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Digital Resistance: #SaveSheikhJarrah and the role of Palestinian Activism on Social Media

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Master in International Studies

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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I must confess my bias, which has been influenced for years by subjective media following the order of a so-called *staatsräson*. I regrettably had to learn it the hard way when it would have been so simple to amplify Palestinian voices on mainstream media without censoring or suppressing them.

A Palestinian first had to move to Portugal to teach a German about the crimes of an Israeli apartheid state, to teach her about the enduring century-long resistance, about steadfastness, uprooting of identity, being deprived of basic human rights and what it means to *not* have the simple freedoms, that come with a German passport. Thank you Ramy.

I am still learning – Learning to listen and to act and to speak in an inclusive and decolonised manner. Language is a powerful tool to narrate. Speaking in active or passive voice, of occupied and occupiers, of oppressors and oppressed instead of a conflict, might seem trivial for some, but makes a major difference to others.

Last but most importantly, thank you to all the participants, who I interviewed during my digital ethnography. People, who have never met me “in flesh” before, have shared some of their emotional and powerful life stories and their trust with me. You gave me the possibility to see the Palestinian struggle through your eyes. Without you it would have not been possible. I dedicate this to you.

Resumo

Esta dissertação de Mestrado explora a evolução dos movimentos sociais transnacionais e a subida da mobilização digital no século XXI, com enfoque no caso palestino. Paralelamente ao estudo teórico dos movimentos sociais, o núcleo desta obra representa uma sinopse da história da resistência palestina, com destaque para o período entre 1936 e as lutas populares de hoje, particularmente a resistência digital na era dos meios de comunicação social. Mais em detalhe, esta dissertação baseia-se num estudo de caso relacionado ao hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah, que se tornou viral em Maio de 2021. O hashtag representa um clamor geracional contra a ocupação israelita e as expulsões relacionadas ao colonialismo do assentamento no distrito de Sheikh Jarrah em Jerusalém Oriental e trouxe uma atenção nunca vista para a causa palestina ao nível global. Esta dissertação contribui para a documentação das narrativas dos ativistas e mapeia os significados da resistência palestina na nova era dos meios de comunicação social, dentro de um contexto histórico mais amplo. Além disso, a abordagem de investigação bastante inovadora e multidisciplinar, que combina a etnografia digital com entrevistas com ativistas, dá um contributo original para os estudos sobre a Palestina no seio da academia portuguesa, o que constitui uma grande lacuna de investigação que existe até aos dias de hoje.

Palavras chave:

Palestina/Israel, movimentos sociais, redes sociais, resistência digital, Sheikh Jarrah, colonialismo de assentamento

Abstract

This Master dissertation explores the evolution of transnational social movements and the rise of digital mobilisation in the twenty-first century, with a focus on the Palestinian case. Parallel to the theoretical study of social movements, the core of this work represents a synopsis of Palestinian resistance history, with a focus on the period between 1936 and today's popular struggles, particularly digital resistance in the age of social media. More in detail, this dissertation is based on a case study around the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah, which went viral in May 2021. The hashtag represents a generational outcry against the Israeli occupation and settler-colonial evictions in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and has brought unprecedented attention for the Palestinian cause on a global level. This dissertation contributes to the documentation of activists' narratives and maps the meanings of Palestinian resistance in the new era of social media within a broader historical context. Furthermore, the rather novel and multidisciplinary research approach, which combines digital ethnography with interviews with activists, makes an original contribution to Palestine studies within Portuguese academia, which constitutes a major research gap that exists to this day.

Key words:

Palestine/Israel, social movements, social media, digital resistance, Sheikh Jarrah, settler colonialism

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List of Acronyms

BDS	Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement
CoE	Council of Europe
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IOF	Israeli Offensive/Occupation Forces
ISM	International Solidarity Movement
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Queer Intersex Asexual/Ally
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NVR	Non-Violent Resistance
oPt	occupied Palestinian territories
Oslo I/II	Oslo Accords (I and II)
PA /PNA	Palestinian Authorities / Palestinian National Authorities
Paltel	Palestinian Telecommunications Company
PDAF	Palestinian Digital Activism Forum
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNLU	Unified National Leadership of the Uprising
UNRWA	United Nations Reliefs Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
VR	Violent Resistance
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance and Research Question

Humanism is the only - I would go so far as saying the final - resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history. We are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace open in for all users in ways undreamed of by earlier generations either by tyrants or by orthodoxies. The world wide protests [...] would not have been possible were it not for the existence of alternative communities across the globe informed by alternative news sources and keenly aware of the environmental, human rights, and libertarian impulses, that bind us together in this tiny planet (Edward Said, 2003, xx-xxi).

This quotation originates from the (revised) prologue of Edward Said's masterpiece *Orientalism*. It is somewhat surprising how he praised cyberspace and its potential for social movements already in 2003, without knowing what social media would mean for the Arab Springs and what dynamics it would foster in his birth country Palestine.

We must remember that whatever how romanticised the concept of humanism may sound, it is motivated by the exact opposite: inhumane practices. When it comes to social duty, humanism and resistance intersect in places where people struggle for freedom, justice, and dignity. These places can take the shape of yelling political slogans through a megaphone, holding up signs that express one's political beliefs, or simply showing up for a protest on the ground. However, these places can also exist virtually, through online petitions, social media posts, comments, and other digital storytelling tools.

The Internet is an extended arm of our society. It mirrors our hopes, aspirations as well as ongoing struggles. In the Palestinian case, it often mirrors life under occupation. 100 years have passed since the establishment of the British mandate in Palestine in 1922. The occupation is ongoing, and so is the liberation struggle.

This work focuses on new developments within the activist landscape, namely digital resistance in the case of Palestine, specifically on the hashtag campaign #SaveSheikhJarrah¹. At the core of my work, I explore the dynamics of transnational social movements and the connectivity of past and present popular struggles in Palestine. I build on existing literature, how-

¹ The campaign went viral in May of 2021. Since 1967, Israel has continued to expand its settlements, illegal under international law, as well as the eviction of Palestinian property in East Jerusalem. The hashtag was created by a grassroots action of the neighbourhood itself and is until today shared all over the world (Alsaafin, 2021). A detailed analysis of the events will be presented in chapter 4.

ever, the timeliness and continuity of the topic, as well as the relatively modern research approach, doing digital ethnography reflects a vast picture of our society, and contributes to the understanding of new dynamics in the field of social movements. Within Portuguese academia research in the field of Palestine Studies is of utmost relevance, as it still constitutes a major research gap.

Lastly, the societal relevance of this dissertation subject is based on social justice and the struggle for human rights. In addition, it is deeply rooted in the author's positionality towards the question of Palestine, which will be explained later in this chapter.

Throughout the process of studying the topic of this present work, as well as conducting digital ethnography, the following a) major research question, and b) minor sub-question guided me:

- a) What are the meanings of Palestinian resistance in the new era of social media?
- b) How can digital campaigns represent new forms of social movements?

However, I would like to stress as well the process of learning from the interview participants. After having categorised the qualitative data, collected throughout my interviews and digital ethnography², I have set up further four analytical questions, linking to the literature studied. These were particularly relevant in order to answer and ensure an in-depth discussion of the major research question:

- c) What are the interviewees' motivations behind being activists?
- d) What are their activist goals?
- e) What challenges do/did they face?
- f) What identitarian and historical significance do they see in #SaveSheikhJarrah?

1.2 Methodology

Research Approach & Research Objectives

This Master thesis uses a qualitative interpretative approach based on the study of social movements, and specifically a more nuanced historically rooted approach towards Palestinian popular struggles in order to answer the before-mentioned research questions. The framework of the present thesis follows a theoretical pluralist structure, including works of prominent scholars of the respective fields as Donatella della Porta (2006; 2015), Mario Diani (1992; 2006; 2015),

² It will be explained in detail in chapters 1.2 and 4.2.

Sidney Tarrow (1998), and Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2014a, 2014b) on social movement studies' framework, and Ilan Pappé (2017), Noam Chomsky (2015), Mazin Qumsiyeh (2011), as well as Michael Bröning (2011) regarding grassroots politics' history in Palestine.

While studying and analysing the literature, it was crucial to observe the ways and junctures through which (online) social movement studies and Palestine studies intersect. The cross-over points are at the heart of my research with the following objectives, namely to:

- a) Identify the significance of digital Palestinian grassroots activism in the context of historical popular struggles
- b) Explain the importance of Palestinian activism in online environments
- c) Explore the potential of digital campaigns as new forms of social movements (in the Palestinian context)

Digital Ethnography

The study of the existing literature is underpinned by a case study, using a digital ethnography approach. Digital ethnography corresponds to our *Zeitgeist* and is seen as becoming more and more important as well in academia, as it serves to provide a broad overview of society's perspectives and opinions.

As the digital world intertwines with the everyday, digital ethnography becomes a key methodological approach. With the emergence of Web 2.0 and its participatory nature, new dynamics arise within this field, as well as critical perspectives on Internet Studies stimulate new practices within ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012). “Digital and Social Media become agents in creating social spaces” (Kraemer, 2017, 187). These new social spaces are observed by digital ethnographers. When studying methodological literature on digital ethnography, there are usually two different noteworthy approaches: 1) web content analysis of large data sets, and 2) social network analysis, particularly used in qualitative studies, using interviews, participant observation, or content analysis (Postill & Pink, 2012).

Within social network analysis again, there are different directions to explore. Hine’s research for example is based on the analysis of the Internet per se, meaning the rise of new online spaces, platforms, or apps. She tries to answer the questions of how the Internet is used, what forms of engagement exist and under what circumstances are the platforms used (Hine, 2009, as cited in Postill & Pink, 2012). Kozinet’s *netnography* approach moves away from studying the nature of these platforms to studying the community and culture from within, focusing on the interactions and social relations in the virtual world (Postill & Pink, 2012; Kozinet, 2014).

Moreover, Postill & Pink (2012) centre on social media as a space for activism. During the 15M/Indignados movements in Spain³ in 2011, the authors investigated on Social Media use during the protests. However, given the various approaches, they argue that there is not a sole solution to conduct digital ethnography, bearing in mind that it is a modern field subjected to the ever-changing dynamics of the Internet (Postill & Pink, 2012).

For this dissertation, digital ethnographic fieldwork follows the social network analysis approach, directed at the mentioned works of Kozinets (2014) and Postill & Pink (2012). It has involved examining selected posts of prominent activists and comments on the specific hashtag campaign #SaveSheikhJarrah from the activist community in order to get a vaster view into the digital activist landscape in Palestine. Furthermore, this research will be enhanced by semi-structured interviews with Palestinian activists, so as to situate the specific hashtag in historical perspective with regard to former Palestinian popular struggles. Here, it will become clear how they interact with the specific campaign #SaveSheikhJarrah, what advantages they see in online Palestinian (solidarity) activism, but also what difficulties they face.

My target group comprised social media activists from Palestine and the diaspora, aged between 20 to 45 years.⁴ The semi-structured interviews being part of this digital fieldwork were either conducted in written form via a questionnaire (see Appendix A), or meetings on Zoom. All the activists were recruited online, via my personal social media accounts. A slide was created (see Annex B) in order to be shared by friends and followers, following the “snowball” sampling method (Frey, 2018). As some of the participants were based in Lisbon, I could meet them personally. As Kozinets (2010, 15) points out, “[O]nline communities are not virtual. They are real communities populated with real people, which is why so many end up meeting in the flesh”.

The evaluation of the interviews, selected posts, and comments follows a mixed thematic approach: Inductive by coding the interview content into different categorisations, based on the activists’ experiences and narratives; deductive by linking the findings to some key-concepts developed in the literature review; the author’s positionality; and the relevance to the topic. I decided to follow this thematic approach as it focuses on the interviewees’ personal experiences and aims to reflect on pre-consistent rules and norms (according to Braun & Clarke, 2006. In

³ 15M or Indignados is a transnational movement that was started in Spain in 2011 and directed at the Euro Crisis as well as the indignation against politicians. Chapter 2.1 will focus on the transnational dynamics of this movement.

⁴ The case study, participants, participant recruitment, digital ethnography and the interviews will be presented in detail in chapter 4.

particular, the main reason for choosing this approach was the increasing silencing and censorship of the Palestinian cause on social media platforms. My idea and objectives behind this were to attempt to unravel dominant narratives, by listening to activists who tell their own stories and share their experiences. “[The] prosaic representation and representation of [my] findings are essential ways to communicate to readers how the social action we witnessed and synthesized unfolded and flowed through time” (Miles et al., 2020, 83).

1.3 Challenges related to the topic and positionality

Positionality

“The concerns you bring to do social analysis may also arise from [...] personal history – of residence, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, past identities or experiences, places of residence [...] and so forth” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, 13). As Lofland & Lofland, most quoted authors within anthropological field research describe, an ethnographic fieldwork online or offline always comes with some challenges. Especially the positionality of the field researcher, personal history, as well as residence and social surroundings can have a major impact on the outcome of the research.

In my case, growing up in Germany and not being taught on the question of Palestine at all, and *if* in a rather non-objective form, with media following a certain political direction oriented towards the so-called *staatsräson*⁵, I initially saw a conflict behind a century-long occupation, and terrorists behind the steadfast and resisting Palestinian people. It was only in Portugal when by the help of a Palestinian friend, I was starting to be more and more engaged in the solidarity movement. Portuguese academia, compared to German is more open towards the issue, and, throughout the course "Political Dynamics in the MENA region" integrated in the Master's in International Studies at Iscte, I was gradually being involved in Palestinian literature such as Edward Said's masterpiece *Orientalism*, and some of the Israeli New Historians works of Ilan Pappé. However, Palestine Studies still constitute an overall major research gap within Portuguese academia. I would like to refer to a talk with Shahd Wadi, a Palestinian feminist researcher in Portugal, as she compared Palestine in academia to a “soundproof room,

⁵“[...] The security of Israel is Germany's reason of state.” This statement was firstly made in 2005 and describes the special relationship between the two states. Even though the term does not have any legal standing in Germany it is of high terminological power (Hever, 2019, 87).

that people cannot go out or in.”⁶ Outside academia, the main news sources of my education on the Palestinian question are indeed (according to Western perception) more alternative, on news channels such as *Al Jazeera* and for the most part social media. When one is interested in this issue, one must actively search for it, because mainstream media usually does not cover Palestinian life under occupation

Conducting my ethnographic fieldwork with my personal Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, naturally my news feed on the platforms is partly influenced by the algorithm, meaning that posts appear not by order of the publishing time, but by the relevance for the user, based on previous likes, comments or shares (Golino, 2021). This means that, during my *netnography*, the social media platforms would for example suggest to me activist profiles, that share similar values and opinions as myself. I have tried to counteract this by the extensive study of wide-ranging literature, both from Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian authors, as well as by deliberately clicking on, for example, more pro-Israeli, pro-Zionist accounts, in order to “neutralize” the algorithm once again. Yet, as the Lofland & Lofland (1995) described, a field-research study can never to fully extent be 100 percent neutral.

“The everyday life of the social media ethnographer involves living part of one’s life on the internet” (Postill & Pink, 2012, 7). This statement accurately describes another challenge I faced as a field researcher. For almost a year, between October 2021 to August 2022 from the time I defined the subject to the time I finished writing my thesis, I was immersed in the digital world of the Palestine solidarity movement, both consciously and subconsciously. Fieldwork changes from rather quiet periods to very active periods. In the more volatile periods, it is especially important to stay up to date (*ibid*). In my case, for example, social media activity was particularly high whenever new neighbourhoods, mainly in East-Jerusalem, were targeted by the Zionist settlement policy⁷. Private and academic life became blurred as I responded to activists’ messages at home in the late evenings, retweeted tweets, created Instagram stories and delved into the comments sections of numerous posts.

⁶ Shahd Wadi (Researcher in Feminist and Palestine Studies), together with Annelien Groten (PhD Anthropology Iscte) were invited to speak at Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa - at the first event of a new series of seminars on the Middle East and North Africa organised by CEI - Centre for International Studies: Reflections on Palestine Studies from within Portuguese Academia 11th May. It centred on the current status of Palestine Studies within the Portuguese academia. To date, the two researchers are the only ones in Portugal, who have completed their doctoral dissertations in Palestine studies.

⁷ It will be explained throughout the further course of this present thesis.

Reflections on activism in academia

The dichotomy that “academia and activism are separate worlds, driven by contrasting aims and imperatives and governed by different rules” is still widespread within numerous educational institutions (Eschle & Maignashca, 2006, 1). Academia is everything activism is not – or at least it used to. The academy made by men for the elite undergoing a hierarchical top-down order, is very different to bottom-up, the grassroots and taking it to the streets. Especially feminist theory, which by the mentioned patriarchal structures within universities is often seen “as a form of activism, rather than a source of legitimate knowledge”, mirrors this line of thought (Bell et al., 2019, 10; Calàs & Smirchich, 2014). However, we can observe a slight change in this issue over the last few decades, within exactly Feminist Studies. The fact that this discipline is increasingly being called by that term, advocates for the shift in this regard, the shift towards making academia more political, and that activism indeed must be rooted in academia (Bell et al., 2019; Eschle & Maignashca, 2006). In my eyes, everything is political. It starts with consuming specific food, if one uses plastic packaging, wears fast-fashion mostly produced in the Global South, and at the end of the day even being apolitical is very much political. The question shall rather be posed how can academia *not* be activist?

I am reflecting on these issues, as my research studying resistance movements and taking on an ethnographic approach talking to activists, represents the interface between academia and activism.

Furthermore, another issue I was aware of throughout this process is that International Relations is a very traditional discipline, often seeing social movements studies as a contested field, with very limited scope of perspective (Davies & Peña, 2019). This will be explained in detail when addressing the state of art in contemporary social movements studies, in the further course of this thesis.

The Question of Ethics

We are conducting a type of outreach during which we have the opportunity to learn, to share knowledge, to listen, to speak, to be enlightened, to outrage, to be offended, to challenge, to be confronted, and even do harm (Kozinets, 2014, 129).

My case study being approved beforehand by my supervisor, still while talking to activists of minority groups (some of which are refugees) I was overly conscious of ethical concerns throughout the process and the uppermost principle of “doing no harm”.

Ethical questions guiding me throughout my *netnography* were for example: 1) Who owns the social networks, what is their political stance on the Palestinian question? 2) How public are social media profiles, or how private are they? 3) Whose consent do I need to obtain throughout my research even if anonymised (meaning information from for example comment sections)? And 4) How do language barriers (Arabic and Hebrew) influence my ethnographic fieldwork? (Kozinets, 2014).

I have consulted a fair quantity of literature, especially in the field of Anthropology, in order to answer these questions. As well in the university course “Ethnographic Field-Research” for a full semester I have dealt with working on several ethical scenarios. Nevertheless, there is no unequivocal answer to some of the questions posed previously.

To begin with, we need to reflect on the relationship between the media companies or rather the US and Israel. In general, it is no secret that the US sees Israel as a strategic security partner within the Middle East (Dine, 1986). Noam Chomsky sums it up:

From the US point of view negotiations [with the PA], are in effect, a way for Israel to continue its policies of systematically taking over whatever it wants in the West Bank, maintaining the brutal siege on Gaza, separating Gaza from the West Bank, and of course occupying the Syrian Golan Heights, all with full US support (Chomsky & Pappé, 2015, 137).

In parallel, there are made oftentimes statements, such as the one recently by Mendelsohn (Vice President of Meta Group), that Israeli tech companies will play a prominent role in expanding the “Metaverse”, and for example that Instagram CEO Mosseri holds dual citizenship, including the Israeli one (Trabelsy, 2021; Solomon, 2020). It appears natural to me that, given the conditions, companies that cultivate such strong personal and strategic economic relations with Israel cannot take an unbiased stance on the Palestinian question.

To comment on the second question, I would like to make use of the popularly renowned expression that “the Internet does not forget”, and so very briefly thought is to conclude that every Internet user is always fully aware of how careful or not they want to be about uploading certain images, thoughts and comments there. Markham describes how digital data usually are processed as public information, kind of like a published article (however often anonymised) (2006). Lester argues that in digital ethnography it might be necessary to move away from the public-private debate as a binary concept (2020). The Internet offers many different possibilities from blogs, to more participatory channels, and on the other hand, hidden private chat

rooms. So, researchers must ask themselves where they are on the public-private spectrum and what measures they need to take, in order to keep their study as ethical as possible. I believe that every person still has the rights to their own intellectual property (even in forms of comments on Social Media), and it may require informed consent to reproduce it. The sensitivity of the subject matter of this work continues to present an ethical conflict, as I do not want to cause difficulties for people in their private and professional lives. However, before posting a comment in the virtual public sphere, every internet user asks themselves what consequences they might encounter, and for what purpose they are posting - for a greater cause, freedom, and advocating for peace. I have thought about this for a considerable time and tried to choose a middle way: All comments, as well as interviews are anonymised and slightly modified (comments) from the original to make them more difficult to trace.

As a German student and researcher based in Portugal, I have an outsider role. Language barriers can affect the comprehensiveness of a study. I speak no Hebrew, and only few words of Arabic, and had to rely partly on friends and translation programmes. A new feature on many social media platforms is that there is a translation function directly below the posts, which was sometimes very helpful. The focus, however, was on English content. This meant that I missed for example most of the statements from famous activists who only post in Arabic. On the other hand, there are great efforts by activists to produce content in English. They want the world to get to understand and hear their narratives. As the anthropologist Burgess writes in his book “In the Field”, “with written accounts this [language barriers] is not so problematic”, however he stresses that it presents a major challenge in spoken interaction (1984, 104).

1.4 Thesis Overview and Hypothesis

This dissertation is composed of four chapters. After this short introduction to the topic regarding the research questions, research objectives, the relevance of the topic, as well as challenges and the researcher’s positionality, chapter two and three build a theoretical framework for the analysis of the case study that will be presented in chapter four.

Precisely, chapter two deals with the study of social movements, beginning with an overview on the issue, then going on to describe the phenomenon of the development of transnational social movements, and the rise in digital mobilisation in the 21st century, from the *Arab Springs* to the *Occupy* movement in the US and offshoots of it such as *15M Indignados* and other European movements. I also touch on various means and tools of mobilisation in the digital age, such as for example *citizen journalism*, *blogging*, or *transmedia storytelling*.

Chapter three then outlines the historical context of Palestinian grassroots resistance and traditional forms of popular struggles, with a specific focus on 1936, 1948, 1967, as well as the periods between 1987-1993 and 2000-2005, until present-day acts of resistance, with a strong focus on digital resistance, namely social media activism. With this thesis I will attempt to show that the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah is a historical and social mirror image of the long history of Palestinian resistance and resilience, “nourished” by the ongoing occupation, which includes settler-colonial activities – offline and now as well online, as part of a *cyber-occupation* (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Taha, 2020).

Finally, in chapter four, the case study of #SaveSheikhJarrah will be presented, answering the research questions. Given the historic complexity of this topic, it is inevitable going into discussing Zionism, Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism, however these themes should not present the focus of this thesis.

2. Social movements studies: Preliminary considerations

2.1 Transnational Movements in the 21st century

Contrary to the assumption that social movements are a modern phenomenon, revolution-like uprisings, similar to our modern understanding of social movements, have been proven to date back to ancient Egypt, mostly directed against the state, state-like forms of government, or elitist rule (Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018). However, social movements as a field of study is a relatively new appearance touching only upon the margins of social theory, political science, or International Relations. Neither Weber, Simmel, Durkheim, nor Marx, who has directly been involved in the labour movement, explicitly share theories on social movements per se. Only in the 1960s scholars such as Touraine started to revive Marxist heritage, paving the way for a theory of new social movements, this time at the centre of social theory (Eder, 2015, 31f; Touraine, 1981).

For him social movements harbour the three core characteristics directed at social change:

- i) a collective actor with an
- ii) identity who has an idea of the enemy while referring to a
- iii) 'totality', which means to the ensemble of historical processes in which historical action is embedded (see Touraine, 1981, as cited in Eder, 2015, 34).

The aim of this thesis is not to analyse the field of social movement research in detail since its inception. It is not to divide social movements into different "schools" or to look at the differences between European and American Studies. It is more about considering the field as an inescapable resource amid the 21st century. A field as a modern phenomenon and mirror of our society that is not static, interdisciplinary, and evolving constantly like our society (della Porta & Diani, 2015).

In general, first and foremost social movements are ways in which people can voice their common complaints and grievances on the current *status quo*. They represent an extra institutional setting established from the grassroots with the motivation to change these grievances, as political institutions fail to do so (Flesher Fominaya, 2014a).

The literature provides a wide range of definitions. Among the most cited are the definitions by della Porta and Diani (2006) who focus on social movements as informal networks, at their core solidarity, or common beliefs and conflictual issues. Tarrow (1998) follows a similar line of thought, but adds the component of a shared opponent, or state authorities. Goodwin and Jasper (2009, as cited in Flesher Fominaya, 2014a) highlight the difference between the terms

social movement and protest, of which the latter is only a small action within a social movement.

Progressive social movements work towards changing the prevailing status quo. *Regressive* movements on the other hand, such as the degrowth movement, strive to transform society back to an earlier stage in history. Social movements harbour the dynamic to generate *counter-movements*. The rise in right-wing extremism in Europe for example was soon challenged by the anti-fascist Antifa countermovement (Flesher Fominaya, 2014a).

Moreover, social movements can be divided into several geographical categories: local, national, and transnational/global. *Transnational social movements* are defined as “movements operating in at least two countries [...] to nearly all nations of the planet in the case of climate justice” (Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018, 201). They existed in a basic form for several centuries. Modern transnational movements however only date back to the 1980s emerging over issues as, for example, the end of South African Apartheid, climate change, or nuclear disarmament. Yet, the dynamics drastically shifted in the 1990s, linking to modern civil society organisations, such as labour organisations, networks of political parties, or the modern types of non-governmental organisations (NGO), we know today. As NGOs can play key roles in the organisational structure of movements, however the increasing institutionalisation of social movements has been regarded as adverse by some authors, as organisations become more and more dependent on financial aid and funding (Esteves et al., 2009). Important milestones in the study of transnational social movements in the 21st century is the emergence of so-called World Social Forums, one of the most wide-reaching international movement networks, and the notable “Battle of Seattle”, one of the largest movements in history, representing the opposition to the expansion of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (ibid; Smith, 2001).

Within these geographic categories, the literature distinguishes between structural motivations and identity-related motivations for collective action. Social movement literature identified several waves of globalisation, and with it the connected transition to neoliberalism, as well as shifts in economic and governmental structures, as the main reasons for rising inequalities and subsequently drivers for collective resistance and social change (della Porta et al., 2006; Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018). More recent perspectives address more nuanced movement campaigns directed at specific neoliberal policies, including for example the privatisation or free trade agreements. In summary, the transformation to neoliberalism in a globalised system represents a major key driver of contemporary social movements (Castells, 2012; della Porta, 2015; Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018).

Similar to Touraine's (1981) original ideas, another line of thought focuses on “empowered identities [as] actors in world society” (Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018, 195, as cited in Meyer, 2009). A “global moral order” with shared values, common norms, or rules formed by the merging of myriad and diverse cultures, have resulted in the establishment and rise of international organisations, non-governmental actors, and social movements - and vice-versa (ibid.).

Significant in the rise of social movements is the striking commonality of a shared identity or a similar political context within the countries, as for example in global feminist networks or the movement dynamics during the *Arab Springs*. Della Porta and Diani (2006, 94) stress the importance of a “we” and “common traits” within collective action, as well as Diani highlights the basis of a “shared collective identity” (1992, 13). However, the literature is divided on the differentiation of identity movements and political movements. Bernstein (2005) for example argues that movements of the LGBTQIA+ community use certain identity characteristics to change the political status quo. Nevertheless, the differentiation can become “downright confusing”, when identity and political movements overlap, as they become political, as Landy outlines “referring to Jewish Israel-critical groups in which expressive and instrumental goals are intertwined” (2011, 25). The same author also underlines his perspective on social movements as historical actors carrying the ability of reimagining identity and, thus, challenging prevailing *narratives* (Landy, 2011).

Social movements are processes of change that unfold over time, that is why, as Markoff puts it: “History matters for movements and for scholars of movements” (2015, 82). A concept, closely intertwined with both identity and history, is represented by narratives. Political actors and activists make use of (counter-)narratives, telling their “stories” as vehicles to support their values, political ideologies, or challenge predominant narratives (Poletta & Gharitty Gardner, 2015). The study of narratives in social movements however is seen in a controversial way, especially when studying social movements through the lens of interviewing activists. On the one hand, scholars argue that when collected enough stories, the outcome of the study should be a nearly exact representation of the events. Others argue for the support of documented empirical data, or for example ethnographic fieldwork observations (Poletta & Gharitty Gardner, 2015). What should be noted at this point is the possibility that in conflicting situations of strong power asymmetries different narratives might oppose one another. In many cases, when archives, cultural artefacts, or other historical records are dispossessed, or destroyed sometimes, oral narratives are the only proof of history. These three lines of thought, or rather the correlation between identity, history and narratives, are of particular importance for this present work

since in my case study, or in general in the case of Palestine, these three approaches to study social movements somewhat intersect.

Another concept I would like to draw upon is solidarity. The concept within social movements is simultaneously unifying, and dividing, as it creates one movement community, but also automatically assumes the existence of multiple identities. Solidarity movements are especially interesting, as they are based on differences, compared to the previous outline of identity-motivated movements, and the sharing of a common identity and grievances. According to Featherstone (2012), solidarity emerges out of asymmetrical power structures and is “forged through political struggle [from below], which seeks to challenge forms of oppression” (as cited in Flesher Fominaya, 2014b, 17). Again, theoretical origins of solidarity can be found in Marxist theory with solidarity between different working classes, or Durkheim, who then studied solidarity among similar as well as distinct social groups (Flesher Fominaya, 2014b).

As our globalised world is changing, so does the nature of social movements. A striking change in the main features of social movements is observable, when studying Castells’ literature. His works focus among other core topics on social movements in the urban sphere (1984), up to a drastic change into a completely different space, than the urban, namely the Internet with its network society (2009; 2012).

The last two decades have represented a drastic change in the dynamics of social movements. The Internet enables mass communication facilitating mass mobilisation across borders, as the example of the Arab Springs in 2011 showed. Regarding this, what changes has the Internet produced and what social media networks and communication platforms have brought about? New opportunities, challenges, and underlying dynamics this shift entails, will be analysed in the next chapter.

2.2 Social movements in the digital age

From Cairo to the world – Increase in digital transnational activism

“Go down to the street, send SMSs, post it on the Net, make people aware” (quote by Asmaa Mafhouz, 2011, as cited in Castells, 2012, 56).

As easy as this sentence seems for us today, living in a digitally connected world, where we wake up to an alarm set on our phone and fall-back asleep sending “Good night” messages via social media platforms, the opposite of easy it was for Asmaa Mafhouz, a (back in 2011) 26-year old student in Egypt. The quote from her video-message, a call for revolution against

“the depth[s] of oppression, injustice, poverty, unemployment, sexism, mockery of democracy, and police brutality” (Castells, 2012, 54) is seen to be the spark that ignited the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Someone uploaded the video-blog, and it suddenly was shared from YouTube all along the Internet, between friends and families, associations, and football clubs, going *viral*, as we would say nowadays. A network of people was formed, in such a rapid pace, online and offline, consisting of women and men, of people of various religious backgrounds, but having one common goal on their agenda: Ending the Mubarak regime. It is reported that over the course of several days more than two million people protested in the central Tahrir Square - the Liberation Square. Later, protestors occupied various spaces and buildings in Cairo, and the revolution took its course across other cities in Egypt, such as Alexandria (ibid).

The Egyptian revolution is part of the Arab Springs, having its origin within the so-called *Jasmine revolution* of Tunisia in late 2010. The mass unrests spilled over into Egypt and other Arab countries, turning the protests into a *pan-Arabic*, transnational movement (ibid).⁸

How did this revolution take place? How could such a large number of people be reached and mobilised so quickly? What are the movement dynamics, both online and offline? To answer these questions, I would like to start by outlining the different methods and mediums used, to mobilise the protestors during the Arab Springs, and consequently turning a virtual community into a movement community. Thereafter, I would like to look at which other more digitally driven movements have come about, considering what dynamics and features they all share, with the Arab Springs and worldwide.

Blogging in Egypt was already a “thing” before the revolution. In a chapter published in 2009, Wheeler discusses Arab societies’ internet use, and describes how “the internet was creating a pathway towards a Muslim renaissance. From all across the political spectrum, young Arabs narrate their vision for a new Middle East” (Wheeler, 2009, 314). Back in 2009, young bloggers in Egypt started to report about police brutality, acts of torture, and arbitrary arrests - followed by their own arrests. Wheeler (2009) emphasises how valuable this tool, which was still very nascent at the time, is for the future, as it challenges entrenched social images of the mainstream-media (ibid). Through blogging, people can share their dreams, opinions, goals and hopes for the future. Blogs become vehicles for reinventing societies and their narratives. The launch of Facebook in 2009 in Tunisia and Egypt and later in an Arabic version brought another

⁸ “Days of Rage” (Yom al Ghadab) protests, as part of the Arab Spring occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Oman, Syria, Yemen, Kuwait, Libya and Bahrain. The success of the Arab Spring at the time spilled over into movements in Europe and the US (Castells, 2012, 95).

major shift in the development of mass online communities and social movements in the digital age (Tufekci, 2014).

However, Tufekci (2014) attributes a crucial role to the news server Al Jazeera. As well other authors stress the importance of a *multimodal* nature of movement communication. At the peak of the protests at Tahrir square, when they turned into violent riots resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people, the government shut down the internet completely. Protestors however stayed informed, through the existence of so-called *citizen-journalism*, miniature documentaries, or short clips recorded on mobile devices, later published on news channels, such as Al Jazeera. When also the satellite connections were shut down, other Arab countries offered the news channel to use their transmission frequencies (Castells, 2012).

With the shutdown of the various networks, the (solidarity-)activist community became even more proactive, now reaching a global level. Some engineers developed a speak-to-tweet tool, through which tweets were produced automatically after leaving a voice message on a machine in Paris, and international hackers provided a programme that converted phone calls into text messages and sent them to every fax in Egypt (Castells, 2012; Yin, 2009). As one might think we became dependent on the Internet, once it is being shut down, we also become creative - more than ever. Indeed “the artistic political creativity” is seen as a powerful side effect of social movements in the digital age, using powerful images, as vehicles of “creative narrative-activated emotions, both mobilising and soothing [...]” (Castells, 2012, 109). Hancox (2019) as well builds on the concept of narrative, as a core dynamic in making meaning of personal experiences, especially for social groups usually being represented by others. She gives especially importance to the method of *transmedia storytelling* as part of social movements. Personal experiences that are wrapped up in emotional stories define modern activism. Among other examples, the author describes how the image of the Avatar movie was used in Palestine and indigenous Australia to raise awareness on the occupation, and the exploitation of natural resources on indigenous land, resembling very much the storyline of the Hollywood movie (ibid.).

Between 2010 and 2014, movements similar to the ones involved in the Arab Springs regarding their organisational structure, emerged all around the world. The Euro Crisis for example evoked the *15M*, or respectively the *Indignados* movement in Spain, which, as the name already reveals, generally circles around the indignation against politicians and criticises their inaction and indifference towards the youth. Starting in Spain, the movement quickly became transnational representing activists in 951 cities in 82 countries around the world. Closely linked to the *Indignados* movement is the *#occupywallstreet* movement, as the first calls to

occupy Wall Street came from Spain, later on turning into the *occupy*-movement all around the US and other countries. The movement, unlike the revolution in Cairo does not have a specific, but rather multiple and open movement goals on its agenda, and focuses on the power of the process of the movement. It is in general directed at economic inequality, however interestingly every occupy movement at different places was locally specialised, each one representing their own struggles and grievances (Castells, 2012; Maeckelberg, 2012; Pavan & Rapini, 2022).

Observably, especially NGOs and Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) tend to be organised on social media platforms, engaging in so-called Hashtag Activism. Hashtags (#) are used as an organisational tool or “indexing system” on social media, facilitating dialogue, sorting topics and ranking trends. They support participatory culture (according to Jenkins, 2006, as cited in Xiong et al., 2019) by allowing users to form (support) groups around political causes and topics, or for example specific (historic) events (Xiong, et al. 2019; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). Postills and Pink add that a specific hashtag “produces the experience of being ‘in the digital crowd’” (2012, 10).

To conclude, referring to the question "what all these movements have in common, apart from happening partly in an online space?", these new kinds of social movements emerging between 2010 and 2014, are often referred to as *networked social movements* (Castells, 2012; Diani & Mische, 2015). Other authors refer to them as *social movement communities* (Staggenborg, 1998; Hassan & Staggenborg, 2015). They are networked in a multimodal way, organised be it through an agglomeration of blogs or Facebook groups, however decentralised with local autonomous representations in different cities, usually without a leader. They are spontaneous, but mobilised and triggered by deep-rooted emotions, by “outrage against blatant injustice, and by hope of a possible change as a result of examples of successful uprisings in other parts of the world” (Castells, 2012, 248). A mere agglomeration of blogs, for example informing people on police brutality, does not make a movement, according to Castells (2012). It is the occupation of the urban space that makes the movement, meanwhile interacting between online and offline spaces. Contemporary social movements are *postmedia*, meaning that the people within a social movement become their own media, as a quote by Indymedia outlines referring to *15M*: “Do not hate the media – become the media” (as cited in Castells, 2012, 124).

Another point the movements I take into consideration have in common is that they are all non-violent at their core, representing a movement-culture of “peace and democracy” (ibid., 138). Yet, the response to the social movements, and the associated occupation of the various squares, was often answered with the opposite – police violence. In all cases, this has increased the solidarity among the activists even more.

Last, and most importantly, the movements or respectively the movement communities, all have in common shared struggles and shared identities, “a shared narrative of common grievances” (ibid, 107) and the urge to change predominantly accepted narratives through their own stories may they are told online or offline (Diani, 1992; Hancox, 2019; Landy, 2011; Pavan & Rapini, 2022).

The occupation of urban space is a key resistance strategy - all around the world, from Puerta del Sol in Madrid (15M/Indignados), Gezi Park⁹ in Istanbul, or Tahrir Square in Cairo (Dhaliwal, 2012; Castells, 1984). Yet, new developments, such as the #metoo campaign¹⁰, however, largely take place online (Dino, 2022). Does that make it any less of a social movement because it is not necessarily directed at occupying urban space but rather the Internet? Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented from gathering and protesting together, people found new forms to show their outrage about the current status quo and to present their hope for change.

And what about conflicting contexts where one simply cannot take it to the streets to protest? Where people are physically separated from each other and most of the time are prevented from taking any action by popular protests? Where protestors fear to be killed? This represents perhaps a new shift, meaning that digital platforms are not used anymore merely to organise the grassroots activities and mobilise the people behind it, but that digital campaigns can create a new type of social movement. This sub-question will be answered in the further course of this thesis, analysing a specific hashtag campaign in Palestine. In the next chapter, the historical context behind popular resistance in Palestine and these possibly new developments will be outlined.

⁹ The Gezi-Park protests of 2013 represent the clash between traditional and modern Turkey. The demonstrations initially were against the destruction of a nature park but turned into the expression of citizens' general discontent and the rejection of the comeback of a conservative, traditional Muslim-orientated idea of society and family. The movement was highly influenced by the organisation through social media platforms, individual blogs and citizen journalism on police brutality (Castells, 2012).

¹⁰ #metoo was started by Tarana Burke already in 2006 as part of a campaign to promote empowerment through empathy among African-American women who had experienced sexual abuse. It only went viral in 2017 when prominent Hollywood actors shared the hashtag (Jaffe, 2018).

3. Social movements in Palestine: Resisting the occupation

3.1 The question of Palestine – an overview

July 2022 marked 100 years since the official establishment of the British Mandate in 1922, 100 years of (settler-)colonial rule, of Zionist advancement. In short, 100 years of the “Question of Palestine”. A question which some might want to answer with “it is too complicated to answer”, others might not want to answer at all or cannot answer at all.

Naturally, much has happened in 100 years: Wars, popular uprisings, and many historical political milestones that one can easily lose track of. However, the question of Palestine at its core is very much simple to answer. History is a powerful tool to answer it while unravelling myths and long-established narratives. As Pappé states

History lies at the core of every conflict. A true and unbiased understanding of the past offers the possibility of peace. The distortion or manipulation of history, in contrast, will only sow disaster. [...] This wilful misunderstanding of history can promote oppression and protect a regime of colonisation and occupation (Pappé, 2017, ix).

The Palestinians are subject to oppression, dispossession, ethnic cleansing, based on illusions and myths, “thanks to” the Balfour Declaration of 1917¹¹, which since then enabled mass Zionist immigration. In 1947 the UN made the partition plan official, separating the land of historic Palestine into two “independent” states, namely an Arab and a Jewish state. *Independent* is the word that applies the least. Formerly native land has been settled for a long time, and since 1967 one can say officially *occupied* (UN 2022; Pappé, 2017).

Internationally, the answers to this “big question” are still very far apart. In 2021, Human Rights Watch, as well as Amnesty International published a report calling out the crimes committed by Israel and name the state an *apartheid* state (Amnesty International, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Within Amnesty International, however, national sections, such as Amnesty Germany, disassociate themselves from this label (Amnesty International, 2021; Sappir, 2022). Interestingly enough, the year 2021 is not the first time the term *apartheid* has been used in reference to Israel's occupation of Palestine. In an UN report from 2017, Falk and Tilley’s investigations also show that “Israel has imposed an apartheid regime on the Palestinian people as a whole [...]” (Falk & Tilley, 2017, 52).¹²

¹¹ The Balfour declaration, a letter by British foreign state secretary Arthur J. Balfour expresses Britain’s support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in native Palestine (Pappé, 2017).

¹² The UN report was informed by another report of Human Sciences Research Council (2009), which at that time already claimed that Israel violated (and continues to violate) both colonialism and apartheid.

As rich as the history of oppression is on the Israeli side, so is the history of popular resistance on the Palestinian side. In the next chapter, an overview of grassroots mobilisation in Palestine and internationally will be given in order to place the phenomenon of digital resistance in historical context.

3.2 Traditional forms of popular struggles

Non-violent and violent resistance in Palestine

In a nutshell, as Foucault prominently wrote “if there is power, there is resistance”, it seems there is a generic interrelation between the exercised power and resistance (Foucault, 1978, 95). In this chapter, it is important to distinguish between different terms or concepts in order to understand the profound meaning behind Palestinian resistance. In academia, resistance usually is divided into violent resistance (VR) and non-violent resistance (NVR). In the specificity of the Palestinian context, authors such as Qumsiyeh and Bröning, both use the terms VR and NVR for reasons of language simplification; however, both explain that for example Palestinian NVR involves much more than just the notion that it occurs without the use of armed violence (Qumsiyeh, 2011; Bröning, 2011). For this reason, I believe it is relevant to refer to these terms in Arabic, as the terminology is most often almost entirely westernised. Resistance lies at the heart of Palestinian identity, encompassing many shapes and forms with nuanced differences.

Bröning (2011, 135f) for example differs between the three different terms *muqawima sha'biya* (popular resistance), *muqawima mujtama'iya* (social resistance), and *muqawima la-uniya* in general as NVR. Qumsiyeh (2011) adds the term *thawra sha'biya*, which refers to the people's revolution. As he asks several Palestinians on the streets of Bethlehem, they suggest that *thawra sha'biya* can (but does not have to) contain partly *muqawima musallaha*, which corresponds to armed resistance. Anyone who is immediately outraged by this term should keep in mind that, examined objectively, “there are no examples of completely nonviolent struggle for freedom from (settler) colonial occupation” in history¹³ (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 20). NVR and VR indeed tend to coexist.

¹³ Neither resistance in India under Mahatma Gandhi, the US with Martin Luther King, resistance in Algeria against French colonial rule, nor Mandela's anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, were inherently non-violent. To a greater or lesser extent, all revolutions and popular resistance movements have always been violent (Qumsiyeh, 2011).

It seems that the history of human struggle is a mix of both to varying degrees. In retrospect, societies that change will naturally choose to emphasize the positive elements. In retrospect, we find that there are more successes among societies that use predominantly non-violent and popular struggle than those who use predominantly armed struggle. And after the victory, the predominant form is celebrated (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 21).

Specifically in the Palestinian case, the media decides to focus actively on armed resistance, and thus creates a distorted view on Palestinian resistance as inherently violent, even terrorist. As explained before, all popular struggles to some extent, at some time, might have violent characteristics, as do past Palestinian struggles. Bröning (2011) focuses on the numerous predominant forms of non-violent resistance and describes in detail how Western media viewed (elected) political groups and parties, mainly Hamas and Fatah, as being terrorist actors. It is the hypocrisy of Western governments that seems to refuse to recognise any efforts towards the promotion of democratisation¹⁴ in the MENA region. Before analysing the present forms of popular struggle in Palestine, an overview of past milestones of Palestinian NVR will be given. The popular struggle of native Palestinians dates back to the Ottoman Empire (around 1880), until today. For my dissertation, however, I decided to concentrate on popular struggles between 1936 and today, with a stronger focus on the years 1948, 1967, 1987-1993 and 2000-2005.

1936-1967

The 1936 *great Palestinian revolt* or *Thawrat Filastin al-Kubra* occurred in the years between 1936-1939 but emerged out of tensions between Jewish settlers and Palestinian natives, as well as the British authorities' advancement of Zionism¹⁵, dating back to the 1920s. The revolt, the first Palestinian uprising, consisted of two phases. From April to October 1936, people engaged in mostly unarmed resistance, such as protests, marches, demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, or civil disobedience, as for example the withholding of taxes. The authorities of the Mandate responded with disproportionate measures more violently to the peaceful resistance, such as with imprisonments, the demolition of homes and the killing and wounding of some prisoners (Qumsiyeh, 2011; Darweish & Rigby, 2021).

¹⁴ Democratization efforts framed according to Western expectations

¹⁵ Modern-day Zionism dates back to the 18th century and has its roots within the Jewish Enlightenment movement. At its core this period brought forward two basic ideas: The redefinition of Judaism as a nationalist movement and the colonisation of Palestine to "return" to their believed homeland of 70CE. The emergence of the ideology was strongly influenced by the works of Theodor Herzl, who argued for the establishment of a Jewish state on Palestinian native land (Pappé, 2017; Chomsky & Pappé, 2015).

These responses led to voices in society calling for armed revolt, resulting in the fighting of several battles. The fighting reached its peak between 1937 and 1939 and resulted in the defeat of the Palestinian fighters through collective punishment, such as the destruction of entire settlements, associated agriculture and financial penalties, as well as curfews. As will be seen in the further course of this thesis, today's Israeli occupation forces have ever since adopted these very punishments (Qumsiyeh, 2011; Darweish & Rigby, 2021). However, the non-violent resistance continued to happen subtly, but with learnt lessons and a lasting impact until today, including symbolic resistance, such as Palestinian clothing, and especially the *kufiyah*, a traditional piece of headwear, which is today a present symbol of everyday resistance (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 89; Asseburg, 2021, 49).

Shortly after World War II ended, in 1947, the British announced they would hand responsibility over to the United Nations, which opted for partition. The Palestinian people rejected the partition plan, and almost immediately fighting broke out, with the Palestinians outnumbered. During the first Arab Israeli war, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights were each reclaimed (later again annexed by Israel) (Qumsiyeh, 2011). The war, however, brought devastating consequences for the local people: The *Nakba*, the Palestinian *catastrophe* that expelled more than 700.000 natives from their land (Asseburg & Busse, 2021; Asseburg, 2021; Qumsiyeh, 2011). Pappé (2017) emphasises the important connection of the 1948 ethnic cleansing, the links of the past, with present day dehumanisation of the ongoing occupation.

Devastated, uprooted, and separated, as a result of the *Nakba*, the *Naksa*, another *setback* followed in 1967. The *Naksa*, also known as the Six-Day war, completely changed the map of the Middle East once again, transforming the remaining native land into Israeli occupied land. Another 300.000 Palestinians had to flee their country, making some of them refugees for the second time, bulldozing their possessions, their houses and gardens, completely razing the memories associated to the ground in order to create new plazas, parks and settlements (Asseburg, 2020; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Pappé, 2017).

During the Six-Day war the Israeli forces forbade the use of the Palestinian flag. People would hang clothes in the colours of the flag on their clothesline. One symbol that resulted and is used until the present day by activists and artists is a *watermelon*, which includes the colours green, black, red and white - just like the Palestinian flag (Chaves, 2021). Even though the *Naksa* is known as the setback, “it had promoted civil resistance” (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 110).

Grassroots state-building and the Intifadas

The efforts regarding forming more political grassroots organisations were constantly present, connecting cultural components of resistance and working towards state-building. Several committees and movement groups, later incorporated into national assemblies and political parties, are dating back to the 1950s.¹⁶ Among more prominent movements is the initial student movement *Fatah* founded in 1959 in Kuwait, with Yassir Arafat as one of the founding members. The more bourgeois movement gained wide popularity. A few years later, in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded (with *Fatah* as the major force within), including a Palestine National fund and a Liberation army, representing the whole Palestinian people, in the occupied territories or in diaspora. This changed the political agenda in this respect, that showed the world that the Palestinians had “a national liberation struggle with political goals that were to be respected” (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 108).

The first *Intifada* (“*shaking off*”, 1987-1993) developed out of a series of smaller grassroots protests and boycotts calling for a native leadership, overthrowing the Israeli occupation authorities. The role of women during the first *Intifada* in the organisation of underground structures parallel to the Israeli administration is noteworthy. Rapidly popular committees out of women, together with students, labour groups, as well as agricultural cooperatives, were formed and incorporated in the centralised coalition Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), in which the exile-PLO (in Algeria) played a fundamental role later (Hassan & Staggengborg, 2015; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Asseburg, 2021).

Society was informed about demonstrations, protests, and strikes via leaflets. Analysis of these further reveals that the calls for the first *Intifada* largely sustained non-violent activity. The response to the mainly peaceful activities was again disproportionately violent on the Israeli side. Above all, collective punishment, such as the blockading of cities and towns, curfews, house demolitions and mass arrests were the order of the day.

Internationally, the first *Intifada* changed the view of the Palestinian question- symbolised by Palestinian youth throwing stones and taking on the tanks of a powerful occupying force. A complex chain of various popular events and the PLO's proclamation of a Palestinian state in 1988 ultimately led to the achievement of first the Madrid Conference in 1991 and later the Oslo Accords (Qumsiyeh, 2011; Asseburg, 2021).

¹⁶ The list of organizations, popular committees or informal local groups is long. Among them, to name a few of the more prominent political organisations, are: The Arab-Jewish Communist Party (1940), the Popular Front (1958, Al-Jabha al-Sha’biya), Land Movement (1960, Harakat al-Ard).

The Oslo Accords¹⁷ should have been a historic milestone in the struggle around the Palestinian question. The negotiations however were characterised by great power asymmetries and represented a rather strategic bargaining for land, disguised in a peace process that was never to end in peace until today. Several changes in government on the Israeli side led to the slowing down of the “peace-process” and the failure to comply with the Accords signed in 1993 (Shlaim, 1995; Pappé, 2017). The Palestinian Authority (PA/PNA) was restricted to small areas in East Jerusalem (designated as Area A). Israel continued to expand their illegal settlements in areas B and C, soon doubling the population within these up to 400.000 settlers. More and more checkpoints¹⁸ were set up, Palestinian homes were continued to be demolished. The period between the initial Madrid Peace Conference and the five-year interim agreement did not give much room for popular resistance. Many Palestinians had an understandable "wait and see" attitude while the peace processes were still underway. There was a strong focus on establishing civil society institutions and forming political groups to be represented in the Knesset.¹⁹ A last attempt to negotiate for peace failed in 2000 in Camp David (US). The invasive and provocative conduct of the entering of Al-Aqsa²⁰ compound by the former Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, together with Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)²¹ shortly after, triggered the outbreak of the second Intifada (Qumsiyeh, 2011).

¹⁷ The Oslo Accords (Oslo I & II) include the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, the acceptance of territorial compromises on both sides, implementing the Green Line, referring to 1967 borders, the implementation of a Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian self-governance in small parts of East-Jerusalem (territory A) and Gaza. Nevertheless, the Interim-Agreement was silent on vital issues, such as the right to return of 1948 refugees, the question of illegal Jewish settlements and *Al-Quds*, Jerusalem (Shlaim, 1994).

¹⁸ After the official occupation in 1967 restrictions for Palestinians were gradually implemented, involving checkpoints. Especially after the second Intifada the number of checkpoint installations grew exponentially. Around 100 of them operate officially inside the West Bank. However United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) counted more than 500 informal checkpoints, so-called physical obstructions, such as roadblocks, fences, bypass roads (connecting Israeli settlements and allowed to be used by Jewish citizens only), and as well the separation wall. Not only do these geographical barriers influence the mobility of Palestinian natives, and complement the Israeli system of oppression and control, they abuse natives psychologically, by their unpredictable nature (Minca & Rijke, 2018).

¹⁹ Al-Tajamu Al-Watani Al-Dimoqrati, the Democratic Patriotic Alliance, including for example the progressive Socialist Party won seats in the Knesset in 1996 (Qumsiyeh, 2011).

²⁰ Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third-most important holy site for Muslims and believed to be site of the temple-mount, which constitutes a major holy site for Jews and Christians. Israel placed more and more access restrictions for Palestinians to enter the compound in the past years (Al Jazeera, 2017). The measures as well as the provocative continuous invasion of the area by Israeli military are seen as a driver of Palestinian oppression, and has made the site a place of uprising, also more recently in May 2021.

²¹ The IDF is a special unit of the Israeli military, particularly active in settlement activities in the occupied territories. In this dissertation I would like to refer to the unit as IOF – Israeli Offensive/Occupation Forces, rather than Defence Forces. The term “defence” is based on an antagonistic concept which represents the Palestinians as aggressors within symmetric power structures, while in contrast the reality consists of occupiers and occupied and strong power asymmetries. Every Israeli citizen must perform compulsory service, without exception. The pervasive presence of the IOF as well in culture and education reinforces the dominant Zionist narrative (Drory, 2004).

Initial peaceful demonstrations (the day after Sharon and some 1000 IOF soldiers entered the compound) were repeatedly answered with violence and the killing of Palestinian civilians, including children. The second Intifada, or as well *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, compared to the first Intifada is argued to be armed and violent; however as reported in the first few weeks, no Israeli civilians were killed (Qumsiyeh, 2011). Soon, the uprising was predominantly violent and armed with power concentration on local militias. An armed wing of Hamas emerged, several suicide bombings by extremist national groups, such as *Tanzim* and *Al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades*, took place (Darweish & Rigby, 2021; Bröning, 2011). The attacks do not represent the intentions of the wider society. However, they have remained largely in the memory of the international community and strongly condemned, which is until today seen to be counterproductive for the Palestinian cause.

Despite the internal fragmented struggle between the two major political forces Hamas and Fatah, both have officially opposed terrorism and updated their charters, making non-violent resistance a major part of their political agenda. The 2009 political programme of Fatah for example is built on the four key concepts of: non-violent resistance, national-unity, state-building and international activism (Bröning, 2011, 95).

Present-day resistance

The wars and violent disputes are well known and shown on Western media. Yet, the collective trauma did not prevent the people from exercising quiet forms of resistance. Bayat (2013, 15) calls this kind of resistance “social nonmovement”. These include the cultivation of confiscated military lands, symbolic resistance through the singing of songs, drawing cartoons²², resistance through words and the publishing of newspapers²³, and most importantly the everyday practice of *sumud*, meaning the practice of *steadfastness* (Darweish & Rigby, 2021). Unlike *muqawima*, a more active form of resistance, *sumud* is the opposite. Mere existence represents resistance (Schiochoet, 2022; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Norman, 2011; Richter-Devroe, 2011). The framing of

²² The Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali is known for creating the figure of *Hanthala*, a Palestinian refugee boy living in exile, barefoot, with torn clothing, looking away from the viewer, back at Palestine, only being able to grow up once Palestine is liberated. *Hanthala* became a symbol of resistance, for example being depicted on activists’ t-shirts, or bracelets and later on becoming the logo of the BDS movement. The artist died in 1987 of injuries of an earlier assassination attempt against him in London (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 133).

²³ For example, the pan-Arabic newspaper *Al-Sha’b* (the people), was first published in 1946, spreading the message of liberation and Arab unity. In 1952 a committee for poets was founded. Another newspaper *Al-Ard* (the land) by the movement *Harakat Al-Ard* was started in 1960, however soon prohibited by the authorities (Qumsiyeh, 2011, 92-103).

passiveness and non-action of *sumud*, however, has been criticized among some scholars. Among others, Ryan (2019) argues for the use of the term resilient resistance. This term gives the practice a more active character than just the existence of the people. Through *sumud*, Palestinians adapt to life under occupation and strengthen existing relationships with each other, forming a strong community, which makes *sumud* indeed an active resilient-building strategy. At this point should be noted that *sumud* is a complex concept of resistance, widely debated among scholars, with more active, passive, non-violent, or even violent forms. Most studies on *sumud* focus on the experience in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), leaving out Gaza and neglecting the fact that it can as well be exercised for example in Palestinian refugee camps, or in general in diaspora. To go into detail would go beyond the scope of this thesis.²⁴

The Palestinian people resists by picking up a pen and paper, a brush and paint. They resist by singing songs, by cultivating olive and orange trees, and by simply going to work and school despite the long waits at checkpoints. They resist in being resilient and steadfast. To reply to the question "How often do you remember having seen any of this on TV, and how often you have seen violent attacks, stone throwing acts, or bombing?", Bröning argues that these violent acts make up only 15% of all types of resistance in Palestine (2011, 138).

One of the most striking features emerging in the *post-intifada* period is the international involvement in Palestinian solidarity activism. In 2001, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) emerged. Several peaceful demonstrations were held, breaking the for months lasting curfews. With the help of international solidarity activists and Jewish solidarity networks, the attention of Western media was increasingly drawn towards the occupation crimes of the state of Israel, covered and broadcasted by BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera.

To name a few grassroots actions, which happened more recently (21st century), and continue to happen until the present day, one of these grassroots actions was directed at the construction of the 700km long Separation Wall along the Green Line²⁵, separating Palestinian farmers from their land and neighbours from each other. The struggle reached a new organisational dimension, when the Palestinian NGO Network initiated a more formalised programme called the "Stop the Wall Campaign" in 2002. Local committees of different villages located near the Green Line were formed, as in the *Salfit* region, which is strongly shaped and fragmented by settlements. As well the villages of *Bil'in* and *Ni'lin* organised popular protests

²⁴ See for example Schiocchet (2011), Qumsiyeh (2011), Norman (2011), Richter-Devroe (2011), Ryan (2019), and Hammad & Tribe (2020).

²⁵ The Green Line refers to the borders of 1967. The apartheid wall however cuts deep into Palestinian territory and lies on most of its course inside the West-Bank (Asseburg, 2021; Al Jazeera, 2015).

through local committees, later making the towns the host of the annual conference on NVR (Bröning, 2011; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Darweish & Rigby, 2021). Not even the declaration of the International Court of Justice in the Hague in 2004 on the illegality of the separation wall and the breaching of several human rights due to the occupation and settlement activities, stopped Israel to continue their Zionist endeavours (Qumsiyeh, 2011; UN, 2004).

Deplorably, no official sanctions have been imposed, nor has any further action been announced against Israel's illegal activities. The wall continues to be built, houses continue to be destroyed, and new settlements continue to be constructed - 20 years later until today.

As the PA also failed to raise an official call in this regard, it has been the Palestinian civil society that launched the call for *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions* (BDS). The movement draws close links to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and follows the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, which equated Israel's occupational practices with apartheid crimes in South Africa. In 2004, some academics launched a boycott initiative against universities, cultural institutions and film, music, and art (PACBI), later enshrined in the official *BDS* movement in 2005 (BDS, 2005a, 2005b; Mc Mahon, 2014; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Bröning, 2011; Asseburg, 2021). The official objectives based on international law are the following:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting, and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194” (BDS, 2005a).

Although the BDS movement clearly and explicitly distances itself from Antisemitism and only denounces Israeli settler-colonial politics towards the Palestinians, the movement is still the subject of controversial debates. The problem here is the decentralised organisation of the movement with locally organised groups all over the world, without any internal sanctioning measures. This gives room for antisemitic groups to label themselves as BDS, even though they act against the philosophy of the movement (Asseburg, 2019). In 2017 the Israeli government classified BDS as a strategic and antisemitic threat (Asseburg, 2021).

Especially in Germany, critics of the movement claim that it targets Israeli citizens and Judaism, and therefore it is linked to Antisemitism. This merely represents a double standard argument, as they seem to forget that Arab citizens in Israel still do not have the same rights as the Jewish citizens (Asseburg, 2019, 2021; Mc Mahon, 2014). In 2019, the German Bundestag (Parliament) passed a simple resolution clearly opposing BDS, thus "combating Antisemitism

at its very nascent stage”²⁶, widely celebrated among Israeli politicians. It seems that the Israeli government has made another attempt to silence a Palestinian solidarity movement, as other states follow their lead. The generalisation of Antisemitism accusations should be considered as dangerous as it enforces the downgrading of severe Jew-hatred and significantly restricts freedom of expression (Hever, 2019). Related to this, Federica Mogherini, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2014-2019), explained that the European Commission does not oppose the BDS movement itself as the importance of freedom of expression, “is also applicable to information or ideas that offend, shock or disturb the state or any sector of the population” (EU Parliament, 2016).

Overall, in this chapter, I outlined a short overview of past and present historic popular struggles in Palestine. Looking back at the first revolt in 1936, Palestinians since then have proceeded their grassroots efforts and developed a strong transnational network for collective action. Especially important it is the shift from mere collectivist mass protests to the politicised and institutionalised incorporation of popular struggle, and the prioritisation of NVR at the core of the political agenda. I would like to highlight Pappé’s notion on the importance and inevitability of connecting the past with the present, once again (2017). We can observe that achievements and cultural symbols emerging out of popular struggles of the past are embedded and enshrined into today’s collective memory, allowing for example Palestinians in diaspora, who have never set foot on their home country, to nevertheless strongly bond with it. Referring back to Castells, I hold the view that the past historic struggles and its consequences have formed a strong movement community – as well online, which the next chapter on digital resistance will outline in detail.

3.3 Digital Resistance in Palestine

Before online schooling became a necessity during Covid-times, and shortly later the so-called home-office scheme became a commodity as well for employees to balance work and family life, certainly it has been a *resistance strategy* for Palestinians in the oPt long ago.

The socio-political impact on Palestinian families, resulting out of the Oslo Accords, including the fragmentation of neighbourhoods in certain areas and the implementation of road-blocks and check points, led to a proportionally high engagement in Internet use among Palestinians in the oPt in the beginning of 2000 (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Khoury-Machool,

²⁶ Author's translation from German (see Bundestag, 2020).

2010). However, the fragmentation also led to the restriction of telecommunication infrastructure, making Paltel (Palestinian telecommunication network) dependent on the Israeli network. Since under Oslo, all landlines, and later cellular, as well Internet had to go through Israeli providers. On top of that, Palestinian Internet use is under surveillance, signals are hacked, and IOF have been destroying Internet and telecommunication infrastructure repeatedly. Tawil-Souri and Aouragh argue for the use of the term *digital occupation*, or *cyber-colonialism* (2014, 116). Despite the growing dependency, as initially stated, several authors note that especially between 2004 and the Arab Springs

Palestinian Internet usage has been substantially higher than elsewhere in the Arab world. Reports show a systematic increase in household computer ownership from 26.4 percent in 2004 to 49.2 percent in 2009, and an increase in home internet access from 9.2 percent in 2004 [...] to 57.7 percent in 2012. Some have argued that Gaza has the largest number of Facebook users per capita in the world (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, 119 f.).

The increase in Internet use directly after Oslo and the associated development of cyber-occupation is not a coincidence. There is indeed a correlation between Internet growth and political resilience. Especially educational institutions, such as schools or universities, resort on the medium to teach, and remain connected (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Khoury-Machool, 2010).

Furthermore, the Internet enables diasporic Palestinian communities to reconnect with their homeland, as for example Khalili's study (2005) in Beirut's *Burj el-Barajneh* refugee camp shows. Other authors' similar studies find that the digital platforms allow border-crossing and virtual access to Palestinian landscapes (Farah, 2010; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011; Tawil Souri & Aouragh, 2014). Website projects such as *Palestine Remembered* or *Obliterated Families* serve both as a virtual space to revisit Palestinian erased villages, and thus preserve collective cultural memory, and the legacy of entirely wiped-out families, as does the latter mentioned project.²⁷

Looking at these examples, it can be argued that the Internet in the Palestinian context, or more specifically these websites challenge the prevailing ideological Zionist narrative, while allowing for Palestinians to tell their own stories. One can also go further by arguing that these websites represent colonial (film) archives (Simons, 2015). However, social media, unlike the websites presented, are more participatory in nature. Everyone with a social media account can share their own thoughts and opinions on almost everything, comment other users' ideas and

²⁷ *Palestine Remembered* was founded in 1999 and creates a space for refugees to share their memories, pictures (before and after 1948), videos, or other comments. *Obliterated families* artistically covers the stories of entirely erased families, during the 2014 attack on Gaza (Palestine Remembered, 2022; Obliterated Families, 2022).

thus join the conversation. Hence creators as well as readers equally participate in shaping the discourse and likewise challenge, as in the Palestinian case towards the predominant Zionist narrative. Social movements and activists use this opportunity mainly to gain a wide audience and support. The content they share would not be shared in the mainstream media. While traditional activism tends to focus on mobilising people, modern activism on social media is aimed at reaching as many people as possible and establishing a network or community of solidarity (Li & Prasad, 2017; Fuchs, 2014). In fact, a study by the NGO 7amleh (The Arab Centre for Social Media Advancement) found that 25,8% of Palestinians in the oPt use social media as political means (2016).

Ever since the advent of social media, certain hashtags supporting the Palestinian cause have been circulating on digital social networks. Since 2015, there has been an increase in hashtag campaigns with the fundamental goals of boosting international solidarity, disentangling the media narrative on the “conflict”²⁸ and, above all, creating awareness on life under occupation. In 2016, for example, under #TelAvivLife, Palestinians shared videos of their everyday lives, capturing severe human rights violations as result of the ongoing Israeli occupation (Li & Prasad, 2018). Below can be seen a selection of various prominent hashtag campaigns, along with a description of the events and a brief explanation of the context:

#TelAvivLife	Campaign to show everyday life under occupation, documenting human rights violations
#it_will_not_be_divided	Solidarity action against the Israeli plan of keeping Palestinians from entering Al-Aqsa Mosque
#Mohammed_Alan	Support to the hunger strike of a Palestinian prisoner
#Mawtini	Mawtini signifies my homeland in Arabic. It is an unofficial Palestinian national anthem. The campaign gathered people to sing, record and share the song on social media
#Save_AlQueiq	Pressure on the authorities to release the journalist Mohammed Al-Queiq, who had been detained in an Israeli prison.

Table 3.1: Overview of past hashtag campaigns in Palestine (7amleh, 2016)

²⁸ The term "conflict" implies that there are two equal parties. However, given the fact that Palestine is under occupation and subject to settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing (officially since 1967, unofficially since the British mandate) the mundane use of this term is simply incorrect, that is why the term conflict in this present thesis is written in inverted commas. (See for example Pappé, 2006, 2017).

However, as social media can support activism and the struggle for human rights, the platforms themselves contribute to (digital) human rights violations, as several incidents in recent years have shown. What includes *digital rights*?

First of all, “human rights apply equally online and offline” (CoE, 2022; UN, 2022b). Digital platforms provide space to advocate for Human Rights, to exercise them, however, as well to violate them, concretely to the domains of surveillance, privacy, online violence or harassment, hate speech, and more specifically in this thesis, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as stated in Article 19 of the UDHR (UN, 2022b).

During the 2015 uprising²⁹, the Israeli regime has placed a focus on prosecuting journalists and human rights activists (both Israeli and Palestinian) over statements they have made on social media platforms (Taha, 2020; 7amleh, 2016). Israel has built itself a framework of questionable laws on which the government relies when such arrests are made. Among them, in 2017, the Knesset passed the so-called *Facebook Bill*, which allows authorities to delete content if it violates certain very vaguely worded guidelines. This bill was followed in 2018 by the "Prohibition of photographing and documenting soldiers", which is punishable by 5 years in prison. Not only are the penalties disproportionately weighted, but they also violate the right to freedom of expression and to freedom of speech. The platforms are complicit by the algorithm used and the guidelines on the content to be deleted (7amleh, 2016). For example, “Zionist is listed as a globally protected group, where any content which opposes Zionism should be removed” (Taha, 2020, 8).



Figure 3.1: Website NGO 7amleh

The NGO 7amleh is eagerly working on documenting digital rights abuses. The 2016 report as well as the more recent one of 2021, shed light on the numerous human rights violations

²⁹ The 2015 uprising involved a series of clashes and attacks between young Palestinians and Zionist settlers (Alsaafin, 2017).

directed at Palestinians and their use of social media. In 2015 alone, 45 arrests based on Facebook posts of Jerusalem residents were recorded, of which some have received sentences of 11-12 months. Among them are minors, kept in detention oftentimes for at least 48 hours, being interrogated without a legal guardian. The usual reason for the detention is again a very vaguely guideline, which refers to “incitement” (7amleh, 2016).

Having explained some of the dynamics of digital activism but also the downside and the danger regarding the human rights violations, as well as some of the incidents of the previous years, this dissertation will use a case study to focus on a similar activist campaign that went viral in May of 2021: #SaveSheikhJarrah. Israel continues to expand its questionable laws, which are illegal under international law, and enforce the confiscation and eviction of Palestinian property in East Jerusalem (Alsaafin, 2021). Sheikh Jarrah is now a prominent example for those evictions, but unfortunately not the only one.³⁰ The hashtag, created by a grassroots action of the neighbourhood itself, has been shared all over the world and has helped to create awareness on the cause itself, but on the other hand sparked and addressed debates on contentious matters, such as the unravelling of the internationally accepted narrative of Zionism.

Following the report by the NGO 7amleh of 2016, a more recent report of 2021 sheds light on the numerous rights infringements committed during the May 2021 uprising, connected to the eviction of the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. Everyday problems and human rights violations online activists have faced, and are still facing until today, will be made evident in the following case study.

³⁰ In May 2021, besides the creation of #SaveSheikhJarrah, other hashtags such as #SaveSilwan, #SaveBeita and more recently (2022) #SaveMasaferYatta have been circulating on social media, referring to similar situations regarding settler-colonial activities in East Jerusalem and Nablus. In Silwan and Beita (East Jerusalem), a similar scenario to Sheikh Jarrah is taking place: house demolitions, evictions, the burning of houses, for which some residents have lost their lives (Patel, 2021). Masafer Yatta is also being mass-evicted by an Israeli Supreme Court law (decision from May 2022, in violation of international law). The difference here is that the village is turned into a military landscape and becomes a training ground for the IOF, known as “Firing Zone 918” (Iqbal & McKernan, 2022).

4. #SaveSheikhJarrah: present struggles, future hopes

4.1 Contextualizing #SaveSheikhJarrah

Everywhere you look on the map, there is a story of dispossession. In the Naqab, Palestinian Bedouins are uprooted and replaced by pine trees. In Silwan, the Occupation forces demolish homes to fulfill a biblical fantasy. In Sheikh Jarrah, ethnic cleansing comes disguised as a “real-estate dispute.” In Beita, settlers build illegal outposts on hilltops, and soldiers kill for them. Out of all the loot, the land remains—indisputably—the most valuable (El Kurd, 2022).

The quote is written by one of the most famous activists, writers and poets of the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah – Mohammed El-Kurd. He and his twin sister Muna El-Kurd are known to be the spark that ignited the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign. But what exactly happened in May 2021 or more precisely *has been happening* for several decades in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem?

Habat al karama of *ayaar*, or short *habat ayaar*, the May uprising of 2021 is the most recent uprising in Palestinian history. Some argue that the demonstrations during the holy month of Ramadan 2021 represent a major shift and this “marks a new phase in the history of the Palestinian struggle” (Nasara, 2021, 330). Several aggressions against Palestinian Muslims and Christians during the month of Ramadan at Al-Aqsa compound³¹, as well as during the Holy Fire celebrations at the Holy Church of Sepulcher³² have sparked first more subtle community protests, which then slowly turned into larger demonstrations, mostly triggered by the Israeli Supreme Court eviction decisions in Sheikh Jarrah (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021). Remarkable is that the firstly only Jerusalem-based uprising spread quickly into other Palestinian towns and ultimately Gaza, involving Hamas launching rockets towards Israel, with the symbolic goal to show that Gaza under siege stands united with the rest of the oPt.³³

However, this story starts way before *habat ayaar*, back in 1954, when 28 Palestinian families were forced to leave their homes in the coastal cities of Haifa and Yafa and move to Sheikh Jarrah’s *Karm al-Jaouni*, as well as the *Kubaniet Umm Haron* area (see maps in Appendix D),

³¹ The aggression included setting up iron barriers in front of Damascus Gate to keep Palestinian Muslims from entering Al-Aqsa compound (Nasara, 2021; Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

³² The Holy Fire celebration (orthodox Christianity) is held every year at the Holy Church of Sepulcher in Jerusalem the night before Easter. The resurrection and arrival of Jesus is celebrated.

³³ Important to mention here is again the unequal power relations between the parties of the “conflict”. Hamas did launch missiles directed against Israel, however given the fact that they were manufactured in Gaza under “siege-conditions” means that they never represented a real threat to Israel. The Israeli attempt of “self-defense” on the contrary resulted in a high-tech military operation on the Gazan enclave, killing more than 200 civilians and displacing more than 30.000 Gazans (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

which back then was subjected to Jordanian mandate. In an agreement between the UNRWA and Jordan the families were assigned houses, for which they only had to pay a symbolic value. However, when Jordan lost the mandate after the *Naksa* in 1967 and East Jerusalem was occupied by the Israeli authorities, the land “dispute” or rather *robbery* in Sheikh Jarrah has begun. Already in 1972, Jewish settlers started to file lawsuits against Palestinian families residing in Sheikh Jarrah, claiming their biblical right to the promised land³⁴, as well as arguing that the land was originally owned by a Jewish Trust³⁵. Contrary to those arguments, there are several documents found in the depths of the Ottoman archives in Ankara, proofing those Israeli authorities had to abide by the agreement between Jordan and UNRWA (Nasara, 2021, Alsaafin, 2021). However, “Israeli courts – judge, jury and legislation – are all in the service of the Jewish settlers” (Alsaafin, 2021).³⁶

An interesting point to mention here is the dominant presence of American Jewish settlers in the oPt, to be more precise in total 15% of all Israeli settlers are American. A viral video scene of Sheikh Jarrah activist Muna El-Kurd confronting a settler in her garden, as well sheds light on this reality in the neighbourhood itself. She says: “You are stealing my house, Yacub”, to what the settler’s response merely is “If I don’t steal it, someone else will”, speaking in a thick American accent (AJ+, 2021). As shortly outlined in chapter one of this dissertation, the US indeed does have a special relationship to Israel, including those settlement activities. Interestingly enough, the US is the only state, who does not recognise the settlements as fully illegal according to international law (Haddad, 2020). In her book “City on a hilltop”, Hirschhorn (2017) explores, among other issues, the motivation of these American settlers within the Israeli settlement movement. It all comes down to the colonial concept of *Manifest Destiny*³⁷, deeply rooted in American psyche, with modern Jewish Americans recreating their own and contemporary frontier story.

³⁴ See for example Genesis 12:7, 13:15, or 15:18.

³⁵ The argument of the settlers contains a contradiction, or rather a double standard in itself. If Jewish settler organisations (such as e.g. Nahalat Shimon Settler Organisation) had owned the land, as they claim since 1875, (which moreover was illegal for foreigners under Ottoman law), and now would want to reclaim it, they also would have to let Palestinians return to their houses pre-1948 (Nasara, 2021).

³⁶ As Khalil Toufakji, a Palestinian cartographer and East-Jerusalem expert claims in an interview with AlJazeera (Alsaafin, 2021).

³⁷ Manifest Destiny is a concept emerging in the 17th century, which follows the ideological idea, that American land is destined by God to British Christian-Puritan settlers. Similar to this idea, as early as 1917 (Balfour Declaration), American Zionists began to promote settlement activities on native Arab land, by comparing it with early Christian “pioneers”, who had colonised native America. See for example Davidson (2005), where he analyses quotes in the New York times such as: “These immigrants to Palestine are indeed the Jewish Puritans [...] their settlements are the Jamestown and Plymouth of the new House of Israel” (161).

Geopolitically speaking, Sheikh Jarrah represents strategic borderland between West-Jerusalem (Israel), East-Jerusalem (Palestine) and *Al-Quds*, the old town of Jerusalem, and further North, the West-Bank with its politically important city Ramallah.³⁸ At the Western end of Sheikh Jarrah lies Nablus Road which directly links the neighbourhood to Damascus Gate, the gateway and one of the entrances to the Old City. Winning over Sheikh Jarrah, somehow means winning over sovereignty of Damascus Gate, and thus isolating the neighbourhood, and subsequently more northern neighbourhoods from Al-Quds, consequently Al-Aqsa and important Christian sites (Nasara, 2021). Furthermore, Sheikh Jarrah represents an important diplomatic and historic area, being home to various NGOs, missions, consulates, and organisations, as well as hospitals, or libraries. Overall, the neighbourhood represents key memories and ancient homes of famous figures of resistance, dating back to the British Mandate and the 1936 revolt. Control over Sheikh Jarrah would as well mean a severe shift of those diplomatic missions to Israel, today residing in the oPt, as well as a symbolic loss of the rich Palestinian resistance history against British colonialism. The “conflict” in Sheikh Jarrah is not just about the neighbourhood per se, “but extends to the recognized borders of 1967, embodying the geo-politics of the conflict in East Jerusalem and Palestinian resistance to the Israeli aspirations of full sovereignty over occupied East Jerusalem” (ibid., 2021, 331).

One of my interviewees (Kareem, 15.06.2022) too puts the happenings in a nutshell: “Sheikh Jarrah is a microcosm of what's happening in all of historic Palestine - *settler colonialism*”. Salma, another of my participants, builds on this political concept and explains that it has long been part of Zionist endeavours, however

now under the global eye, it is through the more acceptable form of forced evictions, demolition of Palestinian homes and expulsion and displacement of Palestinians from their lands. It is justified through the label of a 'property/real estate dispute' (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Simply summarised, the difference between colonialism in the classical sense and settler colonialism is not the absence of resources and the consecutive exploitation of the latter, as well as

³⁸ For better understanding, see a Map in appendix D.

the labour³⁹ of the native population, but the absence of a homeland, and thus the ethnic cleansing⁴⁰ of the native population so as to replace them with settlers. Colonialism is all about “exogenous domination” over the indigenous population, whereas settler-colonialism is all about the displacement and ethnic cleansing or how Wolfe puts it the “elimination” of the natives (Veracini, 2011, 1; Wolfe, 2006, 387). Veracini claims that sometimes “the two stances are intimately intertwined” (2011, 1). However colonisers and settler colonisers strive at the core for very different goals. The somehow blurring of colonialism regarding the exploitation factor and settler colonialism regarding the displacement factor, becomes evident in a diary entry by Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism, where he sets the idea that “Palestinian Arabs were to be worked across the frontier” (Theodor Herzl, as quoted in Veracini 2011, 2).

(Western) Settler Colonial Studies as a scholarly field is relatively recent, as scholars started to impose a colonial lens on the Zionist movement. We can speak of a “settler-colonial-turn” in Palestine Studies, provoked by the works of Wolfe (1999, 2006) and Veracini (2011), in response to the increasingly framing of the question of Palestine as an ethno-nationalist and religious “conflict” during the Oslo Accords (Amoruso et al., 2019; Pappé, 1997; Wolfe, 2006).

The settler colonial activities as part of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, as seen throughout this present dissertation, especially in chapter three, have increasingly targeted the telecommunication and digital infrastructures in the oPt and observably since 2015 digital social networks (Tamleh, 2015). Being censored and silenced is part of the Palestinians’ everyday life, thus, activists have found new ways to resist the increasing cyber occupation (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Taha, 2020).

4.2. The present case study

Participants

As indicated before, the target group comprised of social media activists from Palestine, specifically from East Jerusalem, Sheikh Jarrah and the diaspora, aged between 20 and 45 years

³⁹ Colonisers may define with what kind of labour they exploit the native population with, e.g. physical, reproductive, sexual labour etc. (Veracini, 2011).

⁴⁰ Settler-colonisers as well have found different ways to ethnically cleanse, or eliminate the native population (Veracini, 2011; Wolfe, 2006). It can be in various forms by for example: “being physically eliminated or displaced, having one’s cultural practices erased, being ‘absorbed’, ‘assimilated’ or ‘amalgamated’ in the wider population” (Veracini, 2011, 2).

old. At this point, it should also be mentioned that I had some difficulties in finding these participants. I attended the three-day Palestine Digital Activist forum (PDAF) conference organised by 7amleh⁴¹, where I was able to chat with several activists. Although I wrote to many of them, via chat during the event in order to recruit them for an interview, most did not answer me, one person even blocked me. Many have felt uncomfortable with a face-to-face interview, which is why I needed to adapt to the field, by creating a questionnaire with the exact same interview questions that I would have asked in person. As a result, more participants were found. In the end, I recruited 10 participants, two of whom spontaneously cancelled again. I respect the sensitivity of the issue. For many, it may not be easy to trust me so much without having met me in person.

In the end, 8 Palestinian activists with various different cultural backgrounds were interviewed. This is important to remark, as being raised in multiple different countries has had a lasting impact on how they see their role as activists. Some spent their childhood in Palestine, specifically in Jerusalem, Sheikh Jarrah, Bethlehem, or Ramallah, fled at a later stage due to the occupation, or grew up entirely in diaspora, never having visited Palestine. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the participants.

Name	Age	Nationalities / Cultural Background
Nura	28	Palestinian Jerusalemite from Sheikh Jarrah. Moved to Germany to study and still resides there. But goes back to the neighbourhood once or twice a year.
Kareem	44	Palestinian, born and raised in Germany, studied in Jordan and the UK
Lina	29	Palestinian from Bethlehem, left Palestine in 2013, due to the occupation, and today resides in Portugal. Her parents are still based in Bethlehem.
Omar	28	Palestinian, born in Qatar, studied in Jordan, Sweden and today is based in Portugal. His family used to hold as well Syrian refugee status

⁴¹ In May 2022, the PDAF for the 6th time brought together advocates to the Palestinian cause, human rights activists, journalists, as well as social media companies in order to discuss digital solidarity and digital justice in different contexts around the world, as well as share experiences among activists.

Farah	27	Palestinian, born and raised in Ramallah. Later, she studied and worked abroad in Qatar.
Tabeed	27	Palestinian, Jerusalemite writer and Journalist, studied in Malta and the UK, now based back in Jerusalem
Salma	22	Palestinian born in Jerusalem, based in the UK since the age of 7
Dima	27	Palestinian, born and raised in the US. Dima's mother is a Palestinian refugee, who was born in Jordan.

Table 4.1 Participant overview (Note: names were changed due to reasons of anonymity)

Analysis Overview

The interview was divided into three parts: the first section was meant to be a short familiarisation phase, a kind of warm-up, to get to know each other. The participants informed me about themselves and their cultural background, as well as their background as activists. The second interview section broadly explored social media activism in the Palestinian context, specifically why digital activism is so meaningful, which applications are viable, and to what extent activism on the streets is still pertinent to them. The third part then addressed the hashtag campaign. It was possible to investigate how the activists utilise the hashtag, what their objectives are, what dynamics and challenges they see in hashtag activism, and what the campaign means for the Palestinian grassroots struggle historically speaking.

As shortly outlined in chapter 1, I was able to set up some key categorisations, which were elaborated inductively while analysing the interviews (and posts). I then went on to set these categories into perspective with the previously outlined study of existing literature. The categories were organised deductively into four analytical key questions, which guided me throughout my analysis and served to provide an in-depth discussion of the major research question.

- What are the motivations behind being Palestinian activists?
- What are their goals?
- What challenges do/did they face?
- What historical and identitarian significance do they see in #SaveSheikhJarrah?

4.2.1 What are the interviewees' motivations behind being an activist?

It seems almost preposterous to ask Palestinians about their motivation to be activists. All participants unanimously agreed that the answer lies deeply rooted in their identity.

As a Palestinian, it is part of your identity to have that voice and making sure it is heard. As a Palestinian in the diaspora, it is my duty to speak up for my people, whether they are in occupied Palestine, in the diaspora, or as refugees all across the world (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Other factors that activists referred to are the right of return⁴², the increasing dehumanisation of the Palestinian people, and personal impactful life experiences, as Omar for example shared his experience at the Jordanian-Israeli border. He states that these experiences on the ground have tremendously shaped his behaviour in advocating online.

I felt it from the beginning: There is a no way in. [...] they interrogated me and my brother and have spoken to us for hours and hours and hours and made us wait. I spent there 14 hours just at the border, and I was not able to get in. [...] it made me see my country from the border, which I have never done in my life. It made me feel closer to my country and of course this [experience at the border] is part of my motivation (Omar, 08.06.2022).

Nura from Sheikh Jarrah explains a similar experience, and how everyday life shaped her way in becoming more politically active. She told me how she went to school in Ramallah, as there were more opportunities back then for her, and that coming from Jerusalem, she had to pass daily the Qalandiya checkpoint (the biggest military checkpoint that connects Jerusalem and the West Bank).

When I was not born yet, my parents said it would just take them like 20 to 25 min in the car, which took me then 3 hours sometimes – one way. I was quite young, so I did not really understand all of this, but I grew up like this ever since 5th grade up to 12th grade. Seriously for years, I think I lived at that checkpoint [laughing], more than I lived at home. So, for me, my motivation I would say really comes from that. I witnessed so much at that checkpoint. So much humiliation so much discrimination. [...] Really heart-breaking stories sometimes (Nura, 08.07.2022).

As will be shown in the rest of this analysis, the findings that arise from the interviews correlate with some of the core concepts within social movement studies I draw upon in Chapter 2,

⁴² United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 recognises the right of return. Specifically, Article 11 states: “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible” (UN, 1948).

namely history, identity and narratives. The analysis provides a multitude of quotations from the participants. As I explained in chapter 1.2, in my work it has been important to depict the social processes that the participants experienced over time, in order to better understand and explore their personal narratives.

4.2.2 What are their activist goals?

Raising international awareness and educating on the cause

All participants saw as their main goal of activism the raising of international awareness and educating “outsiders” on the Palestinian cause. This is primarily due to the distorted image that the Western media have been presenting for decades. In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Palestinian reporters to cover the news, partly because of the omnipresence of IOF soldiers, and partly because of the increasing persecution and even killing of journalists – as recently in May 2022 occurred with the Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh. The control of the news remains a military objective (Reporters without borders Germany, 2022).

All participants share the same opinion about the distorted image that is shown in the media almost everywhere in the world. Through #SaveSheikhJarrah, this image has suddenly been reverberated.

The hashtag itself launched the Palestinian cause to a place unlike ever before. While before you would get information about Palestine from mainstream media, and even then barely, now you have faces and voices to the cause, you have trusted accounts, you have information at your reach. It was the first step to exposure, it put Palestine on the map, it exposed Israeli brutality and the conversation has now shifted beyond the usual 'it's complicated' to a place where conversations are now informed and you can have an opinion and a stance on (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Indeed, for the first time as Kareem explains, Palestinians (and in particular the El-Kurd twins) were seen on global news networks, “using the correct terminology to describe the plight of the

Palestinian people.”⁴³ The hashtag sparked a multimodal way⁴⁴ of raising awareness internationally, moving from social media spaces, infiltrating global news outlets and igniting everyday conversations on the street.

Speaking of internationalisation, I would like to mention specific social media projects that participants have indicated to me, which aim at translating online content or tweets, for example, to make the information of #SaveSheikhJarrah accessible in other languages besides Arabic and English. Both Dima and Salma elaborated on how they took part in these initiatives. Dima says that “[she] was also part of various Discord⁴⁵ servers meant to organize digital activism by pairing videos and images coming out of Palestine with captions in English that were then translated to multiple other languages” (17.06.2022), as well as Salma outlines a project she founded (see Figure 4.1):

A by-product of the events of 2021 led to the creation of @TranslateForPali on Instagram where an amazing community of people came together from all parts of the world to translate English content on information packs on the Palestinian cause into their native language to expand its reach (Salma, 20.06.2022).

⁴³ In detail, Kareem refers to the use of vocabulary such as “occupation”, “settler-colonialism”, or “ethnic cleansing” instead of media usually referring to a “conflict” (15.06.2022).

⁴⁴ Given the fact that in the year 2021, compared to 2011 during the Arab Springs, technological devices have changed a lot, at the core the happenings within the Arab Springs, and especially the Egyptian revolution, as seen in chapter 2.2 are much alike. The multimodal way in which social movements evolved over time is remarkable in both cases.

⁴⁵ Discord is an online service for instant messaging, chat, voice conferencing and video conferencing that was originally created in 2015 for computer gamers but is now increasingly used for other areas. The platform describes itself as a non-social media platform and is encrypted (Discord, 2022).

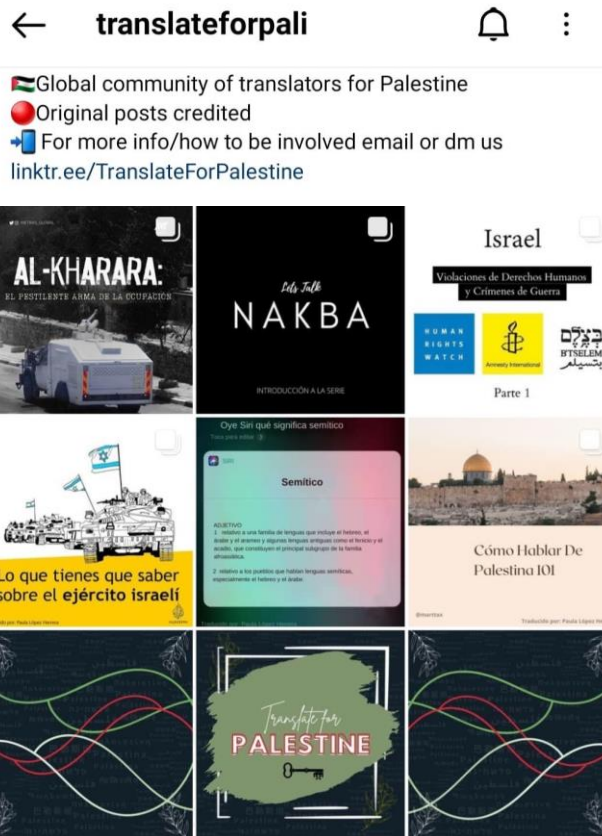


Figure 4.1: Translate for Pali initiative, author’s screenshot of @translateforpali Instagram profile (translateforpali, 2022).

For Nura, social media can be a platform for political education. She also emphasises the importance of highlighting the intersectionality and universal nature of different political issues:

It was very important for me in Europe, to make the people understand, that if you are a human rights activist, you cannot pick and choose, what you want to speak about. I find it insane, that my audience and followers would post about “black lives matter” or they are very feminist for example, but then don’t speak about feminist issues in Palestine. You are excluding women’s rights in a certain country (Nura, 07.07.2022).

Mobilising People for solidarity

The sub-question that arose in chapter 2 related to "whether activism is predominantly taking place on online platforms, and whether a new kind of movement type might have emerged"?, will be attempted to be answered in this paragraph.

The issue was debated with the participants, but their views tended to diverge. Yet, the fact that everyone agreed on was that the activists reach on social media was incomparably broader, to begin with.

Social media activism reaches far more people than street activism, in the age of connectivity, there is no alternative to social media (Kareem, 15.06.2022).

Salma's thoughts on this topic give a good overview of how the two types of activism cannot be regarded as isolated from each other. Online and offline worlds merge, for example when she was invited to speak at events, write articles or give interviews. A protest, she says, may be a one-time thing for many people, but "online activism is more persistent" (Salma, 20.06.2022). For example, by creating a social media profile as an activist, one stays more continuous, fostering a space with a community to ask questions, interact with and perhaps mobilise them to share this content within their community (online or offline).

Nura points out that it is essential for her to keep followers informed not only about current events, but to share credible sources with general information about Palestine, and then her friends in return can share on their social media platforms. She explains that it is crucial, as most of her friends in Germany are very cautious about sharing material about the question of Palestine. "Mobilise, but in a digital way...it pushed them [outsiders] to share our stories", as Omar resumes.

Throughout the events of May 2021, the so-called "Twitter-Storms" were organised by various movement groups, meaning the mobilisation of people to participate in a mass-tweet event, in order to influence the algorithm and for specific hashtags to become trending hashtags, mostly on Twitter, but also on other social media platforms.



Figure 4.2: Author's screenshot of @Palestinian-youthmovement (Palestinian Youth Movement, 2022a).

I could also witness another recent Twitter Storm on the hashtag #SaveMasaferYatta (see chapter 3.3 for context). For the activists taking part in it, the SMO @palestinianyouthmovement made a toolkit available on their website with pre-written tweets that inform on the events in Masafer Yatta. Figure 4.2 and 4.3 show a screenshot of their Instagram Page and an overview of the Event. Appendix C shares the toolkit and tweets provided by the SMO. Indeed, as shown by this example, NGOs and SMOs, by providing this assistance, have found ways to guide activists, and mobilise “outsiders” to the cause to participate in digital activism. Salma points out how she sees #SaveSheikhJarrah as the spark for a new kind of activism:

Sheikh Jarrah [the hashtag] showed us exactly what could be done for the Palestinian cause and it created a guidebook for how to navigate this new form of activism in this context and how to reap its fruits [...] (Salma, 20.06.2022).



Figure 4.3: #SaveMasaferYatta Twitter Storm (Palestinian Youth Movement, 2022b)

However, Lina for example “prefer[s] to be an activist on the ground”, meaning that acting online can only be effective to a certain degree. “I feel it isn’t enough to act on social media and it needs to be implemented on the ground, such as boycotting, and pressing the international law to take action towards their crimes” (Lina, 21.06.2022).

Tabeed in his role as a writer and journalist said his duty lays in strengthening the campaign with actual reporting from the ground, in order to provide the digital platforms with content. Contrary to almost all other participants, he argues that social media platforms only function as a means of dissemination. What matters most to him are the activists and journalists on the

ground who document and contextualise everything: “Social media activism only compliments the street activism. Without street activism and actual action, the social media activism is frankly worthless (Tabeed, 05.07.2022).

Whether a new movement type has emerged or not, cannot be answered here, as the qualitative data sample is far too small. Nonetheless, what can be resumed is that for all participants #SaveSheikhJarrah has generated unprecedented levels of attention and mobilisation, “it has generated a Tsunami of reaction around the world” (Kareem, 15.06.2022), it “spread nationally and globally like wildfire” (Tabeed, 05.07.2022) and might even be regarded as a guidebook or example on how to continue this type of activism in the future. The potential that #SaveSheikhJarrah has shown makes it clear that this development of activism is inevitable and necessary, at least in relation to the Palestinian cause.

Countering the Zionist narrative and the increasing normalisation of the occupation

Throughout this work, another fundamental theme has strongly surfaced. Both in the more general overview of social movements in chapter 2⁴⁶ and in certain storytelling techniques⁴⁷ *narratives* play an ever-present role. This subsection, together with the next “Creating an (online) archive”, tend to overlap in the sense that the activist goals already mentioned contribute above all to the de-mythicising of entrenched Zionist narratives.

Although news platforms have existed for decades, social media is personal, our narratives are not controlled by agendas or political bias, it does not cut the ugly, it does not cater to sensitivities. We have been able to raise our voices and expose every angle of our occupation and its outrageousness, it has also meant that we cannot be disputed, that we do not exaggerate our struggles (Salma, 20.06.2022).

As Hancox (2019) argues especially for social groups, who are usually represented by others, (in this case, the ethnonationalist framing of the "conflict" from the Israeli side) storytelling represents a core dynamic within social movements. Farah follows a similar line of thought and stresses the important factor of Palestinian autonomy in the digital sphere: “It means that we can advocate our own voices and stories and not wait for anyone to do it for us” (Farah, 05.07.2022). Almost all the participants have at least once mentioned the term narrative. They all were conscious of the power social media contains, as a vehicle for propagating the Palestinian narrative.

⁴⁶ See: Della Porta and Diani (2006), Diani (1992), Bernstein (2005), Landy (2011) and Pappé, (2011)

⁴⁷ See: Tufekci (2014) and Hancox (2019)

Mainstream media fails to objectively report on the violence and constant oppression Palestinians are subjected to. Social media has allowed Palestinians on the ground to be the truthful counter-narrative to the biases presented in Western/European news outlets (Dima, 17.06.2022).

Not only are the Western news outlets, the participants mention, reporting oftentimes in a non-objective way, but as well with a rather neutral stance on the question of Palestine, they have been contributing to the increasing normalisation of the occupation. It seems that daily human rights violations, when directed at Palestinians (online and offline), are somehow being tolerated to a greater extent. Indeed, it seems human rights are no longer universally valid. Lina states that when she left Palestine, she “understood that [her] position as a Palestinian activist would be better outside of it, and that the international community was the only hope” (21.06.2022). She mentioned that once she started living abroad, she got to see a different perspective on these events. “I even learned more about Palestine after I left; being in there is like being in a bubble; you don't see things as they appear once you're outside” (Lina, 21.06.2022). Nura also provides her insight into the issue of normalisation of the military occupation and comments:

And of course now [with social media], I can contact my parents [who live in Sheikh Jarrah] daily. Sometimes I see the news on social media and I call them, before they even see the news [laughing] because back home [in Palestine] we get used to all of these bad news, they happen daily. When you are outside [of Palestine] you are more affected by this. And I call my Mum and she is like “Yeah, yeah, I know. But it happens every day.” [...] Everything back home when I was a child is so abnormal. You do not realise, until you are far away, and you are like wow, I can freely move here. I can take a train and travel Europe (Nura, 07.07.2022).

Nura states that for her social media is like a reminder, that life under occupation is *abnormal*. Similar to Lina's experience, she only understood that once she moved to Europe. The aspect that is most important for her within online activism is that the content does not go through many filters, as it would be on mainstream media.

When we speak about a “conflict” it is important to include *all* of the people involved. Which has been missing for years right? You never have a Palestinian voice on TV. You never have someone being interviewed from Palestine, not a voice of our generation. That would be really important. And social media amplifies that voice of younger generations and the voice of Palestinians to speak about their reality. And there is no one better to speak about that than ourselves (Nura, 07.07.22).

The social media world is sometimes hard to grasp, for those who are not “living” in it. To conclude this point, for better understanding, I would like to create a metaphor and compare

the hashtag with a fictitious anthology of Palestinian tales. This volume would be entitled "Save Sheikh Jarrah", and will be about a local story, deeply rooted in the identity and long history of resistance of its inhabitants, written by numerous authors. Instead of being kept somewhere dusty in an elite university library, this "book volume" is of participatory nature, bottom-up, and accessible to anyone with a smartphone or a computer. As soon as one clicks on the hashtag, chapter after chapter opens, and anyone can write an entry in this book and pass on their narrative by tagging the entry with the hashtag. "[It] is a mean to collate a large trove of material under one subject, and perhaps control a narrative by flooding the hashtag with useful material that anyone can click on, if they search for the term" (Tabeed, 05.07.2022).

Creating a(n) (online) historical archive

Rona Sela, an Israeli historian, spent more than 20 years studying Palestinian visual history. Since the 1930's, material was looted and appropriated by Zionist militias (Al-Helou, 2019). In parallel, the Palestinians have resisted and made it their duty to record and store their footage and narratives. The websites and projects mentioned in chapter 3 are just a few of the many examples of how this can be undertaken. Another project that is worth mentioning here, and which correlates strongly with the previous point, is the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA). The archive is composed of over 1000 oral narratives from 1948 refugees and aims to create a Nakba narrative from within (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018). As the PA fails to do so, grassroots youth initiatives start to set up their own online archives, increasingly on social media. As Tarazi, an activist based in Gaza, states in an interview with the Middle East Monitor: "When I first started this project, I created a Facebook page called 'Gaza in the old days'. As I continued publishing photographs, videos, and audio materials the number of followers reached around 70 000" (Al-Helou, 2019).

In this sense, the findings of the analysis of my interviews correlate with the arguments in the literature review (see Simons, 2015). The interviewees, especially Salma and Farah, emphasise the important function of social media as historical data repositories.

To say something, to yell it or plead for people to believe it has proven through history to be useless without the visual evidence to corroborate it. We believe things that happened throughout ancient history because of science, because of monuments that stand to this day, because of ancient artefacts documenting experiences. We believe many recent historical events, because of the invention of photography and the new age of documentation it provided. For Palestinians, decades have passed where many were aware of an Israeli/Palestinian 'conflict' yet the significance of this, what it meant, the events it created, the displace-

ment it caused, the lives it takes, the limitations it created etc. have never truly been comprehended because we did not have the platforms we have today to provide that insight [...] it [#SaveSheikhJarrah] is important because it is an eye into Palestine and it is data that will forever remain (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Farah is a Palestinian artist, architect, and urban planner. On her Instagram account, she posts sketches of Palestinian architecture of cities such as Ramallah, Bethlehem, or Jerusalem, as well as other drawings, where she artistically captures cultural Palestinian symbols, such as olive trees, oranges, keys, kufiyah patterns, Hanthala, and many more. “Resistance can come in many forms [...] Ideally, I would like to document Palestinian architecture and preserve our identity that is being obliterated by the occupation” (Farah, 05.07.2022). Farah's activism is (indirectly) directed against the settler colonial house demolitions, by trying to capture buildings that have not yet been affected by the systematic destruction. In a way, her Instagram page is essentially an online architectural contemporary archive.

This chapter made evident how, as seen as well in chapter 2, (digital) social movements are *postmedia*, as they become their own media. Social media provides a platform for reporting on events independently and correctly, without going through as many filters as mainstream media. Nevertheless, there are filters. Most of the time, activists rely on mega-companies to store data, and as they rely on them, they are subjected to their policies and “community guidelines”⁴⁸. The increasing censorship and silencing of the Palestinian cause is nothing new, rather constitutes a trending topic. The next chapter will deal with these issues and will answer the question of “what challenges do or did the activists face?”

4.2.3 What challenges do/did they face?

Censoring, Silencing and Violating Human Rights

In this section, I mainly use my data collected from the digital ethnography. The posts, tweets, and comment section are reviewed and cross-checked with the official report of the NGO 7amleh, as well as the interviews conducted.

Between May 6th and May 19th of 2021⁴⁹, 7amleh recorded 500 cases of “digital human rights violations” on social media platforms, of which 50% were on Instagram, 35% on Facebook and 15% on Twitter (7amleh, 2021). The types of these violations are mainly limited to

⁴⁸ An overview of the rules on Instagram can be found online. However, as 7amleh also outline in their report, sometimes the wording is very intransparent and not comprehensible (Instagram, 2022; 7amleh, 2021).

⁴⁹ This is the time when #SaveSheikhJarrah emerged and was most present.

the following constraints: The deleting of content such as the removal of stories or posts, the restriction of accounts (meaning the user is unable to use their accounts for a certain period), or even the complete closure of accounts. Other less traceable restrictions are the limitation of story views, or for example “shadowbans”⁵⁰ (7amleh, 2021). Figure 4.4 shows an overview of different notifications on these restrictions.

A post of the Sheikh Jarrah activist Mohammed El-Kurd shows a case of a less traceable restriction. The comments of his followers confirm what the activist suspects: A shadowban.

My story views on IG [Instagram] went down from 250k to 90k (El-Kurd, 2021).

*It is so upsetting that every Post gets censored!!!! On FB Twitter and Instagram. We
have to find an alternative platform
That's huge. Many who post about Palestine are facing the same issue.
.... and it isn't just you, Mohammed, all of the people I follow who post on Palestine
have disappeared from my feed :(
ALWAYS happens when I mention Palestine!
Welcome to the Western version of freedom of speech*

(Comments retrieved from the Twitter thread, Note: wording in comments has been slightly changed due to reasons of anonymity)

⁵⁰ With "less traceable", I refer to restrictions where the user does not receive a warning, as in Figure 4.4. It is rather the followers who notice for example a “shadow-ban”, meaning the absence of certain accounts they follow on their feed and stories.

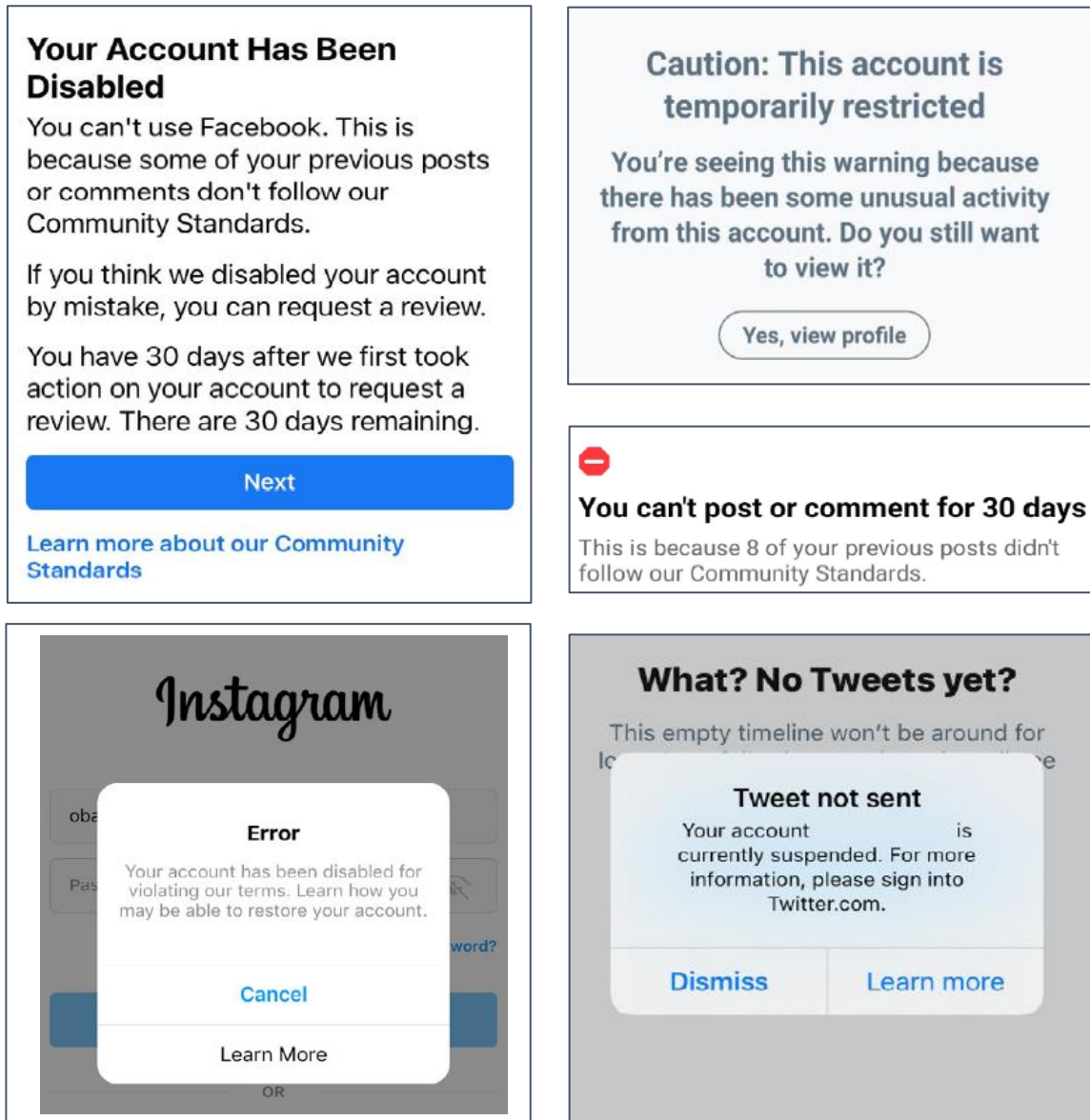


Figure: 4.4 Social Media Censorship (collection of images of the 2021 report (author's depiction via 7amleh, 2021).

I have also spoken and chatted at length with my participants about censorship. All of them have noticed conspicuous activity with their accounts, often linked to #SaveSheikhJarrah, or more broadly to the Palestinian cause. Farah states that there is a strong connectivity between Palestinian content and censorship, she was subjected to:

I notice a dramatic decrease in interaction and exposure whenever I use any hashtag or location associated with Palestine. Many of my stories and posts were also removed with an error message. Many other stories would simply not show to my followers (Farah, 05.07.2022).

In a conversation with Omar, it appeared that he even tried to avoid the use of the hashtag because he was afraid of being blacklisted, or “watched” by the Israeli authorities (08.06.2022). Dima mentions a similar feeling when advocating for her rights. She prefers online activism; however, usually she uses anonymous profiles, in order not to be traced back to her personal or professional life. She explains: “I’m mostly active in digital spaces due to fears of privacy and being falsely smeared due to being vocal about Palestinian rights” (Dima, 17.06.2022). On the other hand, Salma elaborates on how the community found ways to resist these social media restrictions, nevertheless the algorithm as well adapted. It literally targeted her spoken words on her Instagram story.

It became clear what content or how you used the content would subject you to censorship or shadow banning and how the algorithm supported that, so there became a wide push to advise others on how to navigate this and avoid this impacting your posting. However, as time went on the algorithm adapted, I didn't have to use any words on my stories of me personally speaking in them yet it picked on those words nonetheless which either meant some or all parts of my stories would get deleted or would not load for some people, especially when I would speak on the events in Gaza.⁵¹ I had followers reach out to me to let me know they could no longer see my name first on their stories feed (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Is Censorship needed?

A theme that emerged from Salma’s answers was contrary to the line of thought above. She urged the need for censorship. Again, there is inevitably a comparison to traditional activism in the form of protests. Keeping in mind what the world has faced between 2019 and ongoing with the pandemic, much fake news and false information spread, not only on digital platforms but also as part of demonstrations and rallies, such as in Germany by the so-called *Querdenker*.⁵² Spoken word is much harder to censor, as Salma argues: “Anyone can go on to the street and say what they want. Social media provides regulation in that you could report or make people aware of misleading information or accounts” (20.06.2022).

⁵¹ As shortly mentioned in the beginning of chapter 4, in May 2021 Israel launched a military offense against blockaded Gaza. According to the UN 261 people were killed, among them 67 children. Israel claims the offense as justified defense against Hamas rockets (Humaid, 2022).

⁵² Querdenker translated is someone who "thinks out of the box". It is a movement in Germany that emerged during the corona pandemic. It is essentially against the contact restrictions, but the movement was strongly linked to neo-Nazi right wing, and antisemitic groups (Thurm, 2021, author’s translation from German).

The underlying problem, however, is the selective and targeted censorship against pro-Palestinian activism. A post by +972magazine⁵³ on Instagram reveals the contradictory nature of the social network's argumentation. The video depicted a scene of right-wing Israeli settlers shouting hateful slogans and attacking Palestinians and their properties. The video was almost ironically taken down because it violates the Community Guidelines.

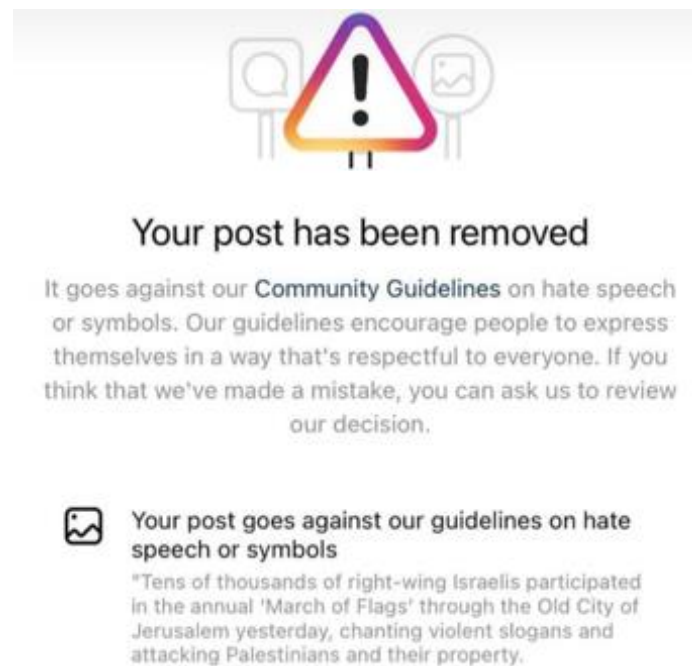


Figure 4.5: Community Guidelines, author's screenshot, +972mag, 2022).

As can be read in the screenshot above (Figure 4.5), content on “right-wing Israelis [...] chanting violent slogans and attacking Palestinians and their property” was deleted by Instagram. By deleting this type of content, reporting on these hate-crimes is being made increasingly difficult for activists. Of course, I agree, videos that contain visible violence, may not be appropriate for all users, especially minors. However, unfortunately, violent videos (of any kind) often circulate on social media and are not deleted at all times. It seems that there is a strong focus on persecuting anti-Zionist content, and every attempt to portray the nature of many violent right-wing settlers is countered by the platforms, or their algorithm immediately.

⁵³ +972 Magazine is an online, non-profit magazine founded in 2010 and run by Israeli and Palestinian journalists, who report on the ground in Palestine and Israel. Their philosophy is to “oppose [the] occupation and apartheid, and [to] showcase perspectives often overlooked or marginalised in mainstream narratives” (+972Magazine, 2021). The name of the magazine comes from the dial telephone code used in Palestine and Israel.

The comment section underneath the posting argues for the complicity of the social media networks in settler colonial activities, as well as the before mentioned selectivity within censorship.

What drives me insane is I'll see actual antisemitic comments and report those and they NEVER get taken down [...]
@META @Instagram Your censorship is unacceptable and deplorable. You are supporting settler-colonialism [...]

(+972mag, 2022+), comments slightly changed due to reasons of anonymity

The strong focus on “persecuting” Palestinian activist content, following the often-widespread logic of equating all anti-Zionist contributions to Antisemitism, leads to serious antisemitic statements being overlooked. This systematic strategy of silencing Palestinian voices follows a similar approach to the efforts of cancelling the BDS movement for example in Germany, as presented in chapter 3. Salma says that she has often received hate comments, which in turn have not been censored. It seems that there is not only in Palestine/Israel a second-class society⁵⁴, but as well on the Internet. What is unacceptable for some is considered tolerable and increasingly normalised for others.

Besides the algorithm and censorship and what that meant to your exposure, I also faced a lot of hateful rhetoric from countless accounts in my messages and also on the comments on the guide⁵⁵ (Salma, 20.06.2022).

In summary, there is a need for regulation that should be applied consistently. Every person suffers equally from hate speech. The selective application to Palestinian content, the strong focus on Palestinian censorship, and the concurrent disregard of hatred against Palestinian activists enforce the downgrading of anti-Palestinian racism, as well often Islamophobic statements, as if monitoring human rights violations were not universally applicable.

⁵⁴ There is no universal citizenship for Arab Palestinian non-Jewish citizens of Israel. For example: “the rights of a citizen classified in law as a non-Jew to the social and welfare services and the material resources of the state and to property are not equal to those of a citizen classified in law as a Jew” (Mc Mahon, 2014, 76).

⁵⁵ Instagram Guides are like small blogs on Instagram. The application allows users to scroll through a curated choice of content, including short descriptions and comments.

4.2.4 What identitarian and historical significance do they see in #SaveSheikhJarrah?

Connecting to a homeland

Referring back to the findings of the literature review specifically in chapter 3.3, the Internet enables diasporic Palestinian communities to reconnect with their homeland and allows border crossing (Farah, 2010; Khalili, 2005; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011; Tawil Sourì & Aouragh, 2014). This argument can also be supported by my interviews. Both Salma (20.06.2022) and Lina (21.06.2022) reveal how the story of Sheikh Jarrah and the outcry on social media has connected Palestinians, whether they live in the oPt or diaspora all around the world, and reinforced their unity. Omar shares a story of how he found new Palestinian friends during the May uprising 2021 via the app Clubhouse⁵⁶.

Omar: And speaking about Clubhouse [...] I got to know people living in Palestine, and we even are trying our best to meet the ones we got close to.

Interviewer: In-person?

Omar: Yes, in-person. One of them was in Spain a couple of days ago, and me and my brother and one more friend, that friend saw her even in Palestine, through Clubhouse. So, he is living under the occupation up North and the other one more South, so they managed to meet in Nablus. They met there and had a great time. He introduced her to his family. Lovely. A simple application drove people to meet. It had a huge effect (Omar, 08.06.2022).

Farah and Nura explain how in general social media can help them with living abroad, as they could connect with friends and family back home in Palestine.

I have some relatives who live in Gaza, and they are not allowed to leave, so I never met them. We only have contact through the phone. And I just added them online on social media. And honestly it is really sad, because throughout the wars, that happened in Gaza, you check up on them, just to see when they were last online (Nura, 07.07.2022).

On the one hand, social media applications can unite the Palestinians; on the other hand, as Omar explains, many also fear the opposite by the too extensive use of the platforms: The division from their homeland. As Omar (08.06.2022) outlines in the previous paragraph, he avoided using hashtags sometimes, in fear of being “blacklisted”, as he still sees the possibility, after being prohibited entry a few years ago, to visit his country one day.

⁵⁶ Clubhouse is an audio only based social app, where user can join, or listen to talks on different topics. The platform was intensively used during the habat ayaar uprising.

Mirroring the past

[I see] the opportunity to contextualize what's happening in Sheikh Jarrah to the broader Palestinian cause. The Nakba began in 1948...but #SaveSheikhJarrah is clear evidence of how it is ongoing (Dima, 17.06.2022).

All participants describe unprecedented attention to Palestine on a global level through #SaveSheikhJarrah. Local activism has become global, present-day activism has taken on historical significance as the hashtag has become a symbol of almost a century-old Palestinian resistance. #SaveSheikhJarrah “[...] [has] transformed into a corridor to understanding the Palestinian cause and decades of occupation in an entirely different lens” (Salma, 20.06.2022).

Lina and Kareem go even further in drawing comparisons between #SaveSheikhJarrah and the Intifadas, two of the most important events in Palestinian resistance history. Past social movements have been governed by their own generational importance. What other past movements have in common with digital resistance is the consistency and the unity it created (Salma, 20.06.2022). Kareem finally explains how he sees the hashtag as an extension of the Intifadas: “#SaveSheikhJarrah was and is an ongoing Intifada, a different form of uprising, a digital Intifada, from the Palestinian perspective, #SaveSheikhJarrah is a continuation of the struggle [...] (Kareem, 15.06.2022).

5. Conclusion

While I am writing this last chapter, another war on Gaza just “ended” with a ceasefire agreement (05.08.2022 - 08.08.2022). While I am writing this, the evening news about the aggression on Gaza are filled with twisted and distorted images of Islamists, extremists, and Jihadists against a self-defending Israel - yet again. And while I am writing this, at the same time, social media is filling up with the Palestinian narrative - and the air with resistance spirit.

“There isn’t one right type of resistance. Resistance against the Israeli occupation of Palestine can be through dance, art, writing, photography, food, books and many others. Resistance comes in many forms and is not limited to the streets” (Farah, 05.07.2022).

I have gained profound awareness about alternate forms of resistance throughout the process of completing this dissertation, albeit more so during the activist interviews and social media interactions I had while conducting my digital ethnography. Concluding, however, broadly speaking, it all comes down to the interrelated, almost cyclical nature of resistance à la Foucault: “If there is power, there is resistance” (1981).

As outlined in chapter 2, social movements date back to ancient Egypt. At their core lies, similar to our contemporary social movements of today, a socio-political outcry directed at the current *status quo*. The participatory nature of the Internet, with the emergence of social media, has generated a radically unprecedented level of mass mobilisation, as the example of the Arab Springs has shown. The successes of these ignited a transnational wildfire, from Cairo to the world, and have motivated and mobilised people globally to voice their grievances and complaints against the *indignant* politics of many countries in the beginning of the first half of the 21st century. This dissertation has also shed light on the various (multimodal) instruments for transmedia storytelling, from blogging to hashtag activism as a form of *micro-politics*, which the ever-changing nature of the Internet has brought about.

These contemporary dynamics of transnational social movements have then been thoroughly demonstrated through the Palestinian case study #SaveSheikhJarrah. In order to comprehend the significance of the current grassroots initiatives in Palestine, specifically those on social media, it was crucial to understand the rich history of the nonviolent Palestinian resistance movement.

Overall, by using a settler colonial lens, #SaveSheikhJarrah seems to constitute a microcosm of the endless story of the Israeli occupation. As early as 1936, at the beginning of the Palestinian question, the response to a peaceful protest, today known as the great revolt, con-

sisted of demolitions of houses, and then, in 1939, the destruction of entire settlements including their agricultural land. In 1948, the *catastrophe began*, when more than 700,000 indigenous people were forced to leave their land, their houses, and their belongings behind. Today, others occupy their homes. Another *setback* followed in 1967, and again entire settlements were bulldozed, wiping out not only possessions but also the memories those carried with them. During and after the Intifadas, Israelis proceeded with demolitions, and even during the "peace processes" that were never supposed to end in peace, settlers dared to expand their settlements. This continues to this present day - until Sheikh Jarrah, until #SaveSheikhJarrah, where not only houses are occupied, but also the Internet.

Since 1936, grassroots efforts have turned from mass collectivist action, protests, and civil disobedience to the politicised and institutionalised incorporation of non-violent popular struggle. Past and present popular resistance connect, as the achievements and cultural symbols resulting from past struggles are enshrined into today's everyday resistance and collective memory. Not only merge the past and present within Palestinian grassroots resistance, but as well online and offline worlds, when #SaveSheikhJarrah is brought to life.

#SaveSheikhJarrah "captures the situation in Palestine for the past 70 years. It brought back memories of the Intifada" (Lina, 21.06.2022). More than 55 years of ongoing occupation of native land only "nourishes" the Palestinian resistance and steadfastness. As the occupation and settler colonial activities move around different spaces offline and online, so does the Palestinian resistance. Through my interviews and digital fieldwork, I proved my hypothesis that #SaveSheikhJarrah is a mirror image of historic Palestinian struggles against the ongoing occupation, or as my participants claim: The Nakba is not an event that ended in 1948. It is *ongoing*. The contemporary Nakba is of an all-encompassing and systemic nature.

In this way, the research question "What are the meanings of Palestinian resistance in the new era of social media" can be answered and organised in different ways, along the inductive categories of the presented digital ethnography.

First, the identitarian and historical significance of the #SaveSheikhJarrah movement is striking: The hashtag served to connect young Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza, and in diaspora all over the world, online and offline. Social media for young Palestinians has become a tool for amplifying their voices, by mapping their narrative on the occupation, which has been silenced and distorted on mainstream media for decades. Some activists suggest that #SaveSheikhJarrah has heralded a new wave of activism, perhaps even a digital intifada with its own generational importance. Second, social media applications provide a platform for ed-

ucating on the Palestinian question, disentangling the Zionist narrative, creating an online archive, and calling out the human rights violations of the occupation. Third, the creation of the hashtag resulted in unprecedented, global attention and the increasing *reproblematization* of the Palestinian struggle.

Nevertheless, despite the positive achievements for Palestinian activism on social media, the platforms have been contributing to digital human rights violations and the targeted censorship of the Palestinian narrative. There seems to be a dichotomy between the many positive dynamics #SaveSheikhJarrah has brought about, and the negative dimensions it has unravelled. On the one hand, activists claim for social media to have precipitated unprecedented levels of attention; on the other hand, the challenging censorship of Palestinian voices is being uncovered – which in itself might be a small gain, as the recording of these digital human rights violations increasingly exposes the settler colonial dimensions on a cyber level. What is alarming in a more general respect is the increasing dependence of activists on these platforms, as daily life under occupation usually does not feature in the mainstream media.

To conclude, with this original and relatively novel research approach I have tried to use throughout this study, I have furthermore demonstrated how activism is part of academia. Academia is one of the most trusted sources of knowledge – if not *the* most trusted. If something is claimed by scientists, people believe it. In this context, it is critical to leverage this knowledge by recognising the relevance of people's narratives and amplifying their voices in order to make these frequently overlooked subjects part of societal discourse.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire and orientation for semi-structured interviews

Warm Up: Background Information

1. Tell me something about yourself. Introduce yourself and tell me where are you from?
2. What is your background regarding being an activist? When did you start to get involved more actively?
3. What is your motivation behind being an activist?

General: Social Media Activism and the Palestinian struggle

4. From a more general and personal point of view: How is the Internet or social media of importance for you?
5. What social media application do you use the most for activism and how frequently? Why specifically this one?
6. Are there any alternative channels apart from the Meta-applications (such as Instagram, Facebook) or Twitter? If yes, please name them and tell me why you consider them important (or less important).
7. Do you see any advantages in Social Media activism, compared to “activism on the streets”?

Specific Questions on #SaveSheikhJarrah:

8. Tell me about the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, what is happening there right now?
9. Why is Sheikh Jarrah so important for the Palestinian popular struggle?
10. And what about the hashtag? How did it develop?
11. How did you/ or do you engage with the hashtag? (Or: How do you see the community engage with it)
 - What is your goal for your audience, when using the # (for example: education, awareness...)
 - What opportunities do you see in this type of activism, and especially about this specific campaign?
 - What challenges did you face?
 - Is the # used for mobilizing people to protest “on the streets”?

12. How do you keep up with censorship?

- Can you tell me about a specific post, that has been censored / or a specific incident, where your profile even was “shadowbanned”?
- What was the reason for the censoring or “shadowban”?

13. In your own words: What does the # mean to you personally?

- and what does #SaveSheikhJarrah or for example similar hashtag campaigns as #SaveSilwan have in common with other grassroots movements in history?
- what makes it unique?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add, mention or share with me?

Appendix B: Participant recruitment

1. Slide for Instagram Story



LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS



Digital Resistance

- Are you between 20 and 45 ?
- Do you call yourself an (online) activist ?
- Are you advocating for the Palestinian cause ?
- ...and frequently engage(d) with the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah ?

Interested in participating?
MORE INFO:
Send an E-mail to
sophia_kelsch@iscte-iul.pt

2. Slide for Tweet



LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS



- Do you call yourself an (online) activist ?
- Are you advocating for the Palestinian cause ?
- ...and frequently engage(d) with the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah ?

Take part in my study!
MORE INFO
DM to [SophiaMaria_K](#)

Appendix C: Twitter Storm Toolkit



SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

#SaveMasaferYatta #DefendMasaferYatta TWITTER STORM TOOLKIT

Date: Tuesday June 21, 2022

Time: 12pm ET / 7pm Palestine / 9am PT

Hashtags:

#SaveMasaferYatta

#DefendMasaferYatta

Follow local groups:

[@YouthofSumud](#)

[@Stophewall](#)

Take Action:

1. Participate in the Twitter Storm - see tweets below
2. [Tell Congress: Defend Masafer Yatta](#)
3. Amplify, tweet, post, share information about what's happening in Masafer Yatta
4. Sign the [Defund Racism petition](#) which targets U.S. organizations masquerading as charities while funding the demolition of Palestinian homes.

SUGGESTED TWEETS

Use the following suggested tweets and build off of them for your various social media platforms.

Share [this clip](#) on Twitter from an IG Live with Sami and Sameeha Hourani, activists from @YouthofSumud in Masafer Yatta, include your own caption if needed.

Check out this [action tool](#) by Stop the Wall.

You may put a link to this document in your thread to urge people to participate in the Twitter Storm.

- ❖ Israel has designated Masafer Yatta a "firing zone" area to justify the forcible expulsion of Palestinians from their homes. Settler-colonial courts DO NOT offer justice, they aid and abet the occupation. #SaveMasaferYatta #DefendMasaferYatta
- ❖ On May 4, Israeli settler courts gave the green light for the demolition of 8 villages in Masafer Yatta, home to some 1300 people. Israel is ETHNICALLY CLEANSING the area, ANNEXING it and further COLONIZING it with illegal settlements. #SaveMasaferYatta
- ❖ Israel has begun ILLEGALLY demolishing Palestinian homes in Masafer Yatta in what is set to become the largest expulsion campaign carried out by Israel since 1967. #SaveMasaferYatta
- ❖ For decades, Palestinians in Masafer Yatta have been deprived of access to roads, infrastructure, and systematically isolated while illegal Israeli settlements took over their land. RIGHT NOW, they are being ethnically cleansed via home demolitions & expulsions #SaveMasaferYatta
- ❖ Masafer Yatta is home to hundreds of Palestinian families. They are steadfast and determined to resist the occupation against Israel's ongoing forced expulsion and home demolition campaign. We MUST resist with them. #DefendMasaferYatta
- ❖ Israel has issued an illegal order to demolish the @YouthofSumud community center in Masafer Yatta where Palestinian activists have been organizing against the forced expulsion and cleansing of their villages. #SaveMasaferYatta, tell @POTUS and congress to

(Palestinian Youth Movement, 2022b).

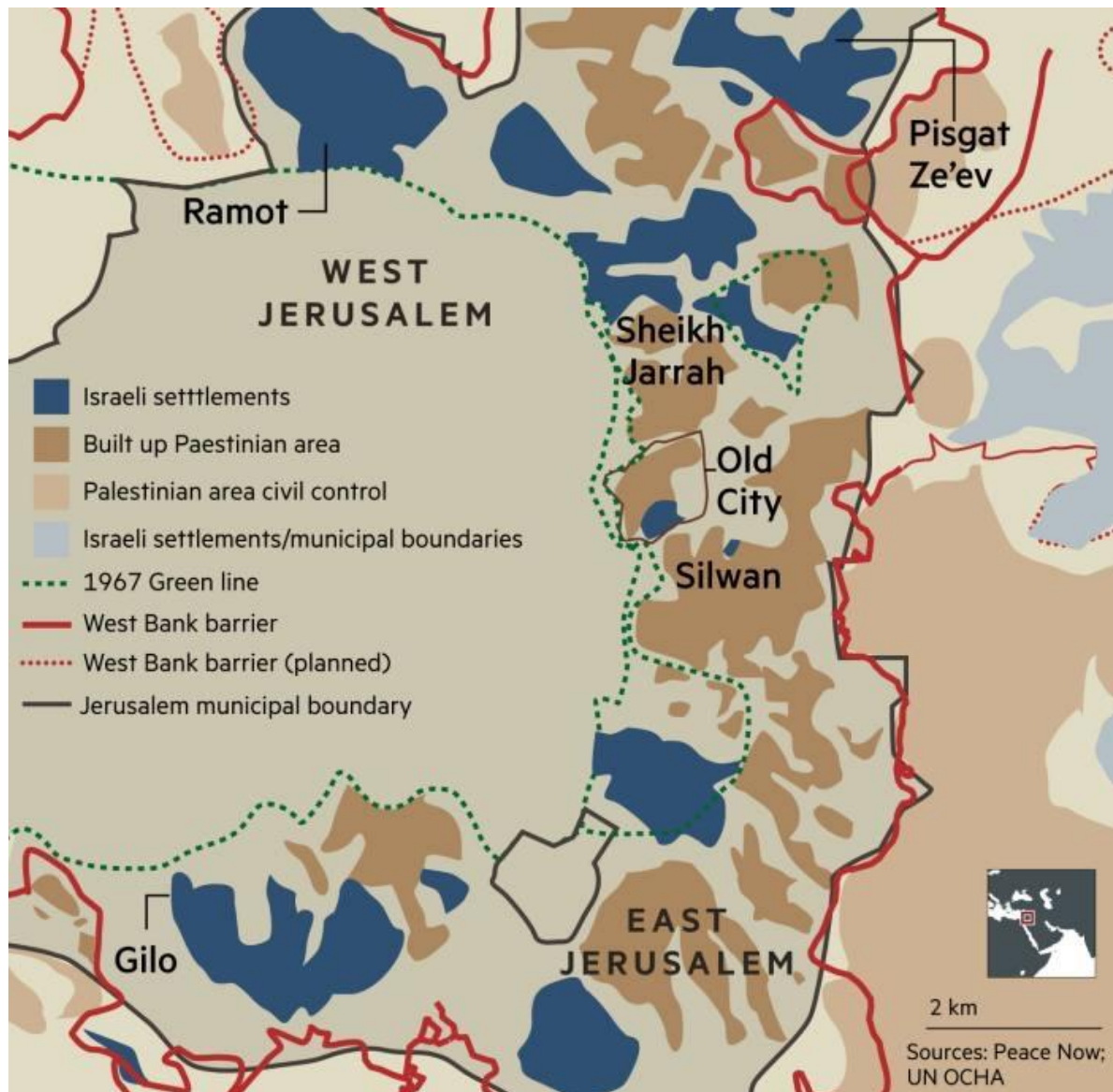
Appendix D: Geopolitical Significance of Sheikh Jarrah – Collection of Maps

a) Sheikh Jarrah's proximity to Damascus gate and al-Quds



(The National, 2021)

b) Overview: Israeli settlements within the Green Line



(Retrieved from: Reed, 2017)

c) Targeted houses in Sheikh Jarrah



(Peace Now, 2019)