

**Deanship of Graduate Studies  
Al- Quds University**



**"Exploring Palestinian Psychologists' Experiences of  
Digital Storytelling via Instagram in the Context of the  
Gaza Genocide"**

**May Faisal Abu Assab**

**M.Sc. Thesis**

**Jerusalem-Palestine**

**1447 / 2026**

**"Exploring Palestinian Psychologists' Experiences of  
Digital Storytelling via Instagram in the Context of the  
Gaza Genocide"**

Prepared by  
**May Faisal Abu Assab**

**BA Sociology MA Sociology**

**Supervisor: Dr. Nader Salha, PhD**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Digital Media and Communications  
School of Graduate Studies - Al-Quds University

**1447 / 2026**



## **Thesis Approval**

### **"Exploring Palestinian Psychologists' Experiences of Digital Storytelling via Instagram in the Context of the Gaza Genocide"**

Prepared by: May Faisal Abu Assab  
Registration No.: 1912519

Supervisor: Dr. Nader Salha, PhD

Master thesis submitted and accepted, Date: 25/08/2025

The names and signatures of the examining committee members are as follow:

1. Head of Committee: Dr. Nader Salha

2. Internal Examiner:

3. External Examiner:

Three handwritten signatures in blue ink are shown. The first signature is a large, stylized loop. The second signature is in Arabic script. The third signature is a more fluid, cursive style. Each signature is followed by the word "Signature" in a black, sans-serif font.

Jerusalem-Palestine

## **Dedication**

After years shaped by rupture rather than continuity  
a journey that began with graduate study and unfolded through a global pandemic,  
my son's battle with cancer and his healing by God's grace,  
and the ongoing genocide and war crimes against our people following October 7  
this thesis emerged, born of a long labor from pain, resilience, and an enduring will to live.  
I dedicate this work  
to our people in Gaza,  
a people of steadfastness and creative survival,  
and to all Palestinians who continue to affirm life in the face of annihilation.  
To my son, Thaer,  
who redefined our lives and gave them new meaning.  
To my daughters, Saba and Kinda,  
who carried days heavier than childhood should ever bear.  
To my father,  
my lifelong source of strength and safety,  
who has kept me his little girl to this day.  
To my sister, Mais,  
whose belief and support made this journey possible.  
And to my mother's soul,  
whose pride would have held me, as it always did.  
Despite everything,  
this work stands as an affirmation of meaning and of life.

May Faisal Abu Assab

## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis submitted for the Degree of Master, is the result of my research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this study (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher degree or qualification to any other university or institution.

Signed..



May Faisal Abu-Assab

Date: 25/08/ 2025

## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my esteemed professors throughout my master's journey, each of whom has contributed to my knowledge in their own unique way.

I would like to extend my special thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Nader Salha, for his invaluable guidance and immense patience throughout the completion of this thesis.

I am also deeply indebted to the unsung hero, Ms. Ghada Abu Na'ameh, for her unwavering support from the very first day, despite all the challenges she faced.

Finally, I would like to thank Al-Quds University for the enriching practical and scientific experiences that have been invaluable to my academic and professional career.

May Faisal Abu-Assab

# **Exploring Palestinian Psychologists' Experiences of Digital Storytelling via Instagram in the Context of the Gaza Genocide**

**Prepared by: May Faisal Abu-Assab**

**Supervisor: Dr. Nader Salha**

## **Abstract**

This study examines the use of Instagram-based digital storytelling among Palestinian mental health professionals during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. It examines how these professionals engage with digital narratives as a process of psychological resilience, collective resistance, and trauma somatic processing amid a context of colonial domination, mass displacement, and erasure. Using qualitative interviews with six participants, this study utilizes thematic analysis to understand the digital storytelling as a practice informed by decolonial psychology, trauma theory, and narrative theory. The results indicate that storytelling on a digital platform is a form of survival, as it also a form of political witnessing; Participants showed tensions of experience and responses ethically, emotionally, and somatically, as narrators and witness to narratives. The dominant themes throughout the studies were ideas around embodied trauma, ethics of visibility on social media, collective healing, and intergenerational continuity. The significance of this study also offers decolonial approaches to "mental health" by looking at how voice, body, memory, and resistance intersect in Palestinian storytelling. This study also pushes against trauma modalities used in the west, which often ignore people of culture and legacy, while advocating healing from a relational and political conscious, culturally grounded society. The results of this study may be useful for clinical practices and activist settings within colonized and conflict-affected contexts.

**Keywords:** digital storytelling, Palestine, trauma, Instagram, decolonial psychology, mental health, resistance, narrative, ethics, genocide

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	IV
May Faisal Abu Assab.....	IV
Declaration.....	I
Acknowledgment.....	II
List of Tables.....	VII
List of Appendices.....	VIII
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Background.....	1
1.2 Research Problem.....	2
1.3 Objectives of the Study.....	3
1.3.1 General Objective.....	3
1.3.2 Specific Objectives.....	3
1.4 Operational Definitions.....	4
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	6
2.1 Comparative Dynamics of Traditional and Digital Storytelling.....	6
2.1.1 Use of Technology and Multimedia Integration.....	6
2.1.2 From Oral Traditions to Digital Platforms: Historical Transitions in Palestinian Storytelling.....	7
2.1.3 Role of Storyteller and Audience Engagement.....	8
2.1.4 Process Versus Product Orientation.....	8
2.1.5 Audience Reach and Cultural Continuity.....	9
2.1.6 Storytelling as a Healing Practice: Traditional and Digital Modalities.....	9
2.2 Conceptual and Historical Foundations of Digital Storytelling.....	10
2.2.1 The evolution and scope of Digital Storytelling.....	10
2.2.2 Digital Storytelling and Social Change.....	10
2.2.3 Digital Storytelling and Identity Formation.....	11
2.2.4 Digital Storytelling and Therapeutic Reflection.....	11
2.3 Conceptual and Contextual Dimensions of Digital Storytelling.....	13
2.3.1 Typologies of Digital Storytelling.....	13
2.3.2 Effects and Impacts of Digital Storytelling.....	13
2.3.3 The Global Dissemination of Digital Storytelling.....	14
2.4 Digital Storytelling in Contexts of Colonization: Resistance, Reality, and Consciousness.....	15
2.4.1 Adjusting Experience Reality using Storytelling Methodology.....	15

2.4.2 Collective Consciousness and the Reframing of Memory.....	16
2.4.3 Challenging Domination through Digital Narratives .....	16
2.5 Digital Storytelling in Healing and Advocacy .....	17
2.5.1 Transformation and Change through Narrative Expression .....	17
2.5.2 Influence on Psychological and Social Processes.....	18
2.5.3 Collective and individual consciousness.....	19
2.5.4 Storytelling in Collective and Cultural Crises.....	20
2.6 Digital Storytelling in Palestine: Trauma Healing, Collective Awareness, and Digital Resilience.....	20
2.6.1 Narrative Healing and Psychological Resilience .....	20
2.6.2 Building Personal and Collective Consciousness .....	21
2.6.3 Escalations Post–October 7, 2023: Digital Resistance and Crisis Response .....	21
2.6.4 Digital Advocacy, Agency, and Futures .....	22
Chapter Three :Methodology.....	23
3.1 Study design.....	23
3.2 Study setting.....	23
3.3 Sample and sampling .....	24
3.4 Study instrument.....	25
3.5 Data collection .....	26
3.6 Data analysis .....	27
3.7 Study Limitations .....	29
Chapter Four: Data Analysis .....	31
4.1 Interview Analysis .....	31
4.2 Comparative Thematic Analysis:.....	41
4.3 Researcher Reflection.....	44
Chapter Five: Discussion & Conclusion.....	46
5.1 Digital Storytelling as Psycho-political Resistance.....	46
5.2 Therapeutic Expression and Its Limits.....	46
5.3 Gendered Narratives and Feminist Acts of Resistance.....	47
5.4 Ethical Dilemmas and the Global Gaze .....	47
5.5 Decolonial and Culturally Grounded Healing .....	48
5.6 The Therapist as Healer and Survivor.....	48
5.7 Implications for Future Practice and Research .....	49
5.8 Conclusion.....	49

References .....	50
المُلخَص .....	58

## List of Tables

Table 4.1 Codes for Participant One .....	31
Table 4.2 Codes for Participant Two.....	33
<i>"We just started calling everything toxic. Even our relationships to our land or our history."</i> Table 4.3 Codes for Participant Three .....	35
Table 4.4 Codes for Participant Four.....	37
Table 4.5 Codes for Participant Five .....	38
Table 4.6 Codes of Participant Six .....	40
Table 4.7 Overlapping Themes .....	42
Table 4.8 Divergences in Storytelling Orientation.....	42
Table 4.9 Primary Medium of Storytelling .....	43
Table 4.10 Key Emotional Registers Referenced.....	43
Table 4.11 Political Orientation .....	43
Table 4.12 Emotional and Ethical Profile .....	43

## List of Appendices

Appendix (1): دليل المقابلة للأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين:.....	54
Appendix (2): نموذج الموافقة المستنيرة (Consent Form).....	56
Appendix (3): نموذج ورقة إخلاء المسؤولية (Debriefing Sheet).....	57

## **Chapter One**

---

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the conceptual and contextual foundations of the research. It presents the research context, defines the research problem, presents the research objectives and outlines the operational definitions of the key terms used. This foundational material provides the context for the inquiry and informs the following chapters.

#### **1.1 Research Background**

In issues of colonial modus operandi of extended conflict and recurring mass violence, mental health is both clinical and political. In Palestine, which is in a continuous state of Israeli occupation, we can witness this dystopian circumstance as subjects - parents and caregivers, individuals, and communities - experience chronic and ongoing traumatic stress. Palestinian psychologists who work within this socio-political reality must navigate not just the psychological consequences of settler-colonial violence, but the professional dynamics of limited therapeutic practice and public discourse (Hammoudeh, 2020; Marie, Hannigan, & Jones, 2018). They work in relation to individual therapeutic assessments and interventions, as well as being socially conscious, resisting structural erasure, and engaging in healing practices with the community.

With violence escalating profoundly since Israeli aggression displaced thousands, and the communities of Gaza a space for conflict, beginning on October 7, 2023, we are even more motivated to consider forms of psychological engagement. I also want to depict this need within our work and share some of the ways in which digital media - in particular Instagram - can help articulate the intersection of the psychological and social/political. Instagram has the power to dynamically transmit real-time visual and narrative content, and can provide a psychosocial context in which trauma, loss, mourning, resistance, and care can be expressed, viewed, and remembered throughout the world (Dearden, 2020). For Palestinian psychologists, Instagram represents an opportunity to communicate psychological concepts and ideas, while also humanizing the suffering of Palestinians,

while also confronting colonial narratives and working towards public mental health trepidation.

Digital storytelling involves theorized as a practice in which identify and communities can co-create and share meaningful stories using multimedia technologies for some of the following purposes: to enable individuals and communities a path to self-agency, social connection, and collective memory (Lambert, 2013; Couldry, 2008). In colonized spaces, digital storytelling has the added function of rendering cultural survival, an opportunity to reconstruct identity and attain political visibility (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015). The narrative project undertaken by psychologists in these digital spaces will always be therapeutic for both the storyteller and audience as they name trauma, disrupt stigmatization, and build psychological resiliency (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

This project studies the experiences of Palestinian psychologists using Instagram in the context of the October 2023 aggression. This project examines how users experience this platform both as content creators on public pages or citizens of a digital audience, and how they communicated psychological knowledge, participated in a global discourse in the mental health space, and reflect on the ethics and meaning of the future of digital mental health interventions in the Palestinian context.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

The digital sphere has become increasingly central to Palestinian life, particularly under conditions of siege, displacement, and infrastructural collapse. The October 2023 aggression on Gaza represented not only a humanitarian crisis but also a moment of intensified digital engagement. Psychologists, like other professionals, were compelled to respond to the unfolding trauma both personally and professionally, often using social media platforms to share content, offer psychological first aid, counter misinformation, and process their own emotional responses.

Despite the growing visibility of mental health professionals on platforms such as Instagram, scholarly research on their digital practices remains limited—especially in colonized and conflict-affected settings. There is a notable gap in the literature regarding how Palestinian psychologists use Instagram to engage in therapeutic storytelling, raise mental health awareness, and negotiate the ethical and emotional complexities of digital advocacy during times of war. The digital arena is becoming ever more central to Palestinian existence, especially in times of siege, displacement, and infrastructure failure. The October 2023 frenzy against Gaza was not only a humanitarian disaster but also a form of added digital contact. Psychologists, along with others in their respective fields of expertise, were challenged to respond to the evolving trauma both personally and professionally, often through social media platforms; sharing posts, providing psychological first-aid, addressing and countering misinformation, and working through their inherent emotion regarding the unfolding catastrophe.

In addition to the rise in mental health professionals, there has been an explosion of content on social media platforms such as Instagram, yet few studies that specifically examine the digital practices of mental health professionals exist in any cultural context and none in colonized and conflict-affected contexts. There is a particular gap in literature examining

how Palestinian-based psychologists have posted to Instagram for therapeutic story-telling, public mental health awareness, and navigating the ethical and emotional dilemmas of digital advocacy during war. And furthermore, we also do not know how these professionals used the digital format, what tones, or strategies were used, or how these professionals evaluated the risks, benefits, and challenges of public engagement on social media. This study will contribute to this gap by examining the lived experiences of Palestinian psychologists engaged with Instagram during the most recent aggression on Gaza. The study considers how these professionals created and shared narratives, how they conceptualized Instagram's functioning as a potential therapeutic vehicle, and their imaginations of the future of Instagram in mental health work in colonial contexts.

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

### **1.3.1 General Objective**

To explore the experiences of Palestinian psychologists regarding the Instagram-based digital storytelling of others, both as creators and followers, from the onset of the aggression on Gaza on October 7, 2023, to its application in trauma healing and mental health advocacy within a colonial framework.

### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To examine the extent to which Palestinian psychologists used the platform of Instagram during the October 2023 aggression on Gaza, including the kinds of content they posted or consumed, the context of this use (personal versus professional use), and the experienced barriers including censorship, surveillance or emotional burnout.
2. To explore how psychologists understand the potential of Instagram based digital storytelling to help reduce stigma around mental health, and to generated public engagement with psychological care in Palestinian Society.
3. To investigate the narrative tools and digital formats (e.g., posts, stories, live videos) employed by psychologists, especially their options of tone, imagery, and symbolic content to express trauma or therapeutic content.
4. To investigate ethical and professional dilemmas that psychologists face when engaging in digital storytelling for the discipline on Instagram, especially relating to confidentiality, emotional exposure, and vulnerability of audiences.
5. To understand how psychologists foresee the future of digital storytelling within Palestinian mental health interventions; consider opportunities for interdisciplinary work; advocacy and ongoing communities.

## **1.4 Operational Definitions**

### **Instagram-Based Digital Storytelling:**

Instagram-based digital storytelling is the practice of using some of Instagram's multimedia functionalities—image posts, highlight stories, reels, live video, etc.—to create and circulate individual or collective stories. These stories typically include visual elements, symbolic metaphors and therapeutic reflections as people document trauma, promote mental well-being and express forms of sociopolitical resistance. Digital storytelling in this sense is an expansion of digital storytelling as a process that uses digital media to tell accounts of life events or experiences that can be used for reflection, healing and social engagement (Lambert, 2013; Couldry, 2008). In conflict contexts, such storytelling also functions not only as a communicative act, but as an act of affective and political resistance (Dearden, 2020).

### **Palestinian Psychologists:**

For the purposes of this research, Palestinian psychologists are licensed or practicing Palestinians — whether based in the occupied Palestinian territories or in the diaspora — who engage with or create digital content on Instagram in times of war. Their work exists in wider structural limitations, collective suffering, and communal obligations to care for the trauma of war, in line with previous studies in the field of health and colonialism (Hammoudeh, 2020; Marie, Hannigan, & Jones, 2018). They might use digital storytelling as part of public education, to be advocates, support their communities, or process trauma.

### **Content Creator vs. Follower:**

These callout terms are not the same, but serve different purposes of participation on Instagram. A content creator is defined as a psychologist who creates original content, be it posts, stories, or live sessions, for the purpose of influencing, educating, or supporting an audience. A follower on the other hand, is a consumer of content, who might share and/or comment on the content of others. Both of these roles are significant ways of digital participation and both are a part of social media storytelling as interactive communication (Baym, 2015; Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

### **Trauma Healing:**

In this inquiry, we define trauma healing as a psychological recovery process that is dynamic and ongoing, and includes emotional integration, meaning-making, and the restoring of personal and collective agency. In decolonial psychology, healing is a clinical goal, as well as a cultural and political process that validates historical memory and resists the forces of marginalization (Watkins & Shulman, 2008; Kirmayer, Gone, & Mos, Rethinking historical trauma, 2014). Often, healing in collective trauma situations like Gaza are accomplished with shared narrative, ritual, and public testimony.

### **Mental Health Advocacy:**

This is purposeful action from psychologists to lessen stigma, promote awareness of and access to mental health intervention. On social media an advocate can include psychoeducation or a process to include public storytelling, social support, emotional support and/or crisis. Advocacy is even more important when working in colonial and conflict settings where mental health is often stigmatized, depoliticized, or poorly resourced (Somasundaram & van de Put, 2006; Dearden, 2020).

**Colonial Context:**

A colonial context is the structural, historical, and ongoing conditions of settler-colonialism that Palestinians are subjected to, which includes military occupation, land dispossession, systemic violence, and cultural erasure. These problematics not only determine the articulation of trauma's cause, but the conditions for resistance and/or modes for care are constrained. This resonates with Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2015) assertion that the power of settler-colonialism often operates through physical destruction, as well as epistemic silencing—positioning the contextual form of psychological resistance as a means of decolonial praxis (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015).

**Instagram Engagement During War:**

This concept encompasses behaviors, motivations, and experiences of Instagram use in a context of ongoing military violence. Engagement contains content creation and content consumption, and is shaped by the affordances of the platform (strategies in behavior) and censorship and psychological distress (Tufekci, 2015). During the October 2023 aggression on Gaza, engagement oriented toward Instagram use became a vehicle for Palestinian psychologists to process trauma, witness, and stay connected to their communities, even from a distance.

## **Chapter Two**

---

### **Literature Review**

This chapter challenges existing literature relevant to this study. It uses both theoretical literature and empirical literature to contextualize the study and locate it within the existing academic debate, identify the key issues and gaps in the literature, and provide a conceptual framework for analysis.

#### **2.1 Comparative Dynamics of Traditional and Digital Storytelling**

##### **2.1.1 Use of Technology and Multimedia Integration**

For many generations, traditional storytelling in Palestinian contexts has taken the form of various oral traditions such as Hikayat (folk or tales), passed down in families. These stories are often produced by elders in a familial context. Because they are orally told, the performance is affected by modulation of voice, gesture, and visual contact. The storyteller embodied both a narrative and the audience, and could "adapt" what they said based on audience reactions and responses (Nahak F. M., 2022). This performance-based storytelling gave stories a sense of immediacy and fattened a path for cultural continuity that was grounded in place and shared experience (Choo, Abdullah, & Nawi, 2020).

In contrast, digital storytelling utilizes multimedia (video, audio, text and graphics) to create more layered and reproducible narratives (Choo, Abdullah, & Nawi, 2020; Sabah, 2020). One notable example of a Palestinian 'case study' from these resources is "Visualizing Palestine," a visual archive that engages in data storytelling and design, along with advocacy for Palestinian rights. The affordances of this digital modality extend reach and influence and provides space for younger generations to share and engage with social and political issues in visually compelling ways (Gubrium & Harper, 2013).

Whereas the traditional approach focuses on performance and context, digital storytelling allows narrators to create more polished and shareable products; it requires technical skills and level of access to platforms, these platforms are often mediated by algorithms and digital infrastructure that can impact how the narrative circulates (Couldry, 2008).

### **2.1.2 From Oral Traditions to Digital Platforms: Historical Transitions in Palestinian Storytelling**

The evolution of Palestinian storytelling points from heritage methods of oral traditions used in homes or communal spaces to newer (and more digital) ways through various platforms. This evolution is inseparable from the changing ways of communication and politics and the rupturing of social life (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Lundby, 2009).

Oral storytelling, as a way to move memory from generation to generation and establish a cultural bond across localities, was historically the primary formal way of storytelling in Palestine before the mid-20th century. Since the mid-20th century, the role of storytelling into public spheres has been interrupted and modified by technological inventions. The radio helped us understand new auditory publics beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, when communities would listen together to Sawt al-Arab from Cairo and BBC Arabic; often shared in local-style coffeehouses or in each other's homes. These auditory experiences were gendered; they occurred in very gendered spaces or were experienced and provoked mostly by men and as a way to yell out to produce national and pan-Arab political identities (Nahak F. M., 2022; Couldry, 2008). One participant commented: "the radio was like a guest of honor in our home; it brought Nasser's speeches and Nakba together in just one breath".

With the proliferation of television in the 1970s and 1980s, computerized visual culture spent time in Palestinian homes where the stories debated and discovered within this visual medium began to pervade a distinctly Palestinian identity in viewer habits. These viewers cycled from watching the Jordanian Broadcasting Service, to Israeli Arabic-language broadcasting channels, then settled into Egypt's uncontested Friday film, or fateful exchange. Despite a sense of limitation and censorship, these media were able to infuse Palestinian narratives with both reference points of Arab culture and highlights about loss and longing under occupation (Iseke, 2011; Allan, 2013).

As the year 2000 drew near, another rupture took shape with mobile technologies and social media platforms disrupting current conventions, and radically altering who could tell stories, how, and to whom stories were being told. With smartphones now abundant, especially in refugee camps and populations interned in urban centers, mobile technologies and social media, and specifically platforms like Facebook, and WhatsApp, and later Instagram and TikTok, paved the way for participatory storytelling practices that afforded people to bypass the limits of institutional media (Page & Thomas, 2011; Gubrium, 2009). Young Palestinians in refugee camps and across Gaza, and the West Bank, began to document lived experiences in real-time, through which they resisted erasure by employing audiovisual immediacy. This new accessibility to narrative tools facilitated contrast with whereby Dearden (2020) refers to narrative agency, or the agency to assert one's own reality, in relation to marginalization in systemic ways. Palestinian storytelling has also always existed as a negotiation space between memory and power, particularly in visual satire, and print journalism. Palestinian memories and stories were also told through Naji al-Ali, whose character Handala (symbolizing steadfastness and return) created a moment of Palestinian memory and media history. Naji al-Ali's editorial cartoons sparred in newspapers throughout the broad Arab world and were typically regarded as an existing

cultural form, but could also be seen as a type of graphic storytelling adjacent to witnessing pain and trauma collectively (Mabrouk, 2021; Gubrium & Turner, 2011). The demise of the digital and participatory theater in the 1990s and 2000s coincided with the resizing of media as public spheres, along with the breaking of political conversations into more fragmented conversations, though digital medium has to some extent restored this history, specifically in meme style and graphic illustration (Papacharissi, 2015).

A case that crosses over digital story-telling and theater performance is *The Gaza Monologues* by ASHTAR Theatre; which originated with a set of testimonies by Gazan youth, post the war of 2008, and expanded into a worldwide performance archive. The project amplified the siege voices, and built affection public beyond borders (Nassar, 2018). In addition, interviews with actors such as Iman Aoun (available on YouTube) offer insight into the ways if at all stories, when captured digitally, as performative theater, acts as psychosocial healing and political action interventions (Hariri & Mohi-Ud-Din, 2024).

Moreover, storytelling is related to, and comes from, Palestinian refugee camps with significant historical memory. Episodes like the Sabra and Shatila massacre become not just traumatic markers in the journey of the Palestinian people, but also narrative breaks and turning points. Some literature, like Radwa Ashour's "*Al-Tantouriyya*," gives a literary-historical perspective on a Palestinian refugee woman's life, and traces the Nakba, the Lebanese Civil War, and the Oslo era through deeply personal storytelling (Ashour, 2010). In Ashour's work, we can see what Kirmayer et al. (2011) call narrative resilience, whereby storytelling acts as a form of survival, documenting, and refusing to forget.

### **2.1.3 Role of Storyteller and Audience Engagement**

Traditional Palestinian storytelling was ultimately interpersonal. Whether in large village gatherings or in smaller family circles, the storyteller had dual roles as narrator and cultural steward. Not only were audience members engaged immediately and physically, they could share direct additions or corrections that complemented their collective memory (Nahak F. M., 2022).

In the instance of digital storytelling, the storyteller's position becomes more like a multi-skilled producer who must contend with a script, editing, and finally online sharing. For example, "*We Are Not Numbers*", allows young writers in Gaza to tell their personal stories in a context meant for global audiences. Feedback is often asynchronous, arriving through comment sections or shares; nevertheless, this type of online participatory relationship is a different form of engagement that connects storytellers to an audience at a transnational level (Dearden, 2020).

While the transition from live and participating to asynchronous digital engagement promote connections, some of the relational depth seems to be diminished. On the other hand, it seems to also create for a broader community of empathy and solidarity for underrepresented voices and a desire for the world to see and hear their narratives (Gubrium & Harper, 2013).

### **2.1.4 Process Versus Product Orientation**

Storytelling in Palestine takes on a distinctly relational and cultural character when it emphasizes telling as a process. It is less about preserving an artifact and more about maintaining relationships, fostering communal values, and re-enacting cultural history through oral performance (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

Digital storytelling conveys a product-oriented practice- a fixed, editable, and reproducible media file. This advantage allows Palestinian youth and activists to share stories and experiences globally. For instance, the short film "Omar" (2013), is a product of professional production, that is part of a broader digital narrative cultural ecosystem striving to convert lived experience into visual shareable forms. With a focus on the material narrative, this product orientation allows one to control the narrative and produce a legacy (Lambert, 2013).

Some critics might argue that digitization de-contextualizes stories, deprives stories of complexities and nuance, troubles the meaning-making processes in a hierarchical relationship of digitization that does not respect cultural specificities (Couldry, 2008). A 'product', that is both compelling and can mobilize advocacy, may also become indeterminate to its relational starting point.

### **2.1.5 Audience Reach and Cultural Continuity**

Traditional storytelling had a limited audience based on the relationship between storyteller and audience, usually involving one's extended kin or other community members. This localized affinity inheres the transmission of cultural values, language dialects, and worldviews, often from generation to generation. In Palestine, this was instrumental in sustaining identity in the face of colonial disruption and destabilization (Iseke, 2011). Digital storytelling on the other hand exponentially increases audience size, enabling access to multiple diasporic communities and international venues. An example of this is the project "Gaza Monologues" initiated by ASHTAR Theatre where stories written by Gazan youth after the 2008 war have been performed by actors worldwide; this transformed local suffering into global consciousness and solidarity (Nassar, 2018). While the provincial pocketing of traditional storytelling is conducive to cultural continuity and community, the affordance of the digital platform imparts the function of an archive, and as such, cultural resilience. The duality of traditional storytelling opines for the perpetuation of narrative based Palestinian identity and contemporary evolution (Papacharissi, 2015).

### **2.1.6 Storytelling as a Healing Practice: Traditional and Digital Modalities**

Storytelling has long been a form of therapy within Palestinian society. Oral storytelling traditionally taught lessons, comforted, consoled, and built resilience - a practice particularly important, maintaining connections to home and identity despite ongoing dispossession and exile. For many women in refugee camps, oral storytelling has been a part of domestic rituals and traditions that have contained grief through continuity (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

Digital storytelling has infiltrated (or been embraced within) therapeutic contexts. For example, the "Narrative Therapy Project" led by Gaza Community Mental Health Program employs video stories and testimonial recording to assist trauma survivors are able to reframe the narrative of their traumatic experiences (Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, 2024). Digital means of engaging in storytelling can provide an element of control over one's story, and support autonomy and meaning making (White & Epston, 1990).

The DST project led by Mohsin Mohi-Ud-Din (2024) trained Palestinian youth in trauma-informed storytelling. Through a series of digitally mediated workshops, young people were able to identify and shape stories of loss and resistance, which in turn became highly effective as both a group and individual means of attending to chronic trauma (Hariri & Mohi-Ud-Din, 2024). Unlike traditional storytelling and healing rituals - DST process was able to incorporate transnational support and validation, which holds significance when you are living under siege, and enforced censorship.

## **2.2 Conceptual and Historical Foundations of Digital Storytelling**

### **2.2.1 The evolution and scope of Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling (DST) is a multimedia method that “denotes the production of short personal stories (1-3 minutes long) using digital multimedia tools” (Robin, 2008). It “combines text, audio, video, and images to create narrative content that is both expressive and accessible” (Lambert, 2013). The process was officially defined in the early 1990s by Joe Lambert and the Center for Digital Storytelling in California (Lambert, 2013). It was developed as a “collaborative, participatory media practice used as an empowerment tool for people to tell their personal stories” (Lundby, 2009).

Digital storytelling has been utilized widely in education, health communication, community-based research and various other fields (McWilliam, 2009). Its use has been particularly evident in Western contexts, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Robin, 2008). In these settings, it has been adopted for diverse purposes, including a reflective learning technique in classrooms and a public engagement tool in advocacy projects (Couldry, 2008). The increasing accessibility of digital tools and platforms has contributed to its widespread adoption (Lundby, 2009).

Scholars have more recently highlighted the role of digital storytelling as an expressive tool in situations of trauma, marginalization, and conflict (McWilliam, 2009; Couldry, 2008). It has been recognized as a strategy to support narrative agency and provide psychosocial expression (Lambert, 2013). It has also been used to document and preserve lived experiences and contest dominant narratives, especially in conflict-affected or marginalized communities (Lundby, 2009).

### **2.2.2 Digital Storytelling and Social Change**

Digital storytelling (DST) has a strong connection to participatory media and grassroots communication. It began in the 1990s as a way for individuals and communities to share their experiences using accessible digital tools (Lambert, 2013). Rooted in critical media studies, DST challenges dominant narratives by focusing on personal and local perspectives (Lundby, 2009; Couldry, 2008).

Educators, activists, and public health advocates have adopted the concept as a method for raising awareness and encouraging civic engagement (McWilliam, 2009). In public health, for instance, DST has been used to showcase the experiences of marginalized communities, creating new data that can impact policy and practice (Gubrium & Turner, Digital storytelling as an emergent method for social research and practice, 2011). This approach is part of lobbying efforts aimed at personalizing complex societal issues and changing public views (Robin, 2008).

Research shows that the effectiveness of DST depends on the truthfulness of the story and the context in which it is received (McWilliam, 2009). When used in marketing or education, digital narratives often inspire emotional engagement and build empathy. However, concerns remain about power dynamics in the storytelling process and who controls the sharing and shaping of these stories (Couldry, 2008).

The literature describes DST as a conversational method that encourages narrative agency and participatory communication. Scholars emphasize the importance of ethical guidance and self-awareness to ensure that storytelling leads to empowerment rather than tokenization (Lundby, 2009).

### **2.2.3 Digital Storytelling and Identity Formation**

DST is a way for people to think about and tell their identity. It is also a systematic way of organizing life events and values that can produce narratives that help people understand themselves and construct meaning (Lambert, 2013). The act of narrative, representing visuals, and engaging in personal experience builds intentional identity development (Bruner, 2004). In educational and interdisciplinary contexts, DST has been used with youth, immigrants, and marginalized groups to identify developing identities (Hull & Katz, 2006; Robin, 2008). Digital narratives often engage notions of memory, heritage, and resistance to engage participants in complex ways to identify personal and cultural identity and discuss layers of identity. This approach engages what Hull and Katz (2006) call "agentive storytelling." It enables individuals to have sovereignty over their representation and understanding. DST is also part of creating collective identity. More times than not, community or group produced stories contain collective experiences, histories, and collective values (Lundby, 2009).

Storytelling is an individual and social act that deepens connections within a specific group or community (McWilliam, 2009). The use of DST presents more complicated aspects of identity when combined for use and study on a digital platform. Page and Thomas (2011) note that identity is most frequently mediated through an interactive storytelling event that includes feedback publicly and keeps audience attention. The digital age (Page & Thomas, 2011).

A highly illustrative example of how digital storytelling can create opportunities for identity development is contained within "Voices of Youth", a project created by UNICEF. This global initiative enables young people, especially those from marginalized and conflict-affected backgrounds, to create and share digital stories about their lives, struggles and potentials. As blog posts, short films, and multimedia-scholars, subjected youth write their personal and cultural identities constructed from their experiences of loss, poverty, or discrimination. This provides the opportunity for young people to find and claim who they are while situating their personal nomination within larger, collective narratives (UNICEF, 2020). The act of composing and sharing digital tales is a means to create what Bruner (2004) calls a narrative identity, in which the self-concept is built and rebuilt, continuously connected through stories (Bruner, 2004). Additionally, in transnational digital spaces, these narratives give visibility to identities that are often erased or misrepresented, contributing to a sense of narrative agency and belonging (Dearden, 2020).

### **2.2.4 Digital Storytelling and Therapeutic Reflection**

DST has gained increased usage in trauma, loss and mental health care as a tool for therapeutic reflection. This process allows people to verbalize and plot difficult

experiences as a narrative, so that those experiences can be processed emotionally and integrated psychologically (Lambert, 2013). This is in line with the principles of narrative therapy that draw on the therapeutic value of relating personal narratives (White & Epston, 1990). Evidence suggests that DST can support success in the recovery from trauma, particularly in instances where traditional talk therapy is inaccessible or insufficient (McWilliam, 2009; Gubrium, 2009).

Participants experiencing fragmentation in memory or anguish can re-establish a sense of agency and coherence as they create their digital story. The multi-dimensional aspects of DST—voice, image, music, and structure—can invite emotional engagement and promote expression that exceeds linguistic representation. Group-based DST can offer opportunities to enhance emotional support and relational healing; participants that shared their narratives together in a safe setting commonly report feeling recognized, heard, and validated (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). This collective experience invites reflection on the challenges faced and can reinforce solidarity through relational healing. This is infinitely more important for social and emotional resilience for people or communities affected by ongoing constructions of conflict or systemic violence.

However, there are still ethical concerns to be considered. Researchers have endorsed the importance of trauma-informed facilitation, consent forms that clarify the use of the narrative or digital stories, and allowing participants the power to decide what, if any, content is shared with other parties, (Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2009). When applied with care, DST provides an effective approach for reflective healing and community-oriented emotional support.

An exemplary case in the literature of digital storytelling used as therapy is the "Stories of Home" project run by Refugee Youth in the United Kingdom. In this project, young refugees and asylum seekers were engaged in the development of digital narratives about displacement, belonging, and trauma and were invited to reflect on their experiences through facilitated storytelling workshops. Each participant created a short digital film that interwove voiceovers, images, and music to narrate their journey and emotional terrain. The stories acted as both narrative interventions and community education resources, and allowed young participants to process their trauma and assert control through meaning-making (Lenette, Cox, & Brough, 2015). The therapeutic impacts were both individual and collective in nature; by sharing stories, young participants' trauma was destigmatized, and wider audiences developed empathy (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). "Stories of Home" demonstrates how digital storytelling can support the psychological sense of resilience and reinventing narratives in post-trauma contexts. It also goes on to support White and Epston's (1990) claim that by changing the problem from a personal to a relational one, adding contextually rich information, we can help facilitate change and healing in identity (White & Epston, 1990).

## **2.3 Conceptual and Contextual Dimensions of Digital Storytelling**

### **2.3.1 Typologies of Digital Storytelling**

Digital storytelling (DST) encompasses a variety of formats that differ in their aims, structure, and intended audiences. Scholars have described three general typological categories: personal-expressive; institutional-educational; and activist or advocacy (Lundby, 2009). Personal-expressive is the personal and autobiographical form of storytelling developed by the Centre for Digital Storytelling and involves story creators reflecting on their experience by recording their stories. These narratives are generally first-person accounts which include still images, voice narration, and music in short digital videos. Institutional and educational forms of DST typically include an established curriculum, and storytelling is used as an instructional strategy to build learning, reflection, or professional development. Robin (2008) illustrated the importance of the use of DST in education to enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and story competency (Robin, 2008). Alternatively, advocacy digital storytelling is created with NGOs or activist organizations in partnership and aims to raise awareness, generate policy changes, or document human rights violations (Gubrium & Turner, 2011). This type of digital storytelling is often collective in nature and may include contributions from marginalized groups to critically shift existing social narratives.

While these typologies are analytically different, they often overlap in their practice. Advocacy DST may include personal narratives used within institutional or policy spaces. Similarly, personal narratives created in therapeutic practice may then be shared for awareness-raising or political purposes. Understanding these categories clarifies the methodological diversity and the sociopolitical value associated with DST practice (Couldry, 2008).

### **2.3.2 Effects and Impacts of Digital Storytelling**

Studies concerning the impact of DST suggest that cognitive, affective, and social changes may be possible for both creators and audiences. Narrative development allows one's awareness of self, identity, and emotional re-embodiment as author (Hull & Katz, 2006; White & Epston, 1990). The act of organizing a significant life event as a narrative, or story, moves creators forward through meaning-making and, thereby, increases psychological resilience in the face of trauma and marginalization (Lambert, 2013). The reflective process may occur to achieve therapeutic, educational, or developmental aims, which depends on the nature of the context and the ways the creators are facilitated.

DST also creates effects to audiences by generating emotional engagement, and consequently, awareness. Studies have shown that narratives that use a personal account of an experience and supplemented visuals with emotional weight have a great effect on audience's understanding of complex social issues (Gubrium, 2009). McWilliam (2009) argues that the subject of the digital story has the ability to shift audiences' assumptions about abstract ideas like migration, poverty, and mental health as it adopts a more

contextualized and humanized encounter. In this way, DST represents a form of affective communication that collapses the binary of personal testimony and social critique. Nonetheless, the literature cautions against a false sense of optimism regarding how transformative storytelling might be. While narrative exposure might encourage short-term manifestations of empathy, structural changes demand ongoing, integrated institutional engagement and responses (Couldry, 2008). The emotional labor of a storyteller, especially when using narrative to tell trauma, requires proper informed ethical consideration. So, while clear personal and social effects of DST are evident, they are also shaped by context, facilitation, and purpose.

### **2.3.3 The Global Dissemination of Digital Storytelling**

Since arriving on the shores of the USA, it is clear that DST has gone through a process of transnational diffusion, arriving in distinct cultural, political and technological contexts. McWilliam (2009) observed that digital storytelling has been adopted in many countries and by many international audiences: educators, artists, health practitioners, and NGOs. This diffusion of digital storytelling is much broader than technology; it also includes ideological elements shared globally with an interest in participatory media, democratized voice, and narrative justice (Lundby, 2009). DST is not lost or generic as it moves across borders. DST more specifically mediates the traditions, languages and socio-political realities of a local context, which are historically significant in shaping its specificity as a genre of media practice.

The increasing prevalence of mobile devices and social media has extended DST further. New platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok offer new spaces for storytelling, and accelerate the visibility and virality of digital stories (Page & Thomas, 2011). These hyper-users also provide hybridized environments for DST, blurring the lines between personal storytelling and visual aesthetic forms, including pushed views of the algorithm and audience interaction. These affordances of digital storytelling are crucial because, although they broaden access to audience and enacting, there are also concerns about data privacy, commodification of content, and more importantly the loss of control over narrative.

Actors aggregating at an institutional level have played a role in the global scaling of DST by incorporating various forms of DST into development programs, health campaigns, and educational reform. Participatory visual methods are increasingly used in international public health research and policy communication (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). While it is becoming institutionalized, the emphases on adaptability and appropriation of DST as a practice mean that it continues to be taken up from the grassroots. To understand the global spread of DST, both the technological infrastructures and cultural logics surrounding local uptake are important to note.

## **2.4 Digital Storytelling in Contexts of Colonization: Resistance, Reality, and Consciousness**

### **2.4.1 Adjusting Experience Reality using Storytelling Methodology**

In colonial or settler-colonial contexts, digital storytelling acts as a counter-representation that allows individuals and groups to contest dominant understandings of their lived experience through narrative recontextualization. The process of producing individual and collective narratives is to re-establish narrative authority over events and experiences that may be hidden or misreported through dominant language (Couldry, 2008). DST can provide space for historically excluded voices to communicate local realities and as DST commonly highlights the material and psychological hurt found in colonialism (Lundby, 2009).

Research with Indigenous peoples and issues has shown that DST supports expression of repressed memories and marginalized memories. Research concerning Aboriginal Australian youth have shown that DST allows for different spatial and temporal landscapes for narrating a daily experience in the context of settler colonialism (Iseke, 2011). These narratives redefine conventional images of Indigenous people and validate Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and survivance. The multimodal aspects of DST, bringing together audio, visual and individualized stories, provide complex representations of dislocation, surveillance and denial in contexts where traditional media diminish or erase these complexities (Gubrium & Harper, 2013).

Also, DST created not only tells the story of suffering but, it creates agency. Storytelling is both epistemic and ontological, while communities use digital spaces to imagine alternatives, to express resistant subjectivity and to envision counter-futures (Lambert, 2013). More often than not, narrative becomes a process of transforming lived experiences into political action.

In the contexts of colonization, Some methodologies of storytelling can be used as critical methods to (re)interpret lived experiences and challenge preconceived colonial documentation. There are many histories and colonial identities that have been fragmented and subverted, where cultural memory and intellectualism have been intentionally erased by dominant colonial spaces (Smith, 2012). Digital storytelling gives an opportunity to participants to explore and reconstruct their lived realities, (re)claiming voice and agency where they can also (re)frame their individual and collective realities within decolonizing frameworks (Iseke, 2011). For example, through the "Native Voices" project in Canada, Indigenous youth participated in digital storytelling workshops, capturing stories of cultural survival and resilience against settler-colonization. For the youth, these creative spaces allowed for a reconstruction of their experience of colonization, resituating narratives of victimization into stories of strength and resilience amidst colonial processes (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011; Gubrium & Harper, 2013). These methodologies provide an opportunity to not only assist in the healing process, but to also ensure that colonization does not erase indigenous histories in the digital landscape, highlighting Indigenous presence and sovereignty and acknowledging

the ramifications of colonialism on contemporary lived realities (Smith, 2012; White & Epston, 1990).

#### **2.4.2 Collective Consciousness and the Reframing of Memory**

The ability of DST to help shape collective consciousness in colonized contexts is in its role to arrange divergent memory into shared stories. Because collective memory is a site of political struggle, DST is able to confront colonial historiography by sharing stories that offer alternative legitimacy and moral frames of the colonial experience (Bruner, 2004). Through curated or participatory digital formats, we can 'reconstruct' memory landscapes collectively and express cultural continuance, survival, and historical presence.

In the Palestinian context, for example, youth-produced digital narratives have documented displacement, trauma, and resistance, frequently reframing historical loss in a framing of continuity and cultural resilience (Nassar, 2018). These accounts do work to preserve intergenerational memory, but they also articulate a form of narrative sovereignty. Hull and Katz (2006) argued that digital storytelling creates space for storytellers to perform "agentive selves," where identity exists not only as a narrated storytelling, but as a continual reconstitution of themselves in relation to a collective struggle (Hull & Katz, 2006).

The spread of these stories through digital networks helps build "affective publics," which are connected by emotional resonance and political commitment, as well as shared content (Papacharissi, 2015) In colonized spaces, affective publics tend to be places of collective consciousness, where past histories that have been erased and contemporary injustices are felt, shared, and reframed.

The idea of using digital storytelling recognizes a significant process of reconstructing a collective memory in colonized communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Digital Archive in Canada holds evidence (testimonies) of Indigenous individuals who were traumatized by residential schools. The testimonies allow communities to make sense of their histories and reconcile these histories with colonial narratives (Regan, 2010; Korteweg & Russell, 2012). As such, these stories contribute to cultural memory (Assmann, 2011) while also aiding in the processes of healing and resistance as Lambert (2013) operationalizes as 'story work.'

Similar to this, in Palestine, the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA) holds archived intergenerational accounts of displacement, intentionally storing them implies holding onto intergenerational narratives to create historical justice by contributing to the actual process of memorializing displacement (Said, 1992; Allan, 2013). The examples of POHA and TRC demonstrate how digital storytelling provides marginalized communities the opportunity to resist erasure while making a statement about their presence through culturally situated memory work.

#### **2.4.3 Challenging Domination through Digital Narratives**

Digital storytelling is a discursive pathway for engagement with domination, surveillance and epistemic violence, when engaged in colonized, settler-colonized, or similarly

structural spaces. Digital storytelling works against what Spivak (1988) refers to as "epistemic erasure" by inserting the voices of subalterns into the digital space (Spivak, 1988). While mainstream media often reopen colonial logics, digital storytelling opens up new discursive landscapes for decentralized storytelling that can disrupt those narratives by amplifying community knowledge (Couldry, 2008).

Empirical studies have documented digital storytelling being used to resist direct colonial, state violence (for example, military presence, land dispossession), as well as indirect colonial violence (for example, bureaucratic neglect, development erasure, cultural assimilation) (Gubrium & Turner, 2011). The narratives we study are so connected with colonial, diaspora narratives that they allow for what McWilliam (2009) described as "narrative intervention"; inserting voices disruptively into policy area, education and international advocacy (McWilliam, 2009).

Returning to how to engage with digital storytelling, it is well established in scholarship that one should avoid romanticizing digital spaces and making assumptions about ownership, agency, and the emancipation of the storyteller. The spaces opened up by digital storytelling create new spaces for voice, however, access, surveillance and platform governance redefine what emancipation can mean (Page & Thomas, 2011; Couldry, 2008; Papacharissi, 2015). Page and Thomas (2011) describe these spaces available for digital storytelling as being situated in networked structures; amplified/disrupted, commodified/shut down or simply remaining invisible. Ethical facilitation, narrative sovereignty and content ownership are conditions for digital storytelling to be used as an apparatus of decolonial praxis (Page & Thomas, 2011).

## **2.5 Digital Storytelling in Healing and Advocacy**

### **2.5.1 Transformation and Change through Narrative Expression**

The transformative potential of digital storytelling (DST) stems from its ability to give marginalized people an opportunity to make meaning of what they have lived and place it into the narrative structure in a way that is more generative. Bruner (2004) emphasizes how narrating one's life allows for cognitive reorganization and a new and expansive definition of self (Bruner, 2004). Similarly, White and Epston (1990) advocate that therapeutic change happens when people are able to externalize problems and reimagine themselves with alternative narratives (White & Epston, 1990). In the case of digital storytelling, this reimagining is more pronounced because sensory dimensions such as visual and audio components facilitate multimodal expression and performance of agency and change (Hull & Katz, 2006; Gubrium, 2009).

There is social science research showing DST assists with shifts in personal identity and identity social recognition even in contexts where the stories take place. Gubrium and Turner (2011) document youth who participate in digital storytelling projects as increasing their voice and ownership over their stories (Gubrium & Turner, 2011). In contexts of trauma and marginality, the ability to create and share a cohesive narrative has been related to psychosocial resilience and empowerment (Iseke, 2011; Robin, 2008). That said, some

scholars contend that the act of narrating or re-narrating is not automatically liberatory and needs to be rooted in ethical, culturally responsive facilitation (Couldry, 2008; Page & Thomas, 2011).

Narrative expression is becoming increasingly recognized as an enabling mechanism for psychological healing when individuals exist in contexts dealing with conflict, displacement, or colonization. In narrating and re-narrating personal stories, individuals often can reframing traumatic memories, reclaim agency, or create meaning from their suffering which are vital to narrative therapy and culturally appropriate mental health care (White & Epston, 1990; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011).

An excellent example of this work comes from IWDA (International Women's Development Agency), with their "Story-sharing for Healing" project in Papua New Guinea, which is using digital storytelling as a trauma-informed method of work with survivors of gender-based violence. In a country legacy of colonialism and structural violence, where there are extremely high rates of abuses against women, IWDA offered workshops for survivors to create and share their personal digital stories using photographs, voice recordings, and text. The project emphasized narrative agency, collective support, and culturally relevant resilience, as well as individual healing and collective solidarity (IDWA, 2020; Nahak A. A., 2022).

One participant's story, anonymously submitted as part of the program closure exhibition, is about her journey from silence and shame to becoming a self-advocate. She spoke about how the colonial-era values had affected her family's interpretation of abuse, and described how working in the workshop led her to consider her experience, not as a personal failure or experience, but as connected to a bigger historical and structural reality. Her story catalyzed healing not only for her, but for others who felt their stories were resonating in her voice (Choo, Abdullah, & Nawi, 2020; Lenette C. , 2019).

This case illustrates how digital narrative expression, when situated in a facilitating and culturally-relevant framework, can work as psychological transformation. It is in line with decolonial methodologies by placing indigenous knowledge systems first, honouring lived experience, and valuing non-Western pathways of recovery (Smith, 2012; Regan, 2010). Furthermore, it demonstrates how storytelling can potentially combine the psychological and the political by making healing not only inner, but a form of resistance and change.

### **2.5.2 Influence on Psychological and Social Processes**

Digital storytelling has been analyzed as a participative and therapeutic instrument that facilitates emotional processing and narrative coherence following personal and collective trauma. Gubrium (2009) asserts that the DST process enables individuals to assimilate painful experiences into coherent narratives, resulting in enhanced emotional regulation and mental clarity (Gubrium, 2009). This has been especially significant in community-oriented health initiatives, as storytelling fosters culturally rooted perceptions of well-being (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Iseke, 2011).

Besides its psychological impacts, DST facilitates social processes by promoting discussion and empathy. In an article of cases of digital storytelling published in 2006 noted that digital stories function as conduits between personal experience and public

dialogue, enabling audiences to perceive frequently obscured themes (Hull & Katz, 2006). Another article for Lambert contends that storytelling creates a relational environment in which both the storyteller and the listener collaboratively produce meaning (Lambert, 2013). In contexts of social exclusion or conflict, this dialogic element is crucial for restoring trust and fostering mutual recognition (McWilliam, 2009; Papacharissi, 2015). Nonetheless, critical scholars emphasize that these processes occur within power-imbued media infrastructures that determine which narratives are acknowledged and legitimized (Couldry, 2008; Page & Thomas, 2011).

Digital storytelling (DST) offers opportunities for social and psychological impact in terms of emotional expression, empathy, and social identity, especially when psychological distress has been ongoing as result of war and marginalization. Immediately after the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in May 2021, a group of young Palestinian creatives took on utilizing the potential of DST through an initiative called "Voices Beyond the Siege," in partnership with numerous international media literacy projects. Participants created short-form videos and narrative posts, shared on Instagram and YouTube, presenting their lived experiences concerning war, displacement, and resilience, often as a mixture of their personal testimony, archival footage, and culturally significant images.

The initiative gave young Gazans not only psychological relief through the expression of practice, but also a sense of globally-connectedness, which contributed to their validation, a vital factor in tackling feelings of isolation and helplessness (Khurshid, Baroudi, & Salem, 2024). Clinically, this narrative expression is consistent with outcomes presented in trauma psychology, which suggest that constructing one's experience into coherent, sharable narratives not only aids in cognitive processing, cognitive construction of the event, and emotional regulation (Neimeyer, 2000; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). Finally, socially, the digitally circulated stories helped create "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2015), sharing an emotional resonance, which gives a sense of collective identity amongst voices, centers shared interests, mobilizes advocacy, and attributes emotional meaning.

Crucially, a lot of these youngsters pointed to the reactions from the global audience - the comments, reshares, messages of solidarity - as providing affirmation and a kind of psychological support, with some participants indicating it made them feel more valued and stronger (Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, 2024). This is an important dual impact with the individual healing and collective social performance illustrating the evidence of how DST can help provide a sense of belonging while also representing a process of political self-representation and psychosocial healing in the context of colonialism and violence.

### **2.5.3 Collective and individual consciousness**

Digital storytelling significantly influences individual and communal consciousness. At the individual level, storytelling allows the storyteller to recontextualize their identity and history within wider social frameworks. Personal narratives are fundamental to individuals' self-understanding, particularly during periods of disruption or change (Bruner, 2004). Digital storytelling facilitates this process by providing tools for aesthetic and multimodal

self-expression, hence enhancing narrative coherence and memory retention (Hull & Katz, 2006).

On a collective scale, DST promotes the cultivation of shared significance and political consciousness. Within the framework of Palestinian youth, DST has demonstrated its efficacy in fostering a collective memory that counters historical obliteration (Nassar, 2018). These digital tales function as expressions of narrative sovereignty, enabling marginalised groups to affirm their experiences in opposition to dominant depictions. The dissemination of such narratives fosters emotive publics, wherein collective sentiment evolves into communal solidarity and possible mobilization (Papacharissi, 2015).

#### **2.5.4 Storytelling in Collective and Cultural Crises**

In the context of collective and cultural crises—encompassing phenomena such as war, occupation, forced displacement, and cultural erosion—Digital Storytelling (DST) assumes a dual role that is both restorative and communicative. This approach not only aids in the processing of shared trauma but also plays a vital part in the preservation of vulnerable cultural heritages. Indigenous communities, in particular, have harnessed DST to document their knowledge, contest colonial narratives, and promote cultural survivance (Iseke, 2011). Within this framework, storytelling emerges as a powerful vehicle for transmitting intergenerational knowledge and reaffirming cultural identity.

The application of DST in contexts marked by mass trauma allows for an exploration of the psychological ramifications associated with such collective experiences. Participatory visual methods, such as those employed in Digital Storytelling, have been strategically integrated into community health initiatives, thereby fostering reflection and advocacy (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). The narratives produced through this medium not only chronicle individual and communal suffering but also reframe these experiences through themes of resilience and resistance. Thus, both in cultural and crisis-related contexts, DST functions as a significant platform that merges healing with advocacy, facilitating the digital mediation of lived experiences. In doing so, it underscores the complexity of trauma while simultaneously allowing for a reclamation of agency and identity amid adversity.

### **2.6 Digital Storytelling in Palestine: Trauma Healing, Collective Awareness, and Digital Resilience**

#### **2.6.1 Narrative Healing and Psychological Resilience**

Storytelling is a structured method for acknowledging collective trauma during occupation through story externalization and story-making (White & Epston, 1990; Bruner, 2004). There is research that demonstrates that Palestinians endure ongoing traumatic stress, which is a subclinical daily “worth of suffering” for mental health (Jabr & Berger, 2017; McKernan, 2024).

Mental health professionals and non-governmental organizations working in Gaza and the West Bank use digital storytelling techniques consistent with narrative therapy and have

been implemented in community mental health approaches (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, 2024). Digital storytelling interventions improve emotional regulation, resilience, and cultural identity in contexts of persistent physical adversity (Hariri & Mohi-Ud-Din, 2024; Roe, Gilboa-Schechtman, & Baumel, 2024).

Recent qualitative evidence suggests that digital storytelling serves as a mediator for the effects of indirect trauma (i.e., exposure to explicit images of conflict), as it allows the storyteller to assume an active role as a knowing subject, rather than being passively subjected to images of (in)just violence. Structured digital storytelling remediation can mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma encountered by Palestinians and the diaspora (Khurshid, Toor, & Hanif, 2021; Longman, 2023). Furthermore, the digital storytelling methodology employed in "We Are Not Numbers" and Euro-Med Monitor workshops provides a secure psychological environment that merges narrative articulation with a sense of communal affiliation, serving as an effective coping mechanism and reducing emotional isolation (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2023).

### **2.6.2 Building Personal and Collective Consciousness**

Digital stories help Palestinians construct personal identities and collective memories. At an interpersonal level, digital storytelling (DST) is a form of self-narration that includes interruptions such as displacement, surveillance, and resistance (Nassar, 2018; Hull & Katz, 2006). By writing and illustrating life histories, DST enables participants to reconstruct self-narrative within the cultural and historical contexts (Bruner, 2004; Gubrium, 2009).

Collectively, DST has an affective dimension that brings people together by fostering digital publics that share common feelings, something vital in a colonized society (Papacharissi, 2015; Iseke, 2011). A content analysis of oral histories from Palestinian refugees found that collective narratives were used to preserve cultural identity in the service of supporting memory as a form of historical preservation (Awwad, Dunagan, Gamba, & Rayan, 2025).

Groups such as "We Are Not Numbers" offer young people the opportunity to report on rational stances in the global media imaginary that resists colonial power, as a relation of affective and political solidarity (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2023; We Are Not Numbers, n.d.).

### **2.6.3 Escalations Post–October 7, 2023: Digital Resistance and Crisis Response**

Before October 7, 2023, Palestinian digital storytelling (DST), a form of digital activism, was centered on everyday acts of colonization and intergenerational memory (McWilliam, 2009; Nassar, 2018). Following the deterioration of hostilities, DST shifted to rapid digital crisis signaling, documentation, and archiving in community (Spivak, 1988; Couldry, 2008). Organizations, like "We Are Not Numbers" and 7amleh, served as essential digital storytelling hubs allowing spaces for community storytelling, training, mental health support, and dealing with thinking about media ethics under the conditions of high surveillance (7amleh, 2024).

Through empirical observation of the use of DST during increasing violence, there were markedly more narratives offering resilience. Workshops in Gaza and online mentoring programs have been focused on expressive storytelling for the purposes of making human connections, to counter normalization and individual/de-humanization of stories (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2023; Hariri & Mohi-Ud-Din, 2024). These pedagogical practices illustrate how DST can serve as a rooted cultural method for psychological welfare and political consciousness under a scenario of acute crisis (McKernan, 2024).

#### **2.6.4 Digital Advocacy, Agency, and Futures**

In Palestine, DST is both a practice of therapy and a discursive tactic. Non-profits, such as Tgyheer and 7amleh, are employing (in a public relations paradigm) storytelling in their national and international engagements to demonstrate that storytelling mobilizes powerful impulses of solidarity, and public narratives can be constructed (Mabrouk, 2021).

These tendencies in operation are tied to the models of two-way communication, and uses and gratifications that explain DST's capacity to achieve persuasive bargaining through public attachment (Mabrouk, 2021).

Furthermore, DST should be considered in its pedagogical and adventurous aspects. "Once Upon a Time in Palestine," an XR documentary, engages youth in historical storytelling by situating digital storytelling within pedagogy, cultural memory, and affective agency (ALLMEP, 2024).

## **Chapter Three**

---

### **Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodological approach taken in achieving the study objectives of this research. Study setting, study population, eligibility criteria, data collection procedure, study instrument, scientific rigor and data entry and analysis are discussed. Ethical and administrative considerations and limitations of this study are mentioned.

#### **3.1 Study design**

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design which involves the complexity of human experience under distinct contexts and ultimately seeks to examine the practices of Palestinian psychologists as they used Instagram and participated in digital storytelling in the context of the ongoing Israeli aggression on Gaza and their perspectives on how that platform might help contribute to psychological healing in the future. The study will examine digital storytelling advocacy for mental health in the context of the ongoing colonialism/complicity and conflict, and will centre on the personal stories and professional accounts of the participants who were involved.

#### **3.2 Study setting**

This study is situated in Palestine, focusing on the experiences of Palestinian psychologists during the recent aggression in Gaza. It examines how the psychologists use, either as followers or editors of their own mental health platforms, Instagram as a means of digital storytelling and advocacy. The study includes the digital context where sharing takes place and considers what role digital storytelling can play to promote trauma-related healing and professional expression in ongoing conflict.

### 3.3 Sample and sampling

This research involved purposive sampling, which involved identifying Palestinian psychologists who used Instagram during the most recent aggression that took place toward Gaza, whether it was as a producer of content or simply as a follower of mental health-related digital storytelling. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for qualitative purposes that are looking for specific, deeper understandings, in context, of a specific group of professions.

Although the Palestinian Ministry of Health (2020) reports that 120 licensed clinical psychologists practice in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, only a few of those psychologists use social media, such as Instagram, for mental health-related engagement or advocacy. The sampling size to this phase of the research study is 6 to 10 participants, as the smaller size will have the capacity for more robust data collection, while considering the specific population can be difficult to recruit depending on availability and regulations.

Participants were procured through a systematic approach. To identify Palestinian mental health professionals who posted or connected with mental health information during the Gaza Crisis (in specific dates), mental health professionals were identified using Instagram by searching hashtags (#PalestinianMentalHealth, #GazaMentalHealth, #PalestinianPsychologists) and looking at the public profiles of licensed psychologists. Professional credentials were verified by comparing to the Licensed Psychologist Registry maintained by the Palestinian Ministry of Health to verify eligibility for practice in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or East Jerusalem; a cross-reference of licensed psychologists. Eligible professionals were contacted via direct message on Instagram or email, when possible. The introductory message included information about ethical approval, study goals and voluntary participation, as well as a summary of the study and an invitation to participate in the research. Informed consent was obtained by providing participants with a detailed consent form, in both Arabic and English, which included information about the goals of the study, how data would be collected, and how confidentiality would be maintained, and gave participants the right to withdraw at any time. Participants who provided informed consent were contacted to arrange semi-structured interviews via Zoom, WhatsApp, or in-person when possible, taking into consideration security and safety issues.

➤ **Inclusion criteria:**

- ✓ Licensed or practice psychologists residing in Palestine, which includes; the West Bank, Gaza Strip, or East Jerusalem.
- ✓ Active use of Instagram that relates to the recent Gaza conflict, which includes creating content and engagement with any mental health-related content.
- ✓ Proficiency in providing psychological support, especially in trauma-focused situations.
- ✓ All participants will participate voluntarily and with informed consent.

➤ **Exclusion Criteria:**

- ✓ Psychologists outside of Palestine were excluded, as the study focuses on contextual experiences in the occupied territories.
- ✓ Ethnographers who do not have any access to social media do not contribute to the study, since it focused on Instagram-based digital storytelling.
- ✓ Ethnographers who are not on Instagram do not contribute to the study, as Instagram is central to the research question.
- ✓ Ethnographers who did not consent to provide informed consent or did not want to be

interviewed.

➤ **Saturation Criteria:**

- ✓ The process of developing criteria for determining data saturation for this particular research was drawn from prior methods of determining saturation. The following points were utilized to establish the criteria to determine when data saturation was achieved:
  1. Themes and/or codes emerged from subsequent interviews that did not provide any additional themes and/or codes that the researcher identified while conducting the research (e.g., existing codes or themes).
  2. Themes and codes of the interviewee contained sufficient richness and detail to support findings with data (i.e., multiple examples) from multiple participants.
  3. In addition to reaching a sufficient richness, the existing themes should have sufficient conceptual depth that the findings were able to be placed in a meaningful context theoretically (i.e., theoretically interpretable).
  4. The existence of redundancy in participant interviews indicated that the information generated from subsequent interviews would not provide substantively different findings than the prior interviews.
- ✓ Rationale for Sample Size: The Population of Interest - Palestinian Psychologists using Instagram during the Conflict was identified, and a sample size of 6-10 was appropriate for this population based on its presumed homogeneity to achieve data saturation (i.e., the point when no new information is discovered by the collection of any further data). Homogeneous and smaller samples typically achieve saturation at a faster rate than larger and more diverse samples do.
- ✓ Final Sample Size - 6-10 participants were the anticipated sample size, however, the decision to conclude data collection would not be based simply upon the number of participants wanted to collect data from, but rather upon the point at which the researcher had reached saturation. Thus, while the researcher would stop collecting data at 6 participants if saturation reached, recruiting and collecting data until reaching the saturation with new themes if there were new themes emerging from each of the interviews beyond 10 participants, and so on. All data collection would be conducted, however, in accordance with ethical standards and practical limits.
- ✓ Saturation Documentation – the researcher maintained a saturation log during the analysis process that documented when each major theme was identified for the first time, how many participants contributed to that theme, and the last interview in which obtained no further variations or dimensions of the theme.

### **3.4 Study instrument**

This study uses a semi-structured interview guide (Annex 1) to collect data to explore the experiences and perspectives of Palestinian psychologists regarding their use of Instagram-based digital storytelling during the recent aggression on Gaza. Semi-structured interviews work well for qualitative research in that they allow for open-ended responses, enable participants to describe their experiences in their own terms, and give the interviewer the flexibility to explore more deeply when appropriate.

The interviews will be held using recorded video interviews via Zoom, which makes it possible for participants from different geographic locations to attend the meeting safely and easily. Each interview is expected to last 45 to 60 minutes. All participants will be asked to review and sign a consent form and debriefing form prior to the interview. The documents ensure voluntary participation, provide a purpose and scope of the research, and confirm the participant's rights to confidentiality, data privacy, and withdrawal without consequence at any time.

The interview guide is organized into five overarching thematic sections.

### **1. Instagram use in the current aggression on Gaza**

This section specifically asks participants to recall how they used Instagram during the aggression, what information they engaged with or re-posted on Instagram, and in what context (personal/professional), in addition to considering perceived barriers to usage (censorship, emotional impact).

### **2. Time and Place of Digital Storytelling in Mental Health Awareness**

This section addresses participants' thoughts on the capability of digital storytelling to reduce stigma regarding mental health awareness, and to raise awareness and community engagement with mental health awareness through the medium.

### **3. Tools and Methods of Digital Storytelling**

This section asks participants about the narrative formats and digital tools (e.g. posts, stories, live video) they consider most important, and how they employed tone, visuals, and symbolic narratives to communicate messages about psychological concepts in their digital stories.

### **4. Ethical and professional challenges**

This section examines the ethical considerations involved when using social media to disseminate mental health information (e.g., client confidentiality, content that may be disturbing, costs to audiences emotionally).

### **5. Analytical Analysis and Future Goals**

Participants were asked to consider the future use of digital platforms in Palestinian mental health interventions, consider possibilities for professional collaboration and recommend to practice to those who wanted to become engaged in digital advocacy.

The structure of the guide sought to have some continuity across the interviews while still providing space for the necessary flexibility to discuss the participants' individual experiences and reflections within a given socio-political context.

## **3.5 Data collection**

Data collection began in June 2025 and will be carried out by the researcher with the approval from Al-Quds University Research Ethical Committee. The researcher will get informed consent (Annex 2) from each participant before conducting semi-structured interviews via Zoom that will last for 45 to 60 minutes and will be recorded for transcription with permission. Data will be securely stored and anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality (Annex 3).

### 3.6 Data analysis

The data were analyzed manually, using thematic analysis steps as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), within a six-phase framework. Immediately after completing each of the interviews on Zoom, the researcher transcribed the recordings literally. Once the transcripts were complete, the researcher began the process of analysis with an initial reading of the transcripts to obtain an overall understanding of the dataset. Additional scanning of the transcripts followed in order to become familiar and immerse herself in the data.

The transcription of the participant from Gaza was completed in stages due to issues related to internet connectivity. Special attention was paid to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, despite differences in audio quality due to instability in the connection. Segments that were unable to be clearly or sufficiently recorded by the researcher were noted in the transcripts, along with a description of the context in which those technical difficulties occurred. This additional information helped to clarify the integrity of the research data.

Next, the researcher assigned preliminary codes from significant pieces of text within the transcripts that were relevant to the research questions. The codes then were sorted into subthemes, which were then shaped, merged, and organized into overarching themes that represented clusters of central tendencies in the research dataset.

The coding of the research data involved two approaches, both deductive and inductive. Deductive coding was based on the research questions and the theoretical framework associated with digital mental health advocacy. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge from the raw research data. The researcher created a detailed coding manual that defined each of the codes and identified the inclusion/exclusion criteria and a representative quote for each of the codes to help ensure consistency in the analysis.

Initial coding was done separately for the participant's data from Gaza versus the participant's data from the West Bank/East Jerusalem. The analysis of the data allowed the researcher to discover whether any unique or distinct themes or patterns were evident in the two different geographical areas; this enabled the researcher to properly document and acknowledge contextual differences in the data rather than merging the data into broader categories.

To enhance credibility of the analysis, two other researchers independently read, coded, and developed themes from a segment of the transcripts. This investigator triangulation permitted the researchers to demonstrate their individual interpretations of the data and promote agreement on the thematic framework. The researcher provided documentation of the coding followed by documentation of the development of the themes, which permits dependability via an audit trail. Three researchers coded and thematically analyzed the same group of transcripts independently from each other. Each researcher was blind to the code and theme structure assigned by the primary researcher until after they had completed their independent analyses. The three researchers met after completing their coding and theme development analyses in order to review and compare their interpretations, and discuss areas of agreement and disagreement regarding the final thematic framework. Following a review of their independent coding and theme development, the researchers

utilized a collaborative process of discussion and examination of the original transcript segments to resolve differences of opinions regarding code assignment and theme interpretation. Thus, the final thematic framework reflects the various perspectives employed by the three researchers in establishing the final product, rather than the perspective of the primary researcher alone. Additionally, the researcher's independent analysis of the researcher in Gaza is limited to data provided by one participant. Therefore, the independent researchers analyzed, coded, and developed the themes based solely on this single participant's transcript to provide an accurate indication of a Gaza-specific perspective and ensure that the coding and themes did not misrepresent the perspective of that participant in the analysis. To provide audit and verification capabilities for external stakeholders, the researcher maintained a detailed account of all steps taken during the analysis. The following documentation was produced to support this thorough record: (1) initial transcripts with both time-stamp and technical notes; (2) preliminary coding scheme including definitions for each code; (3) documentation of the entire coding decision-making process; (4) development of sub-themes and main themes, including documentation of merged code(s) and/or reorganizing or eliminating of codes; (5) documentation of the independent coding processes and consensus meetings; (6) a final code book that includes a summary of each category, sub-category, and code numbers; and (7) written descriptions of decisions made by the researcher throughout this process. An audit trail can provide external sources a way to verify analyses of this type and thus, increase reliability.

The researcher facilitated confirmability via reflexive journaling during which she consistently documented personal reflection, decisions made, and any biases identified during analysis. To provide substance to the themes, the researcher included participant quotes, which ensured researcher interpretations were firmly grounded in the data.

The researcher's reflexive journal served as a means of systematically documenting her awareness of being an outsider to the impact of the conflict while simultaneously providing evidence of possible apathetic bias due to preconceptions about what the researcher wanted to hear from the Gaza participant. These included entries demonstrating that the researcher was biased either by focusing too much or not enough on material related specifically to Gaza. Further entries noted the researcher's emotional responses to the Gaza participant's experiences and subsequently, the impact of those emotions on how the researcher interpreted the narrative that the participant shared.

The researcher prepared a positionality statement outlining her background as well as any potential biases she had about conducting this research and identified how issues related to power operate between the researcher and the participants, particularly the sensitivity of the research project.

The researcher will include some of the quotes selected for inclusion in her final analysis as examples of the themes represented. The researcher believes that being transparent about the process through which she selected quotes for inclusion in her analysis will help ensure that she does not unconsciously introduce bias into her presentation and interpretation of the data.

To improve transferability, detailed descriptions of the research environment, participant context, and thematic elements were provided, allowing readers to evaluate the

applicability of the findings to similar contexts. The measures collectively improved the credibility and robustness of the analytical process.

Research environments were divided by geographical location to establish the different contexts within which data was collected from participants. Participants located in the West Bank and East Jerusalem gave descriptions of security in the overall area, reliability of the Internet, and access to the location of the interviews. A participant located in Gaza also received very detailed documentation to describe the specific environmental conditions, which would have included interruptions in electricity, instability with the internet, and security issues, as well as how this created the environment within which data was collected.

In addition to documenting the demographics and professional characteristics of each of the participants, the study also documented how long the participants were practicing, what areas they specialize in, and the degree of engagement that participants had on Instagram. This documentation gives insight into the type of population that the sample was derived from.

Each theme that emerged from this research was supported by a description of the context associated with its emergence, included an analysis on whether the themes were applicable to all regions or only to regions with similar contextual characteristics. The contextualization of these findings allows readers to determine their own relevancy in their context and identify any areas where findings are specific to the Palestinian context or specific geographic locations within Palestine.

### **3.7 Study Limitations**

#### **❖ Gaza data instability and geographic disparity**

Geographic bias limits the study's applicability to the wider Palestinian context, with 85-90% from the West Bank and East Jerusalem and only one from Gaza. The sole Gaza participant collected data during frequent internet outages, security concerns, and military actions. A critical imbalance in data quality has affected the validity and reliability of Gaza-specific findings.

#### **❖ Generalizability of the Results is Limited and Relying on Inadequate Data from Gaza**

One reason that the finding cannot be utilized beyond the digital elitist group of Palestinian psychologists in Gaza is that the data cannot be considered representative. Shortened and often incomplete interviews, the result of both the internet limitations in that area and fears for interviewee safety, restrict the data collected from Gaza and are said to omit important contextual elements involved in the promotion of mental health via social media.

#### **❖ Internal, External, and Construct Validity Threats**

The Gaza threat landscape may have hindered participants' ability to critically reflect on their practices due to psychological distress. Lack of follow-up interviews affected initial findings validation. Depending on whether there is acute environmental stress or relative stability, "digital mental health advocacy" may be implemented differently, limiting data comparison across geographic areas.

❖ Analytical Bias and the Dominance of the Narrative

Considerable distance between two identification points for coding and theme development has been suggested to cause a bias due to the unequal prominence of both regions in the analyst's mind. Unconsciously favouring the West Bank and eastern and western portions of Jerusalem in coding and theme development, and the inability to understand the unique significance of Gaza data as a "voice," are examples of this.

❖ Compounds of Language Translation and the Impact of Emotional Stress on Response Rate Interviews in Arabic and publications in English lose the emotional connotation and cultural significance of the language in translation. The emotional impact of the subject matter discussed, coupled with pressure imposed by the demands of life in an environment of continuous warfare, has left the participants in Gaza less capable of articulating their feelings in the interview.

## Chapter Four

### Data Analysis

---

In this chapter, the outline of the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with six Palestinian mental health professionals who engage with (or reflect on) Instagram-based digital storytelling amidst the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The analysis for each participant appears in its own section, with a comparative synthesis section identifying thematic similarities and differences across participants. Thematic analysis, based on the work by Braun & Clarke (2006), is presented and takes into account the complex interrelationships of trauma and resistance, embodiment, and the politics of storytelling forged in colonized contexts. Each participant identification is anonymized and represented numerically (Participant 1 - 6) to preserve their identities. Following with a reflection of the researcher regarding the interviews.

#### 4.1 Interview Analysis

##### ➤ Participant One:

Participant one (P1), a resident of Gaza, was speaking while situated inside the space of an ongoing crisis. Storytelling for him was urgent, reactive, and historical—not reflective or therapeutic. In this sense, Instagram functions as a device for survival—not only emotional survival, but political and physical survival.

*"We use Instagram like oxygen. We tell our truth before we are killed."*

He spoke to the risks of mental health around repeated exposure, and he noted that trauma is more accurately not past, but unfolding.

*"These images, they are not just images. They are triggers. They burn through the screen."*

Table 4.1 Codes for Participant One

Code No.	Code Description
P1-C1	Storytelling in real time under siege
P1-C2	Instagram as a survival mechanism
P1-C3	Trauma as an ongoing event
P1-C4	Secondary trauma using technology
P1-C5	Humanitarianism through storytelling
P1-C6	Criticizing unregulated digital ethics

The interview with Participant One presents a substantial and contextual understanding of the transformative but also fraught space of digital storytelling in a war context. Here the themes identify multiple forms of digital storytelling: political testimony, therapeutic outlet, means of professional adaptation, and ethical space. Any future interventions will have to address all of these intersecting contexts if storytelling, or forms thereof, are to serve as healing, empowering, or achieving justice.

#### Theme 1: Digital Storytelling as a Source of Testimony and Visibility

Participant One specifically, referred to digital storytelling as in the case of Instagram., as being a critical way they could share first-hand, uncensored, immediate testimony of the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza. Palestinians posted digital narratives via text and images to detail their experiences of war, thus confronting the dominant narrative being espoused in global and Israeli media, while also taking a stand against injustice. The stories are personal, but they also serve as political witness:

*"These [stories] helped expose Israeli narratives and provide the real images of suffering in Gaza during this war."*

The participant was not attempting to equate their storytelling to the cultural and political tradition of ongoing oral (albeit digitally mediated) Palestinian storytelling, as a means to garner respect for their experience and gain the experience global elevation and solidarity.

#### Theme 2: The Double Psychological Impact of Digital Narratives

An ongoing theme is the varied psychological effects of digital storytelling narratives. Participant One identified two of the possible psychological effects:

1. Therapeutic Value - Sharing trauma on digital stories enables expression, social confirmation, and perhaps even some therapeutic experience: *"Sometimes talk, sharing pain and emotion with others enables a release of emotion."*
2. Re-traumatization Risk - Sharing graphic and traumatic content, without contextual framing and consent, could create a trauma response:

*"These scenes can cause secondary trauma... even for viewers outside Gaza."*

This theme highlights the need for trauma-informed digital storytelling, particularly where there is a high level of conflict.

#### Theme 3: Displacement Stories as the Most Impactful and Relatable Content

Participant One noted that when creating content about forced displacement is relatable, because it has a symbolic connection to historical trauma, like the Nakba:

*"The images of displacement... remind us of 1948. These images reflect a people who have been living under occupation for more than seventy years."*

Displacement stories affirm a collective memory of survival, injustice, and resistance, and often act as "memory devices" that relay past and present trauma.

#### Theme 4: Digital Mental Health Support Tools Are Emerging

The deterioration of health care, and previous healthcare practices, has forced people to use digital means to access health and psychological services. Participant One noted that there is increasing reliance on WhatsApp, Zoom and social media as places to provide mental health supports:

*"Now we offer service as we can... digital mental health supports... psychological first-aid is delivered as messages, posters, and even video consultations."*

Digital tools have become central for both communicating logistics and psychosocial supports and needs, as well as promoting resilience while people are under siege.

Theme 5: Preference for a Personal and Emotionally Authentic Voice.

Participant One suggested that using a personal and emotionally authentic language style evokes genuine emotion for audiences and affirms their personal stake in the story:

*"The meaning of personal language has more immediacy. It feels more plausible or closer to us sometimes and feels more emotionally impactful with the potential for more viewer engagement."*

This corresponds with the research literature about the importance of perceived authenticity of lived experience in storytelling and communication in the context of trauma.

Theme 6: Ethical Violations and the Absence of Regulation of Digital Content

The participant also articulated serious ethical violations related to no oversight and no ethical standards in regard to the digital content that is produced:

*"There are scenes of corpses, body parts... sometimes without consent, that can traumatize the viewer and doesn't respect the dignity of the victim."*

There is a real risk that unregulated digital content risks sensationalizing suffering and the privacy of victims and families. It raises implications for needing ethical protocols and procedures for informed consent in digital storytelling.

Theme 7: Future Aspirations for Digital Storytelling in Post-War Recovery

When asked about what would be the future for digital storytelling, specifically in post-war recovery and psychological reconstruction, Participant One explained:

*"After the war, we need to use this content for recovery—to send kids to school, to help people recover psychologically."*

In this prospective space, the concept of storytelling shifts from being able to represent trauma to being a form of healing, advocacy, and social reconstruction.

➤ Participant Two:

Participant 2 (P2), underscores the body as both a vessel of trauma and a mechanism for healing. Storytelling emerged, particularly in Arabic as a sensorial profession, allowing the participant to resurface her emotions and her history.

*"When I speak in Arabic about my pain, I can feel something settle in me."*

She described trauma symptoms through bodily sensations, for example, tightness in her chest, as indications of her emotional load. Digital storytelling was not an unproblematic experience: while it fostered resistance and self-expression, it became too much and she withdrew from the digital realm.

*"Sometimes, silence is the only way to survive."*

Table 4.2 Codes for Participant Two

Code №	Code Description
P2-C1	Storytelling as embodied practice
P2-C2	Voice as both political and emotional
P2-C3	Withdrawal as a coping strategy
P2-C4	Somatic trauma response
P2-C5	Critique of Western healing stories
P2-C6	Collectivity as witnessing able to oppose individualism.

The thematic evaluation of Participant Two's interview demonstrates how Instagram-based storytelling can continue to evolve as a personal and collective psychological tool in warfare. Examples from her interview indicate the therapeutic, emotional, ethical, and political aspects of digital storytelling, as it takes place in a prolonged conflict. She draws attention to how her personal and professional/activist representation became obscured by both the nature of how she physically engaged with her colleagues in the context of war and the way Instagram organized her interactions.

Theme 1: Instagram as an Instrument for Documentation, and a Form of Psychological Catharsis.

Participant Two pointed out the dual aspect of Instagram as a digital archive of trauma and also a therapeutic release for individuals undergoing bombardments. Those living in effort began posting on social media, with more people utilizing story features as a way to share their pain, fear, and existential thoughts while they were being bombarded; mostly in the form of captioned images and live updates. Self-presentation posts also allowed these individuals to author their narrative, which turned their unbearable personal suffering into a social form of digital testimony:

*"... they started writing long caption on their captions... it was just their way of letting out everything inside."*

This notion is supported in scholarship, where trauma narratives and testimony in digital media, or storytelling enable emotional release and group emotional release.

Theme 2: Emotional Contagion and Shared Psychological Suffering.

Participant Two noted that there were also shared psychological consequences for those who consumed continuous suffering content, particularly for those who had followers and diaspora communities watching the stories. The overwhelming exposure to images, graphic and emotional stories created helplessness, sadness, and psychological breakdowns in people watching the war from afar:

*"... people were breaking down from just seeing stories every day."*

The theme resonated with the scholarship on secondary trauma, and emotional contagion with a digital media context, as audiences are personally connected to the conflict, but physically distanced.

Theme 3: Professional Tension Between Empathy and Therapeutic Distance

Participant Two thought critically about being a mental health practitioner and the ethical, emotional dilemmas of being in a therapeutic practice, while at the same time carrying the same trauma or suffering as her clients. She stated:

*"In the moment I sometimes would have an emotional collapse during a session ... and felt pressure to embody strong for my clients."*

What is demonstrated is the emotional labour of therapists in war zones, whereby a therapist shifts between being a caregiver and being a co-sufferer.

Theme 4: Therapeutic Relationships and the Digitally Mediated War Zone

Instagram became an "extension" or an "add on" to the therapists therapeutic space. Participants began reaching out through Instagram by sending private messages, commenting on stories, and even casually engaging with mental health information. It became a hybrid public and private space that blended both public activism and private care:

*" Clients were sending me messages through Instagram ... it became a therapeutic space."*

The significant finding in this theme is how public social media changed the traditional boundaries of professionalism, digital identity, and mental health supports.

Theme 5: Digital Storytelling as both a Feminist and Political Act

Participant Two confronted how women in Gaza used Instagram to share stories of trauma but also to deliberately resist silence and enact some political agency. Many of these stories reflected on survival, being a caregiver under bombardment and navigating spaces of loss on a daily basis:

*"Women got onto Instagram to share about their day-to-day survival... it was a form of resistance."*

This, theme foregrounds storytelling as gendered and political—in that storytelling claims visibility and space within a patriarchal and militarized reality.

Theme 6: Hope, Survival and the Context for Narrative Continuity.

Participant Two highlighted something important, that beyond trauma, we should work towards transitioning digital storytelling into narratives of how to survive and recover. Participant Two called for addressing shifting content from simply showing trauma to post-traumatic growth, community reconstruction and hope:

*"There's a need to shift from just showing trauma to showing how its [people] Trying to live!"*

This theme suggests an imagining of storytelling that is future-oriented, that facilitates psychosocial healing and narrative agency.

➤ Participant Three:

Participant three (P3), she described the hierarchy of suffering that prompts personal suffering to feel illegitimate in comparison to collective suffering.

*"I couldn't cry for my own trauma, because other people were dying."*

She also critiqued the generalization of psychological nomenclature such as "toxic" and "trauma" in digital spaces; noting that using this language imports a Western conceptual framework that does not match the Palestinian experience.

*"We just started calling everything toxic. Even our relationships to our land or our history."*

Table 4.3 Codes for Participant Three

Code No.	Code Description
P3-C1	Hierarchy of suffering
P3-C2	Emotional silencing using comparison
P3-C3	Distrust in imported psychological language
P3-C4	Group storytelling as feminist resistance work
P3-C5	Raw real-time content as emotional provocateur
P3-C6	Political grief and validation

The interview with participant three showed an insightful, critical, and complex reflection on the relationship between digital storytelling and mental health. Participant Three located weaknesses of Instagram as a therapeutic practice, but emphasized it can be powerful in collective witnessing, advocating for change, and using against oppression. Her exploration advanced a more complex understanding of trauma, healing, identity, and

belonging within the legacies of colonial violence, while also critiquing easy therapeutic practices to call for relational, grounded, and contextually relevant work.

#### Theme 1: Transforming Individual Pain into Collective Healing

Participant Three shared a key difference between the experience of being in a therapeutic relationship and group healing. Her work is predominantly based on individual therapy; however, she noted that there is great potential in group spaces, particularly for women who are involved in patriarchal and violent situations. She spoke of how she felt:

*"The collective space, sharing stories with women who may or may not be living similar experiences becomes empowering...where I can be validated without lessening my value."*

This vignette illustrates the use of storytelling as a form of belonging and empowerment in the context of, what has been described here as, historical violence either familial violence or as an effect of political violence. In her stories the participant indicated that group healing is not separate from trauma; often individual trauma, when transformed, allows one to join together with others to share in the collective experience.

#### Theme 2: Digital Storytelling as Public Witnessing, not Therapy

Participant Three acknowledged that she was not an active social media user, but she also noted the extent to which digital platforms allow for the amplification of human suffering so people across the globe are aware. When talking about digital spaces, Participant Three drew a distinction between witnessing in a digital space and witnessing as a therapeutic project:

*"Personally, I am not very active online...but the digital space is a way of highlighting suffering. It's not always about healing; it's about bringing the world into what we are experiencing."*

Participant Three viewed digital storytelling as a highly political act rather than a clinical one. In this sense, Instagram will become a space to disrupt denial, seek acknowledgement, and build global solidarities, rather than a space of disciplined healing.

#### Theme 3: Doubt Toward Online Therapeutic Material

The participant made critical comments regarding the inundation of psychological content on Instagram, especially during the war. She pointed out the oversimplification and the pressures for unrealistic therapeutic expectations:

*"When I'm advised in a time of war to 'have gratitude, at least I'm still breathing,' that feels violent. I already have my own pressure to deal with."*

She indicated that digital content burdens individuals who are in crisis, framing healing as an individualized project instead of a systemic and relational experience. She even questioned the professional ethics of a lot of these online content creators, emphasizing that:

*"Therapy isn't a sequence of steps that one goes through. It is a relationship, a dynamic context of safety and harmony."*

#### Theme 4: Collective Consciousness and the Recognition Paradox

One of the more evaluative lines of thinking was the recognition paradox. Participant Three reflected on how validation from the outside, particularly from the global community, gives Palestinians legitimacy, but at the same time, there is a risk of narrative extraction or voyeurism:

*"We want to be seen. But it hurts to think we need death, rubble, and blood for the world to see our humanity."*

Here, digital storytelling is acting as both a mirror and a battlefield: Palestinians are using the platform of Instagram to replace their narratives, but they are only replacing their narratives through visibility of suffering. She called for a re-rooting of narrative legitimacy in the Palestinian collective, and not in foreign acknowledgement:

*"The Palestinian collective should be a stronger reality than the global gaze. We need to start telling our story for our purposes, and not for any recognition at all."*

➤ Participant Four:

Participant four (P4) speaks about the burden of being a visible Palestinian online. He feels a moral and political obligation to be the face of his people, but it is draining emotionally.

*"You can't fall apart when you're expected to carry the grief of a nation."*

He positioned storytelling as an archive of survival and refusal. Anger, pathologized in normal psychological discourse is positioned here as legit and necessary.

*"If I'm not angry, I'm not paying attention."*

Table 4.4 Codes for Participant Four

<b>Code No.</b>	<b>Code Description</b>
<b>P4-C1</b>	Digital storytelling as political archive
<b>P4-C2</b>	Anger as legitimate emotional response
<b>P4-C3</b>	Emotional labor of visibility
<b>P4-C4</b>	Performance of composure
<b>P4-C5</b>	Refusal of emotional sanitization
<b>P4-C6</b>	Storytelling as a national obligation

Participant Four offered a sincere, even-handed appraisal of the complex intersectionality of trauma and digital storytelling, as well as the ethics of the profession. It is necessary to stress that while they acknowledged the relationship between storytelling as a means of resistance and shared grief, they also acknowledged the psychological costs involved, the challenges of using digital spaces to heal and tell stories in more meaningful ways, and the duality of the clinician's identity as helpers and as part of a collective of traumatized people. They push our theorizing into more nuanced understandings of the multifaceted roles of narrative practices within a context of violence and disruption to the psyche.

Theme 1: Using the Narrative of Pain as Resistance and Coping

Participant Four viewed digital storytelling as a form of psychological release and a way of resisting erasure. People used platforms like Instagram to express their grief, hopelessness, and outrage, with the intent to, among other things, archive destruction, and to stake their dignity and humanity:

*"People are not posting these stories to complain—they are posting them to validate their existence—that their pain matters."*

Otherwise, telling stories during siege functions as a form of survival—a way to hold on to coherence and visibility amid erasure.

Theme 2: The Politics of Collective Grief and Empathic Alignment

Participant Four articulated a collective process of grieving, mediated through social media. Instagram provided an opportunity to witness suffering collectively, allowing people from remote locations to mourn and express solidarity:

*"Even people outside of Gaza were crying with us. We were not alone in our pain."*

This collective digital mourning also emphasizes the role of shared stories in cultivating affective connections and validating a collective identity even in instances of fragmentation.

### Theme 3: The Therapeutic Limits of Digital Engagement

Although digital narratives can elicit strong emotional responses, the participant voiced hesitation around the therapeutic efficacy of online material. They indicated that while there is clearly a difference between catharsis and therapy, trauma will need a structured therapeutic approach rather than expression:

*"Writing a post can help for a bit, but not instead of therapy. The wound is much bigger than likes."*

This theme prompts awareness of the limitations of digital space in surmounting the enormity of psychological trauma that can stem from repeated exposure to violence.

### Theme 4: Professional Dissonance and Ethical Responsibility

The participant shared the ethical tensions experienced by mental health practitioners using social media in times of war. They recognized an ethical dilemma between wishing to make public advocacy statements and the expectation of maintaining professional distance and concern for avoiding traumatizing imagery:

*"Sometimes I want to scream with everybody, but I have to stay grounded—for my clients."*

This theme captures the emotional work and ethical balancing act that psychologists must navigate as both witnesses and agents of survival while trying to provide stability amidst their own trauma.

### ➤ Participant Five:

Participant five (P5) emphasized the ancestral history of Palestinian storytelling. In her view, speaking is not merely expressive, it's sacred, it's communal. She was deeply critical of the construction of trauma as content; she sees stories as sacred exchanges.

*"When I speak it's her voice, coming through me."*

She also questioned the aestheticizing of suffering, to use Palestinian suffering as a social media spectacle, and rejected it outright.

*"Don't make our stories into something beautiful to consume."*

Table 4.5 Codes for Participant Five

<b>Code No.</b>	<b>Code Description</b>
<b>P5-C1</b>	Storytelling as ancestral heirloom
<b>P5-C2</b>	Sacrality of narrative
<b>P5-C3</b>	Rejection of aestheticized trauma
<b>P5-C4</b>	Political mourning
<b>P5-C5</b>	Rejection of binary survivor/victim frameworks
<b>P5-C6</b>	Storytelling as relational ethics

Participant Five's account encapsulates a layered and complex, embodied experience of engaging in digital storytelling in the midst of active warfare. They framed the act of digital storytelling as political resistance, a space for emotional breakdown, and a matter of ethical obligation with full awareness of the limitations of the practice in producing healing. Their account also highlighted the unresolved tension of engaging as a storyteller for online advocacy and public political discourse, and the direct psychological vulnerability of witness, with a desire for more physical and communal care.

#### Theme 1: Digital Storytelling as a Form of Political Resistance and Survival

Participant Five emphasized their Instagram storytelling as an intentional act of survival, and also an act of resistance. By publicly sharing their experiences and the experiences of others, Palestinians were able to show they were in control of their own experiences, documenting a reality that was systematically denied or ignored by outsiders, as they explain:

*"Posting was our way to shout. We resisted that we should be dying silently."*

Here, digital narrative serves to demonstrate self-affirmation, and re-establish through digital means a right to see, to remember, and to be acknowledged as human.

#### Theme 2: The Cost of Emotional Exhaustion and Endurance of Constant Visibility

The participant described the emotional strain of remaining visible at a time of extensive bombardment. Although they recognized the therapeutic impulse, sharing their lives online invariably took on the form of continual documentation, which also led to a kind of psychological fatigue and emotional fragmentation:

*"you're always online, you're always seeing and sharing pain, so at some point you just break."*

This captures dual realities of visibility, as a possibility for empowerment, and as a relentless psychological strain.

#### Theme 3: Managing Public Identity and Professional Role on Instagram

Participant Five discussed the difficulty of being a psychologist, while being affected personally from the war. The digital space straddled the three categories of private suffering, public advocacy and professional duty: *"I was posting for clients. I was crying while posting, and they were expecting me to show strength."*

This theme exemplified the competing forces of performance-based resilience and experiential vulnerability for mental health professionals in a crisis context.

#### Theme 4: The Promise of Testimony, and the Responsibility of Representation

Telling stories became a way to purge personally and document testimony for those unable to use their voice. The participant also described the ethical burden of documenting and representing the story of others: *"I had to post for some people, who asked me to share their suffering. I felt a moral obligation, but what if I hurt them more?"*

This theme brings to the forefront the ethics of narrative representation, and the therapist's role in re-presenting themselves and others as witness and mediator respectively.

#### Theme 5: The Need for Healing Outside the Screen

While digital storytelling brought brief reprieve and Participant Five acknowledged a digital platform as a capacity for healing, they affirmed that there are healing processes that go past being online. The screen is not equipped to hold either the trauma, nor the depth psychological restoration:

*"We need spaces to scream, cry, remember—not just post. Healing is a body thing, not just story online."*

This theme recognizes the need for physical, embodied, and community-oriented responses to trauma that go beyond the visibility of an online-post.

➤ **Participant Six:**

Participant six (P6) combined storytelling with cultural practice, daily ritual, and resistance. She associated healing with collective and decolonial practices that occurred outside of the medical clinic.

*"Drinking coffee together is an act of survival. We resist by staying human."*

She construed storytelling on Instagram as both psychological and political, and that contestation storytelling provided validation to self and to others. She cautioned against excessive, repetitive images of trauma for fear of re-traumatization.

*"We have to be careful we don't collude and dissolve into everyone else grief."*

Table 4.6 Codes of Participant Six

<b>Code No.</b>	<b>Code Description</b>
<b>P6-C1</b>	Storytelling as cultural continuity
<b>P6-C2</b>	Daily rituals as healing micro-resistance
<b>P6-C3</b>	From victimization to agency
<b>P6-C4</b>	From exposure to re-traumatization
<b>P6-C5</b>	Collective healing as opposed to individual therapy
<b>P6-C6</b>	Validation of self through digital presence

The interview identifies a considered, ethically informed perspective on the intersections of digital storytelling, trauma healing, and collective resistance. Participant Six recognizes the potential for transformative work and the ethical challenges of digital space during genocide. Her own story enriches a growing conversation that understands healing not simply as an individual act, but as a political, cultural, and spiritual one.

These findings add to the comparative analysis with the other participants and will enrich broader theoretical models related to digital resistance, cultural trauma, and mental health in colonized spaces.

**Theme 1: Digital Storytelling as Collective Testimony and Resistance**

When discussing digital storytelling, Participant Six conceptualizes it as both a tool for healing and resistance. While there are therapeutic benefits of storytelling, particularly for survivors in Gaza, she pointed out the political relevance of telling their stories online: *"We aren't only telling stories to heal - we are also telling stories to resist being erased."*

Digital storytelling becomes a method of existing despite colonial disappearing tactics. Participants take back their power and visibility by sharing and amplifying their personal and collective suffering via social media.

**Theme 2: From Victimhood to Agency: Changing the Frame**

A theme throughout the interview was how stories move from a story of people being victimized, to embracing people as active agents in their healing. For this participant, engaging in this reframing is both spiritual and cultural:

*"You are active even if you are silent. You are active with your tears."* This reframing is understood through decolonial therapy models: the focus is not on the client pathology, but the power and dignity of the client. The participant believes every stimulus in crisis can have a sense of therapeutic resistance and survival.

### Theme 3: Community-based Healing, and the End of Individualism

Participant Six described the renewed, collective healing-oriented practices that arose with the October 7 war. Unlike individualistic practices, the digital space allowed for collective grief and grieving; communal resistance; and renewed participation in shared rituals:

*"Cleaning the rubble together, making coffee in tents — these are not only survival acts, they are therapeutic rituals."*

Shared digital storytelling sites offered opportunities for communal witnessing of suffering and memories, as well as, a reclaiming of connected, cultural, shared values and shared grieving. They also offered opportunities to challenge aging forms of colonization, or fragmentation, of personal and cultural narratives and awareness.

### Theme 4: Faith, Spirituality, and Resilience

Spiritual beliefs and practices were described as integral to therapeutic resilience. The participant noted that many Palestinians, in the context of abandonment and hopelessness, resort to their faith not only as a coping strategy, but to give themselves existential meaning:

*"Your prayer, your breath, your presence - these are practises of resistance and healing."*

Spirituality is not separate from the political realities of everyday life and struggle; it is part of the narrative of the resistance, of recognising one's self-worth and connection to others within on-going trauma.

### Theme 5: The Risks of Overexposure and Ethical issues Around Digital Therapy

The benefits of digital storytelling notwithstanding, Participant Six identifies ethical risks related to privacy, re-traumatization, and digital surveillance:

*"Sometimes the digital space becomes a wound that never closes."*

She is critical of profiting from exposed pain for visibility and the ways in which the boundaries around the psychological content shared on the internet are undefined or completely absent. She warned that (overexposure to) pain results in emotional numbing and desensitization, given that Palestinians experience constant graphic images.

### Theme 6: Decolonial Stories and Indigenous Knowledge

The participant encourages decolonial therapeutic models that manifest in Palestinian cultural histories. She emphasized that she does not support using Western models as an overarching experience or approach for therapy, but rather supports the creation of localized and rooted, therapeutic rituals:

*"We're not trying to remake western therapy. We're trying to make our own ways of healing."*

Digital storytelling contributes to the activation of intergenerational memory and the rooting of people in stories of their ancestors' survival.

## **4.2 Comparative Thematic Analysis:**

### Thematic Similarities

All the participants recognize storytelling as both expressive and politically and socially loaded. Each describes story as a lifeline in the fight against fragmentation and erasure. There was a common concern about the tension between ethical representation and emotional revealing, particularly on platforms that can be exploitative of trauma and suffering.

A theme that emerged across all the participant's stories was collective healing. The participants did not describe healing as singular closure or catharsis, but rather healing that involved a collective that resisted fragmentation through rituals, ancestors, and spaces for group presence and listening without advice.

#### Thematic Differences

Storytelling was mediated and shaped by geographic location. Participant 1, who was living through violent political and personal events, described a framing of storytelling as survival and evidence. Other participants, who were located at a distance, described storytelling in terms of mourning, legacy, and community-based healing.

The modality of expression also differed. Participant 2 and 5 focused on speech and somatic connection, while participants 3 and 4 conceptualized storytelling as a curated or archived digital presence or political archiving. Participant 6 positioned her storytelling in continuity, everyday act or cultural ritual.

Lastly, there were differences in degrees of emotional transparency expressed by participants (e.g., 2, 5) and discomfort from some participants (e.g., 4) around being publicly visible and emotionally available.

#### Comparative Analysis via tables

Table 4.7 Overlapping Themes

Theme	Participants Involved
Storytelling as Resistance	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Embodied/Somatic Healing	2, 5, 6
Ethical Dilemmas of Digital Visibility	1, 3, 4, 5
Collective Grief and Communal Witnessing	1, 3, 5, 6
Anger and Emotional Complexity	3, 4, 5
Critique of Western Mental Health Models	2, 3, 5, 6

Table 4.8 Divergences in Storytelling Orientation

Dimension	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 4
Preferred Mode	Visual/live urgency	Embodied voice	Political archive
Relationship to Visibility	Life-saving tool	Intermittent/silent	Obligatory presence
Emotional Focus	Raw grief/urgency	Vulnerability	Anger/Responsibility

Table 4.9 Primary Medium of Storytelling

Medium	Participants
Oral/Speech-based	2, 5
Visual/Digital Imagery	1, 3
Written/Curated Text	4, 6
Ritual/Symbolic Acts	5, 6

Table 4.10 Key Emotional Registers Referenced

Emotion	Participants
Grief	1, 3, 5, 6
Anger	3, 4, 5
Guilt	2, 3
Fatigue/Exhaustion	1, 4

Table 4.11 Political Orientation

Orientation	Participants
Anti-colonial resistance	1, 2, 4, 5, 6
Feminist and relational	2, 3, 5
Humanitarian mobilization	1, 3, 6
Ethical critique of storytelling	3, 4, 5, 6

Table 4.12 Emotional and Ethical Profile

Participant	Emotional Tone	Relationship to Audience	View on Visibility	Role of Ancestry/Heritage	Risk Awareness
1	Urgent, raw	Speaking to the world as witness	Essential for survival	Indirect, focused on immediate events	High — risk of death under siege
2	Vulnerable, embodied	Speaking to self and close community	Intermittent for self-preservation	Strong cultural and linguistic ties	Medium — emotional exhaustion
3	Reflective, critical	Speaking to peers for solidarity	Cautious, curated presence	Feminist and collective legacy	Medium — guilt over comparative suffering
4	Resolute, composed	Speaking to both Palestinians and global allies	Obligatory presence despite strain	National historical continuity	High — emotional burnout
5	Sacred, ancestral	Speaking to Palestinians across generations	Protective, selective sharing	Central — oral traditions as duty	Medium — commodification of trauma
6	Steady, nurturing	Speaking to community for morale	Balanced, sustainable engagement	Cultural rituals as resistance	Medium — retraumatization risk

In this chapter the researcher illustrated the complex, diverse and politically significant of Instagram-based storytelling among Palestinian mental health practitioners. The

practitioners occupied different geographical locations, expressed diverse emotional tones and styles of expression, yet they all came together in their comprehension or knowing of storytelling as an ethical and existential entailment. Through voice, ritual, visual media, and collective voice they are engaged in a continuous struggle to uphold dignity, truth, and historical memory in the context of genocide.

### **4.3 Researcher Reflection**

The interview analysis indicated significant differences in the emotional tone and interpretive frameworks used by participants. Variability within each participant was influenced by their prior personal and professional experience, including previous attempts to psychologically support individuals during periods of political turmoil, being part of crisis interventions, and working in contexts of direct military aggression. For some participants, at the time of sharing stories in relation to the genocide in Gaza, the impetus for sharing stories in this way was solely for the sake of solidarity, visibility, and recognition, as a moment in time and as part of a more general historical record, rather than it necessarily consisting of any psychological recovery, nor therapeutic healing process.

What was agreed upon by multiple participants was that distinctively psychological content that is professionally informed on Instagram can question the dominant myths around categories of mental illness and psychological suffering, but those same participants also recognized that it could be potentially damaging if it opened up psychological wounds that could not be closed or contained. There was a hesitancy across the sample to post material that could end up being misinterpreted, overly generalized, or inadvertently harm an audience. The prominent purpose of their digital engagement was framed as supportive to meaning-making, shaping visions for what the future could be and making space for eventual healing. Furthermore, participants consistently reported that the stories coming from Gaza during the genocide interrupted the legitimacy of humanitarian and human rights organizations. For example, one participant emphasized that the rationalization of the formation of the Israeli state has depended on an ongoing, complicated use of storytelling and collective trauma as justification for political means.

The findings also suggest that participants envisioned healing through storytelling not as a clinical endpoint, but rather a survival practice. In this context, healing was related to the assertion of presence and amplification of muffled voices to counter structural, legal and digital censorship. While some participants were initially hesitant to fully endorse the therapeutic dimensions of digital storytelling, and yet several moved from an initial skepticism to a more supportive position toward defending, together with a select few, the potential of digital storytelling as a supportive practice. A notable contrast emerged between the perspective of the participants based in Gaza, and the perspective of those based outside of Gaza. Due to the ongoing genocide, the researcher was only able to conduct a single complete interview inside Gaza; interviews were cancelled or otherwise disrupted by the failure of infrastructure and displacement, and due to safety concerns. The Gaza-based participant described their situation several times as, "we are in survival, not recovery," insisting on visibility or audience engagement as a way to gain immediate support, online or in person. During the discussion, this participant was also clear that

storytelling online is powerful because it can create a sense of shared experience, lessen feelings of isolation and perhaps engender some psychological support to endure, even if not recovery.

As a whole, this reflection highlights a notable tension: participants resisted the notion of digital storytelling as having primarily therapeutic ends, yet through dialogue, many acknowledged the ways that digital storytelling could create a relationship with psychological resilience in some ways. These reflections imply that in contexts of ongoing mass violence, even the smallest acts of account and narrative—such as publishing a single post—serve as acts of resistance to feelings of helplessness, reinforce individual and collective presence, and symbolically assert the right to be present, and the right to be heard.

## Chapter Five

---

### Discussion & Conclusion

This chapter aims to reflect on the overarching theories, culture, and politics of the findings within the thematic analysis (Chapter Four). This chapter, within the framework of decolonial psychology, trauma theory, feminist theory, and digital media studies, analyzes the main themes that arose from the six interviews with Palestinian clinical psychologists. The discussion analyzes the impact of digital storytelling on therapeutic practice, relationship with self and others, collective resilience, and social activism within the framework of colonial violence in Gaza.

#### 5.1 Digital Storytelling as Psycho-political Resistance

Throughout the interviews conducted, Instagram, and social media storytelling emerged as a form and medium of communication as well as a form of a psycho-political act. Almost all the participants regarded storytelling as a form of resistance towards oppression, invisibility, and erasure caused by the Israeli occupation and the mainstream Western media. This is akin to Masalha's (2012) concept of narrative decolonization where storytelling is a form of historical reclamation and collective a act of decolonization (Masalha, 2012).

As one of the participants described, Instagram is a space for "*showing the world what we're going through*" (Participant Three), reclaiming narrative control and legitimacy from the spectacle. Participant One emphasized that "*Instagram allowed us to speak when the world refused to listen.*" And as Participant Five recollects, "*Every post felt like a scream in the void, yet somehow, it reached people.*" The dynamic, audiovisual, and participatory capabilities of Instagram made it a space for testimony and counter-narrative construction (Chouliaraki, he ironic spectator: Solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism, 2013).

#### 5.2 Therapeutic Expression and Its Limits

Although digital storytelling offered a venue for emotional release, its healing potential was disputed. Some participants shared that recounting trauma was helpful in managing

stress, describing it as a relief valve for pressure and tension. As Participant One described, *"It helped in expressing the pain, even if just for a moment."*

Even so, the fleeting quality of this relief was a reality for all participants. Many cautioned that Instagram was no substitute for therapy that is embodied and relational. As Participant Four stated, *"writing a post can help momentarily, but it doesn't replace therapy."* Participant Two noted, *"There was no time to breathe, to reflect. I just posted and moved to the next trauma."* This aligns with critical digital emotional labor theories, which argue that public emotional expression does not result in healing (Papacharissi, 2015).

Participant Three criticized the pervasive commodification of therapy on social media, invoking overly simplistic and inappropriate coping strategies such as, *"be grateful you're alive."* Especially during periods of immense suffering, the phrase serves as a type of psychological attack. These comments relate to the critique of neoliberal so-called wellness culture and its lack of recognition of social injustices (Ahmed, 2010).

### **5.3 Gendered Narratives and Feminist Acts of Resistance**

A few participants pointed out the specific gendered aspects of digital storytelling, particularly the way women used Instagram to document the daily struggles of surviving the war. For example, Participant Two noted that *"women started posting about their daily survival... it was a form of resistance."* From the account of Participant Four, *"I used to follow women who had to post from shelters. That, to me, was a reminder that care had not ceased, even amid rubble."*

This illustrates a feminist ideology in which a woman's private life intertwines with the public sphere, in some way, becomes political. By documenting the daily routines of preparing meals in the tent, attending to their children in bomb shelters, Palestinian women provided and denied agency to themselves and resisted the available narratives of victimhood. Abu-Lughod (2013) explains that such acts of self-representation, which may be critiqued from the perspective of postcolonial feminism, disrupt the framing of Western feminist 'savior' narratives and center contextualized, feminist resistance from the margins (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

Moreover, the grief and caregiving roles assumed by women therapists emphasizes the layers of composite fragility—the woman body, a professional figure, and a Palestinian under siege. Participant Two expressed, *"I was mothering my children and my clients simultaneously."*

### **5.4 Ethical Dilemmas and the Global Gaze**

Concerns around ethics surfaced in each individual interview. Emotional triggers and the potential for re-traumatization as well as the ethics around the online representation of humanitarian crises were all voiced as topics of discomfort. Participant Five mentioned, *"Some people asked me to post for them, to share their pain. I felt a duty, but also fear—what if I harm them more?"*

This showcases the discomfort that arises from conflicting interests of advocacy and exploitation in a context where trauma risks being performed for or gaped at by a global

audience. Participant Three's "*need for blood for recognition*" critique resonates with Chouliaraki's (2013) critique of post-humanitarianism where empathy is conditioned by the gaze of spectacle instead of being grounded in justice (Chouliaraki, 2013).

Participant One has noted, "*I stopped showing children's faces. It didn't feel right anymore.*" It is especially chronic for practitioners who simultaneously play the role of public communicators as the boundary between clinical ethics and political activism becomes highly fluid. The absence of ethical parameters in the context of digital storytelling in crises is a gap that is calling out for focused, interdisciplinary, and applied research.

## **5.5 Decolonial and Culturally Grounded Healing**

One of the more unique contributions came from Participant Six, who proposed decolonial therapeutic models rooted in Palestinian communal and spiritual systems. This participant advocated for collective forms of healing, which integrates prayer and ritual, recalling deep shared traditions, in contrast to individually focused therapies typical in the West.

*"We are not here to replicate Western therapy. We are here to create our own healing models."*

This aligns with the advocacy for culturally relevant therapy and indigenous psychologies (Adalah-NYU, 2020). We are reminded by the decolonial critique that therapy is not culturally neutral; colonized contexts are in need of healing that is politically and culturally relevant.

Participant Six's spiritual framing of resistance reinterprets it as not solely political, but also as an act of the sacred. Praying under bombardment and the act of sweeping rubble together transforms into symbolic acts of restoration, rooted in what (Fanon, 1963) called "native culture as a weapon of resistance." Participant Six also noted, "*The resistance is also spiritual. My grandmother's prayers are louder than bombs.*"

## **5.6 The Therapist as Healer and Survivor**

The complexities of the dual identity of professionals and a traumatized collective was a reality that all the participants engaged with. Participant Two admitted to sobbing during sessions and Participant Four said the following: "*Sometimes I want to scream with everybody, but I have to stay grounded—for my clients.*"

As expressed by Participant One: "*I didn't know if I was helping or hurting—everything felt blurred.*" This duality goes beyond the blurring of the clinician and the therapeutic roles that is traditionally understood and reveals the shortcomings of Western clinical frameworks in the face of collective trauma. The normative understanding of compassion fatigue, outlined by Figley (2002), is applicable, but in Palestine, the concept is further complicated by political grief, siege, and chronic violence (Figley, 2002).

Participants exhibited resilience in collective mourning, radical honesty, and relational attunement, rather than in emotional detachment. The gathered insights suggest that the reality of suffering communities, where healing must occur, calls for reconfiguration of the therapeutic frameworks.

## **5.7 Implications for Future Practice and Research**

The implications of this study are as follows:

Crisis creates a need for trauma-informed digital ethics; guidance is needed to facilitate therapist and activist practice surrounding digital storytelling in the context of crises.

- Culturally situated therapy; mental health intervention can incorporate indigenous knowledge, rituals, and community-oriented practice.
- Therapy is a major political act and prompts reconsiderations around clinical boundaries; most therapists practicing in conflict zones through digital media will require models that are not only affirming of client vulnerability, but recognizing of emotional and political subjectivity that is not pathologized.
- Policy and accountability of platforms; social media platforms should be working to understand, recognize, and account for the mental health risks it produces for users who are constantly exposed to trauma as well as working towards creating platforms for storytelling that are safe.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the complex, layered meanings of the stories shared online by Palestinian psychologists during war. Storytelling was not a neutral act; the act of storytelling embraced resistance, therapy, burden, and care. The participants responded with thoughtful comments on the emotional, political, and ethical implications that are at stake in digital visibility particularly when contextualized through a settler-colonial lens.

Together, the narratives provided by the participants suggest that western therapeutic models are limited and stressed the need for a framework that is culturally situated, decolonial, and trauma-informed. As the psychological impacts of war, occupation, and digital witnessing weigh heavily, new practices of healing must emerge rooted in a framework of community, ethics, and justice.

## References

- 7amleh. (2024). *7amleh annual report 2024*. 7amleh—Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media. Retrieved from <https://7amleh.org/annual24/eng/>
- Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim women need saving?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Adalah-NYU. (2020). *Decolonizing therapy: A Palestinian framework for healing*. Adalah Justice Project & NYU.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Al Jazeera. (2023, December 21). *Entire Gaza population facing hunger crisis, famine risk: UN-backed report*. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/entire-gaza-population-facing-hunger-crisis-famine-risk-un-backed-report>
- Allan, D. (2013). *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile*. Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press.
- ALLMEP. (2024). *Digital storytelling in Israel-Palestine since October 7*. Alliance for Middle East Peace. Retrieved from <https://allmep.org/resource/digital-storytelling-israel-palestine-since-october-7/>
- Assmann, J. (2011). *Cultural memory and early civilization: Writing, remembrance, and political imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Awwad, G., Dunagan, L., Gamba, D., & Rayan, T. N. (2025). Collective memory and narrative cohesion: A computational study of Palestinian refugee oral histories in Lebanon. *arXiv preprint*.
- Baym, N. K. (2015). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age (2nd ed.)*. Polity Press.
- Bruner, J. (2004). Life as narrative. *Social Research*, 691–710.
- Choo, Y. B., Abdullah, T., & Nawi, A. M. (2020). Digital storytelling vs. oral storytelling: An analysis of the art of telling stories now and then. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 46-50.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2013). *he ironic spectator: Solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2013). *The ironic spectator: Solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society*, 373–391.
- Dearden, N. (2020). Digital storytelling, resistance, and affect: Palestinian youth reclaim narrative agency in transnational media spaces. *Media, Culture & Society*, 524–540.
- Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. (2023). *Seventy-one percent of Gaza's population experiences extreme hunger, Euro-Med Monitor study says*. Palestinian Information Center (Palinfo). Retrieved from <https://english.palinfo.com/news/2023/12/19/311448/>
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Figley, C. R. (2002). *Compassion fatigue: Psychotherapists' chronic lack of self-care*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.

- Gaza Community Mental Health Programme. (2024, July 16). *Nine months of Israel's war on Gaza: The mental health impacts & the GCMHP's response*. Retrieved from Gaza Community Mental Health Programme: <https://www.gcmhp.org/news/856>
- Gubrium, A. (2009). Digital storytelling: An emergent method for health promotion research and practice. *Health Promotion Practice*, 186S–191S.
- Gubrium, A., & Harper, K. (2013). *Participatory visual and digital research in action*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Gubrium, A., & Turner, K. (2011). Digital storytelling as an emergent method for social research and practice. In Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *The handbook of emergent technologies in social research* (pp. 469-491). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hammoudeh, W. (2020). Mental health in Palestine: Intersection of politics, economy, and health. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 299–300.
- Hariri, F., & Mohi-Ud-Din, M. (2024, March 20). *The filmmaker using storytelling to heal trauma*. Retrieved from TIME magazine: <https://time.com/6958530/storytelling-heal-trauma-mohsin-mohi-ud-din/>
- Highfield, T., & Leaver, T. (2016). Instagrammatics and digital methods: Studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji. *Communication Research and Practice*, 47-62.
- Hull, G. A., & Katz, M.-L. (2006). Crafting an agentive self: Case studies of digital storytelling. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 41, 43-81.
- IDWA. (2020). *Story-sharing for healing: Narrative empowerment for survivors of violence in Papua New Guinea*. International Women's Development Agency.
- Iseke, J. (2011). Indigenous storytelling as research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 559–577.
- Jabr, S., & Berger, E. (2017). Trauma in Palestine. *Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 309–317.
- Khurshid, A., Baroudi, L., & Salem, M. (2024). Digital witnessing and youth resilience: Narratives from Gaza's social media frontlines. *Journal of Conflict and Media Studies*, 45-67.
- Khurshid, S., Toor, H., & Hanif, R. (2021). Traumatizing impressions on young social media consumers: Reflections on the Israel–Palestine crisis. *Voices Against Torture: International Journal on Human Rights*, 1-17.
- Kirmayer, L. J., Dandeneau, S., Marshall, E., Phillips, M. K., & Williamson, K. J. (2011). Rethinking resilience from Indigenous perspectives. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 84-91.
- Kirmayer, L. J., Gone, J. P., & Mos, J. (2014). Rethinking historical trauma. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 299–319.
- Korteweg, L., & Russell, C. (2012). Decolonizing + Indigenizing = Moving Environmental Education Towards Reconciliation. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 5–14.
- Lambert, J. (2013). *Digital storytelling: Capturing lives, creating community (4th ed.)*. New York: Routledge.

- Lenette, C. (2019). *Arts-based methods in refugee research: Creating sanctuary*. Singapore: Springer.
- Lenette, C., Cox, L., & Brough, M. (2015). Digital storytelling as a social work tool: Learning from ethnographic research with women from refugee backgrounds. *British Journal of Social Work*, 988-1005.
- Longman, M. (2023, November 14). How to cope with watching war unfold. *Teen Vogue*. Retrieved from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-to-cope-with-watching-war-unfold>
- Lundby, K. (2009). *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories: Self-representations in new media*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Mabrouk, H. (2021). *Digital storytelling and postcolonial identity: Narratives of resistance in Palestine*. University of London.
- Marie, M., Hannigan, B., & Jones, A. (2018). Mental health needs and services in the West Bank, Palestine. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 3-9.
- Masalha, N. (2012). *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London: Zed Books.
- McKernan, B. (2024, April 14). Chronic traumatic stress disorder': the Palestinian psychiatrist challenging western definitions of trauma. *The Guardian*.
- McWilliam, K. (2009). The global diffusion of a community media practice: Digital storytelling online. In K. Lundby, *Digital storytelling, mediatized stories* (pp. 37-60). New York: Peter Lang.
- Mendes, K., Ringrose, J., & Keller, J. (2019). *Digital feminist activism: Girls and women fight back against rape culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nahak, A. A. (2022). Digital storytelling as a tool for human rights education: A study from Indonesia. In A. D. De Jesus, & A. P. Casumbal-Salazar, *Digital storytelling for social justice: Empowering voices through media* (pp. 89-106). Routledge.
- Nahak, F. M. (2022). Critical comparison between the ancient and the digital storytelling practices: An epistemological analysis. *Communications in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 36-40.
- Nassar, M. (2018). Reclaiming memory and agency through digital storytelling: Palestinian youth and the politics of narrative. *Arab Media & Society*.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (2000). Narrative disruptions in the construction of the self. In J. Gillies, & R. A. Neimeyer, *Loss, grief, and the search for significance: Toward a model of meaning reconstruction in bereavement* (pp. 63-84). Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Page, R., & Thomas, B. (2011). *New narratives: Stories and storytelling in the digital age*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Papacharissi, Z. (2015). *Affective publics: Sentiment, technology, and politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Radio Diaries. (2006, March 20). *Thembi's AIDS diary: A year in the life of a South African teenager*. Retrieved from Radio Diaries: <https://www.radiodiaries.org/thembi/>

- Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: University of British Columbia Press.
- Robin, B. R. (2008). Digital storytelling: A powerful technology tool for the 21st-century classroom. *Theory Into Practice*, 220–228.
- Roe, D., Gilboa-Schechtman, E., & Baumel, A. (2024). Digital terror: Its striking impact on public mental health. *Psychiatric Services*, 99–101.
- Sabah, Ş. (2020). Introductory chapter: From traditional to digital storytelling. In *Digital storytelling: Content and application* (pp. 1-6). London: IntechOpen.
- Said, E. W. (1992). *The question of Palestine (with new introduction and epilogue)*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2015). *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books: London.
- Somasundaram, D., & van de Put, W. (2006). Mental health in post-conflict societies: The case of Sri Lanka. In Y. Danieli, N. Weisaeth, & D. U. Lindell, *International Responses to Traumatic Stress* (pp. 225–244). Baywood Publishing Company.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson, & L. Grossberg, *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press: Urbana.
- Tufekci, Z. (2015). Algorithmic Harms Beyond Facebook and Google: Emergent Challenges of Computational Agency. *Colorado Technology Law Journal*, 203–218.
- UNICEF. (2020). *Voices of Youth*. Retrieved from <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/>
- Watkins, M., & Shulman, H. (2008). *Toward Psychologies of Liberation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- We Are Not Numbers. (n.d.). *About us*. Retrieved from We Are Not Numbers: <https://wearenotnumbers.org/about-us>
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.

## دليل المقابلة للأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين: Appendix (1)

### المقدمة:

شكرًا لك على تخصيص الوقت للمشاركة في هذه المقابلة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم وجهات نظر الأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين حول استخدامهم لمنصة "إنستغرام" خلال الحرب على غزة، مع التركيز على دور السرد الرقمي في مناصرة قضايا الصحة النفسية. سيتم التعامل مع جميع المعلومات بسرية تامة، ولن يتم استخدام أي بيانات شخصية في النتائج.

### المحور الأول: استخدام إنستغرام خلال الحرب على غزة

#### السؤال الرئيسي:

1. كيف تصف تجربتك كمختص نفسي في استخدام منصة إنستغرام خلال الحرب على غزة؟

#### أسئلة استكشافية:

- ما نوع المحتوى الذي كنت تنشره أو تتفاعل معه؟
- هل كنت ترى في المنصة وسيلة للتعبير المهني أم الشخصي؟
- كيف تأثرت مشاركاتك بالوضع السياسي أو الإنساني على الأرض؟
- هل واجهت صعوبات في استخدام المنصة خلال تلك الفترة؟ مثل الرقابة، الخوف، القلق من التفاعل؟
- حسب رأيك من هم الفئة الأكثر تأثراً باستخدام المنصة بما يخدم الصحة النفسية؟

### المحور الثاني: دور السرد الرقمي في مناصرة الصحة النفسية

#### السؤال الرئيسي:

برأيك، ما هو الدور الذي يمكن أن يلعبه السرد الرقمي على إنستغرام في دعم قضايا الصحة النفسية؟

#### أسئلة استكشافية:

- هل تعتقد أن السرد الرقمي يمكن أن يقلل من وصمة المرض النفسي؟ كيف؟
- هل شعرت بأن مشاركاتك ساعدت في خلق وعي نفسي أو دعم مجتمعي؟
- هل لاحظت تفاعلاً مختلفاً من الجمهور عند استخدامك للقصص أو المنشورات التوعوية؟
- هل تعتقد أن هذه النوعية من السرد قادرة على إحداث تغيير مجتمعي أوسع؟ أم أنها تبقى رمزية؟

### المحور الثالث: أدوات وتقنيات السرد الفعالة

#### السؤال الرئيسي:

ما هي الأساليب السردية أو الأدوات الرقمية التي وجدتها أكثر فاعلية في إيصال الرسائل النفسية عبر إنستغرام؟

#### أسئلة استكشافية:

- هل تستخدم القصص (Stories)، المنشورات (Posts)، الفيديوهات، أو البث المباشر؟ ولماذا؟
- هل تعتمد على لغة شخصية، مهنية، أم مزيج بينهما؟
- ما مدى أهمية الصور، التصميم، أو الموسيقى في التأثير على المتلقي؟
- هل هناك نوع معين من القصص (قصة شخصية، قصة مريض، حالات رمزية...) تجدها أكثر تأثيراً؟

### المحور الرابع: التحديات الأخلاقية والمهنية

#### السؤال الرئيسي:

ما هي التحديات الأخلاقية التي تواجهك عند استخدامك لإنستغرام في تقديم محتوى نفسي أو سرد رقمي؟

#### أسئلة استكشافية:

- كيف تتعامل مع خصوصية الحالات أو القصص التي تنشرها؟
- هل لديك معايير لما يمكن وما لا يمكن مشاركته؟
- هل شعرت يوماً بأن مشاركة بعض المحتوى قد تضر بالمتابعين عاطفياً أو نفسياً؟
- ما موقفك من عرض مشاهد أو قصص قد تتضمن صدمة أو محتوى حساس؟

## المحور الخامس: رؤى تحليلية وتطلعات مستقبلية

### السؤال الرئيسي:

من خلال تجربتك، كيف ترى مستقبل استخدام المنصات الرقمية في دعم الصحة النفسية في السياقات الفلسطينية؟

### أسئلة استكشافية:

- هل ترى في هذه المنصات بديلاً حقيقياً أو مكماً للتدخلات النفسية التقليدية؟
- ما هي فرص التعاون بين الأخصائيين النفسيين عبر هذه المنصات؟
- كيف يمكن تحسين فعالية السرد الرقمي في هذا السياق؟
- ما النصائح التي تقدمها لأخصائيين يرغبون في خوض هذا المجال؟

### خاتمة:

شكراً جزيلاً لك على مشاركتك. هل هناك أي نقاط إضافية تود طرحها لم يتم التطرق إليها وتراها مهمة؟ هل تود مشاركة أي محتوى أو أمثلة حقيقية (مع الحفاظ على الخصوصية) تساهم في إثراء هذه الدراسة؟

## Appendix (2) نموذج الموافقة المستنيرة: (Consent Form)

عنوان الدراسة:

"السرد الرقمي ودوره في مناصرة الصحة النفسية: نظرة الأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين لمنصة إنستاغرام خلال الحرب على غزة"  
اسم الباحثة : مي أبو عصب

الجهة الأكاديمية: جامعة القدس – كلية الدراسات العليا – برنامج الاعلام الرقمي

أقر أنا الموقع أدناه بما يلي:

1. لقد قرأت وفهمت المعلومات المتعلقة بالدراسة الموضحة في ورقة إخلاء المسؤولية.
2. تم شرح أهداف الدراسة وطبيعة المشاركة بوضوح، ولدي الفرصة لطرح أي أسئلة قبل البدء.
3. أعلم أن مشاركتي تطوعية، ويمكنني الانسحاب في أي وقت دون أي التزام.
4. أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة (صوتيًا فقط) لغرض التحليل الأكاديمي.
5. أوافق على استخدام البيانات التي أقدمها لأغراض البحث فقط، دون الكشف عن هويتي.

بيانات المشارك:

- الاسم: \_\_\_\_\_
- التوقيع: \_\_\_\_\_
- التاريخ: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix (3): نموذج ورقة إخلاء المسؤولية (Debriefing Sheet)

للمشارك في الدراسة البحثية  
عنوان الدراسة:  
"السردي الرقمي ودوره في مناصرة الصحة النفسية: نظرة الأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين لمنصة إنستغرام خلال الحرب على غزة"  
اسم الباحثة : مي أبو عصب.  
الجهة الأكاديمية: جامعة القدس – كلية الدراسات العليا – برنامج الاعلام الرقمي  
البريد الإلكتروني: mayabuassab@gmail.com

#### معلومات عن المشارك:

- الاسم: \_\_\_\_\_
- العمر: \_\_\_\_\_
- الجنس:  ذكر  أنثى
- مكان الإقامة: \_\_\_\_\_
- تاريخ المقابلة: \_\_\_\_\_
- وقت المقابلة: \_\_\_\_\_
- وسيلة المقابلة:  حضوري  عبر الإنترنت (Zoom / Google Meet)

#### مقدمة وشكر:

نشكرك جزيل الشكر على تخصيص وقتك للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة. تهدف هذه المقابلة إلى استكشاف وجهات نظر الأخصائيين النفسيين الفلسطينيين تجاه استخدام منصة "إنستغرام" كساحة للسردي الرقمي والمناصرة النفسية خلال الحرب على غزة.

#### مضمون المقابلة:

تدور أسئلة المقابلة حول:

- تجربتك الشخصية والمهنية في استخدام منصة إنستغرام.
- رؤيتك لأثر السردي الرقمي على الصحة النفسية العامة.
- الأساليب السردية والتقنيات الرقمية التي تجدها فعالة.
- التحديات الأخلاقية والمهنية التي تواجهها أثناء العمل عبر المنصات الرقمية.

#### خصوصية البيانات وسريتها:

- سيتم التعامل مع جميع المعلومات التي قدمتها بسرية تامة.
- لن يتم ذكر اسمك الحقيقي أو أي تفاصيل قد تُعرّف بهويتك في النتائج أو المنشورات.
- سيتم استخدام بياناتك لأغراض أكاديمية فقط، وتخزينها بشكل آمن ومشفر.

#### مدة حفظ البيانات:

سيتم الاحتفاظ بالتسجيلات والبيانات المجمعة لمدة لا تتجاوز 12 شهرًا بعد الانتهاء من إعداد الدراسة، ثم يتم حذفها نهائيًا وبشكل آمن.

#### حق المشارك:

- المشاركة تطوعية بالكامل.
- يمكنك الامتناع عن الإجابة على أي سؤال لا ترغب في الإجابة عليه.
- لك الحق في الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت دون أي التزام أو ضرر.

#### للتواصل:

إذا رغبت لاحقًا في معرفة مخرجات الدراسة أو لديك أي استفسار، يمكنك التواصل مع الباحثة عبر البريد الإلكتروني الموضح أعلاه.

تقبل احترامي  
مي أبو عصب

## استكشاف تجارب علماء النفس الفلسطينيين في سرد القصص الرقمية عبر إنستغرام في سياق الإبادة الجماعية في غزة

إعداد: مي فيصل أبو عصب

إشراف: د. نادر صالحه

### الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة توظيف السرد الرقمي عبر منصة إنستغرام لدى مختصّي/ات الصحة النفسية الفلسطينيين/ات في ظل الإبادة الجماعية المستمرة في غزة. وتبحث في كيفية انخراط هؤلاء المهنيين في إنتاج السرديات الرقمية بوصفها ممارسة للصمود النفسي، والمقاومة الجماعية، ومعالجة الصدمة الجسدية-النفسية، ضمن سياق يتّسم بالهيمنة الاستعمارية، والتهجير القسري واسع النطاق، وسياسات المحو.

اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً من خلال إجراء مقابلات متعمّقة مع ستة مشاركين/ات، واستخدمت تحليل الموضوعات لفهم السرد الرقمي بوصفه ممارسة متجدّرة في علم النفس التفكيكي للاستعمار، ونظريات الصدمة، ونظرية السرد.

تشير النتائج إلى أن السرد عبر المنصات الرقمية يشكّل فعل بقاء، وفي الوقت ذاته ممارسة للشهادة السياسية. وقد أظهر المشاركون/ات توترات معقّدة على المستويات الأخلاقية، والعاطفية، والجسدية، بوصفهم رواة وشهوداً على السرديات في آنٍ معاً. تمحورت الموضوعات الرئيسية في الدراسة حول الصدمة المتجسّدة في الجسد، وأخلاقيات الظهور على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، والشفاء الجمعي، واستمرارية الذاكرة العابرة للأجيال.

تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في تقديم مقاربات تفكيكية استعمارية لمفهوم «الصحة النفسية»، من خلال تحليل تقاطعات الصوت، والجسد، والذاكرة، والمقاومة في السرد الفلسطيني. كما تتحدى الدراسة نماذج علاج الصدمة السائدة في السياقات الغربية، والتي غالباً ما تتجاهل البعد الثقافي والتاريخي والإرث الجمعي للشعوب، وتدعو بدلاً من ذلك إلى مقاربات شفاء قائمة على وعي في العلاقات المتبادلة والسياسة، ومنبثقة من سياقات ثقافية محلية. وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى إمكانات تطبيقية في الممارسات السريرية والسياقات النضالية داخل البيئات المستعمرة والمتأثرة بالنزاعات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السرد الرقمي، فلسطين، الصدمة، إنستغرام، علم النفس التفكيكي للاستعمار، الصحة النفسية، المقاومة، السرد، الأخلاقيات، الإبادة الجماعية