

Ahed Tamimi and the Symbolization of Appearance, Childhood, and Gender

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Ahed Tamimi, a Palestinian girl, was eleven years old when she first “went viral.” In 2015 and again in 2018, photos and images of Ahed’s confrontations with Israeli soldiers went viral and she became a symbol – in both the positive and negative senses – of the Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. In almost every article that mentions her, there is one fact that sets her apart: Ahed is not only a girl and a child, she is also blond-haired, light-skinned, and blue-eyed. As a child – a female child, especially – Ahed is seen as a *symbol* – rather than a *leader* – of the Palestinian resistance. Women and children are often seen as symbols rather than as leaders of a movement. Why? This paper posits three main reasons: first, Ahed does not “look Palestinian;” with features of her appearance that make white “Western” audiences remind them of their own daughters or sisters. Second and third, women and children are most often not viewed as “leaders” in situations conflict and resistance because they are instead seen as needing to be protected. men are the ones fighting; women and children are the ones they are fighting for. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2019 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Ahed Tamimi, a Palestinian girl, was eleven years old when she first “went viral” in 2015. A video of her confronting Israeli soldiers who had just arrested her brother captured headlines around the world. Again in

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