



The daily life practices for a Palestinian boy lives in UNRWA shelter in north Gaza during the war
North Gaza, 2014, Fred Ekblad

visual ethnography and urban practice investigation: "the palestinian urban practices in gaza strip during war 2014"

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It is hard to imagine the forms of human behaviors and reactions in dangerous environments where there are conflicts and wars. However, through the conflict and wars, image has become the factual witness and the powerful tool of bringing out facts and details. The visual ethnography is an investigation approach that depends on using photographs and media images as a methodological tool in studying and analyzing the social behavior. The war in Gaza is worth highlighting due to the new cultural and urban realities and reactions that were produced and formed through the act of occupation and Palestinians will to struggle and endure on the land. This research highlights the Palestinian urban behavior towards the violent degradation of built forms in the space of conflict in Gaza during and after the last war in July 2014, depending on analyzing the important or basic meaning of experience that includes both the external appearance and inner consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning. This research will show how visual ethnography has been used to document events and phenomena that related to the urban practices in Gaza during the war. However, the photographs show concrete data and vital details of everyday events, activity and behaviors, especially in such affected environment that's full of violence, fear and suffering. The findings will show the depth of the relation between photography and architecture, and how can using photography in research gives rich content, and accuracy and logic analysis with evidence for the violations that occur, However, it can be an effective tool to reach the policy makers.

keywords Photography, Architecture, Visual Ethnography, Conflict, Gaza

visual ethnography as a research methodology

This paper will use the qualitative research methodology which considered “a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter”. (Groat & Wang, 2013). Among this methodology things will be studied in their ordinary situations, trying to make sense of, or understand phenomena concerning the meanings that people bring to them. (Groat & Wang, 2013). There are some qualitative approaches that can be applied in studies and researches. In this research paper, a combination of two approaches will be used; the phenomenology approach together with the ethnography approach.

The phenomenological qualitative approach “is arguably the most well-known and established strand of the qualitative research utilized in architectural research. It derives from both the phenomenological tradition of German philosophers (e.g., Husserl and Heidegger, among others) and more recent versions of phenomenology influential in the social sciences”. (Groat & Wang, 2013). This approach aims to explain the important or basic meaning of experience that include both the external appearance and inner consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning. On the other hand, the ethnography qualitative approach associated with the discipline of anthropology, sociology, educational research, and cultural studies. The research aspects of study and investigation meet the ethnographic approach. However, most current ethnographic researches look for interpretations about phenomena that related to human's daily lives. Ethnography discusses thoughts about people's knowledge, experiences, beliefs, social behavior, and their connection to the physical environment and space. (Groat & Wang, 2013)

In the ethnographic method the research will focus on visual ethnography which depends on using photographs as a methodological tool of collecting data. However, the photograph considered the raw material for an infinite number of messages that the observer can have. (Schwartz, 1989).

Through our personal experience in photography and using photos to document events and phenomena that related to the community practices in Gaza during the war, the camera was an important tool for ingoing into the community and document the people daily events. It allowed us to involve in logical, task-oriented action in the development of observation. While taking photographs for this research, we have tried to draw a full image of the Gazans community culture. The photographs show concrete data and vital details of everyday events, activities and behaviors, especially in such affected environment that's full of violence, fear and suffering. The analysis of the images is informed by comments and views from people collected through the ethnographic investigation and personal observation. Using of photographs in ethnography indicates a presentation approach which brings their deep meanings to focus on. By presenting images together with a written text that draws attention to the meanings and topics that these images discuss, the reader will have the opportunity to understand the culture of the community under investigation. (Schwartz, 1989)

One of the unique features of qualitative research is that a range of tactics and research tools can be employed in the context being studied and of course appropriate to the research questions being asked. (Groat & Wang, 2013). However, to achieve the research objectives; a wide variety of tactics have been used; including basically photos, mapping and figures, document studies, observation, and case studies. This group of data gathering and tactics emphasis not so only on quantities of known activities, but on the experiential qualities and conceptualizations of behaviors.

Studying the social phenomena and behavior is a complicated process that needs accuracy and caution, therefore it is very important to find the appropriate investigative tool that is consistent with the study objectives. However, using photography and documentation

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can be an effective tool for social researches. « Empowerment through Photo Novella: Portraits of Participation» a research paper written by Caroline Wang and Marry Ann Burris talking about a social project they did and how the photo novella has been used in their methodology. «The goal of photo novella is to use people's photographic documentation of their everyday lives as an educational tool to record and to reflect their needs. The name photo novella denotes «picture stories». (Wang & Burris, 1994). The methodology the authors used in the project depending on using photo novella as a tool for assessing the needs of the rural women of Chengjiang and Luliang counties. The targeted group of women takes photos for their homes, village, and the spaces where they work, play, and practice their usual life.

The investigation of the women's everyday practices in life depending on analyzing these photographs and images made achieves a brilliant result; the investigation helped in documenting the health issues, studying the village culture, highlight women problems, and reach their voice to policymakers, donors and program planners. For example; a photo of a young girl standing in front of her house carrying her brother on her back, the iron door of the house and the brick wall behind her shows the characteristics of her family's economic status, and the style of building in her village. One other point the time the photo has been taken shows that the girl should be at school; and that was an indication of another social phenomenon says that instead of going to school the girl has to look after her little brother. Which means “ For female children to attend school is useless”.. So it can be seen that each photo is telling a story and forming a dialogue that embodies the village culture, attitudes, and values. (Wang & Burris, 1994) . Within this context; the investigation that is going to be applied to the Palestinian urban behavior in Gaza during the conflict needs to be documented, and the humanity concerns towards the Palestinian issue needs to be raised. Using photography in the research methodology for accuracy and logic analysis will enrich its content, provide both evidence and validation for the violations that occur, and can be an effective tool to reach the policy makers.

the urban practices during 2014 crisis in gaza

Between (2009-2014) there were three sequential wars that had a destructive effect on all aspects of life where large areas of the Gaza Strip had been demolished, and thousands become homeless and contributed considerably to worsen already deteriorated economic and social conditions. The extensive devastation to houses, and infrastructure during the aggressive has further expanded poverty and hindered the probabilities of economic retrieval, if and when conditions allow. Provided for the infrastructure which was significantly damaged. (Alqudwa, 2013). Gaza was already in the grip of a humanitarian and environmental crisis after the first two wars in 2009 and 2012 and before the last crisis began. Unfortunately, the last war in 2014 was the most violent, and the longest war ever in Gaza- Israel conflict. (ILO, 2015)

The last crisis happened on 7 July 2014, when a humanitarian emergency was professed in the Gaza Strip, following of an increase in aggression, involving heavy Israeli aerial and naval shelling and Palestinian rocket fire. In this war, 2,205 Palestinians were killed, including at least 1,483 civilians, of whom at least 521 were children and 283 were women. Over 500,000 Palestinians were displaced at the height of the hostilities; thousands remain displaced. Seventy-one Israelis were killed, including 66 soldiers. (ILO, 2015). The scale of obliteration, devastation and dislocation during the 50 days of fighting was extraordinary in Gaza, since the Israeli occupation in 1967.

Since the first day of the war, the Palestinian families have started their journey of suffering and pain, especially those who have their houses near the borders. However, most of them have left their houses looking for a safe place for them and their children.

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Unfortunately, the Gazans had not much choice, some people looked for relatives who live in a safe area away from the bombing and shooting, have a free space, and able to welcome them to spend few nights in their house till the ceasefire is declared or war ends. Thus; the families who could not find any relevant to live with had to move directly to the nearest UNRWA school, and find a class if there are still any free classes. The last choice is to gather some cloth and build your tent anywhere in Al-Shifa hospital garden. Among this journey, the Gazans have practiced their life in a different way. The practices included in this short period of time show several phenomena that reflect their social culture, and express their way of thinking. These phenomena have been captured by the camera; trying to catch the hidden details, and analyze the set of practices that comes as a reaction towards violence the people suffered. The author's camera has gone through space choosing different parts and locations of Gaza strip focusing on different forms of the daily events. However, within this section, a set of five photographs will be discussed and analyzed. Each photo highlights different issue in a specific space, tells a story, and shows the consequences and aspects of each phenomenon.

urban space (1): al- shifa hospital; hospital or hospitality?

Al Shifa is the largest medical complex and central hospital in Gaza City. (Daily Sabah, 2014) During the war Al-Shifa has opened its doors for thousands of Gazans who have been evacuated from their houses after the Israeli occupation destroyed their houses in east Gaza. (MSF, 2014).



f1_The daily life practices for a Palestinian family lives in a caravan in Al Shujaiya neighbourhood and after two years of 2014 war
East Gaza, 2016, Husam Salem

Despite the emergency situation that have been declared in the hospital to manage the crisis and be able to receive martyrs and wounded people, the hospital facilities have become shelters. However, the hospital garden has been occupied by dozens of tents reminding everyone with the exile catastrophe in 1948, Despite that the garden was planned in a spontaneous and random way by the refugees, it was divided in a marshaled technique trying to preserve as much as possible of their beliefs and social values which were ruptured by war together with their houses. For example; the refugees who have the same family name will be found in contiguous tents in reference to the unity and thread they have, and

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they tried to save it despite the critic situation they live. On the other hand, you will find that most of the men have left their tents and lay down on the sidewalks in order to sleep, giving their wives a space of privacy and freedom, the surroundings have been used as spaces for children to play. A new social pattern has been formed within the hospital space. The tents the refugees used were not ready-made tents. However, they were forced to build their own tents using any available materials. The refugees used the hospital bed sheets as well as their own fabrics and blankets which have been rescued before their houses were bombed. They used a structural element made of wood or metal to support the tent provided to cords to fix the tent. However, some refugees used the hospital walls instead provided with a covering and two supportive elements.

urban space (2): UNRWA shelters; living in a classroom

During the conflict, UNRWA provided humanitarian support (including food, water, Sanitation, Health, psycho-social assistance provided to non-food-items such as hygiene supplies, mattresses and blankets) to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 90 of 156 UNRWA schools, with the remaining school buildings either unsafe or destroyed. (UNRWA, 2015)



f2_Palestinians sleep in a classroom as they take shelters at the UNRWA new Gaza boys prep school in the refugee beach camp

Beach Camp in Gaza, July 2014, UNRWA

The environment of living in the shelters was difficult. However, thousands of displaced people lived in overcrowded spaces; sharing toilets and classrooms together. They were trying to have a sense of privacy and dignity for their women and children by dividing classrooms with hanging blankets or insulation elements. Regarding to a testimony from the UN school in North Gaza who described the situation there said that there was no freedom and no privacy, they were living in a very overcrowded place which makes them especially the women feel afraid and anxious. They were unable to sleep as they were feeling ashamed to sleep and lie down or use the bathroom because there were no keys and locks on the doors and windows.

The cruelty of the scenes and events the Palestinians passed through have had great impact on their behavior. The war has left an imbalance in the built environment performance in all its forms. For example; the school as a learning environment with classrooms, activity spaces, and playground has become a shelter that is full of hard humanitarian scenes which did not respect the Gazans freedom, privacy and dignity. This

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imbalance led many to reject these distorted spaces and think of changing this painful reality. So they used drawing and imagination to redesign these spaces and draw it as it should be. In the figures, designs for a group of designers called Cortoba team. The drawings show the gap between the reality of the distorted spaces the Gazans live in, and the functional task the space should offer in the normal state.



f3_A design by Cortoba team entitled 'In Gaza: the school is a dream'

the design embodies the impact of the war on school spaces and practices inside, Gaza, 2014, Cortoba. (Narrating Gaza, 2015)

urban space (3): parkour players; the cosmetology architecture

One of the community practices towards architecture in Gaza after the war was for a group of youth players called Parkour team. Parkour is "A training discipline using movement that developed from military obstacle course training.". (Wikipedia, 2013).



f4_Parkour players practice their exercises between the destroyed houses in Gaza
Gaza, 2015, Husam Salem

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Three years ago an essay was published on Domus website for the authors; Joseph Grima, and Antonio Ottmanelli; had talked briefly about Parkour in Gaza through an interview they had organized with the team members. (Grima & Ottomanelli, 2013). Looking at the photo. You will find photos for the team members while they were practicing. And you will notice that the background of these photos shows deconstructed buildings, and deserted spaces. This character of activities can be seen as a physique of what can be called “The Cosmetology Architecture”. The deconstructed buildings in Gaza are an architecture that has been naked of all its positive and constructive values. It becomes a form of dismal architecture with totally negative and deconstructive meanings and values. The buildings that have been bombed in Gaza by the Israeli forces and become rubble today are considered instances of killing memory – with all the past context and the future dreams. The nature of humanity could not accept this havoc, demolition, and desolation. So you will find that the people in Gaza have begun the journey of change and community intervention, looking for meanings of beauty, comfort, happiness, and freedom.

As a part of this affected community; Parkour team has started to create their own spaces within the destructed and deserted buildings using their physical abilities. Joseph Grima, and Antonio Ottmanelli in that essay that have been mentioned previously said “ Inspired by the nascent sport of Parkour, the Gaza Parkour Team began to observe the urban fabric of Gaza as a playground through which they could move fluidly, using their bodies –instead of weapons and explosives– to overcome boundaries and barriers”.. (Grima & Ottomanelli, 2013). To some extent this can be true. But their behavior can be considered and analyzed as a natural and human reaction against the affected and damaged environment itself. So it is Cosmetology Architecture; that is created by society as a community intervention among architecture, and against effected environment that has been subjugated by political conflicts (Palestinian-Israeli conflict) in Gaza.

urban space (4): inspiration and sculpting- the memorial architecture

Despite that the architecture has distorted and destroyed, it is nonetheless an effective tool to influence. However, the memorial architecture was one of the prominent manifestations that were introduced after the last war on Gaza. “ Memorials are extraordinary places in the public realm that are very important as places that embody the identity of those who build them”. (Norden, 2003)



**f5_The memorial statues made by Iyad Sabah in front of the destructed buildings
Gaza, 2014. buildings. (Dearden, 2014)**

From Shujaiya neighborhood of Gaza, which was severely damaged during the war, and where people have had to run away from their homes during the shelling; looking for a safe place. The Palestinian sculptor Iyad Sabbah from Gaza has set a group of seven clay statues built out of fiberglass (came from waste materials found in bomb sites), and covered with mud (Dearden, 2014); symbolized the suffering of Shujaiya residents and displacement. The figures which placed on a beach portrayed bloodstained men and women carrying their children and walking towards the sea to embody the refugees fleeing to other countries illegally through the sea in an attempt to run away from death. However, in the background appear the ruins of the destroyed buildings. Sabbah, who considered his work an open space installation art, said "The project I started directly after the war, lasted for around a month and a half. I called the project "Worn Out" because it's linked to the prevailing psychological state of the people and the destroyed buildings and infrastructure". (Othman, 2014).

conclusion

Among this investigation the analysis and findings raised one important question; How can this informal style of power changes the equation of conflict between Palestine and Israel through a set of public, spontaneity, and unplanned practices which were outcomes of cultural, social, and political background?

In the last war in Gaza, there was a widespread argument about who is the victor in this war in which both sides suffered losses. However, the Palestinians found that their struggle and immovability is their victory. On the other hand, Israel found that the Palestinian losses- which was much more than losses on the Israeli side- is their sign of victory. Despite that peace is the main and mutual demand for both sides, it is important to find out what is behind the reactions from both communities. Consequently, how can the human practices and reactions of resistance face the military force in the space of conflict?

Photography as a tool of investigation has found the unseen details and realities behind the scenes. The images included in this paper –at the first sight - makes the viewer believes that the military war machine has prevailed and managed to displacement of these people and turns their lives upside down. However, by looking deeply to the photograph's details the viewer will realize the actual power hidden behind the humanitarian scenes carried by these images.

The violent act was done by the military forces has provoked the Palestinians. Thus, the investigated phenomena were the outcomes. These reactions were completely humanitarian due to their weak and undefended position compared to full armed forces.

Among this investigation, I have realized that the analysis of these phenomena shows the power and elements of human struggle and resistance which is not less important than other means of power. It is a legal, inherent, and human power in any political conflict. However, the political conditions and attitudes cannot be read in isolation from the environment of conflict. Simply because the built environment is considered as the theatre of crisis. As shown in the analyzed phenomena, the built environment has become a part of the struggling power. Thus, the architecture and space together with the community behavior forms a one unit that affect the conflict course.

As a Palestinian who has experienced the crisis in Gaza, and because of being a part of the targeted environment, my experiment has enriched the core of the research, and assisted in analyzing and linking events in sequence. As well as providing me with the ability to design a fully integrated scenario of display that demonstrate the journey of community suffering in the war, included by several phenomena that the Gazans involved in.

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CV

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Husam Salem. A freelance photographer, a reporter, a journalist, and a producer. Husam photos have been published on the biggest international sites such as Time Magazine, The Guardian, AFP agency, AP agency, Al Jazeera English, and others. Husam works for MME (Middle East Eye). He has documented the damages caused by the last war on Gaza for UNDP. Provided to that, Husam gave more than 40 courses about basic photography.

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