Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water:
Using Facebook to Mobilize Solidarity Among
East Jerusalem Palestinians During the 2014 War in Gaza

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This study explores the use of a major Facebook page by East Jerusalem Palestinians during the peak of the war in Gaza for building solidarity with the Gaza people in the asymmetric conflict with Israel. A data set containing 253 posts and 1,149 comments was qualitatively analyzed. Our findings reveal three mechanisms—calling for solidarity, maintaining engagement, and calling for protest—reflecting a configuration in which collective actions were performed through connective discursive practices. We also discuss our study as an account of a bounded protest in which online platforms are limited in their ability to transcend domination and the lack of resources for political mobilization while the offline circumstances of asymmetrical power relations remain unchanged.

Keywords: social media, Facebook, online political participation, mobilization, protest, asymmetric conflict, Israel, Palestine, East Jerusalem

Introduction

This study broadens the discussion on the mobilization of fragmented, dispersed communities in asymmetric, protracted violent conflict through social media tools (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013). We discuss the case of East Jerusalem Palestinians, a doubly marginalized minority, largely isolated by geopolitical barriers from other Palestinian communities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and living under Israeli control.

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Our study explores the ways in which a major Facebook page operating from East Jerusalem was used during the peak of the war in Gaza in the summer of 2014 by the East Jerusalem Palestinians as a platform for building and maintaining solidarity with the Gaza people, for mobilizing political action, and for reconstructing their connectedness and sense of belonging to a larger national collective in times of crisis (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007). The analysis uses qualitative methodologies and is based on a data set containing 253 posts that gained total of 16,388 likes and 1,149 comments. Our findings point to three major mechanisms through which these attempts for mobilization were performed: calling for solidarity, maintaining engagement, and directly calling for nonviolent as well as violent action. From a more critical point of view, we also discuss our study as an account of a bounded protest (Aouragh, 2012), in which the ability of new media to transcend domination and facilitate political mobilization is limited, while the offline circumstances of asymmetrical power relations remain unchanged (Dahlgren, 2013).

Theoretical Background

New media is described as giving rise to new centers of power (Castells, 2013; Curran, 2002) that enable a reconstructed social reality and provide symbolic resources through which conflicts are represented and perceived (Boyd-Barrett, 2002). These "micro-powers" (Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey, 2009), also play a role in mobilizing political participation and protest through supplying alternative channels for communication and mobilization (Bebawi, 2014; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). Alternative social media channels for communicating and disseminating agendas and information become especially significant in political situations in which other channels are blocked, monitored, or restricted by the state (Masoud, 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Social Media, Political Participation, and Protest in Dispersed, Isolated Communities

Society is moving away from traditional forms of political participation through formal institutions. The advent of Web 2.0 and social media (Papacharissi, 2009) has shifted the task of mobilization from organizations with stable structures to individuals and groups (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2013). In places where access to the symbolic power of the mainstream media is banned or restricted, the Internet has been documented to play a role in leveraging the ideological and political power of dispersed, isolated, and fragmented communities (Kalathil, 2002). Through the Internet, such communities are able to maintain close relations with one another (Aouragh, 2008; Pantti & Boklage, 2014).

The protests in the Arab world starting in January 2011 have drawn academic attention to the role of social media in the mobilization of solidarity and civil action (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, & Pearce, 2011; Wilson & Dunn, 2011). Within this framework, increased attention is paid to the capability of social media to build geopolitical bridges. Recent research focuses on the mechanisms through which activists and users in dispersed communities, such as Arab communities residing in the Diaspora, seek to mobilize agendas of protest through social media (Pantti & Boklage, 2014).

People participate in social protests to enforce political change as well as to express grievances and feelings of injustice, indignation, hatred, and hope for a better future (Castells, 2013; Jaspers, 1997; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). These feelings are likely to be strengthened through the gathering and distributing of images. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter enable activists to meet others who share similar goals and emotions, thus supporting and sustaining dispersed activists (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Cammaerts, 2007) and strengthening collective identity through the new media technology (Castells, 2013; Pantti & Boklage, 2014).

Digital communication technologies offer activists efficient tools for coordinating offline action (Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Cammaerts, Mattoni, & McCurdy, 2013). Importantly, social media allows information distribution, dialogue, and identity building through mechanisms of alternative journalistic practices (Bebawi, 2014).

Alternative Journalism, Mobilization, and Protest

The rise of user-generated content online has circumvented traditional mass media control of news and information (Livingstone, 1999; Livingstone & Asmolov, 2010) and has given rise to practices of alternative reporting (Atton, 2002). Alternative reporting refers to nonprofessional noninstitutional use of social media (Atton, 2002; Atton & Hamilton, 2008), which, in the case studied here, is used by activists and protestors to communicate and mobilize their agendas (Bewabi & Bossio, 2014). Chris Atton (2002) uses the term *alternative media* to describe practices that provide information and interpretations of the world that would not be found through other channels. Atton and Hamilton (2008) argue that alternative journalism is "journalism of politics and empowerment," suggesting the political function of alternative modes of practice. They define alternative journalism as produced by outside mainstream media institutions and networks and by amateurs who typically have little or no training or professional qualifications as journalists. Dissemination of this information occurs via horizontal communication networks between members of marginalized or oppressed groups. Similarly, John Downing (2001) describes alternative journalistic practice as radical, grassroots, or community media, and as a form and practice of information dissemination not purely focused on journalism. Alternative journalistic practices are also often referred to as citizen journalism, therefore linking these practices to the enactment of citizenship in everyday lives and the empowerment of ordinary citizens (Allan, 2010; Rodriguez, 2003).

The term *alternative journalistic practices* was used to conceptualize and study the inherent complexities of the different means of information gathering and dissemination that occurred during the Arab Spring protests (Bewabi & Bossio, 2014). Alternative journalism practices were defined in this context as media reportage, production, and dissemination practices that are embedded within the everyday lives of people and are specific to a historical, political, and cultural context (Rodriguez, 2003). Such practices demarcate themselves from professionalized and institutionalized practices of mainstream media in their focus on a particular audience, issue, or specific context and in emphasizing advocacy and first-person and eyewitness accounts and collective and interactive reporting practices (Bewabi & Bossio, 2014).

Research on the Arab Spring indicates that social media have played a considerable role in this Middle East crisis through their function as platforms for alternative journalistic practices (Lotan et al., 2011). Social media are described as emerging during the Arab Spring as sites of communication in their own right that have become "micro-powers" (Castells et al., 2009) presenting a form of communication that enables people to organize protests and allows activists and residents to communicate their specific needs (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). However, other, more critical perspectives point to the potential of new media as tools for repression and control (Morozov, 2011) and emphasize that online networks are inescapably intertwined with the sociopolitical, physical circumstances and power structures in which they are embedded. Therefore, the ability of new media platforms to transcend domination and overcome the lack of resources for political mobilization while the offline circumstances of asymmetrical power relations remains unchanged is severely limited (Aouragh, 2012; Dahlgren, 2013).

Our study focuses on a recent crisis in the Middle East: the Israel–Hamas war in Gaza, referred to by Israelis as Operation Protective Edge, and by the Palestinians as *Al-Jarf Al-Samid* (الجَرف الصامد),[2] which took place in July–August 2014 in the Gaza Strip, and which further aggravated Israeli–Palestinian relations in East Jerusalem and beyond (Ma'oz, 2014). The 2014 war in Gaza began on July 8, 2014, and went on for seven weeks; it included Israeli bombardment, Palestinian rocket attacks, and ground fighting. During the war, 2,205 Palestinians and 73 Israelis were killed ("Israelis Who Were Killed," 2014; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2014).

We examine the ways in which East Jerusalem Palestinians used a social media platform in an attempt to build and maintain a sense of civil nationhood under extreme conditions (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007) and to express and mobilize solidarity, political participation, and protest.

East Jerusalem Palestinians as a Doubly Marginalized, Dispersed Community

Our study examines the case of East Jerusalem Palestinians, a doubly marginalized minority (Suleiman, 2002) in the asymmetric Israeli–Palestinian conflict. East Jerusalem Palestinians are largely isolated by geopolitical barriers from other Palestinian communities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and live under Israeli control. The infrastructure of Palestinian traditional communication in general and of East Jerusalem specifically is subject to restrictions and limitations to its autonomy. Opportunities of journalists working in traditional media platforms to give voice to collective opposition or to express dissenting opinions in the public sphere are partly restricted by both the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Berger, 2013; Jamal, 2005). A brief historical background throws light on the status of this community (Alyan, Sela, & Pomernatz, 2012).

On June 27–28, after the end of the 1967 war, the Israeli government, headed by Levi Eshkol, voted in favor of expanding Jerusalem's municipal borders to include the Jordanian part of the city to its western part. Following this decision, a special ministerial committee under the name of "city unification"

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[2] The Palestinians had another name for the war: *Al-asf Al-Maakul* (العَصْف المَأْكول), meaning "devoured green blades." This expression is mentioned in the Qur'an, referring to an army of enemies after being destroyed by a flock of birds sent by Allah during the Habash attack on Mecca in 570 C.E.

recommended annexing 70 square kilometers of a more agricultural territory (Amirav, 2007; Cohen, 2007). Since then, East Jerusalem was placed under the law and administration of the state of Israel (Cohen, 2007). Israel does not use the term *annexation*, contending that the integration of East Jerusalem is serving the residents and protecting the holy places. In contrast, the international community considers East Jerusalem as de facto annexed by Israel since 1967 and does not recognize this territory as an integral part of Israel (Amirav, 2007).

The Palestinians residents who stayed in the city were given a status of permanent residency, which enables them to work and move freely in Israel and to receive social rights such as welfare and health insurance. They are also eligible to vote in the municipal elections of Jerusalem but choose, consistently, not to do so. Differing from the Palestinians citizens of Israel, East Jerusalem Palestinians are not eligible to vote for the Israeli parliament or to hold an Israeli passport and are subject to additional restrictions and limitations. Their unique geopolitical status positions Palestinian residents of Jerusalem in a state of double marginality (Suleiman, 2002) that is religious, ethnic, and national—a marginalization both in terms of their Palestinian and their Israeli identities, belonging, and sense of connectedness.

In 2013, the number of Palestinians residents living in East Jerusalem was 300,000, out of 800,000 residents in general. It is a very poor population, with 78.4% of the families living in poverty (Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2013). Research has shown that the civil society in East Jerusalem had deteriorated over the years and specifically since the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada (the second Palestinian uprising) (Alyan et al., 2012; Greenberg, 2009; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011).

In addition, the closing of the Orient House, which functioned as a major political-cultural center for East Jerusalem Palestinians and for Palestinians at large, and the building of the separation wall that has separated Jerusalem from the West Bank caused a major decrease in commercial and cultural activities in Jerusalem. Today, there are almost no formal institutions in East Jerusalem that explicitly represent the Palestinian Authority or the Palestinian national agenda. The vast majority of such institutions were shut down or moved outside the municipal borders of the city so they can operate more freely (Cohen, 2007; Dumper, 2011; Tamari, 2003).

The Internet infrastructure in the Palestinian territories was established after the Oslo Agreements and the foundation of a Palestinian communication office (Aouragh, 2011; Ben David, 2012; Khoury-Machool, 2007). In 1996, universities and homes started to get connected to the Internet. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority turned to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers asking for a domain PS. Their request was accepted only in 2003, after the United Nations began to write on its official documents and Web pages the name Palestinian Authority (Ben David & Bahour, 2009).

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2013), 95.7% of Palestinians hold mobile phones, and more than half of the youth ages 15 to 29 use the Internet. In the West Bank 34.3% of the homes are connected to the Internet, whereas in the Gaza Strip only 27.9% are connected. A survey conducted by the Dubai School and Government (2011) on the use of Facebook among

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza found that almost a million people in the age group of 15 to 29 use Facebook.

In 2012, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) published separate data on the use of Internet in East Jerusalem (as defined according to the municipal borders of the city demarcated by Israel): 54.1% of East Jerusalem residents owned a computer, 44.4% had an Internet connection at home, and 96.5% owned a mobile phone. Against this background of geopolitical isolation and lack of formal institutions (Alyan et al., 2012; Cohen, 2007), on the one hand, and considerable connectedness through the Internet on the other hand, it is not surprising that social media is increasingly used as a platform for expressing and mobilizing national and political agendas by East Jerusalem Palestinians.

Research Corpus

This study explores how a major Facebook page operating from East Jerusalem was used during the peak of the war in Gaza in the summer of 2014 by Palestinians from East Jerusalem in an attempt to build and maintain solidarity with the Gaza people and mobilize protest.

We examined Facebook posts and comments during one of the most dramatic crises and escalations in the war: beginning on July 20—12 days after the war in Gaza began and in the midst of the Battle of Shuja'iyya—and ending on July 29. The Battle of Shuja'iyya between the Israel Defense Forces and Hamas military wing, the Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, took place on July 19–20, 2014, in the Shuja'iyya neighborhood of Gaza City, the Gaza Strip. About 100 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed, and hundreds were wounded. Thirteen Israeli soldiers were killed, and more than 50 soldiers were wounded (Dvori, 2014; Wafa, 2014).

Methods

Our analysis focuses on a Facebook page founded and administrated by Palestinians from East Jerusalem. The page relates to political and national aspects of the East Jerusalem Palestinian community, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and Jerusalem as a contested city. To build our research corpus, we conducted an initial mapping of Facebook activity in East Jerusalem by locating a Facebook page dealing with the relevant topics. We then used the snowball technique whereby clicking on one page led us to other related pages. In addition, we conducted a search on Facebook toolbar using keywords such as *al-Quds*, *Jerusalem*, and names of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem to identify additional East Jerusalem Palestinian Facebook pages dealing with these topics. From the resulting corpus of Facebook pages, we chose pages that had at least 10,000 followers and more than 1,000 people "talking about this" (see Table 1).

This process revealed five major East Jerusalem Palestinian pages (see Table 1 for a full list of the pages and basic data regarding each of them). These pages were characterized by almost 24/7 activity of the administrators and users posting and commenting on various issues related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and other sociopolitical and religious issues. From these pages we used the numbers of likes and people "talking about this" to select the most popular and influential page.

***Table 1. Popularity Metrics of Major Facebook Pages Operating From East
Jerusalem Dealing With the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict and Jerusalem as a Contested City.***

Name of page	Date founded	Number of likes	Number of people talking about this
باب العامود الان Bab Al-Amud al-A'n	November 2012	193,027	63,888
مدينة القدس Jerusalem City	October 2010	170,834	1,344
انا من القدس I am from Jerusalem	February 2010	18,362	7,504
صفحة بيت حنينا ـ القدس Beit Hanina's Page- Jerusalem	November 2012	36,382	1,583
المكبر نت mukaber.net	September 2012	17,286	6,359

Note. The data presented were recorded between March and November 2014. The number of likes reflects the number of people who pressed the "like" button of one or more of the pages and became followers. Number of people talking about this is the current metric of how many direct interactions followers have with a certain page. Direct interactions occur when users like a page, post on the page's wall, like a post, comment on a post, share a post, RSVP to a page's event, mention the page in a post, tag the page in a photo, and more.

The page selected using these criteria was Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (باب العامود الان). As shown in Table 1, this Facebook page had the highest number of likes, with a sizable gap between it and the other Facebook pages, thus positioning it as a major social media platform for East Jerusalem Palestinians. This page had 193,027 people liking it and 63,888 people who are "talking about this" engaging in direct activities on the page.

The analysis is based on a data set containing 253 posts that gained a total of 16,388 likes and 1,149 comments to these posts mostly written on the same day in which the post was uploaded. Manual screen shots were taken, using Faststone capture software,[3] of the days included in our study—enabling us to follow 24 hours of activity on the Facebook page and to capture posts, comments, videos, and images online.

Research Site: The Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n Facebook Page

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n was founded in November 2012 by four Palestinians from East Jerusalem, and it was removed by Facebook in November 2014 (for more details about the removal of the page, see the Discussion section). With 193,207 likes, this Facebook page was, at the time of our study, one of the most popular pages operating from East Jerusalem.[4] According to the statistics of *SocialBakers*, its

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[3] http://www.faststone.org/FSCaptureDetail.htm.

[4] The number of the page's likes is updated for September 2014.

distribution of fans is as follows: Israel 39.4%, Palestinian Authority 22.4%, Egypt 13.1%, Jordan 7.8%, and Saudi Arabia 2.0%. Other countries, such as Morocco, Turkey, Italy, and India, appear in the distribution statistics but are not mentioned here since their fan percentage is very low (between 0.1% and 1.8 %). The administrators of the page stated that Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n is a Jerusalemite Palestinian news page. They elaborate on the page's name as follows: "The name of *Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n* is taken from the name of the northern wall of the old city wall; it was used as a main passage to the 'flower of the cities.'"[5] The admins express hope to "show Jerusalem as it has never been shown before."

Analysis

Our analysis is based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss 1967), which emphasizes the generation of theories and concepts based on data derived from the research (Berg, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In line with this theory, a thematic analysis of posts and comments was conducted.

The initial analysis revealed several thematic categories emerging from the posts and comments sampled. After rereading the texts, including images, the number of categories was reduced by combining similar categories and focusing on those emerging as most relevant (Berg, 2004). Next, the various texts were integrated via categories they had in common. These categories were scrutinized again for centrality (repeated appearances across the period examined), for the connections between them, and for their relevance to theory and to the subject of the study (ibid.). The analysis process revealed three major thematic categories, which are presented in the next section.

Findings

This section presents the three major themes that emerged from our analysis of the Facebook page. Taken together, the themes reveal how a doubly marginalized ethnonational community in asymmetric conflict uses social media as a platform for expressing and promoting its agenda and aspirations and for mobilizing action. This is done via three major mechanisms: calling for solidarity, maintaining engagement, and directly calling for action.

Calling for Solidarity with the "Gaza Family"

A major theme that emerged during the time period examined and that is clearly reflected in the quotes below is the call for solidarity and support for the Gaza people. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *This is a message about a general strike in all the Palestinian territories. Sincerely, the person who will open his shop is a greedy bastard and shouldn't be in this village.* (75 likes, July 20, 2014)

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[5] The expression "flower of the cities"—*Zahrat al madain* (زهرة المدائن)—refers to the beauty of Jerusalem and to the longing for the city. It is one of the old names of Jerusalem.

A comment to this post calls directly for an intifada (uprising):

> *Tomorrow Intifada, Understanding Intifada! That's right, we need to let them [the Israelis] feel what the Gaza sons are feeling. The sons of Gaza are dying for us, so our children could live.*

Lacking institutionalized channels for mobilizing solidarity, East Jerusalem Palestinians used this Facebook platform to organize and call for actions that express solidarity with the Gaza people. Several posts such as the one below (See Figure 1) call on people to make contributions to the Gaza people. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *Tomorrow at "Dar Al-Tifel" a charity organization will be collecting products and clothes for families in Gaza. From 9 AM–12 PM. If you can donate to Gaza, even a little, so do so. In the name of Allah, they are in need now, people. Allah will be with them. Allah will be their savior and provider. Please spread the message. #Abu Al-Shahid [the martyrs' father].* (57 likes, July 20, 2014)

The metaphor of blood ties is repeated in many of these calls for solidarity. The posts analyzed here relate to the Gaza people as family and brothers, and thus emphasize the strong connection (and commitment) between the Palestinian people that transcend geopolitical barriers. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *Respect to the doctors' teams in Gaza . . . we bless their work and presence in saving our families in Gaza. Respect #Abu Al-Shahaid* (144 likes, July 22, 14)

The comments on this post echo this call for respect.

> *Sure, Respect.*
> *Respect and great appreciation, angels of mercy.*
> *Allah will protect them and keep them from any harm.*

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *What is scarier than a look of a worrying father? Sorrow and pain with fear, and when the father will be in a bed in a hospital you'll know you are in Gaza! Allah, [where is] the victory you promise to our deprived brothers.* (50 likes, July 25, 2014)

**Figure 1. Screen shot of the post referring to the
father holding his wounded son in the hospital.**

Many posts and comments also featured central motifs involving religion, religious symbols, and evocations of God. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *Calling your venerable name to answer us . . . Allah, let our families in Gaza win. God give them strength . . . Allah, punish those who imposed a siege on them.* (50 likes, July 27, 2014)

Religion and religious symbols emerge as central to the definition of Palestinian personal and collective identity (Ma'oz, 2014). Solidarity and empathy are expressed through religious symbols that are perceived as unifying and as transcending physical distance—connecting people from different areas and constituting a collective source of power and hope. In an almost poetic text, Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> *Allah, protect Gaza. . . its men and youth . . . its women . . . its kids and elders . . . Allah, protect its property, the buildings and the factories. Allah, protect the earth and*

its products . . . Allah, protect its security and the families' source of income . . . Allah
protect its borders and the sea . . . and protect them, you are the best savior. (85 likes,
July 29, 2014)

Because much of the war in Gaza took place during the major Muslim religious holiday of
Ramadan, which involves a month of fasting, many of the quotes refer to Ramadan, asking God to accept
the Ramadan fast and prayers and help win the struggle.

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

May your fast be accepted by Allah (blessing for the Ramadan holiday) don't forget your
brother in Gaza☺. (58 likes, July 20, 2014)

These quotes demonstrate the ways in which the social media platform is used to create and
maintain solidarity among the isolated and fragmented community of East Jerusalem Palestinians with the
Palestinian struggle in general and the Gaza family in particular. The metaphor of family is evoked in an
attempt to transcend geographical boundaries with blood ties. Many of the calls also address God as the
savior and evoke religious content, symbols, and practices as unifying, empowering, and transcending
geographical distances. Our analysis also reveals how this social media channel is used practically for
instigating concrete action. Given the scarcity of established Palestinian formal institutions in East
Jerusalem and the restrictions on traditional media channels (Berger, 2013), the platform of Facebook is
used as an alternative mechanism for mobilizing acts of solidarity: for organizing and distributing
information about marches, strikes, and charity that express solidarity with the Gaza people. Although the
focus here is on the mechanisms, forms, metaphors, and symbols used to call for solidarity and action,
the two themes described below reveal the ways in which connectedness, solidarity, engagement, and
collective action are discursively performed through the online interactions of the page's administrators
and users.

Maintaining Engagement: Encouraging Online Participation

Social media and new media in general pave a path for ordinary users to become journalists or
reporters (Dahlgren, 2013; Liebes & Kampf, 2007). This active online participation through commenting,
uploading photos, liking, and sharing creates and maintains engagement (Castells, 2013).

The administrators of the Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n Facebook page encourage and maintain
engagement by presenting direct questions, asking their "imagined audience" (Marwick, 2011) to respond
and, through their responses, actively participate in this alternative journalism project of jointly reporting,
experiencing, and sharing information about the Gaza war and the ensuing situation in Jerusalem. Bab Al-
Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

Those who have fireworks in their area—make a strong like. (225 likes, July 20, 2014)

This post was uploaded after the information regarding a missing Israeli soldier was verified. The fireworks are an act of celebration of the soldier's kidnapping. The responses to the post draw a geographical map of the users following the page and of locations where the kidnapping was celebrated:

> Beit Hanina
> Wadi Al-Joz
> Silwan is on fire.
> Jabal Al-Mukaber
> Ras Al-Amud
> It is not only fireworks, it is also bullets.
> Allah Akbar we celebrated two holidays, the capturing of the soldier and Eid al-Fitr [feast of breaking the fast, a religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide that marks the end of Ramadan] every year, and you are well—Palestinians people.
> Shuafat is on fire.
> Isawiya is on fire.

The term *citizen journalism* captures something of the countervailing ethos of the ordinary person's capacity to bear witness (Allan, 2005) demonstrated here. Typically for alternative journalistic practices these are more subjective, first-person accounts (Bossio, & Bebawi, 2012). The Facebook page platform is used to create a virtual map defining and interconnecting localities that are part of the East Jerusalem Palestinian community, with users' comments performing an almost ceremonial lighting up of one locality after the other, as if to say: "We are also here." This type of communication continues as the situation on the ground in Jerusalem deteriorates. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> How is the situation at your place? In Silwan there is war . . . Allah will give strength to the youth. Tell us from where are you following us and what is your situation #Abu Al-Shahid" (67 likes, July 22, 2014)

The comments in response to this post again reveal the users' locations:

> Al-Tur is on fire. In Ras Al-Amud there is nothing.
> In Anata there is nothing, it is quiet.
> I'm in Silwan, only up at the entrance, all the clashes are happening down.

As demonstrated by these quotes, the page functions as a platform for providing and receiving updates about the situation in Jerusalem, on the location of clashes, and more. As we can see in the post below (See Figure 2), this platform is also used to communicate information that can help resist the Israeli forces in the struggles that are taking place in East Jerusalem: Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

> A unit of "mistaervim" [Israeli soldiers dressed like and posing as Arab civilians] started to put their shirts inside their pants so they can fit in more easily with the resistance boys in the city of Jerusalem and its surroundings.(139 likes, July 22, 2014)

Figure 2. Screen shot of the post referring to the "mistaervim" unit
(unit of Israeli soldiers dressed like and posing as Arab civilians).

Maintaining engagement and performing connectedness through online participation were closely linked to attempts to mobilize national-civil protest.

Calling for Nonviolent (and Violent) Action: The Al-Quds Intifada

The third topic addressed by the administrators and users of the Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n Facebook page is the intifada. The posts and comments call East Jerusalem Palestinian youth to go out on the streets and start an intifada in Jerusalem. The attempts to ignite an intifada in Jerusalem began before the war in Gaza and are connected to the abduction and killing of three Israeli boys by Palestinians and the killing of a Palestinian boy immediately after that by Israeli civilians in revenge. The posts below relate more explicitly to the violent clashes between Palestinian youth and Israeli forces, emphatically encouraging Palestinian youth to actively participate in these acts of violent resistance and specifically coordinating times and locations.

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

We will turn to flame the earth beneath the feet of the Zionist enemy. We will be angry and we will shake off and resist. To all the families in Gaza, youth, elders, women, children, to our families in Gaza, we will go outside tonight, we will burn all points of friction, and there will be demonstrations on all roads. Arabs of '48 [the Palestinian citizens of Israel]: Gaza is not in another planet. We will go out tonight after the Tarawih prayer [extra prayers performed by Muslims at night in the Islamic holy month of fasting] at 22:00.
Departure places:
Jerusalem: the march begins at the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque, the entrance of Shuafat refugee camp, the entrance of Isawiya village.
Ramallah: Ofer prison, Qalandia checkpoint [Qalandia is a Palestinian village located in the West Bank].

The following posts explicitly declare an intifada:

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

Clllllllaaaaaashes in alllllllll Jerrrrrrusalem, and the youth is on the streets. Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar. (133 likes, July 20, 2014)

In some of the posts such as the post below (See Figure 3), the administrators use hashtags to convince as many people as they can to participate and to connect to the wider conversation taking place in other online platforms. The comments to this post that are also shown here below (See Figure 4) indicate that people from the addressed, hashtagged neighborhoods did indeed respond, supplying more information and supporting the protesters.

Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

#Al-Tur, #Silwan. #Al Ram, #Qalandia, #Beth Lehem, #Hizma, #Al-Saaidia neighborhood, #Bab Hutta. Palestine won't calm down, declaring Intifada. Allah will give strength to the youth and protect them and will keep the mother fuckers away from them. Abu Al-Shahid. (80 likes, July 22, 2014)

باب العامود الان
July 22 ✻

#الطور
#سـلوان
#العيساويه
#الرام
#قلنديا
#بيت_لحم
#حزما
#حارة_السعديه
#باب_حطه
يا نبض #فلسطين لا تهدأ اعلنها #انتفاضه
الله يثبت الشباب ويحميهم ويبعد عنهم ولاد الحرام..
#ابو_الشهيد

Like · Comment · Share   📑 2 Shares

👍 80 people like this.   Recent Activity ▾

**Figure 3. Screen shot of the post referring, with a hashtag,
to places in which clashes are occurring.**

        In these posts the administrators use hashtags to convince as many people as they can to participate and to connect to the wider conversation taking place in other online platforms. The comments to this post indicate that people from the addressed, hashtagged neighborhoods did indeed respond, supplying more information and supporting the protesters:

> *In Al-Tur there is a bad smell of the car which sprays sewage water.*
> *Ya Rab, Allah will protect them and win and preserve them.*
> *Amen Ya Rab.*
> *Allah will save them and grant them victory.*
> *Allah will save them.*
> *Now in Al-Suwanah the car sprayed sewage water in the area.*
> *In Al-Tur warrrrrrrrrrrrrr.* (July 22, 2014)

**Figure 4. Screen shot of the post and comments regarding clashes in
two Palestinian East Jerusalem neighborhoods: *Al-Tur* and *Al-Suwanah*.**

Significantly, as we can see in the following post (See Figure 5) the call for violent resistance and intifada is also directed at Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the President of the Palestinian Authority. Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n (admin) writes:

Urrrrrrgent. Spread as much as you can: Invitation: The social network sites of Palestinian boys invite you to many angry marches in the West Bank and in the security zones and the Mukataa headquarters [the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority]— burn them because they are the reason for the Mahmoud Abbas betrayal of our brothers in Gaza. "Fight, victory or death" [quote of Abu Obadiah, spokesman for the Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam, the military wing of the Hamas]. Share. Share. Share in all formats. (145 likes, July 20, 2014)

Figure 5. Screen shot of the post calling to join the protest against Mahmoud Abbas.

This post had 12 comments in response, all calling for actions against Abu Mazen:

This pig should be assassinated.
Sure he is a traitor, he blames the Gaza people for refusing to accept the A-Sisi [the Egyptian President] suggestion and he says the Hamas are negotiating with the blood of the Gaza people.

In a situation of double marginality in asymmetric conflict, the call for violent protest against Israelis is clearly built upon the two other nonviolent mechanisms of calling for solidarity and maintaining engagement. However, significantly, this call for a Palestinian intifada in Jerusalem is an attempt to mobilize people to step outside the digital platform and perform protest actions in the real world. Interestingly, the call is for an uprising against not only the Israeli authorities but the Palestinian Authority and its President, Mahmoud Abbas. It might be that Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are less prone to self-censorship than Palestinians living in the West Bank, especially when we consider this post in the context of monitoring and even arresting West Bank journalists who criticized Abbas on Facebook (Strickland, 2014). This turn against the Palestinian Authority also can be understood as an expression of the unique situation of East Jerusalem Palestinians, in which they feel marginalized, oppressed, treated unfairly, and misrepresented—in terms of their national and political identities, agendas, and aspirations—both by Israel and by the Palestinian Authority (Cohen, 2007).

Discussion

New communication technologies, and particularly social media, have been described as an important resource for the mobilization, organization, and implementation of collective activities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2013; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011), promoting a sense of community and collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less confined political spaces, and establishing connections (Aouragh, 2012; Castells, 2013).

Our study continues and expands on this strand of research by focusing on the case study of a marginalized, partly isolated community embedded in an asymmetrical, protracted conflict (Alyan et al., 2012). The analysis of East Jerusalem Facebook posts during the peak of the 2014 Gaza war reveals the ways in which this ethnonational community uses social media as a platform for expressing and promoting its agenda and aspirations and calling for action in the context of the protracted asymmetrical conflict with the state of Israel.

Mobilizing Solidarity and Collective Action Through Social Media

Our findings demonstrate how attempts for mobilization were performed via three major mechanisms: calling for solidarity, maintaining engagement, and directly calling for and organizing protest. By providing opportunities for political expression, symbolic identification, and information exchange, social media presented an important alternative resource for the mobilization of collective action for this resource-poor community that is otherwise restricted by financial, political, and spatial constraints (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011). In terms of the major classification

offered by Bennett & Segerberg (2012), our findings reflect a configuration of "connective-collective" action, in which collective actions are performed through connective discursive mechanisms.

Mobilization Through Social Media in the Context of Asymmetrical Conflict

The geopolitical situation of the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem lends our findings special importance. Although this community is defined and self-identified as Palestinian, it is largely isolated from other parts of the Palestinian community and from centers of control, community building, power, and activity (Alyan et al., 2012; Cohen, 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011). Against this background of geopolitical isolation, the potential role of social media in building bridges, repositioning East Jerusalem Palestinians as part of the "Gaza family," and enabling them to discursively perform solidarity among themselves and with the Gaza people becomes clearer and more crucial. Especially interesting in this context is the frequent use of metaphors of family and blood ties and the repeated mention of God, religion, and religious symbols and practices in the attempt to reconstruct the imagination of nationhood and national identity (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007) in this isolated and resource-poor community.

In a sense, the geopolitical situation of the East Jerusalem Palestinian community—its physical isolation together with the lack of formal centralizing institutions—and restrictions of the autonomy of traditional media platforms (Berger, 2013) enables the capture with relative clarity of the use of social media for fulfilling compensational and alternative functions (Castells, 2013; Tufekci &Wilson, 2012). In this void constructed by the vagaries of double marginality in asymmetrical conflict, we examined the attempts to create through social media connecting bridges and construct online "national identity" centers where these cannot physically and politically exist (Cammaerts, 2007).

Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson (2012) describe the Tahrir Square political protests as enabled by social media in a context in which information flow and accessibility are tightly restricted: Broadcast media is controlled by the (Egyptian) government, journalists face restrictions and censorship, and communication between citizens is often subject to surveillance.

East Jerusalem Palestinians live in a complex situation in which they are residents of the state of Israel, economically and otherwise dependent on it, and at the same time are Palestinians involved in a continuous conflict with Israel. The infrastructure of Palestinian traditional communication in general and of East Jerusalem specifically is subject to restrictions and limitations to its autonomy. Opportunities for journalists working on traditional media platforms to give voice to collective opposition or to express dissenting opinions in the public sphere are partly restricted by both the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Berger, 2013; Jamal, 2005). We explore here how social media was used in an attempt to overcome domination and alter the key tenets of this situation (Castells, 2013) and create new possibilities. In this altered arena, our documentation portrays ways in which the marginalized, fragmented, and isolated community used social media to imagine, mobilize, and reconstitute nationality and national solidarity in asymmetric conflict (Frosh & Wolfsfeld, 2007).

The Dark Side

However, the fragility and vulnerability of this project were demonstrated when Facebook shut down the page and removed it from its site (See Figure 6) on November 2014 after receiving negative reports from people who were offended by the page's contents. Thus, ultimately, the process described here reflects the potential empowerment and the disempowerment of social media and digital platforms (Morozov, 2011) that enable monitoring, controlling, and even sanctioning of potentially disruptive content.

Because online networks are inevitably affected by the sociopolitical physical circumstances and by the power structures in which they are embedded (Aouragh, 2012; Dahlgren, 2013), the closing of this page may also reflect, to some extent, the offline structural sociopolitical circumstances of asymmetrical power relations and domination in which this page, and other similar pages, operate.

Figure 6. Screen shot of the message sent by Facebook on November 7, 2014, regarding the closing of the page Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n.

The post announcing the removal of the page (See Figure 7) received 89 likes and 12 comments including the following:

Admin: More than 190,000 likes: removed- goodbye page *Bab Al-Amud*!

Comment: Really?

Comment: Why??

Admin: Facebook closed it.

Comment: Why?

Admin: It is better; it was giving me a headache. hahaha.

Comment: Create a new page.

Admin: Why? Hahaha. It is actually better.

Comment: Allah will compensate you ya kbir [you are great].

Comment: Hahah what's going on?

Comment: Why?— what is wrong with the page!!!

Comment: Whyyyy!

Comment: Wwwaaaaaal [an expression of surprise in Arabic slang]
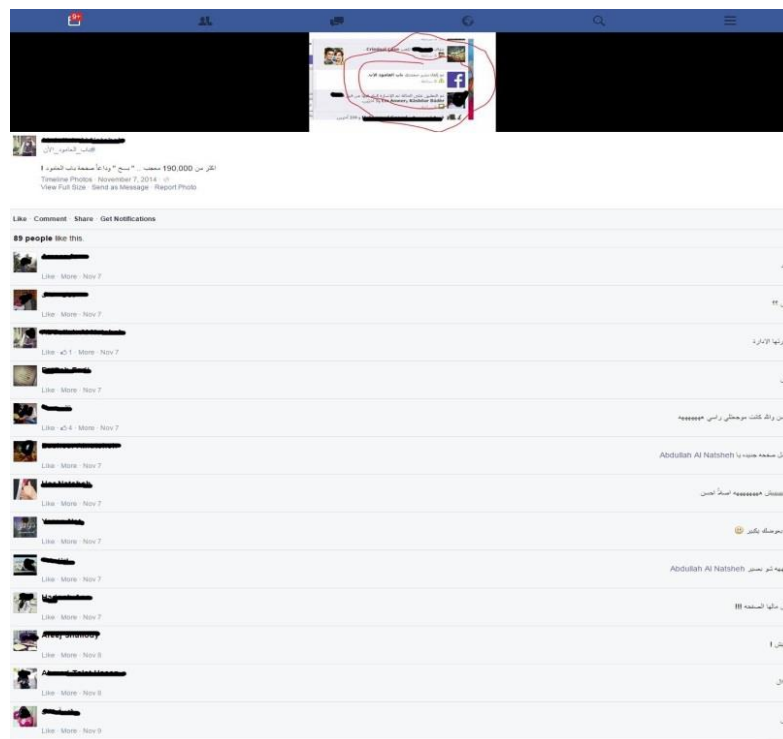
Comment: Why?

***Figure 7. Screen shot of the message posted by the
Admin and the comments regarding the removal of the page.***

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study analyzes one case study and therefore is limited in its generalizability. Future research should explore the use of social media platforms to mobilize solidarity and protest by decentralized, dispersed, and marginalized communities in other sites of asymmetric conflict to reach a broader understanding of this phenomenon. In addition, our findings emphasize the importance of further investigating the role of religious content, symbols, and religion-based disputes in mobilizing solidarity and protest through social media in asymmetric ethnonational conflicts (Ma'oz, 2014). This approach could be extended by considering the broader context of the evolvement of protests in settings of asymmetric power relations.

Based on a Marxist point of view, Aouragh's (2012) analysis of the latest political uprisings in the Arab world distinguishes between three revolutionary stages: (1) prerevolution, in which the activists prepare and mobilize their followers; (2) the moment of revolution, which is the tipping point of the uprising; and (3) postrevolution, the time of successful continuation or dangerous escalation. In terms of this classification and relying on the findings presented here, the collective protest in East Jerusalem seems to be in its prerevolutionary stage (Aouragh, 2012), when activists attempt to prepare the uprising and to mobilize followers and participants via social media. In the intractable conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the war in Gaza was a significant moment that enabled mobilization toward solidarity and protest. Future research should further examine online and offline evolvement of the protest in East Jerusalem and beyond, in moments of dramatic violent crisis such as the war in Gaza as well in more routine phases of this intractable conflict.

Conclusion

Our study focuses on a violent political crisis and on a population living under domination in which the channels through which its collective identity, national ethos, and solidarity can be expressed and mobilized are blocked (Aouragh, 2008, 2011; Greenberg, 2009; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2011). We demonstrated how one Facebook page, both used by and targeting this dispersed group, functioned as an alternative local news source (boyd & Elison, 2013), attempting to mobilize solidarity and protest in the harshly asymmetrical conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Previous work has importantly identified and studied the role of the Internet and social media sites as platforms for organization, implementation, and mobilization of collective action in political contexts that are characterized by asymmetric power (Aouragh, 2008, 2011; Castells, 2013; Khoury-Machool, 2007). Continuing this work, we explored the discursive mechanisms through which activists and users belonging to an ethnonational group living under domination construct and activate what can be seen as a counterpublic sphere (Downey & Fenton, 2003) through which their usually silenced, counterhegemonic voices and narratives can be heard (Couldry, 2010) and through which oppositional actions can be mobilized (Dahlgren, 2013).

But this study is also an account of a bounded protest (Aouragh, 2012) in which the ability of new media platforms to transcend domination and overcome a lack of resources for political mobilization is limited, while the offline circumstances of asymmetrical power relations remain unchanged (Dahlgren,

2013). Facebook's removal of the Bab Al-Amud Al-A'n page emphasizes the temporary nature of this counterpublic sphere and its vulnerability and fragility (Juris, 2012).

Our study focused on one bounded protest that was mobilized through a social media platform. Future studies should expand and study other cases of social media protest carried on under circumstances of violent crisis and severe power asymmetry. It may still be the case that the aggregation of bounded social media protests (Juris, 2012) such the one studied here can, in the long run, create significant sociopolitical change.

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