Translation and localization of children's rights in youth-produced digital media in the Global South: A hermeneutic exploration

Sanjay Asthana
Middle Tennessee State University, USA

Abstract
Through the study of two UNICEF-supported youth media initiatives from Palestine, this article theorizes and generates new empirical knowledge about the encounter between constructions of youth in rights-based discourses of UNICEF and young people's digital media narratives. The research encountered instances where the universal discourse of children's rights did not connect with the local realities of youth (constraints) but found that young people translate children's rights to construct new meanings to suit their local contexts and experiences (possibilities).

Within the fields of childhood and youth media studies, there is very little research on children's rights in the context of young people's digital media practices. To redress the lacuna, the editors of this journal and other scholars have indicated the need for interdisciplinary research to study the interplay between children's rights and information and communication technologies (ICTs) as they play out in children and youth digital media

Corresponding author:
Sanjay Asthana, School of Journalism, Middle Tennessee State University, 1301 East Main Street, Murfreesboro, 37132 TN, USA.
Email: Sanjay.Asthana@mtsu.edu

practices (Gasser, 2014; Livingstone and Bulger, 2013; Third et al., 2014). Referring to the concurrent 25th anniversaries of two events, the adoption of the United Nations (UN) (1989) and the invention of the World Wide Web, Gasser (2014) issued a call for 'an enhanced engagement of children in the discourse on digital rights' (p. 117).

Through a study of two UNICEF-sponsored youth media initiatives from Palestine, this article theorizes and generates new empirical knowledge on the interplay between the constructions of youth in rights-based discourses and young people's digital media narratives. UNICEF mandates that the children and youth media initiatives it supports (in the West Bank and elsewhere) espouse children's rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This article does not compare and/or contrast the two case studies from the West Bank; rather, it explores the specific ways in which children's rights are translated and localized in the respective youth-produced digital media. While I encountered instances where the universal discourse of children's rights did not connect with the local realities of youth (constraints), I also found that young people translate children's rights to construct new meanings to suit their local contexts and experiences (possibilities). It is this double dialectic, of constraints and possibilities, revealed in youth digital media narratives that this article examines in greater detail and offers reflections on the interconnectedness among the triptych of children's rights, digital media and youth lifeworlds.

Youth lifeworlds, the digital and children's rights

Throughout this article, I refer to children and youth together, since in the Palestinian context as well as in the Global South, the categories 'child' and 'youth' are problematic, and the age distinctions do not make sense because childhood and youth are fluid categories. The age-labelling demarcations and linear models of child and youth development (life stages and transitions) specified in the UN CRC do not apply. In the Middle East as well as other non-Western contexts, young people occupy a fluid middle ground between childhood and youth, making it difficult to pin down the idea of youth to universal categories. In Palestine, due to the extenuating circumstances under which children and young people grow up in refugee camps, the terms 'children' (*al'atfal*) and 'youth' (*shabab*) refer to a wide age range – 11–25 years. Therefore, without adhering to a strict age demarcation, I consider children and youth under one rubric, focusing on the unpredictability and contingencies that shape their lives.

In order to grasp the characteristic features of new media and the digital, scholars proposed theoretical concepts such as remediation, digitextuality, participatory culture, bricolage and so on that hold analytic utility in understanding recent shifts that have opened up new communicative possibilities resulting in creating, collaborating, sharing and exchanging stories hitherto unimaginable with previous media forms. Enabled by ICTs, computers, the Internet, social networking sites, mobile devices, apps and so on, the *digital* at once signals the rise of participatory culture that 'absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for the average consumer to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content in powerful new ways', thereby opening up newer forms of communicative modalities – lateral exchanges, bricolage, remediation and translocal connections – not possible in earlier media forms (Jenkins, 2006: 8).

Earlier, Anna Everett pointed out that new media have substantially refashioned our ideas of text. Thus, through the concept of digitextuality, she proposed that 'new media technologies make meaning not only by building new text through absorption and transformation of other texts, but also by embedding the entirety of texts (analogue and digital) seamlessly within the new' (Everett, 2003: 7). Therefore, according to Everett (2003), the various representational strategies of bricolage, collage and other hybridized forms become more complex in the digital age. Broadly agreeing with these insights, I propose that rather than treating new media and the digital as producing semiotic constellations of meanings, it would be useful to consider the wider repertoire of communicative and narrative modalities that generate affective and embodied affordances.

Numerous youth media organizations around the world are using ICTs, digital media and the Internet along with older media to communicate, mobilize and build coalitions on a range of political and social issues. What was once considered youth media production in terms of print, radio and television has expanded to include a wide range of ICTs and digital media forms such as blogs, podcasts, photologs, video-hosting sites and other user-generated content. The new modes of communicative contexts empower young people to author their own digital stories from a position of authority, to dissolve the boundaries between objective and subjective, thereby enabling the daily, personal, emotional registers through which they give an account of themselves (Asthana, 2012).

The UN CRC has gained a renewed attention in UNICEF's partnerships with a variety of private and public institutional actors in operationalizing and implementing a wide array of social policies from complex emergency events precipitated by wars, conflicts and violence to more mundane situations. The 54 articles outlined in the UN CRC build on the earlier Declarations on the Rights of the Child, by expanding 'provision' rights (access to food, clean water, health care and shelter), 'protection' rights (against abuse, harm, exploitation and violence) and including a new category of 'participation' rights (to act and be heard in society). Indeed, within the framework of what have been commonly referred to as the '3Ps', UNICEF has been involved in implementing a range of programmes for children in the Global South.

While the UN CRC offers a useful way forward in debating larger questions about children's rights, it has been critiqued by scholarship from a range of disciplinary perspectives. Such critiques have questioned the universal and normative language underpinning the UN CRC, explicated the ideologies and discourse of children's rights and the deleterious effects of capitalism on children's lives in the Global South (Nieuwenhuys, 2001; Burman, 1996; Imoh and Ansell, 2015; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998; Skelton, 2007; Stephens, 1995). More particularly, the studies noted that the notion of an independent rights-bearing individual self does not speak to the social realities in the Global South, where children are not part of nuclear families but rather live in larger networks of family, clans, villages and communities.

Although scholars explored digital media practices among Palestinian youth, none examined the translation and localization of children's rights in youth-produced digital media (Aouragh, 2008; Sawhney, 2009). A few studies in the Global South, however, have examined local attitudes to the UN CRC, and how children's rights are mobilized in creating 'new spaces of contestation' (Burr, 2002; Shepler, 2012; Vandenhole et al., 2015). Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) developed a non-essentialist approach that considers

children's rights discourse as a complex social field constituted by international agencies, institutions, monitoring bodies, advocacy groups, development workers and so on. By extending the concept of 'translations', they examine the process through which children's rights are disseminated by diverse agencies and institutions and, more particularly, how children negotiate and make sense of these rights. The children's own conceptualization of their rights as 'living rights', the authors argue, has greater utility since this offers insights into children's lived experiences.

Research on the human rights discourse has explored the specific ways in which human rights ideas, norms and practices are adapted and reworked in different social settings. Merry (2006), in her empirical analysis, characterized such adaptation of human rights in terms of 'strategies of vernacularization', that is, a process by which universal human rights are extracted and adapted to local contexts either via replication (direct transfer of imported ideas and institutions without changing these) or hybridization (merging imported ideas, institutions and symbols with local ones). Vernacularization involves translation across the universal and particular continuum, where human rights are made meaningful in their respective social worlds.[1] Drawing insights from Merry's idea of the vernacularization of rights, Hanson and Nieuwenhuys' (2013) living rights, this article proposes that Palestinian youth are involved in translation and localization of the UN CRC ideas, norms and practices via a range of strategies such as creative appropriation, adaptation, reworking and blending particular cultural-specific meanings, idioms, metaphors and symbols with the universal ones. Within this ambit, this article examines the specific ways in which the digital is reconfiguring children's rights and how new media tools are being deployed by the two Palestinian youth media initiatives.

Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutics and narrative identity

To study children's rights in youth-produced digital media, I draw on Paul Ricoeur's (1992) hermeneutic formulation of 'narrative identity'.[2] Broadly, hermeneutics is a theory and practice of interpretation of data, texts and human actions that counters the positivist belief in objectivity as well the relativist claims about the subjectivity of social actors (Kearney, 2011; Scott-Baumann, 2003). According to Ricoeur (1992: 140), a person's narrative identity can be approached via two interconnected and overlapping notions of identity: *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood). While *idem*-identity refers to 'sameness of body and character, our stability illustrated by genetic code', *ipse*-identity pertains to our 'selfhood, the adjustable part of our identity', and furthermore, the two kinds of identities – of sameness and difference – offer coherence to the self and the possibility for change and reflexivity.

For Ricoeur, a person's narrative identity is constituted in and through stories one tells about oneself and others; mediations between/across biographical and collective stories; and in narrative inscribed in cultural and social norms, beliefs, customs, traditions, history and memories. To this end, this article posits that the temporalized notion of narrative identity envisioned as a dialectic between *idem-ipse* is able to account for the contingencies and unpredictability in youth lifeworlds, accords a more substantive understanding of youth actions and experiences and thereby opens up productive

avenues for examining youth-produced digital media in terms of stories, plots and the intersubjective relations between and among young people and their environment.

Instead of rejecting the UN CRC, this article suggests 'reimagining' children's rights along the universal–particular continuum, wherein both the universal and the particular are held together in what Ricoeur had characterized as a 'reflective equilibrium'. Ricoeur's formulation of 'universalism in context' is pertinent to both human rights and children's rights in a contemporary world that is beset with neoliberal ascendancy, religious conflict, postmodern sensibilities and other forms of power and domination that have gained new traction in the face of increasing presence of the Internet and digital media forms. Reflecting on the utility of human rights and pointing to a path that steers clear of hegemonic universalism and contextual incommensurability, Ricoeur (1992) noted,

> On the one hand, one must maintain the universal claim attached to a few values where the universal and the historical intersect, and on the other hand, one must submit this claim to discussion, not on a formal level, but on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life. Nothing can result from this discussion unless every party recognizes that other potential universals are contained in so-called exotic cultures. The path to eventual consensus can emerge only from mutual recognition on the level of acceptability, that is, by admitting a possible truth, admitting proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us. (p. 289)

With Ricoeur's reflections in mind, in the following section, I examine the translation and localization of children's rights in two UNICEF-sponsored youth media initiatives from Palestine. To this end, I draw on my previous research and fieldwork interviews with Palestinian youth conducted in the Dheisheh and Aida refugee camps in the West Bank (Asthana, 2010, 2012; Asthana and Havandjian, 2016). The fieldwork process involved participant-based observation, and unstructured interviews with children and young people, youth media policy makers, programme managers and media education trainers, conducted at the two different locations in Palestine: Bethlehem and Ramallah in the West Bank in the month of January 2013 and 2014, respectively.[3] As part of the fieldwork, I gathered a substantial amount of data on children and young people's media engagements in the West Bank. In this article, I draw on some of my earlier narrative analysis of youth-produced digital media and field interviews pertaining to the UN CRC. In the following section, this article examines several short digital videos and youth interviews that either directly mention the UN CRC or engage with specific aspects of children's rights.

Children's rights in youth-produced digital media

The Lajee Center (hereafter Lajee; in Arabic, *lajee* means 'refugee') is located near the Aida Camp in Bethlehem and was established in 2000. Several youth media projects at Lajee are developed around the UN CRC.[4] At Lajee, my conversation centred on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that sponsored the publication of a magazine and several digital stories, *Rights & Resistance*, that included two sets of films under the titles *The UN Convention for the Rights of the Child* and *Creativity, Expression, and*

Resistance. For the Lajee youth, children's rights have no meaning without reinterpreting and reframing them as instruments of resistance and struggles for social justice; hence, they linked children's rights to resistance that is visible in the title of their series on digital videos.

My initial conversations with Rich Wiles, a British youth media trainer, and Salah Ajarma, director of Lajee, centred on youth media production. According to Wiles and Ajarma, apart from lowering the production costs of media-making, the availability of new and social media tools, inexpensive cameras, computers, photo and video editing software and the Internet brought unanticipated benefits for Lajee's youth: enabling them to craft their own stories; document their lives in the refugee camps; connect with Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and beyond; create an archive of digital memories; and so on. Young people produced short digital stories by mixing still images, animations, drawings and video clips interspersed with audio – such as ambient sounds, soundtrack music and voice-over narration commentary. The digital stories are evocative accounts of young people's daily lives, reflections on their dreams, hopes and nightmares and conversations with grandparents about their ancestral villages. Apart from the ability to operate and use low-end ICTs and digital media, the young people gain exposure and learn about the arts and journalistic practices that underpin media-making processes.

Children and youth at Lajee rework the UN CRC principles into their digital media work such as the *Our Voice* magazine and other photography projects. Lajee's youth media narratives complicate the UN CRC principles, as is evident in their writings in *Our Voice*, where young people invoke and discuss various aspects of children's rights in the context of their everyday experiences, but at the same time invoking their status as stateless persons and non-citizens. The September 2011 issue of the magazine was entirely devoted to young people's exploration of how each of the rights enumerated in the UN CRC impacts their lives.

Several short pieces in the magazine list the various UN CRC articles that are discussed in the context of young people's lives. The subjects dealing with specific UN CRC articles include the definition of the child, non-discrimination, gender equality, free expression, preservation of identity, family reunification, refugee children and so on. In the magazine, Ala Abdura and others declare that the

> Israeli soldiers come regularly to the camp at night with their big guns to arrest a child younger than 13 years old. How would anyone think that a child of this age could be a threat to an occupier with this strength?[5]

Ahmad Yousef, Abdel-Raheem Khraywish, Dyab Ra'id, Farah Natur, Shadi Radwan and Wa'ed Rukh, all between 16 and 17 years of ages from the Jenin refugee camp, write about the different, yet interlinked, questions of power and domination. The passage below points to the particular ways in which they translate Article 2 of the UN CRC on non-discrimination to the Palestinian context:

> We did not want to be refugees or to be living in overcrowded refugee camps. It is the occupation that tried to plant disunity and discrimination between us. It has planted discrimination that we

can see between the children of the camp and those of the city. In the camp, we also note discrimination based on gender between boys and girls. This discrimination is found in our society based on customs and traditions and has no religious basis. Islam urges people to equality and non-discrimination. But here, for example, a girl is deprived from many rights, only because she is a girl and we are deprived from our rights because we are Palestinians and refugees. The Israeli occupation treats Palestinians in bad ways and discriminates between the people of the cities, the villages, and the camps. The occupation discriminates between the Palestinians and the Israelis, as the Israelis are entitled to all the rights and the occupation violates all of our rights as Palestinian children.[6]

Through a strategic use of the principle of non-discrimination, the young people not only contextualize their experience, the socio-economic and structural issues with the living conditions in the refugee camps, the perceptions of the Palestinian middle-class elite in cities towards the camps and villages, discrimination against girls within the Palestinian society and discrimination between Israelis and Palestinians. What emerges is a multilayered critique of Israeli occupation as well as their own society's attitudes towards the girl child, refugee camps, village–city distinctions and so on. Instead of reproducing the universal logic of UN CRC discourse on children's rights, they translate, adapt and rework the principle of non-discrimination and make it speak to their everyday social realities.

In another piece, on preservation of identity, Ahmad Jammal and others speak of their identity as Palestinians tied to their land. Throughout their writings, the young people ask the international community, the Palestinian Authority and the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to secure their freedom from Israeli occupation, protect their rights and provide effective health care. Ahmad Jammal, Farah Thuqan, Isra' Sour, Mohammad Thuqan, Nadeem Abu Wardeh and Yahya Shafi'i, 15–16 years of age from the Balata refugee camp in the Northern West Bank, writing on Article 8 of the UN CRC, 'The preservation of identity', rework the singular logic enunciated in the article, and expand it to describe how Palestinian identity, although tied to the land, has been shaped by global colonial domination of their homeland:

As Palestinian children we have learnt that our connection with the land is parallel to our identity and that we cannot differentiate between them. We have also learnt that we must defend that identity with any possible way because if we lose it, we lose ourselves. The international community is unable or unwilling to force the Israeli occupation to give us our rights. The occupation forced us to learn this lesson as the only way to get our stolen rights. The occupation tries to divide us. It also tries to erase our names and to steal our identity by force.[7]

From the youth narrative above, it is evident that children's rights provide them the space to invoke multiple understandings of their rights through which they explore their own cultural tradition and critique Israeli occupation. This passage broadens the UN CRC principle of the preservation of identity by drawing out the multiple and plural meanings embedded within the notion of Palestinian identity. For Jammal et al., the symbolic meanings of Palestinian identity is connected to their land that has been occupied and stolen by Israel and other colonial powers, and the only way to get their identity back is not through reason but rather by force and resistance.

The two accompanying pictures of a young man holding a portrait of his ancestral Palestinian village and a boy with an identity card point out that Israel is engaged in erasing their identities through the process of normalization of colonial rule. They point to the incommensurable tensions and contradictions that play out in the OPT. The long history of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, dispossession of their homes and villages, refugee camps in which they live and the presence of checkpoints are all tied to their identity cards (*hawiyya*). However, in Arabic, *hawiyya* also stands for identity which carries evocative meanings for camp dwellers (*mukhayyamji*). While the identity cards mark them as prisoners in their own homes, where their mobility is severely restricted and movements tracked, Palestinian youth invoke a prior meaning of *hawiyya* as identity tied to their villages, land and cultural heritage and mobilize it to translate and interpret UN CRC's Article 8. In doing so, they incorporate and vernacularize aspects of the article, infusing it with new meanings, and invoke these as 'stolen rights'. Thus, by connecting their identity to rights – whether one views them as human rights or children's rights – Jammal et al. localize the UN CRC, thereby demonstrating that specific elements of the universal and the particular are interwoven.

During my participant-based observations, I witnessed feisty conversations between the refugee youth and youth media mentors at the Dheisheh and Aida refugee camps, where questions around NGOs, children's rights, colonialism, Palestinian national struggle and global solidarity were explored in great detail and specificity. While several youth were highly suspicious of foreign NGO agendas, they were equally aware of the need for building translocal and international partnerships and networks to amplify their voices through digital media presence and interventions. The digital series, *Rights & Resistance*, produced by children between the ages of 11 and 22 years strategically explores the various articles of the UN CRC characterized in terms of creativity, expression and resistance. Even though they discuss the denial of their basic rights as children within Palestinian society, the central thematic in all films is linked to larger questions around colonialism, power and domination.

Ibdaa Cultural Center (hereafter Ibdaa; in Arabic, *ibdaa* means 'to create something out of nothing') was set up near the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem in 1994. A series of 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. While the rights-based approaches are tied to funding and support from international agencies such as UNICEF and other NGOs, their adaptation through the media narratives reveal that they are not copied *tout court*; rather, they are shaped by the processes of translation and localization that explore the specificities of the Palestinian context. Khaled Al-Saifi, co-founder and board of director of Ibdaa, notes that he and others are wary of NGO-driven Western concepts such as universal children's rights and the underlying funding pressures that are debated during Ibdaa's workshops, translated and reworked to suite Palestinian realities in the refugee camps.

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. While it does not invoke the UN CRC directly, 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 9pm. 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.

Interspersed with her commentary are a series of 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, destruction of their house and the arrest of her father are all revealed by unpredictability and a series of contingencies that increasingly define Palestinian childhood. Although children and young people's lives are marked by such contingencies, they also hold the possibilities for potential transformation and change, as can be discerned from her digital narrative. She recounts joining the Ibdaa's dance troupe, participating in various cultural activities and spreading the message against occupation. The film ends with a few questions that are posed to the viewer: Will the Israelis arrest her for her work at Ibdaa, like they did her father? Will she be able to finish her studies, and what will the future hold?

How do we make sense of Batul Amjad Faraj's digital story? Do we consider it as framed within UN CRC's humanitarian representational regime? Batul's voice invoked a multilayered social and cultural reality that pushes the children's rights discourse beyond the humanitarian register. Her voice does not gesture towards viewer sympathy; rather, it directly links the Israeli occupation to the disruption of family life, destruction of homes and its effects on Palestinian society.

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 women from expressing their feelings, right to education and against forced marriages. For Bara'a, 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 the woman's right to work, she indicates that such customs and traditions 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.

The two Ibdaa youth I talked to during the fieldwork in the Dheisheh refuge camp, Qussay Abuaker, communications and fundraising 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 rights-based humanitarian interventions that consider camp inhabitants as vulnerable victims. Since 2012, Abuaker and Al-Saifi have been involved with the experimental educational project Campus in Camps.[8] As part of the Campus in Camps practice-based workshops, several Dheisheh refugee camp youth and members of Ibdaa have begun to rethink and envision broader youth media strategies for Ibdaa – by incorporating the potential of new media and the digital – built on sustainability and local capital. Abuaker and other Ibdaa youth are involved in 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 and so on that circulate via neoliberal developmental agendas operating through international agencies and NGOs in the OPT. For Abuaker, the UN CRC provides the much needed 'space' and has strategic utility, especially for young people in resisting Israeli occupation, as well as questioning their own Arab traditions.

Referring to Ibdaa's youth-produced short digital videos, Abuaker notes that the lateral communication via digital and social media has helped young people interpret children's rights in terms of their own experiences and the realities in the Dheisheh refugee camp. Through such interpretations – translation and localization – of the UN CRC, Ibdaa's youth appropriate and rework specific elements of children's rights in ways that have not been envisioned in the UN CRC. The universalism of the rights is vernacularized and transformed by young people who infuse it with new meanings. Concepts such as community, public and refugee that underpin the UN CRC do not adequately reflect Palestinian cultural traditions and social realities. For instance, community does not refer to the interactions of people within their environment, something that is better grasped through the Arabic word *mujaawara*, which refers to 'neighbouring' or, more precisely, 'forming or being part of the community'. For Abuaker and others at Ibdaa, this is not a mere substitution of words; rather, by vernacularizing and localizing the concepts, they are able to generate new knowledge and practices that enable them to rethink the camp spaces and the notion of the 'refugee' itself.

The UN CRC operates with a particular conception of the public and public sphere that does not apply in the Palestinian context. The word 'public' (*eamm*) is a fraught one in the OPT due to the miles-long serpentine wall that divides the West Bank, fragmenting Palestinian neighbourhoods, villages and towns. The arbitrary divisions imposed by the wall, checkpoints, electronic fences and roadblocks, all designed to restrict people's mobility, make it impossible to hold on to any idea of a public. To overcome the problem of definitional deficit, and to adapt the 'public achievement model', Ibdaa's youth incorporated local understanding and cultural symbols to substitute the public with 'popular' (*shaebi*), 'civic' and 'common'.[9]

Lajee and Ibdaa's youth connectedness through the translocal spaces via ICTs and social networking sites demonstrate the presence of multiple and overlapping civic spaces,

offline as well an online.[10] For instance, the widespread circulation of the youth-produced digital stories, images and videos uploaded on both Lajee and Ibdaa's Facebook pages as digitextual narratives have generated extended commentary and critique on a variety of international, progressive Jewish and Arabic online web-based news networks and blogs such as Electronic Intifada, Mondoweiss, +972 and B'tselem, among others.[11]

As a new media form and cultural practice, digital storytelling is popular among Palestinian youth, which has led to the forging of translocal connections among refugee children, youth and their families in the OPT, and refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and beyond. In the hands of the Lajee and Ibdaa youth, digital stories are creatively repurposed for Arabic blogs, Facebook pages and YouTube videos. The youth-produced digital stories are attached to gritty and grainy cell phone videos of Israeli incursions into the refugee camps, streets and children's homes that circulate in the multilingual cyberspace. Through new media practices such as tagging, annotating, podcasts, vodcasts and hashtags, Palestinian youth create digitextual media artefacts by reusing and incorporating bits and pieces of pre-existing materials through borrowing, hybridity, cooptation, reinvention (bricolage) and mixing old and new media forms and genres (remediation). The digital stories of Lajee and Ibdaa are remediated with print-based media such as cartoons, graffiti art, posters, magazines and photo-essays that coexist in a multitextured media ecology as untethered digitextual forms used as instruments of civic participation, protests and resistance.

Conclusion

Through the study of two UNICEF-sponsored youth media initiatives from Palestine, this article has explored the translation and localization of children's rights in youth digital media practices via Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity. Children and young people reworked the UN CRC's protection and participation dichotomies and their normative underpinnings that posit an individual autonomous self towards a relational and dialogic selfhood as *ipseity*, to give an account of their personal and social world. The youth digital stories contradicted UN CRC's 'universal' childhood, the private/public split where the nuclear family (private/inside) is viewed as the sole repository of norms and values and the street (public/outside) is posed as a threat to those values. For young people, networks of community, refugee camps and streets are places of sociality, neighbouring, forming a community (as in the Arabic *mujaawara*) and earning a livelihood (a reality for marginalized children and young people in the Global South).

This article also argued that the UN CRC's discourse inscribes singular notions of family and cultural identity, thereby undermining the complex congeries of identities at play in youth-produced digital media. The translation and localization of children's rights in young people's digital media stories revealed that the universal is not rejected but rather refashioned to meet the particular demands of cultural identity, thereby pointing to the significance of Ricoeur's formulation of 'universalism in context'.

In addition, this article has explored the broader question of how the digital age is reconfiguring children's rights, and the interconnectedness among the triptych of children's rights, digital media and youth lifeworlds. For the Palestinian youth who lead precarious lives, the idea of children's well-being currently stipulated in the UN CRC is

too narrow. In fact, all '3Ps' – provision, protection and participation – are limiting. As can be discerned from my analysis, Palestinian youth invoke protection rights as negative rights that are denied to them in terms of harms and threats to their lives. They also call forth their participation rights as positive rights to information, free expression and education. Digital stories and the new media forms offer them opportunities to give an account of themselves, their quotidian lives, combining the autobiographical with the historical, personal experiences and memories with cultural traditions.

While the Palestinian context can be considered as an extreme case, caught up in the Middle East geopolitics with unending conflict and violence, the findings are broadly relevant to the Global South. An immediate finding revealed that while the digital creates opportunities for youth, it poses new challenges to the UN CRC, especially in view of the rapidly changing communication modes that are now part of children and young people's everyday lives. It is in this regard, Veerman (2010) noted that the UN CRC has aged, and it needs updating in the face of new realities for children and youth: the presence and use of the Internet; cell phones; texting; mobile gaming; social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat and WhatsApp; and the ever-increasing social networking apps that have resulted in new forms of risks and harm. While children's exposure to violence, access to inappropriate content, privacy, cyber-bullying, hate speech and so on – intrinsic to new media and the digital – are important, the question of how we take into account the socio-political dimensions that impede children's rights caused by occupation, economic inequalities exacerbated by neoliberal globalization, privatization of public spaces, services and utilities in the Global South looms more important than ever.

UNICEF's involvement in public–private partnerships in ICT initiatives is problematic. For Pieterse (2006), such ICT projects are embedded in capitalist accumulation, and 'ICT4D is digital capitalism looking South – to growing middle classes, rising educational levels, vast cheap labour pools, and yet difficult regulatory environments' (p. 11). For instance, private sector investment through the public–private partnerships brokered by the UN have enabled such large technology firms such as Cisco to build and expand their own markets for Internet and hardware equipment in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. In the context of children's rights and ICTs, and more particularly in the ongoing debates about the significance of developing children's rights for the digital age, public–private partnerships, especially with private technology and Internet firms such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, become problematic.

As policy makers, children and youth media studies scholars debate children's rights in the digital age, they need to engage the interdisciplinary social sciences studies on the UN CRC, particularly those that have analysed the normative assumptions that define children's rights in transcendental and universal terms. In 2014, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner organized a general day of discussion on digital media and children's rights involving a range of stakeholders – UNICEF, governments, NGOs, human rights groups, private sector, policy makers, academics and children.[12] The deliberations resulted in broad categories of recommendations: empowerment, accessibility, digital literacy and safety to address and update UN CRC's '3Ps' in the digital age. The recommendations left out the effects of social, political and economic forces on children's rights and the digital, individualistic and apolitical nature of the UN CRC and

increasing corporatization of the digital. Therefore, what is needed is not just updating of the UN CRC for the digital age but rather 'reimagining' it to tackle a broader set of issues from privacy, safety, Internet governance, ethics, social justice, to name but a few.

Funding

Notes

1. Ricoeur has pointed out that the universal and the particular cannot be viewed as analytically separate realms; rather, they overlap in complex ways. Furthermore, as Merry indicated, terms such as the 'global' and 'local' that stand in for the universal and the particular are also deeply problematic.
2. There is considerable literature in psychology on the role of narrative in the constructions of identities and life trajectories that I do not pursue in this article. Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective of narrative identity is a substantive critique of psychological, psychoanalytic and discourse-centred theorizations of narrative and identity.
3. I like to thank Nishan Havandjian for translating a few interviews from Arabic to English.
4. Lajee's youth magazine, photography and video projects received funding from the European Union and the non-profit organization Broederlijk Delen, and Hoping Foundation, among others.
5. *Our Voice*, 6 September 2011: 3.
6. *Our Voice*, 6 September 2011: 4.
7. *Our Voice*, 6 September 2011: 13.
8. The Campus in Camps project designed by the architects and urbanist researchers, Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman, draws on their Decolonizing Architecture Institute (DAAR), an art and architecture collective located in Beit Sahour, Palestine (www.campusin-camps.ps).
9. According to Hilal and Petti (2012), the concept of 'the common' is different from that of 'the public'. The state apparatus mediates the existence of the public, whereas the common exists beyond state institutions. The public is a space that is given to people by structures of power, whereas the common is a space created by the interaction among people. Refugee camps are definitely sites where the categories of public and private enter a zone of indistinction, where neither public nor private property exists.
10. See www.lajee.org; www.facebook.com/Lajee-Center-م;كر—جال-ز-ءى-323046981135709/; http://ibdaa48.weebly.com; www.facebook.com/IbdaaCulturalCenter/; https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Dheisheh.News/
11. See http://electronicintifada.net; http://mondoweiss.net; http://972mag.com; www.btselem.org; www.icahd.org
12. See www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/Discussion2014.aspx; I point to such issues and raise these questions in the spirit of dialogue and mutuality.

References

Aouragh M (2008) Everyday resistance on the Internet: the Palestinian context. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1(2): 109–130.

Asthana S (2010) Tradition, power, and dialogue: a hermeneutic exploration of youth media imaginaries in Palestine/Israel. *European Journal on Child and Youth Research* 12: 84–91.

Asthana S (2012) *Youth Media Imaginaries from around the World*. New York: Peter Lang.

Asthana S and Havandjian N (2016) *Palestinian Youth Media and the Pedagogies of Estrangement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burman E (1996) Local, global or globalized? Child development and international child rights legislation. *Childhood* 3(1): 45–66.

Burr R (2002) Global and local approaches to children's rights in Vietnam. *Childhood* 9(1): 49–61.

Everett A (2003) Digitextuality and click theory: theses on convergence media in the digital age. In: Everett A and Caldwell JT (eds) *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 3–28.

Gasser U (2014) Taking children seriously: a call for enhanced engagement of children in the discourse on digital rights. In: *25 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Is the World a Safe Place for Children?* Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, pp. 117–121.

Hanson K and Nieuwenhuys O (eds) (2013) *Reconceptualizing Children's Rights in International Development: Living Rights, Social Justice, Translations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hilal S and Petti A (2012) Reimagining the common: rethinking the refugee experience. Available at: www.decolonizing.ps/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/Arles_Reimmagining-ghe-common. Petti-Hilal_copyedited_FINAL.pdf

Imoh TD and Ansell N (eds) (2015) *Children's Lives in an Era of Children's Rights: The Progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa*. New York: Routledge.

Jenkins H (2006) *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Kearney R (2011) What is diacritical hermeneutics? *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* 1: 1–11.

Livingstone S and Bulger M (2013) *A Global Agenda for Children's Rights in the Digital Age*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research.

Merry SE (2006) Transnational human rights and local activism: mapping the middle. *American Anthropologist* 108(1): 38–51.

Nieuwenhuys O (2001) By the sweat of their brow? 'Street children', NGOs and children's rights in Addis Ababa. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 71(4): 539–557.

Pieterse JN (2006) Digital capitalism and development: the unbearable lightness of ICT4D. In: Lovink G and Zehle S (eds) *Incommunicado Reader*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, pp. 11–29.

Ricoeur P (1992) *Oneself as Another* (trans. K Blamey). Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Sawhney N (2009) Voices beyond walls: the role of digital storytelling for empowering marginalized youth in refugee camps. In: *Proceedings of the 8th international conference on interaction design and children (IDC'09)*, Como, 3–5 June.

Scheper-Hughes N and Sargent C (eds) (1998) *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Scott-Baumann A (2003) Reconstructive hermeneutical philosophy: return ticket to the human condition. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 29(6): 703–727.

Shepler S (2012) The rites of the child: global discourses of youth and reintegrating child soldiers in Sierra Leone. In Twum-Danso A and Ame R (eds) *Childhoods at the Intersection of the Local and the Global*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 174–189.

Skelton T (2007) Children, young people, UNICEF and participation. *Children's Geographies* 5(1–2): 165–181.

Stephens S (ed.) (1995) *Children and the Politics of Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Third A, Delphine B, Urszula D, et al. (2014) *Children's Rights in the Digital Age: A Download from Children around the World*. Melbourne, VIC, Australia: Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre.

United Nations (UN) (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: UN, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Vandenhole W, Lembrechts S, Reynaert D, et al. (eds) (2015) *Routledge International Handbook of Children's Rights Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Veerman PE (2010) The ageing of the UN convention on the rights of the child. *International Journal of Children's Rights* 18: 585–618.

Author biography

Sanjay Asthana, Professor in the School of Journalism at the Middle Tennessee State University, earned his PhD in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2003 from the University of Minnesota. He also holds an MPhil degree in Philosophy and an MA degree in Communication from the University of Hyderabad in India. Dr. Asthana is the author of *Palestinian Youth Media and the Pedagogies of Estrangement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); *Youth Media Imaginaries from Around the World* (Peter Lang, 2012); *Innovative Practices of Youth Participation in Media* (UNESCO, 2006); and a co-author of the report, *Media Information Literacy: Policy and Strategy Guidelines* (UNESCO, 2013).