Youth, self, other: A study of Ibdaa's digital media practices in the West Bank, Palestine

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Abstract

While research on youth media offers persuasive arguments about what young people are doing with information and communication technologies (ICTs), a significant absence from the literature pertains to the general neglect of Palestinian youth engagements with inexpensive ICTs and digital media forms. Despite a few perceptive analyses, several studies ignore the role of popular culture in Palestinian refugee life-worlds. This article explores how Palestinian youth living in a refugee camp in the West Bank appropriate old and new media to create personal and social narratives. Drawing insights from Paul Ricoeur's work, non-representational theory, feminist, media, and cultural studies, the article probes the issues through a set of interrelated questions: What are the salient features of the Palestinian youth media initiative? What kinds of media narratives are produced and how do these relate to young people's notions of identity and selfhood? How do young people refashion the notion of the political?

Keywords

affect, digital networking, estrangement, Facebook, ICTs, narrative identity, non-representational theory, Palestinian youth, social media, vital conjunctures

While research on youth media offers persuasive arguments about what young people are doing with inexpensive information and communication technologies (ICTs), there is a significant absence from the literature in the shape of the general neglect of Palestinian youth engagements with ICTs and digital media forms. Despite a few perceptive analyses, several studies ignore the role of popular culture in Palestinian refugee life-worlds.

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Against the backdrop of Israeli aggression, fratricidal violence and religious fundamentalism, Helga Tawil-Souri (2009: 182) states that: 'Palestinian youth are involved in producing new forms of expressions that combine aspects of alternative and oppositional practices to question dominant forms of power, whether located in the west, in Israel, or in their own cultural traditions.'

Drawing upon some recent work on pluralist participatory media, Julie Norman (2009) examined Palestinian youth media as a site of alternative knowledge production and as a tool for creative activism. While Jason Hart (2007) and Lee Rother (2007) explored various dimensions of youth media production, van Teeffelen et al. (2005) probed young people's media engagements in terms of resilience. In their article, Nitin Sawhney et al. (2009) considered how child and youth driven artistic and media programs in Jerusalem could be envisioned as forms of participatory media for urban renewal. While these studies offer perceptive accounts of youth media and advocate for arts and media, for the most part they do not examine the universalist assumptions underpinning children and youth biographies in terms of life-stages with clearly demarcated 'pathways' to adulthood that are problematic for a number of reasons (discussed later).

The increasing uses of ICTs, digital media forms, and the internet by Palestinian youth in their struggle against Israeli occupation have been variously described as 'e-resistance' or 'cyber-resistance', enabling new forms of participation and alliances among Palestinians (Aouragh, 2008; Khoury-Machool, 2007; Najjar, 2010).[1] Although the idea of resistance (in Arabic, *muqawama*) is quite old in the context of Palestinian situation, at the hands of young Palestinians the term has acquired new constellations of meanings. While I examined specific aspects of youth resistance in my previous research on Palestinian youth media, in this article I examine the interplay among agency, resistance and resilience as they play out in the youth life-worlds (Asthana, 2011, 2012).

The first section outlines a theoretical and methodological framework by bringing together Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' (2002) concept of vital conjunctures, the formulation of narrative identity in Paul Ricoeur's (1992) work, and notions of affect and embodiment from non-representational theories. I probe the issues through a set of interrelated questions. What are the salient features of the Palestinian youth media initiative? What kinds of media narratives are produced and how do these relate to young people's notions of identity and selfhood? How do young people refashion the notion of the political? In the second section, I explore the Palestinian youth media initiative, Ibdaa as an example of a pedagogy of estrangement. Section three presents an analysis of youth-produced media narratives. Finally, in section four the conclusions are situated against the background of the findings.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Through a sustained critique of the notion of transitions in terms of chronological age, some recent studies in the fields of children and youth geographies and anthropologies of youth developed a generations model that focuses on young people's relationships with parents, family, community, neighborhood, and larger social networks within which young people are hierarchically embedded (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). Johnson-Hanks (2002) deployed a relational and contextual analytic approach to study motherhood

among young women in Cameroon that focuses on the contingent and uneven ways by which young women move through marriage, childbearing, education and entry into the labor force. According to Johnson-Hanks (2002: 871), young women neither go through life-stages nor represent clearly defined generational interests; instead, a number of 'vital conjunctures' influence young women's biographies in unexpected ways:

> The analytic concept of the vital conjuncture refers to a socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives. It is a temporary configuration of possible change, a duration of uncertainty and potential … vital conjunctures are particularly critical durations when more than usual is in play, when futures at stake are significant.

Furthermore, the very notion of youth as a focus of generation cleavage is a puzzling one because what constitutes youth differs across societies and one needs to subject the idea of age-cohorts and generations to greater scrutiny in order to tease out the variable definitions of youth (Durham, 2004). In the Middle East as well as other non-western contexts, young people occupy a fluid ground between childhood and adulthood, making it difficult to pin down the idea of youth to universal categories. While refugee youth from Palestine are defined in terms of chronological age by their respective governments, I focus on particular vital conjunctures in young people's lives that are shaped by poverty, gender inequity, refugee status and so on. In addition, Johnson-Hanks' perspective on youth, while cognizant of the power dynamics of the relationships within which youth are embedded, offers a better analytic grasp to explore the social and embodied nature of Palestinian youth-produced media.

A range of analytic perspectives commonly referred to as 'non-representational theories' considers human action in terms of embodiment and performativity. Unlike representational theories, which understand the body as a site of inscription by signs and symbols, non-representational theories focus on the somatic and visceral aspects of the body. According to the British social theorist Nigel Thrift (2004), who coined the term and outlined key underpinnings of non-representational thought, representational theories are concerned primarily with how the body is constituted in discourse and ideology, and are unable to account for the non-linguistic aspects of human action and practices. At the most basic level, non-representational theories are concerned with the ontology of human action in terms of a range of physical expressions that are precognitive and not exclusively rational.

Several proponents of non-representational theories also argue for reworking representational theories. For instance, John Dewsbury et al. (2002: 438, emphasis in the original) note that:

> non-representational theory takes representation theory seriously; representations not as a code to be broken or an illusion to be dispelled, rather representations are apprehended as performative in themselves; as doings. The point here is to redirect attention from the *posited meaning towards the material compositions and conduct* of representations.

In important ways, then, questions of human action can be better addressed by drawing upon interrelated concepts – affect, performativity and embodiment – from non-representational theories.

A compelling approach to understanding human action has been offered by Paul Ricoeur's (1992) philosophy. Ricoeur's rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* in favor of a phenomenological self, his critique of linguistic theories, and the importance of he gives to both the linguistic and non-linguistic realms in understanding human action is compatible with non-representational theories, yet at the same time it does not dismiss the utility of representational theories. For Ricoeur, *hermeneutics*, in addition to concerning itself with the interpretation of literary works and cultural artifacts, *is about human action itself*. My argument is that theories of representation and non-representation can be usefully aligned, and that Ricoeur's hermeneutic method can serve as a bridge between the two. Ricoeur's work is compatible with non-representational theories, but at the same time it does not dismiss the utility of representational theories *tout court*.

To this end, the article – guided by non-representational theory and hermeneutics – deploys narrative analysis of youth-produced media, and participant-based interviews with the director and youth leaders of Ibdaa. From a hermeneutic perspective, youth-produced media, and the interviews are considered multi-layered texts that operate at the level of narrative. While critical textual analysis provides insights into how meanings are constituted, media studies scholars have typically ignored the narrative dimensions of the texts, particularly in terms of performative acts and embodied practices that I adumbrate through an engagement with non-representational theories. Two steps were followed in carrying out the analysis: first, texts were read repeatedly; and, second, common themes were identified and the entire body of text organized thematically.[2] I conducted the interviews at the Ibdaa office in the Dheisheh refugee camp in January 2013 and January 2014.

Children, adolescents, youth, and the Palestine–Israel conflict

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has had a profound effect on the lives of children, adolescents and youth in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) comprising the West Bank and Gaza. According to the United Nations, a large number of Palestinians living in the West Bank are children and young people below the age of 30 years. For poor children and youth, the ongoing conflict and occupation has resulted in lack of education, and dwindling employment opportunities. This young generation of Palestinians, also referred to as the post-Oslo generation, has distinct memories of the two *Intifadas* (in Arabic, 'to shake off', in English these are referred to as uprisings) of 1987 and 2000, the ensuing struggle for self-determination from Israeli occupation, the signing of Oslo Accords of 1993, and the subsequent formation of Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2006) notes that while there have been a number of reports and studies on the effects of violence and conflict on the health of children in the OPT, they take an overtly 'medical approach' without analysing the underlying socio-historical causes of violence and conflict in the first place. In recent years, however, an increasing number of studies in public health have investigated the effects of political violence and conflict on children and young people in terms of exposure to, and the experience of, humiliation, distress, trauma and resilience in the OPT (Daiute, 2010; Giacaman et al.,

2007a, 2007b; Nguyen-Gilham et al., 2008). For instance, Rita Giacaman et al. (2007a: 565), in their study of exposure to humiliation among Palestinian youth, found that humiliation is 'not only perceived as a personal feeling, but also as a social process, inextricably linked to loss of dignity, honour, and justice'.

In subsequent studies, Viet Nguyen-Gillham et al. (2008) adapt a more explicit qualitative approach to examine how the construct of resilience plays out in the lives of 10th and 11th grade Palestinian students. By situating the western construct of resilience in the context of 'social suffering', and connecting it with the Palestinian idea of *sumud* (translated as steadfastness, perseverance), Viet Nyugen-Gillham et al. explore both the individual and collective ways through which resilience manifests in the lives of Palestinian youth. Their interviews with Palestinian youth reveal that resilience is experienced in terms of feelings of desperation that are commingled with hope and optimism.[3]

Ibdaa's refugee youth convert their vulnerability into acts of resilience and resistance through a variety of creative responses to the occupation: artwork, wall graffiti, murals, installations, music, street theater, etc. that both invoke and reinterpret Palestinian traditions. The Arabic word *sumud* captures the spirit of the Palestinian way of not only coping with the occupation, but also in confronting and questioning Israeli oppression through a wide repertoire of creative practices.[4] Scholars have noted that the notion of *sumud*, bedrock of Palestinian defiance, has been reworked into stories of daily struggles of ordinary people in order to confront the normalization of Israel occupation.

Ibdaa and the pedagogy of estrangement

The Ibdaa Cultural Center (Ibdaa, in Arabic means 'to create something out of nothing') was set up near the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem in 1994. The media initiatives of Ibdaa are broad-based, covering a range of grassroots activities, from oral history and village documentation projects to digital storytelling and an online radio program. While Ibdaa's main focus is on the performative aspects of youth identity and Palestinian cultural traditions, particularly in terms of music such as *dabke*, its youth media projects include graffiti art, photography, short digital videos, and social media such as Facebook.

Below I offer a brief discussion of two events that I witnessed – one unannounced and the other planned – during my January 2014 fieldtrip visit to the Ibdaa office at the Dheisheh refugee camp to point out how children's and young people's political mobilization is actualized as anguish, pain, suffering; not as feelings but rather as affect and embodiment grounded in the precognitive and non-linguistic realms. First, during conversation with the director of Ibdaa, Khaled Al-Saif, unbeknownst to me and my co-investigator and translator, a street protest erupted near the entrance of Dheisheh refugee camp. Al-Saif went out to find out what was going on, came back and asked us to look out of the windows on the top floor. We saw several children, between the ages of 10 and 12 burning trash and tires near the United Nations office. As a form of street protest, this is not uncommon in the OPT. The United Nations Refugee Work Administration (UNRWA), which is responsible for running education, health, and relief and social services programs for the refugee camps, and the PA, which has municipal and regulatory powers, had been facing protests from the garbage workers demanding higher wages that

Figure 1. Children from Dheisheh refugee camp burning trash in protest
Photo: Sanjay Asthana.

led to the accumulation of garbage in the refugee camps and the streets. What stood out to us was the manner in which the children were rolling the tires, gathering the trash into a heap, some bringing out the rotting trash from the streets, others joining in the protest on the sidelines (Figure 1).

Another event took place during my night visit to the center to talk to other members of Ibdaa. This was a planned event where children participated in a night vigil and protest (Figure 2) against the unfolding political crisis at the Yarmouk camp in Syria where Palestinian refugees, mostly children and women, caught between the Syrian government forces and the rebels have been besieged for months and injured and killed. The hour-long children's march through the main thoroughfare and the streets of the refugee camp, coordinated by several camp elders seemed an unremarkable event. For us, the demonstrations by the children in solidarity with their brethren in Syria revealed the fragility of life and the grimness of the struggles in the OPT. Both the events suggest that children's and youth's life-worlds in Palestine are increasingly shaped by a series of contingencies – moments of uncertainty, suffering and pain caused by the ongoing conflict and violence. Through various gestures, sighs and gazes, their bodies became sites of meaning-making that articulated specific forms of agency and resistance. Such affective and embodied actions at the two events enabled them to cope with, and confront their suffering, uncertainty, and fear.

In her discussion on how children and youth claim and rework citizenship in the Latin American context, Rosanna Reguillo (2009) outlined three main aspects: street marches, participation in protest movements, and the blogosphere as communicative space. Discussing the street protests by Chilean high school students in 2006, Reguillo noted that the youth distanced themselves from the violence that erupted in the streets and, in a deft political move, marched to the UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific and

Figure 2. Ibdaa's children hold a vigil for Yarmouk victims
Photo: Sanjay Asthana.

Cultural Organization) headquarters to deliver a document containing their demands. Unlike the Chilean towns and cities, the Palestinian streets and villages are fragmented by hundreds of Israeli checkpoints, restricting movement and isolating children and young people. Despite their distinct geopolitical locations, the street marches and protests by children in Chile and Palestine display a common orientation to politics as 'sub-activism': that is, following:

> a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life. It is constituted by small-scale, often individual, decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and are difficult to capture using the traditional tools with which political participation is measured. (Bakardjieva, 2009: 92)

For the Palestinian refugee youth, politics as subactivism underpins their daily routines, behaviors and actions, and in a crucial sense, then, life itself is political.

I characterize Ibdaa's youth-produced media in terms of 'pedagogy of estrangement', and argue that pedagogies of estrangement are shaped by immediate material and social realities, revealing dynamic aspects of youth identity at play.[5] It is through estrangement that Palestinian youth exercise their political agency, confront, and respond to structural inequities around them. Rancière (2008) considers an urban arts installation project on the living conditions in the poor suburbs of Paris inhabited by ethnic minorities that seeks to produce a pedagogy that is estranged, yet creates new forms of socialization and awareness of the disconnected social reality of the poor neighborhoods.

According to Rancière (2008 14), 'Film, Video art, photography, installation, etc. rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such they may

open new passages toward new forms of political subjectivization.' For Reguillo (2009: 33), young people's social media practices such as blogging decenter and deterritorialize meanings to 'produce estrangement'. Indeed, through short digital videos, digital net-working, social media and blogging practices, Ibdaa's youth transgress social and cultural boundaries to question Israel's occupation of their land and decenter PA's power in the West Bank through particular modes of youth agency and resistance that the following sections investigate.

Short digital videos

A series of short digital films, featured as part of the *Palestinian Youth Media: Digital Resistance* series that was produced and distributed by the US–Palestine Youth Solidarity Network and the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), explore several facets of refugee youth selfhood, community memory and collective identity. Batul Amjad Faraj's film, *Justice* addresses her viewers, particularly the international community on how the occupation has disrupted her childhood and her family thus:

> I'm a Palestinian child. My name is Batul Amjad Faraj. I am 13 years old. I live in Dheisheh refugee camp. My village of origin is Ras Abu Amar. Since I was young, I've lived without a father because he wanted to defend his country. But the Occupation doesn't allow this. My father worked in Ibdaa Center. He loved working there because it was the only place in the camp, which took care of the children, providing them some of the rights they are denied. One day, my family and I were laughing and playing at home. Suddenly, we heard a loud knock on the door. It was around 9 p.m. My mother opened the door and a soldier screamed at her. They entered the house and hit my father hard on the back. They searched and destroyed the house. Since that day, I've never seen my father. After six years, my mother told me he was in prison. I often wonder why the soldiers did this to my father while they couldn't do this to men living in the U.S.

Interspersed with her commentary are still images of the Dheisheh refugee camp, the Ibdaa Center, family snapshots, a series of pictures of Israeli soldiers breaking into homes, and assaulting refugee families. The recounting of her childhood, her father's work at the Ibdaa Center, camp life, the effects of the Israeli occupation, Israeli soldiers breaking into their home, assaulting the family, the destruction of their house, and the arrest of her father, are all revealed as vital conjunctures through their unpredictability, and a series of contingencies that increasingly define Palestinian childhood. Although children's and youth's lives are marked by such contingencies, they also hold the possi-bilities for potential transformation and change, as can be discerned from Batul's digital narrative.

How do we make sense of the digital short film? Do we consider it as framed within a liberal humanitarian representational regime, one that depicts children 'as *generic human beings* and not as culturally or socially specific *persons*'? While the structure of the film is imbued with a humanitarian stance, Batul Faraj's voice invokes a multi-lay-ered social and cultural reality that pushes the narrative beyond the humanitarian register. Her voice does not gesture toward viewer sympathy: rather, it directly links the Israeli occupation to the disruption of family life, destruction of homes, and its effects on the

Palestinian society. Batul Faraj's rhetorical question about what Israelis did to her father (arrest and imprisonment), and whether they do this to men in the US seemed counterintuitive at first glance. What is ironic, however, is that, unlike in the OPT, which is colonized, and where ordinary Palestinian rights are non-existent, the US, which touts human rights as the beacon of its democratic traditions, has the largest rate of arrests and incarceration of black men in the world.

A few other digital films produced by Ibdaa children are reflections on gender roles and the place of women in Palestinian society that are explored through a rights-based approach. Although such rights-based approaches are tied to the funding and support from international agencies such as UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund) and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their deployment through the media narratives reveal that they are not copied *tout court*; rather, they are shaped by translation and localization to explore the specificities of the Palestinian context. In the short digital film, *Restrictions on Society*, Bara'a Awad, a 16-year-old from Al-Sufia village, and a resident of Dheisheh, explores certain customs and traditions within the Palestinian society that restrict the girl child and woman from expressing their feelings, constrain their right to education, and argues against forced marriages. For Awad, such customs and traditions should be interpreted in terms of a girl's right to her feelings, and women's equality. The question of rights here is strategically posed as a means to engage with Palestinian patriarchal customs. Speaking about a girl's right to choose her own partner, to play sports without constraints, and women's right to work, she refers to such customs and traditions that hinder them as a second occupation:

> I interviewed a friend on the girl's basketball team. She readily talked about her situation as a basketball player in Dheisheh refugee camp because she wants to change how she is seen in society. I asked her about customs and traditions. She considers them a second occupation, an obstacle to girls' dreams. Even though I am a Palestinian refugee and live a hard life, I feel strong. I don't want to be another person living in another place. I want to be accepted as I am in my own country.

Mohanad Abu-Laban, a 14-year-old reflects on the moments when the Israeli soldiers broke into his home in the early hours of dawn. The short video, at first glance, seems to be framed within a humanitarian discourse that seeks to invoke viewer sympathy. Within the film, we notice how Abu-Laban's and his brothers' life-worlds are disrupted by a series of contingencies and unpredictability within a short span of few minutes to an hour. Abu-Laban's reflections on the past event, and the calm, yet visceral description of the specific experiences (the vital conjunctures) of their lives via the short film reveal the affective and embodied dimensions through which he makes sense of the event, the violence, beatings, and injuries to his own self, brothers, and parents:

> Every night of Ramadan [referring to the month of fasting], we'd wake up to our mother's voice. This night was different. We woke to the sound of an explosion at our front door that scared us all. A group of them stormed into our house. We were forced outside in the bitter cold. Six soldiers guarded us while the others rummaged through the house. Four of them handcuffed my two older brothers, despite my mother's pleas. By dawn, the soldiers took off leaving the house destroyed, and taking my brothers with them. In the evening, my brothers returned. They

were exhausted after being beaten during the interrogation. I'll never forget that moment. I was scared, but my fear faded as my parents were there. But I never stop wondering: will the soldiers return? I still don't know what my future holds. I was born a refugee, like all Palestinian children in Dheisheh camp. Even though some use 'refugee' to put me down, I am proud of this label.

The digital narratives do not offer deeper reflections and analysis of the Palestinian situation; as mediation of the micro-politics of everyday life, however, the narratives explore multiple relations of power and domination that mark their presence in the mundane and quotidian aspects of children's and youth's lives. Sylvaine Bulle (2009: 27) has characterized this in terms of two modes: 'the order of representation' (such as values and norms) and the 'order of affect' (individual feelings, emotions, self-realization). Indeed, as can be discerned from the examination of short digital videos, children's and young people's affective and embodied actions do not reproduce the universal categories that underpin children's rights discourse and humanitarianism; rather, what the media narratives indicate is children's and youth's capacity to narrate their life-worlds, and to construct and formulate meanings of their own social worlds.

Digital networking

While processes of globalization have also altered the relations between identity, subjectivity and social imagination, and have enabled the rise of translocality among Palestinian youth, the Palestinian situation further complicates notions of locality due to the fragmentation of their land through numerous spatial barriers that render movement within villages and towns almost impossible.[6] 'Translocal' broadly refers to local-to-local and local-to-global links that disrupt the notion of whole and bounded cultures. While the idea of locality is useful in describing the way in which young Palestinians deploy media forms to connect and relate with other youth from various other locales around the world, it also complicates their sense of space, place, home and dwelling since they live in refugee camps. Ibdaa's refugee youth have forged links between local-local and global-local social spaces through both offline and online environments.

Ibdaa's innovative 'Across Borders' project demonstrates translocality where Palestinians in the refugee camps inside Palestine, and in various Middle East countries, connected through a network of computers and websites, share their experiences, exchange their sense of geography, place, neighborhoods and villages. In doing so, Palestinians brought together individual and collective memories of dispossession and dwelling through their stories and narratives. Through an innovative use of computer labs across various refugee camps in the Middle East – Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon – young people at Ibdaa connected thousands of Palestinian refugees to each other and their homeland. Referring to the 'Across Borders' project as a powerful alternative use of media, Edward Said (2004: 133) pointed out that:

> An enterprising group of young and educated refugees living in Deheisheh Camp, near Bethlehem on the West Bank, established the Ibdaa Center, whose main feature was the Across Borders project; this was a revolutionary way of connecting refugees in most of the main camps – separated geographically and politically by impossible, difficult barriers – to each other

through computer terminals. For the first time since their parents were dispersed in 1948, second-generation Palestinian refugees in Beirut and Amman could communicate with their counterparts inside Palestine. Thus the Deheisheh residents went on visits to their former villages in Palestine and then described their emotions and what they saw for the benefit of other refugees who had heard of, but could not have access to, these places.

The use of inexpensive ICTs, and the digital narratives produced by Ibdaa's youth on Palestinian culture, traditions and identity have enabled Palestinians in the OPT to connect with fellow refugees dispersed across in the Middle East region and beyond. Frequently, the digital media materials are repackaged, reproduced and circulated by others via social media networks. The multimodal nature of the internet and social media opens up new possibilities for sharing and recuperating collective memories for the Palestinians living in the OPT, and the diaspora (*al-ghurba*) abroad.[7]

Discussing life in various refugee camps in Palestine, Sylvaine Bulle (2009: 33) points out the importance of embodiment and affect:

> Like a struggle for the recognition of what is 'already present' (*déjà là*) – the actors operate and recognize the current space of life, shaped by personal and affective attachments. These intimate actions widen and enrich the surroundings to produce a collective space marked by various ways of engaging people – a form of political reawakening.

Social media and Facebook

Inexpensive devices such as cell phones and digital cameras, along with the availability of the internet,has enabled young people to record and document various events in the OPT – such as protest marches, the arrival of freed prisoners in the refugee camp, among others – and to post photos and mobile vids on social media sites. Ibdaa's youth-produced social media work is uploaded on two separate Arabic Facebook accounts. The first Facebook account, maintained directly by Ibdaa's Management Board, provides detailed information on the activities of the organization that include health clinics; music and sports workshops; educational, women's and cultural seminars; ongoing civic work in the refugee camps; and trips by foreign visitors. In addition, there are numerous uploads and commentaries on children's and youth's visits to their ancestral villages and towns. The second Facebook account is explicitly organized in terms of a politically engaged form of digital activism.[8] The second Facebook page is maintained by the Dheisheh refugee camp youth, many of whom also happen to be members of Ibdaa. Ibdaa's dynamic Facebook postings and commentary are in Arabic, and there are more than 27,000 dedicated Facebook followers. As forms of digital activism, these activities enable Ibdaa youth to create horizontal networks within the West Bank and Gaza, as well as across a vastly dispersed Palestinian diaspora (*al-ghurba*) living in the Middle East and beyond.

Palestinian youth media projects engage in a delicate balancing act in order to receive funding from a wide repertoire of international agencies with their own specific agendas and policies. To this end, Ibdaa's first Facebook page takes a pragmatic approach by not endorsing violence toward Israel, but it is very critical of the occupation. On the other hand, the Dheisheh refugee camp Facebook page documents Israeli violence in the

Figure 3. Girl with the hashtag # StopAD poster
Source: Ibdaa Facebook page.

refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza with images of Palestinians who have died in the ongoing conflict. Since Ibdaa's youth are involved in both Facebook pages, the Facebook analysis will treat them as one and study how images, videos and commentaries are mobilized on the Facebook pages. Both Facebook pages are regularly updated with postings – photographs, mobile vids, short commentary, etc.

In the Palestinian context, it is problematic to envision the idea of a public sphere since the Palestinian territories are fragmented and divided up, separating people from their own families and communities (Nabulsi, 2014). However, Ibdaa's youth's connectedness through translocal spaces via ICTs and social media forms demonstrates the presence of multiple and overlapping civic spaces, offline as well an online. In 2013, a series of protests and civic mobilization campaigns erupted in villages, towns and cities in the OPT, with a large number of non-refugee youth involved in the movement. The Ibdaa youth were also involved in offline and social media protests against Israel's illegal administrative detention of Palestinians. The protests were spurred by when hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in different Israeli prisons went on mass hunger strikes. Administrative detention is the process under which Palestinians are randomly arrested and put in prisons without charges or trial. Over the last few years there have been over 100 Palestinians in more than a dozen Israeli prisons under administrative detention.

Since April 2014, there has been a concerted attempt via social media to get innocent Palestinians released from prison. Joining in the mass protests on the ground as well as through social media through the hashtags #StopAD and #Water_and_Salt, they engaged in a sustained campaign via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Figure 3). The hashtags for the administrative detention of Palestinian prisoners (#StopAD and #Water_and_Salt) were launched on Facebook and Twitter as a concerted offline and online campaign in solidarity with the Palestinian prisoners who were themselves protesting in Israeli jails by consuming

Figure 4. Boy being assaulted by Israeli soldier
Source: Ibdaa Facebook page.

only salt and water. Several online blogger activists commented on Ibdaa's social media campaigns and offered sustained commentary on the fate of Palestinian prisoners.

Analysis of hundreds of cell-phone uploads of Facebook photos and short videos of Israeli military incursions in the OPT, refugee camps and homes; arrests, assaults and humiliation of children, young people and adults by Israeli soldiers; demonstrations, protests and events organized by Ibdaa youth, all reveal several key features that distinguish the sensory politics of young people in confronting and mobilizing against the continuing Israeli occupation and the lack of socio-economic opportunities. The shaky, grainy cell-phone videos, and the comments posted in colloquial Arabic are similar to what Charles Hirschkind (2010) found in his perceptive study of the uses of the internet and the practices of blogging in Egypt, where young people reworked the media modalities of the blogosphere and cell-phone videos as well as their language practices, creating a form of 'fuzzy realism' that reverberated across the dominant as well as the alternative media landscapes. Hirschkind states:

> Blogs, I am arguing have provided a unique space for an elaboration of such a form of political discourse, and are enabling the creation of new models of political citizenship…. Blogs also exploit the epistemic value of a certain noise, of two kinds in particular: the gritty abrasiveness of the vernacular and the fuzziness and instability of the video-sound image produced by the cell-phone. (2010: 144–5)

On both of the Ibdaa's Facebook pages, the 'fuzzy realism' of images and the 'gritty abrasiveness of vernacular' bring to the surface the affective dimensions of violence. The hundreds of images and videos documenting the violations of Palestinian bodies and homes (Figure 4) are accompanied by Facebook comments and brief narratives about

Israeli atrocities that do not seek the reader/viewer's pity or sympathy; rather, what is visible is the demonstration of the persistence of resoluteness (*sumud*) in this sharing of their pain and suffering within the OPT, and the larger Palestinian diaspora in the Middle East and beyond.

The fuzzy realism of the grainy images and vids, together with the use of vernacular Arabic on the Facebook pages and social media by Ibdaa and Dheisheh refugee youth acquires a more complex repertoire of communicative meanings that go beyond the mainstream and professional journalistic discourses that frame media reporting through the canon of 'objectivity', and are thereby unable to give an account of the affective and embodied aspects found in Ibdaa's Facebook and social media work. However, within the alternative media, alternative journalism and the socially engaged blogosphere, the affective and embodied aspects are subjected to greater scrutiny and discussion. For instance, the widespread circulation of the images and vids uploaded on both of Ibdaa's Facebook pages have generated extended commentary and critique on a variety of international, progressive Jewish and Arabic online web-based news networks and blogs such as the Electronic Intifada, Mondoweiss, +972 and B'tselem, among others.[9]

Through the second Facebook page, Ibdaa's youth offer deeper accounts of the effects of conflict and violence on the Dheisheh refugee camp. This Facebook page offers them the freedom and critical space to critique Israeli occupation, and to reflect on and write about the contingencies and unpredictability in their own personal and social identities. Despite their extensive use of Facebook and social media, Ibdaa's youth have apprehensions about the dangers of using corporate-based social networking sites that can be used for surveillance by Israel and private technologies. For several youth, however, the social media activism is necessary to counter Israeli propaganda and to build solidarity in cyberspace. Furthermore, Ibdaa and other Palestinian youth media initiatives have to contend with Israel's increasing use of YouTube and the militarization of social media (Kunstman and Stein, 2015).

The two Ibdaa youth we interviewed during our fieldwork in the Dheisheh refugee camp, Qussay Abuaker, the communications and fund raising director, and Aysar Al-Saifi indicated that Ibdaa ought to develop a network of institutional connections with educational and urban spatial projects that seek to move beyond the humanitarian interventions that consider camp inhabitants as vulnerable victims. Since 2012, Qussay Abuaker and Aysar Al-Saifi have been involved with the experimental educational project Campus in Camps.[10] As members of the project Abuaker and Al-Saifi collaborate, debate, and explore concepts that are drawn from their lived experiences and the camp environment. The Campus in Camps project is constantly engaged in reworking concepts and forming new knowledge. For example, the English word 'community' does not adequately reflect the interactions of people within their environment, something that is better grasped through the Arabic word *mujaawara* that expresses how actions are connected to the community. 'Mujaawara could be translated into English as 'neighboring', but the real meaning is closer to 'forming or being part of a community'.[11]

According to Abuaker, while Ibdaa's overall goal of providing a safe environment for children and adolescents has been largely successful, what is needed is several pluralistic, egalitarian approaches that aim at building knowledge from the lived experiences of the camp's children and youth, and moving away from the ingrained

victimization narratives that play out within the humanitarian discourses in the OPT. In addition, for Abuaker, the figure of the refugee itself has to be rethought since the international definition of 'refugee' does not apply to the camp residents any more. The notion of public and private does not apply in the context of the camp; hence the idea of the common serves an important purpose in conceptualizing camp spaces as open and available to the *mujaawara*.

As part of the Campus in Camps' practice-based workshops, several Dheisheh refugee camp youth, members of Ibdaa as well as engaged in other initiatives, have begun to rethink and envision broader youth media strategies for Ibdaa that are built on sustainability and local capital. Abuaker and other Ibdaa youth offer several important critiques of Ibdaa's youth media and other project by generating local and cultural specific interpretations and understandings of a wide network of concepts and buzzwords, such as children's rights, humanitarianism, vulnerability, volunteerism, refugee, empowerment, participation, etc. that circulate via neoliberal developmental agendas operating through international agencies and NGOs in the OPT. Both Ibdaa and the Campus in Camps initiatives are housed in the same building in the Dheisheh refugee camp, and the criticisms of Ibdaa from the Campus in Camps project have been enabling Ibdaa gradually to extricate itself from the humanitarian discourse within which it has been embedded, and to reconfigure itself away from the past toward the present, and reorient itself to the future.

Ibdaa's youth media practices complicate children's rights, and humanitarian and neoliberal discourses. Although Ibdaa, for the most part, has operated within the neoliberal and NGO discourse, and received funding from a diverse set of institutions with their particular agendas, the media practices of children and youth translated and reworked the humanitarian and rights discourses to produce media narratives that, in several instances, go beyond the victimization and vulnerability of children and refugees that informs those discourses. Scholars have argued that in much of the Global South and the OPT, the neoliberal and children's rights discourses 'de-politicize' the structural and socio-economic modes of violence, power and domination (Merz, 2012).

This article probed the category of youth beyond its singular and universal characterizations to examine the relational nature of youth identities via Johnson-Hanks' concept of vital conjunctures, Ricoeur's hermeneutics, and non-representational theories, using them to explore the creative potential of youth agency that is expressed through a repertoire of registers – linguistic, cognitive, embodied, performative, etc. Analysis of Ibdaa's youth-produced media indicated that young people experience, and narrate humiliation, pain, sorrow, and suffering in terms of affect and embodiment, situating the hermeneutics of their actions at the collective and social level. More importantly, this study suggests a more complex formation of youth experience differently shaped by unpredictability and contingencies in Palestinian children's and youth's life-worlds. I posit that further research would need to pursue a detailed longitudinal ethnographic study of Palestinian youth media practices (refugee as well as non-refugee) to examine the particular ways youth experience humiliation, conflict, violence and trauma, and the specific ways they rework these into resilience and dignity through acts of resistance. Indeed, such research would be attentive to the multiple processes of meaning-making and cultural production, and enable a better understanding of the space, place, identity and agency in Palestinian youth life-worlds as they are involved in envisioning social justice.

Notes

 1. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2012) examined the dual nature of ICTs that both enable Palestinians to forge spaces for resistance and contestation, and serve as instruments of surveillance and spatial control of bodies put in place by Israeli security apparatus.
 2. The multimedia materials and interviews were translated from Arabic to English, and the symbolic and cultural meanings specific to the Arabic language were closely studied. This is particularly important since a significant number of documents and multimedia materials are either written and/or produced in Arabic.
 3. In recent years, scholars have undertaken comparative studies to highlight the complexity of young people's experiences of political violence and conflict. See Colette Daiute's (2010) study of adolescents growing up in the aftermath of war in former Yugoslavia, which considers the significance of narrative and identity in youth life-worlds.
 4. For a nuanced argument about *sumud* in Palestinian society, see van Teeffelen and Giacaman (2007).
 5. In Marxist thought, the philosophical and social category *estrangement* has a long trajectory, referring to the alienation of the subject from his/her immediate social realities. Estrangement in English refers to a set of negative attributes such as alienation, antagonism, disaffection, hostility, etc. In German, estrangement (*Entfremdung*) has been broadened and applied to interpret arts and theatrical productions that create 'estrangement effect' or 'distancing' so as to enable audiences or viewers to question given social realities.
 6. See Israeli architect, Eyal Weizman's (2012) study of Israel's spatial occupation in the OPT. See also, Helga Tawil-Souri's (2011) account of ID cards in Palestine/Israel that are designed to entangle and render immobile marginalized Palestinians' movement through checkpoints.
 7. Since the creation of Israel in 1948, Palestinians have been split into three groups, the Israeli Arabs (Palestinians living inside Israel), Palestinians living in the occupied territories, and Palestinians in the diaspora (in Arabic, *Ghurba*) either in refugee camps in neighboring countries or dispersed around the world.
 8. See: https://www.facebook.com/www.ibdaa48.org?fref=photo; https://ar-ar.facebook.com/DheishehNews
 9. See: http://electronicintifada.net; http://mondoweiss.net; http://972mag.com; http://www.btselem.org; http://www.icahd.org
 10. The Campus in Camps project has been designed by the architects and urbanist researchers, Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman The project draws upon their Decolonizing Architecture Institute (DAAR), an art and architecture collective in Beit Sahour, Palestine in 2007, and includes a broad range of methods and methodologies such as spatial intervention, education, collective learning, and public engagement (see: http://www.campusincamps.ps).
 11. See: http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/

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