

Ghummeida: Outdoor Play in a Militarized Zone

NADERA SHALHOUB-KEVORKIAN AND RAZZAN QURAN

Abstract

This paper connects two seemingly distinct subjects—the right to health and children’s play in contexts of a militarized settler colony. Following Ignacio Martín-Baró’s articulation of a critical psychology “of the people,” we outline the spatial and psychosocial economies of childhood outdoor play as forms of social and political determinants of health and human rights.¹ We offer an analysis through the words and reflections of Palestinian Jerusalemite children that expose the mundane violence produced and sustained by the colonizer, whereby children’s play creates spaces of livability against necropolitics. We draw on 50 observations of Palestinian children’s play of Ghummeida—hide and seek—spanning 2020 through 2022 in four locations in occupied East Jerusalem. Our analysis proposes three overlapping fields through which Ghummeida operates: as a game, as resistance to spatial suffocation, and against unchilding. Across each of these fields, children’s ways of embodying their right to play and live are presented as acts of refusing the chronic political violence they are exposed to. The produced processes include generativity, ownership of space, the surface and the body, and psychic repair. The paper concludes by unveiling how Ghummeida, with its metaphoric and embodied imprints, enables Palestinian children’s psychosocial well-being, and pursuit of human rights, through defying their reality under a brutal system of apartheid.

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Introduction

Cruel and mundane settler-colonial subjugation can foreclose psychosocial well-being, producing conditions of precarity.² Nonetheless, children embody their refusal of subjugation by transforming sites of militarization into sites that enhance their creativity and psychosocial well-being.³ This paper applies a decolonial and child-centered approach to explore how Palestinian children in occupied East Jerusalem (OEJ) produce spaces of play in a settler-colonial context. Following Ignacio Martín-Baró's critical psychology "of the people," we offer an analysis through the words and reflections of Palestinian children playing Ghummeida—hide and seek—in OEJ.⁴ We explore children's play as a burgeoning path to well-being by exercising their quest for fun and interdependence, as well as to deal with the relentless attacks on children perpetuated by settler colonialism.⁵ This is in response to the plethora of research on the negative impact of political violence on health and well-being and the under-researched aspects of the collective practices employed to resuscitate health and well-being.⁶

In Palestine, children develop their sense of agency and refusal amid the process of locating their suffering within the colonial violence that dominates their reality.⁷ Recent studies conducted through decolonial research methodologies illuminate the emergent resiliency-building processes among Palestinians, and specifically Palestinian children living under chronic political violence.⁸ Scholars employed qualitative methodologies to explore the sources of spatial agency utilized by children to counteract the harmful impact of chronic exposure to structural trauma.⁹ This invites a deeper exploration of the role and importance of play in childhood development.

We hope to illustrate the use of play by children in OEJ as simultaneously an imaginative and actual space that transmits children's capacity for repair and reclamation. Moreover, this paper highlights the remedying layers of Ghummeida in facilitating children's repossession of personhood and psychosocial well-being within and against a militarized and occupied apparatus. To understand children's play as apparent in Ghummeida, we will

present an analytic scheme staging some of the assemblages apparent in children's play. The analyses demonstrate how children's use of play enacts a refusal of chronic violence through cultivating four assemblages. These assemblages highlight the relationalities between Palestinian children's play as an intentional and active process of reclaiming place amid dispossession. In utilizing play to reconstitute spaces of dispossession as spaces of livability, the children repair psychological wounding, insisting on the right to live and exist without fear.

This article utilizes interdisciplinary language and terms such as "psychic repair" and "unchild-ing." The term unchilding was coined by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian in the book titled *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding* in reference to the systematic process of violating children's right to live and exist as children.¹⁰ Unchilding reveals the multiple and dynamic layers of state violence against the colonized subject, which implicates children's play psychologically, socially, and spatially whereby "violence against Palestinian childhood becomes part of the war machine."¹¹ Hence, Palestinian children are exposed to violence designed to create, direct, govern, transform, and construct colonized children as dangerous, racialized others, enabling their eviction from the realm of childhood itself.¹² Moreover, in psychoanalytic orientations to psychological well-being, the term psychic is used to delineate the psychological interiority of an individual.¹³ The term psychic repair is a psychoanalytic term denoting processes of amelioration, repair, and restoration of one's mental health.¹⁴

Political violence

Political violence is "characterized by both physical and psychological acts aimed at injuring or intimidating populations."¹⁵ Amnesty International has pointed to Israel's system of militarization and domination that has resulted in the fragmentation of Palestinians into domains of control, displacing Palestinians of land and property.¹⁶ The state's structural violence has been maintained through laws, policies, and practices that segregate and con-

trol Palestinians to the benefit of Jewish settlers, depriving Palestinians of their social, cultural, and economic rights. Political violence produces an array of poor mental health outcomes, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety.¹⁷ How and in what ways do children exercise their right to play under a militarized regime, when soldiers, rifles, and surveillance technologies become a mundane scene in their lives? What does play look like amid the condition of “gun to body”?¹⁸

Article 6(1)–(2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “states parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life” and that “states parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.”¹⁹ According to Cindy Sousa, studies on the nexus between political violence and health reveal that political violence “damages community as a shared physical location of people, culture, and identity ... and changes the overall climate and functioning of communities through instillation of collective fear and terror, destruction of network, and diminishment of community organizing activities.”²⁰ With regard to children directly, an estimated 299,979 Palestinian children suffer from psychosocial distress across occupied Palestine.²¹ Palestinian children are exposed to a range of human rights violations, including threats to life, liberty, and security; destruction and damage to homes; forced displacement; physical violence; psychological abuse; detention; and restrictions on their freedom of movement.²²

The violation of the aforementioned rights hinders children’s ability to engage openly and actively in social and political life because political violence “rupture[s] people’s ability to access help from their social environments.”²³ The Israeli system of military occupation and subjugation has myriad impacts on Palestinian children, including impacts to safety, development, and psychosocial well-being.²⁴ Moreover, “political violence may decisively shape family relationships and parent–child interaction and influence each family member in distinctive ways.”²⁵ Hence, political violence and military trauma penetrate every aspect of children’s development by invading the family and inter-

personal fabric.²⁶ Ultimately, chronic exposure to political violence and the erosion of human rights can result in the development of mental health problems, with symptoms of isolation, mistrust, and withdrawal.²⁷

The right to engage in play

According to article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”²⁸ Since the beginning of 2022, 11 Palestinian children have been killed because of Israeli military and settler presence in occupied Palestine.²⁹ Md Rashed Bhuyan discusses geographies of outdoor play in Dhaka, suggesting that children’s locations, preferences, and accessibility to playing spaces must be contextualized by parents, practitioners, and scholars.³⁰ Contextualizing playing spaces involves thinking critically about the way children navigate and move through these spaces. He suggests that when these spaces of play are contextualized, practitioners can improve children’s access to play and expand the health benefits of play. The production of playing spaces amid loss was apparent in the last week of May 2022, shortly after the killing of Al Jazeera journalist Shereen Abu-Aqleh.³¹ Amal, a 10-year-old girl living in the old city of Jerusalem, asked her neighbor to come down and play. Speaking in a loud articulate voice, she beckoned to her friend, ensuring that the soldiers standing and holding rifles nearby heard her:

Come down, come down to play Ghummeida ... We're all down here and we'll wait for you to come down ... They think since they killed Shereen Abu-Aqleh that we will not play ... You think if they filled the graveyard with our bones that it'll keep us from playing ... Come down come down ... We are waiting.

When consulting with voices like Amal’s, health professionals must not only comprehend Amal’s creative actions and call but encourage its distilled properties. Amal’s interruption of violence amid

the mass “graveyard of bones” is an insistence on attaining the right to play against the backdrop of social and territorial uprooting and exterminable policies. In so doing, Amal is galvanized toward a collective outdoor play despite the presence of soldiers.

The benefits of play, as highlighted by the American Psychiatric Association, include the development of creative solutions, cultivation of empathy and respect for others, and the development of social and relational skills.³² Furthermore, Mark Tremblay and colleagues conclude that outdoor and self-directed play are integral to overall psychosocial well-being and childhood development.³³ Children’s expression through play engenders benefits related to health and well-being.³⁴ For example, Donald Winnicott developmentally illustrates how play is an integral building block for adulthood creativity, intellect, and spiritual endeavors.³⁵ Hence, early childhood and adolescence are important developmental stages, as they involve intensive biological, neurocognitive, emotional, and social growth spurts.³⁶

Methods

This paper is a continuation of a previous study entitled “Speaking Life, Speaking Death,” which took place between 2015 through 2020 and examined the mundane effect of militarization on children’s walk to school.³⁷ The present paper was born out of the previous study and took place between 2020 and 2022. It draws on our observation (N=40) of Palestinian children’s play in four locations in OEJ. The first author transcribed the discussions shared and, when guardian consent was approved, audio-recorded the children. The included vignettes arose from discussions with children and their chaperones, and conversations with youth and children who were gathered in public spaces (e.g., schools, shopping centers, and community areas). Most of the observations were documented by note-taking in the author’s journal and by the author’s audio-recording of her thoughts. Parental approval was obtained to ensure children’s safety in a militarized space. The study utilized a multi-methodological

approach in studying children living under systems of militarized control. The observations looked closely into three overlapping fields through which Ghummeida operates: as a game, as resistance to spatial suffocation, and against unchilding. The research was approved by the ethics committee of the Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Ghummeida: The game

Ghummeida, commonly called “hide and seek” in the Global North, is a recognized form of play. Ghummeida has various names across the Levant, including Ghumay, Al-Tummayeh, Tikhbai, and Al-Istighmayeh. Ghummeida has simple rules and is an interactive, collaborative, and communal form of play, as it cannot be played alone. Ghummeida involves both imaginative and physical aspects, for it is reliant on moving inward with eyes closed, and peering outward, in seeking others across the physical terrain. Additionally, children consider viable hiding locations, while craftily seeking others in recalled hiding spaces. Children explore their space and place through Ghummeida. In the context of Palestine, and OEJ specifically, Ghummeida’s insistence on collectivity disrupts the machineries of settler-colonial fragmentation, alienation, and isolation. It is a game that moves against the grain of the military-apartheid state; Ghummeida re-roots what the state is continuously uprooting. Therefore, Ghummeida fulfills a health and well-being requirement through expanding scopes of attaining the right to movement, imagination, and play.

Clinically, play has a long history in psychology and health. In the 1940s and 50s, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein established their careers by developing play therapy methodologies, describing play as a child substitution for free association.³⁸ Donald Winnicott celebrated play as a form of therapy and repair.³⁹ On an international level, in 1989, play was declared a universal human right of every child for its vital role in children’s health and well-being.⁴⁰ By playing out the everydayness in the game, children create a microcosm of life in occupied Palestine. Endeavoring to evade the

seeing eye, they fling their determined bodies and run, darting across the open space, into the swarming crowds, slipping and slinking among them, skillfully navigating their way through well-known familiar places. The myriad health benefits of play include the development of academic learning and physical abilities and the cultivation of creativity and social competence.⁴¹ In the public health field, determinants of health have recently been expanded to include articulations of everyday experiences of pleasure and enjoyment.⁴²

This expansive conceptualization of health is emboldened when observing children playing Ghummeida. Shrieks of joy, pain, and awe are heard over the shouts of the street vendors and squeaking gates of the “killing boxes” in Jerusalem’s old city.⁴³ Occasionally, claims of outrage and injustice may be heard, denoting an ardent refusal of the violation of some rule of the game. More often, the children’s bodies will come together and fuse into a bundle of exhilaration, celebrating yet another joyful or disappointing game as their play reclaims space and togetherness. It is as if the boundary between the lived experience and the psychic experience has been stretched. What those children feel and understand is replayed in the game: the terror of invasion, the determination to flee from a deadly gaze, and, mostly, the longing to move freely and collectively in their places, the places that belong to them.⁴⁴ The mind of the child rewrites the reality of the place they play in, conveying a desire for an uninterrupted being in those places, a being that is not constantly disturbed by soldiers and checkpoints. Defying borders, the game is a borderless space that expands beyond the limits of checkpoints and walls.

During Ghummeida, then, the child exists in a liminal space in which bodies bolt away from the caging gaze toward liberatory possibilities produced of imaginative intentionality. The children are intentional in the game because they embody collectivity, sharing, ideation, and exploration. Full of life, the children’s bodies are liberated to move in ways that defy settler-colonial subjugation. Like a moving cloud, they inhabit their space in myriad and countless ways. However, this imaginative

realm does inhabit limitations. On one of the days observed during our study, children darted from one another on a wild chase to the home base. One of the children, enamored in their Ghummeida playing, bumped into a group of soldiers. The soldiers immediately prepared their assault rifles, prompting the researcher to plunge in to interfere and explain the child’s childness to the soldiers: “They are playing, those are children ... children play. No?” The soldiers fervently shouted, “This is a dangerous place, not a place to play,” to which she responded, “It is dangerous because you are here; leave the place and let the kids play in their neighborhood.” This exchange is important to share, because these are the spaces of freedom and constraint upon which Ghummeida exists in OEJ. The children’s play, although evacuating into fleeting reprieve, does not entirely relieve them from the context of structural violence and militarization. Children remain vulnerable to their excitement, zeal, and tenacity. The intention is to encourage their play, while also ensuring their safety amid locales of persecution.

Generativity specific to Ghummeida

Through play, children master their world, amid a chronic structural reminder that they are not supposed to attain mastery.⁴⁵ For example, Palestinian parents are constantly positioned in helpless roles at checkpoints and during home raids.⁴⁶ Their children watch as their protectors are held in captivity, detained in political imprisonment, and humiliated at checkpoints. The intentional engagement in Ghummeida reminds children that they can and are developing capacities and self-efficacy needed to endeavor in future challenges.⁴⁷ Furthering the intentional aspect engendered in Ghummeida, researchers report that hiding and seeking are both dependent on “perceived intentions and the affordances of others ... a theory of mind is employed, whereby people adopt another’s perspective of how they might behave, rather than persisting with their own singular perspective.”⁴⁸ Hence, from a cognitive perspective, Ghummeida involves an active process of comparing situations and ascribing va-

lences in accordance with collectively learned and experiential pathways. These skills experientially expose children to their capacity at discernment, decision-making, and mastery in a terrain of imposed disempowerment and humiliation. From an emotional perspective, Brian Parkinson highlights emotions as intentions.⁴⁹ Emotions are about something, shaping a direction toward an object.⁵⁰ From this lens, children intentionally defy Israeli surveillance and domination by reorienting their emotive worlds, momentarily, toward a landscape as a playground. Children, here, are showing us how defiance and subversion peer through the veil of helplessness and passivity into intentionality and action. However, the politics of spatiality in present day Jerusalem imposes material constraints on the safety and process of play. To understand the spatiality reclaimed by Palestinian children's play through Ghummeida, as well as the settler-colonial oppression that these children disrupt, we present below a review of the sociohistorical and political materiality of Jerusalem's spatial suffocation.

Ghummeida: Politics of spatial suffocation in Judaization

Here, in the building, on the stairs and in the alley around the house ... we all play ... Ghummeida is my favorite game ... I know exactly where to hide and not to be found [giggling] ... I hide my toys here [pointing to a closet by stairs] ... and we all meet by the stairs to play together... but since the arrest of Mahmoud our neighbor [16-year-old-Jerusalemite], and the daily invasions of the soldiers ... our game is ruined, our neighborhood is ruined. (Fatoum, 12 years old)

Fatoum is a 12-year-old Jerusalemite girl. She invites us into her layered and intricate relationship with Ghummeida and what she extracts from play. Fatoum shares how militarization alters the topography of her neighborhood by seizing spaces of play and detaining her friends. Fatoum speaks about her outdoor play and spatial suffocation as indivisible.

The socio-history of urban "planning" in Jerusalem was formulated through colonial imag-

inaries of a "static place that belonged to medieval times."⁵¹ Defining Jerusalem as such illustrates the settler-colonial ideological narrative within acts of benevolence, concealing its material consequences. The actual consequences, for one, include Indigenous erasure and dispossession from Jerusalem. Rana Barakat traces how "town planning" and "development" in Jerusalem were and continue to be intended processes for social and political control.⁵² The only way for the Indigenous population to build homes, shops, and so forth is through "special" and spatial governmental permission, which is often denied to Palestinians.⁵³ This, as Nur Masalha argues, reveals the Zionist need to Judaize land, eradicating Palestinian presence to "prove" a lineage of belonging to the space and embolden an emotional tie between settler and settlement, while reaping the economic gains of said project.⁵⁴

What the Israeli government identifies as the "open areas project" is the brutal settler-colonial practice of limiting, controlling, and obfuscating the Palestinian neighborhoods of Silwan, Ras al-Amud, Wadi Joz, al-Suwana, Essawiyeh, Sheikh Jarrah, and Al-Tur.⁵⁵ The Israeli aim is to siege Jerusalem with ideological tourist "parks" and settlements, kicking Palestinians out and bringing settlers in.⁵⁶ Israeli law considers Palestinians as mere "residents" of Jerusalem, exposing them to precarious living conditions. Consequently, thousands of Jerusalemites have had their residencies "revoked" by Israeli authorities.⁵⁷ Jerusalem in 2022 is a caged city.⁵⁸ It includes hundreds of biometric cameras, tens of "killing boxes," and hundreds of Israeli soldiers and police storming the city and neighboring areas at all hours.⁵⁹ As Monique Skidmore's research in Burma highlights, the intended outcome of such structures is to alienate, fragment, dislocate, and repulse the Indigenous subject from their sense of space.⁶⁰ The Indigenous subject is surveilled, is to feel and predict surveillance, and is expected to succumb to the right to movement foreclosing, dispossessed of belonging, familiarity, and ease. These technologies are the 21st-century panopticon whereby the Indigenous subject is forced to reckon with their objectification—and in Palestine,

these are considered military necessities.⁶¹

Consequently, it is imperative to perceive children within a decolonial lens, to understand their embodied and psychic liberatory capacities and how they disrupt objectification through Ghummeida. Manfred Liebel outlines the settler-colonial ideological equivalence between children and savagery.⁶² Additionally, he traces the historical lineage of childhood studies to settler-colonial “conquest,” adding, “all dominant models of human ‘development’ included territorial associations ... as territories to be conquered, occupied, researched and proselytized.”⁶³ Hence, to understand children’s liberatory potentialities, we must both uphold children’s knowledge production and learn from their practical effects. This involves following the children’s footsteps. Doing so is the antithesis of Israeli colonial domination and “unchildering.”⁶⁴ When we adhere to children’s prescription of developing articulations of the body, of the sensory apparatus, in relation to the carceral space they inhabit, we too can learn how Ghummeida becomes a critical and pedagogical space for liberation.⁶⁵

Ownership of space

With Ghummeida, children garner fluency in the potential permanence of space. That is, they can hide and alternate turns, but the home base remains the home base, regardless of how settler colonialism distorts the space. Consequently, Ghummeida’s spatial benefits involve enhanced capacity to reclaim space by exploring ground through play. The children’s running, seeking, and hiding reverberates a discourse producing knowledge of nooks and crannies for safety. To the extent that children acquire knowledge on where narrow allies meander, this knowledge becomes a reminder of how to find home when violence erupts.⁶⁶ Hence, children reclaim their right to movement and play, producing a pedagogy of the unoppressed child. In so doing, the children are expanding their own access to health amid “graveyards of bones.” However, this play is contingent on the brutality and force of the Israeli repressive state apparatus, for however mighty the child’s tenacity and curiosity, the force of a bullet continues to penetrate.⁶⁷

The settler-colonial state invests millions of shekels annually to construct a facade belonging between Jewish Israeli identity and Jerusalem. Conversely, these children evince this belonging by running, hiding, and seeking in the old city. The children are reminded, at various junctures of their play, of the wretchedness of the othering gaze, of technologies intended to evoke panopticon disciplined and docile beings.⁶⁸ Yet they insist on playing and creating habitable spaces in deathly zones. Hence, in Ghummeida, the children create what Victor Turner identifies as “liminal entities,” which “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.”⁶⁹

Sara Ahmed shows that

*fear works to contain bodies within social space through the way it shrinks the body ... it works to enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public space through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained. It is the regulation of bodies in space through the uneven distribution of fear which allows spaces to become territories, claimed as rights by some bodies and not others.*⁷⁰

When the children assert their locality in Jerusalem through Ghummeida, they expand their vocabulary of belonging. They also diversify meanings of place(s) intended to evoke fear, with meanings of familiarity. This intrapsychic and spatial process allows for the Palestinian child to make sense of self in an alienating militarized space.

Ghummeida: Unchilding

Amal, the child who opened this article, explained:

From the moment they killed Shereen ... Ghummeida has ... changed ... our playing has changed ... we now make a coffin and hide inside it ... but they dropped Shereen’s coffin ... but we held it ... and delivered it to the cemetery. ... want to see the coffin I hide in? Why can’t we play in the neighborhood whenever we’d like? ... It’s because the soldiers will kill us ... but we find hiding spot, and we hide ... Shereen hid ... yeah yeah Shereen was hiding when they killed her ... but ... I cannot

go without playing, we all love to play, to hide, we get so excited together [giggles] ...what can we play when these soldiers are glued to our homes?!

Hiding from trauma, playing against it to enhance their own processing of reality, and exploring new modes of protection through play reveals the way that colonial militarization marks children's bodies and spaces as shootable. This aligns with what Shalhoub-Kevorkian terms "unchilding," rendering children political capital in the hands of the colonizer.⁷¹ As Amal's articulations illustrate, the children oscillate between constraint, limitation, dehumanization, and spaces for reclaiming childhood, humanity, and the right to exist.

One example of such oscillation can be seen in Lama, a 12-year-old Palestinian child from OEJ. Her every day is plagued with settler insistence on control, domination, and subjugation. Lama, in her childhood, understands this oppression. She names their "watch towers" as "killing boxes." For Lama, her sociohistorical materiality is plagued with memories and actualities of settler-colonial brutality and violence. For her, these "killing boxes" are not "watch towers," because their function exceeds that of a gazing eye, for it is where the sniper hides and where Palestinian children are dragged by soldiers. Lama articulates how her childhood is invaded by settler-colonial governance, simultaneously in the external-public realm and in the internal-intimate realm. For as Paulo Freire shows, where the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter is a reclamation of the right to be human. By fighting to reclaim their humanity, the oppressed refuse the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress.⁷² Children like Lama continue to forge pathways, evincing moments toward collective well-being as children. Lobna Hazaneh and colleagues explored this process of resilience-building among Palestinian children exposed to psychological trauma and found four reconfigured pathways through which these children ascribe meaning to their trauma, producing high levels of post-traumatic maturation.⁷³

The surface and the body

Although children harbor explorative and resilient capacities, they are thrust into realities that quake secure bases and debilitate the ease of life.⁷⁴ These machineries of political violence invade the internal world of children by shifting collective emotional orientations toward fear, anxiety, humiliation, and repulsion.⁷⁵ Ahmed's analysis of fear and its consequences suggests that fear is the anticipation of future hurt. She writes:

one sweats, one's heart races, one's whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation. So, the object that we fear is not simply before us, or in front of us, but impresses upon us in the present, as an anticipated pain in the future.⁷⁶

Nidal, a 10-year-old Jerusalemite boy shrieks in jubilation, "I lost my breath" while playing Ghummeida. Feeling "out of breath" when running is juxtaposed with the enforced loss of breath committed by the Israeli military on Palestinian children. On October 24, 2020, Amer Abdel-Rahim Snobar was 16 years old when Israeli soldiers placed him in a chokehold while at least six other soldiers beat and killed him near the occupied West Bank village of Turmus'ayya.⁷⁷ The Palestinian body, as Ahmed shows us, not only responds to the present exposure of fear but is also responding to historical exposures of fear; the body will re-experience this fear as it becomes forecasted into the future.⁷⁸ Yet Nidal's Ghummeida illustrates an alternative way of relating with and to the body amid settler colonialism. Nidal shows us that Ghummeida becomes a surface through which he reorients sensory phenomena (for example, touch, sound, breath, smell, kinesthesia, and interoception) from a place of alienating fear to exhilarating interdependence.⁷⁹ Ahmed's work on the connection between emotion and sensation, and how emotion is shaped by what we touch and the space(s) we encounter, assists in this reading.⁸⁰ These children, through playing Ghummeida, are contouring the emotional verbiage of what it entails to be Palestinian. They

are cunningly aware of the death machines, the need to hide in coffins, the haunting presence of soldiers ready to render them deviant, criminal, and unchilded. Through Ghummeida, children locate a momentary reprieve to reconfigure their bodies from a locus of disempowerment to a locus of belonging and health. They are “associat[ing] the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace.”⁸¹

Psychic repair

Children’s Ghummeida burgeons panaceas of embodied restoration and psychic repair. Ghummeida involves an element of disavowal and return. Whereas the Zionist narrative insists on the denial of Palestinian existence in asserting “a land without a people,” children’s Ghummeida disrupts this settler-colonial narrative by insisting on existing.⁸² Psychically, these children embody an active stance against intentional settler denial and reality splitting. This is clearest in Amal’s ascriptions to play despite the “graveyard of bones.” Ahmed quotes Elias’s suggestion that certain emotions are often elevated and prioritized while others are ultimately denigrated.⁸³ One’s capacity to control and isolate their emotions becomes heralded as a sign of civility.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, when children insist on losing their own breath while running, insist on shrinking to hide, and expand in seeking, they actively engage in defiance and a reassemblage of the psychic body. This act of defiance is central to the psychic structure of critical consciousness.⁸⁵ This is also what Renos Papadopoulos terms “adversity-activated development.”⁸⁶ In adversity-activated development, the individual exposed to trauma does not merely “bounce back”—rather, they transform meanings, ideals, emotions, and perspectives. In so doing, the child is inscribing the psyche with transformative potentials.

It is the child saying, “I’m here, I will jump out”—it is Amal, Fatoum, Nidal, Lama, and so many more endeavoring to play—that invites and transforms passive to active.⁸⁷ Here, the children unveil the ideological colonial apparatus, responding to spaces of killing with languages of

life-making. These children, through Ghummeida, are shape-shifting the emotional portfolio of being Palestinian, undoing processes of unchilding. Nevertheless, the entire time this exercise is taken up, the material reality of settler-colonial violence permeates. For this reason, although these are spaces of repair, creativity, and curiosity, the children’s lives remain vulnerable to political violence.

Conclusion

As you read this, Palestinian children continue to face militarization. They carry the lineages of their ancestors, remembering and endeavoring to exist in a landscape possessed by settler violence. Importantly, children are not surrendering to these machineries of unchilding. They oppose dehumanization and the tormenting eclipse of their childhood through an insistence on play. Ghummeida is presented as an example of play, refusal, and defiance, generating potential for psychosocial well-being. Children’s play amid militarization is both a public health issue and an important site of analysis for health professionals. Children’s play transforms sites not only to develop their creativity and nourish their enthusiasm and health but also to deal with the unending wounding and unchilding.

For Palestinian children playing Ghummeida, the collectivity, pleasure, freedom, creativity, adventure, and risk configures an assemblage of four components: generativity, ownership of space, the surface and the body, and psychic repair. Ghummeida, we argue, is a reparative process to forge children’s own pathways of being, existing, and playing. Ghummeida displays dialectical meaning ascription by playing with freedom and constraint against the colonial grain. It is an active choosing of hiding space and escapes amid a landscape of killability. Ghummeida extends playgrounds into spaces of livability, furthering a transformation from passive to active in the embodied and psychic sense.⁸⁸ Lastly, it insists on the requirement of employing an attentive epistemological reading of who hides from whom? Under what context? And to what outcome? Practitioners and those who work with children must be insightful, attentive,

and curious of children's play while encouraging meaning ascription. Palestinian children draw on Ghummeida as a conduit to practice the cultivation of an anti-colonial reality. Despite the game lasting a short time, it is time away from pain, suffering, and debilitation. Ghummeida's short time is precious—it is what children snatch as soldiers try to snatch their childhoods.

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