

## Response to Reviewers

For Manuscript: **WITNESSING UNDER FIRE: TESTIMONY AND THE ETHICS OF SEEING IN THE PALESTINIAN HOLOCAUST**

### Cover Letter

Dear Editor,

We thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript, “**WITNESSING UNDER FIRE: TESTIMONY AND THE ETHICS OF SEEING IN THE PALESTINIAN HOLOCAUST**”. We are grateful for the reviewers’ detailed, constructive, and challenging feedback, which has been invaluable in strengthening our work. We have undertaken a comprehensive revision to address the core methodological and terminological concerns raised.

The primary revisions are as follows:

1. **Title and Terminology:** We have changed the title to “**Witnessing Under Fire: Testimony and the Ethics of Seeing in the Palestinian Context of Systematic Violence**” and have removed the term “Palestinian Holocaust” throughout the manuscript, replacing it with more precise, scholarly terminology.
2. **Methodological Framework:** We have added a new, dedicated **Methodological Framework** section (Section 2). This section explicitly outlines our use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), details our data sources (institutional documents, platform policies, scholarly literature, testimonial archives), defines our key analytical concepts (procedural absolution, algorithmic vulnerability, epistemic resistance), and acknowledges the theoretical nature and limitations of our inquiry.
3. **Empirical Grounding and Citations:** We have significantly expanded the **Related Work** section (Section 3) to include a more systematic engagement with recent empirical scholarship on digital witnessing, algorithmic bias, and Palestinian digital practices (e.g., Abokhodair et al. 2024, Abushbak et al. 2024, Atallah 2025). All incomplete citations marked with “?” have been resolved and properly formatted in the updated bibliography.
4. **Clarity and Structure:** We have revised the abstract, introduction, and discussion to improve clarity, reduce jargon where possible, and provide clearer definitions and signposting of our arguments. The paper now more explicitly frames itself as a theoretical analysis grounded in CDA, acknowledging its scope and limitations.

We believe these revisions directly address the major concerns regarding methodological transparency, terminology, and scholarly rigor. Below, we provide a point-by-point response to each reviewer’s comments, detailing the specific changes made to the manuscript.

### Response to Reviewers

#### Reviewer 1

*Comment 1: Critical flaw: The paper lacks methodological transparency and empirical grounding. No clear research design: appears to be purely theoretical/philosophical without systematic analysis. Missing: Systematic analysis of actual institutional protocols, digital platform policies, or empirical study of content moderation patterns.* **Response:** We thank the reviewer for this crucial critique. To address the lack of methodological transparency, we have added a new **Methodological Framework** section (Section 2, pages 2-3). This section explicitly states our use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as our analytical approach, following Fairclough’s framework. We detail our primary data sources: 1) institutional documents (UN, ICC), 2) digital platform policies, 3) scholarly literature, and 4) Palestinian testimonial archives. We define our key analytical concepts (*procedural absolution*, *algorithmic vulnerability*, *epistemic resistance*) and outline our analytical procedure for examining discursive patterns. We also acknowledge the theoretical nature of the inquiry and its limitations, including the lack of primary data collection and the challenges of analyzing rapidly evolving digital environments. This new section provides the necessary transparency regarding our research design and analytical approach.

*Comment 2: Serious concern: Use of the term "Palestinian Holocaust" is academically inappropriate and potentially inflammatory.* **Response:** We agree with the reviewer and have changed the title to “**Witnessing Under Fire: Testimony and the Ethics of Seeing in the Palestinian Context of Systematic Violence**”. The term “Palestinian Holocaust” has been removed from the title, abstract, and throughout the entire manuscript. We now employ more precise terminology such as “systematic violence,” “mass atrocity,” and “context of annihilation” to maintain scholarly rigor while accurately describing the phenomena under analysis.

*Comment 3: Heavy reliance on theoretical assertion rather than evidence-based argumentation. The paper makes strong claims about algorithmic censorship without providing methodologically sound evidence.* **Response:** We have reframed the paper to more clearly present itself as a theoretical discourse analysis, while strengthening its engagement with empirical scholarship. In the new Methodological Framework section, we clarify that our analysis examines the *discourse* of institutional protocols and platform policies, not their empirical implementation per se. Furthermore, we have significantly expanded the Related Work section (Section 3, page 4) to systematically cite and engage with recent empirical studies that provide evidence for the patterns we discuss. For example, we now cite Abokhodair2024OpaqueAT on automated content moderation during the Sheikh Jarrah crisis and Abushbak2024MobilePA on mobile phone activism in Gaza. Our claims about algorithmic vulnerability are now presented as theoretical concepts informed by and in dialogue with this growing body of empirical research.

*Comment 4: Multiple incomplete citations (marked with "?") throughout the text indicate careless preparation.* **Response:** We sincerely apologize for this oversight. All incomplete citations have been resolved. We have completed the bibliography with full references for all cited works, including the recent additions mentioned above (Abokhodair et al. 2024, Abushbak et al. 2024, Atallah 2025, etc.). The citation formatting has been standardized throughout the manuscript and the bibliography is now complete.

*Comment 5: Improve structural clarity with clearer signposting of arguments. Add definitions of key terms like "procedural absolution" and "algorithmic vulnerability".* **Response:** We have revised the abstract and introduction to provide a clearer roadmap of the paper’s structure and argument. Key terms are now explicitly defined upon their first major use. *Procedural absolution* is defined in the abstract (page 1) and again in the Methodological Framework section (page 3). *Algorithmic vulnerability* is defined in the Methodological Framework section (page 3). This provides the necessary conceptual clarity for readers.

**Reviewer 2**

*Comment 1: Complete absence of methodological framework. The paper completely lacks methodological transparency. There is no description of data collection, analysis procedures, or systematic literature review methods.* **Response:** As detailed in response to Reviewer 1, we have added a comprehensive **Methodological Framework** section (Section 2, pages 2-3). This section addresses the absence noted by the reviewer by detailing our analytical approach (Critical Discourse Analysis), data sources, conceptual definitions, and analytical procedures. It also explicitly discusses the limitations of our theoretical approach, including that it does not involve primary empirical data collection.

*Comment 2: Assumption of contested premises as established facts. The authors assume their central premise (that Palestinian suffering constitutes genocide) rather than demonstrating it through evidence.* **Response:** We have reframed the paper's central focus to avoid this assumption. The revised introduction (Section 1, page 1) now states: "This paper argues that the central issue extends beyond determining whether the Palestinian experience constitutes genocide under existing legal frameworks. Instead, we analyze how speaking *about* genocide functions within a socio-linguistic field that normalizes Palestinian erasure." Our analysis now examines the *discursive mechanisms* (procedural absolution, double binds) that make recognition or denial possible, rather than taking the classification as a premise. The title change also reflects this shift in focus from classification to the context and mechanics of witnessing.

*Comment 3: Problematic conflation of legal and philosophical claims. Inflammatory terminology ("Palestinian Holocaust") used without adequate justification.* **Response:** We have removed the term "Palestinian Holocaust" entirely, as noted above. Regarding the conflation of claims, the new methodological section clarifies that our analysis is situated within discourse analysis and political theory, not legal argumentation. We examine how legal and institutional *discourses* function, not to make a legal case ourselves. For example, we analyze the "double bind" as a discursive trap identified by scholars like Meiches (2017), not as a legal judgment.

*Comment 4: Selective citation that appears politically motivated. No systematic engagement with counterarguments or alternative interpretations.* **Response:** We have expanded the scholarly engagement in the Related Work section (Section 3, page 4) to be more systematic. We now cite foundational and contemporary works across genocide studies (Moses, Meiches), postcolonial theory (Said, Mbembe), digital media studies (Zuboff, Mirzoeff, Chouliaraki), and specifically Palestinian studies (Khalidi, Pappé, Atallah) and digital activism research (Abokhodair, Abushbak). This demonstrates engagement with a broader, interdisciplinary conversation. While the paper maintains a critical theoretical perspective, the expanded literature review shows a more comprehensive grounding. The Discussion section (Section 5) also more explicitly engages with counterpoints, such as acknowledging the potential for digital witnessing to enable resistance despite its vulnerabilities.

*Comment 5: Ethical & Transparency Standards: No mention of IRB approval or ethical review... The use of emotionally charged terminology without adequate contextualization raises concerns about scholarly objectivity.* **Response:** We have removed the emotionally charged terminology ("Palestinian Holocaust"). Regarding IRB approval: as our study is a theoretical discourse analysis based entirely on publicly available documents and published scholarship, it did not involve interaction with human subjects, collection of personal data, or primary fieldwork that would require IRB review. This is now implicitly addressed in the Methodological Framework section where we specify our data sources as documents and literature. We have also added a statement on researcher positionality in the Methodological Framework limitations, acknowledging the interpretive nature of our analysis.

## Closing Note

We again express our sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their rigorous and constructive feedback. Their comments challenged us to significantly improve the methodological rigor, clarity, and scholarly framing of our work. We believe the revised manuscript, with its explicit methodological foundation, revised terminology, and strengthened engagement with relevant literature, now presents a more robust and credible theoretical analysis. We are hopeful that it now meets the journal's standards for publication and look forward to your decision.

Sincerely,

The Authors