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FROM THE SHADOWS OF THE WALL TO ONLINE SHADOW BANNING
PALESTINIAN CONTESTATION OF PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL BORDERS

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Abstract

This thesis explores the concept of borders in the Israeli-Palestinian context and Palestinian contestation of these borders both within the physical and the virtual space. It studies the case of the Separation wall as a physical embodiment of entrapment, surveillance, annexation, and performative sovereignty. By analyzing these dynamics, this thesis argues that borders, although staged, are nevertheless violent in the way they are imposed on Palestinians causing the latter to contest and challenge them. Palestinians empower themselves through *sumud* on the one hand by reclaiming their individual existence and in a collective form by organizing themselves on the ground. Online, borders are represented by processes of shadow banning that target pro-Palestinian content and accounts on social media platforms. This thesis explores this second case study through the movement that was ignited by the situation in Sheikh Jarrah between May and August 2021. Practices of resistance were also transposed online through the creation of alternative forms of communication using encoded words to cross digital borders through the circumvention of the algorithm. The focus of this thesis is not only the porous polysemic borders but also the third space it uses as a parallel between the physical and virtual realm showing the dynamics of contestation that spaces of restriction and violence can create. This thesis is driven by the testimonies of Palestinian civilians and community organizers as that complement the literature in the first part and the collection of online data in the second part.

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The situation in Israel-Palestine is constantly evolving and writing about it has been a fascinating journey. The events and dynamics explored in this thesis go up to August 2021 and aim at grasping the multidimensionality of the border-making and unmaking methodologies.

"What gives me hope and sounds like a paradox is Israeli intensified oppression because the more oppression Israel inflicts upon us, the more we long for freedom, justice and human rights and when we long for that, we have the motivation, there is something to make us resist and through resistance, we can make change."

- Manal Shqair, Stop the Wall

INTRODUCTION

When I interned at the Burj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut, one of my colleagues told me that if she could go back to Palestine, she would never stop walking, "I will walk endlessly," she said. Her words kept resonating in my head as I thought of Palestinian mobility in a world that is always in motion both physically and virtually. In such a world, Palestinians face many obstacles: the most prominent one being borders. The process of border-crossing in Israel-Palestine is surrounded with a plethora of security mechanisms, technological devices mobilized for surveillance purposes, tools to enforce the ghettoization of Palestinian Territories and an attempt in distinguishing a sovereign state. Border-crossing is not a fixed process, it is one that stretches over time and space, creates gaps while simultaneously filling hours of Palestinians' days. In crossing borders, Palestinians come face-to-face with the Israeli state apparatus manifested not only through the web of checkpoints along the Separation Wall and beyond, but also through the interactions they have with soldiers; the nods, the screams, the sighs, all these mundane elements of human demeanor come together to produce an experience that is rarely forgotten by Palestinians despite their age as evidenced in the comments given by participants. Through the years and with the rise of social media as a new space to occupy, Palestinians were able to acquire a presence online using various platforms to discuss their life under the Israeli occupation. Although the virtual space is intangible and cannot be grasped, it was able to transpose the shadow of the Separation Wall online through the process of shadow banning, also known as the practice of blocking and taking down a user or their content

In parallel with these processes, elements of contestation and dissent are created and practiced by Palestinians as they cross these borders physically and virtually. These elements can either be personalized and injected into everyday acts or they can take a more organized collective form including public mobilizations and the creation of alternate colloquialisms. In this thesis, I examine and analyze these various dynamics by questioning how Palestinians can contest borders both in physical and virtual spaces. I use two interesting case studies to illustrate my arguments. On the one hand, I explore the Separation Wall also called the 'Security Barrier'

or the ‘Apartheid Wall,’ and on the other I navigate the online world through the social media movement that took place between May and August 2021 after Israeli authorities threatened to displace the al-Kurd family from their home in the Eastern Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

Outline

This thesis is divided into two parts: the contestation of borders in the physical space and in the virtual space. These parts are connected through similar processes they instrumentalize as well as the dynamics they comprise within them. They are both third spaces made up of a restrictive fabric of mechanisms and a sense of resilience intertwined together producing a miscellaneous collection of contradictions.

In the first part, I start by dissecting the Separation Wall along its different goals. In the first chapter, I examine the entrapment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the ghettoization of both territories. I do so by examining the role of the Wall assisted by the ID card system and the permit regime in isolating Palestinians by constraining them and fragmenting them at the same time.

Then, I look at the security apparatus embodied by the Wall in the way that it regulates space and polices Palestinian bodies. I analyze the grid along which Palestinians are observed, dissected, and controlled. I look at the dichotomy of order and chaos between each side of the Wall and examine how through a hierarchical surveillance system, the Wall, along with the checkpoints, hyper-visibilizes Palestinians despite its role in hiding them.

I proceed to explore the role of the Wall and other configurations around it in the process of spacio-cide, or the killing of space, through annexation. My study of spacio-cide does not only focus on how space is destroyed and rendered unproductive, it also explains how it is transferred to the Israeli population and turned into a constructive one. Following this analysis, I expand by discussing the role of the Wall in annexing land from the Palestinian Territories with the example of the Seam Zone, the area between the Wall and the agreed-upon Israeli borders.

Finally, I situate the Wall in a settler-colonial context and study its performative function in its representation of sovereignty. I do so by debunking the bases on which the Wall has been constructed starting from the so-called division it establishes and the myth around the permeability of the structure stating rather its porous nature given the movement it enables. After that, I analyze the colonial technologies it utilizes to rank Palestinians and divide them

on the ground and in status. This pushes me to question the real purpose of the Wall and whether its failure to prevent Palestinians from crossing is intentional.

The second chapter is fully centered around the resistance to the Wall and the structures that are mobilized around it; I start by defining *sumud* through time then I investigate both its individual and collective forms. I structure this chapter differently by interlacing participants' testimonies with the literature I have collected. Indeed, I decided to illustrate the experience of resistance as a personal journey. Similarly, the section that discusses population mobilization through collective action relies on the comments of two community organizers in the respective towns of Jayyous and Bil'in.

In the second part, I dive into the virtual world. In the first chapter, I study the border-making process online following two approaches. First, I tie this process to Israeli territorial monopoly of telecommunication structures; I connect the physical with the virtual by examining the control mechanisms that turn Israeli authorities into the gatekeepers of the online borders. The second approach is one that focuses on content moderation and shadow banning, which conceptualize the online border. I show that these processes have transcended the state apparatus and institutional framework to encompass civil society initiatives that aim at taking down pro-Palestinian content.

The second chapter aims at conceptualizing an evolved version of *sumud*, meaning steadfastness, which focuses on existence outside of time and space using alternative content. It studies and analyzes the various strategies Palestinian and pro-Palestinian social media users have invented and innovated to slip through the virtual cracks and spread their narratives and experiences online. This chapter is not only structured along the comments of participants but also of Palestinian digital rights experts who questioned the sustainability of these strategies. This chapter uses quantitative methodology to demonstrate the connection of the online and physical world and the process of censorship.

Theoretical Framework

Before discussing borders, I must set the context with the physical and virtual space. These are structured and identified according to the actors that populate them, the ways in which they organize themselves and the power dynamics that tie them together. By adopting this perspective, this thesis studies and analyzes both the Separation Wall and social media platforms as border-spaces of control and repression but also of contestation. This spatial ambivalence has been referred to as 'third space' by theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edward

Soja; an in-between space of permanent movement that dissolves notions of dualism and dichotomy. Before them, Lefebvre has conceived it as an intersection between everyday practices and perceptions, representations or interpretations and the spatial imaginary of the time that surrounds it. Third space is not isolated or cut out from the rest of the environment around it; it is a part of larger systems of domination and dynamics of resistance that challenge these same systems. Third space is a contradiction given its simultaneous operations of oppression and liberation. For Bhabha (1994), third space entails a combination of occupation and dissent within one single environment whereas Soja (1996) inspired by Bell Hooks (1990) looks at it as a radical and creative space where opposition takes on different forms enabling Palestinians to have a sense of existence (Johansson & Vintaghen 2015, p.127). It is a space of openness inhabited and claimed by the marginalized. Third space demonstrates hybridity not as an ability to trace two separate moments emerging but rather understanding the creation of different power dynamics defined by both the center and the margin yet still operating as a space of radical resistance (Analecto et al. 2011, p.400).

The Separation Wall built through the West Bank creates a third space that despite being dominated by control mechanisms, is not simply oppressive and negative but also productive. The Wall has a strong disciplinary function turning Palestinians into docile policed bodies, but it has also created its own paradoxical effect by producing a space of resistance and counter-hegemonic practices. The Wall as a third space is seen beyond its physical structure as it shifts towards a fluid and dynamic space of circulation, hierarchy, and human elements; it hides tensions and contradictions, but it also presupposes a system of opening and closing of borders that makes it penetrable and crossable thus invalidating its rigid nature (Ozguc 2010). Third space is thus open to confrontation, refusal, and resistance through the production of an alternative power; reimagining the Wall as a third space is an attempt at reclaiming it for Palestinians who have been resisting it since its construction. Instead of considering the Wall as a one-dimensional element of a larger structural system of injustice, this thesis places the structure in a spatial polysemy which problematizes it. This also means paying attention to the creation of alternative power; Palestinian lives go beyond what is inflicted upon them and are not limited to instincts of survival, they are rather in a state of ‘becoming’ (Ozguc 2010) manifested through different strategies of resistance. As it will be demonstrated later in the thesis, the Wall as a third space expresses a sense of Palestinian consciousness and agency.

Understanding third space opens a discussion around spaces of new modernity, actions, interactions, and networking. The online third space consists of individuals, connected through a telecommunication network, interacting on one platform which could be customized yet

universally defining similar functions, ambiguous but with one clear intention - connectivity; the spatiality of these networks is diverse and rapid (Analecto et al. 2011, p.401). The social media third space is characterized by its counter-hegemonic nature: social networks clearly project the ideologies and supremacies related to information and its sharing, managing, and storing. However, social media is also a space where ideas are debunked, and new forms of information production are instigated through counter-narratives. The digital third space enables the democratization of resistance online for Palestinians despite censorship and shadow banning processes initiated by the Israeli state apparatus in collaboration with social media companies. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter become a battleground of narratives. Israeli mechanisms of erasure and invisibilization of Palestinian content are always at play, as the thesis demonstrates, but this does not stop the reinvention and repackaging of resistance in the online space. Networked social media creates spaces for voices to contest, negotiate and rearticulate the social issues, political suppression, shadow banning, injustices (Analecto et al. 2011, p.401). Sharing videos and pictures of what is happening on the ground serves as a magnifying glass that highlights every Palestinian's reality with the occupation.

Edward Soja (1996) pointed out that 'third' in third space refers to spatial 'otherness', beyond what is lived and what is conceived, real and imagined; 'Third-as-Other' is an open spatial and social system with an expansion beyond 'permanent constructions' (Murrani 2016, p.193). Third space, he said, is "[...] designed to break down and disorder a rigid dichotomy and create [...] an alternative 'postmodern geography' of political choice and radical openness attuned to making practical sense of the contemporary world." (Soja 1996, p.63). Applying Soja's as well as Bhabha's and Hooks' understandings to the Separation Wall and social media enables the identification of dynamics and mechanisms developed on the margins as they make their way towards the center's borders where Israel's power is located. Within this framework, it is important to view marginality as "[...]much more than a site of deprivation" and rather as "[...] the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (Hooks 1990). In this case, the third space should be conceived as one of confrontation, one that opposes liminality to a system of occupation and control. Whether it is in the physical or virtual space, Palestinians' conflict with borders raises questions of identity, resistance, and an alternative sense of agency. Looking at the Wall and social media as third spaces gives a possibility of analysis that goes beyond a hostile face-off between Israelis and Palestinians and rather dives deeper into the intricacies of Palestinian dissent through a re-imagined relationship to resilience.

Within the physical and virtual third spaces, this thesis is paying closer attention to borders. The approach that is used to define them focuses on grassroots organization, and personal stories that complement both the literature and the narratives of the people who must cross these borders. This thesis is driven by statements given by those who live in Palestinian territories and are subjects of the various frameworks which have been academically presented and analyzed in the past. Who better to tell the story of occupation and contestation than those who had to live through the former and practice the latter? This commitment to the bottom-up angle is expressed through the space that is given to the testimonies and interviews within the thesis in the way that they confirm the research process as well as to the definitions; these are considered and recognized through the lens of mobility or lack thereof. The combination between grassroots experiences and space theory constitutes a novelty in the use of borders and their contestation. Given the centrality of dissent in this thesis, the framework around it must be situated within these practices. This contextualization understands the effect that Israeli/Palestinian power dynamics have on the Palestinian experience with elements such as borders. They are thus defined by the way they are lived, by their functionality rather than by the ways in which they were theorized or agreed upon on a global scale.

In his Book 'L'obsession du mur: Politique de militarisation des frontières en Israël et aux Etats Unis,' Damien Simonneau states that the marking of a border has neither control as its sole purpose nor bureaucracy as its sole practice; one can detect in borders a manifestation, symbolism, criminalization, and the construction of the 'Other.' This research's approach to borders is similar to Simonneau's in that it conceives them as "a fluid field made up of a multitude of political negotiations, demands and counter-claims," (Simonneau 2020, p.42). Borders are considered both in multiple places and in multiple de-territorialized processes all of a changing nature; their study in this thesis is through and within the processes that build and alter them constantly. Moreover, borders are not isolated from the actors that create or cross them, they are the fruit of social relations, of powers and practices sometimes marked by cooperation, and other times by forms of opposition between the actors in attendance. Simonneau emphasizes the idea that the nature of borders is to be porous rather than rigid making them problematic for decision makers whose arrangements are based on an exclusion-inclusion antagonism. This perspective looks at the political and media work of constructing representations in the border-space and analyzes the dissemination of narratives in different arenas.

Borders are highly dependent on their physical context. In the Israeli-Palestinian framework, borders oscillate between the separation of two territories and the manipulation of

space and elements of agency. I discuss borders physically through the case study of the Separation Wall. Before diving into the more intricate strategies of the Wall, I first look at the barrier in relation to another space: the Green Line. Indeed, the location of the Wall is controversial (Simonneau, p.26); its route diverges in six places from the Green Line and de facto places large blocks of Israeli settlements in the West Bank on the Israeli side. This inconsistency creates a situation wherein the barrier does not separate Palestinian territories from Israel proper nor does it distinguish an 'inside' from an 'outside' (Latte-Abdallah and Parizot 2017). This lack of clarity of a distinct territorial demarcation had the corollary of erasing a whole set of distinctions particularly between occupation and non-occupation, temporary and permanent, thus tampering not only with space but also with time. The ambiguity and polysemy of borders, despite clashing with the Wall's confident architectural presence, serve as a disorientation strategy meant to blur the lines between Israeli security and the violation of Palestinians' rights. In this sense, borders in their international 1967 definition as the basis of peace settlements, were not respected and their substitutes were designed to separate Palestinians, cut off neighboring villages from each other and ensure Israeli presence and control over key resources such as water and land (Busbridge 2013, p.656). Later in 1987, borders were instrumentalized as channels of expression and practice of the separation policy launched at the time of the First Intifada. This policy, which was promoted by former Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin, was based on the restriction of movement through the establishment of a system that filtered Palestinians willing to enter Israel (Latte-Abdallah and Parizot 2017). In territorial terms, the Oslo Accords allowed the drawing of borders and the division of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into three types of areas: Area A was under the Palestinian Authority's civil control, Area B where the Palestinian Authority was responsible for internal security while Israel took care of external security and Area C under complete Israeli control. During this time, borders, although enforced by the Israeli state apparatus, remained physically denoted through the checkpoints' structures. They nevertheless contributed to the affirmation of a policy of confinement and a hardening of occupation mechanisms (Ibid.). Starting from the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, the readjustments made by the occupation were different from those in the previous period. The general Israeli public was now convinced that there was no solution in sight and negotiations with the Palestinians were impossible so in the face of popular pressure, Israeli policymakers opted to pursue the policy of separation and a few months after the invasion of Palestinian enclaves by the Israeli army, the Sharon government agreed to launch the building of the Wall (Arieli and Sfard 2008). The approach used at the time did not only focus on reducing interaction with the Palestinians but also on

reinforcing a long-term presence and maintaining a solid encirclement around Palestinian enclaves by setting up checkpoints, roadblocks and watchtowers. Israel used border-making strategies to simultaneously separate Palestinians from their territories and reserve itself the right to intervene regularly in the heart of their living space. This adds to the ambiguity of physical borders in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; they were mediums of both division and surveillance, means to invisibilize as well as hyper-visibilize communities.

And just as they express Israeli occupation of space and the manipulation of time, borders are also illustrative of Palestinian contestation and resistance. In choosing to dissect the concept and practice of contestation in that space, I also choose to showcase the versatility and ambivalence of borders, suggesting that they are subject to change and alterations by those that oppose them. The simple act of existing within the border-space is a portrayal of dissent; crossing through checkpoints or holes in the barrier, with or without a permit, 'legally,' or 'illegally' are ways in which borders are manifested but most importantly deconstructed, re-imagined and eventually reclaimed. A more physical and concrete counter-border strategy remains the re-routing of the Wall in the Palestinian villages of Bil'in and Jayyous. Through popular mobilization and civil activism, the Palestinian inhabitants of these villages initiated a re-arrangement of their own space and had the power redefine the border-territoriality embodied by the Separation Wall.

While in the physical space, borders are more visible because of their concrete consequences, in the virtual space, they are more complicated to theorize and conceive. Virtual borders are embodied in Israeli dominance over telecommunication channels and infrastructures. They are transposed online through processes of territoriality and online confinement of Palestinians similar to the strategies deployed at the Wall. Thus, borders embody the plethora of ways in which Israel plans to silence Palestinians and violate their digital rights. In this sense, processes of censorship and shadow banning are considered border strategies given the ways in which they are used to keep Palestinians out of the online space. The Separation Wall is turned into an online Wall which encircles Palestinians, limits them in their modes of expression and communication and fragments their online movement and organization attempts. Just like in the physical space, virtual borders are deployed by the Israeli state apparatus within a larger system of surveillance aimed at policing and restricting Palestinians and the pro-Palestinian content they post and share. Given that the online space is provided by social media companies outside of the region, Israel's control of virtual borders is dependent on its strategic ties with other private actors. This process of trans nationalization of online borders ostracizes Palestinians and confines them further in digital enclaves. Unlike

physical borders which are clearly distinct and made visible through the institution of the Wall and checkpoints, virtual borders are less identifiable and more obscure. This technique is used to give Israeli authorities a larger space of interpretation in their policies and actions towards Palestinians who post online. In the context of the online world, borders are defined in their ability to restrict and limit; this creates an interesting paradox especially considering the social and political dynamics between actors at these borders. In this sense, borders are not limited to the algorithm that operates them, they are also expressed through the individual and collective movements that aim at challenging them. In other words, strategies to circumvent the algorithm, which are discussed later on in this thesis, such as the altering of words are the essence of border-crossing and contestation online. Through the manipulation of language and the use of social media techniques that have been popularized during the social movement instigated after the situation in Sheikh Jarrah, Palestinians could turn borders to their advantage. Furthermore, the internet is not only a space of documentation, it is also one of production knowledge and narrative construction. By choosing to be resilient and to challenge processes of censorship and shadow banning online, Palestinians are expressing their desire and sometimes their duty to maintain their struggle and different discourses alive in the virtual space.

Borders are tools of the third space; they represent simultaneously the system of oppression in its complex structural forms and movements of resistance as perceived and practiced respectively by the Israeli state and Palestinians. On the one hand, the Separation Wall was meant to perform as a type of rigid border but turned out to be flexible. On the other hand, borders in the virtual space are expressed through censorship and erasure practices that serve to limit Palestinians and control their presence online. Through its unwavering tie to Israeli authorities, social media companies have turned their platforms into a space of restrictions and control but have also given birth to innovative and creative means of communication and engagement that not only reimagine borders but also overcome them.

I also discuss the functionalities of borders within the systems of control operated by the Israeli state. I contextualize the thesis in the framework of the mobility regime: a multidimensional apparatus present in different aspects of the lives of Palestinians both in the Palestinian territories and Israel proper. In their collective book ‘Israelis and Palestinians in the Shadows of the Wall: Spaces of Separation and Occupation,’ Stéphanie Latte-Abdallah and Cédric Parizot mention three main elements through which the mobility regime is articulated: tools, signs, and human actors. Tools include physical structure such as checkpoints, walls, or

roadblocks. In June 2012, the United Nations office counted 542 physical obstacles of which 61 were permanent checkpoints, 436 trenches, road barriers, mounds, and concrete blocks in the West Bank. Signs are treated through movement regulations which are stable but are also unspoken and unwritten; some are revealed on the spot while others remain unknown such as 'special security zones,' near settlements or military bases. Then there are actors who refer to soldiers and private security companies' workers to whom the decentralized mobility regime gives immense power. These three elements are multiplied by each other and create a state of extreme spatial uncertainty; Palestinians do not know whether the checkpoints or barriers they cross are going to be open and operated, how the soldiers they will meet will behave and what the daily restrictions are. This disorientation causes the space to decompose into many 'land cells,' the passage between which is hard and slow, and it disintegrates when there are no fixed distances between certain points so the concepts of near-far and in-out are completely debunked (Latte Abdallah and Parizot 2017). Waiting in line, being turned away, and losing access to opportunities become struggles that must be dealt with daily. The mobility regime despite being centered around spatiality affects time, alters it but is also managed through it. This is especially palpable through state measures like curfews which do not only constrain Palestinians timewise thus limiting their activities but also contain them in a space where they are easily policed. Time and space are two edges of the same sword aiming at cutting Palestinian mobility and disabling its flexibility and smooth practice.

Since the Second Intifada, the mobility regime as maneuvered by the Israeli state has applied the Wall and the elaborate checkpoint system as a measure that reinforce the strategy of unilateral separation (Latte Abdallah and Parizot 2017). The rationale behind the establishment of this unilateral separation strategy was a securitization discourse that created a 'need' for Israelis to protect themselves from Palestinians. In the case of the Wall, its construction was a response to Palestinian suicide bombings in Israeli towns and to popular pressure demanding that Israel takes tangible measures to impose a unilateral solution. Overall, a unilateral separation is not meant to produce real separation of territories as much as it creates a false image of separate entities and maintains Israeli control over borders. The separation policy is an important element of the mobility regime; it simultaneously mobilizes a territorial imagination appropriate to the modern state and to systems of control (Havkin; Latte Abdallah and Parizot 2017) whereby there is no principle of symmetry between the two populations but rather the objective to contain the Palestinian other who is deemed very dangerous. The ambiguity of this process is that its purpose is not necessarily the division of territory and population but rather the formation of a filter system that grades populations according to their

right to mobility across borders (Latte Abdallah and Parizot 2017). Checkpoints embody this equivocation given how they intend to represent an international border for Palestinians who must undergo identity checks similar to those at airports, yet they do not represent an international border either. The asymmetry becomes even more visible when analyzing the ethnic and racial profiling that occurs in these spaces; while Israelis have witnessed a normalization of their movement across time, Palestinians experience the continual reinforcement of the occupation and its violence through the suspicion held over their mobility. Therefore, control techniques deployed by the mobility regime attempts to dissociate the trajectories of the two populations; they keep Palestinians at arm's length to facilitate the smooth flow of the Israelis through a fluid uninterrupted border-space. Palestinians are thus confined in fragmented areas that are riddled with obstacles and in which movement is impeded and routes cannot be planned due to the frequent, sometimes unscheduled, changes (Havkin; Latte Abdallah and Parizot 2017). By making Palestinian mobility unpredictable and risky, the Israeli state apparatus aims at discouraging and making it extremely exhausting for the target population to exist and to resist.

In his article about the mobility regime and its impact on Palestinians, Ronen Shamir argues that mobility regimes are based on a paradigm of suspicion in which power holders use an integrated 'risk management' system to limit the mobility of some people if their mobility is viewed as a threat or a risk of crime or terrorism (Shamir 2005, p.200). This suspicion paradigm presented reveals the unequal power structures in place among primarily two groups of people; in the Israeli-Palestinian case, it becomes visible that the paradigm and therefore the mobility regime itself is operated by the Israelis. The dominant group, Israelis, is characterized by their power to stigmatize, isolate, and increase the immobility of the dominated group, Palestinians, by controlling their exit and entrance privileges. The complexity of this system makes it even more difficult for Palestinians to navigate the space, especially considering the areas they live in and the authorities that govern them. The various levels of (im)mobility result from the fact that since 1948, the Israeli authorities have handed out differentiated ID cards to Palestinian residents which function as an instrument to limit Palestinian geographic and economic mobility (Tawil-Souri 2012). ID cards share a common history with other systems of identity registration such as censuses as modernist instruments of control connected to the state's desire for surveillance itself veiled with a language of security and technological advancement (Tawil-Souri 2012, p.160). This ID card system is instrumentalized to define which Palestinian can go where depending on their area of residence and the color of their ID card; it is visible evidence of the symbolic discrimination. Therefore, Palestinians in the West

Bank are subject to more restrictions than Palestinians in East Jerusalem, Haifa, or other Israeli areas. Uneven mobilities over these stratified territories enable Israeli control to extend over Palestinian territoriality, spatiality but also identity and corporeality (Ibid.). The ID card surpasses a functional identity, it is a pass towards a geographical present and a socio-economic future. It is then insufficient to study ID cards and the system they create if they are not examined through the relative mobilities they enforce on Palestinians in relation to the ones they give to Israelis.

Within the complexity of the mobility regime the ID card system coexists with the permit system which is another sophisticated apparatus to manage population movement (Berda 2018). This system reveals an institutional logic centered around the control and monitoring of populations through classifications of security. In this sense, Israel's persistent justification of the management of Palestinians' mobility and the constant violation of human rights is presented as an absolute necessity for the security of the Israeli state and its citizens. In his book 'Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank,' Yael Berda describes the permit system as a "bureaucratic labyrinth that governs the lives of millions of Palestinians in the West Bank" (Berda, p.11). Permits and other documents required for movement across checkpoints contribute to the codification of relationships between the subject and the state; these documents, including permits, constitute a sample of organizational practices that demonstrate the routine and mundane operation of the permit system. The permit regime is the core of the administration of the occupation especially in the West Bank; it is a peculiar set of organizations and technologies that are characterized with what Berda described as 'effective inefficiency.' This principle is a product of the ambiguity of an apparatus that is both civil and military and whose objectives are to create Palestinian dependency on the administrative system to widen the scope of control and to create uncertainty, disorientation, and fear within Palestinian society through the prevention of mobility (Berda, p.35). The normalization of such a system is also expressed in the security discourse which claims governments ought to manage 'dangerous' populations and keep their citizens safe from any physical threat. Population management structures have thus been developed to deal with these security threats through the deployment of technologies, expertise, and staff to prevent movement, support the collection of data about risk populations, the monitoring, identification, and labeling of target populations.

In addition to civilian populations, the configuration of the permit regime for Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories grew within a larger plan to transform the landscape of the labor force in Israel; the monitoring system which was established with the

Oslo Accords and highly benefitted Israel (Berda, p.24). Indeed, the movement and access of Palestinian workers to Israel turned out to be crucial to Israel's economy. Although this might sound like a contradiction to the constraining mechanism mentioned earlier that aimed at limiting the mobility of Palestinians, the dependence of Palestinians' livelihood and freedom of movement rendered the permit regime a powerful economic weapon for population management through distinction between labor and political status. The racial and ethnic separation of Palestinian workers from other workers in the job market fed into the hierarchy of the labor force in Israel, already characterized by stigmatization and stratification (Berda, p.24-25). To better achieve its policing goal, the permit regime encouraged Israeli institutions to harvest information about Palestinians through data, biometrics, and increased opportunities for surveillance. This contributed to the expansion of the Civil Administration's discretion in determining the distribution of permits and allowed the establishment of a system of classification and profiling. These Israeli technologies are not an exception, they are descendants from the British colonial system of surveillance in India which later developed into the rest of the empire including British Mandate Palestine. However, the complexity of the Israeli bureaucratic arsenal is historically unprecedented (Berda, p.36-37).

Space, ethnicity, and documents are the trinity of organizing the mobility regime. The first one through the legal spatial control and containment of Palestinians within the territory; the second is exclusion from citizenship and the third consists of administrative practices that establish a hierarchy through separate orders for different populations in the same territory (Berda, p.36). These three elements are supported by physical or moral violence through military force including the Israeli army and Border Police. The complexity and ambiguous maze-like structure of the mobility regime is an intentional attempt at bewildering its subjects and empowering its operators.

The study of space remains incomplete if not framed by dynamics of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is featured as an interpretative paradigm which highlights Israel's focus on territorial gains and border-making strategies. The fact is that territorial control and expansion is at the heart of the Israeli occupation's settler colonial project. Settler colonialism is a process and a long-term project that is centered around 'the logic of elimination of the native' (Amoruso et al. 2019, p.455) and it must be understood more as a 'structure [rather than] an event.' In this sense, settler colonialism differs from colonialism in its structuring of power and labor relations. The pure settlement colony's purpose is to maximize settler presence and eliminate indigenous presence on the land. Therefore, the economy should rely on the labor force of the

settlers and not the native colonized to provide autonomy and make their presence obsolete. According to Gershon Shafir, Israel could be described as a settler state in that its economy relies on settler and immigrant labor force while using the resources and land expropriated from the indigenous population (Amoruso et al. 2019). In this context, the conquest of labor can only be achieved through the conquest of land, and it is here that state violence and exclusion are combined with forced displacement and land expropriation (Ibid.). Settler colonialism's focus on land is thus closely linked to its logic of elimination so unlike colonialism, it does not destroy to exploit but to replace through the elimination of the indigenous population (Ibid.).

As an ongoing structure, settler colonialism also requires the settlers' continuous attempt to indigenize; in contrast to colonialism, the settler colonial project does not operate by sustaining the difference between colonizer and colonized, it only succeeds when it extinguishes itself - that is, when the settlers cease to define themselves as such and become 'natives' and their position is normalized (Amoruso et al. 2019, p.457). However, while settler colonialism was successful in maintaining this classic organization model in the 1948 areas, today's Israel did not manage to maintain it after the 1967 occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem (Ibid.). In what would later be known as the 1948 *Nakba*[1] for Palestinians, Israel eliminated the natives through population transfer, but settler colonizers failed to indigenize in the 1967 Occupied Territories wherein the distinction between occupier and occupied was starkly maintained. However, I observe a contradiction between the occupation regime and the settler colonial project. Indeed, the occupation is centered around the takeover of space through the construction of settlements but in doing so it establishes a framework that does not normalize the presence of settlers and thus their indigenization therefore jeopardizing the settler colonial project. Although these different structures seem incompatible and were not mentioned in the literature, settler colonialism continuous process that uses indigenous displacement, removal, and depopulation to eliminate Palestinians and inhabit the land with the Israeli settler population. This thesis tries to make sense of these complex systems by questioning the forms of agency that are available to Palestinians.

By examining the settler colonial paradigm and explaining the ways in which it challenges resistance practices, this thesis makes a case for Palestinian contestation of the occupation matrix. In order to do so, the paradoxical combination of the occupation system and the settler colonial project is used to re-frame the conflict in Palestine and look for alternative

[1] The *Nakba* was a mass exodus of over 700 000 Palestinians following their expulsion from their homes during the 1948 war. That same year, the state of Israel declared its independence.

forms of decolonization that go beyond solutions which fail to acknowledge and address the root causes of the system (Amoruso et al. 2019, p.461). Instead, it supports an analysis of ways in which the settler colonial context in Palestine would need to be decolonized through models that extend equal citizenship and rights to the land for Palestinians. The settler colonial framework does not only push us to understand the occupation system through which Israel operates, it also makes us rethink modes of liberation and decolonization that aim at restoring dignity and justice for Palestinians. This means starting the exploration of local modes of indigenous struggles for decolonization (Pappé 2018) and engaging critically with paradigms that do not adopt the success/defeat binary but rather understand resistance. Overall, the settler colonial model and the decolonial practice that challenges it offer an opportunity to think beyond established epistemological frameworks that have dominated the scholarship on Palestine and Israel and create new and alternative ways of imagining Palestine (Amoruso et al. 2019, p.462).

In parallel to the physical space, similar power dynamics and politically charged interactions are present in the virtual space. In fact, social media is often recognized for creating a network of people across the world that have never met but are advocating for similar causes. Malcolm Gladwell has developed a framework within which he debunks the idea that online activism is the root of all social movements. In a New Yorker article published in September 2010, Gladwell refers to Facebook and the likes – mainly Twitter at the time – as tools for building networks and "motivating people to do the things they do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice." In other words, Gladwell considers social media as a source of low-risk activism that favors weak-tie connections and is only well suited to "make [...] the existing social order more efficient [rather than becoming] [...] the enemy of the status quo." (Gladwell 2010). However, with the controversy in Sheikh Jarrah, social media has played an important role in informing and debunking ideas regarding the Israel occupation and the Palestinian Territories. Through different platforms, Palestinian users documented the situation on the ground including human rights violations committed by the Israeli authorities, take back control of the narrative around Sheikh Jarrah and introduce new strategies of resistance to the status quo. In his article, Gladwell criticizes Clay Shirky's claim that the internet illustrates "the ease and speed with which a group can be mobilized for the right kind of cause." He argues that the internet is in fact a simple form of organizing which favors weak-tie connections that give access to information but does not help users persevere in the face of danger. He writes that social media "shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined

activity toward those which promote resilience and adaptability." In that sense, tweeting pictures, and videos of what is happening in Jerusalem and other towns across the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) makes it easier for activists to express themselves but harder for their voices to have an impact. This would be the case if social media was the only medium used by Palestinians in their resistance against the Israeli occupation, but it is not. The efforts that are deployed on the ground and the mobilization of people during protests, sit-ins and other non-violent resistance practices are existent and remain steadfast despite the restrictions imposed both online and offline by Israel. When it comes to Gladwell's theory, according to which the internet's role in social movements remains passive, it is necessary to deconstruct the given definition of resistance and include information, documentation and awareness raising as vital components of dissent. It is also important to acknowledge the role of social media in mobilizing Palestinians on the ground all over the world, without essentializing it. The waves of protests in solidarity with Sheikh Jarrah and Palestine that took place during the Spring of 2021 were led by strong leaders and community organizers on the ground that were able to coordinate themselves through social networks online informing people of actions occurring wherever they were located. Therefore, social media was instrumentalized in a way that made it useful to grassroots activism that demanded international accountability for Israel's actions with the families in Eastern Jerusalem. The way that people were mobilized in the case of Sheikh Jarrah was through acts of communications which turned social media into an important part of the story as it was changing the nature of events and the nature of the social groups that were carrying them out. It enabled Palestinians to reclaim their agency especially regarding their narratives and their portrayals in the Israeli media within an online space that was not welcoming to their voices and stories. What Gladwell described as 'weak ties' when referring to online relationships between activists turned into a community within which people shared their experiences with discrimination, their grandparents' displacement, and dispossession of their land through events such as the *Nakba* or the bombing of their buildings and the killing of their families and friends in Gaza and elsewhere. Online activism was about taking back an online space using new strategies that took censorship and shadow banning into account.

Methodology and Research Design

Given the multidimensionality of my research, I want my methodology to cover all grounds. In this thesis, I use qualitative methods, mainly interviews, directed at Palestinians

living in the OPTs. I was able to talk to seventeen Palestinians including ten civilians and seven grassroots organization members. Among the ten civilians, one was from Majd Al Kurum in the town of Akka, six were from Bethlehem, one was from Ramallah and two were from Jerusalem, both East and West. Most of the civilian participants were university students, some were majoring in law and computer science, but the majority were medical students. Four have already graduated and are now respectively a gymnastics coach, a dentist, a freelance writer and an English teacher. Meanwhile, the grassroots organization members I established contact with include Ines and Mayss from the Palestinian Institute of Public Diplomacy (PIPD), Mona from 7amleh- The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, Manal from the Stop the Wall Campaign, George from The Right to Movement association, Rania, Claudette, Roger and Fouad from the Arab Education Institute's initiative 'Sumud Story House,' and Mohammed Al-Khatib, leader of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) which was involved in the Palestinian town of Bil'in.

Given the Covid-19 pandemic and diplomatic complications with my Tunisian passport, I could not travel to Israel-Palestine which meant that I had to call and video-chat with my participants online. On top of being an interesting experience, these online interactions enabled me to better analyze how distance can make it difficult to communicate especially when it comes to topics as sensitive as Israeli occupation and Palestinian resistance. Throughout my calls, I had to keep in mind that there are some elements my participants were not telling me out of fear of the consequences their words might have on their lives. Some of them even jokingly pointed out that Israeli authorities might be listening in on our conversations. These interviews helped me shape the narratives I was collecting and frame them in ways whereby they complemented the literature. I met many of the interviewees through a friend who lives in Bethlehem; I called them on WhatsApp and on Zoom. Another friend was supposed to do the same but the people she told were reluctant to participate. When I asked her why, she said that some of them were busy, some said they did not have a particular encounter with the Wall, so they had nothing to say, and others preferred not to say anything. "If you think about it, it is traumatic, if they have a very bad experience with the Wall, so I understand. I told them they should talk about it, but they did not want to," she explained. I understood the reluctance and decided to make a note of it. Before calling the participants, I sent them a consent form letting them know their right to opt out of the interview, remain anonymous, not answer questions they did not feel comfortable answering and choose to conceal some of the information they give me up to two weeks after the call. I also told them they could choose if they wanted the interview to be in Arabic, English or both; many chose

the latter. I took care of translating from Arabic to English and did my best to grasp their emotions. Regarding anonymity, most participants let me use their names while three wanted to remain anonymous; I refer to the former by their names: Asala from Majd Al Kurum near Akka, Dana, Leen, Sireen and Kate from Bethlehem, Mohammed from Abu Dis in Eastern Jerusalem and Mohamed Ayyad from Ramallah. My purpose was to make my interviewees as comfortable as possible; it was important for me that they knew my familiarity with the situation and my understanding of the repercussions their testimonies could have on their lives. I did my best so that participants trust me enough to confide in me regarding some traumatic situations they faced whether online or as they were crossing the Separation Wall. So, at the start of every interview, I introduced myself and my research work to the participants; I told them about my nationality, my background and gave them a quick summary of my thesis and the rationale behind it. I mentioned my nationality because I knew the friendly sentiments between Palestinians and Tunisians and thought this could help my participants feel more at ease in my (virtual) presence. I also talked about personal interests of mine to avoid a certain imbalance in information; it was important to me that these discussions did not consist of me extracting information from participants about very distressing moments in their lives without them knowing anything about me. Some participants even asked to see the questions beforehand, so I sent it to them.

To structure the interviews, I divided the questions into two categories: physical and virtual space. During the first part, I asked participants about their experience at the Wall; I started with simple questions like their first impression of the Wall, how many times they cross it per week, the rules they must follow when they do. Then I moved on to more complicated themes such as their relationship with the Wall as a border and the ways in which they practice contestation in that framework. My questions included their definitions and interpretations of *Sumud* in the context of the Wall in addition to the significance of the word 'resistance' in their opinions. Given that some of my interviews were in Arabic, I had to be careful in the words I was using especially when speaking about dissent and resistance; I decided that 'مقاومة' - *Muqawama*- was the appropriate term to use. In its Arabic form, *muqawama* means the 'opposition and refusal to submit to the will of others,' but it can also refer to 'a military or paramilitary organization that wages a guerilla war against the occupying enemy in cities and abroad.' Taking this double-meaning into consideration, I made sure to tell the participants at the beginning of the interview that when I used the word resistance or *muqawama*, I meant nonviolent, non-organized resistance to determine the individual ways in which they visualized it. I was not just looking for testimonies, I also wanted to see the realizations that participants

came to in regard to their personal acts of resistance and how they were able to reflect upon them during our conversations. In a second section, I dive deeper into organized nonviolent resistance which involve grassroots initiatives such as the creation of town committees and other local entities to contest the occupation.

In the second part, the questions were more focused on social media activity during the Sheikh Jarrah situation. I noticed that all the participants had contributed to the social media campaign online whether by writing posts, sharing videos and pictures or reposting content. The questions I asked ranged from the type of content participants were involved in, to their experience with censorship and shadow banning as well as the strategies they developed to circumvent the algorithm. I asked participants about their thoughts on social media and whether they saw it as a positive force within their struggle. Several participants, especially students, mentioned that the moment they realized the Sheikh Jarrah social media campaign was different than the ones before it was when they saw celebrities and influencers who have not really spoken up about the issue before, express their solidarity with the movement. This even encouraged some of them to post and share content online they usually thought was unhelpful. To push the conversation further, I ask participants how they feel about posting pro-Palestinian content using Israeli internet servers and telecommunications structure; this question brought up many interesting responses that lead to discussions around Israeli control of various services. To better grasp the intricacies of resistance mechanisms, this research treats answers given by the participants to complement the findings extracted from the academic literature. The essence of this research lies within its grassroots approach to resistance and its structure that relies on the personal testimonies of those who are subjects of the Israeli state apparatus.

For the second part which deals with the virtual space and forms of resistance online, I use a quantitative methodology to collect data from Twitter to better evaluate and understand users' content, their nature and the narratives they contribute to as well as their techniques to circumvent the algorithm and post despite processes of censorship that target them. Although Twitter is not the most popular platform in the Middle East, I decided to focus my study on it because of its independence from other platforms -considering that Facebook owns Instagram and WhatsApp- as well as the fact that its content is easier to grasp given the character limit it imposes on its users. Additionally, studying tweets is a way to portray the global dimension of the movement thus complexifying the conceptualization of borders in the context of the virtual space and eventually going beyond it. Compared to the physical space, the virtual space's porous borders mean that anyone can post about pro-Palestinian content without necessarily being in or from the region. Social media could be considered a 'democratization of resistance'

in the way in which it has enabled the expansion of acts of dissent online and made them accessible to whoever owns a smartphone and with a Twitter account. It is nevertheless difficult to determine the location of each user who posted about the situation in Sheikh Jarrah between May and August 2021 given that this information is usually added by users.

Given that a large section of this chapter revolves around shadow banning, I had to be careful about how I was going to demonstrate the existence of these processes by basing myself both on the testimonies of Palestinians and the data I collected. However, it can be complicated to show that a phenomenon exists when it is, itself, rooted in concepts of erasure and removal. Since I am not able to collect tweets that have been taken down by the platform, I decided to use another parameter to identify how Palestinians are being censored and whether their resistance strategies online are effective: examining and analyzing tweets that were flagged as 'possibly sensitive' by the platform. What I mean by effectiveness is the ability for content, to stay visible and shareable online rather than being taken down. This effectiveness contributes to the origination of a space where Palestinian narratives are preserved despite the online restrictions, they are subject to. Social media algorithms and machine learning mechanisms scan for certain words flagged by platforms as impermissible. These include words such as 'martyr,' 'Hamas,' 'resistance,' and 'Zionist.' These words are essential in the articulation of plights and the documentation of repression among Palestinians so when the latter are confronted with these restrictions, they must find other ways to convey their message online without being censored. This shadow banning pushed Palestinians to innovate when communicating online. In one of the interviews I conducted, I was told by Mona from 7amleh that no one really knows where these online strategies originate from or who invented them but there is a certainty in the ways in which they made "people grow closer together and collaborate." Therefore, by extracting several tweets that include alternative terms which I list and discuss in the second chapter of the paper, I can figure out the rationale behind their use, their effectiveness and the practicability when trying to document human rights violations.

As mentioned earlier, a category I paid attention to is 'possibly sensitive.' Flagging a tweet as sensitive when it is not, is a strategy utilized by platforms to hide content from its users, dissuade them from looking at it or simply make it less likely for them to see it on their feed. To find out whether encoded tweets help users circumvent the algorithm and not have their content flagged as 'sensitive,' I look up posts on Twitter between May and August 2021 that mention 'israel,' 'palestine' and 'فلسطين' written in full letters, which I refer to as 'normal tweets' then those that use alternative terminologies which include symbols such as asterixis and the '@' symbol, which I refer to as 'alternative' or 'variant tweets,' and I observe whether

there is a pattern that algorithms follow regarding the content they flag as sensitive and that is later taken down or hidden. There are many alternative terminologies and spellings that Twitter users have applied in their tweets; I chose ‘p@lestine,’ ‘isr*el’ and the dotless Arabic term that stands for ‘فلسطين’ -Palestine- ‘فلسطـىں.’ Dotless Arabic which dates to the 7th century (Drissner 2021) is another technique deployed online to avoid censorship as it creates a challenge to digital monitoring services. Including an Arabic word as a search term is a very strategic choice that opens new online territories for my analysis. In fact, it gives me the opportunity to not only look at content posted by English speakers and expand the sample include more local reactions. Regarding the other terms, it is important to point out that the coding method I used included a few similar alternative spellings such as ‘is@el,’ ‘i$rael,’ and ‘plestine’ or ‘p*lestin£.’ However, in my analysis of tweets, I will only focus on the terms I have selected. I do acknowledge that the tweets are not all posted by Palestinians which means that the process of online resistance I discuss is not only limited to those on the ground but also to anyone tweeting or posting in favor of the Palestinians. Following this data collection, I graph the volume of tweets using the different alternative terms throughout the time period I picked to identify peaks and draw a parallel between intensified online mobilization and events on the ground. I have also taken screenshots of some of the tweets that were flagged’ and by referring to Twitter’s definition of a content that is deemed sensitive, I show that most of them do not check any of the boxes and are thus censored for no valid reason. Through this data collection work and analysis, I plan on evaluating the type of content that was shared online during the Sheikh Jarrah movement, identifying censorship elements and the effectiveness of Palestinian strategies. I also recognize the role of machine learning and the difficulties it creates for social media users who are caught in a loop of innovation and constant renewal of their techniques. I demonstrate the effect or lack thereof of the machine learning mechanism by analyzing the flagging of alternative tweets throughout time to see if they are more likely to be flagged later in July or August than in May or June when they were first used.

PART ONE
PALESTINIAN CONTESTATION OF PHYSICAL BORDERS THROUGH PRACTICES OF SUMUD

Contextualization of the Wall

Discourse around the construction of a barrier separating Israelis and Palestinians has been circulating since 1992 following the killing of an Israeli girl. The Israeli leadership at the time and then in 1994 explained that the idea behind the barrier was a demarcation of a clear border that would follow the post-1967 lines. That year, a first section of the Wall was constructed following the border between Sharon and the West Bank. In 1995, the idea was starting to materialize, and the barrier turned into a security fence that would run parallel to the Green Line (Ozguc 2010), a demarcation line set out in the 1949 Armistice Agreements which served as the de facto borders of the State of Israel until 1967. After a series of suicide bombings in 1996, then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres approved the proposal suggesting erecting a two-kilometer-wide buffer zone along the Green Line with fences and electronic surveillance to prevent unauthorized crossings of Palestinians to Israel (Ibid.). This initiative was suspended then brought back during the Second Intifada in September 2000. Israeli leadership proposed two barriers: one along the Green Line, a demarcation line set out in 1949, and another deep within the West Bank separating Palestinian villages and Israeli settlements (Ibid.). This view was rejected by Sharon out of fear that the barrier might be seen as a political border. However, he ended up agreeing to a it as a way to block Palestinians along the 'Seam Zone,' a strip of land extending between the Green Line and the Separation Wall.

A year later, the Israeli government started to construct a multilayered fence complex through the West Bank (Ozguc 2010). This 'fence' was an advanced network of six to eight meters high concrete wall and wire barrier with electronic sensors, watch towers, patrol roads, buffer zones and checkpoints (UN OCHA OPT 2009). By mid-May 2006, 336 km out of a planned total 790 km had been constructed with a total of 83 iron gates along the Wall, dividing

land from their owners of which only 25 open occasionally (Korn 2008, p.118). According to the Israeli government, the concrete part of the barrier is built "only in areas where the threat of sniper fire is real or in areas in which it was impossible to build a fence for topographical reasons," (Israeli Ministry of Defense). When I asked Ines from the PIPD what the first reactions to the Wall were at the time, she told me "People did not realize that their lives would become nightmares just to come to Jerusalem or to go to university or access their land." She gave me the example of Bethlehem: "[Before the Wall], you would drive to Jerusalem [from Bethlehem] through one road, you are in and out quickly. Then they built the checkpoints and the Wall, and you have all these houses at the entrance of Bethlehem whose inhabitants became neighbors to the Wall and that was it." Meanwhile, from the Israeli point of view, the purpose of the Wall was to prevent terrorist attacks coming from the West Bank; while Palestinians refer to the construction as the 'Apartheid Wall,' Israel called it a 'Security Fence.' These semiotics around the barrier are not only indicators of how the two populations look at it, it also shows the enormous humanitarian impact the Wall has had on the lives of Palestinians. In the testimonies I collected for this thesis, many of the participants refer to it as the 'Apartheid Wall.' To maintain the authenticity of their words while pointing out the polysemy that such a structure has created on both sides of it, I decided to keep the term. I will continue to refer to the structure as the Separation Wall keeping a scientific perspective on the situation.

As these chapters discuss occupation strategies directed at Palestinians, it is important to mention that the Wall is not the only perpetrator of these processes and that using it as a lens is in no way an essentialization but rather a compelling angle I thought would be interesting to explore the Israeli occupation system through. In this case, the Wall operates as a case study and is not the only mechanism through which practices of entrapment, surveillance, ghettoization, and border-making are operated, it is rather an element within the larger Israeli system which enacts all of these to a certain extent. Placed within the mobility regime at the intersection of the permit and ID card system, the Wall has created its own bureaucratic and security apparatus by institutionalizing processes of segregation and settler-colonialism which these chapters will thoroughly dissect. Throughout the thesis, I also dive into other technologies attached to the Wall, mainly the checkpoints, which complement it.

CHAPTER I: THE SEPARATION WALL AS A PHYSICAL BORDER

I. Entrapment of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: The Wall as a Tool of Ghettoization

When framing the Separation Wall as a tool for discrimination, it is important to mention the process of segregation that it aims at achieving both physically and symbolically. Segregation in the Israeli-Palestinian context is based on both concrete policies and state practices as well as power dynamics and behaviors that have been established at the Wall and outside of it. Symbolically, the Wall sets up a stage for expressions of power and violence to come alive and be further exacerbated. Israeli authorities produce and maintain by force the stereotypes and identities which make, in their eyes, the Palestinians more and more like what they would have to be to deserve what is inflicted on them (Memmi 2002). In other words, the constant dehumanization and criminalization of Palestinians within the colonial apparatus not only allows actors of the Israeli state to absolve themselves of their acts but also enables them to exploit more those who they have dehumanized in the beginning. "We as Palestinians, we do not exist, we do not have a name or an identity. We are fighting for our existence," conveyed Dana. This symbolic separation of identities and populations serves to justify the entire system of occupation and especially the mechanisms through which it is present in the lives of Palestinians. The perpetuation of the Separation Wall and the continuity it has experienced is rooted in the 'failure' of the Wall itself; if the Wall's purpose is to keep Israelis safe and while the state keeps criminalizing Palestinians and their movement then the Wall appears to be a necessary tool that ought to keep operating. Therefore, the discursive construction of Palestinians as people who have an inherent desire to destroy Israel justifies the occupation and violence towards Palestinians through policies of settlement, displacement and containment which will be explored later on in the thesis. This discourse is further embodied by the architecture of the Wall itself and the advanced technology that is used within it to police the border-areas (Fusté 2010, p.818). Indeed, the entire crossing process with the long waiting lines, the metal detectors, the ID reading machines, the herd-like movement and the overall interactions with Israeli soldiers make it difficult and complicated for anyone to be considered human within the Wall. In this sense, the structure of the Wall itself becomes an added signifier

of the supposed dangerous qualities of these populations (Ibid.). The presence of the Wall itself seems surreal to some like Asala who cannot help but express her incredulity saying: “I cannot fathom the fact that there is still a wall in 2021.”

“The first time I saw the Wall, I remember not being able to see the horizon. The horizon is where the sky touches the land, right? We do not have that here. I am 23 years old, and I have never seen the horizon in Bethlehem,” confessed Dana during our interview. This is what the Wall inflicts on local populations that are hidden behind it. Despite the fact that physical separation is a process that is more focused on strategies of enclosure, it remains rooted in the exclusion of Palestinians. In a different interview, Mohammed Ayyad told me about his disillusionment when he discovered the limits the Wall imposed on him: “The first thing I thought of is how [the Wall] covered the sun. You could feel the rays of sunshine, but the sun was not visible. [I was wondering]: What is this Wall? Why is it enclosing us? And what is it trying to hide from us? I was curious. I also felt uncomfortable: I always thought that living in Ramallah, I was free. After I discovered the Wall, I realized that I was living in a box and that the city I lived in was an illusionary freedom.” Indeed, in addition to being a dividing structure, the Wall allows for the entrapment of Palestinian communities and their isolation from public resources and services. Israel is hence shrinking space and confining Palestinians to a specific territory where they feel trapped. Kate communicated this feeling when she referred to the Wall as a ‘Prison Wall’ saying that whenever she thinks about it, she is reminded of how small and overcrowded Bethlehem is and how there is no room for expansion. “Every population grows but for us, it gets more suffocating, there is no place to grow.” Additionally, the Wall functions as a regime that ‘blocks out’ Palestinian presence and is understood as a practice where exclusion and dispossession serve to deracinate populations. With its physicality, the Wall appears as commanding, menacing, speaking to varying regimes of surveillance, confinement, and other associated technologies. It suddenly shifts from an 8-meter-high concrete cemented barrier to a collection and an accumulation of exclusion areas and guard towers aiming at keeping Palestinians at a distance (Busbridge 2013, p.655). One of the participants I talked to lives so close to the Wall, she can see it from her window (see picture below).

Participant's view from her house in Bethlehem

"The Wall is always there when I leave the house and when I enter it [...]. It gives a feeling of being in an open-air prison. You are constantly reminded of the Wall, so you realize you are not living like the rest of the world, you are not free." This practice of enclosure is also used as a tool to hide Palestinians in an attempt to invisibilize them and erase their presence from the land and the collective memory replacing them with, quite simply, a wall (Pullan 2004). Ines sheds light on this invisibilization process by saying that "Invisibilization is one of the key processes of what the Wall is doing. [It] plays a huge part because it prevents [people] from seeing [...] further hiding the oppressed and the colonized from the colonizer." This erasure of Palestinians is an important part of the Israeli apparatus, and thus the Wall. It was showcased through various theories and behaviors throughout the 19th and 20th century as well as slogans such as the description "a land without people for a people without land" referring to Palestine's vacantness and the necessity for the Jewish people to populate it. In this framework, the Separation Wall is instrumentalized to bring to life the dream of creating a "pure community" on the Israeli side of the barrier and conceal an entire people behind it. On the other hand, walls and other security paraphernalia usually point to a feared subject while the technology itself overwrites that feared thing (Busbridge 2013, p.660). Fear and the sense of danger and threat are linked in a way to the security mechanism, making the feared population, Palestinians in this case, subsumed in their materiality. The Wall environment in which Palestinians exist thus serves not only to criminalize them giving them the same connotation of threat as the Wall itself but it also wipes out, obscures, and writes over their presence given the undesirability that is attached to their identities and intentions. On the Israeli side, the Wall remains a testament to a profound effective function whereby it does not need to be seen, rather it is enough that it is 'there' and felt as there. The Wall is therefore landscaped in such a way that

rising gardens obscure a large part of it transforming what is an 8-meter-high concrete blemish on the Palestinian side into a pleasant background on the Israeli side. Asala elaborated on this saying that "the Wall is visible in Jerusalem and because Western Jerusalem is mostly made up of settlements, the Wall looks very pretty. [In that area] it is not even cement; it is ceramics as if it was a Wall in your house and it is not as high [...]." This contrast that is observed serves to create a specific framework that aims at shaping perception and discourse of each side of the Wall.

As the Wall aims at restricting Palestinians to their villages and towns, ghettoization is the process it uses to keep such control over them. Ghettoization aims to change the organization of space and dictate new spatial relations while reinforcing an already existent imbalance of power; it fragments the physical and symbolic space of Palestinian society thus enabling Israel to control it by creating new relations between the 'inside' and the 'outside,' not only meaning between Israelis and Palestinians but also between Palestinians themselves. In one of the interviews I conducted, Mohamed, an inhabitant from Abu Dis in Jerusalem told me that: "something that people usually do not know unfortunately, yes, the Wall separates us from our land but a great number of Arabs on the other side of the Wall feel like they are better than us. And of course, there is discrimination between those from the West Bank and those from Jerusalem." This is a clear indication that in fragmenting Palestinians, Israel does not only go about it from a physical and spatial approach, it also creates relational and social instabilities within the community. Consequently, the modeling of a certain hierarchy wherein some people have more advantages than others in terms of mobility and opportunities generates a sense of uncomfort and disdain which leads to the weakening of resistance. In her own words, Manal said that "since the beginning, [Israelis] centered their work on exclusion and segregation. The Wall is just a translation of that on the ground: how to weaken the colonized people by fragmenting them." According to Loïc, the ghetto can be theorized as a 'social prison' in that it implies that enclosing a stigmatized population can neutralize the material and symbolic threat it poses for those in power and for society in general (Wacquant 2000). To better understand the process, it is necessary to frame the workings of the ghetto in the West Bank as a mechanism of ethnoracial closure and control. Following the 1967 war and even more so since 1977 Israel has exercised a double policy with the Occupied Palestinian Territories combining territorial integration with demographic separation (Korn 2008, p.117). This meant that the military government was given the permission to confiscate Palestinian lands and transfer them to Jewish settlers resulting in the separation and fragmentation of Palestinians

and the incorporation of settlements within the community thus creating an alienating rupture. Between 1967 and 1990, a time during which borders between Israel and the Palestinian Territories were relatively open, Palestinian workers were employed in Israel and given the authorization to cross. This showcases a state of limited movement that was tied to the economic prosperity and benefit of Israel which was rooted in a capitalization on Palestinian labor. However, with the Oslo process, there was a significant change in policy that went beyond the construction of the Separation Wall and the establishment of 'permanent borders' as stated by then-Prime Minister Sharon. Israel was seeking to neutralize the 'demographic threat' by separating itself from the Palestinians (Korn 2008, p.120). The purpose behind this strategy was not the separation of territory but rather the marginalization of Palestinians; the Oslo Accords gradually became a process whereby Israel was setting borders through the confiscation of land, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the construction of bypass roads. Successive governments proceeded to use this process as a ruse to perfect the means of controlling Palestinian communities by worsening the restrictions on their mobility with the aim of guaranteeing control over as much Palestinian-free land as possible (Ibid.). The Oslo process charted the path for the fragmentation of the Territories into autonomous-like enclaves, leading to the disintegration of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by splitting them into separate territorial entities, unable to sustain themselves economically, and with no sense of political agency. This strategy of fragmentation was the first step in the process of ghettoization that the West Bank and Gaza were undergoing at the time. Other events such as the Second Intifada in 2000, which was also the igniter of the Wall construction, carried great weight in speeding and tightening the siege of the Palestinians (Korn 2008, p. 121). Since then, Palestinian mobility was deemed suspicious, and Palestinians' freedom of movement was further restricted by a combination of checkpoints, closed roads, and locked gates. Furthermore, the institution of a permit and an ID card system as well as a list of restrictions on movement resulted in the creation of Palestinian enclaves which were often equated to the Bantustans that were established by the Apartheid regime in South Africa to segregate the indigenous population while better exploiting its labor force. However, unlike Bantustans, the Palestinian enclaves resemble a classic ghetto; they are smaller, splintered and they serve as a sort of container for storing populations deemed unnecessary or dangerous. Within these enclaves, Palestinian inhabitants were trapped behind barbed wire, fences, ditches, and walls, including the Separation Wall. These impoverished communities lacked infrastructure and were secluded from public services and vital resources such as water, agricultural land, medical centers, and workplaces. Manal highlighted this by telling me how the Wall strengthened the Israeli regime

“in terms of ghettoization of Palestinians and forcing [them] to live in overcrowded enclaves. Overall, the Palestinian ghettos were designed to preserve the territories under Israeli control without providing for the existence of non-Jewish populations (Korn 2008). The fragmentation of the Palestinian territories, which can be attributed to the ghettoization process, represented a channel towards the destruction of political and civil organization as well as the dismantling of the nature and national fabric of Palestinian society.

Although the Wall is not the main actor within the ghettoization process, it is still considered an important tool in Israel’s illegal and ongoing annexation which will be discussed later in this chapter. The Wall’s path and the mobility regime it is associated with contributed to the isolation of several communities residing in the West Bank into ghettos. According to the Stop the Wall movement, a Palestinian grassroots anti-Separation Wall organization, the Wall literally cements the existence of segregated reserves and ghettos for Palestinians. The organization also states that these ghettos mirror both a regime that relegates Palestinians into unsustainable areas and confine them to isolated reservations. Therefore, the primary aim of the ghettoization project in the West Bank is to imprison the Palestinian population and isolate it from basic services; this, along with the loss of land, markets and resources, results in the inability of communities to sustain themselves adequately and with dignity (Stop the Wall Website). To reinforce their presence on both sides of the Wall, Israeli authorities deployed control mechanisms in the heart of the Palestinian enclaves; this process of ‘debordering’ was enacted through the expansion and multiplication of Jewish settlements within the OPTs. This formed what the Israeli army called ‘land cells’ wherein potential opening and closing of enclaves was set up to close Palestinian villages on security grounds (Latte 2021). These spatial reconfigurations isolated Palestinian spaces from each other and allowed their potential closure while policing traffic between them. These mechanisms framed by the mobility regime served to thicken the border turning the West Bank into an in-between border space (Ibid.).

For Palestinians, the Wall is just an additional way of stealing from them; its construction has resulted in numerous spoliations and destructions that imprisoned them and restricted their physical, social, and economic agencies. In fact, the Wall embodies the limits on movement progressively imposed on Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the 1990s (Latte & Parizot 2016). It has imprisoned them in the ghetto which has been gradually reduced in size to almost nothing and its conditions have been made worse over time (Ibid.). In describing her anxiety about the Wall, Kate says that “it starts to feel like prisons in dystopian movies like the Hunger Games where they live in ghettos.” Generally speaking, the ghettoization as enacted by the Wall is another mode of controlling Palestinian space by

operating as a mechanism that dissuades Palestinians from leaving their areas of residence and reducing to the bare minimum their attempts to travel (Korn 2000). The next section dissects the surveillance system that goes hand in hand with the ghettoization process through arbitrary humiliating systems such as the permit and the ID card.

II. Policing Palestinian Mobility: The Separation Wall's Physical and Institutional Surveillance System

Within the framework of the mobility regime and using strategies of entrapment, the Separation Wall reinforces the Israeli state's ability to control the movement of Palestinians and police their agency. This process particularly interesting to analyze given the erasure the previous section was discussing the invisibilization of Palestinians through mechanisms of confinement and ghettoization. Indeed, this hyper-visibilization of Palestinians' presence is operated through the Wall's commanding physicality and the associated technologies it mobilizes for these purposes. The Wall is not just an eight-meter-high concrete cemented barrier, it is a collection and an accumulation of razor wire, emptied exclusion areas, guard towers, electronic sensors, checkpoints, and motion sensors (Bubridge, 2013, p.655). Ines, who is the PIPD advocacy director, pointed out that checkpoints, like the Qalandiya one in Jerusalem, preceded the construction of the Wall "but it was very small, it was a few blocks and two lines and then it became this big airport terminal with watchtowers because with the Wall came the watchtowers. It was not just a separation, it was watching and surveilling and solidifying and concretizing the checkpoints." This proves the ways in which the Wall did not only embody the surveillance apparatus, it also contributed to strengthening already existent tools such as the checkpoints in their policing role. Going back to the initial rationale behind the construction of the Wall, it is possible to understand the reason behind the electronic surveillance tools that adorn it; the protection of Israelis is intrinsically linked to the policing of Palestinians who are deemed a threat to Israel's security. In this context, Dana expressed her confusion when her friend was arrested because they found a ruler in his bag as he was crossing the Wall, saying it was a threat. Similarly, another participant from Bethlehem found the dynamic paradoxical, admitting she did not understand how soldiers who are "[...] surrounded by the Wall as if it was their castle" managed to feel threatened "despite the fact that they have their guns and their Wall." Therefore, although the entrance and exits of Palestinians are registered through the Wall, the general Palestinian movement is still considered suspicious.

The Wall thus enables Israeli authorities to monopolize the legitimate means of movement for Palestinians both internally and across national boundaries.

Meanwhile, movement is controlled and managed through various types of organisms such as checkpoints and other technologies of surveillance; in this system, the movement of every Palestinian is carefully observed, calculated, and controlled. Surveillance within the Wall is manifested in various ways and is not only used to exclude, it rather intervenes in relation to the population and space that is excluded. The Wall functions through hierarchical surveillance and strict observation which make Palestinians hyper visible; it does not only operate on the population level, it manages every individual Palestinian body. Using these techniques, the Wall becomes a tool of spatial monitoring in the way that it invests its own spatial partitioning by dividing the West Bank into areas thus creating its own cartographic reality. On the one hand, checkpoints enable the registration of every Palestinian and on the other, the route of the Wall renders the separation of settlements from Palestinian towns and cities. Just like that, the Wall creates different legal, economic, and social dynamics for different populations and individuals (Ozguc 2010) which explains the existence of two types of spaces: the continuous and fluid Israeli space that is full of certainty and predictability and the fragmented Palestinian space lined with obstacles that generate uncertainty but also violence from the Israeli authorities. In such situations, violence can take many forms such as in Mohammed Ayyad's case as he recounted a traumatic experience he had when he was very young: "I was crossing the checkpoint and the scanning machine kept beeping and I did not know why, so a soldier took me aside. They took me to a room and started searching me. I was really scared so I started yelling and crying. I have had a phobia from soldiers ever since. I did not understand why they separated me from the rest of my family, why they took me to a room, why they asked me to take off my clothes."

Therefore, the material components of the Wall, whether it is the checkpoints, the barbed wire, the cameras, or the soldiers are all staged together with the purpose of not only keeping an eye on Palestinians while judging their mobility as a threat, but also creating a space where violence can thrive behind the veil of securitization. In this sense, the Wall draws a line between the landscape of order (Israel) and chaos (Palestine) which it contributes to producing. By operating through a hierarchical surveillance system and a strict observation methodology, the Wall aims at hyper-visibilizing Palestinians, regulating their mobility by assigning each individual their name, place, body and death by means of omnipresence (Foucault 1997, p.199). Although this chapter emphasizes violence at the Wall as a driver of anger and frustration, I insist that the presence of the Wall itself, no matter the mechanisms that operate it, is what is

at the core of the struggle. This was a sentiment I observed when talking to Dana. She told me that she should not have to be a victim of violence or abuse for the Wall to be wrong: "The mere fact that I have to wake up in the morning to cross this 'thing', [is enough]. Whether the process takes five minutes or 30, it is the same for me, whether they spit on me or tell me I am the queen of Bethlehem is the same for me."

Through the control and discipline of space, bodies and knowledge, the Wall creates its own regime of truth by circulating narratives using a securitization discourse rooted in the marginalization of Palestinians to justify its existence. This marginalization has jarring effects on the ways in which Palestinians experience life through spatial distribution and movement. One example was given to me by Leen who told me that "when people get closer to the Wall, they become scared so they turn down their Palestinian music because it might disturb the Israelis." In acting as a third space, the Wall not only monitors population movement, it also reorganizes Palestinian life through space thus constructing a social dimension on top of the physical one. As a third space, the Wall's organization, meaning and use is a product of social translation, transformation and experience; Palestinians and Israelis are caught in a game of power dynamics that the latter has defined, and the former is still learning to navigate. It shifts from a cemented building to become an element in an uninterrupted process of becoming depending on those who want to cross it and the gatekeepers who decide whether they are allowed to. It is therefore striking to observe how the Wall is a representation of 'life' for Israelis (Ozguc 2010). Through policies and political communication schemes, the Israeli government claims that the saving of lives and containment of terror can only occur through the establishment and continuity of the Wall. Consequently, the process of surveillance in the Wall space alludes to a tendency of equating Palestinian life to a bare one; one that is based on survival rather than life itself. The dehumanization mentioned in the previous section of this chapter characterizes the Wall; the structure becomes a camp where bare life, as defined by Giorgio Agamben, is a medium of violence and oppression aimed at subjugating Palestinians to Israeli power and sovereignty (Ozguc 2010). According to Agamben (1998), bare life is a form of life that can be killed but not truly lived nor sacrificed. This means that the only power that affects it is the sovereign decision to reduce it to bare life, limiting it to a survival instinct and making it cease to exist eventually. Agamben argues that bare life is caught in a zone of indistinction, a sort of legal and political vacuum that contributes to the practices of sovereign power. This was illustrated in Kate's comment about the unwritten rules to follow at the Wall saying that "when [soldiers] ask you a question, you must answer them, you cannot complain

or shout at them even if they shout at you. You must be submissive [because] when you cross you are under their mercy [...].” Leen also shared her view saying that from what she has seen, “[soldiers] do not bother to look at you. For them, you are inferior, so they do not even acknowledge your presence.” For another participant, interactions with soldiers do not have to be violent to be considered dehumanizing, she explains that “[soldiers] take any opportunity possible to undermine you as a Palestinian like when they tell you that you are ‘good to go’ or when they have a say in whether you make it to class on time.” Mohammed Ayyad, on the other hand, described the way he became so desensitized, he started going through the motions with no understanding of what can happen to him at any minute. “Every time I cross, [...], I have this nihilistic feeling. I feel like my autonomy is dismantled, [...], like my existence does not have a purpose.” The multidimensionality of these Palestinians’ feelings thus serves as a concrete example of how ‘bare life’ is lived or rather endured at the Wall.

In this framework and by embodying an apparatus of surveillance and policing, the Wall becomes a materialization of the spatial arrangement of the sovereign state of Israel. In describing bare life conditions, Agamben puts too much emphasis on the sovereignty and power of the dominant force and does not grant resistance the important role it plays within this dynamic. In this top-down theory, sovereign power is the only one who decides what happens to bare life so the capacity of the relation between the sovereign and the lives it rules is limited to the dominant power of the sovereign themself. However, in reality, the sovereign, here the Israeli state apparatus expressed through the Wall, faces contestation and resistance which questions its existence and challenges it; its power is not the only one that ought to be considered. The Wall is a socially constructed space that is reshaped and completely debunked by those it seeks to control and surveil; in this case, Palestinians represent the countermovement that aims at reaching a state of emancipation and freedom (Ozguc 2010), at taking down the Wall even symbolically and leave the state of a bare life to reach a full experience of life that goes beyond survival. The resistance angle of the Separation Wall is studied and analyzed later in this chapter.

In addition to spatial ordering and disciplinary methods orchestrated by the physicality of the Wall and the context it produces, surveillance is institutionalized through a bureaucratic body that expands Israel’s power and places it at the center of every Palestinian’s life. Documents such as ID cards and permits are stapled to the identity of those crossing, defining where they can go, how long they can move for even directing their interactions with authorities at the Wall. The Wall is hence an instrument of surveillance used not only to prevent and

monitor the passage of people but also to put Palestinians beyond the sight of the Israeli Jewish population. As mentioned previously, the Wall does not act alone, it is surrounded by different elements of the Israeli mobility regime that guide it towards its goal of policing Palestinian movement. One of these many elements is the ID card Palestinians must possess to cross the Wall or any other independent checkpoint. This card, which is referred to as the *Hawiyyah*, is both an identification document that allows the categorization of Palestinians as they move across space and the intersection between a visible and tactile means of power and a tool of confrontation and resistance. The existence of the card is proof of Israel's purpose to segregate Palestinians as well as the institutionalization of an infrastructure of control that is centered around Palestinians' continuous presence on the land (Tawil-Souri 2011, p.68). So, although the ID card is just a mundane document, in this context, it remains a clear manifestation of state processes that do not operate as a separate reality behind a piece of paper but as a symbolic and material resource on which they draw and permeate everyday life in a powerful and paradoxical way. Similar to censuses, permits and passports, ID cards are considered modernist instruments of control connected to a state's desire for surveillance, itself couched in a non-discriminatory language of security, safety and administrative advancement that legitimizes its practices both domestically and internationally.

There are three types of identification documents used in Israel-Palestine and they are given to people depending on their place of birth: the West Bank and Gaza ID, both in green casings, and the Israeli ID in a blue casing. These colors are symbolic of a hierarchy in mobility and freedoms on the ground. For instance, those carrying a West Bank ID can only move around the West Bank and are required by Israeli authorities to always carry their ID on them. To cross the Wall, a West Bank ID carrier must be in possession of a permit from the state, but this process is extremely long and complicated and requires applicants to fulfill a number of criteria further limiting their geographic agency. As for the Gaza ID, it does not allow much mobility without a permit. As seen here, the ID card system is closely linked to the permit system which demands that any Palestinian wanting to cross the Wall or any checkpoint obtain a permit from the state. In fact, the permit system goes hand in hand with mechanisms of surveillance and the violation of freedoms. Dana described this in detail when telling me about the process she must go through to receive her magnetic card which allows her to potentially obtain a permit: "They scan our faces and take our fingerprints so we can get the card [...]. They take every single information about you [...]. This is a violation of privacy that we have to undergo." Dana also explained that this process usually takes place in an office but with the Covid-19 pandemic, Palestinians had to apply online thus giving the Israeli authorities access

to their private data. Human rights organizations have also recorded the feeling of humiliation Palestinians go through to get a permit which would allow them to do mundane things such as go to school, to work to the hospital or even to take part in relatives' funerals (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2006, p.1104). Finally, the Israeli ID, which is at the top of the ID card hierarchy, is branched into two types according to the region: the Jerusalem ID and the 1948 ID that refers to the lands occupied by Israel in 1948. The difference between the two is that only those who carry the 1948 ID have an Israeli passport and are thus considered Israeli citizens. As for Arab Jerusalemites, they either have a 'laissez-passer' that is meant to serve as a passport or a temporary Jordanian passport (Welcome to Palestine). The permit regime was created as part of Israel's bureaucratic and security apparatuses and eventually led to the confinement of Palestinians in the West Bank. These restrictions on movement were instituted first with the magnetic ID cards and later when the state introduced permits (Ozguc 2010). The cancellation of the 'general exit permit' for Palestinians who wanted to go to Israel and the institutionalization of the closure policy substantiated the permit regime and its operation in Israel-Palestine. The Wall made it even more visible and complex when, in 2003, the area between it and the Green Line was declared a closed 'Seam Zone' and a permit was required for Palestinians residing in and entering the area. This meant that Palestinians aged 16 and above had to have a long-term residency or permanent residency permit to live in their homes in the Seam Zone area and non-residents above 12 needed to have a visitor permit to be able to enter the closed area. This system gave the Israeli government the possibility to monitor and police every single Palestinian that was either entering or exiting the West Bank. Such a system perfectly individualizes Palestinians making them constantly visible to the Wall's gaze while simultaneously maintaining jurisdiction over the entire Palestinian population. In other words, the Wall was operating as an 'optical machine of human groupings' by introducing different types of permits and creating different population groups (Ozguc 2010; Miller 1983, p.2). Through this ID card system, the Separation Wall renders Palestinians more legible, accessible, embraceable for the security interests of the state while also discriminating against them thus ensuring that the former remain unequal citizens (Tawil-Souri 2011, p.76). The ID hence serves as a point of physical contact between the Israeli authorities, representatives of the state apparatus, and Palestinians within the Wall, a space where Israeli logic and bureaucracy of population control, state securitization and surveillance meets Palestinian exhaustion and continuous contestation. There are cases where the physical contact between the two actors is imbued with violence and humiliation: this is not simply the realization of the ID card as a space where the Israeli state apparatus touches the Palestinian body but of the ID card's

material centrality as a marker of all Palestinians' bare life (Tawil-Souri, p.82). So, when acting as disciplinary tools within a logic of securitization, ID cards are experienced as a dehumanizing experience for Palestinians who are ranked according to their identities and places of residence. For instance, Asala who is from Majd Al-Kurum in Israel expressed how she "might be a little bit privileged" because of her blue ID. "When the soldiers are rude, I can just tell them to shut up and they cannot do anything to me except talk back but if someone with a Palestinian ID said something, they might shoot him," she tells me. Mohamed from Eastern Jerusalem confirmed this difference in treatment saying: "sometimes Jerusalemites [who have the blue ID] have a better life when it comes to salaries and leisure." However, a Western Jerusalemite has also pointed out that her blue ID does not protect her from everything and that she does face discrimination. She explains: "People in the West Bank have their own struggle, their own IDs, their own situation, and people in Gaza have a whole different story. In the 1948 territories, it is a whole other struggle and Jerusalem as well. [Israel] creates this division and sometimes, you feel it working, that you are being separated from these people [...]. We feel like each one of us is in a different bubble and it makes it harder for us." In this sense, the ID card system operates following a logic of separation and identity categorization as means of fragmenting the population.

Israel's plethora of surveillance tools and practices can be summarized through processes that these tools are associated with at the Wall. As a third space, the Wall is a demonstration of how it comes alive socially and becomes a living, almost breathing actor in the Israeli mobility regime. At the same time, surveillance is manifested through both the ID and permit system to track Palestinians in their movement, which is deemed suspicious and threatening to the Israeli state. The institutionalization of surveillance designated a great step not only in policymaking but also on the ground as it simultaneously controlled every individual Palestinian body and maintained power over the population. ID cards and permits at the Wall became channels through which people were monitored and chased; they defined the identity and freedom of each Palestinian and held power over their movement. The chain reaction that the ID card system and the permit regime created contributed to the smooth functioning of the whole surveillance matrix within the Separation Wall. Following the grid that the surveillance system has established, strategies of spatial monitoring and fragmentation were deployed to facilitate surveillance as well as control of the Palestinian population. A great illustration of this is a story Ines told me about a person she met up with who expressed his fear when walking down the road or crossing the street. He felt that "[t]here will always be someone that will question why you are here, and you can be arrested for nothing," that "it is about

making you feel like your inner self has walls too even if it is not a physical one. The Apartheid Wall is made so you grow up feeling that this space is not made for you, that as a Palestinian or an Arab, you are not safe, you do not have the right to security." The next section on spacio-cide investigates this specific mechanism, its functionality as well as its repercussions on Palestinians.

III. Killing Space Spacio-Cide through Annexation of Palestinian Land

Space in the Israeli-Palestinian context does not only represent territoriality and land, it embodies a set of power-dynamics and social relations that highlight a concentration of power and a will for resilience and resistance. Space is also in constant contact with the Wall, which takes it, rearranges it, monitors it and eventually kills and appropriates it through mechanisms of annexation and land takeover. In the Israeli settler-colonial framework, space is the target; territorial control and expansion is at the heart of the occupation's project given the parallel it draws between territorial seizure and the elimination of indigenous presence on the land. The killing of space, also referred to as spacio-cide, refers to the targeting of land for the purpose of rendering inevitable the 'voluntary' transfer of the Palestinian population primarily by targeting the space upon which they live (Hanafi 2010, p.106). The lexical kinship with the term 'genocide' implies that spacio-cide could draw on certain assumptions underpinning the former category (Ibid. p. 111). So, the use of spacio-cide emphasizes both the magnitude and the wreckage and deliberate exterminatory logic against space livability that has underpinned the assault on the space, whether it is build/urban area, landscape, or land property (Ibid.). Spacio-cide is thus portrayed as a deliberate ideology that uses active processes and practices of widespread destruction produced by different actors: the military forces, settlers' land grabbing, urban planners, and capitalist real-estate speculators. In this regard, the interplay of law and landscape architecture meant that Israeli institutions had the power to grab and allocate land based on religious identity, facilitating the transfer of property from Arab to Jewish ownership. Thus, the law was instrumentalized as a proxy for what was a process of violence embodied in the forcible removal of Palestinians from their land and the transfer of their property to settlers. But in this case, the law did more than transfer property, it created a different map of borders and boundaries which produced spaces of access and belonging but most importantly spaces of trespass and exclusion. This chapter does not go into detail to

discuss these laws because what is of interest is not the legal processes behind spacio-cide but rather how it operates as well as the consequences it carries in its wake.

Spacio-cide is based on different dynamics and strategies with a common purpose: the destruction and appropriation of Palestinian physical and social living space. For instance, this process is made possible through the categorization of Palestinians into different groups with the aim of rendering them powerless. In fact, Israel's settler-colonial project has turned spacio-cide into an official state policy by which Israel establishes the potentiality of a structure of juridical-political delocalization and dislocation aimed at transferring the Palestinian population whether internally or outside of fluid state borders as defined by Israel (Hanafi 2010, p.107). This means that the main Israeli target here is not the population directly, but rather the space it was born and raised in. The Jerusalem Emergency Committee, a working group set up by Jerusalem-based organizations after the April 2002 Israeli invasion of the West Bank, published different reports showcasing the systematic destruction of public places in the region. These reports communicated that all but two Palestinian ministries and 65 organizations on the ground were spared in the total or partial destruction of space during that time. In this case, the genocide of space cannot be framed as a side effect of the conflict whereby all means are mobilized to hurt the enemy, it is rather proof of the intent of Israel to not only destroy building environments and urban infrastructures, but also to eliminate the memory of the population that is held in these edifices. Indeed, Palestinian space goes beyond places where Palestinians live or reside, it is the birthplace of Palestinian narratives, of historical events that have defined personal experiences and public discourses, of heritage, cultures, and way of life. Therefore, spacio-cide as enacted by the Israeli authorities, does not restrict itself to physical space, it also controls and takes over the social, personal, and collective identities and relationships space produces. In that sense, through the killing of space, Israeli domination relies on a balance that is centered around the reduction of Palestinian lives to 'bare life' (Ophir 2004). In fact, control over Palestinian Territories refers to the simultaneous operation of destruction of habitable space without the expulsion of too many people, the production of impoverishment without starvation and the denial of access to medical treatment without allowing the outbreak of epidemics (Ibid.). That is why, compared to other colonial conflicts, the Palestinian *Nakba* was based mostly on the loss of land, among other violent encounters. Here, one of the central elements that characterize the Palestinian experience is the dispossession of space by Israeli authorities. Ines estimates that the Wall's purpose is the fragmentation of space through the creation of small islands where Palestinians reside, "[Israelis] are literally hijacking space," she says. To better contextualize spacio-cide strategies, it makes sense to situate them within a

settler colonial framework. With settler colonialism being focused on territorial gains rather than native exploitation, it makes sense to discuss the killing of space, its isolation and eventual reconversion into an Israeli space through the building of settlements on Palestinian land. The maximization of settler presence thus entails the ripping of the Palestinian social and economic fabric as well as the elimination of their space of existence and their reduction to bare life. Throughout the Second Intifada, the Israeli state apparatus aimed at achieving a 'demographic transfer' of the Palestinian population by transforming Palestinian Territories into mere land, thus taking away Palestinian agency and sovereignty over their space. This operation was conducted by means of spacio-cide and through mechanisms of Jewish settlement expansion, harassment, and violence as well as Israeli Army-imposed curfews and forced displacement of Palestinian families. Additionally, housing demolitions were ordered as another tactic to induce the intentional transfer of Palestinians with more than 73,000 housing units damaged and 7,633 destroyed completely in the West Bank and Gaza between September 2000 and September 2005 (Hanafi 2010, p.111). Overall, spacio-cide strategies are focused on the fragmentation, division, and eventual destruction of Palestinian space as an attempt to convert it into a space where Israelis can live. Manal emphasized on the fragmentation dimension by explaining that "every area in Palestine has different things to fight compared to other areas so we are not even united under one main goal. We are fragmented physically, and we are fragmented in terms of [what we are resisting]."

Following this tight balance, the Separation Wall practices spacio-cide through various mechanisms, this chapter will focus on one of them: annexation of land. Although the Wall is not the main tool of annexation, it still incorporated some 85% of the 500,000-settler population on the Israeli side (Busbridge 2013, p.658) as well as de facto annexing some 8.5% of Palestinian lands by 2011. The Wall's path and associated regime are also planned to annex 46% of the West Bank, isolating communities into ghettos and military zones. Manal went as far as describing the rationale behind the construction of the Wall to annex land while using security as a justification: "the Wall was built to annex more land and to refine and advance the Israeli apartheid system by cementing the Bantustans that Israel has been imposing and forcing us to live in." In this sense, with its accompanying regime of permits, IDs and regulations for West Bank Palestinians, the Wall not only impedes Palestinians' free movement but also dispossesses them of their land acting as a mechanism for continued occupation and settlement. In this regard, the Wall is not as much a multi-dimensional technology for controlling and regulating space, bodies and populations, as it is a statement of Israeli state

dominance (Ibid.). The primary purpose of the Wall is thus carved in the, often violent, ways in which it can extend and reproduce domination by reinscribing it in space (Gordon 2008). In its 2004 ruling on the illegality of the Wall in the occupied West Bank, the International Court of Justice stated that it considered the construction a 'fait accompli' which, in the long term, would be tantamount to *de facto* annexation by Israel of Palestinian lands.

Consequently, the aim of this annexation was to incorporate as much strategic territory as possible under Israeli control while at the same time minimizing the number of Arab residents. This way, the Wall was given two functions: delineating an Arab area to contain and limit it and creating another area by the preference given to the Jewish sector and its development. Within this logic, Jerusalem was one of the main cities which witnessed the touches of constructing the Separation Wall. In addition to the urban fabric, the city's structure is interlinked by complex cultural, social, and economic relationships. The overall body of the city found itself encircled by the Wall and a ring of settlements around. This served to further isolate the city and especially its Eastern part from the rest of the West Bank. In this regard, the Wall cuts through villages and neighborhoods separating families and interrupting social and economic ties which further ghettoized areas taken by the Israeli settler-colonial project such as Jerusalem (Stop the Wall). Since 1967, Israel has been attempting to link East Jerusalem to West Jerusalem; it has been doing so through settlement activities which caused the systematic destruction of multiple Palestinian homes with the purpose of expanding the Jewish quarter (Thawaba 2011, p.123). Additionally, Israel has relied on discriminatory zoning practices, complex planning regulations as well as house demolitions to block Palestinian development from available land leaving it vacant until it is expropriated for 'public use' for the exclusive use of Israeli Jewish residents (Ibid.). The eventual ring of illegal Jewish settlements around the core of Jerusalem were instrumentalized in an attempt to cut it off from Ramallah in the North and Bethlehem in the South as a way to prevent any continuity between the Palestinian territories. In 2000, Israel even created soft borders along the Seam Zone between East and West Jerusalem by way of mobile roadblocks and police checkpoints. Through the digging of trenches and the construction of the Separation Wall, the Israeli state allowed itself to block many roads that connect East Jerusalem to the West Bank. Furthermore, observing the trajectory of the Wall around Jerusalem compared to other areas shows that the guiding principle is different. Indeed, the final route of the Wall which was approved by the Israeli cabinet in July 2005 officially consolidated Israel's illegal annexation of occupied East Jerusalem and its surrounding areas (al-Haq 2005). This way, the Wall served as a tool in the isolation of East Jerusalem from the West Bank, the expropriation of Palestinian land, the

destruction of Palestinian property as well as the curbing of Palestinian demographics and geographic expansion and the reduction of the number of Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem. In parallel, the Israeli state apparatus also pursued the construction and expansion of illegal settlements and encouraged the transfer of significant portions of its civilian population to occupied East Jerusalem (Ibid.). In pursuing the policy of 'maximum land acquisition, minimum Palestinians,' the Israeli-defined borders of Jerusalem caused the dislocation of Palestinian towns, villages, and neighborhoods whose social and economic fabric were deeply intertwined and engraved in the city's urban infrastructure. Later, the Israeli authorities, acting as gatekeepers of the ID card regime, gave Palestinians that were deemed to live within the newly defined municipal borders residency status, denoted by the blue ID card whereas Palestinians who were deemed citizens of the West Bank obtained their green ID card. So, while Palestinians with East Jerusalem identification were allowed to reside within municipal Jerusalem and receive benefits such as health insurance, the access of West Bank Palestinians to Jerusalem to work, go to school, obtain health care as well as visit socially was largely impeded. This did not prevent Jerusalem from being the gravitational center of the lives of Palestinians who would obtain special permits to be able to go. In fact, the construction of the Wall has caused many to move back within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to avoid being isolated and to preserve their status as permanent residents of the city. Nevertheless, due to the severe limitations on land use and housing construction, many Palestinians with an East Jerusalem ID moved to the surrounding West Bank over the years (al-Haq 2005). Overall, the merging process of Palestinian communities coupled with the expansion of Israeli settlements around Jerusalem and the total lack of interaction between the two populations has created a discourse around the boundaries of municipal Jerusalem that called out its performativity, calling the borders 'virtual' and 'meaningless.' Yet, these boundaries are used to justify parts of the construction of the Wall around East Jerusalem and to impose heavy restrictions on Palestinians' movement and access to work, education, health, and other social and welfare services (Ibid.).

These limitations are all the more visible in the case of Palestinians living in the Seam Zone, the area between the Separation Wall and the Green Line. These Palestinians found themselves trapped between Israel's Separation Wall and are now neither in Palestinian nor in Israeli space but are rather stateless and space-less (Hanafi 2010, p.111). Here, the Wall's construction did not only exacerbate a discriminatory division between two different spaces populated by two different groups, it has also eliminated space, thus producing an in-between wherein Palestinians are in a state of permanent temporariness. Because the Wall has been and

continued to be constructed on Palestinian land it has created a no-man's land between the Wall and the Green Line which includes 10% of the West Bank. In the Seam Zone, Israeli authorities demand a permit even from those who have lived there long term yet there are no restrictions for Israelis or tourists who are given the right to move freely. For Palestinians, accessing the Seam Zone without a valid permit is a criminal offense punishable by five years of jail time. Similarly, the Seam Zone is operated under a curfew where residents can only cross the Wall during the limited hours that the gates are open or that their permits allow (Dana 2017, p.889). Those who leave the area regularly for work are often unable to cross within the prescripted hours leaving them to stay outside the zone overnight. This jeopardizes their permit status and consequently their right to movement and their personal agency. The issues that are caused by the Wall at the Seam Zone are ones that go beyond mobility for Palestinians as it also touches and hinders their sense of self, their collective identity as well as their culture and historical narratives. Indeed, the Seam Zone is about the capturing of land and its isolation from its people. Land has a specific significance in Palestinian society; the people feel a deep physical and emotional connection to the land they are on linked to ancestry and culture. Agricultural lands have been passed down through families for generations and some farmers still cultivate olive trees planted by their ancestors. However, the construction of the Wall severed this connection for many Palestinians who have property within the zone or had property taken over by the construction of the Wall itself. Those who wished to continue cultivating their land, work in this area and continue to live in their home or visit their family or friends who lived there were forced to obtain one of thirteen different types of permits each with its own requirements, to be allowed entry. The permit regime established in this area made it so that permits were only valid for two years and instilled this sense of temporariness and uncertainty for the population. In addition to complications such as language barriers and discrimination, Palestinians were required to prove ownership of the land to access it, which was extremely difficult given that most landowners would just bequeath the land to their children rather without officially registering the change of ownership (Ibid.). In this manner, the permit regime fragmented families involved in agricultural work, hindering their ability to earn a living, and meaningfully transmitting traditional methods for doing so. Overall, the Wall has resulted in an arbitrary bureaucratic nightmare for those who have been separated from their lands, jobs and families causing many Palestinians to despair and give up their lands and their rights to the areas west of the Wall.

Ultimately, the Separation Wall resulted in the abandonment of an entire way of life for Palestinian families and the complete disruption of their traditions and their collective sense of self. Spacio-cide allowed the destruction, not only of land, but also of the longevity of identity. By investing in the Wall as an actor of the permit and ID card regime, the Israeli state apparatus can completely erase the presence of the Palestinians by discontinuing their attempt in perpetuating their traditions and ways of life as they were enacted by their ancestors. This way, spacio-cide does not only mean the killing of space, but also the eradication of the existence of populations; this can be attributed to a willingness to create a state for another group of people. However, this is not always a success as demonstrated by the next section which explores the performative nature of the Separation Wall in enacting sovereignty.

IV. The Separation Wall as a Settler-Colonial Construct(ion) The Performance of Sovereignty and Border Making Processes

As mentioned previously, the building of the Wall, in addition to being contextualized in a securitization discourse which claims the protection of Israeli residents from Palestinians, is also used as a border-making tool that serves to define the limits of the Israeli state. These borders are further exacerbated by the ID card system and the permit regime which serve to identify who qualifies as a citizen and who is flagged as an outsider that should remain on the other side of the Wall. In this sense, the Wall is instrumentalized to physically express and symbolize Israeli sovereignty. Following the way that borders are defined in this paper's framework, they are imagined and produced by the Israeli state apparatus as entities built around Israeli domination and Palestinian obedience. In that manner, the Wall is transformed into a space of desires and fantasies of national boundedness with contingencies of political intent (Busbridge 2013). The creation and bolstering of a state with a specific people to populate it entrenches itself within the settler colonial framework thus reinforcing the exclusion and destruction of the native population that does not fit the criteria of citizenship. Within this thesis, the Wall acts as a unique space that operates both as a border and a borderland, the latter being an area of overlap between two elements, with the intent of developing territorial sovereignty. However, despite Israeli efforts to make this a reality, the Wall as a border defining structure remains a paradoxical entity and the product of a national Israeli imaginary. Therefore, this section examines the Wall as a performance of sovereignty which simultaneously constructs and deconstructs imaginings of the Israeli nation-state hence fulfilling the double task of forging a perceived, bounded, protective national enclosure and

supporting the necessity of controlling territory beyond the bounds of that enclosure (Busbridge 2013, p.653).

Before diving into the performativity part of this section, it is important to define the ideology of sovereignty and how it is institutionalized in this context. The enforcement of sovereignty lies at the center of the Separation Wall structure in demarcating a 'border' through which it can manifest the profound imbrications of sovereignty with territory. So, the Wall as a paraphernalia serves to fix the scope of Israeli sovereignty by distinguishing a bounded territory from an external world deemed dangerous and threatening. It is through this ideological framing that walls and barriers are presented as a legitimate expression of the sovereign's right to protect its borders from security threats, invasion, and unwanted entry of people from "the other side." To gain credibility when building the Separation Wall, Israel had to construct an identity for Palestinians that essentialized them in terrorism, crime, and violence so that their exclusion could be justified through securitization but more than that, so that the borders that Israel drew were valid in the eyes of the international community. However, more than excluding the other, the primary relationship is one of anxiety and constant uncertainty that pertains to the border because there is no inside and there is no right of entry except for certain conditions. As mentioned previously, borders are polysemic; they are experienced differently by different groups of people and the Separation Wall is no exception in this regard. The duality of the structure is apparent in the nomenclature between the Israelis whom the Wall keeps in and the Palestinians it pretends to keep out (Busbridge 2013, p.656). Despite the stature of the Wall and the Israeli state's attempt to choreograph national borders in response to global and local pressures, these policies have little meaning until they are 'performed' by state agents or by border crossers (Salter 2008, p.365).

In this sense, the Wall ought to be examined within but also beyond the perception that each side has of it; its course tells a particular story that surpasses competing discourses explanations. Perhaps the most apparent element is that the Wall does not represent a simple division of territory given that it does not run along the 1967 borders which are internationally agreed upon as the basis for future peace settlements between Israel and Palestine. In fact, the Wall is more than double of the length of the Green Line with only 15% of its route running along the 1967 borders and 85% cutting at times 18 kilometers deep into the West Bank. So in reality, the Wall and the Israeli settlements behind it prove that the separation is not clear cut and that the blurriness that was created around it enables the Israeli state apparatus to do whatever it wants. In this manner, the Wall separates Palestinians from each other, cutting off neighboring villages sometimes dividing them in two. The Wall thus selectively separates

different populations in certain areas through the ID card system and works to ensure Israeli control over key resources like water, and in the case of Jerusalem, land (Ibid.). Additionally, the Wall's physical body, despite being made of cement and concrete materials, has gates, openings, breaches, and holes where performances of power occur (Azoulay & Ophir 2005). The asymmetrical intimacies performed in the context of these gaps at the checkpoints and at holes in the Wall are performed by dominant subjects whose anxieties about borders and control overwhelm and must be resolved through violence (Razack 2010, p.103). Indeed, the Wall involves rituals of violence; people die because they are prevented from seeking medical care and they very often encounter humiliation and degradation. Mohamed from Eastern Jerusalem told me about the time his grandfather had a stroke and had to be rushed to the ER: "we had to go to Maqased Hospital in Western Jerusalem. We waited for the [permit] and then once we had it, soldiers stopped us at the checkpoint and made us get out of the car. [...] They put us on the side so the paramedics talked to them and asked them what they wanted. I was perplexed because I felt like [my grandpa] was very tired and he needed to go to the hospital and if something happened to him, God forbid [...]. We waited for 30 minutes even though everything was ready, but they did not want to reason. They knew there was a sick person in the car that had to go to the ER because he needed surgery, but they took their time and made us wait for no real reason."

This section not only focuses on the Wall but also on the bordering process it performs and the function it has to include some and exclude many others (Newman 2003, p.15). Additionally, the system of classification, which was made possible through fingerprinting, enabled Israel to have a better channel of identification for Palestinian individuals and allowed it to increase its ability to control them. Most importantly, the Wall is not as much a multi-purpose technology for controlling and regulating space, bodies and populations as it is a statement of Israeli state dominance. Ultimately, these security mechanisms which are mobilized by the Wall to protect Israel's people and its territorial integrity are an attempt at acquiring a semblance of legitimacy resting on the image of an "imagined self-contained territorial unit marked by a presumed congruence between state and nation" (O'Dowd 2010, p.1032). In this sense, the Wall along with its security and control mechanism is deployed as a spectacle of sovereignty in the way that it materially and territorially enacts the claims of the sovereign state, expressing both the inviolability of borders and the supremacy of the state. In the case of the Wall, Palestinians must ask the Israeli sovereigns for admittance and in doing so confess all manner of personal information including economic, social, and psychological factors for their movement (Salter, 2008, p.369). These interactions are evidence that the

essence of the state's sovereignty is not only the monopoly of coercion but the monopoly to decide as well (Schmitt 1985, p.13). The border becomes a space of indistinction in which Palestinian border-crossers are all held in an extra-political nowhere while the Israeli sovereign exercises a decision (Salter 2008, p.370). This alteration of time was illustrated by some of the participants' comments with some of them expressing how their movement depends on the 'mood' of the soldiers. A participant from Western Jerusalem remembers a time when she was stuck in a gate on her way into the Wall's checkpoint. "I had to wait for 20 minutes for the soldier to decide to come and open the gate for me, but I was already late for my class." Another participant from Bethlehem described the crossing process saying that "sometimes it goes smoothly [but] it also depends on the mood of the soldiers. They can keep us waiting for no reason, they are just talking to each other [while] we are in line waiting for their mercy [...]."

Furthermore, the fact that the Wall was built with little to no consideration to Palestinian concerns, widespread international condemnation of the occupation and an International Court of Justice Advisory of the Wall's illegality in 2004 speaks volumes to the strength of the Israeli state (Busbrige 2013, p.659) and its aspiration to impose itself both domestically and globally. Nevertheless, sovereignty remains a complex concept that questions the role of territoriality and borders in the definition of state sovereignty and power. So, if sovereignty is always incomplete and state boundaries remain porous then performance becomes an intricate element of structures such as the Wall which present themselves as advocates for such principles. To better explain the dynamic, one must define performance in its nature and its applicability. Performance is always connected to performativity, that is the practice which reproduces and subverts discourse, and which enables discipline subjects and their performance (Ibid.). A performative occurrence is one that shapes and changes reality, affirming certain claims that only exist because of such affirmations. Performativity frames the world in ways that give it credibility and legitimacy thus making people forget that it is not real and that the situation on the ground is different from what it claims to be. In the context of the border interrogation, what is a natural right – Palestinian mobility – is presented as deviant, as atypical, even unacceptable and requiring explanation whereas what is invented – Israeli sovereignty – becomes unquestionable and normalized (Slater 2008, p.373). In this sense, the ability to define admission/exclusion of Palestinians depends solely upon the evaluation of whether Palestinian mobility is an occasion for normality or abnormality.

Following this understanding, border-making mechanisms such as the Wall are seen as a legal and social performance of sovereignty which ensures all their dimensions are the expression of a performative articulation of power. Therefore, the Wall is not only here to

provide a type of reassurance of national impermeability and emphasize the inviolability of its boundaries but also to enable the Israeli state to construct itself as the absolute master of a particular territory. Meanwhile, some Palestinians, like Manal from the Stop the Wall campaign, claim that "as long as [Palestinians] exist, Israel will not enjoy any kind of sovereignty." Here, Manal justifies the performance of sovereignty by explaining that "there are other areas where the Wall is not constructed and there is no barrier. There are Palestinian communities living in dire conditions there, but they are disrupting Israeli attempts to have sovereignty over the Jordan Valley." Manal adds that "Israelis are obsessed with security [...] like they have this kind of anxiety [considering] Palestinians as a threat [...] and this in itself is [why] they do not have sovereignty over Palestine." Of course, Palestinians cross the Wall to go into Israel every day in massive numbers, whether for work, education or sometimes leisure; this is a testament to the overall theatrical function as stage set productions of intact nationhood autonomy and self-sufficiency rather than a legitimate security measure. A similar sense of performativity can be applied to the case of checkpoints in Israel-Palestine; their notion of theatrical security unveils a plethora of inefficient bureaucratic processes and regulations embedded in ideologies of nationhood that aim at controlling bodies and borders and staging images of separate identities that divide populations. In parallel, the Wall enacts the same political and national subjectivities which physically produce conceptions of an Israeli nation centered around its antagonism to Palestinian identities. The hostility that is born out of this antagonism creates theaters of a supposedly unruly Palestinian-ness that ought to be controlled by Israeli state mechanisms. As a performance of the sovereign, the Separation Wall marks a division between a safe "in here" and a dangerous "out there." The Wall also demarcates the line where civilization ends but where the violent operations of the civilized are still permitted and brutal force may be freely and legitimately exercised against the uncivilized for the fact of their incivility (Bubridge 2013, p.661). In analyzing this dynamic, I find it important to focus on the intentionality behind it: is the Wall a deliberate performance or is the Israeli state apparatus convinced of the existence of the borders the Wall is supposed to delimit for it? Here, I point out that in performing sovereignty, the Israeli state enables itself to justify the continuous existence of the Wall. This falls under the argument mentioned earlier in this chapter whereby the 'failure' of the Wall in blocking out Palestinians is the reason why it still exists and will continue to exist for a long time. When the Wall produces a hostile binary between Palestinians and Israelis, it offers an excuse to remain and be deployed through more advanced technological devices that will better police Palestinian movement. Similarly, the checkpoint system functions as a corrective technology that is designed to fail, in that it situates

its subjects as uncorrectable. By exploring the line which is often drawn by soldiers to control crowds awaiting processing, the checkpoint system produces Palestinians in a way that matches mainstream Israeli discourse so if they do not follow regulations, if they cannot adhere to the rule, then how are they supposed to be trusted with the peace process (Busbridge 2013, p. 660). According to the Israeli state, Palestinians can be defined as potential enemies and temporary friends that permit the 'peace' of the state to exist within a general condition of war and conflict (Salter 2008, p.376). Their existence and thus their border-crossing are the rationale behind the Wall's construction because without their presence, there is no reference point according to which the Israeli state can define itself and delimit its sovereignty on the ground. Therefore, performativity is not only a strategy used by the Wall, but the latter's continuous existence is dependent on performativity. In the context of the ongoing occupation, the Wall performs a double function. On the one hand, it can project an image of normal and intact state boundaries thus producing the imagined state as sovereign, bounded and delimited. On the other hand, the Israeli state apparatus reinforces perceptions of population victimhood to justify the exclusion of Palestinians and the policing of their mobility and agency. By mobilizing these two functions, what the Wall loses in not being a proper marker of legitimate borders, it makes up for in the psychic reassurance it provides (Busbridge 2013, p. 660). But in using performance to keep up the Wall and the mobility regime it falls under, the Israeli state is aware of the lack of legitimacy that it must gain both domestically and globally thus highlighting the short-term effect of performativity. Furthermore, the Wall should not be seen as distinct from the colonial logic of occupation and the settler colonial project in the West Bank which it supports. In an interview one participant expressed her anger with Wall calling it "a colonial tool [Israeli] use to separate [Palestinians], it creates many issues on different levels." The Israeli state apparatus is the product of a British colonial legacy that has shaped the institutions as well as the political and social mechanisms of the Israeli state. Following this argument, the performativity enacted and expressed by the Separation Wall is a particular colonial mutation which not only extends and controls Palestinian territory and resources, it also highlights the imperiality of global racial and cultural hierarchies that position some states as more sovereign than others thus taking away the power of self-determination from other populations. Similar to the checkpoint system that it works with, the Separation Wall enacts colonialist stereotypes on the bodies of Palestinians, producing them as "savages" by forcing them to become more animal-like in their movements because of the difficulty with which they must negotiate and circumvent such control mechanisms.

The Wall's performativity is not only expressed through the imaginary that it fabricates, but also observable and palpable in the borders and borderland that it embodies. The Separation Wall has the status of a non-border meaning that it does not mark any acknowledged or declared border and instead performs an image of border where there is a lack. In this regard, the Wall is as much a borderland as it is a border and it is its borderland dimension that points to its most ambivalent effects (Busbridge 2013, p.661). Borderlands mark the overlap between two things rather than their opposed division. In saying that the Wall is a borderland, it is stated that its construction blurs the line between the uncivilized and the civilized it claims it is separating and showcases the pouring of the uncivilized into the inside and opening the path for tractability into the outside. While sovereignty is performed dialogically and reconstituted through the continual expression of decisions and a border inspection mechanism that deems Palestinian mobility suspicious, the situation on the ground shows that the Wall is not so impermeable to the outside. Therefore, if the border is a symbol of anxiety and tension given its subjectivity and instrumentalization as a settler colonial strategy, the anxiety at the borderland is all the more pertinent because of its elastic nature. Indeed, the structure of the Wall is not static but rather flexible and is subject to change according to the circumstances and the political dynamic that animate the environment it exists in. Consequently, the geography of the border marked by the Wall shifts and expands as parts of it are dismantled, rerouted, and rebuilt. It is in this elastic flexibility that its performance as sovereign state project is undercut. While the Wall itself is a material embodiment of a state ideology, its route is not a direct result of top-down government planning, reflecting instead the power dynamics at play on the ground and the political pressures inflicted by various actors and organizations including Israeli communities and political and human rights activists as well as Palestinian inhabitant. Given the overlap between clashing power dynamics and a plethora of tense interactions between various actors, the Wall's ambivalence makes it harder for it to deal with the existence of Palestinians as a political and social community. In this regard, as much as the Wall performs the necessity of continued occupation, it also inadvertently performs these internal contestations and anxieties of state. The Wall both veils and partially constitutes a violent reality of a shifting colonial frontier which centers its objective around the us/them narrative but is perpetually questioned and contested by those who are excluded as a result of its practice. Cross-examining notions of 'here' and 'there,' 'inside' and 'outside,' 'us' and 'them' create a space at the Wall characterized by interpretations and performances. Eventually, at the border and borderland of the Separation Wall, Israel is performed to its citizens and in the spotlight is the settler who either does the state or is done by it (Busbridge 2013, p.666). In this sense, despite the

permeability of the Wall, the critical moment of crossing is a constant reminder to Palestinians of Israel's power to turn them down and at that moment, Palestinians are made objects of the decision of the Israeli sovereign. However, there remains some value in recognition of their shared opposition as objects of sovereign power.

Overall, the Wall embodies a structure of performed sovereignty that enables it to legitimize its existence while simultaneously questioning that legitimacy. The Wall's construction is rooted in complex dynamics that contribute to perpetuating its presence on the ground while failing to achieve its purpose of blocking out Palestinians and defining the borders of a sovereign Israeli state that is constantly processed politically and socially. Within this framework, settler colonial strategies such as the establishment of settlements behind the Wall and the checkpoints system surrounding it create a security matrix based on the exclusion of Palestinians. With the Separation Wall being an intricate, flexible, and ambiguous colonial frontier and Palestinians being pushed to the edges of this space to fall in the margins and completely disappear, interactions between Palestinians and Israelis, whether through the state apparatus or in society, are tense, and fundamentally asymmetrical in terms of power. The next section navigates ways in which the Wall manipulates the interactions between the Palestinians and Israelis and shapes them in ways that challenge the core of its existence, thus emphasizing its framing as a third space.

CHAPTER II:
SUMUD AT THE SEPARATION WALL

I. Everyday Resistance at the Wall Through the Practice of *Sumud*

As a third space, the Separation Wall encompasses dynamics of power of domination as well as resistance and contestation. The latter are directed at the Wall itself, questioning its existence, denouncing its violent repercussions on Palestinian land and bodies and transforming it into a space of life rather than death. A participant from Bethlehem put it simply by saying that "the Wall is also a way for us to show that we also value life and that our lives do not end just because the Wall is there [...]. The Wall turns out to not be only a negative thing." She adds that "if the occupation ever ends, the Wall will become a symbol to signify the struggle but also a sign that [Palestinians] were not defeated." Similarly, Sireen mentions

how Palestinians were able to "make something out of [the Wall] through the graffiti on it and the messages they communicate." The previous sections of this chapter explored the dominant dynamic centered around ghettoization strategies, surveillance systems, annexation processes and performative border-making mechanisms. This section is oriented towards the resistance practices as enacted by Palestinians at the Wall, it highlights the contestation of borders and borderlands, deconstructs Israeli control of these spaces, and debunks the homogeneity of resistance within the Palestinian population thus showcasing the complexities of the collective struggle. When speaking of resistance in this thesis, I do not mention armed resistance but rather resistance as practiced by ordinary civilians crossing the Wall for work, school, healthcare or other social services and any other purpose. To better grasp the intricacies of such a network, I refer to the term of صمود - *Sumud* - which carries the meaning of steadfastness and a strong determination to stay in the country and on the land, a sense of existence as resistance.

The reason why I intend on keeping the word *sumud* written in its Arabic form rather than refer to it by its translation, is because I find it important to keep the authenticity of the term and hence of the practice and maintain the connection to its Arabic origin. In the Palestinian context, *Sumud* is conceptualized and practiced as an act of dissent, its translation would take away from its connection to the native language of those who practice it and given the centrality of resistance in this thesis, it would defy the whole basis on which it stands. As explained by Rania, a member of the grassroots organization Sumud Story House, "*sumud* should not be translated and it is not one word, it is our life as Palestinians [...], it is seeing the Wall and trying to live until you demolish it." When researching the roots of *sumud*, many of the words that were connected to it referred to meaning such as 'being established/rooted,' 'bearing/carrying,' 'continuity,'[2] as well as 'immortality.'[3] This last one goes back to a religious meaning. Indeed, in the Quran the word *sumud* was attributed to Allah describing Him as a *samad* which not only refers to his eternal nature but also to his majesty and loftiness. In this sense, the linguistic root of the word attributes a sense of power and longevity which is further elaborated on in the practice. In calling oneself a *samid* (a practitioner of *sumud*), one has already ascribed themself a certain embeddedness and a form of divine presence that serves to elevate them over realities of violence and discrimination. However, the appearance of the word 'bear/carry' also implies a certain burden or a weight showing that *sumud* is not an easy process but rather a responsibility.

[2] Almaany Dictionary, "صمد," https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%AF
[3] Maajim Dictionary, "صمد," https://www.maajim.com/dictionary/%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%AF

To better dissect *sumud*, I spatialize it by studying its manifestation through social relations, individual practices and identity expressions within the space of the wall. This means analyzing it through a system of spatial division and processes of inclusion and exclusion as well as through social relations and identities that are spatially organized. This way, relations of power and force which are inscribed into the spatiality of the Wall serve to determine the availability, interpretation, and use of *sumud* within it. *Sumud* is also contextualized as part of a repertoire of everyday resistance and is a combined result of the interplay between social practices and power relations; it can either be done individually or in small informal groups without large and organized coordination. This repertoire, which is inspired from Charles Tilly's repertoires of contentious politics, represents a set of culturally defined learned routines in which a group interacts in opposition to another one. These tactics usually grow out of the particular circumstance of a social place and the life experience of those who practice resistance. These ranges of *sumud* include strategies of conventional resistance which are organized, formal and with clear intentions but most of the time, these are informal, individual and with no clear political goal but rather a purpose of self-empowerment. The micro strategies of resistance are also called 'individualized psychological strategies' (Hammami 2010). These are practiced, for instance, during actual interactions with Israeli authorities at the Wall, and other situations of uncertainty and potential for violence (Hammami 2010, p.48). In this case, *sumud* is studied as an everyday practice that acquires meaning of resistance in various contexts; it coexists in a third space that can capture it as a less visible kind of politics that finds its way through. In this regard, *sumud* refers to a wide array of acts that range from materially based strategies based on survival such as taking care of agricultural land to social and ideational resistance such as maintaining hope and a sense of normality despite the circumstances (Richter-Devroe 2011, p.33). According to Dana from Bethlehem, Palestinians do not have any other choice but to be *samidin*[4], "*sumud* is a way of life [...], we were born in it, and we do not know what ordinary life is like so if you do not want to go crazy, you must have *sumud*. [It] is a reality that was imposed on us, we do not have other options."

Sumud as a sense of struggling and clinging for the land can be traced back to the time of the British mandate in Palestine but only started as a national symbol that was frequently used during the 1960s (Rijke & van Teeffelen 2014, p.86) and was foregrounded during the 1967 war when many Palestinians faced the decision whether to stay or leave. *Sumud* was originally referred to as an Islamic divine attribute (Johansson & Vinthagen 2015, p.110) but

[4] Plural of practitioner of *sumud*

later emerged as a political concept within the Palestinian population in the 1970s and when it was introduced by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to emphasize the importance of maintaining a presence on the land despite Israeli policies of displacement and Palestinian physical and symbolic erasure. During the 1970s, the discourse around *sumud* became primarily associated with the Palestinians living inside on the Palestinian land and their willingness to stay there. General symbols of *sumud* included the olive tree as an ancestral element that connects Palestinians to their historical homeland and their agricultural roots. Throughout the 1970s, *sumud* became more and more connected with Palestinians, and more specifically to those living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza (Rijke & van Teeffelen 2014, p.87). These Palestinians were considered the drivers of the popular struggle which gave focus and guidance to the overall national movement that was centered around resilience and steadfastness. Then *sumud* started to expand thus surpassing its symbolic dimension and materializing on the ground: Palestinians were expressing it through strikes and demonstrations at the Separation Wall during its construction. For over five years, hundreds of Palestinians gathered every week to protest the Wall in various towns such as Bil'in and Jayyous. Protesters practiced civil disobedience, climbing on top of bulldozers, or placing themselves in their path. Some wrapped themselves around olive trees to prevent their destruction or threw stones at the trucks present on the construction site (Nabaa 2014, Against the Wall). They were met with tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets and live ammunition from the Israeli forces, with some of them being beaten, arrested, and injured and a few killed. In a more practical short-term way, the practice of *sumud* focused on expressing anger and frustration with the occupation. However, resistance cannot only be focused on dissatisfaction and disruption, it must encompass a larger meaning, an alternative that would allow Palestinians to regain their personal agency in defining who they are rather than be defined through their opposition to the Israeli occupation. Additionally, there was no consensus on the effectiveness of *sumud* or its definition as a practice of resistance. In fact, the national understanding of *sumud* was criticized as a romanticization of the tragedy of the Palestinian struggle thus creating a feeling of pity around it but most importantly, *sumud* has been called a form of passive non-resistance focusing on survival only (Johannsson & Vinthagen 2015, p.110). Therefore, the relationship between *sumud* as a protective and defensive strategy and resistance as an offensive strategy challenging the occupation and the settler colonial state apparatus has become apparent putting into question the value of *sumud* and raising concerns among Palestinians who did not want the concept of resistance to become tainted by the passivity of *sumud* (Rijke & Teeffelen 2014, p.88). As a result, *sumud* has to be understood beyond the act of being present on the Palestinian

land in its purely demographic aspect. Manal points out the double consciousness involved in this process: “I think there is a thin line between *sumud* and coping with the situation. *Sumud* normalizes the existence of the Wall, but I understand it differently. Part of the definition of *Sumud* is that it is to stay on our land against all odds, refusing to leave, but another part of *Sumud*, and that is a bit tricky, is to try to live a normal life despite the abnormal situation. Here, there is a double consciousness [...]. The situation is abnormal and should not exist [but] at the same time, I know that I should never allow Israel to disrupt my life.”

Explaining *sumud* as the refusal to leave the land does not cover the shared psychological and social dimensions of the concept, especially the human struggle element involved (Rijke & Teeffelen 2014, p. 94). Rather than only staying on the land, *sumud* is more about a lengthy, patient perseverance to preserve Palestinian identity and rights in a colonial context that aims at erasing both (Ibid.). This understanding of *sumud* combines perseverance in socio-spatial circumstances associated with an especially demanding struggle such as Palestinians living close to the Wall or entrapped by it, basically those unable to develop any type of normal life due to the political context in which they live. In this sense, *sumud*, just like the forces that aim at disabling it, is a targeted, almost surgical practice that has a specific purpose for specific causes and communities despite them being part of the same general struggle. *Sumud* thus became a sense of everyday resistance expressed differently by different people and in different environments.; its interpretation is personal, but its practice contributes to the collective movement of liberation. Anything can be framed as an act of *sumud*, as long as the person doing it identifies the purpose behind it as a vector of dissent. The reinvention of *sumud* does not only originate with the development of new technologies of control and surveillance but also with the rise of new generations of Palestinians who have decided to innovate and build on the efforts mobilized by their parents and grandparents to prove and secure their presence on their lands. In this regard, *sumud* has grown into a new type of practice that can encompass a plethora of ways in which newer Palestinian generations can re-attach themselves to their history and their ancestors. *Sumud* is thus recognized as a bridge between the old and the new wrapped in a collective fight for freedom and dignity and just like the Wall, it is a flexible and polysemic element that adapts to the environment it finds itself in. Ines describes the implementation of *sumud* as a changing process but not *sumud* itself: “*Sumud* is still centered around ‘how are you staying on your land?’ [but] the tools and the oppressor evolve, they become more sophisticated so your ways of resisting and maintaining your identity, existence and presence also need to evolve.” Claudette, one of the members of Sumud Story House, indicated that *sumud* is not just about holding on to the land, “it is about living

and laughing, about continuing your studies, traveling and smiling despite the circumstances. [...] Graduating or celebrating your wedding are also a form of peaceful resistance." Rania adds that "*sumud* is singing in front of the Wall, it is living your life while being in a big prison. It is about knowing you are under occupation and the Wall is behind you but resisting in a non-violent way." However, despite the joy that is associated with *sumud*, Rania also notes that "even when living in *sumud*, there is fear [...]. There is a feeling of humiliation as well. I think [it also stems from] doing something I have the right to do when [Israelis] do not let me do it. It is the feeling of challenging the occupation, that there are these restrictions to cross in a legal way when the structure itself is illegal." In combining the two, Sireen summarized *sumud* by describing it as "[Palestinian] existence," she says: "it the reason we are here, […]. Without [it] no one would have stayed." Additionally, it is important to understand that *sumud*, although a powerful tool, can also backfire in certain situations, especially in relation to the surveillance system which counts on Palestinians gaining visibility to police them. Ines elaborates by saying that "[one] can always resist by crossing or smuggling someone in but this means there will be more surveillance [...], people have to deal with it but they are risking their lives when they defy the Wall." Both these testimonials from Rania and Ines serve to debunk the myth around the passivity of *sumud* and its limitation to acts of survival. Risking one's life to challenge the Wall and the occupation overall showcases a sense of courage and initiative that surpasses the scope of survival.

Therefore, in the context of the Wall, the simple act of existing, waiting in line, crossing, handing in the ID card, the permit, walking through the revolving metal doors, passing through the metal detector, any of these mundane acts can be interpreted as an act of *sumud*. It may seem surprising to associate aesthetics and everyday acts with *sumud* but, while suffering has always been a part of it and while courageous people who face a lot of suffering because of the political circumstances are identified as prototypical *samidin*, suffering should not be opposed to existence (Rijke & Teeffelen 2014, p.93). The presence of Palestinians in spaces that were designed to exclude them, separate them from their land and disappear them behind a Wall is a powerful act of resistance and determination. Leen, a participant, interpreted *sumud* in a way that grasped its essence by defining it as "not wanting to leave but wanting to stay in Palestine, to live here and work, to show others that I am better off here with my job and my life [...] although all these barriers are created to make us want to move out and live abroad [...]." Another participant from Western Jerusalem expressed the frustration one can feel when living in the OPTs: "you have this idea that everyone here is fighting you, they do not want you to succeed and [you feel] that you will never get a decent job, but you must stay [in Palestine] no

matter what." She elaborates by mentioning *sumud* as the tool to do so: "*Sumud* means more than being here, it is tolerating everything, being okay with an unfair salary because you are Palestinian. [...]. You show [*sumud*] every day, when you go to work, and you do not like your job and you know you could get a better one but under the Israelis' condition. People died for Palestine so the least you can do is to not normalize, not to work in their institutions even though it is hard [...]. You are literally resisting the occupation by every single move [...]. Choosing to fight every single colonial tool, that is *sumud*." This comment illustrates the weight that *sumud* can have one those who practice it; it is not just about living continuously, it is living while bearing the heaviness of what it means to be Palestinian under the Israeli occupation while maintaining agency and autonomy. In fact, the setting established at the Separation Wall facilitates the dehumanization of Palestinians thus legitimizing the violation of their rights. Consequently, this makes it easier for Palestinians to dehumanize themselves given the way they are treated. In such situations, *sumud* turns into feeling human, regaining a sense of self-love and belonging that transcends the Wall and the security apparatus it embodies. Sumud Story House member Roger states that in his work, *sumud* overlaps with resistance in the way that he teaches younger people how to solve internal problems and have faith and inner peace. One can say that *sumud* enables a gaze shift whereby Palestinians stop looking at themselves through the eyes of those who police them and start taking back control of their own narrative. Manal also interpreted *sumud* through this lens describing it as an attempt to "live our daily lives and to see the human part of us [...]. We should also try to find ways and spaces where we work for ourselves and for the existence of the next generations on the land. For that, we should be more resilient and steadfast and navigate spaces where we are like subjects and not objects, where we are humans." Continuity surpasses one's own life to encompass the ones around it but most importantly, the ones after it. She adds that whenever Palestinians defy the occupation, they achieve decolonization and are able to reclaim what it means to be human, which they are made to forget when they go through checkpoints or to certain areas because of the Wall; "finding these spaces even when they are not obvious and are momentary and do not last for too long, accumulating them is important." In addition to the human dimension, Palestinian *sumud* is also about being educated and aware of one's own self and history. When giving me her definition of *sumud*, a participant from Bethlehem described it as "[...] education and having knowledge of local and global solidarity and the Palestinian cause." In this regard, she saw education as a way to "[...] combat all Israeli arguments and lies, so it is a form of having your existence validated and showing that you have enough knowledge to tell what is right from wrong and how to prove it."

Overall, *sumud* has become a study of everyday resistance, known as the informal and non-organized action carried in an oppositional relation to authority. Intent, consciousness, and outcome were subtracted to include a spontaneous and innate need and desire to live under occupation in spite of humiliating and continuously stagnating or deteriorating conditions. Therefore, the current uses of and meaning attached to *sumud* have created an important discussion directed towards more inclusive patterns of resistance against the occupation with the purpose of moving forward and maintaining faith in a more just and humane future. One of the main ways in which *sumud* was reimagined is in its connection to stillness; while in the 1970s, its meaning emphasized staying on the land and refusing to leave despite the hardships of the occupation, now it has a much more active connotation. Ordinary acts like these become a representation of a more proactive sense of agency that shifts *sumud* from stillness to movement; they are about refusing to be enclosed but also refusing to be slowed down making *sumud* a practice rooted in the alteration of both space and time. In its new form, *sumud* at the Wall is interpreted as continuing with movement and resisting immobility, the locking down of community and refusing the impossibility to reach school or work (Hammami 2005, p.18). Its interconnectedness with mobility gives it a sense of existence at different places and in different times thus creating a strong feeling of omnipresence for Palestinians. To better understand ways in which movement is an active part of *sumud*, I talked to George the founder of the organization 'The Right to Movement.' The Right to Movement plans field trips, camping trips and other sporting events in the West Bank. Its main event is the marathon along the Separation Wall; runners from across the world are invited to run along the barrier without crossing checkpoints. George told me "[the marathon's track] passes by the stuff we pass by everyday as Palestinians the same way we go to school, the same way we run. [Every runner] gets to experience what it means to run under an occupation, but it still is a beautiful journey." He also explained the ambivalence of the organization that aims at both diverting Palestinians attention from the occupation that hinders their lives while simultaneously using sports to tell foreign participants about the violence on the ground. "When you run the marathon, it resembles the reality of our everyday lives: the challenges and limitations in movement as well as passing through the checkpoints, the Apartheid Wall, through refugee camps, by land that has been confiscated or will be confiscated for settlements. So, it is not something we created for good press, it is the reality of where we live and it is portrayed through running," George said. The *sumud* element to George's work is "the fact that we connect to the land, to have the street as our office and to get people to love the land they are on, to be active and present is quite a significant connection that we want to build. [...] In the same way, if you love your land,

you must know it and keep it clean, so we constantly take people on hiking trips all across Palestine. We want them to come and appreciate the beauty of our country. That builds a connection that contributes to *sumud*." This presentation of *sumud* as a spiritual and natural connection to the land serves as a bridge between older interpretations of *sumud* and newer ones which include the marathon and other events organized by George and his team. This way, Palestinians are given the opportunity to look at their land differently, not as something that can be taken away from them at any time, but rather a connection to their culture and their heritage.

For many Palestinians, the Separation Wall is an obstacle to academic endeavors, professional development, social ties, and freedom of movement in a general sense. For this reason, the act of crossing the Wall, whether through the conventional process or in more unconventional ways, is considered as part of the repertoire of contention of *sumud*. Throughout my encounters, I asked participants about their view of the unconventional ways of crossing the Wall; ways which are often referred to as 'illegal' revealing the irony of the word given the illegality of the Wall itself in the eyes of international law. "To cross the Wall illegally for me feels [...] satisfying because despite the heavy security they have around the Wall and the barriers, we still manage to cross, and they still do not know about it. I can see how it might feel liberating, satisfying in an 'in your face' way," one participant told me. Similarly, another one explained to me how she thinks crossing the Wall 'illegally' is an act of resistance: "Some people depend on those 4 000 extra shekels they get from across the Wall. But it is also a way of saying that despite the limitations, we are able to outsmart [Israelis] so despite it all, we can go and see our land, so you do not always have a say in our decisions and opportunities. It is a sense of controlling your own feelings." When asked about these ways of crossing, Dana from Bethlehem referenced an Arabic expression that says, 'negating a negation makes an affirmation,' "so crossing the illegal Wall illegally makes it legal." Sireen had a similar comment telling me: "I know people who cross 'illegally' through the holes in the Wall but when we say 'illegally', what law are we talking about? According to which law have we decided that that was illegal? I think it is illogical to say it is illegal. To Israelis, crossing 'illegally' means moving from Palestinian lands to Israeli lands without a permit, to us, it is about our right to move across our land." To my surprise, I also had the opportunity to interview Asala who did cross the Wall unconventionally one day as she was going home from university and the checkpoint next to her house was closed. "There were two police cars waiting on the other side so [my parents and I] just stayed in the taxi watching them and after half an hour, they left so me, my dad and my mom walked through these rocks and crossed the Wall through

this hole. I felt so powerful, I was finally experiencing what my friends have been telling me about. [...].” This sense of empowerment that Asala talks about is one that many participants have confessed to feeling when hearing of their friends crossing the Wall ‘illegally.’ “I see it as an act of resistance. I know many people from the West Bank who refuse to get an Israeli permit because if they do, it means that they are okay with Israel issuing something and giving them the green light to go somewhere. But [...] I do think we need to be careful,” says a participant from Western Jerusalem. However, others like Leen do not see it as such: “I think that it is humiliating because [Palestinians] cross through holes in the barrier. [...] It might be a type of resistance, that we go into a space that we are not allowed in but I do not think that it is true resistance because they go there to work and make money. [At the end of the day], their employer is Israeli and the other people they work with are not Arabs [...]. If we are talking about resistance, I do not think I would gain much from this.” According to Leen, crossing the Wall in an unconventional way without a permit, although being a signal of the obsoleteness of the Israeli state apparatus to some extent, loses its power so long as the people resisting are still working under the apparatus itself. Mohamed, on the other hand, tells me that “the idea of not waiting for the permit and taking the opportunity with your own hands is considered resistance.” Mohamed’s testimony refers to a sense of agency and decision-making that is often taken away from Palestinians but that they can take back through risky acts such as clandestine crossing. Sireen also referred to “refusing the existence of borders” saying people take the risk of being caught and put in prison for this act. With this in mind, I do not want to essentialize acts of crossing the Wall, legally or not, as acts of *sumud*. I do acknowledge that there are instances in which crossing the Wall is not considered resistance but just what it is: crossing the Wall. For instance, Mohamed told me about a time in 2015 when a friend of his who already had his permit decided to cross ‘illegally’ after seeing the long line of people waiting at the Wall. “It may sound on the surface that it is kind of stupid, but it is a respectable act [in my opinion],” he said. This situation shows that sometimes, crossing the Wall in an unconventional way is more a matter of practicality than actual *sumud*; it is thus possible that the ‘respectable’ act that Mohamed refers to is more about the consequences that can result from crossing the Wall that way, mainly being shot by a soldier. A participant from Bethlehem emphasized this fear by saying: “When I hear [of people who crossed] part of me is like ‘good for them!’ but I do hope they are safe when they are crossing it because when it is done that way, what happens if they get caught?’

At the heart of the Israeli spatial domination is the Separation Wall which is organized around and exercised through configurations of sovereign and disciplinary power (Johansson

& Vinthagen 2015, p.118). This is illustrated through the elaborate rules, tense interactions with Israeli soldiers and the demographic knowledge generated by the information gathering system from the thousands of Palestinians passing through. The contextualization of *sumud* in this framework of movement and border-crossing is another way of looking at the idea of 'existence as resistance,' but instead of stillness, there is personalized and collective strategies of mobility and contestation. This falls into the process of rethinking and reimagining *sumud* with newer generations taking the rationale behind it and reinventing it. This means that the repertoires of resistance to all these elements of the security apparatus attached to the Wall must be as complex and intricate in their operations. Therefore, after navigating the individual practices that embody *sumud* in everyday life, the next section focuses on the politically organized channels that *sumud* uses to reroute the Wall and take back the land.

II. Beyond Stillness and Movement: Practicing *Sumud* through the Rerouting of the Wall

Although everyday politics are the most common form of *sumud* in the Israeli-Palestinian context, there are other types of resistance that take a more organized form, with a clearly defined purpose and a trajectory that specifically target the Wall. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Separation Wall's route was identified as problematic given its deviation from the 1967 borders which delimited Israel from the Palestinian territories thus annexing lands across the West Bank and enclosing a part of the population in the in-between area, called the Seam Zone. These reinvented borders were questioned and contested by Palestinians who were affected by their placement: those who lost access to their agricultural lands or found themselves separated from their neighbors and their families by a cold plain-looking cemented structure. Here, *sumud* was expressed through the mobilization of community resources and human capital as well as grassroots movements and organizations with the purpose of rerouting the Wall and gaining back access to the land that was once the property of Palestinians. This section explores the cases of the towns of Jayyous and Bil'in as paradigms of community organizing and mobilization.

Jayyous

From the hill where the Palestinian town of Jayyous is sited, a view to the flat plain below and nearby elevation reveals an architectural element that tells a story about the way

inhabitants of the town saved their land and reshaped the topography around them (Fields 2010, p.69). A long barbed-wire fence carved a harsh linear incision thus reshaping the entire landscape (Ibid.). Jayyous is located in an area directly affected by the Wall and around 75% of the village's farming land is on the other side of the cemented barrier. Not only that but because of the Wall 50% of the townspeople were dependent on foreign food aid given that their agricultural lands have been cut off. So, to get to their land, farmers must use either the north or south gate which are supposed to open for three short periods a day. However, in June 2005, the gates were usually closed all day and farmers were staging regular protests to demand that they be opened. As of February 2007, the gates are open for only three hours per day- one hour each morning, afternoon, and evening on average. In this regard, Manal elaborates by saying that to cross the gate, Palestinians must have a permit for a once or twice a year entrance which is not enough to cultivate the lands.

In 2002, the town of Jayyous mounted a nonviolent campaign against the construction of the Wall and the expansion of settlement on its land. Local organizations along with the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions and other Israeli-Palestinian associations organized different types of demonstrations; they even planted several olive saplings in the same plots of land where the bulldozers of the settlers had previously uprooted ancestral olive trees. However, according to Manal and what she observed on the ground, "Palestinians from [Jayyous] were the main organizers of resistance activities [while] Israeli and international activists took the role of supporting these actions only without any intervention in the decision that was taken by Palestinians there." Later, in June 2008, communities in Jayyous decided that they would not sit idly by while Israelis annexed their land, so they decided on rerouting the Wall. This was the result of several complaints filed by residents at the Israeli High Court of Justice demanding that it changes the route of the Wall south of the Jayyous and northwest of the town of Azzun al Shamaliya which would lead to the removal of the south gate. The Court ended up approving these demands in addition to calling for the return of 750 isolated dunums of Jayyous lands back to Palestinians control (Palestinian Observatory of Israeli Colonization Activities). In November 2008, the Israeli army's building contractors started to work on the rerouting of the Wall in the southern part of the area. The new plans contributed to the return of a sixth of the village's lands to the eastern side of the Wall, nevertheless leaving the lands of over 311 out of 670 families on the other side. Despite all this, Jayyous residents still demanded the complete removal of the Wall from their lands. Later that month, anti-Wall activists and inhabitants of the town demonstrated by marching to the southern gate around noon and took it down along with parts of the fence. This led to a violent response from the

Israeli authorities consisting of firing tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets and imposing a curfew on the village. A year later, a section of the Wall was removed, and the construction of the new Wall was completed. Despite this, for farmers who own land in this area, the rerouting of the fence did not solve their access problem given that five square kilometers of Jayyous land will remain inaccessible (Amnesty International 2013). After granting permits to farmers so that they can cross the Wall, the army started refusing to renew the permits of a growing number of farmers, depriving them and their families of their livelihood. Additionally, farmers were dismayed at the widespread damage that was done to the fertile agricultural land that they depend on for their livelihoods as the new route of the fence is being built. In fact, the construction of the new route caused the destruction of orchards belonging to farmers from Jayyous and neighboring villages, many of whom had already lost thousands of trees to the construction of the previous route. In parallel, the new section of the fence remained on Palestinian territories and did not follow the Green Line route to accommodate the Israeli settlement of Tsufim. Despite this being a violation of International Law, the Israeli Supreme Court allowed the army to continue building the fence on Palestinian lands thus causing a lot of resistance from Jayyous villagers who engaged in frequent protests and other actions involving damage to the fence by setting fire to construction materials and throwing stones at military vehicles as well as peaceful demonstrations including sit-ins and marches. “When I went to Jayyous to see the Wall and talk to resistors, they showed me how a group of youths destroyed the whole fence. I was told that the kids destroyed the fence and Israelis came back to rebuild it again then the youth destroyed it again. This part of the resistance was about not accepting the Wall as something normal and continuing to see it as something that ought to be dismantled is one of the cracks in Israel’s Wall. Israel has its cracks and the more it presses us, the more cracks there are,” Manal told me. A few months later, the Court determined that a small section of the Wall to the north of Jayyous would be rerouted because it did not serve any Israeli security needs and instead served to expand a neighboring settlement to the West. Although this meant that a part of the land would be returned to Palestinians, there was no evidence that the army was following the orders of the Supreme Court.

Overall, the town of Jayyous remained in a state of uncertainty constantly demanding the return of agricultural lands to its residents. By reshaping the landscape of the Wall in their town through its rerouting, Jayyous villagers highlighted and acted upon the flexibility of the barrier and the performativity attached to its border-defining mechanism. However, the occupation system could always turn the situation to its advantage whether by destroying crops throughout the rerouting process, refusing to give permits to farmers or just refusing to move

the Wall despite a Court ruling stating otherwise. Manal emphasized the plight of Palestinians by stating that "in Jayyous, the Wall for the community was yet another *Nakba*; therefore, people were ready to sacrifice their lives to confront the construction of the Wall." "When the Wall was rerouted, people felt that it was a result of their resistance and sacrifices. Yet they did not rejoice because most of their land was already lost to the Apartheid Wall," she concluded.

Bil'in

Bil'in is a small agricultural town in the Ramallah district of the Central West Bank located three kilometers from the Green Line and has been the site of nonviolent resistance since February 2005 when the construction of the Separation Wall began in the village (Hallward 2009, p.540). Like Jayyous, the Wall cuts villagers off from 50-60% of their village lands thus threatening their livelihoods. Indeed, the Wall prevents Palestinian farmers from having regular, unimpeded access to their land which makes it difficult for the former to maintain their crops and feed their families (Ibid.). Additionally, villagers had only limited access, through a gate in the Wall, which was controlled by Israeli authorities. To better understand the situation on the ground at the time, I talked with Mohammed al-Khatib, the founder of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) which is the Palestinian committee that coordinated and organized the popular struggle in Bil'in. According to Mohammed, after the Intifada, the narrowing process and the installation of checkpoints served to separate residential areas from the agricultural areas. This later became part of the Wall's route wherein the Israeli occupation had control over areas which were not populated while the areas that were populated were encircled, entrapped, and completely enclosed so it was impossible to exit unless through the checkpoints. So, starting from 2005 and in cooperation with Israeli and international activists, Bil'in residents kept holding nonviolent weekly demonstrations against the route of the Wall which often ended in confrontations with Israeli forces. At the time, various means of resistance were deployed to make sure that Palestinians would gain their land back. Mohammed told me about a time when protesters tied themselves to olive trees: "We brought chains with locks, and we tied ourselves to the olive trees they were supposed to destroy for the purpose of the Wall [...]. Most of the time, the soldiers would use violence against Palestinians which draws a picture for the world about our reality showing who is the aggressor and who is the victim so that it is not framed as a war. From here, the creative and passionate dimension of our work in Bil'in started." Mohammed explained that to mobilize a great number of people, the committee adopted the motto 'a win is always a win' which means that "whether you succeed or not in stopping the bulldozers, you are still a winner

so if you stopped them and the soldiers were not violent then you won in slowing down the construction of the Wall and if you were beaten up then you were able to communicate a message to the world revealing the identity of the aggressor." These acts were met with violence similar to the one in Jayyous with arrests and injuries with rubber-coated bullets causing some protesters to become disabled, "but despite this there was still *sumud*," said Mohammed, "they isolated us and would not give us permits so people felt discouraged to participate in the resistance [but] despite all this, people remained together and supported each other to work against all attempts to break down their *sumud*." He also referred to this strategy as 'the centimeter of land' meaning that "every centimeter you leave, a settler will come and take it from you and every centimeter you build on, is a centimeter a settler cannot take from you. In Bil'in, we understood this very early on, so there is no land that is not cultivated. We were able to keep our lands because we stayed on them, and we lived on them." This act can be traced back to the origin of *sumud* as the act of resilience and stillness on the land.

Additionally, a petition against the segment of the route bisecting Bil'in's farmland was filed by the head of the village council in 2005 (Lazaroff and Izenberg 2010). Among other things, the petition alleged that part of the route was designed to protest the new neighborhood of Modi'in Illit even though no one was living there. An investigation into the matter showed that this new neighborhood was supposed to be an extension of the settlement and was being built against existing planning and construction laws. Upon discovering this, the PSCC decided to build a physical structure on the ground, so they built what they called a 'Palestinian House' in the middle of the settlement plans that Israel started building. Mohammed declared that "[The PSCC's] mission here was to prevent Israel from getting a construction permit for the houses from the occupation by building the 'Palestinian House'; this way, if they wanted to stop us from building our house, they would have to interrupt the building of the other houses in the settlement. So, the house was not active, it was later suspended which meant that the other settlement houses were also suspended. For the first time, the suspension was to our advantage. Our place within the settlement also allowed us to keep an opening within the Wall so it was like the Wall was unfinished." The house also served as a way for the committee to keep an eye on settler construction work in the area and stopping it. Mohammed mentioned that through this action, Bil'in was able to bankrupt the settler company in charge of the construction and destroy the settlement and thus the Wall. "Bil'in was not only able to reroute the Wall and take back the land but also stop the execution of the settlement and cancel the establishment of 1500 colonies," he added. Meanwhile, the committee had also filed two cases: the first one using Israeli courts targeting the Wall and another one targeting the settlement

itself as they were both interconnected. Just like the cracks in the Wall mentioned by Manal, Mohammed notes similar cracks in Israeli law: "The Wall is there to protect the settlement, but we had to prove that these settlements are not legal and that even if you want to protect them, you must protect buildings that are already there [...]. From here, Israeli lawyers and human rights activists helped us in proving this point and highlight the fact that these settlements did not even have a construction permit." In the context of this Israeli-Palestinian collaboration, Manal points out that residents of Bil'in believed strongly in the so-called joint struggle with Israelis to dismantle the Wall: "[Residents of Bil'in] believed that Israeli activists could have a considerable role in stopping the construction of the Wall. [They] believed [it could] strengthen their presence in international platforms, especially given the fact that international activists preferred and encouraged this discourse- Israelis and Palestinians struggling together against oppression." Eventually, Palestinian and Israeli activists won the case in 2007 and the Court ordered the government to reroute a section of its Separation Wall at the demand of the Palestinian residents (Kershner 2007). A panel of three judges ruled that a two-kilometer-long section of the barrier should be redrawn, partially dismantled and rebuilt; the new parameters included demands to design the route so that the Wall would be built on state-owned rather than private Palestinian land. While the ruling demonstrated the power of sustained nonviolent joint action to effect minimal concessions from the institutional authorities, reactions from both Israelis and Palestinians highlighted the gaps in perspective and objectives between them (Hallward 2009, p.552). The ruling stipulated that in rerouting the Bil'in section of the Wall, Israeli authorities planned on returning at least 250 acres of farmland to the villagers' side. Therefore, Bil'in demonstrations had a pragmatic goal and an ideal one which was to allow villagers to work on their land and to challenge the necessity of the Wall as such. According to Mohammed, who was one of the main community organizers in the fight against the Wall, the reason behind Bil'in success was not only the coordination of the PSCC and civil society's proactive work but also the creative strategies used and the innovative ways through which *sumud* was expressed involving various actors such as Knesset members and the media. The coordination of these various efforts served to expand the platform of resistance and advocacy and mobilize more people throughout the years.

However, rather than celebrating the victory, some Palestinians explained their concern given the fact that there was no guarantee that the military will act as directed or that the ruling questions the legitimacy of the Wall itself. Others pointed out to the fact that the same court ruled in favor of the settlement Mattityahu East, mentioned above, just a day later and legalized unauthorized expansion of Bil'in grounds east of the Wall. Overall, Bil'in residents and

supporters remained cautious of the decision because although the outcome was positive, to some extent, it also came with an unwelcome side effect literally and symbolically cementing the reality and permanent nature of the Wall in the lives of Palestinians at the time (Roei 2011, p.253). Today, the Wall is still on Bil'in land. Mohammed disclosed that the settlement has expanded in the Bil'in region despite the area that was given back to residents being under full Palestinian control. This is proof of the immortal aspect of *sumud* that has to remain alive despite the circumstances and in the face of constant effort at displacement and occupation as well as Israeli settlement expansion.

In their attempt to reroute the Wall, Bil'in residents utilized a plethora of strategies of resistance that went beyond protest and legal actions in courts. One of these strategies consisted in focusing on nonviolence as a main channel of dissent. A nonviolent framework usually conceptualizes power as a dynamic social relation rooted in civil disobedience and cooperation. Consequently, nonviolent resistance enters conventional power dynamics through mechanisms and procedures of change aimed at structural inequalities and injustices it observes. In the case of Bil'in, nonviolent anti-Wall activists drew on techniques that not only targeted the Wall as a physical performative border but also as an expression of the legitimacy of cultural narratives and political institutions. This approach contributed to making structural violence overt and transcending imposed divisions in pursuit of integrating goals of liberation and regaining of physical and economic agency (Hallward 2009, p.547).

The study of both Jayyous and Bil'in showcases a pattern of which focuses on community mobilizing and the local work of grassroots organizations such as the Stop the Wall campaign in Jayyous and the Bil'in Popular Committee. Both initiatives embodied a desire to hold onto the land which enabled Palestinians to reroute the Wall and readjust the borders. This sense of resilience and strong intent to stay on the land despite the violence inflicted on them is a great archetype of Palestinian *sumud* in its literal sense. "Palestinians considered their refusal to leave their land as an act of *sumud* and called themselves *samidin*," pointed out Manal. *Sumud* also encompasses the legal actions taken by the village committees and community leaders who decided to take their case to courts affiliated with the occupation and advocate for their right to cross these Israeli borders and return to their crops. In this context, *sumud* was the main driver of the cause, encouraging people to act. These various techniques and collective actions also show that beyond symbolism, *sumud* is also a means towards socio economic justice, auto-sufficiency, and dignity.

PART TWO
PALESTINIAN CONTESTATION OF VIRTUAL BORDERS THROUGH ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER I: CROSSING THE VIRTUAL BORDER OF ONLINE CENSORSHIP & SHADOW BANNING

I. Israeli Structural Monopoly over the Digital Space: Telecommunication and Territoriality

When thinking of the Israeli occupation of online space, one considers processes of virtual censorship and the dominant presence of Israeli stories and narratives on social media platforms. However, it remains important to remember the material tools and infrastructure that enable this occupation of online space. Telecommunication is the main communication means for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza so with the increasing use of digital media, the Israeli Palestinian conflict has become a war of narrative and (social) media representation. It is nevertheless important to remember that events on the ground still determine the virtual and that digital networks too are spaces of control. Telephone and internet access in most parts of the world are now privately held and have become largely commercial spaces due to the legal, political, economic, and social decisions that rendered them such (Tawil-Souri 2012). This process of 'digital enclosure' traces the relationship between a material, spatial process, the construction of networked, interactive environments, and the private retrieval of private information. In the case of Palestinians, air wave bandwidths are controlled and allocated by the Israeli authorities; this includes the frequency control for TV radio stations and mobile operators. Israelis thus become the gatekeepers of the global network deciding who has access and who does not.

The center of power in the digital space is in the hands of the Israeli state apparatus including the government, the police force, the military agencies, and the tech industries. Meanwhile, Palestinian tech firms remain secondary giving Israel the ability to decide whether, when and where Palestinians may install, manage, and maintain infrastructure and the ability to limit and destroy said infrastructure (Tawil-Souri, 2012). This type of territorial confinement also determines Palestinian use of the internet. After Israel abandoned the largely debilitated

telecommunications infrastructure existent in the territories in 1995, the Palestinian Authority (PA) handed it over to the private sector. It was at that point that the Palestinian telecommunications monopoly, Paltel, was born. As detailed in the Oslo accords, Israel would control all allocation of frequencies and determine where Palestinians could build new infrastructure. Since part of the landline infrastructure already existed, its geographic condition would not change but most exchanges would take place in Israeli cities. Therefore, all international traffic, initially for landlines and later for cellular and internet lines, had to be routed through Israeli providers. Israel imposed connection and termination fees on Paltel and prohibited it from having its own international gateway. Additionally, it prevented it from importing equipment, such as telephone exchanges and broadcasting towers, which would facilitate building a network connecting the Palestinian territories. This proves how much Palestinian internet traffic relies on an infrastructure that is fragmented and dependent on Israeli networks and authorizations. (Tawil- Souri & Aouragh 2014).

Moreover, technology infrastructures and telecommunication entities further demonstrate the ongoing importance of territoriality such as bordering mechanisms, flows and immobilities. The Israeli regime continuously produces, reproduces, shifts, and fine-tunes digital borders to dynamically enclose Gaza and the West Bank. This digital occupation actively transforms Palestine's social economy, demography and culture toward increasing privatization, surveillance, and control (Tawil-Souri 2012). Overall, virtual borders may be less visible than the walls, gates, fences, and checkpoints of the physical world but they are no less real in their violence and significant in their politics. Similar to the process of land enclosure, an active landscaping process led by the Israeli regime produces new forms of property rights and different systems of circulation and exclusion (Tail-Souri 2012). However, the internet has helped Palestinians cope with this territorial fragmentation and digital discrimination and facilitated the (re)unification of Palestinian voices, with all their diversity. In a sense, framing the internet's necessity as one way to redress Palestinian territorial fragmentation also conveys a Palestinian need to challenge Israel's territorial control in two spaces rather than one (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh 2014, p.104).

The birth of the Second Intifada in September 2000 demonstrated a media transformation and an increase of publicly mediated protest that has deeply influenced Palestinian activism. Online media and specifically citizen journalism during the second intifada gave the world the opportunity to see what was happening inside Palestine from the perspective of those living there (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh 2014, p.121). With this increasingly

accentuated online presence, appeared mechanisms of censorship and erasure of Palestinian voices. During the Sheikh Jarrah events, social media users and digital rights defenders have called out platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for removing pro-Palestinian content, taking down posts that 'go against community guidelines,' label tweets as 'possibly sensitive content' and deleting accounts of outspoken pro-Palestinian content creators. Indeed, Instagram censored content about Al Aqsa Mosque, which has been the site of clashes between Israeli police forces and Palestinians who were there to pray during the last days of Ramadan, after associating the site with terrorism. The platform removed posts and blocked hashtags that included the name of the place because the platform's content moderation system mistakenly associated the site with Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a U.S.-designated terror group. Some of the posts that were flagged were infographics that mentioned Al Aqsa and used the hashtag associated with it (Mac 12 May 2021). Additionally, back in 2019, the Intercept claimed it had obtained internet Facebook policies which showed that the company was moderating the term 'Zionist' on its platform. Facebook claimed that their policy was about Jewish safety but according to their content policy excerpt, it seems that decision-makers were more concerned with shielding Zionist Israeli settlers thus making it more difficult for Palestinians to write their narrative online and convey their outrage. Digital Communication Manager for the Palesinian Institute of Public Diplomacy (PIPD) Mayss Al Alami explained that: "[...] 'Zionism' is one of the few terms that Palestinians use to explain the hatred and discrimination they experience so if you take that away from them and you equate it to anti-Semitism you are basically taking away a very important tool in expressing the conditions we live under." She gave the example of a woman talking about her experience in Silwane and the effect this restriction can have on her content saying "[this woman's] post is not going to be circulated or approved and it might be taken down and people will not know what is going on."

Additionally, digital rights organizations such as Sada Social reported more than 200 violations of Palestinian social media content related to the Sheikh Jarrah demonstrations in East Jerusalem. The Arab Center for the Development of Social Media, 7amleh, documented some 500 cases of Palestinian digital rights violations between May 6 and 19. These takedowns were identified by Access Now, an organization centered around digital rights, as part of a wider pattern of consistent censorship of Palestinian and allied voices and systemic efforts to silence them. Access Now reports that an internet referral unit operated by the Israeli prosecution since 2015 was issuing requests to social media providers asking them to censor content on their websites. This form of censorship is conducted with no legal procedure or justification and without granting targeted users the right to be heard in the decision and without

their knowledge. In the first ten days of May, the Israeli government asked social media companies to take down more than 1010 pieces of content. 7amleh's investigation confirms that many of these cases were false positives in that they did not go against community guidelines. Deleted content included political posts that varied between images, videos, written posts/tweets. Social media companies also used shadow banning to decrease the viewership of published stories which despite being kept online had their access limited. In an interview I conducted, one participant from Bethlehem explained that the reason they post on social media is because "[...] Facebook and Instagram are supposed to be these platforms where everyone is free to express their opinions. And then somehow, [when one] post[s] about something that matters like lives being taken away [or] torture, it goes against [the platforms'] community guidelines [...]." Dana has also mentioned how Palestinians must use this opportunity that all eyes are on them with the situation in Sheikh Jarrah to post online as much as possible saying that platforms "helped bring local cases on the international stage and to international courts so let us not forget how powerful it is." Despite some visibility, social media platforms have brought in more negative consequences than positive ones to the lives of Palestinians. Asala who is a law student expressed her frustration with the repercussions on her life and future career resulting in a self-censorship process. Indeed, she said that she normally does not post content she knows for a fact is going to get censored because she is trying to pass the Israeli bar and "it is hard for Arabs to pass it because it is in Hebrew which is not our first language and the success rate is very low and so if they see that you are posting this much on social media they would 'blackdot' you and fail you the bar. [Then] you would not have a future and I am not trying to do that because I want to get a job as a lawyer in Israeli courts and so I cannot post anything too extreme." Similarly, Kate explains how she is careful in the way she posts: "I try not to be violent in my posts, be balanced while being pro-Palestine." Mona described this self-censorship process as a starting point for Israeli control saying: "even if [Palestinians] are resisting and keep posting, [they] are now thinking before posting anything because [they] should think that [they]might be censored, that [their accounts] could be taken down or could be found because of a certain hashtag or a certain word. Self-censorship is something big when we are talking about social media, freedom of expression and digital rights."

So, in making even the discussion of political and social injustice illegal, the expression of Palestinian views whether in social movement organization and mobilization or as ordinary citizens becomes a criminal punishable act (Santos 2018). Meanwhile, hate speech directed at Palestinians is not included and Jewish Israelis are excluded in the application of the new law (Silver 2016). These double standards are intentional and central to the practice of differential

citizenship rights. When discussing Israeli monopoly over telecommunication services and technological structures, I could not help but wonder what Palestinians thought of the paradox behind using social media platforms and services that are provided to them by Israel to criticize and challenge the occupation system itself. Many have pointed out that the irony in this dynamic is not limited to Internet servers, "the water that we drink comes from them, the cords that we use come from across their borders, the shampoo we use comes from them, everything is from them," says Dana. "But the internet is the only thing that we use against them, to resist them [...]. Online, I feel like I have a voice. Those days that I was posting on social media, I felt powerful because we were dedicated, and they could not shut us down or silence us [...]. When we were uploading stories, we had something inside of us that was telling us to keep going," she adds. Leen put it differently by quoting a video of a girl living in the OPTs: "[she] was saying that [Israelis] think that because you use their currency, speak their language, live with them and use their electricity and water that they have control over you, but they do not own you. When they give you something, you take it and use it to show them you are alive and to help the Palestinian cause." Despite these feelings of empowerment, other participants pointed out a sense of fear like Kate who told me she felt nervous because she heard many stories about people who got arrested because of a post, a comment, or an article and who lost their jobs because of that. What was interesting in Kate's comment is that she was not only referring to Israel but also to the PA, "like what happened with Nizar Banat, the PA killed him because he was an activist who spoke up against them." PA censorship is discussed further in the second part of this chapter. Although posting online can be considered an act of resistance, some Palestinians have gotten used to it and the consequences that come with it whether it is arrests, long interrogations, or jail time. Mohammed admitted never thinking about the contradiction behind posting pro-Palestinian content using Israeli Internet saying "it is an unfortunate reality rather than a form of resistance because we got used to it. Maybe it is resistance, but we do not see it as something that important." However, this normalization is not something everyone is comfortable with. Indeed, another participant from Western Jerusalem explained that "using [Israeli] instruments to raise your voice gives this idea that Israel is a legitimate state, [...] legalizing [its] presence." Nevertheless, she remains aware that these instruments are imposed on Palestinians so taking advantage of them in order "not to be erased" is valid. "I do believe there is a glimpse of hope when someone raises our voice as Palestinians even on channels, I am not fond of," she concludes.

In the physical monopoly Israel maintains over telecommunication structures, it enables itself to maintain similar control over the online space. This contributes to the creation of online borders through processes of territoriality and online confinement, limiting the space of expression of Palestinians on social media platforms. In its partnership with social media companies and other actors abroad, Israel was able to mobilize support to censor and erase Palestinian content in the virtual space. One can draw a parallel between the social media companies' support that Israel receives to create its virtual borders and the international and private assistance it uses with the Wall's surveillance system and border patrol mechanism. On a more national level, Israel assembled different policies targeting those who 'incite against the state of Israel' without a clear definition or boundary to where this law can go. Unlike physical borders that are clearly delineated, virtual borders are hazy and hard to distinguish creating a sense of unpredictability and uncertainty for Palestinians. The next section is another example of border-making in the online space through processes of shadow banning as enacted by the state and civil society.

II. Israeli Governmental Institutions and Civil Society in the Service of Censorship

As a virtual third space, social media has connected individuals through various networks and online interactions creating power dynamics similar to the ones in the physical space. The counter-hegemonic nature of the virtual third space is visible in the altercations between Palestinians and the Israeli state in their online form; social media posts and content become the expression of a certain type of digital dissent bringing Palestinian narratives to the front while Israeli authority is expressed through state censorship as well as Israeli civil society narratives. However, the virtual space is never isolated and is rather connected to concrete consequences such as the arrest of Palestinians for content they posted online and interrogations that usually result in imprisonment. The type of content that is discussed throughout the section, whether in the literature or in comments given by participants, challenges Israeli narratives. In fact, it is critical of the occupation system and the violence soldiers and settlers inflict on Palestinians on a daily basis. Participants mentioned sharing content that included pictures and videos of violent encounters, infographics explaining the history behind the Israeli occupation as well as written original and copied posts about their experiences and stories living in the OPTs and Israel. Therefore, this section aims at reconciling the on and offline dimensions of the virtual third space by exploring the power relationships at play as well as the voices that

are communicated and silenced through it. Additionally, this section thoroughly explores the legal, political, and social tools that are mobilized to erase Palestinian content online.

The Involvement of the Israeli State Apparatus in the Censorship Process

The censorship process in the online space is operated by different entities whose purposes converge towards the silencing of Palestinian voices and the invisibilization of certain narratives that do not follow Israeli discourse. The Israeli state apparatus functions on three different angles: the judicial one following which some bills were passed by the Knesset to codify online censorship, the institutional one manifested through the creation of a Cyber Unit aimed at reporting content online to social media companies directly and a civilian angle managed by the Israeli government to promote Israeli voices and take down Palestinian ones.

The 2017 Facebook Bill & the 2016 Anti-Terror Law

According to reports written by the digital rights NGO 7amleh, in 2017, the Knesset was going to pass a bill that would have granted Israeli administrative courts the power to block content that amounts to online 'incitement' at the request of the government. The bill would have also issued orders to delete content "if it harmed the human safety, public, economic, state or vital infrastructure safe" as well as pave the way for legal actions against social media companies who disseminate such content. Advocacy Advisor, Mona Shtaya, at 7amleh, explained that incitement has a very broad meaning for Israelis. To illustrate her claim, she told me about the case of Dareen Tatour, a young girl who posted an original poem online in which she said 'قاوم يا شعبي قاوم' (Resist my people, Resist). Israeli authorities identified those words as incitement and proceeded to arrest and interrogate Tatour accusing her of instigating people to revolt against the state of Israel. Mona added that Israel can use this excuse of incitement whenever they want to persecute Palestinians. A similar thing happens for posts that contain farewell messages. Indeed, I heard a similar story from Mohammed about a girl who posted online 'forgive me,' back in 2015 when stabbing operations were common. "[T]hey arrested her because they felt like whoever posted things where they were saying goodbye had to be arrested and kept under surveillance." Furthermore, through lawfare contractors in the United States, Israel can sue the providers of Facebook for failing to remove posts by Palestinians that they claim are 'incitement to violence.' Following that claim, the Israeli Anti-Terror law enacted in June 2016 covered legal actions with regard to the accusation of incitement through social media and enabled exceptional measures which allowed for the arbitrary detention and

secret evidence (Santos 2018, p.105). This new law of exceptionalism presented in the Anti-Terror Law is tied to its settler colonial claims. With this law, Israel has given itself the power to arrest, detain and sentence Palestinians on a case-by-case basis. This was the case for Asala who was arrested in her home following the content she posted online on May 24, 2021. "They said they had evidence so I asked them to show me the دليل (evidence) and they asked me if I knew what دليل meant. I said: 'I am a four-year law student, of course I know what it means!' Then I asked them what it meant to post something that incites against the state of Israel, and they did not respond." However, Asala had an idea of why she was arrested: "In every town, there are patriotic people, and I was one of them, so I organized this protest asking people to join and I posted a story on my Instagram and wrote a post on Facebook about the demonstrations with the location and the time. This specific demonstration had a lot of clashes with the police [so] I think it was that." The authorities ended up telling Asala they arrested her because she participated in an illegal demonstration and posted content that incited people against the state of Israel. She was later released and put under house arrest for a week. She also pointed out the difference between the way she was treated and the way her friend with a green ID was treated: "She went through excessive interrogation and was beaten and yelled at [...] whereas I waited in an airconditioned room, I was dressed and had my makeup done. They did put handcuffs on me but when I wanted water, they gave me a glass and they let my mom bring me food and clothes." Asala's story is also proof that resistance practices in Israel-Palestine are also reliant on social media platforms as channels of community organizing. This contradicts Gladwell's theory according to which, social media shifts efforts towards resilience and adaptability rather than towards concrete actions on the ground. In other words, the Palestinian virtual space is not one of performative activism but rather one of dissent centered around works of mobilization and collective action. According to Adalah (2016), an independent human rights organization and legal center, the Anti-Terror Law combined both British mandate-era emergency regulations and other state of exception rules found in Israel's emergency laws based on racialized logics which mark people as suspect 'simply due to the fact that they are Arab' (Adalah 2016). The mechanism through which this law was enacted follows a double-standard that aims at targeting Palestinians and makes it non-applicable to Jewish Israelis on the ground. The criminalization of Palestinian voices and selves and their portrayal as a threat to the security of the state is an additional element that justifies it to the public and gathers the approval of the Israeli public opinion.

The Cyber Unit

Before enacting these censorship laws, Israel has also been developing new ministries and special units that report Palestinian content to social media companies. In 2015, the Israeli Ministry of Justice developed a special 'Cyber Unit' to support the country's National Cyber Crime Unit (Lahav 433) and the Israeli Law, Information and Technology Authority at the Ministry of Justice (7amleh 2020 Report). This Cyber Unit is responsible for drafting and sending requests to tech companies such as Facebook, Twitter and Google based on alleged violations of Israeli domestic laws and the companies' guidelines, terms and standards. As a result, large amounts of Palestinian content has been taken down and severe limitations of freedom of expression and opinon have been imposed by the companies. Many of the social media users I interviewed told me about notifications they received about the content they were posting 'violating community guidelines.' "Instagram notified me twice telling me I was violating community guidelines and one of my Instagram stories was removed. They also told me that my account will be shut down," said Dana. Leen has also received similar messages telling her the content she shared was considered 'harassment' or 'sensitive content.' Meanwhile, Asala told me about a particular picture she posted on her Instagram story of a group of kids in Gaza running from a warplane above them in 2008. "The notification I received was something new, it was not about community guidelines or violence, it was as if Instagram invented this new censorship for Palestinian content. It was weird." The message Asala refers to reads 'Partly False Information. The same information was reviewed by independent fact-checkers in another post' (see picture below). According to the Instagram Help Center, such a warning is usually the result of a third-party fact checker that deems the post "false information, altered content, or content with missing context on Instagram."[5] The policy is then to filter the post by reducing its visibility in feed and stories in addition to the message that shows up under the posts alerting the user that it is false information. "This actually happened in Gaza, let people see this!" says Asala.

[5] Instagram Help Center. "Why is a post on Instagram marked as false information?" (web page), Instagram Site (website), accessed March 28, 2022, https://help.instagram.com/388534952086572.

The Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs even tried to make the argument that several leaders of Palestinian human rights organizations are terrorists affiliated with radical organizations through a campaign entitled '#TerroristsInSuits.' Campaigns such as these are not just intended to silence Palestinian human rights advocacy work, they potentially lead to incitement of violence against Palestinian activists thus shrinking the space for freedom of expression online. 7amleh's last report dating from May 2021 showed that since the Israeli Supreme Court announced its decision to forcibly displace Palestinians living in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and following the attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque, protests and moves of Israeli settlers targeting Palestinians and the attacks on the Gaza Strip, large amounts of Palestinian content and accounts were removed or restricted on social media platforms. According to the report, content and accounts were removed, reduced, and restricted, hashtags were hidden, and archived content was deleted. The digital rights organization claimed it is likely that the efforts of the Israeli Ministry of Justice's Cyber Unit is also behind many of these reported violations (7amleh 2021). Ines referred to this incident by saying that "Israel has these human and technological resources that are systematically asking those

platforms to take down content and the records show that these platforms have complied." Moreover, 40 reports exposed the hate speech and incitement to violence targeting Palestinians and Arabs online including reports of Israeli extremist groups mobilizing lynch mobs on platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram. This was then transposed offline and led to the killing of two Palestinians. In addition to online violence, Israeli authorities used geolocation technologies to track protesters as they were participating in popular mobilizations on the ground. Mona mentioned the case of a "worshiper [who] received a text message from Israeli Intelligence services telling them they will be punished for participating in violent acts given their location." She proceeded to describe this online surveillance system as a tool for "population control."

The Government-Operated NGOs (GONGOs)

A number of non-governmental (NGOs) and governmental organizations are also encouraging citizens and supporters to join coordinated efforts to report Palestinian content online and have it removed from social media. Many of these organizations titled Government-Operated NGOs (GONGOs) are working to conflate criticism of Israel and anti-Zionist discourse online with antisemitism and hate speech. Citizens involved have designed strategies to manipulate social media algorithms with the support of online trolls. GONGOs' work includes both efforts to take down content critical of Israel and advocating for Palestinian human rights as well as working to promote content intended to smear Palestinians including disinformation, incitement and hate speech directed towards Palestinians. In May 2021, the Arab Center's findings show that there were 183,000 conversations that included racism, insults, or incitement against Arabs out of 1,090,000 conversations the report monitored which addressed Palestinians and Arabs online. 29% of such speech incite to violence while 40% included racist conversations against Palestinians.

Furthermore, the government instructs the GONGOs to like, share and comment on pro-Israeli content to increase its visibility on social media. This way, the government and the GONGOs can create a harsher environment online for Palestinians and contribute to shrinking their space for freedom of expression, assembly and association online. 7amleh's Mona concluded that "[...]whenever [Israel] want[s] to take down something or publish their propaganda, they have these platforms controlled by the GONGOs." She also cited the 'Act.IL' platform where Israelis and pro-Israel supporters mobilize. After creating a fake account to find out how it worked, she found out that users on the site are tasked with finding pro-Palestinian

content and reporting it, “so when posts have thousands of reports, social media companies will not review that and will think that this is something that should be taken down, so they do.” She adds that Israelis’ propaganda consists in finding a piece of news that was published by the New York Times and sharing it. “They will write an elaborate comment, and someone will post it and then ask people to like the comment, so it stays [visible]. It is a type of censorship when they are playing with the algorithm because they are taking down Palestinian content and [highlighting theirs].” This was also manifested in the drop many social media users noticed regarding their views. On platforms such as Instagram where on can track the number of people that has seen the content posted, people I interviewed expressed their concern when they compared the number of views on their regular Instagram stories (temporary posts that disappear after 24 hours), which included selfies and regular pictures, and stories that were related to Palestine or Sheikh Jarrah. “I do notice the views dropping compared to when I post a picture or share another post that is not related to Palestine,” says one participant from Bethlehem. Another participant from Western Jerusalem who lives ten minutes away from Sheikh Jarrah was documenting what was happening on the ground: “[Platforms] would take some posts down because they violate their policies. Sometimes, if you write the word ‘Palestinian,’ the post would have very little reach. This happened to me many times. I am very active on social media so when I post a picture of my niece, I get the usual number but when I post something political, I get less than that.”

Through the judicial, institutional, and civilian angles, the Israeli government can control all aspects of online Palestinian presence. By drafting laws, collaborating with social media companies, and mobilizing Israeli citizens, Israel can cover all grounds and restrict online space for Palestinians and pro-Palestinian content in general. PIPD Digital Communication Manager Mayss Al Alami expressed her concern saying “It is a very dangerous game when big tech supports an oppressive regime because it is very delegitimizing of the oppressed [...] and legitimiz[es] the oppressor figure and the laws they are trying to pass as a trusted authority. [Given how] everyone perceives the law and policies as something more rigid they must follow, it is scary. It controls space a lot.”

Methodology & Sample

To better grasp the process of censorship against pro-Palestinian content online, I collected data on Twitter to identify patterns and validate or refute some hypotheses I present in this chapter regarding the link between the physical and virtual space as well as the

conceptualization and practice of resistance online. I look at tweets that use normal terms such as ‘israel,’ ‘palestine,’ and ‘فلسطين,’ which I call ‘normal tweets.’ Then I look at ‘alternative tweets’ which are the ones that use the alternative spelling of the same terms: ‘is*el,’ ‘p@lestine’ and ‘فـلـسـطـيـن’ in this case. Given that the sample for the normal tweets is over 200 000 tweets compared to a little over 25 000 alternative tweets, I thought it would be more feasible to focus on the alternative tweets especially that they are more relevant to the act of circumventing the algorithm and are more directly connected to virtual resistance. The sample of alternative tweets that I use in creating graphs and identifying patterns consists of 25 363 tweets with 282 flagged as sensitive content. In this section of the chapter, I am looking at the flagging process which refers to tweets that are flagged as ‘possibly sensitive.’ Such a label prevents tweets from appearing on users’ feeds or, if they do appear, they are hidden and require users to click to view them. Although this is not a direct form of content moderation given that the tweets are not taken down or deleted, it remains a form of monitoring that hinders the publication of pro-Palestinian content online. Additionally, there is little information about the implication of flagging content as ‘possibly sensitive’ in the sense that once a tweet is flagged, there is no saying whether it will only be hidden, taken down completely or even eventually unflagged.

One of the terms I analyze is the Arabic term for Palestine, ‘فلسطين’ as well as its alternative spelling. There are two rationales behind choosing to look at Arabic terms: first, to better understand a predominantly Arabic-speaking context virtually, I thought including Arabic terms would allow me to catch some of the subtleties that English terms do not convey. In this regard, I observed comments that highlighted the Arab identity of Palestine as well as the expression of Arab solidarity with the Palestinian cause like the referral to Jerusalem as ‘القدس’ - Al Quds[6] . Second, in analyzing two Arabic terms, I wanted to observe the dynamics between a Western mostly anglophone social media platform and the Arabic content posted on it. Arabic, and its ancient forms like the dotless one, can be turned to some extent into a language of resistance in such a framework. The dimension I am exploring resembles to some extent the formulation of *sumud* in its Arabic form even though it is used in a more anglophone context. Maintaining content in Arabic in a predominantly non-Arabic space can serve as an advantage whereby the scope of the algorithm, and hence of the content moderation process, does not encompass it. In my analysis of the data I collected, I observed that 88 tweets using the term ‘فلسطين’ out of 8 455 and four tweets using ‘فـلـسـطـيـن’ out of 496 were flagged as

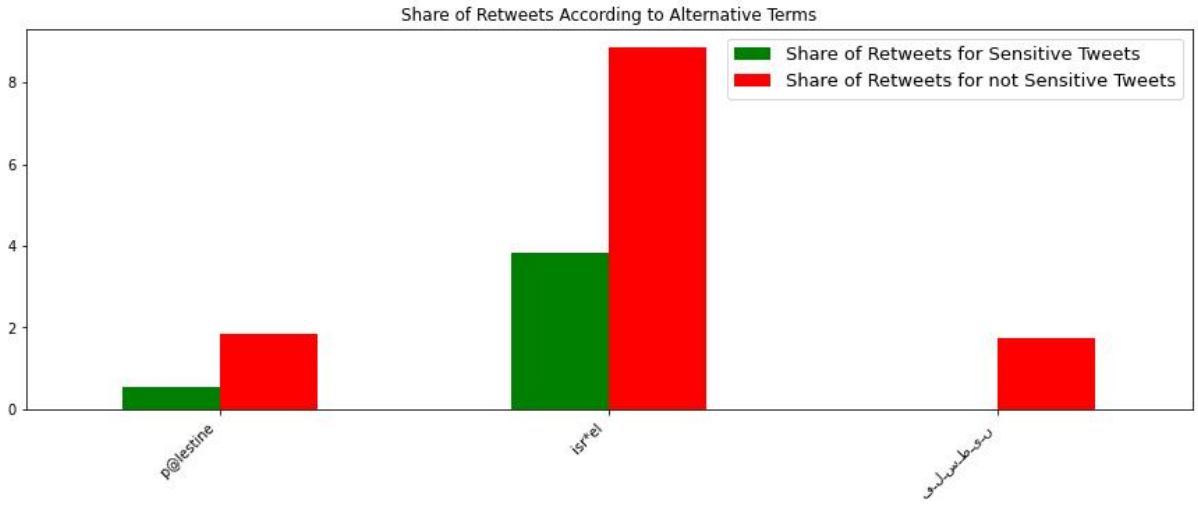
[6] Al-Quds is the transliteration of the Arabic word ‘القدس’ which refers to the city of Jerusalem.

sensitive content throughout the entire time period studied. This is respectively 0.34% and 0.01% out of the total collected tweets. These are the lowest ratios among the entire sample. Although the likeliness for tweets to be flagged as sensitive content remains low in the sample- 2% for 'israel', 2.2% for 'palestine', 1.1% for 'isr*el' and 1.4% for 'p@lestine'- the ratios for 'فلسطين' and 'فلسطـيـن' are still the lowest. This might be due to the linguistic element behind it whereby tweets in Arabic might be less reported by social media users than ones with English terminologies.

Israeli Censorship: Flagging Content as 'Possibly Sensitive' On Twitter - A Quantitative Study

According to Twitter, 'sensitive content' refers to content that is "excessively gory or shares violent, hateful or adult content within live video or in profile header or list banner images," it also includes "media depicting sexual violence and/or assault [...]." Twitter considers that social media users can sometimes share content which depicts 'sensitive topics' which include violent or adult content as well as content that, according to it, normalizes violence and causes distress to those who view it. Therefore, with its 'sensitive media policy' Twitter allows its users to report potential violations via dedicated reporting flows.[7] The process is not clearly explained so there is no true way of knowing whether Twitter employees view posts that are reported before flagging them as sensitive or whether a post is automatically flagged if it is reported by a certain number of people online. In this section, flagging content as 'possibly sensitive' is considered a tool in the censoring process used by the Israeli state apparatus against Palestinians in the virtual space. To prove that this technique does hide content and prevent its circulation online, I calculate the number of retweets according to the alternative terms that I have previously selected. In this analysis, my focus is on alternative tweets which are the ones that use the three alternative terms I selected for my study: 'p@lestine,' 'isr*el' and 'فلسطـيـن.'

[7] Twitter Help Center, "Sensitive media policy," (web page), Twitter Site (website), accessed March 28, 2022, https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/media-policy.



Graph (1): Share of Retweets According to Alternative Terms

Graph (1) looks at the average number of retweets of the sample of tweets that use the alternative terms and are flagged as 'sensitive content.' At first glance, for every single alternative term, the average number of retweets of tweets seems to be higher than those who are not flagged. Indeed, for tweets using 'p@lestine' the share of retweets, which refers to the average number of retweets, is cut by more than half whereas for 'isr*el' the share of retweets decreases from over 9 retweets when it is not flagged to 4 retweets when it is. The case seems to be even more extreme for the term ''فلسطين' given that tweets that are flagged are not retweeted at all whereas those who are not flagged get retweeted almost twice in average. However, in the case of the dotless term, it is important to note that only four tweets using it were flagged as sensitive and none of them were retweeted. It is possible that the users tweeting these did not have many followers thus explaining the absence of retweets. However, after examining the accounts, it appears that three of them have more than 700 followers with one reaching 2 000 and are still active on Twitter which means that they are indeed real accounts. Overall, this means that when tweets are flagged, they lose visibility online and users are less likely to see them on their feed thus causing them to attract less attention. This thorough process is a means of content moderation because despite the fact that tweets that are flagged as 'sensitive content' are usually reported by other users, according to the Twitter guidelines. It seems that Twitter does not seem to put in a lot of effort to check if its definition of 'sensitive content' could be applied to such tweets. Although there is no concrete evidence of this claim, the fact that social media users could only retrieve their tweets and regain access to their accounts, which were taken down by different platforms including Twitter, with the help of organizations such as 7amleh shows that there was an absence of initiative from the side of the

social media platform, but this remains a hypothesis, nevertheless. Additionally, to find out if the flagged tweets were sensitive content, I researched on Twitter the content for both normal and alternative tweets. I selected a few randomly to showcase that the flagging process is not entirely based on the guidelines I mention above regarding 'sensitive content' on Twitter (See Appendix 1 and 2). As observed, although some tweets show some graphic content (including a bleeding body on the ground and soldiers shooting at unarmed people) many are more complicated to categorize. In this regard, it is possible to assume that the flagging occurs in favor of Palestinians because of how they are shown in vulnerable situations, dead, injured, or humiliated, but with a closer look at the general content of the tweets that are flagged, it makes more sense to assume that they are categorized because of how they portray Israel and its army as violent compared to unarmed Palestinians. Additionally, some tweets are very critical of the state of Israel and do use a strong language to convey a message, but they do not seem to violate any of the rules that are set by the platform. Although some might be deemed as hateful, they do not target specific people but rather the state in the sense of the Israeli government with one accusing Arab leaders of being "accomplices" and "traitors" for working with Israel. Others, on the other hand, are either factual or unrelated (maps, protest posters, photos of crops grown in Palestinian towns etc.). Therefore, by relying on the graph and the screenshots, it is possible to confirm the hypothesis according to which Twitter does monitor and erase the content of certain pro-Palestinian tweets by flagging them as sensitive when they do not violate any guidelines, thus reducing their visibility.

The Palestinian Authority's (PA) Censorship of Palestinian Content

Although the censorship system installed and operated by the Israeli authorities is the main one that is cited in this thesis, it is important to mention PA censorship strategies. The repression of activists who were deemed oppositional by the PA has been a reality since the founding days of Yasser Arafat's presidency in 1993 (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh 2014). PA forces under President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas officials in the Gaza strip have repressed activists by curbing what they deemed subversive online politics, cracking down on expressions of opposition to the Israeli occupation and blog posts mocking the president. In the crackdown on protests against the Israeli military attacks on Gaza in December 2008, there was an increase in internal repression and violence against activists and human rights defenders. Some have described the PA as a "subcontractor of the occupation." Ines also criticized the PA saying, "they are this colonized entity with a leadership that is trying to remain with the little power

they have but for their own survival, they have to abide." She adds that the PA are "intelligence informants," so "for them to survive, they have to provide information, so Israel accepts their existence and fuels it." When I asked Mona about the PA's censorship of Palestinians, she mentioned the Cybercrime Law "which is used to criminalize activists and opponents that are against the PA." Back in 2017, President Mahmoud Abbas passed this law by presidential decree in secrecy and enforced it without consulting civil society organizations. Unlike the previous law that aimed at prosecuting crimes committed via computer network, this Cybercrime Law mostly criminalizes offenses against physical rather than virtual assets and identity leaving some loopholes in the legal basis for prosecution. Indeed, the new legislation imposes penalties on internet users who produce or share 'immoral material' or material that jeopardizes 'the public order' with no clear definition of these terms allowing for increased social sanctioning and surveillance by security forces and the instrumentalization of such provisions. After the murder of Nizar Banat in June 2021 by the PA for his criticism of the authority, several journalists and activists have come forward and said the Cybercrime Law was designed to defame them and restrict their activity and their work. "Fortunately, [the PA] does not have power over social media platforms, so they make it internal, arrest people and interrogate them and maybe they ask social media platforms, but the latter do not respond. [...] The two authorities are part of the same system so both [the PA and Israel] censor but for different goals," explained Mona. Similarly, Ines explained that while Israel's hegemony comes from a place of control, the PA's comes from a place of fear: "I think the PA fears the leadership and the people around them, they repress dissent because they are weak, they do it out of fear for their existence which makes it a different dynamic than the one with Israel."

Throughout the censorship process, Israeli civil society is mobilized to report tweets, Instagram, and Facebook posts while institutions try to pass bills and institute laws to prevent any content critical of the state of Israel to be posted online. Using its global network with social media platforms, non-governmental organizations as well as civil society members, the Israeli state apparatus showcases its wide and expanded dominance over mediums of information and communication nationally as well as internationally. While facing these challenges, Palestinians are pushed to innovate and create alternative ways of communication and community organization in the virtual space in an attempt to cross the border of censorship and shadow banning. In framing these processes as border-making strategies in the virtual space, I refer to a definition of borders that is rooted in the experience of those resisting it which, in this case, are Palestinian social media users. Borders are thus embodied by

algorithmic tools that prevent the publication of Palestinian content online. The next section will dive deeper into strategies that are used to cross these borders with a specific case study on the social media movement that rose after the events in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in Eastern Jerusalem.

CHAPTER II: ONLINE RESISTANCE THROUGH ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

I. Countering the Narrative in the Virtual Space Using Alternative Content

Resistance Online during Sheikh Jarrah through Alternative Communication

The uprising that occurred during the Spring of 2021 began in Jerusalem and reached a peak in May coinciding with the start of the holy month of Ramadan. Israeli authorities in occupied Jerusalem cut the speakers to al-Aqsa Mosque to allow an Israeli official to make a speech marking a Zionist holiday. From that point forward, Israeli authorities took several other steps to police public space in Jerusalem. As contention mounted, Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood were being displaced and evicted from their homes by Israeli soldiers and settlers in the area. By the end of May, mass protests had broken out across historic Palestine as Israeli forces repressed Palestinians going so far as to tear gas and stun grenades inside al-Aqsa Mosque itself where worshippers had gathered for Ramadan's holiest night, Laylat al-Qadr (Munayyer 2021, p. 96). Along with physical effort on the ground in the forms of sit-ins and demonstrations, social media has played a massive role in raising awareness about the illegal evictions of Palestinian families from their land in Occupied East Jerusalem to finally build an entire movement dedicated to the cause. One of those facing the loss of their homes are Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd, who have been posting tirelessly every day to publicize the issue and film the altercations with Israeli soldiers and settlers in their neighborhood.

The use of social media opened a space of contestation for Palestinians and offered alternative narratives to the mainstream discourse that is dominated by Israelis. Social media was turned into a tool of resistance and an important site in which to rethink and redefine racialized bodies that are systematically stereotyped, stigmatized, surveilled, and positioned as targets of state-sanctioned violence. Leen hinted at the power of social media in the case of Sheikh Jarrah saying: "I think that the Sheikh Jarrah case represented hope, it showed us that

we were not forgotten, and people were thinking about us [...]. Social media was very important and if it was not for the platforms, all of Sheikh Jarrah would belong to the settlers now." Another participant mentioned how when the events first happened in Sheikh Jarrah, she did not post because she did not think that social media could change anything but when she asked her friends about it, they convinced her it could create a difference. Later when she started seeing people who do not usually share content online post about the situation she said: "that gave me hope." Additionally, the internet consists of electronic infrastructures that make it possible to avoid territorial borders and overcome limits of state media broadcasting. The global space maintained and hosted by the internet offers a unique platform for dispersed communities such as the Palestinian one. Palestinian online identity is formed by being a nation without a state following anti-colonial nationalism. In this sense, Palestinian identity becomes related to an imagined community coming together via the web (Aouragh 2011). Online space is then appropriated as one for mobilization and community organizing allowing Palestinians to reclaim agency both online and offline. Mohammad has described social media as extremely helpful saying that it is a "good place because everyone uses it and the message makes its way to other people but one has to be consistent." Another participant expressed how the social media movement that was created in solidarity with Palestinians online "created a conversation." "Social media is still a double-edged sword [though] people go to prison for what they post so there is a huge sacrifice on our part," she adds. And as censorship techniques evolve throughout the years and algorithmic combinations are used to conceal and take down pro-Palestinian content, social media users had the ability to mobilize the resources at their disposal to alter the ways in which they express themselves online to circumvent the algorithm and document human rights violation happening in their communities. This has been even more visible throughout the Sheikh Jarrah campaign between May and July 2021. A digital rights expert that I interviewed, and who prefers to remain anonymous, told me that the machine that is behind social media companies was created and is operated by white western male leadership: "This is an indicator that indigenous people's content is being labeled and used several times as something that should be taken down. If that is real and [platforms] have a technical glitch, it might be an indicator of a larger problem. They might have the glitch but [this mass censorship] came at a time of escalation which means we were really affected by it so while Israelis were sharing their propaganda, we were not allowed to share our documentations of [human rights] violations." Taking that into account, posting and sharing content online is regarded as a form of resistance. Mayss gave me a similar argument saying that "during those months there was a new idea coming up and people who were good with

technology were making videos about how to use hashtags, how to trick the algorithm and it was just a very strong collective and a creative form of resistance because it was like saying 'Okay you are putting up a fight against us speaking up, here is our retaliation.'" However, this did not mean all social media users were putting their effort into this form of online dissent. One participant expressed her disillusionment with these social media tricks saying that after talking with a lawyer, he told her that censorship was inevitable: "he told me that everything we have been told about fighting the algorithm was actually a lie sold by [Israel]. Just your location is enough for you to be censored. [Israelis] control everything which is why social media can play a specific role but as long as everything is controlled by the oppressor there is no way out. That is why we think of social media as a medium that can help us, but we never rely on it, we believe resistance is our only way out, revolution and violence is our only way out." Another also admitted posting on social media without paying attention to the tricks that people were using online saying: "I was not even paying attention to the algorithm, I did not use the strategies to break it. [...] Because at the end of the day, if they want to take down our stories, they cannot because all stories were [about Palestine]. Where will they put them all?"

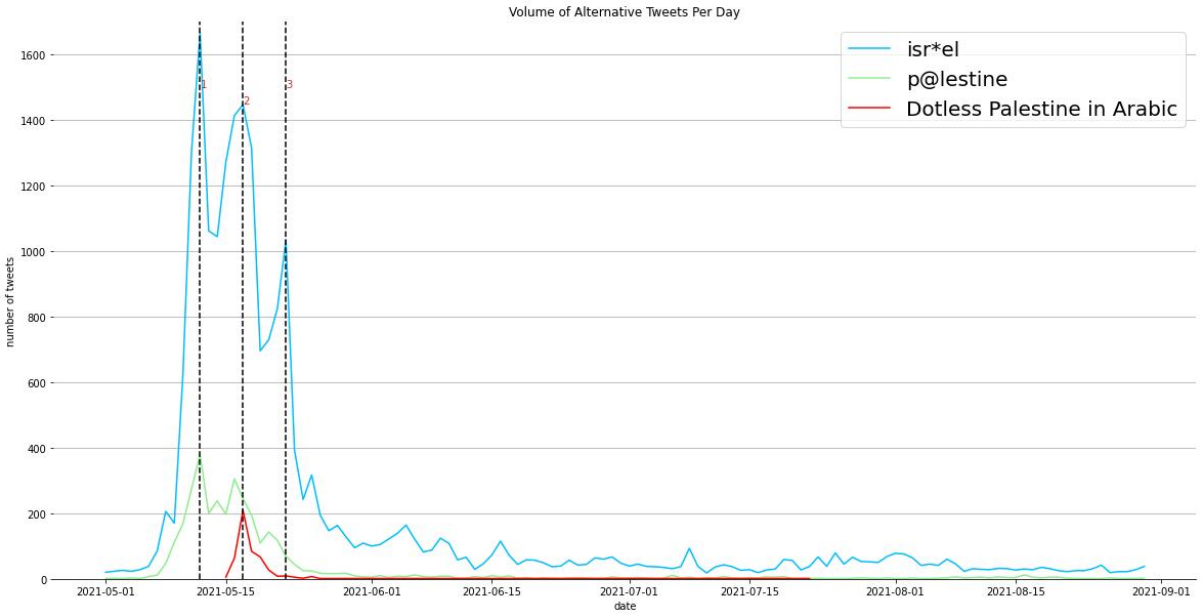
Circumventing the Algorithm as a Contestation of Virtual Borders

Social media algorithms use artificial intelligence and machine learning to scan for certain words or phrases flagged by the platforms as impermissible. These include the word 'shahid' (martyr in Arabic) but also expressions such as 'Hamas,' 'resistance,' and "Zionist." But these words are essential in the articulation of plights and the documentation of human rights violations among Palestinians, so the social media users had to find other ways to convey their message online without getting caught by the platforms. Therefore, Palestinians' innovative tricks to counter the algorithm included sectioning the words or incorporating Latin letters to avoid detection. This strategy was developed by Gaza-based journalist Ahmad Al-Najjar who uses Facebook to share news about the situation on the ground. Having had his account taken down twice and banned several times from the platform, Al-Najjar says he believes this is a "good way to avoid the account being deleted or banned, for now at least." Other strategies included the use of symbols, dots and asterixis when writing words. For instance, instead of writing 'Hamas' or 'Zionist,' one would type 'H@mas' or 'Zion*st.' Kate even referred to these words as "a new language" and describing censorship as "a stupid strategy because when you change the words, they become more important." In addition to the alternative language, Kate also told me about another initiative started by Palestinians during

the Sheikh Jarrah events through which smartphone users went on the Appstore and gave Facebook a one-star rating and commented that it was censoring them. “We exposed Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg [...]. The world got the message, [...] it was an important moment,” she said.

For those posting in Arabic, a website which automates the censorship process by encoding Arabic text to confuse algorithms was created. Tajawz which means ‘to overcome,’ in Arabic encodes Arabic characters into new unrecognizable words like taking Arabic and turning it into written drawings, essentially breaking the process used by algorithms to flag and remove content. For the algorithm, these words are cryptic and impossible to decipher, and they are not going to understand what people are saying but people are going to understand each other (Mashkoor 2021). Meanwhile, innovative users have rolled back centuries of linguistic development and turned to the use of dotless Arabic to trick artificial intelligence trawling technologies and evade censorship. Dotless Arabic dates to the 7th century (Drissner 2021) and can be a little complicated to read but an eye familiar with the language is able to make sense of the words and sentences. With targeted word searches and automated translators struggling to decipher text correctly once the dots are removed, dotless Arabic creates a challenge to digital monitoring services. The widespread use of this technique has been made possible thanks to easy-to-use software tools and websites such as ‘dotless,’ wherein users can paste their text and receive its dotless equivalent (Wrey 2021). When considering the power dynamics at play in the Israeli-Palestinian context, Arabic (dotless or encoded) becomes a means of revolt and a tool of resistance not only against algorithms and censorship mechanisms but against social media platforms and the hostile environment they might create for Palestinian communities. It is possible to draw a parallel between the use of Arabic terms online and the conservation of the word *sumud* to refer to resilience in the physical space and in the context of the Separation Wall. According to Ines “[Palestinians] manage to exist as a people internationally and in this current century [...]. [They] manage to fight invisibilization despite a very heavy and sophisticated and powerful oppressive system and a machine that is proactively trying to erase them. [They] are not only trying to exist because no one cares but because someone really cares to make us disappear.” This form of ‘online *sumud*’ that Ines has referred to in our discussion transposes practices of steadfastness and strength of character back in the virtual world. By bridging the gap between the margin and the center, the online third space places itself at the intersection of politically loaded power dynamics and coordinated acts of dissent. Additionally, the similarity between *sumud* and its online equivalent challenges Gladwell’s theory by connecting resilience and collective action on the ground. Unlike what

he argued, social media has enabled Palestinians to reappropriate virtual space and create strong ties rooted in collective action and community mobilization already present in the physical space. Therefore, the transposition of real-life events onto people's social media profiles and online platforms resulted in the convolution of both spaces and blurring the lines between them. To better understand the parallel between the physical and the virtual space during the events of Sheikh Jarrah Graph (2) collects the volume of tweets using alternative terms between May and August 2021 and compares the number of tweets as well as the dates in which they reach a peak with events on the ground. As mentioned in the previous section, I only focus on alternative tweets in my analysis. By looking at Graph (2), it is possible to discern that there are more tweets using the alternative term 'isr*el' than the other two with the blue graph reaching its highest peak of more than 1 600 tweets at the beginning of the online movement in May. The term 'p@lestine' is next, with a highest peak of almost 400 tweets at the same date and the term 'فلسطين' reaching a peak of 200 tweets a little later around mid-May. However, starting from 22 July, Twitter users have stopped using 'فلسطين' for no apparent reason. In this analysis of the seven peaks present on the graph, I examine the events that correspond to those dates to see if there is correlation between them with a specific focus on why the use of that specific term has boomed that day and what happened on the ground. The reason why I am only looking at the three first peaks is because two of them combine two terms: 'isr*el' and 'p@lestine' for the first one and 'isr*el' and 'فلسطين' for the second one, and because after looking up events during those days as well as analyzing the tweets they coincided it with, I came to the conclusion that there was no real correlation to extract.

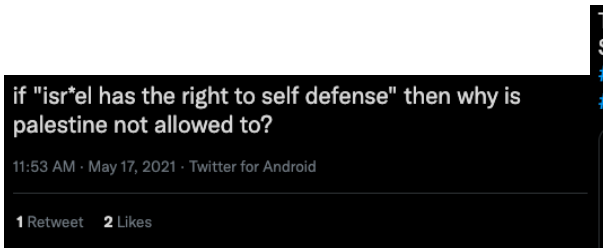


Graph (2): Volume of Alternative Tweets Per Day

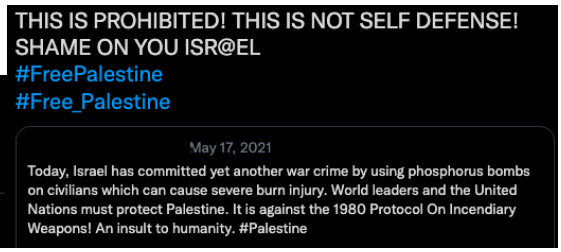
On May 12, there was a peak in the use of the term 'isr*el' as well as 'p@lestine.' On that same day, Hamas had fired a rocket at Tel Aviv killing five people in response to the violence in Jerusalem and the bombing of tower buildings in Gaza City (Alsaafin and Humaid 2021). For Israel the targeting of its commercial capital posed a new challenge so later that day, the Israeli Air Force destroyed dozens of police and security installations along the Gaza Strip including what it claimed were rocket launch sites and offices and homes of the group's leaders killing 35 people (Al-Mughrabi, Farrell and Heller 2021). Although some tweets like Tweet (a) below did mention these events specifically, many of them expressed "standing with Palestine," or asked if there was a way for their respective governments to send help to Palestinians or Hamas. Many have also used the hashtag #GazaUnderAttack which started circulating earlier that month.

Tweet (a)

On May 17, there was a peak in the use of the term ‘isr*el’ as well as ‘فلسطين.’ This date coincided with the killing of three Palestinian demonstrators (Gross and Boxer 2021) during clashes with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as well as the Israeli airstrike which destroyed 94 buildings in Gaza including 461 housing and commercial units, 60 condominiums and the housing offices for media outlets such as the Associated Press, the Al Jazeera Media Network as well as others (Sokol 2021). Although tweets during this day remained general, accusing Israel of crimes against humanity, and describing it as a settler colonial state, many have been responding to the argument that Israelis were just “defending themselves.” Tweet (b) and (c) can serve as examples. Others also claimed that Israel was using “phosphorus bombs on civilians.”



Tweet (b)



Tweet (c)

On the other hand, tweets in Arabic were very broad but expressed support for Palestine calling Al Quds “Palestine’s Capital,” and cursing the Israeli occupation. Tweet (d) reads “May Allah’s curse be upon Israel, may Allah give triumph to the Palestinians, we like the bombing, Palestine is free.” Tweet (e) reads “May Palestine live free, [be] Arab and may the occupation be cursed.”

Tweet (d)

Tweet (e)

The third peak for the term ‘isr*el’ appeared on May 22 following the day when Israel and Hamas agreed on a ceasefire after days of fighting (BBC 2021). However, more than 24 hours after the ceasefire came into effect several residents reported hearing loud buzzing of Israeli drones over Gaza signaling the fragility of this agreement (Pietromarchi, Gadzo and Newton 2021). Although most tweets did not discuss these events, a few of them did criticize the ceasefire and their lack of trust in Israel in keeping it while others described their traumatic experience when finding out Israel bombed a mosque “[less than] 24 hours after they announced a ceasefire.” Many tweets remained very broad in their support for Palestinians not mentioning specific events but rather historical narratives as well as the distinction between being against Israel or “anti-Zionist” and being anti-Semitic. Others were tweeting about Israel’s participation in the Eurovision competition saying it should not be allowed to participate and encouraging other users to boycott the show (see collection of tweets below).

My heart beat faster than ever last night finding out that Isr*el attacked the mosque <24hrs after they announced ceasefire

I felt so restless knowing it'll always be sleepless nights for Pale$tinians until Pale$tine is free and they have equal rights

7:49 AM · May 22, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

This point is always brought up when talking about Palestine: being pro-Palestine and Anti-Zionist does not in no way shape or form mean being Anti-Semitic!! The Occupation of Isr*el on Palestinian land have NOTHING to do with Religion despite how much they want you believe so +

3:13 AM · May 22, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

friendly reminder that waychingeur0vision directly feeds to isr@el no matter who you support. watching and voting is directly supporting isr@el

11:31 PM · May 22, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Isr*el shouldn't be allowed to participate in Eurovision in the first place

11:12 PM · May 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

9 Likes

Just bc isr@el agreed to a ceasefire does not mean everything in Palestine is suddenly back to 'normal'. This wasn't just an 11-day 'conflict'. This is ethnic cleansing, colonialism, an ongoing massacre of Palestinians since 1948 when Zi0nist Terr0rists infiltrated Palestinian +

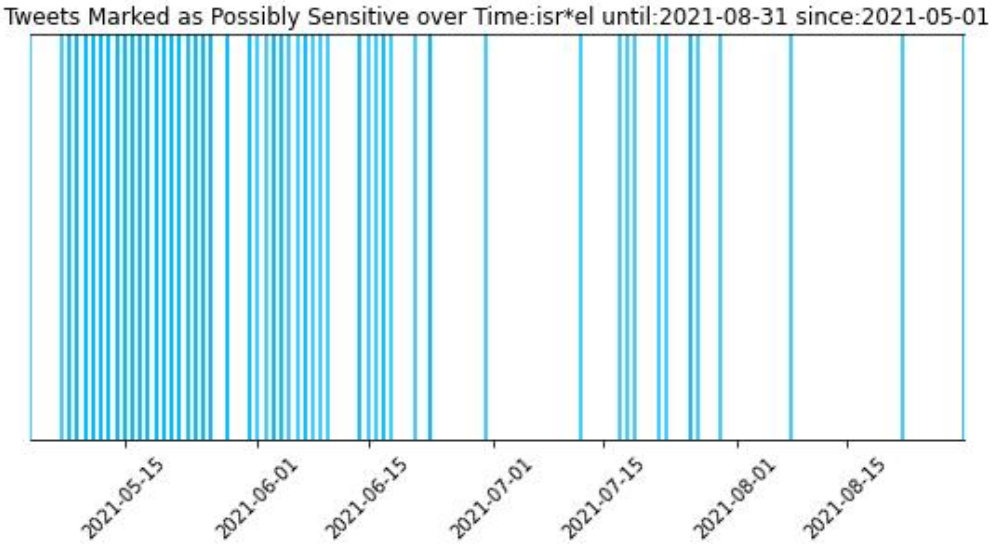
Collection of Tweets from May 22, 2021

Overall, Graph (2) combined with the study of the tweets shows that although there is no complete relevance between the events on the ground and the content of the tweets, social media users from all across the world were still commenting everyday about what was happening and connecting it to larger themes of discussion whether it was the legitimization of resistance, the disconnection between the critique of Israel and anti-Semitic behavior or the occupation system and its impact on Palestinians. I do acknowledge that I was not able to analyze all the tweets that I have collected given the size of the sample I am using so I am relying on the content I could read to come up to this conclusion. Graph (2) also showcased that the term 'isr*el' and other alternative spellings of the word were the ones that were the most tweeted by users online. This is an interesting discovery mostly because, unlike 'Palestine' which can be considered controversial given the state of the Palestinian territories both domestically and on the international stage, Israel is considered and acknowledged as a state. I believe, in addition to circumventing the algorithm, the reason why pro-Palestinian users used alternative terms to mention Israel can stem from the fact that they themselves do not recognize it as a legitimate state thus referring to it through a different spelling including some Twitter users referring to it as 'isnotreal.' By not spelling out the word 'Israel' entirely, it seems as if they are taking away its power.

Tweets using the term 'isnotreal'

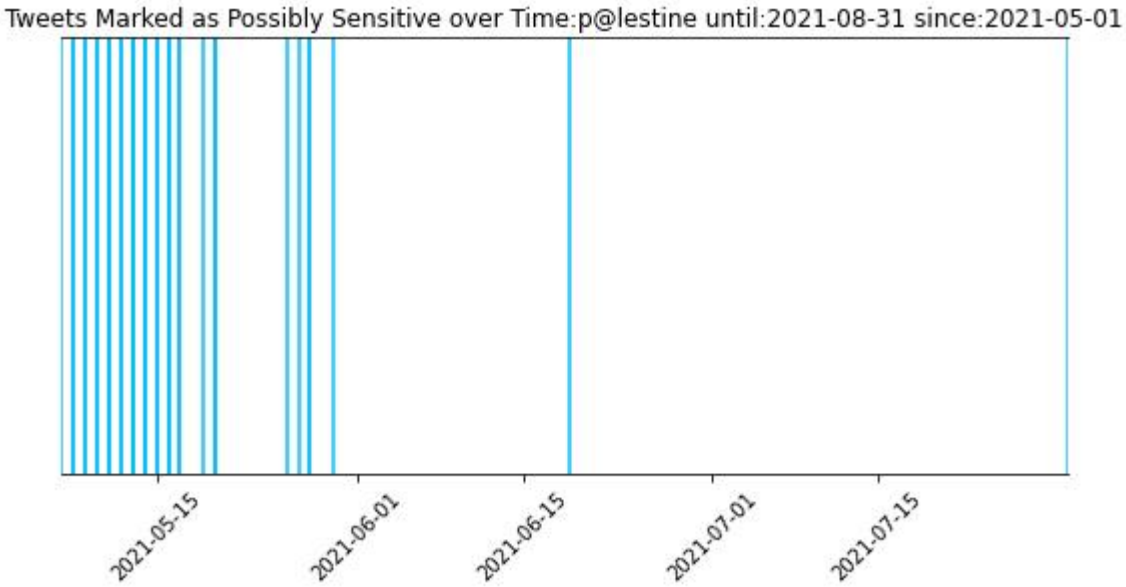
II. Machine Learning and the (Un)sustainability of Alternative Tweets

Throughout the four months during which the case of Sheikh Jarrah was heavily discussed online, social media users kept using the alternative terms but starting from June, the number of tweets using such terms decreased substantially. As seen on Graph (2), the number of tweets using the term 'isr*el' went from over 1 000 on 22 May to less than 200 on June 1st while the ones using 'p@lestine' dropped to less than 100 in that same time period. Regarding the term 'فلسطين,' there were already a few tweets using it at the beginning of the movement, but this number declined further starting from the end of May to then disappear towards the end of July. A possible hypothesis behind this sudden decline can be the fact that the algorithm has picked up on the alternative term given their extensive use throughout the month of May and proceeded to monitor them or to erase them which might explain their disappearance starting from June 2021. In this regard, despite the diversity and creativity that was mobilized to make social media a third space for radical rebellion and the reappropriation of narratives, these online strategies were still regarded as unsustainable. The idea behind this critique is that when posting online, Palestinians had to make double the effort to think about what they were documenting and how they were documenting it. "When these techniques were first coming out, said Mayss, the more people were using them the less effective they were and that is why fighting against tech is so hard because the tools are so strong." Similarly, when I asked Mona about the effectiveness of these strategies, she expressed that there is some danger in using [them]. "Social media algorithms work with machine learning which works through repetition of processes. If we keep using the same strategies over time, machine learning mechanisms will pick up on it. Sometimes, after repeating the same thing, they will still get censored. This is exhausting for us to keep thinking of new ways to share our stories. [...] People keep saying that "Palestinians have found new ways [of countering the algorithm]" but the machine has learned so we must find other ways to tell our story. This is not normal; we should not normalize this kind of censorship." To check whether a machine learning algorithm was responsible for the decrease in number of tweets using alternative terms, I have computed three separate graphs, one for each term, which analyze the flagging of tweets throughout time. In this sense, it is possible to confirm the machine learning argument if the graphs show that more tweets were flagged as sensitive at the end of the time period (around June or July) compared to the beginning (in May). This would point out that the use of alternative terms has become so common online that the algorithm has picked up on them and started flagging them as possibly sensitive thus reducing their visibility and potentially erasing them.



Graph (3.1): Tweets Using ‘isr*el’ Marked as Possibly Sensitive over Time

According to Graph (3.1), the number of tweets that have been flagged as possibly sensitive between May and August 2021, have decreased throughout time. Indeed, the graph shows a condensed number of tweets throughout May till mid-June which declines at the beginning of July then picks up again to almost disappear in August. Graph (3.1) thus proves the hypothesis wrong and debunks the correlation as more tweets are flagged at the beginning of the time period than towards the end. A potential reason for this might be the fact that starting from 5 May, tweets using ‘isr*el’ were more common, then towards the end of May, their number decreased and peaked again around the beginning of June. Therefore, the correlation is not necessarily about the content of the tweets per se but rather the periodicity of their publications as showcased by Graph (2) previously in the section. Although the machine learning argument makes sense, it is unfortunately not visible in the data collected. This decrease in flagging throughout time could also be due to the fact that social media users who report tweets as sensitive content in order to get them taken down have been heavily mobilized towards the beginning of the movement, but just as pro-Palestinians users were tweeting less, other users were less present to report tweets on the platform.



Graph (3.2): Tweets Using ‘p@lestine’ Marked as Possibly Sensitive over Time

Similar to the previous graph, Graph (3.2) showcases the same pattern with more tweets using ‘p@lestine’ being marked as possibly sensitive at the beginning rather than towards the end. More tweets being flagged in mid-May which coincide with the two peaks that tweets using ‘p@lestine’ reached on Graph (2) thus proving the correlation between the two graphs. In this case too, it is possible that the machine learning process has not been utilized. However, I point out that as mentioned previously in this chapter, categorizing tweets as ‘possibly sensitive’ is not the only way to monitor content online; tweets can be fully taken down or labeled differently to minimize their visibility on the platform. In this sense, I do not rule out the possibility of machine learning overall, but more specifically when it comes to the flagging of tweets as sensitive. Regarding tweets using the term ‘فلسطين’ I decided not to analyze their pattern given that there is only four of them in total that were flagged as sensitive. Their analysis might have led to the same conclusion as the previous alternative terms but given that there are only a few of them, no correlation can be drawn between their content and the machine learning process that is explored in this section.

Overall, the number of alternative tweets that were flagged as sensitive is less than the ones for the normal tweets - 282 compared to 392- which means that strategies of resistance online are still considered effective in that they contribute to making tweets less likely to be flagged. However, there is no evidence that the machine learning process of the Twitter algorithm is effective in flagging more tweets through time and as the alternative terms they use become more common. Given this observation, I can only comment on the general

effectiveness of these online strategies but cannot elaborate on their sustainability throughout time.

This section explored how borders, are transposed online, limiting the expression of Palestinian voices. As a response to these virtual borders, social media users came up with creative ways to cross using encoded words to tell their stories while circumventing the algorithm. This section dived into these themes by discussing the strategies used by Palestinians and pro-Palestinian social media users and discussed the creation of a space for the voices that are silenced in mainstream discourses. I also used graphs to examine the different dynamics at play within the virtual space and its interaction with the physical space. The first graph established these dynamics by looking at the content of people's tweets in relation to what was happening on the ground. These connections included contextualization and historical knowledge to showcase the roots of the Palestinian struggle and the perpetuation of a pattern of rights violation by the occupation. After this analysis, I proceeded to focus on the alternative tweets and their usefulness in conveying narratives online. I studied the chronology of the flagging process which debunked my hypothesis according to which algorithms learn over time. It is possible to say that the virtual space is a difficult one to grasp given the volatility and unpredictability that it harnesses. The creation and use of these graphs were an attempt to capture some of the elements of online resistance that both connected it to the physical aspect of the Palestinian struggle while showing the global dimension that it took in the case of Sheikh Jarrah.

"Sometimes, we go to the Wall and pray. I think this is craziness; we are in front of a Wall that is eight to ten meters high, a prison, and we pray for peace. It does not make sense, but this is *sumud*."

- Rania, Sumud Story House

CONCLUSION

Throughout time, both the Separation Wall and social media have embodied unsafe border-spaces for Palestinians, spaces where they are either trapped, policed, erased, or killed. These spaces despite their differences and the plethora of mechanisms they mobilize are often referred to through the negative power they have over Palestinians and the harm they cause for communities that are marginalized at the borders. In reality, the Separation Wall and social media platforms are not limited to the persecuting forces that dominate them, they are rather spaces of tense interactions and contentious interplay between Israeli forces and Palestinians. These politically charged altercations between the two sides make up the third space dimension of both the Wall and online platforms thus colliding the margins with the center of power and giving birth to paradigms of Palestinian life under the occupation. In studying these two entities from an angle of border contestation, I saw that these were not only spaces of isolation and oppression, they were also productive and revolutionary, that they provided a space for alternative innovation. In this sense, by asking how Palestinians contest physical and virtual borders, this thesis attempted to push the boundaries of resistance studies to include innovative tools used by new generations in spreading their narratives and using alternative mediums. It analyzed the continuity of *sumud* from an ancestral practice that tied Palestinians to their heritage and their history, to a revisited channel that attempts to match the occupation's suppressive strategies through time. Another main element of this thesis was the highlight of the 'existence as resistance' paradigm which redefined how resistance to the occupation system was carried out by first looking at non-violent resistance and then by revisiting the dynamic with personalized and individual acts of *sumud* which serve to empower those who exercise them. Borders are thus transfused inside the minds and bodies of Palestinians which means that crossing them whether from the main gates or through the cracks grants them a personal sense of achievement and confidence.

Throughout the thesis, I mention the interdependent relationship between dynamics of persecution and those of dissent saying that one cannot exist without the other. I state the 'failure' of the Wall that keeps operating because Palestinians keep passing through it and apply it to online platforms that keep taking down pro-Palestinian content as long as users keep

posting it. In doing this, I aim at illustrating the vicious cycle that the occupation system has produced wherein meaning for its existence is drawn from oppressive mechanisms thus creating the risk that more of these mechanisms would bring more meaning. Using research and testimonies, I attempt to show that Palestinian *sumud* exists outside of this cycle and that it is neither trapped nor responsible for it. Indeed, by rejecting fragmentation, policing practices, annexation of their lands and the censorship of their content, Palestinians contest borders through empowering ways through education, online knowledge production and professional prospects. This thesis argues that the cycle does not end if Palestinians stop crossing the Wall or posting online because these spaces were built and designed regardless of Palestinian existence. The Wall's construction and the set-up of censorship processes is based around myths of securitization and misinformation which instrumentalized a colonial and dehumanized depiction both in the physical and virtual space respectively. Therefore, in crossing, laughing, or singing at the Wall and in encoding communication online, Palestinians are taking back their humanity thus stripping the Wall and social media platforms of their meaning.

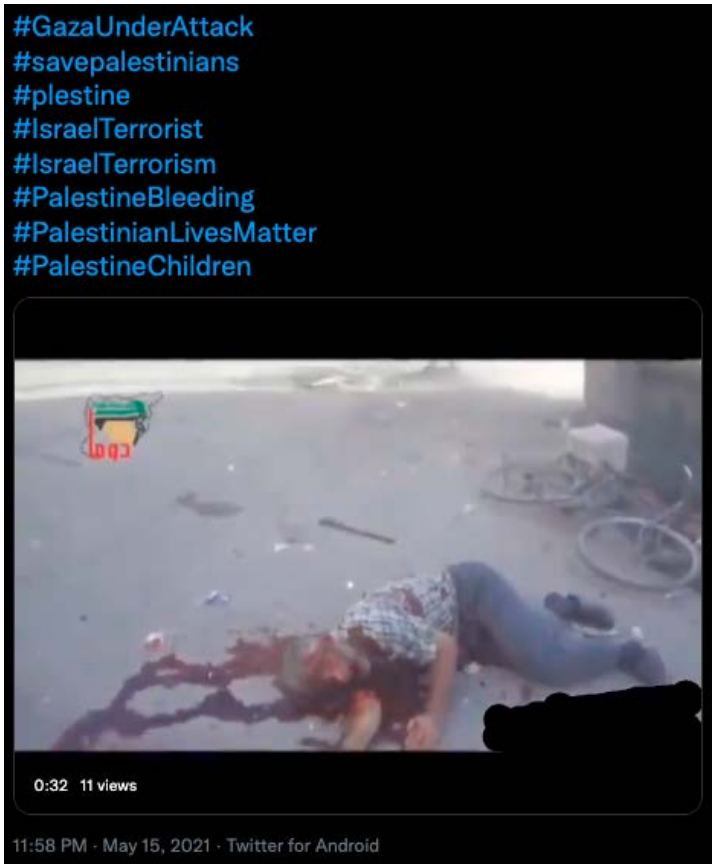
Overall, this thesis aimed at dissecting the complexity of the Palestinian experience by relying on the testimonies of participants from different areas to showcase the multidimensionality of the struggle. By connecting the literature to testimonies and then further to the data, I presented a human approach to the study of resistance; one that did not base itself on numbers or theories alone but that created a configuration of comments and interpretations to complement the quantitative and academic research. I used this approach in many dimensions of my work including the definitions whereby concepts and frameworks are described along the experience that they convey and the connotations they attach to those resisting them. In this regard, borders – the Wall and censorship processes – are not only conceptualized through their functions as imagined by the Israeli state but mostly through the empowering lessons and often traumatic occurrences they create for Palestinians. In using such an approach, I presented an innovative way of analysis that in and of itself embodied dissent. By studying and discussing space through territoriality, identity, and digital presence, I contributed to the creation of a less monolithic conceptualization of space that was also tied to the alteration of time. Combining all these moving parts together meant that I had to situate both the Wall and social media in their respective contexts and that I present them with all their contradictions. In this regard, I highlighted the difference in their third-space appropriation wherein the Wall which is a symbol of limited movement was porous while the virtual space which is often presented as limitless was dictated by policies that limited content. In pointing

out and exploring these paradoxes, I navigated two different spaces with the complexity of their arrangements and the strength of the *sumud* they gave birth to inadvertently.

Appendix 1: Alternative Tweets Flagged as Sensitive Content

Tweets using ‘p@lestine’ and other alternative spellings

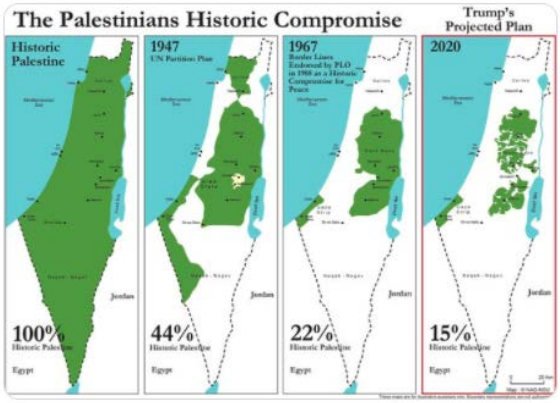
Trigger Warning: tweet showing a bleeding man on the street



According to Twitter guidelines, this content can be considered sensitive, so it makes sense to flag it. However, the upcoming tweets show regular content that does not violate any guideline set by the platform.

"isr@el" is expanding illegally in '67 land.
It's all P@lestine.
They're forcibly displacing P@lestinian families from their homes & their ancestors' homes & they're throwing them in the streets

#SaveJerusalem



6:59 PM · May 28, 2021 · Twitter Web App

7850 Palestinians are threatened to be forcebly displaced in JERUSALEM in P@lestine by the "isr@eli" occup@tion.

Keep sharing with the hashtag.
#SaveJerusalem

(Sheikh Jarrah & Silwan are just examples)

Today at 8PM (in two hours wherever you are)

Timeline about what is happening in p@lestine

2:49 AM · May 16, 2021 · Twitter for Android

Two of the above tweets are about the history of the Israeli occupation of Palestine as well as the recent events in May 2021. Another one mentions a protest in solidarity with the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwane, two neighborhoods in Jerusalem where communities were threatened by displacement.

Tweets using ‘is*el’

love most of his movies but i refuse to watch that pro isr*el one 💪

Aug 22, 2021

disliking chris evans or his movies is a personality flaw I'm sorry

Show this thread

1:26 AM · Aug 23, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

The fact that Isr*el has been killing innocent people since the “”””””ceasefire”””””” and no one is talking about it is just not it

· Jul 28, 2021

Mohammed al-Alami, 12, was killed by Israeli forces today by West Bank town of Beit Ummar

Mohammed was sitting in the car w/ his sister, his father at the wheel, coming back from the shops when Israeli soldiers fired at vehicle

There is no calm when under a military occupation

Show this thread

2:07 PM · Jul 30, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

In the first tweet, the person refers to boycotting a 'pro-isr*el' movie Chris Evans is on while the second one accuses the Israeli state of not respecting the ceasefire that was announced in May. Neither of these tweets are considered 'sensitive content' yet they were both flagged as such and they are both somewhat critical of Israel or claiming their opposition to it. The third tweet mentions the Israeli bombing of Palestinians as they pray; having watched the full video, I can attest that it only shows the fumes and sparks. This could fall under Twitter's policy that bans "content that normalizes violence and causes distress to those who view it." but this definition is too broad to be applied here.

Although this tweet does not show any graphic imagery, it can be considered sensitive given its "gory." It would make sense to flag this as sensitive content.

This last tweet refers to an article in Haaretz, a left-wing Israeli newspaper. This tweet is tricky because, although it does not go into detail regarding the sexual assault that Israeli soldiers have perpetuated on Palestinian women, it does mention assault. According to Twitter's guidelines, this could be considered 'sensitive content' given that it "depicts a sensitive topic."

Tweets using 'فلسطين'

Tweet 1

Tweet 2

Translation Tweet 1: “Our hearts are with you O Palestine, and may God curse Israel the unjust and the occupier. Did you know that dots were invented for non-Arabs and not for Arabs, you can use this page to try it by yourself!”

Translation Tweet 2: “Al-Quds [Jerusalem] is the eternal capital of Palestine and death to Israel.”

These tweets are tricky. The first one curses Israel, but the main point is encouraging other social media users to use dotless Arabic to post online. The second one does wish “death to Israel” so both could be considered as hateful pieces of content.

Tweet 3

Translation Tweet 3: “someone tell Mark [Zuckerberg] that we can go back to when we used to write in dotless Arabic before inventing letters and that he will not understand us and will not be able to translate [what we say]. Hey Mark! Palestine is Arab, damn your mother and damn Israel.

The translation of the picture:
Facebook [Arabic with dots]: “If you violate the guidelines, you will be arrested”
Social media use [in dotless Arabic]: “Damn your guidelines and Palestine is Arab.”

Appendix 2: Normal Tweets Flagged as Sensitive Content

Tweets using the ‘palestine’

The tweet shows a map of Palestine following the “journey of Jesus.” There is no sensitive content in this tweet according to Twitter’s definition.

The content of this tweet states the death of a 17-year-old Palestinian but does not use any strong language or hateful speech.

Tweets using 'israel'

This tweet shows the picture of a Palestinian whose body is withheld by Israel. It does not contain any graphic visuals and is not violent. There is no element that qualifies as sensitive content according to Twitter's definition.

This tweet accuses Israel of Apartheid and blames people for "not see[ing] the facts." The picture shows a red 'truth' pill and a blue 'ignorance' and with the title 'choices on Palestine/Israel' which implies that people usually choose ignorance over truth when it comes to the topic. It is possible that the reference to 'apartheid' was the reason why this tweet was reported and then flagged as sensitive, but it technically does not violate Twitter guidelines.

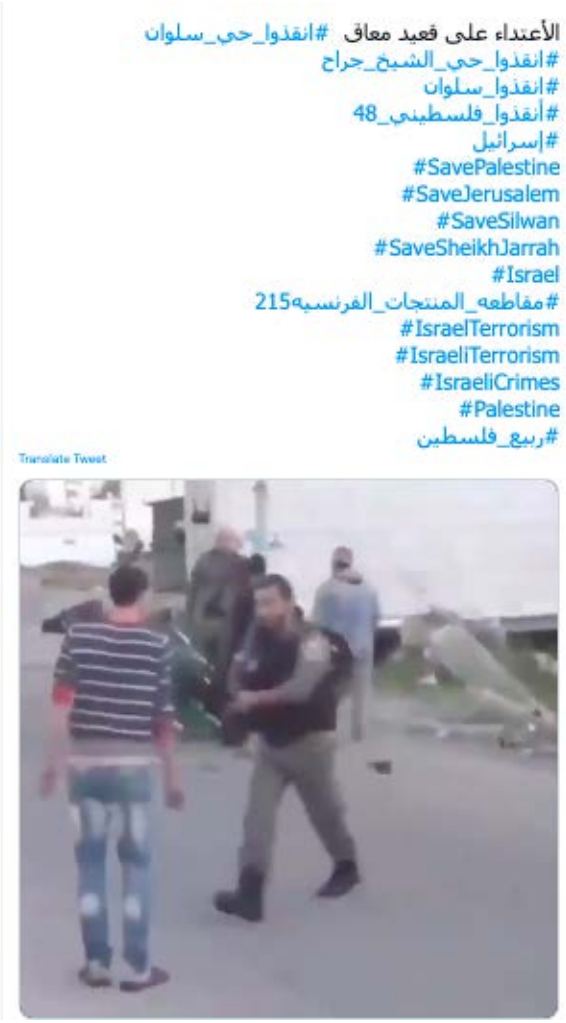
This last tweet criticizes Israel's army for being portrayed as "moral" and Israel for being "an oasis of democracy" by quoting another tweet that mentions how Israel "is killing one Palestinian child every 3 days." What is interesting about this tweet is that it does not use any violent language but rather uses irony to convey its message. It was nevertheless flagged as sensitive with no apparent reason.

Tweets using 'فلسطين'

Translation: "The goods of Tubas, Palestine"
This tweet clearly does not violate any guidelines as it shows the pictures of crops grown in Palestine.

Translation: "Occupied Palestine| A new Israeli plan aims to obliterate the small Mosque in Haifa [Youtube link] on @youtube. Allah destroyed you O Arab leaders, traitors, and accomplices. Patience is beautiful."

What is interesting about this tweet is that in the first part, it refers to an Israeli plan to attack a mosque in Palestine then later blames Arab leaders for collaborating with Israel and being "traitors." Although it uses does not target Israel, the tweet uses strong language to criticize its Arab allies in the region. Although these types of tweets are common, most of them are not necessarily flagged as sensitive so this might be an exception to the rule.



This tweet mentions ‘فلسطين’ in a hashtag but was still flagged. It shows a video of Israeli soldiers pushing and knocking down a Palestinian in a wheelchair then shooting at people who wanted to come and help him. The tweet reads: “The assault of a disabled person #Save_Silwane_Neighborhood #Save_Sheikh_Jarrah_Neighborhood #Save_1948_Palestine # Israel” then later mentions the hashtags “#Boycott_French_Products215” and “#Palestine_Spring” in reference to the uprisings of the Arab Spring in 2011. Having watched the video, there is some violent content to it but it does not necessarily violate Twitter guidelines. This all depends on the definition that is given to content that “causes distress to those who view it.”

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