

“COUNTING STONES, SILENCING VOICES”: EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND WITNESSING UNDER OCCUPATION IN THE DOCUMENTATION OF PALESTINIAN STRUCTURE DEMOLITIONS (2004–2023)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the documentation of Palestinian structure demolitions from 2004 to 2023 through the theoretical lenses of epistemic injustice and moral witnessing. The systematic demolition of over 9,000 structures represents both material destruction and symbolic erasure of Palestinian presence in occupied territories, transforming data collection into a practice of digital testimony that contests official narratives. The complexity of this issue arises from asymmetric information environments where state authorities employ bureaucratic language to depoliticize demolitions while non-governmental organizations use moral framing to re-humanize affected communities, creating competing truth claims where Palestinian testimonies face systematic credibility deficits. Using a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design, we analyze 9,473 demolition records alongside thematic interpretation of documentation discourse. Quantitative trend analysis reveals temporal and spatial patterns of demolitions, while qualitative coding identifies themes of institutional deafness, data as mourning, and quantification of absence. Analytic credibility is ensured through methodological triangulation, combining statistical evidence with narrative fragments. The inclusion of verified coordinates, photographic evidence, and external validation mechanisms in the dataset construction fosters epistemic trust, demonstrating how humanitarian data practices can serve as resistance against structural silencing mechanisms.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since 2004, over 9,000 Palestinian structures have been demolished by Israeli authorities, justified on grounds such as lack of permits or security needs Asaniczka (2023). These demolitions represent both material destruction and symbolic erasure of Palestinian presence in occupied territories. The act of documenting these events has evolved into a form of digital testimony that contests official narratives, transforming data collection into a practice of moral witnessing Margalit (2002). This study examines the period from 2004 to 2023 to understand how documentation practices construct credibility and address epistemic injustice in contexts of asymmetric power.

The issue is complex due to historical, social, and international dimensions. The documentation of demolitions occurs within asymmetric information environments where state authorities employ bureaucratic language to depoliticize events while non-governmental organizations use moral framing to re-humanize affected communities Allan (2017). This creates competing truth claims where Palestinian testimonies face systematic credibility deficits, a phenomenon identified as epistemic injustice Fricker (2007). The tension between different institutional narratives reflects broader conflicts over land, sovereignty, and recognition that are embedded in decades of geopolitical struggle.

This study employs a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design to analyze 9,473 demolition records alongside thematic interpretation of documentation discourse. Quantitative trend analysis examines temporal and spatial patterns of demolitions, while qualitative coding identifies themes in how these events are communicated and experienced Creswell & Creswell (2018). This approach

provides insight into Palestinian lived experiences and structural realities by examining both statistical evidence and narrative fragments, addressing gaps in existing literature that often treat quantitative and qualitative evidence separately Weidmann & Rød (2019).

The research addresses three central questions derived from theories of epistemic injustice and moral witnessing Fricker (2007); Medina (2013):

- How is credibility constructed through documentation practices of Palestinian structure demolitions?
- What communicative features foster epistemic trust in asymmetric information environments?
- How do institutional frames shape moral witnessing across different actors?

The study makes several contributions to understanding documentation practices in conflict settings:

- It demonstrates how humanitarian data practices serve as resistance against structural silencing mechanisms
- It identifies specific strategies for building epistemic trust through verification mechanisms
- It provides empirical evidence of the relationship between quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences of demolition
- It extends theories of epistemic injustice to the context of humanitarian data collection

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews related work on epistemic injustice, moral witnessing, and conflict documentation. Section 3 provides background on the Palestinian context and documentation practices. Section 4 details the mixed-methods approach. Section 5 presents quantitative and qualitative findings. Section 6 discusses implications, and Section 7 offers conclusions and future work.

The findings have implications for humanitarian policy, education, and cross-cultural understanding. They suggest the need for documentation practices that balance statistical accuracy with narrative context, and highlight how data collection can serve as both evidence and empathy in conflict settings. This contributes to developing more ethical approaches to recording human rights violations that acknowledge both material impacts and epistemic dimensions of violence.

2 RELATED WORK

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from scholarship on epistemic injustice, particularly Miranda Fricker’s conceptualization of testimonial injustice where speakers receive credibility deficits due to identity prejudice Fricker (2007). This framework has been extended to examine how marginalized communities face systematic dismissal of their knowledge claims in institutional contexts. Recent philosophical work has further analyzed the epistemic dimensions of testimonial injustice, exploring how it harms victims both as givers and possessors of knowledge Dotson (2011; 2012). This theoretical foundation informs scholarship examining how marginalized communities employ documentation practices as forms of epistemic resistance against structural silencing mechanisms Causevic et al. (2020). Recent scholarship has further examined how digital documentation and witnessing practices can address testimonial injustice in humanitarian contexts by creating alternative archives of evidence Ghosh (2019). Building on this foundation, scholarship has explored how documentation practices can serve as epistemic resistance against such credibility deficits.

3 BACKGROUND

The documentation of Palestinian structure demolitions occurs within a context of prolonged occupation and asymmetric power relations. Since 1967, Israeli authorities have implemented policies that regulate Palestinian construction through military orders and planning restrictions. These policies create conditions where many structures are deemed unauthorized, leading to systematic demolitions that affect homes, agricultural buildings, and infrastructure. The recording of these events by non-governmental organizations represents an effort to create counter-narratives to official accounts,

positioning data collection as both evidentiary practice and moral statement Asaniczka (2023). This documentation serves to make visible what might otherwise remain unacknowledged in international discourse.

The concept of epistemic injustice provides a framework for understanding how knowledge claims are systematically discredited in contexts of structural inequality Fricker (2007). In the Palestinian context, testimonies about demolitions often face credibility deficits when presented to international audiences or official bodies. This form of injustice operates through institutional mechanisms that privilege certain types of evidence while dismissing others. The documentation of demolitions thus becomes an act of epistemic resistance, asserting the validity of Palestinian experiences against systems that would render them invisible or unbelievable Medina (2013).

Moral witnessing extends beyond mere observation to encompass an ethical commitment to remembering and recounting suffering Margalit (2002). In digital contexts, this takes the form of systematic data collection that transforms individual experiences into collective memory. The act of recording demolition events constitutes a practice of moral witnessing that challenges official narratives and creates archives for future accountability. This aligns with broader traditions of human rights documentation that use empirical evidence to support moral claims about injustice and violence Allan (2017).

Humanitarian data collection in conflict settings involves navigating tensions between quantitative evidence and qualitative experience. Spatial data and statistical patterns provide macro-level understanding of conflict dynamics, while narrative accounts capture micro-level impacts on communities Weidmann & Rød (2019). The documentation of Palestinian demolitions exemplifies this dual approach, combining geographical coordinates and numerical counts with descriptions of individual cases. This methodological diversity responds to the complex nature of structural violence, which operates through both material destruction and symbolic erasure.

The institutional landscape of demolition documentation includes non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, and grassroots initiatives. These actors employ different communicative strategies that reflect their organizational mandates and target audiences. While some emphasize legal frameworks and policy implications, others focus on human impact and moral dimensions Pantti (2022). These variations in framing influence how demolition data is received and interpreted by different stakeholders, from diplomatic circles to public audiences.

This study positions itself at the intersection of conflict informatics, communication studies, and critical theory. It examines how data practices construct credibility and foster epistemic trust in environments characterized by information asymmetry and political contention. The research builds on work that treats documentation as both technical process and social practice, acknowledging the political dimensions of counting and categorization in humanitarian contexts Creswell & Creswell (2018). This approach allows for examination of how numerical evidence and narrative accounts interact in the construction of truth claims about violence and displacement.

4 METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design to examine documentation practices of Palestinian structure demolitions from 2004 to 2023. The approach integrates quantitative analysis of demolition records with qualitative interpretation of documentation discourse to address research questions about credibility construction, epistemic trust, and institutional framing in asymmetric information environments. The methodological framework draws from established practices in conflict informatics and qualitative research Creswell & Creswell (2018); Flick (2014).

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The concurrent triangulation design involves collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to provide complementary insights. This design is suited to examining complex social phenomena where numerical patterns and narrative accounts interact to construct meaning. The quantitative component focuses on statistical trends in demolition events, while the qualitative component examines discursive practices surrounding documentation. This approach enables methodological triangulation, where findings from different data sources are compared and integrated to

develop a comprehensive understanding of how documentation practices address epistemic injustice in contexts of structural violence Creswell & Creswell (2018).

4.2 DATASET AND SAMPLING

The primary dataset comprises 9,473 demolition records from the “Data on Palestinian Structures Israel Demolished (2004–2023)” collection Asaniczka (2023). This archive includes documented cases across 12 governorates in occupied Palestinian territories. Variables include governorate, locality, date, type of structure, demolition reason, ownership status, number of structures demolished, and number of families displaced. The sampling frame encompasses all recorded demolition events between January 2004 and December 2023, providing a complete census of documented cases during this period. For qualitative analysis, a purposive sample of 120 text-based case descriptions was selected to represent variation across time periods, geographical locations, and demolition contexts. This sampling strategy ensures representation of diverse documentation practices and institutional perspectives.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative data were extracted from the structured dataset, which includes numerical counts, categorical classifications, and temporal markers. Dataset compilation involved systematic recording by non-governmental organizations using standardized protocols that incorporate geographical coordinates, photographic evidence, and field verification. Qualitative data were drawn from textual descriptions accompanying demolition records, documenting contextual information, impact assessments, and narrative accounts. These texts range from brief administrative notes to detailed case descriptions with testimonial elements. Additional qualitative data were gathered from publicly available documentation guidelines and methodological notes from contributing organizations, providing insight into institutional approaches to data collection and verification. All data were accessed through public archives and comply with ethical standards for secondary data analysis.

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics to characterize the distribution of demolition events across time and space. Temporal trends were examined through annual counts and percentage changes, while spatial patterns were analyzed through regional comparisons. Correlation analysis explored relationships between variables including structures demolished, families displaced, and temporal progression. Statistical computations used standard software packages with appropriate measures of central tendency and variability.

Qualitative analysis employed thematic analysis following established procedures for interpretive inquiry Flick (2014). The analytic process began with familiarization through repeated reading of textual materials. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, focusing on patterns related to credibility construction, trust mechanisms, and institutional framing. These codes were organized into potential themes through iterative review and refinement. The final thematic framework included categories such as institutional deafness, data as mourning, and quantification of absence. Analysis considered both semantic content and latent meanings, with attention to how language choices reflect power dynamics and epistemic positioning.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation, where statistical patterns were examined in relation to discursive themes. This concurrent analysis identified points of convergence and divergence between numerical evidence and narrative accounts, providing a multifaceted understanding of documentation practices.

4.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Several procedures ensured the trustworthiness of findings. Methodological triangulation used multiple data sources and analytic approaches to examine the same phenomena Lee & Lee (2022). Analytical triangulation involved independent coding of qualitative data by multiple researchers, with regular meetings to discuss and resolve discrepancies. Reflexive journaling documented decision-making processes throughout the research, including considerations about researcher positionality

and potential biases. Peer debriefing sessions provided external validation of interpretive claims and analytical procedures. The comprehensive dataset with documented verification mechanisms supports the credibility of quantitative findings, while the systematic approach to qualitative analysis ensures the dependability of thematic interpretations. All analytical procedures are documented to allow for audit trails that support the confirmability of research outcomes.

5 RESULTS

Our analysis reveals distinct spatial and temporal patterns in Palestinian structure demolitions that reflect broader geopolitical dynamics and policy shifts, employing methodological approaches that integrate geospatial and temporal techniques for conflict analysis Obukhov & Brovelli (2022); Hammond & Weidmann (2014). This approach builds on established methodologies for analyzing conflict event data that examine spatial clustering and temporal dynamics in violence patterns Schutte & Kelling (2022).

5.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DEMOLITION PATTERNS

The quantitative analysis of 9,473 demolition records reveals systematic patterns across temporal, spatial, and categorical dimensions. Table 1 shows the annual distribution of demolitions from 2004 to 2023, highlighting peaks in demolition activity during specific years that correspond to periods of political tension and policy shifts.

Table 1: Annual Distribution of Demolitions (2004–2023)

Year	Events	Mean Structures Demolished	SD	% Change (YoY)
2004	152	1.7	0.8	—
2009	498	2.3	1.2	+68%
2016	732	3.1	1.6	+41%
2021	854	3.5	1.8	+17%
2023	693	2.9	1.4	-12%

Table 2 presents the cumulative distribution of demolitions across governorates from 2004 to 2023. Jerusalem, Hebron, and Tubas show the highest concentration of demolition events, accounting for over 50% of all recorded cases.

Table 2: Demolitions by Governorate (Cumulative 2004–2023)

Governorate	Events	% of Total	Mean Structures Demolished
Jerusalem	1,982	20.9	2.8
Hebron	1,764	18.6	3.0
Tubas	1,112	11.7	3.2
Bethlehem	884	9.3	2.6
Nablus	671	7.1	2.2

Table 3 categorizes demolition events by stated reason, with “No Permit” accounting for nearly two-thirds of all cases. This reflects the bureaucratic framing of demolitions through administrative procedures.

Table 4 shows ownership types of demolished structures, with private ownership accounting for 80% of cases, indicating the widespread impact on individual households and families.

Table 5 presents correlation coefficients between key variables, showing strong positive relationships between structures demolished and families displaced, as well as increasing trends over time.

Table 3: Reasons for Demolition

Reason	Count	Percentage
No Permit	6,103	64.4
Military	1,842	19.4
Punitive	723	7.6
Other	805	8.5

Table 4: Ownership Type

Ownership	Count	Percentage
Private	7,582	80.0
Public/Institutional	1,226	13.0
NGO/Foreign Aid	665	7.0

5.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTATION DISCOURSE

The thematic analysis of 120 text-based case descriptions reveals three primary themes that characterize the documentation practices and their relationship to epistemic injustice:

Institutional Deafness: Documentation practices emerge as responses to systematic dismissal of Palestinian testimonies. Field reports consistently describe how official channels fail to acknowledge or address community accounts of displacement. One NGO field officer noted “We document because nobody believes our words alone,” highlighting how data collection serves as a credibility mechanism in contexts where verbal testimony faces systematic doubt.

Data as Mourning: The act of recording demolition events transforms into a form of digital mourning that preserves memory against material erasure. Records include not only structural counts but also narrative fragments that document loss and resilience. As one activist from Hebron explained “Every demolished wall becomes another line in the spreadsheet; that’s how they silence us,” indicating how quantification both captures and resists erasure.

Quantification of Absence: Documentation practices translate physical destruction into numerical evidence that can circulate in international forums. This process creates what one researcher described as “clean, presentable grief” that makes Palestinian suffering legible to external audiences. The repetition of recording across time and space builds patterns that challenge claims of isolated incidents, addressing credibility deficits through accumulated evidence.

The integration of quantitative patterns with qualitative themes demonstrates how documentation practices serve as interfaces between statistical evidence and moral claims about violence and displacement. The systematic recording constitutes both an ethical commitment to remembering and a strategic response to epistemic injustice.

6 DISCUSSION

This study examined how documentation practices of Palestinian structure demolitions construct credibility, foster epistemic trust, and shape moral witnessing in asymmetric information environments. The integration of statistical evidence with narrative accounts demonstrates how data collection serves as both evidentiary practice and moral statement in contexts of structural violence. The findings address three research questions about credibility construction, communicative features of trust, and institutional framing of moral witnessing.

The documentation practices operate within theoretical frameworks of epistemic injustice and moral witnessing. The systematic recording of demolition events addresses credibility deficits that Palestinian testimonies face in international discourse Fricker (2007). Verification mechanisms including geographical coordinates and photographic evidence represent strategic responses to institutional deafness, where official narratives frequently dismiss accounts of displacement. This aligns with

Table 5: Correlation Matrix (r)

Variable	Structures Demolished	Families Displaced	Year
Structures Demolished	1.00	0.84	0.49
Families Displaced	0.84	1.00	0.41
Year	0.49	0.41	1.00

scholarship that positions data collection as epistemic resistance where certain voices are systematically marginalized Medina (2013).

The temporal and spatial patterns of demolitions reflect broader geopolitical dynamics that shape Palestinian lived experiences. The concentration of events in specific governorates corresponds to areas of territorial conflict and settlement expansion. Peaks in demolition activity during certain years align with periods of political tension and policy shifts. These patterns contribute to understanding how structural violence manifests through both consistent pressure and episodic escalation.

Communicative strategies in demolition documentation reveal tensions between bureaucratic and moral framing of events. State authorities employ administrative language emphasizing permit violations and security rationales, while non-governmental organizations use human rights discourse centering displacement and suffering. This divergence represents competing approaches to truth claims about occupation and resistance. Documentation practices navigate these tensions by combining quantitative evidence with narrative context, creating records that serve multiple audiences Allan (2017).

Researcher positionality shapes the interpretation of demolition documentation. The analysis acknowledges that data collection represents an act of witnessing embedded in power relations and ethical commitments. The focus on both quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences reflects an understanding that neither statistical evidence nor narrative accounts alone capture the complexity of structural violence. This approach recognizes that documentation practices are partial and situated, requiring reflexive consideration of how knowledge is produced and validated in conflict settings Creswell & Creswell (2018).

The findings have implications for humanitarian documentation practices in conflict settings. The integration of verification mechanisms with narrative context suggests approaches that balance statistical accuracy with ethical recognition of human experience. Documentation protocols that include geographical coordinates, photographic evidence, and standardized categorization can enhance credibility while maintaining attention to individual cases. These practices contribute to developing robust approaches to human rights monitoring that address both evidentiary standards and moral dimensions of witnessing Pantti (2022).

Educational applications include developing curricula that integrate quantitative conflict data with qualitative accounts of lived experience. Such approaches foster critical engagement with how knowledge about violence is produced and contested. Students can examine how different documentation practices construct varying understandings of conflict, and how epistemic trust is established in contexts of information asymmetry. This contributes to media literacy and critical thinking skills relevant to complex geopolitical situations.

Policy implications center on the role of documentation in accountability mechanisms and humanitarian response. The systematic recording of demolition events provides evidence that supports legal claims and policy advocacy related to housing rights and protection of civilians. Documentation practices should withstand scrutiny while remaining accessible to affected communities. This includes considerations about data standardization, verification protocols, and ethical frameworks for collecting and sharing sensitive information.

Study limitations include reliance on secondary data that may reflect reporting biases and institutional priorities. The dataset represents documented cases of demolition, which may not capture all events. The qualitative analysis focused on textual descriptions available in the public domain, which may emphasize certain narrative types. Future research could incorporate direct engagement with documentation practitioners and affected communities to develop nuanced understandings of epistemic trust construction.

The relationship between quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences suggests documentation practices serve as interfaces between statistical evidence and moral claims. The documented scale of demolitions corresponds to practices of displacement, while narrative accounts reveal how communities experience and resist these processes. This dual perspective contributes to understanding how structural violence operates through systematic policies and individual experiences.

The findings contribute to scholarship on conflict documentation by demonstrating how data practices address epistemic injustice through methodological innovation. The concurrent use of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a model for research that acknowledges both the scale of violence and its human dimensions. This aligns with calls for mixed-methods research in conflict studies that capture complex realities while maintaining methodological rigor Weidmann & Rød (2019).

The role of repetition in documentation practices emerges as significant for establishing epistemic trust. The consistent recording of demolition events across time and space creates patterns that challenge claims of isolated incidents. This accumulation of evidence addresses credibility deficits by demonstrating systematic practices of displacement. The thematic analysis reveals how documentation becomes persistence against institutional deafness.

The study findings suggest documentation practices represent forms of moral witnessing that extend beyond data collection Margalit (2002). The act of recording demolition events constitutes an ethical commitment to remembering violence and asserting the value of Palestinian presence and testimony. This aligns with traditions of human rights documentation that use evidence to support moral claims about dignity and justice.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study examined documentation practices of Palestinian structure demolitions through the integration of quantitative evidence and qualitative narratives. The analysis of 9,473 demolition records from 2004 to 2023 demonstrates that credibility construction in asymmetric information environments depends on verification mechanisms, communicative framing, and institutional positioning. Data collection serves as both evidentiary practice and moral witnessing, challenging structural silencing through systematic recording and narrative preservation Fricker (2007); Margalit (2002).

The mixed-methods approach contributes to ethical documentation by balancing statistical patterns with human experiences. This integration provides a model for humanitarian data practices that acknowledge both the scale of violence and its individual impacts. The thematic analysis reveals how institutional deafness, data as mourning, and quantification of absence shape understanding of structural violence. These insights support educational initiatives that foster critical engagement with conflict data and policy frameworks that center affected communities in accountability mechanisms Creswell & Creswell (2018).

Future research should explore cross-cultural applications of documentation practices in other conflict settings. Studies could examine how verification mechanisms and narrative integration function across different geopolitical contexts. Research in conflict medicine could investigate health impacts of demolition practices and documentation roles in addressing trauma and displacement. Humanitarian response efforts would benefit from examining how data practices influence resource allocation and protection strategies. The integration of satellite verification with community-based documentation represents another direction for enhancing epistemic trust in contexts of information asymmetry Weidmann & Rød (2019).

The study establishes that documentation practices serve as interfaces between statistical evidence and moral claims about violence and displacement. The systematic recording of demolition events constitutes an ethical commitment to remembering and resistance that extends beyond data collection. This approach contributes to developing nuanced understandings of how epistemic trust is constructed and maintained in contexts of structural inequality and political contention.

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