Palestine online: cyber Intifada and the construction of a virtual community 2001-2005

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Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter 7: Everyday Resistance and the Virtual Intifada

I am unable to fight for Palestine so I try this [via internet] the best way I can. When we do this, we feel excitement and joy inside. We can hardly wait to get a new target. – Hacktivist from Tripoli, Lebanon

The use of the internet in a patriotic way may lead to the continuation of the general struggle. – Abu Basel, PLO representative South-Lebanon

7.1 Introduction

Activists use the internet as a means of resistance. Dissemination of (alternative) information is of immense importance in the competition over audiences—i.e., their potential supporters. A new era in the battle over information and political organizing is marked by the grass-roots internet availability; internet users gained more democratic control over content and representation of news, and activists have erected new online sources like Indymedia and blogs. A well designed petition calling for protest or support, is updated with the latest facts and statistics, spiced up with pictures from the internet and a link to film footage on YouTube, and then emailed to thousands of people across the globe in a matter of hours. All this is possible with a low budget; it would have sounded like science fiction ten years ago but today it is part of the everyday tactics for many activist groups. As a tool for political organizations, internet clearly differs from previous tactics of organizing where time, distance, censorship, and financial issues were significant handicaps.

Informed by the spirit of the Mexican Zapatistas in 1995, WTO (Battle of Seattle) protests in 1999, and the unprecedented February 15th protests in 2003 all over the world, the internet was used to construct (new) social and political relationships. It was used with increasing enthusiasm when a tide of activism arose and a global movement began to emerge to challenge Bush’s war politics. Meanwhile, many of these groups ‘matured’ and various union, feminist, ecological, peace, and anti-capitalist groups linked-up. With this development, many have “overcome the limitations of postmodern identity politics” as it provided a basis for “new political alliances and solidarity” (Kellner and Kahn 2004:89). The development of an alternative media concurred with political activism, as the great upsurge of (political) internet use together with the intensification of protest in 1999 and 2001 have showed. More internet militancy emerged when hackers helped create Open Source software. With this software activists/groups can circumvent bans by exploiting wireless networks (Kellner and Kahn 2004:90).

Many of these developments were also represented with regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The engagement of international supporters and the political use of the internet by Palestinians themselves, asks for closer exploration. The aim of this chapter is to answer the research question — How is internet used to
mobilize local and trans-national pro-Palestinian activism—and thus, to turn to the third and final tension as outlined in Chapter One: resistance vs. oppression. At times, the impacts of the recent War on Terror security measures and the massive arrests Palestinians and destruction of their towns/camps, limited my access and chances to conduct interviews. And sometimes the fluctuation of people’s enthusiasm to talk about their internet usage also impinged on my research. Nevertheless, despite the difficult context, fieldwork generated scores of examples that highlight the dialectic relation between resistance and internet, bringing the context of oppression to the fore. The overarching issue since 9/11 in Palestinian politics is the debate about politics in the media.

It is widely assumed that the increase of media propaganda was meant to influence the “hearts and minds”; this “newspeak” logic, as Orwell called it, shaped a pro-war common sense. Thus internet engagement was primarily triggered by the aspiration to narrate alternative analyses about Palestine. Competition over Western audiences was central to Hear Palestine, Palestine Monitor mailing lists, and other websites. Moreover, though closure and military repression limited the possibility to organize public meetings by political parties, lively online debates and mobilization evolved alternative public spheres instead. Political internet use matured with the creation of discussion forums by popular political movements like Hamas and Fatah in the height of the Legislative Elections.

Countering media bias and organizing local and global political mobilizations, led to the birth of a (pro-Palestinian) technopolitical fringe, a new activism that I call Cyber Intifada. These examples begin to answer the research objective and will be further discussed in the next sections. First I will discuss the transformation of Palestinian representation and show how the internet has functioned as a political instrument in the struggle for national recognition. The dominant politics of the media represents the historical transformations in the ways Palestinians have been perceived: sometimes as victims, often as terrorists. This led to a political outcry for a permission to narrate their history, reflected in the (re)construction of a collective public sphere by dispersed diaspora groups in the preceding chapters.

Media activists mainly target audiences in the US and Europe because media distortions about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the West favour Israel. They develop a counter-public-sphere and form counterpublics (Warner 2002), as I conceptualised in Chapter Two. That is why many websites aim at re-humanizing Palestinians, as illustrated in Chapter Five. Official/mass media (print, television, radio) as significant channels for constructing knowledge and ideas are absent for Palestinians. The appropriation of new technology by oppressed communities as part of their everyday resistance made the internet an influential tool. This is an important background to the birth of media activism. I will debate how this new type of activism, sometimes a

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180 Sometimes there was suspicion regarding the work of journalists and researchers. More important were people’s everyday priorities; surviving the economic and military destruction of the Palestinian social-economic fabric at times also meant that internet engagement was not an essential topic during my meetings and interviews.
war of words, is fought. Because their own accounts—uprising—are not televized, other mediation is required.

One of the arguments in the second section is that the media is not neutral and therefore the revolution will not be televized, as Gill Scot Heron sang in the 1970s. The outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 rallied broad political support and the proliferation of new media technology was able to add a new dimension to the Palestinian politics of resistance. (Pro) Palestinians in the West, and many Palestinian groups in the occupied territories and diaspora, played a crucial role in convincing Western audiences of the Palestinian plight. These different Palestinian settings tell us something about the different kinds of involvement and implementation of politics. In Palestine the internet is not the primary tool for persuasion and mobilization because they don’t need to be convinced and already have existing structures for mobilization and resistance. But internet is there used for improving the way the struggle against occupation is organized. Palestinians from the refugee diasporic settings also engage in political support and should not be overlooked. Chatting and debating with pro-Israel opponents in order to persuade them, correspondence with Palestinians inside the OT to comfort and encourage them, and sabotaging pro-Israeli websites to attack them, are the three major ways of everyday resistance by which grass-roots involvement is demonstrated in the diaspora.

The third part of this chapter therefore debates how internet and activism fused in the offline diasporic settings. While not confusing strategy with tactics, and by also seeing the limitations of resistance (and going beyond a utopian vs. dystopian view), local and global online mobilization contribute to Palestinian resistance. While watching their fellow Palestinians throwing stones and organizing protest, many young Palestinians in exile wanted to engage as well: if not with real then with virtual stones. Playing Intifada/combat games in the refugee camp internet cafes, or confronting pro/Israel stereotypes by countering them via online forums, are examples of how a sense of collective participation in the struggle can be experienced through the internet. Besides convincing Americans or emailing Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza, more confrontational tactics also developed. The clearest transformation is the shift from debating into attacking by political hacking. Pro and anti Israel hacktivists were involved in virtual battles. For the exceptional cases that did not consider online debates or hacktivism sufficient enough/anymore the internet was deployed to organize guerrilla type responses.

In order to understand the strong need for the internet one needs to look behind the media (smoke)screens (Philo and Berry 2004). The Israeli atrocities in the OT and the continuation of events that often resembled David vs. Goliath, sharply contrasted with the abstract lip service about Palestinian rights. Whether consciously or because of the “Israelization of Middle East policy” (Beinin 2003), the way the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is re-interpreted is probably the most debatable of all contemporary conflicts. I therefore start with the consequence of biased media politics because this will help us understand why many people wanted to take matters
into their own hands or, how internet technology has enabled a counter-public space to narrate the experience of oppression.

7.2 Permission to Narrate: Documenting Palestinian History

I began a lifelong struggle and attempt to demystify the capriciousness and hypocrisy of a power whose authority depended absolutely on its ideological self-image as a moral agent, acting in good faith and with unimpeachable intentions. Said, 1999.

Permission to narrate refers to an earlier critique by Said in 1984. He, perhaps more than anyone else, practiced the right to articulate the Palestinian narrative in many articles and books. As the quote from his later *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999) above illustrates, it is important for people to communicate their own history. Pioneering research about the social impact of communication technology has shaped our understanding about media. Raymond Williams (1961) was the first to comprehensively stress the need to study the power relations involved. The practice of assigning cultural status and capital is not a neutral exercise. These power relations help to clarify how culture made for the people rather than by the people are served by class interests, as P.H. Thompson (1978) showed in his renowned work. One of the notions connected to these cultural theories concerns the politics of representation; a particularly influential form of this notion came to be known as Orientalism.181

Orientalism unveiled how European colonialism (continues to) shapes relationships between the West and the Non-West. A stereotypical view of Islam/Arabs is increasingly being portrayed as determining the actions of Muslims and Arabs. Moors (2004) argued, “Such a culturalist approach downplays the impact of economic and political structures, it overlooks other uses of differentiation such as class, locality and ethnicity, and leaves little space for agency”. As important studies stressed, ‘reliable’ representation and adequate access to media can only be gained through struggle (Hall 1996). Critical tradition in cultural/media research such as these should also be adapted to ‘new media’. New media represents several changes in the scope, scale, supply, and mediation through a greater access to ICT technologies. However, promoting access with little regard for the structures and processes of power that are embedded in, and contribute to, the inequalities in information societies is problematic (Mansell 2004:97).

Studying the growing development of decentralized new-media is essential vis-à-vis practices of democracy. A shift from state controlled media to electronic and local access to media production has influenced the level of participation. *Local* here

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does not literally mean the scale or level, but a specific participatory, decentralized, relevance as discussed in Chapter Five. Local and grass-roots media escapes state control and therefore plays a potential role in the mobilization of people (Meyer 2001). This shift redefines the *public sphere*, helping to include what should constitute public action. The grass-roots media (contrary to dominant mass media) offers strategies to penetrate the political debate from below. Sometimes media representation and social change (counter-public-sphere) break into the common domain and are able to contest dominant ideological claims. Downey and Fenton (2003) show that the relation between public sphere and society is not objective but embedded in the realm of power/interests. This kind of critique regarding the *public sphere* has become common sense. Public communication does not by design produce social integration. The public sphere concept is not essentially outdated; but it certainly needs reinterpretation, as Downey and Fenton (2003) argue:

A central question for Habermas is whether these groups in civil society can intervene in the mass media public sphere and change the agenda through bringing about a critical process of communication. This can be exceedingly difficult to do in a market-led, mass-mediated system enveloped in its own professional ideologies about what is and what is not newsworthy, about who is a credible source of opinion and information, and who is not (Fenton et al., 1998). Furthermore, the ability of alternative forms of communication to encourage progressive social change must be set in the context of the global dominance of multi-media conglomerates such as NewsCorp and AOL/TimeWarner (188).

Several such decentralized media were discussed in the preceding chapters with reference to empirical examples of parallel/alternative Palestinian public mediation forms. These new public spheres managed to counter official and dominant representations of information. In October 2000, the *September 2000 Clashes Information Centre* launched the first comprehensive political internet response, set up by activists who were experienced in earlier internet activism; this website was clearly inspired by the *On the Ground in Ramallah* website of 1996. This blending of journalism and grass-roots participation became the leading format of many websites that arose with the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Critical revisions are particularly fascinating when considering developments of internet media and politics in the Middle East. In order to contextualize the urgency and enthusiasm for the internet I shall demonstrate the politics of the media in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I will furthermore continue by presenting the birth of a new form of activism.

**Politics of the Media: Between Terrorists and Revolutionaries**

Just say the word “media” to your average diaspora Palestinian and you find out pretty quickly what the phrase “open a can of worms” really means. Nigel Parry (1999).

I have been following the news of the Intifada. I have compared the
images on BBC and CNN with those on Al Jazira and other Arab channels. I have unspun stories, fumed at the American newspapers, and been grateful for some of the reporting in some British press. I have started and ended my days reading appeals for help on the internet. And over and over again I have asked myself ‘what is it that I can do? Ahdaf Soueif (2001).

Habermas’ negative interpretation regarding the impact of mass media has been countered by the growing radicalization of progressive political movements during the 1960s, but also by new political rebellions via internet (Calhoun 1992:33). Habermas commented on Calhoun (1992: 438) that he was, “too pessimistic about resisting power and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic internally much differentiated mass public”. The development of capitalist mass media is clearly not linear and there will be space for alternative strategies. On the development of electronic media Habermas continues:

Thus the mass media have contradictory effects in other dimensions as well. There is considerable evidence attesting to the ambivalent nature of the democratic potential of a public sphere whose infrastructure is marked by the growing selective constraints imposed by electronic mass communication (in Calhoun 1992:456).

This ambivalence and the space for agency is the reason why Nigel Parry could continued his ‘can of worms’ warning by saying: “...As soon as you find space to get a word in edgewise, cheer them up by telling them about two new and very important websites”. The launching of the two websites he refers to (Bitter Pill and Out Load) were motivated by the strong need to resist hegemonic media structures and information bias. After the 1993 Oslo peace process, Birzeit University launched its website as the first in Palestine in 1994. This was followed by On the ground in Ramallah in 1996, and BZU Out Loud online radio station connecting listeners inside and outside Palestine in 1998. The major reason was that activists were disturbed by a widening gap between the lived realities and presented images of Palestine (Hanieh 1999).

Activists use the Internet is utilized to make themselves and their ideas visible in the global public sphere, to communicate their political and cultural messages to the ‘outside’ world (including the diaspora). Palestinian resistance against curfews, closures, occupying soldiers, or colonial settlers, are often framed as terrorism, and criticism against Israeli policy is easily labelled anti-Semitism. Many Palestinians believed that this is one of the reasons why a sufficient international solidarity is lacking and why Western governments tend to support Israel. It is important to analyze these developments because we can hardly understand the urge for (and significance of) such internet outlets without understanding how a common frame is currently used in the Palestinian–Israeli politics of representation.

The West’s interpretation of Palestinians (and their political case) saw several transformations that are quite significant. The first time Palestinians were introduced
to a broad (Western) audience was in the 1970s via news on highjack and kidnap operations after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 and the revived Palestinian resistance movements – most famously, the 1972 Pan Am Airplane highjack by PFLP guerrilla activist Laila Khaled. Although, from a Third World/Anticolonial point of view, her operation was an act of resistance and an attempt to voice a demand for political recognition, the event is usually referred to as a typical act of Arab terrorism. A repetitive portrayal of Arabs as the bloodthirsty angry-looking ‘other’ in American Hollywood films contributed heavily to this trend (Shaheen 2001).

The massacres in Lebanese refugee camps in 1982 and the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987 portrayed a different image of Palestinians; they were also depicted as victims. Television cameras inside the camps and occupied territories showed images of youth defying tanks and guns with stones. Aided by grass-roots technology of a growing international protest movement against neo-liberalism and war, the Second Intifada in 2000 showed another image, beyond the portrayal of Palestinians as either terrorists or victims.

Growing support and the politicized situation also generated new forms of resistance. Especially for a new generation of activists participating in the post-Seattle anti-capitalist movements, Palestinians were later also viewed as revolutionaries. The Palestinian flag and kufiyya (usually referred to as batta, the black and white blocked Palestinian shawl) became symbols of resistance in worldwide protests movements such as at the G8 protests in Genoa (2001), the global ‘15 February’ antiwar demonstrations (2003), and at the European Social Forums. The new circumstances generate everyday forms of activism in which the media plays an important role. This raised alarm among rightwing and pro-Israel supporters who were also keen to, on the contrary, use the internet to spread the image of Palestinian terrorism.

Presenting Arabs as the main perpetrators of terror fed such fears. This strategy worked much better after 9/11 as the War on Terror increased Islamophobia, especially in Europe. There are many sophisticated examples of distortions that have become common sense in the West. Edward Said at the time, summarized most of them as “Barak offered more concessions at Camp David than any PM before him, Arafat cowardly lacked the necessary courage to accept Israeli offers to end the conflict, Palestinian violence has threatened the existence of Israel… and there are all sorts of variations to this, including anti Semitism, suicidal rage to get on television, sacrificing children as martyrs…” (2001:259). Not all realities can be denied, and some of the coverage is inevitable. But, for the majority of audiences in the West, the changes still have not been that radical.

A survey by the Israeli daily Haaretz about editorials in mainstream American newspapers showed that when the Intifada broke out, 67 editorials in 19 papers clearly

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182 In *Real Bad Arabs* Jack Shaheen (2001) describes Hollywood’s vilification of Arabs on the screen with Arabs seen as the insidious others in more than 700 films.

183 One form of deception is to label Palestinian resistance to occupation as the ‘threat of Islam’, or as Muslim fanatics who take cover behind slogans of Palestinian liberation.
expressed sympathy for Israel, 17 gave a somewhat balanced analysis, and only nine voiced criticism against Israeli leaders (Dor 2004). This showed a clear pattern of support for Israel.\footnote{Israelis spoke twice as much on TV news as Palestinians.} Other surveys showed that it were prominent Israelis who often did the writing, underlining the extent to which “Palestinians are not permitted to speak on their own behalf but must be represented by others, if at all” (Ali Abunimah and Hussain Ibish 2001:234). It is important to know why this continues to be the case. These two explanations give a reasonable answer: lack of explanation about the origin of the conflict in the media; difference in the manner in which both sides are presented. Both have measurable effects on public understanding.

In an extensive study by Philo and Berry (2004)\footnote{Their study \textit{Bad News from Israel} focused on news coverage by BBC1 and ITV.} it was shown that the British media constructs a particular public knowledge in relation to the Intifada which disadvantages Palestinians. The first handicap is that they are mainly Muslim and Arab. ‘Cultural’ differences, in terms of who the Western audience identifies with, are important because people tend to sympathize with people who look and sound like them. Thus, rejecting views of people who look ‘strange’ is a common phenomenon. The ways in which specific events are filmed also reveals how differently these categories are mediated. Tania Forte (2002) at Ben Gurion University considers that the production of video news footage about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict utilizes culturally specific perspectives of the self and the other. This creates various types of narratives and proves that besides content, the use of different framings plays an important role. According to Forte, therefore, “When Al Jazeera and Israeli Channel 2 news represented the same footage of the Jenin refugee camp, they interpreted it differently”.

These findings are relevant in understanding how power relations are altered, and that grasping the reasons and origins of the conflict is crucial. Otherwise, there is little understanding of the conflict or the people involved. When Philo and Berry transcribed 89 news bulletins between 28-9-2000 and 16-10 2000, the first thing they discovered was that news coverage about Palestine does not refer to the main issues, and even less explained the history of the conflict. The main message about Palestine contained violence and tragedies. But when refugee rights are not mentioned as one of the key issues of the conflict, it is not surprising that only 8% of the people even knew that Palestinian refugees were displaced from their homes by Israel in 1948. Many of the interviewed did not even understand who was occupying Palestinian land and why. As a consequence some even believed the Palestinians were occupying the territories, or that the Settlers were actually Palestinian. Without knowledge about the origins, the viewer is left with day-to-day events in which it can appear that the ‘normal’ world is ‘disrupted’ only by Palestinian riots or bombs. The first three years, news tended to swing between this view and the view that ‘both sides’ perpetrated violence in a ‘cycle’ of killing, to which Israel often has to ‘respond’. The modes of
representation and ways in which Israelis and Palestinians were described were clearly different.

‘Murder’, ‘atrocity’, ‘lynching’, ‘savage cold blooded killing’ were used to describe Israeli victims. On top of this, Israeli viewpoints were consequently adopted by journalists and built into the structure of coverage. Two days before the ‘Ramallah lynching’ that received round the clock and worldwide condemnation, two Palestinians in the Northern West Bank town Tulkarem were chased, tortured, and stabbed to death by settlers. The two undercover Israeli agents were caught and later killed in a police station. Everything was filmed, and though the footage of an enraged crowd waving with blood on their hands was aired on all major stations, the murders of the two Palestinians was only incidentally referred to, or not at all. It is not possible to exactly measure political effects of the media, yet it is meaningful that while nearly ten times as many Palestinians have been killed only 30% of those interviewed by Philo and Berry thought so. As explained, this debate is mystified because criticizing Israeli policies or pro-Israeli lobby groups quickly receive the anti-Semitism stamp.186

But as hinted above, there is also another trend. Thanks to the internet, Al Jazeera could air their (often competing) live reports on the net and BBC’s footage of the killings of Palestinian children by Israeli tanks in a Jenin market reached many people through email and news groups. According to Ramzy Baroud:

It’s the reader who now decides where the truth lies, at CNN or AntiWar.com, at ABC or Al Jazeera. This is what journalism was meant to be, balanced. Israel is concerned about the Internet, its global accessibility and wide growth…A short message, sent via slow connection somewhere in Ramallah could reach thousands of people all over the world in minutes, refuting the Israeli claims (2001).

Internet has played a strategic role in this attempt to counter the mainstream media and demystify some of the myths concerning the Intifada. Thus as the only accessible mass medium, the use of internet became a means to counter marginalization. Media activism was like a war, not with weapons but with words. How do we assess this new phenomenon, and what is the status/performance of Palestinian internet?

**The Birth of Media Activism: War of Words**

I thought “We have to do something…” When I began to work on the

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186 In May 2005, Bram de Swaan, professor at the University of Amsterdam wrote a piece titled “Anti Israel Enthousiasme” (Anti-Israel Enthusiasm) in which he explains that anti-Semitism is sometimes an easy reflex against criticizing Israel, but that there is also political ‘confusion’ among critics of Israel. In these (somewhat condescending) analyses, critics often do not understand when they are legitimately attacking Israeli politics or whether it is their emotion/anger towards Israel. The problem is that this logic comes down to (a softer/sophisticated) legitimization of the deplorable system of framing criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism. Naomi Klein (2002) made a more fruitful suggestion by calling on pro-Palestinian activists to have/adopt a clear position against anti-Semitism.
Birzeit University website in 1995 it was with Said’s phrase very clearly in mind... it finally dawned on me, permission to narrate our side of the story now lay at a nearby web address www.birzeit.edu! For the next four days, during this explosion, which ultimately claimed 88 Palestinian and 16 Israeli lives, and resulted in several thousand injured Palestinians, a group of us worked day and night on the site. –Parry, 2003.

The outbreak of the al-Aqsa’ Intifada in 2000 forced organizations and activists to regroup and, most importantly, rethink their tactics. One of the issues all participants agreed about was a serious reform of Palestinian public relations and a broadly based battle against the pro-Israeli media. With new ICT instruments, it became possible to combat some of the stereotypes. Several web design companies started to offer their services to increase a Palestinian presence on the internet “so that the world could better understand the realities of the Palestinian situation”. People and organizations in and outside Palestine started to produce websites, mailing lists, and online-discussion groups to counter anti-Palestinian myths. Local/Palestinian internet projects became an alternative to mainstream media for many people. The activist groups and projects often had in common that they mainly targeted the international world/western audience and aimed to re-humanize Palestinians (Chapter Five).

The “permission to narrate” thus means showing pictures and personal stories ‘from within’. The importance lies in the fact that they evoke greater understanding; authentic messengers or sources generate more inspiration/persuasion. Palestinians had no space to voice that message themselves. The message was something impersonal, had less emotional authority. Maher from Shatila camp explained to me why this is a problem:

If I tell you a story that I didn't really experience myself, you will not be affected as much as when it was indeed my experience. And maybe you will be more compassionate with me on a human basis. What happened to us as Palestinians is that others are continuously talking about us or on our behalf.

Correcting the biased views in the media was the initial and strongest political motive for internet use among (pro) Palestinian activists. The internet emerged as an innovative and affordable platform for those otherwise denied the space to tell their stories. It was one of the first attempts to document their contemporary history. Three years after I first gazed at the pages transferred online from Ramallah to Amsterdam, I met the initiators of the earlier websites. Adam explained the importance as he told me during an interview in 2001, “When someone comes back in 30 years to write about this Intifada, it will be much easier than it was for us to write about the First Intifada”.

Electronic Intifada and Palestine Monitor had a profound impact as they developed into highly successful website projects with visitors reaching up to 1 million visitors.

187 Solidarity Design www.solidaritydesign.com, as discussed in Chapter Five.
a month. Mailing lists were a successful asset to the mushrooming internet cafes (Chapter Three/Four). A mailing list, for which one can request subscription or be added to by others, can be a frequently appearing newsletter or an interactive communication list that is open for reactions. Websites that have revolutionized Palestinian internet, such as Palestine Monitor, Al Awda, and Electronic Intifada also introduced their own mailing lists. Karma in Ramallah launched Hear Palestine and gave daily and sometimes hourly inside reports of the Intifada. She invited journalists and offered them a tour around the occupied territories and encounters with local people and places that Western journalists hardly ever visited, as Luyendijk (2006) demonstrated.

One of Karma’s exceptional tactics was designed to tackle this problem; with her non-elite strategies Karma shows that the Mountain goes to Mohammed instead of the other way around:

The American Colony [restaurant/café in East Jerusalem] is probably the most Palestinian-type place journalists are willing to be at. Most foreign journalists hang out there for their meetings and networking. I go there with my Hear Palestine print-out reports and distribute them. When I can’t leave Ramallah [due to curfew and closures], I call the owner and ask him to distribute the weekly report in the café, which I email him.

This special necessity is embedded in the combined effect of the discriminatory ethnocentrism and media structures. During an interview with Palestine Monitor organizer Trish we talked about this specific challenge. She was clear about the targeted audience: “Our audience is outside but we can’t get to them [through the regular channels], and that is why we need the internet.” She explained that Palestinians are often criticized for lacking good representation/PR, and that this information strategy is also one of the major reasons she is active with Palestine Monitor. But she also said that all the information is out there; that the journalists know or can easily know, but that the messenger is considered the obstacle – as if the Arab/Palestinian/Muslim source filters the content away. I asked her whether she was not maintaining ethnocentric media structures by adapting to them:

Sending an email in my name has a different result than when Mohammed does, most people are actually not even aware of the racism. But you see, we can’t single-handedly fight racism; meanwhile we have to act because the fact is that people are going to be prejudiced while we still must find a way to tell them about the 10-month old baby that was killed here. Palestinians basically don’t have time. I am not dramatizing things; people die on a daily basis and its horrible, so yes, maybe we must operate within the racist structure in order to at least get some of the facts across (13/8/2002).

Besides the achievements of Palestine Monitor and Hear Palestine, other examples that specialized in media activism were found as well, such as Alaa’s media activism. During an interview in 2001 he commented:

When they published a story about the Palestine Israeli conflict you could
not find a listing of a Palestinian source while all other countries were
listed. After our internet protests and mobilization they changed the link
list and made it Palestinian, Israeli, Jordanian…etc. We also complained
about the word rubber bullets in their reports of Palestinian casualties
because the name suggested something innocent.

Previously, CNN and other major Western media outlets adopted Israeli terminology
and called them rubber bullets – a factually inaccurate term that softened the depiction
of Israeli violence. CNN had to adjust its list of ‘related links’ and after many debates,
media activists helped introduce the term rubber coated steel bullets. This forms the battle
over terminology, a substantial part of activism. Especially as pro-Israeli initiatives
continuously monitor reports on the Middle East and engage in such PR activities.

However, established foreign journalists tend to also duplicate these
manufacturings. Well-known examples of organized media lobbying are the work of
the rightwing and conservative MEMRI and pro-Israel media groups Hagannah or one
with the ironic title Honest Reporting. One of the results of the latter’s successful
work was the order BBC gave to its reporters to use the phrase ‘targeted killing’
instead of ‘assassination’. Following substantial attacks from right wing groups and
internal pressures, CNN also instructed its reporters to use certain terms in relation to
the Israel-Palestine conflict during the time that the Intifada was daily news. Reporters
were asked to abstain from referring to Gilo as “a Jewish settlement” and instead use
“a Jewish neighbourhood” as a description (Fisk, 2001). This is not just a matter of
semantics.

Censoring the word settlement in relation to Gilo was inaccurate because Gilo
was illegally annexed by Israel. In fact, it was occupied after the already illegal
occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and thus a colonial settlement. The
choice of words has consequences because they lead to euphemisms. The problem of
euphemisms became even more a phenomenon with regards to the Wall erected by
Israel, turning Palestinian territory into separate Bantustans and confiscating more
Palestinian land in the process. It is referred to as a ‘security fence’ because the Israeli
government websites avoid using the term separation wall in order to hide the negative

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188 Despite MEMRI’s political affiliation, it has, successfully, aimed at preserving its credibility as a source
for journalists and commentators. MEMRI was founded by former Israeli intelligence officers Colonel Yigal
Carmon and Likudist Meyrav Wurmser. MEMRI’s "about us" page (http://www.memri.org/aboutus.html) does not
mention Israel and claims to provide "timely translations of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish media, as well as
original analysis of political, ideological, intellectual, social, cultural, and religious trends in the
Middle East.", yet most of the site is about Israel. Moreover, the material MEMRI translates tilts toward
representing Arab discourse critical of Israel/Jews as anti-Semitic. See also the (exceptional) critical article in
Guardian (August 12, 2002), http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,,773258,00.html.


190 The head of CNN Ted Turner had to apologize and step down because he had equated Palestinian
suicide bombing with Israeli military retaliation; he was accused of promoting suicide bombings against
Israelis. http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2002/aug/02/middleeastthemedia.television. See also for an in
depth analysis of the paralyzing effect the issue of suicide bombings has in academic circles: Ghassan Hage
(2003), ‘Comes a time we are all enthusiasm’: Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombers in times of
practice behind the words. This implies political dominance of the general Israeli political perspective, which usually transcends into a hegemonization of terminology, making separation the common and apartheid wall the odd language. In fact, most Palestinians and peace activists refer to it as the Apartheid Wall. The tactical use of words and terms to evoke emotion/solidarity happen on all sides of the debate; politically charged terms like apartheid wall mean to resonate with South Africa to link the Palestinian struggle with South African blacks and Israelis with (white) Afrikaners.

No language is neutral, but the difference is that certain terms are more normalized than others, indicating a linguistic hegemony. For example, many people in the West have come to associate terror with Islam, even though Muslims do not commit most acts of terror. These associations come to the fore because we are often conditioned by the logics of a particular discourse, making us susceptible/interpret social reality according to dominant frameworks. This conscious/unconscious falsification of terms diminishes actual effects of political structures, and sometimes causes debate among journalists. As Robert Fisk wrote, eventually this practice comes down to “Searching for euphemisms for what is really happening”. Usually it is explained that ‘both sides’ in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have to be taken into consideration, which is in fact another illustration where neutrality in the ‘hegemonized’ world of the media comes down to legitimizing the stronger party.

As I argued, this is particularly important in discussions about Palestinian activist (im-)possibilities. For almost 60 years Palestinians have been a non-state people and weak in front of the military and political world powers of the US and Israel. Rather than representing the political field itself and bearing in mind the unequal power balance, the internet is viewed to be a tool. But because of the discrepancy in the politics of representation/power it is an even more important tool. This chapter thus represents the juxtaposition of Palestinian politics and technological developments, and considers the internet an important medium for political mobilization. I consider this virtual Intifada part of the existing set of tactics, such as posters, underground papers, and street activism. The internet has expanded the spectrum of political involvement without necessarily sacrificing a specific mode of recruitment, mobilization, or existing hierarchies. With this approach, I avoid neglecting/exaggerating the potential problems of internet technology.

191 The term that enjoyed the most frequent use in Google would be chosen. It sounds irreproachable at first sight, but if one realizes how many retailers online sell security fences for gardens—while it’s hard to find anyone selling ‘apartheid walls’ online, the pitfall is clear. This was conducted by Steven Klein of Jewish Agency for Israel see The Security Fence - Hopes and Fears, found at www.jafi.org.il/education/actual/conflict/fence/. For more on this dubious Google search, see Israel’s West Bank Barrier: Semantics on the Internet found at www.electronicintifada.net.

192 http://www.stopthewall.org/


194 See for example many of Chomsky’s writings about the relation between media and the Palestine-Israeli conflict. In his writings Tony Cliff (2000), himself Jewish who left Israel, wrote about the tendency to equate the Palestinian struggle for independence and their means, with the Israeli occupation forces and their military superiority: “it is like comparing a sardine with a shark”.

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The internet offers a great foundation of alternative resources for media observers, academics, and activists, sometimes offering a more balanced content and discourse. Alternative internet media becomes even more relevant when it implies greater mobilization as it offers an alternative space for planning and organization. In other words, direct/indirect activism and local/global mobilization emerged as the popular motives; the internet proved to be an effective tool for mobilizing activism.

7.3 The Revolution Will Not Be Televized

The revolution will not be brought to you by the Schaefer Award Theatre and will not star Natalie Woods and Steve McQueen or Bullwinkle and Julia.

The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal. The revolution will not get rid of the nubs.

The revolution will not make you look five pounds thinner, because the revolution will not be televized, Brother.

The revolution will not be televized, will not be televized, will not be televized. The revolution will be no re-run brothers; the revolution will be live. Gil Scott-Heron (Album Ghetto Style, 1974)

In the 1960s and early 70s the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the US, developed a form of political activism that still inspires many activist movements all over the world. But these groups were depicted in the mainstream media as uncivilized or criminal. Malcolm X or the Black Panthers were even referred to as ‘reverse’ (anti-white) racists (Shawki 2006). The representation of black Americans then reminds us of the Palestinian image now. As the above excerpt from Gil Scott Heron’s famous song suggests, official/state media didn’t show the everyday Black reality, let alone oppression, or the causes that led to the upheavals; most of the media framework lacked the contexts related to the struggle and conflict. By the same token, the Palestinian struggle is frequently displayed as ‘violent’ and rarely as the expression of political agency and anticolonial resistance. (Pro) Palestinians dispute such outlets by making use of new electronic media forms. Internet media offers an accessible platform to disseminate, participate, and organize. The internet technology authorized a space to narrate the experience of suffering and struggle, but also to mobilize local and trans-national activism. Everyday use of the internet demonstrates online shared Palestinian nationalism and a political notion of Palestinianess and encloses secular, nationalist, leftist, and Islamist tendencies. Moreover, these online activities also help structure political agency from below.

195 An example of internet as an alternative media channel was the public hearing at the International Court of Justice (ISJ) in The Hague in 2004 on the Israeli wall. In response to the exceptional interest shown by the general public and the limited seating space, and of course the impossibility for most people to attend, the hearing was broadcasted live on the ICJ website.
The very fact that everyday-life gives rise to political agency is important in reference to what De Certeau (1984) described as *the everyday tactics* of non-elites, discussed in Chapter Two. In an outstanding article about ethnographic research during the First Intifada, Iris Jean-Klein (2001) argues that: “Ordinary persons fashion themselves into nationalized subjects, using distinctive narrative actions and embodied practices that are woven into the practice of everyday life” (84). The distinguishable Palestinian-style resistance *Sumud* would at the time go as far as “the suspension of the everyday in the practice of everyday life,” as a form of Palestinian resistance (97-101). The difference between those who are in a position of power and represent it as the norm, and those who do not, is relevant in relation to understanding the power of (internet) media. Hegemonic power is resisted ‘from below’ on a daily basis, for example, by internet activists whose words and actions make up the grass-roots practices of everyday life, for which the term *hidden counter-practices* has been used (Franklin 2001:71-72).

Such counter-practices are the very practices usually meant by activism via and on the internet. A utopian understanding of cyber activism means that internet potential is exaggerated. Although cyber space means a compression of space and sometimes a collapse of time, do they pose “serious challenges to the understanding of resistance” (Fandy 1999:146)? In 1999, the nation-state may have seemed outdated because according to Fandy:

> Concepts such as the specific territory of the state will have to be reconsidered. In an era in which the discourse of the ‘sovereign’ is simply one among many discourses and in which these conversations transcend traditional notions of geographic boundary and the physical contours of the nation-state, political scientists will have to reconsider their fixed understanding of the sovereign state. Today’s electronic media and satellite systems virtually dissolve the traditional barriers that once separated states and nations.

These typical utopian arguments attest to confusion between new important communication modes/access to mass media on one hand and free mobility, participation, and even national sovereignty on the other (Chapter Two). Yet in this research, sovereignty, mobility, and state are crucial, and the setting in a post-intifada/9-11 period shows that the concepts of resistance and state are still important. In the discussion about resistance in Chapter Two I explained that I both visibly staged “politics” and everyday/informal politics are important in understanding resistance. I find De Certeau’s theorizing of resistance important in his attempt to ‘bend the stick’ by challenging dystopian/Foucauldian discourse by highlighting possibilities and spaces of social agency vis-à-vis hegemony (Jean-Klein 2001:87). Through Bayat (1998), I noted that struggle can be found in a variety of different forms/degrees of activism, from political movement to protest movement or from survival strategy to everyday resistance. I thus proposed a Gramscian take on resistance because it displays a non-reductive alternative without disregarding existing
oppression marked by indirect hegemony and direct state power. In the extremely complex reality of Palestinian politics this is an important reminder.

Israeli anthropologist Jeff Halper (2006) defines three phases of strategy that guarantee Israeli control over Palestinians: irreversible facts on the ground, US approval, and unilateral border declarations. In this context, he argues that the collective response by Palestinians generally knows three main elements: sumud/resistance, negotiation, and attrition. According to Helga Baumgarten (2005), even despite the differences between the three main manifestations of Palestinian nationalism (Arab Nationalism, Palestinian Nationalism/Fatah, Islamist/Hamas) each followed a similar trajectory: they begin with maximalist (including armed struggle) goals but scale them back under the impact of Israel’s overwhelming power. These realities make other forms of resistance relevant and worth trying. I’d rather refer to these new forms of resistance as tactical shifts rather than radical/strategic breaks. These tactical cyber transformations by themselves deserve our attention and investigation.

Internet use clearly impacts political action and mobilization at the national and international level. The internet meant that Azzedeen Qassem (Hamas’ military wing) could organize discussions on their online forum ‘Qassam meeting point’ via qassamiyoon.com. Many online activist groups and projects approached Western audiences and became an alternative to mainstream media. Internet projects such as Hear Palestine or Al Aqsa Intifada presented many of the on-the-ground realities. Thus trans/local activism and trans/local internet mobilization together altered international and local political mobilization. This mattered even more because, as Gill Scott-Heron said: the revolution will (needs to) be “live”–result of on-the-ground organizing. Ethnographic research in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon revealed how diaspora activists also participate in mobilization and campaigning. The question is how support by Palestinians in the diaspora is locally practiced, and who represented the different trans-national mobilizations on the World Wide Web. Furthermore, it will be illustrated how trans-national forms of mobilization are organized and experienced.

Local Political Mobilization

I chatted with this woman from America, my friend helped with the [English] language. She was interested in Palestine and started visiting Palestinian chat rooms. We explained many things to her. Later she asked me how she could help, she wanted to send money to help people in Palestine. – Nazih, Beirut

Support for Palestinians dakhil (inside, i.e., in Israel/OT) is strong in the camps of Lebanon. Besides many demonstrations, biyut ‘aza (mourning rituals/gatherings) have been organized for victims (that they mostly don’t know personally) in Palestine.

196 Daniel Sobelman, Haaretz 11/12/2001 Chats with Hamas on the Net. See also Chapter Five.
People that were not politically active and did not want to participate in
demonstrations, joined the masses in the streets after the Intifada. Many sensed that
the Intifada unified the refugees in the ghurba (diaspora) with the Palestinians in the
dakhil (inside). As Samar from Shatila explains:

I mainly talk about the situation there [in Palestine] with my Palestinian
internet friends. I want to know how they organize and work, how they
fight, if they have success, who else they are in touch with, if they are still
ok.

Samar shows that at the time of the Intifada, politics were the primary
motive to discover and exploit the internet. According to Internet Service Providers
(ISPs) customers were especially interested in online news sites that provided last
minute information about Palestine. It seemed as if people's feelings were pressed in a
bottle, which the Intifada released, and could be partly channeled through the
internet. The internet possibilities were being taken up by a part of society that had
previously been excluded from public debates/organizing.

Whether the internet is also used for mass, and on the ground, mobilization
in Palestine remained debatable. With roughly 10% penetration in 2002/03 in
Palestine, there was no mass internet connectivity.\footnote{Nevertheless, it had grown to around 20% in 2005 while it was merely 5% in 1999. This shows the great
growth of internet use. See Chapter Two for a more comprehensive study on internet penetration rates.} Although there was more space
for anonymous communication, many political movements were labelled illegal by
Israel and couldn't openly organize or mobilize. Open mobilization or
announcements on the internet about political activities would have been unsafe;
displaying logistics related to the struggle was considered ‘political suicide’. But, as
stated, there is another politics: politics in the sense of acquiring/disseminating
information that enables Palestinians inside and outside to be politically active in their
pursuit for justice. Thus despite the early lack of mass connectivity and Israeli
monitoring, the grass-roots internet capacity endowed it with more political
significance, especially in relation to political mobilization and censorship. The
internet is not only about mobilizing people through petitions and email protests, but
also an opportunity for people themselves to present and debate different political
views about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and possible solutions. Political leaders in
the camps regarded the use of internet as significant and called for joining the struggle
with Palestine by using the net. Maqda of the al-Aqsa Brigade in Ein al-Hilwe camp
considered the benefits to be greater; “My advice for Arab youth is to seek knowledge
about the internet because it is a means of resistance to fight their enemy and at the
same time an educational tool.”

Abu Basel of the PLO in Bourj al-shamali camp made a similar point in the
opening quote of this chapter. At his office in Bourj al-Shamali refugee camp in South
Lebanon he regularly urged young refugees to fulfil their national duties. Abu Basel
expressed the need to also convince the Arab world: “Before going into debates about
the Israeli enemy, Arabs too should understand the Palestinian national struggle. The
Arab silence sometimes upsets us more than the Israeli oppression.” For him, using the internet became part of that shared responsibility. But there were different interpretations. When I repeated the remarks made by Abu Basel in Bourj Shamali refugee camp concerning the “revolutionary potential of the internet for Palestinians” to 19-year-old Ahmed in Beirut, he was less enthusiastic. He told me, “I don’t believe we can get real political change via the internet”. After we talked for a while about his activities online I realised that, in his perception, ‘political change’ corresponded to a specific level of activism. He told me that “except for discussing and debating our cause, Palestinians can’t be activists on the internet”. This (narrow) understanding of activism ascribes a particular meaning to politics as leading to direct change. I asked him if discussing and debating the Palestinian cause as he does is a form of political resistance through mobilization? He stated that it was contributing to resistance, but is not the resistance itself. The discrepancy in this example illustrates the various ways of judging the role of the internet in the Palestinian movements that indeed need to be acknowledged.

Abu Rami of Fatah, also from Bourj al-Shamali camp, specifically encouraged the youth to reach out for Palestine and enter the net to get involved with the struggle, even if just by words. “I would even give the internet connection for free to those who want to attack Zionist websites”. The political, ‘patriotic’, use of internet was momentarily fulfilled during our interview when Abu Basel saw an email message stating that lobby groups were mobilizing to elect Sharon as ‘person of the year’. His aim was to start his own mobilization and emailed friends and contacts with the advice to vote for Arafat and to spread the message further. The different national/political sentiments I encountered among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are apparent in numerous ways. As illustrated in Chapter Four, one of the manifestations in cyberspace is the choice of nicknames and email addresses. Sometimes nicknames like the number 48, old village names like Safuri, or references to famous martyrs function as their virtual ID.198 Refugee whiz kids spearheaded the cyber Intifada and also engaged in direct confrontations, for example through sharp debate on discussion lists.

The most common/feasible way for people outside Palestine to engage in the political process is in fact through moral support and solidarity. Many people told me they regret not being able to offer concrete help in Palestine, but that at least they could motivate them to continue the struggle. Sahar, coordinating an internet café in Bourj al-Barajne refugee camp, told me in 2003:

When they contact us from Palestine and ask us what we are doing here, we tell them about people going out on demonstrations and such. You can feel it helps lift up their spirit. We know from our experience during the sieges here how it feels. One should do what he can; we offer them through the net what they lack from the media.

198 48 comes from the year 1948 (al Nakba). Safuri is a village near Haifa that most of its inhabitants fled to eventually settle in Lebanon.
Palestinian refugees in Lebanon hardly ever communicated with Israelis before. So when it did happen through these online confrontations, there was great excitement. Shiraz in Shatila described her internet experience:

I decided not to tell her that I am living in Lebanon, I wanted to leave the fear in her heart. Normally we can’t feel strongly against them, when I watch the news on television I feel I can’t do anything. But like this, on the internet, I feel like I am facing an Israeli myself.

One of the young guys in Shatila who also was engaged in internet debates could not believe that some Israelis actually agreed with his political views. “I use to say in chat rooms that I hate Jews because they are responsible for this war against us.” But some online criticized him for his comments. “I contacted my [online] friends in Palestine and asked whether it’s true that there are Jews [Israelis] who help the Palestinians, as they claim. They said there are some but not many, and that also there are Arab Jews.”

Not everybody was intensely involved, mostly played their part by sending support messages. Online support and solidarity brought many people together. Anonymity and access to a global network intensified the meetings between local and global places, but also helped transcend physical and intellectual barriers between people and places previously sealed off from one another. Many of these online friends in the diaspora feel that it is not enough to only give moral support to Palestinians inside, that they must help to mobilize international support as well. Mohammed from Nahr al-Bared also used the internet to mobilize political support:

We have a saying in Arabic – ‘instead of cursing the darkness, light a candle’. Don’t just stand in one place and blame everything and everyone for your conditions. If I managed to communicate with someone and informed him about our conditions or our cause, for me, this is an achievement.

The anonymity and access offered by chat via websites created these new information and communication methods, which made diasporic engagement through support an important phenomenon.

**Supporting and Defending Palestine: ‘Light a Candle’**

Sometimes the consequences of the virtual private connections can become very real, particularly when virtual friends or lovers are injured or killed. When politics, communication, and technology merge, and time and space also fuse, peculiar events occur. 19-year-old Dali from Beirut once chatted with a friend in Palestine/Gaza. At that moment an incursion happened in Gaza. She described the experience in detail and while I listened it seemed as if she was there herself. At a certain point the chat connection between them broke because he had to leave the internet café due to the attacks. She then called him on his mobile from the telephone Central in the camp. By hearing sounds of shooting through the phone, she actually continued the virtual experience. This reminded me of something that took place two years before in
Ramallah. I was at an internet café for an interview appointment with the manager as described in Chapter Six. While I waited we were suddenly asked to log off and leave. From the noise of sirens and shootings it seemed that the clashes were taking place very nearby. I saw people running away from the direction where the Israeli army jeeps were coming from. Some people hiding in the street corners threw stones at the jeeps. Email and chat sessions ended abruptly because of the clashes in front of the IC and the customers had to rush out. I stayed behind with the employee while he shut off the computers. Many PC screens showed web pages and chat programs that were left behind; it could have just as well been the story of Dali in Beirut and her friend in Gaza.

These continuous contacts are important because Palestinians feel empowered when they discover that many others share their resentments and anger; they realize they are not alone. Trans-national support is important, both inside and outside. Mahmoud in Shatila camp in Beirut said:

It’s funny to see how other Palestinians are discussing on these rooms as well, I realize I’m not the only one doing this. There are still Palestinians who try to get our rights. Sometimes I tell them its good what they do. But usually I concentrate on somebody who doesn’t know about us and try to convince them about our case and the truth.

Personal impact is even more significant for Palestinians that are isolated. When Palestinians inside the OT receive solidarity messages, it is a boost and helps them carry on for a while. Intisara Jouri from Askar refugee camp in Nablus was arrested after her brother was accused of being involved in a suicide operation. The IDF demolished the family house and assassinated a second brother. Intisara and her family were going to be expelled as part of a new transfer law. *Palestine Monitor* wrote a feature about Intisara in order to set up a solidarity campaign. Trish of *Palestine Monitor* told me:

I helped Amnesty obtain information and the campaign group wanted the family address in order to organize letters of support. This would be impossible because the West Bank did not receive any post for two months. So we helped the family to open an email address for Intisara. It really matters to have a solidarity campaign by email, I have seen how much it means for people when others actually care and also express their support directly to them.

Such efforts and immediate appeals to evoke sympathy or express solidarity would have required far more organizing/coordinating before the internet. Some of the people also focus their effort on targeting the Arab world, as 16-year-old Hiba from Beirut and Mohammed from a Tripoli camp both stressed:

It makes me feel stronger that we are united. Step-by-step, inshallah, we will liberate Palestine. We have lousy presidents who are like the Israelis. They are afraid of America. Most important is our dignity, what is happening in Palestine and Iraq is so humiliating. We are strong and if we are united we can beat them.
We need to introduce our intellectual thinkers into the internet society and forums much more. I managed to draw a number of Arab people to my forum page by which I have achieved something for our cause. If reaching one person is an achievement, how about these 126 added now? In South Lebanon, Hizbollah and Palestinians kicked out the strongest army. The key is to work together, if not today, then tomorrow.

With these examples I don’t claim that Palestinians are politicized all the time, or that the internet is only used for that purpose. Music, lifestyle, sport, and romance are favourite topics in online activities as discussed in Chapter Four. However, politics continuously shaped the style and discourse on the internet. 18-year-old Nahed from Beirut talked about his internet activities as if they were naturally part of his national duty:

What is taken from us by force we should regain by force but we don’t have any power. We have to make contact with the outside world because if they start their own resistance against their governments [that support Israel] we will be helped. Everyone has a responsibility and should be a part of the resistance. If everybody shares we can make a big difference. For us media is the best tool, and the internet the only effective weapon.

Beside the similarities, there was a discrepancy between the experiences of Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon. Palestinians in Jordan were clearly connected to what was taking place not far away. At the beginning of the Intifada people demonstrated, organized fundraisers, and set up new solidarity committees. Rannia, a Palestinian in Jordan, recalls how Jordan responded to the Intifada:

It was a shock for all. Everyone was stuck to the television. It was terrible when we saw Mohamed al-Durra. Amman was very sad, even the huge shopping malls only played sad music, while trendy cafes changed and art exhibitions activities were about or for Palestine. It was solidarity and sadness, but I was disappointed that nobody went as far as to challenge our government who is collaborating with the sufferings across the border.

The level of participation was different than what I saw in Lebanon. Political activism is not completely absent, but their expression of their activism definitely was. With Palestinians making up the majority of the population in Jordan, and since the country signed a peace treaty with Israel, it is no surprise that the political developments in Palestine/Israel are a serious worry to Jordan. Nevertheless, within the overall context, the internet helped organize some forms of activism in Jordan. A more ‘soft’ political example in which young Palestinians in Jordan could participate was the Global Candle Light, a united street vigil for Palestine that was coordinated through the internet. In March 2002, al-Awda sent an email appeal to light candles for Palestine in all cities of the world. Lighting a virtual candle for Palestine at least gave some sense of participation. This type of organizing was a common style. Yet, the experiences by some of the politically engaged Palestinians I interviewed in Jordan showed how difficult it is to participate in political campaigns, even the soft ones. The
Jordanian police could harass solidarity groups, even when it is as harmless as lighting a candle in the street. When they organized their local part of the worldwide vigil in downtown Amman, the police intervened. Rami told me about his experiences during student revolts at the university in Amman, sparked by the Intifada.

Internet was an important organizer, especially because political assembly was forbidden. And when they did organize protests the state sent in the army and basically crushed the protest and abused the protestors: “We wanted to express our solidarity, many of us are Palestinians, their message was ‘this is not Palestine’ and we were either beaten up or scared off”.

Rannia, who was helping injured Palestinians in a Jordanian hospital as a volunteer, said she feels attached to her family in Palestine, more than she did before: “The injustice implemented on your people makes you more attached to the place. We had regular telephone contact and before we even visited each other, this is impossible now. I wasn’t politically active before the Intifada, there is no leadership to guide or set up something anyway.” Meetings with people like Rami and Rannia and visits to refugee camps made me realize the extent to which solidarity activists and political groups were not warmly welcomed in Jordan. As Rannia explained in Amman in 2003: “The demonstration in April 2002 in which we planned to march towards the Israeli embassy was crushed. The military sealed off the city and they announced via the media that is was an illegal demo. Of course many did go; I drove around with my mother because we tried to join the others. That was perhaps the last big attempt to organize grass-roots protest in Jordan.”

It was clear that some of the youth were passionate and wanted to do something, but felt trapped because they were not allowed to. The problem according to some was the lack of experience. Many of the former activists/leaders were not in Jordan anymore because of the political turmoil between Palestinians and the Jordanian state. Rannia explained it best when she said:

We are raised in Jordan to learn information based on what the Americans want. The lack of national/political interests is mainly because we don't know what should be done and in what way to change the situation. With the defeatist ideas imposed on us we ended up in a political depression; so I guess they succeeded. For example, the boycott campaign was sort of a successful campaign, but it was mostly based on spontaneous motivations and wasn’t sustained. We don't have activist leaders.

Beside the lack of political organizers, there is also a more direct and related problem, as the owner of the popular IC Books@Café in Amman put it bluntly: “We know we will get smashed”. In this context, internet activism opens doors to other political expressions. Rather than the internet diminishing traditional forms of political activity, it combines traditional with new political activity. As Adam told me in 2001 during one of the first interviews back in Palestine:

It’s important to always put in perspective that it is a tool, not an end in itself, and that it can’t substitute for on-the-ground activity of real
movements…. In the end it is local mobilization through mouth-to-mouth, posters, factions, so the internet is not used instead of clashes and demonstrations. But it helps indirectly because television and internet images mobilize anger and motivation.

And Sam Bahour argued:

(…) internet indirectly reaches a larger number of people. You can use the net by printing a communiqué and stick it on the wall in a café or mosque. Internet can in other words be used for organizing the political effort itself. Political parties and election campaigns benefit the most. To reach the other 95% of the populous, we need to use other tools…

Beside these different examples of experimenting with internet to organize support from the Palestinian diaspora, other consequences of the fusing between internet and political activism were the successful trans-national debates.

...But It Will Be Virtualized: Trans-national Mobilization

What Israel has depended on in the past, the ignorance, complicity, or laziness of journalists outside Israel, is now countered by the fantastic amount of alternative information available on the internet. … Here as in many other instances, reliable information is the greatest enemy of oppression and injustice.” (Said 2001:41)

Online trans-national mobilization motivated debates about new strategies and tactics in protest and solidarity movements. At the start of the Intifada in September 2000 the telecommunication firm AT&T agreed to host Israel’s army (IDF) website. Al Awda, which was regarded as one of the best projects concerning Palestinian refugees and human rights in the US, responded by urging all its supporters to protest by switching telephone providers from AT&T to ATX. One of my first encounters with Palestinian internet activism was the appeal against AT&T and was forwarded to me by several people, even though I had no relation to this American company. In response to al-Awda, pro-Israel organizations in the US in turn threatened to boycott ATX because it hosted the Al Awda website. This battle was probably the first example of activist style mobilization before hundreds of other boycott and internet-based tactics emerged. The above quote by Edward Said captures a sense of relief and signifies the first reactions of the impact of the internet.

It became obvious that the Palestine-Israeli conflict was not just a military war. The outbreak of the Intifada forced Palestinian organizations and activists to regroup and, especially in the diaspora, rethink their tactics. One of the issues all participants agreed upon was a serious reform of Palestinian public relations. A grassroots battle against the pro-Israel biased media erupted. Whereas activists have limited access to mainstream (televized) media as Gill Scott Heron sang, the internet technology now gives an alternative medium to air factual and live coverage. Many joined the media activism, targeting the international community. Solidarity Design, for example, offered free internet service to those dedicated to increase the Palestinian...
presence on the web “So that the world could better understand the realities of the Palestinian situation”.

The ‘Western’ audience is the ultimate target because they are considered to play a significant role in influencing their own governments. During interviews in Lebanon in 2003, an internet user in Nahr al-Bared told me: “to win their hearts is to win the control over the economic and military plug that feeds Israel.” Websites that presented government spending and support for Israel, and linked them to economic cuts and privatizations were attempts to shift public opinion. Abu Rami from Bourj Shamali camp in Southern Lebanon said:

The American voter and taxpayer should know that his money goes to Israel. This while many of them live in bad economic conditions and African Americans suffer harsh racism themselves. They are more aware now.

If there used to be predominantly one way of thinking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict before, the internet offered more alternatives. One of the first internet activists in Palestine, Nigel Parry reformulated Gil Scott-Heron’s text into “The revolution will not be televized, but it will be virtualized” (1999). Parry was referring to the potential new space for political dissent in the context of the 1996 clashes mentioned before. University volunteers like him offered daily online updates of a city that was completely besieged. The experiences revolutionized their view and gave birth to several projects afterwards. This did not mean a total turnover in the ICT status, as Sam Bahour explained: “As an IT person I would like to add high tech but in reality, under this crises and poverty, ICT is not the tool for organization or mobilization.”

The International Solidarity Movement, a movement committed to resisting Israeli occupation, integrated the different levels of cyber politics. One of ISM’s leading organizers was eventually denied entry by Israel twice. As it happened, we were both thrown over the border into Jordan in the same week. We met for an interview and talked about ISM. The internet was clearly crucial for him: “We definitely wouldn’t have been here without it. (…) The website is a source to others and it shows people what occupation is in daily life”. The primary tools of internet for ISM came down to recruit and mobilize, publicize and coordinate, and share and negate.

Adam explained that mobilization for the first two campaigns of ISM in Palestine was mostly via the internet; i.e., email lists and websites. ISM tried to coordinate its campaign simultaneously with events around the world via the internet. The ISM support groups in different countries, with their own local ISM websites, played an especially important role. The main ISM website was also used for multiple purposes, showing photos and video uploads of events in the Occupied Territories. Thus an important part of the ISM trainings is how to deal with the media and increasing solidarity. According to Adam:

Everybody comes to Palestine already equipped by these trainings. We try not to use the term ‘human shield’ for example. It has a negative
connotation and we don’t want to use that terminology because we are defending ‘human rights’ while in the media they write we act ‘as human shields for terrorists’ in order to use it against us.

By 2003 the ISM had recruited over 1500 people from all-over the world, mostly from US, UK, EU, Canada, and South Africa, from the ages of 20 to 70. The movement emphasized peaceful intentions and non-violent activism on their website by, for instance, sending out an international call to join the biannual harvest of olives in order to both help families generate money during the economic crisis and to protect/witness the olive trees that were uprooted and the Palestinians attacked during olive picking. ISM was also clear on a-religious and non-violence civil disobedience, such as acting as human shields when protecting Palestinians, several times with fatal results (see Epilogue). Nevertheless, the Jewish Action Taskforce (JAT) dedicated a special section against ISM, referring to ISM as supporters of terrorism. JAT still aimed at emphasizing ISM as violent and as having destructive intentions by making associations between ISM and Islamic Jihad.

ISM managed to counter such accusations by providing updated reports and pictures of their events through the internet and often invited the international press (for example those representing the news from their country) to join them during their activities. The internet as an organizing tool showed to be very effective according to many pro-Palestinian activists I interviewed. They would not have succeeded in reaching international mobilization without the internet. The combination of offline activism and street mobilization had a successful impact. Many of the activities also took place in the Arab context.

Regional Mobilization: Arab Protest

The Intifada sparked the sympathy of many Arabs. Aloush from Jordan explained how the Intifada awakened a spirit of rebellion in Arab streets: “Whether in terms of peace with Israel or in succumbing to dictates of the WB and IMF, it got back the vitality it missed for 25 years”. Aloush, producer of Arab Nationalist mailing list and Free Arab Voice website, extensively uses the internet for political purposes, especially as a counter-public voice. The Free Arab Voice website initially grew slowly but following developments in the region after 9/11 many visitors and subscribers joined. “When it exceeded a certain level, they [Israeli intelligence] began to think of shutting us down. On May 15th, actually the anniversary of Israel’s Independence day and our Nakba, they finally did shut us down.”

Alarization and easier technical possibilities expanded his audiences in the Arab world. Aloush claims to represent more Arab critical analyses unfiltered by Arab regimes or softened as spokespersons in the West. He doesn’t wish to moderate his political opinion: “The internet is a new tool that allows our message to be sent across the world. We can’t do the same through the Washington Post for example, except for
the very few that are themselves part of the American establishment and understand the system, such as Edward Said, or Rachid Khalidi.”

At the time of our interviews in 2003 in Jordan, he had just been released. “During the interrogations, they also mentioned and asked me about my activities on the net.” Aloush was expelled from the university where he taught on charges of having addressed students at a public antiwar rally: “I urged them to join the battle against imperialism because Iraq just was the beginning of other Arab countries being sold.” His own relation with Jordan has seen many transformations. In 1967 his family fled from Palestine to Jordan; in 1970 they fled from Jordan to Lebanon after the Black September war; in 1982 they fled from Lebanon after Israeli invasion and the civil war. After having lived and worked in different countries he returned to Jordan. He therefore pointed at the importance of critical analyses. For him this means that political activism for Palestine needs to go beyond the Palestinian national level. The Intifada sparked increasing activism in the region, strengthening solidarity with Palestine. In Jordan, this level of activism was low, but in Lebanon the protests and activities were very present.

This is related to the political social history of Lebanon and its own battles with Israel. As a 28-year-old activist in Beirut, Bassem had a lot of experience with organizing protest against Israeli oppression but also against the Lebanese political repression. Palestinians are often treated as scapegoats for many of the domestic problems. One of the spaces of protest he and his comrades were involved with was the internet. But for him it is in particular the Arab context that forces activists to be more challenging in their analyses of the internet:

We must go beyond mere communication. Reconnecting Palestinians relieved a lot of frustration, it allowed phone and email connection for Palestinians in Lebanon and that is important. Internet has made Palestinians visible online, before they were invisible in legal and social terms. The internet gave stateless and contested people a form of identity or legitimacy, like an email address and online national identity. Politics needs to be more than this.

On the role of activists and a broadly based resistance he pointed at the international character of a Palestinian struggle. For Bassem: “The liberation of Palestine can’t only be achieved by the Intifada in the OT, it has to be done regionally and internationally.” That is why, besides internal communication, it is more meaningful to start communicating and organizing together within the Lebanese societies. The War of Words I mentioned before, and the trans-national mobilization discussed here, now come together. Activists realize the importance and prepare themselves to deal with the media through grass-roots training. Next I examine other types of participation used by internet activists in the Cyber Intifada by discerning two expressions of political internet activism: political confrontations and direct attacks.
7.4 Virtual Stones

But the keyboard might allow you to reach places that a stone can’t.

– Hacktivist in Beirut, Lebanon

There are several forms of online activism, but convincing the outside world of the Palestinian plight through trans-national mobilization was the most common goal. Internal/Palestinian solidarity and support marked much of the local mobilization. In this section I consider the more radical activism that aims at hitting and attacking the opponent directly. As the third form of collective tactics of the pro-Palestinian Cyber Intifada. There are politics with a small ‘p’ and Politics with a capital ‘P’.

“Pro-Israel hackers told to ignore ‘cyber terror.’” – The front-page title of an article in Israeli daily Haaretz explained that an IT company finally launched the ‘Checkpoint Software Technology’ promising protection from ‘internet terrorist attacks’. One web development firm even tried to conceal the Israeli identity of its clients by the websites taking on a US disguise. The tone in this and many other articles suggested that Palestinians and Israelis were engaged in an intense cyber war. General Security Services, also known as the secret service Shin Bet, went as far as presenting a national pact to fight ‘Cyber Terror’. This is not always media hype, however. The internet can be an organizing tool, a public voice, or a more straightforward weapon. They aim for two things: changing political perceptions about the conflict, and/or organizing direct action.

Mohamed al-Dura Hackers, PalHackers Club, and al-Moghmarekin al-Arab (‘Arab Penetrators’) are some of the hacktivist groups in which Palestinians work. But does the above quote by one of the Palestinian hacktivists I met in a Lebanese refugee camp represent one of these ‘cyber terrorists’? My curiosity about what it is that encouraged him to engage in such activities resulted in an irritable reply by a hacktivist in Tripoli: “And so what should I do when I see an Israeli message online saying ‘we wont spare one Palestinian’? Anyway, who is the cause of us here being homeless, against our will? Come on! It’s worth the effort.”

As an alternative form of resistance by Palestinian internet users, direct action on the internet is more of an option for refugees in the diasporas that are not able to participate in the physical struggle. Many of the young refugees I met in Lebanon were not convinced that debating with others is enough. Whereas for Shiraz, confronting and debating Pro-Israelis or disseminating opinions in support of Palestinians was satisfying, others preferred political expressions in virtual battles through computer games. Some thought it was time to step outside the virtual realms of Intifada games; they joined hacker groups to cause harm to online Israeli targets.

199 Hausman Tamar, 23/03/2001 Haaretz, article number 871713
200 Dror Yuval, 10/11/2000 Haaretz, article number 851703
201 Catherine Cohen, 25/09/2000 Haaretz, article number 864409
Confronting the Enemy

His point of view was based on the Israeli side of the story. When he said ‘Why don’t you accept them [Israelis] and just live in peace?’ I answered ‘Shouldn’t I be in my homeland first to make this possible? You know: be together to live together; instead of being in a refugee camp here?’ Whenever I manage to correct the wrong image or improve our point, especially with Americans, I feel happy! – Safa, Ein al-Hilwe

Safa’s and others’ attempts to convince can lead to a sense of relief if not ‘anger management’. Yet the need to persuade sometimes runs over into the wish to confront. On the question who they like to chat with in particular, many of the interviewed ended up with a similar description: After Palestinians, Israelis were the most favourite internet contacts. Some changes did appear as this quote about a debate between an Israeli and Palestinian woman in a mIRC chat room portrays. These examples do not suggest that the internet is a neutral public sphere where everyone is welcome to express and share ideas with the same potential impact. Abu Basel tried to explain to me why the struggle over (Western) audience means so much to him:

We should convince the audience there is another side of the story. They [Israelis] invade the media with the history of the Jews, the Jewish state… should we leave the websites for the Zionists? We must also talk about the Palestinian cause, how we were forced to leave our homes. We have to clarify the picture. These ideas must reach everyone, also the Israelis.

Cyber tactics can eventually bypass online barriers. Mahmoud, on the internet almost everyday, became used to such measures. But he had recently found a way to circumvent bans from forums.

I don’t have a favourite room anymore because I’m kicked out from most of them. Sometimes I get so angry and enter an Israeli one and write ‘no more Israel, Palestine forever’. So they kick me out but now I always try to go back. But after they kick you out their program recognizes your computer IP and won’t allow you to enter. But there is a program that can remove the bans and kicks and allows you to sneak in again. I also have this program now.

Many of the confrontations concerned a battle over arguments, but there are also those, mostly teenage boys, who use the net as a virtual battlefield. The combat games have to be seen as a form of defiance, although it is a game and no real people are involved. By identifying oneself as a stone thrower, the player is at least a virtual activist for a moment. A good example of this type of virtual Intifada are the stone throwing games where Palestinian activists fight Israeli soldiers, like the Taht al-Ramad (Underash) game (Picture 13). Although far from being one of the heroic Palestinian shabab (youth) in the Occupied Territories that defined the image of the Intifada, being part of a cyber army that attacks Israeli targets is probably as close as anyone can get to being directly involved in the physical political battle.
Shaker is a regular user of *Underash*: “There are many combat games about Bin Laden, Arafat, or Saddam. You can choose to be Bush but most choose to catch Bush. I played one where Arafat was trapped in his compound.” A Syrian publishing house designed this video game about the Palestinian uprising in order to turn Arab children away from popular American video games featuring US soldiers killing Iraqis or Afghans. More than 10,000 copies (cost: 8 US dollars each) were sold in one month. Mahmoud: “Intifada games are exciting; you feel the need to finish all the levels in order to enter the battle. It feels like being there and throwing the stones yourself. When the battle is inside the Aqsa Mosque you can help the injured to escape … you feel you have to kill the soldier.” But Akram, owner of an internet café in a camp in Beirut was a bit more down to earth and made the point that it wasn’t really the game itself, but what it represented, that mattered. “Take Counter Strike, now that’s a game, but in *Taht al-Ramed* you throw a stone three times at the soldier and you are dead.”

Some of those involved in the virtual warfare were also involved in other political forms of cyber activism. When attempts to use the internet to convince or negotiate seem to fail and direct attacks are the aim, the internet becomes a ‘weapon’ rather than a tool. This refers to a *cyber war* concept whereby pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups attack each other with viruses, hacking, and other internet-related sabotage.

**Attacking the Enemy: Hacktivism**

In August 2001 I received several emails with Palestinian URLs such as Miftah.org or popac.org (referring to well-know establishments in Ramallah, such as the Popular Art Centre). These links were fake and contained viruses and were sent by pro-Israeli hackers. A hacker is generally someone who breaks into computer systems with programs that the hackers design and/or share with each other. A rebellious character is true in many cases, especially in their mode of operation, but can stand for oppressive or authoritarian values of as well. Besides the association to criminality, hackers are commonly associated with egalitarian/rebellious values.

Hacking has become a threat with a potential power to hit anyone, anywhere, as several reports attested. Cyber attacks have been debated by the media since the new millennium; the Pentagon exaggeratedly called it the ‘Next Pearl Harbor’. As in real life politics, espionage and show of force are major components

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202 *Counter Strike* is a popular network game in which the player acts as a terrorist force. *Taht al-Ramed* means *Under the Ashes* and is an Intifada game.

203 It is not my aim to trace the epistemological source of the term *hacking* or *hackers* here, but rather to describe how and why Palestinian hackers organize themselves.


in cyber battles. Much of these hypes have decreased by now, but from time to time we are witness to spectacular cases. Unsurprisingly, Israeli computer specialists are considered the world’s best, as also acknowledged by many of the Palestinian IT specialists I interviewed. When a state of the art ICT sector and the best military intelligence in the world come together, a high quality hack context is the result. Several cases signify how real the consequences of hacking can be.

Bunt (2003) asserts that parts of these online activisms are primarily practiced in the name of Islam, and highly international. The internet activities, labelled by Bunt as *Electronic-Jihad*, predominantly relate to conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, Kashmir, and Afghanistan (2003:26). Though Islam certainly plays a role, the internet consumers and producers I met in Palestine, Jordan, and Lebanon expressed their reasons for participating and offering solidarity with Palestine in terms of a(collective) national cause. Moving away from the Jihad paradigm, I would therefore rather define this online activism *Cyber Intifada*, i.e. an uprising using electronic means as the dominant instrument.

These hacktivists can be considered political activists on the internet. They are usually young and technologically very savvy. Their work often consists of website defacements, online graffiti, textual postings, and pictures of atrocities. The Intifada triggered a frenzy of political defacements, postings of pro-Israel or pro Palestinian messages, and attacks on ISPs. US and Israeli websites are the most notable victims of pro-Palestinian hackers. News about Arab or Muslim hackers received substantial press coverage at the time because they were seen as ‘unusual’; this patronizing assumption has at times worked in the hacker’s favour. It indicates why some of the targets of pro-Palestinian hacking did not have adequate defence mechanisms for their databases and servers (Bunt 2003:37). A famous online battle was the one by notorious hacker Doctor Nucker, when he targeted the AIPAC (the American Israel Political Action Committee (along with the National Rifle Association the most powerful lobby in the United States) website and put pictures of Palestinian victims as his signature. The case got high publicity because he also obtained AIPAC’s 3, 500 secured members email list, including 700 credit card accounts, which he then published online (Bunt: 46).

Conversely, Arab and Muslim sites are also targeted by pro-Israeli hacktivists. The Lebanese Hizbollah operated its own server in 2002 because their previous provider was continuously attacked and blocked. The many diversions of Hamas-related websites to pornography by pro-Israeli hackers are well known as well. When President Arafat died the opening page of a Palestinian information site was blocked by a series of fake pictures ridiculing Arafat. But non-radical websites are also targeted. Involving oneself with Israeli websites through hacking caused debates on

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206 An Israeli company hired a hacker to hack the computers of competitors and steal their contract deals, consumer details, and even spy on customers. This example was one of the biggest scandals in industrial espionage in Israel. *Israel’s Nap Computer Spies*, May 29 2005, www.wired.com

207 As I argued in Chapter Five, referring to *Jihad* is problematic as the term is commonly associated with terrorism and Islamophobic discourses equating Jihad to suicide bombings.
whether it is ethically appropriate for Muslims. The disputes even led to an online fatwa by Sheikh Faisal Mawlawy of the Islamic European Fatwa Council. He gave permission to visit secular as well as Zionist websites as an ‘information gathering exercise’ and allowed hacktivist activities but only “as an answer to an attack” (Bunt 2003:46).

The number of hackers is difficult to measure. According to hackerthreats.com more than 500,000 had been identified in 2004, but they were not necessarily politically motivated. Yet, when something takes place as significant as 11/9, the outbreak of the intifada, or the war on Iraq, an explosion of politically driven defacements occur. It seemed important for hackers to be mentioned by other hackers and to be listed on hack sites. Digitalgansters.com is a site where hackers can trade information about their work (Taggart 2001). The pro-Palestinian hack group WFD was notorious for its hacks on .il (Israel) domains with a high profile. One spectacular act was the replacement of Sharon’s election website with a flash movie with text, music, and pictures of the Intifada. The participation in clashes via special Intifada websites or through sabotaging websites by hacktivists presents a certain virtual participation.

Some of the individuals behind Palestinian hacker projects are from refugee camps. I heard about the ‘Mohamed al-Dura Hackers’ during interviews and after a while I tracked them. Two of the participants in this group and several other hackers talked about their motivations and methods. A Palestinian hacker from South Lebanon:

For us the internet is not just for fun. We have a cause. During the Intifada, while our people were resisting and being killed, there was a similar Intifada on the net. More than 200 Israeli sites were destroyed during the first three months of the Intifada.208

They explained how they also receive the names of some Israeli websites from internal sources in Palestine. I asked if they did not consider it useless compared to the actual on-the-ground battles in Palestine: “Both ways are true, the meaning of the keyboard or stone is the same for me. But the keyboard might allow you to reach places that a stone can’t.” The al-mukhtariqin al-‘Arab (Arab Penetrators) had 161 member hackers in 7 countries at the time of the interview the hacker described to me his routine: “Usually on Monday, at 6.30 PM, we meet online to organize attacks. We had a successful operation against the site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The targeted site would be offline for at least one day or even more, depending on its webmasters.” It is not difficult to grasp the motivations behind their work as hackers, especially those in the diaspora. A Palestinian hacker from the North of Lebanon:

I lost my father after he wasted ten years of his life in a horrible Israeli

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208 Al Manar, closely linked to Hezbollah, established a television station in 1996. It launched a website in the same year but due to its success it had to add a new website address at the end of 2000 to accommodate the large number of users. They frequently find themselves at the frontline of cyber battles between pro and anti Israeli hackers. They are deprived of advertising revenues by American companies like Microsoft and amazone.com because of ties with Hizbolah. In Gonzales, 2001; in the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel the IDF bombed Al Manar as a “terrorist” target.
prison. Can I forget what Israel did to my father? The one who now sees Israelis destroy his house also cannot forget. The next generations cannot forget what happened, that is what I am working on.

Different IPs are used when the hacktivists prepare an attack. A member of the Mohammed al-Dura hacker group works from a local internet café. It is easy for him and his comrades to gather this way; when they receive the URL name of a target to be hit, they send each other a missed call as a sign to assemble. Depending on the internet connection speed and the aimed target, the operation itself takes no more than an hour.

As websites are monitored, safety measures are important. Haganah.org is a pro-Israeli website that lists Arab/Muslim websites that support Palestinians. A year before our meeting, the hacker I met was hacked himself. He argues that his website was destroyed because of the subjects discussed on his forum or because he was simply tracked down as one of the hacktivists:

Recovery was very difficult. I first worked non-stop to fix the damage and save what was lost. The site is complete again and also the forums are activated. When I was hacked I felt a big challenge: ‘To be or Not to be’ – to exist as a website and get it back again or not.

One of the hackers I interviewed belonged to a group that received many of their targets from Palestine, they don’t randomly target; Israeli peace groups were, for example, exempted. He described how their activity is usually organized:

They inform my cousin who then informs me that we have a mission. We usually sit together in the same place at the same time to damage the target as much as possible because with four pcs we have more power. We surf to the site afterwards and if we find a note saying that the server is unavailable we know that we destroyed it. But it must be an Israeli site that is hostile to Palestinians.

Concurrently, there is a certain lack of interest among internet producers/initiatives inside Palestine in hacktivism because, contrary to online/virtual obstacles or internet attacks, the experiences of offline/on-the-ground attacks were more important. According to ‘Abdi, an organizer at ABP in Ramallah:

Hacking is not the main threat to us, invasion is. The physical dangers are more of a concern than the virtual ones because our ‘host’ is not something external [indirect/virtual], so we can be directly attacked.

Incidentally, this also answers the discrepancy in the politics of hyper-linking (Chapter Five) that is shaped by avoiding undesirable associations. Thus, in this context, for many in Palestine, the internet is not the primary location where battles take place. This recalls the difference between inside and outside tactics, showing a division in resistance against military oppression through (non- and/or violent) direct action and resisting misconceptions about Palestinians through media/cyber activism. The later, unsurprisingly, takes place more in the diaspora for the simple fact that they
are not at the ‘centre of gravity’. And in addition, the (Western) diaspora more often has access to trans-national mediums to target international (Western) audiences.

Internet Guerrilla

The internet does sometimes facilitate direct/offline resistance that some people do become engaged with. Being dissatisfied with the struggle or feeling detached from it are common denominators, and in many activities there are different ways one can fight, from arguing to attacking and hacking. Chatting was a way to trap the opponent. At the beginning of the Intifada, a Palestinian student used chat rooms to get in touch with Israelis. After knowing each other better, she started a more personal relationship with him online. The Israeli fell in love and he agreed to meet her. She picked him up, but as soon as they drove towards Ramallah he was kidnapped and killed. The girl was sentenced for life in an Israeli prison.209

Apparently, the internet has also been at the centre of guerrilla activism. There had also been rumors that groups outside Palestine were coordinating underground resistance via internet. One of the main newspapers in Lebanon headlined ‘Al Aqsa cells being funded and guided from Ein al-Hilwe, commander using internet to direct attacks’.210 The commander running the cell was a veteran Fatah activist during the Israeli-Lebanese war but split in 1993 in response to the Oslo agreement and formed the Black September 13th faction.211

He welcomed me in his South Lebanese refugee camp office and showed me how he used the internet to help the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade in the West Bank. His own Kataeb al-Awda (Brigades of Return) is one of the cells in South Lebanon that is part of a wider web of Palestinian resistance making use of the new internet technology. As Blanford described, this trans-national participation comes down to co-organising military attacks on Israeli targets by transferring money and military advice from Lebanon to the West Bank. The commander’s group helped coordinate the cells in the West Bank via the internet by using his experience of guerrilla tactics in the Lebanese civil war Israeli sieges. I asked him why he values the internet and maintains their Kataebaqsa.org website. The answer was the same as one of the internet initiators in Ramallah gave me two years earlier:

Need is the mother of all choices. … The net is an important means of communication between Palestinians in and outside, as well as for the resistance. It is used for all our necessary activities: organizing, recruiting, training, and setting up cells. It allows me to work on all of these aspects as if I am in Palestine.

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209 This attempt was repeated by a young Palestinian two years later. When the second anniversary of the Intifada was commemorated, she did almost the exact same operation. A planned chat and email friendship, followed by a kidnap. The operation failed because Israeli intelligence detected her attempts and so she was arrested.

210 Nickolas Blanford, Daily Star, 4 July 2003

211 On this date in 1993 Arafat signed the Oslo deal, considered by many as a first step to capitulation of the most important Palestinian principles.
A Pro-Israeli hack group (also called Haganah)\(^{212}\) attacked the Kataeb Aqsa website several times, but for him it is customary that Israeli intelligence or hackers target them. “Each time we are attacked we just rebuild the site, and we use methods of transmitting encrypted codes and instructions”. Working from a small office in a busy area of the camp hampered the service even more. After I stayed for a while to watch him work, it was obvious how basic assets can make a world of difference. With a laptop on his small desk, the phone connection, and, in case that gets disconnected, the satellite cables, he was updating the communiqués and checking for messages from Palestine. He said:

Thanks to the internet there is a huge difference in terms of communication between the First Intifada and this Intifada, mainly the speed to exchange and direct instructions by our leaders. Even in a refugee camp we can now use such accessible techniques.

The examples in this chapter entail a repositioning of the practices by Palestinian internet users and shows how politics are exercised, constituted, and reinforced. Thus, with the internet hegemonic power structures can be ignored, negated, or shattered, as Landzelius (2002:40) argues. Cyber Intifada represents a new form of grass-roots agency that is being constructed within a broader context while intersecting with newer practices of everyday life.

### 7.5 Conclusion

Over the last five years internet access has become an important instrument for Palestinians; besides helping overcome isolation or fragmentation, internet was significant for progressive activism. In this chapter I presented the important ways Palestinians and pro-Palestinian solidarity activists try to achieve political demands via the internet. I dealt with the final tension that shows the dialectics between resistance and solidarity on one hand, and occupation and repression on the other, a continuous juxtaposition in Palestinian everyday life. I argued that internet activism is not a surrogate for offline and everyday resistance. Technological developments and internet use asserts but also contests political and capitalist authoritarianism. In fact, this dual power is what makes the internet so unique. Three methods of Cyber Intifada political internet use were distinguished: as a public relation tool to convince international audiences (media activism), to recruit activists and organize for local and global protests (mobilization), and internet as a weapon to hack (attack).

The first section stated how for initiatives like Electronic Intifada, al-Awda, Palestine Media Watch, and Free Palestine, ICT development offered a new form of political representation and meant an important step in the attempt to narrate a

\(^{212}\) Haganah means ‘defence’ in Hebrew but also relates to the Haganah militia Jewish armed forces remembered for terrorizing Palestinian civilians out of their villages in 1947/48.
Palestinian perspective. Confirmed by collective participation in different levels of mobilization and resistance, political internet usage in diasporic and occupied settings also contributed in reconstructing the relationship between Palestinian diasporas. The examples furthermore answered the question whether, and how, the internet serves political activists in solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada. Where nations and minorities are oppressed and weak, they rely even more on solidarity.

In the second section I showed that Palestinians have to mobilize beyond their own settings to persuade and reach the international world and convince them to join in their struggle. Email and websites increase communication between individual activists and activist movements, locally and internationally. Beside the ‘official’ structures, different methods of mobilization have involved local communities and international activists. Online and offline ethnography reveal that internet is part of a wider process of self-empowerment.

The third section analyzed how Palestinians managed to use internet technology as a tool within their repertoires, as a tactical instrument or a weapon for the weak. The presence of trans-national hacktivist networks and the growing popularity of websites by al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Hamas highlight the dialectic relation between resistance and internet development.

It is also necessary to be clear about the different power-related factors, the political economic structures involved, and the inequalities. I do not end with euphoric conclusions because as this chapter shows, the internet is not considered a substitute for everyday face-to-face politics. Bearing in mind the US support of and European compliance with Israeli occupation, equating Cyber Intifada and internet activism with anti-colonial struggle or grass-roots resistance is rather problematic. It is important to remain clear about the difference between on- and offline mobilization in the political arena. Many Palestinian users, banned parties of underground militants and stateless refugees are forced to organize outside the confines of ‘official’ politics. Emails and websites help to motivate, but personal debates and face-to-face conversations are crucial. This is especially true concerning defence of a controversial stance or participation in risky activities; people are more likely to be (finally) mobilized to join a movement or protest via offline affiliation and persuasion. This leads increasingly to a definition of the internet as both a blessing and a curse, or in other words, an instrument that can force people into submission and help them to rise up. I will participate in this final debate in the next chapter.