



LUND UNIVERSITY
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To have a country, to have a say

Young people's "lived citizenship" in Nablus



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This thesis is dedicated to the youth I met in Balata, brave weavers of dreams;
and to my parents, for letting me follow mine.

Esta tese é dedicada aos jovens que conheci em Balata, corajosos tecedores de
sonhos; e aos meus pais, por me deixarem seguir os meus.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines young people’s “lived citizenship” in the occupied West Bank and is based on qualitative research, including visual methods, carried out with a group of adolescents in Nablus. Young people’s ordinary experiences and everyday encounters with the notion of citizenship are at the core of my analysis, which adopts a micro-sociological approach in order to go beyond the “passive/engaged” and “personal/political” binaries, typical in citizenship studies. I consider the ways in which a redefinition of what constitutes ‘citizenship’ and ‘the political’ might contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these people – whose citizenship status is, in classic terms, unaccomplished – position themselves in society and make sense of their lives as citizens. My analysis demonstrates that, although participants’ life experiences do not fit traditional conceptions of citizenship, their repertoires are often dominated by such conceptions.

KEYWORDS: citizenship; youth; lived experience; politics; refugees; collaborative research; visual methods.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I begin by asking Said¹ about the meaning of one of his photos, taken a week prior to our meeting in Balata, West Bank's most populated refugee camp, situated in the outskirts of the city of Nablus.²



Photo 1. Children touching hands, Askar refugee camp.

The image, showing two children touching hands, is dark and blurry. I realize from his expression that it does not match what he had in mind when he pressed the shutter. Still, he goes on to explain:

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

¹ To preserve the anonymity of participants, all names mentioned throughout the study are pseudonyms.

² According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Balata hosts over 23,000 refugees (some of which do not actually hold refugee status or Palestinian ID), in an area of 0.25 Km². Created in 1950, Balata's residents came from villages and the cities of Lydd, Jaffa and Ramleh. High unemployment, bad water and sewage network and overcrowded infrastructure are amongst the main problems of the camp. Around 60% of the population is below the age of 25. There are four schools run by the UNRWA but secondary education is provided by the government in the city. The number of students continuing through high school is decreasing as education is becoming costly and the hope that it once represented for Palestinians is losing meaning in the face of reduced job opportunities. The *intifadas* were particularly harsh in Balata, an important resistance stronghold, whose residents engaged in intense political activity (namely those affiliated to Fatah's military arm, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades). During the last *intifada*, Balata became nearly lawless, with the recently established Palestinian police having little influence on the Israeli incursions in the camp, which continue to happen, albeit less frequently. Today, its civic and political actors are still considered strong. There is a very dynamic camp committee, a child centre and a women's programme (UNRWA, 2014; Subuh 2013; OCHA OPT 2008).

I continue, “When I say ‘citizenship’ (*mwatana*) or ‘citizen’ (*mwatan*), what comes to your mind?” “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 old Askar camp³ in a family originating from Jaffa, Said’s unhesitant answer is a reflection of his own life experience. The fact that his notion of citizenship is so coloured by the ideas of absence and loss that my question triggers a negative definition, is telling. Throughout the interview, the general tone of hope in his voice does not lighten his dissatisfaction with Israel’s military occupation, as well as with certain aspects of Palestinian society and governance. At the age of 15, Said is a young man with something to say about the politics surrounding him.

1.1 Research problem and statement of purpose

Whether young people are aware of it or not – in the context of their experience as members of national, cultural or ethnic groups, institutions (such as the school or the family) and organizations – they practice, conceptualize and reimagine citizenship. But is it possible to feel or act like a citizen when one is not old enough to vote and does not inhabit a *de jure* sovereign state? What does citizenship mean to a young refugee, even one with no memory of the moment of displacement or who considers himself/herself “a refugee in his/her own land”? How do young people living in situations of protracted conflict, violence and estrangement from political, social or economic rights view themselves in relation to citizenship? What new theoretical tools and empirical understandings are needed to deal with issues of youth citizenship, particularly in the Middle East?

In contrast with the spectacular activism of the 90s and early 2000s, youth in Palestine have been framed as a group essentially disengaged from politics in recent years and described as “apathetic”, “passive” or “alienated” (Christophersen et al. 2012; Høigilt et al. 2013; Stewart 2011; O’Sullivan 2011; PA 2011; SFY 2009). Moreover, Palestinian citizenship is often described as “weak” or “unaccomplished” while Palestinians, especially youth, tend to be referred to as “not real citizens” or

³ Askar was established in 1950 by UNRWA, in land leased from the Jordanian government, similarly to other camps in the West Bank. It is also located within the municipal boundaries of Nablus, not far from Balata, and is home to around 16.000 registered refugees. In 1965, severe overcrowding led to an extension of the camp (known by Nablusis as “New Askar”), even if this extension was never officially recognized by UNRWA. Division of power between the PA and the government of Israel has further divided the original camp (which falls within “area A”, under PA control) and the new camp (situated in “area B”, thus under joint PA-Israeli control) (UNRWA, 2014).

“citizens to be” (Ibrahim 2013; Khalil 2007), in virtue of the adverse political and social circumstances they face.

The chance to do a volunteer internship in the West Bank, with a youth organization that promotes critical thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, prompted a reconsideration of these representations and a desire to challenge existing trends in social research. The reason for choosing to focus on ‘citizenship’, a concept that pervades popular political discourse and may perhaps be considered overworked in scholarly literature, lies in its normative valence.⁴ To describe aspects of the world and characterize practices or experiences in the language of citizenship “is to afford them substantial political recognition and social value” (Bosniak 2006, p. 12).

Thus, in my study I try to obtain a more nuanced understanding of how young people in the occupied West Bank *live* as citizens. In particular, I investigate how citizenship and participation⁵ are perceived and experienced among a group of young people in the city of Nablus, and what are the main opportunities and obstacles to its exercise. To fulfill these aims, the following question serves as the main guide for my research: *How do young Palestinians in the West Bank perceive and experience citizenship?*

For the purposes of this thesis, I conducted a collaborative visual research project in Balata refugee camp, which I fully describe in the methods section. The collaborative nature of my project intended to provide a space for both participants and me to engage critically with each other’s thoughts and our own. What emerges is a narrative about the struggles and dreams of five young Palestinians from a citizenship perspective, which bites itself in the tail by offering at the same time a reflection on the utility of visual methods to conduct research with youth in the Middle East.

Bringing together in my analysis the concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘citizenship’, I argue that we can begin to understand how young people engage with society and dream it outside of the adult gaze. It is my belief that the voices of the youth that resonate in these pages might contribute to a rethinking of citizenship towards a

⁴ For Bosniak (2006), this appraisive meaning is perhaps the only aspect of citizenship that is not in contention.

⁵ For the purposes of this study, *participation* is broadly defined as the process of taking part in, or helping to steer, decisions that affect one’s life as a young person and the life of the community at large. The notion of *participation* encompasses political and civic, formal and informal dimensions of citizenship, all of which are considered here to be within the realm of politics.

more subjective conceptualization, one wherein the context of an individual's life matters just as much as the political-legal relation of that individual to a state or national community.

1.2 Youth in Palestine today: a contextual background

There is a combination of counterproductive conditions surrounding youth in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) today which motivates them to pursue change and simultaneously hinders their chances to have a tangible role in society (Ahmad 2013), namely the national political scene, the conservative social mentality, the existence of deep inequalities, and of course, the indelible conflict with Israel.

The idea that young people's participation in Palestinian society reached its peak in the period between the two *intifadas*, as younger generations took initiative in an unprecedented manner, is widespread.⁶ Following the 1993 Oslo Accords, the vision of sovereignty was in the horizon and "young people were considered a central piece within this vision, as the future citizenry" (Hart 2002, p. 19). Several development activities aimed at fostering young people's awareness of human rights issues and democratic processes (funded mainly by Western governments) were launched, and large sums were allocated to the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state with an active and healthy civil society (*ibid.*). However, the slow tempo of the peace process and the lack of clear signs of progress were, over time, said to foster political apathy in Palestinian youth (Seif 1999). Eventually, with the onset of the second *intifada* and the subsequent political and military developments, most hopes for young people were buried.

The political split between Fatah and Hamas in 2006, consummated with Hamas' takeover of Gaza in 2007, marked another shift in the complex process of preparation for national sovereignty (Hovdenak 2010) that had inevitable negative impacts on young people and the youth movement (Ahmad 2013). For the first time, the OPT became politically and administratively parted into two competing bodies: President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah-led government, in the West Bank; and Hamas' government in the Gaza Strip, under the premiership of Ismail Haniyeh. The

⁶ According to the Palestinian leadership at the time, the involvement of very young civilians in the uprising was evidence of the intergenerational commitment to the national struggle and of the "corrosive effects of the occupation on Palestinian children and youth" (Hart 2002, pp. 11-12).

internal division gave rise to regional tendencies and destabilized the concept of citizenship for the sake of political allegiances, subjecting all spheres of life to factionalism and undemocratic ideology (PA 2011).

Today, although youth maintain a high rate of voting and are still considered very politicized, they are described as averse to political activity and suspicious of party politics (Høigilt et al. 2013; PA 2012; SYF, 2009). For many authors, the new political paradigm introduced by Oslo undermined the collective struggle and led to a de-politicization of Palestinian society in general (Maira 2013; Mintz 2011; Said 2001). An awareness of the growing authoritarianism of Fatah in the West Bank (Mintz 2011), combined with corruption, mismanagement and political favoritism (Christoffersen et al. 2012), has left younger generations of Palestinians increasingly distant from formal politics.

In a country where more emphasis is placed upon the well being of the family or community, and less on the individual, the very idea of youth involvement in decision-making is largely alien and may be considered offensive (Ahmad 2013). Young people are generally considered immature and inexperienced (Stewart 2011) and older males tend to make decisions on behalf of females and younger males, to ensure the best interests of the group.⁷ It should be noted, however, that the authority of older males is recently being contested in various ways, namely by female participation in education and employment, and through the general attitudes of younger males (Ibrahim 2013).

Besides age, other factors like gender, class, ability/disability or the place where a young person lives (in a city, village or refugee camp) influence most aspects of life, such as education and employment opportunities, mobility, or chances for political and civic participation. In my study, gender and place of residence, in particular, appear as important factors of social differentiation.

Despite significant female presence in education, women's participation in the workforce and public affairs still reflects a substantial gender gap, women being the first to be disinvested in and encouraged to marry when families face dire

⁷ For instance, when the PA was established, the most important government posts were assigned to old leaders of the PLO who had returned from exile, reducing the chances for young people to actively take part in decision-making through formal politics. Therefore, although young people played a major role in the first Intifada, they were not the ones who gained the most from it (Ibrahim 2013).

situations (Chatty 2005).⁸ Discrimination against refugee camp⁹ dwellers by the population of the cities – coupled with a shortage of public services in the camps, the inferior quality of educational infrastructure and the limited capacity for vocational training – slims young refugees’ opportunities of gaining a university degree and accessing jobs.

For Palestinians “education is conceived as a path to resistance and survival” (Silwadi & Mayo 2014, p. 73), one the positioning of military checkpoints, the frequent harassment and the closing of schools and universities by Israel, have not managed to impede.¹⁰ Yet, mainstream education is generally considered authoritarian, uncritical and ineffective in preparing youth for participation in public affairs (Barber 2014; Stewart 2011). Non-formal education – through afternoon clubs, youth groups and other religious/secular, governmental/non-governmental associations¹¹ – on the other hand, may offer youth some opportunities to consolidate their sense of national identity and belonging (Chatty 2005) but does not necessarily foster participation in public decisions. In fact, international reports expose an overwhelming control of committees by older people, usually males, including within organizations that claim to be youth focused (Brakel 2009).

In addition to social and cultural barriers, the external context limits youth substantially since the Palestinian social, political and economic cycle is virtually completely exposed to the Israeli military occupation. Under occupation, a young person’s ability to seek experiences beyond his or her permitted travel zones is considerably reduced and, in addition, the outbreak of uprisings and military offensives has often resulted in the suspension of the financial support on which most youth activities in Palestine rely (PA 2011; Stewart 2011). For those living in

⁸ However, marrying early is not necessarily a passive act as it can also be a coping strategy to escape contexts of violence in the household (*ibid.*).

⁹ Of the 59 official refugee camps set up in 5 UNRWA fields – Jordan, Gaza, West Bank, Syria and Lebanon – 19 of them are located in the West Bank (there are several more, which are not recognized by UNRWA), hosting 16% of Palestinian refugees worldwide. The West Bank alone is home to over 750.000 registered refugees, a quarter of whom still live in camps. To put things in perspective, while the West Bank has the largest number of recognized Palestinian refugee camps of the 5 fields, the most populated of them, Balata, has a population similar to that of the least populated camp in Gaza (UNRWA 2014). Traditionally, armed resistance against the Israeli occupation has taken place in the refugee camps. According to Subuh (2013), people living in dire situations and without future perspectives are more easily recruited for armed resistance.

¹⁰ Youth literacy and the overall enrollment for all three educational sectors in Palestine are high. Primary and secondary education, provided either by the government or UNRWA, is free. Tertiary education is one of the highest in the region, even though more than a third of youth and nearly half of all graduates are unemployed, which forces many to emigrate or travel regularly to Israel for work (Brakel 2009).

¹¹ The PA mentions the existence of some 350 operational youth clubs and 250 civil society organizations with youth-targeted programs in the West Bank and Gaza, yet recognizes that their functioning is seldom inadequate and that they do not reach all youth (PA 2011).

refugee camps, the frequent incursions of the Israeli army, with episodes of violence, intimidation and arrest, also contribute to reduce the quality of life of residents and to make the already unsatisfactory infrastructure even less functional (Subuh 2013).

Finally, it is important to understand how the nature of this occupation has changed, as well as its general implications for citizenship. The establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 and the division of the land in three areas gave Palestinians some limited self-rule, while Israel maintained control over borders (Gren 2009) and continued the process of settlement construction into the West Bank. As Asem Khalil righteously points out, limited sovereignty might mean incomplete regulation of citizenship but it does not mean its total absence.

Indeed, “a quasi-citizenship” was created for those who came under the jurisdiction of the PA (which, due to the complexity of the refugee question, intentionally did not legislate on nationality/citizenship). This situation implied certain entitlements, such as the right to vote and stand for election within the PA institutions, or the right to obtain a passport (under indirect control of Israel), but it certainly did not solve all the problems. Thus, West Bankers were placed at a crossroads regarding a citizenship status that is, in classic terms, unaccomplished. More recently, with Palestine’s acceptance by the United Nations General Assembly as a non-member observer state, citizenship is back at the center of political and legal discussions (Khalil 2007; Khalil 2004).

1.3 Disposition

After this introductory chapter clarifying the significance and purpose of my study and providing some contextual background, I review current literature on youth from a citizenship perspective, in order to find spaces to enter the conversation.

In chapter three, I position the study within related theory, presenting some critiques that illuminate my approach to the study of young people’s citizenship in the occupied West Bank. In particular, I propose Ruth Lister’s notion of “lived citizenship” and Isin & Nielsen’s “acts of citizenship” to better understand how they experience and make sense of citizenship in everyday life. At the end of this chapter, I reajust the guiding research questions of this thesis.

In the next chapter I provide a description of the reasoning behind the choice

of the research methods. I also include some notes on ethical issues, limitations and personal biases, as well as future dissemination of findings.

The findings chapter contains the main empirical results of my study, organized according to the selected coding system. It is composed of five main themes related to participants' perceptions and everyday staging of citizenship, plus an additional section devoted to participants' feedback on the project.

In chapter six, the analysis, I sew the different threads of my study into a cohesive narrative, engaging in productive speculation and laying down the conclusions that constitute the final chapter.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review, however limited, has two main goals. The first is to revisit empirical literature on youth from a citizenship perspective, in order to grasp the current state of the art. The second is to describe the situation of young people as citizens in the Middle East, with a special focus on the occupied West Bank. Literature on citizenship through a “youth lens”, since it is of a more theoretical nature, is mainly addressed in the third chapter.

2.1 Youth from a citizenship perspective

While there is a great deal of literature on youth in different contexts and from diverse fields (e.g. sociology, psychology, health, political science) young people have seldom been analyzed in relation to citizenship (Beauvais et al. 2001). Simultaneously, until the 1990s¹² – when an important paradigmatic shift occurred and youth became at the core of international efforts to guarantee their rights, participation in public affairs and recognition as citizens (or at least as future citizens) – youth were essentially absent from the debate on citizenship. Therefore, the concepts of youth and citizenship seem to have traditionally excluded each other.

The dominant research tradition on young people constructs them as problematic, dysfunctional or deviant subjects (Roche 1999). Such discourses “serve to consolidate in the adult imagination the distinctiveness of adulthood” (*ibid.*, p. 477). Also, since citizenship is a status traditionally reserved for adults, many authors remain skeptical of the idea that youth are *full* citizens. While they can certainly contribute to the economy, be bread-winners, get married, form a family, sometimes own a passport or vote, they are caught between statuses and tend to be seen as citizens “in becoming” (Beauvais et al. 2001).

Therefore, for a long time, research viewed youth only as a pathway to adulthood, exploring the topic of citizenship as a way to predict adult political behavior or simply ignoring youth as competent agents before the legal age to engage in formal politics or become independent from their guardians (Jones 1995 and Coles 1995 *apud* Beauvais e al. 2001; Phillips 1997, Jenks 1996 and Purdy

¹² The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, provided vital encouragement towards greater participation of children and young people in social and political affairs.

1992 *apud* Tisdall & Punch 2012). Currently, most authors (Goździk-Ormel 2008; Coady 2008; James & Prout 2005; Beauvais et al. 2001; Roche 1999) oppose this tendency to “futurize” youth citizenship or to link it exclusively to independence (a liberal concept associated with individualism).

Nonetheless, even literature on young people that views them as “here and now” citizens tends to assume a limited definition of what it means to engage in society. Generally, ‘the political’ is confined to very narrow, traditional or recognizable acts, such as participating in elections, demonstrations or uprisings, being involved in political parties, student movements or other associations (macro-social approach). Thus, for example, a common interpretation of low levels of electoral turnout has been the idea that youth are apathetic, individualistic, do not care about politics or are not attentive to public affairs (Stoker 2006; Pirie & Worcester 1998).

This “disaffected citizen approach” has received criticism from several authors (Cammaerts et al. 2014; Harris et al. 2010; O’Toole et al. 2003; Norris 2003) who have tried to look at the process of doing politics from a different perspective, considering alternative ways to analyse youth citizenship and engagement. For instance, a study on European youth by Cammaerts et al. (2014) indicates that young people are willing to engage politically but that they are disenchanted with mainstream political discourse and institutions, which they believe exclude them or ignore their needs.

Coincidentally, research conducted by Norris (2003) on political activism in Europe indicates that “a generational shift in repertoires from the traditional politics of loyalties towards the contemporary politics of choice” (p. 2) has occurred, and therefore that youth are more likely to engage in “cause-oriented” politics (what some authors call “micro-politics”).

Also noteworthy, a study on youth in Australia by Harris et al. (2010) draws attention to the fact that young people’s social lives and participatory practices are complex and not always oriented towards spectacular activism or subcultural participation, but simply take the form of individualized everyday activities. Indeed, there is a broad group of young people who are not apathetic nor unconventionally engaged but who continue to be interested in social and political issues and seek recognition from the political system in their daily lives.

Studies and surveys on already marginalized groups such as Black, Latino

and Asian youth in the United States (Sullivan 2014; Sullivan & Godsay 2014; Godsay 2014; Hart & Atkins 2002 *apud* Cohen 2006) or rural youth, have also often applied standard measures of participation, in the attempt to address the seemingly political or civic disengagement of these groups. For Cohen (2006), the assumptions contained in such studies are problematic, since personal experiences are rarely elicited. Instead, participants' responses are restricted in order to arrive at a group of actions (e.g. voting, engaging in protests, donating to a charity, being a member of a political party or civil society organization) said to represent the politics of young people. Furthermore, according to Celestine (2009, p. 8), "social scientists who explore civic engagement are generally not interested in detailed evaluations of youth civic life along racial lines".

That being said, a new kind of research *on* and *with* children and young people is being done, which takes their social agency and life experiences into deeper consideration. Various empirical studies of child soldiers (Ensor 2012; Thompson 2007), refugee youth (Chatty 2010; Kumsa 2006), young documented and undocumented migrants (Carrasco & Seif 2014; Hare 2007; Gow 2005), LGBT youth (Russel 2002) or youth with disabilities (Yeung et al. 2014; Skelton & Valentine 2003) have increasingly highlighted certain personal aspects of young people's lives that cannot be detached from their status as citizens.

Moreover, much research now – namely the body of literature concerned with "children's geographies" – is dedicated to finding out what children and young people think, how they see the world and how they view issues ranging from independent mobility to peace negotiations (Carver et al. 2013; Marshall 2013). This stream of research owes a great deal to the "new" sociology of childhood, which emerged as a critique to the dominant child development paradigm¹³ and called for an acceptance of children and young people as social actors in their own right (James & Prout 2005).

However, some authors look critically at this recent proliferation of accounts of young people's daily lives and at research claims to represent their "voices". Noting that most of this "new" sociology is actually grounded in Western ideals of youth (such as independence, individuality and participation) these authors pose a

¹³ Within the social sciences, the field of youth studies carries a strong legacy from Western developmental psychology models, such as Jean Piaget's four stages of child development (Herrera 2014; Chatty 2010;). Most literature on youth inherited assumptions of universal phases in physical maturation, identity formation and normative behavior (Wyn & White 1997) that only started to be challenged in the 1990s.

number of challenges that contemporary childhood and youth studies should address: What of youth who do not want to be agents or participate in public affairs? What about those growing up in cultural contexts where relationality matters more than individuality, as in Middle Eastern societies? What happens to youth vulnerability¹⁴ with so much focus on agency? (Valentine & Meinert 2009, Bluebond-Langner & Korbin 2007 and Horton & Kraftl 2006 *apud* Tisdall & Punch 2012). Possible ways to tackle these challenges include (re)considering indigenous culture, the importance of family relationships and kinship in young people's lives, as well as exploring alternative paradigms. With these critiques in mind, Tisdall & Punch (2012, p. 259) thus suggest:

Focusing on children and young people's perspectives, agency and participation is no longer sufficient; greater emphasis is needed on the intricacies, complexities, tensions, ambiguities and ambivalences of children and young people's lives across both Majority and Minority World contexts.

2.2 Youth as citizens in the Middle East and the West Bank

As the percentage of young people in the world is dropping, the Arab world is witnessing the opposite trend¹⁵, in what has been called "a youth bulge". This places a great amount of responsibility on the shoulders of youth as the fraction of society that can make a change towards the development of their countries. Therefore, it is this segment's perceptions that need to be assessed when examining the notion of citizenship (Maghoub & Morsi 2007). But since Arab youth have, more often than not, been depicted as either passive victims of their social and political circumstances or as threats to regional/global stability¹⁶, little is known about their perceptions about this concept.

According to Sara Mourad (2009), the challenges imposed on the Arab world by its demographic reality are aggravated by the fact that youth is a phase that did not previously exist in these societies, as older generations often got married and formed a family still in their teenage years. But as "The Millennium Development

¹⁴ For example, Judith Butler (2004) conceives of vulnerability not as the opposite of agency but as intrinsic to it, an idea that I further develop in the theory section.

¹⁵ The MENA region includes the largest youth population in the world. More than 50% is below the age of 25, and approximately 30% is between the ages of 18 and 30 (United Nations 2010, p. 1).

¹⁶ Studies on Middle Eastern youth as victims of trauma and PTSD abound (Baker 1990; Montgomery & Foldspang 2001), as well as policing and securitization discourses, often leading to their identification with terrorism (Fuller 2004; Fuller 2003; Hendrixson 2004). According to Youniss et al. (2013), the attraction of youth to armed conflict and political violence in weak or failed states was a main focus of a bulk of research done in the past decade.

Goals in the Arab Region 2007” report acknowledged, young Arabs are becoming both more numerous and better educated which, coupled with the phenomenon of unemployment, contributes to a delay of marriage and parenthood.

Focusing on Egypt, Diane Singerman’s analysis (2011) reveals that youth in the region had long been excluded from formal politics by authoritarianism and socially excluded by the stretching of adolescence, but also economically excluded by high unemployment and insecure jobs in the informal sector. Indeed, many authors argue that it is harder for young people to exercise their rights of citizenship before they reach economic independence and that, when lacking their own resources, youth are limited to “citizenship by proxy” (Ibrahim 2013; Jones 1995 *apud* Beauvais et al. 2001). This combination of repressive and exploitative material conditions provided a fertile environment for the mass protests that began in 2011 – facilitated, of course, by contemporary communication technologies (Menezes et al. 2013).

Undoubtedly, besides the overwhelming involvement of popular classes in the processes of overthrowing ruling dictatorships, a striking aspect of the Arab uprisings was the leading role played by youth in organizing and sustaining the struggle (*ibid.*) – the same youth who had been described as uninterested and passive by the political and academic discourse of the previous decades. So why did 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, used in studies on young Middle Easterners. Writing specifically about Egyptian youth, Youniss et al. (2013) ask whether items such as voting or following current political trends on the news are even useful for estimating participation in societies with oppressive regimes, manipulated elections and state controlled media (such as Egypt under Mubarak).

As pointed out before, young people’s exercise of citizenship cannot be encapsulated into a “passive/engaged” binary. Some observers believe that Arab youth are willing to do something for the common good, but that they currently prefer participating without a long-term binding commitment (Mourad 2009). Moreover, their analysis of the state and the public sphere does not necessarily use the same language or channels as adults. As in other parts of the world, youth in the Middle East have their own understanding of power relations and ways in which they negotiate them in the different aspects of their lives (Maira 2013; AUB-IFI

2011). This argument is supported by the work of authors on “micro-politics”, “non-movements” or “politics of everyday life” (Maira 2013; Bayat 2010; Maira 2009; Gren 2009), to which I shall return in the theory chapter.

Regarding the situation in the OPT, most depictions of young people’s lives are framed by the lack of basic elements of civil society, by a situation of “politically engineered” poverty and by the complexities of citizenship within an occupied territory where a conservative cultural mentality persists. However, Dawn Chatty (2005) argues that this is a situation that Palestinian youth do not accept as unchangeable. On the contrary, they refuse to be seen as merely passive or vulnerable, forming “a critical mass whose predicaments, agency and aspirations need special consideration” (p. 319).

Despite important changes in the nature of the Palestinian struggle and the fact that the impact of the Arab uprisings fell short of most observers’ expectations¹⁷, a rethinking of the politics of young people seems to be in place in the current post-Oslo environment (Maira 2013). A number of more or less organized initiatives (e.g. “Youth Against Settlements”, “Youth for Al-Quds”, “March 15”), and the spillover of culture into politics – noticeable, for instance, in a thriving hip-hop movement – are evidence that young people keep looking for spaces to express their perspectives on society and impact decision-making, often through alternative and mediatized ways (Nabulsi 2014; Maira 2013; Maira 2008). These and other expressions of citizenship within the OPT cannot be fully understood or appreciated unless one follows a more open definition of politics and engagement.

While little is known about forms of engagement among Palestinian youth, even less is known about the perceptions and practices of citizenship of young Palestinians who are neither formally engaged nor involved in subcultural movements. There are few empirical studies of ethnographic influence that touch upon citizenship as an everyday reality for young people in the OPT. An exception, of particular interest to my study, is Brian Barber’s work on Palestinian youth’s life experiences, which paints a more nuanced picture of their relation to politics,

¹⁷ The post-revolutionary environment is fertile in reflections on how the “Arab Spring” left Palestinians behind, and how youth did not manage to assume the same role as in other Arab countries (Salam 2012; Alijla 2014a; Alijla 2014b; Kaiser-Cross 2014).

citizenship and engagement, both due to a “micro-social” approach and to the author’s reflexivity.

In “Politics, politics, and more politics”, Barber (2014) shows how “the political is a thread that runs through every facet” of young people’s lives (p. 220) and how political concerns are perceived as personal concerns. The experiences of a group of young Palestinians from Gaza, interviewed between 1994 and 1996 (after the first *intifada*), illuminate how the present and the future of youth in Palestine are deeply affected by the political dynamics. Barber invites the reader into the mundane aspects of the life of his informants. Hussam’s university rejection of his scholarship application for not being registered as a member of Fatah (then the dominant political faction in Gaza) is one of many examples of the extent to which politics saturates daily life (p. 213).¹⁸

Through this exploration of the personal sphere and of the conditions in which these young people grow up, Barber found an interesting tension between the “ability to express intense defiance against one authority while simultaneously maintaining allegiance, respect, and deference for other authorities”, such as parents or organizational hierarchies (Barber 1999, p. 203). This tension, he claims, might come as a surprise to the Western observer, since mainstream media coverage (and I may add, academic coverage) of youth in Palestine has mostly exposed the defiant and often violent part – during the spectacular, yet brief, events of the *intifadas*. As I wish to demonstrate in my study, life for young people in Palestine is rather more complex and paradoxical.

2.3 Some conclusions

The dominant trends in literature on youth from a citizenship perspective are in line with Jones & Gaventa’s idea that “very little is known about the realities of how different people understand themselves as citizens” (2002, v). Even though there has been an effort to include personal experiences into studies on young people, the literature is still scarce on how ordinary youth around the world reshape and make sense of citizenship, especially outside traditional frameworks and standard measures for investigating this concept. This is a gap that this study

¹⁸ It is, of course, important to keep in mind the time bracket that separates Barber’s research and the present political reality of Palestine, as well as the differences that separate life in Gaza from life in the West Bank. Nonetheless, his findings and discussion remain insightful to my study.

identifies and tries to fill. Moreover, it is important to reflect upon the extent to which focusing on lived experiences (micro-social approach) contributes to furthering our critical understanding of the complexities and ambiguities of young people's place in society.

The existing literature is also consistent in viewing young people's citizenship status as "precarious" (Beauvais et al. 2001) at best. This seems particularly true of Arab youth, whose rights and opportunities for participation depend largely on specific political, socioeconomic and cultural contexts but are generally limited by power verticality, patriarchal social norms and centralized decision-making, still major features of Arab societies. However, again, not enough light has been shed on youth citizenship "from below", since greater emphasis is usually placed on formal political acts or spectacular forms of authority defiance (e.g. elections, uprisings, protests, suicide bombings) rather than the more simple moments of life lived by ordinary Middle Easterners (Bowen et al. 2014).

3. THEORY

3.1 Dimensions of citizenship and classic theories

Throughout time, 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 the Greek case, for instance, rights of citizenship applied exclusively to non-slave adult men.

The modern idea of citizenship has mostly been looked at from two traditions of thought: the *republican*, inspired by the writings of Aristotle, Machiavelli or Rousseau, which peaked during the American and French revolutions and finds modern expression in the work of Hannah Arendt or Richard Bellamy; and the *liberal*, which paved the way for the theories of T.H. Marshall and John Rawls. While the republican model focuses on political agency and the promotion of a common good through civic virtue (Kartal 2002), the liberal model emphasizes a relationship between the individual and the polity (Sassen 2002) that entitles the first to rights and obligations. These two competing but by no means incompatible perceptions have framed the debate on citizenship and its extension to other parts of the world, with the liberal tradition being historically prevalent.

Citizenship is generally understood as encompassing three dimensions or angles: legal, political and social. Differences between conceptions of citizenship revolve mainly around the precise definition of each dimension, their relative importance, the relations between them and the appropriate normative standards (Stanford Encyclopedia Philosophy 2015).

In his seminal work “Citizenship and the Social Class”, T. H. Marshall 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 (e.g. public safety, health, education). Accordingly, the citizen is supposed to respect the law and has the right to claim the law's protection. Marshall's definition of the citizen as the bearer of rights and obligations, with a stress on equality, remains central to the discussion on citizenship, namely in the

work of contemporary liberal political theorists like John Rawls.¹⁹

The political dimension considers citizens more as *political agents*, actively participating in a society's political institutions and involved in decision-making. With the spread of the democratic paradigm in Western societies, a growing number of authors points to the importance of participation at the regional or local levels as a fundamental right and duty of citizenship, “a standard against which democracies should be measured” (Hart 1992, pp. 8-14) and “a primary mechanism for developing legitimacy” (Forbrig 2005, p. 12).²⁰

Finally, the social dimension refers to the “structures of acknowledgement” (Phelan 2001 *apud* Iija 2011, p. 50) of membership in a political community, which provide a source of *identity* and *belonging*. In a straightforward way, without recognition, the rights of a citizen will not be fully realized and participation in the functioning of society will not be possible. This recognition aspect of citizenship is also intimately related to citizens' subjective sense of belonging, sometimes called the “psychological” dimension (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2011; Iija 2011).

The relationship between the three dimensions of citizenship is a complex one: “the rights a citizen enjoys will partly define the range of available political activities while explaining how citizenship can be a source of identity” (Rawls 1971 *apud* Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2011).

3.2 Critiques of classic citizenship

Classic theories of citizenship have encountered numerous critiques²¹, with authors from different fields arguing that citizenship should be conceived as something *more* than a clearly defined relationship between a state and a citizen, regulated by rights and obligations, and enacted through formal political participation. By using some of these critiques as a combined tool of analysis, I

¹⁹ Following the publication of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, Rawls' ideas became the most representative of the liberal model.

²⁰ Models of society that emphasize this dimension could potentially take the status and rights of disadvantaged groups or minorities better into account. However, there is always a danger that the paradigm of participation can also exclude certain people from decision-making or provide an illusive or tokenistic chance of participating, thus merely strengthening the power of those already in socially dominant positions (Farthing 2012; Honohan 2002 *apud* Iija 2011; Hart 1992).

²¹ According to Holston & Appadurai (1996, p. 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”.

believe we can get a better idea of what this “*more*” – which remains a “stubborn blind spot” of theories of citizenship (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2011) – might entail.

3.2.1 Beyond national citizenship

Mainstream conceptions of citizenship are still based on a presumed need for sovereign territorial states and on the idea that the nation-state is the natural form of the modern world. Several authors have already exposed the anachronism of these assumptions, which contradict the reality of 21st century societies, and questioned the once taken for granted correspondence between citizenship, nation and state (Agamben 1994; Soysal 2000; Sassen 2002). But although the nation-state is still “the primary framework to secure citizenship as membership of a society” (Skeia 2003 *apud* Iija 2011, p. 9), it is evident that citizenship rights are also enforced by supranational institutions, like the United Nations or the European Union (EU), and by subnational ones, like municipal governments.

Thus, Soysal (2000) notes, as the link between citizenship and nationality weakens, a number of other forms of citizenship arise (e.g. people with dual citizenship, guest workers who hold various rights without a formal citizenship status, EU citizens, citizens living in autonomous regions like Catalonia or Scotland). With these new forms, new ways of advancing claims emerge beyond the frame of national citizenship. For instance, looking at the European context, when Turkish immigrants in Berlin or Pakistanis in Britain participate in public institutions or put pressure on the governments, they mobilize around the rights implied in a European citizenship they do not possess, and also around particular identities (e.g. Muslim), often appealing to universal human rights discourses to support their claims. Additionally, some dimensions of citizenship experienced by certain social groups (e.g. undocumented migrants, housewives, stateless people, refugees) in our increasingly diverse societies, are hard to account for in the traditional language of citizenship (Sassen 2002).

For many authors, this proliferation of different experiences indicates “a sort of vitality that is significant”. If people invest themselves in claiming rights, they are producing new ways of being subjects with rights but also with responsibilities (Isin & Nielsen 2008, p. 1). For others, they require abandoning citizenship as an analytical concept altogether. The figure of the refugee is of particular importance in

this discussion. In an article entitled “We refugees” (1994), Giorgio Agamben illustrates how the refugee constitutes the antithesis of the citizen:

If in the system of the nation-state the refugee represents such a disquieting element, it is above all because by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty.

Agamben 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, the refugee should be considered for what he is, as a border concept that challenges the very principles of the nation-state. Sicakkan (2004) presents a complementary argument, stating that when *refugeehood* and citizenship are conceptually tied to each other, we tend to look at refugees in terms of citizenship’s assumptions and fail to recognize their human sufferings.

These ideas beg some questions. How are the attributes and definitions of what is means to be a citizen changing with globalization processes? Can other forms and locations for citizenship exist? If the transformations arising from globalization processes correspond to changes in the institution of citizenship and if, as a result of traditional conceptualizations, the experiences of certain individuals tend to be downplayed or erased, then this should lead to new conceptualizations that include emergent subjects and ‘sites’ of citizenship both above and below the nation-state (Sassen 2002; Mavroudi 2008; Khalil 2007; Soyal 2000).

And, perhaps more provocatively, do we need citizenship (or which elements of it) in this emergent post-national order? For Agamben, the answer resides in reclaiming “bare life” as a basis for new forms of political action of non-citizens. For other authors (Kerber 1997; Owens 2009), the link between human rights and national identities and the separation between natural life and the political world – more in line with Hanna Arendt’s view – remain relevant, albeit much more elastic than they were before.

3.2.2 Feminist and *intersectionality* theory

Since the 1970s, feminists have strongly criticized classic theories of citizenship, providing an important impetus to the development of alternative conceptions. As Hobson & Lister argue, “the ostensible gender-neutrality of the label of ‘citizenship’ obscures the gendered exclusions constructed in its name”

(2001, p. 4). A major contribution of feminist scholarship has thus been the illumination of the gendered construction of citizenship and of the ways in which, “in both its civic republican and liberal clothes, [it] developed as a quintessentially male practice and ideal” (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Underpinning this gendered construction was a rigid separation between the private and the public spheres, along with the dichotomous male-female qualities associated with it. The feminist critique not only demonstrates the interconnection between these two spheres, emphasizing how private inequality affects access to resources and power in the public domain; but it also challenges the view of the domestic and intimate spheres as inherently non-political (“the personal is political”) (Cherubini 2011; Hobson & Lister 2001; Lister 2007a).

While an androcentric bias was pivotal to all classic conceptions of citizenship, for a long time women were excluded from the rights of citizenship considered by the liberal tradition, since they were not conceived of as independent and autonomous individuals. Instead, women lived under coverture of their fathers and later of their husbands who, as heads of the household, enjoyed the status of citizens, together with various rights over them (Hobson & Lister 2001).

Feminist theory has definitively exposed the problems with women’s exclusion from citizenship, but introducing of the notion of *intersectionality* allows us to conceptualize it in even more nuanced terms, “as a gendered, racialized and classed construction, grounded on a system of stratified rights and opportunities which differentiates subjects according to their ethnicity and racialization, gender and class position” (Cherubini 2011, p. 1).

Writing about the different historical experiences of American citizenship, Kerber (1997) introduces the metaphor of “braided citizenship”²², identifying several 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 such as women, African-Americans, Native-Americans, legal and illegal immigrants, refugees and Americans born in places acquired or possessed by the US (like Texas before the Mexican War or Puerto Rico), whose lived experience and whose memory of accomplishing citizenship are inconsistent with those of other American citizens.

²² “A braid is of a single length, as citizenship at its best is a single status, but a braid is made of several strands that twist around each other, and each strand (as in the braids we make of hair or rope) may itself be composed of many threads gathered together” (Kerber 1997, p. 837).

3.2.3 Citizenship through a “youth lens”

Because “independent citizenship is stressed as the goal of youth” (Spence 2005, p. 48), young people are the most targeted category by the political system in democratic societies to become active citizens. Paradoxically, most theorists who have closely looked at the idea of citizenship have done so on behalf of adults, especially males. T. H. Marshall’s analysis, for instance, based on the notion of equal citizenship, saw the adult male as the “citizen *par excellence*” (1950, p. 24) and excluded children altogether. Although Marshall does discuss the importance of compulsory education in the training of the future citizen, the status of children was merely that of “citizens in the making” (*ibid.*, p. 25). In the words of Coady (2008, p. 4): “They were seen as human becomings, not human beings. The compulsory education system would form or mold them into citizens. They were to be acted upon rather than acting”.

As with other social groups, feminist and *intersectionality* theory raise strong arguments against the invisibility of children and young people from the debate on citizenship, at the same time providing a powerful tool with which to analyze their experiences. Roche (1999), for example, mentions the contribution of feminist scholars and others who have “unmasked traditional notions of citizenship” (p. 476) when he calls for a redrawn image of citizenship into a “child-friendly” concept, arguing that the exclusion of children operates to the detriment of all.

There has also been a call among some authors (Bell 1995; LeFrançois 2014; Watts & Flanagan 2007) for the inclusion of “*adultism*” (Flasher 1978) as a form of oppression, along with sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, etc. The concept of *adultism* (also referred to as *gerontocracy*)²³ opens up for an analysis of children and young people’s experiences that delineates their reduced social power and disadvantaged citizenship status, *vis-à-vis* adults. Once again, *intersectionality* adds to the discussion, emphasizing that young people’s relationship to citizenship is mediated by social divisions, just as that of adults, calling for a “difference-centered” theorization of youth (Lister 2007b, p. 698).

²³ *Adultism* has also been used to explain young people’s position within adult-centered social research and paternalistic political/ developmental practice. It has been pointed out that *adultism* has an impact in how we deal with other forms of oppression: “The pain we experience as young people helps condition us, to play one of two roles as we get older: to accept further mistreatment as women, as people of color, as workers, etc., or to flip to the other side of the relationship and act in oppressive ways toward others who are in relatively less powerful positions than ours” (Bell 1995).

3.3 Re-orienting the study of what it means to be a citizen: towards the idea of “lived citizenship”

In the previous sections, I have exposed the ways in which citizenship has predominantly been thought about – “the nation-state framework”, “the androcentric framework”, “the adult-centered framework” – and presented the limitations of such frameworks. I have also showed that it is not incoherent to speak of the citizenship of “non-citizens”, “not yet citizens”, “quasi-citizens” and so forth, since people without *formal citizenship*²⁴ may still perceive themselves as part of an “imagined community”²⁵ (be it national, religious, ethnic, global) and be subjects of what most of us call citizenship, in a variety of contexts.

This section will now provide some alternative understandings to analyze how different individuals or groups of people, including those that fall short of the definition of formal citizens, experience and make sense of citizenship. To create my analytical toolkit, I draw on a stream of critical investigations focused on the everyday performance of citizenship, namely 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 circumvent, negotiate or contest the mechanisms of their exclusion and claim recognition by the political system (Bayat 2010; Harris et al. 2010; Lister 2007a; Lister 2007b, Bosniak 2006).

This consideration of ordinary practices as *political* has produced a growing interest in the routines and habits of the everyday through which subjects become claimants of rights and holders of responsibilities. The result has been the inclusion of *habitus* (internalized or embodied ways of thought and conduct) alongside status within studies of citizenship (Isin & Nielsen 2008).

Asef Bayat’s *Life as Politics* (2010), for instance, 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 more spectacular “politics of protest”. Although Bayat engages specifically with social movement theory, his general argument that common daily practices *matter* opens up new possibilities to explore unnoticed social practices and bypass rigid dichotomies of “active/passive” and

²⁴ As Isin & Nielsen (2008) explain, critical studies of citizenship over the last two decades have emphasized that citizenship is not merely a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens. Thus, many scholars now differentiate formal citizenship from substantive citizenship and consider the latter to be the condition of possibility of the former. This distinction is a central feature of my study.

²⁵ The term “imagined community” was coined by Benedict Anderson (1983) and referred primarily to the nation, although it has been later applied to other types of communities.

“personal/political”, thus being useful to investigate citizenship. One of the groups Bayat considers engaged in acts of defiance towards established norms and authority, by sticking to ordinary practices of everyday life, is precisely youth. Through 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” (p. 18). For Bayat, (re)claiming youthfulness – “youthfulness” meaning 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 for 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.

Judith Butler’s (2014) conception of vulnerability as constitutive of (rather than opposed to) political agency is also relevant to the task of re-orienting the study of citizenship towards its understanding as an everyday practice. Departing from a reflection on gender performativity, she argues that, as humans, we are inevitably exposed to vulnerability and affected by discourses we never chose. Yet, those very discourses and vulnerability inform our practices of resistance.²⁶ This perspective – which constitutes a different approach to Agamben’s premise that human life is sometimes negated by power – allows us, for example, to rethink the position of refugees and other aliens in relation to citizenship. If what “remains unrealized by the universal constitutes it essentially” (Butler *apud* Bosniak 2006), it makes little sense to study citizenship without considering the exclusions and multiple actors it produces.

According to Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen (2008), 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” (p. 18). This idea of acts as constitutive of actors, is very important for the point I try to make in this thesis – that it is in fact by acting, by performing “on the stage of existence”, by living, that one becomes a citizen.

²⁶ Aware of those who worry that a focus on vulnerability might reintroduce paternalistic ways of thinking, Butler clarifies that vulnerability does not discount the political agency of the subjugated, nor shores up paternalistic power. She considers undoing this binary between vulnerability and agency to be “a feminist task” (2014, p. 16).

In this sense, the notion of “lived citizenship” developed by Ruth Lister encapsulates most of the critical insights presented in this chapter. It is, therefore, a central reference in my analysis. 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 & Williamson 1999 *apud* Lister et al. 2007c, p. 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, p. 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, p. 115).

This framework has predominantly been used in studies on immigrants (Nyhagen 2015; Vera-Larrucea 2013; Kim 2012), 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, pp. 116-117).

3.4 Revisiting the research question

Informed by the previous review of literature and theory, the study’s main research question can now be revisited. It shall be reformulated as follows: *How do young Palestinians in Nablus experience and make sense of citizenship in everyday life and in what ways is that experience connected to (or disconnected from) formal citizenship?*

Moreover, in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of these experiences and perceptions, I specifically pose two sub-questions. These are of a more descriptive nature and will function as stepping stones to answer the main one: *What social issues do participants identify as the ones most affecting their lives and the life of their community? What factors do they perceive as hindering or*

facilitating their full exercise of citizenship?

In the empirical sections that follow, I address the proposed research questions drawing on some of the presented critiques of citizenship to explore the experiences of a group of young Palestinians in Nablus, while keeping the notion of “lived citizenship” as the overarching analytical framework.

4. METHODS

Inquiring about the life experiences of young people in Nablus and addressing the questions set out for this research is a complex and sensitive endeavour. Therefore, the instruments for data collection and analysis presented below reflect this sensitivity, as well as a commitment to reflexivity and sound ethical research.

4.1 Research design

According to most authors, qualitative research allows for a deep investigation of the motives behind individual aspirations, values and attitudes (Fraser & Gondim 2004), which is suitable to the aims of my study. Qualitative research involves the management and analysis of a large corpus of unstructured data (Bryman 2012), collected using one or more methods. Here, a combination of methods produced the data in which the study is based. I have adopted methodological triangulation for several reasons: to provide a critique to traditional approaches in social research, to check the validity of findings, and to be able to analyse the research questions from multiple angles (*ibid.*). I also follow a phenomenological approach, since I examine how a number of people perceive and experience a concept or phenomenon (Creswell 2007), in this case 'citizenship'.

Ethnography is deemed particularly useful for the study of children and young people's social lives (Tisdall & Punch 2012). Overall, my study denotes an influence of ethnographic methodology, although the length and the depth of the activities developed in the field admittedly do not make for a full-scale ethnography. Ethnographic fieldwork implies an understanding of a group's culture and behaviour as well as detailed accounts of the setting (Bryman 2012), in an attempt "to see as the persons studied view their world", which has been called the "subjective perspective" (*ibid.*, xvii). To some extent, these elements were present throughout the research process and I thus consider that a visual *micro-ethnography* (*ibid.*, p. 433) was carried out.

A *micro-ethnography* involves focusing on a particular aspect of a topic within the group or organization one is studying, such as uncovering understandings and experiences of citizenship amongst a group of young people. My role can be characterized as that of a "*partially participating observer*" (*ibid.*, pp. 442-443), since I took part in some of the group's daily activities (albeit as a non-member) for

a period of time. However, observation was not the main source of data, as visual, written and verbal accounts from participants were more significant.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the marked collaborative nature of my research. While I cannot claim that my study fulfils the criteria of Participatory Action Research (PAR) – which is framed by a radical project of social change and put into action through very specific strategies (Bergold & Thomas 2012; Bryman 2012) – I do argue in favour of the possibility and significance of a deeper involvement of local people in knowledge production. Collaborative elements can be found in the incentives for participant input throughout the research process, as well as in the attempts to generate critical thinking by means of group discussion or individual introspection.

Moreover, because in collaborative research findings should return to the communities, a plan for the dissemination of findings beyond traditional scientific communication or publication was developed. A brochure – featuring a basic description of the study, information on methods and a summary of the main results (in Arabic) – will be produced and later shared with participants and those otherwise involved in the project.

4.1.1 Research setting and selection of participants

The present study is based on fieldwork conducted over a period of 4 months (between August and November 2014) with adolescents living in the West Bank city of Nablus. In the beginning of September, a group of young people active in the organization I volunteered with were invited for a meeting, briefed about the aims and implications of my research project and invited to collaborate. Five of the youth who attended this meeting showed interest in taking part. This was an optimal size group considering that my study intends to explore the research questions rather than offer any conclusive or generalizing evidence on the topic.

Thus, the research project involved a total of 5 participants (2 males and 3 females), 3 of which resided in Balata refugee camp, 1 in Askar refugee camp and 1 in the city of Nablus proper. Participants were aged between 15 and 16 years old at the time of data collection and had been active members of this youth organization for approximately 3 years. They all had attended a photography workshop organized by another international intern prior to my arrival and were already familiar with basic photographic techniques.

Most field activities were carried out following a two-week summer camp on political participation and democracy led by the youth (those composing the sample and others), which took place in the beginning of August in Balata, at the youth centre that hosts the organization. Group meetings and participant observation sessions occurred primarily at said youth centre and occasionally during trips or seminars in other West Bank locations.

The organization's youth worker and my colleague in Nablus, Abood, agreed to be the gatekeeper and main translator. Due to his close relationship with the youth, his native command of the Palestinian dialect and his personal interest in the research topic, he played a very important role during fieldwork, helping me overcome some of the initial challenges of my study. In the sub-section that follows I shall provide some information about him as well, since his presence was constant and crucial throughout the development of this project.

4.1.2 Introducing the participants and the youth worker

Yasmin is a cheerful teenager who refers to religion and Palestine as her two passions. It is not unusual to find her giggling around the youth centre in skinny jeans, flowery sneakers and a neon green hijab, which she carefully readjusts from time to time. She lives in Balata with her family – “but my roots are in Kufr Saba”, she proudly explains. Yasmin enjoys talking to friends on Facebook or on her phone, to which she looks as madly attached as any girl her age.

There are not many words that fit **Noor**'s description better than *fierce*. She is also a resident in Balata, and the older sister in a sizeable family. Opinionated and confident, Noor stands out for talking as much as the boys, if not more. Although she is not afraid to argue or disagree, her peers seem to hold great respect for her views, and so does the youth worker.

Farrah is definitely the quietest of the girls. Born in Venezuela, her family decided to return to Balata a few years ago. She speaks fluent Spanish (like me), which provided a space for us to connect on a different level. With a very low and soft voice, she seems the most uncomfortable with confronting, attributing responsibilities or being critical of social norms. She likes reading books and listening to music.

Said is the only one from the group who lives in Askar camp, although his roots are in Jaffa. A Real Madrid fan, trainers and football jersey are his usual outfit

for a day at the youth centre. In my eyes, Said is a mature and self-aware young man, always ready to help others and participate in common tasks (including cleaning). He enjoys spending time with his friends yet wishes he could visit other places in Palestine or go to the sea, “but that is not allowed”. When Said is not hanging out with friends he tries to find a place to work, something he recognizes to be “very hard [here] due to high unemployment”.

Mohamed is the oldest of the five (16 years old) and also the only one who is not a refugee. He lives in the same middle class neighbourhood as the organization’s youth worker, in the city of Nablus. Treated by the latter as a little brother, Mohamed seems to enjoy special protection while at the same time being the target of the highest expectations. Watching football, spending time on the Internet or on his phone (which he opted to use instead of a disposable camera) are his favourite hobbies.

Abood is 24 years old. He has dropped out of college and works for the youth organization in part-time, his main income coming from his job as a house painter. He is a combination of friend, confidant and leader to the kids who hang out at the youth centre in Balata. As a teenager, Abood was an active member of the organization, having participated in youth exchanges in Europe and conflict-resolution seminars with Israelis. He is of course selective about the people who know of his activism, since many of his close friends do not approve of the work he develops (which they see as normalizing the situation between Israel and Palestine). While Abood shows enthusiasm in his engagement, he is simultaneously demotivated by the social, political and financial challenges of doing youth work in the West Bank and the lack of opportunities for training in this field.

4.1.3 Employing photography in qualitative research

Visual research methods have theoretically played a minor role within the social sciences since these have mostly been word-based and the capacity of images to reveal “truths” has been questioned (Epstein et al. 2006). Though social scientists, particularly anthropologists, have always recorded information in visual form, little attention was initially paid to the kinds of knowledge images could produce (Harper 2001).

That being said, many authors have consistently called for alternative methodologies that provide creative ways of reflecting experiences and analytically richer approaches to the inclusion of visual data in contemporary research are becoming more common. Increasingly accepted by researchers as a subjective and reflexive form of qualitative data production, visual methods have successfully entrenched major fields of inquiry (Konoblauch et al. 2008).²⁷

Apologists of visual research methods have utilized photography and video in their studies, although the first have received much more attention, perhaps for its greater accessibility. Images can function as important records of spatial and social relationships, capture unidentified needs and provide greater levels of detail about emotional meanings than words-only data (Loeffler *apud* Genoa & Dupuis 2013). They also seem to encourage and facilitate communication between researcher and participant, namely story-telling around research topics (Genoa & Dupuis 2013). Artistic representations of lived experiences shed light on oppression, challenge dominant views, stereotypes and myths, spark critical thinking and provide insight into the perspectives of those who are suffering or have been silenced (Genoa & Dupuis 2013). Therefore, photography is a good choice for studying young people in Nablus.

The choice of using visual methods originated in my intention to open spaces for creativity and free expression, as well as to create some degree of collaboration during the research process, in the belief that the hierarchy between researcher and informants could be somewhat reduced. The research design was to some extent inspired by a method known as *photovoice*, which consists of an overlap of different theoretical and methodological approaches such as feminism, critical pedagogy²⁸, and social documentary photography.

Photovoice has been defined and applied in different ways since it was first used by Wang and Burris (1994) – then as *photonovella* – in a participatory health promotion project with women in rural China. My study draws on this and other applications of the method (Wang et al. 1996; Carlson et al. 2006), albeit with

²⁷ Not only within anthropology – where they were originally used (namely to document the lifestyle of indigenous communities) – but also sociology, political science, health, education, social work or management.

²⁸ 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 its development of the notion of “critical consciousness”. “Critical consciousness” (Freire 1972) may be understood as the process by which those who are under oppressive circumstances can learn to analyse the forces causing those circumstances and eventually resist/change them, becoming more fully human.

substantial adaptations. For instance, in this case a broad topic was defined previously and a problem-solving approach was not adopted, which would have been counterproductive given my lack of experience and the financial, human and time limitations of the project.²⁹

Visual approaches to qualitative research such as *photovoice* are considered adequate in studies aimed at enhancing perception and understanding of events, identity and self (McIntosh 2010) with groups that have little opportunity to articulate, justify or assert their interests (Bergold & Thomas 2012). Although disagreeing with the argument of a universal appeal of photographs to all cultures (this can be an issue to some Muslims, especially women), the use of photos proved adequate to work with this specific group of people. Asking participants to take pictures gave me access to sensitive topics (e.g. death, forced displacement, discrimination) that would otherwise have been more difficult to approach with youth living in a conservative environment like that of Balata refugee camp.

4.2 Instruments for data collection

The process of data collection consisted of two main instruments, a photography exercise and a set of individual interviews, complemented by other field activities that took the form of a “*micro-ethnography*” (Bryman 2012, p. 433).

4.2.1 Photography exercise

As mentioned above, there are several variations in the way *photovoice* has been applied in social research.³⁰ In this study, the youth were able to control most of the documentation and were given one camera each (instead of working in groups) that could be taken home so that the reflexive process would continue outside the youth centre.

For a successful completion of the photographic exercise, I held a series of group meetings. During the first meeting, with the support of the youth worker, I briefed the youth about the purposes of the study, the main ethical issues related to participation in academic research, and gave them general information about my

²⁹ In *photovoice* community concerns should ideally guide the research topic selection and community-created solutions should be implemented at the end of the process (Carlson et al. 2006).

³⁰ For example, some researchers took photos together with the subjects (usually children), while others allowed them to take the cameras home. In some cases a camera was shared by a group of people but in most studies there was one camera per participant.

background and current affiliation. This was explained in simplified terms, as the intention was to create empathy and put the youth at ease, while ensuring that they were aware of the implications of participating. We also talked briefly about the topic of citizenship, in order to explore their overall understanding of the concept. After collecting verbal consent from the youth, I distributed informed consent documents to be handed to the youth's parents/guardians.

At the end of the second meeting, I gave participants 27-exposure disposable cameras with a built-in flash and asked them to take photos according to some pre-established guidelines (i.e. "Photograph things you are proud of and things you would like to change in your community"; "Photograph what you like and dislike in the place where you live/play/study"; "Photograph aspects of your life that you find hard to express in words").³¹ The idea behind these instructions was to avoid having the youth photograph without any reflexive process. Although some degree of creative freedom was given, it seemed important to ensure that the group's photos would be able to trigger discussion about the research topic. I also gave participants small notebooks, where they could write details surrounding the photos (such as date and place) as well as any personal thoughts or particular reasons for having taken them.

The logic behind the use of disposable cameras was twofold. First, my limited financial resources made it impossible to provide participants with digital cameras (the youth organization only much later made 3 digital cameras available for use in the office). Second, unlike digital photography, the analogic process requires more concentration and attention to detail on the part of the photographer. The limit of 27 shots also implies that careful choices have to be made regarding what to photograph. These characteristics seemed, from the start of project planning, suitable to the reflexive aims of this research.

The display of the photos was done by means of a private online group on Facebook, shared by the youth worker, the youth and me. In this phase, "reassuring the participants that the photos did not have to be works of art" (Genoa & Dupuis 2013, 10) was important, as some of them were concerned about the quality and appropriateness of the images produced.³² The creation of the online group was

³¹ Instructions were drawn from Carlson et al. 2006.

³² According to these authors, the concern over the quality of photos taken is quite common in studies using visual methods.

meant to cope with the difficulty of scheduling regular meetings in Balata, as the youth were preparing for exams and the youth worker was not always available.

4.2.2 Interview stage

Although focus groups are more typical in *photovoice*, in order to give emphasis to individual experiences and facilitate a more profound exploration of the research questions, I opted to conduct individual interviews.³³ Thus, after the first stage of data collection was completed, individual semi-structured interviews with elements of photo-elicitation were conducted.³⁴

Photo-elicitation has been applied more consistently in ethnographic studies and has involved using photographs to elicit subjective definitions or meanings, invoke comments and trigger discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview (Clark-Ibañez *apud* Genoa & Dupuis 2013; Banks *apud* Epstein et al. 2006). In studies where interviews are driven by the photos taken by the interviewees, photo-elicitation is also known as “*reflexive or auto-driving photography*” (Clark *apud* Epstein et al. 2006, p. 2).

This technique serves a dual purpose: to expand on questions while simultaneously providing a way for participants to communicate dimensions of their lives that might otherwise be impossible to obtain (Hagedorn *apud* Genoa & Dupuis 2013). It is also considered that the use of photographs makes for a less formal process (“not like a test”), reduces anxiety of participants (“ice breaker” effect) and contributes to minimize the power relationship that always exists during an interview (Genoa & Dupuis 2013; Epstein et al. 2006).

Participants in my study were first asked about the photos they took (i.e. “What is meaningful to you about this photo?” “Can you elaborate more on why you chose to photograph this?” “What could be done to help change some of the problems you identified in your photos?”). On a second moment, they were presented with a set of semi-structured questions surrounding the topic of youth citizenship (i.e. “How does it feel to be young in your society?” “Do you think it is important for young people to participate in decision-making and why?”). Interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes and their digital recording was accompanied by note taking.

³³ This has been done in other cases (Berman et al. 2001).

³⁴ Interview procedures were tailored to each participant. Noor, for example, did not want me to keep a voice record of her interview. Therefore, we agreed that I would only take notes and that Abood would later share the transcription with me, but not the sound file.

4.2.3 Other field activities

Field notes were incorporated into my analysis of the findings, guiding further theoretical interpretation. Field notes were taken during or immediately after participant observation sessions and interviews. They included information such as location of the interviews, presence of other people, mood of participants, and particular successes or aspects that could be improved during the following sessions. Some notes taken after informal conversations also proved useful to make sense of the social atmosphere. Additionally, a journal was maintained throughout my entire stay in Nablus. It included personal experiences with the setting and the social-political environment in Palestine, comments on my interactions with the youth, as well as initial notes regarding the connection between research questions and findings.³⁵

4.3 Data analysis

Because data deriving from the photography exercise, the interviews and the *micro-ethnographic* fieldwork took the form of a large corpus of unorganized visual and textual material, it was not as straightforward to analyse as quantitative data (Bryman 2012). Throughout the organization and analysis of the 5 interview transcripts, 5 notebooks and a total of 56 photographs produced, I tried to look for common themes (that is, conceptual regularities, repetitions, similar networks of ideas) and occasionally certain metaphors or local expressions. Moreover, the youth were invited to shape the “story” of this research as experts in their own lives, by discussing what the photos meant to them. The thematic analysis that follows this chapter would not have been the same without their contribution.

The technique used to deal with the existing data was a simple and versatile process of cutting and sorting, which seemed appropriate for a small-scale project such as this wherein the main material came in the form of images and short/medium statements, initially produced in Arabic. While the processing of images is almost limited to this cutting and sorting technique, more sophisticated techniques such as looking for linguistic connectors or theory-related material would not have been efficient considering the characteristics of the text (Ryan & Bernard 2003).

³⁵ Following Genoe & Dupuis 2013, p. 6.

4.4 Ethical considerations

My study required a unique set of ethical considerations that may not be present in regular textual research or research with adults. Special attention was paid to issues of consent, subject anonymity, ownership of photos and harm.

Obtaining informed consent from the youth participating in the study, from parents (as the first were minors) and from subjects eventually appearing in the photos, was crucial to maintaining the integrity of the study. Consent was asked both for the participation of the youth in the project and for the use of the resulting data in any publication or event related to this research. Documents contextualizing the project (translated into Arabic by a native speaker) were distributed to each youth. Later, verbal consent from youth and parents was obtained with the help of the youth worker. Since no human subjects could clearly be identified in the photos (something that had been suggested to participants during the briefing phase³⁶) no other consent issues arose.

Guaranteeing that youth would not be harmed in any way as a result of participating or having participated in this study was of course of the utmost importance. In this case, given the social and political context of Palestine, handing cameras to young people and providing them with a task to complete could potentially put them in dangerous situations. For instance, during the first meeting, Mohamed asked if he could take pictures of Israeli soldiers and did not immediately understand why that was off limits, probably because photographing the army seemed crucial to depict his experience as a young Palestinian. It was necessary for the youth worker to intervene and insist on him not taking any pictures that might put his safety or the safety of others at risk.

4.5 Limitations and biases

A number of limitations were inevitably imposed upon this research and must be acknowledged for the sake of intellectual honesty. I nonetheless sought to minimize these limitations and overcome stumbling blocks along the way. Offering empathy and “appreciating the situations rather than intending to correct them” (Matza *apud* L. Berg 2001, p. 140) proved to be a good recommendation to deal with the challenges I was presented with.

³⁶ As suggested by Genoe & Dupuis 2013, p. 15.

The main limitation encountered was the language barrier. The impossibility of conducting fully narrated interviews in Arabic or having the youth write notes/make comments in English meant that some questions had to be repeated more than once and that the comprehension of certain culture-specific concepts and implied meanings, as well as the immediate clarification of ideas, might not always have been successful. An important example is the one surrounding the concept of ‘citizenship’ itself.³⁷ With a different background and skill set, I could have interacted more and formed stronger bonds with the participants, who essentially viewed me as a friendly stranger (*ajnabia*). Being a volunteer at the organization, nevertheless, allowed me to find alternative ways to communicate and eventually connect with the youth.

The accuracy of participants’ answers, notes and comments was guaranteed by having the youth worker (a Palestinian with a very good command of English) take the role of translator. The potential for mistranslation or misunderstanding over cultural differences was reduced with proper briefing, debriefing and clarification of meanings throughout the research process. The possibility of the translator’s presence skewing participants’ accounts should also be considered. As far as it was possible to observe, the figure of the youth worker (even if a young man in his twenties himself) oscillated between a role model and a source of authority. Still, opting for a person trusted by the group over a stranger seemed important so that participants would not shy away from discussing certain topics relevant to this study.

The lack of an actual research team, as well as time and budget restrictions, certainly influenced the course of the research in a negative way. Collaborative projects and research with youth benefit from an experienced team and the possibility to do extensive fieldwork, so that there is enough time for certain

³⁷ According to Asem Khalil (2007), ‘citizenship’ and ‘nationality’ need to be understood within the historical context of the Middle East. Analyzing their application to Arab and/or Islamic societies thus helps overcome obstacles of untranslatability. ‘Nation’ and ‘people’ must be viewed in the light of the broader concept of the *umma*, a term originally used to indicate the Islamic community, but which can also refer to the Arab nation. In addition, the adjective of the word nation (national) is “*qawmiyya* when it refers to the Arab nation, but *wataniyya* when related to territorial Arab nationalism, also meaning patriotism”. The word *mwatana* refers to ‘citizenship’ yet its root is *watan*, that is, ‘homeland’ (sometimes also used to mean the Arab land, as in *alwatan al-arabi*). Both *watan* and *watanyia* “are highly charged emotionally” (pp. 7-8). In the case of Palestine, there is an inevitable connection between the Palestinian people and the Arab nation – reflecting the Pan-Arabism of Egyptian leader Abdel Nasser, “the real supporter” of the PLO at its inception (p. 16) – yet in the context of claims to self-determination, an emphasis is placed upon a very distinct Palestinian national identity. Thus, *watanyia* and *mwatana* are used, sometimes interchangeably, to refer to the relation between individual and polity. In my interview questions and informed consent documents, I have asked Abood to use the latter.

processes to occur, such as creating trust, giving training to participants or collectively discussing the dissemination of findings. In this case, it was particularly hard to depend only on the good will of participants and the youth worker, who was not always available for group meetings, as well as to conduct research under tourist visa constraints.

As is the case with any decision in scientific research, opting for disposable cameras carried certain disadvantages. Acquired in a photography shop in Nablus, the cameras probably belonged to an old stock and the quality of film had clearly been compromised – hence the blurriness of the photos and the fact that some frames did not develop. In the end, I was left with 8 to 14 photos per participant. Fortunately, the notebooks proved to be a good decision and a way to overcome this situation, allowing for a better understanding of the issues raised by the photos (sometimes being the only reference to inexistent pictures).

An additional problem had to do with *positionality*, that is, the way researchers portray themselves and determine the power relationship within research dynamics. In this case, I struggled to be perceived as a non-authoritative figure, which was not always clear for participants. Thus, obtaining open-ended responses, reactions to peers' comments and informal interactions between the youth and me (as opposed to traditional classroom instruction) proved to be extremely challenging –perhaps also an indication that the reflexive nature of my project was somewhat unfamiliar to the group, including the youth worker.

Finally, my personal biases have been considered so that the extent to which they may have distorted the outcome of this research can be reduced. The implications of my European background on research with Palestinian youth are evident and difficult to avoid, including the potential of me holding preconceived ideas about how Palestinians/refugees live their lives or culturally biased notions of citizenship. One poignant example of bias emerged throughout the research process and relates to the use of disposable cameras.

Besides practical and methodological justifications, I also considered that providing young people in a refugee camp with digital cameras, which could be perceived as gifts or generate feelings of exceptionality, would be problematic. However, disposable cameras turned out to be a foreign reality for youths who grew up in digital age (Mohamed decided not to use the camera at all and took pictures with his cell phone instead). Thus, participants may have felt limited in their

possibilities to take “good pictures” or embarrassed by having to use an old-fashioned system when most of them and their peers own phones with incorporated cameras. Although this is not the case for everyone in Nablus (even less in the refugee camps) and disposable cameras still proved adequate to the existing research conditions, this kind of assumption about local people should be reconsidered when conducting fieldwork.

5. FINDINGS

The photos and respective notes taken by the youth, together with the online discussion, revealed some experiences that served as an inspiration for the design of the individual interviews conducted later. I have organized the empirical findings of my study according to five main themes, all of which touch upon one or more dimensions of citizenship (rights, identity/belonging and participation). I devote an additional section to participants' feedback on their participation in the project. Their photos and quotes illustrate the presentation of findings throughout the chapter.

5.1 Physical environment as a totalizing reality

Concerns over the environment are a pervasive element in the accounts of the youth, who took several photos of street garbage (inside the camps and out) as well as open dumpsters. “I took some photos around the school which show the animals... goats and more... the smell... and there is a steel factory beside it so it's very noisy and polluted. [...] The way to school is full of garbage”, Yasmin complains.



Photo 2. Open dumpster near Askar.

Urban planning and social infrastructure were also major targets of criticism, especially by those living in camps. Participants mentioned over and over again the overcrowding, the degradation of houses (described as “too hot in the summer and very cold in the winter”) and the lack of available public services. Narrow and dirty alleyways between buildings, full of dangerous places where children can be found playing, show the lack of safe and clean leisure spaces. Noor’s photos of her street in Balata, for instance, illustrate how the bad quality of the environment, coupled with poor housing and sanitation, deeply affect young people living in the camps. “This image shows a home that does not contain the basics for living. [There is] a lot of insects, mice and waste.” One particularly powerful photo, taken from her window, shows a child playing with trash. “I think that playing in such conditions is not fair and it kills their [children’s] dreams”, she comments.



Photo 3. Child playing with trash between buildings, Balata.

The two boys complain particularly about not having enough spaces to practice sports outside of school, which forces them to run unnecessary risks. Although Said has taken pictures of his school's football field, he clarifies that he and his friends often have to play in the street or in prohibited areas: "This picture shows teens and children playing football, but hey play once a week in the street because we don't have a stadium to play in."



Photo 4. Youth playing football at school, Nablus.

When I ask participants who they think is responsible for the problems they identified, their first reaction is to point to some source of authority, either internal or external. Noor, Yasmin and Farrah believe that part of the responsibility lies with "the responsible about this place" or "the municipality". The boys share a different position. For them, the occupation is the main factor causing the overcrowding and the deterioration of living conditions in Palestine, particularly in the refugee camps. "The responsible for these problems is the one who made us go out of our land and sent us here [to the camp]", Said says. I ask him to elaborate:

[...] 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.

That being said, when discussing how the problems could be solved, the youth do recognize that the municipality and the occupation are not the only ones to blame. They realize that, as inhabitants of the camp, they can do something to fix these problems, either by giving a good example, taking the initiative to clean or spreading the word about the need to preserve public spaces. It thus seems that, despite the constraints, they still consider themselves as agents with some degree of power to improve the life of the community: “Maybe we can volunteer in the camp and clean it”, Farrah suggests.

Nevertheless, the two boys maintain that ending Israel’s occupation is the most important action to be taken. “If we stayed in our land we could build and care much more about our society”, Mohamed says. When Abood spontaneously enters the conversation to ask: “Maybe your answer would make more sense if you said that 50 or 60 years ago, but what is the occupation’s fault now?” he quickly reinforces his statement: “A very small example: with the population increasing every day, where are those people supposed to go? They will build their houses over each other, there will be narrow alleys and, as an outcome, pollution, bad smell, animals...”.

The physical environment appears in my study as a totalizing reality, especially for those residing in refugee camps. 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). While environmental degradation is, above all, symbolic of the degradation of life for Palestinians, it is also a constant reminder of the circumstance of being under occupation, of the lack of autonomy, administrative power and material means to solve one’s problems as a community.

5.2 Conflict, occupation and violence saturate daily life

The tangible effects of the conflict with Israel, namely the loss of family or friends, the process of territorial expansion, the construction of the separation wall and the corresponding restrictions to movement, were in one way or another mentioned by all participants. Not being able to travel abroad, go to the sea, visit friends and family or easily access other places within Israel/Palestine, especially Jerusalem (“the wall took our holy places”, Said laments), are seen as severe limitations for youth, who feel their agency constrained.

Yasmin explains her feeling of humiliation whenever she has to apply for a travel permit in order to leave the West Bank: “I hate to take the permit to enter my homeland because every time I carry it in my hand I feel despair”. Similarly, even before being asked why he had taken a picture of the sunset, Mohamed explains his visual analogy by adding the following caption: “I wish the occupation would disappear like the sunset at the end of the day.” He also photographed the wall, describing it as important because it “separates us from our country, our civilization and our relatives”.



Photo 5. Segment of the separation wall between Israel and the West Bank (photographed with cell phone camera).

Even if participants are too young to remember the more chaotic periods of Palestine’s political history, their lingering consequences could not be more vivid. In one of her Facebook comments, Noor writes what at first seems to me like an obvious assumption: “Living in a cemetery must be hard...”. She then concludes her thought, alluding to a sense of destitution that often characterizes the Palestinian experience: “...but the worst is to be a soul without a body.”

Noor and the rest of the group immediately connect the photos of graves captured by Farrah and Said to national resistance. At the same time, the personal experience of death, the awareness of the vulnerability of their own existence, 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. When I ask Yasmin if there is anything she would like to add to her interview, she says: "The main thing for me is the right to live safely [...] if we ever have this right we will solve a big problem."



Photo 6. Cemetery in Nablus.

When addressing the loss of loved ones or fellow countrymen, participants use the word *shaheed* (martyr) – an honorific title for a Muslim killed fulfilling a religious commandment or defending property. "Under this ground are the precious people who passed away to God [and who] never got the chance to see their country free" (Noor); "God bless the *shaheed* who died defending this land..." (Mohamed); "People who passed away to the mercy of God, *shaheed*... they all lived the same agony, the same sorrow for migration, the same enemies and the same death... they were waiting to return to their homes and their country" (Yasmin). Although it is unclear who exactly fits the category of martyr³⁸, the idea of martyrdom – strongly

³⁸ In her ethnographic study on everyday politics in Dheishe refugee camp (2009), Nina Gren also mentions this broad use of the term *shaheed* in daily conversations: "When I asked people to tell me a story about a martyr using the word *shahid*, I never knew what kind of martyr my informant would choose to talk about. It might be a story about a child who was killed by Israeli shelling, or a stone-thrower who had been shot or a suicide bomber who had blown himself up" (p. 226).

connected to both national resistance and religiosity (Gren 2009) – is ever present and somewhat glorified by the youth.

5.3 Identity and attachment to the homeland

Another strong theme is the youth's identification as Palestinian, Arab and Muslim, as well as their attachment to the homeland. Everyone spoke about having love for their country and mentioned the importance of remaining loyal to their people's struggle.

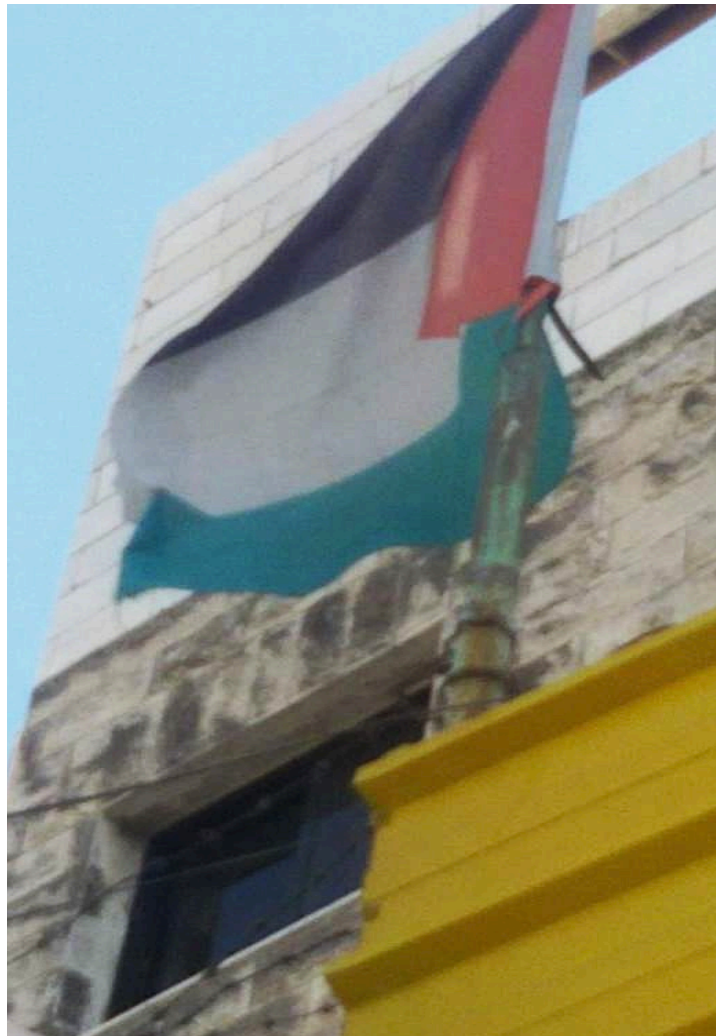


Photo 7. Palestinian flag held in a public building, Nablus (photographed with cell phone camera).

The flag of Palestine is viewed as an important symbol of belonging. “[It is] raised in the centre of the camp, proving our identity as Arab and Palestinian, as we wish it to rise in victory and freedom”, Noor declares. Moreover, it seems to work as an important source of strength for the group, who share the same motivation to

stand against Israel’s occupation (“in spite of the pain”): “Our flag will remain elevated despite of oppression and injustice, despite of the tragedy of the occupation for all these years”; “Our symbol, our flag, will rise everywhere until we get it back to its origin, our country”, Mohamed and Yasmin say.

Several pictures also show olive trees, one of the iconic references to Palestinian rootedness in the land. Olive trees function as a constant 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 notes provide 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 8. Olive tree field in the surroundings of Balata.

Another aspect present throughout the accounts of participants was the reference to coping mechanisms, as well as the importance of resisting and maintaining hope for a better future. All participants seem to find in religion a source of inner strength to deal with adversity. Yasmin’s notes provide 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.” All participants pointed out the importance of thanking God or not forgetting God, for “He” is the one who helps their people overcome the hardships. In addition, social cohesion and social networks appear as important elements in youth’s descriptions of their lives. Yasmin’s photo of a room in her house, which she explains is used to receive guests “in hard times”, or Said’s words of appreciation when he says that there are lots of people in the camp who try to make him happy, denote the existence of very strong ties between people in the community.

In spite of their seemingly overwhelming reality, a general sense of hope runs through participant’s accounts. “Every time I look from my house’s roof I feel hope for tomorrow”, Noor shares. Her words reflect the Palestinian ideological theme of *sumud* (steadfast perseverance), which can be seen as form of both psychological and political resistance: “Despite the fact that we are out of our country, and despite the uprooting of trees, and despite our emigration, we will not lose hope... Everywhere we will plant our symbol – the olive tree.”



Photo 9. Rooftop of Noor’s house, Balata.

The youth express aspirations and dreams for the future (such as progressing in their studies or being able to decide which career to follow) but these are marked by a tone of uncertainty. “Dreams come from it and I don’t know whether I can

achieve them or not”, Yasmin writes, captioning a picture of her bed. It seems evident that an important part of these dreams is the possibility that they might come true, not in the refugee camps where most of them now reside but in their original cities and villages.

5.4 Citizenship from the margins

The youth recognize not only their gross inequalities in terms of rights and opportunities *vis-à-vis* the occupying power but also between different groups of people within Palestinian society. Refugees and women, particularly, are referred to as groups – strands of the citizenship “braid” – with substantial challenges in access to rights and participation in collective decision-making.

◆ *Refugeehood*

There is 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 talks 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 is 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 is also strongly felt at school, and is reflected in differentiated student treatment: “I hate school because of the racism (sic) that distinguishes between the students of the camp and the students of the city”, Yasmin again complains, clarifying that this discrimination exists because most teachers in her school are from the city and the students come from the refugee camps.

At the end of the interview with Mohamed, when asked if there was something he would like to add, or if there was something we should have discussed instead, Mohamed highlighted the importance of widening the debate about “racism” in Palestinian society.



Photo 10. Refugee children playing football in the street, Askar.

◆ *Gender*

Data reveals a certain awareness of gender inequality within the community, although not as much as expected. This could be related to the small size of the group, to the presence of an adult male during interviews, or perhaps to the environment of relative feeling of equality between the members of the youth organization, in terms of chances to voice opinions and take part in activities.

The girls' interventions tend to be focused on particular episodes of daily life. "Young males keep following us while we are coming back home from school and keep bothering us", Yasmin complains, when discussing photos of her school and pointing out aspects she dislikes about the place where she lives. The presence of the male youth facilitator is likely to have avoided other considerations or, at least, to have diverted their criticism towards less fracturing topics, like pollution, housing or the effects of the occupation. But one of the boys, Said, elaborates 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 disappearing (changing), I think, because of technology.

All youth, including the girls, believe that customs and traditions are against some of the things they want to do as young people (namely traveling abroad or visiting places within Palestine), adding to the restrictions imposed by the occupation. However, they generally seem to think that a young person's opportunity to influence decisions in society does not depend so much on gender as on the political situation and personal ability: "Yes, everyone has power but it depends on how each person uses his power and his attitude", Yasmin argues. With the exception of Said, participants seldom discussed gender relations at length or mentioned patriarchal norms as one of the main sources of inequality, instead referring to the occupation as the greatest hindrance to full participation of young people (both boys and girls) in society. This reflects the complex and interwoven effects of patriarchy and occupation, two important power systems shaping the Palestinian context.



Photo 11. Female students exiting school building, Nablus.

5.5 The staging of citizenship

5.5.1 Between claims to participation and society's perception of youth

During the interview phase, youth were asked to describe what being young in their society feels like and to talk about their chances to influence collective decision-making and participate in public affairs. Some youth suggest that adult-youth relations in Palestine do not make the necessary room for young people's real engagement in community affairs and decision-making processes. Said, for instance, believes that being young should be a good feeling, yet complains that his society thinks about young people "in a wrong way". Mohamed agrees: "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".

When asked about the gap between aspiration and agency, all participants admit that customs and traditions are against some of the things they would like to do as young people, and that these 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", Mohamed shares. 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 that you are in love with her. [...] Everything is related to customs and traditions."

However, participants' accounts are also imbued with the idea that participation should somehow depend on maturity or even academic merit, reflecting both the adult-centred 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 quizzes: "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?". Others, like Farrah, do not seem to consider youth participation as a "here and now" necessity and talk about it as personal choice: "Maybe more at an older age and if we have self-confidence and have it as goal in our life".

The fear and vulnerability experienced by the youth due to the frequent army

incursions in the refugee camps and sometimes in the city of Nablus, is 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”, said Mohamed. Said complements:

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.

At the same time, this context of external occupation and constant insecurity is perceived as contributing indirectly to strengthen certain authoritative traits within an already conservative society. For example, looking at a photo of children leaving school, Noor comments: “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. This reflects the effect of the occupation in the Palestinian school curriculum.”



Photo 12. Children walking home together after school, Balata.

In general, participants talk about school as a less than ideal space for youth participation. The verticality of teacher-student relations in the Palestinian education system surfaced as a negative aspect that youth are aware of and which reduces their

influence in matters of concern to them. Mohamed explains:

The [school] principle deals in a dictator way. 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. We did it last year.

When asked about their opinion on Palestinian politicians, the youth complain about the lack of participatory power of people, 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" (Yasmin); "No one cares about us" (Mohamed). Youth perceive 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 declares.

However, while some very clearly expose the democratic deficit within Palestinian institutions and share the wish to live in a society "free from corruption", others seem more accommodated with an internal political environment that they largely associate with the effects of the occupation. The best example of this is Yasmin's comment, while trying to think of solutions for the problems in the refugee camp: "I'm sure the government will not listen much, but at least they are trying to do the right thing in one way or another".

Nearly all participants seem 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 a 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 perceive 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 are suspicious of their competence 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'.

5.4.2 A vocabulary of citizenship and ‘the political’ in contrast with everyday practices and experiences

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 did never spontaneously refer 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 I asked them 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 admit that belonging to the organization increases their interest in society and forces them to question situations or behaviours that they would otherwise not consider. Participants also emphasize the importance of setting an example, taking initiative or raising awareness for social issues. Said, for one, says:

I'm proud that I'm a participant in the association because when someone opens my mind and makes me understand everything better, for sure I will spread it to the people around me who do not understand the things around them very well and are disappointed in their society.

Moreover, the youth believe that new media (including social media) facilitate processes of informal participation in public affairs: “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 shares. The Internet is seen by virtually all youth 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. In Mohamed's opinion, the Internet is also considered 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 was more true and changed most of my opinions”.

Thus, besides a multitude of counterproductive conditions to their exercise of citizenship, to some extent, data reveals that the youth are able to envision ways of influencing decision-making outside of the realm of electoral politics and that they view social activism as a means to provide input in processes of community change. Their narratives include accounts of their family's participation in social networks of support to other Palestinians, of their own individual initiatives to solve community problems or of attempts to address authorities as student representatives (e.g. by sending a letter to the Ministry of Education) – even if these are not articulated in the language of citizenship. It seems that their actual staging of citizenship is a lot more nuanced than their vocabulary would suggest.

5.6 Critical exposure: participant's feedback on the project

Unsurprisingly, most participants mention the cameras as the one aspect they would change about the project. “Using digital cameras, for example, we could have done more in the project”; “to have better cameras”; “What I didn't like was the camera itself because I can't see the photo after I take it”, Mohamed, Yasmin and Noor say. Mohamed also suggests adding video “because with photos it is impossible to show everything 100% and there is no sound.” The impossibility of instantly accessing the photos, manipulating them or transferring them onto a laptop was somewhat frustrating for the youth. But despite the concern over the quality of the images produced, they still made various comments on each other's photos and seemed proud to see their work displayed online (“Aaawww, I took this picture ☺”, Yasmin noted several times).

Overall, participants enjoyed participating in the project and seem satisfied about its most noticeable results: the fact that it forced them to think critically about their society and their own attitudes, to challenge their views, and to interact with adults and peers in unusual ways. Their feedback reveals the passage through some stages of development of “critical consciousness”. Farrah's description of her personal experience in the project is an example of this process:

It was interesting and fun and not hard. In the beginning I said: ‘I'm not going to express my feelings through the photos I will take’. Then, after a while, I saw and felt: ‘Those photos are expressing my feelings and my problems, or the negative things in society’...and because of that exercise I started thinking about how we can solve these problems.

Similarly, Yasmin's words emphasize the power of photos to generate some sort of "awakening", both for the photographer and for the (potential) viewers:

I learned from it because, me personally, I wasn't aware of what bothered me in the camp. [...] When I started taking photos I realized what really bothered me here, so by taking those photos I expressed the problems we have without saying any word. Just look at the photos and you will know. [...] Maybe, if we could spread those photos to other countries we could spread our voice and show how we live.

6. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I further explain what I have learned from my data and try to answer the proposed research questions. First, I address my two sub-questions and then engage with the main question, analysing it from the perspective of “lived citizenship” and considering its different dimensions. I also discuss the extent to which the selected methods have contributed to achieving the purposes of my study and present some suggestions for improvement in future research.

6.1 Main issues of concern for the youth: ‘the personal’ and ‘the political’ as inseparable realms

The findings show that the youth in my study have a number of concerns about their community and that they place themselves both as subjects entitled to rights and as holders of responsibilities. Unsurprisingly, the asymmetrical conflict with Israel, with the corresponding restrictions and denial of rights for Palestinians, appears as an overwhelming source of discontent. The violence and the vulnerability associated with the conflict seem to worry the youth particularly. This is illustrated by photos of material elements of the occupation (the separation wall, travel permits) but also through more symbolic references to national identity, death, resilience and hope (such as olive trees, cemeteries or the sun).

The project also elicited several references to mundane elements of everyday life and socialization in the refugee camps and out. A clear emphasis is put on urban and environmental problems, symbolic of the “wider picture” of life in Palestine. Environment degradation, poor quality of housing and sanitation and lack of public services, especially within the camps, are mentioned as issues leading to a less dignified existence. The youth tend to connect these issues to internal mismanagement (“if they they increase the trash bins, the pollution will not 100% disappear, but it can decrease”) or to the Israeli occupation (“if we stayed in our land we could build and take much more care of our society”), but they also recognize the importance of individual initiative and of intra-community strategies to solve these problems (“we could solve it with awareness”; “it is not only the municipality’s fault, we should do something”).

The youth’s narratives indicate 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 (dealing with death, going to school, building a house, praying, travelling to another city in the West Bank, etc.) and there is no separation between the two realms. Indeed, the collective realization of the imagined political community seems nearly inseparable from the realization of individual/personal dreams or ambitions.

As the critical approaches discussed in the theory section showed, it is impossible to exclude ‘the personal’ from the public calculus of citizenship in Palestine. And since the structural context in which these people are placed informs their personal sphere, it is also impossible to disregard the macro-level of analysis when investigating citizenship “from below”. ‘The local’, ‘the national’ and ‘the international’ are all interwoven in the youth’s accounts, shaping their worldviews and understandings of citizenship.

6.2 Factors influencing full exercise of citizenship

Through the individual interviews with elements of photo-elicitation, it was possible to identify a number of factors, both at the micro and macro levels, which the youth perceive as facilitating or hindering their full exercise of citizenship.

Data indicated feelings of mistrust and underrepresentation towards the Palestinian political leadership as well as a verticality in adult-youth relations, which crosses the different spheres of life. This verticality is especially obvious in participant’s descriptions of school and in the relation between teachers and students. Social inequalities are also seen as hindering young people’s full exercise of citizenship. The findings also point to an awareness of social discrimination and unequal access to decision-making. This social discrimination is mostly felt as being based on one’s official status and place of residence (refugee camp vs. the city). To a lesser extent, gender is also seen as a factor shaping one’s experience of citizenship. Said was, however, the only one to clearly point out an excessive social control over women and their reduced chances to participate in public affairs.

The end of the occupation and the achievement of a sovereign state are considered not only the ultimate solution for the problems identified in the previous section and for improving the lives of Palestinians in general, but also as a crucial condition for young people to gain more influence in collective decisions. The fear, insecurity and multiple restrictions resulting from the military occupation prevent young people 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 (indeed, the whole society) at an allegiance crossroads wherein criticizing one's own government, community, social or cultural norms, looks very much like a path of betrayal.

The findings certainly emphasize aspects that influence the youth's exercise of citizenship negatively, over aspects that facilitate access to rights and participation. Nevertheless, participants still mentioned various examples of their substantive enactment of citizenship in everyday life and referred to certain spaces where they could more openly voice/reflect upon their opinions or mobilize to address social concerns. Strong social ties and a collective identity marked by resistance seem to facilitate community problem-solving and youth participation in social networks of support to other Palestinians. Also, the Internet and social media are viewed as important in facilitating engagement and providing opportunities to challenge the *status quo* – either by allowing the youth to communicate with people from whom they are physically distant, by giving them a sense of agency that they feel does not exist “in reality”, or by encouraging them to question mainstream political/media discourse.

Although most of participant's daily experiences do not amount to the institutional practices we have come to identify with formal citizenship, these experiences still constitute powerful ways to circumvent the current political situation and to secure membership within the imagined community. For example, when Yasmin refers to the room in her house where guests usually stay whenever something bad happens, or when the youth take part in a campaign to raise funds for the victims of the war in Gaza, collecting money from neighbors inside the refugee 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.

6.3 Experiencing and making sense of citizenship in everyday life

The narratives presented in my study show how young people in Nablus 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, alternative understandings were suggested. Combining insights from post-national/transnational, feminist and *intersectionality* theory with a child-inclusive and everyday perspective on citizenship allowed me to grasp the complex and not always congruent role that citizenship plays in the lives of participants in my study.

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 in the analysis of the “lived citizenship” of young people in Nablus since it sheds light on how they position themselves within the gendered, racialized and classed structure of citizenship – exposed by Cherubini and Kerber’s “braid” analogy – in the occupied West Bank. Without a note on *intersectionality*, one might view Palestinian youth (or ‘youth’ for that matter) as a homogenous group, an idea that my study challenges.

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. Keeping in mind Barber’s insights from the field and the critiques to the “new” sociology of childhood presented in my literature review, it seems to me that the only way not to essentialize one’s experience is to explore its intricacies.

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”; “[I can’t] be free like I’m supposed to be”; “to be able to build with a permit from my own government”. But 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 mode” 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 and to put it in dialogue with Agamben’s concept of “bare life”. 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 the 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, p. 17). In other words, as Isin & Nielsen argue, by constituting themselves as subjects to whom the right to have rights is due, the youth in my study very often *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 PA 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 (“at least they are trying to do something”). 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 problem-solving or Internet use for

political purposes) in the language of citizenship.

Finally, there is a tension between an adult-centered perspective on citizenship and youth claims for inclusion and participation. On the one hand, the group believes that youth are the basis of Palestinian 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 public 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. While the boys are somewhat more critical of the fact that Palestinian society often disregards their contributions in public affairs, the girls tend to see participation as a choice that is up to each person to make. Despite these differences, it would be necessary to explore this tension further to find out whether a gender contrast actually exists, which the nature of my study does not allow me to conclude.

None of the participants seemed to have fully resolved 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 perspective, 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, p. 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 create several barriers to young people's exercise of citizenship, (re)claiming youthfulness and demanding the acknowledgment 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 democratizing agents in their society.

My analysis shows that, although the experiences of young people in Nablus do not fit classic frameworks of citizenship, the repertoires of citizenship of my participants are in many senses dominated by those frameworks. The last two tensions, in particular, 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)” (2004, p. 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 Palestinian society (e.g. parents, the government, teachers or older people in general).

6.4 Some considerations on the selected methods

The methods employed in this study and the meta-theoretical assumptions in which they are grounded call specifically for youth ways of knowing and understanding social reality. My project created a safe space for sharing ideas, the photos taken by the youth worked as “emotional triggers” (in a Freirean sense) and critical thinking was encouraged, by focusing on positive and negative issues in the community.

This is not to say that participants’ development of critical consciousness derives exclusively from collaboration in this project, that such a process is ever complete, or that social change has occurred. It would be an overstatement (rooted in a problematic ambition) to suggest that some kind of individual or collective change resulted from this research. Noor expressed it well when she added the following to her interview: “The problems that we have are uncountable... and maybe Filipa can help us in part, but not with every problem that the Palestinian refugees have with their dreams... they can’t achieve most of their dreams...”.

On another note, it is possible that the results of my study might have differed had the group of participants been constituted by more than five youth or had their backgrounds been more diverse (for instance, only one of them lived in Askar camp; all of them were primarily studying, not working or taking care of relatives; none were formally involved in political parties).

That being said, I believe that the methods were fruitful to explore the topic at hand and that they fit well with a “lived citizenship” perspective, since the photography exercise allowed me to elicit references to different dimensions of

citizenship in young people's everyday lives and the other two instruments allowed me to analyse these references further. The sole responsibility for the interpretation (and any misinterpretation) of the accounts of participants is, of course, my own.

7. CONCLUSION



Photo 13. Mohamed's first ever visit to Jerusalem (photographed with cell phone camera).

As I try to sew the final threads of this thesis, I recall the excitement of Mohamed the day he told his friends and me at the youth centre that he was finally going to visit Jerusalem for the first time, although due to unfortunate reasons: “If my father wasn't ill, I couldn't go... it's very hard to visit *Al Quds* unless somebody is ill and needs to go to the hospital there”.

When he returned to Nablus I asked him to describe his experience:

Al Quds 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.

Linda Kerber wrote in 1997 that the “basic international distinction [between citizens] remains the experience of ease or anxiety at a checkpoint” (1997, 853). For young people in the occupied West Bank, this is a fundamental experience in their everyday encounters with the notion of citizenship. I chose to end with this story, as

it exemplifies the complexities of living as a citizen (to be) in a state to be, and also demonstrates how the personal and the political go hand in hand in the everyday experiences of young Palestinians.

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I have attempted to demonstrate how five young people in the occupied West Bank – a group of friends whose life experiences intersect but which are also unique in their own way – make sense of citizenship in everyday life. I have showed that it is possible, and indeed necessary, to problematize the perceptions and experiences of citizenship of individuals who are not (or not yet) citizens in classic terms.

In my analysis I identified and discussed a number of tensions that surface from participants' accounts and which they struggle to accommodate, namely: 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 citizenship and their claims for youth inclusion. I believe these tensions reveal something important about how young people in my study 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.

Finally, this thesis also examined the possibilities of doing research *with* and *about* young people that resembles youth ways of knowing and looking at social reality, and offered an appreciation of the ways in which less exploitative research environments can contribute to knowledge production on youth, particularly in the Middle East. I hope to have provided an analysis at the same time creative, destabilizing, serious and well aware of its shortcomings. The use of photography as a qualitative method and the collaborative nature of my project contributed, in my view, to approach Yasmin, Noor, Farrah, Said and Mohamed as subjects, instead of objects.

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APPENDICES



LUND UNIVERSITY
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Informed consent for research on youth and citizenship in Palestine

Dear participant,

My name is Filipa Pestana and I am a Master's Degree student in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Lund, in Sweden. I hereby invite you to participate as a co-researcher in a project entitled "Youth and citizenship in Palestine" (working title).

The purpose of this study is to examine how youth living in Nablus, Palestine, relate to the notion of citizenship. For this reason, you will be asked to take a number of pictures and discuss them individually or in groups with other young people. You might also be considered for a later interview, if you agree.

These activities will require approximately 4 weeks to complete and will take place at the Happy Childhood Center in Balata.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. Therefore, you are free to withdraw at any time. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, your name will not be included at any stage of the project.

If you have any questions, need additional information or would like a summary copy of this study, please contact me on the number or e-mail listed below.

Thank you for your time and help towards this research project.

Sincerely,
Filipa Pestana

Phone number: +351910971253 / 0569540042
E-mail: filipa.almeidapestana@gmail.com



LUND UNIVERSITY
Center for Middle Eastern Studies

الموافقة للبحث عن الشباب والمواطنة في فلسطين

عزيزي المشارك،
اسمي فيليبيا بيستانا، أنا طالبة لدرجة الماجستير في دراسات الشرق الأوسط في جامعة لوند في السويد. أنا هنا أدعوكم للمشاركة كباحثة مساعدة في مشروع بعنوان "الشباب والمواطنة في فلسطين" (عنوان المشروع).
الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة كيفية ارتباط الشباب الذين يعيشون في نابلس، فلسطين، فيما يتعلق بمفهوم المواطنة. لهذا السبب، سوف يطلب منك أن تلتقط عددا من الصور ومناقشتها بشكل فردي أو في مجموعات مع شباب آخرين. يمكن أيضا استدعاؤك لمقابلة لاحقة، إذا كنت توافق.
سوف تتطلب هذه الأنشطة حوالي 4 أسابيع لتكتمل وسوف تجرى في مركز الطفولة السعيدة في مخيم بلاطة.
مشاركتكم طوعية تماما. لذا، أنت حر/ة في الانسحاب في أي وقت.
من أجل ضمان أن جميع المعلومات ستبقى سرية، لن يتم تضمين اسمك في أي مرحلة من مراحل المشروع.
إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة، أو ان كنت بحاجة إلى معلومات إضافية أو ترغب في الحصول على نسخة من ملخص هذه الدراسة، يرجى الاتصال على الرقم أو البريد الإلكتروني المذكورين أدناه.
شكرا لك على وقتك والمساعدة لتحقيق هذا المشروع البحثي.
مع خالص التقدير،
فيليبيا بيستانا

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