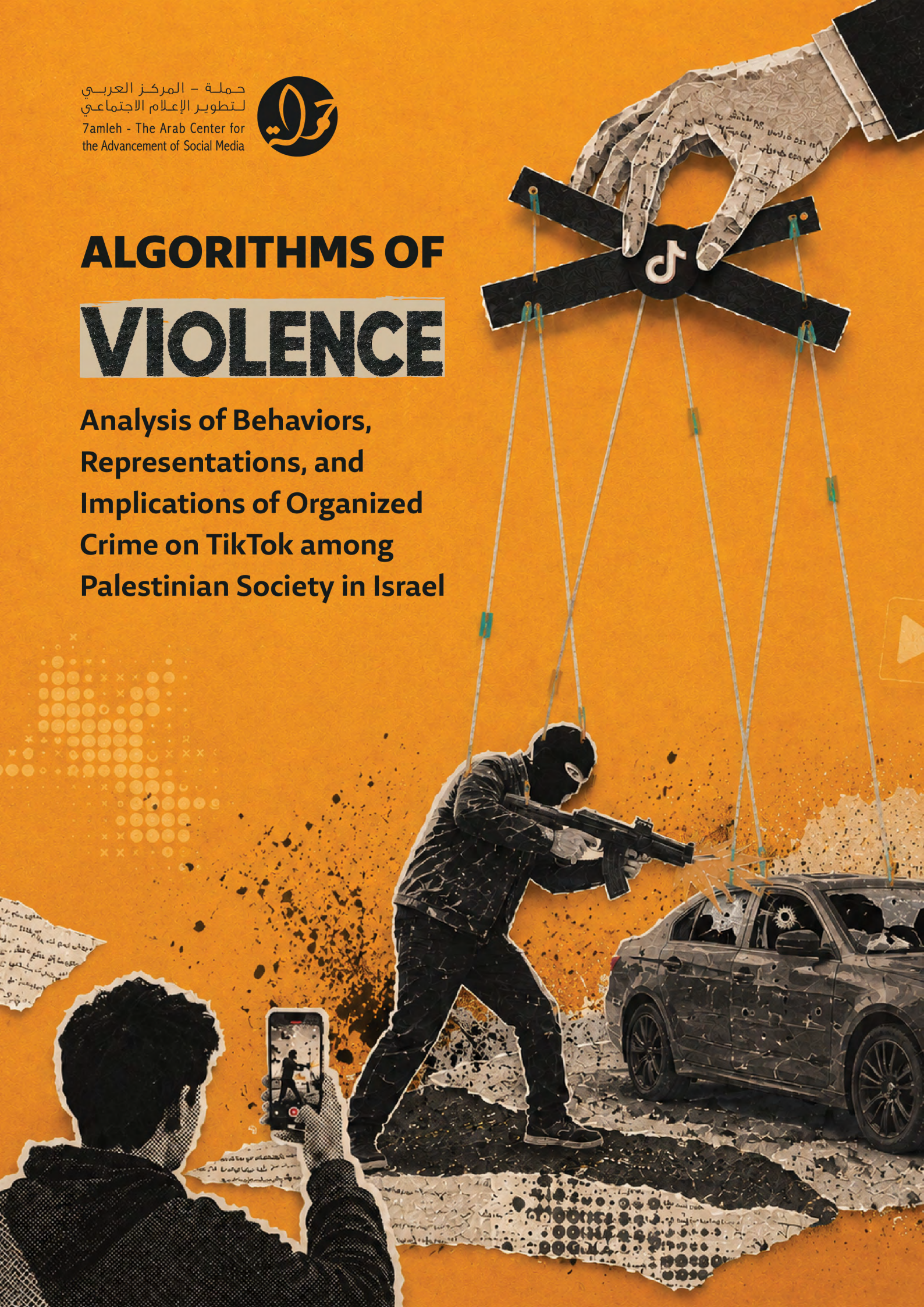




ALGORITHMS OF VIOLENCE

Analysis of Behaviors,
Representations, and
Implications of Organized
Crime on TikTok among
Palestinian Society in Israel



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

Algorithms of Violence: Analysis of Behaviors, Representations, and Implications of Organized Crime on TikTok among Palestinian Society in Israel

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1. Executive Summary

This study examines the relationship between the prevalence of crime and violence in Palestinian society within Israel and the increasing presence of criminal actors involved in crime on TikTok, in a social context characterized by rising rates of organized crime. In recent years, social media platforms have ceased to serve only as neutral media for news dissemination, communication, or social expression and have also become spaces that produce identities and symbols associated with power and domination, thereby reshaping reality. In this context, TikTok stands out as one of the most influential and widely used platforms among youth. At the same time, it is one of the platforms on which criminal gangs are most active, raising fundamental questions about the role of this platform in representing crime, organizing it, reproducing its symbols, and expanding criminal activities.

The study aims to analyze how criminal gangs use the TikTok platform in Palestinian society within Israel, the purposes of this use, its patterns and effects on society, and to understand the social and cultural connotations of this presence. The study was based on interviews with criminologists and digital media specialists, as well as with a group of professionals who work with youth. In addition, AI tools were used to collect and analyze crime-related content on TikTok. Afterward, a sample of 60 posts was selected and qualitatively analyzed using critical discourse analysis and visual and auditory semiotic analysis.

The chapters of the study show that criminal gangs use TikTok for multiple purposes, and that the organizational, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of crime – in the context of criminality among the Palestinian society in Israel – are intertwined: Firstly, criminal gangs use TikTok as a tool to manage and coordinate criminal acts, or as a tool to evoke violence and crime and reproduce it symbolically. The platform also serves as a cultural medium and a tool for building and promoting criminal identity, in addition to being used as a channel of communication between gangs and the public, and as a space to strengthen the collective fabric within criminal networks.

The study shows that TikTok plays a pivotal role in shaping the imagination associated with crime, not only by documenting and disseminating violent actions, but also by building and promoting narratives that glorify power, dominance, and the ability to act with impunity. Crime-related content often features weapons, luxury cars, money, and police chases, along with music and cultural symbols that reinforce the criminal's image as

a powerful and prestigious figure. In this context, criminal content is becoming a means of building symbolic capital in the digital space, where platforms are used to boost reputation, consolidate influence, and send intimidating or threatening messages to adversaries. The study also shows the collective nature of these digital behaviors, as gang members work together to reinforce these narratives and reproduce values such as loyalty, fraternity, revenge, and domination, as well as rhetoric that denounces betrayal and treachery.

Moreover, the study shows that the platform's structure, recommendation systems, and algorithms based on the attention economy amplify the spread of this type of content, due to its reliance on elements of excitement and shock, which often attract interaction and viewing. However, the study data indicate that the consumption and production of criminal content on TikTok is not shaped by a single factor (TikTok) but rather is a result of the interaction of a set of structural, social, and digital factors, including structural poverty, political marginalization, weak entertainment and cultural structures for youth, family disintegration, police neglect, systemic discrimination, and poor media coverage.

The study also suggests that this heavy numbness of content related to violence and crime on TikTok may have important social and cultural effects, including the normalization of violence in the public space, emotional numbness, and desensitization to manifestations of violence, in addition to creating a climate of fear and intimidation within society. On the other hand, this content may enhance criminal gangs' image as a source of power, prestige, influence, and social status. In addition, the presence of criminals on the platform may lead young people to imitate their behavior, engage in crime, or further fuel conflicts in real life.

Based on these findings, the study emphasizes that confronting the phenomenon cannot be limited to security or surveillance measures only, but requires a comprehensive approach involving multiple parties, including technology companies, civil society institutions, educational frameworks, the media, and decision-makers. The study emphasizes the need to develop more effective policies to enhance digital accountability for technology companies to supervise and control violent content in them, and to enhance community awareness of the dangers of exploitation of digital space by criminal networks. In addition, there is a need to invest in educational and cultural programs that target youth and offer positive social alternatives that foster their involvement in community life, away from the circles of violence and crime. Moreover, another need that rose from the findings is the

need to qualify journalists and media institutions to cover crime cases in a responsible and sensitive manner that considers the social and humanitarian dimensions of the phenomenon. The findings also call for strengthening coordination among various societal and political actors to develop a collective strategy to confront crime and violence in both physical and digital spaces.

2. Theoretical Background:

2.1 The Sociology of Digital Crime

The shift towards a “digital society” has enabled contemporary crime to be repositioned and reshaped by new technological tools, in which human and technical practices are intertwined in a single fabric that reframes patterns of action, power, and knowledge.¹ Within this framework, the sociology of digital crime emerges as a field that is concerned with the study of organized crime within the digital society, including the representation of crime, its perpetrators and victims, the formation of collective awareness and concerns about it, social reactions to it, and even the role of technology in protection, accountability, and justice. In this context, organized digital crime is perceived as an activity practiced by criminal groups that seek to capitalize on the new opportunities offered by technology to maximize their profits, organize their ranks, coordinate their activities, expand their power networks, and reduce the risks associated with their activity, reflecting a high level of organizational flexibility on their part.² The relationship between crime and digital platforms can therefore not only be perceived as a neutral mediation relationship, but also as a relationship of production and reproduction of criminal behavior, allowing the circulation of criminal content and encouraging criminal behaviors.³ In this context, several types of crime have emerged that result from the interaction between crime and the digital space: the first type is “copy-cat crime”, which occurs as a result of the perpetrator being influenced by previous criminal content or models that have been exposed through the platforms. “Performance crimes” are crimes committed from the outset with the aim of disseminating them on social media. In addition, “fame-driven crime” stands out, committed by individuals in pursuit of fame and symbolic recognition.⁴

2.2 TikTok and the Attention Economy

TikTok has gained popularity in recent years, which has been accompanied by

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- 1 Powell, Anastasia; Stratton, Gregory; Cameron, Robin. (2018). *Digital Criminology: Crime and Justice in Digital Society*. London: Routledge.
 - 2 Di Nicola, Andrea. (2022). Towards digital organized crime and digital sociology of organized crime. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 25, 1–20.
 - 3 Balqis, Ainun Agustina Atiqah; Badu, Lisnawaty W. (2025). The Influence of Digitalization in Encouraging Crime: A Criminological Perspective. *Estudiante Law Journal*, 7(1), 139–148.
 - 4 Shejuti, Kashfia Kaba. (2023) Role of social media on deviance and crime: a study on content creators of Tiktok. *American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation*, 2(2), Pp. 130-137.

growing concerns about the safety of children and adolescents, due to the role the platform plays in reflecting criminal behaviors on the one hand, and being a tool that contributes to the production and reshaping of criminal acts on the other.⁵ The widespread reach of criminal content on the TikTok platform is related to the way the platform regulates content and the inadequacy of its supervision and control systems,⁶ which are often influenced by the platform's logic and profit goals. TikTok's algorithms and recommendation system serve the attention economy, as attention in the digital space is a valuable resource and currency that drives economic exchanges. The more views and interactions the content gets, the higher the financial return.⁷ Therefore, TikTok offers a highly personalized browsing experience through a targeted, non-random process that enhances the user's attention.⁸ Unlike other social platforms that rely on follower and friend lists to predict user's interests, TikTok's recommendation system tailors videos to each user according to their history of interactions and interests, until they are pushed into the so-called "rabbit hole", that is, slipping into a succession of similar content that evokes and stimulates strong emotional and cognitive responses in the user and keeps them captive to one type of content.⁹ In addition, the platform allows users to gain millions of views without building a solid, stable follower network, through the "For You" page (FYP).¹⁰

The danger of these algorithmic systems lies in the fact that, if the user shows violent tendencies, they may be served, within a short period of time, not exceeding four days, harmful content, even though this content is in principle contrary to the platform's policies.¹¹ Added to all of this is the platform's tendency to promote more violent or shocking content, which may expose users to material even more extreme than their original interests. The risk of the spread of this content cannot be separated from the age group of the most active audience on the platform, which consists mostly young people or teenagers, who are the most vulnerable, vulnerable, and most susceptible to engaging

5 Balqis, Ainun Agustina Atiqah; Badu, Lisnawaty W. Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Heitmayer, Maxi. (2025). The second wave of attention economics. Attention as a universal symbolic currency on social media and beyond. *Interacting with Computers*, 37(1), 18–29.

8 Giddens, Paige. (2024). *Gangs and TikTok: A Content Analysis of Violence Exposures on Social Media* (master's thesis). Kennesaw State University.

9 Amnesty International. (2023). *Driven into the Darkness: How TikTok's 'For You' Feed Encourages Self-Harm and Suicidal Ideation*. Amnesty International. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

Williams, Dylan; Farthing, Rys; McIntosh, Alex. (2021, July). *Surveilling young people online: An investigation into TikTok's data processing practices*. Reset Australia. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

10 Lambrechts, Derica. (2025). #GANGSTER_ARE_COWARDS, #MERCHANTS_ARE_KILLERS and #SAVE_OUR_KIDS: Online geographies of gang content on TikTok originating from Cape Town, South Africa. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 25(1), 104–125.

11 Amnesty International. Ibid.

in criminal activities,¹² especially since their psychological and cognitive immunity remains limited compared to the strength of the platform's predictive and commercial systems.¹³

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the use of TikTok among Palestinian young people belonging to organized crime gangs, in order to document crimes, illegal trade, and public threats, in addition to displaying large sums of money and a luxurious lifestyle, which is estimated to be accessible by illegal means.¹⁴

2.3 Crime and Violence in the Palestinian Arab Society in Israel: from Individual to Organizational Crimes

The phenomenon of organized crime has become one of the most serious and urgent challenges in the Palestinian Arab society in Israel in recent years, to the point that it has become an imposed lifestyle within Arab towns and cities, and even in neighborhoods in mixed cities with a Palestinian majority. The danger of the phenomenon stems from the transformation of violence inside the Palestinian society within the Israel area from the level of individual behavior or sporadic cases to the level of organization and social structure.¹⁵ The term organized crime refers to a criminal project based on the association of a group of people to commit criminal activities of a carefully organized nature, in order to achieve certain goals.¹⁶ In the last two decades, the criminal activity of gangs in the Israel area has expanded to include: homicide, drug and arms trafficking, prostitution, extortion, money laundering,¹⁷ operation of stolen car markets,¹⁸ and illegal black-market shark loans, thus reshaping local life with the logic of use of force rather than law, and turning the civic space into a battlefield.¹⁹

While the number of victims of murders in Palestinian society in Israel between 1980

12 Giddens, Paige. Ibid.

13 Amnesty International. Ibid.

14 Breiner, Joshua; Haj Yahia, Deia'a. (21 October 2022). TikTok Allows the Posting of Videos That Encourage Violence and Include Explicit Threats, Contributing to the Fueling of Conflicts in Arab Society. Haaretz. Retrieved on 24 May 2025 from: [Click](#)

15 Nabulsi, Razi. (2019). How Did Social Violence in the 1948 Territories become Systematic? Institute for Palestine Studies. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#)

16 Jaber, Rida. (January 2019). Violence and Crime in Palestinian Society in Israel: Social and Political Contexts. Madar-The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

17 Charif, Maher. (20 September 2023). Israel: The Rise of Organized Crime within Arab Society and its Causes. Institute for Palestine Studies. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

18 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

19 Boxerman, Aaron. (2020). Arab communities shattered, as organized crime fuels a skyrocketing murder rate. The Times of Israel. Retrieved on 24 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

and 2000 did not exceed 100 victims in twenty years,²⁰ their number increased to 1700 during the same period from 2000 to 2021.²¹ Annual statistics show a steady increase in the number of homicide victims over the years, reaching 96 in 2020, 126 in 2021, and 116 in 2022, then doubling to 245 in 2023, 230 in 2024, and 252 in 2025.²² A study conducted by the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel concluded that “if the Arab community were a state, it would be third after Colombia and Mexico in the crime rate on the OECD scale”²³ while murders in Palestinian society in Israel constitute more than 80% of all murders, even though the percentage of Palestinians in Israel does not exceed 20% of the total population.²⁴

This phenomenon has gone beyond the classic and narrow concept of criminality and penetrated local economic and political structures by interfering in the electoral process, financing campaigns of certain candidates, or threatening and shooting rival candidates.²⁵ In addition, the municipal sphere has become an arena of struggle over public funds, especially in auctions, tenders, municipal budgets, and development projects, which often end in the shooting of mayors or contractors. The relationships of criminal organizations extend to judicial and societal structures, including the police, courts, lawyers, capitalists, and businesses that provide financial support in exchange for protection.²⁶

The phenomenon of crime and violence cannot be understood in isolation from the status of Palestinians in Israel, the structural racism to which they are subjected, policies of exclusion, oppression and discrimination at the legal and economic levels,²⁷ neglect, curtailment of rights and weakening of protection systems.²⁸ Although approximately 2.2 million Palestinians hold Israeli citizenship, the Israeli authorities and institutions – which define themselves as a state of Jews only – continue to treat them as foreigners,

20 Editorial article. (3 August 2023). Palestinians in Israel: Rising Crime and Violence in the Apartheid Greenhouse. Al-Jamaq News. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

21 Watad, Muhammad. (13 January 2021). 1,700 Killed since 2000: Palestinians of 48 Victims of Violence and Crime. Al Jazeera. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

22 Zoabi, Walid Mustafa. (2026). 2025... The Bloodiest Year in Arab Society: 252 Victims in an Unprecedented Rise in Crime. Arab48. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

23 Asharq Al-Awsat (2024). The Arab Society in Israel is Third in Crime After Colombia and Mexico. Asharq Al-Awsat. [Click](#).

24 Summers, Charlie. (2024). Police data confirms Arab homicide rate more than doubled in 2023. Times of Israel. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

25 Mohammad Qadan. (29 December 2020). Israeli Neoliberalism (4): The Rise of Organized Crime and Violence within the Green Line in the Context of the Intertwining of Neoliberalism and Settler Colonialism. Mada Al-Carmel – Arab Center for Applied Social Research. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

26 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

27 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

28 Zoabi, Walid Mustafa. Ibid.

or as a “Palestinian enemies under a test” who must repeatedly prove that they do not pose a “security risk” to the state, and do not identify themselves as part of the extended Palestinian people.²⁹ It seems that there is a strong correlation between crime and violence and the involvement of the Palestinian society in Israel in political events, as crime is used as a means of punishing them for their activism. This happened in 2000 after the Second Intifada, but also after the May 2021 Events (The Uprising of Dignity), and the Genocide in 2023-2025.³⁰

Palestinians suffer from an almost complete absence of means of deterrence capable of eradicating crime or dismantling the networks of influence, relationships, and interests that contribute to the consolidation and expansion of this reality.³¹ The Israeli police systematically neglect this issue, subjecting their policing and law enforcement to national standards.³² For example, since 2004, the Israeli police have succeeded in crushing and dismantling Israeli criminal organizations while allowing the Palestinian criminal organization to operate. The number of indictments filed by the prosecution are limited to a few while shooting cases reach up to hundreds.³³ On the other hand, the Israeli authorities are using all their capabilities to enforce the law in political and security issues, while only monitoring and managing crime so that it does not slide into the Israeli streets.³⁴ Leaked statements by a number of Israeli officers reveal the use of the phrase “let them kill each other”, which is a sign of the planned intention to allow crime and violence to spread inside the Palestinian society in Israel.³⁵

The police’s complicity in this case is not limited to deliberately condoning crime and violence but also to collaborating with some of these gangs. These accusations are supported by official Israeli reports by senior police officers that most of those involved in crime and violence are, in fact, collaborators and agents of the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet).³⁶ In addition to all this is the Israeli authorities’ lax policy of facilitating access

29 Nabbulsi, Razi. Ibid.

30 Sa’ab, Hasan Muhammad. (March 2022). Crime in the Palestinian Community in the Occupied Territories of 1948: A Reading of the Social and Political Dimensions. Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations. Retrieved on 12 May 2025), from: [Click](#).

31 Ibid.

32 Abu Hadouba, Mirvat. (2022). “Minorities and the Police Force: The Arab Minority – Sectarian Violence and the Absence of Police.” In: Muhannad Mustafa (ed.). Palestinians in Israel: Theoretical and Applied Approaches to Violence and Crime in Palestinian Society in Israel. Haifa: Mada Al-Carmel – Arab Center for Applied Social Research. 94-108.

33 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

34 Jaber, Rida. Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Al Jazeera. (6 February 2026). The Spiral of Violence in the Palestinian Society of ‘48: Between Israeli Complicity and

to smuggling routes from neighboring countries³⁷ and to weapons, as the Israeli Ministry of National Security revealed that 70% of the weapons in Palestinian towns originate from the warehouses of police headquarters and army depots, including rifles, pistols, hand grenades, explosive devices, stun grenades and other weapons,³⁸ reaching more than 300,000 weapons in the Arab Society in Israel until 2023.³⁹

The reasons behind these Israeli policies are, firstly, the need to use crime to disintegrate the Palestinian society in Israel and threaten the social fabric by spreading fear and undermining trust among members of society.⁴⁰ Secondly, these policies aim to undermine the sense of security. A survey shows that about 50% of Palestinian citizens do not feel safe or feel insecure, while 71% express concern about their family members being subjected to violence, and 74% indicate that the lack of security affects their quality of daily life.⁴¹ All of this may push the Palestinian society to regression and withdrawal, sometimes resulting in forced emigration from the country, and even to the extent of exhausting the Palestinian society to the point of forcing reluctance to engage in political action because of the preoccupation with survival and safety.⁴²

Collective Responsibility. Al Jazeera. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

37 Watad, Muhammad. Ibid.

38 Sa'ab, Hasan Muhammad. Ibid.

39 Al-Jarmaq News.Ibid.

40 Sa'ab, Hasan Muhammad. Ibid.

41 Watad, Muhammad. (2026). Crime Gangs: Israel's Shadow War on Palestinians in Israel. Al Jazeera. [Click](#).

42 Policy Unit. (2023). Redefining the Scourge of Crime and Violence in Arab Society. Mada Al-Carmel. Retrieved on 12 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

3. Research Questions and Methodology:

3.1 Research Questions:

This study aims to examine the complex relationship between crime in Palestinian society in Israel and social media platforms, especially TikTok, to study how the criminal world adapts to technology and uses it as a tool to pursue its criminal goals. The study also seeks to uncover patterns of TikTok use by criminal organizations and the nature of criminal discourse on the platform, while identifying the mechanisms and tools used to persuade and influence the public. The study attempts to trace the societal effects of the intense criminal presence on the TikTok platform, while questioning the role of regulatory and control structures in confronting this use and its effects.

The research focuses on the Palestinian society in Israel, specifically children and youth (12-35 years old) as the most active groups on the TikTok platform. This phenomenon is tracked from 2023 to February 2026 due to the significant increase in the frequency of violent crimes during this period. The importance of this research lies in its quest to understand the dynamics of the relationship between the digital world and organized crime in Palestinian society in Israel, thereby contributing to the development of effective strategies to address this challenge and reduce its effects.

3.2 Methodology:

In order to understand the interrelationship between social communication platforms and the criminal world, the research relies on a mixed methodology that includes the use of quantitative and qualitative tools, namely: semi-structured interviews, ranging in duration from one to one and a half hours, with four specialists in criminology inside the Palestinian society in Israel, or in the field of digital media, namely: Deia'a Haj Yahya, a journalist and criminologist, head of the crime department at the "Haaretz" newspaper, published several researches and a novel on crime and violence in the Palestinian society in Israel; Dr. Walid Haddad, a lecturer in criminology at Ono College with 33 years of experience in the field of addiction and social deviance. Served for 17 years as a juvenile officer in charge of the Anti-Narcotics Authority, and 7 years as the director of two rehab centers; Attorney Rida Jaber, a specialist in criminal cases since the 1990s and the director of the AMAN Center for Combating Violence in the Arab society; Anas Abu Da'abes, a

marketing and digital strategist and host of the tech podcast “Voice of Tech”, who worked with the Israel Internet Association (ISOC-IL) to track and counter criminal content on TikTok. It should be noted that most of the specialists have been personally affected by crime and violence.

Second: A focus group with six professionals working with children and youth in youth centers, youth centers at risk, schools, or social welfare units in municipalities. More specifically, the research subjects in this group work with young people who are most likely to engage in crime in marginalized areas, or work in projects and organizations aimed at combating crime. The focus group aimed to build grassroots knowledge from the lived and subjective experiences of individuals, and to identify their perceptions and interpretations of these experiences.

One of the main limitations of the study was the difficulty of reaching individuals who knew or had direct contact with the world of crime and violence, including those involved in crime, those who had withdrawn from it, and those who were about to become involved in crime but decided to back down. Interviewing this group would have provided access to qualitative data on the mechanisms and standards for producing criminal content, as well as strategies to circumvent censorship in the digital space. Moreover, due to the ban on gatherings in the wake of the outbreak of the war between Israel and Iran, the study failed to interview young teens to discuss their experience with criminal content on TikTok, their perceptions of it, and its effects on them.

The research used an artificial intelligence tool and language model developed by the Zamleh Center to collect criminal content from TikTok. The system processes text and visual content, analyzes them, and extracts content relevant to the research subject. The system collected 1,083 pieces of content from thousands of videos using a short keyword list related to violence and crime in Israel. This sample of videos was aimed at monitoring audience interactions with criminal content, including views, likes, comments, shares, downloads, etc. Data was collected from 26 November 2025 to 08 December 2025.

In addition to manual research and close follow-up on TikTok, 60 videos were selected from this sample for analysis of the repeated textual, visual, and audio variables. The videos were selected according to two basic criteria: First, their engagement and viewership rates, by choosing content with high, medium, or low engagement rates to compare and understand the factors that attract viewers to certain videos more than others. Second, the

diversity of videos in terms of representing content types: Recruitment, threats, spectacle, trade, etc. One of the central dilemmas in analyzing videos is that most were published by anonymous accounts, and we lack the tools or mechanisms to identify account owners and prove their connection to the crime. This may be possible by analyzing the full content of each account to predict suspicious accounts, but this requires more effort and resources, and future studies can build on it. In general, videos with a high load of criminal rhetoric and symbols can indicate the extent to which criminal culture is widespread and normalized in the discourse of young people who are not members of criminal gangs.

To analyze these contents and posts, the study relied on discourse analysis tools to deconstruct narrative and discourse patterns in posts, representations of social actors, monitoring of metaphors and terms, and audio elements accompanying the content, as well as persuasion and legitimization strategies. In this context, the study considers criminal symbols on TikTok as categories of analysis that embody recurring patterns of criminal discourse and behavior, rather than individual cases. This means that the study uses criminal codes as a means of organizing and classifying content according to its functional nature, such as posts that document, show off, glorify, threaten, recruit, or trade in criminal activity. In addition, the study sought to understand how terms and expressions acquire meaning from the contexts in which they are used and how their connotations change in response to surrounding social and political conditions. The study also relied on a semiotic analysis of the criminal content circulating on the TikTok platform, with the aim of decoding the recurring visual symbols in images and videos, which contribute to the production of meaning within this content, in addition to monitoring colors, gestures, emojis, visual effects, body language, photography angles, etc.

4. Analysis

The analysis of criminal content in this study stems from a socio-political perspective that considers criminal expressions circulating on TikTok as symbols that describe criminal behaviors in reality and reflect an integrated criminal belief system and vision that arose as a reaction to the political and social realities of Palestinians in Israel. This is highlighted by the repeated use of these criminal symbols and connotations as tools to claim legitimacy, delineate hegemony, and define justice and power in the Palestinian society. On TikTok, actors from the criminal world present criminal behaviors and violence as tools of prestige and power, as a means to change the social and economic reality imposed on them by Israel, and as a mechanism for justice, protection, and restoration of rights. In particular, the use of TikTok by criminal gangs in the Arab society in Israel has emerged as a tool to facilitate and expand the scope of illegal practices and activities, as a platform to evoke and build narratives about power, domination and violence, as a propaganda tool and a platform to build a strong criminal image, and as a channel for communication and group formation. These contents take on significance within a complex social and political context characterized by structural marginalization, political repression, deliberate policies of impoverishment, erosion of trust in Israeli law enforcement institutions, and a lack of effective protection. Thus, the study considers TikTok's criminal connotations and symbols as part of a complex network of factors that intersect to produce criminal behavior, both digitally and on the ground: social structure, the economy, state policies, and digital space.

4.1 Chapter One: TikTok as a Supporting Infrastructure for Facilitating Criminal Action

Digital platforms, in general, and TikTok in particular, play a vital role in facilitating criminal activity and enhancing the operational capabilities of criminal networks by allowing criminals to exchange information, recruit, trade, and organize criminal activities. According to marketing and digital strategist, Anas Abu Da'abes: "All things related to direct selling are less present on social media networks because this kind of activity is not aimed at the broad audience [...] because this will leave them [criminal gangs] exposed to the authorities [...] such transactions often take place on other platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp groups because they are more secretive [...]." Although this claim is essentially true as marketing and propaganda content of criminal organizations has become more popular on TikTok, the study spotted several accounts whose posts go beyond this type of

content to try to recruit new members of the gang, or to offer their services to the general public, including: car theft, hiring assassins, counterfeiting money, documenting crimes, and other solid indicators that indicate a high and direct link of content to criminal act. Among the 1,083 posts we collected, there were 101 were of this type, accounting for 9.3% of the sample.

Direct or coded calls to recruit new individuals to conduct operations for its benefit are posted via TikTok, such as recruiting young people to drive cars during shootings, smuggling, or car thefts. The term “raptor drivers” [Shofereyet Jawareh] is usually used to refer to these drivers: “Raptor drivers are needed gentlemen, a clean job and a drive very soon.” The driving period is often limited to 10-15 minutes, while the financial return for each such operation is NIS 1,500-5,000. Advocates often frame this criminal function as means earning a living and providing for families, for example: “Wake up before the holiday comes, come and make your children happy,” or “Come and make your children happy with Ramadan gifts.” These posts often include photos and videos of cars without a license plate taken at night. Journalist and criminologist Deia’a Haj Yahya points out that “almost every year, dozens of young people enter the world of crime because of TikTok,” adding, “one can claim that TikTok functions as the human resources of criminal organizations.”

TikTok includes widespread content whose owners propose to provide services that may be related to killing, beating, burning, and obtaining other rights that resulted from social conflicts. One of the accounts posted the following: “Whoever wants to get his money from anyone or who’s been a victim of fraud, send and we will secure his rights. The men of right.” Another user posted: “Guys, anyone who wants to secure their debt or their rights with anyone and doesn’t know how to achieve it, send a private DM.” Indeed, many responded to him in the comments: “Contact me” and “I have someone who owes me money, you do your thing and take all the money, may god bless you.” Another commenter wrote: “Someone from the West Bank owes me money, and I am from the West Bank. Secure the debt and take half of it.” All 35 comments on this video have the same answers, which reveal the normalization of unlawful violence practices as an alternative means of conflict resolution and securing rights. A report by Suha Arraf indicates that many educated people, such as lawyers and doctors, are turning to criminal gangs to help them secure funds from debts and resolve social and family disputes. The report shows that Palestinians turn to criminal gangs because of the vacuum left by Israeli police institutions, which have a systematic policy of ignoring local conflicts and denying Palestinians citizens of Israel from legal and

legitimate protection.⁴³

On the other hand, TikTok has content that shows cars after theft or promotes illegal trade in them, with many posts showing photos of cars with shattered and scattered glass, while others show cars with dismantled wires in front of the driver's compartment. One user commented on one of these videos, "I don't get it, what does that mean?" to which another user replied, "they steel cars," while others congratulate the user who posted the video on the theft, and others ask on other videos about the price of the stolen car or express their interest in buying, "I am interested", to which the owner of the video replies, "is there 10 thousand in your pocket?"

The study examined other types of financial transactions related to the black market, particularly barter and loans. For example, one of the posts said: "If anyone has post-dated checks and wants to cash them, send a private DM." In other cases, criminal networks may exploit the need of people with car loans for financial liquidity, so they suggest buying these cars to be reused for illegal activities: "Anyone who has a car with a car loan and is interested in profiting from it, contact us, we pay in cash," with a hashtag #sell_your_car and a phone number. One user commented on the same video: "I have one," while another commented: "My car is not with a car loan. I'd like to get rid of it. Does it apply?" The video's creator responded: "What car type?" which shows that this type of video may attract other parties to the illegal trade, even if they were initially off the radar of criminal gangs.

Although criminal gangs rely primarily on WhatsApp and Telegram or phone conversations to threaten business owners to pay protection racket,⁴⁴ they do not neglect to use TikTok as a tool to enable them to achieve this goal. Gangs exploit TikTok to monitor and hunt new victims of financial extortion and protection rackets. Therapist and lecturer in Criminology, Dr. Walid Haddad says: "They follow TikTok accounts. This way they identify their victims [...] criminal organizations look for businesses who posts about their business, such as restaurants, clothing stores [...] to identify business owners who seem to be well-off and then threaten them with the payment of protection racket and royalties in exchange for not causing harm to the shop or its owner. This shows that visibility in the digital space has itself become a danger to business owners who market their work and seek to profit legally." Moreover, Dr. Haddad points out that these gangs deliberately reveal the identity

43 Arraf, Suha. (2020). "The Police is a Greenhouse for Criminal Organizations": Criminals, Police Officers, and Reconciliation Committees. Arab48. [Click](#).

44 The term "protection racket" refers to the imposition of illegal sums of money (extortion) on business owners and professionals in exchange for allowing them to continue their work without being harmed.

of the target person on TikTok so that customers avoid buying from these businesses for fear of being shot while being there; that is, they use TikTok to harm the source of income of business owners as an economic pressure tool that may push them to submit to paying royalties.

Finally, the study monitored several videos documenting the counterfeiting of money, boasting about its printing quality, and offering counterfeit coins and bills of 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200 shekels for sale to the public. These contents are often accompanied by the hashtag #We_print_the_money (الفلوس إحنا نطبعها), indicating that counterfeit money is available for delivery to all regions and explaining that the order is placed via a private DM, with the exchange face-to-face. According to the posts, the prices of buying counterfeit bills range: "Give me 500 and I will hand over 1,000," while according to another post, the exchange is "2,500 for 4,500 and 5,500 for 35,000." Users boast about the quality of the printing. One of the posts mentioned: "Look at this print", and another wrote: "My clients know me and know the difference between the State Mint and counterfeit money." One of the accounts shared their "client's review" of the quality of the money she received: "I received the order, it was top-notch, just like I am used to getting from you. May God bless you [...] just as legitimate businesses do." This case reveals how TikTok has become a black market and an open marketplace for illegal activities, using language and methods that mimic traditional sales practices.

On the other hand, one of the members of the focus group points out that TikTok has become a façade for promoting commercial businesses that may seem legitimate but are in fact a cover for money laundering, as there are famous TikTok influencers who "have been publicly exposed to have ties to criminal families, and are complicit in money laundering," and adds that women are specifically employed in "everything related to money laundering through Dubai, with businessmen or influential people, not only people in the country [...]." According to the same member in the focus group, female influencers' role is not limited to cooperation in money laundering, as they also "sell this dream to other girls [...]" Some influencers play an extremely strong role in marketing the criminal world and attracting other young men and women to enter this world." Anas Abu Da'abes confirms: "There are many secrets and uncovered things on TikTok. We may think an account belongs to a normative person [...] but find out that it is a part of a larger operation. For example, one may think an account belongs to a normal business that advertises on TikTok, but, in fact, it is a part of these gangs." Similarly, a report by Suha Arraf confirms that criminal organizations have a long list of "legal" businesses, such as restaurants, supermarket chains,

wedding halls and others that they hide behind to launder their money.⁴⁵ Abu Da'abes adds that another means of money laundering is through the live streaming tool on the TikTok platform, "there are agreements between these people and criminal entities. TikTok is a source of income in the sense that many people buy credit to support these gangs by paying them with gifts, as is known on TikTok."

The role of TikTok influencers is not limited to marketing criminal gangs and attracting young men and women to cooperate with them in money laundering. Sometimes this may extend to trapping young girls into the prostitution, as says one of the members in the focus group: "there is a woman who speak today of women's rights on TikTok who used to live stream on TikTok for years with a pimp and a night club manager sitting next to her." This indicates that the status of women within criminal organizations nowadays is changing, as they are no longer necessarily victims, but some of them have become involved and complicit, even though men still predominantly dominate this world. Overall, the study sample did not contain samples of similar posts, although some of the videos were suspicious because of the way teenage girls were sexually depicted. However, there is no evidence of their connection to the criminal world or their true goals.

I conclude this chapter with a recent phenomenon in which criminal gangs propose practical solutions for the people of the West Bank to visit the areas beyond the Green Line and bypass the checkpoints, the apartheid wall, and the legal restrictions on movement, thus finding a new market to benefit from and thrive through. Many of them offer to smuggle the people of the West Bank "safely and securely", with one of them writing, "Good evening young men and women. Whoever is interested in entering Israel without any risk and safety, contact me instead of being humiliated. Your safety is our concern you dear ones." More than 18 people commented on this post, including those interested in using their services, and others who inquired about the cost, the route, and previous experiences. There were very few videos suggesting forgery of work permits, driver's licenses, or identity cards. These cases reveal how digital platforms enable criminal services and target groups to scale, thereby enabling the emergence of transnational informal markets in which social and political needs overlap with the profit opportunities of criminal networks.

In our sample, posts of this type achieved 15,383,445 total views, 356,578 likes, 5,342

45 Arraf, Suha. (2020). A State within a State: This is how Criminal Organizations Gained Control over the Arab Society, Arab48. [Click](#).

comments, 43,749 shares, and 21,288 downloads, for a total of 15,810,402 interactions. Accordingly, the average engagement per post was about 156,539 interactions, with an engagement rate of 2.78%. Although the proportion of posts of this type is relatively low compared to other posting types, they achieve high levels of reach and engagement. It can be concluded that criminal organizations are employing TikTok as an infrastructure that reshapes organized crime patterns, allowing them to access new human and material resources, expand their illegal services, and share information and economic opportunities associated with the black market. The growing reliance on TikTok to manage and coordinate criminal activity is transforming the digital space into a true extension of the crime economy, strengthening the operational structure of criminal networks, and connecting actors to one another and to the wider public.

4.2 Chapter Two: Evoking Violence and Crime on TikTok

This chapter lays in the middle between the previous chapter, which discusses TikTok as a tool for managing criminal activity directly, and the next chapter, which discusses criminal culture and the refinement of identity and reputation within the digital space, because the content this chapter deals with is not directly related to the coordination or facilitation of criminal act as in the first, but it is also more explicit and dangerous, as it goes beyond the general symbolic or cultural nature of the crime. This chapter focuses on uncovering the system of symbols, vocabulary, and images that evoke violence and crime as well as the tools clearly used to do so on TikTok. The number of this type of post reached 205 out of 1,083, which accounts for 18.9% of the total posts. It should be noted that this type of content may be disseminated by criminal actors or private individuals influenced by the violent language and rhetoric promoted by organized crime.

Criminals often declare the criminal act or explicitly name it without ambiguity or disguise. It should be clarified that these posts do not contain any explicit calls or threats to kill, nor even documentation of real murders. They contain only texts frequently used in criminal organizations to the point that they have become a feature of their daily discourse. The terms they use include many phrases such as “retzah” (i.e., murder in Hebrew), “pesh’a” (crime in Hebrew), “mafia”, “avryanim” [i.e., lawbreakers or criminals in Hebrew], “gangs”, “slaughter,” and other terms, with explicit calls for followers to adopt and emulate the criminal lifestyle. An example is the repetition of the phrase “beware of being the victim, always be the criminal”, which calls for a reformulation of the moral system and an attempt

to define crime as a strategy for survival in a world based on conflict. These types of posts reveal the role TikTok plays in redefining crime, moving it from undercover activity in dark neighborhoods and alleys to a public digital identity.

Users also often use terms and expressions derived from the realm of death and physical elimination, such as: “graves, soul-harvest, head crushing, destruction, graveyard, burial, king of death, coffins, we will crush your skulls, we will own your head, decapitation, trampling, herd, head decapitator.” Even though these terms do not constitute a direct call to commit violence in real life, they carry a high charge of graphic violence that represents violence in a sensual and direct way and reflects the nature of life, values, beliefs, and perceptions adopted by criminal gangs. These phrases are frequently accompanied by photos, videos, or symbols of soul harvesters carrying their machetes, graves, skulls, or dance parties with masked youth. According to Mustafa Hijazi, the evocation of death constitutes a decisive psychological moment at the heart of the equation of submission and domination, as it shows the readiness and ability of these groups to eliminate opponents and enemies, but it is also a declaration of their readiness to face death and overcome the fear of it, where victory over death is a victory over self, and over devaluation, weakness and humiliation.⁴⁶ The discourse of death constitutes a constant and continuous reinforcement of the logic of deterrence and the prestige of the criminal group in the digital space, and a warning to the recipients that they (the gangs) must be respected because they are not afraid of killing, not they fear death.

On top of all this, TikTok’s posts contain a lot of references to weapons through the use of terms like: “gunmen, gun, pistol, shooting, Kalashnikov, machine gun, Glock,” or through symbols such as, or through images of individuals holding guns and pistols while pinning a football net or spider web symbol over images of weapons to circumvent the algorithm and avoid deleting content. These groups use weapons in their posts as a repository of tools that symbolize their potential, ability to act, and control. Weapons are a “natural” extension of the criminal actor, giving him the authority he has over people’s lives to impose collection of imposed royalties or manage conflicts, as can be inferred from one of the posts: “We will impose our demands by force. It’s either us or them.” Therefore, criminal actors tend to show off and compare their weapons in the digital space. Dr. Haddad says about this: “Different gangs use different types of weapons. One who shoots in a pistol is

46 Hijazi, Mustafa. (2021). Social Backwardness: An Introduction to the Psychology of the Oppressed. The Arab Cultural Center. Retrieved on 12 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

different than the one who shoots using an M16 or a Karlo pistol. There are different grades of gangs [...] therefore, they try to highlight their weapons [in their posts].”

Posts about weapons are also linked to another semantic field used by criminal actors on TikTok, in that life is a constant battle and endless conflicts, so they use military and combat metaphors in their posts, such as “war of men”, “sons of war”, “fighting”, “time of war” or describing themselves as “I am the war you cannot withstand,” or describing the lower level members of the gang who usually carry out criminal operations and receive orders from commanders as “soldiers” (Hayaleem, Sanjeer or Sanajer in Hebrew). This allows criminal actors to redefine themselves as combatants rather than outlaws. Therefore, one may claim that TikTok enables these groups to manage digital performances that simulate combat readiness, even if the platform is not used to manage or escalate a dispute or combat on the ground.

In addition, there are frequent references on TikTok to drugs, which are usually accompanied by photos and videos of parties organized by criminal gangs. It should be noted that these discussions do not take place within the logic of offer and demand or commercial exchanges on the platform, but revolve around personal preferences and taste, while trying to promote a lifestyle based on “being high,” self-absenteeism, and loss of consciousness through drug consumption. One account belonging to a female said: “You live life once, waste it on being high and being in nightclubs.” Drugs are usually referred to in TikTok through encoded language or alternative terms common to criminal gangs, such as: “The strongest kind, green green, brown, high-low, chocolate, rare pill, smelling is expensive,” which is often accompanied by an emoji of a needle. For example, in one of the videos of a party, the singer says: “I don’t work with the brown, only with green and dollars,” to which a user commented: “Just ice, chocolate and cooked.” This symbolic language manipulation allows criminal gangs to evade censorship by the platform and government agencies, while also enabling them to target a specific category of users who are familiar with the criminal code. From this discourse, we can see that criminal gangs have turned the digital space into an arena for discussing the type, quality, scarcity, and severity of drug types, instead of treating them as prohibited and harmful substances.

This type of post in the sample achieved 14,734,730 views, 323,697 likes, 5,201 comments, 42,204 shares, and 73,837 downloads, bringing the total to 15,179,669. According to these data, the average number of interactions per post is about 74,047, while the engagement rate is 3.02%. Content that includes direct references to crime and violence accounts for

one-fifth of the sample and has broad reach due to its high viewership, but levels of direct engagement remain low. In other words, users tend to consume this content visually rather than publicly, a pattern known as passive consumption of violent scenes.

4.3 Chapter Three: TikTok as a Cultural and Propaganda Medium in Building Criminal Identity

The study shows that the prevailing pattern of using the platform is to promote and market criminal organizations, refine their public image, build their criminal identity, and enhance their symbolic position within and outside the group.⁴⁷ TikTok gives criminal actors ample opportunities to build a reputation and publicly display power and wealth. Crime, in this sense, is not limited to illegal acts and behaviors but also encompasses a cultural and symbolic phenomenon. Cultural criminology describes crime as a meeting point between cultural and criminal processes in society, and focuses on the analysis of images, symbols, meanings, representations, and common rituals practiced by criminal organizations.⁴⁸ It should be noted that posts that are directly related to criminal culture may not necessarily come from criminal actors, as TikTok has contributed to the expansion and seepage of this culture into the daily language of young people who are not members of criminal gangs. Therefore, even where it is not possible to infer the account's connection to the world of crime, the posts themselves indicate the spread and popularity of criminal culture on TikTok.

The data indicates that 28.8% of the sample, i.e., 312 out of 1,038 posts, are related to the construction of identity, prestige, and criminal reputation, which shows that criminal organizations consider TikTok a platform that plays a vital role, more than other platforms. These posts garnered 29,407,891 views, 671,742 likes, 9,846 comments, 84,239 shares, and 58,274 downloads, for a total of 30,231,992 interactions. Accordingly, the average interaction per post is about 96,897, while the reaction rate is 2.80%. It has reached the point where these organizations have created semi-institutionalized media outlets to build their criminal identity in digital space. According to Abu Da'abes: "In principle, we

47 Melde, Chris; Weerman, Frank M. (2020). Introduction: Gangs in the modern age of internet and social media. In: Chris Melde; Frank M. Weerman (Eds.). *Gangs in the Modern Age of Internet and Social Media*. Cham: Springer, pp. v–x.

48 Ferrell, Jeff. (1999). Cultural criminology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 395–418.

are talking about [...] semi-institutions, or even institutions, which have all the tools to promote marketing, public relations, and sometimes justify their actions or defend their rivalry with opponents.” This is exactly what the current chapter reveals about criminal gangs’ reliance on a vast and complex system of cultural, popular, and linguistic tools and symbols to market themselves. Indeed, Dr. Haddad confirmed that the level of organization in the marketing of criminal organizations has reached the point of appointing an official spokesperson to communicate with the media on their behalf, as well as to cooperate with TikTok influencers for the same purpose. According to Abu Da’abes: “Every group has several people to talk on their behalf. I imagine that it is not people who are connected to the acts of crime themselves, but they are a kind of PR [...].”

Criminal actors often publish photos and videos of leaders or central figures in criminal gangs, using hashtags with the names of those organizations in their posts to prove their affiliation with them or to attribute the criminal act they document to the organization. This frequent publication of the names and identities of their members enhances their presence in the public mind so that the names become familiar and circulated among users, while over time they become a semi-brand and known on its own within the digital and social spheres. According to journalist Haj Yahya, the importance of building this brand lies in the fact that “for the criminal, the name is more important than the action. Their name precedes their actions. When I come to you, with my reputation, you pay.” Haj Yahya emphasizes this by noting that the emergence of new crime hotspots in Arab towns is often accompanied by extensive posting on TikTok “because he is currently in the process of building his brand, his messages [...] for competitors [...] but more for the community. It is a kind of psychological control [...].”

In addition, criminals often refer to the towns where they are active, using Hebrew hashtags such as “Lod_city_of_crime” and “Beersheva_city_of_crime” as well as Nazareth, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Ramla, Umm Al-Fahm, and other towns. These types of posts reflect rivalry between regions known for criminality, but they also identify criminal organizations by their geographical areas of influence and the towns under their control, as highlighted by expressions such as “this is our area, nobody is allowed to get near.”

In addition, criminal organizations tend to use positive descriptions when describing themselves, such as “pride, glory, honor, and grandeur,” to reframe their criminal behaviors within a system of positive moral values, which may mess with young people’s perceptions

of these groups, thereby enhancing the appeal and spread of this discourse among users. Criminal organizations also tend to glorify criminal perpetrators through using phrases such as: “prestigious, man, men are defined by their actions, legend, luxury, joker, monster, master of men,” while others resort to borrowing words from the fields of power and governance to describe themselves, such as “government, lords of the country, leadership, sultan, king, baron, state, sheikhs, emperor” etc. This terminology further amplifies the status of gangs, establishing them as a sovereign authority parallel to the state and the law rather than as random and unruly groups, and even presents criminal activity as an admirable and worthy model. For example, a user posted a photo of a hand holding an axe with the inscription “There are men who enforce their word, and men who just speak about it.” This phrase celebrates a classic masculine model that sticks to his words even in a criminal context, creating a hierarchy between two types of men: “the real and the fake.” Due to their widespread circulation in the digital space, these terms have slipped from the world of criminality into the everyday vocabulary of the average person. Consequently, they are repeated frequently by young people in daily life and in their online posts.

Through this discourse, young people try to gain respect, appreciation, and self-esteem. They also position themselves in a high social ranking, as interaction with this discourse on TikTok renews their sense of value and entitlement. This need for glorification stems from the fact that the user who posts this type of publication belongs to a vulnerable ethnic minority in Israel, and from their influence on the hierarchy, elitism, and Stratification in Palestinian society. Young people involved in crime are usually individuals who grew up in the shadows on the margins of society in difficult economic and social conditions. One of the members in the focus group asserts: “If we look at educational institutions, even extracurricular education [...] we find that the principal and the teachers respect the strong and those who have money. Unfortunately, marginalized people remain in the shadows. These young people often seek assurances that they are not overlooked. They achieve this by joining a criminal organization and gaining other’s respect through force. These practices intersect with what Mustafa Hijazi describes as the narcissistic wound, i.e., threatened dignity, which is one of the most vulnerable aspects of human existence and is connected to self-pride. Therefore, pride and dignity occupy a fundamental place in the discourse of the oppressed man, because they are among the crucial issues in his life in his attempt to regain his dignity.⁴⁹ The importance of TikTok lies in its ability to meet the social, cultural, and psychological needs of Palestinian youth, and not just in its profitability.

49 Hijazi, Mustafa. Ibid.

There is extensive use of emojis, images, and animal names on TikTok to symbolize the power relations within criminal organizations and between them and the public. These animals can be categorized into two main categories: the first category uses animals such as “lion, wolf, hawk, bat, octopus, and raptor” to describe gang members as predators, strong, brave, cunning, and able to hunt. For example, many tend to pin the lion emoji to hide their face when posting their personal pictures. The following quote was written above a picture of a horse standing on its hind legs with an unknown rider on its back: “The brain is the brain of a wolf, the heart is the heart of a lion, and the eye is replete. May the world be forbidden to us if we hold anyone accountable.” In contrast, a second category of animals is used to humiliate and degrade, such as “sheep, chicken, rabbit, dogs, tails”, which are used to describe opponents or victims to stigmatize them as weak and cowardly. For example, a photograph of three young men wearing helmets riding motorcycles was accompanied by the following statement: “If power were measured by quantity, the rabbits would have taken over the forest.” This coding in the digital space establishes the perception of the social world as a forest governed by the laws of predation, divided into hunters and prey. The use of animal emojis on TikTok is an effective tool, as they serve as easy-to-understand, useful, and easy-to-spread semantics that are in line with the algorithms’ preference for simple content. Animals are familiar symbols in both the Arab and international popular imagination, as they are used as symbols to signify political and social conflicts, especially in the popular proverbs and *Kalila Wa-Dimna*. In global gang culture, animals are often used as emblems of domination, thus, they are transnational cultural symbols in the digital space.

The promotional measures taken to build a criminal identity are not limited to images, videos, symbols, and resonant phrases. All the mentioned methods of glorification and humiliation are also reused through songs and music, to the extent that each criminal gang has its own singer.⁵⁰ In this context, songs are not merely means of entertainment but go beyond that to become a tool that shapes the meaning, narrative, and prestige of criminal gangs and their leaders. In other cases, songs even morally motivate gang members before they carry out criminal operations. Examples of some of the lyrics of these songs are: “Woe be to those who challenge us, we will meet you on battle day, even if the whole world stands against us, we will break out war.” Another song says: “Listen, this is for you, go hide you small chick, the cockroaches have become big, our job is to crush heads.”

50 The Israeli Knesset. (16 July 2024). Crime in Arab Society Dominates Social Media. Al Jazeera. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

Singing is one of the most powerful media for influencing the recipients due to its connection to the emotional nervous system, which activates pleasure centers and dopamine in the brain.⁵¹ It also has deep cultural roots in the traditions of praise in poetry and Arabic folk singing such as the “zajal.” Criminal gangs borrow these methods, recycle them, and use them to serve the same purposes. However, this time, it is used as a tool of social and symbolic recognition to create myths and beautify violence in what looks like a contemporary digital wedding with hundreds of thousands of followers. Just as the names of gangs and their leaders have become a trademark due to the widespread use of TikTok, so too have the names of the singers who accompany these gangs. Technically, TikTok favors the most sensory and emotionally impactful tracks, making the percussive audio energy of this music more pervasive, consumed, and digitally circulated.

Furthermore, social actors frequently market a life of luxury, extravagance, affluence, and wealth as characteristic of criminal organizations. The sample analysis showed that 228 of 1,083 posts (approximately 21.1%) promoted this lifestyle by using hashtags such as “Fortunes of Wealth, limitless money, Dollars Dollars, King of Euros, the Billionaire” and “dirt on hands,” in mockery of a society that devalues money. These posts collectively achieved 22,964,881 views, 512,406 likes, 7,112 comments, 63,807 shares, and 41,988 downloads, for a total of 23,590,194 interactions. Accordingly, the average engagement per post is about 103,466, while the engagement rate reached 2.72%.

In these contexts, money and wealth become central symbols of criminal identity-building in the digital space, linking crime to economic success, and presenting wealth as an indicator of power and dominance. Dr. Haddad says: “This means that the reason behind the display of fictitious achievements on social media is to show that they are successful [...] that they have money and want to show you that they are better than you [...]” Criminals emphasize material wealth because Palestinian society has suffered from systematic discrimination in housing, employment, education, lack of opportunities to earn a decent living since the establishment of the state,⁵² and investment in land,⁵³ to the point that Arab society in Israel has been described as a third-world society within a first-world state.⁵⁴ This reality has

51 Salimpoor, Valorie N.; Benovoy, Mitchel; Larcher, Kevin; Dagher, Alain; Zatorre, Robert J. (2011). Anatomically distinct dopamine release during anticipation and experience of peak emotion to music. *Nature Neuroscience*, 14(2), 257–262.

52 Boxerman, Aaron. Ibid

53 Charif, Maher. Ibid.

54 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

provided crime with fertile ground for growth and prosperity as a means of earning and meeting basic human needs, while blocking legitimate avenues of social and economic profiteering.

When videos on TikTok that show huge sums of money – which may reach millions of shekels – abound, they can become a tool to fascinate and entice young Palestinians to join the world of crime to improve their economic conditions. This type of publication may lead some young people to question the feasibility of working in a legal and legitimate profession, earning salaries of 8,000-10,000 shekels per month, while they can earn tenfold by committing crimes in a shorter period. Quick and easy profit has become the norm that drives the younger generation in Arab society, and so, criminal organizations deliberately devalue professions and jobs that were once considered prestigious. For example, a user posted: “Hey, engineer, did you see to which position arms dealers reached!”, while another user posted a video showing luxury cars next to an old car, and the caption said: “When your brothers are drug dealers and you are an engineer.”

One of the forms of richness and wealth on TikTok is the publication of content to show off luxury cars and motorcycles that may reach imaginary prices that the average person would not normally dream of, such as Rubicon, Range Rover, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Corolla, TMX 530, Brabus, TMX 560,” etc. Although not all these motors and cars command high prices, some are widely used among gang members for prestige and power, ease of maintenance, smooth driving, ease of maneuverability, speed, safety, and their bulletproof capabilities. Therefore, videos of racing, car parades, or fast driving are proliferating on TikTok, especially since the platform’s algorithms tend to favor showy, enthusiastic content with high-impact visuals that deliver a strong dose of excitement. TikTok, then, helps turn gang money and influence into consumable visual codes. A member in the focus group points out that the topic of cars is very present in his conversation with his students: “Cars are a dominant topic in the students’ conversations: ‘There are only two cars of this kind in the county...’, ‘This person has imported this type of car’, etc.” Mustafa Hijazi explains that the glorification of theatrical richness involves a psychological aspect. Show off actions aim to cover up a complex of shame, especially the consumerist actions, in addition to imposter syndrome and attempting to deceive others for prestige or money, because people in marginalized societies are prisoners of appearances.⁵⁵ Therefore, insisting on showing off extravagant life on TikTok is nothing but a symbolic representation that seeks to cover up frustration, marginality, stigma, and structural poverty, and to redefine status

and value through money.

In this context, criminal gangs often possess a general code of appearance, as style is a principal component that defines the criminal subculture, inside and out.⁵⁶ This is notable in TikTok posts showing young men dressed in all black, often wearing a cap, a mask, or a black helmet, adorned with gold chains and tattoos. Recently, a video of a clothing store promoting what is known as “prison clothing” went viral, while other videos promote the sale of “shrouds for criminals and dudes (Avrianim and Dodim in Hebrew) and the for the work of suspects (Hashuda in Hebrew) with a picture of a black shroud made of leather with three long white stripes on one side, and what appears to be an image of a crown. TikTok is helping criminals transform their “dress style” from a mere street dress style into an inclusive cultural paradigm, from the moment they join the gang to the moment they go to jail or even die, and into a consumer item that is openly marketed on TikTok.

I will conclude this chapter by discussing a broad cultural phenomenon in crime posts on TikTok, which is the continuous references to popular media cultural products about crime or global criminal models, allowing them to utilize set of tools, narratives, and perceptions that are ready and familiar to the public in order to represent themselves in a way that serves the local narrative and identity. This content on TikTok may be disseminated by either criminal actors or the public, which can only be read as an indicator of the normalization of crime in public culture. Sample analysis showed 167 posts of this type, which constitute about 15.4% of the total sample of 1,083 posts. These posts collectively achieved 16,721,548 views, 368,920 likes, 5,473 comments, 47,210 shares, and 28,406 downloads, for a total of 17,171,557 interactions. The average engagement per post is about 102,823 interactions, with an engagement rate of 2.69%.

First, the posts contain repeated references to popular series, movies, or characters such as *Valley of the Wolves*, *The Pit*, *Thomas Shelby*, *Jabal Sheik Al-Jabal*, and *Ras Ghalis*, through captions, by posting scenes from them, or by inserting dialogue between the characters in their personal posts. Criminal gangs rely on these media references as a cultural repository from which they derive and borrow familiar narratives and ready-made templates for heroism, prestige, masculinity, and violence. This is particularly dangerous because TV and film dramas often re-present crime in a morally heroic way that beautifies this world, and

56 Ferrell ,Jeff .Ibid.

so, when criminals refer to it on TikTok, they paint their criminal activities with the same moral aura and attract the support of the fanbase.

In addition, criminal gangs often refer in their TikTok accounts to global mafias, such as the Latin cartels, the Italian mafia, and Japanese Yakuza, to borrow certain sayings and principles from these organizations, such as “if there is no bread for the poor, there will be no peace for the rich,” and “we know your name, we know where you are, so your time is limited.” The frequent references to these gangs in the digital space serve several symbolic and social functions. Firstly, criminal organizations in Israel position themselves in comparison to the global mafia, which is considered an icon and a perfect model of organized criminal power. Secondly, it creates the impression that the local group is not isolated but tied to a transnational criminal fantasy. TikTok allows the local mafia to feed on representations and streams of global mafia patterns, beliefs, and methods.

Ultimately, TikTok acts as a cultural medium that enables the production, circulation, spread, and amplification of the identity of criminal gangs as a symbolic system based on performance, image, appearance, rhythm, multiplicity, intertextuality, and overlapping semantic fields that give the criminal actor recognition, prestige, and status within the digital space, with the need to hide their political and societal fragility. Criminal gangs use linguistic structures and sentences that are almost akin to popular slogans and proverbs, thus enhancing the likelihood of their reproduction and repeated use by users on the platform. The algorithmic nature of the platform allows this discourse to be reproduced through similar clips, repetitive phrases, and shared music, thereby controlling recipients’ minds, perceptions, and visions. TikTok plays a pivotal role in consolidating cultural hegemony as formulated by Gramsci, who argues that the ruling elite achieves its power not only through the use of force, but also by pumping and promoting values and ideas that serve the ruling elite through culture, media, and educational institutions, and the public discourse, allowing it to shape and control the individuals’ minds.⁵⁷ This is exactly what criminal gangs do: they use TikTok as a channel of communication through which they pump symbols, images, values and beliefs that make up their criminal cultural identity, allowing it to penetrate the minds of young people and establish new meanings in them about power, prestige and status without the use of direct violence.

57 Gramsci, Antonio. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.

4.4 Chapter Four: TikTok as a Channel of Communication and Formation of the Community

This chapter focuses on the use of TikTok by criminal organizations for two central purposes: conveying messages and expressing a collective dynamic among gang members and between them and other gangs. TikTok enables criminal organizations to organize as groups and form a collective identity by invoking common history, achievements, obstacles, and challenges, and by developing their strategies and recirculating the rules, norms, and principles of behavior that the group has developed for itself.⁵⁸ This role intersects with James Carey's conception of communication as a culture, as he defines communication not only as transmission, but as a ritual and symbolic process through which groups produce and maintain their shared beliefs, values, and social order, which enable them to establish their collective identity and strengthen a sense of belonging.⁵⁹

In terms of using TikTok to convey messages, it is often associated with the dissemination of public or specific threats to rival or competing gangs. Words such as "Revenge, remorse, vengeance, settling scores, their blood is wasted, we will not forget or forgive, be patient, time is running out, what is to come is greater, vengeance will come in time, we will wipe you from the face of earth, everyone who made us wrong will be held accountable, as you condemned us you will be condemned, the world is a cycle, revenge does not die but restored, we will revenge even after a while, you will pay double fold." In this context, the escalation of aggressive or retaliatory rhetoric on social media platforms is a strong indicator of a potential escalation on the ground, where the "digital street" is becoming an extension of the real street.

TikTok's threat messages come in three levels: a clear and direct threat between the criminal gangs themselves, as one post put it: "A message from [name of the criminal gang leader] and his brothers [...] to the family of the deceased [name of a murdered rival], you will pay exactly like [name of another crime family] ." At the second level, sending threats to those who hang out with another family or gang in dispute: "We, all members of the [family name] family, from our youngest to our oldest, warn the following: 1. Anyone who deals with the [family name] family by supplying them with weapons or covering up for them

58 Patton, Desmond Upton; Eschmann, Robert D.; Butler, Dirk A. (2013). Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), A54–A59.

59 Carey, James W. (1989). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

will be accountable for their actions. [...] 3. Do not enter their shops, ride in their vehicles, or participate in any of their events to avoid what will happen.” While this message focuses on threatening whoever deals with the rival family on a criminal level, some of the threats may even include anyone who engages in normal daily interactions with a certain gang. For example, another threat delivered stated that “anyone who thinks of saying hello to [name of the family] will be doomed to be in a coffin. We vow to keep this promise till the day we die.” At the third level, even if the threat messages are not specifically directed at a rival family, they aim to warn and send alerting messages to society in general to evoke fear of the crime family.

As for the use of the TikTok platform to form social relationships and bonds among group members, the analysis identified 259 posts of this type, accounting for about 23.9% of the total sample. These posts collectively achieved 24,118,507 views, 547,392 likes, 8,003 comments, 69,114 shares, and 44,829 downloads, for a total of 24,787,845 interactions. The average interaction is about 95,706, and the engagement rate is 2.77%. Gang members tend to post group or individual photos of other gang members and attach them with phrases such as “my support, brothers, friend, pal, brotherhood only with the noble, my brother, my bar and support, if you have men in your back, you can take mountains down.” This was reflected in a caption of a video of a group of young men fighting: “We are men who do not run after anyone, but we do not forget those who stood with us.” A caption of another post read: “Under the mafia law, one may not sell out his brother.” A third video shows an illustration of several arms holding and drawing back a bowstring to shoot an arrow, accompanied by the following text: “Don’t think I shoot by myself only,” indicating that the strength of the gang lies in the cooperation and solidarity among all its members.

At the same time, gangs often write about the fear of treachery or betrayal of this fraternal bond among gang members, which requires them to be alert, suspicious, and constantly wary of others. This is reflected in the following text: “When your hand reaches out to shake another, let the other hand on the trigger; One cannot trust semi-men.” Moreover, gangs use the following expressions to stigmatize those who commit treason: “filthy spies, treachery, betrayal, treacherous, traitors,” in addition to expressions emphasizing the necessity of “obedience, fidelity, and loyalty” as essential to the continuity of the criminal organization. Some criminals declare in their posts that their defeat would not have happened without treachery and deception: “They betrayed you, [name], because you were an invincible lion. They were afraid of your courage, and they killed you because of treachery.” These posts often warn traitors of the consequences of their betrayal. For example: “A message to every

traitorous person: we will enter your house." Thus, through TikTok, the gang presents itself as a network of "brothers" bound by trust and loyalty. Moreover, gangs portray betrayal and treachery as the most serious internal threats to the group, thereby contributing to the development of an internal, collective symbolic code that promotes belonging and loyalty.

The crossing of the red lines that once defined the nature of criminal activity by criminal gangs seems to have led to an explosion of bloodshed in the criminal world. This is also reflected in digital space. Therefore, many posts on TikTok try to redraw the rules and laws of engagement and fighting between criminal gangs, while they shame those who do not abide by them. For example, one post said: "You Soso [derogatory nickname], you work with small soldiers, take whatever you need from them and throw them to the street when they are killed. This is expected of you, you lowlife." The issue of including attacks on women and children has been a hot topic on TikTok recently: "Acting against women is forbidden. Murdering the women in [name of town] is a step too far. You will pay the price. Revenge. Revenge. There is no place for you among men." Another post reads: "A final warning from the [family name] family. Any publication or circulation of photos of our daughters or any defamation of their reputation in any way, just because you've changed the rules of the game, we also know how to manipulate your daughters' pictures [...] you cannot play with the dignity of our daughters, nor can you blackmail us. Whoever does us wrong will bear the full consequences." Other posts denounced the targeting of people not involved in the crime because of their family ties to those involved. A post read: "To the entire [family name] family, you allowed yourself to kill innocent people who have nothing to do with our conflict, and this only shows your meanness and inability to confront us. We have been clear in our war from the beginning, as clear as the sun. Our war with you is eternal and irreversible. Everything we have done or do is openly declared. We do not hide behind our actions or attribute them to others."

The use of TikTok as a strategy for communication and community-building does not stop there; It extends to efforts to build a fan base for criminal content and the pursuit of criminal fame. This is reflected in the behaviors of young people and the public who interact with this content, leading them to develop admiration for criminal lifestyles and actors, much like their admiring influencers, actors, or singers. Dr. Haddad explains this phenomenon: "I see how young people are recruited to crime via the digital space. I see how young people who are not related to crime share the videos, such as videos of burning a car. This is the beginning of the journey to enter this world [...] by sympathizing with the criminals."

4.5 Chapter Five: The Implications of TikTok's Criminal Presence on Youth and Society

Any discussion of the impact of the criminal presence on the TikTok platform on young people requires answering the question of whether what is happening on TikTok reflects what is happening on the ground, or whether it is causing it. Journalist Deia'a Haj Yahya comments: "Whatever happens on TikTok reflects what is happening on the streets. TikTok and the street are one [...]. Of course, sometimes things start on the street and are transferred to TikTok, [...] and vice versa [...]. However, there is no doubt that TikTok dangerously, quickly, and sharply feeds the street. You feel that the spread of content on TikTok causes unnatural quick escalation." General Manager of the "Aman" Center, Attorney Rida Jaber, comments: "Our perspective is that we live in a virtual world. This is wrong. There is no virtuality. Virtuality is reality [...] not only do you live in it, but the entire society also lives in it." While previous chapters have reviewed many examples of how violence has moved from the physical to the digital space, the creation of a parallel authority by criminal gangs in TikTok by employing the platform as an infrastructure to manage criminal activity, or as an arena for building symbolic prestige and violence, or as a cultural medium to promote and market organized identity, or as a space for the group to reformulate itself and the laws that govern it, the current chapter attempts to uncover the impact of crime on young people in reality.

I begin by discussing the role of TikTok in legitimizing, justifying, and normalizing violence and crime within society, because this normalization may be the gateway to all the subsequent effects to which I will refer. In this context, Differential Association Theory emphasizes that an individual not only learns the techniques of committing a crime but also the motives, incentives, justifications, and attitudes he considers give these actions value.⁶⁰ Criminal gangs use many mechanisms to legitimize their criminal activity. However, the most prominent mechanism is publishing posts that rely on Quranic verses or prophetic hadiths as legal and religious cover for their criminal activities. The verse "But patience is beautiful and God is my help" and the verse "Whoever commits aggression against you, retaliates against him in the same measure as he has committed against you" were repeated a lot in posts of threats among criminal gangs. While religious texts have a rhetorical authority and an aura of sacredness that the recipient does not dare to oppose,

60 Sutherland, Edwin H., & Cressey, Donald R. (1974). *Criminology*. J.B. Lippincott Company

criminal gangs often exploit the public's ignorance of the texts' connotations and contexts to repurpose them away from their original meanings or interpretations, in ways that serve their criminal agendas. This is not much different from similar practices throughout history in which religious texts have been used for various purposes, including political ones.

These legitimization and persuasion strategies, along with the frequent and intense exposure to criminal content, normalize violence among recipients, reduce the gravity of the criminal act in their eyes, and even promote more tolerant attitudes towards crime. Worse, the recipients' feelings become numb and dull because of the excessive consumption of criminal content. Abu Da'abes describes this phenomenon: "There are normative recipients in the digital space who I am sure have nothing to do with crime, but their comments give credence to the criminal act. There are comments such as 'I wonder what he has done [...] about the murdered person. In this sense, criminal content causes societal effects. We slowly lose our sympathy for the deceased." Moreover, Abu Da'abes claims that the same commenters are likely not to have expressed ideas like this with such freedom and candor in real life because it is easier for them to cross the boundaries of the indirect nature of communication in the digital space, thus, "this allows other people to think in this manner." The reactions can range from mere sympathy for the victim to sympathy for the aggressor, as highlighted in many TikTok comments: "Don't worry, the whole nation has got your back" and "live and prosper on it."

Criminal content tampered with the norms by which respect and social status are measured among young people. Instead of the traditional values associated with education, work, and legal endeavors, violence and a criminal lifestyle have become the alternative model of success and prestige. Members of the focus group noticed these changes in the perceptions and aspirations of the youth: "Today, the social status of the youth has changed. The younger generation considers those who wear black clothes, a chain around their necks, and walk with their chests open, hands dangling and heads rising as the group in power. Anyone who dares to cross them gets beaten. Why? Because this gives them societal value." There has been a tangible shift in users' perceptions of the criteria of success and social status on TikTok. This is evident in their comments on criminal content. Members of the focus group assert this claim: "The most courageous leadership," "The best people and kindest persons," "Master of all men," "Leader and the town's Sheikh," "God bless you, you are the man," "If you have a dime, you are worth a dime. This is how the world goes; the diplomas are framed and hung on the wall or in the drawer."

In addition, school students pay large sums of money to "influencers" connected to the

criminal world via TikTok livestreams, in exchange for recognition from these influencers. According to one member of the focus group: “He associates the compliment he takes [...] I mean, I get attention or respect in exchange for the money I pay. Here, the social value or social status that I get is transformed. It is not part of my culture, my achievements, my professionalism, my work, or my morals, but rather it stems from how much I can pay, how much money I have, and how much I flaunt my money and throw it on others.” Similar practices are reflected on the ground. Some normative Palestinian citizens invite singers connected to criminal gangs to host their weddings and social events. Journalist Deia’a Haj Yahya explains: “In general, the Arab society feels disempowered, weak, and statusless. Therefore, they feel that this [singer] represents greater value. I want to feel like this criminal, or this head of a criminal family, or that member of that family. Thus, I will bring [name of singer] so he would sing for me the same compliments he sings for the criminal[...].”

As the previous chapters described the communication dynamics between the users who post criminal content and other users in the comments, the effects of criminal content may sometimes go beyond influencing thoughts and perceptions, to influencing behaviors and causing tangible impact on the involvement of some users in criminal behaviors due to TikTok (illegal trade, car theft, etc.,) or push others to resort to criminal gangs to obtain protection services, forgery, etc. Similarly, interviews revealed that many young people who consume criminal content on TikTok tend to mimic this behavior in their daily lives. The impact of criminal content on TikTok and other social media platforms on individuals’ behavior can be understood through social learning theory, which suggests that individuals learn criminal behavior through interaction with others, observation, and extensive exposure to criminal content. These processes are reinforced through the use of social media platforms,⁶¹ turning them into one of the factors that may lead an individual to adopt and indoctrinate violent beliefs and behaviors.⁶² Journalist Deia’a Haj Yahya reveals that “in the last 4-5 months, [...] I see families that are not on the criminal map who copy and paste the behaviors of members of criminal families. For example, 4-5 cousins take a picture of themselves sitting in the neighborhood, wearing all black clothes, with a motorcycle standing next to them and a song by [name of singer] in the background, or other song that contains threats [...]” This study documented this behavior in the third chapter: cultural criminal elements emerge in youth posts on TikTok, driven by the spread of this culture by criminal actors.

61 Morris, Robert G.; Higgins, George E. (2010). Criminological theory in the digital age: The case of social learning theory and digital piracy. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(4), 470–480.

62 Giddens, Paige. Ibid.

In addition, it was evident in interviews with professionals that some schools have now turned into small criminal hotspots that mimic the criminal behavior of organizations: "I had a case where a student hired another student and paid him to beat someone at school." Another member of the focus group shared a similar story that occurred following a dispute between two female students at the school. The two girls agreed to meet outside the school, but each asked another strong girl who uses violence, does not fear others, and is considered strong, so that they can come and defend them in this confrontation. Indeed, they met, and the four girls were involved in a violent confrontation because they did not manage to solve their dispute. This means that they hired someone else to solve the dispute through violence." These practices are similar to the phenomenon of hiring criminals to commit criminal acts on behalf of members of society, as documented in the first chapter of the study.

Similar to criminal gangs that lend money to citizens on the black market, students in school lend money with interest: "I found out that we have a small group of students in middle school who lend money to buy [drugs and alcohol] [...] They lend it with interest, you loan a twenty and return a fifty." Another member of the focus group shared: "I know stories like these exist in elementary and middle schools, and the existence of a criminal pyramid in them: there is someone in charge, he has assistants, and there are his soldiers at school. These soldiers do the black work for him, i.e., beat kids, buy his food from the cafeteria, hide his problems, get grounded instead of him, it's like taking up his cases."

Members of the focus group report that their conversations with students often indicate that students learn these behaviors through social media platforms, members of a family with involvement in crime, and peer group influence. This suggests that TikTok has become an additional arena for the youth to learn and acquire knowledge within a broader system of learning and influence channels. This fits with the Differential Association Theory, which holds that criminal behavior is learned through individuals' interactions with their social environment and upbringing, taking into account individual differences in tolerance, commitment to values, and habit.⁶³ Moreover, individuals often imitate criminal behavior when they are in close contact with influential social groups, such as parents, peers, and teachers, and through other sources such as the media.⁶⁴ In other words, the relationship between TikTok and mimicking criminal behavior is, in fact, not a direct and exclusive causal

63 Sutherland, Edwin H., & Cressey, Donald R. Ibid.

64 Skinner, William F.; Fream, Anne M. (1997). A social learning theory analysis of computer crime among college students. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34(4), 495–518.

relationship, but one of the environments in which it contributes. One of the members of the focus group explains: “Many of my students know the details of criminal cases [...] and when I ask them about it I find that they know this information from videos on TikTok [...] Part of this information is not shared via regular news: how they got there, what was with them, what car [...]” Another member of the focus group adds: “Confidential information and details are more [exposed] in WhatsApp groups in which we, adults, are absent [...]. There are children in these groups who share videos that are [...] very violent [...]” By circulating this content, peers contribute to feeding each other information about the criminal world and contribute to building this “learning” space in the digital space.

On top of that, users’ age plays a pivotal role in the extent to which individuals tend to imitate criminal behavior. Although young people are the broadest sector that uses the platform, they are also the sector most prone to manipulation, influence, and engaging in violent behaviors following exposure to criminal content on TikTok, due to their incomplete rational and logical thinking, which explains their impulsiveness and quick emotional responses. Many studies have revealed the pivotal role of digital platforms in this crucial developmental stage of young people’s lives, particularly in shaping their perceptions of self and the world.⁶⁵ In addition to these factors, TikTok often reinforces what is known as the herd effect, i.e., the tendency of individuals to follow prevailing behaviors and beliefs, especially when these actions achieve success and attention, or gain social recognition (Balqis & Badu, 2025). Deia’a Haj Yahya asserts: “For example, I find that this brings likes, or some kind of deterrence in people, or a kind of prestige or status [...] then I will want to imitate it.” Accordingly, TikTok is not just a medium for criminal organizations to showcase their activities and beliefs but also an environment for learning. Nevertheless, it is an environment in which the factors and conditions that may lead an individual to emulate criminal behavior are intensified: including age, the platform’s algorithm, social interaction, peer behavior, etc.

Aside from inciting criminal actions, TikTok also fuels conflicts and escalates them on the ground. A report in Haaretz documented two similar incidents: In the first, a young man insulted a girl from another Bedouin tribe in the Negev on TikTok, prompting members of that tribe to fire heavily on his home during the day. In the second, a young man from Rahat cursed another tribe during a TikTok live broadcast, resulting in the tribe’s killing of a man

65 Amnesty International. Ibid.

from his tribe, then posting a video of the killing and mocking him.”⁶⁶ In a third incident documented by the Israeli newspaper Ynet, a criminal family killed two young men from Jadeidi-Makr after they uploaded a video to the TikTok platform in which they expressed their support for a hostile criminal organization. This indicates that the TikTok platform has become a tool in the hands of criminal gangs to track the expressions and attitudes associated with them and their enemies, and to respond accordingly. This impact is not limited to crimes between the criminal gangs themselves. The same model is replicated among the younger generation as well. According to a member of the focus group: “A young man once said to me: ‘I feel like trying Crystal’ [...] The topic of ecstasy seems to be very important to them. Where from? Everything is available nowadays on TikTok, this topic has become trendy.” Another member shared: “There has been an incident with one of the girls at the beginning of this year. A member of her family was murdered, and when another girl posted on her account ‘the killer will be killed, even if after a while’, the first girl approached her, accompanied by another girl in a corner in school not covered by cameras and stabbed her. The [first] girl was rushed to the hospital in a very unstable condition.”

I conclude this chapter with the general and comprehensive impact on Palestinian society in Israel, as the vast spread of violence and crime in the digital space leads to the destabilization of the sense of security among individuals, while reinforcing feelings of fear, anxiety, helplessness, and lack of control over daily life. The Palestinian citizens of Israel live with a continuous, repetitive, accumulated, and frequent state of trauma, while dominated by the mentality of survival. Attorney Rida Jaber adds that this situation “makes you feel alienated from this society and that you are in existential danger 24/7, and that there is no possibility for change or dealing with this topic.” Jaber means that TikTok contributes to amplifying the scope and extent of crime and violence phenomena through sensationalism, allowing “30,000 to control the 1.7 million.” Thus, the criminal gangs have achieved one of their main goals for the use of TikTok, as formulated by Dr. Haddad: “They use this means of communication for the sake of terrorism. There is no need to kill anyone who disagrees with them. It is enough to be afraid of their name [...] they mess with your brain and convince you that they exist [...]” Regarding this effect, journalist Deia’a Haj Yahya expands: “In criminology, there is the sense of fearing crime, not the act of crime. Fear influences people. It changes their behaviors, their house design, and the design of neighborhoods and towns. It also changes behavior on social media and in the

66 Breiner, Joshua; Haj Yahya, Deia’a. (21 October 2022). TikTok Allows the Posting of Videos That Encourage Violence and Include Explicit Threats, Contributing to the Fueling of Conflicts in Arab Society. Haaretz. Retrieved on 24 May 2025 from: [Click](#)

street, the school, and the mosque [...] when you threaten a whole town, it changes your behavior, your mentality, and forces you to act accordingly and practice self-control. You feel you are in danger.” In conclusion, Abu Da’abes adds: “Another thing that I see is the issue of increasing people’s fear, not only the fear of the crime that exists, but also the fear of expressing an opinion.”

4.6 Chapter Six: Failure of Adjustment and Protection Tools

This chapter proceeds from the basic assumption that the prevalence of crime and violence is not only related to the presence of criminal actors or to the digital platforms that allow them to expand, but also to the effectiveness of the actors who are supposed to control this behavior, since the individual’s behaviors are influenced not only by existing patterns of violence, but also by the punishment that may inflict on these behaviors,⁶⁷ and by the way society responds to criminal behaviors and the people who engage in them.⁶⁸ Hence, deterring criminal behavior on TikTok or restricting its effects in reality is not only a technical issue but also related to several structural factors, in which weak social control constitutes an entry point to understanding crime.⁶⁹ In this context, the study shows that all the factors that play a role in the spread of crime and violence in real life are the same factors that contribute to the spread of criminal content on TikTok and its implications, as we discussed in the previous chapter. Attorney Rida Jaber believes that “TikTok does not make you a criminal. TikTok is a factor in the background of crime [...]”

As for the reasons criminal gangs use the TikTok platform to publish content, Abu Da’abes attributes it to the fact that: “The leaders of these gangs are younger than the leaders of the previous generation that used Facebook and Instagram.” Abu Da’abes adds that TikTok is an entertainment platform, not a platform for “academic, political, and economic” content, as with Facebook and Instagram, or for employment like LinkedIn: “TikTok is a chaotic space, so we add to this chaos.” According to the Media Richness Theory, what makes TikTok more influential in shaping young people’s minds more than other platforms is the multiplicity of visual, verbal, and auditory characteristics, which doubles the possibilities

67 Skinner, William F.; Fream, Anne M. Ibid.

68 Kayal, Asrar. (2021). Social Control and Crime in the Palestinian Arab Society Occupied in 1948. Institute for Palestinian Studies. Retrieved on 12 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

69 Shanti, Rawya. (December 2021). An Attempt to Explain Violence and Crime in our Palestinian Arab Society in Israel. Ono Academic College. Retrieved on 7 May 2025, from: [Click](#).

for escalation or mobilization.⁷⁰ According to Attorney Rida Jaber, another factor is that it is “more accessible, available, direct, and more personal. You are alone with the platform, connected 24 hours [...]”

The Israeli police deal with the spread of criminal content on TikTok with the same logic they deal with crime in the field; by applying policies of negligence, discrimination, and turning a blind eye. On the one hand, law enforcement agencies around the world in general face great challenges in keeping pace with technological development and regulating cybercrimes, as Attorney Rida Jaber stresses: “The legislation related to social media websites is lacking. This is a global situation.” On the other hand, the failure of the Israeli police to prosecute and control criminal activity on TikTok is not the result of a lack of systems, but rather a policy of negligence and deliberate selectivity in how to activate censorship and law enforcement. On this, Attorney Rida Jaber says: “Censorship in all matters related to us [the Arab society] on this subject is political censorship, not social censorship [...]” Thus, although Israel boasts of its technical and technological capabilities in monitoring, tracking, and surveillance, it employs these technologies to apprehend and convict Palestinians on the security level, not on the criminal level to protect them from crime. This, in itself, may be a direct reason why criminal actors continue to display and manage their criminal behavior and activities on the TikTok platform, due to a lack of accountability and, at times, the complicity of law enforcement agencies, as reported in several “government in the pocket” publications.

Moreover, the Israeli police often ignore documentation, evidence, and digital data documenting criminal activity in the field. As Suha Arraf discussed in her report the project “City Without Violence”, it aims to reduce crime in the public sphere by installing sophisticated cameras in the streets and neighborhoods of Arab towns. However, the towns have not seen a decline in violence, an increase in the prosecution of criminals, or an increase in solving crime cases. The police used satellite imagery and phone tracking in the arrest of Palestinian youths who participated in demonstrations.⁷¹ So, although technology should maximize the police’s ability to investigate, act, and prosecute, it chooses to activate and disable this capability with political logic.

70 Aboul Ezz, Angi. (2024). AI visual characters in crime storytelling on TikTok “Analytical study”. *Journal of Digital Media and Public Opinion Studies*, 1(2), Pp. 626-717.

71 Arraf, Suha. *Ibid.*

This discrimination and gap between declarations and practices is evident in the distribution of budgets allocated to counter criminal content on TikTok. According to journalist Deia'a Haj Yahya, the Israeli police have set up the "Saif" unit to counter crime and violence in Arab society. One of the tasks of this unit is to predict conflicts from criminal content posted on social media, then prevent crime in advance by directing troops in the field or submitting requests to social media platforms to delete the content. However, the reality reveals a more complex picture, as it was revealed through a Knesset session with the police that since the outbreak of the war on October 7, more than 1,590 requests have been submitted in six months to delete accounts on TikTok for publishing inflammatory content, but the number of similar requests to delete criminal accounts has reached only 50, while the requests for deletion before October 7 did not exceed 150. Subsequently, it turned out that the Saif unit and the police received financial resources to support anti-crime and violence activities but allocated them to security control rather than criminal matters, even though the latter is the responsibility of the Shin Bet.

TikTok also has many videos and content in which criminals mock the police's inability to arrest them, such as the next caption on a video of a stolen car: "It is the year 2026, and what is coming next is greater, you failed country." Sometimes even challenging the police through songs: "By God, you will go home, even if we will need to shoot the Yammar [the central unit for investigation and intelligence]," or uploading videos of police chases of gang members and boasting about their ability to maneuver and escape. On one of the photos posted by a criminal showing a car without a plate number, the police wrote: "Not having a plate is a violation," to which the account that posted the original photo replied: "Bring your pad, I will fill it with violations." This dynamic reveals that TikTok has become a symbolic arena in which the relationship between crime and official authority is being redefined, while attempting to produce an image of criminal gangs' superiority and indifference to the law.

However, countering crime and violence in society – and their new manifestations such as the use of social media platforms – is also linked to broader shifts in the structure of social and political organization. Razi Nabulsi links the rise of crime among the Palestinian society in Israel to a decline in political and national actors, as political movements have always played an alternative organizational and educational role to that of the state.⁷² The

72 Nabulsi, Razi. Ibid.

interviewees' testimonies shared a similar voice regarding combating against crime in general, and the criminal content on TikTok in particular, which is already at the bottom of the leadership's priorities. According to Attorney Rida Jaber: "Our view of this subject is lacking. There is no research or deep understanding of this subject. We depend totally on the state. Society has isolated itself from this matter." Deia'a Haj Yahya adds: "Unfortunately, leaders use slogans only. They do nothing else [...] they did not move to action, even in the slightest degree. Civil society has done limited work, but its work is scattered [...]" Therefore, broader questions must be raised about the absence of intellectuals, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, religious figures, and politicians in confronting crime in both the physical and digital realms.

Moreover, the reconciliation committees – which are supposed to play a social role in managing conflicts and suppressing disputes – now have cooperative relations with criminal organizations, which gives these organizations implicit legitimacy within Palestinian society:⁷³ "[...] You see founders of a certain criminal family [on TikTok] and preaching to youth." This quote reveals the symbolic paradox of figures associated with the world of crime moving into the role of preacher or moral guide in the digital space, thereby gaining moral authority over young people. A member in the focus group suggests that a different character that reveres criminal figures may be attributed to these contents: "The people who are complimented by the singer, and the people who appear to greet the guests are connected, in one way or the other, to the criminal world." In one video of a party hosted by a criminal gang, the singer sings: "A message to the bereaved mother, we reconciled against your will," and: "We no longer execute, reconciliation is the better solution." By singing this rhetoric, gangs boast that they are in control of the reconciliation scene in the Arab society and decide when to fight, and when to reconcile. On the other hand, there are TikTok posts that redefine reconciliation as cowardice and a waiver of rights: "In our society, reconciliation means convincing the weaker side to give up their rights."

The study reveals that the impact of criminal content on TikTok cannot be isolated from the social and economic conditions in which young people grow up. Indeed, research indicates that crime rates are highest in poor and marginalized neighborhoods,⁷⁴ as is the case in the Palestinian society in Israel, as the majority of young people who interact and

73 Qadan, Muhammad. 2020.

74 Cioban, Smaranda; Măirean, Cornelia; Toma, Cristian. (2021). Adolescent deviance and cyber-deviance: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 748006.

identify with criminal content on TikTok are mainly young people in distress, belonging to vulnerable families, or families with criminal ties.⁷⁵ The interviews portrayed these young people as highly susceptible to crime and violence, but at the same time victims of a long process of marginalization. In this context, one of the members in the focus group says: "I know young people from that family who were mentioned by name, saying that no man will remain from this family." In addition, there is a "sense of hatred and resentment for not belonging to society." This is shown in the content they share on digital platforms, reflecting society's failure to protect them. "These boys are victims. I feel sorry for them. They found themselves in a place from which we could not protect them, nor did we know how to provide them with tools to deal with this reality."

The above-mentioned descriptions show that young people with high susceptibility to crime suffer from feelings of low self-worth, defeat, deprivation, and vulnerability. Therefore, the criminal content on TikTok compensates for these feelings, making them susceptible to being influenced by it. Attorney Jaber gives an example of this: "Imagine that you are a 15-year-old boy whose parents have zero economic status, and your achievements and status in school are problematic. This boy sits behind the screen listening to these matters [on TikTok]. In which direction do you think he will go? [...] of course, he will not become a criminal because he has seen someone shooting a gun, but in his mind, he will become more susceptible to crime when he goes out to the streets. His behavior will derive from the atmosphere that has infiltrated his psyche." This data is consistent with what Strain Theory suggests: engaging in crime is a reaction to frustration and failure to achieve goals or a difficult and painful lifestyle,⁷⁶ in addition to a complex family background, poor parental supervision, and the involvement of other family members in crime and violence.⁷⁷ Members of the focus group emphasized this point: "[Parents] of children who come from families affiliated with crime usually feel like they have to defend things shared on TikTok." Another member shared about "cases of children who have taken refuge in this world because of their parents' rejection... The father and mother are separated, each married to someone else, and the child is literally dismissed. It means that nobody wants him." This type of youth rejected by society is the type "who criminals love because they have nothing to lose."

75 Breiner, Joshua; Haj Yahia, Deia'a. Ibid.

76 Agnew, Robert. (1985). A revised strain theory of delinquency. *Social Forces*, 64(1), 151–167.

77 Shanti, Rawya. Ibid.

On the other hand, social control theory assumes that weak social bonds between individuals and institutions, such as family and school, and the absence of family control facilitate individuals' online criminal behavior.⁷⁸ This was also evident in the testimonies of members in the focus group: "There are parents who are busy, without knowing what their children are doing, they are on the phones 24 hours a day, they do not know what content they are consuming or producing [...]." On the other hand, there are parents who support their children's criminal behaviors because they benefit from them: "Parents who know what their children are doing [...] But they are happy because they bring home money, they ride cars [...] the mother is suddenly wearing gold [...]." Members of the focus group discussed two other types of parents: The first type cares about the behavior and morals of their children but has lost any authority over them: "The child becomes stronger than his parents." The other type is still able to monitor their children's behavior in daily life and in the digital space, thus deterring them from engaging in criminal activity. It can be inferred from this that the susceptibility to involvement in crime is not limited to family disputes but is also related to the presence of parents in the child's life and their ability to activate deterrence and guidance, and the technological literacy gap between them and young people, which limits their ability to monitor their digital behaviors.

Finally, the study also examines the role the Palestinian news pages and journalists' social media accounts play in reporting crime and violence, in producing meaning about these stories, and sometimes promoting a dissemination pattern that recycles the showoff logic among criminal gangs. The Palestinian media no longer acts as a neutral mediator and has become a party in constructing and disseminating the criminal narrative, as reflected in both the quantity and quality of its posts. Attorney Rida Jaber warns of the frequency of posting videos about a murder, which turns every crime into a recurring dramatic scene. Furthermore, Jaber holds the public and the press responsible for feeding the digital presence of criminal gangs, claiming that the strength and size of this presence do not solely lie in the actions of the perpetrators, but also in the public's circulation of content. This is confirmed by journalist Haj Yahya: "The videos serve many points. Firstly, they give the criminal a kind of euphoria. Some criminals love to be depicted as legends [...]. They also want their videos to go viral because fear is basically the essence of the criminal organization [...]." Dr. Haddad emphasizes this point, as he believes that criminal organizations are now using the media as a tool to achieve their goals. Dr. Haddad gives an example of this: "The criminals who documented themselves in Sakhnin sent their videos

78 Skinner, William F.; Fream, Anne M. Ibid.

to journalists [...]. The journalists also want to increase their views. This reveals that the relationship between criminals and the media is a utilitarian codependent one. Criminals seek to expand their exposure through journalists' platforms, while journalists seek to gain views and interactions.

The Arab media in Israel has become subject to the standards of the attention economy and logic of views, suspense, shock, and drama rather than objectivity, professionalism, analysis, and humanization, which perpetuates the transformation of violence into material for consumption and entertainment. Abu Da'abes explains that TikTok journalists and influencers treat murder videos as "an action movie, through which they show harsh scenes and describe them in a violent manner [...]." Journalist Haj Yahya reveals the consequences of this type of coverage: "People who watch the videos [...] In an unconscious way, they feel solidarity with the criminal, not with the victim, because they do not see what lies behind the tragedy [...]. In addition, it inflicts psychological wounds on the families of the victims." Haj Yahya gives an example of this: "A woman whose husband was murdered shared with me that her children are still going through psychological treatment because they saw a picture of their murdered father." Dr. Haddad argues that there is a flaw in the nature of media coverage in general, as it focuses on murder as the climax of the event while neglecting other forms of violence and crime: "[...] There is no longer news about a shooting at a house at all, or news about the burning of a car [...]." In other words, some forms of violence have lost their news value because people have become accustomed to the violent scene and its transformation into routine, which reflects a form of media normalization of violence. In addition, journalists' fear of criminal gangs' reactions has become another factor that shapes the nature of media and journalists' coverage of crime, affecting what is withheld from coverage, what is mentioned, the background described, the context of the conflict, and the identities of the perpetrators.

The study claims that dealing with crime and violence in the Palestinian Arab society in Israel should not be limited to those who committed the crime but should also extend to holding accountable those who were supposed to control it, whether it be the family, school, social media platform, society, human rights and professional bodies, law enforcement agencies, or broader regulatory and cultural frameworks. In the absence of efforts to develop tools to combat crime, and when the digital space remains open to criminal actors, the conditions for the continuation of the phenomenon are strengthened when these systems fail to perform their role properly. The lack of deterrence and punishment has led to the rise of a new segment of society that sees violence as a means to protect itself from crime, or as a

solution to reclaim their deprived rights, as reflected in several posts on TikTok: "If murder is legitimate without deterrence in this country, self-defense is an imposition, and the public should be allowed to carry weapons [...]. Iron is deterred only by iron [...]." In other cases, some young people have resorted to armed individuals for protection: "Yesterday, a young man from Um Al-Fahm contacted us because he was threatened to pay protection [...]. We will get to this person, even to his home [...]. No to paying protection."

Nevertheless, criminal rhetoric does not dominate TikTok, nor does it receive unconditional support. Although the sample includes only a limited number of similar posts, some Palestinians use the platform to raise awareness against and warn about criminal rhetoric. For example, the following comment is repeated in posts in which criminal actors boast of their wealth: "One car you get in a legitimate way is better than 100 cars you get in sin." Others warn in comments about the consequences of responding to advertisements to join criminal gangs, especially arrest and imprisonment. Others post messages directed to young people and their families to reconsider their upbringing and beliefs: "Wake up, you older generation. Raise your children right. Don't wait for Ben Gvir to help you because he doesn't care about us Arabs." These messages try to restore the agency over the Palestinian society, restore the obligation to treat violence and crime in society and among individuals, and call to bring about change organically from the bottom up instead of waiting for protection from a government that is indifferent to the Arab society. By the same logic, many individual users involved in armed conflict call for tolerance and forgiveness: "Believe me, if we all forgive each other, none of this would have happened," while others share videos of mothers of crime victims talking about the pain of loss. This is important because humanizing and empathizing with these experiences may reduce the danger of criminal content. Dr. Haddad explains the importance of using TikTok as an awareness platform: "We post content that contradicts the negative content [...]. We must use TikTok positively [...]. You cannot avoid entering this arena because you think you will lose [...] in terms of views and interactions compared to criminal gangs' accounts." Dr. Haddad's view indicates a need for Palestinian activists, journalists, and specialists to join the TikTok platform to reduce the criminal and violent monopoly on it, restore the public digital space, and use it to counter crime rather than strengthen it.

4.6.1 Enforcement of TikTok policies

TikTok regulates the content circulating on its platform through a set of rules and policies known as "Community Guidelines", which define the types of content that are

allowed or prohibited to be published on the platform, according to a thematic classification as follows: Safety and civility, mental and behavioral health, sensitive and mature themes, integrity and authenticity, regulated goods, services and commercial activities, privacy and security.

The bulk of the criminal content discussed in the current study falls under the Community Guidelines, “safety and civility” section, particularly the guidelines on “violent and criminal behavior,” which prohibit promoting criminal activities or disputes on the platform. Also, the “violent and hateful organizations and individuals” policy, which prohibits “violent and hateful organizations or individuals” on TikTok, including criminal organizations. TikTok platform does not allow anyone to promote, support, recruit individuals, or provide any form of assistance to these entities. Although TikTok’s policies explicitly state that it opposes criminal and violent behavior, the platform seems less decisive in enforcement, especially since moderation often occurs after content is uploaded. Indeed, the analysis and examples reviewed in the current report show that TikTok allows accounts and criminal organizations to continue using the platform for criminal purposes, revealing a gap between the platform’s stated policies and its enforcement mechanisms in practice.

The aforementioned gap in criminal organizations’ use of the platform as an infrastructure to facilitate and manage criminal activity or even enhance their operational capability (see Chapter one), contradicts TikTok’s policy prohibiting the use of the platform to provide material support to these organizations through: “Providing money, goods, or services [...] including fundraising, recruitment, or merchandise sales,” and policies that prohibit “promoting theft or vandalism” or “sharing instructions on how to commit crimes that may harm people, animals, or property.” These are also in violation of TikTok’s policies on “regulated goods and services,” which prohibit trading or marketing of prohibited or dangerous goods and services such as illegal drugs, firearms, gambling, and counterfeit currency or documents.

Similarly, the spectrum of content and digital practices associated with using a set of symbols, vocabulary, and images that evoke crime and violence (see Chapter two) is contrary to TikTok’s policy of prohibiting “the display of people, symbols, objects, speeches, or statements associated with violent criminal organizations.” Using the platform to promote, market, or build the identity of criminal organizations (see Chapter three) is a violation of TikTok’s policy that prohibits “promoting or glorifying violence [...] or glorify acts

of violence” or even praise violent criminal organizations. In addition, using the platform as a communication tool between criminal organizations and the public or their victims for the purpose of intimidation (see Chapter Four) is a violation of TikTok’s policy prohibiting “threatening or expressing a desire to physically harm others.”

These data intersect with field testimonies of a feeling of lack of control in TikTok, as Abu Da’abes says: “TikTok in particular, and many other networks, have become a kind of backyard without control [...]” Abu Da’abes explains that the platform’s anonymity makes it difficult to track down and prosecute those involved in disseminating criminal content. This claim is consistent with theories of online moral deviance and disinhibition: Separating the digital act from personal identity weakens the conscience and moral responsibility that might otherwise inhibit the commission of the criminal act. This complexity is heightened when publications do not contain explicit phrases or visuals of violence that would allow them to evade algorithmic censorship, as is the case with publications that feed criminal culture, as discussed in chapters three and four.

The study’s findings reveal a lack of enforcement of TikTok’s policies on two interrelated levels: First, the platform failed to monitor, remove, or limit the spread of content that directly violates its policies on criminal and violent behavior. Second, the platform’s structure, which is based on the attention economy and algorithmic recommendation systems, appears to have amplified rather than reduced the reach of this content, especially when it is shocking or generates high levels of engagement. Therefore, the findings of the study suggest that the challenge is not the absence of policies per se, but rather their limited enforcement and the contradiction between TikTok’s stated commitments to protect users, and the reality of the spread of criminal content on the platform. The continued emergence of this type of content and its reach to millions of users, including children and young people raise fundamental questions about the extent to which TikTok adheres to human rights due diligence principles and about the responsibility of digital platforms to assess societal risks arising from their recommendation systems.

5. Conclusion

The study shows that criminal behavior on TikTok, or in the field, cannot be understood as individual behavior, but rather is a complex social phenomenon that arises from the interaction of a wide range of factors, including the digital environment, marginalization, structural discrimination, poverty, upbringing and family relationships, exposure to violence, weak educational frameworks, weak institutional protection and police laxity. The extent to which individuals are involved in the production, consumption, or circulation of criminal content on TikTok depends on factors similar to those of its prevalence in the field, with the addition of new digital factors such as intensive internet consumption, technical skills, etc. In other words, the digital space does not create crime out of thin air, but it can expand its scope and reshape how it emerges and spreads.

The study shows that TikTok works not only as a platform for the dissemination of violent content, but also as a recruitment tool, a platform for managing and coordinating criminal acts, as a cultural medium, as a symbolic social space for identity building, as a channel of communication and strengthening of relations within and outside the criminal group, and as a propaganda and marketing tool that normalize violence in the public mind and influences the behaviors of some young people. The materials analyzed show that some users associated with the criminal world use this digital environment to mock adversaries, issue statements and threats, glorify gang members, or build a public image that enhances their position within the criminal group.

The rapid development of the internet and social media has provided unprecedented opportunities for criminals to expand their activities, whether through the rapid spread of content to large audiences, anonymous dissemination, or coordination across individuals and networks that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. Moreover, TikTok not only reflects the reality of crime in Palestinian society; it is one of the elements in a complex, intertwined structure of factors that contribute to the reproduction of crime. TikTok's algorithms amplify the spread of shocking content, drama, and excitement, turning views and interactions into a measure of people's social value, while the platform's fast-paced visual performance, music, and instant audience interaction turn crime into a consumable, circulating show.

Confronting this phenomenon requires a holistic approach that goes beyond focusing solely on digital content. The responsibility for combating crime and violence on digital platforms lies with a wide network of social and political actors, including tech companies,

educational institutions, civil society, political movements, the media, the families, etc. Reducing this phenomenon cannot be achieved solely through technical deletion of content, but rather by building a social, cultural, and legal protection system capable of addressing the structural roots of violence and the transformations the digital space has brought to how it emerges and spreads.

6. Recommendations:

A. TikTok

- » Establishing a local content review team of Palestinian specialists, professionals, and researchers to monitor and report on criminal content and develop mechanisms to address it.
- » Developing a mechanism to predict criminal behaviors or monitor and restrict dangerous accounts.
- » Developing immediate censorship and supervision steps to restrict criminal content at the moment of publication.
- » Providing easier and clearer reporting tools for content related to organized crime.
- » Suspension of recommendation systems and algorithms to reduce the algorithmic spread of violent content.
- » Publishing periodic transparency reports on content moderation policies, including the volume of reported criminal content, its removal rates, and the time to respond.
- » Providing independent audit mechanisms that enable researchers and civil society to assess the effectiveness of digital policy enforcement and its impact on affected communities.
- » Strengthening safety settings for teens and limiting the recommendation of violent content for their accounts.

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B. Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights Institutions

- » Establishing a unit for monitoring, tracking, and analyzing criminal content on digital platforms, which includes experts in education, media, and digital rights, to follow up on the phenomenon.
- » Joining forces and building joint coordination frameworks to counter crime and violence, so that each actor works from its own location and competence, including the exchange of knowledge and experiences, the coordination of community initiatives, and the development of more

effective and sustainable collective responses.

- » Issuing practical guides to young people on how to report and document criminal content.
- » Launching digital awareness programs and campaigns on the risks of engaging with criminal content on social media platforms.
- » Organizing training programs for parents and teaching staff to provide them with technical and educational tools to supervise their children's use of technology.
- » Supporting the establishment of youth centers and cultural initiatives in Arab towns to provide safe and alternative spaces for youth to express themselves and participate socially in a way that reduces alienation from society.
- » Developing training programs and workshops for journalists on sensitive and responsible reporting methods of crime and violence, considering the dignity of victims and the privacy of families and limiting the amplification of crime or glorification of perpetrators.
- » Providing digital consultations to business owners on protecting their digital presence from extortion and threats.

C. Political Movements and Local Authorities in Palestinian Society in Israel

- Include the issue of the spread of criminal content on digital platforms in the agenda of political and societal action.
- Developing a comprehensive community plan to confront digital crime and its impact on youth.
- Strengthening independent community reconciliation and mediation initiatives to prevent their exploitation by criminal actors, while developing accountability and internal control mechanisms to prevent collaborations with criminal gangs.
- Practicing political pressure for equitable economic and development policies that address structural poverty, unemployment, and lack of infrastructure and services in Arab towns.
- Establishing community-based support and funding programs for youth and families in need.

- Moving from a temporary response to crime to a long-term field action plan to put pressure on the police and others involved in the outbreak of crime.

D. Educational Institutions and Schools

- » Passing courses in digital culture and media criticism within the educational programs.
- » Developing mechanisms to detect early behaviors indicative of students' imitation of criminal culture.
- » Enhancing the role of educational counselors and consultants in dealing with the impact of digital content.
- » Providing psychosocial support programs for students who are most vulnerable to violent content.
- » Organizing joint awareness workshops for students and parents about the dangers of criminal content on platforms.

E. Press and Media

- » Adopting a media code of conduct for covering crime and violent content.
- » Avoid posting or recirculating videos of violence and murder in a theatrical manner.
- » Focusing on analytical and investigative journalism rather than quick and timely coverage.
- » Highlighting the social and psychological impact of crime rather than focusing on its bloody details.
- » Refraining from communicating or responding to requests from criminals to post videos, photos, or statements.

F. Families and Parents

- » Ongoing and conscious follow-up on children's use of digital platforms.
- » Conducting open dialogue with children about the content they watch and its impact on them.

- » Paying attention to indicators for liking criminal content or glorification of criminal characters.
- » Avoid normalizing manifestations of quick money, violence, or prestige associated with crime within family discourse.

G. International Bodies Concerned with Digital Rights and Children's Rights

- » Putting the spread of criminal content on digital platforms on the agenda of children's online protection.
- » Practicing pressure on tech companies to adopt more effective censorship, oversight, and response standards in environments affected by violence.
- » Supporting research and community programs to address the impact of criminal content on digital platforms on youth.

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