

**PLATFORM FOR
MEDIA CRITIQUE**

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PLATFORM

**VERA PENÊDA ON
LIVE JOURNALISM:**

**“It is indeed the
embodiment. I was
fully present.”**

**BOOK REVIEW:
CHINESE FEMINISM**

**WORDS MATTER:
GLOBAL NORTH/SOUTH**

**PALESTINIAN
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BEFORE THE
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**AL JAZEERA’S
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ANTONOPOULOS :**

**“I cannot not
mention that over
70,000 people died
in Gaza. ”**



Journalism Itself Is In Transition.

By Sanne Breimer

You're reading the second edition of *Cracks*, a media criticism initiative—although we are still finding out exactly what we want to be. What guides us is a shared curiosity about how storytelling and journalism in particular, is transforming. The profession today creates friction and possibility at the same time.

A decolonial approach to journalism is core to *Cracks*. In our first issue, we asked how decolonial thinking can help to imagine a different kind of journalism. In this second edition, it becomes clearer that there is no single best way of practising the profession. Journalism has become a plural ecosystem in which legacy media coexists alongside independent digital-native media and creator journalists.

Within that landscape, language shapes reality. Sunalini shows how terms such as Global North and Global South divide the human experience, yet continue to determine research and funding structures. Journalism is not only changing through technology or platform policy, but also through struggles like this over words. When Priya read the translated essays of Chinese feminist and anarchist He-Yin Zhen from the 1900s, a question for those of us within the media rose: are words offering clarity—or obscuring power?

New journalistic experiments in language and format emerge in response to the limitations of older models. Shafi spoke to Director of Programmes & Impact at the European Journalism Centre (EJC), Vera Penêda, about how “live journalism” contributes to a growing diversification of the media landscape. It doesn't have to “save journalism” from the industry's well-known dark sides, it adds a new way of seeing and experiencing.

Legacy newsrooms, independent collectives,

data journalism, live storytelling, and community-driven media now coexist in a growing pluriverse. Even journalistic independence takes on different approaches: sometimes grounded in institutional neutrality, and sometimes in positioned perspectives.

The urgency of storytelling is most visible where journalism is a matter of survival. Hassan writes from Gaza:

“In our culture, storytelling is not merely a literary pastime. It is a way of surviving. When geography is besieged and borders are closed, the story becomes the only space that no one can fully control.”

Journalism must confront its own methods. Anne's interview with visual journalist Konstantinos Antonopoulos of Al Jazeera questions the authority of data itself. The overuse of data can reduce people and their lived experience to nothing more than a statistic. Konstantinos reminds us how a lack of data is also a story:

“This is something about Sudan that I cannot forget. Not being able to get people on the ground to collect and verify data tells a bleak story.”

Cracks continues as collective, slow work. We're tracing how many journalisms now coexist. The dominance of the old world of one shared reality and a universal idea of objectivity is over, and a new world of transparency about positionality and justice at the center of truthseeking is already here. People like Hassan show the way, by recollecting what has been forgotten:

“Every time a Palestinian story is told honestly, a small crack appears in the wall that has long tried to make these stories invisible.”

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Credits: Mark Ashford for Unsplash

Global North, Global South

By Sunalini Mathew

Sounds like, *us*—the developed, and *them*—the other, the underdeveloped, developing, undeveloped, formerly third world. *They* constitute about 85% of the world's population, but account for not more than 39% of the world's GDP, as per the Washington-based non-profit, Peterson Institute for International Economics.

The Global South is that part of the world where climate change, poverty, and disease collide in ways that only *we* know how to solve, with medicines, vaccines, and medical research so expensive *they* cannot afford to do it. *Us*, the structured, empirical, white; *them*, the corrupt, superstitious, Black.

On the face of it, the Global North refers to countries in North America, Europe, and the northern parts of Asia, Australia and New Zealand; the Global South comprises most in South America, Africa, and South Asia. Many of these lands have heavy colonial pasts to bear. They are now defined by what they don't have: wealth, infrastructure, knowledge.

The term itself, as per most reports, was framed in 1969, by Carl Oglesby (1935–2011), an activist-author from the United States of America. His critique of the Vietnam war found space in *Commonweal*, a magazine “edited by lay Catholics” since 1924, featuring articles at the intersection of “religion, politics, and culture”. Encyclopaedia Britannica says he spoke about “the North's dominance over the Global South.”

The term got press after the 1980 Brandt Report, a product of a commission chaired by the former German chancellor Willy Brandt, to address global financial inequality. It identified a latitudinal line 30 degrees north of the equator, roughly dividing, on the basis of GDP, the world's rich and poor countries.



At the 2025 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society, artist-researcher Evani Radiya Dixit and an associate professor of communication at Stanford, Angele Christin, talked about the perpetuation of an “imperial gaze.” They found problems with the term “Global South” in “its tendency to homogenize countries with diverse political power and technological development” and “an implication of technological illiteracy.” Despite this, they said, many “feel pressured” to use the term, due to “research and funding structures.”

There is, in the use of these words, the connotation of a top-down approach: the north percolating knowledge downwards, except that coffee was harvested in the Global South.

Instead of grouping countries—unless they are formal entities like BRICS—let's just name them. For instance, the World Bank's publication *What a Waste 3.0: Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management toward Circularity until 2050*, speaks about regions, such as South Asia and North America. The India-based news magazine *Down to Earth* goes a step further, with the headline: “Global South is Heading Towards a Waste Tipping Point.”

An unnecessary act of self-flagellation.

In Words Matter, we identify words often used in the media that are laden with colonial baggage, examine their histories, and offer alternatives.

Live Journalism: Return to Emotive Storytelling

An 'old school' experiment turning into a movement

Vera Penêda, Director of Programmes and Impact at the European Journalism Centre, on journalism embodied: "What you can feel stays with you more than what you can read."

**Words and photos by
Shafi Musaddique**

The world of digital journalism has, arguably, led us to the era of numbness. In a world of abundant connection and possibility, one wonders whether the very tools that have expanded our horizons have, somehow, colonized the heart and soul of storytelling. Newsrooms measure impact based on the number of clicks. Journalistic experimentation remains confined within the parameters of Big Tech.

And yet, something very different—rooted in the ancient world of oral storytelling—is emerging. The world of "live journalism," as told on stage, in person, and in community spaces, has begun to appear around the world.

What exactly is live journalism? Close your eyes and think of a reporter walking out on stage. Music can accompany a reading out loud. Raw, unfiltered interviews contextualize the history of the Bhopal gas tragedy or the dark side of China's One Child Policy. Tears flow from the audience. One person in the crowd speaks of their experience.

Vera Penêda, Director of Programmes and Impact at the European Journalism Centre, has been mapping where "live journalism" appears globally. But her starting point wasn't a work-based decision. Rather, it was a moment of



A Live Journalism performance in Perugia, Italy, at the International Journalism Festival, 2026. Christoph Schwaiger, a journalist from Malta, performs with a dash of humor, discussing his investigations into the targeted killing of investigative writer Daphne Caruana Galizia.

experiencing the combination of music, performance, and storytelling in Amsterdam that catapulted her.

The hard, solid facts of what the journalists said on stage didn't entirely stick with her. It was the shared experience that left her with a feeling that journalism became embodied, lived, and real.

"It was so rich on so many levels. What you can feel stays with you more than what you can read," she tells *Cracks*.

"I keep talking about the experience. Live journalism makes me remember the experience, versus an article I read just days ago. It is indeed the embodiment... the fact that I had to go to Amsterdam to see it. It was a train ride, so I had to make time [for it]. I was fully present at that moment."

What you feel stays with you more than what you can read. As a result, live journalism opens issues to “people that wouldn’t naturally be interested in these topics. There’s a bridge,” she says.

Penêda’s curiosity got the better of her after the Amsterdam experience. Expecting to just find a few examples of similar projects, she instead found a form of storytelling that resembles a movement.

Live journalism has, surprisingly, been around for at least a decade in its modern format. In 2016, journalists from Finland’s daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat performed their unpublished stories in front of a crowd of 300 people in Helsinki. One journalist had brought the idea, having been inspired by a live show in Los Angeles where reporters, photographers, and documentary filmmakers took to the stage to tell previously unpublished true stories.

Despite the inspiration, they had little blueprint. Journalists also hid their plans from the newspaper’s management, wanting to move quickly and lightly without bureaucracy and constant fine-tuning.

The Finnish experiment caught the public’s imagination, so much so that it was moved from a “small stage” to the main stage of the national theatre, and then toured the country. After four years, 100 reporters and photographers performed for over 30,000 people, 15 times in total. Thousands of subscribers also watched online.

In Germany, so-called reporter slams have also been around for a decade and spread beyond Europe to Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. After the outbreak of the Ukraine war, Re:Baltica teamed up with local theaters in Latvia to tell the story of mixed Latvian-Russian people attempting to walk the line between contested identities.

Today, there are at least 50 live journalism projects across the world. Each live journalism project is local and completely decentralized. In fact, there is no overarching authority or organization within the live journalism space. Call it decolonial, local, organic.

But can live journalism be a better way of being inclusive?

“I’m not naive to say that live journalism can suddenly bring inclusion in journalism. It’s a tool, a device, to bring the spotlight on people who have been on the fringes. Depending on how it is done, it can be inclusive,” says Penêda.

The live format “won’t save journalism” from the industry’s well-known dark sides. Indeed, it might even replicate biases and blind spots. A question that hangs in the air is accessibility. The format often appears in “traditionally cultural places,” such as theatres and cinemas, places that are off limits for marginalized people.

One working solution has been found in the UK, where journalists go to the streets and say the news “out loud” in front of passersby.

“You have someone in the physical space. Some stop to listen, others go about their lives. But it is still a leveller,” says Penêda.

It is important to note that currently, the live journalism map is dominated by findings from Europe. That might soon change, with submissions arriving from across the Global Majority, particularly in Latin America.

Penêda is on the hunt for examples across the Global Majority, particularly from Asia and Africa.

Examples have already appeared. In Lebanon, the stories of 10 people forced to flee their homes by Israel’s 2024 war in Lebanon, published by nonprofit newsroom The New Humanitarian, were performed last year. In Nigeria, M/OTHER, a production based on CNN journalists reporting on

maternal mental health, took place in 2024, integrating a public discussion between maternal health experts and the creative team.

Penêda wants to do more than just live mapping.

“My ambition would be to create a programme that could support the practitioners doing live journalism. It would be so interesting to have this done in libraries, for example,” she says. At a time when European countries are removing social securities in favour of increased defence and military spending, her ambitions are ever more important.

She warns that live journalism remains small and “not happening at scale” because nobody, as yet, has found a sustainable business model.

Perhaps that is the next frontier of live journalism. Unlike other movements, this one is slow cooking. And in this day and age of hard and fast trends, that in itself is room for hope.



From left to right: Sanita Jemberga (Executive Director The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica), Jochen Markt (Co-Director Headliner), Catarina Carvalho (Founder and Editor Mensagem de Lisboa), Vera Penêda (Director of Programmes and Impact European Journalism Centre), Christoph Schwaiger (freelance journalist), International Journalism Festival, Perugia, 2026.

Palestinian Storytelling Before the World Called It News

On storytelling as an act of reclamation, memory, and resilience.

By Hassan Herzallah

Credit: Emre on Unsplash

In my country, a story does not start on the first page of a book, but from the mouth of someone sitting beside you. Stories here are told before they are written. In my childhood, I listened to tales from my grandmother, my parents, and neighbors sitting outside their houses in the evening. They spoke of cities they were displaced from, the keys to their old home, the Nakba, the olive harvests, and our traditional food.

This is how Palestinian storytelling begins: from memory, from voice, and from the insistence that the story remains alive even when history or foreign narratives try to ignore it. The stories we write today carry the weight of our memories. The key to the old home my family kept is now the key to my room in the city that has been erased, my hometown Rafah, now only part of the past.

In our culture, storytelling is not merely a literary pastime. It is a way of surviving. When geography is besieged and borders are closed, the story becomes the only space that no one can fully control. Palestinians tell their stories everywhere: in poetry, songs, letters, diaries, and even on digital platforms. Storytelling, for us, is not only describing what happens; it is a way to preserve what might otherwise be erased. Our stories deserve to be heard and to continue being told.

Yet much of what the world sees about Palestinians passes through a narrow lens. On news pages and in breaking headlines, we appear as silent victims or as numbers in reports. We are reduced to a moment of an explosion or an image of destruction. What often disappears is everyday life itself: ordinary details, ambitions, humor that survives even in the hardest moments, and a strange persistence to continue. Few realize that behind every breaking news story, a full life was unfolding before it suddenly became a news headline or another number in statistics. Often, slogans and speeches are shared, yet they do not touch the reality here in Gaza.

Sometimes I think about the distance between the story as we live it here, and the story as it is told abroad. Between the voice of a mother trying to feed her children and the brief headline that appears on a screen. This distance is not just a difference in language, but a difference in experience. Palestinian storytelling is therefore a constant effort to bridge this gap and return the story to its owners.

Living in Gaza, or anywhere under siege, is not only about facing war but also about confronting borders in every aspect of life. Borders are not just lines on a map; they are



Credit: Nour Tayeh on Unsplash

decisions that determine what you can dream of and what you cannot reach. For a Palestinian who recently turned twenty-two, borders can be the difference between university acceptance and a missed opportunity, between a scholarship and a dream stopped at a closed crossing. You might read about a university in a distant country, or a program in a place far away, and realize that the distance between you and that place is not just thousands of kilometers, but a whole system of restrictions that can make reaching it almost impossible.

From the moment I began documenting what we live through, I started learning something new about myself as a writer. At first, I thought writing was just about reporting what I saw. But over time, as the destruction, loss, and deprivation of basic rights increased, I realized writing had become something else: a form of bearing witness. To write is to say that this life really happened, that these people were here, and that their stories deserve to be told. Often, words felt too small for what was happening, yet silence seemed even smaller. When your own life is part of the story, and you see your community going through an existence-threatening experience, neutrality becomes more complicated. Bearing witness does not mean abandoning accuracy or truth, but it does mean recognizing an ethical reality that cannot be ignored.

Writing Palestinian stories is not only about pain, but also about dignity and the ways people try to maintain their humanity. In Gaza, even in the hardest conditions, you will find people planting to survive, studying to keep a dream alive, or helping their neighbors. You will find students studying by dim light, mothers trying to make meals from what little they have for their children, and friends sitting together sharing jokes despite everything. These small details are also part of the truth.

Palestinian stories are not just news material or breaking headlines. They are full lives being shaped every day under extreme pressure. Writing about Palestine is not merely describing a passing event; it is entering a long history of memory, identity, and resilience.

This is why I continue telling these stories. Because a story, even when it crosses borders, can break through them. And every time a Palestinian story is told honestly, a small crack appears in the wall that has long tried to make these stories invisible.

“Some stories are forgettable, others don't leave you easily.”

Konstantinos Antonopoulos on the four-act structure of Al Jazeera's *By The Numbers*.

By Anne Jomard

Data journalism uses data to find, verify and tell compelling news stories. However, relying heavily on numbers or throwing excessive statistics and figures at an audience can have an insidious effect. Overuse of data can sanitize stories, reducing people and their lived experience to nothing more than a statistic.

Konstantinos Antonopoulos takes a different approach. He works as a journalist at Al Jazeera since 2013, where he started with data visualizations and infographics at AJ Labs. He describes himself as a visual journalist, a term that encompasses his background in information design and his journalistic outlook.

In October 2024, he started the popular *By The Numbers* series – short-form videos that explain a surprising piece of data in a clear and concise way.

Today, the *By the Numbers* series is the most popular digital series that Al Jazeera produces when you look at – well, the numbers.

For *Cracks*, I spoke to Konstantinos. Here, he reveals

his process in creating these videos, and his personal approach to data journalism, where human stories are at the heart.

(The interview was edited for clarity and conciseness.)

In *By The Numbers*, figures and numbers from news coverage are made relatable. What does that mean?

Once, my editor looked at my *By the Numbers* script and said, “There aren’t enough numbers in this.” But that’s not my approach. Yes, I do numbers, but I am not fixated on them. I might have four or five numbers in a three-minute video, which is not much, but I want to craft a good story about those numbers. People can get really confused when you throw a lot of numbers at them.

How do you choose your story angles when telling a data story?

By the Numbers doesn’t start with: “Here’s the topic I’m going to tell you about today.” It usually starts with: “Here’s a number that seems interesting.” And maybe a challenge; if you



Konstantinos Antonopoulos (right) and one example from the *By The Numbers* series.

have an assumption about something, this number is going to challenge your assumption. When developing this series I thought about how to make great journalism interesting for video. There is only one answer: make it a story, instead of dumping 10,000 numbers on people.

Usually, the number I choose to start the story with is the one that is the most impactful to me. For example, when covering Gaza, I cannot not mention that 70,000 people died. This is a hugely impactful number.

I also look for gaps in the data. No data set is one hundred percent perfect, but when there is a gap, I'm trying to find out why this is missing, because maybe this is a story. If there is a population suffering and we cannot determine why, maybe the system in place needs further investigation. This is something about Sudan that I cannot forget: the lack of data. Not being able to get people on the ground to collect and verify data tells a bleak story.

How do you create these stories around numbers?

After the first episode, I came up with a structure for *By The Numbers* in four acts. It starts with the "cold open," which is the most striking fact, the number that will start the discussion. And from here, I'm going to challenge everything you've heard about this.

For example, the video about Venezuela's oil went out at the same time that Maduro was captured, so everyone was talking about oil and how much oil the US was going to get. But for me, there was a different idea. It started with the premise that Venezuela is the country that produces the most oil in the world, so

"When covering Gaza, I cannot not mention that 70,000 people died."

how come the citizens live on \$4 per month? This is the cold open, the number that gets you hooked, and then the story follows in four acts.

"The Pattern" is evidence of how the thing I told you about in the beginning, works. For the Venezuela story, it was a look at how it became the world's biggest oil producer. So this is about going back in time and putting the structure into place.

Act two, the "Look under the Hood," is the traditional explainer. This is where all the data that supports the main point comes in. I'm not only using data, I'm also explaining why this is happening with other sources.

The third act came to me through the comments of people watching *By The Numbers*. I wanted to flip the table and have the story take an extremely unexpected turn to see if people are watching that far into the story.

The fourth part is about: "What does this mean for the people?" I want to finish the story with what happens to the people who are actually suffering



through it. Like what happens to the people in Venezuela who are living on \$4 per month.

These are the four acts, starting with the patterns, going under the hood, and explaining how it works. Then flipping the tables and telling what is at stake. I anchor or bridge the sections, usually with a question in between. I want to finish the video in a way that gets you to think about all of this.

For the Venezuela video, the flip came when I asked people how they were actually living with \$4 a month. And basically, people survive because of their relatives' monthly remittances. So there is a whole other economy supporting these people; instead of living off oil, they're supported by a cousin in Miami or a sister in Madrid.

It's not easy to take a few numbers and put them in a story. I didn't come up with this idea in one day. This series came through reading a lot of comments and figuring out what actually matters to the people watching *By The Numbers*. But also reading research from people way smarter than me. The idea became: "I want to be your guide to understand these numbers."



“We sometimes really have to dig for reliable data.”

You work with Executive Producer Jo De Frias, Copy Editor Danylo Hawaleshka, and the AJ Labs data team. Where do you get your data from?

We use data sets from everywhere, as long as we can verify them. We have a few partners. For example, for Gaza, we are using three or four basic sources. One is the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the second is the UN, and we have a few other sources, as well as Arabic colleagues on the ground. We cross-reference and verify everything ourselves.

The biggest challenge is getting reliable data; we really have to dig for it sometimes. I wanted to do a story about Iran, before the war started. But the only data I could find about the number of people dying came from the US, which, for me, doesn't cut it, to be honest. I need to find data that I'm confident in. Then I can shape it into a story that people will care about.

Your videos get 500,000 to millions of views, with sometimes thousands of comments. How closely do you monitor the engagement?

I'm usually quite disconnected from this after I send a story out. I honestly don't care about how well a video is doing, about its performance. I have a moral issue with engagement numbers when we are talking about people's lives. But I have been following engagement with stories about Gaza, because I want to see if it is still in the news. Every time I do a

video about Gaza that has fewer views, I'm thinking: "Okay, people could be forgetting about this. Maybe I should double down and make even more videos." Because I don't want people to forget.

And this doesn't just apply to Gaza, by the way. At Al Jazeera, our motto is to be the voice for the voiceless. For me, this really hits a nerve.

I've done stories about how much money Donald Trump or Kamala Harris spent to be elected. These are the kinds of stories I don't really care about when they are finished. It's served because the data is there, and it helps people to make a decision when they vote. But this is a forgettable story.

Any West Bank story stays with me forever. I can still remember the datasets. For the web series "Know Their Names," we were the first to publish the names of the people who were killed in Gaza. The first iteration had 34,000 names. After so many years in journalism, spending a week with this data set was one of the darkest things I've ever done. The video was like a one-minute-long scrolling credit at the end of a movie with the names of all infants under one year old. These types of stories do not leave you easily.

"After so many years in journalism, spending a week with this data set was one of the darkest things I've ever done."

Konstantinos Antonopoulos' approach to data journalism:

- Start with a number that surprises you, and follow the story from there.
- A gap in the data is a story too.
- Source your data well. Think about who your story is about, and find data sources that are likely to be objective about this population.
- Don't overdo the stats and figures; aim to provide clarity on a few key numbers that support your story.
- Use data to tell human stories, focus on the people at the heart of your data journalism.
- Don't fixate on the engagement numbers once the story goes out, apart from using them as an indicator of when you need to cover a topic more, so it stays in the news.



An Unanswered Question

The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory (2013), edited by Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl, and Dorothy Ko

I didn't expect the translated essays of a Chinese feminist and anarchist from the 1900s to spark an existential crisis, but here we are.

The Birth of Chinese Feminism features six essays by thinker He-Yin Zhen, written during the final years of the Qing dynasty, a period of rapid upheaval. While many of her contemporaries championed nationalism as a means for women's equality, He-Yin was cynical that strengthening state power would naturally lead to female emancipation.

For her, the oppression of women was intertwined with broader societal power structures, including wealth, class, and the state itself. Taking aim at male progressive intellectuals claiming women's liberation for the sake of the nation, she wrote: "In the past, when traditional rituals prevailed, men tried to distinguish themselves by confining women in the boudoir; when the tides turn in favor of Europeanization, they attempt to acquire distinction by promoting women's liberation."

The retort still applies to current discourse on women's empowerment. Framed through the lens of productivity and GDP, women are still viewed and treated as instruments of modernization rather than autonomous humans.

She was equally wary of Western liberalism's "sham equality." Even as she

praised the bravery of European suffragettes, she questioned whether elevating a minority of women to power would benefit working-class women at large: "But did such powerful female sovereigns as Queen Victoria of the British Empire or Empresses Lü Zhi and Empress Wu Zetian in the dynastic history of China ever bring the slightest benefits to the majority of women?" A pointed question for corporatized "lean-in" feminism: How will having more female CEOs benefit women if the fundamental structures of inequity remain unchanged?

He-Yin plainly points to the fact that power will co-opt the language of liberation to preserve itself. A question for those of us within the media is: are the words, abstractions, and euphemisms we're using offering clarity or obscuring power?

He-Yin's ire is especially clear in her critique of Confucianism. She quotes example after example from classical texts to support her argument: "They made it sound as though when Heaven gave birth to humans, men were to be valued and women slighted." It's this abundant use of citations that struck me most. All those words, carefully and systematically deployed, just to ask: Aren't women human too?

And in 2026, I'm asking: How many more words do we need?



Credit: Jason Leung on Unsplash

THIS IS CRACKS. CHANGE HAPPENS IN THE FRACTURES.

Thank you for reading our second edition.

Cracks is built as a collective effort by journalists, designers, and thinkers who believe storytelling can transform.

Follow our journey and join the conversation:
Instagram: @cracks.mag

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