HASHTAG WARS: TWITTER AS A DISCURSIVE SPACE IN THE 'BATTLE
OF NARRATIVES' BETWEEN PRO-ISRAELIS AND PRO-PALESTINIANS

BY

SHAHIRAH ELAIZA WAN HASSAN

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Abstract

Traditional forms of media have played a significant role in narrating the military conflict between Israel and Palestine (Said; Aouragh 2; Elmasry). Most recently, the Israeli Defense Forces used their official Twitter account to launch the 2012 Operation Pillar of Cloud in Gaza. This thesis investigates the role played by Twitter in the 'battle of narratives' taking place between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli communities on 14th June, two days after the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag campaign was launched 2014 and 9th July 2014, a day after Operation Protective Edge commenced in Gaza. The thesis argues that Twitter as a microblogging platform acts as an ambivalent discursive protest space for the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians. Drawing on a range of hashtag case studies, such as #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire, the thesis offers a content analysis of 300 tweets in relation to emerging concepts in digital media studies. Pablo Gerbaudo's articulation of 'choreography of assembly', for example, illustrates the role of social media in 'setting the scene' for protest while William Gamson and Andre Modigliani's concept of 'interpretive packages' allows for an exploration of symbolic devices on Twitter such as metaphors, exemplars, injustice symbols and visual images. This thesis draws on these concepts to examine how Twitter's affordances work ambivalently to highlight the victimisation of one side of the conflict while erasing the victimisation of the other.

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“I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being, first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole.” – Malcolm X

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Chapter One: The Role of Discourse and Information and Communications Infrastructures in the 'Israeli-Palestinian Conflict'

The struggle over political power involves attempts to gain control of the language of political debate. The aim to represent and challenge narratives about the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict' from both sides of the conflict has created various competing, contentious and interdependent discourses in traditional media and new media. 'Pro-Palestinian' activists, citizen journalists, foreign journalists and government representatives alike often use social media to counter 'pro-Israeli' narratives, particularly ones that are dominant and privileged in 'Western' mainstream media outlets. In this thesis, I explore the role of Twitter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by analysing the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians before and during the Israeli military incursion in Gaza codenamed Operation Protective Edge in 2014. The 'hashtag wars' of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire were media events and discourses that have been selected as case studies for this thesis. I performed content analyses on a total of 300 tweets from the hashtag feed of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire to identify various discursive elements in the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians in their aim to highlight their own victimisation while erasing the other's.

This chapter outlines the socio-political background of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the role of the victimisation discourse and 'truth regimes', and the political economy of the Israeli and Palestinian and information, communication and technologies infrastructures (ICT) that have led to communication practices such as 'digital militarism'. I argue that the Internet and social media platforms are ambivalent tools and spaces that have some online benefits for the Palestinian resistance but they also reinforce the asymmetrical power relations between Israel and Palestine. Therefore, it is important to understand the conditions and the ideology of Zionism that have led to the imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine, which in turn sparked the Palestinian resistance as a social movement.

Brief History of the 'Israeli-Palestinian Conflict'

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex, dynamic and tumultuous relationship between the Zionist movement and the Palestinian Resistance. The term 'Zionism' is carefully referred to because while the 'Palestinian resistance' is a response to 'Zionism', the Zionist movement has evolved since its inception. The emergence of the Zionist movement created several competing frameworks beginning in the mid-19th century due to the Emancipation of the Jews brought on by the French Revolution, which ended in 1799. What began as the Jews wanting to rebuild a definition of Jewish identity and materialize their desire for Redemption, which refers to God redeeming the Israelites from their various exiles, known as Messianic Zionism, evolved into various types of Zionism. They include Political Zionism, Practical Zionism, Labour Zionism, and finally Revisionist Zionism which is a militant approach founded in 1925 by a Russian Jew known as Ze'ev Jabotinsky who wanted to achieve Zionist goals and counter Russian pogroms in 1903.

With the backing of the American government, the British government pledged support for a Jewish homeland by signing the 1917 Balfour Declaration. The agreement eventually led to the establishment and recognition of Israel as a Jewish state on 14th of May 1948. The *aliyah* (migration) of Jewish communities into Palestine happened in gradual stages but in May 1948 over 700000 Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and 500 of their villages to accommodate Jewish settlements. The expulsion and displacement of Palestinians on 14th May 1948 became known as *An-Nakba*, 'The Catastrophe'. Many of these Palestinians and their descendents are now living in the densely-populated Gaza Strip or living as refugees in neighbouring Arab countries or European countries. They are known as the Palestinian diaspora.

Today, *An-Nakba* is an open secret amongst the Israeli community because any effort to raise awareness about it in Israel is censored or banned by the Israeli government. In 2011, the *Nakba* law was passed to authorise the

Israeli Finance Minister to erase or delegitimise the collective memory of Palestinians, a minority indigenous population, by reducing funding and support for any organisation or event that commemorates *An-Nakba* (Raphaely). The oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli occupation and the suppression of Palestinian discourse in Israel have motivated Palestinians and their supporters to seek various means of raising awareness about the oppression of Palestinians and their struggle for self-sovereignty.

Discourse in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Michel Foucault defines discourse as a culturally and socially constructed representation of reality or object, which reflects the power relations between individuals and institutions (Power/Knowledge 90). Therefore, discourse is often a manifestation of an institution or group's ideology and the product of a set of communication practices that systematically structures and constructs knowledge of a reality or event. In relation to this, discourse also helps shape subjectivities by identifying and defining the social categories of people who participate in or interact with these realities or events. The 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict' is an example of a discursive formation and discursive field, which is comprised of the respective Palestinian and Israeli ideologies, institutions, language, rhetoric and subjectivities. They are described and characterised through discursive knowledge and communication practices such as news reports, news articles, interviews, blog posts, and 'tweets' that have created and defined various subjectivities such as 'Palestinian', 'Israeli', 'terrorist', 'Zionist', 'activist', 'victim' and 'martyr'.

Foucault also contends that discourse is an important factor in the concept of 'power'. He claims that 'power' and 'knowledge' are mutually supportive and it is through discourse that the power/knowledge nexus is established, maintained and dispersed. The 'Palestinian resistance' as a discursive formation is also an example of how power is practiced, especially when it is constrained by others, through the creation of other forms of

discourses that challenge a particular ideology and its discourses and discursive formations. According to Foucault, discourse has the potential to either reinforce or resist power: “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (‘History of Sexuality’ 101). In the ‘Israeli-Palestinian conflict’, the notion of ‘truth’ is central in discursive constructions and processes because it implies credibility and a sense of authority. Thus, the ability to represent the ‘truth’ not only requires power but also creates it especially due to its pertinence in the ‘battle of narratives’. Foucault’s articulation of the concept of a ‘truth regime’ explains how power is created, primarily through discourses that are produced in the forms of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (‘Power/Knowledge’ 131)

In other words, Foucault’s concept of a ‘regime of truth’ can be understood as “a set of codes, practices, institutionalised arrangements and discursive processes that produce what comes to be taken for granted as knowledge, while, at the same time, providing the vehicles that render it true” (Silberstein). He describes ‘truth’ as a product of a series of constraints because it has to go through various individuals of authority and techniques and procedures of authorisation for it to be considered as valuable instead of valueless, true instead of false and right instead of wrong. Due to the serious and political nature of the ‘Israeli-Palestinian conflict’, discourses surrounding

the issue go through a similar process in the contestation between the 'Palestinian resistance' and 'Israeli occupation' as discursive formations and regimes of truth. Thus, discourse can also be a result of a resistance against power, which in this case can be exemplified in the existence of the 'Palestinian resistance' on social media, as an extension of the Palestinian plight and its resistance against Zionism and Zionist discourses and practices that often try to censor Palestinian voices and narratives.

The Israeli government's attempts to suppress Palestinian discourses or narratives correlates with Foucault's claim that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (Foucault, 'The Order of Things' 52). Foucault explains that 'the will to truth' or the will to distinguish what is false or true is a 'prodigious machinery designed to exclude' often achieved through institutional support and reinforcement and institutions such the government and media exert 'a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint... on other discourses' ('The Order of Things' 52).

Truth Regimes

Social media platforms have become useful in the 'Palestinian resistance' and its discourses because they provide Palestinian and 'pro-Palestinian' citizens, activists, citizen journalists and also foreign journalists and activists with new discursive spaces to challenge Israeli narratives that are relatively more dominant in Western mainstream media. To analyse the role of discourse in the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict' in social media it is important to understand that the 'Israeli occupation' and 'Palestinian resistance' are not only social phenomena but they also function as 'truth regimes'. Moreover, it is vital to acknowledge the latter exists due to the former.

The truth regimes reflect how their respective ideologies of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism idealise the land but at the same time differ in their

beliefs, principles and motivations. On the one hand, the 'Palestinian resistance' consists of various nuanced discourses reflecting various aspirations of the Palestinians and pro-Palestinians and that of the Palestinian political organisations such as Hamas, Fatah and Palestinian Authority whose beliefs and principles are perceived to reflect and contribute to the overarching ideology of the Palestinian national movement. The Palestinian resistance is driven by ideas about Palestinian nationalism, which is shaped by the suffering of exile during and after the *Nakba* (Frisch 25) and the struggle for self-determination. Additionally, the Palestinian resistance demands those in the Palestinian diaspora who have been displaced have the right to return and live in a non-colonial and non-apartheid state that acknowledges their status as rightful citizens of the country by granting them the same social, legal and political rights as Israeli Jews.

On the other hand, the existence of modern-day Israel built through the expansion of Israeli residential settlements as part of the 'Israeli occupation' is motivated by the Zionist ideology. In simplified terms, Zionism is based on the Judaic belief that 'Eretz Yisrael' or 'the Land of Israel' is the Promised Land of Israelites or people with Jewish ancestry. According to the Jewish sacred text, the Torah, a Jewish state is part of a divine plan for the 'Jewish redemption'. Thus, the goal of Zionism is to create a Jewish state that would be the homeland for the Jewish diaspora. However, the Zionist movement has evolved since its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century and many orthodox Jews view modern-day Zionism or 'New Zionism' which incorporates a militant approach known as the 'Revisionist Zionism' as a "secular movement which conveniently sidestepped Judaism in favour of nationalistic goals" (Harris 3).

The Holocaust Victimisation Discourse

The state of Israel as it is known today is shaped by the Jewish concept of 'redemption' combined with the need to resist and challenge anti-Semitism by establishing a state where Jews are safe and protected from persecution and discrimination. The formation of Israel was largely based

upon the cultivation of a victim mentality among the Jewish diaspora through the Holocaust (*Shoah*) victimisation discourse and the Israeli right to seek 'victimisation justice' (Yurman 77). The victim position can be understood as a major asset of the Zionist movement and the establishment of Israel. Adi Ophir asserts:

The point is not to ask how Israeli Jews have become victims and heirs to victims whose injuries cannot be healed and whose losses cannot be retrieved. The point is to understand how the victim position functions in Israeli culture; in the state's ideology, the apparatuses in which it is embodied; and in the construction of the constituting narrative of the Jewish state. The critique of Zionism demonstrates that the victim position functions as a key structural element in the discursive fields in which Jewish and Israeli identities are shaped, negotiated and fought for. (182-183)

Today, Jewish victimhood based on the past experiences and persecution of the Jewish people during the Holocaust between 1941-1945 has translated into the need to create absolute security for those with Jewish ancestry. This notion of creating absolute security for the Jewish people is a vital factor in the Zionist movement because "it builds upon a deeper sense of existential insecurity that preceded the establishment of Israel, was strengthened immeasurably by the Holocaust, and for which Zionism conceived a militarily powerful state of Israel as an answer" (Burke 69). Thus, discourses of the 'Israeli occupation' are categorised as 'pro-Israeli' in nature because they legitimise the existence of the state of Israel and often support and justify its government's policies on Palestine and the Palestinian people.

'Palestinian Resistance' as a Truth Regime

The 'Palestinian resistance' is a direct reaction to the 'Israeli occupation' and the nature of discourse is that it "draws on the notion of oppositionality and is often reactive to other discourse within the same socio-

political context” (Althusser and Psecheux cited in Alshaer 104). In other words, ‘pro-Palestinian’ discourse is orchestrated to challenge ‘pro-Israeli’ discourse. Social media have played a significant role in the ‘Palestinian resistance’ by providing Palestinian and ‘pro-Palestinian’ activists, citizen journalists, and foreign journalists with the tools to disseminate counter-information and knowledge about the Palestinian plight and truth regimes. To demonstrate how social media discourses of the ‘Palestinian resistance’ attempt to challenge discourses of the ‘Israeli occupation’ this thesis analyses the communication practices of ‘pro-Palestinian’ and ‘pro-Israeli’ activists during specific media events that took place in the form of hashtag campaigns.

The aforementioned communication practices of ‘pro-Palestinian’ and ‘pro-Israeli’ activists examined in this thesis are ‘tweets’, updates or messages that may include text, links, photos, or videos posted on the social media platform known as Twitter. Social media have challenged the way truth regimes operate by changing the news media ecology. For example, during social movements and street protests, such as the Iranian ‘Green Movement’ in 2009 and the ‘Arab Spring’ in 2011, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were used to circumvent state censorship, counter state propaganda with content produced by local and foreign activists and journalists. Using these events as precedents, Twitter became a communication platform for the dissemination of real-time updates and creation of online communities of Palestinians and pro-Palestinians during and in between Israeli military attacks. Hence, Palestinian and pro-Palestinian Twitter and Twitter users have become part of the ‘Palestinian resistance’ truth regime which produces knowledge and rhetoric that are regarded as more truthful or credible in comparison to the knowledge and rhetoric produced by the ‘Israeli occupation’ truth regime.

The ‘pro-Palestinian’ discourse is not only a manifestation of the e as they can to appeal to the international audience. They use English as the primary language of their discourse. For example, unlike Hamas, the IDF’s official website consists of content in both Hebrew and English. The IDF also

has a separate website called 'IDF blog' where they regularly publish blog posts in English that are then shared on their Twitter and Facebook accounts. It is important to note that English is also the primary language used in its Twitter account, @IDFSpokesperson, which provides updates on Hamas' rocket attacks among other IDF-related content. This reveals their aim to present information and knowledge about their national aspirations and military operations or their version of events as the 'truth' not only to influence and unite Israeli citizens but also gain the support of the wider global community who are observing and interacting with them or their discourse via social media. The Internet and social media have become important discursive spaces for the truth regimes of the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian resistance.

Hence, it is important to unpack how these truth regimes have influenced online 'pro-Israeli' and 'pro-Palestinian' discourses and the development of ICT industries in both Israel and Palestine. The case studies selected for this thesis reveal how the victimisation rhetoric was used to create compelling discourses in order to mobilise pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinians online and justify violence through the idea of self-defense and erase the victimisation of the other side by amplifying their own victimhood.

ICT Development in Israel

Modern-day Israel has become an industrialised and developed country sixty-seven years after its establishment in 1948. Israel's existence is controversial because the state was created by a group of Jews who ascribed to Zionism and received political support from powerful Western nations such as America and Britain. Compelled by the Zionist ideology and the victimisation motif which entails the memory of the *Shoah* (Holocaust) as a key component of Israeli discourse regarding the need for a population of Jewish-descendent to have an independent state of their own resulted in the official and legal acquisition and occupation of the Palestinian land in 1948. Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reports the country had a population of 8.3 million

people at the end of 2014; three-quarters of the population is said to be Jewish while Arab citizens accounted for 20.7 percent of its population (Elis). The Israeli economy is mainly driven by its science and technology sector and the state's reported gross domestic product (GDP) for 2014 is USD \$304.22 billion dollars (Trading Economics). Historically, traditional industries such as agriculture and food processing provided the country with most of its industrial output and labour opportunities during Israel's first phase of industrialization, which took place until the 1970s. However, in Israel's next phase of industrialisation, the government began encouraging local venture-capital investment and concentrated on developing the country's high technology (hi-tech) industry and weapon industry to manufacture technology and arms for its military forces.

Israel's highly competitive high-tech industry was built in the context of its military activities and the development of its defence division, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Aouragh 58). In the late 1980s, former army specialists from the intelligence services and Israelis who worked in California's Silicon Valley returned to Israel to open incubator centers for multinational companies such as Intel, Microsoft and International Business Machines (IBM) (Aouragh 59). By 2009, the Israeli ICT industry employed 204000 workers and it contributed 17.3 percent towards the country's business sector's GDP (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Israel is now often referred to as the 'start-up nation' (Senor and Signer 5) and it is renowned for being a global leader in hi-tech and ICT research and development (R&D). Israel promotes and takes pride in the dozens of industrial and hi-tech parks it has built in an area called 'Silicon Wadi' (the term '*wadi*' means valley in Arabic and Hebrew) which is said to be the Israeli version of the American Silicon Valley in San Francisco.

With an ICT industry that is rapidly progressing and a defense ministry driven by hi-tech innovations, Israel's telecommunications sector benefits from the country's efforts to produce the finest ICT technology. In 2012, the Israeli Ministry of Communications granted Internet service provider (ISP) licenses to forty-three companies ('Internet in Israel', Wikipedia).

However, only two telecommunication companies, Bezeq International (Bezeq) and HOT Telecommunication Systems (HOT), provide the phone and cable infrastructures for Internet service in Israel – Bezeq, which is also a licensed ISP, provides dial-up and asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) while HOT supplies cable Internet service. Among dozens of ISPs, Israel's most popular ISPs are only a handful, such as Bezeq, Internet Zahav Smile, Netvision, 012 Golden Lines and Netvision-Barak while many of the smaller ISPs buy bandwidth from the bigger ISPs and resell it (Hakak).

In 2014, 89 percent of daily Internet users in Israel were between the ages of 25 and 34 (Statista). The Internet penetration rate in Israel was 75.8 percent, which was among the highest in the region. 80.75 percent of the Israeli population is below 55 years old, which suggests why the youth are the most predominant Internet users in the country. These statistics reveal the correlation between the demographics and the purpose of Internet use in Israel. For example, the high number of youth in Israel shapes the way the Internet is utilised, including the most popular websites and social networking sites accessed by Israeli citizens. The most accessed social media websites in Israel are Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter with a 95.77 percent, 1.81 percent and 1.52 percent penetration rate, respectively.

Social Media, Twitter and Digital Militarism in Israel

The most popular social media platforms in Israel in 2014 were Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter with a 95.77 percent, 1.81 percent and 1.52 percent penetration rate, respectively (StatsMonkey). The high Internet user rate among youth implies most of Facebook, Pinterest and Twitter users in Israel are from the same demographic. Jewish Israeli youth are heavily exposed to the nationalist and military-driven Zionist ideology, especially if they underwent the Israeli education system and have been conscripted into the compulsory national service (Yurman 72). Thus, the use of digital technology, such as computers and smart phones, and social media platforms for patriotic and military purposes occurred easily and rapidly because they

were already a part of many young Jewish Israelis' daily lives. The IDF's adoption of social media by its media relations unit, IDF Spokesperson, is categorised as a form of 'digital militarism'.

Adi Kuntsman and Rebecca Stein define digital militarism as “the process by which digital communication platforms and consumer practices have... become militarised tools in the hands of state and non-state actors, both in the field of military operations and civilian frameworks” (6). An example of Israeli digital militarism was the IDF's announcement of the launch of Operation Pillar of Defense via its Twitter account in November 2012. On 14th November 2012, the IDF posted a tweet declaring another military incursion in Gaza had begun. They also posted another tweet to warn Hamas members to not “show their faces above ground in the days ahead”.

Fig. 1. The IDF's tweet that launched Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012, which led it to be deemed as the first war to be announced on Twitter.

Hamas' military wing, the Al Qassam Brigades, responded and exchanged tweets with the IDF, also employing its Twitter account, @alqassambrigade, to warn the Israeli soldier of their impending demise. When the IDF assassinated Hamas' military commander, Ahmad al-Jabari, on the same day they posted an infographic image containing a picture of him

and the text 'eliminated' boldly stated across it. By the second day of Operation Pillar of Defense, the notion of a "Twitter war" or "social media battlefield" became a journalistic cliché (Kuntsman and Stein 20).

In previous years, the Israeli military primarily used the Internet for *hasbara* (public diplomacy), counter-insurgency or as a broadcast medium. During Operation Pillar of Defense, Twitter 'transformed' into so-called "technologies of warning" and a medium for warfare declaration (Kuntsman and Stein 20). Twitter is a social media platform with a range of affordances. Donald Norman defines an affordance as "the design aspect of an object which suggests how the object should be used" (14). Twitter's affordances were interpreted differently during Operation Pillar of Defense as new features such as the ability to embed images into a tweet had been introduced. The IDF had taken advantage its affordances, such as one-to-many real-time communication and the ability to connect with Israeli youth and a Western audience, and applied them in the context of a new imminent war and an on-going conflict between the state of Israel and the governing authority of the Gaza Strip. The IDF harnessed the same Twitter features and affordances but in the context of a different war with its own unique strategy and tactics.

Having said that, the discussion of the digital militarisation of Twitter and its affordances by pro-Israelis is not used to argue that the microblogging platform is mainly used for military purposes. In this thesis I argue that digital militarism entails the encroachment of military ideology and discourse in the everyday use of the Internet and social media, particularly by the general Israeli public. The meaning of Twitter among Israelis is a result of constant struggle between various social groups in Israel who use it. While the IDF and its supporters have adopted Twitter in their efforts, the social media site and app is also used for other purposes among Israelis. Klear's social media analysis of the Israeli Twittersphere reveals that the fifty most popular Twitter accounts in Israel in 2015 fall into the categories of entertainment, news and politics.

In 2015, the top three Israeli Twitter accounts with the highest number of followers were @OhThe1DFandom, a 'One Direction' fan account, followed by @IDFSpokesperson, the IDF's official account and then @netanyahu, which is the account of Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel. Other popular Israeli Twitter accounts include those belonging to politicians, news outlets and agencies, news correspondents, journalists, musicians and entertainment columnists. This information about the most popular Israeli Twitter accounts provide an insight into the identity, interests and disposition of the 1.52 percent of Internet users in Israel who are active on Twitter. Furthermore, it substantiates the assumption that most of the Twitter users in Israel compose of Israeli youth who are active users of smart phones as well (Poushter). Combined with the fact that the IDF and the Israeli prime minister are among the influential Twitter accounts in Israel, this suggests that Israeli youth are predisposed to nationalist and Zionist ideologies. Apart from its youth-centric character, Twitter is also a niche social media platform that is popular among people with specific interests. In 2013, the chief executive officer of a Tel Aviv-based public relations company, Ayelet Noff, claimed "99 percent of Israeli Twitter users are geeks and media people" (Goldenberg).

In this statement, Noff referred to two social groups; the colloquial term 'geek' is commonly used to describe a person who is a "digital-technology expert or enthusiast" (Dictionary.com) and the phrase 'media people' implies she is referring to those who work or have an interest in the media and communications industry. As my subsequent analysis of Twitter suggests, Noff's statement is a crude and oversimplified observation about Israeli Twitter users. However, her statement provides an insight into the findings of the Klear analysis which reveals that Twitter is a niche social media platform not only used by a small percentage of the Israeli society but also a few demographics with specific interests, such as news, entertainment and politics, as a means of obtaining the latest updates about these topics.

Therefore, Twitter has various affordances that are useful to different social groups. The various affordances of Twitter means the militarisation of Twitter in Israel is a process that includes a hegemonic struggle over its meaning and purpose within Israeli society. The Internet was first utilised for academic purposes before it was commercialised in Israel. In a similar way, Israeli society's interpretation of Twitter depends on the context it is used and also the social group that is using it. The Ministry of Defense and universities combined forces to support nationalist efforts and manage the narrative on the IDF's military operations. The ministry used Twitter's affordances to stay relevant among youth and to encourage them to participate in the online discourse about their country's military efforts to defend Israel in its pursuit of Zionist goals and gain support from the international community. While Israel's ICT and digital industries have been a success, the development and growth of ICT infrastructures have not been as prosperous for its Palestinian counterpart.

ICT Development in Palestine

The first Palestinian telecommunications company, Palestine Telecommunications (PalTel), was established after the Oslo agreements were signed in the early 1990s when Palestinians living in the West returned to Palestine to help rebuild the country. Hence, the development of ICT technology and infrastructures in Palestine symbolised hope and transformation for Palestinian civil society, especially in terms of Palestinian activism against Israeli occupation and oppression. Firstly, the Internet led to the creation of Palestinian virtual communities, as a means of overcoming on-the-ground communication barriers such as closures, immobility and curfews imposed by the Israeli government (Aouragh 47). Secondly, access to the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) enabled Palestinians to disseminate information about the First and Second *Intifada* within the Palestinian diaspora and the international community. Websites and content about Palestine and the Palestinian struggle and resistance in the English-language allowed the

international community to read alternative sources of information about the First and Second *Intifada* (John 332; Aouragh 50).

However, the political economy of Palestinian Internet under Palestinian Authority's rule revealed their complicity with Israeli occupation to create technological dependence on Israel and Western nations, such as the United States. For example, when PalTel established its subsidiary, Hadara, in 2005 by purchasing Internet bandwidth from Israel and became the only Palestinian Internet service provider (ISP). Today, Hadara claims they control 60 percent of the Palestinian ISP market (Linked In), but other Palestinian ISP companies are resellers of Hadara's services, which means Hadara still monopolises the Palestinian ISP market and Israel continues to financially profit from Internet use in Palestine. Miriyam Aouragh and Helga Tawil-Souri describe the conditions that has led to Palestine's technological dependence on Israel:

All Palestinian ISPs are essentially Hadara resellers. But Hadara itself cannot have an internet trunk switch that would circumvent Israel. Israeli authorities require Hadara to provide limited bandwidth for Palestinian internet use; internet surfing is invariably slower in the territories than in Israel. Israeli providers sell bandwidth to Hadara at substantially higher rates than to providers in Israel, making access more expensive for Palestinian users. Moreover, the Israeli government has enforced limitations on the kinds of ICT equipment permitted. The combination of higher costs, slower speeds, and limited technologies result in a constrained internet infrastructure. (112)

Thus, not only are Palestinians purchasing Internet services from Israeli companies but also paying more for them. While the Internet has some 'online' benefits it also reinforces the asymmetrical relationship between Israel and Palestine and neoliberal goals of Palestinian elites, such as the Palestinian Authority, who are perceived to be complicit in Israel's occupation of Israel by

many Palestinians. Aouragh and Tawil-Souri refers to this phenomenon as 'cyber-colonialism' (107).

Furthermore, neoliberalism contributed to the cyber-colonialism of Palestine. The development of ICT infrastructures in the occupied Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza in the early 1990s introduced neoliberalism into the Palestinian civil society. Neoliberalism minimised the interaction between the political realm and the socioeconomic order because the post-Oslo Palestinian civil society defined by the proliferation of foreign-funded NGOs required the agencies to be apolitical or disassociated from Palestinian political parties. Tariq Dana refers to this process as the systemic depoliticisation of Palestinian civil society, which impacted the development of political consciousness and crippled the progress of society's political life (204). The development of the ICT industry in West Bank and Gaza was not only spearheaded by Western-educated professionals but also supported by foreign aid. Thus, the depoliticisation of Palestinian citizens gradually took place under the shadow of the very technologies and infrastructures that were supplied by countries like the United States and used in the Palestinian resistance.

The Oslo accords presented opportunities for foreign investors and aid with economic and financial interests in the growth of the Palestinian ICT infrastructures. American influence and financial support played a role through government funding via the premier US government aid arm known as US Agency for International Aid (USAID) and the heavy presence of private technology firms such as Cisco, Microsoft, Intel and Hewlett-Packard and multinational aid agencies such as the World Bank (Aouragh and Tawil-Souri 108). Most aid does not challenge but rather strengthen the economic and political status quo that further institutionalises and maintains Israeli control over Palestinian territories and this applies to its ICT sector as well.

The development of the Internet in Palestine was linked with the transformation of the Palestinian civil society. ICT development in the occupied Palestinian territories was part of a neoliberalist initiative, which employed

Palestinian NGOs as a means to strengthen elitism and dependence on foreign aid. Palestinian ICT development has been under American tutelage and Israeli control. Tariq Dana explains neoliberalism was able to infiltrate Palestinian political life through the existence of Western NGOs and discourses of empowerment and participation that encapsulated the Western logic of liberal individualism, which masked the root causes of Palestinian socioeconomic problems. The discourses disregard “the structure of oppression and reduces human progress to an individualised dimension rationalising individuals’ choices and personal potency to access resources and compete for economic gains” (Dana 202).

The ‘NGOisation’ of Palestinian civil society and the separation between NGOs and political parties and social constituents were signs of depoliticisation. The infiltration of neoliberalism through the introduction of NGOs led to the Palestinian civil society’s breaking away from conventional anti-colonial politics, which characterised the pre-Oslo period in Palestine. According to Dana,

The previously political socialisation and mobilisation of the grassroots had been replaced with foreign-funded projects of excessive technical character, known for their short-term measurable outcomes that persistently fail to contribute to any progressive change in the political and social processes. (204)

On the surface, ICT development may have had some democratising effects on Palestinian society by enabling them to overcome communication barriers and provide alternative sources of news and information about the Palestinian resistance to the international community. However, the growth of ICT infrastructure in Palestinian territories through the establishment of companies such as PalTel and Hadara and American-led NGOs impacted Palestinian political life by reinforcing Palestine’s dependence on Israeli ISPs and Western intervention in Palestinian civil society through the supply of American IT products and services. As a result, it is in the interest of

Israel's Western allies such as the United States to support Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Today, 57 percent of Palestinians live in the West Bank whereas 43 percent reside in the Gaza Strip and the country's overall Internet penetration rate is almost 49 percent (Social Studio 9). There are a total of 56 Internet companies registered with the Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications, of which 40 are wireless Internet (WiFi) companies and 10 are broadband Internet connection companies (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 'International Day for Information Society'). Similar to the Internet's purpose when it was first introduced in Palestine, a high percentage of Palestinian Internet use is for keeping in touch with family and friends and accessing entertainment. Another report states 86 percent of Internet users obtained the news from Facebook and 69 percent from news websites (Social Studio 12).

Social Media and the Palestinian Resistance

In 2014, 75.1 percent of Palestinian Internet users were reportedly active social media users who accessed social media platforms for multiple purposes. The most popular social media platforms in Palestine are Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter and Instagram. 76.5 percent of Palestinian Internet users claimed they used social media for entertainment purposes, while 75 percent used them for keeping in touch with others. In comparison to the aforementioned figures, the percentage of Palestinian social media users who used these platforms for activist purposes were quite low as only 33 percent, 25 percent and 19 percent claimed they used social media to discuss topics regarding culture, politics and Palestinian heritage, respectively (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 'International Day for Information Society'). These statistics support the argument that pro-Palestinian activism on social media is not performed by Palestinians or more specifically, Palestinians who live in Palestine, but by digital activists from around the world. Along with the fact that Palestinian Internet is controlled and monitored by Israel, the low number of

Palestinians who use social media for political activism challenges claims regarding social media's democratising effects on Palestinian civil society.

The most popular social media platform is Facebook, which has a penetration rate of 84 percent (Arab Social Media Report 26) and 85.5 percent of its users consisted of the youth aged between 13 to 34 years old (Social Studio 9). Furthermore, Gazans represented the highest percentage of Facebook users in Palestine at the rate of 38 percent. The popularity of Facebook among Palestinians reflects the steep 86 percent of Internet used who declared they seek news updates via Facebook. Considering 85.5 percent Facebook members are below 34 years old suggests that Internet and social media usage in Palestine are influenced by the interests of youth who make up 30 percent of Palestinian population (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 'On the Eve of International Youth Day'). Other popular social media platforms in Palestine, such as Twitter and Instagram both have a penetration rate of 16 percent. Additionally, more than 50 percent of Palestinians households own a smartphone, which is often used to access the Internet and social media.

Twitter and the Palestinian Resistance

Although significantly lower than Facebook's penetration rate, the percentage of Twitter subscribers in Palestine is higher than Israel's. Additionally, the microblogging platform has gained a reputation for being a 'digital battlefield' that hosts a 'Twitter war' between Israelis and Palestinians and pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent of Twitter's affordances in the Palestinian resistance, which correlates with the history of Internet activism in Palestine. Apart from what can be perceived as a natural progression in Palestinian or pro-Palestinian activism, Twitter was adopted in the Palestinian resistance because of its perceived affordances in contemporary social movements. During its initial years, Twitter was often referred to as a "service in search of a

user application” as journalists and business analysts wondered about its most evident usage (van Dijck 335).

Twitter’s purpose as a tool for political activism was established by its use in famous contemporary movements in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. For instance, Twitter was championed for its role as a catalyst in the pro-democracy Iranian Green Movement in 2009 but it is important to consider how the movement strengthened Twitter’s function, position and meaning as a microblogging service and tool of political activism. Internet users in the MENA region were especially unclear about what Twitter’s function was and how it can be used, which explained the slow adoption rate in MENA. However, MENA movements such as the Iranian Green Movement helped to manifest Twitter’s affordances in political activism and social movements, particularly in terms of gaining worldwide attention through the efforts of digital activists who used hashtag activism to raise awareness about various causes.

Often referred to as part of the online *intifada*, the uptake of social media platforms, such as Twitter, by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian activists of the Palestinian resistance were inspired by the so-called success of the Arab Spring in 2011 (Hitchcock 3). Civil uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt generated international attention, especially among the Western audience. The 15th May Movement was launched via social media, which included the ‘Third Palestinian Intifada’ Facebook page, mobilising thousands of Palestinians to march to the borders of Israel and neighboring countries on 15 May to commemorate Nakba Day (Hitchcock 3). Hence, Palestinians and pro-Palestinians used hashtags like #GazaUnderAttack in 2012 as part of the Palestinian movement and the Palestinian resistance. In 2014, among the most popular hashtags used in Palestine, were #Eid_Shaheed (also written in Arabic form), BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderFire, #icc4israel, #PrayForGaza and #IsraelUnderFire, which was created by Israelis and appropriated by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians (Social Studio 44). These hashtags were used to raise awareness about Israeli violence and oppression that took place

in Palestine, especially in Gaza, thus encouraging Palestinians to discuss political issues on Twitter and take part in political discourse through hashtag activism.

Other examples of Twitter use in the Palestinian resistance include efforts related to the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sactions (BDS) movement. A study conducted by Jennifer Hitchcock reveals that the discourse found within official international BDS movement Facebook and Twitter accounts attempted to “generate enthusiasm by publicizing successful BDS actions internationally, but they also displayed a focus on information and evidence (*logos*) rather than emotional appeal (*pathos*) in the textual content and images for the vast majority of posts” (6).

At the same time, the technological deterministic discourse surrounding the role of hashtag activism in the Palestinian Resistance is challenged by research findings regarding the affordances of Twitter in the 2009 Green Revolution and the 2011 Arab Spring. Studies reveal that the majority of Twitter users who used the hashtags associated with the movements, such as #iranelections, #jan25 and #sidibouzyd, were not located in Iran, Tunisia and Egypt but from other parts of the world (Morozov, ‘Iran: The Downside To the Twitter Revolution’ 10, Gerbaudo 23). Thus, there are various factors to consider regarding the role of Twitter in the Palestinian Resistance that may prove the microblogging platform is not as democratising and powerful as media discourse has made it to be.

For example, frequent electricity blackouts in Gaza of up to 20 hours a day (Global Research) and low Twitter penetration rate in Palestine are important factors to consider in analyses about the affordances of Twitter in the Palestinian resistance as they highlight that most of the pro-Palestinian discourse is not necessarily by Palestinians but by English-speaking pro-Palestinian Twitterati (avid or frequent users of Twitter). Thus, challenging the idea of Twitter as tool of democracy for Palestinian civil society. Furthermore, such factors also suggest that Palestinian voices on Twitter are not an accurate representation of the views of entire Palestinian society. As

mentioned earlier, 85.5 percent of Palestinian Facebook users are aged between 13 and 34 years old. Therefore, it can be deduced that these statistics are a reflection of the demographic of most Internet and social media users in Palestine.

Having said that, the recent wave of pro-Palestinian activism on Twitter involving non-Palestinians signifies a shift in international public opinion and the use of social media as a form of activism, especially among youth. Hence, as part of the study on the role of discourses in the hashtag war between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians it is crucial to analyse Twitter's affordances as a social media platform and use a theoretical framework that helps to unpack the various elements that shaped the competing discourses of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire.

Chapter Two: A Platform Analysis of Twitter and a Theoretical Framework for Understanding its Role in New Social Movements

The Arab Spring popularised the role of social media in social movements by inspiring a new wave of activism that incorporates Web 2.0 features as organising tools. Twitter was instrumental in collective efforts to create networks of activists and mobilise support among the general population by raising awareness about the movement and issues that were salient to its cause. Furthermore, Twitter has become an important source of news and information due to its affordances as a microblogging platform that has been adopted by various social actors. Hashtags, in particular, were useful in shaping the discourse and allowing Twitter users to collectively co-create content and making them more accessible through keyword search.

At the same time, Twitter's role in new social movements is contestable due to its affordances that can be adopted by not only activists but also governments and corporations who are often the bones of contention. This chapter aims to analyse Twitter as a platform and Web 2.0 application that was utilised by contemporary social movements to create a compelling discourse to mobilise and organise supporters. Through concepts such as 'interpretive flexibility', 'choreography of assembly' and 'interpretive packages' the role of discourse is discussed to demonstrate its centrality in organising protest in new social movements via social media, particularly Twitter.

Twitter

The idea of a microblogging website known today as Twitter was conceived by several employees of a podcasting start-up company called Odeo Incorporated's (Odeo) in February 2006. The team of employees was determined to work on a groundbreaking project, as they were not optimistic about Odeo's direction and strength as a company due to having many competitors such as Apple. Hence, they came up with the idea to create a communications service that would allow a person to send a short-messaging service (SMS) text message known as a 'status' to update small groups of

people about what he or she was doing at the time. One of Twitter's co-founders Jack Dorsey expressed that he wanted "to make it so easy to write that you don't even think about it, you just write" and he first trialed the service by using it to inform others that the club that he was at was 'happening' (Sagolla). As this group of Odeo employees worked on developing the project called 'Twtr' the company was going through the process of downsizing and decided to retrench a number of them. Moreover, Odeo had apprehensions about Twtr's viability because its value was difficult to describe and determine at the time.

During this transition, the co-founder of Odeo, Ev Williams and other former Odeo employees established a start-up incubator called Obvious Corporation and made Twtr its sole project. The San Francisco-based company proceeded with the launching of Twtr.com in March 2006 and educated their co-workers and friends about its functionality as part of their experiment with the communications service. As a result, Twtr became popular among the Silicon Valley in-crowd and it was described as the 'SMS of the Internet'. The structure of Twtr.com was very basic; it had an interface page where a user would be able to obtain updates from the people they were 'following' or in other words, the people whose status updates they had subscribed to. The words 'What are you doing?' seen above the status update section prompted the user to provide details on their current activity. The prompt also "emphasised the conversational and personal nature of a tweet and gave a specific directive to its content" (van Dijck, 'Tracing Twitter' 340). José van Dijck explains:

It was used to send and receive text-based messages of up to 140 characters and characterised as something in between a short message service, a phone call, an e-mail and a blog: less cumbersome than keeping a blog, less exclusive than talking to one person on a phone, less formal than e-mail exchanges and less elaborate than most social network sites (SNSs). ('Tracing Twitter' 340)

Six months after Twtr was launched to the public, the domain Twitter.com was purchased by Obvious. The service was rebranded as 'Twitter' and the status updates shared were known as 'tweets'. A tweet was limited to 140-characters because of Twitter's aim to be a service that would be compatible with and comparable to SMSing. In 2007, an annual set of film, interactive and music festivals and conferences known as the South by Southwest Interactive (SXSWi) held in Austin, Texas provided Twitter with the kick-start it needed. The event incorporated the use of Twitter by placing two sixty-inch plasma screens in the conference hallways to exclusively stream tweets by its delegates and this led hundreds of delegates to use Twitter in order to receive the latest SXSWi updates from each other (Levy). Following the SXSWi event, the number of tweets sent daily increased from 20000 to 60000.

In terms of its positioning, Twitter had to set itself apart from other microblogging services such as Tumblr by branding itself an 'autonomous' service that is not connected to one specific tool or country or one specific social networking site service. At the 'Future of the Media' panel in New York, Dorsey was said to have mentioned that he wanted Twitter to be "like electricity, e-mail, SMS, or phone" which indicates his desire for it to be a multi-purpose tool and service (cited Shroeder in van Dijck, 'Tracing Twitter' 336). However, in creating a platform that left too much room for 'interpretation' many were confused about its function and benefit. During the first few years after its launch Twitter was often referred to as "a service in search of a user application" and the exact purpose of this new technology was discussed among journalists, and business analysts who often wondered about the most evident way of using the technology (Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss cited in van Dijk, 'Tracing Twitter' 335; Madrigal).

Tweets drive conversation as they contain features that enable interaction between its users. A tweet may contain text, images and hyperlink, which may be 'retweeted' (to 'forward' or share another user's tweet with one's followers), replied to, and 'liked'. The retweet feature may create a snowball

effect, which amplifies the idea or 'voice' of a Twitter user if it gains momentum after being retweeted many times (Murthy 6). The 'tweet' or 'reply' feature allows a Twitter user to message another user by directly tweeting them or replying one of their tweets by using the '@' symbol also known as the 'mention' function. This communication method or practice on Twitter is a form of addressivity, which is the act of indicating an intended addressee or naming the intended recipient within a post (Honeycutt and Herring 2; Markman 542). When a Twitter user wishes to communicate with another user the @ symbol is used followed by the intended recipient's Twitter 'handle' or username. For example, "@anonymous Hello. How are you?". The mention or tweet will then appear on the sender's profile page and their 'Home' timeline.

The intended recipient will receive an alert to check their 'Notifications' page where the latest Twitter interactions other users have made with them appear in reverse chronological order. Unlike sending messages via direct messaging, in which messages will appear in a user's personal Twitter inbox, a user does not need to follow nor obtain permission from the other user in order to mention them or direct a tweet at them. Hence, the conversationality of Twitter is afforded by the addressivity of the @ symbol. Another key feature of Twitter is the 'Follow' button, which it enables its users to 'follow' or subscribe to the tweets of other users. Unlike other social media websites such as Facebook, the act of following another user on Twitter is not automatically reciprocated.

Twitter's affordances as a microblogging platform continue to evolve as it adds new feature and functions. For example, Twitter has remediated the features of competing social media apps, such as photo filters (a feature associated with Instagram) and the switching of its 'Favourite' button to a 'Like' button (a feature associated with Facebook) represented by a heart-shaped symbol were among several recent changes on Twitter. Remediation is defined as the use of both immediacy and hypermediacy in interpreting the work of earlier media to erase traces of mediation (Bolter and Grusin 5; 55).

The remediation of these features foster interaction and produsage among Twitter users and also define Twitter's position in relation to other SNSs.

Twitter is a platform that consists of multiple features that both strongly influence or limit the way people communicate with each other while using the service. Twitter's features facilitate a dynamic set of affordances such as one-to-many and many-to-many communication in real-time with relatively less censorship in comparison to older forms of media like television broadcasting. This affordance has led the microblogging website and application to become noted for its role in contemporary social movements whereby the mobilisation of support and co-ordination of street protests benefit from the ability to start collective discussions and trending topics by incorporating the hashtag feature (#) and mass disseminate brief information and updates. The use of Twitter by contemporary social movements may have its origins in the idea of the Internet as part of the counterculture movement that took place in the 1960s. However, some of the criticisms about the democratising effects of the Internet and social media are a reflection of the paradox that the foundations of the Internet were developed for military use.

History of the Internet: Military Use and Egalitarian Aspirations

The technical foundations of the Internet, once referred to as the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), was established in 1958 by the United States Department of Defense in response to Sputnik, the first artificial Earth satellite launched by the Soviet Union. ARPA's mission was to keep "the United States ahead of its military rivals by pursuing research projects that promised significant advances in defense-related fields" (qtd. Abbate in Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 21). In 1967, Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) was created as a project to develop computer networks and "exploit new computer technologies to meet the needs of military command and control against nuclear threats, achieve survivable control of US nuclear forces, and improve military tactical and management decision making" (Campbell-Kelly and Garcia-Swartz 25; Lukasik 2). The phenomenon

of digital militarism signifies that the military use of the Internet has come full circle. However, the most common use of social media is implicit in the phrase itself. Social media websites are important tools of communication that foster and maintain social interactions between people who have access to the Internet, regardless of whether they share the same geographical space or not. However, the intention to use the Internet to enhance democracy is embedded in Tim Berners-Lee's design of a system used to access the Internet, the World Wide Web (WWW). While the Internet is a large network of networks, the WWW is an information-sharing model and a means of accessing information on the Internet through web pages and browsers (Beal).

Berners-Lee's egalitarian vision for the WWW contributed to the climate of counterculture in the United States, United Kingdom and throughout the Western world during the 1960s (Jeffries). For example, the first version of the World Wide Web (WWW) was in the form of a simple set up consisting of one website and one browser in December 1990. Collaborative and grassroots efforts between volunteers from various universities helped to improve the initial WWW by communicating with each other via the Internet and fixing 'bugs' within the software (Campbell-Kelly and Aspray 270). The collaborative effort that produced free software for the Internet was later known as the open-source movement.

Berners-Lee was against the commercial exploitation of Internet software and even persuaded the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) to make the Internet and the WWW free for all to use (Campbell-Kelly and Aspray 271). He had a lofty goal to democratise information and in effect, people too, by enabling any person to share content with anyone else and anywhere. He was not alone in his vision of the WWW and the Internet as scholars like Howard Rheingold have expressed, "the political significance of [computer-mediated communication] lies in its capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps thus revitalise citizen-based democracy" (qtd. in Bolter and Grusin 74).

The word 'democracy' stems from the Greek word *demokratia*, which means 'rule/sovereignty/power by the people' (Fuchs 225). However, the democratisation of information is not as simple and straightforward as Berners-Lee and Rheingold envisioned it to be. Among various factors, the commercialisation and censorship of the Internet and social media platforms restricts access and creates digital divides which prevents the spread of ideas that leads to positive changes in society (Fuchs 102; Yong Jin 65).

Furthermore, the Internet and social media have also led to the blurring of the lines between private and public by allowing governments to monitor their citizens and corporations to capitalise on private data tracked and collected from their users' activities. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter harvest personal information from their users' profiles and online activity, known as data licensing, or to create algorithms for advertising or 'native marketing', advertisements that appear relatively inconspicuously on the respective sites (Trottier 10; Gadkari 'How Does Twitter Make Money?').

Moreover, Dal Yong Jin deems the amassing of personal information to generate valuable data that is sold to companies as part of a capitalist process called 'platform imperialism' which promotes asymmetrical information flows. He explains that platform imperialism is not only the commoditisation of personal user information but also the imposition of American symbolic hegemony by platform developers and the domination of the global market with Western technology, cultures and ideologies, particularly about consumerism and democracy (Yong Jin 39). The commercialisation and militarisation of social media are among the criticisms raised regarding the democratising role of the Internet. Despite these criticisms, social media's affordances continue to be adopted by social movements. The features of Web 2.0 align with the characteristics of contemporary or new social movements that came into prominence in the early 1990s.

The rise of Web 2.0 and Contemporary Social Movements

The Internet and more specifically 'Web 2.0' have been embraced by various kinds of social actors ranging from the field of entertainment to politics to social and political activism. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O'Reilly to define the web as a platform of networks. He also used the concept of Web 2.0 to differentiate the types of Internet-based services or applications ('apps') that were available on the Internet before and after the 'dot-com' crisis that resulted in the bankruptcy of many Internet start-ups in 2000 (17; 19). O'Reilly describes Web 2.0 applications as a catalyst in the decentralisation of information by allowing Internet users to collaborate, contribute and participate in remixing data and content from multiple sources to shape applications and new content (17). Unlike Web 1.0, a 'read-only' static interface that acted as a 'tool for thought' which enabled the easy publication of information on the Internet, Web 2.0 functions by harnessing 'collective intelligence' (Fuchs, 127; O'Reilly 22;). Pierre Levy defined collective intelligence as "a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilisation of skills" (13).

Web 2.0 harnesses collective intelligence by cultivating a rich user experience. For example, Web 2.0 apps include social networking sites (SNS) or platforms such as Facebook and Twitter that facilitate interaction and the sharing of information by uploading content and responding to other users' posts through comments, 'likes' or 'retweets'. Web 2.0 contains several features such as 'folksonomy' and participatory authorship. Folksonomy is "a style of collaborative categorisation of sites using freely chosen keywords, often referred to as tags" (O'Reilly 23). The aggregation of content makes it easier for users to search for content by using keywords and it also fosters a participatory culture by encouraging Internet users to think, act and contribute as a collective.

Another key Web 2.0 feature is participatory authorship, which is "the ability to create constantly updating content that is co-created by users" (Stern 1). Participatory authorship utilises the agency of social media users to

produce and co-produce content together. The latter entails the editing or reworking of existing content on the Internet by other users. Alex Bruns refers to the phenomenon of “collaborating and continuously extending and building upon existing content in pursuit of further improvement as” as ‘produsage’ (4). The term ‘produse’ is a portmanteau word combining the words ‘produce’ and ‘use’. Participatory authoring is a key aspect of produsage, which exemplifies Web 2.0’s harnessing of collective intelligence.

The aforementioned features encourage active collaboration and interaction among users. Thus, Web 2.0 has become a platform that enables the formation of networks and online communities. The affordances of social media, such as network building, identity construction and self-expression with relatively less censorship have led to the use of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as instrumental tools in the pursuit of democratic aspirations. To a certain extent such affordances have been advantageous in socio-political contexts whereby heavy media censorship or a strong distrust towards mainstream media is prevalent.

Affordances

Ian Hutchby defines affordances as “functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object” (Hutchby 444). The range of actions that can be done with an object, artefact or technology due to its features and/or design are known as its affordances. Hutchby acknowledges the role of human agency in ‘reading’ or ‘writing’ technology and shaping its affordances and distinctive user experiences. He refers to Keith Grint and Steve Woolgar’s analogy of technologies as ‘texts’ which are ‘written’ or configured by their developers and ‘read’ or ‘interpreted’ by their users to argue that they are open, negotiated processes (445). Based on this theory, the affordances of a technology are partially a result of how a user understands it and interacts with it.

Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport contend a similar argument about the role the Web in activism by asserting it is the social actor’s use of technology

that affects social processes, not the mere existence of the technology itself. They state “technologies do not affect social processes through their mere existence but rather impact social processes through their mundane or innovative uses, and the ways in which the affordances of the technology are leveraged by those mundane or innovative uses” (Earl and Kimport 14). However, Hutchby challenges the idea of technology as *tabula rasa*, which implies that it is only given meaning and structure through its users’ interpretations, perceptions and negotiations. He states the features of an object, artefact or technology provide the conditions that lead to the manifestation of various competing accounts of its affordances:

We need pay more attention to the material substratum which underpins the very possibility of different courses of action in relation to an artefact; and which frames the practices through which technologies comes to be involved in the weave of ordinary conduct. (450).

A technology is designed or ‘written’ with certain features or characteristics with an idea of what its purpose will be but users may adopt the technology for a purpose that may differ from its developer’s intentions. For example, when the telephone was first introduced to the public in the 1870s its functionality was compared to that of the telegraph by its developers because the men who designed, built and marketed the telephone were key individuals from the telegraph industry. As a result, the telephone was initially solely marketed as a practical technology to aid business communications, particularly among men. However, in the 1920s, marketers started to equally promote it as a tool of sociability because women adopted the telephone to stay in touch with friends and family (Fischer 75). The history of the telephone industry reveals how users can ‘interpret’ and apply the features of a new technology in a way that differs from its creator’s intentions. The development of the telephone highlights that many modern technologies are products that are developed and then presented and promoted to the public or intended users or consumers

with multiple factors in consideration, such as competition, profit maximisation and other commercial interests.

The limitation to Hutchby's discussion about affordances is that it lacks a thorough analysis of the way developers and marketers contribute significantly to the direction of a technology's design, meaning and function in society. Commercial interests influence the representation and promotion of a technology and its affordances to specific demographics. As discussed earlier, social media sites such as Twitter are for-profit companies that rely on advertising to generate revenue. For example, Twitter frequently removes or adds new features to their site and changes their slogans annually (McFarland). Alterations to Twitter's slogans, design and features have an impact on how its current and potential users perceive and adopt the platform. The increase of user growth rate is a key goal of Twitter as a company because it addresses the concerns of its advertisers (Koh). To reiterate Dal Yong Jin's argument, commercial interests that serve American capitalist and imperialist goals are antithetical to the democratisation of information. However, this criticism does not acknowledge the complexity of the relationship between social media and their users. Social media platforms such as Twitter do enable Palestinian activists and their supporters to represent themselves and their cause to a wider audience in effort to raise awareness. Twitter's adoption by a spectrum of social groups demonstrates the role of user agency and interpretation when it comes to technology.

Interpretive Flexibility

Another useful concept for understanding the use of technology is 'interpretive flexibility'. In José van Dijck's discussion about Twitter and its rise as micro-blogging platform, she describes interpretive flexibility as a theory that contends "each technological artefact during the first stages of development, has different meanings and interpretations for various relevant social groups" (334). Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker used the history of the bicycle development in the late 1800s to illustrate the role of different social

groups in interpretive flexibility but also to show that “not only is there flexibility in how people think of, or interpret artefacts, but also in how artefacts are designed” (421). To one group of cycle engineers, the air tyre was a solution to the vibration problem of high-wheeled cycles but to another it was a means to increase the speed the vehicle. For yet another group of engineers, it made the high-wheeled cycle more unsafe thus the safety bicycle was presented as a solution instead.

By 1896, the safety bicycle, which incorporated the air tyre along with other features designed into it such as spring frames, the saddle and the steering-bar, became accepted by engineers and the range of users as the most appropriate solution to the unstable high-wheeled cycle. The diverse range of responses towards the air tyre and safety bicycle reveals different social groups (human element) can have radically different interpretations of one technological artefact and the features (non-human element) of an artefact contributes to how it is interpreted, understood and accepted in a given context (Pinch and Bijker 423). Furthermore, some attempts to influence other social group’s interpretations are more successful than others. During this process “a certain interpretation becomes accepted by more and more relevant social groups and eventually leads to a certain technological artefact becoming seen as the appropriate solution” (Meyer and Schulz-Schaeffer 30).

Another media-related example of interpretive flexibility is the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) software. The online chat software was invented in 1988 but it only gained global popularity when it was used to share and obtain up-to-date information during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991. Kuwaitis continued to communicate with each other and the rest of the world through a single functional Internet link that continue to operate for a week after radio and television broadcasts had been cut off (LivingInternet.com; Human Rights Watch 652; Bidgoli 666). IRC was not specifically developed to support dissidents, activists, mainstream media journalists and citizen journalists. However, its affordances were used to fulfill the needs and goals of the aforementioned social actors during the 1991 Gulf War. Therefore, a

technological artefact may have one accepted interpretation or purpose at a given context, like during its developmental stage or initial years in use, and another interpretation in another context. Moreover, different social groups may have varying interpretations of a technological artefact's meaning, purpose and affordances. Thus, a hegemonic struggle between the different social groups' interpretations may take place and one group's interpretation will become the more socially and culturally accepted one at that point in time.

To draw on a more contemporary example, van Dijck uses the social constructivist concept of interpretive flexibility to make sense of Twitter's meaning as a tool or platform. She argues Twitter "will be as much as the result of conscious steering by its owners as of accepting and/or resisting such steering by users, researchers, journalists, business analysts and others" (344, 'Tracing Twitter'). Van Dijck refers to Twitter as a platform instead of an artefact because she views the microblogging SNS as an example of "a set of relations that constantly need to be performed; actors of all kinds attribute meanings to platforms ('The Culture of Connectivity' 26). She also argues that social constructivists such as Pinch and Bijker would consider Twitter's development and rise as a means of communication to be an example of one of the stages of interpretive flexibility, "a stage when a technology is still in flux and various, sometimes contradictory interpretations are waged before stabilisation is reached" ('The Culture of Connectivity' 68).

van Dijck adds to the discourse on interpretive flexibility by highlighting a company's business model as a non-human element which affects the interpretation of the technology, service or platform's developed by said company. For example, she argues the pressure to make Twitter profitable challenges its neutrality as a communication platform. Twitter presents itself as an "echo chamber of random chatter, the online underbelly of mass opinions where collective emotions are formed" but van Dijck raises the issue of "the paradox of enabling connectedness while engineering connectivity, of propagating neutrality while securing profitability which is played out in every aspect of the platform" (van Dijck, 'The Culture of Connectivity' 69). Thus, the

economic and financial implications behind the logic of features such as 'follow', 'retweet' and 'hashtag' that foster interaction, participation and collaboration among users must be acknowledged as well. Thus, an analysis of a technological artefact's role using the concept of interpretive flexibility must also consider the group of developers, advertisers and investors who are invested in the platform's meaning and performance. Thus, the meaning of a technology "will be as much as the result of conscious steering by its owners as of accepting and/or resisting such steering by users, researchers, journalists, business analysts and others" (van Dijck, 'Tracing Twitter' 344).

In light of the literature on the respective theories of affordances and interpretive flexibility, the media can be defined as "socially realised structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualised collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation" (Gitelman 7). At the same time, the meaning, purpose and affordances of the media as technological artefacts or platforms are not solely socially constructed. Features or characteristics constrain certain acts and this influences the way the affordances interpreted and utilised by different social groups in various contexts. As demonstrated in Hutchby's discussion of affordances and Pinch and Bijker's deliberation of interpretive flexibility, the features or material substratum contribute to the interpretation and utilisation of a technological artefact and its affordances. Features enable as much as they constrain certain actions and they also impact the interpretation of a technology because relevant social groups will not have a unanimous and homogenous response towards its features and affordances (Hutchby 450; Pinch and Bijker 423). As a result, affordances are ambivalent. Social media is a prime example of a technology or platform that have multiple and varying meanings in society due to the wide range of social groups that find their affordances useful and advantageous. One such social group would be contemporary or new social movements.

Social Movement Theory

There is no single definition of a social movement but scholars such as Mario Diani, Donatella della Porta and Charles Tilly have outlined several of its characteristics. A social movement can be described as a distinct social process involving “a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity” (Diani 13). Additionally, a social movement is also “a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population’s numbers, commitment, unity and worthiness” (Tilly 7). Thus, a social movement is characterised by four factors: dense informal networks, conflictual collective action, collective identity and the use of protest (Diani and della Porta 20, 28). Social movements are not merely a series of protests or events but initiatives that are based on the idea of collective identities, imagined communities and a sense of connectedness created through discourse. Furthermore, contemporary social movements are known for their grassroots initiatives, which emphasises on their inclusiveness and the solidarity among of different types individuals and groups and the democratic nature of their decision-making processes.

The development of networks and collective identity through shared beliefs highlights the role of communication and media in organising and mobilising social movements. Organisation refers to the planning, designing, executing and controlling the collective action to be undertaken whereas mobilisation involves persuasive mechanisms to draw people into collective action (Lee and Chan 44). Mobilisation requires persuasion because social movements are driven and sustained by collective solidarity. The structure of a social movement is formed by a myriad of social groups or social actors, such as activists, citizens and journalists who aim to create social or political change by protesting and expressing their dissent towards clearly identified opponents. Participants of a social movement may include individuals and

organisations that are not necessarily homogenous but share a distinctive collective identity and shared beliefs. Therefore, the unification of a diverse network or group of individuals and organisations under the umbrella of a social movement requires collective solidarity achieved through emotional persuasion. Mobilisation involves a number of objectives:

Beyond the existence of tensions, mobilisation derives from the way in which social movements are able to organise discontent, reduce the costs of action, utilise and create solidarity networks, share incentives among members, and achieve external consensus (Diani and della Porta 15).

The notion of solidarity can be linked to Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' which draws upon the idea of nationalism as a socially constructed phenomena and cultural artefact that commands "profound emotional legitimacy" (13). He claims "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (15). What constitutes a community is not only sense of comradeship among a group of people but a connection that is based on factors such as a common language and the idea of a 'homogenous time' "in which a community is 'moving' through history together by sharing a consciousness of a shared temporal dimension in which they co-exist" (cited Lo in Gruz, Wellman and Takhteyev 1303).

Social movements are a version of imagined communities because collective solidarity is invoked and manifested by joining offline and online protests to support a cause or performing mundane, everyday life actions such as keeping up-to-date with news about a particular event or country by reading the newspapers or contributing tweets to a trending topic or hashtag on Twitter. In the early 1990s, European theorists such as Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci and Mario Diani proposed that 'unconventional' forms of social activism and collective action such as the feminist, gay rights and environmental movements should be seen as 'new social movements' (NSMs). Leah Lievrouw states that NSMs are defined by key characteristics

that distinguish NSMs from previous types of social movements. She references Touraine's description of NSM participants or constituencies as "well-educated, creative, 'white-collar' knowledge workers as pivotal actors of and agents of social change of post-industrial societies" (47).

The post-industrial society is also known as the information society because during this period the most dominant industries are built upon creative labour and 'knowledge workers' whose main capital is knowledge. Due to their professional roles and level of education, NSMs participants "support causes that are often cultural or symbolic, and more closely linked to their identity" instead of representing an overarching, class interest or ideology (Lievrouw 50). Hence, NSMs have a universal appeal and symbolic events and figures are important aspects of their mobilisation efforts to attract a wide audience. The construction of meaning and the control of information, symbolic resources, and representations have become the main task of NSMs participants (Lievrouw 52). The use of media and ICTs is a key feature of NSMs and "their extensive and sophisticated uses of media and information technologies, not just as tools or channels for relaying information to the participants or the wider public, but as the actual field of action where movement concerns are articulated and struggles played out (cited Rucht in Lievrouw 54).

The use of social media by activists and journalists is a prime example of the media's centrality to NSMs. For example, social media has fostered the phenomenon of citizen journalism. Through social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, 'ordinary' citizens and digital activists can move beyond the constraints and barriers of mainstream media by providing breaking news and updates. As a result, citizen journalism has become a source of content for mainstream media journalists. The prevalence of social media in new movements is linked to fact that the types of activism strongly associated with NSMs are deemed as digital activism, such as blogging and tweeting, especially with the use of hashtags, which is deemed as hashtag activism.

As a form of social and digital activism, hashtag activism is defined as “the act of fighting for or supporting a cause that people are advocating through social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other networking websites” (Techopedia). The most important aspect of a hashtag is an appropriate keyword or slogan to represent the issue or cause in question. Thus, Philip Howard describes hashtag activism as “what happens when someone tries to raise public awareness of a political issue using some clever or biting keyword on social media” (Brewster). Hashtags such as #jan25, #iranelection, #OccupyWallStreet and #BlackLivesMatter contained clever keywords or slogans that contributed to the respective new social movements’ efforts to raise awareness and increase public solidarity, locally and internationally. Among others, these hashtags became the signs and symbols of a collective demand for those who are united against injustice.

Furthermore, hashtag activism fosters the formation of imagined communities due to its temporal nature as the concept of a trending hashtag, which is one of Twitter’s key features, is based on the idea of a subject that is popularly discussed on Twitter during a point in time. Using #iranelection as an example, Negar Motaheddeh describes a trending hashtag as a phenomenon in which “hashtags in tweets would be hyperlinked during this rather brief period in the history of online life, allowing users on Twitter to connect one poster’s tweet with another’s” (18). However, scholars like Evgeny Morozov are critical and skeptical about digital activism and have referred to it as ‘slacktivism’. Morozov defines slacktivism as a form of activism that requires little effort, attention and sacrifice and makes limited political impact while producing a ‘feel-good’ effect on the activist (191). While the mundaneness of digital activism is subject to criticism, it can also be seen as an effort by NSM participants to ‘practice what they preach’ and incorporate activism into aspects of their daily lives. Furthermore, digital activism also contributes to the idea of NSMs as imagined communities because they often entail a level of collaboration or collective effort based on a temporal or

physical activity as part of their expression of solidarity or contribution to the movement.

NSMs are also known as informal, anti-hierarchical networks and this is attributed to the use of the Internet and social media in the organisation and mobilisation of contemporary movements.

Thanks to the Net, mobilisations are able to unfold with sparse bureaucracy and minimal hierarchy; forced consensus and laboured manifestos are fading into the background, replaced instead by a culture of constant, loosely structured and sometimes compulsive information-swapping. (cited Klein in Gerbaudo 23)

However, Pablo Gerbaudo challenges the description of social movements as leaderless, horizontal aggregates. He coined the concept of the 'choreography of assembly' to analyse the role of media and communication in the organisation and mobilisation of contemporary movements. Gerbaudo cites Antonio Gramsci and argues "collective action is never completely spontaneous given that pure spontaneity does not exist" (21). Gerbaudo offers an alternative understanding on the process of mobilisation by emphasising on the notion of 'assembling' or 'gathering' rather than networking' (21).

Nonetheless, his discussion of the choreography of assembly highlights the use of the media, especially social media, in the emergence of 'liquid' forms of organising movements and 'power law distribution' in the flow of communication. However much these and other social media activists refuse the label of leaders, the communicative and organisational work they conduct through Facebook and Twitter amounts to a form of leadership, as a relatively centralised influence on the unfolding of collective action (cited Barker et al. in Gerbaudo 135).

Choreography of Assembly

In light of the extensive use of media and ICTs in NSMs, the rise of Web 2.0 applications marked by the burst in the dot-com bubble in 2001

notably complemented the shift in the type social movements that were occurring in the early 1990s. Thus, Web 2.0 applications such as social media have been adopted by contemporary social movements and have become a crucial aspect of their organisation and mobilisation. Gerbaudo defines the choreography of assembly as the “process of the mediation of physical assembling” and he focuses on the role of communications in ‘setting the scene’ for the display of collective action (21). He asserts that the choreography of assembly fundamentally involves two key moments - “the symbolic condensation of people around a common identity and their ‘material precipitation’ in public space” - and the analysis of the “the spatial character of the process of mobilisation and the way in which it connects dispersed participants with specific places of gathering” (194).

Firstly, Gerbaudo argues the emotional condensation of people entails the process of ‘populism’. He adopts Ernesto Laclau’s definition of populism as the construction of the people. Foucault’s concept of ‘subjectivity’, which expresses the idea that knowledge turns people into subjects and that it is dynamically constructed through discourse is useful in understanding the process of populism. For theorists like Laclau and Melucci, identity-building and the construction of the collective identity are one of the first tasks to achieve during the process of mobilisation, alongside “the identification of an enemy, the definition of a purpose and an object at stake in the conflict” (cited Melucci in Gerbaudo 41). Apart from focusing on identity, the emotional condensation of people is also achieved through the incitement of emotional energy by using an ‘empty signifier’, symbols such as a leader, an image, collective name or possibly a place that have been deprived of particularistic content to create a ‘chain of equivalence’ between different groups of people (cited Laclau in Gerbaudo 42), or an ‘injustice-symbol’.

Thomas Olesen defines an injustice symbol as “empirical ‘objects’ such as individuals, photographs, places, events, that involve human suffering and violence and over time are infused with wider injustice meanings” (74). An injustice-symbol consists of two basic elements - a specific individual (object)

and the violence that this individual has suffered (event) - and the sum of these parts is referred to as a violent person-event. However, a violent person-event is not necessarily an injustice-symbol. Olesen explains that while the former has the potential to arouse 'moral shock', "a sense of outrage in a person that makes a person become inclined towards political action" (Jasper 106), what constitutes an injustice-symbol is its 'universalising' potential (cited Alexander in Olesen 74). What makes an individual, event or place decisively an injustice-symbol is its universalising potential, which means "it can be linked to a social, cultural and/or political problematic with structural roots" (Olesen 74). The formation of injustice-symbols requires agency and the social actors behind their creation are political activists and the media who amplify certain facts to make the issue or event resonate with people. While the media may provide visibility, injustice-symbols only gain global resonance if morally and politically indignant actors outside the context of their creation can adopt and critically engage with the issue or event (Olesen 74).

Secondly, Gerbaudo explains that the choreography of assembly entails material precipitation, which involves turning symbolic assemblages into bodily assembly in public space (42). He discusses Frantz Fanon's analysis of the role of radio stations in Algeria during the Front de Liberation National's (FLN) struggle against the French colonisers between 1959 and 1967. Fanon discovered the possession of the radio was initially considered a sign of complicity with the French colonial regime but eventually became a unifying tool, which "created a new sense of mediated community among the people which sustained the mobilisation of the national liberation movement" (Gerbaudo 42).

Most importantly, the radio also facilitated the physical gathering of people in public space, which presented a fundamental threat to the colonisers. Thus, the dissemination of news and updates and the circulation of slogans, memes and photos of injustice symbols via the media create emotional condensation, which may lead to the material precipitation of crowds who want to proclaim their solidarity with a movement. 'Calls to heroism' and

photos of large crowds gathering to protest against a leader can encourage people to overcome their apprehension and participate in the movement both offline and online (Gerbaudo 63). The concept of the choreography of assembly has a centripetal focus on the role of the media, particularly social media, in contemporary social movements. However, Gerbaudo's discussion on the use of media in movements does not include an analysis of the use of social media by journalists and news media. For instance, news media contributes to the narratives about social movements and the affordances of social media in these movements by framing the issues and events for the general public. News media also provides the 'interpretive packages' that facilitate understanding about a particular issue or event.

Interpretive Packages

An interpretive package is defined as "a schema that provides meaning to and orients the understanding of empirical events" (Olesen 77). William Gamson and Andre Modigliani articulated the concept of the interpretive package to demonstrate the two parallel systems of media discourse and public opinion in the construction of meaning. They analysed discourse of nuclear power in four general audience media – television news coverage, news magazine accounts, editorial cartoons and syndicated opinion columns – in America during the years between 1945 and 1989.

Media discourse can be conceived of as a set of interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue. A package has an internal structure. At its core is a central organising idea, or frame, for making sense of events, suggesting what is at issue. (Gamson and Modigliani 3)

The concept of an interpretive package is linked to Erving Goffman's 'framing analysis' theory and Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's 'agenda-setting' theory. Goffman's theory is based on the idea that making sense of a social situation requires 'frames' of understanding that aid in the construction of meaning. He argues that frames provide the definitions of a situation that are

“built up in accordance with principles of organisation which govern events” (10) and highlights our subjective involvement when using these frames. McCombs and Shaw cite Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang made the observation that, “the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects about what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about” (177). Thus, the media may not have a causal effect on the attitudes or public opinion of their audience or users but the media may have an influence what they deem as salient issues or topics.

Numerous interpretive packages may emerge from any given ‘issue culture’, “a repertoire of idea elements surrounding a given political issue in a political culture” (Johnson-Cartee 170). Interpretive packages are usually created by those who have influence in the news media, such as politicians and activists who provide material for the news or journalists who frame and report the news that is then consumed, deciphered and reproduced as common sense by the news audience (Johnson-Cartee 171). Interpretive packages reveal the function of the media in creating and using these implicit and symbolic ‘frames’ or ‘themes’ that help the news audience to make sense of the stories they read. Interpretive packages are often dichotomous because they contain themes and counter-themes or frames and counter-frames that evoke in the minds of their audience the possibility of the opposite or the negative (Johnson-Kartee 251).

Gamson and Modigliani describe the significance of themes and counter-themes in media discourse: “The theme is conventional and normative; the counter-theme is adversarial and contentious. Both have their own cultural roots and both can be important in assessing any specific symbolic struggle” (6). For example, in Gamson and Modigliani’s study of media discourse about nuclear power they identified the theme and counter-theme of “‘nature’ versus progress’ that are both rooted in American culture. This interpretive package consisting of the ‘nature-technology’ themes or frames reveals the cultural tension that existed in regards to the discourse

about technology and nuclear power. News media organisations and news audiences alike rely on dichotomies because both require themes and counter-themes to make sense of an issue or event.

We construct our rules and regulations based on our symbolic knowledge of the world. We know good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. We deal with these polarised symbols or positive-negative dichotomies in our political negotiations... These positive-negative dichotomies in some strange way comfort us, from we believe that the world is knowable, that are our life tasks are do-able. We can make sense of the complexities of life, and thus we can in some small way manage and control the world around us. (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1-2)

Gamson and Modigliani explain, “a package offers a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame and positions in shorthand, making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device” (2). Each interpretive package has its own symbolic devices associated with its use. Symbolic devices are the “words, actions, body movements and visual cues that stand for ideas and objects to which members of a culture attach similar meaning” (cited Perucci and Knudsen in Johnson-Cartee 166). For example, when the phrase ‘family values’ is used a mental image of a ‘white picket fence’ a suburban family may appear in someone’s mind, instead of drugs, unemployment and domestic violence (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland cited in Johnson-Cartee 166). Therefore, the phrase ‘family values’ serves as a condensational symbol that evoke a wealth of positive thoughts and ideas that are stored meanings within the minds of people in a political culture or context. Karen Johnson-Cartee argues, “the words of political leaders, activists, and journalists serve as the raw materials from which to draw representative expressions of the condensation symbols” (171).

Olesen argues that ‘meaning-adaption’ and global ‘symbol-formation’ are facilitated by interpretive packages. He uses the former term to refer to “how local/national events change meaning as they disembedded” (cites Giddens in Olesen 71) and the latter to refer to symbols such as individuals and events that have gained global resonance (75). Therefore, an interpretive package must be capable of adapting to the context, which may include new facts, new events or new actors and they must be consistent with an existing frame. As a result, “packages ebb and flow in prominence and are constantly revised and updated to accommodate new events” (Gamson and Modigliani 2). Within a media discourse about a particular issue or event, there are always interpretive packages that battle for public acceptance.

Cartee-Johnson explains the arena or battleground over interpretive packages in the mass media, which consists of newspapers, broadcast newscasts and websites whereby “various social groups, institutions and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality” (cited Gurevitch and Levy 252). The battle for public acceptance of interpretive packages now take place on social media platforms as they have become an important source of news. 60 percent of social media users in Western countries such as the United Kingdom and United States deem Twitter to be a useful way of obtaining news (Digital News Report 2015).

As one of the longest running conflicts in the world, the Israeli-Palestinian affair is often discussed on social media. News regarding the latest events and outbreaks of violence in both countries are produced on Twitter. On 12th June 2014, three Israeli teenagers were abducted from the West Bank and the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag campaign was launched to raise awareness about the incident. The interpretive packages within #BringBackOurBoys played a crucial role in the choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli digital activists on Twitter before and during the IDF’s military incursion in Gaza codenamed Operation Protective Edge. As a result, the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys laid the groundwork for pro-Israeli support of the IDF’s military operation in Gaza in July 2014.

Chapter Three: The Choreography of Assembly of Pro-Israelis and Pro-Palestinians through the Hashtag #BringBackOurBoys

An enduring theme in literature about ICT and social media relates to their potential to either facilitate the empowerment of marginalised, emergent and counter-cultural groups or reinforce existing social hierarchies and maintain the status quo (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund and Sandoval 4). In the issue culture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Twitter is often referred to as an 'online war zone', a 'digital battleground' and an avenue for 'keyboard resisters' to participate in the 'online *intifada*' as it is a discursive space for competing polarised narratives of pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians. The use of military and political jargons to describe the microblogging platform by mainstream media, pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians (Eglash & Booth; Jaddeh; Zabaneh) reflect Twitter's affordance as a political communication tool for Israelis and Palestinians.

This chapter demonstrates the ambivalent character of Twitter by discussing how it facilitated the choreography of assembly of pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians through their respective narratives. 100 pro-Israeli tweets and 100 pro-Palestinian tweets posted on 15th June 2014 containing the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys were selected to conduct content analysis of the interpretive packages that contributed to the choreography of assembly of pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians to provide support for Israel and Palestine. This chapter will also analyse the pro-Palestinian counter-narrative of #BringBackOurBoys.

#BringBackOurBoys

In an effort to rally global support for Israel and defend the country from anti-Semitism, state-sponsored programmes and social media campaigns were orchestrated and launched by Israeli universities. A recent example would be the 'Bring Back Our Boys' social media campaign that was created in 2014 by two Hebrew University students and the director of the University of

Haifa's Ambassadors Online academic programme, Morin Hayo-Hemo. This campaign was launched shortly after an announcement was made on 12 June 2014 about the abduction of three male Israeli teenagers named Eyal Yifrah, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer from the West Bank by Hamas members. The Ambassadors Online programme (*Shagririm Bareshet*) is a diploma course that was set up by the University of Haifa in 2012 as part of a plan to combat the delegitimisation of Israel on the Internet and improve Israel's global image (University of Haifa).

The Bring Back Our Boys campaign also demonstrated that the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag was part of an organised effort by a group of leaders who created the campaign and shaped the pro-Israeli discourse on Twitter. In Paolo Gerbaudo's elaboration of the choreography of assembly of new social movements he challenges the popular notion that new social movements are leaderless because collective action requires organisation and mobilisation. He asserts that social movements are organised by a group of influential individuals who often lead by example and incite emotional tension among the wider public. Gerbaudo also discovered that "in the day-to-day life of social movements, the practical organisation of collective action relies heavily on the intervention of highly involved and experienced participants, or core organisers, who are responsible for 'getting things done'" (141).

Therefore, in order for collective action and mass protests to take place deliberate thought, planning and mobilisation of protestors and activists are required. This entails a form of soft choreographic leadership that suggests how people should identify themselves and act as collective in response to a particular event or issue. Soft choreographic leadership is based on the concept of 'soft power'. Joseph Nye explains that soft power is attractive power – it is not merely the ability to influence or persuade but to also attract them because attraction leads to acquiescence (6). Nye describes soft power as a currency that "co-opts people rather than coerces them... [it] rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (5).

The Ambassadors Online programme is a collaborative effort between Haifa University, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs and several Israel advocacy groups (Ambassadors Online). The programme is a means for Israel to assert its soft power as it aims to provide students with sufficient knowledge and training to use the Internet for '*hasbara*', a Hebrew term for public diplomacy. Among Palestinians and pro-Palestinians the term *hasbara* is known as Israeli propaganda (North). Soft power is "an attraction to shared values, and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values" (Nye, 'The Benefits of Soft Power' 7). Through the Ambassadors Online programme *hasbara* is achieved by attracting subjects and social actors to perform their duty towards Israel by defending the country from anti-Semitic online content.

Participants of the Ambassadors Online programme in 2014 consisted of student volunteers, including those who previously participated in similar public diplomacy programmes in Israel. The students created a Facebook page, Twitter account and Instagram account for the Bring Back Our Boys Campaign. They launched the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag which also served as a slogan calling for the release of the abducted Israeli teenagers. It was said that the hashtag had been used more frequently on Twitter after the IDF tweeted it on 14th June 2014 (Liebhart).

Fig. 2. The IDF supported the #BringBackOurBoys campaign and helped to popularise the hashtag by using it on Twitter shortly after the campaign launched.

The #BringBackOurBoys campaign harnessed social media to set the agenda and turn the kidnapping of the Israeli youth into a salient piece of local and international news. The organisers who planned and orchestrated the campaign encouraged pro-Israeli supporters in Israel and abroad to use the hashtag and declare their solidarity with Israel by taking pictures of themselves with signs that called for the return of the missing teenagers (Gur-Arieh). One of the ways the campaign obtained widespread solidarity was through sharing a photo of Sara Netanyahu, the wife of the Israeli Prime Minister, who held a sign with the hashtag slogan #BringBackOurBoys written across it. Following the cue from Netanyahu's act of solidarity, Israelis and pro-Israelis began tweeting pictures of themselves with a #BringBackOurBoys sign. The stream of tweets created hype for the campaign and turned #BringBackOurBoys into a trending hashtag.

Fig. 3. The #BringBackOurBoys Twitter account shared the image of Sara Netanyahu holding a sign saying #BringBackOurBoys in solidarity with the Israeli campaign.

Fig. 3. Israelis and pro-Israelis from around the world posted tweets in solidarity with the #BringBackOurBoys campaign.

The #BringBackOurBoys hashtag was reported to have generated between 2500 to 2800 tweets per hour (Kombluh; Gruen). However, the high volume of tweets was also due to the appropriation or ‘hijacking’ of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag by pro-Palestinian Twitter users. A Twitter ‘war’ between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians began when the latter group appropriated the hashtag to increase awareness of the plight of the Palestinians by highlighting the disparity in the treatment of Palestinian children and young people by Israeli authorities (Said, Devichand and Sampat). Therefore, the high number of tweets incorporating the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag was not necessarily an indication of the pro-Israeli campaign’s success.

One of the affordances of Twitter hashtags is hashtags can create an aggregate of tweets that enable any Twitter user to follow and contribute to a conversation or a Twitter feed about a particular topic. While this is one of the microblogging platform’s affordances that the Ambassador Online programme was relying upon to help them mobilise pro-Israelis to support the Bring Back Our Boys campaign, it is the same affordance that allows pro-Palestinians to use the hashtag and steer the discourse away from the victimhood of their Israeli counterparts. For example, @DavesUpdates1 tweeted, “Equating the kidnapping of 3 Israeli teens with the arrest of Palestinians involved in violence is beyond perverse. #BringBackOurBoys” and @AsmaaElb included the same hashtag by quoting @PalAnonymous’ tweet about the victimhood of Palestinians, “@PalAnonymous: Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jail #BringBackOurBoys”.

Fig. 5. The re-appropriation of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag by pro-Palestinians steered the discourse and highlighted the victimisation of Palestinians.

Additionally, the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag received criticism because it was a re-appropriation of a hashtag created in April 2014 to raise awareness about the kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria (Samuel). The #BringBackOurGirls hashtag was first tweeted by a Nigerian lawyer who tweeted the call for the release of the Chibok schoolgirls on 23rd April 2014 before the hashtag and slogan was officially launched by the 'Bring Back Our Girls' advocacy group. The advocacy group was founded on 29th April 2014 and a social media campaign was organised. The campaign received support and endorsement from many celebrities and prominent figures, particularly from Western countries. Most notably, the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, tweeted the hashtag along with a picture of herself with a somber facial expression while holding a placard bearing the hashtag slogan '#BringBackOurGirls'. #BringBackOurGirls was used over a million times on Twitter and it supplemented the protests that took place outside the Nigerian defense headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria (Jones and Howard).

Fig. 6. Michelle Obama showed solidarity with the #BringBackOurGirls campaign by posting this image on the First Lady of the United States' official Twitter account (@FLOTUS).

The organisers of the Israeli #BringBackOurBoys social media campaign copied aspects of the Nigerian #BringBackOurGirls campaign and took advantage the hashtag and afforded hashtag activism. Hashtag activism is a form of digital activism that became a trend after the #IranElection hashtag was used in the 2009 Iranian Green Movement. #IranElection facilitated discussions about the Iranian elections and helped to overcome the Iranian state's heavy censorship of its mainstream media outlets. In the case of the #BringBackOurGirls and #BringBackOurBoys campaigns, hashtag activism was utilised to raise awareness about the tragic events of the kidnappings and mobilise support. Both campaigns generated similar responses due to similarities between the two events, hashtags and campaigns' communications strategies. The #BringBackOurBoys campaign organisers carefully selected the hashtag, allowing them to leverage on the relative success of #BringBackOurGirls in effort to garner attention, sympathy and support from the international community. Furthermore, it established the belief that Islamic terrorism is a common enemy of Israel and Western countries. The #BringBackOurBoys campaign draws upon the West-East binary or interpretive package and invokes the 'clash of civilisations' analogy

often used in Israeli discourse when discussing the differences between the IDF and Hamas or the similarities between Hamas and other Islamist terrorist organisations.

Fig. 7. The juxtaposition of the Nigerian #BringBackOurGirls campaign and the Israeli #BringBackOurBoys campaign by the latter campaign's organisers led pro-Israelis to draw a comparison between the two unrelated events and label them as 'Islamist military victories'.

Methodology

The methodology used to analyse the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourse of #BringBackOurBoys was modelled on a study of #Palestine tweets by Eugenia Siapera. She examined the dialectical relationship between social media and Palestinian politics by focusing on the produsage of tweets containing the hashtag #Palestine between 15 and 20 March 2011. Siapera performed content analysis on 7557 tweets to uncover the topics and themes of the tweets in #Palestine and the meanings and associations circulated and attached it as a means of understanding the

mediation of Palestine (545). Mediation is the “uneven dialectical process whereby media of communication are involved in the production and circulation of symbols in social and political life” (cited Silverstone in Siapera 540). Siapera identified nine thematic categories of #Palestine tweets - news, activist, solidarity, Arab Spring, personal, Israel-related, topical, advertisement and anti-Palestinian – which led to a subjective, positioned co-construction of an affective Palestine (Siapera 545, 552).

To emulate Siapera’s research and analyse the role of discourse in the mediation and representation of Israel and Palestine via Twitter a total sample of 100 #BringBackOurBoys tweets posted on 14 June 2014 were collected. The sample consisted of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian tweets. The date 14th June 2014 was chosen to allow a three-day build-up of momentum for the hashtag campaign. A content analysis of the tweets was performed by identifying the prevalent themes and interpretive packages within the tweets. Codifying the tweets according to frames or themes and identifying recurring terms and phrases led to the identification of the main frames and interpretive packages in the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourses of #BringBackOurBoys. The purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate how #BringBackOurBoys was part of the choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis on Twitter. The tweets produced in the polarised discourse about the victimisation of Israeli teenagers and Palestinian youth illustrated the role of tweets in facilitating the construction of the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli collective identities and the formation of pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli imagined communities through the expression of solidarity and the participatory nature of hashtag activism.

Content Analysis of #BringBackOurBoys

The urform of the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys is on a slogan that not only highlighted the victimisation of Israeli youth but as discussed earlier, it also drew an implicit comparison between two unrelated events. The discourse of #BringBackOurBoys predominantly contained two types of narratives, pro-

Israeli and pro-Palestinian, whereby the former was the initiator of the hashtag's discourse. The victimisation rhetoric is the main element in the discourse of #BringBackOurBoys and various types of tweets have emerged in Israel's attempt to raise awareness about the missing Israeli teenagers. The pro-Israeli narrative was then challenged by the pro-Palestinian narrative, which underscored the discrimination, imprisonment and murder of Palestinian youth and children by the IDF. In the sample of 100 tweets mentioning #BringBackOurBoys posted on 14th June 2014 only 23 tweets were pro-Israeli while 77 tweets were pro-Palestinian. The overall frame of the #BringBackOurBoys discourse is the victimisation of Israeli and Palestinian youth. Therefore, both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian narratives within #BringBackOurBoys contained the same types of tweets and similar interpretive packages that highlighted the violation of human and children's rights by Hamas and the IDF, respectively.

The pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian #BringBackOurBoys tweets that contributed towards the victimisation discourse were categorised as: (1) news tweets, which provided updates and relevant and noteworthy information in the form of text, infographics and links about the kidnapped Israeli teenagers or the Palestinian children who were jailed or murdered by the IDF, (2) solidarity tweets, which conveyed support for the respective pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian campaigns without sharing any new information, (3) activist tweets consisted of call-to-action posts by pro-Israelis, or which are involved in the organisation of protests on Twitter, and (4) personal tweets, which contained self-expressions and/or personal exchanges or conversations between users. Most of the tweets within #BringBackOurBoys were written in English with a handful of tweets in Arabic and Hebrew. The most prevalent interpretive packages in the pro-Israeli discourse were 'victim-aggressor' and 'civilian-military' while in the pro-Palestinian discourse the 'oppressed-oppressor' and 'civilian-military' interpretive packages were used. Each interpretive package highlighted the collective victimisation of the Israelis and Palestinians.

Interpretive Packages in the #BringBackOurBoys Hashtag

The news, facts and information that help to create injustice-symbols, achieve emotional condensation and construct a collective identity are conveyed through the use of interpretive packages. An analysis of 100 tweets from the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed on 15th June 2014 reveal that numerous interpretive packages have formed the discourse surrounding Israeli-Palestinian conflict issue culture. As a discursive space, Twitter has become a platform for the interpretive packages that have been utilised and repeated by various social actors involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as politicians, journalists and activists. On Twitter, interpretive packages are useful in the meaning-adaptation process as it helps users to make sense of Twitter's content, which comprises of news and information about a wide range of events and issues.

The contentious political issue regarding the sovereignty of the Israeli and Palestinian people began in 1948 and it has become an increasingly complex issue. As a result, there are multiple views and stances on the best solution for the two states and its people. However, various interpretive packages have emerged in the media and the dominant ones are both a reflection and contributing factor in the polarisation of the issue. The content analysis performed on 100 tweets from the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag on 14th June 2014 reflected the dominant interpretive packages used and circulated within the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourse.

Pro-Israeli News Tweets

Studies reveal that Twitter resembles a news medium rather than a social network due to the high amount of tweets containing news or appearing in the form of headlines (Kwak, Park and Moon 6, 10). In the case of #BringBackOurBoys, news tweets played an important role in setting the agenda and framing the issue as an international concern involving the victimisation of innocent youth and a group of Islamist terrorists. Pro-Israeli

news tweets in the #BringBackOurBoys discourse provided links to more information about the teenagers' profiles and their abduction. For example, @azarya quoted a tweet by another user which included a YouTube video link of an update announcement of the kidnapping by the IDF and added the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys. @azarya identified salient information and produced a news tweet which contributed relevant information about the incident and its victims to the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed. The YouTube video is embedded in the tweet therefore it created an immersive online experience for followers of the trending hashtag and a sense of liveness because it appeared as if the event was being reported or discussed online as it was unfolding. Therefore, news tweets attracted pro-Israeli users who are interested in news about the kidnapped Israeli teenagers.

Fig. 8. News tweets made the latest updates more accessible by those who were interested in the issue of the abduction of the three Israeli teenagers through the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys.

News tweets played a significant role in the construction of Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaer and Naftali Frenkel as injustice symbols. The portrayal of the three teenage boys as injustice symbols was a crucial aspect of the campaign as it led to the emotional condensation required to mobilise pro-Israeli support. One particular photo collage of Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel's portraits was widely distributed on Twitter. News tweets often contained the collage and article links containing updates about the missing Israeli teenagers. For example, @TheYiddishWorld tweeted the collage along with the message "RT

to #BringBackOurBoys” and a website link to a live blog with real-time updates about the Israeli teenagers.

The photos of the Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel intently selected for the collage created online visibility for them and portrayed their Caucasian-like, boyish and cheerful appearance and their Jewish religious identity, which was signified through their use of the *kippah* (skullcap) in the photos. The youthful injustice symbols appealed to millennials aged between 18 and 34 years old who are more likely to be Internet and smartphone users and living in Western countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany (Poushter). As discussed in Chapter Two, injustice symbols have a universalising potential and can be linked to an issue with structural roots (Olesen 74). Thus, aspects of the teenagers’ identities that general youth demographic and Western audience could relate to were amplified in news tweets through sharing their photos, names and information about what happened to them.

Fig. 9. A widely tweeted collage of the missing teenagers in news tweets established their status not only as kidnapping victims but also injustice symbols.

News tweets within #BringBackOurBoys framed the kidnapping incident as an act of terrorism and depicted Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel as victims of ‘terrorism’ instead of the result of multifaceted and complex political conflict

that has existed for many decades. Hence, news tweets play a key role in establishing the connection between the abduction of the Israeli teenagers by Hamas members and the threat of Islamic terrorism through focusing on the victimhood of Israeli citizens instead of the socio-political context that contributed to the rise of violence between Palestinians and Israelis. When news tweets identify Israelis as the victim and Hamas or Palestinians as the perpetrators the message of the tweets has more resonance among Israelis and those who empathise with them. Tweets with resonance motivated the expression of solidarity on Twitter through the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys which was a call for the release and return of the Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel.

Pro-Israeli Solidarity Tweets

Israelis and pro-Israelis from various countries around the world expressed their support for Israel and the campaign by demanding for the return of the teenagers and posting messages of prayer and concern via Twitter. The hashtag itself became a symbol of collective demand and expression of solidarity, which created the perception of a grassroots campaign and prompted hashtag activism among Israelis and pro-Israelis. Solidarity tweets strengthened the idea of an Israeli collective identity by affirming the idea of the victimisation of Israelis as a shared experience between Israeli citizens. Furthermore, the articulation of support for #BringBackOurBoys by the international community validates the Israeli victim identity that inspires patriotism among Israelis.

Fig. 10. The online Israeli collective identity was formed through their expression of support for Israel and the #BringBackOurBoys campaign.

Solidarity tweets formed an online imagined community of Israelis and pro-Israelis, which consisted of many Israelis and anyone who empathised with the victims and Israel during the campaign that appeared to urge Hamas members to safely return the Israeli teenagers to their families. Therefore, solidarity tweets also enabled Israelis and pro-Israelis to clearly identity their common enemy, which would be Hamas, an organisation often conflated with the general population of Gaza. Hence, the manifestation of the Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identity through solidarity tweets created an unspoken emotional connection between Israelis and pro-Israelis. This emotional connection combined with feelings of patriotism and/or hatred towards Hamas became the driving force in the mobilisation of pro-Israeli supporters via Twitter.

Pro-Israeli Activist Tweets

Israeli and pro-Israeli digital activists had set hashtag activism in motion to raise awareness about the victimisation of the three Israeli youths and encourage others to support Israel and demand for their return through the microblogging platform. The #BringBackOurBoys campaign was not a social movement because it was organised by a team of state actors, Israel

advocacy groups and academic staff and students. However, it did resemble a new social movement because it was carefully orchestrated to generate discourse that highlighted the victimisation of Israeli citizens. The campaign was popularised on social media, especially Twitter, through hashtag activism. Activist tweets contained explicit call-to-action, such as asking users to pray for the victims or to retweet a tweet, and implicit call-to-action, exemplified in the use of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag to display hashtag solidarity. For example, @MrEph tweeted, “Pray 4 the innocent Jewish boys, pray for those trying to save them from arab terrorists #BringBackOurBoys”. His tweet urged Twitter users to take action by creating emotional tension through describing the abducted Israeli youths as “innocent Jewish boys” and their captors as “Arab terrorists”.

Fig. 11. Pro-Israeli activist tweets contained call-to-action and created emotional tension to mobilise support for the #BringBackOurBoys campaign.

Thus, activist tweets aided in the construction of Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identities and the mobilisation of Israelis and pro-Israelis as an imagined community by appealing to current global sentiments about terrorism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and also the Jewish Israeli identity. Apart from providing messages of call-to-action Activist tweets created a compelling victimisation discourse that encouraged Israelis and pro-Israelis to construct their identities by sharing their personal beliefs and sentiments on Twitter.

Pro-Israeli Personal Tweets

Personal tweets within the #BringBackOurBoys Twitter feed contained cathartic self-expressions by Israelis and pro-Israelis. Israeli and pro-Israeli supporters of the #BringBackOurBoys campaign used personal tweets as a

means of sharing personal insights into their thoughts and feelings about the kidnapping of Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel by Hamas members. Through the cathartic process of expressing their anger, devastation or concern, Israelis and pro-Israelis portrayed the abduction of the Israeli teenagers as an act of terrorism by Palestinians against Israeli citizens. For example, @LauraShaposh expressed her criticism and objection towards anti-Semitic and anti-Israel tweets in the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag, which were most likely pro-Palestinian tweets, and interpreted them as tweets that condoned the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers. She tweeted, “There are some shameful anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic tweets going out under #BringBackOurBoys How can anyone condone kidnapping children?”.

Fig. 12. Personal tweets within the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys reflected the views and sentiments of Israelis and pro-Israelis and helped in the construction of the Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identities.

Personal tweets, such as the one posted by @LauraShaposh, were a means for Israelis and pro-Israelis to express themselves and identify with each other's beliefs and feelings about the kidnapping incident, the victimisation of Israel and possible solutions. Personal tweets contained Israeli victimisation narrative and emotional rhetoric that reflected the galvanisation of pro-Israeli support for Israel and the #BringBackOurBoys campaign which leads to more pro-Israeli discourse on Twitter as Israelis and pro-Israelis begin to use the microblogging platform to communicate their personal thoughts.

Interpretive Packages within Pro-Israeli Tweets of #BringBackOurBoys

Several interpretive packages containing various condensational symbols were created and repeated by numerous social actors such as journalists and digital activists to frame and simplify the representation of a

complex issue on Twitter. The amplification of Israel's victimhood was achieved through the victim-aggressor and civilian-military interpretive packages identified in the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed. These interpretive packages contributed to the construction of the pro-Israeli collective identity and mobilisation of digital protestors on the online discursive space. In the pro-Israel narrative of #BringBackOurBoys, several interpretive packages were identified to have contributed to the victimisation discourse about Israelis. Namely, 'victim-aggressor', which categorised Israelis as the victim and Hamas as the aggressor, and 'civilian-military', which portrayed the conflict as one that involved the targeting of innocent and young Israeli civilians by Hamas' military branch, Ezzeddeen al-Qassam.

Victim-Aggressor Interpretive Package

The victim-aggressor interpretive package was instrumental and prevalent in the discourse of #BringBackOurBoys. In alignment with the aim of Israeli propaganda or *hasbara*, the victim-aggressor interpretive package amplified the victimhood of Jewish Israelis and downplayed the victimisation of Palestinians. Thus, the pro-Israeli narrative of #BringBackOurBoys characterised Israelis as innocent victims and Hamas or Arabs as terrorists. Various tweets within #BringBackOurBoys repeated this rhetoric. News tweets played a significant role in profiling or describing the subjects in news stories about the kidnapping of Eyal Yifrach, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer from the West Bank in June 2014.

@BringBackIL tweeted, "Abduction of 3 Yeshiva Students Inspires #BringBackOurBoys Hashtag" along with a link to a news article about the hashtag campaign. @BringBackIL added the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag to the tweet to include the news article about the abduction of the three Israeli teenagers in the hashtag feed. Even if a Twitter user does not click on link the tweet already established that the teens were young and religious Jews who were targeted because of their religion and ethnicity. Thus, news tweets such

as the one posted by @BringBackIL amplified these characteristics and turned them into injustice symbols.

Fig. 13. Regular updates via news tweets made a spectacle out of the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers from the West Bank, which reinforced their status as victims and established them as injustice symbols.

The victim-aggressor interpretive package was also seen in personal tweets because Twitter was not only a news medium but also a microblogging platform where Israelis and pro-Israelis communicated their views. The #BringBackOurBoys hashtag was a means for Israelis and pro-Israelis to shape their collective identities and form imagined communities consisting of Israelis based on their support for the #BringBackOurBoys campaign. Thus, personal tweets contained the victim-aggressor interpretive package as their producers used Twitter to express their views or concern about the three Israeli victims. Several personal tweets in the #BringBackOurBoys , @JewishTweets posted, “As we go into #Shabbat, we pray for the speedy return of the 3 kidnapped teens in #Israel. #ShabbatShalom #BringBackOurBoys”.

In this particular tweet, the Jewish tradition of observing Shabbat, a Jewish ritual of a day of rest and prayer, became a part of the endeavour to accomplish the safe return of the three Israeli teenagers. The Shabbat-themed personal tweets allowed Jews to identify the teenagers as not only Israeli victims but Jewish Israeli victims, invoking the collective victimisation of Jews which is an intrinsic part of Jewish Israeli identity and Israel’s nation-building discourse. Thus, through the victim-aggressor interpretive package in personal tweets Israelis and pro-Israelis galvanised under the discourse of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag due to their ability to identify with aspects of the victims’ identities, like their religious beliefs.

Fig. 14. Personal tweets reflected the seriousness of the kidnapping incident and mobilised pro-Israeli supporters who identified with the sentiments and values in the tweet.

Activist tweets in the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed also utilised the victim-aggressor interpretive package to raise awareness about the victimisation of the Israeli teenagers and rally Israeli and pro-Israeli support for the campaign. Pro-Israeli digital activists used the hashtag as part of a collective demand for the return of the Israeli teenagers but also in tweets that contain call-to-action. For example, @daniopp directly tweeted Ben Shapiro, an American columnist and influential Twitter user with over 200,000 followers and requested him to help draw attention towards the abduction of the three teenagers in Israel. @daniopp's tweet mentioned, "@benshapiro please spread the word: 3 teens kidnapped by Islamic Jihadists in Israel. 1 of them is an American Citizen #BringBackOurBoys". In this tweet, @daniopp took on the role as a digital activist. He attempted to obtain Shapiro's co-operation in bringing attention to the kidnapping incident and the #BringBackOurBoys campaign by labelling the perpetrators as 'Islamic Jihadists' instead of Hamas. In doing so, @daniopp identified one of the victims as American and linked the aggressor, Hamas, to a common enemy of Israel and the United States. Thus, the tweet attempted to rally support by establishing the relationship / similarity between Israel and the United States.

Fig. 15. Activist tweets within #BringBackOurBoys urged other Twitter users to help raise awareness about the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers, thus using the victim-aggressor interpretive package to portray the pro-Israeli version of the Palestine issue culture.

Civilian-Military Interpretive Package

In the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys, the civilian-military interpretive package was utilised to depict the conflict as one involving Israeli civilians and Palestinian military members who were labelled as ‘terrorists’. Thus, this interpretive package drew attention towards the imbalance of power between the victims and the perpetrators. Yifrach, Shaer and Frenkel were canonised as injustice symbols who were victimised by Palestinian, or more specifically Gazan, military soldiers who used their power and skills to endanger and murder helpless Israeli teenagers. Thus, through the civilian-military interpretive package the victimisation of Israelis was illustrated through framing the kidnapping incident as one depicted the kidnapping incident as an act of terrorism committed by Hamas military members. Tweets that used the civilian-military interpretive package provided evidence of the victimisation of Israelis by depicting Palestinians and Hamas members as terrorists who targeted unarmed civilians and violate international humanitarian law (IHC).

The collective persecution of Israelis is a rhetoric often used since the Holocaust and through #BringBackOurBoys it was represented and exemplified through the victimisation of three Israeli teenage students in the binary civilian versus military discourse. Tweets that incorporated the civilian-military interpretive package displayed strong emotional statements about Hamas. For example, a personal tweet by @BringBackIL proclaimed disapproval towards Hamas’ military branch, Ezzedeen al-Qassam’s tweet which appropriated the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag. @BringBackIL tweeted, “Disgusting: @ezqassam tweets “death to Jews” with #BringBackOurBoys hashtag. #SHAME”. Although @BringBackIL is the official account of the #BringBackOurBoys campaign the tweet is a personal tweet as it reflects the sentiments of the person who posted the tweet.

Fig. 16. A personal tweet by the official #BringBackOurBoys Twitter account highlighted the targeting of Jewish civilians by Hamas' military branch, Ezzedeen al-Qassam.

The strong focus on the persecution of Israelis via the civilian-military interpretive package on #BringBackOurBoys led Israelis and pro-Israelis to exercise their agency to condemn the violation of Israeli human rights and children's rights by Hamas. However, the heavy focus on the victimisation of Israeli youths also generated emotional response among Palestinians and pro-Palestinians on Twitter. Thus, the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys was appropriated by those who support the Palestinian resistance and provided a pro-Palestinian counter-narrative that highlighted the overwhelming numbers of Palestinian children and youth who were discriminated against or persecuted by the Israel Defense Forces.

Pro-Palestinian Tweets in #BringBackOurBoys

Following the launch of the #BringBackOurBoys campaign by its Israeli organisers, online activists from Palestine began re-appropriating or hijacking the hashtag to steer the focus of the discussion from the kidnapping of the three Israeli teenagers to the imprisonment, detainment and massacre of Palestinian children and youth. By raising awareness about young Palestinian victims and war casualties within the #BringBackOurBoys discourse the gravity of the victimisation of Palestinian children is compared, equated and/or amplified to the victimisation of the three kidnapped Israeli youth. Hence, the hashtag hijack by pro-Palestinian digital activists created a contentious

discourse or a battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians via #BringBackOurBoys.

Fig. 17. Twitter afforded the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians via the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag which was appropriated by pro-Palestinian digital activists.

The pro-Palestinian narrative of #BringBackOurBoys contained more visual imagery in comparison to the pro-Israeli narrative. The overwhelming number of pro-Palestinian tweets within the #BringBackOurBoys, especially ones with images depicting Palestinian children as victims of war or being discriminated against by IDF soldiers, contributed to a strong argument and narrative regarding the victimisation of Palestinian children and the misrepresentation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Israelis. In an interview about pro-Palestinian 'keyboard resisters', Mahmoud Hrebat, a 31 year old Palestinian radio show host from Ramallah said, "#BringBackOurBoys was there, we jumped on the wagon and told the story of our boys instead," he said (Zabaneh). As a result, various types of tweets emerged from the 'online Palestinian resistance', which sought to highlight the victimisation of Palestinians by Israelis, especially the IDF.

Pro-Palestinian News Tweets

As an ambivalent platform and a source of news about the kidnapping of Eyal Yifrach, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer, Twitter not only consisted of pro-Israeli news tweets about the incident but pro-Palestinian ones as well. However, news tweets produced by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians contained information about Palestinian political prisoners and child prisoners

who were detained, or 'kidnapped' as described by some pro-Palestinians, by the Israeli Defense Forces. Pro-Palestinian news tweets within #BringBackOurBoys were mainly the outcome of a collaborative effort by the imagined community of Palestinians and pro-Israelis who galvanised to challenge the pro-Israeli narrative about the victimisation of Israelis. Like pro-Israeli news tweets, the youth frame was the overarching theme in pro-Palestinian news tweets of #BringBackOurBoys whereby the focus was on sharing information and circulating news articles on the discrimination of Palestinian children to challenge the pro-Israeli narrative about the victimisation of their citizens.

For example, @jncatron posted a tweet resembling a news headline as it contained the title of a news article by Fars News Agency, an Iranian news outlet: "Children Describe Torture in Israeli Solitary Confinement bit.ly/1ptcFdq via @EnglishFars #BringBackOurBoys". The news article was dated 25 May 2014, a few weeks before the abduction of the three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. However, it was posted on 14 June 2014 and included in the #BringBackOurBoys stream, which raised a point about Palestinian victimisation being more significantly severe. A photo of a child that appears to be Arab or Palestinian and held firmly by two Israeli soldiers was embedded in @jncatron's news tweet but only to illustrate the mistreatment of Palestinian children as the photo had no relation to the news article in question.

Joe Catron @jncatron · 14 Jun 2014

Children Describe Torture in Israeli Solitary Confinement bit.ly/1ptcFdq via @EnglishFars #BringBackOurBoys

↩ 10 ❤ 3 ...

Fig. 18. Pro-Palestinian news tweets within the #BringBackOurBoys feed were produced by pro-Palestinians who galvanised to create content that represented the Palestinian narrative about the victimisation of Palestinians.

In a news tweet posted by a Palestinian, @MuhGazaa shared statistical information about the imprisonment of Palestinian children by the IDF. He tweeted, “Israeli forces detained 740 Palestinian children during the first 2 months of 2014. #BringBackOurBoys #Palestine”. Such information was vital providing factual evidence that contributed to a strong argument about the oppression of Palestinian youth and children. Thus, news tweets played an important role in creating emotional condensation and mobilising pro-Palestinian support.

Fig. 19. News tweets in the pro-Palestinian discourse of #BringBackOurBoys discourse challenged the pro-Israeli discourse with facts and information that became evidence for the argument about Palestinian victimisation.

Palestinians and pro-Palestinians shared news content that reflected the Palestinian experience via news tweets, which helped them to form a unified opinion about Palestinian victimhood and subsequently their collective identities too. Palestinian victimhood and mobilise the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collectivities. As a result, relevant information about Palestinian child prisoners and victims that were essential in the mobilisation of pro-Palestinians became more accessible to Twitter users via news tweets.

Pro-Palestinian Personal Tweets

When the #BringBackOurBoys campaign was launched on Twitter, pro-Palestinians took to Twitter to contest the representation of the kidnapping incident and overall victimisation of Israelis in #BringBackOurBoys. Therefore, Palestinians and pro-Palestinians appropriated the same hashtag and expressed their personal experiences, views and sentiments about the Israeli occupation and its effects on Palestinian youth and children. Personal tweets enabled pro-Palestinians to form a collective identity by enabling Twitter users to identify with the emotions and opinions articulated in the tweets.

Furthermore, personal tweets contributed towards the creation of a pro-Palestinian narrative that is emotionally driven and impactful, thus aiding in the mobilisation of pro-Palestinian activists and supporters on Twitter.

For example, @occpal_gaza tweeted, “I don’t remember a #BringBackOurBoys when Israel kidnapped my husband from his home when he was 16y/o and kept in ISRAEL for 5 years”. This account by the wife of a former Palestinian child prisoner added credibility and personal insight to the Palestinian narrative of #BringBackOurBoys, which aimed to downplay the victimisation of the three Israeli teenagers by invoking an emotional response to the injustice that has been done towards Palestinians.

Fig. 20. Pro-Palestinian personal tweets included personal accounts of experiences by Palestinians that challenged the pro-Israeli discourse of victimisation in #BringBackOurBoys.

Pro-Palestinian personal tweets were also present in the form of opinions and self-expressions. In reference to the kidnapping of the three Israeli teenagers, @Gehad_99 professed in a tweet, “That is nothing, literally nothing compared to what happened and still happening to the Palestinians!! #BringBackOurBoys”. His tweet summarised the main argument and rhetoric of the pro-Palestinian counter-narrative in #BringBackOurBoys. Hence, personal tweets contained emotional rhetoric produced by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians who used Twitter and appropriated the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag as a form of resistance against *hasbara* and Israeli violence. As an act of activism, using the Israeli-initiated hashtag was also a means of expressing solidarity.

Fig. 21. Personal tweets contained the emotional rhetoric required in the construction of pro-Palestinian collective identity and encouraged other pro-Palestinians to show their support and solidarity.

Solidarity Tweets

Due to Twitter's affordances as an ambivalent platform, the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag became a means for Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to identify this particular media moment as an appropriate time to raise awareness about the victimisation of Palestinian children as a part of their struggle to represent the Palestinian perspective as a testimony of their resistance and solidarity. In their produsage of solidarity tweets, Palestinians and pro-Palestinians created emotional condensation by using facts and images that portray Palestinian suffering caused by the IDF's military incursions and discrimination of Palestinian youth and children. For example, @MaramAzzam tweeted, "#BringBackOurBoys can you bring him back to his father ? #FreePalestine #GazaUnderattack2012 we will never forget". The tweet contained a photo depicting a young Palestinian man being surrounded by other men who were trying to comfort him as he cried in agony while holding presumably holding the dead body of his child or sibling.

Fig. 22. Pro-Palestinian solidarity tweets represented the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian imagined communities' appropriation of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag to express their support for the Palestinian cause.

@MaramAzzam conveyed her solidarity with Palestinians by appropriating the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag to highlight the deaths of Palestinian children and suffering of Palestinians during a previous military incursion in Gaza during 2012. The ability to identify with a particular issue or people and then express solidarity with Palestinians via a hashtag that was created by the Israel gave Palestinian and pro-Palestinian Twitter users a sense of participation and belonging within the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian imagined communities on Twitter. Unlike the pro-Israeli narrative, pro-Palestinian solidarity tweets in the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed were the main manifestations of digital activism in the choreography of assembly of Palestinian and pro-Palestinians.

The act of providing a narrative that challenged the pro-Israeli discourse about their victimisation was a form of resistance that galvanised Palestinians and pro-Palestinian from various parts of the world to bear witness to the suffering of the Palestinians and support their cause. Interpretive packages played a significant role in helping Twitter users to decipher the message of a

tweet, which lead them to identify their beliefs and values and organise themselves as a collective of digital activists.

Pro-Palestinian Interpretive Packages

The #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed constituted a discursive space which contained competing pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian interpretive packages. These interpretive packages vied to define and construct the issue of the victimisation of Israeli and Palestinian youth and children, respectively, and the underlying issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In #BringBackOurBoys, the pro-Palestinian interpretive packages were the same as pro-Israeli ones because the former is a response to the latter. Thus, the most prevalent interpretive packages in the victimisation discourse of the Palestinians were 'oppressed-oppressor, which identified Palestine as victims of oppression and Israel as the oppressor, and 'civilian-military', which highlighted the abuse of power by Israel. Additionally, the interpretive flexibility of interpretive packages was demonstrated through the #BringBackOurBoys discourse, whereby both the 'victim-aggressor' and 'civilian-military' interpretive packages were instrumental in the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourses.

Oppressed-Oppressor Interpretive Package

While the pro-Israeli narrative used the victim-aggressor interpretive package, the pro-Palestinian narrative utilised the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package. A compelling narrative about the victimisation of Palestinians was constructed through the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package, which established the image of Palestinians as victims of an oppressive Israeli regime. The pro-Israeli discourse about the abduction of Eyal Yifrach, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer was overshadowed by the pro-Palestinian discourse as it highlighted the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children by the IDF.

The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package entailed that the unjust treatment or control of Palestinians by the Israeli government, particularly towards its youth and children, has been a prolonged violent affair. By raising awareness about Palestinian political prisoners, child prisoners and young war casualties with facts and personal anecdotes and supporting the Palestinian resistance with displays of solidarity, the Palestinian victimisation discourse gains more weight and validity. Thus, creating the emotional condensation needed to mobilise support for the Palestinian resistance and the pro-Palestinian narrative of #BringBackOurBoys.

Pro-Palestinian news tweets provided facts and information about the oppression of Palestinians that were relevant to the youth frame of the #BringBackOurBoys discourse. For example, @aschops tweeted a Russia Today news article and added multiple hashtags to the message, “Five Palestinian #children injured after #Israeli #settlers set fire to their home on.rt.com/9frwp2 #colonialism #BringBackOurBoys”. The tweet contained several hashtags – #children, #Israeli, #settlers, #colonialism, #BringBackOurBoys – which signified @aschops’ attempt to capture several audiences and relate the issue of Palestinian oppression to various topics and issues, such as colonialism and settler colonialism.

Furthermore, the prolonged oppression of Palestinians was also reflected in the news article that was selected to be part of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed as the article dated to 14 November 2013. A photo from the article was shown in the tweet and it represented a Palestinian woman standing in a torched building as she held a child in her arms. This portrayal strengthened the argument that Palestinian children are often victims of the Israeli occupation.

Fig. 23. Pro-Palestinian news tweets in #BringBackOurBoys provided informative content that depicted the oppression of Palestinian children and added credibility to the Palestinian victimisation discourse.

The expression of personal views and sentiments through personal tweets also contributed to the discourse of Palestinian victimisation through the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package. @ana_lolo123 tweeted, “Stop your terrorism first #BringBackOurBoys”. The message in @ana_lolo123’s tweet was directed towards pro-Israelis and other Twitter users following the hashtag discourse of #BringBackOurBoys. It contained an opinion and a cathartic expression about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it referred to Israeli violence as ‘terrorism’. The word ‘terrorism’ is a condensational symbol as its definition has been socially constructed by various social actors, such as politicians and journalists, especially after Al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001.

The term ‘terrorism’ also conjures various idea and beliefs about the ideological motivations of the violence and the perpetrators. Thus, using the word ‘terrorism’ against Israel was a form of resistance that highlighted Israel’s role as the oppressor and the gravity of the Israeli government’s oppression against Palestinians. @ana_lolo123’s tweet illustrated that personal tweets

challenged the Israeli discourse with personal views and sentiments while garnering support for the Palestinian cause through emotional rhetoric.

Fig. 24. Personal tweets within the pro-Palestinian discourse of #BringBackOurBoys contained opinions and sentiments that challenge the pro-Israeli narrative and mobilise pro-Palestinian support with emotional condensation and rhetoric.

The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package was also identified in pro-Palestinian solidarity tweets, which displayed support for Palestinians through the appropriation of the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag and highlighting the victimisation of Palestinian youth. For example, @heavyde65 posted an image of a 17 year old Palestinian boy, Nadim Siam Nuwara, with the words “Israel murdered me” written boldly across it and “You’ll never remember me because I’m Palestinian” written below. The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package is present in this tweet as the message was written in first person narrative to establish Israel as the oppressor and Palestinians as the oppressed.

By sharing this image in the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed, @heavyde65 displayed his solidarity with the oppressed – Palestinians, especially Palestinian youth who have been victimised by Israel – instead of supporting the oppressor – Israelis – through the hashtag, which was its intended purpose and message, a statement of solidarity with the kidnapped Israeli teenagers and Israel, in general. Furthermore, @heavyde’s tweet also conveyed solidarity with the Palestinian resistance by using various anti-Israel hashtags such as #BoycottIsraelApartheid #FreePalestine and #BDS.

Fig. 25. Solidarity tweets challenged the pro-Israeli #BringBackOurBoys discourse by conveying support for Palestinians through the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package.

As discussed above, pro-Palestinian news tweets, personal tweets and solidarity tweets depicted the victimisation of Palestinian youth and the general Palestinian population through the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package. The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package characterised Palestinians as victims of Israeli's oppressive occupation in a general sense. However, the pro-Palestinian narrative of #BringBackOurBoys also utilised the civilian-military interpretive package, which was more specific in terms of identifying the subjects involved in the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children.

Civilian-Military Interpretive Package

The pro-Palestinian narrative challenged the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys about the brutal treatment of Israeli youth by Hamas. raising awareness about the long-standing victimisation of Palestinian youth and children by the IDF. The civilian-military interpretive package framed the Israeli-Palestinian affair as a conflict that involved the abuse of Israel's military power. The violation of the rights of Palestinian youth and children through the

unjust treatment of Palestinian youth and children by the Israel Defense Forces was the central focus of this interpretive package.

Various types of pro-Palestinian tweets incorporated the civilian-military interpretive package, which created emotional tension among Palestinians and pro-Palestinians and mobilised support for the Palestinian resistance on Twitter. Pro-Palestinian tweets minimised the victimisation of the three Israeli teenagers who were kidnapped by Hamas members by highlighting the various ways the IDF has endangered, mistreated and victimised Palestinian youth and children during the last few decades. The civilian-military interpretive package was identified in news tweets posted by pro-Palestinians who shared facts or news links providing factual information that supported their claim regarding the IDF's mistreatment of young Palestinians. For instance, @H4_m4d tweeted a PressTV news article about a United Nations report claiming Palestinian children were used as 'human shields' by the IDF. An image of an adolescent boy sitting on an Israeli army vehicle was attached to the tweet, which provided a visual representation of how Palestinian children may have been used as 'human shields' and victimised by the IDF, as presented in the news headline.

@h4_m4d's tweet demonstrated how news tweets provided legitimacy to the pro-Palestinian narrative about the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children through the civilian-military interpretive package. News tweets containing the civilian-military interpretive package highlighted the role of the Israeli military and the abuse of their power in the oppression of Palestinians. Furthermore, news tweets became a means for Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to use their collective intelligence to disrupt the pro-Israeli narrative of #BringBackOurBoys as a means of performing digital activism and supporting the online Palestinian resistance.

Fig. 26. Palestinian and pro-Palestinians used the civilian-military interpretive package in news tweets to challenge the pro-Israeli narrative about the victimisation of Israeli youth with factual, credible information about the IDF's mistreatment of Palestinian youth and children.

Personal tweets containing the civilian-military interpretive package provided the emotional condensation necessary to galvanise pro-Palestinian support on Twitter as they allowed other Twitter users to identify with the views and sentiments about the IDF. Emotional self-expressions in personal tweets also utilised the civilian-military interpretive package to portray the Israeli occupation as an oppressive regime that has involved the abuse and mistreatment of Palestinian children. @Brown_Saraah expressed herself in her tweet, "Palestinian boys being kidnapped by Israeli soldiers. This is so heartbreaking. #BringBackOurBoys". The rhetoric she used was similar to that of the pro-Israeli discourse, in which she referred to the detainment of Palestinian children as them 'being kidnapped'. In this personal tweet, @Brown_Saraah also included images that depicted the harsh treatment of Palestinian children by the IDF. The images contributed to the civilian-military interpretive package of the tweet and strengthened its intended message about the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children by the IDF. Hence, @Brown_Saraah's cathartic tweet not only allowed her express herself but also demand the return of Palestinian child prisoners through pro-Israeli

hashtag conversation of #BringBackOurBoys. @Brown_Saraah's tweet was retweeted 49 times, which is an indication of the powerful emotional response generated among pro-Palestinians. Hence, personal tweets drew other users to demand the safe return of Palestinian political prisoners and child prisoners, express their solidarity with the Palestinian people and form an imagined community of pro-Palestinians countering the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys.

Fig. 27. The civilian-military interpretive package in personal tweets enabled the cathartic process of expressing oneself on Twitter to challenge the pro-Israeli discourse and aid in the construction of a pro-Palestinian imagined community and display of solidarity via #BringBackOurBoys.

Pro-Palestinian solidarity tweets in #BringBackOurBoys were not always explicit in the way they conveyed support for the Palestinian cause. The use of the hashtag alone can be a means of showing solidarity with Palestinians if the rest of the tweet's content supported the Palestinian narrative. A pro-Palestinian solidarity tweet can be a post that is as simple as an image that aligned with the message of the Palestinian narrative and the pro-Palestinian argument regarding the IDF's mistreatment and oppression of Palestinian youth. For example, @AboSameer2013 tweeted a photo of presumably a blindfolded male Palestinian adolescent kneeling on the ground with his hands and feet tied up. The young Palestinian is also located next to

an armed Israeli soldier sitting in an army vehicle and appears to be holding a rifle. This image symbolises and illustrates the imbalance of power that fuels the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the oppression of Palestinians.

With only the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag and by sharing the photo described above, @AboSameer2013 incorporated the civilian-military interpretive package and displayed his solidarity with Palestinians and the Palestinian youth and children. @AboSameer2013's solidarity tweet disrupted the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag feed with an image that challenges the pro-Israeli representation of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and portrayal of Israeli victimisation by Palestinians, or more specifically Hamas, an governing Palestinian authority frequently described as 'terrorists' by Israelis and the IDF.

Fig. 28. A pro-Palestinian solidarity tweet containing the civilian-military interpretive package can be as simple as an image that aligns with the Palestinian narrative regarding the IDF's mistreatment and oppression of Palestinian youth.

In conclusion, the sample of 100 tweets in this study revealed the similarities between the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourses of #BringBackOurBoys. The analysis of these tweets also demonstrated that the battle of narratives and hijacking of the Israeli campaign's hashtag was a response to the pro-Israeli framing of the abduction of the Israeli teenagers and the Israeli-Palestinian affair. Hence, the choreography of assembly of pro-

Israeli supporters and digital activists by the Israeli #BringBackOurBoys campaign organisers not only mobilised pro-Israeli activists and pro-Israeli discourse but inadvertently, pro-Palestinian ones as well. In the choreography of assembly of Israelis and pro-Israelis, the #BringBackOurBoys campaign organisers, which consisted of a group of skilled and trained Israeli professionals and students, created a social media campaign that resembled a grassroots movement. The appropriation of the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag and the Nigerian movement's tactics, such as the collective demand and display of solidarity with signs bearing the hashtag, created the perception of a grassroots movement.

The campaign's organisers created injustice symbols out of the kidnapped victims, Eyal Yifrach, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer, to construct the Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identities. Furthermore, the 'victim-aggressor' and 'civilian-military' interpretive packages not only aided in the meaning-adaptation process of tweets about their abduction but they also helped to place the kidnapping incident into the larger issue culture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, various types of pro-Israeli tweets and interpretive packages created emotional condensation and mobilised pro-Israeli support based on the larger context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinians and pro-Israelis also incorporated a similar rhetoric and interpretive package as their Israeli counterparts in effort to challenge the pro-Israeli discourse about the victimisation of Israelis by Palestinians and Hamas. Unlike the Israeli #BringBackOurBoys campaign, the pro-Palestinian discourse was part of a grassroots movement – the Palestinian resistance – which, among many other efforts, aimed to resist *hasbara* by countering the Israeli #BringBackOurBoys campaign's representation of the victimisation of Israelis.

News tweets, solidarity tweets, and personal tweets were produced by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians who identified with Palestinians and/or the issue at hand and harnessed their collective intelligence to hijack the enemy's hashtag discourse. Through the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag, Palestinians

and pro-Palestinians formed imagined communities to support the Palestinian resistance on Twitter by raising awareness about the oppression and victimisation of Palestinian youth and children. However, the #BringBackOurBoys campaign primarily laid the groundwork for pro-Israeli support of the IDF's military incursion into Gaza, Operation Protective Edge, which took place three weeks after the abduction of the Israeli teenagers, from 8 July 2014 to 16 August 2014. Henceforth, the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians during the #BringBackOurBoys campaign continued through the respective hashtags of #IsraelUnderFire and #GazaUnderAttack.

Chapter Four: The Choreography of Assembly of Pro-Palestinians and Pro-Israelis through #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire

The contentious nature of the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians was demonstrated in #BringBackOurBoys, which was launched by an Israeli hashtag campaign and then heavily appropriated by pro-Palestinians. In the Palestinian resistance, the Internet is often perceived as a democratising tool due to its affordances that enable Palestinians to challenge the pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian coverage in Western media (Aouragh 39, 167; Elmasry). #BringBackOurBoys had 'set the scene' for the choreography of assembly for two separate hashtag campaigns, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire, that took place after Operation Protective Edge (OPE) commenced on 8 July 2014.

This chapter analyses the discourses of #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire during OPE to identify the types of tweets and interpretive packages that were used to mobilise pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis. The hashtag #GazaUnderAttack helped the formation of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian imagined communities that challenged the mainstream media discourse by sharing updates and images that represented the impact of the conflict in Gaza. However, Twitter's ambivalence is highlighted through the pro-Israeli use of the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag which sought to defend the claims made by pro-Palestinians via #GazaUnderAttack. This chapter highlights the myth of pro-Israeli hashtag activism, particularly through discussing the organisation of the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag campaign and the various tweets and interpretive packages that mobilised Israelis and pro-Israelis on Twitter during OPE.

#GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire in Operation Protective Edge

The search and campaign for the release of three Israeli teenagers - Naftali Frenkel, Gilad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach - who went missing in the West Bank on 12 June 2014 ended on 30 June 2014 when the teenagers were

found dead in Hebron (Rudoren and Kershner). At a meeting of the Israeli security cabinet meeting shortly after the discovery of their bodies the prime minister of Israel declared, “ Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay” (Eg lash and Branigin). On 8th July 2014, the Israeli military operation codenamed Operation Protective Edge was launched in the Gaza Strip. The hashtag #GazaUnderAttack was used on Twitter by residents and citizen journalists in Gaza to share their sentiments and provide real-time updates about the war.

#GazaUnderAttack was created in response to the dominant Israeli narrative in Western media and the #IsraelUnderAttack hashtag feed which asserted an Israeli-centric perspective on events (Saleem; Social Studio 44). Pro-Palestinian activists participated in the Twitter discourse about Operation Protective Edge via #GazaUnderAttack with less editorial censorship and without pro-Israeli political filtering. During Operation Protective Edge, the symbolic success of #GazaUnderAttack was measured by the amount of tweets containing the hashtag in comparison to its counterpart #IsraelUnderFire. In the hegemonic struggle to represent and mediate the war, #GazaUnderAttack was deemed as the ‘winning hashtag’ because it was used 4.1 million times whereas #IsraelUnderFire was only mentioned 47000 times (Dabour).

Methodology

Eugenia Siapera studied the dialectical relationship between social media and Palestinian politics by focusing on the produsage of tweets containing the hashtag #Palestine between 15 and 20 March 2011. She performed content analysis on 7557 tweets to uncover the topics and themes of the tweets in #Palestine and the meanings and associations circulated and attached it as a means of understanding the mediation of Palestine (545). Mediation is the “uneven dialectical process whereby media of communication are involved in the production and circulation of symbols in social and political life” (cited Silverstone in Siapera 540). Siapera identified nine thematic

categories of #Palestine tweets - news, activist, solidarity, Arab Spring, personal, Israel-related, topical, advertisement and anti-Palestinian – which led to a subjective, positioned co-construction of an affective Palestine (Siapera 545, 552).

To expand on Siapera's study on the mediation and representation of Palestine via Twitter a total sample of 200 tweets posted on 9 July 2014 were collected from the respective hashtag feeds of the competing discourses of #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire during Operation Protective Edge. OPE began on 8 July 2014 but the sample selected for the analysis were tweets from 9 July 2014 to allow the time difference between Palestine and the rest of the world to be taken into account when reading the hashtag feed. Qualitative content analysis was performed to identify the prevalent themes and interpretive packages within the tweets posted at the beginning of Operation Protective Edge (OPE). By coding the tweets according to frames or themes and identifying key co-occurring terms and phrases the main frames and interpretive packages of the #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire discourses were identified.

The purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate how tweets using #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire contributed to the choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis on Twitter. The Twitter discourse of #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire facilitated the construction of the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli collective identities and the formation of pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli imagined communities through the expression of solidarity and the participatory nature of hashtag activism.

Content Analysis of #GazaUnderAttack

The phrase 'Gaza Under Attack' implies the victimhood of the Palestinian people and indicates the employment of Palestinian victimisation discourse in #GazaUnderAttack tweets. The discourse of victimisation is the nexus in the various thematic categories of tweets used to raise awareness

about the Palestinian struggle against Zionism that is instrumental in the choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinians. Various thematic categories of tweets were identified in the sample of 100 #GazaUnderAttack tweets posted on 9 July 2014: (1) news tweets, or tweets that convey updates and new information about OPE, (2) solidarity tweets, tweets that may or may not offer new information but which convey support for the Palestinian cause by sharing content that create an emotional response, (3) personal tweets, which contain self-expression and/or involve personal exchanges or interaction between users and (4) pro-Israeli tweets, because supporters of Israel hijacked the pro-Palestinian conversation by appropriating the hashtag. The most prevalent interpretive packages in the #GazaUnderAttack discourse on 9 July were humanity-barbarity, oppressed-oppressor, children-military, ally-enemy, objective-biased. Each interpretive package highlighted the collective victimisation of the Palestinian people by their common enemy - Israel and its allies. #GazaUnderAttack tweets in the sample were predominantly written in English but other languages were also found within the tweets, such as Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Turkish, French, Japanese and Bahasa Indonesia/Malaysia.

Fig. 29. The #GazaUnderAttack thread had an international appeal due to the use of a wide variety of languages in pro-Palestinian tweets.

Tweets from the #IsraelUnderFire sample operated similarly to tweets posted under #GazaUnderAttack. This may be due to fact that the former hashtag and its discourse is a response to the latter. The sample of 100 pro-Israel tweets from #IsraelUnderFire were categorised as: (1) news tweets, or posts which contained updates about Palestinian or Hamas-related violence and its effect on Israel and its citizens, and (2) solidarity tweets, the expression of support for Israel by giving moral support and condemning Hamas and Islamic terrorism targeting of civilians.

Other tweets were categorised as (3) personal tweets, were tweets of self-expression and personal exchanges or interaction between users and finally, and (4) pro-Palestinian tweets, as Palestinians or pro-Palestinians appropriated the hashtag to challenge the pro-Israel discourse in #IsraelUnderFire. The interpretive packages within #IsraelUnderFire were victim-aggressor and civilian-military. emphasised on victimisation of Israelis by their enemy – Hamas. All of the tweets found under #IsraelUnderFire on 9 July 2014 were written in English. The primary use of the English language addresses the Western and/or English-speaking audience and reflects the use of the pro-Israeli narrative on Twitter to mobilise the aforementioned audience.

#GazaUnderAttack

#GazaUnderAttack is an on-going grassroots hashtag campaign that began on Twitter in 2011. #GazaUnderAttack was first tweeted on 8 April 2011 by two Twitter users. @PaakinamSaadni and @Miguelulucho mentioned the hashtag in their tweets about Israeli airstrikes and the IDF's announcement of 'Operation Scorching Summer'. Since then, #GazaUnderAttack has been used by pro-Palestinians to produce, co-create and categorise content regarding Israeli military violence in the Gaza Strip whenever the need arises, but especially during Israeli military incursions in the Palestinian territory.

Fig. 30. The first tweets incorporating #GazaUnderAttack reveal that it was a grassroots initiative by pro-Palestinians from various parts of the world.

Twitter users participated in the discussion by prefixing a message to the #GazaUnderAttack hashtag which enabled other users to discover relevant posts. Palestinians and pro-Palestinians have taken advantage of hashtag activism and folksonomy to highlight and raise awareness about Israeli military violence and the majority of its victims who comprise of children and civilians. Moreover, the reverse-chronological order in which tweets are displayed helps members of the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian counterpublic sphere, such as digital activists and journalists, to use their collective intelligence to participate in the collective act of disseminating the latest news and information. The grassroots hashtag campaign of #GazaUnderAttack mobilises Twitter users based on their interests, beliefs and experiences as Palestinians and pro-Palestinians. #GazaUnderAttack is also a centralised 'space' that enables Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to 'assemble' based on their identification and their expression of each other's beliefs regarding the victimhood of the Palestinians and their rights as people. Moreover, the participatory process of producing #GazaUnderAttack forms the pro-Palestinian imagined community.

Hence, hashtags such as #GazaUnderAttack and #Gaza demonstrate Twitter affords hashtag activism, which supports the Palestinian resistance and relevant social movements. The use of hashtags by Palestinian and pro-Palestinian activists aid them in the choreography of assembly of supporters and the formation of their imagined community by creating emotional condensation and constructing the pro-Palestinian collective identity. Both emotional condensation and collective identity are important aspects in the coordination of protests and cultivation of solidarity and its expression between pro-Palestinians from different countries.

News tweets

Twitter plays a vital role in news and information dissemination, particularly in socio-political contexts or conditions that restrict the production or access of news in mainstream traditional media (Pappacharissi and Oliviera 4). #GazaUnderAttack tweets exemplifies how folksonomy functions in the produsage of news and updates during Operation Protective Edge and how the use of collective intelligence and the collaborative nature of hashtag activism helps to construct the pro-Palestinian collective identity among Palestinians and supporters of their struggle and resistance against the Zionism and the Israeli occupation.

During Operation Protective Edge in 2014, a 16-year-old resident of Gaza named Farah Baker (@Farah_Gazan) proclaimed herself to be 'Gaza's Anne Frank'. Anne Frank was a young German-born Jewish girl who wrote about her experience as a victim of the Holocaust in the 1930s. Instead of documenting her daily life in a diary like Frank, Baker tweets about it. She live-tweeted her experience during Operation Protective Edge by posting messages, pictures, video footages and soundbytes while using hashtags such as #Gaza and #GazaUnderAttack hashtag. Baker first tweeted about the war on 9 July 2014 by incorporating the hashtag #Gaza. On 10 July 2014, Baker began using #GazaUnderAttack more often in her tweets. She gained more than 100,000 Twitter followers who subscribed to her updates about the

war. One of her tweets, “This is in my area. I can't stop crying. I might die tonight #Gaza #GazaUnderAttack #ICC4Israel #AJAGAZA” was retweeted more than 15000 times during the war.

Although Baker did not contribute to #GazaUnderAttack on 9 July 2014 she illustrates the role of #GazaUnderAttack in the produsage of tweets, especially news tweets, about Gaza during OPE. Baker was referred to as the ‘sudden Gaza spokesgirl’ who generated international attention towards the war on Twitter and whose #GazaUnderAttack tweets received a high amount of retweets (Khan). Baker’s account also demonstrates the various categories of tweets found within the #GazaUnderAttack hashtag feed, such as news tweets, solidarity tweets and personal tweets. The substantial increase in Baker’s Twitter followers during OPE reveals there was significant interest in the Palestinian narrative or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict among Twitter users during Operation Protective Edge.

The rise in interest and awareness can be attributed to the gradual increase in BDS support from around the world, especially in the West (Hitchcock 9). It may also be due to the mistrust towards Western mainstream media among pro-Palestinians who claim Western news outlets lack impartiality. Twitter users, especially pro-Palestinians, no longer have to rely solely upon news organisations but can obtain information directly from hashtag feeds such as #GazaUnderAttack and the Twitter accounts of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian activists and citizen journalists like Farah Baker and other pro-Palestinians who contribute to the Palestinian resistance via the pro-Palestinian discourse on Twitter.

Fig. 31. Tweets by Farah Baker during OPE which incorporated #GazaUnderAttack

Citizen journalists and pro-Palestinian activists tweeted and retweeted real-time news and updates to provide insight into the experiences of Gaza residents at a specific moment. News tweets often resembled headlines or updates such as “#BREAKING: New consecutive airstrikes on #Rafah. #GazaUnderAttack”, “@A huge explosions rocks north west of #Gaza now.. #GazaUnderAttack Ya allaaaaaaah” (Elwadia), “Earlier today in Gaza.... From an Israeli airstrikes. #GazaUnderAttack #PrayForGaza #Palestine” (Sarsour) and “The "Israeli" naval shelling is close to the #Gaza seaport now. I think it's a little bit to our north? #GazaUnderAttack”.

Fig. 32. The immediacy and ubiquity of news tweets used phrases like 'Breaking', 'Gaza now' or 'Earlier today in Gaza' created a live and immersive experience for the #GazaUnderAttack thread.

The act of posting and reading the latest updates synchronously with other users leads to the formation of an imagined community as they are collectively and simultaneously participating in the discourse of #GazaUnderAttack and the Palestinian resistance in solidarity with the residents of Gaza. News tweets also contributed to the construction of the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities by providing information that amplify aspects of the victims' identities or details of the war to create emotional tension, such as anger towards Israel for violating the human rights of Gazans or feeling sympathy towards the civilians in Gaza. For example, the

story about six-year-old Kenan Hamad being the only survivor of the war in his family was shared via #GazaUnderAttack to highlight his identity as a young victim of war. As an injustice symbol, Hamad mobilised and Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities by rallying Palestinians who can relate to Hamad's story and mobilising Twitter users based on their beliefs about the rights of all children to safety and protection.

Fig. 33. News tweets about injustice symbols such as Kenan Hamad contributed to the construction of the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities.

Solidarity Tweets

Pro-Palestinian Twitter users who participated in the #GazaUnderAttack discourse as an expression of solidarity are an imagined community because they are responding to the military operation in Gaza which lasted for 51 days. Several of solidarity tweets within #GazaUnderAttack contained other hashtags that convey moral support, such as #PrayForGaza, #PrayForPalestine or #FreePalestine. Solidarity tweets that incorporated #GazaUnderAttack displayed protest against the Israeli government and its Zionist practices. Pro-Palestinian Twitter users expressed their solidarity with Gaza and Palestine in various languages and called for the end of Israeli occupation and violence, condemned Israel and Zionism, raised awareness about the Israeli military's brutality toward Palestinians and gave moral support

to Palestinians by sending a message of prayer or asking others to say a prayer for Gaza or Palestine.

Fig. 34. Solidarity tweets in #GazaUnderAttack were posted in various languages, which reflects the international nature of the pro-Palestinian imagined community.

Solidarity tweets also contained phrases such as “Victory to Palestine” or which provided moral support by implying Palestinians will be victorious in their struggle against Zionism. For instance, @qazizaid89 tweeted, “50 homes destroyed, 1700 damaged by Israel. So many beautiful dreams shattered Monsters have no shame Victory to Palestine #GazaUnderAttack”. .

Fig. 35. Statements such as “Victory to Palestine” in solidarity tweets provided moral support for the Palestinian people, which not only created emotional condensation to mobilise pro-Palestinian supporters but also helped Twitter users to form a pro-Palestinian collective identity.

Solidarity tweets aided in the construction of the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities. Through #GazaUnderAttack citizens of Gaza were able to share their experiences and be heard by other Palestinians and the rest of the world who are on the Twittersphere. They helped Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to identify with each other through the expression of sentiments that reflect the similarity of their beliefs regarding the war or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, unless the hashtag is being appropriated the act of using #GazaUnderAttack is also a statement and an expression of solidarity because it affirms the idea that Gaza and its citizens are victims of Israeli violence and oppression.

Personal Tweets

Personal tweets found within #GazaUnderAttack contained self-expressions by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians regarding the brutality of Israeli military violence during OPE. They were emotion-driven and cathartic in nature, which strengthened the discourse of victimisation and provided emotional condensation for the mobilisation of pro-Palestinians. For example, a pro-Palestinian Twitter user retweeted a post by Gazan doctor @belalmd12 who tweeted about a patient he attended to: "@Belalmd12:Mints ago he was sleeping, then Israel bombed the area He's 2 stunned to cry or complain #GazaUnderAttack". Personal tweets consisted of personalised accounts and updates about the war and how the Israeli military operation has negatively affected them and/or the residents of Gaza emotionally, psychologically and physically. The personal tweet's ability to generate response and mobilise support is reflected in how other Twitter users interact with the tweet through retweeting, 'favouriting' and replying to it.

Fig. 36. A resident of Gaza expressed her fear in a personal tweet which mobilised and generated response in the form of retweets, likes (formerly known as the ‘favourite’ button”) and replies.

Fig. 37. Personal accounts shared by Gazans such as @belalmd12 helped to mobilised pro-Palestinian support by providing an insight into the daily lives of Gazans during OPE.

Pro-Palestinians also shared their sentiments and frustration regarding the oppression and victimisation of Gazans through tweets like, “My heart is constantly breaking for Palestine, when will this madness stop? #FreePalestine #GazaUnderAttack” (Inayaa) which included a screenshot of a poem written by a Gazan that was taken from another social media platform called Tumblr. The self-reflexive content of personal tweets written by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians demonstrate Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities that are based on the shared experience of grief, anger, frustration and sadness expressed through #GazaUnderAttack during Operation Protective Edge.

Fig. 38. The emotional rhetoric of personal tweets constructed a pro-Palestinian collective identity based on shared feelings and beliefs about the victimisation of Palestinians.

Personal tweets from the #GazaUnderAttack hashtag feed were also attempts by pro-Palestinians to engage or interact with other Twitter users, particularly pro-Israelis. The ability to challenge a pro-Israeli or draw their attention towards the suffering of Gazans is an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people performed through the use of hashtags and hashtag activism.

Pro-Israel Tweets

As a feature that can be taken advantaged by various types of social actors, the hashtag is often appropriated or ‘hijacked’. Critics or opponents of those who launched a hashtag campaign do so in the attempt to derail the Twitter conversation. #GazaUnderAttack was originally launched and used by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to highlight the victimisation of Gazans during Operation Protective Edge but Israelis and pro-Israelis appropriated it to challenge the pro-Palestinian portrayal of Israel. For example, @YitzchakGross tweeted “#GazaUnderAttack #PrayForGaza can anybody explain to me what this is? “Be human shields”. An image depicting bombs falling on people standing on top of buildings and the words ‘Be human shields’ written in Arabic is attached @YitzchakGross’ tweet.

The dominant message of the image requires contextual and intertextual information regarding Israeli rhetoric that Gazans are told to be ‘human shields’ by Hamas during war, which is ironically an act the IDF is accused of doing as well in pro-Palestinian discourse (Al Jazeera, ‘Gaza: Human Shields’; Badawi). The antinomical ‘human shield’ rhetoric frames the victimisation of Gazans as the responsibility of Hamas because it suggests they encourage residents of Gazan to not leave their homes despite receiving a warning from the IDF an impending bomb in their area or Hamas deliberately puts civilians in danger by choosing to use homes, schools and mosques for military-operational purposes (Breaking the Set; Gordon and Perugini 174). The human shield rhetoric on social media is prevalent in pro-Israeli discourse because,

Social media is increasingly playing a determinant role in shaping not only the visual perception of the battlefield, but even more importantly the legal and moral gaze on the battlefield. The way in which the perception of the battlefield is framed helps determine whether the violence deployed by the different actors is legitimate or illegitimate. (Gordon and Perugini 175)

Fig. 39. The use of the human shield rhetoric in pro-Israel tweets framed the victimisation of Gaza civilians as Hamas' responsibility.

By appropriating #GazaUnderAttack, pro-Israelis disrupted the pro-Palestinian discourse and hegemonic struggle to have control over representation of Operation Protective Edge took place. Pro-Israel tweets that incorporated #GazaUnderAttack provided an explanation or justification to Israeli violence that is excluded in the pro-Palestinian discourse. For instance, @i_am_cookie lady posted, "If #IsraelUnderFire then #GazaUnderAttack. Stop the rockets, stop the assault. You choose. We aren't." [sic]. Thus, the Israeli discourse shifts the blame towards Gazans, or more specifically its governing authority, Hamas and its military branch.

Fig. 40. Pro-Israel tweets in #GazaUnderAttack held Palestinians and Hamas responsible for Israeli military incursions such as Operation Protective Edge.

News tweets, solidarity tweets, personal tweets and pro-Israel tweets shaped the Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack and enabled various social actors to produce content that mobilised pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli Twitter users to show their support for the respective sides. Interpretive packages played a crucial role in the mediatization and interpretation of the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack.

Interpretive Packages in #GazaUnderAttack

Unlike in traditional media, the news and content on Twitter are generated and produced by its users. In the case of #GazaUnderAttack, the hashtag is part of a grassroots campaign by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to represent and highlight the victimisation of Gazans during the IDF's military operation. Various Palestinian and pro-Palestinian social actors have produced content and contributed to the interpretive packages in the issue culture of Israel. These interpretive packages can be seen in #GazaUnderAttack as they are used in the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian discourse to discuss news and issues regarding Israel-related events. Interpretive packages in #GazaUnderAttack construct the image of Palestinians as the victim and the oppressed and Israel as the aggressor and the oppressor.

Humanity-Barbarity Interpretive Package

The humanity-barbarity interpretive package highlighted the victimhood of Gazans by universalising the plight of the Palestinians. The humanity-barbarity package portrayed the Palestinian cause as a human rights issue rather than a religious or ethnic issue between Muslims and Jewish Israelis or Arabs and Jewish Israelis. Solidarity tweets that contain expression of support for Palestine employed the humanity-barbarity package to invoke emotional response by highlighting the victimisation of Palestinians as one that involves the violation of human rights. For example, @moh7med93's tweeted, "You don't have to be a Muslim to be care about the attacks in Palestine you just have to

be human #GazaUnderAttack”. His tweet demonstrated the use of human rights discourse to depict the state of Israel and its military forces as violators of Palestinian human rights by exposing the crimes committed against the innocent civilians of Gaza. An image is attached to the tweet and it depicts an Arab or Palestinian man being consoled by two other men as he appeared to anguish and cry over a dead child that is presumably his son or daughter.

The image implies the child was a victim of Israeli military attacks in Gaza during Operation Protective Edge and supports the human rights discourse in the tweet by providing visual proof of the violation of children’s rights. Moreover, the representation of the Palestinian father universalises the Palestinian issue and it strengthens the possibility of fathers and parents from around the world being able to relate to the Palestinian man’s role as a father and the sadness that arises from the loss of a child. The image also affirms the idea of Israel as the barbaric rival of the Palestinians because its military attacks have led to the deaths of children, which is not only a violation of children’s rights but also a form of war crime as intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population is prohibited (International Criminal Court).

SSULEIMANI @mo7med93 · 9 Jul 2014
 You don't have to be a Muslim to care about The attacks in Palestine you just have to be human #GazaUnderAttack

8 3

Fig. 41. @mo7med93's tweet demonstrates of the use of the humanity-barbarity interpretive package in solidarity tweets within the #GazaUnderAttack.

The humanity-barbarity interpretive package in solidarity tweets also revealed Palestinians and pro-Palestinians employed Holocaust discourse to depict the oppression of the Palestinians as an example of the violation of human rights of a group of people based on their race and nationality. The appropriation of the Holocaust discourse by pro-Palestinians evoke a universal sense of collective responsibility by juxtaposing the widely known event of the persecution of Jewish people from 1933 to 1945 in Germany with the oppression and victimisation of Palestinians in Gaza during the IDF military operation in the strip in 2014. @AbuBakr_LFC tweeted, "When ppl talk about the holocaust, humanity turns up. Where is your humanity now. #GazaHolocaust #GazaUnderAttack #FreePalestine". The Holocaust discourse provokes the reader to question why the Holocaust is considered as a violation of human rights but not the bombing of unarmed, defenseless civilians in Gaza. The tweet is also an expression of solidarity because it

raises the issue of human rights by asking why the bombing of Gaza does not generate the same level of response from ‘humanity’ or the global community.

Fig. 42. @AbuBakr_LFC's tweet displays support for Palestine by juxtaposing the Holocaust with the Israeli military operation in Gaza to question the bias towards victims of the Holocaust.

In another tweet utilising the Holocaust discourse, images representing a live update from Gaza city were embedded in the tweet to portray the chaos that ensued after the IDF military operation in the city commenced.

@Falasteen_ posted the news tweet: "Gaza tonight. #gaza #GazaUnderAttack #GazaUnderFire #GazaHolocaust #GazaLive" along with the aforementioned images. Several Gaza-related hashtags were incorporated into the tweet to assert the Palestinian city and its residents as victims of a barbaric crime that is comparable to the Holocaust. The use of phrases 'Gaza tonight' and the hashtag #GazaLive in the tweet is an example of the conflation of time and space via Twitter, which draws in the reader and encourages them to take action or express their solidarity on Twitter. Furthermore, the image of an object or building on fire in Gaza correlates with the #GazaUnderFire hashtag within the tweet which responds to the discourse of the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag.

Fig. 43. Phrases and hashtags such as “Gaza tonight” and #GazaLive in news tweets created a sense of liveness and immediacy.

The hashtag #GazaHolocaust highlighted the irony of the conflict because the violators of Palestinian human rights belong to the same category of the victims of the Jewish Holocaust. Hence, the appeal to human rights principle is a key component of the humanity-barbarity interpretive package, which enables the reader to interpret Operation Protective Edge as a form of oppression on Palestinians by comparing two separate events and people, the Jewish Holocaust and the military operation in Gaza, with each other.

Oppressed-Oppressor Interpretive Package

The focus on the oppression of the Palestinian people is an important element of the Palestinian victimisation discourse. In #GazaUnderAttack, the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package was used to amplify the status of Palestinians as victims of Israeli settler-colonialism and domination by highlighting the imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine. The Israeli government and its military defense forces are referred to as ‘terrorists’ Palestinians are often described as terrorists by the Israeli government and the IDF. The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package incorporates terms such as ‘terrorist’ to describe Israelis or IDF soldiers to imply Palestinian civilians are victims of politically and ideologically-driven violence. However, in

pro-Israeli discourse the word 'terrorist' is often directed towards Hamas members and Palestinians.

In the oppressed-oppressor package found in #GazaUnderAttack tweets containing pro-Palestinian discourse the rhetoric of terrorism often used by Israel and its Western counterparts, was set against Israel by describing Israel, Israelis and the Israeli Defense Forces as terrorists. In one particular news tweet, the IDF is referred to as 'Israeli Occupation Forces' and 'Zionist terrorists': "Israeli Occupation Forces target a home in Beit Hanoun, northern #Gaza Another family wiped out by the zionist terrorists. #GazaUnderAttack". By employing the rhetoric of terrorism in this news tweet, Palestinians were portrayed as the oppressed victims of the Israeli occupation and the violence motivated by the political ideology of Revisionist Zionism. Moreover, the terrorism rhetoric in new tweets allowed pro-Palestinians to take advantage of the symbolic condensation of the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' established in the Orientalist and clash of civilisations discourse and apply it on their oppressors, "the zionist terrorists". Thus, framing Israel and Zionism as perpetrators of violence that endanger civilians and mobilising support for Palestine among those who condemn terrorism.

Fig. 44. News tweets employed the terrorism rhetoric and oppressed-oppressor interpretive package to rally support among Twitter users who condemned terrorism.

Fig. 45. Solidarity tweets used the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package to depict Gaza as the victim and Israel as the antagonist in Operation Protective Edge.

The oppressed-oppressor discourse of victimisation highlighted the asymmetrical relationship and imbalance of military power between Israel and Palestine. Solidarity tweets employed the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package to identify which side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict deserves support. For example, @alsweileh tweeted “If You Think #IsraelUnderFire Think Again! #GazaUnderAttack #Palestine #Israel” with an image attached which bore the words “Palestinians have no aviation. Palestinians have no navy. Palestinians have no army. This is no war in Gaza. This is a genocide”. Alsweileh also appropriated the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag in his tweet to mock Israel’s argument that they are constantly threatened by Palestinian violence.

Fig. 46. The oppressed-oppressor interpretive package in solidarity tweets played a key role in highlighting the asymmetrical relationship and imbalance of military power between Israel and Palestine.

Visual images played an important role in strengthening the pro-Palestinian argument regarding the Israeli government's oppression of the Palestinian people by portraying or signalling the impact of the IDF's airstrikes on children and civilians in Gaza. Palestinian citizen journalists and pro-Palestinian activists posted pictures taken during Operation Protective Edge, infographics and political cartoons and memes via #GazaUnderAttack to evoke emotional response, elicit sympathy and appeal to the principles of human rights. Having said that, the credibility of the pro-Palestinian #GazaUnderAttack discourse during OPE was affected by the circulation of pictures from previous military operations in Gaza or other wars in Arab countries, such as the Syrian civil war (Terry).

In previous years, the erroneous photos and manipulation of images by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians, such as the Al Qassam Brigades, led to what is deemed as 'digital suspicion', "a mode of suspicion directed against the digital image and archive as such, articulated most prominently on social media, often in the language of amateur digital forensics (in charges of digital doctoring, Photoshop manipulation, and so on)" (Kuntsman and Stein 58). Suspicion towards images shared by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians

undermined the devastating aftermath of OPE in Gaza. Nonetheless, the dissemination of real and fabricated photos reflects the significance of visual evidence and emotional rhetoric in the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package in the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack.

In traditional media, interpretive packages were used in news broadcasts and news articles to help news audience understand the issues that are being reported. As a form of new media and news medium, Twitter has enabled various pro-Palestinian social actors, such as Palestinian citizen journalists, to produce content and interpretive packages in new media. Interpretive packages were found in different types of #GazaUnderAttack tweets, which reveals their flexibility and applicability across types of tweets. William Gamson and Andre Modigliani's argument that interpretive packages "have the task of constructing meaning over time, incorporating new events into their interpretive frames help Twitter users to understand and participate in the Palestinian narrative and produce Palestinian and pro-Palestinian tweets in a coherent manner by using the same frames, themes and condensational symbols.

#IsraelUnderFire

The aim to highlight and emphasise on the victimisation of Israel and provide moral and legal justification for Operation Protective Edge in Gaza led to the development of an online campaign named '#IsraelUnderFire' by the Interdisciplinary Centre of Herzliya in Israel also known as IDC Herzliya. Yarden Ben Yusef, IDC University's student union president and Lidor Bar David, its head of public relations and former chief-of-staff of the IDF Spokesperson unit, mobilised a team of 400 volunteers in one of IDC's computer labs referred to as the 'Hasbara War Room' (Gravé-Lazi).

The volunteers were trained and then deployed to post pro-Israeli content on social media during Operation Protective Edge ('Social Media: Israel's Newest Weapon Against Hamas'). The team mainly comprised of

university students who created websites and social media accounts and disseminated social media content such as blog posts, tweets, Facebook posts and comments, infographics and videos in nineteen languages to influence public opinion during Operation Protective Edge.

Although the Hasbara War Room volunteers at IDC Herzliya helped to create the #IsraelUnderFire campaign and launch it via social media they were not the first to use #IsraelUnderFire on Twitter. On 25 March 2011, the hashtag was first announced by the official Twitter account of The Jewish Agency, the largest Jewish non-profit organisation in the world that was central to the founding and building of the nation of Israel (Jewish Virtual Library). @JewishAgency tweeted, “Pls use #IsraelUnderFire 4 tweets referring to rockets & other unfortunate things happening”. From that day onwards, #IsraelUnderFire became a hashtag that was used to raise awareness about the barrage of rocket attacks and other Hamas or Palestinian-related violence Israelis face on a frequent basis.

Fig. 47. The Jewish Agency initiated the use of #IsraelUnderFire on Twitter in 2011.

In August 2011, the IDF's official Twitter account, @IDFSpokesperson, began using the hashtag #IsraelUnderFire in their alerts and updates about 'terror attacks' in Israel. The IDF's incorporation of social media and hashtags like #IsraelUnderFire is a form of digital militarism which helped to normalise the presence of IDF, a military unit, on a social media platform. Even though the IDF was not directly involved in IDC Herzliya's #IsraelUnderFire online campaign in 2014, the campaign obtained the service of Lidor Bar David who was a former captain of the IDF Spokesperson unit.

The IDC Herzliya-led #IsraelUnderFire online campaign during Operation Protective Edge turned the hashtag into a key element in a global initiative to promote the idea that Israel has the right to defend itself to an international audience. David explained the campaign's goal was "to deliver a very clear message to people abroad — Israel has the right to defend itself" (Mackey). Evidently, the #IsraelUnderFire campaign is an extension of Israel's military efforts to defend the country against Hamas-related violence.

Fig. 48. Search results of the use of #IsraelUnderFire by the official account of IDF Spokesperson revealed the hashtag was posted by the IDF in August 2011.

Various types of tweets were identified in the pro-Israeli discourse of #IsraelUnderFire which framed the Israeli representation of Operation Protective Edge and Israel's struggle against Hamas. Each tweet category enabled different groups of Israeli and pro-Israeli social actors to contribute to

the #IsraelUnderFire feed, hence mobilising various members of the Twittersphere and Israeli and pro-Israeli community and bringing them together under one collective effort represented by the hashtag.

Personal tweets

In the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag feed, personal tweets included tweets posted by Israeli citizens who shared sentiments about their experience while living under the fear of imminent Hamas rocket attacks in their cities during OPE. Similar to personal tweets within #GazaUnderAttack, personal tweets in #IsraelUnderFire contained personal accounts self-expression that is cathartic in nature. Personal tweets play an important role in the choreography of assembly of Israeli and pro-Israeli users on Twitter because personal experiences provide insight into the lives of 'ordinary' Israelis, which makes the Israeli community more accessible and relatable. The disclosure of details related to the daily lives of Israelis during the war adds to the emotional condensation created by other tweets found within #IsraelUnderFire and increases emotional connection between Israelis and pro-Israelis.

Personal tweets mobilised pro-Israeli supporters among Israelis and non-Israelis who empathise with Israeli citizens because the tweets affirm Israel's status as a victim with the right to self-defense. For example, Israeli citizen @hannaheisner tweeted, "#ItMustStop. I am currently lying in bed, unable to sleep because I am terrified. I just heard rockets nearby. #IsraelUnderFire". The tweet describes her sleeplessness at that moment because the rockets she heard nearby led her to feel fearful. @hannaheisner's tweet includes a cathartic narrative of her personal account of that particular night, which draws other Israeli Twitter users and enables them to construct their collective identity based on shared experiences and beliefs about Israel's victimisation.

Fig. 49. Personal tweets raised awareness about the struggles and fear experienced by Israeli citizens, which contributed to the emotional condensation required in the construction of a pro-Israeli collective identity and the mobilisation of pro-Israel support.

Personal narratives by Israeli citizens added a humanising element to the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag thread and the Israeli community that is often demonised by pro-Palestinian media. Furthermore, personal tweets not only created social cohesion and solidarity between Israelis but also gave the impression that #IsraelUnderFire is a grassroots campaign instead of an organised effort spearheaded by IDC Herzliya, a former IDF captain and a group volunteer of students from a computer room in IDC Herzliya.

News Tweets

The produsage of #IsraelUnderFire news tweets during Operation Protective Edge was a collaborative effort to construct a pro-Israeli narrative challenged the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack. Pro-Israel news tweets were posted by Israeli citizens and pro-Israel Twitter users who harnessed their collective intelligence to share the latest updates and information. The constant stream of news updates on Twitter generated an immersive experience, especially for those who do not live in Israel as it creates the perception of presence. #IsraelUnderFire contributed to this immersive experience by facilitating the produsage and discovery of real-time updates which appeared reverse-chronologically.

Fig. 50. Real-time updates by Israelis and pro-Israelis were a collaborative effort to produce and follow news about Israel via #IsraelUnderFire.

News tweets in #IsraelUnderFire were not only produced by Israeli citizens but also news organisations. As part of their goal to add value, credibility and meaning to their content, traditional media have used their social media presence to take advantage of Web 2.0 features such as interactivity, multimediality and hypertextuality (Chung, Nam and Stefanone 175). Tweets by news organisations contributed to the pro-Israeli discourse by providing salient and time-sensitive credible content to Israelis and pro-Israelis who subscribed to news about Israel as the conflict unfolded and was shared through the trending hashtag of #IsraelUnderFire. For example, @NYJewishWeek, a New York-based independent Jewish community newspaper tweeted, “People are afraid to come out –[it’s risking] the safety of their children’ #israelunderfire”.

J W **The Jewish Week** @NYJewishWeek · 9 Jul 2014
M G "People are afraid to come out-[it's risking] the safety of their children"
 #israelunderfire
bit.ly/1kB4aGv

← ↻ 8 ❤ 1 ...

Fig. 51. News tweets provided up-to-date information and highlighted sensational aspects of the conflict, which created emotional condensation, resonance and solidarity among Israelis and pro-Israelis.

@NYJewishWeek's tweet included a hyperlink to a news article and an embedded photo of paramedics in Israel looking horrified and running in panic through a crowd while carrying an injured man on a stretcher. The photo intensified the message of the tweet by creating a sense of liveness and immediacy through featuring the chaos experienced by Israeli citizens during OPE. Liveness is an important feature that generates a feeling expectancy among Twitter users, which facilitates emotional condensation. Thus, such tweets heightened Israeli's status as a victim of Palestinian violence and compelled pro-Israelis to display their solidarity with the country. Moreover, the attached photo of the unsettling scene conveyed a compelling message about Israel's status as a victim with the right to self-defense, which galvanises pro-Israeli solidarity and a pro-Israel collective identity among Israelis and supporters of Israel alike.

At the same time, the Zionism relies on the notion and belief that Jewish Israelis are collectively discriminated and victimised against. The Zionist ideology is strengthened by news tweets that amplify facts and

information highlighting the fear and anxiety Israeli citizens experience on a frequent basis due to Hamas' rocket attacks. News tweets provided the content to justify the IDF's military incursion in Gaza as a means of self-defense and the emotional condensation to motivate the expression of support and sympathy through solidarity tweets.

Solidarity Tweets

The expression of solidarity was an important objective and outcome of the #IsraelUnderFire campaign. One of the outcomes of the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag was that it generated a widespread display of solidarity towards Israel and its citizens. At the same time, solidarity tweets also functioned as and a personal testimonies and declarations of Israel's victimisation caused by Hamas-related violence. The pro-Israel collective identity and imagined community based on the expression of support for Israel was built through solidarity tweets. Solidarity tweets that incorporated #IsraelUnderFire were the result of a pro-Israel imagined community that was formed by the Israeli and pro-Israel Twitter community's public declaration of their support for Israel and its right to defend itself against Hamas.

For example, Twitter users expressed their support for Israel by posting, "Rockets fired in Ashdod, #Israel earlier. I was in Ashdod not too long ago..... I pray for the state of Israel. #IsraelUnderFire" and "Where ever I stand, I stand with Israel. #IsraelUnderFire" to construct an online identity that reflects their personal stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The catchphrase 'I stand with Israel' functioned as a condensational symbol that invoked patriotism among Israeli citizens and feelings of allegiance towards the Israeli cause among pro-Israelis around the world.

Fig. 52. The pro-Israel imagined community was formed through the expression of solidarity and the pro-Israel collective identity through the use of #IsraelUnderFire in their tweets.

As demonstrated by the aforementioned tweets, the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag was a means for pro-Israel Twitter users to convey moral support. Therefore, the success of the campaign was measured by the number of times it was used on Twitter, which turned out to be significantly less than the number of times #GazaUnderAttack was mentioned on Twitter during Operation Protective Edge. Nonetheless, #IsraelUnderFire facilitated a counter-narrative that was produced by Israelis and pro-Israeli Twitter users from around the world who used the hashtag to share their thoughts, sentiments and experiences. The pro-Israeli counter-narrative shaped by solidarity with the Israeli people contributed to the construction of a pro-Israeli collective identity and the effort to mobilise support for Israel and the #IsraelUnderFire campaign.

Additionally, solidarity tweets demonstrated use of the hashtag #IsraelUnderFire is in itself an expression of solidarity when the message of the tweet aligns with the pro-Israeli argument that Hamas is a threat to Israeli citizens. Thus, tweets incorporating #IsraelUnderFire can be regarded as solidarity tweets, unless the hashtag was appropriated by pro-Palestinian Twitter users who used it to gain attention from the pro-Israeli community on Twitter and deflect the discourse towards the victimisation of the Palestinians.

Pro-Palestinian tweets

As discussed earlier in regards to the appropriation of #GazaUnderAttack by Israeli and pro-Israeli Twitter users, hashtags can be hijacked by the opposition group in a particular debate or conflict. In effort to erase or minimise the victimisation of Israelis, pro-Palestinian Twitter users used the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag to capture the pro-Israeli audience or make a mockery of the hashtag by raising awareness about the victimisation of Gazans. For example, @Jayyusuf_83 displayed his nonchalant attitude towards the threat of Hamas rocket attacks by in his tweet, “I wouldn’t classify a couple hand made rockets landing in empty fields as “fire” #gazaunderfire #IsraelUnderFire”. He also included #gazaunderfire in his tweet to challenge the implicit message behind the hashtag #IsraelUnderFire, which claims Hamas is a legitimate threat to Israel.

Fig. 53. Pro-Palestinian tweets in #IsraelUnderFire minimised Israel’s victimisation.

Supporters of the Palestinian struggle against Israel and Zionism also posted information and images that challenged the pro-Israeli discourse of #IsraelUnderFire to create an emotional response in favour of Palestinians. @Elia_gor tweeted an image featuring a collage of two photos that portrayed injured children in Gaza and the text “Yesterday, Israeli warplanes launched airstrikes on the Gaza strip. This gives you a hint of whom is being target, according to the israeli law. children are terrorists, they should be bombed, burned alive, or shot in cold blood.”. In addition to the image, the hashtags #Gaza, #Palestine, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire were inserted which broadened the audience of the tweet to include those who were following the hashtag thread of #IsraelUnderFire.

Fig. 54. Pro-Palestinian tweets highlighted the violation of children's rights by the IDF.

This discussion of various types of tweets demonstrate that various social actors – both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian – were mobilised through the #IsraelUnderFire discourse for different purposes. Having said that, the discourse of #IsraelUnderFire was predominantly a pro-Israeli counter-narrative against the pro-Palestinian representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Operation Protective Edge. The numerous social actors involved in the pro-Israel discourse of the #IsraelUnderFire campaign were among those who were responsible for the production of interpretive packages that helped Israelis and pro-Israelis to understand news about the issue culture of Palestine.

Interpretive Packages in #IsraelUnderFire

Several interpretive packages identified in the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag feed contributed to the victimisation discourse of #IsraelUnderFire and strengthened the argument regarding Israel's right to self-defense. In comparison to #GazaUnderAttack, the #IsraelUnderFire campaign was not a grassroots movement. Therefore, the content and interpretive packages of the latter campaign were organised and influenced by a team of employees and

students of IDC Herzliya, which included a former IDF captain who led the Israeli military's communications unit and a group of 400 student volunteers.

Victim-Aggressor Interpretive Package

The victim-aggressor interpretive package found within #IsraelUnderFire challenged the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package in the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack. Tweets containing the victim-aggressor package depicted the victimisation of Israeli citizens without explicitly identifying who the aggressor is and only focusing on the act of violence that has made them feel victimised. By not specifically identifying the aggressor, the law of gestalt is applied when Twitter users engage with the content of the tweets. The theory of gestalt functions on the basic principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts therefore a cognitive process takes place to comprehend the whole (Gestalt Principles). Thus, Twitter users meaningfully organise information and knowledge they have been conditioned with regarding the issue culture of Palestine to 'fill in the blanks' and understand the message of the tweets.

The victim-aggressor interpretive package was identified in personal tweets posted by citizens of Israel who described their personal experiences during OPE and expressed their feelings of helplessness and fear caused by Hamas rocket attacks in Israel. For example, @LauraBenDavid posted, "Hard to sleep knowing u could be woken any time by #RedAlert & have to scramble & get kids to safe room #IsraelUnderFire". The tweet provides Twitter users an insight into her life as an Israeli mother, thus mobilising empathetic pro-Israeli supporters and creating an emotional connection between Israelis who can relate to her family's experience of going into a safe room or a bomb shelter during imminent rocket attacks.

Fig. 55. The Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identities were formed with the aid of personal tweets that added a humanised insight into the pro-Israeli narrative of #IsraelUnderFire.

The victim-aggressor interpretive package was also prevalent in personal tweets that represented interaction between Israelis with other Twitter users, especially influential figures. For instance, @rixtonakatloml attempted to draw attention towards the tense situation in Israel by mentioning a well-known British filmmaker and television producer Ben Winston in his tweet: “@benwinston we’re under fire right now Ben. I’m so scared & tired but I don’t want something to happen to me. #IsraelUnderFire #צוקאיתן”. @ritonakatloml represented himself as an Israeli citizen and is thus perceived as a primary witness and victim of the turbulent and volatile atmosphere caused by Hamas rocket attacks, which is implied in his tweet from the phrase ‘we’re under fire right now’ and his use of the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag.

Fig. 56. Personal tweets within #IsraelUnderFire functioned as personal testimonies of Israeli citizens that provide emotional condensation and persuasion, which mobilised pro-Israel support on Twitter.

The victim-aggressor interpretive package was also prevalent in news tweets posted by Israeli citizens and pro-Israelis. Real-time updates about impending rocket attacks and sirens amplify the message that Hamas is the aggressor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. @IdoDaniel tweeted, “1:24 past midnight: air raid sirens now in Beer Sheva #IsraelUnderFire”. Such tweets were consistent throughout the #IsraelUnderFire thread which added a sense

of liveness that is crucial to creating resonance and an immersive experience on Twitter.

Fig. 57. News tweets added liveness to the thread of #IsraelUnderFire.

Solidarity tweets also affirmed the idea of Israel as a victim by using the victim-aggressor interpretive package extensively. To display her support for Israel @RhoGamRach tweeted, “I can’t believe the country that I visited just one year ago is under so much attack #prayforisrael #IsraelUnderFire”. Hence, solidarity tweets underscored Israel’s victimhood through the victim-aggressor interpretive package, which aided in the construction of the pro-Israel collective identity and formation imagined community through the expression of support for Israel.

Fig. 58. Solidarity tweets in #IsraelUnderFire tweets with the victim-aggressor interpretive package strengthened the notion of Israel as a victim.

Civilian-Military Interpretive Package

The civilian-military interpretive package was useful in framing the victimisation of Israel and delivering a compelling message about Israel’s right to self-defense. The civilian-military package portrays the Israeli-Palestinian affair as a war between Israeli citizens and a military organisation and it excludes the role of the IDF in the conflict. The civilian-military interpretive package identified Hamas, or more specifically, its military branch Ezzedein Al Qassam, as the threat that unjustly victimises and directs its rocket attacks toward Israeli civilians. Various types of #IsraelUnderFire tweets incorporated the civilian-military interpretive package which aided in the creation of

emotional condensation among Israelis and pro-Israelis. Framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an asymmetrical warfare between Hamas's military unit and Israeli civilians invokes the idea that injustice has taken place, which acts as a catalyst for the mobilisation of pro-Israel support. Moreover, the civilian-military interpretive package challenges the pro-Palestinian argument that the IDF targets Palestinian children.

News tweets in the #IsraelUnderFire thread utilised the civilian-military interpretive package to create a sense of emergency and urgency regarding the issue of Hamas' rocket attacks. Jewish News, a Jewish community paper, tweeted via their account @aus_jewishnews, "Code Red warning sirens sounded throughout Israel's centre and south, and a rocket hit Jerusalem". The tweet included a political cartoon highlighting the media's bias towards Palestine by portraying Hamas' violence as more intensive than Israel's response towards them. The use of the civilian-military interpretive package in news tweets found within the #IsraelUnderFire thread created the perception that the lives of Israeli civilians are constantly affected and endangered by Hamas rocket attacks. Thus, the civilian-military interpretive package is a potent element in news tweets because it enhanced the emotional condensation among Israelis and pro-Israelis by invoking anger towards Hamas and sympathy towards Israel and citizens.

Jewish News @aus_jewishnews · 9 Jul 2014
Code Red warning sirens sounded throughout Israel's centre and south, and a rocket hit Jerusalem #IsraelUnderFire

Fig. 59. News tweets found in #IsraelUnderFire created a sense of emergency and injustice by using the civilian-military interpretive package.

Israelis and pro-Israelis utilised the civilian-military package in solidarity tweets to express the imbalance of power in the conflict involving Israeli citizens and Hamas military. The depiction of Hamas as a military organisation that aims its rocket attacks at civilians highlighted the victimhood of Israel, which enables the construction of a pro-Israel collective identity based on the condemnation of the unethical treatment of Israelis by Hamas. The pro-Israel collective identity then contributes to the galvanisation of pro-Israel supporters who display their advocacy for Israel's right to self-defense and support for the Israeli government which is trying to protect its citizens.

For example, in solidarity with Israel and the IDF @HannahBlitstein tweeted an infographic image created by the IDF along with the hashtag #IsraelUnderFire. The infographic image breaks down the difference between the IDF and Hamas in terms of their efforts to minimise harm towards civilians. The word 'nothing' is written underneath the column "What has Hamas done to minimize harm to civilians in Israel?". The pro-Israeli discourse of IDF portrays the stark difference between Hamas and the IDF, which according to the

information in the image, takes several initiatives to inform civilians in Gaza that there will be air strikes in their residential areas. Furthermore, the sentence “ Hamas’ goal is to kill Israel civilians” is clearly stated on the image which clearly emphasises on Hamas’ lack of conscientiousness and compassion towards Israeli civilians.

Fig. 60. The civilian-military interpretive package in pro-Israel solidarity tweets mobilised pro-Israel supporters on Twitter by persuading them Israel is protecting its civilians who are endangered by Hamas.

In conclusion, the produsage of tweets for the discourse of #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire mobilised various subjectivities who used Twitter to create and consume counter-narratives regarding Operation Protective Edge. The choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis included diverse actors who discussed different issues and a range of interpretive packages. Through news tweets, solidarity tweets and personal tweets, pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis created salient tweets, hegemonic frames and interpretive packages to highlight and minimise the victimisation

Palestinians and Israelis, respectively. As a result, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire formed a polarised discourse regarding OPE consisting of oscillating and opposing narratives. Furthermore, the hashtags aided in the creation of the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli imagined communities amongst disparate people who galvanised on through their identification with the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli collective identities defined by shared experiences and beliefs about the Israeli-Palestinian affair. Thus, highlighting Twitter as an ambivalent discursive space that has led to offline and online outcomes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Chapter Five: Hashtag Wars: The Offline and Online Aftermath of the Battle of Narratives Between Pro-Israelis and Pro-Palestinians

New social movements in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region have illustrated the role of social media in new forms of collective action. The democratising potential of social media in MENA was seen in the 2009 Iranian 'Green Revolution' and the 2011 'Arab Spring', which consisted of movements such as the Tunisian Revolution and the Egyptian Revolution that took place in the same year. The aforementioned civil uprisings demonstrated how authoritarian leadership and media censorship have led Iranian, Tunisian and Egyptian citizens and activists to seek alternative means of networking, sourcing news and information and displaying collective action. However, the use of technology and social media to prevent and disrupt protests and provide misleading information challenges the discourse on the democratising affordances of social media and the East-West dichotomy prevalent in pro-Israeli discourse.

Apart from acknowledging that the East-West binary is a social construct used to perpetuate the notion of a clash of civilisations, it also obfuscates the complicity of Palestinian social actors, such as the Palestinian Authority, in supporting Western intervention in Palestine. Furthermore, the political economy of Palestinian ICT reveals that the growth and use ICT infrastructure reinforces Israeli occupation as Palestinian Internet bandwidth can only be purchased from Israeli companies. This enables Israel to closely monitor and control Palestinian Internet usage and profit from it as well. Furthermore, the West is entrenched in Palestinian civil society and political life (or more specifically, the depoliticisation of Palestinian civil society) through neoliberalism and the presence of NGOs and foreign aid such as USAID and the World Bank, which creates a co-dependent relationship between the West and Palestine and does not encourage the economic independence of Palestine. Thus, I argue the use of social media by Palestinians may have some online benefits, such as online visibility, but it also complicates the struggle for Palestinian self-determination as the very technology used for the

Palestinian resistance – the Internet – economically, socially and politically strengthens Israel's domination of Palestine.

In this thesis, I have identified various discursive elements, such as types of tweets, condensational symbols and interpretive packages that shaped the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian discourses found within the hashtag feeds of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire. For example, I argue that Twitter is an ambivalent discursive space that has facilitated hashtag wars between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians by enabling a range of social actors, such as digital activists and citizen journalists, to produce content that aids in the construction of the Israeli, pro-Israeli, Palestinian and pro-Palestinian identities. Moreover, these hashtag wars have also generated tweets that mobilise diverse members of public to participate in a collaborative effort to use their collective intelligence and display their solidarity and support for their respective causes.

Paulo Gerbaudo articulated the concept of 'choreography of assembly' in response to cyber-utopic and cyber-dystopic descriptions about social media's affordances in new social movements. He defines choreography of assembly as the "process of the mediation of physical assembling" by focusing on the role of communications in 'setting the scene' for the display of collective action (21). As discussed in chapter two, Gerbaudo explains the choreography of assembly involves "symbolic condensation of people around a common identity and their 'material precipitation' in public space" and the analysis of "the spatial character of the process of mobilisation and the way in which it connects dispersed participants with specific places of gathering" (194).

The concept of choreography of assembly was useful in studying the role of Twitter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during 2014 because it demonstrated social movements are not as leaderless or spontaneous as they are often purported. The role of soft choreography and soft leadership in the #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire social media campaigns highlights Twitter as a platform that benefits both the Israeli occupation and Palestinian

resistance. Thus, challenging claims that social media platforms are democratic in nature as state or corporate interests can influence the way social media users adopt the technologies and the content they produce. Gerbaudo's concept of the choreography of assembly was also reframed to unpack the affordances of Twitter in the battle of narratives between pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis. The hashtag campaigns of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderAttack were selected as case studies and 100 tweets from each hashtag stream were analysed. Unlike the MENA movements discussed in chapter one, whereby their goal was to mobilise street protestors, both the emotional condensation and material precipitation of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian supporters and activists of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire took place on Twitter. The microblogging platform was conceptualised as an online discursive space for the assembly or gathering of digital activists. The concept of choreography of assembly was also rearticulated to deconstruct the hashtag campaigns and identify factors that contributed to 'setting the scene' of online protest and mobilising dispersed pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian digital activists to participate in the battle of narratives as imagined communities.

#BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderAttack were also analysed as separate 'movements' or campaigns with respective leaders and discourses that contained elements such as injustice symbols and interpretive packages. Using choreography of assembly as the overarching concept in the analyses of the case studies revealed the significance of discourse in the battle of narratives between pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis. In the production of 'truth', there are a set of codes, practices, institutionalised arrangements and discursive processes, known as 'truth regimes', producing knowledge and information that are accepted as the truth (Silberstein).

The 'Israeli occupation' and 'Palestinian resistance' functioned as truth regimes that produced and influenced the discourse about their respective victimhood. For instance, the term 'Palestinian resistance' is itself a discursive formation by pro-Palestinians. It implies the kind of actions and initiatives that

are regarded as useful forms of Palestinian activism and resistance and appropriate responses to Israeli occupation and Zionism. Censorship of Palestinian activism in Israel and media bias towards Israeli narratives in Western mainstream media outlets resulted in the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians.

In the battle of narratives on Twitter, the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack and the appropriation of the #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire hashtags by pro-Palestinians were the consequence of the goal to provide a counter-narrative that would challenge the pro-Israeli discourses of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire. By using the concept of choreography of assembly, the analyses of the pro-Israeli discourses of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire reveals that pro-Israeli hashtag activism is a myth because it was co-opted by the Israeli government to justify their occupation of Palestinian land. As a result, I argue that Twitter facilitated the conflation of state propaganda and pro-Israeli hashtag activism due to the pro-Israeli choreography of assembly of pro-Israeli supporters and the discourse that was heavily influenced by digital militarism.

As discussed in chapter one, Israel's military forces have played a substantial role in the defense and nation-building efforts of Israel. When the Internet and social media developed and became more popular in Israel both were employed also adopted by the Israeli government and its military branch for the same purpose – to extend the Zionist agenda. These efforts are a form of digital militarism. In the battle of narratives between pro-Israelis and pro-Palestinians on Twitter, digital militarism played a role by influencing the orchestration of social media campaigns such as #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire. In other words, the Israeli campaigns of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire were thoughtfully and carefully orchestrated to mobilise Israelis and pro-Israelis and generate content that would resembled that of a social movement's and serve the IDF's agenda, which is to justify military operations in Gaza as a form of self-defense. The orchestration of the Israeli hashtag campaigns does not mean the self-expressions by Israelis and pro-

Israelis on Twitter were not genuine but rather they were prompted or provoked to display their solidarity in a certain way, such as the use of the hashtag #BringBackOurBoys and the posting of pictures of them holding a sign with the hashtag written on it.

Gerbaudo discusses the role of soft leadership in social movements and the importance of leaders as communicators in the organisation of events and the choreography of assembly of activists and citizens. He states:

It is communication that organises, rather than organisation that communicates. As a corollary, 'communicators' also automatically become 'organisers', given the influence they can have through their communications on the unfolding of collective action. (139)

In the choreography of assembly of pro-Israelis on Twitter via the #BringBackOurBoys hashtag, the organisers of the campaign were primarily Israeli youth, and more specifically patriotic student volunteers who were trained and mentored by a group experts comprising of lecturers, former Israeli Intelligence staff and Israeli diplomats (Haifa University, 'Ambassadors Online – Our Mentors'). The successive Israeli hashtag campaign, #IsraelUnderFire, was similarly spearheaded by a group of Israeli university staff from the Interdisciplinary Centre of Herzliya which included a former chief-of-staff of the IDF Spokesperson unit and run by 400 student volunteers.

As a result, Israeli nationalistic, Zionist and military discourse were the driving force behind the social media campaigns, which shaped the way pro-Israelis communicated on Twitter and contributed to the hashtag feed about the kidnapping of Eyal Yifrah, Naftali Frenkel and Gilad Shaer and the perceived enemy, Hamas. However, to argue that the #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire campaigns had leaders or core organisers does not diminish the highly participatory nature of the campaigns or the Twitter discourse and the genuineness of the self-expression that ensued after they were launched. The #BringBackOurBoys feed was filled with pro-Israeli solidarity tweets which included images of children, women and men from

various cities around the world, particularly from the West, holding placards with the slogan #BringBackOurBoys written on them. Thus, affirming Israel's victim identity in its contentious relationship with Palestine. The #IsraelUnderFire hashtag feed also contained many pro-Israeli tweets which depicted the victimisation of Israeli citizens by exposing the imminent rocket threats faced by Israel and how they negatively impacted its citizens' daily lives.

The leaders or core organisers of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire framed the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers and the victimisation of Israeli citizens respectively, by using discursive elements such as the Holocaust victimisation discourse in which the victim position is a key structural element in how Israeli and Jewish identities are shaped. Other significant discursive elements within #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire were interpretive packages that contained condensational symbols such as injustice symbols, catchphrases and visual images that helps the audience to identify with the issue and the subjects and interpret the news and information so they can respond accordingly. The use of the same interpretive packages in the pro-Israeli discourses of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire demonstrated the role of communicators as organisers in the choreography of assembly of Israeli and pro-Israeli digital activists.

The victim-aggressor and civilian-military interpretive packages were prevalent in the pro-Israeli discourse which aimed to highlight the victimisation of Israelis through the hashtag campaigns of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire. Injustice symbols were an important element of the #BringBackOurBoys campaign. The representation of the abducted Israeli teenagers as empty signifiers was a crucial step in constructing injustice symbols. For example, the #BringBackOurBoys campaign organisers constructed the image of the three kidnapped Israeli teenagers as injustice symbols by amplifying facts certain aspects of their personal identities, especially ones with a universalising potential such as their age, gender, youthful appearance and Western/Caucasian features.

In tweets posted by the official #BringBackOurBoys Twitter account, @BringBackIL, Yifrah, Frenkel and Shaer were referred to as students and their names and ages were revealed. The focus on universal traits transformed the teenagers into injustice symbols, which increased the likelihood of global resonance of posts and updates about them. At the same time, their religious identity, which is not as universalising, was not hidden. Jewish Israelis who recognised the *kippah* (skull-cap) worn by the teenagers in the images of them that circulated on Twitter were able to acknowledge the teenagers' religious identity and posted personal tweets conveying concern for their safety. The portrayal of Yifrah, Frenkel and Shaer in posts by the #BringBackOurBoys organisers depicted them as injustice symbols, which politicised their identities and played a crucial role in constructing Israeli and pro-Israeli collective identities by facilitating a process whereby Twitter users could identify with the victims' subjectivities.

Pro-Israeli tweets in #IsraelUnderFire contained condensational symbols that responded to the pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack, which depicted the chaos that ensued IDF airstrikes during Operation Protective Edge. The organisers of #IsraelUnderFire used the hashtag to encourage Israeli citizens and pro-Israeli digital activists to produce tweets that would raise awareness about Hamas rocket attacks and other Hamas or Palestinian-related violence endured by Israeli citizens. The Israeli and pro-Israeli imagined communities were formed by the produsage such tweets. During OPE, Israelis shared visual images that represented the disruption of life caused by rocket attacks or the fear of imminent rocket attacks in Israeli cities. Additionally, pro-Israeli #IsraelUnderFire tweets highlighted the victimisation of Israelis through personal tweets containing cathartic expressions of Israeli citizens who shared their experiences with anxiety and exhaustion due to the fear of rocket attacks. Apart from visual images, the pro-Israeli discourse of #IsraelUnderFire also contained a condensational symbol in the form of the catchphrase 'I stand with Israel', which invoked patriotism among Israeli citizens and solidarity among pro-Israelis around the world.

The #BringBackOurBoys campaign organisers also discussed the kidnapping event by using interpretive packages that contributed to the youth victimisation frame. They represented the event by excluding and including certain elements or facts in attempt to influence Twitter users to understand the kidnapping event through their own discursive formations of the incident. For example, they chose not to disclose the information about Israeli government's gag order on journalists which restricted them from reporting about a leaked recording of a phone call in which the three Israeli victims were heard and then murdered (Palestine Unbound). Moreover, the similar phrasing between the #BringBackOurGirls and #BringBackOurBoys hashtags evoked an implicit comparison between the victimhood of the 276 Nigerian schoolgirls with that of the three Israeli teenage boys. The two groups of children or young individuals were not only kidnap victims but also victims of fundamentalist Islamist groups.

The victim-aggressor interpretive package that was prevalent in the pro-Israeli narratives of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire drew upon the condensational symbol of the Holocaust (*Shoah*), a historical event that symbolises and exemplifies anti-Semitism and the victim identity of Jews and Israelis. While youth victimisation was the larger frame in the pro-Israeli discourse of #BringBackOurBoys, the victim-aggressor interpretive and civilian-military packages within the discourse represented the issue of the kidnapping of the Israeli teenagers as an example of the victimisation of Jewish Israelis by Islamic terrorists or Palestinian militarists. Hence, the #BringBackOurBoys campaign laid the groundwork for pro-Israeli support during Operation Protective Edge which took place through the #IsraelUnderFire hashtag. Within the pro-Israeli discourse of #IsraelUnderFire, the victim identity of Israelis was highlighted in tweets that depicted the rocket threats and violence Israeli citizens faced during OPE. The overall victimisation discourse of #IsraelUnderFire was used by the IDF to justify the military incursion in Gaza in July 2014.

Analysing the choreography of assembly of pro-Israelis by underscoring the role of leaders or organisers in the #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire campaigns revealed that the hashtag campaigns were not social movements. BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire appeared to be social movements due to the way they sparked hashtag activism among pro-Israelis. However, they were media or public relation events that were carefully orchestrated by various Israeli state and non-state actors, including the IDF and government officials, to resemble popular social movements such as the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag campaign by Nigerian activists. Despite genuine expressions of solidarity, fear and concern by Israelis and pro-Israelis, #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire exposed the myth of hashtag activism because they revealed the role of Israeli government and IDF in orchestrating the Israeli social media campaigns. Moreover, the analysis highlighted the rising trend of digital militarism in IDF operations and Israeli public relations or propaganda.

However, the analysis also revealed the role of the battle of narratives and the oscillation of discourses in the choreography of assembly of pro-Palestinian digital activists on Twitter. The pro-Palestinian discourses of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire were efforts to provide counter-narratives and challenge the pro-Israeli victimisation discourse in Western media and on Twitter during OPE. Understanding the choreography of assembly of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian imagined communities via the Palestinian hashtag campaign of #GazaUnderAttack and their appropriation of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire revealed pro-Palestinian efforts to raise awareness about Israeli airstrikes in Gaza and the victimisation of Palestinians on a social media platform were more organic and grassroots in comparison to pro-Israeli efforts on Twitter.

At the same time, the grassroots nature of the pro-Palestinian hashtag campaigns and their appropriation of Israeli hashtags do not imply they were leaderless initiatives. Rather, the organisation of their efforts were led by a dispersed network of pro-Palestinian Twitter activists from around the world

and influential Palestinian Twitter users such as Farah Baker who used #GazaUnderAttack during OPE. Moreover, the same interpretive packages of oppressed-oppressor and civilian-military were repeated and recycled in Palestinian and pro-Palestinian discourses during OPE to raise awareness about the victimisation of Palestinians within the frames of Palestinian victimisation by the Israeli government and the IDF. In attempt to highlight the victimisation of Palestinians and make it resonate with a global audience, the pro-Palestinian narrative of #GazaUnderAttack contained condensational symbols like the Jewish Holocaust, which was represented through the use of the hashtag #GazaHolocaust, particularly in tweets that incorporated the humanity-barbarity interpretive package. The pro-Palestinian discourse of #GazaUnderAttack also consisted of the story of six year old orphan named Kenan Hamad who was portrayed as a Palestinian injustice symbol. Tweets regarding him amplified aspects of his identity, such as his age or that he was the only surviving member of his family, to create a narrative that would resonate with Palestinians and pro-Palestinians alike, based on their experiences and/or beliefs about the rights of children to safety and protection, especially during war.

Apart from the juxtaposition of Palestinian and Israeli identities in the oppressed-oppressor interpretive package, pro-Palestinian tweets of #GazaUnderAttack invoked the human rights principle through the humanity-barbarity interpretive package. Both interpretive packages enabled Operation Protective Edge to be perceived as a form of oppression on Palestinians by comparing two separate events and people, the Jewish Holocaust and the military operation in Gaza, with each other. The appropriation of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians illustrated Twitter's nature as an ambivalent platform with affordances that can be taken advantaged of by multiple social actors. Twitter's ambivalence challenges the cyber-utopic discourse regarding its democratising effect on Palestinians or the way Palestinians resist and communicate their suffering and victimisation to the rest of the world. At the

same, Twitter provided a means for Palestinians and pro-Palestinian to inhabit the enemy's hashtag feed as part of a grassroots effort to erase or minimise the victimisation of Israelis, capture the attention of pro-Israeli audience and make a mockery of the hashtags by raising awareness about the victimisation of Gazans. Analysing the choreography of assembly of Palestinians and pro-Palestinians from around the world on Twitter the content analysis the pro-Palestinian discourse of #BringBackOurBoys, #GazaUnderAttack and #IsraelUnderFire demonstrated the role of discourse in creating a stronger argument about the victimisation of Palestinians and mobilising support for the Palestinian cause. Applying the concept to the analysis of the hashtags' discourses also revealed how different types of tweets, interpretive packages and condensational symbols contributed to the construction of the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian collective identities, which enabled them to form imagined communities and respond to the pro-Israeli discourse on Twitter during OPE.

In response to the youth frame and the pro-Israeli discourse about the victimisation of Yifrah, Frenkel and Shaer, Palestinian and pro-Palestinian users galvanised and used their collective intelligence to produce tweets that created a compelling narrative about the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children. Visual images representing various occasions of Palestinian children being detained and/or treated harshly by the IDF were used by pro-Palestinians with condensational symbols that reflected the injustice young Palestinians have faced for almost seven decades. The pro-Palestinian discourse contained more visual imagery and factual information in the form of infographics in comparison to its pro-Israeli counterpart, thus creating a more emotionally provocative narrative about Palestinian victimisation. Moreover, the oppressed-oppressor and civilian-military interpretive packages contributed to the overall frame of the victimisation of Palestinian youth and children by identifying Israelis and the IDF as the transgressors and Palestinians as the victims. Thus, the Palestinian narrative overpowered the #BringBackOurBoys' pro-Israeli narrative, in which the kidnapping incident was the only example given as an indication and representation of the

victimisation of Israeli youth.

Having said that, pro-Israeli tweets were present in the #GazaUnderAttack discourse as well, which illustrated that in the battle of narratives between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israelis, the latter also appropriated the enemy's hashtag and occupied their hashtag feed to challenge the pro-Palestinian representation of the conflict and provide a different perspective to the pro-Palestinian portrayal of Israeli violence. For example, the phrase 'human shield' was used as a condensational symbol that invoked a commonly used pro-Israeli rhetoric that shifts the responsibility of the victimisation of Gazans from the IDF to Hamas. Thus, the pro-Israeli discourse undermined the Palestinian victimisation discourse of #GazaUnderAttack, which is the objective of hashtag appropriation as demonstrated by the appropriation of #BringBackOurBoys and #IsraelUnderFire by pro-Palestinians as well.

In conclusion, the use of social media platforms such as Twitter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict involves a dynamic relationship between various pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian social groups. Twitter does have various affordances that can be taken advantaged of by Palestinians and pro-Palestinians to raise awareness about their cause, form online communities, counter pro-Israeli discourse on mainstream media and social media and foster support from the international community. The liveness of Twitter has been advantageous to both sides of the conflict as it gives its users a sense of presence and expectancy during unfolding events in relation to Operation Protective Edge. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that Twitter is not a neutral discursive space in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict despite its ambivalence. The influence of corporate and political interests in the use of the Internet and Twitter also challenges claims that Twitter is in it and of itself a democratising platform. Despite the celebratory discourse on the role of Twitter in the Palestinian resistance, the microblogging service does not change the on-the-ground reality of Palestinians and it even strengthens Israeli occupation. Therefore, hashtag movements can only support on-the-ground social movements instead of replacing them.

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