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Working From the Backstage: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Save Sheikh Jarrah Campaign

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Abstract. This article explores the evolution of protests in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, focusing on the shift in dynamics and the movement's composition. The research employs a longitudinal perspective, utilizing Protest Event Analysis (PEA) and Qualitative Social Network Analysis (SNA) to trace changes in protest networks from 2000 to 2021. The study introduces the concept of a *backstaging mechanism*, highlighting the movement's ability to strategically step aside to achieve its goals. This mechanism is examined through a triangulation of data, combining PEA and SNA results with insights from 20 interviews with activists from diverse ethnonational groups. The paper contributes to the literature on social movements by offering nuanced insights into the dynamics of protests involving varied groups and international organizations.

Keywords: Sheikh Jarrah, backstaging mechanism, social movements, qualitative social network analysis, protest event analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem gained widespread attention in all media outlets in May 2021 after the Israeli High Court's decision to remove eleven Palestinian families from their homes. Thousands of people gathered in demonstrations, making the *#savesheikhjarrah* hashtag viral. Nevertheless, protests are not something new in this neighborhood. The first evictions took place in 2008-2009, sparking a solidarity movement of Israeli activists supporting the Palestinian residents of the district, which has persisted to this day. However, significant changes have occurred since then. What was once described as a joint Israeli-Palestinian protest movement is now predominantly associated with the Palestinian struggle, considered the catalyst for the 2021 Unity Intifada (Tatour 2021; Alqaisiya 2023).

What has changed in the coalition, and how has the involvement of the Israeli left in these protests transformed? For what reasons have Israeli activists withdrawn from this struggle, and what have prompted others to stay and continue to be interested in the issue? This paper will try to answer these questions by presenting what I will call the backstaging mechanism i.e., the ability of a section of the movement to step aside when this may help achieve the movement's outcomes.

This contribution is based on a triangulation of data. Through a Protest Event Analysis (PEA), it was possible to reconstruct the protest networks over time. The timeline of the protests was split in two in order to build two different Figureic networks. The first network (T1) covers the period from 2000 to 2011, and the second covers the period from 2012 to 2021 (T2). In this way, it is possible to see how the composition of the protests has changed over twenty years and carry out a longitudinal Qualitative Social Network Analysis (SNA) that compares the campaign at two different moments in time and scrutinizes issues of stability and change within a movement that sees the collaboration of distinct ethnonational groups and international organizations. The SNA data were then corroborated by 20 interviews with activists from both ethnonational groups who participated in the Sheikh Jarrah protest cycle at different times. In addition, I took part in several demonstrations during different periods of fieldwork in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and East Jerusalem. The period from March to May 2022, when I did my last field exploration, was precisely one year after the demonstrations that brought Sheikh Jarrah back into the international news.

This article contributes to the literature on social movements by examining the evolution of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood protests in Jerusalem from a longitudinal perspective, offering insights into the dynamics of protest movements that involve diverse ethnonational groups and international organizations. It also confirms previous funding concerning the Israeli leftist trajectory in the movement. The research introduces the concept of the backstaging mechanism, contributing to Tilly's (2001) and Della Porta's (2014) research agenda. In particular, the paper is interested in contributing to the debate on relational mechanisms. As suggested by Tilly (2001: 24), «Relational mechanisms alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks; words such as ally, attack, subordinate, and appease give a sense of relational mechanisms». Similarly, Della Porta, in her book *Mobilizing for Democracy*, writes: «mechanisms are categories of action that filter structural conditions and produce effects». Hence, considering the backstaging mechanism as a possible relational mechanism means recognizing the importance of movements' interactions within a cycle of protests and increasing our knowledge of these dynamics and their effects on certain political and social processes.

The paper also contributes to the literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by focusing on the emergence of a campaign that tackled a pivotal issue in this field – the dispossession and eviction of Palestinian families from their homes. The question of evictions and resist-

ance to them is central to area studies on Palestine. It is expressed in all the literature that addresses the concept of *Sumud*, which also emerged in the analysis of this case. In this way, the article enhances the understanding of the multifaceted nature of activism in the Israeli-Palestinian context and its implications for broader conflict dynamics.

The article's structure unfolds as follows: it begins with an initial contextual section detailing the situation in Sheikh Jarrah and the broader Palestinian context. The subsequent section delves into the analysis of protests within the neighborhood, even though these have been studied by Palestinian and non-Palestinian scholars. Following this, the theoretical framework is introduced, employing a longitudinal analysis to demonstrate shifts in protest composition over time while maintaining a certain level of continuity. The article then proceeds to conduct a Qualitative Social Network Analysis (SNA) at two selected time points. In the final section, the study attempts to formalize a trend previously identified in other research further supported by field interviews: the demobilization of Israeli activists and the concurrent development of new strategies by those who continued to mobilize in this movement.

2. SHEIKH JARRAH: A STORY OF ATTEMPTS OF DISPLACEMENT AND RESISTANCE

2.1. Contextual Notes

International reports, notably Falk and Tilley (2017), highlight the division of Palestinians into four judicial “domains” since 1967. Palestinians in Israel (1.7 million) are governed by Israeli civil law, resulting in different types of discrimination that mainly manifest in access to resources, jobs, lower salaries, and racism (Abdo-Zubi 2011; Norwich 2017; Rouhana and Ghanem 1998; Zinngrebe 2019). The Basic Law reinforces Israel's Jewish nature, distinguishing citizenship from nationality (Falk and Tilley 2017). Yiftachel (1999) argues that despite formal democratic institutions, the ethnic element in the Basic Law prevents Israel from being a full democracy, defining it as an “ethnocracy.” The military law domain applies to 4.6 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, living under military occupation since 1967. Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza need permits to enter Jerusalem; they are subject to severe restrictions on their right of movement through checkpoints and roadblocks and their right to security because of the frequent night raids inside Palestinian houses (Hilal 2015; Khawaja 1993). In addition, they are often victims of settlers' violence (Alimi and Demetriou 2018;

Ghantous and Joronen 2022). Oslo Accords delineate zones with minimal autonomy. Gaza, part of the OPTs, became an open-air prison post-2005, and the Israeli government controls essential resources, imposing severe constraints (Bhavnani, Choi and Miodownik 2011). The fourth domain denies Palestinians repatriation rights, contrasting with the “National Law”, granting any Jewish person worldwide Israeli citizenship at the time (Amnesty International 2022). Finally, the 300,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are subjected to a special legal domain, which is the one of permanent residency (Huberman 2023). They experience discrimination in access to education, health care, employment, residency, and building rights. They also suffer from expulsions and home demolitions, which serve the Israeli policy of “demoFigureic balance” in favor of Jewish residents (Falk and Tilley 2017). The category of permanent residency is designed to prevent Palestinians’ demoFigureic and, importantly, the electoral weight being added to that of Palestinian citizens in Israel. As permanent residents, they have no legal standing to challenge Israeli law; they lack the right to vote in national elections conducted by the Palestinian Authority or the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. The only voting privilege accorded to them is participation in the Jerusalem municipality elections. Such a legal framework represents a blatant infringement upon fundamental civil and political rights (Falk and Tilley 2017).

The neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, located near the Old City, has become a contentious site that saw several cycles of protest to prevent the eviction of Palestinian families residing there. The dispute centers on the Simeon the Just tomb, where a Jewish community was established in the late 19th century. However, they gradually abandoned the site during the Arab revolts of the 1920s and 1930s through the 1948 War of Independence. Under Jordanian rule from 1948 to 1967, the Jordanian government, utilizing the Enemy Property Law, assumed control of these plots. In 1956, 28 Palestinian families receiving refugee aid from UNRWA¹ were selected for a relief project in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Development. According to the agreement, these families would relinquish refugee assistance and pay a nominal rent for three years, after which house ownership would be transferred to them. After three years, formal ownership was not transferred to the families, and this lack of evidence forms the basis for Nahalat Shimon

International’s case against the Palestinian residents. In 1972, 27 families were notified of rent owed to the Sephardic Community Committee and the Knesset Israel Committee². Using 19th-century Ottoman-era documents, these committees initiated a process with the Israel Lands Administration (ILA) to register the lands in their names. In 1982, a legal case for rent delinquency was brought against 23 families. Rather than contesting ownership claims, the lawyer for the Palestinian families, Itzhak Toussia-Cohen, reached a court-sanctioned agreement, providing residents with “protected tenancy” status, subject to appeal only if proven based on false grounds³. Families argue that Toussia-Cohen lacked authorization for the agreement, a decision serving as a legal precedent for subsequent appeals. In resistance to authorizing Committees’ ownership claims, most families refused to pay rent. In 1997, Suleiman Al-Hijazi challenged the Committees’ ownership claims in a lawsuit, asserting his ownership of the disputed territory. The case was rejected in 2002, and subsequent appeals were also unsuccessful. Despite a 2006 court decision not corroborating the Committees’ ownership, their official registration was never revoked, and subsequent rulings have upheld the 1982 precedent⁴.

In 1999, settler activity commenced in the neighborhood and has persisted since. The initial group of settlers acquired tenancy rights from a family, subdividing the structure for more families. In 1999, due to charges of rent delinquency and unauthorized construction, a section added by the Al-Kurd family was forcefully evicted and sealed. Two years later, settlers illicitly entered the sealed section, establishing their residence.⁵

On March 28, 2004, Mohammed and Fawzia Al-Kurd were ordered to evict the settlers from the added section of the house, demolish it, and seal any remaining openings⁶. The sentence was reiterated on February 25, 2007⁷. Being unable to demolish the house with the settlers inside it, the Al-Kurds repeatedly sought police

² <https://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/SheikhJarrahEngnew.pdf>

³ Under this classification, tenants and their cohabiting kin are guaranteed the security of living in their units so long as they pay rent and abide by rigid restrictions regarding maintenance and renovation.

⁴ In November 2006, following a Magistrate Court decision, the Israel Lands Registry (ILR) received an order from the Lands Settlement Officer of the Court to cancel the Committees’ ownership. The ILR failed to execute the officer’s order and referred the case back to the court.

⁵ The Al-Kurd’s unit is adjacent to a small bloc of settler residences, and settlers there marked the sixth group to move into the neighborhood. The event launched the Al-Kurds’ story into the Palestinian media, which frames the story as symbolic of the Palestinian situation in Jerusalem. Here is the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNqozQ8uaV8>

⁶ Criminal Case 2353/03.

⁷ Civil Court of Local Affairs 2353/03.

¹ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a UN agency dedicated to supporting Palestinian refugees’ relief and human development. Established in 1949 by the UN General Assembly (UNGA), UNRWA was tasked with providing relief to all refugees resulting from the 1948 conflict.

assistance and filed requests and complaints with the district police. In November 2008, following the loss of a protracted appeals process, Fawzia and Mohammed Al-Kurd were forcefully evicted from their home.

2.2. The Protest Cycles

The hashtag #SaveSheikhJarrah gained momentum in Western countries, with British singer Dua Lipa and Academy Award-winning actress Viola Davis among those who shared it⁸. In October 2020, the Israeli court ruled in favor of settlers who claim that Palestinian families live on land that used to belong to Jews. Palestinians appealed the decision at Israel's High Court. In Sheikh Jarrah, Palestinian residents were subjected to military violence by the army, and armed settlers, who attacked civilians, gathered at large outdoor tables to celebrate the breaking of the fast (*iftar*) together as a sign of solidarity with the threatened families (Sauvage 2021). On May 6, the Israeli army deployed in force to protect Knesset member Itamar Ben Gvir, a far-right politician who, in a provocative and highly offensive move, decided to move his office to a house under settler occupation. Now, he is the Minister of National Security (*Ibidem*). After this event, Israeli and Palestinian activists gathered in a joint protest, with quite a few people also coming from Tel Aviv. Five Knesset MPs also participated in the demonstrations: three Palestinians, Sami Abu Shehadeh, Ahmed Tibi, and Osama Saadi, and two Jews, Ofer Cassif and Mossi Raz (who were interviewed for this research). Cassif, a communist deputy, was beaten by police officers in Sheikh Jarrah some weeks before. His denunciation garnered scant empathy in a right-dominated Knesset that sympathized with the settlers' ambitions (Gharabli 2021).

However, the vast mobilizations against Sheikh Jarrah evictions were not as sudden as described. Bosi (2008) clearly demonstrated that even eventful protests usually result from long-term processes. Therefore, approaching the political process of social movements must necessarily incorporate a temporal dimension (McAdam and Sewell 2001: 91). Indeed, in 2008, when the Israeli High Court issued the first eviction orders for eight families, mass demonstrations started. Incorporating a temporal dimension in the analysis becomes crucial not only because it accounts for change and stability but also because it shows once again that all mass demonstrations result from long political and social processes influenced by the interaction of a myriad of actors.

The Protest Event Analysis (PEA) conducted for this study utilized the news aggregator Nexis Lexis, which collected news articles related to the Sheikh Jarrah campaign from the earliest identified articles in 1980 through the end of 2022. In Appendix B, it is possible to find the list of sources comprising the search string used in the research. The search yielded an exceptionally high number of articles, primarily attributed to the peak of protests in 2021, resulting in over 30,000 articles. After eliminating duplicates republished by various newspapers (a specific function of Nexis), the final count was slightly over 20,000. The coding process followed a conventional approach to protest event analysis, with the inclusion of event types. This was done considering events like demolitions and decisions from the Israeli court, which were deemed connected to the protests, following Tilly's *Event Catalogs* (2002) that understands protest events in interaction with other events not as single occurrences. In this way, the relational element of interactions is also kept into account by considering different events as not only part of the same cycle of protest but as reciprocally influencing each other (*Ibidem*). Additionally, a part of the coding process was specifically dedicated to creating matrices for the social network analysis.

As shown in Figure 1 (created from the PEA dataset), 2021 was exceptional; however, protests and mobilization in the neighborhood have been constant since the 80s, with another pick in 2008-2011 when the first eviction orders were issued. What has changed is, on the one hand, the composition of the movement and the political opportunities frame it was inserted in. The Israeli government is becoming increasingly right-wing, leav-

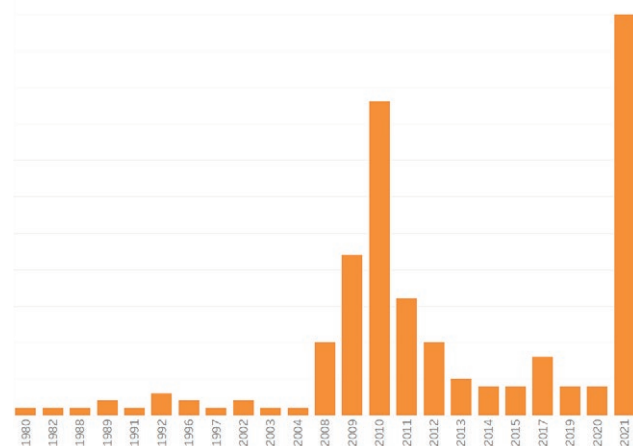


Figure 1. Protest in Sheikh Jarrah per year. *Source:* PEA from 1980 to 2021 from newspapers. Demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah.

⁸ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/832457-dua-lipa-raises-voice-in-support-of-palestinians>

ing marginal space to express dissent (Filc 2018: 130); in addition, some of its last decades' discriminatory policies towards Palestinians, such as the construction of the separation wall, declared illegal under international law (2004), are increasing the level of segregation and dispossession of the whole Palestinian population (Falk and Tilley 2017).

What has not emerged from the more recent newspaper articles and media sources, however, is that the gatherings and protests of Palestinian and Israeli groups cooperating for years to avoid the expulsion of residents continue to occur every Friday without exception. This is why I speak of a backstaging mechanism as different from disappearing completely or de-mobilizing. It implies that the presence of a section of the movement remains, but it steps outside the spotlight, and their support comes from a corner, not from the stage's center. It means remaining an active part of the movement and the coalition but from the shadows, continuing the job on equal footing without changing the relationships with their partners, but allowing a section of the movement – in this case, the historically oppressed group – to be at the stage as the main, and sometimes only, actor. As reported by an Israeli activist, part of a new group active in Jerusalem:

I don't know if it was okay for everyone, but maybe the fact that they took some distance from Israelis allowed them to be successful. I do not know, but if it was the case, okay, great. I am happy if they succeed; I do not care how. However, this was last year. Now, most of the youth that participated here are no longer there. Some of the leading figures of the protests are abroad while we are still there. I am not saying it is wrong. It is cool with me that they should live their normal lives, but it is important to say that there are people in Sheikh Jarrah with whom we still work closely, who are very willing and active and want to work with us, including the formal committees. Sheikh Jarrah committees are willing and happy to work with us. Maybe there was a change, and it was okay, but the relationships remain. (IS31)

The backstaging mechanism also differs from the definition of an abeyance network, which involves a whole movement that remains silent and has the possibility of being re-activated in the moment of need (Hmed and Raillard 2012). Here, it appears that just a section of the movement is not visible and does not demobilize; it remains active but in the shadows. The backstaging mechanisms illustrate the possibility of segments of the movement providing continuity and even massive mobilizations by sidelining when necessary for the cause and reaching the outcome of the movement. It reveals the link between relations, time, and strategies. It is an explanatory tool that searches for the connection

between change and continuation of the qualitative network analysis explored here.

3. CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION: TIME AND RELATIONS

This case is inserted into a broader research agenda, able to connect different analytical levels of interactions from the micro to macro level, passing through the meso-organizational dimension and crossing time and identities. In social movements, the process matters as much as the outcomes. Movement mechanisms and dynamics tell us much about actors' choices, strategies, and their ways of staying "in the movement". Entities are not interdependent; they act according to their interaction with social fields, networks, social worlds, and political contexts. Social actors' identities and actions result and evolve through exchanges. They cannot be understood as coming from a pre-relational moment (Dépelteau 2018: 17). As pointedly articulated in Emirbayer's *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* (1997), relational theorists reject that some discrete, pre-given units, such as the individual or society, are the ultimate starting points of sociological analysis. As he states: «Individual persons, whether strategic or norm following, are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded [...] [a relational perspective] depicts social reality in dynamic, continuous and processual terms, and sees relations between social terms and units as pre-eminently dynamic in nature, as unfolding, ongoing processes rather than as static ties among inert substance» (Ivi: 287-289). Relations cannot escape a reflection on time, continuity, and change. In line with this, Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi (2015) agree on the importance «to focus on changes in patterns of relational dynamics within and among the major parties and actors involved in episodes of contentious politics» (*Ibidem*: 38). In the study of this case, the relational element, exemplified through both the networks and the personal experiences of activists, is conjunct with the Protest Even Analysis and the temporal study of previous cycles of protest (Hutter 2014). They further underline that «actors, groups, or organizations within a social movement make claims that may influence the state and potentially other non-state parties; their activity triggers an interactive chain of moves and countermoves» (Ivi: 39).

In addition to the interactionist school, scholars specializing in social movements have consistently emphasized the significance of relationships among events. Protests often manifest in cycles or waves, as noted by Andrews and Biggs (2006), Tarrow (1989), and

Wada (2004). While some of these cycles or waves result from diffusion processes or external conditions, many are intentionally orchestrated by movement activists (Della Porta and Andretta 2002: 59). This contribution aims at posing the spotlight on certain internal conditions and their changes across time as the combination of the PEA and qualitative SNA shows. Relational dynamics may change in this chain of moves and countermoves, and new modes of coordination and cooperation can emerge and develop (Della Porta and Diani 2015: 189). This paper tells this story: how diverse movement components interacted and changed their participation into a socio-political alliance that crossed an ethnonational divide. Indeed, analysis of movement strategies involves identifying interactions within the movement and exchanges between it, the state, and external actors as underscoring changes in mobilization. Substantiating a process-based account of how cooperation emerges and unfolds means capturing the heterogeneity of social movements. These relations are crucial in shaping mobilization patterns (Norwich 2017: 179). In fact, the identification of an understudied process, such as the one of coalition formation among different ethnonational groups, has allowed for the documentation of new mechanisms deemed crucial for the survival and maintenance of the movement itself.

In this regard, Tilly and Tarrow (2007) highlighted the importance of relational mechanisms. They draw on the brokerage concept as a relational mechanism that creates new connections between previously unconnected sites. “Diffusion” is understood as the spreading of forms of contention, an issue, or a way of framing it from one site to another. “Coordinated actions” occur when two or more actors engage in mutual signaling and parallel making of claims on the same object. Following these insights, this article will advance the theorization of a new mechanism that tries to understand why a salient component of the movement was sidelined in the description of the 2021 eventful protest in Jerusalem. This results from years-long interactions, disagreements, confrontations, and adjustments. Relational mechanisms are those that define the shape of the protest network (Della Porta 2008: 30-31). Hence, developing a conceptual tool, such as the backstaging mechanism, enters into a research agenda that aims at keeping into the due account interaction among actors who are different but co-participate in the construction of the mobilization and the cycle of protest. It creates an epistemological space in which relational mechanisms can be identified both through mapping instruments such as the PEA and the SNA and then explored and filled with meanings through interviews. The campaign analyzed here took

place in two very different moments, and the different protest cycles were qualitatively and quantitatively very different. Consequently, paying attention to the relational and interactionist dimensions can illuminate the changes within the *#savesheikhjarrah* campaign. In addition, the backstaging mechanism is probably something retraceable in other movements, too, where asymmetries of power due to differences in race, gender, class, religion, and ethnicity are present. Indeed, it has a strategic dimension and a moral one insofar as the leadership role is played by the historically oppressed ethnonational group, not the opposite.

4. A NETWORK THAT CHANGES

This section will present the qualitative Social Network Analysis results interpreting cohesion and homophily measures in the two different time spans.

4.1. *First cycle of protests*

The qualitative social network analysis was based on the Protest Event Analysis data. The data collection spans from the late 1980s, marking the initial collaborative protest between Israelis and Palestinians in 1996. Subsequently, as depicted in Figure 2, there was another notable surge in protests around 2008-11, followed by a revival in 2021 due to the renewed threat of expulsion for the residents. In terms of timeline, T1 encompasses the period up until 2011, as shown in Figure 2, while T2 covers the span from 2012 to 2021, as illustrated in Figure 3. The year 2011 holds significance as a point acknowledged by all participants as a downturn in the momentum of the Sheikh Jarrah campaign. The rationale for selecting this time cut is twofold, encompassing both endogenous and exogenous considerations. The inclusion of both an internal and external variable is driven by the aspiration to enhance the legitimacy and scientific significance of constructing the two networks. While 2012 marked a year of notable Arab revolts with profound ramifications throughout the Middle East, including Israel and Palestine (Alimi 2012), the aftermath of the 2011 pick in the Sheikh Jarrah protests witnessed a decline in mobilizations. It is thus plausible to posit, in accordance with the protest cycle theory (Portos and Carvalho 2022), that as the movement progressed into its final phase, a discernible alteration in its composition occurred. Eventful protests (della Porta 2020) are notoriously considered critical junctures. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider them as a water-

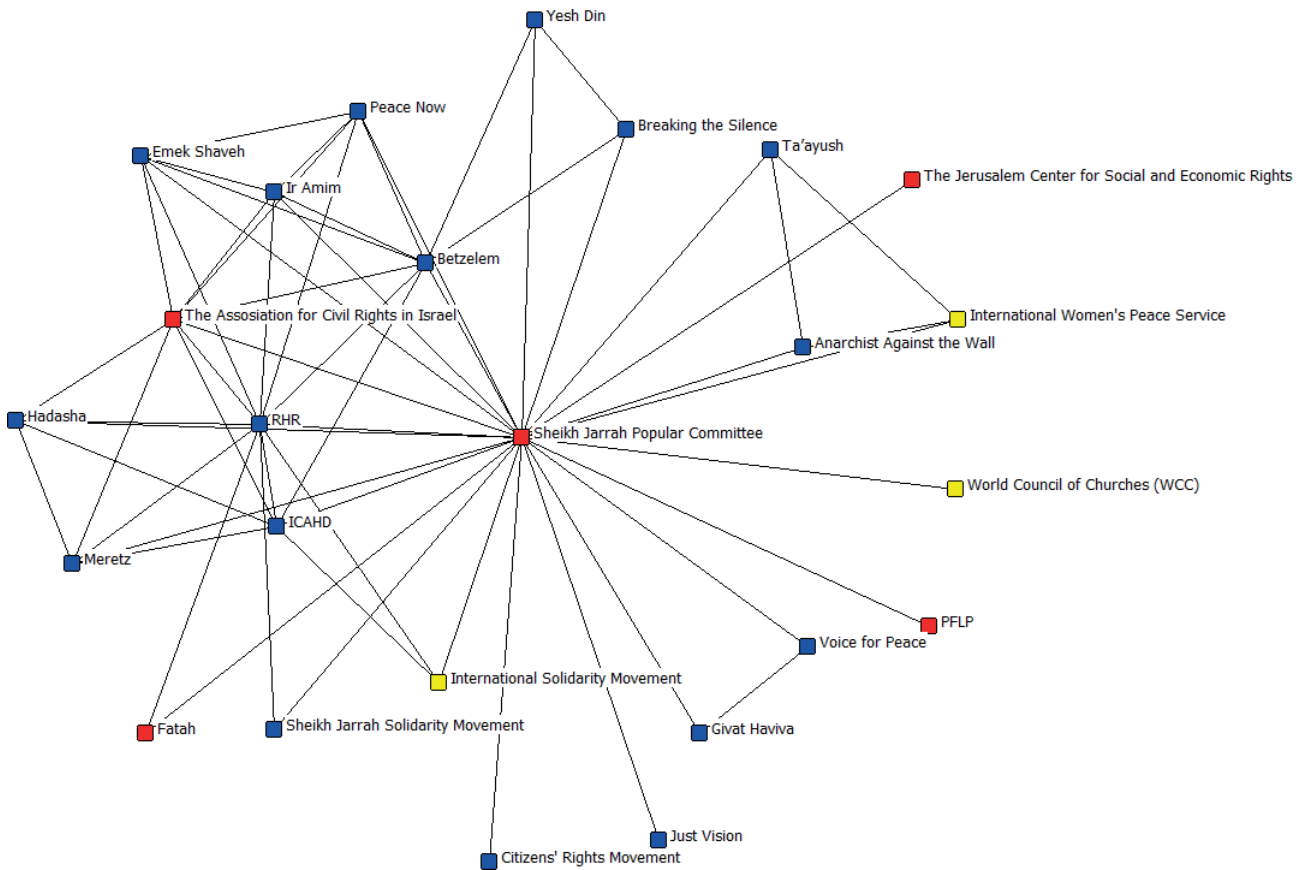


Figure 2. PEA Network 1996- 2011. Source: Author’s own elaboration.

shed between two cycles of protests: this is when it is possible to retrace change and continuity.

A Palestinian resident’s recollection highlighted this differentiation:

When it started in 2008, there used to be four or 500, and there used to be more people from Jerusalem. It went on for one year. But then, you know, people get tired, and they evicted those who were evicted. Things came down, so they could not keep the same momentum. But this small group of people (Israelis) continued to go every Friday, even if they were 30. Look, the thing which shows how they are determined is that they go if it is raining, if the weather is freezing, whatever the weather, they never said: “Oh, this Friday, we don’t go. It’s cold.” So, every Friday, they are ready to come. You know, most of the people are very sensitive to doing things with Israelis because of this issue of normalization; most of the people, Palestinians in Jerusalem, don’t come to this. Usually, the biggest number could be 20, 30, 40, or 50 Palestinians. There are always people from the neighborhood, but Palestinians of Jerusalem do not come. (PA12)

Captured prior to the significant mass mobilization of 2021, this statement links the temporal aspect and the relational and political opportunity frame. While the scale of the protests has diminished over time, a cluster within the Israeli left still displays an unwavering commitment to mobilization, joining the residents in demonstrations every Friday at 3 pm in the winter and 4 pm in the summer. However, Jerusalem’s broader populace and typical Palestinian residents exhibit limited involvement in the movement.

T1 (Figure 2) shows a broad participation of Israeli organizations and collectives in contrast to a minority of international organizations. The central Palestinian actor is certainly the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood Popular

Table 1. T1 Network’s Indicators.

Number of Nodes	25
Number of Ties	120
Density	0.307

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Committee, which coordinates protest actions and tries to keep together the different souls and political positions of the two sides of the neighborhood (East and West). For this reason, the Committee is at the center of the network. Most organizations associated with the “Israeli Left” galaxy are present in the network: Peace Now, Emek Shaveh, Ir Amim, Ta’ayush, Breaking the Silence, and others. As mentioned already, both in the literature and the interviews, the residents of Sheikh Jarrah developed disagreements and felt like they were being instrumentalized by the Israeli left and their political agenda (Fleischmann 2019; Hallward 2011). Hence, some of these groups were demobilized in a second cycle of protest.

Looking closely at network measures, we see that the average density of the network is 0.307. Density refers to the proportion of actual connections (edges) among nodes (groups) compared to the total possible connections. An average density of 0.307 indicates that about 30.7% of the potential connections between groups in the protest events occurred. In other words, the network is moderately connected, with around a third of possible connections being explored. The standard deviation of the density values across the network is 0.868. This suggests significant variability in the density of connections among the different groups. Some actors have very few connections, while others might have more contacts. Given this context, an average density of 0.307 implies that the protest events network is moderately interconnected, with notable variability in connectivity among different groups.

Another analysis that is worth presenting is the homophily test. Performing a homophily test in Social Network Analysis involves assessing whether there is a tendency for individuals in a network to form connections with others who are similar to them in some way. Homophily refers to the tendency of people to associate and connect with others who share similar attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity, interests, or other characteristics. Here, the test was performed based only on the ethnic attribute. Nodes were divided into Israel (Group 1), Palestinian (Group 2), and international (Group 3).

Israeli groups outnumber all the others. The tie strength between individuals in Group 1 and Group 2 is 53, while the strength between individuals in Group 1 and Group 3 is just 4. It indicates a high connection between Palestinian and Israeli organizations, leaving international organizations closer to Israeli ones. The E-I Index measures the proportion of ties within groups compared to the total number of ties in the network. In your case, the E-I Index is 0.348, which indicates some level of homophily, meaning individuals with similar characteristics are more likely to be con-

nected than those who are different. Finally, the correlation coefficient measures the relationship between group membership and tie strength. In this case, the correlation is -0.095, close to zero. A value near zero suggests a weak relationship between group membership and tie strength, indicating that the network’s homophily is weak. To conclude, individuals with similar characteristics are more likely to be connected; however, the relationship is not very pronounced, and there are several connections between Palestinians and Israeli organizations, as shown in Figure 2. As with any analysis, it is essential to consider the context and the specific research question when interpreting these results.

From a more qualitative point of view, we observe the presence of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary socialist party founded in 1967 by George Habash. The PFLP is today deemed a terror group by Israel. The PFLP does not recognize either the Fatah-led government in the West Bank or the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip as legitimate. Because of the terrorist classification, its activity in the Occupied Territories and Gaza was nearly impossible. It now has a small number of political operatives. The PFLP had gradually dwindled before the harsh crackdown that preceded the Second Intifada. However, it was a major political player in the OPTs before then. The fact that it participated in demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah shows its considerable political involvement during the 1990s, as does Fatah, the other mainstream political group represented in the network. They will no longer play this role within the period considered in T2. After the construction of the separation Wall in 2006, it became nearly impossible for political representatives from the OPTs to visit Jerusalem and engage in its socio-political arena, as well as for ordinary Palestinians: permits are required and not always granted (Amnesty International 2022: 95).

By contrast, Meretz is the Israeli political party that was most present at the campaign’s start and remains until nowadays. Meretz was formed in 1992 from the ashes of Mapam, a Marxist-inspired party (in which Israelis and Palestinians campaigned together). The new list won 12 Knesset seats in the 1992 elections and became part of the Labor government led by Yitzhak Rabin, which signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. This explains why it is present in the T1 network. During the fieldwork, I had the opportunity to meet two Meretz members who were also representatives of the Jerusalem municipality. Meretz representatives consider the evictions of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah a crime against humanity, and it has always been a constant and central point of their political program (Hasson 2023).

The reasons for this shift are several. Palestinians are now utterly disillusioned with their political parties' insignificance and corruption (AMAN 2020). They do not feel represented by the Israeli ones either since they cannot vote in Israeli national elections, only in Jerusalem's municipal elections. Nonetheless, the Meretz party maintained a presence in the neighborhood through its representatives, such as Mossi Raz, who attended the weekly demonstration almost every Friday. Unlike the PFLP, Mertz, as a political party within the Israeli political system, was allowed to continue participating in the demonstrations as one of the few institutional voices against evictions. None of their representatives was elected in the 2022 electoral competition.

To conclude, this first Figure shows a situation of several and recurrent cooperation between Palestinian residents, their committees, local Palestinian organizations, Israeli human rights NGOs, international NGOs, and political parties from Palestine and Israel. Although East Jerusalem is part of the rest of the Occupied Territories, Fatah and the PFLP are now outlawed from entering Jerusalem and cannot participate in local politics.

Table 2. T2 Network's Indicators.

Number of Nodes	16
Number of Ties	54
Density	0.242

Source: Author's own elaboration.

International NGOs were a minority, while the Israeli organizations were numerous and highly active. Some of them remained active, and some demobilized.

4.2. Second cycle of protests

The second Figure (Figure 3) presents a contrasting image. It is notably smaller regarding node count and connections (Tab. 2). It highlights how, post-2012, the interactions between the two ethnonational groups diminished, partly due to increased pressures against normalizing relations with Israelis. However, insights from this second network (Figure 3) also reveal the

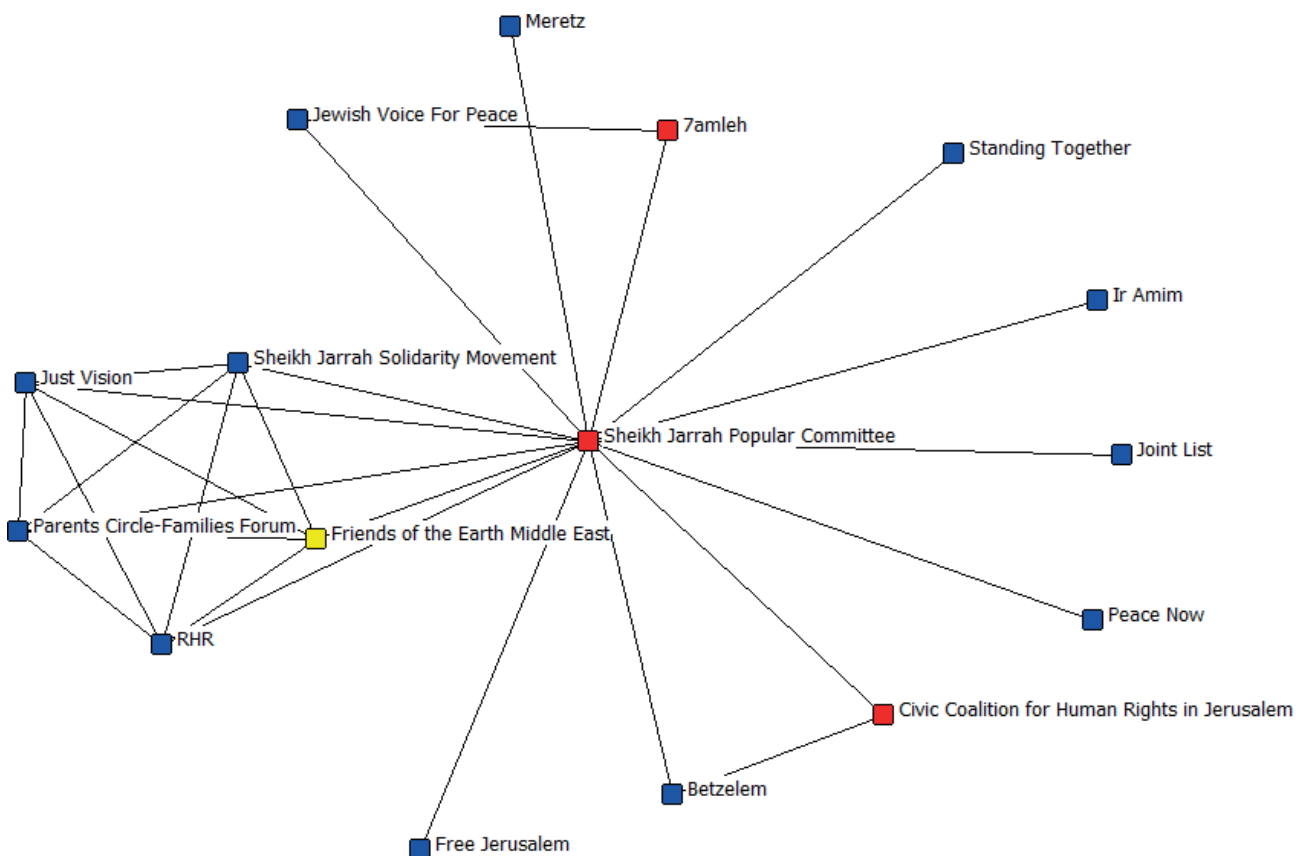


Figure 3. SNA 2012-2021. Source: Author's own elaboration.

continued involvement of certain Israeli groups in the Sheikh Jarrah mobilizations. Notably, Rabbis for Human Rights has remained consistent – an organization well-known within the Israeli left landscape. Another significant figure on the Israeli left is Ir Amim, an NGO focused on Jerusalem’s urbanization and planning. While the Sheikh Jarrah Popular Committee undeniably remains central to these networks, there has been a shift in its degree of centralization. Unlike T1, more nodes are exclusively linked to the Sheikh Jarrah Popular Committee and lack connections. This could stem from challenges and disagreements faced by the movement. As elucidated by previous studies (Fleischmann 2019; Hallward 2011), a section of the Israeli left distanced itself from the coalition after disagreements over certain action repertoires and the future evolution of the movement. It is plausible that this disappointment prompted a more cautious approach to forming alliances, with a heightened focus on the residents at the core of each collaboration, considering both new and existing partnerships and centralizing the decision-making process.

Nonetheless, a more tightly knit subgroup is highlighted in red in Figure 4. Clusters or closely connected subgroups denote sets of participants within a network whose interactions are significant enough to categorize them as distinct entities. What unites them is their shared identity as Israeli organizations. Notably, this is also the only instance where an international organization could be identified, likely introduced by these Israeli entities. Homophily is here more prominent than in the previous network.

Density measurements further suggest a network with diminished cohesion. In this scenario, a node possesses a 24% likelihood of engaging in collaboration with other actors within the network. Given the network’s scale, this statistic still highlights a degree of closeness and interaction among the different nodes. However, the decline in cohesion could also be attributed to the factor above: a period of tension that prompted certain participants to exit and pursue distinct paths in activism. This assertion was reaffirmed by one of the activists who played a role in both T1 and T2 mobilizations:

So, we knew all the time that there are different approaches within the neighborhood and the people—some like our presence less than others. Moreover, in the beginning, we said, okay, we are connecting with whoever we want. We want many people to hear of Sheikh Jarrah. This is surely what they want from us. However, it was a mistake. I think it was an important lesson of post-2011: everything we do, we do with the will of the people from the neighborhood, and now this is the bottom line. (IS32)

The in-degree metric not only identifies nodes with greater centrality but, particularly in this relatively compact network, sheds light on those nodes that occupy more peripheral positions. Similar to the preceding case, Israeli organizations collaborating with the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood committee are also prominent here. A generational shift has occurred, even though certain older groups have maintained their involvement. Notably, Free Jerusalem, a collective established in 2015, has joined the network, primarily comprising young individuals and university students from the city. Some Palestinian residents have identified this group as proactive in organizing protests and gatherings, particularly during heightened tension. During a conversation with one of the founders, a comprehensive discussion took place about the collective’s name. Notably, Free Jerusalem deliberately opted to exclude the term «peace», unlike most Israeli groups. The founder’s response was as follows:

Of course, we desire peace, just like everyone else, but we believe that genuine peace cannot be achieved until a portion of Jerusalem’s population (the Palestinian community) ceases to be confined to an underserved area of the city and treated as second-class citizens. Only when we all experience freedom and equal treatment can discussions of peace hold true meaning. (IS31)

In this specific network, the Homophily Measures indicate an E-I Index of 0.448 and a correlation of -0.314. These values suggest some level of homophily in the network, as the E-I Index is greater than 0 (though not excessively high), and the correlation is negative (indicating weaker ties between individuals with similar characteristics). The correlation remains low in both networks, demonstrating that the two networks’ ethnic homophily is not necessarily an indicator that fosters cooperation, and those Israeli and Palestinian organizations do not necessarily prefer to work with groups of the same nationality, and the networks are instead heterogeneous. However, it is true that, in particular, in the previous case, Israeli groups more frequently work with people of the same ethnonational identity even when working in the framework of the Palestinian cause.

In summary, the network displays two significant trends: firstly, the past participation of political parties from both sides within the confines of the conflict’s geoFigurey – and secondly, a consolidation of the entire network around the central committee of the neighborhood. Although further examination of these data is warranted, given the article’s scope, the network primarily serves as a visualization tool to elucidate the evolving pattern of campaign relationships over time. The follow-

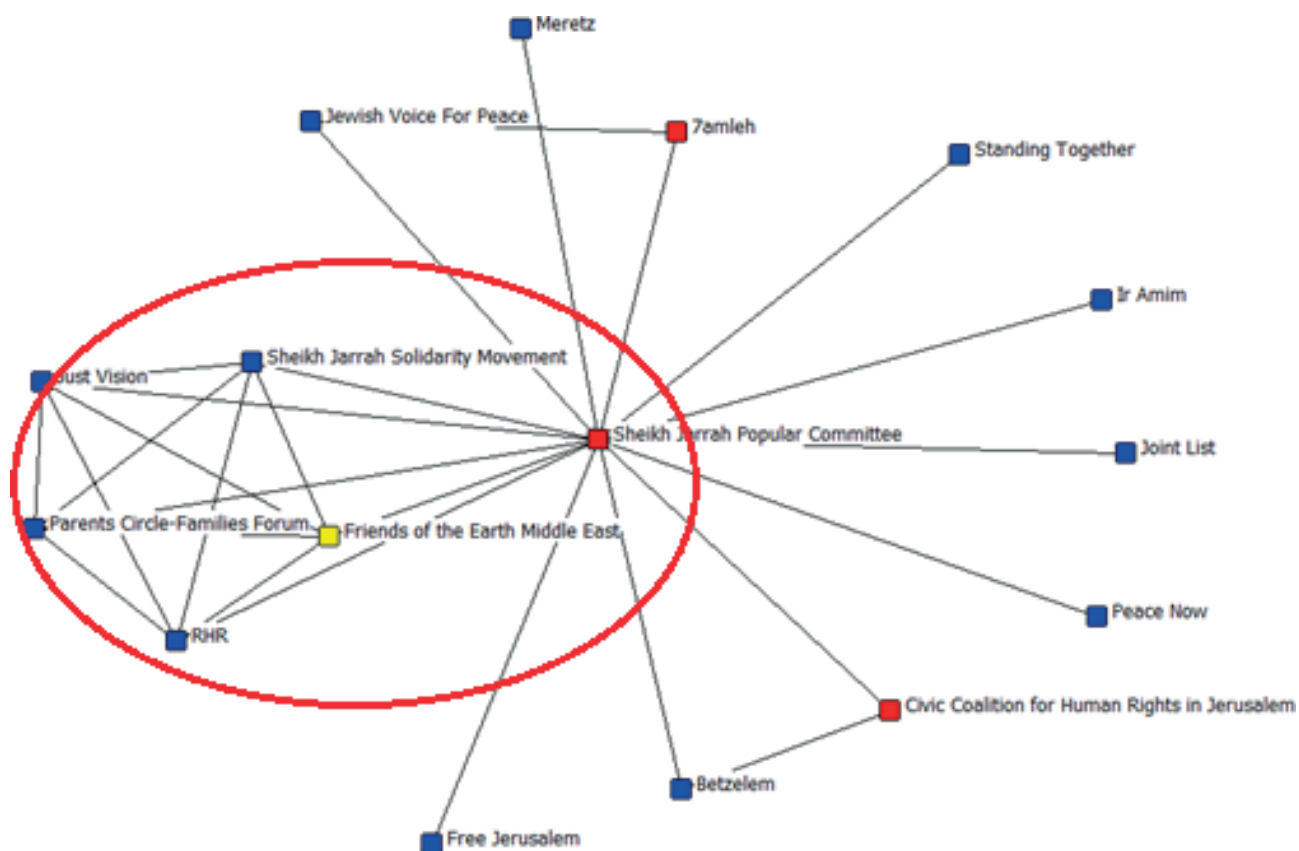


Figure 4. Cluster. Source: Author's own elaboration.

ing section will illustrate what has caused such a qualitative change in the networks.

5. A HISTORY OF MISTAKES AND AMENDS

This section gives more concrete examples of what the backstaging mechanism means and goes into more depth into certain episodes that took place during the 2021 campaign. Jabril, the resident of Sheikh Jarrah, recalls their first encounter with Israeli activists:

They came to my house in 2008; I remember it perfectly; they were a girl and a boy, young, wearing jeans, she was curly with blond hair, and they said to me: "We want to help you, what can we do?" At first, I was skeptical; rumors began circulating about the importance of non-normalization. However, was this normalization? They were just a boy and a girl. Moreover, I told them: Let us have some tea and see what we can do together. (PA27)

Jabril reported that, since then, the movement and support from both Israeli and international activ-

ists have expanded and proved crucial. Unfortunately, the increased involvement of NGOs has led to resentment, especially against some Israeli peace organizations accused of "appropriating" Sheikh Jarrah's cause as a standard-bearer of left-wing Liberal Zionism. In 2008-2011, Sheikh Jarrah was identified as a bulwark of the Israeli left to safeguard democracy. Then, only ten years later, the same neighborhood became the emblem of the Palestinian national struggle. Much has been written on the involvement of the Israeli left in the first Sheikh Jarrah campaign; hence, what is reported here corroborates most of that analysis (Fleischmann 2019). Regarding the more recent surge of protests, the predominant emphasis in most contributions has been on the role played by social media and its impact on globalizing the protest (Miladi 2023; Huberman 2023).

Fleischmann (2021), for example, underlines that despite the potential advantages of Israeli involvement in campaigns against housing evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, it has not always been welcomed by Palestinians and, in fact, has been viewed as a hindrance. The dominant Israeli presence was identified as the primary factor leading to divisions inside the movement (*Ibidem*: 194).

As the movement expanded to include more Israelis, an exclusive Israeli organizing committee was established, distinct from the joint Palestinian – Israeli planning committee, indicating a growing divide (Ivi: 195). This situation aligns with concerns raised by Budour Yousef Hassan (2017), warning of the risk of external groups co-opting the grassroots Palestinian resistance movement under the guise of solidarity and coexistence. Strategic differences emerged between the Israeli-only committee, aiming for a broader anti-occupation campaign, and the joint Palestinian – Israeli committee, focused on addressing the Sheikh Jarrah evictions. This was confirmed by activists interviewed during my fieldwork as well. One of the Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity Movement funders, a collective of Israeli leftists involved in the first Sheikh Jarrah campaign, who later split in 2012, shared his experience. Some activists changed sites, some remained, and a minority demobilized utterly.

We were a group of Israelis who lived mainly in Jerusalem. Sheikh Jarrah's was an emblematic cause. At the time, we were close to the university, which is just over Sheikh Jarrah, and we did not mind being arrested. So often, during the 2009/2010 protests, we provoked the police precisely to get arrested, to make the media talk about us. In this way, however, the Palestinians stepped out of the spotlight. I do not know if it was the right strategy, but at one point, the residents asked us to stop. Some of us got angry, and after some discussions with the residents, the group disbanded. (IS34)

Another Palestinian activist, active in 2009/10, said:

At that time, the Israeli Peace Organization or Solidarity Organization also took part, and they took the space, the public space, and kicked off all the other demonstrators and, activities, and organizations for the rest of the year. This meant that Sheikh Jarrah was no longer a place of Palestinian resistance. (PA19)

Even within cooperation that persists over time – the Friday demonstrations continue every Friday and see the assiduous participation of both Israeli and Palestinian activists – coalitions do not necessarily remain unchanged, but like all relationships, have vicissitudes, evolve, take steps back, grow, and modify. Following a moment of crisis, in which criticalities of the coalition emerged and were discussed, people have taken different routes. Still, more importantly, those who have decided to stay had to change their relational strategies and coalitional dynamics to continue to be active in that struggle. New generations who desire deeper relations of cooperation need to adapt and make amends for the

mistakes they have previously made. It is in this context that the backstaging mechanism crystallized.

All the activists interviewed stated how, in recent times and with the rekindling of the conflict in the spring of 2021, relations and collaborations with the inhabitants of Sheikh Jarrah have become more tense. This is certainly due to several factors. As mentioned, previous disagreements within the 2008-2011 *#savesheikhjarrah* coalition played an important role. On the other hand, there is also the question of anti-normalization, which is nowadays much more felt in Jerusalem due to a generational change. Many of the young people who participated in the protests in April 2021 were people who mobilized for the first time to support the neighborhood, and they did not accept the presence of the Israeli left there. They felt disappointed and advocated for non-normalization. As remembered by a Palestinian resident of Sheikh Jarrah:

*What happened last year was different because, for once, all Palestinians united for Sheikh Jarrah. I guess for Jerusalem. So, there was Al-Aqsa, there was Gaza, and all these elements gave this momentum to the uprising. It gave momentum to Sheikh Jarrah and became very well known. Did you know that according to people who work with this social media, the hashtag *#savesheikhjarrah* was shared by 40 million globally? They knew about Sheikh Jarrah in one way or another because of all of that. And the young activists who use these social media manage to reach some well-known celebrities, each with 1 million 2 million followers. I think Sheikh Jarrah became more known than the Palestinian cause. Sheikh Jarrah put Palestine and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on top of the agenda again after it was very quiet for a long time. (PA26)*

Hence, in 2021, Sheikh Jarrah became global and although there was a large component of Israeli activists who had been active in this campaign before the neighborhood became famous all over the world, they suddenly disappeared from the stage and, therefore, also from the news. Once Sheikh Jarrah was headlined by the international newspaper as “the Palestinian cause”, the Israeli activists found themselves in a different position, and they decided to step aside. The Israeli activists, in this case, have really demonstrated what it means to leave the leadership of the movement to the Palestinians, to the group that lives under occupation, and not to the one that enjoys greater resources and international support. Here, an Israeli activist described a moment of tension with some younger Palestinian activists in the neighborhood during the 2021 protests:

So, for example, I remember one evening at the beginning of Ramadan, Ibrahim was inviting some Israeli activists to

have an Iftar dinner at his house. Then, some young activists of East Jerusalem started to come, and they were sitting on the street chanting and hanging out. At a certain point, someone told us, that they heard there were Israelis there, they did not like it very much, and Ibrahim was very upset. He looked at them and said, "Some of these people are part of the Palestinian struggle before you were born. They have been here with us for 12 years now, so, if you have any problem with them, you have to chick me off too. (IS32)

Ibrahim himself remembers this episode very well: «I really wanted the young activists there. They are very important, they are the future generation of the Palestinian struggle, but they cannot question my choices. They cannot question my partners» (PA19).

Although moments of crisis and hardship arose when the presence of the Israeli activists was questioned, they continued to participate in the weekly protests.

During a Friday demonstration, young people, mostly from East Jerusalem, but not only some came also from the north, joined. An only-Palestinians group was doing another demonstration at the same time and the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah did not know what to do. Therefore, they somewhat like came through; we were in the garden, our meeting point while they came from the neighborhood East side. They saw us, turned around, and went back to the neighborhood. Something like this. I was looking, and I told the other Israelis this is not up to us; this is for the people of the neighborhood to decide how they want to do it. So, I saw some people from the committee from the eastern side, and I saw them going to these young people, and I didn't understand what happened there. I saw the reaction, but I could not hear what they were saying. I asked afterward and I have been told that the residents told, "Listen, those are our partners, if you like, you can join, and we will be more than happy to have the demonstration together but if not feel free to go". This was very very very strong. I was like, whoa. I was impressed but on the other hand I also told myself: are you sure that's the right thing to do? (IS28)

As can be seen from all these testimonies, cooperation between the various groups is never easy or natural, especially in protests expansive moments where new groups and new personalities join with their, sometimes different, ideas on what the tactics of the movement should be. On the other hand, however, those alliances that are based on long-lasting interpersonal relationships are able to survive time and difficulties. In order to mediate these problems and keep the presence of the Palestinian youth in the protests, the backstaging mechanism was applied.

In summary, going back to the previous protest cycle gives us some tools to understand what happened

in 2021. Previous moments of tension that saw the Israeli activists becoming the protagonists of the Sheikh Jarrah resistance made the residents more cautious about their alliance strategies. This is also evident in the centralization of the second network. However, this decision was also strategic in nature. Indeed, presenting Sheikh Jarrah as a Palestinian movement for national liberation permitted to obtain more extensive support from different parts of the Palestinian population from several locations, how also came to join the demonstrations. The result was deploying the backstaging mechanism. In the words of an Israeli activist:

I think the strategy is to keep in contact always. You do not just stick with people when you need something; there's continuous communication. This also means leaving some space. Sometimes, because of our involvement, they may have problems because our discourse is not the same as the Palestinian discourse. So, it is fair that they represent the Palestinian struggle. We are not neutral. We are the Occupier. And even if I am against Israeli policy and so on, I know I am the oppressor. (IS28)

In this testimony, not only emerges the need to stay and maintain a relationship even when there is no need for «action», but it also stresses the need to step aside when necessary. This distancing is not only related to a strategic dimension essential for achieving specific objectives but also as a way to deal with power asymmetry between the groups. The mechanism of backstaging implies that a component of a movement or coalition perceived as tricky or even adverse by a part of the public opinion decides not to claim its belonging to a campaign to increase the chances of success of the campaign itself. However, this does not involve a detachment or a distancing from the movement, but rather a stay in the campaign by moving away from the spotlight.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The focal point of this paper addresses a less-explored aspect within the realm of social movements: the trajectory of the movement components that fade from official news coverage. While existing literature predominantly delves into elucidating the dormancy of movements through abeyance networks, it rarely tackles the question of where the overlooked segments of these movements diverge. This article addresses this inquiry by introducing the concept of the backstaging mechanism.

To achieve this, the paper employs a Protest Event Analysis (PEA) of the news, acknowledging its inherent biases in representation – mitigated by the numerous

interviews and participant observations – along with a qualitative Social Network Analysis (SNA). This combined approach, although existing, remains uncommon in movement studies, providing a nuanced, long-term perspective. Despite the numerous studies scrutinizing the protest cycle of 2008-2011 and more recent analyses focusing on 2021, this paper uniquely bridges together the two mobilizations systematically. While offering a continuous study of the protest cycles, it narrates a story involving actors from movements of Palestinian origin mobilizing alongside Israeli activists. The network analysis reveals a shift from an initial phase where Israeli organizations were highlighted as key participants in the protests. In T2, there is not only a decrease in the presence of Israeli organizations in the campaign but also a centralization of the Sheikh Jarrah Neighbourhood Committee. This enriches the literature on non-violent mobilizations in Palestine and introduces an innovative approach to studying protest cycles.

While presenting a partial analysis of the two protest cycles, this article opens avenues for future studies on the same movement. It serves as a reference for analyzing movement outcomes and examining how the Israeli component influences the campaign's success/failure. Furthermore, it explores how neoliberal and gentrification dynamics intersect with colonialism and Palestinian expropriation, offering a macro-social lens for categorizing phenomena across different global regions. Examining the transformations within the campaign and its evolution over time, particularly in terms of composition and objectives, aligns with the focus of this special issue. This perspective enables us to contextualize movements not only within the political and social sphere but also within a historical and relational framework. The relationship, frequently overlooked by scholars of movements, is with time itself and how it influences the discourses, composition, objectives, repertoires, alliances, and ultimately, the mechanisms of these movements.

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APPENDIX

*A: List of interviews***A3: Save Sheikh Jarrah Campaign (Total 20).**

ID	Date	Location	Actor type	Gender	Language	Documentation
IS2	05/11/2019	Jerusalem	MP	M	Spanish	Transcribed
IS4	19/11/2019	Jerusalem	Activist	M	English	Transcribed
IS7	25/11/2019	Jerusalem	NGO	F	English	Transcribed
PA12	05/11/2020	Online (Jerusalem)	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
IS21	16/03/2021	Online (Jerusalem)	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
PA16	10/03/2022	Jerusalem	Resident	M	English	Transcribed
PA18	18/03/2022	Ramallah	Resident	M	Arabic (with translator)	Transcribed
PA19	25/03/2022	Jerusalem	Resident	M	English	Transcribed
PA21	07/04/2022	Jerusalem	Resident	F	English	Transcribed
IS27	13/04/2022	Jerusalem	MP	M	English	Notes
IS28	14/04/2022	Jerusalem	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
PA24	15/04/2022	Jerusalem	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
PA25	16/04/2022	Ramallah	Resident	F	English	Transcribed
IS31	17/04/2022	Jerusalem	NGO	F	English	Transcribed
IS32	18/04/2022	Jerusalem	Activist	M	English	Transcribed
IS33	19/04/2022	Tel Aviv	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
Pa26	20/04/2022	Jerusalem	NGO	M	English	Transcribed
IS34	20/04/2022	Jerusalem	Activist	M	English	Transcribed
PA27	22/04/2022	Jerusalem	Resident	M	English	Transcribed
PA28	22/04/2022	Jerusalem	Resident	M	English	Transcribed

PA: Palestinian Nationality

IS: Israeli Nationality

IN: International

B: PEA Sources on LexisNexis

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1) Agence France Presse | 20) The Associated Press |
| 2) Arutz Sheva | 21) The Canadian Press (CP) |
| 3) Associated Press International | 22) The Daily Star (Lebanon) |
| 4) BBC | 23) The Jerusalem Post |
| 5) BBC Summary of World Broadcasts | 24) The Jordan Times |
| 6) BBC Monitoring Middle East – Political Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring | 25) The National |
| 7) CNN.com | 26) The New Your Time |
| 8) FARS News Agency | 27) The Palestine Chronicle |
| 9) Jordan News Agency | 28) The Times of Israel |
| 10) Jordan News Agency (Petra) | 29) Xinhua General News Service |
| 11) Ma’an News Agency | 30) Jpost.com |
| 12) MENA English | |
| 13) Middle East Eye | |
| 14) Mondoweiss.net | |
| 15) National News Agency Lebanon (NNA) | |
| 16) Palestinian News Network (PNN) – English | |
| 17) Palestine News & Information Agency (WAFA) | |
| 18) Press TV | |
| 19) Qatar News Agency | |

Query string: Sheikh Jarrah OR حارج خيشلا AND initiative OR petition OR signature OR campaign OR protest! OR demo! OR manifest! OR march! OR parade OR rall! OR riot! OR festival OR ceremony OR vigil OR boycott! OR block! OR sit-in OR squat! OR bomb! OR firebomb! OR molotov OR assault OR attack OR bomb OR curfew OR stone OR teargas OR strike OR boycott OR riot OR High Court OR activis* OR organiz* OR ةمظنم OR سرام OR ةرهاظم OR طشان OR حاجت