

Diraya.media—Learning Media Literacy With and From Media Activists

PHILIPP SEUFERLING

The London School of Economics and Political Science, UK¹

INGRID FORSLER

Södertörn University, Sweden

GRETCHEN KING

Lebanese American University, Lebanon

ISABEL LÖFGREN

Södertörn University, Sweden

FARAH SAATI

Lebanese American University, Lebanon

Taking stock of media activist initiatives in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region, this article discusses findings from case study research informing the media education platform “diraya.media.” Through participatory methodology, the case studies and the bilingual (Arabic/English) website aim to analyze and strengthen local media literacy pedagogies by learning *with* and *from* media activists in the region. This article reports on six case studies of SWANA-based media activist organizations and pedagogical material for the media literacy classroom. The goal is to reflect and discuss the methodological and theoretical ramifications of Diraya as a pedagogical space for reflection and knowledge exchange between media activists and other learners in the region and beyond. Drawing on the participating activists’ experiences, Diraya is embedded in the turn toward radical media education and civic media literacies, contributing to (1) de-Westernizing media literacy education, (2) creating more learning materials based on local activist knowledge as

Philipp Seuferling: p.seuferling@lse.ac.uk

Ingrid Forsler: ingrid.forsler@sh.se

Gretchen King: gretchen.king@lau.edu.lb

Isabel Löfgren: isabel.lofgren@sh.se

Farah Saati: farah.alsaati@lau.edu

Date submitted: 2022-06-21

¹ We would like to express our gratitude to the Creative Force program at the Swedish Institute, which made possible this research. We also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

Copyright © 2023 (Philipp Seuferling, Ingrid Forsler, Gretchen King, Isabel Löfgren, and Farah Saati). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

important resources to increase media literacy, and (3) enabling of long-term collaborations by archiving and making public experiences from SWANA-based media activists.

Keywords: media literacy, civic media, media education, media activism, de-Westernizing, SWANA region

We intensively use traditional and digital media to advocate and campaign for women's and girls' rights. We want students and everyone who reads this case study [on Diraya] to know that media, and digital media, give space to vulnerable populations to speak their needs, and that through these tools we can allow solidarity among all women and girls. (Aliaa Awada, co-founder and former co-director of Fe-Male, Lebanon; Diraya, 2020a, 00:24:50–00:25:27)

As the quote above from a case study participant for the Diraya online learning platform suggests, the availability of traditional and digital media technologies in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region² resulted in the use of diverse media platforms and technologies in support of marginalized groups and social movements (El Hamamsy, 2012; Khalil, 2014, 2017; Lim, 2012; Sreberny, 2015; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Tazi & Oumlil, 2020; Yaghi, 2019). For example, in Lebanon, where Awada is based, 90% of the population has smartphones, and even more (nearly 95%) follow TV news (Dennis, Martin, & Hassan, 2019). Notably, critical scholarship on social movement media practices in the region since the 2010–11 Arab uprisings has pointed to the need to look beyond the narrow emphasis on media activism using social media platforms and learn from media activists about the challenges and opportunities using multiple media formats and working across different platforms (King, 2021). Media activists are often at the forefront of the usage and adaptation of new media technologies in advocating for fundamental human rights and social justice. Media activists are not just critical of hegemonic media practices but also mobilize media to disrupt oppression in the media. Recent media education research has called for scholars to investigate "how media activists organize learning about media and technology to combat media oppression and advance social justice" (King, 2020, p. 441).

In this vein, in this article we first embed this observation in a wider theoretical move to "civic" and "radical" media literacies (King, 2020; Mihailidis, 2018). Second, the article analyzes the findings and outcomes of a two-step method, which involves (1) conducting case studies of media activism in the SWANA region for the media literacy classroom, and (2) creating the online platform Diraya (Diraya, 2020b). The method aims to co-construct, document, and make available knowledge with media activists who are working on the ground in contested scenarios and using media technologies in innovative and transformative ways. Arguing for the importance to cultivate and co-create knowledge about "civic media literacies"

² SWANA is the preferred term, according to decolonial frameworks that reject the positioning of the region from a Eurocentric perspective. Specifically, the term does not assume North America or Europe is the center from which the SWANA region can be located to be the Near East or the Middle East geographically. Thus, this article uses SWANA and not Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This choice also recognizes that in the SWANA region and among Arab speakers the term "Asharq Al-Awsat" (or Middle East) is still commonly used, but SWANA is increasingly used among decolonial scholars and activists.

(Mihailidis, 2018, 2019) from below, this article analyzes a research procedure that not only pointed out the lack of locally relevant, from-the-ground approaches to media literacy but also attempted to learn with and from media activists to develop new methods, pedagogies, and tools for media educators, students, and activists. Addressing current gaps in media education in the SWANA region, the intended outcome of the methodology is to strengthen media literacy practices through qualitative and applied research methods that collected, analyzed, and published experiences sourced from practitioner knowledge and materials shared by SWANA media activist organizations. Based on media activist experiences, we first prepared six case studies from Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia, and second, we launched a bilingual online learning platform by facilitating an engaged, participatory, and action-oriented approach.

Table 1. Participating Media Activist Organizations.

Name of Organization	Country	Focus
Fe-Male	Lebanon	Feminist collective, radio show, and website
International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC)	Palestine	Palestinian perspectives for global audiences
Inkyfada	Tunisia	French-Arabic media collective, social justice oriented
Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM)	Iraq	Network for Iraqi bloggers to exchange skills and create collaborative online campaigns
MadaMasr	Egypt	Independent online news website
My.Kali	Jordan	Online magazine for issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other people (LGBTQ+)

“Diraya” means “know-how” in Arabic and was chosen as the name for this platform that makes accessible the experiences of six media activists and their organizations (see Table 1) as well as presents three lesson plans based on the case studies. The case studies, sourced from in-depth interviews, offer insights into the histories, practices, challenges, funding structures, and strategies of each organization. Thus, the platform serves as a teaching and learning tool for radical media education (King, 2020) developed from social movement media practices by documenting experiences of and offering skills from media activists in the region for other media activists as well as for the media literacy classroom. Additionally, the platform functions as an important historical archive of movement media experiences from across the SWANA region that can be further developed to include more media activists and their organizations.

In this article, we situate the theoretical and methodological approach and the wider implications for media literacy education and research. First, we discuss relevant literature to conceptualize the approach through radical media education and civic media literacies, then we describe the methodological procedure and findings, and lastly, we reflect on how the Diraya project contributes to de-Westernizing media literacy by promoting regionality and civic competencies.

Theorizing Media Literacy in the SWANA Region

In the SWANA region, the United Nations reported that more than half of the population is below the age of 25 (Marmol, 2018). Most of these youth use the Internet, as detailed in a multiyear study of seven countries in the SWANA region. The study found in 2013 some 22%–88% of SWANA youth confirmed accessing

the Internet, whereas in 2019 that number jumped to 72%–99% of youth using the Internet (Dennis et al., 2019). This spike in Internet use demonstrates that young people have greater access to digital platforms and are spending more time online. These data complement research on digital media activism in the SWANA region that indicated media activists also are increasingly using the Internet as part of communication and tactical strategies in campaigns and social movements (Melki & Kozman, 2021; Sreberny, 2015; Tazi & Oumlil, 2020).

Media activists in the SWANA region are at the forefront of using, adapting, and grappling with digital media technologies in their counter-hegemonic media practices. As demonstrated by Kaun (2016), media activists are critical actors who navigate the affordances and regimes of media and technologies for the purpose of social change, and as such their practitioner knowledge can benefit the development of media literacy pedagogies. The potential of learning from media activists is not always recognized nor used in traditional media literacy approaches. As pointed out by Mihailidis (2018, 2019) in his call for a civic turn in media literacy education, rather than drawing on “collective advocacy or activism” media literacy initiatives have often prioritized individual responsibility along with a critical and distanced scrutiny of media content (Mihailidis, 2019, p. 4). Cultivating individual abilities to be critical of media can, in boyd’s (2017) view, “backfire” and lead to increased distrust in media institutions and experts rather than promoting community activism and structural change. To counter such polarization, researchers have argued that media literacy education must be underpinned by civic intentionality (Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Middaugh, 2019; Mihailidis, 2018, 2019). This ambition is concretized by Mihailidis (2019) in a framework that “refocuses media literacy from a set of skills and competencies to a set of value-driven constructs that support civic intentionality in media literacy practice” (p. 107) by taking stock of the social engagement, imagination, and persistence present in many communities. Making space for civic literacies in the media education classroom, according to Mihailidis (2018) requires rethinking media literacy. He writes that such approaches

help to envision media literacy pedagogies and practices as enabling agentive action-taking, evoking a caring ethic, inspiring critical consciousness, developing persistent engagement, and creating conditions for emancipatory communication, where people are able to work together to respond to social problems that prevent progress from taking place. These approaches do not start with media texts, platforms, or modalities. Instead, they ask how media can support civic outcomes that bring people together in support of a common good. (Mihailidis, 2018, p. 162)

Building on this conceptualization of civic media literacy as action taking, media educators are implementing media education practices that build on the experiences of media activists by producing or using media activist content in university or high-school classrooms (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Marmol, 2018; Melki, 2017). However, another approach to media education is rooted in media activist ways of learning or radical media education pedagogies. Specifically, radical media education seeks to learn from and with media activists, an approach that builds on the emancipatory pedagogies of Freire (1970) and hooks (2003) by pursuing transformative goals within the classroom or other spaces of learning. In this way, radical media education, like civic media literacy, moves beyond critique by raising awareness of and practicing forms of social movement media making, including learning tactics for disrupting hegemonic media practices (King, 2020). While a couple of decades of media literacy theorizing has produced a plethora of approaches (digital literacy, transmedia literacy, critical media literacy/education, etc.), civic media literacy emphasizes learning about media

activism and producing media for civic engagement whereas radical media education focuses on developing pedagogical approaches based on the ways activists facilitate learning about media and technology within their organizations and social movements. This article argues that civic media literacy and radical media education approaches are complementary in that both engage intentionality within learning.

Drawing on the frameworks of radical media education and civic media literacies, Diraya is grounded in and built from the engagement of activists in the SWANA region with the goal of learning from their efforts to bring positive change to their communities. By centering knowledge from media activists, the project demonstrates how media literacy initiatives can better focus on local questions, values, and skills rather than aim for standardized models for media literacy based on Western culture and society. Media educators working in the SWANA region have noted that there is a near absence of locally relevant curricula (Marmol, 2018; Melki, 2017). Indeed, the field of media literacy faces the same challenge of de-Westernizing that has provoked a much-needed debate in media and communication studies (c.f. Curran & Park 2000; Hirji, Jiwani, McAllister, & Russill, 2021; Kraidy, 2018; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Wang, 2011), and the project ties in with larger discussions on how the field, its pedagogies, and analyses can be de-Westernized (Harshman, 2018; King, 2020; Melki, 2017; Schmoll, 2021). The frameworks of radical media education and civic media literacies also circumvent the paternalistic underpinnings of the field (Buckingham, 1998; Livingstone, 2004), wherein approaches to "literacy" have a bias toward textual interpretation (Forsler, 2020) and "suggest a passive and submissive connotation on part of the 'illiterate'" (Errázuriz, 2019, p. 15).

Building on the above critical scholarship, this article positions radical media education and civic media literacies as necessary approaches for de-Westernizing media literacy. By using radical and civic media pedagogies to research and develop the case studies plus curate content for a bilingual online learning platform, Diraya promotes knowledge exchange and dialogue between local activists and media education classrooms within the SWANA region and beyond. Specifically, Diraya attempts to de-Westernize media education in the SWANA region by centering the experiences and expertise of local media activists, who as social movement media makers engage in radical media education practices within movements by mobilizing formal and informal learning (King, 2020).

Every day, youth in the SWANA region use media activism to engage in political participation and social movements. Media, from the analogue to the digital, are already used by many activist groups to address an array of political, social, and cultural issues in many contested sites. However, the media strategies and skills used and deployed by media activist groups across the region may vary widely due to specific legal, infrastructural, and technological constraints. Diraya presents the case studies to show how some SWANA media activists use communication tools in diverse ways to pursue their social change agendas within these constraints. The next section details the methodological approach for collecting qualitative data to develop six case studies of media activist organizations from six different SWANA countries and discusses the findings that are included as part of the pedagogical material presented on Diraya that mobilizes activist knowledge for the media literacy classroom. After summarizing the research method used to collect data and findings that were used to prepare the case studies for the platform, this article draws on reflections from study participants to discuss the methodological and theoretical implications of Diraya as a de-Westernized pedagogical space for teaching radical media education and civic media literacies.

Methods: Case Studies and Website Creation

The methodological framework for collecting the data used to build Diraya draws on theories of social movement media and radical adult education to document the formal and informal practices that shape the learning environments of media activists (King, 2020). In the literature, movement media making includes both the “outward-directed” and “inward-directed” media practices of social movements (Rucht, 2004, p. 32). Media activism within social movements is facilitated by radical media education processes, that is, “the everyday teaching and learning practices” shared among activists, which according to King (2020, p. 443) should be documented as part of critical media education research and teaching. By valuing activist knowledge and experiences as part of data collection, media education scholarship can investigate the historical and structural contexts that shape the radical pedagogical practices of media activists. Such engaged, participatory, and action-oriented research methods center media activists in the co-construction of knowledge with the aim to support the social transformation goals of the participants.

In collecting data, six media activists aged more than 18 years from six different SWANA countries and organizations were invited through the networks of the project team. In addition to confirming activists from different countries, the project team also prioritized gender equity among the participants. Finally, the project team also confirmed one participant whose organization began in the early 2000s to include at least one media activist project that began before the 2010–2011 Arab Uprisings and spanned two decades. One commonality among all the case study participants was that they were in their 20s when they became media activists.

The goal of data collection was to compile knowledge and experiences from media activist initiatives to develop case studies of SWANA media activist organizations and not present individual media activists. Therefore, the consent form acknowledged the data collected would not be anonymous, recognizing that media activists and their organizations work in public and contested environments. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Furthermore, relevant archival materials were collected from each participant with permission granted to the project team through the consent process to include these as part of the case study and to publish the same for educational purposes via the online platform. The participating media activists were offered a small honorarium for their time. The participants also benefited from having the opportunity to co-create knowledge, provide peer review feedback on the beta version of the online platform, and learn from each other through the platform and later during the launch event held online with representatives from nearly all the case studies.

The instrument that guided the qualitative data collection was a protocol prepared in English and Arabic for conducting interviews. Participants were invited to share stories and detail histories in response to the open-ended questions posed. The interview consisted of seven themes, beginning with a brief introduction to each media activist (i.e., how they personally got involved in media activism) and the institutional history of their media activist organization. The next part focused on the organization practices, media tactics, and educational practices of each media activist group. The interview protocol then solicited a message from each activist, asking: “What advice would you give to future youth media activists?” The messages were edited into a short video that appears with subtitles on the main page of the Diraya platform. Lastly, the interview protocol asked each participant to “share one problem or challenge from your media activist experience that provides a teachable moment.” The last question was intended to solicit a real-life challenge that SWANA media activist groups experienced and to show how each resolved the problem. These

scenarios became part of the lesson plan curricula provided on Diraya to complement the case studies published on the website.

The data collection took place over two engagements with six study participants as follows: First, participants were asked to contribute case study data in two ways: (1) by recording an interview in one session for 60–90 minutes, and (2) by submitting public, organizational, or personal archival materials mentioned during the interview (such as policy documents, training materials, or media content). The interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were then coded using a grounded theoretical approach to analyze the raw data by identifying patterns or themes arising from the interviews to identify the case study categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These categories were then developed into headings to create subsections for each case study that included the following: Overview (or how the project began), Goals, Structure, Funding, Group Process, Training, Media Practices, Constraints, and Policies. This analysis was then summarized into a case study narrative that included quotes, hyperlinks to external resources, and documents shared by the activist interviews to present the media activist organization. The six case studies of SWANA media activism were then uploaded to Diraya along with a picture and short bio to introduce the participant who contributed to each case study (see the Appendix for three screenshots of the website: Figures A1–A3).

The second part of preparing the case studies involved asking participants to provide peer review feedback on the beta version of the online learning platform and to comment on at least two of the other case studies. Lastly, participants were invited, but not obliged, to participate in the public launch of the platform. For the launch, an online seminar was held and recorded, with five study participants joining in the facilitated discussion to reflect on their contribution to the research and engagement with the platform. The collaborative process of developing Diraya is used here as a method to explore and facilitate radical and civic media literacies, and the finished platform is intended as an applied methodological contribution to these fields (providing a learning platform and lesson plans) rather than as communication of research results.

In addition to study participants providing peer review feedback, university students were also invited to provide feedback using a short survey. Three members of the project team who are also instructors at Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden, and Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon, used the beta version of the platform in their teaching. Student feedback through the anonymous survey also informed the final revisions on the platform and the educational material provided.

Findings

The main focus of this article is to reflect on the methodological and theoretical contributions of the Diraya platform to the de-Westernization of media education pedagogies and research as well as to the civic and radical turn in media literacy approaches by conducting case study research in the SWANA region and building an online learning platform to publish the case studies. The results of the six case studies are presented in detail on the Diraya platform. However, across the case studies, the findings showed that media activists in the SWANA region engage in various formal and informal practices as part of “the everyday teaching and learning” (King, 2020, p. 443) that happens within their organizations.

For example, some of the case studies showed how media activists organize formal training (such as Iraqi Network for Social Media [INSM] in Iraq) or send their members to training sessions held by other

organizations (such as Fe-Male in Lebanon). Mada Masr in Egypt sends its team members to sessions given by external experts and on occasion brings in outside experts to conduct training for the team. Groups like My.Kali in Jordan have a much more informal process for facilitating media activist learning, which happens as the team works on the magazine. This matches the “learning while doing” ethos of radical pedagogies mobilized by media activists (King, 2020, p. 444). In addition, the case studies found that some media activist organizations develop training material (while some have none at all, e.g., My.Kali). Examples of internal training material include the International Middle East Media Center’s (IMEMC’s) *Journalist Handbook*, which guides volunteer contributors in Palestine in the production of news for international audiences from a local perspective. The handbook includes a section of standard terms the IMEMC expects in news reports, along with sensitive and discarded terms. This section guides volunteers on the preferred terminology for reporting, which includes using “Israeli military” as opposed to “IDF (Israeli Defense Forces),” which the International Middle East Media Center (2017) considers a biased term because military actions by the Israeli government “could be argued by opposing sides as either ‘defense’ or ‘offense’” (p. 7).

As the data were analyzed, one theme that arose pointed to the alternative political economies that are mobilized by media activist organizations in SWANA as they navigate the economic and legal constraints on the ground. Each organization offered unique strategies for funding its media activism. For example, Inkyfada is a nonprofit organization that is funded by a for-profit company that sells media production services. Others, like IMEMC, obtain a single annual contribution from another nonprofit organization based in the United States, which covers the salary of one staff person and otherwise relies on volunteers. Each media activist organization also discussed challenges, some legal like when the My.Kali website was blocked for some time by the Jordanian government so they backed up their website on different servers outside the country. Mada Masr in Egypt developed protocols after being subjected to state violence during a raid on their offices. Similarly, after being raided by the Israeli military during which their server was confiscated, the IMEMC started to back up their website across several online servers and did regular backups locally as well. The case studies as published on Diraya detail these experiences developing policies and protocols under the heading “Constraints,” and one of the lesson plans mobilize these media activist experiences to facilitate learning in the media education classroom.

Although the sample size was small, a case study approach ensured the research produced an in-depth and systematic analysis of each initiative. In addition, due to the absence of case studies on media activism from the SWANA region available for media educators, six case studies offer a major contribution to de-Westernizing the field in general and specifically benefit educators working in the SWANA region who can access the published case studies along with pedagogical resources in Arabic on Diraya. The findings illuminate how already existing media activist knowledge and pedagogies can benefit civic media literacy and radical media education approaches by centering practitioner experiences in media education research and teaching.

The discussion below offers our analysis of data sourced from the archive of the public launch event (Diraya, 2020a). The online event presented the Diraya platform and demonstrated its use. Afterward, a member of the research team hosted a group interview with five of the study participants on their experiences co-constructing knowledge for the Diraya platform. The archive of the discussion was analyzed for themes arising from the data according to the theoretical and methodological aims of the research project outlined above.

Discussion: Learning Media Literacy *With* and *From* Media Activists in the SWANA Region

This section discusses three main contributions that emerged from the research process of the Diraya project, through the method of case studies and the creation of a learning platform. Building on the radical media education and civic literacies framework introduced above, the following analysis reflects on the experience of teaching and learning with the Diraya platform as well as the group interview held with study participants during the online launch event. This discussion is organized according to three themes that are informed by the theoretical framework: (1) de-Westernizing media literacy education (2) co-constructing knowledge with media activists in the SWANA region, and (3) learning from media activists. In line with the participatory methods of the Diraya project that aimed to co-create knowledge, this section centers on the voices of media activists, and the quoted material stems from the group interview held with study participants at the public launch seminar (Diraya, 2020a).

De-Westernizing Media Literacy Education

From the start, the research project was strongly situated within the SWANA region with the goal to understand and articulate media literacy from the local context. As discussed above, this places the project within the body of work stressing the need to de-Westernize media literacy education (e.g., Harshman, 2018; Schmoll, 2021). In line with radical media education by King (2020) and the civic media framework by Mihailidis (2018), Melki (2017) formulated a “media literacy of the oppressed” specifically for the SWANA region, which is rooted in the local experiences and competencies, especially in regions marked by conflict (p. 5). While much theorization and practice of media literacy stem from Western, industrialized, liberal, and democratic societies, certain concepts, needs, competencies, and constraints take different shapes elsewhere. Put differently by Melki (2017):

A media literacy of the oppressed reframes existing concepts and competencies, engages local communities in the reinvention of media literacy, integrates media literacy critical reading and writing/production as well as participatory activism, prioritizes problems of the oppressed communities, and introduces new concepts and issues that address these communities and enriches media literacy as a whole. (p. 7)

Yet, while Melki (2017) further points out the difficulty of creating “media literacy where it doesn’t exist” and the importance that “seeds of such efforts are rooted in firm local grounds” (p. 11), the Diraya project has shown pathways of productively harvesting experiences of locally grounded media literacy competency across the region, which actually do exist, and the value of connecting and documenting these. As a participant from MadaMasr, one of the case studies, pointed out:

I think it’s very interesting how ways of collaboration between different networks and different initiatives across the Middle East and North Africa came together, not only to produce accessible knowledge but also alternative knowledge to media and media practice. (Mostafa Mohie, MadaMasr, Egypt; Diraya, 2020a, 00:14:01–00:14:24)

Here, Mohie hints not only at the value of connectivity across activist groups—a point we will return to below—but also at the specificity of “alternative” knowledge in the SWANA region, which he sees a need for. While certainly media literacy training and competencies for media activism are more accessible in

Western contexts, these curricula hardly respond to or emerge from challenges on the ground in contexts such as the SWANA region. In addition to creating relevant models for local use, participants also stress the pedagogical aspect of the project as contributing to a more diversified understanding of media literacy and to spreading knowledge about media activist practices in the region:

Another thing is that we have been promoting our work mainly for Western audiences because we write in English. We want to tell the world about what's happening in Palestine. [Diraya] might be a platform that some other people in the region will see and bring this experience to many other people. But also still helpful for people in Western countries to see because that will help the mission to bring Palestinians and people from all over the world together through media. I hope that people can invest to hopefully work together with some of the initiatives that are already existing. We can help each other in all ways possible. (George Rishmawi, IMEMC, Palestine; Diraya, 2020a, 00:18:50–00:20:00)

As mentioned by Rishmawi from the IMEMC, the material on Diraya is available in two languages, Arabic and English, to enable multiple uses of the material for regional as well as international audiences. Providing educational material on media literacy in Arabic is also a way to address the lack of locally relevant curricula in the region, as pointed out by Marmol (2018) and Melki (2017). In the following section, we will discuss this pedagogical dimension of the project.

Learning With Media Activists

A de-Westernizing perspective on media literacy education emphasizes not only the inclusion of diverse geographical and sociocultural contexts but also a wider inversion of power hierarchies in knowledge production and pedagogies. Therefore, following Mihailidis' (2018) notion of civic media literacies rooted in local collective action and King's (2020) theorization of radical media education pedagogies found within social movement media practices, the methods of case studies and the creation of an online learning platform enabled new ways of developing media literacy, starting from activists themselves, that is, learning with them. As noted above, and reflected by the participants, locally sourced curricula from and for the SWANA region are largely lacking, but a strong desideratum.

Many people who work for My.Kali, or volunteer for it, are not specifically journalists. There could be activist individuals, you don't need to be a certain type of writer to actually document important stories. So we try to share information about how connectivity and documentation is a unanimous process, you don't have to be a graduate of a certain type. So this is one of the things that we're hoping [Diraya] would reflect. (Khalid Abdel-Hadi, My.Kali, Jordan; Diraya, 2020a, 00:35:28–00:36:02)

As Abdel-Hadi from My.Kali notes, such pedagogical tools for media activism need to be adapted to the diverse backgrounds of the involved participants, who are mostly not formally trained in media, communications, or journalism. Valuable media literacy education must therefore be rooted in the specific needs, experiences, and work processes that the activist organizations offer, and derive transferable pedagogical tools from and for them. In this project, we used collaborative techniques of knowledge construction, including continuous peer-reviewing of the case studies and the website. The value of the local

knowledge cultivated from below and made available by Diraya is reflected by Najm from the Iraqi Network for Social Media as follows:

It's a very important project for us and for everyone to see a website that has all these materials. We are working with a lot of bloggers and journalists but they don't know the meaning of media literacy, so it's very important to educate them. We also have a connection with the Iraqi universities, we already did a lot of workshops and raised awareness about what media literacy is, so I think it's very important to connect with other NGOs from the region, and share experience with each other on this website. So I think [Diraya] will be a very helpful resource for all of us. (Dina Najm, INSM, Iraq; Diraya, 2020a, 00:20:26–00:21:25)

Translating local knowledge into accessible, bilingual, case study based curricula enables a mode of "learning with," where SWANA activists can start learning from each other and broaden their repertoire with new perspectives and approaches from different fields of expertise. Mohie stressed that by being "ready to revise our journalistic tools that we are using," organizations can benefit from the "multitude of skills and experiences that come to this field of media activism" (MadaMasr, Egypt; Diraya, 2020a, 00:54:29–00:54:38).

The kind of work we are doing can always be improved and developed by making use of knowledge from other fields and from other professions. For example, for me one of the things that I have learned about journalism is how it can make use of fields like anthropology, sociology or cinematography and how we should not limit ourselves within the tools that we are used to rely on to produce journalism. (Mostafa Mohie, MadaMasr, Egypt; Diraya, 2020a, 00:54:58–00:55:25)

Thus, a comparison of experiences across the region, and across fields of activism (e.g., activism for different causes, such as feminism, LGBTQ+, democracy, anti-occupation, etc.) can become a pedagogical tool in itself. This outcome is evident in the lesson plan from Diraya titled "Media Activist Constraints in the MENA Region," which provides six scenarios shared by case study participants with learners who work to "identify potential solutions to common challenges experienced by SWANA media activists" and "then compare their solutions with the real-world example provided by media activists" (Diraya, 2020b). The other two lesson plans presented by Diraya seek to engage learners in a comparison of "alternative/independent media practices" and "organization, access, and participation practices" mobilized by SWANA media activists (Diraya, 2020b). In this way, comparison and adaption become teachable parts of activists' media literacy, even for experienced media activists, as explained by another participant:

When we speak about digital media and activism, it's always great to see how other not-feminist groups are doing and not-women's rights groups are using these tools to advocate and do activism online and on traditional media. It is always interesting to see how others are using these tools to advance the rights of specific populations and groups, so we love the initiative [of Diraya], and I think linking us together although we didn't see each other, or we didn't have this conversation together [. . .] We went into each of the case studies and learned from it. (Aliaa Awada, Fe-Male, Lebanon; Diraya, 2020a, 00:22:20–00:23:10)

Developing pedagogical platforms and lesson plans to mobilize civic media literacies by learning with social movement media makers also benefits students in classrooms. This was evident after teaching with the beta version of the platform in the feedback received from the students mentioned above. Both students and media activists learning from Diraya emphasized the necessity of radical media education research that promotes social movement media archiving and documentation, which is discussed below as a third contribution of the project.

Learning From Each Other: Diraya as an Archive

The achievement of enduring temporalities is an often cumbersome task in activism, where individual actions, such as communication campaigns, protests, or the like, can be singular, highly ephemeral events. Due to lacking institutionalization and material means, experiences, outputs, policies, and routines remain oral, are not systematically stored, and are quickly forgotten (Seuferling, 2021). As perceived by the participants, this temporariness of much media activism also forms a hindrance to more lasting media literacy education and development, where systematic and accessible documentation of experiences and skills could facilitate learning and professionalization. One of the participants explains that fixation and documentation of experiences and skills also create a moment of deceleration, opening up for reflection on the work done, and a more planned improvement:

We are so overwhelmed with the work that sometimes it's very difficult for us to take a minute to reflect on our work and what we do. So actually [. . .] it was such an experience to read [Diraya] because it was almost a reflection of our work and what we do because we don't take the time to actually see where the gaps are, what we do, and how it all plays out. So it's actually a moment for us to overview our own work through the eyes of people who work in educational systems. (Khalid Abdel-Hadi, My.Kali, Jordan; Diraya, 2020a, 00:17:02–00:17:37)

A fixated resource, available over time, can thus enable media literacy training more easily, being sharable and adaptable for multiple contexts, benefitting media activists, students, and other learners. In addition, an archive can function as a space for reflection and a meeting point, where individuals can encounter experiences, inspire others and create collective collaborations. As noted within the civic media literacies framework, an emphasis on individual action and literacy skills often hampers deeper collective engagement so that the ability to connect and create communities becomes a skill in itself (Mihailidis, 2018). Abdel-Hadi also reflected on the need for such communities to enable long-term commitment:

One of the issues that I faced as an individual is that, when I started my career, it started from an individual point of view. There was no collectivity at that point because it came from a need. But I think starting as an individual the problem was getting the collective to believe in this product and we really suffered from creating that structure and we had to learn so much from public mistakes. So I think discussing these things in a collective manner, creating a structure in a collective helps having a goal, having the support that you need in case of any kind of situation and also you share the kind of ideas and cause for you to actually create this publication. (Khalid Abdel-Hadi, My.Kali, Jordan; Diraya, 2020a, 00:47:37–00:48:43)

While an archive of media activism can be used as a place for collaboration and knowledge exchange, it is of course also the basis for the other themes discussed here. As discussed above, it can be used as a way to collect and spread knowledge about SWANA media activism as well as to enable media literacy education in the region. The three points described in this section should thus not be regarded as separate themes but rather as different perspectives of the often messy and entangled practices that constitute the production of knowledge. To illustrate, we want to end this section with a quote from one of the participants discussing the importance of a regional perspective for the sake of documentation as well as collaboration:

I think we live in a very unique time in this area and in the world in general and I think that the media practice that we are trying to discover and develop now is really important to be documented and for us even to reflect on. I think a project like [Diraya] helps us first to reflect on our experiences, and also to give the chance to the people to reflect on our experiences and our work, give us feedback and think collectively about this. Also for me personally, I started to know more about other initiatives in the region, that I didn't have the chance to know about before. So for me I think that was one of the things that made me really excited about this project. (Mostafa Mohie, MadaMasr, Egypt; Diraya, 2020a, 00:14:33–00:15:45)

Conclusion

In this article, we have drawn on the framework of civic and radical media literacies (King, 2020; Mihailidis, 2018) to discuss the procedures and findings of a research project, using the methodology of case studies and website creation to study practices and pedagogies of media activist organization in the SWANA region. In response to an often articulated lack of local, non-Western media literacies for the classroom (Melki, 2017), the presented study has by way of case studies found that media activist organizations in the SWANA region are in fact highly engaged and experienced in developing and adapting media literacies, which in turn can form the basis for civic and radical pedagogies of media literacy. Therefore, the implementation of a website as a consecutive methodological step has served to connect, make shareable, and archive the findings of the case studies. The website creation, based on a participatory approach of learning with and from media activists in the region, pointed out how such approaches from below can (1) de-Westernize media literacy education at large by adding local knowledge adapted to specific regions; (2) create opportunities to learn and develop sharable pedagogies of media literacy with media activists as equal participants; and (3) respond to a need of documenting, archiving, and making accessible existing knowledge through an online platform.

Ultimately, an advantage of online spaces is that they have the potential to grow, adapt, and reshape. In the case of Diraya, such opportunities include the addition of more case studies, a closer collaboration with educators, or the development of more interactive meeting places. This text should thus be considered a snapshot of an ongoing process, and as a discussion of its theoretical and methodological foundations, rather than a finished model of "best practice." As an example of concretizing the radical media education and civic media literacies frameworks into a pedagogical resource, Diraya is an invitation to further discussion on how local engagement and a de-Westernizing approach can be used in parallel to broaden and diversify the field of media literacy.

References

- boyd, d. (2017, January 5). *Did media literacy backfire?* *Data & Society* [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <https://points.datasociety.net/did-media-literacy-backfire-7418c084d88d>
- Buckingham, D. (1998). Media education in the UK: Moving beyond protectionism. *Journal of Communication*, 48(1), 33–42. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02735.x
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Curran, J., & Park, M. (2000). *De-Westernizing media studies*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Dennis, E. E., Martin, J. D., & Hassan, F. (2019). *Media use in the Middle East, 2018: A seven-nation survey*. Northwestern University in Qatar. Retrieved from www.mideastmedia.org/survey/2019
- Diraya. (2020a, December 10). *Launch event with Khalid Abdel-Hadi (My.Kali), Aliaa Awada (Aliaa Awada, co-founder Fe-Male and former co-director), Mostafa Mohie (MadaMasr), Dina Najm (INSM), and George Rishmawi (MEMC)* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.diraya.media/launch-event/>
- Diraya. (2020b). *Home*. Retrieved from <http://www.diraya.media/>
- Diraya. (2020c). *Case studies. Fe-male Lebanon*. Retrieved from <https://www.diraya.media/fe-male-lebanon/>
- Diraya. (2020d). *Learning materials*. Retrieved from <https://www.diraya.media/learning/>
- El Hamamsy, W. (2012). Shooting under fire: Filmmaking and the aesthetics of resistance. *Wasafiri*, 27(4), 45–49. doi:10.1080/02690055.2012.714129
- Errázuriz, L. (2019). Metamorphosis of visual literacy: From “reading images” to a critical visual education. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 15(1), 15–26. doi:10.1386/eta.15.1.15_1
- Forsler, I. (2020). *Enabling media: Infrastructures, imaginaries and cultural techniques in Swedish and Estonian visual arts education*. Huddinge, Sweden: Södertörns högskola.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Harshman, J. (2018). Developing global citizenship through critical media literacy in the social studies. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 42(2), 107–117. doi:10.1016/j.jssr.2017.05.001
- Hirji, F., Jiwani, Y., McAllister, K., & Russill, C. (2021). Putting race at the forefront of communication studies. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 46(3), 689–710. doi:10.22230/cjc.2021v46n3a4173
- Hoechsmann, M., & Poyntz, S. R. (2012). *Media literacies: A critical introduction*. London, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. London, UK: Routledge.
- International Middle East Media Center. (2017). *International Middle East Media Center Journalist Handbook*. Retrieved from https://usercontent.one/wp/www.diraya.media/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/IMEMC_Journalist_Handbook.pdf
- Kaun, A. (2016). *Crisis and critique. A brief history of media participation*. London, UK: ZED.
- Khalil, J. F. (2014). Youth-generated media. In K. Gwinn Wilkins, T. Tufte, & R. Obregon (Eds.), *The handbook of development communication and social change* (pp. 439–452). London, UK: Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118505328.ch26>
- Khalil, J. F. (2017). Lebanon's waste crisis: An exercise of participation rights. *New Media & Society*, 19(5), 701–712. doi:10.1177/1461444816686321
- King, G. (2020). Radical media education practices from social movement media: Lessons from teaching and learning in Lebanon. In D. Frau-Meigs, S. Kotilainen, M. Pathak-Shelat, M. Hoechsmann, & S. R. Poyntz (Eds.), *The handbook on media education research* (pp. 441–448). London, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. doi:10.1002/9781119166900.ch40
- King, G. (2021). From Chiapas to Palestine: Historicizing social movement media before and beyond the Arab uprisings. *Media and Communication*, 9(4), 320–330. doi:10.17645/mac.v9i4.4455
- Kraidy, M. M. (2018). Global media studies: A critical agenda. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 337–346. doi:10.1093/joc/jqx024
- Lim, M. (2012). Clicks, cabs, and coffee houses: Social media and oppositional movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 231–248. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01628.x
- Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14. doi:10.1080/10714420490280152
- Marmol, E. (2018). Alternative media as critical pedagogical intervention against neoliberalism and racism. *Democratic Communiqué*, 27(2), 24–35.
- Martens, H., & Hobbs, R. (2015). How media literacy supports civic engagement in a digital age. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 23(2), 120–137. doi:10.1080/15456870.2014.961636
- Melki, J. (2017). Guest editorial: Towards a media literacy of the oppressed. *The Media Education Research Journal*, 8(1), 5–14.

- Melki, J., & Kozman, C. (2021). Selective exposure during uprisings: Examining the public's news consumption and sharing tendencies during the 2019 Lebanon protests. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 26(4), 907–928. doi:10.1177/1940161220972892
- Middaugh, E. (2019). More than just facts: Promoting civic media literacy in the era of outrage. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 94(1), 17–31. doi:10.1080/0161956X.2019.1553582
- Mihailidis, P. (2018). Civic media literacies: Re-imagining engagement for civic intentionality. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 43(2), 152–164. doi:10.1080/17439884.2018.1428623
- Mihailidis, P. (2019). *Civic media literacies: Re-imagining human connection in an age of digital abundance*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Rucht, D. (2004). The quadruple "A": Media strategies of protest movements since the 1960s. In W. Van De Donk, B. D. Loader, P. G. Nixon, & D. Rucht (Eds.), *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements* (pp. 25–48). London, UK: Routledge.
- Schmoll, K. (2021). A local lens on global media literacy: Teaching media and the Arab world. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 13(3), 62–74. doi:10.23860/JMLE-2021-13-3-5
- Seufferling, P. (2021). *Media and the refugee camp: The historical making of space, time, and politics in the modern refugee regime*. Huddinge, Sweden: Södertörns högskola.
- Sreberny, A. (2015). Women's digital activism in a changing Middle East. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47(2), 357–361. doi:10.1017/S0020743815000112
- Tawil-Souri, H., & Aouragh, M. (2014). Intifada 3.0? Cyber colonialism and Palestinian resistance. *The Arab Studies Journal*, 22(1), 102–133.
- Tazi, M., & Oumlil, K. (2020). The rise of fourth-wave feminism in the Arab region? Cyberfeminism and women's activism at the crossroads of the Arab spring. *CyberOrient*, 14(1), 45–49.
- Waisbord, S., & Mellado, C. (2014). De-westernizing communication studies: A reassessment. *Communication Theory*, 24, 361–372. doi:10.1111/comt.12044
- Wang, G. (Ed.). (2011). *De-westernizing communication research: Altering questions and changing frameworks*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Yaghi, A. A. (2019, 25 July). *Palestinian youth fight back on social media. The electronic intifada*. Retrieved from <https://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-youth-fight-back-social-media/27866>

Appendix

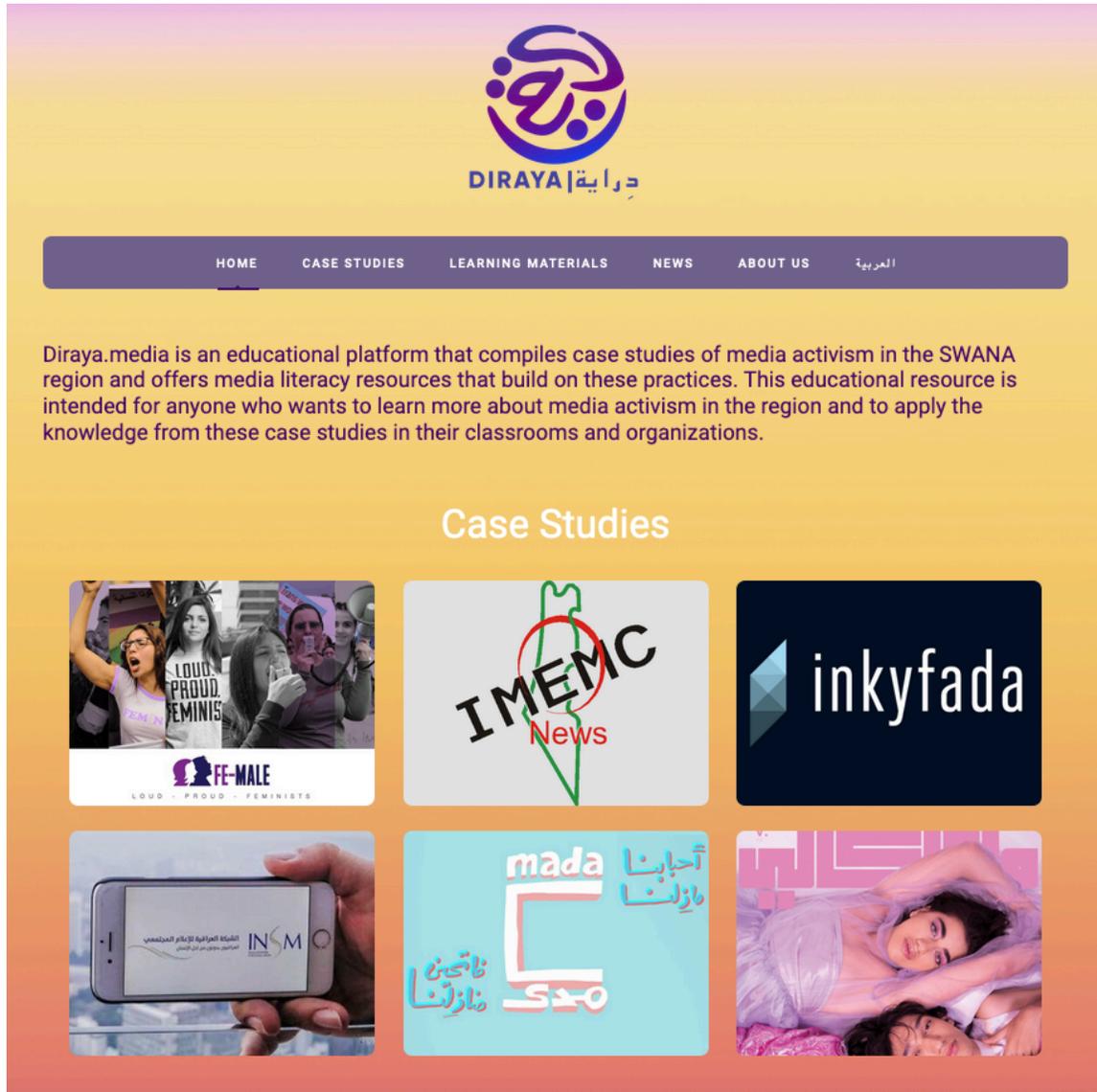


Figure A1. Screenshot of starting page of Diraya.media (Diraya, 2020b).

DIRAYA | دراية

HOME CASE STUDIES LEARNING MATERIALS NEWS ABOUT US العربية

Fe-Male | Lebanon

Alia Awada | Feminist Activist | Co-Director at Fe-Male

FE-MALE
LOUD · PROUD · FEMINISTS

OVERVIEW GOALS STRUCTURE FUNDING & TRAINING MEDIA PRACTICES CONSTRAINTS BIO

Fe-Male is a feminist collective founded in 2011 by women who were between the ages of 23 and 27. In 2013, Fe-Male was officially registered as a national non-governmental organization (NGO) in Lebanon. Alia describes how the founding of the organization by a team of all women was intentional:

"We consider that women do not have a space to make decisions. That's why all of our staff are women and girls to make sure they have a space to express themselves."

Before becoming an NGO, the founders of Fe-Male were active for two years as a volunteer collective producing a radio program called "Sharika wa Laken" (or *Your [female] partner, but...*) on the Beirut based radio station **Sawt El Shaeb FM**. The radio program evolved into a digital feminist platform. The collective created the radio show and website as advocacy spaces to talk about women's rights in Lebanon.

The name of the organization, Fe-Male, is derived from the fact that they believe that society cannot prosper without women (or females). The naming emphasizes the "FE" syllable to show that males and females share power, and women should always be there to participate in society along with men equally. The vision of Fe-Male is to grow the public space for feminists in Lebanon and achieve gender equality. Fe-Male does this work by building the capacity of women and girls in Lebanon to be able to use media tools to advocate for their human rights.

Figure A2. Screenshot of case study of Fe-Male, Lebanon, on Diraya.media (Diraya, 2020c).

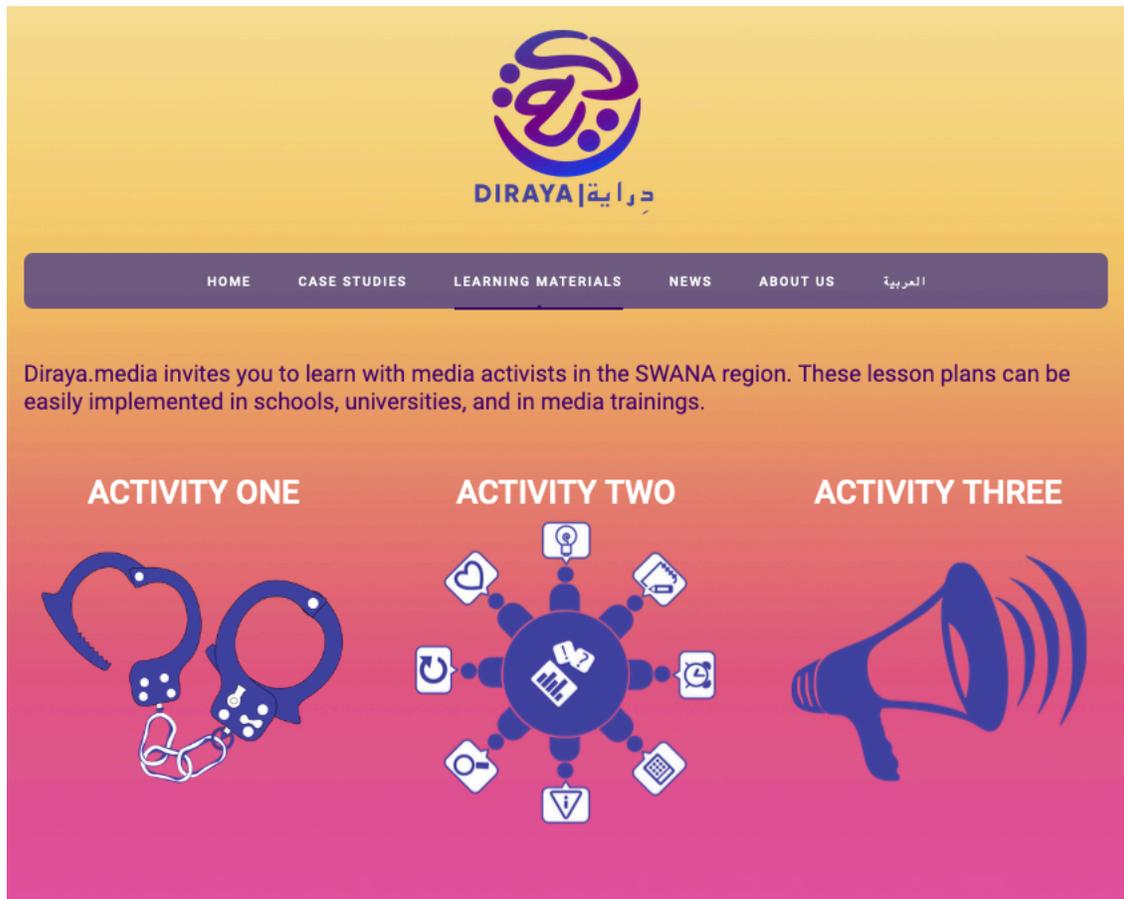


Figure A3. Screenshot of learning materials on Diraya.media (Diraya, 2020d).