

Old conflict, new perspective: Power shift in the news from Gaza

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Abstract

This study draws upon in-depth interviews conducted with the leading scholars, journalists, anti-war campaigners and peace activists commissioning the new media tools including Skype. Notably, it brings about eye-witness accounts of the Gaza conflict as some of the participants have survived the Israeli assault on aid-ship Freedom Flotilla (Mavi Marmara). In this sense, it offers first-hand descriptions and the experience of consuming and resisting new media technologies.

This analysis shows that most journalists are compelled to be cautious in reporting Israeli actions inside the occupied territory (Gaza). Further, media coverage of Gaza reflects a disproportionate reporting because most sections of the mainstream media include soundbites and opinions of writers that endorse the Israeli government propaganda. In contrast, the evidence shows that media systematically excludes the progressive voices including the Jewish scholars and campaigners. Thus, too often, news emerging from Gaza mainly through the mainstream media is either biased or manufactured.

This state of affairs stimulates ordinary people; be they peace activists, campaigners, or scholars to make use of alternative means of communications and news dissemination that is the new media. However, this study finds that new media has transformed the Gaza conflict to an extent that Europe has more Palestinian sympathizers than ever before. Despite, perceptible progress and achievement, the new media is facing a threat that comes from the powerful political elites and the large media corporation. Arguably, new media sites such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are icons on a

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switchboard where the push buttons lie under the fingertips of powerful elites, be they the governments or media conglomerates.

Keywords

Gaza conflict, new media, propaganda, news reporting.

Introduction

Reporting from conflict zones continues to pose a vast challenge for the global news media organizations. Particularly in regions where governments have adopted a policy of strict control; put a barricade on journalists of entering into affected areas. As a result, jeopardizing of impartial reporting of atrocities, human rights and press freedom all emerged as crucial challenges. Furthermore, war and conflict reporting has become more of a perilous task than ever before and so has the safety of those intending to capture and transmit news.

The world witnessed one of the most ruthless accounts of press freedom and human rights violation in the 22-day invasion of Gaza, known to world as Operation Cast Lead, which was launched by Israeli army on December 27, 2008. During this period, both Israeli and international journalists were prevented from reporting from the occupied territory. The incident prompted scholars, media experts and critics to discuss and debate the emerging roles of new media and ‘citizen journalists’ in covering conflicts particularly in controlled situations. In the heart of the discussion was use by media outlets of news, photographs and videos from conflict zones where mainstream media had been either banned or had limited access.

At that moment, the Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index (2009) dropped Israel’s ranking 46 places to 93rd out of 180 countries as result of its controlled media policies in Gaza, which continues today in one form or another (Reporters without Borders, 2009). Gidon Levi affirmed in 2011 that ‘no Israeli journalist has set foot in Gaza in three years and one month’ (Israel Social TV, 2011). In 2014, Reporters without Borders ranked Israel even lower, 96th (RWB, 2014).

The depiction of a media blockade is universally visible that is a well-known weapon of control in the government weaponry. Denial of media access has become a widespread phenomenon even in democratic countries such as the United States of America, Britain and Europe, where *The Guardian* has been banned because it published *WikiLeaks* cables. Chelsea (née Bradley) Manning and Julian Assange face trial for disclosing facts that have embarrassed governments in these countries.

During the Gaza conflict, news was so channeled through social media that many viewed this phenomenon as watershed moment. Jon Burg described the

Gaza assault as, 'The World First Social Media War' (Burg, 2009). In a same vein, Moeed Ahmad, head of new media at Al-Jazeera branded the conflict as 'War 2.0' (Flora TV, 2009).

It could be said that the story of Gazans is passion against power, struggle versus suppressor, and fact versus falsehood. Manifestly, this narrative is often seen in the mainstream media that too often is accused of taking the same line of argument as that of the Israeli government. Arguably, in recent years, Palestinians have gained enormous attention and sympathy mainly on the new media platforms around the world.

For many writers and researchers social media is changing the landscape of the Palestine issue despite crackdowns in various forms and government monitoring. In contrast, most sections of the mainstream media are evidently less accommodating of the Palestinians cause which is also documented in several academic studies. Mariam Barghouti argued that the mainstream media has not only misunderstood Palestine but it also shows that the 'Portrayal of Palestinians in Western mainstream media have not changed much since the colonial era' (Aljazeera, 30 December 2017).

For various reasons, Israel-Palestine conflict continues to draw attention from the media experts, critics and academics. Perhaps, one aspect is that it continues to happen in episodes almost every year during festive season or at the peak of Christmas. This paper particularly examines the 2008 brutal assault of the Israeli forces on Gaza and the way mainstream and new media reported it.

Previous studies embark upon reporting Israel-Palestine conflict considering both parties perspective that include (Hass, 2003; Liebes, 1997; Schleifer, 2006). Now, by all means, innovative ways of technology has enabled ordinary people to disseminate information as eye-witness accounts that were exclusively limited to the mainstream media. Thus, several recent studies acknowledge the significant shift in the news with rise of new media that include Bayoumi, 2010; Berenger, 2013; Hayes et al., 2013.

Notably, this article provides a narrative of a shift in public understanding and opinion of the Israel-Palestine conflict with the rise of alternative means of news gathering and dissemination in the age of new media. Further, based on scholarly evidence it examines the Gaza war coverage in the mainstream western media. In the context of alternative journalism, it also aims to provide an account of ordinary people war coverage using cyber devices particularly those boarded on the Flotilla aid ship.

Method and research questions

Most of this work's findings are drawn from a set of interviews conducted during and after the Gaza assault in 2008 and Flotilla attack in 2011. These interviews were carried out both online and face-to-face with scholars, journalists, campaigners and activists including Flotilla on-board aid-workers. A total of twenty individuals with dissimilar backgrounds were interviewed in different time periods (2009–2015) with a blend of open and close ended uniform questionnaire. It is essential to elucidate that respondents' 'dissimilar backgrounds' here refer to their roles in the professional spheres as well as their dissimilar opinions of conflict. This article is an upgraded version of previous research that dealt with the same subject. Notably, part of previous research has been published in *Palestine Chronicle* (19 October 2016) and *Al-Ahram* (3–9 November 2016).

One of the research questions was: 'What role did the social media play in the Gaza conflict and in what ways it was different from the mainstream media?'

Table 1

List of academics, campaigners, and journalists consulted and cited by author

Names of interviewees	Professional background	Year
Norman Finkelstein	Professor	2011
Ewa Jasiewicz	Journalist (survivor of Flotilla)	2011
Charles Glass	Journalist	2011
Phil Rees	Independent film maker	2011
Yvonne Ridley	Journalist	2009
Andrew Gilligan	Journalist	2011
Peter Obourne	Journalist	2011
Nick Davies	Writer and journalist	2011
Avi Shlaim	Professor	2011
Paul Weller	Journalist	2011
Ian Black	Journalist	2011
Martin Bell	Professor	2010
Brain McNair	Professor	2010
Roy Greenslade	Professor	2010
Antony Loewenstein	Journalist	2010
Greta Berlin	Campaigner (survivor of Flotilla)	2015
Paul Larudee	Campaigner/activist	2015
Mary Hughes-Thompson	Activist	2015
Noha Mellor	Professor	2015
Salman Sayyid	Professor	2011

A notable feature of this article is that it presents eye-witness accounts of those boarded on the aid-ship Freedom Flotilla that came under attack from the Israeli Defense Forces. A number of leading academics, journalists, campaigners and activists went on to assist Gazans in the wake of attack. It argued that conflicts will continue to happen around the globe mainly because global powers are in the business of arms trade. Governments, private businessmen and warlords are drawing huge deposits of profits out of arms sales.

Also, one may say that the role of new media in reporting wars and conflicts has been somewhat glamorized in recent years. The fact of the matter is that the media conglomerates are disinclined to capitulate their powerful roles as the controllers of media contents to those ordinary people (new media users) that aspire to report the Israeli atrocities. Furthermore despite several success stories of the new media unveiling and covering sensitive issues that largely went unreported before, it is still too early to proclaim new media has changed the landscape of conflict reporting.

Additionally, it is worth noting that since the interview process started in 2009, the working conditions for the journalists covering Gaza conflict have shown no sign of change. To this day, the Israeli army has attacked, detained without trials, banned and killed several journalists reporting and entering into the most vicious sieged Gaza zone (Aljazeera, 25 April 2018; MEMO, 13 August 2013 and 5 September 2018; CPJ, 2018). These states of affairs have paved the way for new media to report from the war-zones around the globe such as the Gaza.

Admittedly, reporting the Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the most sensitive, multifaceted and complicated issues that encompasses numerous technicalities and constraints including a Western media 'hostile' to the Palestinians and a Palestinian press biased towards Israel (Dor, 2004; Liebes, 1997; Schleifer, 2006). For such serious allegations and delicate reasons one may say that the conflict reporting is a tricky business that involves professional and legal challenges, safety and security of journalists, freedom of expression and human rights (Cottle et al., 2016; Mbaine et al., 2006; Nohretedt & Ottosen, 2014). Both sides have their own narratives and views, as one side see themselves as the victims and the oppressed, while the other are in denial and emotional attachment to land.

Henceforth, a close attention has to be paid to explore and incorporate wide-ranging opinions when reviewing the literature. Moreover, it must embrace the representation of various strands of public that is discernible in the interviewees list. Given the privacy of sources and their right to data protection and information, consent was taken from all participants for the use of material,

as well as their names in citations and direct quotes. This limits the chance of misinterpreting and altering the respondent's responses especially in case of a limited space, sensitivity of the topic.

Why does this topic seem to be important after 10 years?

Nearly a decade on, evidence shows that nothing has much changed in the media coverage of Gaza nor there has been any substantial revolution recorded in the attitude and position of political elites in relation the Israel-Palestine conflict. During the 2008 invasion of Gaza, several mainstream media organizations reporting on the Gaza attack were labelled as biased for various reasons, for instance the BBC. Ten years on, take the reporting of the BBC that is supposed to be an independent news organization still faces pressures, accusations and criticism of its Israel-Palestine reporting biases (The Guardian, 12 January 2009 and 23 May 2011; The Independent, 15 August 2018).

Worryingly, an ongoing systematic media presentation of Gaza seems so insolent that it is unable to unearth cautious selection of a word 'Operation' behind the Israeli government shrewd efforts to curb its brutalities. Take, for instance, phrases such as Operation Hot Winter (2008); Operation Pillar of Defense (2012); Operation Protective Edge (2014). It is therefore argued that most sections of the media are equal actors of the conflict. Hence, Gaza conflict remains one of the few examples of the media failures in reporting tragedies and victims.

Furthermore, in the world of information, the authenticity and accuracy of news reaching out from Gaza seems like a Mount Everest to be climbed as Israeli government maintained the blockade. This paper sets a scene for a broader inquiry into Israel-Palestine conflict that remains a test case for the news media organizations as well as several democracies around the world. Evidently, those nations take pride in endorsing and supporting human rights and freedoms appear to be reluctant over the inhumane actions of Israel.

Literature review: Question of fairness in reporting Gaza

This section explores and examines wide-ranging debates and discussions surrounding the role of the new media technologies in the Gaza conflict. Obviously, people of Gaza have lived with the horrific atrocities of war long before the advent of new media technologies what we know today as YouTube, Facebook, blogging, live streaming and podcasting. Undeniably, the new media has made it possible to witness what was nearly impossible before say for instance coverage of events where there were no reporters present on the spot. Now it is not a fiction but a reality. 'Brave New World' novelist Aldous Huxley predicted almost over 60 years

ago that ‘Someday a much cheaper alternative to typesetting may be developed and there will be a “Do It Yourself” movement’ (Huxley, 1956). Huxley’s prescience has become reality as ordinary people can produce and dispense news from war zones to a global community. The opening question to ask is that how this old conflict has changed with the rise of new media?

The dilemma of media coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue can be traced back to the beginning of the conflict itself. Unfortunately this long-standing issue remains stagnant. Several media studies have included: MIFTAH (Media Monitoring Unit) May and June 2005 reports titled ‘Public discourse and perceptions: Palestinian media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict’; KESHEV (Centre for Protection of Democracy) reports of March 2005 and January 2006 titled ‘Disconnected: The Israeli media coverage of the Gaza disengagement’; FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) report January/February 2001 and several other reports accessible at these and other organizations’ web-sites¹ dealing with the issues of media find disparity and elements of media bias in the coverage of Israel-Palestine conflict on both sides.

The widespread notion of Israel having unconditional backing of the American and British governments while the Palestinians lack support in the western media and political circles may not be a fairer assumption. The Gaza assault was largely opposed in some sections of the western media which increases public sympathy for Palestinians particularly visible in blogs, campaigning organizations web-sites and social networking sites that specially highlights several high-profile incidents:

- An alleged hit squad of Israeli agents used stolen passports issued by a variety of countries to fly into Dubai in 2010 from different countries, assassinate Hamas leader Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, who had just arrived at a Dubai hotel en route to another country, and flew away within 24 hours. No one has ever been arrested. The misuse of British passports caused a public outcry for a governmental investigation.
- Following the Gaza attack, British teachers’ and trade unionists boycotted of Israel in 2009 and Israeli money was refused by organizers of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, joining the boycott of Israeli State Institutions (BDS, 2009).
- In addition, because of the demonstrations against British public financial assistant for the Palestinians [Viva Palestina] and the issuing of the ‘British arrest warrants of Tzipi Livni on war crimes’ most high profile Israelis have avoided travelling to Britain for fear of being charged for war crimes.

¹ Available from: www.miftah.org; www.keshev.org; www.fair.org

These are a few examples that reflect the complex nature of this issue but at the same time few illustration also dismiss the perceived notion that the entire western media, scholars and politicians favour Israel regardless of its atrocities. Take the case of the BBC refusing to on-air an appeal for Gaza humanitarian aid, which caused public outcry and raised questions about the BBC editorial standards in covering Gaza war. However, in an interview with the *BBC* Tony Benn launched the appeal by himself during his appearance in a BBC talk (*The Guardian*, 26 January 2009). Benn continues to tell audience bank details to financial assistance for Gaza children and need people waiting for the help (YouTube, 2009)².

On the other hand, the Israeli government and its supporters often point out uneven coverage of the conflict from their own perspective. For instance, Alan Dershowitz (2006) complains that Israel receives negative media treatment: 'In one sense, it should come as no surprise that tiny Israel, the Jew among nations, attracts such disproportionate attention from the world. After all, the Jewish people – both before and after the establishment of the state of Israel – has always been the focus of disproportionate attention, mostly negative, despite the small number of Jews in the world' (Dershowitz, 2006).

But evidence suggests an opposing narrative of the conflict to what Dershowitz' claims that Israel (as a government) had little or off-putting news coverage in U.S. media. Importantly, the evidence also dismisses the widespread notion of presenting all Jews as oppressors and Zionists. For instance, 'Jews against Zionism' and 'True Torah Jews against Zionism' are few of many organizations that dissent with those believe in oppression. Opposite to these voices are political neocons in the United States who openly advocate tough laws and support military actions in Gaza.

For example, in *The New York Times* of January 14, 2009, Thomas Friedman, who vigorously supports Israeli attacks on the Gaza strip, famously referred to such attacks as an 'education' and said that 'this "education" worked on Hezbollah, and he hopes it will work in the current conflict in Gaza' (Uruknet, 2009). For many reasons, Friedman's argument appears insensible as we have seen aggressive policies fail in Afghanistan, Iraq and even in Iran before the start of the war. Leading scholars – mostly on the Left – dismiss the aggressive approach. In line with Friedman, British columnist Melanie Philips persistently defends Israeli policies and argues that Israel is doing its 'self-defense': 'Europe has waited for 50 years for a way to blame the Jews for their own destruction.

² Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E21MdXe3BOQ&gl=GB&hl=en-GB>

So instead of addressing genocidal Muslim anti-Semitism, the Europeans have seized upon a narrative which paints the Jews as Nazis and Palestinians as the new Jews' (Berry & Philo, 2004).

Propaganda model in practice

Drawn upon Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1988) 'Propaganda Model of News' that is based on five categories namely: concentration of the media ownership, advertising, source of information, flake (negative response) and anti-communism and fear as control mechanism, it argued that despite the criticism this model is visibly dominant in the news relating to Israel-Palestine conflict. Robert Fisk offers a best illustration that is descriptive of 'Propaganda Model' in case of Palestine that is often described as 'neighborhood' but not as a 'colony' or 'outpost' (Fisk, 2006; 2001).

The massive use of propaganda in the Israel-Palestine conflict has long interested academics. The effective use of propaganda is often visible in the Israeli government campaigns compared with efforts by its opponents who supposedly benefit from Al-Manar and Al-Aqsa TV channels.

Ha'aretz published a story December 22, 2000, which quotes an Israeli minister who admitted 'To his great dismay <...> the information provided by Amira Hass in *Haaretz* concerning some of the incidents in the territories has been more accurate than what he was been told by IDF' (cited in Hass, 2003). Hass provides evidence of such propaganda practices within the Israeli army. In a series of interviews with Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Hass quotes a soldier who admitted to her that the IDF rules of engagement 'change every day'.

Several leading studies talk about propaganda tactic in wars and political situation that is used to shape public opinion (Bagdikian, 1983; Karim, 2004; Miller, 2004; Snow, 1998; 2002; 2004; 2010; Thussu, 2004). Terence H. Qualter (1959) calls it the 'weapon of power politics'.

Howard Friel and Richard Falk (2007) offer a comprehensive account of media reportage of Gaza that indicates media bias. These authors examined *The New York Times* editorial pages on Gaza issues and conclude the major global paper went easy on Israel's 2006 attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon. *The New York Times* declined to criticize Israel's military campaign. Friel and Falk analyzed reports from leading global newspapers, newswires and international donor agencies such as *Haaretz*, *Jerusalem Post*, *Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Amnesty International press releases*, *France Presse*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Yediot Ahronot*, and *Reuters* from July 8 to November 13, 2006 and found that *The New York Times* failed to put facts in the right order (Friel & Falk, 2007).

According to Friel and Falk, *The New York Times* labelled Noam Chomsky an ‘extremist’ for his outspoken views on Israel while its writer Ethan Bronner praised Alan Dershowitz (2003) and tag the professor’s book as ‘intelligent polemic’ in a review (Friel & Falk, 2007). They pointed out how the *New York Times* crossed intellectual honesty borders by calling Dershowitz an expert and discrediting Chomsky, a recognized thinker of our times.

In John Pilger’s recent documentary ‘The War You Don’t See’ David Mannion, the Editor in Chief of *ITV News* admits that ‘The Israeli propaganda machine is very sophisticated and in its own terms it’s quite successful’ (Pilger, 2010). Furthermore, the findings indicate a visible media disparity in covering Gaza, the *BBC* Head of Newsgathering, Fran Unworth, argues ‘The *BBC* has a duty to report what the government and their representatives are saying’ (ibid).

In the same documentary Greg Philo argues that most journalists feel fearful of talking against Israel (ibid). Philo further notes the British journalist are so fearful that before filing story about Israel some ask their bosses ‘what can I say, which words can I use’. In his interview with Stephen Sackur of the *BBC Hard Talk* (January 23, 2007) George Galloway exposes several cases of the media unequal coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue in the Middle East and points out the following: ‘Andrew Gilligan who actually told the truth and he got sacked. The man who backed him Greg Dyke, the Director General of *the BBC* stood by his man and got sacked. Gavin Davis stood by his DG and got sacked <...> Piers Morgan in the *Mirror* got sacked, I got sacked’ (YouTube, 2010).

Systematic media reporting and the excluded voices

Close scrutiny of media coverage of Israeli-Palestinian conflict holds several accounts of disproportionate reporting. Chris Hedges avers that critics and scholars such as Yuri Avnery, Tom Segev, Ilan Pappé, Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, Noam Chomsky, Dennis Kucinich, Norman Finkelstein and Richard Falk, are all ignored, unrepresented and voiceless in the media (Truthdig, 2009).

Hedges’ observations are accurate as most mainstream media, including Middle East news outlets, have given little time or space to Jewish peace activists. Absent from the media are spokespersons from a long list of Jewish peace organizations including ‘Jewish Voice for Peace’, ‘European Jews for a Just Peace’, ‘Jews for Justice for Palestine’, ‘The Jewish Peace Lobby’, ‘Independent Jewish Voices’, and ‘Jews against Islamophobia’.

The fact is that in case of Gaza Israeli government exercises strict control over national and international journalists to report its actions against civilians. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) ‘Operation Cast Lead’ brings a media blockade which has opened novel avenues for new media to generate information and

news supply as Will Ward describes ‘The government even prohibited Israeli soldiers from bringing in mobile phones. By now the medium of choice for leaks of embarrassing information the world over’ (Ward, 2009).

Thus, new media has become latest target of the government control as Ward suggests ‘Analysis on the role of new media in the Middle East has largely centred on how “citizen journalists” can now set the agenda for news outlets, and how social media users repackage, comment on, and distribute content in innovative ways’ (ibid). Hughes-Thompson experienced worse restraints from IDF: ‘In the pre-dawn hours we suddenly saw live feed from the Mavi Marmara showing Israeli commandos rappelling down from helicopters and shooting passengers...(as the IDF shot out the cameras)...the Israelis confiscated all their cameras, computers, cell phones and all their electronics (along with other possessions including money, credit cards, etc.) Israel then used social media to put out false information claiming they had been attacked and were merely defending themselves’ (Interview with author, 2015).

The bloggers and independent filmmakers have brought the angle of conflict and, as a result, the anti-war movements are growing and more people are showing their opposition to this longstanding conflict. For instance, in a video *Russia Today*³ reporters shows stream of interviews that includes: the Israeli broadcaster Ehud Shem Tov the editor of *Social TV*, Professor Tamar Liebes of Hebrew University and Lt. Aliza Landes, head of the Israeli Defense Forces new media department.

It explains on the basis of conversation that the footage of Flotilla was edited by the Israeli army before it reached the television channels. For instance, the demonstrations happened inside Israel were not shown to avoid public anger and hence the public was shown a military broadcast version as Tov says, ‘Israeli media doesn’t give Israeli public a true picture what is happening’. All Israeli military correspondents worked in the army and there is a deep connection between them. Definitely there are videos that army is not releasing’ (Russia Today, 2010). Likewise Jasiewicz pointed out, ‘The activists on the ground in Gaza during the massacres 2008-2009 (myself included) were all either blogging or sending our email reports to their contact lists’ (Interview with author, 2011).

Discussion and analysis

Most all of the respondents consider new media as a force for change that has transformed the news patterns from conflicting zones such as the Gaza. But they also raise fear that Israeli government has the power and sources to shut

³ Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvwti0p0p8o>

new media sites. So the question then arises is that whether or not the new media is an independent entity? And will it survive government restrictions?

The new media facilitates to establish bond between Israelis and Palestinians [common people] which reminds us the fall of 'Berlin Wall' that failed to resist before people's desire. Coincidentally, in this case ordinary people through networking are becoming closer to each other than ever before and it seems the idea of 'Iron Wall' as offered by Avi Shlaim (2001) is noticeably declining.

About half of the participants of this study said that social media is still beyond the reach of many people. Phil Rees argues that only wealthy 'westernized groups' use social media whilst countryside and urban dwellers are 'largely disenfranchised' that makes its role as 'unrepresentative'. Further, Rees concluded: 'Its role has been exaggerated precisely because it has not challenged the news agenda. It did not challenge a simplistic, often inaccurate perspective (a pro-Western, democracy seeking majority fighting a religious extremist and oppressive regime)' (Interview with the author, 2011). In contrast, Norman Finkelstein expressed a different point of view: 'Because of the new media, the mainstream media no longer set the agenda: the mainstream media must now compete for an audience with the new media' (Interview with author, 2011).

Truly, recent years have witnessed many channels, community radios, blogs and web-sites those give space to marginalized communities, for instance, in an outstanding short film 'Year to commemorate war in Gaza' (2011), Eitan Lerner, of *Israel Social TV* brings about an insight of Israeli citizens who staged at Robin Square to mark solidarity with Arabs. In this film, Lerner display interviews of political activists, scholars, journalists and professionals who choose to act and oppose Israel's brutal siege of Gaza which includes: Combatants for Peace Event, Hadash Party and Doctors for Human Rights Association series of demonstrations held in Tel Aviv and Jaffa during the months of January and March 2009 (YouTube, 2011).

But Israeli government restrictions and pressures on new media users as well as shutting of social networking sites displays the bleak-side of social media. Take the case of assault on Freedom Flotilla incident that had cost Israeli government a strong opposition outside the world. During the attack on Gaza Flotilla the eyewitness account reaches to the entire world as Ewa Jasiewicz said: 'The Israelis bombed the transmitters for phones and Internet in the North of the strip, so, there was no tweeting or emailing or even calls I could make or take, not me or anyone else' (Interview with author, 2011). However, such experiences also taught activist and new media users to be more prepared and cautious as Hughes-Thompson explained her experience of the year 2011: 'I was on the Canadian flotilla boat TAHRIR in Greece (our boat was on the island of

Crete) and by that time we had WiFi on board, previously unheard of... we had the ability to email photographs & videos in seconds' (Interview with author 2015).

Notably, the Paris attacks of 2015 were marked with safety check features for people. Additionally, Facebook users changed their display profile (DP) to French flag but on the same day Facebook neither allowed people to mark Beirut attack nor to change their display profile (Al-Jazeera, 15 November 2015).

News from Gaza in the age of new media

The world has begun to see live podcasts, audios, visual images and videos of concentrated camps, military patrols in the streets, rotten remains of bombed hospitals and mosques showing civilians under attack, demolition of Palestinians homes, stopping children from going on to schools, and forcefully separating them from parents. Charles Glass describes Palestinians sufferings as, 'I do know about Gaza, where people would have every right to be angry with or without the Internet' (Interview with author, 2011). Evidence shows that the new media has emerged as a blessing for the Palestinians. Greta Berlin shared her experience in the following words: 'When we began organizing to sail a boat to Gaza in 2006, the only social media available was Gmail. The rest were in their infancy. By the time Freedom Flotilla I was attacked in 2010, we were working with Twitter, Facebook, Google groups and web-sites. In four years the world changed completely. Social media has changed the playing field of information' (Interview with the author, 2015).

Almost all participants interviewed for this study believe that the new media has potentially changed the view of Gaza conflict that was ignored and unreported for several decades. A few recent studies on the role of new media in Israel-Palestine conflict affirm the similar view that new media has transformed the conflict reporting (El-Zein & Abusalem, 2015; Zeitzoff, 2017).

In contrast, the mainstream media has overwhelmingly refused to investigate human rights abuses, torture and everyday harassment experienced by the Palestinians. This behavior raises concerns for many living in the democratic world including the partakers of this study. As Mary Hughes-Thompson puts it, 'some reporters are daring to (occasionally) report on crimes against Palestinians, though most such crimes go completely unreported, while every single attack on Jewish Israelis (or Jews anywhere) is front page news' (Interview with the author, 2015). Others, like Norman Finkelstein, have raised similar concerns: 'Newspapers like *The New York Times*, which are basically mouthpieces of the Israeli foreign ministry, no longer control public perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict' (Interview with author, 2011).

Arguably, most news media organizations cover various events according to their own financial and political vested interests. Take for instance, the case of Iraq War in which most of the western the media misguided and misinformed the public (Basile, 2017; Dudge, 2006; Mitchell, 2013). Not only wars but also elections in democratic countries like America and Britain the media had tool sides and manipulated the public opinion in favor of liked-minded politicians (Bartle & Allen, 2018; Beers, 2010).

Noticeably, the Gaza assault and blockade is yet another reprehensible illustration of the mainstream media reporting that has badly failed it. For Yvonne Ridely Gaza is often unreported because the 'mainstream media is under the influence of politicians and a very strong Zionist lobby' (Interview with author, 2015).

Maybe, those media organizations align with the Israeli government avoid covering Palestinians suffering at the hands of IDF. Fairly speaking both sides endorse their view point across through various channels including the media.

Several scholars have noted that both Israel and the Palestinians have employed propaganda tools as part of their key strategies to present the conflict to the wider world that include textbooks curriculum in schools to literature and use of the mainstream as well social media brimming with horrific pictures to persuade public opinion (Chesnoff et al., 1969; Peled-Elhanan, 2012; Robinson, 2013).

On the other hand, the IDF also notices the growing importance of social media and makes use of every social media platform available that includes notable names such as Twitter and YouTube. An Israeli military spokesman Major Avital Leibovich publicly admitted, 'We open channel on YouTube and the purpose was to reach audience in other countries in other land <...> my dream is to have everyday blog in Arabic and in English next time when we have a conflict' (YouTube, 2009). In contrast, Hamas employs PAL Tube and The Electronic Intifada for updates during the siege. However, Israel has an edge over Hamas because it is considered a terrorist organization in the west which support Israel's point of view.

Will Ward (2009) finds that, 'The Israeli military debut its own YouTube channel to broadcast clips of surveillance and air strikes, eager to portray its weapons as precise and show off its technological command of the battle space. Hamas has also sought to use the media. In Gaza, a group of Hamas fighters allowed Algerian journalist Zouheir Alnajjar to videotape the inside of their homemade rocket factory' (Ward, 2009).

But new media has made it possible for people to report war crimes, which was previously unthinkable. An eyewitness of Gaza atrocities Paul

Larudee illustrates as, 'Gaza is mass murder and ethnic cleansing. It is war crimes and crimes against humanity' (Interview with author, 2015).

The notion of humanity is the significant thesis behind western invasions and interference in others matter in the Middle East and beyond. But when it comes to Israel many western nations appear to be silent. As Noam Chomsky has suggested that, 'Israel has been abducting civilians for decades, and no one has ever suggested that anyone should invade Israel' (cited in Barsamian, 2007).

Take the case of Israeli assault on Gaza dozens of short films and documentaries were broadcast at various video hubs those includes: YouTube, Vimeo, Netflix, Hulu, Daily Motion, Metacafe, Veoh, Screen, TV.com and Break.com. Simultaneously, on other front bloggers channel news from inside Gaza during and after the conflict making it the rest of the world to look into the issue from a completely different perspective of mainstream media and politics. For example, blogs such as 'Gaza Mom', 'Iraq Burning', 'Live from Gaza', 'Podcast from Gaza', 'Telling the Story of Gaza', 'Gaza.mov' and 'From Gaza with Love' are evident of emerging trends of new media.

In addition, *Al Jazeera's* 'Creative Commons Repository' programme assist students from Islamic University of Gaza to produce short films of their daily life under occupation and share it with the outside world. In brief, Finkelstein has rightly put it as, 'The main achievement of the new media is that it has loosened the monopoly of the mainstream media' (Interview with the author, 2011).

For instance, documentaries such as 'The Gaza Strip' (2002); 'Death in Gaza' (2003); 'The Other Israel' (2006); 'Occupation 101' (2007); 'Tunnel Trade' (2007); 'Tears of Gaza' (2008); 'The Birth of Israel' (2008); 'Erased: Wiped Off the Map' (2009); 'Sleepless in Gaza' (2010); 'The Zionist story' (2010) and 'Valley of Wolves Palestine' (2011). All these videos present liberal and insight view of the conflict, for instance, Ronen Berelovich documentary 'The Zionist Story' includes interviews of Israeli historians, scholars and campaigners who hold opposing views of Israeli government that hardly ever appear on mainstream media channels. In sum, Noha Mellor points out: 'Social media in the MENA region, as elsewhere, serve as new platforms for virtual conversations, and these tend to become quite heated during crisis situations, such as the Gaza conflict in July-August, 2014. Numerous hashtags appeared on Twitter, as part of Hamas's crusades such as #GazaUnderAttack, #StopIsrael and #PrayforGaza' (Interview with author, 2015).

Conclusion

The analysis offered in this article is by no means final. It clearly has to be refined, in order to do full justice to a more comprehensive study and, since the crisis

in Gaza is ongoing, there has been a radical shift in the Britain, America and the European domestic political landscape that will certainly have an impact of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Besides, the political situation in Syrian, Yemen and beyond in the Middle East will also have an effect on the conflict. This inquiry has erudite that in the past few years Israel-Palestine issue has gained more scholarly and public attention as the world of information has enormously changed.

New means of communications including smartphone's, tablets, mini-computers, satellite phones and other smart technological instruments have now made it possible to report any event live or at least record it happens. The campaigners, activists and volunteers on Mavi Marmara aid-ship witnessed, recorded and somehow managed to disseminate the brutal Israeli commandos attack on the Flotilla. Somehow, one may call it a new turn in reporting from Gaza, 'as it happens' because of information technology revolution.

Arguably, it has now become more challenging for those in power to control the flow of information than ever before. In turn, the case of Palestine and Gazans is strong and it gets more sympathizers in Europe and around the world. Another significant change signals growing role of new media in strengthening and mobilizing anti-war voices inside Jerusalem. In addition, anti-war campaigners and human rights activists are using online platforms to connect and drive likeminded communities globally in favor of Gazans. Somehow, new media has emerged as a blessing for the Palestinians. Evidence show that the Palestine issue has gained more popularity after the invention of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter that many believe have become battle ground among unarmed Palestinians and the Israelis.

Until the present, new technologies are constantly evolving in advancement which makes it impossible to scale new media future as well as its successes and failures. Also, despite growing use of new technologies yet today for most people around the globe new media technologies are luxury items. However, given the rise of humanitarian activist movements in Europe and beyond most people involved are reasonably educated and well aware of these technologies so in this regard there is a potential and space for new media technologies. Globally, blogging is still a prevalent source of expressing alternative opinions and news dissemination. But of course new technologies are still beyond the reach of majority of the world citizens who also requires knowledge and skills to operate smart phone and write blogs.

The other side is bleak and that is media conglomerates and governments increasing pressures and crackdowns on web-sites, blogs and all sorts of new mediums of news. It is here the real challenge lies ahead in future. Based upon

the analysis of interviews it concludes that besides challenges there are hopes and success stories of new media in Gaza and this keep the passion moving. The challenge ahead for the researchers and academic community is yet to find an answer to a question that whether or not the new media is more or less independent from media conglomerates and political elite's control and also whether it can be both professional and trustable.

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Appendix

The Media Report Card Studies list: *Deadly Distortion: Associated Press* Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, *Off the Charts: ABC, CBS, and NBC* Sep. 2000 – Sep. 2001 Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, *Off the Charts: New York Times* Sep. 2000 – Sep. 2001 Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004, *SF Chronicle (CA) Report Card* Sep. 2000 – Mar. 2001, *San Jose Mercury News (CA) Report Card* Oct. 2002 – Mar. 2003, *San Jose Mercury News (CA) Report Card* Apr. – Sep. 2002 and *New London Day (CT) Report Card* Mar. – Jun. 2003.