

Emancipation and Collaboration: A Critical Examination of Human Rights Video Advocacy

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between political freedom and collaboration in the work of human rights organizations. I focus here on the ethical and political implications involved in the production of evidence once the documenting tool, the camera, is in the hands of an engaged civilian rather than a bystander, such as a photojournalist. By examining cases in the Occupied Palestinian Territories where the Palestinians are the photographers of human rights violations, I outline the relations and tensions between emancipatory acts and collaboration via visual information production. Human rights organizations laud new technology and celebrate the participation of those afflicted by such violations in knowledge production as a form of empowerment, and those afflicted may experience the visual practice as a mode of self-representation. But inevitably such a practice is based on collaborative action. In the Israeli/Palestinian conflict case study below, such collaboration has negative effects, which impinge upon the emancipatory features of this mode of documenting.

Keywords

B'Tselem, collaboration, emancipation, human rights, Israel/Palestine conflict, video advocacy, visual evidence

On 28 August 2015, during one of the weekly Nabi Saleh village demonstrations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Bilal Tamimi, a local resident, filmed an Israeli soldier attacking a member of the Tamimi family, an 11-year-old boy (Figure 1).¹ In the video, the soldier is shown aggressively trying to arrest Muhamad Tamimi, who allegedly threw stones during the demonstration. During the attempted arrest, the boy's family beat the soldier, struggling to free Muhamad from his grip. At the end of the video, the soldier is seen leaving the site, defeated and

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Figure 1. Nabi Saleh Saleh demonstration, 28 August 2015. Photo: Bilal Tamimi.



Figure 2. Tel Rumeida, Hebron, 24 March 2016. Photo: Imad Abu Shamsiyeh.

empty-handed.² Several months later, on 24 March 2016, Imad Abu Shamsiyeh, a Palestinian resident of Hebron, recorded the Israeli soldier Elor Azaria aiming his weapon at Abd a-Sharif, an injured Palestinian, and shooting him (Figure 2).³ According to media reports, a-Sharif and Ramzi al-Qasrawi were shot after stabbing a soldier. Ramzi was killed instantly; a-Sharif was lying injured on the ground when Azaria fatally shot him. The video of Abu Shamsiyeh prompted the Israeli military

police to launch an investigation of the incident. Azaria was charged with manslaughter and convicted.⁴

Unlike most documentations of human rights violations visited on Palestinians, these videos captured the public's attention. Widely circulated in the media, they gave rise to debates in Israel and elsewhere. The videos were filmed by Palestinian civilians – non-professional photographers who are members of the community whose human rights were violated. They form part of a documentary project by B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization that operates in the OPT. The organization distributes cameras to Palestinians so they can record violent events and incidents of harassment at the hands of Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers.⁵ Among the violations recorded are military home invasions,⁶ restrictions on movement,⁷ house demolitions,⁸ instances of unlawful detention,⁹ and assaults by Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers.¹⁰ This kind of documentation is not exceptional at present. Rather, it is part of a process we now see in human rights information production and distribution. Technological developments have enabled organizations to encourage individuals and groups to record human rights violations via video cameras, with the videos then being distributed via social and mainstream media. Human rights organizations use these visual materials as evidence and as means to engage the public in human rights issues.

Academic writers have called the visual documentation by ordinary people *citizen journalism* and *citizen camera witnessing*. These labels account for the eyewitness's ethical role and obligation (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013: 2; Allan, 2015). Concerning witnessing, Michal Givoni states it 'not just expanded and honed the available repertoire of moral practices but also opened up new avenues of political existence' (Givoni, 2014: 127). This characterization also applies to video documentation. Today, afflicted people mediate their suffering and needs to viewers via new media technology, occupying a role once restricted to professional photographers. Rather than being in front of the camera's lens, the people who would have been subjects of photographs and films can now produce visual documentation themselves. That is, the videos Palestinians film constitute a representation of the Israeli occupation as they perceive it. Hence, I argue, digital visual documentation and the internet embody means that contain an emancipatory promise. As part of their struggle, people who suffer human rights abuses can represent themselves *by themselves*. For instance, Khadrah Abd al-Karim from Asirah al-Qibliyah, a Palestinian village, said, 'Filming the images is helpful to us. It has given me inner strength.'¹¹

Emancipation is 'the fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is associated with freedom, liberty, independence, and autonomy. Yet, although emancipation and freedom are frequently seen as synonyms, within the liberal understanding it is freedom, and not quite emancipation, that is part

of the logic underlying the community's values. The common liberal idea is based on the notion that each of us needs protection from other human beings who threaten our liberty and security. Hannah Arendt, in her lecture 'Freedom and Politics', noticed in modern western societies the phenomenon that withdrawal from the outside world had come to be regarded as a form of liberation: this is the freedom of the individual. This tendency, which she criticizes, portrays freedom as a mode of separation from, as opposed to interaction with, others (Arendt, 1960: 29). Palestinians under occupation are far from exercising such freedom; however, their production of self-representations via video cameras may be perceived as emancipatory practice, especially from a postcolonial perspective. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), articulate ways claims of European supremacy over the Orient had been asserted through representation.¹² Western domination of peoples of the East was not merely a territorial matter. By restructuring their sense of themselves through authorized (western) eyes, a process of thematic, epistemic, and theoretical domination was established, and it still operates as an adjunct to the territorial conquest and occupation of land. Thus, emancipation in this sense I discuss is a liberation from the occupier's representation and the forms it is designed to take.

However, the videos I discuss here result from a collaborative project. B'Tselem's Camera Project, which has as its basis the self-image-making of Palestinians, is a collaboration between human rights experts and amateur photographers – a techno-political relationship between the Palestinians and an Israeli human rights organization sponsoring the project. The photographers who collaborate with a human rights organization collude with its ideology, and also with the complexity of a specific political context such as the Israeli colonialist regime, within which the organization works (Azoulay and Ophir, 2012).

Collaboration is 'the action of working with someone to produce something' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). The internet is salient here. From its beginning the internet represented a collaborative work of information creation. Along with this, without idealizing it, the internet endorses what are called 'alternative or counter public spheres that can offer a new, empowering sense of what it means to be a citizen' (Dahlgren, 2004: xi). Thus, forces of collaboration and emancipation work together on the internet mainly – now – via social media platforms. Though the 'public sphere' on the internet is continuously threatened by commodification (Allmer, 2015; Fuchs, 2014; Van Dijck, 2013), it nurtures creativity, self-expression, connection, and community-building. Such collaborative information production also occurs in the production of digital images, such as videos.

Collaboration is part of the technological evolution of the internet. However, collaboration also carries negative meaning in some political

circumstances: when people work with the enemy during a war or conflict, they are called collaborators. Some anti-colonial movements have adopted a strategy of non-collaboration with the colonial forces: for instance, the Palestinian boycott movement, whose participants reject working with or for Israeli institutions, because these institutions are perceived as part of the ongoing Israeli occupation both directly and indirectly.¹³ As I present here, not all Palestinians at the OPT see working with an Israeli organization as collaboration in a political sense, but they are inclined to do so according to the situation.

Here I focus on emancipation and collaboration in video advocacy. These traits are not how the Palestinians describe their video filming and not how B'Tselem sees the documenting project, but through the two traits, which seem contradictory, that I can sketch the contingent and expected of the Camera Project dynamic. I combine visual analysis, a close reading of the various events' representations documented in the media, and interviews. I decided to focus mainly on the aforementioned videos by Tamimi and Abu Shamsiyeh because these Palestinian photographers are not only part of B'Tselem's project but also act independently. Watching their videos and talking with them discloses the benefits, interests, faults, and contradictions in their collaboration with the Israeli organization.¹⁴ I also base my research on a comparison of their work to other videos that are part of the organization's project. I met these amateur photographers and ten other Palestinians who have filmed human rights abuses in the OPT.¹⁵ In our conversations I posed questions about their encounters with B'Tselem's Camera Project and the mode of collaboration it entails; how they understand the visual documentation they have made; what its importance is; and whether they remember notable events. I also inquired specifically about the cited videos. The discussions were open conversations in which the photographers added their own views. I spoke with the leading team of the B'Tselem video and field research departments, who told me how the project is managed and what its main objectives are. Based as it is on visual culture research, my methodology regards the videos as having an aesthetic and political effect; its interdisciplinary approach combines visual examination and critical political reflection (Rose, 2001). The research addresses matters of visual knowledge production, reproduction, and circulation that bear essential implications for understanding the status quo of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Huchberg, 2015).

The Camera Project

The fundamental tool of human rights organizations advocating for individuals and groups is to show the existence of wrongs and to turn them into a public 'issue' through mediation (McLagan, 2004: 224). Visual information about human rights violations also forms a central way to

achieve this aim. Visual images illustrate violations and are oriented toward engaging the public regarding human rights issues. The conviction that leads human rights organizations to invest in such work is the belief that exposure of information about rights abuses will prompt action (Avni, 2006; Keenan, 2004).

Sharon Sliwinski's (2011) historical account of human rights visuals as a tool of ethical evaluation (especially in the 20th century) shows how the spectator is situated as a central figure. Films, videos, and internet visuals transform audiences into witnessing publics (Torchin, 2012). These visual images, Wendy Hesford (2011) argues, shape the visual field of human rights advocacy through normative conventions about the conditions of social and legal recognition. These academic writings center the *reception* of the visuals, whereas the present research seeks to add an understanding of the *mode* of production and what it entails, such as its political and technological conditions.

Recent technological developments and the low cost of equipment have provided new opportunities for civilians to participate in the production of human rights visuals (Gregory, 2012). Organizations help human rights activists understand how to use video as a central tool in their struggles. Focusing on possibilities of social change the media can create via their communications, the creation of human rights videos and their distribution represent political actions in their own right. A political community can be formed through this kind of engagement (Hinegardner, 2009).

Despite the widespread presence of Palestinian videos from B'Tselem's Camera Project in social and mainstream media, few researchers discuss the videos. Pini Miretski and Sascha-Dominik Bachmann see the project as a 'civil Panoptic' strategy: video cameras surveilling potential human rights abusers are spread across the West Bank and Gaza, so that the actions of the Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers can be monitored with regard to their adherence to standards of international law (Miretski and Bachmann, 2015). The civil panopticon is a powerful conception, yet surveillance is not sufficient: to be an effective strategy, there must be follow-up after incidents. In most documented cases the Israeli police do not initiate an investigation, and the investigations mounted often exonerate Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers.¹⁶

Lisa Lebow considers how this practice represents a form of non-violent struggle, in which the cameras in Palestinians' hands are like weapons (Lebow, 2012). Though the project strengthens the Palestinians' position in the occupied/occupier power relation, Palestinians may also find themselves singled out when they are holding cameras and thus be the target of further violence. Moreover, Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers quickly became accustomed to the presence of the cameras, diminishing their deterrent effect against violent actions. These findings lead one to wonder why Palestinians and B'Tselem use

this technology if it is not effective. But I have never received an answer on this issue.

Here I offer a different view of the Camera Project. I elucidate the network of video advocacy and hence reveal the salient features of the political and ethical dynamics.

Documentation by non-professional photographers in the OPT dates from around 2007, when B'Tselem's Camera Project launched its first video.¹⁷ This marked a change, as until then most of the photographs and films from the OPT had been taken by bystanders, either human rights activists or photojournalists. Most of the documentation of the OPT was made by representatives of Israeli and foreign news agencies, and not by Palestinians. Though Israeli reporters from the 1970s onwards critically assessed the Israeli occupation, the Camera Project offered a new view because the cameras were placed in Palestinians' hands, bringing forth a perspective from within (Alexandrowicz, 2018).

Technological developments enabled B'Tselem to launch its project, which emerged around the same time it became unsafe for Israelis to work and document in the OPT. International, Palestinian, and Israeli human rights organizations have worked in the OPT since 1987, when the first Intifada erupted. B'Tselem (Hebrew for *in the image of [God]*) was founded two years later and has become a prominent organization focusing on collecting information about human rights violations in the OPT. It has published hundreds of reports about incidents there, among them fatal shootings by security forces, house demolitions, restrictions of movement, and instances of land expropriation. The Israeli organization began its collaboration with Palestinians for security reasons. As a response to the violent events of the first years of the second Intifada (2000), and in order to avoid exposing the organization's Israeli members to violent harm, B'Tselem began recruiting local Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza as field researchers. With the establishment of the Camera Project, the number of Palestinians involved grew – the work of the all-Israeli organization became a joint effort, or collaboration, between Israelis and Palestinians.¹⁸ B'Tselem's employees spread out across the OPT to serve as a kind of infrastructure, mediating between the Israeli human rights organization and the Palestinian photographers. The project thus forms a human-technological network, one in which the visual information collected by the cameras is transferred, through the mediators, from the Palestinian territories to Israel. B'Tselem is responsible for broadcasting videos on social media and to try to do so on the mainstream media and provides context for the documentation. Sometimes, when the videos present solid evidence of an offense, as in the 22 February 2018 case of Yassin a-Saradih's killing by Israeli soldiers at Jericho, the organization demands that an investigation be opened.¹⁹

The organization has distributed around two hundred video cameras to Palestinians, and, according to B'Tselem's members, half of them are

currently in use. The cameras are allocated to Palestinians who live in high-risk zones, and they are encouraged to carry them at all times because 'you cannot know when an event of human rights abuse will occur'.²⁰ In the Israeli public sphere, B'Tselem is often accused of being pro-Palestinian; therefore, the organization is cautious so that its evidence is not impugned as one-sided. Consequently, it selects photographers who have not been involved in political activism to minimize suspicion that the evidence has been tainted by the ideological biases of the photographer. B'Tselem conducts trainings for the Palestinian volunteers, where they learn how to use the camera, how to achieve clear and effective visual evidence, and what human rights are. The collaboration between human rights experts and amateur photographers is also valuable because of the aesthetic of the unprofessional video. Sometimes blurred or otherwise poor-quality images, especially in comparison to what is usually produced in professional visual documentation, imparts a sense of urgency and anxiety to what's being depicted. Thus, non-professional visuals mediate a sense of authenticity through seemingly 'immediate' appearances. Furthermore, as Michael Sfard, a well-known Israeli attorney who specializes in defending Palestinians, argued in a discussion of the Camera Project:

[. . .] with shifting the camera lens from the Palestinians to the event, his/her troubling figure (for the Israeli viewers) disappeared from the frame. Documenting from the Palestinian perspective enables the Israeli public, without the presence of the Palestinian figure, to see the harm.²¹

Sfard's perception demonstrates the utility of the Camera Project's mode of visual documentation, which, due to it being executed in collaboration with an Israeli organization, is concerned mainly with an Israeli audience.

In recent years there have been fewer events in the OPT left undocumented. The downside of this practice is the unofficial Israeli police policy to open an investigation into an incident *only* if video documentation of the incident in question exists. Because the very acknowledgment of violations now depends on visual documentation, all parties in the OPT (Palestinians, settlers, soldiers, activists) tend to carry cameras with them (Stein, 2017).

Although international and Palestinian organizations have also offered video cameras to Palestinians, most of the photographers I talked to prefer to use the cameras provided by the Israeli organization.²² B'Tselem's cameras give them a sense of protection. In the first years of the project, B'Tselem and the Israeli military forces agreed that Palestinians holding a camera with the organization's tag should be protected. Palestinian volunteers mentioned this as a positive outcome of the Camera Project, although this meant, obviously, that collaboration with

B'Tselem entailed collaboration with the Israeli military forces. Since 2016 B'Tselem has changed its policy regarding collaboration with the Israeli military forces. The organization stopped referring complaints to military law-enforcement authorities. It continues to document and report human rights violations in the OPT, focusing on the politics of evidence but not using the documentation for legal prosecution.²³ The videos collected by the Camera Project are therefore designed with the prospect of becoming evidentiary material, although they are not necessarily used as such.

Regarding the protection guaranteed to the Palestinian volunteers as a matter of rights, Kareem Issa Jubran, the field research director at B'Tselem, explains, 'until we started the Camera Project, Palestinians did not know that they have a right to film. The Israeli army did not know it as well'.²⁴ This understanding (or lack thereof) encouraged the organization to emphasize the right to film to both sides, which, to some extent, empowers the Palestinians in the occupier/occupied power relationship. This right, however, may be dismissed, as a bill in the legislature now proposes to ban the filming of Israeli soldiers on duty.²⁵

When I asked Jubran, a Palestinian and a senior member of B'Tselem, about the collaboration of Palestinian volunteers with an Israeli organization, he told me:

The role of B'Tselem is different from solidarity organizations and our acceptance in the Palestinian community is different. I do not try to endorse a political position. I do not peddle coexistence, but the work itself creates collaboration. Among Palestinians there is talk about normalization; I try to keep some distance from this terminology, and concentrate on issues of human rights. On the grounds of this agenda, Palestinians accept our work and maybe even accept the Israeli community. In my work I build a culture: a culture that asks to see the other not through the stereotype we have of them as an occupier – there are people who care about my rights and the abuse I suffer from.

In his account, Jubran describes the double role he plays within the Israeli human rights organization. Having assessed the reaction of Palestinians to B'Tselem's work as an outsider, he now positions himself as a Palestinian insider who has been brought to reconsider the state of human rights culture within the polarization of occupation. The collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis in the organization's human rights work challenges its members. B'Tselem, as an Israeli organization, strives to influence Israeli public opinion and to educate people about human rights. Palestinians with no respect for the Israeli public or its human rights education struggle to free themselves from occupation.

Thus, while documenting abuses, for Palestinians, part of a nonviolent struggle for self-determination – emancipation – these aims can be compromised through collaboration with an Israeli organization whose mission is fighting for human rights.

To comprehend the perspective of Palestinians on the convoluted collaborative effort with this Israeli human rights organization, I will look first at the visual documentation practice carried out at Nabi Saleh village. The Palestinians at Nabi Saleh have their own YouTube channel, which enables a comparison between the content of the videos they upload and broadcast and B'Tselem's selection of footage drawn from the same events. The juxtaposition shows that B'Tselem focuses on evidence of human rights violations, whereas the Palestinians present, through their videos, scenes from an emancipatory struggle: their struggle for independence from the occupation.

Tamimi Press

From their outset (2009), the demonstrations at Nabi Saleh, a small Palestinian village located 20 kilometres northwest of Ramallah, have taken the form of non-violent processions. Setting out from the village centre and proceeding to al-Qus spring, village residents regularly protest the takeover of village lands by the nearby Jewish settlement, Halamish. Most of the time, after the demonstrations have dispersed, confrontations between security forces and stone-throwing youths arise. According to B'Tselem, security forces use extensive crowd-control means as soon as a demonstration begins, even if there is no violence being directed at them. Frequently, demonstrations are halted while still inside the village, with the Israeli security forces imposing a curfew on the entire village.²⁶ Nabi Saleh residents, as a result of the demonstrations, suffer from abuses such as home searches in the middle of the night²⁷ and a foul-smelling liquid being sprayed on Palestinian homes.²⁸ Over the years, three deaths have occurred during demonstrations or afterwards.²⁹

Bilal Tamimi, known as the photographer of the village, started filming events after B'Tselem approached him and offered him video cameras for documentation. He maintained an independent YouTube channel, 'Tamimi Press', and a 'Nabi Saleh Solidarity' Facebook page, where he uploaded videos from the weekly demonstrations. After each demonstration, he edited the videos he'd filmed and broadcasted the edited version on YouTube; he would also send written reports and videos to the press and to a list of selected email addresses. Some of these videos, he declared proudly during our conversation, have been published worldwide. The importance of working for the village and for B'Tselem, as Tamimi says, lies in the distribution of the videos rather than the event of documentation: 'The aim is to reach more viewers.' This supposition is based on the emancipatory nature of online communication, where the

old-fashioned protest films and publications create networks of resistance-information (Bennet and Segerberg, 2012).

The independent circulation of videos has not been presented as a counter or objection to B'Tselem's work. In Tamimi's view, the human rights struggle and the village's anti-colonial struggle are the same. However, what is demonstrated on Tamimi's sites and B'Tselem's website suggests otherwise.³⁰ From Tamimi's videos the organization plucks events which show rights abuses. 'Violent dispersal of demonstration in a-Nabi Saleh',³¹ 'Nabi Salah, 12.11.2010, use of extended range tear gas canister',³² 'a-Nabi Saleh: excessive use of crowd control measures',³³ 'Israeli security forces spray "Skunk" at Palestinian homes',³⁴ are titles of videos posted on B'Tselem's website, and the clips, selectively detached – physically and conceptually – from the original videos, show the events only as rights violations. The use of legal human rights language frames and contextualizes the Nabi Saleh demonstration videos in a very particular way. While Tamimi shows almost the whole protest, B'Tselem selects just the events of abuse. Additionally, in a staged introductory video on Tamimi's sites, national liberation slogans are combined with human rights claims.³⁵ Three girls from Tamimi's family are featured marching with Palestinian flags, wearing traditional and modern clothing. The girls' voice-over at the opening of the video declares that their struggle for their beloved land is priceless, and with that statement they position themselves not as the conventional passive victims of human rights abuses but as active 'freedom fighters'. Thus, while B'Tselem strives to purify the videos so as to make them exclusively human rights abuse documentations, the Nabi Saleh protestors and their documentations combine the human rights struggle with that of self-determination.

The evidentiary human rights approach of B'Tselem, in comparison to that of Tamimi's YouTube channel, also shows itself in the framing of the 2018 Gaza demonstrations. From the beginning of Gaza's border protests, B'Tselem has collected videos and other information about assassinated Palestinians from social media platforms with the aim of making evident whether Palestinian demonstrators were involved in combat and clarifying how they were killed (during confrontation, in flight, or during a non-violent civilian demonstration). This visual information, as with the videos selected from the demonstrations at Nabi Saleh, has nothing to do with the emancipatory practice of Palestinian self-representation in the demonstrations or the videos produced by the Palestinians. The visual information is collected to contribute information for the organization's ongoing disputation of the Israeli government's claim that it is engaged in just killings.³⁶

The collaboration with B'Tselem's Camera Project, as mentioned above, empowers the Palestinians within the dynamic of

occupied/occupier relations. Tamimi, however, also expressed the partnership's limitations:

When I have the camera, I have more control over the situation. [Yet] the soldiers will do what they do with or without the presence of the video camera. For example, when soldiers enter the houses after midnight for a search,³⁷ I can film it and then use the documentation so everyone will know that things like that happen. However, sometimes the soldiers try to prevent me from filming, like by handcuffing.

Even when he uses B'Tselem's identification card or presents himself as a reporter, he is attacked. The camera exposes him to more aggressive violence than would otherwise be the case, as he is a recognized person.

A December 2017 video shows Tamimi's 17-year-old niece Ahed slapping an Israeli soldier. The video, filmed and uploaded to Facebook by a family member, went viral, and a few days later, in the wake of hostile social media reactions, Ahed was arrested and charged with assault.³⁸ Her actions made her a known figure of Palestinian resistance. Her appearance – a young, blonde, blue-eyed and un-veiled Muslim girl – may well have helped extend her circle of supporters, who came from around the world. Punished for the boldness that was recorded as part of an independent act of documentation, she was awarded with attention for her 'occidental' look.

Abu Shamsiyeh's experience, as seen in what follows, was different from Tamimi's. Although he didn't film the event with one of B'Tselem's cameras, Shamsiyeh decided, appreciating the importance of what he had filmed, to distribute his footage through B'Tselem.

A Palestinian Cobbler's Video Incriminates an Israeli Soldier

On 24 March 2016, after hearing gunshots, Imad Abu Shamsiyeh from the Tel Rumedia neighborhood of Hebron went to a neighbour's roof and filmed what was happening:

I saw a soldier approaching an injured Palestinian. He fired his gun. Yet, I was not sure if he hit. When the ambulance drove away I saw him strike his [the Palestinian man's] head. At that moment I understood I had filmed an important event. I had evidence that Palestinians are being killed also in a situation when they are neutralized.

Hebron is the only place in the OPT with settlements in the heart of a Palestinian city. The struggle between Palestinian and Jewish communities in the old city of Hebron, H-2, revolves around these settlements

(Clarke, 2000). A constant Israeli military presence ensures the security of the Jewish settlers. Israel enforces a system of separation between the settlers and Palestinians, which has influenced the city center's economic decline and has led to Palestinians' departure (Swisa, 2003).

Besides the restrictions on their movements imposed by the separation regime, Abu Shamsiyeh's family – as do other Palestinian residents – endures attacks from settlers and soldiers. Settlers commit physical assaults, and soldiers often search their house.³⁹ Abu Shamsiyeh volunteered for B'Tselem's Camera Project for several years. However, at that time, he and a friend and neighbor, Badee Dwaik, founded Human Rights Defenders Group, an independent organization. Dwaik explained the political reason for forming the new organization and included criticism of B'Tselem's approach:

There are Palestinians who have difficulty holding a camera from an Israeli organization. Nearly all the information we receive is from Israeli organizations. Why should we obtain statistics on the expansions and building of the Jewish settlements in the OPT from [the Israeli organization] Peace Now? Why would Palestinians not have their own data? I read a B'Tselem report and comprehend the language they use: In this report they write that an Israeli citizen was assassinated by a Palestinian, yet when they write of an assassination of a Palestinian by Israelis they make a distinction between the Israelis. Why do they not make the same distinction between the Palestinians? With 70% of B'Tselem's approach I agree, but with 30% I do not, and it matters.

He added comments about the importance of having an independent Palestinian archive of testimonies and specified that the identity of the data gatherer and the context provider were crucial in this regard. However, the political weight of knowledge production is constrained by the occupation. He could not fulfill a camera request from people in Jerusalem because he could not reach them due to movement restrictions. In addition, the cameras they own themselves are less protected because they lack an Israeli organization's tag. However, it seems the soldiers believe an organization supports your practice when you have an HD camera.

The camera Abu Shamsiyeh used that day belonged to the new organization, yet he decided to publish the video of the assassination through B'Tselem. Immediately after the shooting, he called B'Tselem and they suggested transferring the material to them so that he would have the organization's support.

After the video was published, Abu Shamsiyeh was subjected to reprisals. He received threatening emails and calls and later found himself unemployed. The video that captured public attention and served as

essential evidence in the conviction of the Israeli soldier did not change the Palestinian photographer's life conditions for the better but, on the contrary, for the worse. Nevertheless, the success of the video empowered him to continue documenting as part of his struggle against the Israeli occupation.⁴⁰

An Israeli Soldier Captured in the Lens

The two videos received extensive public attention, yet neither was perceived to be a self-representation. The effect of visual documentations is based on the reactions they elicit and how they are absorbed into the public sphere. Visual documentations are thus detached from the events of filming and the conditions of documentation. Tamimi documented a failed attempt to arrest a Palestinian child. Whereas he saw the soldier's attempt to arrest a boy as a misuse of power, the reactions of leading figures in Israeli society were concerned with the soldier's appearance – specifically, with his degradation. In Abu Shamsiyeh's documentation of the a-Sharif assassination, the soldier Azaria became the center of the public debate. Prime Minister Netanyahu told the cabinet, 'IDF troops, our children, adhere to high moral standards as they bravely fight blood-thirsty murderers in tough operational circumstances', evoking Azaria as the son of all Israelis.⁴¹

The video of the confrontation from Nabi Saleh received similar reactions. It was immediately broadcast by the mainstream Israeli media, where it generated harsh responses. On her Facebook page, Miri Regev, the Israeli minister of culture and sport, laid bare the shock she felt when watching the Israeli soldier's humiliation. She claimed the soldier appeared, metaphorically, to be handcuffed, unable to secure his safety. After viewing the video, and as a consequence, she even demanded a change in the rules of engagement in the OPT.⁴² Avigdor Liberman, a member of parliament at the time, asked for the same revisions.⁴³

In Israeli public debate, Azaria, the soldier caught on video shooting a Palestinian, was perceived by some as a murderer, while others saw him as a victim, and still others as a hero. A rally held in support of the soldier attracted two thousand participants, and even more signed a petition to release him.⁴⁴ Azaria was convicted, but his sentence was cut by a third.⁴⁵

Evidently, the videos were detached from their photographers and the circumstances of documentation when broadcasted. The Israeli public was focused on how Israel and its soldiers were mirrored in the visuals. The main figures in the public debate were the Israeli soldiers involved, rather than the Palestinian civilians. The struggle for human rights and/or the end of occupation was not at the center of this public debate.

In our conversation, Abu Shamsiyeh said:

Although in the video we are four – the two assassinated Palestinians, the Israeli soldier, Azaria, and myself, the photographer – in the public discussion it was only Azaria. Even in interviews, reporters did not ask what is my message in the video. They were focused on their questions. They see us just as the background to the event and it irritates me personally. But I still go everywhere in Hebron with the video camera.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to offer a critical analysis of human rights organizations' documentation of state-sanctioned violence by civilian photographers. Two events of human rights abuses that took place in the OPT during the summer of 2015 and the spring of 2016 have been its focus. In these events the Palestinian photographers involved were working with the local Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, filming videos that circulated widely in Israel and globally on the internet. Through interviews with organization members and photographers, along with visual and media analyses, I have discussed the political and ethical promise and limitations of this mode of visual production. Political and ethical factors come to the fore through both a theoretical lens and an applied analysis of the emancipatory potential of visual evidence collection and the contradictory forces embedded in acts of collaboration with both the nongovernmental organization and the state. This article has attempted to engage in an analysis of the problematics of both. Evidence complicates human rights organizations' assumption that giving cameras to those experiencing subjugation will foster empowerment. That this mode of documentation comprises self-representation and a framing of the conflictual situation may imply an emancipatory practice. Post-colonial scholars, such as Said and Spivak, critically point to the subjection of the Orient through representations by the West. Thus, the new technology of digital photography and internet broadcasting can potentially free the occupied from such subjection. The changing forms of documenting human rights abuses seem to authorize the photographers by giving them tools with which to film and publish by themselves. Instead, the human-technological network, as I show, produces collaborations between Israeli organizations (here, B'Tselem) and Palestinian photographers, and this network provides a way of perceiving the contradictory forces that enable documentation through new technologies and the human interactions and forces of circulations that constrain those possibilities.

Furthermore, reflecting on new media technology – digital photography and the internet – we can see aspects of emancipation and collaboration in the processes of production and circulation. Additionally, the collaboration I have considered here is linked to the specific political conditions in the OPT and of the Camera Project, a collaboration between experts working for an Israeli human rights organization and non-professional Palestinian photographers. The photographers expressed inspiration for self-representation via the content of some of the films and the mode of circulation. Yet, as shown in the two events that I have discussed, the political situation of the Israeli occupation limits the visual field of Israeli viewers when they see the documentation of Palestinian photographers. Instead of generating compassion for the community whose human rights have been violated, the viewers from the opposing side of the conflict see a danger to their own image. Exploring the competing forces of emancipation and collaboration enables us to refute the simplistic celebratory claims of human rights organizations about engaged civilian photographers. The videos filmed by Palestinian civilians are not autonomous, nor are they freed from the Israeli/Palestinian power relation, from the collaborative powers of the media, or the organization's network.

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Notes

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1. Peter Beaumont, 'Nabi Saleh images illustrate changing asymmetry of Israeli-Palestinian conflict', *Guardian*, 1 September 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/01/nabi-saleh-images-illustrate-changing-asymmetry-of-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.
2. The video taken by Bilal Tamimi: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgI_oIfjqc.
3. The video taken by Imad Abu Shamsiyeh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8WK2TgruMo>.
4. 'Raf Sanchez, Israeli soldier convicted for killing wounded Palestinian in Hebron, as angry crowd protests his innocence', *Telegraph*, 4 January 2017: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/04/Israeli-soldier-convicted-for-killing-wounded-Palestinian-Hebron-as-angry-crowd-protests/>.
5. <https://www.btselem.org/video/about-btselem-video>
6. 'Israeli soldiers carry out puzzling actions in a Hebron home', August 2017: https://www.btselem.org/video/20170927_soldiers_carry_out_puzzling_actions_in_hebron_home

7. Moving a house in Hebron: https://www.btselem.org/video/20170912_moving_house_in_hebron.
8. House demolition in East Jerusalem: <https://www.btselem.org/media/815>.
9. Unlawful detention of residents of the village of Madama, near Nablus: https://www.btselem.org/video/20170314/btselem_volunteer_assaulted_and_arrested#full.
10. Settlers' attack on a Palestinian school at Burin village: https://www.btselem.org/video/20170505_settlers_violence_near_burin_school#full.
11. <https://www.btselem.org/video/20140306/khadrah#full>.
12. Said's and Spivak's writings have received many critiques over the years. See for instance Dabashi's in his book *Post-Orientalism* (2009).
13. See the BDS movement's site: <https://bdsmovement.net/>.
14. The talk with Bilal Tamimi and Imad Abu Shamsiyeh took place on 17 December 2016.
15. I only met Palestinians who live in the West Bank. B'Tselem also works with Palestinians in Gaza, but, as an Israeli citizen, I am not allowed to enter this area.
16. On the issue of accountability, see B'Tselem's website: <https://www.btselem.org/accountability>.
17. The first video was taken in Tel Rumeida, Hebron. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUXSFsJV084>.
18. The claim that B'Tselem is a joint effort of Israelis and Palestinians should be regarded with caution. The board members are all Israeli citizens, and so is the executive director. Yet there has been a radical change in the diversity of employees.
19. Y. Kubovich and Y. Berger (2018), 'New footage: Israeli Army shot Palestinian, left him without medical care for 20 minutes', Haaretz, February 28: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/new-footage-israeli-army-shot-palestinian-left-without-medical-care-1.5864846>.
20. The information was delivered by Yoav Gross, the former director of the video department, in a conversation held on 27 August 2013.
21. The discussion was at Tel Aviv University, 11 January 2013.
22. This was declared, for instance, by Jum'aa Rab'i during a conversation that took place on 8 February 2014, in a-Tuwani, South Mt. Hebron area.
23. See 'B'Tselem to stop referring complaints to the military law enforcement system': https://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20160525_occupations_fig_leaf.
24. The conversation with Kareem Issa Jubran took place on 27 August 2013 in B'Tselem's office, Jerusalem.
25. 'Israeli bill to ban filming soldiers on duty condemned', Aljazeera, 28 May 2018: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/israeli-bill-ban-filming-soldiers-duty-condemned-180528150533045.html>.
26. 'Background on the demonstrations at a-Nabi Saleh', B'Tselem, 2 January 2013: https://www.btselem.org/demonstrations/a_nabi_saleh.
27. 'Middle of the night in a-Nabi Saleh', B'Tselem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jnb6z5HZ34&t=138s>.
28. 'Israeli security forces spray "Skunk" at Palestinian homes', B'Tselem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-njv7RJqtRM>.

29. Gili Cohen, 'Israeli military closes probe into death of Palestinian protester Mustafa Tamimi', Haaretz, 5 December 2013: <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-1.562013>. 'Israeli soldiers shoot and kill 21-year-old Palestinian in Nabi Saleh', 16 June 2018: <https://972mag.com/israeli-soldiers-shoot-and-kill-21-year-old-palestinian-in-nabi-saleh/135990/>. Chaim Levinson and Jack Khoury, 'IDF: Probe: 80 bullets fired without justification in the death of West Bank Palestinian', Haaretz, 16 January 2013: <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/idf-probe-80-bullets-fired-without-justification-in-death-of-west-bank-palestinian.premium-1.494352>.
30. Videos (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4L3oaYtyLss>) of different sites around Nabi Saleh number around two hundred all together. Some of the videos are featured on B'Tselem's websites, but most are not. The videos present the weekly demonstrations of residents from the Palestinian village of Nabi Saleh in the West Bank. Several document abuses that the Palestinian residents have suffered from the Israeli army, and others feature interviews with local, international, and Israeli activists who have participated in the demonstrations (this information was obtained on 30 December 2016).
31. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFWT5c0eq8M>.
32. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVws1-As_hk.
33. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zSmhA96clw>.
34. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-njv7RJqtRM>.
35. <https://www.youtube.com/user/tamimi1966>.
36. I received this information from one of B'Tselem's data coordinators. The interview was held on 1 June 2018.
37. See, for example, the search that Tamimi filmed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jnb6z5HZ34>.
38. 'Palestinian girl filmed slapping Israeli soldier is charged with assault', *The Guardian*, 1 January 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/01/ahed-tamimi-palestinian-girl-filmed-slapping-israeli-soldier-is-charged-with-assault>.
39. See 'Soldiers harass B'Tselem volunteers' family and confiscate hard disk': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JecEG13MjY0>.
40. Patel Yumna, 'Palestinian activists slam draft law prohibiting filming of Israeli forces', Middle East Eye, 19 June 2018: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-photo-ban-article-1578539473>.
41. 'Netanyahu cabinet at odds over murder probe of soldier in Hebron shooting', Reuters, 27 March 2016: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-idUSKCN0WT0BY>.
42. Regev, 'The one who hurt a soldier his blood be on his own head', ngr, 30 August 2015: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/721/349.html>.
43. Uzi Baruch, 'Shaming incident at A-Nabi Saleh', 29 August 2015: <http://www.inn.co.il/News/News.aspx/305209>.
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