

Between the catastrophe and the promised return: Palestinian refugee trajectories and conceptions of time in Lebanon

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This paper is based on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork for my Ph.D. dissertation. The dissertation is called *Refugee Lives: Ritual and Belonging in Two Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon*,^[1] and it is a comparative ethnography of one Muslim (Al-Jalil) and one Christian Palestinian refugee camp (?bay eh) in Lebanon. It utilizes a ritual approach for understanding two contrasting patterns of belonging (including both social organization and identity) found in the two camps.

Lebanese and even many Palestinians tend to attribute the camps' differences solely to religion. But my study argues that religion is only one among other important referents that influence the camps' daily discourses and practices and construct the multi-faceted identities and alliances that characterize the lives of people in these contrasting settings. This paper's argument is centered on Chapter I of *Refugee Lives* and aims at highlighting the camps' unique historical trajectories, arguing that such trajectories shaped much of the camps' distinct sociocultural characters. In doing so, it moves away from both exegetic and more essentialist cultural explanations based mainly on religion.

The main visible differences between the two refugee communities are:

In the Muslim camp, Al-Jalil, social life is heavily militarized. Finding expression in a broader pace of daily life, Palestinian political parties and social movements share space with social workers, religious authorities, and lay people. The Christian camp, ?bay eh, in contraposition, is completely devoid of militarization, and the camp's quotidian life mixes both Palestinian and Lebanese themes. Social practices and discourses are significantly different from those of Al-Jalil.

Quotidian social interaction in ?bay eh does not revolve around a public creation and assertion of Palestinianness, but precisely the opposite; Palestinianness is expressed privately, thus ensuring that a Palestinian identity does not reverberate in the public sphere; so that it would not create new conflicts or open old wounds. ?bay eh

community's social life is much more dispersed especially because of different categories of belonging: non-*muwaʿan* Palestinian, *muwaʿan*, and non-*aʿl Filasṭiny* Lebanese (respectively: Palestinians who do not hold Lebanese citizenship, Palestinians who do hold Lebanese citizenship, and Lebanese with no-Palestinian origins). Such categories designate the level of incorporation of individuals in a *continuum* from Palestinianness to Lebaneseness. Dispersal is increased by the diffuse physical environment of the camp, the absence of the Palestinian institutions brought by the PLO, ʿbay eh inhabitants' attachment to Christian values, and their own perceptions of themselves. All these forces pull the camp's social dynamics away from highly formalized forms of ritualization, as I demonstrate in *Refugee Lives*.

While Al-Jalil is located in Ba'albak – an area dominated by the Shi'i ʿizboll ah – ʿbay eh is the only Christian Palestinian refugee camp in the world, and is located in Mount Lebanon – an area almost exclusively Christian, and dominated by Christian political parties opposed to ʿizboll ah. These distinct characters are crucial for establishing the contrasts between the camps' ritual and social dynamics.

Although overt public ritualization was more pervasive in Al-Jalil than in ʿbay eh, it marked the quotidian in the latter camp as well. The lower level of ritualization of ʿbay eh, when compared to Al-Jalil, can be partially attributed to ʿbay eh's social fragmentation and desire to keep a low profile of social manifestations of nationhood, leading to different strategies of social belonging such as the local economies of trust explored in *Refugee Lives*. Al-Jalil's higher level of ritualization of daily life can be, in turn, attributed mainly to the value of *ʿumud* (steadfastness) that pulls individuals and groups to hyper-expression of their personal and collective selves – a process connected to the two other interconnected processes of “hyperinformation” and “hyperredundancy” as Valentine Daniel and John Knudsen describe in *Mistrusting Refugees* (Daniel and Knudsen 1996). Therefore, ritual tempo, that is the ritualization of the rhythm of daily life, is not simply a synonym for formal ritual, but rather a pervasive context in which much of daily life is framed. Although not everything inhabitants of Al-Jalil and (especially) ʿbay eh do is ritual, in *Refugee Lives* I show how the context in which the quotidian is framed in these two settings is ritualized largely because of the refugee experience of “time within time” that pulls them towards constantly rearticulating and recreating their condition through ritualized modes of behavior. That is, ritual tempo is defined here as the ritualized context, pace, and rhythm of daily life; it is not a clearly demarcated ritual with a structure, narrative, and pre-conceived symbolic system.

This paper has three parts: In the first section I will present an interlude about the ways Palestinians frame time, while in the two remaining sections I will offer oral historical accounts of how the generation that actually left Palestine has contextualized coming to Lebanon and settling in each one of the refugee camps; that is, I will present their general views of the making of Al-Jalil and ʿbay eh arguing that such historical trajectories and the way they tend to be framed in each camp has had immense impact in each camp's social organization and identity processes.

A. Palestinian Conceptions of Time

Largely due to their refugee condition, refugees in Al-Jalil and Bayeh spent much of their time thinking and talking about their condition. The present time is lived in both camps as a “time within time”[2] – in contrast to the “normal time” of non-refugees. This “time within time” constitutes a force pulling individuals to collectively articulate their existential condition, and further ritualize their quotidian routines.

For Lena Jayyusi, contemporary memory articulates a “past condition,” “a bibliographical event,” and a “historical facticity,” but always from the point of view of “present interests,” “viewpoints,” and “subjective (even also subjunctive) modalities.” Besides, she suggests also that the same can be said about history (Jayyusi 2007:107) – a point already made by George Stocking (Stocking 1982) and that resonates Hans Georg Gadamer’s fusion of horizons (Gadamer 2005).

According to this perspective, iteration of the similar yet different – in a metonymical relation where the difference is located within the similarity – is a feature of all collective identity; “constituting, shaping, and apprehending collective fate and experience.” In other words, the (re)-iterability of personal experiences makes possible the constitution of collective experiences. But for collective memory to exist, iterability must come coupled with “the simultaneity of the iterable narrativized event, present *within* the narrative itself, and iterated endlessly in one narrative after another” (Jayyusi 2007:111).

The collective experience thus formed adds a layer to individual experiences, “which can enhance its sharpness, its associated sense of the tragic, and the potentiality for continued remembrance through its entry into a public register.” Therefore, collective experience frames personal experience. The simultaneity of the experience, its iterability, and its simultaneous onset implicates thus “the very identity of the bereaved,” and for Jayyusi, such general features are also found in the Palestinian narratives about the *Nakbah*[3] (Jayyusi 2007:111).

For her, these collective memories create a “subjunctive mood” that “encompasses both past and present” (Jayyusi 2007:119). Memory is then often recast into this subjunctive mood that by its turn is interwoven with relationships between “past to present,” “memory to the contemporary,” and “both to the future,” resulting in “different inflections of the relationship of the past to the present and the future, and distinct inflections of the subjunctive mood itself within memory” (Jayyusi 2007:107).

Thus, Palestinian memory does not create a fixed past or “timeless symbols attesting history” – which she calls “time out of time” – as much as it indexes “the vicissitudes of time,” “the works of others,” “the presence and agency of the historical subject” – which she calls “time within time,” defined as “the pocket or fold of time unfolded, opened up,” that “provides the dynamic and power of that agency. It offers not merely a vision of, but a project for, the future” (Jayyusi 2007:130).

But as I found during my field research, besides narratives, such cumulative (both in time and networked) iteration, constitutive of notions of time and space, also creates rituals that shape people’s behaviors, expectations, desires, moral imperatives, and thus their very own agencies. Different than Jayyusi, I hold that it is mainly through enactment in

living rituals that iteration does its work of shaping time and agencies – and not only or mainly through articulated narratives of time. Keeping that in mind, let's turn more thoroughly toward Palestinian conceptions of time.

It is widely recognized today that the Nakb ah has become, at the individual, community and national level, “both in Palestinian memory and history, the demarcation line between two qualitatively opposed periods” (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007:3). But, strikingly, little has been produced about the period of Palestinian history (and memory) known as the Nakb ah. As Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod point out in *Nakba*, “Although Palestinians had various forms of identity before 1948” it generally included “a sense of themselves as Palestinians” (Sa'di & Abu-Lughd 2007:4) – as previously recognized by authors such as Beshara Doumani (1992) and Rashid Khalidi (1998) among others. El-Nakb ah represents both in academic Palestinian history and popular Palestinian memory the “beginning of contemporary Palestinian history;” “the focal point for what might be called Palestinian time. The Nakba is the point of reference for other events, past and future ... The Nakba has become a key event in Palestinian calendar – the baseline for personal histories and the sorting of generations” (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007:5).

Because the Nakb ah is not a removed past – due to the continuing general Palestinian dispossession – recounting Nakb ah memories is a fulcrum of Palestinianness in that the collectivity “adjusted these memories to each other” producing a “canonization” of “some stories and symbols” (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007:7), and – I will add – social practices.

And for Sa'di and Abu-Lughod there are three aspects of the relationship of Palestinian memory with time that make it singular: 1. Because Palestinian memories of 1948 serve as a base for political claims there is a practical urgency in remembering and registering the Nakb ah (among other events and periods). 2. The sense that the Nakb ah is still ongoing is due to the fact that most Palestinians still live its effects or similar processes. 3. The Nakb ah is seen as marker of a generational time frame that propels social processes of transfer (of “stories,” “memories,” “foods,” “anger,” “burden,” “the great significance of the past,” and “the inheritance of the identity”) from one generation to another (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod 2007:19).

Lila Abu-Lughod recognizes that, especially for Palestinian refugees living outside the Occupied Territories, “*El-'Awd ah*” (the Return[4]), “evokes nostalgia for the homeland they were forced to flee in 1948 and a reversal of the traumatic dispersion that sundered families, ruined livelihoods, and thrust Palestinians into humiliating refugee camps or individual adventures to rebuild lives armed with little more than birth certificates, keys to the homes they left behind, and the stigma of having somehow lost their country to the alien people” (Abu-Lughod 2007:77).

But beyond the recognition of nostalgia, I hold that for most Palestinian refugees (among whom Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are included) *El-'Awd ah* is as much a marker of popular and historical time frames as *El-Nakb ah* is. It is not a marker of memory as *El-Nakb ah*, but it is a utopia that projects the idealized past into the future and locates the present in-between such romanticized times.

For Rosemary Sayigh El-Nakb ah is also a constitutive element of Palestinianness, but for her it is a site in memory that, citing Sa'di, she calls an “eternal present” (Sayigh 2007:135). Besides gender – which is her main focus – Sayigh also points toward a generational difference in understanding and dealing with Palestinianness, very much intensified with the Six Days War that recast much of the feeling of dispossession into the need to be steadfast (*?umud*) in the “revolution” (*thawr ah*). I also recognized the main generations she mentions during my field work. These are: *Jil El-Filas?yn* (the Generation of Palestine), *Jil El-Nakb ah* (Generation of the Disaster), *Jil El- Thawr ah* (Generation of the Revolution, highlighted in Lebanon), and the *Jil El-Intifa? ah* (Generation of the Intifa? ah, which stands out in the Occupied Territories and spans the current generation). The main generations Sayigh points to when discerning modes of narrative are the *Jil El-Nakb ah*, and the *Jil El- Thawr ah*. For Sayigh, it was only with the Generation of the Revolution that narratives of the Nakb ah took other forms “in recollections of camp conditions as experienced by a child, or of national commemorations days in school, or in declarations of Palestinian identity” (Sayigh 2007:140).

Although Sayigh did not develop her production in the direction of narratives about El-‘Awd ah, she assumes that a cyclical concept of history is “fundamental to expressions such as these: Only God moves history, not men; it is He who will eventually restore the Palestinians to Palestine” (Sayigh 2007:143). That is, she seems to, at least surreptitiously, recognize that El-‘Awd ah is very much understood as a return to the past. And given that the Generation of the Revolution – very much inspired by the Occidental leftist secular thought – was responsible for popularizing much of this frame, religion is not a necessary component of such temporal frame.

Alongside gender (her focus) and the generational gap (which is not as much developed in her work) she recognizes the necessity to identify diversity within the Palestinian experience and identity. As she states, “internal differences need to be written into the unwritten collective story” (Sayigh 2007:136). “Disparities of power or status between classes, sects and ethnicities, city and rural residents, the educated and the uneducated, men and woman: all are glossed over in nationalisms that lead to, and follow, the establishment of a state. Historians of the Palestinian people need to reflect on whether the predominant model of ‘history’ – with its focus on ‘facts’ and the ‘public domain’ – is inclusive enough to match the full reality of a unique difficult struggle” (Sayigh 2007:136).

As an attempt to such a recognition of differences, I hold that due to ?bay eh’s specific historical trajectory – for instance, since the PLO never managed to secure a place in the camp, and thus the *Jil Al- Thaur ah* never really existed – most camp residents do not wish (or sought to) to return to Palestine as much as Al-Jalil residents did. As such, although Al-Nakb ah continued to frame past and present, El-‘Awd ah did not represent as much the passage between present and future in the camp. And, accordingly, the future is not seen as much as a return to a utopian past Palestinianness. Such utopian past is still vivid for many (especially older generations), but now very much unforeseen and uncast

into the future. In dialectical relation, ?bay eh's political mobilization was almost null, and did not express the same as it did in Al-Jalil. It is chiefly due to this fact that ritualization of daily life took on much less pervasive and formalized forms in the Christian camp.

During my field research I met with as many representatives of the Jil El-Nakb ah as I could, and as a consequence I was able to put together a comprehensive understanding of both camps' unique histories as seen through the eyes of its older inhabitants. The very concise and selective oral history of Al-Jalil and ?bay eh refugee camps presented in the following two sections of this paper is thus based on such interviews. I chose here to follow mainly the thread of only a few of the interviewees, since most of them overlapped in what I understood to be a collective effort to make sense of the past and present situation in each camp. The specific reasons why the PLO never made it to the Christian camp, along with the connected reason why most ?bay eh residents do not dream and work for going back to Palestine, will be further explored in light of this oral history.

B. Settling in Al-Jalil

I begin with a brief history of Al-Jalil. My narrative follows that of Abu 'Abbas, who is a first generation resident of Al-Jalil (or *Wavel*, as UNRWA names it) Palestinian refugee camp. His story, is of course specific to himself, but also is similar in most respects to the stories of other first generation migrants.

Abu 'Abbas told me he was from *Shifa 'Amar*, a village located just some 20 miles away from the main port city of Haifa, in what he still calls Palestine. There were Christians, Druze, and Sunni Muslims in Shifa 'Amar, as he remembers it. He himself is a Sunni Muslim, as are all the other refugees in Al-Jalil. Some of his former village neighbors took different routes and ended up in different places in the Middle East. A few made agreements with the "Zionists," and remained in the village or elsewhere (particularly Haifa) in what became Israel.

Almost all the Christians and Muslims were displaced from Palestine. Most of them fled to the West Bank or to Lebanon and became refugees. People from other parts of Palestine fled to different places. People from the south tended to flee to the Gaza strip or Egypt, people from the East tended to flee to the West Bank of Jordan, and people from the center regions tended to go to Jordan and Syria along with some other inhabitants from the north. Those Christians and Muslims from Shifa 'Amar who settled in Lebanon tended to join neighbors or kin in one of the sites where the refugees were gathering. Different groups of ex-Shifa 'Amar dwellers went to different places in Lebanon too.

From Shifa 'Amar, Abu 'Abbas fled to *Bint Jbail* in south Lebanon in the company of some of his relatives and neighbors. There he stayed only for two months, deciding to move to *'Anjar* – located in the Beq'a Valley, 50 km away from Beirut, on the Beirut-Damascus road, close to the *Masn'a* crossing – with a group of Palestinian refugees stationed in Bint Jbail.

Abu 'Abbas' moved to 'Anjar because he had heard that there were some unoccupied houses in that village. Once there, he discovered that although there were indeed some empty houses, the village was the site of a large group of Armenian refugees.[5]

In about September of 1948 clashes erupted in 'Anjar between the Armenian and the Palestinian refugee groups. Abu 'Abbas remembered that it had to do with the occupation of the empty houses. The clashes took significant proportions; the roads around 'Anjar were closed and the Lebanese authorities drove the Palestinian refugees away. According to Abu 'Abbas, everyone went to where they thought it would be best. Again, neighbors or kin tended to go together. He and his group decided to go to another, irregular Palestinian settlement in the Beq'a valley, known by the name of *Ghoro*.

Meanwhile, other Palestinian refugees who had also been in 'Anjar prior to the group's expulsion joined other Palestinian refugees in a similar situation and settled in a French barracks close to the main entrance of Ba'albak. The French barracks was named after a general who once commanded the battalion stationed in the Beq'a Valley: General *Wavel*. In Abu 'Absas' memory, because the barracks were unused following Lebanese independence, in 1948 French authorities took in some Palestinian refugees.

Many of those who left 'Anjar with Abu 'Abbas went straight to join other Palestinian refugees in the Wavel barracks, and in 1952 UNRWA transformed the site into a Palestinian refugee camp. Although Wavel is still the official name of the camp for UNRWA and the Lebanese authorities, its dwellers, most of them coming from Galilee, named the camp Al-Jalil. As Ghoro did not have any school and it was close to Al-Jalil, its young, school-aged refugees went to school at the newly built UNRWA school in Al-Jalil refugee camp. Many Ghoro inhabitants started to build bonds with Al-Jalil community.

At the time of my interview with him, Abu 'Abbas did not mention anything else about reasons behind the transformation of the French barracks into a refugee camp for Palestinians, but the deal came as part of the armistice negotiated in 1949 between Lebanon and Israel, by which Lebanon agreed to refrain from settling the Palestinians close to the Israeli border (Sfeir 2008).

Abu 'Abbas' stay in Ghoro did not last many years, however, as the site was taken aback by the Lebanese army in part due to pressures from the Kata`eb[6]. He left Ghoro with most of its inhabitants and settled in another site originally created by the French authorities to receive Armenian refugees: *Ra shidy eh*. *Ra shidy eh* today is the southernmost Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, 5 km south of the Lebanese city of *Sur* (Tyre), and only some 15km away from the Israeli border. From information I gathered through other Palestinian refugees I learned that adding to the original *Ra shidy eh* site, in 1963 "the new camp" was especially created to receive the families coming from Ghoro and from El-Buss. Abu 'Abbas also did not remain in *Ra shidy eh* for too long, and after some months he was transferred by the Red Cross to Al-Jalil refugee camp where he met former Ghoro inhabitants as well as other Palestinian refugees coming from different villages of Palestine who had previously been gathered in different sites around Lebanon.

Abu 'Abbas' entire journey lasted several years until he was finally settled in Al-Jalil refugee camp in 1964, where he lives until today in the same apartment building that once served the French soldiers, that the same place he has occupied since he first arrived in the camp from Ra shidy eh. Among the most important things he remembers about the early days in the camp is that the Lebanese erected a *?ajiz* (checkpoint) at the entrance of the camp, and entry was only allowed for the refugees themselves and those allowed by the Lebanese government and the UNRWA. Proudly, Abu 'Abbas told me that in 1968 The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) finally took over the checkpoint.

As it is common knowledge, in 1970 the PLO moved its headquarters to Lebanon following the Black September in Jordan[7], and in 1975 the Lebanese Civil War finally exploded. With the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 came PLO defeat and the evacuation of the Palestinian Resistance Movement from Lebanon to Tunisia leaving behind many resistance units in the Palestinian refugee camps and a profoundly altered national culture permeated with standardized PLO symbols and institutions. Although one of the conditions of the PLO's withdrawal was the guaranteed security of Palestinian refugees in the camps, with the power vacuum created by the absence of PLO, Lebanese militias engaged in serious fighting with the lightly protected refugee camps. Above all, the famous "War of the Camps" pitted the main Palestinian factions against the Shi'i social movement/political party "AMAL" and small Palestinian guerillas who saw in the conflict an opportunity for reinforcing their position vis-à-vis the dominant cadres of the PLO. Some camps were particularly targeted for their geographical position or strategic value.

Since Al-Jalil was located in Ba'albak – an area then dominated by AMAL – it was part of a deal with the Shi'i group that saved the camp's physical integrity. Due both to the camp's social composition and its relative isolation from the other camps, the possibility of striking a deal between AMAL and Al-Jalil camp was almost unique among the Palestinian refugee camps at that time, and such historical developments are among what make Al-Jalil a unique space today. According to another Al-Jalil elderly, AMAL was not very interested in entering in a war with Al-Jalil. Because of the camp's proximity to Syria, the camp had developed close relations with its Syrian neighbors, whose main client in Lebanon at the time was AMAL.

By 1983 Syria already had control over northern Lebanon and the Beqa' Valley (where Ba'albak is located), which allowed the Asad regime to influence Palestinian politics. In April of that year, Fata? units stationed in the Beq'a mutinied against the central leadership forming the Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) in Damascus against 'Arafat's leadership. Also in 1983 another split of Fata?, commanded by Abu Musa, gave birth to the Fata? Al-Intifa? ah and their socialist ideology. Syria then supported the attacks of Palestinian groups such as the PNSF, Al-Sa'eqa, and Fata? Al-Intifa? ah against the Nahr Al-Bared and Beddawi camps in northern Lebanon, forcing 'Arafat's expulsion from his last stronghold in Tripoli. Only later, especially between 1985 and 1987, AMAL led the War of the Camps against 'Arafat's PLO.

Some elders in Al-Jalil told me that there was no fight between AMAL and the PLO in their camp because the camp was not a strategic post, given its small size and its relative isolation from other camps in Lebanon. Some others, though, told me that what prevented the conflict was the fact that at that time PLO loyalists gave up all their weapons to AMAL and its proxies in exchange for safeguarding Al-Jalil's peace. One of Fatah's most important strongholds in Lebanon's camps is still today based in Al-Jalil. It is partially the fact that Al-Jalil is located in such a Shi'i stronghold that developed its special character, explaining, for instance, the relatively stronger partisanship of movements such as Fatah and the PFLP-GC. History had a whole different trajectory in Bayeh.

C. Settling in Bayeh

Although not a camp inhabitant, I chose to interview Dr. Anis Sayigh due to his good connections with Bayeh residents. Most Bayeh refugees came from a village on the northwestern Palestinian border with Lebanon called *Al-Bassa*, and Dr. Sayigh himself was from that same village. Both because of the proximity of the Lebanese border and because of its high Christian component, Al-Bassa had close connections with Lebanon.

In Sayigh's words, "Al-Bassa was the most Lebanese town in Palestine (...) good and bad traits." "They were so open to man and woman relations, love affairs, etc." As he stated, this openness was mainly among the Christians themselves, and there were almost no inter-religious marriages. Al-Bassa was bisected by one street dividing Muslims and Christians.

According to Dr. Sayigh, however, like many places in the Middle East, the village was not sectarian – as he understood "sectarianism" as a political attitude. The fact that different religious communities would choose to live grouped together would sometimes cause tensions, but these were never transplanted to the political arena, and in Palestine Muslims and Christians did not fight for political hegemony as they did in Lebanon – or so he claimed. Although stating that "we do not believe in sectarianism in Palestine," he also recognized during the interview that "at the beginning there were very few of us who became Lebanese, but now there are more and more. From their questions you would know. Such as: what is your religion?" Thus, "becoming Lebanese" for him was a question of cultural attitude, rather than simply taking up citizenship.

As Dr. Sayigh told me, after 1948 Christians in Palestine preferred to flee to Lebanon either because of these economic or educational bonds, or due to the mere fact that they were Christians. After 1948 most of these Christians came from Haifa, Jaffa, Tiberias, Jerusalem, or from the northern country side of Galilee. But, because at the beginning "they thought they would return to Palestine," the wealthy ones – who had no need of tents and rations – did not register with UNRWA.

In addition, the Lebanese government had its own plan to deal with the refugees. In the very beginning President Camille Sham'oun offered citizenship to any Palestinian Christian who went to Lebanon. According to Dr. Sayigh, he was "very sectarian," and the plan was to increase the number of Christians in the country in order to maintain the

status quo in which Christians (mainly the Maronites) were the hegemonic political power in Lebanon. “It [citizenship] was just for the Christians,” Dr. Sayigh added. In practice, the Christian refugees knew about this plan since priests would often inform them about it in church after mass.

As a result, most Palestinian Christians did not remain in Lebanon as refugees. Thus, yet another consequence of the 1948 war was the erasure of the Palestinian Christian community in Lebanon. More and more of these Palestinians were cast in the shadows, to the point that few people today know that the Palestinian Christian community was relatively thriving both in numbers and in economical, political, religious, and social matters before 1948.

Abu Jorge, an old man from Al-Bassa who is part of the *Jil Al-Nakb ah* (The generation that lived 1948 events as it is known by the Palestinians), told me how he got to *?bay eh* camp. According to his story, following 1948 events in Palestine, he first settled in *Ra shidy eh* amongst other Palestinian refugees – Muslims and Christians coming from the cities or from the *?ey’ ah* (village). It was only after about three years that he moved to *?bay eh Al-Ta?et* (Lower *?bay eh*). In his memory, his motivation was to “avoid problems.” Abu Jorge noticed that “here [in *?bay eh*], since the beginning there were just Christians.” For different reasons some other Christians also went to *Jisr Al-Ba sha* and *Mar Elias*. UNRWA took up the gathering of Palestinians in *?bay eh* only in 1956, renting the space for 99 years and making it a Christian Palestinian refugee camp along with *Mar Elias*, while *Jisr Al-Ba sha* also had a Muslim component.

Other *Jil Al-Nakb ah* residents in *?bay eh*, on other occasions, told me that the reason why some Christian Palestinians went from *Ra shidy eh* to *?bay eh* was because a Lebanese priest invited them to do so. The reasons behind that invitation would mainly be, in their point of view, to protect the Christian Palestinian community by taking them under Christian wings and bringing them closer to Christian territory. The area around *?bay eh* was still largely uninhabited, but as Christian Lebanese businessmen were developing the area for rural production, the Palestinians would be able to find seasonal work there. As the Christian inhabitants of Al-Bassa tended to maintain their village bonds when they came to Lebanon and chose to live amongst other Christians, most of them accepted the invitation to live in *?bay eh*, where they were joined by relatives and other Christians from other villages. Only after many years and following the camp’s first conflict, did they move to *?bay eh Al-Faw`* (Upper *?bay eh*), as they were preparing the land for settlement. Because of that – Abu Jorge points out – not everybody in *?bay eh* “is from 1948;” and not everybody in *?bay eh* was even Palestinian at all. In his words, these were “*kullo Gharib*” (all strangers [Lebanese Christians]) that came to live in the camp because it was “safe” during the Lebanese Civil War.

As early as 1973 there were conflicts between *?bay eh*’s Palestinians and the Lebanese army. And as soon as the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975 the Palestinian refugee camps located in East Beirut (an area dominated by the Phalangist and other Christian militias) were put under siege. Yasser Arafat – then chairman of the PLO – could not maintain his position in the northeastern suburbs of Beirut, and in the process of this struggle, almost all of the camps there were totally destroyed.

As Jihane Sfeir noticed, the massacres of Tel Al-Z'atar and Karantina became famous, but other less famous camps fell in the same way, such as the Christian majority camp of Jisr El-Ba sha (Sfeir 2008). The only camp that remained standing in the area was ?bay eh, and the reasons for that are to be found both in the camp's unique character and in the camp's early takeover by the Phalangist militiamen.

Because of its location – as the story goes according to locals – ?bay eh was already severely cut off from the rest of the camps when the PLO started to build its institutions in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon. There was an early commitment between the camp's refugee community and the Christian community around it that the fight for the Palestinian cause should not pit camp inhabitants against their Christian neighbors. And while some ?bay eh elders claimed that the reason for that attitude was an early identification with the local community via religion (despite the heavy stigmatization of the Palestinians), some claimed it would have been simply impossible to act differently in the highly Christian dominated area of ?bay eh without putting families' sustenance and their own lives at risk.

As some ?bay eh residents liked to tell me, since the beginning ?bay eh was not a very fertile ground for PLO militiamen, but it was at the front line of the PLO intelligence apparatus. As another elder remembered, ?bay eh was the spearhead of an intelligence effort that also involved the camps of Jisr El-Ba sha, and Karantina. According to some of ?bay eh's elders, as soon as the Lebanese Civil War erupted there were simply no conditions for the PLO to maintain its headquarters north of Beirut given that the place was a stronghold of the Phalangist militiamen. By 1976, after the destruction of Jisr El-Ba sha, Karantina and Tel Al-Z'atar, every communication line was cut off, and ?bay eh inhabitants were left at the Christian Lebanese militia's mercy.

As Abu Jorge recounted, there were mainly four conflicts in ?bay eh that shaped the camp's life and relations with the Lebanese. The first one was the one in 1973, the second in 1975, then there was the 1982 Israeli Invasion, and finally the conflict in 1990 (after the *a`if* agreement that brought the end civil war).

The conflict of 1973 was between the Palestinians in ?bay eh and the Lebanese army, as the Lebanese army mounted a checkpoint at the highway below the camp and started to ask everyone entering towards the camp for an identity card. All of those who were recognized as Palestinians would be stopped and interrogated. Some of those who were stopped were beaten, while many others were jailed. The Palestinians who were in ?bay eh went to fight with their few Kalashnikovs, since in ?bay eh there were only a few PLO militants.

With the triggering of the Civil War by the famous *'Ayn Al-Rumaneh* bus incident[8] , from the January 7th to January 14th of 1976 ?bay eh was under siege due to a Kata`eb effort to control the camp. The fight was described to me by some ?bay eh elders as being between the Phalange Party, *el-a?rar*[9] (free man; from *?urry eh*, meaning freedom), and the Palestinians; and in the end the Phalange militiamen easily took the camp. There was not too much resistance because as Abu Jorge says, the camp was “small,” and did not have many “PLO people.” In the aftermath, the camp was finally occupied by force by

Kata`eb militias, and about five offices were installed in different points of the camp. As Abu Jorge recalls, many Kata`eb militants took over the Palestinians' houses, took their money, and used them to fill and carry sand bags to their front positions in East Beirut.

Close to the end of the war the Lebanese army lead by General *Michel Aoun* started their "War of Liberation," which was intended to get rid of all Lebanese militias – a precondition to the transition from his military rule to the establishment of a civil Lebanese government. One of the Army's main battles was with the Kata`eb, who accused Aoun of usurping the power and refused to cede their positions to the army general. As it turned out, the Kata`eb's territory bordered with that of Aoun exactly around ?bay eh, and because the Kata`eb still held offices in ?bay eh – militarily strategic position, since the camp is located on a hill overlooking the road linking Beirut to Tripoli – in 1990 the Lebanese Army shelled ?bay eh.

As Abu Jorge remembered, this time the Palestinian refugees were not the cause of the conflict, but rather caught in the crossfire. Following the army's success, according to UNRWA data, in 1990 alone twenty five percent of ?bay eh was turned into rubble (UNRWA 2010). Abu Jorge spoke to me about these matters in his own residence and in low voice, as according to him many of the Lebanese who were seeking shelter from the war, as well as many of those who came with the Kata`eb, were his next door neighbors.

Therefore, different than in other camps, the most important and immediate effect of the PLO's coming to Lebanon for ?bay eh's residents was a final severing of connections with the rest of the Palestinian refugee camps, and thus their sometimes voluntary and other times forced permeability to the context around them. This has been the case in the past, under the pressure of Christian Lebanese militiamen, and is the case today – still in the absence of Palestinian institutions – under the wings of Lebanese Christian social and charitable institutions, such as NGO's, schools, churches, and hospitals.

Conclusion

These two general oral histories demonstrate that in the locals' perspectives the histories of their camps are unique, albeit sharing similar narratives of Al-Nakba. Besides, ?bay eh's uniqueness is not seen by the locals as having been constituted directly by their divergent religious affiliations. Rather, the very homogenous Christian composition of the camp was created by the Lebanese, especially due to the Lebanese priest who recruited a selected (Christian) sample of refugees who were then located in a common refugee camp in south Lebanon (Rashidy eh).

It is true that, as Dr. Sayigh puts it, Christians and Muslims did tend to live and marry among their own in Palestinian villages such as Al-Bassa. But the fact that they lived in different quarters does not necessarily mean that they preferred not to mingle with Muslims in other aspects of social life.

That religion is a measure for identification among Christian Palestinians is not a novelty introduced with their coming to Lebanon as refugees, but much of the way some ?bay eh's Palestinians today (especially the younger generations) blur their Palestinianness by

affiliation with Christianity is a result of their tentative accommodation to their Lebanese surroundings. Since the PLO institutions never took a hold in the Christian camp, ?bay eh's population was socialized into a very different social reality. In ?bay eh, until very recently – and diametrically opposed to what happened in Al-Jalil – Palestinianness was not overtly celebrated, but actively privatized and commonly effaced (a bit by force, a bit by will). Besides open institutionalized repression, local culture and upbringing, ?bay eh residents have been trying to cope with their own unique situation in different ways than Al-Jalil's youth.

To conclude, there is no simple formula for understanding how Palestinian refugees in Lebanon relate to ethnicity, politics, religion, and their current condition of refugeeness – or any other category of belonging, as I demonstrate in *Refugee Lives*. But the deep imprint of the different socio-historical conditions to what each camp has been subjected should not be minimized, as I hope became clear throughout this paper.

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Notes

1. Schiocchet, Leonardo Augusto, 2010. Refugee Lives: Ritual and Belonging in Two Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon. PhD Dissertation defended at the Anthropology Department at Boston University.

2. Jayyusi, Lena , 2007. Iterability, Cumulativity, and Presence in Sa'di, Ahmad & Abu-Lughod, Lila; Jayyusi, Lena, 2007. Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory. New York: Columbia University Press.

3. “The Catastrophe” – as most Palestinian refugees call the creation of the state of Israel in 1947, which in turn created their own refugeeness.

4. El-‘Awd ah means the return to Palestine. And, at least among those refugees I met in Lebanon, takes much of its force through “ *El-Haqq El-`Awdah* ” (The Right of Return), as stipulated by the United Nations Resolution 194.

5. It is commonly known that thousands of Armenians coming from Turkey had been settled in ‘Anjar between 1920’s and the 1930’s (Sfeir 2008; Verdeil et al 2007).

6. Then, a Christian Lebanese right-wing militia.

7. The Jordanian Civil War, when the PLO was driven away to Jordan and moved to Lebanon.

8. When Lebanese opened fire on a bus caring a number of Palestinians in ‘Ayn Al-Rumeneh neighborhood of Beirut. This event I widely cited as marking the formal beginning of the Lebanese Civil War.

9. That I understood as being anyone that did not represent a political party or army.

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