



Hana Mahamid

Journalism with a Conscience

On a winter day in 2018, alongside my journalist peers, we waited outside an Israeli high court for prisoner Israa Al-Jaabis to enter the courtroom. Israa was accused by the Israeli Occupation Authorities of carrying out an attack against its forces in 2015. During that incident, Israa's car was set on fire, causing her to be disfigured. We all knew of Israa's scars and disfigurement, but seeing her face in such close proximity was suffocating.

Our main camera was rolling, but I was also taking pictures with my mobile phone. I asked her if she was in pain. She gave me the side-eye and sarcastically answered: "What do you think?" I asked her about her hands and fingers. She raised her hands in front of the camera and said, "There are no fingers."

This memory of Israa still haunts me – her sullen facial expressions in response to what seemed like superficial questions asked by journalists. The line between extracting a piece of information and capturing a photo on one hand and violating a person's privacy on the other is often very thin. I am always conscious of this and worry about crossing that line.

I have been working as a field journalist for thirteen years, and when Al Mayadeen satellite television channel aired a decade ago, I was one of its reporters, producers, and documentary directors who covered events in the occupied territories. Throughout my career, the pain of the Palestinians has been the dominant story. Rarely, if ever, are other stories told. But all journalists, in the midst of covering loss, destruction, and bloodshed, must revisit their consciences and tap into their humanity to avoid the devastation of repeatedly witnessing and having to communicate such harsh realities, which can easily compromise their capacity for compassion and numb them to events. I wonder whether this is required of Palestinian journalists as well. The answer, of course, is very complicated.

As I watch from the other side, I have always felt perplexed and confused by the scenes of shelling on the besieged Gaza Strip. My focus and concern have been for the Palestinians subject to bombardment and for an entire city turned into a pool of death for children and entire families, along with their destroyed memories.

I would be lying if I said I work without bias. Throughout my long and difficult journey, I have been careful to report the news accurately. But I have always searched for what is beyond the stories of Palestinians who have had to chase after their rights and their dreams of freedom.

In October 2015, I faced one of the most challenging moments of my career. I was covering an Israeli incursion into Al-Essawiyah neighborhood in Jerusalem when a stun grenade was thrown directly at our crew. I suffered facial burns



With my baby daughter Shams, a week after I suffered burns as a result of a stun grenade fired at me by the occupation forces while I was working.

and became hearing impaired in my left ear. The moments of the attack were horrendous and filled me with terror and humiliation. I felt my face melting and became terrified at the idea that my little girl Shams would grow up with a mother whose face was disfigured. The horrifying thoughts that came to my mind are too many to recount. My agony did not stop there; rather than providing help, an Israeli officer began to interrogate me. Two days later, my Israeli-issued journalist card was revoked.

It's an understatement to say that the path of a Palestinian journalist is not paved with roses. But what is important, in my view, is the message: the stories and perspectives that we present make our work worth the challenges. Professionalism is the perfect mixture of a job, an identity, emotions, and respect for the privacy of the other. It is a complicated equation that I certainly aim to solve one day.

Al Mayadeen Palestinian and Lebanese field crews meet at the Palestinian-Lebanese border, separated by the Israeli border security fence.

