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Israel/Palestine

Shireen Abu Akleh's killing made clear that Israel's war on Palestinian journalists is part of its war on Palestine

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV580 - May 2023 -
Publication date: Friday 12 May 2023

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During the Israeli military invasion of Ramallah in the early [2000s](#) as part of [Operation Defensive Shield](#), I was around nine or ten years old. We had one of those large box-shaped televisions. I remember this because I kept ruining the color with magnets despite my mother's repeated appeals to stop.

At the time, Shireen Abu Akleh had already been with Aljazeera for four or five years, working as their field reporter in Jerusalem.

"The Israeli army is currently invading our offices," I remembered her saying through the screen, her face barely showing. It was dark, and the cameraman's light was not enough. She seemed to be in a stairwell, and Abu Akleh's fierce voice continued reporting through the fear.

That was the first memory I remembered when I found out about Abu Akleh's killing: the image of all of us huddled around the television as the Al-Jazeera offices were raided by the military not too far away from where my family lived at the time.

The second memory that came to mind after I learned of her death happened almost a decade ago — the first time I met her.

Shireen Abu Akleh was the only journalist at the scene when I experienced my first arrest by the Israeli army in Nabi Saleh. I was 19. She was the only journalist that dared come close to myself and a friend, also arrested, as we were taken to the military jeep. I remember Shireen walking cautiously but with a confidence that told everyone she was just doing her job. She kept coming closer until the soldiers obstructed her, so she held her microphone towards the two of us as we were being handcuffed and detained. She yelled at us to explain what was happening to us, why we were there, as her microphone flailed. She asked us, and her voice felt like a saving grace.

I yelled: "the soldiers are taking us because we wanted to go to the spring." That was the truth. We wanted to go sit by the spring owned by the Palestinians of Nabi Saleh, and we were taken at gunpoint by settlers in Halamish. I was afraid, but Abu Akleh made me feel seen, made me take comfort in the fact that if a crime were to happen, someone would know.

Almost a decade later, on May 11 of last year, the Israeli army shot [Shireen](#) with a bullet to the neck. Now a senior correspondent for Al-Jazeera, Abu Akleh was covering an Israeli invasion of the Jenin refugee camp. She was one of the earliest journalists to catch on the rise of armed resistance and the Israeli assassination campaign against youth. It was the same army that raided their offices in Ramallah two decades ago and the same army that bombed their offices in Gaza on live television two years ago.

Despite [Israel's effort to attack her coffin and the people mourning her](#), Abu Akleh was buried in Jerusalem last May.

Shireen's imprint on those who heard her voice and followed her coverage remains a testament to her bravery, professionalism, and the importance of journalism in an increasingly suffocating environment.

Shireen changed Palestinian journalism

On May 11, 2022, Palestinian media and social networks were erupting with news on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. I remember receiving the news from a friend through a phone call that day. I mainly stayed silent, went to a cafe, and continued my silence. The entire city of Ramallah seemed to be in paralysis. None of us knew what to do with the news.

"I woke up that morning and it felt like my phone had exploded with messages on Signal and Whatsapp," Dina Hamdan, editor and manager of the Marie Colvin Journalist Network, told Mondoweiss, recalling the moment she learned of Abu Akleh's killing. Hamdan admits that she did not register the loss at first. "It took a while for me to understand that the 'Shireen' everyone is talking about is Shireen Abu Akleh," Hamdan said.

"It felt like we were in a funeral but for the whole of Palestine," Yara Eid, 23, a human rights advocate and reporter, told Mondoweiss on the first anniversary of Abu Akleh's death. "It felt like Palestine lost one of the important figures we have," Eid said.

Having survived the war on Gaza in 2014, the 23-year-old became a war correspondent last July and August shortly after Shireen's killing.

"Shireen was killed in May, and a few months later I found myself reporting on the ground and I was a journalist...a war journalist," Eid confessed. "I didn't expect that." It was Eid's first time back to Gaza since she left to study at the University of Edinburgh six years earlier.

"I was so traumatized from the war in 2014, and I never thought I would be able to do anything," Eid said. "I never thought I would survive another war, and there I was on the ground, reporting, wearing my PRESS vest," the 23-year-old said, recollecting her first assignment during the week-long military aggression on Gaza last year, when [49 Palestinians were killed](#) in a matter of days, with more succumbing to their wounds in its aftermath.

Eid, now two years younger than Shireen was when she first started working at Aljazeera in 1997, struggles to capture the words. Finally, she rests on saying: "she is so much more than a journalist."

Abu Akleh and her killing have birthed a new sense of identification and heartache for Palestine and Palestinians. A woman from Jerusalem, a Christian with dual American citizenship, she almost constantly reported directly from the field, no matter how dangerous. She overcame stereotypes and maintained the profession's integrity by reporting on a context that was also her own lived experience. Perhaps this is why she became such an icon that all Palestinians have rallied around.

"If this happened to Shireen, then it could happen to any journalist," Dina Hamdan told Mondoweiss, reflecting on the moment she saw the assault on Shireen's funeral.

In this, Shireen's death was also a rude awakening and a reminder that Palestinian journalists, despite being journalists, remain Palestinians and hence "legitimate" targets for Israel.

On June 6 last year, I joined Mondoweiss as Senior Palestine correspondent. Shireen's execution in the previous month was a formative event that propelled me to end my years-long hiatus from reporting. I was not the only one, either.

Shireen's impact in death and life has transcended her role in covering Palestine. Her killing became a moment of rupture and mending for Palestinians, from the river to the sea and in the diaspora.

Journalists second

"Israel was established on the mere principle of ethnically cleansing Palestinians, including journalists," Eid explained to Mondoweiss. "They're really threatened by journalists," Eid continued. "They always had the intention to attack Palestinian journalists," she said. "And that's because they're threatened by the other narrative, they're threatened by the narrative Palestinians show."

The fact that Abu Akleh was wearing her PRESS vest is what appalled the international community in Israel's targeted shooting at non-combatants. The fact that not even those words emblazoned across her chest could save her is what horrified Palestinians. Because, at the end of the day, she was a Palestinian first.

"I didn't know her personally," Hamdan told Mondoweiss. "But she's one of those people whom you thought would always be there to tell the story, not to become the story."

Abu Akleh's case highlights the grave injustices journalists face in bringing the public reliable and updated information and analysis. However, it also emphasizes the lethal environment which Palestinians must navigate. In fact, the targeted assault on media production and Palestinian journalists has become a pillar of the Israeli colonial apparatus rather than a case of "collateral damage."

Abu Akleh's case is just one of the clearest examples of this policy — she was wearing a protective flack vest that read PRESS, and a protective helmet, when the bullet that killed the 51-year-old passed through the gap between her protective equipment, hitting her neck. According to independent investigations by media agencies, the lethal attack was likely intentional and [targeted](#).

"The 2022 assassination of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli security forces remains unpunished, despite strong pressure from the international community and the Israeli authorities' admission," Reporters Without Borders [stated](#).

Since 2001, more than 21 journalists have been killed in what is seen as a "[deadly pattern,- <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/05/on-anniversary-of-shireen-abu-aklehs-death-new-report-details-israels-history-of-killing-reporters-with-impunity/>]" according to the latest [report](#) by the Committee on the Protection of Journalists (CPJ).

But the number may be much higher. According to the [Palestinian Ministry of Information- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/12/infographic-the-journalists-killed-by-israeli-forces-since-2000>], at least 45 Palestinian journalists have been killed since 2000, while the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate puts the number at 55. Since 2018, and in the span of five years, Israeli forces have injured at least 145 Palestinian journalists. This is not even counting the assaults on journalists during field coverage. Israeli forces and settlers have assaulted and detained international journalists, including journalists on assignment for the BBC, CNN, and the New York Times.

"They're threatened that Palestinian journalists can actually show the world what's really happening," Eid said, reflecting on the targeted killing and assault of Palestinian journalists.

The bloodbath Israel unleashed during the 2018 [Great March of Return](#) upon Palestinians — journalists and protesters alike — is one of the bloodiest examples of this Israeli fear. Israeli forces shot at the unarmed demonstrators indiscriminately and intentionally.

With a siege imposed on Gaza, making it difficult for journalists to reach it safely, younger journalists from the coastal enclave reported developments from the field. It was not an easy terrain to navigate for either journalists or Palestinian. Being both would only put you at greater risk.

Israeli forces created [games of who can shoot more knees in a single day](#), and [others cheered snipers](#) as they fired toward the unarmed Palestinian protesters trying to escape their prison and shed light on the Gaza slaughterhouse. The Israeli violence only escalated. On [April 6](#), 2018, Israeli snipers shot photojournalist Yasser Murtaja, 30, and on April 13, Israeli snipers shot journalist Ahmad Abu Hussein, 27. Both were wearing PRESS vests, yet both were killed. Over 20 journalists identified as media personnel were injured with gunshot wounds during the Great March. More than 36,143 Palestinians were injured throughout that year. An independent investigation by the Human Rights Council found that aside from two cases, [Israel's use of force](#) was unlawful. Yet no one was held accountable for the crimes against Palestinians (journalists or otherwise).

It becomes clear from this record that Israel's war on Palestinian journalists is part of its larger war against Palestinians. It is also evident in the circumstances of Shireen's death. Covering an Israeli raid in Jenin refugee camp, which had been experiencing the nascent resurgence of armed resistance, Shireen was killed by the same bullets directed against her fellow Palestinians. Since her death, those bullets have continued to fly, and the Israeli war machine has taken the lives of nearly 300 Palestinians in the past year. Shireen was one of them.

"From ethnic cleansing to apartheid to constant attacks and killing of children," Eid told Mondoweiss. "All of this is documented by people like Shireen." Continuing to reflect, Eid said, "and that is so scary for Israel, and they can't handle it. That's why they attack them, so the truth won't be told."

11 May 2023

Source: [Mondoweiss](#).

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