

Reporting from the front line

Following a talk he gave on campus last term, Leeds Student met with fellow student and journalist, Sameh Habeeb, to talk about his experiences as a reporter during the 2008 attacks on Gaza.



man walks through the ruins of a destroyed building in the aftermath of the attacks (left); shrapnel falls in Gaza City on day two of the War (top right); a Palestinian child surveys the damage (bottom right).

S: What drove you to start? **H:** The environment I was in - when you look around you and see people being killed and people suffering you have to use all the abilities you have to do something about it. With the media blackout that is going on I felt I had a duty to speak on behalf of those suffering around me. I first began blogging and then after managing to get a camera started taking photos. A photo alone is not enough, however; what is going on in Gaza is much bigger than what other photos or words alone can tell - it is important to combine both.

S: Is there any kind of student journalism in Gaza? **H:** Yes - there is a journalism department at the University of Gaza but they are not taught in English which can make it difficult for them to have their voices heard within the international community.

S: During the talk you gave at Leeds University earlier this year you mentioned problems

with selling your work to mainstream news organisations such as the BBC and CNN - could you elaborate on this?

S: I was not selling my work to these organisations; I was offering it for free. These organisations are unaccustomed to showing the other side of the story and didn't

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want to show certain sides to the story, such as bloody photos. There is a major blackout in terms of what is going on in the Gaza Strip and the rest of Palestine in general. For example, the terminology used is biased in favour of Israel. Parallelism is also commonly used which depicts

Palestine and Israel both as big powers when in reality it is only Israel that is the big power.

L.S: How did you first establish your links with international news organisations?

S: I was working as a citizen journalist in the Gaza War, and publishing daily ‘dispatches’ on my blog, when I was approached by several news agencies, including the BBC, CNN, and Sky News, to report for them about the events on the ground; none of the major news organisations have correspondents stationed within Gaza and so they were forced to rely on citizen journalists like me for information.

L.S: Do you believe these mainstream news organisations to have a hidden agenda?

S: They are certainly pro-Israeli. I think you have to ask yourself who controls the media.

L.S: Were there any moments during the invasion of Gaza when you saw your role as futile?

S: No. While I was making one of my daily dispatches a bomb exploded only metres away and there was shrapnel flying everywhere. My own house was also partially destroyed by a bomb. This didn't scare me or make me submissive, however; reporting during the War was like being in hell but there was never a time when I felt like giving up.

“Reporting during the War was like being in hell but I never felt like giving up”

L.S: How important do you think it is to have international correspondents stationed in Gaza? After what happened to Alan Johnston do you think it is safe for foreign journalists to

stay there?

S: There should definitely be more media outlets in Gaza. Gaza is safer for journalists now than any time, and there haven't been any kidnappings since Alan Johnstone. It is Israel that is stopping journalists from entering the Gaza Strip not the risk of danger from within.

L.S: How can student journalists within Britain avoid becoming part of the media ‘blackout’ you have described?

S: Obviously it is very difficult for student journalists to actually go to Gaza at the moment and experience it for themselves. I would advise them to be open to more ideas, however, and not let the thought of risk put them off. As a journalist you cannot have fear; journalists should be stronger than soldiers.

Sameh Habeeb is the founder and editor of the Palestine Telegraph. For more information visit: www.paltelegraph.com

Photos: Sameh Habeeb
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