



معهد مواطن للديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان  
Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights



Annual Report

2016/2017

## Background

Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights was inaugurated as a primary unit in Birzeit University in 2016. The inauguration was the result of the combination of the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy – Muwatin (founded in 1991 in Ramallah) incorporation into the university, joining with the Master's Program in Democracy and Human Rights (founded in the Faculty of Graduate Studies in 1999), along with several other activities related to this academic program, joining together all to form the current institute.



## Mission

Through its academic programmes and various related activities, Muwatin strives to foster an interdisciplinary approach to research and teaching, thus constructing a space to apply these intellectual and practical tools in order to better understand our lived realities. The institute believes in cooperation and the integration of its efforts with other programmes and activities in Birzeit university. It is a primary and paramount concern for the institute to engage our students in these activities, as well as providing them with the space and tools for them to become core components of the institute's work. Our students and researchers benefit from the opportunities that we provide to connect with other academic and research institutes, local civil society, national institutions and foreign visiting researchers. Muwatin seeks to serve as a central intellectual interactive source for all those interested in issues concerning democracy and human rights, whether theoretical or applied. Indeed, the Institute insists in engaging with the community to serve as a platform for those interested in understanding and impacting our lives. Particular attention is given to hegemonic and regulatory structures that have been heavily prevailing over the lives of Palestinians living in colonial conditions. Muwatin aims to provide the space for intellectual inquiries on fundamental issues concerning the Palestinian people, as we work collectively towards dismantling hegemony and colonialism and forging our national liberation.

## Goals

Muwatin seeks to explore the definitions of democratic systems and human rights in all its inherent complications and paradoxes. Through this work, the Institute will further our collective understanding of democracy and human rights, both in its local context and through a vigorous engagement with the international discussion around these key issues, both practically and theoretically - including, of course, the vital critical approach to both democracy and human rights and their histories. This active work of knowledge production in the Institute is within a framework of protecting liberty, freedom and justice - not only as rhetorical tools, but also as practical tools for societies that cherish humanity, strive for equality justice and peace. The Institute is committed

to working towards improving the means and methods of a political system that respects the people's will and dignity, in particular the Palestinian people.

The Institute works towards achieving these goals through the diverse courses offered in our graduate studies program, as well as through the space and opportunities provided for research and workshops; organising symposiums; publishing newsletters, books and pamphlets; convening conferences and regular training sessions, connecting with other local, national, and regional institutes in the Arab world as well as other global institutes with a similar trajectory and philosophy, with a specific focus on academic institutes who, through their work, elevate the principles of humanity, dignity, the protection of freedoms, achieving true equality and real justice.

## **Muwatin Institute in the Academic Year 2016/2017**

Muwatin Institute was still in its establishment phase during this past academic year, which makes it the year of the establishment of the Institute's identity in its new chapter. The work was divided into two directions, the first involved design and structure, programmes, direction and institutional spirit, including the institutionalisation and upgrading of the quality of existing activities; while the second involved the completion of ongoing activities that form the work spirit of the Institute. These two directions are presented below in detail, in addition to Muwatin's achievements, failures, and future prospects.

### **First: Design, structure, programmes, and Muwatin identity**

The design of the current structure of the institute took several factors into account: firstly, Birzeit University's mission and the role of Muwatin in its achievement; secondly, maintaining Muwatin's identity within the university; thirdly, the development of the current activities and programmes of the MA programme for democracy and human rights and of the Karamah Initiative that was under the umbrella of the MA program and the Faculty of Graduate Studies, which is now one of the hosted initiatives at the institute; Fourthly, the evaluation of the current societal needs; and fifthly, the evaluation of the capabilities, and available and expected resources in sight.

To this end, the institute was structured in a way that encompasses four components: teaching, research, outreach, and the information centre.

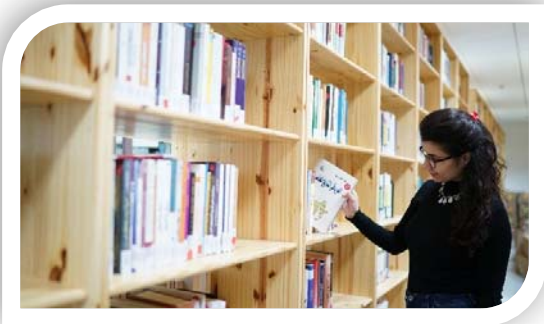
The **teaching** division highlights two main programmes; the MA in Democracy and Human Rights (DMHR), and the Arab Masters Programme in Democracy and Human Rights (ARMA). ARMA is a joint masters programme between several universities and its headquarters will be in Saint Joseph University - Beirut starting September 2017. It is also part of the "Global Campus for Human Rights" that joins six regional masters programmes in addition to the ARMA and is based in Venice - Italy. Muwatin seeks excellence in teaching and uses the most modern resources for interdisciplinary education. It aims to give students unique attention to create cadres that will be able to develop democracy and protect dignity and human rights in Palestine.

**Research** at Muwatin works in various directions: theory, application, and policies. This categorisation aims to meet the various needs of the community, the Institutes' cadre, and what the teaching programmes need. The institute plans to continue its role as a think tank for democracy and human rights.

**Outreach** forms a central dimension of the institute's work. It consists of two directions: continuing education, and communication. In the continuing education, focus is put on programmes oriented at issues of democratic governance, human rights protection, and research skills. In communication, the work comprises interventions and conventions. Muwatin believes outreach is a major mean to connect theory and practice, which is why it is given a central place in our work.

The **Information Centre** is also divided into two main sections: the information repository, which includes Muwatin Library and the resource lab; and information production and dissemination, which includes publications, websites, databases, and audio-visual resources. Muwatin endeavours to become a national centre for information and educational materials on democracy and human rights.

Regarding our mission, everything was designed to represent the belonging to the Palestinian



national liberation project with a non-partisan humanist character, with special attention to social justice and equality. Regarding work spirit, Muwatin is trying its best to develop a team that has a sense of belonging to the University and the Institute, and that is able to communicate with the public and avoid being donor driven. The main characteristics of the working mechanisms and programmes at Muwatin are the interdisciplinary nature of its projects and activities, the mixing of the degree leading teaching with continuing

education, and the combination of teaching and research. Employment priorities are given to our students to serve as research assistants and field researchers, and undertake other related tasks to help them gain experience in the field in addition to their education. Our main interest is, as stated above, combining theory and practice which guides our approach to working with the students.

Physically, Muwatin is in the final stages of establishment at the University, in which its library has been moved into the University; at the end of this academic year, the institute is preparing to move to its designated facilities on campus. All of this will help improve our work environment.

Grants and contracts are important for institutes and are considered a main tool for their development and completion of their projects. To this end, Muwatin is working on establishing its networks with donors that are known for their respect of scientific independence, with an eye on diversity of resources. In the coming period, priority will be given to grants that are academic in nature on the first hand, and to those that provide support for the Institute on the other hand, in

addition to any agreements and grants of cooperation for the ongoing programmes at the Institute. Regarding the pace of fund raising, it will remain slow until we establish a sufficient absorptive capacity and ensure that that fund raising does not become our main duty at the Institute.

## Second: Activities and programmes

### Teaching

The masters programme (DMHR) has developed its plans last year and worked upon implementing them in this academic year. These plans included a variety of new courses including skills courses, practical courses, courses open for continuing education, and courses discussing trending issues in the community such as the right to strike, social security, and municipal elections. Three of our students were employed at Muwatin during this academic year, and two received research grants; Muwatin also welcomed two students from the ARMA programme during the second semester; two students were sent to Hungary for a summer course, and one to India (in partnership with the PhD program in social sciences). In addition to that, students met the University's visiting academic delegations, the MA programme welcomed a delegation from the Colombian Constitutional Court, students visited Nablus, and several non-standard classroom activities took place. Also, students worked on developing a database for dignity literature, monitoring local elections, and in the field work of "The Regulation of Palestinian Everyday Life" research.

### Research

The research project "The Regulation of Palestinian Everyday Life," implemented in partnership with the London School of Economics (LSE), was the most prominent project this year. The project seeks to study the frameworks regulating the daily lives of Palestinians under colonial rule and within neoliberal arrangements. The project aims to involve faculty and students from both universities in joint research, exchange of teaching, and knowledge sharing. It also seeks to lay the foundations for a sustainable development partnership between Birzeit University and LSE. Around 15 MA students were enrolled in a fieldwork course in order to participate in the fieldwork of this research.

During this academic year, Muwatin worked on the first phase of a project on youth alienation, which attempts to establish a societal perception of the causes and ways of addressing the state of youth alienation. This project was carried out in



the Institute's approach to deepen understanding of central issues in Palestinian society in order to contribute to addressing them.

In partnership with the Global Campus, Muwatin has carried out research on the impact of security on the state of democracy and human rights in the Arab region. The Institute is also working on the development of a project on self-determination in conjunction with the search for funding for its implementation.

## Outreach

### Continuing Education

Muwatin started its work in cooperating and networking with civil society organisations, highlighted in the designing and implementation of a programme about the engagement in Emancipatory Education for the Union for Civil Society Organisations for Development. It also started the discussion about developing training modules for unionists with the Fuad Nassar Society for Development Studies.

During this academic year, several MA courses were open for non-student participants as continuing education courses covering topics like social security, the elections, authority-dissent nexus, and managing campaigns and activities. Seven non-student participants enrolled and most of them got their participation certificates successfully. We believe this new approach helps us deliver what we are specialised in to the community and widens the horizons of classroom discussions by involving those who work in the field.

### Communication

Muwatin, DMHR, The Dignity Initiative, and the Idea Factory held a number of activities during the year, including the Muwatin 22nd annual conference focusing on higher education, which received great community attention. It is noteworthy that Muwatin's annual conferences contribute to addressing the sensitive issues addressing societal concerns, and in promoting community participation and organisation. We have also started preparing for the next annual conference entitled "Democracy in the Public Square," involving researchers from around the world.



During this academic year, the second round of the Idea Factory was completed and the third round started. The Idea factory demonstrated success in the second round in terms of attracting students and stimulating initiative-taking among young people. This resulted in a successful student conference in terms of attendance and impact. The students also completed four papers on different topics, in addition to many student activities in partnership with academics, activists, and decision-makers.

A seminar on violence and radicalism was organised in cooperation with the Spanish institution NOVACT and the National Committee of Popular Resistance entitled “Examining the Paradigm of Preventing Violent Extremism in Light of UN Efforts.”

The Karamah Initiative also held a roundtable for Issam Makhoul the Director of the Emil Touma Center for Palestinian and Israeli Studies, on Emile Touma's book "Roots of the Palestinian Problem".

In addition to all of this, students enrolled in the elections course monitored local elections and Muwatin generated a report for the commission based on their monitoring and reports.

### Information Center

During this academic year, efforts were put in moving the books from Muwatin’s library in Ramallah to the University. Muwatin’s library includes more than 12000 volumes and periodicals that were categorised and shelved after putting up a policy on how to deal with them in relation to priority in categorisation and shelving. By the end of the year around one-third of the books were shelved.

The terms of reference for Muwatin’s new website were prepared and developers were contracted. The first phase of an annotated bibliographical database for literature on dignity was completed. This database aims to support academics and students in their research. There is also a plan to create a CSO database during the next academic year. Moreover, there is an initial discussion with the department of media to prepare recorded TV spots about issues of democracy and human rights.

### Future Prospects

The main priority for Muwatin during the next academic year is to get involved in programmes and initiatives to the highest extent in its focus areas. This is summarised in finding resources for several future plans that include, developing theoretical research, continuing the development of the databases (CSOs and Dignity literature), finalising the categorisation and shelving of Muwatin Library books, launching the website, and developing a project to produce media spots for the Institute. Where these spots help enhance critical knowledge and increase participation in local and public debates. The Institute is planning to develop a project that will be considered an extension of the Idea Factory, aimed at working with youth and opening up their horizons for thinking and creative writing.

Muwatin will continue welcoming non-student participants in its continuing education courses on topics related to democracy and human rights in its plan to combine formal and continuing education. Nonetheless, the Institute will work vigorously on expanding its networking with civil society organisations in areas related to community participation and continuing education. Muwatin plans to publish two books in the coming year to maintain its pace of publishing. Last but not least, Muwatin will hold its 23<sup>rd</sup> annual conference and start planning for its 24<sup>th</sup> conference.

## Hosted Initiatives

### The Dignity Initiative

The Windsor-Birzeit Dignity Initiative is an international, interdisciplinary, multi-faceted partnership between the University of Windsor (Canada) and Birzeit University (Palestine) that aims to study and further human dignity.

Inspired by the increasing call for dignity from communities and committed to the ideals of engaged, transformative scholarship, the Windsor-Birzeit Dignity Initiative assumes an organic relationship between dignity and free will. It therefore emphasizes free will as both an end and a value that informs the Initiative's overall processes and procedures.

The Initiative's main aims include:

- Generating theoretical and methodological innovations designed to reflect and support dignity
- Creating multifaceted platforms for scholars, students, public officials and communities to discuss and develop ways to further dignity with special attention to the Arab world
- Undertaking field research and empirical studies that present practical illustrations of the importance of dignity as a transformative concept
- Encouraging dignity in teaching as both an area of inquiry and a pedagogical approach
- Facilitating university-societal partnerships in the service of human dignity
- Encouraging teaching and scholarship that engages lived realities

### Idea Factory

“Idea Factory” is a student-based project, initiated by students from Birzeit University and executed under the supervision of “The Windsor Birzeit Dignity Initiative” that aims to discuss the absence of youth's participation in shaping their future, in other words their absence from effective participation in the public sphere.

Students participating in this project held brain storming sessions to discuss the growing phenomena of alienation from the political scene. Whereas apathy amongst youth has become very visible towards social and economic issues which affects their daily lives, reality and their future (for example: the absence of job opportunities, corruption in the hiring system, an unjust



distribution of wealth, the fall back of the quality education of and the increase in its cost, and many other issues...). This phenomena of alienation is visible in their lack of participation in political parties (even amongst student parties), the decrease in political participation in all of its forms, and an overwhelming feeling of desperation. From what these students concluded from the brain storming sessions, they formulated research cases, and then conducted research, discussions and produced papers. Also for this purpose, many meetings with different people were held, whether from a political background, or others depending on the need and the topic addressed. The students also refer to teachers in the university on the subject matter they are dealing with.



The Idea Factory aims to assist youth in their aspirations towards effective participation and shaping of the public space. This is done through the creation of a space for dialogue and debates on the public space, its shaping, and the formulation of ideas on its reality and future. The environment which fostered the dialogue is based on intellectual adversity, cultural adversity and the use of multiple knowledge tools.

We aim to create a sense of awareness of the reality that we live in, in order to surpass false awareness and to develop critical thinking amongst youths, in the hopes of creating young leaders who are able to step into the public space and demand the realisation of their hopes and future aspirations.

## **Muwatin Partners**

Muwatin works vigorously to enhance its partnerships and networks with local, national and international organisations, donors, and local NGOs working in the fields that are related to the programmes of the institute, in addition to Muwatin partnerships with other units and institutes in Birzeit University.



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