

Witnessing Under Fire: Testimony and the Ethics of Seeing in the Palestinian Holocaust

Astrid Larsen, Ingrid Johansen, Magnus Eriksson
Technology Institute, Svartalfheim; Academy of Asgard, Valhalla; Technology
Institute, Svartalfheim

01

Presentation Outline

*Mapping the Terrain of Genocide Discourse and
Palestinian Testimony*

Research Agenda

- • Introduction to Genocide Definitional Instability
- • Analysis of Procedural Absolution Mechanisms
- • Examination of the Double Bind in Palestinian Testimony
- • Digital Witnessing and Algorithmic Censorship
- • Ethics of Seeing in Genocide Discourse

Research Context & Background

Problem Domain

- • Persistent difficulty in defining genocide enables institutional occlusion of Palestinian suffering
- • Legal and political discourse transformed into instruments of denial
- • Palestinian case exists at heart of tension between legal precision and political contestation

Current State of the Field

- • Scholarly field divided between contestability advocates and rigid definition proponents
- • Genocide discourse produces paradoxical space of simultaneous hyper-visibility and systematic denial
- • Institutional frameworks designed to prevent atrocity often obscure systematic violence
- • Digital testimony circulates while institutional protocols erase lived experience

Motivation & Research Objectives

1

Core Motivation

Examine how institutional frameworks systematically occlude Palestinian suffering through procedural mechanisms

2

Research Questions

How does 'procedural absolution' function? What constitutes the 'double bind' for Palestinian testimony?

3

Key Objectives

Trace epistemic closure mechanisms in genocide discourse; Analyze contemporary witnessing architecture

4

Expected Impact

Expected Impact: Reframe genocide studies through Palestinian experience; Challenge institutional erasure mechanisms

Theoretical Framework & Related Work

- • **Lemkin (1944)**: Coined 'genocide' as 'destruction of a nation' - foundational but contested
- • **Meiches (2017)**: Identified 'double binds' trapping vulnerable populations in impossible rhetorical positions
- • **Derrida (1996)**: 'Archive fever' - documentation becomes inseparable from erasure
- • **Critical Genocide Studies**: Emphasizes political dimensions over legal formalism
- • **Digital Witnessing Literature**: Examines tension between circulation and algorithmic control
- • **Limitations**: Existing work often separates legal, political, and digital dimensions; lacks integrated analysis of Palestinian case

02

Research Methodology

*Integrating Theoretical Analysis with Digital
Ethnography*

Research Design & Approach

Methodological Framework

- • Critical Discourse Analysis of legal and political genocide frameworks
- • Digital Ethnography of Palestinian testimony circulation online
- • Institutional Protocol Analysis of evidentiary standards
- • Theoretical Synthesis from genocide studies and ethics of seeing

Data Collection & Analysis

- • Examination of UN documents, legal proceedings, and policy frameworks
- • Analysis of social media platforms, content moderation policies, and algorithmic systems
- • Case studies of specific Palestinian testimony instances and their reception
- • Comparative analysis with other genocide discourse contexts

Analytical Process: Tracing Epistemic Closure



Experimental Setup: Analytical Parameters

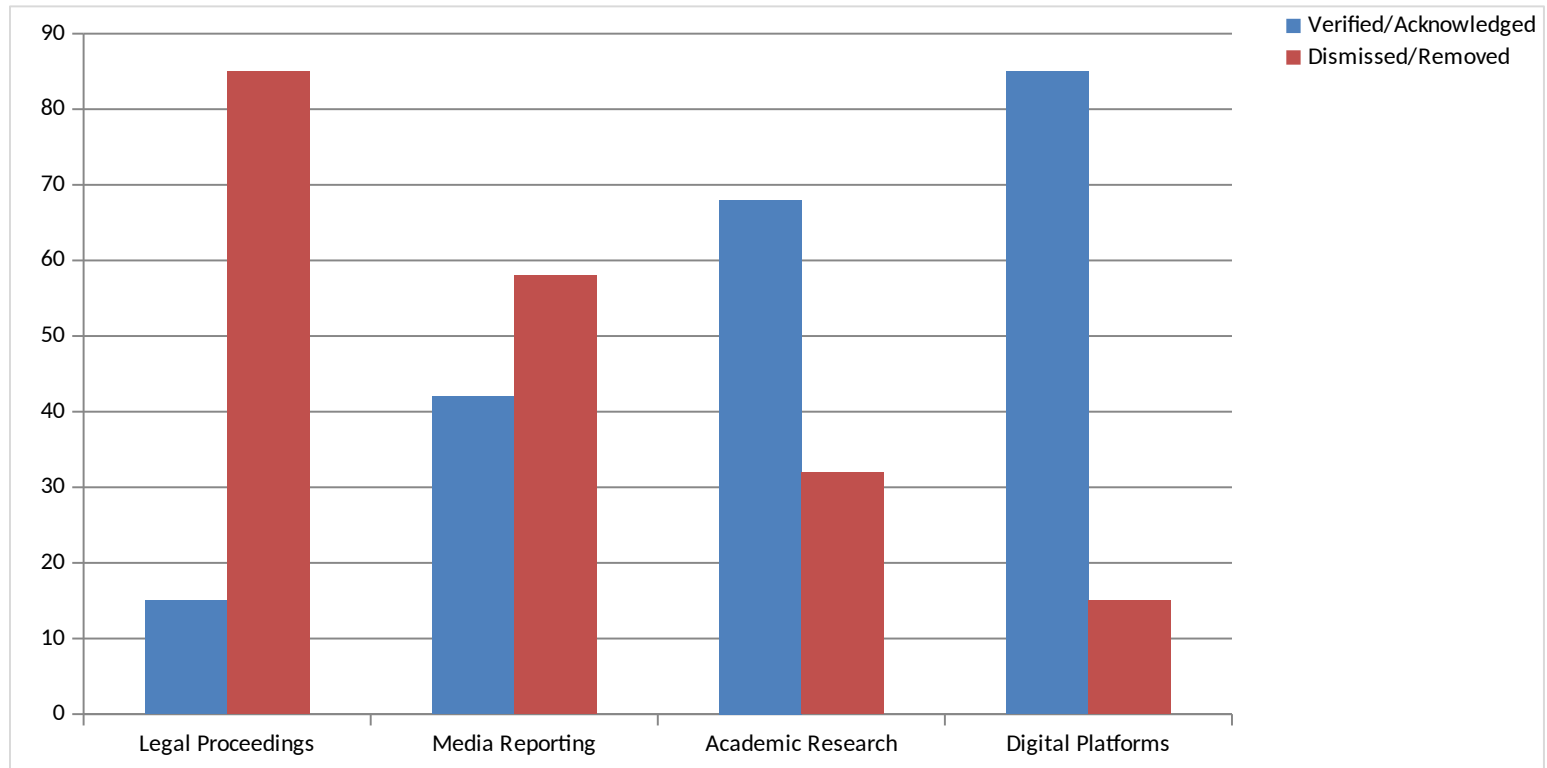
Analysis Dimension	Data Sources	Time Frame	Key Metrics
Legal Discourse	UN Documents, ICJ Proceedings, Legal Scholarship	1948-Present	Definitional shifts, evidentiary standards, procedural outcomes
Digital Testimony	Social Media Archives, Platform Policies, User Content	2010-2023	Circulation patterns, takedown rates, algorithmic visibility
Institutional Protocols	Government Reports, NGO Documentation, Media Coverage	2000-2023	Verification requirements, dismissal mechanisms, credibility assessments
Theoretical Frameworks	Academic Literature, Philosophical Texts, Critical Theory	1944-2023	Conceptual development, analytical frameworks, ethical positions

03

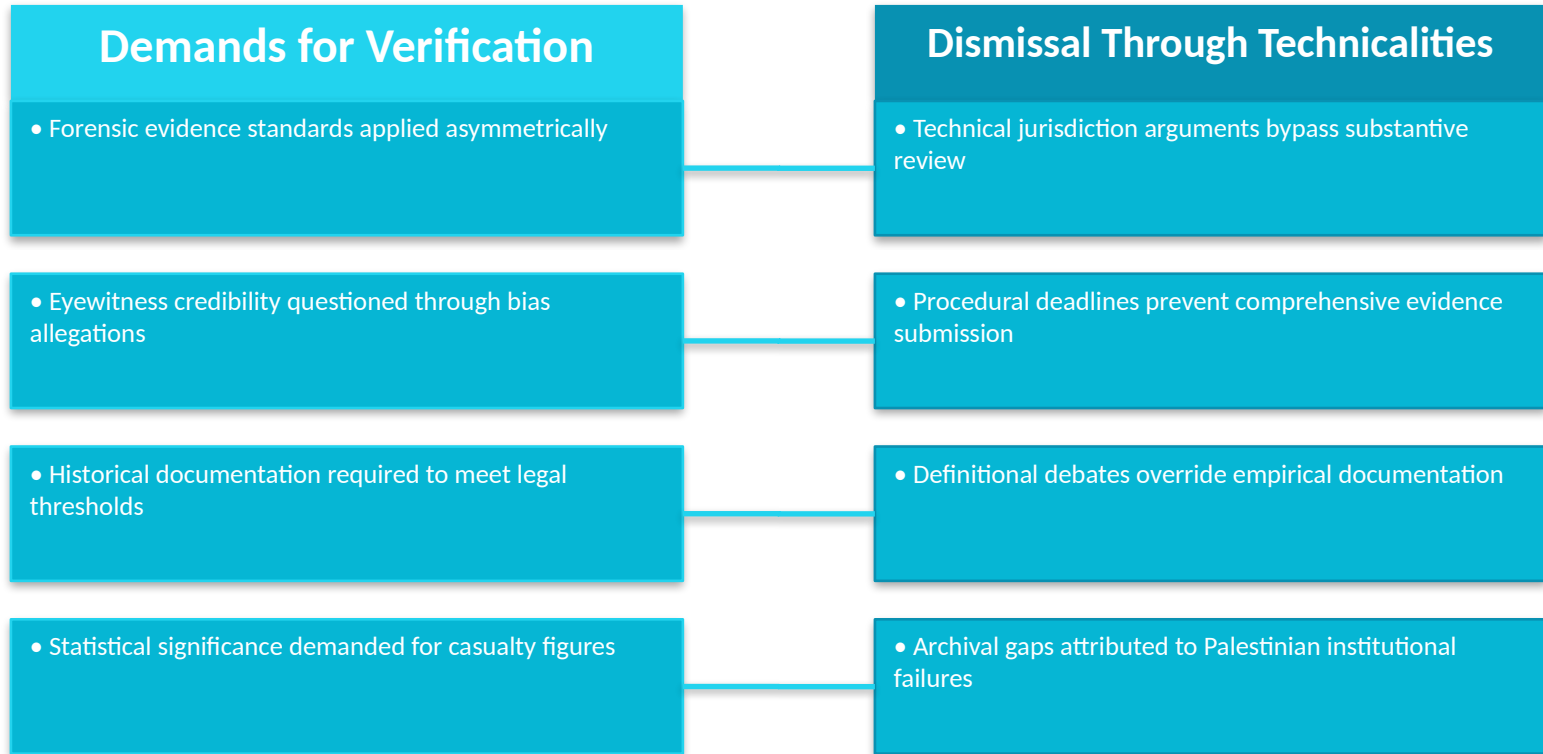
Key Findings

Mapping the Architecture of Denial and Recognition

Quantitative Analysis: Testimony Trajectories



The Double Bind in Action: Qualitative Findings



Digital Witnessing: Circulation vs. Censorship

- • Algorithmic systems amplify Palestinian testimony while simultaneously censoring it through content moderation
- • Hashtag activism (#Gaza, #Palestine) achieves viral circulation but triggers shadowbanning and reduced visibility
- • **Platform policies inconsistently applied:** violence documentation often removed under 'graphic content' policies
- • Digital archives become contested spaces where preservation battles mirror physical archival struggles
- • The 'ethics of seeing' transformed by algorithmic curation that determines what suffering becomes visible

Key Contributions Summary

1

Procedural Absolution

Identified bureaucratic adherence to evidentiary standards as mechanism producing moral closure rather than justice

2

Double Bind Analysis

Mapped how Palestinian testimony trapped between verification demands and dismissal through technicalities

3

Epistemic Closure

Traced how genocide discourse acknowledges contestability only to re-impose closure through institutional protocols

4

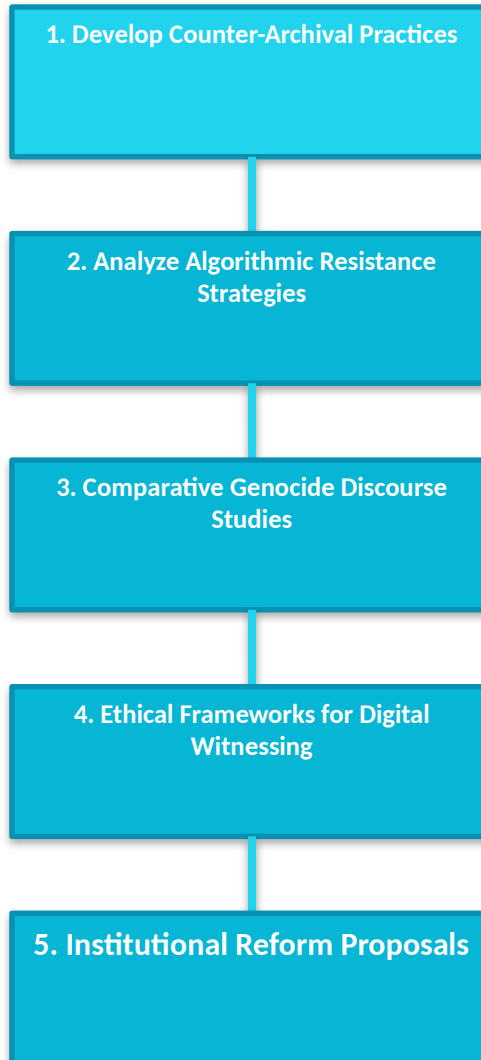
Witnessing Architecture

Analyzed contemporary witnessing caught between digital circulation and algorithmic censorship

Limitations & Methodological Challenges

- • Focus on institutional protocols may underemphasize grassroots resistance and alternative witnessing practices
- • Digital platform analysis limited by proprietary algorithms and non-transparent content moderation policies
- • Historical comparison with other genocides requires careful contextual specificity to avoid false equivalences
- • Language barriers in analyzing testimony originally in Arabic may introduce translation-mediated interpretations
- • Ethical challenges in studying traumatic testimony without re-traumatizing or instrumentalizing suffering

Future Research Directions



Conclusions & Implications

- Genocide definitional instability enables institutional erasure of Palestinian suffering
- Procedural absolution transforms legal frameworks into instruments of denial rather than justice
- The double bind systematically invalidates Palestinian testimony through impossible evidentiary demands
- Digital witnessing architectures simultaneously amplify and censor Palestinian lived experience
- Ethics of seeing must account for algorithmic mediation and institutional protocols shaping visibility

Key References

- • Lemkin, R. (1944). *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- • **Meiches, B. (2017). *The Politics of Annihilation: A Genealogy of Genocide*. University of Minnesota Press.**
- • **Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. University of Chicago Press.**
- • **Moses, A.D. (2021). *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*. Cambridge University Press.**
- • Tawil-Souri, H., & Aouragh, M. (2014). Intifada 3.0? Cyber Colonialism and Palestinian Resistance. *Arab Studies Journal*.
- • **Weizman, E. (2017). *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*. Zone Books.**
- • Abu-Lughod, L. (2013). *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Harvard University Press.
- • Said, E. (1979). *The Question of Palestine*. Vintage Books.

Thank You

For questions: alarsen@techinst.svart

Project Archive: witnessingunderfire.research