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*Social Science Information* 2012 51: 459

DOI: 10.1177/0539018412456769

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<http://ssi.sagepub.com/content/51/4/459>

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# The Palestinian diaspora on the Web: Between de-territorialization and re-territorialization

Social Science Information

51(4) 459–474

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DOI: 10.1177/0539018412456769

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## Abstract

This article analyzes Web-based networks of Palestinian communities in Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Australia, the United States, Canada, Spain, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The findings show a thematic and demographic shift from organizations of Palestinian communities abroad to a transnational solidarity network focused on Palestinian rights and the Boycott movement. Although the Palestinian Territories function as the network's strong center of gravity, analysis of the references reveals that diaspora and non-diaspora actors operate as two distinct but intertwined networks: while diaspora actors are unique in putting emphasis on community as activity type and on diaspora and the right of return as primary cause, non-diaspora actors are mainly dedicated to solidarity as activity and Palestinian rights and the Boycott movement as primary cause. Despite this, ties between diaspora and non-diaspora actors are stronger than among diaspora actors, which indicates that part of the dynamics of Palestinian communities is manifest not just between diaspora communities, but mostly between diaspora communities and civil society organizations in their host societies.

## Keywords

boycott, diaspora, internet, Palestine, Web

## Résumé

L'article analyse les réseaux de communautés Palestiniennes sur le Web en Allemagne, France, Italie, Autriche, Australie, Etats Unis, Canada, Espagne, Argentine, Chili et Uruguay. L'analyse montre un glissement thématique et démographique d'organisations de communautés Palestiniennes à l'étranger vers un réseau de solidarité transnationale centré sur les droits palestiniens et le mouvement du Boycott. Bien que les Territoires

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Palestiniens fonctionnent comme centre de gravité principal du réseau, l'analyse des références montre que les acteurs de la diaspora et les acteurs hors-diaspora opèrent en tant que deux réseaux distincts mais entremêlés: alors que les acteurs de la diaspora sont les seuls à mettre l'emphase sur la communauté comme activité type et sur la diaspora et le droit au retour comme cause primordiale, les acteurs hors-diaspora sont principalement orientés vers la solidarité comme activité et vers les droits Palestiniens et le mouvement du Boycott comme cause primordiale. En dépit de cela, les liens entre acteurs de la diaspora et acteurs hors-diaspora sont plus forts que les liens entre acteurs au sein même de la diaspora, ce qui indique qu'une part de la dynamique des communautés Palestiniennes est manifeste non seulement entre communautés de la diaspora, mais aussi et principalement entre communautés de la diaspora et organisations de la société civile dans les sociétés d'accueil.

### Mots-clés

boycott, diaspora, internet, Palestine, Web

The term 'Palestinian diaspora' is highly contested. It is often used alongside other terms such as exile, dispersal and refugeeness,<sup>1</sup> and relates to a heterogeneous group of individuals and communities whose time and circumstances of dispersal range from forced migration and exile to voluntary migration, and whose status in their host countries ranges from refugeeness and statelessness to full assimilation (Hanafi, 2005: 157; Peteet, 2007: 630).

The demographics of the Palestinian diaspora and its history are described by Hanafi (2003) in four main categories: economic migrants to South America in the 19th century; the traumatic dispersal of 700,000 Palestinians from Israel to neighboring countries during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War; the second wave of displacement following the Six Day War in 1967 and Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories; and more recent waves of political and economic migration to Europe and the United States which started in 1977 and were influenced by political events such as the 1982 Israel–Lebanon war, the 1991 Gulf War and the Intifadas in 1987 and 2001.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2009), 6.8 million Palestinians live in the diaspora, compared to 3.99 living in the Palestinian Territories (i.e. 2.5 million in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and 1.5 million in Gaza): that is, more than half of the Palestinian population worldwide lives in the diaspora. The PCBS report then specifies the demographics of the Palestinian diaspora:

1.25 million (11.5%) live in Israel; 3.24 million live in Jordan (29.8%); 1.78 million (16.3%) in the other Arab countries, and Palestinians living in foreign countries is estimated to be 618 thousand (5.7%).

It should be noted that these figures include the population of over 900,000 Palestinian refugees living in United Nations Relief and Works Agency camps in Lebanon and Syria (UNRWA, 2010).

The contestation of the term 'Palestinian diaspora' is thus complicated primarily by the fact that it covers populations of refugees and non-refugees, and that both populations are

considered a stateless diaspora, that is, a diaspora of people whose home country is not an independent and sovereign state (Sheffer, 2003: 23–24, 153–154), or, as defined by Schulz, communities whose focal point of identity and politics is a place lost (Schulz & Hammer, 2003: 10). The contestation of the term is further complicated by Palestinian refugees' demand for right of return as part of a peace agreement that would settle the borders of a future Palestinian state. Palestinian acceptance of the term 'diaspora' might indicate the acceptance of Palestinian refugees' condition as permanent.<sup>2</sup> While 'diaspora' connotes permanent settlement in the host country, 'refugeeness' entails a temporary condition, and relates to the host states' efforts to keep their status temporary. Since Palestinian refugees comprise the largest groups of Palestinians abroad, applying the term 'diaspora' – with its connotations of permanent settlement abroad and as an outcome of social processes of identity formation vis-à-vis the host country and the home country – entails compromising their right to return. Conversely, the insistence on the politics of return may indicate the refusal of the Palestinian diaspora (Peteet, 2007: 628).

The literature on diaspora focuses on transnational networks, identities, flows and economic exchange as constituting contemporary diasporas in a globalizing world. Hanafi defines a diaspora as a set of relationships between the homeland, which functions as a center of gravity, and a periphery of nodes – communities, groups and individuals – who relate to the territory of origin as a center of gravity, but live in different parts of the world:

A classic diaspora is defined by a center of gravity which has two functions: it channels the flux of communications between diaspora members at different peripheries, and provides a location where members (especially family) can meet. The first function does not necessarily suggest a physical site; the meeting location might be a service provider or institution such as the National Jewish Fund for world Jewry, the Tunisian Base of the PLO for Palestinians and the PKK in Germany in the Kurdish case. In regard to the second function, a physical geographical location is a necessity and is an important factor for communitarian economic transactions. (Hanafi, 2003: 174)

Diasporas are thus constituted and defined by the multi-polar ties between the homeland and the periphery, as well as by ties among the communities in the periphery. Such ties are manifest at various levels, ranging from processes of identity and community-building to economic exchange. Put differently, national diasporas are defined and formed by constantly changing dynamics between the national and the transnational. In the Palestinian case, the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1993 has radically changed the balance between the national and transnational components of the Palestinian diaspora, which necessitated rethinking the Palestinian diaspora in terms of transnational networks in times of rising Palestinian nationalism and a process of state-building. In many ways, the Palestinian struggle for statehood was initiated by the PLO, which was, historically, a diaspora organization (Peteet, 2007: 637). The 1993 self-rule arrangements that followed the Oslo peace process, however, changed the function of the Palestinian diaspora both in shaping Palestinian national identity as well as in participating in the state-building process. According to Frisch, the 'territorialization' of the PLO following the 1993 Oslo Interim Agreements reversed the role of the Palestinian political

leadership from an 'outside' to an 'inside' organization, and resulted in the withering of the Palestinian diaspora at the expense of the state-building process, to the extent that diaspora political movements' ability to make claims on the state-building process from the outside has become 'a voice in the wilderness' (Frisch, 2009: 257). Hanafi describes, on the other hand, more complex and ambivalent ways in which diaspora members partake in the state-building process:

Though willing to support the homeland economically and financially, the diaspora also seeks a decision-making role regarding the process of institution building. There is a certain amount of ambivalence and paradox, composed of a positive appreciation and a deleterious suspicion of national commitments, at work in the construction of the diaspora composed. (Hanafi, 2003: 175)

Thus Palestinian transnational networks and the Palestinian national entity maintain mutual dependencies of construction and deconstruction. While the Palestinian national identity has been imagined and constituted by transnational diaspora networks, the realization of the homeland in its current form has weakened them. In terms of Hanafi's analysis of diaspora networks as comprised around a center of gravity, the territorialization of the homeland as a self-ruling entity did not strengthen the transnational network around it, but rather turned the Palestinian Territories into a weak center of gravity around which partial and torn transnational networks are formed.

Since the term 'diaspora' is too general to include all Palestinian individuals and communities around the world, too charged in relation to the politics of refugees' right of return, and too abstract to encompass the complexity of socially constructed and legal statuses, as well as changing levels of national and transnational affiliations, researchers agree that the term should be treated as an analytical term, not an ontological one.<sup>3</sup>

This article presents Web-based networks of Palestinian communities abroad, while taking into account the politics and complexities of the Palestinian diaspora both in relation to the Palestinian refugees and their right of return, and to the complex ties between transnational networks, state-building efforts and the politics of a stateless diaspora. The research questions that guided the analysis draw on the theoretical problems described above. Treating 'diasporic dimensions' of Palestinians abroad analytically, the analysis is guided by the following questions: Should the transnational network be treated separately from local politics? How can one study the relationships between diaspora and territory of origin in light of the ever-changing dynamics between center and periphery? Has the institutionalization and the territorialization of the political leadership indeed withered the Palestinian diaspora?

It should be noted that this Web-based analysis of the Palestinian diaspora deviates from the demographics presented in the PCBS report, since it focuses principally on the actors and the activities of Palestinians living in 'other foreign countries' (to use the PCBS report wording), in particular the United States, Canada, Chile, Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Israel. As is further discussed below, Palestinian refugees and Palestinians living in Arab countries are referred to by many other actors (mainly humanitarian associations and inter-governmental organizations) or are discussed as a primary cause for advocacy or aid, but they are themselves absent as network actors. Their absence can be explained in both methodological and analytical terms.

Methodologically, Palestinian refugees living in UNRWA camps have a very low Web-presence, despite past efforts to establish websites for each refugee camp in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

Analytically, the absence of Palestinian refugees as actors in the following Web-based network of the Palestinian diaspora reinforces the political ramifications embedded in the concept of the Palestinian diaspora and its triangular relationship with the refugees' right of return, and the Palestinian Authority's state-building attempts.

To better understand the dynamics and politics of contemporary Palestinian diaspora networks on the Web, this article draws on Sari Hanafi's analysis of the ties between new media and the Palestinian diaspora in terms of periphery and a (weak) center of gravity. Hanafi suggests that, although new media enable new forms of connectivity between diaspora actors unrelated to their physical presence, they are still affected by the absence of a physical meeting-place – the possibility for all diaspora members, especially refugees, to meet in the diaspora's center of gravity, the Palestinian Territories.<sup>5</sup> According to Hanafi, the absence of a physical meeting-place results in new forms of social integration, which include both physical and virtual networks that have distinct organizing principles. If, before the advent of new media technologies, Palestinian diaspora community networks manifested various levels of institutionalization, whether in the form of familial networks, 'village clubs' in the US or supra-national Arab networks, new media have individualized and atomized the agency of Palestinian diasporic actors, who now maintain various forms of physical and virtual relationships both with the center (the Palestinian Territories) as well as with other members of the Palestinian diaspora (Hanafi, 2005: 593). According to Hanafi, new media also contribute to the de-sanctification and de-territorialization of the homeland, as they are 'capable of facilitating a conciliation between the diverse cultural heritages represented in the Palestinian diaspora by existing in the host country while connecting to an inaccessible (and perhaps idealized) homeland' (2005: 597). Thus, although Hanafi claims that new media contribute to a simultaneous connection of dispersed communities not only with their center but also between peripheral nodes, the absence of a physical center of gravity results in torn and broken networks, which do not culminate in a 'Palestinian diaspora', but in Palestinians as 'partially diasporized people' (Hanafi, 2003: 157). That is, in the Palestinian case, although new media enable new geographies of connectedness between diaspora actors, unrelated to their physical location, these new geographies and networks eventually result in new forms of de-territorialization, both of the center (whether virtual, imagined or physical), and of the periphery.

## Method

In light of the above, the empirical questions that guided the analysis attempted to examine various levels of institutionalization of the Palestinian diaspora and the extent to which actors in the periphery form comprehensive ties among themselves, as well as between themselves and the (weak) center of gravity. Therefore, the starting-points selected for crawling the corpus for the purpose of this analysis represent specific forms of institutionalization and political organization of Palestinian communities abroad: websites of associations and organizations of Palestinian communities that already represent existing

structures and modes of organization, rather than individual actors. For each country, search-engine queries performed in the local language as well as in Arabic attempted to find the top actors for keywords such as 'Palestinian community' and the name of the host country. The assembled websites of Palestinian communities and diaspora organizations from different countries had been brought together as the starting-points for the analysis in order to find out whether actors in the periphery form significant ties among and between them. To examine the extent to which these networks maintain ties with the center of gravity, and the extent of the center's 'weakness' in organizing transnational diaspora networks, actors based in the Palestinian Territories were not included in the initial starting-points (they emerged later on in the resulting hyperlinked network). Despite attempts to include Palestinian diaspora associations and organizations from countries in the Middle East, these were not found and thus not included in the starting-points for the analysis, contributing to its emphasis on actors from Europe and North America.

After the crawlers fetched and consolidated the corpus of the hyperlink network, a classification scheme was developed for analyzing the network along various lines. To analytically distinguish between different actors who may function as central hubs and authorities but are not diaspora actors, the first classification defined whether or not each actor in the network is a diaspora actor.<sup>6</sup> To capture the complexity of the actors in relation to the diaspora, other categories also relate to 'diasporic dimensions' of the actors, such as whether or not the actors refer to the Palestinian diaspora, whether or not they refer to their country of residence and whether or not they refer to the Palestinian Territories. These categories enable the diaspora to be analyzed as an issue and the Palestinian Territories as a center of gravity, addressed both by diaspora and by non-diaspora actors. Further classifications enable a zoomed-in view of relationships between various types of actors ('publisher types'), such as associations, media, individuals, governmental institutions, inter-governmental organizations, foundations and campaigns. For a detailed analysis of the webspace of the network, each actor was also classified according to its specific 'genre', that is, whether it is a website, a blog, a portal or an online news source. The country of residence of each actor was inferred from the website's content (for example, a blogger who indicates that she is from Spain), as well as by the postal addresses provided by the actors, especially in the 'contact us' page. In addition, the languages used by each actor were noted, and various methods were used to derive each website's start date. In terms of the content and activities of the actors, a distinction is made between the actors' main activity, and their primary and secondary causes. Activities and causes may coincide, but are oftentimes different. 'Activity' describes the field in which the actor is operating, for example, 'solidarity', 'media', 'education', 'policy' or 'academic'. A 'cause' is the main issue an actor is dedicated to. This enables a fine-tuned analysis of the actors not only in relation to the types of the organizations, but also in relation to the specific activities that go along with specific causes. For example, an association can be classified as operating in the field of media, but its primary cause is education. This may be very different from a research institution, whose activity is academic, and whose primary cause is media justice. It should be noted that 'diaspora' can be listed either as an activity or a primary cause so that non-diaspora actors too could be classified as dedicated to the Palestinian diaspora as a cause, or an issue. To sum up, the classification scheme enables the treatment of 'diasporic elements'

in the network, either by diaspora or non-diaspora actors, where diaspora can be the actors' main activity, their primary or secondary causes, or a reference.

## Findings

The network comprises a population of actors that were crawled from websites of Palestinian communities in Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Australia, the United States, Canada, Spain, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. At first sight, it is a dense transnational network with no distinct clusters, although its density varies in different areas of the network, which indicates some form of 'internal clusters' (see **Graph Palestinians-1. General network overview**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>7</sup> The network's starting-points – websites of Palestinian communities abroad – are peripheral nodes in the network. As discussed further in this article, the network's main actors and causes are shifted from organizations of Palestinian communities abroad to a more general solidarity network focused on the Palestinian cause and Palestinian rights, and the Boycott movement against Israeli commercial and cultural products. In that sense, the resulting network revolves around the center of gravity rather than representing the peripheral ties between various communities of the Palestinian diaspora. On the other hand, the dense transnational network, which includes close ties between diaspora and non-diaspora actors, indicates that part of the dynamics of Palestinian communities in North America, South America and Europe is manifest not only between diaspora communities in different places, but also and primarily between diaspora communities and civil-society organizations in their host societies.

Although organizations of Palestinian communities outside the US are peripheral nodes in the network, the network is organized around a dominant 'star hub' – Electronic Intifada – which is classified here as a diaspora actor. Electronic Intifada is a US-based online news source that was established by US Citizens of Palestinian origin and is an authoritative and active source providing news, opinion and analysis about Palestine in the English language. Electronic Intifada is the top referenced actor of all publisher types and all website types from all countries of residence (see **Graph Palestinians-2. Electronic Intifada, the network's star hub**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>8</sup>

Despite the network's dense structure, internal clusters and repeating patterns are revealed by overlaying the network's graph according to different classification categories: country of residence, publisher type, type of activity and primary cause. Comparison of the categorized graphs of the entire network shows a repeating pattern coupling geographical location, primary causes and main activity. After unfolding the network's repeating patterns, I turn to a zoomed-in analysis of diaspora actors' role in the network.

## Network demographics

### *Country of residence*

The structure of the network is geographically oriented. The largest group of actors is from the United States (29%, 101 nodes), which is also apparent in the centrality and density of US actors on the graph. The second-largest country of residence is the



Palestinian Territories (9%), followed by Germany (6%), Israel and the UK (5%) and Canada (4%). The distribution of the other countries is lower than 3% each.<sup>9</sup>

Specificity of issues and types of actors determine the geographical arrangement of the graph.<sup>10</sup> While the US cluster is central and is populated mostly by media actors, the UK cluster is dedicated mainly to campaigns and to the Boycott movement. The local Palestinian/Israeli cluster is dedicated to advocacy of human rights and to alternative media (see **Graph Palestinians-3. General network overview, by country of residence**, in the colour section of this Issue).

At the bottom left of the graph in Palestinians-3, the Spanish-language cluster includes actors from Spain, Chile and Argentina, which are mostly diaspora actors. Similarly, the German-language cluster located bottom right on this graph is also diaspora oriented. The countries of residence mainly fit the starting-points of the crawl, although Palestine/Israel were not included in the starting-points. In that sense, the network has brought the 'center of gravity' back in.

### General graph demographics

The corpus is comprised mostly of associations (54%, 190 actors). The second-largest category is 'individual' (14%, 51 nodes), and 'media' (14%, 51 nodes). It is thus a civic space, which operates mainly in media spaces.

The network overview according to publisher types reveals a coupling of publisher types and their primary cause (see **Graph Palestinians-4. General network overview, by publisher type**, in the colour section of this Issue). The Boycott movement (top right) combines associations and campaigns.<sup>11</sup> Top left, the blogosphere and media spaces combine individual and media publisher types. Bottom right, the area of the graph which includes most diaspora actors, is characterized by institutional actors such as the Human Rights Information and Training Center<sup>12</sup> and the Palestine Curriculum Development Center.<sup>13</sup> The inter-governmental space is adjacent to the institutional actors.

Palestinian rights are the primary cause of most network actors, across all publisher types (23%). The second-largest cause is media (10%), followed by boycott, education and diaspora (5% each), and refugees (4%). The distribution of causes reveals that, despite the specificity of the starting-points as diaspora communities, the overall network is dedicated more to solidarity with the Palestinian cause than to issues related to the Palestinian diaspora.<sup>14</sup> The specific diaspora-related issues are further explored below.

Activity types are distributed among the large number of categories of activities employed by the network.<sup>15</sup> Still, the majority of actors' activity (both diaspora and non-diaspora actors) is categorized as 'solidarity' (34%). (See **Graph Palestinians-5. General network overview, by activity type**, in the colour section of this Issue.)

The second-largest group is 'media', with 19%, followed by 6% for 'community', 4% for 'religion' and 3% for 'information', 'peace' and 'social'. There is only one actor whose activity is defined as 'diaspora'.<sup>16</sup>

The subgraph of solidarity as activity shows high density around the campaigns and boycott thematic areas, indicating close collaboration between solidarity and the Boycott movement, and with related campaigns (see **Graph Palestinians-6. Subgraph of solidarity as activity type**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>17</sup> By contrast, the Spanish and

German spaces, which are more dedicated to diaspora-related issues and actors, are peripheral to the larger solidarity cluster.

## The role of diaspora actors in the network

An overview of the network according to the classification of actors as diaspora and non-diaspora shows that diaspora actors are interwoven throughout the transnational network, and, although the network's star-hub is defined as a diaspora actor, the majority of diaspora actors pull the network away from its center (see **Graph Palestinians-7. General network overview, by diaspora**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>18</sup> Apart from the Spanish-language space, which forms a separate cluster of diaspora actors, the density of links between diaspora actors is determined mainly by geography and language.

### *Diaspora actors*

Considering the exclusivity of diaspora actors in the starting-points, the percentage of diaspora actors in the crawled population is rather low (22%, 78 nodes). The percentage of edges is even smaller – only 4% of the network's edges are defined as diaspora. Compared to the dense hyperlinked network, the loose structure of the diaspora actors may be in line with Hanafi's definition of Palestinians as 'partially diasporized people' representing torn and partial networks (see **Graph Palestinians-8. Subgraph of diaspora actors, highlighting geographical clusters**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>19</sup>

The practice of link-sharing is differential among diaspora actors and is also geographically determined. Among diaspora actors, those receiving the most edges are from the US, but those that share the most links are from other countries, such as Germany, Canada and the UK. In other words, the US forms the core of the network also in terms of the organization of diaspora actors.

Electronic Intifada, for example, which is the most-cited source by both diaspora and non-diaspora actors, is not listed in the top diaspora actors that share the most links to either diaspora or non-diaspora actors. The list of top-actors includes neither Palestinian refugees nor organizations related to them.

### *Demographics of diaspora actors*

The typical demographic profile of the network's diaspora actors are associations dedicated to either community or solidarity as activity, and to either Palestinian rights or diaspora as a primary cause. Fifty-nine percent (46 nodes) of all diaspora actors are associations. Seventeen percent (13 nodes) are individual websites, and 6% (5 nodes) are defined as 'media'. In terms of types of websites, the majority of diaspora actors are websites (68%, 53 nodes) and the second-largest category is blogs (18%, 14 nodes).

Most diaspora actors (31%, 24 nodes) mention the US as their country of residence. That is a fifth of all US actors in the corpus (24%). By contrast, there are seven diaspora nodes from Germany (9% of diaspora actors), which equal a third of all other actors from

Germany.<sup>20</sup> Diaspora actors from Canada are closer to the center since they are more interlinked with US-based actors (see **Graph Palestinians-8** in the colour section).

While diaspora actors from the US, Germany and Canada share their hyperlinked space with non-diaspora actors from their countries of residence, the Spanish-language space stands out as a diasporic space since 100% of the corpus's actors from Chile (9 nodes) Uruguay (2 nodes) and Mexico (1 node) are diaspora actors (see **Graph Palestinians-8**).

Notably, among the diaspora actors that share only links with non-diaspora actors (and are thus seen as isolated nodes in the graph of diaspora actors) is the Palestinian Right of Return Coalition,<sup>21</sup> which highlights the tension concerning the homogeneity of the Palestinian diaspora in terms of refugees and non-refugee communities (see **Graph Palestinians-8**).

The type of activity characterizing diaspora actors shows that 'community' as an activity type is unique to diaspora actors compared to the entire corpus. While the popular activity types among diaspora actors are evenly distributed between 'community' and 'solidarity' (24%, 19 nodes each), diaspora actors' activity as 'community' comprises 95% of the entire corpus, compared to 50% for 'solidarity'. Similarly, diaspora actors whose activity is defined as 'information' (6 nodes) and 'culture' (4 nodes) make up 50% of the entire corpus.

This alludes to the pattern of unique issues dealt with by diaspora actors compared to non-diaspora actors. Like non-diaspora actors, the largest group of diaspora actors is dedicated to Palestinian rights as a primary cause (27%, 21 nodes). But the second-largest primary cause among diaspora actors is 'diaspora', which makes up 100% of 'diaspora' as a primary cause in the entire corpus. And while only 9% of diaspora actors (7 nodes) are categorized as having 'refugees' as their primary cause, they make up 54% of the entire corpus. In other words, the entire discussion about diaspora and almost half of the discussion about refugees as a primary cause is brought to the network by diaspora actors.

In terms of references to the Palestinian Territories as a center of gravity, diaspora actors contribute 25% of the corpus' references to the Palestinian Territories (88% of all diaspora actors, 69 nodes). As with non-diaspora actors, most diaspora actors do not mention specific places of origin in the Palestinian Territories. That is, the network at large is dedicated to the Palestinian Territories as its center of gravity, but in ways that are more related to the network's characterizations as a transnational solidarity network rather than as a diaspora network.

By contrast, diaspora actors differ from non-diaspora actors by their high rates of references to the diaspora: 73% of all diaspora actors refer to the diaspora. That makes up 63% of references to the diaspora by the entire corpus.

## Center of gravity

The Palestinian Territories functions as the network's center of gravity for all network actors, but in a sense it brings together two types of intertwined networks: diaspora actors, with their related activities and issues; and solidarity actors, whose activities and issues are not diaspora related. This is especially evident when analyzing the network's subsections 'community' as an activity type, and the boycott of Israel as a primary cause.

### *Activity type – community*

The network's subsection Community-as-Activity is a relatively small space (20 nodes, 6% of all activity types), characterized by low density of edges; but its analysis highlights the unique activity and causes of the network's diaspora actors, which make up 95% of this subspace (see **Graph Palestinians-9. Subgraph of community-as-activity type**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>22</sup> The list of top actors (both in terms of authority and diffusing hubs) includes websites from diaspora communities around the world, with a similar profile to the crawl's starting-points.

Unlike other subsections of the network, the Community-as-Activity subsection is dedicated to the diaspora as the largest category of primary cause (60%, 12 nodes). This makes 71% of all actors in the corpus dedicated to the diaspora as a primary cause. Unlike any other category, the 'community' activity type does not treat Palestinian rights as a primary cause – only 5% (1 node), which is only 1% of the corpus of websites dedicated to Palestinian rights.<sup>23</sup> The second-largest categories of primary cause for 'community' as activity type are 'education' and 'refugees' – all of which are diaspora-related issues (10% each); 5% are dedicated to 'culture' and 'activism'. By contrast, 0% of the Community-as-Activity actors are dedicated to boycott as a primary cause.

### *Boycott as a primary cause*

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement brings together most organizations in the world campaigning for the Palestinian cause. The BDS network originates from the Palestinian Territories and is steered by the Palestinian BDS National Committee, comprising 19 Palestinian civil-society organizations. The committee's statement was issued in 2005, and has since been adopted by the International Coordination Network for Palestine, which brings together most Palestinian solidarity movements around the world, unified under the BDS cause.<sup>24</sup> On the map, the BDS movement and the Palestinian diaspora reside in the network as side-by-side issues, but a closer inspection shows that there is less thematic connection between the two issues and their actors (see **Graph Palestinians-10. Subgraph of boycott as a primary cause**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>25</sup> A zoomed-in view of the actors dedicated to boycott as a primary cause shows a dense internal cluster (18.3% internal density, compared to 3.3% inbound and 5.5% outbound), indicating an issue network. Among boycott actors, most edges exchanged with actors are dedicated to Palestinian rights and media as a primary cause, indicating both the framing and the target activity of the boycott movement in the media space.

Notably, 100% of websites dedicated to boycott as a primary cause are not diaspora actors. Rather, the list of highly interlinked top actors indicates a network of transnational organizations, with a distribution of publisher types between associations (74%), individuals (11%) and campaigns (16%). The activity of 95% of boycott actors is defined as 'solidarity', and their type of websites is distributed between sites (68%) and blogs (32%), but there are no actors defined as news sources. Also in terms of the geographical distribution of the actors, the profile of the BDS movement is somewhat different from the diaspora spaces described above. The proportion of actors from the US (42%) and the UK (16%) is relatively higher than elsewhere in the network, and other dominant

countries are France, Spain, Italy and Denmark (5%).<sup>26</sup> Countries that are dominant in the diaspora and community spaces such as the Palestinian Territories, Israel, Canada and Germany, do not have boycott actors.<sup>27</sup> Notably, 100% of BDS actors refer to the Palestinian Territories and 0% to the diaspora. Thus in terms of the center of gravity, while diaspora actors and the Boycott movement have a mutual center of gravity, they exclude one another in terms of activity, primary cause and geographical distribution.

### *The Palestinian Territories as country of residence*

The role of the Palestinian Territories as the network's center of gravity, especially in relation to the two-way links between diaspora and its center of gravity, is further highlighted in the analysis of actors whose country of residence is the Palestinian Territories.<sup>28</sup> In terms of inbound links to actors residing in the Palestinian Territories from actors residing in other countries, the most edges are received from the US, but the highest density of links is from the Netherlands.<sup>29</sup>

However, the participation of actors from the Palestinian Territories in the diaspora spaces is rather low. Only 6% of actors from the Palestinian Territories are defined as diaspora actors, and 25% (8 nodes) of them refer to the diaspora. While the primary cause of 28% of actors residing in the Palestinian Territories is Palestinian rights, 0% is dedicated to 'diaspora' (see **Graph Palestinians-11. Palestinian Territories as a country of residence**, in the colour section of this Issue).<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusions

The network that is crawled from starting-points of organizations of Palestinian communities in the different countries is characterized by its strong transnational solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian Territories as a center of gravity. The network is dense and cohesive, and most network actors are dedicated to Palestinian rights as either a primary or a secondary cause. However, the shift from the network's starting-points as diaspora actors to its resulting transnational solidarity network is perhaps indicative of the lack of ties between diaspora actors among themselves and in relation to the center of gravity. Rather, they are brought together by their strong ties to non-diaspora civil-society organizations in their host societies, which are dedicated more to the Palestinian cause and less to issues related to the Palestinian diaspora.

Thus the network reveals aspects of the dynamics of the Palestinian diaspora that emerge on the Web: it is no longer defined around Palestine as a *place of origin*, but is instead constructed around Palestine as a *point of reference*; its organization is less around a network of familial, social and transactional ties between *communities* of Palestinians who have been dispersed to many places in the world, and more around global *advocacy networks* that transcend their immediate social networks; and its members are no longer only *Palestinians abroad*, but also *natives of the host countries* who identify with the Palestinian cause.

Since most actors are dedicated to Palestinian rights and the Palestinian Territories, distinguishing between diaspora and non-diaspora actors is apparent mostly in terms of type of activity and the specific issues related to geographical location. In that sense, the geographic specificity and arrangement of actors and causes reaffirms the

de-territorialization of the Palestinian diaspora, as noted by Hanafi. On the other hand, the network's strong emphasis on the Palestinian Territories as a cause and as the network's center of gravity may indicate re-territorialization of the Palestinian diaspora vis-à-vis the state-building process.

The time of data collection is important in examining the relationships between networks of Palestinian diaspora communities, the Palestinian Authority as representing the center of gravity and the boycott movement. The data was collected during the months that preceded the Palestinian UN bid for recognition as a sovereign state in September 2011, and when the Boycott movement and campaigns were reaching international volume and gaining success. It is noteworthy that the Palestinian Authority is hardly represented in the network, indicating the extent to which the Palestinian diaspora is not aligned with its policy and its tendency to prefer the settling of a sovereign state demarcated by the 1967 borders, which compromises to various extents the question of Palestinian refugees' right of return. On the other hand, the Boycott movement, which started in the Palestinian Territories and expanded prodigiously among transnational activists abroad, is very dominant in the network, showing a different kind of transnational commitment to the center of gravity, one that is less affiliated with political movements and more with cultural and civic modes of engagement.

## Funding

This research was supported by the ICT-Migrations program of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris and by the PhD President's Scholarship, Bar-Ilan University. The author would like to express her sincere thanks to Dana Diminescu, Mathieu Jacomy and Matthieu Renault (FMSH, Paris) and Adi Zamir-Nitsan (Bar-Ilan University).

## Notes

- 1 Both Schulz and Peteet provide a semantic analysis of the Arabic equivalents to the English term 'diaspora'. While the term *shatat*, meaning 'dispersal', may be semantically closest to the English term, the terms used most frequently by Palestinian refugees are *manfa* (exile, in the sense of forced expulsion) and *ghurba* (absence from the homeland) (see Peteet, 2007: 639; Schulz & Hammer, 2003: 20).
- 2 As Julie Peteet notes: 'Assigning Palestinians diasporic status could risk diluting concerns with policy and long-term, equitable solutions. This political dimension suggests a careful reading of the concept, in particular its flexibility and thus widespread currency' (2007: 636).
- 3 Peteet, for example, suggests referring to 'diasporic dimensions' in the lives of Palestinians around the world that are determined by factors such as the time of displacement, the spatial proximity to the homeland, and demography (Peteet, 2007: 643). In a similar way, Schulz suggests treating the diaspora as a condition of alienation and estrangement of transnational networks of mobility that maintain uneasy relationships with their homeland. Instead of treating the 'Palestinian diaspora' as a homogeneous group, she suggests referring to Palestinians as people who 'lead diasporic lives', where 'diasporic dimensions' can also be applied to Palestinians who reside in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and Israel (Schulz & Hammer, 2003: 22, 73).
- 4 Such efforts were materialized around the Across Borders Project, which aimed to reconnect Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East with the Palestinian Territories through ICTs (see Aouragh, 2011; Ben-David, 2011; Hijab, 2001; Schulz & Hammer, 2003).
- 5 The question of what to call the Palestinian Territories is also contested. The various official and unofficial names have political connotations and are often used exclusively by certain

actors to make a political statement. For example, the UN refers to 'Occupied Palestinian Territory', Palestinian sources use 'Palestine', and the US administration refers to the 'West Bank and Gaza'. In this article 'Palestinian Territories' is used as an umbrella term in order to avoid official language employment by specific actors.

- 6 The guiding principles for classifying an actor as 'diaspora' were the following: self-description of the actors as diaspora; when the majority of the members of associations are of Palestinian origin; actors that are Palestinian refugees. Within these guiding principles, websites of Palestinian Israelis were included as diaspora as well. This was in the attempt to capture the widest category of diaspora actors, while being aware of the political ramifications (and contestation), of the inclusion of Palestinians living in Israel as diaspora.
- 7 See general map overview on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=map&map=56&section=25>. Note that the graphs relating specifically to this article, plus the coloured graphs and subgraphs produced by the other contributors to this Special Issue, are not reproduced within the body of each article, but have been brought together in an appendix section located at the end of the issue and can be accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0967010612456918>. For more details and data, the reader may also refer to the e-Diasporas atlas platform, namely for this article at: <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=section&section=25>.
- 8 See Actor Profile on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=258&section=25>.
- 9 It should be noted that 22% of the actors did not specify a country of residence.
- 10 See subgraph Country of Residence on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=13&section=25>.
- 11 See subgraph Publisher Types on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=4&section=25>.
- 12 See Actor's Profile on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=165&section=25>.
- 13 See Actor's Profile on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=170&section=25>.
- 14 See subgraph Primary Cause on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=8&section=25>.
- 15 See subgraph Activity on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=7&section=25>.
- 16 The blog Uprooted Palestinians is the only actor whose activity is defined as 'diaspora'. See Actor's Profile on the E-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=318&section=25>.
- 17 See subgraph Solidarity as Activity on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=7&section=25&value=Solidarity>.
- 18 See subgraph Diaspora? on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=nodeattribute&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=5&section=25>.
- 19 See subgraph Diaspora?=yes on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=5&section=25&value=Yes>.
- 20 Websites of Palestinian communities in Berlin are loosely interlinked.
- 21 See Actor's Profile on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=270&section=25>.
- 22 See subgraph Community as Activity on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=7&section=25&value=Community>.
- 23 The Palästinensische Vereinigung Hamburgs. See Actor's Profile on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=node&graph=67&map=56&node=277&section=25>.

- 24 The global BDS network has 59 official members from 22 countries around the world, including Australia, the US, Canada, Europe (Belgium, France, Catalunya, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland), The Middle East (Syria, Palestinian Israelis, Egypt) and Asia (Malaysia). See the BDS movement website, <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>. This umbrella site is not listed as an actor in the graph.
- 25 See subgraph Boycott as a Primary Cause on the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=8&section=25&value=Boycott>.
- 26 About one-fifth of all sites from Europe and 8% of all US actors are dedicated to the boycott as a primary cause.
- 27 It is an English-language space representing the leading countries of the boycott movement. Arabic is the fourth language, preceded by French and Spanish.
- 28 The definition of actors residing in the Palestinian Territories includes actors from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem; see subgraph Palestinian Territories as Country of Residence in the e-Diasporas Atlas platform, <http://maps.e-diasporas.fr/index.php?focus=value&graph=67&map=56&nodeattribute=13&section=25&value=Palestinian%2BTerritories>.
- 29 Interestingly, Israel is third in the list of inbound links to actors in the Palestinian Territories, indicating perhaps collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, as is evident in the cluster of the general graph.
- 30 Diaspora makes up 6% of the secondary causes in the Palestinian Territories, which are 11% of the entire corpus dedicated to the diaspora as secondary cause.

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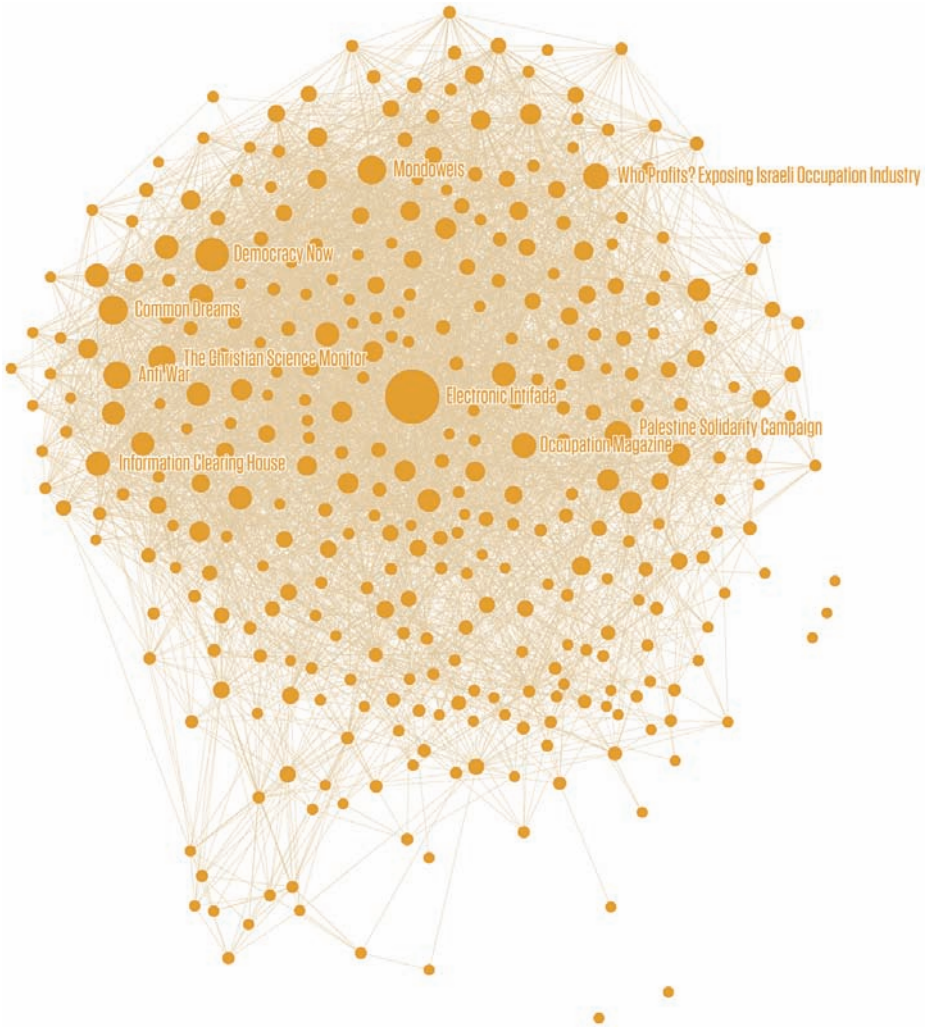
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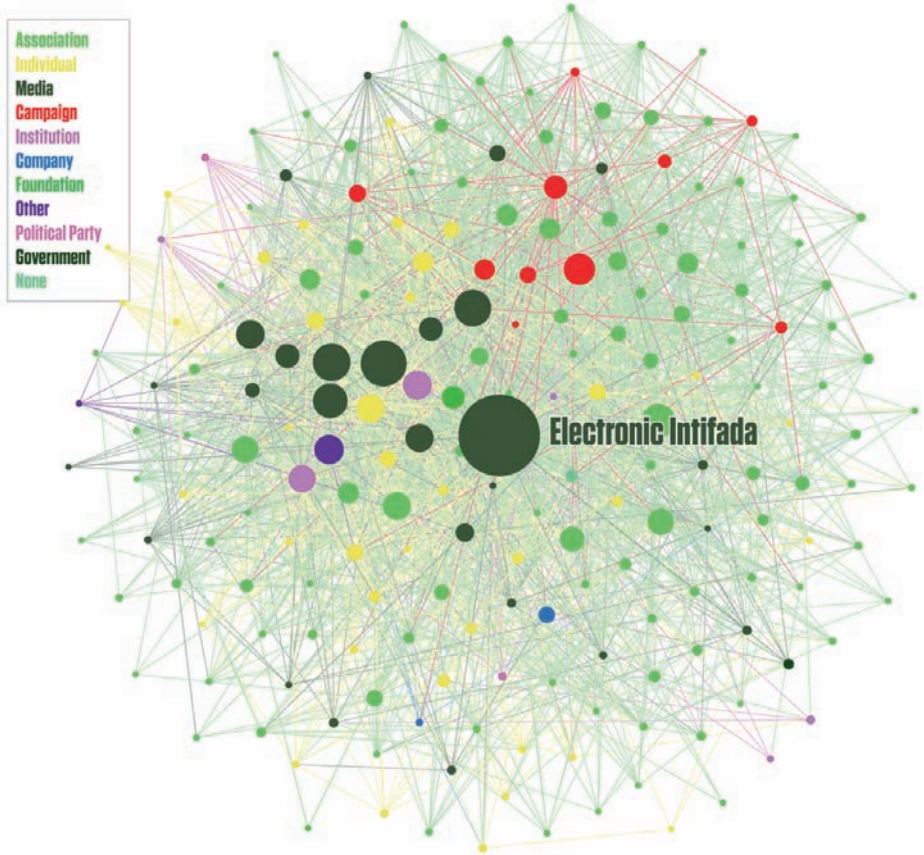
**Author biography**

Anat Ben-David is a post-doctoral researcher at the media studies department, University of Amsterdam. She recently completed her PhD studies in the program for Science, Technology and Society at Bar-Ilan University (Israel). Her dissertation examines the socio-technical elements that shape Palestinian borders, territories and spaces on the Web. Anat is also affiliated with the Digital Methods Initiative, University of Amsterdam, which develops methods and tools for studying the Web.

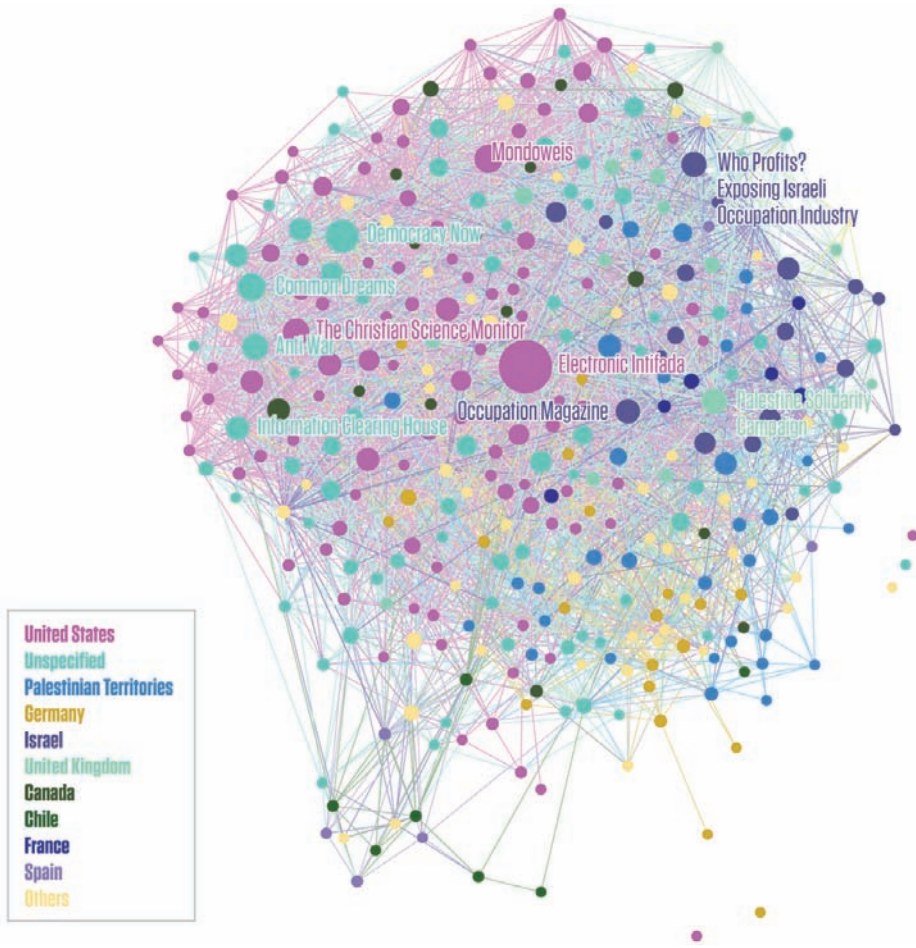
## Ben-David: The Palestinian diaspora on the Web



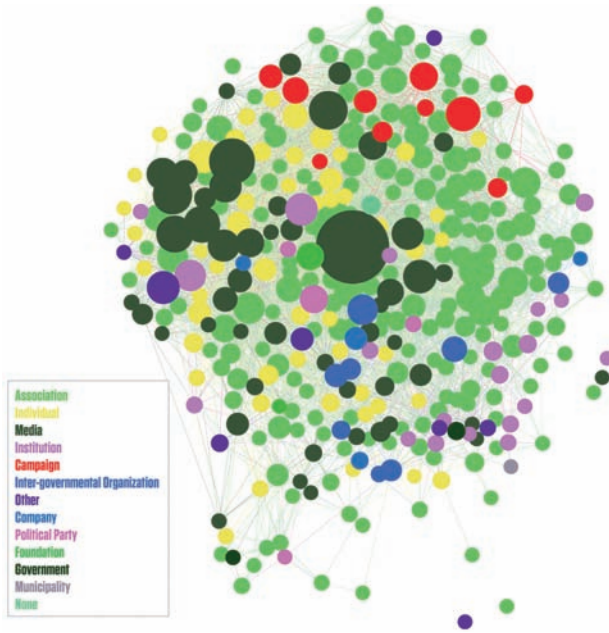
**Graph Palestinians-I.** General network overview.



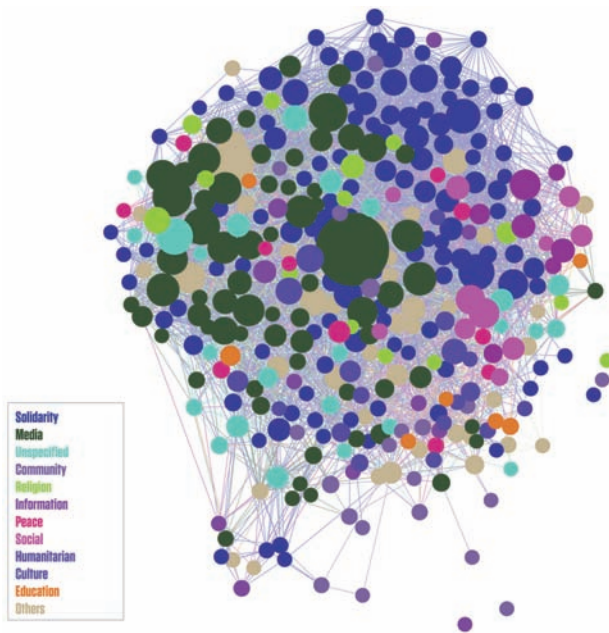
**Graph Palestinians-2.** Electronic Intifada, the network's star-hub.



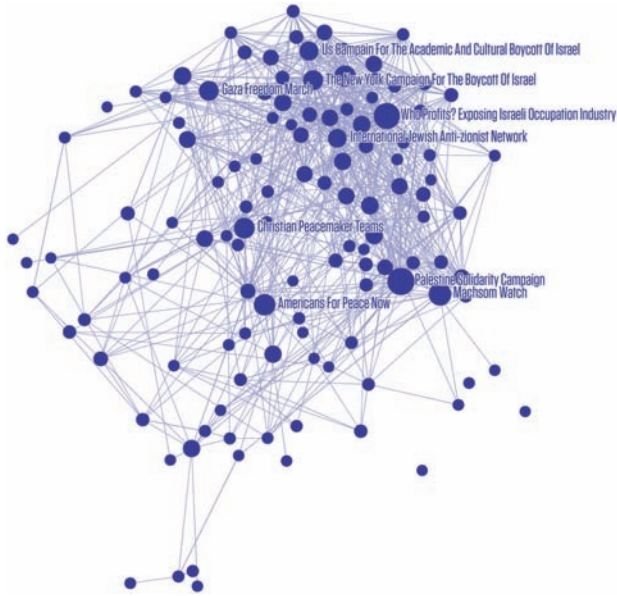
**Graph Palestinians-3.** General network overview, by country of residence.



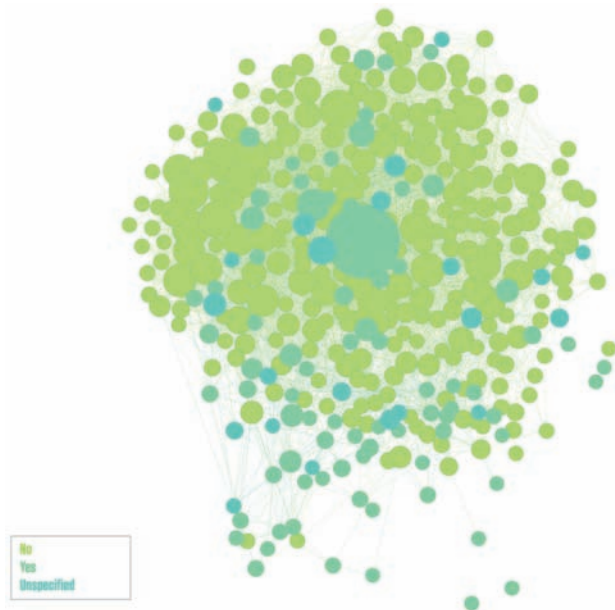
**Graph Palestinians-4.** General network overview, by publisher type.



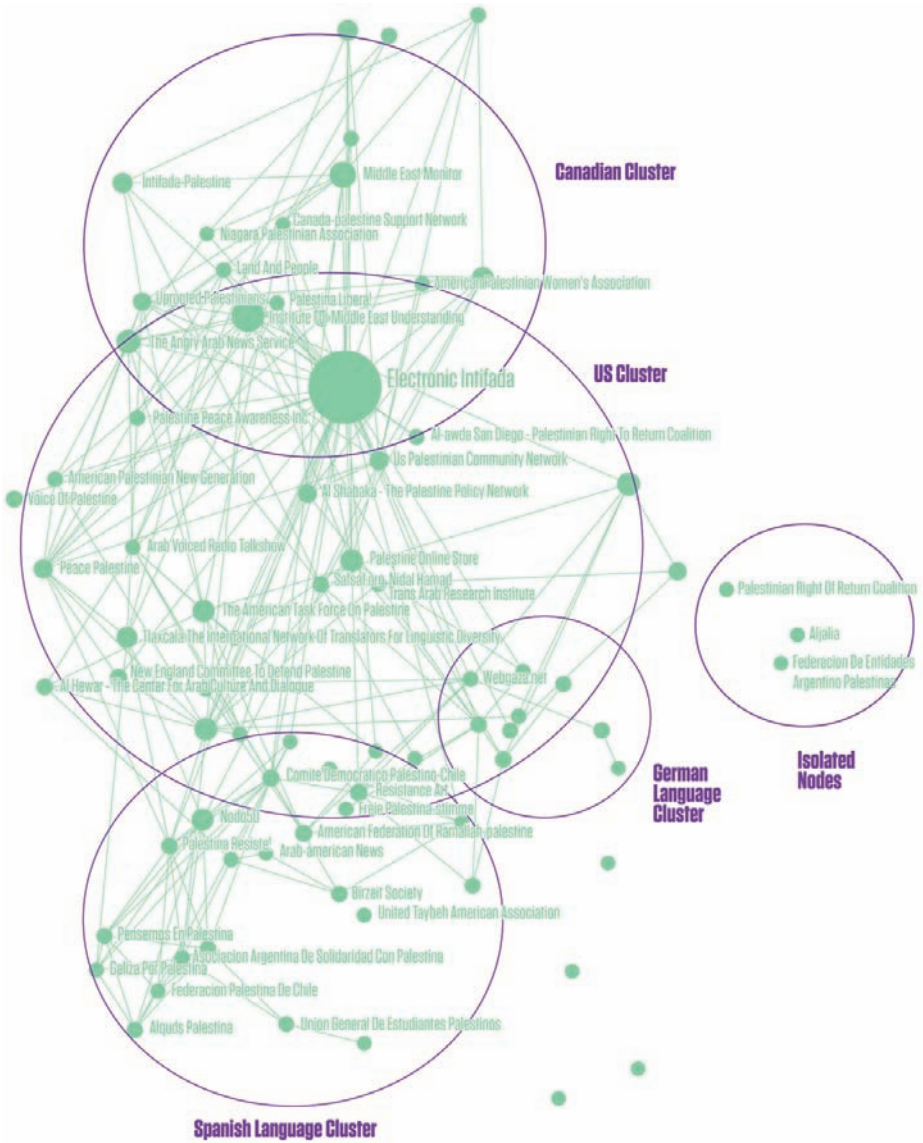
**Graph Palestinians-5.** General network overview, by activity type.



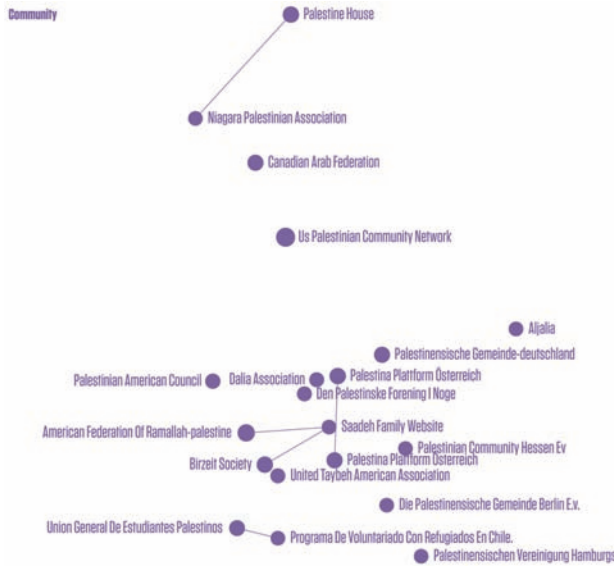
**Graph Palestinians-6.** Subgraph of solidarity as activity type.



**Graph Palestinians-7.** General network overview, by diaspora.



**Graph Palestinians-8.** Subgraph of diaspora actors, highlighting geographical clusters.

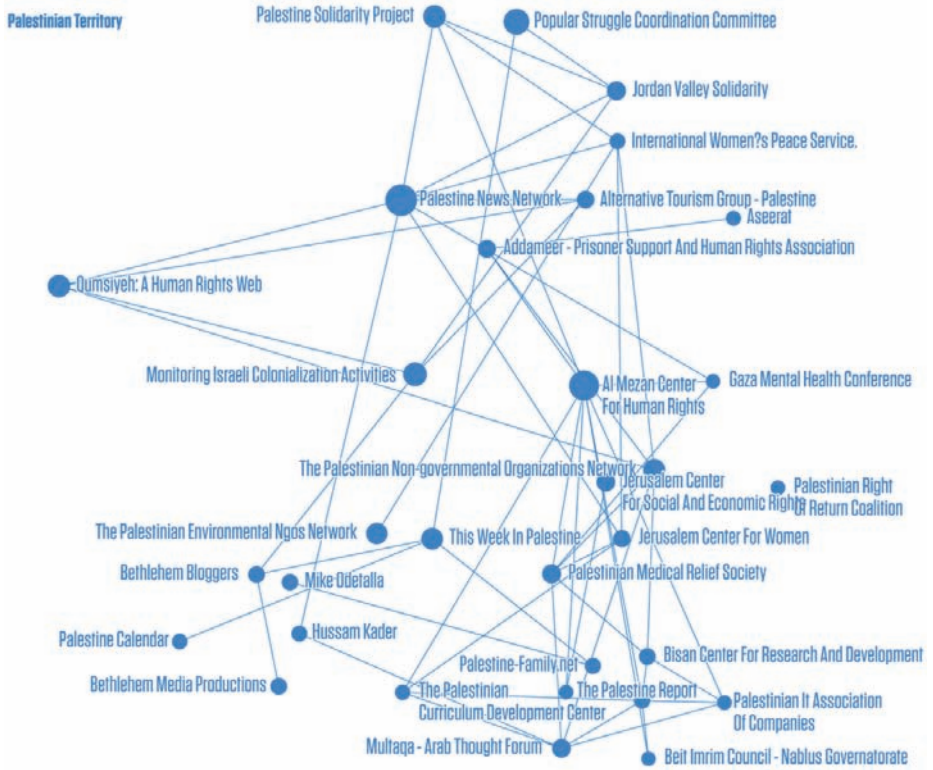


Graph Palestinians-9. Subgraph of community-as-activity type.



Graph Palestinians-10. Subgraph of boycott as a primary cause.





**Graph Palestinians- II.** Palestinian Territories as a country of residence.