

THE **L**IMITS **S** OF FREE **S**PEE**C**H: UNDERSTANDING MEDIA IMPERIALISM

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OUTLINE

- “Civilized hypocrisy”
- Historicizing media imperialism
- Media bias in Western news
- Censorship on social media
- Resisting media imperialism



CIVILIZED?

Amr Zahr, Palestinian-American comedian and political activist, comments on the “civilized hypocrisy” American media coverage of Ukraine.



WHAT IS IMPERIALISM?

To understand media imperialism, let's first define imperialism.

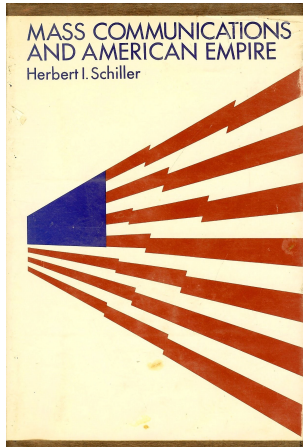
SAMIR AMIN

“Defining imperialism broadly, as Amin did—as the complex intermingling of economic and political interests, related to the efforts of large capital to control economic territory—makes clear that ...imperialism has not really declined at all.”

-- Jayati Ghos “Interpreting contemporary imperialism: Lessons from Samir Amin”
([March 18, 2021](#))



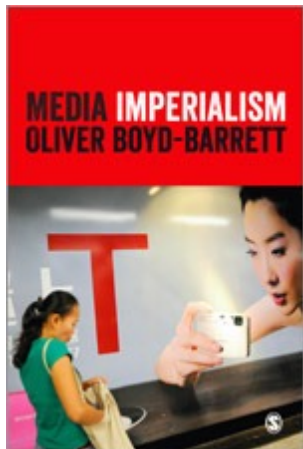
WHAT IS MEDIA IMPERIALISM?



In 1969 Schiller theorizes media imperialism

“Schiller was the first U.S. communication studies scholar to conceptualize, examine and do critical research on the United States as a unique postcolonial Empire that relied upon communications and media to materially support and ideologically promote its expansion.”

– Tanner Mirrlees, “U.S. Empire and Communications Today: Revisiting Herbert I. Schiller” ([2015](#))

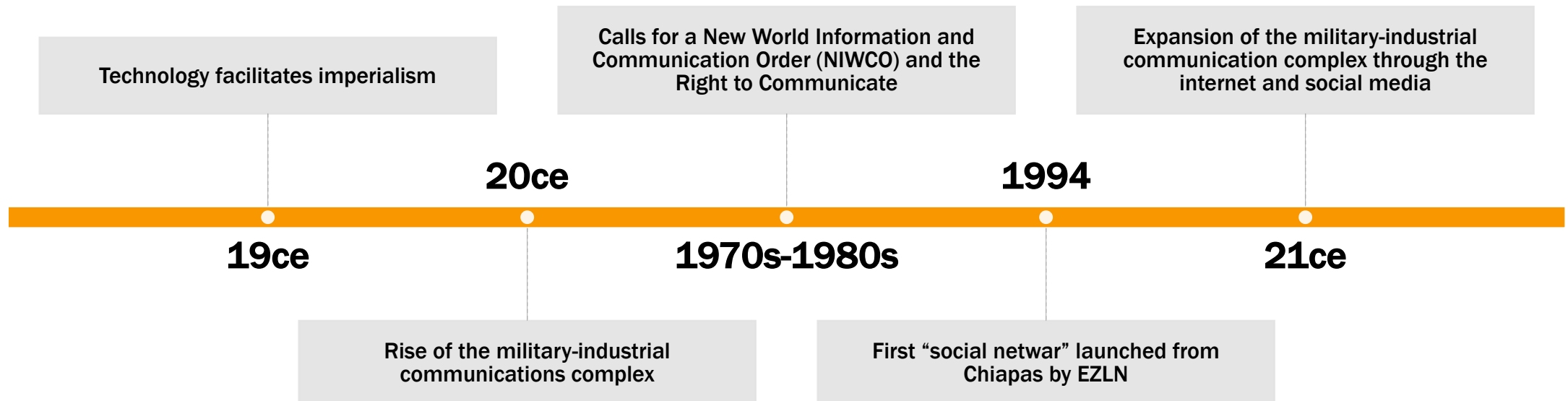


Imperialism is facilitated and resisted through media

“Firstly, processes of imperialism are in various senses executed, promoted, transformed or undermined and resisted by and through media. Secondly, the media themselves, the meanings they produce and distribute and the political-economic processes that sustain them are sculpted by and through ongoing processes of empire building and maintenance, and they carry the residues of empires that once were. Thirdly, there are media behaviors that in and of themselves and without reference to broader or more encompassing frameworks may be considered imperialistic.”

– Boyd-Barrett, Media Imperialism ([2014](#))

TIMELINE



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Daniel R. Headrick

The Tools of Empire

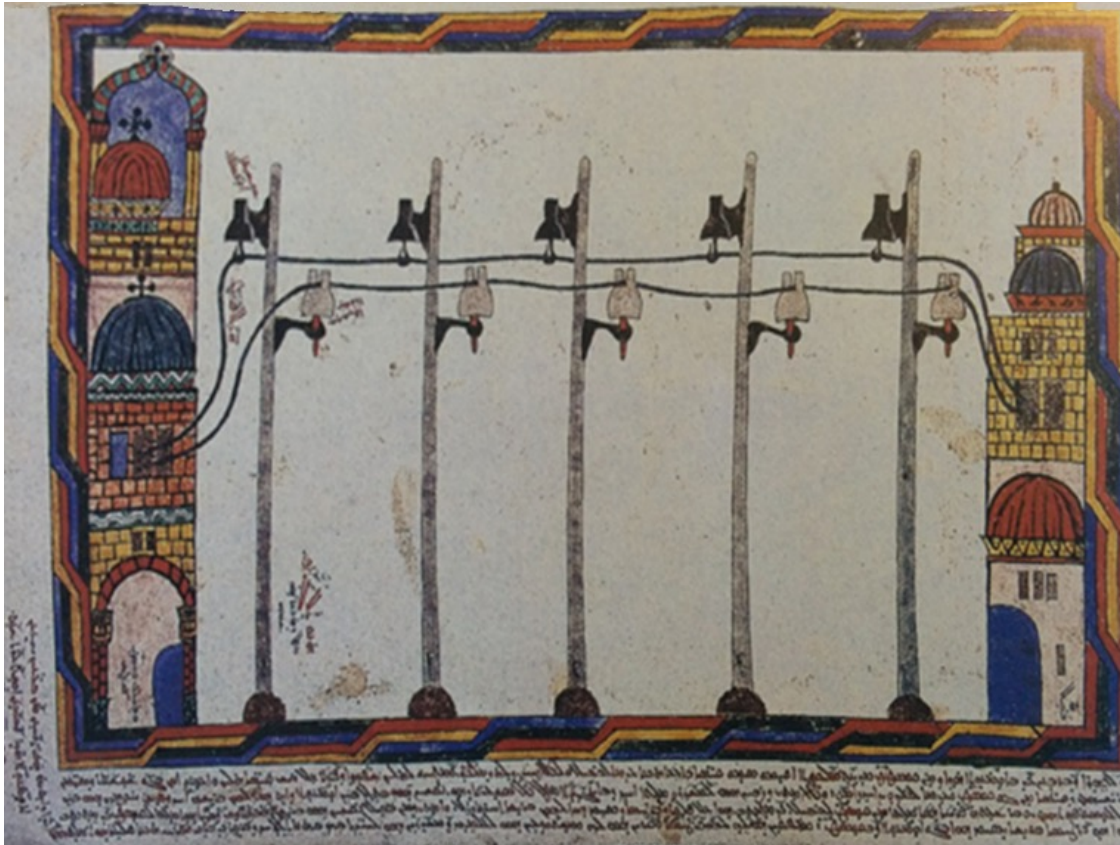
Technology
and European Imperialism in
the Nineteenth Century



TECHNOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM

In the 19ce, technology like Guns, Canals, Gunboats, Steamships, Railroads, & Submarine Cables for the **Telegraph** facilitate imperialism

EARLY MEDIA IMPERIALISM



The Telegraph and the Ottoman Empire

“By the 1880s, approximately 20,000 miles of telegraph wires and cables stretched across the Ottoman Empire, circulating more than three million electrical messages each year”

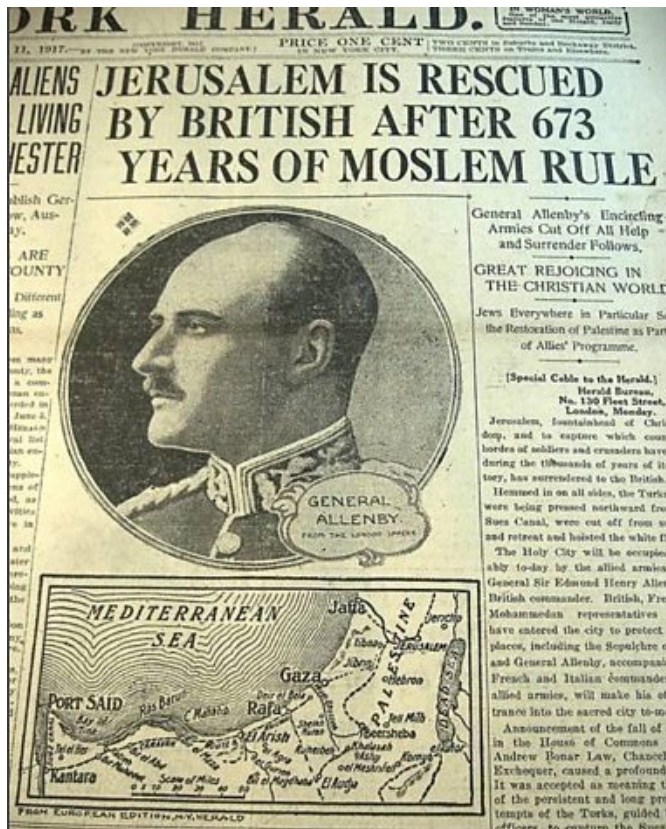
– Pauline Lewis ([2021](#)) in *“Imagining the Telegraph in the Ottoman Empire”*

“The telegraph came to the Ottoman Empire as another **instrument of modern warfare.**”

– Eugene Rogan ([1998](#)) in *“Instant Communication: The Impact of the Telegraph in Ottoman Syria”*

Illustration from a Syriac-Orthodox Gospel Book. c. 1870, depicting the Istanbul-Baghdad telegraph line

EARLY MEDIA IMPERIALISM



Newspapers and the Occupation of Palestine

Before the end of the First World War, Britain and France divided the territories of the defeated Ottoman empire under the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.

The agreement was kept secret from the Palestinians, in part because no newspapers were permitted to be published during the war (Omer, 2015). ”

– King ([2021](#)) in “Palestine: Resilient Media Practices for National Liberation”

Front page, The New York Herald, December 11, 1917

EARLY MEDIA IMPERIALISM



The 1906 Radiotelegraph Convention gathered 30 maritime States

Germany, the United States of America, Argentina (Republic of), Austria, Hungary, Belgium, the United States of Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Denmark, Egypt, Spain, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, the Netherlands, Persia, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Siam, Sweden, Turkey, and Uruguay.

Carving-up Radio Spectrum

Radio broadcasting relies on spectrum, or what Smythe (1981) calls “a peculiar natural resource” that is “nondepletable and self-renewing” yet requires global cooperation “for the radio spectrum to be used by everyone” (p. 301).

These characteristics of the radio spectrum for political economists like Smythe (1981) make radio spectrum allocation **one of the best examples of the relationship between politics and technology** (p. 308).

– *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*

RADIO AND COLONIALISM

The main transmitter site for the Palestine Broadcasting Service, airing the **BBC's Empire Service**, operated in Ramallah from March 1936 until the war of ethnic cleansing led by Zionist militias in 1948.





RESISTING COLONIALISM THROUGH RADIO

Fanon ([1959](#)) wrote that the Voice of Algeria broadcasts by the FLN resistance to the French occupation helped strip the “**occupier's voice ... of its authority.**”

MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMMUNICATIONS COMPLEX

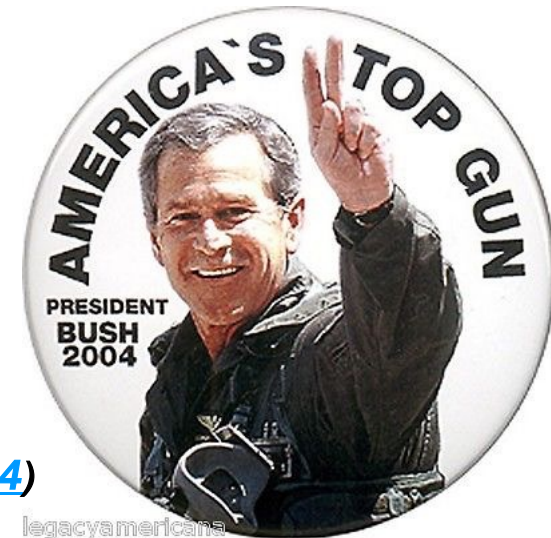


In 20ce, Rise of Modern War Propaganda & Censorship

“How Woodrow Wilson’s Propaganda Machine Changed American Journalism” ([LINK](#))

**Includes:
Mediation of war,
Militainment, and a
Culture of militarism**

– Andersen & Mirrlees ([2014](#))



legacyamericana

NWICO

Discussions at UNESCO for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) drew on **critiques of media imperialism** and became an important focus of research and advocacy during the 1970s-1980s, which saw the rise of the Right to Communicate (["Many Voices, One World," 1980](#)).

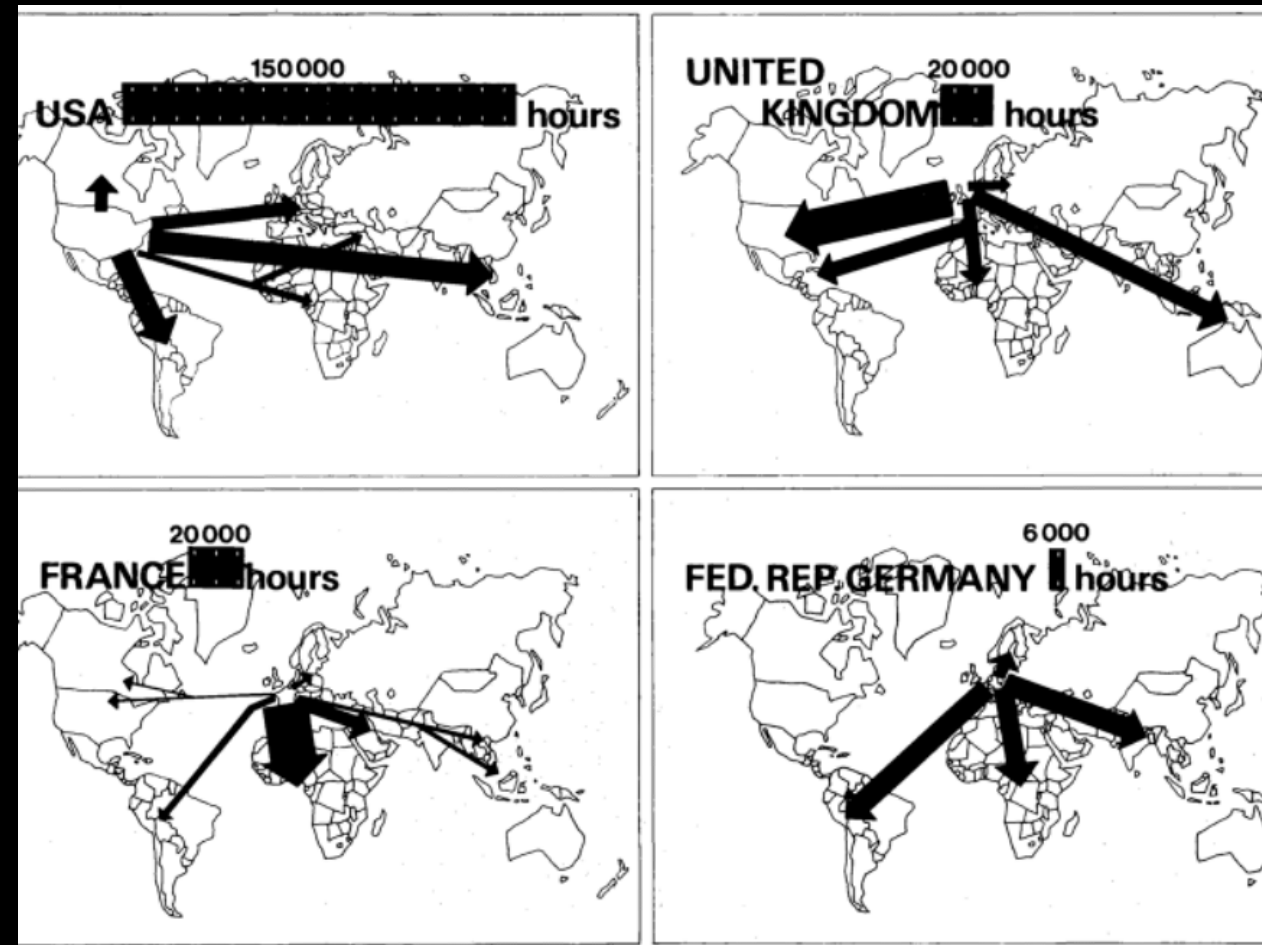


Image credit: Television Traffic – A One-way Street? (UNESCO, 1974)

ENGINEERING PUBLIC CONSENT

Lies about Iraqi soldiers dumping babies out of incubators were used to secure support for the Gulf War in 1991, followed by **lies** about Weapons of Mass Destruction used to justify the war and occupation of Iraq in 2003.



MEDIA BIAS IN US NEWSPAPERS

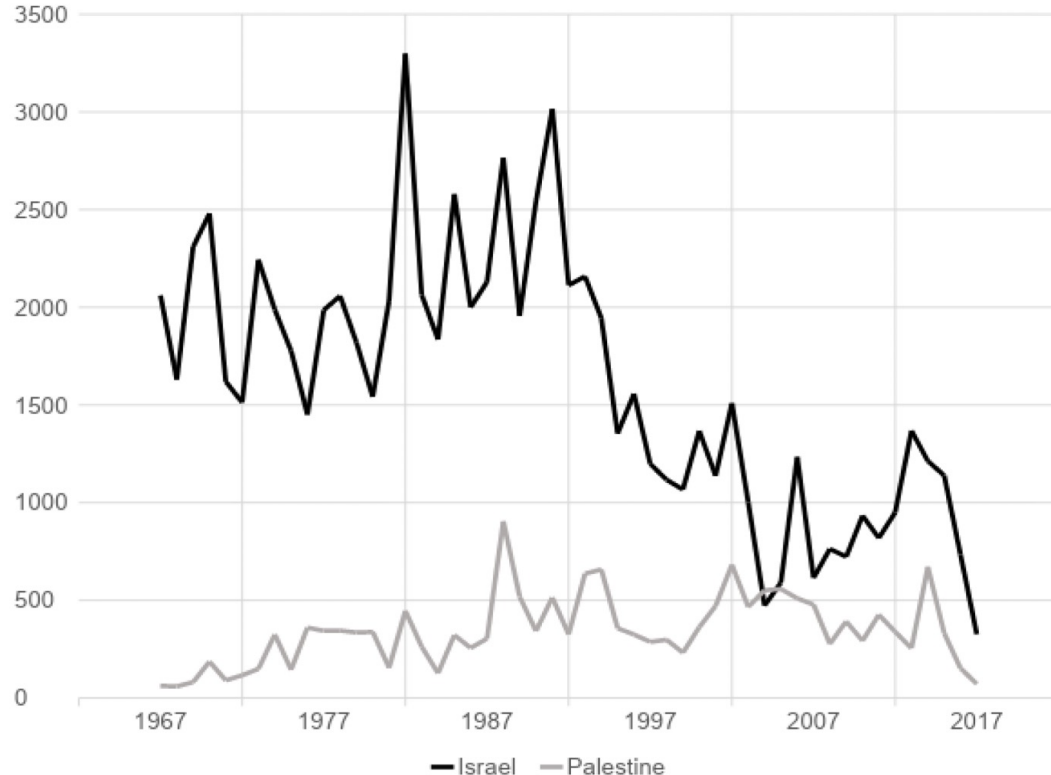


FIGURE 1 – HEADLINES PER YEAR

In a recent report by [416Labs](#), thousands of headlines from US newspapers were analyzed over 50 years from 1967 to 2017:

- Over four times more Israeli centric headlines than Palestinian ones.
- Israeli headlines were statistically more significantly positive than Palestinian ones by for all publications, except for the Washington Post.
- Over the 50-year time period, there has been a near 85% decline in the instances of the word “**occupation**”
- Mention of “**Palestinian Refugee(s)**” has declined by 93% over the 50-year period.

CENSORSHIP ACROSS PUBLIC MEDIA

August 2020

CBC owes the people of Palestine an apology

Over 2,000 people have written to the CBC to condemn its deletion of the word "Palestine" and its subsequent insists the word falls outside its standards.

BY KAREN RODMAN - SEPTEMBER 11, 2020 - 1

Share on Facebook

Share on Twitter



LOGO FOR THE CBC SHOW THE CURRENT (IMAGE: FACEBOOK)

<https://mondoweiss.net/2020/09/cbc-owes-the-people-of-palestine-an-apology/>

May 2021



EHA News - Deutsch
@eha_deutsch



Die Deutsche Welle hat sich für dieses Fernseh-Interview entschuldigt und den Beitrag entfernt. Der Sender teilte mit, dass @AliAbunimah getätigt habe.

#GazaUnderAttack



2:26 PM · May 13, 2021



Read the full conversation on Twitter

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/watch-german-tv-regrets-airing-interview-about-gaza>

February 2022

German broadcaster ends contracts with two Lebanese journalists over years-old tweets deemed 'anti-semitic'

L'Orient Today / By Farah-Silvana Kanaan, 08 February 2022 16:41



Bassel Aridi, one of two Lebanese journalists who were terminated from German news outlet Deutsche Welle over tweets they made. (Credit: @basselaridi/Twitter)

<https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1290231/german-broadcaster-ends-contracts-with-two-lebanese-journalists-over-years-old-tweets-deemed-anti-semitic.html>

CENSORSHIP ON SOCIAL MEDIA

7amleh - The Arab Center for the Development of Social Media [documented](#) more than 500 cases of digital rights violations from May 6 – 19, 2021:

40 Cases

at least of of hate speech and incitement to violence against Palestinians and Arabs

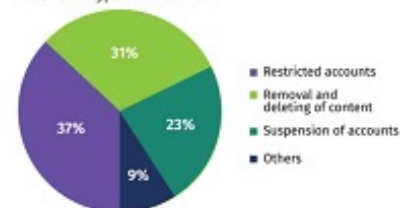
500 Reports



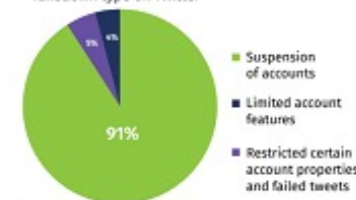
Takedown type on Instagram



Takedown type on Facebook



Takedown type on Twitter



On May 18, 2021: US Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib posted a letter to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok ([LINK](#)) to cease censorship and ensure Palestinian voices are heard.

ENGINEERING PUBLIC CONSENT

Coverage about the war in Ukraine broadcast by **state-funded** Western media and circulating on social media platforms owned by **US-based monopolies**, justifies arming Ukraine, sanctioning Russia, and benefits the military-industrial communications complex.

Internet Culture

The White House is briefing TikTok stars about the war in Ukraine



Technology

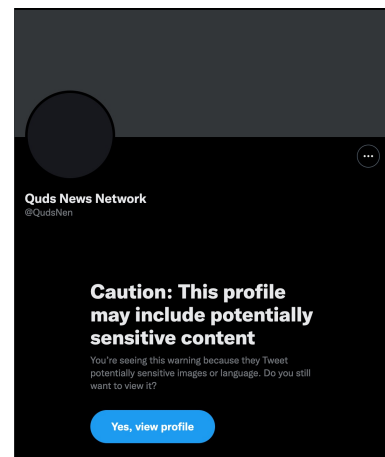
Facebook breaks its own rules to allow for some calls to violence against Russian invaders

Silicon Valley companies are under major pressure to isolate Russia as its invasion drags on

By Elizabeth Dwoskin

March 10, 2022 | Updated March 10, 2022 at 6:59 p.m. EST

SCALE OF THE PROBLEM



Billion-dollar deal partners Google and Amazon in Israeli occupation of Palestine

March 28, 2022 | 10:44 AM CDT | BY RAMZY BAROUD

SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

<https://www.internetlivestats.com>



5,308,384,167

Internet Users in the world

(Screenshots taken at 12:45pm on May 19)



4,378,225,516

Videos viewed **today**
on YouTube



53,131,892

Photos uploaded **today**
on Instagram



3,158,689,448

Facebook active users



388,143,181

Twitter active users

RESISTING MEDIA IMPERIALISM

“Since the printing press arrived in Palestine, the indigenous population has used **every communication medium** as a tool for national liberation.”

-- King (2021) “Breaking the silence: Public communication in/for Palestine”

“The increasing sophistication of the Palestinian and Lebanese armed and unarmed resistance, the growth of the solidarity movement in western countries, the consensus of western human rights groups about the apartheid nature of Israel, and **the expansive reach of alternative media** exposing Israeli crimes have all been important if uneven factors in inducing this panic.”

-- Massad (2022) “Why Israel's leaders and allies are in a state of panic over its future”



The New York Times

Israel Bombs Lebanese Radio Site Linked to the Palestinian Uprising

Give this article

By Ihsan A. Hijazi, Special To the New York Times
Aug. 10, 1988

‘Give us 10 minutes’: How Israel bombed a Gaza media tower

An Israeli air raid flattened a building housing residential apartments and the offices of news organisations, including Al Jazeera and AP, in Gaza.



A combination picture shows al-Jalaa building as it collapses after being hit by Israeli missiles [Mohammed Salem/Reuters]



RESISTING MEDIA IMPERIALISM

**Anti-Palestinian Racism: A Resource
by The Anti-Empire Project**

-- Justin Podur ([2021](#))

**10 things to remember when
reporting on Palestine**

-- The Palestine Institute for Public
Diplomacy ([2022](#))

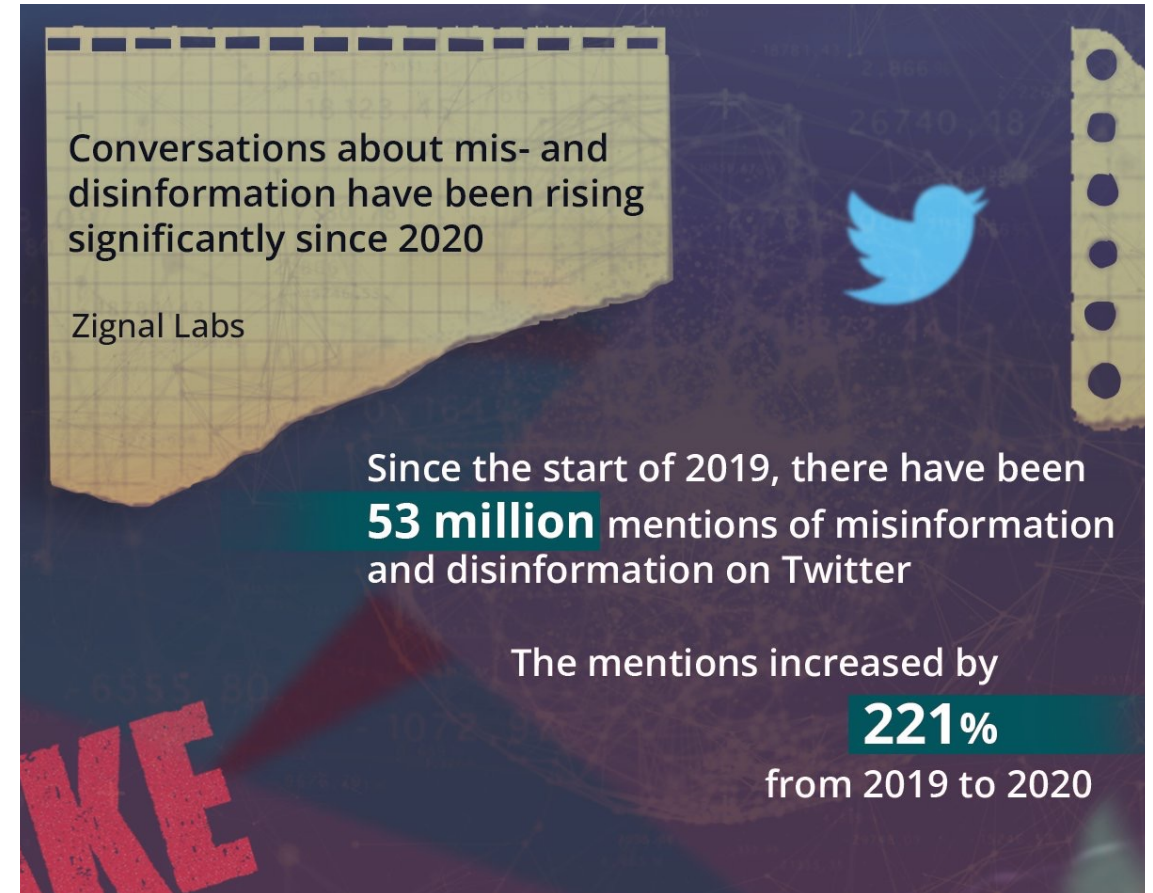


Image credit: @Al Mayadeen English

RESISTING MEDIA IMPERIALISM

This article “seeks to transcend the narrow Arab uprisings moment and promote **South to South learning** by drawing lessons from the social movement media practices of indigenous peoples from Chiapas to Palestine.”

-- King (2021) “From Chiapas to Palestine: Historicizing Social Movement Media Before and Beyond the Arab Uprisings”

Table 1. Strategies of social movement media from Chiapas to Palestine.

Political Economy Framework	Chiapas	Palestine
Historicizing social movement media	Communiques from EZLN circulated online by media activists in the 1990s, followed by EZLN beginning radio broadcasting and video production in the 2000s, also using shortwave radio and the Internet to share this content worldwide.	Palestinian newspapers began circulating in 1908 and radio began broadcasting by the 1930s, television and radio from diaspora aired throughout the 1950s–80s, followed by graffiti and fliers during the First Intifada, and launching radio and television from Palestine in the 2000s and using the Internet to share news and content globally.
Diversity of tactics	Multimedia, multiplatform, community-run spaces, content guidelines to center indigenous narratives, indigenous-international networks among audiences and media activists	
Alternative political economies	Minimal resources, volunteer power, free from donor or funder agendas	
Military-industrial communications complex	Backup servers and accounts, masking words in social media content, production and broadcasting facilities in secret locations	

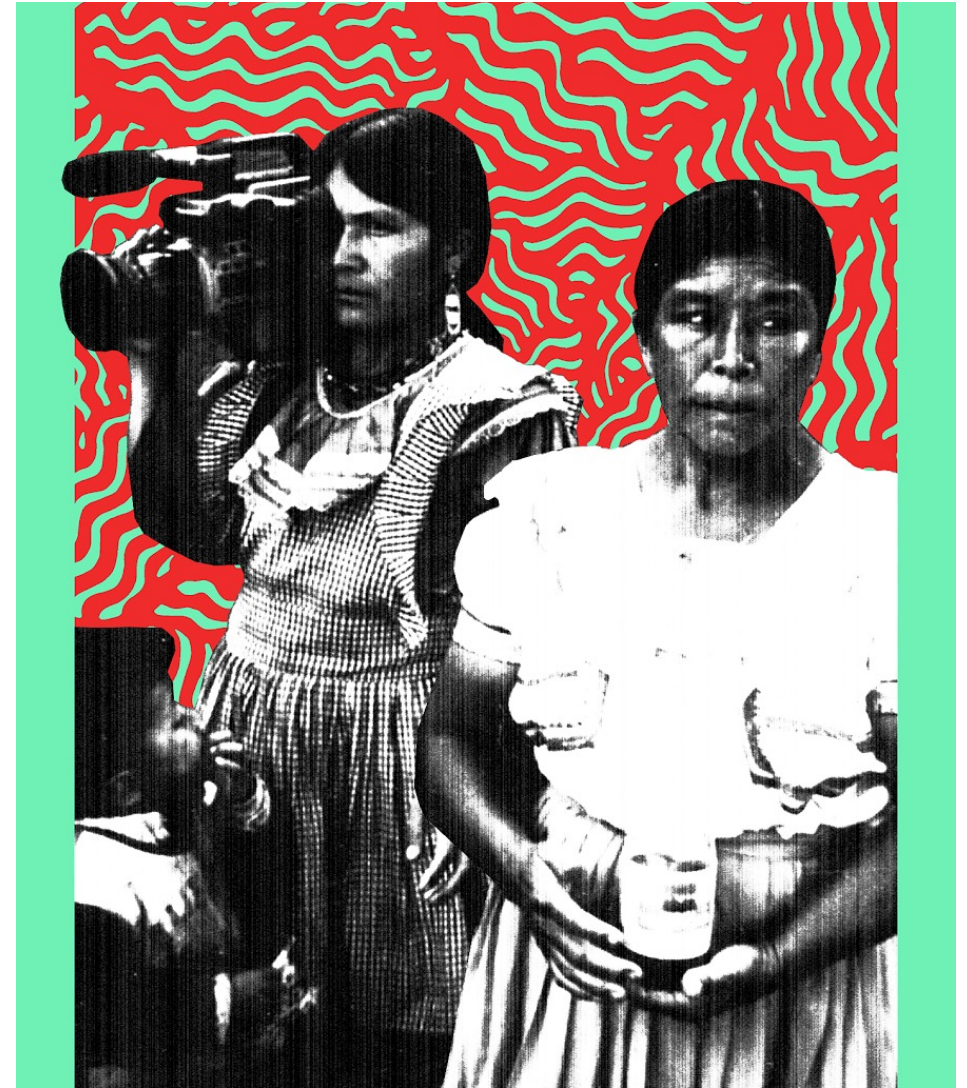


Image credit: Padgett, R. (2017, February 25). *Radical Legacy of the Zapatista's Media Strategy. Intifada!*

<http://www.svillywood.com/intifadaessays/radicalmedia>



*“I managed to overcome my fears in difficult times because I have chosen journalism in order to be close to the people. **It might not be easy to change the reality, but at least I was able to convey the people’s message and voice.**”*

– Shireen Abu Akleh, journalist and martyr of Palestine

شكراً / **THANK YOU!**

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