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Childhood as Political Capital

In this book, I examine the settler-colonial invasion of childhood, the targeting of children by settlers and their state, and the ways children survive colonial dispossession. Critical investigations of colonial and settler-colonial projects reveal a set of narratives and justifying ideologies that are mediated by and vacillate between two seemingly polarized ideologies. At one end, we find the "civilizing" narrative of that ideology, which justifies the (ostensibly humanist) attempts to "save" Native children from their communities. Within this ideology children and their families are assumed to be victims of their own (inferior/uncivilized) pathologies. Thus, these children must be integrated into the political economy of the settler state, acculturated and reshaped to amend their own backwardness (Moses, 2004; Razack, 2015). At the other, seemingly opposite end, we see the demonizing, dehumanizing, securitized discourse of the child as "born-terrorist" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015a, 2015b).

The first ideology claims to offer "compassionate" interventions, suggesting that Native children perpetually need assistance in ascending to modernity. Historians and critical scholars have explored this spectrum of colonizing logic in a variety of settler-colonial societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and Israel. The second ideology relies on ever-inventive globally politicized machineries of dispossession manifested and produced by the settler-colonial state and the corresponding story that it wishes to generate. These two polar-opposite ideologies, as well as those ideologies which operate between them, reveal through their inherent logic and essential practices that children matter and are indeed valuable subject/objects in the political-economic exchanges implicated by these ideological positions. The larger question that this book interrogates has to do with the dynamics of a political regime that regularly deploys operational practices that inscribe power over the bodies and lives of children – and, more specifically, how that dynamic is manifested in the Zionist colonial project.

The Zionist movement's impositions on Palestinian childhood can be traced back to the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe) and even earlier, to the movement's expansion efforts in the early nineteenth century. Palestinian children were not exempt from the violence of nascent Zionism and later the Israeli state, a violence that resulted in

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the expulsion of the majority of Palestinians from their homeland. During the Nakba, five-year-old Salwa was saved from settler and Zionist militia violence by her aunt, who was visiting her brother in Haifa, Palestine. She fled Palestine and went to Lebanon with her aunt. Since Salwa struggled daily with the trauma of being separated from her parents and siblings, her aunt decided in 1951 to send her back home with a group of Palestinian returnees. During this attempted return to Haifa, Israeli authorities captured the group as they crossed the newly established borders, and Salwa was arrested, classified as an "infiltrator," and put in prison for more than two weeks.[1] This critical aspect of the narrative of Salwa's childhood, in which the state was initially responsible for her displacement and then for her subsequent marking as unwanted, as an "infiltrator" – not as a child searching for her parents – compelled me to examine in depth the power inscribed over children and the very concept of childhood itself in settler-colonial contexts. How can we connect the various technologies of state violence and comprehend its active political work, including legally authorized violence and inhumanity? What kind of sociopolitical as well as imagined (b)orders do such inhuman practices, *specifically aimed against children*, secure?

Settler-colonial projects require sustained structural and institutional strategies to supplant and dispossess Native populations. Palestinian children today, like Salwa in 1948, continue to face a reality of uncertainty, one in which the Israeli state demarcates their lives as undesirable and unwanted. Native children in settler-colonial contexts such as Australia, Canada, and the United States were and are subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional violence. The array of policies against Native children suggests that settler states perceive Native children as necessary targets of state policies that can serve political goals and social reordering. In this book, I ask the question: How do these policies, acts of governing, and targeting techniques translate into the lives of Palestinian children?

While psychological and psychosocial scholarship on children in conflict zones provides important insights into children's lives and consciousness, I want to overcome theoretical limitations that individualize the study of political trauma and childhood as much as possible. This book conceptualizes Palestinian childhood within the framework of racialized violence and settler-colonial theory, which identifies Israel as a settler-colonial state. Only a decade after Israel's establishment, scholars such as Fayez Sayegh and Maxime Rodinson began to articulate the state and its Zionist ideology as settler-colonial (Sayegh, 1965; Rodinson, 1973). More recently, Patrick Wolfe's analysis of the settler state's need to eliminate the Indigenous people it encounters allows us to depart from the neutrality and ambiguity that often pervade discourses on "conflict" or "war zones." His work allows us to consider the specificities and distinctly territorialized and spatialized relationships between the Israeli colonial state and Palestinian childhood and children,

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[1] Oral history interview conducted by the author in Haifa, April, 2012.

a relationship which is intrusively and intentionally biopolitical in both concept and execution. The structural machinery of settler colonialism and the sociopolitical context of race and place work together to precondition the experiences of Palestinian children in ways that have until now remained unexplored (Giacaman, et al., 2007; Rabaia, Saleh, and Giacaman, 2014). The centrality of the Zionist settler regime involves the confiscation of space through theft of the land, to Judaize it and create a demographic majority in the state through the continuous uprooting of Palestinians.

However, it is also critical to note the centrality of bodily reproduction and its integral entanglement with Zionist settler colonialism. The connection between the state and reproductive health has been extensively analyzed by scholars such as Nitza Berkovitch (1997), Jacqueline Portugese (1998), Rhoda Kanaaneh (2002), Adi Moreno (2016), and Michal Nahman (2006, 2008, 2013). Their scholarship has revealed Israel's pronatalist fertility regime and its reproductive technologies. These are practices embedded in an ideology of biopolitics that I myself have explicitly examined in my study on the politics of birth and death in Palestine (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014, 2015a, 2015b) and to which I have pointed in terms of its deep entanglement with the dispossession of land and the eviction of Palestinian populations. The Zionist colonial imaginary as embodied in an actual fertility regime offers a compelling account of the way the body of the colonized is a no-body, a space as empty as the land. The Zionist aim to produce the "Sabra" – a new type of Israeli-born Jew who exhibits attributes of strength as opposed to the weakness of the Diaspora Jew (Weiss, 2002) – affirms the biblical Jewish religious narrative and not only leads to the institutionalization of a stratified and racialized biopolitical regime, but indeed justifies it.

We can see how the institutionalization of biopolitics reveals the settler's anxieties, and in the Zionist case such anxieties encourage policies that compel high Jewish birthrates at the state level. Palestinian scholar Ahmad Sa'di (2014) references the political work of Shmuel Toledano, the prime minister's advisor on Arab affairs during the 1970s and 1980s. Toledano followed the development of Israeli demographic policies concerning Palestinians in Israel which inculcated family planning among them and which awarded direct and indirect assistance to Palestinian women, raising their educational standards and "elevating" their family life – all in an attempt to decrease the population of Palestinians. The work of people like Toledano goes jointly with the work of Zionist pronatal biopolitical policies that encourage the production of the Jew while creating policies that undermine and discourage reproductive fertility among Palestinians. Striving for the dissolution of the Native society and the promotion of the settlers' one goes hand in hand with the thinking of Theodor Herzl, the founding father of political Zionism, who wrote in his utopian novel *Altneuland* (Old New Land): "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct" (1960 [1902], p. 38). This urge to destroy, which is then followed by an idealized replacement, is the central policy of

the settler-colonial rulers. Zionism, mediated by this "destroy to replace" policy, is similar to other nationalist ideologies and movements that enhance biopolitical interests as made apparent in their demographic governance and population management, as Kanaaneh (2002) and Tamara Neuman (2004) have argued. Zionism is a settler-colonial *project*, not merely a nationalist ideology, one intertwined with Jewish religious theologies, historical legacies of the Holocaust, and demographic anxieties, all of which not only favor Jewish birthrates, but aim at the destruction of the Native in order to replace him/her with the settler.

Children are of course a critical part of this dynamic. There is very little research on Israeli policies against Palestinian children. As in Australia, Canada, and the United States, scholars have only just begun to address *violence against children* as a site of political inquiry. The reasons for these silences signal the structural persistence of settler-colonial logics at work across geographies and reveal how challenging it is to confront the painful truths involved in recognizing how violence pervades children's lives. However, historian Rosemary Sayigh has shown how Palestinian refugees of the Nakba, many of whom were children during their displacement, have told their stories repeatedly over the years; they have shared their memories of displacement with each other and with their own children (Sayigh, 2015a), memories that create "holes in the wall" of the "thundering story of Zionism" (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di, 2007, p. 12; Sayigh, 2015b, p. 6).

In this book, I borrow from the voices of children of today while juxtaposing them with the voices of yesterday's children, the reflections of refugees – now elderly – who were children during the 1948 Nakba but still remember their efforts to save themselves from the cruelty of the settler-colonial project. One example of the resilience of the displaced is found in the narratives of such elderly people, those who refused to live in exile as refugees, who "infiltrated" back into their homeland, and whose memories are marked with intimate details, as with Um Mahmood who shared with me her ordeal as a twelve-year-old child:

> Going back home was considered illegal by Israel . . . [but] my mother was deter-mined to make it back. [My family and I] walked all night long . . . I was exhausted from carrying my little brother . . . and at the same time, I felt heat coming down my legs, and pain. I stopped a couple of times and cleaned my legs with the leaves and soil around me . . . while in silence, in the dark, we feared them discovering our return. When the sun came up, I realized that my legs were covered in blood. I had gotten my period.[2]

As we concluded our interview, she stressed: "It is as if the bleeding [has] never stopped. Even now, when I am an old woman, I dream about being a little girl, walking in the dark, bleeding to death, screaming for help, and nobody cares." Ultimately, her wound can never be fully healed, as it was the result of an invasion of

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[2] For more detail on the politics of infiltration, see Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2016b).

the most intimate of spaces, a maiming of the sacred relations of body, self, family, and place.

During my fieldwork between 2002 and 2007 on home demolitions among Palestinian families, I was intrigued by four-year-old Samar's refusal to go to kindergarten without taking all her toys. Her parents struggled every day to convince her to leave them at home. Samar explained to me: "My neighbor's house was torn down while he was at school . . . when he came back, he couldn't even find his toys. I'll always keep my toys with me . . . I am clever; I can save my toys from their bulldozers . . . I can." Samar continued, describing the physical pain she experienced while trying to "save" her toys: "They are hurting my back . . . I have many toys, and I love them all, and must carry them with me; they [the Israelis] are hurting my back . . . but, I am clever, I am saving my toys." These assertions, repeated plaintively, open up a window onto the everyday violence state actors impose on children's psyches and lives.

Samar's narrative is similar to Hala's, whose family was forcefully evicted from their East Jerusalem home in the middle of the night in order to make way for Jewish settlers. Five-year-old Hala spoke about her eviction and her resulting fear of the night: "I can't sleep without my mom and dad next to me. At night they attack, and they make my mother and father cry." When asked who "they" were, she replied with wonder:

> You mean you don't know them? They take little kids' homes. They even took my swing, and now their children play with it and I have no swing, not even a house . . . They also took our lemon tree, and that made my mother very sad.

Samar's and Hala's remarks disclose children's power to "save toys," live through unpredictable losses, and endure their parents' suffering, pain, and powerlessness amid the colonizer's attacks that aim to possess the home, the land, and the body and psyche. The voices of these young girls signify a constant sense of anxiety mixed with modes of both confronting and reworking a violence that has become all too familiar. Their stories illustrate how innovative children can be in their resilience and resistance against never-ending loss and fear that pervades the intimate spaces of their homes. Hala's and Samar's responses to and contestation of violence, their language in speaking back while saving what can be saved, and their care and worry about their parents, siblings, and friends are not the only coping strategies of children. The untold stories of Um Mahmood, Salwa, and Hala are not only narratives of hardship, but also a realization of an historic rupture that continues to be mediated by the unending violence of the present.

Through historical tactics of dispossession and current technological capacities, Palestinian children's experiences are both hyper-visible and invisible at the same time. The eviction of and attack against Palestinian children are apparent in some sites, such as home and school, but different policies across the historic Palestinian homeland mask other experiences of suffering. For example, in Hebron, especially

on Shuhada Street in the center of the Old City, daily attacks against and imprison-
ment and eviction of children and families establish an archetypal environment of
fear that pushes Palestinian families out in order to allow settlers in. In Hebron, as in
Jerusalem, the dominant colonial discourse violently declares that the land belongs
exclusively to Jews, resulting in a need to create checkpoints, walls, and borders to
"safeguard" the settler from the colonized.

Focusing on ideologies secured when violence is directed at children and identi-
fying the state's violent crimes against them in the settler colony enables us to trace
the modes through which children's lives and bodies are transformed into politi-
cized targets within the colonial project. Colonial ideology and policies, rooted in
local analytics of race-making, culturalized stereotypes, and moral imaginations
against communities of Others, signify that children matter to the modern nation-
state (Brocklehurst, 2006). Scholarship on colonialism reveals that the ways children
are raised, fed, schooled, and cared for shape the modes through which colonial
governance operates and produces political power (Stoler, 2002; Moses, 2004).

One of the major modalities of power which effect Native children's erasure and
dispossession, clearly apparent in settler-colonial and colonial studies, is the target-
ing of children's welfare and education. Such strategies in Palestine continue to
this day with the annihilation and dispossession of land and sovereignty and through
a child welfare system that "compensates" for that loss through the interjection of
liminal and uncertain identities that the child is expected to adopt. As Fiona Paisley
(2004) insists, the settler-colonial locating of the child along racial and gendered
lines concerns the management of race and the management of both imperial and
colonial race politics (see also Jacobs, 2009; Stoler, 2002). Critical race scholars have
pointed out that the modalities of power invoked through (re)education and the very
destructiveness of the education and child welfare system themselves in the colony
are clear reminders that race and colonialism are inherent in the operation of the
welfare system as well as the educational one.

The invasion of childhood education as a specific location of control has con-
stituted an essential tool by which the Zionist regime has managed Palestinian
children and their educators and silenced their histories and moral claims. In
governing the colonized through an educational system aimed at shaping citizens'
subjectivities (Said, 1999, pp. 36–45), Zionists have used educational spaces and
personnel (educators, teachers, administrators) to maintain surveillance over both
the home and the homeland and to control textbooks, historical narratives, schools,
and the very home itself (Sa'di, 2014). Zionists implant secret security personnel in
schools, hire and fire teachers, and build and demolish schools with the specific aim
of managing and controlling childhood education so as to secure the consciousness
of the Palestinian child – and, I would argue, of future adults and leaders (Zureik
et al., 2010; Sa'di, 2014).

During the early years of the establishment of the State of Israel, two laws were
passed to ensure such dominance – the 1949 law of compulsory education and the

1953 law of state education – in order to institutionalize free compulsory education for all children between the ages of five and thirteen. In so doing, Israel created different educational systems for Jewish immigrants and for Palestinians. Sylvia Saba-Sa'di and Ahmad H. Sa'di examined the categorization of Palestinians in Israel into Muslim, Christian, Bedouins, and Druze. In their study of the Druze community in Palestine, they noted that the invasion of education through policy institutionalized Druze and Arab identities among the younger Palestinian generation so as to reorder and govern the colonized and their educational curriculum. The authors explain:

> In addition to the textbooks, the spaces in the school were arranged to mold students' subjectivity. The students are surrounded by conspicuously placed symbols, portraits, and slogans, which epitomize the duality of their identity as Druze and as Israelis. Beside the Israeli flag, which all schools in Israel are obliged by law to raise, the Druze flag is placed.
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> (Saba-Sa'di and Sa'di, 2018, p. 826)

Similar invasions of education and children's welfare and identity are apparent in the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), where in each area and over various time periods Israel has invoked and has continued to utilize different regimes of control. Israeli human rights organizations such as the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and B'Tselem have issued numerous reports to stress the discriminatory policies applied, for example, in Occupied East Jerusalem (OEJ). In May 2015, ACRI stated that: "The current educational inequalities, particularly in East Jerusalem, not only reflect social and economic inequality, but highlight the overall issue of discrimination within Israel" (ACRI, 2015; see also Ir Amim, 2014). Invading, controlling, and militarizing education in the Palestinian context – similar to, but also different from, other colonial and settler-colonial contexts – reinforces racialized hierarchies of life and death that locate Palestinians and Israelis and that locate Palestinians among themselves. Given the takeover of children's education, it remains open to debate whether the colonial regime is interested in "killing the Indian in the child" (Churchill, 2004; Fournier and Crey, 1997) and so saving the child, or whether it aims to achieve a different political goal.

Whether within Occupied East Jerusalem, the 1948 borders of Palestine, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip, Palestinian children face daily Israeli discrimination and violence. The Israeli military and security forces arrest, interrogate, and detain approximately 700 Palestinian children each year, and "an estimated 7,000 children have been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system – an average of two children each day" over the past ten years (UNICEF, 2013). Several human rights organizations have criticized Israel for violating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Addameer, 2013; B'Tselem, 2011; DCI, 2012; UNICEF, 2013). Abuses reported by children detained and interrogated by the Israeli army include "physical assault,

stress positions, sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, verbal threats, isolation, and ... [denial of] access to parents or lawyers" (Addameer, 2013). A 2014 report from the Defence for Children International (DCI) documents the normalcy of both settler and soldier attacks against children in the West Bank. In 2013 alone, Israeli soldiers killed five Palestinian children, and between 2011 and 2013 more than 1,500 were injured. Sixty-seven of these children suffered severe injuries (Strickland, 2014). Additionally, between 2008 and 2012, the DCI documented 129 cases of settler violence directed specifically at Palestinian children (Strickland, 2014, p. 16). Not surprisingly, such violent and daily intrusion into children's lives fundamentally affects the quotidian routine and the course of their education.

The DCI report further notes the prevalence of army and settler attacks on elementary and secondary schools (Strickland, 2014, pp. 12, 16–17). Palestinian students from a school in Jalud, near Nablus, recall one attack in which settlers threw stones at the windows of their teachers' cars and set the surroundings of the school on fire. The principal of the Urif Secondary School, also near Nablus, pointed out that the Israeli military had attacked the school six times since 2013 (Strickland, 2014, p. 16). During these incidents, the military used "non-lethal riot dispersal methods," including stun grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets (Strickland, 2014, p. 17). Not only do such attacks interrupt student learning, such "methods" have the potential for serious physical injury, even death.

Palestinian children in Gaza face similar circumstances, as their lives are constantly at risk and their access to education is hindered by the Israeli military occupation. A United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) assessment of the conditions following Israel's 2014 war in Gaza reports that the Israeli army killed more than 500 children in less than three months (OCHA, 2014, p. 1). During this same period, 3,374 children were injured, with an estimated 1,000 suffering permanent disabilities. OCHA anticipates that 373,000 Palestinian children in Gaza will need specialized psychosocial support because of the trauma they have experienced during the war (OCHA, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, because of the severe damage and destruction caused by the occupying Israeli forces, half a million children were unable to begin the school year on time. Israeli attacks destroyed twenty-six schools, intensifying an already acute situation in which schools in Gaza are overcrowded and underresourced (OCHA, 2014, p. 4).

According to statistics released by the Ministry of Information in Ramallah, Israel's occupation forces killed 1,518 Palestinian children between September 2000 and April 13, 2013 (Global Research News, 2013), and 129 Israeli children were killed as a result of the conflict over the same period (Remember These Children, 2013). A recent report found that approximately 74 percent of Palestinian children have experienced physical and psychological abuse during arrest, transfer to detention facilities, or interrogation (DCI–P, 2013). These statistics

from both the West Bank and Gaza represent the ubiquity of structural and physical violence circumscribing Palestinian childhood.

A report on the treatment Palestinian children face when they encounter the Israeli military noted: "It may be that much of the reluctance to treat Palestinian children in conformity with international norms stems from a belief, which was advanced to us by a military prosecutor, that every Palestinian child is a '*potential terrorist*'" (Children in Military Custody, 2012, emphasis in original). As the global security, surveillance, and counterterrorism industry expands, the construction of Palestinian children as terrorists is tied to the commodification of their lives in which their bodies become experimental objects for the Israeli military, defense contractors, and security corporations. Security and surveillance technology and new weapons are tested on the Palestinian population in order to "prove" their effectiveness to potential customers and clients (Khalek, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Kane, 2015). This depiction of the Palestinian child as always already a "potential terrorist" and its continual and indeed *sentimental* reproduction of that embodiment through popular culture are then *materially* acted upon by Israeli soldiers and police. Another report that collected the testimonies of Israeli soldiers about their military service summarized their attitudes and actions toward children:

> the testifiers depict a routine in which Palestinian minors, often under 10 years of age, are treated in a manner that ignores their young age, and how, in practicality, they are perceived by both the soldiers and the military system at large as subject to the same treatment as adults.
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> (Breaking the Silence, n.d., p. 4)

During Israel's aggressive 2014 military operation in Gaza, the occupying forces and much of the Israeli public included Gazan children in the formulation of the Palestinian "threat." Investigations into Israeli military wrongdoing have all absolved the Israelis of any culpability in attacks on civilians and the places they assumed to be safe (Adalah, 2016). That the army and much of Israeli society considers the dead bodies of Palestinian children to be "casualties of war" (and sometimes celebrated them as such) demonstrates how these children's lives are objectified and erased by the violence of settler colonialism. Ironically, the ambiguous classification of "casualties of war" allows Palestinian children momentary pity in the larger context of dehumanization. During the 2014 Israeli war in Gaza, which I will discuss in depth in Chapter 5, Israeli pro-war demonstrators expressed their desire to eliminate the Palestinian people. The demonstrators, approving the Israeli army's use of extreme force, chanted: "Gaza is a graveyard!" and "There's no school tomorrow, there's no children left there [in Gaza]!" (Window into Palestine, 2014; Carlstrom, 2014). They celebrated the death of more than 500 children as an "opportunity" to eliminate Palestinian resistance and existence and thus establish "security" for the Jewish

state. Large groups of Israeli demonstrators made clear that they endorsed their state's military efforts to turn Gaza "into a graveyard." At the same time, the American television journalist Bob Scheiffer reported:

> In the Middle East, the Palestinian people find themselves in the grip of a terrorist group that is embarked on a strategy to get its own children killed in order to build sympathy for its cause – a strategy that might actually be working, at least in some quarters. Last week I found a quote of many years ago by Golda Meir, one of Israel's early leaders, which might have been said yesterday: "We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children," she said, "but we can never forgive them for forcing us to kill their children."
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> (DemocracyNow!, 2014)

The analogy between Gaza and a graveyard can be traced back to Brigadier General Zvika Fogel, the leader of the Israel Occupying Force's Southern Command Unit during and after the Second Intifada (2000–2005). Laleh Khalili notes that the unit "unofficially declared death zones in Gaza, where anyone entering could be shot" (Khalili, 2012). This construction of the relationship between space and bodies compels us to reject the term "war zone" and replace it with "death zone." As Fogel himself asserts, "We had to create areas in which anyone who entered was considered a terrorist" (Feldman, 2007). The implications of this shift from war zone to death zone are clearly articulated by the demonstrators' exultant chants about dead Palestinian children. Through understanding the settler state's goal of replacing the Native's society with its own, we can begin to unravel Israel's claims about self-defense and "national security" and thus undertake a new reading of the political work of state violence against children.

For me, understanding the complexity of childhood across historic Palestine requires investigating how Palestinian children do not simply exist in a context of violence, but also how they exist as targets within "death zones" created by the Israeli military, targets that are justified by Israeli society. The spatial implications of "death zones" are particularly relevant to Palestinian children because, by expanding the culpability of "terrorist" violence to certain areas (rather than certain bodies), children fall into the spatial category of presumed guilt. The concept of "death zones" produces a politicized space in which all inhabitants – the "dangerous" populations, the taken-for-granted enemy – threaten the colonizing state. Palestinian children's social, racial, and geographic status and location thus become entangled with the justifying logics of their necessary elimination.

Israeli politicians also articulate antagonistic and insensitive statements about Palestinian children. During Israel's attack on Gaza in 2014, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Hamas "use[s] telegenically dead Palestinians for [its] cause" (Winer, 2014), remarking further that "the worst thing is that they [Hamas] use their children, they use their civilians" (CNN, 2014). Mirroring Netanyahu's view, in what has become a famous and