



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies

Second Cycle Degree (MA) in
Communication Strategies

***From Newsrooms to News Feeds: How Arab Women Journalists
Use Social Media to Shape Their Professional Identities during
Conflict***

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ACADEMIC YEAR
2023/2024

Abstract

Since the start of the October 2023 conflicts in Lebanon and Gaza, Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists have been stepping up and reporting on the war on social media platforms like Instagram. My thesis aims to study how five women journalists, three from Palestine (Bisan Owda, Hind Khoudary, and Plestia Alaqad) and two from Lebanon (Fatima Ftouni and Diana Moukalled) are using social media to shape their professional identities during conflict. The research uses a multimodal qualitative content analysis of fifteen Instagram posts, three from each journalist, posted from September 2023 to September 2024, focusing on textual and visual elements. The key themes explored include journalistic integrity, emotional tone, gender, empowerment, collaboration, networking, advocacy, mentorship and the challenge of stereotypes. It's important to mention that all the women chosen for the study are independent, freelance or citizen journalists who don't belong in traditional media organizations. I found that these journalists often blend professional journalism with storytelling techniques, advocacy, and emotional expression, engaging their followers in ways that traditional media often cannot. At times of crisis, being active on social media platforms such as Instagram helps these journalists gain credibility, build trust, and reframe their professional identities. Additionally, it provided them with a strong platform for networking and collaboration, allowing them to make connections with other journalists, activists, and global organizations and advance their careers in the process. This research is important because it adds to the expanding body of research on digital journalism, gender, and conflict, highlighting how women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon are using social media to reinvent news communication, build professional networks, and support women's empowerment during times of crisis.

Keywords:

Women Journalists, Social Media, Digital Journalism, Lebanon, Palestine

Acknowledgements

To supervisor Professor Claudia Padovani, who provided her continuous support, guidance and encouragement throughout this entire research journey.

To my dear family, to my mother, father and sister who have been there for me through it all. You've been by my side through every moment, in every step and this is dedicated to you. I owe you all my achievements.

To my friends, who have comforted me, laughed with me, cried with me - even from a distance. The past two years wouldn't have been the same without you.

To my home. To Lebanon.

Thank you.

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List of Abbreviations

AJ+	Al Jazeera Plus
AUB	American University of Beirut
CEDRE	Economic Conference for Development through Reforms with the Private sector
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFWIJ	Coalition for Women in Journalism
EED	European Endowment for Democracy
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
LBCI	The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, Plus
MADA	Palestine Center for Development and Media Freedoms
NBN	National Broadcasting Network
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WACC	World Association for Christian Communication

Introduction

Journalism has seen a tremendous change as a result of the development of the Internet and the adoption of new distribution methods (Griessner, 2012). Social media platforms have drastically altered the way we share and consume news, and have therefore changed the journalism sector as we know it (Schmid *et al.*, 2017). The emergence of such platforms has also changed how we as audiences consume, interact with, and report on conflict, in addition to how journalists write about war.

This phenomenon is increasingly becoming apparent recently, especially since the start of the conflict between Israel, Gaza and Lebanon in October 2023. In October in 2023, Israel officially declared war on Gaza as a direct reaction to a surprising and coordinated assault by Hamas, catching Israel off guard with rocket attacks and ground incursions (Alsaafin, 2023). The conflict quickly escalated to Lebanon, involving continuous exchange of fire between the Israeli forces and Hezbollah and other armed groups along the southern border of the country. Since the start of this war, citizen and independent journalists—including women—have become more important in the context of conflict journalism on social media. Indeed, women journalists in Gaza have shown an admirable ability to cover news and report from the field, especially on digital platforms. This is not surprising because, according to Hankir (2020), many powerful women journalists and media advocates in the Middle East have defied social standards over the past century, frequently putting their lives in danger in order to uncover and discuss difficult political truths online. In light of this, I must mention the significant influence these Lebanese and Palestinian women have had on how the conflict is viewed and reported worldwide.

Therefore, this thesis studies the digitisation of journalism and the rise of alternative and citizen journalism during times of conflict. With the development of social media, the nature of journalism has become more interactive, multimodal, and decentralized (Pavlik,

2001). Authors such as Višňovský and Radošinská (2018) , Selvik (2021), Saragih & Natsir (2023), have all mentioned social media's role in the rise of citizen journalism, relating it to the media's offering of platforms that let its people produce content on their own. It is no longer unusual that ordinary citizens can produce news or media coverage of major events as they happen (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). Amongst popular social media platforms is Instagram, which according to Saragih and Natsir's (2023) is the most likely platform to have an impact on alternative journalism and growing the number of readers. Indeed, Instagram allows direct engagement with the public, enabling journalists to not only report the news but also to express personal experiences, emotions, and advocacy (Saragih & Natsir, 2023). For women journalists in the Arab world, particularly in Lebanon and Palestine, Instagram offers a big opportunity to shape their professional identities while reporting on conflicts.

In Lebanon, the media environment has changed a lot since digital and social media platforms gained popularity. As news companies adjust to an online presence, Saltzis and Dickinson (2008) note that an alternative form of media has appeared. Due to the public's rising skepticism of traditional media organizations, Lebanon, like other Arab nations, is experiencing a transition toward digital media (Ballout, 2023). By covering important socio-political issues that traditional media tend to ignore, alternative media and citizen journalists have become more popular in Lebanon, especially by tackling issues such as corruption and the economic crises. Within this evolving media environment, women journalists navigate both personal and professional challenges, using Instagram to build a professional identity.

The way social media influences journalism during times of war is also apparent in Palestine, where reporters frequently have to deal with dangerous situations and severe restrictions. In addition to the usual risks that come with reporting from conflict areas, Palestinian journalists—particularly women journalists—also face socio-cultural challenges related to gender and professional representation (Joseph, 2010). Since the start of the war in October 2023, social media became even more important for journalists, especially

citizen and freelance journalists, to share updates and news from the ground (Horbyk, 2023).

The study by Fahmi et al. (2024) emphasizes the double aspects of social media in conflict reporting: its uncensored nature and possible difficulties in upholding ethics and journalistic integrity. However, it's important to note that the media revolution has led to a big shift in journalism ethics, moving from a traditional approach to a more revolutionary one, which is why my study will contradict the standard notions of journalistic ethics (Ward, 2018). According to Ward (2018), neutrality and objectivity as ethics are being questioned since journalism has become more and more subjective, emotional, and overtly political on social media. Therefore, I am adapting the new sense of journalistic integrity in this research.

In this context, the studying work of Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists becomes essential to understand the intersections between gender, media, and conflict. Their unique use of Instagram offers an opportunity to challenge traditional journalistic practices and ethics. Instagram has enabled these women to develop a form of journalism that is not only informative but also emotionally resonant. Thus, this thesis will study the ways in which these journalists are utilizing social media during the war in Gaza and Lebanon to shape their professional identities.

My thesis, consequently, adds to the growing body of research on gender, conflict, and digital journalism by studying how Arab women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon are redefining their professional identities and transforming the way that news is shared during wars and conflict on social media. This study then highlights how social media platforms are growing more important in war reporting because they allow reporters to give more personalized and genuine stories while avoiding traditional censors.

Consequently, I will address the following Research Question:

RQ: How do Arab women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine use Instagram to shape and promote their professional identities during times of conflict?

Purpose of the study

This thesis aims to study how during the unprecedented Israel-Gaza and Israel-Lebanon war, Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists are using social media to shape their professional identities. It also contributes to the study of alternative and independent journalism in the Middle East, especially during times of crisis.

Theories of Digital Journalism, Gender, and Conflict in the Arab world

Introduction

The emergence of social media has greatly changed how we, as individuals access and receive news and information, impacting how we shape opinions in new and significant ways (Schmid *et al.*, 2017). The distinctions between private and public information, as well as between producers and consumers, have also grown increasingly hazy due to the integration of social media into our daily lives (Chadwick, 2017; Ekström & Shehata, 2018). Social media platforms not only give users the opportunity to learn about current events, but they also give them a way to interact with the information in their social networks by sharing, liking, and commenting (Couldry *et al.*, 2010). As a result, journalism has become one of the most significant and relevant subjects in current social media research. (Liu *et al.*, 2017) In the era of digital media, journalism requires us to reassess all we know about the concepts and practices of news and opinion distribution (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018).

In fact, journalism is frequently referred to as the profession of difficulties (Abushmas, 2020). However, there are no words to describe the dangers and violations journalists face when working in crisis areas. Journalists living in conflict areas like the Middle-East are constantly subjected to physical and psychological violence, intimidation, and harassment. Furthermore, just by virtue of being women in fields where masculinity frequently rules everything, Arab women journalists frequently endure greater hardships. Regardless of how well or poorly they are able to cover stories or news, women journalists are rarely supported by the local community and are frequently underappreciated on all social and economic levels (Abushmas, 2020).

This chapter aims to explore the ways social media platforms have altered journalism, especially when it comes to conflict reporting, citizen journalism and women journalists. It explains how digital platforms have transformed traditional journalism allowing the

participation of more people. The chapter also focuses specifically on Arab women journalists and their experiences utilizing social media.

Social Media, Citizen Journalism and the Challenge of Journalistic Integrity

Nowadays, the internet has significantly improved its ability to facilitate two-way communication which has led to a rise in popularity of advanced new tools such as message boards, blogs, wikis, and social networks (Newman, 2009). These instruments are commonly known as 'Social Media' and are frequently connected with the notion of 'Web 2.0' (O'Reilly, 2009). This concept, promoted by internet expert Tim O'Reilly (2009), suggests that the internet reaches its maximum effectiveness when users make use of its interactive tools and network capabilities. According to the findings of the *Global Digital Report 2024*, which was released in January 2024, over 5.35 billion individuals have access to the Internet globally, and 5 billion of those users actively use social networking sites (Kemp, 2024). Therefore, social media can be justifiably regarded as a profoundly significant communication phenomenon of the second decade of the twenty-first century (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018).

Recently, the talks about television news from the 1990s, such as its technological progress and impacts, seem like a faraway recollection (McLaughlin, 2016). The attention has now turned towards the quick growth and spread of fresh social media platforms like blogs, Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram (McLaughlin, 2016). These platforms have closed the distance between audiences and news stories even more, speeding up the spread of information in ways that older technologies could not compete with (McLaughlin, 2016). Recently, social media platforms are being extensively discussed for a wide range of reasons and in numerous contexts (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). These platforms are becoming increasingly vital and important for advancing

communication, empowering underrepresented voices, and fostering intercultural dialogue as the digital era progresses (Boyd, 2008).

News media have faced many new challenges in the last few years (Monahan & Ettinger, 2018). The emergence of the Internet and the adoption of new distribution models have significantly revolutionized journalism (Griessner, 2012). Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), and YouTube are transforming the way that media is created, shared, and consumed (Newman, 2009). Newspaper front pages and television news broadcasts now frequently feature user-generated images and videos on their front page (Newman, 2009). Harcup's *Oxford Dictionary of Journalism* (2014) states that social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and "countless other forums, and in just a few years they have become as important a way for journalists to find stories and sources as they are for news organizations to promote their brands" (Harcup, 2014).

Additionally, McNair observes that the impact of new media and technology has caused the ruling model of journalism of the twentieth century—which was previously embodied by professional journalists providing unbiased and trustworthy information—to become fractured and subject to widespread questioning (McNair *et al.*, 2009). In fact, Data from the *Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2023* predicted a big shift in audience behavior driven by younger demographics (Newman, 2023). These changes included a preference for more approachable, casual, and entertaining news formats that are mostly consumed on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok and are usually delivered by influencers rather than journalists (Newman, 2023). While they won't completely replace text online, Newman (2023) believes that visual and audio forms are expected to start playing a bigger role in the mix in the coming years. The historically hegemonic role of major mainstream media outlets and international media conglomerates has been undermined by new digital channels, particularly social media, which have altered how we search for, choose, and examine information sources and news (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). Thus, it should come as no surprise that "alternative journalism" has become more

and more of a phenomena in recent years, drawing the attention of academics and media professionals alike (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). Therefore, it is clear that digital media is gradually but steadily replacing legacy media. In one respect, this change has made it easier for consumers to obtain and distribute news on a variety of channels, including social media, mobile devices, apps, and the like (Ekström *et al.*, 2020). However, this change has generally also undermined the business plans of established news legacy media companies, leading to the deterioration and shrinkage of newsrooms as well as the dispersion of news audiences (Ekström *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the increasing power and cost-effectiveness of social media platforms have presented major obstacles to traditional media and journalism (Selvik, 2021). Fresh faces are continually joining the scene, causing audiences to become more divided, as media experts who were once influential in shaping public conversations are now struggling to influence public sentiment. Digital media populism is causing major disruption in the political field by challenging the control of traditional ruling parties, leading to a divided and unstable environment (Selvik, 2021). This digital revolution is a significant worry for dictators because it allows their adversaries multiple chances to communicate, rally, and coordinate demonstrations, endangering their authority (Selvik, 2021). Evidently, Selvik (2021) points out that the exchange of information happens way faster and more widely when communication takes place online. It raises the political heat and alters the rules of political communication (Selvik, 2021). Both autocracies and democracies have shown how powerful social media can really be, some examples are the Arab Spring, Donald Trump, and the Black Lives Matter movement (Selvik, 2021).

Thus, the rise and rapid growth of new digital technologies as well as miniature intelligent devices—particularly smartphones and tablets—have provided relatively passive media audiences like readers, viewers, and listeners, with a plethora of options to produce and share journalistic content (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). Multiple academic literature titles, particularly several noteworthy publications with Anglo-Saxon provenience, frequently mention "witness journalism" or "accidental journalism" as a specific form of citizen journalism. It is no longer exceptional that ordinary people like

citizens can widely share rare films or even media coverage of important events as they happen. In any free society, citizen journalism actually plays a crucial role by providing a range of perspectives (Višňovský & Radošinská, 2018). As such, we have to acknowledge that certain of the noted "alternative" forms of journalism do function as essential counterweights to the extensively disseminated mainstream media, functioning as partially independent, participatory, or even undercover information distribution channels (Radošinská, 2016).

The emergence of citizen journalism on social media is directly related to the media's provision of platforms that enable its users to generate content on their own (Saragih & Natsir, 2023). One social media platform that allows its members to share user-generated content is Instagram. Through the use of Instagram, the public is now able to offer information in the same way that journalists do in mass media outlets like radio and television. Before, people could only obtain information from the media through journalists. Instagram and other social media platforms are the source of a lot of news that is reported in mainstream media even today. According to Saragih and Natsir's (2023) research, Instagram is used as a new engagement medium that is expected to have an impact on growing the number of readers. Instagram impacts the way editors and the public engage not just by gaining more readers but also by giving the community a platform to voice thoughts and comments. It turns out that readers engage with the content significantly. Different reader comments serve as a medium for interaction (Saragih & Natsir, 2023).

Certainly, the emergence of citizen journalism has altered the delivery of media by allowing people to share their personal stories and give voice to perspectives that are often marginalized and unique, like women's (Penn LPS Online, 2024). Because their audiences have more information sources to choose from, big media companies feel more pressure to cover issues that are in the public interest. This is another benefit of this phenomenon. However, there is reason for concern given the growing popularity of participatory

journalism about the absence of monitoring in the areas of objectivity, transparency, and fact-checking (Penn LPS Online, 2024).

Traditional news organizations may feel pressured to compromise truth and fairness in favor of speed as a result of the emergence of social media platforms and real-time interactive journalism (Penn LPS Online, 2024). News organizations are more likely to report inaccuracies or misleading material that damages public trust when they put traffic and engagement above journalistic integrity. The public's confidence in professional journalists has steadily decreased in recent years. This explains the significance of journalistic integrity for journalists, online and offline. Professional journalists that follow a code of ethics and report on the facts while maintaining fairness, objectivity, and transparency are more likely to exhibit journalistic integrity (Penn LPS Online, 2024).

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (n.d.) has published a Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, which includes the following ethics: Respect for the facts and the public's right to truth is the journalist's first duty; the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the collection and publication of news; and of the right of fair comment and criticism. This is significant because, in an era of divisive politics and rapid technological innovation, ethical journalism serving the public interest is more necessary than ever, according to the International Federation of Journalists (n.d.).

It's important to mention that the media revolution has caused journalism ethics to shift from a traditional approach to a revolutionary one (Ward, 2018). The rise of digital media has caused three things according to Ward (2018). The possibility for citizens to publish and practice journalism far from the professional newsrooms, extreme populism and intolerance, which are empowered by technologies that spread misinformation and contaminate the general public, and the global public sphere are the three main components of the revolution. All three of these elements weaken traditional journalistic norms and cause shifts in the journalism ethics (Ward, 2018). According to Ward (2018), very few goals or principles are unquestioned in today's world. Today's journalism can be overtly

political, subjective, and emotional. Traditional notions like news neutrality and objectivity are disregarded. New practices need the development of new ethical standards, such as those affecting participatory journalism, which includes the public in the news gathering process (Ward, 2018).

Arab Women Journalists Navigating Social Media

Many scholars have mentioned the importance of exploring different aspects of Arab society to fully understand the status of Arab women, especially when it comes to their presence in decision-making positions in the government, economy, and media (Abu Lughod, 2001; Joseph and Slyomovics, 2000; Shor *et al.*, 2015). It is essential to have a proper portrayal of women in these areas since media platforms have a major impact on shaping and assigning gender roles and characteristics, and provide an important space for the discussion and change of these concepts (Sakr, 2004).

The internet's main value lies in the large amounts of information it can store and transmit, making it an important information-based technology (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Cyberspace is fundamentally a virtual space made up of, and functioning on, the transmission and sharing of information. Historically, people in power determined access to and control over information, often strengthening pre-existing societal hierarchies. Social media has created new dynamics that have occasionally questioned these power structures. Nevertheless, the dominant structures present in social media platforms frequently replicate the hierarchical gatekeeping roles that have traditionally controlled media landscapes (Newsom & Lengel, 2012).

Throughout history, women have had limited participation in designing and managing internet structures, as these online spaces have mainly been shaped by male influence (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Therefore, women are frequently excluded from influencing the

discussion and significance in digital spaces. Despite facing many obstacles, feminist movements now have found ways to defy patriarchal limitations by crafting online personas that, while hidden behind some traits that allow them to navigate in environments dominated by men, still uphold feminist principles and stories (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Social media is now seen as an essential tool for marginalized and silenced groups, providing a platform to share and amplify their voices, goals, and experiences to a much bigger international audience. Additionally, these online platforms are crucial for self-expression and advocacy, particularly for women in areas or societies that limit women's voices. Therefore, it is essential to explore more about how women utilize social media platforms and how these sites can still be utilized for personal empowerment and feminist advancements (Newsom & Lengel, 2012).

Newsom and Lengel (2012) investigate the capacity for online activism to create significant change, particularly in empowering marginalized voices and promoting inclusive conversations. They claim that the online environment offers a strong chance for marginalized individuals and groups to voice their opinions and fight for social change (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Actually, feminist activist spaces online play an important role in enabling gendered discussions. These women can use these online spaces to discuss topics such as gender identity, equality, and representation, when they don't have that opportunity elsewhere (Newsom & Lengel, 2012).

Evidently, the active participation of women journalists in Arab uprisings is a clear proof of their strong influence in both virtual and physical spaces. Marzouki (2011) demonstrated that a clear protest against stereotypes in the Arab world, where public areas are mostly male-dominated, was the involvement of women in the Tunisian protests. The impressive and transformative presence of women in these events was praised, emphasizing their crucial role in influencing the revolution's story (Marzouki, 2011).

Additionally, Khamis and Vaughn (2011) highlighted how social media's unbiased structure and setup helps empower women and pushes them to actively participate in

activism. The digital environment enables their online activism and citizen journalism, leading to real-life displays of bravery as women participated in protests and demonstrations on the streets. Social media acts as a connection between the digital and physical realms, enhancing the impact of women's voices and actions in these groundbreaking movements (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011)). The increased presence of women in the global spotlight can be linked back to the growth of online activism, driven largely by the use of social media platforms (Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Social media has allowed people from all over the world to see the important roles of women in these movements, as they challenge traditional gender norms and take part in their contributions to success (Newsom & Lengel, 2012).

Over the past century, a lot of influential women journalists and media advocates in the Middle East have challenged societal norms, frequently endangering their lives to expose and address disturbing political truths (Hankir, 2020). These women are considered revolutionary in a way, fueled by a dedication to truth, they made important impacts on the journalism scene in their area. Nevertheless, despite their accomplishments and the big impact they made, these women continue to be largely overlooked and undervalued, even within the Middle East. Their efforts and bravery in the media, their fight for social justice, and their political discourse are frequently overlooked by the larger historical context, which marginalizes their contributions (Hankir, 2020).

In the book *Our Women on the Ground*, Hankir (2020) wrote about a unique glimpse into the lives and experiences of Arab and Middle Eastern women journalists reporting on their home regions. In her book, Hankir (2020) writes about the bravery and resolve of many women, one of them being Ruqia, a woman journalist who challenged ISIS by recording and sharing their atrocities in Raqqa on social media. Ruqia, unlike traditional journalists, did not have formal journalistic training and did not work for any major news outlets or organizations. Instead, she took on the role of a citizen journalist instead of a traditional journalist, and used social media to reach her goal - posting real, first-hand reports of the unfolding atrocities in her city (Hankir, 2020). Despite her increasing social

media following and people around her asking her to keep her identity and pictures private, Ruqia still refused. She dedicated herself to sharing the truth, demonstrating the remarkable persistence of women journalists in the Middle East, who persist in questioning societal roles on both local and global levels. Her thorough and brave narrations played a key role in forming the global perception of the conflict, even from a distance (Hankir, 2020).

This narrative of courage aligns with Sakr's (2004) research that explores the duty that Arab women journalists are faced with at times when there is significant miscommunication and distrust between the Arab-Muslim world and the West . The study proved that these women journalists not only serve their local audiences but also serve as bridges to Western readers and viewers who, particularly women, experience similar challenges in their careers (Sakr, 2004). It's relevant to note that these women are not limited to covering only "women's issues", and that they also have to address the challenge of delivering international news to audiences with ethnocentric perspectives or limited knowledge (Sakr, 2004).

The women featured in Sakr's (2004) research proved to have remarkable flexibility, since they work on a variety of different subjects for local and foreign media. A lot of these journalists also believe they have a responsibility to help new reporters, therefore recognizing the significance and importance of mentorship. Some Arab women journalists have embraced the role of a mentor, while others are eager to help the upcoming generation of media professionals (Sakr, 2004). Furthermore, these journalists continue to prioritize self-improvement, especially due to the increasingly demanding global media industry that requires strong writing skills, editing abilities, and a wide range of knowledge. They emphasize the significance of advancing women in different sectors such as medicine, economics, sports, and aviation, viewing mentorship as a crucial tool in achieving this goal (Sakr, 2004).

Conquering gender and corporate barriers needs a lot of dedication to media literacy and education, not just for individuals but also for their communities. Sakr's (2004) study

notes that women journalists understand the importance of reaching out beyond just their local boundaries. They also understand the importance of actively creating connections to encourage relevant discussions. Arab women in media, whether in the roles of reporters, editors, or leaders, can influence a more interconnected and knowledgeable media landscape (Sakr, 2004).

Women journalists in the Arab world, particularly in conflict zones, face many unique challenges that could affect or shape their reporting styles and professional image. Mellor (2011) provided examples of both men and women journalists in pan-Arab media who, in an effort to improve and elevate their professional image, frequently choose to strike a compromise between adhering to journalistic standards and finding ways to give their work greater legitimacy. Additionally, it was suggested that male journalists relate to news of agony and suffering on an emotional level, while women journalists typically report on it in an unemotional manner (Mellor, 2011). The debate about detachment versus attachment in news reporting, and the feminist media debate about the difference between masculine and feminine values in mediating pain, which is mainly talked about in the Arab world, both lead to the discussions in the study (Mellor, 2011). These studies shed light on the ways Arab women in journalism are adapting their roles and approaches to overcome cultural and professional obstacles and leave a lasting impression on the industry.

The Future of Conflict Reporting in the Digital Era

Sacco's (2016) research mentions that despite the recent rise of digital media, journalism during war and conflict continues to matter because the fundamental responsibility of a journalist to relay personal experiences from conflict zones to audiences at a distance has not changed. In a globalized world that connects us digitally, there is still consumer demand for information that confirms what people see on the news (Sacco, 2016). Nevertheless, Sacco (2016) acknowledges that the means for journalists to do their

job have been radically transformed. The growth of digital platforms, online interaction, and social media has altered how journalists report about wars, to how audiences consume, engage, and participate in reporting of war. Nowadays, audiences are able to engage with content directly, comment and reply in real-time to impact information sharing, which was not the case years ago. Though not pertaining to the utilization of social media platforms, this shift illustrates that war journalism and production practice, and the overall media landscape, has changed dramatically, where traditional media practices have been swapped for rapid consumption methods of engagement and dissemination of information (Sacco, 2016).

According to Høiby and Ottosen (2019), war reporters traditionally have had on the spot access to areas where wars and other important events take place, in order to communicate and inform the public effectively. This access is important for the media to be able to gather and share precise and prompt information about the truths of war, which frequently endangers journalists (Høiby and Ottosen, 2019). However, reporting on conflict areas poses considerable dangers and difficulties for both domestic and foreign news outlets. Numerous casualties have occurred due to the dangers of reporting on wars and unrest. From 1992 to 2023, an alarming 2,161 journalists globally were verified to have been killed while working, emphasizing the severe dangers linked to journalism in war zones (CPJ, 2024). The significant number of fatalities shows how dangerous it is for journalists to report on these crises.

According to Høiby and Ottosen (2019), the increased dangers faced by journalists in contemporary conflicts are leading to a greater dependence on information from sources other than direct observation. The risks of reporting from the front lines must be avoided by using indirect sources, which has an impact on the reporting's immediateness and firsthand quality (Christensen & Khalil, 2021). The inability of journalists to be physically present in these unstable locations presents significant obstacles for those reporting crises such as those in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq. They usually rely on digital media platforms to get information and material in order to overcome these challenges

(Christensen & Khalil, 2021). Christensen & Khalil (2021) suggest that it is crucial to rely on digital platforms and social media for real-time updates and insights from local sources when traditional on-the-ground reporting is not feasible.

Modern technology like social media platforms have led to the emergence of citizen journalism (Bahador & Tng, 2010). According to Bowman and Willis (2003), citizen journalism is the act of citizens gathering, reporting, analyzing, and sharing news and information. This form of journalism has the potential to drastically alter the position of citizens in conflict reporting, from that of consumers to producers, victims to witnesses, and framers to analysts (Bahador & Tng, 2010). Indeed, the rise of digital media has led to an increase in doubt among journalists, due to the simplicity with which almost anyone can share content on the internet (Al-Ghazzi, 2014). The distinction between real and prefabricated stories has become more difficult to tell apart due to the widespread usage of online platforms during crises. This made it more difficult for journalists to accurately describe events in the face of contradicting information and ulterior objectives (Al-Ghazzi, 2014).

Christensen and Khalil's (2021) study highlights how journalists now use different methods when working with user-generated content, especially during conflict reporting. Their research highlighted the necessity of acquiring authorizations from the initial creators of the material whenever possible. This procedure is still essential even as the content goes viral and spreads quickly on different platforms and news sources. This cautious method is especially important when reporting on conflicts from afar, as social media and digital communication tools are crucial (Christensen & Khalil, 2021).

Christensen and Khalil's (2021) research also discovered that different platforms fulfill unique roles depending on the type of conflict and the regional contexts. For example, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram were recognized as the main platforms for viewing and exchanging user-created content, while encrypted messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram are better used for secure communication with sources in

risky locations. The research showed that journalists now see the stream of news content on social media sites as a useful source of information. Nevertheless, they are extra careful when dealing with the potential dangers and confirming the accuracy of the information before including it in their reports (Christensen & Khalil, 2021).

Sacco (2016) states that despite being dynamic and constantly changing, social media platforms highlight the ongoing significance of journalism in the digital era. Tools such as Storify in social media do not take the place of traditional journalism, but can be used as a tool to gather and combine information from different sources (Sacco, 2016). Jenkins (2006) defines this process as convergence, a continuous process in which new media forms do not replace old ones but rather mix and interact, with platforms such Instagram exemplifying this type of interaction. Instead of being overwhelmed by the quick pace of social media, journalists use these channels to stay up to date by gathering live updates from multiple sources and verifying their accuracy (Jenkins, 2006). Newman (2009) sees journalists as individuals who can create and share information using both traditional and modern social media platforms.

Furthermore, these digital platforms enable journalists to interact directly with communities and individuals who offer firsthand information on conflicts and events (Sacco, 2016). This forms a mutual relationship in which journalists serve as intermediaries, connecting the disparity between unprocessed social media content and the reliable information the public desire. Journalists are then not just reporting news; they serve a sort of connection between the constant flow of digital information and the audience's requirements for clarity, truth, and context (Sacco, 2016).

For instance, Fahmi *et al.*'s study from 2024 attests that Palestinian journalists covering the war in Gaza since October 2023 have experienced the impact that social media and citizen journalism have on disseminating information from conflict zones. Social media is known for having two drawbacks: it makes it easier than ever to disseminate news quickly and widely, but it also makes it more difficult to uphold ethical standards and

journalistic integrity because of how quickly unverified or graphic content spreads. This finding emphasizes how digital platforms have a big impact on how news is distributed because of how quickly verified or graphic content can be promoted, challenging traditional journalistic methods. Journalists in Gaza have established collaborative groups to preserve professional standards in response to these complications. This proactive strategy emphasizes how crucial it is for journalists to stay united and double check their work in order to navigate the constantly changing social media landscape and maintain accuracy and integrity in reporting in conflict (Fahmi *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

To conclude, the rise of social media and the digitisation of news has brought both challenges and opportunities in the field of journalism. Instagram and other digital platforms have made it easier for journalists to gather and share news content, reaching a larger audience and allowing them to post updates instantly. Nonetheless, maintaining journalistic standards still requires constant verification of the content. The emergence of citizen journalism has also created fresh possibilities for cooperation with traditional media, offering facts and opinions from different points of view and first-hand accounts. However, there is little research about how journalists, especially Arab women journalists during conflict, might profit from social media platforms. There is also an obvious lack in the research when it comes to the usage of social platforms by Arab women journalists, their reasons for engaging with them, and the possible benefits and drawbacks of these tools. This research will attempt to fill that gap in the research.

The Media Environment and Professional Challenges in Lebanon and Palestine

Chapter 1: Lebanon

Introduction

As Lebanon adapts to the changing and constantly evolving digital age, the country's media sector is going through big changes. According to Saltzis and Dickinson (2008), "a new form of journalism has appeared as more and more news organizations have developed a presence on the Internet" (p. 4). Furthermore, online journalism has been described by Pavlik (2001) as "potentially a better form of journalism" since it can reconnect an audience that has become more frustrated and mistrustful. Indeed, independent and alternative media have grown in popularity as the Lebanese public becomes less trusting of its traditional media for a variety of reasons that this chapter will tackle. This chapter will also discuss the challenges faced by women journalists in the media, particularly in Lebanon, as they navigate these changes and other difficulties.

Background: Lebanon and the Media Scene

Lebanon is a country situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). It includes a small stretch of land and is one of the smallest independent nations globally, with Beirut serving as the capital city (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). The country located in the Mediterranean region, is known for its high population density and impressive literacy rate (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). Despite having limited natural resources, Lebanon has succeeded in functioning as a bustling hub for trade and culture in the Middle East for a long time (Kingston *et al.*, 2024).

At about 4,015 square miles, Lebanon is one of the world's smallest nation-states. It was initially controlled by France in 1926 as a result of a League of Nations mandate. However, Lebanon didn't fully reclaim administrative control from the French or achieve complete independence until 1943 (Nisser, 2023). Due to this historical heritage, French and Arabic are Lebanon's official languages. Yet, English is commonly used in various regions of the country, showcasing its diverse range of languages (Nisser, 2023).

Lebanon is recognized for its abundant diversity, made up of different ethnic, religious, and kinship groups that create a very diverse society (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). The Lebanese population is a mix of various cultures like Phoenician, Greek, Armenian, and Arab influences, creating Lebanon's distinct cultural identity (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). Apart from the larger Lebanese population, certain ethnic groups like Armenians and Kurds also live in the country (Kingston *et al.*, 2024).

Lebanon is a nation with deep sectarian divisions that are evident in its geographical, political, and cultural aspects. Around 60-65% of the population is Muslim, including Sunni, Shi'a, and Druze groups (Nisser, 2023). The Shi'a Muslims have a significant demographic representation, whereas the Druze mainly reside in rural regions (Nisser, 2023). Approximately one quarter of the total population consists of Christians, including a substantial number of Maronites, as well as different Catholic and Orthodox groups (Nisser, 2023). Moreover, there is a significant Armenian population in Lebanon, which is a result of the historical impact of the Ottoman Empire on the region (Nisser, 2023). These sectarian divisions impact the nation's social structure, as well as its political and cultural spheres. The complexity of Lebanon's national identity and governance is influenced by the distribution of religious groups in various regions and their levels of political and social power (Nisser, 2023).

Lebanon has always had a rich history of strong print media (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). The most popular Arabic newspapers in the country are Al-Nahār and Al-Safīr, along with a French newspaper called L'Orient–Le Jour and The Daily Star, an English daily

publication (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). Despite being influenced by politics, Lebanon's print media is still considered one of the most vibrant and free in the Arab world (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). The print media has a certain level of independence in contrast to the government's strict regulation of audiovisual media (Kingston *et al.*, 2024). Television and radio broadcasting stations, particularly those that broadcast political news and commentary, are subject to greater government influence (Kingston *et al.*, 2024).

Despite the common belief that Lebanon's media is the most liberated in the Arab region, Dajani (2013) argues that this idea is mostly untrue. He claims that although the media in Lebanon may seem more liberal compared to other Arab nations, its level of freedom is still very limited. Nevertheless, the type of limitations varies compared to those observed in neighboring countries. Instead of being enforced by the government, these limitations are ingrained in Lebanon's distinct sectarian and financial systems (Dajani, 2013).

In Lebanon, the media is mainly independent from direct government influence, not because of strong democratic systems, but because of the lack of a united and centralized state (Dajani, 2013). As stated by Dajani (2013), Lebanon does not have a genuine government, but rather functions through a group of tribal-sectarian leaders. These influential individuals, instead of the government, have a strong influence over the media. The media system is influenced by the sectarian allegiances and financial interests of elites, rather than journalistic freedom and independence principles (Dajani, 2013). Press freedom in Lebanon is constrained by sectarian leaders' power and interests, as they manipulate media narratives and information (Dajani, 2013). Dajani (2013) emphasizes that despite the presence of liberal laws regulating the media in Lebanon, the enforcement of these regulations is usually very chaotic and biased.

Additionally, Dajani (2013) claims that numerous Lebanese media outlets sacrifice their credibility to get financial profit instead of holding onto their journalistic integrity, which makes the ongoing lack of national unity in the country worse. These media channels

are usually financially supported from multiple sources, such as foreign embassies, companies, local political organizations, and even the Lebanese government (Dajani, 2013). These media organizations are then required to support and back the agendas of whoever financially supports them in return for the money they give them. Lebanon ends up with a media landscape that is very divided, with many outlets promoting the interests of their backers, increasing Lebanon's political and sectarian rifts (Dajani, 2013).

However, when it comes to Lebanese television, experts state that the Lebanese broadcasting system is different from both Western models, where television is mostly privately owned, and many other third world models, where television is mostly publicly owned (Rugh, 2004; Dajani, 2001). Most researchers studying Lebanese media ownership do not use a particular Western theoretical framework (Dajani, 2001 & 2006). Instead, they examine ownership patterns based on Lebanon's confessional divisions, noting a different and unique mix of public, private, political, sectarian, and commercial ownership (Dajani, 2001 & 2006). Indeed, ownership of Lebanese channels creates an intriguing network of connections within the country and in the surrounding region (Mady, 2016). At a national level, the channels are affiliated not only with specific religious groups but also with political parties (Mady, 2016). Locally, the channels' connections to their state allies like Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, as well as their Western allies, are based on their party and sectarian affiliations (Mady, 2016). Lebanon then ends up with a media environment where each outlet is politically biased and follows an unspoken ethical standard, with full editorial allegiance to the group or nation providing financial support (Dabbous, 2010; Fandy, 2007). The media's bias is heightened during periods of political or military turmoil according to Fandy (2007).

Dajani (2006) points out a big contrast in Lebanese television, specifically the conflict between the "public interest and the interests of political, financial, and economic entities in the country" (p.5). Not having this balance is especially harmful because it hinders the exchange of information, which is important to have a knowledgeable and educated society. Dajani (2006) believes that the absence of press freedom in Lebanon hinders the

development of a genuinely independent press, a view shared by numerous scholars who feel that the country's media environment is severely compromised. As stated by Mady (2016), Lebanese audiences are very aware of the political connections and prejudices of the media outlets they support. As a result, these channels are viewed by the audience not as unbiased sources of news but as places for pushing political agendas, with the news being less important than pushing specific beliefs or goals (Mady, 2016).

The Digital Transformation of Lebanese Journalism

Digital technology has caused major shifts in news production and consumption in Lebanon by integrating online journalism into the local media scene (Costa, 2011). Costa (2011) states that the growth of online newspapers in English and French has broadened journalism's influence and brought about a new type of reporting that serves a global audience and Lebanese expats alike. Traditional Lebanese newspapers, mostly in Arabic, still target local and Arab readers. Yet, online newspapers have expanded their reach by attracting urban upper-middle-class readers, the diaspora, and international audiences as well. The rise of digital technologies has changed the way communication happens and transformed how information is perceived and dealt with (Costa, 2011). A study by El Takach (2022) found that 47% of Lebanese journalists surveyed have successfully adjusted to the digital environment, with 51% actively working on improving their digital skills for the changing media landscape. The results reveal the increasing focus on digital literacy in Lebanese journalism, emphasizing the industry's ongoing transition to a globally interconnected and digitally focused setting (El Takach *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, the October 2019 protests in Lebanon brought attention to the growth of digital journalism since social media was crucial in disseminating real-time news and elevating the voices of protesters across the nation. In 2015 and 2019, Lebanon witnessed unprecedented huge demonstrations urging the Lebanese government to implement real

political and economic changes, marking a historic first for the country (Assi, 2021). The protests in 2015 and 2019 were foreshadowed by smaller protests in 2011. The events in several Arab countries since 2011 have raised hopes of achieving democratic reforms and challenging political systems throughout the Arab world. Lebanon was among the first nations affected by these developments. It is frequently observed that Lebanon is prone to both local and international changes due to the close ties that exist between Lebanese political parties and outside influences (Assi, 2021).

In 2015, numerous youth protested in Beirut due to the government's neglect of the garbage crisis, leading to streets overflowing with trash (Assi, 2021). However, in 2019 there was a sharp rise in protests as a result of the devaluation of the Lebanese currency, widespread inflation, and a major reduction in government services (Assi, 2021). According to Assi (2021), the protests brought together a large number of Lebanese people of various regions and religious backgrounds, who gathered in squares and public locations to express their discontent and anger against the government. Unlike previous protests, which were mostly focused in Beirut, these protests were the first to occur in all of the cities in Lebanon. Moreover, these protestors were driven by the combined efforts of ordinary people, not by religious authorities as had happened in the past. Particularly, young Lebanese citizens organized these protests using social media, protesting the sharp decline in public services over the previous few years (Assi, 2021).

Everything began on October 17, 2019, when citizens all over Lebanon, including those in Beirut, carried out protests against the government's proposed new taxes on IP phone usage, gasoline, and tobacco (Selvik, 2021). They also protested against the government's proposed fee on WhatsApp, a popular messaging app in the nation due to high costs associated with using traditional mobile services and outdated infrastructure (Selvik, 2021). But in order to understand the intensity of the October 2019 protests, it is important to take into account the events that occurred before them. During the CEDRE international donor conference held in Paris in 2018, over \$11 billion was promised to Lebanon in order to boost its struggling economy (Mandour, 2021). Nevertheless, the

assistance depended on the government implementing reforms that were delayed because of political disagreements, resulting in the government being inactive for several months. In September 2019, Lebanon's prime minister announced an economic state of emergency due to the worsening crisis (Mandour, 2021). Nationwide fear and anger increased as a result of a rise in political and sectarian violence, which included armed clashes in Kfar Matta over the arrival of Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil (Mandour, 2021). The implementation of the "WhatsApp tax" and the year-long sense of helplessness then finally triggered the widespread public protests (Mandour, 2021).

As demonstrations erupted in Lebanon on 17 October 2019, social media rapidly took over as the primary source of information, outshining conventional media in showcasing the widespread rage and anger among the Lebanese population toward long-standing political and economic inequalities (Selvik, 2021). Selvik (2011) notes that WhatsApp played a major role in both starting and organizing the protests. It became the main tool for communication, spreading important information, including specifics about protest sites, road closures, and current political events, facilitating rapid and successful communication among different factions and groups (Selvik, 2021). During this time, Facebook also became an important tool for activists and ordinary people. Through live streaming, protesters were able to record and share events as they happened on-site, offering a more immediate and unedited view of the protests (Selvik, 2021). In his analysis of the 2019 protests in Lebanon, Jabre (2021) had two major findings. A civic engagement narrative first gained popularity on social media, bringing Lebanese people together and facilitating greater coordination in their joint actions against the government. People were encouraged and inspired to participate in the demonstrations by this broadly circulated positive story. Secondly, there was an effort to weaken the protests by spreading false or manipulated information online, used strategically to create divisions. Despite efforts to weaken and delay the movement, these tactics failed to stop or weaken the demonstrators' united front (Jabre, 2021).

According to Selvik (2021), social media's widespread reach quickly began to have an impact on Lebanon's traditional media sources. Major TV networks, including LBCI, New TV, and MTV, modified their reportage to the protesters' points of view and started showing the movement in a positive and encouraging manner. On the other hand, pro-government networks such as OTV, NBN, and al-Manar presented a different picture, depicting the protests as part of a bigger scheme to create unrest in the country (Selvik, 2021).

Well-known Lebanese reporters were at the forefront of this media shift, using their large social media followings to promote the messages of the protesters (Selvik, 2021). The journalists, once known for their traditional and passive style, started having a more assertive and defiant attitude, sharing and shedding light on the stories and challenges of residents in poor areas and marginalized regions, people who have been historically overlooked by the traditional media (Selvik, 2021). The top Lebanese journalists have a significant following of hundreds of thousands on X (previously known as Twitter) and other social media networks, and their opinions and testimonies hold a lot of importance, since their audience trusts them (Selvik, 2021). Knowing the influence of social media on changing journalism, these journalists urged for a revolution within their field. They started opposing the old ideas of journalists being just 'mouthpieces for politicians' and instead pushed for the creation of a union for independent journalists to have more control and influence in political discussions (Selvik, 2021).

Frakes (2020) states that there is a growing trend of protesters in Lebanon using alternative media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X to share information internationally amid the ongoing revolution in the country. Activists rely on these platforms to share live updates and instant videos, often filling the gaps of traditional media coverage. This change has also led to the emergence of different media platforms, like *Thawra TV*, which is a page that consistently posts videos and updates on the protests, even after mainstream media has ceased coverage. Lebanese people started preferring these outlets, wanting to stay away from the sectarian biases of traditional media. Platforms such as

Thawra TV have gained the trust of individuals looking for transparency and truth during the nation's political turmoil (Frakes, 2020).

According to Ballout (2023), a significant shift has been taking place in Lebanon's media scene due to the emergence of different digital media platforms. Many of the new digital outlets have been started by independent researchers, civil society activists, and regular citizens without formal journalism experience, unlike the traditional media sources. But they all share the same objective, which is to further contribute to society by challenging common storylines and biased reporting that traditional media outlets continue to support (Ballout, 2023).

According to Mikdashi (2020), alternative media is an important tool to encourage democratic communication, particularly for people who are frequently disregarded or marginalized by mainstream media. It provides a platform for individuals and groups that are frequently left out or misrepresented in the media to narrate their own story in the style that best suits them. This kind of media differentiates itself from mainstream media by concentrating on niche markets and supporting particular populations that are frequently left out of mainstream media coverage (Mikdashi *et al.*, 2020). Online alternative media platforms in Lebanon are gaining popularity quickly, despite being in their initial stages and appealing primarily to young, city-dwelling populations (Ballout, 2023). Using digital technology and the broad reach of social media, these platforms are standing out by providing in-depth and investigative coverage of local matters. By talking about important political and socio economic problems in Lebanon and the wider Middle East, like corruption, financial crisis, and power abuse, they are rewriting the narrative in the media (Ballout, 2023).

During the last ten years, the alternative media movement has been slowly increasing in size, but it significantly picked up speed during the October 2019 demonstrations (Ballout, 2023). Following that, the devastating blast at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 increased the people's need to uncover the widespread corruption in Lebanon and call

for accountability and justice (Ballout, 2023). This blast resulted in the deaths of over 218 individuals and caused numerous injuries, and destruction in the capital. This terrible incident acted as a trigger, bringing the public's anger together and intensifying the reform movement that had been gathering momentum since the earlier protests. Transparency was given more importance after the incident because people wanted answers and solutions to the underlying problems that led to the catastrophe. For that reason, online alternative media outlets became important voices in the local media scene (Ballout, 2023).

Nonetheless, Ballout (2023) notes that these new platforms encounter substantial obstacles. Insufficient variety in funding continues to be a consistent obstacle, exacerbated by the nation's severe economic crisis. Besides that, they usually do not have the necessary organizational structure and editorial expertise to expand their operations completely. However, they have still effectively created a new culture of independent and investigative journalism in Lebanon, depending on data-driven research, rigorous fact-checking, reliable sourcing, and good reporting techniques. This commitment to maintaining journalistic integrity presents the potential of a new media landscape in Lebanon that puts a focus on the truth, integrity, and holding public people accountable rather than fulfilling the interests of powerful political and business organizations (Ballout, 2023).

Many platforms have gained popularity due to this momentum, getting much media coverage for their unique and investigative material and their coverage on important topics (Ballout, 2023). They release content in Arabic and English, providing a new perspective on Lebanon's socio-political scene (Ballout, 2023).

Ballout (2023) mentions seven major digital media outlets that have emerged in Lebanon and that have gathered significant media attention. Established in 2013, *Raseef22* is a digital media organization located in Beirut. It covers a wide range of subjects in 22 Arab nations, such as lifestyle, art, culture, economy, and politics. *Raseef22* was founded by Kareem Sakka, Rasha Hilweh, and Hassan Abbas and operates in Arabic and English languages. It was originally meant to be a blog inspired by the Arab Spring, but the

Pan-Arab media organization still expanded significantly, despite being banned in Saudi Arabia and Egypt for its coverage of sensitive topics (Ballout, 2023).

Started in 2017 by well-known Lebanese journalists Hazem al-Amin, Alya Ibrahim, and Diana Moukalled, *Daraj* is another independent digital media outlet that tackles modern issues like women's rights, climate change, and freedom rights. It has gotten popular for its investigative reporting, and winning awards like the Best Digital News Startup in the Middle East (Ballout, 2023).

Megaphone, established in 2017 by Lebanese journalist Jean Kassir, is the third digital media outlet mentioned by Ballout (2023), famous for its multimedia content that focuses on overlooked local issues and marginalized communities. *Megaphone* works on social media and initially focused on short videos, but because of its well-liked content and on-the-ground coverage during the October 2019 protests, it gained popularity. The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and Open Society Foundations are among the major international funders of the platform (Ballout, 2023).

Founded in 2011 by Nahla al-Chahal, *As-Safir Al-Arabi* is another digital media outlet that posts content about in-depth socio-political analysis and highlights marginalized communities in the Arab region. Although it started as an addition to *Al Safir* newspaper, *As-Safir Al-Arabi* remains independent editorially and is financially supported by different international sources (Ballout, 2023).

The Public Source, established in 2020, is a non-profit media organization that covers socio-economic and environmental issues from a left-wing point of view, creating in-depth investigative reports and trying to stay self-sustainable through subscription revenue (Ballout, 2023).

Established in 2014, *Maharat News* reports on issues related to media freedom and human rights abuses in Lebanon and the Middle East region, it's backed by funding from international organizations like UNICEF and UNDP (Ballout, 2023).

Lastly, *Beirut Today* established in 2017 provides online news coverage in both English and Arabic on political, social, and economic subjects, and has been endorsed by institutions such as the Thomson Reuters Foundation (Ballout, 2023).

Ballout (2023) mentions that these platforms are important to expand the variety of media in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. Mikdashi (2020) mentions the way alternative media is changing journalism in Lebanon by using social media. These online journalists are creating new media strategies through the use of digital platforms, which are considered necessary to support democratic systems not just in Lebanon but also in the region. One of the primary qualities of this alternative media is that it is interactive, encouraging community members to actively participate in the public sphere. By using an inclusive approach, alternative media creates an environment for people to voice their concerns and engage in conversations about issues that directly affect their day-to-day lives, resulting in a more informed and capable society (Mikdashi *et al.*, 2020).

Writing Through Resistance: Women Journalists in Lebanon

The environment for women in journalism in Lebanon is shaped by a unique combination of continuous gender inequality and advancements. Though the country's attitudes on gender are more progressive than other Arab nations, old patriarchal ideas still prohibit women from completely assuming leadership roles in several industries (Melki & Hitti, 2020). Women still face many challenges, even with the important part they play in the workforce and the active women's rights movement that advocates for reform and addresses injustices (Amel Association & CESTAS, 2010; Khalaf, 2010). Men outnumber

women in the workforce by a ratio of three to one, while political representation has stayed below five percent since women got the right to vote in 1953. Furthermore, these issues are made worse by the absence of a professional ethics code or legal structure to address gender bias in the workplace (Amel Association & CESTAS, 2010; Khalaf, 2010).

Within this challenging environment, women journalists face a 2:1 gender disparity, unfair pay, and workplace behaviors like sexual harassment that stop them from advancing in their career (Melki & Mallat, 2016). Women are excluded from decision-making roles in the media industry, stopping them from impacting policies that could promote improved gender equality despite their valuable contributions. There is an obvious contradiction in Lebanese society: despite the fact that women are making progress in many areas, the media industry continues to reflect broader societal constraints that prevent gender equality in leadership roles (Melki & Hitti, 2020).

In the media scene of Lebanon, women journalists are often faced with sexist traditions and norms that affect their entrance into and advancement within the media industry. According to Moubarak (2024), it all begins with the establishment of physical standards. Women are often judged based on how they look, such as their body type, hair, and beauty—qualities that are considered essential for success in journalism. However, women also face challenges that go much beyond just these basic expectations. The persistent culture in many media companies also normalizes the high rate of sexual harassment from directors, recruiters, and coworkers—regardless of how explicit or subtle. Women journalists have to not just handle these unwelcome advances, but also have to deal with them as a necessary part of their work, which creates a workplace that has a greatly negative impact on their mental well-being (Moubarak, 2024).

As an example, Moubarak (2024) mentions an interview done during her research, where a woman journalist talked about a negative experience in salary negotiations where she asked for more money. The CEO of the media company acknowledged that women are often paid less unless they go out of their way to request a higher salary, basically requiring

them to demand fair pay for themselves. This made the interviewee feel so discouraged that she ultimately rejected the offer. This shows how outdated ideas that men are the primary breadwinners force women in the media industry to constantly advocate for equal treatment, such as paying men the same as women. This kind of thinking leads to men being paid more than women, which is a persistent structural issue that hinders women's advancement in Lebanese media (Moubarak, 2024). According to a study by Melki and Hitti (2020), even after taking into account factors like age, seniority, education, experience, and the number of employees managed, journalists in the middle income range are more than twice as likely to be men, and those in the highest income range are four times more likely to be men. In fact, journalists in the low income range are more likely to be women.

In her study, Moubarak (2024) also uncovered that many women journalists in Lebanon are moving from full-time jobs to freelancing jobs because of the tough and relentless expectations set by media organizations. Full-time jobs often make them work even on holidays, and weekends are also expected to be worked. One especially disturbing story from a woman interviewed by Moubarak (2024) highlighted the severity of the women journalists' circumstances in Lebanon. After being kidnapped for a job related to her journalism, she got back to her media organization hoping to receive help or at the very least a short break to recover and rest. However, she was forced to return to work right away, leaving her with no time to recover from the traumatic experience. This harsh work environment, coupled with a lack of empathy and support from their supervisors, often leaves women reporters feeling exploited and disregarded, leading them to pursue freelance work because it offers them the flexibility and independence they need (Moubarak, 2024).

Moubarak's (2024) research also highlights the challenges women journalists face in managing their profession, pregnancy, and motherhood. Interviewees describe feeling tired, emotional, and financially strained due to their work and family responsibilities. They also face discrimination, such as being told they cannot get married or have children if they get a job, which is a deeply rooted issue in Lebanon. The research highlights the need for

media organizations to address these issues and provide support for women in the workforce. The study highlights the need for more efforts to meet the special needs of mothers in the media sector (Moubarak, 2024).

Moubarak's (2024) study also found that sexual harassment is a prevalent issue in Lebanon's journalism, with 70% of women journalists reporting encountering misconduct. Other forms of harassment include verbal abuse, hate speech, threats, physical abuse, and cyberbullying. A significant 96% of participants reported their coworkers had experienced harassment. The causes of these incidents are often attributed to fear and shame, often leading to silence. Many women also report having to use fake names to discuss sensitive issues, such as LGBTQIA+ rights, to avoid criticism and bullying (Moubarak, 2024).

Although a lot of research has been done about difficulties, challenges and injustices women journalists face in the media sector in Lebanon, there is a clear lack of studies on how women journalists could navigate and influence the rising independent media in Lebanon. The studies that currently exist mostly focus on traditional Lebanese media structures, leaving out the ways in which these women journalists use social media platforms. This research will attempt to fill that gap in the research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the media scene in Lebanon progressively shifts to a digital approach, the rise of online and alternative journalism has changed the production and consumption of news in the country. In fact, a growing mistrust in traditional media outlets and a growing reliance on independent and alternative media platforms have been the highlights of this change (El Takach *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, despite past studies covering and digging into the struggles women journalists face in the Lebanese media

sector, there is a significant gap in the research when it comes to these women's relation to alternative media outlets and the influence of social media on their career.

Chapter 2: Palestine

Introduction

Palestine has long been a central point of conflict, where the press plays a crucial role in documenting ongoing struggles. Even with an extended tradition of press regulation, Palestinian journalists continue to fear for their lives whenever they cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is the reality in Palestine and Israel (Joseph, 2010). For Palestinian journalists, notions like equal treatment, fair pay, freedom of movement, and access to information are frequently absent from their daily lives. But it is generally harsher for women journalists (Joseph, 2010). This chapter examines the history of Palestine, the evolution of Palestinian media, while highlighting the struggle of Palestinian women journalists in their field. It also explores how these women report on conflict and use social media platforms to report under the most challenging circumstances.

Background: Land, People, and Struggle

The region of Palestine, comprises present-day Israel and the Palestinian territories, it contains the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean shore and the West Bank west of the Jordan River (Brice *et al.*, 2024). The term "Palestine" has had different interpretations throughout history, sparking debate over its exact definition. This region's governmental structure and borders have changed over the course of almost three millennia, showing the complex history of this area. Furthermore, Palestine is also referred to as the Holy Land, as it has a

lot of religious importance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For thousands of years, Palestine's significance in religion and culture has made it a focal point of both disputes and respect (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

The term "Palestine" is known in history as representing a region of great cultural and historical significance. Still, different explanations have been made about the limits of this area. In the past, it was believed that the eastern border of Palestine stretched past the Jordan River, sometimes even reaching the edge of the Arabian Desert. This wide and occasionally changing definition shows the complicated and disputed characteristics of the region's geography throughout history (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

Nowadays, the borders of Palestine have become more precise. Currently, Palestine is the region found east of the Jordan River, with its northern limit coinciding with the border separating present-day Israel and Lebanon. Bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, it includes the Gaza Strip along the coastline. The Negev Desert sits at the southern boundary, stretching all the way to the Gulf of Aqaba (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

The political turmoil and conflicts in modern Palestine, especially in the western region near the Jordan River, have significantly influenced the social environment of this small area. Most recently, the composition of people living in this area show a complicated mix of Jewish and Arab residents. Israeli Jews made up around 50% of the population on the west side of the Jordan River, while the other half was made up of Palestinian Arabs, including Muslims, Christians, and Druze, along with a few smaller minority groups (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

There has been a great rise in the Jewish population with more people being born in Israel, despite many immigrants who have also made the region their home since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (Brice *et al.*, 2024). However, the Arab community in the country is mainly made up of people who are the children of individuals who used to reside in the region during the British Mandate, and often for many generations preceding

that era. Intense conflict and changes in the geopolitical landscape characterized the postwar era in Palestine, laying the foundation for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From 1945 to 1948, Palestinian tensions grew due to Jewish immigration, with the Yishuv advocating for a Jewish state and Arabs advocating for an independent Arab state. The British opposed Jewish immigration, but President Truman pushed for displaced Jews. Tensions escalated with the establishment of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1945 and the approval of the UN's plan to divide Palestine in 1947. The Zionists then significantly progressed and violence increased in the area, ending with the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Following the conflict, Israel was granted recognition and sovereignty over the majority of the former mandate region, with Jordan and Egypt assuming responsibility for the remaining portion. The Arab armies were ultimately defeated. The split of Palestinian Arab society and the development of a new geopolitical environment in the region characterized this era (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

The 1948 Nakba led to the revival of Palestinian identity, with refugees and national awareness forming the basis. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) emerged in the 1960s, advocating for freedom and dismantlement of Israel. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War and Israeli occupation intensified Palestinian resistance. Despite facing obstacles like disputes with Arab nations and internal rifts, the PLO remained a significant player in the Palestinian quest for self-rule. In the late 1980s, Hamas emerged, an Islamic group opposing the PLO's non-religious patriotism and advocating violent actions against Israel. Hamas gained sway in Gaza and achieved victory in the 2006 elections, causing further separation within the Palestinian leadership (Brice *et al.*, 2024). In 2007, following Hamas taking control, Israel enforced a blockade on Gaza, which still remains in place today (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023). The control of Gaza by Hamas made the relationship between Palestine and Israel even more unpredictable. Israel declared Gaza as an enemy while it's controlled by Hamas, and put in place a blockade, limiting incoming goods. Egypt facilitated a six-month truce in June 2008 between Hamas and Israel. When the agreement expired, Hamas declined to extend it, which retriggered the violence. Israel responded to the attacks by carrying out air raids and then sending in troops on the ground. After 22 days

of fighting, both parties announced a one-sided ceasefire. The conflict led to the deaths of 13 Israelis and more than 1,000 Palestinians (Brice *et al.*, 2024).

Israel started three military campaigns against Gaza after 2008, in 2012, 2014, and 2021, causing the fatalities of numerous Palestinians, specifically children, and a lot of damage to residential areas, educational facilities, and commercial structures (Alsaafin, 2023). In 2014, Israel killed almost 2,100 Palestinians during a 50-day operation known as "Operation Protective Edge," 1,462 of them were civilians and nearly 500 of whom were children. As a result, 11,000 people were hurt, 20,000 homes were damaged, and almost 500,000 people had to be relocated (Alsaafin, 2023).

The West Bank and East Jerusalem are still under Israeli authority in addition to Gaza. Around 5 million Palestinians currently live in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. In addition, almost 1.6 million Palestinians are citizens of Israel. This amounts to nearly half of all Palestinians globally. The majority of Palestinians live outside of Palestine, primarily in Arab nations (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

All of these events led to the most recent and possibly worst increase in tensions between Israel and Palestine, after more than 16 years of a devastating blockade on Gaza (Alsaafin, 2023). In October in 2023, the ongoing tensions finally escalated into an all-out war when Israel officially declared war on Gaza. This was a direct reaction to a surprising and coordinated assault by Hamas, catching Israel off guard with rocket attacks and ground incursions (Alsaafin, 2023). The Palestinian militant organization Hamas carried out its most heinous attack on Israel to date on October 7th, killing nearly 1,200 people (CFWIJ, 2024). They attacked many Israeli cities and kibbutzim, breaching the security lines surrounding Gaza. At least 200 hostages were also taken prisoner and returned to Gaza by them. Israel quickly responded by launching the largest bombing campaign in the region, which is said to have killed over 35,000 Palestinians, including at least 113 journalists (CFWIJ, 2024).

Alsaafin (2023) mentions the long-standing crisis, stemming from colonial history over a century ago, as one of the most persistent and heartbreaking conflicts in recent history. The conflict has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands and forced millions to flee. The Gaza blockade, which was initiated after Hamas took over the Strip, has transformed the region into a highly unstable hotspot, with worsening humanitarian conditions over time. The conflict in October 2023 represents a fresh and highly risky phase in this long-standing battle, sparking concerns of broader regional turmoil and prompting pressing inquiries about the fate of both populations in the midst of ongoing violence and devastation (Alsaafin, 2023).

Challenges and Resilience: Palestinian Media & Citizen Journalists

When Israeli military authority first began in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (1967–1994), Palestinians faced significant restrictions on their media sector. While foreign networks were occasionally available, local Palestinian radio and television stations were subject to restrictions. Palestinian publications were subject to severe license and content restrictions by Israeli authorities (Berger, 2013). According to Berger (2013), newspapers played a vital role in communication and political mobilization against the occupation, despite facing obstacles. Newspapers in support of the PLO were prohibited, and all publications had to be authorized by the Israeli Military Censor in Jerusalem. Financially, newspapers frequently depended on hidden assistance from different political groups, a tradition that has somewhat continued (Berger, 2013).

For example, early in the 1990s, the newspaper Al-Quds that had previously supported Jordan, shifted its support to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the Palestinian cause gained momentum (Berger, 2013). The first intifada in 1987 and the Oslo Accords of 1994 marked the beginning of this change, granting the PA limited power over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem and establishing the Palestinian

Authority (PA). There were then five phases in the Palestinian media's development under the PA. In the first phase, which ran from 1993 to 1994, local media had more freedom; but, in the second phase, which lasted from 1994 to 1996, there was more control. While harassment decreased during the third stage, which ran from 1996 to 2000, it nevertheless had an effect on journalism. Journalists covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict faced conditions similar to a war and had restricted access to information during the fourth phase, which ran from 2000 to 2006. The final stage started in 2007 when Hamas took control of Gaza, causing major division in the media (Berger, 2013).

Berger's (2013) research shows that Palestinian journalists have faced confrontations with Israeli soldiers in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. The presence of the Israeli military always restricts their efforts, involving violence and strict control measures. Even nonviolent demonstrations can escalate into dangerous clashes with them, using rubber bullets, stun grenades, and tear gas. Israeli checkpoints and closures also pose significant obstacles, making travel within and outside the territories complex and posing danger to their work (Berger, 2013).

However, when it comes to the Gaza Strip, a number of things make matters worse for journalists, whether it's for international or local media outlets (Abushmas, 2020). It has always been challenging for journalists to operate in the Gaza Strip due to its unique circumstances, cut off from the rest of the world and even from the other Palestinian side of the region (Abushmas, 2020). Since 2007, Hamas authorities have controlled the media in the Gaza Strip (Adwan & Naser, 2019). Prior to then, Israel or the Palestinian Authority controlled the media landscape (Abushmas, 2020).

In addition, A study conducted in 2015 by Fridh attempted to map and properly analyze the working conditions for journalists in Palestine. It also covers the opportunities and limitations that Palestinian journalists—freelance journalists in particular—often face and overcome. Upon examining the responses provided by the interviewees, the researcher found interesting conclusions. The main asset of Palestinian freelance journalists was their

adaptability, but they needed a stable paycheck. According to the study, if those journalists felt financially secure, they might have an opportunity to become less accommodating and more direct. The media, like all other industries, has long been a reflection of Palestine's crashing economy. This has also created an opportunity for local media outlets operating within the territories to treat journalists unfairly in terms of compensation. It is worse for independent journalists because they would have to give in more rights to their income (Fridh, 2015). Actually, freelance journalists in Gaza would rather collaborate with foreign news desks, even if it means compromising some of their professional values. Additionally, this kind of work offers a means of expressing oneself without worrying about the consequences stemming from many aspects of Palestinian society (Fridh & Wingren, 2015).

Furthermore, citizen journalists have gained increased significance in the context of Palestinian journalism, especially since the start of the war in Gaza in October 2023. Activists and citizen organizations have recognized the importance of social media and citizen journalism in addressing narratives against the Israeli media power since the 2008 Gaza war (Horbyk, 2023). Palestinian citizen journalists are now not just disseminating information; they are also engaging audiences to encourage change (Garfias, 2024). According to a recent study by Garfias (2024), young Palestinian journalists—especially citizen journalists on social media—are exposing the occupation and conflict in Gaza through powerful discourses that trigger moral and emotional reactions from their audience.

Some of the most popular citizen journalists include Motaz Azaiza, Hind Khoudary, Bisan Owda, Plestia Alaqad, and others. Many people rely on these journalists to report what is happening, not only to the Palestinians living in Gaza but also to the foreign press at large, that does not have the resources or ability to report what is happening in Gaza (Serhan, 2023). Serhan (2023) states that their raw and unedited coverage provides a unique insight into Gazan life that figures and numbers alone are unable to convey. These journalists do not pretend to be unbiased observers; none of them is. All of them are living and covering the fight at the same time (Serhan, 2023). They have reformulated their own

kind of journalistic integrity that fits their unique journalistic goals. In fact, these journalists are using powerful discourses like vulnerability as resistance, the difficulty of witnessing, or direct calls to action by using powerful, emotional pictures and phrases that evoke guilt and accountability (Garfias, 2024). By providing witness testimonies that are widely shared on social media, these discourses assist journalists in balancing global narratives and challenging the ruling stories surrounding the conflict (Garfias, 2024).

According to a research by Fahmy et al. (2024), journalists currently reporting the conflict in Gaza have made an effort to keep their national identities and personal prejudices apart from their professional work and reporting. However, the strain of not being able to persuade their audience to support them and fight the conflict makes this issue even more unachievable, making neutrality or objectivity almost impossible to achieve and extremely difficult (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024). Their motivations for reporting are greatly influenced by their feeling of national responsibility, Palestinian identity, and firsthand encounters with conflict. Furthermore, the situation now has an additional layer of complexity due to the rise of social media. Although these platforms have greatly aided in the spread of news and created fresh opportunities for real-time conflict reporting, they have also raised concerns about ethical standards and accuracy. These online platforms regularly disseminate false information, thus it is up to journalists to verify it (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024).

However, Palestinian journalists have also had to deal with significant issues like interruptions in communication and censorship by algorithms on social media. By helping journalists deal with media blackouts in Gaza, digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram have created new opportunities for war correspondents covering the conflict (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024). The usual communication obstacles associated with traditional war reporting have been overcome by these online platforms, which help journalists to connect with a worldwide audience and spread news more broadly. According to Fahmy *et al.* (2024), these benefits do however come with significant obstacles that limit the journalists' ability to report securely and effectively. During the Israel-Gaza conflict, internet outages

and communication blackouts have created significant obstacles that have forced journalists to risk their lives in order to use the internet. Algorithmic censorship has been applied to journalists, resulting in content limitations or account suspensions on social media sites. They have been unable to spread important information as a result of this restriction, which has reduced their influence and audience (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, the dependence on online platforms and the fight against algorithmic censorship draw attention to the complexities of modern war reporting, in which technology both facilitates and hinders journalistic efforts (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024).

Palestinian Women Journalists, Social Media and the Gaza Conflict

It's undeniable that the global feminist movements have had a significant impact on how women are portrayed and involved in different fields (Lippe & Ottosen, 2016). Women journalists in conflict zones have gained significant attention in recent years, and have been very visible in the media despite all the challenges they face. However, they still have a long way to go to catch up to other journalists, even women journalists, who work in less dangerous conditions. But most of the media is dominated by men, and gender matters in war reporting just as much as it does in other domains around the world. It is also an established fact that during times of conflict and war, there is frequently a rise in the violations committed against women journalists - a fact that is not nearly talked about enough (Lippe & Ottosen, 2016).

The targets of slang campaigns, assault, and physical or psychological harassment are frequently women journalists (Abushmas, 2020). When it comes to a region such as Palestine, or more precisely the Gaza Strip, women journalists face not just typical abuses and violations but also a variety of community-related offenses on a regular basis. Because there is no impartial government in Gaza and the population views women journalists as

sinner if they try to achieve anything, hundreds of offenses against them go unrecorded (Abushmas, 2020).

A third of Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip are women, according to MADA, the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA, 2018). For a variety of reasons, a significant number of journalists, however, are not listed or registered in the syndicate database. In fact, there are more female students majoring in media studies than male students in Gaza, yet barely any of them are listed (MADA, 2018). For this reason, women in this field may not appear to be as powerful and successful as their counterparts of the other gender (Zoonen, 1994). These factors tend to imply that the women journalists in Gaza are facing what could be described as a male-dominated sector within a male-dominated culture. Zoonen (1994) further contends that "if data tell something about differences between women and men in journalism, they actually say something about self-perception and self-images." However, in Palestinian media, the issue is not one of self-perception or self-image; rather, it is one of gender-related socioeconomic and cultural variables (Zoonen, 1994).

After going through many struggles and events, Gaza could never again be a secure place for journalists, particularly women, to operate, whether under the governments of Egypt, Israel, the PA in 1994, or Hamas in 2007 (Azzouni, 2010). In the Gaza Strip, discrimination and oppression against women journalists remains unchanged. Women's rights have been repeatedly repressed by Palestinian conservative culture and religious organizations, and despite the progressive new generations across all regions, not much has changed. The gender equality and human rights activist *Suheir Azzouni* (2010) identified two primary categories of barriers and difficulties Palestinian women currently face in achieving their rights: internal to their own culture and society, and external to the occupation, conflict, and instability (Azzouni, 2010).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the dangers and difficulties faced by women journalists covering war areas—particularly the Gaza Strip—Abushmas (2020)

conducted a study involving interviews with experienced reporters from Gaza, Palestine. It was established that covering news entails a number of risks and difficulties for women journalists from both internal and external sources. The Israeli army's abuses and the harsh policies of the Israeli government are the main sources of external risks for women journalists. On the other hand, internal hazards are frequently associated with the actions and policies of the Gaza Strip's governing authority, as well as the local community and workplace culture for women journalists. In fact, Abushmas's (2020) study found that while covering news on the field, women journalists in Gaza experience ongoing feelings of insecurity. They blame this on the Israeli soldiers' blatant disregard for every international agreement pertaining to the safety of reporters in war areas. They claim that this behavior by the Israelis disrupts their reporting and occasionally prevents them from arriving at the scene. The subjects of Abushmas's (2020) research also further emphasize that being freelance journalists places them at greater risk because, when working in a war area, women journalists lack the necessary protective gear. They describe items such as protection vests, helmets, medical kits, gas masks as all part of an ideal kit. This greatly increases one's reluctance to visit a specific scene and promptly follow up on any breaking news in the field. As women journalists in Gaza, they were also impacted by being summoned and questioned by the security forces there. This kind of violation was reported by five of the nine women journalists the Abushmas spoke with about their experiences. The journalists who participated in the research also talked about their experience covering protests and the fact that they were subjected to several instances of harassment and violence. Occasionally, sexist comments were directed at these women reporters, such as "women were not supposed to leave their house and act like men," and other remarks that implied that the work done by women journalists went against customs, religion, or social norms. The journalists further stated that they were the target of numerous hostile acts via websites linked to Hamas and those endorsing them. All women journalists acknowledged the existence of this ongoing assault, citing mostly disparaging remarks they frequently encounter on social media platforms or menacing communications they get in addition to dubious remarks containing allegations of treachery and religious desertions (Abushmas, 2020).

Despite the many challenges and constraints they frequently face, Palestinian women journalists in Gaza have consistently risen to the occasion and shown themselves to be exceptional and resilient (Kilman, 2017). Indeed, women journalists in Gaza have demonstrated a remarkable ability to cover news and report from the field. Palestinian women journalists are subjected to a daily barrage of human rights breaches and abuses, particularly with regard to their freedom of expression and their employment in news reporting (Kilman, 2017).

Most recently, and since the beginning of October 2023, Gaza's residents have experienced unspeakable suffering because of the war after Hamas carried out a deadly attack on Israel (Bashir, 2024). However, if it weren't for the journalists in Gaza who never stopped documenting and disseminating the horrific details of this conflict on social media, the world would never have known about the profound details of such circumstances (Bashir, 2024). Particularly during conflicts with the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian lands, women journalists in Palestine have assumed a leadership position in the media industry. Since October 7th 2023, women journalists have been actively covering the Israeli war against the Gaza Strip's population on social media. The continuing conflict in Gaza has been the "deadliest" for journalists, according to a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists. It has resulted in the greatest number of media workers dying in one place and in a short amount of time in the final two months of 2023 (Bashir, 2024).

The role of Palestinian women journalists on social media sites is still not well understood, despite the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still developing. Since the conflict started on October 7, 2023, there have been changes in the ways that women journalists have covered the issue and dealt with it on social media. However, these are all new concepts that have not yet been backed up by research. Therefore, it is worth studying the way Palestinian women journalists are reporting on the conflict using social media.

Conclusion

To conclude, Palestine is a historically significant country and territory with a long history of conflict and ongoing violence, particularly in Gaza. In response to this reality, Palestinian journalism frequently involves reporters operating under severe restrictions, facing threats, and risking their lives to report the truth. Women journalists in Palestine have to deal with even more challenges, restrictions and physical threats, especially during times of conflict. Additionally, the growth of citizen journalism, particularly on social media, has given Palestinian journalists a platform and a chance to tell their own stories. Research about how these instruments are influencing the work of Palestinian women journalists, particularly in times of war, is still lacking, nevertheless. While acknowledging the determination and resilience of those who report from the front lines, this study aims to fill some of the research gap.

Gaps in Research

While my thesis has highlighted the ways Arab women journalists, particularly from Lebanon and Palestine, are using social media platforms, it has also revealed a significant gap in literature. There is very limited research on how social media platforms are being used specifically by independent women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine, particularly in the context of war and conflict. More research should be done about digital journalism and citizen journalism in Palestine, with special focus on women journalists since they are very underrepresented. There is also a gap in research specifically concerning Lebanese women journalists and how they are dealing with the digitalisation of journalism in recent times. As Horbyk (2023) and Garfias (2024) suggest, social media plays a big role in changing narratives and offering new alternative perspectives during conflict, but its effects on journalistic integrity and professional identity still remain underexplored.

Methodology

In order to better understand how women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon use social media to shape and project their professional identities during times of conflict, this study focuses on both textual and visual elements of social media posts. The research employs a Qualitative Multimodal thematic content analysis. With the help of this method, it is possible to understand how the selected Lebanese and Palestinian women journalists utilize digital platforms and interact professionally with one another. This method was inspired by Garfias' (2024) research that used Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the posts of Palestinian citizen journalists active in the current conflict in Gaza. The work done by Garfias (2024) showed how deeper narratives in conflict reporting might be found by integrating textual and visual aspects.

Sampling

My study will analyze Instagram posts shared over the period of one year, from September 2023 to September 2024. I chose this period because it includes significant geopolitical events, such as the start of conflict in Gaza and Lebanon. It will end around the time I am conducting this research. Even though recent research has shown X (previously Twitter) to be the top social media platform for journalists in 2024 (Albasi, 2024), my study specifically examines Instagram. The reason for choosing Instagram as a priority is based on the fact that the journalists I have selected for this study have strategically focused on this platform, particularly since the start of the conflict in Gaza and the Israeli-Lebanese borders in October 2023. Therefore, concentrating on Instagram will allow a more detailed analysis on how these journalists utilize visual storytelling and engagement. For example, the Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1 on Instagram) has a following of 4.7 million followers on Instagram, compared to X (@wizardbisan on X) where she has

150 Thousand followers (Owda, n.d.). This substantial difference in reach underscores the importance of Instagram as a platform for these journalists.

In this research, I have chosen three Palestinian women journalists and two Lebanese women journalists to analyze. These journalists were deliberately selected because they are recognized figures in their specific fields, with large numbers of followers and active participation on Instagram. Choosing to prioritize Palestinian journalists reflects the increased presence and influence of Palestinian voices in today's media environment, especially with the ongoing conflict and its international significance. Palestinian journalists have been leading the way in documenting and sharing their experiences, despite facing unique challenges, making their presence on social media crucial for this research. All chosen reporters work as freelancers, citizen journalists or are with independent media, which is important as they use social media without the support or limitations of mainstream media organizations.

I will be using a purposive sampling method, three Instagram posts from each journalist will be selected, totaling 15 posts. This number of posts will allow me to get the information I need out of a small sample. I selected the post with careful consideration to have a good representation of the journalists' work during the conflict. The selection criteria focused on different relevant time frames during the conflict, key events, and distinct themes that align with my study's focus.

For the analysis, I have selected three Palestinian women journalists—Bisan Owda, Plestia Alaqad, and Hind Khoudary—along with two Lebanese women journalists, Fatima Ftouni and Diana Moukalled. I specifically chose these journalists for their significant presence on Instagram and their use of the platform to create professional personas and connect with their audience. It is important to note that most of the chosen journalists have gained the majority of their online following the timeframe my research is covering.

The following table offers a summary of the journalists chosen for analysis in this research, detailing their names, Instagram handles, number of followers, professional affiliations, countries of origin and language of their content.

Name	Instagram Account	Followers count	Nationality	Languages	Affiliation
Bisan Owda	@wizard_bisan1	4.7 Million	Palestinian	English & Arabic	Freelancer
Plestia Alaqad	@plestia_alaqad	4.5 Million	Palestinian	English & Arabic	Freelancer
Hind Khoudary	@hindkhoudary	1.2 Million	Palestinian	English & Arabic	Freelancer
Fatima Ftouni	@fatiimaftouni	123 Thousand	Lebanese	Arabic	Independent News Outlet
Diana Moukalled	@dania_moukalled	3.4 Thousand	Lebanese	English & Arabic	Independent News Outlet

Table 4.1: Overview of Selected Journalists: Instagram Accounts, Followers, Professional Affiliation, Languages used and Nationality. Information retrieved on September 6, 2024.

Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1): The well-known Palestinian filmmaker and citizen journalist, Bisan Owda has gained a large Instagram following of 4.7 million followers thanks to her influential reporting on Gaza events (Owda, n.d.). Her famous selfie-style videos, which connected her with a wide audience, have established her as a key figure in Palestinian journalism. Her content was shared by major news outlets including BBC News, Al Jazeera and ABC News (The New Arab Staff, 2024). She won an Emmy in the

Outstanding Hard News Feature Story category along with AJ+ for their documentary series in Gaza “It’s Bisan From Gaza – and I’m Still Alive” (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Plestia Alaqad (@plestia_alaqad): Another influential Palestinian citizen journalist who provides first hand reports from Gaza is Plestia Alaqad. On her Instagram account, she shared updates and deep personal thoughts, showing an unedited view of life in Gaza to her 4.5 Million followers (Alaqad, n.d.). She has been using her platform to support human rights, gender equality, and youth empowerment since before the 2023 war on Gaza, becoming a strong advocate (The New Arab Staff, 2024). Alaqad moved to Beirut in August 2024 from Australia, where she and her family had sought safety after leaving the Gaza Strip in November 2023 (The New Arab Staff, 2024).

Hind Khoudary (@hindkhoudary): A freelance journalist and human rights activist with 1.2 million followers on Instagram, her focus is on matters concerning Palestine (Khoudary, n.d.). She uses her Instagram to showcase her journalism and activism, and to bring attention to the challenges experienced by Palestinians in Gaza. She has worked for different publications such as The New Arab, the Middle East Eye, Anadolu Agency, and +972 Magazine during her career (The New Arab Staff, 2024).

Fatima Ftouni (@fatiimaftouni): A Lebanese journalist working for Al-Mayadeen Media Network, which is an independent Arab satellite news channel located in Lebanon. She is known for her reporting on South Lebanon and matters affecting the region, especially since the start of the conflict with Israel in South Lebanon on the shared borders. Her Instagram account with 123 thousand followers showcases her commitment to sharing stories that are often overlooked (Ftouni, n.d.).

Diana Moukalled (@diana_moukalled): A well-known Lebanese journalist and documentary filmmaker renowned for her courageous and perceptive journalism. In 2017, Moukalled teamed up to establish Daraj Media, an independent media platform that focuses on addressing contentious and overlooked topics in the Arab region (Lebanese American

University, n.d.). She has 3.4 thousand followers on her Instagram profile (Moukalled, n.d.).

Framework

In this research, I will use a multimodal thematic content analysis framework. Its intent is to reveal the underlying themes and patterns that define the journalists' online presence. This strategy will help me get a better understanding of how these women journalists convey their messages, engage and interact with their audience, and manage their roles in this media scene.

A multimodal approach to communication methods, according to Pearce (2018), focuses on textual, auditory, linguistic, spatial, and visual elements. Unimodal analysis used to be popular because it reflects traditional academic practices that valued text over pictures as the most effective study focus (Pearce *et al.*, 2018). However, studying visuals and giving images priority in this research are important to improve the content analysis's ability to look into "the whole story." Though the visual presents unique analytical challenges, Pearce (2018) states that visuals are essential to the fully multimodal character of many platforms. In my research, using a multimodal method is therefore essential because it captures the interaction between text and visuals in the journalists' social media posts, allowing for a deeper and better understanding of their online presence.

My qualitative multimodal analysis framework is built around a combination of existing research methods and frameworks from other studies to create an approach that is in line with the goals of this research:

Research conducted by Djerf-Pierre, Ghersetti, and Hedman (2016) studied journalists' social media usage. It was discovered that 51% of journalists considered social

media useful for networking, while 43% deemed it necessary for personal branding, and 44% used it to share others' stories. This framework provides a detailed insight into how journalists interact with social media, and is especially valuable for examining the work of women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon (Djerf-Pierre *et al.*, 2016).

To enhance the textual content analysis, WACC's Global Media Monitoring Methodology will be used to evaluate how journalists' media content both mirrors and influences their professional identities and the wider media environment. This includes recognizing important patterns in representation, framing, and narrative building.

In addition to being inspired by these existing frameworks, I will create a unique framework for multimodal analysis by establishing eight distinct themes that match the research goals. It's important to note that in this research, the concept and theme of journalistic integrity is redefined from its traditional sense to better align with the realities of today's journalism on digital platforms. According to Ward (2018), fresh concepts must be joined to create a thorough understanding of what responsible journalism entails in the age of digital media. Today's journalists operate in a toxic (and international) public space populated with far-right "journalism," and disinformation (Ward, 2018). Reporting on events in an objective and unbiased way is not enough for journalists to define themselves against these global influences anymore (Ward, 2018). The core goals of journalism integrity need to be rethought. Modern journalism can be overtly political, subjective, and emotional (Ward, 2018).

Recently, emotion is becoming a much more significant factor in how news is created and consumed as media and society change (Beckett, 2015). Garfias (2024) states that Palestinian journalists covering the Gaza crisis on the internet use powerful, emotional imagery and language. This will be recognized by the framework, which examines the emotional tone used by female journalists. Thus, this framework will guide me to analyze how these women are merging personal expression and emotions with reporting, therefore challenging the notion that women journalists report in an objective fashion (Mellor, 2011).

The framework will also focus on challenging stereotypes, which aligns with Marzouki's (2011) findings, which mentioned the big role women journalists played in Arab uprisings. This challenges the stereotypes around Arab women being passive or inactive during conflicts and protests, as women journalists were active in both the physical and digital sphere during the Tunisian uprisings (Marzouki, 2011). Similarly, this framework will look into how Palestinian and Lebanese women are challenging stereotypes in their online presence.

Since all of the journalists chosen work as freelancers or for independent/alternative media outlets, they often blend reporting with acts of activism and advocacy. They balance their personal beliefs with their professional duties. Thus, I will examine how their posts call for social, political or human rights actions, and if they mention protests, movements or add any call to action.

Since I am analyzing social media posts, specifically on Instagram, it's important to study the methods journalists use to engage their followers on the platform. Engagement is essential for social media sites like Instagram, and this element evaluates how these journalists engage with their audience on the platform. Therefore, this theme is important to study what kind of methods are used by the journalists to engage with their audience on social media platforms.

Additionally, since Djerf-Pierre, Ghersetti, and Hedman's (2016) study found that 51% of journalists considered social media useful for networking, it was important to include that theme in the framework to study if women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine have also benefited from social media in that aspect.

Gender is another crucial lens in this research, particularly when it comes to studying how women journalists are working in the traditionally male-dominated field of conflict reporting. Looking into whether posts emphasize gender issues, gendered experiences, and

if they emphasize women's empowerment is very beneficial to the study of Arab women journalists during conflict.

I will also focus on the theme of mentorship and support. Similar to Sakr's (2004) research, this framework recognizes the importance of mentoring in forming professional identities, especially in conflict zones. Sakr (2004) points out that Arab women journalists actively support each other and the next generation of women wanting to be journalists by taking on mentoring responsibilities. This research will look into how and if Lebanese and Palestinian women journalists use social media for the purpose of mentorship.

Through the integration of the mentioned methods, my research will provide a thorough understanding into the ways in which Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists use social media to build their professional personas and impact their followers using both textual and visual content.

Qualitative Multimodal Thematic Content Analysis

This framework aims to look into the text, including vocal (auditory) text and visuals in the content of Instagram posts from women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon, focusing on **eight main themes**:

1. Journalistic Integrity:

- **Textual:** Who is quoted in the post? What is the central focus of the post? Does the text focus on important social issues, objective reporting, or self-promotion? Does it highlight marginalized voices? Does it report on factual information?

- **Visual:** What visual elements are used to represent different perspectives? Do the visuals reflect professionalism and credibility in journalism?

2. Emotional Tone:

- **Textual:** Are the words emotionally charged? What emotions does the text express? Are there specific words or phrases in the caption or content that evoke a particular emotional response? How does the tone influence the audience's perception of the post's message?
- **Visual:** Do the visuals convey an emotional tone? Do the visuals evoke strong emotions? How do the visuals complement or contrast with the emotional tone conveyed in the text?

3. Challenging Stereotypes:

- **Textual:** Does the post challenge or perpetuate stereotypes? Does the text address or critique common stereotypes or misconceptions? Are there examples?
- **Visual:** Do the visuals challenge stereotypes? Does the post portray individuals in non-traditional or unexpected roles? Do the visuals break away from typical portrayals of certain groups?

4. Advocacy and activism:

- **Textual:** Do journalists craft an authentic voice while balancing personal and professional boundaries? Does the text explicitly call for action, change, or support for a specific cause? Does the text reflect a strong stance on social justice, political issues, or human rights advocacy?
- **Visual:** Do the visuals reflect activism or advocacy? Do the visuals capture moments of raising awareness or supporting a specific cause?

5. Audience engagement and Interaction:

- **Textual:** How do journalists engage with their audience through likes, comments, and direct messages? Do they speak directly to their audience? Is there a call to action?
- **Visual:** How do the visuals encourage audience engagement? Are there visuals of journalists engaging with the audience?

6. Networking and collaboration

- **Textual:** Do these online interactions lead to career opportunities? Do the texts include joint projects or teamwork? Is there focus on shared achievements or goals?
- **Visual:** Do the visuals reflect networking or collaborative efforts? Do they depict professional interactions? Do they capture joint projects or teamwork?

7. Gender and Empowerment:

- **Textual:** Does the text convey a message of empowerment for women? How is gender part or not part of the news report?
- **Visual:** Do the images portray women in powerful positions or overcoming challenges? Do the visuals complement the text in emphasizing women's empowerment? Does body language convey self-assurance and independence?

8. Mentorship and Support:

- **Textual:** Does the text reflect experiences of mentorship or support from other women in the industry?
- **Visual:** Do the visuals show women mentoring or guiding others? Are there visuals of women collaborating or working together?

Analysis of Palestinian and Lebanese journalists' Instagram posts

Posts by Bisan Owda

Post 1: Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1). Posted on 26 July, 2024.



Figure 5.1.1: Appendix 1. Post 1.

The post by @wizard_bisan1 (2024) highlights the text “Bisan and AJ+ have been nominated for a News and Documentary Emmy” (Owda, 2024). This post is a collaboration between Owda’s account and the official account of AJ+ that celebrates their nomination

for a News and Documentary Emmy on their joint online series *“It’s Bisan from Gaza and I’m Still Alive”*.

The caption of the post talks about Owda’s accomplishments, including winning a Peabody award for the same series. This falls under the theme of Professional integrity. It showcases Owda's professional achievements and her commitment to journalism in Gaza. Additionally, it shows her role in documenting life in such a conflict area and her dedication to showcasing Gaza's beauty and culture. Her dedication to journalistic ethics is further highlighted by the acknowledgment of her work from esteemed organizations like the Peabody Jury and the Emmy nomination. The picture of the post reinforces the theme of journalistic integrity by showcasing Owda in a press outfit with the award, symbolizing recognition of her professional achievements and commitment to her work.

In addition, the text in the post is emotionally charged, especially in its presentation of Bisan Owda's achievements and the challenging conditions in which she operates. Phrases like “showing bravery and persistence in the midst of imminent danger” (Owda, 2024) and “carrying a heavy journalistic burden” (Owda, 2024) convey a strong emotional undertone. Her acceptance of an award from a refugee camp in occupied Gaza, along with the description of her work during Israel's war on Gaza, increases the emotional impact, emphasizing her resilience and the gravity of her situation and the importance of her work online.

The post also relates to the theme of networking and collaboration, highlighting Owda's partnership with AJ+ and her global acclaim from awards such as the Peabody. This suggests that she has developed a lot of important professional connections that have likely played a role in her big success. Recognizing her work on an international level highlights the importance of these online partnerships in enhancing her professional development and career. The picture, which includes the award, symbolizes the success of the collaboration between Owda and AJ+, reflecting the professional relationships that have facilitated her achievements.

Finally, even if the post doesn't directly discuss audience engagement, the awards and praise received infer that her work has connected with viewers worldwide, resulting in higher visibility and potentially more engagement with her content.

Post 2: Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1). Posted on 1 December, 2023.

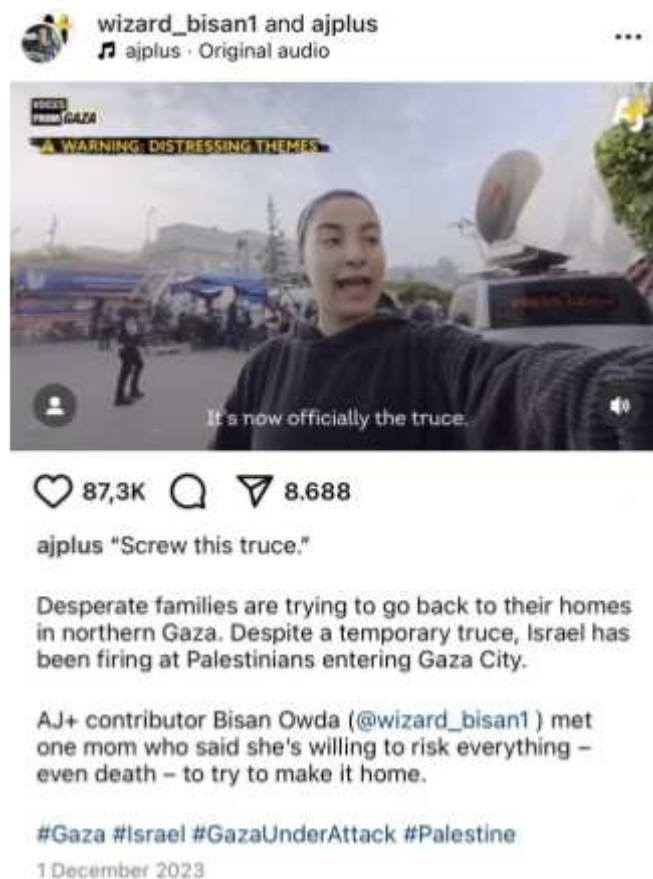


Figure 5.1.2: Appendix 1. Post 2.

The video posted by @wizard_bisan1 (2023), Bisan Owda partners with AJ+ to film daily life in Gaza amid a brief ceasefire. The video starts with Owda talking about the ceasefire, then shows scared children reading Israeli leaflets instructing civilians to leave the north. The video switches to a mother who is determined to go back to her home in

northern Gaza, despite the dangers. Owda depicts civilians trying to go back to Gaza City, where a few are fired at by Israeli forces, she emphasizes the violence that took place during the truce.

Owda shows a dedication to journalistic integrity by highlighting the experiences of civilians during the truce, particularly the voices of vulnerable groups like children and mothers. Owda mentions how the conflict is still ongoing despite the ceasefire, emphasizing the human cost of war with details and facts such as “Israel has been firing at Palestinians entering Gaza City.” In terms of visuals, integrity is reflected in the video of kids reading warning flyers to leave, a straightforward depiction of the actual circumstances in the area. She interviews children, who are usually marginalized and not represented enough in news reporting. The footage of civilians trying to go back to Gaza City, even though there is a possibility of being shot at, also emphasizes her dedication to sharing a truthful, balanced and unfiltered story despite the dangers. Owda focuses on marginalized groups in her text and visuals, ensuring her coverage is ethically sound and giving them a central narrative in mainstream media.

Both the caption and the video carry a deeply emotional tone, reflecting the desperation and resilience of Gaza’s civilians. The caption, “Screw this truce,” sets an angry and frustrated tone right from the start, expressing the emotional exhaustion of people who have suffered through broken promises of peace. This strong emotional language conveys the disillusionment of civilians living under a war that continues despite agreements to ceasefire. In terms of the visuals in the post, the emotional depth is even more pronounced. The fears and anxieties of children are shown through the close-up shots of them reading Israel's dropped flyers. Their tense and anxious body language, combined with their descriptions of horror, heighten the emotional effect. The mother's video expressing her willingness to risk death to go back home shows the depth of sadness and resolve, which transforms the post into an illustration of human hardship. The contrast between the mother's resistance and the ongoing street violence heightens the emotional pressure, pulling the viewers further into the everyday struggles of the civilians. The use of

close-ups and the real-time documentation of these events allow viewers to connect emotionally with the individuals in the video, enhancing the post's overall impact.

Additionally, Owda's post challenges the typical stereotypes linked to Palestinian civilians and mothers, notably the depiction of them as passive sufferers during conflict. They are typically shown as just numbers instead of individual, real people. The text and visuals highlight both determination and resilience. The mother's declaration, "death would be more merciful than what they are making us go through," challenges the perception of Palestinians as helpless, showcasing their strength in the face of impossible circumstances. This statement portrays civilians and especially mothers in Gaza as playing an active role in their struggle for dignity and survival. In terms of imagery, the civilians' decision to go back to Gaza City despite the threats demonstrates their strength and determination. By documenting the mother's choice to take her family back home, despite the danger of being shot, Owda chooses to challenge the stereotype of powerless Palestinian women; she instead presents them as daring individuals capable of making significant decisions for their families and for themselves. Owda records people walking, set on going home, showing their defiance and questioning assumptions about passivity during conflict.

Both the text and images in this post also convey a sense of advocacy. Owda's choice to highlight the breaches of the ceasefire, particularly noting that Israeli forces targeted civilians, shows that she is not just a neutral bystander. Owda's text highlights the unfairness of the situation, indirectly supporting global recognition and responsibility. Her caption expresses strong annoyance towards the ineffective international agreements, urging her viewers to analyze these political choices carefully, especially the phrase "Screw this truce." The video highlights everyday acts of resistance, such as a mother's attempt to go back to her house, in terms of visual activism. Owda not only captures these moments as a journalist, but also as an advocate for Palestinian resilience. Her visuals depict a collective defiance as the streets are filled with people who are no longer willing to be displaced. The mix of text and images in the post serves as a powerful instrument for

activism, encouraging viewers to acknowledge the continuous injustice and human rights abuses in Gaza.

Finally, it's important to note that Owda's collaboration with AJ+ is an important element in this post and illustrates how essential networking and collaboration is on social media. In the post, it is highlighted how Owda and AJ+ are connected, showing how working together can help independent journalists reach more people. This collaboration helps her share her narratives with a bigger, worldwide audience, boosting her reputation, trustworthiness and presence in the global media industry. The visual aspect of the video production highlights the advantages of this partnership in a professional manner. The resources from AJ+ probably helped Owda produce the high-quality footage and editing, demonstrating how such professional collaborations can enhance the coverage and reach of independent or citizen journalists like Owda. The partnership boosts the personal brand of Owda and elevates AJ+ by showcasing significant stories from Gaza. This effective collaboration showcases how using social media platforms such as Instagram can result in influential journalism, especially for freelancers and independent journalists like Owda.

Post 3: Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1). Posted on 26 August, 2024.

Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1) (2024) shared a video in collaboration with the "*Ele Elna Elak*" (Translation: "What's ours is yours") campaign (@ele_elna_elak) that raises money to provide food, water, shelter and more for Palestinians in Gaza. In the video, Owda celebrates her birthday with orphans in Gaza. The caption emphasizes how dedicated she is to humanitarian efforts, particularly during 11 months of conflict, and adds a call to action for the viewers to contribute to the cause through donations to the mentioned campaign. In the video, Owda goes to an orphanage, giving out cake and bonding with the children, mentioning the importance of helping Gaza's most vulnerable population.

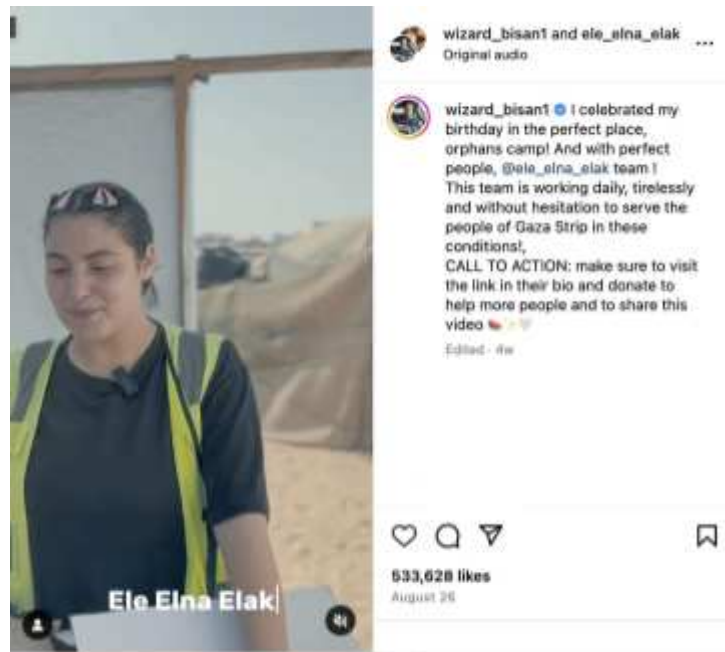


Figure 5.1.3: Appendix 1. Post 3.

Owda merges personal and professional narratives in her post while upholding journalistic integrity by talking about the continuous humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Owda's decision to celebrate her birthday at an orphanage and her partnership with the "*Ele Elna Elak*" initiative demonstrate her dedication to raising awareness about people like orphaned children impacted by conflict. In her text and video, she highlights the significance of helping orphans, who are usually overlooked in popular media. The post focuses on the cause rather than self-promotion, which shows her commitment as a journalist dedicated to Gaza's challenges. As for the visuals in the video, the sight of Owda's activities at the orphanage, playing with children and giving them cake, reinforces the theme of integrity as she becomes deeply involved in the community she is documenting. Her active participation with the children and the sharing of food show that she is not just a bystander, but she is actively involved. This reinforces her commitment to advocacy journalism in the conflict zone, emphasizing important stories.

When it comes to emotions, the post has both compassion and hope. The caption under the post highlights the emotional significance of Owda commemorating her birthday during 11 months of conflict in Gaza, and she emphasizes that the real cause for celebration is the endurance of her community. She notes in her caption: “ I celebrated my birthday in the perfect place, orphans camp!” As she discusses the orphans who have suffered unbelievable trauma in the video, her voice and words are filled with a strong emotional impact as she asks for help. She speaks passionately about the orphans who have suffered a lot of unimaginable trauma and asks for assistance from her audience. The emotional tone is made more obvious by the visuals of children’s joy juxtaposed with the grim reality of their situation. The video features children laughing and playing, which contrasts with the acknowledgment of the horrors they have faced. The video has a bittersweet quality due to Owda's engagement with the children, combined with the upbeat music and cake cutting scenes, balancing between happiness and an unspoken sadness.

Additionally, This post challenges stereotypes about Gaza by highlighting not only its destruction but also moments of resilience and happiness. The story goes beyond the usual image of Gaza as only a war-torn area by showcasing the lively existence of kids in an orphanage camp, celebrating in spite of the challenges they face in the middle of the conflict. Owda's choice to celebrate her birthday with the children demonstrates that even in the most challenging situations, life goes on. The visual image of children smiling, playing, and eating cake, living their lives challenges the view of Gaza as a constant place of despair. The post challenges the traditional depiction of conflict zones and shows that Palestinians in Gaza still have humanity and spirit by emphasizing positive moments.

Furthermore, Owda’s post is centered around advocacy. The caption urges viewers to go to the "*Ele Elna Elak*" campaign’s profile and help financially to help the orphans of Gaza. Owda utilizes her platform and large profile reach to shine a spotlight on the campaign's efforts and help vulnerable children. In terms of visuals, the video strengthens this activism. Owda's interactions with the children that are caught on camera, along with the fun and positive atmosphere at the orphanage, provide a compelling argument for the

campaign's significance. The visuals demonstrate how donations and support can make a positive impact, providing viewers with a clear motivation to contribute.

Finally, Owda actively promotes audience engagement by providing a clear call-to-action in the caption: "make sure to visit the link in their bio and donate." (Owda, 2024). By engaging her audience in the humanitarian cause, she turns passive spectators (her followers) into involved contributors. The post has an intimate quality, as Owda celebrates her birthday with kids in Gaza, which establishes an emotional bond with her audience, potentially sparking comments, shares, and contributions.

Posts by Plestia Alaqad

Post 1: Plestia Alaqad (@plestia.alaqad). Posted on 27 August, 2024.



Figure 5.2.1: Appendix 2. Post 1.

The post by @plestia.alaqad (2024) shows a picture of her donning a keffiyeh, seated in front of the American University of Beirut (AUB), which visually represents her ties to Palestinian heritage and strength. The keffiyeh, a symbol of Palestinian culture and defiance, is visibly displayed in the center of the post, amplifying the visual significance of the message. Alaqad writes in her caption that she was awarded the Shireen Abu Akleh

Scholarship, named after the renowned Palestinian-American journalist who was tragically killed while covering an Israeli raid in the West Bank in 2022. Shireen Abu Akleh was a veteran reporter for Al Jazeera, known for her fearless coverage of Palestinian life under occupation. The scholarship honors her legacy by supporting aspiring journalists like Alaqad.

The post shows strong emotions, using phrases like "this is for you, Shireen" evoke a profound feeling of respect. The emotional tone in this context links Alaqad's individual experience to the broader Palestinian battle. Alaqad projects the emotional influence of the case of Shireen Abu Akleh, who represented bravery and resilience in areas of conflict. The caption connects her personal achievement to a broader historical story, giving the post a feeling of motivation, resilience, and determination against difficult obstacles. She writes “When times get overwhelming, I remember Shireen's words: ‘it takes endurance...keep your spirits high.’” This emotional connection strikes a chord with her viewers, boosting the post's capacity to connect on a more intimate level.

Regarding journalistic ethics, the post subtly showcases Alaqad's dedication to journalism by emphasizing her focus on education and justice. By being awarded the Shireen Abu Akleh Scholarship, she connects with the concept of brave journalism and support for Palestinian rights. This is supported by her caption, when she writes “Education is the most powerful tool a Palestinian can acquire. And while Israel has destroyed every single university in Gaza, Palestine, it will never stop young women like me from learning in the pursuit of justice.” She mentions Israel’s destruction of educational institutions in Gaza, fighting for justice. Additionally, her rise in popularity and reputation in the field and her dedication to practice journalism as more than just a job, but as a struggle for justice for Gaza, are demonstrated by the recognition from a major university like AUB and a foundation that honors a well-known international journalist.

The visual of Alaqad in front of AUB in Lebanon, along with her statements, also emphasize her dedication to her profession, portraying her as a journalist whose work is

focused on seeking truth and empowerment. In addition, the post also challenges stereotypes, specifically related to Palestinian women and their societal roles. Alaqad challenges typical portrayals of Palestinian women as victims, or housewives, by presenting herself as an educated, motivated woman fighting for justice. Rather, she represents strength, empowerment, and control, particularly by emphasizing education as a means of opposition.

Networking and collaboration also come into play, as Alaqad's scholarship and her connection to AUB show the importance of professional networks and institutional support in her career. This collaboration does not only increase her exposure as a journalist, but also links her own experience to a big community that acknowledges and promotes Palestinians in the field of journalism. In fact, being active on social media and sharing her work and experiences as a Palestinian citizen journalist helped her gain recognition, leading to her being awarded the Shireen Abu Akleh Scholarship. By utilizing social media to showcase her journalism work and support for Palestinian rights, Alaqad created an international platform with followers from all over the world, which got her interest from organizations such as AUB and Yafa. The scholarship acknowledges her hard work in digital presence and journalism, leading to potential growth in her career.

Mentorship is also a theme seen in this post by the legacy of Shireen Abu Akleh, who serves as a source of motivation and inspiration for women Palestinian journalists such as Alaqad. Being awarded the Shireen Abu Akleh Scholarship links Alaqad to a type of institutional guidance that pays homage to Shireen's courageous and honest character. In this post, Alaqad becomes a source of inspiration for younger people. Alaqad also inspires other women to pursue a similar career path by showing this important milestone in her career and education, which creates a network of mentorship and motivation for future women journalists.

Finally, the themes of gender and empowerment are central in this post, with the visual of Alaqad showcasing her identity as a powerful Palestinian woman by wearing a

keffiyeh at the American University of Beirut. The scholarship, dedicated to a women journalist who advocated for the Palestinian cause, highlights the importance of education and professional acknowledgment in empowering women. Alaqad's honoring of Shireen and her dedication to journalism show the strength of women supporting each other. Alaqad inspires them to overcome obstacles and have hope.

Post 2: Plestia Alaqad (@plestia.alaqad). Posted on 27 August, 2024.



Figure 5.2.2: Appendix 2. Post 2.

This collaboration post features Plestia Alaqad (@plestialaqad) and @muslimagenda, a Muslim Women's Festival in Australia. It documents Plestia's participation as a speaker at the event. The post is a video in which Plestia talks about her experience as a reporter covering the Israeli war in Gaza. She highlights her decision to take charge of sharing the story rather than relying on foreign journalists. In a suit designed with a keffiyeh pattern, Plestia talks about her personal and professional experiences, such as how her relatable

content, like longing for simple comforts like “getting her nails done” during the war, helps to humanize the people of Gaza.

This post centers on Plestia's commitment to ethical journalism, as she decided to personally document and report on the genocide in Gaza using her phone. She highlights the lack of international journalistic presence in conflict zones, stating, "international journalists weren't allowed in... why are we supposed to wait for some international journalists to come and report and tell the narrative the way they want?" This statement reflects her commitment to truthful, on-the-ground reporting that centers marginalized voices, particularly those of the Palestinian people. She strengthens her credibility as a journalist by highlighting the dehumanization of Palestinians in the mainstream media, aiming to provide a more comprehensive and genuine story. The integrity is reinforced in the video as Plestia confidently speaks about her work and mission on stage, while also featuring visuals of her reporting in Gaza. Her wearing a keffiyeh-patterned outfit, which symbolizes Palestinian resistance, solidifies her position as a supporter of her community and a journalist who prioritizes ethical journalism. The dedication of centering those most affected by the conflict is underscored by the images of children and the people she reports on in Gaza.

The language used in the video is filled with emotion, particularly when Plestia talks about how the media dehumanizes Palestinians, portraying them as just statistics on television. Her anecdote about posting a diary entry—"Oh, I miss getting my nails done"—highlights the emotional disconnect created by international media, and how small, personal details can resonate deeply with her audience. This personal touch creates a feeling of empathy, reminding viewers of the shared humanity between them and Palestinians living in the war in Gaza. The visuals, especially in the clips playing of Plestia's scenes reporting from Gaza, and engaging with children, makes the video even more emotional. Her speaking at such an event, with the unedited footage playing of destruction and war Gaza elicits a strong emotional juxtaposition, evoking emotions of both strength and sadness. The final moments, in which she embraces and welcomes individuals

following the event, create a feeling of appreciation and intimacy, strengthening the emotional bond between herself and the attendees, those who support her cause and fight.

Alaqad's post also directly confronts misconceptions about Palestinians, especially in her diary entry discussing the absence of little comforts. By sharing this personal story, she makes the people of Gaza appear more human, demonstrating they are not only casualties of war but also individuals with normal lives, dreams, and familiar worries. She says that it's okay, and normal to miss such small things even during war. It's okay to talk about them. She fights the media's representation of Palestinians as just numbers, or distant individuals by making them more relatable to the audience and providing them with a voice that represents their complete humanity. The video's visuals illustrate this point by featuring Alaqad, a Palestinian woman holding a position of power and impact, speaking with assurance while on stage. The keffiyeh-wearing audience, her interactions with children, and the visuals of her reporting work disrupt the stereotypical image of passive victimhood often associated with Palestinians. These images present a different story of power, perseverance, and resilience.

Alaqad's speech advocates for individuals, especially journalists, to seize control of their own narratives instead of relying on others to share their stories. Her focus on utilizing her phone for vlogging and sharing the complete story of events in Gaza makes her both a citizen journalist and an activist. Her speech communicates her true self, mixing personal life with work duties, and showcases her work in promoting Palestinian representation in worldwide media. The visuals of Alaqad's strong presence on stage, combined with clips of her reporting in Gaza, underscore her role as an advocate for Palestinian rights.

In addition, the post represents a collaboration between Alaqad and *@muslimagenda*, a group that advocates for the voices of Muslim women. The fact that she was invited as a guest speaker in this sort of event showcases how collaborating and networking can enhance her platform and broaden her influence as a journalist and activist. This partnership

shows the career benefits women journalists can get from being active online and participating in global events.

Alaqad's speech sends a powerful empowerment message, especially to women and other marginalized voices. By seizing control of the story of her life, she not only boosts her own strength but also inspires others who feel underrepresented in popular media. The words she speaks motivate her listeners to take an active role in molding their own narratives, advocating for self-sufficiency and empowerment. The visuals of Alaqad's confident presence on stage, combined with her reporting from Gaza, enhances the message of empowerment. The keffiyeh pattern on her outfit connects her to Palestinian resistance, while her professional attitude and warm interaction with the audience highlight her position as a strong woman setting a positive example.

Finally, while Alaqad didn't specifically talk about mentorship in her speech, her choice to be proactive in reporting on the Gaza conflict instead of waiting for others shows a type of self-direction and empowerment. Still, the festival organized by Muslim Women's Festival (@muslimagenda) offers an opportunity for individuals like Alaqad to exchange their stories, creating a mentoring environment for those who may find motivation in her experiences.

Post 3: Plestia Alaqad (@plestia.alaqad). Posted on 19 May, 2024.

Plestia Alaqad (@plestia.alaqad) (2024) , collaborating with *Hazen Agency* (@hazenahency), discusses her upbringing in Gaza, her path to journalism, and the enduring challenges faced by Palestinians. The video combines scenes of her daily life, instances of strength, and the devastation of Gaza.

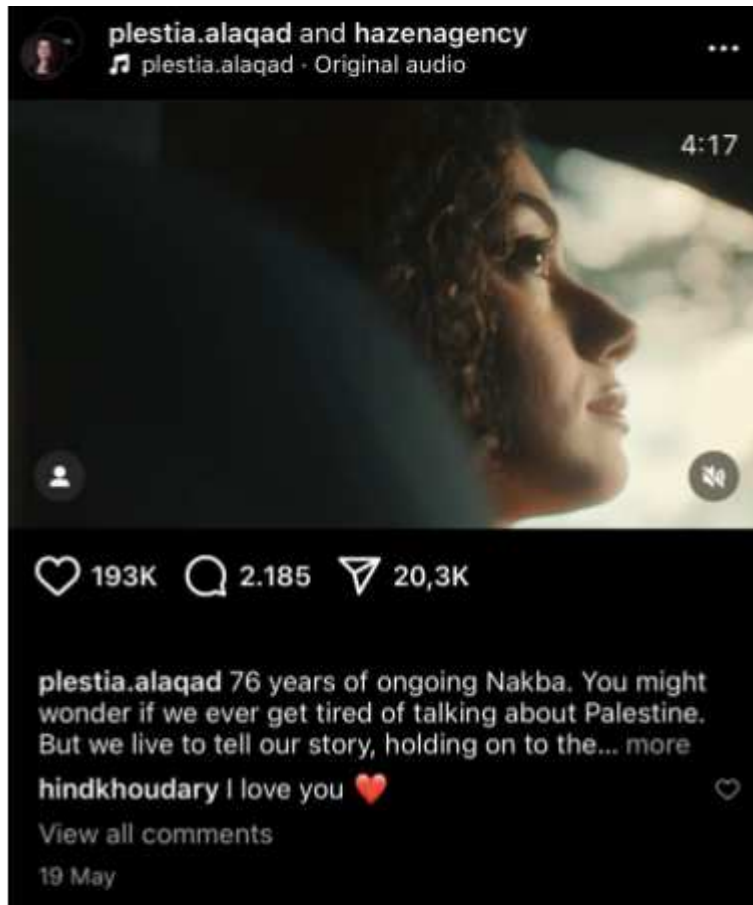


Figure 5.2.3: Appendix 2. Post 3.

In this video, Alaqad discusses an important transition in her reporting style by talking about her early journalism career and the shift to her coverage of the Gaza War. She proves her dedication to producing a reliable and genuine perspective of the war by sharing untold stories. She describes how her journalism aims to portray Palestinians as human beings, pushing back against media depictions that turn them into just numbers. She addresses her moral obligation to protect and disseminate the stories of deceased individuals, guaranteeing they are not forgotten. The visuals enhance Alqad's authenticity and integrity with the clips showing familiar, human aspects like family get-togethers, daily routines, and the charm of Gaza. Her dedication to capturing the beauty and sorrow of life in Gaza is highlighted in the video by the visuals of demolished buildings, destroyed cafes, and streets filled with images of those who have passed away. The visuals show how she is

a journalist who is closely tied to her community and committed to sharing their truth with the world.

The video content is filled with emotions, where Alaqad reminisces about her experiences in Gaza, like family trips and the happiness of everyday life, contrasting with the devastation and sorrow from conflict. The way she portrays covering bombarded areas, missing colleagues, and the escalating number of casualties triggers deep feelings of sorrow within her viewers. The emotional impact of her story comes from her juggling of optimism and sorrow, as she shows us not only her grief but also her strong resolve to keep sharing these tales. Her line, "It's hard to remember memories that don't exist, just like Mohammed is dead," powerfully conveys the grief and trauma of living through ongoing violence.

Alaqad's words demonstrate a powerful stance in support of advocacy, as she stresses her choice to not rely on international reporters and instead seize control of the narrative. Her plea for global recognition of Palestinians as people, individuals with dreams and aspirations, makes her advocacy even stronger. "I just want the world to know that we're humans like them. We love life and we all have dreams." This statement is both an appeal and an act of advocacy, as she asks her viewers to look at Palestinians as people with the same hopes and desires as anyone else. "We live to tell our story, holding on to the hope of returning to our land and celebrating a Free Palestine." This also reflects her activism and advocacy for Palestinian representation and freedom. Her role as an advocate is highlighted by the visuals of her reporting from Gaza, playing with children, and depicting daily life amid destruction. She captures the strength of Palestinians in the face of such awful conflict by using her camera to capture their beauty and resilience, serving as a form of activism.

Lastly, the video posted was created in partnership with a creative firm that assisted in the production of the video. The partnership demonstrates networking by the way it helps Alaqad increase her social media reach and engage better with her audience. The partnership is demonstrated by the visual content, which features excellent production elements that enhance her story.

Posts by Hind Khoudary

Post 1: Hind Khoudary (@hindkhoudary). Posted on 7 June, 2024.



Figure 5.3.1: Appendix 3. Post 1.

@hindkhoudary's (2024) post is a raw, unfiltered video about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, focusing on the medical situation of Palestinians who are unable to leave the territory for life-saving care. The video, where she addresses the camera, simply captioned "I do not have a caption - listen to the end," (Khoudary, 2024) presents Khoudary speaking directly to the camera in an intimate, emotionally charged monologue. She details the impact of Israel's military operations, particularly the closure of the Rafah crossing, which has trapped thousands of Palestinians in need of urgent medical care.

Khoudary's post highlights the urgent need for medical care among Palestinian families. She demonstrates her commitment to ethical journalism by promoting marginalized voices, like quoting a conversation with a man whose wife died after being denied chemotherapy. In her video, Khoudary states, "I met those families. I met those people" (Khoudary, 2024), emphasizing her involvement and commitment to reporting these stories. She moves beyond traditional reporting to expose the humanitarian crisis at a deeply personal level, revealing the devastating effects of war on civilian lives. The visuals in the video remain very simple, with Khoudary speaking directly to the camera, highlighting the raw nature of the story even more. The absence of intricate visuals and aesthetics highlights the seriousness of the topic.

The post is also emotionally charged, especially when Khoudary describes her talk with the man who lost his wife. The frustration and despair reflected in her words strike a chord with the audience, evoking sympathy for those affected. The straightforwardness of saying "I hate this world" (Khoudary, 2024) captures her helplessness in the face of the ongoing tragedy. The close-up shot of Khoudary speaking directly into the camera highlights her emotions. Her serious face, the sadness present on her features, along with the absence of any other visual elements, highlights the seriousness of the situation and enables the audience to concentrate on what she is trying to convey.

Khoudary's decision not to include a caption, except for "I do not have a caption - listen to the end" (Khoudary, 2024) means she wanted to interact with her audience through her video instead of the usual social media interactions such as likes and comments. This places the focus of the post on the topic rather than on social media metrics. The post is also in the theme of advocacy, as Khoudary speaks up for the people in urgent need of medical help in Gaza. She also becomes an advocate for the rights of the people residing in Gaza, who she states deserve to have access to medical care during the conflict.

Post 2: Hind Khoudary (@hindkhoudary). Posted on 23 August, 2024.

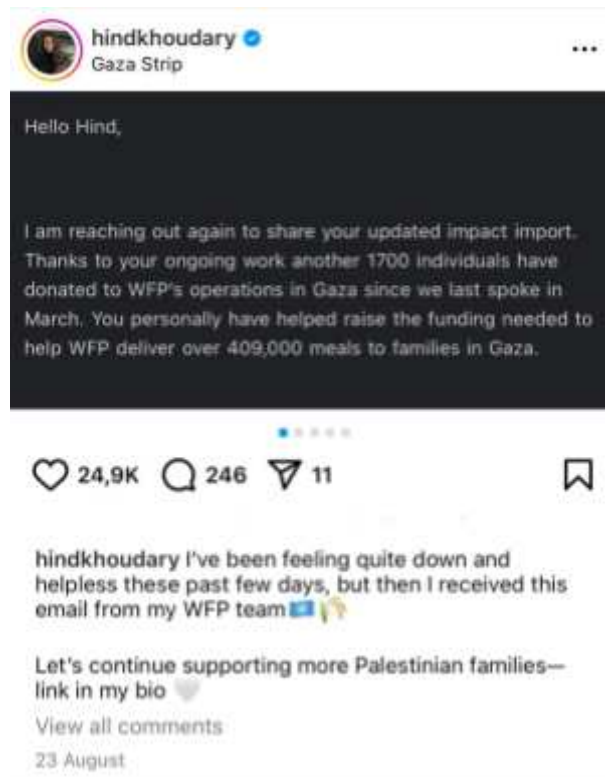


Figure 5.3.2: Appendix 3. Post 2.

In @hindkhoudary's (2024) post, the journalist posted a carousel of images mentioning an email she received from the UN World Food Programme (WFP), expressing gratitude for her work in raising funds and awareness for Gaza. The email thanked her for her contributions to helping provide meals to thousands of Palestinian families.

Khoudary's ability to find a balance between activism and journalistic ethics is shown in this post. The UN WFP email highlights how by sharing important stories and posts, she has motivated people to make a lot of donations, bringing in over \$208,000 in funding. Khoudary's dedicated herself to helping Palestinian families, and used her platform to share stories, which demonstrates her dedication to giving marginalized communities a voice,

aligning with journalistic ethics of covering underrepresented communities. Her work creates journalism that not only educates but also leads to real tangible societal change.

Khoudary's post is emotionally charged as she expresses on her caption feeling "down and helpless" until she receives the email from the WFP. Being able to show this vulnerability shows her emotional attachment to the subject she is covering and adds a layer of depth to the post. Visually, the pictures of smiling children and the message expressing gratitude for her efforts to raise awareness and provide real help for families in Gaza makes the post more emotional, evoking feelings of hope and achievement. The wording used in the email, like "You are making a real difference" and "lifesaving aid," triggers emotions of empathy and urgency, leading her audience to be motivated to act.

Khoudary's post challenges the stereotype of Palestinian journalists only concentrating on the conflict and their career. By showing her work with the WFP and the how much help she's been able to get for numerous families, she shows herself as more than just a war correspondent but as an advocate for human rights. Showing visuals of happy children in the post and reporting the delivery of over 409,000 meals, the images challenge the negative and somber views of Gaza, it then shows its resilience, hope, and the big support for its people during the war.

This post effectively showcases how Khoudary manages her responsibilities as both a journalist and an activist. By relating herself to the WFP's efforts and encouraging her audience to keep supporting and donating to Palestinian families, she combines her work duties of journalism with advocacy for a cause that means a lot to her. The email states that her journalism has directly helped in raising funds, showing that her work is not just informative but also clearly transformative. The caption, "Let's continue supporting more Palestinian families," shows that the journalist is calling for her followers to keep supporting, therefore blending her role as a journalist with that of an advocate.

Additionally, the way Khoudary uses social media to engage with her followers is important in this post. The email from the UN WFP acknowledges the direct impact her social media presence and content has had on increasing donations and driving awareness. Additionally, the statement “link in my bio” is a clear call to action that encourages further engagement and donations, which shows Khoudary’s proactive approach to maintain a dialogue with her audience that is not just passive social media consumption.

Moreover, Khoudary's professional network is evident through her collaboration with the UN WFP, and their email to her. Her involvement with such a well-known global organization boosts her professional reputation and proves that her presence on social media has got her collaborations that can enhance her influence. Through sharing this collaboration with her followers, Khoudary marks the importance of networking in getting real results, such as obtaining financial support for humanitarian efforts in Gaza. By working together with the UN WFP, she improves her standing as an important figure in humanitarian reporting and attracts funding from international sources.

Lastly, Khoudary's post is empowering, especially for women in journalism. She shows how women can use their voices to make a difference by proving that she has raised more than \$208,000 for Gaza. The texts in the email, especially phrases like "You tell important stories" and "People not only listen, they take action," points out her role in influencing the conversation surrounding Palestine and encouraging other women to become involved.

Post 3: Hind Khoudary (@*hindkhoudary*). Posted on 21 October, 2023.

In an Instagram post from October 2023, @*hindkhoudary* posted a picture with the freelance journalist Motaz Azaiza in Gaza, talking about the insufficient safety gear for journalists in conflict areas of Gaza. In the post, she’s asking her audience for help to obtain press jackets and protective gear, mentioning the risks of reporting in Gaza and the lack of

support from organizations for journalists in the area. The caption highlights the challenging conditions in which these reporters work, facing restrictions on electricity, internet, and necessary tools for their job security.



Figure 5.3.3: Appendix 3. Post 3.

Khoudary's post reflects her journalistic integrity, by showing that she's still working despite difficult circumstances that journalists in Gaza face. Even though she has no safety gear nor other necessary equipment, she still cares about elevating the voices of Gazans and reporting as a journalist from the field. This commitment to her work, even when in danger, shows a strong dedication to her journalistic ethics. Khoudary maintains journalistic integrity by being transparent about what equipment is missing and the lack of external support, highlighting the challenges of reporting news from conflict zones.

The post exudes an urgent and vulnerable tone. By directly appealing to the audience with phrases such as "We kindly appeal for assistance," Khoudary taps into the emotional weight of her circumstances. She mentions the risks that she and her fellow journalists

encounter, saying that wearing a press jacket might not ensure their security, but it is still important to take safety measures. She tries to trigger a feeling of empathy and unity among her followers, causing them to feel a personal connection to her hardships. The image, featuring Khoudary and Azaiza together, heightens the emotion and makes the plea for help more humane and personal.

Khoudary's post also challenges the stereotypes that journalists, particularly Palestinian women journalists, are helpless victims in areas of conflict. In the visual and the text, she presents herself as an equal to Azaiza, and as proactive individuals working to tell the stories of Gazans to the global audience together, even with the potential dangers. Her portrayal as a strong, independent woman challenges stereotypes of Palestinian women as helpless, showcasing her courage and determination to carry out her job in spite of dangerous conditions.

In addition, this post proves how Khoudary manages to juggle her responsibilities as both a journalist and an activist. The request for safety gear is not just a personal plea, but also a declaration of support for all freelance journalists in Gaza. Not only does she ask for help, but it also highlights the bigger problem, that institutional support for journalists is absent. Khoudary publicly tackles these obstacles to support the safety of all journalists reporting on conflicts, combining her job with advocacy. As a result, Khoudary's clear call for help also motivates her followers to quickly interact with the post. The post takes the form of an open letter, urging her followers and possibly bigger organizations to get involved in obtaining press jackets and other necessary equipment.

This post emphasizes how networking also plays a big role in Khoudary's journalistic work. By mentioning other journalists and collaborating with colleagues in Gaza, she highlights the team effort involved in their work. This partnership with Azaiza shows the power of freelance journalists collaborating and working together to navigate the risks of reporting in areas of conflict.

Finally, Khoudary's public request for safety equipment can be seen as an informal form of mentorship for younger or less experienced journalists. By openly addressing the challenges of freelancing in a conflict zone, she indirectly educates aspiring journalists on the significance of being a journalist, fighting hardships and being able to ask for assistance. Her collaboration with Azaiza also demonstrates a form of mentoring among peers, as the two journalists support one another while undertaking the risky and poorly resourced task of reporting from Gaza.

Posts by Fatima Ftouni

Post 1: Fatima Ftouni (@fatiimaftouni). Posted on 6 May, 2024.



Figure 5.4.1: Appendix 4. Post 1.

The post by @fatiimaftouni (2024), translated from Arabic, features mourning for journalists who have lost their lives in areas of conflict, particularly in South Lebanon. The video shows Ftouni reporting for *Al Mayadeen* - an independent news outlet in Lebanon - in her press outfit at the Lebanese-Palestinian border, a location with symbolic significance due to its close proximity to Israeli settlements. During this commemoration event, journalists are seen standing behind the journalists holding pictures of their deceased colleagues as a powerful representation of remembering and standing up against oppression. The caption highlights the compromises journalists in South Lebanon have made, effectively connecting the current remembrance to the larger fight for press freedom and justice.

Ftouni shows deep commitment to professional integrity through her post, in both the textual and visual elements. In the caption, Ftouni writes about the solemnity of the commemorative event and the journalists' solidarity in this stand to honor journalists who have died during covering conflict. She also mentions the location of the event, strategically located at the Lebanese-Palestinian borders, to highlight the journalists' dedication to reporting from dangerous grounds. The video adds a message of integrity and sacrifice, as it reflects the respect and remembrance afforded to the journalists who have lost their lives and affirms the role of reporting important stories even despite immense risks.

This post by Ftouni is very emotionally charged, as the tone is one of solemn reverence, sadness and defiant resilience. The caption, paired with Ftouni's report in the video, convey a deep sense of mourning and respect for the journalists who lost their lives. The words used: "solidarity stand" and "resistance" evoke a strong emotional response to shed light on the gravity of the loss of lives and the struggle for press safety. The visuals of the video support these emotions, as it shows the journalists lined up with portraits of the deceased to create a poignant atmosphere. It emphasizes the emotional weight of the event and the shared grief between the journalists who lost their colleagues during the conflicts.

Additionally, the post textually and visually reflects a strong sense of advocacy and activism. Ftouni's post sends a strong message advocating for the recognition of journalists' sacrifices and journalists' safety during conflicts. It calls for solidarity with the fallen journalists and emphasizes their bravery in the face of such conflict, it shows a commitment to the bigger cause of press freedom, press safety and human rights. The visuals of the journalists standing lined up along the Lebanese-Palestinian borders is a significant form of protest and activism. These visuals, along with the display of portraits serve as a visual advocacy statement, calling for the acknowledgement and respect of journalists and human rights during conflict. Ftouni's collaboration with *Al Mayadeen*, an independent news outlet based in Lebanon, also connects her work to a broader network that promotes independent journalism.

Ftouni's post also hints at the role of networking and collaboration. Her text and video highlight the importance of working alongside other journalists and organizing a collective stand for fallen colleagues. It also underscores the significance of professional connections and mutual support in their field. The collaborative nature of the captured event shows the value of networking and collaboration in maintaining solidarity and amplifying the collective voice. The visuals also reinforce the idea of collaborative efforts in advocacy, emphasizing how networking contributes to the impact of journalistic endeavors.

Post 2: Fatima Ftouni (@fatiimaftouni). Posted on 12 March, 2024.



Figure 5.4.2: Appendix 4. Post 2.

The post by @fatiimaftouni (2024), translated from Arabic, represents the physical and emotional destruction caused by the Israeli occupation during the conflict in South Lebanon. We see Ftouni standing on top of the rubble of destroyed houses, the aftermath of the conflict, as she delivers a powerful speech about the resilience and strength of the

inhabitants of the South. She addresses the Israeli forces directly, declaring that the people will still remain strong despite the destruction caused by their airstrikes. Both the textual and visual elements in this post emphasize the themes of solidarity, resistance and resilience in the face of conflict.

The theme of journalistic integrity is featured in this post as Ftouni reports from the middle of the conflict zone, offering an unfiltered and real view of the destruction and its impact on the locals of the area. She shows how important it is for journalists to be the voice of marginalized people, of people affected by violence and conflict who are not always featured in mainstream media. Ftouni ensures the stories of her community in South Lebanon are heard, by documenting the resilience of the people even in the middle of chaos. The visual of the journalist standing on top of the rubble and the visuals from the funeral both captured both the devastation and her commitment to covering the conflict and its aftermath. The visuals emphasize her dedication to reporting the reality of the situation in South Lebanon, which is often underreported by international media.

The language used by Ftouni in this post is undeniably emotionally charged. Phrases, translated from Arabic, “we are not afraid”, “we see the resilience and we see the steadfastness in the eyes of the people here” , “the people of the land will remain here” are all inspiring, reflecting a deeply empowering tone. Her coverage sends a message of support, resistance and perseverance. She creates an emotional connection with those affected by the conflict and shows support to their cause. The visuals of the destruction surrounding Ftouni as she reports, and the clips of the funeral and crowds mourning their martyrs evokes a sense of both loss and collective strength and unity. The gravity of her message is emphasized by the visuals.

While traditional narratives usually portray the people affected by conflict as helpless victims, Ftouni challenges the stereotypes with her post and pictures the people of South Lebanon as resilient and strong willed. She counters the stereotype of passivity by showing the participation of big crowds in the martyrs’ funeral to emphasize the collective and

unified will to survive and fight oppression. She also challenges gender stereotypes by being a women journalist standing confidently in the midst of rubble and destruction in a conflict zone. She clearly states that she is not only a journalist but also part of the resistance, part of the community, proving strength and determination.

Ftouni's post is also a message of advocacy and activism. She goes beyond just being a journalist and acts as an advocate for the resistance of people of South Lebanon. Her post is a call to action, for people to recognize the resilience of the population in the South and acknowledge their battle. Ftouni sees herself as both an activist and a journalist by openly condemning the damage done by the Israeli forces.

Ftouni's post encourages audience engagement. She directly addresses the Israeli occupation in her speech, and encourages people to think about all the destruction that has happened, and to then support the people of the South. Her choice of words creates an emotional bond with her views and encourages them to empathize and share the sentiment of resilience. Ftouni also strategically uses the visuals of her standing in the rubble to catch the attention of the viewer and draw them into this narrative.

Ftouni serves as a mentor for other journalists, especially those that work in areas of conflict. She's also a model of resilience and courage for aspiring reporters. Her physical and emotional stance in the post demonstrate how reporters can work in such dangerous environments while also committing to truth and advocacy. Furthermore, she sends a message of empowerment for both journalists and the local population in the South. She inspires people to stay strong, and continue resisting oppression.

Post 3: Fatima Ftouni (@fatiimaftouni). Posted on 23 December , 2023.

In the post by @fatiimaftouni (2024), the journalist delivers a short speech in Arabic addressing the people of Lebanon who have grown tired of the conflict with Israel and

weary of the resistance movement in the South. She asks those people who feel such emotions to leave the sadness to the families of the martyrs in Gaza and South Lebanon and the soldiers fighting in the resistance movement at the borders.



Figure 5.4.3: Appendix 4. Post 3.

Ftouni shows journalistic integrity by posting a video addressing a sensitive subject that's emotionally challenging to her audience. By doing that, she positions herself as a journalist committed to delivering difficult truths. Instead of shying away from the subject of public fatigue, she chooses to address the people directly and acknowledge their weariness, to ask them to consider the situation of martyrs and fighters instead. She presents a clear, balanced and firm perspective of the conflict, maintaining her professional integrity. The high quality production of her video also proves her professionalism and commitment to sharing high quality content to her audience.

Ftouni's post also aims to debunk the stereotype that individuals involved in resistance are only militants and not concerned about the emotional consequences of conflict. Speaking to sadness and fatigue, she gives humanity to the resistance, challenging the idea of it being isolated and recognizing that sadness is part of the struggle. In this way, she makes resistance more complex by highlighting the sacrifices made by the families and fighters in Gaza and South Lebanon. The video also counters visual stereotypes of women journalists in conflict zones by portraying Ftouni as an actively involved member in the resistance narrative, as opposed to being a passive observer. She comes across as self-assured and composed, facing the camera and implying that she is someone with inner strength who is engaging with both emotions and intellectual pursuits of defiance, challenging the traditional portrayal of women in journalism as passive observers in male-dominated fields.

This post also showcases Ftouni's shift from typical journalism into advocacy by urging the people of Lebanon to persist in backing the resistance movement and actively encouraging them to voice their support amid the conflict situation. This piece goes beyond reporting; it's a plea for unity with the combatants and heroes – solidifying her role not just as a journalist but also as an advocate, for the cause of resistance. The high quality video production boosts the effectiveness of her message's advocacy. The clear imagery puts emphasis on her words and ensures that the call to action resonates clearly with her audience. Incorporating subtle visual elements like eye contact with the camera enhances the touch of her advocacy work and adds a sense of immediacy and importance to her plea.

Posts by Diana Moukalled

Post 1: Diana Moukalled (@*diana_moukalled*). Posted 26 September, 2023.



Figure 5.5.1: Appendix 5. Post 1.

The post by @*diana_moukalled* (2023), translated from Arabic, is a carousel post of pictures of Moukalled's writings. She writes an emotional and personal message about her experience sending her only son away to college in Britain to study after the Beirut port explosion. The post, captioned with "empty nest syndrome," explores the idea of parental separation amidst the difficult socio-political situation in Lebanon.

The post is emotionally charged, as Moukalled expresses the loss, grief and resignation she feels from having to send her son to get an education outside Lebanon because of the socio-political situation, especially after the Beirut port blast. The phrases

and expressions she used, especially to describe her house as “quiet and tidy” and “with the music turned off” express the emptiness she feels from her son’s departure. Her feelings of fear and grief go beyond just her personal situation, as it evokes a sense of shared pain that most Lebanese families and mothers feel, being forced to send their kids away during the political, and economical instability in Lebanon.

Moukalled challenges the stereotypes about Lebanese women and mothers being passive in the face of conflict. Instead, she proves herself to be a divisive figure, able to make hard decisions for the safety of her family members. In fact, she positions herself as both a mother and a journalist, navigating Lebanon’s socio-political situation.

Although Moukalled’s post serves a deeply personal message, it also advocated for systemic change in the country. She refers to the Beirut blast explosion and Lebanon’s crumbling health and education system and calls for a change, and for attention to the failures of the government. She used a personal story to critique society and call for an urgent need for reform in Lebanon. Her position as a journalist and co-founder of the independent media outlet “*Daraj*” adds weight to her advocacy, since she isn’t just a mother sharing her story but an advocate for systemic change.

Moukalled’s position as the co-founder of an independent news outlet also reflects the importance of networking and collaboration in her career. Her decision to share her story on her platform and through *Daraj* highlights the importance of independent media in creating spaces where journalists can share their stories and experiences and relate them to bigger relevant topics. The visuals of the post back up this claim, as she uses *Daraj*’s logo in the pictures.

Gender also plays a central role in Moukalled’s post, as she shared her experience as a mother. The post highlights maternal emotions and experiences, and ties it to bigger societal issues like the danger of living in Lebanon and decline in the educational system. The caption mentioning “empty nest syndrome” further points to her gendered experience.

So we see this merge between Moukalled's two identities, as a mother and journalist, to share this post about her experience and call for systemic change in Lebanon.

Post 2: Diana Moukalled (@*diana_moukalled*). Posted 22 April, 2024.



Figure 5.5.2: Appendix 5. Post 2.

In this post, translated from Arabic, @*diana_moukalled* (2024) posted clips of her interview with Nada Abdelsamad, a Lebanese journalist who was released from her job with BBC Arabic over a retweet (sharing a post on X) about Hamas' 7th October 2023 attack. The post is in collaboration with *Daraj*, an independent media outlet in Lebanon that Moukalled co-founded. The post touches on issues regarding media censorship, racism, discrimination and freedom of expression. Moukalled uses her platform to address the unjust treatment Abdelsamad received after working with the BBC for 26 years and

encourages people to watch the full interview on *Daraj*'s Youtube channel. She also emphasizes the struggles of women journalists in the Middle East.

In the interview, Moukalled and Abdelsamad delve into core journalistic values such as freedom of speech, putting the post in the theme of journalistic integrity and ethics. Abdelsamad's dismissal from the BBC raises questions about the limits of journalistic freedom and expression on social media. The post makes us question if Abdelsamad was targeted unfairly for her political stance and addresses censorship in the media. The visual of the interview also shows Moukalled and Abdelsamad in a professional setting, with composed and calm demeanor, illustrating the professionalism and ethical strength that women journalists embody even under pressure. Sharing this interview emphasizes Moukalled and *Daraj*'s focus on honest journalism and freedom of expression.

The post is emotionally charged, touching on the emotional toll of discrimination. We can detect Abdelsamad's frustration with the unfair treatment she received at BBC, especially when she emphasizes her 26 years of service for the channel. This makes her dismissal even more resonant, as it influences viewers to feel sympathy for someone treated unjustly after so many years of dedication. Moukalled's tone stays serious yet empathetic in the interview, showing respect for Abdelsamad's story.

The collaboration between Moukalled, *Daraj* and Abdelsamad reflects the importance of networking and solidarity in the journalistic field. By using her platform, Moukalled helps Abdelsamad share her story, make her voice heard by a vast audience, and therefore demonstrating the way independent media can support journalists who have been sidelined by mainstream organizations. The posts hints at the crucial role independent outlets play in fostering dialogue around freedom of expression and discrimination in journalism.

The post fits the theme of gender directly, as Abdelsamad's story is framed through the lens of being an Arab woman in the media industry. Moukalled chooses to highlight the part of the interview when Abdelsamad's talks about how she thinks she would have been

treated differently if she were a white, blonde journalist, emphasizing the intersection between gender and ethnicity in the discrimination she faced. Moukalled empowers other women journalists by using her platform and *Daraj*'s to amplify the stories of injustice like Abdelsamad's. The post highlights women's resilience in the journalistic field, proving that they are not victims, but active agents that seek change. The visuals of Moukalled and Abdelsamad conducting the interview also portray a powerful narrative of women journalists empowering and supporting each other.

Post 3: Diana Moukalled (@*diana_moukalled*). Posted 12 February, 2024.



Figure 5.5.3: Appendix 5. Post 3.

@*diana_moukalled*'s (2024) post, translated from Arabic, in collaboration with *Daraj* revolves around the Western media's portrayal of the death of a six year old Palestinian girl named Hind Rajab - killed by the Israeli army in Gaza. Moukalled criticizes western media outlets for using the word "died" instead of "killed" in their headlines about Hind, and

therefore masking war crimes committed by Israeli forces. The report tackles the issue of media double standards, war crimes and the dehumanization of Palestinians.

As mentioned previously, Moukalled criticizes and calls out Western media outlets such as CNN, BBC, and The New York Times, for their choice of language when reporting about the death of a Palestinian girl. The report raises ethical questions about the role of language, the choice of language in media coverage and how it can affect the audience's perception of conflicts. Moukalled also addresses the double standards Western media outlets apply when covering similar tragedies like Hind's in different contexts. The journalist offers the example of Ukraine where assaulters are more clearly identified. Her post highlights the importance of unbiased reporting, especially during conflict where the life of innocent civilians is at stake. The video presents screenshots of the mentioned headlines by Western media outlets, reinforcing Moukalled's statements and providing concrete examples of the media's failure to provide accurate descriptions of Hind's death.

Moukalled gives voice to Hind Rajab's story, challenging the stereotype of Palestinians as passive victims and nameless casualties. It also counters the usual portrayal of Palestinian deaths by Western media as an unfortunate but inevitable result of war, instead of it being an intentional act of violence. The visuals in the video also challenge these stereotypes by using pictures and videos from Hind's story as well as content from Gaza.

Moukalled highlights the importance of independent media in challenging mainstream narratives by collaborating with *Daraj* in her post. She points out the failures of Western media to her audience and gives a platform for Palestinian voices and stories. The post serves as an example of how collaboration between independent media can expose bias and advocate for more ethical journalism.

The topic of gender is directly tackled in this post, as it mentions how the stories of women and children like Hind Rajab's can be sidelined and misrepresented in the media.

Moukalled points out that there are many other stories like Hind's that deserve attention. This shows empowerment in her insistence on giving voice to marginalized voices - therefore becoming an advocate for ethical reporting. As a women journalist, Moukalled's critique of Western media speaks to the empowerment of women in the journalistic field. The pictures of Hind, as well as the audio clip of her last phone call, were used in this video as a reminder of how women and children suffer during conflict. By using these stories, Moukalled ensures that the voices of women and children in Gaza are heard in a global media scene that usually overlooks or misrepresents them.

Discussion

The analysis of social media posts, specifically Instagram posts, by Lebanese and Palestinian women journalists showed interesting results. All the women involved in the study are committed to reporting online and reaching their audience on Instagram. They are using Instagram to navigate the new and changing media landscape in both Palestine and Lebanon. This aligns with the findings of Saragih and Natsir's (2023) study, which notes that Instagram is the new interaction platform that is expected to have the most effect on audience growth.

Selvik (2021) noted that there has been an important change in the Lebanese media sector, with journalists now adopting a more assertive and engaged reporting style. Fatima Ftouni and Diana Moukalled are both Lebanese journalists who are using their platform to challenge stereotypes, and advocate for marginalized communities, underrepresented people and expose corruption during the conflict in Lebanon. Most of their posts included the themes of journalistic integrity, challenging stereotypes and Advocacy and activism. For instance, Ftouni's posts are usually on the ground reports, first-person accounts from South-Lebanon where the conflict is happening at the border with Israel. She posted videos standing on top of the rubble of homes in South Lebanon and delivered a speech about the resilience of Lebanese people living in that area, who are often underrepresented in Lebanese media. Diana Moukalled, co-owner of the independent media outlet *Daraj*, also uses her platform to talk to vulnerable populations. In one of her posts, she talks about the death of Palestinian girl in Gaza, whose story was covered incorrectly by major international news outlets. This also aligns with Ballout's (2023) findings on the rising influence of independent media in Lebanon, which is driven by digital platforms.

Furthermore, this study redefines journalistic integrity to meet the changing needs of digital platforms and conflict reporting. Based on an analysis of their Instagram posts, Palestinian and Lebanese journalists have changed their way to report on social media to

include marginalized voices, direct calls to action, and highlight moments of personal vulnerability. For instance, Bisan Owda and Diana Moukalled push their followers to feel angry, take responsibility, and engage morally. They do this by using emotionally charged images and words. This aligns with Garfias's (2024) findings, that this change of integrity leads to a new kind of journalistic ethics designed for the blurring boundaries between activism and reporting of conflict in today's digital context. For example, Bisan posted herself celebrating her birthday with orphans and calling for her audience to donate and help. In another post, Bisan showed dedication to journalistic integrity by reporting on the experiences of civilians during the war, particularly the voices of vulnerable groups like children and mothers.

Additionally, the results show how social media is used by women journalists in both countries to cross political and cultural barriers. Sakr's (2004) study mentions how Arab women journalists reach both local and foreign audiences in their dual roles. This is evident because the themes of mentorship and support as well as gender and empowerment were in a lot of the posts. For example, Plestia Alaqad's posts mostly fit within these themes. She posted herself giving speeches in front of an international audience in Australia, encouraging journalists to take charge of their own narrative. Her posts paint her as a mentor to inspiring women journalists. This shows how these Arab women journalists do more than just report during conflict; they also educate and inspire their viewers. This confirms Sakr's (2004) study about how Arab women journalists believe they have a responsibility to help new reporters and take on the role of mentors.

Moreover, the results show that journalists such as Plestia Alaqad, Bisan Owda and Hind Khoudary actively interact and engage with their followers by using their caption, comments, videos and real-time updates; this is compatible with the findings of Saragih and Natsir (2023) about how Instagram encourages audience engagement. By using Instagram and these tools, the journalists can have a two-way discussion where the audience is able to participate actively in the discourse. For example, in one of her posts, Hind Khoudary asks her audience for help as she needs safety equipment to report in the conflict zone. In

another post, she urges her audience to listen to her and watch her video by captioning the post “I do not have a caption - listen to the end”. This interaction builds ties between the journalist and their audience, especially in times of crisis.

Also, most, if not all the posts analyzed were emotionally charged. The tone of vulnerability, anger and despair is frequently used by all of the journalists. This is aligned with the findings of Garfias's research (2024), which highlights how effective emotional storytelling is in triggering strong reactions while building closer bonds with their audience. For instance, the Palestinian journalists' Instagram posts usually blend unfiltered, personal storytelling with powerful pictures that highlight the urgency and seriousness of the Gaza War. Bisan Owda for example, shows desperation and resilience when she posts about the displacement of civilians in Gaza during the war, and the atrocities they go through. She also highlights emotional moments and emotional phrases in her content, such as a mother saying “death would be more merciful than what they are making us go through”. It is also the case for the Lebanese women journalists who used emotionally charged content. Fatima Ftouni's post about the martyred journalists was filled with grief, sadness but also resilience as she mourns the passing of her colleagues and that they will continue to report the conflict in South Lebanon. By doing so, these journalists are not just reporting, they are bearing witness and using their vulnerability as a form of resistance by sharing these hardships with their followers. Therefore, while Mellor's (2011) study mentions how Arab women journalists have tried to keep a balance between professionalism and legitimacy by reporting about conflict, pain and suffering without any emotions, the results of this analysis showed differently and challenged Mellor's (2011) ideas.

The results of the study also showed that many of the posts analyzed were in the theme of networking and collaboration. In fact, many of the women journalists studied collaborated with either major news outlets, educational institutions, campaigns, and festivals. This reveals the importance of social media to advance the careers of women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine through collaborations and networks. Social media allowed these journalists to connect with editors, and audiences beyond their immediate

geographic and professional circles, which allowed them to get opportunities for mentorship, cross-border collaborations, and shared reporting. For example, in the posts analyzed, Bisan collaborates and reports for AJ+ frequently and has been nominated for a News and Documentary Emmy on their joint online series *“It’s Bisan from Gaza and I’m Still Alive”*. This aligns with the rising trend of journalists using digital technologies to build and promote professional communities, as studies like Pavlik (2001) have shown. This study emphasized how new media can help professionals build connections with larger audiences and networks. Another example is Plestia Alaqad, who was awarded the Shireen Abu Akleh Scholarship to continue her education at the American University of Beirut. Hind Khoudary also expressed in one of her posts her collaboration with the UN World Food Programme, and the effect it has had on helping her community in Gaza.

The results also showed an interesting correlation between these themes of gender, empowerment and motherhood. For example, in one of the posts analyzed Diana Moukalled posts about her experience and struggle as a mother having to let her only son go to university abroad because of the unstable situation in Lebanon. This post offers a great example of how motherhood and professional identity can intersect on social media platforms, aligning with studies on the evolving role of women journalists. Sakr (2004) emphasized that Arab women journalists balance personal and professional duties while challenging traditional gender norms. The idea that women journalists need to stay away from personal stories to be credible is directly challenged by Moukalled's openness to discuss sensitive events, such as her experiences as a mother. This also aligns with Djerf-Pierre et al. (2016), who found that social media offers women journalists opportunities for personal branding and storytelling.

Since both the Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists are in similar situations, living in areas of conflict that are very similar too, their posts have a lot in common. However, since the Lebanese journalists are part of independent, funded media outlets in Lebanon, they have a higher production budget for their posts. Thus, to compare the posts, we see that Lebanese journalists use more video editing effects, professionally made videos

and visuals, and higher quality visuals, compared to the Palestinian journalists who often are freelancers and are more likely to create content using just their phone.

Conclusion

The results of this study were very interesting. This thesis aimed at providing answers to the research question: How do Arab women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine use Instagram to shape and promote their professional identities during times of conflict? The findings reveal that women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon are shifting and moving away from traditional methods of reporting and towards a more personal, emotional style of communication and benefiting their careers from growing a digital audience.

In fact, women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon are using advocacy, emotions, personal experiences and stories in their reporting on the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon to increase credibility, bond with their audience and gain the trust of their followers. Instead of keeping a detached stance, the journalists are using very **emotional language and visuals** to prove the gravity of the situation they are reporting on to a global audience. For example, Palestinian freelance journalist Bisan Owda humanizes the events from Gaza by sharing both factual reporting about the war and personal stories from her own life and how she is affected by the conflict. In a similar way, Lebanese *Al Mayadeen* journalist Fatima Ftouni brings attention to underrepresented voices—the voices of the families in South Lebanon—that do not receive enough media coverage. She creates a feeling of solidarity and community among those who follow her. These journalists directly address the viewers and establish a connection with them through using powerful, emotional and expressive imagery and language that invokes guilt and accountability. They encourage their followers to not be more than passive listeners and viewers, but to take action, support them and get involved.

Women journalists from Lebanon and Palestine are merging their professional identities with **activism** when they're reporting on the war. They present themselves as not just neutral or objective observers of the conflict, but as active participants in the narratives they cover. They openly advocate for causes like human rights, social justice, women's rights and the suffering of people in conflict zones. This intersection between journalism and activism empowers both the journalist and the communities they report on, highlighting women's power in the media landscape.

This research challenges the traditional ideas around **journalistic integrity** and ethics, since, as articulated by Ward (2018), the rise of digital platforms has changed the meaning around journalistic norms toward greater subjectivity and emotional engagement. This is evident in the way women are reporting online during the conflict between Israel, Gaza and Lebanon. The results are also aligned with existing research, particularly Pavlik (2001), who's study emphasized the importance of digital media in engaging audiences through storytelling. These findings contradict Mellor's (2011) claims about men leading in emotional reporting on conflicts over women who take on a more emotionless style. This creates a new environment where women journalists use emotional depth as a storytelling technique online.

In addition, this study found that women journalists in both Palestine and Lebanon using social media to share their journalistic work are able to get a lot of important **collaborations and networking** opportunities. The results show that many journalists, although being citizen or freelance journalists, have been able to significantly advance in their careers. They have been able to collaborate with other journalists in the field, with big organizations like the UN, major news outlets, and have been invited as guest speakers at important events. They have also won awards, such as the Emmy Bisan Owda was awarded. In fact, they have been able to help their communities grow by forming networks and offering **mentorship**, especially to other journalists reporting during conflict. They encourage other women to use their voice and start reporting, and become sort of role models for other women to be inspired by. They exemplify how women can uphold their

professional integrity while also embracing and promoting important gender-specific experiences.

Finally, this thesis emphasizes how **women's empowerment** plays a part in Arab women journalists' work on social media. In addition to covering the conflict, these women are using their digital platforms to challenge gender stereotypes and advocate for women's empowerment. Diana Moukalled's post about her experiences as a mother is an example of that. By embracing their identities as women, mothers, and professional journalists, Palestinian and Lebanese journalists are defying traditional expectations and paving the way for better gender inclusivity in the media field. By taking on roles that were traditionally done by men, these women are also redefining gender roles and journalism in the Arab region.

Overall, women journalists in Lebanon and Palestine are creating new spaces for themselves in the media industry. They are using social media platforms as tools not just for storytelling but for shaping their professional identities. They balance factual reporting with emotional, personal storytelling, challenge traditional stereotypes and gender norms, and advocate for social justice and empowerment. They are changing the traditional sense of conflict journalism and making it more inclusive, engaging and representative of various perspectives.

I believe that further research is much needed in this area. I encourage future research to look into how these dynamics continue to evolve as digital media and conflict reporting changes, and study the growing influence of women journalists in the Arab world. There is also a need to explore the topic of Citizen journalism on social media during conflicts, especially in the Palestinian context.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is the inability to interview the selected journalists. The Palestinian and Lebanese women journalists selected for analysis live and work in difficult and insecure conditions because of the ongoing wars in Gaza and Lebanon. Because of this, I was not able to establish communication with them and reach them to conduct interviews. My study was therefore dependent on analyzing these journalists' social media posts and previous literature relevant to the topic, which may not fully show the depth of personal experiences, motivations, and professional strategies that the interviews would have provided.

Another limitation is the small sample size. Although the study's focus on five journalists—three Palestinian and two Lebanese—offers useful details on how they use social media during conflict, a bigger sample might have offered a bigger range of perspectives and a better understanding of how women journalists in Palestine and Lebanon handle their professional roles online.

Future Directions

Future research should tackle the ways social media platforms continue to change as tools for both traditional and alternative journalism, and especially this shift during times of war or conflict. Seeing how digital communication is constantly changing and evolving, more studies should provide insight about how platforms are adapting over time, and how journalists' use of them changes in response to technological advances. More research should also specifically pay attention to the unique experience of women journalists using social media tools in these environments and how they contribute to both local and international media. It would be interesting to also conduct comparative analyses between men and women journalists and how they are adapting to change. Comparing gender

differences in news making practices in these contexts may help highlighting different approaches to storytelling techniques, emotional engagement, and audience interaction. Comparing posts produced by professionals, both women and men, from different news outlets—possibly covering a broader political spectrum in terms of orientation—could also shed light on how diverse political views influence reporting during conflict. Another comparative analyses could be between different regions or types of conflict to understand the challenges and strategies journalists use in this context. Finally, the way journalists are balancing advocacy and journalism during conflict reporting is also an area important to explore.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (@wizard_bisan1)



ajplus and wizard_bisan1

ajplus Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1) has been nominated for a News and Documentary Emmy for her work with AJ+ on the series "It's Bisan from Gaza and I'm Still Alive."

Since Oct. 7, Bisan has captured life during Israel's war on Gaza. Before that, she produced social videos showcasing Gaza's beauty and culture.

In June, she won a Peabody for the same series, accepting it from a refugee camp in occupied Gaza. She was one of the youngest people to accept an award at this year's ceremony.

The Peabody Jury lauded her for "showing bravery and persistence in the midst of imminent danger and for carrying a heavy journalistic burden as the entire world looks on."

#Gaza #Palestine #Bisan #Israel #News #ImStillAlive #BisanFromGaza #Palestinian

8w

191,425 likes
July 26

Add a comment...

Post 1 : [Link to Analysis](#)



ajplus and wizard_bisan1
Original audio

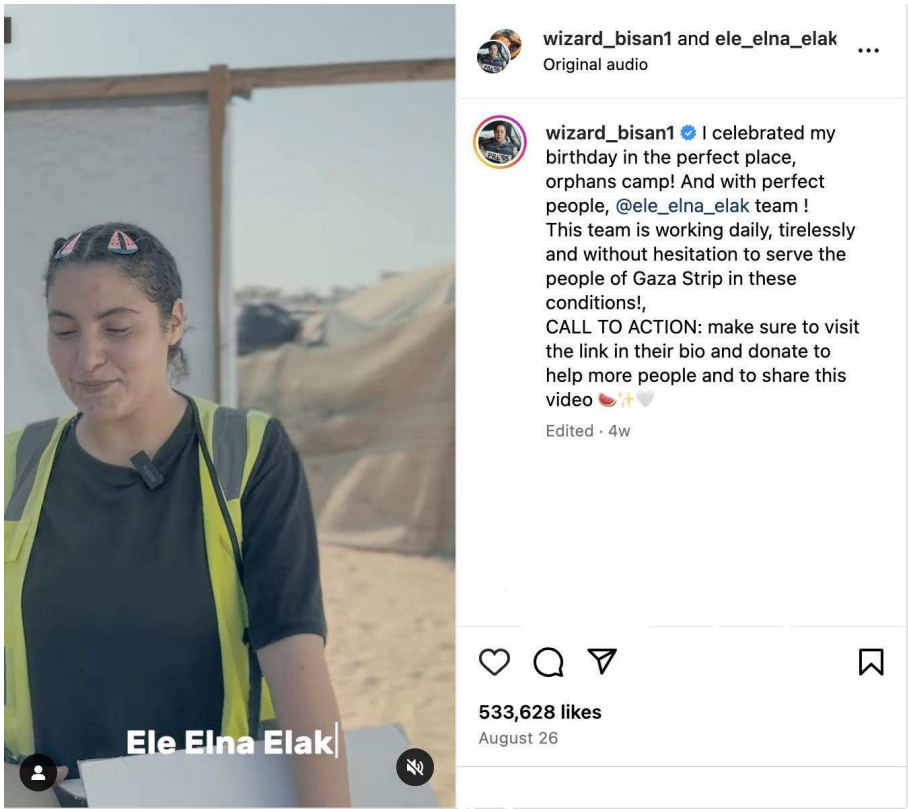
Desperate families are trying to go back to their homes in northern Gaza. Despite a temporary truce, Israel has been firing at Palestinians entering Gaza City.

AJ+ contributor Bisan Owda (@wizard_bisan1) met one mom who said she's willing to risk everything – even death – to try to make it home.

#Gaza #Israel #GazaUnderAttack #Palestine


87,325 likes
December 1, 2023

Post 2: [Link to Analysis](#)



The image shows an Instagram post. On the left is a video thumbnail of a woman, Ele Elna Elak, wearing a black t-shirt and a yellow high-visibility safety vest. She has a microphone clipped to her shirt and is looking down at a laptop. The background is an outdoor setting with tents. The name 'Ele Elna Elak' is overlaid on the bottom of the video. To the right of the video is the post's caption and metadata. The caption is from user 'wizard_bisan1' and mentions '@ele_elna_elak team'. It describes their work in an orphans camp in Gaza and includes a call to action to visit their bio and donate. The post has 533,628 likes and was posted on August 26. It was edited 4 weeks ago.

wizard_bisan1 and ele_elna_elak ...
Original audio

wizard_bisan1  I celebrated my birthday in the perfect place, orphans camp! And with perfect people, @ele_elna_elak team ! This team is working daily, tirelessly and without hesitation to serve the people of Gaza Strip in these conditions!,
CALL TO ACTION: make sure to visit the link in their bio and donate to help more people and to share this video 🍷👉👍👉

Edited · 4w

533,628 likes
August 26

Post 3: [Link to Analysis](#)

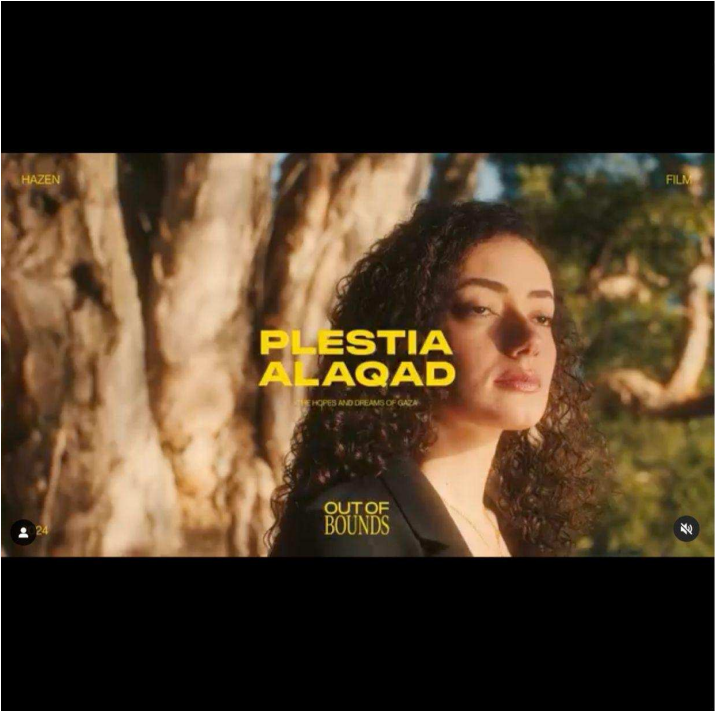
Appendix 2 (@plestia.alaqad)



Post 1: [Link to Analysis](#)



Post 2: [Link to Analysis](#)



plestia.alaqad and hazenagency
Original audio

plestia.alaqad 76 years of ongoing Nakba. You might wonder if we ever get tired of talking about Palestine. But we live to tell our story, holding on to the hope of returning to our land and celebrating a Free Palestine 🇵🇸

It was great working with you on this project @hazenagency <3
18w

193,185 likes
May 19

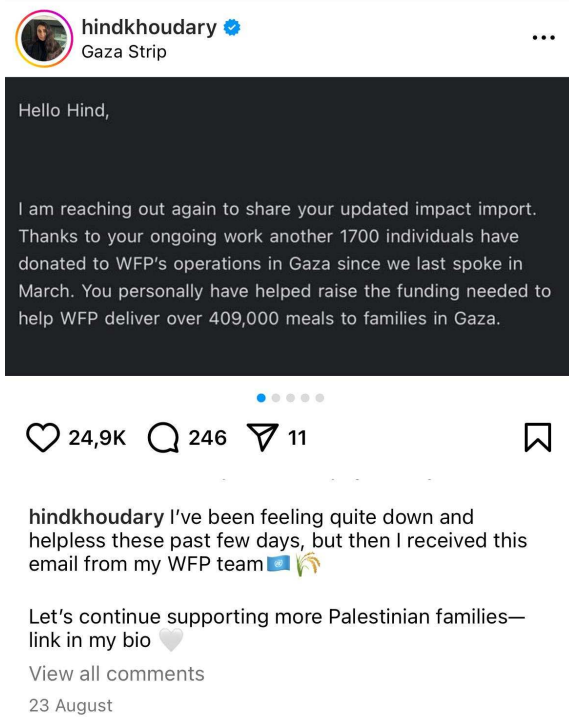
Add a comment... Post

Post 3: [Link to Analysis](#)

Appendix 3 (@hindkhouday)



Post 1: [Link to Analysis](#)



Post 2: [Link to Analysis](#)



hindkhoudary • Dear All,

We are Hind and Motaz, working as freelance journalists for various news agencies and outlets. Regrettably, we lack essential safety equipment like press jackets, relying on borrowed gear from friends and colleagues.

We kindly appeal for assistance in obtaining this safety equipment, as we are dedicated to making the world aware of the current situation in Gaza. Our goal is to amplify the voices of Gazans and share their stories.

It's important to note that there is currently no organization or association offering support to journalists on the ground.

245,705 likes
October 21, 2023

Post 3: [Link to Analysis](#)
Appendix 4 (@fatiimaftouni)



almayadeenlebanon and fatiimaftouni
Original audio

almayadeenlebanon 19w

في أقرب نقطة من الحدود اللبنانية الفلسطينية، مقال "مستوطنة المطة، بنفد عدد من الصحافيين وثقة تضامنية مع شره داء الصحافة الذين ارتقوا في #جنوب_لبنان

مراسلة #المباين فاطمة فتوني

#لبنان
#المباين_لبنان
#فرح_عمر
#ربيع_معماري
See translation

1,247 likes
May 6

Post 1: [Link to Analysis](#)



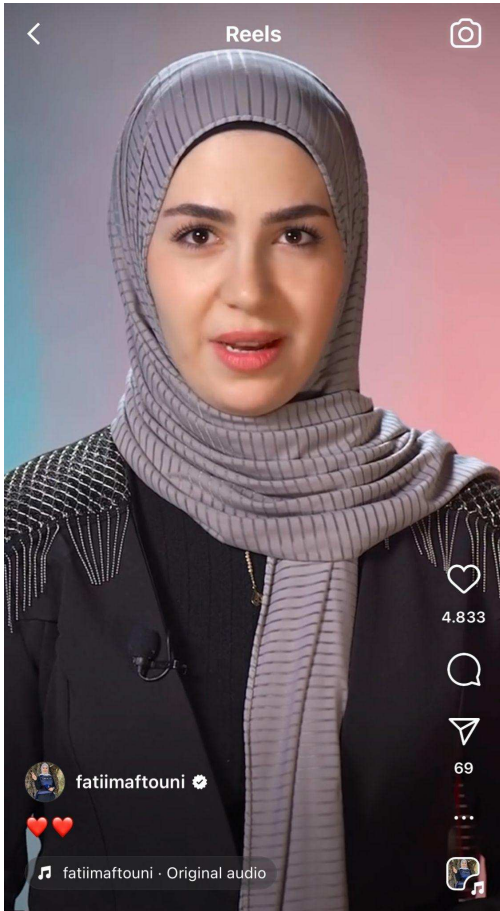
fatimaftouni •
Original audio

fatimaftouni • نعاين الدمار ونقف فوق الركام ونقول لـ لا حد تلال.. لا نحافظ..
#بليدا
#جنوب_ليبان
28w

♡ 💬 🚩

2,673 likes
March 12

Post 2: [Link to Analysis](#)



Post 3: [Link to Analysis](#)

Appendix 5 (@diana_moukalled)



204 19 23

diana_moukalled عن متلازمة العش الفارغ وما يصيبنا حين يغادرنا أبناؤنا.. المقال كاملا في لينك البايو

Post 1: [Link to Analysis](#)



Post 2: [Link to Analysis](#)



darajmedia and diana_moukallec ...
Original audio

darajmedia وسائل إعلام غربية (أمريكية وأوروبية) استخدمت لفظ "ماتت" عوضاً عن قُتلت في الحديث عن الطفلة الفلسطينية هند رجب ذات الـ 6 أعوام، والتي وجدت جثتها بين جثث أفراد عائلتها بعد 12 يوماً من فقدان الاتصال بهم.

قُتلت الطفلة عند على يد الجيش الإسرائيلي جنوب غرب مدينة غزة بصف إسرائيل استهدف السيارة التي كانت تحملها وأهلها، ولم ينج حتى المسعفان اللذان أرسلوا لإنقاذها بعد أن أطلقت نداء استغاثة. لفظ "ماتت" يخفي وراءه انتهاكات الجيش الإسرائيلي وما يرتكبه من جرائم حرب بحق الغزيين.

ديانا مقلد تناقش في هذا الفيديو كيف تمت مقاربة مأساة الطفلة هند

Western media (particularly American and European media) have used the term "died" instead of "killed" when reporting on six-year-old Palestinian child Hind Rajab,



656 likes
February 12

Log in to like or comment.



darajmedia and diana_moukallec ...
Original audio

Hind was killed by the Israeli army in southwest Gaza, after an Israeli raid targeted the car that was transporting her and her parents. The two paramedics that were sent to save her after she had made the call for help also did not survive. The term "died" hides a list of violations and war crimes that the Israeli army .has committed against Gazans

In this video, Diana Moukalled speaks about how there have been "some complaints from the West" regarding the Israeli army's behaviors, "but none of them have amounted to the point of stopping arm sales or putting actual pressure on Israel, which is hinting at a broader war on Rafah, the last refuge sought by fleeing "Palestinians



656 likes
February 12

Log in to like or comment.

Post 3: [Link to Analysis](#)