

Agency operating within structures: a qualitative exploration of agency amongst children living in Palestine

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Abstract

Over the last two decades the concept of agency has played a pivotal role in childhood studies, bringing a radical shift into the old views of children and childhood development. However, little agreement has been reached on what exactly agency means, how it should be measured, especially amongst children affected by military violence and oppression. Based on drawings and walk-along interviews with 70 children from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the present study provides an analysis of children's agency across the multiple settings in which they live. Our findings highlight the dynamic interconnections between the children's agentic practices (*the employment of social capital; challenging movement restrictions; receiving an education; personal strategies; reclaiming play-areas; meaning-making process and political agency*) and the multiple ecologies implied in promoting - or suppressing - their opportunity to act and cope with their surroundings. Our research challenges the dominant picture of children exposed to political violence as helpless victim, portraying them as active agents who mobilize resources both within themselves and throughout their social, physical, and political world. The study suggests implications for practices when designing intervention for children in contexts of chronic political violence.

Figure 1. Drawing depicting the pervasiveness of the occupation

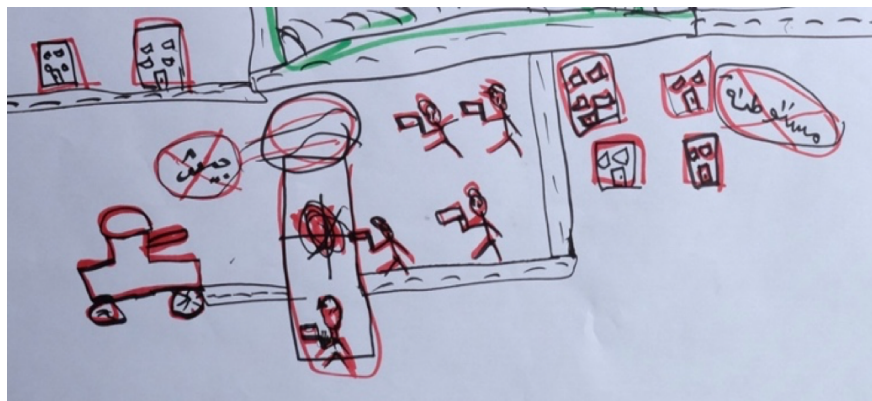


Figure 2. Drawings representing children's awareness of the appropriate roads to reach their favourite places.

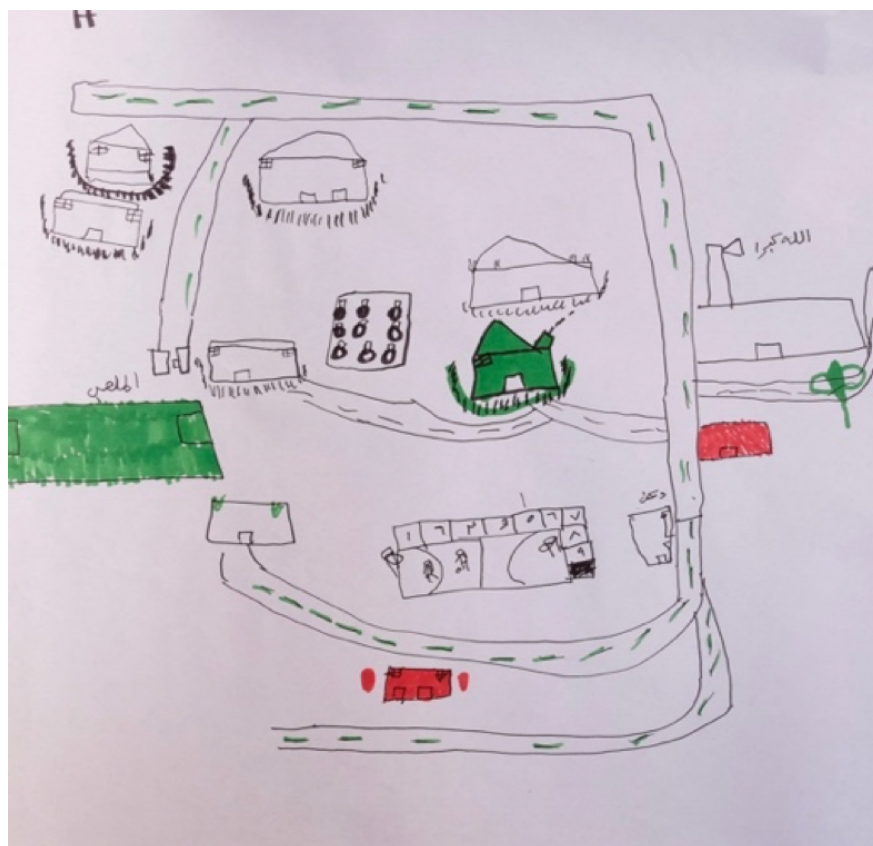
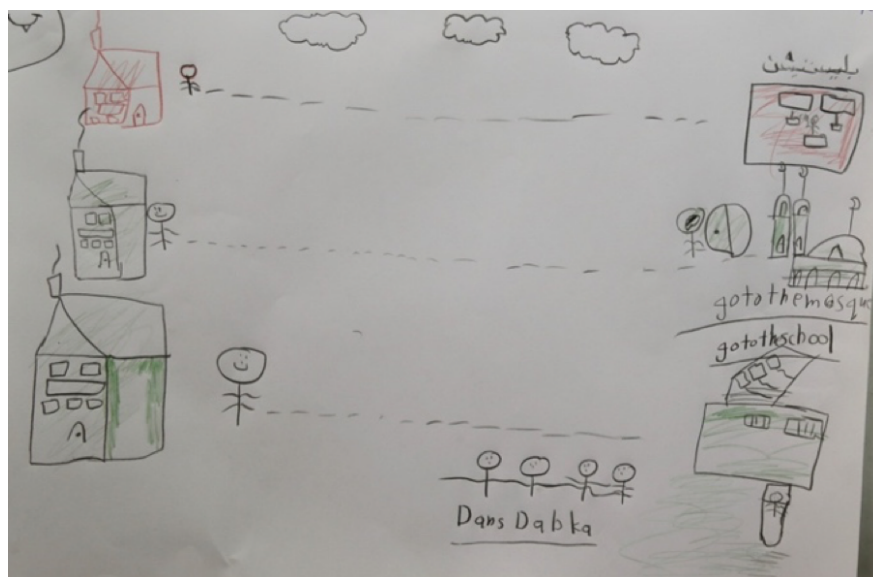


Figure 3. Data-driven model of children's agency

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