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DOROTA WORONIECKA-KRZYŻANOWSKA
Polish Academy of Sciences

The Meanings of Ordinary in Times of Crisis: The Case of a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank[1]

Abstract: For people living in violent and insecure contexts, "ordinariness" and "crisis" take on new meanings. Daily efforts to manage these contexts transform everyday life into a scene of resistance, a place of refuge and a domain of resilience and survival. The article discusses four ways in which Palestinian refugees from Al-Am'ari camp in the West Bank frame the ordinary amidst protracted exile, ongoing occupation and recurring military conflict by: (1) suspending everyday life, (2) defending normalcy amidst the crisis, (3) normalizing the experience of crisis and (4) fostering a normative sense of ordinariness. Instead of adopting arbitrarily defined categories of ordinariness and crisis, the aim of the paper is to reconstruct how they are produced, understood and narrated by camp inhabitants. The analysis is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Al-Am'ari camp between January 2010 and August 2012.

Keywords: crisis, violence, daily life, ordinariness, agency, Palestinian refugees in the West Bank

The seeming logic of the concept of "crisis" is that it is "a temporary abnormality linked to a particular event" (Scheper-Hughes 2008: 36). Its temporary and isolated nature makes it supposedly easier to distinguish "crisis" from "ordinary life." For some, however, the crisis is prolonged indefinitely. These are their experiences as well as understandings of categories like "crisis," "emergency" and "ordinariness" that blur the commonly held opposition between crisis and ordinariness (see Kelly 2008, Abrahams 1986). Research on groups living in insecure and violent conditions exposes these categories' referential, contextual and dynamic character. This in turn allows us to explore the ways in which actors ascribe subjective meanings to their quotidian practices, the ways in which they use them as acts of resilience and, possibly, means of resistance.

The theme of daily life in times of crisis has been a popular subject of inquiry in social sciences and social history. Numerous studies on World War II and the Holocaust analyzed individual and group survival and copying strategies, as well as daily acts of human resilience in the face of most adverse circumstances (e.g. Des Pres 1980; Lewin 2002; Gildea 2006; Szarota 2010). The experience of living under the condition of persistent threat of physical abuse or death has been studied in its variety of manifestations and socio-cultural contexts, including the exposure to state

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terror (e.g. Suárez-Orozco 1992; Margold 1999), civil wars and unrests (e.g. Edgerton 1986; Feldman 1991; Macek 2000; Borell 2008; Pettigrew and Adhikari 2009) or torture (e.g. Punamäki 1988; Conroy 2001). Aside from researching the conditions of spectacular violence such as war or terrorism, a number of social scientists dedicated their efforts to understand daily experiences of particularly fragile and deprived communities exposed to different kinds of insecurities such as the destitution, threat of sexual abuse or domestic and criminal violence (e.g. Scheper-Hughes 1993 and 2008; Green 1999).

In anthropology, a discipline known for its commitment to explore the everyday, the theme of daily life amidst violent and insecure conditions received much attention (e.g. Riches 1986; Robben and Suárez-Orozco 2000; Schmidt and Schröder 2001; Chatterji and Deepak 2007; Pain and Smith 2008). As argued by Pain and Smith, "there may have been a period in history when fear was restricted to real and imaginary risks in primarily local settings: but increasingly, risk and fear are experienced, portrayed and discussed as globalised phenomena" (2008: 1). The concepts of anxiety, fear and crisis are no longer reserved for studies on communities facing extreme economic deprivation or violence, but are often used to characterize whole societies in peace-time contexts, as can be seen in the works of most prominent sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991). The scope of these concepts' possible application in contemporary anthropological research occurred to me during the biennial EASA conference in 2012, where I presented the initial draft of this article at one of the 142 workshops exploring the conference main theme, "Uncertainty and disquiet," in various social contexts ranging from war, natural disaster and displacement to that of illness, disability, unemployment or challenges of modern urban life.

Instead of tracing daily coping and survival strategies of dealing with anxiety and crisis, this article approaches the problem from a different angle by analyzing the ways in which the very meaning, or notion, of "ordinariness" is constructed and used in the situation of chronic crisis. The study is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Al-Am'ari refugee camp in the West Bank. It explores four possible ways of framing the ordinary amidst protracted exile, ongoing occupation and recurring military conflict. Unlike the majority of research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict focusing on its political and military aspects, it analyses ordinary Palestinians' narratives on the experience of life in a violent and insecure context. While, as noted by Jean-Klein (2001), there is a tendency in social sciences to emphasize static, routinized and reproductive character of everyday life, in this article I treat daily practices of Al-Am'ari inhabitants as sites of agency endowed with potential for transformative action. Instead of tracing manifestations of arbitrarily defined categories of ordinariness and crisis, I aim to reconstruct how they are understood and narrated by informants themselves. I am interested in how Al-Am'arians assign meanings to their daily practices, treating them as acts of resistance, places of refuge from the disturbing reality or simply ways of getting by. Before discussing theoretical framework of the analysis I provide a brief introduction into the studied case, together with a note on methodology and data.

Al-Am'ari Refugee Camp in the West Bank

The 1948 war saw massive expulsion of Palestinian Arab population, estimated at around 780,000 persons, by Jewish military forces fighting for the establishment of the Israeli state (Sharoni and Abu Nimer 2008). In the chaos of war, people fled in different directions finding shelter under protection of neighbouring countries. Some of the refugees, fleeing mainly from the area of central Palestine, reached the twin cities of Ramallah and Al-Bireh located in the West Bank, at this point of time under control of Jordan. In 1949 International Committee of the Red Cross founded few refugee camps in the area, one of which later became known as Al-Am'ari. During that year the UN established an Agency, UNRWA, devoted to providing assistance, protection and advocacy for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. The Agency took control of refugee camps one year later and launched a series of campaigns helping refugees to satisfy their basic needs and arrange life in exile. Sixty-five years later UNRWA remains the main provider of services to registered Palestinian refugees estimated today at 5 million people, 1.4 million of which live in 58 refugee camps located in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.[2] Al-Am'ari, one of nineteen West Bank refugee camps, is inhabited by approximately 6,000 persons, the majority of whom live in low-quality houses that replaced tents. The area is very congested, as the growth of camp population has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in space assigned to the camp. At present, as a result of Oslo Accords, Al-Am'ari is located within the limits of Area A, which means that it is under full control of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).[3]

Refugees in the West Bank live in the environment that is typical of sequential crises of military, political, economic and (at times) humanitarian character. The Hanafi's observation on Palestinian society as one "characterized by a psychology of transition and impermanence" (2007: 45) is particularly true for the refugees. During their sixty-six years long exile, the political environment in the West Bank has changed dramatically, as has the reality of life in refugee camps. West Bank history of the past six decades can be divided into seven distinct periods: the Jordanian administration (1948–1967); the Israeli military government (1967–1980); the Israeli civil administration (1981–1987); the first *intifada* (1988–1993); the Oslo years (1994–2000); the second *intifada* (2000–2006); the present (2006–). All periods, however, have something in common: they have been marked with occupation, higher or lower levels of violence, as well as with feelings of uncertainty and insecurity about the future

[2] Source: http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=85, retrieved on: 22/08/2013.

[3] Oslo Accords, a peace agreement that brought the first *intifada* to an end, inaugurated establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), a Palestinian self-governing body which was supposed to gradually evolve into autonomous political entity in charge of the Palestinian Territories. The Territories, that is the West Bank and Gaza Strip, were divided into three respective zones. While the PNA's authority over civic institutions and the Palestinian population extended over all three of them, the share of responsibilities over security and policing differed: the Area A, consisting of all Palestinian urban centres, found itself under sole control of the PNA; in the Area B, created for the majority of smaller towns and villages, PNA took responsibility of maintaining public order leaving security matters to Israeli forces; the Area C (Israeli settlements, the so-called military "security zones" and roads between settlements and Israel proper) remained under full control of the Israeli forces (Gordon 2008).

(Gordon 2008). Over the years, if compared to the rest of Palestinian population, camp refugees were more frequently subject to various forms of Israeli repressions and imprisonment (e.g. Qudsi 2000) and they tended to be more active in the national struggle, with Al-Am'ari being considered as one of the most active camps in the West Bank, both according to Israeli statistics (Yahya 1990) and popular opinion. All these "rhythms of violence and calm, of disruptions and expectations, and memories of past violence" (Allen 2008: 455) have shaped Al-Am'arians' understanding of categories like crisis and normalcy, providing points of reference for interpreting both present and future realities.

Data and Methods

The article is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Al-Am'ari refugee camp in the West Bank. During four subsequent research trips, spread from January 2010 through August 2012, I remained actively involved in camp life, both in my capacity as a researcher and community worker responsible for training young fencers in the local sports club. This voluntary engagement gave me a unique opportunity to conduct systematic participant observation in the central social institution of the camp, namely Al-Am'ari Youth Centre, as well as it proved crucial for establishing local contacts and recruiting interviewees. In total I carried out forty eight in-depth semi-structured interviews with Al-Am'arians, two with UNRWA employees and one with a prominent Palestinian sociologist.[4] In the process of arranging interviews with camp inhabitants, I strived to achieve gender and age balance, distinguishing three major age groups according to focal points in Palestinian history. Apart from observations, interviews and numerous informal conversations, the gathered material included socio-demographic profile of Al-Am'ari produced by local and regional UNRWA offices; visual data such as graffiti, posters, political cartoons, urban and interior arrangements; and various written resources, e.g. publications issued by camp institutions or two dissertations authored by local social sciences students based on extensive research in Al-Am'ari.

Theoretical Framework

Based on research on Brazilian shantytowns and political violence during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2008) called for the revision of our notions of trauma, vulnerability and daily resilience. She argued that narratives on trauma and recovery, which rose to prominence in late modernity, were shaped by the clinical model of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the context of anthropology, model's domination in the analysis of human responses to

[4] Out of fifty one in-depth interviews, six were carried out in English and forty five in Arabic. During thirty one of the latter I was accompanied by my research assistant, while the remaining fourteen I conducted on my own.

horrific events has often been criticized for its assumed universality and disregard for possible cultural variations (Summerfield 2004). According to Scheper-Hughes by its emphasis on the vulnerabilities of human nature, the PTSD model underestimates the human capacity for resilience and carrying on amidst both extraordinary and everyday violence. Our understanding and "construction of humans as resilient and hardy or fragile, passive and easily overwhelmed by events should not be viewed as an either/or opposition" as "human nature is both resilient and frail" (Scheper-Hughes 2008: 42). Particularly in research on communities exposed to prolonged or chronic crisis, the opposition tends to blur our judgments offering the officious figures of either passive victims or hardened veterans, whose thick skin and resilience in the face of most horrific events renders them somehow less human.

Even during the most turbulent times, people try to lead an "ordinary life;" however, the problem of living an "ordinary life" in a violent context remains under-researched by anthropologists dealing with armed conflicts, who tend to focus on the violence rather than the mundane, quotidian aspects of social life (Kelly 2008). Here, violence is deeply embedded in ordinary life (Das 2007). As emphasized by Scheper-Hughes (2004), violence can take variety of forms such as structural, psychological or symbolic; and consequently should be understood as a continuum of different types of violent acts that are produced in "the structures and *mentalities* of everyday life" (14). By upholding the analytical opposition between violence and ordinariness, as well as by overlooking the mundane aspects of life amidst armed conflict, not only do we limit our understanding of the phenomenon, but we are also at risk of overemphasizing the experience of violence in lives of the people we study.

Although there is a substantial body of research on nationalism and resistance, as observed by Jean-Klein (2001), the vast majority of it is marked with a "denial of authentic nationalist production in everyday life" (84) treating it "as a space where nationalism is perhaps acted out but not initiated or co-authored" (89). In his famous book *Banal Nationalism* Michael Billig criticized a tendency, widespread among sociologists, to understand and analyse nationalism in its "hot" manifestations overlooking the "continuous flagging or reminding of nationhood in daily life routines" (1995: 8). Though the author treats quotidian practices as vehicles of national ideology crucial for the very survival of nation states, he does not discuss actors' agency in assigning and transforming meanings of personal routines, but rather speaks of sociohistorical processes' capacity to shape individuals' motives and behaviour and of national particularities being constructed "beyond individual." While it would certainly be an overstatement to consider people's daily habits as a subject of constant evaluation and reflexivity, by focusing solely on their unconscious and reproductive character we risk blinding ourselves to actors' self-nationalizing projects expressed, among others, in the realm of everyday life.

Tim Edensor (2002) notices that though the majority of daily practices are carried out in an unreflective manner, at times they may become subjects of social scrutiny. As "[r]eflexivity and unreflexivity are not properties that are associated with particular kinds of enaction, but depend upon contexts" (Edensor 2002: 89), realizing the national component of one's daily routines is often triggered by disruption of or threat to

the established social order. While Edensor discusses two types of such situations, that is finding oneself in new social context or encountering with some national Other, it seems that his observation may be extended to include other kinds of intimidating circumstances such as the military conflict. He criticizes a tendency in social sciences to conceptualize everyday life as primarily static and routinized, overlooking its "polydimensional: fluid, ambivalent and labile" (Gardiner 2000: 6) character. In that respect, Herzfeld's study on cultural intimacy is a notable exception. The author's observation that "because national ideologies are grounded in images of intimacy, they can be subtly but radically restructured by the changes occurring in the intimate reaches of everyday life" (Herzfeld 1997: 31) proves crucial for understanding mechanisms through which actors' efforts to assign particular meanings to their daily practices may have a repercussion on the national level, e.g. by becoming collectively shared strategies of resistance.

Based on her analysis of the first *intifada* and given the shortfalls present in the literature on the subject, Jean-Klein (2001) calls for the acknowledgement of everyday practices' potential to be driven by individual agency, motivated by various objectives and designed to meet various goals, be it oppositional, emancipatory or hegemonizing. This article aims to respond to this call by analyzing four different ways of framing the ordinary in times of crisis by Al-Am'ari refugees. The presented analysis draws on an assumption that the everyday life may become a place where agency and subjectivity are acted out, where individuals engage in the production of new social identities (see Escobar 1992), as well as in the transformation of the existing ones.

In everyday life we can distinguish at least two different modes of agency. The first one can be traced in the work of de Certeau (1984). According to the author, in the situation when systems of production expand over virtually all spheres of human life, it is the individual users who take the action to carve out spaces for agency in their everyday life. Though at times the systems producing meaning and context (be it television, the economy or military occupation) may seem overwhelming, individual users, families or communities may "subvert them not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept" (de Certeau 1984: xiii). Even in case of crisis, emergency or military conflict, actors may retain their agency by delimitating the spaces of their everyday life and transforming the meaning of laws, orders or representations that are being imposed on them.

The second mode is based on assumption that these are actors themselves who recognize and negotiate the distinction between ordinary and extra-ordinary experiences. According to Roger Abrahams (1986: 61), the ability

> "to recognize typicality becomes a means of recognizing how to feel and interpret what is going on. Through such reflexive activity we can recognize the difference between the more and the less ordinary, the everyday and the special event, as it is becoming an experience."

Here "the ordinary" or "everyday" emerges as an intrinsically emic category, constructed by actors themselves as they engage in interpreting their daily practices

and experiences. A category that is dynamic and relative and can accommodate variety of meanings that may differ not only among respective cultural contexts, but also within particular groups or may change during individual's life span. Recognizing particular practices or events as "ordinary" is an attribute of actors' agency and therefore may be used as a tactic or as an element of a broader strategy, designed to meet a particular purpose.

Four Meanings of Ordinary in Times of Crisis

In the analysis I use Florian Znaniecki's (1927) methodological principle of the humanistic coefficient, reconstructing how Al-Am'ari residents have themselves produced, understood and used the categories of ordinary and crisis in various historical periods and social contexts. This section discusses four ways of framing the ordinary in times of crisis that emerged from my analysis of fieldwork data as well as the anthropological literature of Palestinian society: (1) suspending everyday life, (2) defending normalcy amidst the crisis, (3) normalizing the experience of crisis and (4) fostering the normative sense of ordinariness.

Suspending Everyday Life

Palestinians suspended everyday life as a form of resistance during the first *intifada*. The massive protests against Israeli occupation started in Gazan and West Bank refugee camps, which soon became local centers of resistance, even prior to the emergence of organized leadership known as Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (Gerner 1994). For the most part, during the first *intifada* Palestinian resistance focused on non-violent civil disobedience tactics (such as protests, non-payment of taxes and partial daily commercial strike), though the easily recognized symbol of the uprising became that of a young Palestinian throwing stones at fully equipped Israeli army (Tamari and Hammami 2001). Despite the harsh counter-insurgency measures employed by the Israeli forces, most of my interviewees recalled the first *intifada* with a degree of nostalgia as a time of heart-warming solidarity and national unity.

The suspension of daily routine was an oppositional practice employed by many West Bankers to reveal and to emphasize the abnormality of Israeli occupation (Kelly 2008). Jean-Klein (2001) describes the strategy as domestic self-nationalization of individuals, households and communities through suspending daily routine and "self-consciously desisting from a limited range of activities," which were "sacrificed for the cause" (2001: 96). According to the author, it encompassed diverse leisure activities, including evening strolls, women's morning coffee circles, trips, picnics and other outings. Leisure activities as such were considered as acts of forgetting and as a waste of time that could instead be devoted to an active involvement in resistance. Similarly, there were certain self-restrictions on body adornment (jewelry and the like), the wearing of make-up and expensive clothing, which could possibly empha-

size class differences at the cost of national unity.[5] The celebration of social and family events, most noticeably weddings, was also a subject of suspension. Given the hardship experienced by many people the traditional joyful way of celebrating weddings was considered improper. All these practices could be interpreted as acts of popular initiative aiming at mass mobilization and a way of manifesting one's commitment to the national cause (Jean-Klein 2001).

Jean-Klein's observations agree with accounts of the first *intifada* presented by my interviewees. A forty-three-year-old woman from Al-Am'ari recalled the wedding of her brother, which took place during the uprising:

> I remember they were sitting like this, the [political] situation was not too much [good] (…) they didn't sing or anything. On the day of the wedding we made a dinner and we ate the dinner (…). But in the evening the people who came brought her [the bride] (…) a tape-recorder (…). But my mother didn't agree [to play it], she said that we are like the other [people]. I don't know who brought the tape-recorder, but she [the mother] said no, we don't want [it]; we are like the [other] people.

In this account, we can see that this is not the lack of resources or opportunity to make the wedding "as usual," but it is a conscious decision on the part of female head of the family to restrain and "be like the other people"—meaning to comply with the rule of suspension.

Even though there was a considerable effort on behalf of the leadership of the *intifada* to orchestrate this "policy of joyless austerity" transforming it into "a hegemonizing exercise" (Jean-Klein 2001: 91), such an appropriation of that popular initiative by political actors was often opposed by the ordinary Palestinians, who emphasized their agency and authenticity of their involvement in that form of resistance. My forty-five-year-old interviewee who got married during the first *intifada* remembered:

> Interviewee: no there were no weddings, the weddings were slight. I got married in the first *intifada*, we didn't have any wedding (…) [It was] in my house, just a bit, even the ululation[6] was forbidden. There were women who were ululating, but they forbade them. It was forbidden to ululate.
> Interviewer: but who forbade it?
> Interviewee: The Tanzimat[7]. Because, how can you ululate if your neighbor is imprisoned or your other neighbor is martyred. [During] the *intifada*, the people were together for good or for ill, not because of [the Tanzimat]. If you made a wedding, [you make it] in silence, in silence.

While explaining me why people restrained from traditional ways of celebrating weddings during the first *intifada*, the interviewee first pointed out to the political leadership who issued a formal ban against ululation. On the second thought he

[5] I am thankful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out other possible reasons behind the self-restriction on body adornment in times of crisis (e.g. fear of being accused of collaboration or being robbed). I agree that such concerns might have motivated individuals to abide by the ethos of austerity dominant during the first *intifada*. However, my aim here is to reconstruct the strategies of self-nationalization based on informants' narratives and they themselves did not voice such concerns while describing the practices of self-restriction.

[6] Ululation as "a traditional show of female exaltation" (Jean-Klein 2001: 97) is commonly performed at joyful occasions, most noticeably weddings.

[7] *Tanzim* (plural: *Tanzimat*)—officially established in 1995 as a military faction of Fatah devoted to countering Islamist opposition to the movement (Katzman 2002). According to al-Am'arians, the local *Tanzim*-like formation originated during the first *intifada* when it was responsible for organizing resistance, distribution of aid and internal policing.

admitted, however, that the true reason was solidarity among people, as one could not give himself into celebration when other member of the community faced a loss. This emphasis on active participation in resistance and sense of agency was common in narratives on the first uprising and it was often confronted with the experience of the second *intifada*, which was thought to have been beyond control and reach of the ordinary men.

Defending Normalcy Amidst the Crisis

While civil disobedience, massive protests and stone-throwing were the major forms of resistance adopted by the Palestinians during the first *intifada*, the second uprising—which began in 2000 and lasted for about five to six years—was largely military in character and did not actively engage Palestinian civil society (Gordon 2008). The second uprising saw the growing disenchantment of ordinary Palestinians with the national leadership, while most of the ordinary Palestinians experienced it through Palestinian and Arab media coverage, which was instrumental in providing understanding of the events to the local population (Tamari and Hammami 2001). The Israeli army's invasion of the territories controlled by the PNA, known as "Operation Defensive Shield," caused major damage to what was thought to be paramilitaries' hiding places, alongside with private and governmental properties, general infrastructure as well as educational, cultural and media institutions. It is estimated that the second *intifada* claimed over 4600 lives on the Palestinian and over 1000 on the Israeli side.[8] Moreover, the system of checkpoints and roadblocks rendered the movement between Palestinian cities a lengthy and risky endeavour, as one could not anticipate the obstacles to be met on the way.

The new political context and altered character of the uprising itself were crucial for shaping the strategies followed by ordinary Palestinians in their everyday lives. While in the first *intifada* people suspended their ordinary lives in an act of self-nationalization, during the second uprising "the seemingly mundane activities involved in the search for the ordinary were ethnographically glossed by many Palestinians as *muqawama* (resistance) or as a form of *sumud* (steadfastness) in the face of the Israeli occupation" (Kelly 2008: 368). In general, the ethos of *sumud*, that is staying put in the land despite all measures employed by the occupation authorities, is central to the contemporary Palestinian identity and as such expressed by politicians, artists and ordinary men alike (Hamdi 2011). In the words of my forty-year-old male interviewee:

> We are sitting on our land, if they killed us, imprisoned us, slaughtered us, beat us, we remain in the land. There is nothing left only if they bomb us with an atomic bomb like in Hiroshima. But if they threw it on us, they will die with us and we will rest, both of us. (…) There is nothing [in regard to military equipment] they haven't used on us and we are ready for anything they want to try on us (…). They [the Israelis] think we live in humiliation, but I think we live in pride and dignity. When I come to the checkpoint I come with pride and dignity. The soldier who stands there he does not humiliate me. On the contrary, I humiliate the solider that stands there armed (…). We are on the land, sitting in our houses, steadfasting, they will not deprive us of our rights, so what can they do to us?

[8] For more facts on the second *intifada* see the website of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories, http://www.btselem.org/.

The interviewee finishes his explanation of the ethos of *sumud* with a rhetorical question, emphasizing the helplessness of the Israeli state in the face of Palestinians' determination to stay in their homeland. Despite the various military technologies employed by the occupation Palestinians continue to steadfast, what gives them pride and dignity as legitimate inhabitants of the land.

Particularly during the hard times of the second *intifada* performing family duties and not letting the Israelis to obstruct the daily routine was seen as a mode of resistance and one's obligation. People tried to "defend" their ordinary lives against the horrors of conflict; due to restrictions on movement and the general feeling of endangerment, many ordinary Palestinians confined their activities to home spaces and struggled to retain agency over the very basic dimensions of their everyday lives. I remember talking to a young middle-class village man who described the route to Jerusalem he used to take during the second *intifada*. Instead of using the closest Qalandia checkpoint—where Palestinians who intended to cross it were instructed by Israeli soldiers to publicly lift their shirt showing that they do not wear the blast on their chests—he used to walk two kilometres further to a checkpoint where such security measure was not practiced, because he simply felt ashamed to undress in public. In order not to compromise his usual standards of modesty, he was ready to take an extra effort and a longer route (Field notes 12/06/2010). Similarly, the twenty-eight-year-old female interviewee recalled the night of Israeli invasion during the second *intifada*:

> The sound of the shooting and tanks, for the whole night, it was not normal. This day we slept in our veils, in our veils because we were afraid that they [the Israeli military] can enter our house. All of us. I remember there wasn't a girl who did not sleep in her veil.

The theme of living in constant fear from an unexpected intrusion on the privacy of one's home was a frequently recurring theme in female narratives on the *intifadas*. In anticipation of a possible attack, people restrained from enjoying the liberty of their domestic spheres, i.e. by staying fully dressed. These examples show how the situation of crisis may disturb people's most intimate daily routines, as well as how they can choose to quest for ways to stick to their "usual" norms and values, despite the overwhelming experience of crisis.

This quest for normalcy in times of crisis may also include the work of imagination and conscious production of the ordinary. As noted by Lori Allen in her work on the second *intifada*, in "conditions where the routine and assumptions of daily life are physically disrupted, purposefully and as part of the political program of Israeli colonialism, everyday life in Palestine—in its everydayness—is itself partly the result of concerted, collective production" (2008: 456). Once, while having a grill at the rooftop of one of Al-Am'ari houses, I witnessed a conversation between my key informant and his Jordanian friend. As his friend praised the nightlife of the Jordanian capital and complained over that in Ramallah, Abu Muhammad objected by saying that nowadays it is much better than it used to be even few years ago, when it was dangerous to get out of the house after 10 p.m. Not convinced by this argument, the Jordanian said that not much have changed in that respect. It made my informant to admit that

while inside Ramallah there is some sense of freedom, the movement between cities is still subject to restrictions. While his friend was glad to have made a point, Abu Muhammad explained his previous statement by saying: "we need to imagine for ourselves that there is peace and stability to be able to live" (Field notes, 13/08/2011). For him producing normalcy was a matter of being able to live under the conditions of occupation and ongoing conflict.

Normalizing the Experience of Crisis

Whereas the previously discussed strategy (i.e. defending normalcy amidst the crisis) was about finding a way to maintain the normal patterns of behavior despite the crisis or—if it was not always possible—to seize any opportunity to re-establish them in the moments of reprieve, the third strategy is by normalizing the new codes of conduct that were induced by the experience of crisis. Adapting to new realities of life in crisis requires re-orientation of, or at times even building new, frameworks of interpretation and reference that guide individuals' daily efforts to navigate through the both new and difficult circumstances. In the situation of constant physical threat, it often means "the establishment of new 'corporeal' patterns involving new ways of seeing, hearing and reacting" (Borell 2008: 68). This effort to normalize crisis takes variety of forms and can be understood as a tactic of resistance or a matter of resilience by reflecting a will of the individual to refuse the crisis to paralyse their social activities. In this context, "normal" is without its normative overtone of how things ought to be, but is rather something one grows used to. As observed by Lori Allen in the context of the second *intifada*, when the majority of ordinary Palestinians were alienated from the mainstream organized forms of resistance, the "kind of agency entailed in practices whereby people manage, get by, and adapt was simply 'getting used to it'" (2008: 457).

Some assume that the people who live in a situation of protracted conflict become emotionally immune to what is happening to them. However, the assumption that incorporates a concept of normalization as a reaction determined by particular circumstances does not leave space for individual agency and personal predispositions. Quite the contrary, I would argue that normalization can be perceived not only as a strategy to routinize the experience of conflict in order to be able to function regardless, but it can also be a tactic of resisting its devastating influence by restoring the individual sense of agency. At the beginning of my fieldwork in particular I was surprised how in some conversational contexts people tended to employ narrative tactics that aimed at downplaying the horrors of conflict, qualifying them as *'adi* (normal), while some other time the account was presented in an emotional and detailed manner. Then I realized that the practice of framing traumatic or disturbing events as "normal" could be understood as a performative strategy of restoring agency amidst critical situations. By presenting them as "normal" actors express their familiarity with the situation, their knowledge of how it can be handled, as well as a degree of control over it (see also Gren 2009: 13).

Recounting the events related to Israeli invasion of the camp in the midst of the second *intifada*, my female interviewees recalled:

Hanaa: the first hit, after they took the boys, was our house. (…) Before they entered [it] they ordered us to go out. (…) We were not afraid [because] the boys were not there. They took us out and told us to stand outside (…). Then they entered other house[s] (…) and threw the girls out. The girls gathered all together (…) we were standing together. We didn't hear the Jewish were here because we were laughing all the time (…). Before our neighbours came [to join us], they were afraid and they were crying. Then [when we were together] we, the girls, started to laugh, talk and gossip.
Nadeen: There was a woman, from the house of our neighbour, her voice was very loud. He [the soldier] told her: what is [with] this voice [of yours]! (…) She told him: why are your trousers torn apart? Is it not a shame that your trousers are torn apart? He told us: stop it! Be quiet! We [would] never [stop], we made this Jew crazy.
Hanaa: yes we made him crazy. One [soldier] was sitting at the door of the house and he was holding a gun like this, towards us. (…) They were sitting inside and resting, after they searched [the house]. And this one was sitting like that, happy, and we didn't pay attention [to what he was doing].
Nadeen: We were not interested [in what they were doing], we were laughing at them.
Hanaa: we were laughing. My mum was saying: stop it! Be quiet! (…) We didn't stop, oh God. We were not afraid; the boys were not [present].

Those events took place on a day when Israeli military invaded the camp, temporarily took all male inhabitants into custody for interrogation (and imprisonment in some cases), imposed curfew and searched all the houses through—a day recalled by most of Al-Am'ari inhabitants as one of the toughest during the second *intifada*. In this account, however, we find few signs of fear, insecurity or emergency. In this narrative it is the women who, in the face of intimidation, manage to act "normally," laughing, gossiping and ridiculing the soldiers. It is presented as an act of resistance to the abnormality of the situation, as a tactic giving the women psychological advantage over the soldiers who cannot gain control over them.

Another manifestation of getting used to life in constant crisis is boredom. In research on the second *intifada*, Tobias Kelly (2008) observed that feeling bored with the situation was a constant refrain in the narratives on the harshest years of the uprising, when one's personal freedom (in respect to educational, professional or leisure activities) was severely limited. The feeling of boredom was to a great extent caused by fear of Israeli military and kept the majority of ordinary Palestinians at home. Accordingly, when I asked my female interviewees:

Interviewer: and the second *intifada*, how was it?
Sameh: it was boring (*mumilla*)
Fatma: this *intifada* was harder than the first *intifada*
Interviewer: It was worse?
Fatma: yes, worse. There was more harm, we were more under pressure.

Getting used to danger does not by definition mean that people do not feel afraid, anxious or depressed. Though as rightly pointed out by Borell (2008) the earlier experience of violence may equip individuals with particular strategies of risk evaluation and management ready to be utilized when the risk reoccurs, it should not be equalized with getting used to violence *per se*. Based on Fatma's account we see that familiarizing some forms of violence (i.e. those employed during the first *intifada*), does not mean general immunity against unexpected and more brutal violent acts. Individual responses to particular dangerous situations differ and some claim to be more immune than others. The predictability of familiarized violence helps to reduce

the level of fear and allows individuals to treat some events as "normal" and others as threatening (Lysaght 2005).

Fostering Normative Sense of Ordinariness

As observed by Tobias Kelly, we can distinguish between two senses of ordinary: one "is an empirical sense of the everyday and mundane;" the other being "a normative sense of what should be" (2008: 365). Whereas the three already discussed ways of producing the ordinary in times of crises related to the former, the fourth refers to the latter, that is the normative sense of ordinariness. In the situation of crisis, the belief in what ordinary life should be like may be treated as a longed-for ideal and used as a positive point of reference by which the present is being evaluated.

In the situation of ongoing crisis and uncertainty in particular, namely the one experienced by Al-Am'ari inhabitants, concepts of "normalcy" and "ordinariness" can become very powerful symbols. The "normal life," for instance, may be portrayed as a desirable state of affairs, to be achieved only if particular conditions are met. The ideal of such a longed-for normalcy can be situated across time and space. People may see it as a dreamed-of outcome of their struggle (for example the establishment of sovereign Palestinian state); they may also consider it as an attribute of another space or country, the one they would like to be part of (Kelly 2008), while others, particularly refugees, may date it back to the period prior to exile.

In case of refugees, these are often the imagined geographies of origin that are constructed as an ideal of "ordinary life" to be contrasted with the insecure life in exile. A thirty-five-year-old man from Al-Lud when I asked him what he knows about his place of origin, replied: "they were comfortable, they were living in love and peace, the Muslims and the Christians, they had calm and stability." In the narratives of pre-1948 homeland Al-Am'arians often focused on the aspects they considered lacking in their contemporary lives. While there is a strong sense of loss in the memories of "the best of all possible worlds" that can never be retrieved, these memories are also used as a base for narratives about future. In the situation of ever-changing circumstances where gains are only temporary, the imagining of pre-exilic places of origin may be used as narrative place of refuge from uncertainties of life under occupation, but it may also serve as a tool of political mobilization for the cause of return to the pre-1948 places of origin. Then, return represents the very hopes for normalcy—a very powerful incentive for both political and military action.

Conclusion

Living in violent and insecure contexts such as military conflict and occupation, people are faced with incidents that obstruct their daily practices and, at times, threaten their lives. Here, discussing individual's agency may seem absurd, while describing strategies by which people manage the experience of conflict may be mistakenly equated with their acceptance of the *status quo*, which can in turn be used to question au-

thenticity of their suffering. Treating people only as subjects of violence devoid of any control over their daily lives is potentially less controversial, but may limit our understanding of them by silencing their voices. Though in a situation of ultimate physical threat to one's life the space for agency may be disputable, for many people—such as the residents of Al-Am'ari—the experience of danger and uncertainty extends beyond a particular point in time and goes through periods of intensification and reprieve. Here, the crisis is not a matter of exception, but needs to be incorporated into people's daily lives. The work of crisis' incorporation is a conscious effort on behalf of individuals and groups that cannot be reduced to an automatic response to difficult circumstances. Indeed, the experience of crisis knocks people out of the routinized and taken-for-granted patterns of behavior, but it also forces them to adopt a more reflexive attitude towards daily life. This, often forced, reflexivity towards daily practices forms the grounds for meaningful and transformative action. As Albert Camus in his famous essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* put it: "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (2000 [1942]: 109). Following Camus, although awareness gives the crisis its traumatic quality, it is also a prime condition for agency. Living in violent contexts requires navigating through dangers encountered in everyday life, but the meanings assigned to the navigation tactics may differ not only among individuals but also across time and social conditions. People who are exposed to prolonged crisis create their own frameworks of reference through which the particular experience can be interpreted and dealt with. In this article I discussed four possible strategies of framing the ordinary in times of crisis, each charged with different meaning and designed to meet a different purpose. It is not my intention to romanticize everyday life's capacity for agency, but to treat it as a subject of anthropological inquiry, particularly in the context it seems to be endangered by—the context of crisis.

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Biographical Notes: Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyżanowska is PhD candidate at the Graduate School for Social Research, Polish Academy of Sciences. In her research, she conducts extensive ethnographic fieldwork and combines anthropology with sociology to examine daily life in societies marked by long-term conflict. She received her MA from the University of Warsaw; her thesis examined the role of sporting clubs in everyday life in Belfast during the Troubles. In her PhD dissertation Dorota analyzes the experience of extended exile and living in a Palestinian refugee city-camp in the West Bank, where she spent eight months of fieldwork. Aside from pursuing PhD in sociology, she also hold a BA diploma in Arabic linguistics and culture at the University of Warsaw. Dorota has been a Visiting Study Fellow for the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University and has received a grant for her PhD work from the Polish National Science Centre.

E-mail: dorota.woroniecka@gmail.com