8. Conclusion

There is no simple formula for understanding how Palestinian refugees in Lebanon relate to religion, ethnicity, politics, and their current condition of refugeeness – or any other category of belonging. Nonetheless, I hope that the reader will be more informed about the interplay of the plural processes of identification and motivation at play. External domination, although present, was never completely achieved in the cases presented, and military resistance is not the only way in which domination is denied its powers. Rather, the refugees I encountered found much more nuanced ways to go about alleviating or obscuring their conditions of repression and marginalization. These ways did not depend simply on conscious strategy, or even totally on choice – since the word choice suggests consciousness.

Of course, Palestinians did try to take control over their lives as much as they could but making sense of themselves and others was a far more complex and internalized process. Existing alongside practical reason, this process was embedded in a broader apparatus wherein moral imperatives, conscious choices, adaptive survival, preferences and sympathies, feelings, thoughts, resistance, acceptance, and other possible influences, known or unconscious, spoken or mute were synthesized, motivating individual and collective action and reflection. Religion was certainly an important element engendering the two camps' very distinct characters, but never on its own, and not so much by way of orthodox dogma as through religiosity embedded in everyday life.

What ultimately constitutes Palestinianness to refugees and non-refugees does not reside necessarily in objective concepts such as *dīn* (religion), *jensiyya* (nationality), *qawmiyya* (national identity, widely understood in ethnic terms; nationalism) or even *aṣl* (genealogical descent), but rather resides in the concrete collective experiences of individuals. Due to their stateless status, in the case of Palestinians *jensiyya* may equate even more than usual to *qawmiyya*.

Besides, from all such categories, *qawmiyya* is perhaps the most dangerous one for reasons well expressed by Charles Lindholm:

> In polar contrast to the effort to disintegrate restrictive racial categories is the assertion that ethnic and national identities are natural, oppositional, and hierarchical. As a result, what is in principle an open category turns into a closed one. The danger of naturalizing ethnicity (and viewing the nation as an ethnic entity) is horribly evident in events such as the destructive internal wars ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia and the genocidal slaughter of Tutsis in Rwanda. (Lindholm 2007: 225)

When discussing the "politization of ethnicity in South Asia," Stanley Tambiah also enlightens by showing how the new polities generated

> have become, or made to become, conscious of ethnic identity, and how in turn they have energized as collectivities to engage in political action (...) This instrumental efficacy of ethnicity in making claims on the resources of the modern state inevitably in turn reinforces and maintains ethnic political machinery – patron/client networks, bossism, and patronage structures – through which affirmative action and pork-barrel distributions are dispensed. (Tambiah 1996: 335)

To these authors' insights, I would add that such a situation can be even exacerbated by an already national context marked by sectarianism, especially as it regards its relation to a refugee population that does not fit the system in any way. As Peteet states, "Palestinian Otherness" is juxtaposed not with a homogenous, singular category of Lebanese, but with a shifting set of sectarian groups and alliances. Palestinians, perceived as a threat, serve as a "common denominator" to unify disparate elements of polity (Peteet 1996). The consequence is again well expressed by Tambiah: "The quests for group worth, group honor, group equivalence, and so on are central foci in the politics of ethnicity and critical ingredients in the spirals of intense sentiments and explosive violence that ensue" (Tambiah 1996: 337).

This book focused on the realm of social belonging and organization. In this sense, I argued that largely due to their refugee condition, the present was also lived in both camps as a suspended time in contrast to the normal time of non-refugees, when the idealized plenitude of their national identities was unreachable. Nationhood set a flexible framework for the experiencing of time in both camps. First, there was *al-Nakba* ("The Catastrophe"; evoking the original displacement caused by the creation of the state of Israel in 1948)

marking the boundaries between an idyllic past and the present condition of refugeeness, followed by *al-ʿAwda* ("The Return") setting the boundaries between the present condition and a utopic future. *Al-ʿAwda* was often lived as a messianic religious and/or nationalistic return to a pre-*Nakba* past. In other words, a way out of the suspended time that would bring up the end of present suffering. Accordingly, *al-Ḥaqq al-ʿAwda* ("The Right of Return"), especially inspired by the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 from December 1948 – that foresees the right of return of Palestine refugees to the territory that is today within Israeli borders – was closely connected to *al-Qaḍiyya al-Filastyniyya* (The Palestinian Cause), motivating the refugees' present social belonging and dynamics. However, each one of the camps I described developed unique ways of collectively negotiating such themes, revealing different perspectives, moods, strategies, interests, and goals, but also affects, dispositions, and sensibilities. Within these themes, I also found rich individual variation. This book showed how the principles informing this suspended time, in conjunction with the postcolonial and settler colonial contexts of the Near East, refugee camp environments, and a drive to take back control of their own identities, often constituted a strong force pulling individuals to collectively articulate their existential condition, further ritualizing their quotidian routines.

Furthermore, concepts such as interests, goals, and moral imperatives are heuristic devices often used by social scientists to qualify social action as inherently determined, for example, by economic interests, ideology, or morality. This tactic often fails to account for the complexity of personal/social motivation and social action. This book challenged these heuristic divides altogether to more thoroughly appreciate people's actual and varied experiences of motivation and belonging. Motivations are not directly derived solely from either religion, ethnicity, nationalism, political ideology, economical strategy, or other social/cultural value systems. Rather, motivations generally compound at least some of these variables, mobilizing multi-faceted sets of referents. In turn, dispositions, affects, and sensibilities in the form of partially unconscious embodied drives, generated by subjects' mobilization of sets of referents, pushed them to respectively act and feel in certain ways. Ritualized expressions of embodied dispositions, affects, and sensibilities thus, along with conscious strategies, desires, and objectives, strongly motivated social action. Social referents associated with religion, nationhood, or the refuge only acquired meaning through their linkages with motivations and in context. Both referents and motivations varied according to context and according to the personal biographies of individuals and characters of social actors.

In other words, Al-Jalil and Dbayeh refugees were neither living in a world of instrumental entrepreneurship, nor in a world molded by inescapable moral demands. Sometimes they were divided between the two, and often tried to merge both. Yet, at least just as often, they did not recognize both as different realms, and thus were not split between one and the other. Such "merged" worlds gave rise to selves different from Erwin Goffman's (1963; 1967) mechanist competitive role-sets, and yet the tension between practical reason, desires, sympathies, moral imperatives, and social obligations created an environment where self-consciousness must be accepted with caution (Cohen 1993). That is, in Al-Jalil and Dbayeh, people made sense of themselves and the world around them also largely at the margins of the boundaries of such self-consciousness, by being part of something larger than themselves. These were collectives with which they were organically connected at least as much through daily routine that ritualized and sacralized the quotidian as through rituals that set the mundane world apart.

In both camps, the actions and reflections of individuals were embedded in the context of their respective ritual tempo. Ritualization can also produce autonomy, even extreme autonomy, as we have seen in *Chapter 7*. Thus, along with socializing members of a community into a set of values and practices and behaviors, helping demarcate its boundaries vis-à-vis others, organizing history, and providing frameworks for understanding the world, ritualization can also be engaged to transform that very reality. Like Charbel, many Palestinian refugees I met were deeply motivated by transforming the world around them, which they were pursuing also within the realm of the ritual tempi they were respectively immersed in.

Thus, I utilized a ritualization approach for understanding contrasting processes of belonging encompassing matters of social organization and belonging processes. To do so, in turn, I presented the social dynamics that occurred along two different axes among the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon. The first axis aggregated processes of inclusion and exclusion that consisted of the relations between people's social organization and their complex and individual processes of identification to groups such as the party and the family. The second was composed of the dynamic interplay between ingroups and out-group that occurred at the levels of the camp and the nation. The resulting ethnography I presented avoided the essentialist trap of generalizing "the Palestinians," but still permitted an overall understanding of the camp's and individual's contexts that went beyond a mere statement of the

uniqueness and subjectivity of groups or individual selves (including the self of the anthropologist).

In this regard, I hope to have shown that in many Palestinian communities, existence as a refugee is already widely understood as resistance (Schiocchet 2013), just as enduring suffering is seen as resistance (Schiocchet 2018). Collective suffering is by no means general among Palestinians, but as I also found among Palestinians in Brazil, Denmark, Austria, and the West Bank, it was exceedingly common to the Palestinian experience everywhere, or at least to the understanding of Palestinianness. However, not unqualified suffering that reminds us we are all human, but qualified suffering as an essence shared only among those who went through one of its particular iterations. In this sense, two of the main themes of Palestinian public expressions of suffering, in many ways re-appropriated through activism, are the ongoing character of the *Nakba*, and the drive against narratives of pure victimization towards narratives of resistance. Both are part of a same set of discourses, colored by the notion of the "Palestinian Cause," and thus inherently intertwined. While the first calls for witnessing Palestinian suffering, the second qualifies how that suffering must be apprehended. As I also developed elsewhere, among the refugees, and ironically largely through PLO nationalist jargon that has gone out of PLO's control, resistance needs not be experienced as bellicose or even apart from routine, but can be essentially embedded in the quotidian[1] (Schiocchet 2015, 2013). This is in line with Foucauldian thought. As Catherine Bell reminds us, to Foucault, power must be understood beyond pure coercion and violence: "At the heart of power relationships lies an insubordination or resistance (…) Hence, to explore power is to explore the necessary and simultaneous resistance to power that continues to provoke and legitimize its exercise" (Bell 2009: 201).

Overall, by way of the ritualization approach focused on Palestinianness and on to what extent religiosity informs different social belonging processes, this book explored boundary making and maintenance in both camps. It presented relations between individuals at multiple levels of sociality, and the layered relationships between individuals, social groups, and the polyphonically imagined Palestinian community. Dbayeh's lower level of ritualization,

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1   It does not follow that all Palestinian agency is resistance - see, for instance (Mahmood 2005) - only that resistance is embedded in much of daily life, rather than only present when expressed overtly.

when compared to al-Jalil, can be partially attributed to its social fragmenta-
tion and hesitation to assert nationhood clearly and loudly, leading to differ-
ent engagements with social belonging such as the local economies of trust
explored in *Chapter 7*. Al-Jalil's higher level of ritualization of daily life can be,
in turn, largely attributed to the value of *ṣumūd* (steadfastness), which drives
individuals and groups to a hyper-expression of their personal and collective
selves, especially when compared to Al-Jalil. Therefore, ritual tempo, or the
ritualization of the rhythm of daily life, is not simply a synonym for ritual as
a rupture with the quotidian, but rather a pervasive context in which actors
frame much of daily life. Although not everything inhabitants of al-Jalil did
was ritual, they ritualized the very quotidian largely because of the refugee
experience of the present time, which pulled them towards constantly rearticu-
ulating their condition and a collective overcoming through ritualized modes
of behavior. That is, ritual tempo is the ritualized context, pace, and rhythm,
of daily life; it is not a clearly demarcated ritual with a structure, narrative,
and pre-existing symbolic system, but a broad context marked by ritualiza-
tion. On the other hand, resistance in Dbayeh tended to take a different shape,
less marked by Palestinianness and collective ritualized engagement with dif-
ferent notions of resistance. A common form of resistance then was simply
to mobilize that which was common between Palestinian refugees and the
Lebanese surroundings, and Christianity was one such noteworthy commonal-
ality.

As to the different ways refugees from each camp understood their lives
and acted upon the world, some general tendencies were presented in Part
I and II, but these tendencies were by no means straitjackets. While context
was indeed evocative, different subjects within the same refugee camps un-
derstood and engaged ritual and religious life differently. Nonetheless, the
deep imprint of the different socio-historical conditions that each camp was
subjected to, as outlined in Parts I and II, should not be underestimated.

Each part of this book covered different aspects of the quotidian, but all
of them were concerned with the same tension between integration and par-
ticularity, and between religion and quotidian life. The dynamic interplay be-
tween groups and individuals (at any level, from national, religious, political
or ethnic belonging, to individual uniqueness) was presented according to
centripetal and centrifugal tendencies – to use Marshall Sahlins terms (1972)
– towards integration or dissolution. Dispute, management, conflict, and in-
ternalization of ideas and practices all acted in composing daily life largely
through ritualized processes of communication.

Finally, as to religion as an index for social belonging, due to the differences in the two camps, which include for instance the value of ṣumūd in Al-Jalil and the relative lack of this value in the Dbayeh, social investments tended to manifest differently. As we have seen, in Al-Jalil, there was the tendency to disclose one's allegiances within the community. These displays were performed both as ritualized rehearsals and as public expressions of one's identity. By contrast, Dbayeh's quotidian also contained ritualized routines, although such investments tended to be less public and more situational, and to detach religion from nationhood.

In both camps, subject's motivations were not directly derived solely from either religion, ethnicity, nationalism, political ideology, economic strategy, or other social/cultural value systems. Rather, motivations generally seemed to merge at least some of these referents. The intrinsic amalgamation of referents that generates social motivations is in turn essential to the understanding of the relative place of religion in each of the camps' social belonging dynamics. Context was central. For instance, although the Palestinian flag was often a symbol of belonging in Dbayeh as it was in Al-Jalil, it was displayed in different ways,[2] evoked different experiences and behaviors, and represented diverse ideas of Palestinianness.

If in Al-Jalil nationhood was sometimes superposed with ethnicity (Arabness), in Dbayeh some (usually younger generations) instead expressed their Christianity and displayed it as a mode of ethnic belonging in a bid for shared identification with the Lebanese population surrounding them. Perhaps if there had not been a heavy toll to be paid for being a Palestinian in Dbayeh, the situation might have been different. Yet, if there had been no deep, local identification with Christianity, such a bridge could not have been spanned either. The articulation of Palestinianness and Christianity I witnessed in Dbayeh was by no means the same as in other contexts, from Christian families living in Mar Elias' camp, to Palestinians with Lebanese citizenship living in large Lebanese urban enclaves. This strongly reiterates that both ritualization and religiosity are bound to context.

In the cases presented, religion was indeed a central referent to refugee's vernacular expressions of the self, as well as a currency to fundamental organizational principles such as local economies of trust, which were in turn heightened by a disposition toward suspicion strongly associated with

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2   In Dbayeh I only saw it inside the houses, as opposed to Al-Jalil where they dominated the public space.

the refugee condition, and very much embedded in each camp's own ritual tempo. Yet, *religion*, as presented in this book, rather than doctrine alone, or cultural determinism, refers rather to religiosity. Thus, I approached religion in the same way that I approach rituals through ritualization: both are processes in-the-making and embedded in the much broader and more pervasive language of everyday life. My argument is not that religion was nowhere to be found in the cases I present in this book, but precisely the opposite: religion was everywhere, and therefore hardly ever being the sole defining factor of social experiences and forms of belonging. Even though not entirely new, this is an argument still worth making, both for scholars interested in Palestine studies and, more generally, for those who insist on portraying religion as a distinct domain of social life apart from others. However, more than simply making this case, this book aimed to describe ethnographically, through concrete instances, how religion is embedded in the quotidian of Palestinian refugee camp dwellers in Lebanon, which may inspire others to take this thought elsewhere.