

Modes of online resistance: Israel's strategic framing of pinkwashing on social media, and
the emergence of queer counternarratives

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ABSTRACT:

While the topic of discourse framing has been relevant to the Israel-Palestine conflict since it first began, it has never been as salient as in the aftermath of October 7th 2023. This is especially true given the rise of digital platforms and the subsequent amplification of competing narratives. Following drastic military escalation in Gaza, Israel has intensified its online presence using platforms like Instagram and X to justify its actions against mounting criticism, which has been met with direct online resistance from pro-Palestinian solidarity movements. This thesis will explore the conflict in the context of LGBTQ+ identity politics, as this has become central in how each side shapes and legitimizes their respective narratives. Israel has systematically employed “pinkwashing” by distinguishing itself as a beacon of Western progressiveness despite its ongoing human rights abuses in Palestine. In response, counter-narratives have emerged online using hashtags like “NoPrideInApartheid” to promote an intersectional understanding of queerness that combats Israeli attempts to erase the Palestinian struggle. Two primary research questions have been formulated, namely 1) how does Israel use its online framing of queerness as a political tool?, and 2) how are online counternarrative movements emerging as a form of resistance?

This thesis uses framing theory as a framework and employs a mix of inductive coding, critical discourse analysis, and thematic analysis to investigate how online discourse is manipulated to influence perceptions in times of conflict. The findings suggest that Israel has increasingly used fearmongering and stereotypes to frame itself as a protector of queer rights against the brutality of Hamas and Arab men, and to in turn justify military intervention. Meanwhile, the pro-Palestinian narrative has emerged through the virality of hashtags and documentation of queer experiences via the platform “Queering the Map” to resist against Israel’s political dichotomization of Palestinian and queer identity. The goal of this paper is to contribute to the academic literature on the interplay between political discourse, online platforms and queer identity.

KEYWORDS: Framing; Pinkwashing; Israel-Palestine; Counternarratives; Resistance

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1. Introduction

Across different countries, the use of social media has become a recurring trend for both state and non-state actors to shape narratives and influence public opinion (Crilley et al., 2020). In that regard, the state of Israel is no different. Being the only country with an official Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) account, it is not new to online diplomacy. Indeed, the nation branding of Israel has always been one of their top priorities, as shown through their extensive public relations campaigns and foreign policy agendas (Hirschberger, 2021, p. 121). From promoting the attractiveness of its landscapes, to displaying the religious diversity among IDF soldiers, Israel has always tapped into social media to craft a positive image of itself, one that aligns with its geopolitical goals (p. 121-122).

Since the aftermath of October 7th 2023, the state of Israel has been amplifying its attacks on Gaza, alongside its presence online, especially on X and Instagram (Martin et al., 2023). Indeed, the official Instagram of Israel (@stateofisrael) has taken it upon itself to scrutinize politicians and high-profile figures alike, such as Gigi Hadid – a Palestinian-Dutch model – for showing her support towards Palestine, which resulted in her phone number being leaked and death threats being sent.¹ This form of fear-based tactic demonstrates the extent to which the state of Israel is willing to counter and censor any form of opposition. Instagram and X have also been transformed into a battle ground where Israel attempts to not only justify its military actions, but also influence international and domestic audiences. Moreover, the framing of these actions as “self-defence”, has become a recurring theme as Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, tries to win over the support of the international community (Martin et al., 2023).

In their efforts to further justify these rhetoric, the state of Israel has drawn attention for its strategic use of framing on social media, where it presents an intricate interplay of queer imagery juxtaposed with military narratives. One example of this, is a photo posted on X of an IDF soldiers waving the pride flag over a bombardment camp while justifying their actions “in the name of love”.² This type of media campaign can be interpreted as pinkwashing

¹ Dazed. (2023, October 18). *Gigi and Bella Hadid face death threats for supporting Palestine*. Dazed. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/61138/1/gigi-bella-hadid-death-threats-supporting-palestine-hamas-israel-social-media>

² “An IDF soldier raises a Pride flag in Gaza. It says, “In the Name of Love” in English, Hebrew, and Arabic.” <https://twitter.com/NevetB/status/1723812379195273512>

(Schulman & Chávez, 2019) as it reinforces this image of Israel as a “progressive safe haven for gays and lesbians” to appeal to Western receptivity, while framing Palestinians as “barbaric” and “homophobic” (Ellison, 2013; Lahir, 2020). However, such practices aren’t new, and have been documented numerous times. Safety (1991) notes that the Israeli media has always sensationalized Palestinians and reinforced stereotypes, transforming them from refugees into terrorists (p. 96). The strategic targeting of Western audiences – specifically Americans – to garner their sympathy, has concluded in what Safety calls the construction of “dominant systems of interpretation” (p. 97). Indeed, by promoting its relatively progressive stance on women’s or LGBTQ+ issues, Israel positions itself as a beacon of Western progressiveness.

In response to Israel’s pinkwashing, counter narrative movements have emerged online. The use of hashtags such as *#QueersForPalestine* or *#NoPrideInApartheid* have been used to challenge these dominant narratives and expose the dissonance between pinkwashing discourses and the treatment of Palestinians (Abushback & Majeed, 2020). Additionally digital platforms have facilitated the creation of alternate online spaces, or ‘borderscapes’, such as *Queering the Map*. Through a radical imagination of mapping and cyber spaces, *Queering the Map* has served as a counter-mapping repository for queer Palestinians to share their experiences, preserve their voices and maintain a sense of community, all while the physical space they live in is being destroyed (Kirby et al., 2021b; Krichker, 2019).

Despite being relatively recent in the academic field, the exploration of pinkwashing in Israel and queer resistance is not new, and has highlighted the complexities of using queerness as a political tool. Byrne (2013) investigates how queerness is used “in order to legitimize the settler colonial state of Israel.” The article looks at methods through which Israel has tried to “rebrand” itself and “subvert the growing visibility of the anti-apartheid movements [by] pinkwashing Israel as a paradise for queers of all nationalities, including Palestinians” (Byrne, 2013, p.136). Other scholars have looked into the politics of queerness, and what it means to decolonize queerness in the context of Israel-Palestine. Lahiri (2020) suggests that queer theory is often viewed under a Western performative lens which discredits the existence of queer Palestinians (Lahri, 2020; Libretti, 2004). As a response, queer Palestinian organizations such as AlQaws were born as a form of resistance to “connect queer Palestinians in the diaspora [and] confront pinkwashing” (Lahir, 2020). Indeed, a number of scholars have looked into Palestinian resistance. Abushbak and Majeed (2020) investigate how mobile phone users form online resistance against the Israeli regime through

“digital testimonies” (p. 4) and how social media has been used to spread information in real time. While some studies have explored the intersectionality between online queer resistance and online Palestinian resistance, very little research has been done on the emergence of queer hashtag activism in solidarity with Palestine. Additionally, no prior scholars have investigated the role of queer cyber-spaces like *Queering the Map*, which disables the erasure of queer Palestinians by archiving their memories.

In a period where Israeli media has been increasing its pinkwashing strategies, looking at counternarratives provides for an interesting and necessary study about the refusal to comply with such rhetoric as well as the question of belonging. This thesis answers the following research questions: *1) how does Israel use its online framing of queerness as a political tool?, and 2) how are online counternarrative movements emerging as a form of resistance?*

Through answering my research question, this thesis hopes to make a small contribution to the academic field by enriching the discourse on digital activism, framing theory and the interplay between online platforms and queer movements. Gaining knowledge in this field might contribute to fostering awareness about the complex ways in which digital platforms are employed to influence perceptions and control narratives. Lastly, this thesis aims to place sexual liberation within the broader context of colonized Palestine, and hopes to serve as a reminder that queer liberation is intersectional and cannot be achieved at the expense of another groups’ oppression. With social media playing a foundational role in communicating information, it is crucial to understand how information is framed and spread in times of conflict.

2. Theoretical framework

Given the wide range of themes this thesis navigates, this section will establish the guiding theoretical framework. We begin with an exploration of framing theory and how framing is used in the context of queer narratives. By diving into the concept of framing and its role in influencing ideologies, this will help shed light on how media operates as a mechanism of social control and propaganda. Additionally, this section examines how queerness is framed as a pinkwashing strategy by Israel to present itself as LGBTQ+-friendly, and divert attention from its human rights abuses. Then, this theoretical framework navigates the realm of digital activism and how online spheres can become a form of counter narrative. Finally it elucidates the meaning behind politics of belonging and politics of identity in the context of Israel, Palestine, and queerness.

2.1. Framing Theory

In the age of social media, several scholars have explored the impact that platforms like Instagram and X hold in shaping discourses and narratives (Seo, 2014). It is a tale as old as time, that “whoever controls the media, controls the masses” (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010).

Frames are indispensable to our interpretation of information and reflect a critical part of meaning making (Schmid, 2021, p.33). Thus, the act of framing would imply the careful selection of content, narrated through a default interpretive structure (p. 36). Grounded in Goffman’s theory, Persson (2018) posits that framing manifests itself in discourse and is subject to collective construction. It can be used as a tool to exercise power, or shape narratives and influence ideologies in an either conscious or unconscious manner. However, he marks a clear distinction between intentional and unintentional influence; one marks a clear imbalance of power while the other does not (p. 136).

Shehata (2007), complements framing theory by explaining how information is interpreted based on cognitive structures called “schemas”. Schema theory posits that individuals make use of mental frames or schemas to interpretate information by linking them to their exiting knowledge or experiences (p. 3-4). Conversely, Butler (2009), extends this concept by arguing that the conditions in which an event or discourse is framed, are directly related to the ontology of framing, or in other words, the nature of frames as entities that shape reality. Her argument is rooted in feminist theory as she maintains that frames cognitively shape identities – especially those in relation to gender and sexuality – and work “to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot” (p. 3).

This is particularly evident in the way Israel highlights their LGBTQ+ stance on social media to influence international perception about how progressive they are, while demonizing Palestinians. Indeed, spreading pinkwashing propaganda on X and Instagram as an intentional framing strategy suggest a colonial discourse which goes beyond territorial occupation (Seo, 2014; Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014). By leveraging LGBTQ rights, Israel is deflecting from the occupation of Palestinian land, therefore reinforcing colonial practices. Intentional framing entails the carefully curated dissemination of information to support a certain narrative (Schmid, 2021). The branding of Israel's identity progressive on LGBTQ issues would therefore suggest an intentional manipulation of people's perceptions of them (Judith, 2009).

2.2. Pinkwashing as a form of framing

By framing a diligently curated narrative, Israel has fabricated their desired outcome for their brand image. One of the many tactics employed has been the strategic use of pinkwashing on Instagram and Twitter.

Sarah Shulman, a Jewish lesbian scholar and BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanction) activist, coined the term 'pinkwashing' in relation to Israel-Palestine, which she defined as "Israel['s] attempt to shine its image and justify its actions through positioning itself as safe and accepting of gays and lesbians" (Schulman & Chávez, 2019). The punitive use of queerness as an instrument for occupation also sheds light on the wider '*homonationalist*' sentiments that are prevalent in Israel and beyond. Ritchie (2014) explains that these sentiments stem from a lack of intersectionality among gay white men who prioritize and "privilege their racial and religious identity" (p. 618). Understanding homonationalism is crucial as it lays the foundation for identifying how pinkwashing operates.

Homonationalism "sanitizes" homosexuality by "normalizing queerness into patriotism" and racializing national belonging (Puar, 2007, as cited in Schotten, 2016, p. 354-355). Moreover, Schotten (2016) continues by arguing that the United States and Israel are the two biggest benefactors of homonationalism (p. 362-363). By co-opting this supposed progressiveness and queer-friendly image, the state of Israel capitalizes on Western homonationalist sentiments, and deflects attention away from what is really happening. Israel uses pinkwashing to spread their narrative and build acceptance for the occupation and (Roffman, 2013, p. 29) conceal the nation's oppressive practices against Palestinians. If

pinkwashing is a tool of Zionism, then the act of opposing pinkwashing constitutes an act of resistance against settler colonialism (Schotten, 2016: p 365).

2.3. Counternarratives as online resistance

The act of resisting is not confined to one format. Indeed, the digital landscape that we live in has opened us to new modes of political activism on the internet (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014: p.106). It has the power to influence global opinions and connect people in immediate and accessible ways. As a part of broader practices of resistance, online activism seeks to challenge dominant narratives “by reframing the issues of justice for Palestine” and digitally connecting people (p.107).

Indeed, the potential of social uprising on a global scale – thanks to platforms like Twitter and Instagram – has been evident through movements like Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring (Wang & Zhou, 2021). The rise in popularity of social media has become an indispensable tool for resisting and countering certain narratives by democratizing information, connecting networks of individuals and providing a platform to those affected by systems of oppression. This section elucidates these practices by looking into the role of hashtags as counter-narratives as well as cyber spaces as sites of resistance.

2.3.1. #NoPrideInApartheid, #QueersForPalestine

Social movements have, in the digital era, shifted from being “collective” to being “connected” (Wang et al., 2016). While one doesn’t exclude the other, this shift has shed a new light on the power of virality. The use of hashtags has grown rapidly alongside the use of social media, as a tool for exposure and symbolic resistance (p. 852- 853). Indeed, examining the frequency of hashtags can serve as a means to mobilize public action and counter the status quo, whatever it may be. Furthermore, the use of hashtags can be a way to convey a message or spread awareness (Ta’amneh & Al-Ghazo, 2021). Their ability to spread information becomes strategic to connect global movements of resistance.

Duarte and Virgil-Hayes (2017) investigate how the use of hashtags under specific posts can serve as a means to circulate information, but also as a form of disruption and self-determination beyond the physical space, into the cyberspace (p. 174). Hashtags serve many purposes. Jost et al. (2018), as cited in Abbas et al. (2022), identify three main functions of hashtags: 1) they facilitate political mobilization through information, 2) they convey emotional messages, 3) they play a vital role in the dissemination of information, influencing political outcomes (p. 289). Moreover, the use of hashtags in social media has the

transformative power to influence public opinion on certain issues, by facilitating the distribution of information and reaching a wider audience. According to Anisa et al. (2023), the transformation of public opinion often serves as a powerful catalyst for social change (p. 800). Hashtags can act as a vessel for education, aiding in the correction of misconceptions and misinformation, as well as enriching dialogues and collaborations across different cultures (Anisa et al., 2023). Moreover, by democratizing online political engagement in “playful” ways, hashtags often succeeded in offline action (Abbas et al., 2022).

#FreePalestine has been one the most commonly used hashtag in the digital sphere, and a symbol of the movement of resistance and support for Palestine (Anisa et al., 2023). In the context of Israeli-Palestine and pinkwashing, reactionary hashtags like #NoPrideinGenocide or #NotInMyName are often seen in the comment section of tweets and Instagram posts. Not only do they showcase the refusal to identify with homonationalist and Zionist discourse, but also function as a way to dismantle neocolonial frames. Similarly, the emergence of the hashtag #QueersForPalestine unites queer activists who fight in support of Palestine, highlighting the link between queer and Palestinian liberation. These hashtags are not merely symbolic; they create a space for resistance through lived experiences and a shared understanding of struggle that extends beyond virtual spaces. In the age of the information economy, capturing and maintaining the attention of individuals is essential. Castells (2015) argues that visual and symbolic communication thus becomes an imperative in the digital age, with hashtags acting as signposts, drawing users’ focus by maintaining the virality of content. Moreover, scholars argue that the effectiveness of hashtags is often correlated to the emotional weight they carry. Ahmed (2004) elucidates this by stating that that emotions are not just personal experiences but are also embedded in social contexts and relationships. This perspective sheds light on how personal testimonies and shared experiences in digital activism can resonate with broader audiences, thereby fostering a sense of collective identity and solidarity.

2.3.2. Imagining spaces of resistance

In the struggle for self-determination and geographies of oppression, biopower and borders become a topic of contingent debate. With Palestinian freedom of movement being heavily regulated, radical imagination of space becomes part of Palestinian day-to-day self-determination (van Teeffelen, 2021, p. 57; Foucault, 1978, p. 138). Dillard-Wright et al. (2022) argue that a prerequisite for societal transformation is a radical imagination of the future (p.79). Colonial discourses are often limited in their imagination. The practice of

radical deconstruction and redefinition of institutional structures to reimagine better ones, ultimately offers a vision of social change. In the context of this framework, a radical imagination of space entails a decolonial and anti-pinkwashing imagination of borders.

Fictive and imagined spaces become day-to-day realities in light of oppression, and can manifest themselves through cyber spaces or 'borderscapes' (Krichker, 2019). To understand borderscapes, one must first understand the importance of space. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the social production of space, as explained in Stanek's article (2007) provides an understanding of the dynamic relationship between social processes and the physical environment. Lefebvre posits that places are not neutral entities, but are actively shaped by social practices, representations, and lived experiences. In light of the ongoing occupation, space, imagination and experience become intertwined in what is called the borderscape. Krichker (2019) defines the borderscapes as "the material output of the difference in sovereignty marked by the international boundary" (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary, 2015, as cited in Krichker, 2019, p. 1227). Harley (1989), complements the notion of borderscapes by introducing the concept of colonial cartography. This highlights how maps and spatial representation have been used as a tool for colonial interests, by erasing the presence of indigenous populations.

In the digital age, online platforms can serve as the space where different framings of reality are reimaged, disseminated, and colonial cartography is contested. In the context of this framework, a radical imagination of space entails a decolonial and anti-pinkwashing imagination of borders.

2.3.2.1. *Queering the Map*

Drawing on the concept of borderscapes, particularly in the digital realm, we explore how online spaces such as "*Queering the Map*" become essential for constructing a digital geography of resistance. "The site was launched in 2017 by founder Lucas LaRochelle. Its mission was to gather submissions from queer people and create a global digital archive of queer memory" (O'Neill, 2023). By allowing queer Palestinians to pin their experiences on a digital map, the platform becomes a means of spatially documenting and archiving their existence, and in turn a form of resistance (Lin, 2021). If to exist is to resist, then the act of mapping serves to defy the erasure of queer voices and contributes to the visibility and validation of queer identity within the Palestinian narrative (Segalo et al., 2015). Platforms like "*Queering the Map*" enable the counteraction of homonationalist narratives. Queer

Palestinians engage in a process of counter-mapping, challenging dominant frames and offering an alternative cartography that acknowledges the complexities of queer existence within a landscape marked by oppression (Harley 1989). Therefore, engaging in counter-mapping, queer Palestinians resist these colonial practices and reclaim their spaces and histories. Peluso (1995) describes counter-mapping as a subversive act that challenges traditional power dynamics by incorporating the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities.

2.4. Politics of belonging and identity

Understanding liberation in a neo-colonial governance, means understanding the complexities of belonging and identity rooted in anti-colonial movements. Said (2000) explains that liberation means the reestablishment of a people's "identity, culture and language, and, above all, [the reappropriation of] their territories (p. 181). For Palestinians, the colonial experience is rooted in a desire for autonomy and equality, which have been central themes in politics of belonging and identity. However, these politics are deeply intertwined with competing narratives of nationhood – such as Zionism advocates for the establishment of a Jewish state in historic Palestine, and has profound implications for the politics of belonging and identity in the region – and historical legitimacy, reflecting the complexities of ethnonationalism in the Middle East (Said, 1993).

Under the guise of politics of identity, the Zionist project entails the colonization of Palestinian lands and the marginalization of its indigenous populations, thus challenging notions of inclusivity and multiculturalism (Sasson-Levy & Rapoport, 2019). Critics argue that Zionism, as practiced by the Israeli state, perpetuates a system of apartheid and exclusion, privileging Jewish citizens at the expense of Palestinian rights (Pappe, 2014). This has sparked debates about the compatibility of Zionism with principles of democracy and human rights, and raises questions about the possibility of a just and equitable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Finkelstein, 2018).

In the context of queer politics, Zionism further complicates the dynamics of belonging and identity. The Israeli state's use of pinkwashing to portray itself as a progressive sanctuary for LGBTQ+ individuals stands in stark contrast to its treatment of Palestinians. This creates a paradox where the promotion of queer rights is used to mask and justify the ongoing occupation and oppression of Palestinian people (Schulman & Chávez, 2019). Queer

Palestinians and their allies resist this narrative by asserting that true queer liberation cannot be achieved without addressing the broader context of colonialism and occupation.

2.4.1. *Palestinian self-determination*

Palestinian self-determination is intricately linked with the quest for sovereignty and liberation from colonial occupation. The Palestinian struggle encompasses political, cultural, and territorial dimensions, as articulated by international law and affirmed by numerous United Nations resolutions. Central to this struggle is the right to determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development, but above all, the right to a remembered presence and collective history (Said, 2000, p. 184). However, Palestinian self-determination faces significant challenges of politics of identity and memory (Said, 2000). This is also, primarily due to the ongoing Israeli occupation, characterized by military incursions, illegal settlements, and the restriction of movement through checkpoints and barriers (Khalidi, 2017, p. 14). The concept of self-determination for Palestinians encompasses not only the establishment of an independent state and the preservation of their cultural heritage but also the resistance against erasure (Said, 2000).

2.4.2. *Queer self determination*

Similarly, queer liberation and self-determination also encompasses politics of identity. Beyond the fight for equal rights, movements advocating for queer liberation, also seek to create inclusive spaces where individuals can affirm their identities and form supportive communities. Miller (2015) explains that *queer* acts as an umbrella term which “acknowledges diverse people across gender, sex, and desires”, and *self-determination* is “the right to make choices [that] authenticate one’s self-expression [and affirms the legibility of their identity]” (p.37). Thus, queer self-determination involves the struggle against heteronormative structures and the marginalization of individuals based on their sexual orientation. While queer self-determination strongly advocates for equal rights and opportunities, this struggle is also about the right to “become”, achieving visibility and recognition. Queer liberation becomes intrinsically tied to broader social justice movements that seek to challenge and dismantle systems of inequality based on race, class and gender.

In the context of Israel-Palestine, the quest for queer self-determination is often overshadowed by the irrationalities of systemic oppression under Israeli occupation, the precarity of Palestinian livelihoods and the selective liberation of one identity over the other

(Atshan, 2020). Crenshaw (1989) posits that an intersectional approach is crucial in understanding the complexities and the interconnectedness of social justice movements.

2.4.3. Intersection of queer and Palestinian self determination

The junction of queer and Palestinian self-determination embodies the essence of liberation by imagining a possibility for both sexual and national liberation. That is because “queer liberation cannot be realized while colonial subjugation persists, [seeing as] they are inextricably linked ” (Atshan, 2020, p. 222). The convergence of the two identities and their emancipation underscores profound complexities about the dismantling of oppressive structures (Puar, 2007, as cited in Schotten, 2016). Feminist scholar Crenshaw (1989), emphasises the notion of intersectionality, by recognizing that various forms of oppression are intertwined. Indeed, multiple scholars have argued that true liberation requires a holistic and intersectional approach.

3. Methodology

For this research, a multi-method qualitative approach was employed to comprehensively explore the numerous topics at hand (Ventura & Ventura, 2018). This section will outline the research design and explain the rationale behind the chosen method. To reiterate, this thesis firstly aims to identify *how* narratives of queerness are framed in social media in times of conflict. It seeks to unveil how queerness is framed by the state of Israel as a political tool. Secondly, it aims to understand how counter narratives emerge as a form of online resistance. The scope of the research covers three main platforms: *Instagram*, *X* and *Queering the Map*.

3.1. Rationale and research design

The design uses a multi-method qualitative approach that integrates 1) a content analysis combined with a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Israel's Instagram and X with 2) a thematic analysis of hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid as well as a 3) thematic analysis of the platform *Queering the Map*.

The decision for this design is driven by the goal to capture the complexities of framing strategies, and the multifaceted nature of online resistance. Therefore, a qualitative method is best suited to answer the research question as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the language, meanings, experiences, and perspectives within digital spaces (Boeije, 2010). Moreover, a qualitative design rooted in framing theory operates on an inductive approach which offers interpretation and adaptability, thus capturing the complexity of online narratives (Flick et al., 2004). Unlike quantitative research, codes in qualitative research are not fixed, which allows for flexibility in interpretation (Boeije, 2010). However, this does not mean that the analysis of the data was purely inductive, as the operationalization was guided by sensitizing concepts derived from the theoretical framework.

A content analysis allows for an overall exploration of language used, and visual elements within Israeli pinkwashing narratives through framing theory. This method helps identify key trends within the data. Since the first goal is to identify how queerness is framed by the state of Israel, this research prioritizes the interpretation of language. By diving into the qualitative aspects of framing strategies, this approach allows me to uncover the underlying power dynamics and nation branding embedded within Israel's Instagram and Twitter posts. A critical discourse analysis is then employed for an in-depth examination of the language embedded within the data. Given that language is an enabler of social and

political practices, a CDA is imperative for revealing power interests and political and ideological frameworks behind certain texts or images (Machin & Mayr, 2012: p.4). This method “expos[es] strategies that appear normal or neutral on the surface [but in fact] seek to shape the representations of events” (p. 5).

The thematic analysis of hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid on Instagram and X uncovers how the emergence of counter-narratives form to become online resistance. The aim is to identify patterns, and assess the overall emotions that are associated to the hashtags, thereby revealing how activists and users collectively mobilise to create new social movements. (Neuendorf, 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a thematic analysis is more advantageous as it allows for a detailed exploration of recurring frames within a data. This is especially crucial when studying resistance, as it enables the identification and understanding of the forms of resistance that emerge. The systematic inspection of texts and images, provides a deeper understanding on the significance of language, imagery and symbols that are used to construct, disseminate, and reinforce resistance narratives (Vaismoradi et al., 2013: p. 400). This method allows me to capture the complexities of online resistance, and highlight the functionality of hashtags beyond their symbolism, and as tool of civil disobedience and community organizing (Highfield, 2016).

The second thematic analysis is conducted on the platform Queering the map. The resistance of narratives found on platforms like Queering the Map are more complex due to the duality and intersectionality of the narratives present on the platform. A thematic analysis enables the exploration of this complexity by identifying, analysing, and interpreting interconnected themes. Furthermore, this approach moves beyond mere statistical representations, offering a rich, qualitative understanding of diverse, individual experiences. This is particularly important in contexts involving marginalized groups, such as Palestinians, whose experiences might otherwise be reduced to numerical data. By employing a thematic analysis, the research ensures that these voices are not only heard but also critically examined and understood within the broader context of resistance and identity formation. Amplifying marginalized voices is essential when examining how counter mapping frames resistance. This method provides a platform for these voices to be amplified, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

3.2. *Corpus*

The sampling methodology for this research is designed to capture a comprehensive collection of the data from three primary sources: 1) content posted on Instagram and X by the State of Israel, 2) hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid on Instagram and X, 3) entries from Queering the Map.

Each of these sources offers a unique insight into how queerness is both framed and contested online in times of conflict. The data collection process entailed gathering the relevant information that is conducive to answering the research question. The collected data is then imported into Atlas.ti for systematic organization and analysis. Atlas.ti is a qualitative data analysis software that scans through large volumes of data efficiently and generates comprehensive and nuanced interpretations, thus facilitating the coding process (Frieze, 2012). All of the data was collected through purposive sampling, which involves the careful selection of data in a way that is not random (Etikan et al., 2016).

The first sampling focused on the content published by the state of Israel on Twitter and Instagram. Israel's twitter account (@Israel) has existed since 2009 and has a total of 36,7k tweets. Their Instagram, (@stateofisrael), on the other hand, has existed since 2012. Both social media platforms have actively been used as a way to leverage their PR campaigns, engage in digital foreign policy, and ultimately shape international perceptions about them (Crilley et al., 2020). Posts from these platforms, but also from the social media account of Israel's ministry of foreign affairs (@israelmfa), were selected through purposive sampling, based on their relevance to pinkwashing (Schulman & Chávez, 2019). The data collection involves several steps to ensure comprehensive and systematic gathering of information. For Instagram, the data was collected by going through @stateofisrael's manually, and archiving the posts relevant to the research. As for X, the data was collected by using a mix of manual sampling and Atlas.ti. The tweets were then archived and categorized based on thematic relevance. For the purpose of this research, I examined posts from two distinct periods: before and after October 7th 2023, ranging from May 1st 2022 to May 1st 2024. Analysing the temporal division allows for a comparative analysis of the shifts in the framing of queerness in response to significant political events that occurred in the context of October 7th (Martin et al., 2023). Out of 3343 Instagram posts, only 44 samples were collected manually based on their relevance to the research question, and the time frame they were in. As for X, a total of 57 samples were collected. These involved tweets directly posted by Israel, but also replies and retweets. The final result led to a total of 101 posts containing

pinkwashing strategies, but also included less overt content such as the weaponization of women. This data is then transferred to Atlas.ti which facilitates the coding process by allowing me to apply codes to segments of text and images within the posts and create frames.

The second sampling involves the analysis of the specific hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid. Hashtags play a critical role in digital activism by facilitating the organization and dissemination of counter-narratives (Wang et al., 2016). These particular hashtags have been used to challenge Israel's pinkwashing tactics and to promote solidarity with Palestinian causes. Furthermore, the use of hashtags allows for the examination of user-generated content that reflects grassroots resistance and the collective sentiments of the queer community online. By analysing posts containing these hashtags, I aimed to explore how language and imagery are employed to counter the dominant narratives of Israel's pinkwashing, but also as a way to mobilize public opinion and create a digital space for resistance. The exploration of the associated sentiments shed a light on the dynamics of digital activism (Duarte & Virgil-Hayes, 2017). For this research, the data collected was only posts dating after October 7th 2023, until May 1st 2024. This led to a total of 51 posts under the #QueersForPalestine and 34 posts for the #NoPrideInApartheid through purposive sampling, which resulted in a total of 85 posts.

For Queering the Map, data collection involved a qualitative review of entries from the location of Israel/Palestine, focusing on personal narratives that highlight experiences of queerness. Since this digital mapping platforms allowed users to share their personal stories, these entries were extracted and downloaded and manually reviewed to verify the relevance to the research. The manual review provided contextual accuracy. I collected all of the samples in one day, to minimize overcrowding in my data collection.

3.3. Operationalization

Given that this study examines data through a theoretical lens, the operationalization process of this research involves defining the key concepts that are central to the study. The primary objective is to explore how queerness is framed in times of conflict, and how counternarratives emerge online as a form of resistance. As such, to answer the research question key concept will be guiding the operationalization. These concepts are adaptable and allow for the exploration of themes and patterns that emerge within the data. While the research will be guided through framing theory, the sensitizing concepts serve as the

interpretative frameworks that will provide direction for this study. (Silverman, 2020). These concepts are: framing, pinkwashing, and counternarratives.

Framing theory provides a lens for analyzing the construction and communication of social issues. Frames are the interpretive schemes that highlight certain aspects of reality while obscuring others, thereby shaping and influencing public perceptions and discourses (Shehata, 2021). This involves analyzing the language, images, and narratives presented in social media posts to understand how LGBTQ+ rights are defined to project a progressive image while distracting from controversial political and military actions (Schulman and Chávez, 2019). In the context of this research, framing theory is used to examine *how* the State of Israel uses homosexuality as a political tool through practices of pinkwashing.

Framing theory operates in four key functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions (Entman, 1993, as cited in Bastos et al., 2021). By applying these characteristics, the analysis aims to uncover how Israeli social media posts frame narratives about homosexuality and attribute them to a broader political context in the service of their interests. Key constructs include the representation of homosexuality, the use of imagery, and the linguistic strategies employed by the State of Israel on Instagram and X to frame narratives. Specifically, textual elements such as subtitles, captions, and any other accompanying narrative will be analyzed to uncover intentional framing strategies. Visual elements, including images and symbols, will be examined for their role in reinforcing homosexuality as a political tool within the framed discourse. This thesis will analyze cases of pinkwashing in which Israel positions itself as pro-LGBTQ+ or presents Palestinians as homophobic.

The second concept guiding the operationalization of this research is pinkwashing. This concept emphasizes Israel's strategic use of framing within the data. This involves examining the ways in which narratives of queerness are framed on Instagram and X, by the state of Israel, and identifying various elements such as language and rhetoric, symbolism, and selective imagery. Pinkwashing as a sensitizing concept offers a critical understanding of the framing strategies used by the state of Israel.

The last main concept will be that of counternarratives as informed by Stuart Hall (1997), in Hunter's article (2018). Indeed, Hall emphasizes that culture media and diaspora are all intertwined (p. 31). This paper's qualitative analysis contextualizes counternarratives within the broader socio-political and historical dynamics of the conflict. Counternarratives

provide an alternative perspective that serves to challenge dominant narrative, such as the one of pinkwashing. In the context of this research, these counternarratives are propagated in two main ways: through the use of hashtags on X and Instagram and through the act of countermapping in *Queering The Map*. As such, operationalizing the concept of counternarratives within this research, involves examining users generated content on these platforms.

3.4. Processing and analysis of data

This section details the data analysis and coding process. Utilizing a multi-method qualitative approach, the analysis employs a critical discourse analysis for posts from the State of Israel and thematic analysis for hashtags and entries from *Queering the Map*. The process involves data collection, preparation, coding, categorization, and interpretation, which were done both manually and with the use of Atlas.ti. The analysis and results of these data sets will provide an understanding of how queerness is strategically framed by Israel and how counternarratives and online spheres emerge as forms of resistance within the digital landscape of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.4.1. Analysis of Israel's official Instagram and X account

The analysis of X and Instagram focuses on identifying how queerness is framed by the State of Israel through its social media posts. This involves an inductive coding approach, starting with the development of a coding scheme informed by framing theory.

As previously mentioned, only content from May 1st 2022 to May 1st 2024 were used. All of the posts are analysed and scraped through to remove any unnecessary information. In turn, the selected samples are identified into initial coded. These codes are grouped into broader categories that reflect the framing strategies employed by the state of Israel. The research looked into specific patterns such as LGBTQ+ symbols, linguistic frames like structural opposition or overlexicalization – this includes progressive language or comparison – fearmongering tactics and feminist discourse. These frames help to understand how Israel constructs narratives around LGBTQ+ rights to project a progressive image and target homonationalist sentiments (Entman, 1993; Schulman & Chávez, 2019).

3.4.2. Thematic Analysis of Hashtags

The investigation of the hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid was done through an interpretative thematic analysis, to shed light on how counternarratives emerge as forms of resistance. This process involves several steps: First, all relevant posts

containing these hashtags are searched on Instagram and X after October 7. Due to the large quantity of data that existed, a purposive sampling is conducted for a total of 85 posts. Each post is carefully read, and initial codes are created based on recurring themes, sentiments, and rhetorical strategies. Common themes might include solidarity, calls to action, and critiques of pinkwashing. These initial codes are then reviewed and refined, with similar codes being merged and sub-themes identified. For transparency reasons, it should be mentioned that the initial goal of the research was to identify the frequency of the hashtags *under* the posts of the state of Israel's Instagram and X; however not enough data could be collected. Instead, the thematic analysis of these posts aims to uncover how language and imagery are used to mobilize public opinion and create digital spaces for resistance (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Highfield, 2016).

3.4.3. *Thematic Analysis of Queering the Map*

Queering the Map provides personal narratives that highlight experiences of queerness and resistance. To analyse the entries, I conducted an interpretative thematic analysis, focusing on how users articulate their experiences and resist dominant narratives. I first did an open coding of all of the entries to identify fragments which I then labelled into data driven codes (Boeije, 2012). These codes are in turn imported into Atlas.ti to perform the axial coding for the identification of the main themes – each one having 20 categories. Those included: symbolic acts of return, and reclaiming space, among many others. Finally, selective coding groups the axial coding into the final relevant frames for this research. I used the software's query tool to search for specific keywords and phrases, making it easier to identify relevant frames. By analysing the entries on *Queering the Map*, the analysis aims to amplify marginalized voices and understand the complexities of online resistance (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

3.5. *Reliability and ethical considerations*

To produce credible, trustworthy research, not only are ethical considerations paramount, but ensuring the reliability and validity of the study is also vital. Due to the research being qualitative and operating on an inductive approach, more biases may be attributed to the analysis of the data (Silverman, 2011).

Reliability of the study ensures the reproduction and replicability of the research in the future. This involves meticulously annotating the process, from the data collection to the analysis (p. 360) to ensure this reliability, several strategies were employed. First the research

design was meticulously documented, thereby providing transparency on account of the research process, and to ensure that this research can be reproduced (Fries, 2014). Second, the use of Atlas.ti guarantees that the coding process is as consistent as possible (Fries, 2014). Moreover, the software's capabilities of organizing relevant codes and schemes is crucial to maintain the reliability of the findings. The third strategy to ensure both reliability and credibility, is the constant comparison and cross checking. Silverman (2011), states that by doing those, the research reduces the risk of discrepancies and ensures consistencies in the coding.

To ensure its ethicality, this research will be guided through the lens of Harding's standpoint theory, which will not only ensure that my own positionality is considered, but will also prioritize marginalized perspectives and recognize the influence of social location in knowledge production (Vadasaria, 2014). This theory posits that knowledge is socially situated, and those who occupy marginalized positions can offer unique and critical insights that are often overlooked by dominant narratives. In the context of this research, standpoint theory informs the analysis of counternarratives by prioritizing the voices of queer Palestinians and other marginalized groups who seek to challenge Israel's pinkwashing tactics. This framework will guide the examination of Queering the Map and the use of hashtags like #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid. By bringing these perspectives to the forefront, the research aims to uncover the complexities and intersections of identity, resistance and digital activism. Vadasaria (2014), highlights the importance of recognizing the influence of social location on knowledge production, which will be crucial for interpreting data from a perspective that challenges dominant narratives and power structures.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results and findings of the research. The purpose of this research was to identify how queerness is framed in times of conflict. In doing so, it aimed to answer the following research questions: 1) *How is queerness framed by Israel as a political tool on Instagram and X, and 2) how are online movements emerging as a form of resistance?* The chapter is divided into the two main sections with corresponding subsections.

The first section presents the results of the analysis of tweets and Instagram posts from the state of Israel's official accounts. During the analysis, three main themes emerged from Israel's framing of pinkwashing. The second section presents the results of the thematic analysis of #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid and the thematic analysis from Queering the Map. Three main themes emerged in the analysis of the hashtags, leading to the framing of resistance. The analysis of Queering the Map shed light on counter mapping as a form of resistance. The findings are illustrated in this chapter through both text and illustrations.

4.1. Framing of pinkwashing

With social media being widely used for receiving information, it has become easier to frame a desired image and influence opinions, hence Israel's active use of Twitter and Instagram. The result of the analysis show that Israel's use of language, semiotics and imagery strategically frame a certain narrative about themselves through both explicit and implicit pinkwashing strategies. However, there is a clear shift in the language of these frames which coincides with the time frame from before and after October 7 2023.

Prior to that date, Instagram and Twitter were primarily used as a means of digital diplomacy and online foreign affairs. While Israel itself has its own Instagram and Twitter account, they also have official accounts for each and every consulate and embassy, ranging from @israelinusa to @israelinnigeria and @israelinuzbekistan. In addition, the ministry of foreign affairs also has an official Instagram and X account as well and official account for the city of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Preceding October 7, the framing of queer narratives on social media was intended as a means for Israel to portray themselves as progressive and a way to embellish their image. However, those frames drastically change after October 7.

4.1.1. Nation branding and the homofication of Israel

On both Instagram and Twitter, the tone and imagery before October 7 predominantly centres around the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, and the positioning of Israel as part of the global LGBTQ+ movement. Indeed, the first main theme that emerged from the data was the theme of nation branding. Here, narratives of queerness are framed with the objective of informing foreigners about Israel's commitments to sexual inclusion and diversity. These images are conducive to pinkwashing propaganda as they paint an overly exaggerated positive image of the Israel's attitudes towards queer movements. Images like the one present on Figure 1 and Figure 2 are a perfect example of the portrait that Israel is trying to paint: in other words, a beacon of sexual liberation. The discourse Israel uses in their captions, such as their participation in "international day against homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia" indicates strategic self-promotion and devotion to gay activism. By highlighting their advocacy efforts, Israel exploits queer liberation movement and embeds them in Zionist discourse. Moreover, by parading the involvement of the state and government officials, post like this serve to endorse their support in allegiance with homonormative institutional structures (Hartal & Sasson-Levy, 2022).



Figure 1 Screenshot from the official Instagram of Israel's ministry of foreign affairs (May 17th 2023)



Figure 2 Screenshot from the official Instagram of Israel's ministry of foreign affairs (June 8th 2022).

One of the recurring patterns that was observed in the data set was the pinkwashing of official governmental bodies. By enhancing the visibility of high-ranking deputies or reposting tweets from official politicians, Israel brands a virtuous image of their government. In doing so, they legitimize their initiatives for inclusion and target – mainly neoliberal western – “sociotropic beliefs” (Shehata, 2021, p.3). Sociotropic belief is the idea that societal issues are pressing. These beliefs often dictate how individuals navigate political decisions and perceptions towards a government. The data showed several labels associated with the fostering of positive governmental perceptions by displaying symbols of pinkwashing alongside governmental endorsement. For example, in the post shown in Figure 2 the ministry of foreign affairs is seen raising the LGBTQ+ flag, thereby merging the national identity with identity of progressiveness. The framing of governmental officials adds another layer of legitimacy since the juxtaposition of the formal setting of diplomacy signals official recognition and support for gay rights. Similarly, the act of reposting tweets from other official governmental bodies or politicians also serves as a strategy of pinkwashing. For example, Figure 3 represent tweets that have been reposted by the state of Israel. By featuring the direct engagement of deputies in events such as “the inaugural of LGBTQ+ Diplomacy Network”, Israel displays sociotropism, which can be leveraged to shape public opinion and government approval.

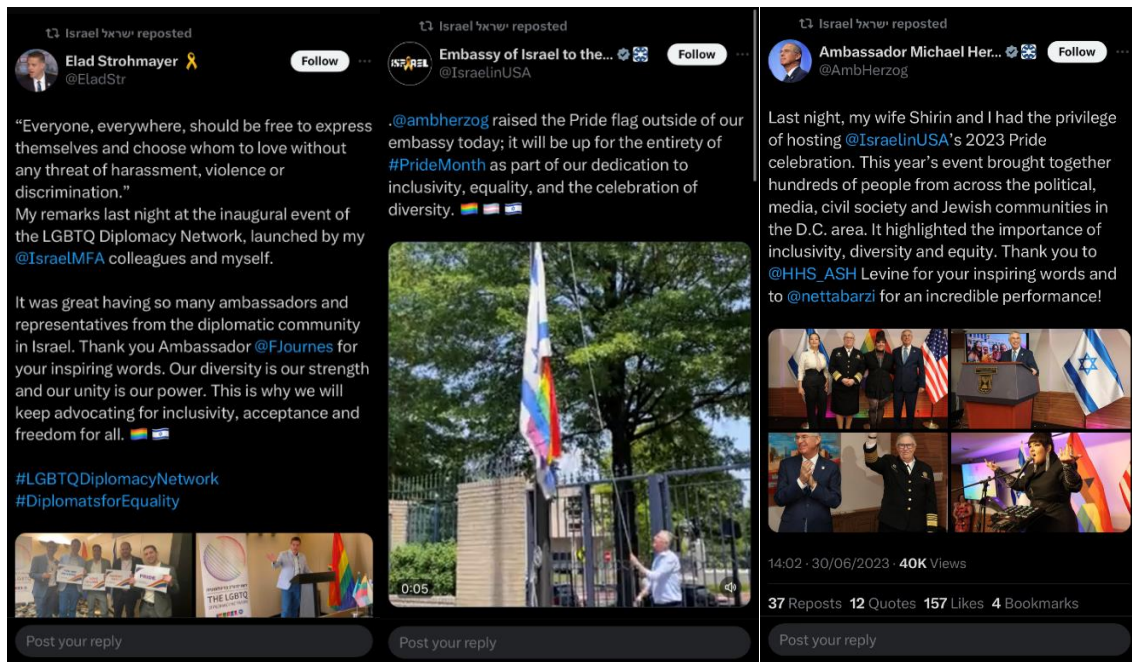


Figure 3 Screenshots of three different reposts taken from the Israel's official X account (June 2023).

Simultaneously, this type of social media content activates and reinforces positive mental associations to Israel, which serve to influence individuals to accept and internalize the narrative that Israel is progressive. This approach can be traced back to Shehata's (2021) schema theory, which maintains Israel's positive publicity, by reorienting public focus and reducing cognitive dissonance. Figure 4 shows how this approach functions through an illustration. The image was taken directly from Shehata (2021). The diagram illustrates the relationship between level of abstraction, level of schema development and media effects. This diagram can be applied to the data set by elucidating the effectiveness of pinkwashing strategies.

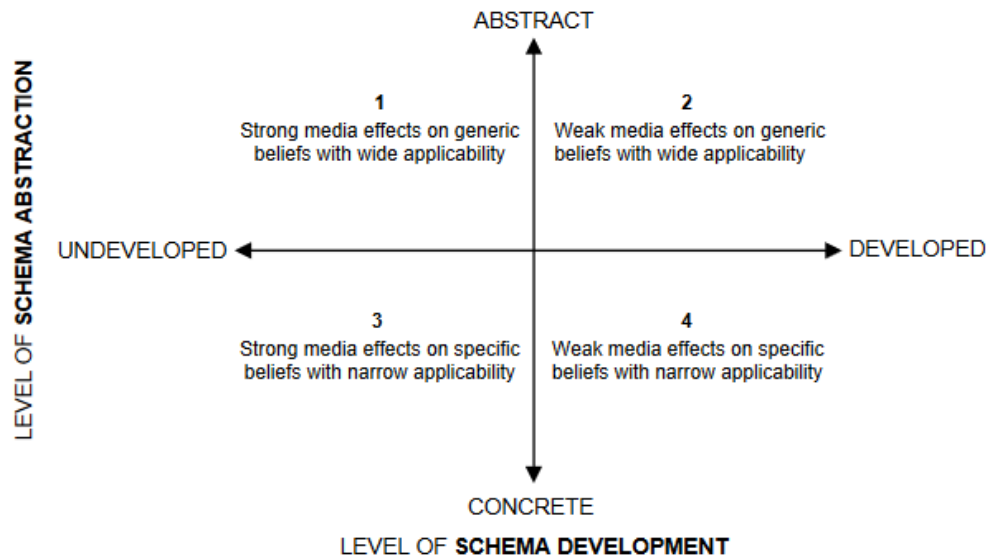


Figure 4 The relationship between schema characteristics and media effect (Shehata, 2021)

Strong Media Effects on Generic Beliefs with Wide Applicability (Quadrant 1): Israel's strategic promotion of LGBTQ+ rights through, high-visibility actions and symbols such as the inaugural of LGBTQ+ Diplomacy Network, aims to create a significant media effects on generic beliefs about inclusivity and human rights. The goal of such efforts , is designed to influence the broad range of attitudes and judgments about Israel as a nation, in hopes to create a positive image of Israel. Indeed, the aim is to leverage Israel's social media's capacity to create dominant narratives and influence opinions (Entman, 1993).

Weak Media Effects on Generic Beliefs with Wide Applicability (Quadrant 2): In cases where the viewers may already have well-developed and abstract schemas about LGBTQ+ rights, the media effects may be weaker. However, by consistently aligning themselves with the image of progressiveness, and safety, these tactics may reinforce these generic beliefs, in order to maintain their wide applicability. This would ensure Israel's perception as a beacon of democracy, and the only progressive country in the Middle East remains untainted, especially is for those who already had this positive preconception.

Strong Media Effects on Specific Beliefs with Narrow Applicability (Quadrant 3): For audiences with less developed schemas or specific beliefs about Israel's policies, the strategic use of symbols and endorsements would have a greater impact. The targeted messaging in images, such as the raising of the Pride flag by the Israeli Ambassador, can influence specific beliefs about Israel's internal politics. Such images serve to cultivate a positive emotional responses, thereby creating a strong media effect on narrowly applicable beliefs.

Weak Media Effects on Specific Beliefs with Narrow Applicability (Quadrant 4): In the scenario where the viewer may already have well- developed schemas, the media effects might be weaker. However, by integrating these specific beliefs into broader narratives of national identity and progressivism, Israel aims to enhance their relevance and impact on the international podium. This is achieved through their overly exaggerated semiotics, and emphasis on tourist attraction. By repetitively presenting images and narratives that emphasize LGBTQ+ inclusivity, Israel seeks to activate – in more subliminal ways – existing positive schemas associated with these values. For instance, the repeated use of the Pride flag and progressive language in official contexts reinforces the association between Israel and sexual liberation. This activation of positive schemas makes it easier for individuals to process and accept the narrative being presented, reducing cognitive dissonance and reinforcing the desired perceptions (Matthes, 2008).

The strategic use of symbols and language in these images also helps to create and reinforce new schemas that associate Israel with progressive values. Over time, these schemas become stable mental models that influence how individuals perceive and interpret subsequent information about Israel. This process is crucial for nation branding, as it helps to establish a consistent and favourable image of the country in the minds of international audiences (Hirschberger, 2021).

The second recurring pattern that was observed in the dataset, was the theme of *homofication*. Prior to October 7th 2023, strategies of pinkwashing primarily showed images of celebration. Visual tropes displaying the rainbow flag juxtaposed with the star of David and other Jewish symbolism aim to frame Israel as a progressive society celebrating “love, tolerance and diversity” (Figure 5). Likewise, saturating symbols of queer and Israeli pride over dull imagery acts to reinforce belief systems about Israel. This suggests that Israeli national identity and LGBTQ rights are not only compatible, but that the latter is in fact central to the former (Fiske & Taylor, 2017; Ritchie, 2014). By contrasting symbols of nationalism and queerness, the state of Israel is tapping into sentiments of homonationalism, which are inherently linked to pinkwashing (Puar, 2007, as cited in Schotten, 2016). These findings also suggest that visual semiotics play an important role in influencing perceptions about certain discourses in more insidious and covert ways, by positioning themselves as a safety haven for people of the LGBTQ community (Schulman & Chávez, 2019)



Figure 5 Screenshot from the official Instagram of Israel showing images of pride, (June 8th 2023)

Moreover, the analysis of the data suggested that the lexical choices in the captions are carefully crafted to reinforce their narrative. By emphasizing that “*thousands of Israelis and visitors from around the world will be gathering in Tel Aviv for pride*” (Figure 5), the @stateofisrael purposefully targets Western liberal audiences and promote “gay tourist initiatives” (Kelly, 2020). Such linguistic helps create a positive image of the state within the international community, and enhance the attractiveness of its city. This is also exemplified by Israel’s strong partnerships with America. Indeed, Figure 6 shows retweets from the state of Israel’s pride celebrations in New York and West Hollywood. Organizing and participating in LGBTQ+ events in international cities also serves to make Israel a marketable destination and attract LGBTQ+ tourism. With these images that show the deliberate and direct involvement in prominent Pride marches abroad, viewers of this retweet are led to believe that Israel is as an appealing destination for LGBTQ+ travellers. The emphasis on inclusivity and diversity in the captions and visuals suggests that Israel is a welcoming and safe place for LGBTQ+ individuals, which is a significant factor in tourism decisions (Hughes, 2006). In addition, language such as the caption “*Celebrating 75 years of Israeli diversity*” accentuates the false narrative that Israelis and Palestinians coexist harmoniously (Pappé, 2016).

Before October 7, strategies of pinkwashing were used to frame Israel as an inclusive and attractive destination, thereby branding their image positively, and shifting the focus away from negative schemas. The tactical use of queer narratives for PR campaigns, foreign alliances and visual tropes constructs a queer friendly brand of Israel, one where the potential

gay tourist can “hold hands with his partner in public [in] a walled-in nation without the threat of either homophobic violence or terrorism” (Kelly, 2020, p. 164).

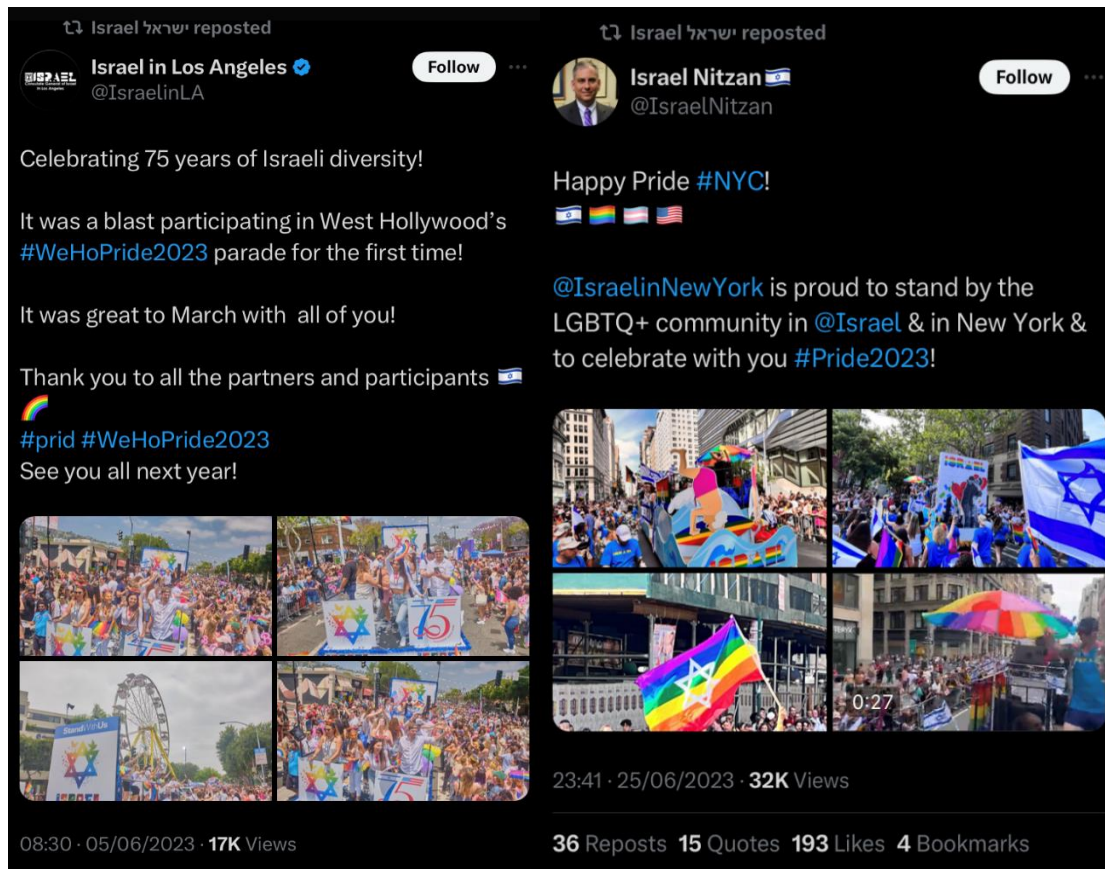


Figure 6 Screenshot of two retweets from Israel's official X showing their involvement in West Hollywood pride and New York pride (June 2023).

4.1.2. Saving the gays

After October 7, the framing of queer narratives revealed a noticeable shift in discourse. Unlike the strategies used before the Hamas attacks – where pinkwashing aimed to display Israel's progressive policies on sexual liberation – queerness is now used as a way to outline the paradigm of good versus evil (Schotten, 2016, p. 364). This binary framework acts as a powerful rhetorical tool that justifies “self-defence” and genocide, by using gay rights as the apotheosis of morality. By framing itself as the ‘good’ and the ‘saviour’, Israel acts as the defender of LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights and other minority rights. This focus creates a narrative that Gaza's occupation is a prerequisite for gay liberties (Kelly, 2020).

The data revealed that after October 7, pinkwashing centralizes Hamas, framing their brutality against gay Palestinians. The use of emotive lexical such as “terrorist organization”, “murder” and “torture”, serve to portray Hamas as the embodiment of evil. Furthermore, the data revealed that Arab men are also framed in a way that reinforces

stereotypes, portraying them as homophobic and having “two wives”. These stereotypes tap into the common Western prejudices about the Orient, portraying it as both “exotic” and “barbaric” – in other words an uncivilized place, unlike the West (Said, 1978). This framing aligns with the arguments that orientalist and patriarchal tropes are leveraged to rationalize political and military actions, under the guise of protecting human rights (Butler, 2009; Said, 1978). Thus, the occupation is not merely presented as a territorial conflict but as a moral and cultural imperative to save Palestinians from their own leaders. Furthermore, a recurring pattern that was observed in Israel’s official social media accounts, was the display of gay IDF soldiers. Proving to the world that the Israeli military is proud of its LGBTQ+ soldiers maintains the idea that nationalism and serving the country transcend gender and sexual orientation. This also suggests the idea that queer Israeli soldiers are prepared to sacrifice themselves to save their country and all victims of Hamas, and save liberal democracy.

The image in Figure 7 shows a screenshot from one of the posts in the data. The lexical in the tweet intentionally employs an orientalist lens to frame Hamas, and by extension Arab men, within a broader narrative of justified Israeli occupation. This type of post reinforces the idea of cultural and moral split between the West, that is Israel, and the Arab world. Elusions to misogyny, polygamy, and homophobia are used to leverage Western fears of Islamic extremism. Furthermore, detailing the torture of Ishtiwī's, and writing about Hamas’ efforts to hush such actions serve to amplify the perceived threat and moral depravity associated with Hamas. By extension, this narrative casts a shadow over Palestinian society, suggesting that such brutality is endemic and culturally ingrained.

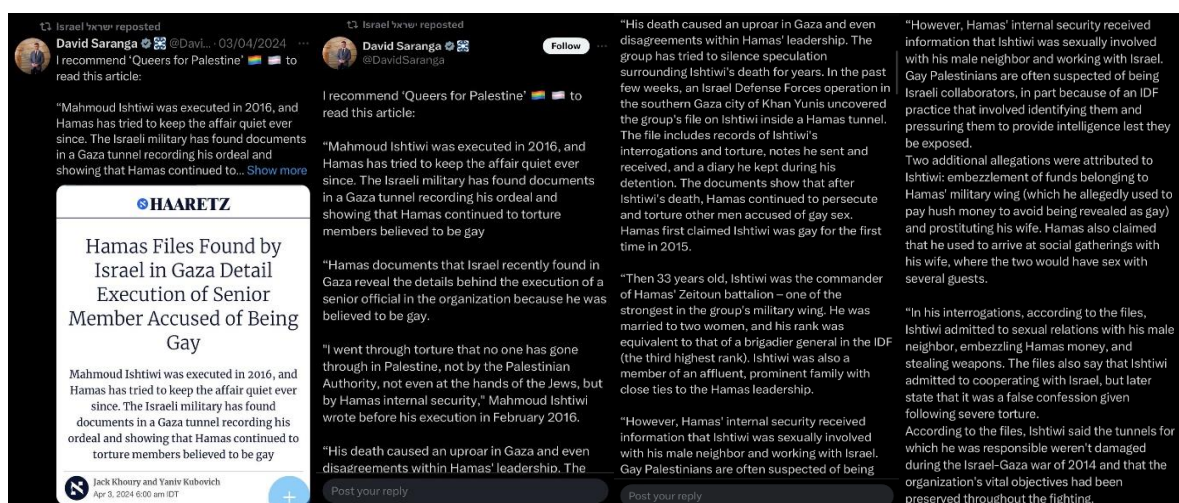


Figure 7 Screenshot from a tweet reposted by @Israel, directly addressing the movement ‘Queers For Palestine’ (April 3rd 2024)

This type of reductionist stereotype serves as a mechanism to justify Israel’s military dominance and alleged protection of innocent Palestinian civilians against the tyranny of governmental body. Furthermore, this exemplifies a discourse of white saviourism, woven into the Israeli narrative of defenders of human rights and bastion of progressiveness (Cole, 2012). This discourse supposes that the progressive Western man is the altruistic saviour of all oppressed brown people – a narrative that stems from colonial practices. It suggests a sense of moral Western superiority and duty to save non-Western societies. Schotten (2020), explains that in the colonial period, the criteria for a nation’s sovereignty were based on how a society treated their women; today they are based on “how well [they] treat [their] homosexuals” (p. 360). The pinkwashing of hegemony shifted the discourse from “white men saving brown women from brown men”, to “white homosexuals saving brown homosexuals from brown homophobes” (Spivak, 1988, as cited in Schotten, 2020). Posts like these illustrated in Figure 8 and Figure 9 claim that without Israeli intervention, Palestinian minorities such as women and queer people would remain oppressed by Hamas.

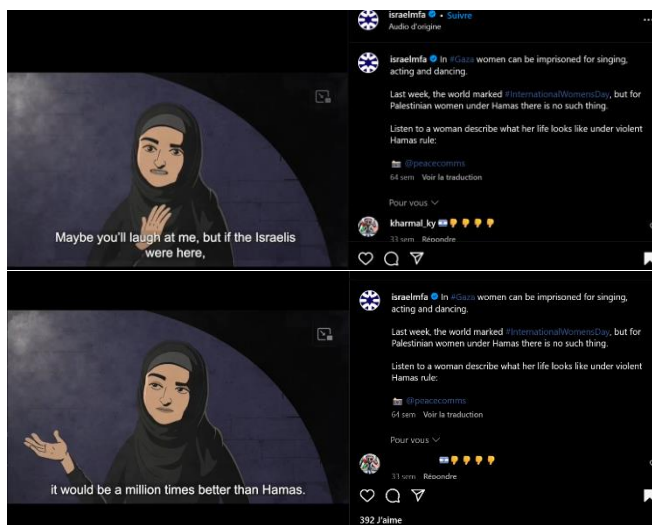


Figure 8 Screenshot from animation video posted on Israel’s ministry of foreign affairs official Instagram. (Oct 30th 2023)



Figure 9 Screenshot from Israel’s x (November 19th 2023)

4.1.3. *If you are a feminist, then you should stand with Israel...*

One of the main frames observed from this theme was the use of gendered discourse. Within the data collected, pinkwashing narratives extend beyond the semiotics of queerness toward narratives around feminism. Discourse around feminism intersects with queer liberation since the latter is a by-product of the former (Atshan, 2020).

The analysis of the posts from after October 7th 2023 reveals strategic fearmongering surrounding gendered violence. Intentional fear-based language such as “*horrifically butchered*” and “*raped*” are used to elicit strong emotions and horrify the viewers of these posts and garner sympathy. Strong emotional stimuli have proven to reduce individual capacity for critical thinking, thereby making them more receptive to the intended message (Witte & Allen, 2000). The depiction of extreme violence against women serves to highlight the tyranny of Hamas, versus the innocence of Israeli women, once again reaffirming Israel’s role as a defender of human rights. By framing Israel as the protector of women, these posts seek to create long-term justification for Israel’s actions, including the occupation of Palestinian territories.

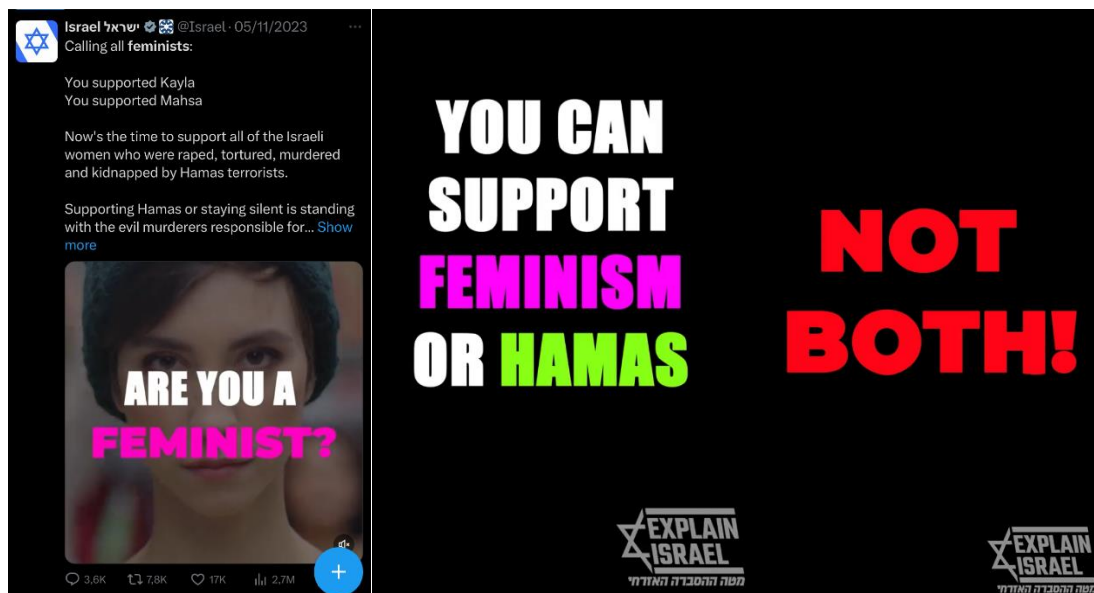


Figure 10 Screenshot of a tweet from @israel’s official X account, calling out all feminists, and denouncing their complicity (November 5th 2023)

The images in Figure 10 represent an example of the data that was analysed. In this tweet, the state of Israel posted a video on their official X account, which instantly captures the attention of viewers, by directly addressing them with the bold lexical text “*ARE YOU A FEMINIST?*”. The bold colours also serve to create an urgency in the emotional response of viewers, as seen in the ending of the video: “*YOU CAN SUPPORT FEMINSIM OR HAMAS, NOT BOTH*”. This post creates a false dichotomy in that it erases decades of occupation from the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict and frames respective sides as solely “good” and “bad”. Moreover, this rhetorical strategy undermines the fundamental principles of feminist theory, which dictate that feminism is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989). Instead, it depicts a selective version of feminism, one that excludes Palestinian liberation, in favour of Zionism.

These posts reveal a selective appropriation of feminist rhetoric that ignores the intersectionality that is inherent to contemporary feminism. Intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1989), emphasizes the interconnected nature of social issues such as race, class, and gender, which often overlap. By focusing solely on the gendered violence against Israeli women and ignoring the broader context of occupation and systemic violence against Palestinians, these posts fail to engage with the full spectrum of feminism, which advocates for the liberation of all oppressed groups (Crenshaw, 1989, p.166).

This pattern was commonly observed in the data. Indeed, the state of Israel directly addressed users, calling out the supposed silence of “*Western feminists*” or their support towards the Palestinian cause, as support towards terrorism. By using terms such as “hypocritical feminists”, Israel manipulates viewers into supporting only Israeli women – and by extension pro-Israeli narratives – and therefore recentres gendered violence as a singular issue only applicable to Israel. Furthermore, the deliberate approach of directly addressing viewers aims to elicit a sense of guilt for not condemning and addressing the suffering of Israeli women (Pere et al., 2022).

A commonly identified frame was the over-victimization of Israeli women. By exaggerating their victimhood, Israel aimed to target the concerns of feminist, and galvanize the support of the international community. Throughout the data, an overwhelming use of the hashtag #BelieveIsraeliWomen was observed, as well as other emotive language such as “justice” next to the words “pain”, “suffering” and “Hamas”. Figure 4.11 illustrates this; the phrase “*Israeli women deserve to be believed*” functions to create a collective image of helpless victims in need of protection and justice. This tweet attempts to co-opt feminist solidarity for Israel’s own geopolitical agenda and nationalist goals.

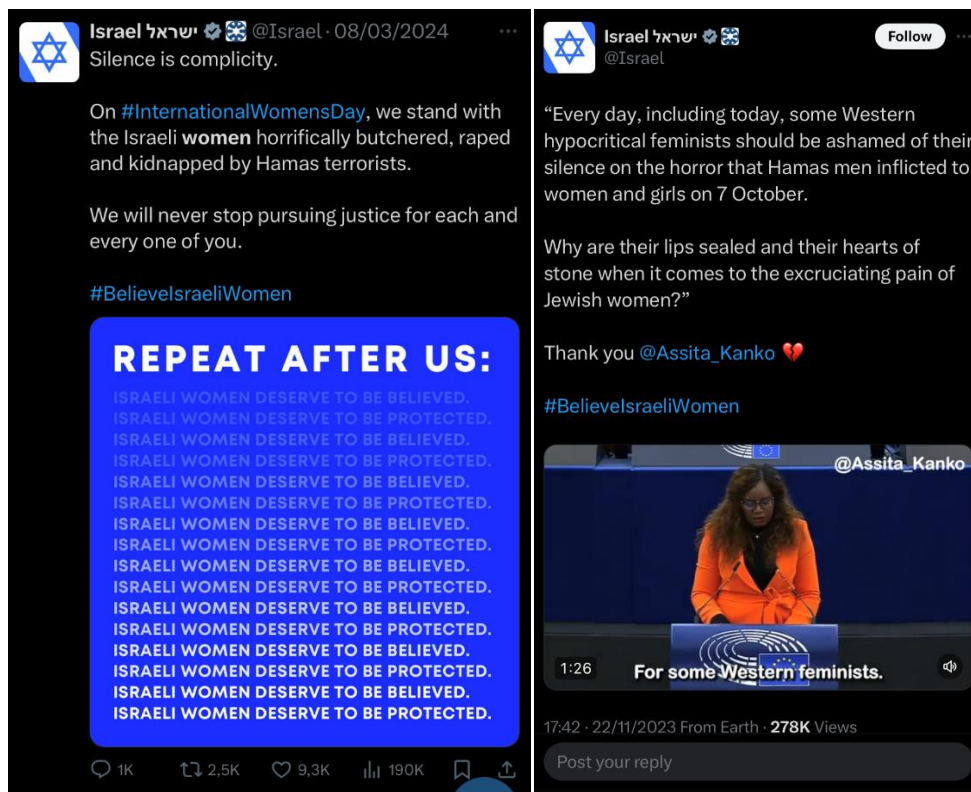


Figure 4.11 Screenshots from the official x of Israel: Image 1 frames the (over)victimization of Israeli women; image 2 frames the hypocrisy of Western feminism that Israel is addressing (March 8th 2024).

The findings of this first analysis underscored the multiple strategies used by Israel when framing pinkwashing on social media. The employment and the purpose of queer narratives shift drastically after October 7th 2023. Prior to that date, their efforts of pinkwashing cantered mainly around the nation branding of the state. Instagram and X were used as platforms which aimed to position Israel as a beacon of democracy, using inclusive language and a plethora of queer imagery juxtaposed with Jewish symbolism. Leveraging these narratives aimed to foster positive perceptions and sociotropic beliefs among user of the platforms.

Following October 7th, the analysis of the data demonstrates a discernible shift in Israel's social media narrative – where the pinkwashing was recalibrated to emphasize the trope of 'good' vs 'evil'. The state of Israel increased their fearmongering language, emphasizing the tyranny of Hamas and their threat towards queer rights, and tapping into the Western fears of terrorism to justify their military actions. Moreover, the frequency of feminist discourse – albeit selective feminism – and the over victimization of women, can be seen as an attempt to paint themselves as the sole victims.

4.2. Framing of resistance

With digital platforms becoming engines for shaping public perceptions, one can only wonder how they are being leveraged as a way to resist. Protests in the name of queer liberation and Palestinian liberation are not new, but digitalization has allowed for these protests to also establish themselves online (Wang et al., 2016). This section explores the multifaceted nature of digital resistance against pinkwashing. It reveals how language and imagery are used in virtual spaces and online platforms to challenge pinkwashing narratives. The thematic analysis of the data aims to answer the question of *how online counter narrative movements emerge as a form of resistance*.

4.2.1. Hashtags and the framing of resistance

The first set of data that was analysed contained Instagram and Twitter posts which used the hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid. From this analysis, three primary themes appeared leading to the framing of resistance. These themes were: global solidarity with Palestine; the rejection and exposure of pinkwashing; mobilization and community organizing. Figure 12 represents a visualization of the distribution of themes in the format of a pie chart. Each fraction represents one of the themes, with the size of each segment proportional to its frequency. Out of the 85 posts that were collected as data, 18 posts accounted for the theme of global solidarity, 29 posts accounted for the rejection of pinkwashing, and 38 posts represented mobilization and community organizing. Each theme encapsulates different aspects of online resistance through the use of hashtags, as derived from the data.

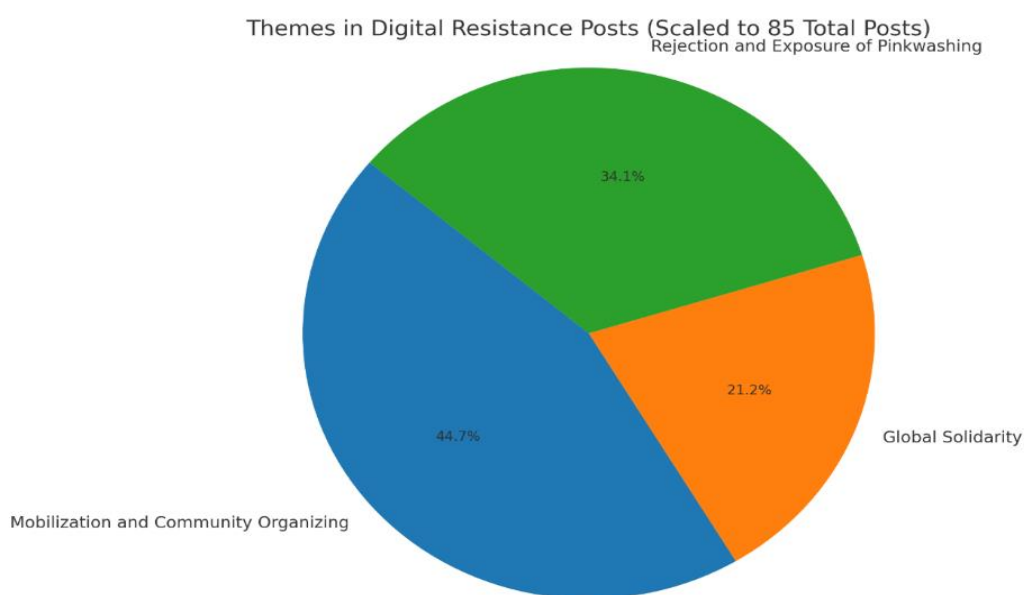


Figure 12 Pie chart illustrating the distribution of themes based on frequency (made with Matplotlib)

4.2.1.1. Global solidarity

The results showed that global solidarity was a significant theme, representing 21.2% of the data. Albeit #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid were written in English, the findings revealed these hashtags acted as a channel for transnational communication and global solidarity (Emma, 2015). This theme underscored a significant insight into the universal power of hashtags in digital activism, and how their influence transcends geographical borders and language barriers.

The findings were illustrated in the way that the hashtags were used by non-English speaking activists, thereby embedding them in a multilingual context, and fostering international dialogue. This can be linked back to Abbas et al. (2022) who posit that hashtags serve as digital markers which guide users to related content and facilitate exchange in discourses, regardless of native language. Moreover, the consistent use of these hashtags across posts from different countries highlights their role in creating a unified global movement and also highlights their ability to unify diverse groups around a common purpose (Gerbaudo, 2012). Gerbaudo (2012) stated that the use of hashtags creates “the momentum required for a popular movement to materialise”, due to the high level of interactivity on social media (p. 110). Moreover, platforms like Instagram and X amplify the nature of participatory culture by “increasing [the] scope for political and social engagement” from the bottom up, and carrying the promise of autonomy from bureaucratic – and often authoritarian – structures (p. 22). For example, the employment of #NoPrideInApartheid was often seen under Chinese posts, such as the one showed in Figure 13, suggesting that the discourse around pinkwashing resonates with disparate local struggles, and connects them under a sense of global kinship. This solidarity was not limited to China, as the hashtags #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid were also identified in Finnish, Japanese, and Portuguese posts.

The strategic use of the hashtags also enables activists to tap into broader networks and reach individuals who may not be directly informed about the movement, but still share similar values or concerns. Moreover, creating a sense of belonging and shared purpose, helps to foster a collective identity that is essential for sustaining long-term engagement and commitment to the cause. The data revealed that the international use of hashtags highlighted the presence of diverse voices online, many of whom were advocating for resistance and liberation under a feminist lens. For instance, one Instagram caption from Chinese activists started with “As Chinese Queers/feminists we stand in solidarity with the global movement

#StopPinkwashing and stop Israel's occupation and genocide.” The feminist angle in queer counter-narratives is rooted in the principle of intersectionality and global solidarity which are key aspect of the feminism. Banerjee & Kankaria (2022) exemplify this further by exploring how hashtags have been used by social media users globally to denounce a specific incident of gang rape which happened in 2012 in Delhi, leading to the government introducing new laws and “stringent punishments” (p. 3). This stresses how hashtags can create an international feeling of comradeship, thereby generating a unified movement of resistance against pinkwashing, and leading to impactful changes within institutional structures.

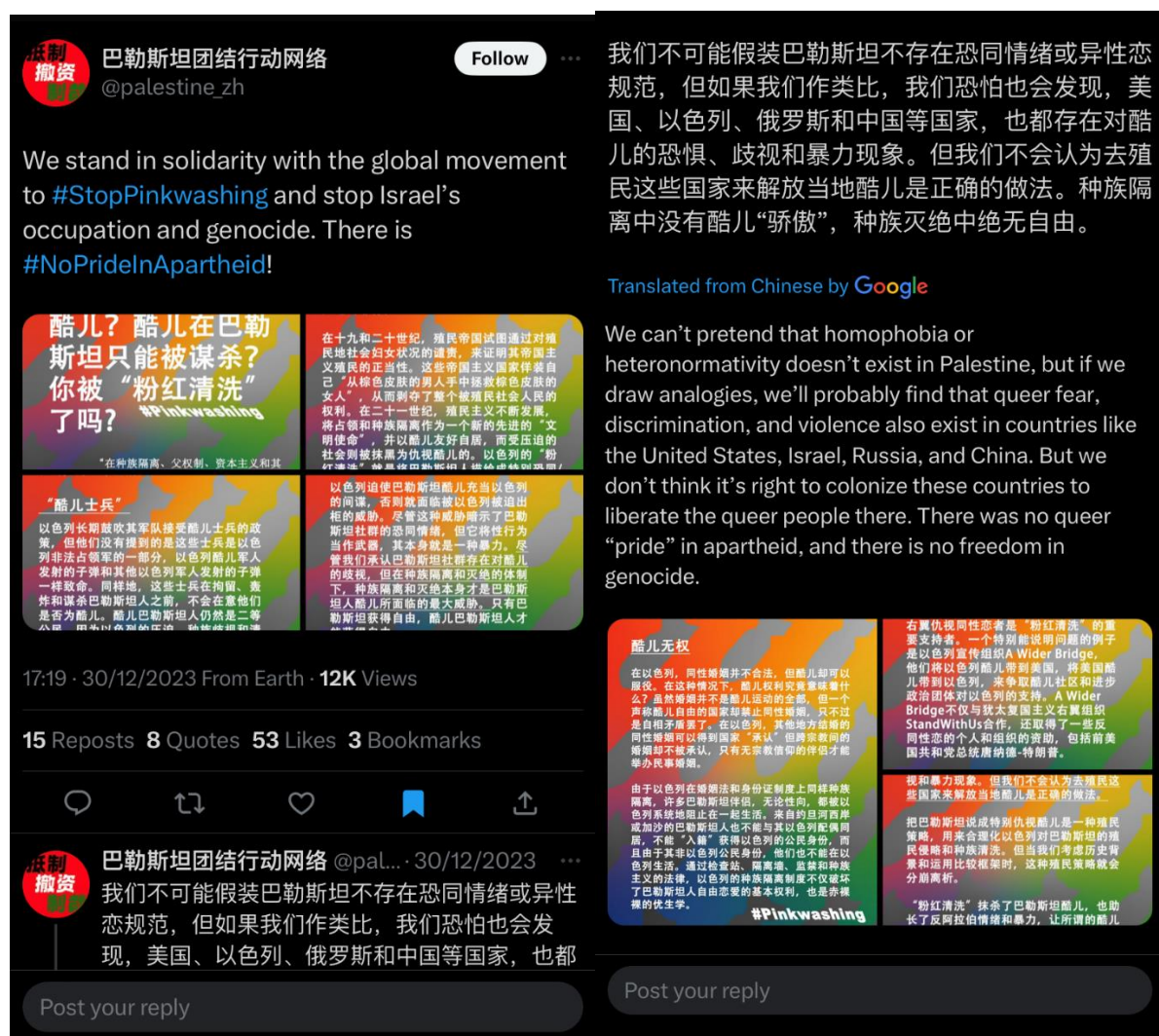


Figure 13 Screenshot of tweet posted by Chinese activists in support for Palestine; the tweet explains what pinkwashing. The last sentence ends of the tweet ends with “Only when Palestine is free, can queer Palestinians be free.” (December 2023)

4.2.1.2. Rejection and exposure to pinkwashing

The second theme was the rejection to pinkwashing. This theme stresses the refusal to identify with pinkwashing ideologies and homonationalist discourses. It is emphasized by posts exposing the truth about pinkwashing and informing viewers about the dangers of such narratives, which can be linked back to Abbas et al., (2022) and solidifies what Anisa et al. (2023) said about hashtags influencing public opinion. This theme is critical in understanding how hashtags help dismantle narratives, by acting as vectors of information dissemination. They categorize content, facilitate the search for related post, and contribute to movements that seeks to counter dominant narratives from an educational angle as seen in Figure 14. The language in these posts is usually educational and confrontational as it aims to inform followers of the dangers and deceptive practices of pinkwashing.



Figure 14 Screenshot of an Instagram thread which seeks to inform about pinkwashing (June 26th 2021)

Figure 14 depicts a screenshot from a thread posted on Instagram which is intended to educate followers about pinkwashing. The language in this post, like many others from the dataset, utilizes emotive language that was often seen as typographically emphasized in bold fonts to create a more impactful delivery and highlight the severity of the issue at hand. Educational semantics are effective in mobilizing resistance, as they raise awareness, demystify certain issues, and empower individuals through knowledge (Anisa et al. 2023). Likewise, the educational framing of the data lends credibility to movements of resistance by anchoring them in reliable information and academically supported sources. According to Tufekci, cited in Waisbord (2018), individuals who are well-informed are increasingly likely

to engage in sustained activism. Language plays a pivotal role in influencing critical thinking, therefore analysing the tone and type of language helped to decipher the effectiveness of digital activism. Additionally, posts like the one illustrated in Figure 14 often maintained that queer and Palestinian liberation are intersectional and historical in their fight against oppression, which serves to broaden the movement of social justice.

Indeed, multiple historical references were made to explain that queer and Palestinian solidarity is not just a modern phenomenon or a trend, as shown in Figure 15. Rather, they are profoundly embedded in historical contexts. These posts often made references to past activism and notable figures who have championed both LGBTQ+ rights and Palestinian freedom. The junction of these struggles underscores how intersectionality is fundamental in the quest for justice, as both movements navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and solidarity.

Figure 15 illustrates a post from the data that directly quotes activists like Sarah Schulman, and invokes the legacy of figures such as Audre Lorde and James Baldwin. Audre Lorde's work for instance, bridges the gap between feminism and Palestinian liberation, and puts emphasis on recognizing that multiple oppressions must be fought simultaneously (Lorde, 1984, as cited in Sajed & Salem, 2023). Her stance resonates deeply with today's activists who recognize that the fight for Palestinian liberation as inherently linked to the broader fight for LGBTQ+ rights. This perspective can be traced back to Crenshaw's (1989) approach on intersectionality which emphasizes the interconnectedness of various systems of oppression. These historical references are not mere rhetorical devices; they serve to create a continuum that connects past and present struggles, providing a sense of legitimacy to contemporary activism. By situating current efforts within a broader historical framework, activists highlight the long-standing intersectional nature of queer solidarity with Palestine and underscore the ongoing relevance of this alliance.

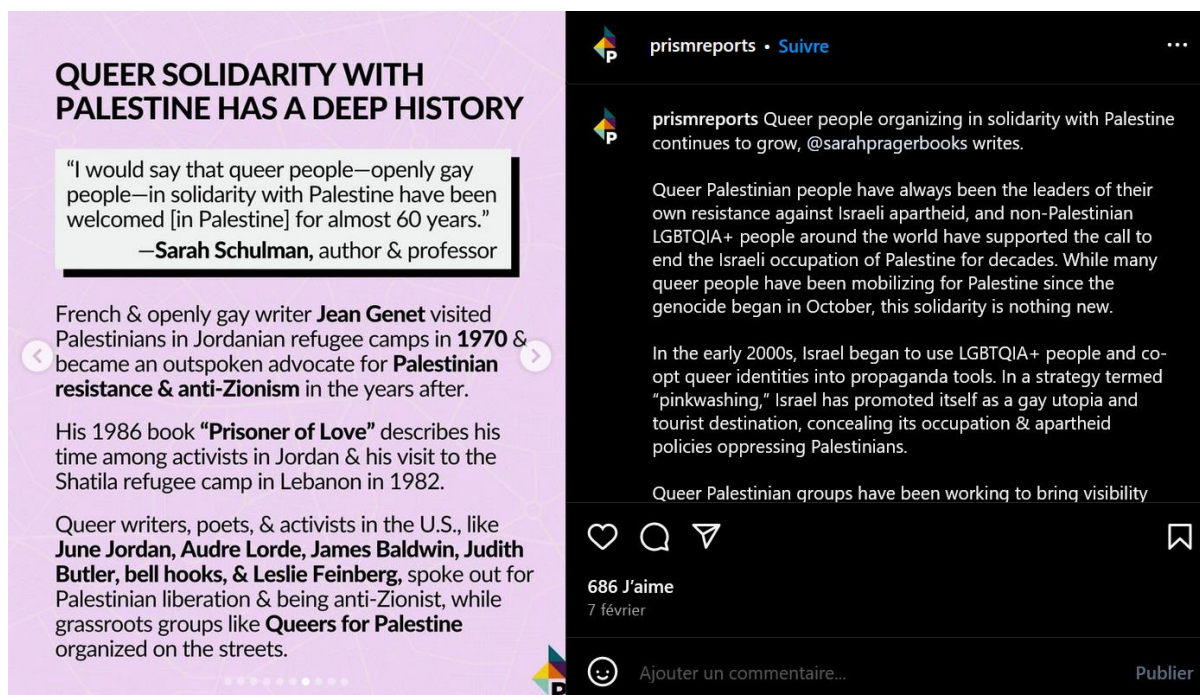


Figure 15 Screenshot of a post from Instagram referencing historical figures, as a way to expose pinkwashing practices and educate viewers on the ongoing solidarity between queer activists and Palestinian freedom (February 2024)

Other posts from the dataset exemplified the theme of ‘rejection and exposure to pinkwashing’ by putting emphasis on the aspect of rejection. This was illustrated by more direct and explicit condemnation of pinkwashing, which could be seen by the language employed in these posts. The analysis found that posts that used hashtags to reject the pinkwashing rhetoric displayed a sharp emotional tone and moral appeal, and a strong stance of active opposition (Figure 16). Similarly, other posts from the data revealed that the rejection of pinkwashing was often articulated through direct testimonies of queer Palestinian or Jewish individuals. The integration of personal stories and testimonial evidence helps to humanise an issue and create an understanding that moves beyond abstract concepts, grounded in real, lived experiences (Figure 17). This form of counter-narrative encourages followers or viewers to question manipulative tactics and resist against them. Moreover, the use of hashtags here helps to translate the sentiment of rejection into a sense of urgency, thereby effectively framing resistance and mobilizing online communities.

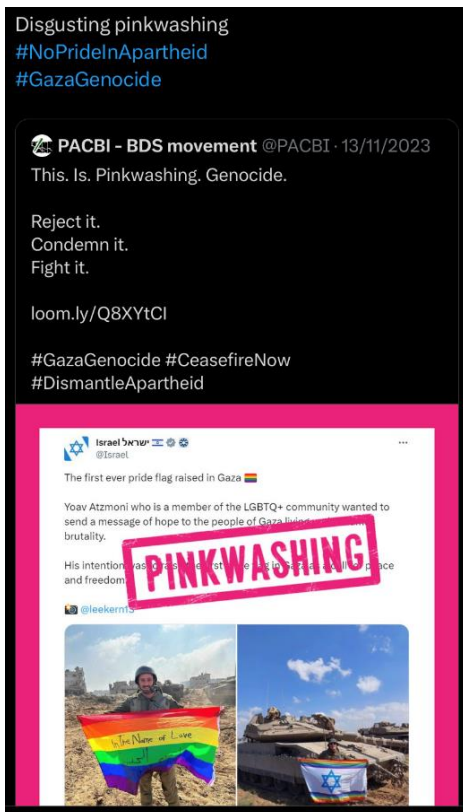


Figure 16 Screenshot of an x user rejecting the pinkwashing narrative

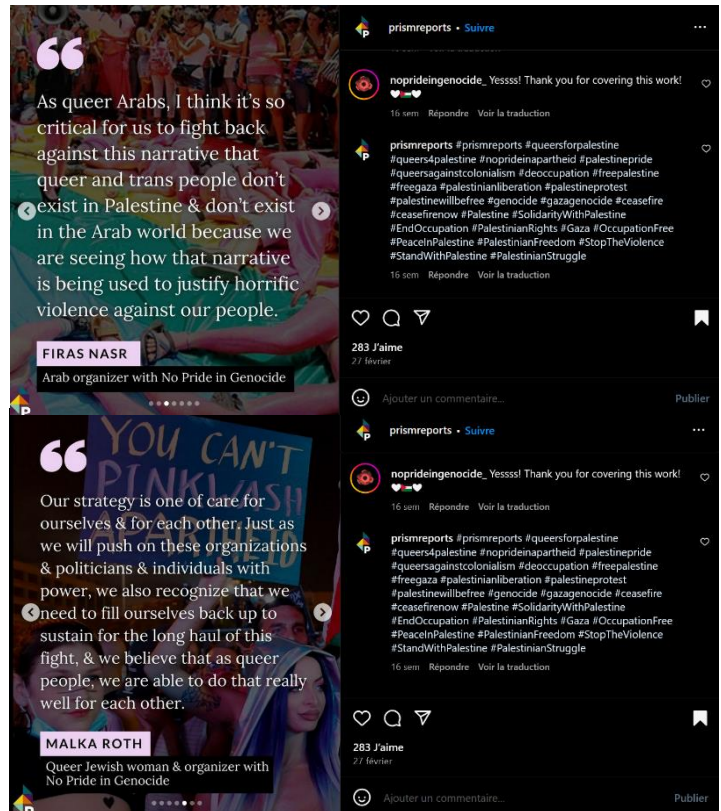


Figure 17 Screenshot of two testimonies rejecting the notion of pinkwashing and underscoring the importance of queer solidarity with the Palestinian movement (February 27th 2023)

4.2.1.3. Mobilization and Community Organizing

The analysis of the data revealed that “mobilization and community organizing” was the most significant theme. Being a critical aspect of resistance, this theme was heavily emphasized in the language and imagery detected in the posts, and also falls under one of the three main purposes of hashtags as identified by Abbas et al. (2022). With hashtags playing a fundamental role in increasing virality, posts under #QueersForPalestine and #NoPrideInApartheid become more than motivational markers; they also “express a strong sense of action” which serves to mobilize a community by circulating information (Yang, 2016, p 15). The data revealed that these posts often targeted the queer community on Instagram and X, but also encouraged participation and coordination of actions from everyone. These actions were usually demands asking people to sign petitions or join protests and marches, as shown in Figure 18 and 19.

Figure 18 and 19 represent examples of the data linked to the theme of mobilization and community organizing. These Instagram posts acts as rallying cries for people to mobilize and engage in acts of resistance. Figure 18 depicts an announcement that was posted on Instagram, informing people about a rally against Israeli pinkwashing and genocide in

Washington DC. At the bottom of the caption, a number of hashtags can be seen – including #noprideinapartheid and #queersforpalestine – as a means to amplify the reach of this post. This example elucidates the efficacy of hashtags in their proactive efforts to mobilize people. This aligns with the findings of Abbas et al. (2022) and Anisa et al. (2023) who argue that hashtags are a catalyst for concrete social action. Moreover, the symbolic framing of events, such as using Valentine's Day to protest genocide, and the inclusion of diverse imagery, helps to make the cause relatable and engaging for a broad audience. This approach aligns with the findings of Aarts (2013) who argues that visual and symbolic communication is essential in the digital age for capturing attention and conveying messages effectively.

Figure 19 depicts an Instagram thread representing demands of the LGBTQIA+ organization to call for a permanent ceasefire. In this specific screenshot, which represents the last image in the thread, we can see a clear sign of urgency, where followers are asked to sign the petition regarding the demands. Content like these ones often use motivational language or vivid and colourful imagery aimed at inspiring viewers to participate in socio-political movements.

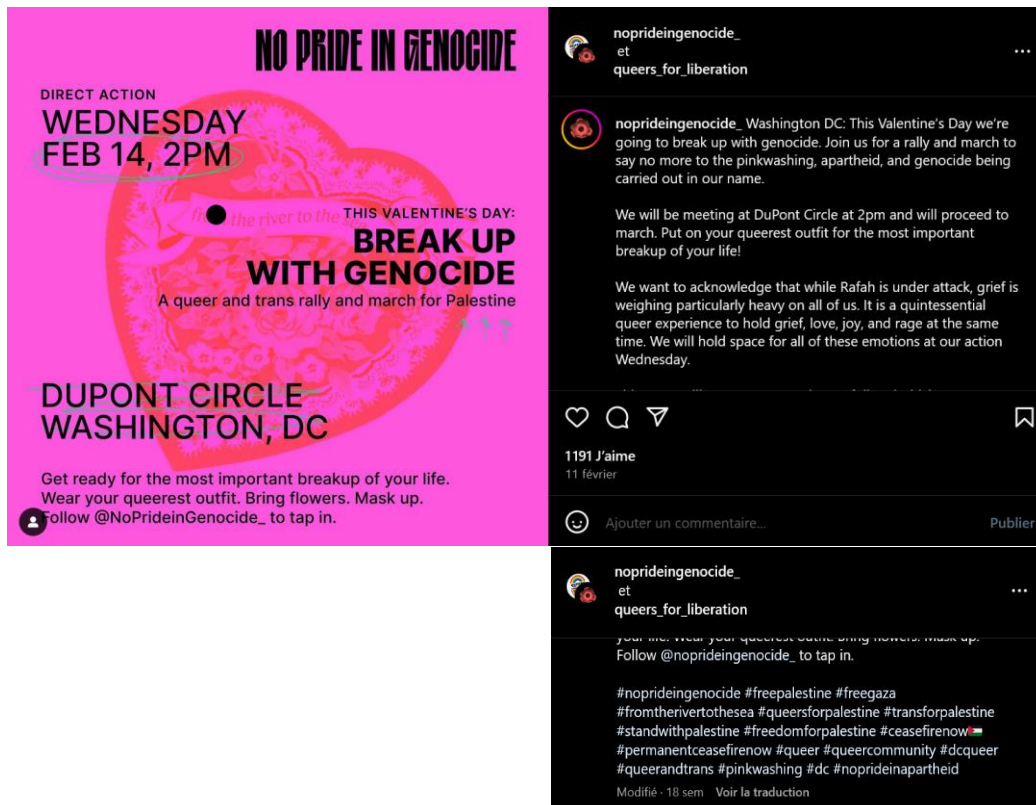


Figure 18 Screenshot of a post found under the hashtag #QueersForPalestine inviting their followers to join their rally in Washington DC (February 11th 2024)

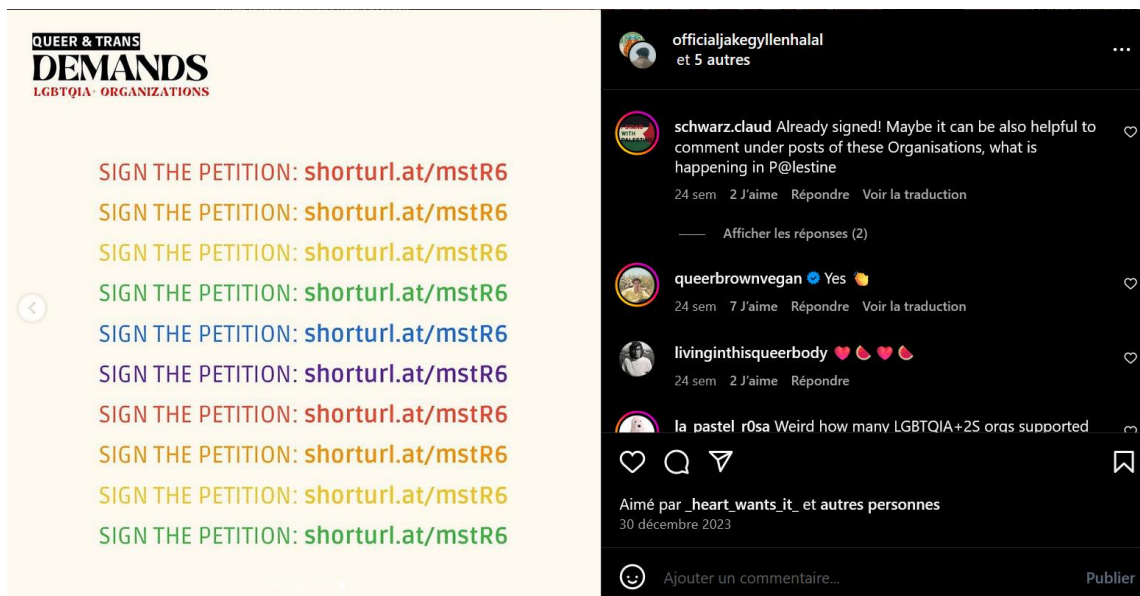


Figure 19 screenshot of a post found under the hashtag #QueersForPalestine, asking their followers to sign a petition with demands for a permanent ceasefire (December 30th 2023)

The strategic use of these hashtags not only facilitates the search index of related content, but they also enable communication and networking among individuals. Indeed, a number of these posts stressed the necessity for connectivity and support within the queer

community. For instance, some of the posts encourage their viewers to join online groups, participate in constructive discussion, organize, and share with and learn from each other. This focus on digital networking underscores the interconnectedness of modern activism and the role of social media in fostering a sense of community (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). The ability to reach a large audience quickly and efficiently makes social media an invaluable tool for organizing collective actions, which can be observed in posts like the one in Figure 20.

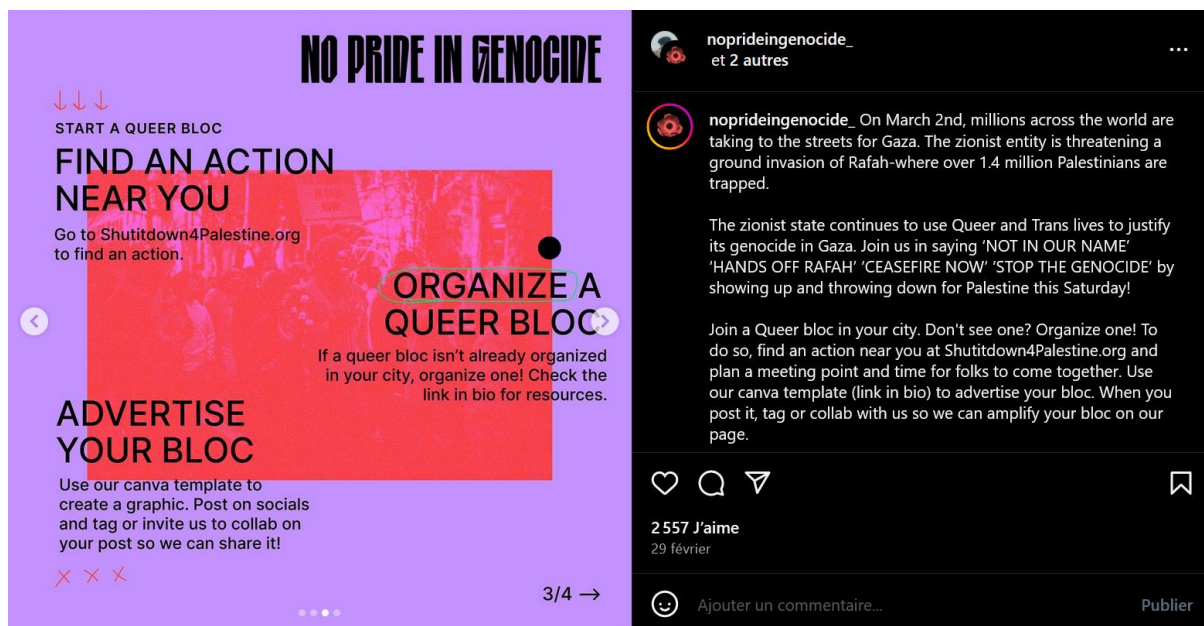


Figure 20 Screenshot of an Instagram post, asking people to join a queer bloc, or organize and collaborate with other individuals (February 29th 2024)

At the heart of this theme is the proactive effort to unite diverse individuals under a shared goal of solidarity with Palestine. The strategic use of hashtags helps to create a sense of continuity and cohesion and facilitate the sharing of information through posts, threads, engagement and discussions (Anisa et al., 2023). Furthermore, consistently using the same hashtags across multiple posts and platforms can help increase the visibility of “grassroot organizers”. This lowers the barriers to participation, encourages broader engagement, and strengthens the movement of resistance overall.

The thematic analysis of this data set revealed how hashtags play a fundamental role in countering pinkwashing narratives. Their multifaceted nature enables resistance by putting emphasis on global solidarity for Palestine, rejecting and exposing pinkwashing, and finally mobilizing and uniting communities to organize. These themes reveal how online activism has emerged, by underscoring the purpose of hashtags in their ability to counter dominant narratives and foster collective action.

4.2.2. Queering the map and the act of countermapping

Tawil-Souri & Aouragh (2014) posited that the act of resisting is not confined to one format. Online platforms provide marginalized individuals with the space to contest, challenge and resist dominant narratives. A platform like Queering the Map (QTM) embodies this space by allowing its users to document and amplify their experiences on a virtual map, thereby contesting the erasure of their identity. By democratizing testimonies and storytelling, QTM offers an alternative way of resisting through the act of countermapping and a way for queer Palestinians to reappropriate their identity and their territory – albeit in a digital way (Said, 2000).

This section presents the results from the thematic analysis of the second set of data, which were entries from Queering the Map. By focusing on the experiences of queer Palestinians, this analysis hopes to shed light on the emergence of counter narratives and their intersection with the politics of belonging and identity. From the findings, two main themes emerged leading to the final framing of resistance, exemplified here by the act of counter-mapping. The themes were: 1) assertion of identity and 2) resilience and memory. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from the entries, providing a nuanced understanding of how users engage with the platform and occasionally with imagery to illustrate the quotes. This section was informed through the lens of standpoint theory, as conceived by Hall (Hall, 1997, as cited in Hunter, 2018).

4.2.2.1. Countermapping as assertion of identity

The first theme from the analysis is the assertion of identity. For queer Palestinians, the essence of their existence is intrinsically linked to the notion of intersectionality, as they navigate the dual aspects of both queer and Palestinian identity, as well their emancipation under Israeli occupation (Maikey & Stelder, 2015). The intersection of these identities, places self-determination and liberation – this includes sexual liberation – “in the broader context of colonized Palestine” (p. 90). This was captured in a number of entries, as users unapologetically asserted their queerness in relation to their Palestinian identity. Here, the term ‘queer’ suggests a political identifier that resists single-issue identity politics and Zionist pinkwashing (p. 100). One example from the data exemplifies this in the following entry, illustrated here in Figure 21:

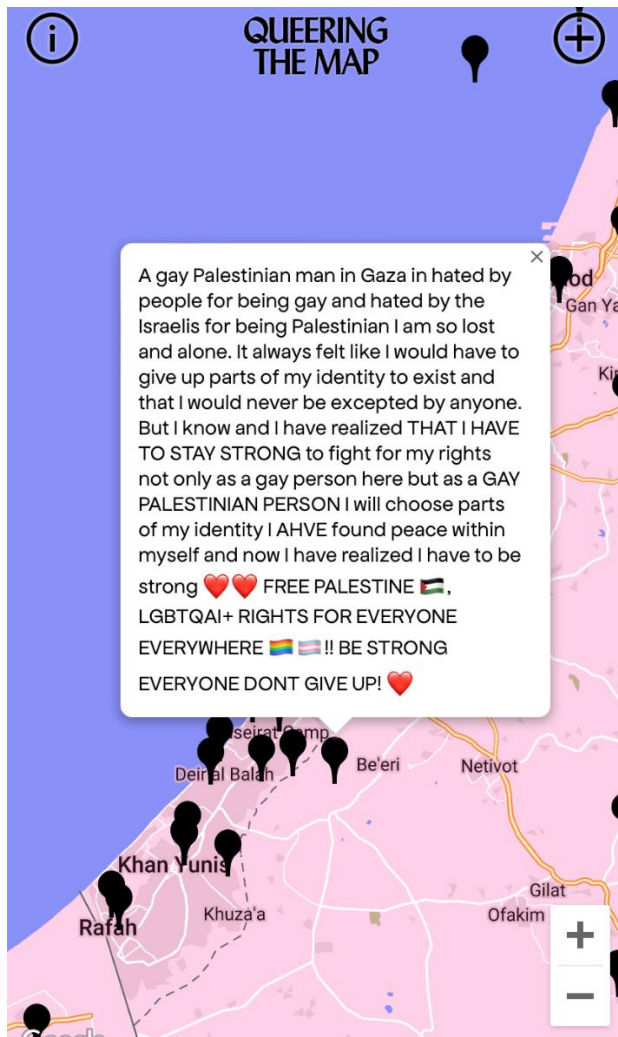


Figure 21 Screenshot from QTM

This illustration depicts a screenshot taken from QTM, capturing an entry that is pinned in Kibbutz Re'im. In this entry, the user expresses both of his identities, as a gay man and as a Palestinian man. He admits that he faces discrimination for both identities, yet cannot be one without the other. This entry is powerful as it not only reveals the realities of Palestinians under occupation, but also the desire for LGBTQ+ individuals to be visible in a society that “describes queerness and Palestinianness as mutually exclusive” (Atshan 2020, p. 45). This pin illustrates just one example among many that express the same feelings. One entry pinned in Khan Unis stated:

“Pls know despite what the media says there are gay Palestinians. We are here, we are queer. Free Palestine.”

Individuals' narratives on QTM serve to challenge the erasure of their identities by asserting their visibility and their right to belong. This can be linked back to Atshan (2020) who argues that queer Palestinian activists firmly believe that radical change and queer liberation within

their society cannot be realized under Israeli occupation “considering that political and sexual freedom [are not] divorced” (p. 39). Entries on QTM, like the one illustrated in Figure 20, reaffirm this statement by rejecting the predetermined colonial frames of sexuality and asserting their identity independently of oppressive structures (Maikey & Stelder, 2015, p.100). Establishing their visibility is crucial to counter-narratives of pinkwashing, as queer Palestinians often find their identities marginalized within the broader discourses of Palestinian liberation.

The analysis of the data also highlighted how the assertion of identity was materialized through the reclamation of space. The way users on Queering the Map reimagine the boundaries of cartography exemplifies this reclamation and the potential for decolonial world-building as elucidated by Harley (1989). By documenting their personal experiences, and reimagining the possibilities of life independent of Israeli occupation, queer Palestinians assert their connection to their land and their history. An entry from Kafr’Ana illustrates this:

"We are Palestinian refugees, some of us are queer, somewhere here a Palestinian village called Kafr’Ana used to exist. I visited it yesterday and I wanted to document it on this website to remind my fellow queer family around the world that Israel is a settler colony. I finally went to visit the place I hesitated for a very long time. (...) On my way to Kafr’Ana I let the driver stop next to a house with oranges & a big Israeli flag. I picked up some oranges as fast as I could before the owner of the house sees me. ‘its okay to do so, you’re in your land’ said the driver."

By mapping Kafr’Ana onto Queering the Map, the user reclaims the village from colonial narratives and cartographic dispossession. Similarly, in other entries individuals pinned and documented their personal experiences onto QTM, and in doing so, reclaimed their belonging to these sites. A large number of entries imagine a free Palestine, often putting typographic emphasis on words such “*free*” or “*Palestine WILL be freed*”. These sentiments also reflect the broader Palestinian diaspora’s yearning for the return to their homeland, a theme which has been central to the Palestinian identity. In asserting their presence onto the map, queer Palestinians resist the erasure of their cultural heritage within both queer and Palestinian discourses, which can be linked back to Segalo et al. (2015), and Krichker’s (2019) concept of borderscapes. For Palestinians the mere act of existing represents a form of resistance. As such to acknowledge the identity of Palestinians within the broader context of queer narratives serves to defy the dominant discourses of

pinkwashing, while reflecting a broader commitment to self-determination. The following quote from the dataset reflects this resistance:

“Our Queer Palestinians voices is higher than the brutality of the occupation and higher than the oppression that our society puts upon us, The voices of freedom will win and Palestine will be free and so we will be.”

The analysis of the data revealed that queer Palestinians asserted their identity by sharing their stories, underscoring the importance of visibility and intersectionality, and reclaiming the sites of their homeland. The act of counter-mapping functions as prefigurative practice that embodies the resistance of queer Palestinians and their hopes for emancipation.

4.2.2.2. Resilience and collective memory

The second theme that was identified from the dataset was the one of resilience and collective memory. This theme encapsulates the determination of queer Palestinians to preserve their heritage and honouring their ancestral land. It also unveils the endurance of queer Palestinians against the violent legacy of settler colonialism and the importance of community amidst the ongoing genocide.

Entries from the data exemplified this theme by testifying about their experiences, and how the occupation of Palestine has directly affected them and their families generations prior. Statements like this entry, which was pinned in Tiberias, unequivocally speak about the displacement and separation caused by the ongoing occupation:

“The only thing I know about this place is what my grandparents went through in the 1948. Not love but misery. To any one reading this please dont support settler colonialism please dont support our ethnic cleansing”

Quotes like this one reinforce the notion of collective memory as well as the resilience of older generations of Palestinians. The implicit reference to the Nakba³ – which refers to the ethnic cleansing and exodus of Palestinians in 1948 – and the loss of their land connects personal family history to a larger national trauma, thereby reinforcing the idea of collective memory of dispossession shared by many Palestinians. Moreover, the historical reference serves as a reminder of the resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of oppression, and the generational impact of colonialism. Entries from the data often highlighted the emotional landscape of queer Palestinians’ lives. Indeed, the sense of loss and displacement was

³ <https://www.un.org/unispal/about-the-nakba/>

omnipresent, and can be linked back to the politics of identity, borderscapes and colonial cartography (Harley, 1989; Krichker, 2019). Entries like the illustrated in Figure 22 exemplify this further, by asserting their right to live in their homeland and rejecting the narrative of pinkwashing, and imaging a space where Palestine is emancipated. This can be traced back to Said (2000) who stated that preservation of cultural heritage becomes a curtail component for Palestinian self-determination. Moreover, these entries refer back to Krichker's (2019), concept of borderscapes, by deconstructing the boundaries of geographical realities, and imagining an alternative possibility of autonomy and emancipation.

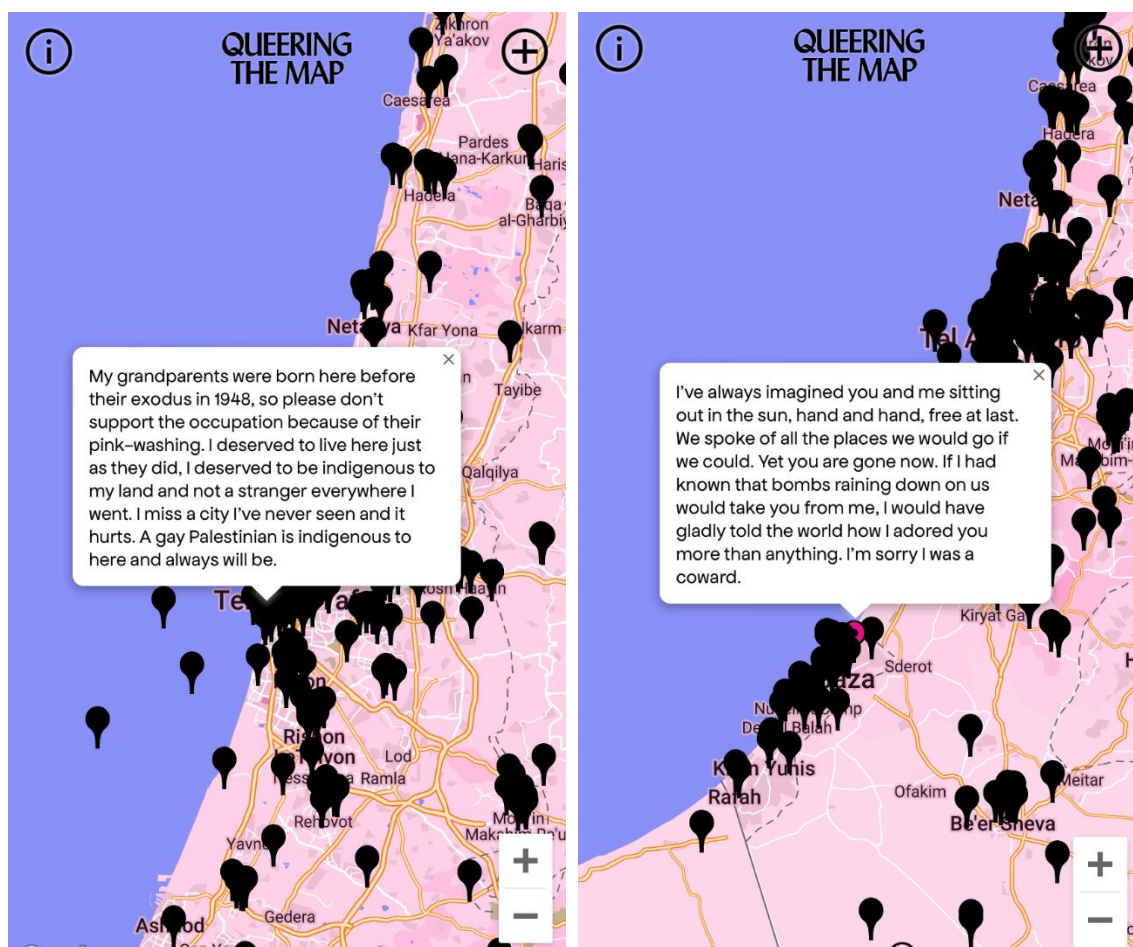



Figure 22 Screenshots of two entries from QTM,

The data indicated that collective memory and resilience are inexorably linked with their identity and their resistance against colonial erasure. The mere act of preserving their memory on a map, or preserving the memory of their loved ones serves to defy the narratives Palestinians, as a “people without a land, and a land without a people”. The realities of displacement, and exile are further exacerbated by these geographies of nostalgia. The sense of loss – loss of land, and loss of loved ones – is prominent in almost every pinned entry.

This entry from Gaza encapsulates the colonial experience of Palestinians, queer and cis alike:

"The place where you died, even though we were only penpals, I love you to my core, 5 years of the best friendship. Ahmad died of the airstrike, you died of heartbreak. Khalid, I love you, I loved the way you came out to me, how I came out to you, how you introduced Ahmad as your boyfriend, I wanted to share your hurts with me, but we're seas apart, I'll free Palestine just for your eyes. I hope you rest well in heaven, kiss Ahmad all you want, and be very happy, in this life or another I'll follow you, and we can unite, I love you to Icarus and beyond  "

This entry reflects one of the many others pinned on Queering The Map; the sentiment of grief is ubiquitous among Palestinians, who's identities are more often than not, marked by personal loss and political violence. Moreover, the individual's commitment to a "free Palestine" amidst the loss they have experiences, sheds light on the profound nature of Palestinian resilience (Schotten, 2016). By affirming their existence and their insistence in the liberation of their land, narratives on Queering The Map resist against Israeli occupation and pinkwashing through the act of countermapping. In that regard, Palestine turns into a "virtual space through which individuals imagine, maintain, and negotiate a state [and] keep the memory of Palestine alive" (Tawil-Souri & Aouragh, 2014, p.128). In the act of documenting and mapping their experiences and stories, queer Palestinians challenge the erasure of their identity, as both queer and Palestinian individuals. Similarly, the act of queering spaces through countermapping platforms like QTM, embody a form of radical resistance, by asserting the intersectionality between queer liberation, and Palestinian liberation. In the words of Schotten (2016), "radical queer commitment to this decolonization may be the very meaning of [Palestinian] liberation" (p. 24).

5. Conclusion

The transformation of online discourse in response to conflict reveals how strategic framing is used to influence public perception and achieve real political goals. This is particularly evident in the context of LGBTQ+ identity politics, where queer alignment serves as a tool for political legitimacy. This thesis aimed to answer two primary research questions, being 1) how does Israel use its framing of queerness on Instagram and X as a political tool, and 2) how are online counternarrative movements emerging as a form of resistance? Drawing from the framing theory, I have developed an inductive coding scheme to help answer these questions.

The first question uses critical discourse analysis to examine the Israeli state's social media posts on Instagram and X. The findings indicate a prevalence of pinkwashing strategies which serve national political interests. Prior to the events October 7th, these generally took the form of nation branding and homofication, engaging in the LGBTQ+ movement to shape the Israel's image as a progressive nation and strengthen sympathy from Western audiences. Following the events, the strategy increasingly took the form of constructing a false dichotomy, or "us versus them" trope. Posts more often drew links between the IDF and pride, and contrasted this using language and stereotypes that emphasised the brutality of Hamas. This effectively links the LGBTQ+ liberation cause to Israeli military interests. Israeli social media posts also used similar tactics with regard to the women's liberation movement, positing Israeli interests as exclusively feminist. Overall, the findings indicate that Israel furthers its military and political agenda by disregarding important context and intersectional queerness. This simplification ultimately erases the queer Palestinian experience and allows the state to capitalize on Western sympathies to legitimize its actions.

The second question uses thematic analysis to examine the use of the hashtags "#QueersForPalestine" and "#NoPrideInApartheid" as well as countermapping as form of resistance against Israeli discourse framing. The examination of hashtags reveals three main themes. Firstly, the findings indicate that the hashtags were linked to broad international engagement which suggests that they facilitate the creation of global collective identity and long-term commitment to the cause. Secondly, many hashtags were linked to social media posts that adopted educational and confrontational language to reject pinkwashing, by deconstructing Israeli colonial narratives and acknowledging queer Palestinian experiences.

Thirdly, the hashtags often served as calls to action, suggesting that they served as tools for mobilization and community organizing.

The countermapping analysis, which drew on data from the platform Queering the Map, suggested two central ways in which the counternarrative movements have emerged. Firstly, countermapping serves as an assertion of identity by reclaiming land and reflecting the broader Palestinian diaspora's yearning for self-determination. Secondly, countermapping represents a form of resilience and collective memory, documenting personal and generational queer experiences and linking these to national identity. The interconnectedness between identity, and memory and resilience, was encapsulated in the notion of liberation and self-determination.

5.1. Evaluation of Theoretical Framework

The first theory, which was foundational for the realization of this study, was framing theory. This provided a lens which guided the analysis of the data. This theory, elucidated how the framing of certain narratives can shape one's perceptions as a result of the way information is presented. This theory shed light on the way Israel framed narratives of queerness, but also feminist discourse, while embedding them in a Zionist and nationalist context. Conversely, using pinkwashing as one of the sensitizing concepts, revealed how Israel manipulates queer rights to appeal to Western sensitivities, while deflecting criticism away from the occupation and its genocidal tendencies. The strategic use of pinkwashing also aligns with Puar's (2007), notion of homonationalism, by exploiting sentiments of patriotism from "gay white men", through governmental endorsement and effective nation branding strategy.

Countermapping, as observed on QTM, serves as a powerful tool for asserting identity and resisting erasure. By documenting personal and collective experiences, queer Palestinians reclaim their connection to the land and challenge colonial narratives. This act of digital cartography embodies what Harley (1989) describes as the potential for decolonial world-building, where marginalized communities envision and create alternative realities. The act of countermapping on Queering the Map, exemplifies the resistance and determination of queer Palestinians, by negotiating the geographical boundaries of colonial powers, digitally reclaiming the land, and radically imagining a space for resistance.

5.2. Methodological Reflection

The methodology proved to be insightful for the research, as it provided a deeper comprehensive approach to examining both state top down narratives, and bottom up narratives. Moreover, the cross examination of the data offered a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of digital activism and resistance. Using digital platforms as data sources captured real-time, user-generated content, thus offering a temporally relevant and dynamic view of resistance practices.

However, the study also faced limitations. The reliance on publicly available social media data may have introduced selection bias, as not all voices are equally represented online. The interpretive nature of qualitative analysis means that possible bias could have influenced the findings, despite efforts to mitigate this through meticulous coding and cross referencing back to the theoretical framework. Tawil-Souri (2014), warns against the inherent dangers of online activism, emphasizing that while digital platforms provide a vital space for resistance, they can also bare the risk of becoming mere symbolic rhetoric, thereby shifting the focus away from foundational issues such as the statelessness of Palestine. As Tawil-Souri (2014), aptly puts it, “The digitalization of the Palestinian struggle must not bear the cost of becoming a symbolic rhetoric for liberation, shifting away from the foundational problem that Palestine remains without a nation-state” (p. 152). There is the risk of reducing the movements in solidarity with Palestine or the “Palestinian cause”, as merely a discourse.

Moreover, the combination of global media attention and contingent opinions vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine, has resulted in wide circulation of information that seeks to drown out certain movements. This was especially evident when looking at hashtags #QueersForPalestine, which had been used to mock the movement. As a cause or a movement garners more attention, “it becomes saturated by others’ attention in an ever-widening loop” (Tawil-Souri, 2014). This saturation can dilute the specificity of the Palestinian struggle, making it a symbol for multiple causes rather than a focused political movement.

Future research could explore the evolving landscape of digital activism and the role of emerging technologies in shaping resistance movements. For example by investigating the ways in which algorithms and platform policies impact the visibility and reach of counternarratives could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of digital resistance. Moreover, due to the interpretive nature of the research, future research could benefit from using a mixed method approach, incorporating both a qualitative and a quantitative method.

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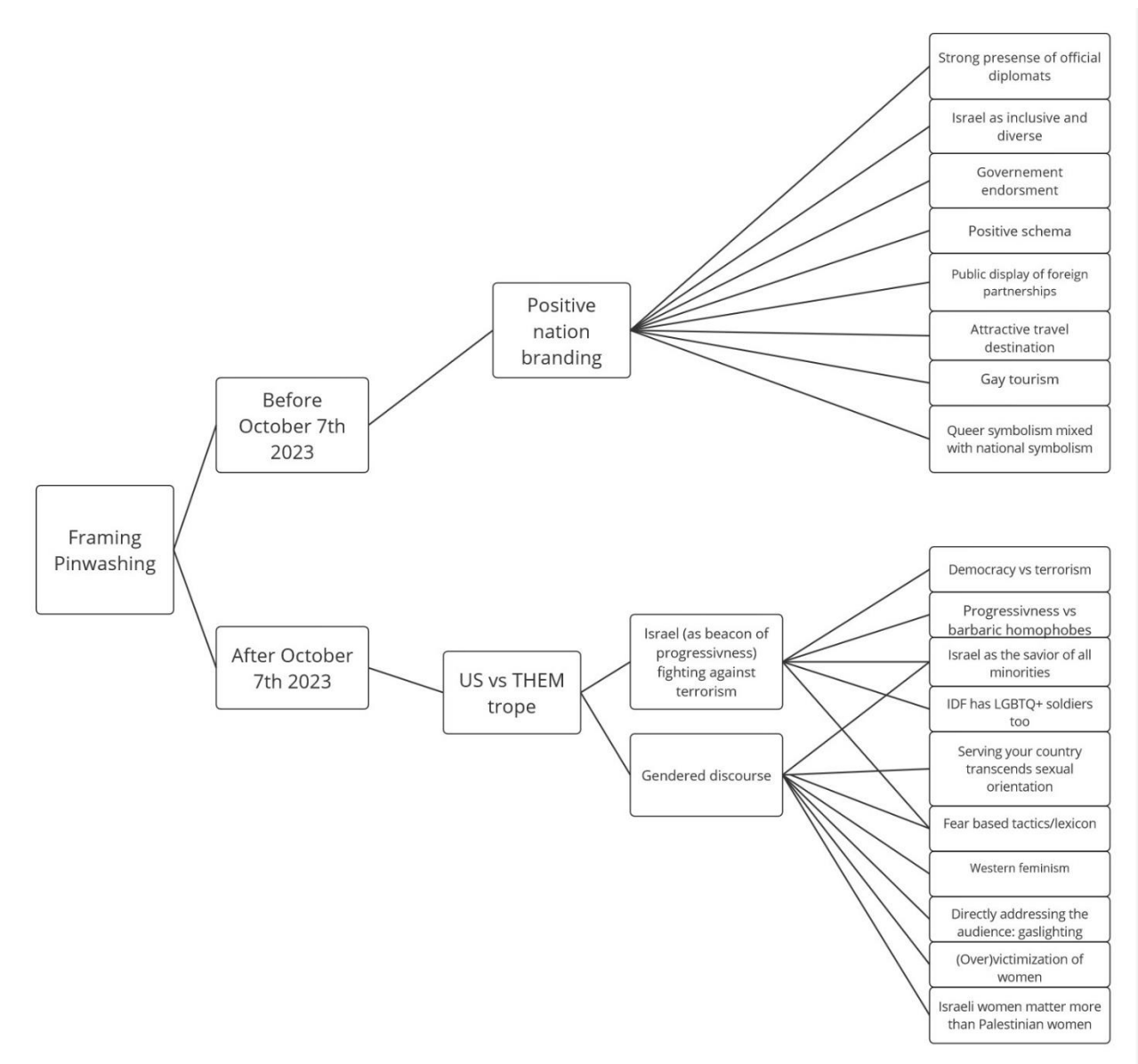
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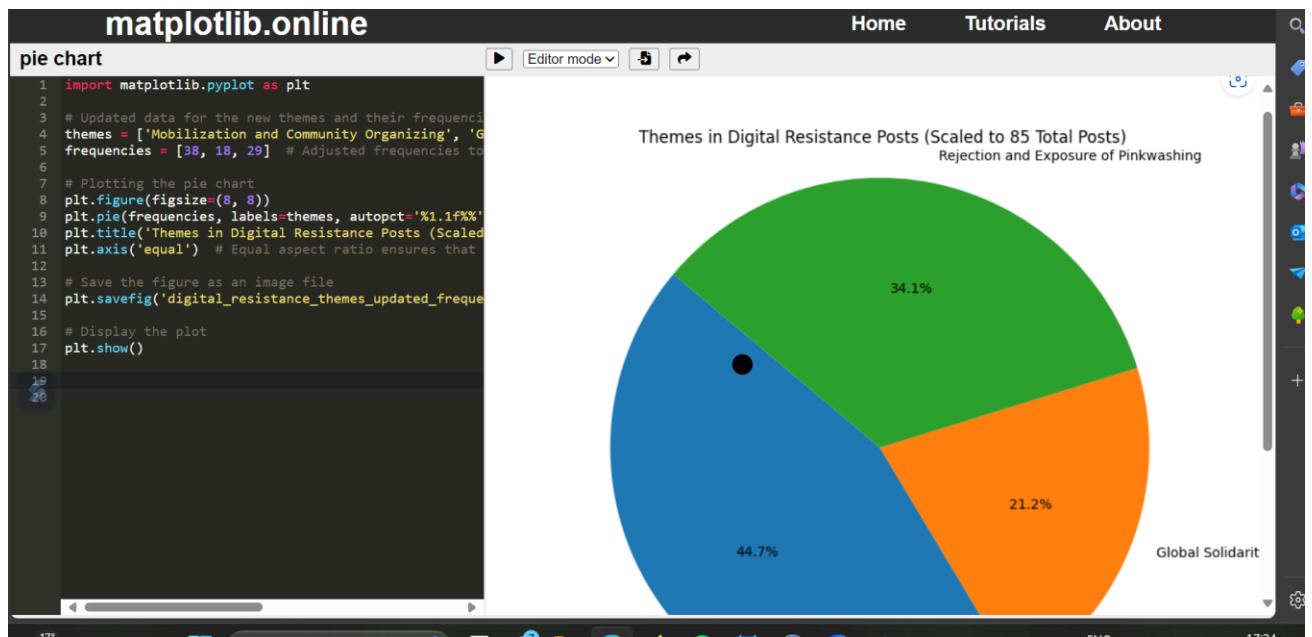
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Appendix A- coding tree from analysis of Israel's official Instagram and Twitter



Appendix B- Evidence of the coding process for the creation of a pie chart from Matplotlib



Appendix C- Coding tree for Queering the Map

