

‘I’m Bisan from Gaza and I’m Still Alive’: Palestinian Digital Feminism and Intersectional Narratives of Resistance

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study adopts a postcolonial feminist intersectional approach to investigate the agency and activism of Palestinian women who are utilising social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, to amplify their voices of resistance, share their narratives of empowerment, and challenge mainstream Western media narratives amid the war in Gaza. Through analysing a number of prominent Palestinian women digital activists’ social media accounts, the study unpacks the intersectionality and overlap between myriad forms of feminist resistances and activism which crosscut the parallel political and social spheres, and private and public spheres. The study explores the ways through which these women activists deploy digital media to convey their messages and analyses the most important themes they focus on, such as asserting their empowerment, showcasing their resistance, boosting their visibility, and galvanising international solidarity and support. The study unpacks the affordances of these social media platforms, such as the power of visual communication through images and videos, and the role they play in enhancing the visibility of women’s resistances and activism and broadening their global outreach. The study investigates how digital spaces empower marginalised voices and it contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities and hybridity of intersectional, global feminist activism and resistances.

Keywords: social media, Palestinian women, digital feminism, online activism, Gaza war

INTRODUCTION

The Gaza war which erupted in October 2023 has been a focal point of global attention, due to the significant humanitarian toll, extensive damage, and high casualty figures (London *et al.*, 2024). Thousands have died in Israel’s war on Gaza, thousands more have been left seriously injured or missing under the debris, and hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee to overcrowded shelters and makeshift homes. The financial cost has also been high, with losses amounting to billions of dollars, severely impairing Gaza’s already fragile economy (Khalidi and Iwidat, 2024).

The gravity and scale of this humanitarian disaster necessitates a closer look at its coverage in international media outlets, especially mainstream Western media, compared to social media platforms, and the most important characteristics of each. It also requires an in-depth exploration of the rise of alternative voices on digital platforms, such as Palestinian digital activists, who challenge and resist the dominant narratives surrounding the war on Gaza through various forms of cyberactivism (Howard, 2011).

Against the backdrop of this temporal context, namely the war on Gaza, this study pays special attention to the multiple roles that Palestinian women activists have been playing, and how they have been using digital media tools to fill the gaps in legacy media’s coverage of this war.

Gaps in Mainstream Western Media Coverage

The coverage of the Gaza war in mainstream Western media has been problematic. According to Fahmy *et al.* (2024), ‘individual, media routines, organizational, institutional, and social systems level factors’ have an effect on how this war is covered by journalists and how in-depth and rich the stories written by those who have experienced it firsthand are (174). This is primarily because mainstream media frequently encounters a variety of problems in its efforts to give the public the information they need about this war, such as logistical limitations, ideological conflicts, and political restrictions (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024).

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Consequently, there has been an ongoing critique, particularly in the Middle East and amongst Palestinian supporters worldwide, that mainstream Western media have not covered the Gaza war truthfully, impartially, and comprehensively (Khamis, 2023a). Numerous factors have been cited as the cause behind this, including the one-sided coverage of the crisis that favoured the Israeli narrative over the Palestinian narrative. This was particularly evident when relying on official reports from the Israeli side, more than the Palestinian side (Youmans, 2024).

The lack of historical contextualisation of this intricate and protracted conflict, which has lasted for several decades, and the dehumanisation of the Palestinian victims—by either downplaying or ignoring the severity of their daily humanitarian suffering—are two other related criticisms of this coverage (Khamis, 2023a).

There are a number of reasons for these gaps in the coverage of the Gaza war by mainstream Western media. These include the fact that international journalists have limited access because of political restrictions from the Israeli side and concerns about their safety which further limit their ability to report comprehensively (CPJ, 2023, 2024; Palmer, 2022). Therefore, a large number of foreign media outlets regularly depend on statements from the Israeli government and state embedded journalism, which restricts the range of viewpoints and the breadth and depth of news reporting.

Furthermore, many mainstream Western media outlets have mischaracterised and reduced the complexity of the Gaza crisis, which has been entwined with numerous regional and international geopolitical interests for many years, to an 'Israel-Hamas conflict,' exacerbating the reductionism and decontextualisation of this war's media coverage (Khamis, 2023a).

According to Johnson (2023), distorted reports of the first several months of the Gaza conflict were broadcast by CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News. According to Pérez Castro (2024), the majority of news reports regarding the Gaza war that were published in print media—including prestigious newspapers like *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*—favoured Israel and showed a persistent bias against the Palestinian people, paying little attention to their suffering.

Youmans (2024) contends that 'News outlets have consistently prioritized Israeli lives over Palestinian ones, adopting Israeli framing and narratives even when they fail to stand up to scrutiny.' This style of reporting frequently produces a narrative that is created by the powerful and ignores the underprivileged.

This has been applicable to Western media's coverage of the Gaza crisis which has been criticised for its shortcomings in addressing pain, elevating Palestinian voices, giving historical context, and humanising the victims (Zghoul, 2022). Due to the underreporting of Palestinian civilian deaths and the emphasis on military data, rather than firsthand accounts of civilian loss and resilience, the public's perspectives on the war have been distorted because of the lack of accurate and complete information (Fahmy *et al.*, 2024; Khamis, 2023a; Peterson, 2024).

Palestinian perspectives and voices have not been sufficiently represented by Western media, particularly American media. According to Badran *et al.* (2024), official narratives frequently obscure the voices of individuals who live in Gaza, preventing the general public from learning about the variety of individual experiences and ordinary lives of the Palestinians, who are often misrepresented as either passive victims or, worse, violent villains.

While Palestinian lives have not received sufficient attention, depth, or specifics, there has been a discernible trend to concentrate more on Israeli experiences, giving Israeli narratives more emotional depth and relatability (Buheji, 2024). Palestinians are dehumanised by this discrepancy in media coverage patterns, which turns them from unique people with complex lives into insignificant statistics. The lack of narratives that emphasise their hopes, perseverance, and day-to-day hardships strengthens preconceptions, prevents empathy, and aids misrepresentation.

Another notable void in Western media coverage has been the poor contextual analysis of the political and historical aspects. Reports around the Gaza war frequently exclude essential information about the protracted history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is key to understanding the adversarial dynamics of the war (Pérez Castro, 2024). Audiences are left with a superficial and contemporary grasp of this conflict that lacks in-depth awareness of its historical context.

Moreover, political barriers, ideological challenges, and logistical constraints have hindered the journalists' ability to provide in-depth coverage, leading to a skewed reporting that often prioritises the Israeli narratives. The insufficient historical context, underreporting of Palestinian suffering, and the absence of Palestinian voices dehumanised the Palestinians and reduced their stories to mere statistics. This lack of diverse perspectives and emotional depth further skewed public perceptions about the Palestinians, reinforced power imbalances, and boosted misrepresentation.

Alternative Narratives Via Digital Media

Due to its ability to bridge gaps and fill voids in mainstream media coverage, social media platforms have emerged as essential tools for presenting alternative narratives (Kokeyo, 2023). The way conflicts are reported has changed dramatically as a result of social media, which greatly influenced the Gaza war coverage (Avelar, 2024).

Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have given laypeople a voice by displaying their images, real-time updates, and personal narratives. Popular posts and hashtags, including #freepalestine and #GazaUnderAttack, have raised awareness and sparked discussions beyond national boundaries, as well as occasionally outside ideological ones (Shestakov, 2022). Through offering lively firsthand reports from those on the ground and enabling them to provide real-time updates, social media sites have given voice to those who are otherwise voiceless, marginalised, and invisible (Dogbatse, 2024).

Diverse points of view are made possible by citizen journalism through presenting tales that conventional media might not cover. A large worldwide audience can now hear the viewpoints of common people, thanks to the democratisation of information (George, 2024; Schmitt *et al.*, 2024).

Human rights violations and humanitarian issues that are commonly disregarded by mainstream media are among the many issues that activists, and the general public, use social media to raise awareness of (Awwad and Toyama, 2024), thus providing thorough knowledge of conflicts.

Therefore, social media has a big impact on how people perceive and disseminate information regarding the Gaza war. For instance, social media ‘influences the way Americans, especially young Americans, perceive the conflict’ (Georgios *et al.*, 2023).

Social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, is where younger viewers obtain more news, compared to conventional media like television and newspapers. According to Bruns and Hanusch (2017), viewers’ perceptions of events are influenced by hashtags, viral posts, and multimedia content.

Through the affordances of digital platforms, users can participate directly with shared materials online, increasing engagement and interactivity. Social media makes online campaigns that raise awareness and promote global action—like joining petitions and fundraising—more accessible. Using audio-visually and hashtags like #GazaUnderAttack, people around the world have come together to show support and awareness (Manor and Crilly, 2018). These platforms assist the organisation of grassroots efforts aimed at creating momentum and influencing global public opinion, as well as giving younger audiences access to the most recent updates on the situation in Gaza.

Furthermore, community development and internet networking are critical for raising the funds required to support charity projects. According to Al Attar and Brik (2024), these platforms foster comprehensive dialogues, resource sharing, and coordinated actions of activism, all of which boost collective engagement and global solidarity.

Thus, despite its limitations, such as the speed at which information spreads, which invites misinformation and creates problems with verification, social media is still crucial for increasing awareness, strengthening mobilisation and solidarity, and filling the gaps in mainstream media coverage, through sharing eyewitnesses’ first-hand accounts. These functions are clearly manifested in Palestinian women’s digital activism when covering the Gaza war, as will be discussed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study unpacks the myriad ways through which Palestinian women activists have utilised digital media platforms to challenge mainstream Western media’s coverage of the Gaza war, amplify their voices of resistance, share their alternative narratives, and assert their feminist identities.

In doing so, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the various forms of Palestinian digital feminist activism via Instagram and TikTok?
2. What are the main themes in Palestinian digital feminist activism via Instagram and TikTok?
3. How can social media affordances serve Palestinian digital feminist activism?

These questions will be addressed in the article’s discussion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Digital Feminist Activism: An Intersectional Postcolonial Approach

This study adopts a postcolonial intersectional feminist approach (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Al-Ali, 2012; Joseph, 2000; Moghadam, 2003). This approach is informed by the conceptualisation of feminism as the complex and dynamic relationship between awareness and action, consciousness-raising and mobilisation, and the importance of unpacking women’s unique individual personal experiences to acknowledge their diverse realities and amplify their varied voices (Radsch and Khamis, 2013).

By doing so, this approach challenges rigid and standard conceptualisations of Western feminism which can obscure the diversities and complexities of women’s lived experiences, forms of agency, and expressions of activism (AlKhaled, 2021). Therefore, it offers a novel approach in the realm of investigating the multiplicity,

plurality, and *hybridity* of transitioning feminisms and activisms across different social, cultural, historical, and geographical contexts (Tzoreff, 2014).

Most importantly, this approach compels us to investigate the complexities and nuances of shifting feminist identities and resistances *beyond* the 'gender norms' vs. 'modernity,' or the 'tradition' vs. 'modernisation,' or even the 'religious' vs. 'secular' dichotomies, since it acknowledges that these modes of feminist resistance are not mutually exclusive, rather they coexist in parallel and they overlap, giving birth to new *hybrid* identities which crosscut multiple spheres.

Therefore, adopting an intersectional feminist approach necessitates moving away from the static mindset of a 'one size fits all' model of feminism and acknowledging the multiple forms of feminisms, activisms, and resistances, while denouncing the adoption of a western-centric, ethnocentric, uniform feminist model, which privileges western-defined feminism, as the only valid form of feminism to be emulated and adopted by women everywhere (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Al-Ali, 2012; Joseph, 2000; Moghadam, 2003; Walby, 2011).

A number of scholars adopting this postcolonial intersectional feminist approach asserted the necessity of moving away from this orientalist approach, through acknowledging the necessity of appreciating the multiple forms of activisms and feminisms which prevail in non-Western communities in the Global South, including Arab and Muslim societies, among different groups of women representing varying demographics, experiences, manifestations of religiosity, and expressions of activism and resistance to combat different layers of oppression across the social and political spheres simultaneously. Fully embracing this postcolonial intersectional feminist lens entails resisting the stereotypical orientalist misperceptions of the Global South and of Arab and Muslim women's gendered identities (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Moallem, 2005). This necessitates acknowledging, and accepting, their varied forms of identity-expression (Khamis, 2023b).

Therefore, this approach contributes to countering wider structures of social and political injustice and oppression and the justifications behind them which are oftentimes embedded in deep colonial, orientalist, and Islamophobic discourses which legitimise the dehumanisation of the 'Other' (Khamis, 2023b).

Moreover, adopting such an approach necessitates avoiding the so-called 'save the Muslim woman syndrome' (Abu-Lughod, 2013) which implies that Arab and Muslim women are helpless, oppressed, and weak beings who lack *agency* and, therefore, need to be *saved* by 'Others,' especially (women with agency, that is to say: white, middle class and educated) Western feminists.

One of the most important techniques which women from marginalised communities, including in the Arab World and the Muslim World, have been relying on to defy their sidelining, invisibility, and misrepresentation has been cyberactivism (Howard, 2011), especially cyberfeminism (Radsch and Khamis, 2013), which has been providing them with the needed tools to raise their voices, share their narratives, and defy their stereotypes and marginalisation, both socially and politically. There is a growing body of intersectional interdisciplinary feminist scholarship which is paying special attention to bringing transnational and postcolonial approaches into the analysis of 'digital feminist activism' which refers to digital practices and online spaces that activists engage with to promote feminist voices and experiences (Vachhani, 2023).

Another interconnected term is 'networked feminism' which refers to 'a form of contemporary political action that is characterized by complex connectivity and which operates at the intersections of online and offline' (Fotopoulou, 2016: 49). This term encompasses 'broader questions of how technology shapes the social imaginaries of feminist politics' (Vachhani, 2023: 1033).

These terms are particularly relevant to this study, as they help unpack networked activist and feminist movements in the Global South and help understand the potentials, nuances, limitations, and complexities of the digital feminist activism of the discussed Palestinian women.

Social Media Affordances as Tools for Feminist Digital Activism

Social media platforms have diverse features and unique affordances. Understanding the affordances of each social media platform helps determine their role in this study, such as raising awareness, mobilising action, or fostering deeper connections. It matters because these affordances affect how women in Gaza represent their realities, how they are perceived by the global community, and how their stories and voices are amplified. In recent years, social media platforms have transformed the ways in which individuals and groups engage in activism, share stories, and build movements.

Two of the most prominent social media platforms—Instagram and TikTok—offer distinct affordances that shape how content is created, shared, and consumed. Both platforms prioritise visual content, but their unique features influence how users communicate and interact with audiences (Lu and Steele, 2018). Understanding these distinctions is critical for appreciating the role of social media in contemporary advocacy, especially in contexts where visibility and voice are often constrained by political and social factors (Chalise, 2024).

Both Instagram and TikTok are designed around the principle of visual content, making them powerful tools for advocacy and activism. According to Anderson (2020), Instagram initially a photo-sharing platform, has

evolved to include a variety of content formats such as photos, videos, Stories, Reels, and IGTV for longer-form content. TikTok, on the other hand, is entirely video-based, allowing users to create short, engaging clips that can be easily shared (Schellewald, 2021). The visual nature of both platforms enables users to communicate powerful stories, and for women in Gaza, these affordances provide opportunities to depict their daily realities and struggles in ways that transcend language barriers.

Another similarity is the reliance on user-generated content and community interaction. Both platforms encourage active participation, whether through creating content or engaging with others through likes, comments, and shares. This interactivity is essential for advocacy movements because it allows activists to foster a sense of community and support (Leong *et al.*, 2019). Women in Gaza can, for example, post videos of their daily lives under occupation, which can prompt solidarity and emotional engagement from audiences around the world.

Instagram and TikTok are also driven by algorithms that prioritise popular content, making it possible for activists to reach wide audiences if their content gains traction. The ability to go viral on either platform means that even marginalised voices, such as those of the women in Gaza, can achieve a level of global recognition, drawing attention to issues that might otherwise remain ignored by mainstream media.

According to Lei (2024), “Achieving viral success on TikTok and Instagram requires a complex mix of aggressive audience engagement with careful protection of brand reputation” (5). This means that women in Gaza could achieve a level of global recognition and viral success, while balancing drawing attention and boosting engagement with safeguarding their personal identities for security reasons.

Despite these similarities, Instagram and TikTok differ in crucial ways that affect how content is created and shared. One of the most significant differences is the format and length of the content. TikTok is designed for short-form video content, typically between 15 seconds and 3 minutes, encouraging quick “short video content, catchy, and visually engaging narratives” (Steele, 2021: 463). This format suits content that needs to grab attention quickly and fits well with TikTok’s algorithm, which aggressively recommends new content on the ‘For You Page’ (FYP). In contrast, Instagram offers a broader range of content formats, from single photos and videos to multi-part Stories and IGTV for longer video content. This flexibility allows for more detailed and sustained storytelling which can be crucial for activism that requires context and explanation, as is often the case in advocacy related to complex socio-political issues like those in Gaza.

TikTok places a strong emphasis on discovery by frequently displaying material to users from networks other than their own (Kaye *et al.*, 2022). Rapid viral dissemination is made possible by this characteristic, particularly when users interact with popular music or hot subjects. TikTok’s discovery feature may allow women in Gaza to share their stories with a much wider audience, possibly even attracting attention from abroad (Cervi and Divon, 2023). But this emphasis on virality also means that TikTok content can be ephemeral and lacking deep engagement, as trends change quickly.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative methods to investigate the use of social media sites, especially Instagram and TikTok, by Palestinian women activists to share their narratives around the war in Gaza. Qualitative research is particularly relevant for this study, since it allows for deep, rich, and contextual descriptions and analysis of social phenomena and offers valuable tools for understanding them and unpacking their complexities (Creswell, 2013). A qualitative approach enabled a comprehensive investigation of the varied ways through which women in Gaza utilise social media, including the content they share, the issues they discuss, and the ways they express themselves, given the continuous nature of digital communication (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Data Collection

This study’s data has been manually extracted from public Instagram and TikTok accounts online belonging to Gaza-based women. To guarantee that only pertinent content has been gathered and to enable in-the-moment observations of user behaviour on various sites, a manual scraping technique has been used. Manual scraping refers to the process of manually collecting data from websites or social media platforms by directly observing and recording the content, rather than using automated software tools, allowing for more precise and contextually relevant data collection (Silverman, 2016). Manual methods allow researchers to apply consistent criteria when selecting and coding data, ensuring methodological rigor and facilitating more accurate comparative analyses across different platforms (Flick, 2018).

Using a purposive sampling technique (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015), we selected videos and online contents which are most relevant to this study. We chose samples of digital postings about Gaza that specifically represent the voices of Palestinian women activists and journalists. The accounts from which these postings have been selected were chosen due to the public prominence of the digital content creators and their participation in social and political struggles, as well as the visibility of their platforms and the regularity of their online activities.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, a popular technique in qualitative research, was used to examine the gathered data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A methodical investigation of the recurrent themes in the content published on TikTok and Instagram was made possible via thematic analysis. The investigation concentrated on the ways in which Palestinian women use these platforms for advocacy, self-expression, and solidarity—particularly in light of Gaza's societal constraints and political crisis.

The process involved coding the data (posts, pictures and videos) to come up with key themes, such as empowerment, resistance, and community-building, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, which includes familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. In thematic analysis, visuals such as charts, diagrams, or infographics can enhance the interpretation of patterns and the relationships between themes. For example, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that visuals offer a clear way to represent the connections and distinctions between emerging themes. This approach emphasises clarity in illustrating relationships among themes, making the data more accessible and engaging for audiences (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of this political crisis, ethical considerations were paramount. The study adhered to ethical research standards, ensuring that no private or sensitive information has been collected, and that all the accounts and postings which have been analysed were publicly available, not private or restricted accounts, and were accessible. Obtaining informed consent was not applicable in this case, since the study relied on publicly available data. No identifying details were shared to protect the anonymity and privacy of the users who are engaging with these online accounts.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

RQ1: The Various Forms of Palestinian Digital Feminist Activism

The Palestinian people, particularly women and children, have borne the brunt of the Gaza war's devastating effects. As the violence escalates, it becomes increasingly crucial to highlight the stories of those most impacted.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective (Al-wazedi, 2020; Chambers and Watkins, 2012), the voices of Palestinian women are vital in challenging the intersecting forces of imperialism, patriarchy, and occupation. Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become crucial tools for Palestinian female journalists and influencers to amplify these narratives. These platforms serve as modern-day 'affordances'—enabling resources that allow women to both resist and reframe dominant colonial and patriarchal discourses (Lu and Steele, 2018).

Through their digital activism, these women are reshaping global perceptions by foregrounding the gendered and intersectional dimensions of the Palestinian struggle. They use social media not only to document the suffering of women and children but also to emphasise resilience and resistance within a broader postcolonial context (Banerjee and Kankaria, 2022). This fusion of feminist discourse with digital tools highlights the continued relevance of postcolonial feminism in contemporary conflicts, as these influencers and journalists stand at the intersection of resistance, gender, and digital activism, reclaiming narratives that have often been marginalised or silenced.

As noted by Awwad and Toyama (2024), social media democratises access to information, allowing oppressed communities to reclaim their narratives and challenge the gatekeeping of mainstream media. For instance, during initial outbreaks of violence, when airstrikes first targeted densely populated areas in Gaza, Palestinian influencers such as Mariam Barghouti and Rania Zabaneh shared real-time updates from Gaza through the live share feature of Instagram. These posts often focused on the immediate chaos, showing the destruction of homes, the displacement of families, and the psychological toll on children.

As tensions continued to rise, their posts began to delve deeper into the long-standing effects of occupation. Barghouti, for example, used Instagram stories to draw parallels between the sudden escalation of violence and the enduring impacts of occupation, framing her posts around themes of intergenerational trauma and resilience in the face of military aggression. She emphasises how the conflict disproportionately affects Palestinian women and children, often drawing attention to their experiences that are frequently overlooked in conventional media.

By sharing posts, reels, and IGTV content, Barghouti fosters a form of activism that humanises Palestinian experiences, allowing her global audience to witness the destruction of homes, the displacement of families, and the loss of innocent lives. Her work situates the resilience of Palestinian women within a broader framework of resistance against both military occupation and gendered oppression.

When Al Jazeera's senior producer Rania Zabaneh covers the Gaza war, she focuses on the impacts on women and children. Through her Instagram and Twitter accounts, she shares reports that shed light on the everyday

struggles of Palestinian women living under occupation. Her content includes images and videos that document the aftermath of bombings, interviews with grieving mothers, and stories of women who have resisted the occupation in both subtle and overt ways. Zabaneh emphasises the gendered dimensions of conflict, highlighting the unique challenges faced by Palestinian women, such as the need to care for their children amidst extreme stress.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective (Al-wazedi, 2020; Chambers and Watkins, 2012), the stories shared by these women on social media challenge imperialistic narratives that often obscure Palestinian lives, especially the gravity of women's struggle during this war. This variation in their activism, from documenting immediate trauma to fostering resilience and building international solidarity, highlights the adaptability and complexity of their resistance, and shows the transition from the workspace, in the case of professional journalists, to their personal lives to illustrate the multifaceted reality of living under prolonged occupation.

RQ2: The Main Themes in Palestinian Digital Feminist Activism

Feminist identity as Palestinian resistance and empowerment

In the context of the Palestinian struggle, postcolonial feminism intricately interweaves national liberation with gendered resilience, positioning Palestinian women as critical figures in the resistance movement. Challenging the misperception of Arab and Muslim women as desperate and weak women, the roles of Palestinian women as journalists and influencers who capture both suffering and resilience as agents of resistance in today's digital age illuminates the layered realities of war from distinctly gendered and intersectional perspectives (Puar, 2017).

One glaring example is how the young Palestinian journalist, Bisan Owda, used her personal Instagram platform to document the war. Her real-time reporting from Gaza using her account 'I'm Bisan from Gaza and I'm Still Alive' went viral on AJ+, winning a 2024 Emmy Award. It brought unparalleled visibility to the daily toll of the conflict on women and children and captured vivid portrayals of survival, featuring images of women shielding children from explosions and documenting scenes of families in cramped shelters. This level of visibility fills mainstream media's gaps in humanising Palestinians.

Owda's posts highlight the intersectionality inherent in her experience as a young woman journalist navigating both patriarchal norms and the colonial experience of occupation. Her ability to reach international audiences underscores the importance of 'feminist knowledge' in postcolonial contexts, allowing global viewers to grasp the compounded oppressions faced by Palestinian women and children through her lens of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

Another compelling example is Palestinian journalist, Nour Odeh, who leverages her Instagram account to provide daily updates on the situation in Gaza. Her work exemplifies what Haraway (1988) refers to as 'situated knowledge,' reflecting the lived experiences of those most affected by conflict. One particular post by Odeh in December 2023 shows a mother comforting her child under the flashing lights of explosions, symbolising both vulnerability and fortitude. Her posts highlight women's dual roles as nurturers and symbols of Palestinian resistance.

Furthermore, Odeh critiques global feminist movements for their failure to address the unique challenges faced by Palestinian women living under colonial oppression and patriarchal structures. Odeh's posts challenge the view of women as mere victims, instead positioning them as central agents of resistance. Thus, contextualising personal suffering within broader colonial and patriarchal structures, making a compelling case for intersectional solidarity with marginalised women globally.

Similarly, TikTok influencer @palestinianmommy utilises humour, vlogs, and political commentary to portray the everyday struggles of Palestinian mothers. In one widely shared video, she juxtaposes the mundane act of cooking dinner with the backdrop of an air raid, illustrating the juxtaposition of normalcy and the devastating realities of wartime survival. The video's concluding appeal for global solidarity underscores the intersection of personal experience and political action, resonating with hooks' (1984) notion of the 'personal as political.' This framing contextualises the lived experiences of oppressed individuals within broader narratives of resistance and power.

Moreover, by contrasting daily life with the imminent threat of violence, the young Palestinian activist Ahed Tamimi underscores how Palestinian women's experiences of violence are not isolated events, rather they are part of a larger struggle against the intersecting oppressions of colonialism, militarism, and patriarchy.

Activist Ahed Tamimi gained international recognition as a teenager after being imprisoned for slapping an Israeli soldier. Through her Instagram advocacy for Palestinian rights, she emphasises the significant contributions of Palestinian women and girls in resisting Israeli occupation. Tamimi shares stories, images, and videos of young women participating in protests, challenging the stereotype of women as mere victims of conflict. In a notable post featuring young girls engaged in demonstrations, she underscores the importance of female empowerment in the fight for Palestinian liberation.

Collectively, the digital activism of women like Owda, Odeh, @palestinianmommy, and Tamimi underscores the power of crafting feminist narratives around the Palestinian liberation discourse. Each of these figures operates from unique vantage points within the intersectional web of gender, age, and sociopolitical status.

Their posts reveal how Palestinian women negotiate their multiple identities and advocate for global solidarity, challenging dominant narratives that ignore, marginalise, or dehumanise their experiences. This reclamation of agency highlights a postcolonial feminist commitment to intersectional activism that opposes gendered and colonial violence, fostering an inclusive solidarity that respects their lived realities and voices across diverse audiences (Hurley and Johnston, 2022).

Global solidarity through the intersectionality of gender and nationalism

Understanding the suffering of Palestinian women and children during the Gaza war necessitates adopting a postcolonial feminist lens which critically examines how colonial legacies intersect with gender, race, and class to create unique experiences of marginalisation, as articulated by theorists like Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). In the context of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian women journalists and influencers leverage social media platforms to underscore the disproportionate impacts of the conflict on women and children.

Mariam Barghouti, for example, utilises Instagram to highlight the compounded effects of the siege on Gaza. In one poignant post, she shares the story of a young girl who lost her mother in an airstrike, emphasising the distinct trauma that war inflicts on young girls compared to boys, and the specific emotional and social consequences of war on female youth (Barghouti, 2021). Furthermore, Barghouti's posts offer a critical intersectional narrative in which gender, age, and national identity converge, challenging the dehumanising framings that often dominate international media's coverage. By sharing these layered, personal accounts, her work calls for a global feminist solidarity rooted in understanding Palestinian women's specific experiences of oppression under occupation.

Similarly, Lara, known as @gazangirl, employs Twitter and Instagram to discuss the historical and ongoing effects of the occupation on Palestinian women. She underscores the necessity of women's participation in the Palestinian liberation movement and their roles within both resistance and identity-preservation spheres. By sharing her personal experiences as a woman living in Gaza, Lara draws attention to the surge in gender-based violence that accompanies conflict. Her Instagram Stories feature interviews with Palestinian mothers, revealing the psychological toll of raising children amid constant fear of airstrikes. Lara also critiques global feminist movements for their selective advocacy and lack of action in supporting the rights of Palestinian women, thus highlighting the need for a more inclusive feminist discourse.

Malak Mattar, a young Gaza-based artist, utilises Instagram to share her vivid artwork which reflects the suffering of Palestinian women and children throughout the ongoing conflict. Her poignant illustrations convey the complexities of resilience and the emotional burdens borne by women in crisis. In one piece, she depicts a mother shielding her child from a bomb, symbolising the protective instinct and psychological strain experienced by women during wartime. Through her visual storytelling, Mattar places women's experiences at the forefront of the larger narrative of the Israeli occupation, using colour and symbolism to illustrate the challenges facing Palestinian women.

Through their strategic use of social media tools and their affordances, these Palestinian women not only articulate their lived experiences, they also challenge dominant narratives surrounding gender, violence, and resistance. By centring their voices and everyday narratives, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of postcolonial feminism that recognises the intricate intersections of gendered identity and oppression within the specific context of conflict.

RQ3: Social Media Affordances and Palestinian Digital Feminist Activism

The differences in affordances between various social media platforms shape how they are being used by Palestinian women to advocate for their rights and share their stories. The use of intersectional, postcolonial feminist theory elucidates the digital strategies of Palestinian women to be activists (personal life) and journalists (professional life) during the crisis (Rogan and Budgeon, 2018).

Through their utilisation of digital platforms and their affordances, they not only challenge dominant media narratives but also create inclusive spaces that connect the women and children who have become victims and amplify their voices through telling real-time stories of the horrors of the war across local and global contexts

On TikTok, the affordance of this platform enables women to focus on short, impactful videos that align with global trends to gain immediate visibility. Given TikTok's virality potential, they capitalise on it to create quick emotional appeals, leveraging the platform's trending challenges, and they use music to draw attention to their struggles. This enables their videos which may show brief, yet powerful, moments about daily life in Gaza to resonate with viewers and gain prompt attention internationally.

However, the affordances of Instagram enable women in Gaza to engage in more sustained storytelling through longer videos, slideshows, and pictures. They can also use Instagram's photo posts or IGTV to provide more in-

depth accounts of their lives through interviews, photo essays, or longer video updates to illustrate how their personal lives have been affected by the political events. When navigating these complexities, these women turn to their personal digital media spaces on Instagram to give a day-to-day chronicling of events which helps them maintain a consistent presence in their audience's feed, while offering a deeper understanding of ongoing events (Ghabra, 2018).

Visuals have a unique capacity to evoke empathy, as people tend to react emotionally to human faces and real-life scenarios depicted in images and videos. A study by Melhemallaham (2024) highlighted the psychological impact of war images on students, showing that visual depictions of the war in Gaza intensified their emotional response and engagement. In times of war, visuals can humanise abstract statistics and distant events, compelling audiences to feel the urgency of the situation. Unlike text, images and videos provide instant information (Allan and Allbeson, 2024; Friend, 2007).

Additionally, Instagram's captioning feature which allows for the inclusion of text, provides important context that might be difficult to convey in TikTok's shorter format, such as the intricacies of life under occupation or the specific challenges women face in Gaza. For example, Mariam Barghouti and Rania Zabaneh, two women who are positioned in the midst of the war, use their personal social media accounts to draw attention to the suffering, demonstrating how these visual accounts offer a crucial channel for exposing the suffering of young and marginalised groups in Gaza.

According to Avelar (2024), younger audiences—who are more active on social media sites like Instagram and TikTok—often turn to short videos and images rather than traditional media sources to obtain their news. Videos and images create a lasting visual memory of an event and they serve as archives that can be revisited and shared long after the conflict ends. Migowski da Silva (2023) contends that this supports historical documentation and sustained advocacy initiatives. As demonstrated by hashtags like #FreePalestine and #GazaUnderAttack, which draw attention to the situation and promote global engagement, visuals also boost online participation.

Remrey (2024) indicates that videos and pictures from war areas provide firsthand perspectives on situations that may be hidden by mainstream media. By displaying raw firsthand information from the ground, they subvert official narratives. A narrative opposing the official news coverage of the Gaza conflict was established by social media posts showing the devastation of homes and the suffering of residents. Khamis (2023a) explains how Western mainstream media frequently dehumanises Palestinian victims by emphasising statistics over first-hand accounts.

In the context of postcolonial feminism, the social media affordances that these platforms offer are crucial for amplifying the narratives of marginalised voices (Dogbatse, 2024). They enable Palestinian women to assert their agency, challenge dominant discourses, and cultivate a global community of solidarity (Radsch and Khamis, 2013). Through these platforms, they not only document their realities but also engage in a transformative dialogue that redefines the intersections of gender, identity, and resistance within the context of ongoing colonial struggles.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing literature on postcolonial intersectional feminism through examining how Palestinian women in Gaza use social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok as tools for resistance, empowerment, and activism, and how, by doing so, they are raising awareness about the plight of the Palestinian people and filling some of the gaps in legacy media's coverage of the Gaza war.

Through the lens of postcolonial feminism, the narratives shared by Palestinian women highlight the enduring legacies of colonialism and how they intersect with patriarchy, occupation, and militarism. In other words, these women are engaging in multilayered forms of resistance against multifaceted and intersectional forms of oppression.

The dual roles of Palestinian journalists like Rania Zabaneh and Mariam Barghouti illustrate the intersection of professional journalism and personal and political activism in the lives of these women. This intersection of personal and professional lives characterises feminist activism (Rogan and Budgeon, 2018). According to Chrifi Alaoui (2021), women's ability to put their personal narratives on digital platforms enables marginalised groups to reclaim narrative control and challenge mainstream discourses. Also, they draw attention to the amount of subjugation and discrimination they experience in order to survive, while trying to provide people with information globally.

Similarly, Ghabra underscores how Palestinian women activists use social media to humanise Palestinian experiences and foreground gendered perspectives which are often absent in legacy media, thus challenging dominant narratives that marginalise them and empowering their communities (Ghabra, 2018). This approach allows them to go beyond the constraints of traditional journalism, which prioritises objectivity, and embrace subjective storytelling as a form of resistance and self-representation.

To the women mentioned, social media tools became the avenue to challenge the dominant discourses around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which are narrow or one-sided. These women move beyond the 'othering' or muted group space to become subjects with voices geared towards change. This is particularly important in a context where mainstream media outlets, especially in the West, frequently portray Palestinians in dehumanising and distorted ways (Al-wazedi, 2020; Chambers and Watkins, 2012).

Postcolonial feminism emphasises the importance of centring the voices and experiences of women from formerly colonised regions. In the context of Gaza, Palestinian women journalists, activists, and social media influencers like Bisan Owda, Mariam Barghouti, Rania Zabaneh, and Nour Odeh exemplify this approach by using their platforms to reclaim narratives about the war, occupation, and their lived experiences. This enables them to move from being peripheral to becoming centred voices of resistance.

Through visual storytelling, these women highlight not only the suffering of women and children but also their resilience (Chrifi Alaoui, 2021; Ghabra, 2018). They shift the discourse from one that merely victimises women to one that reenacts and recognises their agency within the broader resistance movement (Banerjee and Kankaria, 2022). Through their personal digital platforms, they become the voice and the screen through which the experiences of both men and women are seen and appreciated amid the war.

In doing so, these women utilise what Lu and Steele (2018) refer to as the affordances of digital media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to reframe dominant colonial and patriarchal discourses. Their digital activism challenges the imperialist narratives that frequently depoliticise or oversimplify the Palestinian struggle by offering nuanced and gendered perspectives on the impacts of the conflict. Social media, therefore, becomes a vital tool for not only archiving their suffering, but also for fostering global solidarity, galvanising support, and preventing their erasure.

However, it is important to steer away from technological determinism by remembering that social media platforms are simply tools and that the most important element in the process of cyberactivism is always the actors who are deploying these tools, in this case the women themselves. It is always their own agency, goals, and objectives which shape this process.

Through tackling these complex and interconnected phenomena, this study contributes to the intertwined bodies of literature on intersectional postcolonial feminism, 'digital feminist activism' (Vachhani, 2023; Ghabra, 2018), and 'networked feminism' (Fotopoulou, 2016; Vachhani, 2023). It illustrates that these women's experiences cannot be fully understood without accounting for the intersection of colonial occupation and gendered violence, as their roles as mothers, caregivers, and activists are all shaped by both the patriarchal structures within their society and the political forces which seek to silence them. We argue that Palestinian women activists are engaging in multiple intersectional feminist struggles which crosscut the public and private, the local and global, the personal and political, and the online and offline simultaneously to defy their marginalisation, amplify their voices, and resist suppression.

Palestinian digital activism also illustrates the convergence of the private and public and the personal and political, as an important concept in intersectional feminist thought. bell hooks (1984) famously stated that 'the personal is political,' underscoring how individual experiences of oppression are linked to broader systems of power. This perspective highlights how personal narratives within Palestinian digital activism can illuminate the complexities of living under occupation, revealing how these individual experiences resonate with broader societal injustices. In doing so, they create a space where personal experiences become part of the collective struggle for justice, underscoring the interconnectedness of individual and political realms.

This duality fosters solidarity among activists and promotes a deeper understanding of how intersecting identities—such as gender, class, and ethnicity—shape their experiences and resistance. Thus, Palestinian digital feminist activism not only serves as a tool for political engagement, but it also acts as a critical site for the exploration and expression of identity, community, and collective empowerment, illustrating how personal survival and resistance are deeply political acts within the context of occupation.

The intersectional feminist framework used in this research further enriches the analysis of how Palestinian women activists use social media, since their myriad identities as women, Arabs, Muslims, and inhabitants of an occupied territory result in intersecting, and overlapping, layers of marginalisation and invisibility which shape their lived realities (Broekhuysen and Al Shaer, 2023). Their advocacy activities are complicated by these intersecting oppressions. However, their point of marginality becomes a space of "radical possibility, openness, emancipation, and empowerment to have dreams of a better future" (hooks, 1989: 20).

Western legacy media is frequently critiqued for its biased coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often portraying Palestinians as passive or violent figures, while overlooking the historical and sociopolitical context that has led to this war. Khamis and Dogbatse (2024) argue that such biased representation in Western media diminishes the lived experiences of Palestinians. Therefore, Palestinian women utilise digital media as a space for counter-narratives that emphasise resilience, resistance, and the will to survive (Ghabra, 2018). They use their professional

and personal digital platforms to serve as a corrective to the dehumanising reductionism found in mainstream Western media coverage.

Social media enables marginalised voices to address intersectional issues such as race, gender, and colonialism, providing a means to foster solidarity across global audiences (Calafell, 2020). Thus, by occupying digital spaces, these women invite their followers to engage in a critical discourse around their marginalised communities under siege. Digital media activism challenges colonial occupation, ethnic erasure, religious marginalisation, and gender discrimination, all of which influence how they interact with, and are portrayed on, digital platforms.

The work of female influencers, activists and journalists in this study illuminates these intersections by highlighting how the Israeli occupation impacts women differently than men, often exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities. This aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) notion that marginalised groups experience overlapping forms of oppression, which must be understood in relation to one another.

As postcolonial feminist scholars have long noted, nationalist movements often marginalise women's contributions, viewing them as secondary to the larger cause of national liberation (Katrak, 1989; Munyoka, 2023; Vickers, 2002; William, 2023). This reclamation of feminist narratives underscores the continued relevance of postcolonial and intersectional feminism in understanding contemporary conflicts.

By using social media to document their experiences, Palestinian women are not only engaging in digital activism, rather they are also reshaping the global understanding of what it means to resist (Nartey, 2023). Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have provided these women with the tools to challenge dominant narratives, amplify their voices, and build global solidarity.

Their activism highlights the need for a more inclusive and intersectional feminist discourse that recognises the unique challenges faced by women in conflict zones, particularly those living under the dually repressive colonial and patriarchal structures. It is only through a deep and nuanced analysis of these intersecting historical, contextual, spatial, temporal, and socio-political factors that we can truly unpack the complexities and paradoxes of multi-layered feminist activism in Gaza and appreciate its depth, diversity, outreach, and impact.

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