

**Deanship of Graduate Studies
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**How American Social Movements Frame Political
Violence: The Case of Shireen Abu Akleh from April
2022 to the present**

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Violence: The Case of Shireen Abu Akleh from April
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**Prepared By:
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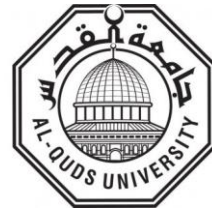
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Thesis Approval

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the late Shireen Abu Akleh, whose fearless pursuit of truth and justice continues to inspire voices across generations. Her legacy reminds us of the power of integrity and courage in telling the stories that matter.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to my professors for their invaluable guidance and to my family for their unwavering love and support throughout this journey

Declaration:

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

Signed: Hiba Albabish

Heba Ibrahim Issa Albabish

Date: 1st September 2025

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All substantive ideas, arguments, and interpretations presented in this thesis remain my own.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how American social movements and media framed political violence abroad, focusing on the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022. It analyzes how advocacy groups and U.S. media responded, the narratives they created, and how these frames shaped public opinion and political accountability. Using social movement theory, framing analysis, and critical media studies, the study shows that advocacy organizations quickly mobilized to demand justice, emphasizing press freedom, human rights, and U.S. responsibility. However, their efforts faced barriers such as political alliances, media hesitancy, and government silence. The analysis compares coverage across different sources: Palestinian media was clear, Israeli media often deflected responsibility, U.S. mainstream outlets were ambiguous, and alternative sources like the Zeteo documentary *Who Killed Shireen?* made bold claims. The thesis also highlights the role of cultural perceptions and stereotypes, drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, to explain how American audiences interpreted the frames. By showing how Shireen's journalist role, U.S. citizenship, and symbolic value were used in advocacy, this study clarifies the challenges of transnational justice campaigns, the limits of moral framing in U.S. foreign policy, and the uneven resonance of different narratives. The findings have implications for future advocacy strategies and U.S. accountability in international human rights cases.

Keywords: political violence, framing, Shireen Abu Akleh, social movements, media, United States, advocacy, journalism, accountability, Orientalism

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

On May 11, 2022, an Israeli sniper shot veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh while she reported on a military raid in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. She was wearing a clearly marked press vest and helmet. Witnesses, colleagues, and video evidence quickly pointed to an Israeli sniper as the shooter (Al Jazeera, 2022a). Shireen was more than just a regular journalist. She was a voice for her people, the Palestinians. She was an internationally known correspondent for Al Jazeera, and a U.S. citizen. Her death sent shockwaves through the region and across the world. Shireen had spent decades reporting on the Israeli occupation of Palestine. For many Palestinians, her voice was a constant and firm presence. In Washington, D.C., where she once lived and reported, people recognized her on the street. Her followers trusted her, and they saw her killing as not just a tragedy, but as an attack on truth and accountability.

The question of who killed her, and how that story would be told, immediately became deeply political. Confusingly, media reports, government statements, and advocacy efforts in the U.S. offered sharply different narratives of the event. Palestinian news agencies and Al Jazeera called her killing an execution. Israeli officials initially blamed Palestinian militants before acknowledging that she was likely accidentally shot by an Israeli soldier. Meanwhile, U.S. officials offered cautious language that emphasized complexity over clarity. It did that by launching investigations that dragged on without resolution.

In 2024, a new development added weight to longstanding claims. The documentary *Who Killed Shireen?*, produced by Zeteo, which is a new media organization and a podcast channel that hosts independent and unfiltered journalism, publicly named the allegedly responsible Israeli sniper as Alon Scagio and suggested that U.S. officials, including the Biden administration, may have known or suspected Israeli responsibility from the start. Despite this confirmation, no meaningful new actions were taken by the U.S. government. Rather than undermining the purpose of this study, this moment sharpens it. The central issue is no longer whether the truth can be uncovered, it is what happens when officials know the truth and still meet it with silence. This thesis explores how various political

forces shape narrative how frames, not just facts, help determine whether justice is pursued.

This research focuses on how American social movements and media outlets have framed Shireen Abu Akleh's killing and what those frames reveal about the political limits of accountability. This study utilizes social movement theory and framing analysis to investigate the language, emphasis, and omissions present in both advocacy and media coverage. It inquires about the impact of these narratives on political responses, particularly regarding the U.S. government. The principal research question directing this thesis is: How have American social movements and media framed the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, and to what extent have these frames influenced calls for justice and political accountability from the U.S. government?

Two sub-questions further guide the inquiry: How did American advocacy groups and media outlets differ in the way they frame Shireen Abu Akleh's killing, and what narratives are emphasized or excluded in these frames? And, What impact, if any, have these framing efforts had on U.S. political discourse, policy actions, or investigations related to Shireen Abu Akleh's death?

While some readers may see this work as focused mainly on advocacy groups, I chose to frame it within the broader field of social movement studies. Social movements are commonly defined as organized, collective efforts by people without established power to bring about or resist social, political, or economic change. Advocacy groups, NGOs, and even media outlets often act as vehicles through which social movements express

themselves, amplify their claims, and gain visibility. In this sense, advocacy campaigns around Shireen Abu Akleh's case are not separate from social movements but are part of the larger dynamics that scholars of social movements analyze. My aim, therefore, is not to limit the discussion to advocacy groups as discrete actors, but to draw on social movement theory to understand how collective action, framing, and political opportunities shaped the responses to Abu Akleh's killing and the framing of U.S. citizens' cases more broadly.

The following chapters give background information on Shireen Abu Akleh's life and work. They review relevant scholarship on framing and political violence, analyze the media and movement responses to her death, and assess how these responses intersect with power, silence, and the American state's willingness to act.

1.2 Who is Shireen Abu Akleh?

Shireen Abu Akleh was born on April 3rd, 1971, in East Jerusalem in the Israeli occupied West Bank. For a period of Abu Akleh's childhood, she and her family lived in New Jersey, where members of her mother's family lived, and she gained US citizenship through these relatives. However, she continued to reside in Jerusalem in her childhood neighborhood of Beit Hanina. Abu Akleh went to Jordan in 1987 to study Architecture at the Jordan University of Science and Technology but eventually decided to change her

field and major in Journalism and Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025, Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022, Appendix A, Figure A1).

After graduation, Abu Akleh went back to Palestine and worked in several media agencies. In 1997, she moved to work at AL Jazeera TV as a field correspondent reporting from Jerusalem. Her return to the occupied West Bank coincided with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Abu Akleh shot to prominence across the Arab world for her coverage of the second Intifada (2000-2005), and particularly the Israeli invasions and curfews imposed on Palestinian cities in the occupied West Bank (Al Jazeera, 2022b). For a quarter of a century, Abu Akleh covered many conflicts on the ground between the Israeli army and the Palestinians.

At one point in her life, she returned to the United States to produce some minidocumentaries for Al Jazeera on American society. Topics particularly focused on the plight of minorities from Washington D.C. to New Mexico. Her popularity reached international audiences. Journalist Dalia Hatuqa (2023), her former colleague at Al Jazeera in Washington, D.C. recalls her time working with Shireen in Washington, D.C., noting that,

Even in DC, people would stop her in the street asking for a selfie, to which she would happily oblige. She was down to earth and oozed modesty and humility. Of course, it would be impossible for her to not know what she meant to so many people, but she never let it get to her or go to her head.

1.3 The Killing: Al Jazeera and Haaretz

On Wednesday, May 11, 2022a, Al Jazeera announced that its correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh was shot by the Israeli occupation army while covering its incursion of Jenin camp. In a subsequent news story, Al-Jazeera posted the news of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli army bullets and confirmed that Shireen was wearing a press vest when she was apparently targeted by the occupation army.

Al Jazeera published a video showing the moment after Shireen was injured, where she appeared lying on the ground amidst the sounds of gunfire from Israeli soldiers (Al Jazeera, 2022c). Shaza Hanaysheh is a journalist and a colleague of Abu Akleh. She was present during the incident and she later confirmed that the Israeli army deliberately fired at the Al Jazeera crew. According to Hanaysheh, the journalists were standing in an open area where no Palestinian gunfire had occurred, yet Israeli forces began shooting heavily upon their arrival. As the shots rang out, Abu Akleh and Hanaysheh ran for cover behind a tree. Hanaysheh recalled that Shireen fell before reaching the tree, and despite her collapse, the soldiers continued firing (Salman, A., Gold, H., & Allen Greene, R. (2022, Appendix A, Figure A2). "Every time I extended my hand toward Shireen, the soldiers fired at us," she said (Gulf Today, 2022).

Israeli military statements initially claimed that it was Palestinian gunmen who opened fire on Israeli soldiers in Jenin, and that Israeli troops subsequently returned fire (The Times of Israel, 2022). However, eyewitness testimony contradicted this narrative. Ali al-Samoudi, a producer for Al Jazeera who was wounded at the scene, stated: “It was totally calm, there was no gunfire at all” in the area where the journalists were standing (Hendrix et al., 2022). He further emphasized there were “no fighters where we were, none at all” (Hendrix et al., 2022). Additionally, Atta Abu Rmeileh of Fatah confirmed that “Shireen and journalist crews were in a totally different location, at least 300 meters away ... with no line of view at all between the two places” (The New Arab, 2022). Al Jazeera’s bureau chief, Walid al-Omari, echoed this, stating unequivocally that “there was no shooting by Palestinian gunmen” at the time of the incident (Time, 2022).

1.4 Funeral Procession Incident

At 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 12, Palestinian officials held an official funeral to honor and bid farewell to Shireen Abu Akleh at the Palestinian presidential headquarters in Ramallah in preparation for her transfer to Jerusalem, but the Israeli occupation authorities obstructed the funeral procession as it was heading to Jerusalem. The body arrived about two hours later and the official farewell ceremony was held despite the Israeli police assaulting several mourners in front of the French Hospital in Jerusalem.

The funeral procession of the journalist set off at 2:00 p.m. from the French Hospital towards the Greek Catholic Church in Jerusalem. Videos were filmed from the scene showing the occupation forces trying to prevent the removal of the body and suppressing the funeral procession, where they beat a number of mourners with batons, including those carrying Abu Akleh’s coffin, and almost knocked it over (Sky News, 2022) and (Shubert, A., & Salman, A., 2022, Appendix A, Figure A3). Shireen’s body was returned to the hospital after the attacks by the occupation forces on the procession. The Israeli police entered the crowds to lower the Palestinian flags.

After the official funeral ceremony at the Palestinian presidential headquarters in Ramallah, Shireen Abu Akleh’s body was transferred to Jerusalem, her birthplace. On Friday, May 13, 2022, she was laid to rest at Mount Zion Protestant Cemetery, near her family’s home. Thousands of Palestinians marched through the streets of Jerusalem to honor her life and legacy as they accompanied her casket. Her interment in Jerusalem symbolized not only a return home, but also a powerful national farewell to a journalist deeply rooted in Palestinian identity and resistance (Elbagir et al., 2022).

This thesis argues that while American social movements successfully framed the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh as a profound moral and political injustice, their efforts were ultimately neutralized not by a competing narrative, but by the U.S. government’s deployment of ‘strategic silence’, a powerful tool of inaction that insulated geopolitical alliances from moral accountability.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Scholars of social movements highlight that mobilizing support is not simply about grievance, although they are relatively constant, but about strategy, framing, and organizational strength (McAdams, 1982). A core theme that emerges across the literature is that movements must actively shape narratives and leverage structure to gain influence. This is a list of literature and frameworks that explain this idea.

2.1 Broad Theories of Social Movements (Macro-level)

Doug McAdam's (1982) analysis sets the foundation for scholars. In his work, he states that the civil rights movement lost momentum in the late 1960s because of fragmentation and a lack of centralized coordination. Through his work on the Black Freedom Movement, he reinforces this strategic view. In *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, McAdam details how opportunities, internal organization, and collective identity combined to catalyze mobilization. Building on McAdam's framework, this thesis draws attention to "political opportunity structures" that advocacy groups around Shireen Abu Akleh's killing had to navigate. Those are opportunities that were shaped by a democratic administration, a progressive caucus or meetings in Congress, and heightened global attention to press freedom.

2.2 Bob's Global Morality Market

Clifford Bob's (2005) *The Marketing of Rebellion* fundamentally challenges the idealistic view that transnational advocacy is driven primarily by neutral compassion for the neediest groups. Instead, Bob argues that insurgent groups face a fiercely competitive "global morality market" where success depends on their capacity to strategically market themselves to international NGOs, media, and gatekeepers. He shows that support goes not to the most oppressed but to those who effectively frame their grievances to resonate with foreign audiences, build alliances with powerful NGOs, and adapt their narratives to match donor and media interests. Bob's framework shows that structural inequalities give some movements a built-in advantage over others. For example, he points out that the relationship between activists and NGOs is not purely based on solidarity, it's more of a transaction shaped by unequal power. Activists need legitimacy, visibility, and resources, while NGOs look for causes that fit their own agendas and appeal to donors. This idea

helps us understand how movements around Shireen Abu Akleh's case must also work within this "moral marketplace," where they try to present their cause in ways that gain international recognition and support. Both Bob and McAdam stress that success depends not just on outside opportunities but also on how movements organize themselves and frame their goals.

Noakes and Johnston (2005) emphasize that grievances alone are insufficient to guarantee social movement mobilization. They observe that injustice is widespread and persistent, yet collective efforts to oppose it are comparatively rare. The authors note that many individuals with objective reasons to protest often remain unmobilized. While acknowledging the influence of macro-level factors, such as broad social changes, elite divisions, or political opportunities, and meso-level factors like resources and social networks, Noakes and Johnston argue that these structural and organizational elements, either individually or combined, cannot fully explain the occurrence of protests or the rise of social movements. Instead, their focus is on the micro-level processes of social construction, specifically framing. It is conceptualized as a vital social-psychological process of perception and consciousness that mediates between external conditions and collective action. For people to participate in a social movement, they must first undergo cognitive and interpretive processes. Those processes require them to be convinced that an injustice has occurred, persuaded that collective action is warranted, and ultimately motivated to act. Framing, in this context, serves to define situations by identifying problems, assigning responsibility, and proposing solutions.

Marshall Ganz's 2000 article explores how social movements and organizations can achieve their goals even with limited resources. Ganz introduces the concept of "strategic capacity," which he defines as a blend of leadership, networks, and internal deliberation. His comparative analysis of farmworker unions during the specified period, 1959–1966, illustrates the central logic of the article. It says that organizations with fewer resources can still succeed if they possess adaptability and strategic sharpness. The core argument is that resourcefulness and the deliberate development of strategic capacity can enable groups to overcome significant resource deficits and achieve their objectives. This idea is crucial for understanding how relatively small groups like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Lina Abu Akleh's advocacy team were able to remain visible despite limited institutional power.

2.3 Framing Theory (Meso-level: how movements shape meaning)

Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford's (1986) seminal article introduces the concept of frame alignment processes, which has become foundational in social movement theory. They argue that for collective action to occur, the interpretive frames of individuals must align with those promoted by a movement. The authors identify four key processes: frame bridging (linking previously unconnected individuals or groups with similar grievances), frame amplification (clarifying or invigorating an existing value or belief), frame extension (broadening the frame to include additional interests or values), and frame transformation

(changing how individuals interpret reality). These processes highlight the active, strategic role movements play in shaping perception and mobilizing participation. In the context of this thesis, frame alignment provides a useful lens for analyzing how different actors, from Palestinian advocacy groups to U.S. media, sought to align public understanding of Shireen Abu Akleh's killing with their own narratives, whether to mobilize outrage, maintain ambiguity, or counter competing frames. The concepts of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing originate with Snow & Benford, but scholars like Noakes and Johnston systematized their use across movement studies, making them central to how we analyze recent advocacy discourse.

2.4 Cultural Contexts of Framing

Framing theory emphasizes that resonance depends on how frames align with audiences' pre-existing cultural narratives and beliefs (Snow & Benford, 1988). For this reason, it is important to consider how orientalist assumptions shape the reception of frames in the American context. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) illustrates how the West has historically constructed the East as inferior, irrational, and perpetually embroiled in conflict. These representations intersect with framing because they influence whether advocacy efforts are received sympathetically, dismissed as expected, or distorted through stereotypes. For instance, the widespread assumption that Palestinians are exclusively Muslim demonstrates how the omission of Shireen Abu Akleh's Christian identity weakened potential cultural resonance with American Christian audiences. Although Orientalism will be discussed more fully in later chapters, its importance to this thesis is vital. Whenever we speak about framing, a sense of orientalist logic is always at play, often reinforcing and sometimes overlapping with the very dynamics framing theory seeks to explain.

Going back to the meso-level of framing theory, the theory itself is explored in depth by Chong and Druckman (2007), who distinguish between 'frames in thought', the mental structures or considerations people draw upon, and 'frames in communication', the cues that shape what people think about and how. They show that even subtle shifts in how an issue is presented can lead to significant changes in public attitudes because frames change which aspects of an issue are accessible and seen as relevant. Their psychological model emphasizes that people's opinions are not always fully formed but are often constructed on the spot using available frames, making them vulnerable to framing effects. Importantly, they argue that the strength, credibility, and repetition of frames, as well as the presence of competing frames, can all moderate these effects. The article also clarifies that framing is distinct from related concepts like priming or persuasion because it specifically shifts the weight given to different beliefs rather than changing those beliefs outright. By articulating this process, Chong and Druckman's work helps explain why variations in news headlines, like the use of passive voice, emotional language, or moral appeals, can either activate outrage ('frames in thought') or blunt it ('frames in communication'). Their analysis provides a critical lens for examining how media outlets and advocates strategically shape public opinion and policy outcomes through framing.

2.5 Media & Conflict Framing (Micro-level application)

Entman's (1991) analysis of U.S. media coverage of two nearly identical aviation tragedies, Korean Air Flight 007 shot down by the Soviet Union and Iran Air Flight 655 shot down by the U.S. Navy, demonstrates how geopolitical alliances shape framing. He shows that American media framed the Soviet act as deliberate and immoral, while the U.S. incident was treated as accidental and technical, despite similar facts. This contrast underscores how framing is not just about information selection but about moral judgment, legitimacy, and narrative control. Entman's work provides a critical precedent for analyzing Western media coverage of the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh, particularly how U.S. outlets adopted cautious language, prioritized official Israeli and American sources, and often avoided emotional or accusatory framing. His research lays the foundation for understanding how framing bias operates within international reporting and is vital to this thesis's investigation of narrative asymmetry and political complicity.

Mintz and Redd (2003) offer an expansive typology of framing relevant to foreign policy and international advocacy. Their framework identifies multiple forms of framing, purposeful, thematic, evaluative, structural, interactive, and counterframing, and emphasizes how actors strategically deploy frames to influence policy, public opinion, and institutional outcomes. Importantly, they argue that the success of a frame depends not only on its content but also on timing, the actor's legitimacy, and the ability to counter competing narratives. This conceptualization enriches this thesis by providing a vocabulary to assess how movements framed Shireen Abu Akleh's death to American audiences. Particularly useful are their distinctions between productive and failed framing, and structural vs. evaluative framing, categories that align closely with the divergent media and advocacy strategies observed in this case. Their work underscores that framing is not simply communicative, but inherently political, seeking to persuade audiences, shape memory, and determine policy salience.

Gabriel (2024) brings framing theory into media studies, drawing on Chomsky and Said to show how mainstream outlets can reproduce dominant power structures through framing. This intersects with movements when the media either amplifies or muffles their claims. Gabriel's work is especially useful for this case study, as it shows how Western media privileges some victims over others. Such media frame and report Palestinian lives, even when American, with less moral urgency. This helps explain the framing ambiguity in U.S. coverage of Abu Akleh's death.

Assaf (2023) provides an empirical case study highly relevant to this thesis, analyzing how U.S. mainstream media covered Shireen Abu Akleh's killing and documenting patterns of false equivalence in headline construction and narrative framing. He shows how journalistic "balance" often translated into moral and factual asymmetry which places equal weight on Israeli official statements and Palestinian eyewitness accounts even when evidence heavily favored one side. This tendency, Assaf argues, is rooted in both ideological pressures and professional norms of "objectivity" that privilege state actors.

His findings complement Gabriel's (2024) argument about moral asymmetry in Western media and support Clifford Bob's (2005) broader theory of structural inequalities in global advocacy: even with strong evidence and moral claims, movements face discursive environments that dilute their message.

Evans (2010) provides an important comparative case study that deepens this critique. Analyzing New York Times coverage of two similar Middle East conflicts, the Israeli siege of Jenin and the Lebanese army's siege of Nahr al-Bared. Evans shows how subtle framing choices generated vastly different public and policy reactions. He finds that the NYT emphasized civilian suffering in Jenin but framed Nahr al-Bared with distance and sympathy for the army, despite greater destruction and displacement. This demonstrates how media framing selectively determines whose victimhood is morally amplified and whose is overlooked, shaping international responses. Evans' work echoes Gabriel's (2024) argument, as well as Chomsky's and Said's broader critiques of Orientalism in Western reporting. Together, they reveal how movements for accountability, like that for Shireen Abu Akleh, must confront entrenched patterns of selective sympathy in global media discourse.

In sum, the literature converges on the importance of framing, strategic action, and organizational structure, while differing on the emphasis between internal vs. external factors. This thesis applies these theories to a case that is both highly symbolic and underexamined; how a transnational movement framed the death of a U.S. citizen killed by a close American ally. A notable gap remains in studies on how transnational justice movements, especially in cases involving Palestinian-American victims, frame state violence to an American audience.

2.6 Shireen-Specific Literature (case grounding)

Most academic work on Shireen Abu Akleh focuses on her death and its political, legal, and symbolic implications. The literature generally agrees on the controversial nature of her killing and the contested narratives that followed, but diverges on emphasis, some focus on media narratives, others on legal accountability or symbolic meaning. Arabic-language sources like Farraj (2022) provide detailed narrative and historical context, stressing how Abu Akleh's killing fits into a broader escalation of Israeli violence. These accounts offer an insider lens, often overlooked in English-language sources. They highlight the violence at the funeral procession and point to a deliberate targeting of a high-profile journalist.

Devin Gillen's *History in the Making* contextualize Abu Akleh's career in relation to Palestinian journalism under occupation. This source offers a humanized and historically grounded portrait. These works move beyond the killing to explore the institutional constraints and professional risks she faced throughout her career.

An additional perspective emerges from Abu Akleh and Abdelnabi's (2024) interview, "Shireen Abu Akleh: The Everlasting Voice of Palestine," which highlights Shireen's dual legacy, as both a journalist and cultural symbol for Palestine. The authors emphasize how her reporting not only shaped international media coverage but also empowered a generation of young Palestinian journalists, particularly women. They describe Lina Abu Akleh's advocacy for accountability, campaigning internationally despite denial from Israeli authorities, as a continuation of Shireen's symbolic influence. Abu Akleh and Abdelnabi argue that Shireen has become more than a reporter. She has become a lasting political and cultural figure, whose life story summarizes ongoing restrictions on press freedom in Palestine.

These works position Abu Akleh not only as a tragic figure but as a central anchor in a wider narrative about press freedom, gender, and transnational Palestinian identity. Her death mobilized not only political actors but also symbolic memory across Arab, diaspora, and activist communities.

In addition to foundational framing scholars like McAdam, Ayoub (2023) introduces the concept of "counter-data" as a grassroots framing tool. In his study of the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh, Ayoub explores how Palestinian communities produce digital evidence, such as videos, eyewitness testimonies, and geolocation analysis, to challenge dominant state narratives. This practice, known as counter-data, goes beyond traditional media framing by making the act of documenting itself a form of resistance. Ayoub shows how counter-data exposes and resists the asymmetrical data regimes that often favor the narratives of powerful state actors. This form of framing is not just rhetorical but evidentiary. It reflects a shift in how advocacy and political resistance operate in the digital age.

Gunawan, Ihsan, and Anderson (2023) examine the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli army gunfire in May 2022, analyzing the incident through the lens of international law. The study details how the Palestinian Authority formally submitted evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC), seeking an investigation under Article 15 of the Rome Statute. The authors assess the relevant legal frameworks, including international humanitarian law, the right to life under international human rights law, and ICC definitions of war crimes. Their normative legal approach outlines the procedures available to hold perpetrators accountable, while also highlighting the legal obstacles posed by Israel's non-cooperation and political shielding, particularly from the United States. The work underscores both the theoretical possibilities and real-world limitations of pursuing legal remedies in the face of political impunity and international inaction. While Gunawan et al. offer a valuable legalistic approach, this thesis argues that advocacy around Shireen's case has also relied on non-legal frames, emotional appeals, national identity, and journalistic symbolism, which play a vital role in movement success or stagnation.

A more recent source, the 2024 documentary *Who Killed Shireen?*, released by Zeteo, pushes further by identifying the Israeli sniper allegedly responsible as Alon Scagio, who

was later killed in combat. The documentary argues that Abu Akleh's killing set a precedent for impunity that encouraged further violence against journalists in the West Bank. It also presents evidence that the Biden administration suspected Israeli responsibility early but supported Israeli denials publicly. The film critiques both Israeli delay in admitting fault and U.S. political shielding. It points to a systemic failure in accountability from two of the most powerful actors involved. This source is central to this thesis's analysis of narrative disruption and accountability silencing. Zeteo's investigative framing and bold attribution are used in Chapter 6 to examine the political risks of naming perpetrators when state actors remain unresponsive.

Together, these works show strong consensus on the significance of Abu Akleh's case but diverge in their focus, whether the emphasis is narrative framing, institutional journalism, legal advocacy, or personal legacy. What is missing is a deep, comparative study of how American advocacy organizations frame her death versus how Palestinian or Arab groups do. There is also little exploration of how American audiences interpret these frames, especially in relation to their own notions of justice and citizenship. This thesis aims to fill that gap by using frame theory to map the divergence and convergence in movement discourse and public engagement in the U.S. context.

2.7 Palestinian, Israeli, American Media Headlines About Abu Akleh

Media coverage of Abu Akleh's killing differs clearly across Palestinian, Israeli, and American outlets. This section reveals a clearly divided media landscape, where narratives serve political ends.

Palestinian agencies like MA'AN and Wafa described her death as an execution, placing responsibility on Israeli forces. Their reporting is emotive and immediate which reflects national outrage and collective mourning. This frame aligns with Al Jazeera's coverage, which offered footage and eyewitness reports rejecting Israeli claims of crossfire.

Israeli outlets like *Ynetnews* employed defensive framing that suggested that Abu Akleh may have been caught in crossfire during a clash with Palestinian gunmen. The language emphasized "complexity," "regret," and "possibility," and this framed the incident as tragic but unintentional. This fits with broader patterns of narrative control in conflict reporting.

When analyzing U.S. mainstream media coverage, the patterns observed here align closely with Assaf's (2023) findings, introduced in the Micro-level application. His concept of false equivalence is evident in headlines that present Israeli and Palestinian accounts as equally credible, even when independent forensic investigations, such as The Washington Post's (2022) analysis, pointed strongly toward Israeli responsibility. For example, The New York Times headline, "Journalist Is Killed in West Bank Clash," not only uses the passive voice but also frames the incident as an inevitable byproduct of "clashes," a construction Assaf critiques as obscuring agency and moral responsibility.

This direct connection between the literature review and the case-specific examples reinforces the argument that discursive bias is not incidental but systemic and it shapes public perception and, ultimately, the advocacy environment. This dynamic is analyzed more deeply in Chapter 4, where headlines are compared side by side, and their grammatical constructions (active vs. passive voice, agent-naming vs. deflection) are broken down using critical discourse tools.

The Washington Post, in contrast, offered a forensic, investigative approach using video, photos, and acoustic analysis to conclude that an Israeli soldier likely fired the fatal shot. However, even in its objectivity, the *Post*'s framing avoids the moral or legal implications emphasized in Arab and Palestinian media. While the *Post* represents a high standard of investigative journalism, its framing choices, such as omitting words like “intentional” or “execution”, demonstrate the limits of even “neutral” outlets when addressing politically sensitive subjects.

Gabriel (2024) helps contextualize this discrepancy by applying framing theory to coverage of Palestine and Ukraine. He suggests that Western outlets often privilege certain victim narratives while marginalizing others, based on geopolitical alignment. When combined with Assaf's study, this illustrates a patterned inconsistency in whose suffering is made legible to American audiences. For example, while Ukrainian journalists killed during the Russian invasion were memorialized with moral clarity, Shireen's killing was presented through ambiguity and balance, even though she was a U.S. citizen and press member.

A major scholarly gap here is a comparative media framing analysis that systematically quantifies how headlines and lead paragraphs in different countries represent the event. To address this, Chapter 4 offers a comparative breakdown of how U.S., Israeli, and Arab media covered key moments in the case; Shireen's death, the funeral procession, and the U.S. government's responses. There is also little research on how American public opinion responds to these divergent narratives, a key issue given Abu Akleh's U.S. citizenship. Part 6 returns this issue, exploring the disconnect between public sentiment (e.g., #JusticeForShireen campaigns) and political inaction in relation to media influence.

2.8 Journalism Dangers in Palestine

Several international organizations have documented systemic threats to journalists in Palestine which highlights a broader climate of impunity. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemned the ongoing lack of accountability in Shireen Abu Akleh's case, and it's urging an independent international investigation and noting that “justice has yet to be rendered” despite evidence pointing to Israeli responsibility and a persistent pattern of attacks on Palestinian journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has also documented numerous harrowing incidents that range from harassment and equipment destruction to shootings, which links Abu Akleh's death to a broader trend of journalist targeting. In May 2024, following nearly two years of an unresolved FBI inquiry, CPJ

publicly called for a clear timeline for the investigation's conclusion and criticized Israel for its lack of cooperation. These statements reflect deep frustration with bureaucratic delays and signal a broader demand for accountability, not only from Israel but also from the U.S. government.

Malkawi, Fareh, and Rabab'ah (2024) provide empirical insight through critical discourse analysis of 200 headlines (Arabic and English). Their study finds consistent patterns of ideological framing, especially in how perpetrators are (or aren't) named. English headlines often obscure agency, while Arabic ones tend to assert it. This pattern reflects broader discursive inequalities in how Palestinian journalists are situated within international narratives: often not as professionals targeted for their reporting, but as victims of generalized "conflict." Their analysis strengthens the argument that headline structures are not neutral but ideological. Frames shape whether readers see violence against journalists as exceptional and unacceptable, or merely unfortunate collateral damage. This is significant given the post-death calls by CPJ and RSF, (Reporters Without Borders) in French: *Reporters Sans Frontières*, not only for transparency but for structural reforms to how journalist deaths are investigated globally. Their advocacy has called for binding commitments from states, including the U.S., to ensure thorough and independent inquiries when journalists are killed abroad. These organizations also provided extensive documentation of other attacks on journalists in Palestine before and after Abu Akleh's death, suggesting that her killing was not an anomaly, but part of a broader pattern of disregard for press safety in conflict zones.

What remains under-explored is the connection between these media discourses and policy impact. Do shifts in framing by major news outlets correlate with action (or inaction) by states or international bodies? Chapter 6, evaluates whether the increased attention to Shireen's case led to meaningful political or legal consequences, or whether structural barriers to accountability overpowered even sustained press coverage.

Chapter Three

Methodology:

Tracing the Narrative and Impact of Shireen Abu Akleh's Case

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how I approached my research on how American social movements and media framed Shireen Abu Akleh's killing and how those frames affected U.S. government responses. My method was qualitative, mainly using discourse and frame analysis. I focused on how movements, media, and officials used language to describe what happened, assign responsibility, and demand (or avoid) justice. Case study methodology centered on Shireen's case as an example of how transnational advocacy can respond to political violence, especially when the victim is a U.S. citizen. I also mentioned other cases of U.S. citizen murder abroad to compare them with Abu Akleh's case to show differences and similarities in framing and what factors come into play in leveraging each case. This comparison is important in this paper as it can expose a parallel system of promoting diverse messages from diverse media outlets and organizations that affect the public's opinion. I chose Abu Akleh's case because it brings together media freedom, human rights, and U.S. foreign policy in one moment. This made it ideal for studying how advocacy efforts work across borders and institutions. The decision to focus on a single case allowed for deep, context-rich analysis.

To answer my main question; How movements and media framed Shireen's killing and whether these efforts pushed the U.S. government to respond, I gathered and analyzed a range of sources. I reviewed reports and investigations from a variety of media coverage including major U.S. outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, CNN. International and regional media, such as *Al Jazeera English*, *Haaretz*. Palestinian news sources, such as Wafa, MA'AN; and Israeli coverage, namely *Ynetnews*

This range of media helped me compare how different outlets framed the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. For example, *The Washington Post* conducted a comprehensive forensic analysis in June 2022, reviewing video, audio, and eyewitness testimony; it concluded that the fatal shot most likely came from an Israeli soldier, directly challenging Israeli denial and providing critical evidence cited by human rights groups and the Abu Akleh family

(Hendrix, 2023). Similarly, *The New York Times* published an investigation finding that the bullet originated from the approximate location of an Israeli military convoy and that there were no Palestinian gunmen nearby (Al Jazeera Staff, 2022). CNN echoed these findings, referring to Israeli responsibility as “likely” while emphasizing the need for further investigation (Axios, 2022).

In contrast, major Israeli outlets such as *Haaretz* and *The Jerusalem Post* initially framed her death within a “clash” narrative, repeating IDF claims that Palestinian militants may have been responsible and emphasizing uncertainty, despite mounting evidence to the contrary (Hendrix, 2023). Palestinian media, including Wafa, Al-Quds, and the Palestine Chronicle, framed the killing more forcefully. They described it as a deliberate act, highlighting eyewitness footage, video evidence, and the conspicuously marked press gear that Abu Akleh wore, often calling it an *assassination* and linking it to broader state repression (Wafa, 2022; Al Tahhan, 2022).

These contrasting frames enabled me to study how narratives competed in public discourse, whether emphasizing intentionality, ambiguity, or systemic violence, and how such framing influenced audience perceptions of accountability. My analysis applied critical discourse methods which identifies elements like agent suppression, thematic framing, and emotional power; Chapter 4 provides an in-depth comparative examination.

Clifford Bob’s idea of a “global morality market” helped me understand why certain versions of the story got more attention. As I noted in my earlier analysis of Bob’s book, movements succeed when they frame their cause to match the values of global actors, in this case, press freedom and human rights and *The Marketing of Rebellion* fundamentally challenges the idealistic view that transnational advocacy is driven primarily by neutral compassion for the neediest groups. Bob argues that insurgent groups face a fiercely competitive “global morality market” where success depends on their capacity to strategically market themselves to international NGOs, media, and gatekeepers. He shows that support goes not to the most oppressed but to those who effectively frame their grievances to resonate with foreign audiences, build alliances with powerful NGOs, and adapt their narratives to match donor and media interests. Bob’s framework highlights how structural inequalities systematically advantage some movements over others. He further emphasizes that the relationship between insurgents and NGOs is not one of unconditional solidarity but a transactional exchange shaped by unequal power: insurgents need legitimacy, publicity, and material aid, while NGOs seek causes that advance their own missions and attract donors. This perspective provides a critical lens for analyzing how movements advocating for Shireen Abu Akleh’s case navigate similar moral marketplaces, trying to “sell” their cause for international recognition and justice.

This thesis mainly uses framing theory as the tool for analysis. At the same time, it is important to note that frames are not received in isolation but within a larger cultural and political context. For this reason, Orientalism, as explained by Edward Said (1978), will also be considered later in the analysis. I am not using Orientalism here as a full

methodology, but as a background lens to understand how American audiences may interpret frames about Shireen Abu Akleh. While framing helps explain how activists built their messages and calls to action, Orientalism helps explain why some of these messages were accepted, ignored, or misunderstood. In this way, the main method is framing theory, but Orientalism remains important to show the wider context that shapes how people see and respond to these frames.

Also, I collected public materials from U.S.-based and international advocacy groups, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

To analyze the discursive contestation around Shireen Abu Akleh's killing, I employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach that foregrounds the role of framing in shaping public narratives. In line with social movement theory, this method explores how actors construct meanings, define injustices, and propose calls to action through language. As Noakes and Johnston (2005) argue, grievances alone are not enough to mobilize social movements; rather, what matters are the cognitive and interpretive processes through which individuals perceive injustice, assign blame, and become motivated to act. They emphasize that framing is a social-psychological mechanism that mediates between objective conditions and collective action. Therefore, my analysis focuses on identifying how various media actors, including Palestinian, Israeli, American, and alternative outlets, framed the killing of Abu Akleh in ways that either mobilized or muted demands for justice. Through close reading of headlines, lexical choices, agent suppression, and thematic repetition, I explore how these frames shaped the public's understanding of intent, responsibility, and legitimacy of calls for accountability. In doing so, I build on Noakes and Johnston's insight that framing helps to define situations by diagnosing problems, assigning responsibility, and proposing solutions, thereby playing a crucial role in social mobilization.

I looked at press releases, open letters to Congress, campaign websites, and social media posts. I analyzed how these groups used framing strategies. The Diagnostic challenge involves defining the problem (e.g., impunity, targeted killing). The Prognostic proposes solutions (e.g., FBI investigation, ICC involvement). Lastly, the Motivational challenge calls for action (e.g., petitions, protests, emails to Congress).

One pattern I saw was how groups emphasized Shireen's U.S. citizenship and her role as a journalist, which, as Bob explains, made the case more "marketable" in the global NGO and media world. I also analyzed how different groups strategically tailored their messaging to different audiences: CPJ emphasized press freedom for media professionals, CAIR and JVP emphasized racial and moral responsibility to faith-based or justice communities, and Lina Abu Akleh's advocacy humanized the story for broader appeal.

To understand how the government responded (or didn't), I examined Press briefings from the White House and State Department, Congressional letters and statements from figures like Reps. André Carson, Rashida Tlaib, and Ilhan Omar, The text of the Justice for Shireen Act (introduced November 2022), and References to the FBI investigation.

I used these documents to see how responsive the government was to pressure. In line with Doug McAdam's political process theory, I looked at how movements tried to work through "political opportunities", like a Democratic administration, a progressive caucus, and global attention to press freedom. I also paid close attention to the language used by government officials, phrases such as "tragic event," "complex situation," and "no conclusive evidence" were examined for their rhetorical function and impact on momentum for accountability.

3.2 How I Analyzed the Data

1. Thematic Analysis

I read all sources carefully to find common themes, repeated ideas, and keywords related to justice, press freedom, and U.S. responsibility.

2. Discourse and Frame Analysis

I studied how different actors used words and symbols to tell a story about Shireen's death. For example, calling her a "martyr," focusing on "crossfire," or talking about "journalistic freedom." I paid attention to tone, metaphor, and emphasis. I gave particular attention to how these frames either centered or obscured agency, responsibility, and urgency.

3. Process Tracing

I tried to follow the timeline: when movements made demands, and how the government responded. This helped me see where advocacy may have shaped public debate or policy language. For example, I looked at whether statements from CPJ or Lina Abu Akleh led to hearings or public statements from officials. This also included mapping the temporal correlation between media events (e.g., release of the Zeteo documentary) and shifts in policy statements or media headlines.

4. Theory-Informed Reading

I connected these findings to McAdam's ideas about how movements work. In my earlier analysis of McAdam's work, I noted how tactical innovation, leadership, and timing matter. For example, Lina Abu Akleh used her personal connection to humanize the case. This helped build emotional momentum, like civil rights leaders once did through moral appeals.

3.3 Why This Method Matters

My approach allowed me to see how advocacy and media shape political conversations around violence, not just by stating facts, but by choosing frames that connect with public values. This is especially important in transnational cases where facts are known but justice is avoided. Rather than just describing events, I showed how different actors, journalists, activists, politicians, tried to tell the story in a way that could move people, raise pressure, and demand accountability.

Using social movement theory gave my research structure. Bob's insights helped me understand why certain narratives gained traction and why others didn't. McAdam's theory

helped me think about timing, opportunity, and strategy, and how activists must constantly adapt to political realities. This methodology not only informed the analysis but also guided the structure of the body chapters, each organized to reflect key frames, tactics, and responses chronologically and thematically.

Chapter Four

Framing Shireen Abu Akleh – Media Narratives Across Borders

Media framing of Shireen Abu Akleh’s killing varied widely across Palestinian, Israeli, American, and alternative outlets. These differences reveal how news media construct meaning through selection, emphasis, and omission. Those are decisions that can shape public understanding and political response.

Drawing on framing theory, particularly the work of Chong and Druckman (2007), this chapter analyzes how these outlets deployed “frames in communication” to activate certain “frames in thought” in their audiences. It examines not only what was reported, but how: the language, structure, and imagery used to tell Shireen’s story.

I recognize that the role of the press, especially in traditional journalism, is not to advocate or to stir emotions but to report facts. Neutrality and restraint are central to journalistic standards. At the same time, social movement theory highlights that mobilization requires more than facts, it depends on framing that engages cognition, values, and emotion. As Noakes and Johnston note, people must undergo “cognitive and interpretive processes” before they participate in collective action. From this perspective, press coverage, even if it seeks neutrality, plays a role in shaping how events are cognitively processed by the public. Frames that avoid assigning responsibility or invoking moral clarity may limit the motivational power of the coverage, whereas advocacy groups and alternative media deliberately frame events in ways that inspire action. Thus, my argument is not that the press should act as advocacy, but that social movements must recognize how journalistic frames affect their ability to mobilize wider publics.

4.1 Palestinian and Arab Media: Clarity and Condemnation

Palestinian and Arab outlets offered clear, consistent narratives from the outset. They framed Abu Akleh’s killing as a deliberate act of state violence against a prominent journalist, and they placed it within the context of occupation and systemic targeting of the press. Outlets such as *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* and *MA’AN News* immediately framed Abu Akleh’s killing as a deliberate execution of a journalist. Headlines like “استشهاد شيرين أبو عاقلة” (the martyrdom of Shireen Abu Akleh) and references to the event as a “الجريمة البشعة” (awful crime) reinforced agency and culpability from the outset. These headlines

foregrounded Israeli agency using active voice and emotionally loaded terms, e.g., “Israeli forces assassinate Al Jazeera journalist.” The consistency in terminology reinforced a diagnostic frame that emphasized Israeli military culpability and the broader suppression of Palestinian journalism.

The funeral attack, in particular, was framed as a continuation of the violence. Al Jazeera Arabic, Al-Mayadeen, and other regional broadcasters aired live footage of Israeli police attacking pallbearers. Their anchors used emotionally charged language: “a desecration of dignity,” “الاعتداء على الكرامة” (الجزيرة, 2022), and “a war on mourning.” “حرب على الحداد” (الميادين, May 13, 2022). This framed not only the violence but also the denial of symbolic closure. The emotional register was unmistakable. Language invoked not just journalistic injustice but martyrdom, nationhood, and collective mourning. “Shireen is every Palestinian mother,” read one opinion headline on Al Arabiya. This cultural framing helped urge public solidarity across the Arab world.

Moreover, the personal became political. Tributes from journalists emphasized not only Abu Akleh’s professionalism but her symbolic value as a woman in conflict journalism. After her death, Palestinian women journalists publicly honored her as a role model and source of empowerment. Amena Ashkar, a former research assistant at the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, remarked, “*Shireen ... showed what I, a woman, am capable of providing this cause*” (New Arab, 2022). Similarly, Rasha Al Aqeedi, an Iraqi writer, researcher and analyst based in Washington, D.C., framed Shireen as a cultural breakthrough: “*An Arab woman ... reporting live—was new, and we were all in awe*” (New Lines Magazine, 2022). AFP, Agence France-Presse, a major international news agency based in Paris, France, reported that many young female journalists said their career choice was shaped by watching Shireen in action (Gostoli, TRT / AFP, 2022). Even Gideon Levy, an Israeli journalist and author, in Haaretz acknowledged her as a heroic figure: “*died a hero, doing her job*”, a tribute that carried unspoken weight about her gender and vulnerability in conflict zones (AP News, 2022). Collectively, these frames underscore how Shireen’s identity as a female journalist became a potent symbol of resistance, visibility, and representation in war reporting.

Framing in Arab media was not merely oppositional to Israeli narratives, it was designed to assert narrative sovereignty. The consistent use of active voice and emotive framing helped construct Shireen’s death as a moral violation, not just a battlefield casualty.

4.1.a. Journalism dangers

While these accounts foreground the personal and symbolic dimensions of her legacy, Devin Gillen’s *History in the Making* situates Abu Akleh’s career within the historical trajectory of Palestinian journalism under occupation. Journalism in Palestine operates within one of the most restrictive and dangerous environments for reporters worldwide. As Gillen details, Palestinian journalists navigate a media landscape shaped by decades of

military occupation, institutional censorship, and direct threats to their safety. This difficult environment has not only restricted press freedom but has also made Palestinian journalism deeply political. Every time journalists report the news, they are pushing back against the stories and viewpoints promoted by the occupying forces. Within this context, Shireen Abu Akleh's career gains added significance as her ability to report consistently and credibly under such conditions reflects both professional resilience and a collective struggle to preserve Palestinian voices in the global media sphere.

4.2 Israeli Media: Deflection and Delay

Israeli coverage, particularly from *Ynetnews*, *Haaretz*, and *The Times of Israel*, followed a familiar pattern of “defensive framing” which is a term used by Assaf (2023) to describe efforts to neutralize international criticism by emphasizing complexity and uncertainty. Initial reports suggested that Abu Akleh may have been killed in crossfire between the IDF and Palestinian militants. Initial reporting also reflected what Chong and Druckman (2007) refer to as ‘frames in communication.’ For example, *Ynetnews* ran cautious headlines such as ‘Slain journalist Abu Akleh likely killed by Israeli stray bullet, IDF probe concludes’ and framed the event as happening amid crossfire, removing agency in favor of chaos and ambiguity.” (*Ynetnews*, 2022a; *Ynetnews*, 2022b).

Haaretz, while more critical than some other Israeli outlets, initially offered a cautious narrative: its first report acknowledged the “possibility of Israeli responsibility,” yet prominently emphasized the IDF’s claim that Palestinian militants may have fired in the area (*Haaretz*, May 11, 2022). Only weeks later did *Haaretz* publish pieces acknowledging likely Israeli culpability, often citing independent investigations. Even as Israeli officials gradually shifted their stance, from outright denial to reluctantly acknowledging responsibility, media headlines often lagged behind which created a narrative buffer during the most intense scrutiny. Initially, immediately after the killing, Israeli leaders blamed Palestinian militants, claiming that gunfire during a raid could have been responsible (*The Guardian*, May 11, 2022). By May 13, the IDF indicated it was “possible” that a soldier might have fired the fatal shot but framed it as accidental and downplayed the possibility of wrongdoing (*Al Jazeera*, May 13, 2022).

Despite this shift, outlets such as *The New York Times* and *CNN* continued to use cautious language, referring to Israeli responsibility as “likely” or “possible” without prominently updating earlier headlines. Even after the Israeli forces officially admitted the “high possibility” of accidental fire on September 5, 2022, and declined to launch a criminal investigation (IDF statement, *Axios*; Israeli military probe, *CNN*), many media narratives retained ambiguity by emphasizing complexity or still pointing to Palestinian fire. This delay in reframing allowed initial frames of uncertainty to remain dominant in global discourse for months, effectively diluting accountability and softening public demand for justice.

The linguistic features of Israeli reporting were subtle but powerful. Israeli military statements, as carried in *Haaretz* and *CNN*, frequently described the event using phrases such as “high possibility” of an *unintentional* shooting, framing it as a *tragic incident* during ambiguous *clashes* rather than deliberate targeting (CNN, Sept. 6, 2022; RSF, Sept. 5, 2022). Headlines like “*Israeli military admits Shireen Abu Akleh likely killed by Israeli fire, but won’t charge soldiers*” (CNN, 2022) and RSF’s description that Israel “obscured the truth with vague justifications and hypotheses” illustrate how responsibility was softened linguistically. From a critical framing perspective, this use of passive or speculative language constructs a narrative of unpredictability and denies agency. It normalizes impunity and minimizes moral or legal culpability.

A few Israeli columnists later criticized this framing. In an op-ed published on May 11, 2022 in *Haaretz*, veteran journalist Gideon Levy questioned, “If it had been a Jewish journalist, would the language have been the same?” (Levy, 2022). Levy highlighted the persistence of denial, institutional sluggishness, and moral indifference in Israel’s response, contrasting it with the greater empathy shown when Israeli or Jewish lives are implicated. He argued that while international outrage was predictable in Abu Akleh’s case, equivalent concern is rarely afforded to ordinary Palestinian civilians whose deaths receive only perfunctory or dismissive responses. This internal critique emphasizes the tension within Israeli media between nationalist narrative imperatives and journalistic integrity. This shows how language choices are shaped by broader power dynamics and selective empathy.

4.3 U.S. Mainstream Media: False Equivalence and Framing Ambiguity

Mainstream American media presented the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh with a layer of neutrality that often obscured responsibility. Outlets such as *The New York Times*, *CNN*, and *NPR* (National Public Radio) adopted what Assaf (2023) calls a “false equivalence” frame, giving equal weight to Israeli and Palestinian accounts even when independent investigations pointed clearly to Israeli culpability.

For example, a May 11, 2022 *CNN* article titled, “Al Jazeera journalist killed during Israeli raid in West Bank” used passive voice and vague language. The headline did not name a perpetrator as it was not known at that time, nor did it indicate the nature of the attack. The report included both the IDF’s claim of crossfire and eyewitness refutations but presented them as equally credible. This is a pattern that appeared across several early articles. When *CNN* and other mainstream American media outlets framed the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh using passive voice and “false equivalence,” they engaged in what Chong and Druckman (2007) describe as “frames in communication.” These are the external frames, how journalists and institutions choose to present information to the public. In this case, framing Abu Akleh’s death as part of a “raid” or suggesting she “died during clashes,” without clearly assigning agency, is a deliberate communicative act that shapes audience perception.

However, for communication frames to be effective in promoting justice or clarity, they must activate what Chong and Druckman call “frames in thought”, the internal, cognitive processes by which individuals interpret and emotionally respond to information. That means a frame should ideally trigger moral clarity, empathy, or a sense of urgency. But in the example from CNN, the media’s neutral language and balanced positioning of conflicting claims (IDF vs. eyewitnesses) dilute the moral stakes. Rather than helping readers grasp that a press member might have been targeted unjustly, the coverage leaves them uncertain, unsure who to believe or what to feel. This ambiguous framing prevents “frames in thought” from forming clearly, which in turn reduces public pressure for accountability, and hinders the possibility of collective action.

While uncertainty is a natural part of breaking news, responsible journalism should not give equal weight to unequal claims, particularly when one side has eyewitness testimony, physical evidence, and independent investigations, and the other side offers institutional denials or vague assertions. Instead of framing such events with false neutrality, as Assaf (2023) warns, journalists should clearly contextualize the power dynamics between actors (e.g., a heavily armed state vs. a civilian journalist). They also need to use cautious but transparent language like “according to multiple eyewitnesses,” or “an early investigation suggests,” rather than collapsing competing accounts into a misleading balance. They can acknowledge asymmetries in credibility, such as the difference between an official military spokesperson and multiple verified eyewitnesses or video evidence. Lastly, they can revisit and update earlier reports as clarity emerges, rather than allowing vague early frames to dominate the narrative.

This interpretation aligns with the broader argument of this thesis that framing is never neutral, and that even journalistic “objectivity” can serve to blur accountability, dilute outrage, or protect entrenched power when used uncritically. In this case, using the passive headline (“journalist killed during raid”) without naming actors or clarifying context, especially when alternative evidence is already surfacing, can obscure responsibility and hinder calls for justice. *The New York Times* similarly published an article on May 11 titled, “*Shireen Abu Akleh, Trailblazing Palestinian Journalist, Dies at 51,*” which spent substantial space highly praising her career but was noncommittal on responsibility. The headline, notably, framed her death as a passive occurrence, “dies at 51”, rather than “shot by Israeli soldier,” despite eyewitness testimony and video evidence.

As Gabriel (2024) argues, such euphemistic language is not accidental but ideological. He explains that U.S. media framing of Palestinian deaths consistently employs vague or neutral terms, such as “clashes,” “crossfire,” or “unrest”, to obscure agency and avoid attributing responsibility, especially when allies like Israel are involved. Gabriel draws a comparative analysis between the coverage of Palestine and Ukraine to show how narratives shift depending on geopolitical alignment. While Ukrainian victims are described using personalized and emotionally resonant language, Palestinians are often portrayed abstractly or as collateral damage. This discrepancy, he suggests, reflects an underlying ideological bias that normalizes violence against certain populations while

elevating the suffering of others. In his words, framing becomes “a tool of selective empathy,” where political considerations dictate not only how violence is covered, but whose lives are grievable and whose are not.

Even after *The Washington Post* released a detailed forensic analysis concluding that an Israeli soldier most likely fired the fatal shot, other outlets continued to use vague framing. Articles would say, “The circumstances of her death remain unclear,” or “Multiple investigations suggest possible Israeli involvement,” avoiding definitive language even as evidence mounted. (Axios, 2022; Guardian, 2025). Gabriel’s analysis, drawing on Chomsky and Said, helps explain this pattern: American media often operate within a structure of implicit alliance, especially regarding U.S.-Israeli relations. This produces what he calls “moral asymmetry”, that is, the tendency to report foreign violence through a lens that excuses allies and demonizes adversaries. This asymmetry is especially stark when compared to media coverage of other journalists. For example, when a foreign army force kills American journalists in Ukraine or Afghanistan, headlines used active voice and named perpetrators. In Abu Akleh’s case, the fact that she was both Palestinian and American created a dissonance that U.S. outlets resolved through cautious, often sanitized, language.

Malkawi, Fareh, and Rabab’ah (2024) offer empirical validation for this observation. Their critical discourse analysis of headlines from English-language and Arabic-language sources finds that U.S. media disproportionately use passive constructions and rarely name the Israeli military as the actor. Consider this headline from *NPR* (May 11): “*Journalist dies while covering Israeli military operation.*” This structure erases agency and turns a killing into an unfortunate side effect. Compare this to Wafa’s Arabic-language headline: “Israeli soldiers assassinate journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Jenin.” The using of the word ‘assassination’ implies that they targeted her. Using Malkawi et al.’s framework, this difference represents a shift from agent-present framing (“X did Y to Z”) to agent-absent framing (“Z suffered an outcome”), which obscures both culpability and moral clarity. Not all American coverage followed this pattern. *The Intercept* and *Democracy Now!* adopted more assertive frames, which are addressed in Section 4.4. However, the dominant mainstream discourse was one of “balance”, which, in this case, meant moral fog.

This framing had significant consequences. By delaying the assignment of responsibility, U.S. media coverage contributed to political inaction. As analyzed in Chapter 6, government officials often pointed to “ongoing investigations” or “conflicting reports” as reasons for withholding condemnation or initiating legal steps. These justifications relied on the media’s ambiguity to sustain plausible deniability. In summary, U.S. mainstream media played a subtle but powerful role in shaping public understanding of Abu Akleh’s killing. While avoiding overt bias, their reliance on neutrality and passive constructions worked to defuse outrage and delay calls for justice, all while maintaining the appearance of objectivity.

Most of the American media examples I cite, such as CNN, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, were published on May 11, the day of Shireen Abu Akleh's death. On that day, these outlets reported many of the available facts, including that she was killed during an Israeli raid. However, I describe these headlines as vague because they avoided directly attributing agency, often relying on passive constructions like "journalist killed" rather than "Israeli soldier killed her." In contrast, Palestinian outlets and Al Jazeera framed the event with much greater clarity, naming Israel as responsible and often invoking martyrdom language to emphasize meaning and injustice. This difference shows that while American media did cover the facts, their framing muted responsibility and avoided moral condemnation, distinguishing them from Palestinian media narratives.

4.4 Alternative Media and the Power of Naming

Alternative outlets, especially those operating outside mainstream editorial norms, offered some of the clearest and most assertive narratives regarding Shireen Abu Akleh's death. Programs like *Democracy Now!*, *The Intercept*, and investigative documentaries like *Who Killed Shireen?* framed her killing not only as a violation of press freedom but as a symptom of systemic impunity for Israeli violent actors. Alternative media engaged in frame transformation, as explained by Snow et al, by challenging dominant narratives and reshaping Abu Akleh's killing as an attack on journalism rather than an unfortunate incident of conflict.

Democracy Now! dedicated multiple segments to the case, featuring Lina Abu Akleh, CPJ representatives, and international law experts. Unlike mainstream outlets, they framed her killing with clear language, "Israeli sniper shot Shireen Abu Akleh" (2022), and emphasized the lack of consequences as part of a pattern of targeting journalists. Their diagnostic frame was not just that Abu Akleh was killed, but that the failure to hold anyone accountable would ensure future attacks. *The Intercept* ran a headline that read, "*Israeli Military Killed Shireen Abu Akleh. Will the U.S. Do Anything About It?* (2022)" This headline combined both diagnosis and prognosis, naming the perpetrator and directly implicating U.S. foreign policy in the outcome. Such clarity sharply contrasts with the false equivalence of mainstream media. Alternative outlets served not only as information sources but also as movement allies. This led to the amplifying of activist frames and pushing beyond journalistic neutrality.

A particularly influential example was the Zeteo documentary *Who Killed Shireen?*, which aired in 2025. The film made two major claims, first that the sniper who killed Abu Akleh was Alon Scagio, a member of an elite Israeli unit; and second that the Biden administration had early intelligence suggesting Israeli responsibility but chose supporting Israel's public denial. The documentary's framing was confrontational and accusatory. It did not hedge language or present multiple narratives. Instead, it presented a moral and political indictment of both Israel and the United States. This kind of framing aligns with what Ganz (2000) calls "strategic capacity" in advocacy movements, the ability to adapt tactics, develop compelling narratives, and seize emotional momentum. The release of the

documentary served as a moment of reframing, reigniting media attention and advocacy pressure after months of political silence.

When the investigative documentary *Who Killed Shireen?* was released in May 2025, it triggered a significant surge in media coverage and public discourse around Abu Akleh’s death. The documentary identified the Israeli sniper as Alon Scagio and alleged that U.S. officials had internal evidence suggesting an intentional shooting, later publicly downplayed (Al Jazeera Staff, 2025; Zeteo, 2025). Its revelations propelled a flurry of headlines from international outlets, The Guardian, NPR, CNN, The Times of Israel, and Al Jazeera among them, each reporting on its findings and listing questions about accountability and political cover-up (Zeteo, 2025; Lemkin Institute, 2025). The documentary’s release also prompted renewed statements from U.S. lawmakers and CPJ, who criticized the prolonged FBI investigation and called for full transparency (CPJ, 2025). Far from fading into obscurity, the documentary served as a reframing moment, bringing back public momentum and reframing the narrative not as a tragic accident but as a case of systemic impunity.

4.5 Comparative Observations and Gaps

Comparing the four media ecosystems reveals a spectrum of narrative clarity and moral framing as shown in Table (1.1)

| Media Type | Palestinian/Arab | Israeli | U.S Mainstream | Alternative Media |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Actor Naming | Strong | Weak | Ambiguous | Strong |
| Voice | Active | Passive | Passive | Active |
| Emotional Framing | High (Martyrdom, injustice) | Low (complexity, regret) | Moderate to Low | High (impunity, outrage) |
| Political Consequence | High public mobilization | Narrative protection | Justified political caution | Advocacy alignment |

One clear pattern is that headline writers are more likely to suppress agency in U.S. and Israeli media, often through passive constructions or headline structures that emphasize uncertainty. For example, compare *Al Jazeera* (2022): “Israeli forces assassinate veteran journalist” and *The New York Times* (2022): “Journalist dies during raid in West Bank” This difference is not trivial. It frames emotional engagement, moral clarity, and ultimately political response. Another gap appears in the relative absence of Abu Akleh’s U.S. citizenship in Israeli and U.S. headlines. Her dual identity could have been a leverage point in advocacy but in headlines, writers underemphasized it, and this reduced her symbolic power in American media narratives. Furthermore, U.S coverage gave little attention to the funeral assault compared to Arab media. This moment, rich in visual and emotional impact, could have generated moral outrage, but it remained underreported.

4.6 Conclusion

Media narratives surrounding Shireen Abu Akleh's killing were shaped by structural, cultural, and political factors. While Palestinian and Arab media framed her death as an act of targeted violence and martyrdom, Israeli and U.S. mainstream outlets employed language that neutralized or deferred responsibility.

Alternative media, in contrast, functioned as an extension of the advocacy movement, using unambiguous language, emotional appeals, and investigative framing to challenge state narratives. These differences matter. Media frames influence public perception, emotional engagement, and political feasibility. By choosing which voices to amplify and which structures to emphasize, journalists, like activists, play a central role in constructing what is considered truth, tragedy, or injustice.

The disparity in media language across outlets reflects what Entman (1991) identifies as narrative asymmetry, where geopolitical alliances shape the tone, emotion, and moral framing of international news events. Just as U.S. media softened its language when the U.S. military downed an Iranian civilian airliner, so too did mainstream U.S. outlets use euphemistic or ambiguous framing in covering the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. Terms like "clash," "incident," or "crossfire" diluted clarity and accountability. In contrast, Palestinian and independent media applied direct framing, labeling the act as "assassination" or "execution." This divergence highlights how media framing is both political and structural, reinforcing Entman's argument that the identity of the actor influences whether an event is presented as a tragedy or a crime.

This divided and often unclear media coverage created the setting in which advocacy groups had to work. The next chapter looks at how these groups tried to build strong frames and use specific tactics to push through the uncertainty and make their message heard.

Chapter Five

Advocacy, Framing, and Movement Strategy After Shireen Abu Akleh's Killing

Shireen Abu Akleh's killing triggered a wave of advocacy efforts, particularly from U.S.-based human rights and media freedom organizations. These groups engaged in rapid-response campaigns that sought not only to demand justice for Abu Akleh but to reframe broader narratives about U.S. foreign policy, press freedom, and Palestinian rights. Their strategies reflected distinct framing choices and movement capacities, which this chapter explores through the lens of social movement theory. Drawing on the works of Bob (2005), McAdam (1982), Ganz (2000), and others, this chapter dissects the tactical framing choices, organizational resources, and political targeting strategies deployed by movements seeking accountability for Shireen's death.

5.1 Strategic Framing: Shaping the Meaning of Shireen's Death

Following the killing, several advocacy organizations began constructing frames to interpret the event, mobilize supporters, and influence policymakers. These included diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames, as identified by the aforementioned social movement scholars.

Diagnostic Framing (Defining the Problem)

Groups like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Amnesty International, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) defined the problem in different but overlapping ways.

First, CPJ emphasized the systemic impunity for killings of journalists, citing over 20 Palestinian journalists killed since 2000. Quotes from CPJ's May 2022 statements described Shireen Abu Akleh's killing as part of a broader pattern of impunity, calling it "a grave violation of press freedom" and "a test of U.S. credibility" in protecting journalists abroad (CPJ, 2023).

Second, Amnesty International characterized Abu Akleh's killing not as an isolated case but part of a broader pattern of extrajudicial violence and apartheid, arguing that such

killings are components of a system of state-structured oppression. Their deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa, Heba Morayef, called for accountability ‘all the way to the top of the Israeli military’s chain of command,’ emphasizing that ‘these killings... are part of a system of apartheid which thrives on violent oppression and crimes under international law’ (Amnesty International, 2022).

Third, on May 11, 2022, JVP’s Political Director, Beth Miller, tweeted:

Israel is the only country in the world where the US doesn’t track which weapons go to which military unit. Why? For moments like this, when people demand to know if US weapons were used to shoot & kill a Palestinian American journalist.

This framing calls U.S. military support into question and underscores the need for transparency. Also, on May 11, 2022, JVP tweeted: “A journalist murdered in cold blood by the Israeli military and the NY Times can’t even muster the integrity to report the story truthfully. She was targeted. By snipers.” JVP also launched a petition titled “New York Times: Tell the truth,” that argues that the NYT used passive voice, failed to name Israeli responsibility, and emphasized Israeli perspectives over eyewitness accounts and human rights organizations like B’Tselem.

Similarly, CAIR underscored Abu Akleh’s American citizenship, stating that “when an American journalist is killed, we expect our government to act decisively, regardless of who the shooter is” (CAIR, 2023). These frames attempted to resonate not only with human rights norms but also with American values of justice, press freedom, and protection of citizens. This strategy aligns with Bob’s (2005) notion of ‘marketable framing’, tailoring messaging to appeal to key gatekeepers and funders. Advocates used frame extension, as explained by Snow et al., by linking Abu Akleh’s killing not only to Palestinian rights but to universal principles of press freedom, thereby broadening the constituency of concern.

Eyewitness videos and audio documentation that contradicted Israeli claims after Abu Akleh’s killing exemplify what Ayoub (2023) calls “counter-data.” This visual and grassroots-generated evidence helped Palestinian media and international outlets frame the incident as a targeted killing, not a crossfire incident. Ayoub emphasizes that the act of documenting, especially in real-time, functions as both a tool of framing and a form of resistance, particularly under asymmetric power structures. Palestinian journalists, by capturing and circulating such content, reframed the narrative away from official state accounts and toward a more accurate representation of events.

As media analyst James North (2022) contends, the mainstream U.S. media fell into a classic pattern: ‘react immediately to bad news by putting out false or unproven statements... knowing that the Americans will take the bait with a “both-sides say, who knows what’s true?” story’ (pp. 1–2). This underscores how early frames in coverage, co-

produced through institutional restrictions and state misdirection, delay clarity and dilute moral accountability.

Prognostic Framing (Proposing Solutions)

The movement's solutions also varied in specificity and ambition. CPJ and Reporters Without Borders called for an independent investigation led by the U.S. government, preferably through the FBI (2022b). Also, Amnesty International demanded a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) (2022). Finally, Progressive members of Congress, influenced by advocacy lobbying, introduced the "Justice for Shireen Act,". The bill was designed to ensure accountability through investigative transparency (Carson, 2022). It sought to make U.S. investigations mandatory in cases involving U.S. citizens killed by foreign militaries. These agencies frames these proposals as necessary steps not only for justice in Shireen's case but for setting international precedent. This strategic move sought to extend individual advocacy into broader structural reforms.

Motivational Framing (Calling for Action)

Advocates used a range of emotional and moral appeals. Lina Abu Akleh, Shireen's niece, became a central moral voice, speaking to Congress, media, and international bodies. Her advocacy emphasized Shireen's values, American identity, and symbolic role as a journalist fighting for truth. Furthermore, on November 15, 2022, CMEP's Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, joined 25 Christian faith leaders in a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, urging a U.S.-led investigation into the killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. The letter emphasized both moral and legal imperatives, stating that the U.S. government must ensure accountability, especially because Abu Akleh was a U.S. citizen, which is a strong example of faith-based advocacy using moral framing. These motivational appeals were often visual and personal: social media posts included videos of Shireen reporting, the moment of the funeral attack, and Lina's emotional pleas. Ganz's (2000) theory of "strategic capacity", the ability of movements to combine emotional clarity with tactical flexibility, is evident here. Lina's unique position as family, activist, and media-savvy speaker helped elevate the campaign's moral resonance.

Additionally, the framing choices varied across platforms: social media emphasized emotion and immediacy; press releases focused on legal precedent and structural critique; direct congressional lobbying used both moral and policy-oriented language. As Mintz and Redd (2003) emphasize, purposeful framing is a deliberate attempt to insert organizing themes into political discourse. Advocacy groups such as CPJ and CAIR utilized Shireen's identity as a journalist and a U.S. citizen to frame her killing as not only a press freedom violation but as a test of U.S. democratic values, an example of thematic and interactive framing aimed at mobilizing public opinion and institutional actors.

As Doug McAdam (1982) emphasizes, movements succeed not only because of grievances but also because of organizational strength and the ability of institutions to coordinate their efforts. In Shireen Abu Akleh's case, advocacy was most effective when groups such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and Palestinian human rights organizations converged on a unified demand for an independent investigation. This coordination amplified their legitimacy and visibility in Washington and in international media. However, there were also moments when the advocacy landscape was fragmented: some groups framed the issue primarily as a press freedom concern, while others emphasized U.S. citizenship, and still others tied it to the broader struggle for Palestinian rights. These differences sometimes diluted the overall message, making it easier for U.S. officials to downplay or compartmentalize their response. Together, these dynamics illustrate McAdam's point that while grievances may be constant, organizational unity can significantly strengthen, or weaken, the influence of a movement.

5.2 Framing, Stereotypes, and Orientalist Perceptions

While framing theory highlights the importance of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames, these frames do not operate in a vacuum. Their effectiveness depends on how they resonate with audiences who interpret them through existing cultural assumptions and stereotypes. As Snow and Benford argue, frame resonance is shaped by whether a frame connects with an audience's pre-existing beliefs and values. In the American context, public perceptions of Palestinians are often mediated by stereotypes that conflate Palestinian identity with Islam, conflict, and violence. When advocates failed to foreground that Shireen Abu Akleh was a Palestinian Christian, they missed an opportunity to challenge these stereotypes and broaden resonance with American Christian communities who might otherwise identify more strongly with her story. In this sense, the absence of framing her religious identity limited the mobilization potential of justice campaigns in the United States.

Orientalism, as articulated by Edward Said, provides a critical lens for understanding why certain frames struggle to gain traction. Orientalist discourse constructs Palestinians and other Middle Eastern peoples as the "Other": irrational, inferior, and perpetually embroiled in violence. This backdrop shapes how American audiences interpret frames around Shireen's killing. For some, sympathy may emerge precisely because she is imagined as a victim from a "developing" or "inferior" region. For others, her death is dismissed as a predictable "collateral" outcome of reporting from a conflict zone, a reaction that reflects orientalist assumptions about Palestinians as expendable. In both cases, the orientalist gaze mediates frame reception and either dilutes or distorts the intended motivational appeal of advocacy efforts. Thus, the intersection of framing theory and Orientalism highlights the structural challenges faced by transnational justice movements: their ability to mobilize depends not only on the strategic crafting of frames but also on their capacity to contest entrenched stereotypes that shape audience perception.

5.3 Movement Infrastructure: Who Mobilized?

A diverse ecosystem of advocacy organizations, both large and grassroots, engaged in the campaign. Each brought distinct resources, histories, and institutional identities. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): With decades of experience defending global press

freedom, CPJ offered both legitimacy and global media access. They issued reports, briefings, and public calls for an FBI investigation. Amnesty International: Leveraged its international legal apparatus to frame Shireen's killing as a war crime and tied it into a broader apartheid framework. Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP): Positioned itself as a Jewish organization critical of Israeli policy, allowing it to challenge dominant U.S. narratives from within the American Jewish community. The CAIR and American Muslims for Palestine (AMP): Tied the campaign into broader Muslim American advocacy and racial justice discourse, often referencing Black Lives Matter to build coalitional momentum.

These organizations attempted to explore McAdam's (1982) three movement prerequisites: political opportunity (a progressive Democratic Congress), mobilizing structures (NGOs and activist networks), and framing processes (linking the case to broader justice frames). Their coordination, while decentralized, showed signs of shared infrastructure, open letters with multiple signatures, coordinated days of action, and joint social media campaigns. These tactical alliances exemplify a process known in social movement theory as "frame amplification" (often referred to colloquially as *coalitional amplification*), where movements intensify shared interpretive frames by bridging organizations, reinforcing core messages, and amplifying collective calls to action across networks. By aligning multiple groups around a common diagnostic and motivational frame, coalitional amplification enhances discursive resonance and boosts political pressure within the global morality market. (Snow et al., 1986). Importantly, the presence of well-established groups like CPJ alongside activist-led groups like JVP enabled multiple fronts of engagement. One focused on legal/institutional advocacy, and the other focused on grassroots mobilization.

5.4 Policy Pressure: Tactics and Targets

While advocacy groups framed Shireen Abu Akleh's killing as a moral and legal crisis, they also pursued targeted political action. Their strategies included lobbying, legislation, and public campaigns aimed at applying pressure to the U.S. government, particularly Congress and the State Department. Advocacy groups identified and engaged progressive members of Congress who had shown interest in Palestinian rights and press freedom. Reps. André Carson, Rashida Tlaib, Ilhan Omar, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez issued or co-signed letters to the Biden administration demanding an independent U.S.-led investigation. Senator Chris Van Hollen, while more centrist, also called for transparency from Israeli officials and the FBI.

Activists organized virtual lobbying days and in-person visits to Congressional offices, targeting members of the Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committees. As noted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (2022), these efforts often paired family voices like Lina Abu Akleh's with policy experts from CPJ or Amnesty to humanize and professionalize the advocacy. McAdam's notion of "political opportunities" is useful here; the advocacy groups leveraged a relatively favorable political climate, which is a Democratic-controlled House and widespread attention to press freedom, to push their demands. However, the depth of that opportunity proved limited by bipartisan reluctance to criticize Israel.

In November 2022, Rep. André Carson introduced the Justice for Shireen Act, which called for a mandatory FBI investigation when U.S. citizens are killed abroad under suspicious circumstances; transparency requirements from the State Department; provisions to block military aid to units found responsible for civilian killings.

The bill marked a major milestone in advocacy efforts. Its introduction was a direct result of movement pressure and was supported by JVP, CAIR, and CPJ. Advocacy groups mobilized supporters to email Congress, resulting in over 50,000 constituent messages. Despite its visibility, the Justice for Shireen Act failed to gain meaningful legislative momentum. Originally introduced by Representative André Carson in November 2022 (H.R. 9291), the bill was referred to the House Foreign Affairs Committee but no hearings were ever held, and it was not advanced further in the legislative process (Congress.gov, 2022). When reintroduced in May 2023 (H.R. 3477), it similarly stalled at referral, with no committee action recorded and no progress toward floor consideration (Congress.gov, 2023). However, the bill's existence nonetheless functioned as a symbolic milestone. Its introduction marked a shift from general condemnatory statements to formal legislative proposals tied directly to accountability mechanisms, which drew support from over 60 civil-society groups, including Amnesty International, CPJ, RSF, and JVP, who urged Congress to pass the act as a measure of U.S. accountability (Mondoweiss, 2023; CPJ, 2023). Though it remained in committee, the bill's sponsors and advocacy coalitions used it strategically to sustain public attention and frame the killing not simply as tragic, but as a legal and policy failure.

Public Campaigns and Protest

Activists also organized street protests and public actions, especially during key political moments. A major protest in Washington, D.C. occurred on May 20, 2022, outside the Israeli Embassy. Also, media, academia, and civil society sent petitions and open letters Secretary of State Antony Blinken with high-profile signatories. Moreover, Activists coordinated Twitter and Instagram mobilization efforts, many using #JusticeForShireen, often centering on emotional appeals by Lina Abu Akleh. For example, Lina tweeted “Accountability requires action. We look forward to a US investigation that leads to real consequences. Shireen was my aunt and the voice of...” (Abu Akleh, 2022, Crawford & Winsor, 2022), using her personal narrative to humanize advocacy while galvanizing support online.

These tactics reflect Ganz's (2000) insight about “strategic capacity”: successful movements tailor their messaging to each platform and audience, using data, emotion, and moral appeal where appropriate. The campaign also displayed flexibility; after initial government silence, groups shifted from public shaming to appeals to American values, invoking the need to protect U.S. citizens and the sanctity of the press.

5.5 Framing vs. Silence: Obstacles and Limits

Despite strong advocacy, the campaign for accountability faced formidable barriers. Chief among them was the strategic silence of the Biden administration, which avoided clear condemnation of Israeli actions while claiming to support a full investigation. State Department statements frequently used ambiguous phrases like: “We are deeply saddened by the death of Shireen Abu Akleh.”; “We support a thorough and transparent investigation.”; “We continue to call for accountability” (2022).

These formulations avoided direct attribution of blame. As Gabriel (2024) notes, such rhetoric functions as a form of narrative containment, appearing responsive while avoiding political rupture. Even when the Israeli military acknowledged “a high probability” that one of its soldiers fired the shot, U.S. officials emphasized the lack of “intent” and resisted calls for sanctions or conditions on aid.

Political Constraints and Advocacy Limits

Several significant obstacles emerged alongside advocacy efforts. Pro-Israel lobbying networks such as AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) have aggressively targeted progressive lawmakers, including Reps. Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, Cori Bush, and Jamaal Bowman, often deploying Super PAC spending to influence primary races and deter support for legislation critical of Israeli military actions (Politico, April 2024; Financial Times, 2024). This pressure contributed to reluctance from centrist Democrats, who feared political repercussions and donor backlash for supporting measures like the Justice for Shireen Act.

Media coverage limitations hindered sustained public engagement. Mainstream outlets often reverted to neutral or ambiguous framing, failing to mobilize or maintain public pressure over time (as discussed in Chapter 4). Movement scholars like McAdam (1982) and Bob (2005) argue that structural power, in this case, U.S.-Israel political alignment, can outweigh even strategic framing efforts.

Finally, intra-movement diversity also constrained the campaign: while groups like CPJ, Amnesty, and JVP pushed for legal accountability, others focused on narrative justice or indirect pressure. Some organizations hesitated to directly confront U.S. foreign policy, leading to fragmentation of purpose and tone within the advocacy ecosystem. This lack of coherence diluted the collective influence and limited the ability to push beyond symbolic gestures into legislative change.

Moreover, the inability of some frames to gain traction, despite emotional clarity, illustrates what Mintz and Redd define as “failed” or “counterproductive” framing, where intended outcomes are not achieved, or audiences respond in unintended ways. In this case, the failure to spur a decisive U.S. governmental response shows how structural political alliances can neutralize even strategically framed advocacy efforts.

5.6 Conclusion

Advocacy efforts around Shireen Abu Akleh's death demonstrate both the potential and the limits of framing strategies in transnational justice movements. By drawing on moral narratives, symbolic identity, and legal claims, advocates created a compelling campaign that briefly penetrated the U.S. political landscape. However, the failure to achieve concrete policy change, beyond symbolic gestures and stalled legislation, reflects the enduring power of silence, alliance, and media ambiguity. This chapter showed how social movement theory, particularly the work of McAdam, Ganz, and Bob, helps make sense of both the movement's agility and its structural constraints. Despite momentary gains, the road to justice remains blocked not by ignorance, but by intentional political choices.

Chapter 6

Impact, Silence, and the Limits of Accountability

While advocacy efforts brought Shireen Abu Akleh's case to the forefront of international attention, the political and legal outcomes were limited. This chapter explores the extent of that impact, from shifts in public discourse to the absence of accountability.

6.1 Public Response: Visibility Without Resolution

Shireen's killing sparked global visibility, especially in Arab and diaspora communities. Vigils, hashtags, and digital campaigns spread rapidly, and her name became synonymous with the dangers of journalism in Palestine till present. However, this visibility did not translate into meaningful policy shifts. Sentiment analysis of social media showed spikes in engagement around major events, her death, the funeral assault, the Zeteo documentary, but with declining momentum between them. This episodic attention reflects a broader pattern of moral fatigue in human rights advocacy.

American public discourse, while momentarily energized, largely lacked sustained institutional follow-up. Op-eds appeared in outlets like *The Washington Post*, clearly calling for justice and naming U.S. complicity, including a personal appeal by Lina Abu-Akleh herself, arguing that 'Americans deserve a full accounting of [her] death' (Abu Akleh, 2022), and editorials such as 'Truth is emerging in the death of Al Jazeera's Shireen Abu Akleh' and 'We need accountability in Shireen Abu Akleh's death' that highlighted U.S. inaction as undermining both moral credibility and press freedom. These pieces signaled a shift from passive reporting to moral demand.

6.2 Congressional Action and Political Pressure

Progressive members of Congress issued three key congressional interventions between May and November 2022. On May 19, a letter led by Rep. André Carson and cosigned by 57 House Democrats urged the State Department and FBI to initiate a U.S.-led investigation into the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh (The Times of Israel, 2022). On June 23, 24 U.S. Senators, led by Sen. Chris Van Hollen, sent a letter to President Biden calling for direct U.S. involvement in the investigation under U.S. auspices (Chris Van Hollen,

2022). In November, the FBI formally opened an investigation, a move prompting both the introduction of the Justice for Shireen Act by 19 House Democrats and sharp criticism from Israel's defense minister (Axios b, 2022). These efforts received coverage in major media outlets and drew statements from advocacy groups like Amnesty International, yet the State Department's responses remained cautious and diplomatically vague.

The Justice for Shireen Act was the most concrete legislative proposal but remained stuck in committee (U.S. Congress, 2023). In comparison, past incidents, such as the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, received bipartisan resolutions and sanctions (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2018; Time, 2018; Axios, 2018). The lack of similar momentum in Shireen's case highlights the asymmetry of U.S. foreign policy priorities. Bob's (2005) theory of unequal voice in the global morality market is useful here. Despite Shireen's U.S. citizenship and professional status, her political position as a Palestinian journalist limited her marketability in the eyes of key institutions.

6.3 The Role of the Biden Administration: Strategic Ambiguity

The Biden administration's approach was marked by strategic ambiguity, a rhetorical performance of concern without substantive consequences (Larison, 2022). President Biden made no direct public comment on the case, even during his July 2022 visit; he avoided assigning responsibility while acknowledging Abu Akleh merely as 'an American citizen and a proud Palestinian' (RSF, 2022). Secretary Blinken later expressed his 'deepest condolences and commitment to pursue accountability,' but stopped short of demanding an independent U.S. investigation (Axios, 2022). Meanwhile, the State Department consistently deferred to Israel's internal investigation, relying on the U.S. Security Coordinator's summary of that probe despite clear conflicts of interest (Democracy Now, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022). The FBI's decision to open an investigation, quietly reported in late 2022, was never accompanied by a timeline, mandate, or public update.

The Zeteo documentary's findings were especially condemning. It suggested the Biden administration had intelligence naming the shooter (Alon Scagio) and advised a low-profile response. This claim was never publicly addressed. A 2025 investigation by Zeteo asserts that U.S. officials initially concluded Abu Akleh's killing was likely intentional, knowing the soldier would have seen her press vest and recognized she was a journalist. However, reportedly under political pressure, the Biden administration publicly characterized the incident as unintentional and reframed it as 'tragic circumstances' rather than deliberate wrongdoing (Al Jazeera Staff, 2025 ; Democracy Now!, 2025). The film suggests this shift functioned as intentional damage control, advising a low-profile response to avoid straining relations with Israel and neutralizing any potential accountability for a U.S. ally. Assaf (2023) and Gabriel (2024) both argue that silence is not merely inaction but a strategic choice, one that maintains geopolitical alliances at the expense of justice. The Biden administration's behavior exemplifies this.

6.4 Movement Successes: Shifting the Discourse

While concrete policy outcomes were limited, advocacy around Abu Akleh's death did achieve discursive and symbolic successes. These included shifting media narratives, elevating Palestinian voices, and creating new space for critique within U.S. policy debates. Several mainstream media outlets, including *The Washington Post*, eventually adopted more assertive language, citing forensic evidence and eyewitness accounts that directly contradicted Israeli claims. This shift would likely not have occurred without sustained advocacy, including the pressure generated by CPJ, Amnesty, and Lina Abu Akleh's media appearances. Lina's presence in public discourse also marked a new kind of visibility: a young Palestinian-American woman repeatedly addressing Congress, cable news, and global forums with moral clarity and strategic purpose. Her testimony at a congressional briefing in December 2022 was widely circulated and cited by both advocacy groups and lawmakers. Due to Lina's involvement in the advocacy process, she is best described as a human rights advocate and emerging journalist, not a career politician. Lina's presence in public discourse marked a new kind of visibility: as a Palestinian-American woman repeatedly addressing Congress, global forums, and media with moral clarity and strategic intent. Her congressional testimony in December 2022 resonated widely in advocacy circles and among lawmakers. Contrary to pursuing formal political office, Lina continues to build a career as a journalist and human rights advocate. In 2024, she co-founded the Shireen Abu Akleh Foundation, offering fellowships to aspiring Palestinian journalists and reinforcing her role in shaping press freedom movements rather than electoral politics. The case also contributed to a growing pattern in which Palestinian-American issues are no longer relegated to fringe advocacy circles.

Following Abu Akleh's killing, several progressive organizations added Palestine-specific language to their human rights platforms. This can be seen as an indicator of shifting discursive norms. "Following Shireen Abu Akleh's death, notable U.S. advocacy and progressive organizations began embedding Palestine-specific framing into their official platforms. For example, the Committee to Protect Journalists joined 60+ groups urging Congress to pass the *Justice for Shireen Act* (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2023), while ADC immediately categorized her death as a war crime and called for conditioning U.S. support to Israel (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2022). Similarly, chapters of DSA such as Silicon Valley DSA publicly framed her killing as an assassination, and by 2023, the national DSA platform had formally endorsed strong Palestine language, including calls for U.S. disengagement with Israel and support for Palestinian self-determination (Democratic Socialists of America, 2021; 2023)."

Groups like Al-Haq, Forensic Architecture, and Shireen's family used what Ayoub (2023) defines as counter-data to support legal claims and advocacy. These efforts exemplify framing through evidentiary production, not only constructing narratives but generating data that contradicts official state accounts. The use of independent investigations, eyewitness maps, and forensic analysis strengthened the framing of Shireen's killing as a human rights violation and helped move the issue into international legal forums like the

ICC. These discursive gains, though limited in legal effect, helped shift the Overton window, expanding what is publicly sayable about U.S. complicity in Israeli military violence.

The limited success of movement narratives may be viewed through the lens of Mintz and Redd's (2003) idea of "productive framing." While these efforts shifted public discourse and generated policy proposals such as the Justice for Shireen Act, the lack of governmental follow-through suggests that these frames achieved symbolic but not structural outcomes. Given the media's early hesitance to reframe the killing, as North (2022) documents, Palestinian advocacy groups had the added burden of pushing back against mainstream narrative inertia, underscoring the political necessity of counterframing and grassroots documentation.

Even when international legal mechanisms were invoked, accountability remained elusive. As Gunawan, Ihsan, and Anderson (2023) argue, the Palestinian Authority formally submitted evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC), framing Shireen Abu Akleh's killing as a potential war crime under international humanitarian law and the Rome Statute. Yet, the authors emphasize that such legal efforts are often obstructed by Israel's refusal to cooperate and the political shielding it receives, particularly from the United States. This dynamic mirrors the broader findings of this thesis. Advocacy can shape discourse and raise global awareness, but translating moral and legal claims into actual accountability is constrained by entrenched power relations and political alliances.

6.5 Comparative Framing: Shireen Abu Akleh and Other U.S. Citizens Killed Abroad

To further contextualize the framing of Shireen Abu Akleh's killing, this section compares her case with other U.S. citizens who were killed abroad under disputed or violent circumstances.

In September 2024, Israeli forces killed Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, an American-Turkish activist, in the occupied West Bank during a protest. Al Jazeera reported the incident and highlighted her dual citizenship and peaceful activism (Al Jazeera, 2024). However, the case did not gain the same global traction or sustained media framing as Abu Akleh's. While Shireen was framed as a martyr for press freedom and the face of journalistic courage, Eygi's case was largely reduced to a footnote in the ongoing coverage of Israeli military operations.

The case of Omar Assad, an 80-year-old Palestinian-American who died in Israeli custody in early 2022, also saw limited media coverage. U.S. outlets briefly reported on the case, yet framing emphasized Assad's age rather than accountability.

Rachel Corrie, an American activist killed in Gaza in 2003, received more sustained attention. Still, even her case, which involved eyewitness testimony and international outcry, eventually faded from the public eye. Corrie was sometimes framed as naïve or

reckless, undermining the moral clarity of her activism. This reflects what Entman (2004) would call evaluative framing that distorts attribution of responsibility.

Framing Shireen's case alongside others highlights what Noakes and Johnston (2005) call "interpretive struggles", the battle over defining not only what happened but what it means. Abu Akleh's status as a professional journalist, her institutional backing, and her symbolic status allowed for a stronger, clearer frame of injustice and martyrdom to emerge. Other victims, despite shared nationality or activist commitments, were often framed through lenses that diminished blame or failed to sustain moral momentum. This comparative analysis shows that while frames may differ in clarity, intentionality, and resonance, they all contend with structural power, media gatekeeping, state alliances, and institutional inertia. It supports the initial argument that framing justice is as political as the pursuit of justice itself.

There are factors that can account for variation in the level of attention advocates gain for U.S. citizens killed abroad according to Al Jazeera article (2025). The first factor is the pre-existing public visibility and legacy. The second factor is institutional and organizational backing. Third factor is the nature of the incident and perceived moral clarity. Fourth, framing choices in mainstream and allied media. Fifth, governmental response, both U.S. and host country. And lastly, alignment with broader political and media agendas.

The first factor is the pre-existing public visibility and legacy. Shireen Abu Akleh: Well-known across the Arab world as a veteran Al Jazeera correspondent; decades-long credibility meant her death immediately resonated globally (Al Jazeera, 2025). Omar Assad: 78-year-old Palestinian-American with local recognition in his West Bank community but little international profile, initial coverage was mostly regional until NGOs amplified it. Rachel Corrie was an activist that was already known in anti-occupation networks. Her 2003 death while acting as a human shield was widely publicized because she was a young, idealistic American peace activist. Eygi had a limited prior public profile. The coverage concentrated in Turkish and niche activist circles.

Second factor is the institutional and organizational backing. Abu Akleh: Al Jazeera invested heavily in international advocacy, hiring lawyers, submitting to the ICC, coordinating with CPJ and RSF. Assad: Advocacy led mainly by family and Palestinian NGOs, with periodic boosts from CPJ and HRW but less sustained institutional push. Corrie: The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and Corrie's family campaigned persistently in U.S. and Israeli courts, keeping her case visible for years. Eygi: Had backing from religious and peace organizations but lacked the global media muscle of Al Jazeera.

Third factor is the nature of the incident and perceived moral clarity. Abu Akleh: Killed wearing press vest in a clearly civilian context; video evidence supported claims of targeted killing, making moral framing straightforward. Assad: Died after detention at an Israeli checkpoint, less visual evidence, some ambiguity over cause of death diluted

narrative clarity. Corrie: Death by IDF bulldozer during protest, photos and eyewitnesses reinforced the injustice frame. Eygi: Killed in a more chaotic protest context, media could frame as crossfire, diluting moral clarity.

Forth factor is framing choices in mainstream and allied media. Abu Akleh: U.S. mainstream media initially used passive voice (“died during clashes”) but sustained Arab media outrage pressured outlets toward more direct attribution (Gabriel, 2024; Malkawi et al., 2024). Assad: Coverage often used medicalized or ambiguous language (“heart attack after detention”), reduced moral attribution to Israeli authorities. Corrie: U.S. media was split, some emphasized her activism and humanitarian role, others questioned her judgment for being in a high-risk zone. Eygi: Coverage framed largely in terms of “protester killed” without deep context.

Fifth factor is governmental response, U.S. and host country. Abu Akleh: Public condolences from U.S. officials but muted calls for accountability; ICC submission stalled. Assad: U.S. embassy expressed “concern” but no high-level investigation demand. Corrie: U.S. pressed for inquiry, but Israeli court ruled her death an accident; U.S. did not escalate further. Eygi: Minimal U.S. engagement, partly due to geopolitical context and lower-profile advocacy.

Sixth factor is the alignment with broader political and media agendas. Abu Akleh: Press freedom and journalist safety were already on global agendas; advocacy could link her case to these existing frameworks. Assad: Case intersected less with a major international theme, limiting resonance beyond human rights advocacy circles. Corrie: Her death became part of anti-war and anti-occupation narratives during the early 2000s. Eygi: Advocacy did not align strongly with any dominant U.S. media or political narrative at the time.

6.6 The Global Morality Market and Unequal Voice

Clifford Bob’s concept of the “global morality market” offers a powerful framework for understanding the challenges faced by advocacy groups. Bob argues that not all victims or causes receive equal attention. Movements must frame their narratives in ways that appeal to gatekeepers, funders, and institutions. Shireen Abu Akleh’s case appeared “marketable” on several fronts: she was a journalist, a woman, a U.S. citizen, and a recognizable figure. Yet, advocacy still struggled to produce major political shifts. This suggests that marketable identity is necessary, but not sufficient. The problem was not lack of clarity, but the politics of voice. As Bob would argue, causes involving U.S. allies, especially Israel, face structural barriers to legitimacy. Even the most compelling moral narratives can be drowned out by geopolitical considerations. Moreover, the morality market is not just about who speaks, but who listens. Despite extensive documentation, media coverage, and public statements, the gatekeepers of justice, Congress, the FBI, the executive branch, remained largely unmoved.

A notable moment in the case's trajectory was the 2025 Zeteo documentary's identification of the Israeli sniper allegedly responsible for Abu Akleh's death as Alon Scagio, who was later killed in combat. While this revelation adds specificity to public knowledge, it may also function as a strategic form of closure. By attributing responsibility to a now-deceased individual, both the Israeli and U.S. governments can sidestep deeper inquiries into command responsibility, institutional rules of engagement, or broader patterns of impunity. In this way, the naming of a dead soldier offers a symbolic concession that avoids actual accountability. From a framing perspective (Chong & Druckman, 2007), this move reframes the issue as an individual error rather than a systemic failure. From the standpoint of Bob's (2005) global morality market, this deflection reveals how powerful states can navigate reputational damage by offering narratives that satisfy surface demands for justice while shielding entrenched structures. In the case of Abu Akleh, this tactic illustrates the limitations of legal and moral advocacy when it encounters a global system calibrated to protect, not prosecute, strategic allies.

The Zeteo documentary's exposure of intelligence suppression further illustrates how states actively manage information to avoid moral escalation. Even when a case fits the criteria for attention, it can be neutralized by silence or delay. This reflects Bob's claim that the morality market operates on strategic and political calculations, not just the intrinsic merit of a case. Abu Akleh's killing, while morally urgent and politically significant, became a casualty of that market's structural inequities.

6.7 Conclusion

The case of Shireen Abu Akleh shows how transnational advocacy, media framing, and U.S. political structures intersect in both powerful and frustrating ways. Advocacy groups framed her killing effectively, using legal, emotional, and moral appeals. Media coverage evolved from ambiguity to limited clarity. Public figures, especially Lina Abu Akleh, provided a humanizing and compelling narrative. And yet, the U.S. government, despite clear opportunities for accountability, offered only rhetorical concern and bureaucratic inertia. This chapter has argued that the limits of justice in this case are not accidental. They reflect broader patterns in how the U.S. navigates foreign policy, media responsibility, and advocacy pressure, particularly when allies are involved. In doing so, it also highlights the enduring role of silence as a tool of power, not just absence, but strategy.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion – Framing, Silence, and the Politics of Justice

7.1 Policy and Practical Implications

This thesis has examined the multifaceted efforts by U.S.-based advocacy groups, journalists, and public figures to demand justice for the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. It has also analyzed how American media framed the killing and how the U.S. government responded. The central finding is that even the most strategically framed, emotionally resonant, and politically relevant cases can be neutralized through silence, not because they fail to mobilize, but because they challenge the interests of powerful allies.

From a policy perspective, the case reveals several gaps in policy making. The U.S. lacks a formal mechanism for investigating the deaths of American citizens killed by allied militaries abroad. Congressional oversight remains limited unless executive leadership prioritizes a case. There are few institutional pathways for advocacy groups to escalate pressure once media attention fades.

To address these gaps, several practical steps can be recommended. First, codify investigative responsibilities for U.S. agencies (e.g., DOJ, FBI) when citizens are killed abroad in conflict zones. Second, introduce conditionality in foreign military aid tied to cooperation in civilian death investigations. Third, establish independent media watchdogs with congressional reporting mandates on cases involving journalists. Lastly, encourage Congress to hold public hearings on journalist safety and U.S. complicity in global press suppression. The Shireen Abu Akleh case should become a model for reform, not an exception that disappears in the archives of diplomatic caution.

Ayoub's concept of counter-data also provides a lens through which to understand the limitations of framing under state surveillance. Despite the strength of Palestinian and international efforts to frame Shireen's killing as a deliberate act, Israeli control over surveillance and official narratives continued to dominate formal diplomatic arenas. As Ayoub argues, counter-data challenges epistemic injustice, but the success of framing is

still mediated by the unequal power to disseminate and legitimize information. This reinforces the thesis's final claim that framing matters, but power matters more.

The framing choices around Shireen Abu Akleh's killing, whether successful, failed, or countered, highlight what Mintz and Redd call "the politics of perception." Their framing typology clarifies why justice for Shireen remains difficult to achieve. Advocacy efforts, though morally forceful, lacked the institutional leverage to override dominant state narratives that diluted public outrage and suppressed decisive policy change.

The comparison with other U.S. citizens killed in similar contexts, such as Omar Assad, Rachel Corrie, and Aysenur Eygi, underscores the consistency of this pattern. In each case, advocacy movements sought to mobilize moral outrage through resonant frames, but U.S. officials defaulted to silence or ambiguity. This suggests that strategic silence is not unique to Abu Akleh's case but part of a broader state practice of insulating geopolitical alliances from accountability.

7.2 Directions for Future Research

This thesis focused on a single case in depth to highlight the challenges of framing political violence and seeking justice within asymmetrical power structures. Scholars also need interviews with frontline journalists in Palestine to understand their experience with risk, abandonment, and advocacy. Quantitative studies are essential to measuring the impact of headline framing on public opinion, political mobilization, and legislative outcomes. Ethnographic studies of advocacy organizations can demonstrate how internal debates shape framing strategies, especially around politically sensitive cases. We also need to explore how diasporic identity (e.g., Palestinian-American, Muslim-American) affects narrative legitimacy in U.S. discourse. This case has opened up a new frontier for research into "transnational framing politics", the process by which domestic institutions respond to violence committed abroad, especially when the victim shares national identity but challenges foreign policy norms.

7.3 Closing Reflection

The killing of Shireen Abu Akleh was not only a tragedy, it was a test. A test of international norms, U.S. commitments to press freedom, and the power of transnational advocacy. Her death revealed the structural inequities in whose lives are grievable, whose stories are legible, and whose justice is actionable. The advocacy that followed was strategic, emotional, and persistent, but it faced an architecture of silence built to withstand precisely these efforts. And yet, something did shift. People said her name. Journalists changed their framing. Politicians faced questions they would once have avoided. Movements grew bolder, more organized, and more intersectional. In the end, justice may not arrive through institutions, but through memory, mobilization, and continued insistence on accountability, however inconvenient that demand may be.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Figure A1

Shireen Abu Akleh reporting for Al Jazeera



Note. From *Shireen Abu Akleh*, by Encyclopædia Britannica Editors, 2022, Encyclopædia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shireen-Abu-Akleh>). Copyright by Encyclopædia Britannica.

Appendix A

Figure A2

The Aftermath of the Shooting of Shireen Abu Akleh



Abu Akleh was killed in targeted attack by Israeli forces, by A. Salman, H. Gold, & R. Allen Greene, 2022, CNN (<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/24/middleeast/shireen-abu-akleh-jenin-killing-investigation-cmd-intl>). Copyright 2022 by Cable News Network.

Appendix A

Figure A3

Mourners and the casket bearers were attacked



كيف تصوغ الحركات الاجتماعية الأمريكية العنف السياسي: قضية شيرين أبو عاقلة من أبريل

2022 حتى الوقت الحاضر

إعداد: هبه ابراهيم عيسى البعبيش

المشرف: د. دانيال كرايدر

الملخص

تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى دراسة كيفية قيام الحركات الاجتماعية ووسائل الإعلام الأمريكية بتأطير العنف السياسي في الخارج، مع التركيز على مقتل الصحفية الفلسطينية-الأمريكية شيرين أبو عاقلة في مايو 2022. تحلل الدراسة كيفية استجابة مجموعات الضغط الإعلامية ووسائل الإعلام الأمريكية، والسرديات التي أنشأوها، وكيف أثرت هذه التأطيرات على الرأي العام والمساءلة السياسية. باستخدام نظرية الحركات الاجتماعية، وتحليل التأطير، ودراسات الإعلام النقدية، تظهر الدراسة أن المنظمات المناصرة سرعان ما تحركت للمطالبة بالعدالة، مع التركيز على حرية الصحافة وحقوق الإنسان ومسؤولية الولايات المتحدة. ومع ذلك، واجهت جهودهم عوائق مثل التحالفات السياسية، وتردد وسائل الإعلام، وصمت الحكومة. تقارن الدراسة التغطية الإعلامية عبر مصادر مختلفة: كانت وسائل الإعلام الفلسطينية واضحة، بينما غالبًا ما حاولت وسائل الإعلام الإسرائيلية التهرب من المسؤولية، وكانت وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية التقليدية غامضة، في حين قدمت المصادر البديلة مثل الفيلم الوثائقي *من قتل شيرين؟* مزاعم جريئة. كما تسلط الأطروحة الضوء على دور التصورات الثقافية والصور النمطية، بالاستناد إلى مفهوم الاستشراق لإدوارد سعيد، لشرح كيفية تفسير الجمهور الأمريكي للتأطيرات. من خلال توضيح كيف تم استخدام دور شيرين كصحفية، وجنسياتها الأمريكية، وقيمتها الرمزية في المناصرة، تبرز هذه الدراسة تحديات الحملات العادلة العابرة للحدود، وحدود التأطير الأخلاقي في السياسة الخارجية الأمريكية، وعدم تساوي صدى الروايات المختلفة. تحمل النتائج دلالات لاستراتيجيات المناصرة المستقبلية ومسؤولية الولايات المتحدة في قضايا حقوق الإنسان الدولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنف السياسي، التأطير، شيرين أبو عاقلة، الحركات الاجتماعية، الإعلام،

الولايات المتحدة، المناصرة، الصحافة، المساءلة، الاستشراق