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Metadata as Resistance

A case study on Language, Power, and the Cataloging of Palestinian Cultural Heritage

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English title:	Metadata as Resistance: A case study on language, power, and the cataloging of Palestinian cultural heritage
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Abstract:	The cataloging and classification of cultural heritage materials are not neutral processes, they shape historical narratives, collective memory, and access to knowledge. This study investigates how librarians and archivists navigate and contest dominant classification systems, with a focus on the cataloging of Palestinian cultural heritage. Using the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as a central case, the research identifies key structural limitations in representing Palestinian identity, displacement, and political struggle, revealing how cataloging systems often reflect institutional and geopolitical biases. Grounded in feminist and decolonial theory, and drawing on critical cataloging literature, the study uses a case study approach centered on a semi-structured interview with a practicing librarian, annotated cataloging documents, and supporting materials from the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA). The analysis explores how information professionals challenge erasure through local vocabularies, community-informed metadata, and ethically grounded practices. It also considers how cataloging can serve as a form of resistance and care within conditions of occupation and exile. The findings demonstrate that classification systems are sites of both epistemic violence and professional agency. They highlight how catalogers can intervene in dominant infrastructures to make marginalized histories visible and retrievable. By analyzing these practices in the context of Palestine, this research contributes to broader conversations about decolonizing knowledge organization and reimagining classification as a political, ethical, and community-centered endeavor.
Keywords:	Critical Cataloging, Palestine, Library of Congress Subject Headings, Decolonial Archives, Case study, Knowledge Organization, Librarianship, Cultural Heritage

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We also want to express our deep appreciation for the feminist, postcolonial, and decolonial scholars whose words and visions have guided us, and for those who will continue this work after us. Their courage to question dominant systems and reimagine how knowledge can be organized has been a constant source of inspiration. We are equally grateful to the librarians, archivists, and all those working, often quietly and against the grain, to resist normative, biased metadata structures and to center marginalized and Indigenous voices. This thesis stands on their shoulders. This work was undertaken with a commitment to justice-oriented, community-informed scholarship and we hope it contributes, in some small way, to the ongoing and collective work of resistance, remembrance, and reimagining. We also hope it marks the beginning of our continued engagement in this field, both as scholars and practitioners, committed to challenging dominant narratives and supporting more inclusive, equitable ways of organizing knowledge.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge that this thesis was written with editorial support from OpenAI's ChatGPT, which was used for feedback and thematic coherence. All analysis and interpretation are our own. The use of AI was guided by a commitment to academic integrity, and all content was critically reviewed, adapted, and revised to reflect the standards, voice, and ethical responsibility of this thesis.

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1 Introduction

"For any individual, group or situation, classifications and standards give advantage or they give suffering."
-Bowker and Star, 1999, p. 6

This chapter introduces the central problem of how dominant classification systems, particularly the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), marginalize Palestinian cultural heritage through biased and inadequate terminology. It situates classification as a political practice that shapes access to knowledge, highlighting the epistemic violence embedded in seemingly neutral metadata systems. The chapter outlines the theoretical framework, research questions, and methodological scope, while also reflecting on the positionality of the researchers and the structural constraints of conducting this work within Western academia.

Library classification systems are far from neutral tools; they actively shape how knowledge is preserved, accessed, and understood. These systems, often presented as objective and technical, are embedded with cultural, political, and epistemological assumptions that usually privilege dominant worldviews. As Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999) emphasize, classification structures are "often sites of political and social struggles," even as their power remains obscured beneath layers of technicality (p. 196).

This struggle is particularly visible in the cataloging of Palestinian materials, where systems such as LCSH embody Western-centric and colonial logics of classification. While other national vocabularies, such as RAMEAU in France or GND in Germany, more explicitly acknowledge occupation or contested sovereignty in their subject terms, LCSH often obscures these political realities through vague or state-aligned terminology. Its global reach, amplified by widespread adoption in library systems worldwide, makes its omissions especially consequential for the representation of marginalized histories.

Since the Nakba[1] of 1948, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly displaced, the Israeli state has played a significant role in controlling historical narratives through the restriction of archival access, the destruction and appropriation of documents, and the reframing of cultural heritage, as documented by Nur Masalha (2012) and further examined by Rona Sela (2017). As Roxy Moon (2023) argues, archives thus become contested spaces, not only preserving history, but actively shaping collective memory and cultural identity.

Within this context, the classification of Palestinian materials within systems like LCSH often obscures or distorts how Palestinian identity, history, and culture are represented and understood, shaping the broader production of knowledge about Palestine within institutional and global contexts. For example, the lack of recognition of Palestine as a state by the U.S. government limits the use of *Palestine* as a subject heading, frequently subsuming Palestinian content under broader or politically charged categories such as

[1] See section 4.1 Definitions of Terms and Concepts

"Arab-Israeli conflict," "Middle East – Politics and government," or even "Israel – History." Materials on Palestinian resistance or identity may be categorized under "Terrorism" or "Jewish-Arab relations," reframing them through a lens that obscures their cultural or historical specificity. This misclassification has tangible consequences: it restricts access, reframes cultural heritage through external lenses, and contributes to the marginalization of Palestinian identity within global information infrastructures.

These issues are not unique to the Palestinian context. Library and archival classification systems have long served as instruments of epistemic control, often marginalizing Indigenous, non-Western, and subaltern forms of knowledge. As articulated by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1988), the term subaltern refers to groups historically excluded from systems of power, those whose voices are systematically silenced or distorted by dominant structures of representation. In the context of knowledge organization, this silencing is enacted through classification systems that embed hierarchies of power and privilege. As Hope Olson writes, feminist, postcolonial, and Indigenous scholars have shown how these systems encode assumptions about gender, race, ethnicity, and nationhood (2001). She argues that "biases of gender, sexuality, race, age, ability, ethnicity, language, and religion" limit the expression of diversity in naming and organizing knowledge (p. 639). Such embedded biases do not only reflect societal norms, but they also actively participate in reproducing them and they shape what kinds of knowledge are considered legitimate, visible, and retrievable within institutional frameworks.

In response, critical cataloging and decolonial archival movements have emerged to challenge these limitations, advocating for more inclusive, context-sensitive metadata practices. Digital archives in particular have created spaces where Palestinian communities and allied institutions can reclaim historical narratives and resist institutional erasure (Moon, 2023). These efforts not only subvert dominant classification logics but also assert cultural sovereignty and reframe the politics of memory.

This study is a critical examination of how Palestinian materials are cataloged within dominant classification systems, with particular attention to the ethical, political, and practical challenges faced by librarians and archivists. Framed as a qualitative case study, it explores how professionals navigate institutional constraints while making decisions about metadata and subject headings in contexts marked by geopolitical conflict and asymmetries of power. A more detailed discussion of the case design and methodology can be found in the methods chapter.

By analyzing how classification systems construct, maintain and obscure Palestinian heritage, this research contributes to broader conversations on knowledge organization as a tool of cultural preservation and resistance. Grounded in an intersectional and decolonial framework, the study seeks to inform both efforts toward more equitable, historically accurate, and inclusive practices in librarianship, archival work, and adjacent fields of cultural heritage.

1.1 Problem Formulation

The classification and cataloging of cultural heritage are foundational to how knowledge is structured, accessed, and remembered. LCSH, widely used in libraries and archives globally, has long been critiqued for their Eurocentric orientation, outdated terminology, and embedded political biases. Though often framed as neutral tools, these systems reflect dominant cultural narratives and institutional ideologies that shape how identities and histories are represented, or obscured (Bowker & Star, 1999; Ewing, 2023).

In the case of Palestinian cultural heritage, these structural limitations become particularly visible. Existing classification frameworks frequently fail to represent Palestinian materials accurately, either through terminological gaps, problematic categorizations, or the absence of appropriate subject headings. These omissions are not merely technical, they contribute to the marginalization of Palestinian identity within global knowledge infrastructures and affect how library users discover, interpret, and engage with these materials.

Librarians and archivists often operate at the intersection of institutional constraint and critical intervention. While cataloging practices are typically governed by standardized systems like LCSH, information professionals also hold the potential to resist and reframe these structures through more inclusive, community-informed approaches. Critical cataloging and decolonial archival movements have highlighted this dual role, calling attention to the power of metadata to either reinforce or challenge dominant narratives. Yet despite growing awareness, significant structural and epistemological barriers persist.

While there is growing theoretical and historical critique of classification systems, especially in relation to Palestine (Carlstone, 2023; Holloway, 2018; Knowlton, 2005), there remains a significant gap in understanding how information professionals, those who do the daily work of cataloging, navigate these constraints in practice. Few studies have examined how catalogers and metadata specialists interpret, challenge, or negotiate biased vocabularies in their own institutional settings. This lack of empirical insight has practical consequences: it not only restricts knowledge of professional agency but also limits our understanding of how classification systems might be reimagined or transformed from within. This research seeks to address that gap by examining the experiences, decisions, and interventions of information professionals working with Palestinian cultural heritage.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

With this study we aim to identify, describe, and analyze the central challenges involved in cataloging Palestinian materials, and to explore how information professionals engage with, contest, or rework dominant systems like LCSH. Drawing on materials shared by a Lebanese librarian working with adjusting and correcting subject headings dealing with Palestine, the research maps specific classification choices and gaps to better understand how and where misrepresentation occurs. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to efforts that reimagine knowledge organization not only as a technical practice but as a

political and ethical one, centered on the reclamation of narrative agency and the preservation of marginalized cultural identities. Our research questions are as follows:

1. How do normative, including political assumptions embedded in dominant classification systems affect the cataloging of Palestinian identity within library and archival practices?

2. How do information professionals contribute to shaping subject headings that more accurately reflect Palestinian identity and cultural heritage?

3. In what ways can digital archives serve as alternative spaces for preserving, reclassifying, and reclaiming Palestinian cultural heritage under conditions of occupation and displacement?

1.3 Empirical Limitations

This section outlines the key empirical limitations that shaped the scope of the study, including the limited empirical material, the narrow focus on LCSH, and the reliance on document analysis rather than field-based observation.

Limited Empirical Scope
The study originally aimed to include interviews with three professionals, two archivists and one librarian, all of whom had participated in a public lecture on cataloging Palestine organized by Archives and Digital Media Lab. However, due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints, only one interview was successfully conducted: a semi-structured interview via email exchange with Basma Chebani, Associate University Librarian at the American University of Beirut. While her contributions were rich and foundational, the absence of additional practitioner voices limited the diversity of institutional experiences and perspectives represented in the study.

It is also important to acknowledge the broader context in which these professionals operate. All individuals we contacted were based in Lebanon, a country that experienced renewed Israeli military aggression and violent conflict in the autumn of 2024. Given the severity of the situation, and the immense personal and professional pressures our potential interlocutors were likely facing, we as researchers situated in the Global North made the ethical decision not to pursue these contacts further. Pressuring individuals already working under conditions of conflict and instability would have been both inappropriate and unethical, and we fully respect their need to prioritize safety, care, and local responsibilities.

Narrow Institutional and Technical Focus
This study focused specifically on cataloging practices related to Palestinian cultural heritage within the context of LCSH and related metadata infrastructures. As such, it does not explore the full range of classification systems (e.g., RDA, Dewey) or international thesauri in use across different library systems, nor does it provide comparative analysis with other colonized communities whose metadata experiences may offer useful parallels. A comparative or multi-case study design could deepen future research.

Reliance on Document Analysis and Secondary Data
In addition to the single interview, this study relies on document analysis, including a spreadsheet of LCSH List of English Subject Headings about Palestine and Guidelines for Improving Discoverability of Resources on Palestine shared by Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA) Thesaurus, and critical cataloging literature. While this material provided a valuable foundation for analysis, it does not fully substitute for fieldwork-based observation or extended dialogue with practitioners across multiple institutions. The nature of the data collection was shaped by both logistical constraints and the sensitivity of the topic, which may have influenced the accessibility of participants. Additionally, due to time constraints and the qualitative nature of our study, we chose to narrow in on fewer examples from the documents provided. This choice was informed by examples given by the cataloging expert in the semi-structured interview we conducted.

1.4 Epistemic Challenges and Researcher Positionality

This section reflects on the authors' positionality as white women researchers writing about Palestinian cultural heritage from within Western academic institutions. Grounded in feminist and postcolonial theory, it acknowledges the ethical complexities, power dynamics, and political sensitivities of the research, emphasizing a commitment to transparency, reflexivity, and solidarity rather than representation. In addition, the structural and political context in which this research was conducted – specifically, within a Western academic institution – introduced further constraints that influenced both access to materials and the framing of analysis.

Researcher Reflexivity and Solidarity
We are conscious that research from positions of racial and institutional privilege can unintentionally reinforce hierarchies of authority, particularly when researchers fail to acknowledge their positionality or present their perspectives as universally valid. In response, we have sought to be transparent about our motivations, interrogate our assumptions, and center the voices and professional practices of those within the communities we discuss. We do not claim to be the authority here but rather seek to critically examine the cataloging infrastructures that obscure and marginalize Palestinian histories – systems built and upheld within institutions to which we ourselves are connected. We understand our role as one of solidarity and critical reflection, and we aim to contribute to a broader movement toward inclusive, community-anchored practices in knowledge organization.

Centering Marginalized Voices
As part of our ethical and epistemological commitments, we have deliberately prioritized sources authored by scholars from the Global South, particularly Palestinian and other SWANA-based[2] researchers. This decision reflects our aim to decenter Western academic dominance and to amplify voices that have historically been marginalized in global knowledge production. However, the

[2] See section 4.1 Definitions of Terms and Concepts

research infrastructure at our Swedish university provided very limited access to publications and scholarly work produced outside of Europe and North America. This structural imbalance shaped our research process and underscored the broader epistemic challenges of conducting critical, decolonial work within a Western academic framework. In response, we actively sought out literature through alternative means, including fieldwork and participation in academic spaces dedicated to Palestinian scholarship. Prioritizing Global South perspectives is not only a methodological choice but an ethical stance to resist reproducing the very knowledge hierarchies our study seeks to critique. This approach is further detailed in section 2.2 Materials and Ethical Considerations, where we elaborate on our empirical sources and decisions made in response to these structural constraints.

Epistemic Barriers and Structural Exclusions

This thesis is written within a Western academic context and must meet the formal requirements of a Swedish university. Writing about Palestine in such a setting presents specific limitations and challenges. We are acutely aware that scholars and others who lift the Palestine question, or who identify the colonization of Palestine for what it is, are facing professional risks, including loss of research funding and, in some cases, more severe consequences. We deeply regret that individuals engaged in research on Palestine, or those who challenge dominant historical narratives, are subjected to various forms of pressure, surveillance, or silencing within Western institutions. As a result of this, we have made careful decisions about language and framing to ensure that no participant or contributor to this thesis is placed at risk. Nevertheless, our work is grounded in postcolonial theory, and we critically understand the State of Israel as a settler-colonial project. This theoretical orientation informs our analysis while simultaneously navigating the constraints imposed by the institutional context in which this research is conducted.

Another important challenge relates to access to relevant scholarship. It proved challenging to locate research produced within Palestine or by Palestinian institutions through the academic databases provided by our Swedish university. These platforms are heavily skewed toward Western European and North American publications, resulting in a structural underrepresentation of voices from the Global South, particularly those working within or in close proximity to Palestinian contexts. This imbalance not only narrows the scope of available perspectives but also reflects broader patterns of epistemic exclusion within global knowledge infrastructures.

Expanding Access Through Fieldwork

To address this gap, Malin Färdig traveled to Doha, Qatar, in the winter of 2024 to access literature, archives, and research collections at local libraries and research institutes. While in Doha, she also attended the Annual Palestine Forum 2025, the world's leading academic conference dedicated to Palestinian studies. Organized by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in collaboration with the Institute for Palestine Studies, the forum brings together scholars from around the world and offers unparalleled academic quality and research diversity. This opportunity was instrumental in expanding the empirical and theoretical foundations of the thesis beyond the limitations of Western academic gatekeeping.

The Situatedness of Knowledge

Finally, as with all qualitative research, the interpretation of the empirical material is shaped by the researcher's positionality, theoretical lens, and methodological choices. While care was taken to remain reflexive, intersectional, and ethically grounded throughout the analysis, different researchers might emphasize different aspects of the material or draw alternative conclusions.

As white women researchers studying the representation of Palestinian cultural heritage in cataloging systems, we recognize the ethical complexities involved in writing about a community to which we do not belong. Our approach is informed by feminist and postcolonial scholarship, particularly the work of bell hooks, who emphasized the importance of self-reflexivity, accountability, and ethical responsibility when engaging across lines of difference (hooks, 1989). We are also guided by Sandra Harding's standpoint epistemology, which argues that all knowledge is situated, and that beginning inquiry from the perspectives of the marginalized can expose the limits and biases of dominant knowledge systems (Harding, 2004).

2 Method and Materials

This chapter outlines the qualitative case study design and critical epistemological framework guiding the research. Drawing on feminist, postcolonial, and critical cataloging theory, it details the materials used – primarily a semi-structured email interview with Basma Chebani and supporting documents – alongside a thematic literature review that centers Global South perspectives. The analytic strategy is grounded in the use of sensitizing concepts, enabling a reflexive and interpretive approach to understanding how cataloging practices both constrain and enable the representation of Palestinian cultural heritage. Ethical considerations and researcher positionality are integrated throughout to ensure transparency and accountability in navigating this politically sensitive topic.

2.1 Case Study Design

We use a qualitative, case study approach to examine the challenges of cataloging Palestinian cultural heritage, with a particular focus on how information professionals navigate, challenge, or reinforce subject headings within dominant classification systems. Case studies allow for an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (Simons, 2009), making them particularly well-suited for investigating profoundly situated issues like the cataloging of Palestinian materials. Rather than striving for broad generalizations, this study aligns with Simons' (2009) argument that case study research is about particularization and offers rich, detailed insights that contribute to knowledge and practice rather than prescribing universal solutions. The case study method, as Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) notes, is uniquely suited to "closing in" on real-life situations and analyzing knowledge structures as they unfold in practice.

The analytical approach is informed by postcolonial and feminist theory (El Saadawi, N. 2010; El Sadda, H. 2012; hooks, 1989; Olson, 2001; Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 2003; Said, 2003; Spivak, 1988), which serve not only as theoretical orientations but also as critical epistemological commitments that shape how knowledge, power, and representation are understood in this study. These traditions question the ways in which dominant systems produce cultural hierarchies, marginalize difference, and naturalize particular worldviews as universal. Perspectives from critical cataloging (Holloway, 2018; Knowlton, 2005) complement this lens by emphasizing the political dimensions of knowledge organization and calling attention to how subject headings and metadata practices can reproduce, or resist, systems of oppression. Together, these approaches enable a critical examination of how classification systems structure knowledge and mediate cultural visibility, particularly for communities whose histories and identities have been excluded, erased, or distorted.

2.2 Materials and Ethical Considerations

To achieve a nuanced understanding of how cataloging practices, and the interpretations of them, shape both access to and the construction of Palestinian cultural heritage and identity, this research draws on a diverse range of materials. These include: (1) a semi-structured email interview with cataloging expert Basma Chebani; (2) two documents she provided, including the MELA Working Group's Guidelines for Improving Discoverability of Resources on Palestine and a spreadsheet of LCSH List of English Subject Headings about Palestine (see Appendix C and D); (3) scholarly studies analyzed in the Previous Research chapter, including work by Berman (1993), Holloway (2018), and Knowlton (2005), which examine and document the political limitations, terminological omissions, and representational biases embedded in dominant classification systems like LCSH; and finally, (4) a body of critical literature analyzed thematically (see section 5.2), which informed the conceptual framework and offered insight into metadata practices and resistance strategies. Together, these sources enable a multi-layered, qualitative analysis that connects institutional practices with broader theoretical and political concerns and help build the case for understanding cataloging as both a site of constraint and a space for professional agency and resistance.

A central component of the empirical data is a semi-structured email interview with Basma Chebani, Associate University Librarian for Cataloging and Metadata Services at the American University of Beirut and President of the Lebanese Library Association. Chebani has built four thesauri and was the project manager for the Arabic version of the Agrovoc thesaurus of FAO in 1990. She also served as Head of Library in the Arab Atomic Energy Agency from 1993–2002 and as Head of Technical Services in the Information Center of the League of Arab States from 1983–1990. In 2022, Chebani joined the MELA Working Group on Palestine, which advocates for subject heading reform relating to Palestinian identity across cataloging systems that use LCSH. In this thesis, when not referring to Chebani by her name, we refer to her as the 'metadata librarian' and 'cataloging expert.'

We contacted Chebani following a Zoom lecture titled *Cataloging Palestine: Cultural Imperialism in Subject Headings* (January 27, 2025), in which she and others discussed the challenges of cataloging Palestinian identity and heritage in a colonial context amidst ongoing violence. While our original intention was to conduct a live semi-structured interview, the participant requested to respond via email in order to facilitate the task due to scheduling constraints, time differences, and suggested a zoom meeting as a follow-up to clarify in case we encountered any ambiguity. We provided her with an interview guide containing eight open-ended questions (see Appendix 10.1), designed to elicit detailed reflections on professional practice and cataloging interventions. Chebani responded in depth, offering thoughtful, narrative-style answers and sharing supplementary materials, including a spreadsheet of relevant LCSH terms and the MELA Working Group's guidelines for improving discoverability of Palestinian resources. The follow-up Zoom meeting she suggested for clarification was unnecessary due to the fact that her responses were so rich and comprehensive that no further clarification was required. Two other participants from the same lecture were contacted for potential interviews, but scheduling conflicts, as well as research deadlines and other

ethical considerations already mentioned under section 1.3 Empirical Limitations prevented further participation. While more interviews would have strengthened the study, future research may build on this groundwork to expand the empirical material.

Although the interview was conducted asynchronously, it adhered to the methodological principles of semi-structured interviewing and allowed for reflective, well-considered engagement with the research themes (Bryman, 2016). While email interviews may lack the immediacy, spontaneity, and non-verbal cues present in synchronous formats (Opdenakker, 2006), they offer clear advantages in politically sensitive or logistically complex contexts. As Meho (2006) notes, the asynchronous nature of email interviews allows participants more time to reflect on their answers, which can result in more detailed, thoughtful, and narrative-rich empirical material. In this case, the format supported participant comfort, mitigated logistical barriers such as time zone differences, and accommodated the emotional and political weight of the topic. These benefits outweighed the drawbacks, and the resulting material directly informed both the ethical and analytical dimensions of the study. These responses and materials form a core component of the empirical material used in this study.

In addition to the interview, this study incorporates document analysis of related texts, including prior critical research on LCSH (Holloway, 2018; Knowlton, 2005), records of classification changes, institutional metadata policies, and the MELA subject heading recommendations. All materials were analyzed through a conceptual lens shaped by sensitizing concepts (see section 2.4), enabling attention not only to terminological decisions but also to omissions, negotiations, and acts of resistance. This dual approach – interview and document analysis – enables a fuller understanding of how metadata professionals operate within, against, and beyond dominant cataloging infrastructures. Drawing on Olson's (2001) concept of permeability, the study treats classification systems not as fixed or neutral, but as potentially penetrable structures that can be reshaped through ethical and inclusive interventions. Permeability here refers to the openness of information systems to diverse voices and the capacity for metadata practices to accommodate complexity, plurality, and difference. This principle ensures that cataloging practices are examined not only for their limitations, but also for the possibilities they contain when critically contested or reimagined by metadata professionals.

2.3 Selection and Analysis of Thematic Literature and Previous Research

In place of a conventional literature review, this thesis incorporates a thematic analysis of critical scholarship in library and information science (LIS), archival studies, and postcolonial theory. Rather than aiming for an exhaustive overview, the review focused on identifying central themes and critical debates within existing research on classification systems, colonial knowledge production, and the cataloging of Palestinian cultural heritage. This body of literature was engaged not only as background but as a source of conceptual insight that shaped the development of the analytical framework.

The selection of literature for this thematic analysis was guided by both ethical and epistemological considerations. Given the study's focus on Palestinian materials and its grounding in postcolonial and critical cataloging frameworks, we deliberately prioritized texts authored by scholars from the Global South, particularly Palestinian, Arab, and SWANA-based researchers. This approach reflects a commitment to resisting epistemic exclusion and to challenging the dominance of Western-centric perspectives in the fields of library science, archival studies, and knowledge organization. The literature was identified through a combination of academic databases, snowball sampling from key reference lists, and targeted fieldwork efforts, including visits to research institutions in Doha, Qatar, and participation in the Annual Palestine Forum 2025. The aim was not to compile a comprehensive survey of the field, but to center voices and perspectives that are frequently marginalized or absent in mainstream Western academic discourse. In this way, the selection of sources became both a methodological and political act, integral to the study's aim of contributing to more inclusive and decolonial approaches to knowledge organization.

The process involved iterative and reflective reading of key scholarly texts, with close attention to recurring concepts such as "erasure," "resistance," "subject representation," and "epistemic power." Through this interpretive analysis, broader themes such as epistemic violence, metadata resistance, and archival control were identified and synthesized. These patterns informed the formation of the study's sensitizing concepts and helped position the research within ongoing conversations in critical cataloging, postcolonial theory, and knowledge organization. This approach aligns with Bryman's (2016) critical realism, which acknowledges the structural underpinnings of observed practices.

This thematic analysis directly contributed to the formation of sensitizing concepts such as "erasure," "resistance," "agency," and "classification as power." These concepts informed both the design of the interview and the interpretation of empirical material. They also helped structure the Results and Analysis chapter, which is organized around techniques of resistance identified through both literature and fieldwork. The concepts are not used prescriptively, but as interpretive lenses that help reveal how power and representation are enacted through cataloging practices, both directly and indirectly.

In addition to the thematic literature analysis, the empirical studies reviewed in section 5.1 Previous Research, including foundational critiques of LCSH, were analyzed as a distinct body of empirical and practice-based scholarship. These studies were selected for their relevance to cataloging practice, institutional authority (i.e., the power of libraries and governing bodies to define, maintain, and enforce classification standards), and political interventions within classification systems. Our selection was also guided by a specific interest in research that addressed the treatment of Palestine within LCSH or offered broader insights into the political dimensions of classification. We conducted close reading and comparative analysis to identify patterns across the literature, particularly regarding terminology bias, institutional resistance to reform, and cataloger agency. These findings were synthesized to highlight recurring structural limitations in LCSH and related systems. This review also allowed us

to identify key techniques of resistance described in the literature, which also contributed to the structure and framing of our Results and Analysis chapter. Additionally, these studies reinforced our understanding of knowledge organization as a system shaped by institutional and political forces, one that not only structures access but also determines what is recognized and valued within catalogs.

2.4 Analytic Strategy and the Use of Sensitizing Concepts

This study adopts an interpretive, grounded theory-inspired approach to analysis, guided by the use of sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). Rather than approaching the material with fixed hypotheses or coding frameworks, the research relies on inductive analysis – allowing key patterns, themes, and concepts to emerge from the data itself. As Bowen (2006) explains, "inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306, as cited in Bowen, 2006, p. 13).

Sensitizing concepts function not as definitive categories, but as interpretive tools that "merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7, as cited in Bowen, 2006, p. 14). In this study, the concepts of erasure, agency, resistance, and classification as power were not applied as rigid codes but evolved through repeated engagement with the material. They offered a flexible lens through which to approach the data – orienting the researcher toward specific dynamics without predefining their form.

This thematic process aligns with Morse and Field's understanding of grounded theory as the search for "common threads that extend throughout an entire interview or set of interviews" (Morse et al., 1995, pp.139-140, as cited in Bowen, 2006, p. 13). In this case, analysis involved iterative reading of the interview, supporting documents, and prior literature, guided by the question: *What are these catalogers and scholars trying to reveal about knowledge, power, and representation?* Through this process, abstract but recurring themes began to surface – not always immediately obvious, but clearly significant once recognized.

The sensitizing concepts were operationalized through recurring themes that emerged during the analysis. For example, erasure was observed in the absence, distortion, or obscuring of subject headings; agency became evident through the use of ethical judgment, creative metadata decisions, and the adoption of community-authored vocabularies; and resistance appeared in both formal advocacy efforts – such as SACO proposals – and informal workarounds, including the strategic use of uncontrolled fields. The broader concept of classification as power informed the broader analysis of institutional structures and their effects on knowledge representation. These themes are not exhaustive but serve as illustrative of how the sensitizing concepts guided interpretation across diverse empirical materials.

This approach allowed theory and empirical material to remain in dialogue throughout the research process, supporting an iterative, reflexive mode of analysis aligned with feminist and decolonial epistemologies (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Naples, 2003). These methods emphasize ethical accountability and the importance of researcher reflexivity when navigating asymmetrical power dynamics in knowledge production (Harding, 1987; hooks, 1989).

3 Theory

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that underpins the study, drawing on postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theory to interrogate classification as a form of power. It situates library cataloging within broader histories of imperialism, epistemic violence, and representational control, while also engaging critical cataloging literature that challenges these structures. Central concepts such as “classification as power” and “metadata sovereignty” are introduced to frame cataloging as a political and ethical practice, particularly in the context of Palestinian cultural heritage. Together, these perspectives provide the conceptual tools necessary to analyze how metadata systems both reproduce and resist structural marginalization.

3.1 Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory

The analytical framework for this study draws primarily on postcolonial and decolonial theory to critically examine how library classification systems function as instruments of knowledge control. Scholars such as Mohanty (2003), Said (2003), and Spivak (1988) have shown how systems of representation have been shaped by histories of imperialism, often encoding colonial hierarchies into seemingly neutral structures. These frameworks are essential for understanding how cataloging practices shape cultural visibility, especially in contexts where political conflict intersects with historical erasure.

Library classification systems like LCSH encode power structures and reproduce dominant epistemologies. Postcolonial theory is especially useful in examining how such systems determine not only what is preserved or accessible and what is not, but also how cultural materials are framed. As Said (2003) and Spivak (1988) argue, knowledge systems have historically operated in service of empire, shaping how colonized subjects are represented – or rendered invisible. In the case of Palestine, these logics manifest through the absence or marginalization of specific subject headings, or through the subsuming of Palestinian identity under broader or state-aligned categories. This not only limits discoverability but also erodes historical continuity and cultural specificity.

This erasure is not incidental but is part of what Spivak (1988) describes as "epistemic violence": the systemic silencing of subaltern voices through dominant forms of knowledge production. Spivak’s concept of the subaltern, as mentioned in the introduction, refers to those who exist outside hegemonic power structures and are denied access to representation within dominant epistemes. In classification systems, subaltern groups – such as Palestinians – are either excluded or made legible only through imposed, often reductive, terminologies. For example, cataloging Palestinian history under subject headings like “Arab-Israeli conflict” or “Middle East – Politics and government” reflects these epistemic dynamics. Postcolonial theory thus serves as a lens through which cataloging decisions can be interpreted as political acts, situated within broader histories of settler colonialism, displacement, and cultural dispossession. It also helps foreground the ways in which acts of metadata resistance, such as revising subject headings or creating localized vocabularies, function as decolonial interventions.

As Bowker and Star (1999) argue, classification systems are often presented as neutral, technical structures, but they are in fact deeply political. They are embedded with assumptions that shape what knowledge is considered legitimate, and whose histories are made legible. This perspective aligns with critical realism (Bryman, 2016), by acknowledging the existence of underlying social structures that may not be immediately observable but significantly shape outcomes – in this case, the visibility or erasure of Palestinian identity within global knowledge infrastructures. By integrating postcolonial and decolonial insights, this study emphasizes that cataloging is not merely an administrative process, it is a site of ethical and political struggle, where classification decisions can reproduce or resist dominant narratives of identity, history, and belonging.

3.2 Feminist Theory and Intersectionality

Feminist theory, particularly in the field of knowledge organization, contributes an intersectional lens to this analysis. As Olson (2001) writes, classification systems do not merely omit marginalized identities, they actively reinforce hierarchical structures by privileging dominant norms. Olson builds on Joan Scott's critique of the equality/difference binary, arguing that calls for equality often ignore the specificities of difference. Scott notes that:

> "The political notion of equality thus includes, indeed, depends on, an acknowledgement of the existence of difference… if individuals or groups were identical or the same there would be no need to ask for equality… Equality might well be defined as deliberate indifference to specific differences." (Scott, 1988, p. 44, as cited in Olson, 2001, pp. 652–653)

This critique is especially relevant to LCSH, where gender and race are often only marked when they deviate from normative assumptions (e.g. male, white, Western). Similarly, Palestinian history and culture are not granted neutral or autonomous subject headings but are instead situated within larger geopolitical designations such as "Middle East" or "Arab-Israeli conflict," which obscure their specificity and reduce their visibility.

Feminist theory further illuminates how classification systems reproduce normative hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, and power by reinforcing structures that appear neutral but are embedded with dominant assumptions. These systems frequently mark difference only when it deviates from an unspoken norm, thereby reinforcing the invisibility of marginalized subjects. This understanding of systemic bias is essential for a critical reading of how Palestinian identity is cataloged and constrained within institutional infrastructures.

Feminist scholars such as Nawal El Saadawi (2010), Hoda Elsadda (2012), bell hooks (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), and Sandra Harding (1987) have emphasized the importance of reflexivity, situated knowledge, and ethical engagement in knowledge production. Their work collectively challenges dominant knowledge systems that obscure, distort, or erase marginalized voices. El Saadawi (2010) exposes how state institutions and intellectual

traditions often collude in suppressing women's voices and cultural autonomy, highlighting the entanglement of gendered oppression with political and institutional power. Elsadda (2012) similarly critiques how national archives and cultural narratives marginalize women's histories, calling for feminist interventions that reclaim representational space and challenge the ideological construction of memory.

These perspectives guide our approach to both analysis and methodology, especially when engaging with communities and contexts to which the researchers do not belong. While Harding's standpoint epistemology (2004) is discussed in the introduction's chapter on positionality, its influence remains relevant here: beginning inquiry from marginalized perspectives can help uncover the limits and biases of dominant knowledge systems. These feminist interventions reinforce the imperative to foreground voice, context, and the material consequences of abstraction within cataloging practices.

3.3 Critical Cataloging and Knowledge Organization

Critical cataloging scholarship forms a third pillar of the framework, offering field-specific insights into how metadata and classification reproduce systemic bias. This study is also informed by critical cataloging perspectives (Holloway, 2018; Knowlton, 2005; Olson, 2001), that seek to challenge these dominant systems and explore alternative, community-based, or decolonial approaches to metadata, which we go deeper into in chapter 5 Previous Research and Thematic Analysis. This field emphasizes the political and ethical dimensions of knowledge organization, highlighting how librarians and archivists can intervene in classification structures to resist erasure and promote representational justice.

Berman's *Prejudices and Antipathies* (1993) provided an early critique of offensive and exclusionary subject headings, while later studies by Holloway (2018) and Knowlton (2005) demonstrated the persistence of institutional inertia and political alignment in subject access systems. Drabinski (2013) and Olson (2001) have shown how controlled vocabularies encode institutional worldviews under the guise of neutrality. Their work supports a shift in how cataloging is understood: from technical task to site of ideological negotiation. The growing field of critical cataloging advocates for inclusive, community-informed, and reflexive metadata practices that respond to the structural inequalities embedded in existing systems.

In relation to Palestine, these perspectives enable an analysis of how catalogers respond to constraints by modifying headings, constructing alternative vocabularies, or participating in collective resistance efforts such as the MELA Working Group. These acts are understood not only as professional discretion, but as political agency enacted within institutional boundaries.

3.4 Conceptual Tools: Classification as Power and the Right to Metadata Sovereignty

This study uses two key conceptual framings to interrogate the politics of knowledge organization: classification as power and the right to metadata sovereignty.

Classification as Power
As mentioned earlier, Bowker and Star (1999) argue that classification systems are not neutral structures; they are embedded with assumptions that shape what knowledge is considered legitimate, and whose histories are made legible. Drawing on Foucault's (1980) theory of power as diffuse, relational, and productive, this study understands classification not simply as an organizational tool, but as an instrument that governs what can be seen, remembered, and known. Classification establishes the boundaries of intelligibility – what is findable, searchable, or retrievable – and, by extension, what is deemed culturally valid.

The Right to Metadata Sovereignty
This thesis introduces and develops the concept of the right to metadata sovereignty, building on the established discourse around Indigenous data sovereignty. To our knowledge, the concept of "metadata sovereignty" has not yet been systematically theorized within LIS or knowledge organization. While the term appears sporadically in discussions of digital infrastructure or legal governance, its application to cataloging systems and metadata classification practices remains underdeveloped. Here, we extend the principles of data sovereignty – rooted in the rights of Indigenous peoples to control, govern, and interpret data about their communities – into the domain of metadata and cataloging.

Inspired by Indigenous data sovereignty movements, such as Te Mana Raraunga in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Te Mana Raraunga, 2018) and the Native BioData Consortium in the United States (Tsosie et al., 2021), this concept highlights the importance of community control not only over data ownership, but over the descriptive structures and vocabularies through which identities, histories, and knowledge are organized. These movements, which we address more in section 5.2, assert that sovereignty over data includes decisions about how communities are represented in databases, libraries, and archives – what is labeled, what is searchable, and what narratives classifications reflect.

Within this study, the right to metadata sovereignty is defined as the right and capacity of historically marginalized or colonized communities to define, control, and apply metadata standards that reflect their own cultural logics, political realities, and epistemologies. This right includes both technical agency (e.g. creating subject headings, adapting vocabularies) and conceptual authority (e.g. naming events, places, and identities on their own terms). It is not limited to institutional reform but includes oral, embodied, and community-led archival practices that resist dominant classification structures. We argue that this right should be recognized as part of a broader framework of informational and cultural rights, particularly for stateless and Indigenous communities whose histories have been systematically suppressed or distorted by dominant infrastructures. By proposing this right as a normative ideal, this thesis

contributes a conceptual tool that links ethical representation with descriptive agency. It repositions cataloging not as a neutral task, but as a space where communities must be empowered to assert control over how they are known and remembered.

4 Background

This chapter outlines the historical and political context necessary for understanding the colonization and classification of Palestinian cultural heritage. Key concepts such as settler colonialism, Nakba, and metadata sovereignty are defined to ground the analysis. The chapter centers the work of Palestinian and Israeli scholars whose research critically examines the structures of occupation and resistance. This focus reflects a feminist and decolonial commitment to challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized perspectives.

Since we have intentionally chosen to write this thesis from a feminist and decolonial perspective, this chapter foregrounds the work of Palestinian and Israeli scholars and historians whose research offers critical, historically grounded, and ethically committed perspectives on the colonization of Palestine. These scholars, many of whom have directly experienced or borne witness to the unfolding realities of occupation, dispossession, and resistance, provide essential insight into the lived and structural dimensions of the conflict. Centering their voices is both an epistemological and political choice, reflecting our commitment to challenging dominant historical narratives and amplifying accounts that are often silenced or dismissed in Western academic discourse.

4.1 Definitions of Terms and Concepts

This section provides definitions and explanations of key terms, concepts, and events used throughout the thesis. Clarifying these definitions is essential for establishing a shared understanding of the analytical framework and ensuring conceptual consistency. All definitions are grounded in established academic literature and historical documentation, forming a basis for a critical and evidence-based approach. The aim is to ground the discussion in precise terminology and to avoid ambiguity in interpreting complex or contested concepts.

Language is never neutral, nor is it in the context of Palestine. Terminology is routinely politicized, and efforts to describe the situation accurately are often met with accusations of bias or distortion. Concepts such as ethnic cleansing, occupation, and settler colonialism are frequently challenged – not on scholarly grounds, but for ideological or political reasons (Erakat, 2019; Pappé, 2006a). This makes definitional clarity essential. Therefore, this section aims to explicitly state how terms are used in the study and in this way, we hope to prevent misinterpretations and to establish a transparent analytical framework.

British Mandate for Palestine (1920–1948)
The British Mandate for Palestine was the colonial regime established by Britain under the League of Nations, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. As Rashid Khalidi (2020) notes, though framed as a civilizing mission intended to guide the territory toward self-determination, the Mandate primarily served British imperial interests and facilitated Zionist settler

colonialism by implementing the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a “Jewish national home” in Palestine. This was done without the consent of the Indigenous Palestinian Arab population, who constituted the overwhelming majority at the time. This framing aligned with the broader colonial discourse of the “civilizing mission,” which portrayed imperial rule as a benevolent force guiding so-called backward societies toward modernity. Postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) have critically examined how such narratives not only justified imperial domination but also functioned epistemically to silence the voices of colonized peoples. In the Palestinian context, this civilizing logic masked the British facilitation of Zionist settler colonialism, while simultaneously erasing Palestinian political agency and Indigenous claims to sovereignty.

As Palestinian historian and academic Nur Masalha (2012) emphasizes, the Mandate period institutionalized the structural dispossession of Palestinians, paving the way for the 1948 Nakba and the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland. This era could be framed as the beginning of a “colonial war” against the Palestinian people, orchestrated in partnership between Britain and the Zionist movement (Khalidi, 2020, p. 9). Ilan Pappé (2006b) further describes the Mandate as a key stage in the transformation of Zionism from a political ideology into a settler-colonial project, enabled and protected by British authority. In this understanding, the time of the British Mandate was not an inconsequential administrative phase, but a foundational moment in the still ongoing colonization and displacement of the Palestinian people (Khalidi, 2020; Masalha, 2012; Pappé, 2006b).

Ethnic cleansing

Israeli historian and political scientist Ilan Pappé defines ethnic cleansing as "an effort to render an ethnically mixed country homogenous by expelling a particular group of people and turning them into refugees while demolishing the homes they were driven out from" (2006a, p. 22). This process is often carried out with or without formal orders, as perpetrators understand what is expected of them. Massacres may accompany these actions – not necessarily as part of a genocidal plan, but as a tactic to hasten the targeted population’s flight. Once expelled, the victims are often erased from official records and collective memory.

Nakba

The Nakba (Arabic for ‘catastrophe’) refers to the forced displacement, dispossession, and destruction of Palestinian society that made the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 possible. Coined by the prominent Syrian historian Constantine Zurayk in *Ma’na an-Nakbah* (1948), the term captures the magnitude of the rupture experienced by Palestinians: the expulsion of over 750,000 people, the destruction of more than 500 towns and villages, and the erasure of Palestine from political, geographic, and historical representation (Masalha, 2012).

As Masalha (2012) notes, the Nakba marked not only the physical fragmentation of the land and the uprooting of its Indigenous population, but also the systematic dismantling of Palestinian society through planned military operations such as Plan Dalet. These operations, carried out by Zionist forces, aimed at the “destruction of Palestinian towns and villages” (p. 2) and were

accompanied by massacres, expulsions, and the deliberate reshaping of the landscape through renaming, colonization, and the establishment of new settlements on the ruins of Palestinian life. The Nakba was not an unintended consequence of war, but the foundational mechanism through which a settler-colonial state was established on nearly 80% of the territory of the British Mandate for Palestine.

Crucially, the Nakba is not a closed chapter in history. It is an ongoing structure of erasure and domination, visible in the continued displacement of Palestinians, the denial of return to refugees, and the expansion of settlements and militarized control. The mechanisms that enabled the 1948 expulsion – military force, legal manipulation, demographic engineering, and ideological justification – have persisted in various forms. As Ahmad Sa'di (2005) reflects, "a society that had existed as far as human memory can go back disappeared during a few months," (p. 8) and the legacy of that disappearance continues to shape Palestinian life under occupation, inside Israel, and in exile.

The Nakba, in this sense, is not only a historical event but also a foundational concept for understanding the Palestinian condition under settler-colonial domination. It signifies a continuing process of ethnic cleansing, spatial erasure, and cultural negation, central to both the formation of the Israeli state and the experience of Palestinian resistance and survival.

Occupation

Occupation, in the context of international law, refers to the control of a territory by a foreign military power without sovereign title, typically in violation of the right to self-determination. According to the Fourth Geneva Convention (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949) and reinforced by UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967), such an occupation is subject to legal obligations that prohibit annexation, settlement, and the exploitation of resources belonging to the occupied population.

In the case of Palestine, the United Nations has repeatedly affirmed that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza constitute occupied Palestinian territories, with Israel recognized as the occupying power. This designation carries legal weight, regardless of political claims to sovereignty (UN OCHA, 2023). As Edward Said (1984) argued, military occupation is not only a matter of territorial control but also an assault on the capacity of a people to represent themselves, to "narrate" their own history and political reality. The denial of "permission to narrate," he writes, is central to the workings of occupation as a discursive and political system.

Settler colonialism

Settler colonialism refers to a systemic, ongoing process of elimination and replacement of an indigenous population by a settler society (Khalidi, 2020; Masalha, 2018; Said 1979b). In the Palestinian context, it entails the physical displacement of Palestinians, the erasure of their historical presence, and the construction of a settler narrative that legitimizes expropriation through religious and imperial discourse. It is not a past event, but a continuous structure of domination and denial.

Shatat

In this study, the term *shatat* is used instead of "diaspora" when referring to Palestinians. According to Palestinian researcher Salman Abu Sitta (2016), the most accurate translation of *shatat* is "dispersion in exile," which more precisely captures the forced nature of the Palestinian displacement. Unlike "diaspora," which is often used in a broader sense and can imply voluntary migration, *shatat* emphasizes the involuntary, traumatic aspect of exile. This distinction is important because it underscores the political and historical circumstances surrounding Palestinian displacement, highlighting that it was not a voluntary or choice-driven movement but a result of forceful expulsion. Thus, using *shatat* aligns more accurately with the experiences and history of Palestinians, reflecting the painful circumstances of their displacement.

SWANA

SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) is an alternative term proposed to replace the more commonly used "Middle East." The term "Middle East," as pointed out by Swedish theologian and professor of Semitic languages Tryggve Kronholm (1995), is a Eurocentric, Western-imposed label that has historically been used to define the region from a Western perspective. It is considered problematic because it is vague, loaded with colonial connotations, and does not account for the complexities or diversity of the area it describes. Kronholm mentions that terms like "the Orient" and "the Levant" are similarly problematic as they reduce a vast, diverse region into simplistic, external categorizations.

The Palestinian poet and associate professor Mejdulene B. Shomali (2023) further elaborates on the issue, noting that many scholars regard "Middle East" as a colonial construct and prefer using SWANA. This term is seen as more neutral, acknowledging both the geographical scope (Southwest Asia and North Africa) and the cultural diversity of the region. By using SWANA, there is an effort to avoid the historical baggage associated with Western-imposed terms, allowing for a more accurate and respectful understanding of the region's complexity. Despite these efforts, SWANA has not yet gained widespread use, but it reflects a move toward a more decolonized and inclusive approach to naming this important part of the world.

Since this study employs postcolonial critical perspectives and theories, the term SWANA will be used instead of "Middle East" or “Levant” to align with a more decolonized approach to understanding the region. This choice reflects the desire to move away from the Eurocentric, colonial connotations of "Middle East" and to adopt a more inclusive and geographically accurate term. The term "Middle East" will only be used in direct quotations or in contexts where the term is already established, such as in the case of the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA). Outside of these specific instances, the study will adopt the term SWANA to maintain consistency with a postcolonial framework. This approach respects the conventional use of the term where necessary while still adhering to a critical, postcolonial perspective in the broader discussion.

Zionism

Zionism is a political ideology and settler-colonial movement that emerged in late 19th-century Europe, grounded in the belief that the Jewish people are entitled to sovereignty in the territory of historic Palestine. While often presented in mainstream discourse as a national liberation movement (Khalidi, 2020; Pappé, 2014; Said, 1979a), Zionism from its inception was at the same time tied to European colonial practices and epistemologies and antisemitic oppression (Khalidi, 2020; Shohat, 1988). Its foundational logic rested on territorial acquisition and demographic transformation – goals that required the removal or erasure of the indigenous Palestinian population.

The rise of Nazi Germany, and especially the Holocaust, made Zionism increasingly attractive to segments of the Jewish population, not least because European powers – including the Nazi regime itself – at times saw Zionist emigration as a solution to what they called the "Jewish question." As the Lebanese academic and writer Gilbert Achcar (2011) notes, the Third Reich's early policies encouraged Jewish emigration to Palestine, viewing Zionism as a means of facilitating Jewish removal from Europe, even cooperating with Zionist organizations in the 1930s to that end. This convergence of interests between antisemitic regimes and Zionist aspirations underscores how Zionism's development was shaped not only by Jewish nationalism but also by European colonial and racial logics (Achcar, 2011). This complex history will be explored further in the next section.

As Masalha (2012) argues, Zionist claims to exclusive Jewish ownership and sovereignty over the "land of the Bible" relied heavily on a mythologized reading of the Hebrew Bible as a divine land deed. This ethnocentric "promised land-chosen people" paradigm was instrumentalized to justify settler-colonial expansion and ethnic cleansing in Palestine. Central to the Zionist narrative was the idea of *return* – a concept that simultaneously negated the continuous, lived presence of Palestinians in the land and portrayed the territory as empty, captured in the enduring slogan: "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Masalha, 2012, p. 3). This slogan not only erased the existence of the Indigenous Palestinian population but also exemplifies how language and myth were mobilized to legitimize territorial dispossession and historical denial.

Khalidi (2020) highlights how Zionism functioned not only as a nationalist movement but as a settler-colonial project that sought to establish a state by means of conquest, displacement, and the reconfiguration of territory and memory. The 1948 Nakba and its aftermath were not anomalies but necessary consequences of Zionism's core objectives. Similarly, Pappé (2006b) underlines that Zionist leaders were fully aware that building a Jewish state required the removal of the indigenous population – a fact borne out by policies such as Plan Dalet.

Furthermore, Zionism has extended beyond the material colonization of land to what Masalha describes as the "colonisation of minds" – shaping global perceptions of Palestine, Palestinians, and the legitimacy of resistance. Said (2003) argues that Zionism, like other settler-colonial ideologies, was legitimized through Orientalist frameworks that depicted Palestinians as backward, invisible, or inherently violent, thus rationalizing their displacement.

In this thesis, Zionism is understood not as a cultural or religious phenomenon, but as a modern political movement rooted in European settler-colonial logics. It is inseparable from the ongoing structures of dispossession, apartheid, and violence that define the Palestinian experience today.

4.2 Historical Background

This section outlines the historical background of the connection between the occupation of Palestine, the destruction of Palestinian cultural heritage as a strategy to establish and maintain colonial control, and the lack of adequate subject headings in cataloging as part of this broader process. The deliberate targeting of archives, libraries, and historical records – whether through destruction, appropriation, or misrepresentation – has played a crucial role in efforts to erase Palestinian historical continuity and national identity. Within this context, classification systems and subject headings reflect and reinforce power structures, shaping how Palestinian history and culture are documented and accessed. Understanding these mechanisms provides essential context for analyzing the impact of cataloging practices on the visibility and representation of Palestine in knowledge systems. The section ultimately frames the Palestinian struggle within a decolonial analysis, showing how past and present colonial structures shape not only political realities but also systems of knowledge, cataloging, and representation. This background draws on the work of some of the world's most prominent scholars on Palestine, both Palestinian and Israeli, whose research critically examines the historical and epistemological dimensions of the conflict.

The modern history of Palestine reflects a long and painful experience of colonialism, displacement and resistance. Understanding this history is key to comprehending the factors behind the situation in Palestine today and the persistent struggle for Palestinian self-determination. This section provides an overview of the historical events that have shaped and led to the current situation in Palestine, emphasizing the colonial dimensions of Zionism, including the Nakba of 1948, and the continuous efforts to erase and replace Palestinian history and identity.

The historical background of Palestine reveals a pattern of colonization, ethnic cleansing, and cultural erasure, intertwined with steadfast resistance and the preservation of collective memory. As the Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi asserts in *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (2020), "There is no reason that what has happened in Palestine for over a century cannot be understood as both a colonial and a national conflict" (p. 9). Recognizing this history is essential to understanding the ongoing struggle for Palestinian liberation – a struggle not only for land but for existence, identity, and justice.

Early Zionist Movement and British Mandate
Zionism emerged in the late 19th century as a nationalist movement aiming at the establishment of a Jewish state, primarily on Palestinian land. Early supporters of the Zionist Project openly acknowledged its colonial nature. As Masalha (2012) highlights, Zionist leaders used terms such as *hityashvut* (Hebrew for 'colonization') to describe their project in Palestine. Theodor Herzl, by many considered the father of modern political Zionism, imagined

the Jewish state as "a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism" (Hertzberg, 1970, p. 222, as cited in Khalidi, 2020, p. 10). This explicitly colonial framing placed Zionism within the broader structure of European imperialism in the SWANA region.

In *Orientalism*, Palestinian-American academic and literary critic Edward Said explores how Western perceptions have historically portrayed Arab peoples as inferior. He observes that "Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over" (Said, 2003, p. 207). This perspective dehumanized Arabs, reducing their individuality and agency, and served to justify colonial ambitions by portraying them as obstacles to be managed rather than as individuals with rich cultures and histories.

Palestine had been part of the Ottoman Empire for four centuries when, after World War I, Great Britain colonized Palestine and Transjordan through the British Mandate for Palestine. Behind this colonization was mainly the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration, as Israeli historian and political scientist Ilan Pappé (2006) explains. In an agreement reached in May 1916, British diplomat Mark Sykes and French official Georges Picot divided the Arab Middle East into spheres of influence and carved the region into new political entities, laying the groundwork for European colonial control. The British Mandate for Palestine arranged for an extensive Jewish immigration from Europe, all according to the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which helped "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (British Government, 1917). In the process, the indigenous Palestinian society was systematically dismantled. British authorities actively supported the settlers, helping them build "the autonomous structure of a Zionist para-state" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 8), while deliberately undermining Palestinian political and social institutions. This mirrored broader European colonial practices, which often framed their interventions as "civilizing missions" aimed at saving or uplifting colonized peoples (Khalidi, 2020; Said, 1994; Spivak, 1988). The Zionist Project, encouraged by British support, systematically marginalized Palestinian political representation. Palestinians, the indigenous population with a long-standing historical and cultural connection to the land, resisted these colonial policies. However, their efforts were met with suppression by both British forces and Zionist militias (Khalidi, 2020).

The Impact of Nazism and the Holocaust

The rise of Nazism and the horrors of the Holocaust fundamentally reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the 20th century and had direct consequences for Palestine. European antisemitism, culminating in the Holocaust, intensified global support for the Zionist project – not necessarily out of solidarity with Jewish self-determination, but as a way for Western powers to absolve themselves of responsibility for centuries of antisemitic violence by facilitating Jewish emigration to Palestine (Achcar, 2011). In fact, the early years of the Nazi regime saw a limited but strategic cooperation with Zionist organizations, based on a shared interest in the expulsion of Jews from Europe (Achcar, 2011). This alignment highlights the complex and unsettling ways in which antisemitic and Zionist agendas could converge under colonial conditions.

Philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt also reflected critically on the post-Holocaust shift in Jewish politics. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), she noted with concern how the trauma of genocide was mobilized to justify state-building efforts that displaced another people. While she acknowledged the existential need for refuge after the Holocaust, Arendt warned that replicating the structures of nationalism and exclusion would create new injustices (Arendt, 1963). This dynamic would become tragically clear in the events of 1948, when the formation of the Israeli state came at the direct expense of the indigenous Palestinian population.

The Nakba of 1948

The most critical event in modern Palestinian history is the Nakba – Arabic for 'Catastrophe' – of 1948. This began on the evening of May 14th when the British Mandate withdrew from Palestine and the Jewish settlers declared the State of Israel. During the following period, over half of the Palestinians were forcibly displaced by Zionist militias and, later, the Israeli army. Pappé identifies events such as Plan Dalet, a Zionist military strategy aimed at the systematic destruction of Palestinian towns and villages, and the Deir Yassin massacre as clear examples of ethnic cleansing. This massacre, carried out on April 9, 1948, by the Irgun and Lehi paramilitary groups, resulted in the killing of Palestinian villagers, including women and children. As Pappé (2006a) emphasizes, the violence was not incidental but served a psychological purpose within the broader campaign: to instill terror and prompt mass flight. The event became a symbol of fear across Palestine and played a significant role in accelerating the displacement of the Palestinian population.

As Masalha explains, "1948 was the year of the Palestine Nakba (Catastrophe), the uprooting of the Palestinians and the dismemberment and de-Arabisation of historic Palestine" (2012, p. 1). The mass expulsion and destruction of Palestinian communities sought not only to create a Jewish majority state but also to erase Palestinian presence from both history and collective memory. More than 500 villages and towns were depopulated and subsequently destroyed or repurposed, leaving a painful and deep-rooted mark on Palestinian collective memory (Masalha, 2012). Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced into exile, where many remain today, scattered across refugee camps, neighboring SWANA countries, and the *shatat*.

Continuing Settler-Colonialism and Politicide

The Nakba was far from a singular event; it was a culmination of settler-colonial strategies designed to transform the demographic and political landscape of Palestine. This process has been described by Israeli researcher and professor Baruch Kimmerling as 'politicide'; "the dissolution of the Palestinian people's existence as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity" (2003, pp. 3-4). Kimmerling's term captures how Zionist policies have aimed not only at territorial conquest but also at erasing Palestinian national identity. This ongoing process shapes how Palestinians are represented – or deliberately misrepresented – across political, legal, and archival systems.

The establishment of the Israeli state did not mark the end of Palestinian dispossession. The settler-colonialism continued through the expropriation of Palestinian lands, the implementing of military rule on Palestinian citizens

within Israel, and the transformation of depopulated Palestinian villages into Jewish settlements, forests, and public spaces (Masalha, 2012).

The Erasure and Resistance of Palestinian Identity

A critical element of the colonial project is the destruction and appropriation of Palestinian archives, libraries, and cultural institutions. As Masalha emphasizes, "The Nakba is the turning point in the modern history of Palestine – that year over 500 villages and towns and a whole country and its people disappeared from international maps and dictionaries" (2012, p. 3). This systematic erasure extended into cataloging systems, where the misclassification or absence of Palestine in subject headings reinforces broader structures of marginalization and invisibility.

Libraries, archives, and cultural institutions were systematically looted or destroyed, and the classification of Palestinian materials in global knowledge systems continues to obscure their cultural specificity (Masalha, 2012; Sela, 2017). For instance, as Israeli curator and researcher Rona Sela (2017) documents, tens of thousands of photographs, films, and documents were confiscated by Israeli intelligence during military operations in Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories. These materials, many of them belonging to Palestinian institutions such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Research Center and the Palestinian Cinema Institute, were then reclassified under Israeli military archives, stripped of their original context, and often labeled with ostensibly depoliticized or even derogatory terms. In this process, Palestinian visual culture was not only physically seized but epistemically reframed within Zionist archival structures, further erasing its cultural origins and political significance.

The Israeli state systematically sought to erase Palestinian ties to the land by renaming geographical sites and replacing Arabic names with Hebrew ones. This was not merely an act of nationalization but a deliberate attempt to overwrite Palestinian history with a narrative rooted in biblical symbolism that Zionist settlement was a continuation of ancient Jewish history (Masalha, 2012). Such measures were part of a broader strategy of politicide, as outlined by Kimmerling, aiming to eliminate Palestinian national identity by displacing populations and erasing their cultural and historical footprint (Kimmerling, 2003). In an interview with the Sunday Times in 1969, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir infamously claimed that "There was no such thing as a Palestinian people" (as cited in Masalha, 2012, p. 4). Her claim summarizes this strategy – a denial of Palestinian identity to justify their dispossession. The idea that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land" (Masalha, 2012, p. 3) strengthened the settler-colonial narrative that denied Palestinian presence and authority.

However, the attempt to erase Palestinian identity was met with resistance. Palestinians have continually fought not only for their physical land but also for the preservation of their history and identity (Khalidi, 2020). The Nakba and its aftermath solidified a collective Palestinian memory that remains central to their national consciousness. This resistance manifests through cultural expression, political activism, and international advocacy, challenging the Zionist framing and proclaiming the Palestinian right to self-determination.

In conclusion, understanding this historical trajectory – including the Nakba, ethnic cleansing, and the *shatat* it created – is essential for analyzing the power dynamics embedded in archival and cataloging practices today. It also underscores the urgency of critically interrogating how knowledge systems contribute to either the erasure or the affirmation of Palestinian identity, heritage, and memory in SWANA and beyond.

4.3 The History and Influence of the Library of Congress Subject Headings

The Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) is one of the most influential and widely adopted tools in library classification globally, shaping how materials are organized and accessed in collections around the world (Chan & Salaba, 2016). Developed in the late 19th century and continuously expanded, LCSH was intended to standardize how materials were categorized and retrieved across collections (Stone, 2000). Over time, it has become a global authority in knowledge organization, shaping the way topics are indexed in academic libraries, national institutions, and digital databases around the world. Its extensive adoption gives it both structural weight and symbolic power – it does not simply describe information but actively participates in framing what is visible, searchable, and ultimately knowable.

This centrality also means that LCSH plays a powerful role in reinforcing dominant worldviews. Numerous scholars have shown how LCSH reflects and reproduces institutional biases – particularly in its treatment of race, gender, and colonized communities. One widely critiqued example is the former use of the term “Illegal aliens,” which, despite public pressure and professional advocacy, remained in use for decades. The term’s continued presence in the subject vocabulary, despite its dehumanizing and legally inaccurate connotations, exemplifies how cataloging infrastructures can resist change and perpetuate exclusionary narratives (Berman, 1993; Drabinski, 2013). This study focuses on LCSH not only because of its global reach and influence, but also because it offers a concrete site for analyzing how classification systems uphold – or can potentially challenge – systems of marginalization in knowledge organization.

5 Previous Research and Thematic Analysis

This chapter reviews key scholarly work on classification, cataloging, and archival power, with a focus on how Palestinian identity is represented, or erased, within dominant systems like LCSH. It begins by outlining foundational studies and then presents a thematic analysis of literature that critiques political bias in metadata, highlights resistance by librarians and communities, and explores alternative models of cataloging and archiving. Drawing on postcolonial and decolonial frameworks, the chapter situates classification as a contested site of power, representation, and possibility. These insights inform the analytical lens for the empirical findings presented in the next chapter.

5.1 Previous Research

Two key studies provide the foundation for this thesis: Steven A. Knowlton's *Three Decades Since Prejudices and Antipathies* (2005) and Steven W. Holloway's *LCSH in the Southern Levant* (2018). Both works critically examine the biases and limitations embedded within LCSH, highlighting its ongoing failure to represent marginalized voices accurately and equitably.

Knowlton (2005) builds on Sanford Berman's influential critique *Prejudices and Antipathies* (1993), first published in 1971, which identified hundreds of LCSH terms considered racist, sexist, Eurocentric, or otherwise offensive. Berman proposed alternative headings and cross-references designed to reflect a more inclusive and just approach to subject representation. Knowlton investigates the extent to which these recommendations were implemented over the following three decades. Of the 270 subject headings reviewed, only 39% were fully revised in line with Berman's suggestions, 24% were partially changed, and 36% remained unchanged. His study reveals how bureaucratic conservatism and a commitment to system consistency often outweigh social justice considerations in metadata reform.

Knowlton highlights how LCSH continues to center a presumed "neutral" user, typically white, male, Christian, Western, and heterosexual, thereby marginalizing users outside this dominant frame (Olson, 2001). This approach leads not only to the stigmatization or invisibility of certain groups, but also to misleading representations of race, religion, and geography – such as Christian terms presented without explanation, while non-Christian or non-Western ones require clarification. For this thesis, Knowlton's study offers critical historical context, demonstrating the slow pace of reform and the broader cultural forces that shape subject access. While not focused on Palestine, the structural patterns of exclusion that Knowlton identifies are highly relevant to how Palestinian identity and cultural heritage are cataloged within LCSH.

Where Knowlton offers a macro-level historical critique, Holloway (2018) brings a geopolitical focus to LCSH terminology. In *LCSH in the Southern Levant*, he investigates how LCSH reflects U.S. political alignment in its subject headings related to Israel, Palestine, and the surrounding region.

Holloway challenges the supposed neutrality of LCSH, demonstrating how subject headings such as “Palestinian State” or “Israeli-Occupied Territories” remain absent or underused, despite decades of advocacy and international recognition of Palestinian sovereignty. Instead, LCSH often prefers vague or state-aligned terminology like “administered areas” or “disputed territories,” which obscure the region’s colonial realities.

Holloway examines the classification of regional terms such as “Gaza strip,” “Golan Heights,” and “Israel,” showing how changes in headings often follow political shifts rather than international law or scholarly consensus. For instance, references to Syrian territory in descriptions of the Golan Heights have been softened or removed over time, while hierarchical links between “Palestine” and “Israel” have been eliminated. LCSH, Holloway argues, increasingly fails to reflect internationally recognized designations, in contrast to other systems like France’s RAMEAU or Germany’s GND as mentioned earlier in the introduction, which explicitly reference occupation and contested status.

Importantly, Holloway does not only critique but also offers practical suggestions for decolonizing metadata, such as incorporating multiple subject headings to reflect geopolitical complexity, adapting local authority records, and advocating collaboratively for systematic reform. His work situates LCSH within broader movements in critical cataloging and postcolonial LIS, making his contribution especially valuable for this study’s focus on Palestinian heritage and identity.

Together, Knowlton and Holloway offer complementary perspectives. Knowlton reveals the entrenched institutional conservatism of LCSH, while Holloway shows how that conservatism manifests in a concrete, geopolitically charged context. Both demonstrate that subject headings are not apolitical descriptors but active sites of ideological reinforcement, shaping what users can find, how identities are framed, and whose histories are made visible.

However, Knowlton’s work does not reflect the past two decades of critical cataloging advancements or evolving geopolitical discourse, while Holloway focuses primarily on terminology and representation within the LCSH structure itself. Neither study examines the on-the-ground practices of librarians and archivists working with Palestinian materials. This thesis builds on their foundational insights by exploring not only the structural bias in subject headings, but also the everyday decisions and ethical challenges faced by information professionals navigating these limitations which we will analyze deeper in the Results and Analysis chapter. It adds an intersectional and decolonial lens to the conversation, investigating how subject cataloging both reflects and reinforces, even distorts, power, and how it might be used to resist it.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

The reviewed literature is organized thematically and foregrounds three key areas: (1) how dominant systems like LCSH reproduce political hierarchies and obscure Palestinian narratives; (2) the role of librarians, catalogers, and archivists in resisting or reworking these systems; and (3) how community-led initiatives, including oral history projects and digital archives, intervene in dominant epistemologies through alternative forms of metadata, classification, and representation.

While archives and cataloging are often treated as neutral and distinct domains, this review demonstrates their shared role in structuring what becomes visible and knowable. In the Palestinian context, where historical erasure and political displacement intersect, these systems of classification become battlegrounds over cultural legitimacy, narrative agency, and access. As such, this review does not only chart scholarly contributions, but it also situates the act of cataloging itself as a political and ethical intervention into systems that too often unreflectingly encode oppressive power structures.

5.2.1 Subject Headings and the Construction of Palestinian Identity

Scholars have long critiqued LCSH and other knowledge organization systems for encoding political bias through claims of neutrality, often flattening complex or contested histories through vague or euphemistic terms (Berman, 1993; Ewing, 2023; Knowlton, 2005; Olson, 2001). Such critiques are especially urgent when considering how Palestinian identity and political struggle are represented, or rendered invisible, within dominant systems of classification. As the American librarian and former president of the American Library Association Emily Drabinski (2013) argues, controlled vocabularies are historically situated and ideologically embedded, which means they often reproduce the worldview of the state or institution that governs them. This body of work provides a necessary foundation for analyzing how classification operates in Palestinian contexts, as explored in the empirical sections of this thesis.

These critiques of LCSH and similar systems provide important context for understanding the structural challenges faced by catalogers working with Palestinian materials. While this thesis returns to these systems in the Results and Analysis chapter, the literature also shows that classification bias extends beyond LCSH and is deeply embedded in broader archival infrastructures, including state-controlled collections and institutional metadata practices. For example, researchers have shown that subject headings like “Arab-Israeli conflict” are often used instead of more historically and politically specific terms like “Nakba*”* (Berman, 1993; Knowlton, 2005). The Library of Congress has also refused to recognize “Palestine*”* as a sovereign subject heading. Instead, materials are categorized under broader or more neutral terms such as “Palestinian Arabs” or “Middle East politics” – a colonial geographic framing that erases Indigenous specificity in the region, now increasingly referred to as SWANA. These choices in classification hide the political reality of Palestinian dispossession and make it harder for users to find materials that reflect

Palestinian perspectives. Another example of this is that Palestinians attempting to return to their homes after 1948 are labeled “infiltrators” in Israeli military archives, recasting rightful return as a security threat. Films confiscated from Palestinian sources are described as materials by “Terrorists” or “Arab gangs”, and Arabic place names are replaced by Hebrew ones.

Though this occurs outside LCSH, the underlying logic of epistemic control through classification is directly relevant to global cataloging practices. Sela (2017) shows how similar strategies are used in Israeli state archives, where Palestinian documents are taken, renamed, and reorganized to fit narratives that center state-aligned or Zionist nationalism. All of these examples show how classification systems can be used to support one political story while erasing another. This issue becomes especially clear in the representation of Palestinian materials. Israeli archival practices often reclassify looted materials according to Zionist terminology and codes, erasing Palestinian provenance and identity (Sela, 2017). Although this does not directly concern LCSH, it reflects a broader system of epistemic control that similarly affects the cataloging of Palestinian identity within global archival infrastructures.

Sela (2017) further illustrates how cataloging itself becomes a tool of colonial control when archival materials seized from Palestinians are reclassified using Zionist codes, often without any acknowledgment of their provenance. A striking example of this is documented by Hannah Mermelstein (2011), who describes how approximately 6,000 Palestinian books, confiscated during and after the Nakba, were labeled with the code “AP” for “Abandoned Property” and integrated into the holdings of the Jewish National and University Library. These books, many of which contain inscriptions or ownership marks, remain in the library’s closed stacks, yet their Palestinian origin is not acknowledged in the catalog. Instead, provenance information has been systematically omitted or erased, further severing these materials from the communities and individuals they were taken from. These acts not only obscure Palestinian identity but also assert Israeli epistemic authority over what constitutes legitimate history (Mermelstein, 2011; Sela, 2017).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate how classification systems like LCSH do not merely reflect political bias; they actively construct and constrain identity through language. For Palestinian materials, this results in a cataloging environment where sovereignty, resistance, and displacement are either distorted or entirely absent. This can be considered a form of epistemic violence – defined by Spivak (1988) as the systemic denial of a people’s right to produce, preserve, and circulate their own knowledge – shapes both representation and retrievability. These critiques set the stage for understanding how librarians and archivists are pushing back through intentional acts of metadata resistance, explored in the next section.

5.2.2 The Role of Librarians and Archivists in Resisting Erasure

While cataloging and classification systems often reflect dominant political ideologies, librarians and archivists have also played crucial roles in resisting these structures and creating more inclusive vocabularies. This section examines how practitioners intervene in knowledge organization systems to resist erasure and advocate for ethical representation, particularly in relation to Palestinian materials.

Palestinian-American academic Beshara Doumani (2009) frames Palestinian archival practice as a form of political resistance. In the face of structural silencing, individuals, family associations, research centers, and cultural institutions such as the Institute for Jerusalem Studies, Riwaq, and grassroots initiatives across the *shatat* have taken it upon themselves to collect, preserve, and classify Palestinian histories. This "archive fever," as he calls it, should be understood not merely as a reaction to loss, but as an assertion of presence in systems that have long denied Palestinian historical agency.

The Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA), hosted at the American University of Beirut, exemplifies such resistance. As Hana Sleiman and Kaoukab Chebaro (2018) explain, POHA's catalogers intentionally rejected standardized subject heading systems like LCSH in favor of community-based vocabularies that center first-hand experience and political context. Instead of retrofitting Palestinian oral histories into existing taxonomies, the team created a bilingual, bottom-up thesaurus derived directly from interview content. Terms such as "Yawm al-Ard (Land Day)," "Attempt at return," and names of depopulated villages function as metadata that preserve cultural specificity and narrative integrity.

Palestinian digital archives challenge dominant systems like LCSH (Moon, 2023). By using metadata that highlights specific towns, family names, and local terms, archivists make sure that Palestinian identity and place names are not erased. These custom metadata practices help build an archive that reflects Palestinian perspectives and ways of knowing. This broader pattern of archival resistance is further explored by Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017), who argue that librarians and information professionals are not merely neutral service providers but are embedded within, and implicated by, political structures. Their study emphasizes how LIS professionals respond to systemic injustice not only through advocacy but by transforming metadata practices themselves. Drawing on examples such as Indigenous knowledge systems and refugee archives, they highlight how classification is a site of ideological struggle and suggest that ethical engagement, care, and relationality must be central to any effort at decolonizing information systems. Their framework offers a lens through which to understand cataloging as a form of professional and political resistance, particularly when practiced in solidarity with marginalized communities.

In this context, librarians and archivists are not "neutral" facilitators but active agents capable of shaping the discoverability, integrity, and ethical framing of cultural materials. Their interventions suggest alternative models of cataloging

that prioritize community engagement, narrative accuracy, and historical justice. These examples show how cataloging can operate as a site of resistance, challenging erasure not only by preserving content but by redefining how that content is structured and made accessible. These practices form the groundwork for a broader rethinking of metadata as a terrain of political and ethical struggle, a theme that recurs throughout this thesis.

5.2.3 Normative and Political Bias in Classification Systems

The biases of systems like LCSH are not incidental, they reflect the geopolitical interests of the institutions that maintain them. As Israeli curator and researcher Rona Sela (2017) and Palestinian author and essayist Adania Shibli (2021) make clear, classification and control over archives go hand-in-hand with broader projects of colonial domination. In Shibli's example, even personal libraries like the Palestinian poet, teacher, and scholar Khalil al-Sakakini's were looted, reclassified, and incorporated into Israeli academic institutions. The books were, as mentioned earlier, relabeled as "Abandoned property" and used to serve Israeli state narratives.

This structural erasure is not only bureaucratic but also linguistic. When dominant institutions control the language of classification, Palestinian experiences can become quite literally unsearchable (Shibli, 2021). As such, cataloging decisions, even those that appear technical, are in fact deeply political. They shape not just what is known, but what can be known. In response, Palestinian catalogers and their allies have begun to build alternative metadata structures and local vocabularies that challenge institutional erasure and reclaim descriptive power. The next chapter explores these interventions in greater depth.

5.2.4 Indigenous Data Sovereignty as a Comparative Framework

This pattern of epistemic violence is not unique to Palestine. Scholars working in Indigenous and decolonial archival studies have long documented how cataloging and classification systems distort or erase the realities of Indigenous peoples globally. For example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Māori data sovereignty network Te Mana Raraunga asserts Indigenous rights to control how Māori people, lands, and culture are represented in national data infrastructures (Te Mana Raraunga, 2018). In the United States, an Indigenous-led organization called Native BioData Consortium works to ensure that genomic data related to Indigenous peoples is governed by the communities themselves. Rather than allowing external researchers or institutions to control how this data is collected, stored, and used, the Consortium advocates for protocols that reflect Indigenous values, priorities, and consent frameworks. This work challenges extractive research models that have historically exploited Indigenous knowledge and biological materials, and it affirms the broader principle of Indigenous data sovereignty: that communities should define and oversee the ethical standards that govern their data (Tsosie et al., 2021).These initiatives are part of the broader movement for Indigenous data sovereignty, which emphasizes collective ownership, cultural authority, and

ethical control over how data is collected, categorized, and accessed (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; Carroll et al., 2020). Situating the Palestinian case within this broader context reveals how classification systems often function as tools of colonial governance, and how resistance to these systems is part of a larger global push for narrative sovereignty and epistemic justice.

Indigenous data sovereignty movements offer powerful models of resistance to classificatory erasure. The case of Palestine demonstrates how similar dynamics operate under conditions of settler colonialism, occupation, and statelessness – but with distinct constraints. Unlike some Indigenous communities with recognized legal status or access to national data infrastructures, Palestinian librarians and archivists often work within institutions shaped by external governance or geopolitical pressure. LCSH reflects long standing political bias – eschewing terms like *Palestine* or *Nakba* in favor of neutral or state-aligned categories such as "Arab-Israeli conflict" (Holloway, 2018; Knowlton, 2005). These classificatory choices obscure cultural specificity, fragment historical continuity, and limit the discoverability of Palestinian knowledge.

5.2.5 Digital Archives as Decolonial Interventions

Digital archives have become important tools for Palestinians to protect and share their cultural heritage outside of state-controlled systems. Archives like the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive (PMDA) and POHA show how digital platforms can help communities take back control over how their history is described and accessed. PMDA and POHA use description, metadata, and database design to challenge Israeli erasure and provide users with access to materials outside state-controlled systems (Moon, 2023). These platforms support alternative ways of organizing and describing Palestinian materials, but they also face technical and infrastructural limitations.

The Birzeit University archive, located on the West Bank, is an example of what Lourdes Habash and Raed Bader (2023) call "archival anarchy". Instead of following strict rules for how materials should be described and categorized, the archive is built through practice and intuition. They argue that not having a fixed system is a political choice that reflects the realities of living under occupation. The result is an open and flexible archive that focuses more on preserving presence than creating order.

Lila Abu-Lughod (2018) reflects on the political and imaginative possibilities of archiving in the Palestinian context. She emphasizes that for a people without a state or a state archive, the question of what an archive is – how it can be assembled, accessed, or even imagined – is deeply political. Rather than focusing on traditional institutional records, she encourages us to think about how memory practices can challenge dominant narratives and create space for new futures.

The Palestinian filmmaker Jumana Manna's *A Magical Substance Flows into Me* from 2015 engages directly with a suppressed sound archive once held in the Israeli National Library (Abu-Lughod, 2018). By reactivating and recontextualizing this material in a Palestinian framework, the film interrupts colonial narratives and suggests new ways of understanding shared cultural

histories between Arabs and Jews before 1948. In another example, Palestinian-American professor Sherene Seikaly's personal encounter with her great-grandfather's documents reshapes not only her scholarly analysis of class and economy in Mandatory Palestine but also challenges the myth of Palestinian passivity by revealing stories of legal resistance and bureaucratic negotiation (Abu-Lughod, 2018).

These examples show how archives, both formal and informal, are not static repositories but active sites of political struggle and historical recovery. They allow Palestinians to narrate from within and reclaim space in the historical record. Abu-Lughod (2018) reminds us that this work is not only about documenting what was lost, but also about imagining what could be possible.

5.2.6 Community-Driven Classification at POHA

The Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA) is an example of how cataloging can be done in a different way. Instead of using systems like LCSH, POHA has created its own method based on local knowledge, spoken memory, and the specific experiences of Palestinian refugees. The POHA project was created to include voices that have been left out of traditional historical records (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018). Many Palestinians, especially refugees, have not had access to written archives, either because of displacement or because the official documents do not reflect their experiences. The archive uses oral testimony to challenge this exclusion and to build a different way of recording memory and history.

Unlike LCSH, which operates through a hierarchical and monolingual (English) structure shaped by Western state-centered epistemologies, POHA's cataloging is bilingual (Arabic–English), non-hierarchical, and shaped by the priorities of the communities it represents. The team avoided using a fixed list of subject terms. Instead, they listened closely to the interviews and created keywords based on the actual words and themes used by the speakers themselves (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018). These keywords reflect community-specific language and geography, and often capture historical, political, and cultural realities omitted or misrepresented in traditional classification systems.

Some of the keywords they developed include "Yawm al-Ard (Land Day)," "Attempt at return," and "Protests against settlements." These terms carry important meanings in the Palestinian context, but they are often missing or misrepresented in systems like LCSH. The team also included names of villages, schools, religious sites, and community leaders mentioned in the testimonies, as well as historical events such as "'Ayn al-Zaytun, Palestine – Massacre of, 1948" and "Palestine–History–Zionist Invasion, 1948". By doing this, they were able to document the geography and history of Palestine before 1948 – one that is often left out of dominant archival frameworks.

This way of cataloging allows the archive to keep the orality and emotional tone of the interviews, while also challenging traditional, colonial ways of organizing knowledge. By focusing on the lived language of refugees, POHA creates a more inclusive and accurate representation of Palestinian memory. It is a powerful example of how cataloging can become a form of resistance and a way to protect and make visible marginalized histories.

Furthermore, the POHA team decided not to rely on full transcription of interviews, recognizing that turning oral testimonies into text can flatten their meaning and remove important emotional and auditory elements (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018). Similarly, in her documentation of testimonies from Gaza, Caitlin Procter (2025) highlights how voice recordings often carry the sound of Israeli drones and other background noise, adding layers of context that are lost in written transcripts. In this way, POHA challenges both the authority of the written word and the centrality of Western archival principles. The project centers Palestinian ways of remembering where memory is spoken, embodied, and deeply connected to relationships and experiences.

5.2.7 The Palestinian Counter-Archive as Epistemic Resistance

Counter-archiving is not about finding one "true" version of the past. It's about making space for many stories at once. It challenges the fixity and linearity of traditional archives, opening space for contradiction, multiplicity, and the messiness of lived experience. This is especially important in situations of exile and occupation, where people are scattered, and official archives are missing or controlled by the occupier. When there is no state archive, Palestinians use fragments – personal stories, feelings, small collections – to keep memory alive (Abu-Lughod, 2018). These alternative archives carry both pain and possibility. They help preserve identity, but they also imagine different futures.

The concept of epistemic violence, as discussed earlier in section 3.1 Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory, is central to understanding the politics of archival control in the Palestinian context. Drawing on the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Ann Laura Stoler (2002), and Edward Said (2003), scholars have framed archives not as passive storehouses of history but as tools of governance that shape what is knowable and who is authorized to know. Israeli military but also civil institutions have, as Sela (2017) argues, weaponized archival practice by looting, censoring, and reclassifying Palestinian materials. These actions erase context, hide where the materials come from, and make Palestinian narratives harder to access, often in the name of "security" or "neutrality".

Epistemic violence occurs not only through destruction or theft, but also through classification itself. As Drabinski (2013) argues, systems like LCSH reproduce dominant worldviews by naturalizing their subject hierarchies, obscuring the ideological work they perform. For Palestinians, this results in a cataloging language that recodes their history through the lens of settler colonialism – reducing anti-colonial resistance to "Terrorism", masking the Nakba under "Arab-Israeli conflict", or fragmenting identity into racialized subcategories like "Palestinian Arabs" (Berman, 1993; Knowlton, 2005.).

Palestinian archival practices must be understood not only as methods of cultural preservation but also as acts of political resistance. Ziyada (2013) introduces the concept of the counter-archive to describe how Palestinians respond to both physical and symbolic erasure. In contrast to state archives that aim to fix, categorize, and control the historical narrative, the counter-archive

emerges from below. It is fragmented, grounded in personal experience and used as a way to resist epistemic violence. It resists both the material plunder of colonial regimes, and the symbolic erasure embedded in classificatory systems like LCSH.

To reiterate, archiving is deeply connected to power. Drawing on the work of thinkers like Foucault and Derrida, Ziyada (2013) shows that archives are not neutral – they function as mechanisms that shape what is remembered, who is authorized to remember, and what is rendered invisible. Derrida famously asserted that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory" (Derrida, 1995, p. 12, as cited in Ziyada, 2013, p. 9), highlighting that archiving is not just about preservation, but also about control. Ziyada reinforces this view by arguing that the archive operates as a structure of authority, one that governs the conditions under which memory and historical legitimacy are produced. In the Palestinian context, this perspective is crucial for understanding how the seizure, suppression, and reclassification of cultural materials constitutes not only material dispossession but also epistemic violence – violence that determines what histories can be told, and who gets to tell them.

Building on Foucault's theory of the archive, it becomes clear that archives are not neutral containers of historical data but structured systems of power that regulate discourse. As he writes, "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" and further, "it is the system of its functioning" (Foucault, 1992, p. 129). Rather than preserving all utterances equally, the archive organizes knowledge according to specific regularities, privileging some narratives while silencing others. In the Palestinian context, this understanding helps clarify how archival institutions participate in the erasure of Indigenous narratives – not only through physical control, but by delimiting what can be said, remembered, or even searched. The Palestinian counter-archive challenges this by giving value to first-hand experience, emotion, and oral memory as sources of history. It does not try to copy how official archives work but instead tries to break away from their logic completely.

Through examples like the Destroyed Villages Project and Riwaq's work with architectural heritage, Ziyada (2013) shows how Palestinian institutions are changing the idea of what an archive can be. Things like land papers, family photos, and traditional buildings are treated as archival materials – not because they fit official standards, but because they express Palestinian presence, memory, and loss. These materials are often digitized and shared outside formal institutions, creating a scattered but powerful archival network that challenges centralized and colonial systems of classification.

In response, many Palestinians and allies work with counter-archiving. This doesn't just mean adding more material to existing archives. It means building something different – something that challenges how traditional archives work. These practices include independent digital archives (Habash & Bader, 2023; Moon, 2023), oral history projects (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018), and creative or embodied forms of storytelling (Abu Hatoum & Shah Hoque, 2024). All of these strategies resist the idea that only the state can define what counts as history. Instead, they create spaces for other kinds of knowledge – based on

community, emotion, and resistance.

Oral history is a key part of the counter-archive since storytelling can be used as a form of resistance (Sleiman & Chebaro, 2018; Ziyada, 2008). When older generations in refugee camps and rural areas share their memories, they offer a way of knowing that comes from the inside. These stories do not follow the structure of systems like LCSH, which often leave out or misrepresent Palestinian experiences. Instead, they create a different logic – one that values emotion, memory, and personal experience. In this way, the counter-archive becomes more than just a method; it becomes a refusal to be erased, and a way to rebuild memory in the face of colonial systems that try to control what can be known.

5.2.8 Embodied Archival Praxis in Exile

Beyond institutional archives, including counter-archives, Palestinian communities in *shatat* have created alternative ways of archiving that focus on the body, emotion and relationships. Abu Hatoum and Shah Hoque (2024) explore how digital storytelling in *shatat* works as a form of archiving that challenges state-driven histories. Through their analysis of short films by Rana Nazzal Hamadeh and Serene Husni, they show how materials like soil, bread, and family gestures function akin to archival objects that carry memory, loss, and continuity.

These visual narratives challenge traditional definitions of what constitutes an archive. Instead of relying on mediated documents and metadata, these archives store memory through bodily actions, fragments of land, and the act of preparing food. For example, in Hamadeh's work, soil carried in a jar from Palestine is not just symbolic; it becomes a physical link to ancestral land, resisting erasure through its tangible presence. Kneading dough, in this context, becomes an act of passing knowledge between generations, turning the home into a living archive. These actions, usually done outside of formal institutions, create what Abu Hatoum and Shah Hoque (2024) describe as a dispersed and emotional network that connects diasporic people to histories of place and loss – not to assert sovereignty, but to sustain cultural memory and belonging in the absence of statehood and territorial control.

This type of archival work does not seek approval from formal institutions and it often exists outside state recognition, resisting categorization and control (Abu Hatoum and Shah Hoque, 2024). These embodied practices challenge the conventional view of archives by asserting the value of memory rooted in emotion and personal connection, rather than official records. Within the Palestinian *shatat*, such forms of archiving are particularly powerful, as they allow for continuity and rootedness in the absence of territorial sovereignty.

By focusing on embodied knowledge, this approach to archiving reclaims both physical space and personal identity. It creates an emotional counter-archive that operates across different spaces, formats, and generations. In this way, it broadens the idea of what digital archives can be – not just places to store scanned documents, but platforms for reshaping identity, heritage, and connection under conditions of displacement and dispossession.

In summary, this literature review in the form of a thematic analysis has examined how scholars, librarians, and archivists have engaged with the politics of classification, representation, and archival control in relation to Palestinian materials. Across these works, a central and recurring theme emerges: cataloging and classification are never neutral acts. They are shaped by geopolitical power, institutional norms, and ongoing structures of colonial erasure. Dominant systems like LCSH embed normative and political worldviews that marginalize or distort Palestinian identity. These frameworks often erase specificity through euphemistic language, suppress histories of displacement, and undermine narrative sovereignty (Drabinski, 2012; Olson, 2001; Sela, 2017). At the same time, the literature reveals how librarians, archivists, and communities are actively resisting these structures. Through alternative thesauri, local metadata vocabularies, oral history projects, and digital counter-archives, they build infrastructures that center Palestinian language, memory, and experience. Projects like POHA and PMDA offer models of what we propose to call metadata justice and narrative reclamation. Whether through cataloging reform or affective storytelling, these practices do not merely critique dominant systems, they reimagine what knowledge organization can be – particularly for stateless or exiled communities such as those in the Palestinian *shatat*, where the archive becomes both a vessel of memory and a strategy of survival.

Taken together, the reviewed literature affirms that classification is a site of both struggle and possibility. It sets the stage for this thesis to explore how information professionals engage with, navigate, and subvert dominant cataloging infrastructures, using their professional agency not only to describe the world, but to challenge its silences. Across these texts, several interrelated strategies of resistance emerge: the development of localized vocabularies and thesauri, metadata workarounds within dominant systems, advocacy through formal channels like Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO), ethical cataloging grounded in care, the reconfiguration of subject access for visibility, professional solidarity and training, and the creation of digital archives as decolonial infrastructure. Together, these practices form a foundation for understanding the professional and political agency of catalogers and archivists working with Palestinian materials. They also structure the thematic categories explored in the next chapter.

6 Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the key findings of the study through a thematic analysis of techniques of resistance identified in both the interview and relevant literature. Rather than following interview questions, the chapter is organized around cataloging strategies such as local vocabularies, metadata workarounds, institutional advocacy, ethics of care, and digital archiving. These techniques reflect how metadata professionals actively challenge dominant classification systems and reclaim descriptive power. Guided by the study's theoretical framework, the chapter explores how these practices intervene in systems of epistemic violence and support the visibility of Palestinian cultural heritage.

Rather than organizing the findings by topic or interview question, this chapter is structured around key techniques of resistance observed across the material. These techniques reflect how catalogers and metadata practitioners respond strategically and ethically to classification bias – by proposing alternatives, building local vocabularies, negotiating institutional reforms, and prioritizing care and justice in their work. Each section focuses on a specific method or intervention, analyzing how it functions in practice and what it reveals about the broader politics of knowledge organization.

Importantly, these techniques of resistance were not only evident in the empirical data but also emerged through the thematic analysis of previous literature. The thematic analysis revealed recurring strategies used by catalogers and archivists – such as metadata activism, bilingual vocabularies, community archives, and oral historiography – that now serve as interpretive categories in this chapter. In this way, the analysis draws strength from both fieldwork and scholarship, offering a dialogical understanding of practice and precedent.

The analysis is guided by the sensitizing concepts introduced and presented in more detail in section 2.4 which outlines the theoretical framework – "erasure," "agency," "resistance," "classification as power," and "the right to metadata sovereignty" – as well as insights from postcolonial, feminist, and critical cataloging theory. Together, these lenses support a nuanced reading of cataloging as a dynamic and politically charged practice, one shaped by negotiation, care, and a collective effort to resist epistemic violence and reimagine what metadata can do.

6.1 Using Local Vocabularies as Resistance

One of the most consistent and impactful forms of resistance identified in this study is the creation and use of local, community-rooted vocabularies, terms and classifications that reflect the lived realities, historical specificity, and political context of Palestinian heritage. Rather than relying exclusively on dominant systems like LCSH, catalogers, archivists and metadata professionals working in Palestinian contexts have developed alternative vocabularies that prioritize cultural authenticity and narrative sovereignty.

A central example is the POHA Thesaurus. According to the metadata librarian interviewed for this study, who directly worked on this thesaurus, the POHA

vocabulary was built directly from oral history interviews with first-generation Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The descriptors emerged from the language used in these testimonies, ensuring that the vocabulary remained grounded in lived experience rather than externally imposed categories. This process not only affirms cultural specificity but actively challenges the depoliticized and universalizing logic of dominant cataloging systems.

In 2023, the POHA Thesaurus was formally granted the code **"**poha**"** by the Library of Congress Coding Committee, enabling it to be used as a recognized authority source in MARC records. This institutional acknowledgment of a community-developed, decolonial vocabulary is both rare and significant. It reflects a growing recognition, albeit limited, of the need for metadata structures that reflect marginalized communities' own terms, histories, and perspectives. Notably, Basma Chebani, the cataloging expert interviewed in this study, was directly involved in the efforts to secure this coding recognition. Her work exemplifies how information professionals can intervene within institutional frameworks to advance the visibility and legitimacy of alternative, community-rooted vocabularies. In this way, the POHA Thesaurus embodies what this thesis refers to as the right to metadata sovereignty: the ability of communities to define, control, and use descriptive systems that reflect their own epistemologies and priorities.

The POHA Thesaurus provides subject terms that are either absent or distorted in LCSH, especially those describing events like displacement, military occupation, and cultural resistance. Its bilingual structure (Arabic-English) underscores a commitment to accessibility and narrative accuracy. As the metadata librarian explained, the aim is not only to catalog what exists, but to preserve and name what has been historically obscured. This strategy reflects what Olson (2001) describes as an ethical orientation in classification, one that resists exclusionary norms and strives to include the perspectives of those historically silenced. Drabinski (2013) similarly argues that controlled vocabularies are embedded with institutional worldviews, and that meaningful change requires active resistance through alternative practices. This approach also echoes Berman's (1993) early critiques of LCSH, which called attention to the system's racial, cultural, and political biases, and advocated for vocabularies that more accurately reflect community-specific knowledge.

The POHA Thesaurus, therefore, does not merely supplement existing structures – it reclaims descriptive authority and challenges the epistemic violence previously discussed. It offers a practical model for how cataloging can function as a site of resistance and historical justice, especially in contexts shaped by colonial erasure. This kind of cataloging is not only technical, but also political. It pushes back against dominant systems like LCSH, which obscure Palestinian specificity within depoliticized or colonial terms, and instead affirms the legitimacy of localized knowledge structures. POHA shows what a decolonial approach to metadata can look like: one that respects complexity, historical trauma, and the right to tell one's story in one's own terms. Through this community-driven framework, POHA asserts the right to name, define, and organize Palestinian cultural heritage on its own terms. Its controlled vocabulary is not merely an index, it is a form of narrative agency, a refusal to be misrepresented, and a challenge to dominant archival structures that have long silenced or distorted Palestinian voices.

6.2 Strategic Metadata Intervention and Workarounds

Another key technique of resistance practiced by information professionals working with Palestinian materials is the strategic use of metadata workarounds, creative interventions that expand visibility and accuracy within the constraints of dominant classification systems. These practices demonstrate professional creativity and agency, enabling catalogers to navigate or circumvent institutional constraints in order to promote more equitable and representative access to information.

One prominent example shared by the cataloging expert interviewed for this study involves the use of uncontrolled fields, particularly field 653 in MARC records. When official LCSH fail to reflect lived realities – such as the Nakba, specific refugee camps, or the names used by Palestinian communities for historical events – catalogers can manually add alternative descriptors in these fields. While not "official" headings, these additions make the records searchable through commonly used community terms, significantly improving discoverability for users.

For example, the MELA Working Group's guidelines (Appendix C) recommend adding terms like:

653 _0 Al-Aqsa Flood, Israel, 2023
653 _0 Gaza War, 2023–
653 _0 عملية طوفان الأقصى
653 _0 الحرب على غزة

These entries include English transliterations and Arabic script, recognizing that researchers may use a variety of language pathways when searching for material. Similarly, to preserve historical specificity, MELA advises catalogers to use older Palestinian place names, such as "Salamah (Palestine)," in the authority field 370 for individuals born before 1948. This resists the default replacement of pre-Nakba geographies with Israeli place names and helps retain connection to erased or depopulated locations.

These tactics reflect what Holloway (2018) critiques as a persistent issue in LCSH: the system's reliance on vague or state-aligned terminology that erases geopolitical specificity. For example, headings mentioned earlier in this study like "Arab-Israeli conflict" or "Middle East – Politics and government" may appear neutral but flatten the complexity of Palestinian experiences. As Knowlton (2005) explains, such euphemisms are not incidental, they are embedded in the system and frequently reflect the political position of the U.S. government rather than international consensus.

By manually inserting terms like "Nakba, 1948," "Deir Yassin massacre," or "Jabalia refugee camp," catalogers are not simply filling a gap; they are reclaiming narrative space. These interventions assert what Olson (2001) describes as "representational justice", ensuring that marginalized communities are not only included but described on their own terms. They also resist the gatekeeping function of the catalog, which too often restricts access through rigid taxonomies designed around dominant norms.

These workarounds, though often invisible to the casual user, constitute a subtle yet powerful form of resistance. They allow catalogers to preserve cultural specificity, acknowledge trauma and displacement, and restore user access to historically suppressed narratives. Through these acts, metadata professionals become quiet agents of justice, working within and against the system to transform the politics of visibility from the inside out.

6.3 Institutional Advocacy and SACO Negotiation

While many cataloging interventions occur at the local or organizational level, this study also highlights a more formal strategy of resistance: institutional advocacy through participation in controlled vocabulary reform. This work is exemplified by the metadata librarian's engagement with the MELA Working Group on Palestine, particularly in efforts to revise and expand subject headings in LCSH via the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO).

SACO provides a mechanism for librarians to propose changes or additions to LCSH, but the process is governed by strict guidelines designed to maintain internal consistency and "neutral" language. As the cataloging expert interviewed for this study explained, proposals must conform closely to established terminology and structure to avoid rejection. "The suggestions should be according to the guidelines to prevent any possible rejection of the proposed changes," she noted, underscoring the rigidity of a system that paradoxically asks for reform while resisting fundamental shifts in worldview.

Despite these constraints, MELA has made significant progress. In 2023, it successfully advocated for the addition of two new subject headings: **"**Palestine question (to 1948)" and "Palestine question (1948–)". These terms provide critical historical framing and offer new access points for researchers working with Palestinian materials. The metadata librarian described this approval as a "breakthrough in the history of Library of Congress Committees," particularly given the institution's long-standing reluctance to acknowledge Palestinian political and historical claims in official vocabulary.

This form of institutional advocacy aligns with Knowlton's (2005) observation that while the Library of Congress has made incremental changes to LCSH, meaningful reform has often required sustained, collective pressure from professionals committed to representational justice. Working within bureaucratic constraints, librarians and archivists engage in what might be termed "strategic compliance" – adhering to procedural rules while simultaneously pushing those rules to their ethical and political limits. As Abu-Lughod (1990) argues, acts of resistance often manifest not in overt opposition but through subtle, embedded practices that navigate and disrupt dominant power structures from within.

The cataloging expert's dual role as both a participant in SACO and a developer of community vocabularies like the POHA Thesaurus demonstrates how institutional engagement and grassroots intervention can operate in tandem. While local vocabularies offer immediate alternatives for cataloging Palestinian heritage, SACO participation works to reshape the larger information architecture, however slowly. This advocacy must also be read in the context of what Spivak (1988) calls epistemic violence: to recap, the

systematic exclusion of marginalized perspectives from dominant forms of knowledge. Proposing new subject headings through SACO becomes a form of representational resistance – one that attempts to make Palestinian history and political struggle visible not only within local catalogs but within global infrastructures of knowledge.

At the same time, the limitations of the SACO process serve as a reminder that even well-intentioned reform efforts can reinforce the authority of the very systems they seek to change. As Holloway (2018) and Olson (2001) argue, cataloging structures grounded in state-aligned worldviews often absorb critique without fundamentally transforming their logics. Nonetheless, participation in SACO can open up space for gradual change, build collective knowledge, and keep pressure on institutions to acknowledge the political dimensions of classification.

6.4 Cataloging as Ethical Practice and Care

Another core strategy of resistance that emerged both from the interview and the thematic analysis of existing literature is the practice of cataloging as care – an ethical approach that prioritizes responsibility, historical justice, and community representation over the illusion of neutrality. In politically charged contexts such as Palestine, cataloging cannot be treated as a neutral, technical act. Rather, it becomes an embodied ethical practice shaped by the cataloger's positionality, political awareness, and professional judgment.

This was articulated clearly by the metadata librarian, who wrote:

> "The Palestinian question is a just cause… so I am impartial in assigning subject headings already available in the LCSH list with the freedom of proposing more adequate subjects outside the list (local subjects) in order to cover the subjects of the collection."

Her framing reveals a refusal of institutional "objectivity" when it serves to obscure injustice. Instead, she aligns cataloging choices with historical reality and ethical responsibility – demonstrating what Hope Olson (2001) describes as an "ethical relation to the Other." Rather than passively reproducing flawed vocabularies, ethical catalogers must act with care toward both the materials and the communities they describe.

This perspective is further enriched by Carol Gilligan's (1982) feminist ethics of care, which challenges dominant moral theories that emphasize abstraction, neutrality, and detachment. Gilligan argues that ethical decision-making is rooted in relationality and context: an ethic of care centers empathy, attentiveness to others, and the imperative to minimize harm. Within this framework, cataloging is not just a question of procedural correctness, but of relational accountability. The cataloging expert's approach – assigning subject headings that reflect community-specific realities and refusing to mask injustice under "neutral" terms – embodies care as an ethical stance.

This also resonates with feminist critiques of knowledge production more broadly. As theorists such as Minh-ha (1989) and hooks (1994) argue, neutrality often masks complicity with dominant ideologies. In contexts of

colonization and erasure, the refusal to take a position may itself reinforce structural injustice. In this case, cataloging materials related to Palestine without political and historical awareness would mean contributing to the erasure rather than resisting it.

This imperative to name injustice and center personal experience also resonates with the work of El Saadawi, whose writings unflinchingly confront state violence, patriarchy, and institutionalized silence. In *The Essential Nawal El Saadawi* (2010), she emphasizes how systems of power rely on the erasure and distortion of marginalized voices, particularly those of women and colonized communities. Her feminist praxis insists on the responsibility to speak truthfully and publicly about oppression, even when dominant systems discourage or penalize such visibility. Read alongside Gilligan and hooks, El Saadawi's work affirms that ethical practice – whether in literature or librarianship – requires resisting complicity, naming structural harm, and refusing neutrality when it sustains injustice.

The metadata librarian's ethical stance also emphasizes active learning. She encourages librarians to "read about Palestine history to better understand the Palestine question," arguing that subject expertise cannot be separated from political and historical context. This aligns with feminist epistemologies that emphasize situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1987), recognizing that ethical knowledge work requires reflection on one's role, responsibility, and limitations. This ethic of care extends beyond terminology to cataloging practice. By choosing to assign subject headings such as "Deir Yassin massacre" or "Nakba, 1948" where LCSH remains silent, the cataloging expert reclaims cataloging as a tool for truth-telling. In this sense, ethical cataloging is not just about accuracy, it is about redressing invisibility and offering access to contested histories that might otherwise be erased.

By foregrounding care, responsibility, and critical awareness, this strategy reimagines cataloging as a form of ethical resistance. It reflects an emerging consensus among critical catalogers and archival theorists: that systems of knowledge must not only include marginalized communities but be accountable to them. As outlined in the thematic analysis, this practice aligns with broader trends in the literature where ethical engagement and narrative accountability are seen as foundational to metadata justice – especially in contexts of colonization, displacement, and epistemic harm.

6.5 Reclaiming Discoverability and Subject Access

Another critical strategy of resistance identified in this study is the deliberate reconfiguration of subject access to improve the discoverability of Palestinian materials. In classification systems like LCSH, what users can find is inseparable from how subjects are framed. This means that discoverability is never neutral, it is shaped by the epistemological assumptions built into metadata standards.

The metadata librarian made clear that the absence of accurate and representative subject headings directly limits user access to Palestinian

materials. As she explained, terms like “Palestinian resistance,” “Nakba,” or “Deir Yassin massacre” are either missing from LCSH or insufficiently represented, forcing catalogers to either improvise or conform to misleading categories such as “Arab-Israeli conflict” or “Middle East – Politics and government.” This issue mirrors the critiques raised by Knowlton (2005), who argues that LCSH routinely favors euphemism and ambiguity over political specificity, particularly when addressing non-Western or colonized subjects.

Reframing user access becomes a form of metadata resistance, where catalogers intervene in the systems that dictate what can be searched, retrieved, or even recognized as a valid subject. Drawing from her work with the MELA Working Group, the cataloging expert described how local terms are added to uncontrolled MARC fields (e.g., 653 or 691) to reflect historically or culturally specific language omitted from official headings. For example, terms like “Al-Aqsa Flood,” “Nakba, 1948,” or “عملية طوفان الأقصى” (Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, in Arabic) are recommended for inclusion alongside authorized subject headings to improve visibility for a broader range of users.

These interventions are especially important in politically sensitive contexts, where the language used in metadata not only frames historical events but also shapes public understanding. The decision to label an archival entry with “Palestinian resistance” rather than “terrorism,” or “Occupied Palestinian Territories” rather than “disputed territories,” reflects a fundamental act of representational justice. This approach aligns with growing calls in LIS literature for metadata justice – an effort to decolonize classification by aligning it with the lived vocabularies, experiences, and political realities of marginalized communities (Caswell, 2020; Olson, 2001). As Olson argues, subject headings often reinforce dominant norms by marking difference only when it deviates from an unspoken white, male, Western default. In Palestinian contexts, this produces a cataloging landscape where visibility is structurally denied or distorted.

Chebani’s advocacy and cataloging practice reflect a strategic response to this problem. When official language fails to represent the material truth of a resource, she supplements records with culturally meaningful terms, even if they fall outside of controlled vocabularies. This reclaiming of subject access is not just a workaround, it is a principled strategy grounded in care, accuracy, and user needs. This practice also reflects what Caswell and Cifor (2016) describe as radical empathy in archival work: an attentiveness to how systems impact real people, and a willingness to act accordingly. Rather than upholding objectivity as an end in itself, this model of cataloging centers relational ethics and political awareness. It also recalls Drabinski’s (2013) insight that subject access systems are “always in motion” – never settled but continually negotiated by those who use and maintain them.

In this way, subject access becomes a battleground for epistemic visibility. By expanding discoverability through local vocabularies, bilingual terms, and politically accurate metadata, catalogers resist systems that obscure and silence. Their work challenges the idea that metadata is merely technical and instead affirms that who can find what – and how – is a question of power.

6.6 Solidarity, Training, and the Limits of Reform

The sixth strategy of resistance identified in this study does not involve metadata schemas or subject headings, but rather the professional commitments and solidarities that sustain ethical cataloging work over time. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, acts of resistance – from local vocabularies to strategic interventions – depend not only on technical skills, but on historical understanding, mentorship, and collective support.

The metadata librarian interviewed emphasized the importance of political literacy in ethical cataloging, particularly in contexts like Palestine. Encouraging young catalogers to read and understand Palestinian history, she frames subject access not simply as a technical outcome, but as a reflection of knowledge, accountability, and care. This insistence on historical awareness reflects an ethic of responsibility deeply aligned with feminist theories of care (Gilligan, 1982) and postcolonial critiques of neutrality (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1988).

The work of the MELA Working Group, for instance, exemplifies how collaboration across institutions and national borders creates space for shared resistance. Through annotated vocabularies, advocacy guidelines, and mentorship, such networks build the practical and emotional capacity needed to challenge entrenched systems. These relationships reflect the ethics of radical empathy mentioned earlier, a form of care that is politically committed, institutionally aware, and sustained through collaboration.

Yet even these collective efforts face structural constraints. The SACO submission process, bureaucratic delays, and institutional risk aversion all limit the speed and scope of change. As Knowlton (2005) and Holloway (2018) have shown, reform within systems like LCSH is possible but requires persistent pressure, often over years. These limits remind us that critical cataloging is not just a matter of innovation, it is also a struggle for institutional legitimacy and epistemic space.

Still, this research reveals how solidarity and training remain crucial tools of resistance. They foster resilience in the face of institutional inertia and create the conditions for sustainable change. Building from this, several key pathways emerge for advancing ethical cataloging: political and historical literacy should be integrated into cataloging education, ensuring that metadata professionals understand the cultural and geopolitical contexts they engage with; peer mentorship structures must be strengthened to support context-informed and community-anchored cataloging decisions; networks of professional solidarity, such as MELA, can play a pivotal role in coordinating advocacy and distributing the labor of reform; and institutions themselves must be pressed to adopt more flexible, multilingual, and community-rooted metadata practices that reflect diverse ways of knowing and remembering.

These forms of relational resistance are essential to the future of equitable knowledge organization. They challenge the assumption that reform is solely a technical matter, highlighting instead how classification work is always embedded in relationships, histories, and power. Ultimately, this thesis affirms that efforts to decolonize metadata must be grounded not only in systems

change, but in the everyday ethics and solidarities of those who do the work. These initiatives do not promise quick fixes, but they do point to what a more just, reflective, and responsive knowledge system could look like – one in which Palestinian cultural heritage, and the heritage of all marginalized communities, is not only preserved but made visible, legible, and searchable on their own terms. These strategies, grounded in care and resistance, invite a reimagining of cataloging as a collaborative act of memory-making, one that honors both professional responsibility and historical justice.

6.7 Digital Archives as Decolonial Infrastructure

In addition to metadata-level interventions, this study underscores the critical role of digital archives as decolonial infrastructure, platforms that enable not only the preservation but the redefinition of cultural memory under conditions of erasure, occupation, and displacement. Digital archives such as the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA), and the community-led projects emerging from networks like MELA, are not merely repositories; they are political spaces where marginalized communities reclaim control over their narratives, vocabularies, and representational frameworks.

This aligns with Caswell's (2014) argument that digital archives can function as "spaces of resistance" that challenge dominant historiographies and reassert the epistemic agency of historically silenced groups. Caswell highlights how community archives disrupt archival logics premised on neutrality, centralization, and state authority and instead offer an ethics of accountability, affect, and co-creation. The POHA project exemplifies this, not only through its community-rooted thesaurus and oral history-based taxonomy, but also by reconfiguring authority: it shifts epistemic legitimacy from institutional catalogers to refugee narrators and cultural practitioners themselves.

Moon (2023) expands this argument by conceptualizing digital archives in settler-colonial contexts as "counter-archives of memory", dynamic platforms that resist the state's monopoly over historical truth and material access. In the Palestinian case, where the Israeli state has systematically destroyed, restricted, or appropriated historical records (Masalha, 2012; Sela, 2017), the construction of alternative digital repositories becomes a necessary act of cultural survival and political defiance. Moon emphasizes that these archives are not simply parallel structures, but interventions in the politics of visibility and recognition. They enable dispersed and diasporic communities to articulate histories otherwise excluded from official infrastructures.

In this context, digital archives are best understood not only as tools for storage or access, but as decolonial technologies, modes of organizing, relating, and remembering that challenge colonial epistemologies and state-sanctioned taxonomies. Their multilingual, nonlinear, community-governed structure actively resists the hierarchical, monolingual, and state-aligned logics of systems like LCSH. As these projects foreground community-defined authority and narrative sovereignty, they also embody the principle of metadata sovereignty developed throughout this thesis: the right of communities to describe themselves on their own terms.

Moreover, digital archives foster transnational solidarity and knowledge circulation, enabling activists, researchers, and cultural workers across geographic borders to share strategies, vocabularies, and tools. They facilitate radical empathy and create an ethics of connection and care that treats metadata and archival description not as technical tasks, but as relational and moral practices. Within this framework, the archive is not a neutral container but an active site of memory-making, cultural continuity, and political refusal.

In relation to institutions, digital archives are especially significant. As Caidi et al. (2017) highlight through examples like the Digital Archives and Marginalized Communities (DAMC) project, these platforms provide opportunities for relational, community-led, and ethically accountable knowledge practices. For Palestinian communities, digital archives represent not only tools for preservation but spaces of resistance and reclassification, countering the silences imposed by institutional infrastructures. By building infrastructures that center indigenous knowledge, lived experience, and multilingual access, Palestinian digital archives push the boundaries of what archives are and whom they serve. They demonstrate that in the absence of institutional accountability, memory can still be reclaimed and that digital tools, when wielded with care and consciousness, can become instruments of resistance.

6.8 Toward a Decolonial Practice of Cataloging

The strategies examined throughout this chapter, ranging from local vocabularies and metadata workarounds to SACO advocacy, ethics of care, and professional solidarity, do not operate in isolation. Rather, they form a constellation of resistance practices that collectively point toward a decolonial reimagining of cataloging. These interventions challenge not only the technical architecture of metadata but the epistemological assumptions that sustain it. In doing so, they reveal cataloging as a site where professional responsibility intersects with historical justice, and where metadata becomes a tool for reclaiming narrative power.

What emerges from this analysis is a layered understanding of resistance: it is at once tactical and principled, situated in everyday decisions as well as long-term institutional advocacy. These practices operate across different registers – linguistic, technical, political, emotional – and are sustained not by formal authority but by ethical commitment and collective care. Catalogers and metadata professionals working with Palestinian materials navigate a landscape shaped by systemic erasure, yet their work demonstrates that meaningful resistance is both possible and already underway.

Crucially, these practices do not merely “fix” the problems of classification; they unsettle the very logics of universality, neutrality, and hierarchy that underpin dominant systems like LCSH. By foregrounding situated knowledge, relational accountability, and multilingual access, they propose an alternative ethos of metadata grounded in reciprocity, memory, and the right to self-definition. This ethos resonates with broader movements in critical cataloging, decolonial archiving, and feminist information studies, which together affirm that how we name, describe, and retrieve knowledge is never a neutral task.

While institutional reform remains slow and often resistant to structural change, the examples explored in this chapter offer a roadmap for what a decolonial metadata practice might look like: one that centers the communities described, prioritizes epistemic justice, and treats classification not as a fixed order, but as a space of ethical encounter and political possibility. These efforts do not erase the limits of the current system, but they mark the boundaries of what can be transformed, and who is doing the work of transformation.

Ultimately, to catalog Palestine is to catalog against erasure. It is to intervene in infrastructures of knowledge that have long rendered Palestinian histories illegible or disposable. And it is to insist, through each term, each record, each choice, that another way of remembering is not only imaginable, but already in motion.

7 Discussion

This chapter reflects on the broader implications of the study's findings, challenging the idea that cataloging is a neutral or apolitical task. Drawing on the concept of metadata sovereignty and critiques of professional "neutrality," the discussion situates cataloging within wider structures of power, care, and resistance. It explores what it means to catalog ethically in contexts of historical erasure and settler colonialism, with a focus on Palestine. The chapter also considers implications for professional practice, institutional reform, and the role of AI in knowledge production.

One of the central insights that emerges from this study is the myth of neutrality in classification systems and knowledge infrastructures. While cataloging practices are often presented as objective or technical, this research demonstrates how such claims mask deep political and epistemological commitments. The classification of Palestinian cultural heritage, in particular, reveals how metadata structures are entangled with histories of colonialism, power asymmetry, and institutional complicity.

The idea that librarians and archivists can or should remain neutral has long been upheld as a professional ideal, particularly by institutions such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which emphasizes neutrality and impartiality in its professional codes and ethical guidelines (IFLA, 2012). However, as our findings and the work of information professionals like Basma Chebani show, neutrality often functions as a form of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988): a refusal to name injustice, a denial of context, and an erasure of complexity. In Chebani's words, "there is no need to pretend to be ethical and objective" when the systems themselves reproduce inequality. Her stance reflects a broader shift in the profession toward what feminist theorists call ethical clarity – the recognition that taking a position can be more just than hiding behind the fiction of impartiality (Olson, 2001; Scott, 1988).

This critique of neutrality is not unique to this study. It echoes a growing body of scholarship that problematizes the invocation of neutrality in response to activism, particularly in relation to colonialism, race, and settler violence. Mathiasson and Jochumsen (2023) warn that accusations of "activist librarianship" are frequently used to discredit efforts to make libraries more inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the communities they serve.

In the case of Palestine, neutrality becomes a cover for structural alignment with dominant state narratives. The absence of subject headings like "Nakba" or "Occupied Palestinian Territories" is not an apolitical oversight, it is a product of institutional systems that prioritize geopolitical alliances over representational justice. Efforts to challenge these absences, whether through SACO proposals, local thesauri like POHA, or metadata workarounds, are often dismissed as political bias, even as the existing system maintains its own embedded partialities. Why aren't the systems themselves called into question, rather than the work to create more inclusion and representation within them?

This study supports the argument that classification systems are never neutral. They are choices made within regimes of power, and they have material

consequences for visibility, access, and memory. What this research contributes is an account of how information professionals navigate those constraints with intentionality, care, and resistance. These acts – grounded in ethical judgment and political awareness – suggest that the path forward for librarianship lies not in retreating into assumed objectivity, but in continuing to challenge or even confront the social and historical conditions that shape the very act of organizing knowledge.

7.1 Challenging the Neutrality Ideal: Why Is It Radical to Care?

If cataloging is not neutral, then neither is the decision to intervene. Yet interventions by librarians and archivists, particularly when they seek to redress injustice or amplify marginalized perspectives, are frequently dismissed as activism, bias, or even professional overreach. This raises a central question: Why is it considered radical to care? The answer lies in the professional norms and institutional frameworks that have long rewarded detachment, standardization, and alignment with dominant narratives. Within this context, acts of care – choosing terms that reflect first-hand experience, making space for erased histories, prioritizing community-defined vocabularies – are viewed as deviations from the norm. But as feminist scholars have argued (Caswell & Cifor, 2016; Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 1994), care is not sentimentality; it is a relational, ethical, and often political practice grounded in accountability.

Our findings reflect ongoing tensions within the profession, where practices labeled as "activist cataloging" are, in fact, expressions of librarianship's core commitments to equity, access, and the public good (Drabinski, 2019; Mathiasson & Jochumsen, 2023), in other words, a central value of librarianship. As Mathiasson and Jochumsen argue, what is often dismissed as political overreach is better understood as a form of ethical responsibility that emerges from within the profession's own values. When practitioners like Chebani insist on naming the Nakba, including Palestinian place names, or correcting decontextualized subject headings, they are not engaging in partisanship – they are resisting erasure. To care about how communities are represented in the catalog is not radical; it is responsible. Caswell and Cifor's (2016) notion of radical empathy feels especially relevant here. Rather than being treated as exceptional, such care should be understood as integral to professional discourse and central to the ethical practice of librarianship.

Recent research by Haider and Sundin (2022) highlights how demands for neutrality are increasingly mobilized by far-right actors in public debates about libraries and knowledge institutions. Their analysis of political discourse in Sweden reveals a growing backlash against libraries' efforts to promote media literacy and source criticism. Far-right parties argue that any institutional guidance on how to assess information constitutes bias, portraying neutrality not as a method for ensuring access to diverse perspectives, but as a tool to silence critique. This rhetorical move reframes professional responsibility as overreach and positions neutrality as a demand for passivity in the face of disinformation and historical distortion.

As Haider and Sundin (2022) further argue, neutrality is not a non-position – it is an ideological stance shaped by political histories and shifting power relations. In the context of rising epistemic polarization, the concept of neutrality is increasingly co-opted to challenge the legitimacy of public institutions, including libraries, schools, and media outlets. What appears as a call for balance or objectivity often conceals efforts to undermine pluralism and to erode trust in established systems of knowledge. The paradox, as Haider and Sundin point out, is that neutrality is anything but neutral. It functions as a political position masquerading as objectivity – one that, when weaponized, delegitimizes the role of public institutions in supporting democratic discourse. In this light, to care – to intervene, to contextualize, to name – is not only a rejection of false neutrality, but a necessary ethical response to the conditions of epistemic and political struggle.

7.2 The Right to Metadata Sovereignty: Toward Descriptive Self-Determination

This study introduces, and starts developing, the concept of metadata sovereignty – the right of communities to define, control, and implement the terms through which their knowledge, identities, and histories are organized. This concept, inspired by Indigenous data sovereignty movements (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; Rainie et al., 2017), extends those principles to classification systems, counter-archives, and metadata infrastructures.

Metadata sovereignty challenges the idea that technical systems should be controlled solely by centralized authorities like the Library of Congress. Instead, it envisions a pluralistic metadata landscape in which community-authored vocabularies, bilingual thesauri, and culturally grounded metadata are recognized as equally legitimate – if not more so – than dominant vocabularies. Projects like the POHA Thesaurus exemplify this possibility in practice. By extracting descriptors from oral history interviews with Palestinian refugees, POHA asserts not only representational accuracy but also narrative ownership. As this study has shown, such work is not merely corrective; it is transformative. It invites libraries and archives to move beyond the logic of inclusion and toward a paradigm of redistribution of descriptive power.

The vision of metadata sovereignty is also in conversation with feminist scholarship that foregrounds the politics of memory and representation. For instance, Hoda Elsadda's work on cultural memory and gender in Arab contexts critiques the erasures embedded in nationalist canons and advocates for practices that center women's lived experiences and epistemologies (Elsadda, 2012). Through her work with the Women and Memory Forum – a feminist research organization in Egypt that challenges dominant historical narratives by producing alternative archives – Elsadda (2018) emphasizes the importance of reclaiming women's voices through gender-sensitive documentation practices. This approach resonates with the concept of metadata sovereignty, which also calls for community authorship, representational justice, and the redistribution of descriptive power. Together, these perspectives affirm that metadata is not neutral infrastructure – it is a site of struggle over visibility, authorship, and the right to shape how histories are recorded and accessed.

7.3 Implications for the Profession

In challenging the illusion of neutrality, this thesis affirms that cataloging is not a passive act of record-keeping – it is a dynamic and consequential site of power. Librarians and archivists are not merely implementers of metadata standards; they are agents capable of reshaping how knowledge is structured, accessed, and remembered. Caidi, Ghaddar, and Allard (2017) argue that librarians operate at the intersection of professional ethics and broader political contexts, often navigating between institutional norms and social responsibility. Their work shows how classification systems have historically been implicated in settler colonialism, racial exclusion, and the marginalization of Indigenous and racialized communities. As they note, libraries are not outside of political systems but embedded within them, and information professionals must acknowledge their roles in sustaining or challenging these structures (Caidi et al., 2017).

This has direct relevance for the cataloging of Palestinian cultural heritage, which is often obscured, misclassified, or erased within dominant systems like LCSH. As this thesis demonstrates, the lack of appropriate subject headings and the entrenchment of normative state-based vocabularies contributes to the structural marginalization of Palestinian identity. In this context, professional education must take seriously the politics of classification. Courses on metadata, cataloging, and archival practices should foreground histories of exclusion and teach students how to critically interpret, challenge, and ethically intervene in standardized systems.

Furthermore, institutions must support and fund the development of digital archives, local thesauri and controlled vocabularies rooted in community knowledge, particularly in contexts of occupation, exile, and historical erasure. LIS professionals must engage in "diversity by design," (Dali & Caidi, 2017, as cited in Caidi et al., 2017, p. 399) which entails deliberate and sustained efforts to confront systemic forms of oppression, not merely celebrate representational diversity. This includes resisting frameworks that tokenize or assimilate marginalized communities and instead fostering participatory knowledge production.

The emergence of concepts like metadata sovereignty signals a potential paradigm shift in the field; one that centers ethical responsibility, historical justice, and community-defined authority. Moving beyond the illusion of neutrality is not only necessary but urgent (Caidi et al., 2017). Librarianship must evolve into a profession that does not retreat from the political but meets it with care, clarity, and critical commitment.

Finally, international cataloging authorities must revise their governance models to allow for meaningful community input, more flexible vocabularies, and the integration of regionally specific metadata systems. Professional organizations must also defend the right of information professionals to challenge biased systems and engage in metadata activism without fear of professional censure or reputational harm.

7.4 Reflections on AI, Research Labor, and Critical Ethics

As researchers engaged in this thesis during a time of rapidly expanding artificial intelligence, we felt it important to reflect briefly on our relationship to these tools. Throughout our master's program, we were introduced to and trained in AI-supported research practices – tools we had not previously used. Yet, during the process, we found ourselves in an ongoing ethical dilemma.

On the one hand, we are researchers who value slow scholarship: spending long hours reviewing literature, collecting quotations, and writing with care. On the other, as students in a Library and Information Science program where AI tools are increasingly integrated into the field, we were introduced to these technologies as part of our coursework. Several assignments and modules encouraged us to experiment with AI to better understand its capabilities, limitations, and implications – not as passive users, but as critical practitioners. While our thesis supervisor explicitly advised us to write independently and avoid relying on AI for drafting, advice we have followed, the broader program reflected a pedagogical emphasis on digital literacy that included responsible AI engagement. This well-intentioned exposure raised questions not only about ethics, but also about authorship. Who is doing the writing when AI is involved? What does intellectual contribution mean in a landscape where machines can co-produce academic prose?

One of our concerns relates to the growing body of scholarship on the ethical risks posed by large-scale language models. These systems often reproduce and amplify the very forms of bias and epistemic violence we critique in our work (Bender et al., 2021). More than this, the environmental impact of training and maintaining large-scale AI infrastructures is significant – from energy consumption to water use in cooling data centers – and disproportionately harms communities that already face climate vulnerability (Birhane, 2021). These harms are rarely visible to end users, yet they are embedded in every prompt and every model output.

Our decision to use AI tools sparingly, and primarily for technical editing, was not dictated by any institutional rule but by an ethical stance grounded in care, responsibility, and discomfort. We do not claim this restraint as moral high ground, nor do we reject the potential uses of AI outright. But we believe it is important to ask: *what values are being embedded into our research practices, and whose interests do these tools ultimately serve?*

In acknowledging these tensions, we simply aim to make visible the ethical questions that often remain unspoken in academic production. As with classification systems, the technologies we use matter – not just for what they help us produce, but for how they shape the very conditions under which knowledge is made.

8 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the study's main findings and reflects on their broader implications for knowledge organization, professional ethics, and the politics of representation. By examining how information professionals resist dominant classification systems through strategies like local vocabularies, digital archives, and metadata activism, the study highlights cataloging as an inherently political and ethical practice. It confirms the concept of metadata sovereignty as a central contribution, affirming communities' right to define and describe their own heritage. Ultimately, the chapter argues that to catalog Palestine is to engage in an act of resistance, one that challenges erasure and reclaims the power to name.

With this thesis we set out to examine how information professionals engage with, resist, and reconfigure dominant classification systems in the context of Palestinian cultural heritage. Through a semi-structured interview with cataloging expert Basma Chebani, close analysis of cataloging documents, and a critical and thematic reading of relevant literature, the study highlights both the structural violence embedded in systems like LCSH and the creative, ethical, and political strategies employed by practitioners to challenge these constraints.

The findings offer clear insight into the three guiding research questions of this study: how information professionals shape subject headings that better represent Palestinian identity; how normative and political assumptions embedded in dominant systems affect classification; and how digital archives serve as alternative spaces for cultural preservation. The study shows that cataloging is not a neutral or merely technical act – it is a political and ethical practice that shapes visibility, memory, authority, and accessibility. Practitioners use techniques such as developing local vocabularies, inserting community-authored subject terms, advocating through formal channels like SACO, and grounding decisions in care and historical justice. These interventions form a constellation of decolonial strategies that resist erasure and reimagine what metadata can do – and for whom it is done.

One of the thesis's central contributions is the articulation of metadata sovereignty: the right of communities to define, control, and implement metadata that reflects their own epistemologies. In the case of Palestine, this includes naming the Nakba, preserving pre-1948 place names, and developing bilingual, context-sensitive thesauri like POHA. These efforts challenge colonial classification logics and assert the right to cultural self-representation within global infrastructures.

Moreover, this study also affirms the significance of digital archives as decolonial infrastructures. Community-led projects like POHA and initiatives within the MELA Working Group do more than preserve cultural material; they disrupt dominant frameworks by reclaiming narrative authority and prioritizing accountability, multilingual access, and radical empathy. In spaces where institutional archives have failed to include or accurately describe

Palestinian voices, digital archives become key sites of resistance and reimagination.

Additionally, this thesis challenges the enduring myth of neutrality in librarianship. As the analysis demonstrates, claims to neutrality often serve to uphold dominant power structures under the guise of objectivity. In contrast, ethical cataloging – grounded in care, clarity, and political awareness – emerges as a form of accountability. As El Saadawi (2010) argues, silence in the face of oppression is not passive, it is a function of institutional complicity. Naming injustice, even when uncomfortable, is essential to resisting systems that erase and distort marginalized voices. In this sense, to catalog with integrity is to speak when institutions prefer silence.

The broader implications for the field of Library and Information Science are clear. If classification is a site of power, then information professionals must be trained not only in technical standards but in political literacy, historical awareness, and community accountability. Institutions should invest in local thesauri, support activist cataloging networks, and revise governance models to allow for meaningful community input. Professional associations must defend practitioners who challenge biased systems and promote metadata justice.

Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a growing body of work that understands cataloging as a terrain of struggle where epistemic violence and epistemic repair are in constant tension. It invites a shift in how we understand our roles: from gatekeepers of standardized knowledge to co-creators of plural, situated, and accountable memory systems. To catalog Palestine is to resist its erasure. In doing so, it reveals the broader stakes of classification, not just as a method of description, but as a mode of political engagement, historical care, and collective resistance.

9 Further Research

This study focuses specifically on the cataloging of materials related to Palestine. While this case reveals broader patterns of erasure and misrepresentation within dominant classification systems, future research could usefully expand the scope to examine how materials related to other Indigenous peoples are treated within cataloging systems shaped by Western epistemologies and colonial biases. A comparative analysis, between the cataloging of Palestinian materials and that of other colonized or Indigenous communities, could illuminate both shared mechanisms of marginalization and the diverse ways in which librarians and archivists resist and reframe dominant systems of knowledge organization.

Additionally, future studies could explore quantitative or computational methods to map patterns of subject heading usage – such as the frequency or absence of key terms across collections. While this study focused on a smaller set of examples due to its qualitative scope and time constraints, a broader dataset could reveal larger trends in how Palestine is represented (or obscured) across library catalogs. Such research could support evidence-based cultural policy reform and help substantiate calls for systemic change in metadata infrastructure.

There is also significant room for methodological innovation. Future research could explore how community-based participatory methods, such as collaborative thesaurus building or metadata workshops, can be incorporated into cataloging and classification reform. This could also include studies that develop contextual vocabularies or locally-authored authority files, drawing from the lived experiences and epistemic traditions of affected communities.

On a conceptual level, further research could build on the theoretical groundwork laid in this thesis – particularly the articulation of the right to metadata sovereignty. To our knowledge, this is the first academic study to introduce and define this concept in the context of cataloging. We propose it as a framework for understanding how communities assert control over how they are described, classified, and made findable within knowledge infrastructures. This concept offers a foundation for future inquiry into how power, memory, and visibility are negotiated through metadata. As such, it invites researchers to develop new terminology that emerges from lived experience, cultural specificity, and community-defined values – terms that resist flattening complexity in favor of legibility. Concepts such as “relational metadata,” “descriptive sovereignty,” or “affective tagging” are examples of the kinds of critical vocabularies that might deepen interdisciplinary conversations across library and information science, Indigenous studies, cultural policy, archival studies, and digital humanities. This work could also inform the evolving role of librarians and information professionals, who are increasingly asked to navigate ethical, cultural, and political responsibilities alongside technical expertise. Expanding the language, we use to describe metadata practices can support more inclusive, collaborative, and justice-oriented infrastructures – while reaffirming the library’s potential as a public space committed to access, care, and collective memory.

Finally, future research could open valuable pathways for bridging disciplinary and professional boundaries. As the politics of metadata increasingly intersect with broader questions of justice, identity, and memory, there are meaningful opportunities for collaboration across fields such as digital humanities, gender studies, philosophy, environmental justice, Indigenous studies, and the arts. These interdisciplinary engagements could generate new ways of thinking about knowledge organization – ways that are not only technically robust, but also culturally responsive, imaginative, and grounded in lived experience. Such weaving across fields would support the continued evolution of the library as a public space for all and expand the role of information professionals as collaborators in meaning-making and collective memory.

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Appendices

A. Interview with Basma Chebani

Interview Guide:

1. First of all, tell us about yourself; how you got into this work, and what your roles are in the various organizations you work with.

2. Tell us about how the MELA working group tackles the updating of Subject Headings about Palestine in the LCSH list and how this improves access and discoverability.

3. Referring to the guidelines you sent us for improving discoverability of resources on Palestine, could you speak to your personal experiences of working within a system where the subject heading “Palestine” is not recognized, and the challenges this has presented, and the solutions you’re working on?

4. What does the lack of recognized sovereignty mean for things like bibliographic records, ISBN registration, or standard cataloguing processes?

5. What ethical considerations do you keep in mind when cataloging Palestinian collections (e.g. selecting language, subject headings, descriptive terms, etc.)?

6. What changes or advocacy efforts do you think are needed to how Palestinian records are classified in global library systems?

7. What advice would you give to future cataloguers/librarians working with Palestinian heritage materials?

8. Is there anything we haven’t covered that you think is important for our research, or anything else you would like to add?

B. Transliteration System

When transliterating Arabic script, the ALA-LC Romanization system (developed by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association) has been used. The transliteration chart is provided below.

Letters of the Alphabet

Initial	Medial	Final	Alone	Romanization
ا	ا	ا	ا	[omit]/ā
بـ	بـ	ب	ب	b
تـ	تـ	ت	ت	t
ثـ	ثـ	ث	ث	th
جـ	جـ	ج	ج	j
حـ	حـ	ح	ح	ḥ
خـ	خـ	خ	خ	kh
د	د	د	د	d
ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	dh
ر	ر	ر	ر	r
ز	ز	ز	ز	z
سـ	سـ	س	س	s
شـ	شـ	ش	ش	sh
صـ	صـ	ص	ص	ṣ
ضـ	ضـ	ض	ض	ḍ
طـ	طـ	ط	ط	ṭ
ظـ	ظـ	ظ	ظ	ẓ
عـ	عـ	ع	ع	‘ (ayn)
غـ	غـ	غ	غ	gh
فـ	فـ	ف	ف	f
قـ	قـ	ق	ق	q
كـ	كـ	ك	ك	k
لـ	لـ	ل	ل	l
مـ	مـ	م	م	m
نـ	نـ	ن	ن	n
هـ	ھـ	ـة ، ه	ة ، ه	h/t*
و	و	و	و	w/ū
يـ	يـ	ي	ي	y/ī

C. MELA Guidelines for Improving Discoverability of Resources on Palestine

Introduction

[a summary of the issues, the reasons for these guidelines, an explanation of terms such as LCSH and LCDGT]

Guidelines

Current LC guidelines for Palestine

In bibliographic records

Because the United States government does not recognize the state of Palestine, there are special guidelines for using the heading "Palestine" in bibliographic records, contained in Subject Headings Manual, H 980. In sum, "Palestine" is only assigned "to works about the region on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea that in ancient times was called the Land of Canaan, later the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and in modern times comprises the entire state of Israel, as well as the various disputed territories."

The "disputed territories" have their own geographical headings: Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and West Bank; there is no comprehensive heading that expresses the State of Palestine. The heading "Palestinian National Authority" may be assigned "to works about the Palestinian National Authority as a governmental entity."

The coding in MARC field 043 Geographic Area Code is as follows:

Gaza Strip	awgz
Golan Heights	a-sy
Jerusalem	a-is and/or awba, as appropriate
Palestine	a-is awgz awba
West Bank	awba

In authority records

The headings "Palestine," "Gaza Strip" and "West Bank" may be used in MARC field 370 Associated Place in the following subfields:

a (place of birth)
b (place of death)
e (place of residence/headquarters)
f (other associated place)
g (place of origin of work or expression).

Do not use in subfield c (associated country).

Problematic LCSH

There are several solutions for dealing with LC subject headings which either cannot be changed or are in the process of being changed, or whose application is unsatisfactory. Currently the backlog for project proposals (i.e. subject heading proposals that affect a multitude of established subject headings or generate a multitude of new subject headings) is at least one year. Some recommended solutions are as follows:

- If your institution/consortium allows for the remapping of LCSH to an alternative heading, this can be an easy way to display a more appropriate subject heading. A popular example is the remapping of "Illegal aliens" to "Undocumented immigrants." The original heading and all the variants should still be searchable.
- Alternative vocabularies such as Wikidata and LCDGT can be used in addition to LCSH. While these vocabularies cannot be used in the same way as LCSH (such as adding subdivisions), they can help to provide better discoverability. LCDGT authority records in particular allow for the addition of romanized vernacular script variants.

  650 _7 Gazans. $2 lcdgt

  651 _7 State of Palestine. $2 wikidata $1 https://www.wikidata.org/entity/Q219060

- Keywords can be added to MARC field 653 Index Term. Terms added in 653 are indexed but uncontrolled, since they do not come from an authorized list. You can use topical terms, group names, personal names or places, as well as non-English terms. The coding will vary accordingly. It is important to note that not all discovery systems display the 653 field.

  653 _2 Jabalia refugee camp

  653 _0 فلسطينيون

  Some institutions prefer to use the 690-699 MARC fields to record local subject headings. These fields are not retained in the OCLC master record. For any uncontrolled terms, please consult with your institution's authority control librarian to make sure you are conforming with local practice.

In the sections that follow, we provide specific recommendations for common problematic LCSH encountered when cataloging resources on Palestine and Palestinians.

Palestine

The lack of a single heading for the state of Palestine, as well as the lack of "Palestine" as a qualifier for subordinate geographical entities located in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, can hinder discovery and

cause confusion for users. Including the term “Palestine” in an indexed field can help to facilitate discovery.

Option 1: Use “Palestine” for works that discuss the state of Palestine in general despite LC guidelines. Apply this term both in the subject heading (651 $a) and the geographic subdivision ($z).

Examples:

- Filasṭīn fī rubʻ qarn (1948-1973) : mashrūʻ qāʼimah biblīyūghrāfīyah bi-al-maṭbūʻāt al-ʻArabīyah wa-al-maʻrabah al-ṣādirah fī Lubnān wa-al-ʻIrāq
- فلسطين في ربع قرن (١٩٤٨-١٩٧٣) : مشروع قائمة ببليوغرافية بالمطبوعات العربية والمعربة الصادرة في لبنان والعراق
- 651 _1 Palestine $v Bibliography.

al-Funūn al-shaʻbīyah fī Filasṭīn

- الفنون الشعبية الفلسطينية
- 650 _0 Folklore $z Palestine.
- 651 _0 Palestine $x Social life and customs.

Option 2: Add “Palestine” to a 653 or 691 field for works that discuss any part or all of the state of Palestine, in addition to subject headings for subordinate geographical entities.

651 _0 West Bank $x Politics and government.
653 _5 Palestine

OR

651 _0 West Bank $x Politics and government.
691 _0 Palestine.

Option 3: Add “State of Palestine” from Wikidata to a 651 field for works that discuss any part or all of the state of Palestine, in addition to subject headings for subordinate geographical entities.

Example:

651 _0 Gaza Strip $x History.
651 _7 State of Palestine. $2 wikidata $1
https://www.wikidata.org/entity/Q219060

Palestinian Arabs

This is the current heading in LCSH, with the variants “Arab Palestinians,” “Arabs $z Palestine,” and “Palestinians.” This heading is problematic because the people in question refer to themselves as Filasṭīnīyūn, i.e. Palestinians, and a small minority of Palestinians are not Arab.

A project to have this heading changed to “Palestinians,” with a separate subject heading for “Arabs $z Palestine,” was submitted to the Library of Congress in early 2024, but it will not be reviewed until sometime in 2025.

Option 1: Remap “Arab Palestinians” to “Palestinians” if your institution allows this.

Option 2: Use the LCDGT heading “Palestinians” in addition to the LCSH heading. It may be added to your institution’s bibliographic records retroactively as well as added to new records.

Example:

650 _0 Palestinian Arabs $x Social conditions.
650 _7 Palestinians. $2 lcdgt

Genocide

As of September 2024, there are five event subject headings for genocides in LCSH: Armenian Genocide, 1915-1923; Assyrian Genocide, 1842-1933; Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945); Romani Genocide, 1939-1945; Rwandan Genocide, Rwanda, 1994.

There are also two event subject headings with genocide as a variant: Anti-Sikh Riots, India, 1984; Srebrenica Massacre, Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1995. And one geographic heading has genocide as a variant: Sudan $x History $y Darfur Conflict, 2003-

Currently the Palestinian and Gazan genocides do not have event subject headings. Until such headings exist, use the LCSH “Genocide” subdivided by place to provide retrieval by keyword searching.

For the genocide of Palestinians in general:

650 _0 Genocide $z Palestine.

This can be subdivided by $x History $y 20th [or 21st] century if that is the focus of the resource.

For the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza:

650 _0 Genocide $z Gaza Strip $x History $y 21st century.

The October 7, 2023 attack and the war in Gaza

The subject headings for the attack and war were approved in September 2023 and were based on the most common usage in English-language news sources per Subject Headings Manual, H 1592. They are:

October 7 Hamas Attack, Israel, 2023
Israel-Hamas War, 2023-

The records for each of these headings include a substantial list of variants (10 variants for the attack, 8 for the war). Although this allows for discovery using variants should users search specifically for subject headings, the variants are not discoverable via keyword searching. It is recommended to provide at least one variant in an uncontrolled field to help improve discoverability.

For the attack, Al-Aqsa Flood is fairly common in English and can be provided in a 653 or 690 field (only the 653 field is shown in the examples that follow):

653 _0 Al-Aqsa Flood, Israel, 2023

For the war, add the second most common name in English in an uncontrolled field:

653 _0 Gaza War, 2023-

For resources in Arabic, also add the corresponding names of the attack and the war in Arabic:

653 _0 عملية طوفان الأقصى.

653 _0 الحرب على غزة.

Other variants can be added if deemed necessary for better keyword access.

Notes

[work arounds / strategies for documenting (respecting Palestinian cultural memory and narrative self-agency) and enhancing discovery --- things like use of 5xx fields, transcriptions in Arabic, etc]

Place names: romanization (popular vs. LC and others), original script--notes to include variants

Transcription of part of introduction, summary, back cover.
English summary
Two summaries for dual-language resources
Cases: title not representative, fiction, essays
Special collections: 545 Biographical note using recommended biographical dictionaries
Banned books: https://id.loc.gov/vocabulary/rbmscv/cv00205.html , https://id.loc.gov/vocabulary/rbmscv/cv00206.html
520 v. 500

Name authority records for persons

Person born, resided and/or died within the current borders of Israel before 1948

370 Associated Place is used to record a place associated with the person. For persons who were born, lived and/or died in Palestine within the current borders of Israel before 1948, it is not necessary to use the most recent name of the geographical entity listed in the NAF, which will be qualified by "Israel." According to the *Descriptive Cataloging Manual: Z1: Name and Series Authority Records*:

> If the name of the associated place has changed, the name of the place that applied in the time of the entity being established in the 1XX may optionally be recorded in place of, or in addition to, the current form of name. It is not necessary to follow subject cataloging policies to use the latest form of name only.

It is also not necessary to use an established geographical name or create a new NAR for an unestablished name. An unestablished name should be recorded in a separate 370 field without $2 naf.

Recommendation 1: If the name of the geographical entity was changed, record the original name, qualified by "Palestine," instead of, or in addition to, the current name. Do not add $2 naf. Optionally add "Palestine" in subfield f (other associated place).

Example (died before 1948):

370 $b Salamah (Palestine)

OR

370 $b Salamah (Palestine)
370 $b Kefar Shalem (Tel Aviv, Israel) $2 naf

OR

370 $b Salamah (Palestine)
370 $b Kefar Shalem (Tel Aviv, Israel) $f Palestine $2 naf

OR

370 $b Salamah (Palestine)
370 $f Palestine $2 naf

Example (born before 1948, died after 1948):

370 $a Bīr al-Sabʻ (Palestine)
370 $a Beersheba (Israel) $b Ḳiryat Shemonah (Israel) $f Palestine $2 naf

Recommendation 2: If the name of the geographical entity has remained the same, additionally record "Palestine" in subfield f.

Example (born before 1948):

370 $a Haifa (Israel) $f Palestine $2 naf

Person born, resided and/or died in the state of Palestine

Names of cities, towns and villages in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are not qualified by country. “Palestine,” “Gaza Strip” and “West Bank” may not be used in subfied c (associated country) of 370 Associated Place.

Recommendation: In separate subfield f’s, add “Palestine” and “Gaza Strip” and/or “West Bank,” as appropriate.

Example (born in Nablus; resides in Rām Allāh):

370 $a Nablus $e Rām Allāh $f Palestine $f West Bank $2 naf

Nationality/ethnicity of person

368 Other Attributes of Person or Corporate Body, $c Other designation can be used to record a person’s nationality and/or ethnicity.

Recommendation: Record “Palestinians” from lcdgt in 368 $c. Record only if the resources specify that the person is Palestinian.

Example (Palestinian born in Nablus):

368 $c Palestinians $2 lcdgt
370 $a Nablus $f Palestine $f West Bank $2 naf

Example (Palestinian who resides in Lebanon):

368 $c Palestinians $2 lcdgt
370 $e Lebanon $2 naf

Title authority records

Creator characteristics

386 Creator/Contributor Characteristics can be used “to record demographic characteristics of one or more creators or contributors associated with a work or expression, in particular for characteristics common to a group of creators or contributors associated with a work or expression.”

Recommendation: Record “Palestinians” from lcdgt in 386 $a. If recording multiple demographic characteristics from different vocabularies, use a separate 386 for each thesaurus.

Example:

130 _0 Mukhtārāt min al-shi‘r al-Filasṭīnī
430 _0 مختارات من الشعر الفلسطيني

386 Palestinians $2 lcdgt
386 Poets $2 lcsh

D. LCSH List of English Subject Headings about Palestine

LCSH/LCC	
Palestine question (To 1948), Palestine question (1948-)	
Palestinian Arabs	
Destroyed Palestinian towns (such as ‘Ayn Ghazāl (Palestine))	
Al-Aqsa Intifada, 2000-2005	
Gaza Strip	
Gaza War, 2008-2009	
Gaza War, 2014	
Gaza, Battles of, Gaza, 1917	
Hebron Massacre, Hebron, 1929	
Hebron Massacre, Hebron, 1994	
Intifada, 1987-1993	
Israel-Arab Border Conflicts, 1949-	
Israel-Arab War, 1948-1949	
Israel-Arab War, 1967	
Israeli West Bank Barrier	
Land Day	
Lebanon War, 2006	
Lebanon ǂx History ǂy Israeli intervention, 1982-1985	
Lebanon ǂx History ǂy Israeli intervention, 1996	
Operation Dessert, 1973	
Palestine (sh 85097163)	sh85097163
Palestine (n 80009667)	n80009667
Palestine ǂx History ǂy Arab rebellion, 1936-1939	
Palestine ǂx History ǂy Arab riots, 1920	
Palestine ǂx History ǂy Arab riots, 1929	
Palestine ǂx History ǂy Partition, 1947	
Palestinian Nakba, 1947-1948 sh2021006805	sh2021006805
Palestinian National Authority	
Population transfers |x Palestinian Arabs sh90004734	sh90004734
Repatriation ǂz Israel	
War of Attrition, Middle East, 1969-1970	
West Bank	
Agricultural colonies--Palestine	sh2007100795
Arabic essays--Palestine	sh2007005195
Arabic poetry--Palestine	sh2007005173
Authors, Arab--Palestine--Biography	sh2009115270
Botany--Palestine	sh2009117468

Bronze age--Palestine	sh2009117650
Christian pilgrims and pilgrimages--Palestine--Early works to 1800	sh2009119510
Education--Palestine	sh2008118983
Ethnology--Palestine	sh85045356
Excavations (Archaeology)--Palestine	sh2008103400
Folklore--Palestine	sh2008120903
Jewish law--Palestine	sh85070292
Jewish law--Palestine--Cases	sh85070293
Jewish refugees--Palestine	sh2009127807
Jews--Colonization--Palestine	sh2008106109
Jews--Colonization--Palestine--History--20th century	sh2008122344
Jews--Palestine--History	sh2008106110
Jews--Palestine--History--20th century	sh2008106112
Jews--Palestine--Politics and government--20th century	sh2008122406
Jews--Palestine--Social life and customs	sh2009127860
Land settlement--Palestine--History	sh2009128593
Land settlement--Palestine--History--20th century	sh2009128594
Land tenure--Palestine	sh2009128592
Mandates--Palestine	sh2008107309
Names, Geographical--Palestine	sh2010103052
National liberation movements--Palestine	sh2010103158
National liberation movements--Palestine	sh2010103158
Nationalism--Palestine	sh2010103159
Palestine--Antiquities	sh85097164
Palestine--Boundaries (Jewish law)	sh99001993
Palestine--Description and travel	sh2008116508
Palestine--Description and travel--Early works to 1800	sh2008116511
Palestine--Emigration and immigration	sh85097165
Palestine--Emigration and immigration (Jewish law)	sh93005324
Palestine--Ethnic relations	sh2010104993
Palestine--Historical geography	sh2008116513
Palestine--History--1799-1917	sh85097171
Palestine--History--1917-1948	sh85097172
Palestine--History--1929-1948	sh85097176
Palestine--History--19th century	sh2023002337
Palestine--History--20th century	sh2008108855
Palestine--History--21st century	sh2023002332
Palestine--History--638-1917	sh85097170
Palestine--History--70-	sh85097169
Palestine--History--70-638	sh85097168
Palestine--History--Arab rebellion, 1936-1939	sh85097177

Palestine--History--Arab riots, 1920	sh85097174
Palestine--History--Arab riots, 1929	sh85097175
Palestine--History--Partition, 1947	sh85097178
Palestine--History--Proposed partition, 1937	sh92003349
Palestine--History--To 70 A.D.	sh85097167
Palestine--In Judaism	sh85097186
Palestine--International status	sh2008108853
Palestine--Pictorial works	sh2008116509
Palestine--Politics and government	sh85097180
Palestine--Politics and government--1917-1948	sh85097181
Palestine--Politics and government--1948-	sh85097182
Palestine--Social conditions	sh2010104994
Pilgrims and pilgrimages--Palestine	sh2010106409
Politicians--Palestine--Biography	sh2010107377
Second Coalition, War of the, 1798-1801--Campaigns--Palestine	sh2010007357
Shrines--Palestine	sh85122138
World War, 1914-1918--Palestine	sh2010119552
World War, 1939-1945--Palestine	sh2010119757
Zionism--Palestine--History	sh2008124292

E. Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BORÅS
Department of library and information science
Supervisor: Jutta Haider
Researchers: Malin Färdig, Katherine Knox Beler

2025-03-03

Consent for the collection and processing of personal data

As part of the master's thesis course at the University of Borås, we are conducting a study with the purpose of examining what opportunities exist for librarians and archivists to contribute to the creation of representations of language that maintain Palestinian identity.

We who are conducting the study would like you to provide certain information about yourself, more specifically your name and the answers you will provide us within the interview we conduct pertaining to your professional background and experience.

The personal data will be used to help us create, build, support and evaluate our case study to highlight the real-world experience of cataloguing and archiving Palestinian cultural heritage.

The University of Borås is the controller of the processing, and the legal basis for the processing is article 6.1 (a) in the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, (consent).

The personal data will be used by us and may be made available to the teachers of the current course and central administrators at the university. The data may also be public documents which means that anyone, as a general rule, may access it in accordance with the principle of free access to public records.

The personal data will be stored in the EU/EEA, or countries outside the EU/EEA that the EU Commission has determined to have an adequate level of protection, i.e. sufficiently high according to the GDPR. The data will be erased when it is no longer necessary.

Because of the nature and small scale of the study we cannot guarantee complete anonymity. However, if you wish, we can present the results in writing in such a way that no direct quotes will be directly attributed to you, through your name or position within your institution. In this case, please check the box below.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you consent to the processing of your personal data as described above, you may withdraw your consent at any time whereby we will stop using your personal data. Because of legal requirements we may however be prevented from immediately erasing your personal data.

I hereby consent that the University of Borås may collect and process my personal data as described above.

☐ I want the results to be presented in a way that no direct quotes will be directly attributed to me through my name or position within my institution.

_____
Signature

_____

Name in block letters

_____

Place and date

To be filled in by the responsible teacher or supervisor

_____
Student's name

_____
Course and semester

_____
Course responsible (name, department)

Privacy Notice

Your privacy is important to us at the University of Borås. We are committed to protect your personal data and only process it according to applicable laws and regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The University of Borås is the controller of the university's processing of personal data. If you have any questions about how we process your personal data, you are welcome to read more about this on our website, http://www.hb.se/privacy, or contact the course responsible.

Your Rights

- The university is transparent with how we process your personal data. If you want to know what personal data we process about you, you can request a copy of the personal data and information about the processing free of charge once per year. To order a copy of your personal data and information about the processing, you can use the form for this that is available on our website, http://www.hb.se/dataskydd.
- If you consent to processing of your personal data you may withdraw the consent at any time. We will then not continue to process your personal data. Personal data that have been made public, e.g. published on social media, is usually not affected by a withdrawn consent however. Because of legal provisions we may also be prevented from immediately erasing your personal data.
- You have a right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing, including profiling, which produces legal, or other significantly effects. The University of Borås does not make such decisions.
- You have a right to have the processing of your personal data restricted.
- You can request rectification or supplementation of personal data that is inaccurate or incomplete.
- You have a right, under certain circumstances, to have your personal data erased.
- You have a right to receive your personal data in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format to transmit those data to another controller.
- You have a right to lodge a complaint to the supervisory authority (Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten).

Contact us

Controller

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