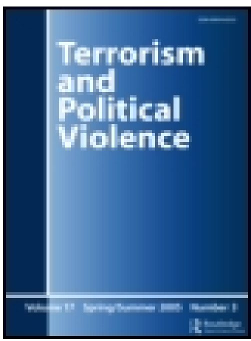

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Palestinian Social Media and Lone-Wolf Attacks: Subculture, Legitimization, and Epidemic

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the impact of social media on the wave of Palestinian lone-wolf attacks against Israelis from October 2015 through September 2016. My principal argument is that social media played an important role in shaping the identity, perceptions, and behavioral patterns of dozens of assailants, and was key in creating the dynamic that ultimately characterized both the spreading of the idea of lone-wolf attacks and its execution. Social media reflected reality on the ground while simultaneously nourishing, amplifying, and escalating the situation by providing a platform for the emergence of new sources of authority, including an online subculture with distinct codes and pseudo-ritual patterns to support assailants. Social media also contributed substantially to shaping the contagious character of the attacks, and their capacity to persist without direct organizational guidance, following a typical epidemiological dynamic of spread, containment, and preservation.

KEYWORDS
Social media; lone wolf; terror; subculture; epidemiology

On Saturday night, October 3, 2015, a young Palestinian named Muhannad Halabi stabbed to death Aharon Bennett and Nehemia Lavi in the Old City of Jerusalem. This attack marked the beginning of a wave of lone-wolf attacks that deviated from the patterns of previous violent outbreaks of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first and second Intifadas reflected a widespread popular uprising, in which large sections of the population took part on a large scale. The wave of lone-wolf attacks, however, reflected the direct participation of a relatively small and particular demographic, and did not appear to be backed by a broad Palestinian consensus.[1] Also, contrary to the Intifadas, the Palestinian political organizations showed minor, even negligible direct involvement in the latest wave of violence. The choice of targets appears to be yet another difference. The suicide bombers of the second Intifada typically targeted Israeli civilians, whereas 53% of the lone-wolf attacks targeted Israeli security forces, and 28% targeted civilians (2% of attacks targeted both, and 17% were thwarted before the target was definitely categorized).[2] In other words, this particular wave of violence was not an Intifada in its historical meaning.

As of September 2016, 330 Palestinian individuals have perpetrated more than 280 attacks, most using knives or motor vehicles. The median age of these lone wolves was 20, and the average age 21.6, with numerous attackers in their early teens.[3] Although assailants' chances of surviving were considerably lower than inflicting significant harm—especially since most targeted armed security forces—the attacks persisted, bewildering both Palestinians and Israelis. The number of victims killed was 43; more than 160 perpetrators—nearly 50%—were

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killed.[4] The overwhelming majority of assailants acted independently, appearing to infect each other with seemingly hopeless missions. Despite the difficulty of maintaining the violence without practical support or guidance from any organization, these lone-wolf attacks continued at varying levels for many months. The curious reality sparked debate regarding the extent of the impact mobilizing content on Palestinian social networking sites (SNS) had—or did not have—on the violence.

This article examines how SNS influenced the identity, perceptions, and practices of Palestinian assailants, and how they affected the characteristics and structure of this wave of lone-wolf attacks, particularly its proliferation and persistence without an apparent guiding hand. The core argument is that while SNS are not responsible for the fundamental motives for the attacks, social media simultaneously reflected and shaped reality by nourishing and amplifying it in a way that ultimately had a decisive impact on structuring its dynamics. The mechanism by which this took place is twofold. First, the growth of online communities in recent years has offered assailants alternative sources of legitimacy to the traditional authority of families and political organizations. Indeed, assailants took action as individuals. However, their interaction with their online peers indicates that they viewed themselves as envoys of collectives that supported them rather than as lone wolves. The emergence of online communities as sources of legitimacy stemmed from the Palestinians' distinct social and political circumstances. Equally important, however, it reflected global trends such as the expansion of social media, diffusion of power of traditional hierarchies, and the emergence of a new generation sharing similar distinct traits. In other words, the setting is Palestinian but the emergence of influential online communities also mirrors wider, universal circumstances.

Secondly, SNS enabled the concept of lone-wolf attacks to spread virally in a dynamic, which, I argue, is analogous to epidemics, and manifests in two patterns. The first is the epidemiological structure of contagion, outbreak, containment, and low-grade continuity that allowed the attacks to continue for an extended duration, despite the lack of organizational support. The second is the clustering of attacks. Both patterns rely on the structural characteristics of SNS and the emergence of an online subculture supporting the assailants. Using an inner language that reflected perceptions, symbols, and pseudo-ritual codes, this subculture helped in both disseminating the idea of perpetrating attacks, as well as shaping their particular patterns of action. The discourse within the online supporting subculture reveals that many assailants' decision to attack was not made on a whim or in a fit of frenzy, but was rather the last phase of an extended process. Here too, the findings extend beyond the Palestinian case to the overarching way in which social media can shape perceptions, and serve as a mobilization tool for lone-wolf terrorism.

This empiric study contributes to the discourse that has been ongoing, particularly since the Arab Spring, regarding social media's ability to recruit and mobilize individuals to collective political action. Three main streams make up this discourse. The first is often referred to as cyber-optimist, and includes thinkers such as Shirky, Castells, Hussain & Howard, and Tremayne, who, among other things, attribute novel, even revolutionary powers of recruitment to social media. [5]The second, dubbed cyber-pessimist, includes Gladwell, Morozov, Fuchs, and Brym et al., who maintain that social media's ability to mobilize is limited.[6] Nestled between the two poles are the cyber-realists, among them Lutz et al. and Earl et al., who acknowledge the influence of SNS but argue that their advent does not necessitate new theoretical frameworks.[7] Additional empiric research in recent years, such as that of Wolfsfeld et al. and Margetts et al., does not reconcile the

dispute but presents a complex relationship between social media and existing political conditions.[8] Similar divisions exist in public and semi-academic discourse regarding the role of SNS in the Palestinian lone-wolf attacks. One side maintains that SNS hold a key role in the violence, while the opposite voice argues that SNS merely reflect reality rather than shape it, and that the motives driving attacks must be sought in the fundamental circumstances of the Israeli occupation, as well as vengeance and other personal causes.[9] This article further enriches existing research, as well as the particular discussion of the recruiting capacities of SNS, by contributing to the body of knowledge about lone-wolf attacks at large,[10] and specifically to the particular intersection between SNS and lone-wolf attacks,[11] a little-examined angle within the abundant literature on the Internet and terrorism in general.[12]

Against this backdrop, the assumption underpinning the article is seated between the cyber-optimists and the realists. On one hand, as both streams agree, social media has indeed profoundly influenced and empowered many spheres of life, including political mobilization among Palestinians. On the other, we must take into account that in many cases, SNS can serve as a shock absorber for those who are satisfied with online protest, instead of taking it to the street and acting on it. Also, accepting the argument that SNS have had a powerful effect does not dictate optimism about their long-term impact, especially with regards to hastening democratization. SNS is a tool that serves any master skilled enough to utilize it to his benefit. Turkish President Erdogan used SNS to save his authoritarian rule during the attempted coup of July 2016. ISIS and its horrific and efficient use of the medium offers another stark example. In addition, the cyber-realists' argument that the advent of SNS does not necessitate new theoretical frameworks is somewhat conservative, as it seems that the broad impact of social media does in fact require new frameworks of understanding, as this study offers. This brings me to my critique of the debate regarding the role of Palestinian SNS in the lone-wolf attacks: focusing on mobilizing content highlights only one perspective of their broad influence. Nevertheless, viewing SNS strictly as an extension of traditional media is an equally narrow approach. The interactivity of social media creates social arenas and erodes old hierarchies' top-down control of information and political power, which now spread from the bottom up, amplified by SNS. These fundamental differences make SNS a potent force in shaping reality.

The study is anchored in the field of contemporary Middle Eastern history and studies, combined with concepts from network theory and communication studies. Most empirical data was collected from daily monitoring of major Palestinian SNS during 2015–2016. Using numerous primary sources, I studied more than two dozen assailants whose online activity it was possible to reconstruct—a time-sensitive challenge, as most pages were deleted immediately after the attack.[13] In addition, I examined the assailants' interaction with hundreds of members in their online communities, thus providing wider context on the assailants and their supporting subculture. [14]

The first section of the article presents the processes that led to the emergence of online Palestinian communities. In the second, I analyze the wave of lone-wolf attacks as an epidemic-like phenomenon. The third explores the characteristics of the assailant support subculture and the "conceptual virus" that expedited the attacks' contagion. The fourth explains the evolution of the SNS sphere into a new source of legitimacy for assailants. The fifth and final section analyzes the phenomenon of the clustering of attacks.

Online communities

The growth of Palestinian online communities over the last decade stems from local social and political processes as well as global ones, in particular the emergence of SNS. To begin with, this process is contingent on the generally broad internet penetration. In 2016, there were approximately 1.7 million internet users in the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem[15] (figures exclude the Gaza Strip, largely extraneous to the wave of lone-wolf attacks),[16] representing 58% of the population.[17] The overwhelming majority of these—1.2 million—used Facebook, making it the most popular social networking site. More than half of these Facebook users—684,000, or 56%—were between the ages of 13 and 24.[18] According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, 70.7% of the West Bank population is in the 15–29 age group, meaning that most young people in the West Bank use Facebook. Furthermore, 90% of West Bank Facebook members use smartphones as their primary internet device,[19] indicating that online content is easily accessible, despite the lack of a 3G network. Two-thirds of Palestinians express concern that their internet activity is under surveillance,[20] which may be assumed to impact their online visibility.

The foundation for the growth of online communities is the trust members place in virtual connections. From a network theory perspective, trust derives from the frequency of iterations on the network, and the volume of content transmitted.[21] A comprehensive Palestinian survey indicates intensive daily activity of young Palestinians on SNS in 2015. Ninety-six percent of respondents stated that they used Facebook primarily as a source of news, and 94% used it chiefly to communicate with friends. Only 15% turned to Facebook primarily for pure entertainment.[22] These figures reflect the high level of iterations and content transmission that build trust in both SNS platforms and content. The uses cited as most popular—news and communication—are particularly relevant to offline activities, including political action.

The high number of Palestinians seeking news on SNS would not be particularly meaningful if they were turning to mainstream outlets or professional news sites. However, respondents appeared to shun the established media, which they perceive as biased, and prefer news agencies self-described as non-partisan and objective (see below).[23] The overall decline of traditional media is particularly interesting in this context, considering its mobilizing role during the first and second Intifadas, when it offered the organizations an effective means of disseminating their message widely and uniformly.[24]

Young Palestinians' trust in virtual relationships developed simultaneously with an inverse process of erosion in power of traditional collective focal points of authority, particularly that of the political organizations. The inability of the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) to deliver the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been considered a failure, and many Palestinians have despaired of both. Moreover, "the resistance" (*al-muqawama*), the militant alternative promoted by Hamas, has also failed to resolve the Palestinian problem. This disappointment reflects in Israeli prisons, where 14% of the total 6500 Palestinians jailed for hostile activity against Israel refuse to identify with any political movement. This is a fairly new phenomenon, and more prevalent among the young guard of prisoners. More than half of these unaffiliated prisoners were arrested during the wave of attacks that began in October 2015, which underscores the politically independent nature of the incidents, and suggests that this is a widening trend, at least among the younger demographic.[25]

Additional social processes both local and global, such as the growth of alternative information sources and individualism, compound the political changes of recent decades.[26] From satellite television in the 1990s to today's online abundance, new channels of information have diffused the power of traditional information brokers including authorities, religious leaders, and familial elders, and eroded their monopoly on knowledge,[27] the principal asset anchoring their social authority.[28] Hilal argues that individualization processes stemming from the neoliberal economic structure adopted by the PA also caused collective frameworks to give way to the preference of personal interests. [29]

Conversely, the growth of online communities shows that Palestinian youth still crave belonging to a collective; however, they prefer to choose their community themselves, and even create it. Indeed, key to the appeal of online communities is the autonomy they offer, easing young people's subordination to traditional frameworks to allow them connections of their own choosing. This freedom to create alternative communities is particularly important in the Palestinian context because of SNS' capacity to bridge geographic, social, gender, and political divides. Many studies stress the importance of community early in life, when individuals develop their own identity through identifying with their surroundings.[30] Particularly relevant to the Palestinian case is Hammack's observation that individuals within weakened groups are motivated to strengthen the bond between their identity and communal ideology because of the external threat to the collective identity, which is essential to the development of the individual identity.[31] Within the surrounding community, contemporaries and peers are particularly influential.[32] This is an inherent advantage of online communities, which, as Barker notes, often reflect a generational peer group of adolescents with substantial mutual influence. [33]

Palestinian cyberspace is home to hundreds of online communities, ranging in size from a few dozen members to millions, and in focus from hyper-local to global. Some cater to a common area of interest, such as *Ask Jerusalem*, which cultivates Palestinian knowledge about the city; others focus on collective action, such as returning the bodies of assailants held by Israel.[34] There are also dozens of online communities for specific localities, such as *The Social Place of al-Fawar Refugees Camp*, or *The Discussions of the Boys and Girls of Hebron and Ramallah*.[35]

Other communities orient towards the Palestinian national and Diaspora spheres. The two largest pan-Palestinian online communities are the al-Quds News Network (*Shabakat Quds al-Ikhbariyya*)[36] and the Shihab Agency (*Wikalat Shihab*), each with approximately six million followers, only one quarter of whom are Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel.[37] Neither openly admit political affiliation and both present themselves as professional news agencies but in practice, they serve as platforms for exchanging opinions and sharing information. These two major hubs serve as what social sciences refers to as gatekeepers of information, and are dramatically larger than other nodes on the Palestinian SNS-based information network. As such, they wield considerable influence in determining what content is promoted, and which disappears.[38] This power actively shapes the media agenda and reflects political clout,[39] which had a definitive impact on the lone-wolf attacks, as shall be demonstrated further.

Frequent iterations enhance the trust and sense of collectivity in online communities, as is evident from their ability to mobilize significant collective action in real life. On November 16, 2015, a local Facebook group for the Qalandia refugee camp organized riots against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops preparing to demolish the home of Mohammad Abu-Shahin, who murdered the Israeli Danny Gonen. With military efficiency, organizers assigned tasks to

the camp youth by neighborhood and location and instructed them which weapons to use, all online.[40] IDF forces entering the camp indeed encountered fierce opposition. [41]These events reoccurred on July 3, 2016 when troops returned to demolish the homes of another two assailants. The same Facebook page served as a real-time war room that organized and coordinated the violence, which resulted in clashes and the death of two young Palestinians.[42] Additional and more complex facets of online impact on the physical realm will be addressed in the discussion of the subculture that aided the bottom-up epidemic spread of the lone-wolf attacks.

Epidemiology

The PA doesn't want this, the [political] parties don't want this, even the populace doesn't want it, but there are children here, and every night each one of them thinks about doing something like this tomorrow and doesn't ask anyone. . . . We don't understand how this happened. . . . This started 6 months ago and almost each one learned from another. [43]

Borrowed from the field of medicine, the term "epidemic" is often used generically. However, its theory has been studied by a wide range of disciplines and applied to address a variety of phenomena from contagious diseases to the spread of fashions or proliferation of ideas.[44] Classical models of epidemic or viral phenomena describe the progression of an epidemic in four principal stages, starting with a moderate change and early adoption, and advancing to a critical mass and peak before waning. This model forms a Gaussian bell curve that reflects a symmetrical structure.[45]

Network theory has since proposed an alternative epidemic model that does not produce a symmetrical bell curve. Barabási demonstrated that many online and conventional networks are characterized by a scale-free structure, which produces a curve that declines more moderately than its initial growth. This creates a "long tail," representing both the slow taper of the epidemic as well as the residual and latent presence of the virus that harbors possible re-eruption. This structure applies equally to social epidemics and computer viruses, as well as biological ones.[46] The most important aspect of the scale-free structure is the function of major hubs/gatekeepers. If they do not exploit their many contacts to disseminate the virus, it will not achieve epidemic proportions.[47]

Two additional factors necessary for the outbreak of an epidemic are a small, unexpected change that serves as a catalyst and makes the virus contagious, and the existence of a platform, a context in which to thrive. The unexpected change can be a mutation in a biological virus, adding a new feature to a product's design, or a minor incident in a loaded political situation. [48]Such was the case in December 1987, when a traffic incident in which an Israeli truck struck Palestinian laborers ignited the first intifada. In December 2010, the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi sparked a revolution in Tunisia that spread to become the Arab Spring. On SNS, content can become contagious due to a change in presentation or format. When the video documenting the beheading of James Foley by ISIS in August 2014 became viral because of its shocking, pornographic nature, ISIS realized it had found the right formula to promulgate its content. This video also triggered a change in the apathetic attitude of Western decision-makers towards the war in Syria.[49] Given that the small change that serves as a catalyst is unexpected, it naturally follows that the epidemic it can ignite cannot be predicted in accurate terms either.

The third and final condition is the existence of a context, or a biological, physical, social, political, or other platform on which the epidemic can spread. The diffusion of SNS provided a platform that significantly amplified the spread of viral content. In 2002, journalist Daniel Pearl was beheaded in front of a camera. This reverberated widely, particularly throughout traditional media, but lacked the power to spread as quickly and as widely as the video of Foley's execution, primarily because there were no SNS. To view the video of Pearl's execution, one needed first to learn of the incident, which was not available through the passive consumption now offered by shared content on SNS. Then, one actively needed to search for it online, as traditional media withheld the graphic segments, thereby impeding its viral potential. The massive connectivity of SNS enabled the Foley video to spread far more widely and more rapidly.

The tipping point of the lone-wolf attacks

The stabbing attacks perpetrated separately by Muhannad Halabi and Fadi ʻAloun on the night of October 3, 2015 marked a turning point that would turn the lone-wolf attacks into an epidemic phenomenon within 10 days. After Halabi and ʻAloun served as instigators, three developments transpired to make it contagious. First, a critical mass of violent activity was reached. Next, a "conceptual virus" appeared, born of the overall body of content within the supporting subculture that shaped the assailants' image, rationale, and legitimization. The ultimate stage was the spreading of this "virus" by the key hubs of SNS that set a belligerent tone and combative discourse.

Attempts to stab Israelis were not uncommon before the wave of lone-wolf attacks. Between January and August 2014 such attacks ranged from zero to two a month, or one incident on a monthly average. However, in August and September 2014, incidents already increased to three a month, most likely against the backdrop of Operation Protective Edge (July–August) and other incidents, such as the July murder of a Palestinian teenager by Jews in apparent revenge for the murder of three Israeli teenagers. Indeed, between September 2014 and September 2015, the rate of lone-wolf incidents was higher than before. These generally ranged from one to five a month, with the exceptions of six incidents in November 2014 and seven in August 2015, or 3.33 on a monthly average.[50]

One such attempted attack occurred just the day before Halabi's attack, and yet both Palestinians and Israelis regard Halabi as the individual who sparked the recent wave of lone-wolf attacks. This emphasizes the difficulty in predicting epidemiological occurrences in accurate terms. There are two reasons for this perception. First, Halabi's action was "successful" in that it resulted in two slain Jews, thereby breaking a stagnation of failed attacks. Secondly, he used his Facebook page to shape his own image and guarantee the legitimization of his acts after his death.[51] The page drew wide public attention, as visitors, especially peers, used it to learn about his personality and messages. Halabi became instantly famous, and a model for imitation.[52] ʻAloun received similar attention, despite inflicting lesser harm to his victim before being shot dead. His Twitter account and Facebook page were the main sources of his fame; pictures revealed a handsome young man, who devoted great attention to personal impression management on SNS. [53]

The critical threshold was crossed the following week, when attacks sharply spiked to 22, and continued to soar throughout October to a total of 64. This decreased to 42 in November and 40 in December, and stabilized at a monthly average of 25 from January to March 2016.

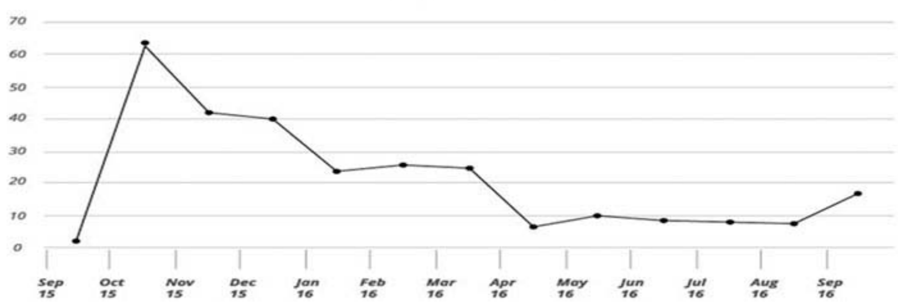

Figure 1. Sources of data—Israeli General Security Service, ITIC, Hamas.

From April to August, numbers dropped to 7–10 attacks a month. In other words, the wave of lone-wolf attacks clearly demonstrates (Figure 1) a scale-free structure, beginning with a sharp increase and declining into the "long tail" illustrating the continued, low-level persistence of the "conceptual virus," i.e., the idea of the lone-wolf attack (to be discussed). This structure also empirically reflects the independence of the separate incidents. Arguably, a guiding hand would have produced a more balanced curve, illustrating an organization's desire to control timing and maintain a consistent level of violence. Indeed, this was a leaderless violence that spread like wildfire in the first stages, and then declined and smoldered.

Like a biological epidemic or an internet virus, [54]ideas existing in cyberspace can re-erupt. Castells maintains that many of the protest movements organized online in the past decade cannot be eradicated because they are primarily an idea, not a classic organization. He borrows from botany the term *rhizomatic* to describe these movements because of their ongoing horizontal growth, which remains largely undersurface until the next outbreak.[55] The connection between an idea's capacity to persist online and subsequent outbreaks explains the dynamics that characterize Palestinian lone-wolf attacks, too. SNS did not invent the concept of resistance to Israel, but they heightened the idea's viability and continuity based on a contagion dynamic that helped potential assailants realize the extent of support for attacks and even synchronize their actions, as will be discussed further on.

Parallel to the epidemic of attacks that erupted in October 2015, a viral militant discourse took over Palestinian SNS, replacing the moderate tone that prevailed in earlier months. In keeping with the epidemic dynamic,[56] the major hubs/gatekeepers of Palestinian SNS mobilized to disseminate militant content to an unprecedented extent with multiple reiterations. Dozens of posts, images, and videos were published every hour. In the borderless cyberspace, non-Palestinian hubs also contributed occasionally, sharing Palestinian content to pages with exceptionally high numbers of followers, exponentially increasing the spread.[57] Analytical data from Twitter providing the main hashtags associated with the violent events during the first four months offers an illustration of the structure of spread of militant discourse. Fluctuations in discourse around tags such as *#al-intifada mustamira* ("The Intifada Continues") and others exhibit an epidemic scale-free structure similar to that of the attacks themselves (Figure 2). The purpose of these graphs is to provide an overview of the rise and decline of combatant discourse at the same time lone-wolf attacks took place. However, one should not expect to find a statistical connection between fluctuations of discourse and events on the ground. As stated in the study's core argument, the relation between SNS and events on the

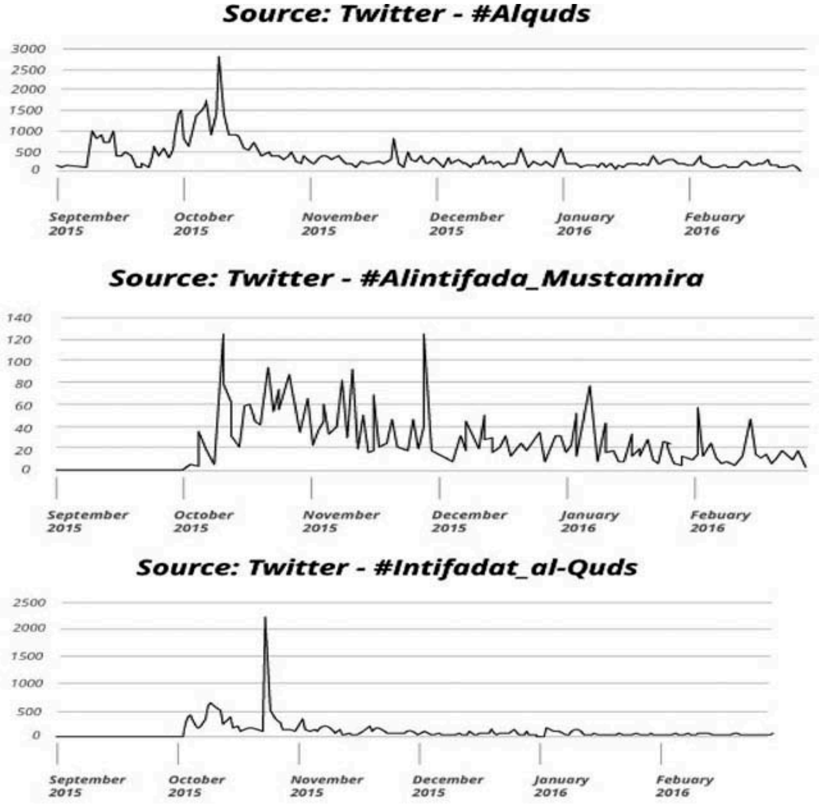

Figure 2. Source—Twitter (absolute numbers).

ground is a two-way street: SNS reflect events and react to them, and at the same time fuel and shape them as well. In such bilateral relationships, it is very difficult to establish a statistical connection that is solid enough to allow generalization. Moreover, fluctuations in the graphs of events or of the discourse may be influenced by unrelated variables. While the graph of events can certainly be influenced by factors irrelevant to the online sphere, fluctuations in the discourse graph might be caused, for example, by migration of the discourse on lone-wolf attacks from one hashtag to another. Such migration may account for fluctuations in use of the *#al-intifada mustamira* hashtag, although it generally retains its scale-free structure.

Nahon and Hemsley note the intrinsic relations between viral ideas on SNS and creating an atmosphere that influences the field. All viral content begins with an individual decision to share it, and the potential to influence perceptions and behavior is inherent to this interaction. Although social practices and norms are generally slow to change, the connectivity and rapid propagation of SNS hubs can accelerate change by virally disseminating models of desirable behavior.[58] In such situations, even if the majority of the population does not support attacks, people are more likely to remain silent than risk being ostracized for expressing a minority opinion. [59]

This is even truer for ideas already present among groups or subcultures, such as the Islamic notion of martyrdom (*istishhad*). Such pre-existing ideas already enjoy a basic level of legitimacy, [60]but are propelled to dominate the discourse after becoming viral. In addition to underlying cultural acceptance, quantitative feedback on SNS such as the number of likes or

shares, demonstrate that an idea does have support. By exposing individuals to the perceptions and activities of others, SNS both legitimize viral content, and encourage others to join. A young Egyptian visiting the Facebook page "We are all Khalid Sa'id" before the revolution in 2011 would have seen that around 300,000 people were planning to demonstrate in Tahrir Square, and think chances of the demonstration affecting change would grow if they were to attend too.[61] Known as the "information cascade," this dynamic motivates individuals to follow the actions of others even when it contradicts their original opinion.[62]

The assailant support subculture and the "conceptual virus"

For the lone-wolf attacks to become an epidemic, they needed not only the support of major hubs/gatekeepers but also the two other conditions described by Barabási, Nahon, and others. An adequate context was already in place—resistance to Israel. Still lacking, however, was a change that would update this idea and tap into the organizations' weakness, the complex identities and anti-establishment tendencies of the youth, and, most importantly—propel it into virality. This change came with the emergence of a grassroots subculture, complete with an inner language that formulated the logic of the lone-wolf attacks, and transformed it into a viral concept.

A salient feature of social media is its ability to bridge physical divides and provide a tangible sense of community to supporters of a particular ethos. An inner language and symbols unique to a given subculture or imagined community are key in generating this feeling. The connectivity of SNS allows very rapid formation of such a language. It took ISIS supporters only a few months to develop a virtual *lingua franca* that included both verbal as well as nonverbal codes (the ISIS flag, images of smiling corpses, green birds, and more). These helped overcome language and culture gaps, and allowed transmitting messages without using explicit language that might endanger the user.[63]

The subculture supporting Palestinian lone wolves also evolved rapidly to the point where its verbal and nonverbal codes were understood by young users consuming its viral content. Nonverbal communication included emojis for expressing moods, both those common online as well as others specifically meaningful to the supporting subculture, such as knives, pistols, hearts, and fingers showing the V-sign (victory). Other nonverbal content involved images such as posters depicting a young person wearing a helmet shaped like the Dome of the Rock with the hashtag *#intifadat al-Quds* or hands dripping blood and drawings of famous attacks. Undoubtedly, the most important symbol is the knife. It became an icon glorified as a simple yet powerful weapon, embodying the assailant's mental strength to negate the enemy's military and technological advantage, and ridicule its fears. This is not an entirely new idea, but rather an updated rendition of a key component of "the resistance" doctrine of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other militants. [64] Since 2014, ISIS has been a primary agent of iconizing the knife. Concern that identifying Palestinians with ISIS would undermine the Palestinian cause prompted Palestinian commentators to caution against glorifying the knife as a symbol. [65]

The inner language of supporters also includes explicit or veiled verbal content, which integrated into popular culture. Such is the song "Longing for Stabbing" (*'Ushaq al-T'an*), written after the attack by Mohammad Ali al-Miqdad in October 2015, praising his actions and calling for more stabbings to defend the Al-Aqsa Mosque.[66] Published on YouTube and various SNS, the song quickly became a hit in the West Bank. The following month, still at the height of the attacks, the Palestinian News Agency *Ma'an* published an extensive feature on similar

potentially inspiring songs.[67] Another hallmark of the inner language is the "Ten Commandments for any *Shahid*," written by Bahaa 'Allyan, who killed four passengers on a Jerusalem bus in November 2015. The post, in which he asked that his death not be appropriated by political organizations, became viral, and a widely quoted code.[68]

Patterned phrases such as "We shall live like proud hawks and die like upright trees," "Count me dead," and other variations offer a more subtle form of verbal content.[69] Another feature of verbal expression is the monologue, in which aspiring assailants "correspond" with a *shahid*, both glorifying him and hinting at their own intentions. The martyrs appearing in this context were mostly well-known assailants from the recent wave of attacks, such as Muhannad Halabi, Mohammad Milhem, and Bahaa 'Allyan, although more obscure figures were addressed occasionally. The mock-correspondence allowed potential assailants to introduce themselves in tandem with their role models and a quasi-chain of "authorities" (*isnad*). This reiterates the authenticity of the value of *istishhad* and serves the assailants' quest to share the legitimacy of their predecessors. This is essentially an adaptation of the "convoy of martyrs" (*qafilat al-shuhada*), a longstanding Muslim notion that new martyrs join their forerunners to move towards a shared goal. [70]

Other verbal codes change frequently, obliging Palestinian security to monitor closely and scramble to keep up, according to Ashraf al-'Ajrami, a former Palestinian official.[71] Israeli officials are less open about the measures taken to counter the lone-wolf attacks. However, current official reports suggest Israel has studied closely—and efficiently—the advance online activity of potential assailants, including their inner language, starting in early 2016. According to recent reports, by April 2017, this monitoring led to the identification of 2200 Palestinians who were in various stages of preparing lone-wolf attacks. Israel arrested 400 of these and passed on the names of another 400 to the PA to investigate. Israeli security authorities attribute an eventual decrease in the number of attacks to this activity, as well as to a decline in motivation on the part of potential assailants themselves, given the high risk of death compared to the low chance of success.[72] Either way, the figures reveal the extensive involvement of SNS, upon all its various actors, in the preparatory stages of lone-wolf assailants.

"Like" it or not: Online communities are a source of legitimacy

In addition to reinforcing the sense of community, protecting its members, and making the concept of attacks contagious, inner language also served to legitimize the potential assailant. This both underscores the emergence of online communities as a source of authority in light of the ongoing erosion of traditional hierarchies, and illustrates the complex identity of young Palestinians seeking both individuality as well as a collective of their own choosing. The collective component of this complex identity, as well as the discourse assailants engaged in with their online communities, indicates that they themselves did not necessarily perceive themselves as lone wolves, but as envoys of collectives that support them.

Seeking legitimization on SNS is not exclusive to Palestinians, or to aspiring assailants. The very idea of accumulating "likes" is ultimately about legitimacy, self-affirmation, and social affirmation. Legitimization is a subjective concept. Many assailants engaged in dialogue with their environment, while others favored monologues and unilateral declarations. Most were not politically affiliated, and often voiced anti-establishment sentiment. Some made religious claims and others nationalist statements, while others yet merged the two. Studies examining the

relationship between personality traits [73]and online activity found that high levels of extroversion and openness correlate with a tendency to use SNS.[74] Others demonstrate a link between specific personality traits and goals such as social acceptance and impression management.[75] Either way, the essential objective of an assailant's declaration of intent on SNS is to secure legitimacy—whether before or after the fact.

A key question at this point is why assailants regard online communities as an intimate enough environment for sharing their intentions. Most likely, the answer lies in the tendency of social media users to envision all members of their imagined virtual communities as similar people sharing the same opinions, with little regard for others reading their posts. These users have in mind "their" community only, and it is from them alone they seek legitimization.[76] Aspiring assailants are no exception to this general behavior.

In January 2016, 18-year-old ʻAbada Abu Ras was apprehended after stabbing two Jews in Jerusalem. His Facebook feed showed extensive use of the inner language of the supportive subculture, particularly the emojis listed above. Around 6 weeks before taking action, he wrote "#I yearn for an event that will take my life," alongside images of a bloodied hand and a knife. The hashtag, a cross-platform nod to Twitter, apparently reflected Abu Ras' desire to contribute a new coined phrase to the inner language. Two weeks prior to the attack, he posted a coined phrase used by previous assailants: "I don't need things that come from people. I need things that come from heaven, like the *shahada*." Appearing to emulate Muhannad Halabi, Abu Ras repeatedly posted Halabi's picture with icons of knives and hearts. Two days before attempting to join the "convoy of martyrs," Abu Ras uploaded a poster of a masked assailant brandishing a knife, with the caption "Stabbing has special meaning."[77] The many encouraging comments hailing Abu Ras a hero [78] indicate the codes he employed to announce his intentions were deciphered correctly.

On February 18, 2016, Omar al-Rimawi and his friend Ayham Subih, both 14, stabbed to death Yanai Wisman and injured another Israeli at a shopping center. Al-Rimawi's Facebook activity reflects disregard for political movements but a deep commitment to the national-religious collective. He shared militant posters, used symbols and phrases typical of one anticipating death, praised martyrdom, and chose the *shahid* Ibrahim Daoud as his role model. Among the many supportive commenters was Subih, who would soon cross the virtual divide to become Al-Rimawi's partner in the attack.[79] Here too, the positive responses to al-Rimawi's posts show that his inner language was properly decoded by supporters.

On March 8, 2016, 22-year-old Fouad Abu Rajab was shot dead after firing towards a policeman. Unlike Abu Ras and al-Rimawi, Abu Rajab did not engage in dialogue with others on social media, and stuck to unilateral declarative rhetoric. Like other assailants, he shunned the PA and was politically unaffiliated. On SNS, he voiced admiration for well-known assailants and often shared images of famous attacks.[80] Just hours before attacking, Abu Rajab posted verses from the Quran that conveyed his desire to die. His last action online was sharing[81] the "Ten Commandments," of Bahaa ʻAllyan.[82]

In June 2016, 18-year-old Mohammad Tra'ayra murdered Hallel Ariel, a Jewish girl five years his junior. Tra'ayra's Facebook page reflected the complex identity that integrates sheer individualism with a strong commitment to the collective: his posts emphasized his personal rights—including that to take his own life—while highlighting his commitment to the national collective. "There are many reasons, but there is only one death," he wrote on March 28. On May 3, he uploaded a poster of a dying person, hooked up to monitors, and wrote: "My dream

is simple—a hospital, a bed, and the doctor saying 'we've lost him.'" Later that month, Tra'ayra wrote, "Death is a right and I demand my right." The assailant-in-the-making used additional methods of voicing his message and declaring intent. In mid-March, he posted praise of his cousin Yusuf Tra'ayra, also 18, who had previously attempted a vehicular attack. On June 25, following the death of Majd al-Khadour, a woman from his village who carried out a vehicular attack the previous day, Tra'ayra shared posters from the online "#brave sister" campaign that encouraged women to take part in the attacks.[83] Tra'ayra's political awareness was as sharp as his rejection of any establishment and any political affiliation.[84]

Facebook is not the only platform that is used to create online communities that support lone-wolf assailants, a fact that illustrates the versatility and flexibility of the media. For example, on March 20, 2017, the Israel Police announced it revealed a WhatsApp group of Palestinians from Jerusalem and the West Bank named "The Road to Heaven." Among other things, such as sharing religious content, this online community was used for encouraging lone-wolf assailants. A week before, Mahmud Ibrahim, a member of the group, was killed after stabbing two police officers in the Old City of Jerusalem. Based on the information and conversations stored on the assailant's smartphone, the police exposed the group and arrested 18 of its members.[85]

The question whether the assailants acted spontaneously or as the last phase of a longer process persists. However, the discourse assailants engaged in with their online communities for weeks, even months prior to the attacks, suggests decisions were not made in a fit of frenzy.

Clustering of attacks

An intriguing phenomenon of the lone-wolf attacks is the way in which they often clustered in short time periods, generally on the same day. This clustering is closely linked to the epidemiological characteristics of the attacks, and to social media. The summary of attacks in the first month of the violence wave, October 2015, showed that clusters of at least two attacks occurred on 19 days out of 31.[86] In November, cluster occurrences dropped to 12 days, followed by nine in December, seven in January, six in February, five in March, and only one in April. After a lull in May, a single cluster of two attacks occurred on one day in June. Two more occurred in August, and September marked a sharp spike to five clusters.

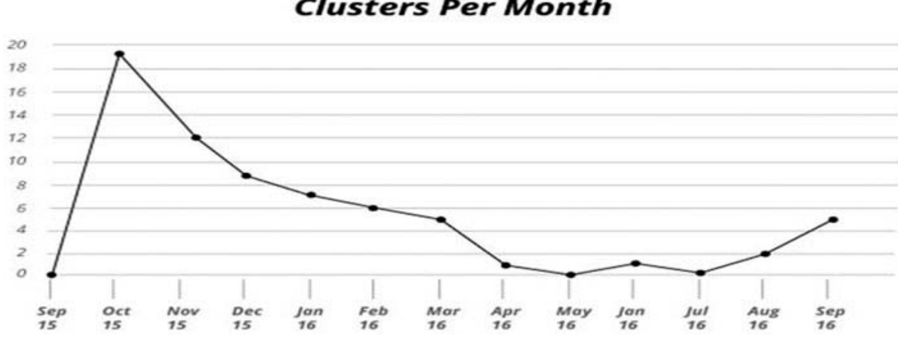

Figure 3. Sources of data—Israeli General Security Service, ITIC, Hamas.

These numbers produce a curve (Figure 3) that illustrates the same kind of scale-free epidemic structure that characterizes both the attacks (Figure 1), and the proliferation of militant discourse on SNS (Figure 2). This is a somewhat surprising finding. Generally, the more attacks occur, the higher the probability of clusters forming. However, unless the number of attacks exceeds the number of days available in any given month, this is not a mathematical certainty. Otherwise, the attacks could have been distributed in any number of ways, and yet, clusters did occur—and in a general scale-free structure that is not coincidental. Observers often attribute the clustering to a copycat effect, but this alone does not explain the phenomenon. Another common explanation argues that imitation attacks were driven by a quest for revenge. While many undoubtedly were, [87]this fails to explain why assailants such as Raghed and Firas al-Khadour attacked in clusters weeks, sometimes months after the incidents they sought to avenge. [88]Therefore, I propose two different causal factors.

Synchronization without coordination

The first factor is synchronization,[89] which is how an assailant times the attack, consciously or otherwise, without coordinating with other assailants. Here too, SNS are key. Social media responds swiftly to events and relates them to a massive audience, thus notifying potential assailants of attacks almost in real time, allowing them to synchronize their actions. SNS also enable assailants to ride the wave of publicity generated by the previous attack, thus playing a double role.

After 5 months of relative calm with a monthly average of 7–8 incidents, Israelis were jolted by a cluster of five attacks on September 16, 2016, and an additional four clusters in the following days. This abrupt outbreak demonstrates the rhizomatic nature of the epidemic, meaning its potential to re-erupt and break the “long-tail” pattern of the scale-free epidemic structure when circumstances facilitate it.

As one Palestinian official noted, Israelis might have been less surprised by the re-eruption of attacks had they been aware of the storm raging on social media.[90] Palestinian cyberspace was seething over images of a dead teenager, ʻAbd al-Rahman Dabbagh, who was killed in an altercation with Israeli soldiers on September 9, and of six-year-old Lama Musa, who was killed in an accident with an Israeli motorist the following day. On September 15 another teenager, Mohammad Sarahin, was shot dead when IDF soldiers tried to arrest him.[91] These consecutive incidents appeared to amass to a critical threshold of public rage, which was amplified by the two major information hubs, *Quds al-Ikhbariyya* and *Shihab*, and translated into a militant discourse. In early September, few posts on these sites focused on mobilizing attacks, but on September 10, these increased to several every hour, primarily disturbing posthumous images of Dabbagh and Musa, and later of Sarahin too. As reports began to arrive of lone-wolf attacks on September 16, the two hubs increased such posts to dozens hourly. These included translated headlines from Israeli media expressing fear of renewed escalation, and posters of Sarahin and Musa alongside new assailants such as Firas al-Khadour and Said ʻAmru (see image), thus making the immediate connection between the “crimes” and their inevitable “punishments.” [92] A potential assailant seeing such posters hailing the fresh *shahid*s could regard this as a preview of the promised glory he or she would enjoy if they were to act on their plan right now.

Uncoordinated synchronization was evident also in the sequence of five lone-wolf attacks that struck in Orlando, Paris, Nice, Ansbach, and Rouen between June 12 and July 26, 2016. Presumably, the proximity of these events was not coincidental, but rather the result of

#Image | 4 martyrs have risen during the Eid Al-adha
blessed because of the occupation.
#Martyrs _ Eid
Translated from Arabic

Image: Facebook page of Shabakat Quds al-Ikhbariyya, September 16, 2016.

uncoordinated synchronization between assailants claiming to identify with ISIS.[93] The year before, a cluster of attacks occurred in Paris, starting with the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices on January 7, and continuing over the next 2 days with the killing of a policewoman and the attack at the Hypercacher supermarket. According to the French investigators, Amedy Coulibaly, who perpetrated the last two of the three attacks, was driven by an overwhelming desire for publicity and fame.[94] In 2008, he held the lead role in a widely publicized underground reality video filmed in Fleury-Mérogis prison.[95] Coulibaly timed his attacks to follow that on Charlie Hebdo, and even demanded the release of the assailants, although it seems he was not acquainted with them.[96] Thus, coordination had consequences beyond timing.

It seems that more than a few of the Palestinian lone-wolf attackers craved fame, and perceived themselves as reality stars of sorts. As such, there would be little sense in striking when public attention was focused elsewhere. The first four-day hiatus after five solid weeks of lone-wolf attacks by Palestinians came in November 2015, immediately after the Paris

attacks on the Bataclan Theater and elsewhere on November 13. Single attacks resumed in Israel on November 18, and clusters 2 days later.[97]

Clusters were formed on particular days not only by the dynamic of the attacks themselves but also by other events widely reported on SNS. Ahmad Manasra, only 13, became a social media star after perpetrating an attack in Jerusalem, but it wasn't the attack itself that made him so popular. To dispel rumors the teen was executed, Israeli authorities released a video from Manasra's police investigation. At one point in the video, he responds to a question, saying "I don't remember." [98]Driven by the main Palestinian SNS hubs, the video rapidly went viral. The hashtag "#don't remember (*mush mutadhakir*) was launched to praise Manasra for not cooperating with his investigators.[99] The morning after the video was released, a cluster of two attacks occurred in Jerusalem, one of them by two 13-year-olds, like Manasra. Many Palestinians believed these attacks came in direct response to the video. [100]

Legitimacy and social proof: Lone-wolf attacks and the Werther effect

The second cause of the appearance of clusters derives from a contagious dynamic in which the mere knowledge of attacks is perceived by potential assailants as legitimacy for their own future actions. As noted, their ultimate decisions are probably not spontaneous, but rather the result of a process that relies, *inter alia*, on the supporting subculture, which regards *istishhad* as a legitimate option. To better understand the psychological mechanism behind this perception, it is useful to compare the lone-wolf attacks with a different kind of epidemic: suicide. The basis for comparison is twofold. First, suicide is a well-documented social epidemic bearing the same hallmarks and dynamics of other epidemics. In addition, many Palestinians do in fact regard these attacks as a form of personal suicide that takes place in a political context. [101]

After years of steadily increasing, suicide rates in the West Bank dropped in 2015, according to an official Palestinian report. [102]One explanation for a somewhat surprising decline during a particularly difficult year for Palestinians is that some people who might have committed suicide anyway decided to end their lives by perpetrating an attack, thereby entering a different statistic. Evidence for this was found in numerous cases, including Israa 'Abed who was recognized as psychologically unstable, [103]Yasmeen Tamimi, whose engagement was broken off the evening before, [104]and 13-year-old Bara 'Awis, shot after behaving suspiciously at an IDF checkpoint, who said afterwards that she had "come to die."[105] The number of intended suicides out of the total of lone-wolf assailants depends largely on how suicide is defined. To use Durkheim's distinctions, some assailants were motivated by anomic (social isolation) or egotistical (narcissistic) reasons, while others acted for altruistic ones. Durkheim defined all the above subtypes as having suicidal tendencies, [106]but if we tally only the cases in which assailants acted out of personal distress, the figures will naturally be lower.

As with any epidemic, suicide has contagious characteristics. To describe these, Phillips coined the term the "Werther effect" after the jilted protagonist of Goethe's 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which allegedly prompted a wave of suicide among readers of the period. The reason for suicide epidemics can be personal distress, as seen in cases from the United States, Great Britain, and Micronesia, but also collective distress, as in Tunisia or among the Inuit of Canada. [107]Past suicide epidemics also showed that media played a central role in spreading them.

Suicide during an epidemic is often apparent in its pseudo-ritual form, employing the inner language of a particular subculture in various ways, such as the means of suicide. In several

suicide epidemics documented in the US between the 1940s and 1960s, the method of choice was crashing a motor vehicle. In Micronesia during the early 1980s, it was a very particular style of hanging. When Mohammad Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia in December 2010, the images spread rapidly over SNS and sparked not only the Arab Spring but also hundreds of self-immolations throughout the Middle East.[108] If the actions of lone-wolf assailants are, *inter alia*, suicides, then the knife and motor vehicles used for ramming victims have pseudo-ritual significance within the subculture supporting the attacks. This also often manifests in the way assailants chose to avenge the death of a relative. Majd Khadour, for example, was killed while carrying out a vehicular attack in June 2016. Three months later, her sister Raghed and cousin Firas chose the same means and location for their attempt, which came as part of the cluster of September 16. [109]

The subcultures supporting suicide are often comprised of young people, and in this context too media plays a decisive role in shaping the epidemic. As with the Palestinian "Longing for Stabbing" song, the inner language of the suicide epidemic in Micronesia infiltrated popular culture through songs, graffiti, and symbolic fashion accessories.[110] A study of 135 suicide attempts in England found that many belonged to the same social groups in which self-harm was recognized as a means of communicating messages. From these and other examples, researchers concluded that suicide is integral to the inner language of subcultures which already legitimize the act. While most Palestinians consider suicide (*intihar*) a prohibited act, certain groups within that society consider martyrdom (*istishhad*) one of heroism. According to Merari, the Palestinian suicide bombers of the second Intifada (2000–2004) drew their support from their micro-social unit (or subculture), rather than from society at large.[111] From this perspective, the norms supporting *istishhad* may be viewed as the cultural baggage affirming the final step as a viable, legitimate option.[112] At this stage, only the catalyst is missing.

This is where the second cause of cluster attacks comes into play, and similarly creates clusters within a suicide epidemic. Wheeler explained the contagiousness of social behavior as a matter of suggestibility or social proof. Witnessing an individual who engaged in controversial behavior and was not punished makes it easier for a person leaning towards similar behavior to overcome inhibitions holding him back.[113] Suggestibility is the foundation of the claim that suicides can catalyze future cases.[114] Essentially, this is no different from the decision to take forbidden action such as running a red light or vandalizing public property only because one sees other violators, and thus the legitimacy to follow their example.

The widespread assumption that Geothe's novel led to a suicide epidemic was never researched in depth. Assuming it did, this provides the first example linking suicide clusters and locales with effective mass media. In his research on suicide in the U.S., Phillips found that suicide rates increased immediately after newspapers reported on a suicide. The most famous examples occurred after the death of Marilyn Monroe.[115] In Tunisia, at least 107 cases of self-immolation (and many more across the Middle East) were reported in the 6 months after Bouazizi's iconic act of desperation.[116] Monroe, Bouazizi, and other well-known suicides share an additional similarity with the lone-wolf assailants in the inspiration they provided for others. The much-publicized deaths of Muhannad Halabi, Fadi ʻAloun, Bahaa ʻAllyan, and others both inspired and catalyzed those who followed. Several comprehensive quantitative studies have found that the very awareness of famous suicides reinforces the legitimacy of suicide within vulnerable communities. [117]

Conclusion

SNS are not responsible for the fundamental motivation of the Palestinian lone-wolf attacks during October 2015–September 2016. However, it is unlikely that the particular dynamic of this wave of violence would have unfolded as it did without their involvement. SNS are more than just another means of communications, they are the platform on which new social arenas arise and contribute to the deep changes already underway in Palestinian society. These processes include sharpening the distinctiveness and increasing individualization of the young generation, the erosion of traditional sources of authority, and the burgeoning of online communities that serve as new sources of authority.

Palestinian cyberspace is largely shaped by a handful of key information hubs with the power to impose militant discourse. Thus, social media is also responsible for the unprecedented dissemination of content that is violent, demonizing, and otherwise mobilizing. Social media feeds on events on the ground, but also nurtures and intensifies them. It is the arena in which the inner language of the supporting subculture takes shape, and the one to which assailants turned for legitimacy. Social media played a critical role in transforming lone-wolf attacks into a social epidemic with continuity and the potential to re-erupt, even without the guidance or support of traditional political organizations. Blurring the boundaries between cyberspace and the street, SNS contribute to particular traits of the lone-wolf attacks, particularly their contagion and clustering. Another pivotal role of the SNS, albeit less addressed in this context, is the way it conveys Israel to young Palestinians. Unlike the older generation, the young demographic has little firsthand knowledge of Israel and is particularly susceptible to the negative images SNS choose to stress, once again underscoring their political strength.

These factors have redefined attributes of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in a way that renders terminology such as "Intifada" unsuitable and ultimately counterproductive to understanding how this outbreak differed from previous confrontations. Understanding these changes must go beyond recognizing the influence of new technology, and necessitates viewing events in their broader global social, cultural, and political context. This particular brand of escalation is Palestinian but it shares roots with other changes sweeping the Middle East of the Arab Spring. It is also linked to global shifts such as the rise of a young generation with new perceptions of the individual and collective, a general disdain for establishment, and other characteristics that are often difficult for the surrounding society to decipher. At the same time, SNS form the sphere that facilitates the existence of subcultures and imagined communities. These, despite their vague boundaries, have proven sufficiently meaningful and solid to affect individual and group actions.

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Notes

1. According to JMCC in March 2016, 53% of the Palestinian opposed the lone-wolf attacks: www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=70201
2. Data refers to October 2015–December 2016 and were processed according to the data collected by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center: http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/Terrorist_Attacks
3. *Walla*, March 18, 2016; *Haaretz*, April 1, 2016.
4. Calculated upon the data of Israeli General Security Service reports, October 2015–October 2016: www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Reports/Pages/default.aspx; cf. Hamas annual report for 2016: http://palestine.paldf.net/uploads/pdf/hassad2016/hassad2016.pdf (accessed January 16, 2017).
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12. For example: Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2006); Maura Conway, "Terrorism and the Internet: New Media-New Threat?," *Parliamentary Affairs 72*, no. 2 (2006): 283–298; Jytte Klausen, "Tweeting the Jihad," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 1 (2015): 1–22; Moran Yarchi et al., "Promoting Stories about Terrorism to the International News Media," *Media, War & Conflict* 6, no. 3 (2013): 263–278; James P. Farwell, "The Media Strategy of ISIS," *Survival* 56, no. 6 (2014): 49–55.
13. In addition to the attackers' original accounts I collected many primary sources from the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), publications of the Israel police spokesperson's office, and articles in Arabic and Hebrew that published direct quotations of materials in their original languages.
14. According to Israeli officials, monitoring social media activity in 2016 led to the arrest of 137 Palestinians and thwarted 134 attacks: *Ynet*, November 15, 2016: www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4878452,00.html; *Israel Channel 10*, July 3, 2016: www.ifat.com/InfoBuzzerItemPage/?resourceId=7178746&appUser=0

15. www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm#me (accessed March 16, 2016).
16. The Gaza Strip is surrounded by the security fence and unlike Jerusalem or the West Bank, there is no Israeli presence in its territory.
17. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Yearbook of Palestine, 2016," www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/1/default.aspx
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