

Chapter 6: *Al-ṣumūd*: Sacralization and Ritualization of Palestinianness

a. Palestinian Steadfastness as a Mission

In Al-Jalil, the sacralization of Palestinianness was a key component of the ritualization of the quotidian. This chapter contributes to the broad discussion of the possibility of treating religion as a general anthropological category (rather than as brought about by anthropologists' interlocutors), as epitomized by the Clifford Geertz-Talal Asad debate.¹ As we have seen, in both Al-Jalil and Dbayeh religion and nationhood were interwoven and embedded in each other, reinforcing Asad's critique of Geertz' hermeneutical approach. As a result, at least in this case, labeling certain phenomena as simply "religious," isolating and studying them in relation to other such phenomena, is not as constructive as analyzing them in relation to the broader social context. Being a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon, whatever the context, was not only evocative of meaning, but also a moral and existential imperative from which much is derived.

In Al-Jalil and Dbayeh, the Palestinian nation became infused with moral perceptions and values, which in turn often came to be infused with religion. Generally speaking, in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, *the Palestinian cause* tended to be sacralized and collectively upheld as a mission, thereby contributing to ritualization dynamics in most camps. One of the most common vehicles for this sacralization was the idea of *ṣumūd* (steadfastness; resistance), which often infused the cause with religious undertones (Schiocchet 2013). Apart from the notion of *al-ṣumūd*, *istashhād* (martyrdom) also tended to sacralize the Palestinian cause and consequently Palestinianness itself. This sacralization, in turn, was firmly tied to the Palestinian

1 See especially (Geertz 1973) and (Asad 1993)

time framing processes first presented in *Chapter 2*. While elusive in practice, *ṣumūd* tended to play an important role in the group's processes of belonging. With *ṣumūd*, an Islamic divine attribute,² and *ṣāmīd* (plural, *ṣāmīdyn*), a derived term that denotes the subject who possesses the qualities of *ṣumūd*, many Palestinian refugees indexed the framing of time as Islamic praxis. Through the concept of *ṣumūd*, this chapter discusses the refugee camp environment and its influence on social belonging processes of sacralization and ritualization of the quotidian.

Here, thus, comes yet another point in which my analysis is seemingly similar yet diverges considerably from that of Khalili's *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine* (2007). Khalili understands *ṣumūd* as a "narrative form" distinct from "heroism" and "suffering" (ibid: 214), whereas I do not think that considering them distinct, even just as ideal types, helps to understand the Palestinian experience of *ṣumūd*. To her, the narrative of suffering "makes suffering itself a virtue, and denies the possibility of agency, mobilization or collective action" (ibid: 224). As I understood from my own fieldwork, however, *ṣumūd* was generally much entangled with suffering and heroism, and even when not relating to *ṣumūd*, suffering could also be a form of agency, albeit one not characterized by resistance, similar to what Saba Mahmood describes in *Politics of Piety* (2005). In practice, however, *ṣumūd* was not just a form of nationalist narrative, but it became an idea prompting dispositions, affects, and sensibilities, more or less embodied in the subjects depending on context and case.

b. Dbayeh and Al-Jalil in Perspective

Refugees' experiences of religion offer fertile ground for academic investigation, arguably as much as relations between the refugees and extraneous and communitarian religious institutions. However, the former remains relatively unexplored by scholars. In Al-Jalil and Dbayeh, proselytizing religious missions are very rare. Religious institutions mobilize camp residents towards pious behavior instead, encompassing moral conceptions of the self and, more so in Al-Jalil, political activism. This does not mean that religion is lived in the same way by Palestinian refugees everywhere. My own fieldwork experiences among Palestinians in Denmark, Brazil, and Austria, when compared

2 In Islam, *Ṣamad*, meaning lord, eternal, or everlasting, is an epithet of God. Both *Ṣamad* and *ṣumūd* derive meaning from the same root "ص" - "م" - "د".

to Lebanon, suggest that the refugee camp plays an important role as a symbolic center of refugee life and in generating and maintaining steadfastness (Schiocchet 2014b). Moreover, engagement with what Oliver Roy (2004) calls “Islamic neo-fundamentalist movements”³ (such as transnational Salafi networks) was more widespread among Palestinians in Denmark and Lebanon (albeit not in Dbayeh and very little in Al-Jalil). However, such religious groups did not tend to appeal to a largely secularized and demotivated group of Palestinian refugees from Iraq resettled in Brazil, or the older generations of Palestinians living in Austria.

In the Danish case, where Palestinian migrants lived in Gellerupparken – a ghettoized neighborhood of Aarhus – alongside Kurds, Somalis, Iraqis, and other Muslims, Islam was more a part of the language of social belonging than in the other contexts more deeply marked by Palestinian national themes. A large shack in front of the residential compound of Gellerupparken, called Bazar Vest, supplied the community with produce, work, and community life, while two mosques served as spiritual centers. In Aarhus, not only did Palestinians have to share a ghetto-like area with other Muslim minorities, but many among the local Danish population also had a tendency to stigmatize all Muslims, underplaying discrete ethnic or national categories of belonging. By underplaying such differences and concomitantly homogenizing Muslims as a coherent group, the Danish context imposed Islam as a primary category of identification for Palestinians and other Muslim minorities in Denmark. Thus, the local centers of these immigrants’ sociality became more associated with religious and economic activities than with folklore or nationhood, thereby favoring second generation immigrants’ identification with transnational Islamic movements at the expense of Palestinian national movements.

This process did not occur to the same extent in Austria,⁴ where Palestinians mainly arrived in the 1970s, as students rather than refugees, establishing themselves as liberal professionals such as doctors, dentists, and lawyers, and engaging with secular leftist civil society in political, cultural, and social

3 To Roy (2004), Islamic neo-fundamentalism is characterized by the intent to purify Islam from politics (such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh), as opposed to political Islam – or the so-called Islamists – which is characterized by the engagement with politics (such as Hezbollah or Hamas).

4 However, the great influx of Afghan and Syrian refugees (among the latter, many Palestinians) in 2015 and to a lesser extent still in 2016, quickly started to change the Austrian context, which became more similar to that of Denmark.

terms. Palestinianness in Austria was thus reinforced by Austrian activists themselves, who had their own understanding of the Palestinian cause and were not interested in religion. This relationship started already during the times of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, who was – willingly or not - directly responsible for the PLO's legitimization as the sole representative of the Palestinians outside of the Arab world,⁵ and opened the path for the shaping of the Palestinian cause as a universal, secular, and mainly socialist agenda among the European Left.

In Brazil, neo-fundamentalism and religious orthodoxy also did not appeal much to the minds of a group of initially 114 Palestinian refugees fleeing Iraq, nor to the older generations of Palestinians who had arrived in Brazil already during the first half of the twentieth century (Schiochet 2019). Almost all the Palestinian refugees from the group resettled there in 2007 came from the Rwayshed refugee camp in Jordan, where they were initially placed following their persecution in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Almost all these refugees were Muslims, with the exception of one family. Moreover, almost all of them, including the Christian family, tended to praise Hussein as a great secular and popular leader, many having been directly employed in the Iraqi governmental machine run by the Ba'ath party. This connection came about especially because Saddam Hussein himself branded the Palestinian cause his own, rallying against Syria during the Lebanese civil war, and treating the few Palestinians in Iraq with positive distinction. This, in turn, reinforced Palestinianness over religion, especially given that many of the forces opposing Hussein mobilized an Islamic rhetoric. Moreover, prior to their settling in Brazil, there were already strong disagreements within the group that had lived in Rwayshed. In Brazil, interaction was much diminished due to a lack of common space, and consequently the group cannot be said to have formed a community *per se*. Some were initially drawn to connect to Palestinians who had been living in Brazil for several generations, an encounter first facilitated by the Palestinian Arab Federation of Brazil (FEPAL). These early generations of Palestinians in Brazil arrived mostly between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, alongside Lebanese and Syrian entrepreneurs.⁶ Conflicts erupted between the old and new groups to the extent that, within a couple years, only a handful of the

5 Inside the Arab world, the main figure responsible for legitimizing the PLO was Gamal Abdel Nasser.

6 Many in this group were Christians.

Rwayshed refugees remained around the Palestinian cultural and political centers in Brazil, while most of the others were cut off even from humanitarian aid networks. In this way, belonging was not collectively articulated around a refugee camp or any symbolic Palestinian space, but Palestinianness remained a key element to most individuals composing the group.

In Al-Jalil, “Islamist” movements mixing Islamic vernacular expressions with nationalist rhetoric (such as Hamas or the Islamic Jihad) tended to be preferred over “purified” religious identities purged of national content (Roy 2004). I suggest that the camps’ historical and geographical context, located in Shi’a dominated territory, under the grip of Lebanese Shi’a movements and the Syrian government but also culturally influenced by their surroundings, was decisive in shaping this tendency in Al-Jalil, as presented in *Chapter 2*. Moreover, as we have seen in *Chapter 4*, Christianity in Dbayeh did tend to frame the language of social belonging as well, albeit not alone, and more by way of social belonging processes than religious piety. Thus, in Denmark, Austria, and Brazil, collective and individual expressions of *ṣumūd* took different shades from those expressed in Al-Jalil, Dbayeh, and the other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. However, virtually all the Palestinian refugees with whom I interacted, whether in Al-Jalil, Dbayeh, Denmark, Austria, Brazil, or elsewhere, in one way or another associated their present suffering with the time framing tendency described in *Chapter 2*. Furthermore, they often framed the act of enduring the present through the concept of *al-ṣumūd*.

Refugees are stripped of citizenship rights. Citizenship is supplanted by dispossession and displacement, making nationhood (or its absence) an imperative shaping the refugee experience.⁷ This, in turn, tends to profoundly shape the experience of life in general. Religion, ethnicity, and much else besides, even when not the initial cause of flight, tend to be infused with nationhood and humanness, whether through nationalism and humanitarianism or not. The refugee experience, however, is diverse. Comparing two groups of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, one living in a refugee camp in an urban area and the other living outside the refugee camp, Malkki came to the conclusion that the refugee experience varies even among the Hutu themselves, and that the juridical category *refugee* has serious limitations due to its universalist approach and practical design. As in Malkki’s *Purity and Exile* (1995), this chapter shows the plurality of the refugee experience, but also suggests that Palestinianness, albeit plural, should be treated as a single arena of negotiation,

7 Or, as Malkki puts it, “the national order of things” (1995).

where widespread tendencies shape social belonging and the refugee experience in various ways. Rather than being approached as unique and random accounts, the case studies presented here are better understood as variations underscored by dominant tendencies of a shared but diverse subjunctive. The peculiar Palestinian tendency to frame time as presented in *Chapter 2* is generally compelling, while different subjects (both individuals and groups) engage it differently according to context. In other words, a critical event (*Nakba*) and a utopian turnout of events (*al-awda*), disposed in temporal sequence, unite the historical past with a moral mythical future, and locate a highly varied present Palestinian refugee experience within these terms. This present tends to be experienced minimally through a condition of passive resistance and moral commitment to whatever is perceived as “the cause” (*al-qadiyya*), which is often partially expressed through the idiom of *ṣumūd*, as I will develop in the remainder of this chapter. This formula, however, is not to be taken normatively, but only as a widespread tendency in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, actualized through unique iterations there and beyond, yet generally evocative of the elements described above. Furthermore, the fact that some Palestinians chose to distance themselves from Palestinianness, as I found in some cases both in Denmark and in Dbayeh, does not necessarily mean that Palestinianness is perceived differently by these subjects, only that their self-ascription is focused elsewhere.

c. Existence as Resistance

In practice as much as in discourse, the broadest understanding of Palestinianness among refugees is embodied by a shared experience of loss and the condition of exile to which they are subjected. Faced with more than six decades of displacement, Palestinian refugees are haunted by fears of the effacement of their properties, rights, lifestyles, and, more importantly, their own identity. Such fears mark their understanding of themselves, which in turn frame their engagement with the world. The fear of self-effacement also leads to an idealization of one’s own existence as resistance. Within Palestinian refugee camps in general, being a refugee is one more element reinforcing the equation “existence = resistance” as an attribute of Palestinianness – an equation present in peoples’ discourses, rally signs, songs, etc.

The “existence=resistance” equation defines the type of passive resistance that characterizes the idea of *ṣumūd* as opposed to, for example, *muqāwama*, which is a more active (and often armed) form of resistance. Palestinian

refugees tend to feel and say they are *maḥrumīn* (dispossessed). Their shared experience of dispossession makes them *maḥrumīn* and at the same time turns their mundane, quotidian routines into acts of resistance. Through language, folklore, and practices such as those described earlier, they insist on their dream of living the plenitude of their Palestinianness – that is, being Palestinian without the attached stigma of the term and the practical impediments that it engenders. The most pressing of these impediments is the refugee condition. Thus, there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) understanding that living as a refugee automatically entails being *ṣāmūd* but does not necessarily entail participation in the *muqāwama*.

All *ṣāmūdīn* Palestinians are also considered martyrs of *al-Qadiyya al-Falastiniyya* upon death – not only according to the discourse of the political parties and social movements, but also in popular understanding. However, participation in a martyrdom operation, whether independent or organized by an Islamist or secular political group, generally awards the participant more social capital and thereby adds to his/her Palestinianness. Today, this differentiation has even caused a modification in colloquial Arabic usage, introducing the new term *istishhādy*⁸ to refer to a martyr that deliberately seeks martyrdom, as opposed to *shahīd*, a martyr in a more general sense.

d. *Al-ṣumūd* in Context

Despite the contemporary tendency to inscribe *ṣumūd* into the quotidian through often-embodied Islamic praxis,⁹ the concept also has a more “secular” history, as evidenced by the PLO’s usage of the term. This emphasizes that to live as a refugee and to insist on being solely Palestinian, for example, through celebrating Palestinian food or dance, is already an important form of resistance against the perceived imperialist objectives of Israel. However, even among the Palestinian Christians or Marxists I met, for whom Islam did not define the terms of their vernacular politics, *ṣumūd* conceptions were still influenced by the sacredness that the term holds in Islam. This is partially because even the PLO’s framing of the Palestinian cause, which popularized the general usage of the term *ṣumūd* in Palestinian cultural and

8 For more on this, read Nasser Abufarha’s *The Making of the Human Bomb* (2009).

9 I understand Islam more broadly as a culture, so in this case even the understanding of most Christian Palestinians is somehow tied to an Islamic definition and popularization of the concept.

political dialects, consciously or unconsciously borrowed many of its acmes from Islamic culture.

Ṣumūd is not always a driving force in Palestinian refugee's lives. In Dbayeh, for instance, I found that although the idea of *ṣumūd* was still present, especially in the older generation's discourses, it was not particularly important for younger people and did not define either generation's social practices. Among the most important reasons for *ṣumūd*'s effacement from the discourse and practice of young people in Dbayeh was that most of these youths did not define themselves unambiguously as "Palestinian" due to the camp's specific historical context.

The fact that older people, who still tended to define themselves unambiguously as Palestinian, continued to assign great importance to the idea of *ṣumūd*, attests to the generalized indexation of Palestinianness through the subjects' commitment to being *ṣāmid*. Furthermore, in Dbayeh, the older generation's social practices did not reflect a *ṣāmid* posture as much as those of older generations in other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. This relates to the difference between their identity discourses and their social practices and it can be explained by their lack of hope of returning to their now changed homeland, and the consequent tentative accommodation of their lives to a foreign environment, all the while maintaining a stereotyped discourse of Palestinianness. Thus, for this specific group in Dbayeh being Palestinian had more to do with how they lived their lives in the past than with how they lived in the present of my ethnographic fieldwork. In contrast, younger generations in the same camp tended to define their own identity through their present engagement with their Lebanese surroundings and the largely Lebanese composition of the camp itself.

The Palestinian time framing intimately interwoven with the concept of *al-ṣumūd* was historically generated and maintained within the context of the secular activism of a Muslim majority, but by the time of my fieldwork its vernacular language was becoming ever more Islamized. It was precisely in those cases where *ṣumūd* was an essential component of social practice and discourse that I found a broader tendency toward the hyper-expression of identity, leading to the ritualization of the quotidian. The ritualization process discussed throughout the book so far, and thus the ritual analysis I developed in the previous chapter, are based on the Palestinian social belonging process I witnessed while in the field, and which was firmly tied to variations of the abovementioned Palestinian framing of time.

e. Resistance, Martyrdom and Ritualization

Al-Jalil had two sheiks, one affiliated with Fatah and the other with Hamas. They disputed authority and favor with political leaders, local Palestinians working for UNRWA, and local Palestinian associations at times partially funded by international NGOs. The camp's mosque played a central role in articulating public life in Al-Jalil. This was also a political role, as it tended to publicly meddle in politics on what could be considered common ground among the local political factions. The sheiks there tended to preach attachment to the Palestinian Cause, fomenting *ṣumūd*, martyrdom, and other forms of "resistance," and to mediate local disputes. They did this while promoting Islamic values and rooting their messages in an ideal of Palestinianness. The mosque's capillarity in daily life was very wide, as it organized public and private collective rituals such as funerals, weddings, daily prayers, as well as religious and even national ceremonies. As with authority and favor, however, the mosque shared many of these quotidian tasks with political leaders and social activists. UNRWA's influence was mainly felt publicly through the large school it ran in Al-Jalil, although many of its teachers were at odds with several UN positions regarding the Palestinian situation. In this way, both humanitarian and religious agents had to at once dispute and share influence with political leaders.

While the mosque played the call to prayer and sermons, political offices frequently played military marches as party hymns, whereas local foundations typically preferred Palestinian *dabke* or nationalist singers and poets such as Marcel Khalife¹⁰ or Mahmud Darwish. In some cases, there could be a confluence of the two types of music, as when, for example, the headquarters of Fatah al-Intifada lent a large empty room in its office for local youth *dabke* rehearsals. As developed in *Chapter 3*, along with the sound density of the music, and the visual density of the posters and graffiti, the streets of the camp contained a multitude of people carrying their own personal charms. Necklaces, t-shirts, rings, wristbands, and other paraphernalia accompanied discourses with political, moral, and religious undertones, reproducing and disseminating Palestinianness throughout the public space of the camp in everyday life. What I witnessed in Al-Jalil was a hyper-expression of Palestinianness, which I understood to be highly associated with the imperative of national belonging

10 Marcel Khalife is a Lebanese singer and oud player, known for praising Palestine in some of his songs.

through the group's refugee condition, reinforced by the instigating environment of the camp. Even personal celebrations such as birthdays, marriages and funerals were often flooded with nationalist expressions. At a marriage, for example, it was common to hear speeches describing how committed a Palestinian was the groom. At a funeral, a Palestinian flag, that of a political party, or both would cover the deceased's coffin as a sign of moral rectitude.

In the celebration of an *'amaliyya istishhādiyya* (martyrdom operation), the *istishhādy* was different from the *shahīd*. Although any death could inspire national feelings, the primary purpose of celebrating an *istishhādy* was to instill a shared sense of Palestinianness that tended to be experienced as sacred, and to create a specific political effect, i.e., if not another *istishhādy*, then at least *ṣumūd* (steadfastness) among the community. It is precisely in this entailment of generating and maintaining *ṣumūd* ritually – something akin to Benedict Anderson's ideas on map, museum and census (1983) – that I see the basic general structural similarity between calendric and extraordinary collective celebrations in Palestinian contexts, including the Al-Jalil refugee camp and many others. As a result of the values instilled by these events and the consequent establishment of an ideal Palestinian posture, it was common to attribute moral value to a person's life depending on how "active" (*nashaṭ*) they were in the Palestinian cause. The measure of one's commitment was in terms of degrees of a *ṣamīd* posture – the *istishhādy* was generally considered to have the highest level of commitment, while the collaborationist/traitor invariably had the lowest.

As previously noted, the pace of daily life in Al-Jalil, as in most other Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon¹¹ and the Occupied Territories, contained the same ritual properties that were found in the circuits of celebrations described above. Like in Al-Jalil, the ritual tempo of other camps also tended to instill Palestinianness and *ṣumūd* in the quotidian, mundane life. Perhaps the most pervasive of this tempo's ritual properties was the instilment and dissemination of *ṣumūd* among the participants, and its frequent attribution as a measure of Palestinianness. In fact, Al-Jalil's high level of ritualization in daily life can be greatly attributed to the value of *ṣumūd*, which drove individuals and groups to a hyper-expression of their personal and collective selves.

11 Urban, open, mixed, and often larger camps such as Shatila tended to be less cohesive and thus less ritualized than other camps with a stronger sense of community and tighter communal life.

f. Sacralization and Ritualization of the Quotidian

Since the end of the 1980s, social movements and political parties explicitly characterized as “Islamic” have been gaining momentum in the Palestinian political and social landscape, as well as in other Middle Eastern countries. Islam has been increasingly incorporated into the nationalist, political, ethnic, and moral language in two different ways: first, as a rejection of discourses and practices seen as non-Islamic and their substitution with those seen as Islamic; and second, as the Islamization of discourses and practices that once were perceived as secular. Following this trend, the concept of *ṣumūd*, developed as a secular praxis although with inspiration from Islamic culture, has become increasingly inscribed into an Islamic praxis by Muslims, in the same way that political activism and Palestinian resistance have been increasingly conflated with Islamic resistance. While still mobilizing the discourse of *ṣumūd*, if not by mentioning the word, by supporting the existence=resistance formula, many Dbayeh Palestinian Christians expressed to me that this was one of the main reasons for their discontent with the Palestinian political scenario today, and why some no longer dream of returning to Palestine. Thus, niches exist whereby *ṣumūd* is not re-Islamized and the concept – as well as the “resistance” itself – continues to be expressed primarily in secular discourses, despite its religious undertones. In this way, *ṣumūd* continued to instill a moral sense of obligation to the Palestinian cause in the Christian camp Dbayeh, even among individual cases in which it was more a feature of rhetoric than a moral imperative.

As Olivier Roy explains structural radicalization in France, it is not the “radicalization of Islam,” but the “Islamization of radicalism” (Roy January 7, 2016). Even though the contexts are vastly different, Roy’s turn of phrase encapsulates the trend towards the moralization of Palestinian resistance in the refugee camps in Lebanon, and its deeper engagement with Islam as a vernacular for expression, more so than as a motivation for action in itself. While political resistance has become increasingly associated with Muslim resistance in many Palestinian contexts, what makes the concept of *ṣumūd* particularly susceptible to Islamization is that historically *ṣumūd* is one of the divine attributes, and *Ṣamad* His epithet. It is possible to find in the *Qur’an* and in the *Sunna* direct justification for the necessity of a *sāmīd* posture and for the maintenance of its sacred meaning. In Lebanon, the term was frequently associated with divine attributes, such as “will” and “power.” Given that most Palestinian political activists were Muslim and some at least somewhat pious,

and given that Islam was also a cultural reference beyond religious praxis, the majority of Palestinian political activists ascribed Islamic connotations to the meaning of *ṣumūd*.

Even more pervasively, the concept of *ṣumūd* allows all Palestinians to feel and be recognized as *foci* of resistance. Thus, a considerable number of Palestinians, especially among refugees and inhabitants of the Occupied Territories, derive meaning in their lives, at least in part, from the idea of *ṣumūd*. This, in turn, confers to *ṣumūd* a variable measure of sacredness dependent on the subject in question. This sacredness may be Islamic or only a referent to the sacralization of the polyphonic idea of the Palestinian cause. Either way, as the mission is sacred, the subject invested in it can be compared to a missionary, and the propensity to advocate “the cause” as a form of proselytization is strong, even in cases where the cause is not directly infused with religious values.

In the case of the Palestinians living in most of the refugee camps in Lebanon, the social, territorial, and identity confinement to which they were subjected evoked and reinforced Palestinianness even in the most mundane of quotidian tasks. As with all things relating to the sacred, *ṣumūd* involved certain obligations while it gave meaning and legitimization to the subjects’ actions and conceptions. Because the subjects invested with *ṣumūd* turned their own existence into something sacred, daily routines were by extension sacralized. Thus, enduring the hardships of the camp, the pain of dispossession, or the suffering of loss, separation, and prejudice became a moral imperative, a sacred mission in the name of Palestinianness. Sacralization was in turn an integral part of a process by which the quotidian became ritualized.

g. Time and *ṣumūd*

I observed a general commitment among Palestinians to search for the possibility of living the plenitude of an ideal Palestinianness that could be found in a future that included a return to a pre-*Nakba* past. This commitment was then translated into a steadfast posture (*ṣāmid*), which was directed toward the Palestinian cause (or *al-niḍāl al-falastiny* – the Palestinian struggle) sacralizing the present, and thus the quotidian. The utopian objective of the cause was understood more generally – and almost independently of political orientation, and thus of the means in which it was employed – as *al-‘awda* (the return). The return, however, was understood not as much as a practical aim (and many in fact did not want to “go back” to Palestine) as a collective ideal.

In this way, *al-ḥaqq al-'awda* (the right of return) was invested with exceptional meaning, inspiring social action and worldviews among groups of Palestinian refugees and individuals in Lebanon and elsewhere.

The present was thus understood twofold: first, as a temporary aberration to be abolished with “the return” (often through “the right of return”); and second, as an almost ineluctable but also unacceptable condition determining Palestinian fate – a “realistic” conception also motivating present agency, identity, and social organization. Only through *amal* (hope) and *imān* (faith), both directed toward the Palestinian cause and God, could the present predicament be escaped. Frequently, through the amalgamation of hope and faith, not believing in the Palestinian cause became synonymous with not believing in God, which gave the cause considerable impetus. The present was at the same time composed of repeated emulations of what Palestinians perceived as the Palestinian past, and a repudiated time to be suspended by advancing into a future idealized according to that ideal past. Performing Palestinianness unrestrictedly, that is, to be a Palestinian as one is supposed to have been in the times before the Nakba, or supposed to be to reach the subjunctive utopia, represented an important way of transcending the present. In this way, time folded within itself.

The refugee condition occupied much of the lives of Palestinians in Al-Jalil, Dbayeh, and camps elsewhere, as their refugee status locks the present within an idealized past and a future utopia mirrored in that past. This subjunctive and embodied framing of time constituted a force which compelled individuals to collectively articulate their existential condition through ritualized practices deployed in the quotidian. As we have seen, ritualization was more prevalent and overt in Al-Jalil than in Dbayeh. It tended to occur more frequently and to have more profound effects in camp environments that were closed off from their geographical and social surroundings, as Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon tend to be for a variety of reasons. Dbayeh camp residents lacked the social practice of *ṣumūd* and other ritualized activities common in Al-Jalil, mainly because Palestinianness was not as fervently celebrated as it was in Al-Jalil and other camps. Yet, even for these residents, calling upon the rhetoric of *ṣumūd* in the public sphere was still important, especially when faced with other Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, or international NGOs. The basic idea that living as a refugee was a form of resistance was still pervasive in Dbayeh, although this resistance was not as often associated with ideas as broad as the Palestinian cause or the Palestinian struggle. Instead, it was often framed as pertaining to the Dbayeh community,

or Palestinian Christians at large. This praxis observed in Dbayeh, however, did not necessarily break the general linkages between a Palestinian ideal of *ṣumūd* and the ritualization of the present. Although different contexts generated certain internal differences in how Palestinianness was conceived of and lived, these differences did not completely interrupt the subjunctive Palestinian framing of time, but instead disputed iterations contributing to its dynamic. In the particular case of Dbayeh, it was not so much Palestinianness that changed, but the residents' own ambiguous attachment to it.

In contrast, the ritual tempo in Al-Jalil was firmly anchored in variations of this Palestinian framing of time, which was largely propelled by the embodiment and performance of *ṣumūd*. Overall, even when ritualization was weak or non-existent, as among Dbayeh residents, I still found iterations that characterized the present as a "time within time." While the performance of *ṣumūd* was not as prevalent in Dbayeh,¹² it fueled the sacralization and ritualization of daily life in most of the refugee camps in Lebanon.

h. Point of No Return

Even among Palestinians who did not actually wish to "go back" to Palestine, in most cases one could still find this general way of conceiving of time, marked by the pre-*Nakba* past, the aberrant present, and the rightful return as defining features of Palestinianness. Among these individuals and groups, the professed unwillingness to return to Palestine tended to appear as though it had caused them to split from the group in terms of their life choices and trajectories, but not in terms of their Palestinianness or the commitment to the general right of choosing the Return or not. This held true in Dbayeh.

Every camp had its own specificities, as Al-Jalil was different from 'Ayn al-Helweh, Beddawy, al-Buss, Shatila, Mar Elias, and others. However, as demonstrated in *Chapter 4*, Dbayeh was different in an exceptional way. It was perceived as unique to the extent that most Palestinian refugees who actually knew of its existence would state that Dbayeh was not a Palestinian refugee camp. The most important differences included: the complete absence of Palestinian political parties, social movements, and charitable organizations; the absence of Palestinian clergy in the two local churches despite a long-standing demand for a Palestinian priest; the perceived lack of commitment to the Palestinian cause and thus the lack of *ṣumūd*; the isolation of the camp

12 Or in Shatila.

from others; the supposed higher standard of living of Dbayeh inhabitants; and, last but not least, the fact that virtually the entire camp was Christian. All these elements were mutually reinforcing and understood in conjunction with each other. Thus, other Palestinian groups frequently resorted to stripping Dbayeh's social space and its inhabitants of their Palestinianness.

Despite the apparent lack of *ṣumūd* in Dbayeh when compared to other camps in Lebanon, it is not religion alone (or even mainly) that explains its historical difference. Instead, the lack of *ṣumūd* corresponded more to the absence of Palestinian *tanẓimāt* (political organizations), since Dbayeh was located in an area that since the 1970s had been controlled by Lebanese Christian political parties overtly hostile to Palestinian refugee presence in Lebanon. As a consequence, the camp was completely devoid of Palestinian institutions and developed a very specific socialization process, especially concerning younger generations. The fact that local religious leaders were Lebanese reinforced the symbolic linkage between Christianity and Lebanon at the same time that it weakened local feelings and expressions of Palestinianness. This situation was further exacerbated because a Lebanese Christian organization, Caritas Migration Center, was *de facto* in charge of most social services in the camp, while the UNRWA office there remained closed most of the time during the period of my field research.

Without the support of Palestinian institutions, and given their tendency to accuse the PLO and other Palestinian political institutions of neglect, Dbayeh inhabitants were not socialized to emphasize their Palestinianness over other identity traits. Consequently, most of the camp's inhabitants expressed no identification with Palestinian politics and claimed that they did not wish to return to Palestine. Given this historical context and the general ethos it shaped, Dbayeh inhabitants were not committed to the idealization of a future return (*al-'awda*) as a possibility to live the plenitude of their Palestinianness. This, in turn, influenced the general Palestinian framing of time in ways that were different than in Al-Jalil. Personal idealization of the future tended to be open-ended and dependent on individual and group will. While many simply wished to become Lebanese through *tawfīn* (taking up a local citizenship) and refrained from a more collective Palestinian discourse, others still invoked the importance of the return as a collective solution while choosing another path for themselves and their families. As *tawfīn* was seen as precisely the opposite of *ṣumūd*, others perceived the camp as less Palestinian, or not Palestinian at all. The most common explanation for this perception was that the camp residents were Christian, and not

Muslim. Hence the strength of the association between Islam and a *ṣāmid* posture, and between the Palestinian Cause as protected by Muslims, while not an Islamic cause in itself.

Although Dbayeh residents' Palestinianness was (rarely) publicly performed, their most pressing demands were localized, having to do with the future of the group and not necessarily with all Palestinians. Therefore, there was *ṣumūd* involved in this resistance, but although the Palestinian Cause was frequently part of the discourse, it was not exactly Palestinianness that was at stake. While they may have attributed the cause of their dispossession to being Palestinian, instead of demanding a solution to the Palestine question, they tended to demand a solution for their own, immediate problems. From the perspective of many Dbayeh's residents, *tawfīn* was not necessarily the opposite of *ṣumūd* precisely because of this relegation of the Palestinian cause to much more circumscribed local civic goals. Yet, Dbayeh residents were an outright target for the assumption that its members' lack of *ṣumūd* was associated with their religion.

Thus, there was a difference between the *ṣumūd* called upon in Al-Jalil and Dbayeh. Underlying this was the fact that Palestinian social institutions did not socialize the refugees in Dbayeh, and this group did not develop the same hyper-expression of Palestinianness as Al-Jalil inhabitants. Given the lack of a vibrant Palestinian public sphere through and against which to live their quotidian lives, identity maintenance was not as much marked by Palestinianness, and these refugees seemed to have slowed down their resistance in the name of their Palestinianness, albeit without disputing much how other refugees imagined, felt, and performed it.

i. Religion and Popular Culture

Hyper-expression of Palestinianness, along with the sacralization and ritualization of the quotidian, are features characteristic of certain contexts marked by physical and social isolation and the stigmatization of a given group. These social traits only came about in the refugee camps of Lebanon through a socialization process very much influenced by Palestinian institutions, especially those of the PLO during the Lebanese Civil War, which made possible shared social characterization and social action. Among the most consequential elements in this socialization was a Palestinian time-framing tendency that tended to push Palestinians toward understanding their present condition as an aberration to be amended by a posture defined by *ṣumūd* and geared

toward what was understood as the Palestinian cause. But even when Palestinians were disenfranchised, and socialization lacked the Palestinian apparatus, a general notion of Palestinianness still tended to involve certain key elements, such as the notion of the disaster as characterized by the *Nakba*, the abomination of the present Palestinian condition, and the utopian *ʿawda* (return), at least as a collective possibility independent of personal choice. Furthermore, present life as a refugee tended to be lived, at least to some measure, as resistance against an existence of suffering associated with the refugee condition, which, in turn, was associated with Palestinianness. While refugeeness is not circumscribed to Palestinianness, nationhood, often infused with religious undertones, made the experience of the present unique in the Palestinian contexts I analyze in this book.

To conclude, the complex intricacies of the concept of *ṣumūd* and its local social expressions tend to be conceived in relation to the Palestinian cause as a sacred mission, a duty to all Palestinians, and a binding trait of Palestinianness (Schiocchet, 2015b). I have shown here that labeling certain phenomena simply as “religious” to isolate and study them mainly in relation to other such phenomena, is not, at least in this case, as constructive as analyzing the religious components of social belonging processes and expressions in light of the broader context of Palestinian refugeeness. This conclusion corroborates that of Stanley Tambiah (1979; 1996), who proposed approaching the study of ritual and religion in a way that resembles that of “popular culture.” The conceptualization and expression of *ṣumūd* in Al-Jalil and Dbayeh was not bound to the religious realm, but was instead inextricably tied to the broader social conditions, which in this case is especially the condition of refugeeness and the utopia Palestinians have devised around making it surmountable. Thus, similarly to what Tambiah observed in the context of ethnoreligious clashes in the Indian subcontinent (1996), among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon religion is ineluctably tied to identity politics, while suffering and coping strategies are experienced through a religiosity not detached from the quotidian, but embedded in the present.

