IDENTITY AND PLACE IN EXTENDED EXILE:
THE CASE OF A PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CITY-CAMP

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ABSTRACT[2]. Though commonly assumed to be holding this status temporarily, according to current UNHCR statistics almost three quarters of refugees worldwide find themselves in a situation of protracted, long-term exile. Protracted exile poses a major challenge to earlier dominant academic theories that refer to refugee dilemmas with the metaphor of uprootedness and longing. The identity situation of long-term refugees is far more complex, yet it remains understudied. This article contributes to the understanding of protracted displacement through the case study of al-Am'ari, a Palestinian refugee camp located in the West Bank. Since their establishment in the aftermath of the 1948 war, Palestinian refugee camps have been symbols of national suffering and served as commemorative sites dedicated to pre-exilic locations in parts of historical Palestine. However, the interpretation of this suffering, as well as of camps' commemorative functions, changed over time and was marked with the perceived tension between commitment to places of origin and growing domestication of, as well as attachment to, al-Am'ari. The coexistence of these seemingly contradicting sentiments can be explained with the concept of "mediated locality," defined here as a structure of feeling territorialised in a place that acts as a symbolic representation of another site, to which individuals or groups feel attached. The empirical basis for this concept draws on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the al-Am'ari camp at intervals between January 2010 and August 2012.

Keywords: Palestinian refugees, exile, refugee camp, commemoration, place, identity

Introduction

According to the Human Security Report Project, there has been a consistent trend in regard to global state-based armed conflicts[3] in the aftermath of World War Two. While in 1946, 47% of the conflicts were intra-state, by 2005 this figure rose up to 100% (HSRP, 2008). This profound change, among others, led Mary Kaldor (1999) to introduce a distinction between old and new wars based on differences in goals, financing and methods of warfare. According to the author, the new war financing and methods are characterized by decentralized war economies dependant on external resources and the use of guerrilla warfare techniques and instilling terror. As the aim of new wars "is to control the population by getting rid of everyone of a different identity" (Kaldor, 1999:9), combatants mainly target civilians.

Targeting civilians often involves mass expulsion of local populations. This in turn leads to growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons, estimated in 2011 by UNHCR at 25.9 million, a figure that does not include the five million registered Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA[4]. Following this trend, the 20th century was proclaimed "the century of refugees" (Loescher, 1993), the name current statistics prove to be fitting to the next century as well. What seems to be a relatively new trend, however, is the increasing number of refugees who find their condition protracted. Current UNHCR (2011) statistics show that almost three quarters of the total refugee population (7.1 million) live in a situation of protracted, or extended and long-term, exile. If we add to that the number of Palestinian refugees, the global population of long-term refugees is at least 12.1 million people.

These significant changes on the ground need to be followed by a revision of dominant theories and assumptions on refugees. There has been a tendency within the field of refugee studies, among others, to treat displacement as an anomaly in an otherwise stable and sedentary society (Malkki, 1995; Turton, 2005). Consequently, "one finds in this literature the assumption that to become uprooted and removed from a national community is automatically to lose one's identity, traditions, and culture" (Malkki 1995:508; Malkki, 1997; Chatty, 2010). Refugees are often thought to be living in a condition of social limbo, passively waiting for return. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this concept is at times extended to include long-term refugees, as seems to be the case in Arjun Appadurai's

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[3] The HSRP (2008) distinguishes between two main types of armed conflict: (1) state-based conflicts, where at least one national government is involved; and (2) non-state conflicts fought by paramilitary groups, warlords, and other such non-state actors.

[4] UNRWA – the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East established in 1949. It provides education, healthcare, work and relief for Palestinian refugees, as well as it collects and runs a comprehensive database on Palestinian refugees and refugee camps.

belief that quasi-permanent refugee camps are "context-produced rather than context-generative" (Appadurai, 1996:193). Though the above-mentioned assumptions have been challenged in general, they remain ill-equipped to understand the situation of refugees living in protracted exile.

For both camp and non-camp refugees, the relation between identity and place becomes increasingly complex in the situation of protracted exile. Long-term refugees often seem to be torn between the feeling of belonging to the places of origin and growing domestication of, and attachment to, sites of contemporary residence - refugee camps. These place-oriented sentiments are often portrayed as a zero-sum game, where the intensification of one is at the cost of the other (Zetter, 1999).

In this article I introduce a different interpretation of dilemmas faced by camp refugees living in extended exile, based on the concept of "mediated locality." I define mediated locality as feeling territorialised in a place that acts as a symbolic representation of another site, to which individuals or groups feel attached. I argue that quasi-permanent refugee camps can function as sites of commemoration, the habitation of which may be treated by the refugees as a proof of commitment to their pre-exilic locations. I address questions of how a refugee camp becomes a symbolic representation of refugees' places of origin and how the fact of its inhabitation permits residents to retain the link with pre-exilic communities and locations. My interpretation is based on spending eight months on ethnographic fieldwork in al-Amʿari, a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. Before addressing these issues, in the following sections I introduce the basic socio-historical context of al-Amʿari camp and discuss my data and methods.

Al-Amʿari Refugee Camp in the West Bank

As a result of the 1948 war around 780,000 people of the Arab population of Palestine left their homes fleeing from Israeli paramilitary groups fighting for the establishment of the state of Israel (Sharoni and Abu Nimer, 2008). For some of the refugees who had reached Ramallah/al-Bireh area in the West Bank, in 1949 the International Committee of the Red Cross established a refugee camp, later to be known as al-Amʿari. UNRWA, a UN agency founded to provide work and relief to Palestinian Arab refugees, took responsibility of the camp in the following year. Gradually the Agency replaced tents with provisional housing. Over the years, as camp inhabitants realized that their stay in al-Amʿari was likely to be extended, they began to improve housing conditions by themselves. It was done to a large extent without any formal control by UNRWA or other local institutions and the result is overpopulation of the camp (less than half a meter separates most shelters), bad ventilation and an inadequate infrastructure.

During their sixty-five years long exile West Bank refugees have lived under the condition of permanent uncertainty and insecurity. The political situation on the ground has been changing constantly, rendering "their refugee situation an ongoing rather than a temporary one" (Rosenfeld, 2002:522). The relative stability under Jordanian administration (1948-67) was followed by the years of direct Israeli occupation (1967-80 under military government; 1981-87 civic administration) the opposition to which led to the eruption of the first *intifada* in 1987. Throughout the six years of uprising the camp community remained actively engaged in resistance, what was met with harsh measures on behalf of Israeli military forces, including prolonged curfews, massive arrests, frequent house searches and general harassment, some of a physically violent nature. As a result of the Oslo Accords, an agreement that brought the first intifada to an end in 1993, al-Amʿari camp found itself in Area A under sole control of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)[5]. Only seven years after the agreement, however:

> Palestinian resistance was engendered once again by a series of excess and contradictions, most of which were produced as a result of the division Israel made between the administration of the population [which was assigned to the PNA – DWK], on the one hand, and the control of space [which remained under Israeli authority – DWK], on the other (PNA, 2008: 172).

Though unlike the first uprising, during the second *intifada* Israeli counterinsurgency measures did not focus primarily on the camps, their consequences left a deep mark on al-Amʿari community.

Today the total number of registered Palestinian refugees is as high as 5 million of which more than 1.4 million live in 58 refugee camps existing in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon[6]. Al-Amʿari is one of 19 refugee camps located in the West Bank and is home to approximately 6,000 persons[7]. The camp population is very young: the age average is 26.6 years,

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[5] According to Oslo Accords, the Occupied Territories were to be divided into three respective zones. In all of them the PNA took responsibility of civic institutions dealing with the Palestinian population, whereas in terms of security and policing their status has been different. In Area A, which includes all Palestinian cities and their surroundings, the PNA has been given the jurisdiction and sole responsibility of maintaining order. In Area B, which comprises many West Bank towns and villages, the PNA's duty was to maintain public order, while security had been the matter of Israeli forces. Finally, Area C, which consists mostly of Israeli settlements, roads connecting settlements with each other and with Israel proper and the so-called 'security zones' (areas of strategic importance to Israel), was subjected to full Israeli civil and military control, except over Palestinian civilians (Gordon, 2008).

[6] See: UNRWA, http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=85 (16/02/2013).

[7] All data on al-Amʿari presented in this section come from the UNRWA's official al-Amʿari Refugee Camp Profile.

with 55.4% of al-Am'ari residents being under 24 years old. The unemployment rate is 27.5%, while almost three-quarters of the camp active labour force work in private enterprises (71%), 17% in public sector and 8% in UNRWA. Approximately one-fourth of camp inhabitants acquired some sort of secondary education, with 6.2% holding a university degree or a diploma from one of the community colleges operating in the West Bank. Within the Palestinian Autonomy al-Am'ari camp is especially famous for its football team, a real champion in the Palestinian league. The camp is also renowned for its well-established NGO infrastructure, wide variety of activities for children and adults alike and an ability to attract visitors and foreign aid.

Data and methods

This article draws on eight months of fieldwork in the al-Am'ari camp conducted at intervals between January 2010 and August 2012. For the whole period of my fieldwork I lived inside al-Am'ari and I was involved in its community life, which allowed me to conduct participant observation on a daily basis. During four subsequent research trips I made fifty recorded in-depth interviews with camp inhabitants[8] and was engaged in countless informal conversations; I acquired statistical data on al-Am'ari from local and regional UNRWA offices; I gathered various sort of textual data, such as brochures and books published and disseminated by camp organizations, two dissertations in social sciences written by camp inhabitants on aspects of living in a refugee camp and other documents produced by both individuals and camp institutions; I recorded substantial amount of visual data on internal and external spatial arrangements, posters, graffiti, children drawings and the like.

The Troubled Relation between Identity and Place during Extended Exile

As noted by Gupta and Ferguson (1997), at least since the mid-1990s the commonly assumed isomorphic relation between place, identity and culture has become increasingly criticized and challenged in the field of anthropology. According to the authors we are currently living in "a world where identities are increasingly coming to be, if not wholly deterritorialized, at least differently territorialized" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 37), while "the irony of these times is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places becomes perhaps even more

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[8] Out of fifty interviews five were held in English and forty-five in Arabic. In the case of thirty one Arabic language interviews I used the help of a research assistant, while fourteen I conducted entirely on my own.

salient" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 37). Despite the much-debated mobility of people across space, commonly encapsulated in the concept of globalization, the idea of homeland – be it individual, ethnic or national – remains a very powerful symbol readily used in the process of political mobilization (Smith, 1999). This ongoing practice of attaching places to particular ideologies reflects "the power places have to call forth an emotional response in us, a power which is especially potent when skilfully and artfully linked to the ideology of nationalism" (Turton, 2005:258).

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that – though increasingly a common experience – the dilemmas of de-territorialization are still lived in their most advanced form by refugees, migrants and other stateless people, who form a vanguard in inventing creative ways of reconstructing links between identity and place. If this condition is to spread over other social groups and become a norm rather than an exception, then it is perhaps even more compelling reason to study those groups for whom it has already become part of the experience. For refugee studies, on the other hand, a final departure from the one-dimensional conceptualization of the relation between identity and place, often limiting it down to refugees' persistent nostalgia for the places of origin, is also a much-needed development given discipline's criticism for pathologizing displacement by giving into sedentarist thinking (Malkki, 1995; Malkki, 1997; Turton, 2005; Chatty, 2010). According to Malkki, to adopt such a narrow conceptualization is "to blind oneself to the multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them" (1997:72). As Clifford Geertz (1996) argues, the very assumption that territorialization of identities is inherent to the human condition seems to go unquestioned:

> [f]or it is still the case that no one lives in the world in general. Everybody, even the exiled, the drifting, the diasporic, or the perpetually moving, lives in some confined and limited stretch of it – "the world around here" (Geertz, 1996:262).

Several studies have shown that refugees in various social and cultural contexts are pre-occupied with maintaining continuity with their pre-exilic social and physical worlds (Colson, 1971; Zetter, 1994; Malkki, 1995; Parkin, 1999; Hirschon, 2001; Hammond, 2004). The variety of practices aiming at retaining these links – for example by cherishing elements of the pre-exilic heritage, fostering the feeling of belonging to the places of origin or maintaining social relations with former fellow villagers - have also been widely described in the Palestinian context (Peteet, 2005; Gren, 2009; Chatty, 2010; Gambian, 2012). In the case of protracted exile, refugees' relation to place has often been characterized as a tension between continuous attachment to original locations and growing

domestication of residential sites in exile. The relation between the two is commonly understood as inversely proportional and time-dependent, following the pattern where the initial attachment to pre-exilic home is gradually giving ground to adaptation to exile and domestication of the sites of contemporary residence (Zetter, 1999).

However, as some studies have shown, the relation between place and identity in protracted exile is far more complex (Malkki, 1997; Zetter, 1999; Peteet, 2005; Feldman, 2006; Agier, 2011; Gambian, 2012), particularly for refugees who, despite the passage of time, continue to inhabit a very specific urban and social setting of a refugee camp. As shown by Liisa Malkki (1996) on the example of Hutu refugees living in Tanzania, the experience of inhabiting a refugee camp is an important factor structuring refugees' understanding of exile and their relation to the places of origin; refugee status and aspirations for return play a more central role in the social worlds of camp dwellers than in those of town refugees.

Though humanitarianism is commonly accused of silencing refugees' political and historical claims (Malkki, 1996; Agamben, 1998), it "also and often unintentionally, can open new spaces of visibility" (Feldman, 2008:500). Refugee camps – these contained spaces designed to organize and bring assistance to people fleeing danger – are in themselves embodiments of the very concept of forced migration and as such can be creatively used by refugees and national politicians alike to increase the visibility of the national cause. This particular potential on behalf of refugee camps has been recognized by Ilana Feldman who argues that in the Palestinian context "refugee camps – while by no means "ordinary" dwelling spaces – exemplify the capacity of mundane spaces, objects, and practices to operate as forms of visible commemoration" (Feldman, 2008:507).

A refugee camp becomes a symbolic representation of refugees' places of origin such that the act of its inhabitation allows residents to retain the link with pre-exilic communities and locations. As victims of forced displacement, camp refugees find themselves in a particular kind of social limbo: they wait for return and the ability to resume their ordinary lives, while they remain "outside of the places and outside of the time of a common, ordinary, predictable world" (Agier, 2002:323) of the host population. With the passage of time, however, refugees address this initial condition of social limbo in their attempts to organize life anew in exile. Part of this process consist of *re-territorialization* that is an "effort to create new localized residential communities" (Appadurai, 2003 [1996]:345) in the camp. Through the process of re-territorialization the camp does not become simply an alternative, or a substitute, to refugees' places of origin. Rather it becomes their symbolic representation characterized by a particular form of locality through which the trauma of displacement is mediated by the experience of exile and encampment.

I adopt Arjun Appadurai's definition of locality "as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects" (1996: 182). In the course of exile the camp becomes a mediated locality of refugees' places of origin, a symbolic representation of their pre-exilic locations. The camp operates as a site of commemoration, a site where the initial trauma of war and displacement is transformed into suffering caused by extended exile, where the elements of pre-exilic geographies of origin are re-created both spatially and socially and where refugee identity is territorialized and fostered.

Refugee camp as a *lieu de mémoire*

Though the camps were established to manage and provide assistance to its inhabitants, along with these formally recognized purposes they began to operate as sites of commemoration of the Palestinian refugees' cause. As visible embodiments of exile, the camps asserted a special symbolic and political status not only for the refugees, but also for the Palestinian nation in general. They began to function as *lieux de mémoire*, whose role is to "stop time, to block the work of forgetting" (Nora, 1989:19) about the injustice done to generations of refugees and the Palestinian national project. Given their symbolic significance, there has been a continuous concern over camps' prime means of visibility, namely their physical appearance and material conditions. Refugees are active participants of the international refugee regime, conscious of the need to argue the authenticity of their suffering in front of the international community and donor organizations, if they are to secure future financial aid and political recognition (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2010). This endeavour is particularly challenging for refugees in the situation of protracted exile, when their "refugee credentials" – and hence the potential to attract resources - are very likely to be questioned (Malkki, 1996; Gambian, 2012).

Since the very emergence of al-Am'ari, its inhabitants realized camp's role as a physical embodiment of their refugee status and the aspirations of return. There has been a conviction, which is present to certain extent till this day, that those refugees who stay in camps are likely candidates for an eventual return. In the early years of al-Am'ari's existence some people consciously chose to settle in the camp, while in the following decades some families decided to remain in the camp for that reason. According to my interviewees, the camp's capacity as a form of visible commemoration stems from both its internationally recognized status – as a site administered by the UN and inhabited by people holding refugee cards – and the poor living conditions prevailing at the site. In that sense "the very conditions of people's daily lives (...) articulate both displacement and desire to return home" (Feldman, 2008:509) and the camp becomes an easily readable sign of the injustice done to Palestinian refugees, which urges those in power to relieve its inhabitants of their suffering.

Given its symbolic meaning, the very appearance of the camp's space has been a subject of conflict and negotiation. In many Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East, the concern over maintaining their provisional appearance led to fierce opposition, on behalf of both refugees and host populations, to any major improvements of living conditions there (Peteet, 2005, Feldman, 2008, Gambian, 2012), a phenomenon that according to Tamari was informed by a "mistaken philosophy among Palestinians that the more miserable the camp residents, the more their political position will be enhanced" (Tamari, 1999:84). Al-Amʿari has not been different in that respect. During an interview with the director of UNRWA services in the camp he mentioned that for al-Amʿarians one of the hardest moments in camp's history was when UNRWA began to replace tents with cement housing units in the middle of 1950s. Whereas the tent has been regarded a universal symbol of the provisional character of refugee status, the more "solid" cement houses were perceived as visible signs of permanency, potentially threatening the cause of return.

As the time passed, however, people began to organize their lives anew in the camp, followed by investment in housing and infrastructure. This process, which intensified in the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, was – according to many of my respondents – limited by UNRWA who controlled all construction works in the camp and issued a formal ban on building dwellings higher than one floor. One of my interviewees justified this decision on behalf of UNRWA by the need to maintain the "camp-like" appearance of al-Amʿari:

> they didn't allow to make high buildings, because it is a camp, if someone sees that the camp is like two, three floors, he will say that it is not a camp (…) anybody can live in these buildings [that are in al-Amʿari now]

Following the Oslo Accords of 1993, UNRWA eased its control over construction works in the camp, for example by amending the ban to allow building two-storey houses. Since 1993, the Agency has not been very strict in exercising its powers in that domain and nowadays up to 60% of dwellings have more than two floors. With its densely populated cement houses and paved narrow alleys filled with shops and local enterprises, al-Amʿari does not resemble a popular image of a refugee camp, as a provisional arrangement of tents or makeshift shelters set up somewhere aside of the regular urban landscape of the host population. The question arises as to whether these changes in al-Amʿari's appearance really threatened its camp status as well as its symbolic function as a site of commemoration of the Palestinian refugees' cause.

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The transposition of suffering

Camp residents' idea of what makes al-Amʻari a refugee camp changed over the years. While in the beginning (meaning the 1950s and '60s) the camp-character of al-Amʻari was mainly represented through the overall aura of temporariness manifested in the camp's appearance; its understanding gradually evolved into that of a space defined by habitation of people holding refugee status. When I asked my respondents directly what makes al-Amʻari a refugee camp after 64 years have passed, most pointed out that they, the refugees, continue to live there. In an interview with a twenty-one-year old woman from al-Amʻari, when I asked her whether considerable improvements in camp's space could threaten al-Amʻari's character as a refugee camp, she strongly disagreed and asserted:

> We are refugees, because it is not our country. For everyone there is a homeland, everyone should be in his place, in his homeland. Because of that we will remain a camp. Wherever we will go, wherever we will come from, we will remain a camp.

What is made clear in this statement is that the camp's existence and endurance is defined by refugees' presence at the site. As such, the camp cannot be transformed or cancelled and it is to last until the refugees are allowed back to their pre-exilic locations.

How could this shift in understanding of what makes al-Amʻari a refugee camp be understood from a theoretical perspective? It seems that by the very act of inhabiting the highly politicized and symbolized site of a refugee camp, its dwellers are labelled as refugees as well as they assert their refugee identity through residence in this spatial embodiment of exile. Adapting Paul Connerton's (1989) argument about the capacity of bodily practices to fulfil commemorative and mnemonic functions, the act of inhabiting a camp may be interpreted as a physical and symbolic continuation of the initial expulsion, as a means of daily reliving the suffering caused by the exile. According to Greenberg, "to remember the traumatic past is, at least to some extent, to experience the suffering caused by the original wound" (Greenberg, 2005: 93). This particular understanding of commemoration resonates with Palestinian camp refugees' own practices and interpretations. Many Palestinian camp refugees believe that staying in the conditions of the camp - often miserable despite the described improvements - is a form of steadfastness, of expressing their commitment to the places of origin, as well as of not agreeing for the contemporary *status quo*.

As noted by Gambian (2012) in the case of Palestinian refugees, suffering in its existential dimension is crucial for their sense of identity and understanding of history. By emphasizing their loss and suffering, both that related to expulsion

and life in the camp, camp inhabitants aim to restore continuity with their pre-exilic lives and localities. Avishai Margalit has argued that reliving the past can take the form of displacing "that which brought the trauma about with a different object that is somehow associated with the object of the past" (Margalit, 2002: 126). In that case, the suffering caused by prolonged exile and encampment can to some extent replace the trauma of the initial flight, while it remains its natural consequence. The experience of loss and displacement is mediated through the experience of encampment, namely living in a space designed by definition as a temporary and imperfect substitute of refugees' original locations.

The refrain of home

It is not only the suffering through which the camp becomes a representation of refugees' places of origin. In the case of many Palestinian camps researchers have noted refugees efforts to re-create both communities and places of origin in the space of the camp (Bisharat, 1997; Peteet, 2005; Gren, 2009; Chatty, 2010). In the chaos of the 1948 war, people often fled in groups so that when they reached a safe place family members and former neighbours tended to settle next to each other. Therefore many camps began to resemble a patchwork-like structure of neighbourhoods representing pre-exilic locations (and often named accordingly), where former co-villagers or fellow townspeople lived in both physical and social proximity. The process of refugees' settling in al-Am'ari took a very similar path. Till this day four of camp neighbourhoods are called after their inhabitants' places of origin (Na'ane, Annaba, Abu Shushe and Malha quarters) and, even though their initial homogenous composition has diversified, these names continue to be used as important markers of camp's space. During first decades after camp's establishment al-Am'ari refugees functioned mainly within the pre-1948 social networks, while in the course of exile these loyalties gradually gave ground to broader camp solidarity. Nevertheless, at present there are three heritage societies whose role is to integrate al-Am'arians of shared origin (namely: Society of Lid, Society of Na'ane and Society of Annaba) and organize various activities to nurture pre-exilic traditions and distinct local identities.

This practice of "re-creating certain aspects of home imbues the camp with form and meaning otherwise absent in exile" (Parmenter, 1994:67). This is to say that retaining links with the pre-exilic past is not simply a past-oriented attempt to secure continuity of identity (which may otherwise be felt lacking in the context of exile), but it can also be a future-oriented and instrumental strategy of accustoming oneself to life in exile. In her analysis of the latter on the example of camp refugees in Gaza, Ilana Feldman used Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of "territorial refrain" through which a particular space is being organized

and domesticated. According to the author "the repeated articulation of memories participates in and animates a refrain of home that shapes people's experiences of their communities, of themselves, of their past and of their future" (Feldman, 2006:15). The elements of pre-exilic life are necessary building blocks of the process of domesticating camp's space and organizing life anew in exile. Particularly for refugees living in unstable political contexts, it is the past that represents safety and well-being and therefore can serve as a stable point of reference both individual and group identity can rest upon. For the West Bank refugees their extraordinary long exile has been marked by ongoing crises of military, political, economic, and at times humanitarian, character (Gordon, 2008). In the situation of ever-changing circumstances, the imagined geographies of pre-exilic home as well as the theme of return, form a stable point of reference for al-Amʻarians' contemporary identities and a powerful vision they can adhere to.

In the case of prolonged exile, refugees' efforts to domesticate the camp's space, initially focused around re-creating aspects of pre-exilic home, take a variety of forms. In general each camp comes into existence as a result of some historical event (which caused the expulsion), but it also defines a framework for a new social life to begin. With the passage of time and through the efforts of individual refugees and local camp institutions, strong social ties develop between camp inhabitants (Hamzeh, 2001). It has been particularly visible in the case of West Bank refugee camps, where ongoing political crises – such as first and second *intifadas* – resulted in intensification of local *vis-à-vis* family bonds, in a society that is traditionally known for the prevalence of family ties over friendly and neighbourly ones (Hanafi, 2007). Many individual camps emerged as new social entities, characteristic not only of inner-cohesiveness, but also of sharp boundaries separating them from the outside world (Johnson, 2007). It was certainly the case in al-Amʻari, where under difficult circumstances the largely *ad hoc* grouping of people fleeing danger transformed itself into a strong local community its inhabitants grew attached to.

Aside from the fact that staying in the camp strengthens their case as Palestinian refugees, many of the people I talked with emphasized their attachment to al-Amʻari; the camp has become their place of belonging, the place they are going to defend if necessary. My thirty-two-year old male interviewee expressed it in a following way:

> Belonging, that's it, belonging. In my life I got used to the camp life (…) the camp became my city, my village. And what is more, al-Amʻari, it is all about coming back, to our country, as long as we are living in the camps our cause will continue to be heard and seen. But if we went, went out of the camps, we would wipe out any right to ourselves.

What is particularly interesting in this statement is that there seems to be no inconsistency between being strongly attached to the camp as a place of one's belonging, and in the same time treating one's presence in this place as a proof of belonging (or right) to another space.

Territorialization of refugee identity

Despite the passage of time and thanks to the continuous effort on behalf of camp inhabitants, al-Am'ari remains a refugee camp, where the themes of exile, refugeedom and right to return continue to play a key role in forming local camp identity and binding the community together. Maurice Halbwachs argued "that it is through their membership of a social group (...) that individuals are able to acquire, to localize and to recall their memories" (Connerton, 1989:36). Al-Am'arians form a strong camp community bounded by common memories of the pre-1948 Palestine, experiences of exile and aspirations for return. By living in both physical and social proximity camp inhabitants are able to foster their common refugee identity through daily practices of communicative memory. As noted by Assmann, every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others' where the others are "not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past" (Assman, 1995:127). Al-Am'arians' individual memories are shaped through communication and daily encounters with fellow refugees, a grassroots process that leads to production of highly localized narratives of the pre-exilic lands, somehow independently from, or parallel to, the official discourses instigated by state institutions and political parties (Khalili, 2004).

Many al-Am'arians realize that the camps' capacity as a site of commemoration is directed both outwards - that is to the Palestinian nation and the international community - and inwards to keep successive generations of camp inhabitants committed to the pre-exilic Palestine and the cause of return. When I asked my thirty-two-year old interviewee whether he would like his children to move out from the camp, which in practice often means living in better conditions, he said that he would prefer them to stay. He explained himself by saying that in general camp inhabitants should be encouraged to remain steadfast in the camp, as it is the only way of securing the Palestinian cause. In the further course of the interview he explained that steadfastness in the camp is not only a matter of sending a message to the world, but it is also about keeping future generations aware of the injustice that was done to them. According to him, while living in the camp children begin to ask themselves questions:

Tomorrow he will ask himself: why am I in the camp and not in a village or a city? Because he knows that he has a village, the Jewish drove him out of it and he has the right to come back.

By living in this highly politicized and historicized space new generations of camp inhabitants are brought up in the culture of not forgetting their original lands and contemporary rights. Many people I talked with had expressed a conviction that refugees living outside the camp, particularly those residing in good conditions, are more likely to give up the cause of return, though the verification of this claim is beyond the scope of this research.

Conclusion

Given the prevailing trends of forced displacement, quasi-permanent refugee camps become increasingly common forms of refugee settlement. Taking into account these developments, Michel Agier has argued that "the background model of research on present-day camps is that of the Palestinian camp" (2011:188), understood not as a makeshift place of waiting, but rather as a site of emplacement endowed with potential for creating new hybrid identities. This is to say that even in the situation of a seemingly total de-territorialization, namely forced displacement, people do employ various practices of place-making. With the passage of time and thanks to the efforts of its inhabitants, camps emerge as new socio-spatial entities. Contrary to what may be a common assumption and an often employed interpretation in studies on refugees, domestication of camps' space does not have to mean fading attachment to places of origin. My research findings suggest that camp's space may be constructed and understood as a symbolic representation of refugees' places of origin, while refugees' relation to that space, and the emergent camp community, as a mediated locality through which the pre-exilic past is being lived in exile.

In this article I distinguish four aspects of this phenomenon on the example of al-Am'ari refugee camp in the West Bank. First is the camp's capacity to fulfil the role of a national *lieu de mémoire,* a physical embodiment of exile that serves particular commemorative functions for local, national and international audiences. Second, for some refugees the very fact of inhabiting a camp may be treated as an extension of the initial trauma of displacement and therefore an expression of the continuous commitment to their places of origin. Third, in the process of domesticating the camp's space and forming a camp community, elements of pre-exilic physical and social worlds have been re-created in al-Am'ari, what allowed for retaining some form of continuity with the pre-1948 past. Fourth, the camp is a place where the refugee identity of its inhabitants has become territorialized and can be expressed and fostered on daily bases.

I argue that, apart from its contribution to understanding the condition of prolonged encampment, the phenomenon of mediated locality is an interesting case for exploring possible relations between identity and space, a topic that is very much debated in contemporary anthropology and sociology.

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