Beating Algorithmic Discrimination: Maneuvering Digital Surveillance to Indigenize the Narrative

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Social media platforms are important tools for the new generation of youth activists. However, digital surveillance practices are employed to punish, discipline, and silence indigenous communities. In this article, we explore how digital surveillance of Palestinian content on Facebook and Instagram manifested during the 2021 Sheikh Jarrah movement and how Instagram and Facebook users maneuvered these surveillance practices. Drawing on in-depth interviews, we find that activists are exposed to multiple intersecting structures of surveillance and censorship—manifested in surveillance by social media companies, the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian government, the workplace, and familial-societal networks—which we conceptualize as *layered surveillance*. We examine the creative visual and textual tactics activists utilize to maneuver layered surveillance, arguing that these tactics serve to reinforce indigenous knowledge and resilience. We conclude by reflecting on the interlocking global forces imbricated in the relationship between technology and oppression.

Keywords: surveillance, maneuvering, tactics, digital resistance, indigenous activism, Palestine

Historically, the digital surveillance of Palestinians has been rooted in the Palestinian tech industry's infrastructure. In recent decades, Israeli surveillance of Palestinians has intensified, especially with the development of social media platforms, underscoring the need to examine this growing control over Palestinians' freedom of expression. The Sheikh Jarrah events that Palestinians termed "The Unity Intifada" marked a significant benchmark in Palestinian resistance. In 2021, Palestinian activists turned to social media to protest the forced displacement of 28 Palestinian families from their homes of multiple generations in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem. They launched a hashtag on social media platforms

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(#SaveSheikhJarrah), which millions of people used around the world, including notable international celebrities in music, cinema, and fashion (Balkiz, 2022).

The forced displacement of Sheikh Jarrah families received widespread attention on platforms, which raised public and international pressure to prevent their displacement and demand an end to the Israeli colonization of Palestine. This uprising impacted global solidarity with the Palestinian cause, validating the Palestinian indigenous narrative. However, this political event was faced with an unprecedented level of surveillance through social media platforms and an equally powerful wave of digital maneuvering and resistance (Phattharathanasut, 2024). While the events "offline," or on the ground, controlled the scene, online resistance fed the events in an interwoven and international interplay (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014).

We address a twofold question: *How did digital surveillance of Palestinian content over Facebook and Instagram manifest? and how were digital surveillance practices resisted by activists on these social media platforms?* This article is situated within a growing strand of research on digital surveillance and digital resistance. In what follows, we outline the study's context and related literature. We then discuss our methods and present our findings, concluding with a discussion on the creative ways of maneuvering, in texts and visuals, that the activists used, and the implications for digital surveillance and digital resistance research.

Surveilling Occupied Palestine: A Digital Colonial Reality

Surveilling Palestinian digital content is rooted in a historic-colonial domination of Palestinian information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure (AbuShanab, 2019; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014) and invasive surveillance operations by Israel (Nashif, 2021). Since online spaces are grounded in offline materiality, there is a need to analyze the Internet's underlying neoliberal and colonial political economy to better understand the structural constraints of Internet activism, what Tawil-Souri and Aouragh (2014) call "cyber colonialism" (p. 102).

Following the Oslo Accords,[1] the Internet was introduced to Palestinians under the claim of integrating Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority (PA) into modernity and the global economy. Numerous tech firms from the United States, including Cisco and Microsoft, began infiltrating the Palestinian market, claiming to expand the free market (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). However, Israel controls critical aspects of the ICT sector, making it impossible for Palestinians to develop an independent network or expand Internet accessibility, safety, and flow of information. For example, Israel controls the largest Palestinian telecommunication company (Paltel), including the allocation of Internet frequencies and decisions regarding Palestinians' access to equipment, investment in international markets, and expansion of ICT infrastructure (AbuShanab, 2019).

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[1] The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) that took place in 1993. These agreements aimed to achieve peace through fulfilling the right of Palestinians to self-determination and mutual recognition by the PLO and the State of Israel (Freedman, 1998).

This colonial grip over the ICT sector has created a tiered system of accessibility, where Israelis enjoy access to 5G technology, while Palestinians in the occupied West Bank are limited to 3G and those in Gaza Strip to 2G (Farah, 2024). Palestinians are also constrained in ICT equipment procurement (Musleh, 2022). During military attacks on Gaza in 2014, the Israeli army bombed 14 Paltel stations, resulting in an estimated loss of US$32.6 million (Musleh, 2022). In 2023, the destruction of the ICT infrastructure, along with other infrastructures in Gaza, was disastrous (Wintour, 2023).

In 2023, Palestinians marked a new phase in the Nakba,[2] where the genocide unfolding in Gaza killed an estimated 45,338 Palestinians (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). Since October 7, 2023, Israel has damaged 75% of Gaza's telecommunications infrastructure, destroying at least 50% of it (Middle East Eye, 2024). Shutdowns prevented Gazans from reporting bombings or contacting rescue teams during emergencies (Farah, 2024).

In addition to impeding Palestinian ICT infrastructure development and practicing ongoing mass surveillance of Palestinians, the Israeli government also systematically silences Palestinian voices online through legal avenues (Shtaya, 2020), practicing "informal governance" in cyberspace (Eghbariah & Metwally, 2020). In 2015, the Israeli government established a "Cyber Unit," an Internet referral unit aimed at requesting content removal from social media companies based on alleged violations of domestic law (Eghbariah & Metwally, 2020). Hintz and Milan (2018) argue that data-based citizen surveillance is not limited to authoritarian countries but extends to Western democracies, in what they call "Western authoritarian" (p. 3939) illiberal digital practices.

These discriminatory practices and collaborations with corporations to remove, censor, or block Palestinian content resulted in an 800% increase in content takedown requests submitted by the Cyber Unit until 2022 (Siegal, 2022). According to the Cyber Unit, most posts were made on Facebook, with 87% of them already removed. Some 770 complaints targeted posts on TikTok, resulting in 84% of the posts being removed (Nashif, 2022). The Israeli government escalated these efforts by developing the "Facebook Bill" in 2017, which gives the Israeli administrative court authority to block social media content on the basis of "incitement to violence and terror" (Nashif, 2022, p. 12). Our study joins scholarship that challenges addressing surveillance from a purely techno-centric perspective, aiming to decenter technology and bring nuance into the debate on its role and place in the production of social inequalities (Peña Gangadharan, 2017; Peña Gangadharan & Niklas, 2019).

Digital Surveillance: Disciplinary Practices

Studying the politics of surveillance in the Middle East and North Africa, Felsberger (2020) argues that the origin of surveillance technologies must be understood within practices of colonial control. Felsberger (2020) states, "The Panopticon, and the related imagined modes of power and surveillance can thus not fully be comprehended without also studying the colonial roots of the Panopticon" (p. 5). Current

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[2] The ethnic cleansing, displacement, and dispossession operations that led to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 are referred to by Palestinians as the "Nakba," or catastrophe, which is understood as an ongoing event (Eghbariah, 2024).

surveillance and carceral techniques implemented by the Egyptian state are heavily impacted by strategies inherited from the British colonial rule of the region (Bardhan, 2022). Contemporary practices of digital surveillance and control perpetuate colonial legacies (Felsberger, 2020).

One of the main elements of colonial control is Israel's investment in cyber security systems. In 2022, the value of investments in cyber security companies in Israel was estimated at around 3.5 billion U.S (Statista, 2023). In 2020, the funds raised by the Israeli cybersecurity industry reached a record of approximately $8.8 billion (Israel National Cyber Directorate, 2022), putting half of the global cybersecurity investments in Israel (Reuters, 2022). Palestinians live under a sophisticated system of incessant policing, imprisonment, control, and mass-surveillance practices by Israel. Moreover, Israel's cybersecurity techniques are not merely exercised to observe Palestinian content over social media, but rather to practice politics of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) to silence, marginalize, subjugate, punish, and discipline Palestinians to produce Palestinian "docile bodies" (Shraydeh, 2021). For example, in 2022, Israel arrested 410 Palestinians for social media activity under allegations of incitement to violence and terror (Middle East Monitor, 2023).

In addition to the increasing collaboration between Israeli security units and social media platforms using algorithms and content moderation policies to monitor and control Palestinian content (Fatafta & Nashif, 2017), Palestinians face widespread digital rights violations by the authoritarian Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto government of Hamas in the Gaza Strip (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Laws and legislation were introduced by the Palestinian state to reinforce control and surveillance over social media, producing a "digital occupation" sphere (Thompson, Stringfellow, Maclean, & Nazzal, 2021) where mass surveillance and punitive actions are practiced by social media companies, Israeli occupation, and authoritarian regimes.

"Ways of Maneuvering": Digital Resistance

"A tactic is a manoeuvre in the enemy's field of vision"—de Certeau (1984, p. 37)

Despite the vast digital surveillance and punitive actions practiced by social media companies, Israeli occupation, and authoritarian regimes over Palestinian social media accounts, the Save Sheikh Jarrah campaign, united under the hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah, became a viral global trend, mobilizing people across occupied Palestine and around the world to oppose the forced displacement of residents of the historic Jerusalem neighborhood.

At the height of the hashtag's circulation, Internet users utilized new ways to maneuver structures of domination. We explore how creative tactics were employed to maneuver digital surveillance and indigenize the narrative. Indigenous peoples around the world use digital technologies in their activism. Carlson and Frazer (2020) conceptualize how social media afford opportunities to reject the violence of colonization and domination as "Indigenous Activism" (p. 1). Indigenous organizations in Latin America use ICT to enhance communication, access to information, visibility, and interest promotion (Lupien, 2020). As Lupien (2020) states, "ICTs allow Indigenous actors to perform, represent, debate, and re-conceptualize indigeneity in new and innovate ways. They provide tools for cultural positioning and survival, for countering

essentialized understandings of indigeneity" (p. 8). Digital tactics help activists gain visibility, cultivate solidarity, diffuse Indigenous consciousness, and enforce accountability (Duarte, 2017).

While Palestinian activists face digital surveillance as a practice of discipline and punishment, this system of domination is challenged by the power of tactics (De Certeau, 1984) or resistance practices against the larger systems of discipline and control. Tactics are ways of operating that could manipulate the mechanisms of discipline, which we conceptualize in this article as "ways of maneuvering." We understand activists' tactics of maneuvering within the framework of infrapolitics, the cultural underpinning of political action, expressed through their resistance and survival (Scott, 1985).

Therefore, our study analyzes colonial control over indigenous people, situating it within the analytical framework of indigenous activism to elevate narratives that have long been absent, silenced, or erased.

Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis

We explore how surveillance of Palestinian digital content through Facebook and Instagram manifested during Sheikh Jarrah events and how these digital surveillance practices were resisted by activists on Instagram and Facebook. We take an interpretivist approach, which facilitates our understanding of the variety of digital surveillance practices, the motivations of activism, meanings, feelings, narratives, and the heterogeneous lived experiences of our participants. We use an exploratory qualitative research design and in-depth interviews to collect data. In total, we conducted 20 interviews (ages 22 to 40, average 29) with journalists, bloggers, social and political activists, archivists, lawyers, and filmmakers. Some participants are more politically active than others. Participants also have heterogeneous lived experiences related to the Palestinian cause. All participants identify as Palestinian, and we included participants living in various locations like Jordan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada to account for the different articulations of the Palestinian experience at home and in the diaspora. All interviews were conducted in Arabic by the first author. Interviews lasted between 60–100 minutes, were audio-recorded, and transcribed after completion. Interviewing was chosen as the primary method, as it facilitates collecting the breadth and depth of information needed given the complexity of the topic. It also allows researchers to understand respondents' feelings, values, meanings, and personal experiences that may be difficult to reach otherwise (Patton, 2002).

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form specifying data protection and confidentiality. We identified key concepts from relevant research to guide our interview protocol, which were explored and refined during the initial interviews, considering participants' positions and the logics that might explain their statements (Alvesson, 2003). Upon concluding the interviews, the researcher posed questions regarding the participants' experience of the interview and their ability to refer eligible contacts.

We selected participants with diverse characteristics and backgrounds through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing conversations to digress and enabling the researcher to probe activists' experiences and perspectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Participants were asked about their social media activity in general, and during the Sheikh Jarrah events in particular, their digital content, and their experiences of being public figures or influencers on Facebook

and/or Instagram. We also asked participants about motivations for covering the news of the events and their thoughts on the punitive consequences they experienced during and after their activism such as account bans, content censorship, loss of account monetization, warnings, or decrease in reach and number of views and followers.

Participants expressed feeling surveilled by different parties, including social media companies, Israeli occupation, local authorities, familial and relative ties, colleagues, and work networks. Participants explained their methods of resisting surveillance while supporting the counter-hegemonic narrative of the Palestinian cause and Sheikh Jarrah's indigenous inhabitants.

To analyze the interview data, we used a thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All transcripts were translated from Arabic into English by the authors, who used their linguistic and contextual knowledge to begin the process of open coding and translating meanings. The data was then read and reviewed by the three researchers, who are all Palestinians engaged in the Palestinian political and socio-economic context. All authors were involved in pattern recognition to identify recurrent themes and turn them into analytical categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The researchers read the first transcript and collaborated to generate initial codes based on text portions that reflected concepts or ideas referred to by the participants. The second transcript was then read and coded using the codes generated from the first transcript alongside new ones based on constructs not encountered in the previous transcript. The codes were then divided into themes, categorizing overarching themes that were examined for internal and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2002) to verify that data within themes were meaningfully correlated and that there were clear and identifiable distinctions between them.

We also practiced reflexivity concerning the subjectivities of the research team and ensured that participants were given opportunities to account for their practices (Cunliffe, 2003), while appreciating the processes of interaction and experiences that occur in the field (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014). In this respect, it is important to acknowledge the three Palestinian authors' engagement in social and cultural activism, including writing, speaking, and involvement with the Palestinian community. This engagement helped provide access and build participants' trust through shared perspectives on Palestinian social norms and practices.

Table 1. Participants' Profile.

Activist Name	Gender	Location	Job	Platforms of Activism	Year of Digital Activism	Number of Followers During the Study
Mira	Female	Canada	Activist/ Journalist	Instagram	2010	917,000
Amjad	Male	Ramallah	Journalist	Facebook	2014	11,347
Dina	Female	USA	Journalist/ Blogger	Instagram	2019	7,735
Tara	Female	Ramallah	Journalist/ anchor	Instagram	2016	12,000
Reem	Female	Jordan	Journalist	Instagram and Facebook	2017	2,740
Dalia	Female	Ramallah	Lawyer	Facebook	2018	-
Luna	Female	Jerusalem	Activist/ Journalist	Instagram	2019	73,900
Moe	Male	Haifa	Journalist & blogger	Facebook Instagram	2005	162,000
Thaer	Male	Jerusalem	Digital creator	Instagram/Facebook	2012	112,000
Masa	Female	UK	Digital rights defender	Instagram and Facebook	-	18,400
Jawad	Male	Jordan	Film Director	Instagram	2019	642,000
Layla	Female	Jerusalem	Videography	Instagram	2013	176,000
Sara	Female	Ramallah	Representative of Media/ news agency	Instagram and Facebook	-	130,000
Nay	Female	Qatar	Journalist	Instagram and Facebook	2019	261,000
Nabil	Male	Jerusalem	Journalist	Instagram and Facebook	2017	9,163
Rina	Female	Ramallah	Operation manager	Instagram	-	-
Nour	Female	Ramallah	Graphic designer	Instagram	-	-
Afaf	Female	Ramallah	Mother	Facebook	-	-
Abbas	Male	Ramallah	Technical officer	Facebook	-	-
Julie	Female	Jerusalem	German representative office	Instagram	-	-

*All the names used in the table above are pseudonyms to protect the identities of participants

Motives for Activism

The data collected revealed various reasons and motives for activism during the Sheikh Jarrah events. Participants' narratives revealed a sense of duty and responsibility to challenge the biased hegemonic narrative produced and circulated by dominant media corporations and reinforced by platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The findings highlighted that participants' sense of responsibility emerged from their identification as Palestinians, both living in occupied Palestine or refugees across the world.

Dina, an American Palestinian journalist and blogger living in the United States, with over 7600 followers on Instagram, explained how she perceived media bias in the United States and challenged it:

> Here [referring to the United States], media is massively biased against Palestinians and the Palestinian struggle … I felt truly obligated as a Palestinian to give details, context, facts, photos to the posts that some Western biased social media are spreading … I think that this extra context is impactful and powerful [...] I remember I only had 4,000 followers before Sheikh Jarrah events, but during that I gained like around 3,000 followers more.

Mira, a Palestinian-Canadian activist, journalist, and refugee in Canada, highlighted her motives and duties to share news with her 900,000 Instagram followers:

> I have many reasons to participate. First, being a Palestinian refugee, second, I am a journalist, and third, I am a political science and history graduate who is aware of the importance to spread news about the Palestinian cause, its refugees, and indigenous people … what happened in Sheikh Jarrah overwhelmed me while I am forcibly far away from my hometown [...] I have a lot of followers and I am pretty sure most of them have no clue what's happening in Palestine, therefore, I share, and share, and share.

Dina and Mira's comments, alongside similar narratives, revealed participants' awareness to promote counter-hegemonic narratives about what was happening during the Uprising. The activism campaign went viral, generating global solidarity that transcended the boundaries of nationality. Still, different forms of surveillance continued to restrict activists' digital rights and freedom of expression.

Layered Surveillance: Beyond Digital Surveillance

Participants' experiences extended beyond social media companies' surveillance. In fact, they are exposed to multiple structures of surveillance simultaneously, including social media companies, the colonial Israeli occupation, the authoritarian Palestinian government, their workplaces, and familial or societal networks. We conceptualize these surveilling modalities as "layered surveillance," to account for the ways multiple surveillance modalities simultaneously overlay Palestinian speech. Our finding reveals some modes of directionality, or a "ripple effect," of diverse surveillance modalities under digital coloniality. For example, our finding shows how the digital coloniality of Israeli occupation manages and supports Palestinian authoritarian security and intelligence units to locally oppress Palestinians, which produces modalities of

self-surveillance, as our participants share. Our finding corresponds with Lyon's (2017) notion of "surveillance culture" (p. 824), which goes beyond state social surveillance to examine "how today's subjects make sense of, respond to, and—in some cases—initiate surveillance activities," such as self-surveillance (Nazzal, 2024).

Participants' experiences of surveillance by social media companies are in line with Peña Gangadharan and Niklas's (2019) criticism of the hegemonic techno-centric perspective of surveillance studies, which ignores uses of technology as a colonial tool producing discriminatory practices and social inequalities. Discriminatory surveillance modalities violate Palestinians' digital rights on Instagram (Raydan, 2022), Facebook (Koslov, 2019), and YouTube (Nazzal, 2020). Our findings show that much of the participants' content was taken down by Instagram and other platforms, thus limiting their freedom of speech and reach. These digital limitations manifest as a noticeable decrease in the number of followers, shadow-banning, lag on stories, blocking Instagram lives, and other punitive tactics. For example, Reem, a Palestinian journalist with 2,730 followers who lives in Jordan, commented: "The reach on my Instagram stories was about 400 views before the Sheikh Jarrah events, then it dropped to 100–200 views, and the lag was happening to me from time to time."

Jawad, a Palestinian director with about 642,000 followers who lives in Jordan, well-known for his films centering on Palestinian experiences, faced surveillance from Instagram, TikTok, and Israeli social media users. He stated, "The stories with any Palestinian sign keep lagging, and then these stories receive less views."

Collaboration between Israeli forces and social media companies like Meta and Twitter is increasingly well documented (Nazzal, 2020). Efforts like the Cyber Unit or Project NIMBUS serve the Israeli government, military systems, and the arms of the economy (Koren, 2022). Israel's advancement in cyber-surveillance, spyware, and cyber-arms has made occupied Palestine the world's most watched, governed, and militarized area (Benjakoub, 2023; Halper, 2015; Hempel, 2022).

A report by Civicus (2016) cites multiple instances of preemptive arrests, interrogation, and detention of Palestinians for expressing political opinions on social media. Participants highlighted how activists use words to maneuver algorithms that prevented them from using contextual words such as *shaheed* (martyr), *Al Quds* (Jerusalem), *moqawama* (resistance)*, or *Al-Aqsa* (landmark mosque in Jerusalem). This maneuvering tactic is one of many created by users to resist algorithmic bias.

Moreover, participants shared how platforms track and punish users retroactively based on old posts. Amjad, a journalist-activist working for a Jordanian TV channel, shared his experience using Facebook:

I recently got banned because Facebook decided to track and classify old posts I posted as sensitive content. This is because Facebook has updated its ban list with new words, which I used in posts from 2017 [...] Facebook is now punishing users retroactively on their old posts [...] and when you make a claim, you feel as if a machine is replying to you, and this makes you feel frustrated that you are treated as an object or number not a user with rights as they [referring to Facebook] claim.

Some of the activists we interviewed experience another layer of surveillance by the authoritarian Palestinian government and security forces (hereafter PSF). Franks (2016) stated that the rise of government surveillance is one of the most oppressive forms of censorship, such as the Malaysian government's surveillance system (Johns, 2021). In occupied Palestine, PSF were trained to persecute dissent, gather intelligence for arrests, and ensure Israel's security (Nazzal, Stringfellow, & Maclean, 2024).

Some participants shared how their online political expression was met with governmental censorship. Amjad explained the censorship and threats he faced:

> I've been experiencing two-edged surveillance; from social media and from our authority ... much of what I share over social media is oppositional to many leaders and corrupted people by the dominant political party … therefore, I've been receiving many warnings [...] at some point, the government tried to put some pressure on my work as a journalist, therefore, my work informed me that they received calls from the government regarding my activism as a way to threaten my livelihood … I made it clear that if anyone intervenes in the posts I share, I would resign, since it is my personal profile and I have the freedom to share what I want.

Dalia, a lawyer and activist, shared her experience of being arrested by the PSF. She shared the consequences of a post she wrote:

> After the heart-breaking assassination of the political activist Nizar Banat by the PSF, I posted a criticizing post which received a lot of attention and engagement over social media ... It got over 150 shares. During that night, I received a lot of adds from fake accounts. People started to comment with bad words about me … And, I got arrested for one day, where I was also harassed in the prison.

Our findings reveal that the surveillance by the PSF constitutes a local surveillance modality targeting Palestinian activists under the umbrella of Israeli surveillance and supported by social media companies. Following the Oslo Accords, evidence emerged on the growing security cooperation between the PA, the United States, and Israel (Silver, 2016). This American-Israeli strategy concerned funding, man-powering, and weaponizing the PSF by implementing Dayton's plan in the West Bank (White, 2009), which greatly impacted Palestinian activism (Silver, 2016).

The PSF are considered increasingly authoritarian (Human Rights Watch, 2018), reinforcing a culture of militarized policing, human rights violations, and rule of law. They have arrested members of groups who oppose the official "peace process," particularly supporters of dissenting political parties. Hundreds of civilians have reputedly been transferred into military detention without due process (Human Rights Watch, 2018), sparking claims of torture and assassination (White, 2009). In June 2021, during protests condemning the assassination of political activist Nizar Banat (Aljazeera, 2021), "Violence and surveillance, enacted literally or discursively, and manifested in digital or physical forms, are routinely exercised over Palestinian citizens" (Nazzal et al., 2024, p. 6). Our findings correspond with Sombatpoonsiri (2024) that these "digital repression tactics" succeed in oppressing dissenting voices, as

happened in Thailand's 2020–2021 protests (p. 1611). Moreover, Dalia's comment, along with other accounts, intersects with feminist surveillance studies (Gill, 2019), which address the tendency to objectify and sexualize women through the politics of looking and the male gaze, social media use, and the quantified self in many spheres, particularly the politicized one. Nazzal et al. (2024) found that Palestinian women activists are exposed to various techniques of surveillance and defamation enacted digitally using social media to spread accusations of shame, question the "honor" of women activists, and tarnish their reputation.

Moreover, some participants' narratives revealed a ripple effect of this multifaceted surveillance from companies, Israeli occupation, and PSF produced social and familial fear among other non-activists' members such as family members, friends, work managers, or colleagues. Some participants were monitored by close networks, family members, and relations who were concerned about the possible risks of activism. Comments included "My mom keeps telling me that Israeli soldiers will come to arrest me at some point" (Tara), or "A friend of mine keeps lecturing me saying that I am risking my future and my family's reputation in this traditional society" (Layla). These concerns demonstrate that social and familial ties play a strong role in monitoring, deterring, and surveilling. Dalia expressed her fear of her father's reaction if he sees what fake accounts write about her: "I was very worried about my dad seeing the bad comments, cursing, and tarnishing comments which were targeting me personally from the pro-government electronic flies." The electronic flies Dalia refers to are pro-regime, often fake social media accounts that spread disinformation and fear-mongering to sway public opinion or launch personal attacks through offensive comments (Jones, 2019).

The ripple effect of layered surveillance means that familial, social, and collegially enforced surveillance adds a layer that thickens and reinforces existing systems of surveillance like the colonial, governmental, and corporate layers. This interplay is exemplified in a story told by Layla, an activist from Jerusalem, about her friend, a well-known Palestinian journalist who was forcibly separated from her two young children for more than ten days after she was arrested by the Israeli forces. Layla shared:

> After 10 days, she [referring to her friend] was released under two strict conditions; home imprisonment for specific period of time, and not to share any political content for the rest of her life … the whole family like her husband, sisters, and family have been much more cautious and worried about their digital political activism … it was a traumatic experience to arrest her for the first time and kept her away from her beloved little kids.

Amjad's mother, Afaf, confirmed that she always monitors Amjad's profile because she is worried about him. She said, "I am afraid that Amjad will be arrested by either the Israeli occupation or by the Palestinian authorities." Surprisingly, some participants shared that they were monitored and criticized by their followers. Mona shared:

> It not always great to be under the light, I get punished by my followers a lot. As they assume that your identity, content, and personality should be as homogenous as possible with them … During Sheikh Jarrah events, many followers cursed at me for sharing political

content [...] because you are an influencer and you have a lot of followers you aren't allowed to do anything wrong.

Dina, a Palestinian American journalist who faced surveillance from her American colleagues, expressed:

My colleagues at work keeps advising me to chill out while posting about the cause … there was a time that I needed to be silenced because I was working for a government agency in the United States where I might literally lose my job [...] I usually used TikTok to share news about Palestine but to be honest I later deleted some of my videos, because I was applying for a certain job.

Dina's comment evokes Foucault's panopticon metaphor applied to the workplace where employers or managers monitor employees by digital and technological devices (Manokha, 2020), and Dennis' (2008) concept of self-surveillance as "individualized resistance and protection from a society that is more reliant on surveillance" (p. 347), or as Nazzal (2024) describes, when individuals "de-anonymize or self-surveil their online presence in fear of societal norms and patriarchy and sometimes de-politicize their online content in fear of organizational/political surveillance" (p. 4203). Our results show that Palestinian activists experienced self-surveillance regardless of where they were located (in Palestine or abroad). Nay, who works for a Qatari TV channel, and Julie, who works with the German Representative Office in Ramallah, both mentioned workplace restrictions on sharing political opinions and said they self-monitor their content to stay "safe." The impact of participants' "offline" social relationships affecting their self-monitoring of their digital content is in line with research on social media platforms as spaces bound by relationships with family, friends, employers, and governmental entities (Kruse, Norris, & Flinchum, 2018; Nazzal, 2024). These boundaries become murky, especially for influencers in the Gulf countries, whose engagement with political content threatens their opportunities and, thus, their livelihood. Mira, who was active during the Sheikh Jarrah events, commented about influencers with partnerships in the Emirates:

The recent issue of Arab normalization became my main obsession […] The most important market for influencers is the Emirates market that is normalizing with Israel. Therefore, opposing influencers might lose the opportunities in the Emirates market, as a result I might lose my followers, money, and contracts.

It is worth mentioning that the positionality and privileges of some Palestinian participants who live in the diaspora, such as Dina, Nay, Julie, and Mira, have offered them more "security" to express their political stances. Therefore, while the risk faced by participants in the diaspora involves deleting a post or losing a job, Palestinians living in occupied Palestine risk being arrested, tortured, or even killed, just as in the genocide in Gaza, where at least 217 journalists and media workers have been killed (Hussein & Duggal, 2024).

Ways of Maneuvering: Text and Visual Fabrication as Digital Resistance Tactics

Palestinians have a rich history of resisting colonization and occupation in the public and digital spheres. Palestinians have been using ICTs for activism, mobilization, and communication across historic

Palestine and the diaspora since Internet access became widespread in occupied Palestine (Nabulsi, 2014; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014; Zidani, 2021, 2024).

For the Palestinian diaspora, a new type of diaspora identity is represented and reshaped through social media platforms, producing "expressive forms of identity-based political engagements that are simultaneously both deeply local and digitally global" (Kumar, 2018, p. 1). However, extant literature has little research on the different forms of surveillance that Palestinian activists face and how they can resist biased hegemonic social media companies. Our findings reveal the resistance tactics and the creative techniques that helped activists maneuver algorithms while supporting the Uprising.

Participants' accounts revealed two digital maneuver and resistance techniques: textual fabrication and visual fabrication. We build on Markham's (2012) conceptualization of fabrication as an ethical practice to protect privacy in Internet-mediated social contexts. According to Markham (2012), "One practical method of data representation in contexts in which privacy protection is unstable is fabrication, involving creative, bricolage-style transfiguration of original data into composite accounts or representational interactions" (p. 334).

One well-known digital resistance technique for bypassing algorithms is the encryption of terms. Amjad explained that he and Moe utilized this technique to fabricate their texts:

> To divert the algorithms which can detect specific censored Arabic words like "moqawama" [meaning resistance] I usually write an English letter or an emoji, or a dash between the Arabic letters so that it won't be caught … or I change the word shaheed [meaning martyr] into ش_هيد by inserting an underscore between the Arabic letters.

Moreover, we found that participants experienced language discrimination against their Arabic content where Arabic posts, hashtags, and videos are more surveilled compared to other languages (Nazzal, 2020). Therefore, activists began sharing the news in other languages, such as English and French, to spread the word. As Reem put it:

> My Algerian followers who speak French fluently were reshaping posts about what was happening in Sheikh Jarrah and Gaza, and Instagram did not shadow ban them because they were translating the content to French. Hence, there was less censorship on foreigners. Translation is a technique to get away of Instagram restrictions.

Another textual fabrication used by activists is deleting censored words and maneuvering text through vague or indirect captions. For example, Layla explains how she and Thaer shared posts or stories with indirect captions: "My tactic is only about paraphrasing the news, for example, instead of writing the hero Karim was martyred… I mention the name of his child that will not see his father anymore".

Thaer, a Jerusalemite digital archivist and photographer with 112,000 followers, shared content from the heart of Sheikh Jarrah. His Instagram account was heavily restricted, with some content shadow-banned and deleted. Thaer used deletion tactics not merely to bypass algorithms but to protect other

activists from being arrested by the Israeli forces. He said, as if warning other activists to be careful about their content:

> Do not mention the names of the youth being arrested, instead say there is a female in her twenties being arrested by the Israeli forces from Sheikh Jarrah [...] Personally, I don't share any hashtags related to the cause, nor posts … I prefer to use stories instead … another method I started to use is when I noticed that I got highly restricted from Facebook or Instagram is that I share the videos I documented with foreign influencers that have a huge number of followers, and I tell them that they can even use the videos without mentioning the source, most importantly is to circulate the video as much as possible.

Thus, in addition to language discrimination, activists and journalists explained that social media surveillance machines are designed and operationalized for a higher level of scrutiny of content emerging from the West Bank and Gaza—what is known as locative discrimination (Nazzal, 2020).

Palestinian scholars and news outlets have documented the creative ways Palestinian Internet users play with spelling and phrases to avoid censorship of their posts on Palestine and to protect themselves from potential risks. Be it through lengthening words, disrupting spelling, removing or adding dots, or incongruous punctuation, it is important to note that these strategies have a long history rooted in the Arabic language and in Palestinian resistance and are not a new phenomenon that is unique to the digital age or to online spaces (Mawasi & Zidani, 2021). Repertoires of resistance are also a living praxis of resilience and collective opposition in Palestine's urban environment, like structure, or murals (Sabbagh, 2022).

Visual fabrication manifests through the addition of elements like sketches, emojis, and filters, using mundane content as a distraction, increasing engagement with followers, or employing content deletion or ephemerality (like Instagram stories). We spoke with a participant who works at a digital media platform creating informational and journalistic materials about Palestine, which has been blocked many times by Instagram. They said that they used different visual maneuvering techniques:

> We used to write the name of the martyr in the post design without their photo, and we usually use the calligraphy handwriting in order to manipulate the algorithm. However, today the algorithm recognizes this technique [referring to calligraphy] so we had to find another way … now we are using childish sketches or what we can call naïve art technique. For example, we digitally design a sketch of a prison instead of showing the real photo of an Israeli prison.

This Palestinian media agency developed creative visual ways to fabricate content to bypass biased algorithms by expressing meaning through sketches and drawings. Thaer, who utilized this technique, explained, "sometimes I use the caricature technique by sharing artwork that contains Palestinian content or featuring a Palestinian struggler."

Visual fabrication was also used in video, be it live video (like Instagram live) or permanent video (like reels). Dina's approach to videos illustrates how visual and textual fabrication often work together:

I used the storytelling technique by recording video in English but in a different way. Instead of sharing the videos in a very serious setting, I narrated the stories without being that formal … so, my videos were taken in a home setting; either in my room or in the kitchen by showing just my face and speaking about the political situation while making my coffee very normally, as a way of bypassing the algorithms. Showing my normal everyday face definitely changed things, speaking in English, also the words I was using; I knew the words that would get me censored so I found a way out by using other "safe words"… I think I developed this lexicon of how not to get censored.

Another visual maneuver tactic participants use is to confuse the algorithm and avoid censorship by adding filters or emojis to censored photos or adding particularly mundane photos before and after the censored content. Tara said, "I was using stickers or emojis on the stories I share." Dina explained her more elaborate technique: "I was sharing random stories of a water or coffee cup, a Netflix series, or a dish of food, and other daily normal photos to camouflage or distract the Artificial Intelligence sequence and its algorithms."

Indigenous people are aware of the ill-intentioned surveillance in online spaces, or the "settler gaze" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020). Frazer and Carlson argue that the expansion of capacities is a praxis of hope within a tech-colonial context. In the case of Palestinian expression, the visual and textual fabrication tactics used to maneuver layered surveillance demonstrate how indigenous people draw on their deep knowledge of language, visual culture, and community to communicate with each other and build a living adaptable set of tactics that they modify based on ongoing changes in their circumstances, technological affordances, and the mechanisms of surveillance and oppression affecting them. Their maneuvers also strengthen the indigenous knowledge that colonial dynamics seek to erase.

Conclusion

This article examined the layered surveillance that Palestinian activists in the 2021 #SaveSheikhJarrah movement faced from multiple online and in-person forces, and the creative visual and textual maneuvering tactics they devised to bypass and resist it. The findings are contextual, given that the researchers draw on interviews solely with Palestinians, yet our findings contribute to research on surveillance in a highly politicized and hyper-surveilled context where surveillance cannot be explored from a unidimensional perspective as multi-layered surveillance was manifested in capitalist companies, occupations, authorities, and social ties and networks. This will also expand our understanding of how organizational and personal communication differ in specific contexts.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on digital resistance and maneuvering. While creative tactics do not prevent the layered surveillance and censorship mechanisms that are enforced on online expression, they do hold power in that they become a way to practice and reinforce indigenous

knowledge. Tactics involving language-play and visual symbols require culturally rooted knowledge to understand and participate. There are numerous global examples of creative resistance and maneuvering. Indigenous peoples in Australia use memes to revise historical narratives (Frazer & Carlson, 2017). To navigate and challenge the constraints of state censorship in China, netizens use wordplay as alternative symbolic infrastructures that facilitate playful civic engagement and subtle forms of resistance (Zidani, 2018). In post-revolution Egypt, Arab youth create parody videos and memes to assert cultural agency and challenge dominant narratives (Elsayed & Zidani, 2020).

Notably, however unique these dynamics might be in each context; there is a global culture of surveillance (Lyon, 2017) intertwined in the dynamics of colonialism and authoritarianism, sometimes under the guise of democracy. Global examples within digital resistance literature correspond with our contributions in this study, which situates the Palestinian resistance within wider digital resistance movements. For example, Ozduzen and McGarry (2020) explore how digital platforms, especially Twitter, played a complex role during the Occupy Gezi protests in Turkey in 2013. Rather than framing social media purely as a tool for democratic resistance or top-down surveillance, the authors explore how digital traces (like tweets, images, and hashtags) became contested spaces shaped by conflicting narratives, state control, and activism. Bardhan (2022) examines how young women from Egypt and Tunisia use Instagram to engage in self-presentation, identity construction, and everyday forms of resistance, carving a space for micro-politics on digital platforms. Sombatpoonsiri (2024) studies the intersectional nature of digital repression by the Thai state, and how gender, age, class, and political identity intersect to shape the ways Thai protesters are targeted online.

The Sheikh Jarrah case is fit for unpacking these digital dynamics as it serves as a contemporary example of colonial oppression in all its complexity. It is a present-day example of how displacement and erasure strategies that are supposedly local to a specific region are entangled—even held up by—both local and global practices and politics in governance, technology, media, and even in our social fabrics. While the focus on a single context is a limitation of this study, it expands the possibilities for further research. Our study demonstrates how digital activists face multiple oppressions relating to colonization, occupation, and violence. Future research on digital surveillance could focus on one or more of the hidden and intersectional layers of surveillance in which indigenous communities engage in their political and social activities. The notion of digital resistance, with its various strategies and tactics, offers considerable potential for theorizing the continuous and interactive digital resistance processes that validate marginalized communities' narratives. Moreover, future research can draw connections to the tech industry to unpack how tech software and spyware like Pegasus and Predator are used by entities and governments around the world to surveil political opponents or dissidents. This global market of spyware helps reinforce layered surveillance experienced by Palestinians and others in occupied, authoritarian, and oppressive regions.

As academics, we must work to understand how networks, markets, and technologies create a layered oppressive force for individuals in these contexts to confront. This is the reciprocity we can give Palestinians and other indigenous communities.

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