SCUOLA DI DOTTORATO
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

Department of Human Sciences "Riccardo Massa"

PhD program in Education and Communication Sciences
Cycle XXXII

UNPACKING THE CONSTRUCT OF AGENCY

Pathways to well-being and life satisfaction in children affected by military violence and political oppression: a mixed-method research design in Occupied Palestine.

Federica Cavazzoni

Registration number: 822618

Tutor: Prof. Guido Veronese

Coordinator: Prof.ssa Laura Formenti

ACADEMIC YEAR 2018/2019

All perceiving is also thinking,

all reasoning is also intuition

all observation is also invention.

Rudolf Arnheim

CONTENTS

Abstract

This dissertation has explored the well-being and life satisfaction of a group of Palestinian children living in the context of armed conflict and political violence, with a specific focus on the resources and capabilities that these children actively display in order to cope with those environments. Within the mainstream literature children are conventionally viewed as a vulnerable group and their coping abilities, survival skills and agency have been long overlooked and underestimated (Chatty, 2009, 2010; Veronese, Pepe, Jaradah, Murannak, & Hamdouna, 2017a; Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2018). With the present work we have attempted to fill the gap in literature, which has recurrently depicted and assessed children's weakness and the risks to their mental health as consequences of their exposure to political conflict and violence, advancing our scientific knowledge on children's capacity to cope with traumatic realities (Barber, 2014; McNeely et al., 2014; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). In order to challenge the traditional conceptualization of children as a highly vulnerable group, this research has been designed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective which also takes account of the competencies and strengths deployed by children to promote their own well-being in adverse contexts. More specifically, by conceptualizing agency as the person's capacity to act and contribute to his/her own security, well-being and development (Williamson & Robinson, 2006), this work has aimed to outline the importance of agency for children's well-being and, hence, its contribution in helping them adapt to and cope with challenging and traumatic living conditions.

Within a socio-ecological framework, our research design comprises two studies, a quantitative study and a qualitative one, with a sample of 250 children from 7 to 13 years old (M= 11.58; SD = 1.49; 45,2% male, 54.8% female) (75 for the qualitative investigation, M= 10.27; SD= 1.38, 68% female, 32% male), coming from different contexts in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (rural areas, urban areas, and refugee camps). The mixed methodology adopted has allowed us to approach and explore the phenomena in two different ways, reaching a more comprehensive understanding in a first attempt to *unpack* the construct of agency. Through the quantitative exploration we have been able to determine the extent to which children's ability to mobilize resources helps them to feel more satisfied with their life, and thus reduces the negative impact of their traumatic experiences. This analysis confirms that children's agency plays a key role in promoting

their psychological well-being in settings characterized by political violence and structural oppression.

Secondly, through the qualitative exploration, Palestinian children have shown themselves to be highly competent and active agents who draw on personal, social and external resources to enhance their well-being and life satisfaction and cope with adversity. Children's agency has emerged as particularly multidimensional, revealing the importance of moving across individual, family, community, and societal levels when examining life in war-torn contexts. The conceptual model built from our data highlights the crucial interconnection between, on the one hand, children's strategies and practices of agency (i.e., actively employing social resources; challenging movement restrictions; receiving an education; personal strategies; reclaiming play-spaces; meaning-making processes and political engagement) and, on the other hand, the multiple ecologies implied in promoting – or suppressing – their ability to mobilize resources to improve their own well-being.

Our findings challenge the above-mentioned picture of children as helpless victims, portraying children living in the shadow of violence as active agents who mobilize resources both within themselves and within their social, physical, and political world. By filling gaps in the available knowledge about the protective process associated with well-being and positive mental health outcomes in children exposed to political conflicts and violence, this research suggests possible directions to follow in order to design better policies and interventions. Our findings underscore that intervention programs must be designed to foster and cultivate children's agency and to mobilize the ecological resources that can protect them at an individual, relational and cultural level.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of many years of work, during which I have received the support and help of many. Given the limitations of space, it is not possible to name all the people who have gone along with me in these years, but I will try to do my best.

I must first thank my professor and friend Guido Veronese for his guidance through each stage of the process and for supporting me from start to finish, and my colleague and advisor Alessandro Pepe for his active help, cooperation, and encouragement along my path. I would like to extend my sincere obligation towards all the professors on my doctoral committee who gave me their help and feedback to strengthen my abilities and understanding of theories and methods. Special thanks are due to Cindy Sousa and Marwan Diab for agreeing to serve as external committee members and for the time that they have dedicated to supervising my work and suggesting how to improve it. My heartfelt thanks also go to my friend Alec Fiorini, for his fundamental assistance in removing all my barbaric grammar errors from this work and to Peter Bearman, Sabrina Russo, and Rita Giacaman, for their invaluable support and feedback during my visiting periods at their universities.
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Shaher Yaghi and Alaa Jaradah for helping me in the collection of data and for their essential assistance within and outside Gaza. This research was indeed made possible by the help, support, and friendships of numerous Palestinian individuals, families, associations, and institutions. I am deeply indebted to all my Palestinian friends and colleagues who have helped me during these years, welcoming me into their homes and lives and sharing with me their experiences and their knowledge. I owe you all a lot. I would especially like to thank my research assistants, translators, and consultants – Ehab Ghafri, Hania Obaid, Lina, Mona Nofal, Hala Kittaneh, Hala Schoman, Abd Salayma, Ali Noubani, and Jihad Ramadan – and all the associations who have supported me with their hospitality and invaluable help – *Human Supporters Association, Ibdaa Cultural Center, Jordan Valley Solidarity Campaign, Remedial Education Center*.
Sincere thanks also go to Giulio Tonincelli and Ahmed Altawil for their video and photography skills, which have ensured a complete and professional visual reportage for this thesis. A final, exceptional, and heartfelt thanks to all the children, young people, families, and volunteers who have so generously participated in and contributed to this research.

In addition to all the wonderful support that I have found in Palestine, there is also a whole list of people in Italy to thank. First and foremost, I owe a huge debt of gratitude (and not just of gratitude!) to my parents and my sister – mostly – who are always interested and proud of my work and who always inspire me to stand on the shoulders of giants. Without them, this research would not have been possible. A final special thanks go to Giacomo, Veronica, Josephine, Valentina, and all my friends and colleagues for their support and assistance during this beautiful but hard path. The last thank to Matilde, Alessandra e Caterina and all my Ph.D. colleagues for making this journey less lonely, for their cooperation and for contributing to my mental wellbeing during these years.

Introduction

If it doesn't start personal, it does not start.
But if it ends personal then it ends.
Arguelles, 2007

Although no precise estimate is available, at present there are hundreds of millions of people living in contexts marked by armed conflict and political violence (Harbom & Wallesteen, 2010).[1] The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been raging for almost a hundred years, is regarded as one of the most prolonged, controversial, and intractable conflicts in contemporary history (McNeely et al., 2014). Following the founding of the Jewish State, the Six-Day War of 1967, and two Intifadas, Palestinians are now living in their sixth decade of Israeli military occupation. Israel exercises political and military control over the whole Palestinian territory (the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem) through tight networks of control and restrictions of Palestinians' movement and life (Halper, 2002; Rabaia, Saleh, & Giacaman, 2014; Weisman, 2007). This prolonged occupation exposes the Palestinian population to daily situations of danger, violence, and human rights violations (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Qouta, Punamäki, & El Sarraj, 2008). Many researchers, clinicians, policy-makers, and human rights activists have documented the consequences of this exposure to political and military violence on the civilian population. In particular, they have highlighted the dangers posed to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and psychological development of children and youth (Al-Krenawi, Lev-Wiesel, & Mahmud, 2007; Amnesty International, 2007).

If we look beyond the Palestinian context, we see that, particularly over the last 30 years, concern for and interest in the development of children growing up in contexts marked by political violence and warfare has greatly increased, not least because of the dramatic surge in the number of minors exposed to such dangers. Within the various fields of psychology, social work, and mental health, increasing efforts are being made to identify and describe the impact of political violence on the mental health of young people and children (De Jong, 2005; Dubow et al., 2010; Giacaman et al., 2007).

[1] The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) uses the expression political violence to describe any attempt – made by a government or State – to achieve political objectives through the systematic use of physical force, or manipulation, including the denial of basic needs and human rights, such as access to food, education, healthcare, medical treatment, and freedom of expression and association (Marshall & Sousa, 2017).

Despite this growing interest and research, no consensus has been reached within the academic community as to how we should envisage and interpret the impact of this violence and its possible implications. If we delve into the literature on the mental health and well-being of children in contexts of armed conflict and political violence, what we find is an open debate between those who follow and promote a strictly psychiatric and biomedical model and those who seek to examine the whole issue from a more holistic and broader socio-ecological and socio-historical perspective (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

On the one hand, therefore, researchers and academics in the first camp have long concentrated their efforts on understanding and evaluating how exposure to such violence contributes to increasing mental health distress, even leading to the development of longer-term psychopathology. With reference to the concepts of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, attention has been devoted to identifying psychiatric symptom patterns that could be defined and evaluated on the basis of objective diagnostic criteria, which is to say criteria independent of the social, cultural, or environmental context in which the suffering is observed. Within the Palestinian context, research in this field has extensively documented how high levels of military and political violence experienced during childhood development leads to the emergence of a wide range of negative outcomes in terms of mental health (psychological stress, behavioral problems, post-traumatic stress disorder) (Palosaari, Punamäki, Qouta, & Diab, 2013; Qouta, Punämaki, & El Sarraj, 2003; Slone & Mann, 2016; Thabet, Thabet, & Vostanis, 2018).

On the other hand, various scholars have questioned the assumption of a direct, objective, and observable link between exposure to stressful experiences and the onset of psychiatric or psychological disorders (Barber, 2008; Boyden, 2003; Cairn & Dawes, 1996). These authors have emphasized the need to re-think the notion of psychological trauma and suffering by tracing its epistemological origins back to a Western intellectual model that cannot be regarded as universally applicable (Boyden, 2003; Summerfield, 2001; Veronese, Pepe, & Castiglioni, 2015). Within this second current, a growing number of studies have emphasized how most children, even when living in highly traumatic and violent contexts, 'do not succumb to psychiatric illness' (Cairn & Dawes, 1996, p.137). The attention has shifted from the detection and evaluation of trauma symptoms in exposed children to the observation of their well-being and the behaviors enacted in order to preserve this well-being. One example would be the birth and development of the concept of resilience (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Masten, 2001; 2011; 2014). In order to identify and observe a 'resilient outcome,' it is necessary to pay attention to all those resources and protective

processes that promote and lead to positive adjustment, and hence positive functioning, despite specific risks (Atallah, 2017; Jones & Sumner, 2009; Werner, 2012). These approaches have laid the foundation for the acquisition of new knowledge from the field-based data which ensures a more holistic investigation of the life experiences and well-being of children living in war-torn areas, by also taking into account the local understanding of sickness, coping, adaptation, and well-being (Ben-Arieh, 2005; Qouta et al., 2003; Veronese, Castiglioni, Tombolani, & Said, 2012).

Exploring this important and topical debate has made it possible, first of all, to question existing – and predominant – models that have attempted to investigate and outline the consequences of exposure to political and military violence. It has also revealed the presence of a considerable numerical discrepancy, insofar as studies dealing with risk factors and the subsequent psychopathology are far more numerous than ones exploring the variables and processes associated with positive outcomes.

It is precisely this gap in the literature that my project seeks to fill, by addressing a largely unexplored question: how have Palestinian children been able to maintain positive psychological and emotional functioning throughout this long history of dispossession, as well as episodes of lower and higher intensity violence? (Rabaia et al., 2014, p.174). More specifically, the present study aims to contribute to the incipient investigation of one of the elements that seem to play an important role in relation to this question: *the construct of agency*. As we will discuss in this thesis, several factors promote, protect, and contribute to well-being – understood not merely as the lack of any particular disorder among exposed children, but as a sense of wellness of individuals, referred to all type of evaluations, both positive and negative, that people make of their lives. One factor that emerges – throughout most of the studies we will be examining, albeit not always in a clearly defined way – is the concept of agency. All the members of a population living in a context of armed conflict and political violence play an active role in ensuring their own safety and preserving their own well-being and development. This capacity to act and mobilize resources, to participate in this promotion, and to preserve one's own well-being has been studied in terms of agency.

Over the last two decades, the concept of agency has been one of the key theoretical contributions to the new studies on childhood. This concept, which implies that of participation, sees children as actively involved – like adults – in assigning meaning to their own reality, and hence in improving and promoting their own well-being and life satisfaction. The questioning of the orthodox idea of the exposed child as a helpless victim

(Boyden, 2003) and its replacement with the understanding of the child as an active agent with respect to his/her development and life have brought about a radical shift within the research and interventions in this field.

Although it is possible to find some studies that highlight this capacity for mobilization and for the deployment of resources as a means to face challenging contexts, it is evident that we know little about the different ways in which children exert and display this agency, as well as about what personal, contextual, social or cultural resources may contribute – or repress – this mobilization. Armed conflict and political violence alter the whole social ecology of children by jeopardizing their safety, social bonds, and environmental resources. This makes it necessary to observe the phenomenon within a theoretical framework that allows us to take into consideration the different risk and protection factors present in a child's environment and also to observe how these factors interact with one another, which contributes to an enhancement in the child's psychological well-being (Boothby, Strang, & Wessells, 2006; Tol, Haroz, Hock, Kane, & Jordans, 2014). Thus, in an effort to help fill these gaps, we have chosen to develop our investigation within a socio-ecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1989).

Setting out from these premises, in the present research we explore the agency of Palestinian children and evaluate its contribution to the promotion of their well-being and life satisfaction. More specifically, through this work we wish to pursue two goals. First of all, we seek to identify and investigate the actual presence of this contribution, by addressing the following questions: does this capacity of children to mobilize themselves and mobilize their resources actually increase their life satisfaction and well-being? Does the fact of being capable – and of perceiving oneself as capable – of exercising active control over one's own life and well-being also contribute to mediating and reducing the impact of traumatic events in everyday life? Subsequently, for the purpose of unpacking the construct of agency and its constitutive aspects in detail, we explore and investigate the individual, social, cultural or contextual sources that children refer to in their everyday life in order to mobilize their competencies and activate their strategies to better cope with their difficult reality. We therefore ask: what factors operate as sources of agency, helping children to challenge their environment? Most importantly, what strategies do children adopt, in terms of their actions and competencies? How does their agency manifest itself in their everyday practices?

In the choice of a method to unpack this multi-faceted construct and thereby answer our research questions, we have once again turned to the available literature. While there is a

dearth of quantitative studies on agency from a psychological perspective, the tools currently available to carry out a quantitative evaluation of children are limited, unspecific, and insensitive to cultural or contextual aspects (Veronese, Pepe, Cavazzoni, Obaid, & Perez, 2019a, b). Moreover, when seeking to consistently develop this research with the aims and theoretical framework we had set, we realized that a purely quantitative assessment would not enable the kind of active involvement of the participants that can afford some insight into their points of view and allow them to display their competencies and resources (Fassinger, 2013). The possibility of bringing these two perspectives together into a single study thus led us to opt for a mixed-method design (Cresswell, 1999; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, our research design comprises two studies, both qualitative as well as quantitative, which includes a sample of 250 children (75 for the qualitative investigation) between the ages of seven and thirteen, coming from different contexts in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (rural areas, urban areas, and refugee camps). The first step was to assess whether and to what extent this agency is perceived by the children and if it displays a significant influence in increasing their well-being and in mediating the presence of traumatic symptoms. Through the usage of self-reported questionnaires, we explored and investigated the statistical association between the children's sense of agency, on the one hand, and their life satisfaction, affect balance, and the traumatic symptoms they reported, on the other. Secondly, we set out a subsequent qualitative study to better understand and outline the construct of agency. Through a participatory place-based methodology and the usage of visual methods – such as drawings, child-led tours, and interviews – we observed how the children use and activate their individual, recreational, educational, social or environmental resources as a means to preserve positive functioning and subjective well-being, despite their challenging contexts, and also in what form their agency is expressed.

Over the course of this thesis, we will therefore conduct a detailed exploration of the construct of agency as it relates to a group of Palestinian children living in contexts affected by political violence and oppression. Through both quantitative data and the children's own words, we will see how this agency is exerted and displayed and how it shapes the way in which the children face everyday life. The work is divided into 6 chapters, which may be outlined as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an initial overview of the literature exploring the consequences and impact of political violence and armed conflict on children. Through an in-depth and critical gaze, we will present the breakthrough research in the field by considering and moving

beyond the biomedical perspective that has long dominated research on the topic. The chapter will investigate the most recent studies devoted to well-being and life satisfaction in contexts marked by armed conflict and political violence. *Chapter 2* will go on to trace the various academic approaches adopted by geographers, philosophers, and psychologists to address the issues of agency. Starting with an exploration of the history and origin of the concept, we examine the various developments of the construct: from Bandura's foundational conceptualization to the new perspectives that consider agency as embedded within a particular socio-cultural context. The chapter will then examine the new perspectives regarding children as agentic subjects and the privileging of children's voices and experiences in academic research. From here, we will go on to explore children's expression and sources of their agency in the context of political violence and armed conflicts through a systematic literature review addressing the last ten years of peer-reviewed material on the subject. In *Chapter 3*, in order to introduce the research project (including its aims, hypothesis, theoretical and methodological background, and the specificities of the fields explored), we will start with a brief summary regarding the historical and political background and a description of the context where this research took place: Palestine. Therefore, we will proceed by providing some significant key points on the prolonged, and still unresolved, conflict between Israel and Palestine. This background information and the contextualization of the political situation are foundational to the study and analysis. After this historical introduction, we will provide an overview of the life of children living in Palestine. With the First Intifada, Palestinian children and youth started taking a prominent political position. The media began showing images of youth confronting soldiers, as well as of children engaged in demonstrations, being imprisoned, and even killed. As a result, children became a symbol of the Palestinian struggle. As Marshall (2013) notes, Palestinian children found themselves trapped within a controversial dualism: as both heroes of the uprising and also innocent, traumatized victims of the occupation. The iconic image of the *children of the stones* – children throwing stones against army tanks, representing hope and resistance in the First Intifada – has today been transformed into a symbol of suffering, humiliation, and victimization (Marshall, 2013). Thus, in an effort to find a balance within these two divergent characterizations, more recent studies about Palestinian children will be presented. Furthermore, we will introduce both the aims and the hypothesis that drove the present research project, in addition to the theoretical and methodological approaches that we have used to address them. Finally, we will provide some specific information about the sites in which the fieldwork took place.

Chapter 4 and *Chapter 5* describe the two studies that constitute this research. More specifically, Chapter 4 presents and outlines the quantitative study. In order to assess the actual perception of agency and its possible influence on the participants' well-being, through the use of self-reported questionnaires we have explored the statistical link between the sense of agency of the children, their life satisfaction, their affect balance, and their traumatic symptomatology. Chapter 5 illustrates the second step of this study, aimed at identifying the forms that this agency takes through a thematic analysis of qualitative data. The purpose is to advance a more comprehensive exploration of the expressions and sources of childhood agency as well as of the many ways they are used to both reinforce life satisfaction and control trauma. Therefore, after a description of the participants and the contexts investigated, the participatory place-based methodology adopted is presented. Then, starting from the exploration of how relational, educational, recreational, communal, and physical places either support or suppress a child's ability to mobilize their resources, the analysis seeks to reveal how children navigate their way through the violent and challenging context in which they find themselves. Finally, in *Chapter 6* the results of the two studies will be discussed in an integrated way, so as to develop and present a more comprehensive and complete description of children's agency in Palestine. We will describe the limits of such research and its possible applications in terms of clinical practice and of interventions designed to promote the well-being of children in such contexts. The last section will be devoted to some necessary reflections on the ethical challenges encountered during the work.

Chapter One
Children, armed conflicts and political violence

1.1 Growing up among conflict-affected areas: a brief overview

Concern for children growing up in conditions of political violence and armed conflicts is not new. Since the mid-1990s, scholars, academics, and mental health practitioners have explored and investigated the impact of war and political violence on the mental health and well-being of youth populations living in conflict-affected areas (Ager, 2002; Gilligan, 2009). A considerable body of literature has been developed in order to investigate the risks and challenges faced by those children so as to develop more effective prevention techniques to help them both cope and survive in their environment (Barber, 2008; Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, Charrow & Tol, 2013, Cummings, Merrilees, Taylor, & Mondi, 2017c; Masten, 2014). After Garmezy's (1983) first central review on the well-being and mental health of children living amidst armed conflict and war-torn environments, this research area has increased significantly.

Despite the growing academic and clinical interest in this area, scholars still highlight the urgent need to develop new research on children and youth's life under political and military violence, underlining two main areas in need of consideration (Barber, 2008; Betancourt et al., 2013; Cummings et al., 2017a; Masten, 2014). On the one hand, according to the Secretary-General to the United Nations Security Council's annual report (United Nations, 2014), the number of children living in conflict zones has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the new century. The latest analysis of the United Nations' Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC, 2014) found that over the last few years one in six children live in conflict zones, and that approximately 1.35 billion children under the age of 18 are residing in a conflict-affected countries, thereby running the risk of severe physical and psychological violence. On the other hand, they emphasize the importance of new studies that consider the fact that over recent decades modern warfare has changed and that conflicts are increasingly being fought in populated civilian areas (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013, United Nations International Children's Emergency Found, 2017). Nowadays, we have many examples of conflicts that have been

long-running and intractable, characterized by both intermittent and ongoing violence that occur in the everyday places of people's lives (Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2018). The annual data shows that the killing of children occurs at rates higher than any other time over the past two decades, which corresponds to increased levels of violation, attacks on safe places, and the denial of humanitarian assistance (CAAC, 2014). Places such as schools or hospitals are becoming potential targets within conflict zones (Save the Children, 2018), making access to basic needs, such as education or health care, often difficult or dangerous. To provide some numbers, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA, 2014) has reported a systematic targeting of schools in several recent conflicts: between 2009 and 2012 it documented attacks on education in at least 70 countries (e.g., Columbia, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan). More recently, a study carried out by Save the Children (2018) in the Occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) found 256 education-related violations in 2016, affecting almost 30.000 children – up from 190 violations the year before. The denial of humanitarian access in conflicts has also increased since 2010 (CAAC, 2014). For example, siege and starvation tactics are being used as a weapon against civilians and children in Syria, Yemen, the Gaza Strip, and Sudan. All of these elements force children to develop within contexts characterized by pervasive violence and omnipresent danger (Tol, Jordans, Kohrt, Betancourt, & Khomproe, 2013). They are continuously under risk of both physical and psychological threats, such as personal attacks, abduction, recruitment into armed forces and militias, sexual exploitation, and dangerous labor conditions (Wessells, 2006). Moreover, their social ecologies are disrupted on multiple levels, putting them under risk of being separated from their families, losing significant others, having their homes destroyed, and being forced to flee (Wessells & Kostelny, 1996).

Therefore, the well-being and mental health of these children is a matter of great international concerns amongst scholars and clinicians, who are working to develop more effective intervention techniques to help these children cope and survive within these adverse conditions. In exploring the abundant literature on the effect that violence, loss, and dispossession have on children, the existence of a predominant current that has widely focused on the negative outcomes of this violence was immediately apparent (Tol, Song & Jordans, 2013). Academics have extensively investigated the impact of this violence, reporting high percentages of post-traumatic stress disorders or its symptoms among the exposed youth population. These studies have been grouped under the *bio-medical model* and they testify to the significant challenges that these environments pose to the

development of children, underlying the different forms of psychological maladjustment in children exposed to these violent conditions (Cummings, George, McCoy & Davies, 2012; Davies, Sturge-Apple, Boscoe, & Cummings, 2014). More recently, a growing literature has started to question the underlying assumptions and the Western construction of this model, thereby challenging its applicability and validity across the world. This burgeoning area of research is aimed at capturing a more comprehensive picture of the experiences of children and youth affected by armed conflict and political violence (Betancourt, 2012; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Tol, Song, & Jordans, 2013).

In the following paragraphs, these two different approaches will be presented and discussed, which serves as the basis for the present research and its theoretical framework.

1.2. Trauma as a universal human response

1.2.1 *Traumatization* and the bio-medical model

Throughout the 20th century, the interest in assessing and exploring the lives of children living in the context of armed conflicts and political violence has been growing consistently, motivated by the dramatically rising numbers of minors exposed to this violence around the world. Thus, researchers, clinicians, and policymakers have directed their efforts at investigating the psychological consequences of war and violence on children's mental health (Akesson, Basso & Denov, 2016; Slone & Mann, 2016; Tol, Song & Jordan, 2013).

As previously stated, when discussing and analyzing children's exposure to war and armed conflict the majority of scholarly research in this area focuses on the concept of *trauma*. This concept first made its appearance within the scientific community at the end of the 19th century (Freud & Breuer, 1985; Janet, 1989) and it only gained significant popularity among psychologists and psychiatrists after the Vietnam War, where it was adopted to explain the symptoms of anxiety or depression reported by returning veterans back in their home country. Therefore, the assumption behind trauma conceptualization – and trauma-based approaches – is the existence of a violent experience (such as war) so extreme that it causes a pathological reaction within the individual, or a 'traumatization' (Summerfield, 1998, 1999). This 'traumatization' is expressed with core patterns of psychiatric symptomatology that can be identified and assessed with specific diagnostic criteria, independently from the social and physical environment (Miller, Kulkarni, & Kushner, 2006). Accordingly, academics began to investigate and document the impact of

these traumatic experiences – due to wars, military violence, or armed conflicts – reporting high percentages of symptoms in the exposed population, which ranged from heightened transient (non-disordered) psychological distress and behavioral problems to the increased prevalence of mental disorders, including mood, anxiety and conduct disorders (Tol, Song & Jordans, 2013, p.445).

The implicit model underpinning trauma and post-traumatic stress syndromes is *the bio-medical model of health,* which emphasized biological (somatic) and individual factors related to people's reactions to war and traumatic events. It assumes disease to be fully accounted for by the deviation from the norm of measurable biological variables, leaving no room for the social, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of illness (Engel, 1977, p.130). This model, born and developed in the Western world, has its roots in the Cartesian division between mind and body. It defines health as the absence of disease and it involves elements of predictability, calculability, and control within the diagnosis of that disease (Alonso, 2004). This underlines the assumption that indicators of mental disorders should aim to be uniform and universal. Within this framework – and its related measurements – high levels of military violence and stressful events experienced during childhood has been evidenced to be a crucial predictor of severe depressive or post-traumatic symptoms and increased psychological distress, which was a correlation found across several countries affected by prolonged conflict (Boxer et al., 2013; Palosaari, Punamäki, Qouta, & Diab, 2013; Slone & Mann, 2016; Thabet, 2018). Growing up and living in war-torn and violent environments has been correlated with psychological symptomatology, such as internalizing symptoms (e.g., depression or anxiety), externalizing ones (e.g., aggressive behavior), and high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder[2] (PTSD), which is identified as the primary outcome once exposed to violence and war (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2012; Attanayake, McKay, Joffres, Singh, Burkle, & Mills, 2009; Palosaari et al, 2013). Moreover, the persistently stressful conditions associated with protracted conflicts (e.g., poverty, unsafe housing, parental distress, marginalization) has been linked to a rise in PTSD symptoms among children in Afghanistan (Panter-Brick, Grimon, & Eggerman, 2014), Uganda, and Sri Lanka (Fernando, Miller & Berger, 2010; Olema, Catani, Erti, Saile, & Neuner, 2014).

[2] The PTSD - introduced in the third revision of the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III, 1980) is characterized by the presence of three different but co-existing symptom clusters: *intrusion symptoms* such as re-experiencing traumatic memories through images or nightmares; *avoidance symptoms* such as restricting thoughts and rejecting reminders of the traumatic events; and *arousal symptoms* such as irritability, impaired concentration, hyper-vigilance and sleeplessness.

Therefore, grounded in this bio-medical framework, many clinicians and practitioners' have adopted trauma approaches and diagnosis in a variety of different contexts, assuming that it was universally applicable (Ferrari & Fernando, 2013; Summerfield, 1999). The post-traumatic reaction became a category to represent a universal *human response to traumatic events*, unbounded by time and context (Chatty, 2010). Even if it is clear that these studies and the related interventions have been developed with the best intention and to foster knowledge concerning children's life and well-being in situations characterized by chaos and violence, it begs an important question: since the diagnostic category of PSTD was developed to assess the mental health problems of individual soldiers returning from the front, can it be adopted to understand the distress of populations across the world, who are dealing with adversities such as military violence, dispossession, dispersion, ongoing colonization, or humiliation? (Rabaia, Giacaman, & Nguyen-Gillham, 2010).

1.2.2 Do distress symptoms necessarily produce psychological disabilities?

If we ask "does X cause Y?" the best scientific answer is almost always "it depends" (Garbarino, 2014)

As we have previously introduced, in recent years an increasing number of scholars have started to raise questions about the overemphasis on 'traumatization' as the most commonly studied outcome in the field of research on the impact of war and armed conflicts on mental health. Undoubtedly, war and political violence are among the most destructive known forces (Boyden, 2003), thereby putting children at risk of being emotionally, psychologically, and physically overwhelmed by such exposure. However, scholars have started to argue that this overemphasis has contributed to the growth of what has been defined as the 'trauma industry' (Bracken, 2002; Chatty, 2009, 2010). From the crucial work of Derek Summerfield (1999, 2001), among others, it has been evidenced that this industry and its attendant clinical interventions reflect the Western tendency to pathologize stress, causing collateral effects such as the disempowerment and stigmatization of survivors (Braken, 2002). Moreover, the bio-medical model does not take into account the social, cultural, and psychological variables of the disease, neither in the diagnosis or treatment intervention, which assumes that the impact of collective violence can be understood only by focusing on the individual (Bracken, 2002; Chatty, 2009, 2010, Rabaia et al, 2010).

There are several points that need to be questioned and explored within this model. The first is that trauma and the corresponding trauma framework are indeed interpretative models, resulting from a specific cultural and historical process (Summerfield, 2001; Veronese, Prati, & Castiglioni, 2011). Accordingly, assuming that this approach and diagnostic criteria is universally applicable is both methodologically and epistemologically incorrect. Nevertheless, this specific and cultural understanding of trauma has been considered and used as a universal set of theories and practices to treat and represent suffering around the world (Thompson, 2009, p.56). Breaking from this tradition, the biomedical model should be reconsidered and understood as one of the many ways in which to approach people's suffering, which is culturally and historically situated and is far from being universal (Boyden 2003; Veronese & Barola, 2018).

Recognizing the specific historical, physical, and cultural background in which the bio-medical model is born leads us to a second reflection. Under this framework, a vast amount of studies have investigated the impact of violence on youth populations, framing and depicting children as inevitably overwhelmed by massive adversities (Barenbaum, Ruchkin, & Schwab-Stone, 2004). Again, considering children as highly vulnerable and, if exposed to violence, desperately in need of treatment and protection is a Western construction of childhood (which is a concept that will be extended in Chapter Two). Considering the child as vulnerable and incapable – due to his/her cognitive and emotive stage of development – and, thus, unable to cope with adversity, might bring scholars to overlook children's capabilities and resourcefulness. In fact, as a consequence much less is known about children's ability to cope with their hostile environment or other important elements that can help to analyze or predict their mental health. Recognizing the fact that children are not always necessarily vulnerable does not mean that they should be expected to tolerate adversity, but it allows us to take into account the many ways in which they exhibit resilience in order to maintain a positive functioning. Otherwise, an approach centered on their vulnerability might risk victimizing and passivizing the child, which means not recognizing him/her as an active and socially situated actor engaged in his/her personal struggle to cope with, and resist, their adverse environment.

A final aspect that is worth being investigated is related to the Western tendency to pathologize stress, which frames the suffering of war in terms of mental disorders and which leads researchers to overlook relevant social and political issues (Giacaman, 2018). It is well-known that political violence does not only target the individual's well-being but that it also endangers the entire community's well-being and cohesion (Robben, 2005; Sousa,

2013). As such, military and political violence generates a 'social suffering' that is not attributable to the distress and suffering in psychopathology, but is a moral and collective distress experienced in war that must be understood within its cultural and socio-political milieu (Giacaman, 2018; Veronese, Cavazzoni, Russo, & Sousa, 2019). As previously discussed, within the biomedical model, there is little consideration of social, environmental, and political factors, all of which are of major importance in the case of countries affected by oppression and political violence. When we consider the sorrow and despair caused by war solely in terms of mental disorders while ignoring the relevant social and political issues, we end up depoliticizing the impact of war and conflict on mental health in favor of a framing that conceives of mental health as a purely biological phenomenon (Giacaman, 2018; Punamaki, 1990). On the other hand, the lens of social suffering allows for a shift from this focus on the individual to one that more accurately considers the social, political, historical, and cultural contexts of suffering. Therefore, this emphasis on individual psychopathology has prevented us from recognizing and considering the various environmental, political, and social dimensions of children's well-being and development, which are otherwise lost in the search for universal patterns of symptomatology disconnected from the broader social context (Miller et al., 2006; Summerfield, 2001).

Although developing studies on trauma and war sufferance remains essential, the risk of a narrow analysis of post-traumatic reactions remains high. Even if we recognize that the physiological experience of suffering does have some universal characteristics, always seeking these universal patterns might lead us to overlook the protective resources that individuals, families, and communities mobilize within these contexts (Summerfield, 1999; Veronese, Sousa, Cavazzoni, in press;). Moreover, as discussed, this might lead to a medicalized view that stresses individual pathology over more social suffering, thereby obfuscating the fact that both oppression and political violence are moral and collective problems requiring justice (Giacaman, 2018). Therefore, over the past few decades an increasing number of alternative approaches to mental health have started to take shape that do not solely rely on medical symptoms, but also link mental health to indicators of social and personal well-being and overall quality of life (Giacaman, Rabaia, Nguyen-Gillham, Batniji, Punamaki, & Summerfield, 2011). These approaches – driven by more comprehensive and culturally informed conceptualizations of how political violence and conflicts affect mental health – has produced an essential shift away from individualized and pathologized diagnoses and symptoms and towards a multi-dimensional analysis of

suffering and resilience. These more comprehensive perspectives provide us with the possibility of considering children as active subjects in the assessment of their lives and, thus, to better discern the balance between strain and resources. In fact, although traumatic events, political violence, and oppression are linked to severe psychological burden and mental illness (De Jong, Komproe, & van Ommeren, 2003; Mollica & Caspi-Yavin, 1991), they can also bring about the development of unexpected resources, personal growth, and coping strategies (Diab, Isosavi, Qouta, Kuittinen, & Punamaki, 2018; Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012; Veronese, Pepe, Massaiu, De Moll, & Robbins, 2017).

Within the following paragraphs, we will present the growing body of research that has highlighted that, even within extreme conditions, children and youth emerge much better than might be expected (Barber, 2013).

1.3 Beyond trauma: children's adaptive responses to violence

As argued in the previous paragraph, a considerable body of research has been developed addressing the impact of war and other types of traumatic events on a child's development. The research that has examined these effects has traditionally centered on trauma, focusing on the different forms of negative functioning caused by the children's exposure to violence and war (Al-Krenawi, Lev-Wiesel, & Mahmud, 2007; Badour, Resnick, & Kilpatrick, 2017; Copeland, Keeler, Angold, & Costello, 2007). However, as we have seen, this prevailing biological model has not succeeded in providing a comprehensive understanding of children's psychological responses to living under political violence and armed conflicts. Considering children as *inevitably traumatized* tends to reduce them to a victim status, overshadowing other aspects of their experiences (Barber, 2008b; Barber & Doty, 2013; Boyden, 2003; Veronese, Pepe, & Castiglioni, 2014; Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2018). Rather than continuing to adhere to this generalized understanding of childhood traumatization, there was a profound need for an alternative and advanced understanding of their many different possible outcomes and experiences (Akesson, 2014). How have children managed to hold on throughout such violent and devastating experiences? This point has received considerably less interest amongst researchers.

Concurring with Cairns and Dawes' (1996, p.34) assertion that "we have counted enough symptoms," in the past two decades, scholars have started to look for a more nuanced understanding of children's realities and experiences that goes beyond negative adaptation

and trauma. In fact, while exposure to violence and conflict does cause suffering for children and it places them at a higher risk of developing psychiatric distress, there is also evidence showing that many of them can endure these traumatic events and maintain their healthy development (Barber & Doty, 2013; Fernando & Ferrari, 2013; Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015). This ability to cope, recover from, and adapt in the face of adversity has been typically described as *resilience* (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1985; Boyden & Mann, 2005). If in a prior conceptualization resilience was delineated as a static trait or personal outcome that people either possessed or lacked, over the years it has been developed in terms of an ongoing dynamic process that is continuously being built and re-built, within families and communities. Resilience is thus strictly related to the person's context and the associated availability of both logistical and emotional resources (Pfefferbaum & Klomp, 2013; Sousa, Haj-Yahia, Feldman, & Lee, 2013; Ungar, 2008; Veronese, Cavazzoni, Russo, & Sousa, 2019).

In the next paragraph, we will delineate the resilience framework, following its development from its first traditional conceptualization within the realm of the individual, until the more recent socio-ecological understanding of resilience that considers it as interlocked within the multiple levels of social and ecological context (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013).

1.3.1 *An ordinary bit of magic*: the resilience framework

Resilience is defined by those who defy the odds and show positive outcomes – Wexler et al., 2009

Nowadays resilience has become a buzzword. It turns up across every field, from psychology and education, to management, marketing, and advertisement. The word resilience is not making an appearance just in specialized articles and scientific journals but everywhere, which is adding confused and often different meanings to the concept. Therefore, an in-depth investigation of the history and development of this construct is necessary in order to explain where exactly our research is situated.

The first steps away from trauma-based conceptualizations were made during the 1970s, when developmental research on children who grew up in contexts of risk and adversity started to document their extraordinary ability to both confront and cope with those events (Denov & Akesson, 2017; Cicchetti, 2013; Fernando & Ferrari, 2013; Masten, 2014). As

previously stated, scholars started to pile together evidence that children exposed to severe adversities, such as parental psychopathology, poverty, environmental disasters, and war, were also able to present different and several unexpectedly positive outcomes (Masten, 2011; Tol, Song & Jordans, 2013). In a historical period when researchers were putting all of their efforts into the understanding and prevention of psychopathologies, the discovery of these 'less vulnerable' children was fascinating. Why did these children keep functioning well despite the challenging circumstances they grew up in? What are the factors determining these surprising outcomes scenarios? These questions opened the way to new and alternative perspectives, which started to diverge from the investigation of trauma and psychopathological outcomes to take a greater interest in the recognition of resources within the individual and their communities, emphasizing health, capabilities, and positive adaptation. This change of direction took shape and eventually gave birth to a new paradigm: the resilience-oriented framework (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013).

Notwithstanding the employment of different definitions within the related literature, resilience has been broadly defined as *a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity* (Luthar, Cicchetti & Backer, 2000, p.543), which is connected to the absence of mental health or psychosocial problems and to the ability to develop competencies despite adverse living conditions (Masten, 2001). From this definition, we can deduce that it has been conceptualized as a dynamic process and as a set of positive functioning patterns that enable push people towards positive development despite major adversity (Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002; Sousa, 2013). In other words, in the face of life's challenges, such as major transitions, stress, or significant adversity, some people demonstrate a capacity to successfully cope and resist negative psychosocial consequences, which had previously been expected. In addition, what is peculiar about the concept of resilience is that it implies not only the capacity to survive during a traumatic event without manifesting psychopathological patterns, but also the ability to overcome the experience in an active process that allows individuals to maintain a more stable equilibrium and achieve enhanced outcomes (Bonanno, 2004; Rutter, 1993; Rutter, 2012).

Over the decades, the interdependence between individual, family, and community systems on the one hand and biological, physical and ecological systems on the other has become increasingly evident (Masten & Narayan, 2012). Socio-ecological models have started highlighting the interconnection between individuals and the multiple levels of their social and ecological contexts (Ungar, 2011). Therefore, it was necessary to take into

account the numerous aspects and levels of children's lives within their social ecology in order to understand and promote a recovery process, which requires an integrated perspective with consideration of multiple, interdependent systems (Masten, 2014). Conceptualizing resilience as the product of a coexistence between many factors that interact at multiple levels within a socio-ecological environment in which children grow-up, (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Ungar, Lee, Callaghan, & Boothroyd, 2005; Wexler et al., 2009), provided us with a better and more comprehensive understanding of the concept. In order to enhance resilience, we should be able to address all its determinants and thus consider it as a multi-faceted psychological process that implies ecological, collective, and cultural factors, all of which need an independent assessment (Suarez, 2015).

1.3.1.1 From the individual to the ecological model of resilience.

Thus, within the investigation of children's life and their way of coping with adverse living contexts, scholars have started to also account for the influences of the social-ecological world in which the children grow up. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1994) ecological model of hierarchically nested ecosystems provides a valuable conceptual framework to investigate the effects of political violence on children's lives, including its impact on their education, neighborhood, community, and nation-state (Akesson, 2014; Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993).

In his model, which highlights the transactional nature of different levels of influence on human development, the ecological environment is presented as a set of nested structures, like a set of increasingly small circles, organized in concentric layers (see Figure 1). These nested structures represent the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Firstly, the individual is located in a *microsystem* – the first of the four layers — consisting of all the interactions between the child and people in their immediate surroundings, such as their school or home. These interactions include a pattern of activities and the role and relationship of the person with whom the child has come into direct contact (e.g. family members, friends, teachers) (Forrest, Shen Miller & Elman,2008). Bronfenbrenner reminds us that these relationships, as is the case with all relationships, are bi-directional and reciprocal: just as peers, parents, and teachers influence the child's behavior, in the same way his or her characteristics (personality, way of thinking, etc.) influences the behavior of the others (Tissington, 2008). The interactions between two (or more) of these settings that contain the child (i.e. the relation between home and school) constitute the *mesosystem*. The mesosystem could be

understood as a 'system of microsystems' that consists of interconnections between two or more systems in which the child actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.25). Then, moving outward, these systems are nested within the *exosystem*, which includes formal and informal societal structures, such as government structures, economic and cultural institutions, and neighborhoods. This system accounts for interactions among settings in which the child does not actively participate and is not directly involved, but that can influence his/her experience within the immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p.227). In other words, the exosystem is involved whenever experiences that occurred in another social setting – in which the child has no active role – influences what he or she experiences in an immediate context (Tissington, 2008). Finally, the more distal layer – the *macrosystem* – concerns the broader cultural context, including the historical, political, and sub-cultural aspect of the social ecology (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Brofenbrenner, 1979). This layer is not a specific context, but it refers to observed values and norms in a particular culture and or subculture (e.g. ideologies and belief systems). As described from Brofenbrenner (1989), this system consists of the overarching patterns of micro-, meso-, and exo-systems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or the broader social context, "with particular reference to the developmentally-investigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems" (1989, p.228). The influence of the macrosystem penetrates through all other layers (Berk, 2000). Thus, the way in which this system is able to address the child's needs might influence the support that he or she can receive at lower levels of the environment (Tissington, 2008).

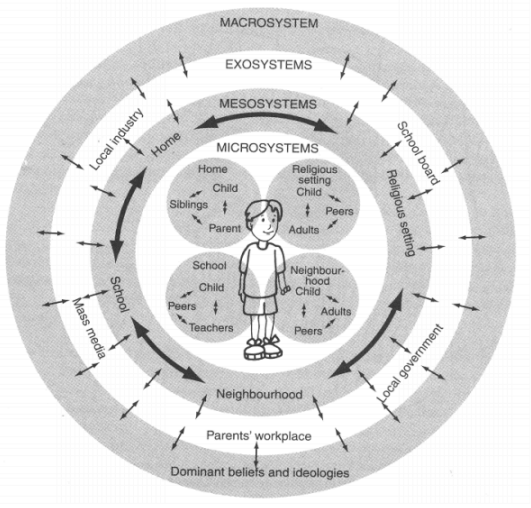


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development. (Source: Penn, H. 2005).

Following this idea of the child's social ecology, researchers have started analyzing the many different relationships involved in the psychosocial impact of war and political violence on children, understanding resilience as not *occurring in isolation*, but as *"*an interactive process that requires something or someone to interact with. It is dependent upon context and environment, including our relationships*"* (Kent, 2012, p.111). This broader ecological view allows us to enhance our understanding of the multiple protective sources or risk stressors in the children's world during times of insecurity and hardship.

Individual-level resilience. This first level, which includes individual factors, has been widely explored and discussed within resilience literature. Scholars have identified favorable individual traits and characteristics that help children to develop ways of coping and adapting to the adversities that they face (Garcia-Dia, DiNapoli, Garcia-Ona, Jakubowski, & O'Flaherty, 2013). These include demographic characteristics, such as gender and age, as well as personal attributes or skills. Characteristics such as self-esteem, compassion, good coping skills, temperament, optimism, spiritual connections, and emotional regulation have been identified as fundamental for children to "develop" resilience and facilitate their positive adjustment (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Sousa et al., 2013). For instance, being optimistic and confident in their own competencies has been found to improve children's ability to *bounce-back* from traumatic events (Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, Post, Hoyer, & Adam, 2010; Werner, 2012). Similarly, higher self-esteem has been associated with higher levels of resilience and well-being, which suggests that the presence of resilience strategies is influenced by the perception that the child has of him/herself as an autonomous agent that is capable of coping and dealing with adversity (Halevi, Djalovsky, Vengrober, & Feldman, 2016; Sun, & Stewart, 2007; Tol, Song, & Jordans, 2013). Studies also revealed that religious beliefs and practices are often a pivotal component of youth resilience, promoting an orientation towards the future and fostering a sense of optimism and control that enable children to endure hardships (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Klasen et al., 2010; Sousa et al., 2013). Regarding the role of age and gender, it appears to be unresolved within the literature on political violence and resilience. Some researchers have highlighted that older children display higher resilience behaviors and attitudes (Halevi et al., 2016), while others did not find any significant differences or correlation (Sousa et al., 2013). Older youth have been depicted as being more able to access all those personal resources, which might help them in dealing with difficult situations. For instance, developing cognitive resources, including intelligence, creativity, and mental

flexibility, has been associated with the ability to attribute meaning to a traumatic event, which enables the individual to better process the experience (Kuterovac-Jagodic, 2003; Halevi et al., 2016). In addition, scholars have evidenced that boys seem to adopt more personal coping strategies, such as action, distraction, and positive self-instruction (Hampel & Petermann, 2006), while girls tend to cope with daily stressors by seeking social support and, thus, utilizing social resources (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Hampel & Petermann, 2005).

Subsequently, scholars have focused their attention on the many proximal and distal factors of the social and physical ecology of children, highlighting the strong and active role of families, communities, and the broader environment. All of these factors may interact and have a role in predicting successful development despite their exposure to traumatic adversity (Lounsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Masten, 2001, 2011).

Family-level and social-level resources. Family and social relationships are crucial contributors to children's healthy development, offering them some degree of protection from the impact of political violence (Nguyen-Gillham, Giacaman, Naser, & Boyce, 2008; Thabet, Ibraheem, Shivram, Winter, & Vostanis, 2009). Good parenting, high parental education, and family cohesion have been identified as core components that appear to build resilience in children affected by political violence (Tol et al., 2013; Walsh, 2003). A more supportive parental style has been found to augment children's creativity and cognitive capacity, which, in turn, contributed to improved psychological adjustment (Diab, Peltonen, Qouta, Palosaari, & Punamaki, 2015). Similarly, children who reported higher levels of parental support were found to display higher levels of self-esteem and more positive perceptions on their life and future, which is crucial to balance the negative effects of the surrounding political violence (Harel-Fisch, Radwan, Walsh, Laufer, Amitai, Fogel-Grinvald, & Abdeen, 2010). In addition, parental support was related to increased pro-social behavior in children, which is linked to a major capability of accessing social resources to seek help (Kerestes, 2006). Moreover, being able to build and access significant social relationships has been strongly connected with a higher level of resilience among children, and also with lower levels of depression (Theron & Engelbracht, 2012; Tol et al., 2013). Peer and social support has been observed as a significant predictor of psychological health since it is linked to lower levels of internalizing emotional and behavioral problems in children (Betancourt, McBain, Newnham, & Brennan, 2013; Peltonen, Qouta, El Sarraj, & Punamaky, 2010; Rutter, 2012).

Community, contextual, and cultural resources. The resilience construct has been widely criticized for neglecting contexts and for lacking research on culturally-based protective factors (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2011). Over the past two decades researchers have worked to address this critical gap by including both contextual and cultural factors within resilience research (Barber & Schluterman, 2009; Cummings, Merrilees, Schermerhorn, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cairns, 2011; Masten & Narayan, 2012). Scholars have also started to highlight the need to examine resilience within a framework that considers the interactions between individuals and their environment, which is crucial to understanding how resilience operates (Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004; Ungar, 2011). On the one hand, children's ability to cope and adapt to life-threatening situations has been related to the availability and accessibility of resources – social, cultural, and physical resources – in the surrounding environment (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Diab et al., 2015). For instance, being able to attend school appears to protect them from negative consequences by fostering a sense of normalcy and purpose in the midst of violence (Betancourt, Rubin-Smith, Fizmaurice, & Gilman, 2010; Betancourt, Borisova, Williams, Meyers-Ohki, Rubin-Smith, Annan, & Kohrt, 2013). On the other hand, a growing number of voices have started to understand resilience as culturally embedded (Marie, Hannigan, & Jones, 2018), thereby considering the fact that the children's ability to cope may also depend on the social meaning that their culture and society have been able to attribute to past traumatic experiences (Diab et al., 2015). Culture is an important shared collective resource that promotes resilience, particularly within situations of conflict (Sousa et al., 2013, p.246). Being able to collectively negotiate the significance and experience of an event in a culturally meaningful way has been strongly associated with positive outcomes (Ungar, 2008). For instance, cultural ceremonies have been found to have a pivotal role in rebuilding self-esteem and community acceptance after experiences of extreme violence (Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

Despite the important progress that has been made in involving cultural, contextual, and other socio-ecological factors in our understanding of resilience, many concerns are still to be addressed. This concept remains problematic and ambiguous due to its overemphasis and its extensive use both within and beyond the social sciences. In an extensive review, Layne and colleagues (2007) found as many as eight different definitions of resilience just within trauma literature alone (Layne, Warren, Watson, & Shalev, 2007). Some academics do not differentiate between resilience and recovery, describing it as a decreased vulnerability to

stress in reaction to traumatic experiences, which implies either relative resistance to risk or an ability to escape risk (Hoge, Austin & Pollack, 2007; Rutter, 2006; Wexler, DiFulvio, & Burke, 2009). On the contrary, others have underlined explicit differences between resistance and resilience, wherein the former is defined by the individual's ability to maintain positive functioning under adverse conditions while the latter describes those whose recovery is quick and full (Layne et al., 2007). Furthermore, the fact that resilient-functioning is defined and justified by its distinction from normative adaptation (Barber & Doty, 2013, p.234) and can only appear in a context of risk and adversity raises more question than it answers. How do we define what is a normative adaption? Is the classification of some experiences as "risky" universally accepted?

1.3.1.2 Overemphasizing resilience

Defining resilience includes the need for other operational definitions of risk or other protective factors, threats, adaptive behaviors, and negative outcomes. Several of these constructs, albeit widely used, lack the clarity needed for research and clinical application. The criteria for evaluating positive functioning or success in developmental tasks are influenced by cultural and historical contexts. In the same way, the assumption that events can be perceived and processed equally within different contexts is problematic. In accordance with the classic stress theory, which asserts that an event is stressful to the degree that is perceived as such (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), research that moves across cultures and societies has underlined the numerous variations in the attribution of meaning to similar experiences (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; Veronese, Pepe, & Castiglioni, 2015). These divergent constructions of meaning are influenced both from individual heritage and physical maturity, but also by the cultural, social, and political environment in which the child lives. This process of assigning meaning may literally determine if the conflict is perceived as taxing or not, calling into question the very definition of resilience. On the one hand, resilience requires risks. At the same time, it is impossible to reach a universal statement about the psychological effect of armed conflict on children (Barber, 2013; Cummings, Merrilees, Taylor, & Mondi, 2017b). There is a contradiction at work here since it seems that by trying to conceptualize and operationalize resilience, it risks falling within the broader Western medical paradigm that the researchers had previously wanted to challenge. Up until now, much of the contemporary research on resilience continued to underestimate children's natural competence in adjusting to trauma

(Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015; Ziadni, Hammoudeh, Rmeileh, Hogan, Shannon, & Giacaman, 2011).

Scholars are still calling for a more sociological understanding of the concept and a more precise conceptualization of its parameters. "These many meanings imputed to the term resilience alone – which range between the extremes of an 'absence of pathology' on the one hand and 'heroism' on the other, to 'differences in developmental pathways' – strongly underscore the need for a more precise professional terminology with which to conceptualize, define, measure, and apply resilience-related phenomena" (Layne et al., 2007, p.499). Instead of imposing a pre-existing understanding of resilience, there is a need to move forward when it comes to the identification and exploration of the many factors and processes that cross children's multiple ecological levels.

Nevertheless, the study of resilience and its evolution still represents a very important first step away from the previously described deficit and trauma frameworks. As such, it represents an important step in the development of new intervention models that focus on the strengths and capabilities of young people and their social ecology (Ager, 2013; Barber, 2013; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Veronese et al., 2015). As we have discussed in the opening paragraph, research on children living in contexts of political violence and armed conflict has primarily focused on negative psychological outcomes, ignoring the others domains of children's functioning. This trend has tended to pathologize normative stress (Summerfield, 1999) and attribute the malady of war to the individual (Nguyen-Gillham, Giacaman, Naser, & Boyce, 2008). Instead, the resilience framework has challenged the adequacy of these models and, in the process, inspired the development of new approaches that are specifically designed to understand the factors that enable children to endure their situation. Hence, this newfound focus on resilience brought scholars to explore children's functioning and wellbeing by asking: how, why, and for whom do resources truly matter? (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013).

1.4 Perspectives on children's functioning: towards a socio-ecological lens

If we ask "does X cause Y?" the best scientific answer is almost always "it depends" (Garbarino, 2014)

Historically, mental health research is dramatically weighted on the side of psychological disorders and dysfunctions. As widely discussed, researchers have too often focused on the negative impact of the exposure to political violence or armed conflict during childhood, giving less attention to the study of positive psychological functioning (Boothby, Strang, & Wessells, 2006; Wessells & Kostenly, 2013). Mental health has typical been equated with the absence of illness, rather than the presence of wellness (Ryff & Singer, 1996), therefore failing to address and expand the research on the protective features associated with well-being and positive functioning (Streuli, Woodhead, & Camfield, 2009). On the other hand, an emphasis on these aspects helps to balance the focus on the negative aspects of children's lives, providing a more positive view of children's capacities and resilience (Boyden, Cooper, & Lives, 2006). Indeed, promoting well-being is a fundamental part of improving the overall health of a population, especially the health of children. The United Nations Children's Fund has defined children's well-being in terms of "health and safety, material security, education, socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born" (Adamson, Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007, p. 1). Such a simple definition illustrates the complex and multi-faceted nature of the construct.

In recent years the growing number of well-being-related publications is evidence that this construct has become firmly embedded within academic and policy discourse (Jones & Sumner, 2008; Streuli, Woodhead, & Camfield, 2009 Wilk, 2008). It has been shown that well-being is a crucial contributor to the individual their social's functioning, enabling people and communities to successfully manage their lives (Barry, 2013). Moreover, armed conflicts, wars, and forced migration have deepened the global concern for the protection of children and the promotion of their health and well-being. Yet, until now the impact of military conflicts on a child's overall well-being was poorly understood (Frey, 2012). Unquestionably, war and armed conflicts have devastating effects on the well-being of children and families, which manifests through increased levels of poverty, marginalization, and weakened community and family structures. However, the common association between violence and well-being, which is that *wars reduce happiness and health*, is not as

clear as it might initially seem. “Before undertaking an analysis of how calamities [wars, revolutions, famines, and pestilence] modify our emotional and affective experience, I would stress the general principle of the diversification and polarization of these effects in different parts of the population. By this principle is meant that the effects of a given calamity are not identical – indeed, often are opposite – for different individuals and groups of a society concerned” (Sorokin, 2010 [1942], p.14).

In the previous paragraph, we have reviewed the relationship between the exposure to adversities and armed conflict and children’s paths to resilience and healthy development. In the studies conducted on different populations who were exposed to uniform levels of stress, numerous variations and differences arose, which reveals the difficulty in establishing a distinct pattern of results. It has been widely established that what can be considered “adaptive” in one context might be referred to as maladaptive within another. Researchers working in conflict-affected areas, for example Palestine, (Barber, 2014; Punamaki, 1996; Veronese, Said, & Castiglioni, 2011; Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola, & Said, 2012) Uganda, or Nepal, (De Berry, 2004; Hinton, 2000) are claiming that children are not equally vulnerable. Large proportions of children ‘do not succumb to psychiatric illness’ (Cairn & Dawes, 1996) but continue to function well. Hence, these findings have encouraged many clinicians and academics to explore the many factors that have a role in promoting the child’s competencies and well-being. In the past two decades, within both social scientific and humanitarian work, well-being has been used more as an umbrella term to encompass specific concepts such as ‘positive adjustment’, ‘quality of life,’ and ‘resilience’ (Camfield, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2009). As we have previously outlined, resilience paradigms have enabled a shift in direction “from a focus on external risks to a focus on how these external risks are dealt with by the individual” (Rutter, 2006, p.8), thereby acting as a springboard for the developing of new perspectives on children’s functioning.

Within these new perspectives, scholars have demonstrated an increased interest in expanding the criteria for mental health and positive functioning in order to include concepts of subjective well-being (SWB) and quality of life (QOL) (Barber, 2009; Diener, 1984; Giacaman, Mataria, Nguyen-Gillham, Safieh, Stefanini, & Chatterji, 2007; Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003; Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015).

1.4.1 Defining well-being and subjective well-being

Amongst academics and policymakers from several different fields, including both economics and psychology, *quality of life* (QoL) has been lengthily considered as a valued societal outcome. For years, the quality of a person's life has been assessed externally and objectively, following criteria such as income or wealth, educational attainment, occupation, and health status (Keyes, 2012). Of late, scholars have started to point out that conventional QoL metrics based on economic indicators were not sufficient to assess quality of life. As a result, researchers have been moving towards alternative approaches to measure an individual's well-being. Therefore, during the 1950s the concept of well-being began to make an appearance within the scientific literature. Much progress has been made in defining this construct over the last twenty years. New generation of scholars started to investigate health and development not just in terms of the absence of illness but also including the presence of *subjective wellbeing* (SWB). This can be traced back to Ed Diener's studies and his attempts to define and operationalize the concept (1984, 1994). SBW – widely adopted by people as a synonym of "*happiness*" or "*satisfaction*" – reflects an individual's sense of wellness and it refers to all type of evaluations, both positive and negative, that people make about their lives. According to Diener and colleagues, it is a heterogeneous category composed of three interrelated components: positive affects, negative affects, and general life satisfaction (Campbell, 1976; Huebner & Dew, 1996). "Thus a person is said to have high [SWB] if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences unpleasant emotions such as sadness and anger. On the contrary, a person is said to have low [SWB] if she or he is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection, and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997, p. 25). Positive and negative affectivity are intended as broad temperamental factors, where the first "reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert" (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988, p.1063), whilst the second is related to feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, or anger (Ebesutani, Smith, Berstein, Chorpita & Higa-McMillan, 2011). Together, they constitute the *affect balance*. Positive and negative emotions are orthogonal dimensions: thus, the increased value of NA does not necessarily correspond to a decrease in PA (Veronese & Pepe, 2017a, b; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Whilst affect is defined in terms of emotional responses, life satisfaction – also called perceived QOL – is defined as a cognitive "evaluation to life as a whole or with reference to specific life domains, such as family, friends, or school" (Diener, 1984,

p.550), which actively contributes to subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Self-confidence, family relations, social relations, education, and environmental security, are the factors constituting this substrate of life satisfaction. These factors are strongly correlated with a person's global life satisfaction (Seligson et al. 2003) and are interactively considered in order to enable positive psychological functioning. This conjunction and the relation between life satisfaction and the affect balance compose the substrate of subjective well-being, which was found to be linked to many health-related outcomes (Diener & Chan, 2011).

Hence, to reach a comprehensive evaluation of a person's health, beyond the mere absence of psychiatric illness, indicators of subjective well-being also began to be incorporated. Currently, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence showing that higher perceptions of subjective well-being lead to improved health, longevity, and positive social relationships (Diener & Chan, 2011; Judge and Bono, 2001). Positive moods together with characteristics such a life satisfaction, hopefulness, and optimism have been evidenced as a predictor of longevity and good mental and physical health (Chida & Steptoe, 2008). Similarly, perceived life satisfaction represents an essential indicator of an individual's well-being, whereas lower levels of life satisfaction have been associated with psychological and social problems, such as depression, anxiety, and weak social interactions (Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005; Leversen, Danielsen, Birkeland, & Samdal, 2012). Additionally, the affect's component of SBW and the quality (and quantity) of social relationships are strongly connected: positive emotions have been identified as an important promoter of sociability, pro-social behaviors, and positive perceptions of the others (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Tay, Kuykendall, Diener, 2015).

Despite the increased attention on the constructs of well-being and its recognizably favorable effects on physical and mental health, it is quite surprising that very little research has been devoted to the study of the various factors that enhance these constructs. Scholars have attributed two main reasons for this: "first, young children are expected to be happy and satisfied because little demands are put on them, and second, because, in general, researchers in psychiatry and psychology are mostly interested in studying problems and disorders rather than studying the factors that enhance children's wellbeing" (Rosenbaum & Ronen, 2013, p.209). However, despite the fact that the majority of studies on children and youth are still focused on mental *illness,* and not on mental *health* or well-being (Rosenbaum & Ronen, 2013), few notable efforts have been made to establish a correlation

between well-being and its many benefits for children's healthy psychological and social development (Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Howell, Kern, & Lyubomirsky, 2007; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). More recently, scholars have begun to focus on children's own experiences, skills, activities, and knowledge. In the process, researchers have discovered that several different factors – including intelligence, self-regulation, hope, beliefs, self-efficacy, self-esteem, supportive relationships, spirituality, and community belonging – are implicated in children's well-being and their ability to positively adapt to adversity (APA, 2010; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Cicchetti, 2010; Garmezy, 1983; Luthar, 2006; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Masten, 2014).

Enlightened by these findings, many researchers have concentrated their efforts on identifying the conditions or factors that could facilitate and improve children's well-being in war contexts (Barber, 2009; Boothby et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006; Tol, Reis, Susanty, & De Jong, 2010).

1.4.2 Well-being in contexts of political violence: a systematic literature review

Psychologists and social science scholars have long been interested and concerned with the effects that exposure to chronic political and military violence has on children's well-being. As previously discussed, the majority of research on this topic has followed a trauma model, which stresses that exposure to political and military violence as a child has long-term developmental risks (Davies, Sturge-Apple, Boscoe, & Cummings, 2014; Merrilees, Cairns, Taylor, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cummings, 2013; Taylor, Merrilees, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cummings, 2016). More specifically, these experiences may have lasting, adverse effects on the multiple domains of functioning – such as the cognitive or the socio-emotional domain - that are still in the process of developing (Betancourt, Newnham, McBain, & Brennan, 2013). However, the majority of this literature, which is predominantly focused on PTSD and trauma (Ferrari & Fernando, 2013; Karam et al., 2014), has failed to recognise the diverse environmental and relational dimensions of children's well-being and development. Recognizing that political violence and armed conflicts are 'one of the most destructive of environmental forces known' (Boyden, 2003), there is also evidence to suggest that many children seem to endure these traumatic events and enjoy a healthy upbringing. Although less interest has been paid to this topic, in the past several decades many scholars have left the trauma paradigm, increasingly invoking the

terms of *resilience, capabilities* (Bartley, 2006), or *competence* (Masten, 2001). Across many different countries, studies have revealed the many factors that have a role in promoting the child's competencies and well-being (De Berry, 2004; Veronese, Said, & Castiglioni, 2011; Veronese & Barola, 2018), developing new intervention models aimed at strengthening these capabilities and the ones of their social ecology (Ager, 2013; Barber, 2013; Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Veronese, Pepe, Castiglioni, 2015).

1.4.2.1 The review's objectives

Since promoting positive well-being is a fundamental part of improving the overall health of a population, especially amongst children, much work has been done to expand the definition and evaluation of a person's health. Besides just the absence of psychiatric illness, new indicators of an individual's well-being and quality of life have begun to be incorporated (Barber, 2009; Seligson et al. 2003; Veronese et al., 2010; Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015). However, the number of children living in these contexts is growing, and not enough is known about the well-being of these children and the many factors that affect their health and well-being (Giacaman et al., 2011; Veronese et al., 2012;). Therefore, further investigation is warranted. A better understanding of how children conceptualize and understand *well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction* is indeed necessary, as well as the identification of the strategies and resources that act as a buffer against stressful events. Moreover, exploring the factors that enhance the well-being of children is critical to ensure policymakers make informed decisions as to where exactly their preventive efforts should be focused on.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to systematically review the literature, including both qualitative and quantitative studies, that explores the factors that constitute and influence the well-being and life satisfaction of children living amidst a context characterized by armed conflict or political and military violence. The scope of this review is limited to school-age children and youth (6 – 17 years old).

1.4.2.2 The search strategy

This literature review was guided by the PRISMA standards for systematic reviews (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). PRISMA is an evidence-based set of minimum standards for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The review was conducted in April of 2019 using *Medline/PubMed, PsycInfo, PsycArticles*, *Embase* and *Google Scholar* databases for all peer- reviewed publications from 2008 to April 2019 that pertain

to the issue of well-being and life satisfaction amongst conflict-affected children. The time range (2008 – 2019) was determined in order to include and explore the most recent literature related to the topic. Returns were limited to those that contained keywords within a matrix of relevant terminology identified in the study title or abstract. To this end, we used the following combination of key words and subject headings to guide the search: (1) child(ren), childhood in combination with (2) armed conflict, political violence, military violence, and (3) well-being, psychological/subjective well-being, life satisfaction. Studies have been selected according to the criteria underlined below.

1.4.2.3 Eligibility criteria

As previously stated, only articles that were published from the year 2008 to the present were included in order to comprehensively evaluate the most recent advancements in the literature related to the well-being and life satisfaction of children living in adverse contexts (armed conflict and political or military violence). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies were included, while case studies, case reports, and narrative or systematic reviews were excluded. In addition, articles subject to full review were those that adhered to the following criteria: (1) the publication had to address children's overall well-being or life satisfaction; (2) the publication described psychosocial interventions aimed at strengthening children's well-being and psychological functioning (thus excluding intervention on trauma and PTSD), (3) the article had to address school-age children (7 – 15 years old); studies addressing both adults and children were included only if the data provided for children was reported separately; (4) focus on civilian populations living within contexts of political violence and armed conflicts, and (5) were available in English and had been peer-reviewed and published (un-published or non-peer-reviewed materials were excluded). Articles were also excluded if they came from book chapters, dissertations, conference proceedings, conference abstract, workshops, or brief reports, if they did not fit the age criteria, or if they were not available in English. Besides these, studies were also excluded if target populations were asylum seekers or refugees and were therefore living in a country where there is a certain level of perceived safety.

1.4.2.4 Results

Database queries returned a total of 1,218 unique studies. Each abstract was screened for relevance and those not meeting inclusion criteria were excluded. Additional records were identified through bibliography mining. Articles that included adults and children were

retained, as long as the youth population could be clearly delineated in the paper. References from search results were cross-checked and any duplicates were eliminated. Opinion pieces, editorials, reviews, and special issues were also excluded. In conclusion, 70 full-text articles were further assessed for eligibility. Of these, 48 were excluded for failing to meet the study criteria (Figure 1). After the final screening process, a total of 22 studies met the inclusion criteria and they are reviewed and summarized in Table 1.

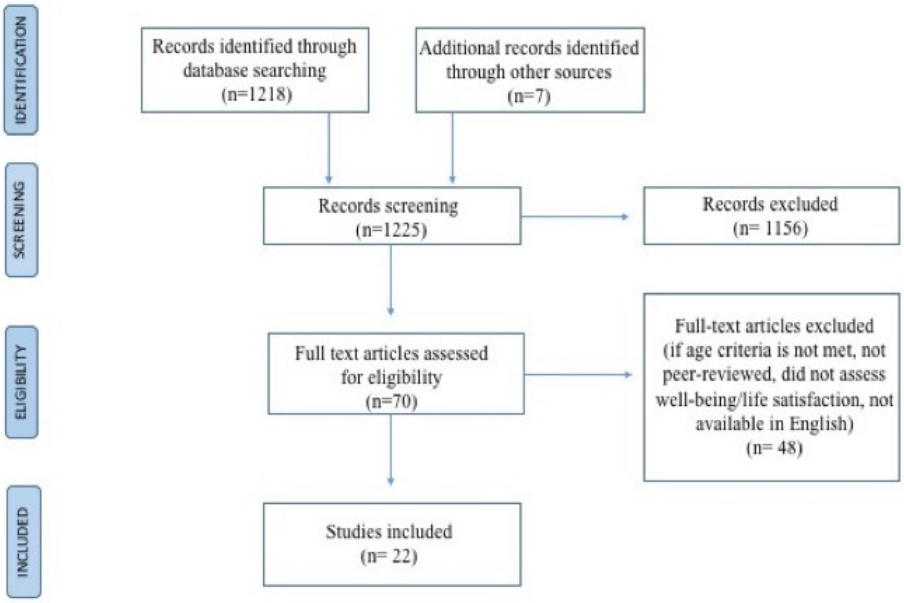


Figure 1. Flow of information through the different phases of the review

The twelve quantitative studies, seven qualitative studies, and the three mixed method studies that were reviewed included a total of 34,043 children and youth. Fourteen articles (63.6%) focused on children exposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ten of them conducted within the solely Palestinian population, one conducted with the Jewish Israeli population, and one conducted in Israel with both Jewish and Arab-Israeli populations. Another two were conducted with both Palestinian and Israeli populations. Two additional studies investigated the well-being of children living in the Ampara district of Sri-Lanka – affected both by civil war and the tsunami of 2004, one study focused on South-Sudan, another in Northern Ireland, one in Rwanda, and one with child victims of armed conflicts living in Kalamansig, Philippines. One final study jointly examined children living in Jordan, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Syrian refugees living in Iraq, while another focused on school-aged children living in Afghanistan, Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia, and Liberian

refugees living in Sierra Leone. For more information about the types of methods used across studies (e.g., surveys, narrative research, ethnography, mixed methods, longitudinal), details of the study locations and the descriptions of the sample see Table 1. The studies investigated a range of domains and dimensions that mutually interact to enhance (or diminish) children's well-being and life satisfaction. Besides, four other studies explicitly focused on assessing the effectiveness of interventions aimed at promoting and assessing children's well-being and health. Over the next few sections we will provide a narrative synthesis of the studies reviewed by following the types of hypotheses tested. The findings are grouped and summarized in Table 2. Finally, the policy implications, as well as literature gaps and recommendations aimed at informing the practice of future research and interventions, are highlighted in the discussion section and reported in Table 3.

Table 1. List of the studies investigated.

Author(s), year	*Study location*	*Sample and method*	*Instruments*	*Aim / dimension explored*
Berger, D. E., Miller, K. E. & Fernando, G.A. 2009	Sri Lanka	Mixed method Qualitative study: 42 children (13-19 years old) Quantitative study: 427 children (mean age: 14,5)	Focus group Self report questionnaire	Contribution of daily stressor on children's health and psychological well-being Development of CDSS instrument
Constandinides, D; Kamens, S., Marshoud, B. & Flefel, F. 2011	Palestine West Bank	Cross sectional cohort design 877 youth 13-15 years old 401 girls 476 boys	School based intervention	Effectiveness of a school base intervention Questionnaire for the assessment of psychological well-being
Cummings, E.M., Merrilees, C., Taylor, L.K, Goeke-Morey, M. & Shirlow, P. 2017	Northern Ireland	Quantitative study 928 mother-child dyads (10-20 years old) 745 girls 435 boys	Self report questionnaire	Children emotional insecurity about the community in context of political violence
Diab, M., Punamäki, R. L., Palosaari, E., & Qouta, S. R. 2014	Palestine Gaza Strip	Quantitative study 428 children 10-13 years old 48% girls 51% boys	Self report questionnaires	Effectiveness of the TRT psychosocial intervention in enhancing good social relations and WB.
Eiling, E., Van Diggele-Holtland, M., Van Yperen, T., & Boer, F. 2014	Republic of South Sudan	Mixed methods 122 children (8-16 years old) 49 girls 73 boys	Group exercises Interviews Role-play Drawings Self-report questionnaires	Outcome evaluation of psychological support intervention I DEAL, aimed at improving resilience and psychosocial well-being.

Harel-Fisch, Y., Radwan, Q., Walsh, S.D, Laufer, A., Amitai, G., Fogel-Grinvald, H., & Abdeen, Z. *2010*	Palestine Israel	Quantitative study 7.430 in West Bank 7.217 in Gaza 11.288 in Israel (5.255 Jewish, 6.033 Arabs) 11-13-15 years old	Standardized self-administered questionnaires	Impact of exposure to armed conflict events on mental health, psychological wellbeing and risk behaviour. Parental support as a buffer.
Itzhaki, Y., Yablon, Y. B., Itzhaky, H. *2018*	Israel	Quantitative study 261 males 14-21 years old	Self report questionnaires	Examination of the contribution of BLR and dropping out of high-school to the well-being
Nguyen-Gillham, V., Giacaman, R., Naser, G., & Boyce, W. *2008*	Palestine West Bank	Qualitative study 321 youth 15-17 years old 164 girls 137 boys	Focus group Open-ended questions	Unpack resilience construct. Youth's pathways to well-being
Noguera, R. T. *2013*	Philippines Kalamasing Sultan Kudarat Mindanao	Qualitative study 160 children 7-12 years old 70 girls 90 boys	Interviews following Pagdadala model (Decenteceo, 1997)	Spirituality as a part of psychological intervention to empower well-being
Pells, K. *2011*	Rwuanda	Qualitative study 8 children each focus group (50 FG) Children and youth 12-25 years old	Focus group	Resilience and agency in children, promoting their well-being and health
Scales, O.C., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Wallace, T., Inselman, A., Stephenson, P., & Rodriguez, M. *2015*	Iraq Jordan Lebanon Philippines	Quantitative study 1150 children, 11-18 years old 368 Syrian refugee in Iraq (52% female) 480 from Jordan (5% female) 105 from Lebanon (58% female) 597 from Philippines (51% female)	Self report questionnaires	Assessing youth well-being (positive relationship, positive values, skills, self-perceptions) in emergency setting
Slone, M., & Roziner, I. *2013*	Israel	Quantitative study 580 youth Mean age: 16 61% girls 39% boys 53% Jewish 47% Muslim	Self report questionnaires	The moderating role of self-complexity (SC) on well-being (WB) and psychopathology
Thomas, F.C., Tol, W.A., Vallipuram, A., Sivayokan, S., Jordans, M.J., Reis, R., & De Jong, J.T. *2016*	Sri Lanka	Qualitative data N/A	Focus group Semi-structured interviews	Identified examples of resources for children at the individual, family and community level.
Veronese, G., Castiglioni, M., Barola, G., & Said, M. *2012*	Palestine West Bank	Qualitative and quantitative study 74 children 6-12 years old 31 girls 43 boys	Experiential activities Story-telling Art therapy Self report questionnaires	Ecological dimension affecting well-being. Positive and negative affect, self-perceived life satisfaction and happiness

Veronese, G., Castiglioni, M., Tombolani, M., & Said, M. 2012	Palestine West Bank Israel Nazareth	Quantitative study 216 children 9.11 years old 97 girls 119 boys	Self report questionnaires	Explore optimism, life perceived happiness and life satisfaction
Veronese, G., Fiore, F., Castiglioni, M., Barola, G., & Natour, M. 2014	Palestine West Bank	Quantitative study 74 children 8-16 years old 38 girls 36 boys	Self-report measure	Relationship between family quality of life (QoL) and children's psychological well-being and ability to cope
Veronese, G., & Castiglioni, M. 2015	Palestine West Bank	74 children 6-12 years old 31 girls 43 boys	Experiential activities focused on emotional and relational competence "What makes me satisfied and happy"	SWB domains
Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Jaradah, A., Al Muranak, F., & Hamdouna, H. 2017a	Palestine Gaza Strip	Quantitative study 1276 children 6-11 years old 746 girls 530 boys	Structural equation modelling Self report questionnaires	Life satisfaction, affect balance and well-being. Assess interrelationships
Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Jaradah, A., Al Muranak, F., & Hamdouna, H 2017b	Palestine Gaza Strip	Explorative qualitative study 200 children 6-11 years old 96 girls 104 boys	Experiential activities Art techniques Role play	Self perceived risk and protective factors SWB dimensions
Veronese, G., Cavazzoni, F., Antenucci, S. 2018	Palestine West Bank Gaza Strip	Qualitative research 122 children 6 – 15 years old 68 girls 54 boys 44 in Dheisheh camp 32 in Aida camp 46 in Jabalia camp	Self-characterization (Kelly, 1991) Drawings	Sources of agency and well-being
Veronese, G., Barola, G. 2018	Palestine Gaza Strip	Qualitative research 64 children 8-14 years old Intervention group: 28 children (7 girls, 21 boys) Control group (10 girls, 26 boys)	School-based intervention Self report questionnaires	Intervention aimed at empowering positive emotions, life satisfaction and optimism
Winthrop, R., & Kirk, J. 2008	Ethiopia Afghanistan Sierra Leone	Mixed methods 312 children 8-16 years old Eritrean refugee in Ethiopia 8-12 years old in Afghanistan 7-17 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone	In depth interviews Focus group Questionnaires Classroom observations School mapping Video – photo documentation	Children's conceptualization of their own well-being in relation to their school experience

1.4.2.5 Discussion

Overall, the selected studies present diverse contributions to what constitutes well-being and life satisfaction for children exposed to political violence and armed conflicts across diverse socio-cultural settings. Within these studies, which occurred across thirteen different countries, researchers were able to identify several dimensions that were contributing to the children's well-being in situations of significant adversity. In the process, the concept of well-being emerged as a combination of personal resources and supportive contexts – such as family, peers, and community – that vary over time or across contexts. Thus, the following discussion of the findings, as well as the order in which they were presented, is organized using an ecological lens (Brofenbrenner, 1979). We will present the identified factors, of both micro- and macro-systems, which together form a potential protective shield around children. In addition, a final paragraph will report on the implications of the research, practices, and interventions that were discussed within the studies reviewed.

Table 2: Critical findings

Individual resources promoting children positive well-being
Gender and age
• Results are mixed on the role of age and gender as a source of protection
• Females reported greater severity of psychological problems
• Females better able to exploit social relationships and personal resources
• Older children are better able to get in touch with their positive emotions, while younger children report more negative emotions.
Agency and coping strategies
• Have an active role: power to make choices and find adaptive solutions.
• Children's own ability to resist and to mobilize resources for adjusting to ongoing violence
Self-complexity as a moderator of exposure effects to political life events, important for WB.
Feeling of life satisfaction and children's ability to activate positive emotions
• Positive emotions mitigate the effect of traumatic events, enhancing children's WB.
• Satisfaction with life helps children to mitigate negative emotions, promotes positive affect, and mitigates effects of trauma
Have access to the education: learning, improving their capacity, being educated
• School is perceived as a satisfying place, restore sense of normalcy
• School can support children's WB - importance of learning
Spirituality
• Strong religiousness: higher levels of WB
• Religion as resource due to its provision of a social network for the individual.
The web of supportive relationships
Support of the social dimension
• Cohesive social networks can provide the basic socio-emotional needed to foster feelings of belonging and self competence, increasing well-being and life satisfaction.
Family resources
• Family provides nurturing and protection: source of strengths, practical life learning, confidence, and courage.
• Family well-being strongly influence child's well-being.
Friends: having good, positive relationships with peers
• Play, sociality.
• Closeness and the possibility of mutually sharing experiences.

Community and collective resources

Community characteristics and values

- Community is a source of strength, values, and resource for children.
- Community provide significant protection, enabling children to attribute sense to uncontrollable events.

Political domain

- It drives sense-making activities in a difficult environment.
- The more the context is able to attribute meaning to adversity and to actively involve children in the struggle to overcome it, the more individual well-being will be protected

Environmental factors, basic needs and access to resources

Safety and security

- Human insecurity
- Need for space
- Freedom of movement

Access to resources

Individual resources promoting children positive well-being

The different personal resources that are able to enhance and improve the well-being of children living in conflict-affected areas emerged from these studies. These include demographic characteristics, agency and coping strategies, self-complexity, emotional orientations (i.e. life satisfaction, positive emotion), education, as well as religious beliefs.

Gender and age. Girls were sampled in 21 of the 22 studies reviewed and female participants comprised 51% of the total research participants (four of the studies did not specify gender distribution). Evidence was mixed regarding the role of gender and well-being. On the one hand, the majority of studies evidenced that females reported a greater severity of psycho-social problems compared to males. Although boys seem to be more exposed to violence than girls, they displayed fewer traumatic symptoms and perceived more significant support in terms of participation in community activities, thereby perceiving the context to be more protective (Veronese et al. 2017a). On the other hand, females were better able to exploit both social relationships (e.g. peers and family support) and personal resources (e.g. optimism, self-esteem) when compared to boys, exhibiting higher levels of life satisfaction and greater feelings of protection from families and community members (Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015). As with gender, findings were not univocal regarding role of age in determining children's well-being and life satisfaction. Some findings did not find any correlation between children's ages and the impact that violence has on their well-being. Others suggested that older children might somehow be better protected from the effects of political violence than younger children since they are in a better position to get in touch with their positive emotions (Veronese et al., 2014).

Agency and coping strategies. Agency and coping strategies were also mentioned and assessed as protective factors when it came to a child's ability to adjust to adverse life-

contexts, enabling them to find creative solutions in these unpredictable contexts. Agency can be intended as the power of individuals to make choices and establish an active role within their daily lives and, especially in contexts characterized by political violence, 'such engagement can be healing' (Das et al., 2011, p.34). In almost all of the reviewed studies, children were depicted as actively negotiating with their complex living environments (Nguyen-Gillham, et al., 2008; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese et al, 2018; Pells, 2011). For instance, within the Palestinian context, agency and the ability to endure and overcome the harsh realities were also connected to the capacity to make life as normal as possible (Nguyen-Gillham, et al., 2008). Being able to maintain the activities of an ordinary life, such as playtime, the enjoyment of places, and attending school, helped promote children's sense of wellness.

Self-complexity. In a study that included 580 Israeli and Arab-Israeli adolescents, Slone and Roziner pointed out the powerful influence of self-complexity in moderating the negative impact of the children's exposure to violence and, thus, to improving their well-being. They wanted to explain the variability amongst youth affected by the same amount of violence by introducing the concept of self-complexity, associating this variability to "differences in cognitive representations of the self, and more specifically, to differences in the complexity of self-representation" (Slone & Roziner, 201, p.660). Within their findings, Israeli adolescents were reporting a higher level of well-being than their Arab peers. Thus, by assessing the levels of self-complexity amongst their sample, they found that those adolescents with higher levels of complexity were also demonstrating greater well-being and fewer symptoms of psychopathology.

Satisfaction and positive emotions. Feelings indicating high levels of positive emotions and happiness were found to be critical factors in children's well-being across many of the reviewed studies. Positive affects played a significant role in reducing traumatic symptoms (Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017 a,b). These findings are in line with Diener's conceptualizations of well-being (2009), which is defined by people's evaluation of their own lives and is composed of several distinct but interrelated components: positive effects, negative effects, and general life satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Huebner & Dew, 1996). In their studies with school-aged children in Palestine – from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – Veronese and colleagues found that feelings of life satisfaction enable children to experience and activate positive emotions which, in turn, mitigate the impact of traumatic events (Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017 a). These findings confirmed the fact that positive emotions in children

have a crucial role in controlling traumatic reactions caused by political violence and armed conflicts, contributing to positive adjustment and well-being.

Similarly, it was evidenced that negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and a sense of hopelessness caused by armed conflicts are strictly linked to higher levels of psychological distress and PTSD (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2016). For instance, in Harel-Fisch and colleagues' comparative study (2010) of Israeli youth and Palestinian children (from both the West Bank and Gaza), they found that as a result of their increased exposure to high levels of armed conflict, Palestinians showed an elevated degree of negative emotions and lower levels of well-being when compared to their Israeli peers. Likewise, the children perceived negative emotions as a threat to their psychological integrity and happiness both in Palestine and Sri Lanka (Thomas et al., 2016; Veronese et al., 2017b).

Education. Most studies observed that having educational opportunities was significant for children's well-being. School attendance widely emerged as a source of vital importance in supporting children's lives, mental health, and well-being within the studies reviewed. School has been identified as essential in helping children who are living in contexts affected by political violence to achieve a sense of safety and normality in their daily lives. Moreover, regular school attendance was associated with higher levels of self-esteem, confidence, and pro-social behaviors among children. For example, in Nguyen-Gillham and colleagues' study (2008), school was highlighted as a crucial element since it provides a primary structure and routine amid the chaotic and complex environment that surrounds Palestinian children. Similarly, in South Sudan, being able to achieve good results in school was strictly connected to greater satisfaction levels in life and, thus, positive adjustments and a greater sense of well-being (Eilinig et al., 2014). In addition, the school also symbolized a safe place where children could boost their future prospects, aspirations, and opportunities while engaging in learning, playing, and socializing activities (Veronese et al., 2017b; Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). In the comparative research that included Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Sierra Leone, the acquisition of specific skills (e.g., Islamic studies, languages, mathematics) emerged as the primary way in which school supported children's well-being (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Education was depicted as the way to construct pathways towards a brighter future in order to achieve greater happiness and satisfaction (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Evoking the words of a Kunama refugee boy attending the fifth grade in Ethiopia, "my desire is to know and be able to identify what is good and bad in my daily life and how I might act in prevention if something happens in my life. Because of this, I have more interest and desire in education." (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008, p.650).

Spirituality. Religious beliefs have also been assessed as crucial factors for children's well-being. Religiosity was widely associated with higher levels of optimism and positive emotions, as well as reduced levels of distress symptoms, thereby providing evidence that strong religious convictions are often a fundamental component in the life of children and youth exposed to armed conflicts and political violence. In Sri-Lankan children, spirituality was uncovered as a factor that facilitated coping (Thomas et al., 2016) and its presence in Palestine helped children deal with the ongoing violence that they faced, introducing "narratives of redemption and freedom rather than revenge and violence" (Veronese et al., 2017b, p.372). Being religious was also connected to optimism and a sense of power and hope for the future: God could respond to their needs (Noguera, 2013). The interesting study carried out by Itzhaki and colleagues (2018) with ultraorthodox Jews in Israel evidenced how becoming less religious was correlated with a lower level of social support and a reduced sense of community: both factors that were mentioned as important to youth's overall life satisfaction. What was surprising in that sample was that the youth who abandoned their religion reported that their well-being was primarily affected by being rejected by the surrounding religious community. Despite religion's ostensibly elevated importance in their lives, the low levels of well-being that they experienced seems largely related to the repercussions of being excluded from religious communities. "Youth seemed to feel that community members' love for them was conditioned by their adherence to communal norms, and when they did not comply with these norms, they experienced a reduction in this love" (Itzhaki et al., 2018, p.7). This finding highlights that religion was perceived as a significant resource for youth's wellness mainly due to its attendant social network, which bring us to the second group of well-being resources, which is the importance of social networks.

The web of supportive relationships

Findings indicate that familial and social support were also key dimensions in promoting individual's well-being and greater life satisfaction. The social dimension seems to be crucial in ensuring connectedness within a fragmented society, thereby helping children to cope with feelings of isolation (Veronese et al., 2017b). Cohesive social networks have been found to be crucial in providing the basic socio-emotional needs to foster feelings of belonging and self competence, which increases the children's well-being and life satisfaction (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2016; Veronese et al., 2014).

In fact, higher levels of perceived social support have been linked to increased adaptive behaviors and overall greater life satisfaction. The value of supportive relationships, such as family and friends, was transversal in almost all of the selected articles. A variety of family-level predictors of life satisfaction and well-being emerged from the studies. The family was depicted as a vital source of protection from the negative impacts of being exposed to traumatic events and high levels of perceived family support was associated with increased levels of well-being and life satisfaction (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2016; Veronese et al., 2014). Similarly, higher levels of family support were linked to lower levels of emotional distress and post-traumatic symptoms amongst participants. For example, amongst Filipino children the family emerged as a significant source of strength, practical life learning, confidence, and courage (Noguera, 2013). The children depicted their family as the place where they can receive help, when needed, and be both nurtured and protected (Noguera, 2013). Similarly, parental support was associated with positive perceptions of life and health in the large study of Harel-Fisch and colleagues, which they conducted in the occupied Palestinian territories (2010). In their study, the authors underlined the role that parental support plays in children's well-being and mental health, "buffering" the effects of exposure to military and political violence. Analogously, a family's improved quality of life has been found to positively influence both children's psychological well-being and their ability to cope with traumatic experiences (Veronese et al., 2014). On the contrary, when the family structure is compromised as a consequence of the ongoing conflicts, it represents one of the largest factors that negatively impact children's well-being (Thomas et al., 2016). Difficulties and suffering within the family itself risks undermining children's resourcefulness and their ability to adjust to trauma. "The child's satisfaction with its family, and how the family is satisfied with its child, may activate a process enabling children to interpret their lives positively, making them optimistic and satisfied with their lives" (Veronese et al., 2014, p.566).

Likewise, positive relationships with friends and peers are central to children's perceptions of happiness and well-being (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). Being friendly and sociable is correlated to a higher level of well-being in school-age children from South Sudan (Eiling et al., 2014) and it was also described as a vital source of joy by children in the Philippines (Noguera, 2013). Similarly, Diab and colleagues (2014) identified the protective and beneficial effects of positive peer and sibling relations throughout childhood and early adolescence, which provides children with a sense of safety and closeness that enables the possibility of sharing experiences. Moreover, friends and family, as well as other

significant adult members of a given community, were also described as the ones who fed, consoled, and protected them. As such, they represent real sources of security and protection for the children (Noguera, 2013).

Community and collective resources

Growing up with the perception of belonging to a community is a well-known and crucial aspect in a child's life and well-being. A community can be a source of strength, values, and resources for children. Research has indicated that community acceptance promotes an optimistic outlook on life and an overall greater satisfaction and perceived well-being. Within the studies reviewed, two leading themes related to the importance of the community emerged.

Community characteristic and values. Community values, identity, and practices have been identified as critical to providing protection for children living amidst political violence, and also in promoting their well-being and life satisfaction within a collective sense of belonging and empowerment. The majority of the studies that were reviewed show how communities provide essential protection for children, enabling them to attribute a sense, and a meaning, to the vast amount of uncontrollable events that they are made to endured (Cummings et al., 2017a; Itzhaki et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2012). On the contrary, being unable to perceive themselves as part of a bigger community and the consequent inability to access and recognize shared values strongly increased youth vulnerability, while also diminishing their well-being and life satisfaction (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010). For instance, in their study, Harel-Fisch and colleagues (2010) have attempted to understand the different levels of well-being and positive perceptions amongst Jewish and Arab children – both of whom were living in Israel. As the authors explained, "Israeli Arab children are living in a predominantly Jewish country built on Western democratic values and may aspire to many of the values of the society they are growing up in, thus causing a perception of social inequality and a sense of personal - environment misfit. The Arab Israeli society has a strong connection to Arab culture and heritage. The conflicts in values, culture, and tradition between Western and Arab culture may leave them in a particularly vulnerable position for mental health issues and risk behaviours" (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010, p.635). Therefore, the studies agreed upon the importance of being able to access and perceive a shared cultural identity in order to feel protected, to attribute meaning to the extreme events that they faced, and thus, to preserve and improve their well-being (Cummings et al., 2017a; Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Itzhaki et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2012).

Political domain. Political activity, including both civic and political involvement, also emerged as a protective factor amongst participants who found themselves in situations of conflict, while also being vital in restoring a sense of their own identity. The reviewed research suggests that political activity helps children develop feelings of empowerment, dignity, and hope for the future - all factors which offer protection from the effects of violence. Civic and political commitment allows children to develop interpretations and meaning about what is happening around them. For example, in the studies related to the Palestinian territories, engagement in political activities, which manifests itself in the struggle against the Israeli occupation, showed widespread protective effects on children's exposure to political violence. Nguyen-Gillham and colleagues (2008) conducted research in the occupied Palestinian territories that identified ideology, a connection to the land, and the struggle against the occupation as the crucial factors in children's well-being. "To be passive politically is humiliating while even a minor political gesture restores a modicum of dignity" (Nguyen-Gillham, 2008, p.296). Similarly, Veronese and colleagues (2017b) observed how Palestinian children in Gaza appeared to react to the imposed limitations on their movement and the everyday threat of losing their treasured spaces (i.e. home, school) due to the Israeli military occupation by developing a strong sense of attachment them. The research conducted in refugee camps revealed similar findings since refugees expressed a strong degree of identification with the places that they come from. In this sense, their home villages function as a constitutive element within a collective protective memory (Veronese et al., 2017b).

Environmental factors, basic needs and access to resources

As well as satisfaction with school or family, being satisfied with their living environment is another crucial component of overall life satisfaction. This has an important protective role for children living in war-affected contexts. Within the studies reviewed, two main aspects were identified as necessary in order to feel happy and satisfied with their own lived environment.

Safety and security. It is well-known that during wars, conflicts, or military occupations, no place is perceived as safe and the possibility for children to move freely in the environment is severely limited. However, children widely reported the need to have safe spaces. Thus, their ability to move within their surroundings is related to their well-being and happiness in life, which is crucial in helping them display the high levels of optimism needed cope with extreme trauma (Veronese et al., 2012). For instance, children coming

from a Palestinian city – devastated by military incursions, curfews, night-time home invasions, imprisonment, and targeted murders – reported lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness than the children from other rural areas (Veronese et al., 2012).

Accessibility to resources. Children's perception of their own well-being was strongly related to their ability to access resources. For example, not being able to access health or educational opportunities strongly contributed to reduced levels of well-being in the studies reviewed. In the specific case of Palestinians, they often complained of a lack of services and resources related to the health system, which meant that they were not able to provide adequate health protection for their families (Veronese et al., 2017b). Similarly, in the eastern district of Ampara, in Sri Lanka, Berger and colleagues (2009) underlined the fact that children's inability to access play-spaces or to attend school was threatening their everyday life and well-being.

Implication for research and practices

From the studies reviewed, the necessity of exploring and prioritizing both well-being and life satisfaction in children exposed to political violence and armed conflict vividly emerged. Table 3 illustrates the numerous implications for research, practices, and interventions that we were able to identify during the review process.

Table 3. Implications for practices, policy, and research

Need to foster knowledge on dimensions of well-being in order to inspire interventions and treatment that focus on

- The ability to **activate positive emotions** as a crucial resource for dealing with traumatic reactions.
- **The role of the SC, education, and spirituality** in enhancing children's well-being and moderating the impact of political violence.

Essential to put **the role of culture and local knowledge** in emphasis when examining and intervening with children living in politically violent context

- Need to define more specific and **culturally relevant indicators of well-being**: attention to local perceptions and conceptualizations.
- Need to develop more sophisticated **and culturally sensitive measures** supported by qualitative data analysis.

Importance of keeping a **politically-informed focus**

- **Political implications in mental health disciplines** become unavoidable when children are involved in protracted conflicts.
- Need to consider the **political and social nature of the conflict** and, therefore, of the **children's suffering and processes of self-recovery**.

Implications for practices based on this review underline the need to emphasize attention on:

Changing the focus: programs directed to **empower children** to advocate their right to dignity and life satisfaction, not only clinical programs focused on alleviating symptoms.

- Importance of an **emic perspective**: how they experience the violence, how they respondto it, and their daily lives and priorities.
- Interventions aimed at **strengthening aspects of positive functions, promoting competence, natural abilities** and children's awareness of their rights.

Need to include the **role of the social dimension** (familial, social and community support) in enhancing and promoting children's well-being: prioritize **family and community-oriented intervention**

- **Multi-level intervention**: to interconnect family and community resources with environmental protection factors.
- Direct clinical efforts and **community-based interventions** towards families, groups and the entire community, in order to promote positive adjustment to trauma and reinforce protective factors.

Firstly, the authors underlined an urgent need to foster knowledge on the well-being of children who had been exposed to political violence in order to inspire interventions and improved child-care treatments. Accordingly, the role of agency, self-complexity, education, and spirituality needed to be explored and understood within a socio-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moreover, scholars now place much more emphasis on the role of positive emotions as a crucial resource towards ensuring children's well-being and, above all, uncovering new ways of activating them (Thomas et al., 2016; Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017 a, b). A second point that is discussed in all of the studies reviewed concerns the critical role of both culture and local knowledge when examining children living in contexts of political violence. Scholars affirm the need for more sophisticated and culturally sensitive measures and pre-intervention assessments in order to identify the local resources available within a community (Thomas et al., 2016). Lastly, the authors highlight the importance of maintaining a politically-informed focus (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese & Barola, 2018). In evaluating the well-being and mental health of children involved in protracted conflicts, armed violence, and oppression, the are unavoidable political implications. It is indeed mandatory to take into consideration the political and social nature of the conflict that affects the populations in order to be able to address children's suffering and process of self-recovery (Veronese & Barola, 2018).

Furthermore, when analysing the implications for clinical practices, scholars highlight the urgent need for multi-level clinical interventions that simultaneously consider personal, family, and community resources, as well as environmental factors. In order to address and promote children's well-being and life satisfaction in their ecological conceptualization, interventions need to emphasize and focus on enhancing social support across all the dimensions of the children's lives the lives (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010). The evidence demonstrated that sustained attention must be given to interventions aimed at supporting families, networks of friends, and communities in order to promote and re-activate all of the resources associated with positive functioning and adaptation (Constandinides et al., 2011). Scholars therefore outlined the need to develop new clinical interventions aimed at

strengthening aspects of positive functioning and promoting children's well-being, thereby reinforcing related individual and contextual factors (Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola & Said, 2012). Furthermore, greater attention should be assigned to perceptions of well-being. As outlined, local conceptualizations of well-being and the available resources in the environment should guide any intervention (Thomas et al., 2016), together with an awareness of children's competencies, personal resources, and priorities (Pells, 2011). As Boyden expressed, "if children are to be helped to overcome highly stressful experiences, their views and perspectives need to be treated as a source of learning and strength, not weakness" (Boyden, 2003, p.15). Engaging children in the development of projects and interventions might help restore and enhance their sense of agency, which, as discussed, is an important first step in promoting their well-being.

1.4.2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this systematic review was to synthesize the body of existing knowledge on well-being and life satisfaction amongst children impacted by armed conflict, while specifically summarizing information that could be useful in developing direct interventions aimed at enhancing the well-being of children imparted by armed conflicts. Armed conflict and political violence have been found to negatively impact the well-being and life satisfaction of children. Such exposure can lead to symptoms of hostility and unhappiness (Al-Eissa, 1995), increased disobedience, violence, the externalization of problems (Baker, 1991; Cairns & Dawes, 1996), a reduction in optimism, the inability to enjoy basic things, and a reduction in overall perceived well-being (Gibson, 1989; Harel-Fisch et al., 2010). On the other hand, as has been well documented, positive effects have also been found amongst affected children, such as increased sociability and greater life satisfaction (Barber, 2008; Sousa et al., 2013).

These findings emphasize the importance of the subjective (psychological) dimensions of children's well-being and may be able to inspire new interventions and treatments that focus on the children's ability to activate resources (individual, social, and environmental) in order to deal with traumatic reactions. This review is unequivocal in confirming the ecological nature of children's well-being in violent and armed contexts. Moreover, these cross-country studies strongly recommend the need to implement community-based interventions focused on well-being and the need to develop more culturally sensitive measures based on available resources. Besides community-based interventions, scholars argue that humanitarian aid for children often misses the point, disregarding children's

perspectives, resources, and agency (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008), which suggests that there is an urgent need for alternative perspectives. All of the voices in the reviewed studies reminded us of the fact that "children can be agents of their own lives. They understand themselves not as helpless objects that are acted upon," (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008, p.658) but as subjects that actively construct their own life experience. Engaging children in the development of interventions and programs may help restore a sense of agency amongst them, which will go far in terms of preventing the development of traumatic reactions (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese & Barola, 2018). In conclusion, the authors highlight the importance of taking a politically-informed focus into consideration while designing interventions targeting children living in areas of chronic political and military violence. In other words, political considerations and implications in mental health disciplines have to be taken into account when populations are involved in protracted conflicts.

1.4.2 What constitutes a good life after war?

The effects of war and armed conflict on children are matters of international concern. As previously argued, children's health and well-being are strictly related to the cultural, social, and surrounding ecological environment in which they grow up. However, the number of studies that have focused on the implications of the relationship between these factors for the well-being of children is still very limited (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Schermerhorn, Merrilees, & Cairns, 2009). Political violence endangers all aspects of children's' life, jeopardizing their personal and social environment at multiple different levels (Magid & Boothby, 2013). Moreover, extreme violence has many simultaneous *ecological* consequences, which include increasing poverty and marginalization, fomenting social and institutional distrust, and causing the disruption of social networks that thereby prevent children from accessing support and protection (e.g., schools and hospitals). This violence targets children and their families, including shared institutions, culture, traditions, and values. For instance, it has been well established that supportive and cohesive families serve as a secure base for children (Cummings et al., 2009). Conversely, inter-parental conflict and violence has been associated with problems in psychological adjustment and with diminished well-being in children (Holden & Ritchie, 1991). Thus, including the many factors that act and interact at multiple levels of the child's broader environment will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of their well-being (Barber & Doty,

2013; Masten, 2014; Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015). All of these social and cultural variables are embedded in children's development and are therefore of fundamental importance to their ability to positively adapt to adverse situations. Furthermore, all of these factors have a role in shaping how children, and human beings in general, perceive their reality. As such, all of these factors operate as resources through which children understand, predict, interact, and control their surrounding world (Exenberger & Juen, 2013; Marsella, 2010). Likewise, children's developmental phases and tasks are linked to a specific combination of these factors acting together. As previously outlined, the meaning of subjective well-being, resilience, or maladaptive behaviors are modeled by context and culture. Together with demographic factors, culturally situated knowledge is crucial for the comprehension of what is interpreted as a successful developmental task or what is viewed as competence in a given cultural and historical context (Exenberger & Juen, 2013). "The *developmental appropriateness* of children's experiences, the "harmfulness" or "benefits" of their environment cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they are developing, the values and goals that inform their lives and their prior experiences of learning skills and ways of thinking" (Woodheah, 1999, p.13).

Hence, the relevance of a socio-ecological perspective in the understanding of well-being and health in children living in conflict-affected areas has been made clear (Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer, 2009; Cummings et al., 2017b; Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). Ecological theory in the psychological field has been developed within many subsequent perspectives that have brought to a general recognition of multilevel bases of human development, formulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989). As previously described, this model implicates dynamic mutual interactions between a series of interrelated systems that surround the growing child (the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems), developing a conception of the child's environment as *nested structures like Russian dolls* (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013, p.348). Following this path, later adaptations resulted in a bio-psycho-socio-ecological system theory that offers the most comprehensive way of taking into account the many influences on children's development. As Garbarino (2014) has argued, well-being and health depend upon all the constituent elements of the child and their context, such as gender, temperament, cognitive competencies, age, family, neighborhood, society, and culture. Only by incorporating the multiple levels of their social ecology can a more comprehensive understanding be achieved. In order to address the question of why what might be perceived as overwhelming to one child is only perceived as a minor

inconvenience to another, we need to consider the interaction of the systems that represent the ecological perspective.

Despite these scholarly interventions, there remains a strong emphasis on both individual maladaptive conditions and the psychopathological effects of war and violence, with still very little attention dedicated to children's relationships, families, neighborhoods, and communities as protective resources. As a consequence, many studies still proceed as though *political violence occurs in a vacuum* (Dawes & Cairn, 1998). Moreover, interventions are still prioritizing clinical practices such as psycho-therapeutic and pharmacological treatments over holistic psycho-social interventions (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1995; Summerfield, 1999). Even if decades of research have taught us that families and communities play a central role in childhood development, the reduction of symptoms is still considered the primary criterion and objective of clinical interventions (Betancourt, 2012; Diab et al., 2015; Shonkoff, 2010). These bio-medical models underscore the extent to which development and well-being are influenced by a dynamic interaction between risk and protective factors, which can be identified within the individual, family, community, and broader socio-economic and cultural context (Shonkoff, 2010; Veronese et al., 2017a). Therefore, an ecological framework is indeed needed in order to conceptualize multi-level interventions aimed at fostering long-term mental health and well-being among the population suffering from political violence, which includes new advanced analytical approaches and new directions in measuring and assessing socio-ecological influences (Cummings et al., 2009). Assessing the many different layers across social ecology and the children's extended support systems (family, social, economic, and political) has the potential to improve our understanding of the impact of political violence on childhood development. Therefore, this multi-faceted analysis is essential to the creation of clinical interventions that are able to improve children's well-being and capacity to mitigate the effect of conflict exposure (Betancourt & Khan, 2008: Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, Charrow, & Tol, 2013).

To conclude and introduce the next chapter, there are a few more considerations that require our attention. As we have previously discussed, well-being is a socially contingent and context-specific construct and its definition can change over time. Moreover, well-being is defined as a subjective evaluation of the individual on his own quality of life. However, until now little was known about what children identify as well-being. As Ben-Arieh and George (2001) pointed out, if we want to address our concern about adequately measuring

and detecting children's well-being, it is necessary to involve them in all stages of the research process. However, children's perspectives have been lengthily neglected by the psychological sciences and developmental psychology (Fattore, Mason, & Watson, 2008), which has situated children as the objects of research, rather than the subjects (James, Jenk, & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 2002; Qvortup, 2005). "Standpoint theory stresses the fact that as well as being authoritative about their world, children see things differently as a result of their different location, structurally, in the social order. Acknowledging that difference, and valuing children's understanding of their different status, has also been important for us as researchers. How children understand what being a child means, the nature of childhood and adulthood, and the powerfulness of adults in a child's world, is especially significant if we are to understand well-being from the child's point of view" (Fattore et al., 2008, p.68). It is therefore mandatory to involve children in the process of defining their own understanding of well-being by enabling their voices and appreciating the significance of their personal experiences.

Chapter Two
Introducing children's agency

In the previous chapter, we addressed the topic of children's well-being, introducing the importance of recognize children's capabilities to act in enhancing and promoting their well-being and life satisfaction. As we have widely discussed, the predominant biomedical models, whose origins lie in Western traditions, had the tendency to depict people living in stressful or emergency situations as passive victims and psychologically vulnerable and, thus, undermining their capabilities and resources at both individual and collective levels (Hinton, 2008; Sousa et al., 2013). People's "capability to act" has been studied under the term of *agency* and it has been extremely important within childhood study in overcoming the view of children as defenceless victims, moving towards a new conceptualization of minors as *active, empowered* young people (Alexander, Callaghan, Sixmith, & Fellin, 2015; Brown, & Westaway, 2011; Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003; Veronese, Pepe, Jaradah, Al Murannak, & Hamdouna, 2017a).

Over the past two decades the concept of "agency" had been one of the key theoretical contributions in the development of the 'new childhood studies' (James, 2009). It had significantly emphasized the role of the child as a social agent in his development and life, generating a radical change in the approach towards children and childhood and to childcare, research and intervention. Recognized as social agents, children started to be considered as meaningful subjects, as *beings* and no longer passive objects that are significant as *becomings* (James & James, 2012; Qvortrup, 1994). Although nowadays the notion of agency has become a *type of mantra* (Durham, 2008) within social science, the understanding of its concept remains inadequate, and it make an appearance under a wide variety of meanings. Scholars thus herald the necessity of more specific definition for concepts like actors and agency, which sometimes "sound more like slogans rather than notions grounded on empirical evidence" (Stoecklin, 2013, p.443).

Following this introduction, the chapter will go on to trace the various academic approaches (from geographers, philosophers, and psychologists) to address the issues of agency (Ahearn, 2001, 2010; Bandura, 1999, 2018). Starting with an exploration of the history and

origin of the concept, we examine the various developments of the construct: from Bandura's foundational conceptualization to the new perspectives that consider agency as embedded within a particular socio-cultural context. The second paragraph examines the role that children's geography, sociology, and psychology have played in developing and extending the new perspectives regarding children as agentic subjects and the privileging of children's voices and experiences in academic research (Ben Arieh, 2005; Biggeri, Ballet, & Comim, 2011). In fact, within the contemporary discourse on children's rights and the new developments within childhood studies, we will demonstrate how much more attention has been given to the notion of children's agency. More recently, the western picture of a vulnerable, passive child has been subverted and replaced with a portrait of the child as "a subject of rights who is able to form and express opinions, to participate in decision making processes and influence solutions." (Santos Pais, 2000, p.4). However, the lack of research on children's agency in its multiple forms endorses a fragmented outlook of their actions and capabilities. To counter this, we will introduce many recent studies that have focused on the overlooked dimensions and characteristics of childhood agency (Barber, 2008b, 2014; Durham, 2008; James, 2009; Habashi, 2011; Iervese & Tuttolomondo, 2014; Veronese et al., 2017 a,b). From here, we will go on to explore children's expression and sources of their agency in the context of political violence and armed conflicts through a systematic literature review addressing the last ten years of peer-reviewed material on the subject. In summary, the research reviewed reveals the crucial role of agency in mobilizing survival skills and protecting children from the hardships in their lives. Finally, we will conclude the second chapter with a reflection on how this new perspective – articulated by researchers within psychology, anthropology, and geography – enables the recognition of children as having an active role in both the research process and within intervention development.

2.1 Agency: definitional issues

> *Probably no concept is central to psychology and its aspirations, yet as poorly articulated, as that on human agency.*
> Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003

The term *agency* generally refers to the ability of people to make choices in their lives and act on them in order to obtain a specific outcome (Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003). If we move forward in the quest for a more specific definition within academic literature –

and even more within childhood studies – the concept remains inadequately defined, appearing frequently and with a wide variety of meanings. Within the psychological discipline, many scholars have complained about the lack of a coherent conception of agency, despite its importance (Ahearn, 1999; Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Martin et al., 2003). This term has been – and is still - used in heterogeneous ways, making it a hard to define and iniquitous concept.

Over the past couple of decades, in an attempt to address this problem, many different definitions have been developed. Agency has been described as *the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.971), *the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act* (Ahearn, 2010, p.112), *the ability to people to help themselves and to influence the world* (Sen, 1999, p.18); *the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices* (Brown & Westaway, 2011), *the capacity of individual and corporate actors, with the diverse cultural meanings that they espouse, to play an independent casual role in history* (McLaughlin & Dietz, 2008, p.105) or, finally, more broadly, as *the ability and possibility for individual to make choices and to act autonomously within a system of norms and constraints* which implies *not only that the individual is endowed with a certain grade of competence but also the presence of favorable environmental conditions in order to express this competence* (Iervese & Tuttolomondo, 2014, p.245).

All these definitions agree on describing *agency* as the ability to act in order to obtain a specific and desired result, but they also underlie some peculiar aspects: the concept of *freedom of choices and of action,* the importance to include the *context current contingencies* (i.e., constrain contingencies or structural factors) and its *socio-cultural and political aspect* (i.e., how its conceptualization may differ from society to society).

By exploring the literature on this topic, it is evident how the issue of freedom, and of its socio-cultural aspect, has been the protagonist of an historical and academic debate that started a long time ago:

> "The issue of freedom of choice and action has taken a variety of forms since first broached by Chrysippus, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E), and other classical Greek philosophers. For, if human individuals have no agency, no freedom to choose and act, personal life loses its possibilities and social life loses its responsibilities. If there is no agency, there is no praiseworthy accomplishment – no persona triumph, no serve to a common good. In a very real sense, the assumption of agency is a metaphorical cornerstone to Western culture. It is difficult to understand the enormous impact to this

> assumption, even if seldom articulated explicitly, on our persona and collective experience. […] People are self-conscious and capable of self-knowledge. They are agents, from whom autonomy (at least since the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant) is a central Western value" (Martin et al., 2003, p.3-11).

As we understand from Martin and colleagues (2003), the issue of freedom and conception of agency has its roots in history. Much of the philosophical debate has put its efforts into the topic, and both philosophers and psychologists have tried to find a third way between the libertarianism perspective regarding the existence of free will – intended as the existence of the possibility to choose our way in life, freedom of choice and action – in contrast to the deterministic statement that free choice does not actually exist. While philosophers kept their attention on *what it means to be an agent* (Martin et al., 2003, p.57), theoretical psychology during the '80s and '90s started to move the focus onto how agency might be acquired or developed.

The first scholar that devoted the majority of their efforts to the study and conceptualization of agency, within the field of social-cognitive psychology, was Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura (1989, 1999, 2001, 2018).

2.1.1 Human agency by Albert Bandura

The concept of *human agency,* as defined by Bandura, refers to the person's power to actively – and in a transformative way – operate within their surrounding context, influencing the course of events for given purposes. Bandura defines human agency as a creative, generative, proactive and self-reflective process, which is a distinctively human characteristic: "the human capacity to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation, and action. […] People can effect change in themselves and their situation through their own efforts" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175).

In his major work, in order to understand how human agency is defined and exercised we have to go back to the concept of *self-efficacy,* which is the central element to Bandura's (2001) conceptualization: "beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency" (Bandura, 2001, p.3). People's beliefs-system about their capabilities to exercise control over their context and the events that occur in their life is the foundation of human agency. Being able to believe and trust their own resources and competencies influence the *anticipatory scenario* (expectations about life) that they construct about their life. Thus,

following Bandura's reasoning, if ones have a high sense of personal efficacy, they will be able to predict and invoke successful scenarios which, in turn, will positively guide my performance towards achieving their personal goal. Otherwise, if ones think to be *inefficacious*, their expected scenarios will be different, unattainable or unpredictable, and thus reducing their performance. "People's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles. The stronger the beliefs in their capabilities, the greater and more persistent are their efforts [...] Self-efficacy is a proximal determinant of human motivation, triggering emotion and actions" (Bandura, 1989, p.1176).

Hence, people's beliefs-system about their capability can be interesting if we think about how a positive and reliable sense of personal efficacy might actively contribute to their well-being. Consider the individual as potentially effective in controlling and managing the events that affect their life might act as a protective factor against threatening or taxing situations (as for Lazarus and Folkman's model of stress and coping 1984). "Efficacy beliefs influence how threats and taxing demands are perceived and cognitively processed; […] regulate motivational, affective and cognitive functioning, enable people to create beneficial environment and modify and control them" (Bandura, 1999, p.28). As we can deduct from his words, people's well-being is strictly connected to their ability to experience and perceive an optimistic sense of personal efficacy.

Furthermore, a second important aspect highlighted by the work of Bandura refers to the four aspects that should be taken into account when we refer to human agency: *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness,* and *self-reflectiveness.* Firstly, being an agent means being able to influence one's functioning and life circumstances. Strategies and actions are driven and directed by people's intentions, making them *contributors* of (in) their lives. Then, people can predict and anticipate the effects of their actions, laying down plans and goals to motivate themselves. Forethought includes the *temporal extension* of agency: through cognitive representations, people guide their choices and behaviors. "Forethought enables people to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and to shape and regulate the present to realize desired futures" (Bandura, 2018, p.131). Finally, agents are also self-regulators and self-examiners of their own ability to function. Is this action helpful in order to pursue my goal, or should I make some changes? Human agency does not involve only the ability to accomplish an action, but it also implies the possibilities of constructing and modifying courses of action. "Agents are not only planners and forethinkers. […] The metacognitive capability to reflect on oneself and the adequacy of

one's capabilities, thoughts, and actions is the most distinctly human core property of agency" (Ibidem, p.131).

Summing up, we can reflect on the final aspect of Bandura efforts to delineate his conceptualization of the construct when he addressed the question: how do people exercise their agency?

Traditionally, human agency has been looked at as an individual aspect and so exercised individually. People's ability to exercise control over their own lives or environments via their power and actions. On the other hand, it is well-known that people live their lives together, in groups, collectively. Moreover, there are many spheres of functioning where people do not have direct control over social conditions and institutional practices that affect their everyday lives (Bandura, 2018). Hence, Bandura underlines two other possible ways to "exercise" agency: the so-called *proxy agency* and *collective agency* (Bandura, 1999, 2001).

The first one refers to the possibility of people expressing their agency by letting others act on their behalf in order to obtain a specific outcome. "In many spheres of life, people do not have direct control over social conditions and institutional practices that affect their lives. Under these circumstances, they seek their wellbeing and security through the exercise of *proxy agency* rather than through direct control. In this socially mediated mode of agency, people try to get those who wield influence & power to act on their behalf to get what they want" (Bandura, 1999, p.34).

Exercising *collective agency*, on the other hand, includes acting through shared beliefs of efficacy and aspirations. This expansion in the conception of agency is crucial since it underlines how it's possible for people to gather together and believe in their collective power in order to produce the desired results. "Perceived collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual's members. Rather, it is emergent group-level propriety. It is people acting collectively on a shared belief. This influence the type of future they seek to achieve through collective action" (Bandura, 1999, p.35).

This collective dimension of efficacy beliefs has essential insights if we think on a broader social level. Shared beliefs and the ability to perceive collective efficacy is considered a type of predictor of the forms and levels of people's political participation and social activism. "People who believe that they can achieve desired changes through citizen action and regard their governmental system as trustworthy and socially responsive display high involvement in conventional models of political action" (Bandura, 1999, p.35).

2.1.2 Towards a socio-ecological understanding of agency

A major significant contribution on agency and well-being has its roots in Amartya Sen's (1985, 1999) studies. Considering people as the "owner" of agency means that when we are interested in exploring and assessing their well-being and welfare, we should consider people's freedom in achieving them.

> "Consider two persons with identical actual functioning vectors, including – as it happens – both of them starving. Person A is starving because she is very poor and lacks the means to command food. Person B is starving out of choice, because of her religious beliefs, which have made her decide to starve and undergo the consequent suffering. In terms of misery caused by the starvation, we learn that there is no difference between A's experience and B's. Even if it were plausible to say that A and B both have the same level of well-being, in terms of being undernourished, miserable, etc., there would nevertheless remain an important difference between the two cases. B could have in a straightforward sense, chosen an alternative life style which A could not have chosen. This is a difference that is relevant to assessing the well-being aspect of the two persons respectively, though it is not necessarily a difference between the actual well-being levels achieved by the two. In judging a person's advantage, the importance of well-being freedom must be recognized. […] The possibility of starving was open to both, but fasting by choice was open only to B." (Sen, 1985, p.201).

In Sen's example, the difference in the well-being between A and B – or *well-being freedom* – is connected to the agency of a person and their ability – and freedom – to "exercise" agency. Which opportunities does a person have in order to achieve their own well-being? Sen's works insist on a connection between the issues of 'individual' freedom of action and the social and environmental characteristics of the world that people inhabit. Internal characteristics, such as age, gender, physical conditions or personal skills, can be critical resources for an individual's proper functioning. For instance, age can be a significant factor in shaping the child's capabilities. Conversely, people do not live in an isolated state and so it is wise to take into account social and environmental factors (e.g., policies, social norms, natural environment, public infrastructure) (Biggeri, Ballet & Comim, 2011). This is the starting point of Sen's work: several freedoms depend on the actions and support of others as well as the nature of social arrangements (Sen, 2002).

Going back to the question that arises from Sen's work, on which opportunities – and freedom of action – a person has in order to achieve their well-being, Klocker's (2007) conception of 'think' and 'thin' agency is significant. The distinction between the two lies

precisely on the opportunities that the person has to act, to 'exercise' their agency. As the author explains, *thin agency* "refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives" (2007, p.85). On the contrary, *thick agency* means having the possibility to act within a broad range of options. However, agency is not static: "It is possible for a person's agency to be 'thickened' or 'thinned' over time and space and across their various relationships. Structures, contexts, and relationships can act as 'thinners' or 'thickeners' of individual's agency, by constraining or expanding their range of viable choices" (Klocker, 2007, p.85).

Both Sen (2002) and Klocker's (2007) conceptualizations underline the importance of taking into account personal and collective values, contextual, and cultural aspects within the exploration of people's agency and how people exercise it. Within the numerous definitions of agency that we have previously analyzed, besides the issue of individual freedom there was a recurrent reference to the importance of including broader variables such as structural, social and cultural factors into the understanding of the concept. For Bandura (1989, 2001) and consecutive scholars, people are intended both as products and active producers of their actions and personal development of their lives. However, in Bandura's (2001) conceptualization – which is still fundamental and relevant – the sociocultural contexts and practices seem to be more *influential* than *constitutive* (Martin et al., 2003). As Martin and colleagues pointed out, contexts and cultures are "more than influential communications and interactions. [They] consist in conceptual and symbolic systems that furnish routines, frames, and other resources for thought and action – resources that once appropriated and internalized help to constitute psychological persons" (Martin et al., 2003, p.73).

When coming to the contextual and structural influence on people's agency, the work of the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984) is particularly worthy of being mentioned. Giddens (1984) addressed the attempt to understand the dialectical relationship between social structure and agency. In the so-called "structuration theory," he outlined how social life is continually produced and reproduced by the process of structuration: agency is constrained by structure as well as structure is a resource that people can draw on in their interactions with others. Hence, people's choices are not only constrained by social – structural influences but also shape them (Stoecklin & Fattore, 2018). In Giddens' conceptualization (1984), agency is referred to as the capacity of people to make things happen, to have an influence and control on them. He introduces the concept of *reflective monitoring* (1984,

p.9), not so far from the agentic proprieties of self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness mentioned by Bandura. For Giddens, reflective monitoring means that the actor shows awareness of their actions. Moreover, this is strongly linked to the ability to act also intended as the power to *make a difference*: "To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy (chronically, in the flow of daily life) a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to 'make a difference,' that is, to exercise some sort of power" (Giddens, 1984, p.14).

At this point we are able to understand that agency – intended as the capacity to act freely – is embedded in a particular sociocultural context that is also nested in the biological and physical world (Martin et al., 2003). Given that we are investigating children in this piece of research, the question presents itself spontaneously: do children have agency? Alternatively, are they allowed to be considered as "owners" of agency, freedom, and rights?

2.2 Do children have agency?

> *The desire to give emphasis to the active, resilient, resourceful aspect of the welfare subjects is an understandable reaction to the pathologizing and problematizing of the passive and 'dependent' welfare subject which dominated much thinking about social policy in the past.*
> (Hoggett, 2001, p.42)

2.2.1 Children as social agents

The notion of *agency* has largely influenced and redefined the research field across many disciplines, and mostly within the area of childhood studies (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Effectively, since children were not considered agentic subjects but rather powerless young people, we must give credit to the concept of agency as having challenged this idea in an abrupt manner (Thompson, Torres, Swanson, Blue, & Hernández, 2019; Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2018).

Scholars are now accustomed to thinking about children as *social agents*, but it was not before the late '80s that the term 'agency' made its appearance and spread out in the academic world, redefining research on childhood. Interest largely grew within the sociological study of children (Mayall, 2002), focusing on their agency and capabilities within the social-constructionist approach. Intellectual debates came to life, starting to challenge part of Piaget's work on child development (Donaldson, 1978) and attributing much more credit to the efforts of Russian psychologist Lev Semënovič Vygotsky (1986) who was underlying the active role of the child in his development. "The child is not just engaging in activities as an individual that promote changes in cognition in the manner envisaged by Piaget; rather, the child becomes involved in social relations and activities of different kinds and is thus positioned, foremost, as a social actor" (James, 2009, p.38).

These studies culminated in a new paradigm, encompassed by the term of *the new social studies of childhood,* an area developed around two main themes: the conception of childhood as a social construction and the recognition of the child as a social actor (James & Prout, 1990, 2003; James, 2009; James & James, 2012). Conceptualizing childhood as a social construction – rather than a natural, universal and vulnerable phase of the human life – means acknowledging the fact that its definition constantly changes in form and content across history, cultures and social context, assuming different meanings as a consequence of political and social changes (Denov, 2010). In contrast to Jean Piaget's theory of child development, age and the developmental stage are no longer considered as primary indicators of children's responses to events (Boyden, 2003). "The immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture (James and Prout, 1990, p.7). Hence, in contrast to the previously dominant perspective, the new sociology of childhood studies arguing the social construction of childhood moved in the direction of the recognition of children and young people as owners of agency and rights. Incorporating this focus on agency while assessing children's well-being and functioning provides us with a more comprehensive picture of their capabilities to cope in the face of threats. In fact, on the one hand, considering the child as a competent subject underscores that he or she is never just passive in front of a taxing environment (McLaughlin and Dietz, 2008). Children have their own ways to adapt to their contexts, pursue their goals and express their agency in different places and under various forms (Jeffrey, 2012). On the other hand, it underlines that they have their own way to 'frame' issues, and thus they may have different priorities from those explored and assessed by researchers. Therefore, order to address correctly children's priorities and needs, it is

necessary then to considering them as a valuable 'knowers' and their experience significant (Fattore, Mason, Watson, 2009; Jeffrey, 2012). Many other academic fields – including geography, education and law – adhered to this new perspective within the general area of the childhood studies, taking a stronger *child- and actor-oriented approach* to research (Tisdall & Punch, 2012).

There is now extensive literature that examines the multiple forms agency takes within children and young people, from survival skills and resourcefulness down to open resistance (Barber & Doty, 2013; Garbarino & Bruyere, 2013; Klocker, 2007; Habashi & Worley, 2009; Veronese et al., 2017a, b). Agency, identified as playing a crucial role in protecting children facing hardships in their lives, has been delved into and uncovered as a unique capital for mobilizing survival skills and personal well-being (Veronese, Pepe, Jaradah, Al-Murannak & Hamdounda, 2017a).

2.2.2 Children's agency in contexts of armed conflict and political violence. A personal, relational and contextual competence.

As discussed in Chapter One, over recent decades, international concern and academic attention has grown concerning children and youth affected by war and political violence (Wessells, 2006). There are currently more than 230 million children living in conflict-affected countries (UNICEF, 2014) that are experiencing exceptionally high levels of suffering. As we have discussed at length, children exposed to political violence and armed conflicts have been too often depicted as highly vulnerable to psychological trauma, which affects them emotionally, psychologically, and physically. On the other hand, within this chapter we have presented a growing new emphasis on the active, resilient and resourceful child that is – as Hoggett as brightly stated – an understandable reaction to the pathologizing of the passive subject that dominated thinking about social policy in the past (Hoggett, 2001, p.42).

Hence, re-thinking children living in war-like contexts as actively involved in transforming their environments and in giving meaning to their experiences has pushed scholars to wonder and explore their resources and capabilities (Gilligan, 2006; Habashi, 2011, 2013; Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2018). Children have been depicted as actively engaged in challenging their living conditions by converting competences and abilities into coping mechanisms and survival strategies in order to cope with their adverse surrounding. Within contexts and social structures – that act as 'thinners' of children's

agency by constraining their range of viable choices (Klocker, 2007) – factors such as personal competences, demographic characteristics (i.e., age or gender), values and spiritual beliefs and emotional orientations widely emerged as motivational triggers aiding children in opposing the oppressing power dominating their lives and those of their surrounding communities (Alexander et al., 2015; Beazley, 2007; Veronese et al., 2018). For example, in a study with young female domestic workers in Tanzania, Klocker (2007) sketched a portrait of her participants as far away from the one of passive victims forced to worked due to their vulnerable position. Those young girls emerged as actively engaged in the negotiation of the expectation and power relations around them, able to make decisions aimed at improving their own lives and those of their families. "They do not enter CDW [child domestic work] because they are weak or ignorant, they do so because they honestly believe that this decision will produce the best possible outcome" (Klocker, 2007, p.92).

This notable change of perspective has also been supported and expressed in article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – which emphasizes the right of the children to "express … views freely in all matters affecting them". Children are starting to be depicted as agents capable of displaying multiple capacities to overcome adversity and also as agents that are able to positively influence their own fate and that of others (Boyden & De Berry, 2004, p.xvii). Collaborative and participatory methods have started to be adopted to explore children's experiences and perceptions, which considers their voices as first expressions of agency (Ochen, 2015). "As Foucault (1990) asserted, language and discourse are not neutral mediums of expressions, but instead are expressions of power relations and reflect the practices and positions that are tied to them. Discourses seek to empower some while subordinating others. In the case of war-affected children their lives and circumstances have frequently been defined and articulated by adults" (Denov & Blanchet-Cohen, 2016, p.237). As a result of the need for research methods grounded in children's perspectives, the inclusion of their voices has started to gain consensus among academics.

Furthermore, since agency is exercised within an historical and physical context, which also regulates and conditions actions – structural influence – an ecological, context-sensitive approach is required to identify it. Family context, life opportunities, and constraints experienced, all have an impact on children's ability to choose, act, and transform. Thus, to cite Habashi and Worley (2009, p.44) "the notion of child's agency should not give us a false notion of autonomy. Child agents must be understood and recognized as actors within

the global/local discourses, and their actions are explicitly intertwined within local resources".

2.2.2.1 *Being agent in thinning contexts*: a systematic literature review

As introduced in the previous chapter, scholars have identified several different examples of children's agentic behaviors, highlighting the multidimensionality of their agency and its importance in terms of children's positive adjustment, quality of life, and well-being (Spellings, Barber, & Olsen, 2012; Thomspon et al., 2019; Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2018). Agency has been associated to personal abilities and skills (e.g., cognitive competences, optimism, self-esteem), and it was shown to be mobilized and activated within families, social structures, and the broader environment, evidencing the need to utilize a socio-ecological lens to explore this construct (Robson, Bell, & Klocker, 2007). However, in exploring the literature on the topic, it becomes evident that there is a lack of research on children's agency in its multiple forms, which endorses a fragmented outlook of their actions and capabilities. Therefore, it easy to get lost within the different facets that agency might assume, which precludes a more holistic conceptual understanding. To provide some clarity about the ways in which agency is expressed and displayed by children, we developed a comprehensive review of the current literature. This systematic analysis has focused on studies that have investigated, explored, or assessed agency and agentic behaviors in children living in areas of armed conflict or political violence.

2.2.2.1.1 The review objectives

In this review we explored the academic studies that have been published in the past ten years on both the *agency* and *sources of agency* in children living amidst contexts of armed conflict or political and military violence. The expectation is that this exploration might allow for a more comprehensive view of the various forms and expressions of agency displayed across different contexts and culture. The interest of this review is addressed at school-age children and youth (6 – 17 years old). Starting from Boyden's conceptualization of agency (2010, p.xi) as one's 'constructive engagement with adverse societal conditions', we hope to establish a more in-depth understanding on how young people negotiate with their harsh living environment and engage with adversity. Reaching a comprehensive review of the topic might be as well useful in providing critical information for policy-

makers in order to improve the health and development of children living within these contexts.

2.2.2.1.2 The search strategy

This literature review was guided by the PRISMA standards for systematic reviews (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). PRISMA stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses. It is an evidence-based minimum set of standards for reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The search was conducted in May of 2019 using *Medline/PubMed, PsycInfo, PsycArticles*, *Embase* and *Google Scholar* databases for all peer- reviewed publications dating from 2008 to 2019 (May) that pertain to the agency of conflict-affected children (with *Google Scholar* only the first ten pages for each search were examined – 10 results each page. After page 10 the results were not consistent with the search criteria). The search results were limited to those that contained keywords within a matrix of relevant terminology identified in either the study title or abstract. To this end, we used the following combination of key words and subject headings to guide the search: (1) child(ren), childhood in combination with (2) armed conflict, political violence, military violence and (3) agency, agent(s), agentic. Search sensitivity was refined by using keywords as well as bibliographies of the eligible studies identified in the early stages of the search. These studies were selected according to the criteria underlined below.

2.2.2.1.3 Eligibility criteria

Only articles that were published from the year 2008 to 2019 were included in order to comprehensively evaluate the more recent literature related to agency of children living under armed conflict, political or military violence. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies were included. In contrast, case studies, case reports, as well as narrative and systematic reviews were excluded. In addition, articles subjected to full review were those that adhered to the following criteria: (1) the publication must address children's agency (sources of agency; absence of agency; factors that impact agency, forms of agency); (2) the article must address children (6 – 15 years old); studies addressing both adults and children were included if data provided for children were reported separately; (3) a focus on civilian populations living within contexts of political violence and armed conflicts (studies were excluded if target populations were child soldiers or prisoners); (4) the studies took place in a post-conflict setting or a setting with protracted political violence; and (5)

the studies were available in English, peer-reviewed, and published (unpublished or non-peer-reviewed materials were excluded). Articles were also excluded if they came from book chapters, dissertations, conference proceedings, conference abstract, or workshops.

2.2.2.1.4 Results

Database queries returned a total of 682 unique studies. Each abstract was screened for relevance and those not meeting the established criteria were excluded. Additional records were identified through bibliography mining (n=3). Articles that included adults and children were retained, as long as the youth population could be clearly specified in the paper. References from search results were cross-checked and any duplicates were eliminated. Opinion pieces, editorials, reviews, and special issues were also excluded. In conclusion, 63 full-text articles were further assessed for eligibility. Of these, 48 were excluded for failing to meet the study criteria (Figure 3). After the final screening process, a total of 15 studies met the inclusion criteria, and they are reviewed and summarized in Table 4.

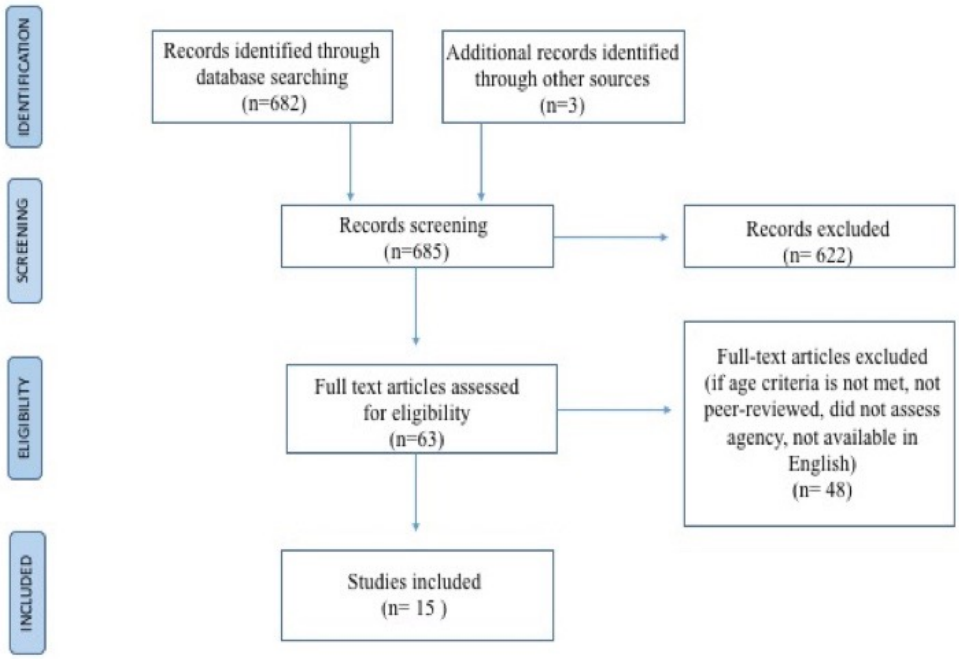


Figure 3. Flow of information through the different phases of the review

The three quantitative studies, eleven qualitative studies, and one mixed methods study that were reviewed included a total of 5,744 children and youth (in three studies the exact number of participants was not declared). Nine articles (60%) focused on children exposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, eight of them conducted within the solely Palestinian population and one conducted in Israel with both Jewish and Arab-Israeli populations. Two studies (13,3%) were implemented in Liberia, one in the United Kingdom, one in South-Africa, one in Rwanda, and one with youth living in Egypt, Kuwait, and the Gaza Strip. For more information about the types of methods used across these studies (e.g., surveys, narrative research, ethnography, mixed methods, longitudinal), including details of the study locations and the descriptions of the sample, see Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of studies: authors, locations, description of the sample and the study method, dimension explored.

Author(s), year	*Study location*	*Sample characteristic*	*Instruments*	*Aim / dimension explored*
Ben-Arieh, A., & Attar-Schwartz, S. 2013	Israel	Quantitative study 1.753 youth Age: 15-17 46% boys - 54% girls	Self report measures	Children's knowledge and attitude to participation.
Crawley, H. 2010	United Kingdom	Qualitative study Asylum seekers Age: 12-18	In-depth interviews	Children's agency and experiences within asylum interviews
Habashi, J., & Worley, J. 2009	Palestine West Bank	Mixed method 12 children Age: 10-13 50% female - 50% male 1.187 children Age: 10-14 51% female - 49% male	Interviews Focus group Self reported measures	Agency of children's political socialisation
Habashi, J. 2011	Palestine West Bank	Qualitative study In 2001 12 children Age: 10-13 In 2006 16 children Age: 10-15 50% female - 50% male	Ethnographic research Interviews	Exploration of the experience of children's agency of religion

Habashi, J. *2013a*	Palestine West Bank	Qualitative study 1- 12 children Age: 10-13 2- 16 children Age: 10-15 50% female - 50% male	Ethnographic research Interviews	How Palestinian children's agency integrates Islamic religious idioms in daily life
Habashi, J. *2013b*	Palestine West Bank	Qualitative study 12 children Age: 10-13	Ethnographic research Interviews	Children's agency in reconstructing collective memory
Khamis, V. *2013*	Palestine West Bank Gaza Strip	Quantitative study 1.697 children Age: 6-16 (mean=12)	Self report questionnaires	Agency as a source of hope and implicated in enhancing school achievement
Killian, B., Van der Riet, M., Hough, A., O'Neill, V., & Zondi, T. *2008*	South-Africa	Qualitative study 117 children Age: 8-18 59 males - 58 females	In-depth interviews Focus group	Children's agency in situation of extreme adversity
Kira, I. A., Alawneh, A. W. N., Aboumediene, S., Lewandowski, L., & Laddis, A. *2014.*	Palestine West Bank	Quantitative study 438 youths age: 12-19 (mean = 15,7) 55% males- 45% females	Self report questionnaires	How children's "will to survive" operates. WTS: key of human agency
Levey, E. J., Oppenheim, C. E., Lange, B. C., Plasky, N. S., Harris, B. L., Lekpeh, G. G., ... & Borba, C. P. *2016*	Liberia Post-conflict setting	Qualitative study 75 youth age: 13-18 38 girls - 37 boys	Semi-structured interviews	Factors enhancing resilience. Agency amongst those factors.
Levey, E. J., Laird, L. D., Becker, A. E., Harris, B. L., Lekpeh, G. G., Oppenheim, C. E., ... & Borba, C. P. *2018*	Liberia Post-conflict setting	Qualitative study 75 youth age: 13-18 38 girls 37 boys	Two in-depth interviews selected among 75	Elucidate factors that may enable youth to reclaim a sense of agency
Pells, K. *2011*	Rwuanda Post-conflict setting	Qualitative study Age: 12-25 N/A	Ethnographic research Focus group	Children's agency in a post conflict context
Thorpe, H., & Ahmad, N. *2015*	Palestine (Gaza Strip) Kuwait Egypt	Qualitative study Youth < 18 N/A	Interviews	Agency of youth in negotiating space for themselves through sport
Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Jaradah, A., Murannak, F., & Hamdouna, H. *2017*	Palestine Gaza Strip	Qualitative study 200 children Age: 6-11 96 girls - 104 boys	Experimental activities Art techniques Role play	SWB Sources and dimension of agency
Veronese, G., Cavazzoni, F., Antenucci, S. *2018*	Palestine West Bank Gaza Strip	Qualitative study 122 children Age: 6-15 68 girls - 54 boys	Self-characterization technique Drawings	Sources and dimension of agency

These studies investigated a range of domains and dimensions that were enhancing, allowing, or expressing children's agency. For example, while one study specifically focused on the factors causing a lack of agency, another assessed the real willingness and inclination of youth to participate as agents. Over the next few sections, we will provide a narrative synthesis of the studies reviewed, followed by the types of hypotheses tested. The findings are grouped thematically and summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Critical findings

Acceptable spaces: dimensions and areas in which children deploy their creativity and personal skills.

Education and aspirations for the future
- Education as a fundamental tool in helping children to overcome the difficulty they face and to lay the foundations for a better future.
- Study and work to improve your situation.

Sport and leisure
- Play as a creative way to adjust to the hard living conditions.
- Sport activities revealed a potent agency in negotiating with dangerous spaces.
- Leisure activities as alternative way of living: as a means of forgetting the war and escaping from their harsh everyday reality.

Social cohesion and support
- Family and social support: foster individual agency and offer resources for children's well-being**.**
- Giving support: social support as a manifestation of agency itself.
- Social cohesion: enhance support between individuals, which enables them to build collective action or strategies to endure form of oppression.

Off-limited spaces: spaces where children's voices and actions are often overlooked.

Religiosity
- Powerful resource: provides sense of safety, meaning, values and shared practices, optimism towards the future.
- Religion increases action readiness and mobilisation.
- Religiosity as a form of resistance and a call for solidarity.

Historical and political understanding
- Children's active role in constructing and re-constructing their history and collective historical memory.
- Children as keepers, agents and co-authors of future history.
- Resistance by not forgetting the past.
- Meaning making process: powerful empowering side of knowledge.

Civic and political engagement: amongst resistance and militancy
- Process of political socialisation: reconstruct political knowledge crucial to develop a sense of competence and control over situation.
- Role of civic and political engagement: self-protective, adaptive function and buffer against symptoms of distress and trauma.
- Engage in political activities as a way to take control over dangerous situation and act in order to protect themselves.

***When structures constrain too much*: adverse factors suppressing children's agency**

Web of multiple adversities: suppress children's agentive capacity.

Lack of hope and aspirations: impossibility for action

Finally, the policy implications, as well as literature gaps and recommendations aimed at informing the practice of future research and interventions, are highlighted in the conclusion section and in Table 6.

Table 6. Implications for practices, policy and research

Need to foster knowledge on dimensions, expressions and sources of agency in order to inspire interventions and treatment that focus on

- Focus on children's agency, capabilities and resources
- Changing the assumption that children have no agency.

Need for **community-oriented and child-centred** programs and interventions.

- **Interventions** not only aimed at promoting recovery for symptoms but also at **fostering advocacy and a sense of agency**.
- Need to **involve children in project** that could promote their agency and **provide opportunities to critically reflect** on their context.
- **Collaborative and participatory research** to provide **valuable space for local voices and knowledge**.

Importance of different **theoretical and methodological frameworks**.

- **Mixed method analysis** for a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomena.
- Qualitative and quantitative methods to consider **children's local reality, as well as the political, cultural and contextual situations**.
- **Everyday paradigm**: explore the everyday practices in which **children engage in order to cope, deal, and transform** their complex surrounding environments.
- Necessity to expand the focus on research: towards more **psychopolitically valid studies and interventions**

2.2.2.1.5 Discussion

Overall, the selected studies present different and valuable contributions that provide us with a more comprehensive view of children's expressions of agency across diverse socio-cultural settings. In all the countries studied, children's capabilities were limited because of the environmental or political situations (e.g. political violence, displacement, marginalization, poverty), which challenges and threatens their sense of agency (or *thinners* it). However, both in qualitative and quantitative studies, authors have demonstrated how children engage with their adverse environment, turning risk factors into *sources of agency* and coping strategies in order to deal with armed conflict and political violence. Going back to the aforementioned socio-ecological theories, in order to explore people's agency and their way to exerting it, we must take into account personal and collective values, as well as contextual and cultural aspects.

In the following discussion, in order to present our results, we grouped the findings into two main "areas" for exploring children's agency, which we have named termed *acceptable places* and *off-limited places*. The choice of this categorization was made to evidence that children's agency has been more commonly depicted and explored within certain domains

considered 'accessible' for children (i.e., agency displayed through education, sports and leisure, religiosity, social relationships), while often overlooking those areas considered *off-limits* for children. For example, political socialization and civic or political engagement have been considered, within the mainstream discourse, as off-limit arenas of action for children that they are not old *enough to engage* in (Ruddick, 2007, p.516). Therefore, acknowledging the fact that in politically violent environments children's lives are surrounded by politics, in our discussion we wanted to provide a space to explore, in greater depth, the reviewed studies where children's agency emerges through their political and social understanding of their surroundings and in their ability to speak and act against either war or the injustices that they face. Finally, we will address the issue of those factors and structures that are suppressing children's agency, which represents a major risk factor for children's life and well-being.

Agency within acceptable spaces

Within the studies reviewed, scholars have pointed out several dimensions and areas in which children deploy their creativity and personal skills. Education, aspirations for the future, sport and leisure, as well as social cohesion and support, emerged expressions of children's agency within these reviewed studies.

Education and aspirations for the future. Education widely emerged within the studies' reviewed and was often described as a fundamental tool in helping children to overcome the difficulty they face as it allows them to lay the foundations for a better future. The school is perceived as space where children can socialize, play, learn, and be engaged in the construction of meaning as it relates to their own lives. For instance, children living in Gaza (Veronese et al., 2017) described the school as a place where they can learn and gain the necessary skills to improve their living conditions and to work for a better future. As a 12-year-old boy from Gaza stated: "I want to be a doctor or electrician, because I want to solve the problem of electricity and water in my country" (Veronese at al., 2018, p.867). Children explain the possibility to study and be educated as a way to increase knowledge, gain confidence, and learn strategies to cope with the environment and also to act as an agent of change (Veronese et al., 2018). Similarly, in Pell's study (2011) in Rwanda six years after the genocide, children presented education as "the only way out" of the difficult circumstances they experience (Pell, 2011, p.599). Hence, education was strictly connected with the possibility of gaining the tools and expertise necessary in order to imagine a positive future and cope with the different adversities. For example, within the Palestinian

context, since the challenges faced are related to the Israeli occupation, education emerged as a source of strength to both resist and survive Israeli oppression (Veronese et al., 2018). Linking education and hope, Khamis' quantitative study (2013) amongst 1,697 children living in Palestine (both in the West Bank and in Gaza) addressed the question of how hope might positively impact children's education and school achievement. Within her findings, children with higher hopes also had better academic achievement. Her research, especially her conception and measurement of the *hope* dimension, is relevant to our own argument. Khamis considers hope as a bi-dimensional characteristic made of two distinct and interrelated components: *agency* and *pathways*. In order to assess children's level of hope, Khamis utilized a six-item, self-reported questionnaire, with three items for each of the two components (Children Hope Scale, CHS, Snyder, et al., 1997). "Children with high hope are able to plan cognitive strategies (or *pathways*) to achieve desired goals and have motivational strategies (or *agency thinking*) that enable them to use those pathways" (Khamis, 2013, p.113). Hence, agency is here intended as the perception of the child to be able to initiate action toward a desired goal, while pathways reflect the perceived ability to produce *routes to the goal*. Thus, in her findings both components emerged as salient predictors of school achievement that actively buffer the negative consequences of traumatic experiences.

Additionally, agency exhibited through both hope and education recurrently emerged within the reviewed studies (Levey et al., 2016; Levey et al., 2018; Pell, 2011). In Rwanda, children expressed a strong desire to work and act in order to make their life meaningful. Pell outlines that many children adopted a 'survival mission' (Pell, 2011, p.602), which is defined as a firm determination to make the world a better place or to help the others in similar situations. Similar results emerged from the two studies of Levey and colleagues (Levey et al., 2016; Levey et al., 2018) in Liberia. In these studies, children demonstrated their sense of agency through the expression of their willingness to work in order to change their situation, both by planning for the future and expressing confidence in their ability to carry out their plans. Within these narratives, the children "presented themselves as having something to offer to their community, their nations, and implicitly to the interviewer" (Levey et al., 2018, p.951). In other words, agency emerged as a critical factor in developing an active coping style that leads children to take action to satisfy their needs.

Sport and leisure. It was well-established within the reviewed studies that leisure activities, such as sport and play, are crucial to children's development. They are children's preferred medium of interaction and they are accessible ways to express and control their

emotions in both adverse and everyday conditions (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Veronese, Castiglioni, & Said, 2010). "Life is so difficult – says an 8-year-old girl in Veronese and colleagues study in Gaza (2017, p.368) – what should I do? You have to try to enjoy yourself by playing or reading or watching TV". Play represents a creative way in order to adjust to the overwhelmingly hard living conditions and it also helps them to develop a sense of competence and control in face the of danger (Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018).

An expression of agency through sport is described in Thorpe and Ahmad's research (2015) on action sport in the Middle East. The authors thoroughly explored the development of parkour across Egypt, Kuwait, and especially in the Gaza Strip. The geographical and political situation in Gaza is extremely complex. The fact that it is surrounded by walls and destroyed by ongoing and brutal wars makes Gaza a very harsh – or even unliveable – environment. Despite all the social, cultural, economic, physical, and psychological obstacles they face, youth have developed their unique parkour group, thereby revealing a potent agency in negotiating with their living conditions and re-appropriating of the dangerous spaces in their environment. We might suppose that given the presence of walls and the siege of Gaza that prevents them from freely moving "horizontally," youth have taken back their freedom of movement "vertically." Within the interviews, participants described the activity as an "alternative way of living", or as a means of forgetting the war and escaping from their harsh everyday reality. "It teaches me how to overcome obstacles. It makes me feel free" or more, "It gives me the strength to face the pressure of the occupation" (Thorpe & Ahmad, 2015, p.689). Moreover, children demonstrated the 'use' of parkour not only to enhance the quality of their everyday life, but also to make people aware of the conditions in which they live. By showing and sharing their capabilities to the world, with the help of social networks, they are raising awareness of the situation in Gaza and developing networks of solidarity throughout the world.

Social cohesion and support. A recurrent theme through the studies was related to the importance of social and family support in fostering children's ability to act. On the one hand, social cohesion and support emerged as having a crucial role in helping the children to mobilize both their agency and resources (Kira et al., 2014). For example, support from the family and the community emerged as a source of protection that enables the possibility of feeling free in acting and displaying capabilities, and also in getting access to resources (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013; Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018). On the other hand, it emerged also as a manifestation of agency itself. In Levey's and colleagues'

findings (2018), girls were expressing their agency by taking care of others, and in being able to help the other who "lacks" agency, this emerged as a way for participants to take action, rather than becoming passive. Similarly, being able to feel and perceive cohesion with the community, such as the sharing of religious, political, or ideological values, enhances social support between individuals, which enables them to build collective action or strategies to endure forms of oppression (Kira et al., 2014).

Children's agency within off-limited areas

As we have briefly introduced, while the 'expressions of agency' mentioned earlier have been recognized as legitimate for children, studies reviewed shows that there are other settings in which, however, their agency can be depicted. In a politically violent environment, children's lives are surrounded by politics and their agency, therefore, also emerges within the cultural and political discourse in which they embedded and from the resources that are available to them (which is also dependent and conditioned by the politics). Therefore, As Hart clearly stated, "the experience of growing up in situations where profoundly asymmetrical power relations give rise to systematic oppression may lead to the early development of 'political' understanding" (2008, p.277). Thus, this second group includes different ways in which children comprehends and respond to their harsh environments, deploying attitudes of agency through a political, spiritual and social understanding and engagement within their surrounding contexts.

Religiosity. It is well-known that religion is one of the most powerful resources mobilized during oppression. Feeling connected to God and a religious community helps by providing a sense of safety, meaning, values, and shared practices. In other words, it provides a feeling of connectedness amongst people and within a community (Vindevogel et al., 2014). Within the studies reviewed, most of the children mentioned the importance of God and religion in giving them strength, protection, and positive aspirations for the future (Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018). Moreover, studies showed that being able to perceive a strong connectedness within the community – thanks to the shared beliefs, practices, and values – is of foundational importance to a child's ability to attribute meaning to experiences and also to develop strategies to cope with various situations (Veronese et al., 2018). On the other hand, children also distinguish "between religion as an act of individual faith and the politic of religion as it is employed in the local narratives" (Habashi, 2013a, p.157). Throughout the studies the connection within religion and agency was thus also related to the fact that belonging to a religion might increase *action readiness and mobilization*

(Habashi, 2012, 2013a; Kira et al., 2014, p.390; Veronese et al., 2017). This *form* of children's agency has been widely overlooked and underestimated within the related literature and, for example, children who endorse Islamic idioms in an act of resistance have been perceived to be exercising a form of violence (Habashi, 2013a). However, the reviewed studies have suggested that children who introduce religiosity as a source of resistance also introduce narratives of redemption and freedom, rather than revenge and violence (Habashi, 2012, 2013a; Veronese et al., 2017). Within the Palestinian context, children's agency continually integrates Islamic idioms in order to face and resist the Israeli oppression. For instance, in Habashi's first study (2011) religious sites were associated by children as contemporary symbols of nationalism: "*we are fighting for the Dome of the Rock*" (Habashi, 2011, p.135). Her study demonstrated how children were displaying agency in a creative way: employing religious signs as a method of fighting and resisting their daily oppression. Additionally, connoting the resistance as a 'religious resistance' allows children to overcome the Israeli – territorial – borders. Fighting to protect the Dome of the Rock presupposes a "call" for all Muslims around the world. In this way, children are made to feel connected to a community of faith that transcends the territorial border and thereby reduces the feeling of isolation imposed by the Israeli military occupation.

Historical and political understanding. It was evident reviewing the studies that children can be extremely aware of the situation in which they live and the overall dynamic of their surrounding context. As we have stated, children are not merely passive victims or 'empty' recipients of adults' views and narratives. They have their own abilities and ways of learning, understanding, and re-appropriating their history. Both formal (e.g., school, books, media) and informal (e.g., streets, friends, family) structures operate as significant contributors in children's cognitive ability to construct meaning out of their experiences. For instance, Habashi (2013b) underlined Palestinian children's active role in constructing and re-constructing their – and their country's – history and collective historical memory, which is helped by the community's oral narrative practices. Within her findings, children were able to comprehend past political and historical events and their implications and they were also able to integrate them as part of their own daily life**.** Children's narratives testified to their ability to understand the relationships between the history of previous generations and their own present situations. In doing so, they depicted themselves as the *keepers, agents* and *co-authors* of future history. This ability to remember and "keep alive" their (and their country's) historical and collective memories was described by children as another way to cope with and resist the Israeli oppression. Resistance is made through

education and stones, but also by *defying the Israeli prediction that Palestinians would forget the past* (Habashi, 2013b, p. 430). Similarly, in Pell's study of Rwanda after the genocide (2011), children displayed a deep and complex awareness of the history of their country, demonstrating an acute ability to perceive and understand the historical continuum between the past, present, and future. Contrary to the general consensus that new generations do not have to know about the traumatic history of the genocide, Pell's participants evidenced the opposite, which is that being aware of the past was influencing their choices for the future, rather than augmenting traumatic responses. In both cases, making sense of the tragic events of the past emerged as a crucial factor in building goals and imagining alternative futures. Being familiar with their collective historical memory arises as a critical aspect for establishing meaning, demonstrating the powerful empowering side of knowledge. Even if we are not accustomed to thinking that children can "reach" this level of awareness and understanding, the protective role of the *meaning-making process* in regards to traumatic experiences has been studied. Literature on war and organized violence indicates that children's mental health and well-being is strictly linked to their capacity to assign and share the meaning of a traumatic experience: *trauma arises when a child cannot give meaning to the overwhelmingly frightening experiences that he/she is living* (Garbarino & Bruyere, 2013, p.253). Collective memories, together with political engagement and ideology, allow children to make sense of their surroundings. Just as an ideology around shared collective meanings can protect children from exposure to stressors, civic and political engagement might also help them "to expend their energy and release their sense of political and social frustration" (Chatty, 2010, p.366).

Civic and political engagement: amongst resistance and militancy. Collective memory and awareness is undoubtedly connected to the existing political context and discourse in which children's everyday life is embedded. This *process of political socialization* (Habashi & Worley, 2009) starts within these everyday contexts, which enables children to build and also reconstruct political knowledge (Habashi & Worley, 2009). Thus, it was not surprising to see that this dimension emerged as salient across almost all the studies reviewed, and especially within the Palestinian context (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013; Habashi & Worley, 2009; Habashi, 2011, 2013a, 2013b; Kira et al., 2014; Thorpe & Ahmad, 2015; Veronese et al., 2017, 2018). For Palestinian, as Habashi stated (2013a), their *geo-political agency* is consistently evolving through their experience of oppression and their willingness to engage as active participants within the political life of the community, which is a response that emerged in order to develop a sense of competence and control over their

situation, despite the overall condition of instability (Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018). This knowledge and awareness was brought to light by Habashi study (2013a) in Palestine, where participants showed the ability to differentiate between religion and politics: "The Jews are not the one occupying our land, and they do not kill us. The Zionists are carrying the weapons" (Habashi, 2013, p.157). Accordingly, in Ben-Arieh and Attar-Schwartz's study (2013) on Jewish and Arab youth living in Israel, they found that their political participation – defined as an engagement with and expression of concern for political rights – emerged as more central within the Arab groups. In contrast, the Jewish group exhibited a more positive attitude towards their own rights and their ability to freely exercise them. Acknowledging the fact that Palestinians in Israel are subjected to social, economic and cultural discriminations and, thus, experience "less" rights compared to their Israeli counterparts, they nonetheless strive for more for rights and emancipation. As an example, Palestinian youth were vigorous participants within the civic sphere, which they used as a means of claiming their rights.

Hence, the authors are in agreement about the powerful role of civic and political engagement amongst children, which serves as a self-protective, adaptive function and buffer against symptoms of distress and trauma (Thorpe & Ahmed, 2016; Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018), as well as depression and suicidal ideation (Kira et al., 2014). "The action-oriented struggle – militancy and proactive aggression – is a class of coping that may be unique to oppression. Militancy, resistance, and uprising against oppressors are characteristics of action-oriented strategies that promote direct proactive response. Social action is a therapeutic activity for trauma survivors" (Kira et al., 2014, p.389). Similarly, Veronese and colleagues (2017) noted that children's ability to cope with this ongoing violence was vastly improved when they perceived themselves as able to confront the Israeli soldiers, either physically or in a representational sphere (e.g., throwing stones, demonstrating): "*I feel happy and strong when I can join the demonstrations to protest"* (2017, p.371). Their willingness to engage – directly or indirectly – in political activities, being a part of the *resistance*, was described by participants as a way to take control over dangerous situations and act in order to protect themselves, their family and their community (Veronese et al., 2018).

When structures constrain too much. Adverse factors suppressing children's agency

Within all the studies reviewed, there was only one that highlighted how adverse factors may compound together and ultimately suppress children's agency. Killian and colleagues

(2008) have investigated how extreme harsh conditions (experiences of poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic) were affecting and compromising the ability of children living in South Africa to retain and exercise a sense of agency and their ability to cope with their illness and the poor living conditions. These children were struggling with a complex web of multiple adversities and their agentive capacity was severely compromised as a result. The multiple losses experienced, such as their exposure to the virus and their extreme poverty, were identified as a crucial process that inhibits their agency. As one participant reported in their study, "he does not go to school because he does not have the money to buy books" (Killian et al., 2008, p.406). The children experienced these adverse conditions as overwhelming and it severely compromised all aspects of their life. We could say that, whenever *the structures constrain too much*, children perceive a lack of hope, aspiration, and the impossibility for action. For instance, in Veronese and colleagues' study (2018) within different contexts in Palestine, what emerged from the narratives of Gazan children was the inability to imagine themselves ever being outside the strip. Instead, the unbelievably violent and constraining environment – which defines present-day Gaza since the possibility to ever travel outside the country is denied – negatively impacts children's aspiration and, thus, their ability to imagine ways of overcoming their present situation. The last aspect was evidenced by Habashi's work (2011) where children's social identity did not emerge solely as a protective factor. For example, if children perceive that their country is not globally recognized and that within the official history it is represented as powerless (as is the case with Palestine), this dimensions might turn into a system of meaning that only works to suppress agency and foment apathy.

2.2.2.1.6 Conclusion and implication for practices

All authors within this review agree on the underlying necessity to abandon the dominant medical paradigm, which tends to pathologize children's suffering and fails in recognizing their resources of agency and self-recovery (see Table 6). A meaningful example comes from Pell (2011), who points out that the term 'trauma' did not even exist in Rwanda until the arrival of the NGOs after the genocide. Hence, to explore and detect existing resources – and to promote them – the prevalent idea of children as weak and vulnerable needs to change. As Crawley's work shows (2010), within the Western conception of childhood as *an age of innocence*, children's agency – as well as their political identity – is entirely unexplored. In her research into the experience of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK, the author demonstrates how the system, especially the interviews that are

conducted, keep positioning those children as passive victims, thereby failing to engage them directly. The primary assumption is that they *have no agency* and so there is nothing of substance to explore. Crawley stresses the importance of changing these assumptions on children and their agency, particularly on children living in a context of violence and poverty since they are usually forced to grow up very quickly.

Scholars jointly reviewed and advocated for community-oriented and child-centred programs that are not only aimed at promoting recovery from symptoms but also at fostering advocacy and a sense of agency in children and in their social ecology (Levey et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018). As long as the critical attention will primarily be on their vulnerabilities, researchers and clinicians will fail to properly engage children as social actors (Crawley, 2010; Levey et al., 2018). Alternatively, involving them in projects – for instance in assisting others – could promote their agency (*giving support*), while also providing them with an opportunity to critically reflect on their surrounding contexts (Habashi & Worley, 2009; Levey et al., 2016). Moreover, collaborative and participatory research and projects provide valuable space for local voices and knowledge (Thorpe & Ahmad, 2015).

For a theoretical and methodological framework to detect agency, the authors suggest the usage of a mixed method analysis, which allows for a more comprehensive explanation of the phenomena (Habashi & Worley, 2009). Qualitative and quantitative methods, side by side, might also help in considering the local reality, as well as the political, cultural and contextual situations (Habashi & Worley, 2009; Kira et al., 2014; Veronese et al., 2017). Furthermore, as Pells (2011) suggests, agency should be investigated within the everyday context: "the everyday provides a holistic paradigm for understanding the lives of children and young people in post-conflict [or ongoing] situations, which sees them as actively involved in negotiating a complex environment" (Pells, 2011, p.603). This view takes into account all the everyday practices in which children engage in order to cope, deal, and transform their complex surrounding environments. The everyday is the departure point for understanding the specific cultural, political, and social context in which the children are situated, as well as their strength and ability to act. Understanding the many ways in which their agency is expressed may help in developing instructions and suggestions for future projects. Violence and conflict destroy the necessary spaces and everyday contexts through which children express their agency, which severely impinges their sense of confidence and hope for the future. "It is the everyday realm that is destroyed by conflict, and it is through the everyday that children restore a sense of normality and meaning. It is this sense of the

everyday and its inseparability from the socio-cultural, economic and political, as well as with issues of agency and multiple identities and positioning, which provides a more complex and nuanced picture of legacies of genocide for children and young people" (Pells, 2011, p.603).

Within the studies reviewed, children demonstrated remarkable agency in many creative ways and under many different forms. They continue to maintain their agency despite all the challenges they are living through, and they hold on to the hope and aspiration for a better future for them and their community. Although their situations may seem *unchangeable*, children actively seek to make the best out of a *very raw deal* (Chatty, 2010, p.333). None of these studies denied the horrendous and severe consequences of armed conflicts, violence, or genocide that were experienced by the participants of their studies. However, all of them underlined that the "trauma paradigm is only one way of capturing the legacies" of these events (Pells, 2011, p.595), which places a misplaced emphasis on children's passivity and vulnerability. Accordingly, there is a joint call to expand the focus of research and critical interventions beyond the western, deficit-oriented, and individualistic view, and towards studies and interventions that are *psychopolitically* valid (Kira et al., p.405).

2.3 Influence on theories, methods and implications for practice: acknowledging children's agency

Sometimes listening to children produces surprising results.
Boyden, 2003, p.19

The increased acknowledgment of the active role of children within social sciences has had a great influence in developing new ways of measuring and monitoring children's well-being and their role in their own development and life (Ben Arieh, 2005). Furthermore, the emphasis and reconceptualization of the concept of 'childhood', with its own characteristics, priorities and needs, impacted strongly on the way interventions and policy were thought about (Baraldi & Iervese, 2014; Brown & Westaway, 2011; Crawley, 2010; Veronese et al. 2017a; Thompson et al., 2019). Thus, this new perspective generated some radical changes in the approach to child and childhood, child-care interventions and research. Academicians and policy-makers started distance themselves from the

psychological discourse of the child as a traumatized individual which was overlooking children's agency (Summerfield, 1999; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese et al., 2018). Over the past two decades we witnessed a sort of revolution, reflecting a transition away from deficit and trauma, towards a specific focus on the strengths and capacity of children and their social ecology.

2.3.1 Detecting children's agency in the everyday spaces: the concept of situated agency

As we have discussed within this chapter, politically violent contexts are characterized by a complex web of multiple adversities and children's agentive capacity might be severely compromised (Habashi, 2011; Killian, Van der Riet, Hough, O'Neill, & Zondi, 2008; Veronese et al, 2018). On the other hand, scholars have underlined how children may express their competencies in multiple different ways, which can be easily not depicted. In accord with the aforementioned Pell's (2011) paradigm of the everyday, many scholars started to explore the specific cultural, political and social context in which children lives as a departure point to observe their agency. Children do not just live in spaces where they experience obligations and constrictions; they are also active in defining them and transforming or reclaiming space as well (Robson et al. 2007). Therefore, considering how children act and construct their world has a crucial role in getting a deeper understanding of their actions and their "capabilities" to act (Beazley, 2003; Davies, 2008). A crucial development, and certainly an aid in addressing the issue of how to observe and measure children's agency, and "what do – cultural and context – specific resources allow individuals to do" (Stoeckiln & Fattore, 2018, p.50) comes from Stoecklin's theory of *situated agency* (2018).

> "Actors live in the world that is living in them. They are constructors of the social systems, which in turn inform their representations. The classical antecedental causal approach ('chicken and egg') in sociology makes no sense once this is made clear: actors build agency; they do not possess it. When we say we have agency, we use the wrong verb: neither having nor being are appropriate verbs to speak of actors. Actors are doing things. Actors are doing agency, they don't have it and they are not it. Agency is therefore seen in a new light: actors are building agency, which is the 'structure' that is both habilitating and constraining their actions. …Many authors use agency in the sense of 'power to act' (Garnier, 2015). I define agency as a 'power to transform'" (Stoecklin, 2018, p.566-571.

And again,

> "Contexts are the field where agency can be observed. Agency itself has no existence per se. You cannot touch it. Only instantiations of it can be observed" (Stoecklin, 2018, p.560).

This awareness that contexts might be the area where to observe agency started to take hold within the field of childhood studies amongst psychology, human geography, education, and developmental psychology. More researchers had indeed applied "place-based" methodologies in their studies on children's capabilities and agency, considering the place as a *medium* and a *container of action* (Akesson, 2014; Hammad, 2011; Tilley, 1994). A number of studies have started to pay attention to young people's use of space and explore children's interactions and perceptions of their surrounding environments (Bell, 2002; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Morrow, 2001). For instance, Lorrain Val Blerk (2006) in her study with children workers in Uganda, underlined that the capacity of participants to establish themselves in informal work was linked to their sense of spatial security. The same point emerged in Gibson's study (2008), where a young homeless man's survival strategy in New York was linked to a constant search for places that offered protection. From thereon in many studies started to adopt qualitative methodologies in order to generate richer data and enable children's critical reflections on how they *agentically* use spaces and places in and around them (Akesson, 2014; Alexander, Callaghan, Sixsmith & Fellin, 2015; Hammad, 2011).

Nowadays, it is widely recognized that spaces are connected with culture, language, history and memory and therefore are more than "physical landscape against which life occurs, rather they are experienced, remembered, understood and imaged by people who occupied them" (Hammad, 2011, p.555). Experiences of connectedness and sense of belonging to a social but also physical environments are fundamental to a person's well-being as well, contributing to a feeling of inclusion, acceptance, coping and resilience (Hettitantri & Hadley, 2017; Sousa, Kemp, & El-Zuhairi, 2019). This is even more evident within members of communities affected by armed and ongoing conflicts, those suffering from a loss of connectedness with both people and place. For instance, in contexts of social suffering due to a colonial history, the population's identity is strictly locally and geographically defined, tethered to the assertion of original occupancy, land rights and the concomitant spurning of colonial influences (Adelson, 2000). Several studies conducted in

areas affected by political violence and conflicts highlight the importance of children's connectedness to place in developing a sense of belonging - something fundamental for children's well-being in conflict-affected contexts (Hettitantri & Hadley, 2017). Hammad (2011) reflects on the Palestinian context: places "tend to be impregnated with deeply rooted meanings derived from individuals everyday socio-spatial practices and emotional as well as political attachments to the land. To understand them and capture this complexity, one must be theoretically and methodologically attuned to their residents "lived" experiences and interpretations of those places." (Hammad, 2011, p.555). Along these lines, Shalhoub-Kevirkian (2006) explored the socio-spatial experiences of children living in Palestine, focusing on children's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards the separation wall. Her findings highlighted the abilities and different strategies employed by children to negotiate the wall's presence. Similarly, qualitative studies carried out in Palestine (Denov & Akesson, 2017; Marshall, 2014; Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2018; Veronese et al., 2017a, b) have shown that children are actively capable of re-shaping their reality, exerting control over multiple domains of their lives (i.e., school, social and family relations).

Beyond being a site of sense of belonging and where to form one's identity, these places can represent a protective physical, social and emotional environment where children can develop in safety (Spencer, 2005). Researchers started to address their interest on how children – living in dangerous or conflict-affected areas – actively engage with the creation of "safe" places in which they can act and feel secure enhancing their well-being (Akesson, 2014; Hettitantri & Hadley, 2017). For instance, Akesson (2014) investigated the role of place in children's lives, addressing the question on how place and space affect children's lives. She challenges the idea of how environment impacts children, towards an exploration on how children act amongst their environments. She underlined how places where children live, play, work and "act" matter because they can provide a sense of abode in a turbulent world. These abodes might shape the nature of interactions while social interactions can transform themselves to give new meanings to places.

Thus, while within literature there is still a tendency to overly emphasize the social environment over the physical one, scholar now jointly advocated on the need to explore both *people* and *place* (Denov & Akesson, 2017; Sousa et al., 2019) hence highlighting the necessity of the physical side.

2.3.2 Enhancing agency: implication for practices

These developments have led to a growing consensus among academics of the need to develop more inclusive and participatory child-centred approaches, placing their voices as social actors at the centre of the research processes (Barker & Weller, 2003). Moreover, as we have seen, children's social and cultural environments may offer diverse resources in understanding children's lives, capabilities, and well-being. Practitioners and academics have widely criticized western mental health approaches for their tendencies to be insensitive to the cultural and social dimension of suffering, hailing the need for more culturally grounded, family and community-based approaches (Kostenly, 2006). Voices are shaped and embedded in social interactions: giving voices to participants provides insight into community values, beliefs and cultural traditions: necessary elements to steer interventions or support initiatives.

Hence, recognizing children as competent and 'knowledge holders' of their rights and experiences underscores a crucial political significance. Social interventions and child-protection programs following a so-called *paternalistic approach* (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012) started to be decried as a cause of the denial of children's capacity to act and survive. Thus, across the past decade, interest in the development of alternative methods, focused on children's capabilities and participation, has swelled. Participatory techniques, capability-based approaches and art-based methods have been utilized to both empower and actively engage children in the research process and provide them with the opportunity to tell their stories, point of views, priorities and needs (Denov & Akesson, 2017). According to Sen (1999), giving children the opportunity to participate means giving them the possibility to freely make decisions concerning their own life. As consequence, this reduces the asymmetry or power balance relationship between adult researchers and children, and this engagement may help to uncover their strategies and agency. As Casas argued, to evaluate children's quality of life *we need to go and ask them* (2003, p.2). Only by promoting children's participation within research processes we can really begin to take into account their priorities, perceptions, values and aspirations (Hart, Biggeri, & Babic, 2014). These approaches help recognize participants' strengths, promote their self-efficacy and empowerment and their awareness within the broader environment (Baraldi & Iervese, 2014; Hart, Biggeri, & Babic, 2014). As recently stated by Thomspon and colleagues, ignoring children's agency "can lead to problematic policy and a critical misdirection of resources […]. The development and implementation of effective and appropriate policy

responses and social services require an understanding and respect of young people's agency" (Thompson et al., 2019, p.2).

These points demonstrate that agency is not something inherent and automatic: scholars agree that agency should be addressed, enhanced and *cultivated* (MonCrieffe, 2009). Research and interventions should focus on and directly address agency in order to cultivate it. Children's participation might be a way of 'thickening' their agency through the research process. In fact, promoting children's active participation – aside for ethical reasons – means "socializing them towards an understanding of their own competencies" (Matthews, 2003, p.274).

However, despite the fact that in the past decade children have begun to receive recognition as agents and experts on their own lives, policies, global declarations and legislative frameworks are still a long way from positioning themselves at the centre of the discourse. Even if in recent years the consensus on a child's fundamental rights has increased – culminating with the UNCRC inclusion of 'participation rights' (The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child), children are not able to enact these rights on the majority of occasions. Developing and ensuring research processes, intervention programs and policies that address those needs closest to children has to start supporting them and their social ecology capabilities across all stages they go through. Quoting Iervese and Tuttolomondo (2014, p.245), 'children's capabilities and functioning are observables only by enabling their self-expression'. By recognizing children as rights holders and social actors the necessity to develop measurement and interventions which are able to promote children's participation and capabilities has been successfully highlighted. Even more so if we want to "observe" and cultivate *agency.*

Closing remarks fundamental to appropriately direct research, interventions and indeed any related work, need to be dedicated to a few critical areas. As a first point, the risk of "continuing colonial imperialism and of introducing ideas antithetical to certain cultures and traditions" (Tisdall & Punch, 2012, p.5) should be avoided and the recommendations from the field remind researchers to constantly probe the actual meaning of *agency* across different groups of children. If we think within a social-constructionism paradigm, which guides this work, we would agree with Stoeckin and Bonvin (2014, p.78) in saying that the main discourse on the 'competent child *risks* falling into the trap it wanted to escape' since 'being competent' is again a social construction which could change across countries,

context and time. Moreover, within the idea of what a 'competent child' is, a big chunk should be dedicated to the investigation of the opportunities they have and the environment in which they live in terms of their levels of freedom. As Tisdall and Punch pointed out (2012), the quantity of studies that have addressed the issue of children as agents within a constrained context (i.e., child soldiers, child prostitutes, or children living on the street) risk falling into the overarching intention to counteract traditional views of children while failing to sufficiently problematize those situations. In order to react to the over protective and paternalistic conceptions of children, there is the additional risk of considering children as solely competent agents (Stoeckin & Bonvin, 2014). As Rosen (2007, p.142) points out, there are thousands of children and youth "caught up in armed warfare who are committing horrible crimes. How should we see them: as innocent victims of political circumstance who should be protected and forgiven, or as moral agents who should be held responsible for their actions?"

Chapter Three
Introducing the research project

As widely discussed, research in countries affected by political violence has traditionally focused on the negative outcomes, which leaves out many different aspects of children's experiences (Miller, Kulkarni, & Kushner, 2006; Tol et al., 2013). Palestinians have been living under conditions of oppression and structural violence for at least three generations (Barber et al., 2014; Rabaia, Saleh, & Giacaman, 2014). Indeed, there exists a growing body of work that, while focusing on the Western bio-medical model, is investigating the negative psychological impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian children. However, in the past few years an emergent interest is developing around a different question: how have Palestinian children been able to maintain a positive psychological and emotional functioning throughout this long history of dispossession as well as episodes of lower and higher intensity violence? (Rabaia et al., 2014).

It is from this question that this research project draws its inspiration. More specifically, it is interested in contributing to the ongoing investigation and exploration of one of the many overlooked factors that might play an essential role in answering this question: the agency construct (Ahearn, 1999; Bandura, 2001, 2018). As Hakly and Kallio (2015) highlight, research on children living amidst conflict and violence might follow two distinct roads: either identifying the children as traumatized or vulnerable victims, or emphasizing their active roles within the construction of lifeworlds and political process. The second approach is the path that this research has followed.

In this chapter, in order to introduce the research project (including its' aims, hypothesis, theoretical and methodological background, and the specificities of the fields explored), we will start with a brief summary regarding the historical and political background and a description of the context where this research took place: Palestine. Therefore, we will proceed providing some significant key points on the prolonged, and still unsolved, conflict between Israel and Palestine. This background information and the contextualization of the political situation are foundational to our study and analyses. In addition, it ensures that

neither the reader nor the writer falls into the trap of decontextualizing the study and *depoliticizing* the violence (Marshall, 2014). After this historical introduction, we will provide an overview of the life of the children living in Palestine. Since the First Intifada, Palestinian children and youth have started to take a position within the political forefront. The media began showing images of youth confronting soldiers, as well as children engaged in demonstrations, imprisoned, and even killed. As a result, children become a symbol of the Palestinian struggle (Peteet, 1994). As Marshall (2013) notes, Palestinian children found themselves trapped within a controversial dualism: heroes of the uprising and innocent traumatized victims of the occupation. The iconic image of the *children of the stones* – children throwing stones against army tanks represented hope and resistance in the First Intifada – has today been transformed into a symbol of suffering, humiliation, and victimization (Marshall, 2013). Thus, in an effort to find a balance within these two divergent characterizations, more recent studies about Palestinian children will be presented. Finally, we will introduce both the aims and the hypothesis that drove the present research project in addition to the theoretical and methodological approaches that we have used to address them. Furthermore, we will provide some specific information about the sites in which the fieldwork took place.

3.1 The occupied Palestinian territories

The State of Palestine – better known as the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) – is located in the Middle East, bordering with Egypt, Israel, and Jordan. It comprises two separated areas: the West Bank, which includes East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

As of 2018, the total Arab population in Palestine is estimated to be 4,952,168 million people, of which 3,008,770 live in the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – and 1,943,398 live in the Gaza Strip (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Moreover, there are currently approximately 215,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem and 413,000 living within the West Bank – excluding East Jerusalem (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The high number of Jewish residents within oPt refers to the Israelis currently living in internationally non-recognized settlements[3], which are continually growing. Up to today,

[3] Settlements are Jewish communities built in Occupied Palestinian Territories. Settlers live in West Bank but are citizens of Israel. Since built in Palestinian territories, settlements are illegal under International Law as re-affirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016). More information about the settlement will be provided within the paragraph.

there are 143 settlement locations in the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – and 106 outposts (Office of the European Union Representative, 2019).

3.1.1 A brief historical and political overview

Starting more than sixty years ago, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been often defined as one of the longest, most controversial, and bitterest conflicts on Earth.

The premises of the conflict can be traced back to the beginning of the 1900s when – in response to the anti-Semitic policies in Europe – the British government (during the British mandate) issued the *Belfour Declaration*, which was designed to support the birth of a Jewish homeland on Palestinian land. In a recent study conducted with two colleagues – Guido Veronese and Cindy Sousa – and a group of Palestinian teachers in Gaza, when we asked the participants to recall all the significant historical events that have occurred in their country, all of them started with the 1917 Declaration. The women described that moment as 'the first catastrophe and the reason why every other war has happened in Palestine, because they denied Palestinians the right to their homeland' (Veronese, Sousa, & Cavazzoni, in press).

The situation precipitated in 1947 when the UN Partition Plan, which was backed by both the United States and the Soviet Union but rejected by the Palestinians, divided Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. This partition caused the expulsion of between 714,150 and 780,000 Palestinians from their homes (Khalidi & Elmusa, 1992). On May 14th, 1948, the Jewish State was declared and, with this Partition Plan, Israeli borders came to include 78% of historical Palestine. Since thousands of Palestinians had to leave their houses due to the violent attacks and forced expulsions – according to United Nations an estimated three-quarters of them – Palestinians refer to this period as *Al-Nakba*, or the catastrophe. The rest, which was about 150,000, remained and became Israeli citizens (Khalidi & Elmusa, 1992). At the time, UN resolution 194 recognized the right of displaced Palestinians to return to their homes but "the earliest practicable date for this event has still not arrived" (Rabaia et al., 2014, p.172). The historical process of displacing Palestinians continues to this day.

The control of the remaining part of Palestine (22%) was split between the Jordanian government, for what concerns the West Bank, and Egypt for the Gaza strip. This partition lasted until 1967 when the difficult co-existence between the countries exploded in a war between Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. In the so-called *Six Days War*, Israel took control and initiated the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights,

and parts of East Jerusalem. For the Palestinians, this event brought a *second Nakba*: approximately 320,000 were displaced (Sachar, 2010) and a third of them became refugees for the second time in their lives (Rabaia et al., 2014). In defiance of the UN Security Council's call to withdraw from the occupied areas, in June 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem. They declared the two parts of the city as Israel's capital, extending the status of residents – but not citizens – to its Arab population (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998), effectively *making them immigrants in their land* (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2016, p.145). At the end of 1967, Israel was three times its previous size (Häkkinen, 2014). During this same period, Israel began the process of establishing Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

The Palestinian resistance began after the 1967 Israeli occupation and reached its peak in 1987 with a popular uprising that lasted for six years – the First *Intifada* (which literarily translates to 'shaking off'). Palestinians started resisting using non-violent forms of popular struggle, such as civil disobedience and boycott movements against Israel, or by "simply surviving and staying on the land" (Akesson, 2014, p.30). The Israeli response was strong: home demolitions, stricter movement restrictions, sweeping arrests, and imprisonment without trials. Moreover, a new system of permits was developed and imposed to prevent the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank. Throughout the First Intifada, the number of fatalities was dramatically high and included about 1,110 Palestinians and 160 Israelis, as well as thousands injured from both sides (B'Tselem, 2013). Twenty percent of the Palestinian deaths were children under the age of 16 (Harms & Ferry, 2008).

The uprising ended in 1993 when the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) signed the *Oslo Agreement*. The Accord was meant as a way for the Palestinians to regain control over some of the West Bank, but it ended with an even more fragmented situation: the West Bank was fractured into a complex *mosaic of areas* (Kersel, 2015): named areas A, B and C. Area A composes the main urban areas but only about 18% of the land and 55% of the Palestinian population. In those areas, the Palestinian Authorities (PA) maintains control over all security, civil and administrative affairs. Area B includes approximately 21% of the land and 41% of the population. In this area, Israeli and Palestinian 'share' the control: the PA keeps its authority upon the civil affairs, while the security is controlled and exercised by the Israeli military forces. Finally, in Area C, which composes the majority of Palestinian land (60% of the land but 4% of the population), the control is entirely run by the Israelis, including law enforcement, urban planning, and

construction (OCHA, 2019). Between lands under Palestinian control (A and B) often there is not contiguity or contact.

As decided in the Accord, Israel was supposed to guarantee a gradual handover of both civil authority and security responsibilities over to the PA (Kersel, 2015). To this day, they have retained full civilian and military authority over all C areas, which is the vast majority of the country. Since the Oslo Accords, Palestinians have no control over their national borders, their democratic processes, and their own economic development. Instead, they live under a foreign power that has resulted in a form of military occupation (Rabaia et al., 2014). This non-contiguous territorial division remains today leading to fragmentation within the West Bank, both physical and political (Akesson, 2014).

Land expropriations and home demolitions continued under the Oslo Accords: from 1993 to 1998, approximately 670 Palestinian homes were destroyed in the West Bank and more than 50.000 acres were confiscated (Pressman, 2003). Moreover, Israel was frequently closing borders – within Gaza and the West Bank, but also internal boundaries between various Palestinian cities – effectively preventing travel, trade, and both health and educational services. Hence, due to the failure of the Oslo Agreement and the continuous disrespect and denial of basic human rights caused by the occupation, the Palestinian frustration exploded into a second major uprising in 2000.

> "Palestinians had thought that the 1993 Oslo Agreement would lead to better lives, greater freedoms, the end of Israeli control, and, at the end of five years (1998), Palestinian statehood. Oslo was thought to mean the end of Israeli occupation and the start of Palestinian self-determination. When such change failed to materialize and, in many ways, the situation on the ground worsened in the mid and late 1990s, many Palestinians started to believe that the diplomatic process was a dead end and renewed confrontation was the only alternative." (Pressman, 2003, p.120).

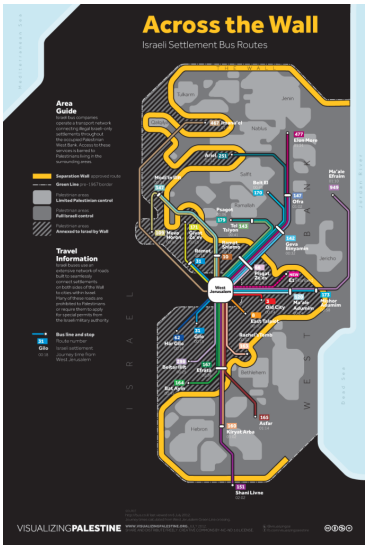
The Second Intifada has also been named the al-Aqsa Intifada, which is in reference to when the Israeli politician Ariel Sharon provocatively visited the Temple Mount, which is sacred to both Jews and Muslims, and walked – guarded by 1,000 soldiers – into the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. A fight started between the Palestinians defending their holiest site and the security forces guarding Sharon. In a few days, the uprising spread across Palestine and into Israel. This second revolt, which lasted for most of the next five years, was even more devastating than the prior uprising. Israeli forces violently invaded Palestinian towns

and cities, killing and injuring civilians. In addition, Palestinian suicide operations brought violence into Israel, attacking both military and civilian sites (Brym & Araj, 2006).

> "Lightly armed Palestinian forces and civilian stone throwers were pitted against the Israeli military forces. Palestinians suicide attacks against Israeli proceeded apace. Israeli forces escalated their assault on the West Bank in 2002, targeting the Palestinian infrastructure of telecommunications, educational facilities, PA ministries. Closure tightened as checkpoints proliferated and roads to and from the villages were blocked, further fragmenting the road system." (Peteet, 2017, p.16).

The Second Intifada started winding down in 2005. In total, it resulted in the death of about 4,000 Palestinians and 1,137 Israelis, as well as more than 50,000 Palestinian injuries and 8,341 Israeli injuries (B'Tselem, 2013). According to an Amnesty International report (2007), most of the victims – on both sides – were civilians, including 800 Palestinian children and 120 Israeli children. In addition to their violent military response, Israel also strictly limited the Palestinians' freedom of movement by completely cutting off the Gaza Strip from the rest of the West Bank. Palestinians were no longer allowed to reach Gaza for family visits or marital reunification, while the possibilities of travel abroad for Gaza residents were severely restricted or entirely prohibited. Imports and exports through Gaza were also significantly reduced (B'Tselem, 2017b)

As for the West Bank, during this same time, Israel started the construction plan to erect the 712 km separation wall, which is two times longer than the UN Green Line (border line). The declared purpose of the wall was to prevent "security issues," since this was coming after the strongest Hamas' attack wherein 30 civilians were killed and 140 others injured (Nacos, 2004). The objective of the wall was aimed at preventing Palestinians to enter in Israel – or East Jerusalem – without a permit. At the same time, some other undeclared objectives were made evident. The wall in many places does not follow the established UN Green Line, but instead *zigzags through Palestinian land* to incorporate Israeli settlements and other Israeli interests (Akesson, 2014).



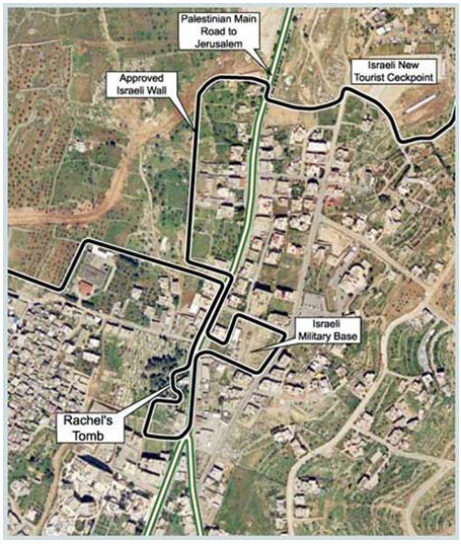


Figure 4. Maps of Israeli bus connection across the wall (retrieved online from: https://visualizingpalestine.org/).
Figure 5. Section of the wall within Bethlehem and Jerusalem, in correspondence of Rachel's Tomb (retrieved online from: http://www.ynkb.dk/eng/bethlehem-kopi.shtml)

This 'zigzagging' is easy to see from Figure 4: the yellow line represents the Separation Wall, whereas the entire area established by the 1967 Green Line is dashed, thereby evidencing the differences within the two paths. The building of the wall, which was based strategically on Israel's self-interests, changed the configuration of the space remarkably. As B'Tselem reported (2017), the barrier has been a major political instrument for furthering Israel's annexationist goals: it effectively functions as an Israeli takeover of almost 10% of the West Bank. In the second figure, there is an example of this spatial reconfiguration. The wall literarily enters into the city in order to include the religious sites – holy for all three religions – on the Israeli side. For example, the wall reframed the borders annexing Rachel's Tomb, which is located in the heart of Bethlehem (see Figure 5). It also canceled the primary direct road from Jerusalem to Hebron (Southern Palestine) and completely cut off Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Thus, the barrier inflicted collateral damage on Palestinian communities, beyond the just the dispossession of land. Many Palestinian towns were separated from each other and, in some areas, residents are enclosed by the wall, with consequent difficulties accessing social networks as well as health and educational services (Giacaman et al., 2009).

As for Gaza, the restrictions on movement imposed since the 1990s started to be intensified after 2007, when Hamas took control over the Strip, with damaging impacts on the

population. Israel used its control over the crossings in Gaza to enforce a blockade, making approximately two million people prisoners inside the Gaza Strip. Travel in and outside of Gaza was prohibited, as well as the import and export of goods, which brought the economy of the Strip to a complete collapse and turned the residents into dependents on international aid (80% of residents, according to B'Tselem, 2017b). In addition, severe restrictions were imposed over the fishing zone: the borders in which Gaza's fishermen were, and still are, allowed to go has been strictly reduced from the 20 nautical miles stipulated by the Oslo Accords to only 3-6 nautical miles. As a result of the blockade, levels of unemployment, food insecurity and aid dependency are growing each year. According to the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, the level of unemployment in Gaza in 2017 reached 44% (by comparison it was 18.9% in the year 2000), which includes 71% employment for women, and 61.9% for youth less than 29 years old (B'Tselem, 2017b).

In addition, an ongoing, low-intensity conflict has led to three wars in the last ten years, which caused the death of over 3,800 Palestinians (including 920 children) and 90 Israelis (OCHA, 2017): December 2008 - January 2009 (*Operation Cast Lead)*; November 2012 (*Operation Pillar of Defense*); June - August 2014 *(Operation Protective Edge*). Furthermore, as a result of these three wars, more than 14,609 housing units have been totally destroyed and approximately 128,100 other units have reported severe or major damage (OCHA, 2017). Due to Israel's imposed blockade, access to construction materials and critical equipment is strictly limited, making reconstruction hard to start, prolonging the displacement of those who have lost their homes.

3.1.2 The current situation

Palestinians are now living in their second half-century of the Israeli occupation, wherein the human rights situation is continuing to deteriorate day-by-day. John Dugard – the UN's Special Rapporteur of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, said the following in his 2017 report:

> "The international community, speaking through the United Nations, has identified three regimes as inimical to human rights – colonialism, apartheid and foreign occupation. Numerous resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations testify to this. Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem contains elements of all three of these regimes, which is what makes the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) of special concern to

> the international community. That the OPT is occupied by Israel and governed by the rules belonging to the special legal regime of occupation cannot be disputed. […] Moreover, it is not possible to seriously argue, as Israel has attempted to do, that Israel has ceased to occupy Gaza since August 2005, when it withdrew its settlers and the Israel Defense Forces from Gaza... Israel was able to exercise effective control over the Territory by reason of its control of Gaza's external borders, air space and sea space. Since that date it has exercised its military authority within Gaza by military incursions and shelling, in circumstances which clearly establish occupation".

In the West Bank, Palestinians have to face a continued advancement of Israeli settlements, with the consequent loss of land. As can be seen from the underlying maps (Figure 6), the "percentage" of Palestinian-controlled land has been in continuous decline.

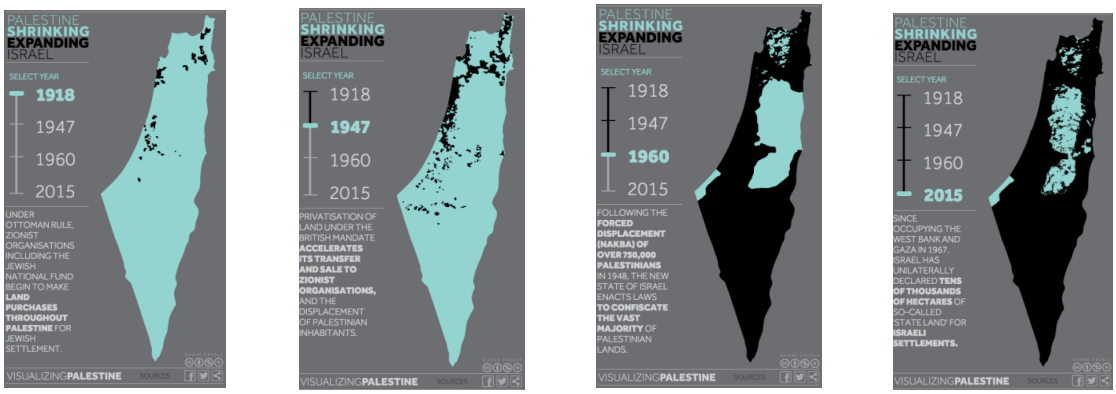


Figure 6: Palestinian Map from 1918 to 2015 (retrieved online from: https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/israeli-palestinian-conflict-101/)

Israeli politics is actively supporting the expansion of settlements within the Palestinian territories, which includes the continuation of demolitions and the denial of building permits. In doing so, they are putting the legitimate Palestinian residents living in either Area C or East Jerusalem under an everyday threat of displacement or forceful transfer. From 1967 to the end of 2017, according to B'Tselem, more than 200 Israeli settlements were established within the West Bank and more than 620,000 Israeli citizens are currently residing in them (B'Tselem, 2017c). It is important to note that these settlements have differing dimensions. For instance, the Ariel settlement – established in 1978 and located in the Central West Bank, 20 km east of the Green Line – is the fourth-largest settlement in the West Bank and it extends for a perimeter of almost 15,000 km^2 (49,177 km^2 Ma'ale Adumim Settlement). The settlements are also increasing within East Jerusalem. Currently, there are more than 3,500 Israeli settlers living in the heart of Palestinian communities.

From the beginning of 2017 through the first eight months of 2018, the Israeli authorities have approved construction plans for 10,536 housing units and they have issued tenders for an additional 5,676 (Human Right Watch, 2019). At the same time, 390 Palestinian homes were destroyed and 407 people were forcibly displaced. Moreover, the violence of Israeli settlers has significantly increased over the last year. According to OCHA (2018), three Palestinians were killed last year by settler violence and 83 were injured, including 20 children. Meanwhile, within the West Bank there were reports of 144 Palestinian attacks against settlers, which caused seven fatalities. In the first three months of 2019, 218 Palestinian were forcibly displaced, including 97 children and 57 women, as a consequence of the demolition of 136 structures (88 in Area C and 48 in East Jerusalem). OCHA has also reported that those demolitions have affected over 25,000 people up to this year, the majority of which were impacted by the destruction of water connections and wells (OCHA, 2019).

On the other side, the situation in Gaza has dramatically worsened. On the 30th of March 2018, Palestinians from Gaza have started a collective demonstration, known as The Great March of Return, where they demand an end to the blockade of Gaza and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. According to OCHA (2018b), from March to December 2018, 180 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli Army, including 20 children and three medical workers, and more than 24,000 people were injured. The World Health Organization reported that amongst the wounded, at least 1,200 require long-term limb reconstruction and extensive rehabilitation (WHO, 2018). Moreover, a total of 80 Palestinian were killed by Israeli air and artillery strikes. Armed Palestinian groups have also fired 1,130 rockets towards Israel, killing one person and injuring approximately 40 people (HRW, 2019). As a punitive measure (Human Rights Council, 2019), Israel is tightening the closure of Gaza, preventing the movement of people and restricting the importation and exportation of goods (i.e., food supplies, fuel, medicines, construction materials). Since the 2014 war, approximately 17,700 Palestinians remain displaced. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) revealed that 95% of people in Gaza don't have access to clean water and electricity remains at a crisis level (between 4-5 hours and 12 hours per day) and impacts nearly every aspect of life in Gaza (i.e. health services, water and sanitation services, agriculture sectors) (UNRWA, 2018).

After decades of occupation, Israel continues its political domination over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by controlling external borders, military checkpoint, and road closures: networks of restrictions of Palestinians movement and life (Rabaia et al., 2014; Halper, 2002). Palestinians are also facing extreme difficulty in obtaining any building permits from the Israelis, thereby forcing them to live under the constant risk of home demolition and displacement. "Israeli securitization does not necessarily cohere with an actual threat but, rather, has slid into *security theology* in which the Palestinian poses an existential threat to the state. Hypercriminalized, the Palestinian requires constant surveillance and control" (Peteet, 2017, p.21). Yet, military jurisdiction in the West Bank does not also apply to the Israeli settlers living in the area, establishing notable territorial and ethno-national differences and, consequently, ethnic and national discrimination (Joronen, 2016).

There are also currently around five million Palestinians living as refugees spread between camps in neighboring Arab countries. Only 5% of residents in the West Bank and Gaza were born before the establishment of the Israeli State and more than 85% of them were born after the Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1967 (Bureau, 2013). In other words, the majority of those living within Palestine and Israel today have lived their entire lives during the previously described period of conflict (Ayer, Venkatesh, Stewart, Mandel, Stein & Schoenbaum, 2017).

3.2. Being a child in Palestine

By introducing this complex and intractable conflict, it easier to understand how children in Palestine are living in a society where ethnic-political violence is a common occurrence – *a fact of life* (Ladd & Cairns, 1996, p.15). This prolonged military occupation and its manifestations have significant effects on each member of the community. For example, Palestinian children are continuously exposed to violent circumstances, night raids, arrests, house demolitions, personal assaults and injuries, as well as air bombardments (Arafat & Boothby, 2003). Over one third of the residential areas in Area C (189 out of 532) lack a primary school. Consequently, the children living in those areas have to cross military checkpoints or be exposed to harassment by settlers on their way to school each day (B'Tselem, 2017c). Moreover, Israeli violence permeates even the boundaries of their private homes (Akesson, 2014). Depending on the areas in which they live, their home can *be suddenly bombed* [in Gaza], *demolished* [in East Jerusalem and Area C], or *invaded* [in refugee camps]. During the 2002 occupation in the city of Nablus, the Israeli army were

using a technique called *walking through walls*, which made even private homes in Palestine areas of warfare and occupation (Bleileh, 2010).

As Weizman (2012, p.185-193) described:

> "Soldiers avoided using the streets, roads, alley, and courtyards that define the logic of movement through the city, as well as the external doors, internal stairwells, and windows that constitute the order of buildings; rather, they were punching holes through party walls, ceilings, and floors, and moving across them through 100-metre-long pathways of domestic interior hollowed out of dense and contiguous city fabric. […] When the soldiers have passed through the party wall, the occupants are assembled and, after they are searched for 'suspects', locked inside one of the rooms, where they are made to remain – sometimes for several days – until the military operation is concluded, often without water, sanitation, food or medicine."

Defense for Children International have reported that between 2008 and 2012, the majority of arrests of children were made within the walls of their houses and during the night (DCI, 2019). At present, Israel is detaining 210 Palestinian children within jails, including two under the age of 14 (B'Tselem, 2019). Each year approximately 500-700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12 years, are detained and persecuted in the Israeli military court system (DCIP, 2019). Moreover, "an estimated 7000 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). During interrogation, a high percentage of them experience intimidation, verbal abuse, and physical violence. Furthermore, children are commonly arrested with the charge of stone-throwing, which is considered a security offense: a child of 14 years old can be sentenced for up to 20 years for this crime and for up to 6 months if the child is under 14. (DCIP, 2012; DCIP, 2014).

As Shalhoub-Kevorkian notes (2016, p.149):

> "Numerous human rights organizations have deplored the Israeli state's abuse of Palestinian children […]. Yet advocacy efforts structured around expanding children's rights and protections through the enforcement of international legal mechanisms do not attend to the structural conditions of settler colonialism and so do little to help the Palestinian child. For Palestinian bodies, as the bearers of an *a priori* raciality and thus of ungovernable violence, have been constructed in such a way as to be outside any ethical consideration. Only within this theoretical framework can we

> begin to analyze the attack on and violation of children's bodies, lives and spaces."

Therefore, a massive amount of studies has been published describing the symptoms and syndromes that affect the Palestinian population (Diab, Punamaki, Palosaari, & Qouta, 2014; Khamis, 2015; Qouta, Punamaki, Montgomery, & El Sarraj, 2007; Qouta, Punamaki, & Sarraj, 2003; Rabaia et al., 2014). Since approximately half of the population is under 18 years old (40% under 14 years old), children and youth have been at the center of these investigations.

3.2.1 Dispossessing childhood: the deleterious effect of the occupation

Researchers and scholars in the past few decades have primarily directed their efforts to investigate the impact of the violent and prolonged Israeli occupation on Palestinian children, especially since the First Intifada (Barber, 2001, 2008). Numerous studies have provided us with quantitative evidence on the association between such exposure to violence and the development of adverse mental health outcomes: including psychopathological symptoms, behavioral problems, mood disorders, and post-traumatic syndromes (Diab, Punamaki, Palosaari, & Qouta, 2014; Khamis, 2015; Qouta, Punamaki, Montgomery, & El Sarraj, 2007; Qouta, Punamaki, & Sarraj, 2003; Rabaia et al., 2014). For instance, a recent comprehensive study conducted in Gaza with 205 children from ages 9 to 16, revealed that approximately 30 percent of the children exposed to higher levels of war trauma had developed PTSD with a risk of developing other associated disorders (e.g., emotional symptoms, neuroticism, etc.) (Khamis, 2015).

Scholars have found evidence to conclude that there is a positive correlation between childhood exposure to politically violent events and a higher risk of developing psychological disorders (Al-Krenawi, Lev-Wiesel & Sehwail, 2007; Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Thabet & Thabet, 2015; Thabet, Thabet, & Vostanis, 2018). In a recently published and noteworthy systematic review, Ayer and colleagues (2017) synthesized the empirical research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its psychological consequences. What emerges from their work is that political conflict and violence have a detrimental impact on overall psychological well-being, which is thereby putting indigenous population at a much higher risk of developing pathological distress.

Furthermore, it is well-known that political violence and armed conflicts do not only target individuals, but jeopardize communities, families, societies, habits, and traditions. The Israeli occupation has dramatically increased poverty levels and has led to

marginalization between Palestinians as well as the disruption of their social networks. Under these conditions, children may easily suffer from malnutrition, maltreatment, humiliation, lack of access to health care facilities, adverse socio-economical conditions, as well as separation from – or loss of – loved ones, in addition to weakened community and family structures (Diab, 2018; Giacaman et al., 2011). All of these factors contribute to harmful consequences on the child's physical and psychological health, as well as on his or her social development (Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

Due to these unpredictable living conditions, Palestinian children – both in Gaza and in the West Bank – experience everyday feelings of personal insecurity, persistent anxiety, and fear over the well-being of their friends and families (Kolltveit et al., 2012). Many of them sense that their family or their homes are not able to protect them, which manifests into a sense of persistent insecurity and an awareness that physical harm is a constant risk (Diab, Isosävi, Qouta, Kuittinen, & Punamäki, 2018). For instance, in Massad and colleagues' study (2017), the lack of safety and security, even inside the house, has been linked with the development of different disorders amongst Bedouin children (Massad, Khammash, & Shute, 2017). It is therefore conceivable that children display fear and distress through dependent behavior, somatization and anxiety, sleep disorders, or through other general symptoms of distress and avoidance (Peltonen & Punamaki, 2010; Thabet & Thabet, 2018; Thabet, Thabet, & Vostanis, 2018). All these factors might have a destructive impact on a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Khamis, 2015; Thabet & Thabet, 2015). For healthy development, a child needs to feel a sense of security and physical protection. Studies have widely evidenced the crucial role of family, social support, and resources in preventing these feelings of fear, insecurity, and helplessness (Betancourt et al., 2012; Sousa, Haj-Yahia, Feldman, & Lee, 2013)

Finally, there is countless evidence showing that ethno-political violence leads to an increase in community, family, peer, and school violence (Boxer et al., 2013; Dubow et al., 2010). If we frame this social phenomenon using social-ecosystem theory, these results are not surprising: a higher level of violence within the social ecology contributes to higher levels of violence throughout the lower levels of the social ecology. For instance, in their survey conducted in Palestine, Clark and colleagues (2010) observed a significant correlation between women reporting domestic violence and the exposure of their husbands to ethno-political violence. As Akesson notes (2014, p.42), "the occupation has created an environment where violence is normalized, and children act out this normalization." This community and family violence exposes children to significant risks of developing

emotional and behavioral problems (Aisenberg & Herrenkhol, 2008; Ozer & Weinstein, 2004).

Yet, compared with the vast body of research mentioned above focusing on the vulnerability of children in Palestine, there are very few studies providing any evidence of their capacity to positively adjust to the military violence they are being exposed to (Veronese, Cavazzoni, Antenucci, 2018; Veronese & Barola, 2018). Even if all of these studies were indeed necessary and fundamental to understand the state of Palestinian children under occupation, and also to provide evidence of the negatives impacts of it, as Rabaia and colleagues (2014, p.174-175) have stated,

> "It must be assumed that these studies were conducted with the best intentions. […] There is no doubt that Palestinian children have been exposed to many violent events and its likely that this exposure has affected them and that they may display some or all of the symptoms that correspond to the diagnostic symptoms associated with mental ailments such as PTSD, anxiety, depression and mood disorders"

but we must also be aware that this prevalent and deep attention on negative outcomes and trauma

> "… creates the impression that young Palestinians exposed to violence had become mentally ill. […] The question on how Palestinians had managed to maintain their mental health throughout their long history of dispossession and episodes of lower and higher intensity violence received markedly less interest.". (Rabaia et al., 2014, p.174-175)

3.2.2 Resilience, coping strategies, agency and skills of survivals: the overlooked dimensions

From the previous paragraphs it is easy to see that in Palestine there is still a continuous debate about the psychological effect of the Israeli occupation. In a literature review of at-risk youth health in the Middle East, Nelson et al. (2015) pointed out that the majority of the studies (58%) referring to Palestine and Palestinian refugees were focused on mental health and conducted with a trauma perspective, suggesting elevated rates of PTSD and trauma-related disorders within the Palestinian population. On the other hand, it is also evident that this focus on the negative mental health outcomes and trauma does not provide

a comprehensive account of the Palestinian children's experiences. Children are not just vulnerable and passive agents, but are also 'resilient' in the face of stressful events and demonstrate an ability to develop healthy psychological functioning (Massad, Khammash, & Shute, 2017). Several different studies conducted with children living in both Gaza and the West Bank have detailed children's survival strategies strategies in the conflict, which includes creative ways in which they seek to reconfigure their livelihoods. By focusing their attention on the many underrepresented contextual and ecological factors, these researchers report the existence of a Palestinian child with high levels of optimism, happiness, and overall life satisfaction (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Veronese et al., 2012), and are thus able to display positive signs of mental health and well-being (Barber & Schluterman, 2009; Giacaman et al., 2011; Rabaia, Kassis, Amro, Giacaman, & Reis, 2018; Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015; Veronese et al., 2017b). In the process, scholars are reframing the mental health paradigm to focus on the broader framework of social justice, quality of life, human rights, and human security (Giacaman et al., 2011).

These 'new' research trends started to grow after the First Intifada, where children and youth who were more actively involved within the struggle were found to cope better psychologically in comparison with their less-involved peers (Baker, 1991). Palestinian children, born and living within the occupation, started to be depicted not only as traumatized victims, but instead as active agents able to function well in spite of the surroundings risks (Barber, 2013).

Reviewing the various studies of Palestinian children, positive outcomes have been associated to various individual factors and characteristics, such as high self-esteem (Arafat & Boothby, 2003), successful and active coping (Qouta et al., 2005), perceived self-efficacy and sense of agency (Veronese, Cavazzoni, Antenucci, 2018; Veronese et al., 2019a, b), and strong ideological and social commitment (Barber et al., 2014; Habashi, 2008). High levels of self-esteem, positive emotions, and happiness were found to be critical factors in children's well-being, reducing and effectively mitigating the impact of traumatic events (Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola, & Said, 2012). Furthermore, political activity as well as ideological and social commitment has been highlighted as crucial in helping children develop feelings of empowerment, dignity, and hope for the future. As we have explored in the second chapter, ideological commitment – together with a sense of belonging – offers children a possibility to develop social meaning and interpret what is happening around them. In the context of Palestine, proactive engagement in political activities and, thus, in the struggle against the occupation, has been widely reported

a protective factor. As Nguyen-Gilliham and colleagues note, "to be passive politically is humiliating while even a minor political gesture restores a modicum of dignity" (2008, p.296). Following this line, many scholars investigated the protective potential of youths' political activism in moderating the effects of political violence, despite their young age (Atallah, 2017; Barber, 2008). As Peteet (1994, p.41) underlines:

> "*aql*, or mental maturity, was traditionally acquired by youths as they achieved important milestones in life such as finishing school, getting a job, establishing a house, getting married, and having children. However, with general strikes, school closure, mass imprisonment of youths, and a cessation of wedding parties out of respect for the martyrs, the intifada disrupted these important 'life-cycle transitions'."

Furthermore, focusing on community resources, processes, and practices when investigating children's experiences and life under occupation has been found to be culturally significant (Atallah, 2017). Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of school, peer, and family relations as protective sources against trauma. Being able to access familiar socio-cultural resources and support enables the possibility of feeling free in acting and displaying one's own capabilities. Family and community factors have been identified as playing a crucial role in Palestinian children's well-being and development. Good maternal mental health (Qouta, Punamäki, & El Sarraj, 2005), a nurturing parental style (Barber, 2001), and functional family dynamics and relations (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996), have all been associated with a healthy psychological adjustment of a child. Analogously, parental support and a family's improved quality of life have been linked with positive outlooks in life and mental health, thereby playing a fundamental role in 'buffering' the effects of a child's exposure to political violence (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Veronese, Fiore, Castiglioni, & Natour, 2014).

Moreover, family and community networks have a powerful protective role in processing structural and protracted trauma, allowing people to harness cultural beliefs, traditions, and spirituality. Being able to feel and perceive cohesion within the community, such as the sharing of religious, political, or ideological values, enhances the social support between individuals and enables them to build collective strategies to endure forms of oppression. Many scholars have emphasized the healing power of community practices, such as gathering to recollect memories of lost villages or coping through a loss together (Athalla, 2017; Ghanim, 2010).

For what concerns our main topic of interest, there are still very few studies that have made it their primary focus to explore the dimensions of agency within the Palestinian context. However, as Chatty (2009) discusses in her research with Palestinian youth refugees, "life for Palestinian youth is framed by the lack of the basic elements of civil society. It is a life of poverty from which there is no escape because it is politically engineered. But it is a situation which young people in Palestinian refugee camps do not accept as unchangeable. Although they recognize that no more space is available, they actively seek through a variety of mechanisms of coping strategies, to make the very best out of a very raw deal" (2009, p.333).

In the second chapter of this work, we discussed the growing emphasis on re-thinking how children living in war-like contexts are actively involved in transforming their environments and in giving meaning to their experiences. Within those studies reviewed, nine of them took place within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite the intense and structured violence within the school, home, and everyday social contexts, Palestinian youth and children continue to maintain a sense of agency and hold on to aspirations for a better future both for themselves and their community (Chatty, 2009). For instance, Palestinian children show a deep awareness of the difficult situations they are living in, but they also demonstrate the ability to find sources of self-empowerment and to identify creative solutions to get the best from their surrounding environments (Veronese et al., 2017a). They exhibit their agency in the face of extreme limitations and restrictions – on their movement, rights, and opportunities. Researchers have identified several domains in which Palestinian children display their agency, thereby promoting their own well-being. For example, Palestinian children are actively struggling to continue their education as a means of increasing their knowledge, gaining confidence and self-esteem, and learning strategies to cope with their adverse environment. Education was presented and perceived both as a potential source of power against the occupation (Chatty, 2009; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese, Cavazzoni, Antenucci, 2018) and also as a way to reach personal goals and better their futures (Akesson, 2014; Khamis, 2013; Veronese et al., 2017a). Similarly, religion is introduced within children's narratives as a source of resistance and action against violent oppression (Habashi, 2011, 2013; Veronese et al., 2017a) and it is crucial in providing a structured framework for developing shared meanings, values, and collective practices (Veronese et al., 2018). Hence, Palestinian children are actively engaged in learning, understanding, and making sense of both their surroundings and their country's history. In addition to spirituality, political activism, collective memories, and shared

ideology are all sources to which they turn to make sense of their national history and collective surroundings. As we have previously discussed, Palestinian children and youth have demonstrated their willingness to engage as active participants within the political life of their country and community ever since the First Intifada. This engagement allows them to develop a sense of competence and control over their situation and, in doing so, counterbalance their constant condition of instability (Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2018).

3.3 The research project

3.3.1 Theoretical approach: a socio-ecological perspective

The structural, pervasive, and violent occupation of Palestine damages both the child and the *social fabric* (Akesson & Denov, 2017) that fosters his or her healthy development and well-being. This social fabric is constituted from different and interconnected parts: families, schools, communities, society, and culture. All of these elements are crucial and fundamental factors within the lives of the children. Although much of the theoretical literature has focused on individualized approaches, studies within war-affected countries are demonstrating a need for a more comprehensive and holistic perspective. Indeed, the critical words of Cairns and Dawes are very clear in expressing the necessity for alternate paths that diverge from the western, individual-centered, ones (1996). A child's life and development is embedded and shaped by the social, cultural, and material context in which they live. Within the many works reviewed in this dissertation, there are several systems – such as family, social relationships, school, or spirituality – that have been identified as key factors in shaping children's responses to adversity in order to maintain a positive well-being. Moreover, it has been evidenced that economic, cultural, and political forces have a crucial role in the child's development. Accordingly, Brofenbrenner's model of hierarchically nested ecosystems (1979) enables us to understand a child's perspective with a specific focus on how political violence effects education, community, and nation-state (Akesson, 2016).

Therefore, the theoretical background of this research project encompasses the socio-ecological theories that consider all the factors – micro, meso, and macro – affecting and shaping children's lives. An ecological approach might be an appropriate response to Cairns

and Dawes's call: rather than only emphasizing the individual, it also includes familial, social, cultural, and political perspectives within the study of the child's well-being (Tol, Haroz, Hock, Kane, & Jordans, 2014). In accord with Boothby and colleagues, we believe that a socio-ecological lens will allow us to reach the "dynamic picture of how children develop amid changing social, political, economic, and cultural worlds that offer a mixture of protection and risks to children's rights and well-being" (Boothby, Strang, & Wessells, 2006, p.5). By also incorporating a framework that draws upon an ecological model, we are able to take into account the many risks and protective factors in the child's social environment and to observe how they interact and contribute to children's psychological well-being. Children cannot be considered in isolation from their surrounding context. A socio-ecological approach enables us to both maintain a wider perspective and to integrate micro and macro elements in the investigation of children's lives and experiences, which provides a more complex, dynamic, and holistic understanding. (Akesson & Denov, 2017).

Furthermore, this perspective emphasizes both external influences and subjective experiences, portraying children as actors rather than as passive victims. "Children in war zones make choices about how they live, negotiate their roles within groups, and actively engage and cope with the stresses and risk they face. […] The domains of subjective experiences, cognitive appraisal, feelings of empowerment and competence, meanings, and purpose contribute enormously to how children are affected by armed conflict" (Boothby et al., 2006, p.5).

Therefore, this framework enables us to reach a holistic and socially situated understanding of children's agency, while paying closer attention to:

- The broader social ecology and political context: *Human actions are meaningful and meaning requires a context* (Martin et al, 2003, p.84). In the context of armed conflict and structural oppression, political violence must be considered as the foundation of the problem, not the individual's inability to cope (Atallah, 2017; Boothby et al., 2006). Thus, during the discussions of the findings, we will draw from well-known post-colonial theories (Holland, 2003; Said 1984) that take into account how broader socio-historical factors affect the everyday realities and experiences of children and populations.
- The meaning of the experiences. Children are actively engaged in building their own meaning and ways of coping with their surrounding world (Gergen, 2009). Adopting an ecological perspective allows us to integrate a socio-constructionist

approach, which considers all experiences as mediated through social contexts, spiritual and cultural values, and ideologies. The aim of Gergen's social constructionist approach is to go beyond the individualistic ideology so as to "reconstitute [the psychological world] as a domain of the social," (1997, p. 736) wherein "we can envision the elimination of psychological states and conditions as explanations for action, and the reconstitution of psychological predicates within the sphere of social process" (p. 740).

Culture shapes development, providing meanings, beliefs, values, and structured responsibilities (Vygotsky, 1986). Thus, the way children interpret their experience and mobilize their resources is also culturally scripted and must be taken into account and explored.

Accordingly, adopting a socio-ecological approach to the study of children's agency entails the inclusion of the multiple layers of social structures, which affect the child's well-being and functioning. In doing so, this perspective might challenge preconceived notions of how environments act upon children and vice versa.

3.3.2 Aims and objectives

The previous paragraphs were necessary to define and clarify the context of this research and also to establish its aims. The psychological discourse, more often adopted by the scientific community, tends to provide us with a picture of a traumatized child that elides the broader political context. This view risks pathologizing the children and removing their agency at both the individual and collective levels (Sousa et al., 2013; Summerfield, 1999; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). On the other hand, much of the cited research highlights that Palestinian children display a significant capacity to adapt to their adverse circumstances. They are able to maintain a sense of satisfaction about their lives, which emerged as a form of protection for their mental health and for the mobilization of resources (Veronese et al., 2017b; Veronese et al., 2019 a, b).

Even if few qualitative studies have been carried out in Palestine, the dimension of agency – under its multiple forms – has been mentioned amongst the factors that contribute to enhancements in children's well-being as it helps them to confront their everyday life. Children mobilize resources within homes, schools, relationships, and the streets. Children are also able to actively reshape their experiences and exert control over various domains of their social context, developing a sense of self-competence and enhanced well-being in

the process. Moreover, as widely documented in Chapter Two, having an active role as a social actor in contexts characterized by ongoing and diffuse violence allows children to enact their resources and competencies in order to conserve their own proper psychological functioning (Gilligan, 2009; Veronese et al., 2018). Thus, recognizing them as active agents leads us to wonder about their capacity for action and the ways in which they interpret their everyday experiences in order to make sense of their suffering (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008).

Therefore, moving from the above mentioned premises and the conceptualization of agency as the power of individuals to make choices and establish an active role within their daily life, this research is aimed at exploring the various sources, domains, and expressions of children's agency that help to minimize their psychological suffering and enhance their overall well-being.

In order to assess the substantial contribution of children's agency in their well-being and overall satisfaction with life, this project aims, firstly, to investigate the *actual* presence of this contribution as well as its *amount*. For example, does a child's capability of mobilizing resources enhance their life satisfaction and well-being? And if so, does their agency have a significant role in mediating and reducing the impact of the traumatic events and environments where these children live?

Next, with the purpose of deeply *unpacking* this construct and its dimensions, we will explore and investigate the sources – individual, social or environmental – that children 'use' to mobilize their competencies and agency in order to develop strategies for adjusting to the traumatic realities in which they live. Which factors act as sources of agency for children living in Palestine, helping them to actively confront with their environment? And which strategies – in terms of action, competences, and attitudes of agency – do children display? And finally, how do they manifest them in their everyday lives and practices?

3.3.3 Chosen methodology

Determining how to address the hypothesis and, thus, which methodology to adopt in order to *unpack* the construct of agency and its multi-dimensional aspects was not an unproblematic process. On the one hand, the literature evidenced a lack of quantitative investigations into children's agency from a psychological perspective. On the other hand, as previously explained, the construct itself has yet to be conceptualized and, therefore, the available self-reported measures for its quantitative assessment in children are limited,

unspecific, and insensitive to cultural and contextual differences (Veronese et al., 2019 a, b). Furthermore, in line with the abovementioned theoretical frameworks and aims, quantitative measurements do not enable us to get an insight into children's experiences or other crucial aspect in order to acknowledge them as competent social actors. As Boyden (2003, p.19) noted,

> "A research that ignores children's perspectives is unlikely to be able to predict the impact of exposure to adversity […]. When researchers anticipate in advance events and circumstances that they consider highly stressful, they could miss such important subtleties. Studies that disregard children's perspectives risk resulting in misplaced interventions that do not address children's real problems or concerns and may even pose a threat to their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Children must be encouraged to provide a real insight into their feeling and experiences".

Therefore, to be coherent with our methodological background and theoretical framework to accurately address children's agency, it was necessary to choose a methodology that can also actively engage participants within the resource process, allowing them to voices their stories "by honoring their strengths, needs, and values" (Fassinger, 2013, p.75).

The possibility of integrating two lenses within one study is what led to the suggestion to utilize a mixed-method design (Creswell, 1999; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This method offers the potential to reach our aims, which both increases the comprehensiveness of the study as well as the potential for a deeper understanding of the complex phenomena.

Mixed methods research started to become more 'popular' within social sciences in the second half of the 20th century. It is defined as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, method approaches, concepts or language into a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.17). There are ongoing and intense debates on the merits of this methodology. Many scholars have criticized this attempt to integrate two methodologies perceived as differing and conflicting. Quantitative approaches gather information through instruments, providing large and representative samples, and asserting relationships among construct and variables (Creswell, 1999). In contrast, qualitative methods involve collecting text, or other information, from participants within a site, allowing them to express themselves and also enhancing the relationship between the researcher and the participants. However, this strict dichotomy has not been universally accepted:

> "Most believe, as I do, that the qualitative-quantitative distinction is a false dichotomy. The best cross-cultural psychological research can be richly informed by the insights and perspectives of those who prefer to use a variety (and often a mixture) of procedures, techniques, and methods that have been supported and used by psychologists" (Lonner, 2009, p.907).

Although the paradigms that underpin the two approaches are indeed substantively different, scholars argue that an in-depth knowledge of the two methods allows for the implementations of both, while preserving the strengths of each one. Moreover, the ability to explore the phenomena both qualitatively and quantitatively might result in a more holistic and in-depth understanding (Ponterotto, Mathew, & Raughley, 2013). Therefore, in accordance with Lonner's assessment (2009), numerous academics have worked to develop more precise guidelines to help build research that effectively integrates these two approaches in a structured and organized way.

In the present research, we adopted a mixed-method sequential explanatory design. The purpose of this design is "to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a primarily quantitative study. The qualitative data collection can be used to examine the results in more detail" (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutman, & Hanson, 2003, p.178). This approach implies a first study where the researcher collects and analyze the quantitative data. After, the qualitative data is collected, analyzed, and utilized to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first study. Then, the two methods are integrated during the final interpretation phase of the study (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

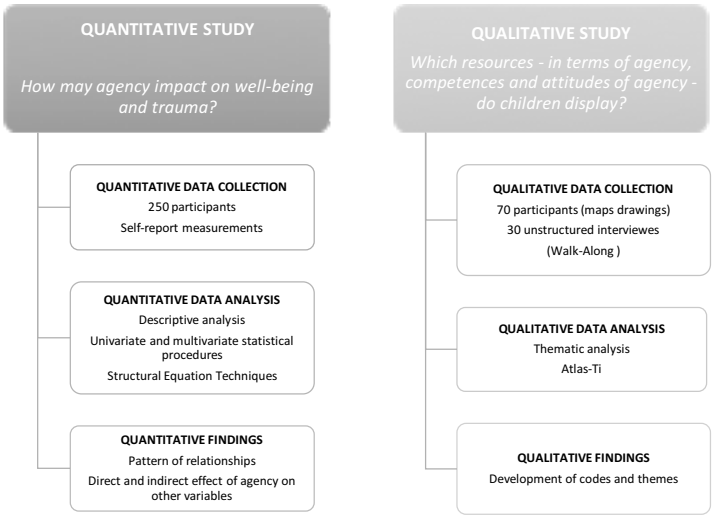


Figure 7. Research process: a sequential explanatory design

Since the purpose of the study was to explore, delineate, and unpack the multi-dimensional construct of agency, the priority has been given to the qualitative data collection and analysis, despite it being the second study of the research process (Figure 7). The first quantitative study has focused primarily on revealing and assessing the contribution of agency on the well-being and life satisfaction of a group of Palestinian children and to test its potential mitigating effect (direct or indirect) on trauma, whereas the goal of the qualitative study was to enhance the understanding and provide clarification to the quantitative results. The overall purpose was to explore and detect the various forms, expressions, and sources of Palestinian children's agency. Thus, the two approaches (extensively described in the next chapter) have been integrated during the interpretation of the outcomes of the entire study.

3.3.4 Ethical guidelines and reflections

This research was carried out following APA ethical principles and code of conduct (American Psychological Association, 2010). The study was approved by the Ethical Board of the University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan (Italy).

Moreover, working with children required paying close attention to different ethical issues. Informed consent was obtained both by parents and children. More frequently, consent was sought verbally: written informed consent was often refused since it may be viewed as threatening by heads of family (Krogstad et al., 2010; Veronese et al., 2019 a, b). Before any activity, children were fully briefed concerning the modalities and meanings of the activities in which they would be invited to take part. They were informed that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time and to decline to take part in any specific activities if they wished to. This work was driven by the principle – drawn from tropical epidemiology – of *no survey without service* (Pongprapai, Tayakkanonta, Chongsuvivatwong, & Underwood, 1996). Hence, all of the work was conducted with a side of different experiential activities, that were structured with the help of local expert counsellors, in order to provide the children with a meaningful framework for their participation in the research process (Veronese et al., 2016). Secondly, in researching countries affected by political violence, the security aspect of both researchers and participants should be addressed. The approval of the Ethical Board of the University and the local knowledge of our research assistant helped us to ensure that no harm could come to children as a result of participating in the research project. Day-by-day decisions were

made in order to ensure the security of the outdoor activity sites, the manner of the research (culturally sensitive), and the safety of both the participants and the research team.

Finally, it is necessary, even more so when working in war-affected countries, to be self-reflective. As Martin and colleagues (2003) have previously stated

> "We psychologists would do well always to remember that we inhabit times, societies, and cultures that construct us as subjects through our participation in them, a participation that is mostly inarticulate and taken for granted. In our attempts to reflect on and articulate our lives and work, we are forever embedded in the particulars of our locations in historical, sociocultural time and space, from which we never can escape. Our insights, generalizations, and understandings arise within this contingency and, consequently, are necessarily incomplete, power-infused, limited, and open to revision (Martin et al., 2003, p.42).

Thus, reflections on our own position in relation to the context and the population were always noted and taken into account, which considered all data as a product of *social exchange* (Hammack, 2010, p.514) between the researcher and the subject. During the analysis, discussion, and interpretation of the data and narratives of children, we always tried to remain aware of our position within the encounter and to constantly challenge eventual stereotypical assumptions as sources of bias (Padgett, 2009). Moreover, in order to counter-balance this effect, we have always worked with Arabic-speaking, local research assistants. We knew all of them from previous voluntary activities (2014-2017). Local researchers were trained and informed on the purpose of the study, their role in it, as well as the many vital ethical considerations. The collaboration with local research assistants deeply enriched this research, as they facilitated our entrance within the community and also provided additional and substantive contributions from other perspectives.

3.3.5 The field work: where the research took place

The fieldwork for this project took place in several different locales, where we previously had the chance to spend some time during both personal and work experiences. Thus, we had the benefit of both prior knowledge and connections.

There were two main reasons for exploring the dimensions of agency within different contexts in Palestine. First, the literature suggests for us to implement research throughout different contexts, in order to reach a more representative and comprehensive sample. Thus, mostly for what concerns quantitative data, it was important to select participants living in

different areas both in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. Therefore, the children who participated in this research were coming from urban areas (Nablus City in the West Bank and Gaza City in the Gaza Strip), rural areas (Fasayel and Al-Jiftiik village in the West Bank, Beit Hanoun and Khan Yunis village in Gaza), and refugee camps (Dheisheh refugee camp in the West Bank, and Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza). Secondly, since the purpose of this research was to detect children's expressions, forms, and sources of agency, being able to explore different contexts with different adversities might provide us with more sensitive and context-specific findings. Exploring these different contexts might also allow us to see place-related experiences as well as environmental and occupation-related difference within the many contexts in which the participants live, specifically Areas A and C. Hence, in this section, we will briefly describe each context to help provide a better understanding of these places and the specific history and challenges that exist in each setting.

3.3.5 .1 Within the West Bank

Nablus City. Located in the northern region of the West Bank, approximately sixty kilometers north of Jerusalem, Nablus is very much the nerve center of the upper West Bank. The center of Nablus – called the Old City – was mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts dating back to the 19th century BC, while the expansion of the city outside the walls occurred at the end of the 18th century AD. Historically, the city has been the center for trade, both locally and internationally. Since the 1967 war, Israel has started to build many settlements surrounding the city. During the First Intifada, the district of Nablus recorded 365 deaths as a result of the Israeli violence. The situation got much worse during the Second Intifada when the Israeli Defense Forces [IDF] invaded the city and imposed a curfew for almost 200 days. The city stayed under siege for at least two years, during which time the army was entering into each house and both arresting and killing the residents. When my research partner from Nablus recalled that period – when he was only 13 years old – he remembered that "it was impossible to go outside. If any person walked in the street, he was immediately shot dead". Moreover, he recounted the complete lack of safety since "they could come anytime. We were not allowed to close the door of our house, not even the windows. If they wanted to enter in the night in your family's house with no reason, they could".

Today, even if the occupation inside the city has officially ended, Israel still controls all movement to and from Nablus through the usage of a check-point – the Huwwara check-

point – located just outside the city. Due to movement restrictions, closure, and violence, the economy of the city has collapsed. As an example, of the 80 soap factories that used to operate within the city, only three still remain.

Fasayel and Al-Jiftiik villages. Fasayel and Al-Jiftiik are two small villages located within the Jordan Valley, 22 km north of Jericho, near the banks of the Jordan River. The Jordan Valley, together with the northern Dead Sea, constitute almost 30% of the West Bank and it is inhabited by approximately 65,000 Palestinians and 11,000 settlers (B'Tselem, 2017). This area is the largest land reserve for West Bank development, but, after the Oslo Agreement, almost 90% of this region has been designated as part of Area C, which has thereby put it under full Israeli administrative control. Israel exploits almost all the resources and prevents the Palestinians from entering or using 85% of the area (B'Tselem, 2017). Since Israel retains the full control over law enforcement, planning, and construction, most of the Palestinian structures (e.g., houses, schools) are without a permit and, thus, regularly served with demolition orders, which creates a feeling of chronic uncertainty and threat (OCHA, 2018). According to the B'Tselem reports (2018), the Israeli civil administration demolished at least 698 Palestinian residential units in the Jordan Valley between January 2007 and September 2017, which resulted in 2,948 Palestinians (including 1,334 minors) losing their homes. Moreover, 283 adults – and 386 minors – lost their homes in this process on at least two occasions. Before 1967, both villages had access to water and were mostly inhabited by farmers. Today, the homes of most Palestinians living in these areas are not connected to either water or electricity networks and construction is heavily restricted. Moreover, nearly a third of the residential areas in Area C lack primary schools, forcing the children to travel long distances to school, exposing them to harassment from Israeli settlers, and requiring them to pass military checkpoints (OCHA, 2017).

Dheisheh refugee camp. The Dheisheh camp (Bethlehem), was established in 1949 and it was originally designed to host 3,000 refugees. Today the number of residents has increased to 15,000 in 0.33 sq. Km area (UNRWA, 2015a). Dheisheh was very politically active during both Intifadas. In the First Intifada, for eight years the camp was surrounded by a wall, which was built by the Israelis in order to control the resident's action and movement. The wall was removed after the Oslo Agreement when control was re-taken by the PA (Basak, 2012). Despite being under full Palestinian control (Area A), ever since the Second Intifada the Israeli forces regularly conduct campaigns of incursion, home invasion, and arrest. Health and education within the camp are managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWUA). The most pressing difficulty for residents is the high

unemployment rate, which exists despite their high level of education and the lack of open and safe public spaces (due to incursions by the IDF during the night). Due to the overcrowding within the camp, there is a general lack of recreational and social space. The situation in the camp has worsened after the United States' decision to cut financial support to the UNRWUA, which has resulted in medical centers cutting supplies and streets that are filling with uncollected garbage.

During the month that we spent in the Dheisheh refugee camp, both exploring the site and conducting the research, we experienced five night-incursions. According to a recent report published by the UNRWUA (2019), in 2018, the IDF carried out around 19 military operations per day, for a total of more than 7,000 annually. Almost 700 of these incursions occurred in refugee camps, usually in the middle of the night and under the form of violent, raid-like invasions (e.g., tear gas, sound bomb, rubber bullets) (UNRWUA, 2019). These incursions often resulted in propriety damage and injury: in 2018 there were 78 refugees injured and four killed, including one child.

3.3.5 .1 Within the Gaza Strip

The current situation in Gaza – which affects all residents in the Strip – had already been described in the previous chapter. As reported by B'Tselem (2017b), the situation in Gaza "is the scene of a humanitarian disaster that has nothing to do with natural causes. It is entirely man-made, a direct result of official Israeli policies".

There are approximately 516,000 residents in Gaza City, which makes it the largest and principal urban center within the Gaza Strip. The two rural areas investigated in our study are located in the surroundings of Beit Hanoun, in the north, and of Khan Younis, in the south. Like every place in the Strip, both rural and urban areas have been harshly bombed during the 2008, 2012 and 2014 attacks. Additionally, with the beginning of the March demonstrations, numerous residential units within these areas have been recently destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. For what concerns the camp, seventy-eight percent of the population in Gaza are refugees and half of them are registered as residents in one of the eight refugee camps managed by UNRWA, with Jabalya being the largest one. This camp is located north of Gaza City and today it includes 113,990 residents within an area of only 1.4 square kilometers. Since the blockade was imposed, the unemployment levels have risen dramatically and most of the families are not able to provide for themselves. Moreover, basic hygiene is almost impossible to keep, since 90% of the water is unfit for human

consumption (UNRWUA, 2016). As for the Dheisheh camp, since it is overcrowded, there is a general lack of both recreational and social space.

Chapter Four
A quantitative assessment of children's agency

As understood from the previous chapter, the study and the exploration of children's agency demands us to use multiple tools and methodologies. There is a growing awareness that while quantitative studies are fundamental, they become more explicative when supported by related qualitative studies. This combination provides us with more information and it leads to richer insights into children's experiences, which goes beyond mere predictions (Haj-Yahia, 2007). Similarly, qualitative methods alone are limited in scope to only providing systematic overviews. As a result, the notion that mixing methodologies helps us to grasp the complexity and variety of contemporary social science research questions is, by now, widely recognized (Christensen, Mikkelsen, Nielsen, & Harder, 2011; McCormak, 2002). Given the argument of this research and the literature reviewed, it was evident that neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches were, in themselves, satisfactory when seeking to explore and understand children's agency. However, each approach does actively contribute to the broader understanding of the construct. Therefore, this methodology was studied and developed in order to gain – as Greene (2005, p.410) argues – a "more complete, contextual, contingent and complex understanding of the phenomena of interest than would have a single-method study.".

In this study, a social-ecological framework is used to give a comprehensive picture of the expressions and characteristics of agency in children living in the context of political and military violence. This view looks to capacities and resources in both the individual child and his/her broader social environment, as well as the interaction between them.

Hence, the first part of the study utilized a quantitative approach in order to explore and understand the statistical association between children's sense of agency, their life satisfaction, and their emotivity. The purpose of this part of the study was to assess how these various factors were buffering the impact of traumatic experiences, whereas the second step of this study was conducted to explore this buffering phenomenon in greater detail. Drawings, child-led tours, and narratives create a stimulating environment for participants' expression, which highlights the different ways in which children employ their

available resources and understand their environment in order to actively enhance their happiness and improve their life satisfaction. As previously mentioned, the available measures for assessing agency are very broad and they are mostly incapable of detecting context-specific nuances. Therefore, grouping these measures together with the children's interviews enabled us to observe and understand children's agency through their own words and everyday behaviors. Finally, the literature suggests that in order to increase our understanding of Palestinian children's experiences, research should be conducted in diverse locations (Akesson, 2015). For instance, children's experiences might differ massively between Gaza and the West Bank and the challenges faced by children living in a refugee camp might be very different from the ones faced by a child living in a village. Accordingly, the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative material throughout these differing contexts in Palestine helps us to contextualize the different impacts of the individual's physical location and circumstances.

4.1 Introducing the quantitative study

As widely discussed in the previous paragraphs, numerous studies have quantitatively assessed the association between children's exposure to violence and negative mental health outcomes (Punamaki, Palosaari, Diab, Peltonen, & Qouta, 2015; Rabaia et al., 2014). More recently, however, a smaller group of researchers have been working on identifying the positive outcomes of this exposure, which include personal growth, life satisfaction and the development of positive coping styles (Barber & Schluterman, 2009; Veronese & Pepe, 2017a, b; Veronese et al., 2017b). Within the Palestinian context, life satisfaction and positive affect balance have been identified as a crucial factor in reducing stress symptoms, enhancing children's well-being, and improving their overall mental health (Veronese et al., 2012; Veronese & Pepe, 2018). Veronese and colleagues (2017b) developed and tested a structural model in which life satisfaction acted as an antecedent of trauma via negative emotions. In other words, they found that perceived life satisfaction (in the domains of family, school, living environment, and peer relationships) plays an essential role in reducing negative emotions and, subsequently, in mitigating the effect of traumatic events. An interesting step forward has been highlighted in a recent study carried out in South Africa with a group of adolescents, which demonstrated that the more the participants perceived themselves as able to mobilize resources following traumatic experiences, the more satisfied they were with their life (Botha & van den Berg, 2016). Thus, it seems

possible to assume that agency – defined as the capacity to mobilize resources – has an important role in promoting life satisfaction in children exposed to political violence and oppression (Gilligan, 2009; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Previous qualitative studies have assessed the positive relationship between an individuals' perceived self-control and agency with an overall improvement in their ability to recover from traumatic experiences (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Being able to actively exert some sort of control over the multiple domains of their lives enhances the children's sense of competence and psychological well-being (Marshall, 2014; Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2018).

Therefore, the aim of this first step was to quantitatively assess this assumption and, in doing so, to investigate agency as a potential determinant in promoting life satisfaction in children exposed to the violence of war and military occupation. Using a socio-ecological lens and within the perspective that considers children as competent and socially situated actors who are capable of actively mobilizing resources of agency to protect themselves, the aim of this study is to investigate the association between agency and life satisfaction. More specifically, to explore how – and to what degree – the construct of agency is associated with life satisfaction, which in turn might function as a buffer mitigating trauma-related symptoms. In other words: does a child's ability to mobilize these resources improve their life satisfaction and, thus, reduce traumatic responses? Hence, starting from Veronese and colleagues structural model (2017b) and introducing the variable of agency, the first hypothesis was that agency would help to both predict and enhance life satisfaction. More specifically, it is expected that there will be a positive correlation between the level of agency expressed and the level of children's reported life satisfaction (*H1*). Secondly, greater life satisfaction was expected to be associated with fewer traumatic symptoms. More precisely, this hypothesis wanted to confirm Veronese and colleagues model, with life satisfaction acting as a predictor of trauma via negative emotions (*H2*). Finally, I expected that the relationships between agency and symptoms of trauma would be mediated by levels of reported life satisfaction, which would mean that enhancing children's life satisfaction and agency might help to mitigate the effect of trauma (*H3*).

4.1.1 Participants

The participants in this quantitative study were 250 Palestinian children recruited at primary schools located in different contexts (rural areas, urban areas and refugee camps) both in the West Bank (12.4% from Nablus City, 19.6% from Fasayel and Al-Jiftiik villages, 16%

from the Dheisheh refugee camp) and in the Gaza Strip (17.6% from Gaza city, 20% from Beit-Hanun and Khan Yunis villages, 14.4% from the Jabalya refugee camp) (Table 7). Children's ages ranged from 7 to 13 years (M= 11.58; SD = 1.49); 113 were males (45.2%) and 137 were females (54.8%). All of the participants belonged to the Muslim religion. To be included in the study, participants were required not to have been diagnosed with physical or psychological syndromes and to be in good health. Moreover, only children who had been directly exposed to one, or more, episode of violence or had witnessed violent acts over the two months prior to the study were included in the sample. These inclusion and exclusion criteria were assessed using clinical interviews by specialized psychologists working in the different institutions and associations that were collaborating with this research.

The children and their families were fully informed about the research aims and were aware that they could decline to fulfill the questionnaires (or to answer any specific items) and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from all the families involved in this study. In the classroom, the children were asked directly and the significance of each question was fully explained to them. As introduced before, this work was driven by the principle – drawn from tropical epidemiology – of *no survey without service* (Pongprapai, Tayakkanonta, Chongsuvivatwong & Underwood, 1996; Veronese et al., 2016). Therefore, both during and after the research, children were involved in two afternoons of activities aimed at reinforcing their survival skills and to providing them with a meaningful framework for understanding and responding to the items in the questionnaires. Children were free to take part or not in these activities. The questionnaires were anonymous and children's names were substituted in order to ensure absolute privacy.

Table 7. *Description of the sample*

Context		*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
West Bank	*Nablus*	17 (12%)	14 (12%)	31 (12%)
	Fasayil/ Al-Jiftiik village	30 (22%)	19 (17%)	49 (20%)
	Dheisheh refugee camp	26 (19%)	14 (12%)	40 (16%)
Gaza Strip	*Gaza city*	19 (14%)	25 (23%)	44 (18%)
	Beit Hanoun/ Khan Iunis village	31 (23%)	19 (17%)	50 (20%)
	Jabalya refugee camp	14 (10%)	22 (19%)	36 (14%)
		137	113	250

4.1.2 Instrument and procedures

Four self-reported questionnaires were administered. These questionnaires covered a wide range of topics ranging from children's life satisfaction, to emotions, agency, traumatic symptoms, and lived experiences of trauma itself. The questionnaires were completed by children in the classroom, with the help of a local partner and two social workers that were previously trained by the researcher. Finally, each child was asked to write or draw something that had frightened him/her during the last couple of months. This was necessary to fulfill the inclusion criteria and, thus, to reach children who had been directly exposed to episodes of violence or who had witnessed violent acts. This task facilitated the creation of a complete list of potentially terrifying events experienced by children in their life, without needing to employ a standardized generic traumatic checklist. To avoid subjective interpretation by the researchers, the children were asked to comment on and explain their drawings. These narratives were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by the local bilingual assistant researcher.

In accordance with Veronese and colleagues' study (2017b), the instrument used to estimate life satisfaction was the *Multidimensional student's life satisfaction scale;* the instrument used to assess the target latent variable was the *Positive and Negative Affect for children*; and the symptoms of trauma were identified using the *Children's impact of event scale.* Finally, children's sense of agency was measured with the *Children's hope scale*.

4.1.2.1. Multidimensional student's life satisfaction scale (MSLSS) (Huebner, 1994). Global life satisfaction has been defined as a cognitive evaluation of one's overall quality of life (Shin & Johnson, 1978). As we have discussed in the first chapter, research has widely evidenced the role of life satisfaction in children and youth well-being, especially in their ability to adjust to adversity (Huebner, 2004; Leversen, Danielsen, Birkeland, & Samdal, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2016). This instrument provides a measure of the individual's subjective evaluation of life (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991) and, thus, it assesses life satisfaction as an ecological construct comprised of multi-contextual levels. This scale includes 40 different items and explores life satisfaction across five specific dimensions: family, friends, school, living environment, and self (Huebner, 2004). The responses are rated on a Likert scale: never = 1; sometimes = 2; often = 3; almost always = 4. The instrument has been cross-culturally validated in a range of settings and has displayed robust psychometric proprieties. However, while the five-factor structure is equivalent across cultures, some researchers have found differences between the collectivist

cultural and individualistic systems. For instance, the "*Self*" domain has been valued more by Americans than Koreans (Markus and Kitayama 1991). In the present study, the MSLSS was administered in an adapted and validated Arabic version (Veronese & Pepe, 2018), which includes the exploration of only four out of five dimensions: family, friends, school, and living environment. The "Self" factor was excluded from the Arabic version of the instrument because it did not demonstrate a sufficient level of internal consistency (see Veronese & Pepe, 2018).

4.1.2.2. Positive and negative affect scale for children (PANAS-C). This model is a two-dimensional model of affect structures, which includes independent positive and negative affect dimensions (Huebner & Dew, 1996). In this study, the scale adopted was the child's brief version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) and it included ten separate items, five measuring the child's level of positive affect and five others measuring the negative affect. Children can express how they have experienced each emotion using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Negative and positive affectivity are intended as broad temperamental factors, the first is related to feelings of sadness, fear, guilt, and anger (Ebesutani, Smith, Bernstein, Chorpita & Higa-McMillan, 2011), whilst the second "reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert" (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988, p.1063). The literature highlights that these two dimensions are independent: an increase in positive affect does not necessarily correspond to a decrease in negative affect (Veronese et al., 2012a). The psychometric proprieties and factor structure, as well as its cross-cultural adaptation, were previously evaluated within the Palestinian context (Veronese & Pepe, 2017a).

4.1.2.3 Children's impact of event scale (CRIES-13). The Impact of Event Scale developed by Horowitz and colleagues (1979) assesses and measures traumatic responses in people who have experienced distressing events. More specifically, it assesses the main phenomena of either re-experiencing or avoiding the traumatic event itself. The American Psychiatric Association defines a *traumatic event* as one "that is outside the range of usual human experience, and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone" (1987, p.250). Scholars have shown that what qualifies as a distressing event to an individual is "any event that produces symptoms of traumatic stress, as intrusion, numbing and arousal" (Norris, 1992, p.410).

In the present study, it was implemented in its adapted version (the *Revised Children's Impact of Event Scale*, Veronese & Pepe, 2013) that has been specifically developed for Arabic-speaking cultures. It also includes three sub-scales: 4 items measuring *intrusion* (the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced through perturbing unwanted memories, thoughts, images, and flashbacks), 4 items measuring *avoidance* (avoidance of trauma-related stimuli after the traumatic episode, such as staying away from the reminders of the event or denial of the meaning and consequences of the event), and 5 items measuring *arousal* (intended as the perception and processing of potentially threatening information). All items are rated on a 4-point scale (not at all, rarely, sometimes, often; scores 0,1,3 and 5) with no reversed items.

4.1.2.4 Children's hope scale (CHS). The first difficulty encountered in quantitatively investigating agency is identifying an appropriate standardized instrument capable of accurately measuring the construct. In accordance with recent research (Veronese and colleagues, 2019 a, b) related to the present study, I have adopted Snyder's operationalization of hope. Hope is understood as a positive mental state composed by two distinct dimensions: the person's belief in their ability to initiate and sustain actions to achieve a certain goal (*agency*) and the self-perceived ability to generate ways of achieving those goals (*pathways*). Hence, in Snyder's conceptualization, agency is conceptualized as the children's ability to harness their motivation, resulting in enhanced well-being and a greater ability to cope with hardship and adversity (Snyder et al., 1991, 1996).

Therefore, the Children's Hope Scale assesses hope in order to explore these two factors: agency and pathways. It is a six-item, self-reported index designed for children in the second grade and older. Three items detect agentic thoughts (a child's perception of their capacity to start and continue movement toward their goals: *I think I'm doing pretty well; I am doing just as well as other kids my age; I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*) and three items detect pathway thoughts (a child's capability of producing the means to achieve these goals: *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me; When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it; Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem*) (Snyder et al., 1997). In the present study, items were recorded on a 5-point ordinal scale for frequency (none of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, and always) (Haroz, Jordan, De Jong, Gross, Bass, & Tol., 2017). The psychometric proprieties and factor

structure, as well as its cross-cultural adaptations, were previously evaluated across different conflict-affected countries (Haroz et al., 2017).

In this conception of hope, there is the fundamental implication that the way in which children think about their goals can make a difference in how they come to handle stressors. In other words, “children who think hopefully […] can envision different means to achieve their desired health outcomes (pathways thinking), and they can initiate and sustain efforts at applying themselves to these means (agentic thinking)." (Snyder, Hoza et al., 1997, p.401). This conceptualization takes into account the way in which children learn to think about themselves in relation to the barriers they encounter in their everyday lives. Therefore, the present model of measuring hope in children is consistent with our definition and conceptualization of agency. Hence, in accordance with a previous study (Veronese et al., 2019 a, b), here *agency and pathways have* been considered as a combined measure of a child’s capacity to "generate agency" (sense of agency) rather than as subcomponents of the construct of hope itself. The back-translation method was utilized for the translation of the CHS into Arabic.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Descriptive and correlational analysis

As a first step, children’s self-reported traumatic experiences were categorized and summarized in Table 8. Approximately half of the interviewees reported having been exposed to more than one event related to political violence. About one-fourth of the children (24.8%) described having been exposed to war experiences (such as witnessing – in person or on television – a bombing). Thirty-nine of them reported to have suffered from traumatic experiences caused by the ongoing Israeli occupation: 6% of the children experienced at least one episodes of house demolitions, incarceration of a family member, or displacement caused by the presence of settlers, while 15.6% reported experiences involving military violence (e.g., incursions and attack by the Israeli army, sound-bombs, tear gas, shootings). Twenty children reported the death – or risk of dying – of a significant other as extremely terrifying (60% of these cases was attributable to either the Israeli military or settlers). Moreover, a considerable percentage of children mentioned that they had been terrified from an encounter with wild animals (13.2% concern a fears of snakes, mice, dogs, hyenas, or scorpions) or of the unsafe environment in their surrounding living

areas (4.4%). In addition, twenty-five children (10%) had experienced episodes involving community and/or family violence, such as sexual harassment, threats, or physical violence. Forty children reported a fear of the darkness – and the ghosts and demons living therein – or of having nightmares due to watching horror movies (8.4%). Finally, twenty-one children (8.4%) reported feelings of anxiety and concern about their future aspirations after having experienced failures in schools or losses in the popular struggle.

Table 8. *Traumatic event check-list*

Traumatic event	Number of children who experienced it	Total %
War and war-related events	62	24.8
Military violence	39	15.6
Shooting, Israeli army incursions and raid, tear gas, sound-bomb.		
Israeli occupation		
Presence of settlements, arresting, house demolitions, displacement.	15	6
Unsafe environment		
Road, streets, cars, empty houses	11	4.4
Community and/or family violence		
Physical violence, sexual harassment, thief, kidnappers.	25	10
Children's fears		
Demons, ghost, darkness	40	16
Wild animal	33	13.2
Snake, mice, dogs, hyenas, scorpions		
Death of someone significant	20	8
Death or risk of dying		
Horror movies	21	8.4
Future aspirations	21	8.4
Failed exams, lost fight		

Geographical and political context emerged as a strongly salient factor concerning the presence of some events. For instance, war episodes were reported solely within the children living in the Gaza Strip (31% in the Gaza Strip sample). Moreover, even if traumatic experiences related to military violence and the Israeli occupation were recurrent amongst all the various contexts, some differences emerged. For example, children in both Gaza (in urban, rural and refugee camp settings) and Nablus barely mentioned experiences of military incursions from the Israeli army (6.4% of participants in Nablus and nobody in Gaza), sounds-bombs, or arrests, while they were very frequent in the Dheisheh refugee camp (65% in the camp sample) and in the two villages in the West Bank (23%). Likewise, experiences related to the Israeli occupation, such as house demolitions, the presence of settlers, and displacements, were mostly reported by the children living in the rural areas of the West Bank (15 children in the villages and 2 in the refugee camp). Finally, dogs emerged as frightening for children across all of Palestine, while snakes and scorpions were reported solely from children living in rural areas (both in Gaza and the West Bank), and a fear of mice was only reported in the Dheisheh refugee camp (where the camp's sanitary situation is problematic).

4.2.1.1 Main descriptive statistics

Secondly, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS.25) was used to assess a variables' reliability by means of Cronbach's alphas (internal consistency). Table 9 offers a summary of the main descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the study (i.e., children's life satisfaction, sense of agency, affect balance, and trauma symptoms), along with their internal consistency coefficients. All scales had acceptable internal consistency coefficients ($\alpha < 0.60$) and all variables were preliminarily checked by computing Mahalanobis distances ($p < 0.001$) in order to identify and skip multivariate outliers. There were no extreme multivariate values and no variables presented multi-collinearity (more than 60% of the variance within each variable is not in common with the other independent variables). Then, the data were assessed to verify whether the scores were normally distributed. Significantly, none of the variables within the study displayed kurtosis or skewness values exceeding the recommended limits [-2, +2; George & Mallery, 2010].

Table 9. *Main descriptive statistics for quantitative measures*

Measure		Mean	SD	Percentile 25	Percentile 50	Percentile 75	Kurtosis	Skewness	α
MSLSS	Family	3.56	.48	3.29	3.71	4.00	.180	-1.06	.72
	Friends	3.39	.51	3.11	3.56	3.78	.422	-.992	.73
	School	3.44	.52	3.13	3.50	3.88	.545	-.992	.74
	Living Environment	3.19	.59	2.88	3.25	3.63	.608	-.895	.70
	Life satisfaction	3.44	.34	3.20	3.50	3.73	-.454	-.593	.86
PANAS-C	Negative Affect	2.16	.79	1.60	2.00	2.65	-.586	.375	.73
	Positive Affect	4.22	.70	3.80	4.40	4.85	-.454	-.667	.77
CRIES	Intrusion	2.05	1.43	0.75	2.00	3.00	-.774	.283	.71
	Avoidance	2.96	1.43	2.00	3.00	4.00	-.796	-.306	.65
	Arousal	2.15	1.27	1.15	2.00	3.20	-.723	.245	.64
	Overall trauma	2.39	1.10	1.66	2.41	3.15	-.466	-.007	.81
CHS	Agency	4.17	.85	3.67	4.33	5.00	.307	-1.01	.63
	Pathways	4.05	.88	3.67	4.33	4.67	.401	-.907	.61
	Global agency	4.11	.79	3.67	4.33	4.83	.338	-1.01	.78

Turning to the participants' scores on the self-reported scales reported in the table, it was discovered that the degree of children's life satisfaction was high, as indicated by the values reported in the *Multidimensional student's life satisfaction scale* (MSLSS), generally falling at around 3 (3=often, 4=always). Out of the four differentiated domains, the most favorable marks were obtained for family life (average = 3.56), whilst the greater variability (SD =0.30) was found in both *Friends* and *Living Environment* subscales. Accordingly, in the *Positive affect and negative affect scale for children* (PANAS-C), lower scores were obtained for negative affect (average 2.16; SD: 0.8) compared to positive emotion (average 4.22; SD: 0.7). With regard to *Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale* (CRIES), average scores were low, generally falling at around 2 (between rarely and sometimes). Notably, the literature evidenced that a combined score of 30 for all the scales, and 17 and above on the eight items relating to intrusion and avoidance, is an efficient marker for identifying cases of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Perrin, Meiser-Stedman, & Smith, 2005). The overall average score was of 31.07, which is above the cut-off score (≥ 30), thereby demonstrating the severity of the children's traumatic symptoms. Intrusion levels were very close to the cut-off (8.2 over 7.5) and the children reported very high levels of avoidance of traumatic events (cut-off: ≥ 4, M = 11.84). Finally, for what concerns the *Children's hope scale* (CHS), higher scores were obtained for the *agency* subscale (average 4.17; SD: 0.9) compared to the *pathways* subscale (average 4.05; SD: 0.8), which also presented the greatest variability (0.3).

4.2.1.2 Gender and contexts comparisons

With regard to gender comparisons, after the test of all assumptions (e.g., linearity, homogeneity, normality, homoscedasticity, outliers) and after controlling for age, an analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) was run to determine the effect of gender on each variable (Table 10). The conducted analysis revealed few statistically significant differences as a function of gender. The average level of life satisfaction was similar for both boys and girls. Statistically significant differences between boys and girls appeared only in relation to the *school* dimension, which was higher for females (M=28.2, SE= 0.35) compared to the male group (M=26.7, SE=0.39), with a significant mean difference of 1.497, 95% CI [-2.522, -0.471], $p < .05$. No gender differences were found in the expression of positive emotions, whilst negative affect was significantly higher in the female group with a mean difference of 1.192, 95% CI [.251, 2.169], $p < .05$. On the CRIES and its subscales, after adjusting for age, there was not a statistically significant difference between the two group

(M=29.83, SE= 1.33; M=27.08, SE=1.21, respectively) [F (1,247) =2.76, p=.098, partial h2= .11]. Moreover, in accordance with Perrin et al. (2005), both groups did not reach the cut-off point (≥ 30) for a PTSD diagnosis. Finally, no gender differences were found in relation to children's sense of agency [F (1,247) =.969, p=.326, partial h2= .004].

Table 10. *Difference between gender group, adjusted for age*

Dimensions	Group	N	Unadjusted		Adjusted	
			M	SD	M	SD
Life satisfaction	M	113	132.6	13.4	132.5	1.26
	F	137	135.1	13.5	135.2	1.14
Family	M	113	24.8	3.50	24.76	.31
	F	137	24.9	3.22	25.08	.28
Friends	M	113	30.1	4.81	30.09	.43
	F	137	30.8	4.40	30.82	.39
School	M	113	26.7	4.33	26.70	.39
	F	137	28.2	3.90	28.20	.35
Living environment	M	113	25.6	4.74	25.56	.44
	F	137	25.4	4.83	25.45	.40
Negative Emotion	M	113	10.12	3.88	10.12	.37
	F	137	11.31	3.90	11.32	.33
	M	113	21.11	3.69	21.07	.32
Positive emotion	F	137	21.15	3.37	21.18	.29
Overall trauma	M	113	32.5	14.9	29.83	1.33
	F	137	29.4	13.5	27.08	1.21
Intrusion	M	113	6.65	6.08	8.621	.54
	F	137	7.86	5.43	7.891	.49
Avoidance	M	113	12.5	5.72	12.52	.54
	F	137	11.3	5.70	11.28	.49
Arousal	M	113	11.3	6.69	11.31	.59
	F	137	10.3	6.06	10.30	.54
Sense of agency	M	113	24.38	4.94	24.34	.44
	F	137	24.90	4.62	24.93	.40
Agency	M	113	12.45	2.51	12.43	.24
	F	137	12.54	2.60	12.56	.22
Pathways	M	113	11.93	2.81	11.91	.25
	F	137	12.36	2.51	12.37	.23

In addition, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of our data, the scores were compared in relation to children's various living contexts. As a matter of fact, areas of residence has been considered as an important variable that might change resilience trajectories for those exposed to political violence (Sousa et al., 2013).

The first investigation regarded score differences between children living in the West Bank and children living in the Gaza Strip. The analysis of co-variance, after controlling for age and gender, revealed few statistically significant differences as a function of living context. Children's satisfaction with their life, as well as negative and positive affects and trauma symptoms, were equal between the two groups. Children living in West Bank

reported higher satisfaction related to school (with a mean difference of 1.801, 95% CI [.707, 2.89], p= .001) and in relation to their sense of agency. CHS scores were indeed greater in the West Bank group (M=25.6, SE=.43) compared the Gaza group (M=23.7, SE=.44), as well as for its sub-scales.

More interesting results were found while exploring the differences within urban areas, rural areas, and refugee camps (see Table 11). Even if there were no significant differences between the groups concerning the symptoms of trauma (*CRIES*: F (2, 245) = .274, p = .760, partial η2 = .002; *Intrusion*: F (2, 245) = .189, p = .828, partial η2 = .002; *Avoidance*: F (2, 245) = .656, p = .520, partial η2 = .005; *Arousal*: F (2, 245) = 2.05, p = .132, partial η2 = .016), negative emotions (F (2, 245) = .916, p = .402, partial η2 = .007) and their sense of agency (*CHS*: F (2, 245) = .257, p = .773, partial η2 = .002; *Agency:* F (2, 245) = .213, p = .808, partial η2 = .002; *Pathways*: F (2, 245) = .300, p = .741, partial η2 = .002), a statistically significant difference emerged for other variables (*MSLSS*: F (2, 245) = 10.69, p < .001, partial η2 = .080; *Family*: F (2, 245) = 7.17, p < .05, partial η2 = .055; *School*: F (2, 245) = 7.97, p < .001, partial η2 = .061; *Living Environment*: F (2, 245) = 16.38, p < .001, partial η2 = .118; *Positive emotions*: F (2, 245) = 6.49, p = .002, partial η2 = .050). Generally, more positive scores were reported from children living in cities and villages all throughout Palestine, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. On the other hand, children living in refugee camps reported lower satisfaction levels with their lives (M=128,3 SE=1.49) compared with children living in rural and urban areas (M=137.1, SE= 1.52; M=135.9, SE=1.30, respectively). They also reported lower levels concerning the dimensions of family, school, and their lived environment. Similarly, refugee children had the lowest scores in positive emotions, while no significant difference was found between residents in urban areas and rural ones.

Table 11. Differences between children living in villages, cities and refugee camps, adjusted for age and gender.

Dimensions	Context	N	Unadjusted		Adjusted	
			M	SD	M	SD
Life satisfaction	Urban Areas	75	137.1	12.9	137.1	1.52
	Refugee camp	76	128.1	12.9	128.1	1.49
	Rural Areas	99	136.1	13.2	136.0	1.30
Family	Urban Areas	75	25.59	3.14	25.56	.38
	Refugee camp	76	23.71	3.66	23.75	.37
	Rural Areas	99	25.37	3.01	25.36	.33
Friends	Urban Areas	75	30.01	5.04	29.05	.54
	Refugee camp	76	29.92	4.39	28.85	.53
	Rural Areas	99	31.29	4.32	30.33	.46
School	Urban Areas	75	27.63	4.70	27.77	.47
	Refugee camp	76	26.08	4.07	26.06	.46
	Rural Areas	99	28.55	3.44	28.46	.40
Living environment	Urban Areas	75	27.48	4.52	27.35	.52
	Refugee camp	76	23.11	4.84	23.21	.51
	Rural Areas	99	25.83	4.15	25.85	.45
Negative Emotion	Urban Areas	75	10.32	3.96	10.46	.46
	Refugee camp	76	11.32	3.84	11.28	.45
	Rural Areas	99	10.71	3.97	10.63	.39
Positive emotion	Urban Areas	75	21.85	3.48	21.72	.40
	Refugee camp	76	19.86	3.57	19.96	.39
	Rural Areas	99	21.56	3.97	21.58	.34
Overall trauma	Urban Areas	75	32.23	15.6	31.57	1.67
	Refugee camp	76	30.79	14.1	31.11	1.64
	Rural Areas	99	20.79	13.3	30.01	1.43
Intrusion	Urban Areas	75	8.76	6.44	8.56	.68
	Refugee camp	76	8.01	5.23	8.12	.66
	Rural Areas	99	7.96	5.57	8.03	.58
Avoidance	Urban Areas	75	12.31	6.03	12.10	.67
	Refugee camp	76	11.12	5.70	11.21	.66
	Rural Areas	99	12.04	5.54	12.13	.58
Arousal	Urban Areas	75	11.16	6.45	10.92	.74
	Refugee camp	76	11.66	6.25	11.78	.73
	Rural Areas	99	9.76	6.29	9.85	.64
Sense of agency	Urban Areas	75	25.08	5.01	24.99	.56
	Refugee camp	76	24.08	4.64	24.60	.55
	Rural Areas	99	24.47	4.70	24.47	.48
Agency	Urban Areas	75	12.73	2.64	12.07	.30
	Refugee camp	76	12.34	2.50	11.83	.29
	Rural Areas	99	12.44	2.55	11.95	.26
Pathways	Urban Areas	75	12.35	2.70	12.33	.31
	Refugee camp	76	12.16	2.60	12.20	.30
	Rural Areas	99	12.03	2.69	12.02	.27

4.2.1.3 Correlation analysis

Finally, in order to evaluate the potential direct association between the children's demographic profiles (age and gender) and the variables under study, zero order correlations and descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) are reported in Table 12. The data concerning the girls is above the diagonal and the one concerning boys below the diagonal.

Table 12. *Zero-order correlation among variables under study, means (m) and standard deviations (SD) differentiated for gender*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	m	SD
LIFE SATISFACTION *(1)*	-	- 0.37**	0.47**	-0.19*	- 0.26**	**NS**	- 0.17*	0.35**	- 0,29**	134	13.9
NEGATIVE AFFECT *(2)*	- 0.47**	-	- 0.31**	0.56**	0.47**	**NS**	0.46**	- 0.18*	**NS**	11.3	3.90
POSITIVE AFFECT *(3)*	0.46**	- 0.47**	-	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	0.47**	- 0.29**	21.2	3.37
INTRUSION *(4)*	- 0.43**	- 0.36**	- 0.32**	-	- 0.62**	0.37**	0.83**	**NS**	**NS**	7.86	5.43
AROUSAL *(5)*	- 0.52**	- 0.41**	- 0.31**	0.67**	-	- 0.30**	0.82**	**NS**	-0.20*	10.3	6.06
AVOIDANCE *(6)*	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	- 0.45**	- 0.32**	-	- 0.70**	**NS**	**NS**	11.3	5.70
TRAUMA TOT *(7)*	- 0.46**	- 0.39**	- 0.29**	- 0.88**	- 0.84**	- 0.71**	-	**NS**	**NS**	29.4	13.5
CHS *(8)*	- 0.35**	**NS**	- 0.44**	-0.20*	- 0.32**	**NS**	- 0.22*	-	-0.17	24.9	4.62
AGE *(9)*	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	**NS**	-	11.6	1.42
M	132	10.1	21.1	8.65	11.3	12.5	32.5	24.4	11.5		
SD	14.0	3.88	3.70	6.08	6.69	5.72	15.0	4.94	1.58		

In general, the correlation analysis revealed clear, consistent, and stable patterns of relationship among all the key variables under study. Significant positive correlations were found between life satisfaction, positive emotions, and children's sense of agency.

Accordingly, where there was a strong negative correlation between both life satisfaction and positive affect and measures of trauma (intrusion and arousal) and negative emotions. Avoidance was not found to have a significant correlation with any other variables (except for trauma measures). Finally, children's sense of agency was positively correlated with both positive emotions and life satisfaction, but no significant correlations were found with negative emotions and trauma measures. Regarding age, a negative correlation emerged only within the female group in relation to life satisfaction, positive emotions, arousal symptoms, and sense of agency. Hence, older girls tended to display lower levels in all four of these dimensions.

Thus, this preliminary analysis supported the idea that children's agency was more strongly associated with the domain of life satisfaction and less strongly associated with trauma symptoms. However, correlations do not allow us to test the cumulative network of associations among the variables of interest or to explore their direct and indirect effects. Therefore, in the second step of the analysis, a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was employed, in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between these variables. SEM is a development on the general linear model (GLM), which allows us to simultaneously test a set of regression equations. The software used to simultaneously model and analyze the inter-relationships among the constructs is known as AMOS (Analysis of Moments Structures).

4.2.2 Exploring direct and indirect effect: structural equation modeling

In order to assess the main hypotheses and, in doing so, analyze the inter-relationship among the variables, a structural equation modeling technique (Bollen, 1989) was used. The SEM technique allows us to evaluate the network of direct and indirect effects between those variables and to create latent – or unobserved – variables, thereby decreasing the bias caused by measurement error (Merrilees, Cairns, Taylor, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, & Cummings, 2013).

From the aforementioned preliminary analysis, it was not possible to assess the cumulative network of associations among all the variables and break down the total effects into direct and indirect effects. SEM techniques enable us to explore and estimate different regression equations at the same time, while also checking that the proposed model fits with the data. In the present work, the suitability of the model in relation to the data was assessed using the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom ($\chi 2/df$), a normed fit Index (NFI; Morin, Marsh, & Nagengast, 2013); the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Morin et al., 2013), a

comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). An acceptable fit is indicated by a $\chi 2$/df ratio as high as 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), an NFI, TLI and CFI equal to or greater than 0.95, and RMSEA of less than 0.08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

Starting from our hypothesis and the previous studies, the conceptual model of pathways comprised three latent variables (children's sense of agency, life satisfaction, and trauma symptoms) and ten measured indicators (Figure 8).

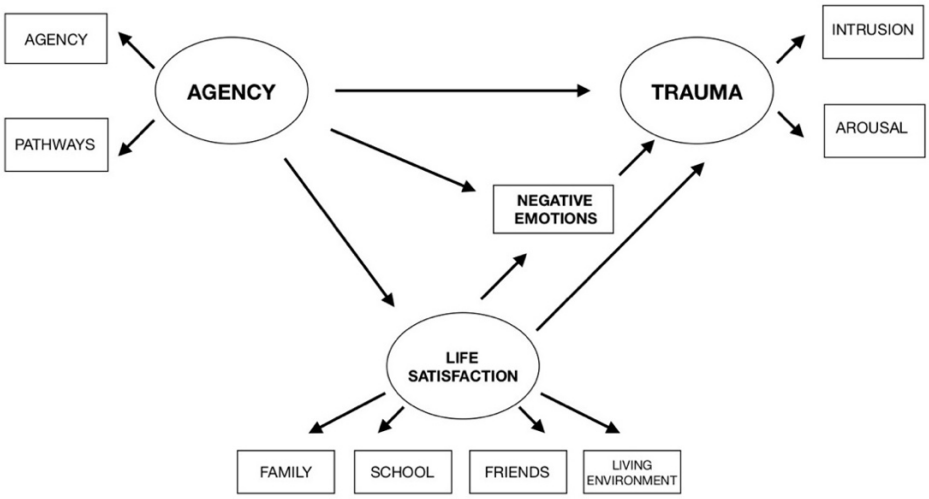


Figure 8. Conceptual model of pathways connecting latent variables and observed indicators.

As a latent variable, the *sense of agency* was assessed via the observed variables of agency and pathways. Furthermore, the target latent variable – trauma symptoms – was measured through the observed variables of *intrusion* and *arousal* (CRIES-13). The *avoidance observed* variable was dropped from the final model since it did not reveal any significant relationship with the other variables. This finding was not surprising, however, since there is a recognized ambiguity in considering avoidance as a symptom within the context of ongoing and constant threats of violence. In fact, the literature suggests that avoidance behaviors might represent effective protective strategies in dealing with ongoing threats to one's own personal safety and welfare (Mattews & Stolarsky, 2015; Punamaki, Palossari, Diab, Peltonen, & Quota, 2015; Veronese et al., 2017b). Then, as recommended by the literature (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009), the third latent variable – *life satisfaction*– was estimated by considering children's reported satisfaction levels using the four key life domains, including satisfaction with family, friends, school, and their overall living environment.

Furthermore, one additional manifested variable concerning negative affect (measured by the five items of the PANAS-C) was included in the model. As introduced in the first chapter, researchers have suggested that the three dimensions of positive affect, negative affect, and global life satisfaction constitutes a multidimensional model of children's subjective well-being (SWB) (Diner, 1984; Huebner & Dew, 1996). In fact, this positive affect variable was inserted in the first model in order to take the children's overall well-being into consideration. Unfortunately, it has been excluded from the final model since no significant relationship with the other variables emerged. This finding is also supported by the existing literature. For instance, in Israel-Cohen and colleagues' study with youth exposed to war in Israel, life satisfaction and negative affect were effectively mediating the severity of PTSD symptoms, while positive affectivity was found to be an insignificant factor (Israel-Cohen, Uzefovsky, Kashy-Rosenbaum, & Kaplan, 2015). Similarly, the model published by Veronese et al. (2017b) revealed that the negative affect actually amplified the effects of trauma in Palestinian children, whereas positive affectivity did not seem to be related in any way to either intrusion or arousal symptoms.

Finally, since the study was not interested in assessing individual differences, age and gender were included as "background variables" whose effects needed to be controlled for and isolated. The effect of gender also proved insignificant in explaining either stress reactions or life satisfaction in either group. As such, it was dropped from the final model.

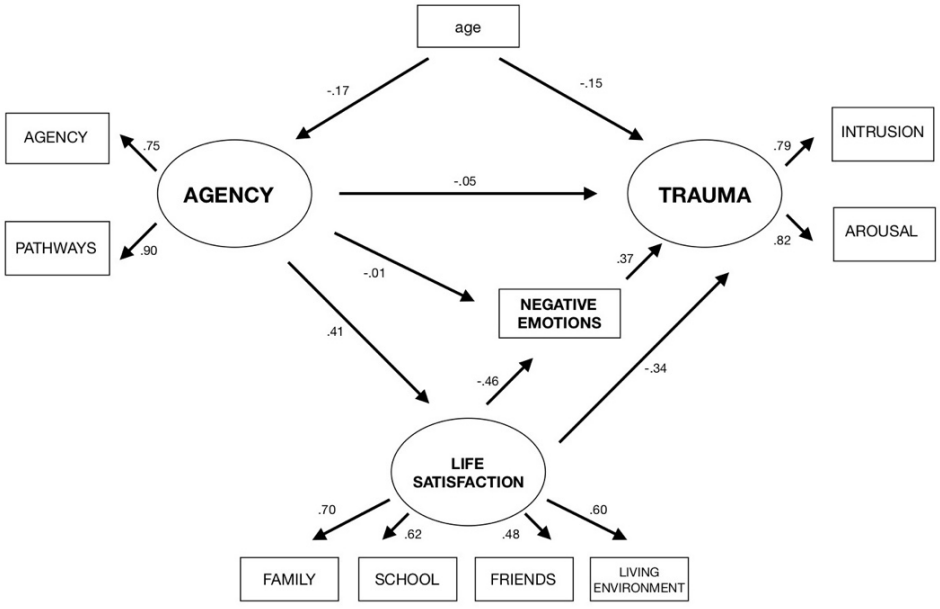


Figure 9. Structural equation modeling results for the relations between agency, life satisfaction, negative emotions and trauma symptoms. Standardized direct effect. Model fit: (X^2/df= 1.81; NFI= .934; TLI= .951; CFI=.969; RMSEA= .057; AIC: 103.535).

Hence, the structural equation model allowed us to test the concurrent effects and impacts of the sense of agency, life satisfaction, and negative affectivity on childhood trauma. More specifically, the model revealed that children's sense of agency directly predicted their satisfaction with life. Moreover, it seems to play an indirect role in predicting the decrease in both negative emotions and the presence of trauma-related symptoms. Likewise, life satisfaction directly predicted a decrease in negative emotions and trauma. The results of the final model (Figure 9) suggests that the model fit the data (X2/df= 1.93; NFI= .914; TLI= .951; CFI=.96; RMSEA= .060; AIC: 103.535). These indexes confirmed both the conceptual and statistical robustness of the relationships between the variables.

4.2.2.1 Pathways analysis

With regard to the pathways analysis (Table 13), the children's sense of agency was found to wield positive standardized effects on reported life satisfaction ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, the analysis of the relationship between the sense of agency and the symptoms of trauma and negative affectivity did not reveal any statistically significant connection. However, the model did reveal the statistically significant and negative effect of life satisfaction on both trauma and negative affectivity ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$; $\beta = - .46$, $p < .001$; respectively). Finally, negative affectivity positively and directly predicted the symptoms of trauma ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$), revealing that negative affects contributed to an amplification of the effects of trauma.

Regarding the children's demographics, their ages wielded direct, significant, and negative effects on both agency and trauma symptoms ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$; $\beta = - .15$, $p < .05$; respectively). In contrast, the relations between age and life satisfaction and negative affectivity were not statistically significant.

Table 13. *Summary of path values for the structural model (direct standardized effects)*

Path	From	To	Value	p
(1,2)	Agency	Life satisfaction	0.41	0.001
(1,3)	Agency	Negative Affect	0.01	0.926
(1,4)	Agency	Symptoms of trauma	-0.05	0.522
(2,3)	Life satisfaction	Negative Affect	-0.46	0.001
(2,4)	Life satisfaction	Symptoms of trauma	-0.34	0.001
(3,4)	Negative Affect	Symptoms of trauma	0.37	0.001

Furthermore, the model showed that the total impact of the exogenous variable (sense of agency) on the target one (trauma symptoms) was constituted entirely by mediated effects. Thus, in order to investigate the role of life satisfaction and negative affectivity within this relationship, we had to move beyond direct effects. The model revealed a negative and statistically significant total effect of the children's sense of agency on the symptoms of trauma ($\beta = -.256$, $p < .01$). The cumulative effect of one variable in the model reflects all the different ways in which the relationships between the other variables can be reflected. In other words, it summarizes all the indirect and direct effects between the variables (Figure 10). Again, the total effect of the children's life satisfaction on their trauma symptoms were found to have both a significant and negative relationship ($\beta = -.51$, $p < .01$).

Breaking down the total effect, it is possible to observe if there is an effect of one variable on another variable that is 'transmitted' (at least partially) via a third/intervening variable. In our case, for example, life satisfaction has an effect on the relationship between agency and trauma symptoms (green path, $\beta = -.14$, $p < .01$), while the effect of negative affectivity was smaller (blue path, $\beta = -.004$, $p < .01$). Considering the indirect effect of both variables (red path), the indirect effect of children's agency on life satisfaction and negative affectivity proved to be both negative and statistically significant ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), which suggests that their sense of agency may be involved in lessening the consequences of trauma by impacting the children's emotions and life satisfaction. In addition, their sense of agency wielded positive and indirect effects on all the various domains of the children's satisfaction, with values ranging between $\beta = .28$ (i.e. satisfaction in the family, $p < .01$) and $\beta = .19$ (i.e. satisfaction with school, $p < .01$).

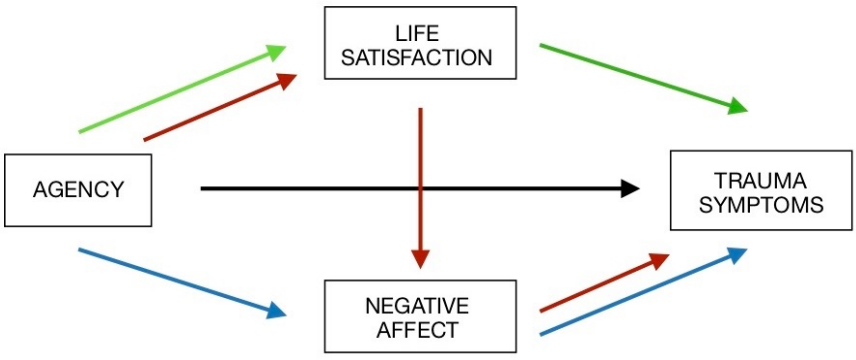


Figure 10. Indirect and total effects.

4.3 Preliminary discussion of the findings

In general, the children seem to be happy and satisfied with their lives, despite the dangerous and uncertain context in which they find themselves.

Through this preliminary analysis, both agency and positive emotions emerged as relevant key domains for ensuring the children's general life satisfaction. On the contrary, as expected, high levels of fear and anxiety were found to be strongly correlated with an increased severity of the symptoms of trauma. In our findings, negative emotions were most commonly reported by girls. Within the literature, the role of gender on these outcomes, especially in the context of political violence, is still controversial. When investigating how children's experiences of political violence change across gender, the analysis revealed very few significant differences. For example, both boys and girls reported the same scores concerning life satisfaction, positive emotions, sense of agency, and measures of trauma. Neither of the groups displayed levels of traumatic reactions that could be considered enough for a diagnosis. The only significant disproportion was found concerning negative emotions, which were higher in the female group. This finding is in agreement with several other studies, which proves that even if girls are usually less exposed to political violence (since they are often kept within the house), they report more feelings of depressions and anxiety (Giacaman et al., 2007; Qouta et al., 2003; Thabet & Thabet, 2015). This difference in the expressions of negative emotion might also reflect a specific cultural aspect within the oPt. In the cultural perception of gender, boys are under more social pressure, which demands of them to repress emotions like fear and sadness (Veronese, Pepe, & Castigloni, 2015). Concerning the influence of age, many studies have found that children's reported life satisfaction decreases with age (Goswami, 2014; Strozik, Strozik, & Szwarc, 2016). In the present study, this finding was confirmed only within the female group. More specifically, older girls reported a lower level of life satisfaction, less positive affectivity, and a reduced sense of their own agency. Otherwise, age did not show any significant correlation within the male group to any of these variables.

Some interesting findings emerged while investigating the territorial differences amongst the participants. As Sousa and colleagues (2013) have highlighted, areas of residence should be taken into account as a variable with a potential effect on the resilience trajectories for those exposed to political violence. While there was no significant difference comparing children's overall life satisfaction (and their sub-domains) between Gaza and the West Bank, children living in refugee camps were significantly less satisfied. They reported a

lower level of satisfaction concerning school, family, and the living environment, as well as the lowest score in positive affectivity. In general, children from cities and villages were found to be more satisfied with their life, including with the local area in which they live. This result was in line with several studies that have pointed out and assessed the severity of PTSD symptoms and degraded living conditions amongst children and youth living in refugee camps in comparison with those living in towns and rural areas (Dubow et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2007; Haj-Yahia, 2008). As Giacaman and colleagues explained (2007, p.365):

> "It has been well over 50 years since then [displacement], with no solution to the question of refugees in sight. In the meanwhile, living conditions in camps continue to be characterized by poverty, over-crowding and severe political, social, and psychological pressures. […]. Indeed, refugee camp living in itself introduces all sorts of contextual stressors that go beyond living standard and wealth, and even beyond the recent increase in military violence. Trauma in the camp is not merely due to current war like conditions, poverty and over-crowding, but to the long-standing effects of war, inherited from over 50 years of Palestinian history. Camp dwelling adolescents may have less access to support mechanisms that provide protective/moderating effects on mental health outcomes, perhaps because of the stigma associated with living in a camp, among other factors that can be the subject of further investigations".

Furthermore, in assessing the relationships and effects within these variables using the structural equation model, this hypothesis appears to be partially confirmed by the quantitative findings. Firstly, the main aim of this part of the study was to test the role of agency in improving and enhancing life satisfaction among children living in different contexts characterized by ongoing political violence (*H1)*. As described, children's sense of agency displayed a consistent and positive correlation with life satisfaction and its aforementioned dimensions. More specifically, the model revealed that agency directly impacted life satisfaction, mainly in the domains of family, friends, and living environment. Secondly, our results support the notion that feeling satisfied with their own lives plays an essential role for children in being able to both control and mitigate reactions to trauma as well as reduce negative emotions (*H2)*. Higher levels of general life satisfaction were indeed associated with reduced negative emotions and, thus, symptoms of trauma, despite their continuously dangerous and unpredictable life context. Accordingly, the model evidenced a robust negative association between life satisfaction and both trauma symptoms and

negative emotions (see Varela et al., 2018; Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017b; Veronese et al., 2019 a,b; Veronese & Pepe, 2017). In addition, children able to perceive themselves as being satisfied with their social relationships, school, and living environment, also displayed less negative emotions and fewer intrusion and arousal behaviors. Therefore, life satisfaction proved to play a substantial role in acting as a buffer against adverse mental health outcomes. As previously mentioned, the fact that avoidance proved to be insignificant within the model was unsurprising. Palestinian children live every day in conditions of fear, insecurity, and danger. As many have already noted, considering avoidance a symptomatic response within these contexts should be called into question (Cairns & Wilson, 1984; Veronese et al., 2017b). In fact, distancing and avoidance tactics might be considered as adaptive and protective strategies, which help children in reducing the impact of the continuous threats that they face everyday (Punamaki et al., 2014; Veronese et al., 2017b).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the association between agency and life satisfaction suggests that children's sense of agency might be viewed as a means of enhancing their life satisfaction. Accordingly, agency has a role in protecting children from trauma-related symptoms (*H3*). On the one hand, the direct effect of agency on trauma measures has not yet been found to be significant. On the other hand, it has been shown that agency strongly and directly impacts life satisfaction and its related domains. Hence, while agency alone is not able to protect children, it is able to play a major role in reducing negative emotions and trauma symptoms. In other words, the model suggests that agency might have a major role in enhancing life satisfaction, which, in turn, contributes to lessening the presence of traumatic symptoms.

4. 4 Direction for the second part of the study

As previously stated, this first step of the research aimed to explore and assess the children's capacity for action in settings of military occupation and political violence, in addition to its direct or indirect power in mediating the impact of traumatic experiences on children. These preliminary results helped to confirm that children's agency plays a significant role in promoting both their well-being and life satisfaction. As the children display agency within the different domains of school, living environment, family, and peer relationships, they are actively protecting themselves from trauma and mitigating emotions such as fear, anxiety, and sadness. Their perceived sense of agency enables them to maintain a good life

satisfaction and, thus, proper psychological functioning in the face of their adverse living situations.

On the other hand, the operationalization of agency via the *Children's Hope Scale* turned out to be incapable of capturing the full complexity and nuance of the construct. As revealed from the data, for instance, no differences were found between the various contexts explored, supporting the idea that the instrument is insensitive to setting-specific dimensions of agency and its sources in the environment of political and military violence. Moreover, this measure does not provide us any insight on the many ways in which children mobilize resources in order to overcome traumatic experiences or to survive in adverse conditions.

Hence, the starting point for the second phase of this research project was aimed at exploring this construct in more accurate and context-specific ways, in order to build up an advanced and in-depth picture of the various domains of children's agency. This quantitative phase revealed and assessed the contribution of agency on children's life satisfaction and its indirect role in mitigating the effects of traumatic experiences. It also shed an important light on how agency, by enhancing overall life satisfaction, might act as a protective factor against trauma symptoms. Therefore, in the second step, the purpose was to move forward in a more comprehensive exploration of the forms, expressions, and sources of childhood agency and the many ways they are used to both reinforce life satisfaction and control trauma. Which factors – individual, social, or environmental – act as a source for children's agency? And which resources – in terms of actions, competencies, and attitudes of agency – do children mobilize in order to maintain and promote their well-being, despite the violent environment in which they live?

Chapter Five
The qualitative explanation:
an "*in vivo*" exploration of children's agency

No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself.
No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story.
And then I will tell it back to you in a new way.
Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own.
Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority.
I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk.
hooks, 1990, p.344

In the previous chapter, our quantitative findings revealed that children's capacity for action plays a significant role in promoting their well-being and life satisfaction in settings of military occupation and political violence (Veronese et al., 2019 a, b). Children have demonstrated an ability to actively protect themselves from both trauma and negative emotions by displaying agency throughout the different domains of their life (i.e. family, friends, school, and living environment). Subsequently, this chapter illustrates the second step of this study, aimed at identifying the forms that this agency takes through a thematic analysis of qualitative data. The purpose was to advance a more comprehensive exploration of the expressions and sources of childhood agency as well as the many ways they are used to both reinforce life satisfaction and control trauma. Therefore, after a description of the participants and the contexts investigated, the participatory place-based methodology adopted in this second qualitative part of the study is presented. Then, starting from the exploration of how places (relational, educational, recreational, communal, and physical) either support or suppress a child's ability to mobilize their resources, the analysis goes forward trying to depict how children navigate their way across the violent and challenging context in which they find themselves.

As discussed in Chapter Two, scholars have widely evidenced that the way to develop a more textured picture of children's life experiences, capabilities, and expressions of agency, is by involving and engaging them within the study process. The child must be considered as an active agent in society rather than a mere passive subject. Quite often, research affords relatively limited input from children (Kostenly, Ondoro & Wessells, 2014; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). As Ben-Arieh (2005) has pointed out, the issue of involving children

in the research has both a normative and methodological aspect. The first aspect is juridical in nature, since children are not presumed to have the same civil rights as ordinary citizens. In contrast, the second aspect concerns the voice of the subject, which "does not necessarily represent the truth more than any other perspective, but it is crucial for the analysis of the data" (2005, p.580). This aspect is connected to the powerful words of bell hook, quoted above, which have inspired the methodological and theoretical choice of this research.

The literature on the topic suggests that adopting participatory, child-centered, culturally-respectful, and non-imposing methodologies might reduce the risk of facing the ethical problems related to imbalanced powers relationships (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Participatory techniques have been utilized to both empower and actively engage children in the research process as it provides them with the space and opportunity to recount their stories and their points of view (Denov & Akesson, 2017). According to Sen (1999), allowing children to participate means giving them the possibility to freely make decisions concerning their own life. As a consequence, this reduces the asymmetry between adult researchers and children, which thereby helps to better uncover their strategies and investigate their agency. Therefore, only by actively promoting children's participation within the research processes we can adequately take into account their priorities, perceptions, values, and aspirations (Hart et al., 2014). Thus, these child-centered approaches help us to recognize their strengths, promote their self-efficacy and empowerment, and enhance their awareness within the broader environment. As Boyden and Mann (2005) noted:

> Research that ignores children's perspectives is unlikely to be able to predict the impact of exposure to adversity […]. When researchers anticipate in advance events and circumstances that they consider highly stressful, they could miss such important subtleties. Studies that disregard children's perspective risk resulting in misplaced interventions that do not address children's real problems or concerns and may even pose a threat to their self-esteem and self-efficacy. For adults to better understand children's problem and needs, they require children to explain and interpret their childhoods: children must be encouraged to provide real insight into their feelings and experiences. (Boyden & Mann, 2005, p.19).

In line with what has been said so far, recognizing children as competent agents and as the 'knowledge holders' of their own experiences has a crucial political significance (Barber, 2008; 2014; Veronese et al., 2017a). Participatory methodologies place the voices of children, as social actors, at the center of the research process in order to hear what they

have to say on their socio-spatial words and on the issues that affect their lives. (Barker & Weller, 2003). The participants' engagement enhances the sensitivity of the method to both community and cultural factors, which provides a way to understand how children define well-being and life satisfaction as well as how they manifest their own agency (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

Hence, by conceptualizing agency as a child's capacity to act and shape his or her own life, this second study was aimed at supporting the view of children as empowered young people, which necessitates a critical exploration of the ways they cope, resist, and act within their lived environment. Therefore, in this qualitative study we wanted to improve our understanding of children's agency through an in-depth analysis of their lived experiences in situations of military and political violence. More specifically, we investigated how children use their resources – personal, social or environmental ones – to actively maintain a positive function and subjective well-being despite their adverse contexts. Which resources do children have within their social and physical environment that help them to mobilize that agency in order to develop strategies for adjusting to the traumatic realities in which they live? And, mostly, which strategies – in terms of action, competences, and attitudes of agency – do children display? As discussed in Chapter 3, our study was informed by socio-ecological theories that acknowledge the impact of children's lives on micro, meso and macro factors within their environment (Johnson & West, 2018).

5.1 Detect children's agency by the power of the place

Thus, moving from our quantitative findings, this second study was developed in order to address this central question: how can we observe, and then detect and define, children's agency?

As previously discussed, contexts affected by political and military violence are characterized by a complex web of numerous challenges. Children express their competencies in different ways, which can not be easily depicted in such intricate settings. In accordance with Pell's paradigm of the everyday (introduced in Chapter Two), a crucial aid in addressing the issue of how to observe children's agency and how to depict the cultural and context-specific resources which allow individuals to act, comes from Stoecklin's theory (2018) of *situated agency*. As expounded upon in the previous chapter, Stockelin (2018) considers agency something that does not exist *per se*, but is instead obtained within a specific context. Thus, the context is the field through which agency can

be observed. Starting from this conceptualization, the participatory methods applied in this second part of the research was chosen in order to include the children's everyday physical and relational environment within the investigations. Spaces and places are also *medium and a container of action* (Tilley, 1994), and thus, perfect scenarios to observe and detect children's agency.

In the last two decades, we have seen a growing interest in the geographies of children (Hammad, 2011; Spencer, 2005; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Many academics have investigated children's use of spaces and the connection between the place and their identity, their well-being, and their quality of life (Akesson, 2014; Bell, 2002; Cresswell, 2004, 2014; Hammad, 2011). As widely acknowledged, places are more than physical landscapes, they are connected with culture, language, history, and memory (Cresswell, 2004, 2014). Therefore, including spatiality within our research enables us to understand how a child interprets and engages with their lived environment, which gives us access to their experiences and local knowledge. This is even more important in contexts of proactive conflict, where places are at the center of the contestation, such as Palestine. Places are not "inert containers" but are "politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions" (Rodman, 1992, p.641). In Palestine, this process is particularly exceptional: some roads are accessible only to Israeli settlers and cars have different colored license plates depending on the province. All of these are symbols of belonging and exclusion that the Israeli occupation uses to shape every corner of Palestinian children's lives (Akesson, 2014; 2016; Sousa, Kemp, & El-Zuhairi, 2019). In such a complex context, Hammad (2011, p.555) points out,

> [places] tend to be impregnated with deeply rooted meanings derived from individuals' everyday socio-spatial practices and emotional as well as political attachments to the land. […] To understand them and capture this complexity, one must be theoretically and methodologically attuned to their resident's 'lived' experiences and interpretations of those places.

Therefore, within a socio-ecological approach to children's experiences, by including an attention to the place it is possible to explore how the environment interacts with the diverse layers of a child's ecological systems (Ager, Boothby, & Bremer, 2009). Children's development and their ability to mobilize resources are shaped by all of these layers: individual, environmental, and the community ones. Therefore, the participatory method adopted in our study was a *place-based approach*, which was used to get access to the

evocative power of the place as a way to approach children's agency. Starting from the observation of how they participate and negotiate with their social and physical environment, we detected and identified the ways to engage in diverse acts to cope with and resist the violence of their lived environment.

5.2 The qualitative study

5.2.1 The research context

As mentioned, attention to the physical environment is especially relevant within the Palestinian context. The living conditions for children and families might be very different from cities to refugee camps, with different implications on their well-being. In fact, children's experiences might vastly differ between Gaza and the West Bank. Meanwhile, rural villages face their own distinct challenges, such as the encroaching separation wall, the seizure of land, and settler violence.

Therefore, as was the same with the quantitative part of our research, the study was conducted in five different sites within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in order to explore and detect the unique place-related experiences and suppressors within the different contexts. In the process, we were able to explain and give sense to the differences that emerged out of the quantitative study, while also exploring what caused these manifest differences throughout the five sites. Table 14 summarizes the different settings where the sampling was carried-out. These sites were selected to represent the different places that Palestinian children were living in and they were selected both for their environmental and occupation-related diversity (presented in Chapter 3). The aim was to observe how children understand, navigate, and react with their surrounding environment in various settings and with different degrees of territorial control and adversity (i.e. rural areas, urban areas, and refugee camps).

Table 14. Settings included in the study

	Area	*Site*	*Setting type*	*Security control*	*Civilian control*	*Children (%)*
West Bank	A	Nablus	City	Palestinian	Palestinian	21%
	A	Dheisheh	Refugee Camp	Palestinian	Palestinian	38%
	C	Fasayel	Village	Israeli	Israeli	19%
Gaza Strip	A	Gaza City	City	Palestinian	Palestinian	14%
	A	Jabalia	Refugee camp	Palestinian	Palestinian	8%

Note. Children (%) refers to the percentage of children living in a specific context.

5.2.2 Participants

The participants in this qualitative exploration were 75 children, all of whom were attending primary school. Moreover, all of them belonged to the Muslim religion. The children's ages ranged from 7 to 13 (M= 10.27; SD= 1.38), and included 51 females (68%) and 24 males (32%). Participants were chosen through convenience sampling: local community-based organizations from each site connected the research team with children and their families, asking who might be willing to participate in the study. Data was collected between April and December 2018.

Inclusion criteria were related to both age and not having been previously diagnosed with any physical or psychological disease. Basic demographics were collected, including gender, age, site of residence, education, and religious affiliation. Table 15 shows the distribution of the study sample, according to both site and gender. As described in the table, 15 children were from Nablus City (73% female, 27% male), 29 from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp (83% female, 17% male), 14 from Fasayel (64% female, 46% male), 6 from Gaza City (50% female, 50% male), and 11 from the Jabalia Refugee Camp (36% female, 64% male).

Table 15. Distribution of the study sample

Area	Site	Male	Female	Total
West Bank	Nablus	4	11	15
	Dheisheh camp	4	24	29
	Fasayel	5	9	14
Gaza Strip	Gaza City	3	3	6
	Jabalia camp	7	4	11
		24	51	75

All families were asked to sign a written informed consent and all of the participating children had the purpose of the research carefully explained to them. They were all free not to answer any of researcher's questions, to refuse to participate in any activity, or to withdraw at any moment. Participants were not rewarded for their participation in the study. In addition, all of the material used for the activities were decided upon each organization that helped us with the activities at the end of the work.

Once again, in line with the principle *no survey without service* (see Chapter 3), the activities were structured with the help of local expert counselors and aimed at providing children with a non-judgmental and safe space through which to express their emotions,

ideas, concerns, and perspective in an active way (Allden, Jones, Weissbecker, Wessells, Bolton, Betancourt, ... & Sumathipala, 2009). In addition, consistent with recommended and commonly used practices for conducting interviews in war-affected countries, and with the *don't harm principle* in mind, the local expert counselors collaborated with the team throughout each part of the research process in order to ensure that everything meets the local people's needs (Lopez, Figueroa, Connor, & Maliski, 2008; Wessells, 2017).

5.3. The study's methodology

5.3.1 Map me your world

As a first step, all children were asked to draw a map representing all significant places – both safe or unsafe – within their neighborhood on an A3 sized white paper. They were given three colors, which corresponded with the safety level perceived by the children: green to represent safe places, black for neutral ones, and red to represent the unsafe places (Blaut, Stea, Spencer, & Blades, 2003; Darbyshire et al., 2005).

Mapping has been widely considered a powerful research tool to explore and address how children think about and operate within space (Darbyshire et al., 2005). Research conducted across countries has shown that children as young as four already possesses *mapping abilities*, in that they are able to geographically distinguish and portray the various spaces in their lives (Akesson, 2014; Darbyshire et al., 2005). Thanks to their power in stimulating and supporting the narrative process, maps "have not only been used to decipher and geolocate stories, but to tell them as well" (Caquard, & Cartwright, 2014, p.101). In other words, mapping and drawing activities provide us with an insight into children's perceptions of their environment and on how they situate themselves within the diverse spheres of their lives, such as family, community, and school (Akesson, 2014). Moreover, the task helps to encourage the children's active participation by letting them freely express themselves.

The actual instructions were the following:

> 'Draw the map of your neighborhood (i.e., your city, your village, your camp). A map of the places that you know better. We would like to see in your map the areas that you like most, where you feel happy and safe when you go there, and also the place that you do not like, where you think it is dangerous to go, or where you feel bored or bad. Take your time to think about your city (village or camp), and you can start at the place you prefer. Do not worry if the places in your drawings are a bit different from the real locations. You can start using the black marker to draw the map. Then, with

> the green one, color the places, the buildings, or the spaces that you like, where you feel safe and where you feel happy to go. With the red marker, we ask you to color or mark the places that you do not like and avoid for some reason, or you think that is dangerous and unsafe for you to go.'

Subsequently, participants were individually asked to describe and explain their maps, so as to better understand how the places and spaces represented were either enhancing, or some cases suppressing, their agency. Asking the children for detailed explanations of their drawings is recommended in order to avoid both misinterpretations and imposed assumptions (Hammad, 2011). Moreover, supporting the children in their efforts to explain their drawings also provides them with the opportunity to express their views and experiences (Clark, 2004). As Boyden and Ennew (1997) clarified, visual research that fails to allow children to explain or interpret their work, "cannot be called participatory" and "will not likely be considered scientifically valid, and may in fact be unethical" (1997, p.116).

5.3.2 Now, bring me in it.

Upon completion of the drawing task (all 75 children participated), 40% of them (30 children in total: 7 from Nablus, 6 from Fasayel, 10 from the Dheisheh Camp, 3 from Gaza City, and 4 from the Jabalia Camp) were invited to continue the conversation during a walk around their neighborhood, while showing the research team the places where they move throughout their daily lives (Andreson, 2004, Carpiano, 2009). The remaining children (60%) did not participate due to previous commitments with their family, work, or school business, or because they simply did not want to take part in the following activity.

Consistent with what was mentioned above, this second step of the research was designed also to take the physical location into account (where agency can be observed) and, thus, to bring the interviews *into the places itself* (Hammad, 2011). As Anderson noticed (2004, p.255) "the role that place may play in influencing the knowledge produced during this process or how place could be harnessed to elicit information on social identity or power relationships, is often ignored.". Therefore, the activity consisted of asking the children to walk us (the research team) outdoors in order to enter their maps. The walks consisted of one child at a time leading the team on a tour of his/her neighborhood, both among the places drawn and beyond them. They were asked to bring us to all the places they wanted to, including where they spend their time or where they gather with friends. In addition, if they wanted they could lead us into all those places that they avoid, or those that they

consider dangerous[4]. During the walk, interviews were conducted using an *open-ended* format: the participants were provided with little direction regarding what to discuss and then left free to comment on whatever they wanted to. The areas of inquiry investigated included: descriptive information (e.g. describe the place that we are visiting), emotions (e.g. how do you feel in this place? why do you (dis)like it?), behavioral information (e.g. how do you spend your time here?), and relational information (e.g. do you go to this place alone? with which people do you share your time with here?).

This technique of *talking while walking* (Anderson, 2004) has been described as a *walk around* (Carpiano, 2009), and it has been specifically used to study the interactions and implications of place on people's general health and well-being (Carpiano, 2009). This method also provides us with access to children's knowledge, and it facilitates the observation of their everyday practices and competences within their environment. As underlined by Kusenbach (2003, p.463), one of the pioneers of this methodology,

> "When conducting go-alongs, fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their natural outings, and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects' stream of experiences and practices as they move through, and interact, with their physical and social environment".

Hence, the researcher accompanies the participants within their familiar environments, observing and asking questions throughout. In this way, the researcher can reach a deeper understanding of people's experiences within their environment and see how they act, react, and process their surroundings. As Carpiano noticed (2009), the investigator is thus able to observe "the interplay between structural conditions and individual agency for shaping action" (p.268). This technique has also emerged as an excellent way to elicit communication with children, thereby providing a more active setting for the interview process.

This technique perfectly suited our aims, providing us with the opportunity to observe the participants' everyday activities as well as their relationship with their favorite places in their natural milieu (Christensen & Prout, 2003). It allows us to witness how children engage with their environments, adding the exploration of their physical environment to our

[4] As presented in Chapter 3, the research team was composed by a two local researcher and one counselor. Their presence helped us to ensure that no harm could come to children as a result of participating in the research project and to ensure, day by day, the security of the outdoor activity sits. Moreover, the local counselor was well-known and trusted from the children. Therefore, children were facilitated to address to him/her for any difficulty encountered during the walk-around interviews.

investigation, which is crucial if we want to detect and observe children's agency. What do they identify as *neighborhood-based* resources? How do they get access to them and use them to both express their agency and enhance their overall life satisfaction? Moreover, exploring the children's perceived safe and unsafe places makes us reflect on the importance of places for children's health and how these places function as either sources or suppressors for their overall well-being. This technique also might provide us with the opportunity to observe how children actively engage in the creation of "safe" places in which they can freely act and mobilize resources (Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Sousa, in press.). Finally, it increases the engagement and participation of respondents, thereby minimizing the typical dynamics of unbalanced power that exist between the interviewer and interviewee (Carpiano, 2009).

All children reportedly enjoyed the process, which is fundamental considering that the reliability of our research has been strictly connected to the degree of freedom the participants enjoy in actively taking part in it (Kefalyew, 1996). The duration of the walk happened to be extremely variable: from a few minutes (one child wanted to stop after the first place) to more than two hours. Children decided both the route and the amount of time. In some places, they asked to stop, play, or rest. Moreover, all of the walks also included a tour of the child's house and relatives' houses, which lasted as long as four hours[5]. The guide-led tour seemed to drive a sense of validation and pride in the children. Some of them even assumed a real "guide posture" while giving the tour (Akesson, 2014).

Figure 11. Child-led tour in Nablus

[5] Taking our time in the house and accepting and enjoying traditional Palestinian hospitality was indeed necessary to give the family a chance to know us and see what we were actually doing. Moreover, it was particularly helpful to get insights and different perspectives on many issues concerning life in that environment.

The adopted methodology, constituted by several different techniques (mapmaking, interviews, and walk-alongs), allowed us to collect data from a variety of sources and, thus, develop a more holistic and nuanced picture of children's lived experiences. Moreover, as many have noticed, this combination of methodologies –including visual methods – is way of triangulating data and engaging children in the research process by grounding the discussion in their experiences, thereby making the research process more collaborative and participated (Dennis, Gaulocher, Carpiano & Brown, 2009; Hammad, 2011; Smith, Duncan, & Marshall, 2005). As Akesson (2014, p.75) stated:

> "Participants can indicate where experiences occurred (through maps), what experiences looked like (through drawings), and how experiences unfolded (through narrative). Combining maps, narratives, and drawings ensures that participants' lived experiences were not reduced to one aspect, and contributes to an understanding of how they interpret, understand, and navigate their environments."

Therefore, the combination of methods employed allowed us to reach a more comprehensive understanding of children's lives and well-being, particularly in the context of political violence, by avoiding overly-simplified, one-dimensional representations that might derive from one-method research design (Lowe, 2019). Moreover, in line with the socio-ecological framework, involving the participants in the research design is essential to obtain a unique perspective and to encourage their active engagement (Denov, Doucet & Kamara, 2012; Mitchell, 2011).

5.4 The data analysis

All the map narratives and *conversations in place* (Hammad, 2011) were video and audio recorded and the places shared by the children were all photographed. The interviews were conducted in Arabic by three local research assistants (two for the West Bank and one in Gaza) and then transcribed and translated into English by two professional translators, one from Gaza strip and one from Nablus city.

In order to analyze the variety of material and address the exploratory nature of the research questions, a thematic analysis was applied. With the help of the *Atlas.Ti 8.2.1*. qualitative data analysis software, 30 outdoor interviews were coded as well as 75 map narratives. To proceed with the coding and the exploration of emerging themes, a data-driven approach (Charmaz, 2006) was adopted because of its systematic but flexible

guidelines. Moreover, according to existing social scientific literature, the grounded theory is compatible with socio-ecological theories since it allows us to reach the meaning and significance that children attribute to their experience (Pettigrew, 2000). According to Charmaz (2011, p.359):

> "The constructivist version of grounded theory attends to context, positions, discourses, and meanings, and actions and thus can be used to advance understandings of how power, oppression, and inequities differentially affect individuals, groups and categories of people. Last, but extremely significant, grounded theory methods provide tools to reveal links between concrete experiences of suffering and social structure, culture, and social practices or policies."

Therefore, following Charmaz's (2006) instructions, narratives were subjected to a thematic analysis, conducted using a data-driven approach, which means that the process of coding the data is lead "without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg. 83).

The analytical procedure started during the research process: after each interview, a period of time was taken for a debriefing discussion with the research assistants. This first step was crucial to detect initial themes, which helped to direct and inform the following interviews. Subsequently – once back from the field – the material was read to gain a general sense of the interview. Based on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the analytical procedure consisted of several different steps. First, an *open coding* analysis of the narratives was made to identify, inductively, core thematic and conceptual themes. The coding process involved segmenting the narratives into *natural meaning units* (portions of the text), then highlighting them and labeling them using the Atlas.Ti. This process is defined as *open* since the researcher *stays open* to the many stimuli coming from the data and tries to observe and analyze all of the different meanings within the text. Then, the identified codes and categories were compared across different groups. During this process, similar codes were subsumed under more comprehensive labels and relationships within them were identified and established, thereby merging overlapping ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, Morehouse & Maykut, 2002). To create the labels – and then connect them by categories and organize them into levels – two different procedures were followed (in accordance with Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Barbour, 2008): *in vivo coding*, which consists of labeling strictly using participants' words and *a-priori coding*, which involves the creation of labels that refer to pre-existing categories rooted in

the literature itself. Once all the interviews were analyzed, we proceeded with the categorization: labels were compared, united, or likened to each other, and subsequently organized into categories and sub-categories. Moreover, the labels created from the children's words were connected with the ones from the existing literature.

In the following section, we will present this data in a narrative format, without cutting the narratives into codes and labels, in order to provide a more comprehensive and systematic description of the findings.

5.5 Results

The methodological technique adopted for the investigation aimed at detecting children's resourcefulness and agency, as well as their search for space places to spend time feeling protected and happy. In the meantime, we wanted to consider how children's agency might be suppressed, or *thinned,* and which factors play a role in this. Therefore, as the first step, from the analysis of children's maps, several themes were grouped around the places drawn by the participants: their homes, friends and relatives' houses, community spaces, outdoor areas, educational and recreational spaces, and holy sites (Figure 12).

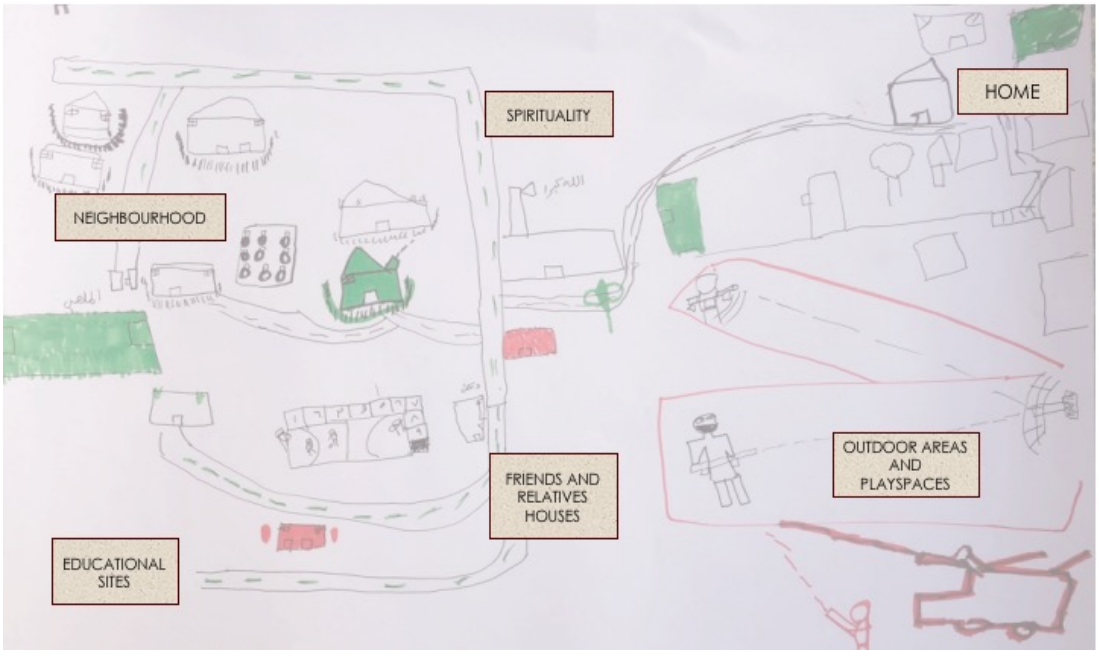


Figure 12. Recurrent places drawn by participants.

Then, adopting the concept of situated agency, all of these sites were analyzed and conceptualized as places where children's agency could be observed within the many levels

of a child's environment. Accordingly, the analysis process proceeded by *decomposing* these places and interrogating the children's narratives by asking: How do children live within these places? What is the protective (or risk) function of that specific place? Which factors can be identified as contributors to children's sense of well-being? Which aspects of their lived environment (e.g. social, cultural, or physical aspects) operate as sources for their agency and which ones suppress it? How do they express their agency within these places? How are we observing it in their social practices? And, thus, how is agency displayed in their everyday life?

Yet, as this chapter illustrates, this way of proceeding allowed us to identify a variety of aspects that were depicted by our participants as playing a significant role in enhancing their life satisfaction and well-being and, thus, in enabling them to mobilize and express their agency. More specifically, we were able to identify eight key dimensions related to children's well-being while also establishing their role as either an enhancer or suppressor of their own agency (Table 16).

Table 16. Dimensions of children's well-being and their role in enhancing or suppressing children's agency

Well-being dimension	**Sources of agency**	**Suppressors of agency**
Safety and Security	Feeling safe at home: allowed to sleep, play and feel happy Feeling safe in community spaces Feeling safe at school: allowed to learn	Feeling unsafe: negative emotions Feeling powerless: inhibiting normal activities Threatening environment: restrictions of movement
Social capital resources	Spending time with family and friends: enjoyment Perceiving family and friends' support Share feelings and thoughts with peers: manage stress and anxiety Support from community: taking care of each other	Community violence Lack of social capital resources
Experiencing freedom of mobility	Perceived freedom to go around, discover the city, and to regain control Walk and explore: getting to know your surroundings Being able to reach places	Feeling in cage: passivity Negative emotion: *I don't know any place* Gender differences: injustice
Place for children Recreational areas	Opportunities to have access to places dedicated for children Access to play-spaces Places to enjoy activities Enjoying natural spaces and green areas	Lack of places for children to play Gender difference access: injustice Lack of green areas, loss of beautiful places: sadness and negative emotions
Education	Sense of normalcy Gain competencies to improve oneself Hope and aspirations: bettering your future	No access to school: loneliness Lack of normalcy: perceived dangers
National identity and sense of belonging	Sense of belonging and pride Solidarity, less isolation	Feeling defeated
Religion and	Feeling solidarity	

spirituality	Shared values and goals Perceived strengths and hope	
Living environment, history and political identity	Understanding and meaning making process Reminders of collective history Sources of political socialization	No understanding: anxiety and negative emotions Injustice and powerlessness

Then, connected to these various dimensions described by the children in their physical and social environment, it was possible to identify the different strategies that children displayed in order to preserve or improve their access to those resources, and thus preserve and enhance their well-being.

In the next paragraphs, we will describe – and then discuss – each dimension as depicted from the children's perspective, either as an activator or as a suppressor of their agency. Subsequently, we will focus our attention on the different strategies displayed by children to negotiate with their adverse living conditions. In doing so, we will present a data-driven conceptual model of these multiple behaviors and strategies through which children manifest display their agency.

5.5.1 Overarching themes of children's agency

5.5.1.1 Safety and security

This first dimension refers to children's perception of safety and security within their physical and social environment. From the analysis of the maps – and related descriptions – children's depicted the presence of both safe (green) and unsafe (red) places. The interviews revealed the extent to which children were aware of the violence and the dangers pervading their everyday lives. Moreover, all of the maps reported aspects of their surroundings perceived as dangerous and threatening, where children described themselves as vulnerable to attack, injury, or arrest from the Israeli army.

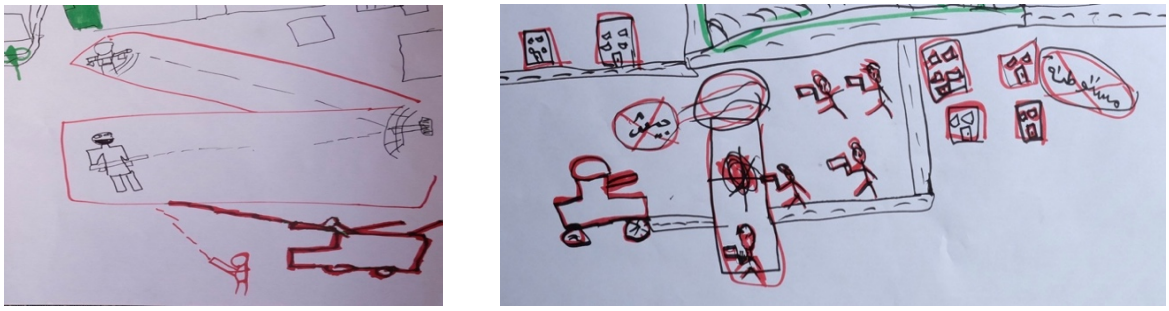


Figure 13 - 14. The ongoing presence of the Israeli army depicted respectively in Fasayel Village and Dheisheh Refugee Camp, both in the West Bank.

Most drawings revealed the terrifying and pervasive presence of the Israeli violence within children's lives and surroundings. For instance, M., an 11-year-old boy from Fasayel Village, drew two Israeli soldiers "*shooting the fire for training exercise"* in a closed military area that surrounds his village (Figure 13). Similarly, children represented settlers' houses, clashes, checkpoints, the siege of Gaza, and the separation wall in Bethlehem. All of these factors were representations of the permeating violence around them. While walking around, all of the participants brought us to at least one place which reminded them of, or alerted them to, the Israeli presence.

> "This street is the way they take to enter in the camp (Figure 14). Sometimes they come every night, sometimes once a week, but they always come. They enter with their big tank from this road, because it is the gate to enter in the camp. When they enter they shoot the fire to anyone who move in the dark. They use sound bomb and gas to make people fear." (Dheisheh Camp, 12 years old, male)

> "This place is very dangerous because every Friday people come here to protest and claim for their right. They come here peacefully to say to the world that they want to go back to their land and to ask the end of this closure they put on us. And each time, the army shoot the fire and bombs, they kill many people, children, women or men they don't make differences. Also if we don't have gun or weapons. This place is frightening; it is a place of death". (Gaza Strip, 11 years old, male)

The presence of an Israeli threat was not only depicted within outdoor areas. For children living in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp and the Fasayel Village (area C), this violence was perceived as permeating the private dimensions of their houses and schools. The idea that the army might suddenly enter within the private sphere of the home, harming the children's and their family, was depicted in many of the children's narrative. Some participants had drawn their home or school without marking it either in red or green, which they explained as being a consequence of the potential danger they experience inside these places. For example, H. from Fasayel village explains this choice of color saying:

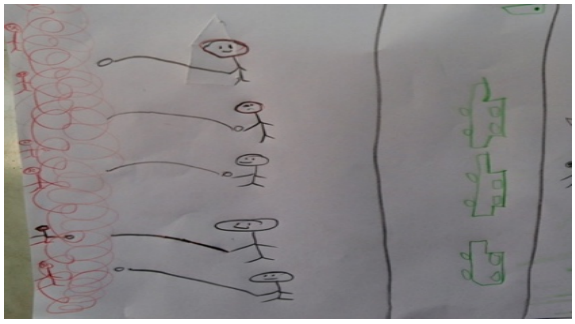
> "I love my house, I love it because I have my family there and all of us are here. But I did not color it because I don't feel I am totally safe in it. The occupation can enter here. They came few weeks ago to arrest my uncle, I was very scared they could take me or my father." (Fasayel, H, 10 years old, female)

While in Nablus, the Israeli occupation was never mentioned by the children in terms of an everyday presence within the city itself, but rather as a Palestinian-nation problem which they must reclaim their freedom from, whereas within Gaza the children referred to their

worries related to the possibility of a new war. Each place was described as both safe and potentially unsafe at the same time, due to the unpredictability of Israeli attack in which everything can become a target.

> "My school is safe, we can spend time here, but they bombed very close to here and so nobody could come here in that time. When they bomb, each place is dangerous." (Gaza Strip, M, 13 years old, female)

Moreover, the occupation forces were never mentioned or pictured within the Strip, but often represented close to the border (Figure 15, 16). None of our participants from Gaza reported ever having participated in the *Friday marches* (see Chapter 3), but all of them were aware of the situation and, thus, they pictured it as a very unsafe place.



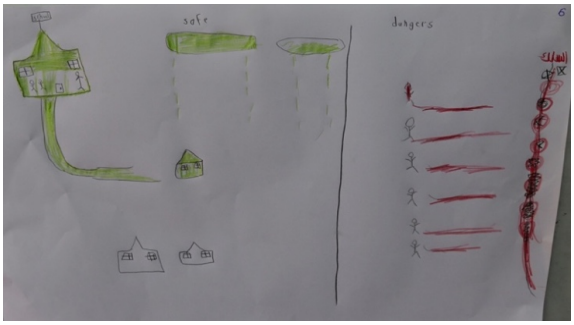


Figure 15-16. Both children represented the Israeli soldiers in red and being close to the barrier.

The Israeli occupation was not the only source of danger and insecurity perceived by children. In rural areas, participants reported feeling afraid of wild animals, such as snakes, hyenas, or scorpions. In addition, many places were marked in red due to the threat of community violence, which increases the danger within the outdoor environment. Children reported feeling scared of *evil people* who attack or rob in the street, unpleasant neighbors, or violent peers. Amongst the girls, outdoor areas were often perceived as lacking security due to the presence of men that make "comments in bad ways, offend and use against me very offensive words" (Nablus city, F, 12 years old, female).

Rubbish and dirtiness were also often marked as unsafe and unhealthy aspects of their living areas. For instance, most of the children in Dheisheh camp complained about the presence of garbage in the streets and even inside the school. Rubbish was often described as annoying due to the smell and its *ugliness*, but also as dangerous since it attracts animals.

> "Once it happened to my neighbor. He was playing here in the street and he was bit by a mouse. All the family was very worried, they brought him to the hospital. There

> are many diseases that you can get from mice! It is so dangerous to have all this rubbish in the camp" (Dheisheh camp, M, 11 years old, male)

All of these factors seem to act as significant deterrents of children's agency. Feeling unsafe, either outdoors or within the confines of their own homes, was described by the children as a source of negative emotion, with consequent sleep problems and distress. All of these factors were negatively impacting children's happiness and inhibiting the normal activities of their everyday life, such as going to school and studying.

> "I can't sleep well when I'm home. I can sleep better when I'm in my grandfather's house because he lives out from the camp, and I feel protected. In my house we are very close to this street, that is right near the gate that the army use to enter in the camp. And the roof of our building is high, this make it dangerous because they enter in the house to go to the roof. I feel bad when I'm so worried that I can not sleep. I feel tired and sad the day after and I cannot concentrate. Sometimes in the school I'm very tired, too tired to concentrate." (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, 8 years old, F, female).

Negative emotions, such as fear and sadness, were enabling a feeling of powerlessness within the children. Moreover, the children also identified the ways in which their threatening environment imposed numerous restrictions on their freedom of movement.

> "I'm very afraid of the animals there, I don't walk in that street because they are there and can attack me. This is very bad because my sister got married and she lives just at the end of this road, with her babies. I would love to go and spend time there, I'm very happy when I do it. Because of the animals, I can't go alone, I have to wait until someone is free to go. This makes me sad, I have to wait here, sit in the house and do nothing." (Fasayel, 8 years old, F, female).

Despite all of these adversities, most children have demonstrated an active engagement in the creation – or preservation – of their own safe places within these uncertain environments. They described the importance of perceiving safeness and protection in their houses, in spiritual places, or within educational sites. In their own words, they explained the importance of safety as the necessary characteristic to enjoy and feel satisfied with their lives. For example, perceived safeness within their own house allows them to sleep, feel the quietness, and thus, play and feel happy. Similarly, as M. clearly stated, feeling safe is necessary if "you want to learn in the school in a good way" (Dheisheh camp, 13 years old, M, female).

5.5.1.2 Social capital resources

In Palestine, people tend to maintain robust ties with their extended families, often sharing houses together or living nearby each other, which involves cooperation and the sharing of responsibilities (Harker, 2009; Akesson, 2014). This traditional habit helps significantly in providing children with opportunities to experience everyday interaction, socialization, and family security (Akesson, 2014). The children's maps were in fact studded with houses of relatives and friends, which were marked as safe landmarks within their neighborhoods.

Figure 17. J.'s map references her home, her school, and friends' and relative's houses where she plays and spends her time. She depicted all of the places that contribute to giving her a sense of safety and well-being. On the bottom right hand corner of the map, Jana drew her home and her cousins' houses. In the upper right hand corner, she labeled her best friend's house and her grandfather's house. On the left part of the map she depicted the association where she spends time with her friends, playing and learning during afternoons or summers.

Most of the places that children have drawn and where they brought us were defined for their social dimension. For example, when speaking about her house, a 10-year-old girl from the Jabalia Camp explained:

> "I love my house because is the place where my family is. My family is the most important thing for me to be happy. I love to spend time there because is the place where I can spend time with my family." (Jabalia camp, M, female, 10 years old).

Spending time with family and friends was evidenced as an important factor in enhancing their well-being and life satisfaction. Moreover, within the children's narratives, the value and importance of supportive relationships amongst their friends, peers, and families was widely highlighted and explicitly connected to their ability to better manage periods of distress. The children extensively described engaging in activities with their families (both nuclear and extended) and how this was contributing to their well-being and protection.

As M. indicated:

> "My family supports me a lot, they make me feel I can do a lot of stuff, they make me feel free. When we are together, we sit on the sofa, and my father tells us stories. Or I cook with my mother and in the night we all play together, with my little brother too. I'm very happy when is Friday and we use all day to travel somewhere beautiful. And most, they make me feel safe. They support but also they protect me. I don't feel afraid when my family is with me. If I am scared or something, I run back home and there I fell safeness and happiness again with them" (Jabalia camp, F, female, 11 years old).

In their narratives, the participants highlighted the centrality of friendship in their lives. Friend's houses and the routes to reach them always featured within their maps. Using the drawing as a departure point for discussion, an 11-year-old girl from the Dheisheh Camp described the importance of her friends' support in order to cope with and accept the violence of the occupation. As she explained,

> "Sometimes when something happen, after we see each other here in the association, we stay together and play. We also share with some closer friends why we are scared. Like when they came to take my uncle, my friend Jane helped me a lot to feel better. She explained me what happened to her family before and she made me feel better, more quiet and less scared. Have her like friend is very important for me." (Fasayel, H, female, 12 years old).

Sharing feelings and thoughts with peers emerged as a common strategy used by children in order to reduce their feeling of isolation and to find ways of foreseeing the different possible scenarios of their insecure environment. Regarding H.'s statement, being able to know what will happen when the soldiers come and make arrests, discovering the procedure and the subsequent 'steps', was crucial in helping her to manage her fear and anxiety. Together, children share their experiences and knowledge, which provides them with new and collective meaning to better interpret their complex environment. Therefore, positive peer relationships were acting as a source of resilience, which improves the children's overall well-being.

Finally, perceived support from community members was also mentioned as a crucial factor in reassuring children of their safety, despite their adverse environment. The children that described their environment as characterized by strong sentimental bonds between residents, who *take strong care of each other,* mentioned it as a crucial component of their

happiness. Children depicted small gestures of care as essential for their lives within these particular spaces.

For instance, during the tour, F. was very precise in the choice of the street to follow in the path, explaining:

> "To reach the old city I pass from here. The street is very dangerous but you have to cross it if you want to go there, cars drive very fast here. So I come here when I want to cross, because here people are very nice. They take care of me and they help me crossing the road. When I arrive, I come here to the tire shop and I ask him to help me to cross the road. I like this from my neighborhood, we take care of each other, we are not strangers. If I lose myself I can go there and find people who help me" (Nablus, female, 11 years old).

On the other hand, this connectedness with family and community was severely lacking in other contexts. For example, children living in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp often complained of not being able to perceive a sense of protection from their fellow community members. In fact, their families only agreed to let them move around by themselves if some relatives lived close by, as explained by a girl living in Dheisheh camp:

> "I wish my cousins to come back to like in the camp. When they were here, they were living here, in that house, you see? Now is empty because they moved outside the camp. I was happy when they were there because we were living all close and we could share a lot of time and play together. And my family was ok to make me come here, because they were there and they could take care of me. Now they are not here anymore, we don't have other relatives within the camp, and so my mother does not want me to go, we don't know the others"

As our research assistant explained, in the Dheisheh Camp all the residents come from different villages. Even if they express some pride in belonging to the camp, they were originally from different parts of historical Palestine. Therefore, they do not perceive of themselves as a community unit. "United yes, in the struggle to go back to our villages, but we are not a community." Not being able to perceive this unity and the subsequent mistrust that it creates amongst community members manifested itself as a significant risk factor for children's well-being, limiting their movement and their capacity for action.

5.5.1.3 *Experiencing freedom of mobility*

Strictly connected to the first two dimensions, but mentioned so frequently that it deserves its own label, is the opportunity for participants to *move freely* within their environment. The importance of this freedom – or alternatively the prohibition – to physically explore

their surroundings clearly emerged as an important factor from both the children's maps and the subsequent walking tours. Children's narratives repeatedly revealed their happiness in being able to go around and explore their environment, by themselves or with friends, without the need for adult supervisions. This ability – or the lack thereof – was manifested in the maps. For example, some drawings included different streets and paths, showing that some children were able to move around and that they had an awareness of the appropriate roads to reach their favorite places (Figure 18,19).

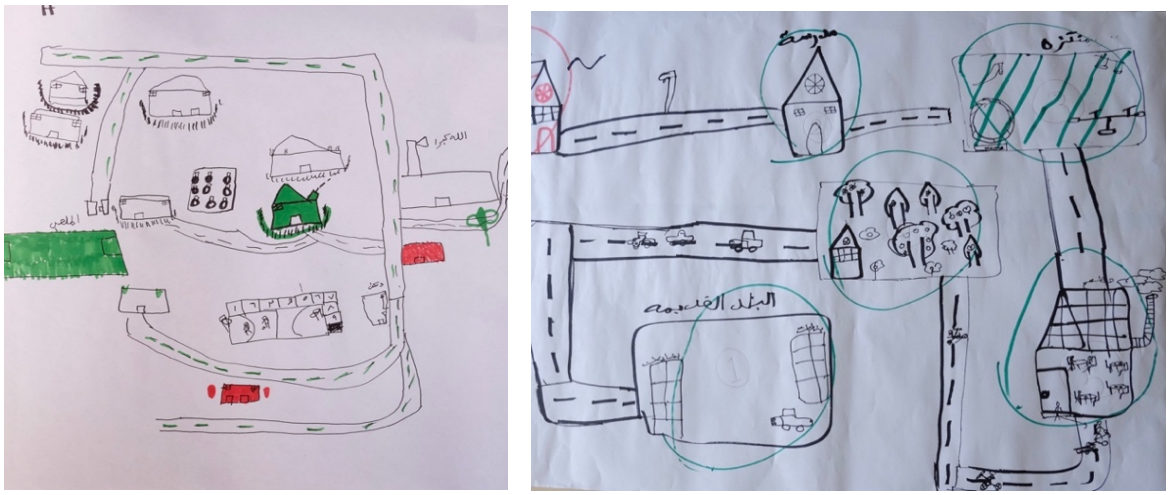


Figure 18-19. Maps from Fasayel Village and Nablus City. The one of the left is a boy of 12 years old and he pictured – in green –his home, the football field, and the streets he recognized as safe and, thus, that he walks through everyday. The second one is a drawing from a 13-year-old girl from Nablus City. She was able to represent all the streets that connect her favorite places.

On the other hand, many maps offered a more schematic collection of places the children liked or activities that they took part in, without any precise or accurate geographical connection between them (Figure 20-21).

Figure 20-21. Maps from Gaza City and the Dheisheh Refugee Camp. The first one is drawn by an 11-year-old boy from the Gaza Strip. On the left he drew his home and on the right of the map the places where he goes. He doesn't know how to reach the mosque from the school, all places are far from each other. His father drives him there by car and back home. The path on the upper side of the paper is red since "the gym where I go is very far and so I lose a lot of time in the street". Similarly, in the second map, an 8-year-old girl represented a collection of her favorite places and the one she dislikes, without any connection between them.

Children explained the absence of streets saying that adults usually drove them since the places are very far (mostly in the Gaza Strip) or because they are very unsafe. In our sample, gender, more than age, emerged as a major influence on the freedom experienced by children. Girls complained about the difference between the degree of freedom they experienced compared to the freedom given to boys. While boys could spend their time enjoying outdoor activities, girls reported spending much more time at home after school.

> "I would like to go out, make a lot of stuff, but I have to stay in the house because my family doesn't want me to go out by myself. When was younger I could more. Now no. So I don't know a lot of place outside, usually after school I come back home and I play inside the house. (Dheisheh Camp, 12 years old, J, female).

> "I feel very bad about this. I have to stay in the house while my brothers, also if they are younger, they can go out. This is because I'm a girl and my family is more protective with me. People in the street could be bad at me or complain to my family because it is not nice for a girl to walk alone. I hate this because so I have to stay in the house when my brothers can walk around the city and be happy" (Nablus, 13 years old, M, female).

The restrictions imposed on their ability to explore their environment denies them access to many resources, reducing the children's capacity to engage and develop his or her own independent survival strategies. For example, using the drawing as a departure point for her discussion, J., an 11-year-old living in the Dheisheh Camp, explained why there are no streets in her map:

> - "Tell me more about your picture. What is it this?"
> - "This is my home, and this is my friend's home. I love to go there and spend time with her. We play a lot but we study too. Her house is beautiful and their family is very nice with me, we are like sister."
> - "Can you walk to her house?"
> - "No, I cannot. This is bad. Before we had another house, and I was very close to my aunt and my friend, this one. It was so close that I could walk two minutes to get there, and my father was ok. But now we are more far and my family says it is not safe and right [appropriate] for me to go there alone, walking. This is very bad because I can not spend time with her and so I'm sad. I'm happier when I can spend time with friends and play. I feel depressed and lonely in the house"
> - "And this green building?"
> - "This is the association. I love to spend my time, but also there I cannot go by my self. The way to go is not very safe, because there are some houses of bad people and they will say bad things to me."

As explained by the child, the perception of the danger within her surrounding environment severely reduces her possibility to access to many of the places she loves, impinging upon her ability to enjoy her time with her friends. Moreover, from her explanation, it emerged that walking alone within the camp for her was *not right*, or not considered appropriate, since she is a girl. In a more explicit way, this aspect was outlined by M. (13 years old) who, while walking in the street, stopped to show us a group of children playing outdoors in the camp.

> "Do you see? You can see boys in the street, playing outdoor, here. But you don't see any girl. Where are now the girls? They are in the house, because it is not nice for our culture to see girls going around in the street. Only boys can have this freedom".

If within both the cities and villages the restrictions on movement seem to be independent from the children's demographic characteristics and are mostly related to the lack of safety within the environment or the significant distances between places, in both of the refugee camps the situation was perceived differently. Girls complained of having to face more gender hierarchies that limited their freedom, which underlines a feeling of injustice caused by evident inequalities.

5.5.1.4 *Recreational areas: places for children*

Recreational sites, associations, parks, and natural areas were depicted in all of the maps and were described as crucial aspects in the children's lives since they provided them with the opportunity for play (Figure 22-23).

Figure 22-23. H. and L., from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp. Both of them depicted in their maps the importance of places dedicated for children, such as the association and the gardens in Jericho. H., describing her drawing, explained to us that she drew two parks in her map. There is only one park close to the camp (there isn't a park within the camp) but she drew it two times because she loves it so much.

The participants strongly stressed the importance of having access to places where they can – as S. stated – *enjoy their childhood before growing up* and where they feel free to play safely.

> "This is my friend's house we always come here to play and have fun. I come to play at day because this street is scary at night. I come here at night but a little bit because I afraid of this way since it is dark at night and there is no light. Sometimes I come in the afternoon when it is day. I come here alone. My classmate come to take me from home. We play here and we feel happy. We want to live our childhood before getting grew, we want to go wherever we want and play a lot! When we play we feel joy." (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, S, 9 years old, female).

> "I love the association because it is a place for us. We can come here, and feel free to be together, play and be happy. We don't have to worry that you will break something, or that there are dangers. This place is for us". (Nablus, H, 11 years old, male)

From their drawings and narratives, the crucial role that the living environment has on children's well-being and life satisfaction vividly emerged. Children described being satisfied and happy as long as their cities, villages, or camps, were able to support their needs, providing them with spaces where they can enjoy leisure activity freely and safely: *we are children and we love to play* (Gaza City, 12 years old, female). Play-spaces were described as places where the children could go to reduce negative emotions and restore feelings of happiness.

There were several different factors described as being associated with the children's access to these play-spaces, including the effective presence of the place within the context of age and gender. For instance, children in Nablus highlighted, with satisfaction, the existence of *a green and beautiful* park close to the city that is within walking distance of them.

Figure 24-25. Play-spaces for children in Nablus: a trampoline in the Old City and a park with seesaws.

In contrast, participants living in Gaza complained about the long distance they have to cover in order to access any green space or amusement park.

> "I love here, I'm so happy we are here. This place makes you feel happy, safe and quiet. You feel your soul is relaxed. Because this place is for children, everything is for us here. The horses, the games. A place where we can enjoy to be child and play. I feel so well here; I can forget about all things negative". (Jabalia Camp, 11 years old, male)

> "This amusement park is a dream. I'm so happy we have a place like this in Gaza. So, when I am sad, maybe because I feel we are defeated seeing on TV the Friday clashes, I ask my family to bring me here. This place makes you remember you don't have to think always to these things who are big and sad. You can come here, get amuse, be happy. We are children and we love to play. In this place you feel safe." (Gaza City, R, 12 years old).

In villages and refugee camps, the access to play-spaces was described as being much more complex. For example, in both the Dheisheh and Jabalia refugee camps, children expressed with negative emotions the fact that *there is no park in the camp*. In both settings, the participants expressed a feeling of disappointment in regards to the lack of green spaces dedicated to them within their living areas. While children from Gaza usually described the sea as an acceptable substitute – *we are lucky because the sea is beautiful, you can go in the sand and play there* – the ones living in Dheisheh suffered from a lack of natural areas and parks. Most of them drew a big park near Jericho, approximately 19 miles away.

Other restrictions to the children's access of play-places were once again related to gender. As discussed in the previous section, boys were much more frequently permitted to play outdoors in comparison with girls. As H. explained, girls' activities were more constrained due to heightened parental concerns for their daughters' safety.

> "My family doesn't want me to play outside. They let me play only in the house. They don't want me to walk outside even to go to my friend's house. They are worried because it can be dangerous since the soldiers are very close. I love this part of the school because it is a place that my family trust, just beside the school, so I don't have to walk much. I love to have the opportunity to have this place, it gives me happiness". (Fasayel, H, 9 years old, female)

In both refugee camps, girls perceived of their opportunities for enjoying their life as deeply unequal in comparison with those of their male friends.

> "This is a play-station point and an Internet point. Inside here you have computers and you can see videos and play games. This is the only place in the camp and it

> could be nice to come here and play. But, do you see? They are all boys. A girl cannot come here, they will start to look at her in very bad ways" (Dheisheh camp, M, 13 years old, female)

They explained to us that playing or entering in such places was not expressly forbidden, but the threat of familial shame was enough to restrict their access (in accord with Marshall, 2015). Most areas were therefore not technically forbidden, but were not considered to be private enough for girls to enjoy them.

> "This is the school. On the left you can see the male part, and on the right the female one. Both of them have this big yard here. The one of boys now is full of them playing football, the one of the girl is empty. Where are the girls? In the house. Their brothers or father would say that is not appropriate to stay here and play, people can see them. So they are in the house. This is so unfair, they have so much more opportunities to play, train, be happy and feel strong. We are restricted, it is like they close many doors for us". (Dheisheh Camp, M, 13 years old, female)

This injustice was perceived by the female participants with a strong sense of rage and hopelessness. Girls reporting having less opportunities than boys to play, undertake activities, and enjoy their time.

5.5.1.5 *Education*

The maps and interviews illustrated the extent to which school plays a pivotal role in the children's lives. All of the participants included their schools within their tour, underlining the many different aspects in which school contributes to their life satisfaction and well-being. It emerged as an essential aspect of their lives. The narratives indicated many ways in which school provides them with opportunities for improving their capabilities and competencies, thereby enabling a better future for them.

> "I marked the school with the green color. Not only because the school is a safe place for me, where I can go and feel comfortable playing and chatting with my friends. When there is war, we cannot go to the school and this is so sad. I loved the moment when we were able to be back in the school again, it meant that the war was really over. But also I believe that school is important because they teach me valuable things. I learn many things that will improve my life allowing me to find a good job, help my family and be happy". (Gaza, J, 11 years old, male)

In their work Winthrop and Kirk (2008) argue that school can support and shape children's well-being through four main ways: it allows for a *return to normalcy*, it acts as a

mechanism of socialization, it provides a *nurturing environment* and, finally, it plays a pivotal role in enhancing *coping and hoping* (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Re-reading J.'s aforementioned words, we find evidence for each one of these positive aspects. First, being able to access the school offered Jane an essential routine amidst her otherwise unpredictable environment and it also signified that the war was over. In this sense, the mere attendance to school was playing a crucial part in providing her with a sense of normalcy and stableness (Apfel & Simon, 2000). Secondly, this routine was providing her with the opportunity of interacting with friends and peers. These encounters help children in developing appropriate social behaviors, building positive relationships, and also coping better with difficult circumstances (Arafat & Bootbhy, 2003). Third, the school was perceived as a safe place for her, thus providing a protective and nurturing environment, amidst the chaos of the occupation (Nicolai, 2004). Finally, it was described as an essential place of learning that is foundational to improving her future prospects. In these adverse settings, the school might actually assist children in dealing with difficult circumstances, providing them with necessary tools, positive aspirations, and goals for the future (Apfel & Simon, 2000).

Therefore, school was broadly conceptualized as a safe place where children get the opportunity to gain skills and increase their competencies, with the ultimate aim of improving their future. Moreover, education was referred to as a way of establishing stability and economic security for their families. Ten-year-old A. from Fasayel explained that children in his school *study and learn there in order to become what they want in the future*.

> "I want to go to school because I want to work and be successful. School is important for me for this, I can get education and so I can be strong and successful if I study. Education gives you power, because you can do a lot of stuff and you can decide what after that. I want to find a good job so I can provide for my family and buy for my mother a house where she can have more space".

5.5.1.6 *National identity and sense of belonging*

As introduced in the previous dimension, despite their long history of dispossession and the lack of international recognition for the State, children always referred to themselves as proudly Palestinian. This was even more evident amongst participants from refugee camps: children who had never seen their inherited homes still identified themselves with these places, describing them with memories passed down through generations. For example, in

the association that exists in center of the Dheisheh Camp, there is a map of historic Palestine, with all of the names of the resident's original villages prior to 1948. All thirty of the participants in the camp were able to happily locate *the real village* where they came from on the map, even if most of their parents were actually born within the camp itself. M., a thirteen-year-old girl living in the camp, brought us to the association where she used to go every day to dance *dabka*. In front of the association, there is a big key, which – as she explained – is in remembrance of all the people who lost their homes in 1948. This symbol represents the key to the homes from which they were displaced. "Some people still hold it" showing their attachment to their homes and their hope for a future where they will be able to go back.

Figure 26-27. The door of Aida Refugee camp in Bethlehem and the key of Jericho, with an engraving which says *we will return*. It is a symbol for the Palestinian refugee, claiming their rights to come back to their lands and houses. As Atallah (2017, p.380) highlights, "keys are frequently passed down from generation "as reminders of their right to have a history and to maintain a remembered presence as indigenous peoples".

The children's love for their country and the importance of feeling Palestinian was evidenced within their maps by the many Palestinian flags drawn (Figure 28, 29, 30). The raising of the flag was mentioned with pride, empowerment, and self-esteem (in accordance with Qouta, Punamaki & Sarraj, 2005).

Figure 28-29-30. Palestinian flags drawn by H. in Fasayel, M. in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, and J. in Gaza.

In describing their pictures, H. positioned the Palestinian flag above the school explaining that every morning in the school they raise it while singing the national anthem. She described with positive emotions that morning tradition since it provides her with a feeling of pride and validation. In her own words, raising the flag makes her feel "good and proud. I feel love and power, this is our country, and we have our flag.". Similarly, children reported feelings of happiness and comfort in seeing the Palestinian flag, demonstrating a strong attachment to their country and a powerful sense of belonging to a shared national identity.

> "I drew the Palestinian flag because the place I love more is my country. I belong here. Whatever happens here I will never leave, even if millions of people occupied it I will not leave. Our people have always been here, and I belong, like them, here. I feel strong and good within my people and my country". (Dheisheh refugee camp, male, 10 years old)

Similarly, when she agrees to participate in the second step of the activity, H., a nine-year-old from Fasayel Village, asked us if she could change her clothes before taking the team on the tour. When she came back, she was wearing traditional Palestinian garments. She described the motivation for her choice by explaining her love for her country and all the things in her country:

> "I wanted to wear this because this is a symbol of Palestine. I like all people in Palestine and I feel safe and I belong here. I think we should remember our country always. When I wear this I feel Palestinian and this makes me feel strong and good. Thus, if I have to be your guide, I want to be a good guide, and represent my country in a good way. In all its aspects".

With these words she also confirmed the validity of this interviewing technique and the way in which the requested task made her feel empowered. However, this feeling of belonging, when related to the perception of being on the "defeated" side of the conflict, was also generating feelings of powerlessness, loss of hope, and passivity, which suppresses the child's well-being and will for action. For instance, an eight-year-old boy standing in the green area, only a few miles away from the siege in Gaza, expressed his sense of frustration about the demonstrations taking place every Friday:

> "I don't like to be here. I feel sad because I see that there is Israel and we are Palestinian, divided from our capital and our country. When I'm here and I see the barrier, I feel I have lost because we have lost lands and our country is already stolen. Like this I feel that we are defeated and that there is nothing that we can do".

Similarly, some children perceived the lack of a national identity due to the absence of cohesion and solidarity amongst the Arab population, both within the national border as well as outside of it.

> "I feel so sad about our country and Jerusalem. Once I went there and I saw many Arabs buying stuff from Israeli shops. This made me feel so sad because it is like we are not one country, they are not Palestinian. They looe their memories and identity. Arabs also don't care about Jerusalem; they don't help us. We are alone and we are losing alone." (Dheisheh camp, 11 years old, female).

5.5.1.7 *Religion and spirituality*

Religion and spirituality are central aspects in the lives of many people around the world. Narrating their maps, children often included mosques or religious sites, defining them as sources of love, quietness, and identity.

> "This here is the mosque. I love to go to this mosque, it is very close to my house. When I'm there, I feel peace. Mosque is a quite place, where silence prevails. I go there to find quietness and to feel peace with myself. I love that feeling. People are very nice inside there. When something bothers me or when I have scary thoughts, I go there to feel relaxed, safe and loved by my God". (Fasayel, L, 11 years old, female).

> "I like to come here and pray. I think is very important to do it in order to remember who you are. Because we are Muslims we should pray. When I pray, I feel I am close to God. Religion is everything for me. We get close to God through religion and then we enter paradise. We behave good following religion and we keep to be good people." (Gaza City, M, 10 years old, male)

As expressed in their words, religion appears to be essential in giving them strength, protection, and positive aspirations for the future. The children develop a religious identity as a part of a wider collective one, which provides them with a sense of belonging and solidarity. Moreover, children described the mosques as a place where they can be in contact with the community and where they learn about important morals, values, and social behaviors. Eleven-year-old M., from Nablus, indicated the mosque as a place where he learns and get in touch with his religion.

> "I love my religion, Islam. I like to go to the mosque because there I hear people reciting Al-Quran with beautiful sounds. I like to learn about my religion, because we are Muslims and Al-Quran because it teaches you beautiful values. To be clean,

> polite, to wash your hand, to help people. It helps you to be a nice person. When you are angry or sad about something and you think to do something not nice, you remember what Quran told you, and you choose a different way".

Similarly, H., from Gaza City, described her relationship with the mosque close to her school in the following terms:

> "I believe that with our religion, through Islam, people love each other. And Islam equals between people rich and poor. Rich people can give charity to poor ones. Also, Islam teaches us to respect ourselves and respect others and not to say bad words. I believe we should come here in the mosque, to learn of all these. These will help us to be together, united and don't fight between us."

M,'s words, like other children in our study, challenge the contemporary Western idea of children who endorse Islamic idioms being potentially radical and violent (see Chapter Two). Instead, our findings corroborate other studies that have suggested that religiosity carries with it narratives of redemption, forgiveness, and freedom, rather than revenge and violence (Veronese et al., 2017; Habashi, 2011; 2013a). All of the children identified religion and religious practices as a fundamental part of their life, helping them to feel safety, happiness, and also restoring a sense of hope and control over their life.

The importance of God and religion was also mentioned concerning the children's aspirations for the future as well as feelings of freedom. For example, an 11-year-old boy from Gaza explained that when he thinks about the occupation and the siege, he prays to "God to ask that they get out from our land." Similarly, in the face of violent attacks from both settlers and the Israeli army, children were turning to God "to free our Palestine and get a better life without occupation", "to take the occupation away" or "to make the occupation disappear.

Therefore, feeling connected to God and belonging to a religious community helps children by providing a sense of safety, meaning, as well as shared values and practices. Children demonstrated a propensity to actively ask God for protection and to "use" the mosque – or religious practices – as a method of feeling better and restoring their well-being.

> "I come here to pray. Pray makes me feel closer to God and God gives me happiness and he takes away my fears and my sadness. I feel better after" (Jabalia Refugee Camp, H, 8 years old, female).

5.5.1.8 *Living environment shaped by the occupation: meanings, history and political identity*

As Corner has claimed (1999, p.277), the experience of space cannot be separated from the events that happen inside of it. In fact, after observing children's everyday practices within their environment, it is apparent that their understanding of the political situation in which they live is reflected through their spatial awareness and their ability to interpret the signs and symbols of the occupation that surround them. For example, most of the descriptions of the outdoor areas during children's guided tours were deeply rooted in episodes related to the occupation, violence, and a general struggle against oppression.

> "Here is where the confrontations happen. Now you see it quite, but if you come here on Friday you will see a totally different place. We [Palestinians] come here to protest and to say that we want this siege to open and the occupation to arrive to an end. We just want to be free. They [the Israelis] are there not to listen but to shoot to us, also if we are unarmed. They don't want to give us our land because they live in our houses now and they don't want to go away." (Jabalia Camp, 10 years old, male)

During the guided tour of her neighborhood, S., a 9-year-old girl from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, depicted herself as overwhelmed by negative emotions, such as sorrow and pain, concerning the situation in her camp due to the Israeli violence:

> "They come sometimes every night. I can't sleep, I can't feel happy here because of this, I feel I can't go on with them coming so much. I don't understand, we are already refugees, what do they want from us? Where do they want us to go? I don't understand why they come, what they want. I just stay in my room, terrified. Why they don't go in other country? Why are they mad with us? Me and my family just wait the opportunity to go away from here".

On the other hand, the narrative of M., a 13-year-old girl from the same camp, was very different. During her tour, as in those of many others, an historical and political understanding and awareness vividly emerged. M. brought us to see the separation wall between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Figure 31-32. Separation wall in Bethlehem.

She illustrated the meaning and the function of the wall, explaining how it restricts her from accessing her beloved capital, which is *on our land, not theirs*.

> - "This is the Apartheid wall. It separates us from Jerusalem and it ruined our life in Palestine. It separates us, it has no other function. The Israeli had built it because they want Jerusalem to be just for them. We have more than one wall in Palestine. They took our land, it has been 70 years now, but we still have hope and the more we grow up the more our hope increases, we will return to our lands. We are a lot and we will succeed together. From that road, 10 minutes and you are in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is our direction"
> - "Have you ever been there?"
> - "Few times, but it is not safe because we need a permission which is difficult to have. And there are a lot of soldiers, they make a lot of checkpoints and they control us. It bothers you a lot, think if someone control you in your own country? This is our land, not theirs. And this is the map of Palestine. It demonstrates that this wall divided Palestine, and if it does not exist we would go to Jerusalem easily".

Thus, being able to make sense to the surrounding violence they experienced was evidently significant in reducing negative emotions, such as the feeling of passivity, and in enhancing their well-being. Indeed, while S.'s narrative was full of negative feelings and unanswered questions, it also showed her striving to make sense of what is happening around her. M.'s words also revealed a deep insight into the political situation of her country and the invasive nature of the Israeli occupation. Like M., most of the participants in our study revealed an acute ability to 'read' and assess the meaning to the many symbols of the occupation that are sprinkled throughout the spaces of their everyday lives. Moreover, the children demonstrated an ability to utilize these symbols as reminders of their collective history of struggle for freedom.

> "Going around here, if you pay attention, you can see many photos as these ones. These pictures are here to teach us and remind us that these people died in order to protect us and our country." (Abed, Nablus, 11 years old).

> "I like to come in this place because these chairs have names of the cities, the original cities which now are taken by Israel. A lot of people in Gaza were coming from that cities and here they can come to remember that. This is important for us children, here I learnt that Israel took our country and cities. Coming here remember us that it is our right to ask for our cities back, since they have stolen them to the original owners." (Jabalia camp, 12 years old, female)

5.5.2 Children's ways to display agency

As explained within the previous introduction, connected to the above-mentioned resources – or risks factors – identified by the children in their surrounding context, it was possible to identify and observe the different strategies that our participants displayed in order to protect themselves, which enhances their well-being and improves their satisfaction with their own lives. How do children describe or act their agency through their everyday practices?

5.5.2.1 Actively employ social resources

As evidenced, the children's maps were studded with houses of relatives and friends, evidencing the relevance of social support for children everyday life, happiness and well-being. Moreover, observing children's social practices amongst their family, friends, and community members, it was evident that social resources provide them with a sense of certainty and safety, through which they can mobilize resources and develop a sense of their own agency. Therefore, concerning the dimension related to social support (*social capital resources)*, children's agency might be seen as a reflection of the active 'usage' of this resource in order to ask for help and protection. Friends, family, and community members were mentioned within the narratives as the necessary support in order to be able to both act and feel better. For example, S., a 9-year-old girl living in Nablus, explained us how she is able to reach her desired destination by asking her friend to support and protect her:

> "Sometimes I have to pass through this neighborhood which I am afraid of. I'm scared and I ask my friend to walk with me. She is older and she knows people in that areas, so she can help me. In this way I don't have to wait until Friday to go there with my family but I can go when I want asking her to walk with me"

Similarly, other examples came from A. living in the Dheisheh Camp or from L. in Jabalia:

> "This is my grandfather house, I love to come here, I fell joy and happiness here. I'm very happy and pride of me when I reach this house and spend time with them. But I cannot come a lot because my parents prevent me to go since in this area there are boys who hit me. I want to come here for me, so I run to my grandpa and I ask him to come down and protect me. He is not angry about that, because he knows that even if I am a boy I can ask for help, they are a lot and I am alone, so he helps me" (Dheisheh Camp, 9 years old).

> "The teachers help me to solve my problems. When I fight or get upset or something happen, I don't like to sit and see these bad things happen to me. I stand up and I go to talk to Miss Eman [the teacher] and she helps me telling me what to do and she makes me understand what happened. When I can not solve the issue with her, I go to the social specialist. When I try to solve by myself, if I cannot forgive them I bit them. So asking their help is better for me and them" (Jabalia Camp, 11 years old).

Children did not show passivity when confronting the limitations imposed upon them by the difficult environment in which they live. Instead, they revealed a strong tendency of employing their social resources in order to continue with their activities and take control of their lives. Finally, in accordance with Levey and colleagues' (2018) findings (discussed in Chapter 3), the participants manifested their agency in the act of taking care of others:

> "I help my mother; I go to shop what she needs. It makes me happy to see how much I can help and contribute. I feel powerful when I gain money so I can contribute and make my part to make her happy" (Nablus, 10 years old, male)

> "I feel good, happy and power when I feel that I'm also taking care of others as they take care of me. I take care of them, we keep holding each other hands and I feel better feeling all this love. I feel I have a role in my family too" (Gaza city, 11 years old, female)

In the same way in which social and family support contributed to the children's ability to act, perceiving of themselves as playing a role within their family's or community's well-being and happiness was strongly underlined by the participants. Being able to contribute to the economy of the family – with either economic or emotional support – was described as a powerful source of positive emotions, pride, and happiness, giving the participants a reason to take action rather than remain as passive agents.

5.5.2.2 Challenge movement restrictions

Within the identified dimensions of children agency – acting as source or suppressor – we have discussed the importance revealed from the participants to have the opportunity to *move freely* within their environment. This freedom – or alternatively the prohibition – to physically explore their surroundings clearly emerged as an important factor from the children's narratives. Both boys and girls strongly asserted their need in being able to go around and explore their environment, by themselves or with friends, without the need for adult supervisions. They reported feelings of both happiness and powerfulness when they are able to go somewhere alone or show us their mapping abilities, which is connected to their knowledge of their physical surroundings.

Hence, their agency – in regards to this aspect – was strongly reflected in the fact that such adverse living conditions were not passively accepted by the children. They displayed and mentioned many different ways in which they try to challenge these imposed limitations, thereby regaining control over their environment and reducing feelings of helplessness and isolation.

> "This is the street I can do to go to the mosque by myself. I colored it in green because it is safe and I can do it. Here where there is this red building, that is the clinic, I draw two roads. This one in red, but it is not always dangerous. Only when the soldiers come. From this place I can stop and check, because it is high but also hidden. If they are coming, I can reach my destination taking this second road, that the soldiers don't know and so it is safe. I'm not scared from them. I don't want them to be able to lock me in the house due to the fear. I know this place better than them, so I can change street and go where I want". (Fasayel, M, male, 11 years old).

> "This is Al-Qarion neighborhood. I like this part very much, there are very nice places where they make dessert and there are many good games in the neighborhood. I feel happy here. I am lucky that some relatives live here, so I could use their houses to explore this part in a nice way, if something scares me I can run back there. I feel well, powerful and happy when I'm walking here alone and I feel I can do it." (Nablus, L, female, 11 years old).

Moreover, female participants complained of having to face more gender hierarchies that limited their freedom, which underlines a feeling of injustice caused by evident inequalities. Girls powerfully affirmed their willingness to change these cultural norms that were depriving them of their freedom, displaying a strong sense of agency in the process. As M. (13 years old, Dheisheh Camp) argued, "women should work to free ourselves from these rules which are limiting women's mobility and thus their potential".

In other words, the children demonstrated an ability to mobilize different resources in order maintain the possibility of moving around both freely and safely. Most of them were using both social and physical aspects of their environments, such as shops or friend's and relatives' houses as secure bases from which they can explore the surrounding environment from. Having these strategies for gaining a sense of security and a feeling of safety was mentioned as the foundation for their overall well-being and life satisfaction. It enables a more complete engagement with their life, which allows them to carry out that which they either want or need to accomplish.

5.5.2.3 Reclaiming for play-space

As previously discussed, participants described being satisfied and happy as long as their cities, villages, or camps, were able to support their needs, providing them with spaces where they can enjoy leisure activity freely and safely. Play-spaces were described as places where the children could go to reduce negative emotions and restore feelings of happiness.

Regardless of gender differences or context issues, all of the children strongly emphasized the lack of places specifically dedicated to them, which they described as a crucial challenge to their well-being and overall happiness. On the other hand, they did not complain about it passively. Most of them reported different strategies that they had developed to improve the quality of their free time and ideas to solve this issue. For instance, some participants reported putting all of their efforts into persuading relatives to 'open' their gardens to allow children to have a place to play or into convincing their family to let them go to the association on Sundays, which is an opportunity to meet with friends and play in secure environment. Other participants described to us the manual work they undertook to create spaces of play *where there was previously nothing*. As M. explained, in Fasayel they had no playground, thus:

> "We were playing between people and cars. This is annoying and dangerous, you cannot play well and feel comfortable. So an idea sprung to our minds to make a playground away from people and cars. We asked help and four adults guys made the playground in about four days. I helped them. We cleaned it, but it cost us. It was very hard but the results it is so good; you see? Now we have a playground. We came to a consensus that we will made it as playground. Then we came here we removed a lot of stones. We brought axe to ease us the work. We waited for the rain. It rained. We kept playing so it became flat. It could be hard to clean the area from the stones, but no, we had fun. It was like we were playing. The game was to throw stones far away and in the same time we were cleaning the area." (Fasayel, 12 years old, male).

Similarly, girls expressed, out loud, the need to create new places of play that would include special or protected outdoor areas specifically for them. Children's agency was also reflected in the ways in which they did not accept the unfair rules of access, suggesting many alternative solutions, which is a demonstration of their active role.

> - "This is so annoying; I think this is the main problem of the camp"
> - "Do you want to leave the camp when you will grow up?"
> - "No I don't want to leave the camp; I want to change it. I want to build a place where girls can play when they want, so they don't have to stay in the house. Playing is good for us, for our mood and for our minds. I think girls should have the same opportunities than boys. We should raise our voices and said what we need." (Dheisheh camp, M, 13 years old, female).

5.5.2.4 Receiving an education and work hard

All of the participants included their schools within their tour, underlining the many different aspects in which school contributes to their life satisfaction and well-being. It emerged as an essential aspect of their lives. Moreover, the narratives described above indicated many ways in which school provides them with opportunities for improving their capabilities and competencies, thereby enabling a better future for them. Children explicitly connected the opportunity to get an education and learn skills with the hope for a better future.

Despite the different adversities faced in the various settings, all of the participants described their willingness to attend school and *work hard* in order to improve their personal situation, help their family, and even to try to solve some of their country's problems. For instance, in Gaza, many children revealed that their desired future profession was to be either a doctor, engineer, or builder, in order to work on the problems related to a lack of water, electricity, and displacement caused by the occupation and blockade. Similarly, girls highlighted the importance of being educated as a way to improve women's situation within their country. As M. explained:

> "I like the school, education is very important for me. For me also as a girl. School is important for women; they can get chance. In this community man is everything, women should become everything. Women should take some of the power that men have, the women don't have rights, with education they can improve their right. Education is important for the women because they can have the chance to change her condition, to take her places. In the future I want to be a police woman because I want to take my place and send the men away. And also to make the place safer

> and more justice, because police is not fair to our society." (Dheisheh camp, 13 years old).

Considering school as a potential source of agency, children mentioned it as a way to face and resist the multiple barriers of life under occupation. For instance, many children referred to school as a *ticket out* of Palestine (Akesson, 2014). For example, one twelve-year-old from Gaza described her determination to go to school and study as a means of developing the necessary skills to build a future for herself outside of Palestine.

> "I go to school everyday and I study a lot because life is very hard in Gaza. My grandpa says that since many years the situation is not improving. The opposite of improving. Thus, they always taught me that studying, learning foreign languages and developing competencies might help me to go outside from here. To find another place to live, better than this one" (Gaza city, M, 12 years old, female).

If on the one hand education was perceived as a means of getting away and building a better future elsewhere, on the other hand several children referred to education as a method of resisting the occupation and fighting for their rights. Many participants – especially in the Fasayel and Dheisheh refugee camps – referred to education as a powerful tool against Israeli oppression. "They don't want us to be educated," explained a thirteen-year-old boy from the Dheisheh Camp, "but if we learn stuff we can understand more the situation. Education is a strong tool for us to resist the Israelis and claim for our rights". Children evidenced a deep awareness concerning the complexity of the conflict surrounding them, as well as the need to develop competencies and mobilize resources in order to fight back. Similarly, in Fasayel, L. showed us the room in the school where she attended her favorite lessons: English and Arabic.

> "It's very important for us to study and learn both. Firstly, Arabic is important because is our culture and our languages. We are Palestinian. The occupation wants to take our lands, but also our tradition and identity. We have to study our culture and origins, to make them be inside us so they will not be able to take them away. And we have to learn English, because it is the language of the foreign people. Like you. We need to be able to talk to you, to describe the situation in our village. So we can ask help to the people of the world if we learn how to talk to you". (13 years old, female).

Similarly, M. explained that the association for her is crucial since it helps her to cultivate her Palestinian identity:

> "I come here to improve my skills in *dabka*. This makes me feel powerful and pride because *dabka* is resistance. We don't only resist by stones, but also cultivating our traditions and heritage. They want to expel us and cancel our tradition. We express our identity and with this we express also our existence".

Therefore, her motivation to exercise and improve her *dabka*[6] level is to keep Palestinian culture and identity alive. The children displayed and revealed their agency through their willingness to continue their education, which they conceptualized as a way to both develop competencies and keep Palestinian heritage alive, despite destructive attempts by the Israeli occupation to suppress it.

5.5.2.5 Personal strategies to protect yourself

As previously described, the interviews revealed the extent to which children were aware of the violence and the dangers pervading their everyday lives. Participants reported different aspects of their surroundings perceived as dangerous and threatening, that were negatively impacting their happiness and inhibiting the normal activities of their everyday life, such as going to school and studying. However, despite all of these adversities, most children have demonstrated an active engagement in the creation – or preservation – of their own safe places within these uncertain environments. Their attitudes of agency were strongly reflected in their own determination to cope with their environment in order to feel secure *enough* to maintain their everyday activities and oppose the limitations imposed by fear. They described different personal strategies that they adopt in order to reach this safety.

The most common strategy adopted by the children could be termed as an *avoidance strategy* since they described their willingness to take a distance and avoid all circumstances considered potentially dangerous. The majority of them said they preferred to avoid activities, places, or feelings that reminded them of previous traumatic experiences.

> "Here, I don't like here because I'm afraid, there are people that are not good and they can hurt you or kidnap you. Once when I was walking here some boys have beaten me. I'm not strong enough to beat them back to protect me, so I avoid this place. That's the way I deal with this, I go far away to protect my self. I feel better when I avoid the areas and I'm away" (Nablus, 10 years old, J, Male).

> "I don't like when boys play with gun, saying a group is the occupier and the other Palestinian. I don't like these games; they remind me about how much the Israeli are bad with us. I always avoid it because today you play, tomorrow it can be true this game. (Nablus, 9 years old, male)

[6] A traditional Palestinian popular dance

They described strategies for avoidance such as talking to friends, covering their ears, or listening to music.

> "I sleep in my room and my room overlooks the street. I open the window and look at them [Israeli army] then I close it quickly then I put things in my ear so I cannot hear them and I can go back to bed. I'm very afraid of them but if I don't hear the sounds I feel better, because when I can sleep after in the day I fell rest and happier." (Dheisheh camp, K, female, 7 years old).

It is important to highlight the fact that these *avoidance strategies* that clearly recall the so-called avoidance symptoms are distinct due to their positive connotation. Within a context of political and military violence, which characterizes present-day Palestine, the danger experienced by the children is not relegated to the past, but instead represents an ongoing and persistent threat. As notably mentioned by the young boy (10 years old) from Nablus, *today you play, tomorrow it can be true.* Therefore, avoidance might work for them as a non-pathological – but adaptive – response to an environmental threat that exists for them in the present (Diamond, Lipstiz, & Hoffman, 2013). The children demonstrated an awareness of the danger around them and they have developed powerful strategies of protecting themselves in order to restore their ability to sleep, feel safer, and thus, improve their overall well-being.

A second strategy that the children described as a method of protecting themselves from adverse experiences and negative emotions was to engage in activities in order to either distract themselves or dispel negative emotions. For instance, M., a 13 years old girl from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, showed us a spot in the street during her tour where, only a couple of months' prior, the Israeli army killed a young guy during a night invasion.

> "When I'm very sad because I see like this place, where Malek died and it reminds me to very sad memories, I have a notebook where I write everything in it. When I feel hurt or sad, I write. Writing makes me feel better, I take emotions out and I put them in the notebook. I feel relief after, I feel lighter."

Moreover, activities such as playing and reading were frequently mentioned as personal strategies of confronting adversities and restoring positive emotions.

> "When I'm very sad I feel that the only thing I can think about is the people who died, I go to play. I find a place to play in order to forget my sad memories and

> thoughts. This is very good for me I feel better after" (Gaza Strip, F, female, 9 years old).
>
> "Reading is very important to me, sometimes when I'm sad I go to the park and I read. Being inside stories I found in the books makes me happy, it is beautiful for me. I can forget where I am or why I'm sad and be part of those stories. This makes me feel better, I think we should have more access to books" (Nablus, F, female, 12 years old).

This dimension of play and engagement in leisure activities appears to help the children to perceive a sense of self-control in the face on the ongoing violence that they experience.

Then, while complaining about the violence of the occupation and detailing their strategies of self-protection, children typically invoked God's power and strength. For example, an 11-year-old boy from Gaza explained that when he thinks about the occupation and the siege, he prays to "God to ask that they get out from our land." Similarly, in the face of violent attacks from both settlers and the Israeli army, children were turning to God "to free our Palestine and get a better life without occupation", "to take the occupation away" or "to make the occupation disappear. Therefore, as previously stated, religion is one of the most powerful resources mobilized to combat oppression. Feeling connected to God and belonging to a religious community helps children by providing a sense of safety, meaning, as well as shared values and practices. Children demonstrated a propensity to actively ask God for protection and to "use" the mosque – or religious practices – as a method of feeling better and restoring their well-being.

> "When I'm sad, I don't sit and just be sad. This will not help me in feel better. I know that when I'm in the mosque I'm never sad. So, I come here to pray. Pray makes me feel closer to God and God gives me happiness and he takes away my fears and my sadness. I feel better after" (Jabalia Refugee Camp, H, 8 years old, female).
>
> "Sometimes I cannot sleep because I am afraid that the soldier will enter or because I made a nightmare. I tell to my parents and I ask them to read Al Quran for me. Sometimes they read it before I go to bed so I don't get afraid. Hence, I feel asleep. Quran helps me to feel better, and safer. Reading it together makes me feel safe and restored" (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, J, 11 years old, female).

Finally, some participants described having learned of different ways to – somehow – 'co-exist' with the occupation, even taking "advantage" of it. For example, many children confided with us that sometimes when they arrive late at school because they do not want to get out of bed, they use "a new checkpoint" or "an army control" as an excuse. Similarly,

all throughout the West Bank, children understood that in close proximity to the settlements there is always a good Internet connection:

> "This place is scary because the settlement is right there. Do you see it? There where there are those trees. Trees like this are of the Israeli. Only they have those trees here. I hate them, but sometimes I come here because from there you can find the Internet. We cannot have Internet cable here, but we can come here and use theirs, watch videos on the phone and have fun" (Fasayel, A, male, 12 years old).

Similarly, a young boy from the Fasayel Village brought us very close to the close military zone where the Israeli soldiers go to train and exercise. He explained to us that while they exercise, they shoot a lot. Despite the fear and bother caused by the sound of the shooting, M. described it as an opportunity for him to *make good money and be happy*, often spending the money earned to play with video games.

> "I know them, they come a lot so I know how they do, when they come to make the training here. They shot a lot. So I sit far away, here, that is safe and I wait for them to finish and go away. When they leave, I go from here there and I collect the empty bullets. I collect a lot of them so I can sell the iron and make money to buy things to fell happy and play play-station. So yes, it is scary, and bad when they come to shot, but after I can make good money and happiness from that". (M, 12 years old).

Hence, their agency is reflected in the fact that such terrifying and adverse living conditions are not passively accepted and suffered by they children, but instead they have developed their own ways to act upon them and even benefit from them. These different strategies demonstrate how children attempt to regain control of their environment and their lives, despite the pervasive and ongoing political and military violence.

5.5.2.6 Meaning-making process and political agency

As widely discussed above, being make sense to the surrounding violence they experienced was a significant aspect of the children's ability to mobilize resources, reduce the feeling of passivity, and enhance their well-being. Children's narratives different ways in which the children were actively engaged in making sense of their own situations by harnessing their environmental and social resources. The children displayed a variety of ways in which they negotiate, adapt, and process the ongoing presence of the military occupation that pervades their lives. Their agency – concerning this point – was strongly reflected in the fact that such violent experiences and adverse living conditions were not enough to stop them from

finding creative strategies to survive and imagine a better future. For example, the children repeatedly demonstrated an ability to use their political awareness to find their own ways of both protecting themselves and acting upon their surroundings in order to enhance their well-being, which amounts to a refusal to accept the ongoing situation of the occupation. From the children's words, we identified two main ways in which the children were facing, adapting, understanding, and interpreting their environment, as well as developing strategies to better cope with it.

I understand and thus I know what to avoid and how to protect my self

Children displayed an active engagement in trying to make sense and adapt to the complexity of the situation surrounding them. In other words, being able to understand what is going on around them emerged as a vital need for the children, even, and especially, if the situation proved itself to be dangerous. "How can I protect myself if I don't understand from what should I stay away?" commented A., an 11-year-old boy from Fasayel. During his tour, he led us in front of a group of houses that were just a few minutes walking distance from his school, explaining to us that those houses were lived in by settlers that sometimes come to attack their village.

> "I go to ask my family when I feel I need to understand something. I ask them: what is going on? Why today I don't have to go there? Sometimes they say: don't think about it, you are a child. I get angry then. I want to understand what is going on. And so now, they explain it to me, what the Israeli want, why and about the power that they have. They explain me why is dangerous to go there. I did not know before that Israeli were living there, I though those houses were for Arabs. Now I understand, now I know why you have to be careful or stay far away." (Fasayel, 11 years old, male)

Family and significant others proved to have a pivotal role in helping the children to understand, interpret, process, and ultimately overcome their difficult life experiences. Similarly, in Nablus, J. brought us to her grandfather's home, which is where she would go when she needed to ask for information about the situation around her.

> "When I want to understand something I come here and I ask to my grandpa. He is old and he lived many years, so he knows a lot. It is so important to me to have him, in order to understand what is happening in my city. I feel anxious if I don't understand what is going on. Like yesterday, why there were so many Israeli so close to the Old City? I was worried they wanted to take the city like in the past. My grandfather explained to me about Yusef Tomb and why in the day of Yusef we must avoid that part of the city. I like this way, he talks to me like I can understand.

> And when I do, I feel better, this helps me to feel less scared" (Nablus, 13 years old, female).

Both of them highlighted the importance of being able to make sense of their dangerous and unpredictable environment in order to deal with negative emotions such as fear and anxiety. Moreover, they both complained when they were treated as though they were unable to understand, thereby manifesting their agency in their active attempts to acquire information about their situation and to read and adapt to their harsh contexts. These are all strategies they deploy to minimize their own fears and protect themselves against the uncertainty and chaos of their situation. Within Gaza, the 'security' situation is slightly different. Children in Gaza do not face the everyday presence of soldiers or settlers but have to cope with the constant and terrifying threat of a possible new war. 11-year-old children living in Gaza have already lived through three different attacks (2008, 2012, 2014), and there is not much that you can do to protect yourself during the bombing. As a result, what emerged amongst the children interviewed in Gaza was the importance of their awareness and socio-political understanding in order to feel and perceive a sense of safety. Children did not talk about the actual practices of self-protection (e.g. avoiding something), but rather the different creative ways they and their family have adopted to find security. For instance, a young girl living in a Gaza Strip explained:

> "After the last war, we changed house. We were living very close to the school and the Israeli once entered right in that street, so it was very dangerous. Then my family told me we were moving house and coming to the city center and that they said the house was big because they bought a floor not for us but to rent to foreigners. At the beginning I was angry and sad. Why do we have to live with people we don't know? I want to live with my family and relatives. Then my father explained me that this way is safer. If they will bomb again, they will not bomb where there are foreigners, because they don't want the world to know what they do. So having foreigners in the house makes the house safer. I was not angry anymore, I was very happy to understand this and to feel my family finds good way to be safe. And now, I also practice my English every day with them." (Gaza City, 12 years old, female).

Thus, being able to make sense of negative experiences seems to have a strong moderating effect that reduces their levels of anxiety, insecurity, and depression, and therefore increases the child's overall well-being.

I understand the history of my country, which is our right and our struggle to resist

The children explained that an awareness of their country's historical and political situation provided them with explanations for why they – as a member of the Palestinian community – are experiencing these hardships. From their narratives, it has often emerged that a political education (both formal and informal) provides children with a framework through which to understand the meaning of their complex surroundings. For instance, while guiding us throughout his camp, M. explained what he learns through the political and occupation symbols present in the spaces of his everyday life:

> "I think it is important to have this writing around our walls. In the camp, on the apartheid wall. The maps, the sentences people writes, the photos of our people who died. Yes, it is sad to go around and see all this, you see this and then you think about the occupier. But they [Israeli] are here anyway, also if you don't want to think about it. I think these writing and photos are important for me because they teach me things about the history of my country, the things that happened here, why they happen. They make me remember and this is important so we children we don't forget and we remember our rights, our history and we feel strong and not defeated if we remember our past" (Dheisheh camp, 11 years old, male).

As previously stated, civic and political involvement has been shown to have an important protective role in children's health and well-being when living in conflicted-affected areas (Barber, 2008; Punamaki, 1996; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese et al., 2018). This involvement provides children with ideological categories and notions that are crucial for making sense of their surrounding world. As M. explains, having an understanding of the cultural and historical past of his country instills in him a sense of connectedness with his country and as well as a commitment for the future, thereby giving him with a feeling of purpose and self-efficacy. Researchers have demonstrated that a lack of purpose – or a lack of meaning – might lead to negative outcomes in children by increasing their feeling of passivity, depression, and powerlessness when confronting certain situations (Damon, Menon, & Cotton-Bronk, 2003; Wexler et al., 2009). Therefore, being able to perceive a larger purpose within a shared community is vital for sustaining their well-being and resilience, providing children with possible strategies for action (Punamaki, 1996).

Similarly, while walking through a big street close to the wall, another girl from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp focused our attention on the many small marbles that where scattered everywhere on the floor, explaining:

> "Here, do you see these small marbles on the ground? This is because here a lot of confrontation happens. Why here? Because on the other side of the wall there is

> Jerusalem, with Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock. This is why they do all this. You feel sad and defeated when you see the wall. But our Quran says that we should join together and protect them. If we do this, we will be a lot, fight back for our holy places, with all the Muslim in the world. We will free our Palestine" (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, female, Jana, 14 years old).

Hence, within the children's narratives, collective and shared meanings – obtained through ideology, religiosity, and political involvement – were helping them to confront feelings of isolation and powerlessness, providing them with the strength and courage to resist the oppression and negotiate hardships. As Nguyen-Gillham and colleagues argue (2008, p.295), *being politically involved is a way of life* for Palestinian youth.

> "I'm not afraid from soldiers. Because they want to terrify us, so why should I fear them? They have weapons and we have stones. They took our land and we are defending and taking it back. In the future we might have lots of fair people and we can free our Palestine. Now people come here, they come to draw on it and express their sadness and how much Palestine is important. They write their sorrow on the wall and about Jerusalem, about how much is important. More people come, more people will want to free our Palestine". (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, female, 13 years old).

As evidenced by this girl's words, she depicted herself as a part of a larger political struggle. Her understanding and internalization of Palestinian history has framed her engagement in the fight for national liberation, which gives something to feel apart of – a common purpose. In summary, children proved to be able to locate themselves – thanks to the social and physical resources within their environment – in an historical and political context, which allows them to identify themselves within a collective struggle and, thus, play an active role in reaching that purpose, which is crucial for withstanding the hardships they face.

5.6 Discussion: a conceptual model of children's agency

Having or perceiving of their own agency – intended as the capacity to exert some sort of control over their own life and their surrounding physical and social environment – was delineated as a crucial component of children's well-being and life satisfaction within the context of the ongoing conflict. More specifically, we identified eight dimensions related to children's well-being, all of which played a role as either an enhancer or suppressor of their agency, that demonstrate the importance of moving across individual, family, community,

and societal levels when examining life in war-torn contexts. In addition, connected to the resources identified by the children in their surrounding context, we were able to observe the different strategies that children displayed in order to protect those dimensions who were identified as essential for their well-being and life satisfaction.

In Figure 33, we present a conceptual model of the multiple dimensions of children's well-being that were discernible in our interview and of the many strategies and practices that they exert in order to preserve or improve their well-being and life satisfaction.

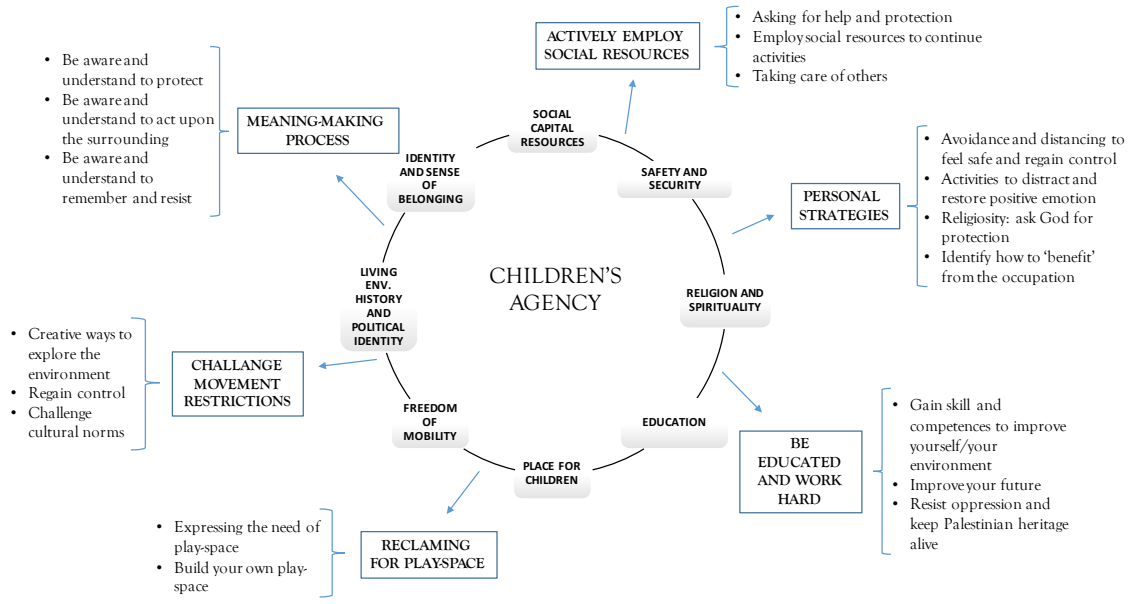


Figure 33. Data-driven model of multiple dimensions of Palestinian children's well-being and their agentic strategies to preserve it.

The model visually highlights the crucial interconnection between, on the one hand, children's strategies and practices of agency (i.e., actively employing social resources; challenging movement restrictions; receiving an education; personal strategies; reclaiming play-spaces; meaning-making processes and political engagement) and, on the other hand, the multiple ecologies implied in promoting – or suppressing – their ability to mobilize resources to improve their own well-being.

Therefore, we proceed by illustrating and discussing our results through the usage of the conceptual model, thereby integrating the multiple ecologies implied in promoting or suppressing children's agency with the practices and strategies mobilized by the children in order to improve their well-being and life satisfaction.

***Safety, security and personal strategies*.** Unsurprisingly, the importance of feeling safe and secure within one's surrounding environment emerged as an important dimension in a large proportion of the interviews. Amongst social science scholars, it is widely acknowledged that security and safety has a significant influence on a child's quality of life (Cummings et al., 2013; McNeely et al., 2014; Qouta, Punamäki, & Sarraj, 2008; Williamson & Robinson, 2006;). Political violence and armed conflict challenges the children's belief of the world as a safe place, which actively compromises their psychological and physical well-being (Laor & Wolmer, 2003). In our study, all of the participants reported experiencing either physical threats, danger, or a general feeling of vulnerability to attacks both from the Israeli army as well as community violence (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Rabaia et al., 2014). Moreover, the environment was widely perceived as unhealthy (due to the unhygienic conditions) or unpredictable, enhancing feelings of fear, sadness, and distress (Giacaman et al., 2007; Haj-Yahia, 2008). Likewise, a common perception of a lack of safe places was mentioned as sabotaging their everyday lives, eliciting negative emotions and imposing restrictions on their freedom of movement (Akesson, 2014; Khamis, 2015; Rabaia et al., 2014). Therefore, children mentioned security as a crucial aspect of their well-being, describing it as a necessary prerequisite to being able to fully engage with, and enjoy, their lives. In other words, an important interconnection between their agency and security emerged through our research. Accordingly, the children were often actively engaged in developing their own strategies in order to feel secure *enough* to keep on with their favorite activities and actively oppose and transcend the limitations imposed upon them by fear. These included behaviors of 'adaptive' avoidance to protect themselves, survive, and restore their well-being (Diamond et al., 2011), engagement in leisure activities to express and control their emotions and reduce anxiety (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Veronese, Castiglioni, & Said, 2010; Veronese et al., 2018), seeking God's protection to regain a sense of control and safety (Wessells & Strang, 2008), and the development of strategies to both manage and get some sort of 'benefit' from the constant presence of the occupation (such as 'stealing' Wi-Fi). Therefore, despite the pervasive sense of insecurity and uncertainty, children were determined to live a 'normal' life within their abnormal living contexts*: we are children and we want to play* (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). These different strategies demonstrate how they attempt to regain control of their environment and their lives, despite the pervasive and ongoing political and military violence.

Social capital resources and the employment of those resources. The support from family, friends, and community members was also mentioned as a critical factor in ensuring children's protection and enabling their well-being. It is well acknowledged that high levels of *social capital resources* (Mowbray, Wolley, Grogan-Kaylor, Gant, Gilster & Shanks, 2007) within family, peer groups, and the community have an essential effect on people's well-being. These resources refer to the promotive and protective influences that grow out of the social relationships between children and their environment (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Veronese, Fiore, Castiglioni, & Natour, 2014). As evidenced from the literature on the topic, a positive association exists between social support and physical and mental health, indicating that a person's well-being is inextricably tied to a person's relationships (Cohen, 2004; Qouta, Punamäki, & El Sarraj, 2005). In fact, a higher level of social support in children exposed to political violence has been associated with a reduced risk of internalizing emotional problems (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). Following Cohen's definition (2001, p.676), this dimension refers "to a social network's provision of psychological and material resources intended to benefit an individual's capacity to cope with stress," which is a common phenomenon that emerged from the children's narrative. Most of the places that children have drawn and where they led us were defined for their social dimension.

Hence, in accordance with a previous study in Palestine, our findings confirmed that friends and family play a pivotal role in providing children with a sense of protection and emotional support (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). Participants described their social resources as a crucial factor in developing an enhanced ability to cope with adverse circumstances. Children especially stressed the importance of spending time with friends and family to experience emotional support, which helps to manage the negative impacts of their circumstances (Barber, 2001; Veronese et al., 2018). It was also revealed that peer relations are crucial in mitigating the negative effects of the violence the children experienced, since they help to effectively reduce feelings of isolation and they also improve their ability to cope with the overall insecurity of their environment (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). In addition, parents, relatives, and community members were also seen as sources of protection and emotional security in the face of political violence (Qouta et al., 2007; Sousa, 2013). Feeling connected to, and thus protected by, their neighborhood community provides the children with a secure base, sustaining their relationships with both people and the place itself and enabling them to act autonomously within their environment (Akesson, 2014; Qouta,

Punamäki, & Sarraj, 2008). Children's agency was strongly reflected by their persistent attempts to 'use' these social resources to actively ask for help and protection in order to continue with their regular activities, despite the dangers encountered. Moreover, being able to contribute to the economy of the family – with either either economic or emotional support – was described as a powerful source of positive emotions, pride, and happiness, giving the participants a reason to take action rather than remain as passive agents (Levey et al., 2018).

Freedom of mobility and challenge of movement restrictions. All of the participants highlighted the importance of being able to freely move around their environment. In the context of political and military violence, children's ability to move around in outdoor areas is strictly limited (Akesson, 2014; Hammad, 2011). Their access to spaces and places are usually controlled by caregivers – who tend to protect them – or is limited by the structural violence of the Israeli occupation (Akesson, 2014). In accordance with Fattore and colleagues (2008), these restrictions placed on children's independent mobility might bring about a variety of consequences, such as feelings of isolation, passivity and depression. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that, as a precondition to feeling happy and enjoying their lives despite the adverse settings, children mentioned the need to autonomously explore around their environment and to feel free from constrains. Restrictions on their mobility – which was an especially common complaint amongst the female participants – were denying them access to various resources, effectively reducing their ability of develop their own independent strategies of coping and survival, and to benefit from relational support. Lidén's research (2003) in a suburban neighborhood of Norway revealed that the differences in how children move around their neighborhood communities were linked to a complex set of factors, such as age, ethnicity, family relations, and cultural values. In our sample, gender, more than age, emerged as a major influence on the freedom experienced by children[7]. Girls complained of having to face more gender hierarchies that limited their freedom, which underlines a feeling of injustice caused by evident inequalities. This finding was not surprising, giving the gendering of roles within Palestinian society (Marshall, 2015; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). As Chatty discussed (2009, p.330), "within the Palestinian society family codes of honor operate in such a way as to make discrimination and physical and emotional violence against girls more pronounced than against boys. A girl's movement

[7] Gender's differences are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

within the family and in the community is circumscribed and in some areas their freedom is rigidly pre-determined to conform to either 'Islamic' or 'traditional' norms". However, in confronting these restrictions, children did not react with passivity or resignation. Instead, they vigorously asserted their right to this freedom to move around and enjoy outdoor areas and to have increased gender equality related to it. The participants all displayed different and creative strategies in order to challenge these imposed limitations, thereby regaining control over their environment and reducing feelings of helplessness and isolation. These included using social and physical aspects of their environment as secure bases to explore around autonomously, which persuaded their families to give them more freedom. Having these strategies for gaining a sense of security and a feeling of safety was mentioned as the foundation for their overall well-being and life satisfaction. It enables a more complete engagement with their life, which allows them to carry out that which they either want or need to accomplish.

Place for children, reclaiming for place-spaces. Children highlighted the importance of being able to having access to places specifically dedicated for children, where they can play safely and undisturbed. It is well known that children's preferred medium of interaction is through play (Landreth, 2002), and that it also provides them with essential opportunities to develop and learn various skills and competencies. Moreover, in the context of war and armed conflict, play is considered a healing experience (Hyder, 2004). There is indeed a significant body of literature evidencing the vital influence of leisure activities in positive child development and well-being (Leversen, Danielsen, Birkeland, Samdal, 2012). Being engaged in these activities also satisfies one of the basic needs for a child, since it promotes happiness, social interaction, and thus, life satisfaction (Veronese et al., 2012; Veronese et al., 2018). The lack of play-places was perceived as negative for children's well-being and happiness, limiting their capacity to engage in leisure activities in their own ways. However, most of the children reported different strategies that they had developed to improve the quality of their free time and suggested alternative solutions. These included persuading relatives to give access to private space (such as a private family garden) to allow children to have a place to play or also to actively engage themselves in the creation of independent play-spaces.

Education, national identity, and spirituality. Receiving an education and work hard. Education, national identity, and spirituality were also mentioned as powerful enhancers of

children's agency and, transitively, their well-being. During armed conflict, policymakers and international organizations always advocate education to support the physical, psychological, and social well-being of children (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). The school allows children to maintain their daily activities, which can be viewed as an act of resilience in the midst of occupation, incursions, and displacement (Chatty, 2009; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). Despite the harmful impact of the Israeli oppression on the education system in Palestine, education remains a priority for most of the population (OCHA, 2013). In comparison to other educational systems throughout the world, school enrollment is relatively high, reaching rates above 90% for both male and female students (OCHA, 2013). Indeed, in our study, all of the participants included their schools within their tour, underlining the many different aspects in which school contributes to their life satisfaction and well-being. Most of the participants stressed their willingness to further their education as a means to improve their future prospects and gain capabilities to deal better with the ongoing situation in Palestine. Additionally, going to school emerged as crucial method of restoring a sense of routine and normalcy to their lives (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006), which enhances the children's ability to cope with their situation while also providing them with the tools to look forward to a better future. Moreover, school was typically perceived as a safe place to engage in social activities and play. Both male and female participants mentioned education as a way to strengthen their abilities, thereby enabling them to someday play their part in improving the situation of their country. Education was described as a means of resisting the occupation, challenging male-dominated societal and cultural norms, and also helps women claim their rights and assert themselves within the community.

Besides, through this educational engagement, the children also revealed the importance of both learning about and maintaining their Palestinian identity and heritage. Palestinian flags studded several of the children's maps and their narratives highlighted the major importance in feeling a sense of belonging with a wider community in order to better cope with the effects of political violence (Akesson, 2016; Habashi, 2011, 2013; Peteet, 2005). To be more specific, this sense of belonging enhanced their feelings of validation and pride, which helps to sustain the children's need for self-definition while also lessening feelings of isolation (Hammad, 2011; Khalidi, 1997). The participants specifically highlighted how feeling as though *a country is beside them* was helping to reduce their fear and find a common direction towards a shared purpose (Veronese et al., 2018).

Finally, children also mentioned how spirituality teaches them shared values and communal goals, which have a strong function in uniting a community that has been fragmented by displacement and war. Since Durkheim's theory of social integration (1915), it is well-established that participation in religious organizations, practices, or – more broadly – religious institutions (such as a church or mosque), is strongly tied to an individual's overall well-being. As outlined in his work, religion plays a significant role in legitimizing societal norms, thereby providing people with guidelines that encourage positive behavior. It also functions as an important means of socialization and offers crucial emotional support to individuals (Stolz, Olsen, Henke, & Barber, 2013). Within the literature related to conflict-affected areas, it has been evidenced that the protective role of religion and religious participation is intimately connected to the social and psychological outcomes of the children living in these conflict zones (Veronese et al., 2018; Wagener, Furrow, King, Leffert & Benson, 2003). Moreover, amongst Palestinians, their Islamic faith is widely considered to be a crucial source of psychological well-being, especially in children exposed to political violence and structural oppression (Barber, 2001), as well as a central part of their culture and identity, which has many positive impacts on their lives. Accordingly, in our work, the children highlighted the importance of Islam in teaching and providing them with positive values, behavioral and moral guidelines, as well as a purpose in life, which supports them when having to face an adverse and dangerous environment (Salas-Wright, Olate, & Vaughn, 2013; Stolz et al., 2013; Wessells & Strang, 2008). In addition, faith in God allowed children to feel protected and maintain both hope and positive aspirations for the future (Eggermann & Panter-Brick, 2010; Sousa, 2013). This is exemplified by the fact that the children asked God for protection and also used the mosque to restore positive feelings and improve their well-being.

Living environment, history and political identity. The meaning-making process. Finally, children have shown that they are not passive spectators of their living environment, which is so shaped and studded by the signs of Israeli occupation (Akesson, 2014; Hammad, 2011; Peteet, 2005). On the contrary, they illustrated an acute ability to read the many signs of the occupation within their physical landscape in order to make a sense of their situation and ultimately find their own strategies of dealing with it. As evidenced by much of the literature related to conflict-affected areas, being able to attribute some meaning to war-related and violent experiences is deeply connected to the impact that these experiences might have on a person's life and health (Barber, 2001, 2008; Betancourt & Khan, 2008;

Putamaki, 1996). An ability to attach a significance to an otherwise unpredictable or perturbing event, which are common in conflict areas, helps individual to contextualize their situation, which reduces the impact of trauma (Garbarino, 2014). Indeed, most of the participants expressed a deep political and historical awareness of the complex context in which they live, which was connected with a higher level of optimism and overall happiness. This ability to make sense of their situation enables children to protect themselves, reduces feelings of passivity and hopelessness, and enables the mobilization of resources (Barber, 2008, 2013; Nguyen-Gilliham et al., 2008; Veronese et al., 2018). This 'informal' political education is actively providing children with a framework through which to understand the meaning of their complex surroundings. Moreover, the children's narratives testified to their ability to understand the relationships between the history of previous generations and their own present situation. Being able to reach such a complex awareness of the historical continuum between the past, present, and future of their country was influencing them by providing a direction for their future choices and also assisting in the development of alternative paths (Habashi, 2013b, Habashi & Worley, 2009). Likewise, this heightened awareness provided them with collective memories and, thus, a larger purpose within a shared community. As outlined by Barber (2008), being able to locate yourself within a historical and political context while also identifying a collective purpose – *we will return to our lands*[8] – powerfully help in withstanding the hardships experienced as a result of the occupation. It also helps to recognize a common direction and the active role that will be required to reach that direction, – *Jerusalem is our direction* [in terms of gaining access to their capital again] – which creates a feeling of solidarity – *we are a lot*. As Barber (2008, p.289) has argued, amongst Palestinians "the historical meaning given to the struggle was passed on continually through stories of earlier stages of Jewish/Arab conflict by the youths' fathers and grandfathers, facilitating both personal and cultural continuity. […] It was clear that an ability to understand the conflict was a significant parameter that distinguished the degree to which youth felt injured by the violence."

Therefore, related research has widely evidenced the powerful role of civic and political engagement amongst children, which serves as both a self-protective and adaptive function to buffer against symptoms of depression and trauma (Barber, 2008; Kira et al., 2014; Thorpe & Ahmed, 2016; Veronese et al., 2017; Veronese et al., 2018). In our work, children were – or wanted to be – active participants within the civic and political spheres of their country, which they described as a means of claiming their own rights. They also expressed

[8] M.'s words, 13 years old, Bethlehem (p.175 of the present chapter).

their willingness to play an active role within their country's ongoing liberation struggle as well as a desire to take back their fully deserved freedoms. The more they perceived themselves as being attached to their roots and community, the more likely they were to want to contribute to the well-being of their community through civic and political activism.

Finally, since the method adopted in the research was a mixed-methods approaches, in the next chapter we will move forward a final discussion integrating findings from both our quantitative and qualitative study, in order to reach and provide a more accurate understanding and assessment of children's agency.

Chapter Six
Children as agents of change

Observing the contemporary conflicts that are affecting our world, it is evident that there is a growing tendency to target civilians and communities, and children are often among the causalities (Farewell, 2003; Garfield & Neugut, 1997). Armed conflicts and political violence place children under a constant threat of death, bombardment, detention, persecution, and displacement, resulting in both inevitable psycho-social distress and negative consequences for their physical and mental health health (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Rabaia et al., 2014; Ziadni et al., 2011). As discussed, clinical and academic research has widely focused on investigating the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder on an individual basis (Qouta et al., 2003; Thabet & Thabet, 2015). This focus has certainly brought important and crucial findings to light, but it has also tended to overlook children's positive adaptive capabilities, such as their ability to function in the face of such violent contexts. Accordingly, the present work has explored one of the key dimensions that contribute to enhancing the well-being and life satisfaction of children affected by political and military violence: the construct of agency.

In the previous chapters, we have highlighted the historical and political contexts, the methodologies applied, and the preliminary findings of our research project. So far, we have developed the research working through two different and separate studies. The first one allowed us to proceed with a quantitative exploration and assessment of children's agency. Through this, we were able to determine the extent to which their ability to mobilize resources was significantly helping them to feel more satisfied with their life and, thus, reduce the impact of their traumatic lived experiences (Veronese et al., 2019 a, b). The second study – extensively detailed in Chapter Five – consisted of a qualitative exploration. More specifically, using a combination of qualitative methods, we went on to explore the everyday practices and strategies that children exert in order to face their challenging contexts. The visual methods adopted were a successful way not only of collecting data, but also in engaging the research participants. This was crucial in order to gain access to children's own way of developing concepts and social meaning through their various

interactions within their harsh environment. The qualitative information provided by the thematic analysis of drawings and narratives were particularly interesting in light of the quantitative results obtained from the self-report measures. The conceptual model built from our data highlighted the crucial interconnection between, on the one hand, children's strategies and practices of agency (i.e., actively employing social resources; challenging movement restrictions; receiving an education; personal strategies; reclaiming play-spaces; meaning-making processes and political engagement) and, on the other hand, the multiple ecologies implied in promoting – or suppressing – their ability to mobilize resources to improve their own well-being.

Therefore, in the following paragraphs, in accordance with the mixed methods methodology, qualitative and quantitative findings will be integrated in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of the construct of agency. To start off, the results of the quantitative study will be presented with regard to the variables of life satisfaction, affect balance and trauma measures. We will see how the qualitative data can help us to better understand these results. Afterwards, we will discuss on what concerns our variable of interest, children's agency. We will integrate the quantitative results with the richer material coming from the qualitative exploration. Finally, we will consider the differences that have emerged in relation to both gender and the children's living contexts (rural, urban and refugee areas).

6.1 Integrating quantitative and qualitative results: a mixed discussion

6.1.1 *What makes me satisfied with my life*?

The multiple ecologies implied in promoting or suppressing children's well-being and agency.

Within both quantitative and qualitative investigations, the study shows that children declare fairly high levels of satisfaction with their own lives, despite the dangerous and uncertain contexts in which they live (Veronese, Castiglioni, Tombolani, & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2018). Moreover, feeling satisfied with one's life plays an essential role in reducing negative emotions and, thus, mitigating reactions to trauma.

Our quantitative findings reported that the aspects of the children's life with which they are most satisfied, regardless of either age or gender, are their family and friends (Peltonen et al., 2010; Veronese et al., 2017b). This result agrees with the qualitative study. For example, all of the participants drew images of a house, associating it with their family and numerous friends. Support from family and friends enables them to deal with stressful or frightening situations, since it protects them from the adverse consequences of military and political violence (Betancourt et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2016; Veronese et al., 2014). Within their narratives, children highlighted the importance of spending time with friends and family in order to *be happy*. It was revealed that social relationships play a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of the violence experienced, allowing children to feel some connectedness and solidarity, which in turn lessen their feeling of isolation (Betancourt et al., 2012; Triplehorn & Chen, 2006). Moreover, family and friends were mentioned as crucial sources of protection and emotional security (Cummings et al., 2012; Veronese et al., 2018). The children reported turning to their peers or relatives to receive help in dealing with everyday tasks, to share their feelings, and also to get some reassurance. Therefore, the study confirms previous results about the importance of social relationships as a crucial contributor to children's overall well-being and life satisfaction (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010; Mowbray et al., 2007; Veronese et al., 2017b).

Moreover, within the domain of life satisfaction – measured on the *multidimensional student's life satisfaction scale* (MSLSS, Huebner, 1994) – school emerged as another domain in the children's lives that they are very satisfied with. It is indeed well-known that school can be crucial for children to develop self-esteem, a positive self-perception, and healthy behaviors (Chatty, 2009; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). Our qualitative findings allowed us to broaden our understanding of the many ways in which school and education contribute to children's well-being and life satisfaction. For example, during the interviews, going to school emerged as a crucial act to restore a sense of routine and normalcy to their lives, which is to say a necessary condition to face and reduce the negative emotions connected to their unpredictable living environment. "When there is war, we cannot go to school" – said a nine-year-old girl from Gaza. "I like to go and chat with my friends". In other words, school provides them with a safe space to engage in learning activities, socialization, and play, which were all mentioned by the children as sources of happiness and well-being (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006). In addition, the qualitative investigation also revealed the numerous other meanings that the children assign to school. It is not only

a safe place dedicated to children, but it also represents a powerful source of learning and personal aspiration (Akesson, 2016; Habashi, 2011, 2013; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). The children stressed the importance of furthering their education as a means of gaining the necessary skills to better deal with their ongoing situation and to improve both their life and their future. *Education gives you strategies and hope, you can feel less sad and more powerful*, as 13-year-old M. from the Dheisheh Refugee Camp explained, evidencing the role that education plays – as a part of life satisfaction – in reducing negative emotions and mitigating the potential for negative outcomes.

The last domain investigated by the self-reported questionnaire concerned children's satisfaction with their living environment. Our quantitative analysis evidenced that children, on average, reported higher scores in this dimension. By contrast, in the qualitative exploration, the children did not exhibit satisfaction with their living environment as a physical space. Issues such as a lack of safety, a lack of places dedicated to children, and uncleanness, were all found to negatively impact the children's happiness about their living areas (Cummings et al., 2013; McNeely et al., 2014; Qouta, Punamäki, & Sarraj, 2008; Williamson & Robinson, 2006). The environment was widely perceived as being unhealthy, dangerous, or unpredictable, which enhanced negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and distress. The children stressed that the lack of a safe and child-friendly environment was sabotaging their lives by imposing a restriction on their mobility and, thus, depriving them of the opportunity to move autonomously within it (Akesson, 2014; Ziadni et al., 2011). To understand the differences among these findings, we could argue that the items related to satisfaction with the living environment apply more to the children's neighborhood community than to their physical living environment. Indeed, children highlighted the importance of feeling a sense of connectedness with their community and community members (Arafat & Boothby, 2003; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). For example, they described themselves as feeling better and more satisfied with their surrounding environment when "they took care of each other". In their maps and tours, the children showed how their knowledge and perception of the environment was dependent on the people living within it and *making it safe*.

Therefore, the strong positive relationship between positive emotions and life satisfaction is quite evident (Johnson & Cronister, 2010; Veronese, Barola et al., 2012). Accordingly, our quantitative findings have highlighted a significant positive correlation between positive affect and children's life satisfaction and a negative one in relation to trauma measures (Veronese et al., 2017b; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). This result is in

agreement with the qualitative study. The more the children described themselves as being satisfied with their lives – by getting enough support from family or by having a place to play in the neighborhood – the more they reported positive emotions and the less affected they were by either Israeli or community violence. This finding supports the idea that feelings of life satisfaction contribute to a more positive affect balance in children, which, in turn, mitigates the effect of traumatic events (Veronese, Barola et al., 2012; Veronese et al., 2014; Veronese et al., 2017b). However, the positive affect variable has been excluded from our structural equation model since no significant relationship with the other variables has emerged. This finding is supported by the existing literature (Israel-Cohen, Uzefovsky, Kashy-Rosenbaum, & Kaplan, 2015; Veronese et al., 2017b) and suggests that lower levels of positive emotions are less implicated in mitigating the impact of trauma than lower levels of negative ones (Veronese et al., 2017b). For instance, in the study on youth exposed to war in Israel by Israel-Cohen and colleagues (2015), life satisfaction and negative affect were found to effectively mediate the severity of PTSD symptoms, while positive affectivity was found to be an insignificant factor (Israel-Cohen et al., 2015). Similarly, the model published by Veronese et al. (2017b) revealed that the negative affect actually amplified the effects of trauma in Palestinian children, whereas positive affectivity did not seem to be related in any way to either intrusion or arousal symptoms (Veronese, Pepe, Jaradah, Al Muranak, & Hamdouna, 2017b).

By contrast, quantitative findings highlighted a significant negative correlation between negative affect and children's life satisfaction (Veronese et al., 2017b). More specifically, the model revealed that life satisfaction directly predicted a decrease in negative emotions and trauma. In addition, negative affectivity positively and directly predicted the symptoms of trauma, revealing that negative affects contributed to an amplification of the effects of trauma (Israel-Cohen et al., 2015; Veronese et al., 2017b). Indeed, the qualitative findings evidenced that negative emotions, such as fear and sadness, enabled feelings of powerlessness among the children, making them feel more vulnerable to their threatening environment. For instance, feeling unsafe, either outdoors or within the confines of their own homes, was described by the children as a source of negative emotion, with consequent symptoms of anxiety, sleep problems and distress. Therefore, in this particular research context, the model adopted revealed that negative affect contributed to amplifying the effect of trauma in children, whereas positive affect did not seem to be influential (Veronese et al., 2017b).

As far as the children's traumatic scores are concerned, although they did not actually display any high level of trauma (once the values were adjusted for age and gender), they reported a higher level of avoidance behaviors. On the other hand, the correlation analysis evidenced that avoidance had no significant relationship with any other variables investigated in the study. As previously discussed, this finding was unsurprising. Given the everyday conditions of fear and insecurity in which Palestinian children live, the notion of avoidance as only a pathological behavior should be called into question. Rather, during their *walk-around*, the participants demonstrated how those avoidance tactics should instead be considered adaptive and protective strategies that are employed to reduce the impact of the continuous threats that they face in their everyday lives.

6.1.2 *How can I act to preserve or improve the things that make me happy and satisfied*?

As previously mentioned, my study aimed to investigate the fact that agency – understood as the capacity to mobilize resources – has an important role in sustaining and improving life satisfaction in children exposed to political violence and structural oppression. In the previous section, we have discussed how higher feelings of life satisfaction were found to play an essential role in reducing negative emotions and, thus, mitigating reactions to trauma. Therefore, the next step was to test the hypothesis that the more the children perceive themselves as able to act and mobilize resources in the face of traumatic experiences, the more they report feelings of satisfaction and improved well-being. Indeed, agency emerged as a key factor to ensure a child's general life satisfaction (Veronese, Castiglioni, Barola, & Said, 2012; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese & Pepe, 2017b). The quantitative analysis confirmed the positive role of children's perceived sense of agency in enhancing their life satisfaction, which – as discussed – was shown to effectively buffer negative emotions and mitigate the impact of traumatic symptoms. However, if we go back to the scale used to assess children's agency (see Chapter 4), the items are constituted by broad, unspecific questions (e.g., 'I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me' or 'when I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it') providing little information on how children actually exert this agency. Here again, the qualitative exploration contributes to enhancing our understanding, by offering different examples of participants *solving* their problems and *getting the things in life that are most important* for them, thereby enabling them to cope with their challenging context and to enhance their well-being and life satisfaction.

Within the children's everyday practices and narratives, there was indeed an enormous diversity in terms of how they acted and expressed their own agency in order to face the challenges posed by their environment. For instance, the children mentioned security as a crucial aspect of their well-being, describing it as a necessary prerequisite to being able to fully engage with, and enjoy, their lives. Therefore, they described themselves as actively engaged in developing their own strategies in order to feel safe *enough* to carry on with their favorites activities. Despite the pervasive sense of insecurity due to their unpredictable context, the children emerged as determined to live a normal life (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008), by adopting strategies that included engagement in leisure activities to express and control their emotions and reduce anxiety (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Veronese, Castiglioni, & Said, 2010; Veronese et al., 2018), seeking God's protection to regain a sense of safety (Wessells & Strang, 2008), and distancing themselves from any potential source of danger (Diamond et al., 2011). Similarly, being able to autonomously gain access to parks and play-areas, or just being able to move freely within their environment, was mentioned as being essential to their life satisfaction, since it enabled them to enjoy life and spend time with friends. Accordingly, perceiving a lack of access to play-spaces was strongly linked to a reduction in the children's level of satisfaction with their own lives, sabotaging their well-being and generating negative emotions. Here again, during the *walk-around*, the participants displayed different and creative skills in order to deal with those obstacles, thereby regaining control over their environment and reducing feelings of helplessness and isolation. These skills included using social and physical features of the environment as secure bases to explore it autonomously, with the children persuading their families to give them more freedom, and also engaging in the creation of independent play-spaces. Similarly, the children expressed many ideas as to how they could act on their living environment (i.e. by building a playground, opening private gardens to children, setting up play-spaces for girls, cleaning the neighborhood) in order to *get the things that are most important* for them and, thus, improve their life satisfaction and well-being.

Furthermore, the children's agency has revealed itself not only in attempts to improve their quality of life and their well-being by overcoming these everyday obstacles, but also in relation to societal and political issues. For example, both female and male participants mentioned education and political engagement as ways to strengthen their abilities, thereby enabling them to someday play a part in improving the situation in their country. Education was mentions as a means of resisting the occupation, challenging male-dominated societal and cultural norms by helping women affirm their rights, and solving

the country's structural problems. For example, as an 11-year-old boy from Gaza explained, becoming an engineer might give him the opportunity to overcome the problem of the lack of clean water, which would definitely ensure a better quality of life for his family and for his country as a whole. Similarly, a 13-year-old girl from the Dheisheh camp expressed her desire to continue her education since "women have to be educated to affirm their rights, free themselves from these rules [cultural norms] and prove them [i.e. men who think that women belong in the kitchen] wrong*"*. Accordingly, advancing their education, claiming equal rights, engaging in protests against the imposition of the siege or the wall, and regaining control of their outdoor play areas were all ways for the children of negotiating and actively acting upon their own world. As A., a 9-year-old boy from the Gaza Strip, explains:

> "I remember the wars. More than once, I remember. If I could put my efforts into changing something in this world, it would be to ensure that nobody has to hear the sounds of war. I know why they do it, and so I know that we should all do our best to better our situation and take back our freedom. I am young, but I can do my part now, by going to school and explaining what is happening to my little brothers, so we will all know why and remember that we should play our part".

As revealed by this boy's words, the children strongly believed in their own power to make a difference through historical remembrance and active resistance (Barber, 2008; 2013; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Nguyen-Gilliham et al., 2008; Putamaki, 1996; Veronese et al., 2018). Within their narratives, the children testified to their constant attempt to understand the relationship between the history of previous generations and their own present situation by asking their family questions or 'reading' the many signs of the Israeli occupation within their surroundings. Being able to reach such a complex awareness of the historical continuum between the past, present, and future of their country was influencing them by providing a direction for their future choices and also encouraging them to explore alternative paths (Akesson, 2014; Barber, 2009; Habashi, 2013b, Habashi & Worley, 2009). Therefore, the children stressed how their capacity to make sense to their oppression – through relatives, the community, and religion – was helping them to realize the *abnormality* of the occupation and therefore struggle for their freedom. The children expressed their willingness to play an active role within their country's liberation struggle as a way to take back their freedom and their own rights, both of which were described as necessary in order for them to feel fully satisfied and happy with their lives.

Therefore, as evidenced by both qualitative and quantitative data, the children rarely depicted themselves as either spectators or passive victims when confronting the violence of their lived environment. Instead, they often suggested solutions that put them at the center, assigning themselves an active role in order to cope with the adversities they encountered. This fact supports our model of agency as an effective buffer for symptoms of trauma and negative emotions.

6.2 Some considerations related to gender and contexts differences

6.2.1 *Where are the girls now? Only boys can have this freedom*

Especially in contexts of armed conflicts and political violence, the ways in which children's experiences of violence is shaped by gender is still a controversial topic (Diab et al., 2018; Khamis, 2015; Punamaki et al., 2015). Our quantitative analysis revealed few significant differences caused by gender. For instance, the average level of life satisfaction was similar for both genders. When separately examining the life domains, the only significant disproportion emerged in the school, wherein girls reported higher levels of satisfaction and happiness concerning attendance. The qualitative exploration might help in explaining this result. As previously discussed, the children's access to places – especially in the context of ongoing political and military violence – might be strictly limited (Akesson, 2014; Hammad, 2011). Moreover, research has shown how the differences in how children both move within and access places may be established by factors such as age or gender (Fattore et al., 2009; Hammad, 2011; Van Blerk, 2006). Within our sample, female participants complained more about their limited access to play-spaces and the lack of child-dedicated areas in comparison with their male counterparts. This finding was not especially surprising given the strict gender roles that exist within Palestinian society, which results in boys being allowed to move freely and autonomously around their neighborhoods and to benefit from a higher number of places where they can spend time playing and socializing (Chatty, 2009; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). As a 13-year-old from the Dheisheh Camp explained, "boys can play outdoors, in the street, but where are the girls now? In the house […] Only boys can have this freedom". Due to Palestinian society's 'family codes of honor' (Chatty, 2009), girls' mobility is more controlled and restricted so as to conform to 'traditional' norms (Marshall, 2015). Female participants were strongly aware of these rules – "it is not

forbidden, but the place is considered not private enough for us*"* – and they perceived these rules as both unfair and in need of reform (Marshall, 2015). The Palestinian girl's limited access to safe places of play and socialization might explain their higher satisfaction level within the dimension of school since it provides them an opportunity to socialize together, thereby assuming a crucial importance within their lives. We may perhaps extend this line of reasoning to explain the disproportional number of female participants in our qualitative study. As previously explained, for the second phase of this study we asked our local partners to introduce our activities to the family of the children who participated in the first quantitative part in order to see who was interested in continuing. For example, when we arrived in the Dheisheh Camp to present ourselves to the children and get to know each other, we encountered way more children than we had expected, especially more girls. We conducted our activities during the spring break, which meant that the school was closed. As discovered, "there is no park in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp*"* and the children therefore spent most of their time in the association. "I spend lot of time in the association, it is the only place where I can go when school is closed, and my family likes it", said 9-year-old L. when describing the green building in her map. Boys also played in the association, but they can spend their time in the school yards (an outdoor area of the school accessible when the school is closed), within streets, at the Internet points, or in coffee shops, which are all places considered to be *inappropriate* for girls.

This *unjust*[9] disparity was also connected to feelings of anger and sadness. Indeed, within our quantitative analysis, negative affects were higher in the female group, while no difference was found concerning positive emotions (Giacaman et al., 2007; Qouta et al., 2003; Thabet & Thabet, 2015). This result might also reflect a specific cultural aspect within the oPt, where cultural expectations lead boys to repress emotions such as fear and sadness (Veronese, Pepe, & Castigloni, 2015). This is exemplified by the fact that whenever male participants would refer to the adverse or threatening aspects of their everyday lives, they would underline the fact that they were not afraid of them. "This is dangerous, not that I'm afraid from it, just I don't go or similarly, I can't sleep when they enter but I'm not afraid from them". Therefore, the lack of expression of negative emotions was also evident within their narratives. Boys maps were equally studded by red – dangerous – places, but when they were asked, most of them described those places as being dangerous places to avoid, but without any emotional connotation.

[9] This negative connotation was expressed by participants

A final consideration in relation to gender concerns the fact that the quantitative analysis revealed that life satisfaction, positive emotions, and perceived agency, were all decreasing within the female group as the participants got older. Therefore, the older girls reported lower levels in all three of the variables. Again, analyzing the children's narratives, we could suppose that this finding has to do with their closeness to the age of puberty. As the girls grow older, they are more affected by cultural and traditional norms that limit their mobility and control their behavior. As M., 13-year-old from Nablus, explained to us: "I have to stay home when my brothers go out. This is because I'm a girl […] it is not nice for a girl to walk alone". As previously discussed, having the ability to use their environment to play and interact with their peers provides children with the resources to meet the challenges imposed by political violence (Fearn & Howard, 2011). Through the act of play, children can develop innate skills that support their independence and their experience of emotions and behaviors (Fearn & Howard, 2011). These restrictions prevent them from exploring their surroundings and reduce their opportunities to gain access to resources, and thus, severely limit their agency and life satisfaction (Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Moreover, recognizing these gender inequities was eliciting negative emotions amongst the female participants: "I feel very bad about this, I have to stay in the house when they go out", continued M. from Nablus. Therefore, from our work, we can suppose that one reason why boys display more resilience and satisfaction with their lives might also be connected to the fact that their society and their environment offers them more independence and, thus, more opportunities to develop strategies and take active control over their own lives. Better understanding how both the social and physical environment functions as either a source or suppressor for children's well-being and agency could help in addressing these inequalities.

6.2.2 The extent of the context influence: differences and similarities across areas

This research showed that children's experiences within Palestine were dependent upon their place of residence. As previously highlighted, sites of residence need to be taken into account when investigating the ways in which children react and cope with traumatic and adverse experiences (Haj-Yahia, 2008; Sousa et al., 2013). One reason for this is that the child has to face very different adversities depending upon his/her particular setting (Dubow et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2007). For example, while children from Gaza have to deal with the constant threat of a new war developed, they barely mentioned any experience of military incursions or arrests. In contrast, children in the Dheisheh Camp highlighted the

routine nature of Israeli army invasions. Likewise, experiences related to the occupation – such as housing demolitions, settler violence, and displacement – were pervasive within West Bank villages but were almost absent in the city, where children expressed more concern about intra-community violence. It is also important to consider the different resources that a particular environment might, or might not, offer to its inhabitants. An environment can support children's well-being and protection, providing them with play-spaces, access to education, safe opportunities of mobility, and areas for the social interaction, among others. All of these factors may have a powerful effect in enabling children to develop and find their own ways of coping with their challenging environments in order to preserve their well-being (Akesson, 2014; Giacaman et al., 2007).

Despite the differences in exposure, our quantitative analysis did not reveal any significant changes within the variables under study among residents in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with the exception of the agency dimension that was lower amongst residents of the Gaza Strip. Given the vagueness of the self-reported instrument used to measure agency, this result is not necessarily meaningful. However, what we can deduce, thanks to the detailed qualitative study, is that one possible explanation lies in the unique nature of that environment, which does not provide children with adequate opportunities to actively participate in the various aspects of their lives. It is, indeed, hard to find a personal strategy of protecting oneself when the excepted danger is a missile attack or bombardment. Similarly, within the maps, we observed that children living in Gaza would often draw a more schematic collection of places that they like or activities they take part in, without any recognizable connection between them. Moreover, since the distances between the places were often quite long, the children were unable to walk to these locations, which meant that their access to these places was dependent upon them being driven by willing adults. The peculiarity of Gaza is in its unpredictability, since each place can be made unsafe if the Israeli army decides to attack. Moreover, the ongoing Friday clashes, which started more than one year ago – where the residents from Gaza go to claim their rights and their freedom – often end in carnage. The children were very aware of what happens there and they described feelings of sadness and a loss of hope due to the unbalanced nature of the conflict. As a 11 years-old-boy from Gaza stated: "they should stop doing this, this is not the right way, we are defeated in this way. They should go home and pray to God, and God will save us all". Therefore, in the case of Gaza, it might seem that the many adverse factors compound together and tend to suppress children's agency. Recalling Killian and colleagues' study (2008), which was discussed in Chapter Two, the harsh conditions, such

as the multiple losses experienced, displacement, extreme poverty, and the restriction of their movement, might be identified as a crucial process that inhibits their agency. Therefore, the extremely violent and constraining environment might negatively impact children's aspirations and, thus, their ability to imagine ways of overcoming their present situation (Killian et al., 2008).

More varied results were found when investigating the differences between urban areas, villages, and refugee camps. A clear discrepancy in overall levels of life satisfaction emerged between the children from villages and cities in comparison with those living in refugee camps. Refugee children reported a lower level of life satisfaction concerning family, school, and their lived environment, as well as the lowest score in positive affectivity. This result was in line with several studies that have assessed the severity and depredated living conditions amongst children living in refugee camps (Dubow et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2007; Haj-Yahia, 2008), which could be more intelligible with some additional qualitative analysis. Since the United States decided to cut their funding to UNRWA, the already difficult situations within the refugee camps have worsened, which includes worsening hygienic conditions. All of the children living in the refugee camps complained about the ever-present garbage and dirtiness, which they even represented within their maps. In addition to the unhealthy environmental conditions, the children also identified the detrimental social conditions within the camps. As previously discussed, the common perception of the camps' members was that they all come from different cities. Even though more than half of a camp's residents were actually born within the camp itself, it was common for refugees to identify themselves with their former villages. As a consequence, the families did not perceive of themselves as a community unit that takes care of each other. The absence of communal networks has a negative impact on children's everyday lives, mostly restricting their mobility. If the environment – both social and physical – is perceived as potentially unsafe, parents are more protective, limiting children's outdoor mobility. As outlined by H., "we do not have relatives within the camp, so my mother does not want me to go; we do not know the others".

Moreover, genders inequalities – discussed above – were more prevalent within refugee camps and villages in comparison with the city, where girls complained less about gender hierarchies limiting their freedom. The cities were described as being more supportive since they were able to provide children with parks, green areas, and play-spaces. The absence of those areas, as we have previously discussed, strongly impinges upon children's agency and

well-being. Moreover, it also increases gender inequalities: “there is no park in the camp, and the Internet point is just for boys”. Having access to playgrounds, green areas, and open spaces were described by both Nablus and Gaza City resident as extremely important for their well-being since they enriched their overall quality of life.

Finally, in the specific case of the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, the presence of the Israeli army was very pervasive, disruptive, and aggressive. While we were conducting our research, the army invaded the camp at night more than three times in two weeks. Sleeping within the camp made it easy to understand why children have difficulty sleeping. Not only are the sounds deafening, there is also the persistent fear of being arrested or having a family member arrested or killed. The Israeli soldiers have the power to enter into any building, including private houses and schools, which is a reality that makes it difficult for children to feel safe within their environment. Despite these differences in exposure, the specific context did not explain any significant amount of the variability within trauma measures. Therefore, a further investigation to better explain this result would be of great interest. As previously discussed, the children were actively negotiating with the everyday reality of their lived environment and were deploying many different strategies to improve their current situation and to enhance their well-being. It would be worthy to evaluate – with a more context and cultural sensitive instrument – whether these children present higher levels of agency that could then balance the lower satisfaction with their life and, thus, mitigate the traumatic responses.

6.3 Future directions and guidelines for practices

An analysis of the data uncovered multiple factors and themes that illustrated how participants express their agency, benefit from their resources, and negotiate with their surroundings in contexts of extreme adversity. Agency emerged as an inherently multidimensional construct that can be observed and exercised within different domains and across different levels. All these domains and levels must be taken into account in order to obtain a full and nuanced understanding of this dimension and its various manifestations. Social structures, as well as social relationships and the physical environment, might all have an impact and a role in fostering or constraining this exercise of agency. This research was able to identify some of the many ways in which Palestinian children resist the Israeli

oppression in their everyday practices and experiences, which can be crucial in providing guidelines for developing new interventions and direct clinical practices. Moreover, it provided an important account of children's understanding of what might enhance – or hinder – their well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction. In doing so, this research sheds a light on the capacity and ability that children display when participating in research about their lives. Hence, the final themes and data might be a significant starting point in developing more comprehensive indicators of children's agency, which are fundamental for clinical practices, research, and policy. Policymakers and social service providers often rely on indicators and quantitative measures to build their practical action plans and policies (Ben-Arieh, 2008). Therefore, this research might have an impact beyond the building of knowledge. Stressing the importance of these aspects of children's experiences (such as civic engagement and freedom of mobility), which have often been overlooked in policy circles, might be crucial in developing new and improved programs and policies.

6.3.1 Some directions for indicator development

Within this work, we addressed the topic of children's well-being, by introducing and investigating the critical recognition of children's capabilities to act, in order to enhance and promote it. This 'capability to act' has been studied under the term of *agency* and, as we have widely discussed, it is an extremely important concept within childhood studies. Although the notion of agency has become a *type of mantra* within the social sciences (Durham, 2008), the understanding of both the concept and its operationalization remains inadequate. Our findings help to confirm that agency plays a key role in promoting children's well-being in contexts characterized by political violence and oppression. The measurement that we adopted in our quantitative assessment, the *Children's Hope Scale,* assesses hope by exploring the two main factors, which are agency and pathways. Three of the items are dedicated to detecting the presence of agentic thoughts, which is intended as the capacity to start and continue the actions toward their goals. Another three items are used to detect pathway thoughts, which are defined as the child's capacity of producing the necessary means to achieve their goals (Snyder et al., 1997). In this conception of hope, there is the implication that how children think about their goals can make a difference in how they handle stressors. As Snyder and colleagues have discussed (1997), if the child is able to 'think hopefully,' he or she may develop and imagine different strategies to reach their goals and also be ready to face obstacles and challenges.

After conducting the qualitative investigation, it became obvious that this scale was unable to fully grasp the complexity and nuances of this multidimensional construct (Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Although this instrument might be viewed as a first attempt to operationalize the construct of hope, it revealed itself to be insensitive to both the context-specific and gender-specific dimensions of agency. Within its six items, it does not include any questions related to the social and physical environment in which the child lives, despite the crucial role that this environment plays in how the child develops, mobilizes resources, and responds to stress. As is revealed from their narratives, the children interact with diverse systems and sub-systems (from the micro to the macro) in their everyday practices, which include encountering both obstacles and facilitators that should be considered in the assessment of their agency. Agency was manifested within the many aspects surrounding and constituting their lives, their relationships, their political identity and rights, as well as the opportunities they have to experience freedom. Therefore, any attempt to grasp agency in all of its complexity and entirety should take into account the many different indicators and the multi-faceted aspects of children lives and well-being. Recalling Sen's studies (1985,1999), when we consider people as an 'owner' of agency, we should also consider their freedom to exert it. Which opportunities does a child have in order to achieve or enhance his or her happiness and well-being? Sen argues that we must always keep in mind the connection between the issues of 'individual' freedom of action and the social and environmental characteristics of the specific piece of the world that the people inhabit. As we have seen, age, gender, or sites of residence, all might have a significant role in shaping children's capabilities or opportunities for action. Besides, children do not live in isolation: several of their freedoms are dependent upon the actions and support of the others around them, as well as the nature of the social arrangement in which they find themselves (Sen, 2002).

Therefore, since agency matters as a means to foster and improve other developmental outcomes, including those affecting life satisfaction and well-being, researchers must develop a method of instrumentally assessing it. It is well known that developing indicators from qualitative data is a complex and challenging task. Scholars have highlighted the fact that the transformation from qualitative research to quantitative measurements often risks losing some of the richness and complexity of the findings (Fattore et al., 2009). However, a new and culturally sensitive instrument would facilitate a more comprehensive operationalization of the construct of agency in clinical psychology, particularly in the Palestinian context (Veronese et al., 2019a, b).

From this work, it is possible to suggest some ideas for the development of novel indicators to better measure agency. Firstly, following the same perspective that had driven this research, we believe that the indicators should not only be concerned with the basic needs of childhood development, but also with the essential factors that promote this development. The focus should therefore be directed on the many aspects that constitute their quality of life rather than just their basic survival (Pittman & Irby, 1997; Samman & Santos, 2009). As previously discussed, the predominant biomedical models tended to depict children living in adverse and emergency situations as passive victims, thereby overlooking and undermining their capabilities and resources at both individual and collective levels. Therefore, while undertaking the challenging task of developing a measurement for assessing agency in children living in the context of war and political violence, the perspective should move from the negative to the positive. In other words, attention should move beyond survival and the traditional domains of health and instead be directed towards positive indicators with open attention to the many new domains of childhood development (e.g., safety and civic skills) (Ben Arieh, 2008). Therefore, the building of those indicators should be attentive to both direct – such as children's actually expressions of agency - and indirect indicators, and thus, to the potential sources and suppressors – *thinners* or *thickeners* – that foster proactive behaviour or not.

6.3.2 Implication for research, policy and practices

Nowadays, the interconnection between research, practice, and policy creation is largely recognized. An increasing number of research projects over the past few decades have gone on to develop programs designed to foster children's well-being and mental health in contexts of political violence and armed conflict (Betancourt et al., 2013; Cummings et al., 2017; Jordans, Tol, Komproe, & De Jong, 2009). In the majority of cases, these researchers have centered their research on the negative outcomes associated with exposure to political violence (Akesson, 2014; Barber & Schluterman, 2008; Veronese et al., 2017a, b). This focus has catalyzed a number of interventions directed at 'healing' the ill child from the trauma of war, mostly within the private sphere of his or her individuality. If, on the one hand, these interventions are crucial to help the child overcome the deleterious impact of war and violence, on the other hand it follows a western *paternalistic approach* (Bordonaro & Paine, 2012) that has tended to consider children as passive and voiceless victims in need of protection. As a result, the intervention programs developed out of this approach often

end up eliding the broader political context, such as the structural violence of the occupation, and excluding children from participation and decision making, thereby overlooking their capacities of action (Panter-Brick, 2002; Marshall, 2013). In addition, the policies produced are heavily dependent on studies and normative ideas related to children in America and Europe, which makes their applicability and utility across cultures and social contexts highly questionable (Boyden, 2003). In fact, more recently researchers have started to argue that children's well-being and health must be understood, explored, and assessed alongside children – *go and ask them* – and by considering the social, economic, and physical contexts and constraints in which they live (Ben-Arieh, 2008; Casas, 2003). Moreover, research methodology should respect the 'expert' knowledge of the participants. Using narrative and participatory approaches and instruments might help children in transforming their daily practices into healing strategies and tactics for coping with the ongoing violence within their everyday lived experience (Veronese et al., 2012; Veronese et al., 2017b). Involving them within these participatory processes has proved to have various positive effects, such as making them aware of their competencies, and thus, the research process itself might actually increase the children's agency. Therefore, rather than adopting an existing intervention for a Western model, researchers have aimed to provide more culturally grounded intervention, with a program targeting different levels of the child's social ecology (e.g., individual characteristics, family, community, and school).

In our study, we presented narratives that capture the complex forms of the children's psychological suffering during years of structural oppression as well as their resultant coping strategies. Following an ecological approach, it was possible to pay attention to both the capacities and resources of the individual child, as well as those of his or her broader social, political, and physical environment. With their voices, participants described experiences and attitudes related to their – abnormal – living contexts. They clearly expressed their needs (e.g., green open spaces or greater equality in accessing play-spaces) and how they plan to reach them, enhancing their well-being and improving their happiness and life satisfaction in the process.

> "My mother always say I have to stay in the house to play because it is better for my safety. I don't believe this is true, I think it is better for me it because it means I have a safe place outside where I can feel free to enjoy myself with my friends." (H., 9 years old, Female, Fasayel village)

By recognizing children as social actors endowed with basic human rights, the importance of promoting children's participation within the research process clearly emerged. In other words, their capability and agency can only be observed by enabling the children's self-expression.

Hence, our findings help to confirm that agency plays a crucial role in promoting children's well-being in contexts characterized by political violence and oppression. Therefore, psychological and psychosocial interventions must take into account the child's active engagement in the daily struggle for his or her existence (Marshall, 2015; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Our work indicates that clinical interventions should be aimed at strengthening aspects of positive functioning of both the child and his social ecology in order to directly address the different sources of agency and better cultivate them (MonCrieffe, 2009). As we have discussed – and observed – conflicts degrade the social structures that protect children. Therefore, community and familial interventions that promote Palestinian social capital are of fundamental importance to help re-activate the crucial support systems that help children cope with the political violence and uncertainty that characterizes their lived environment. Families and peer groups play an important role for children in conflicts, by providing shelters, emotional support, and protection, all of which are essential to challenge the uncertainty, violence, and displacement of the social environment (Triplehorn & Chen, 2006). In the absence of this social support, children have fewer resources through which to rebuild their lives.

Therefore, in order to promote the children's well-being and to mitigate the impacts of this ongoing and extremely violent context, clinical efforts should be aimed at the child's social environment as well as the entire community. Instead of promoting interventions centered on symptoms, participatory and action research model can complement, address, and engage children in the process of preserving and enhancing their well-being (Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Moreover, although all children face adversity in situations of armed conflict, girls often face greater challenges than boys. The combination of insecurity created by the occupation and the cultural gender norms that are keeping girls out of the public sphere both result in them having less services and resources in comparison with their male counterparts (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008). Therefore, programs should define and develop specific strategies to better engage girls and address issues of gender inequality (Kachachi, 2017). Hence, from our study the importance of value interventions directed at supporting and enhancing children's agency clearly emerged and what is evident is the need to intervene to expand children's range of viable choices.

Finally, encouraged by the strong evidence coming directly from children's words and remarks, researchers and policymakers should focus their efforts on remembering and supporting the first fundamental societal change that has the potential to enhance happiness, dignity, and well-being: the end of the occupation. In fact, the greatest desire and priority of Palestinian children in our survey is the end of the occupation and the establishment of their political freedom. As Yasser from Gaza – and many others – said,

> "My prior wish and desire if I have to say what will really make me feel happy and safe [well-being] is the end of this occupation. I would like everybody to be free do move where they would like and come back. If the occupation vanishes, we can start to work and better many things within us and our society. As long as we have the occupation, this is very difficult to imagine".

6.3.3 Limitations and challenges of the study

To conclude, some limitations and challenges within the study must be acknowledged and discussed. A first limitation is related to the generalizability of our findings. As we have already widely described, the selection of participants was conducted with a school population. Therefore, children's agency, risk, and opportunities, which might improve or jeopardize their well-being and life satisfaction, need to be explored in the non-school attending population as well. Even if the out-of-school rate in Palestine is very low, including these children within subsequent research should be considered. Furthermore, there was gender disequilibrium present in the group of residents at the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, preventing us from providing a detailed picture of the gendered aspects of agency. On the other hand, this aspect provided us with some important information since the disproportionate presence of girls within the association of the camp served as evidence of the heightened importance of that space for them, which was due to their lack of access to other play-spaces in comparison with the male children of the camp. We agree that other researchers must proceed with caution before generalizing these findings to children in other situations of political violence and armed conflict. In our research, we have explored children's experiences and observed their agency in different settings (rural areas, urban areas, and refugee camps) both in Gaza and the West Bank, which might have improved the transferability of our research to other communities. However, as previously discussed, many aspects of the children's agency that emerged in this study were somehow connected

to local socio-political and cultural contexts. For example, the nature of the conflict, as well as the meaning attributed to it, was revealed to be fundamental, thereby demonstrating the strictly local character of our research.

Secondly, from a methodological perspective, the quantitative instruments used in the study to measure agency created numerous challenges for us. On the one hand, they were able to detect children's agency and to assess its association to life satisfaction, demonstrating, in the process, that agency has an essential role in enhancing children's life satisfaction and, in turn, mitigating the symptoms of trauma. On the other hand, the measure adopted is unsatisfactory and cannot adequately explain children's different capabilities. Moreover, the instruments cannot account for the many social and environmental aspects of children's lives, thus showing its inability to grasp the full complexity of this multidimensional construct. For instance, in collective societies such as Palestine, the extended family and the community are both crucial for children in developing their identity and competencies. This has significant implications for the way children live and understand trauma. As we have discussed, trauma connected to oppression and political violence can be dealt with in a collective way, not as an isolated event only affecting the individual (Summerfield, 1999). As a result, the construction of social meaning, as well as the process of healing, both take place in a collective context and with collective resources (Farewell, 2003). For what concerns our second investigation, academics have acknowledged the issue of validity when dealing with qualitative research (Leavy, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative studies are often characterized by a small number of participants, thereby limiting the representativeness of their findings. On the other hand, we have employed a variety of methods (i.e., drawings, map-making, go-alongs, interviews) aimed at improving trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005) and enhancing the study's validity.

A third limitation is that we did not include the children's family in this research. Scholars have emphasized the crucial role that adults play within children's lives (Boothby et al., 2006; Denov & Akesson, 2017); therefore, their inclusion in the study could have had a meaningful impact. Our findings highlighted that adults are a crucial part of children's social environment and life in general. As such, including parents and extended family members might enrich their research and offer opportunities for better understanding how children negotiate with their complex environment.

Finally, a significant challenge for this research is related to the researcher's limited Arabic language capabilities. Children were very patient in respecting the time required for translation during the interviews and activities. Moreover, the presence of local assistants

and translators was crucial in helping us to gain access and trust within the communities, and also to create a team environment when collecting and reading our data.

To conclude, given the opportunity, we hope to expand this research in order to further explore these aspects longitudinally and thus be able to measure agency's trajectories over time. Indeed, a longitudinal exploration might allow us to see if there are – over time – different or even opposite paths. If after a certain amount of time, despite children's efforts, their surrounding structures are not supporting their agency, but rather restricting or silencing it, will their agency start to take other forms or simply decrease? If, despite their request, no new place-spaces or green areas are developed, will this suppress their active strategies of adapting to and coping with their adverse environment?

6.4 Conclusive reflections on the research and researcher's positioning: why are we doing research and for whom?

> *Thinking critically, listening carefully, and analyzing relations of power of which we are part so that we can identify and unpack assumptions, unearth patterns of thinking and acting, and recognize their effects.* Potts and Brown, 2005, p.263

In these concluding paragraphs, I would like to address some of the ethical challenges encountered during this work, which I believe are shared by all those who conduct research and fieldwork in contested places and with oppressed populations. The first point concerns our own positioning as researchers: which role did we adopt and choose to adopt in the field? How did we position ourselves in relation to our informants? Then, strictly connected to this first issue, there comes a second point, related to the academic or theoretical position that the research itself takes. What are our attitudes towards academic neutrality and the research's ideology? (Anderson, 2002; Shukaitis, Graeber, & Biddle, 2007). Both aspects might have significant effects on our work and on the ways in which knowledge is created (DeSouza, 2004). Therefore, as we come to an end, it is worth taking some time to reflect upon these questions.

6.4.1 *Nothing about us, without us, is for us*[10]

The first point requires a critical analysis on our role and the involvement (as researchers) with both the participants in the study and the community where the research took place.

[10] Anti-Apartheid movement's motto

The term *positioning*, which derives from Bronwyin Davies and Ron Harré's study (1990), asks us to investigate the relationship between researchers and their interlocutors. Positioning concerns the social categories that frame researchers, such as ethnicity, religion or gender. The *status sets* (Milligan, 2016) that I embody – being white, a woman, an adult, a researcher, an un-married European woman – may intersect and affect both the relationships that I have with my interlocutors and the ways in which I conduct, read, and interpret my research. Thanks to critical perspectives – including, but not limited to, the theoretical contributions of western Marxism – we are well aware that knowledge is historically situated and that it is socially constructed by the interactions between people and by the interests of the dominant classes within society (Brown & Strega, 2005; Lather, 1986). Therefore, interrogating ourselves and the interactions and relationships through which this knowledge is (co-)constructed is essential. The differences between our status and that of the participants – adult/child, academic/outside worlds, privileged/oppressed – might establish unbalanced relationships of powers between the subjects, leading to some confusion about who should really be entitled to create meanings about a specific social world.

Given the subaltern status of our participants (as Palestinian and even more as children whose agency is ignored and whose role in shaping history is overlooked), what is the proper positioning of the researcher to ensure that the *subalterns can speak* (Spivak, 1988) through their own voice, thereby giving them back the authority of their own social knowledge? There is a significant academic debate concerning whether or not the researcher, in order to properly understand and 'hear' the voices of his or her interlocutors, should be part of the same community or at least share the same background, or if he/she should be an 'outsider'. For instance, within anthropological studies, scholars have stressed the importance of a position of *outsiderness* for the researcher, which they view as a crucial prerequisite to the creation of new knowledge (Gitlin, 1994). Within our fieldwork, we would argue that much of the information that we accessed could not have been shared or divulged if we had been a part of the same community. There were several instances in which children were able to confide in us about the familiar and cultural contradictions within their community precisely because of our 'outsiderness'.

Hence, regarding this debate, we would support Hellawell (2006) and Thomson & Gunter (2011) in their opposition to the fixed concepts of 'insider' or 'outsider' research, which posits the idea of a knowledgeable outsider (which includes in-depth knowledge on the cultural and societal norms and values of the place where the research takes place) that

places him/herself *in-between* these two positions (Milligan, 2016, p.247). The term *in-betweener* recognizes the attempts made by the researcher to 'stay' in between, through the choices made within the research design and the data collection. As a matter of fact, our choice to adopt a participatory approach was driven by this attempt to position ourselves within this liminal space. As mentioned earlier, the literature related to participatory techniques was developed to challenge the unequal power relations and dynamics between the researcher and the researched by giving the voices of the latter the proper space and authority to be heard. Therefore, this approach helped us to address both the power imbalance between the adult/researcher and the child/informant as well as our inside-outside position and perspective. In our study, attributing the role of 'guide' to the participants, and thus as experts of their own life and its social contexts, provided us with access to an inside view of their everyday experiences. It allowed us to enter in private areas, which would have otherwise been impossible to reach (or even know about) from my outsider position as a woman, adult, and non-speaker of the local knowledge. Following their lead, it was possible to gain a unique insight into their lives and, thus, to switch from an outsider positioning to that of an *in-betweener*. Therefore, as an in-betweener researcher, the final and intrinsic aim of our research is not to become an insider but, rather, to better amplify the voices of the insider participants, who have been silenced for a long time. This brings us to the second line of questioning that we introduced at the beginning: is there a political dimension to the research? What is the academic and theoretical positioning of our research?

6.4.2 The ghost of the political aspect of the research

Being educated and socialized into a Western ontological and epistemological framework, we are used to considering objectivity and neutrality as a fundamental aspect for any valid scientific research. For decades, academics have positioned themselves as *super partes observers*, claiming that their research must distance itself from any potential political implications in order to achieve a more scientific and neutral frame of analysis. On the other hand, critical, feminist, indigenous, and post-colonial approaches developed over the last several decades have strongly questioned this concept of *neutrality*, evidencing the existence of a political aspect as an intrinsic characteristic of all research and knowledge. Scholars belonging to these disciplines have therefore asserted the non-existence of an interest-free knowledge (Reinharz, 1985, p.17), underlining that concepts such as neutrality and objectivity have been too long employed to justify the ideological nature of research

aimed at legitimating certain privileges based on class, race, and gender (De Jong, 2012; Lather,1986; Reinharz, 1985).

Thus, in order to better reflect on our theoretical and academic positioning, a fundamental question arises: what do we mean by (academic) neutrality? I remember asking myself this question the first time that I entered Gaza. Not very far from the entrance gate, there is a wall painting made by Banksy, the well-known British street artist, which states: "if we wash our hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, we side with the powerful, we don't remain neutral." Without entering into the specifics of the Israel-Palestine debate, we can identify a broader question within his words: what does academic neutrality actually entail after we have concluded that knowledge is socially constructed by, and for, the dominant interest within a society (Lather, 1991)?

As Stuart Hall argued (1996, p.448), we always speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of particular experiences. This makes us all *ethnically located* (Hall, 1996, p.448), which prevents us from entering into a perfectly neutral position. This suggests that there is an implicitly subjective and political aspect that exists in the very process of conducting research, which manifests itself in the choice of subject matter, in the methodology adopted, and in the theoretical approaches applied (Conti, 2001; Lamphere, 1994). Should we direct our methodological efforts at trying to reach an unobtainable position of neutrality, or might we start to move beyond this goal? Russell (2015) provides us with one possible answer:

> "It is a given that all knowledge is orientated, such that even those who claim to be producing scientific, disembodied knowledge 'about' the world are themselves reproducing dominant subjectivity. The question must thus be rethought as which side do you choose to take; do you choose to reproduce the dominant way of seeing/knowing? Or do you choose to align with an antagonist perspective that knows the world differently?" (2015, p.225).

Patti Lather (1986), already in the 1980s, had similarly suggested that we stop striving for neutral research and instead move towards an ideological and committed stance that is aimed at criticizing and subverting the dominant status quo (Lather, 1986, p.67). Again, more recently, Makkawi (2009, 2017) has claimed that research carried out on colonized communities cannot be neutral, but that it should oppose and confront dominant discourses, thereby building space for the oppressed. In the same ways in which feminist studies has

struggled to present an alternative narrative to the dominant masculine one, research within an oppressed population should direct its efforts at presenting an alternative narration to the predominant Western one (Merrill & West, 2009). The final aim should therefore be oriented at giving back to historically silenced people the possibility of telling their own stories, providing a space for a polyphony (Bakhtin, 1981), which gives consent to the subaltern to speak and, in doing so, contrast the dominant Western discourse (Rahola, 2002; Said, 1991). This approach to research has been widely delineated and developed in recent years under the terms of 'militant research' (Shukatis et al., 2007; Tuoza, 2003), 'embedded research' (Hodkinson & Chatterton, 2006), 'anti-oppressive research' (Brown, 2007; Potts & Brown, 2005), or 'activist research' (Ciancian, 1993; De Jong, 2012; Gitlin, 1994). However, all of these different names refer to a common research goal, which is to challenge inequalities by empowering the powerless and promoting social change. This kind of researcher is oriented towards the co-production of knowledge, which reconsiders the power of subaltern knowledge.

Even without directly inscribing our work within this academic field, we would state that the open ideological goal of our research is oriented at providing the necessary conditions to enhance participants' self-determination, which enables their voices to be heard. From the choice of topic (children's agency and capabilities) to the methodologies adopted, our interest was to reveal and empower local knowledge, offering our interlocutors a space through which to take an active part in the research process. This enabled them to become aware of their capabilities and strengths and to develop a critical consciousness of their own social condition. As a matter of fact, the aim of a participative process is not just to acquire and produce knowledge on groups in order to 'help' them, but rather to jointly produce this knowledge in order to make it accessible and understandable to all those involved (Chatterton, Fuller, & Routledge, 2007, p.4). Hence, research should not be oriented towards adjusting or conditioning people to their oppressive environment. Instead, the co-production of contextually relevant knowledge can be directed at cultivating – both for the researcher and the researched – a critical consciousness, which establishes lines of solidarity and supports people in their struggle for political self-determination.

Several literature has argued that efforts to improve the resources and resilience of oppressed peoples might only be providing them with better strategies to passively cope and accept their conditions, rather than empowering them towards new ways of challenging the structural causes of their own oppression (Joseph, 2013). According to this argument,

resilience-oriented interventions are not aimed at providing participants with the necessary tools to better comprehend the root causes of their oppression. Accordingly, this approach does not consider them to be political subjects able to actively participate in changing their situation. In this conception, the interventions only encourage a passive attitude and they only "fix the individual victim so that she/he can adjust better to the colonial condition" (Makkawi, 2017, p.486).

In regards to our own work, we would stand with a more comprehensive vision of resilience, which does not solely reduce it to the acceptance of an oppressive environment. In a recent contribution, Bourbeau and Ryan (2018) remind us that resilience talks about *bouncing back* but also *bouncing forward*, underlining its transformative and re-modeling dimension. The process involves, thus, the potential for a *personal and relational transformation* (Walsh, 2003, p.3). According to these authors, resilient subjects might be fully able to comprehend the root causes of their own subjugation: while coping and adapting, they could also be engaged in resisting these underlying causes (Bourbeau, 2015; Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018). This point of view is quite interesting for our work since it allows us move beyond the binary conception of, as well as the supposedly diametric opposition between resilience and resistance. Research interventions might instead be directed at enhancing both resilience and resistance, while considering them in a continuous relation with one supporting and re-enforcing the other. To explain the concept better, we can recall Bourbeau and Ryan (2018, p.229) words:

> "To seek to maintain a perceived status quo in the face of disturbance is inherently a highly political move, just as it is highly political and deeply active move to adjust to change by seeking to transform policy. […] communities developing strategies to adjust difficulties are also potential sites of resistance to the structures, inequalities or injustices that have necessitated these adjustments. Enacting resilience can mean that you find a way 'to get on' with daily life without acquiescing to the political, economic, or social situation that you are in."

This dynamic process between resilience and resistance has been highlighted in different countries affected by protracted conflict and ongoing violence. For example, resilience is both a necessary and positive characteristic in order to maintain the spirit of resistance movements in contexts where the conflict endures over many years (Idler, Belén Garrido,

& Mouly, 2015; Schock, 2005). In Palestine, the fact that people's resilience – expressed in the ways that they deal with, and adapt to, the stresses of their daily life – actively assists and supports the process of resistance has been widely explored (Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018; Ryan, 2015). They call this process 'resist to exist,' and it broadly defines the resilient behaviors used to adapt and maintain a normal life within abnormal situations, which are also interpreted as forms of resistance against the Israeli occupation and its displacement policies (Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018; De Jong, 2005; Peteet, 1995). Thinking about our work, we would argue that the connection between resilience and resistance recalls the one that we have described between agency and life satisfaction. The one not only supports the other, but also provides the necessary conditions for its realization. The capacity for agency is both related to the capacity of the person to adapt and cope with a given situation (resiliency) and also to act and alter the relations of power and oppression within their own world (resistance). Therefore, research and interventions should be directed at empowering resilience and life satisfaction, which is opposed to the idea of it merely enhancing the participant's acceptance of their own oppression. At the same time, these research interventions are designed to promote and sustain agency and resistance against the characteristic imbalance of power that operates within oppressive systems.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the well-being and life satisfaction of a group of Palestinian children living in the context of armed conflict and political violence, with a specific focus on the resources and capabilities that these children actively display in order to cope with those environments. Within the mainstream literature children are conventionally viewed as a vulnerable group and their coping abilities, survival skills and agency have been long overlooked and underestimated (Boyden, 2003; Chatty, 2009; 2010; Veronese et al., 2017a; Veronese et al., 2018). With the present work we have attempted to fill the gap in literature, which has recurrently depicted and assessed children's weakness and the risks to their mental health as consequences of their exposure to political conflict and violence, advancing our scientific knowledge on children's capacity to cope with traumatic realities (Barber, 2014; McNeely et al., 2014; Veronese et al., 2017a, b; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). In order to challenge the traditional conceptualization of children as a highly vulnerable group, this research has been designed to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective which also takes account of the competencies and strengths deployed by children to promote their own well-being in adverse contexts. More specifically, by conceptualizing agency as the person's capacity to act and contribute to their own security, well-being and development (Williamson & Robinson, 2006), this work has aimed to outline the importance of agency for children's well-being and, hence, its contribution in helping them adapt to and cope with challenging and traumatic living conditions.

As widely discussed within this work, political violence in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) has harmful effects on the life and health of children and young people. Decades of Israeli occupation have shaped Palestinian children's lives within an environment characterized by a constant threat of violence at school, at home, and in neighborhoods (Akesson, 2014). Within the academic literature, this violence has been associated with a wide array of negative outcomes on their mental health and well-being, ranging from psychological distress to increased prevalence rates of mental disorders (Qouta et al., 2003; Tol et al., 2013; Veronese et al., 2017a, b). However, while we agree about the importance of highlighting these negative consequences of the Israeli occupation on children's health and development, this body of research – with a specific focus on trauma and subsequent psychopathologies – has dominated the literature on the topic for

too long, leaving little room for other perspectives (Barber, 2008; 2014; Giacaman et al., 2011; McNeely et al., 2014). Indeed, this over-reliance on the medical model has produced an emphasis on pathology rather then coping and well-being, and it has led scholars to consider political conflict-affected children as inevitably suffering psychological consequences (Barber, 2008, 2014; Cairns & Dawes, 1996; McNeely et al., 2014; Summerfield, 2001). It is well-established that political and military violence affects children's physical, psychological and emotional development. However, Palestinian children manage to preserve a high level of life satisfaction and well-being, resisting the harmful effect of the occupation and adapting to their adverse life circumstances (Baber, 2013; Tol et al., 2013; Veronese et al., 2017a, b). Even if an increasing number of publications have started highlighting and interpreting these positive outcomes, we still know comparatively little about how children cope and what factors protect them from the violence, enhancing their well-being and life satisfaction.

Therefore, here is where this study might provide the most significant contribution. By moving beyond the medical model approach and conceptualizing children living in war-torn environments as agents who actively attribute meaning to their experience and who participate in enhancing and safeguarding their well-being, this research explores agency as one of the factors that might play a key role in ensuring children's happiness and well-being.

The mixed methodology adopted has allowed us to approach and explore the phenomena in two different ways, reaching a more comprehensive understanding in an attempt to *unpack* the construct of agency. More specifically, through the quantitative exploration we have been able to determine the extent to which children's ability to mobilize resources helps them to feel more satisfied with their life, and thus reduces the negative impact of their traumatic experiences. This analysis confirms that children's agency plays a key role in promoting their psychological well-being in settings characterized by political violence and structural oppression (Chatty, 2009; Veronese et al., 2019 a, b). Agency has emerged as a means for Palestinian children to regain control and power over their lives and to display a capacity to act on those factors causing them distress and negative emotions. School, the living environment, family and peer relations are the domains in which the participants deploy their agency to protect themselves from traumatic experiences (Stoecklin, 2018; Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). Secondly, the combination of qualitative methods adopted in the second study has provided an opportunity to explore children's perceptions, perspectives and practices in relation to their capacity for action in settings of military and political violence (Marshall, 2014). Through this qualitative exploration,

Palestinian children have shown themselves to be highly competent and active agents who draw on personal, social and external resources to enhance their well-being and life satisfaction and cope with adversity (Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). Moreover, children's agency has emerged as multidimensional, revealing the importance of moving across individual family, community, and societal levels when examining life in war-torn contexts. The conceptual model built from our data visually highlights the crucial interconnection between, on the one hand, children's strategies and practices of agency (i.e., actively employing social resources; challenging movement restrictions; receiving an education; personal strategies; reclaiming play-spaces; meaning-making processes and political engagement) and, on the other hand, the multiple ecologies implied in promoting – or suppressing – their ability to mobilize resources to improve their own well-being. For instance, the children mentioned security as a crucial aspect of their well-being, describing it as necessary to being able to fully engage with, and enjoy, their lives. On the contrary, restrictions on their mobility denied them access to various resources, effectively reducing their ability to develop strategies of coping and resilience, and to benefit from relational support.

Therefore, by integrating the analyses provided by the two different studies, a composite and multifaceted portrait of children's capabilities and resources has emerged. The present research provides an overview of the multiple ecologies implied in promoting agency and well-being among children exposed to prolonged and structural violence (Suarez, 2015) and of the multiple ways in which these children exert and enact their agency. Our findings challenge the above-mentioned picture of children as helpless victims, portraying children living in the shadow of violence as active agents who mobilize resources both within themselves and within their social, physical, and political world (Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2019). The children interviewed displayed a real determination to find their own ways of regaining control over their environment, showing that their adverse living conditions were not enough to stop them from finding strategies to survive and imagine a better future for themselves and their communities. In fact, they expressed and enacted a variety of strategies to protect themselves from adversity, such as asking for help from their social networks, engaging in activities to distract themselves and restore positive emotions, or avoiding any potential source of danger. Similarly, advancing their education, affirming their equal rights, engaging in protests against the imposition of the siege, or the wall, and regaining control of their outdoor play-spaces, were all ways for them to negotiate

and actively act upon their own world. These children rarely depicted themselves as either spectators or passive victims when confronting the violence of their lived environment. Instead, they often suggested solutions where they play an active role in resisting the occupation or improving environmental and cultural issues (the lack of water or gender inequality).

Therefore, our study challenges the definition of children as vulnerable subjects, depicting them instead as competent, capable of adjusting to traumatic experiences even in contexts of chronic violence (Barber, 2011, 2013; Gilligan, 2009; Rabaia et al., 2014; Veronese, Castiglioni, Tombolani, & Said, 2012; Veronese, Pepe, Obaid, Cavazzoni, & Perez, 2019 a, b).

On the basis of our findings, we would argue that this integrative, ecological approach can help inform policy and mental health models. By filling gaps in the available knowledge about the protective process associated with well-being and positive mental health outcomes in children exposed to political conflicts and violence, this research suggests possible directions to follow in order to design better policies and interventions. With Williamson & Robinson (2008, p.7), we would argue that the most crucial resource in situations of armed conflict and political violence 'is the affected population'. So rather than focusing solely on the deficits and psychopathology of children, research and interventions should consider them from a perspective that emphasizes strengths and capabilities (Wessells, 2018). Focusing on agency does not eliminate the effect of trauma on children, but allows us to pay attention to their many ways of comprehending and responding to the challenging situations in which they live (Habashi, 2011). Therefore, recognizing agency resources means emphasizing the ability of children to participate in the promotion and safeguarding of their own well-being and thus developing interventions that are not merely aimed at providing the population with a one-way flow of assistance. As we have discussed within this work, children's agency is not something inherent or innate but must be investigated, enhanced, and cultivated (MonCrieffe, 2009). The more children have the opportunity to actively participate in their recovery process, the more their agentic capability can contribute to reinforcing their well-being and survival skills (Gilligan, 2009; Veronse & Barola, 2018; Veronese et al., 2019b).

Hence, the findings of the research presented here underscore that intervention programs must be designed to foster and cultivate children’s agency and to mobilize the ecological resources that can protect them at an individual, relational and cultural level.

To conclude, as the research described here takes place in Palestine, it is important to remember that enhancing and cultivating children's agency also helps to improve the civil rights of oppressed populations and to advocate for social justice. We believe that, in order to protect children and promote their well-being, any psychosocial intervention should also be directed at promoting and safeguarding their human rights by supporting actions aimed at improving the life and civil rights of oppressed populations (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014; Diab, Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2019a, b). As discussed in this work, agency is both related to the capacity of individuals to cope with a given situation as well as to their capacity to act and alter relations of power and oppression in their own world (Jeffrey, 2012; Katz, 2004). Therefore, on this concern, we believe that further developments should include more attention to the perspectives based on oppression theories, liberation psychology, and post-colonial studies (Lather, 1986; Makkawi, 2017; Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2009; Said, 1984; Scott, 1990). These approaches, such as James Scott's studies (1989) on 'everyday resistance,' might help us to unravel the complexity of the dialectical relationship between agency and structure, while also shedding further light on the everyday 'emancipatory weapons' (Alawattage & Wickramasinghe, 2008) deployed by Palestinian children. Integrating these perspectives within the broader exploration of the many ways in which children are able to contrast their oppressive environments and the dominant Western discourse (Rahola, 2002; Said, 1991) might help to enable people who live in marginalized or oppressed countries to develop awareness and "become the protagonists of their own process of liberation" (Luque-Ribelles, García-Ramírez & Portillo, 2009, p.282).

References

Adamson, P., Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P., & Richardson, D. (2007). Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries. Florence, Italy: Innocenti Research Center.

Adelson, N. (2000). Re-imagining Aboriginality: An Indigenous peoples' response to social suffering. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 37*(1), 11-34.

Ager, A. (2002). Psychosocial Needs in Complex Emergencies, *The Lancet*, 360, 43–44.

Ager, A. (2013). Annual Research Review: Resilience and child well-being–public policy implications. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 54(*4), 488-500.

Ager, A., Boothby, N., & Bremer, M. (2009). Using the protective environment framework to analyse children's protection needs in Darfur. *Disasters*, *33*(4), 548-573.

Ahearn, L. M. (1999). Agency. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 9*(1-2), 12-15.

Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual review of anthropology, 30*(1), 109-137.

Ahearn, L. M. (2010). Agency and language. *Society and language use, 7*, 28-48.

Aisenberg, E., & Herrenkohl, T. (2008). Community violence in context: Risk and resilience in children and families. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 23(3), 296-315.

Akesson, B. (2014). *Contradictions in place: Everyday geographies of Palestinian children and families living under occupation* (Doctoral dissertation, McGill University Libraries).

Akesson, B. (2015). Geographies of Palestinian children and families: A critical review of the research and a future research agenda. *Conflict, Violence and Peace*, 1-18.

Akesson, B. (2016). Palestinian children forging national identity through the social and spatial practices of territoriality. In: *Childhood and Nation*, 141-162. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Akesson, B., & Denov, M. (2017). Socio-ecological research methods with children affected by armed conflict: Examples from northern Uganda and Palestine. *Children affected by armed conflict: Theory, method, and practice*, 139-162.

Akesson, B., Basso, A. R., & Denov, M. (2016). The right to home: domicide as a violation of child and family rights in the context of political violence. *Children & Society, 30*(5), 369-383.

Al-Eissa, Y. A. (1995). The impact of the Gulf armed conflict on the health and behavior of Kuwaiti children. *Social Science & Medicine, 41*(7), 1033-1037.

Al-Krenawi, A., Lev-Wiesel, R., & Sehwail, M. A. (2007). Psychological symptomatology among Palestinian male and female adolescents living under political violence 2004–2005. *Community Mental Health Journal, 43*(1), 49-56.

Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (2012). The impact of political violence on psychosocial functioning of individuals and families: The case of Palestinian adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 17*(1), 14-22.

Al-Krenawi, A., Lev-Wiesel, R., & Mahmud, A. S. (2007). Psychological symptomatology among Palestinian adolescents living with political violence. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 12(1), 27-31.

Alawattage, C., & Wickramasinghe, D. (2008). Appearance of accounting in a political hegemony. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting, 19*(3), 293-339.

Alexander, J. H., Callaghan, J. E., Sixsmith, J., & Fellin, L. (2015). Children's corporeal agency and use of space in situations of domestic violence. *Play, recreation, health and well being*, 1-21.

Allden, K., Jones, L., Weissbecker, I., Wessells, M., Bolton, P., Betancourt, T. S., ... & Sumathipala, A. (2009). Mental health and psychosocial support in crisis and conflict: report of the Mental Health Working Group. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, *24*(S2), 217-227.

Alonso, Y. (2004). The biopsychosocial model in medical research: the evolution of the health concept over the last two decades. *Patient education and counseling, 53*(2), 239-244.

American Psychiatric Association (1987). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, *Revised Third Edition*. Washington, DC.

American Psychological Association (APA). (2010). *Resilience and recovery after war: refugee children and families in the United States.* Washington, DC: Author.

Amnesty International. (2007). *Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Enduring occupation Palestinians under siege in the West Bank*. MDE /33/. London, United Kingdom: Amnesty International Publications.

Anderson, J. (2002). Researching environmental resistance: Working through second space and third space approaches. *Qualitative Research, 2*, 301–322.

Anderson, J. (2004). Talking whilst walking: a geographical archaeology of knowledge. *Area*, *36*(3), 254-261.

Apfel, R. J., & Simon, B. (2000). Mitigating discontents with children in war: An ongoing psychoanalytic inquiry. *Publications-society for psychological anthropology, 11*, 102-130.

Arafat, C., & Boothby, N. (2003). *A psychosocial assessment of Palestinian children*. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.

Atallah, D. G. (2017). A community-based qualitative study of intergenerational resilience with Palestinian refugee families facing structural violence and historical trauma. *Transcultural psychiatry, 54*(3), 357-383.

Attanayake, V., McKay, R., Joffres, M., Singh, S., Burkle Jr, F., & Mills, E. (2009). Prevalence of mental disorders among children exposed to war: a systematic review of 7,920 children. *Medicine Conflict and Survival, 25*(1), 4-19.

Ayer, L., Venkatesh, B., Stewart, R., Mandel, D., Stein, B., & Schoenbaum, M. (2017). Psychological aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 18*(3), 322-338.

B'Tselem. (2013). Statistics: Fatalities. Retrieved July 1, 2019, available from http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/any/by-date-of-death

B'Tselem. (2017). The separation barrier. Retrieved July, 1, 2019, from https://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier

B'Tselem. (2017b). Gaza Strip. Retrieved July, 1, 2019 from internet, available on: https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip

B'Tselem. (2017c). Settlements. Retrieved July, 1, 2019, from internet, available on: https://www.btselem.org/settlement

B'Tselem. (2019). Statistic on Palestinian minors in the custody of Israeli security forces. Retrieved July, 1, 2019, from internet, available on: https://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody

Badour, C. L., Resnick, H. S., & Kilpatrick, D. G. (2017). Associations between specific negative emotions and DSM-5 PTSD among a national sample of interpersonal trauma survivors. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 32(11), 1620-1641.

Baker, A. M. (1991). Psychological response of Palestinian children to environmental stress associated with military occupation. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 4*(3), 237-247.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. Bakhtin*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American psychologist, 44*(9), 1175.

Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of personality. *Handbook of personality, 2*, 154-196.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual review of psychology, 52*(1), 1-26.

Bandura, A. (2018). Toward a psychology of human agency: Pathways and reflections. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 13*(2), 130-136.

Baraldi, C., & Iervese, V. (2014). Observing children's capabilities as agency. *In Children's Rights and the Capability Approach* (pp. 43-65). Springer, Dordrecht.

Barber, B. K. (2001). Political violence, social integration, and youth functioning: Palestinian youth from the Intifada. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 29, 259–280. doi:10.1002/jcop.1017

Barber, B. K. (2008). *Adolescents and war: How youth deal with political violence.* Oxford University Press.

Barber, B. K. (2008b). Contrasting portraits of war: Youths' varied experiences with political violence in Bosnia and Palestine. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 32(4), 298-309.

Barber, B. K. (2009). Glimpsing the complexity of youth and political violence. In B. K. Barber (Ed.), *Adolescents and war: How youth deal with political violence* (pp. 3–32). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Barber, B. K. (2013). Annual research review: The experience of youth with political conflict—challenging notions of resilience and encouraging research refinement. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 54, 461– 475.

Barber, B. K. (2014). Research on youth and political conflict: Where is the politics? Where are the youths? *Child Development Perspectives, 8*(3), 125-130.

Barber, B. K., & Doty, S. B. (2013). How can a majority be resilient? Critiquing the utility of the construct of resilience through a focus on youth in contexts of political conflict. In *Handbook of resilience in children of war* (233-252). Springer, New York, NY.

Barber, B. K., & Schluterman, J. M. (2009). An overview of the empirical literature on adolescents and political violence. *Adolescents and war: How youth deal with political violence*, 35-61.

Barber, B. K., Spellings, C., McNeely, C., Page, P. D., Giacaman, R., Arafat, C., ... & Mallouh, M. A. (2014). Politics drives human functioning, dignity, and quality of life. *Social Science & Medicine, 122*, 90-102.

Barbour, R. (2008). *Doing Focus Group*. London: Sage

Barenbaum, J., Ruchkin, V., & Schwab-Stone, M. (2004). The psychosocial aspects of children exposed to war: practice and policy initiatives. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45*(1), 41-62.

Barker, J., & Weller, S. (2003). “Is it fun?” Developing children centred research methods. *International journal of sociology and social policy, 23*(1/2), 33-58.

Barry, M. M. (2013). Promoting positive mental health and well-being: Practice and policy. In *Mental Well-Being* (pp. 355-384). Springer, Dordrecht.

Bartley, M. (2006). *Capability and resilience: beating the odds*. UCL Department of Epidemiology and Public Health.

Basak, P. (2012). The impact of occupation on child health in a Palestinian refugee camp. *Journal of tropical pediatrics, 58*(6), 423-428.

Beazley, H. (2007). The 'Malaysian orphans' of Lombok: Children and young people's livelihood responses to out-migration in eastern Indonesia. *In Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: Young rural lives, 17,* 107-120. Routledge.

Bell, D. (2002). Person and place: Making meaning of the art of Australian Indigenous women. *Feminist Studies*, *28*(1), 95-127.

Ben-Arieh, A. (2005). Where are the children? Children’s role in measuring and monitoring their well-being. *Social indicators research, 74*(3), 573-596.

Ben-Arieh, A. (2008). The child indicators movement: Past, present, and future. *Child Indicators Research, 1*(1), 3-16.

Ben-Arieh, A., & Goerge, R. (2001). Beyond the numbers: How do we monitor the state of our children? *Children and Youth Services Review, 23*(8), 603-631.

Ben-Arieh, A., & Attar-Schwartz, S. (2013). An ecological approach to children's rights and participation: Interrelationships and correlates of rights in different ecological systems. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 83*(1), 94.

Benight, C. C., & Bandura, A. (2004). Social cognitive theory of posttraumatic recovery: The role of perceived self-efficacy. *Behaviour research and therapy, 42*(10), 1129-1148.

Bentler, P. M. (1990). Fit indexes, Lagrange multipliers, constraint changes and incomplete data in structural models. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 25*(2), 163-172.

Berger, D. E., Miller, K. E., & Fernando, G. A. (2009). Daily stressors in the lives of Sri Lankan youth: a mixed methods approach to assessment in a context of war and natural disaster. *Intervention, 7*(3), 187-203.

Berk, L.E. (2000). *Child Development*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 23-38.

Betancourt, T. S. (2012). The social ecology of resilience in war-affected youth: A longitudinal study from Sierra Leone. In The social ecology of resilience (pp. 347-356). Springer, New York, NY.

Betancourt, T. S., & Khan, K. T. (2008). The mental health of children affected by armed conflict: Protective processes and pathways to resilience. *International review of psychiatry*, *20*(3), 317-328.

Betancourt, T. S., Borisova, I., Williams, T. P., Meyers-Ohki, S. E., Rubin-Smith, J. E., Annan, J., & Kohrt, B. A. (2013). Research Review: Psychosocial adjustment and mental health in former child soldiers–a systematic review of the literature and recommendations for future research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 54*(1), 17-36.

Betancourt, T. S., Brennan, R. T., Rubin-Smith, J., Fitzmaurice, G. M., & Gilman, S. E. (2010). Sierra Leone's former child soldiers: a longitudinal study of risk, protective factors, and mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 49*(6), 606-615.

Betancourt, T. S., McBain, R., Newnham, E. A., & Brennan, R. T. (2013). Trajectories of internalizing problems in war-affected Sierra Leonean youth: Examining conflict and postconflict factors. *Child Development,* 84, 455–470.

Betancourt, T. S., Meyers-Ohki, S. E., Charrow, A. P., & Tol, W. A. (2013). Interventions for children affected by war: an ecological perspective on psychosocial support and mental health care. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 21(2), 70–91.

Betancourt, T. S., Newnham, E. A., McBain, R., & Brennan, R. T. (2013). Post-traumatic stress symptoms among former child soldiers in Sierra Leone: follow-up study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 203(1), 196–202.

Betancourt, T. S., Salhi, C., Buka, S., Leaning, J., Dunn, G., & Earls, F. (2012). Connectedness, social support and internalising emotional and behavioural problems in adolescents displaced by the Chechen conflict. *Disasters, 36*(4), 635-655.

Biggeri, M., Ballet, J., & Comim, F. (2011). *Children and the capability approach*. Springer.

Blaut, J. M., Stea, D., Spencer, C., & Blades, M. (2003). Mapping as a cultural and cognitive universal. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *93*(1), 165-185.

Bollen, K. A. (1989) *Structural Equations with Latent Variables.* New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? *American psychologist, 59*(1), 20.

Boothby, N., Strang, A., & Wessells, M. G. (2006). *A world turned upside down: Social ecological approaches to children in war zones*. Kumarian Press.

Bordonaro, L. I., & Payne, R. (2012). Ambiguous agency: critical perspectives on social interventions with children and youth in Africa. *Journal of children's geographies. 10*, 365-372.

Botha, A., & van den Berg, H. (2016). Trauma exposure and life satisfaction among at-risk black South African adolescents. *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 26*(6), 500-507.

Bourbeau, P. (2015). Resilience and international politics: Premises, debates, agenda. *International*

Bourbeau, P., & Ryan, C. (2018). Resilience, resistance, infrapolitics and enmeshment. *European journal of international relations, 24*(1), 221-239.

Boxer, P., Rowell Huesmann, L., Dubow, E. F., Landau, S. F., Gvirsman, S. D., Shikaki, K., & Ginges, J. (2013). Exposure to violence across the social ecosystem and the development of aggression: A test of ecological theory in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. *Child development, 84*(1), 163-177.

Boyden, J. (2003). Children under fire: challenging assumptions about children's resilience. *Children Youth and Environments*, 13(1), 1-29.

Boyden, J. (2010). "Preface". In: *Years of conflict: adolescence, political violence and displacement*, ix–xii. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Boyden, J., & De Berry, J. (2004). *Children and youth on the front line: Ethnography, armed conflict and displacement* (Vol. 14). Berghahn Books.

Boyden, J., & Ennew, J. (1997). *Children in focus: a manual for participatory research with children*. Rädda Barnen.

Boyden, J., & Mann, G. (2005). Children's risk, resilience, and coping in extreme situations. *Handbook for working with children and youth: Pathways to resilience across cultures and contexts*, *3*, 26.

Boyden, J., Cooper, E., & Lives, Y. (2006). Questioning the Power of Resilience: Are Children Up To the Task of Disrupting the Transmission of Poverty? *CPRC Workshop on Concepts and Methods for Analysing Poverty Dynamics and Chronic Poverty*, University of Manchester, UK.

Bracken, P. (2002). *Trauma: Culture, meaning and philosophy*. Whurr Publishers.

Bracken, P. J., Giller, J. E., & Summerfield, D. (1995). Psychological responses to war and atrocity: The limitations of current concepts. *Social science & medicine, 40*(8), 1073-1082.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard university press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). Ecological systems theory. *Annals of Child Development, 6*, 187-

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *International encyclopedia of education*, *3*(2), 37-43.

Brown, G. (2007). Mutinous eruptions: Autonomous spaces of radical queer activism. *Environment and Planning, 39*, 2685–2698.

Brown, K., & Westaway, E. (2011). Agency, capacity, and resilience to environmental change: lessons from human development, well-being, and disasters. *Annual review of environment and resources, 36*, 321-342.

Brown, L., & Strega, S. (2005). *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Browne, M. W., & Cudeck, R. (1993). Alternative ways of assessing model fit. *Sage focus editions, 154,* 136-136.

Bruner, J. S., Jolly, A., & Sylva, K. (Eds.). (1976). *Play: Its role in development and evolution.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Brym, R. J., & Araj, B. (2006). Suicide bombing as strategy and interaction: The case of the second intifada. *Social Forces, 84*(4), 1969–1986.

Bureau, United States Census. (2013). *International Data Base*. Retrieved from internet on January 1, available on: https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/informationGateway.php

Cairns, E., & Dawes, A. (1996). Children: Ethnic and political violence: A commentary. *Child Development, 67*, 129–139.

Cairns, E., & Wilson, R. (1984). The impact of political violence on mild psychiatric morbidity in Northern Ireland. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 145*(6), 631-635.

Camfield, L., Crivello, G., & Woodhead, M. (2009). Wellbeing research in developing countries: Reviewing the role of qualitative methods. *Social Indicators Research, 90*(1), 5.

Campbell, A. (1976). Subjective measures of well-being. *American psychologist*, *31*(2), 117.

Caquard, S., & Cartwright, W. (2014). Narrative cartography: From mapping stories to the narrative of maps and mapping. *The Cartographic Journal, 51*(2), 101–106.

Carpiano, R. M. (2009). Come take a walk with me: The "Go-Along" interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health & place*, *15*(1), 263-272.

Casas, F. (2003). Getting children's points of view from 12 to 16 years old through group administered questionnaires. *International Meeting on Methods and Techniques in Children's Research in International Comparison at Deutsches Jugendinstitut*. Jugendinstitut.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2011). Grounded theory methods in social justice research. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 4*(1), 359-380.

Chatterton, P., Fuller, D., & Routledge, P. (2007). Relating action to activism: Theoretical and methodological reflections. *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place*, 216-222.

Chatty, D. (2009). Palestinian refugee youth: Agency and aspiration. *Refugee Survey Quarterly, 28*(2-3), 318-338.

Chatty, D. (2010). *Displacement and dispossession in the modern Middle East*. Cambridge University Press.

Chida, Y., & Steptoe, A. (2008). Positive psychological well-being and mortality: a quantitative review of prospective observational studies. *Psychosomatic medicine, 70*(7), 741-756.

Christensen, P., & Prout, A. (2003). Children, place, space and generation. *Childhood in generational perspective,* 133-154.

Christensen, P., Mikkelsen, M. R., Nielsen, T. A. S., & Harder, H. (2011). Children, mobility, and space: using GPS and mobile phone technologies in ethnographic research. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *5*(3), 227-246.

Ciancian, F. (1993). Conflicts between Activist Research and Academic Success: Participatory Research and Alternative Strategies. *The American Sociologist/Spring*, 92-105

Cicchetti, D. (2010). Resilience under conditions of extreme stress: a multilevel perspective. *World Psychiatry, 9*(3), 145-154.

Cicchetti, D. (2013). Annual research review: Resilient functioning in maltreated children–past, present, and future perspectives. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, 54*(4), 402-422.

Cicchetti, D., & Lynch, M. (1993). Toward an ecological/transactional model of community violence and child maltreatment: Consequences for children's development. *Psychiatry, 56*(1), 96-118.

Clark, A. (2004). The mosaic approach and research with young children. In: Lewis, Vicky; Kellett, Mary; Robinson, Chris; Fraser, Sandy and Ding, Sharon eds. *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People*. London, UK: Sage, 142–161.

Clark, C. J., Everson-Rose, S. A., Suglia, S. F., Btoush, R., Alonso, A., & Haj-Yahia, M. M. (2010). Association between exposure to political violence and intimate partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory: A case-control study. *The Lancet*, 375, 310–316.

Coffey, J., & Farrugia, D. (2014). Unpacking the black box: The problem of agency in the sociology of youth. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17*(4), 461-474.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). Planning educational research. *Research methods in education. New York: Routledge Editors*.

Cohen, S. (2004). Social relationships and health. *American psychologist, 59*(8), 676.

Constandinides, D., Kamens, S., Marshoud, B., & Flefel, F. (2011). Research in ongoing conflict zones: Effects of a school-based intervention for Palestinian children. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *17*(3), 270-302.

Conti, A. (2001). Research as a political method. *Metropolitan proletarian research.* Available at: http://www.ecn.org/valkohaalarit/english/conti.htm

Copeland, W. E., Keeler, G., Angold, A., & Costello, E. J. (2007). Traumatic events and posttraumatic stress in childhood. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 64*(5), 577-584.

Corner, J. (1999). *Recovering landscape: Essays in contemporary landscape theory.* Princeton Architectural Press.

Crawley, H. (2010). 'No one gives you a chance to say what you are thinking': finding space for children's agency in the UK asylum system. *Area, 42*(2), 162-169.

Cresswell, T. (2004). *Defining place. Place: A Short Introduction.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Ltd, 12.

Cresswell, T. (2014). *Place: an introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.

Creswell, J. W. (1999). Mixed-method research: Introduction and application. In *Handbook of educational policy*, 455-472. Academic Press.

Creswell, J. W., Plano Clark, V. L., Gutmann, M. L., & Hanson, W. E. (2003). Advanced mixed methods research designs. *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research*, 209-240.

Cummings, E. M., George, M. R., McCoy, K. P., & Davies, P. T. (2012). Interparental conflict in kindergarten and adolescent adjustment: Prospective investigation of emotional security as an explanatory mechanism. *Child development, 83*(5), 1703-1715.

Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Schermerhorn, A. C., Merrilees, C. E., & Cairns, E. (2009). Children and political violence from a social ecological perspective: Implications from research on children and families in Northern Ireland. *Clinical child and family psychology review*, 12(1), 16-38.

Cummings, E. M., Merrilees, C. E; Taylor, L. K. & Mondi, C. F. (2017c). *Political Violence, Armed Conflict, and youth adjustment: a developmental psychopathology perspective on research and intervention.* Springer International Publishing AG.

Cummings, E. M., Merrilees, C. E., Schermerhorn, A. C., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cairns, E. (2011). Longitudinal pathways between political violence and child adjustment: The role of emotional security about the community in Northern Ireland. *Journal of abnormal child psychology, 39*(2), 213-224.

Cummings, E. M., Merrilees, C. E., Taylor, L. K., & Mondi, C. F. (2017b). Developmental and social–ecological perspectives on children, political violence, and armed conflict. *Development and psychopathology*, 29(1), 1-10.

Cummings, E. M., Merrilees, C., Taylor, L. K., Goeke-Morey, M., & Shirlow, P. (2017). Emotional insecurity about the community: A dynamic, within-person mediator of child adjustment in contexts of political violence. *Development and psychopathology*, *29*(1), 27-36.

Damon, W., Menon, J., & Cotton Bronk, K. (2003). The development of purpose during adolescence. *Applied developmental science, 7*(3), 119-128.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C., & Schiller, W. (2005). Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: More insight or just more? *Qualitative Research, 5*(4), 417–436.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the theory of social behavior, 20*(1), 43-63.

Davies, M. (2008). A childish culture? Shared understandings, agency and intervention: An anthropological study of street children in northwest Kenya. *Childhood, 15*(3), 309-330.

Davies, P. T., Sturge-Apple, M., Boscoe, S. M., & Cummings, E. M. (2014). The legacy of early insecurity histories in shaping adolescent adaptation to interparental conflict. *Child Development*, 85(1), 338–352. doi:10.1111/cdev.12119.

Dawes, A., & Cairns, E. (1998). The Machel study: Dilemmas of cultural sensitivity and rights of children. *Peace and Conflict, 4*(4), 335–348.

De Berry, J. (2004). The sexual vulnerability of adolescent girls during civil war in Teso, Uganda. *Children and youth on the front line: ethnography, armed conflict and displacement, 14*, 1045-1062.

De Jong, A. (2005). *To exist is to resist: Non-violent resistance in the Palestinian occupied territories*. Unpublished Master Thesis University of Amsterdam: available at Amsterdam University Library.

De Jong, A. (2012). The Gaza Freedom Flotilla: Human Rights, Activism and Academic Neutrality. *Social Movement Studies, 11*(2). 193-209.

De Jong, J. T., Komproe, I. H., & Van Ommeren, M. (2003). Common mental disorders in postconflict settings. *The lancet, 361*(9375), 2128-2130.

Defence for Children International, Palestine (DCIP). (2012). *Bound, Blindfolded and Convicted: Children Held in Military Detention.* Jerusalem: DCIP.

Defence for Children International, Palestine (DCIP). (2014). *Growing Up between Israeli Settlements and Soldiers.* Jerusalem: DCIP.

Defence for Children International, Palestine (DCIP). (2019). *Military detention.* Jerusalem: DCIP.

Dennis Jr, S. F., Gaulocher, S., Carpiano, R. M., & Brown, D. (2009). Participatory photo mapping (PPM): Exploring an integrated method for health and place research with young people. *Health & place*, *15*(2), 466-473.

Denov, M. (2010). *Child soldiers: Sierra Leone's revolutionary united front*. Cambridge University Press.

Denov, M., & Akesson, B. (2017). *Children affected by armed conflict: theory, method, and practice*. Columbia University Press.

Denov, M., & Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2016). Trajectories of violence and survival: Turnings and adaptations in the lives of two war-affected youth living in Canada. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 22*(3), 236.

Denov, M., Doucet, D., & Kamara, A. (2012). Engaging war affected youth through photography: Photovoice with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. *Intervention*, *10*(2), 117-133.

Desouza, K. C. (2004). Knowledge management: A new commission for industrial engineers. *Industrial Management, 46*(1), 26-27.

Diab, M. (2018). *How to help war-affected children: Effectiveness of psychosocial intervention to improve social-emotional competencies and resilience*. Tampere University Press.

Diab, M., Isosävi, S., Qouta, S. R., Kuittinen, S., & Punamäki, R. L. (2018). The protective role of maternal posttraumatic growth and cognitive trauma processing among Palestinian mothers and infants. *Infant Behavior and Development, 50*, 284-299.

Diab, M., Peltonen, K., Qouta, S. R., Palosaari, E., & Punamäki, R. L. (2015). Effectiveness of psychosocial intervention enhancing resilience among war-affected children and the moderating role of family factors. *Child abuse & neglect*, 40, 24-35.

Diab, M., Punamäki, R. L., Palosaari, E., & Qouta, S. R. (2014). Can psychosocial intervention improve peer and sibling relations among war-affected children? Impact and mediating analyses in a randomized controlled trial. *Social Development*, *23*(2), 215-231.

Diab, M., Veronese, G., Jamei, Y.A., Hamam, R., Saleh, S., & Kagee, A. (2018). Community work in the ongoing crisis context of Gaza: integrating a public health and human rights approach. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 39*(3), 320-330.

Diamond, G. M., Lipsitz, J. D., & Hoffman, Y. (2013). Nonpathological response to ongoing traumatic stress. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 19*(2), 100.

Diamond, L. M., & Aspinwall, L. G. (2003). Integrating diverse developmental perspectives on emotion regulation. *Motivation and Emotion, 27*(1), 1-6.

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological bulletin*, 95(3), 542.

Diener, E. (1994). Assessing subjective well-being: Progress and opportunities. *Social indicators research,* 31(2), 103-157.

Diener, E., & Chan, M. Y. (2011). Happy people live longer: Subjective well-being contributes to health and longevity. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 3(1), 1-43.

Diener, E., Suh, E., & Oishi, S. (1997). Recent findings on subjective well-being. *Indian journal of clinical psychology*, *24*, 25-41.

Donaldson, M. (1978). *Children's minds*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.

Downe, P. J. (2001). Playing with names: How children create identities of self in anthropological research. *Anthropologica*, 165-177.

Dubow, E. F., Boxer, L. R., Huesmann, L. R., Skikaki, K., Landau, S., Gvirsman, S. D., & Ginger, J. (2010). Exposure to conflict and violence across contexts: Relations to adjustment among Palestinian children. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 39*, 103–116.

Dubow, E. F., Huesmann, L. R., & Boxer, P. (2009). A social-cognitive-ecological framework for understanding the impact of exposure to persistent ethnic–political violence on children's psychosocial adjustment. *Clinical child and family psychology review, 12*(2), 113-126.

Durham, D. (2008). Apathy and agency. The romance of agency and youth in Botswana. In: Cole & Durham (Eds.), *Figuring the future. Globalization and the temporalities of children and youth,* 151–178. Santa Fé: School for Advanced Research Press.

Durkheim, E. (1915). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.* London: George Allen and Unwin.

Ebesutani, C., Smith, A., Bernstein, A., Chorpita, B. F., Higa-McMillan, C., & Nakamura, B. (2011). A bi-factor model of negative affectivity: Fear and distress components among younger and older youth. *Psychological Assessment, 23*, 679–691.

Eggerman, M., & Panter-Brick, C. (2010). Suffering, hope, and entrapment: Resilience and cultural values in Afghanistan. *Social science & medicine, 71*(1), 71-83.

Eiling, E., Van Diggele-Holtland, M., Van Yperen, T., & Boer, F. (2014). Psychosocial support for children in the Republic of South Sudan: an evaluation outcome. *Interv: J Mental Health Psychosocial Support Conflict Affected Area*, *12*(1), 61-75.

Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American journal of sociology, 103*(4), 962-1023.

Engel, G. L. (1977). The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine. *Science, 196*(4286), 129-136.

Exenberger, S., & Juen, B. (2013). *Well-being, resilience and quality of life from children's perspectives: A contextualized approach*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Farwell, N. (2001). 'Onward through strength': Coping and psychological support among refugee youth returning to Eritrea from Sudan. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 14*(1), 43-69.

Fassinger, J. F. (2013). Toward Best Practices in Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-Method Research: A Social Justice Perspective. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, 5*(2), 69-83.

Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2009). When children are asked about their well-being: Towards a framework for guiding policy. *Child Indicators Research, 2*(1), 57-77.

Fearn, M., & Howard, J. (2011). Play as a resource for children facing adversity. An exploration of indicative case studies. *Children & Society, 26*(6), 456-489.

Feldman, I. (2009). Gaza's humanitarianism problem. *Journal of Palestine Studies, 38*(3), 22-37.

Fernando, C., & Ferrari, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of resilience in children of war*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Fernando, G. A., Miller, K. E., & Berger, D. E. (2010). Growing pains: The impact of disaster-related and daily stressors on the psychological and psychosocial functioning of youth in Sri Lanka. *Child development*, 81(4), 1192-1210.

Forrest, L., Shen Miller, D. S., & Elman, N. S. (2008). Psychology trainees with competence problems: From individual to ecological conceptualizations. Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 2(4), 183.

Fraser, M. W., Kirby, L. D., & Smokowski, P. R. (2004). Risk and resilience in childhood. *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective, 2,* 13-66.

Freud, S., & Breuer, J. (1985). *Studies in hysteria.* Penguin.

Frey, B. S. (2012). Well-being and war. *International Review of Economics*, *59*(4), 363-375.

Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1993). Boys play sport and girls turn to others: Age, gender and ethnicity as determinants of coping. *Journal of adolescence, 16*(3), 253-266.

Garbarino, J. (2014). Ecological perspective on child well-being. *Handbook of Child Well-Being: Theories, Methods and Policies in Global Perspective*, 1365-1384.

Garbarino, J., & Bruyere, E. (2013). Resilience in the lives of children of war. In: *Handbook of resilience in children of war*, 253-266. Springer, New York, NY.

Garbarino, J., & Kostelny, K. (1996). The effects of political violence on Palestinian children's behavior problems: A risk accumulation model. *Child development, 67*(1), 33-45.

Garcia-Dia, M. J., DiNapoli, J. M., Garcia-Ona, L., Jakubowski, R., & O'Flaherty, D. (2013). Concept analysis: resilience. *Archives of psychiatric nursing, 27*(6), 264-270.

Garfield, R. M., & Neugut, A. I. (1997). The human consequences of war. *War and public health*, 27, 33.

Garmezy, N. (1983). Stressors of childhood. In N. Garmezy & M. Rutter (Eds.), *Stress, coping and development in children* (43-84). Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

George, D., & Mallery, M. (2010). *SPSS for Windows step by step: A simple study guide and reference, 17.0 update* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Gergen, K. J. (1997). The place of the psyche in a constructed world. *Theory & Psychology, 7*(6), 723-746.

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Harvard university press.

Ghanim, H. (2010). Being a border. In R. A. Kanaaneh, & I. Nusair (Eds.), *Displaced at home: Ethnicity and gender among Palestinians in Israel*, 109–118. New York: State University of New York Press.

Giacaman, R. (2018). Reframing public health in wartime: From the biomedical model to the "wounds inside". *Journal of Palestine Studies, 47*(2), 9-27.

Giacaman, R., Khatib, R., Shabaneh, L., Ramlawi, A., Sabri, B., Sabatinelli, G., ... & Laurance, T. (2009). Health status and health services in the occupied Palestinian territory. *The lancet, 373*(9666), 837-849.

Giacaman, R., Mataria, A., Nguyen-Gillham, V., Safieh, R. A., Stefanini, A., & Chatterji, S. (2007). Quality of life in the Palestinian context: An inquiry in war-like conditions. *Health policy, 81*(1), 68-84.

Giacaman, R., Rabaia, Y., Nguyen-Gillham, V., Batniji, R., Punamäki, R. L., & Summerfield, D. (2011). Mental health, social distress and political oppression: The case of the occupied Palestinian territory. *Global public health*, 6(5), 547-559.

Gibson, K. (1989). Children in political violence. *Social Science & Medicine, 28*(7), 659-667.

Giddens, A. (1984). Structuration theory, empirical research and social critique. In: Giddens, *The constitution of society*: *Outline of the theory of structuration*, 281-305.

Gilligan, C. (2009). Highly vulnerable'? Political violence and the social construction of traumatized children. *Journal of Peace Research*, 46(1), 119-134.

Gitlin, A. (1994). *Power and Method. Political activism and educational research.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). Grounded theory: The discovery of grounded theory. *Sociology the journal of the British sociological association*, *12*(1), 27-49.

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). (2014). *Education Under Attack*. Retrieved by internet on May 2019, available on: http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_0.pdf

Goswami, H. (2014). Children's subjective well-being: Socio-demographic characteristics and personality. *Child Indicators Research, 7*(1), 119-140.

Greene, J. C. (2005). A Reprise on Mixing Methods. *Discovering successful pathways in children's development: Mixed methods in the study of childhood and family life*, 405.

Habashi, J. (2008). Palestinian children crafting national identity. *Childhood, 15*(1), 12-29.

Habashi, J. (2011). Children's agency and Islam: unexpected paths to solidarity. *Children's Geographies, 9*(2), 129-144.

Habashi, J. (2013). Children's religious agency: conceptualizing Islamic idioms of resistance. *Area, 45*(2), 155-161.

Habashi, J. (2013b). Palestinian children: Authors of collective memory. *Children & society, 27*(6), 421-433.

Habashi, J., & Worley, J. (2009). Child geopolitical agency: A mixed methods case study. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 3*(1), 42-64.

Haj-Yahia, M. M. (2007). Challenges in studying the psychological effects of Palestinian children's exposure to political violence and their coping with this traumatic experience. *Child abuse & neglect*, *31*(7), 691-697.

Haj-Yahia, M. M. (2008). Political violence in retrospect: Its effect on the mental health of Palestinian adolescents. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32*(4), 283-289.

Häkkinen, M. (2014). *Psychosocial Coping in Prolonged Conflict. An Ethnography of Palestinian People in the midst of Ongoing Volatility*. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland.

Hakli, J., & Kallio, K. P. (2015). Political geographies of childhood and youth. Virtual Special Issue. Editorial. *Political Geography, 46,* 31-40.

Halevi, G., Djalovski, A., Vengrober, A., & Feldman, R. (2016). Risk and resilience trajectories in war-exposed children across the first decade of life. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 57(10), 1183-1193.

Hall, S. (1996). New ethnicities. In: Morley & Chen (Eds.), *Critical dialogues in cultural studies*, 441-459. London: Routledge.

Halper, J. (2002). The key to peace: Dismantling the matrix of control. *The other Israel: Voices of refusal and dissent*, 20-40.

Hammack, P. L. (2010). The cultural psychology of Palestinian youth: A narrative approach. *Culture & Psychology, 16*(4), 507-537.

Hammad, S. H. (2011). Senses of place in flux: A generational approach. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 31*(9/10), 555-568.

Hampel, P., & Petermann, F. (2005). Age and gender effects on coping in children and adolescents. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 34*(2), 73-83.

Hampel, P., & Petermann, F. (2006). Perceived stress, coping, and adjustment in adolescents. *Journal of adolescent health, 38*(4), 409-415.

Harel-Fisch, Y., Radwan, Q., Walsh, S. D., Laufer, A., Amitai, G., Fogel-Grinvald, H., & Abdeen, Z. (2010). Psychosocial outcomes related to subjective threat from armed conflict

events (STACE): Findings from the Israeli-Palestinian cross-cultural HBSC study. *Child abuse & neglect*, *34*(9), 623-638.

Harker, C. (2009). Spacing Palestine through the home. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 34(3), 320-332.

Harms, G., & Ferry, T., M. (2008). *The Palestine Israel conflict: a basic introduction*. New York, NY, 10010.

Haroz, E. E., Jordans, M., de Jong, J., Gross, A., Bass, J., & Tol, W. (2017). Measuring hope among children affected by armed conflict: cross-cultural construct validity of the children's hope scale. *Assessment*, *24*(4), 528-539.

Hart, C. S., Biggeri, M., & Babic, B. (2014). *Agency and participation in childhood and youth: International applications of the capability approach in schools and beyond*. A&C Black.

Hellawell, D. (2006). Inside–out: analysis of the insider–outsider concept as a heuristic device to develop reflexivity in students doing qualitative research. *Teaching in higher education, 11*(4), 483-494.

Hettitantri, N., & Hadley, F. (2017). Young children's experiences of connectedness and belonging in postconflict Srilanka: a socioecological approach. In: Denov & Akesson (Eds.), *Children affected by armed conflict: theory, method, and practice*, 43-65. Columbia University Press.

Hinton, R. (2000). Seen but not heard: refugee children and models for intervention. In: Panter-Brick & Smith (Eds.), *Abandoned children*, 199-212. Cambridge University Press.

Hinton, R. (2008). Children's participation and good governance: Limitations of the theoretical literature. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 16*(3), 285-300.

Hodkinson, S. & Chatterton, P. (2006). Autonomy in the City? Initial reflections on the social centres movement in the UK. *City, 10*, 305–315.

Hoge, E. A., Austin, E. D., & Pollack, M. H. (2007). Resilience: research evidence and conceptual considerations for posttraumatic stress disorder. *Depression and anxiety, 24*(2), 139-152.

Hoggett, P. (2001). Agency, rationality and social policy. *Journal of social policy, 30*(1), 37-56.

Holden, G. W., & Ritchie, K. L. (1991). Linking extreme marital discord, child rearing, and child behavior problems: Evidence from battered women. *Child development*, *62*(2), 311-327.

Holland, E. W. (2003). Representation and misrepresentation in postcolonial literature and theory. *Research in African Literatures, 34*(1), 159-173.

hooks, b. (1990). Marginality as a site of resistance. In Ferguson, R. (ed.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, MIT, Cambridge, MA, 341–343.

Horowitz, M., Wilner, N., & Alvarez, W. (1979). Impact of Event Scale: A measure of subjective stress. *Psychosomatic medicine*, *41*(3), 209-218.

Howell, R. T., Kern, M. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). Health benefits: Meta-analytically determining the impact of well-being on objective health outcomes. *Health Psychology Review, 1*(1), 83-136.

Huebner, E. S. (2004). Research on assessment of life satisfaction of children and adolescents. *Social indicators research, 66*(1-2), 3-33.

Huebner, E. S., & Dew, T. (1996). The interrelationships of positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction in an adolescent sample. *Social Indicators Research, 38*(2), 129-137.

Huebner, E. S., Valois, R. F., Paxton, R. J., & Drane, J. W. (2005). Middle school students' perceptions of quality of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 6(*1), 15-24.

Huebner, E.S. (1994). Preliminary development and validation of a multidimensional life satisfaction scale for children, *Psychological Assessment, 6*, 149–158.

Human Rights Council (HRC-40). (2019). Fortieth session – Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. Retrieved from internet on July 1, available on:https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session40/Pages/40RegularSession.aspx

Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2019). Israel and Palestine. Events of 2018. Retrieved from internet on July 1, available on: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine

Hyder, T. (2004). *War, conflict and play.* McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Idler, A., Belén Garrido, M., & Mouly, C. (2015). Peace territories in Colombia: Comparing civil resistance in two war-torn communities. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 10*(3), 1-15.

Iervese, V., & Tuttolomondo, L. (2014). Youth agency and participation outside the classroom. In: *Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth: International Applications of the Capability Approach in Schools and Beyond*, 243- 259. A&C Black.

Israel-Cohen, Y., Uzefovsky, F., Kashy-Rosenbaum, G., & Kaplan, O. (2015). Gratitude and PTSD symptoms among Israeli youth exposed to missile attacks: examining the

mediation of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *10*(2), 99-106.

Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Regional Statistics: Settlement*. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on: https://www.cbs.gov.il/EN/pages/default.aspx

Itzhaki, Y., Yablon, Y. B., & Itzhaky, H. (2018). Becoming less religious (BLR) and well-being among high school dropouts. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.

Ivankova, N. V., Creswell, J. W., & Stick, S. L. (2006). Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice. *Field methods, 18*(1), 3-20.

James, A. (2009). Agency. In: *The Palgrave handbook of childhood studies*, 34-45. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

James, A., & James, A. (2012). *Key concepts in childhood studies*. London: Sage.

James, A., & Prout, A. (1990). Time and transition in the study of childhood. In: *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Routeledge, 216-237.

James, A., & Prout, A. (2003). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. Routledge: London.

James, A., Jenks, C., & Prout, A. (1998). *Theorizing childhood. Cambridge*: Polity Press.

Janet, P. (1889). L'Automatisme Psychologique [The psychological automatism]. Paris: Alcan.

Jeffrey, C. (2012). Geographies of children and youth II: Global youth agency. *Progress in human geography, 36*(2), 245-253.

Johnson, E. K., & Cronister, J. (2010). Psychological adjustment and coping in the post-conflict. In: Martz (Eds.), *Trauma rehabilitation after war and conflict. Community and individual perspectives.* 265-289. NY: Springer.

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*, 14-26.

Johnson, V., & West, A. (2018). *Children's Participation in Global Contexts: Going Beyond Voice*. Routledge.

Jones, N., & Sumner, A. (2009). Does mixed methods research matter to understanding childhood well-being? *Social Indicators Research*, *90*(1), 33-50.

Jordans, M. J., Tol, W. A., Komproe, I. H., & De Jong, J. V. (2009). Systematic review of evidence and treatment approaches: Psychosocial and mental health care for children in war. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 14*(1), 2-14.

Joronen, M. (2016). Minor (s) Matter: Stone Throwing, Securitization, and the Government of Palestinian Childhood under Israeli Military Rule. In *Childhood and Nation*, 95-116. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Joseph, J. (2013). Resilience in the UK and French security strategy: An Anglo-Saxon bias? *Politics, 33*(4), 253-264.

Judge, T. A., & Bono, J. E. (2001). Relationship of core self-evaluations traits—self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability—with job satisfaction and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of applied Psychology, 86*(1), 80.

Kachachi, G. (2017). Working with children affected by armed conflict. Practical protection work during the Darfur crisis in the Sudan. In: Denov & Akesson (Eds.), *Children affected by armed conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press, 276-295.

Karam, E. G., Fayyad, J., Karam, A. N., Melhem, N., Mneimneh, Z., Dimassi, H., & Tabet, C. C. (2014). Outcome of depression and anxiety after war: a prospective epidemiologic study of children and adolescents. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, *27*(2), 192-199.

Katz, C. (2004). *Growing up global: Economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*. University of Minnesota Press.

Kefalyew, F. (1996). The reality of child participation in research. *Childhood*, *3*(2), 203-213.

Kent, M. (2012). From neuron to social context: Restoring resilience as a capacity for good survival. In: Ungar (Eds.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. New York: Springer, 111–126.

Keresteš, G. (2006). Children's aggressive and prosocial behavior in relation to war exposure: Testing the role of perceived parenting and child's gender. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 30*(3), 227-239.

Kersel, M. M. (2015). Fractured oversight: The ABCs of cultural heritage in Palestine after the Oslo Accords. *Journal of Social Archaeology, 15*(1), 24-44.

Keyes, C. L. (2012). *Mental well-being: International contributions to the study of positive mental health*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Khalidi, R. (1997). The Formation of Palestinian Identity: The Critical Years, 1917-1923. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, 171-190.

Khalidi, W., & Elmusa, S. S. (1992). *All that remains: The Palestinian villages occupied and depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Inst for Palestine Studies.

Khamis, V. (2013). The Mediating Effects of Child Strengths and Hopes on Academic Achievement for Palestinian Children Exposed to Armed Conflict. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology, 1*(2), 112-121.

Khamis, V. (2015). Coping with war trauma and psychological distress among school-age Palestinian children. *American journal of orthopsychiatry, 85*(1), 72-79.

Killian, B., Van der Riet, M., Hough, A., O'Neill, V., & Zondi, T. (2008). Children's Loss of Agency under Extreme Adversity. *Journal of Psychology in Africa, 18*(3), 403-412.

Kira, I. A., Alawneh, A. W. N., Aboumediene, S., Lewandowski, L., & Laddis, A. (2014). Dynamics of oppression and coping from traumatology perspective: The example of Palestinian adolescents. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 20*(4), 385.

Klasen, F., Oettingen, G., Daniels, J., Post, M., Hoyer, C., & Adam, H. (2010). Posttraumatic resilience in former Ugandan child soldiers. *Child development*, *81*(4), 1096-1113.

Klocker, N. (2007). An example of 'thin' agency: Child domestic workers in Tanzania. In: *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth*, 100-111. Routledge.

Kolltveit, S., Lange-Nielsen, I. I., Thabet, A. A. M., Dyregrov, A., Pallesen, S., Johnsen, T. B., & Laberg, J. C. (2012). Risk factors for PTSD, anxiety, and depression among adolescents in Gaza. *Journal of traumatic stress,* 25(2), 164-170.

Kostelny, K. (2006). A culture-based, integrative approach. In: *A world turned upside down: Social ecological approaches to children in war zones*, 19-38. Kumarian Press.

Kostelny, K., Wessells, M., & Ondoro, K. (2014). Community based child protection mechanisms in Kilifi, Kenya: A rapid ethnographic study in two rural sites. *Interagency Learning Initiative on Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Child Protection Systems, London*.

Krogstad, D. J., Diop, S., Diallo, A., Mzayek, F., Keating, J., Koita, O. A., & Touré, Y. T. (2010). Informed consent in international research: the rationale for different approaches. *The American journal of tropical medicine and hygiene, 83*(4), 743-747.

Kusenbach, M. (2003). Street phenomenology: The go-along as ethnographic research tool. *Ethnography*, *4*(3), 455-485.

Kuterovac-Jagodić, G. (2003). Posttraumatic stress symptoms in Croatian children exposed to war: A prospective study. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 59*(1), 9-25.

Ladd, G. W., & Cairns, E. (1996). Children: Ethnic and political violence. *Child Development*, 67(1), 14-18.

Lamphere, L. (1994). Expanding our notions of" critical qualitative methodology": Bringing race, class, and gender into the discussion. *Power and method: political activism and educational research*, 217-226.

Landreth, G. L. (2002). Therapeutic limit setting in the play therapy relationship. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 33*(6), 529.

Laor, N., & Wolmer, L. (2003). Preface: Posttraumatic stress syndrome in children and adolescents and the challenge of war, terror, and disaster. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 12, xv – xix.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange, 17*(4), 63-84.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within/in the postmodern.* New York: Routledge

Layne, C. M., Warren, J. S., Watson, P. J., & Shalev, A. Y. (2007). Risk, vulnerability, resistance, and resilience: Toward an integrative conceptualization of posttraumatic adaptation. In: Friedman, Keane, Resick (Eds.), *Handbook of PTSD: Science and practice*, 497-520. New York, NY, US: The Guilford Press

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Coping and adaptation. The handbook of behavioral medicine*, 282325.

Leavy, P. (2011). *Oral history: Understanding qualitative research.* Oxford University Press.

Lenette, C., Brough, M., & Cox, L. (2013). Everyday resilience: Narratives of single refugee women with children. *Qualitative social work, 12*(5), 637-653.

Leversen, I., Danielsen, A. G., Birkeland, M. S., & Samdal, O. (2012). Basic psychological need satisfaction in leisure activities and adolescents' life satisfaction. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(12), 1588-1599.

Levey, E. J., Laird, L. D., Becker, A. E., Harris, B. L., Lekpeh, G. G., Oppenheim, C. E., ... & Borba, C. P. (2018). Narratives of agency and capability from two adolescent girls in post-conflict Liberia. *Culture, medicine, and psychiatry, 42*(4), 947-979.

Levey, E. J., Oppenheim, C. E., Lange, B. C., Plasky, N. S., Harris, B. L., Lekpeh, G. G., ... & Borba, C. P. (2016). A qualitative analysis of factors impacting resilience among youth in post-conflict Liberia. *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health, 10*(1), 26.

Lonner, W. J. (2009). Senior editor's introduction to the special issue: Qualitative and mixed methods research in cross-cultural psychology. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *40*, 907-908.

Lopez, G. I., Figueroa, M., Connor, S. E., & Maliski, S. L. (2008). Translation barriers in conducting qualitative research with Spanish speakers. *Qualitative Health Research, 18*(12), 1729-1737.

Lounsbury, D. W., & Mitchell, S. G. (2009). Introduction to special issue on social ecological approaches to community health research and action. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 44*(3-4), 213-220.

Lowe, R. C. (2019). *Advantages Of Mixed-Methods Research In Health Related Studies On The Elderly*. The University of Arizona, 1-24.

Luque-Ribelles, V., & Portillo, N. (2009). Gendering peace and liberation: A participatory-action approach to critical consciousness acquisition among women in a marginalized neighborhood. In: Montero & Sonn (Eds.), *Psychology of liberation*, 277-294. Springer, New York, NY.

Luthar, S. S. (2006). Resilience in development: A synthesis of research across five decades. In D. Cicchetti & D. J. Cohen (Eds.), Developmental psychopathology: Vol. 3. *Risk, disorder, and adaptation*, 739– 795. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child development, 71*(3), 543-562.

Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological bulletin, 131*(6), 803.

Magid, B., & Boothby, N. (2013). Promoting resilience in children of war. In: *Handbook of resilience in children of war*, 39-49. Springer, New York, NY.

Makkawi, I. (2009). Towards an emerging paradigm of critical community psychology in Palestine. *The journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy, 12*, 75-86.

Makkawi, I. (2017). The rise and fall of academic community psychology in Palestine and the way forward. *South African Journal of Psychology, 47*(4), 482-492.

Marie, M., Hannigan, B., & Jones, A. (2018). Social ecology of resilience and Sumud of Palestinians. *Health*, 22(1), 20-35.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological review*, *98*(2), 224.

Marsella, A. J. (2010). Ethnocultural aspects of PTSD: An overview of concepts, issues, and treatments. *Traumatology, 16*(4), 17-26.

Marsh, H. W., & Hocevar, D. (1985). Application of confirmatory factor analysis to the study of self-concept: First-and higher order factor models and their invariance across groups. *Psychological bulletin, 97*(3), 562.

Marshall, D. J. (2013). *A children's geography of occupation: Imaginary, emotional, and everyday spaces of Palestinian childhood.* Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky.

Marshall, D. J. (2014). Save (us from) the children: Trauma, Palestinian childhood, and the production of governable subjects. *Children's Geographies, 12*(3), 281-296.

Marshall, D. J. (2015). Existence as resistance: Children and politics of play in Palestine. *Politics, Citizenship and Rights*, 1-15.

Martin, J., Sugarman, J., & Thompson, J. (2003). *Psychology and the question of agency*. SUNY Press.

Martín-Baró, I. (1994). Toward a liberation psychology. In: Aron & Corne (Eds.), *Writings for a liberation psychology*, 17-32, Harvard University Press.

Massad, S., Khammash, U., & Shute, R. (2017). Political violence and mental health of Bedouin children in the West Bank, Palestine: a cross-sectional study. *Medicine, conflict and survival, 33*(3), 188-206.

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist, 56*, 227–238.

Masten, A. S. (2011). Resilience in children threatened by extreme adversity: Frameworks for research, practice, and translational synergy. *Development and Psychopathology, 23*(2), 493-506.

Masten, A. S. (2014). Global perspectives on resilience in children and youth. *Child development*, 85(1), 6-20.

Masten, A. S., & Narayan A. (2012). Child development in the context of disaster, war, and terrorism: pathways of Risk and resilience. *Annu Rev Psychol*.63, 227-257.

Masten, A. S., & Reed, M. G. J. (2002). Resilience in development. *Handbook of positive psychology, 74*, 88.

Matthews, H. (2003). Children and regeneration: Setting an agenda for community participation and integration. *Children & society, 17*(4), 264-276.

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards a sociology for childhood: thinking from children's lives*. Open University Press.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophical and Practical Guide.* London: The Falmer Press.

McCormack, J. (2002). Children's understanding of rurality: exploring the interrelationships between experience and understanding. *Journal of Rural Studies, 18,* 193-207

McLaughlin, P., & Dietz, T. (2008). Structure, agency and environment: Toward an integrated perspective on vulnerability. *Global Environmental Change, 18*(1), 99-111.

McNeely, C., Barber, B. K., Spelling, C., Giacaman, R., Arafat, C.J., Daher, M., … & Abu Mallouh, M. (2014). Human insecurity, chronic economic constraints & health in the occupied Palestinian territory. *Global public health, 9*(5), 495-515.

Merrilees, C. E., Cairns, E., Taylor, L. K., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings, E. M. (2013). Social identity and youth aggressive and delinquent behaviors in a context of political violence. *Political Psychology*, 34(5), 695–711.

Merrill, B., & West, L. (2009). *Using biographical methods in social research*. London: Sage.

Miller, K. E., Kulkarni, M., & Kushner, H. (2006). Beyond trauma-focused psychiatric epidemiology: Bridging research and practice with war-affected populations. *American journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76(4), 409-422.

Milligan, L. (2016). Insider-outsider-inbetweener? Researcher positioning, participative methods and cross-cultural educational research. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 46*(2), 235-250.

Mitchell, C. (2011). *Doing visual research*. London: Sage.

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement. *Annals of internal medicine, 151*(4), 264-269.

Mollica, R. F., & Caspi-Yavin, Y. (1991). Measuring torture and torture-related symptoms. *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 3*(4), 581.

Moncrieffe, J. (2009). Introduction: intergenerational transmissions: cultivating children's agency? *IDS Bulletin, 40*(1), 1-8.

Montero, M. (2009). Methods for liberation: Critical consciousness in action. In: Montero & Sonn (Eds.), *Psychology of liberation,* 73-91. Springer, New York, NY.

Morehouse, R. E., & Maykut, P. (2002). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. Routledge.

Morin A. J. S., Marsh H. W., Nagengast B. (2013). Exploratory structural equation modeling. Structural Equation Modeling: A Second Course. In: Hancock, Mueller, & Charlotte (Eds.), *Information Age*, 395–436.

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of counseling psychology, 52*(2), 250.

Morrow, V. (2001). *Networks and neighborhoods: Children's and young people's perspectives*. NHS Health Development Agency.

Morrow, V., & Richards, M. (1996). The ethics of social research with children: An overview. *Children & society*, *10*(2), 90-105.

Mowbray, C. T., Woolley, M. E., Grogan-Kaylor, A., Gant, L. M., Gilster, M. E., & Shanks, T. R. W. (2007). Neighborhood research from a spatially oriented strengths perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(5), 667-680.

Nacos, B. L. (2004). The terrorist calculus behind 9-11: A model for future terrorism? In: Martin (Eds.), *The new era of terrorism: Selected readings.* 176–187. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Nelson, B. D., Fehling, M., Jarrah, Z. M., Tiernan, M. E., Albezreh, S., Alhokair, A., … & VanRooyen, M. J. (2015). Youth in crisis in the Middle East and North Africa: a systematic literature review and focused landscape analysis. *Eastern Mediterranean health journal, 21*(12).

Nguyen-Gillham, V., Giacaman, R., Naser, G., & Boyce, W. (2008). Normalising the abnormal: Palestinian youth and the contradictions of resilience in protracted conflict. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 16(3), 291-298.

Nicolai, S. (2004). *Learning Independence: Education in Emergency and Transition in Timor-Leste since 1999*. Paris: International Institute for Education Planning, UNESCO.

Noguera, R. T. (2013). The narratives of children in armed conflict: An inference to spirituality and implication to psychological intervention. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, *18*(2), 162-172.

Norris, F. H. (1992). Epidemiology of trauma: frequency and impact of different potentially traumatic events on different demographic groups. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*, 409-418.

Ochen, E. A. (2015). Children and young mothers' agency in the context of conflict: A review of the experiences of formerly abducted young people in Northern Uganda. *Child abuse & neglect, 42*, 183-194.

Olema, D. K., Catani, C., Ertl, V., Saile, R., & Neuner, F. (2014). The hidden effects of child maltreatment in a war region: correlates of psychopathology in two generations living in Northern Uganda. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 27(1), 35-41.

Olsson, C. A., Bond, L., Burns, J. M., Vella-Brodrick, D. A., & Sawyer, S. M. (2003). Adolescent resilience: A concept analysis. *Journal of adolescence*, *26*(1), 1-11.

Ozer, E. J., & Weinstein, R. S. (2004). Urban adolescents' exposure to community violence: The role of support, school safety, and social constraints in a school-based sample of boys and girls. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 33(3), 463-476.

Padgett, D. K. (2009). Qualitative and mixed methods in social work knowledge development. *Social Work, 54*(2), 101.

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). (2018). *State of Palestine: indicators*. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/881/default.aspx#Population

Palosaari, E., Punamäki, R. L., Qouta, S., & Diab, M. (2013). Intergenerational effects of war trauma among Palestinian families mediated via psychological maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37(11), 955-968.

Panter-Brick, C., & Leckman, J. F. (2013). Editorial commentary: resilience in child development–interconnected pathways to wellbeing. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 54(4), 333-336.

Panter-Brick, C., Grimon, M. P., & Eggerman, M. (2014). Caregiver—Child mental health: A prospective study in conflict and refugee settings. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 55(4), 313-327.

Pavot, W., Diener, E. D., Colvin, C. R., & Sandvik, E. (1991). Further validation of the Satisfaction with Life Scale: Evidence for the cross-method convergence of well-being measures. *Journal of personality assessment, 57*(1), 149-161.

Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2018). Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990-2016, Conflict Trends Project. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: www.prio.org/ConflictTrends

Pells, K. (2011). "Keep going despite everything": legacies of genocide for Rwanda's children and youth. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *31*(9/10), 594-606.

Peltonen, K., & Punamäki, R. L. (2010). Preventive interventions among children exposed to trauma of armed conflict: A literature review. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression, 36*(2), 95-116.

Peltonen, K., Qouta, S., El Sarraj, E., & Punamäki, R. L. (2010). Military trauma and social development: The moderating and mediating roles of peer and sibling relations in mental health. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 34*(6), 554-563.

Penn, H. (2005). *Understanding early childhood education. Issues and controversies*. Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd.

Perrin, S., Meiser-Stedman, R., & Smith, P. (2005). The Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale (CRIES): Validity as a screening instrument for PTSD. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy, 33*, 487–498

Peteet, J. (1994). Male gender and rituals of resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A cultural politics of violence. *American Ethnologist, 21*(1), 31-49.

Peteet, J. (1995). Transforming trust: dispossession and empowerment among Palestinian refugees. *Mistrusting refugees*, 168-186.

Peteet, J. (2005). *Landscape of hope and despair: Palestinian refugee camps*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Peteet, J. (2017). *Space and mobility in Palestine*. Indiana University Press.

Pettigrew, S. F. (2000). *Ethnography and grounded theory: a happy marriage?* ACR North American Advances.

Pfefferbaum, R. L., & Klomp, R. W. (2013). Community resilience, disasters, and the public's health. *Community engagement, organization, and development for public health practice*, 275-298.

Pittman, K., & Irby, M. (1997). Promoting investment in life skills for youth: Beyond indicators for survival and problem prevention. *Eurosocial Reports,* 62, 239-246.

Pongprapai, S., Tayakkanonta, K., Chongsuvivatwong, V., & Underwood, P. (1996). A study on disabled children in a rural community in southern Thailand. *Disability and rehabilitation, 18*(1), 42-46.

Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of counseling psychology, 52*(2), 126.

Ponterotto, J. G., Mathew, J., & Raughley, B. (2013). The value of mixed methods designs to social justice research in counseling and psychology. *Journal for Social Action in Counseling and Psychology, 5*(2), 42-68.

Potts, K., & Brown, L. (2005). Becoming an anti-oppressive researcher. In: Brown & Strega (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches.* Canadian Scholars' Press, 225-286.

Pressman, J. (2003). The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Studies, 23*(2).

Punamäki, R. L. (1990). Relationships between political violence and psychological responses among Palestinian women. *Journal of peace research, 27*(1), 75-85.

Punamäki, R. L. (1996). Can ideological commitment protect children's psychosocial well-being in situations of political violence? *Child development, 67*(1), 55-69.

Punamäki, R. L., Palosaari, E., Diab, M., Peltonen, K., & Qouta, S. R. (2015). Trajectories of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) after major war among Palestinian children: Trauma, family-and child-related predictors. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *172*, 133-140.

Qouta, S., Punamaki, R-L., & El Sarraj, E. (2003). Prevalence and Determinants of PTSD Among Palestinian Children Exposed to Military Violence. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 12*(6), 265–272

Qouta, S., Punamaki, R-L., Montgomery, E., & El Sarraj, E. (2007). Predictors of Psychological Distress and Positive Resources Among Palestinian Adolescents: Trauma, Child, and Mothering Characteristics. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 31*(7), 699–717.

Qouta, S., Punamäki, R. L., & El Sarraj, E. (2005). Mother-child expression of psychological distress in war trauma. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 10*(2), 135-156.

Qouta, S., Punamäki, R. L., & El Sarraj, E. (2008). Child development and family mental health in war and military violence: The Palestinian experience. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32*(4), 310-321.

Qvortrup, J. (1994). Childhood matters: An introduction. In: Qvotrup et al. (Eds.), *Chidhood matters: Social theory, practice, and politics.* Aldershot: Avebury.

Qvortrup, J. (2005). *Studies in modern childhood: Society, agency, culture*. Springer: London.

Rabaia, Y., Giacaman, R., & Nguyen-Gillham, V. (2010). Violence and adolescent mental health in the occupied Palestinian territory: a contextual approach. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health, 22*(3), 216-221.

Rabaia, Y., Kassis, S., Amro, Z., Giacaman, R., & Reis, R. (2018). Coping and helping to cope: Perspectives of children of Palestinian political detainees. *Children & Society, 32*(5), 345-356.

Rabaia, Y., Saleh, M. F., & Giacaman, R. (2014). Sick or sad? Supporting Palestinian children living in conditions of chronic political violence. *Children & Society*, *28*(3), 172-181.

Rahola, F. (2002) Pratiche etnografiche e sapore antropologico. In: Dal Lago & De Biasi (Eds.) *Un certo sguardo. Introduzione all'etnografia sociale*. 27-53. Roma: Laterza.

Reinharz, S. (1985). Feminist distrust: Problems of context and content in sociological work. *Exploring clinical methods for social research,* 153-172.

Research, 18, 146.

Robben, A. C. (2005). *Political violence and trauma in Argentina*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Robson, E., Bell, S. & Klocker, N. (2007). Conceptualising agency in the lives and actions of rural young people. In: Panelli, Punch & Robson (Eds.), *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: young rural lives*, 135-148. Routledge.

Rodman, M. C. (1992). Empowering place: Multilocality and multivocality. *American anthropologist, 94*(3), 640-656.

Rosen, D. M. (2007). Child soldiers, international humanitarian law, and the globalization of childhood. *American anthropologist, 109*(2), 296-306.

Rosenbaum, M., & Ronen, T. (2013). Emotional well-being and self-control skills of children and adolescents: The Israeli perspective. In*:* Keyes (Eds.), *Mental well-being*, 209-229. Springer, Dordrecht.

Rouhana, N. N., & Bar-Tal, D. (1998). Psychological dynamics of intractable ethnonational conflicts: The Israeli–Palestinian case. *American psychologist, 53*(7), 761.

Ruddick, S. (2007). At the horizons of the subject: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the rights of the child part one: From 'knowing' fetus to 'confused' child. *Gender, Place and Culture, 14*(5), 513-527.

Russell, B. (2015). Beyond activism/academia: militant research and the radical climate and climate justice movement(s). *Area, 47*(3), 222-229.

Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity: Protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 147*(6), 598-611.

Rutter, M. (1993). Resilience: some conceptual considerations. *Journal of adolescent health*, *14*(8), 626-631.

Rutter, M. (2006). Implications of resilience concepts for scientific understanding. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1094*(1), 1-12.

Rutter, M. (2012). Resilience as a dynamic concept. *Development and psychopathology, 24*(2), 335-344.

Ryan, C. (2015). Everyday resilience as resistance: Palestinian women practicing sumud. *International Political Sociology 9*(4), 299–315.

Ryff, C. D., Singer, B. (1996). Psychological Well-Being: Meaning, Measurement, and Implications for Psychotherapy Research. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 65,* 14-23.

Sachar, H. M. (2010). *Israel and Europe: an appraisal in history*. Vintage.

Sagi-Schwartz, A. (2008). The well being of children living in chronic war zones: The Palestinian –Israeli case. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 32*(4), 322-336.

Said, E. W. (1984). Orientalism reconsidered. In: Moore-Gilbert, Stanton & Maley, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 126-145. London: Routledge.

Said, E. W. (1991). *Identity, authority and freedom: The potentate and the traveler* (No. 31). University of Cape Town.

Salas-Wright, C. P., Olate, R., & Vaughn, M. G. (2013). The protective effects of religious coping and spirituality on delinquency: Results among high-risk and gang-involved Salvadoran youth. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 40*(9), 988-1008.

Samman, E., & Santos, M. E. (2009). *Agency and Empowerment: A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence*. Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), University of Oxford.

Santos Pais, M. (2000). Child Participation and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Political Participation of Children. *Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies*, 3-10, Cambridge.

Save the children. (2018). The War on Children: Time to End Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/war-children-time-end-violations-against-children-armed-conflict

Scales, P. C., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Wallace, T., Inselman, A., Stephenson, P., & Rodriguez, M. (2015). Brief report: assessing youth well-being in global emergency settings: Early results from the Emergency Developmental Assets Profile. *Journal of adolescence*, *45*, 98-102.

Schock, K. (2005). *Unarmed insurrections: People power movements in non-democracies* (Vol. 22). University of Minnesota Press.

Scott, J. C. (1989). Everyday forms of resistance. *The Copenhagen journal of Asian studies, 4*, 33-33.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale university press.

Seligson, J. L., Huebner, E. S., & Valois, R. F. (2003). Preliminary validation of the brief multidimensional students' life satisfaction scale (BMSLSS). *Social Indicators Research*, *61*(2), 121-145.

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984. *The journal of philosophy, 82*(4), 169-221.

Sen, A. (1999). *Commodities and capabilities*. OUP Catalogue

Sen, A. (2002). *Rationality and Freedom*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2006). Negotiating the present, historicizing the future: Palestinian children speak about the Israeli separation wall. *American Behavioral Scientist, 49*(8), 1101-1124.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2016). Stolen childhood: Palestinian children and the structure of genocidal dispossession. *Settler Colonial Studies, 6*(2), 142-152.

Shin, D., & Johnson, D.M. (1978). Avowed happiness as an overall assessment of the quality of life. *Social Indicators Research, 5,* 475–492.

Shonkoff, J. P. (2010). Building a new biodevelopmental framework to guide the future of early childhood policy. *Child development, 81*(1), 357-367.

Shukaitis, S., Graeber, D., & Biddle, E. (2007). *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization*. Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press.

Slone, M., & Mann, S. (2016). Effects of war, terrorism and armed conflict on young children: a systematic review. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 47(6), 950-965.

Slone, M., & Roziner, I. (2013). Does self-complexity moderate the effects of exposure to political violence for adolescents? *Anxiety, Stress & Coping*, *26*(6), 659-673.

Smith, A., Duncan, J., & Marshall, K. (2005). Children's perspective on their learning: Exploring methods. *Early Child Development and Care, 175*, 473-488.

Snyder, C. R., Cheavens, J., & Sympson, S. C. (1997). Hope: An individual motive for social commerce. *Group dynamics: Theory, research, and practice*, *1*(2), 107.

Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., Yoshinobu, L., Gibb, J., Langelle, C., & Harney, P. (1991). The will and the ways: development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*, 570-585.

Snyder, C. R., Hoza, B., Pelham, W. E., Rapoff, M., Ware, L., Danovsky, M., ... & Stahl, K. J. (1997). The development and validation of the Children's Hope Scale. *Journal of pediatric psychology*, *22*(3), 399-421.

Snyder, C. R., Sympson, S. C., Ybasco, F. C., Borders, T. F., Babyak, M. A. & Higgins, R. L. (1996). Development and validation of the State Hope Scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 70*, 321-335.

Sorokin, P. A. (2010). *Man and society in calamity: The effects of war*. Revolution, Famine [1942].

Sousa, C. A. (2013). *Political violence, health and resilience* (Doctoral dissertation).

Sousa, C. A., Haj-Yahia, M. M., Feldman, G., & Lee, J. (2013). Individual and collective dimensions of resilience within political violence. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, *14*(3), 235-254.

Sousa, C. A., Kemp, S. P., & El-Zuhairi, M. (2019). Place as a Social Determinant of Health: Narratives of Trauma and Homeland among Palestinian Women. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *49*(4), 963-982.

Sousa, C., & Marshall, D. J. (2017). Political violence and mental health: Effects of neoliberalism and the role of international social work practice. *International Social Work*, 60(4), 787-799.

Spellings, C. R., Barber, B. K., & Olsen, J. A. (2012). Political activism of Palestinian youth: Exploring individual, parental, and ecological factors. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 74*(5), 1084-1100.

Spencer, C. (2005). Place attachment, place identity and the development of the child's self-identity: Searching the literature to develop a hypothesis. *International Research in Geographical & Environmental Education, 14(*4), 305-309.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the interpretation of culture. *Urbana: University of Illinois Press*, 271-313.

Stiglitz, J. M., Sen, A. & Fitoussi, J. (2009). *Report by the commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress*. Paris: Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress.

Stoecklin, D. (2013). Theories of action in the field of child participation: In search of explicit frameworks. *Childhood, 20*(4), 443-457.

Stoecklin, D. (2018). Institutionalisation of children's rights: Transformability and situated agency. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 26*(3), 548-587.

Stoecklin, D., & Bonvin, J. M. (2014). The capability approach and Children's rights. In: Hart, Biggeri & Babic, *Agency and Participation in Childhood and Youth: International applications of the capability approach in schools and beyond*. A&C Black.

Stoecklin, D., & Fattore, T. (2018). Children's multidimensional agency: Insights into the structuration of choice. *Childhood, 25*(1), 47-62.

Stolz, H. E., Olsen, J. A., Henke, T. M., & Barber, B. K. (2013). Adolescent religiosity and psychosocial functioning: Investigating the roles of religious tradition, national-ethnic group, and gender. *Child Development Research*, 2013.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage publications.

Streuli, N., Woodhead, M., & Camfield, L. (2009). What's the use of 'well-being' in contexts of child poverty? approaches to research, monitoring and children's participation. *The International Journal of Children's Rights, 17*(1), 65-109.

Strózik, D., Strózik, T., & Szwarc, K. (2016). The subjective well-being of school children. The first findings from the children's worlds study in Poland. *Child Indicators Research, 9*(1), 39-50.

Suarez, E. B. (2015). Surviving juntas (together): Lessons of resilience of indigenous Quechua women in the aftermath of conflict in Peru. *Intervention, 13*, 6-18.

Summerfield, D. (1998). "Trauma" and the experience of war: a reply. *The Lancet,* 351(9115), 1580-1581.

Summerfield, D. (1999). A critique of seven assumptions behind psychological trauma programs in war-affected areas. *Social science & medicine*, *48* (10), 1449-1462.

Summerfield, D. (2001). The invention of post-traumatic stress disorder and the social usefulness of a psychiatric category. *Bmj,* 322(7278), 95-98.

Sun, J., & Stewart, D. (2007). Age and gender effects on resilience in children and adolescents. *International Journal of mental health promotion, 9*(4), 16-25.

Tay, L., Kuykendall, L., & Diener, E. (2015). Satisfaction and happiness–the bright side of quality of life. In: Glatzer, Camfield, Moller, & Rojas (Eds.), *Global handbook of quality of life*, 839-853. Springer, Dordrecht.

Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., & Cummings, E. M. (2016). Trajectories of adolescent aggression and family cohesion: The potential to perpetuate or ameliorate political conflict. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *45*(2), 114– 28.

Thabet, A. A., & Thabet, S. (2015). Trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and resilience in Palestinian children in the Gaza strip. *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science, 11*(1), 1-13.

Thabet, A. A., & Thabet, S. (2018). Psychosocial problems in refugee children victims of community violence in Gaza Strip. *Int J Neurol Nursing*, 4, 2456-5229.

Thabet, A. A., Thabet, S., & Vostanis, P. (2018). The relationship between trauma due to war, post-traumatic stress disorder and fears among palestinian children. *EC Pediatrics, 7,* 171-178.

Thabet, A. M. (2018). The Relationship Between Trauma Due to War, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Fears among Palestinian Children. *EC Paediatrics*, 7, 171-178.

The United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2013). *The occupied Palestinian territory. Consolidated Appeal, 2013*. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/CAP_2013_oPt.pdf.

The United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2017). Gaza Strip: *The humanitarian impact of major escalation hostilities*. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-strip-humanitarian-impact-major-escalation-hostilities

The United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018). *The high level of violence by Israeli Settlers; Rise in Israeli fatalities*. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/high-level-violence-israeli-settlers-rise-israeli-fatalities.

The United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2018b). *Humanitarian snapshot: casualties in the context of demonstrations and hostilities in Gaza, 30 March - 31 December 2018*. Retrieved from internet on June 3, available on: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-casualties-context-demonstrations-and-hostilities-gaza-30-march-31-0

The United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (2019). *Demolition in West Bank undermine access to water.* Retrieved on July 2, available on: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/demolitions-west-bank-undermine-access-water

The United Nation Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip). (2019). *Six-Month Report on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem*. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/sixmonth_report_on_israeli_settlements_in_the_occupied_west_bank_including_east_jerusalem_reporting_period_july-december_2018_0.pdf

The United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWUA). (2015a). *Dheisheh Camp.* Retrieved from internet on July 3, available online from: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/dheisheh_refugee_camp.pdf

The United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWUA). (2016). *Jabalia Camp.* Retrieved from internet on July 3, available online from: https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip/jabalia-camp

The United Nation Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWUA). (2019). *We thought we lost him*. Retrieved from internet on July 3, available online from: https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/%E2%80%9Cwe-thought-we-lost-him%E2%80%9D-tear-gas-use-dheisheh-camp

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2013). *Children in Israeli military detention: observations and recommendations.* Retrieved from internet on July 3, available online from: www.unicef.org/oPt/UNICEF_oPt_Children_in_Israeli_Military_Detention_Observations_and_Recommendations_6_March_2013.pdf.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2017). *Children under attack at shocking scale in conflicts around the world*. Retrieved from internet on October 21, available on: https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102357.html

The United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC). (2014). *Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council* (A/68/ 878–S/2014/339). Retrieved from internet on October 21, available on: https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). (2018). *Gaza Strip*. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on: https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip

Theron, L. C., & Engelbrecht, P. (2012). Caring teachers: teacher–youth transactions to promote resilience. In: Ungar (Eds.), *The social ecology of resilience*, 265-280. Springer, New York, NY.

Thomas, F. C., Tol, W. A., Vallipuram, A., Sivayokan, S., Jordans, M. J., Reis, R., & de Jong, J. T. (2016). Emic perspectives on the impact of armed conflict on children's mental health and psychosocial well-being: Applying a social ecological framework of resilience in northern Sri Lanka. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *22*(3), 246.

Thompson, A., Torres, R. M., Swanson, K., Blue, S. A., & Hernández, Ó. M. H. (2019). Re-conceptualizing agency in migrant children from Central America and Mexico. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 45*(2), 235-252.

Thompson, C. M. (2009). Mira! Looking, listening, and lingering in research with children. *Visual Arts Research*, 24-34.

Thomson, P., & Gunter, H. (2011). Inside, outside, upside down: The fluidity of academic researcher 'identity' in working with/in school. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education, 34*(1), 17-30.

Thorpe, H., & Ahmad, N. (2015). Youth, action sports and political agency in the Middle East: Lessons from a grassroots parkour group in Gaza. *International review for the sociology of sport, 50*(6), 678-704.

Tilley, C. Y. (1994). *A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths, and monuments* (Vol. 10). Oxford: Berg.

Tisdall, E. K. M., & Punch, S. (2012). Not So 'New'? : Looking Critically at Childhood Studies. *Children's Geographies, 10* (3), 249-264.

Tissington, L. D. (2008). A Bronfenbrenner ecological perspective on the transition to teaching for alternative certification. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 35*(1), 106-111.

Tol, W. A., Haroz, E. E., Hock, R. S., Kane, J. C., & Jordans, M. J. (2014). Ecological perspectives on trauma and resilience in children affected by armed conflict. *Helping children cope with trauma*, 193-209.

Tol, W. A., Jordans, M. J., Kohrt, B. A., Betancourt, T. S., & Komproe, I. H. (2013). Promoting mental health and psychosocial well-being in children affected by political violence: Part I–Current evidence for an ecological resilience approach. In: Fernando & Ferrari (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children of war*, 11-27. Springer, New York, NY.

Tol, W. A., Reis, R., Susanty, D., & De Jong, J. T. V. M. (2010). Communal violence and child psychosocial well-being: qualitative findings from Poso Indonesia. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 47*(1), 112–135.

Tol, W. A., Song, S., & Jordans, M. J. (2013). Annual research review: Resilience and mental health in children and adolescents living in areas of armed conflict–a systematic review of findings in low-and middle-income countries. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *54*(4), 445-460.

Triplehorn, C., & Chen, C. (2006). Layers of support. The social ecology of protecting children in war. In: Boothby, Strang, & Wessells (Eds.), *A world turned upside down*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 223-247.

Tuoza, S. (2003). On the research-militant. *Colectivo Situaciones,* 1-11. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on: http://strickdistro.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Reading-6-Nov-2012-Colectivo-Situaciones-2003.pdf.

Ungar, M. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *38*(2), 218-235.

Ungar, M. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 81(1), 1- 24.

Ungar, M., Ghazinour, M., & Richter, J. (2013). Annual research review: What is resilience within the social ecology of human development? *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, *54*(4), 348-366.

Ungar, M., Lee, A. W., Callaghan, T., & Boothroyd, R. A. (2005). An international collaboration to study resilience in adolescents across cultures. *Journal of Social Work Research and Evaluation, 6*(1), 5.

Van Blerk, L. (2006). Diversity and difference in the everyday lives of Ugandan street children: The significance of age and gender for understanding the use of space. *Social Dynamics, 32*(1), 47-74.

Varela, J. J., Zimmerman, M. A., Ryan, A. M., Stoddard, S. A., Heinze, J. E., & Alfaro, J. (2018). Life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and school violence: A mediation analysis for Chilean adolescent victims and perpetrators. *Child Indicators Research, 11,* 487-505.

Veronese, G., & Barola, G. (2018). Healing stories: An expressive-narrative intervention for strengthening resilience and survival skills in school-aged child victims of war and political violence in the Gaza Strip. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 23(2), 311-332.

Veronese, G., & Castiglioni, M. (2015). 'When the doors of Hell close': Dimensions of well-being and positive adjustment in a group of Palestinian children living amidst military and political violence. *Childhood,* 22(1), 6-22.

Veronese, G., & Cavazzoni, F. (2019). 'I hope I will be able to go back to my home city': Narratives of suffering and survival of children in Palestine. *Psychological studies,* 1-13.

Veronese, G., & Pepe, A. (2013). Psychometric properties of IES-R, short Arabic version in contexts of military violence. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *23*(6), 710-718.

Veronese, G., & Pepe, A. (2017a). Life satisfaction and trauma in clinical and non-clinical children living in a war-torn environment: A discriminant analysis. *Journal of health psychology,* 1359105317720004.

Veronese, G., & Pepe, A. (2017b). Positive and negative affect in children living in refugee camps: Assessing the psychometric proprieties and factorial invariance of the PANAS-C in the Gaza Strip. *Evaluation & the health professions*, 40(1), 3-32.

Veronese, G., & Pepe, A. (2018). Cross-cultural adaptation, psychometric proprieties and factor structure of the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS): A study with Palestinian children living in refugee camps. *Current Psychology*, 1-10.

Veronese, G., Castiglioni, M., Barola, G., & Said, M. (2012). Living in the shadow of occupation: Life satisfaction and positive emotion as protective factors in a group of Palestinian school children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(1), 225-233.

Veronese, G., Castiglioni, M., Tombolani, M., & Said, M. (2012). 'My happiness is the refugee camp, my future Palestine': optimism, life satisfaction and perceived happiness in a group of Palestinian children. *Scandinavian journal of caring sciences*, *26*(3), 467-473.

Veronese, G., Cavazzoni, F., & Antenucci, S. (2018). Narrating hope and resistance: A critical analysis of sources of agency among P alestinian children living under military violence. *Child: care, health and development*, 44(6), 863-870.

Veronese, G., Cavazzoni, F., & Sousa, C. (in press). Spatial agency as a source of resistance and resilience among Palestinian children living in Dheisheh refugee camp, Palestine. *Health and Place.*

Veronese, G., Cavazzoni, F., Russo, S., & Sousa, C. (2019). Risk and protective factors among Palestinian women living in a context of prolonged armed conflict and political oppression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 1-29.

Veronese, G., Fiore, F., Castiglioni, M., & Natour, M. (2014). Family quality of life and child psychological well-being in Palestine: A pilot case study. *Journal of Social Work*, *14*(6), 553-575.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., & Castiglioni, M. (2015). Fundamentalism in the mental health system-children agency and activism in the shadow of PTSD industry-a Palestinian case study. *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*, 118, 220-230.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Cavazzoni, F., Obaid, H., & Perez, J. (2019a). Agency via life satisfaction as a protective factor from cumulative trauma and emotional distress among Bedouin children in Palestine. *Frontiers in psychology, 10*.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Jaradah, A., Al Muranak, F., & Hamdouna, H. (2017b). Modelling life satisfaction and adjustment to trauma in children exposed to ongoing military violence: An exploratory study in Palestine. *Child abuse & neglect, 63*, 61-72.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Jaradah, A., Murannak, F., & Hamdouna, H. (2017a). "We must cooperate with one another against the Enemy": Agency and activism in school-aged children as protective factors against ongoing war trauma and political violence in the Gaza Strip. *Child abuse & neglect*, 70, 364-376.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Massaiu, I., De Mol, A. S., & Robbins, I. (2017). Posttraumatic growth is related to subjective well-being of aid workers exposed to cumulative trauma in Palestine. *Transcultural psychiatry, 54*(3), 332-356.

Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Obaid, H., Cavazzoni, F., & Perez, J. (2019b). Agency and life satisfaction in Bedouin children exposed to conditions of chronic stress and military

violence: A two-wave longitudinal study in Palestine. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 1359104519864134.

Veronese, G., Prati, M., & Castiglioni, M. (2012). Postcolonial perspectives on aid systems in multicultural contexts: Palestine and Uganda. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 15, 545-551.

Veronese, G., Said, M., & Castiglioni, M. (2011). Growing-up amidst military violence: Socio-ecological implications of resilience in Palestine. *Perspectives on immigration and terrorism*, 127-142.

Veronese, G., Sousa, C., & Cavazzoni, F. (in press). Survival and resilience among Palestinian women: A qualitative analysis using individual and collective life events calendars. *Violence against Women.*

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Wagener, L. M., Furrow, J. L., King, P. E., Leffert, N., & Benson, P. (2003). Religious involvement and developmental resources in youth. *Review of religious research,* 271-284.

Walsh, F. (2003). Clinical views of family normality, health, and dysfunction. *Normal family processes*, 27-57.

Watson, D., & Tellegen, A. (1985). Toward a consensual structure of mood. *Psychological bulletin, 98*(2), 219.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*, 1063-1070.

Weizman, E. (2012). *Hollow land: Israel's architecture of occupation*. London: Verso books.

Werner, E. E. (2012). Children and war: Risk, resilience, and recovery. *Development and psychopathology*, *24*(2), 553-558.

Wessells, M. G. (2006). *Child soldiers: From violence to protection*. Harvard University Press.

Wessells, M. G. (2017). Children and armed conflict: Interventions for supporting war-affected children. *Peace and conflict: journal of peace psychology*, *23*(1), 4.

Wessells, M. G. (2018). Supporting resilience in war-affected children: how differential impact theory is useful in humanitarian practice. *Child, Abuse & Neglect, 78,* 13-18.

Wessells, M., & Kostelny, K. (1996). *The Graca Machel/UN study on the impact of armed conflict on children: Implications for early child development.* New York: UNICEF.

Wessells, M., & Kostelny, K. (2013). Child friendly spaces: toward a grounded, community-based approach for strengthening child protection practice in humanitarian crises. Natural helpers play a critical role in ensuring children's safety during and in the aftermath of crises. *Child abuse & neglect*, *37*, 29.

Wessells, M., & Strang, A. (2006). Religion as resource and risk. In: Boothby, Wessells, & Strang (Eds.), *A world turned upside down: Social ecological approaches to children in war zones*, 199-222, Bloomfield: Kumarian Press.

Wexler, L. M., DiFluvio, G., & Burke, T. K. (2009). Resilience and marginalized youth: Making a case for personal and collective meaning-making as part of resilience research in public health. *Social science & medicine, 69*(4), 565-570.

Wilk, R. (2008). The strange economics of happiness. *Rethinking Economic Anthropology: A Human-centred Approach*, 11-12, London.

Williamson, J., & Robinson, M. (2006). Psychosocial interventions or integrated programming for well-being? *International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict, 4*, 4–25.

Winthrop, R., & Kirk, J. (2008). Learning for a bright future: Schooling, armed conflict, and children's well-being. *Comparative Education Review*, *52*(4), 639-661.

Woodhead, M. (1999). Towards a global paradigm for research into early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 7*(1), 5-22.

World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Situation report in occupied Palestinian territory, Gaza 23 September – 6 October 2018*. Retrieved from internet on July 21, available on:http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_Health_Cluster_SitRep_23_Sep_-6_Oct_2018.pdf?ua=1

Ziadni, M., Hammoudeh, W., Rmeileh, N. M. A., Hogan, D., Shannon, H., & Giacaman, R. (2011). Sources of human insecurity in post-war situations: The case of Gaza. *Journal of human security*, *7*(3).