



**The War on Gaza:
An Analytical Reading
of the Consequences and
Impacts on Digital Safety
among Palestinian Youth**

7amleh- the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media

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1. Executive Summary

The Israeli aggression against Gaza, after October 7th, revealed the grave consequences of weaponizing modern technologies to serve the Israeli military establishment. Additionally, it has disclosed the role that rapid and volatile developments in the political and on-the-ground arenas have played in the unprecedented and alarming disproportional rise in violations of Palestinians' digital rights¹, which has completely undermined all safe spaces for Palestinians. This paper, therefore, intends to provide an analytical reading of the potential effects of Israel-led digital rights violations on erasing the sense of safety and security of Palestinian youth, while reviewing the stances and positions of human rights institutions on this matter.

This war has eroded the entire fabric of Palestinian society, dismantling its social, institutional, moral, human rights, digital, and legal foundations. This resulted for a state of emergency and a pervasive fear culture to become a normalized and inescapable reality, trapping and besieging Palestinian youth.

Digital platforms have played a pivotal role in exacerbating fragmentation by liquifying the boundaries between safe and unsafe spaces in both digital and physical realms. They have blurred liminal zones, plunging Palestinians into a state of uncertainty and fear regarding their futures and the threats surrounding them.

The widespread and extensive use of technology across the geographic spaces and various areas of social life has enabled a constant breach of Palestinian youth's safety and security, regardless of their location. As the digital world represents an extension of the human self and social life in all its complexities, by violating Palestinians' digital rights, Israel is also violating their other fundamental rights. By eliminating security from Palestinians' digital experiences, Israel is also eliminating security from their physical, social, and psychological experiences, especially since they are deprived of the legal, technical, economic, and social protections necessary to guarantee their rights, human dignity, and right to life as well.

The paper concluded with recommendations on the need for intersectional rights-based work among civil society organizations. These recommendations include: conducting in-depth critical studies to assess the risks of digital violations to the rights and security of Palestinians, strengthening public resilience to counter digital violations, exploring safer and more liberated alternatives to existing platforms,

1. 7amleh. (2023) #Hashtag Palestine 2023 extracted from: <https://7amleh.org>.

establishing an external legal authority capable of pursuing and holding platforms accountable and taking punitive measures against them in the event of violations of the law. Additionally, the paper recommends that companies and actors in the "high-tech" field incorporate engineering ethics courses into educational curricula, regularly updating platform governance mechanisms (a set of laws, rules, policies, and procedures for managing companies), and customize default settings to protect users, and prepare to respond to crises in advance.

Keywords:

Digital security, digital platforms, safe space, militarization of technologies, weaponization of technologies, liquefaction of fear.

2. Introduction

International covenants, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)² and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)³, affirm every individual's right to life, liberty, security, thought, belief, freedom of expression, and the right to access accurate and unbiased information. In addition to the right to peaceful assembly and political participation, individuals have the right to associate with other members of their society, and to practice their culture and language. Additionally, the right to equality and non-discrimination is guaranteed; this includes the right to equal protection under the law, ensuring the protection of all rights, especially during times of war and crisis, and compensation for any harm resulting from their violation. For instance, the law prohibits any arbitrary violation of an individual's privacy or dignity, any defamation of their reputation, or any incitement of hatred against them on the basis of race, religion, or nationality.

Subsequently, with technological advancements, numerous charters were formulated; such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001)⁴, the Digital Rights Charter (2021)⁵, and the Declaration of Principles and Digital Rights in the European Union (2022)⁶, which acknowledged the guarantee of all the aforementioned human rights in the digital realm as well. This means that no entity is permitted to violate, deprive, or restrict these rights.

Furthermore, every individual has the right to access the internet, and their technological devices must be equipped with appropriate security measures to ensure the protection of their information. In cases where authorities suspect a device owner of violating the law, they must adhere to legal boundaries when accessing the device, maintain the confidentiality of the extracted information, and ensure that its use is limited to specific predetermined purposes related to the case at hand.

It is worth noting that internet networks and digital companies are obligated to

2. United Nations. (1948). **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org>.

3. United Nations.(1966). **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org>.

4. Council of Europe. (2001). **Convention on Cybercrime**. Retrieved from: <https://rm.coe.int>.

5. Derechos Digitales. (2021). **Charter of digital rights**. Retrieved from: <https://derechodigital.pre>.

6. European Commission. (2022). **European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles**. Retrieved from: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu>.

support democracy, ensure the safety of social activists on their platforms, and protect their right to solidarity. They must also be neutral and inclusive, regardless of the sender, recipient, or content of the posts.

Nevertheless, the gap between international treaties and real-world actions remains vast. This compelled the Pentagon, in 2011, to officially designate cyberspace as the fifth domain of warfare, alongside land, sea, air, and outer space⁷. This is because the internet has fundamentally transformed the way conflicts and wars are conducted in the modern era⁸.

The Palestinian situation constitutes an example of one of the most ferocious digital conflicts and wars, as digital companies not only confiscated and suppressed all the above-mentioned rights after October 7, 2023, but were also active and complicit partners in Israel's war on Gaza in particular, helping to target Palestinians and pro-Palestinian supporters. Numerous reports have been issued in this regard, documenting and monitoring digital violations during the aggression on Gaza. Those include, but are not limited to 7amleh's #Hashtag Palestine 2023⁹ Report and the Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Digital Rights¹⁰.

Digital wars are not limited to the Palestinian case alone. We can hardly find any modern conflicts that have not, at least partially, utilized digital technologies to fuel existing political and social unrest¹¹. The grey and liminal areas from a political and legal perspective, such as occupied territories, refugee camps, and regions classified as "developing" or "unstable," have long served as testing grounds for new control and surveillance technologies intended for military purposes, such as controlling indigenous populations¹².

7. Dunn Cavelty, Myriam, and Andreas Wenger. (2020). Cyber security meets security politics: Complex technology, fragmented politics, and networked science. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41(1), pp. 5-32.

8. Singer, Peter Warren, and Emerson T. Brooking. (2018). *LikeWar: The weaponization of social media*. Eamon Dolan Books.

9. 7amleh Center. (2023). #PalestineHashtag 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

10. 7amleh. (2023). Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Digital Rights since 7th October 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

11. Łubinski, Piotr. (2017). Social Media Incitement to Genocide: ECHR countries perspective. in: *The Concept of Genocide in International Criminal Law*. Taylor & Francis.

12. Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. (2021). "The ghost in the algorithm: Racial colonial capitalism and the digital age". in: *Global Historical Sociology of Race and Racism*. Emerald Publishing Limited. Pp. 221-249.

One of the most well-known examples to the above is the escalation of hate speech and threats targeting Palestinians during the settlers' attack on the village of **Huwwara** in **February 2023**¹³, as well as during the **May 2021 uprising**¹⁴. Similarly, when a **Hindu nationalist** party in India published incendiary materials targeting **Muslims in 2020**, it resulted in the perpetration of violent acts against them. The dissemination of hate content against the **Tutsi** and **Hutu** peoples in **Rwanda** also led to a genocide that claimed the lives of nearly two million people¹⁵. The same can be said about the violence against the **Rohingya population in Myanmar**¹⁶ in **2019** and the **massacre of Uyghur**¹⁷ individuals.

2. Safe Digital Spaces?

Safe spaces are essential for shaping identity, intellectual freedom, equality, and achieving democracy¹⁸. An individual's perception and political practice of security depend on the changing ontologies of uncertainty generated by diverse historical, geographical, and political contexts, as well as the power dynamics between the actors involved¹⁹. Security is a social construct²⁰, meaning that the individual is safe from the dominance of the hegemonic groups. Spaces are considered safe and secure when members of marginalized groups can express themselves and challenge the prevailing societal discourse without fear of repercussions.

Generally, digital spaces are considered less secure than their real-world counterparts, as the boundaries between safe and unsafe spaces are more permeable, flexible,

13. 7amleh. (2023). Analysis of the inciting Israeli discourse against the town of "Huwwara" on the Twitter platform. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

14. Ifex. (2021). Threatened Spaces: How the Digital Rights of Palestinian Youth in Jerusalem are Escalating Online. Retrieved from: <https://ifex.org>.

15. Byman, Daniel, and Aditi Joshi. (2023). Preventing the Next Social-media Genocide. in: Survival December 2020–January 2021: A World After Trump. Routledge. Pp. 125-152.

16. TechPolicy.Press. (2023). The Real-World Impact of Online Incitement on Palestinians and Other Vulnerable Communities. Retrieved from: <https://www.techpolicy.press>.

17. 7amleh. (2024). 7amleh issues a position paper on the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the lives and narratives of Palestinians. <https://7amleh.org>.

18. Waldman, Ari Ezra. (2018). **Safe social spaces**. Wash. UL Rev, 96, Pp. 1537.

19. Bubandt, Nils. (2005). Vernacular security: The politics of feeling safe in global, national and local worlds. **Security Dialogue**, 36(3), Pp. 275-296.

20. Gibson, Anna. (2019). Free speech and safe spaces: How moderation policies shape online discussion spaces. **Social Media+ Society**, 5(1).

and changeable, making them susceptible to constant redrawing²¹. Therefore, a significant percentage of Palestinian youth did not believe, before the war, that the digital world was a safe space for them²². However, the outbreak of war on October 7th, 2023, was a pivotal moment; causing the boundaries between the digital and real worlds, as well as between the safe and unsafe spaces within them, to get blurred, leading to a near-complete undermining of the sense of security among Palestinians.

3. General Framework

The digital world has never been a safe space for Palestinians. The technological mediums that are rapidly integrating and permeating governmental and societal institutions, as well as decision-making processes, are inherently imbued with politics, bias, stereotypes²³, and the ideological frameworks and principles of the programmers behind them. As such, technologies are considered embodiments of social knowledge and sites where the existing power relations²⁴ between the dominant and the oppressed groups are reflected. The structures of oppression, authoritarian power systems, and digital power often intersect, enabling the replication, deepening, and automation of these systems²⁵, as well as the entrenchment of racist regimes along with racial superiority²⁶. Cyberpower is understood as the utilization of digital resources to achieve specific political or military objectives within and beyond the cyber domain²⁷.

21. Brownlie, Julie. (2018). Looking out for each other online: Digital outreach, emotional surveillance and safe (r) spaces. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 27, Pp. 60-67.

22. 7amleh. (2019). Silenced Network: Two-thirds of Palestinian youth do not feel safe to engage in political participation online. <https://7amleh.org>.

23. Crawford, Kate, and Trevor Paglen. (2021). Excavating AI: The politics of images in machine learning training sets. *Ai & Society*, 36(4), 1105-1116.

24. Ibid.

25. 7amleh. (2024). 7amleh issues a position paper on the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the lives and narratives of Palestinians. <https://7amleh.org>.

26. McMillan Cottom, Tressie. (2020). Where platform capitalism and racial capitalism meet: The sociology of race and racism in the digital society. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(4), Pp. 441-449.

27. Dunn Cavelty, Myriam, and Andreas Wenger. Ibid.

Physical Security

The occupation's militarization of artificial intelligence-enhanced technologies, and their utilization as primary tools for mass killings and assassinations, ensures the maximum level of destruction and human casualties in Gaza, effectively depriving Palestinians of better chances of survival and preserving their physical security. Additionally, online platforms pave the way for creating an environment conducive to the perpetration of war crimes²⁸ against Palestinians by disseminating sponsored advertisements that endorse the Israeli war on Gaza, and allowing the proliferation of incitement and hate speech against Palestinians²⁹. This is because digital violence necessarily fuels real-world acts of violence. In this manner, social media platforms create modern forms of racism that determine individuals' entitlement to life and death, in addition to serving as a tool to numb emotions and normalize the commission of horrific atrocities when dealing with the racialized body³⁰, which contributes to the escalation of tension, anxiety, and fear among Palestinians.

Since the start of the aggression, the Israeli military apparatus has deliberately and systematically targeted the telecommunications infrastructure in Gaza, resulting, according to a report by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in the complete disruption of communications services at least ten times until mid-April of this year (2024). This has led to 75% of the communications towers in the Gaza Strip (a total of 841 towers) going out of service, causing a sharp 91% decline in the value-added activity of the information and communications sector during the first three months of the assault on Gaza³¹.

Targeting telecommunications infrastructures and restriction of Palestinians' access to the internet constitute a violation of their right to communicate³², creating an environment of doubt, fear, and uncertainty among individuals³³. The collapse of the communications sector contributes to the obscuring and concealment of

28. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. (2024). The Palestinian Statistics and the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy issue a joint press statement on the occasion of the World Telecommunications and Information Society Day, which falls on May 17th. Retrieved from: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps>.

29. 7amleh. (2023). Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Digital Rights since 7th October 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

30. Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. Ibid.

31. Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. Ibid.

32. MediaJustice. (2023). MediaJustice's Statement in Solidarity with Palestinian Resistance. Retrieved from: <https://mediajustice.org>.

33. Green, Linda. (1994). Fear as a Way of Life. *Cultural anthropology*, 9(2), Pp. 227-256.

the massacres committed by Israel in Gaza, the spread of misinformation, and the impediment of Palestinians' calls for help, depriving them of access to vital information about survival tactics amidst Israel's relentless bombardment³⁴. This diminishes their chances of resilience in this catastrophic situation as ambiguity and opacity continue to increase³⁵.

Consequently, technological mediums during times of war and crises constitutes an extension of human and humanitarian life, as digital communication has become an essential tool to ensure the survival and resilience of Palestinians. Similarly, in his famous book "The Medium is the Message," Marshall McLuhan perceived the technological medium as an extension of the body and an amplification of human capabilities; for instance, headphones serve as an extension of our ears and the sense of hearing³⁶. Likewise, the term "cyborg" describes the state of technology's integration and permeation into the fabric of human life, bodies, and cognition. The human experience of being a "cyborg" means that human existence and the self cannot be separated from technologies³⁷. Therefore, depriving Palestinians in Gaza of the digital world may lead to the erosion of their physical security and even contribute to their erasure in death. ***Consequently, digital safety in people's access to communication networks during wars and crises represents a fundamental line between life and death.***

Psychological Security

With the outbreak of the war, the Israeli authorities intensified the imposition of wide-ranging censorship over Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territory, in addition to the Israeli public's voluntary participation in monitoring Palestinian digital content. Surveillance technologies are one of the deeply rooted mechanisms of violence within the military, enabling it to tighten its control over racialized bodies³⁸, their movements, and their discourses, while violating their right to privacy³⁹.

The digitization and liquefaction of human life into data transform the internet

34. Byman, Daniel, and Aditi Joshi. Ibid.

35. Green, Linda. Ibid.

36. McLuhan, Marshall. (2017). The medium is the message. **Communication theory**. Routledge, Pp. 390-402.

37. Fischer, Eran. (2022). The Digital Society: Communication as Technology. Ra'anana: Open University. (In Hebrew). 7amleh.

38. Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. Ibid.

39. 7amleh. (2023). #PalestineHashtag 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

into a disciplined, monitored, and organized space soaked with structures of social oppression⁴⁰. Instead of liberating the individual from injustice, the permeation of technological progress and modernity has deepened the existing social power relations by institutionalizing them as a system of social control, in a similar manner to the one described by Foucault in his book "Discipline and Punish"⁴¹ when he used the "Panopticon" building as a metaphor to describe the practice of repression in modern society at the level of consciousness.

Foucault points to a persistent sense of fear and a constant feeling of surveillance pervading modern society, even in our most mundane and routine daily activities. The awareness of the scrutinizing and monitoring gaze serves to domesticate and subjugate the individual, ensuring their automatic compliance and modification of their behaviors to align with the existing power relations and social order. As a result, fear becomes an invisible, indefinite, and silent way of life⁴², leading to the normalization and internalization of the "Panopticon" effect within individuals, through the assimilation of psychological deterrence and political traumas⁴³.

This is precisely what has happened in the Palestinian context. Palestinians have become acutely aware of the surveillance of their words and actions in the digital realm. This heightened surveillance has eroded their sense of security and trust in their surroundings. As a result, Palestinian youth have resorted to self-censorship and self-deterrence in their online activities, significantly curtailing their political participation. Previous surveys conducted before the war⁴⁴, as well as a recent poll carried out by 7amleh during the war in 2024, revealed that a staggering 59.2% of respondents (449 individuals) engage in self-censorship.

A stark example of the psychological harm caused by the absence of digital security among Palestinians is the severing of ties among Gaza residents and their isolation from one another following the disruption of communication services. This prevented families from reassuring each other of their safety after being scattered by bombings and forced displacement. Moreover, The spread of rumors about atrocities

40. Fischer, Eran. (2022). *The Digital Society: Communication as Technology*. Ra'anana: Open University. (In Hebrew).

41. Foucault, Michel. (2015). *Discipline and Punish*. Tel Aviv: Resling.

42. Green, Linda. *Ibid*.

43. Hammer, Ricarda, and Tina M. Park. *Ibid*.

44. 7amleh. (2019). *A Silenced Network: Two-thirds of Palestinian youth do not feel safe participating in politics online* <https://7amleh.org>.

committed on the ground⁴⁵ exacerbated feelings of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, and doubt about the fate of loved ones. Another instance involves the Israeli military making anonymous calls to Gaza residents to spread rumors and misinformation, or sending text messages threatening their lives, such as 'You have been classified as participating in hostile activities and will be eliminated.'⁴⁶

In addition to publishing photos and videos depicting the killing, torture, and violation of the dignity and freedom of Palestinians, as well as uttering insults and abusive language against them, aimed to undermining their psychological security and instilling a feelings of defeat in them. These tactics have spread panic among civilians and are part of the military use of technology to wage psychological warfare⁴⁷ against the enemy, undermining their resolve, steadfastness, and psychological resilience.

Additionally, Israeli intelligence and authorities utilize images or information gathered unjustifiably and illegally from Palestinians to threaten and blackmail them into collaborating with Israeli forces, a practice known as 'Isqat'. Victims of practice are often from marginalized communities such as women and the LGBTQIA+⁴⁸ community. Undoubtedly, the repeated and ongoing violations of users' privacy in the digital realm, the theft of their information, its use as leverage, and its rapid and widespread dissemination with severe consequences have fundamentally altered the nature of warfare.⁴⁹

45. Mina Rights Group. (2023). Open call for an immediate physical and digital ceasefire in Gaza, and for Palestinians globally. Retrieved from: <https://menarights.org>.

46. Green, Linda. Ibid.

47. Smex. (2023). How the Israeli Occupation Restricts the Development of Internet Infrastructure in Palestine. Retrieved from: <https://smex.org>.

48. Łubinski, Piotr. Ibid.

49. Mina Rights Group. (2023). Open call for an immediate physical and digital ceasefire in Gaza, and for Palestinians globally. Retrieved from: <https://menarights.org>.

Epistemological Security:

Echoing Martin Luther King Jr., the American astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson once said "I dream of a world where the truth is what shapes people's politics, rather than politics shaping what people think is true."⁵⁰ In the Palestinian context, technological media produces a collective fascist epistemic delusion⁵¹ by intensifying the censorship of voices supporting the Palestinian narrative⁵² while promoting Israeli propaganda⁵³ through overt algorithmic bias and discrimination. This selective flow of information causes the fragmentation of humanity into sectors consuming knowledge patterns fundamentally different from one another.⁵⁴ Consequently, it poses a grave threat to individuals' right to knowledge and political participation,⁵⁵ as well as an obstacle to the Indigenous people's healing and recovery process from trauma, usually enabled by the acts of political participation.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it may erode the political consciousness and will of the public⁵⁷.

In a climate of content restriction, platforms determine which groups have the right to narrate their stories⁵⁸ and which do not. There is a strong correlation between truth and knowledge on the one hand, and power and authority on the other⁵⁹. In the digital post-truth era, Palestinian narratives have become increasingly fragile and volatile, particularly as they are constantly subject to doubt, suspicion, and questioning⁶⁰.

50. Overall, Rosemary, and Nicholls, Brett. (2019). Truth, post-truth, non-truth: new aestheticized digital regime of truth. In: **Post-truth and the mediation of reality: New conjunctures**, Pp. 79-103.

51. SMEX. (2023). From cutting off communications to targeting journalists: How is 'Israel' destroying the digital infrastructure in Gaza? <https://smex.org>.

52. Łubinski, Piotr. Ibid.

53. Arab Reform Initiative. (2018). Policing the Digital Sphere: The Impact of Palestine's Cybercrime Legislation. Retrieved from: <https://www.arab-reform.net>.

54. Singer, Peter Warren, and Emerson T. Brooking. Ibid.

55. Cvar, Nina, and Robert Bobnic. (2019). Truth, post-truth, non-truth: new aestheticized digital regime of truth. In: **Post-truth and the mediation of reality: New conjunctures**, Pp. 79-103.

56. Ibid.

57. Human Rights Watch. (2023). Meta's Broken Promises Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org>.

58. 7amleh. (2023). #Hashtag Palestine 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

59. Meyrowitz, Joshua. (1986). **No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior**. Oxford University Press.

60. Lockie, Stewart. (2017). Post-truth politics and the social sciences. **Environmental Sociology**, 3(1), Pp. 1-5.

Attacks on and assaults against reality and truth engender feelings of defeat, loss, and trauma in individuals. These feelings may manifest through the Freudian concept of compulsive repetition, which, in the digital realm, is evident in repetitive behaviors and patterns of expression related to resentment, anger, denial, sarcasm, and fear, even in attempts to reaffirm the authenticity of truth. Indeed, the repeated and desperate efforts of Palestinians and supporters of the Palestinian cause in confronting the policies of social media platforms, which intensify and automate the frequent deletion of content supporting the Palestinian cause, are sufficient to generate similar feelings of resentment, anger, and denial, especially when they are turned into perpetrators for expressing and sharing their narratives and opposing the war.

One of the most painful examples of Palestinian attempts to assert the truth of their reality was when the United States doubted the validity of the number of martyrs in Gaza, despite the Palestinians sharing millions of pieces of content and materials that show the retrieval of the bodies of the martyrs from under the rubble. As a result of this skepticism, the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip issued a 212-page document containing the names and ID card numbers of those who perished due to the Israeli aggression on the Strip⁶¹.

This incident reflects the decline of the role of truth in social media platforms, as long as what determines the validity of the evidence and testimonies coming out of the Gaza Strip is the extent to which they are consistent with the beliefs and values of the powerful social actors, and the extent of their willingness to believe that it is the truth⁶². Therefore, in a world where all solid foundations and all facts can collapse and vanish from under the Palestinian's feet, as if they never existed, it is natural for the absence of truth to push Palestinians into a routine state of doubt, anxiety, tension and conflict over the truth, out of fear of its loss and erasure⁶³. Ultimately, the Palestinian is forced to wage a war to regain agency over the Palestinian narrative and truth, which requires him to remain in a state of constant vigilance and inhumane alertness.

61. 7amleh. (2024). 7amleh Center issues a position paper on the impact of artificial intelligence technologies on the lives and narratives of Palestinians. <https://7amleh.org>.

62. MediaJustice. Ibid.

63. Green, Linda. Ibid.

Linguistic Safety:

A safe linguistic communication environment is essential to enhance the individual's sense of security⁶⁴ and institutionalize safe imagined political communities⁶⁵. However, Palestinians navigate an unsafe digital linguistic space, where algorithms fuel hostile imagination towards them, depicting Palestinians in a brutal light. This is achieved through the use of artificial intelligence techniques, to create prevalent negative stereotypes about them⁶⁶, and by manipulating the meanings of widely used terms and slogans among Palestinians and supporters of the cause⁶⁷, classifying and banning some under the criteria of "anti-Semitism" or "hate speech against Israel"⁶⁸, which constitutes an attempt to criminalize and distort the voices condemning the aggression on Gaza. Additionally, the level of hatred and digital incitement against Palestinians has reached unprecedented levels, with nearly 3 million instances of violence and hate content against Palestinians on political, ethnic or religious grounds surfacing just in the last quarter of 2023⁶⁹.

Semantic warfare is considered a deliberate and common phenomenon where linguistic systems and discourse are used as primary weapons in political battles and conflicts. Specific patterns of speech, such as incitement, propaganda, and extremism, serve to replicate oppression against marginalized ethnic, gender, and national groups⁷⁰. Dehumanizing individuals, along with demonizing the groups they belong to is one of the techniques of inciting Genocide⁷¹ by justifying the violence practiced against these groups. In the Palestinian context, similar techniques serve as a means of justifying the bloody war that Israel is waging against Palestinians⁷², and of controlling them by ensuring they comply with, acclimate and adapt to feelings of terror and fear⁷³ resulting from an unsafe linguistic environment.

64. Nurmi, Niina, and Johanna Koroma. (2020). The emotional benefits and performance costs of building a psychologically safe language climate in MNCs. *Journal of World Business*, 55(4), 101093.

65. Bubandt, Nils. Ibid.

66. SMEX. (2023). From cutting communications to targeting journalists: How is "Israel" destroying the digital infrastructure in Gaza? <https://smex.org>.

67. 7amleh.. (2023). Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Digital Rights since 7th October 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

68. (February, 2024). "Meta" considers banning the word "Zionist" if it offends Israel. Al Jazeera. Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.net>.

69. 7amleh Center. (2023). Racism and Incitement Index for 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

70. Marwick, Alice E. (2013). Online identity. *A companion to new media dynamics*, Pp. 355-364.

71. Łubinski, Piotr. Ibid.

72. MediaJustice. Ibid.

73. Green, Linda. Ibid.

Collective Security:

Fear or a sense of threat and insecurity cannot be spoken of as a purely subjective personal experience, as fear tends to permeate the collective memory and the collective imagination, dismantling communities and tearing apart their social fabric by sowing doubt and uncertainty among their members and destabilizing social relations⁷⁴. Digital Platforms have violated the Palestinians' right to form a collective national identity by imposing restrictions on following, posting, sharing, and even liking content that reflects their collective beliefs or affiliations⁷⁵.

Similarly, digital platforms have suppressed the Palestinians' right to collective political organization during the war, banning the hashtag #StormOfJerusalem from the early days of the war, in addition to restricting pro-Palestinian groups and pages active in political and social organization and mobilization. In a report by 7amleh in the last quarter of 2023, the platforms restricted and removed content from 242 media outlets, 28 NGOs, and 44 social/political movements⁷⁶.

Through these policies, Israeli institutions ensure the isolation of Palestinians from one another, forcing them to face the Israeli repressive system with all its institutions and arms individually. The increasing fragility and fluidity of collective support networks in the digital world, and the erosion of collective solidarity⁷⁷, undermine the Palestinians' ability to effectively and collectively deal with the ongoing genocidal violence practiced against them, and for the community to serve as a shield to protect the individual from punishment and persecution.

One of the cases in which the Israeli institution succeeded in undermining the stability of social relations and trust bonds among Palestinians was the permeation of doubt into the minds of Palestinian citizens of Israel following the persecution campaign that targeted them for expressing opinions on social media platforms. On one hand, some have grown suspicious of even their closest kibbutz, after friends or acquaintances filed complaints against them for posting content related to the events of October 7th, especially when those stories were shared only with their close friends list on Instagram.

74. Ibid.

75. Meyrowitz, Joshua. Ibid.

76. 7amleh. (2023). #Hashtag Palestine 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

77. Deuze, Mark. (2007). Zygmunt Bauman Liquid Fear. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(4), Pp. 503-506.

Furthermore, distrust and suspicion intensified when the Israeli authorities refused to reveal the names of those individuals before them. On the other hand, the state of repression and collective silence that followed the persecution led to an increase in fear and uncertainty. This is because a community provides reassurance to its members when demonstrating a clear supporting stance toward them, compared to the feeling of isolation experienced by individual when struggling mentally and politically. It also becomes easier for the institution to observe individuals when they express an opinion that deviates from the documented consensus of the majority.

Economic Security:

The destruction of the infrastructure of communication networks and the technology sector has had devastating economic consequences for Palestinians⁷⁸, in addition to the discriminatory and exclusionary policies against them regarding collective funding and solidarity platforms⁷⁹, and the economic punishment policies imposed by Israel on Palestinian employees due to their posts on social media⁸⁰. A previous survey by 7amleh in 2019 showed that Palestinian youth citizens of Israel have become more inclined to abstain from digital political participation due to fear of losing their living "privileges"⁸¹. While integrating Palestinians into the digital economy is an important prerequisite for achieving sustainable economic development, stability and security,⁸² Israel's imposition of digital economic barriers against Palestinians while manufacturing poverty and destitution⁸³ within the context of war contribute to entrenching inequality and reinforcing political and economic dependency⁸⁴ between Palestinians and the occupation. This situation also stirs panic among them due to the lack of a sense of national economic stability, constancy or security⁸⁵.

78. Posen, Barry R. (2023). Europe can defend itself. **Survival December 2020–January 2021: A World After Trump**. Pp. 7-33.

79. RAJVANSHI, ASTHA. (2024, March). Palestinians Have Turned to Crowdfunding Platforms for Survival. Time. Retrieved from: <https://time.com>.

80. 7amleh. (2023). #Hashtag Palestine 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

81. 7amleh. (2019). A Silenced Network: Two-thirds of Palestinian youth do not feel safe participating in politics online. <https://7amleh.org>.

82. Banna, Hasanul. (2020). The role of digital financial inclusion on promoting sustainable economic growth through banking stability: Evidence from Bangladesh. **Development Review**, 29(2020). Pp. 19-36.

83. Yunus, Muhammad. (2009). Economic security for a world in crisis. **World Policy Journal**, 26(2), Pp. 5-12.

84. McMillan Cottom, Tressie. Ibid.

85. Green, Linda. Ibid.

Legal Security:

Since the outbreak of the war on October 7th, Israel has been enacting emergency laws⁸⁶ and amending numerous laws, including the "Counter-Terrorism" law⁸⁷, which allows for the expansion of the persecution and repression of Palestinians regarding a broader range of interactions on social media platforms. These vague and expansive laws have impacted political pluralism, freedom of political expression, and the documentation of occupation crimes. They have also left ample room for law enforcement agencies to digitally besiege Palestinians by intensifying and expanding campaigns of pursuit, repression, and arbitrary arrest of Palestinians after October 7th⁸⁸ for merely expressing their opinions on social media⁸⁹. By the end of April of this year, the number of such individuals had reached hundreds, according to a statement by the Palestinian Prisoners' Club⁹⁰.

In Comparison to a 2019 survey by 7amleh, which revealed that more than a third of the respondents (1,200 people) had been subjected to punitive measures due to expressing their opinions on social media networks⁹¹, a 2024 survey by 7amleh showed that more than half of the respondents (449 people) had been subjected to punitive measures by the Israeli authorities, and approximately 60% of them had undergone similar accountability by the Palestinian Authority. The same survey also indicates that the percentage of those who faced pressures from Palestinian security agencies to delete political and social posts is almost equal to the percentage of those who faced similar pressures from Israeli security agencies, at 80.2% and 82.9% respectively. Thus, instead of the legal system protecting the digital rights of Palestinians, the Israeli authorities have undermined, adapted and utilized laws as tools for "legal" persecution and repression. This being justified by claiming

86. Madar. (2024). At First Glance - Emergency Law Authorizes Banning the Work of Media Outlets, Internet Pages, and Mobile Applications in Israel if their Work Harms Israeli Security.

87. Adalah. (2023). Amendment No. 9 to the Anti-Terrorism Law 2023: "Prohibition of Consuming Publications of Terrorist Organizations". <https://www.adalah.org>.

88. 7amleh. (2023). #Hashtag Palestine 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

89. Smex. (2023). How the Israeli Occupation Restricts the Development of Internet Infrastructure in Palestine. Retrieved from: <https://smex.org>.

90. (April, 2024). Palestinian Prisoners' Club: 8,430 arrests in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, after 200 days of aggression. WAFA - Palestinian News and Information Agency. Retrieved on (03.06.2024) from: <https://wafa.ps>.

91. 7amleh. (2019). A Silenced Network: Two-thirds of Palestinian youth do not feel safe participating in politics online. <https://7amleh.org>.

that laws no longer align with the requirements of the new emergency situation⁹². Creating an environment of control and punishment, reinforced by fear⁹³, serves as an effective mechanism of deterrent and control.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the elasticity and liquefaction of the law in this manner further erodes individuals' trust in the legal system. This is particularly evident in the amendment to the "Counter-Terrorism Law," which constitutes a severe breach of privacy, enabling extensive surveillance of Palestinians' digital activities, control of their ideological orientations, and even the ability to hold them accountable based on perceived intention⁹⁵.

92. Arab Reform Initiative. (2018). Policing the Digital Sphere: The Impact of Palestine's Cybercrime Legislation. Retrieved from: <https://www.arab-reform.net>.

93. Green, Linda. Ibid.

94. 7amleh.. (2023). Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Digital Rights since 7th October 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

95. 7amleh. (2023). #PalestineHashtag 2023. Retrieved from: <https://7amleh.org>.

Conclusion and Epilogue

The occupation's exploitation of digital technologies to manufacture death, horror and fear has led to a complete undermining of the boundaries that once delineated safe spaces from unsafe ones in both the digital and physical worlds, as the consequences of digital violations have extended to the human rights of Palestinians. The absence of safe spaces during the war has left a vast void that has allowed fear to seep into the Palestinian existence through even the narrowest of cracks, to the point where the culture of fear has become a prevalent characteristic of the Palestinian people, similar to other colonized peoples⁹⁶. In his book "Liquid Fear", Bauman points out that what is most frightening in modern liquid life is when fear becomes diffused, vague and unclear, accompanied by a state of uncertainty usually arising from ignorance of future risks and threats⁹⁷. The digital darkness that has engulfed Gaza, along with the constant changes in corporate policies, developments on the ground, and new applications of technologies, leaves Palestinians exposed and naked in the face of doubt, uncertainty and fear in a crisis that is the most severe since the Nakba.

This state of uncertainty is one of the hallmarks of the liminal or transitional phase, where liminal selves are neither fully present (here) nor completely absent (there). Victor Turner defines this as the middle stage of rites of passage, which prepares the individual for reintegration into society after a limited period of time characterized by ambiguity, In-betweenness, confusion, uncertainty, vagueness, instability and fear⁹⁸.

Some thinkers see the need to distinguish between this type of liminality (a transitional stage) and a persistent and ongoing liminality, where some individuals or groups are trapped in a marginal or borderline life and identity that is constant and continuous. This is a state where the boundaries and divisions between different spheres of life dissolve, and the natural social structures are suspended indefinitely. Often, there is no escape from this state, as the structural and social barriers that constrain individuals within it are insurmountable. Consequently, this state is accompanied by persistent feelings of discomfort, disturbance and instability⁹⁹, with fear becoming a pervasive reality experienced and lived by individuals in contexts where states of emergency become the norm, the routine the ordinary, and the hidden baseline¹⁰⁰.

96. Green, Linda. Ibid.

97. Deuze, Mark. Ibid.

98. Deuze, Mark. Ibid.

99. Bamber, Matthew, Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, and John McCormack. (2017). Occupational limbo, transitional liminality and permanent liminality: New conceptual distinctions. *Human Relations*, 70(12), Pp. 1514-1537.

100. Green, Linda. Ibid.

Recommendations

To ensure that digital platforms continues to serve as safe spaces for Palestinians during emergencies, it is necessary to strengthen them at three different levels, excluding the recommendations outlined in the various reports referred to in this paper:

1. The human level - Users and social actors (civil society institutions, academics, political frameworks and movements, educational and cultural institutions, etc.):

- Conducting critical studies regarding the risks of digital violations to the rights and security of Palestinians.
- Enhancing public immunity and capacity, in addition to equipping a robust human rights workforce to address these violations during emergencies.
- Promoting collaborative, intersectional human rights efforts among digital, legal, feminist, educational and journalistic, health and mental health organizations [etc.] during crises.
- Exploring safer and more freedom of expression oriented alternatives to dominant monopolist platforms, and investing in technologies developments to enhance security.
- Providing Palestinians with necessary safe spaces to share their experiences, needs and perceptions of digital security.

2. The external level - legal authorities:

- Civil and human rights organizations should transition from documenting violations to pursuing prosecution and accountability by taking practical and legal steps to punish companies and other perpetrators of digital violations, including users, politicians, and governments.
- Establishing a deterrent and strict external legal authority that compels technology companies to develop secure platforms for their users and regulate social interactions in the digital world.

3. The internal level - design, development and corporate policies:

- Incorporating "engineering ethics¹⁰¹" courses into the educational curricula of programmers, to encourage them to make socially conscious, ethical and responsible decisions.
- Periodically updating and developing governance mechanisms for digital platforms to keep pace with political and field developments.
- Conducting periodic assessments to review the company's practices, and implementing precautionary measures to ensure the security of its platforms for all users, including developing internal charters and protocols to protect human rights.
- Defining user protection as the "default setting" and not as precautionary measures that the user must consciously and effectively take.
- Companies must be prepared in advance to deal with any sudden crises or unexpected emergencies.
- Enhancing the resilience and survival chances of individuals affected by humanitarian disasters and crises by providing immediate access to information, enabling them to request rescue, automating aid programs, and cooperating with relief organizations and agencies to coordinate a comprehensive and rapid response during crises.

101. Harbers, Hans. (2005). **Inside the politics of technology: Agency and normativity in the co-production of technology and society**. Amsterdam University Press.

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