To Have a Country, to Have a Say: Using Visual Methods to Explore Young Palestinians' Lived Citizenship

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Youth in Palestine have been framed as disengaged from politics, in comparison with their spectacular activism during the two intifadas, and as unaccomplished citizens, as a result of their political circumstances. This article addresses a rethinking of the notion of citizenship, in the context of Palestinian youth, towards a more nuanced conceptualization. My investigation departs from a participatory photography exercise carried out in 2014, with a group of five young Palestinians living in the city of Nablus. Through the use of visual methods, which offer an alternative way of seeing their experiences, I discuss young people's ordinary practices and everyday encounters with the notion of citizenship and consider how a micro-sociological approach based on the concept of *lived citizenship* may allow us to move beyond passive/engaged and personal/political binaries, typical in citizenship studies.

Photo by Said, youth center in Balata Refugee Camp, September 2014 (disposable camera)

INTRODUCTION

I begin my first interview by asking Said the meaning of one of his photos, taken a week prior to our meeting in Balata, the West Bank's most populated refugee camp, situated in the outskirts of the city of Nablus. The image, showing two children touching hands, is dark and blurry, as a result of my decision to use disposable cameras in my project. Although this was perhaps not what he had in mind when he pressed the shutter, Said ponders for a while, and then explains:

> Shaking or touching hands is a sign of peace, and I would like to have peace in the world. It means a lot to me because it shows that those kids like and care about each other, despite being in a refugee camp, with all the violence and everything bad around them.

"When I say citizenship (*mwatana*) or citizen (*mwatin*), what comes to your mind?", I continue. "The Palestinian refugees who had to go out of their land and lost it… these became words with no meaning for them." Having grown up in a family of refugees originating from Jaffa, Said's unhesitant answer is a reflection of his life experience. His notion of citizenship is so colored by the ideas of absence and loss that my question triggers a negative definition.

Whether young people are aware of it or not – in the context of their experience as members of nation-al, cultural or ethnic groups, institutions and organizations – they practice, conceptualize and reimagine citizenship. But is it possible to feel or act like a citizen when one is below voting age and does not inhabit a de jure state? What does citizenship mean to refugees and stateless people, including those with no memory of the moment of displacement or who consider themselves refugees in their own land? How do youth living in situations of protracted conflict and estrangement from political, social or economic rights look at citizenship? What new theoretical tools and empirical understandings are needed to deal with issues of youth citizenship, particularly in the Middle East?

In this article, I take on the notion of unaccomplished (Ibrahim 2013; Khalil 2007) Palestinian citizenship and proceed to offer a different view of how youth in Palestine today live as citizens, engage with society, and dream it outside of the adult gaze. Contesting the representation of today's youth in Palestine as "apathetic," "alienated" and essentially disengaged from politics (Christophersen et al. 2012; Høigilt et al. 2013; O'Sullivan 2011; Stewart 2011), I explore the possibility of understanding citizenship within the framework of everyday life. By doing so, I suggest reorienting citizenship towards a more subjective conceptualization, one wherein the context of an individual's life matters just as much as their legal or political status.

I have incorporated visual methods in my research to facilitate the discussion around the concept

of citizenship, whose meaning is both theoretically contested and culturally specific. Departing from snapshots of everyday life in the West Bank, taken by the participants in my study, I was able to engage more deeply in conversations about how they perceive themselves as citizens in terms of identity/belonging, rights/responsibilities and opportunities/obstacles to participate in society.

TRENDS IN LITERATURE ON YOUTH CITIZENSHIP

The academic fields of youth and citizenship have traditionally excluded each other. Since citizenship was a status reserved for adults, social research tended to view youth as a pathway to adulthood. The topic of youth citizenship was merely explored as a way to predict adult political behavior, and youth were, for the most part, ignored as competent agents before the legal age to engage in formal politics or become independent from their guardians (Beauvais et al. 2001; Tisdall and Punch 2012).

Most authors today (Coady 2008; Goździk-Ormel 2008; James and Prout 2005; Roche 1999), however, oppose this tendency to link youth citizenship exclusively to independence (a liberal concept associated with individualism). But still not much is known about how different groups of young people understand themselves as citizens (Jones and Gaventa 2002). One reason for this is that social research continues to uphold a limited definition of what it means to engage in society, and *the political* remains confined to very narrow acts such as participating in elections or uprisings, being involved in political parties, student movements or associations. This macro-social approach to the study of politics has led to a generalized image of contemporary youth as disaffected.[1]

Such an approach has also received criticism from authors who look at the process of doing politics from a different perspective, considering alternative ways to analyze the role of youth as citizens. Some studies conducted in Western countries (Cammaerts et al. 2014; Harris et al. 2010; Norris 2003) indicate that young people are in fact willing to engage politically, but are often disenchanted with mainstream political discourse and institutions, which they believe exclude them or ignore their needs. Thus, they are more likely to engage in cause-oriented politics, sometimes referred to as micro-politics. These studies suggest that, while the status of young citizens may be often precarious, there is a broad group of young people around the world who continue to be

interested in social and political issues and to seek recognition from the political system in their daily lives. Young people's exercise of citizenship, therefore, cannot be encapsulated into a passive/engaged binary. This argument is supported by the work of authors on non-movements, micro-politics or the politics of everyday life (Bayat 2010; Gren 2009; Maira 2009; Maira 2013), to which I will return. First, I outline some of the main points raised in the literature on Arab youth. Then, I discuss the ways citizenship has been approached in academic literature in order to pave the way to the idea of *lived citizenship* that I adopt in this research. After a brief discussion of the use of photos as a methodological tool, I move to discuss the photos collected from my respondents and the insights I draw from them with regards to their lived citizenship.

YOUTH IN THE ARAB WORLD

As far as youth in the Arab World are concerned, they have traditionally been depicted as threats to regional/global stability, or as passive victims of their social and political circumstances – both external ones, such as military interventions; and those intrinsic to the functioning of Arab societies, such authoritarianism. Yet, again, very little is known about their own perceptions of citizenship.

According to Singerman (2011), youth in the region have been excluded from formal politics by authoritarianism, socially excluded by the stretching of adolescence, and economically excluded by high unemployment and insecure jobs. This combination of conditions provided a fertile environment for the mass protests that began in 2011 (Menezes et al. 2013). Undoubtedly, a striking aspect of the Arab uprisings was the role played by youth in organizing and sustaining the struggle – the same youth who had been described as uninterested and passive by the political and academic discourse of the previous decades.

So why did the literature prior to the uprisings fail to predict this leading role? The explanation lies, in part, with the aforementioned standard measures of political and civic engagement, also used in studies on young Middle Easterners. Indeed, activities such as voting or following current political trends on the news seem quite useless for estimating participation in societies with oppressive regimes, manipulated elections and state controlled media, such as Egypt under Mubarak (Youniss et al. 2013).

Some researchers, on the contrary, have argued that Arab youth prefer to participate without a long-term binding commitment and that their analysis of the public sphere does not necessarily use the same language or channels as adults, but that they are willing to do something for the common good (Mourad 2009). Much like in other parts of the world, youth in the Middle East seem to have their own under-

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1 Many studies on marginalized groups – such as rural youth or Black, Latino and Asian youth in the United States (Godsay 2014; Sullivan 2014; Sullivan and Godsay 2014) – have applied such standard measurements in the attempt to address their disengagement, rarely eliciting personal experiences.

standing of power relations and ways in which they negotiate them in the different aspects of their lives (AUB-IF 2011; Maira 2013) – their engagement in the Arab uprisings is testimony to that.

In the case of Palestine, there are very few empirical studies touching upon citizenship as an everyday reality for young people. One exception is Brian Barber's research with young Gazans after the first intifada, which illuminates how the present and future of youth in Palestine are deeply affected by political dynamics (2002; 1999). An interesting finding of this study is the tension between the "ability to express intense defiance against one authority [Israel] while simultaneously maintaining allegiance, respect, and deference for other authorities," such as parents or organizational hierarchies (1999, 203). This and other tensions have been overlooked by academic and media coverage of youth in Palestine, which has mostly exposed the defiant and spectacular (but brief) moments of the intifadas.

CLASSIC CITIZENSHIP AND ITS CONTESTANTS

For much of human history, citizenship has provided the main criteria to distinguish between citizens and foreigners but it is, of course, a concept controlled by social norms that define certain persons as less than fully capable of bearing that status (Beauvais et al. 2001). In Ancient Greece, for instance, rights of citizenship applied exclusively to non-slave adult men, and only much later did the concept start to imply equality. The modern idea of citizenship is generally understood as encompassing three dimensions: legal, political and social. In *Citizenship and the Social Class*, Marshall (1950) conceives of citizenship essentially as a legal status, resulting from a series of rights established in succession – civil rights, necessary for the development of individual liberty; political rights, such as the right to elect and vote; and social rights, those that guarantee a decent life. Marshall's definition of the citizen as the bearer of rights and obligations, remains central to the modern discussion on citizenship.

The classic notion of citizenship as a clearly defined and recognized relationship between a state and a citizen, regulated by rights and enacted through formal political participation has encountered numerous critiques.[2] Within the field of transnationalism, for one, many authors (Khalil 2007; Mavroudi 2008; Sassen 2002; Soyal 2000) believe that new ways of being a citizen are being produced by the processes associated to globalization. Others, like Gi-

orgio Agamben (1994), claim that the proliferation of different social experiences – such as migration, statelessness, *refugeehood* or multiple-citizenship – require abandoning citizenship as an analytical concept altogether, as it is no longer useful to describe the contemporary sociopolitical reality.

Feminist authors not only emphasized how private inequality affects access to resources and power in the public domain, they also challenged the view of the domestic and intimate spheres as inherently non-political – "the personal is political" (Cherubini 2011; Lister 2007a). Feminism and postcolonialism have often pointed out the exclusions that the concept of citizenship has produced, uncovering its seemingly equalitarian nature and explaining how different forms of exclusion intersect.[3] Linda Kerber (1997), for instance, introduces the metaphor of *braided citizenship* to discuss historical experiences of American citizenship, identifying strands which woven into three ropes (race, class and gender). In that way, she argues, it is possible to account for the narratives of individuals (e.g. women, African and Native-Americans, immigrants, etc.) whose lived experience and memory of accomplishing citizenship are inconsistent with those of other Americans.

Influenced by these different critiques, there has been a growing consideration of ordinary practices and routines through which subjects become claimants of rights and holders of responsibilities that has resulted in the inclusion of *habitus* – alongside *status*, the focus of classic theories – in studies of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen 2008).

TOWARDS THE IDEA OF LIVED CITIZENSHIP

To create my analytical toolkit, I drew on a stream of critical investigations focused on the everyday performance of citizenship by those who lack official standing to participate in the polity or claim citizenship rights, yet whose daily activities and interactive networks in the community allow them to negotiate or contest the mechanisms of their exclusion and claim recognition by the political system (Bayat 2010; Bosniak 2006; Harris et al. 2010; Lister 2007a; Lister 2007b). According to Isin and Nielsen, who first theorized citizenship in terms of acts, to investigate citizenship critically implies focusing on "those moments when, regardless of status and substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens or […] as those to whom the right to have rights is due" (2008, 18). This idea of acts as constitutive of actors, is very important for the point I make in this

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2 According to Holston and Appadurai (1996, 193), among the most vocal critics "are groups organized around specific identities – the kind of prior differences liberalism relegates to the private sphere – which affirm the importance of these identities in the public calculus of citizenship."

3 In addition, Roche (1999) notes, in unmasking traditional notions of citizenship, feminists/intersectionalists opened a space to transform it into a "child-friendly" concept. As with women, or people of color, the exclusion of children or youth from citizenship operates to the detriment of all.

article: that it is in fact by acting and performing on the stage of existence – by living – that one becomes a citizen.

The notion of lived citizenship, developed by Ruth Lister, is therefore a central reference here. According to Lister, a feminist theorist, lived citizenship refers to "the meanings that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens" (Hall and Williamson quoted in Lister et al. 2007c, 167). Because it "is about how individuals understand and negotiate the three key elements of citizenship: rights and responsibilities; belonging; and participation" in everyday life (Lister et al. 2007c, 168), lived citizenship is explored through "a core of empirical works that analyze the experiences of citizenship of different categories of social actors in different contexts" (Cherubini 2011, 115). This framework has predominantly been used in studies on immigrants (Kim 2012; Nyhagen 2015; Vera-Larrucea 2013), although it seems to hold potential for analyzing experiences of other groups (Rubin et al. 2014). For Cherubini, who uses this approach to look into the experiences of migrant women in Andalusia, lived citizenship is useful because it pays attention to "citizens' understandings of the meanings of citizenship and subjective representations of their position" within the community, while also broadening the analysis to aspects of everyday life that are usually absent from mainstream conceptions of citizenship, as they are considered to be part of the private and not the public sphere (Cherubini 2011, 116–117).

Asef Bayat's *Life as Politics* (2010) also prompts us to consider the "politics of practice" as a powerful engine of social change in the Middle East, often overlooked due to a tendency to focus on the "politics of protest." Although Bayat engages specifically with social movement theory, his general argument that common daily practices matter is useful to investigate the concept of citizenship because it opens up new possibilities to explore unnoticed social activities and bypass rigid dichotomies of "active/passive" and "personal/political." For Bayat, youth is a group often engaged in acts of defiance towards established norms by sticking to ordinary practices of everyday life. In his analysis of young people in post-revolutionary Iran, he explains how a "non-movement" to reclaim youth habitus was forged – "in being treated as full citizens, in what to wear, what to listen to, and how to appear in public" (Ibid., 18). For Bayat, (re-)claiming youthfulness (the social habitus associated with being young) is the core characteristic of youth mobilization. The fact that youth engagement is often mistakenly conflated with student movements or youth branches of political parties, attests to the need to look more attentively at the ordinary practices of young people as imbued with social and political value – or better, as constitutive of young citizens.

It is also useful to reorient the study of citizenship towards Judith Butler's (2014) concept of vulnerability as constitutive of (rather than opposed to) political agency and push for its understanding as everyday practice. Departing from a reflection on gender performativity, she argues that humans are inevitably exposed to vulnerability and affected by discourses they never chose. Yet, those discourses and vulnerabilities are precisely what informs daily practices of resistance. This perspective – a different approach to Agamben's that human life is sometimes entirely negated by power[4] – allows us to rethink the position of refugees and other aliens in relation to citizenship. If what "remains unrealized by the universal constitutes it essentially" (Butler quoted in Bosniak 2006), then one cannot study citizenship without considering the exclusions and multiple actors it produces (citizens, denizens and all those in between).

EMPLOYING PHOTOGRAPHY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Increasingly accepted as a subjective and reflexive form of qualitative data production, visual methods are considered adequate in studies aimed at enhancing the understanding of events, identities and selves (Konoblauch et al. 2008; McIntosh 2010) with groups that have little opportunity to articulate, justify or assert their interests (Bergold and Thomas 2012). Images record spatial and social relationships, capturing unidentified needs and greater levels of detail about emotional meanings than verbal data (Loeffler in Genoa and Dupuis 2013). They also encourage and facilitate communication between researcher and participant – namely storytelling around research topics – contributing to challenge dominant views or stereotypes, sparking critical-thinking, and providing insight into the perspectives of those who are suffering or have been silenced (Genoa and Dupuis 2013).

I chose to incorporate visual methods in my research design as I believed the study group would benefit from this more collaborative form of exploring personal experiences. I was, to some extent, inspired by *photovoice*, a method which incorporates different theoretical and methodological approaches, such as feminism, critical pedagogy[5] and social doc-

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4 Agamben (1994) claims that the concept of citizen is no longer adequate to describe the contemporary sociopolitical reality and even objects to conceptualizing "the refugee" in terms of citizenship. Rather, it should be considered for what it is, as a border concept that challenges the very principles of the nation-state.

5 The work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, considered one of the main founders of critical pedagogy, provided an important inspiration to this method, namely through his development of the notion of *critical consciousness* (Freire

umentary photography. Photovoice has been defined and applied in different ways since it was first used by Wang and Burris (1994).[6] My study draws on a number of applications of the method (Carlson et al. 2006; Wang et al. 1996), albeit with substantial adaptations.

My study relied on fieldwork conducted between August and November 2014, with five adolescents living either in Balata refugee camp or in its vicinity. According to UNRWA (2016), the West Bank is home to around 775 000 registered refugees, a quarter of whom live in 19 camps. Some camps, as is the case of Balata, are located next to major towns, and the lines between camp and city are sometimes porous. Initially built to host approximately 5 000 refugees, Balata is today's largest West Bank camp, serving 27 000 people. With nearly 60 percent of its population under 25 years of age, youth are especially affected by the challenges facing camp residents, such as overcrowding, poor infrastructure, insecurity and high unemployment. Nevertheless, Balata is known for its strong civil society, visible in the number of active community organizations, including youth clubs.

The chance to volunteer with one of the civil society organizations present in the camp (a local branch of an international non-governmental organization (NGO)) provided me with a good opportunity to meet young people and develop a participatory photography project. The project involved two male and three female participants, aged between 15 and 16 years old. This was considered an optimal size for the group given that the intention was to explore the research questions rather than offer any conclusive or generalizing evidence on the topic. Mohamed, Said, Farrah, Yasmin and Noor (pseudonyms) had been active members of the organization for approximately three years. They had attended a photography workshop organized by an international intern before my arrival and were familiar with photographic techniques. All participants identified as refugees, except for Mohamed. Three of them resided in Balata. Said regularly joined the group from Askar camp, where he lives with his family, and Mohamed from the city of Nablus proper.

The process of data collection consisted of two main instruments, a photography exercise and a set of individual interviews. After a briefing meeting, participants were asked to photograph their surroundings while taking notes in a notebook. They were given basic guidelines, such as: "Photograph a place that is meaningful to you and explain

why," and "photograph something you would like to change where you live." While maintaining the space for creativity, it was also important to ensure that the photos would trigger discussion around the research topic. The photos and respective notes taken inspired the design of the individual semi-structured interviews. Asking the youth to take pictures gave me access to sensitive topics (e.g. death, forced displacement, discrimination) that would otherwise have been more difficult to approach.

During the course of my research I struggled to be perceived as a non-authoritative figure. Therefore, obtaining open-ended responses or informal interactions (as opposed to traditional classroom instruction) was sometimes challenging. The implications of my European background on research with Palestinian youth were difficult to avoid, including the potential of me holding preconceived ideas about how Palestinians/refugees live their lives, but I tried nonetheless to reflect on the possible impact they had on my research. One example of bias that emerged throughout the research process relates to the use of disposable cameras. Besides practical and methodological justifications,[7] I considered that providing a group of young people in a refugee camp with digital cameras could generate feelings of exceptionality. However, disposable cameras turned out to be a foreign reality for youth growing up in a digital age (Mohamed decided not to use the camera at all and took pictures with his cellular phone instead). As a result of my choice, participants may have felt limited in their possibilities to take *good pictures* or embarrassed to use an old-fashioned system when most of them and their peers have phones with incorporated cameras. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the research yielded significant insights on the ways Palestinian youth enact and live citizenship, which I now turn to.

DAILY REMINDERS OF OCCUPATION AND STATELESSNESS

The photography exercise elicited several references to mundane elements of everyday life and socialization in and out of the refugee camps. These elements showed that the youth have a number of concerns about their community and that they place themselves both as subjects entitled to rights and as holders of responsibilities.

1972). It may be understood as the process by which those who are under oppressive circumstances can learn to analyze the forces causing those circumstances and eventually resist/change them, becoming more fully human.

6 Which was labeled *photonovella* in a participatory health promotion project with women in rural China.

7 The logic behind the use of disposable cameras was twofold. First, my limited financial resources made it impossible to provide participants with digital cameras. Second, unlike digital photography, the analog process requires more concentration and attention to detail on the part of the photographer. The limit of 27 shots per camera also implied that careful choices had to be made regarding what to photograph. These characteristics seemed suitable to the reflexive aims of this research.

Concerns over the environment and the multiple physical barriers they face, are pervasive in the photos. All participants took pictures of garbage and open dumpsters, criticized poor urban planning and social infrastructure, and complained about overcrowding, house degradation and lack of public services. One photo taken from Noor's window portrays a child playing with trash: "I think that playing in such conditions is not fair and it kills their [children's] dreams."

When asked about who they thought was responsible for the problems identified in the photos,
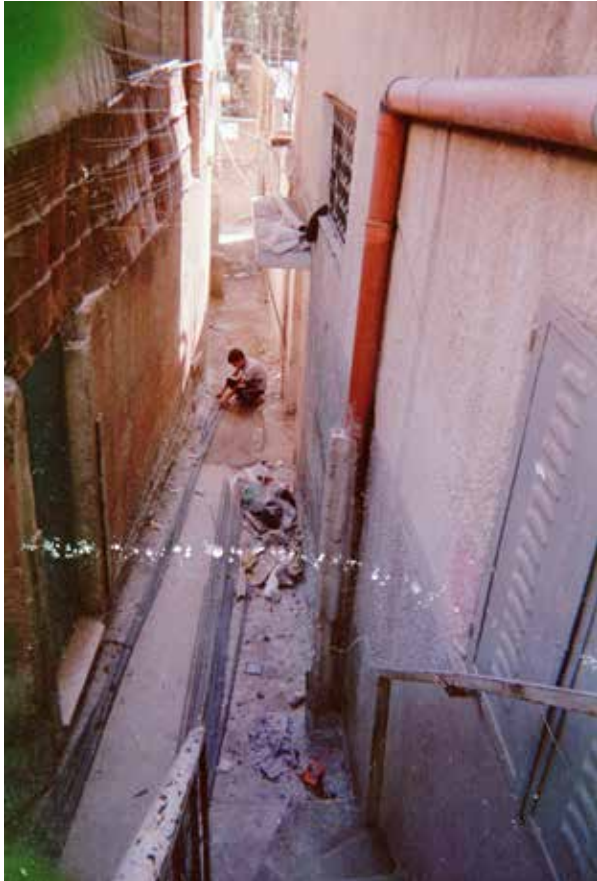

Photo by Noor, Balata Refugee Camp, September 2014 (disposable camera)

they recognized the importance of individual initiative and suggested volunteering to clean the camp, but their most immediate reaction was to point to some source of authority, such as the municipality or the Palestinian/Israeli governments. Said, in particular, named Israel's occupation as a factor causing the deterioration of living conditions in Palestine, especially in the camps:

> The responsible for these problems is the one who made us go out of our land and sent us here [to the camp]. […] because of the occupation the land is divided into A, B and C areas, so we can't expand for example to B area and we can't go to C area without a permit, so A is a very crowded area. Everyone is building over each

other. How could I solve this problem? To have a country… not to have an occupation… so I can build anywhere I want, with a permit from my own government.

The physical environment appears as a totalizing

Photos by Said, open dumpsters near Askar Refugee Camp, September 2014 (disposable camera).

reality, and the concept of dignity emerges from the accounts of participants, with frequent references to their living conditions as less than fully human: "This is not a life… this place is not good even for animals" (Said). The degradation portrayed is, above all, symbolic of the degradation of life for Palestinians – a constant reminder of the circumstance of being under occupation and of the lack of administrative power to solve one's problems as a community. Unsurprisingly, the youth agreed that ending the occupation was the most important action to be taken to fix the social problems elicited in the photos.

Barriers to movement and the inability to travel abroad or go to other places within Israel/Palestine (especially Jerusalem), were also seen by participants as severe limitations, with an impact on citizenship. Yasmin explained the feeling of humiliation whenever she applied for a travel permit to enter or exit the West Bank: "I hate to ask for a permit to enter my homeland because every time I carry it in my hand I feel despair." Mohamed, who photographed the wall, described it as "separating us from our country, our civilization and our relatives." During the course of my fieldwork, he had the chance to visit Jerusalem for the first time in his life, although for unfortunate reasons: "If my father wasn't ill, I

Left: Photo by Yasmin, garbage and bad smell on the way to school, September 2014 (disposable camera)

Right: Photo by Farrah, poor infrastructure in the refugee camp, September 2014 (disposable camera)

couldn't go... it's very hard to visit Jerusalem unless somebody is ill and needs to go to the hospital there." When he returned to Nablus I asked him about his experience:

> Jerusalem is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. My dad had told me: "you will be amazed," and I really was. However, they [the Israelis] stopped me and told me I had a fake permit. But I did not! But they insisted that my permit was fake... Then they made a phone call and said that there was a problem with the computers, and finally allowed me to go in.

As Kerber wrote, "the basic international distinction [between citizens] remains the experience of ease or anxiety at a checkpoint" (1997, 853) and for young people in the occupied West Bank, this is a fundamental experience in their everyday encounters with the notion of citizenship.

Even if the youth were not old enough to remember the more chaotic periods of Palestine's history, their lingering consequences could not be more vivid. Noor, as the rest of the group, connected the photos of graves to the national resistance movement: "Living in a cemetery must be hard... but the worst is to be a soul without a body," alluding to

the sense of destitution that often characterizes the Palestinian experience. Yasmin shared the sense of loss echoed by Noor: "The main thing for me is the right to live safely." Thus, the experience of death, the awareness of vulnerability, and the idea that, for a large part of the world, Palestinians are considered unworthy of all things human, appear as profound marks in these teenagers' lives and are at the core of their claims for rights.

Moreover, the fear experienced by the youth due to the frequent army incursions in the refugee camps and sometimes in Nablus, was presented as an inhibitor of free expression, action towards social change and political participation: "If I want to express my feelings about the political situation they [the Israelis] could shoot me or kill me or arrest me, so I can't express my opinion" (Mohamed). Said's words went in the same direction:

> It's hard to take decisions because of the psychological aspects that affect us. [...] For example, when someone doesn't have war, killings, occupation and the army, you can say anything you want and take decisions freely without any pressure from anyone else. But when you have all of these bad things happening around you because of the occupation, for sure you will speak in fear.

Left: Photo by Farrah, cemetery in Nablus, September 2014 (disposable camera)

Right: Photo by Said, cemetery in Nablus, September 2014 (disposable camera)

SYMBOLS OF GROUP IDENTITY AND ATTACHMENT TO THE HOMELAND

The reference to national symbols, to coping mechanisms and to the importance of maintaining hope for a better future, was common in all my interviews. "[The flag of Palestine] is raised in the center of the camp, proving our identity as Arab and Palestinian, as we wish it to rise in victory and freedom," Mohamed explains when commenting on one of his photos. The flag is viewed as an important symbol of belonging to the Palestinian, Arab and Muslim community. It seems to bring strength to the group, much like olive trees, the iconic reference to Palestinian rootedness in the homeland. Olive trees function as a reminder for youth of their people's past, as a source of optimism to live the present, but most of all as a legacy they are meant to carry on. Said's written notes provided an emotive explanation of the reasons behind having photographed olive trees:

> One day I went with my father to visit his friend and I took some pictures of his beautiful land. He said that he waters it and takes care of it because we are Palestinian and we cannot forget our lands. [This] gave me motivation not to be pessimistic about the future, no matter what happens in Palestine, because we will get our rights back one day. I believe that my land is the most beautiful I have ever seen.

Photo by Said, olive tree fields in Nablus, September 2014 (disposable camera)

Similarly, Noor's words reflect the Palestinian ideological theme of *sumud* (steadfast perseverance):

> Every time I look from my roof I feel hope for tomorrow. Despite being out of our country, despite the uprooting of trees, and despite our emigration, we will not lose hope. Everywhere we will plant our symbol – the olive tree.

Social cohesion and a collective identity marked by resistance were present in the youth's descriptions of their lives and the ways in which they cope with the political circumstances. Religion contributes to this cohesion in important ways. All participants admitted to find in Islam a source of inner strength and thanked God for helping them overcome the hardships. Yasmin's notes, for example, provided the necessary data where the camera failed to deliver: "A photo of a rosary and a bracelet – I love to connect religion with Palestine. They are my life."

This strong cohesion seems to facilitate community problem-solving and participation in social networks of support to other Palestinians. For example, when Yasmin referred to the room in her house where guests stay "when something bad happens," or when the youth took part in a campaign to raise funds for the victims of the war in Gaza, collecting money from neighbors inside the camp, we are in the presence of practices that cannot be decoupled from citizenship because they constitute a defiance of the very circumstances by which these people find themselves excluded from formal citizenship.

Photo by Noor, view of her house in Balata, which gives her "hope for a better future", September 2014 (disposable camera)

DIFFERENCES AND INTERSECTIONS IN ACCESS TO CITIZENSHIP

The youth were aware not only of the existing inequalities in terms of rights and opportunities to access citizenship vis-à-vis the occupying power, but also between different groups within Palestinian society, as explained by the braided citizenship metaphor. Refugees and women, particularly, were referred to as groups with substantial challenges in access to rights and participation in collective decision-making.

There was a sense of *otherness* to the accounts of participants regarding the experience of historical displacement and relocation in West Bank refugee camps (only Mohamed's family is originally from Nablus). For Said, the Palestinian refugee population is equated with exclusion, invisibility and non-citizenship (for him, the refugee is the ultimate non-citizen). Yasmin talked about refugeehood as the circumstance of having incomplete or limited rights and being oppressed: "I feel sorry that I am a

refugee and can't exercise all of my rights or be free like I am supposed to be."

Marginalization of refugees was said to begin at the camp, where the shortage of public services, the inadequate social infrastructure and the lack of job opportunities stand in contrast with the reality of city life. Discrimination was also strongly felt at school, and reflected in differentiated treatment of students: "I hate school because of the racism that distinguishes between the students of the camp and the students of the city," Yasmin complained, clarifying that this discrimination exists because most teachers in her school are from the city while the students come from the refugee camps.

Photo by Yasmin, school for girls in Nablus, September 2014 (disposable camera)

My interviews also revealed a certain awareness of gender inequality within the community. The girls' interventions tended to be focused on particular episodes of harassment in daily life: "Young males keep following us while we are coming back home from school and keep bothering us" (Yasmin). One of the boys, Said, elaborated further on gender relations in Palestine, pointing to the slimmer opportunities of young women to participate in society when compared to those of young men:

In our society most decisions are made by men. Why? Because most girls do not go out of their houses and the parents don't let them go out freely anytime they want. For example, if a girl is one hour late they will ask her a hundred questions. On the other hand, the boys, if they stay outside of the house until late, their father will say nothing. It's like the father encourages his son to do whatever he wants. […] Women, if they had better chances, they could do more and change more in society. The parents play a big role in this. […] But now things are slowly changing, I think, because of technology.

All youth believed that customs and traditions worked against some of the things they wanted to do as young people (namely traveling abroad or inside Palestine), adding to the restrictions imposed by the

occupation. However, they also seemed to think that a young person's opportunity to influence decisions in society depends more on personal ability: "Yes, everyone has power, it depends on how each person uses his power and attitude." Thus, with the exception of Said, instead of gender relations and patriarchal norms, participants referred to the occupation as the greatest hindrance to the full participation of young people in society, which reflects the complex and interwoven effects of patriarchy and occupation, two important power systems shaping the Palestinian context.

BETWEEN CONTESTATION AND CONTRADICTION

During the interviews some participants suggested that adult-youth relations in Palestine do not provide the necessary room for young people's real engagement in community affairs and decision-making. Said, for instance, complained that his society thinks about young people "in a wrong way." Mohamed agreed: "It's hard because I can't express my feelings freely... they always say you are too young. […] Adults keep telling us: 'you are young, you don't know what you are doing.'" For him, this comes with an important contradiction: "Most of the society are youth so we should have a say in decisions."

All participants admitted that customs and traditions are often used to limit their autonomy. "I want to decide by myself what I want to be in the future and what will be my field of studies... to have that decision" (Said). As mentioned before, Said finds gender relations especially hard to approach: "Something we cannot talk about in our society is dealing with the other gender. For example, if you talk to a girl who is older than you, everybody will believe you are in love with her."

However, participants' accounts were also imbued with the idea that participation should somehow depend on maturity or even academic merit, reflecting both the adult-centered political paradigm they inhabit and the importance played by education in the Palestinian imaginary. When asked about whether she thought young people could contribute to improve society, Yasmin asked: "Unfortunately most [youth] are losers who don't care much about education. If they don't care about their studies how could they care about society's problems?" Farrah talked about participation as a personal choice: "Maybe more at an older age and if we have self-confidence and have it as goal in our life."

The context of external occupation and constant insecurity is perceived as contributing indirectly to strengthen certain authoritative traits within an already conservative society. Looking at a photo of children leaving school, Noor commented: "They are glad and they run to their homes as if they were being freed from a prison where they have been imprisoned for a long time." On more than one occasion,

participants talked about school as a less than ideal space for youth participation and the verticality of teacher-student relations in the Palestinian education system surfaced as an aspect that reduces young people's influence in matters of concern to them.

> The [school] principle deals with us as a dictator. He says that the teachers are always right but not the students. They think it's always the students' fault. They shout at us, so it's hard to do something, but maybe we can collect the students, the good ones, and make a sheet, sign it and send it to the Ministry of Education (Mohamed).

Photo by Noor, children leaving school, September 2014 (disposable camera)

When asked about their opinion on Palestinian politicians, the youth complained about the lack of participatory mechanisms, except occasionally, during elections: "Most of them just care about their own benefits… just want to keep their chair and do not care about the people" (Said); "They are not interested once they have everything they want" (Mohamed). The youth perceived themselves as especially estranged from decisions concerning the peace process. "A lot of the things they do I don't agree with, like the negotiations," Mohamed declared. But while some clearly exposed the democratic deficit within Palestinian institutions and shared the wish to live in a society free from corruption, others seemed more accommodated with an internal political environment that they largely associate with the effects of the occupation.

Nearly all participants seemed to struggle with finding a balance between their own perceptions of youth and the ones imposed on them by society. The contradictions within their accounts reveal both a desire to break away from a patronizing view of young people and an acceptance of that view. Said, for example, who argued that most youth are not in a suitable age to make a decision (referring to the electoral age) and that they "do not have rational thinking," at a different moment during the interview also noted how "society itself does not build a generation that can make decisions."

The youth in my study find themselves in a paradox. While they are confronted with an external authority that is considered illegitimate (and which in a way reinforces a conservative mentality in Palestinian society), their national/local institutions and leaders also fail to represent their interests and question their ability to contribute in the public arena. Thus, criticizing the *powers within* seems necessary to realize some personal aspirations but often counterproductive to their struggle against the *powers without*.

The circumstance of being below voting age seems to weigh on participants' accounts of their experience as young citizens, revealing a tendency to regard participation in society as more effective when it occurs through formal political channels. Accordingly, the youth never spontaneously referred to their activity as members of a non-governmental organization or to other forms of civic engagement (for example, having mobilized to collect donations for the victims of the war in Gaza) when asked about ways in which a young person can contribute to changing or improving society.

When directly asked about what it meant to them to be active in a youth organization, though, they proceeded to explain the motivations and outcomes of their engagement in youth work. For all of them, being part of a group and having the space to discuss ideas, improve skills and seek support for personal problems, is seen as providing unique chances to impact their community. They admitted that belonging to the organization increases their interest in society and forces them to question situations or behaviors that they would otherwise not consider. Participants also emphasized the importance of setting an example, taking initiative or raising awareness for social issues.

Moreover, they see new media (including social media) as facilitating the processes of informal participation in public affairs. The Internet is seen as a channel for expressing one's ideas anonymously and exchanging points of view without much social control, as well as a way to circumvent spatial limitations: "I can say that the Internet creates a different personality for me, which is stronger than reality. For example, I could say anything on Facebook without being scared that others will beat me," Mohamed explained. He also considered the Internet a more reliable source of information on topics of concern: "What I saw on TV about Gaza didn't have much effect on me, unlike what I was seeing on the Internet, which changed most of my opinions."

Thus, aside from the multitude of counterproductive conditions to the exercise of citizenship, the youth are able to envision ways of influencing decision-making and community change outside of the realm of electoral politics. Their narratives include accounts of their participation in social networks of support to other Palestinians and of attempts to

address authorities, even if these are not articulated in the language of citizenship – like when the youth mobilized to collect money inside the refugee camp to help the victims of the war in Gaza. It seems, therefore, that their actual staging of citizenship is a lot more nuanced and complex than what their vocabulary suggests.

EXPERIENCING AND NEGOTIATING
CITIZENSHIP IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The youth's photographs and narratives indicated that their lives are touched by *the political* in deeply personal ways. Much like what Barber found in his study on youth from Gaza, for youth in my study all ordinary aspects of life carry political connotations (going to school, traveling, praying, receiving guests, etc.). Indeed, the collective realization of the imagined political community seems nearly inseparable from the realization of individual/personal dreams or ambitions. *The local*, *the national* and *the international* are all interwoven in the youth's accounts, shaping their worldviews and understandings of citizenship.

Young people in Palestine are forced to negotiate their expectations for society and for their own lives within the limited possibilities of a citizenship status that is, in classic terms, unaccomplished. Because the lack of a sovereign state, the circumstance of being refugees, their youthfulness, the local, national and international power dynamics, and a number of additional challenges exclude them from classical frameworks of citizenship, an alternative understanding was suggested.

The notion of lived citizenship was proposed in order to account for both the substantive aspects and the subjective meanings that citizenship has in these young people's lives. Influenced by several critiques, this notion highlights that private issues and everyday experiences may be relevant to understand how people evaluate their citizenship and make a meaning for themselves, regardless of their legal status. Intersectionality is also relevant for my analysis of the lived citizenship of these young people as it sheds light on how they position themselves within the gendered, racialized and classed structure of citizenship in the occupied West Bank.

In order to provide an interpretative characterization of the lived citizenship of youth in Nablus, I have organized this section around a pattern of tensions that illustrate their rich and often paradoxical experiences. In doing this, my point is not only to represent their voices but also to dwell on the ambiguities within these voices.

The first tension is the one between de-territorialized citizenship and the need for a sovereign state. With the exception of Mohamed, the identity of participants is profoundly shaped by the experience of displacement and refuge. The findings show that, for participants, the status of citizen is ideally connected to territorial sovereignty and that chances to exercise citizenship depend largely on having their own country. This is noticeable in several references to independence, freedom and the administrative powers of a sovereign state: "until we get it [our flag] back to its origin, our country," or "to be able to build with a permit from my own government." Paradoxically, it is precisely in the circumstance of being stateless that their claims to rights are grounded and it is in the refugee camp that they find their main locus of political agency and resistance. If, according to the nation-state model of citizenship, the refugee is the antithesis of the citizen, from a lived citizenship perspective, the vulnerability implied in the experiences of statelessness and refugeehood is crucial to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how these individuals live as citizens.

It may be useful here to reflect upon Butler's point on vulnerability as a constitutive element of agency. For Butler, if one is to conceive of agency/resistance beyond the terms of state sovereignty, it is important to consider the ways in which vulnerability enters into agency and contributes to the embodiment of resistance – in fact becoming part of the very practice of resistance. I am inclined to agree with Butler when she criticizes Agamben's idea that all the vulnerable have left is to reclaim *bare life* as a way of doing politics. Such a drastic idea underestimates the role of vulnerability in the formation of agency and fails to recognize certain moments of resistance as enactments of citizenship (even if incipient). For the youth in my study, their claims to rights (namely the right to live safely) and their acts of resistance against the military occupation appear precisely "as a social and political form that is informed by vulnerability" (2014, 17). In other words, as Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue, by constituting themselves as subjects to whom the right to have rights is due, the youth in my study act as citizens.

The second is the tension between their disenchantment with the Palestinian political system and the inescapability of formal politics. On the one hand, the youth recognize the Palestinian Authority's institutions and the government as sources of authority, and indeed expect them to act as such, managing certain basic aspects of their lives. On the other hand, they are overwhelmingly conscious of being under occupation, deprived of a sovereign state and with limited chances of actually influencing collective decisions. Even if the youth claim that their government does not cater to their interests, they primarily see themselves as citizens under siege, and thus questioning *oppression within* could be detrimental to the national struggle. Moreover, despite their criticism of Palestinian leaders and institutions, they seem to consider electoral politics as the most relevant form of staging citizenship, not necessarily articulating their active membership in a youth organization or other kinds of engagement (such as

individual/collective initiatives for community prob-lem-solving or Internet use for political purposes) in the language of citizenship.

Finally, there is a tension between an adult-cen-tered perspective of citizenship and youth claims for inclusion and participation. On the one hand, the group believes that youth are the basis of Pales-tinian society and a category of people who should have a stronger say in public decisions, which is in a way contrary to social norms in Palestine. But on the other hand, they also point out young people's immaturity, dysfunctionality or natural tendency to bring trouble rather than input as valid explanations for their exclusion from the political arena. Thus, participation is mentioned ambiguously, either as a right that should be claimed here and now, even if it challenges social and cultural conventions, or as something that can be done later in the future or which implies certain competences. For instance, participants often equate participation with merit in other areas of life and the idea that a bad student probably does not make a good citizen, surfaces from some interviews.

None of the participants seemed to have fully re-solved the dilemma between social constructions of youth and their own aspirations. It is perhaps relevant to think about Bayat's discussion on youthfulness in the context of this tension. In Bayat's perspec-tive, unless youth claim their right to be and act as young people, placing that right "at the heart of their conflict with moral and political authority" (2010, 120) in order to assert themselves as citizens, they may remain as conservative as other social groups. In Palestine, where moral and political authority but also the context of external occupation creates several barriers to young people's exercise of citizenship, (re-)claiming youthfulness and demanding the acknowl-edgment of that condition in the public arena could be a way to fight calcified structures of power, both within and without. On the contrary, if their youth claims remain accommodated under the prevailing norms, young people will not be able to act as de-mocratizing agents in their society.

My analysis shows that, although the experiences of young people in Nablus do not fit classic frame-works of citizenship, the repertoires of citizenship of my participants are in many senses dominated by those frameworks. The last two tensions, in partic-ular, are in line with what Barber found out about youth in Gaza: "their attitudes simultaneously reflect defiance (to 'illegitimate' authority) and deference (to 'legitimate' authority)" (1999, 189).

Illegitimate authority is represented primarily by Israel (or sometimes the international community at large) and legitimate authority is represented by organizational or social hierarchies within Palestin-ian society (e.g. parents, the government, teachers or older people in general).

CONCLUSION

In this article I have showed that it is possible, and indeed necessary, to problematize the percep-tions and experiences of citizenship of individuals who are not (or not yet) citizens in classic terms, such as the young Palestinians who participated in my study. The use of photography and other visual techniques in qualitative research has opened oppor-tunities for conducting investigations about young people (and together with them) that resemble youth ways of knowing and looking at social reality. Less exploitative research environments can contribute positively to research on youth, particularly in the Middle East, and visual methods can definitely be part of this effort to further involve research sub-jects in knowledge production about their lives and experiences.

In my analysis, I identified and discussed a number of tensions that surfaced from participants' accounts and which they struggled to accommo-date: the tension between the need for a sovereign state and de-territorialized citizenship; the tension between their distrust in the political leadership and the inescapability of formal politics; and the tension between an adult-centered perspective on citizen-ship and their claims for youth inclusion. I believe these tensions reveal something important about how young people in Palestine relate to the notion of citizenship: that although their lived experiences certainly do not fit classic models of citizenship, they often articulate them according to such models.

Although my findings tended to emphasize as-pects that influence the youth's exercise of citizenship negatively, participants mentioned various examples of their substantive enactment of citizenship in ev-eryday life and referred to certain spaces where they could more openly voice/reflect upon their opinions or mobilize to address social concerns. The Internet and social media, importantly, are viewed as channels that facilitate engagement and provide opportunities to challenge the status quo – by allowing the youth to communicate across distance, by giving them a sense of agency, or by encouraging them to question mainstream political/media discourse. And even if most of my participants' daily experiences did not amount to the institutional practices we have come to identify with formal citizenship, these experienc-es still constitute powerful ways to circumvent the current political situation and to secure membership within the imagined community.

Finally, the achievement of a sovereign state is of course considered the ultimate solution for the problems identified by the participants in my study, and also a crucial condition for young people to gain more influence in collective decisions. The fear, insecurity and multiple restrictions resulting from the occupation prevent youth from expressing their opinions or taking a more active role in the making

of social change. Importantly, the condition of being under occupation places young people (and the whole society) at an allegiance crossroads wherein criticizing one's own government, community, social and cultural norms, looks very much like a path of betrayal.

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