Hospitality in the Name of God

An Ethnographic study of Lebanese Evangelicals hosting Syrian refugees

Håvard Østrem

Master thesis

Department of Social Anthropology

University of Oslo

Spring 2020

Copyright Håvard Østrem,

2020,

Hospitality in the Name of God,

Håvard Østrem

www.duo.uio.no

Publisher: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

All photographs are taken and owned by the author.

Abstract

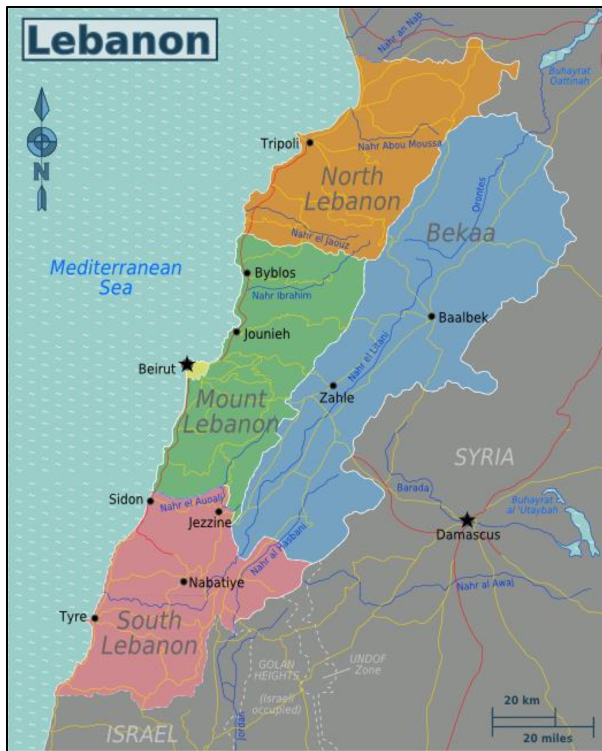
By turning the ethnographical gaze towards an Evangelical community in Beirut, Lebanon, which greets, hosts, and takes care of displaced Syrians, this thesis explores how believers motivate themselves to engage in humanitarian work. After the influx of refugees, caused by the spill-over of the Syrian civil war, the Lebanese society has experienced a widening social distance between the sects and faith-groups that fragments the country. The thesis employs the term "distance" to make sense of not only the historical developments that lead to confessionalism, but also to the current economic and social situation in Lebanon. This is further contrasted with "closeness", manifested in a small faith-based community in Beirut, which inter-religiously welcomes the Other. The social support work in the church is in essence humanitarian, but at the same time faith-based, and while one is not mutually exclusive of the other, this combination might in some cases lead to ethical and theological tensions, such as issues of conversion and unbalanced power relations. In fact, I argue that 'the gift' in a discourse of faith and humanitarianism is not without meaning, and the thesis explores different theoretical approaches to the gift in order to understand anticipations of reciprocity and the inherent power involved in giving to someone who cannot return the gift. The thesis asks if there is such a thing as an unconditional gift, and whether recipients still feel obliged to repay. Finally, we hear the voices of the community members themselves, as pastors, employees and volunteers negotiate and makes sense of their choices to wholeheartedly greet the stranger, in the name of God. Each person creates for themselves a multi-layered reasoning for engaging in humanitarian work, and some value the faith aspect higher than others. By investigating closer the different stated reasons, the thesis aims at displaying a broad range of why believers choose to show kindness and compassion towards strangers – a trait that is sorely lacked in the contemporary world.

Acknowledgements

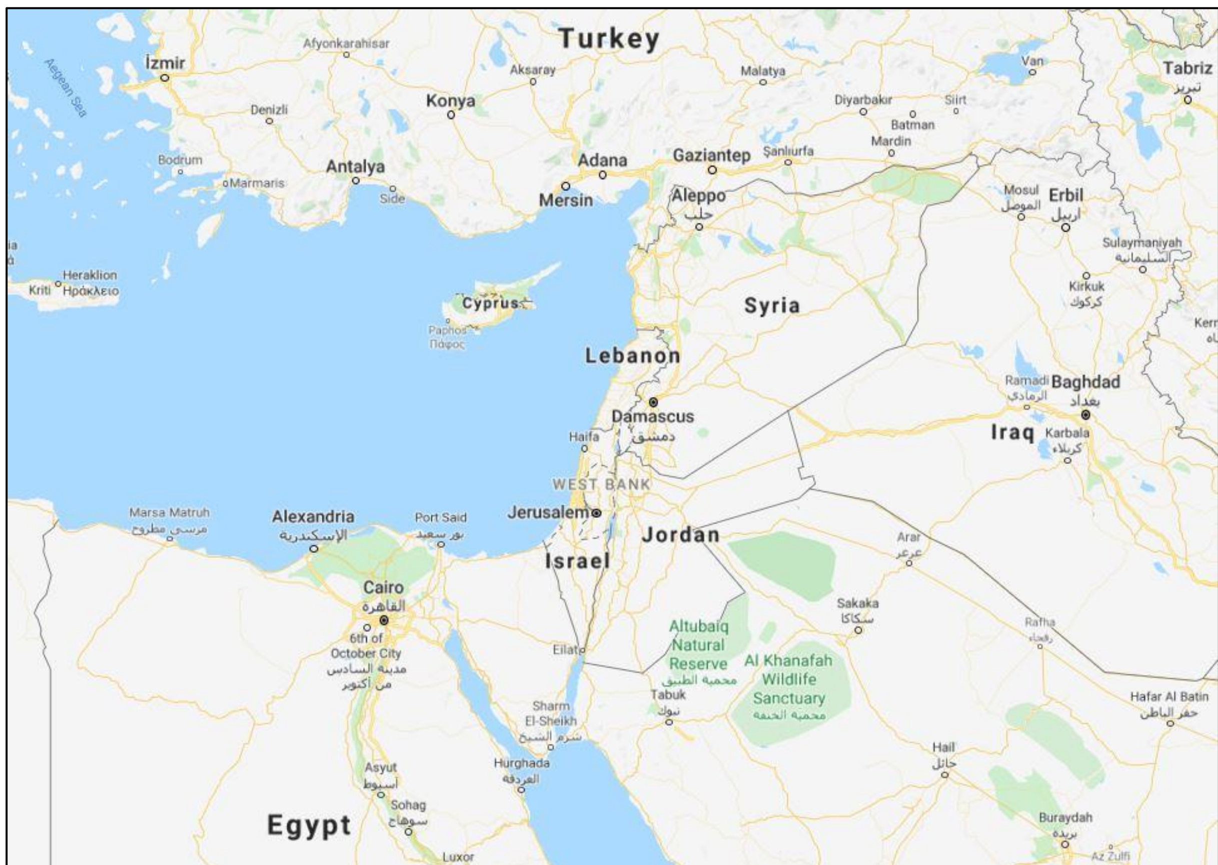
I must first and foremost thank my good friends and interlocutors in Beirut for their persistent encouragement, who during the fieldwork welcomed me with open arms and showed me hospitality like I have never experienced elsewhere. Their emotional support, friendship and interest motivated me to finish the thesis. Thank you for showing me compassion.

I would also like to express gratitude to my supervisor, Theodoros Rakopoulos, who over the last two years has been of great assistance, and a true inspiration and mentor in the process.

Finally, I am grateful to my partner, friends, and family for keeping me sane and on the right track. An extra appreciation goes to those of you who read, gave feedback, and contributed to important corrections.



1 Map of Lebanon.



2 Map of the Levant. Map data ©2020 Google, Mapa GISrael, ORION-ME.

Content

1. Introduction ... 1
Research question ... 2
Definitions and disrupted categories ... 4
Methodology ... 7
Reflexivity and position ... 8
Overview of the thesis ... 11
2. Keeping Distance ... 12
Basics on the Lebanese society ... 13
Thirty years of civil war and occupation ... 17
Hostility and refugees: Syrian relations ... 19
Where is the state? ... 25
3. Closeness: an Unlikely Family ... 27
Close relations ... 28
Community ... 33
Arbitrary volunteerism ... 40
4. "Pray for my son, pray for my rent" Faith-based giving and powerful relations ... 46
Hospitality in the name of God ... 46
Gifts in House of Christ ... 52
Reciprocity ... 54
The Unconditional gift ... 59
Graciousness ... 60
Powerful relations ... 61
5. "It's a Heavenly Purpose" The Objectives of Aid ... 65
Humanitarianism ... 66
"The end goal of this is really just to love them." ... 67
Hospitality ... 71
Serving God: a counter service ... 74
"Planting seeds" ... 78
One faith, multiple objectives ... 81
6. Conclusion ... 83
Epilogue ... 87
Literature ... 89

[35] But love your enemies, and do good to them,
and lend to them without expecting to get back anything.
Then your reward will be great,
and you will be children of the Most High,
for He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.
[36] Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6:35-36

Let the wary stranger who seeks refreshment keep silent with sharpened hearing;
with his ears let him listen, and look with his eyes;
thus each wise man scouts out the way.

Håvamål, verse 7.

1. Introduction

"When I grew up, there was civil war in Lebanon. I tried to escape from home a lot. Because of the environment I was in, many of my friends used to take drugs. I started to smoke, and tried weed and hookah, I went so deep on this path," Pastor Yousef recounted, while looking into my eyes. We were sitting at his desk in the small, open office area, overlooking the now empty church room in an impoverished neighbourhood in Beirut, Lebanon. He told me the story apparently without shame, and he seemed to have told it many times before. It was one of those profanity-to-piety stories that are often narrated in Evangelical circles. In his personal recollection, he explained how he went from being a drug abusing militia man in the Lebanese civil war, to a leader of an Evangelical congregation; how he was 'born-again'. But that was not the most striking part. I had come to this particular church, which I will call House of Christ, because of their extensive humanitarian work towards Syrian refugees in the neighbourhood. I was aware of the Lebanese conflictual history with Syria, and the general resentment in the population towards the displaced Syrians. The striking part about Pastor Yousef's story was his journey from fighting his enemies, to loving them, although many years later. The Lebanese civil war, which he referred to, happened between 1975 and 1990, followed by 15 years of Syrian occupation of Lebanon (Anderson, 2016). The hospitality that House of Christ now showed, made me curious to what might be their motivations to help the same Muslim neighbours whom they fought and hated only a few decades ago. Why, and how, could someone care so deeply for a stranger?

Pastor Yousef continued his personal story:

> I was raised in a family of non-believers, but they were Maronites.[1] I grew up in this [sectarian political] party, which had a militia, and because of the civil war, I had to join. The Lebanese hate the Syrians because they played a big role in the war. The Syrians surrounded us at that time, and cut our water and electricity. They started to drop bombs on us. Every home has someone killed by Syrians. That's why they hate them so much. Even the Christian areas hate the Syrians because the

[1] The Maronite Church is an Eastern Catholic church, mainly found in Lebanon.

> same thing happened to them. […] In the militia, I used to hit Syrians when I saw them. We also took their IDs and ripped them. The militia had a policy that said 'Know your enemy. Your enemy is Syria'. This was a Christian militia! The Syrians tortured me also. It is a bit difficult to forgive. It happened during the war. They got me and tortured me.

After quitting the militia in post-war Lebanon, and moving from his village to Beirut, Yousef started hanging out at nightclubs, became addicted to cocaine, and tried injecting narcotics. "This continued even after I got married. My wife didn't know that I was on drugs. And after the wedding she started to figure out, and because of that she lived under a lot of pressure. My son and daughter were growing up, and I didn't take care of them."

Pastor Yousef's dramatic recollection of the war taught me not only about the brutal past which most adults in Lebanon experienced and still vividly remember, and their views on the neighbouring people, but also how beliefs and worldviews are in a constant process of change. It was difficult to picture this small and chunky man, who was also the most smiling, peaceful and lovable person in the congregation, and the spiritual leader of more than hundred people, to have been a soldier and a drug abuser. This personal process is comparable to the transformation that many recipients of aid went through after they became part of the Evangelical community, as we will see.

Research question

An array of questions has been asked by scholars researching migrants and refugees the last few decades, and particularly in the wake of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 (See Rakopoulos, 2016; Oikonomakis, 2018, on solidarity; Mavelli & Wilson, 2017, on faith and migration). Topics such as citizenship, globalisation and borders, marginalisation and securitisation has been widely studied. The conjunction of hope and faith among displaced has also been under scrutiny. I leave these viewpoints for someone else to complete, and I will rather aim to get a closer look at the hosting community – the ones welcoming the displaced Other. This is not ground-breaking either (see for example Naguib, 2016; and Mavelli & Wilson, 2017), but by investigating hospitality in an otherwise hostile context and history, established through interreligious relationships, this study explores personal motivations for being hospitable. Put differently: why does an Evangelical community in Beirut choose to welcome and support the stranger?

This is not a question asked in a vacuum, but in the context of an increasingly polarized and fear-based globe, where the stranger is increasingly conceived as dangerous (Yassin, 2018, 9). As a result of refugee influx following geopolitical conflictual reasons – among other the Syrian civil war that hit the adjacent countries in 2012 and Europe in 2015 – a “new wave of anti-immigrant and anti-refugee reactions” (ibid.) has emerged. To counter this sentiment, I will explore how there are actors who do what they believe is goodness towards displaced, and whether these actions are theological anchored. By looking at hospitality in hostile environments, I believe we might change our perceptions of the stranger in general, and refugees in particular (Carriere, 2017, 148). Therefore, this is not a study of fear, suffering and xenophobia, but rather of humanity, hope and hospitality (Robbins, 2013).

This thesis is a small contribution to an already extensive anthropology of the Middle East and Mediterranean. It is overlapping and confirmative of much of what has been written on the topics of moral and religious studies, and is placed in the conjunction between the latter and political economy. It looks at how aid is materialised in a moral discourse, and asks if it is useful to use gift exchange as an analytical approach in humanitarian work. Much of the existing work on the Mediterranean and the Middle East is concerned with the flow of resources, and particularly the relations between giver and receiver of those resources. The thesis will consequently carry a notion of social economy, but I stress the affectionate aspect of such. Empathy will manifest through the faith system as compassion, which we will see is highly regulatory as to how the resources are distributed.

My fieldwork was conducted in Beirut, Lebanon, in the context of the refugee influx from Syria, which also brought multi-displaced Iraqis and Palestinians in addition to Kurds and Syrians. I was curious of why people in a religious community would spend time and energy on hosting and caring for a precarious group of people with a profoundly different background and life situation, namely people who not so long ago were called the enemy, as the vignette showed. Simply put: what motivates the believing giver and host, to seemingly greet the stranger on the doorstep unconditionally?

Even if this is a universal and highly generalised question bordering on philosophical intervention, this study utilises an ethnographically unique example in order to suggest an answer – or as we will see, multiple answers. Studies of faith-based local communities hosting refugees is not new or unique (see Mavelli & Wilson, 2017), but what is rare on the other hand, is *ethnographical* studies of religious communities hosting and supporting people affiliated

with another faith. Added to that is the history of war and occupation between the two countries in question, still creating tense and often conflicting social relations in the society at large.

One reason that faith-based humanitarianism seems somewhat understudied could be the role of faith, which often in the humanitarian discourse is neglected or dismissed as something irrelevant or even irrational. Scholars of humanitarianism has long reduced religion to something secondary of what is truly important: the human being. Along with Amira Mittermaier, I argue that we should "take God seriously" (Mittermaier, 2019, 5-6) when studying social phenomena in faith-based communities. If their faith in God is important in our interlocutors' daily lives, it should be a subject of investigation to the researcher. In my study, we will meet born and raised Christians, born-again Evangelicals (note the difference), Sunni Muslims, "cultural Muslims", ex-Muslims, and so on. In all of these peoples' lives, (either the Christian or the Muslim) God, personal faith, and the doctrinal and social community plays an immense role, both transformative and performative.

Definitions and disrupted categories

Some definitions are due to start off with. I have found inspiration in how preceding scholars has dealt with the terminology, but more importantly are my own definitions based on emic understandings of terms: how and when words were used, both verbal and as actions.

My understanding of 'hospitality' is inspired by Derrida, Pitt-Rivers, Herzfeld and many others, and I understand it to be goodhearted action towards the Stranger, manifested as care. In the Beiruti setting, as in any big city, the stranger does not necessarily have to be a traveller or foreigner in the geographical sense, but is a stranger to a social community. When a newcomer to the church said that he had lived five years in the neighbourhood, it was not surprising. The sectarian demographical enclosures are characteristic of Beirut as we will see, often reducing the Neighbour to a Stranger. Still, in our case, the stranger who was shown hospitality was most often Syrian. While "the stranger is the absolute unknown, whose radical alterity echoes the numinous presence" (Candea & da Col, 2012, 6), hospitality is also frail, and could easily be replaced with hostility if the wrong turn is taken. As a guest, you have an implicit responsibility to honour your host, according to Pitt-Rivers (2017), who also claims that gratitude is the simplest way to do this. In any case, a relation between host and guest must constantly be negotiated and maintained. Important to Derrida, is that hospitality "does not only concern the foreigner" (Still, 2005, 93), emphasising on the role of the host. Levinas also makes it clear that the host *needs* the alterity, in order to define oneself. It is only through the Stranger that we

make sense of who we are, and who we are not, thus the relationship is necessary as an ambiguous tool for constituting the self (Levinas, 2000). As should be clear by now, the current research question is asking why the *hosts* are hosting, rather than why the guests are "guesting". I understand the host's position in the relation as the most ambivalent and frail (Fassin, 2012, 133), but also the most powerful – in all senses of the word.

'Humanitarianism' is closely linked to hospitality, or put differently, one could argue that hospitality is one type of humanitarianism. I view the latter as a range of different types of actions, covering an equally wide range of needs in the recipient. It is a deliberate improvement of any aspects of human conditions, elevating the suffering and pain resulting from crises (emergency relief) or structural demeaning circumstances, and is loosely based on Miriam Ticktin's understanding of the term (Ticktin, 2014, 274). The main difference, which my interlocutors emphasised thoroughly, is that *all* aspects of life are important, not only material aid, such as food, water and shelter, but also spiritual, social and emotional aspects, which we will see in the following chapters has a significant influence on a person's welfare, especially in a time of crisis.

Disrupted categories

The usefulness and uselessness of categories as analytical units will be clear in how they are applied in this thesis. I find the usage of tags such as "Muslim" or "refugee" ambivalent for their reduction and simplification of the human subject. One of anthropology's biggest paradoxes is the need to generalise in order to say anything at all, and the textual simplification of complexity is distancing what is written to what is lived experience, and unfortunately, as social researchers we must utilise categories to make sense of our findings. We seek to break down categories, but at the same time are we dependent on them to make sense of the world we see, thus reproducing them. For example, as a researcher studying the conjunction of Christianity and Islam, or Muslims and Evangelicals, categories such as these are what first comes to mind (Mavelli & Wilson, 2017, 5). We tend to take them for granted, unable to ask critical questions of what they imply. My interlocutors from Syria remain prime examples. Most of them were born into Muslim families, they would tell me. I then asked rhetorically: "so you are Muslim?". Amir, one of the young men in the community, told me that it was not that simple. First of all, he differentiated between a "real" believer, and what his family were, "just Muslims", thus implicitly connecting the faith system to a "cultural" way of living. But after he fled alone from Syria, he sought community and friendship in House of Christ where he became a loyal member. When asked about his current faith, he hesitatingly answered that he "thought

he was Christian". In other words, the categories we apply are often best suited for the researcher, and are not always applicable to how people relate to their complex and changing selves. Thus, by utilising the generalised terms "Muslims" and "Christians", we try to say something general and encompassing, but at the same time, we reduce our human interlocutors to simple tags that they themselves not always recognize. I wish to highlight this conundrum in the introduction, but throughout the thesis, a certain level of generalisation is necessary in order to compare and make sense of ontologies.

Contradictions, discrepancies and oxymorons might evolve into apparently incoherent ontologies in the thesis, but as anthropologists, we are trained to seek divergences in what people do, what they say they do, and what they say they think. It will also be clear that I am not looking for one answer, but rather an emical understanding of how my interlocutors made sense of their choices while forming their lives and faith. I will show that 'Christianity' or even 'Evangelism' is not always one coherent doctrine, but rather a range of ideas built on individual and collective perceptions and values. Some argue along biblical lines, while others with strictly humanitarian reasoning in a seemingly secular manner.

Further, I will not contribute to an "anthropology of suffering" (Robbins, 2013), by reducing my refugee interlocutors to tormented objects (Mittermaier, 2019, 107). In fact, the word 'refugee' might have implicit victim connotations (Mavelli & Wilson, 5; 7), but I prefer showing how displaced people are creative, persevering and mindful humans with agency, rather than letting the term go to waste in sympathy. El-Nakib and Ager (2015, 29) argues by the same lines when investigating humanitarian work done by local faith-communities in a refugee camp in Jordan: "[…] there was general agreement that beneficiaries were not powerless or passive recipients of assistance, that they deliberately and actively tapped into resources made available by Christian organizations […]" (ibid.).

Narrowing in

During fieldwork, I found it difficult to engage in the female sphere, even though I had some female interlocutors who were employed in House of Christ. Hence, a fully balanced gender perspective is probably not presented in this study. It is for now worth mentioning that 81% of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women and children (Yassin, 2019, 20), making gender a trait that influence how hospitality is enacted, and the general perceptions among the Lebanese population. Muslim refugee women have lower income than men, adding to the difficulties of their economic situations. In the church community, this gendered fact influenced some of the

services offered to the displaced, manifested for example in female hygienic products and possibilities of meeting with a gynaecologist.

The reader might also find a lack of discussion on citizenship and non-citizens strange, considering the displacement issue, but it was never a topic of conversation among neither the Lebanese nor Syrian refugees. I suggest that the absence of the state, combined with strong confessionalism and emphasis on the local community, made the unity of citizenship irrelevant and too abstract for my Lebanese interlocutors. The displaced were more concerned about the separation between documentees and *sans papiers*, which determined whether they were eligible for certain rights and services.

Furthermore, other topics that will not be covered in the thesis, is the link between faith-based humanitarian work and proselytizing (with the exception of a section in chapter 5), and the link between evangelism and materiality (for more on this, see Bornstein, 2005; Coleman, 2004).

Methodology

The present thesis is based on six months ethnographic fieldwork in Beirut, from January to June 2019. The congregation where the research was conducted is located in one of Beirut's underprivileged suburbs, but location and name of the church will be anonymized for the protection of my interlocutors. In House of Christ, I worked as a volunteer, handing out food, blankets, medicines, in addition to organizing movie nights for young men and teaching a computer class for Syrians. As mentioned, I was interested in how volunteers, employees and leaders of the church community viewed the support work in the neighbourhoods, and many of them became close friends and interlocutors in the research. In addition, a group of young Syrian men who spent much time hanging out in the church, kindly included me in their social group, and their voices will also be present throughout the thesis. During my stay in Lebanon, I spent most of my time in the church, which turned out to be a social hub for all kinds of people in the community, who came and went through the day.

I chatted, observed, helped out, drank instant coffee, ate shawarma, interviewed, and in general "hung out", in the church – conducting "participant observation" among the faithful. Language was partly a challenge, but due to a four weeks intensive Arabic course and a strong perseverance of non-English speaking interlocutors, we managed to communicate. Most Lebanese spoke English well, and were usually helpful in translating the Arabic I did not understand. Thus, all interviews, except one, were conducted in English. The interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that I wanted to understand how people made sense of their

ontologies, and by asking the same questions it became easier to compare. Still, interviews often turned out quite different from each other, both in topics, styles, and length. Interviewing as a method is, as we know, not sufficient (Burawoy, 1998). When investigating personal motivation, actions are as illuminating as stated reasons, if not more so; at best, it is difficult to be sure of what one says is based on sincere feelings. In fact, I found that people often did not reflect on their reason to do certain things. Thus, a constant pitfall of the research was the inability to really know how my interlocutors saw the world. This, of course, is a common problem, or even paradox, of anthropology, but it is equalized by our qualitative method, which secures in-depth and long-lasting relations with interlocutors. Still, in the end, we are left with one option: to trust what our senses and our interlocutors tell us (see for example Mittermaier, 2014, 521).

Reflexivity and position

Even though an ethnographer and his interlocutors manage to speak the same language, it should not be taken for granted that they always understand each other. Studying unfamiliar social phenomena in an unfamiliar cultural setting is in itself an argument for long-term fieldwork. The ethnographer must first get to know the environment s/he is researching, before recognizing particularities. One way of avoiding this problem of the initial affiliation process, is through the resonance between the researcher and the interlocutors (Wikan, 1992). The more 'tacit knowledge' (Wolfinger, 2002, 87) the ethnographer brings to the fieldwork, the easier will the period of adaptation be. My personal position as a Christian who was raised in the Church of Norway, and later in an Evangelical congregation, not only granted me access where it would not have been possible otherwise, but also created a fellowship of trust between myself and my interlocutors in a short amount of time. House of Christ gave me an internship on the premise of my faith, thus including me into their community. In addition, I came to the church community with a certain type of tacit knowledge about a highly internationalised charismatic Evangelical discourse. For example, there was no "culture shock" when witnessing an embodied type of worship. Even the songs were played to familiar melodies. This meant that I could skip some of the "first-encounter inquires", and faster make way for deeper levels of understanding. It does not mean however, that I immediately understood everything that was going on in the House of Christ, but I quickly felt at home, and the context was somewhat familiar. This led me to look for what was particular and unique, not in the faith discourse itself and how it was materialized, but in how the discourse was enacted within the specific context of post-war relations with displaced neighbours. What I brought to the field shaped my

questions, and I believe that a non-believing researcher would have been more attracted to the doctrinal or ritual aspects of the church. Researchers are intrigued by the unfamiliar, which in my case was not the faith itself, but the conjunction of humanitarianism and religion. In retrospect, I value the saved time and trust gained in having resonance with the congregation.

Kathryn Kraft (2012), who also happened to do research on church communities in Beirut, argues that her informants' "[…] willingness to share with [her] was based on trust and their understanding of who [she was]: what they shared and how they shared it was in response to their perceptions of [their] relationship" (Kraft, 2012, 19). In other words, the type of information we gain access to, is partly based on how our interlocutors view the relationship between them and us. Meneses et al. (2014) contend that anthropologists and theologians have much to learn from each other, especially in the discourse of believing subjects. When speaking of the researcher's position as a believer, they argue that "being religiously committed can assist them [the researcher] to comprehend, and even validate, their subjects' own points of view" (Meneses, et al. 2014, 89). In other words, a believing researcher has an inherent opportunity to make sense of the lives and choices of believing subjects. Still, the fieldwork in Beirut was conducted in an unfamiliar society, though in a somewhat "familiar" culture and community. We can thus view my position as one of discursive insider, but cultural outsider (see also Bornstein, 2005).

The granted access, as mentioned above, would not be able without resonance. My position as a Christian, European male undoubtedly presented opportunities that would otherwise have been denied. An immediate level of trust and social recognition was given from my interlocutors, and the mentioned group of young Syrian men kindly included me in their social gatherings. The pitfall of this position, especially as a Christian, is the lack of critical distance, somewhat similar to doing ethnography "at home". When things are too familiar, we stop asking critical questions, and I found that the best antidote was to remain aware of the influence this had on the research. The disadvantage of being a male researcher (if there are any) was for my part a lack of access to the female sphere, which as mentioned, informs the outcome of this thesis. Finally, my position as Norwegian was ambiguous because House of Christ had some ties to Norway, through donations from Norwegian organisations and cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council. I do not think it was ever the case, but if someone saw me as a representative of a donor, it could have affected behaviour towards me. Further, the leaders of the church might have taken extra precautions and spent too much resources on facilitating my

stay, thus draining the actual social work. Finally, I cannot know for sure how my position affected how the members of the church perceived me and my role as a researcher.

Challenges

This section is short, but one of the most important throughout the thesis. It is twofold: the first part considers emotional challenges for the ethnographer; the second discusses general ethical challenges in the field, especially on behalf of my interlocutors. On the question of the reason to studying moral ontologies in the first place, I lean on Nefissa Naguib (2010), who states that "Affective human sentiments are fragile and pervasive, and yet they have the possibility to assist us in developing tools for social analysis of care giving, revealing some of the most basic ways that human societies under structural violence sort out life, make sense of their world, as well as how people practice or transform relationships" (Naguib, 2010, 125-126). I believe the sentiments she refers to are those of our interlocutors, but I argue that we should have a keen eye to our own emotions, and how they too can be tools for analysing how and why we react certain ways to certain social phenomena. Put differently, how the ego reacts should not be forgotten, even when studying other people's sentiments.

Studying humanitarianism among poor displaced people in an overpopulated and war-torn part of Beirut was emotionally draining. Sickness, hunger and despair was always present, but so were happy moments of community, care and hospitality. For my part, it was difficult not to get emotionally distressed when walking around in the neighbourhood, especially when visiting people in their cramped homes. As a defence mechanism I developed an emotional distance to the misery, to get around this emotional distress. This very objective, unhuman and artificial gaze allowed me to conduct my research without breaking down, but it became the objectivity-vs-subjectivity debate embodied. Being emotionally engaged with interlocutors and fellow humans should resonate with the ethnographer, but at a point the closeness makes analytical research impossible. Creating a sentimental barrier, on the other hand, makes the research possible, but removes the human aspect. I do not have the answer to this conundrum, I only suggest that each ethnographer must negotiate and balance his own trajectory.

The other and more substantial part of challenges experienced in Beirut were ethical ones, mainly tied to interlocutors' anonymity. While some were born and raised Christians in the sectarian country of Lebanon, and thus contended their religious freedom without any reason of fear, others had come from a Muslim country with their Islamic faith intact, but later transformed or converted into 'born-again' Christians. This transformation included a great risk

of persecution to the converts themselves, and to their immediate families. To maintain interlocutors' anonymity has therefore been an utmost priority before, under, and after the conduction of fieldwork.

This fact was also the reason that the study is not first and foremost concerned with displaced refugees themselves, but rather their hosts. By choosing this unorthodox approach, I hope to minimize the exposure of converts, even though they often show pride in their newfound beliefs. Further, the study of converts in the Middle East has been given much attention in the social sciences (see for example Kraft 2012, 2013; Schirrmacher 2019).

Needless to say, all personae have been altered to the unrecognisable. Revealing details of the church has intentionally been left out, as have detailed descriptions of areas. Many of my interlocutors live in fear of persecution, and especially vulnerable are those families and individual who holds a precarious future of not knowing whether they will remain in Lebanon, try to exit to Europe or elsewhere, or, which is currently the increasing trend, return to Syria. It was consequently not surprising that many of my close friends and interlocutors had adapted fake names, rather than using their birthnames. For these individuals, the present anonymisation functions thus as a double insurance.

Overview of the thesis

How then, should we best prepare to find possible answers to our inquiry? Following the introduction is an overview of the context where the social and humanitarian work is taking place, both in the society and in the community. I apply the binary opposition of *closeness* and *distance* as a meaningful analytical tool to understand not only the current inter-national and inter-religious relations in Lebanon, but also the conflictual and sectarian history of the country and how that has shaped the present-day situation. Next, I revisit 'the gift', to see if faith-based humanitarianism can contribute to a critique of Mauss' famous understanding of what it means to give and receive. Finally, I ask what the motivations for my interlocutors are to engage in this work, and take a closer look at their emic objectives in supporting and hosting refugees.

The thesis is constructed as follows: Chapter two looks at *when* and *where* the hospitality work is taking place, describing the socio-political context. Chapter three investigates the community itself, thus considering *who* is doing *what*. Further, chapter four pursues the question of *how* it is done, and finally, in chapter five we hear the voices of the interlocutors making sense of their personal, deliberate choices, answering the question of *why* they invest time, money and themselves in the displaced stranger.

2. Keeping Distance

"As such, the stranger is near and far at the same time*, as in any relationship based on merely universal human similarities"* – Georg Simmel, 1908 (148).

Lebanese society is significant for several reasons. Not only is it carrying a troubled history of war, sectarianism, and fragility, but the country is today balancing on a knife's edge made up by a powerless state, an immense debt, and political stalemate. At the same time, Lebanon is hosting a large portion of the spill over from the Syrian civil war, but refugees from the neighbouring country are denied hospitality in formal camps. Thus, displaced people are forced to find residence on their own. As we will see in this chapter, Lebanese economy is on the brink of collapse, making it even more difficult for both hosting nationals and refugees to find livelihood. Despite these challenging circumstances, the Lebanese society is still afloat, but it is marked by a seemingly unbridgeable gap between people of different backgrounds.

I have deliberately chosen to present a history of distancing through the eyes of my informants, which is clearly a one-sided moral history of negotiating the accommodation of the Syrian nation in general, and Syrian soldiers, refugees and workers in particular. It is therefore an emic and subjective presentation of a micro-history, which from a moral point of view tries to make sense of a national and regional macro-history.

Throughout this chapter, we will see how Lebanese society is signified by different kinds of distance. We will also see that the only form of distance that is not prevalent in Lebanon is the geographical type. But elsewhere distance is reigning in relations, between sects, in economy, and in general communication. I find the term *distance* applicable when investigating the Lebanese society, and it will in the following chapter be contrasted with *closeness*, which can be found in communities hidden away in the corners of society. As shortly displayed, distance is both an active choice made by actors on both sides of the social gap to prevent interaction with the stranger on the other side, and at the same time a deeply structural trait in the society, created by many years of sectarian trench digging. Combined, these makes up a vicious circle of ever-increasing distance.

Basics on the Lebanese society

To understand today's religious and political situation in Lebanon, it is important to consider the history of the country, but due to limits of space, we must remain brief in the description of the historical context.

The geographical area of Lebanon has for a long time been important in trade routes, and European ships often docked on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean on their wayfaring to the Far East. The close connection to Europe is still obvious in the country, and most of the residents speaks either French or English in addition to Levantine Arabic.

In July 1920, Lebanon, as a part of Greater Syria, was invaded and put under direct French colonial jurisdiction (Anderson, 2016, 223). Not long after, as a result of an Ottoman-like divide-and-rule tactic where religious minorities gained semi-autonomy (ibid. 25), the Syrian Mandate was separated into ethnoreligious provinces – a feature which to this day has a tight grip on the country. The provinces east of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains became "Greater Lebanon", which France decided to separate from the rest of Syria. Here runs the Bekaa Valley parallel to what is the Lebanese Syrian border today, only a few kilometres from the main crossing point between the two countries. This particular area was of interest to France because of its dense Christian population, which was recognized to make up half the Lebanese population, while the other half was Muslim. A Christian ally to the French along the Mediterranean shore was useful in trade, but also strategical for political and military reasons. In May 1923, the constitution of the Lebanese Republic was ratified (Anderson, 2016, 224).

Sectarianism

One of the most striking features of the Lebanese society, in my opinion, is its strong emphasis on contrasts, and how they deploy an often-exaggerated rhetoric of differences between people. Categorising seems an important tool to make sense of social groups, as we will see.

The Christians of Lebanon were, and still are, mainly Maronite, which is an Eastern Catholic church. There are other Christian denominations in Lebanon, among them the Greek Catholic church, the Armenian Orthodox church, and several Protestant communities, including an increasing number of Evangelical congregations. Muslims are highly represented in the country today (arguably more than half of the population), mainly consisting of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. In addition, the Druze community has always been large in the area, traditionally

residing in the mountain areas of Lebanon. A total number of 18 different faiths[2] are commonly accepted in the country, creating a web of interfaith relations, but even more dominant is the sectarian *division* that strengthens the feeling of internal group belonging. The result is a society made up by different faith-based groups, which in some cases, like the Maronites, claims to be an *ethnoreligious* group. In fact, sectarianism, or confessionalism as it is sometimes referred to, is by many regarded as the most describing aspect of the Lebanese society. The majority of political parties is either simply equivalents of faith groups, or highly influenced by faith belonging, making political parties made up by religiously mixed politicians rare. This is inevitably creating stalemate, especially in the political sector, because cooperating with another party who identifies with exactly what differentiate them, is causing social and religious distance and conflict between parties and people (Knudsen & Kerr, 5).

The third day of fieldwork, my Lebanese host whom I stayed with during the first two weeks, expressed his frustration with the political situation. He was in his thirties, held a stable job at a bank, and owned his own apartment. In other words, he was better off than most of his co-nationals. Still he looked back to the time of the Syrian occupation between 1990 and 2005 with ambivalent nostalgia. With the Syrian presence came a firm leadership, and life was more predictable, he said. Then he told an analogy: "I like to compare this country with a house full of kids, with only one father. As long as he is there, things are under control, but as soon as he leaves, no one gets anything done. It can take years before someone works out a working policy, because no one wants to cooperate." In his mind the father was Syria, and the kids were different sectarian leaders, trying to take as much of the shared resources as possible. His analogy was particularly timely, because after winning the general election in May 2018, prime minister Saad Hariri had by that point spent 9 months trying to form a government. The election itself was five years overdue, and had been postponed three times since it was originally supposed to take place in 2013.

In 1943, Lebanese politicians agreed on “The National Pact”, which determined the roles of the different sectarian leaders (Knudsen & Kerr, 5). Rooted on a 1932 consensus[3] which stated that 51% of the country was Christian, while 49% was Muslim, a multi-confessional state arose, and a shared power agreement was laid down. Thus, the “Troika” was agreed, giving the presidential position to a Maronite Christian, the prime minister to a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the House to a Shi’ite. “As a result, all positions — legislative, executive, judicial,

[2] 12 Christian denominations, five Muslim denominations, and Judaism.
[3] Today, it is still the only official consensus in the country.

as well as those of the civil service — were allocated along confessional lines […] On the surface, this agreement seemed to create an equitable power-sharing agreement that protected all the sects from one another" (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 382). The agreement has been described as a painful compromise, based on inter-confessional competition (Knudsen & Kerr, 5), which over the years has become consolidated, but remains a target of public dispute.

"No victor, no vanquished" has by several authors been expressed as critique to show the problem of a competing multi-confessional society in Lebanon, meaning that nothing gets done because of the power sharing agreement (Knudsen & Kerr, 2012, 5; Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 384). As in several states in the region, such as Iraq, Syria and Cyprus, strong religious belonging is not only a source, but also a manifestation, of political disagreement, which in some cases may develop into conflicts. "The immediate purpose of heightening the discord between Christians and Muslims is to create artificial unity within each religion as internal conflicts are subsumed in order to intensify the struggle against the external enemy" (Orji, 2011, 477).

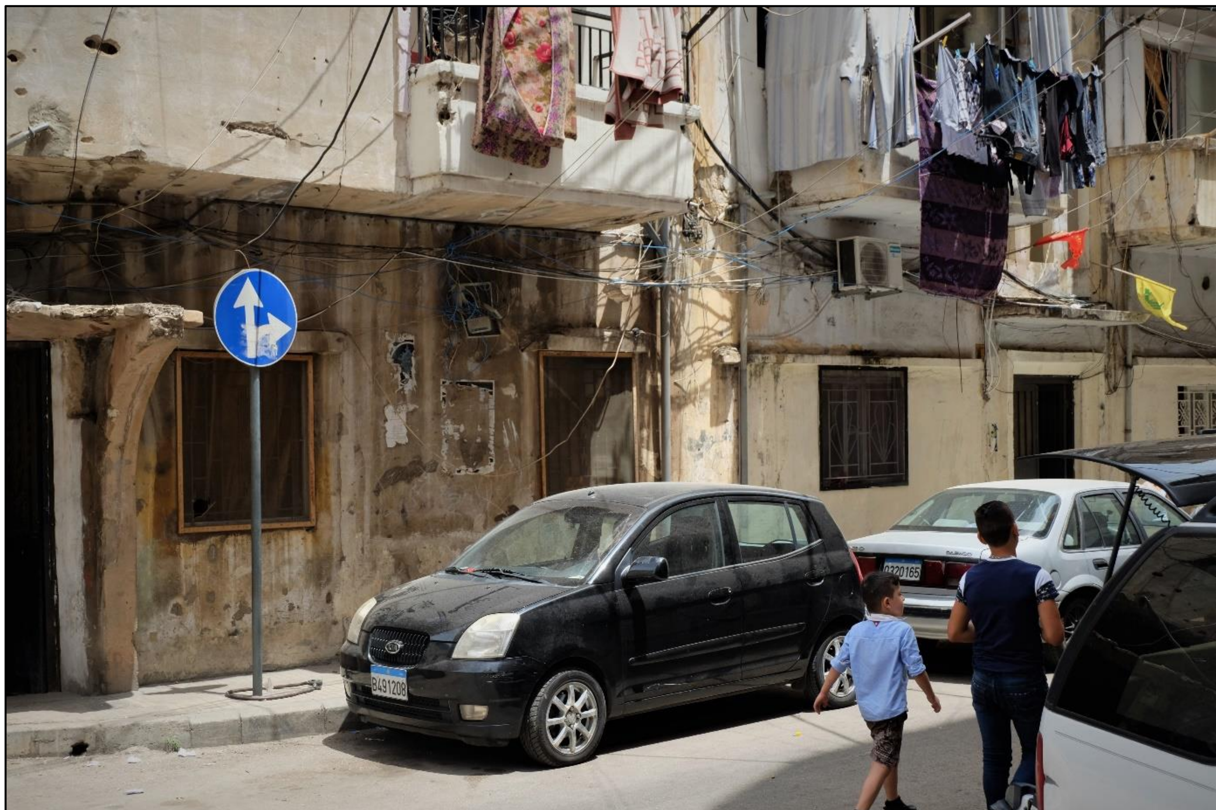
A recent example from Lebanon is telling. During the fall of 2019, raging wildfires were afflicting parts of the country. The Christian politician Mario Aoun asked in all seriousness "why were all the fires specifically located in Christian areas?", utilising a suspicious, sectarian and dividing rhetoric. Areas separated by religious lines are common in Lebanon, and throughout the country it is easy to identify the belonging of a certain neighbourhood, which is literally flagged or clearly marked with faith symbols. The Lebanese people are categorised by religious affiliation, further widening the social distance in the population.

Economic distance

Before turning to the formative Lebanese civil war, we will for a moment consider the economical distance in the country. Reem, a young female employee in House of Christ, stated that "the Lebanese [people] are really into appearances and prestige. So it's all part of that image, that we want others to see us for."

In the weak Lebanese state, the confessional leaders oversee much of the private sector of the country, making sure the needs of services and goods are covered for its people. Thus, Lebanon has become a neoliberal state, where the central government builds a foundation of competition between the confessional groups. After parts of Beirut were destroyed in the 15 year long civil war, the late prime minister Rafic Hariri was responsible for rebuilding the city. Solidere, the private company founded by Hariri, has since the middle of the 1990s rebuilt parts of Beirut's

now fancy downtown. “Hariri’s entrepreneurial vision […] has turned the city centre into a glitzy business metropolis catering for oil-rich elites and international business corporations” (Knudsen & Kerr, 2012, 12). A neoliberal state in debt, combined with a large sectarian private sector, has over the last 30 year created big differences and distances among the Lebanese people, particularly making a few rich entrepreneurs and politicians richer. “The country remains physically segregated into distinct confessional enclaves” (ibid. 13), but is also economically split. The contrasts in the capital are vast, especially if one ventures out of the “glitzy business” center, and into some of the areas that has not been rebuild after the war, such as the Palestinian refugee camps, the impoverished neighbourhoods where most Syrians have settled, or marginalised areas and cities outside Beirut.



3 Kids walking in a quiet street of Beirut. In the background hangs a Hezbollah flag.

Thirty years of civil war and occupation

A brutal civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1975 after sectarian clashes. The build-up to the armed conflict consisted of a combination of national political arguing, caused by confessional power sharing and economic problems, combined with external, regional conflicts, namely the Israel/Palestine issue (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 383). The already weak government was unable to prevent the initial fighting turning into large scale conflicts, which led to the outbreak of war on April 13, 1975.

The Lebanese civil war was complex and multidimensional, in the sense that it was an interconfessional war where the alliances often changed throughout the 15 years (Fisk, 1990). At the same time it was also a proxy war in the midst of the Cold War era, in a region where both the US and the Soviet Union were trying to grasp power, and to weaken the opposition (Kerr, 2012, 34). Further, the regional powers at the time, namely Syria and Israel, also had their own interests in the civil war. A few years before the outbreak in Lebanon, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, PLO, was kicked out of Jordan, and was allowed to stay in Lebanon to continue the fight against Israel. So after the Lebanese civil war started, Syria entered Lebanon on US' blessings with 12000 soldiers in 1976. The Americans hoped Assad would help defeat PLO which sided with the Soviet Union and consequently posed a common threat in the region (ibid.).

Syria on the other hand, had their own interests. By maintaining a weak state in Lebanon, Hafiz Assad would have the power to control the country, and thus a better grip of the Israeli situation. The Syrian president utilised alternating Lebanese sectarian militias to fight whoever was the biggest threat at the particular moment. "Syria vacillated between supporting the Muslim, Druze, and the Christian forces, at all times working to guarantee that no group could grow powerful enough to control the entire country" (Anderson, 2016, 354). When the Syrian army entered Lebanon in 1976, it would mark the beginning of a nearly 30 year-long military occupation that remains fresh in the Lebanese' collective memory.

All in all, the 15 year long civil war resulted in "[…] more than 144,000 killed; 184,000 injured; 13,000 kidnapped; and at least 17,000 missing" (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 382). As we will see, relations between Lebanese and Syrians are tense to this day, and many are traumatised by the memory of war, blaming much of the conflicted damage on Syria.

Sectarian distance

Blaming the entire civil war on Syria is a simplistic, but mainstream reasoning among Lebanese people, which unifies them internally, and ignores sectarian differences that also played a fundamental part in the build-up before the war, and more importantly, manifested throughout the war by confessional militias (Fisk, 1990). In fact, because the civil war was first and foremost sectarian, one result of the conflicts was deepened trenches between communities. In a vicious circle, a growing lack of trust between the sects is causing further distance (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 384). Even today, thirty years after the war ended, a great mistrust reigns in the Lebanese people. According to a survey, 85 per cent of the Lebanese population believes that they, as a nation, has not yet fully reconciled with one another (ibid. 386-387).

The war ended in 1989, when a peace agreement was signed in Ta'if in Saudi Arabia. Syria became an international guarantor, and while the agreement redistributed power more equally along confessional lines, it weakened the state and empowered the sectarian hold on certain institutions, further dividing the populations (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 385). Syria on the other hand, became a proxy-state (Kerr, 2012, 33), which also reflected an U.S. disinterest in Lebanon (during the Gulf-war), and Hezbollah's rise to power in the country. The Shi'a militia-cum-party Hezbollah arose during the civil war as a resistance force at the time of two Israeli invasions in southern Lebanon. Post-war, the party was the only military militia allowed to remain armed, according to the Ta'if Agreement. In addition, the Parliament seats which up till that point had given the Christians a slight advantage in numbers, were now evenly distributed between Christians and Muslims. Further, the Christian President's position was weakened, and the Ta'if Agreement gave more power to the two Muslim positions.

Part of the problem with the agreement of 1989, according to Ghosn & Khoury, was the encompassing amnesty law, which indiscriminatorily swept all crimes committed during the civil war under the rug, including war crimes and human right crimes (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011, 390). Afterwards, there was no room for juridical closure at a trans-sectarian level. The results are still ongoing accusations against leaders of different sects, and a widening socio-political distance in the country, but there have been recent signs of a youth generation trying to overcome the sectarian distance in Lebanon, symbolising hope of a unified country.[4]

---

[4] Particularly noteworthy were the protests that began during the fall of 2019, which for a short while utilised a post-sectarian language and were united under the Lebanese cedar, instead of sectarian flags which usually reigns in such protests. See the epilogue for more.

Hostility and refugees: Syrian relations

The Lebanese civil war is relevant for several reasons. Not only is it a recurring topic and scapegoat in the Lebanese society, both at a community level and government level, but today's Syrian-Lebanese relations are also highly inflicted by the conflict. The Syrian army remained in Lebanon 15 years after the war had ended, which for many acted as a constant reminder of loss, grief and war. Not before prime minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated in 2005, which led to nationwide protests against the Syrian presence in Lebanon, called "the Cedar Revolution", did the foreign army pull out, leaving Lebanon to deal with their swelling troubles on their own. 2005 thus marked the first time in 30 years without a foreign state power residing in Lebanon. Some authors have argued that it also marked a nationwide awakening from a "collective amnesia" of the civil war and the following occupation period, but also causing the consequential problem of "subjective memories" of the war (Knudsen & Kerr, 2012, 13). By not talking about the brutal civil war for 15-30 years, and being unable to create a public discourse about the traumas inflicted upon each other, the sectarian narratives of war further divided the population.

One extra crisis coming

Reem, the young woman mentioned above, shared her experience with the influx of refugees from the neighbouring country after the Syrian civil war started in 2011. The following is an excerpt from an interview with her.

> H: How did the general state of Lebanon and Beirut change after 2011?
>
> R: I was teaching in 2011, and […] I remember the fact that almost every Lebanese person I met was complaining, and hating the Syrians, saying "there is no electricity, no water, no job opportunities. They took everything, let them go back to where they came from!". Lebanon didn't have a proper government, and the Lebanese were already suffering from these things, and now you had one extra crisis coming. The government was not able to provide for the Lebanese citizens, and then another million and a half [Syrian people] suddenly came. They started working, and because they are cheaper than the Lebanese, of course they took the jobs.
>
> H: How were refugees treated in the communities?

R: I am trying to remember physical incidents. My friends, and the way they spoke about them [the Syrians] was really racist. But you also have to keep in mind that the hurt they [the Lebanese] have. So many Lebanese families lost members, that until now they don't know where they are. You have these really deep wounds, that they cannot get over. The idea that Lebanon is for "us", and this is "our country, and you do not have a place here. This is our land, and that is your land, and let's stay where we are", it is not patriotism, but maybe nationalism? The idea of "us and them", no unity.

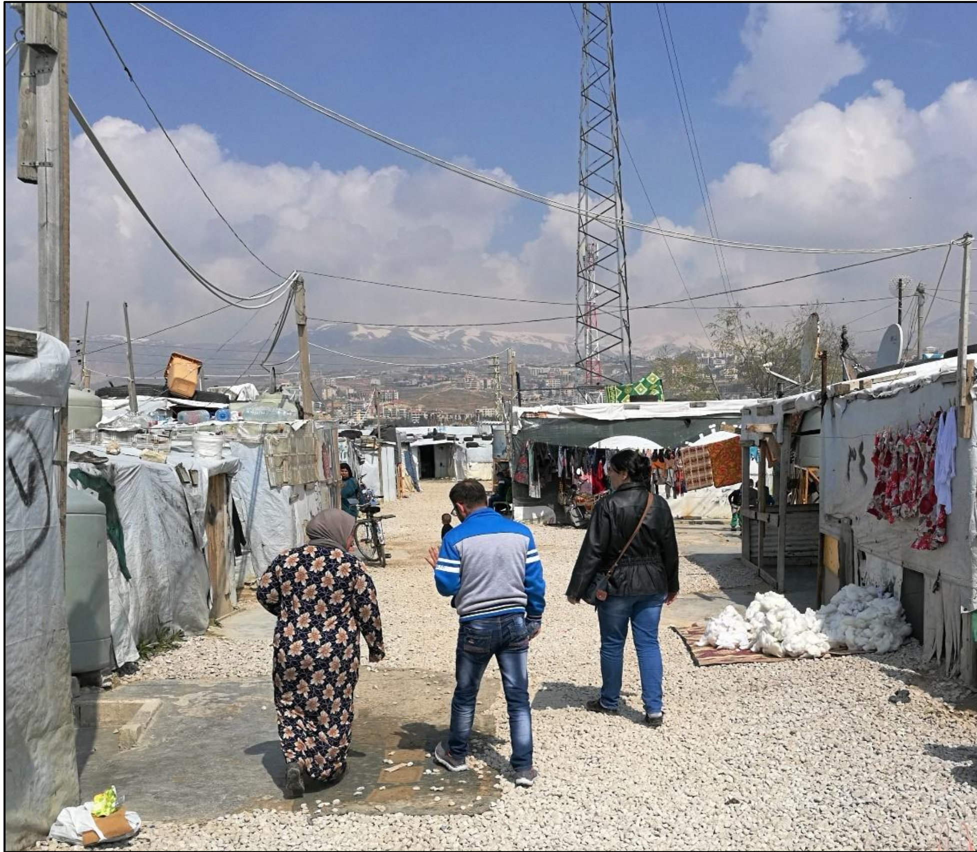
H: Is it still like this today?

R: Definitively, yes.

Reem was born around the time when the Lebanese civil war ended, which also meant that she experienced the Syrian occupation in her childhood, as most young Lebanese adults. The reactions to the influx of refugees after 2011 were therefore based on previous encounters with Syrians, and many had recollections of confrontations with Syrian soldiers. More extreme were stories such as Pastor Yousef's, of how members of the older generations took part in the fighting in sectarian militias. The point for now is to show how everyone creates their own understanding of the relations towards the neighbouring Syrians, based on collective and individual recollection.

The neighbour

When the war in Syria began in 2011, and the first refugees were forced to flee the country to neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, the latter state accepted all border crossers, but denied them formal settlements. Thus, not being able to live in refugee camps, Syrians had to improvise their residence in Lebanon. Consequently, the most affluent displaced were able to rent apartments in the cities, while the destitute were forced to make do in rural or impoverished areas.



4 Representatives from House of Christ visit an informal refugee camp in Bekaa valley, only a few kilometers from the Syrian border.

The Lebanese government realised where the influx was heading when the first Syrian displaced came across the border. The government did not want another “Palestinian problem”, which according to an Al Jazeera journalist, had “left deep scars”.[5] In 1948, when the Palestinians had to flee from what was the newly established Israel, they were allowed to establish and live in formal refugee camps throughout Lebanon. Some of the largest Palestinian camps were placed in Beirut. The mistake, according to the Lebanese government, was giving the Palestinians a stable environment and infrastructure, where they would regain their strength, but never return from. Rather, most of them stayed in Lebanon, and a common narrative that I encountered multiple times is that Palestinians have been draining the already precarious economic situation in the country. Armed Palestinian groups were also one of the triggering causes of the civil war (Thorleifsson, 2014, 48). Still, the Lebanese government has become notoriously known for poor treatment of refugees. Knudsen and Kerr (2012), writing in the

[5] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/lebanon-formal-refugee-camps-syrians-150310073219002.html [22.04.2020]

wake of the Arab Spring and the Syrian rebellion (not yet an official civil war at the time they wrote) about politics in post-Cedar Revolution Lebanon, argues that "long-term deprivation, exclusion and marginalisation are the results of state policies towards refugees" (Knudsen & Kerr, 2012, 18). They wrote about the treatment of Palestinian refugees, but the same can easily be applied to describe the Lebanese state's "hospitality" towards the displaced Syrians.

The notion of "the neighbour" is useful, because it materialises the distance and closeness in the relationship. Though implying geographical closeness between two (groups of) people, the social or affectual relationship is often a different case. Thus, the term 'neighbour' is highly ambivalent, and in the following chapter, we will see how closeness still is created between dissociated people.

Lebanon is hosting refugees from 17 countries, according to 2016 numbers (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, 25), adding to the complexity already existing in the frail society. The Lebanese state has over the last ten years experienced a moral dilemma, considering to what extent they could, and should, facilitate for, and directly give aid to, foreigners seeking refuge in the country. This has become a prevalent dilemma, not only in Lebanon or the Middle East, but it is a universal dilemma of assessing the Other, and protecting the Self. "Over the past two decades", argues Fassin (2012) about Europe, "A dialectics of hospitality and hostility, of host and hostage: we recognize the rhetoric of immigration policies that has become widespread" (Fassin, 2012, 136). In Lebanon, Fassin's words are equally true, as Reem expressed above. 30 per cent of the Syrian refugees lives in "poor urban neighbourhoods" that already struggle with being overcrowded with poor Lebanese and Palestinian refugees (Yassin, 2018, 43), because the Lebanese state does not facilitate formal camps. Even if refugees are allowed to live in the same neighbourhood as locals, integration is difficult when resources are dwindling. "In *reducing subjectivity* to solely that of representation, refugees […] are made to be set apart from the local host community producing an unbridgeable social distance between the two populations. The refugee may be 'invited in' but is avowedly kept in confined quarters", says Zaman (2017, 163, emphasis added). He argues that hosting societies through simple rhetoric means "makes the stranger distant" (ibid.), such as reducing their subjectivities to mere "refugees" who are "taking our jobs" or "increasing our rent". In addition, Syrian refugees in Lebanon were often blamed by locals for crimes (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 44), further building on a general scapegoating.

Two clashes of culture

These attitudes were widespread during my fieldwork in Beirut, but more so in the society at large than in the Evangelical community where I worked. Miriam, a Lebanese woman in her late thirties who was employed in House of Christ, explained her view on Syrians as scapegoats. She said that some members reacted strongly when the first Syrians came to the church, and continued:

> Some [Lebanese] didn't want their kids to go to Sunday school with the Syrians. And they're not just any Syrians, the people who came to our church are the lowest of the Syrian families. Not the families from Damascus, or well-off families. They come from the rural areas of Syria. They are farmers or lived in small villages. Very different cultures. There were two clashes of culture, because they were not only Syrians, but very different Syrians. Cultural and socioeconomical clashes between the Syrians and the Lebanese, because of the history of [being] enemies. Every single person in our church in their forties and up have really experienced the war. They vividly remember being checked at checkpoints, or having someone killed by Syrian soldiers.

As a result of this transnational sociocultural "clash", physical and verbal confrontations and harassment have occurred between the "hosts" and the "guests" (Yassin, 2019, 62; Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 43; Mhaissen & Hodges, 2019, 16). A felt moral obligation to share resources with a neighbour in crisis, is contested by a perception that hospitality inherently means not only giving, but sacrificing oneself (Thorleifsson, 2014, 52).

Not only are the old "enemy" forced to live in their country, but many Lebanese also claim that Syrians are ruining the country while awaiting their exit. Miriam said that few organisations in Lebanon wanted to help the refugees in the beginning. It was mainly Evangelical churches, and some faith-based NGOs, she claimed. She then told a story of a time she worked in an NGO that supported Syrians. Her boss had been thrown out of a car dealership, because the seller knew that the man helped Syrians. They were both Lebanese, she said, and continued:

> There is hate, because one, you are helping our enemies, [and] two, you are helping those who are coming to steal our jobs, opportunities, filling our cities, using our infrastructure, but not contributing to it. There is a lot of hate for the Syrians from the Lebanese community. Maybe it's a bit less now, because the church pioneered, and served and helped them. [...] I feel that the church, through teaching, the people

responded to faithfully obeying the Holy Spirit and the word of God, much healing happened.

Distance in opportunities

Even if the social situation in the church community was slowly becoming better, which Miriam claimed God was accountable for, there was a widening economical distance in the society at large. In addition to verbal and physical harassment, Syrian refugees were blamed for increased prices, particularly house rent. Research on hospitality in a Lebanese village conducted during the first years of the Syrian civil war, claims that there was a consensus among Lebanese villagers that monthly rent had increased from 200 USD to 450 USD in a matter of two years (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 16). Because of high rental prices, amongst other reasons, 69 percent of Syrian households in Lebanon live below the poverty line (Yassin, 2019, 44).

An even more dominant rhetoric in many Lebanese communities that further widened the social distance between the local population and the displaced, was the assertion that the Lebanese lost their jobs to Syrians who were paid less. “The influx of cheaper Syrian labor has decreased work opportunities and reduced salaries” according to locals (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 40), making it more profitable for entrepreneurs who could reduce expenses by hiring foreign workers. The same goes for property owners who could rent out parts of their houses or sheds to an increasing demand, and make a profit of the situation (ibid, 39).

Still, finding work was very difficult for Syrians. 44 per cent of Syrian refugee men in Lebanon aged 15-64 were not working as of 2017 (Yassin, 2018, 89). Among my Syrian interlocutors, only two in a group of 12-15 guys had steady income. Others were forced to continuously search for employment in construction or shops, which is two of the most common lines of work among Syrians. Others were physically or mentally traumatised to a degree that formal work became impossible, and were reliant on salaries of family members, gifts, or arbitrary informal work. Amir, the young man from a city in northern Syria who was mentioned in the introduction, did not have a steady income, and was often forced to seek new construction sites where he would ask for work. His workplaces were frequently located far outside Beirut, and he often had to travel several hours to get there. After a few weeks, when the project was done, he had to start the search again for a new construction site. His perception of the relationship between Syrian workers and Lebanese managers or co-workers was telling. He said he preferred not to talk to his Lebanese boss at all, except when he got his orders. This way, Amir said, he

dodged the verbal and social abuse. He stated that there was a lot of racism towards Syrian people, and that they were discriminated in the society, but he had never experienced this himself, "because he keeps distance". The last part is particularly interesting, considering how the relationship of distancing is two-way. The Syrians remain safe from harassment by keeping to themselves in a sort of diaspora community, but at the cost of potential integration. On the other hand, after being part of the Lebanese society for some years, most Lebanese seem to have accepted the fact that they are hosting fleeing refugees. "Coexistence without empathy" coined Nasser Yassin to describe the sectarian relations in Lebanon (Yassin, 2012), but it might also be applied to the Lebanese Syrian relations. "The end result of the dense and embedded social networks is a form of intra-group or intra-communal capital" (Yassin, 2012, 206). This makes socially bounded places communally homogenous, creating "bounded solidarity" in a closed off network (ibid.). This way, both the Lebanese and the Syrians are actively maintaining and widening the social distance, which also should be seen in light of that most Syrians are expecting to leave Lebanon in a not too distant future.[6]

As a result of an increased Syrian working force, combined with an opportunity of aid and support for the refugees, many locals felt neglected. There is no support for the host, in a society on the brink of economic collapse. Young Lebanese men were particularly frustrated, claiming they had fewer job opportunities, but also decreasing wages, and the army has remained one of few stable sources of income (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 39-42).

Where is the state?

Drawing closer to the end of the chapter, and soon embarking on questions considering *close* relations in Lebanon, one inevitable question remains unsolved. As argued, the Lebanese state is hesitant when it comes to dealing with refugees, not only because of a general lack of resources, a contempt for Syrians, and a complex confessional power structure causing a long-lasting governmental stalemate, but also because of the experience the Lebanese state has with Palestinian refugees, during 70 years of playing host.

The Lebanese have since the independence developed a rigid and seemingly unshakable sectarian system of state power. While looking fragile, the power sharing principle has proven difficult to change, and the inherently distancing sectarianism has become the very defining

[6] Most of my interlocutors expected to go back to Syria in the future. Others dreamed of leaving for Europe or Canada. During my stay in Lebanon, some Syrian families went back to Syria, despite UN recommendations.

symbol of Lebanon. “The state thus exists as a table for negotiation between sect leaders while also providing services for those outside sectarian protection and patronage” (Anderson, 2016, 319).

At the same time, the state has knowingly transferred state power to sects, thus weakened the democratically chosen politicians. Much of what would normally be considered state services are now provided by sects, which eases the existence of the government (Anderson, 2016, 358). The result is nonetheless that services are privatised and traditional “state revenue” ends up in the hand of rich private persons, who often happens to be sectarian leaders and therefore politicians. Though the Lebanese state has been depicted here as somewhat weak and unstable, it deserves credit for being resilient in the challenges they have met throughout its existence.

One result of this weakened government is the rise of stronger nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs) and local faith communities (LFCs), who are working to fill the void of the state, often in the name of solidarity (Rakopoulos, 2016, 148; see also Oikonomakis, 2018, 74-75 for a Greek example of solidarity initiatives towards refugees). Welfare, emotional and often physical and material support are provided by these state substitutes. Erica Bornstein (2005), writing about Christian NGOs in Zimbabwe, explains how the state appreciated the work offered by FBOs, and how the neoliberal state deliberately left a void in services that international NGOs and private organisations had to fill (Bornstein, 2005, 16; 97). But even if the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is highly present in Lebanon, it is “chronically underfunded” (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 21), thus creating a large space for others to fill. In the following chapter, we will explore how a local faith community fills many of the services needed in the lives of refugees.

3. Closeness: an Unlikely Family

"Beyond dialogue, a new maturity and earnestness, a new gravity and a new patience, and, if I may express it so, *maturity and patience for insoluble problems."* – Emmanuel Levinas, 1999, (87).

In the centre of downtown Beirut, the large, picturesque Mohammed Al Amin Mosque is eye-catching for tourists and locals alike. The gigantic religious building looks like it always has been part of Beirut's skyline, but it was in fact only opened in 2008. According to the local guide inside the mosque, it can host 5000 people at once, and except during prayer time, it is open to the public. While the building itself has a sandstone looking exterior with bright blue domes, the inside is decorated with white marble walls with golden Quranic inscriptions in Arabic. In the ceiling, dropping almost all the way down to the red-carpet floor are three huge chandeliers in crystal. I remember especially well the first time I visited the Al Amin Mosque, sitting on the soft floor, mesmerised by the beautiful decoration. The mosque guide sat down next to me, and with a low voice he started to hymn the Islamic call to prayer, the same that is chanted over the loudspeakers outside of the mosque five times a day. While he was singing the Islamic prayer, he was accompanied by loud, rhythmic church bells from the building next door. In many parts of Beirut, mosques and churches are located next to each other, in what appear to be a harmonic symbiosis of religions. The proximity of religious faiths is not only a source of conflict, but a foundation for building interreligious relationships upon.

This chapter will utilise the concept of 'closeness', which is contrasted with the mentioned distance in the Lebanese society, and especially between the Lebanese host society and the Syrian refugees. This juxtaposing strategy or style of writing is not without reason. It is based on how I perceived the divided, but at the same time unified, discourse in the Lebanese society, manifested in the Evangelical church community of House of Christ. I will show that even though there are issues of social distance throughout society, there is something bringing people closer despite differences, in the form of community-based affection, hospitality and love. Thus, both inter-national and inter-religious relations were of importance in the community where the research was conducted. The sense of comradeship and make-shift families offered by the congregation, proved to be central coping mechanisms for many of the young Syrian men who

used the church as their social meeting place. Many of these Syrian men were struggling to find paid jobs, and therefore had time to fill every day. At the end of the chapter we will see that by volunteering in the church, they made sense of what could otherwise be boring and lonely days, but the lack of structure in this kind volunteering, results in what I call "arbitrary volunteerism".

Close relations

The opening citation from Levinas in this chapter is from a speech held in 1967, contemplating the Christian-Judeo relationships forming as a response after World War II. What he considered the insoluble problem was that these relations emerged from Christians with a sense of guilt, combined with solidarity, and not out of pure love for the Other. It is not the dialogue itself that Levinas is searching for, but a deeper proximity and close relations where the Self is created through the Other (Levinas, 1999, 87). In this argument, he calls our attention to not only how we choose to engage in relations with strangers, but more importantly *why* we do it.

As we saw in the last chapter, the sectarian history of Lebanon has created a society where the sectarian affiliation is an important part of most people's identities. The result of this is not always sectarian wars or political conflicts, because it also renders a minimum level of tolerance for other religious groups who are present in the local community and at the national scene. The Lebanese people has over the years built up a communicative system where they recognize that they must, to a certain extent, relate to people from other religions. The mechanism for this is often to not emphasize your faith identity when dealing with strangers.

This chapter aims to describe the somewhat unlikely and contra-intuitive symbiosis of mainly Sunni Muslim Syrians and Evangelical Christian Lebanese, embracing each other, in an otherwise highly discriminative society. People in the church community stressed a rhetoric of 'one family', which is a common unifying concept in both Islam and Christianity. Brother, sister, father, mother, became regular nicknames across national and religious lines, as we will see. In addition, though not an emic term, I want to explore this sense of closeness through the metaphor of 'neighbourhood'.

Interfaith communion

House of Christ consists of around 70% refugees, of which the majority has Sunni Muslim background. Among the displaced, some were also Christian, for example Orthodox Armenians from Syria or Christian Iraqis – many of the latter had fled from ISIS precisely because of their faith. The sectarian diversity is a potential factor of conflict, as we have seen on a societal level,

and on the community level. I will show that there was a turbulent transition when Syrians first started to attend services, and many of the Lebanese long time-Christians were highly sceptical. A few years later, personal relations seem to have settled, though the relation between Islam and Christianity is as relevant as ever.

Pastor Rashid, an elderly, retired pastor who was one of the more conservative and strict Lebanese leaders of House of Christ, once told me that there is an important difference between 'Islam' and 'Muslims': "While Islam is the bad seed that are brainwashing the people, the Muslims are human beings created by God. Earlier, we were told that the Christians should restrain the Muslims from letting the demonic Islamic faith spread. […] [But] we must love them and help them." This was a seemingly harsh statement, and it was not a common rhetoric among the Christian Lebanese in the church. It was consequently not a representative statement, but the fact that he emphasised on the human beings, rather than the system of religion (or "culture"), is worth noticing and shows a perceptual process. One contextual explanation of this statement could be Pastor Rashid's witness of a brutal sectarian civil war in Lebanon. In many ways, the relations between the different faiths in the country had grown worse during his lifetime, except for the last few years where there has been a fragile sectarian balance due to the exhaustion of war and the following Syrian occupation. Another factor behind statements like Rashid's, and this is my point, is the fact that every person makes up his own situational narrative and system of beliefs, even inside a doctrinal faith. Pastor Mujir, the Senior Pastor of the church, expressed the sentiment differently: "Well, everyone deserves care, love, respect and honour. It does not matter where you come from. […] We are very respectful; we are not polemic, so we do not attack Islam.". These seemingly conflicting views both look at love as the method for creating close relations between humans, but shows that there are contested meanings of what Islam might mean for the Evangelical church.

One story I was told multiple times put the church's acceptance in perspective. A Muslim woman, who apparently had made it clear that she rejected Jesus, had come to church to receive material support for some years. She was not there to listen to Bible stories, but rather to receive whatever the church could provide. This was common among many of the recipients, and accepted by the church. What was different about this woman was that she one day showed up in the church with her Islamic praying mat, because she wanted to pray there. Pastor Yousef, though usually the most patient and loving person, lost his temper and rebuked her for this. The woman still attends the church, in the same sense as before. In other words, there is strong Christian identity in the humanitarian work that is done. Pastor Rashid frequently reminded me

that it was first and foremost a church who happened to be offering some support to struggling people in the community, and not a humanitarian NGO. As we will see in later chapters the people of the church create their very own teleologies for action, not necessarily based on a strict ecclesiastical or doctrinal set of laws.

It also bears mentioning that Lebanon is the only Arab country where people can legally change their religious status (Kraft, 2012, 118), which again is telling of the close relations between different confessional communities, but also how public the confessional identity is. While there is religious freedom, the state is at all times concerned with faith belonging in the population, making faith affiliation and sectarianism an important topic of politics. It might also say something about the dynamic openness of a globalised country, in addition to its sectarian history.

Inter-national

Lebanon and Beirut have over the last ten years turned into a hotspot, and for many reasons a global place-to-be. First, but also the grimmest reason, it is due to the current and continuous state of conflict in neighbouring countries in the region, combined with a minimum level of political stability in Lebanon. Thus, people from all over the world come to Beirut to have a foot in the Middle East, but still be on safe grounds, as journalists, diplomats, students, missionaries, NGO-workers, and researchers. In addition, the highly neoliberal economy of the state makes the country *look* more "European" or even "American" than a lot of the neighbouring countries. This last point might also be a reason why rich people from the Gulf-countries travel to, and often invest in, the liberal city of Beirut. The point is that the local Lebanese population, and thus the church community where I did fieldwork, are used to having foreigners in their globalised society.

After the Syrian occupation ended in 2005, but before the civil war started in 2011, it was not uncommon for Syrian men to work in Lebanon (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 34-35). The jobs were better paid, and the short distance made it a better option than doing migration work in the Gulf countries. Some worked on the fertile fields of the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, which has become an area with many Syrian refugee settlements. One of the refugee camps I visited there used to be a seasonal working settlement for the same men that now lives there "permanently". When the war started, they went home from the fields to Syria and brought their families and a few belongings back to the "camp" in the Bekaa Valley.

An Iraqi man who worked in the church administration and had lived in Lebanon with his British wife for many years, pointed out an interesting fact to me. After a Sunday service he said that the church had worked strategically with refugee populations for a few years, not because they were Muslims or Syrians, but because they were in need. This need, and in extension the very fact that the church was targeting the need through humanitarian work, created a lot of attention from churches outside Lebanon, and particularly in Europe, the US, China and South Korea. In fact, the church was now so full of expatriates that there was a serious concern for the lack of Lebanese people in the congregation. "The Lebanese used to be the main population group in the church, but then the Syrians came, and now, because of the Syrian influx, there is an expat influx, a wave of expats, which to a large extent neglects the locals," he said. By "neglecting the locals" he referred to the many expatriates who were working for religious and non-religious NGOs serving only Syrian displaced (Christophersen, Thorleifsson & Tiltnes, 2013, 40). They (we) were in Lebanon explicitly because of the Syrian influx, and were also living of the Lebanese hospitality, often without consideration. Consequently, the church community consisted of Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Dutch, Chinese, Americans, Germans, and a Norwegian amongst others.

The good Neighbour

70 years after the Palestinian displacement, when a few hundred thousand Palestinians settled in refugee camps in Lebanon, the Lebanese state found itself forced into the same ethical and socio-economical dilemma. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they had learned from the past, and now preferred to avoid giving the Syrians a protected environment in formal camps, making it less tempting to settle permanently. The result was that Syrians who had capability and economic resources, moved into the cities and rented houses and apartments next to the Lebanese – thus settled. They were no longer only neighbours across the borders, but suddenly across the street as well. This deserves a demographic correction. An important and interesting feature of the local areas of Beirut, is the fact that they are usually sectarianized, or "homogenous" (Yassin, 2012), meaning that a Hezbollah street might be next to a Christian Orthodox street, or a Maronite street. There were multiple examples of this in the neighbourhood where I conducted the fieldwork, and it is argued that this physical compartmentalisation is creating socio-spatial boundaries (Yassin, 2012, 212). However, writing before the influx of refugees from Syria, Yassin could not predict how mass displacement would alter the demographics in the city. The Syrians who moved to Beirut, settled mainly in the cheapest neighbourhoods, and since the displaced were mostly Sunni

Muslims, they tended to keep away from the Shi'ite (especially Hezbollah) streets. Still, they usually had no choice, which in the end made the streets more religiously and internationally mixed. In this way, the term "neighbours" is suiting, especially when you take into consideration that the term does not say anything about the emotional substance of the relation, only the physical form and distance. As we know, one does not always know one's neighbour, but the proximity forces you to acknowledge the other's presence. Further, one might even have a neighbourly relationship built on disagreement, jealousy, conflict, or gossip. In many ways, these feelings and relations that were once part of the Syrian-Lebanese neighbourhood on an inter-national level, are now manifested on a community, or even street level. Close relations are now even closer in the geographical sense.

Kidwai, Moore & FitzGibbon (2014) argues on the contrary that Syrian Muslim refugees in Lebanon "are most likely to move to a location inhabited by those from similar religious backgrounds." This, they claim, is due to a potentially higher degree of hospitality, tolerance and acceptance. If we turn it around, what they seem to be saying is that in inter-faith communities and neighbourhoods, they might not experience the same respect and hospitality. While there could be truth in this, it is unwise to generalise to say that a certain faith group will act in a certain way. Their statement thus lacks empirical support, and I will argue that because of Beirut's sectarian communities and history, inter-faith acceptance is more likely than other places. As pointed out, different faith groups live side by side in Beirut.

Fassin (2012), writing in the context of asylum seekers in northern France, claims that there is a fine line between *hospitality* and *hostility,* which in the French case is manifested in a negotiation of the dualism of securitization and humanization (Fassin, 2012, 134-135). This paradoxical "compassionate repression" (ibid.) is also present in Lebanon, but in addition to the ambivalent signals emitted through (come-but-do-not-stay) policies from the Lebanese government, there are also other contradicting actors and actions on a societal and community level. In many ways, the word *neighbour* as both a metaphor and a demographical fact, can be suiting when describing the current relations in Lebanon. Zaman (2017, 166) argues that forced displacement is not about active hosts caring for passive refugee-objects, but rather a relationship where both parts turn into close neighbours. Such an extraordinary social situation transforms the hosting community as well, as a mental adjustment to better prepare them for meeting (the needs of) their "guests".

Community

There was a strong sense of belonging in the group of people with whom I spent most of my time conducting research. Not only internally in groups of friends and close relations, but there was also a feeling of belonging in the church in general. As showed in the previous chapter, the relations at a societal level was more distant, but it seemed to many of my Syrian friends that they did not care as long as they were not harassed personally, and they rarely got involved in politics.[7] Still, as mentioned above, it took some time before the new and exponentially growing Syrian group became an undisputed and internally accepted part of the congregation. Fassin (2012) claims that states have two means of resolving the tension around whether granting asylum to refugees or not: repression (rejection) or compassion (acceptance) (2012, 148-149). I would like to expand this thought, by showing that non-states actors might show compassion when the state show repression. Carrière (2017) argues that communities or private persons who act hospitable in times of hardship for refugees, also entail a notion of resistance towards an unwelcoming state (2017, 153). "The initiative of someone who offers hospitality to an asylum seeker is surely a substitute for the deficiencies of the state […]" (ibid.). Without diving too deep into a political analysis, the point for now is to show how a small faith-based community is acting contrary to the state.

House of Christ

After 2011, it still took some time before refugees of the Syrian civil war started coming across the border to Lebanon. But as mentioned, Syrian migrant workers were common in the country at this point, and they represented a precarious and marginalized group in the society. Pastor Yousef had for some time already served a small Syrian community from his house, which is located in one of the impoverished and most densely populated areas in Beirut. Once a week, he invited people he met on the streets to come to his house. He offered them food and gave out Bibles, but there was at this point no funding for material humanitarian support, nor was there a need in the same extent as after 2012. Still, he gathered large groups of Syrians in his small living room, and his family showed them compassion and hospitality. "It was not important to

[7] One important exception are policies that directly targeted Syrians. During the summer of 2019, the Lebanese state enforced a large scale campaign based on a law stating that Syrians without proper documentation were not allowed to work in shops, and would be jailed, fined or in worst case kicked out of the country (or all three) if they were caught by the police while working. The latter "raided" the shops of Beirut, looking for what was considered illegal non-taxpaying immigrants. The shops were immediately closed if Syrians were found working there. The result was that many Syrians lost their jobs. Some moved back to Syria because it was now getting harder to find work in Beirut.

tell them about the love of Jesus, it was enough to show them your love," Pastor Yousef explained. When the war started, he was mentally prepared to serve the Syrians, but lacked a physical location.

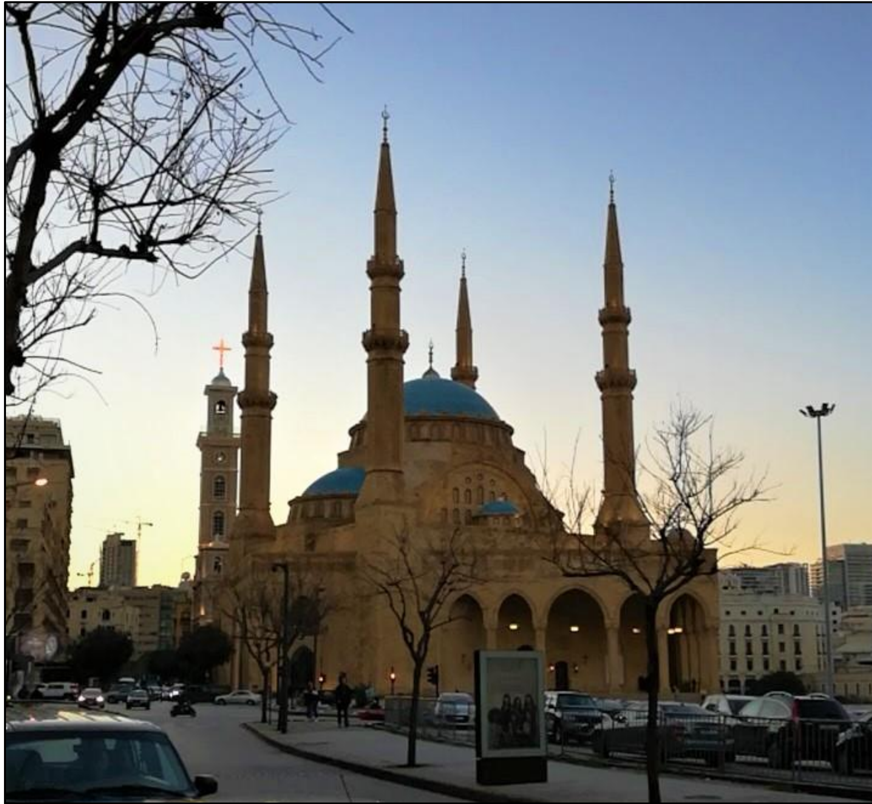
Following that, the displaced Syrian were for a few years bussed from the underprivileged neighbourhood where most of them lived, to the main church which was located in the Beiruti suburbs. The church building resembled a European protestant church to a large degree. It was a large sandstone coloured building, with a cross on the outside wall facing the street. The church consisted of multiple floors, which included the church room with a baptism pool, a music studio, and a designated floor for the school program that House of Christ ran for local and refugee children. The school had 80 students between 6 and 14 years. It was not a formal education program, because of official requirements the church was not able to meet, but they had a few teachers and five classrooms.

When pastor Yousef's living room was no longer proportional to the number of Syrians who wanted to visit his house, the congregation rented 12 buses every Sunday and drove to the larger church. Together with the existing congregation, they quickly filled the Sunday service, and in 2014 they decided they needed another service, which later turned into three services when a large group of Iraqis also joined. This exponential growth happened in just a few years, and they soon realised it would be better for everyone to find a second location closer to where the Syrians lived.

Eventually, they rented a large room on a quiet street of the neighbourhood where most of the Syrians were settled. "A room" sounds simplistic, but it still describes the physical outline of the church. Entering from the street, one would not be able to tell from the outside that this was a church. The modest room consisted a large empty space with a 2x2 meter stage close to the door. There was room for 110 plastic chairs, but most of the time, the chairs were stacked along the side walls of the room, except during Friday worship and Sunday service. In the far back of the room was a short staircase up to an overlooking office floor, and a short staircase down to a basement used as storage. The office floor had a water cooler, and a closet, and two desks, one for Pastor Yousef, and one for his colleague George.

At the same time as the church expanded and established what came to be known as "the Syrian branch" of House of Christ, the leadership realised the great need that followed the displaced. Simultaneously as opening the new church room, a social support work started taking place, consisting of giving out food vouchers, opening the mentioned school program, and a close by

kindergarten, and eventually a clinic with volunteering doctors and nurses. For this to work, the church became dependant on support from international church organisations, and congregations in foreign countries, in addition to their own in-house tithing.



5 *Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque with Maronite Cathedral of Saint George in the background.*

"Suddenly you have all these strangers coming"

According to one employee in the church, strong feelings surfaced among the around 100 members of the church when the Syrians started coming. Senior Pastor Mujir, the leader of House of Christ and the visionary behind the hospitality work towards refugees, tried to explain what happened to the existing Lebanese congregation once the buses with Syrians started showing up on Sunday mornings. Most of the Lebanese leaders in the church expressed the same sentiment, looking back with hindsight to the period when the merge with the Syrians happened. Pastor Mujir said:

> "I felt people were against what I was doing. But then I understood that they [the Lebanese] have legitimate fear and legitimate concern, so I had to tackle that. I had to preach about it, I had to speak about it. I had to be gracious about it, and give them a

> chance to express their concern and feelings. Those who came traditionally from the church had always seen the church as a safe place to be. With an extended family they can spend time with, but suddenly you have all these strangers coming, so it created fear, and they struggled with that, which I understand."

The strangehood Pastor Mujir is referring to is what we saw in the preceding chapter as *distance*, both physically and mentally. The core of the stranger issue seems to be a generalisation of the individual to a certain ostensibly unified group of strangers, rather than seeking to know people on a personal, intimate level (Simmel, 1971, 148). The strangers are perceived as the embodiment and representation of an unwelcome *thing*, rather than the potential individuality the group is consisting of, containing the same emotional and ideological diversity as "our own" group. To explain why fear and struggle arose among the Lebanese attendees, Amal, a 40-year-old woman who was Director of Relief in the church, said:

> "There are about 300 men, who since that war, they don't know where they are. There is a big history of hate, war, killing, lots of people who lost their loved ones. That history is very hard to overcome. When we started serving the Syrian refugees, even in this church, not all [of the people in] the congregation were okay about it. Because lots of [people in] the congregation lost some of their loved ones to the Syrian army, and they couldn't differentiate between the Syrian army and the Syrian people."

In other words, the merge was not painless for the existing congregation, and feelings were, and still are, strong. The fleeing Syrians were reduced to living representatives of the traumas that some of their countrymen had inflicted 30 years ago. But through strategical work from the leaders and the pastors, relations became closer and better. Hosting displaced became a central part of the church identity, which had to be accepted. The word 'healing' was fundamental in the jargon used about the merge, and so was 'forgiveness'. Miriam, who was mentioned in the last chapter, stated that "much healing happened over the years". Recall also how Pastor Yousef was captured and tortured by Syrians, then spent much time thinking and processing, but in the end, he was able to forgive.

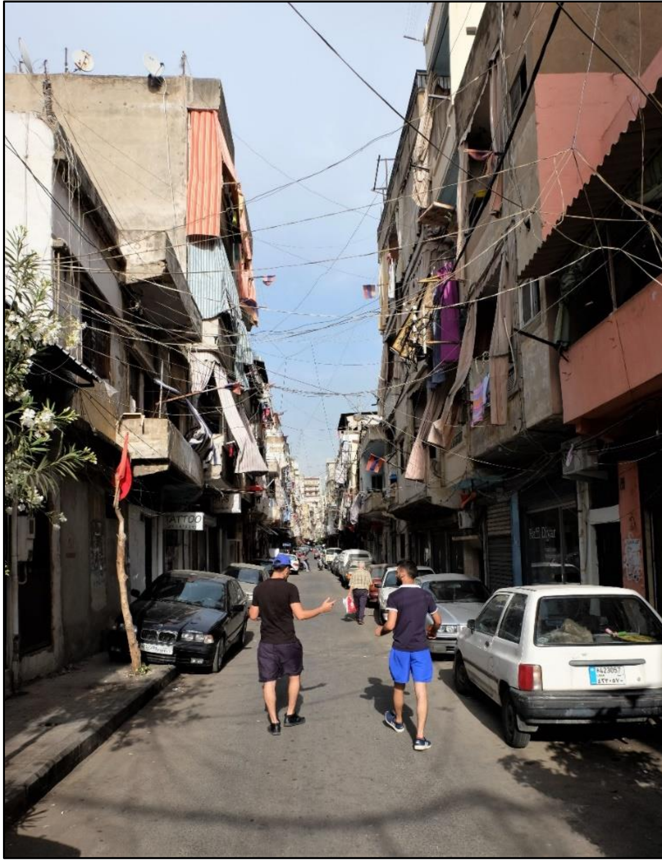
One family

An important tool in the unifying process that the church went through was the family-rhetoric. As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, this is not uncommon in religion (Zaman, 2017, 166), but it still deserves some exploration. To emphasize that a group of people is a family does not mean that they are always in agreement or never fighting, but it says something about

an apparently unbreakable bond between the members of the group. There are strong, quasi-biological emotions holding them together, tying the members in.

Sameer was a good example of the power of this rhetoric. As a 17-year-old boy, coming to Lebanon with his mother, father, brother, and sisters, he lived in a safe environment compared to many of his peers who were displaced without family. Sameer and his family rented a tiny apartment in the neighbourhood close to the Syrian branch of House of Christ. It had only one room, functioning as a living room, kitchen, and bedroom. During my time with Sameer, he was the only one in his family who was working consistently, while his father had sporadically employment all over Lebanon, and was therefore rarely home. Still, his family and life situation were better and more complete than most I met. When Sameer's work ended at 5 p.m., he always went directly to the church where he often found George, Amir, me, and whoever happened to be there. As a young guy, he was obviously in need of socialisation with his friends, but the problem, and the telling point, was that he usually refused to go home. As far as I know, he was not afraid of spending time in his house with his family, but he preferred to be with his friends. George, who was ten years older than Sameer, constantly tried to dismiss him. "You are the man of the house, and your mother needs you at home", he would lecture the 17-year-old. Sameer answered that we were his brothers and his family, and that he wanted to sleep in the church.

In the family rhetoric, the relational words are obviously important, and works as miniature rites to initiate a "pseudo-kin relationship" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 124). "Brother" was the most common one, applied to all men in the church, except the pastors who unsurprisingly were called "Baba", meaning father or dad. Men and women across nationality and age called each other brother and sister. "Son" and "daughter" are other common names used internally in a multi-generational community. As patriarch as religious communities usually are, the Father is the one in charge – in this case the pastors. Pastor Rashid was reaching an age where he was jokingly called "Jiji", a nickname for grandfather, and he accepted the humour. These terms are social rather than biological, but had the function of creating relations that resembles those of close kin. One method that Pastor Rashid used to sediment this close relations-approach was to visit people in their house. Here they could speak freely, and according to himself, the women would not wear their *hijab* while he was there, which they would otherwise use in public or in front of unfamiliar men. By dealing with people in closeness, his goal was to create bonds of mutual respect and love equal to those of a family, or as Julian Pitt-Rivers eloquently put it: "non-kin amity loves to masquerade as kinship" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 124).



6 Amir and Karim walking in an Armenian neighbourhood.

Erica Bornstein (2012, 146) suggests that we look at empathy in the humanitarian discourse through what she terms "relational empathy", as based on close relations – family substitutions – and not the empathy-altruism. The latter is in many ways the more classical, neo-colonial, way of imagining a suffering Other far away, in dire need of human rights and physical aid. The relations between a Lebanese host community and a Syrian guest population, and how they socially, spiritually, and physically embrace each other in difficult times, are in this regard similar to Bornstein's relational empathy. Rozakou (2016) also argue along similar lines when she explains that what looks like unexpected local responses to refugee influx on Greek islands, might be rooted in a shared understanding of the highly valued family (Rozakou, 2016, 196).

The family relations internally in the church community were not as easy for everyone. For the young Syrian guys Karim and Amir, it was a bit more ambivalent. Both were in their twenties, and had been alone in Beirut for many years. Amir travelled from his hometown around 2013 when he turned 18 and would otherwise have been forced to join the Syrian Army. Not long after, his city was attacked by ISIS, and most of his family fled across the border to Turkey. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he struggled to find work and to pay an increasing rent, thus taking back-breaking work in construction far outside Beirut. When I knew him, he was

constantly walking crooked because of leg and back aches. Karim, on the other hand, had been in Beirut since before the civil war. He was a couple years older, but also in the same precarious situation as Amir. He had only occasional informal work, and struggled to pay his rent. Both enjoyed the close relations they found in the church community, with both Lebanese and other young Syrians. In many ways, this functioned as a proxy family, covering their need for care and attention, or as Mortensen (2019, 40) put it: "Apart from making 'the difficulties less', friends constituted a resource in exile, where the extended family no longer served as the social and material backbone of everyday life". Still, being away from his family for nine years, Karim was about to break down. One evening when we were walking together, he confessed that he considered going back to Syria where his entire family was still living. When I asked what that would mean for him, and if he would have to join the army, he replied "Hell is not hell if you are with your family".[8]

One reason for the emphasis on the family rhetoric might be the lack of the close community feeling that many ex-Muslims experience once converting to Christianity – especially in an Evangelic doctrine, where individualism reigns (see especially Weber, 1991 [1930]). To make up for emptiness left by no longer being part of the *ummah* (Islamic community), displaced people, and converts in particular, search for a community replacement.

There were periods of time when these young men did not have any work. Thus, coming to the church and spending time with other people served two uses. First, it was a social need and want to hang out with friends, but secondly, it was about *using* time. Life without occupation is a boring and seemingly meaningless life, and these men had nothing to do to fill their time. No work also meant no money to spend, so loitering was the only option. This became clear in the church during daytime, when the place was full of young men hanging around. The smartphone was a useful medium to make time go faster, and so was eating and simply walking in the neighbourhood. But what was more striking was the need to work. Young, able men came looking for meaningful things to do, and there were always big and small practical tasks that needed to be done in the church. This is what I call *arbitrary volunteerism.*

[8] I later learned that Karim went back to his family in Syria, not long after I left Lebanon. Some months later, after failed attempts to contact him, a mutual friend told me that he was serving in the Syrian army. This was at the same time as the Turkish invasion of northern Syria, in the fall of 2019.

Arbitrary volunteerism

As I spent most of my days in the Syrian branch of House of Christ, I was struck by the number of people lingering throughout the day. Some came and went at the strangest times, some came looking for other people, others just wanted to take advantage of the Wi-Fi, yet others came to ask for favours or money. In general, trying to find work in Beirut for Syrian refugees was difficult, especially since the work they got was usually heavy work in construction or repair shops. An Iraqi man, named Mohammed, was an example of such. He lost all his fingers on one hand, after ISIS men captured him and struck him with an axe. Afterwards, he fled to Syria with his extended family. Later, they had to flee to Beirut, where they had lived for a few years. Because of his handicap and trauma, he was unemployed, without any prospects of getting back to work. Thus, he spent most his time in the church, claiming that it is better to work for free in a place he considers his second home, than doing nothing.

Kraft (2012) referring to her own fieldwork among newly converted ex-Muslims in Christian communities in Lebanon, argues that even though they felt loved by the church people, they were not involved in the way they hoped. They wanted to partake in the helping as well – they wanted to *give* (Kraft, 2012, 57). In my experience from the Evangelical church in Beirut, it was the complete opposite. Everyone who wanted to help, had the chance to contribute in the community, and there were no prerequisites necessary. George especially, was highly pedagogical and emphasized that after knowing people for a while, he knew where they could best serve, and in which areas people had their "gifts" (from God).

Liisa Malkki (2015) writes that isolated and lonely people in Finland have a *need to help*, but not through simply donating money, but by dedicating their time to make gifts. The physical gift itself thus is somehow reduced to a commodity, but the valuable time spent is the real gift. Further, by dedicating time to help others, they are helping themselves deal with loneliness. The knitted scarfs and toys became "[…] an important gift to oneself – and *of* oneself – and an alleviation of claustrophobic solitude for many" (Malkki, 2015, 160). This resembles the bored men of my fieldwork, who preferred to spend time working with arbitrary tasks in the church, rather than loitering in the streets or at home. Their volunteerism became a "gift of oneself" (ibid.), to the church community, to fellow displaced in need, and to themselves. Derrida argues similarly that time is the ultimate gift (Derrida, 1992), and serving others was a present theme in the volunteer work in the church. Time given cannot be given back, and one who gives time, truly gives of himself.

There were always things to be done in the church. Every week, shipments of different material goods or food came through the doors. These needed to be packed into suitable family sizes. Mattresses, blankets, food bags, milk powder, toys, pain killers, herbs, and candy were distributed – either every week or sporadically. Much of such work was based on volunteers. What is interesting, was the level of unsystematic volunteering, or arbitrary volunteerism. Instead of asking people in advance, or basing it on a system of volunteers, where everyone regularly takes one shift, they simply used whoever was there at the time.

One of the Lebanese employees stated that the church is run 95% by volunteers. Amal, the Director of Relief, said that there were more than 120 volunteers in the church. Personally, I believe the number is higher, but the point is that there is no way of counting how many were involved in a period of time, because everyone was always helping out, even if they were not supposed to. Further, another part of the explanation follows Kathryn Kraft's (2012, 42) theory of converted Christian ex-Muslims who struggle to find a close community as they were used to from their previous faith, where Islam was so intertwined in all aspects of the social life. "Feelings of emptiness and guilt have to be addressed as they attempt to live out a belief system that does not have as great an emphasis on *tawhid* [community] as that which they knew previously" (ibid.).

In the Christian context and jargon, helping others systematically is often called *ministry.* Systematically in this case means work that is done by a representative of an organisation, on order from the latter. The church had goals and visions, and to be able to accomplish and reach these, all sorts of ministries were conducted. Youth ministry, school ministry, kindergarten, musical, technical, practical, transportation work etc. were different types of jobs that constantly needed to be done in the church, to be able to reach the set goals and expectations. This was systematically performed through planned or arbitrary volunteerism on order from the leaders of House of Christ. The Director of Relief in the church, Amal, said that "Ministry is really draining. It will be exhausting. You have to have a heart for it." By stating this, she emphasised that the volunteers, as the employees, should not do work without reason, and her statement points to the research question of why people would voluntarily engage in exhaustive social and humanitarian work in a faith-based community.

Amir was a prime example of a volunteer in the church. He had his entire social network there, and even if he was working the whole day in villages far outside Beirut in heavy construction work, he would still come to the church at night, and help out if it was needed. For some of the displaced, this might be an intentional, or unconscious, way of giving something back to the

community that helped them in the first place. Amir explained to me that he thought about his family in Turkey, and if someone were helping them, then he should help someone where he was. “When I give help, I feel happy. Especially when I help kids. In my heart, I feel happy. I don’t know, but I think it’s love,” Amir said.

This counters Bornstein’s (2012) ethnographic description of time dedicated to others through voluntary work. Her context is expats and middle-class Indians working voluntarily in temples, schools, NGOs and orphanages, and she suggests that privileged volunteers has an aim of gaining experience (Bornstein, 2012, 114). What the volunteers she described had in common was their socioeconomic level. Their volunteerism was not necessary in the rational sense – they do not gain material benefits such as money or food by doing it. I would on the other hand like to show that people are not always working voluntary *because* they have a surplus of money, or are in need of experience. Volunteer work might also be instrumental, by easing the boredom caused by an absence of paid work. In other words, some might work voluntary exactly because they do not have a surplus of money. It can function as a way to engage in meaningful activities in an otherwise precarious life situation.

Refugees helping refugees

The famous sociologist George Simmel states that inherent in being a stranger, one is rootless and detached from the new community, but at the same time there is something tying him closer in. To phrase Simmel, it is “[…] a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement” (Simmel, 1971, 145).

It is significant to notice that the relation between Lebanese and Syrians is not a one-way patron-client relationship. It is not “host saving refugee” in the dramatic way we like to imagine. Though it was usually Syrians who received support in the church at the time I was there, they were also providing it in many cases. We cannot talk about humanitarian aid in nationalistic terms, as one nation rescuing the other, and we cannot depict Lebanon as the greener grass on the other side of the fence. This became clear to me when I realised that some Syrian families were traveling back into their country in civil war, rather than staying in Lebanon. The number of unemployed Lebanese are growing, and the protests against their own government has become more outspoken, physical and resentful. No doubt, the Lebanese are also taking a major blow from the Syrian influx, and are currently also in great need. Pastor Mujir said to me that they had before the Syrian civil war a vision of providing aid to a group of people in need in their community. “We did not know that they were going to come from Syria, Iraq or Lebanon,”

he said. His point was that need is need, whatever the cause might be, how it might look, and who is carrying the burden.

“Give it to someone who needs it”, Karim said when George tried to give him a food voucher of $60. He refused to take it, stating that there were people in more need than him. In the Syrian branch, all the humanitarian work is orchestrated by Pastor Yousef and George. The latter, himself a Syrian, was particularly dedicated to helping others, and all sorts of people came to him with their needs and problems. As mentioned, there was a large body of people who were volunteering with all sorts of practical, and usually simple, work. Every Friday and Sunday, after the church meetings, everyone who attended got a doughnut, and often something else. Milk powder was also a common good that was distributed on these occasions, and these were particularly popular among young mothers with children. In such situations it was often Syrians who were giving on behalf of the church, and Syrians who were receiving. According to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) the long-lasting nature of displacement, eventually makes the refugee communities involved in helping each other (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, 25). Creating this community together, they themselves “turned it into a second home” according to Reem. By contributing to the community and in the church, the refugees showed agency, and were constituting themselves as part of a new society (Horst, 2019, 45).

The work that is put into the church by Syrians, accounts for a large part of the humanitarian work that is done. I want to show two ethnographic cases which exemplifies this in a satisfying way. The first one is a garage sale, and the second is a temporary medical clinic – both in the Syrian branch of House of Christ.

The church organised a two-days garage sale in the church room. The idea was to sell hygiene products, shoes, and second-hand clothes to an affordable or symbolic price, to both members and non-members of the church. It was never supposed to be profitable, nor was it, since the transportation cost of all the items that came by ship to Beirut was much higher than the total revenue. Everything costed 2000 Lebanese Pounds (LBP), which was $1.32[9]. The main room of the church was filled with stacked clothes on tables – mostly women’s clothes, but some for men and children as well. In addition, hygiene products, such as razors, pads and adult diapers were put in the back of the room. Lastly, shoes (of undeniably poor quality) were placed on the office floor. The garage sale was a success, and ca. 150 people, mostly women, bought something. For now, I am not interested in the costumers, but in the workers, though there was

[9] 30.09.2019

only a fine line between the two. There was in total nine Syrian people volunteering during the two days, plus George who was overseeing the project. As a compensation, the volunteers got to choose eight items each from the tables for free, and just as the doors were about to open in the morning, the volunteers were running around looking for the best items to pick, put aside, and bring home later. What struck me at the time was that the volunteers of the event, representing the church and the foreign donors, were "cheating" on the actual recipients of the garage sale, namely the refugees who were waiting outside the door. My initial reaction must have been due to my preconceived belief that people who volunteer are better off, and have a surplus of money, time, and energy to give to others. But this is not necessary the only reason for giving. The garage sale was meant to help needing people in the community, but needing people were also volunteering. They wanted something in return for helping, but was that the main reason for contributing in the first place? We assume that people who volunteer are *givers,* but my point is that we cannot always that easily differentiate between *givers* and *receivers.* Malkki (2015, 164) is quoting a Finnish Red Cross secretary general who stated that "The difference between the helper and the helped is a line drawn in water". Sometimes, as showed, these categories intersect, and needing people are the ones who gives. By showing how displaced people themselves actively engage in supporting precarious neighbours, I want to remove the passive victim label that refugees often get, and instead prove how they are actively coping with times of hardship through agency (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016, 26).

The other example of a situation where refugees were helping refugees, happened a few weeks after the garage sale, during a transitory medical clinic in the church. A team of doctors, nurses, a dentist, and a few assistants, came from a church community in the U.S. and held a two days clinic in the main room of the church, the same place where the garage sale had been. People in the neighbourhood could come and get free check-ups, or bring their issues to the doctor who would try to diagnose them, and then prescribed free medication. The idea was simple enough, but language would soon complicate the process. The beneficiaries were mostly Syrian refugees without any English skills. The American doctor team did not speak a word Arabic, and so the organisers had to improvise to find someone who knew both languages well enough to communicate medical terms. Even though the languages had to be simplified, it was not an easy task. In the end, a few hours after the clinic opened, they managed to gather nine people, Syrian and Lebanese, who spoke well enough English to accomplish the job. Some of these were displaced themselves with their own physiological issues, just as the ones who were receiving the medical help.

What then, are volunteers in precarious situations expecting to gain from giving? We saw that Amir said it had to do with love for him, and he wanted to give to the community, in the same way that someone in Turkey was currently helping his family. Amir, in the same interview, said that he believed some of the volunteers are expecting more physical *things,* for their contribution, but this he condemned as "selfish". Still, people giving in the form of working as volunteers, gain a sort of agency and subjectivity. They are contributing, therefore they matter, not as suffering and receiving objects, but as human subjects equal to the hosts. Thus, the distance between 'Us' and 'Them', 'Self' and 'Other', 'Familiar' and 'Strange', 'Subjects' and 'Objects' is removed in a unifying process, tying them closer together.

Concludingly, I will argue that the church community, being present in their society, is aware of the dangers of engaging in an ongoing dividing discourse. Engaging with the stranger, there is an ambiguous focus on the similarities and the differences, that is, the closeness and the distance. To create a more sustainable and inclusive society, we must also include the everyday actions of refugees (Horst, 2019, 53). Through communion rhetoric and action (working closely together) the host community tries to minimize a social gap that has been there for years, but we will in the next chapter see how there are still some unbalanced power relations between the hosts and the guests. We will also see that workers in the church, both employees and volunteers, are in fact expecting something in return for their work, but in a much more divine way. The religious side of giving and receiving will be the subject of the next chapter.

4. “Pray for my son, pray for my rent”
Faith-based giving and power relations

This chapter takes a closer look at what it means to be hospitable in a faith-based context, and what implications this has on a giving-receiving relationship. I question if the classical Maussian framework is useful when considering religious gifts, and explore whether unconditional giving actually exists, and if the power relations created by such giving is due to insurmountable expectations of reciprocity.

Hospitality in the name of God

There is a surprisingly vast body of scholarly literature on the conjunction between humanitarianism and religion (for an overview see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011a). It is surprising because humanitarianism traditionally has been associated with the initial response by *secular* humanitarian organisations in times of crisis, such as Médecins Sans Frontières or the International Committee of the Red Cross. That said, western humanitarianism originated in many cases from Christian ethics such as compassion and charity (Fassin, 2011, 38; Mittermaier, 2019, 4-5). Traditionally, such Western-based, secular humanitarian organisations, either state driven, state sponsored or non-governmental, have usually been striving for neutrality, and have therefore avoided explicit political and religious values in their *modus operandi.* Yet, the myth of impartiality and neutrality has been busted for a while (see for example Redfield, 2011), and a growing appreciation has emerged for what faith-based organisations (FBOs) can contribute with to their shared goal of elevating human suffering. Especially emphasized is the closeness FBOs have to local environments, and those inflicted in it, through church communities, mosques, temples etc. That is, both a geographical and social closeness, as we saw in the previous chapter. With the rise of attention towards FBOs in humanitarian crises, so has the academic literature grown. A distinction must be made between FBOs, which are based on religious values and principles, but have stated programmatic functions and goals, and local faith communities (LFC), which first and foremost are groups of worshiping believers in a congregation, such as House of Christ (See also Orji, 2011, 473-474).

After a brief review of some of the most relevant literature, we will look at how humanitarian support towards Muslim refugees is manifested and materialised in the Evangelical community in Lebanon.

Faith-based humanitarianism

Ager and Ager (2017) argue rightly that FBOs, and especially the subcategory of local faith communities (LFCs), have always played an important role as first responders to humanitarian crises (Ager & Ager, 2017, 48). Some of the features that make religious communities better prepared to contribute in critical situations, are already existing structured organisations in the inflicted area, local knowledge, clear leadership, felt responsibility towards their immediate community, and a set of moral values urging to help those in need. In addition, LFCs manage facilities that may be used in times of crises, and usually have followers who are ready to volunteer (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Ager, 2013, 4). Further, Mavelli & Wilson (2017, 4) claims that this is particularly true in countries with a neo-liberal economy and an evasive state. In my fieldwork in Lebanon, all these factors were present, which left LFCs and FBOs with a responsibility to tend to precarious people.

Interestingly, the mentioned strive for neutrality in the humanitarian sector is more symbolic than human-centred, since 84 percent of the world's population affiliates with a faith (or cosmology)(Ager & Ager, 2017, 39-40), and it is even more true among refugees, who mostly originate from Muslim countries.[10] Since over 90 percent of the workers in humanitarian aid are nationals, they often embody the same beliefs as the beneficiaries (Ager & Ager, 2011, 468). Critical authors have pointed at this discrepancy, arguing that FBOs are better prepared to care for refugees' spiritual needs, in addition to their physical needs (see for example Kidwai, Moore & FitzGibbon 2014, 11). Consciously ignoring the fact that the beneficiaries most likely have a faith, thus also a spiritual need, is telling. But there is an increasing attention towards those who are basing their physical and spiritual support on religious precepts, especially LFCs and organisations (Ager & Ager, 2017, 38; see also Mittermaier, 2019). Ager & Ager (2017) argues that we therefore must take religious communities and organisations seriously, and the authors identify how local faith communities are building relations with refugees in three ways: first, as displaced themselves, where they engage in religious activities in diaspora. Second, by

[10] The recent years has seen an increase in conflicts in South America, leading to displacement of inflicted Catholic Christians.

advocating for the refugees' rights, through political means; and finally third, by hosting refugees, which is the case in this study (Ager & Ager, 2017, 12).

The most common critique of faith-based humanitarianism is that aiding might be a way to proselytize frail and traumatised humans who have recently fled from some sort of catastrophe. This is of course mostly relevant if the hosting community is of a different faith than the displaced ones. There are inherent power relations in such hospitality situations, especially when the displaced people are recipients of material goods, which might create an insurmountable feeling of reciprocity, as we will see later in this chapter. This unbalanced relation might be exploited by the hosting community, according to some critics (Beaman, Selby and Barras, 2017; Bornstein, 2005, 27). We cannot completely diminish the chance of proselytization in religious-cum-humanitarian settings. This is part of a larger discussion on the motivations behind the hospitality, which is the subject of the next chapter.

According to Riera & Poirier (2014), the UNHCR has in the last decade re-evaluated cooperating with LFCs, and more trust is given to religious organisations working towards the same goal as secular organisations – to ease the pain and suffering of people in crises. There is currently an awakening in how international NGOs and governmental organisations treat FBOs and LFCs (ibid.). As we dive into a teleological discussion of means and ends, among them gift-giving, we note that even with a growing literature on the intersection of faith and forced migration (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011a), what is currently lacking is empirical evidence on how inter-religious hospitality plays out in places adjacent to the countries in crisis.

Holistic humanitarian hospitality

There is a strong emphasis in faith-based humanitarian organisations on helping and supporting *all* facets of the human life, including spiritual and emotional aspects. This is true in the church community in Beirut as well. House of Christ, a permanent body of believers who met to worship, did not consider themselves a "faith-based organisation" *per se*, but admittingly recognizes that the work they did, had humanitarian functions. Life is complex, and so should the support be, and humanitarianism should account for what Senior Pastor Mujir considered to be the "*whole* human experience". For instance, when the transitory medical clinic visited the already cramped church for a couple of days, Pastor Yousef wanted space dedicated to prayer. Visitors and patients could receive prayer from a church representative, in addition to physiological examinations and treatment. Erica Bornstein (2005), in her fieldwork among Protestant NGOs in Zimbabwe, found the same connections between the spiritual and physical

need, and the NGO did not separate the two (Bornstein, 2005, 48-49). Senior Pastor Mujir, argued that this strongly differentiated Western, secular humanitarianism from the faith-based hospitality in an Arab community. “We do not think in a systematic way, we are relational,” he said, arguing that objectifying and systemising humanitarian treatment removes the human itself from the treatment. Thus, by also tending to the spiritual needs of the person, the treatment is more holistic. This latter term, “holistic”, often recurred in the community as the ideal way of meeting and treating the displaced. Pastor Mujir criticised the western humanitarian discourse for being “dismantling […] and looks at different parts within a human being. We look at humanity in a more holistic way.” Further, he continued:

> We shouldn’t be thinking ‘okay, there is an emotional need, let me serve it. There is a physical need…’. These are all connected so deeply, in the complexity of humanity. Neurologically, physically, emotionally, spiritually are all connected. This is a human being, who has lost his house, land, olive trees, and maybe members of his family. And he is in Lebanon. They are in great need. This was initially our motivation for reaching out to them. As you […] practically start serving them, you discover that, as you are sitting with a mother to console her, her child is crying. You ask ‘why is your child crying?’. Well, she doesn’t have milk to feed the child. So you move with compassion to feed the child. To discover that the father has a trauma challenge because he was prisoned by ISIS for six months, and was beaten almost to death. So then you have to treat that emotional crisis in the family. Then you discover that these people are in despair, they have no hope, they have a spiritual hunger, or maybe the wife has seen Jesus in a vision, so then you move with compassion to give them the greatest gift ever, in Jesus Christ. […] We all need something. We all have our spiritual challenges, our emotional, our physical, our relational [challenges].

Pastor Mujir argues that we do not pay enough attention to the spiritual aspect when hosting and caring for the displaced other. At the same time, some scholars claim that “Muslimness” in refugees’ identities is *over-emphasised* in the Western displacement discourse (Beaman, Selby and Barras, 2017, 89). Migrants from Muslim majority countries coming to Europe and North America experience a constant focus on Islamic symbols and culture (such as questions about *hijab,* praying, mosques, etc.). The emphasised alterity in the displaced further separates “them” from “us”, while they may in fact be carrying a spiritual need that demands care. In other words, by neglecting the spiritual part of refugees’ mental health, we risk neglecting an important

aspect of their lives. But by over-emphasising on their religious belonging, not as a spiritual need, but as a categorising label, we reduce their subjectivity to a number of alterity. That said, the situation was much different in Lebanon, which is a highly inter-religious country.

Came for the vouchers, stayed for the message

There was no secret that most, if not all the Muslim Syrians who first came to the church, came to receive *goods*. Or as Mujir bluntly put it: "why would they come? There is no reason for them to come, except to receive". The most sought-after item was the food vouchers. The vouchers had a value of $60, and could only be used on food items in a specific supermarket. In addition, the church also gave out a fixed number of food bags every month. At one point, a local organisation who donated a large amount of the vouchers to the church was considering stopping their support. George, who oversaw the distribution of vouchers, quickly realised what this would mean. He said that without the vouchers, the church would have lost half the attendants. These gifts have been a major part of the church's recent growth.

According to Miriam, many Syrians first came to the church to get food and other things, but eventually they got curious about why Christian strangers were giving out free food without expecting anything in return. This 'unconditional love', as most of the church staff called it, is what made people come back. A Syrian woman who was a devoted Muslim when she came to Lebanon, started coming to the church to pick up food and other goods. Eventually, she started listening to the stories that were told, which intrigued her into learning more about Christianity. At the time of fieldwork, she was leading and teaching 20 women. Pastor Yousef connected the means and the end, and stated that "the help that we give is like a key to reach them". He explained why he was giving out gifts of food and material goods, and he hoped people he met would be interested in hearing more about the Christian God.

Money was a recurring topic in the community, and the church was not simply handing it out. Rather, all donations, either from churches abroad or the local population, were used to buy food and non-food items such as blankets, matrasses, and medicine. Not rarely gave privileged employees (and volunteers) of the church of their own money to help families they felt extensively sorry for. Pastor Rashid, who was once responsible for the medical ministry in the church, told me a story of a woman in need:

> One woman came to me and said 'Pastor, my son has a high fever. It has been three days, and it's not going away. He is dying. I need medicine!' I said 'I don't have more money. I already spent what I had of personal money. I don't have anything to

> help you, but you're breaking my heart.' She wanted to go away, she was so sad. But the Lord reminded me, and I said [to her:] 'come here, come here. I don't have the money, but I have the Lord – let's pray!' And I prayed with her for her son to be healed. The second day she came running and smiling, saying 'Pastor, the moment you prayed for my son, I went home, and the fever was gone, it was amazing!', and continued 'Pastor, I don't have money to pay the rent, except for these 50 dollars. Please pray on these 50 dollars, so that they can become 500 dollars, so I can pay the rent!'

There was an understanding among the church staff that while giving food and material goods was important and valuable in itself, sharing the word of Jesus was as fundamental. George, who was working closest to the recipients of the support, and had good relations with most of them, became occasionally frustrated when he realised that people were deceiving him. He knew, as everyone did, that a lot of people were not interested in the Christian message, and he acknowledged this, but when people were faking interest instead of being honest, or deceiving him into giving items, he was disappointed. "It hurts when people are lying on top of exploiting", he said and continued: "We don't force anyone to become Christian, but these people are adults, we shouldn't be raising them like they are kids. That's all I expect: honesty". This climaxed when he realised that a young Syrian man with two wives and four children, whom George had supported from his own pocket for a while, did not use the money on medical treatment for his sick daughters, as he said, but spent the money on something else. This happened several times, and each time George trusted him to do the right thing, but ended up with being frustrated.

Pastor Yousef, on the other hand, was more satisfied with the beneficiaries' varying response. He compared the work with the biblical story of Jesus who fed a few thousand people with two fish and five bread, and stressed that some people just came, ate, and went home, while others stayed to listen to what he had to say. The following excerpt is from an interview with Pastor Yousef:

> If you have a baby, and he is hungry, and it has been five hours without a meal, you can't rock him or sing to him. If he's hungry he will not shut up. It is the same process [with recipients of support]. If they are hungry, feed them, give them comfort. Then you can show them Jesus. In that case, you will be able to talk with him, and he will see that you showed him love before talking about Jesus. You showed him Jesus before talking about Him. It is not good to come and talk a lot

> and say ‘Jesus loves you. You’re a sinner.’ […] You show them love. Then he will ask why you are doing this. Then you can speak about Jesus.

As we shift the focus of the chapter, we will take a closer look at what Pastor Yousef and the other representatives of House of Christ, were expecting from the recipients. To give humanitarian gifts in the name of God is not without meaning. The voucher or the medicine is imbued with transcendence, and further it is given to often impoverished people, meaning that we cannot neglect that an aspect of power is involved. Is reciprocity expected, demanded or even possible, if so, in what sense?

Gifts in House of Christ

I see hospitality not as a type of gift, but rather the other way around. The two have similarities, in that they imbue something to and on the Other, but hospitality is so much more than reciprocity, materiality and socio-juridical contracts (Candea & de Col, 2012, 1-2). Hospitality is concerned with the self and the strange(r), and puts the spotlight on relations, affiliation, and alterity (ibid.). We will come back to hospitality at the end of the chapter, and for now, we consider the usefulness of applying orthodox gift-analysis on faith-based gifts.

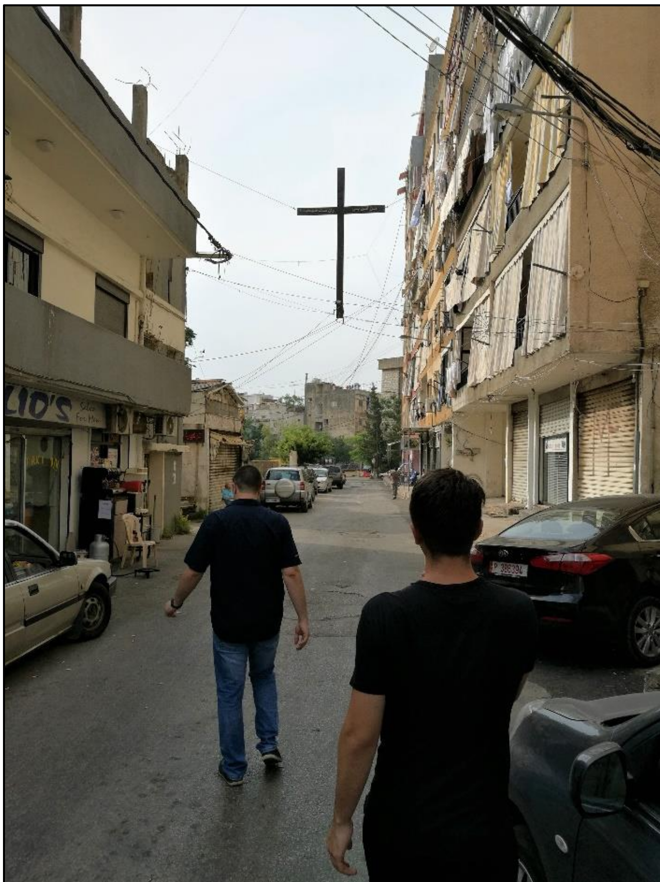
I will present two strands, or schools of thought, in the anthropological discussion on the gift: starting off with a critique of the Maussian economical-political perspective (which remains the most recognized, but simultaneously most debated), and then moving to a moral- and grace-based tradition made famous by Julian Pitt-Rivers.

The giver, donor, or benefactor is in our case the church community as an institution and organisation. It is not personified, and no individual is taking the honour for the gifts or the work that is done. Rather, the giving community points to God as the original Giver. So how then, are these exalted gifts manifested? Based on my interlocutors’ view on the support work, I suggest five overlapping types of gifts that were given to the displaced: physical (such as food, vouchers, medicine), intellectual (education, computer classes, start-up support), emotional (comfort, marriage and trauma counselling), spiritual (prayers, Bible classes, spiritual guidance), and finally relational (social network and proxy families).

Every month, the church gave out food vouchers and food bags. These were regular, while other material goods, such as blankets and mattresses were distributed irregularly, depending on donations and the season. Church representatives, usually George and Pastor Yousef, made lists of who would get what each month. George invited families to come to the church to get their

vouchers at a specified time. They all came, sat in line, and waited for their name to be called. Then they approached to the table in the middle of the church room where George sat, and signed that they had received the 90 000 LBP ($60) voucher.

Because of limited funds, families did not get food and vouchers every month, and it was consequently allocated evenly. It was usually women who came to the church to get the food and the non-food items. This could be explained by several possibilities. First, it happened during daytime when it was more likely that only women were home. Second, it was often women who attended the church meetings, and thus knew the place and the representatives better. This is closely related to the third reason, which is an inherent shame for Muslim men to receive aid from a Christian church, according to my interlocutors.[11] Even with religion removed, men are supposed to be able to take care of their family. Seeking help can be viewed as shameful for the masculinity, according to a church representative who tried to explain the gendered unbalance.



7 George and Sameer.

[11] It was not unusual that husbands followed their wives to worship night and Sunday service, while they either waited at home or outside the church.

The Unfree Gift

To apply classic gift transaction theory, let us take the food voucher as a useful point of departure. Should we believe Mauss, the voucher as a gift is a social contract, making a bond between the giver and the receiver (1990). Mauss calls this a 'total social phenomenon', because it encompasses moral, legal, economic, political and religious aspects at once. But following his argument, the gift demands a repayment, and is thus not free (Mauss, 1990, 4; 9). Giving demands reciprocity. To explain this, he argues that there is something inherent in the gift that is forcing a repayment. According to Maori tradition this is the *hau*, an essential part of the giver that still resides inside of what is given (ibid. 14). The gift is not inactive, and the *hau* needs to return to the original giver (ibid. 15). This would put the Syrian refugees in an awkward position. People who have nothing and who are receiving "unconditionally", are suddenly expected to reciprocate the food vouchers?

Erica Bornstein, working with beneficiaries and impoverished Indians, asks a provocative question concerning the unfree gift (2012, 24). She looks at how the Hindu religious gift called dān, in all its different forms, is not easily categorised in Mauss' terms, often because it is anonymous. While recognizing that a religious gift could be instrumental, to gain followers or debt, this rational is lost when the receiver is unknown. Mauss would on the other hand reject this as nonsense, and claim that an anonymous gift is an oxymoron, because a real gift is dependent on a relationship, and while you can have a relationship with an anonymous person, you cannot have an anonymous relationship (Douglas, x, in Mauss, 1990). Further, the argument goes, the gift itself could never be completely free because of the recipient's recognition of a gift structure, which inherently involves repayment (Derrida, 1992, 13). Let us assume for now that Mauss was right, but how can impoverished Syrian displaced possibly reciprocate humanitarian gifts?

Reciprocity

The obvious starting point would be to ask whether the Syrian recipients feel obligated to give back. We already got a few hints by looking at the arbitrary volunteerism, but in general, we can see a common, maybe unconscious, felt obligation to somehow repay. Since these people have little money, the repayment is done in other ways, such as dedicated time (Derrida, 1992). I cannot speak for impoverished people receiving aid in secular humanitarian situations, but in the religious sphere, an additional complex layer is added.

One day, George and I went to the man with four children and no job, mentioned above. George first met him on the street of Beirut, where his children were selling paper tissue to people passing by. The man's need was devastating, George said, so he decided to bring a box and two bags of food to the family, and I helped carry. Once at their house, the man invited us in, and accepting the offer would have been the common and polite thing to do. It was therefore surprising when George said no to entering his house. Walking back again, George explained that this moment was problematic, because the man, like others who receive, felt obligated to repay in some way. This also goes for attendance in church events. Some people who receive from religious communities will feel that it is expected from them to participate in services, worships or similar, or even show a will to change their belief as a sort of reciprocity. George was aware of this, and knew that it was a difficult situation for recipients, because he believed faith should not be forced. Recall how he stated that all he expected was honesty. He preferred to get to know people slowly, and give slowly, so they would not feel pressured.

Another brief example is pieces of jewellery found in the offering – or tithe – box after Sunday services. Pastor Mujir explained this by saying that poor people want to give of the little they have, because they are truly inspired and want to contribute. Or maybe they feel pressured to contribute? Or maybe it is a way to repay for what they have received?

Loyalty

One possible way to look at the reciprocity issue is through loyalty. I encountered this one day as I went with Karim to renew my phone subscription. As we entered a store we had never been to before, we were greeted kindly by a young Syrian man behind the counter. As I was about to pay the 16.000 LBP, Karim and the seller realised that they came from the same Syrian city. Suddenly, the man refused to accept my money. To my surprise, he did not want it, and gave me the subscription for free. When we left, I was confused. Karim explained that it is common for Syrians who works in shops, to not charge the costumer for their first visit to the store. While it might look like a welcoming and generous gesture, it also has other implications. Karim said that there were implicit expectations for me as a costumer to come back to "repay" the first service with my loyalty. Or as Mauss would put it: a reciprocal bond is created. By giving, the person behind the counter makes sure that he got regular customers. For a shop, loyalty and customers means steady income. While it seems like a selfless act, it is also an example of how giving and hospitality have positive outcomes for the host. Could the same strategy be utilised in the church to gain followers? By giving away food and other material goods, which is not repaid in the traditional sense, the church might secure that beneficiaries return, and this way

amass a large body of followers. If not necessarily converts, then still attendees who affiliate with the congregation.

Keir Martin (2013) writes about big-men in Papua New Guinea who have strategical, instrumental reasons for giving: «[T]he aim of the 'big-man' gift transactor is to acquire a large following of people (gift debtors) who are obligated to him» (Gregory, 1982, 51 cited in Martin, 2015, 187). Further, the big-man has jurisdiction and respect among his followers, who in their turn repays with loyalty. I want to be careful to imply and apply this theory on the reasons for humanitarian work in House of Christ, but the result is nonetheless participating receivers in a faith community.

Conversion and transformation

The topic of conversion could be a thesis in itself, and I regret the small space it has received here. Again, I want to emphasise that we are first and foremost concerned with the Evangelical givers, rather than the receivers. But one cannot be concerned with one without investigating the other, or rather, the relation between the two.

Pastor Mujir expressed his reciprocity expectations as following:

> Naturally, in a culture of honour and shame, it is honourable to give something in return. Sometimes, many of our [Syrian] brothers and sisters have felt the urge or the responsibility to pay something back by being present in these meetings. I respect that, and I give them the honour to do it. […] If you feel that you want to visit me and my family in my home, just come. I am not going to feel like you are doing it because you are faking it, or being genuine, when you come, it does not mean that you are a follower of Jesus. The freedom of not coming, should include the freedom of attending as well. I would never say to them "I forbid you to come, because people would think that we are giving you vouchers, so that you would come."

The pastor is emphasizing that there never was any obligation for the receivers to repay, not by attending, not by faking one's conversion, and not fiscally. Still, close relations could be artificially close out of fear for distance, or out of gratitude for the care. While I believe most of the prior Muslim recipients in the church who had become Christians were sincere in their conversion, some employees agreed that it could be a performative strategy behind the change. I do not suggest that anyone repaid the material gifts they got from the church by converting. I do not have evidence of this, and I believe it is unlikely. Still, we must consider the growth in

attendance that the congregation experienced after starting the humanitarian work. The converts themselves were thus not of interest, but rather the non-converts who were attending to church meetings. Those who converted had made their choice, and were free to come or not, while Muslim recipients (which was by far the majority of the receivers) were put in a more awkward position. Sometimes the need to repay manifested in attending the services and other meetings. Senior Pastor Mujir confirmed this, but stated that "it doesn't matter to us if they fake it". When this happened over a period of time, new attendees started to listen to the message, which in some cases led down the path to Christianity. This journey took weeks for some, and years for others. Thus, I argue that the social setting is both performative and transformative, in the sense that some are deliberately trying to alter how others perceive them, *as* interested in the Christian message while faking an inclination towards conversion. However, some are at the same time truly changing their cosmologies.

A simple distinction between 'conversion' and 'transformation' must be made. The former is used in Western media, but also by scholars (see for example Kraft 2012), often about Christians or atheists becoming Muslims. 'Transformation' on the other hand, was used by Christians and ex-Muslims alike in Beirut as an emic term to describe the process of changing faith. The emphasis is on *process*, as something that is constantly changing and being moulded (Kraft, 2017, 221). Transformation happens when a person's ideas, ideals, ontologies, and values change, but it is still the same human. One can argue that 'conversion', by contrast, happens in a blink of an eye, just like you convert one currency into another. The point is that many, if not most, Syrians who were actively engaged in the church community were somewhere "on the road to Damascus", that is, somewhere between Islam and Christianity (Handman, 2010, 578).

Another useful distinction is that of 'instrumental' and 'spiritual' transformation. As mentioned, the church representatives acknowledged that many came only to receive, and were never truly interested in the message they were told. Kraft (2012, 6) states that "[…] there is an important difference between the individual who converts because of *convenience in institutional affiliation* with a different group, and the individual who undergoes a radical change in worldview because of a new understanding of, or encounter with, the sacred" (emphasis added). Limit of space hinders me in investigating closer the latter form of transformation, which is a spiritual change.

The social aspect of transformation is unneglectable, and people rarely change their faith in a vacuum. Kraft (2012, 7-8) argues that when you grow closer to people from a small faith

community, and your relations with people outside that group is simultaneously weakening, it is difficult *not* to convert. In the church community in Lebanon, this was clear as many young people, in need of physical and emotional support, met in a stable environment that had the capacity to host and take care of a large number of people. They received love, and at the same time, they had no one to oppose the drag towards Christianity. At the same time, Kraft argues that close family and friends who belong to a certain faith affiliation will easily influence the ego (ibid.). Extended family or friends might "hold them back", but in the displacement case in Beirut, few had such relations. It was not uncommon that wives and mothers, who were the first to show interest in the Christian message, influenced the closest family to transform their worldview. Put differently by Tania Li (2014): […] the subject [is] an agent whose desires don't stand outside a conjuncture but are formed within it, and are formative in turn" (Li, 2014, 19).

Typology of reciprocity

The gift has an inherent powerful meaning, which not only constitutes the giver as the greater man, but also undermines the receiver, according to Mauss. He claimed that "the unreciprocated gift still makes the person who has accepted it inferior, particularly when it has been accepted with no thought of returning it. […] Charity is still wounding for him who has accepted it." (Mauss, 1990, 83).

The problem with the term reciprocity, claims Graeber (2001) while criticizing Mauss, is that it is over-encompassing (Graeber, 2001, 218). In order to make sense of the term, Marshall Sahlins' created a typology of reciprocity, where he identified that different expectations of reciprocity based on relations forms a continuum, consisting of 'generalized' (solidary or altruistic), 'balanced' and 'negative' (profit seeking) reciprocity (Sahlins, 2004, 193-195). Even more useful is it, according to Graeber, to talk about 'closed' and 'open' reciprocity, where the latter is based on intimate relations of permanent mutual commitment, while the former retains a possibility to end the relationship (Graeber, 2001, 220). But this is a continuum, and the relation might change. In other words, it is not a question of whether or not one is obligated to reciprocate, but how close(d) the relations are. Creating and maintaining close relationships is functional for the receiver, and diminishes the obligation to reciprocate.

But all of this is only relevant where the giver intentionally imposes a reciprocal demand on the giver, or if not intentionally, then at least consciously. The hosting church community were aware that what they did for a receiving group of people had an inherent meaning of power, but at the same time, they were unambiguous in their compassion and unconditionality. Analysing

reciprocity in a socio-economic manner is useful, but ours is a case of moral, thus leaving the term somewhat useless. We are dealing with a discourse of faith and compassion, far removed from economy, even though some recipients were no doubt fiscally exploiting the support. Mauss' framework is not universal, and does not seem sufficient to cover the sentiments in our case. Rather, we must look elsewhere. Bornstein (2011) argues along similar lines. The gift was misunderstood by Mauss, she claims, it is not an economical bond between the giver and recipient, but a sacred virtue, and she effectively nullifies the debate of what a 'humanitarian gift' means in the Maussian sense, because a gift of true compassion cannot impose reciprocity (Bornstein, 2011, 143).

The Unconditional gift

Is it naïve to believe that there are no hidden motives for giving in a religious setting? Should we believe people stating they are giving from their heart? Or should we always expect a deeply selfish motivation? These questions are of course difficult to answer, and it is widely known that there is no obvious compatibility between what people say, do and think. "We must have a will to understand and listen to those we study […]. This may open up an enchanted world of relationships based on compassion" (Naguib, 2010, 140). I believe the stated reasons people offer are valuable as a starting point.

The first time I met George, we were chatting by his desk in House of Christ when a Syrian woman with a small boy on her chest, and a young girl at her feet, came in. The woman was crying, and said that her son needed brain surgery to survive. George tried to explain that the church did not give money upfront before such operations, but rather reimbursed afterwards. This was impossible for the woman who had no money. George assured that the boy would still get the surgery he needed, and said to me with a grave face: "What can we do, her son needs surgery. We can't risk that she is not telling the truth, and we neglect her". The woman, and others with similar critical medical need, got operation or the medicine for free from the church.

All giving was done unconditionally, meaning that the church representatives did not expect any form of return form the recipients. A religious man who gives to others in the name of his God, without excepting anything material back in this world, is still not void of expectations (See Coleman, 2004 for more on "sacralised transactions"). For a secular person, this might seem irrational, but to the former, it is highly rational. This became clear when Pastor Yousef said that the volunteers had in fact some expectations: "They are expecting something from God. To have a place in Heaven.". Expecting a transcendent repayment, for an earthly gift or

deed, frees the original receiver from the reciprocal obligation (Coleman, 2004, 432). God takes the debtors place (Naguib, 2010, 140), and repays by securing the giver posthumous ascension, or as Pitt-Rivers (2017, 174) put it: "[…] the axis of exchange is no longer on the mortal plane". It does not make sense to talk about this as *reciprocity*, at least not in the Maussian sense. Now, we should be careful to use this as a universal explanation for all religious acts, and we will see in the next chapter that the range of personal motivations is wide, and surpassing soteriology. Still, Graeber says it nicely: "At the very least, doing a good deed put one in better standing in the eyes of God and thus aided one's chance of eternal salvation" (Graeber, 2001, 161). If God is omnipresent and observing deeds, believers should do good things to their fellow men, not only because it is good in itself, but because their life-after-death depends on it. An act of giving might thus serve two seemingly opposing benefits: self-interest and selflessness. Even if these seem mutually exclusive, they are dependent on each other, as reasons for giving in the first place (Coleman, 2006, 181). Bornstein argues that Western child sponsors expect salvation in return of their gifts, and not any worldly repayment (Bornstein, 2005, 69). Salvation as a possible motivation for doing humanitarian support work will be discussed further in the following chapter, and we will leave it for now with a cliff hanger: "Is the donor of alms helping the beggar to stay alive, or is the recipient, of priestly caste perhaps, offering the donor the opportunity to acquire grace by becoming associated, through this act of charity, with the divinity?" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 81).

Graciousness

During my time in Beirut, George changed his method of voucher distribution from inviting all the recipients to the church, to walking to their homes to deliver the voucher. He stated that the reason was the joy when they received unexpectedly. When I joined him on his route of voucher delivering, it was clear that he was right. The women did not invite us in when they were alone, but met us on the street, and were grateful without hiding their happiness. George explained that meeting people in their home or on their street, felt more secure for them, and it might ease some of the socio-religious pressure they feel coming to the church as Muslims.

I later asked George, who usually was in the church from early morning to late evenings, how he possibly had energy to keep on doing this work, every day of the week, without ever taking time off. One time, after we had worked the whole day, and ended the night by walking in the neighbourhood, he sent me home, while he went back to the church at 11:30 PM to continue working. He replied that "happy people are like batteries that I collect every day. In the evening I take the full batteries home, so that I will be charged through the night".

While Sahlins argued that reciprocal actions are rarely material (Sahlins, 2004, 190), Pitt-Rivers asks if we can look at reciprocity without being concerned with grace (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 71)? Grace, in the latter's sense, works as substitute for the economical, material reciprocity, and asserts that hospitality and support cannot be repaid with commodities, money or services. Rather, by gratitude and goodness is valued higher among the church representatives. Relations of mutual respect and care are maintained as long as the recipients learn how to "operate a system of tacit reciprocities" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 20), in other words, show a moral and social gratitude for what they have received. Hence George's reluctancy towards continuing the support to the man who showed no gratitude, and in a matter of fact, disgraced the gifts he had received by lying. This is an important point, which separates Mauss and Pitt-Rivers. The latter criticise Mauss for his will to see every gift transaction with a social-economical contractual gaze (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 97). Instead, real gifts are based on a moral relation, and are always voluntary. "The moral obligation is only to return grace and what is resented if it is not returned is not the material loss but the rejection of the donor's self" (ibid.).

As noted in the previous chapter, House of Christ did what they could to decrease the social gap between the host community and the displaced. Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian children went to the same school, their families went on outings, and they celebrated Christian holidays together. We will shortly see how these close relations are effectively diminishing the need to repay, or rather, transforming the expectation from one of reciprocity to one of gratitude. According to Zaman (2017) is the easiest and most accepted (and expected) way to repay hospitability is to show gratitude (2017, 163).

At the same time, the reality of displacement and unfriendly past was never forgotten, and even in a moral discourse, there is a hierarchy, or unbalanced power, in hosting and giving. This would always be the case in humanitarian giving, even without the historical context, argues Fassin (2011). The humanitarian gift "is unequal in that there can be no counter-gift: recipients of humanitarian assistance cannot offer anything in return, except in the highly asymmetric form of gratitude […]" (Fassin, 2011, 45).

Powerful relations

Towards the end of the chapter, I want to explore a topic that is inevitable when discussing gift relations, humanitarianism, and religious transformation. I argue that reciprocity is neither expected, nor achieved, in close relations such as in the church community, which might further boost the power relations that look highly unbalanced. The mentioned family rhetoric thus

works in two curious ways. First, it is drawing people closer, bridging social gaps, and creating substituting kin relations, but at the same time, it constitutes a hierarchical, or even patriarchal, structure of protection and support.

"The law of hospitality is founded upon ambivalence", claims Pitt-Rivers (2017, 178), while invoking Derrida's hospitality paradox (Candea & da Col 2012, 3). The guest is honoured by the invitation, while the host is honoured by the visit, but still "it is always the host who ordains, the guest who complies" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 179). This ensures an imbalance of reciprocity and power, "on a knife-edge between suspicion and trust" (Candea & da Col, 5). The problem of the stranger is thus one of impossible integration. Derrida claims that the foreigner is from the very first encounter forced to be docile because the language that is used, and hereunder cultural signs and expectations of behaviour (such as religious praxis and knowledge), are immediately creating distance between the stranger and the host. The former lacks knowledge of the hosts' discourse, habitus, laws, and language. The stranger is forced "[…] to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc." (Derrida, 2000, 15).

The Other is left somewhere between a community member and a hostile threat (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 164-166), and the attempt to integrate him in the faith-based community might leave him in a sort of patron-client relation to the hosting Lebanese. But an important part of what condemns the displaced into an unneeded, yet felt reciprocity is the gifts and support in themselves. For this reason, gift-giving is a "a threat to the formation of egalitarian relationships" (Rozakou, 2016, 186), and makes hospitality "both the manifestation of the incorporation of the *xénos* in sociality and a transformative and deeply hierarchical form of inclusion" (ibid. 188).

In the presence of the Other, as the French philosopher Levinas (2000, 141) would put it, the Same creates a close relationship, where it integrates and contains the former. Further, "… if the Same can contain the Other, then the Same has triumphed over the Other" (ibid.). By stating this, Levinas argues that even if the two, the 'I' and the 'You', becomes one in relation, there is an inherent inequality of power.

The church congregation worked on effectively diminishing the power relations, in multiple ways. As we have already seen, Graeber argues that in close relations, as those between close friends, the feeling of a permanent bond makes the reciprocity unnecessary. One does not keep

track of everything each close friend or family member is owing to whom, in order to one day claim everything back and diminish the relation. Put differently: "[…] once a tally of favors is kept the amity has gone out of it and we are left with a tacit contract; the relationship is no longer simply moral but implicitly jural" (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 132).

Simultaneously, when representatives of House of Christ argue that they are vessels of God's goodness, they exalt the gifts to a transcendent level, and reciprocity should not be felt towards these intermediaries. Maybe it is exactly the lack of material disinterest (an ascetic ethic), and putting God in center, that makes the reciprocity "open" in the first place, which makes it look like a family relation.

The open reciprocity might easily form relations of patronage and authority (Graeber, 2001, 221). This latter structure is the same as in the family, and in other words: close, personal relations similar to the those of the family are not void of power relations, even more so because no reciprocity is expected.

Tahir Zaman, writing about Islamic traditions of hospitality, states that one often finds an unequal power relation in the humanitarian discourse (Zaman, 2017, 171). As we have seen from the community in Beirut, even though the church tried to make the relations egalitarian, it is difficult to forget one part gives, and the other receives. To diminish this power inequality, Pastor Mujir said in a service one Sunday that the church was not Lebanese. "In fact", he pleaded, "it is a Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese church, and not Lebanese hosting refugees". Again, this rhetoric helps unify the congregation as one. And as argued in the last chapter, much of the support work done for refugees is done by fellow refugees.

Another factor that helps balance the power relations, is the demographical fact. The hosting evangelical community is a religious minority in society, while the Muslim guests are part of a bigger group in two aspects. First, because they are Sunni Muslims in a Muslim majority country; and second, because the number of Syrians makes up about one fifth of the population in Lebanon.[12] So while House of Christ might look highly patriarchal in their care and work (Coleman, 2004, 429), it is at any time possible for the receivers to stop attending or receiving. In fact, George once said that "They are not living because they receive – they were already living". It is possible to seek out other, either Muslim or secular, NGOs at any time (See also

[12] As of October 2019, the official UNHCR number is 919 578 registered refugees. [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71#_ga=2.84073690.257737061.1572347955-773252874.1570194817 29.10.2019]

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011b). The reality is that most have become comfortable in the stable and caring environment offered by the church.

Still, it is unavoidable that receiving physical or spiritual support in a different faith community than your own, might cause uneven power relations. Returning briefly to the discussion on transforming or converting to Christianity, it is finally a personal choice, but the social structures surrounding that choice cannot not be diminished. Kraft (2012) argues that conversion from Islam to Christianity is both an active and a passive process for the person involved (2012, 8). One is highly influenced by social relations and ties, but makes up one's own mind, taking steps into a new faith.

We can conclude that the transformation is dual. As we have seen in this chapter, the recipients get spiritually, materially and socially needed support, while the hosts, who started out with anti-immigration sentiments and were sceptical to Syrians, becomes a caring neighbour and brother with respect for the struggles the displaced are going through. But they are possibly also transformed in another way. We have seen hints of what the hosts are expecting in return for their good deeds, both from earthly recipients, and their divine God. In the following chapter, we explore closer the emical reasons to engage in this work, as we listen to the hosts' own understanding of why they spend time and money on caring for the Other.

5. “It’s a Heavenly Purpose” The Objectives of Aid

This chapter will present a range of dispersive personal motivations from the point of view of staff and volunteers in a local faith community, to engage in humanitarian work. It is based on the ethnography of the actions and statements from people involved in House of Christ in Beirut. Without comparing, ranking, or morally assessing their reasoning, I will present it as it was told by my interlocutors.

When engaging in social action, such as charity or general giving, it can be useful to differentiate between the “driving force” and the “aimed goal” of the act. While the latter is the set objective or result which we strive to achieve, the former is what gets us there. Sometimes, we engage in what seem like irrational means to reach a certain goal, or the other way around, we might set goals that are inconsistent or unachievable for our resources. Either way, it is beneficial to differentiate between the two, especially in a discussion about why and how we do try to reach certain objects.

As we will see shortly, employees and volunteers in House of Christ had different opinions on what was their key objective, for instance “spreading the word of God”, or minimizing human suffering in the neighbourhood. Further, most of my interlocutors recognized a multiplicity of goals, of which attaining to local need was always one of them – the most important goal for some, and less important for others. What united them, on the other hand, was a shared driving force. All of them, even ex-Muslim Syrians who were now working or volunteering in the church, identified the Christian message as what gave them strength to continue working. They had a shared faith foundation.

While the church community in Beirut was united through their common driving force, they were highly individual in what were their preferred objectives, or personal motivations to get involved. It was also clear from Pastor Mujir that he gave the members a great amount of

personal freedom to motivate themselves, inside a fixed platform of Christian evangelical values, which constituted the church' doctrine.

The greater discussion on personal motivation is based on a search for personal objectives. This, further, is induced by the reason for anyone to do anything at all. Can an act truly be selfless, or are we trying to overshadow a deep selfishness? The problem, and thus the critique, is exactly this search for a separation between the two (Graeber, 2001, 162). According to Graeber, *we* assume that selfishness and selflessness should conflict with each other (ibid.). Maybe the danger lies in our attempt in trying to artificially separate the two, or in how we want to simply categorise motivations in binary "selfish" and "altruistic" compartments.

To indicate the following motivations, it is enough to quote Bethan Lant (2017) who speaks of his experience with working in faith-based NGOs helping refugees: "While an organization may declare itself secular or faith-based, the motivations of the people who make up the organizations are rarely solely based on one motivation. […] The beliefs and reasons behind why we, as part of organizations and individually, do what we do are complex." (Lant, 2017, 59). In other words, the artificial separation of the following statements makes it clear that if taken alone, these single reasons are only part of what makes the wholeness of human motivation. The following descriptions of different motivations are, as mentioned, not ordered by value or credibility, but, if anything, by complexity.

Humanitarianism

Amir, who had recently converted from Islam to Christianity and was thus not that familiar with Christian theology, claimed that human beings were his main reason for helping with different tasks in the church. He realised that he was contributing to a greater cause, which for him was simply and powerfully just "humanity". We should also recall that Pastor Mujir in the previous chapter claimed that the "great need among displaced in Lebanon" was their initial motivation for reaching out to them. In addition to the purely "humanitarian" gifts given by the church, like food vouchers, mattresses and blankets, medicine and a free clinic, and education for children, were also events organised by the Director of Relief in the church. These events, though happening in the church buildings, were often free from religious content. As mentioned in chapter 3, the visiting clinic offered people in the neighbourhood free physiological examinations by professional doctors, in addition to medicine sponsored by the church. The garage sale gave people in the community a chance to buy second-hand clothes, hygiene items and shoes at very low prices.

When I asked George what his main motivation for helping struggling people in the neighbourhood, he explained that he was raised in an orphanage in Syria. His childhood had been very difficult, and he knew how it felt to be powerless. Through empathy, he could feel pain in the people he met, and stated that he simply "had to help", and that he felt like a soldier who just keeps working. The metaphor of the soldier at war – working tirelessly, persistent and self-sacrificing – is interesting in a religious setting, but let us not forget the reason for displacement. Further, at that time he did not mention any faith-based reasons for working like he did, which strengthens the locus of the human wellbeing as a motivation. Another day, George stated: "It is sad and disturbing to think about all these people. A million times, I have thought about quitting, but then I think about the people and families that smiled and were happy for receiving help."

"The end goal of this is really just to love them."

The compassion, or love for the fellow man, which was adamant in the discourse surrounding the reasoning of aid in the church, was based on the biblical understanding of *agape*. The Greek term is a sacrificial and unconditional type of love – the same love as God showed the world when he sacrificed his Son, according to Christian doctrine. Therefore, it is not surprising that love became a central theme in the support work for refugees, when considering the endorsement of compassion as a main value in Evangelical theology. After all, Jesus died because God loved not only the believers, but every human being. Particularly emphasized in the church community, among the pastors, the employees and even some of the ex-Muslim attendees who recognized the content, was Matthew 22:39. In the particular Bible verse, Jesus states that the second most important commandment is "Love thy neighbour as yourself", ranking only after "Love the Lord your God". Compassion, or simply 'love', was thus a great motivation in itself, to help people in need.

Miriam Ticktin (2011) explains how nurses she met while researching immigration politics in France, "were experts in the practice of compassion", because they were trained to see the universally human aspect in everyone who came through the hospital doors (Ticktin, 2011, 113). As Ticktin's nurses, the evangelicals in House of Christ were also trained in compassion, and most of them had the chance to participate in actions of compassion, and as we have seen, they gladly engaged in it voluntarily.

During a Sunday morning sermon, a pastor of a neighbouring church was preaching to the congregation about forgiveness and love in the society. By this point, is should be clear that

topics such as these speak to a turbulent and violent past between Lebanon and Syria, in addition to the inter-sectarian differences between various Christian denominations and Islam. His point was that Lebanese people had struggled to make *peace* with the enemy, but the Bible tells the believers to *love* the enemy. It was difficult, the pastor said, but it would lead to the greatest peace solution, because "love throws out all hate and fear".

Reem was highly aware of the past and how it influenced today's society, including the refugee situation in the country. "With the situation we have, with the past, the Syrian war and the refugees who's coming, our history, we can use this as an opportunity to show them love", she said. Instead of continuing a disruptive path of systematic discrimination towards the former enemy, showing compassion towards Syrians as fellow human beings, would be the Christian way of dealing with the tense situation. Returning to the family rhetoric, Reem reflected on how she ideally should be "[…] treating everyone as if everyone was my sister or my mother. That is really the true love, when He says 'love one another'". For Reem, the love was central to the reason why she was engaged in working with refugees and poor, while pointing to the type of family relations she wanted to have with newcomers (to the church and to the country). The love derived from Christ, she said, should be directed to everyone. "These people who are hungry and dying of whatever disease, how can you speak about Jesus as love, without loving them practically? The end goal of this is really just to love them."

Amir also understood the humanitarian work in the church as an act of compassion, stating "I think all the work that the church does, giving food, medical help, school and visiting people, is love." He felt the closeness and the love in the community when he sometimes missed out on events, and was called by others who wanted to check if he was okay.

Mercy – a debated deed

Love, or compassion, is a deep-felt, personal motivation for acting, and it has been argued that religious believers are "motivated purely out of love for their human brothers and sisters" when engaging in humanitarian work (Shovlain, in Ferris, 2005, 324). As we will see, there were more reasons for Lebanese Christians to help refugees than "purely out of love", though it might be an ideal to many believers. Doing deeds solely based on love towards other human beings, especially towards a former enemy, were by some considered to be acts of mercy. While my interlocutors had different opinions on what 'mercy' was, the word frequently emerged in the aid discourse. One of the older leaders in the church explained mercy in a twofold way. "Mercy is to receive what you do not deserve. […] Talking in a worldly perspective and not a Christian

perspective, why should I help a Syrian who is in Lebanon?" But this "earthly" mercy was not the type that the church was engaged in. Rather, a more divine type was stressed, one where church members were simply vessels of the mercy from a merciful God. People in need are "[…] receiving acts of mercy that God channelled through me to give to him", he continued. In other words, God's mercy is manifested in humanitarian deeds, towards refugees in this case. There is an inherent act of humbling oneself in being merciful, Miriam argued. She reflected that God's descension, in sacrificing His son, was the greatest act of mercy to undeserving people. Humans, on the other hand, she said, could not be merciful. "You're human, as they are human", she reflected when talking about acts of mercy towards refugees. Her point was that humans cannot descend anywhere, thus we cannot humble ourselves to be merciful as God. At the same time, doing acts out of unconditional love was possible, she claimed.

Not everyone in the church was equally sure that humans could manifest God's mercy in the world. George had the impression that mercy was divinely out of reach for humans, so another strategy was needed, something that was more accountable and justifiable. This became clear one day as we were walking on the streets of Beirut after yet another visit to the Syrian family mentioned above, who George claimed kept using cash gifts on wrong things. The problem with human mercy, according to George, is that it can never be perfect, and thus the church community constantly runs the risk of helping "the wrong people". He referred to people with bad intentions, stating that some of the other leaders in the church were "giving without thinking". He was on the other side rooting for what he called "Team Justice", as the only leader in the church. Justice was fairer, he said. It made more sense to him, because then each family could receive according to their size, and people should get what they deserve (Pitt-Rivers (2017, 88) wrote that "Grace is opposed to calculation"). More importantly, justice is also easier for humans to execute than mercy, but while the latter is to a larger extent "unconditional", the former *cannot be unconditional* because it is based on previous actions, deeds and sins. Justice is a reaction, while unconditional acts are done in a vacuum, without reason, without asking anything in return. This makes the two dichotomies opposites on a continuum (For more on justice versus mercy, see Levinas, 1999, 102; Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 88; and Elisha, 2008).

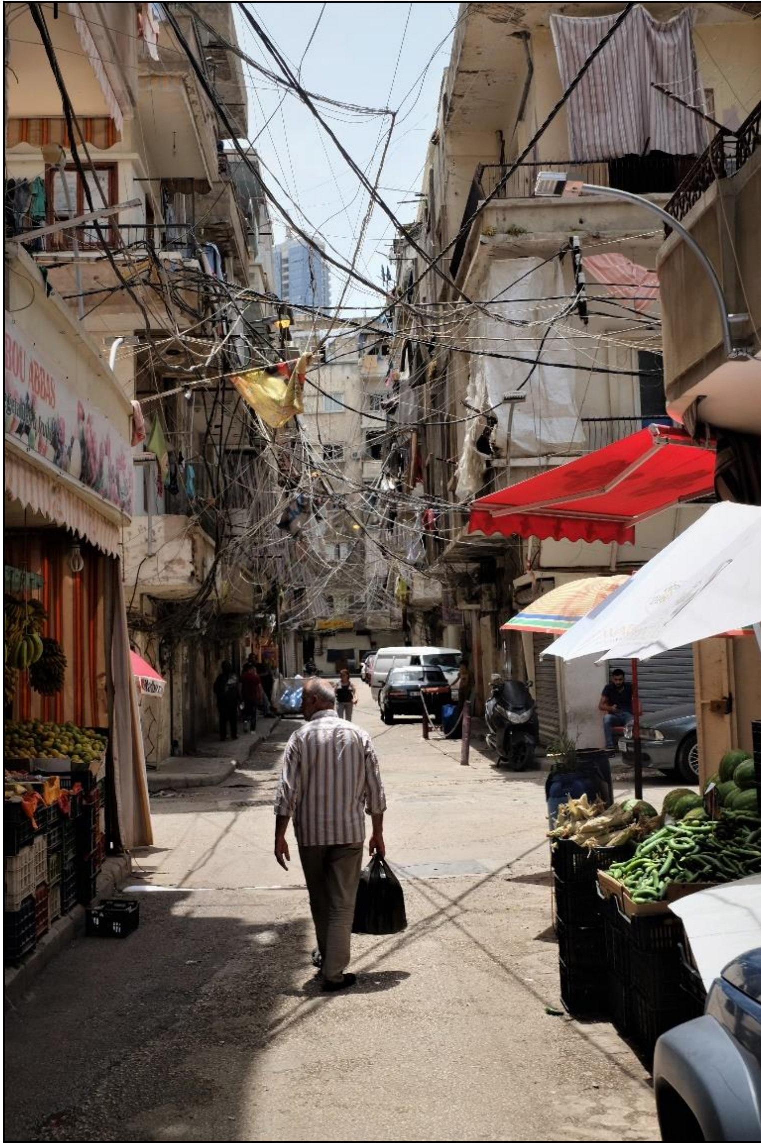
Ticktin (2011) argues that compassion is negotiated and sometimes deliberately held back, even by ostensibly sympathetic professionals, and is thus doused with subjectivity (2011, 117-118). The statement that someone does not *deserve* compassion might seem as an oxymoron, as we tend to think about compassion as unconditional (recall *agape)*. Still, there is an element of

choice in whom one decides to show compassion for, and Ticktin explains this as the receiver's lack of a trait which would otherwise evoke a compassionate feeling (ibid.).

The question arising is why George continued to give to the man who had cheated him several times, and who was not grateful for what he received? George knew that loving unconditionally is a part of what Jesus did and wanted his followers to do. A part of loving unconditionally is giving unconditionally. This is mercy, he recognized, to give of oneself without expecting anything in return. Therefore, he tried to forget what people had done to him and to the church, and thus forgive them. This is the merciful thing to do, and what Pastor Yousef continuously did, contemplated George. He realised that he should become better at "doing mercy", and this was the reason he still gave the man food and medicine. "I think mercy is difficult, but I have to try. Jesus fed 5000 without asking who they were", George said.

George unknowingly incarnated a well-known paradox in the Evangelical aid-discourse, which Elisha (2008) named "the paradox of compassion and accountability" (Elisha, 2008, 180). While most Evangelicals claim unconditionality in their *modus operandi,* a need for accountability often arises (I will give you money *if* you spend it on medicine). Put differently, compassion is based on a certain level of responsibility from the recipient, but critical or selective unconditionality turns into an oxymoron. The food vouchers given to refugees were so-called unconditional gifts, since they were given without reciprocal expectations, but they were not totally without meaning. There were inherent demands in the vouchers, for instance that they had to be used at a certain store, all at once, and not on alcohol or tobacco. Thus, full unconditionality seems difficult, even for the most selfless Christians. Derrida (2005) argues along similar lines when explaining the "hospitality paradox", in which hospitality in the pure form is to greet whoever is at the doorstep, unconditionally – that is, without conditions (Derrida, 2005, 7). But the second we ask for their name, or their origin, we impose prejudice and conditions onto the visitor, much like imposing conditions on the usage of unconditional gifts.

The two parallel modes of conduct, which are respectively governed by the principle of grace and the principle of law (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 76) are representing the sacred and the profane. God's inherited *agape* was for some too exalted to be transferable to strangers, or put differently, it was simply not possible for humans. Other managed to use love as a divine reason for helping struggling people in Beirut. It was meant for everyone, no matter nationality, economical class or religious faith. While everyone in the community found love central to the aid work, hospitality was a more disputed motivation.



8 The streets of Beirut.

Hospitality

The last part of this chapter will explore how explicit faith-based rhetoric were utilised in daily operations concerning the support work in the community. We will pick up the thread on hospitality in a faith-based context, before we ask how important it was for the hosts to evangelise to the displaced, which was often referred to as "planting seeds". Finally, some of my interlocutor stressed a concern for divine recognition, or working for their God, more than anything else.

Senior Pastor Mujir was clear that the vision of the church was based on an undiscriminating faith, where marginalized people were equal to everyone else in the society. In fact, before they

began supporting refugees from Syria, the congregation engaged in social work for disadvantaged Lebanese. Again, the word “unconditional” was prevalent. When I confronted Pastor Mujir with what I thought was an elementary trait of all Arab communities, namely unconditional hospitality, he differentiated between “Arab hospitality” and “Christian hospitality”. He explained it this way:

> How I see hospitality in the Arab world in general, is hospitality to your own extended family and hospitality toward those who are of higher rank than yourself. It is extremely rare to see a family expressing hospitality to somebody they do not know of a lower rank. It is only in a church context that you see this.

According to him, there is a social factor present in whom people show hospitality towards in what he calls “the Arab world”. To prove this, he asked whether I had felt the “Arab hospitality” during my stay in Lebanon. I had indeed, I told him, upon which he said that regular families in Lebanon gains honour when hosting foreigners, and especially Western men. It is the same with local people of high status, such as priests, officials, officers, and politicians. To contrast, he was certain that regular families would rarely invite, or help, poor, unknown people – especially not Syrians, because it would be the opposite of honouring.

Thus, the Arab hospitality, to use a very generalized expression, is centred around receiving rather than giving, and the hosts is the one who benefits. This is also supported by Amira Mittermaier (2019) who did fieldwork among Islamic charity organisations in Cairo. She calls this “competitive hospitality”, meaning that one hosts in order to receive (Mittermaier, 2019, 135). The host claims reciprocity and honour.

The concept of ‘honour’ needs unpacking at this point. Contrary to Wikan’s studies from Egypt and Oman, the term was ‘experience-near’ (Geertz in Wikan, 1984, 637) to my interlocutors. It was frequently employed, while I never heard anyone mention ‘shame’. I lean on Julian Pitt-Rivers’ classical definition of honour, which he argues is “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride" (Pitt-Rivers, 1965, 21, his italics). Wikan argued on her hand that anthropologists struggle to comprehend the emic use of the term, thus participates in the reproduction of ‘honour’ as a vague and mystical entity that can be lost (Wikan, 1984, 645). Leaving the term out of our discussion would be to neglect an important emical concept, but including it might be an inherent trap. Consequently, we must see how my interlocutors dealt with the term. The

word was mostly used when talking about hosting and receiving guests and visitors – both refugees and anthropologists – on an individual and community level. My interlocutors unknowingly followed Herzfeld's suggestion that we should narrow the meaning of the overstrained word 'honour', to that of 'hospitality', which is more precise and less ambiguous (Herzfeld, 1987, 75). Hospitality then, remains not a synonym of honour, neither in the church in Beirut, nor in Herzfeld's understanding, but they are still closely related, and when talking about the honour to serve God or guests (either refugees, anthropologists, or other visitors) it is the serving and the hospitability which must be investigated closer.

Amir explained to me that hospitality has become a "habit" in the Arab societies (speaking with experience from Syria and Lebanon). During my stay in Beirut, I had been on numerous house visits to families and singles, and without exception, they all put out food and drinks for their guests. Even very poor families managed to find something to serve, because doing otherwise would be an undeniable blow to their honour, even if no one else knew (Pitt-Rivers, 2017, 179). When discussing hospitality in Arab countries, Amir claimed "Even water is hospitality!".

Reem confirmed that being hospitable in the Lebanese society was "Just reflecting an image of kindness to strangers". This image is built on what she called 'prestige', in a society that is highly superficial and where outer appearances are extremely important. She continued: "It's all part of an image we want others to see us for. But not what is really deep down in our heart. Of course there are exceptions, there are kind people. [...] It's about how we'd like foreigners to look at us. There is a lot of hypocrisy."

Christian hospitality: putting God in the center

Referring to the discussion of mercy, Pastor Mujir believed the Christian way of dealing with the problem of hospitality is through a God-given mercy. Further he thought that believers were only channels of that mercy. Thus, their vision became centred around need, whoever embodied it, which simultaneously levelled inequality and status among the faithful – a common value rhetoric in Christian (and other monotheistic) discourses. By finding and elevating need, God's mercy was given to the world, through "Christian hospitality". This hospitality was centred around God, and it became clear when I went on home visits with Pastor Yousef. Though the families we visited put out snacks or coffee for us, the importance of the meeting was always spiritual. The pastor prayed for and with the families, especially if it was sick or disabled people in the house, and he often ended the session by reading a Bible verse. In a sense, he was the external authority, coming to visit, which sounds like the type of hospitality mentioned by

Pastor Mujir, but the difference was in who was really hosting whom. The Lebanese pastor, walking around in the neighbourhood, praying for Syrian families, supporting them with money or medicine, still retained the position of host, even though he was the one visiting. It became an interesting dynamic in these meetings, and through these visits, Pastor Yousef put God in the center, and at the same time decreasing the honour-level of the visit, though it was no doubt very honouring to receive visit from the local pastor.

Reem also emphasised that Christian and Arab hospitality were two very different things, but that they might *look* similar on the outside. The host looks caring and selfless, fulfilling a need in the visitor, be it hunger, thirst, homelessness, sickness etc. One day, I was present at a meeting for the ushers in the Syrian branch of House of Christ, joining 15-20 volunteers who were actively doing different task in the church during services, such as sitting at the mixing table, singing in the worship team, or welcoming attendees by the door. The meeting was kicked off by an American girl, the only non-Arab person in the room (in addition to me), who read a Bible verse. The verse said: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phi 2:3-4). These seemingly non-controversial verses made one of the young Lebanese men react strongly, stating that it was very difficult in the Arab world to always consider other people more important than oneself. He believed that would be much easier in USA. His reaction could be interpreted as a negotiation between the "Arab hospitality" and the "Christian hospitality", which was inherently conflicting. Implicit in his statement, he argued that the regular Lebanese person, though Christian, did not have the resources to always put others before himself. It simply did not make sense if one wanted to survive in the Lebanese economy. Further did his critique say something about how he viewed the social distance growing among his fellow Lebanese citizens. A few Christians purposefully diminishing their position and selves, would not do any good. His outburst was rejected loudly by almost everyone else, and after a 15 minutes heated debate, Pastor Yousef had to intervene. He tried to resolve the issue in a diplomatic and politically correct manner, asking "Why are we doing this, putting other people before us? Because God wants, and we serve God, not other people, but we serve God through putting other people before ourselves."

Serving God: a counter service

As we saw in the previous chapter, when God is put in the middle of gift-giving, it exalts the reciprocity debt from the recipients (Mittermaier, 2019, 4). To get something in return from God, was not an uncommon thought among the Evangelicals in Beirut, and we recall Pastor

Yousef who said that the volunteers expect a place in Heaven. Salvation is *one* aspect of the reciprocity problem, and only one possible motivation for participating in religious giving. In fact, a Chinese missionary who worked in the neighbourhood in Beirut, was not convinced that this could be a reason for doing Christian humanitarian work. Evangelical Christians, he argued, are not "buying" their way into Heaven by doing good deeds, which is a more common rhetoric in Catholicism and Islam.[13] Rather, they are already saved, he said, which should also be "the reason to do this work in the first place – not to be saved, but because they are saved".

Salvation might be one *functional* motivation for doing Christian acts. Georg Simmel (1971) writing on sociological perspectives on the poor, claims that when Jesus says to the young, rich man "Give your riches to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven", it is not because he relieves the poor, but because his sacrifice symbols a surrender to something more divine than earthly riches (Simmel, 1971 [1908], 153). In this case, the poor is reduced to a tool for the rich man, through which the ascetic can achieve salvation. He is not driven by a sincere wish to lift people out of poverty, but by his own deliverance. Giving to charity, in the name of a greater divinity, the act of giving is not "an end-in-itself, but merely a means to an end" (ibid. 154). Simmel argues that in a religious discourse, action is in fact taken whereto the ego's salvation is the end goal. If we assume that this "economic of salvation" (Mittermaier, 2019, 89) is consistent, all religious acts must be revisited to see whether they are done not only with altruistic goals, but also if the ego is securing a place in Heaven.

Soteriology, the study of religious doctrines of salvation, has since Weber been a difficult field in the study of religion. In the different denominations in Christianity, a wide range of theories and practices has developed concerning how followers will and can reach salvation. Some, like the Calvinists Weber based "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1991[1905]) on, believe in a pre-destined doctrine, where only a certain number of believers will achieve deliverance. But if only a few are pre-elected, then why would the rest of the believers not let go of their hard-work ethics? Weber argues that they nonetheless feel obligated to work in the name of God: "Thus, however useless good works might be as a means of attaining salvation, for even the elect remain beings of the flesh, and everything they do falls infinitely short of divine standards, nevertheless, they are indispensable as a sign of election. They are technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation" (Weber, 1991, 115). An imminent risk of displeasing an omnipresent God would surely influence what types

[13] In Islam, collecting points for a celestial reward is commonly known as "thawāb".

of deeds that are done, and how they are completed. Whether fear of damnation or a wish to please God, it is no wonder why Christian hospitality would center God in inter-human meetings.

If Evangelicals, in contrast to Calvinists and other denominations such as Maronites, does not engage in righteous actions "*to* be saved, but because they *are* saved", the mentioned fear become a celebration of an undeserved mercy – or rather grace – from God. Evangelicals' acts could therefore be seen unnecessary for achieving salvation. Rather, they could be seen as praise to the deity who already assured them a place in Heaven. If God had already saved them, could their actions be a way of repaying? Weber states that "The social activity of the Christian in the world is solely activity in *majorem gloriam Dei*. This character is hence shared by labour in a calling which serves the mundane life of the community" (Weber, 1991, 108). In other words, Christian acts could simultaneously be celebrating and expressing gratitude to the Saviour.

When Pastor Yousef told the story of why he first wanted to help Syrians, it quickly became clear that his idea of "need" was not a strictly humanitarian one. When he was asked why he spent so much time and money on helping struggling refugees, he said: "It's true that I give time, and even my home, to some people. My wife, son and daughter are serving. I like to invite people to my place. But there is no humanitarian purpose behind it. It's a heavenly purpose." By stating that there was no humanitarian purpose, I do not believe he felt that the humanitarian aspect was meaningless, or that it simply was a means to proselytize, but rather that those actions would not have taken place where it not for the church to begin with. If the community had not been Evangelical, there would not have been any social work for refugees. Traditionally, other Christian denomination in Lebanon (such as Maronites, Greek and Armenian Orthodox) were not known for their intimate relations with people targeted by their charities. They were also donating large amounts of money to help, but the local faith-communities were rarely involved in the support work "on the ground". At least not inviting refugees into their congregations as House of Christ did. Pastor Yousef wanted all his acts to be seen as they were done in the name of God.

Mary, a young Lebanese worker in the church, took the discussion a step further, contemplating that she preferred to be in the background of the aid work, because she did not want to risk getting any honour for the work that was done. Her reasoning was that if she was "giving through God", but the receiver (of medical treatment, for example) did not recognize that God was the one to thank, she would end up with undeserved honour (see also Mittermaier, 2019, 135). "I try my best, because I really don't want to be in trouble with my Creator. [Laughing]

Not again. I am really afraid, because you are responsible for every word that comes out of your mouth, and every action you do as well. I am sometimes afraid that when I speak with people, I am carried away, and do the picture on me [sic].” In other words, she is not afraid that her actions or words would lead to condemnation, but that the people she helped would remember her instead of God, as the one who helped them. Mary admitted that every person had an “innate feeling of helping others”, but that non-believers would have a greater wish to become someone’s hero. “To be like ‘I am the one who gave, the one who saved you.’ It is a pride they show”, she said about those helping from a non-faith reasoning. She continued:

> However, I believe that helping people is much different in a biblical way, it is acknowledging the wisdom of God. I am helping the person because, first, they have the breath of my God in them, so I love them. I do not love their acts, but I love them. And who I am to judge this person whom Christ died for? I am helping this person according to the will of my God. If my God says ‘yes, help him’, I will help. I believe helping a person, especially with food and medical cases, is the first step of saying “I care about you”. I care about you physically first, but then integrating the spirit as well.

Miriam also stated that her motivation was not based on human need itself. “You feel God doing something amazing. […] How can I *not* help? How can I not do my part, do whatever, clean the floors? So you feel privileged to be part of what God is doing in this part of the world. This is the number one motivation, the feeling that it is a God-thing”, she said. The two latter statements from Mary and Miriam confirms that their action is not based on a wish to gain or buy salvation, but rather as a reaction to a salvation that is already secured. They did not feel the need to please their God, but rather a need to share what they felt. This might also be where the Evangelical doctrine best meets up with the actions in the church community, because as mentioned, engaging in charitable activities is materialising the compassion given by God, and manifesting a shared understanding of faith. Miriam declared: “Whenever we are doing something to poor or sick people, it is like doing it to Jesus, not for Jesus. It is not to please Jesus or God, but to show […] Jesus’s love”.

Reem argued that her personal motivation for the faith-based humanitarian work was as simple as “fulfilling my calling”, and by being “God’s servant”. Again, the receivers of the aid are reduced to an indirect importance in the motivations. Recall Senior Pastor Mujir, stating that it did not matter where the need came from, what country of origin or through whom it was manifested. The importance, it seems, is that there was a need for believers who could act as

God wanted them to. Not to please Him, and not to reduce human suffering, but to declare their faith. Religious acts or rituals that show appreciation to a deity is not unusual, and might be even more common in polytheism where different gods represent different aspects of life. But also in Islam where the alms *zakat,* one of the five pillars, is plaid to give back some of the riches received from Allah in the first place (Bornstein, 2012, 27).

While celebrating Jesus was for some the end goal, and reducing suffering was a means to achieve that goal, love was still central because of the mercy the believers had received in the first place. They were bound to share it to their neighbours through brotherly compassion. This is overlapping with the compassion mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, and shows how complex these ontologies might be. But if sharing God's love is a motivation in itself, either to celebrate Him or to show gratitude, we must investigate a more instrumental aspect of this love. When Pastor Yousef stated that the love of Christ was his motivation, he also said: "Maybe I have secured my place in Heaven after all, but there are some souls I need to bring with me". These souls were all the people he cared for in the community. By showing compassion, he was working in behalf of God to try to save them. In this regard, the love had a function.

"Planting seeds"

We cannot ignore that proselytizing might be a strong motivation among Evangelical church workers in a faith-based humanitarian discourse. In general, Christianity possess a doctrine of worldwide proselytism, which some denominations value higher than other. Protestant Evangelicals are usually among the most motivated to "spread the gospel" and thus to declare their faith to non-Christians (Elisha, 2008). This was often obvious in House of Christ when traditional non-ceremonial activities had faith aspects, such as praying before movie nights with the adolescent boys, or learning to insert worship songs into a program in computer class, or the mentioned prayer corner in the temporary clinic.

Omri Elisha (2008), writing on the "moral ambitions of grace" and soteriology in an American Evangelical church, claims that "[…] altruistic motives for helping the poor and needy are viewed as secondary to the motives of evangelism" (Elisha, 2008, 178). I would personally be careful to assume that all who engage in what he calls "faith-based activism" (ibid.) would have proselytizing as their main motivation for social and humanitarian work. Still, it is a crucial part of Evangelical values, also in House of Christ. However, exactly how important spreading the gospel was for each person, was a personal assessment. For some, particularly among the long-time believers and those calling themselves "born again" Christians, it was the most central

aspect of all their actions, while for others, especially Syrian refugees who had newly come to the Christian faith, the human need usually had precedence. It was clear that the church values corresponded with helping inflicted people from the neighbouring country. Senior Pastor Mujir said that his calling was to help the "inbreaking of the Kingdom of God in the Arab world", which of course included Lebanon and Syria.

The church collaborated with a refugee camp in the Bekaa valley, which happened to be supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council in addition to receiving funding from the church and possibly other communities. It was located in the lush valley, surrounded by snow-capped peaks and green fields. On our way over the mountains from Beirut to the Bekaa valley on my first visit to the refugee camp, I was told by the Director of Relief in the church, Amal, that House of Christ had supported this particular camp for a while. During wintertime, when the area often became flooded by rain and snow, the church distributed mattresses and blankets, and was now working on getting clean water to the camp where ca. 500 people lived. They also financed the building of a fence, so children would not fall into the open sewer behind the camp. Lastly, the church community payed school fees for many of the kids, though there was not room for all of them to attend. The displaced who lived there were Sunni Muslims originating from a village in North-East Syria.

What was different during this particular visit, was that the church representatives, a group of ten people, went to the camp without having anything material to distribute. Once there, I never got the impression that the displaced people expected anything from us, or that they were disappointed when they did not receive anything. I joined two Christian Syrians from the church who easily interacted with a few families. The three of us visited multiple families in the camp, talking to men and women, sometimes grandparents, and always ending the visit with prayers from the church representatives. They prayed for the children, or the sick and old people in the house, or simply for better conditions and brighter times. It was obvious that the Syrian village was used to having Christians visiting them, and they all happily received us, honouring their guests with sugared tea. Since the church members did not bring any material goods this time, the refugees seemed content with receiving prayers, in addition to the general compassion and relations. Amal stated that by coming there as friends, rather than as beneficiaries, they hoped to build close relationships. Further, by being "exposed to Christian ministries" over time, the Syrian Muslims and the Christians had built a relationship of trust and acknowledgement, but at the same time, if the congregation had not given material and social support, it would most likely not have been equally easy to show up and talk about Jesus. When asked what the purpose

of this particular visit to the camp was, Amal answered: "It's about building relationships and planting seeds".

The "first aid, then Jesus" strategy was something I heard from most of the employees of House of Christ. They all recognized the importance of extinguishing human need, before "talking about Jesus". This led to a huge portion of the church attendees coming for the aid solely, not caring much about Christian message. George estimated that out of the 500 Syrian families somehow affiliated with the church, only 60 of them were transformed Christians. House of Christ's reach was large, both geographically and socially. Something that secular, and especially foreign NGOs lack, is a foundation in the diversity of people which a local community holds. This is particularly true in a society where information travels mainly by word of mouth. Thus, secular NGOs has few means to reach people with small networks, and people with physical and social disabilities. The church community, and other local faith communities such as mosques, would on the other hand be able to reach old and sick people because the members of the congregation were rooted in the communities themselves, and applied their broad networks in search for people who would like to receive. Reem stated that this was the important role of a church in a community. "Reach out to the community, through the love of Jesus, transforming them. In turn, the ripple effect. If you're transformed, you cannot but share, and make disciples, and so on and so forth. This is how God will use us to transform the Middle East." Not only were they able to help feed and cure people in the neighbourhood, but they used the same method to "transform" them.

Pastor Yousef, who spoke about showing love to struggling people in the local community, agreed that "the end goal is to send people out", meaning that through transforming people affiliated to the church, the gospel would spread (See also Kraft, 2016, 400). A young, female employee stated that "it is like we are fishing men",[14] while Amal concluded that "I think everyone here are really driven by the motivation of delivering Christ for everyone".

Faith-based humanitarianism will to some extent always entail an element of faith in one (or more) divinities. Critiquing this evangelising discourse is important, and the power relations involved in "transforming" people has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. The Syrians, and non-Christian Lebanese, who meet Evangelicals on the streets of Beirut could easily be viewed as passive receivers of faith, or as "agency-less victims" waiting to be saved.

[14] Referring to Matthew 4:19 where Jesus said "Come, follow me, […] I will send you out to fish for people".

As the previous chapter showed, changing faith is a process, embedded in a deep, personal experience, socially influenced, but not easily manipulated. While the church did not hide its visions of sharing the gospel to the "Arab world", it was still a community-based church, meaning that they rarely left their local area to evangelise. Thus, it was first and foremost a religious group in a bound geographically area, attending to community members who chose to seek humanitarian aid.

One faith, multiple objectives

There is a wide range in different motivations for doing support work in the Christian community, and never is there just one reason for engaging in this work. Individuals tends to construct for themselves a patchwork of reasoning for acting, and even more so when doing social-cum-faith work in a spiritual, but still humanitarian setting. In other words, it is unproductive to look for one reason, or to ask which motivation is most important or fundamental, but by detecting different objectives and how people are trying to reach set goals, we might get a better and more holistic understanding of what motivates people in a faith discourse.

By this point, I want to visit the four 'rationales' offered by Weber, and rephrased in Bornstein (2012, 24). Lose connections can be made between them and the personal motivations in this chapter. "Arab hospitality" can be seen as habitual as Amir put it, and falls into the category of 'traditional rational' – something done out of habit or because it has always been this way. Further, compassion, empathy and love are affectual rational, done out of strong sentiments, whether towards humanity in general, or for a specific person, deity or cause. "Planting seeds", on the other hand, is deliberate and strategic, and thus has an instrumentally rational reasoning, while lastly, a humanitarian motivation is closer to a value rational than any of the other, because it underpins the *process* and intentions of helping, rather than set goals to be achieved.

My aim with this chapter has been to show a diversity and complexity of human reasoning for engaging in social actions such as charity in a religious discourse. I believe it is counterproductive to look for *one* personal motivation in any person, but by investigating the range of reason that might be constantly negotiated and contested, we can learn how people create meaningful *telos*, which will always be unique in each person, but in this case is based on a shared understanding of faith. While action taken might contradict stated reasoning, I do not want to contest or single out inherent oxymorons. Quite the opposite, these *competing ethics* are part of the Evangelical discourse, which is most clearly seen in questions of salvation,

compassion and proselytism (Elisha, 2008, 183). Every member of the congregation has the freedom to build their own view of the world, in the name of their current understanding of God, which in general has been an important part of Protestantism. The individual is left to make sure their own standing with God is a righteous one, because only the ego is responsible for his salvation (Weber, 1991, 153). Lastly, despite articulating what seems like highly individual objectives, I want to emphasise that these believers are united in a congregation that utilise family rhetoric to contrast the reigning sentiment in the rest of society, in order to create a communion.

6. Conclusion

Pastor Yousef was beaten and tortured during the Lebanese civil war, a war in which he himself fought Syrian soldiers to defend his political-religious stance as a Maronite. The continuous distancing taking place in the Lebanese society over the last fifty years, further boosted by the current refugee influx from troubled neighbouring Syria, has created a premise where conflict and sectarianism thrive. But Pastor Yousef eventually learned to love his neighbours, and his enemies, and found his peace in another doctrinal community, Evangelism. He concluded the story of how he transformed into a 'born-again' Christian as follows:

> A Sunday morning, I was coming back home from a late night in Junieh[15], and I was so tired. I had had a lot of alcohol. My wife and kids used to go to my wife's parents to spend the weekend there. It was a chance for me to go out. I remember it was raining, and I was so drunk. I laid down on the bed for a while, and at 9 AM I took a shower with cold water, in order to wake up. I put on some clothes, and started walking to my wife's parents. On my way, I crossed by a church, and I heard the worship song "Song of freedom". The song hit me very hard. I felt that something was hooked to my ears. I went a bit further, and I bought a manouche[16] with cheese and a Pepsi. I ate the food, and I started feeling pressure in my head and that the worship song did something to my mind. I paid for the food, and went back to the church. It was like someone was dragging me. I opened the door and went into the church. After going a few steps in, I couldn't stand, I fell on my knees, and started to… what is it called… [imitating worshiping with reaching arms]. I started to cry without knowing why. I tried to open my eyes, but it was too wet of tears. I heard a voice saying "do you want to rest?". I thought someone was standing next to me, like a priest or something, and opened my eyes, but no one was there. I heard the same voice again. So I moved my head as to say yes. I felt something was coming over me. Peace, comfort, but no one was around me. […] After the worship, the pastor welcomed me and said "I want to see you on Monday. We have discipleship".

[15] A small city north of Beirut, known for being a place people go to party and do drugs.

[16] A Lebanese type of pancake, commonly sold on the streets.

> That moment changed my life. I went to my wife's parents house, and they already prepared the lunch, with whiskey and hookah and everything. Every time I went there, these things were ready. That day I didn't drink or smoke, I just ate and left. I told my wife "let's go". Her parents thought that there was an issue between me and my wife, and that I was going to hit her when we got home. When we got back, I was honest with my wife. I don't think she believed me in the beginning. After a while, she believed what she saw in me, and she followed me to the church. She became a believer too. After a while, our daughter came as well. Then, we decided to open our home as a church. I started going [outside] with my wife Raniya, my daughter and my son Elias, and give away Bibles, and invite people to our home. Then the war started in Syria in 2011, and more Syrian people came.

I have attempted to show how and why a small Christian Evangelical community in Beirut has opened their hearts and their arms, in order to host the fleeing Other, manifested as displaced Syrian Muslims.

In the previous chapter, it became clear that it is unfruitful – as in anthropology in general – to look for *one* model of explanation for solidary action. Even though these undeniably positive adjectives we use to describe this type of social response from a supporting community, are signifying a selfless motivation, we have seen that such objectives can be contested. For every individual action, there is a complex and composed, sometimes seemingly incoherent state of reason leading up to the action itself – as a multi-layered motivation, where ethics of compassion is only a part of the equation. It must again be underlined that these seemingly individualistic reasons are part of a communal faith discourse that emphasise a shared faith. In other words, they are united by the same deity, but have the space to make sense of their relations with each other, and with God.

In addition to the multi-layeredness in each person, we have seen that the community was constantly in a process of change. Pastor Yousef's story was one of the more extreme transformation, but most Evangelicals could recount the story of how they were 'born again'. Simultaneously, the hosting community went through a process of accepting, forgiving and loving their neighbours. The Syrians as the receiving community, on the other hand, shared equally personal changes. Not only were many traumatized after being displaced, and many were alone in Lebanon and had to build a new personal and social life, but a large segment of the aid recipients became interested in a new faith, further adding to a personal transformation. Finding unity in disruptive times is important, not only in the stability a community offer, but it might also function as a guiding shepherd in a personal negotiation of transformation.

At the same time as being a small contribution to a regional discussion on faith, confessionalism, and hospitality, I want to end with drawing attention to the larger context, in which we are all potential actors of compassion. How is this empirical example important in the greater discussion on global migration and hospitality towards displaced groups? This thesis is not meant as an antidote to an ever-increasing polarized public, but to show that we might learn from people elsewhere how we can create a closer society, however we choose to motivate ourselves. In many ways, this is in line with Robbins' (2013) encouragement to look for personal understandings of what it is to do good, and how different people optimistically experience and makes sense of their lives and actions, thus contributing to what he coined an "anthropology of the good" (Robbins, 2013, 457).

I do not believe converting Muslim refugees into Christianity is the answer, nor that this is the main goal of the work that is done in the church community in Beirut. People leaving their faith risk persecution and social abandonment, and sometimes physical, mental, and spiritual abuse by family members and the community. Forsaking close relations is a difficult choice, and usually something people see as the last option. Interfaith communication, cooperation, and co-existence in empathy, on the other hand, might prove as great assets in our societies, and necessary steps in a world growing closer and further apart at the same time.

While religion in general is a source of disagreement, conflict and distance in the Lebanese society, faith has in our case proven to be a factor of compassion and hospitality, creating an environment for a holistic approach to humanitarian support, even inter-religiously. Faith and morality are closely connected, and to quote Sadia Kidwai (2017):

> while not suggesting that faith alone inevitably leads to [...] open-heartedness, it could be argued that the absence of faith values which emphasized unconditional generosity and respect for human dignity has allowed for a moral vacuum to develop in which refugees can be dehumanized, and in which the protection of and provision for refugees are viewed through the cold lens of profit and security [...] Indeed, the antipathy towards religion developed in post-Enlightenment Europe has resulted in religion and faith values often being perceived as part of the problem, rather than a potential solution to modern protection needs (Kidwai, 2017, 176).

Other authors contradict this, and argue that religion is growing increasingly more relevant and important in today's modern societies, leading to what some has framed the as a "post-secular era" (Mavelli & Wilson, 2017, 12; Cannell, 2006, 32), thus understanding faith as one possible motivational force of compassionate action. What was clear in House of Christ was how members and employees

tried to recreate the compassion and mercy they felt God had given to them in the first place. Whether or not they succeeded in distributing this unconditionally, was a subject of debate as we have seen.

Finally, we can choose to focus on the alterity in the Stranger, or we have the option to converge on our shared humanity. This is an active choice, and we must take responsibility for our path. While anthropologists thrive of radical alterity and difference, we are at the same time concerned with the same unit: humankind. In the same manner, House of Christ in Beirut was not emphasising on the social differences between people of sectarian belonging (and other categories), but what made them Same, the humanness, and the mutuality of being children of God.

Epilogue

The problem with writing relevant ethnography is the challenge to make it remain 'outside time', without removing the important context. I have deliberately excluded much of the current local and regional affairs when writing, in a wish that this thesis might be relevant outside the present crisis in Lebanon – and for that matter, outside the Syrian refugee influx in general. If the findings are meant to be applicable outside the region, the selection of empiric matter had to exclude the recent protests and demonstrations in Lebanon, and the developments of the long-lasting and ongoing Syrian civil war. It was difficult to leave out what I personally found relevant, hence it will be the subject of this short epilogue.

After ending fieldwork in June 2019, I did what most of my informants could not: leave for Europe. In the following months, a unified revolt took place among the Lebanese people, igniting latent issues that the sitting and the past governments were aware of, but had not managed to deal with. There were complex reasons for the lasting protests, but the deteriorating economic situation among the Lebanese middle class was a key factor, consisting of less work options and increasing rent. The introduction of a tax on the communication app "Whatsapp" triggered the initial protests, in the society that never experienced the "Arab Spring". That people were unsatisfied with a simple government substitution, became clear when the sitting prime minister Saad Hariri left office, while the protests endured. The protesters wanted a complete shift in the fundamental way the country was run. Many called for a demolition of the confessional system, which still looks undeniably unshakable. The protests were not directed against the refugees, and the displaced were not solely blamed for the worsened situation in the country, but they were still part of the economic situation. My Syrians friends and interlocutors in the church kept me updated on the latest developments through videos and pictures of burning tires, riot police with water cannons, and flying stones. They were in a precarious situation because of the protests. It was not their fight, but they still felt the repercussions since the whole capital shut down for weeks. Many of them were left without work for a long period, and most of them stayed home, even though the church tried to operate as usual.

As the situation in Lebanon worsened through 2019, many Syrians took the decision to travel back to Syria, contrary to UNHCR recommendations. For the returnees, Lebanon had become worse than what they imagined a war-torn-and-still-in-conflict-Syria to be. As mentioned in a footnote in chapter 4, Karim was one of many Syrians in the church who went back to his homeland, even though it meant army service in a brutal war.

When facing deteriorating quality of life, one has two strategies of response, argues Hirschman (1970). Either *voice*, as in protesting, complaining etc., or *exit*. The Lebanese population used the former to express their disregard of the state and its structures. For them, exit as in migration was not only difficult, but to an

extent unwanted. Loyalty shapes the decision of whether to stay, or to go. But for the Syrian refugees, many felt torn between the two strategies. Most had lived in Lebanon for several years, and leaving for Europe or the first choice Canada was becoming increasingly difficult. Thus, exit to Syria was the only realistic option. Some also felt integrated into a local community in their new lives in Beirut, such as most of the Syrian church members. Those who were displaced with their families had no reason to return, especially when considering the instability and uncertainty of Syria. The community they had built in Beirut was experienced as a communal replacement of what they had left behind. Karim, on the other hand, did not have a strong enough loyalty sentiment towards Lebanon or his friends there, that it was worth staying. Rather, his loyalty was with his family in northern Syria. According to UNHCR surveys, returnees are "mostly influenced by 'family reunification'" (Yassin, 2018, 132). Displaced people long for their family and close friends, not surprisingly. Creating proxy-families in hosting communities is a strategy, not for keeping the refugees in the new community, but covering an important, emotional human need.

Another disruptive factor that at the time of writing is raging in Lebanon during the spring of 2020, and everywhere else, is the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus is hitting precarious people all over the world particularly hard, due to lack of testing equipment, general health education and medical resources. Sameer kept me updated on the numbers of sick and dead people due to the disease in Lebanon. He argued that the numbers were underreported, and that in his opinion the pandemic was "much worse than the civil war". He drew similarities to his experience of the Syrian civil war, where there also were lockdowns and curfews. He described the streets around his house as completely empty, with only soldiers with guns making sure people were staying indoors. Sameer also told me that the church had closed temporarily, but it had on the other hand increased their medical work from a newly established clinic, in order to keep serving some of the need in the neighbourhood.

Literature

Ager, A. & Ager, J. (2011) Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 24*, 456-472. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer030

Ager, A. & Ager, J (2017) Challenging the Discourse on Religion, Secularism and Displacement. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (37-52). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.

Anderson, B. (2016) *A History of the Modern Middle East: Rulers, Rebels, and Rogues.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Beaman, L. G., Selby, J. A. & Barras, A. (2017) No Mosque, No Refugees. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (77-95). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.

Bornstein, E. (2005) *The Spirit of Development: Protestant NGOs, Morality, and Economics in Zimbabwe.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bornstein, E. (2011) The Value of Orphans, in Borstein, E. & Redfield P. (Eds), *Forces of Compassion. Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (123-147). Santa Fe: SAR Press.

Bornstein, E. (2012) *Disquieting Gifts: Humanitarianism in New Delhi*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Burawoy, M. (1998) The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, *16*, 4-33.

Candea, M. & da Col, G. (2012) The Return to Hospitality. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 18*, 1-19.

Cannell, F. (2006) Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity. In Cannell, F. (Ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity* (1-50). Durham: Duke University Press.

Carrière, J. M. (2017) The Refugee Experience as Existential Exile. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (145-156). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.

Christophersen, M., Thorleifsson, C. & Tiltnes, Å. A. (2013) Ambivalent Hospitality: Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. (*FAFO-rapport 2013:48*) Oslo: FAFO.

Coleman, S. (2004) The Charismatic Gift. *Royal Anthropological Institute, 10,* 421-442.

Coleman, S. (2006) Materializing the Self: Words and Gifts in the Construction of Charismatic Protestant Identity. In Cannell, F. (Ed.), *The Anthropology of Christianity* (p. 163-184). Durham: Duke University Press.

Derrida, J. (1992) *Given time: 1: Counterfeit money.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (2000) *Of Hospitality.* Stanford: Stanford University Press

Derrida, J. (2005) The Principle of Hospitality. *Parallax, 11*(1), 6-9. doi: 10.1080/1353464052000321056

El Nakib, S. & Ager, A. (2015) *Local faith community and civil society engagement in humanitarian response with Syrian refugees in Irbid, Jordan. Report to the Henry Luce Foundation.* New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.

Fassin, D. (2011) Noli Me Tangere, in Borstein, E. & Redfield P. (Eds), *Forces of Compassion. Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (35-52). Santa Fe: SAR Press.

Fassin, D. (2012) *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ferris, E. (2005) Faith-based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations. *International Review of the Red Cross*. *87*, nr. 858, 311-325.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2011a) Introduction: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 24*(3), 429-439. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer033

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2011b) The Pragmatics of Performance: Putting 'Faith' in Aid in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 24*(3), 533-547. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer02

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. & Ager, A. (2013) Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Humanitarian Situations. *Refugee Studies Centre Working Paper Series* NO. 90.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) Refugees hosting refugees. *Forced Migration Review, 53,* 25-27. www.fmreview.org/community-protection

Fisk, R. (1990) *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ghosn, F. & Khoury, A. (2011) Lebanon after the Civil War: Peace or the Illusion of Peace? *The Middle East Journal, 65*(3), 381-397. www.muse.jhu.edu/article/448025.

Graeber, D. (2001) *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value. The False Coin of Our Own Dreams.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Handman, C. (2010) Events of Translation: Intertextuality and Christian Ethnotheologies of Change among Guhu-Samane, Papua New Guinea. *American Anthropologist, 112*(4), 576-588. Doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1433.2010.01277

Herzfeld, M. (1987) "As in your own House": Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society, in Gilmore, D. (Ed), *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean.* (75-89) Washington D.C.: American Anthropological Association (Special Publication no. 22).

Hirschman, A. (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Horst, C. (2019) Refugees, Peacebuilding, and the Anthropology of the Good. In Bradley, M., Pernuiak, B., Milner, J. (Eds), *Refugees' Roles in Resolving Displacement and Building Peace: Beyond Beneficiaries.* (p. 39-54) Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Kerr, M. (2012) Before the Revolution. In Knudsen, A & Kerr, M (Eds), *Lebanon After the Cedar Revolution,* (p. 23-38). London: Hurst Publishers.

Kidwai, S., Moore, L. & FitzGibbon, A. (2014) The role of religion in the formation of cross-community relationships. *Forced Migration Review, 48,* 10-13. www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/faith.pdf

Knudsen, A. & Kerr, M. (2012) Introduction: The Cedar Revolution and Beyond. In Knudsen, A & Kerr, M (Eds), *Lebanon After the Cedar Revolution,* (p. 3-23). London: Hurst Publishers.

Kraft, K. (2012) *Searching for Heaven in the Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World.* Oxford: Regnum Books Int.

Kraft, K. (2016) Faith and Impartiality in Humanitarian Response: Lessons from Lebanese Evangelical Churches Providing Food Aid. *International Review of the Red Cross, 97,* 395-421. doi:10.1017/S1816383115000570

Kraft, K. (2017) Religious exploration and conversion in forced displacement: a case study of Syrian Muslim refugees in Lebanon receiving assistance from Evangelical Christian. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 32*(2), 221-235. doi: 10.1080/13537903.2017.1298904

Lant, B. (2017) Praxis Community Projects: A Secular Organization? Exploring the Boundaries between Religious and Secular in Migration Support. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (p. 53-60). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.

Levinas, E. (1999) *Alterity and Transcendence.* New York: Columbia University Press

Levinas, E. (2000) *God, Death, and Time.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press

Li, T. (2014) *Land's End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Malkki, L. (2015) *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Martin, K. (2013). *The Death of the Big Men and the Rise of the Big Shots: Custom and Conflict in East New Britain*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Mauss, M. (1990) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London: Routledge Classics

Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (2017) The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (1-22). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.

Meneses, E., Backues, L., Bronkema, D., Flett, E., & Hartley, B. (2014) Engaging the Religiously Committed Other: Anthropologists and Theologians in Dialogue. *Current Anthropology, 55*(1), 82-104. doi:10.1086/674716

Mhaissen, R. & Hodges, E. (2019) *Unpacking Return. Syrian Refugees' Conditions and Concerns* (Sawa for Development and Aid report February 2019).

Mittermaier, A. (2014) Beyond Compassion: Islamic Voluntarism in Egypt. *American Ethnologist, 41*(3), 518-531. doi: 10.1111/amet.12092

Mittermaier, A. (2019) *Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Mortensen, E. L. (2019) Being Care-ful Among Friends. *Etnofoor, 31*(1), 29-46.

Naguib, N. (2010) For the Love of God: Care-giving in the Middle East. *Social Sciences and Missions, 23*(1), 124–145. doi:10.1163/187489410X488549

Naguib, N. (2016) Humanitarian Pluralism: The Arctic Passage in an Age of Refugees. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 48*(2), 377-381. Doi:10.1017/S002074381600012X

Oikonomakis, L. (2018) Solidarity in Transition: The Case of Greece, in Porta, D. (Ed) *Solidarity Mobilizations in the 'Refugee Crisis': Contentious Moves* (65-98). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Orji, N. (2011) Faith-Based Aid to People Affected by Conflict in Jos, Nigeria: An Analysis of the Role of Christian and Muslim Organizations. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 24*(3), 473-492. doi:10.1093/jrs/fer034

Pitt-Rivers, J. (1965) Honor and Social Status, in Peristiany, J. G. (Ed.), *Honour and Shame* (19-77). London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (2017) Honor and Social Status in Andalusia, in da Col, G. & Shryock, A. (Eds), *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus* (3-34). Chicago: Hau Books.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (2017) The Place of Grace in Anthropology, in da Col, G. & Shryock, A. (Eds), *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus* (69-103). Chicago: Hau Books.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (2017) The Kith and the Kin, in da Col, G. & Shryock, A. (Eds), *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus* (121-139). Chicago: Hau Books.

Pitt-Rivers, J. (2017) The Law of Hospitality, in da Col, G. & Shryock, A. (Eds), *From Hospitality to Grace: A Julian Pitt-Rivers Omnibus* (163-184). Chicago: Hau Books.

Rakopoulos, T. (2016) Solidarity: The Egalitarian Tensions of a Bridge-Concept. *Social Anthropology, 24*(2) 142-151. doi:10.1111/1469-8676.12298

Redfield, P. (2011) The impossible Problem of Neutrality. In Borstein, E. & Redfield P. (Eds), *Forces of Compassion. Humanitarianism Between Ethics and Politics* (53-70). Santa Fe: SAR Press.

Riera, J. & Poirier, M. (2014) 'Welcoming the stranger' and UNHCR's cooperation with faith-based organisations. *Forced Migration Review, 48,* 64-68. www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/faith.pdf

Robbins, J. (2013) Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 19,* 447-462.

Rozakou, K. (2016) Socialities of solidarity: revisiting the gift taboo in times of crises, *Social Anthropology, 24*(2), 185-199. doi:10.1111/1469-8676.12305

Sahlins, M. (2004) *Stone Age Economics.* London: Routledge.

Schirrmacher, C. (2019) Leaving Islam. In Enstedt, D., Larsson, G. and Mantsinen, T. (Eds), *Handbook of Leaving Religion.* Leiden: Brill.

Simmel, G. (1971 [1908]) *On Individuality and Social Forms.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Still, J. (2005) Derrida: Guest and Host. *Paragraph, 28*(3), 85-101.

Thorleifsson, C. (2014) Fordrevne syrere i Libanon: gjestfrihetens muligheter og begrensninger. *Babylon, 12*(1).

Ticktin, M. (2011) *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ticktin, M. (2014) Transnational Humanitarianism. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 43.* 273-289.

Weber, M. (1991 [1930]) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: HarperCollins Academics.

Wikan, U. (1984) Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair. *Man*, *New Series, 19*(4), 635-652.

Wikan, U. (1992) Beyond the words: the power of resonance. *American Ethnologist*, *19*(3), 460-482.

Wolfinger, N. (2002) On writing fieldnotes: collection strategies and background expectancies. *Qualitative Research 2*(1), 85-95.

Yassin, N. (2018) *101 Facts & Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis.* Beirut: American University of Beirut.

Yassin, N. (2019) *101 Facts & Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis. Volume II.* Beirut: American University of Beirut.

Zaman, T. (2017) A Right to Neighbourhood. In Mavelli, L & Wilson, E. (Eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (157-174). London: Rowman & Littlefield int.