

AL 'AYSH MUSHTARAK, AL 'AYSH WAHID:
INTERRELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE AND CROSS-
RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN
SOUTHERN LEBANON

by

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A THESIS

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This ethnographic research project on Shia-Catholic coexistence in Southern Lebanon centers on young adults' voices and actions. Traveling between a Christian village (Maghdouché) and a Muslim village (Ghazieh) to conduct thirty-three qualitative interviews, I examine the interreligious relationship in which young adults engage. I advance an understanding that ordinary youth of different social identities have the ability to enact and bolster long-term peacekeeping. In the case of Ghazieh and Maghdouché, the vast majority of young adults re-conceptualize identity and religion to detach from sectarian master narratives, and they instead articulate a narrative underscoring a shared fraternal connection with religious neighbors. In the process, many young adults treat religious temporalities and spaces as inclusive, surpassing the sectarian to become the neutral or religiously sublime. Although tensions sometimes surge in the interreligious, intercommunal relationship, I determine a general “common life” or “single life” (*'aysh mushtarak* or *'aysh wahid*) marked by friendships, shared spaces, and mutual reliance. Lebanon's history of sectarian conflict does not impel the youth I interview to reproduce sectarian narratives. This postwar generation—which

rejects divisive war-era master narratives that enemize the religious other—craves an alternative Lebanon, one that disintegrates the sectarian sociopolitical structures and constructs an inclusive, interreligious nationality centered on evolution, direction, productivity, democracy, and youth representation. Yet considering the crises plaguing Lebanon and the desperation of young adults to flee, I dare to theorize the country's demise.

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Background, and History

Lebanon: the country where everyone wants a piece while we want peace.

— Sandra Chami Kassis, Lebanese author

Yesterday was somehow better and it will be worse tomorrow. It's constant decline. You can't be sure of anything, other than the fact that it will only get worse.

— Timour Azhari, Lebanon
correspondent at Thomson Reuters
Foundation (from Aljazeera's *The
Take* 08/04/21)

Introduction: Southern Lebanon and Youth

As a religiously plural country with eighteen officially-recognized religions, Lebanon is an ideal site within which to explore interreligious coexistence. Since pre-modern and ancient times, religious communities and minority groups fleeing persecution have found refuge in the Levant. While these communities have faced bloodshed including the brutal fifteen-year-long Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), faith in the notion of *al-'aysh al-mushtarak* ("the life together" or "le vivre ensemble") persists (Farra-Haddad, 2017). Prior to the 1975 commencement of the Civil War, Lebanon was even lauded as an exemplary case of consociationalism (Lijphart, 1969). Alas, over the past half-century, state sectarianism has pitted religious communities against one another at the economic and political levels, forcing development to run competitively along sectarian lines. Even so, everyday peace among people and communities of different religious identities has emerged, and continues to emerge, across the country. It arises and is maintained organically between neighbors, friends, classmates, coworkers, and lovers.

In his book *From the Holy Mountain*, Dalrymple (1997) writes, “the modern demonization of Islam in the West, moreover, and the recent growth of Muslim fundamentalism (itself in many ways a reaction to the West’s repeated humiliation of the Muslim world) have led to an atmosphere where few are aware of, or indeed wish to be aware of, the profound kinship of Christianity and Islam.” While I do not seek to analyze the theological kinship of the Christian and Islamic religions in this thesis, I aim to explore the relationship between their adherents in Lebanon. Because Islam and Christianity have been present in the Levant since the births of both religions, local communities have had centuries to adopt social mechanisms that mitigate interreligious conflict. From personal experience as a young Lebanese woman, I know that interreligious relationships exist and yet are sadly overlooked by international institutions, media outlets, and scholars of the Middle East. As anguishing news reports and pessimism-based political projections dismantle the Middle East’s historical “mosaic of religions and peoples” (Russell, 2014), we must consider where peace manifests within regions of plurality. We can learn immensely from these examples.

Popular media outlets emphasize the religious fundamentalism and militia group activity pervading Southern Lebanon, and it is precisely because of this magnified violence that I aim to showcase the coexistence that exists and continues to prevail in the region’s plural communities. Southern Lebanon is ripe with insight on Christian-Muslim coexistence, since both groups of religious adherents have lived there for centuries. Conducting a microanalysis of youths’ interreligious relationships in Southern Lebanon, I explore Ghazieh and Maghdouché, neighboring village communities representing the Muslim-Christian relationship. Ghazieh, a town of 50,000

Shia Muslims, sits beside Maghdouché, a town of 8,000 Melkite Greek Catholics and a few Maronite Christians. Despite occasional escalations of violence between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon, peace has reigned between these two southern Lebanese communities in recent decades following the Civil War. In particular, I focus on the peace manifesting in the interactions and relationships among the region's youth, who comprise Lebanon's postwar generation born after the end of the Civil War in 1990. I interpret the contexts in which youth engage with one another to enact the interreligious relationship. Through an on-the-ground lens centered on local village residents' voices, my project prods the intersection of the locally-felt social repercussions of sectarian politics, the coexistence in regions of religious diversity, and the agency of the postwar generation.

This ethnographic thesis examines interreligious coexistence and cross-religious engagement among young communities in Southern Lebanon. As a whole, I present the efforts of ordinary young people who establish a healthy relationship with the religious other through intuitive measures. Through a vivid microanalysis of Ghazieh-Maghdouché relations, I advance an understanding that ordinary people have the ability to enact and bolster long-term peacekeeping. I examine the “common life” or the “single life” (*‘aysh mushtarak* or *‘aysh wahid*) in which both communities of Ghazieh and Maghdouché engage, surpassing a foundational layer of tolerance to reveal respect, care, and love. Peaceful spiritual pluralism requires more than the acknowledgment and celebration of diversity, and primarily necessitates mutual respect and empathy (Abouchedid et al., 2002). An ethnographic research study focused on Muslim-Christian coexistence has a lot to offer a world in which, as Dalrymple says, the

kindship between Islam and Christianity is deeply forgotten. In part a dark consequence to this amnesia, sectarian groups have historically and at present undertaken extreme violence in the Middle East, including in Lebanon, in the name of God. As a means to interpret religious plurality in a region recognized as centrally sectarian, I reach to young adults' perspectives about their religious neighbors and the interreligious relationship in day-to-day life. At an individual level, we can learn from these young communities' grounded faiths, personal values, and moral commitments; and at a regional level, we can better understand the nuances of coexistence among religiously-diverse communities in the Middle East.

While the majority of research about Lebanese youth and the interreligious relationship draw from youths' engagement in mediated interfaith dialogue sessions (Adyan Foundation, 2020), I provide a new angle on how youth of different religious identities interact with one another in non-formalized settings: at cafés, stores and shopping centers, schools and universities, protests, religious spaces such as churches, and on the streets. With an intersectional consideration of gender, age, and level of religious conservativeness, I share an authentic depiction of the types of interactions occurring organically on the ground. The ethnographic perspective I adopt, through which I am concerned with youths' life stories and lived experiences, distinguishes my research from broader, politically-centered lenses other scholars have utilized when considering religious pluralism in Lebanon.

Most deeply, at the core of my thesis is a platform to highlight the voices of young adults in Lebanon, who are under-heard and under-represented in Lebanese institutions, media channels, and academia concerning Lebanon in general. I reach to

these voices—which represent around 18% of the total population (UNDESA)—to help us envision Lebanon’s tomorrow. This postwar group, the country’s *shabab*,¹ are the children of those who grew up during the Civil War and lived through fifteen years of sectarian politics and divisions. The war generation gave birth to this postwar group, educating and nurturing them with narratives about the religious other. Yet these young adults did not experience the Civil War’s sectarian bloodshed. Although they may consume their parents’ memories and opinions, they themselves did not live through a time of interreligious violence between sectarian militias. Thus, they may hold novel approaches to fostering everyday peacekeeping and interreligious coexistence absent of sectarian narratives and memories of violence. Scholars like Khalaf (1993) and Jeha (2008) view the Lebanese postwar generation as a peacemaking generation rooted in the ever-evolving globalized and cosmopolitan world.

By examining today’s group of youth, we gain “a glimpse into the future cultural, social and political dynamics of a society” (Righi, 2014, p. 70). Adolescence and early adulthood are critical periods during which humans construct and reconstruct their cultural, social, and political identities (Erikson, 1959). These identities center on values, ideals, intimate relationships, social lives, as well as wider groups and institutions such as religion, politics, and nation (Harb, 2010). By seeking Lebanese youths’ personal experiences with faith and perspectives on their Abrahamic brothers and sisters, we taste a possibility of Lebanon’s future. Since the Civil War, the same men’s faces have dominated politics and religion, and these men do not represent the postwar generation, but rather, counterproductively return to the same divisive

¹ *Shabab* translates to “young people.”

sectarianism-entrenched narratives. Today's young Lebanese will soon lead the country to confront major contemporary economic, political, social, and ideological issues. Does the Sunni young adult, the Shiite young adult, and the Christian young adult today approve of the religious divisions in Lebanon's sectarian system? As party politics inflame with recent escalations of sectarian violence, do these young adults envision a future of deeper religious discrimination or an erasure of religious divide? Youths' answers to these questions are needed, and yet under-sought, when honestly asking: what will Lebanon become?

A Religious-Political Knot

Religion seeps into every corner of Lebanese society and, most centrally, politics. To fully appreciate the complexity of the religious-political knot, Lebanon's foundation must be analyzed. In 1943, once Lebanon gained independence from the French, leaders established a consociational confessional government to protect the rights of the eighteen officially-recognized religious communities. In reality, Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system was birthed by France, who wanted to place Maronite Christians at the top of a religion-based spoils pyramid (Noe, 2021). This government formation culminated as the controversial Lebanese National Pact, in which political power was allocated in accordance with the size of all sectarian communities determined by a 1932 census (Saadeh, 2002). In this confessional system, sectarian identity determines the political role one may gain. Specific religious groups hold high-ranking offices: Sunni-Muslims earn premiership, Shias become the speaker of parliament, and Maronite Christians occupy the position of presidency. The National Pact allocated parliamentary seats to Lebanese Christians and Muslims. Also based on

the 1932 census, other government positions including civil service and ministerial staffing positions were occupied according to a fixed quota of six to five in favor of Christians. This quota was slightly readjusted in the Taif Agreement negotiated in Saudi Arabia to end the Civil War (Cammett, 2019).

Identity polarization is central to the political-confessional system, since Lebanese leaders represent artificial entities (sects) rather than the state. Deputies elected on the basis of religious affiliation serve as de facto representatives of their political-religious communities. Normally, voters must cast ballots for all parliamentary candidates no matter their religious identity. Because of rampant corruption intertwined in the religious-political knot, pre-electoral bargains among leaders and political parties of different sects undercut incentives for politicians to gain support from other religious sects (Salloukh, 2006). Since the country's independence, foreign powers have also regularly corrupted Lebanese elections to support the sectarian leaders that most benefit their narrow interests—including to curtail Shia militias' influence (Stocker, 2016). Particularly as Lebanese politicians prioritize their sectarian communities' needs over the nation's interest, religious minorities are rarely represented or considered as a political priority, fueling their resentment (Minority Rights Group, 2020).

The demographic-based allocation of power leads to an uneven distribution of educational, infrastructural, and economic opportunities. Because religious minorities have legal vetoes over one another, and because leaders tend to look out for their sects' demands rather than fostering intersectarian consensus and co-operation, inoperability and "institutional paralysis" impede productive governance in Lebanon (Nahas Calfat, 2018). In the process, Lebanon's political-religious communities seldom intermingle in

politics, which hampers true national integration and stagnates national development. Furthermore, when political conflicts occur in Lebanon, the contenders are often from religious institutions, leading to the formation of political families (Baroudi and Tabar, 2009). In the process, the religious and the political become too obscure to untangle.

While the confessional system is largely responsible for sectarian divisions in Lebanon, the Constitution seems to aim to deter sectarian discrimination and persecution at a surface level. It explicitly appoints the state as protector of religious rights, implicating the political in the affairs of the religious. For instance, Article XIX of the Constitution establishes:

There shall be absolute freedom of conscience. By rendering homage to the God Almighty, the state shall respect all religions and creeds and shall guarantee and protect the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.²

The Constitution designates the central state's involvement in ensuring the freedoms of religious minorities. The emphasis on "all religious sects and creeds" and "absolute freedom of consciousness" protects non-monotheistic minorities. This acknowledgement of religious freedom intends to promote peace and grounds the management interreligious coexistence. Yet there are limits to these politically-ensured rights, particularly for unrecognized minority religious groups. For instance, religious groups in Lebanon must be officially recognized by the government to construct houses of worship, apply for autonomous religious jurisdiction pertaining to personal status matters, and to receive tax exemptions (LIRF Report, 2014). Messarra (2020, p. 2)

² Author's translation based on the original French text

argues that the Lebanese Constitution in and of itself is not “confessional” but has become “overly-confessionalized” by the lack of boundaries set in the state to combat sectarian domination and clientelism. In their interpretation of the Constitution, today’s political elites enact corrupt practices that do not prioritize Lebanese wellbeing, but rather reinforce sectarian discrimination.

In addition, sectarian identity serves as the basis for personal status in Lebanon today. Official state-issued identification cards list the religious identity of the card holder. Social institutions such as marriage, inheritance, and child custody require that citizens follow the laws and courts affiliated with their official religious community, even if they do not actively practice that religion. Religion occupies most spaces, overlaying sectarian borders across the country. One cannot escape the sectarian identity that inherently references differences among people, no matter their personal activities and expressions of life.

Although Lebanon’s institutions are significantly reliant upon religious demographics, current statistics are outdated since the last official census was conducted and published almost a century ago. The census not only determines parliamentary seats but also cabinet positions and employment through the public sector. A new set of published religious demographics would thus cause immense sectarian disruption to Lebanon’s already-fragile political order (Barshad, 2019). Christian groups may be particularly fearful that their decreasing population may result in reduced political representation—for which Muslim political parties would assuredly push and Christian parties would resist. Minority Rights Group (2020, p. 1) provides the following estimates for today’s demographics that reaffirm a Muslim demographic

majority, although these statistics are not officially confirmed: Muslims at 57.7 percent of the population (28.7 percent Sunni, 28.4 percent Shia, and the rest are smaller numbers of Alawites and Isma'ilis), Christians at 36.2 percent (composed of Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Protestant and others), and Druze at 5.2 percent. This information also does not account for statistics about the Syrian and Palestinian refugee communities. Lebanon's religious diversity is even more expansive, as it hosts many small religious groups such as Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Zoroastrians, Yezidis, and others.

This thesis focuses on the social dynamics between the Shia Muslims of Ghazieh and the Melkite Greek Catholics of Maghdouché. The Shia population of Lebanon is generally concentrated in eastern Sour, in the southern suburbs of Beirut, and in the northern half of Biqa'a and Jabal Amil. Across these regions, Shia political-religious militias Hezbollah and Amal are the de facto governing bodies, particularly in Shia villages such as Ghazieh. On the other hand, only around 5 percent of the Lebanese population are Melkite Greek Catholics, mostly concentrated in Zahleh of the Biqa'a valley, but some of these Catholic communities reside in Saida and Sour. Both Maghdouché and Ghazieh are located in *el-Jnoub*, Lebanon's South Governorate.

Histories of Sectarianism and Foreign Involvement

Under Ottoman rule until the early twentieth century, official decrees advocated for religious equality in modern-day Lebanon. Empire rulers, who were mostly Sunni, formalized a system of religious coexistence in which non-Muslims had special protections according to the millet system. The Ottomans considered Christians and Jews living in the empire as *dhimmi*, meaning "protected person" (Irani, 2011). These

non-Muslim monotheistic communities were free to retain their original faiths while living under Ottoman rule, since they were considered to be “People of the Book,” which emphasizes a level of affiliation felt by Ottoman rulers towards Christians and Jews. Though often romanticized, in reality the empire marginalized Christians and Jews and upheld the superiority of Muslim over non-Muslim citizens (Makdisi, 2019).

Sectarianism was initially “actively produced” in the Ottoman territories by foreign forces in the mid-nineteenth century (Makdisi, 2000, p. 52). At this time, violence erupted for a series of reasons between Christians and Druze communities in the Levant, such as the 1860 Damascus Massacre—a context that justified French intervention to protect the Christian communities and simultaneously increase their power in the region (Rogan, 2004). This sparked a new era of European colonialism and missionary intrusion that challenged Ottoman hegemony. Together, European and Ottoman policymakers re-established pre-Ottoman “traditional” order in Mount Lebanon; however, in actuality they created a new sectarian order based on a geographical reconfiguration along communal lines (Cammatt, 2019; Makdisi, 2000, p. 52). As violence persisted in Mount Lebanon, the Ottoman government established Druze and Maronite parallel governments. Decades before Lebanon’s confessional state was even founded, the region began operating through a sectarian system of governance.

After the establishment of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement defining British and French spheres of influence and control of the dismembered Ottoman Empire, foreign powers deepened sectarian divides in today’s Lebanon, each championing a different religious group. While ostensibly advocating for religious freedom, these imperial

forces supported structures of political sectarianism. While France favored Lebanon's Catholics and Maronite Christians, Arab nations offered their support to the Sunni and Shia. Britain backed the Druze while Russia was interested in protecting the Lebanese Greek Orthodox population (Makdisi, 2000). Lebanon truly became a collage of communities on which any foreign force could lay its claim. France, in particular, exploited sectarian divisions to exert its colonial influence in a conflict-ridden region. Ultimately, France hoped to create a predominantly Catholic and Francophile entity (Minority Rights Group, 2020). Lebanese unity threatened its objective.

After French forces left Lebanon following the 1923-1943 French Mandate, only a few decades of stability lasted during which the tiny country proudly wore the title 'Paris of the Middle East.' But soon after, a Civil War broke out, unsurprisingly sectarian in nature, to devour the country for fifteen years. "I opened my eyes to war," Jean Said Makdisi's (2008) mother often said in reference to the daily violence. Every Lebanese generation in the past century has experienced some form of warfare, whether the Civil War or the most recent 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. War is passed through generations, and there is seemingly no escape other than emigration. Even then, memories pervade and haunt. While the youth currently in Lebanon never lived through the Civil War, most of their parents and grandparents did. The country's roots are coated in this sectarianism, defining Lebanon's bloody history.

The reasons for the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War were political, economic, and social, punctuated by internal and external alliances that were both religious and political in nature. The conflict cleaved Lebanon's religious factions into opposing parties, but the Civil War was never truly about theology, nor was it only about the

Lebanese. Yet religious difference among the Lebanese population became the central premise for individual and collective violence in the form of kidnappings, forced displacement, and massacres. The conflict hinged on religion as an identity marker exploitable by elites to ignite sectarian differences (Berkley Center, 2013).

The violence was horrendous. War lords amputated religion from its intrinsically integrative nature, exacerbating its divisive potential. While many Lebanese religious leaders called for coexistence, militants called for radicalization, transforming the political conflict into a religious one (Kanafani-Zahar, 2002).

Lebanese identities, which were plural and composed of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, and socioeconomic class, were forcibly reduced to a single component: the religious. Religion was taken as the all and became confused with the entirety of one's identity, rendering religious identity a tool of exclusion (Kanafani-Zahar, 2000).

Reporting about this phenomena during the Civil War, Thomas Friedman (1984) writes, "the Lebanese are becoming extinct. It is not that they are dying off, although they are doing that, too. It is that the number of people in Lebanon who think of themselves and identify themselves as 'Lebanese'—as opposed to members of a religious group—is becoming smaller and smaller." Heightened by the Civil War, sectarianism created a context within which nationality no longer held value; rather, religious identity was the basis of a person's entire being. A Lebanese Christian reported to Friedman that, "we don't feel for South Lebanon anymore, we don't feel for East Beirut." The Lebanese cared mainly for the regions where their own religious community resided. The nationality-linked community became dismembered.

The Lebanese Civil War is contextualized in the immigration of Palestinians following the first exodus after Israel's foundation in 1948. In Southern Lebanon, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) ran guerrilla operations and launched rockets into the northern borders of Israel. Lebanon was always met with Israeli reprisals, which increased tensions that tugged the Lebanese population into either of the two groups: the pro-Western Christian Lebanese front and Muslim-Arab nationalist movement. The former, known as the Libanists, called for the disarmament of refugees, whereas the latter, the Arabists, supported the Palestinians in the battle against Israel. The Libanists were mainly composed of Christian groups like the Maronites and Greek Catholics, whereas the latter constituted a jumble of Shia, Sunni, and Orthodox Catholic Lebanese sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. While previously manifesting as occasional violence, tensions between the two groups escalated into Civil War. Lebanon's "fragile political balance" in this "unfavorable regional political situation" facilitated Israeli and Syrian intervention throughout this long conflict (Mullet & Vinsonneau, 1999).

The war officially began on April 13th, 1975, when Christian Phalangists attacked a bus driving Palestinians to a Muslim refugee camp in the Christian-majority Northern Beirut. This attack escalated into explosions of violence between the Christian Lebanese Front and the Lebanese National Movements, composed of leftist, pan-Arabist, and Syrian nationalist parties (Minority Rights Group, 2020). Throughout this turbulence, Lebanese communities automatically backed the political parties aligning with their religious affiliations. The majority of interreligious violence occurred in the mountains and Beirut, whereas the South suffered most deeply from Israel's invasion to

defeat the PLO in 1978. Israel temporarily withdrew, but first supported a surrogate Maronite Christian force to exert control in Southern Lebanon. Foreign influence was rampant, particularly with Syria's adamant support of the Maronite government. Although the Lebanese political class fooled itself into believing it was dominant, in reality it was the subordinated, submissive to neighboring powers (Messarra, 2020).

Israel re-entered Southern Lebanon in 1982 with the aim of completely destroying the PLO, an invasion costing the lives of 19,000 people, most of whom were civilians. It occupied about 1,100 square kilometers of territory containing 168 southern villages, including both Maghdouché and Ghazieh. Southern Lebanon bore the brunt of Israel's authority in Lebanon, which further enforced sectarian fragmentation and traumatized many Muslim Lebanese. Israel often encouraged Christians to provoke local Muslims in regions like Chouf and Saida (Minority Rights Group, 2020). Inspired by the Shia-majority theocratic government of Iran that came to power in 1979, Hezbollah emerged in the 1980s to take up arms against the Israelis occupying the south. Since the militia's *raison d'être* was to oppose the occupation, it easily secured a broad Shia constituency. At the same time, Hezbollah attacked many reminders of Israel and the West. Foreigners were abducted and held hostage by Hezbollah and groups under its influence. Hezbollah fighters also carried out suicide bombings at the Israeli intelligence headquarters in then-occupied Tyre, the U.S. embassy, the U.S. embassy annex, the U.S. marine barracks at the Beirut airport, and the French embassy (Norton, 2000, p. 25-7). The group's actions, which became increasingly aggressive over the course of the war, reflected Shia radicalization under the pressure of Israeli occupation.

Lebanon was not its own country, as the Lebanese did not control their own territory. Throughout and even after the war, foreign actors including the French, Americans, Iraqis, Iranians, Syrians, Palestinians, and Israelis corrupted Lebanese leaders for their own narrow interests (Noe, 2021). By the time the Civil War ended in the 1990s, Syria dominated the Lebanese government, with influence in the presidency, security forces, and judiciary. The Israeli military did not fully withdraw from Southern Lebanon until May 2000. In other words, Israel still occupied Southern Lebanon when many young adults of the postwar generation were born. Corruption infiltrating the government, coupled with foreign influence, weighed down the Lebanese economy and resulted in stagnant development. Syria did not stop involving itself in the country until the February 2005 assassination of the Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who symbolized national opposition to Syria. This explains why many Lebanese blamed Syria for Hariri's murder (Minority Rights Group, 2020). Previous protests against Syrian influence had little effect, but after Hariri's murder, Lebanese grief and anger manifested as mass mobilizations against Syria, culminating in the Cedar Revolution. Pressured by the Lebanese and international community, Syria withdrew all military personnel in the Spring of 2005, marking the end of thirty years of occupation (Righi, 2014).

The consequences of colonialism, war, and occupation are visible across Lebanon, in the bullet holes dotting buildings and the painful memories clenching the hearts of still-mourning families. More than 144,000 people died, 184,000 injured, 13,000 kidnapped, and 17,000 missing, with physical damages accumulating to around \$25 billion (Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 382). Furthermore, the war led to the

displacement of almost a third of the country's population (Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project, 2001, p. 4) and the exodus of almost one million Lebanese, including half of the population of Beirut (Byman and Pollack, 2007, p. 139). The majority of those who escaped the country were Christians fleeing to Europe or the United States. This loss of Christian communities, in addition to high growth rates among the Muslim population, further distanced the fragile power-sharing arrangement of the 1943 National Pact from the actual internal religious demographics.

In the midst of the violence, the trauma, the suffering, and the memories, many scholars including Hounet (2011) argue that a “policy of amnesia” pervaded Lebanon after the end of the war in the 1990s. This “policy” facilitated reconciliation processes in the South and Mount Lebanon governorates. Now, I wonder about this violent history's impact on communities, particularly on young adults who were born after the Civil War. Unlike their parents and grandparents who currently occupy positions of authority in political and religious institutions, young adults do not carry lived memories of the Civil War. Thus, they are uniquely positioned for not having personally suffered in their lifetimes from trauma related to the manifestation and magnification of the religious-political knot. While scholars such as Righi (2014) explore the themes of youth and memory in relation to the Civil War, most carry out their research in Beirut. I am most curious about the suburbs of Lebanon, an under-explored region where villages are often religiously homogenous. This geographical and religious context surges with delicious particularities, inspiring me to examine how youth of the Southern Governorate—*el-Jnoub*—conceive religious identity in relation to society and politics. Has the war generation fed today's young adults with hostile

narratives about the religious other as a consequence of their experience of the war's interreligious violence? And importantly, do young adults adopt and regurgitate such narratives?

To understand the background of youths' childhoods in *el-Jnoub*, I must also point to the Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006. Many youths from Ghazieh and neighboring Maghdouché vividly remember this violence, which shaped their perspectives on life, politics, and society. The tense fighting between Israel and Hezbollah lasted 33 days from July to August 2006. In response to Hezbollah militants having abducted two Israeli soldiers, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon and specifically targeted the Shia South during their extensive assault. Israel conducted massive bombing raids of southern villages and cities while also bombing Beirut and highways, communication facilities, and factories. To cut Lebanon off from the international community, Israel bombed the runways at the Beirut-Rafic Hariri airport and created a naval blockade. Because Hezbollah soldiers fired rockets into Israel from *el-Jnoub*, Israel specifically attacked Shia communities like Ghazieh. Since Maghdouché is so close to Ghazieh, its outskirts also suffered from the violence. During this summer conflict, forty-three Israeli civilians died and a total of 1,500 Lebanese died, including many children. One quarter of the Lebanese population was temporarily—and in some cases, permanently—displaced because of this war (Makdisi, 2008), including the majority of the young adults I interviewed for this thesis. Many left Maghdouché and Ghazieh out of fear of being harmed. This war represented an escalation of the endless conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that continues to this day. In the war's aftermath, Lebanon's economy declined sharply with the downfall of the tourist industry (Minority

Rights Group, 2020). Moreover, an increasing number of people began to further resent and side against Hezbollah for supposedly provoking the war, reinforcing sectarian tensions between non-Shia and pro-Hezbollah communities.

Despite the end of formal wars, violence and death continued to take on a sectarian-political undertone mixed with foreign influence. The postwar generation grew up in this unstable national environment. In June 2007, an anti-Syrian member of parliament, a Sunni Muslim, and nine others were killed by a bomb blast in Beirut. Shortly after, another bomb in the Christian mountains killed another anti-Syrian, Maronite politician. Syria was likely behind both attacks. In May 2008, the country was brought to the brink of a second civil war, when Hezbollah and its sympathizers fought Sunni and Druze pro-government forces. One month later, sectarian clashes re-erupted in Lebanon's second-largest city, Tripoli, where pro-government Sunnis fought pro-Syrian, pro-Hezbollah Alawites.

In April 2010, following years of heightened sectarian tensions, hundreds of young Lebanese demonstrated publicly in favor of secularism (Minority Rights Group, 2020). They criticized their sectarian government and the sectarian violence swallowing all corners of their nation. In February 2011, again, secular and politically nonaligned activists marched through the streets of Beirut to protest their country's sectarian political system (Reuters Staff, 2011). These were precursors to the larger mobilization of the politically nonaligned and mostly secular young activists who, in October 2012, would demand for a secular state to replace the sectarian government. At this time, Lebanon began to experience spillover instability from neighboring Syria after its Civil War began. Syrian refugee arrivals aggravated intercommunal tensions, particularly

between Syrian opposition groups and pro-Assad groups. At this time, Hezbollah fighters entered Syria to support the Assad regime, which disappointed some Lebanese Shia communities who did not want the organization to be involved in foreign political affairs.

In the following years, hostility increased between the Lebanese Shia and Sunnis, culminating into gun battles in Sidon in the autumn of 2012. Animosity led to a massive spectacle of violence in August 2013, when Sunni militants killed almost thirty people in a Hezbollah-dominated area of Beirut (Minority Rights Group, 2020). One week later, two Sunni mosques in Tripoli were bombed seemingly as a response, resulting in more than forty-seven fatalities and five hundred injuries in what has become known as the “biggest and deadliest [blasts] in Tripoli since the end of Lebanon’s own civil war” (Holmes and Siddiq, 2013). While Hezbollah released a statement condemning the Tripoli blasts, the militia group and the Assad regime are considered responsible. These sectarian clashes, manifesting differently on a daily basis, know no end, whether between the Shia Hezbollah party and the Salafi Sunnis, or between the Christian Lebanese Forces and the Shia Amal militia. This is the environment in which the postwar generation grows, learns, and dreams. In this next section, I turn to Lebanon today to discuss the sectarian conflict and competition in relation to social, economic, and political crises plaguing Lebanon.

A Country In Decline

Corona distanced people away from one another. Once Corona started, hospitals started to become selective with whom to open to. People were unable to go into the hospitals if they weren’t connected to Hezbollah. My father got Corona, and he wasn’t able to get into the hospital until he found a connection to the militia. When we were able to get this internal

connection, he was able to enter. It makes people distanced from one another, competitive with one another. My father is still in the hospital after three months of being in there. Just because of the situation in Lebanon. He caught Corona three months ago and was taken to the hospital and then as soon as he healed, he caught it again in the hospital before he could leave. I think in about a week he will be able to return home.

— Laurent, summer 2021

Two days ago, I was waiting for gas in a line that wasn't even moving for four hours. And then, I walked and left my car and realized that people were filling gallons with gas. Even though every week, we are only able to get half a gallon. But we don't hide in the house, we put it in the car. People are hiding gallons of gas, and selling them for more price. They give it to people in their own sects, not to random people. Now there is no medicine. But what is happening? If you go to the pharmacy, you won't find medicine. Why? People are overstocking medicine. They buy for six months in advance. But they have hidden all the medicine. For my mom, she needs a lot of medicine. There is no medicine. A lot isn't available. Because a lot of people take and hide, take and hide. They are taking away from us. People are cheating in Lebanon. People are causing the crisis in Lebanon. People are causing this crisis.

— Mona, summer 2021

“Lebanon is like a pie; it's not really a state. It's a bunch of militias coming in and taking slices of that pie,” Dr. Anis Germany (2021) summarizes succinctly. For years, youth have protested against the corruption enabled by their leaders, the most recent major outburst of resistance manifesting as the October 2019 Revolution during which mass demonstrations against the political class arose across Lebanon. Lebanese of all ages, villages, and religious identities gathered in the streets of Beirut and marched to demand political change. The Lebanese rejected the political class' toxic hold on the country, calling out their political exploitation of every sector and industry, including their reliance on sectarian networks to stay in power.

When the revolution started, the politicians started to get scared more and more. They saw a huge group of people hating them.... this group of people consists of sooo many religions. This scared the politicians. This

conflict is a conflict between Lebanese government and the people, not a conflict between the Muslims and Christians.

— Jaafar, summer 2021

Ultimately, the October Revolution did not lead to foundational reform of the economic and political systems, but it offered the Lebanese hope that change was possible in their future. It inspired Lebanese citizens from all religious sects to fight together. Youth were central actors in these protests, as student movements were revived across Lebanon. Student clubs from the country's biggest universities including the American University of Beirut and the Université Saint-Joseph protested on and off campus ("Lebanese revolution: One month", 2019). Lebanese youth have long been the drivers of change, congregating at the forefront of every battle Lebanon has ever fought, including this most recent revolution (Abu Harb, 2020). A few of the young adults I interviewed commented on their experiences openly challenging their government's corrupt rule in October 2019. However, many youth mourn that while the revolution raised awareness and promoted solidarity, the situation today in 2021 is worse than in 2019, for no substantial change occurred that resulted in meaningful amelioration of daily life conditions.

In fact, since the 2019 Revolution, the country has fallen deeper into despair, poverty, and corruption. The same sectarian warlords who ruled the country during the Civil War remain in positions of power today, relying on the perpetuation of the status quo. They have exploited the cross-sectarian political system that allows them to loot the state and weaken its institutions, ultimately driving the country into bankruptcy (Abouzeid, 2021). Lebanon is now a non-functioning state. The World Bank reports that Lebanon is confronting one of the worst economic depressions in modern history.

On June 1st, 2021, while I was in Lebanon, the World Bank released its Lebanon Economic Monitor underscoring that the economic and financial crises rank in the top three most severe crises in modern history. The country's middle and upper classes can no longer afford basic resources such as electricity, gasoline, and food. Of course, when I was in Lebanon, I did not need a statistic to reveal the severity of the living circumstances. Medicine, gasoline, bread, water, electricity, diesel: all of these were nearly unavailable during the summer of 2021. But to hear news of this report still came as a shock, and this depression will likely only worsen (Reuters, 2021). The World Food Program finds that food prices have gone up by almost 628% in the past two years. Three years ago (around the time of the 2019 Revolution), less than thirty percent of the population was classified as 'poor,' yet today over three-quarters live in poverty. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2021, the minimum wage sat at around \$40 per month. Public sector employee wages have been decimated. The living situation of Syrian and Palestinian refugees is even more disastrous, with over 90% living below the poverty line. The Lebanese lira has lost over 90% of its original value (Chehayeb, 2021). Public schools and Lebanon's sole public university are at risk, as it is unclear if there will even be another complete school year. The Lebanese economy is nonproductive, grounded in debt, and almost exclusively reliant on remittances and loans from abroad.

At the beginning of this chapter, Laurent and Mona describe examples of sectarian exploitation and competition in the summer of 2021, during which basic commodities and services like healthcare, medicine, and gasoline are rare and consequently become hoarded by certain sects. Clashes over fuel erupt often between

villages, quickly turning into sectarian disputes. For instance, the Shia village Ankoun and the Christian village Maghdouché (one of the communities I examine in this research project) disputed over scarce fuel supplies, resulting in the injury of six people (El Dahan, 2021). The Lebanese army was forced to intervene to prevent further injuries. With subsidies lifted by the government, the already-limited supplies of gasoline are almost unaffordable for most Lebanese. And gas station owners are often almost as corrupt as politicians, as many hoard fuel and wait for prices to increase to make more money, or they choose to sell the fuel on the black market rather than offer it at normal prices to villagers. This corruption does not only engulf the actions of fuel station owners, but of any person selling rare goods. While conducting research in Ghazieh, I heard news that a local pharmacist was hoarding medicines and selling them on the black market while his shop shelves were physically bare of medicines that Ghazieh residents were so desperate to obtain. Officials found his warehouse full of much-needed medicines packed tightly in boxes. Just as political sectarian groups lay claim to Lebanon's resources, so too do many community leaders and ordinary people within the system.

Over the past two years, Lebanese people have also faced severe power outages. At the time of my research, the state was only offering about one to two hours of electricity per day. This consequently limits access to water, internet, and alternative communication services. In October 2021, the state-run electric grid completely collapsed, and today most of the country still faces long stretches without power. Since electricity and most basic medicines are unavailable, hospitals and clinics are on the verge of collapse. Moreover, Lebanon's public health sector is burdened by an exodus

of medical workers fleeing the country (Bitar, 2021). Generic medications are mostly unavailable in pharmacies, and only those with “fresh dollars”³ can afford the medication at exorbitant prices off the black market. In addition, the social security situation in Lebanon is near bankruptcy, as it is nearly incapable of responding to the needs of people who require medicine, surgery, and medical attention (Bitar, 2021). The COVID-19 vaccination program was also unsurprisingly mismanaged, as less than 10% of the country was vaccinated during my visit (Our World in Data, 2022).⁴ The program is in disarray, with sectarian officials at the very front of the line to get vaccinated while vulnerable populations including refugees are placed at the end of the line.

Lebanon has always been a vastly unequal society, but the current economic crisis has generated a two-tier society in which a minority of people exploit the crisis to make more money. Since the Civil War and its aftermath, Lebanon has suffered unresolved political assassinations, bombings, and intercommunal violent clashes marking the continuation of decades of power struggles between right-wing forces. These culprits are usually unidentified and not brought to justice because the weak sectarian system cannot guarantee nonpartisanship. Warlords who are now politicians continue abusing the same mechanisms in place since the Civil War. Subsidies programs are mismanaged, exploited, and abused by the high class to accumulate money at the expense of the majority of the population, who sink further into poverty (Bitar, 2021). Militia-related financial networks, such as the ownership of banks, have turned into politician-aligned financial networks (Abouzeid, 2021). Even moments of

³ Informal way of referencing U.S. dollars

⁴ Today, only 30% of the country is fully vaccinated (Our World in Data, 2022).

so-called peace under the leadership of the post-2019 “national unity government” consist of political parties ganging up on the population to divide its spoils (Bitar, 2021).

For over thirty years, Lebanon has been almost exclusively dependent on loans from the IMF, World Bank, and other countries, hurling itself into a neoliberal disaster. Najib Mikati, the richest man in Lebanon now spearheading the most recent government formation, has nominated to resume negotiations with the IMF, which will further indebt his country’s population for generations to come. Bitar (2021) argues that these international organizations are responsible for Lebanon’s downfall, predicting that an eventual bailout will be a bailout of the banks, not unlike what happened in 2008 in the U.S. This will further decimate the public sector, kill what remains of the country, and eliminate the potential for economic, political, and social change.

Bitar mourns, “The international community holds a huge responsibility for constantly allowing the political class to reproduce itself, for throwing it a lifeline whenever it is in crisis, and for preventing the will of the people to be assumed.” Indeed, European, U.S., and Middle Eastern financial institutions have profited from Lebanon’s sky-high interest rates since the end of the Civil War. These external state powers have benefited from Lebanon’s dependence on foreign investment and aid, as they periodically threaten to “strangle” the financial system to satisfy their own political and economic objectives (Noe, 2021). Western leaders, including George W. Bush, have supported Lebanon’s warlords and sectarian chieftains since the end of the Civil War to weaken Hezbollah. Overlooking their corruption and mismanagement, the West has hailed these sectarian leaders as independence heroes combatting Islamic terrorism

(Noe, 2021). With European backing, previous U.S. administrations have invested in Walid Jumblatt, Amin Gemayel, and members of the Hariri family, who are all applauded for their pro-Western approach. Yet these are the very politicians who exploit the corrupt sectarian system that Western leaders criticize. Former presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump themselves backed the long-standing governor of Lebanon's Central Bank, Riad Salameh (Noe, 2021), despite his direct engineering of the Ponzi Scheme at the root of Lebanon's financial crisis (Slim, 2022).

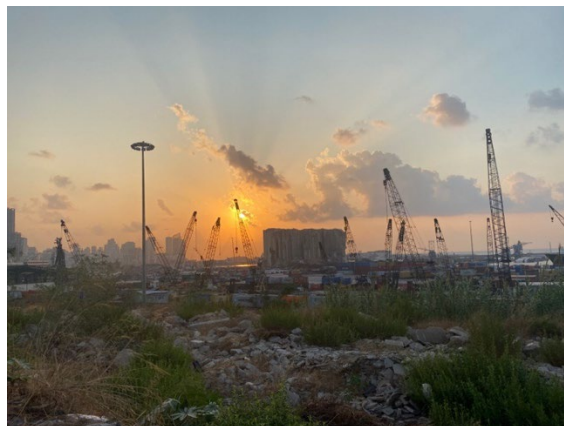
While Western nations claim they want to fight corruption in Lebanon, they clearly have neglected to support appropriate accountability and regulatory bodies. Instead, foreign loans and grants, foreign states, and state contracts pour money into “hazy schemes that never materialize.” For instance, one Lebanese executive director claims that a wastewater project consisting of multiple foreign loans totaling \$200 million was never actually executed (Abouzeid, 2021). The money is often pocketed by state officials. This director tells *The New York Times*, “If you still believe that you can trust the same warlords to take new aid money in order to fix the problems, you're delusional.” In this country, development is impeded on all axes. As external powers treat Lebanon like a massive company, the country has yet to even become a true state. But Lebanon is a country of human beings in need of protection.

Unaccountability rests at the heart of corruption in Lebanon. Even one year after the heartbreaking 2020 explosion at the Port of Beirut, no individual or organization has been deemed guilty. *The Public Source*, a Beirut-based independent media organization, reports that 252 people were killed so far by the blast (2021). The Lebanese Health Minister neglectfully stopped recording the number of casualties that took place after

the blast and only accounts for 191 victims, but people are still dying today from injuries caused by the explosion. Families of the victims, the 10,000 people injured by the blast, and the 300,000 displaced have not received any official support from Lebanon's Ministry of Health. They are left on their own. In its disregard for the humans killed by the explosion and subsequent fires in Beirut, the Lebanese government has failed to bring the culpable to justice.

I think... the Beirut Port explosion brought us all together. We were so disappointed by our leaders. Instead, we saw people of different religions and different nationalities coming together. For example, the Palestinian Red Cross was also helping out at the explosion. We were all together, regardless of religion. No one was asking us "What is your religion?" before helping. This is how we should be, on a daily basis. Uhhh, but other than that, nothing happened; everything remained the same in this country with conditions from hell.

— Nadia, summer 2021



Port of Beirut, after the explosion⁵

⁵ All photos are taken by me.



Housing wrecked by the Beirut Blast, still shattered one year after the explosion⁶



In front of the explosion site, buildings ruined by the blast now wear posters of resistance

⁶ Sadly, this is only one of many buildings I see in Beirut, entirely destroyed and evacuated by the previous residents.



In memory of the victims of the Beirut Blast, memorial in Achrafieh

The international community is complicit in the culmination of the present crises. After the Beirut explosion, French President Emmanuel Macron promised that no aid would be given to the Lebanese government without reforms. But these Western reforms, Bitar (2021) argues, involve privatization and harsh austerity measures that will only benefit the banking sector and corporate elites. Now, the political elites prepare themselves for the 2022 elections. Without the financial support of the international community, this class would be unable to finance itself or bribe people with basic services. The further Lebanon twirls within the neoliberal complex, the further corruption runs rampant.

On October 14th, 2021, Shia militias Hezbollah and Amal organized protests against the investigations into the explosion at the Port of Beirut, claiming that the case was politicized and that the West and local partners in Lebanon were exploiting the investigation to further their political goals. While various groups share different versions of how the shooting began, some say that during the demonstrations, snipers (whom Hezbollah claims were part of the Christian Lebanese Forces militia) began firing at the Shia protesters (DW Akademie, 2021). This turned Beirut into a war zone, as the Shia from Hezbollah and Amal responded with shooting. At least seven people died, raising fears that new violence would fill the void left by the near-collapsing state (Al-Omar & Yee, 2021). These sectarian clashes led to the evacuation of residents from their homes and children from schools, unveiling the ugly extent to which politics, religion, and sectarian identity intersect when coupled with impunity. Some find that by pushing for accountability, sectarian conflict like the October 14th example emerge and endanger peace among religious communities. This leaves citizens who simply want

justice dubious about whether they should push for truth or whether they must submit to the status quo in order to avoid future sectarian clashes (Khodr, 2021).

Hezbollah is not the only group trying to impede investigations into the explosion at the Port of Beirut, since most political parties and figures stand against Judge Tarek Bitar's efforts. Both Bitar and his predecessor pushed to interrogate senior political and security officials accused of negligence. As a response, many politicians accused Judge Bitar of politicizing the investigation, violating the constitution by ignoring immunity granted to lawmakers and state officials, and discriminately going after some officials while not others (AP Staff, 2021). The Lebanese political class has campaigned against the investigation, such as filing a lawsuit against Bitar to impede a fair trial (El Deeb & Mroue, 2021). Suspensions and obstructions of the probe anger families of the explosion's victims. As politicians fight for their immunity, the true victims of the Beirut blast are forgotten. The faces of the Lebanese people, the humans suffering on a daily basis, are blurred as the political elite shove justice to the side.

“Without exaggeration, we are experiencing the harshest form of existence since we were conceived as a state by the French,” Professor Rania Masri (2021) claims. Over the year 2021, the leading Lebanese news and media outlet *961* reports on babies found in garbage bags, signaling the desperation of mothers and fathers who cannot imagine their own futures, let alone the futures of their children (Shkair, 2021). Lebanon's sole suicide hotline receives over a thousand calls per month now. Since 2020, the number of people phoning the hotline has more than doubled and is expected to continue to grow as the economic crisis batters the population. The growing mental health crisis sees no end with the shortage of drugs to treat anxiety, depression, and

psychosis, as well as the emigration of hundreds of healthcare specialists (France24, 2021). As many youth tell me throughout our interviews, life in Lebanon is unbearable. The exclusionary sectarian state does not open opportunities for them. Daily struggles engross the Lebanese, who become increasingly preoccupied by their search for gasoline and diesel. What happens when the human being's dreams are pushed aside, replaced with small problems that make life so much harder to live (Bitar, 2021)? Lebanese leaders weaponize national crises to reduce their citizens to the most basic necessities. They manipulate the local people, offering fuel and other resources in exchange for their vote. The undemocratic roars in this land, starving its people. Abou Harb (2020) considers youth to be the last spark of hope, or at least, "that is what we are constantly told." But in today's corrupt land of Lebanon, youth are basically paralyzed. This sociopolitical and economic context is important to consider as we move on to discuss the specific case of inter-religious relationships between the young adults of Southern Lebanon. These dire circumstances paint the background of their daily interactions, as youth may either feel a sense of deepened solidarity with their religious neighbors or increasing competition, hostility, and exasperation.

Setting: Ghazieh and Maghdouché

"Our villages are so interconnected. They're basically one big village," This is how I hear a middle-aged woman from Ghazieh describe her village's relationship with Maghdouché to a Druze man in the mountains. This August morning, she takes me to the beautiful cedar mountains so that I can see what Lebanon is like "from above." It is certainly cooler than the muggy air in *el-Jnoub*. "In fact, Maghdouché and Ghazieh are so interconnected we forget they're two villages!" The woman adds to the Druze man.

The villages are certainly intertwined. The roads of Maghdouché and those of Ghazieh merge at many points. Maghdouché has fewer residents than Ghazieh, sitting on a hill overlooking the Shia village. In Maghdouché, the well-known statue of Our Lady Awaiting, known locally as Our Lady of Mantara or the Virgin Mary, crowns a tall, white stone tower. This tower dates to ancient times and sits beside a Melkite Greek Catholic shrine of the Virgin Mary discovered in 1721 by a young shepherd. I myself have meditated beside this shrine, and I assure you it has been a source of inspiration and reconnection to my soul. Near the statue is a cathedral, a cemetery, and a sacred cave where the Virgin Mary rested while she waited for her son centuries ago. This site is particularly popular as a tourist destination among all religious groups. On the 8th of September every year, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is also celebrated there. “It is especially important that Jesus has visited this place. [...] It is a very holy land. It is a real holy land,” Melkite Catholic Archbishop Elie Béchara claims (2021).



Our Lady of Mantara



Cemetery by Lady of Mantara



The Maghdouché church



View of Maghdouché from the top of the statue of Mary



From the streets of Maghdouché

On the other hand, Ghazieh does not have a specific tourist destination such as the statue of the Virgin Mary in Maghdouché, although the Shia village is one of the largest business hubs in Southern Lebanon. The village even has its own football club called *Al-Shabaab Ghazieh* (“Young Men of Ghazieh”). The Corniche of Ghazieh, a large walkway bordering the beach, is a popular spot where young adults from nearby villages meet, walk, drink juices, and smoke the hookah at the cafés overlooking the sea. *El-Ein*, Ghazieh’s main square built around a small circular pool of water, is also a place to congregate with friends, especially in the evenings. Visitors from outside of Ghazieh often go to *el-Ein* to seek directions to their friends’ homes in the village. When looking closely, you can make out the Amal militia flags on the posts surrounding *el-Ein* rather than the Lebanese red, white, and green flags, which demonstrates how the sect is visibly prioritized over nationality in this village.



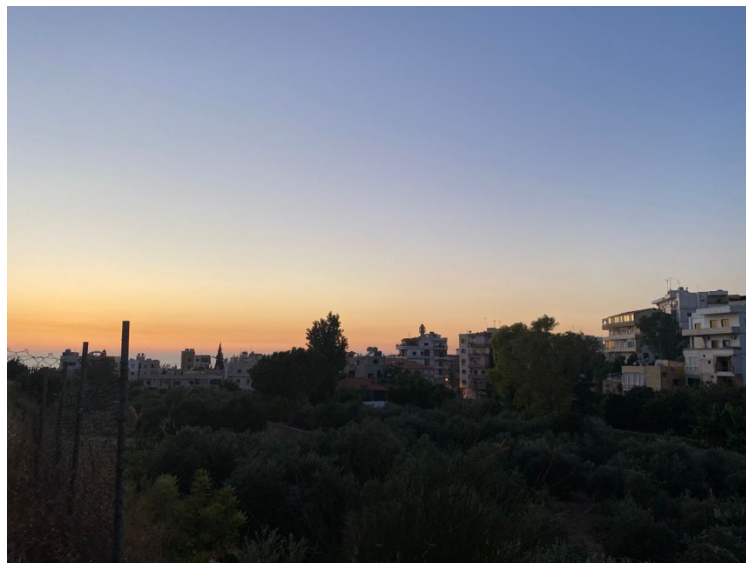
El Ein, Ghazieh's Central Square



View of one of Ghazieh's many mosques during evening tea



Central Ghazieh's neighborhoods



Ghazieh at sunset



Cemetery at Central Ghazieh, located next to the Temple of the Prophet Idris

By examining the relationship of two religiously homogeneous communities, I hope to contest the perceptions of religion as a divisive force in Lebanon. The particular social and geographic contexts of Maghdouché and Ghazieh offer me the rich opportunity to uncover the informal social strategies adopted by each community's youth to maintain peace in the backdrop of regional religious radicalization, heightened sectarian identity, and militia-political tension.

Research Question and Findings

I first explore how youth understand their faith and their religious neighbors.' Next, I analyze the nature of the interreligious relationship, including why and how young adults connect with one another. Finally, I consider youths' perspectives on the religious-political knot inherent in confessional politics and histories of the Civil War to consider how youth interpret the country's sectarian roots and what they envision for their country's future beyond their personal interreligious relationships. My central research questions are: 1) How do youth in the Catholic community of Maghdouché and

Shia community of Ghazieh engage with one another and interpret the interreligious relationship? How is this relationship conditioned, enacted, and understood? And 2) How do youth understand the religious-political knot inherent to the country's sectarian system? What do their familial and personal experiences, memories, and reflections tell us about the future of Lebanon?

To preview my findings, I propose that the interreligious direct contact and interreligious relationships are foundational to the villages' coexistence. Youth delegitimize and reject sectarian narratives, bolstered by their lived knowledge about the other. In this sense, de-sectarianization necessitates a background of cross-religious engagement. In response to my first question, I argue that youth instrumentalize the Lebanese national identity as a means to unite themselves and minimize the sectarian identity that has historically ignited interreligious conflict. Just as religion is a tool expropriated by their political leaders, youth in Ghazieh and Maghdouché reclaim their faith as their own, conceptualizing it as an inclusive, loving force. Rather than serving as exclusionary constructions, spiritual spaces, ceremonies, and holidays serve to further unite youth, revealing that the religious identity has the potential to surpass the religiously-fixed to become the "sublime." While I echo Aïda Kanafani-Zahar's (1997) interpretation of religious sublimation emerging from the interreligious interaction, I add that youth connect not only during these sacred times and spaces, but also in the sectarian mundane. Through these daily experiences, youth display an intimate knowledge of one another across religious lines, manifesting as an appreciation and understanding of the other's faith and way of life.

To address my second question, I find that youth of Ghazieh and Maghdouché challenge master narratives that demonize the religious other, since most either detach themselves from memories of interreligious violence by adopting a generational amnesia or master narrative about Israel as a source of suffering rather than other religious groups. The country's history of sectarian conflict does not impel youth to fall deeper into sectarian narratives. Rather, when considering their government's political history and contemporary structure, most youth are immensely critical of the religious-political knot. They envision a democratic future in which their leaders better represent them, their needs, and their aspirations regardless of religious identity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

My research nestles in three landscapes of literature and ties each together from an intimate, on-the-ground lens to understand coexistence among young adults in Southern Lebanon. First, my project echoes with scholarly research on everyday peace, interfaith dialogue, reconciliation, and coexistence between members of different religious communities. Second, because my study concerns the Lebanese postwar generation, my research calls to literature on young adults' identities, roles, and agency within contexts of conflict and trauma. Finally, my project draws from research concerning the Lebanese religious-political knot, in which the confessional government ensures that sectarianism carves political divisions.

Everyday Peace & Interfaith Coexistence (Outside & Inside of Lebanon)

Around the world, communities of ethnic, racial, religious, cultural, and ideological plurality coexist and are not necessarily divided along identity lines. In the multi-confessional society, everyday peace is regulated by mechanisms that ensure the continuation of that society. The mere cohabitation of people from diverse communities living within the same area does not position identity as the “locus of conflict” (Cammett, 2019). Rather, such conflict emerges from the manner in which identities are mediated, accepted, and categorized. Roger Mac Ginty (2014, p. 549) defines everyday peace as the “routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence.” This involves coping mechanisms such as avoiding controversial subjects and concealing a specific identity to not draw attention to oneself. However,

everyday peace also encompasses activities that challenge the fixity of conflicts. Heyd (1995, p. 218) suggests that everyday peace relies on “sensitive perception and intuitive responses” of so-called ordinary people who are not necessarily peacemaking professionals. In deeply divided societies, conflict avoidance and conflict-minimizing skills are not collected at institutional meetings or conflict resolution workshops, but rather, stem from “widely held empathetic and intuitive genius” (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 551). For instance, Baily (1996) observes that in one religiously-mixed Indian city, people have highly sophisticated cognitive abilities that allow them to be pragmatic, quotidian thinkers and calculators who process through the consequences of their decisions. In this sense, ordinary people have the ability to consider their actions towards people of different religions and predict the consequences of their behavior on their communities’ dynamics.

Asuna Yoshizawa and Wataru Kusaka (2020) find that everyday peace between Muslims and Christians manifest in the form of mutual assistance for everyday survival in the Southern Philippines. Many regard those who practice other religions as companions sharing the same “paths to happiness.” This underscores the perception of a shared experience of life. In addition, members of multireligious families may reconceptualize religions so that they coexist by “implementing non-decision” to maintain healthy family relationships. In this way, flexibility and ambiguity in everyday life grounds inter-faith cohabitation even if there is no specific shared local identity. Finally, Yoshizawa and Kusaka reveal that even when Christian women married to Muslim men face polygamy without consent, they blame their husbands’ behavior on patriarchal culture rather than Islam (p. 69). Regular individuals cross pre-determined

divides to enact everyday peacemaking, which prevents religion from becoming a point of conflict as religious differences are blurred. This signifies that peace is not inherent, but the product of everyday efforts that often come organically and instinctively to communities. Also in the context of the Southern Philippines, Hannah Neumann (2010) and Coline Cardeño (2019) posit that the construction of shared local identity in conjunction with the weakening of clan and ethnoreligious identities constitute the foundation of everyday peace.

Religious events, celebrations, and commemorations may also serve as spaces and times for religious communities to come together and engage with one another. Alexander Horstmann (2011) shows how multi-religious ritual traditions can facilitate the coexistence of Muslims and Buddhists in Thailand. In this sense, rituals involving multiple faiths encourage communities to transcend cultural difference, or at least productively manage difference. Albertus Bagus Laksana (2014) also highlights how a Javanese spiritual pilgrimage is a “rich milieu” where Islamic, Catholic, and Javanese culture intersect within the interactions between Muslims and Catholics.

Judith Butler (2012) advocates the ideal of “cohabitation” with others with whom deliberation is difficult or seemingly impossible. She argues that “those with whom we cohabit the earth are given to us, prior to choice, and so prior to any social or political contracts we might enter through deliberate volition” (Butler 2012, p. 125). We are ontologically bound with strangers, and thus “to destroy the other is to destroy my life” (p. 88). Specifically, she argues that violent return to the land by the Israeli state attacks not only Palestinians but also the Jewish value of cohabitation. Humans have the right and the obligation to cohabit with neighboring others.

In recent decades, local movements have surged to organize conversations between people of different faiths and galvanize inter-communal relationships, which diverge from elite-focused theological discussions and formal postwar reconciliation processes. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury, and Emily Welty (2007) present four models of interfaith dialogue that occur when individuals of different religions interact with one another: exclusivism (considering one's religion as superior to others'), pluralism (acknowledging differences between faiths while affirming the legitimacy of each), syncretism (emphasizing the common elements of various religious traditions), and finally, transformation (understanding of religion is altered through interacting with other religious individuals). Abu-Nimer (2004, p. 497) distinguishes between the religiorelative person and the religiocentric person. The former firmly believes that other religions have the right to exist and be practiced, resists the dehumanization of other religious groups and individuals, and acts peacefully with others. The latter denies other religions' "truth" and conceptualizes the existence of an absolute correct path. Corsini (1999, 827) specifies that religiocentrism is the "conviction that a person's own religion is more important or superior to other religions." Using the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Abu-Nimer (2004, p. 495) contends that religion has the potential to play a constructive function in conflict dynamics, and thus, religious identity and interfaith dialogue should be part of peace processes rather than blamed for all communal conflict. Religious identity can be a force for peace and source of cooperation when individuals and religious groups reimagine conflict as conflict over resources, rather than existential conflict.

Considering that the tiny country has eighteen officially-recognized religions, Lebanon is a ripe region within which to explore interfaith connection, interreligious engagement, and everyday peacemaking. In Lebanon, the 1989 Taif Accord signaled an end to the Civil War and proposed the abolition of the sectarian system, but it did not create platforms for interreligious coexistence and dialogue, nor other mechanisms of transitional justice, interreligious engagement, and social cohesion (Zakharia, 2016). Following the agreement, institutions began to encourage formal interfaith dialogue sessions to foster communication across sectarian lines. Antoine Messarra (2021) has supervised and written about many Islamic-Christian dialogue and field programs over the past century in Lebanon. He argues that coexistence requires stable dialogue, interaction, and knowledge about the religious other (p. 6). Considering the country's long history of interfaith dialogue and its unique religious plurality, Lebanon has the capacity to model interfaith dialogue in the Arab region. Furthermore, youth have been included in a limited number of interfaith initiatives in Lebanon. For instance, the Dialogue for Life and Reconciliation, founded in 2010, generates spaces for dialogue between youth from different backgrounds and addresses sensitive matters related to religious diversity in Lebanon (Adyan Foundation, 2020). Still, many dialogue initiatives in Lebanon struggle to engage youth participants in substantial ways despite youths' high levels of enthusiasm.

There is a certainly a difference between these interfaith dialogue initiatives (whether they include youth or not) and the local, organic processes of peacemaking. Although the former have been documented by organizations like Lebanon's Adyan Foundation, the latter have been under-reported because of their organic formation in

non-formalized settings, which renders them all the more important to analyze. By focusing on everyday peace and coping mechanisms employed by local people to coexist, we realize that peace is rooted in ordinary lives, flourishing naturally thanks to people's sophisticated cognitive abilities which are not learned from "conflict resolution 'gurus'" (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 551). Ordinary locals can contribute immensely to everyday peacemaking and long-term peacekeeping in mundane spaces where technocratic approaches are impractical. Indeed, throughout the Lebanese Civil War, Christian and Muslim civilians sheltered one another, helped one another cross demarcation lines, and collaborated to satisfy their basic needs (Kanafani-Zahar, 2002). The war violently tore the nation apart while simultaneously consolidating bonds of coexistence in some religious communities. This serves as a counter-narrative to the perpetuated notion that all religious groups were blindly and ruthlessly pitted against one another, and offers a lens of agency that recognizes how local strategies of local communities are informally adopted to cultivate a peaceful culture. We must look beyond the binary of peacemaker and citizen, of coexistence and conflict, of reconciliation and violence. Most research about interreligious coexistence in Lebanon concerns organized interfaith dialogue sessions. In this thesis project, I focus on the localized measures taken in Southern Lebanon, rather than the institutionalized peacemaking approaches enacted in formal dialogue sessions mostly in major cities like Beirut.

Lebanese scholar Aïda Kanafani-Zahar's (1997, 2000, 2002, 2004) fieldwork on interreligious dialogue and reconciliation after the Civil War echoes with the intentions of my research. Although Kanafani-Zahar concentrates mainly on the Chouf district of

the mountains inhabited by Druze, Christians, and Muslims, while I conduct my research in the country's Southern Governorate where Hezbollah has a much deeper presence, she too adopts an on-the-ground lens focused on participant observation and interviews. Adopting the term *le vivre ensemble*—which translates to 'life together' or 'coexistence'—Kanafani-Zahar (2004) notices *une culture de devotion* shared between Shia and Maronites in Hsoun, within which daily spiritual actions such as prayer and exceptional practices such as fasting are common in all villagers' practice of faith. The Shia and the Maronite communities coexist in the daily enactment of their faiths, and their *vivre ensemble* does not minimize, but actually may strengthen, their commitments to the Divine. In the case study of Chouf, religious pluralism is relational in the sense that it is supported through ritual religious exchanges and the overcoming of religious differences (Kanafani-Zahar, 2000). This *vivre ensemble* entails mutuality and an awareness of the religious Other. Religious community members necessitate an intimate knowledge about the other religious community's practices and beliefs.

In her ten years of fieldwork in Lebanon, Farrah-Haddad (2017) finds that devotional practices observed at sacred sites, such as saints' tombs, are commonly shared by both Christian and Muslim communities. These visits contrast with the codified religious dichotomy of the mosque and the church. Religion is not necessarily the locus of contrasted difference but that of negotiated difference within religious spaces and temporalities. In Hsoun, Kanafani-Zahar (1997) proposes that a religious expansion occurs among Christians and Muslims as Holy celebrations serve as a neutral environment for social cohesion and compromise. Religious committees even encourage villagers of different religious identities to participate in one another's

festivals and traditional rituals to foster solidarity. Thus, communities often implement measures that enable their religious neighbors to participate in their ceremonies. For instance, Maronites in Hsoun celebrate the carnival Marfa' annually, during which villagers perform a sheep sacrifice and consume the meat during a feast. In order for the Shia Muslim villagers to participate in their feast, Maronites choose to perform the sheep slaughter in accordance with Shia rituals to ensure that the meal is *halal*.⁷ Hence, the Maronites surmount the domain of their religious dogma to actualize the social requirements for interreligious cohesion (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997). These Maronites demonstrate their fluid interpretation of their religion by including the Shia population, and the Shia demonstrate their own religious flexibility through their participation in a non-Islamic religious holiday. As both sides adapt their religions to engage with the religious other, a multi-confessional interconnectedness occurs, in which the interreligious compromise neutralizes the environment for all parties to feel comfortable. In fact, by interweaving both religions, Islam and Christianity appear to be quite compatible, so long as their believers are willing to accommodate the religious others. Villagers of Hsoun not only tolerate plurality but honor it. Kanafani-Zahar (2000) emphasizes that while these communities differentiate themselves through their various rites and ceremonies, they reach out to one another not during non-religious occasions, but on the contrary during the very moments that represent the highest form of religious expression and experience.

In shared religious temporality and space, the *espace de laïcité relative* (space of relative secularism) is nurtured (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997). These are neutralized spaces

⁷ Licit

where the interreligious encounter flourishes. A revolutionary community is formed where individuals do not act solely in function of their religious status. The “secular” connotation to this neutral space concerns the exercise of relational pluralism, not the absence of religion altogether. Building off this point, Kanafani-Zahar (1997) notices a sublimation of the religious in such interreligious interactions. This involves the surpassing or expansion of religion to work in function of coexistence. The sublime religious establishes an open system of proximity where religious groups interact with a mutual knowledge about the other’s religious principles.

This religious sublimation is rooted in the inclusion of one another in each other’s religious events. For instance, in the sacred rituals of sacrifice and celebration, there occurs a transition from the Divine to the human, from the sacred to the sublime, from the religious to the social. In this sublime space, no individual transgresses the religious codes, nor are they locked within them. This is where the *espace de laïcité relative* manifests. Religious differences are not forgotten, but rather this metaphorical space defies the Lebanese cultural, sectarian, war-era norms of categorizing humans according to their religious affiliation. Coexistence may lead to a para-religious that is superficially secular. This intervention of the para-religious within the social sphere of the interreligious relationship establishes an interpersonal link that manages the complex reality of religious diversity. No scholar to my knowledge has expanded on Kanafani-Zahar’s work of the late 1990s and early 2000s, prodding me to wonder whether the case of Hsoun is an exception or an example of the interreligious interactions across Lebanon. I keep her reflections in mind as I examine Southern Lebanon in the summer of 2021.

Youth Identity, Agency, and Role Amid Societal Instability

Although ongoing sectarian conflict and discrimination plague Lebanon, the postwar generation has not directly experienced the interreligious Civil War. Youth carry their parents' and grandparents' narratives about sectarianism and the religious other while actively forming their own perspectives through their personal interactions and experiences with their religious others. Since the group, rather than the individual, is the center of community life in Lebanese villages, the behavior of individuals in life-situations can be considered an expression of group patterns (Tannous, 1942). Thus, we must wonder which cultural-community narratives reproduced by Lebanese youth are reflections of their group patterns—such as the home, mosque/church, or greater community—rather than their own personal experiences. These broader cultural narratives allow community members to construct their life stories with discursive resources (Hammack, 2008), contextualizing these narratives in an ideological space that offers meaning and purpose (McAdams, 1997).

Unfortunately, Southern Lebanese youth have not been the focus of many studies, but various scholars highlight youths' positionality in regions of conflict and trauma in the Middle East. Focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Phillip Hammack (2009) differentiates between youths' personal narratives stemming from experience and reflection, and youths' master historical narratives calling to broader cultural stories perpetuated by communities. Hammack asserts that, like the larger narrative of the Jewish-Israeli identity, Israeli youths' stories can be characterized as quasi-redemptive in their focus on existential insecurity, exceptionalism, and delegitimization of Palestinian identity. In other words, youth may ingest and reiterate

themes about their community identities. However, youth may also completely or partially reject those discursive master themes, instead relying on their personal experiences to define their perspectives. Hammack (2010) explores two conceptions of youths' role in political conflict. One conception is that identity is a burden for youth, in that youth internalize a master narrative of collective identity, and thus play a role in reproducing conflict. The other conception is that identity benefits peace, in that youth use identity as a tool to instigate sociopolitical change. In settings of conflict, Hammack maintains that identity must be thought of as both a burden and a benefit for youth. Khosravi (2008) discusses youth agency and assertion of personal narratives in opposition to the master narratives, although he does not use this language. He suggests that Persian youth demonstrate defiance against cultural narratives and parental dominance in alternative spaces such as shopping centers and coffee shops, which serve as centers for expression and imagination. I imagine that youth in Southern Lebanon also experience an internal reconciliation and mediation of master and personal narratives as they process and reformulate narratives about the religious other. The narratives they ingest and the narratives they repeat are crucial to investigate, which I choose to do in this thesis.

By engaging with war, memory, and history, Lebanese youth can rehumanize the banality of violence and reflect upon the outgroup members through universal rather than sectarian lenses (Righi, 2014). However, when confronting personal lived experiences of war, youth resort to master discourses (Hammack, 2009) of collective victimization and demonstrate a heightened perceived threat to group identity (Righi 2014, p. 246). In resonance with Seidman (2012)'s analysis, Righi (p. 244) writes that

the figure impeding the redemption of collective memory is the “unremitting image of the demonic other.” In the context of postwar Lebanon, identity construction is a tensional process, in which youth overcome an identitarian status quo of ambivalence between remembering versus forgetting and between sustaining a discourse of opening up to versus recoiling from the other (Righi, 2014, p. 245).

Various studies point to the benefit of inter-group interactions to decrease hostility and negative perceptions towards those of different identities. In a longitudinal study tracking how a coexistence program affects Israelis’ and Palestinians’ relationships with and attitudes towards each other, Schroeder and Risen (2016) find that teenagers who formed an outgroup friendship during the program felt more positive feelings toward outgroup program members. These teenagers also felt an increase in positivity toward all outgroup members (beyond the program participants), which insinuates that friendship with an outgroup member aids in decreasing negative attitudes about other outgroup members. While master narratives centered on histories of conflict and demonization of the other may draw youth away from outgroup members, youth engaging in relationships with outgroup members may feel decreased tension towards the other and the other’s community, opening youth to develop personal narratives based on direct experience.

Because adolescence is a critical transitional period from childhood to adulthood, adolescents are a vulnerable group when facing the calamities of war and trauma. Like the ongoing tensions shaping the narratives ingested and produced by Israeli and Palestinian youth in Hammack’s studies, historic and present violence also paints the background of interreligious relationships in Lebanon. Lebanese youth are no

strangers to trauma, displacement, and conflict, all of which entrench their experience of life in Lebanon. Unsurprisingly, war is intimately related to mental health problems, particularly amongst children and adolescents (Murthy, 2006). Khamis (2012, p. 2009) finds that most adolescents from Southern Lebanon have been exposed to various types of trauma due to the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006, including injury, death of family members, and losing homes due to bombing. Khamis adds that adolescents whose family member(s) were injured during the war are particularly prone to suffering from depression and anxiety. Shaar (2013) finds a prevalent rate of post-traumatic stress disorder in Lebanese adolescents ranging from 15.4% to 25.0% because of the 2006 war, to which the majority of youth in Southern Lebanon (including the communities of Maghdouché and Ghazieh) were exposed.

Today, the dire economic, political, and social crises in Lebanon weigh on the mental health of these young individuals. The International Labour Organization reports that Lebanon's youth unemployment sits at around 25%—and Thern et al. (2017) suggest that youth unemployment during times of economic crisis can be associated with increased risk of mental health problems needing inpatient care. Many of the thousands of callers to Lebanon's sole suicide hotline are young adults (France24, 2021). How can Lebanon offer resources like inpatient care to its young population when its medical infrastructure is barely functioning? On top of this, thousands of Lebanese youth had a “near-to-dying” experience during and after the Beirut Explosion at the port on August 4th, 2020, coupled with the subsequent personal, collective, and nationwide chaos. Lebanese children, even those who were not displaced or injured by

the blast, do not know true national peace amidst their country's "minimal stability and security" (Gavin, 2021).

Lebanon's Religious-Political Knot

Even though today's daily violence is different from that of the Civil War, many Lebanese maintain a political-religious war culture. Whether the explosion at Beirut's port or the fifteen-year-long war, violence has long pushed the country's population into sectarian outfits. For instance, Lebanese communities today blame Hezbollah and its allies for the explosion at the Port of Beirut, while Shia militias including Hezbollah blame Christians including Judge Bitar for discrimination against the Shia militia during investigations. These tensions erupted into bloody clashes that offered a haunting taste of the civil war (Vohra, 2021). Antoine Messara (2021, p. 6) argues that the Lebanese live in either Civil War or ceasefire—there is never absolute peace. This is partly due to the fact that in Lebanon, the sect serves as a quasi-national homeland (Seidman, 2012). This sectarian solidarity stems from the construction of the sectarian other as an enemy threatening the self, kin, sect, and nation. Its "force of evil" is of unmeasurable magnitude (p. 29-30). The inflation of the sectarian other into a demonic figure and the simultaneous purification of one's sectarian community enable banal killings, exemplified by the Civil War, and evolve into acts of personal and collective redemption. Even today, millions of Lebanese aggressively blame the religious-political (sectarian) other for the arduous circumstances they endure. This tendency did not disappear with the 1989 Taif agreement—it continues every day.

Many academics point to Lebanon's confessional state as an aggravator of tensions and animosity between sectarian groups. Hostility and violence resulting from

the political instrumentalization of religions conceals the religions' intrinsically integrative nature (Kanafani-Zahar, 2002). In Lebanon, the impact of sectarianism even seeps into the seemingly apolitical and areligious, such as sports. While other societies rely on sports as a source of bonding and solidarity, Reiche (2011) argues that sports further divide the Lebanese population because confessionalism produces conditions that only allow for competition within and between sects. Exacerbating the patron-client relationship, political leaders expect complete loyalty from the teams they fund. Often, sport teams adopt political party colors as team colors and post large posters of politicians in their arenas. Thus, politics coat almost every ounce of Lebanese society. For instance, the soccer team of Ghazieh *Shabaab Al Ghazieh* is politically affiliated with Nabih Berri, a Shia politician serving both as head of the militia group Amal Movement and as Speaker of the Parliament since 1992. Around Ghazieh's soccer arena, green flags and posters of the Amal Movement are plastered, some with Berri's face.

While Lebanese religious leaders like Berri are treated as "authentic representatives" of their confessional sects, the majority are selected and trained by elite institutions rather than by local Lebanese citizens (Henley, 2016). There is a disconnection between local Lebanese and their sectarian representatives, which many youth deplored during my conversations. As political elites empower these religious leaders, they contribute to the demarcation and practical separation of communities. The majority of religious leaders enforce religious orthodoxy and specific visions of social propriety (Saadeh, 2002). While religious figures do not always directly incite sectarian hatred and violence, their monopoly over spiritual matters and their backing from

political institutions impede the social integration among various religious communities and even deepen sectarian divisions (Henley, 2016).

Many scholars perceive this sectarian system of governance as discriminatory in that it hinders genuine efforts to overcome religious and cultural differences.

Unfortunately, there have not been many formal spaces for individuals of different religious identities to meet, converse and engage with one another for non-sectarian purposes (Cox, Orsborn, and Sisk, 2015). For Haddad (2009), Lebanon fails to enact true democratic consociationalism because trust in contemporary institutions, open dialogue, and a primary allegiance to the country over the sect are all absent. These failures strengthen group identities and hinder cross-sectarian cooperation. Couland (2005) argues that Lebanon is consequently deeply harmed by the sectarian system. Confessional identity trumps Lebanese citizenship status as confessionalism robs Lebanese citizens of their right to be represented as citizens of a representative democracy rather than as adherents of a faith (Nahas Calfat, 2018). Lebanon has become a nation where the individual generally identifies more with religion than nationality. The fixed relationship between religious identity and politics, and between religion and violence, operates dangerously in the cultural-political practice of sectarianism in postwar Lebanon (Shaery-Yazdi, 2020). The artificial idea persists in Lebanon that the citizens are Christian, Sunni, or Shia over the label “Lebanese.” While worship of the Divine is a personal practice, it is publicized and politicized when it regulates the way humans form a government and pass laws.

However, Makdisi (2000) does not envision sectarianism as an unchanging condition, despite the fact that sectarianism has prevailed since Lebanon’s conception as

a nation. He argues, “sectarianism was produced. Therefore it can be changed” (p. 166). For Makdisi, sectarianism represents not Lebanon’s end political state, but a transition from the large multinational Ottoman Empire to a society based on a unifying Lebanese identity. Focused on the region of Jabal Amil in *el-Jnoub*, Chalabi (2006) presents how the Shia community participates in identity negotiation after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The regional Amali identity turned from one of peripheral rural Ottoman community to an active political Lebanese one. They garnered a national identity to compete and negotiate with other geographic, religious, and ethnic identities. In my own research, I find that many youth also participate in identity negotiation as they reach towards Lebanese identity as a unifying national label while dismissing the sectarian one.

To understand *el-Jnoub*, Lebanon’s southern governorate, one must understand the region’s political-religious context driven by the Hezbollah militia group. Meier (2015) asserts that Hezbollah specifically utilizes Southern Lebanon in its successful “quest” to become a major political party. He characterizes the South as a “borderland area” instrumentalized by Hezbollah to create a common identity among the Lebanese Shia population based on Shia religious involvement. But the South is not religiously homogeneous, since many Christians live near or within Shia towns and villages, such as the Catholic village of Maghdouché that sits beside Shia Ghazieh. Nevertheless, Hezbollah often obtains sympathy from these non-Muslim communities, as the group distributes social services to residents of *el-Jnoub* and propagates an anti-Israel ideology, which can easily gain momentum in *el-Jnoub* due to Israeli threats to security including the 2006 attack on the south. In addition, Hezbollah’s outreach strategy to

Sunni and Christian communities is notable, as the movement emphasizes common causes such as fighting the Islamic State and repatriating Syrian refugees when targeting these communities. In fact, some Christian allies have applauded Hezbollah as a defender of Lebanon's minority groups (Kranz, 2019).

In *A Privilege to Die*, Thanassis Cambanis (2010) narrates the stories of ordinary Shia Muslims, Christians, and Druze in *el-Jnoub* who support Hezbollah. Speaking with Hezbollah supporters, fighters, and their families in Southern Lebanon, Cambanis sheds light on the stories of the people who lost their homes during Israeli bombings and of educated Lebanese returning to Lebanon to support Hezbollah's resistance. Makdisi (2008, p. 100) explains that various communities in Lebanon now support and trust Hezbollah, including those who normally did not subscribe to its ideology, because Hezbollah successfully fought the Israelis in 2006 while the Lebanese army did not.

The perception of Hezbollah as a resistance organization, the political alliance formed by Hezbollah across sectarian groups, and the insecurity caused by armed groups like Sunni Salafi militants all combine to moderate Lebanese citizens' views of Hezbollah (Karakoç, Özcan M., & Özcan A., 2021). Shia activities within Hezbollah break from the hegemony of Christian narratives about Lebanese nationhood. In the process, Shias place themselves within the center of Lebanese politics despite their historical marginalization since the genesis of the Lebanese political system in 1943. Until the 1960s, the Lebanese Shia were very marginal in the political and social arenas of Lebanon despite being one of the largest sects in the country, whereas Christians held the most significant political spears—including the presidency (Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2008). Asher

Kaufman (2006) proposes that Shias utilized the Civil War as an opportunity to increase their power, epitomized in the establishment of Amal in 1974 and Hezbollah in 1982. While Hezbollah has relations with Iran, the organization is not a faceless collective of Lebanese Shias. Rather, it derives its legitimacy from Shia support. For many, Hezbollah is the first organization to put the Shia of the South on an equal footing with other sects and political powers (Kaufman, 2006). Yet there is little research concerning how Shias' involvement and support of Hezbollah impact their on-the-ground interactions with Christians, and how Christians in the South interpret the Shias who are involved in Hezbollah. This is why I explore, in this thesis, how the youth of the Hezbollah-supporting community of Ghazieh interact, connect, and engage with the youth of the Christian community of Maghdouché.

We must explore how Southern Lebanese religious groups relate to one another today in Lebanon, over thirty years since the end of the Civil War, and how youth in particular interpret and experience these interreligious dynamics. As a response to Mac Ginty's (2014) emphasis on local and organic processes of peacemaking rather than formalized processes led by so-called experts, I think about everyday peace and interreligious coexistence through an on-the-ground perspective centrally hinging on youths' voices and experiences in day-to-day life. While acknowledging and examining instances of mistrust and lack of cooperation among young adults to offer a holistic representation of their relationships, I also consider Kanafani-Zahar's (1997, 2000, 2004) understandings of *le vivre ensemble*, *l'espace de laïcité relative*, and the religious sublimation involving the para-religious. I specifically offer a young-adult focused lens to capture the young postwar generation's position, which Kanafani-Zahar does not

explore. By considering the interreligious relationship with a historical and structural understanding of Lebanon's history of interreligious war, sectarian foundation, and ongoing tensions, I also am inspired by Hammack's (2009, 2010) analysis of youths' master and personal narratives and youths' role amid political conflict. This thesis reveals how youth root into their agency as they choose to engage with one another across religious borders to enact the interreligious relationship.

Chapter 3: Methods, Reflection, and Writing

Primary Data Collection

One warm July evening, I meet Mona and Ali, a young couple with three beautiful toddlers dressed in pink. As I walk up the broken stairs to her apartment, under which children squeal and play, I am unsure of what to expect. I feel silly, walking with my notepad in one hand and a laptop in the other. I am so out of place in this “academic” role I am playing. I enter Mona and Ali’s home. Unlike the overly-decorative feel of most homes I visit in Lebanon, with Qur’anic or Biblical calligraphy framed on the walls and golden bowls filled generously with nougat, this home is a fairy garden, with pink blankets covering the couches, dolls scattering the floor, and dried flowers taped to the walls. Immediately Mona’s three girls greet me, encircling my body and giggling although I am not sure why. One asks me why I am dressed the way I am (no hijab, although I am dressed conservatively in long loose pants and a long-sleeved cardigan). I assume they are raised in an environment where most adult women are veiled. The eldest of the little girls, this one wearing a tutu, wrinkles her nose and tells me my black sandals are ugly. “You should not wear these,” she tells me in a commanding, so-sweet voice.

Mona is a thirty-year-old mother, small and usually veiled in a black burka, although she greets me in a low-cut nightgown. This is my indicator that there will only be women present in the home. The first half of our interview is between the two of us. She feeds her youngest daughter, who sucks noisily at her breast. Her husband Ali, a thirty-year-old man who joins us later in the evening, is a tall and big-boned man with thick black curls. After we meet, he immediately begins to make me fresh lemonade despite my polite protests, and he and I talk in the kitchen to the sound of his chopping and squeezing. I decide to combine Mona and Ali’s interviews together to save them time, alternating my questions from one to the other as they care for their three young girls. Sometimes, I ask Ali a series of five questions and then ask Mona the same five before moving onto another topic; other times, Ali and Mona answer questions together, adding detail to one another’s narratives and playfully debating one another when their memories or opinions do not completely align. The children’s chatter fills the background, as they interject with their own words that often are unrelated to the subject of the interview.

— Raimy’s diary, 07/22/2021

This is just one example of the many meetings I organized to interview young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché about their relationships and daily interactions with

their religious neighbor. Mona and Ali were the oldest people I interviewed, since most of the youth to whom I spoke were in their early- to mid- twenties without children nor spouses. Every meeting was beautifully unique, and I adapted to the circumstances based on my intuitive read of the room. I allowed for the interviews to feel scattered, messy, silly, and emotional. Sometimes I cried with the interviewees, other times I laughed with them, and sometimes the meeting was neutral and distant. This is the beauty of ethnographic research: I allowed each interview to run its course, for bonds to form between myself and the interviewees, and for trust and care to grow.

My thesis is based on fieldwork I conducted in Southern Lebanon from June to the end of August 2021. My research is qualitative in nature, based on my semi-structured and in-depth interviews with young men and women from Maghdouché and Ghazieh. In total, I conducted 33 formal interviews, almost equally divided between people of Ghazieh and those of Maghdouché. I also had about a dozen informal conversations that were not recorded, but which I wrote about and reflected on in my research journal.

The context of Lebanon surges with opportunity to explore interreligious dynamics, and Southern Lebanon is underexplored by scholars of Lebanon who mostly conduct research in the capital Beirut. Asher Kaufman (2006) believes that the story of a single community “can sharpen our understanding of broader issues such as the construction of national identities, colonial legacy.” This motivates him to take a micro-level approach and examine a border story of the only seven Shia villages in Mandatory Palestine. Likewise, Saker El Nour et al. (2015) conducts a “microanalysis” of the Lebanese village Sinay. Inspired by these scholars, I embark upon a microanalysis of

inter-village dynamics between Maghdouché and Ghazieh in this thesis, with the belief that by doing so we can better understand the broader contexts underlying Southern Lebanon.

I choose to study Ghazieh and Maghdouché because of the villages' geographical proximity, which can be measured by a two-minute drive between the two. I could have picked any two villages in Southern Lebanon, whether Ghazieh and another neighboring Christian one, or Maghdouché and another neighboring Muslim one, because these small, religiously homogeneous villages are scattered across *el-Jnoub*. I choose Ghazieh and Maghdouché out of familiarity. While my family lives in Ghazieh, my grandfather owns a piece of land in Maghdouché where he tends to his small field on an almost-weekly basis. I grew up visiting both regions, and at a very young age I walked between the two villages.

For my research, I decided against sending out surveys that would have allowed me to gain hundreds of responses. Rather, I focused on having one-to-one, in-depth conversations with young men and women. Before conducting my in-person interviews, I obtained approval from the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board to conduct my research in compliance with the ethical requirements of human subjects research as well as public health safety requirements in the U.S. and Lebanon. When I arrived in Lebanon and began speaking with youth, I ensured to obtain oral consent to proceed with the interview. I asked young adults whether they felt comfortable with me recording our interview, and if they verbalized "no" or showed any sign of discomfort, I refrained from recording. In addition, before beginning each interview, I asked the young adults if they would like to pick pseudonyms for themselves to protect their

privacy. The majority told me I could pick a name for them. For clarity, I ensured every young adult's pseudonym correspond to their gender and village's religion. Finally, in my written notes from interviews and my interview transcriptions and translations, I did not imprint the young adults' real names and I ensured their real names were absent in my digital work. This was entirely to secure confidentiality.

I adopted a snowball sampling approach to speak with these individuals. First, I connected with one Christian young adult from Maghdouché I already knew and one Muslim young adult from Ghazieh I already knew. After conducting interviews with these two individuals, I asked them to connect me to one other individual with whom they are “acquainted” and who they thought would be willing to do an interview. I asked them kindly to reach out to that individual and share their contact information with me if they agreed to be interviewed for my study. Once I interviewed this new individual, I also asked them to connect me to another individual with whom they are acquainted. This form of snowball sampling ensured that I was not solely interviewing people from one friend group. I ultimately met a variety of young people who represent different economic backgrounds, ideological perspectives, religious beliefs, and political views. I connected with both veiled and unveiled women; I spoke with youth who have family abroad and others who do not; I met people who support the Islamic militia Hezbollah and others who are against it. Furthermore, I ensured that I interviewed an equal portion of men and women from both Muslim and Christian religions. Overall, I spoke to sixteen young adults in Ghazieh (eight women and eight men) and seventeen young adults in Maghdouché (eight women and nine men). I commit to not over-generalize, because while I can extract averages, a perspective is

one perspective of a human being. The more in-depth perspectives I learn, the more holistic my thesis will be.

The majority of my semi-structured interviews lasted 90 to 120 minutes. Sometimes, an interview totaled a mere 30 minutes if my interviewee was rushed or expressed disinterest in continuing the conversation. There were many times, however, when an interview lasted three to four hours, during which I spent the entire afternoon or evening with my interviewee. Some young adults enthusiastically brought me to different sites that they talked about during our interview, showing me specific stores or mosques. Usually, I made follow-up interviews with individuals who expressed desire to tell me more. For instance, I met with Blaise, a Christian from Maghdouché, for six extended visits. Midway through our first interview, he gushed, “*Oooof je suis tombé amoureux de ces questions!*”⁸ Needless to say, I met with him various more times, his enthusiasm addictive. After each interview, I transcribed my recordings and notes word-for-word into Word documents, faithful to the language(s) employed throughout the interview. After completing these transcriptions, I then translated each of them into English, leaving only a few terms in Arabic or French that I sensed needed to remain in the original language.

Multilingual fluency is a big component of conducting on-the-ground research in Lebanon. In Ghazieh, I mainly spoke in Arabic during my interviews, mixed with some English depending upon whether the interviewee also employed this language. In Maghdouché, I spoke mainly French and Arabic, although English naturally came up in the conversations as well. Often, all three languages were intertwined, particularly if it

⁸ Ohhhh I have fallen in love with these questions!

was a long conversation. I grew up in a household where French, Arabic, and English were interwoven in conversations, mixed around so that a single sentence often comprised three languages. Due to this, it was not difficult for me to enter this trilingual conversation, in which a question in Arabic may merit an answer in French or a mix of an Arabic-English response. This excerpt from my conversation with Léa in Maghdouché depicts the trilingual mix:

Raimy: Et vous avez des amis qui sont musulmans?⁹

Léa: Eh, akeed, ande ktir min school, messehiye ow kamen min el Islam. We were good friends, there were no problems, it was rawa2 between us. C'était une belle vie. J'ai beaucoup d'amis à Ghazieh à cause de l'école.¹⁰

Raimy: Eh, chokran. Tu peux me donnais plus d'information à propos de ces relations? What did you do, where did you do it? Kamen andeek ktir friends honik bil Ghazieh?¹¹

My question in French immediately is answered in Arabic, followed by a sprinkle of English, then French. To this response, I myself naturally adopt a mix of languages, mirroring Léa's linguistic patchwork. This is the lovely advantage of language: the more you know, the more you connect. Accessing, understanding, and intuitively interpreting this mosaic of languages is crucial to accurately represent the voices of Lebanese youth. I am positive my experience in both villages hinged on my ability to speak the languages fluently and utilize those languages in a similar pattern as the villages' inhabitants.

⁹ And you have friends who are Muslim?

¹⁰ Yes, of course, I have a lot from school, both Christian and Muslims. We were good friends, there were no problems, it was peaceful between us. It was a beautiful life. I have a lot of friends from Ghazieh because of school.

¹¹ Yes, thank you. Can you offer me more information about these relationships? What did you do, where did you do it? Oh, also do you have friends there in Ghazieh?

Because I am knowledgeable about the social and cultural landscapes of Southern Lebanon and understand the particularities of this environment, I was able to adopt a nuanced lens throughout my research. Having lived in Beirut as a child and having spent extended periods of time in Lebanon as I grew older, in addition to being raised by Lebanese immigrants in the U.S., I have an intimate understanding of the culture within which I researched so that I was not worried about crossing implicit cultural boundaries. I researched with respect, particularly when in Ghazieh, where women are encouraged to dress conservatively. I wore long pants and skirts, careful that they were not too revealing or tight, but that they were also elegant. Certainly, every situation was different, and I sometimes felt a deeper connection with one young adult over another. Some interviews were formal, during which we sat at a distance at an outdoor location or talked on the phone with polite and formal greetings. Other times, the interviews felt more intimate, like the one I describe at the beginning of the chapter, when I visited Mona's home and the children greeted me with squeals. This is ethnography's "being real."

Throughout this thesis, I may not actively reiterate the religion and village of each young adult. Every time I introduce a young adult, I usually write where they are from, but I will not remind you of their village and religion every time they reappear. This might be an inconvenience, but I also want to stray away from consistently categorizing people if unnecessary. However, here is a hint that renders it easier to recognize the religion of young adults: those in Maghdouché, like in most Christian villages in Lebanon, have Western names. The young adults in this study who are Christian from Maghdouché have names like Blaise, Claude, Camille, Elise, Léa, and

Laurent. The names of the young adults from Ghazieh, the Muslim village, are clearly Arab and are often Qur'anic names: Kaamil, Ali, Asma, Fatima, Amira, Mona, and so on. I hesitate to make this generalization, and there are certainly exceptions, but I write this to offer a facilitated means of identifying my interviewees' backgrounds.

Before traveling to Lebanon, I conducted two interviews virtually on WhatsApp videocalls. I quickly realized that these virtual interviews were insufficient, and that I got a very limited taste of the young adults' perspectives. I knew that I needed to walk along the streets of Lebanon to look around and think: What is going on here? What is this space telling me? What are these peoples' presences hinting? When I did arrive in Lebanon, I took advantage of my physical presence to visit religious sites and meet with many young adults in person, processing my surroundings with excitement. My project is focused on the interreligious relations between two villages: a Muslim and a Christian one. But I understood that I needed to explore other spaces to gain a deeper understanding of these village communities' specific relationship. I visited villages across the country, traveling to Christian regions in northern Lebanon like Achrafieh, Harissa, Sannine Mountain, Batroun, Jbeil; Druze villages like Mtein in the cedar mountains; and Muslim villages like Nmairiyeh, Mlita, Khiam, and more. In addition, I visited major cities like Beirut, Saida, and Sour. I spent a few days at a refugee camp in the outskirts of Beirut, where I met Syrian and Palestinian refugees and was invited into their homes. I contextualize Southern Lebanon within this comprehensive geopolitical understanding of the country's ethnoreligious plurality.

The conditions within which I researched were challenging. Certainly, I am not claiming that a summer of fuel shortages, electricity shortages, road closures, price

increases, and sectarian conflict could compare to living in these conditions without end. My visit to Lebanon, after all, was marked by an arrival and a departure date. However, because of my physical presence in Southern Lebanon, I was able to approach my interviewees' perspectives with a much more accurate understanding of the circumstances they were enduring than if I had conducted my interviews virtually from the U.S.

Due to the social crises overwhelming Lebanon, none of my interviews occurred on the first date and time agreed upon. I often planned to speak with an individual and then realized that neither one of us had enough fuel to meet. Or that the fuel lines were too long to wait in. Or that there was simply no fuel available in the village. And sometimes, if I set up a virtual interview (which was the case if the individual lived too far from me and I did not have fuel), the interview was frequently rescheduled because of electricity cuts that interrupted our internet-mediated connection. Many times, I started an interview virtually and then frustratingly got cut midway through because of electricity and diesel shortages. We then had to wait a few hours—and even, in some cases, a full day—before the electricity returned to resume the interview. I laugh now, out of sadness, remembering the adrenaline rush I felt when the electricity came back on for those scarce moments of the day in the summer of 2021. When the internet came on, I immediately started calling those with whom I never ended the conversation, hoping that they too had electricity or time to meet.

In addition to the problems posed by the intense electricity and fuel shortages, roads were closed daily by informally-banded groups of young protesters, which made it even harder for me to travel by car throughout the summer. Many of the youth I

interviewed told me that the perpetrators were supporters and members of the Amal militia trying to exercise and prove their control in a situation beyond reach.¹² These road closures impeded my ability to interview people, of course, as sometimes protesters burned tires for hours. As I previously described, electricity constraints made it difficult to meet with my interviewees virtually, but the road closures and fuel shortages combined to create an even more dire situation to conduct interviews in. My solution was to adopt a mix of in-person and virtual interviews, and I sometimes myself walked to my interviewees' homes to avoid burdening them. This involved traveling many kilometers in the thick humidity under the sun's fiery bite, and often my face was coated in sweat by the time I reached their homes. But, and I write this with conviction, it was worth it every time.

In my fieldwork, participant observations and site visits are central. I visited various religious sites and attended religious celebrations. I made a point of visiting the mosques and churches across *el-Jnoub* and the whole of Lebanon. Because Ashura was celebrated during my visit, I attended various Islamic events designated to commemorate Imam Hussein. In addition to the young adults I met for formal interviews, I had conversations with many adults, both working and unemployed, men and women, middle-aged and elderly, to get a general sense of how the multiples crises were affecting everyone. These conversations were not recorded and were extremely casual, at restaurants, coffee shops, and on the notoriously-packed buses. In Ghazieh

¹² These men are informally referred to as the *zohran* in Ghazieh and Maghdouché—which literally translates to *the bastards*. These are young men who are generally supporters of the Amal Movement. During my trip to Lebanon, I find myself constantly encountering these young men who close the roads in an attempt to exert their power.

and Maghdouché, I also made an effort to speak to religious and village leaders, business owners, and mothers and fathers. To familiarize myself with the general contexts I researched from an academic standpoint, I also met with scholars on Middle Eastern politics and confessionalism, religious scholars, and ethnographers. I also have had many conversations with Antoine Messarra, the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Religious Studies, Mediation, and Dialogue (Lebanon), who has done work on Islamic-Christian relations and Lebanese postwar reconciliation.

Today: Writing, Positionality, and Limitations

Drawing from Mac Ginty (2014), I keep in mind the following three premises in my thesis to determine whether they apply in the Maghdouché-Ghazieh context: 1) the fluidity of the social world, since individuals, collectives, ideas, and practices are malleable despite narratives of fixed boundaries; 2) the heterogeneity of groups often seen as homogenous, since there exists an infinite variety in human beings that cannot be quantified by labels of “Muslim” or “Christian” despite my substantial employment of these terms throughout my thesis; and 3) the importance of environmental factors, as the Lebanese have very limited control over the grim external factors shaping their day-to-day lives.

I adopt an ethnographic lens in order to offer a sample of the on-the-ground perspectives and experiences of youth. Throughout this thesis, I share an abundance of excerpts from my interviews with Lebanese young adults. These are English translations completed by me, a young adult with a multilingual tongue, but I am not fully knowledgeable. I am aware that by translating words, I take away from the depth of the original language and meaning. I have tried my best to ensure that my translations

faithfully epitomize the original Arabic or French transcript. But as a young human with my own linguistic biases, I am certain I have made mistakes, however small, that detract (even if only slightly) from the original meaning of the interviews. For this, I apologize to my interviewees. If I could have written this thesis in Arabic or in French, I would have. Alas, time constrains me and I must conform to artificial academic requirements that make it impossible for me to write the same text in all three languages.

Interested in the autoethnographic process, I also sprinkle in excerpts (like the one below) from my journal that I kept during my time in Lebanon. These come in the form of poetry and journal entries. I understand the ethnographic method as both a process and product, in which my research and writing describe and analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience. This method challenges conventional, canonical ways of representing my others (Ellis et al., 2011). I am a human who has experienced surprise, fear, delight, and divinity throughout my research. I cannot mechanize myself during my interviews, nor during my site visits and my participant observations. I share these excerpts from my journal to show some of the intimate moments I experience without drawing away from Lebanese youths' voices. This project is not a bland experience during which I wake up, interview, work, and go to bed. As much as I try to maintain a scholarly position during my interviews, I also have shared many emotional conversations and experiences with the young adults I met. As I consider my surroundings, I observe myself and the changes that occur in me. For instance, I am invited by a few Shia men and women from Ghazieh to accompany them to the North of Lebanon, as I describe:

I walk through the pebbled beach of Jbeil, a Christian village in Northern Lebanon. I fall in love. Women run around in bikinis around me, their naked limbs dark from the sun's kiss. Men lay with bottles of beer talking in French. I realize I'm in a different world than the Southern Muslims villages in el-Jnoub, where I had been staying for the majority of my trip. I am in awe that I am here with people from Ghazieh, because this is such a different place. Here, up North, I feel like I'm on a Western island, where language and clothing and beverages are Western. I swim through the Mediterranean's belly, and I remember she is a mother to me. I forget that she is here, that she has been waiting for me and beckoning to me from across the Atlantic. I want to swim deeper into her body, but I don't. I am still hesitant, because I don't see other girls and boys swimming far. I follow their lead and twirl, in circles. I feel more free here, in these crazy waves, than I do anywhere else.

— Raimy's diary, 07/20/2021

Importantly, in Arabic, the term “God” translates to “Allah.” Both Christians and Muslims refer to Allah when speaking about the Divine. In Maghdouché, many individuals refer to God as Dieu, the French translation. Dieu, God, Allah: they are references to the Divine. I use these terms interchangeably in this thesis so as not to make Allah the exclusive Divinity of the Muslims and Dieu/God the exclusive Divinity of the Christians, for such a categorical understanding is false and poisonous. So I ask for awareness that youth call to the Divine with three names—God, Dieu, and Allah—with no divisive or sectarian intentions.

Kanafani-Zahar (2000) understands there is no multicultural Christian and Muslim society in Lebanon, but rather a society with two religious variants rooted in a mother culture in which religious differences are moderated by specific mechanisms. As I research and write this thesis, I dance between different terms to refer to “my” and “your” religious communities. While some scholars like Schroeder and Risen (2016) use language such as “ingroup” and “outgroup,” I resist such distancing language. Inspired by Kanafani-Zahar's interpretation, I understand the “other” religious

community as the “Abrahamic brother/sister/sibling/neighbor/other.” I employ variations of this wording throughout this thesis when referring to the Shia community of Ghazieh and the Catholic community of Maghdouché. Using the language of “Abrahamic sibling,” I emphasize the mother culture of these Abrahamic communities. The Shia is not an absolute category, nor is the Catholic, for they are “two variants” of a single culture, according to Kanafani-Zahar. There are also moments when I refer to the Abrahamic sibling as the “religious other,” which I use for clarity’s sake rather than to distance and otherize the communities from one another. I will sometimes also say “neighbors of different religions” or “religious neighbors” to point to the neighboring religious community without employing othering language.

When I consider limitations, my mind fills with “I could have, I could have, I could have...” I could have stayed in Lebanon longer, had I not been bound to my departing flight at the end of the summer. Had I stayed longer, I would have been able to conduct more interviews, attend more religious celebrations in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, explore more Christian and Muslim villages, and visit more religious sites. However, my thesis is limited to an academic deadline. Likewise, had there not been a COVID-19 pandemic, had the country not suffered from fuel and electricity shortages, and had I not come in the blazing hot summer, I could have done more research. If my fuel tank was filled, I would have been able to meet more individuals. If there was no pandemic, I would have been able to attend religious festivals and events that were either cancelled or made virtual. If the political situation was stable, roads would not have been closed so frequently and I could have visited people of different communities more easily. But I am not a perfect scholar, nor are the conditions of life

perfect, because ethnography is inherently messy. This is not a science with control trials. This is life in its most naked form, and I am honored to be a part of these communities for a few months.

In this research, I am both outsider and insider. Superficially, I look like most young women in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, with dark curls, dark eyes, and tan skin. I am a young twenty-one-year-old American female who happens to have two Lebanese parents. This gives me an advantage to relate to the young adults on physiological, linguistic, and cultural levels. If I do not open my mouth and tell anyone I study in the U.S., most would assume I am a full-time resident of Lebanon because of my Arabic and French fluency and my Lebanese physical features. However, I do share my story so that I can be frank with those I interview. I tell them that I study at an American university and that I am conducting research for a thesis that I will be defending in the U.S. Perhaps this information influences the choices youths make to tell or not to tell me certain stories.

Overall, I find it particularly easy to talk to the women of Maghdouché and Ghazieh because of my gender. I also find that both communities of women are open to discuss their intimate memories and experiences with me. For instance, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, one Christian woman from Maghdouché, Adèle, tells me about her hurtful experiences of being harassed on social media by Muslim men from Ghazieh. Another woman, Amira from Ghazieh, tells me about the physical discomfort and self-consciousness she feels in her own village because women in Ghazieh are expected to dress conservatively while she desires to wear less-conservative clothing. While I generally receive some open answers from the men in Ghazieh, many are notably shy

and often a little vaguer in their answers. Perhaps this is because of the existing female-male dynamics in many of the conservative Muslim villages in *el-Jnoub*, where there is reservedness during conversations between young men and women. I am previously aware of these dynamics from lived experience, so I enter my conversations with the young men of Ghazieh expecting for them to be formal.

On the other hand, in Maghdouché, I am able to interview young men more publicly without the fear of being judged for immodesty. In this Christian village, both friendships and romantic relationships between young men and women are normalized. I remember my shock as a seven-year-old girl when I first witnessed PDA: a teenage girl and a teenage boy with their arms wrapped around one another, kissing right there in the Maghdouché garden! My young brain was dismayed to watch this display of passion that I had never witnessed in Ghazieh, where romance I assumed is kept behind doors and often is not tolerated until marriage. This is the type of nuance I would not have intuitively known had I not previously spent extended time in *el-Jnoub* and understood the differences between the two villages. Christian villages in Lebanon have a Western feel to them. Not only are the residents ready to speak in French rather than Arabic, but lifestyle and dress are different than in the Ghazieh community's. When driving up from Ghazieh, where most of the women are veiled if not completely covered by a burqa, and where Hezbollah flags hang from buildings and lampposts, to the hills of Maghdouché, the differences are clear. The young Christian women wear skirts, young men flirt openly, and beer bottles are carried around casually in the evening. It is a strange feeling to go from one village to the other, and they are only a couple of minutes apart. I sense the change in energy.

Not everyone is eager to meet me. As a scholar studying in the West, my Lebanese roots are sometimes insufficient to build rapport. For instance, one young man who initially agreed to talk becomes increasingly suspicious while I attempt to schedule a meeting. A few times, he asks me whether I am an American spy, and so I decide to stop asking to meet with him. Instead, I tell him that while I am truly a civilian researcher studying in the U.S., I sense his discomfort and do not want to put him in an uneasy situation. I take the initiative to stop the conversation, because I genuinely care that this young man does not feel pressure or distress. This example reveals the limitation that accompanies my being a Western scholar with Western funding for a project that I will present to a Western university. I often wonder what voice I do not hear because of the understandable fears of the young man I do not interview.

It is important that I do not spend equal amounts of times in the Christian and the Muslim villages. Rather, I live in Ghazieh and frequently visit Maghdouché for interviews and independent exploration. But because my days are mostly spent in Ghazieh, and because this is where my family members live, I have a much deeper understanding of their perspectives compared to those of the Christians in Maghdouché. I spend day and night in Ghazieh over the course of the summer, so I witness daily issues like violent fighting at gas stations and Amal's protests on Ghazieh's streets. I experience Ashura for its ten days and for ten days see the black flags and hear the Islamic chants on the streets of Ghazieh. I do not have this active, daily, casual, lived experience in Maghdouché that expands beyond the frequent day-long visits I take. Perhaps a living circumstance in which I split my time equally between both villages would have been more ideal for this project. As a result, I feel more qualified to speak

about the Ghazieh community's experiences than Maghdouché's, instead relying heavily on my interviews with Maghdouché residents when speaking about the Christian village's history and daily politics.

Finally, while I am a researcher, I am also a friend, ally, activist, and human who has made promises to the youth I interview. Some people share intimate information that I decide not to insert in this thesis, not because it is irrelevant, but because I believe it is told to me as a friend and not as a researcher. As I write, I ask myself, "What is my commitment to people? What do I owe them? What do they expect of me?" I refuse to instrumentalize youths' voices for the sake of academia, for a thesis, or even worse, for a grade. While I sometimes feel wrong writing this thesis, since I am taking snapshots of youths' lives and entering all their infinitude into this limited text to produce an academic argument, I believe in the project of ethnography more than not doing it. I hope that I can use these pages and this opportunity to highlight youths' voices, to share them, to publicize them, to give them the love and attention they deserve. I write this thesis for those I interview. I use their voices for them, hoping that I can reveal a piece of their lives to bring attention to a region often overlooked by the West. Every day I have had these youths' best interest in my heart. I sincerely hope my research brings some light to their lives, whether today or tomorrow.

Chapter 4: Faith and Religious Identity

After our first interview in Ghazieh, Nadia invites me to Beirut for a few days. We walk arm-in-arm in the Hamra district, giggling in excitement at the matching belly piercings we both just got (on a complete whim). But when we return to her cousin's apartment, Nadia's joy turns into pain. She insists someone cast the evil eye on her while we were out, for chills immediately take over her body. When the electricity comes on, she calls her grandmother and asks her to perform an incantation to remove the evil eye. She is quivering and feverish, and I keep my hand on her arm to comfort her. After a few minutes, Nadia leaves the room and returns with the Qur'an, placing it on her aching belly. She tells me that the Qu'ran will heal her.

Within the matter of five minutes, her 38.7 degree fever falls to 37. I sit there, stunned by the sacred book placed on her belly. Nadia smiles at me and says, "I truly believe in this. I truly believe that the Qur'an has tremendous power. Do you see that? My friend, also, she started to bald at the back of her scalp... the doctor recommended she read the Qur'an for an hour every day for a year. After that, her hair was thicker, and she no longer had the balding patch... magical, huh?" This way of thinking seems taboo in the Western setting within which I research. But I watch Nadia's fever fall once she places the divine text over her heart. I extend my hand to the book as it rests on her chest, feeling the thump of her heartbeat through the thick covers. When she leaves the room after feeling better, I hold the Qur'an to my own stomach, trying to feel into the intense power manifesting through its pages.

We can imagine dozens of very logical explanations for Nadia's temperature drop. But I look to this young woman and I crave to understand how faith shapes the way she lives. We can conceptualize Nadia, a Shia Muslim who walks around in tanks and a brand-new diamond belly piercing, as both a contradiction to and the manifestation of Islamic beliefs as understood in sectarian Lebanon. Why should it be strange that a woman who is a practicing Shia Muslim not wear skirts and piercings? After all, Nadia never skips a prayer, reads the Qur'an, fasts every Ramadan, and carries the Islamic faith deep within her heart. She has a personal belief system and a personal relationship with Allah. What do her belly tops have to do with the ways she honors her Creator? She defies the cultural "restrictions" of her community, and in the process, epitomizes the core of her religious tradition: regardless of the ways she decorates her external self, internally, she is purely Shia and purely religious and no portion of her appearances minimize or have any influence on her faith.

— Raimy's diary, 08/22/2021

Faith is mysterious and ineffable, not necessarily a rational and emotional experience (Aslan, 2017). It is a choice to believe in something beyond the physical world and to believe that we humans are more than the sum of our material parts. I have kept in touch with Nadia on a daily basis since the end of August when I left the country. Twice since the episode described above, she tells me that someone again cast an evil eye on her, and that twice she has been healed by the Qur'an's healing force.

Before delving into the relationships between youth of different religious identities in later chapters, I explore youths' conceptualizations of their identity, faith, and personal relationship with the Divine. I use this chapter to better contextualize the belief systems of the residents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché. How do they construe and experience the Divine? What role does Allah play in their lives? By analyzing the faith of youth in Maghdouché and Ghazieh, we can better appreciate their interreligious interactions and relationships. After all, one's relationship with faith begins within one's own lived experience, which consequently seeps into one's relationship with adherents of other faiths. Most centrally, do youth connect their faiths to their identities? Do they associate themselves to their religions? In a country where identity politics are very alive, I wonder how youth present themselves and what inclusive and/or exclusive terminology they employ as they socially position themselves in a community or multiple communities.

Youth Identity: Religion & Nationality

Social identity is more salient in contexts of fragmented societies and groups (Chakravarty, Fonseca, Ghosh, Kumar, & Marjit, 2019), as in Lebanon. The identities youth choose to take on—whether these be rooted in their religious background, village,

or nationality—reveal how youth want to be known and how they relate to others. Upon meeting the thirty-three young adults in this research, one of the first questions I ask is “How do you identify?” While some young adults introduce their Christian or Muslim identities, all young adults frame their Lebanese nationality as the grounding point of their beings. Faith is very alive in the lives and reflections of the young adults, but the religious identity is not dominant among these individuals.

For instance, Adèle, a twenty-two-year-old woman from Maghdouché, automatically tells me, “I am a Lebanese woman, or just a Lebanese person, actually.” As I will discuss later in this chapter, the Christian faith resonates deeply with Adèle and she believes wholeheartedly in Allah, but she does not label herself with religious terminology. She even strips herself of the social identity of gender by correcting her initial response of “Lebanese woman” to “Lebanese person.” At her core, she most identifies with her belonging to the Lebanese land, not to a gender, nor to a sectarian community. In the process, she exemplifies a fundamental shift from being a gender, a religion, and a village to being a Lebanese. A twenty-year-old man from Maghdouché named Blaise takes it one step further in his explicit de-affiliation with any sect. We sit on a marble bench in Maghdouché overlooking the beautiful hills of *el-Jnoub*. As Blaise speaks, his thin arms move with life, gesturing to the land around us, his words urgent and excited:

I am Lebanese. When I want to identify myself, I say “I am a Lebanese.” The Lebanese. Because I believe nowadays, there is not a Christian, nor a Muslim; there are only the Lebanese. In this period of time specifically, the Lebanese are considered to be one person. He is not a Christian, a Muslim, khalas¹³. I don’t care. I am only a Lebanese. I just want to exercise my citizenship in Lebanon.

¹³ Enough!

Blaise, like Adèle and the other young adults from Maghdouché, is deeply connected to the Christian faith, which he practices through prayer, fasting, and attending mass. However, Blaise does not see his religious practice as a marker of identity. He is “only” a Lebanese. Blaise makes the radical assertion that “in this period of time,” which is a period of political, economic, and social collapse threatening the livelihoods of the Lebanese every day, the Lebanese are “one person.” There is no room for sectarian divides today. I sense that Blaise is tired of the existing situation. His final sentence, “I just want to exercise my citizenship in Lebanon,” calls to his desire to live in a country where his belonging is accessible to him. He wants to exercise his tangible rights as a democratic citizen, not as a sectarian community member.

The reality of Blaise’s desire is understandably lamentable in a country where sectarian divisions have historically impeded citizens from accessing certain services and areas of governance. The Civil War created a nation where suddenly there were no more Lebanese, but only pro-Israelis, pro-Syrians, pro-Druze, pro-Shiites, pro-Sunnis, and pro-Maronites (Friedman, 1984). This sectarian social structure cloaked the lives of Blaise’s parents’ generation, but not his generation. Blaise rejects this past world, disassociating from this historical Lebanese reality. When individuals or groups of people are targeted on the basis of identity, whether religious or otherwise, the political salience of that identity often increases and serves as a source of animosity against members of other communities (Huddy et al., 2015). This explains hyperpoliticization of religion in contemporary Lebanon. By insisting on the Lebanese identity and minimizing the sectarian, Blaise prevents the religious from becoming the political, the Divine from becoming the violent. Both Adèle and Blaise from Maghdouché generalize

their identities as much as possible so that they are inclusive, barrier-free labels. This practice of fashioning identity as a uniting force is a central component of everyday peace(keeping) between religious groups in Lebanon. These youth display a powerful agency aimed at reclaiming identity as one's own, rather than a sect's.

A similar perspective is reflected in the answers of the young men and women of Ghazieh. Fadi, a man in his early twenties from Ghazieh who adheres to Shia Islam, tells me:

I describe myself as Lebanese, of course, not as my religion. Not as Shia. I don't describe my identity as religion. I am Lebanese. When I go somewhere, I am Lebanese, not Shia.

Like his peers in Maghdouché, Fadi specifically identifies with his nationality, not with his religion. When he is displaced from his home context, when he goes "somewhere," he does not identify with a religion, but with his country. Notably, if he identified with the Shia label rather than the Lebanese one, he would have the potential to connect with a greater portion of the Middle East, including the Shia communities of Iran, Iraq, or Bahrain. Youth like Adèle, Blaise, and Fadi choose with what their identities align: their nation. In this self-determination, they fight war-era divisive histories and contemporary geopolitical tensions that have often divided the Middle East not between nations, but between Shias and Sunnis. These youth choose to root in the Lebanesehood. They choose national solidarity.

Offering a slightly more ambiguous perspective, Anaïs adds:

I am Lebanese. It depends on the situation. I will not say "I am Christian and refuse other religions." Of course not. But I don't have any problem telling you that I am a Christian. But I identify as Lebanese.

Anaïs mediates between her nationality and her religion, clearly establishing that she is not close-minded on the basis of religion. She insists on her nationality, as if to establish

a common thread, a universal identity, among her peers. She does not deny that she is a religious person and that she follows the Christian religion, but she returns her focus to her nationality as her identity. She believes in God but she belongs to Lebanon. The Christian religious and the Lebanese national are not mutually exclusive. Anaïs reveals ambiguity in the mention that her identity “depends on the situation,” which is more flexible than Blaise and Fadi’s strict emphasis on only being Lebanese. From this, I understand Anaïs’ identity as a force of negotiation. She tells me frankly that she is both Lebanese and Christian, but she reinstates her nationality as a baseline. Perhaps she means that she does not assert her Christian identity to avoid projecting any exclusionary sentiment. In this sense, Anaïs’ intention is like Blaise’s and Adèle’s, for she too avoids enforcing divisions.

Similarly, Baasim from Ghazieh also tells me, “I am Lebanese, and my religion is Shia. But I’m Lebanese.” He returns to his being Lebanese, which is separate from his religion, Shia Islam. Other youth from Maghdouché and Ghazieh repeat this reasoning, rejecting the Christian or Muslim label to dedicate their beings to their nationality. I interpret this return to the nationality as the postwar generation’s rejection of sectarian divisions. These youth revive the nation. They revive nationality. They reject the social sectarianism, the hardline religious identification that ignited the Civil War, and the mentalities that demonized the other. This resonates strongly with the work of other scholars, like Hannah Neumann’s (2010) and Coline Cardeño (2019), who find that the emphasis of shared identity and the weakening of clan and ethnoreligious identities ground everyday peace.

In their responses, Southern Lebanese youth hint at the country that could have been had the French not come with their colonial forces, had the confessional government not been established, and had the Lebanese identity been the foundational blanket enveloping the entire nation. But this reality did not exist, for Lebanon was basically conceived as a sectarian pie. Instead, youth in Maghdouché and Ghazieh exert their agency by creating their own Lebanon, which is a Lebanon united on the basis of Lebanese identity. This is a new Lebanon. This alternate Lebanon offers youth an opportunity, a vision to produce and enact in their land. This Lebanon does not only reside in youths' imagination, for youth render it alive through their actions. I see this active re-imagining and re-creating as a central component of everyday peace between Maghdouché and Ghazieh. Just like Makdisi (2000), youth seem to see sectarianism not as the final product of their country, but as a transition state that will hopefully lead them towards a society based on a unifying Lebanese identity.

Many of the young adults I interview across villages repeat very similar ideas, underscoring their Lebanese nationality and minimizing (or in some cases, like Blaise's, complete erasing) their sectarian identities. However, I am particularly stunned by Nadia's unique response. Nadia is the young Shia woman from Ghazieh with whom I spent the most time. She has called or texted me on an almost-daily basis since our first interview in July, blurring the artificial lines between research and friendship. We sit in her grandfather's living room, sipping on iced water that relieve us only briefly from the heavy heat.

“I am a Lebanese woman,” she tells me. Because I am comfortable with her, and because we have already spent a couple of hours talking, joking, and practicing hairdos for curly hair on one another, I push a little further.

“Would you describe yourself as Shia, Arab, Middle Eastern?” I ask. She immediately releases giggles.

“Uh no, not really, Raimy. I’m not proud of those, hahaha!”

I chuckle with her, mostly in shock, because I remember all her practices that are rooted in Islam and the extra-ordinary, as I describe in the small vignette at the beginning of this chapter. Nadia meditates on the words of the Qur’an and the Hadiths on a daily basis, and she practices her faith openly, ritually praying and fasting. Yet Nadia simultaneously jokes that she is not proud of the labels Shia, Arab, and Middle Eastern. In this rejection, she insinuates that there exists a difference between labeled identities and lived practice. Nadia is not shy to practice her religion, and she shares her religious experiences openly with me, but she retreats from the religious label. She exercises her faith while disengaging from any sectarian identity. To her, faith is the internal, the spiritual beyond this world. Perhaps this-worldly-identities like “Shia” do not do justice to, and potentially reduce, the actual meaning behind these terms entrenched in politics and histories of violence. This exemplifies an awareness of the nuances in the Lebanese religiopolitical context. Nadia sees beyond the superficial labels and favors the spiritual over real-world labels.

Importantly, only a few young men and women from Ghazieh and Maghdouché report a strong identification with both nationality and religion and explicitly raise both identities when discussing their lives. These individuals allow for the religious identity

to coexist with the national one. To these young adults, this dual existence does not reduce the importance of either of the two identities. During a long conversation with Majd, he repeats my question (“Do you consider yourself more Muslim or Lebanese?”) back to me in disbelief. He tells me, “I am a Lebanese Muslim. It’s just like that. Both together and not separate.” To him, there is value in claiming one’s religion as their identity, but ultimately, he also insists on the importance of his nationality. There is no need to erase one identity for the existence of the other. He feels at peace with both.

While most young adults solely emphasize their Lebanesehood in response to my question about identity, whereas a minority of youth, including Majd, articulate a dual identity of nationality and religion, all youth mention nationality. I interpret this pattern as a means of actively resisting sectarianism and divisive violence to which Lebanon is prone. By elevating their status as Lebanese people with agency and self-determination, young women and men reclaim their identities as their own and not as a sectarian community’s. In the process, they create the foundation for everyday peace based on national unity—which offers a taste of an alternate Lebanon that surpasses the current religiopolitical, divisive establishment.

The Divine in Youths’ Lives

Allah is present in the lives of all those I speak to in Ghazieh and Maghdouché. Normally I do not dare make such a bold statement, but after spending a summer among these young individuals, and after asking questions and spending time with each of them, it is clear to me that each holds space for the Divine in their hearts. All young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché tell me that they believe in Allah; however, each reacts to this belief and experiences the Divine in distinct ways. Ingrid Storm (2013)

suggests that for individuals who are personally deeply religious, faith has a different spiritual and social meaning than nationality. As described in this section, the vast majority of youth in Ghazieh and Maghdouché turn away from religion as an institution and instead reformulate it as a marvelous force of trust, hope, and mission.

Rami epitomizes this notion in the following statement, as we sit in *el-Ein*, the small plaza of Ghazieh:

I don't identify as a religious person – nor am I atheist. It's more like... a faith. Faith is a purpose for you to live. It is a reason for you to prosper. Without faith, there is no hope. Without hope, there is no happiness in the first place. Have this hope in society, have this hope in your own life, and hence, afterwards, it all subsequently manifests under that title "faith"... religion is just a tool. It just defines how you can be closer to God. How you can pray in the right way. How can you do the right thing. What not to do, what is *halal*,¹⁴ what is *haram*.¹⁵ It is just a tool to facilitate the relationship between you and God. That's it; that's religion. It's more a practice that is built with God. That defines the relationship between me and God. That's it. My family are extremely religious, in a good way. They have a trinity of faith, reason, and religion. I come from a religious background, my family is Muslim, and so are my siblings. I live in a community of Muslims. But I don't identify myself as a religious man. I'm not religious in the first place, so I cannot tell you "how religious I am." [Rami makes air quotes as he says these final four words]

Unlike his family, whom he categorizes as "extremely religious," Rami disassociates from the religious label while clarifying that this does not make him an atheist. He has faith, even if he is not "religious." Rami's words epitomize Dr. Goodwin's distinction between religion as "what we do" and faith as the belief itself. Rami's hope in life and society is his faith. He has a belief system and a hope for the future. On the other hand, Rami deciphers religion as an instrument defining one's relationship with God. It offers instructions for how to pray and how to exercise a religion, but ultimately the religion is

¹⁴ Permissible or sanctioned by Islamic law

¹⁵ Forbidden by Islamic law

not in itself the relationship with God. It only mediates one's relationship with God.

Expanding on this notion, Blaise adds:

I want to live my spirituality without conditions. It is different from religion, from all religions, from institutions. I, as a Christian and a young person, am not an abnormal person. I am human. Today I had a spiritual day, actually. I said to myself, this day is essential. I cannot be whatever they say God wants us to be. God is like our brother, the relationship between me and God is a very friendly relationship. So .. I behave like he is my friend. We should not be afraid of God. As a man, I don't want to be afraid of God. God created me to love me. It doesn't make sense to be afraid of him. God loves me the way I am. I am human, I cannot refuse to make mistakes or suppress my mistakes. My spirituality is normal. I pray, I go to church, I talk to the saints. When I have an exam, when I or someone is sick, I exercise my spirituality. I am a normal person. I'm not saying, "If I drink alcohol, God will kill me. " No, chill chill chill! God is our friend. And besides, alcohol is a material thing. When we go to heaven, all that material goes away.

Like Rami, Blaise establishes a difference between his faith—his spirituality—and the actual religion he relates to institutions. His words are radical in a country where religion has historically been used as a means of controlling, creating fear, and exerting power. "God is our friend" counters the narrative that we must fear God. Fear drives sectarian divisions, and during times of crisis, God is often mechanized to inspire people to join a certain religious-political party—whether it be Shia, Sunni, Catholic, Maronite, Druze, etc. Throughout the Lebanese Civil War, the name of God was actively abused to inspire terror in the Lebanese population and psychologically force them to support one of the political-religious parties. By isolating religious identity from its social context throughout the Civil War, militia chiefs transformed political conflict into a religious one (Kanafani-Zahar, 2002). Various religious leaders, including Amédée Grab and Ismail Amin (2003) speak against such an *abus du nom de*

*Dieu*¹⁶ perpetuated throughout history. Interestingly, Blaise uses the distant term “they” —not we—when describing what “they say God wants us to be.” In this way, he rejects narratives employed by militants who argue there is a unique path to connect with the Divine. For example, Blaise criticizes the rules endorsed by certain religious leaders, particularly the fundamentalist Muslim leaders, who prohibit alcohol. He sees a truth to faith beyond the instrument of religion.

As a young man with radiant agency, Blaise challenges the political abuse and instrumentalization of God’s name. His relationship with God epitomizes love, inclusion, and friendship. It is a casual, day-to-day one, as Blaise turns to God when he has an exam or when his loved ones are ill. This perspective is deeply empowering and perfectly frames the rest of this chapter, since Blaise and many of his peers in Maghdouché and Ghazieh understand the Divine as a resource to call to and access ritually for one’s benefit. This brings the Divine to the mundane, crossing a boundary between the Beyond and Earth. I find it notable that in considering today to be “essential,” Blaise recognizes today as a spiritual day. I do not know Blaise’s exact intentions with this language, but on the day of this interview, it is not a religious holiday for Christians or Muslims. It is a normal day under the Arab sun’s thick blanket, with the quotidian crises of fuel and electricity shortages. But Blaise sees today as important, perhaps because it is a day of sharing his perspective with me, or perhaps because he intuitively senses it as essential. He does not need a religious official to mark this day as spiritual. He feels it and he knows it. This takes religion from “them”

¹⁶ Abuse of the name of Allah

and makes it his. Faith is his own to be interpreted, felt, and honored. Blaise expands on the importance of Christianity in his life:

I exercise my religion in a balanced way. I volunteer for a Christian NGO, I attend mass, I like to visit the church. I trust God, like other religious citizens. I exercise my religion in a balanced way. And now as a young person, I have my nationality first and my religion as a second. I am first Lebanese, and next Christian. And I am not too strict, I am flexible.

Demonstrating his active involvement in the Christian world, Blaise shares his volunteer work, practices, and beliefs while simultaneously prioritizing his Lebanese nationality as an identity. “I am first Lebanese,” he says, which rejects the possibility of putting his sect first. He commits to Lebanon, then to Christianity. He would not fight for his religion if that meant disregarding his nationality. Thus, he rejects the logic of the Lebanese Civil War.

From a different religion and village (Shia Islam and Ghazieh) and different gender (female), Amira shares her own experience of faith and religion in her life:

Spirituality... you can get lost in it, because every religion tells you something different. But I know there is Allah; but I say that you don't have to pray and fast to go to heaven. It is enough to just be a good person, to not steal and harm others. There are some people who are really consumed by religion and focus on their religions; but there are others who act religious but truly aren't religious. The people of my religion may say that the way I act is *haram*. Like they may say women must wear the hijab and not wear shorts and they can't go out at night.. these are forbidden. Alcohol and smoking is also *haram* – they are not allowed. I don't fast, I don't pray. But in hard times, I do think about Allah.

Amira's faith is rooted in her belief system, for she says “I know there is Allah.” At the same time, she does not believe she must follow “rules” such as praying and fasting to be considered a good person. Rather, her perspective on being worthy of heaven, of being “good,” is to be ethical. This is a common narrative traced throughout the young

adults' narratives. Amira has a reflective relationship with Allah, one that reminds us of Blaise's own "friendly" relationship that is not conditional on rituals and rules, such as abstinence from alcohol. To not pray and to not fast (which may indeed be considered *haram* in Ghazieh) does not disengage Amira from her relationship with God. Amira verbalizes a difference between those who she perceives are truly religious and those who are only superficially religious. Despite her claiming that she does not know a lot about the Islamic religion, she exemplifies agency and self-determination as she still considers herself to be Muslim. She is not like some of the villagers "who act religious but truly aren't religious." She does not accept that her external appearance as an unveiled woman and her lack of participation in Islamic rituals render her non-spiritual. She still thinks of Allah "in hard times," and imagines Him as an inclusive figure who can be accessed without requirements. He is present in her life. This directly opposes the narratives of the older generation of her parents who lean into conservative practices, particularly in a Hezbollah-supporting village like Ghazieh.

Amira's life story highlights her courage as a young woman who pushes against the opinions of others about religion. When she was younger, her parents ordered her to wear the hijab. After a few years wearing the veil, Amira decided to take it off because she was uncomfortable wearing it. She clarifies, "I didn't wear it because my religion said women must cover up; I wore it just because." Her justification for wearing the veil was not rooted in Islam's mandates, but rather, her reasoning at the time was "just because." She did not feel a specific spiritual justification for wearing the hijab. It was the culmination of her circumstances, inspired by social expectations and pressures—especially those of her family—to be veiled. Amira tells me that when she chose to take

the hijab off as an adolescent, she was scared about what people would tell her. “I was ashamed,” she admits, “But then, in the end, I took it off. My father, he didn’t accept for me to take off the hijab. He was not happy about it. But my mom had also been forced to wear the hijab when she was a child, like me, so she understood me and didn’t have a problem with me taking the veil off.”

Living in Ghazieh, Amira fears others’ responses about her decision to abandon a conservative cultural norm that is closely associated with belonging to the Islamic faith, especially in villages where most of the people are religiously and culturally traditionalist. This registers with Al-Kazi & González’s (2018) comment that in culturally conservative communities, women’s decision to persist dressing conservatively is influenced by family and peer views of the hijab. However, many women in the Muslim world, like Amira, choose to disassociate from the hijab for a variety of personal reasons (Syahrivar, 2021). Amira in particular highlights the social (mostly familial) pressures shaping the tension and expectation of how to dress, which resonates with the theme of dress I explore in Chapter 6. Ultimately, Amira resists the label others place on her of being *haram*. She is not consumed by those criticisms; the fear of being judged and the perceived social pressures do not inhibit her from living as an unveiled woman in Ghazieh. Most importantly, she does not see her relationship with God as weakened because of her way of dress, even if other villagers characterize her as unfaithful.

Echoing a very similar perspective to Amira’s, Adèle shares that while she externally may not appear to be religious, her faith is strong in her heart. When I ask about the importance of religion in her life, Adèle responds:

Religion in my life is important, but not very important. I am someone who believes, yes, but I live my faith through my daily actions, not through prayer and stuff.. It is different than other people. When I talk about religion or belief or whatever, people think I don't believe in God. But I do, I do believe in God. In my own way. This is my own way of thinking, my parents have nothing to do with it. For me, God and Jesus and Father, everything... I can talk to Him directly. But in Christianity, they say you have to go to the priest and church and I don't know what. I don't believe in these things. I believe that I can talk to Him directly. And He will respond. I don't believe in church, I don't believe in priests... well, it's not that I don't believe in that; I just don't feel that they benefit me or add anything to my life.

“I do believe in God. In my own way.” Adèle senses that others may perceive her as non-religious because of her specific conceptualization of and interaction with the Divine. But Adèle believes deeply in God in her own way. She contests conventional Catholic structural elements such as the priest and the church building, arguing that these elements do not “add anything to [her] life.” In this sense, she sees the Divine as something that should enhance her experience of life, rather than obstruct or complicate it. Like Blaise, she also refers to the vague “they”—the religious authorities of Lebanon and the greater Catholic community—who organize how religion is enacted. Adèle resists these narratives. Perhaps this is why so many young adults also reject the often-hijacked term “religious” as they honor the Divine. Rather than submitting to pre-organized structures of religious practice, Adèle finds that the most intimate means of connecting with God are driven by faith that “He will respond.” Like Blaise, Adèle has an internal relationship with God, talking to Him directly. She strips away existing barriers between her and the Divine to enact her faith. In this way, just as youth claim their Lebanese identities as their own to separate themselves from war-era sectarian divisions, Adèle also reclaims her faith as her own to separate herself from hegemonic religious (and often politically-infused) narratives. Youth expand the Divine to place it

beyond the religious (which is a “tool,” as Rami says), making it the para-religious (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997) not in the sense of the secular, but in spirituality beyond sectarian labels. We can predict that youth do not see the Divine they honor as inherently different from the Divine honored by other religious communities. This encourages an inclusive, compassionate, and fraternal understanding of the Abrahamic neighbor’s faith.

As I go from interview to interview, I am deeply moved by the heartfelt emotion ingrained in youths’ answers as they articulate their faith into words, trying to explain to me what is, inherently, unexplainable using language. People like Blaise, Adèle, and Jacques are not all close friends (although everyone in Maghdouché is distantly acquainted, considering how small the village is), but they hold similar answers that complement one another’s. Jacques explains:

I am not “of” a religion. I don’t think about religion, and I am not religious. Of course, I honor and respect my village; my village is one of the most beautiful ones. Actually, I am very proud that I’m from Maghdouché. Of course I honor and believe and respect God. One does not have to be religious to honor and love God. Everything happens according to what God wants. I have immense faith. Of course religion is something important in all lives of humans; He is very present. Whenever something happens, one will say “Ya Allah!” or everything... “Allah wi Wafho” “Bi teke la Allah.”¹⁷ I am someone who is from the religion, ordinary, casual. I don’t think a lot of religion; I just have faith. My parents, no, they are very tied to their religion. But they are also not blinded by religion or only see things through a religious lens.

To be religious and to believe in Allah are not synonymous, Jacques hints. He is proud of his village, which is a Christian one, but he does not consider himself to be “of” the Christian religion. His faith, which he sees as “immense” and “important in all lives of

¹⁷ *Ya Allah!* means “Oh God!”; *Allah bi Wafho* means “God be with you!”; “*Bi’teke ala Allah*” also means “Let God be with you.”

humans” does not mean that he is religious. In fact, Jacques expresses a difference between his perspective on God and that of his parents, whom he describes as “tied” to their religions, although he adds they are not brainwashed. Jacques recognizes the constant presence of Allah in his community, as He even soaks into expressions used casually on a daily basis. Allah is everywhere, determining everything, in the minds of these young community members.

Nadia, the young Shia woman who appears in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, also has immense faith. She expands on the conception of the Divine’s power, pushing us to abandon judgmental perceptions:

No one can judge us now. God will judge us in the end. He will be the one to determine where we will stay when we die, after we die, where we will go... Heaven or hell. The people cannot decide, only God can decide. This is why everyone should focus on their own life and work on their own religion without interfering with others. I think that we please God in some way. I pray every day. I never skip a prayer, actually. And I fast during Ramadan. And I do celebrate all the Muslim occasions. So I think I’m close to God. I don’t consider myself to be that religious. It is between me and God. I do not show it to people. It does not, it is not clear by how I dress up, but it is how I believe.

She exemplifies how open-minded youth reject this worldly judgements. Like Jacques, Nadia also does not consider herself to be “that religious.” Her faith manifests differently than his, but she too does not tie herself to the religious label. Her comments implicitly critique those in Ghazieh and Maghdouché who judge people like Adèle and Amira for their unconventional and non-traditionalist perspectives about God. If Nadia does not explicitly verbalize that she is a Muslim, people from Southern Lebanon may not necessarily guess it. She wears skirts and crop tops when we visit Beirut together. During one of our visits together to Sour, she strolls around the beach in a bikini. She also smokes and watches romance movies—of which her religiously conservative

mother disapproves. And yet Nadia feels very close to God. The religion is not what makes her close to Him. The religion is only a mediator between her and Him. She does not veil herself or present herself as outwardly religious, because her relationship to the Divine is an intimate one that does not necessarily need to be publicized via religious instruments. Her faith is a private matter she does not make public through the wearing of hijabs.

While most young adults respond with similar perspectives that faith is a personal matter that does not need to be shown through “religious” practices, a few Shia young adults from Ghazieh feel differently. For instance, Fatima is a young Shia woman who says that she “does it all” when it comes to Islamic rituals and practices. At the age of nine, she began wearing the hijab and praying. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, she consistently attended Islamic schools and for over ten years she participated in Ghazieh’s *kachaf*, a local version of the girl scouts where she participated in bonding activities in addition to religion classes. She fasts, does not listen to music, and reads books about Islamic theology. She does not drink *arak*,¹⁸ nor any other kind of alcohol, and she recites religious texts. At the time of our interview, it is the week of Ashura, a commemoration of the death of Imam Hussein, and Fatima tells me that every day she has been reciting texts about Imam Hussein’s martyrdom. Fatima’s experience with religion aligns with the Islamic-conservative conventional path taken by most women in Ghazieh. Importantly, these Islamic practices and beliefs are her means of ensuring goodness, just as other youth also derive hope and love from their faiths:

¹⁸ Lebanese alcohol made from anise.

If we understand our religion in a right way, it will help us reduce religious fanaticism and hate towards people of different beliefs. My feelings belong to a spiritual side... Sometimes when you are studying the Qu'ran or praying or anything, your thoughts take you to another place. It is hard to solely think about praying and fasting. But in these minutes when you are praying, you should only think about God. Don't think about anything else. Myself, I try to focus every time. If we follow the guidance of our Prophet Mohammad and all the other important people in our religion, like the Imam, we will be good at praying. When I read the Qu'ran, when I pray, when I fast... these are crucial. If I really follow the religions deeply, I won't be wrong to people. If we understand religion correctly, we can reduce pain [...] I think about the problems in life and in school, and I think how much God helped me. I have learned many things, and God made me recognize things. He taught me patience.

Fatima connects her being a good person who does not harm others to her religious practices such as reading the Islamic texts, fasting, and praying five times a day. This reminds us that for many youth in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, religion is a means of ultimately achieving the ethical. Fatima rejects religious fanaticism and explicitly verbalizes a goal of reducing hate towards other religious groups. But overall, her focus recenters to Allah. Her objective is to know Allah. She utilizes religion, the tool at her disposal, to achieve her goal of being a good person who knows Allah. From my understanding, Fatima equates the ethical to knowing Allah. Both are the same, because Fatima seems to believe that reducing pain in our world is the result of knowing Allah. This of course is different than the Divine emerging from the ethical relationship with others, which philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1982) argues.

Fatima recognizes that God has worked for her. In her relationships and her university work, religion has helped Fatima face challenges. Her relationship with God is a positive, instructive one that benefits her. He is a teacher for her and His force serves her. This reminds us of Adèle's abandoning what does not "add anything" to her life. While Adèle turns away from religious elements like Catholic priests and church,

Fatima turns toward Islamic elements in the belief that she benefits from them. Both women act in ways they believe improve their lives. A few other conservative women from Ghazieh describe similar perspectives to Fatima's, including Asma, a twenty-three-year-old Muslim woman who recently got engaged to a young man from Ghazieh. After showing me pictures from her engagement party and, most importantly, the gold engraved band she wears proudly on her ring finger, Asma tells me:

Allah is very important; He is the number one most important thing in my life. My life turns around Islam; I don't try another path than Islam. This is how my life is. It revolves around Islam. My family is this way, so I am this way. I will continue to be this way.

Asma centers her life on Islam. She commits to the path of her faith. She also raises an interesting point: she follows her family's religious path and refuses to try another path. Her family introduced her to her lifestyle, and so her family's beliefs become her own, which demonstrates how belief systems and practices are passed through generations. This life focus on Islam does not make Asma see other religious groups negatively at all, as I discuss in Chapter 6, for she shows enthusiasm to understand and engage with Christians. Nevertheless, Asma shares a sense of being consumed by Allah, revolving her life around Islam.

Julien, a Christian from Maghdouché, describes a similar experience of being absorbed in Allah:

Once our faith enters one's heart, it takes place in one's breathing. Allah and your religion allow you to know yourself. It allows you to understand all the mistakes you have made with yourself and others. So religion makes you see things in a new way, in a way different than your non-religious life. I believe in Allah, I pray, I look at the Injil¹⁹ from time to time, and I don't hurt others or condemn others. I live a peaceful life.

¹⁹ *Injil* is the Gospel of Jesus

Julien perceives faith as the path to illumination, which he understands is “to know yourself.” Once faith pervades a life, it manifests everywhere. In particular, Julien distinguishes between the religious life and the non-religious life, arguing that the religious one offers a new vision. It opens his universe to a new understanding of the world. This new understanding has offered him a “peaceful life” for which he is grateful. Like Fatima, Julien concludes that he does not hurt others as a result of his faith. In this sense, belief in Allah and religious rituals lead Julien to being a good person. His perspective is only one example of the infinite interpretations youth have of faith, Allah, and religion, which I attempt to share in this chapter to show the inspiration and power youth derive from their faiths. These spiritual experiences undoubtedly influence the ways youth interact with one another and understand their coexisting village communities.

All young adults with whom I speak believe strongly in the Divine’s guiding force in their personal lives, regardless of whether they identify with a religion or replace their religious identity with the national identity. Their faith is special to them. Centrally, they perceive faith as an extra-ordinary mechanism of inspiration, direction, and love. Simultaneously, many young adults reformulate religion to be ethics-based, calling to a moral system while upholding the existence of the Divine.

Throughout my interviews, I notice a difference between identification as “religious” and connection with “faith.” Importantly to note, “religion” is the language used when expressing the fundamentally inexpressible, whereas “faith” is personal, mysterious, individualistic, inexpressible, and indefinable (Aslan, 2016). Scholars such as Dr. Goodwin (2020) claim that most religions emphasize what we do and how we

are, not what we believe. Faith is the belief system. And this belief is unmeasurable. In this section, I find that both Christian and Muslim young adults perceive faith not as a measurement of their beliefs, but as an unquantifiable form of connection to the Divine, as an inspiration and a reason for living. They emphasize a difference between religion and faith, pushing away the former in their appreciation of the latter. Faith here resembles what Westerners often conceptualize as spirituality, as ethics, and as acting morally. To varying degrees, I discover that many Lebanese young adults equate religion to sect, a stigmatized instrument of division in the country. They resort to de-identifying with the sectarianized religious label to honor the Divine in a non-political, pure manner.

Religion in Home and Society

During our conversation, Adèle is eager to explain the importance of religion in her village, not only ideologically, but also historically. While sharing this information, Adèle walks me through the church, gardens, and grotto near the well-known statue of Mary. Maghdouché is an important village for the Abrahamic religions because the Virgin Mary previously lived there as she waited for her son Jesus. Although Ghazieh is not known as a historical landmark like Maghdouché, it is under the control of the Shia Islamist group Hezbollah and has become increasingly religiously-conservative over the past few decades. After investigating how young adults interpret and experience their faiths and connection to the Divine, I would like to contextualize their beliefs within their village environments. By doing so, I offer a better understanding of the spaces within which I research interreligious relationships. I am curious because in these conservative villages, it is not the norm for people to vocalize views like Amira's and

her peers.’ Rather, from personal experience, I find that most adults in these communities reflect very conservative views. For instance, Nadia tells me that in Ghazieh:

Religion plays an important role. Most importantly in how people think in this village. They are very narrow-minded, close-minded. They don’t want to improve or to open to other ideas... expand their minds, expand how they think. They don’t want to improve the way that they’re thinking. For example, I cannot wear a crop top or a tank top when I am in my village. Because people do not accept this. I know, this is how we were raised. A few months ago, I was wearing a dress that was long but it had an opening on the side, like a slit. The people kept staring at me here and giving me nasty glares!

Similarly to Amira’s comments at the beginning of the chapter, Nadia also feels constrained to dress in a certain fashion to avoid challenging social norms embedded in conservative Islam. Nadia offers the example of wearing a slitted dress to show the intolerance of those around her. Consequently, as I previously mentioned, Nadia adapts to the different villages she visits and dresses differently according to her location. She is certainly proud of her belly piercing in Beirut, where she ties her shirt in a knot above her waist. Her intuitive read of her environment allows her to make thoughtful choices about how to present herself. Nadia explicitly expands on religion’s role in making the villagers “narrow-minded, close-minded,” implying that villagers’ ingestion and interpretation of Islam inhibits them from opening their minds. She links this directly to their opposition to her revealing clothing.

Having spent his entire life in Ghazieh, Majd explains how acceptance and belonging in his village are contingent on one’s belief in and practice of Shia Islam:

Everything, everyone here must be Shia in Ghazieh. To be accepted by others, he should be Shia Muslim. But I also have brothers who are Sunnah and they don’t have any problem with that. I go to all Shia ceremonies. I must be this way. I must be Muslim. Because of God and

the Qur'an. I say Allah is everything. If people here have a big deal in their work and they get good money, they will say "God sent this to us." It is everything. And everything has Allah. He helps us with everything.

Majd feels a social expectation in Ghazieh for residents to follow Islam (particularly Shia Islam) to be "accepted by others." If one is not Shia Muslim, one is not completely accepted, according to Majd. Translating what he says from Arabic to English, I have to be cautious. When Majd claims "I must be this way," I extract a dual meaning. First, that members of his village are pressured to adhere to the Shia sect. Second, because Majd says that he is Muslim "because of God and the Qur'an," not because of society, I understand that Majd does not personally feel forced into his religion, but rather, he feels the force of Islam so greatly that he cannot deny it. It is not a matter of having a choice or not having a choice in believing, it is simply that, to Majd, Islam is a truth that is Divine, a truth that he would feel wrong rejecting. Ultimately, the power of Allah and the Qur'an determine his beliefs, not the conservative social pressures in Ghazieh. "Everything has Allah," Majd tells me, which again reflects the notion of religion consuming all. Allah is constantly present, in all positive occurrences and in all struggles.

Majd casually mentions the multi-religious nature of his family composed of both Shia and Sunni Muslim children. During a separate conversation, I ask Majd to tell me more about his family. I am curious because thus far in my life and my research, I have not encountered a family in Ghazieh in which some children are raised according to one faith and others according to another. True, we can generalize Shia and Sunni Islam as the same mother religion, but in the context of Lebanon, where sectarianism reigns and such differences are culturally important, such a multi-religious family is unique. In fact, some Lebanese (like Mona and Ali during our interview) claim that

there are more tensions between Shia and Sunni Muslims than between Shia and Christians. Majd tells me that he and his mother are Shia, whereas his older brothers and sisters are Sunni like his late father who died in 2006. While Majd was raised according to his mother's faith, his siblings were raised according to his father's. Growing up, Majd's siblings learned the Sunni practice and identified with the Sunni religion. But they also attended the ceremonies and events of the Shia community with Majd and his mother, revealing a religious fluidity in the family that manifests within the community as well. Majd counters Lebanese sectarianism (according to which Shia and Sunni are in constant battle) by saying, "We are all Muslims, there is not a big difference. I have many Sunnah friends, and we do not talk about this religious difference very often." The fact that Majd's Sunni siblings live in the same household as him, participate in Shia celebrations, and are also well-integrated in Ghazieh reveals that the almost-entirely homogeneous Shia community has the capacity of opening itself to young men and women of different religions, or at least, different sects of the Islamic religion as longtime members of the community.

The only couple I interview, Ali and Mona, are very conservative in the manner they practice Shia Islam. Although they are busy caring for their three young girls, they graciously offer me their entire evening. They speak extensively about how Allah is present in the minds of the Ghazieh community, and in particular, their lives as a young married couple. Mona begins:

Allah is soooo present in our lives in Ghazieh. In particular, I think "Allah! Let us be done with this mess happening in Lebanon! Allah, please let us be done."

Ali tells me about how ingrained God is in their lives and in the decisions they take:

When I asked Mona to marry me, Allah was in my mind. I asked her to marry me in the name of Allah. Allah wants us to marry, and is involved in things of marriage. The way I think about Allah when I raise the children, how I treat the hajji²⁰.

Mona refers to the chaos consuming Lebanon through food, medicine, and electricity shortages. She calls to Allah in these difficult moments, as if to bring him into her life and into the lives of the Lebanese who are suffering. Ali too describes the ways in which he bases his own decisions on what he believes Allah desires. He carries the spirit of Allah in his actions and in the energy he puts into his life. He does not see a division between his spirituality and his home, or his spirituality and his society. Spirituality is inherently present in every aspect of life.

Camille, an eighteen-year-old from Maghdouché, also summarizes how involved Allah is in her life, describing the inspiration she derives from her faith:

In my life in Maghdouché, religion is a reason to live. Because it makes me believe that Allah has something set for me, something beautiful, which will happen to me tomorrow or after tomorrow or beyond tomorrow. So it makes me think “I want to live. I will live” for my whole life. I want to be happy with everything in my life. Because I have faith in Allah, so everything I am doing, it is for my wellbeing. Allah is so important. He is my reason to live. He is protection. If you don’t have this protection in your life, your life won’t have reason. Sometimes you need someone on your side. So you talk to Allah.

Similarly to how Ali considers Allah’s wishes for his way of life, Camille also sees her life in relation to Allah’s plan for her. Camille feels eagerness to live and she trusts she will live her life, because she interprets this life in relation to Allah’s good intentions. Her faith ignites her excitement. She associates her faith in Allah to her belief that she is doing what is right for her and her health. Like some of her peers from

²⁰ *Hajji* here refers to “older woman”. Here, Ali is referring to Mona’s mom, who lives with them in the apartment. The term is used as a sign of respect.

Maghdouché and Ghazieh, she considers the Divine as a reachable presence, not domineering away from her or over her, but as a force “on your side.” Perhaps she considers Him to be the closest thing to her. Her faith offers her wellbeing. Her belief in Allah gives her happiness.

Fadi also considers religion as a “reason to live,” as Camille says, but he also shines light on the darker ways in which religion is manipulated as a tool in the greater Lebanese society as a mechanism with which to discriminate:

I live for my faith. Of course, it is something important in my life as a man in Ghazieh. But of course, religion has played a role that isn't very good in my life because I have lived my life here as a labeled Muslim. Because in Lebanon, jobs are even divided up by religion. So job recruiters prefer people of their own religion, as opposed to another religion.

Fadi examines the power of religion to break apart a society. As a Shia Muslim, Fadi has suffered professionally because he finds fewer opportunities with organizations and businesses that are dominated by people of other religions, likely Christians or Sunni Muslims. This demonstrates the depth to which sectarianism rules in a religiously plural society, of which young adults like Fadi are aware and tired. While he sees faith as his reason for living, Fadi is sober about the on-the-ground discriminatory practices embedded in institutionalized and politicized religion. Warda, a young Shia woman of Ghazieh, also laments this problem. She tells me that because religion dominates all facets of society, even when applying to jobs, “we have to apply to organizations within our own religion.” Since she is a veiled woman whose faith is externally visible through the hijab she wears, it is even easier for her to be discriminated against. There are some business owners who only employ people from their own religious sect, rather than from another sect, no matter their qualifications. This is literally a microcosm of the

government's set-up, in which ministers are employed on the basis of their sect rather than their expertise (as I explore in Chapter 8). This certainly results in resentment among youth in their early twenties who want to start their careers. In fact, Warda made the difficult decision to stay in school and obtain a Master's after graduating from college because she felt helpless and uninspired by the lack of work opportunities available to her as a young woman. The postwar generation directly feels the impacts of this sectarian social system, as youth are denied opportunities simply based on their religious affiliations.

Warda shares another example of how community rules based on religious discrimination spark injustice. Like Fatima, Warda has been veiled since the age of nine, which is common for girls in Ghazieh. She recounts a memory from a family excursion during her childhood: "We all wanted to go swimming in a pool, but the lifeguards told me that I was not allowed to swim because I am a veiled girl. I got very upset. This was an ugly occurrence that happened in my life. Even as a young girl, I got upset because of this." Warda critiques the way religion was manipulated as a way to control and repress her as a veiled woman. Her Islamic faith—which visibly manifests in her wearing the hijab—was construed as a reason for her to be prohibited from swimming in the pool. While young Muslim women like Nadia and Amira externally do not appear religious because of the way they dress and thus face judgement from their conservative community, others like Warda experience discrimination because of their visible signs of religious identity: the hijab. In both cases, the instrumentalization of religion as a mechanism of knowing, judging, and categorizing women results in exclusionary patterns that these young women recognize and critique.

Based on my conversations, it is seemingly less common for religion in Maghdouché to suppress one's abilities to dress or act as one would like. While the young adults of Maghdouché express a link between their religion and their village, none bring up examples of discrimination like Warda's. Generally, the Christian villages in Lebanon are recognized for being more liberal than the Muslim villages with regards to language, dress, and daily habits. Many young adults drink, smoke, and wear revealing clothing in these towns. But religion is still extremely important in this setting. Camille emphasizes the connection between the personal and the social:

Faith is very important for Maghdouché, because it is what founds the relationships between people in our community, the way we treat one another. The religion of humans, and whatever religion, not just Christianity, supports peace. So people treat others on this foundation. So of course it is something very crucial for our society. Of course I am religious, because first of all, my social world is this way, and my parents raised me in this way. You see, your religion comes from the environment within which you live, and how your parents raised you. And when you grow up, religion becomes a thing of you and in you, for you, inside you. A thing for you.

She links her religion to the social world within which she lives, emphasizing the importance of religion on both a personal and village level. Christianity serves as a "foundation" on which Maghdouché's residents connect with one another. She believes that the "religion of humans"—no matter the religion, "not just Christianity"—inspires peace. She understands that religion supports kindness and respect, not unlike her counterparts in Ghazieh. Religion as a tool, if not manipulated for the sake of politics, can nurture coexistence. However, it must not be exploited and construed as something it is inherently not. In its purest form, Camille sees faith as "a thing for you;" in other words, it is a benefit to the human being. Unlike other young adults like Rami who

reject religion and instead employ the term “faith,” Camille utilizes the term “religion” liberally without allowing the stigma of sectarianism to corrupt the word.

For the young adults in *el-Jnoub*, Allah is important. He serves as an inspiration, as a light in their hearts that guides them. I find that all young adults in Maghdouché and Ghazieh have a strong connection with the Divine, regardless of their specific identities or religious affiliation. While some do not enact religious rituals or abide by religious-cultural rules, each young adult articulates a deep faith and belief in God. Importantly, not all young adults identify themselves as Christian or Muslim. Many today abandon identities based on religious affiliation, which have become entrenched in sectarianism and the politicized Divine, as their means of reclaiming religion in their own terms. Youth instead articulate a preference to wear the cross-religious inclusionary label: nationality. In their personal narratives, youth hint at an alternate Lebanon, one that erodes the historical sectarian divisions to instead erect an inclusionary Southern Lebanese community in which the national identity is prioritized over the sectarian. This prioritization of the national group over the religious offers an identity- and community-centered avenue to everyday peace in a greater sectarian region, one which may be applicable to other interreligious village communities in Lebanon.

Similarly, many young adults reconceptualize the conventional image of religion in their villages to emphasize an accessible, non-exclusive faith that brings the Divine to the mundane, the sacred to the social. In this way, youth also reclaim faith as their own from which to benefit, rather than as an institutionalized power forced upon them. This effort symbolizes the postwar generation’s resistance to the politicization of religious

identity and religious truth, which facilitated the violence of the Civil War. Youths' non-traditionalist, open-minded approaches to understanding their relationships with Allah certainly inform the ways in which these young adults perceive the religious other, which I will describe in following chapters. As they disintegrate the specific labels of "religious" (whether "Christian" or "Muslim"), young adults from Maghdouché and Ghazieh open themselves beyond the sectarian identity, conceiving themselves as people of faith (not of sect). Of course, this influences the way they approach, relate to, and care for people in different religious communities. Later in this thesis, I argue that this reimagined religion is a sublime expansion of faith, Abrahamic in nature rather than sectarian, allowing for youth from both villages to connect together and enact the interreligious relationship. In my next chapter, I focus specifically on the interreligious interaction, collaboration, and union within religious spaces and temporalities, where sectarianism is erased from the sublime religious.

Chapter 5: Sacred Times and Spaces of Interreligious Interaction

Between Abrahamic Neighbors

The recitation of Imam Hussein's story blasts from the speakers of trucks driving through the streets of Ghazieh. There's a fuel crisis, but somehow, these trucks have collected enough gas to drive around the village in circles. Wasta, I think to myself. The militia has been saving fuel for its own. It is the 19th of August, the final day of Ashura. Parades of children walk through the streets, holding black flags with Imam Hussein's name printed across in white letters. Others walk mourning, chanting, hands patting their chests... And then I see them, dozens of men walking in closely-knit rows and slicing the fronts of their heads with steak knives, blood pouring down their faces. This is Amal's doing, one young woman to my right whispers. This didn't happen in the past, this isn't Hezbollah's fault. I am wordless. Blood sprinkles onto the streets of Ghazieh, this beautiful village's streets. A single handkerchief is blown by the wind across the street. It's soaking in blood. I am shocked, but then I turn to the young girl next to me and she holds her hand out to me. She is also shaking. She doesn't believe in this.

— Raimy on the 10th day of Ashura, 2021

Ashura, one of the most important Shia holidays in Ghazieh and often compared to the Christian Holy Week, is observed for ten days to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. I hesitate to share the vignette above because global attention on cases of self-inflicted violence during Ashura has stigmatized those who honor the holiday. This sort of self-flagellation is not rare during Ashura in Shia Lebanon (Deeb, 2005). In Ghazieh, men and women usually slap their chests, but there is often a small group of men who participate in the processions with more aggression, cutting into their skin with the edge of a blade. Those men are not the majority. I hear men and women of all ages deplore the practice, telling me that they do not like that this happens every year. The woman by my side in the vignette above, for example, is stunned by this outburst of violence. Had I conducted all my research virtually, I would have not actively witnessed Ashura. From my on-the-ground

participation, I learn that even as bodily mortification practices such as the one described in my vignette are maintained, Southern Lebanese youths' minds do not close into dogmas but rather open up and free themselves of preconceived sectarian divisions.

Since Ghazieh and Maghdouché are historically and socially rooted in religion, religious rituals and ceremonies are central to daily life. Reicher et al. (2021) find that even in small religious villages, people relate to a range of identities with diverging concerns and interests, so during religious festivals and ceremonies there is potential for a degree of shared identity in which people's priorities and concerns align. Rituals such as the procession on Ashura bring people of diverse social identities together under the name of a shared identity, or at least, within the realm of similar priorities. Both Ghazieh and Maghdouché are committed to celebrating holidays, even during the pandemic. *La culture de devotion* is prominent, culminating in daily words and actions, as well as exceptional practices such as fasting. Just as Ghazieh fills with dark flags and Islamic posters during Ashura, Maghdouché lights up with Christmas trees and decorative posters of Jesus and Mary in December. One of the most important celebrations in Maghdouché holding a similar weight to Ashura in Ghazieh is Eid al Saydeh Mantara honoring the Virgin Mary every September 7th. Adèle explains that people from all over Lebanon attend the ceremony and festival in Maghdouché, during which the villagers walk from the church at the center of village all the way to the statue of the Virgin Mary (photograph in Background Chapter). Although I was not present in Maghdouché on September 7th and thus did not get to experience the holiday on-the-ground as I did for Ashura in Ghazieh, I still understand it as a central day for Maghdouché's villagers that is taken very seriously.

This elaboration on *la culture de devotion* in Ghazieh and Maghdouché contextualizes the importance of religious times and spaces. In this chapter dedicated to examining religious ceremonies, rituals, sites, and holidays, I begin by exploring whether young adults participate in their own village's religious events and sites, and then examine how they relate their faiths to their community's religious practices. I subsequently turn to examine whether youth connect with one another across religious spaces and times, and I consider the possibility of fostering Kanafani-Zahar's (1997) understanding of the "religious sublime"—that is, the extra-sectarian, social, and inter-personal spirituality.

Youths' Experience of Religious Holidays and Sites

Before exploring how youth participate in one another's religious spaces and temporalities in this chapter, I first analyze how Christian and Muslim youth from Maghdouché and Ghazieh understand and experience sacred sites and holidays of their respective religions to better understand the importance of these spaces and temporalities to their faith. In their reflections, I note youths' agency as they—no matter their religious affiliations or levels of conservativeness—choose to either have deep or limited participation in religious spaces and holidays. Camille explains to me:

We participate in all Christian occasions; Christmas, Easter, all these... and of course I pray. And of course my parents pray. If your parents got you accustomed to praying and going to church when you're young, of course when you're older you do the same on your own without your own parents. This is what happened to me. Normally, there is Church on Sunday, and after Church, there is lunch, or then dinner, with family. There aren't people outside of the family. Or you may have a big gathering, on occasion.... Then a lot of the whole village is there. It isn't exactly a dinner or a lunch. It's a thing or event of the whole village, inside the village.

She expresses eagerness and commitment to engaging in the majority of religious ceremonies and honoring most holidays in her village. As discussed in Chapter 4, Camille considers religion to be “a reason to live.” She is inspired daily by God. In this excerpt, Camille links the way she was raised to her enthusiasm about religious practices such as attending church and participating in sacred ceremonies. As a young woman, she reproduces the rituals she was taught as a child. Interestingly, she experiences these religious spaces and days as both Holy and social. For instance, Sunday offers her the chance to connect to her faith by going to Church and also to her family and community by afterwards attending lunch or a “big gathering.” The sacred day constitutes both a ritual and a social activity. These social practices where Camille congregates with family are integral to her experience of her religion, which harmonizes the spiritual with the communal.

Just as Camille participates in “all Christian occasions,” Fatima from Ghazieh expresses an eagerness to participate in all Shia holidays:

Muslims holidays and celebrations, there are so many here in Ghazieh! Until today I am in the *kachaf*,²¹ and we celebrate Ashura. Even if I don’t physically go to celebrate or commemorate these days, on WhatsApp we chat online and send pictures. Or we do Zoom meetings, especially during Corona. I watch online the celebrations. We invite people from outside. Christians... not always, but yes it happens that they are there. During Ashura every year, where I went to listen to the speakers, we would have some Christians talk about the *adat*²² of Islam, about the Imam Hussein.

Through both in-person and virtual platforms, Fatima not only utilizes holidays as both a spiritual and a social opportunity to engage with her own religious beliefs, but also to hear from others. She enthusiastically discusses the breadth of ways she connects to

²¹ *Kachaf* translates to boy/girl scouts.

²² Customs

Holy ceremonies even during the pandemic, which reveals her flexibility as a religious person. She commits to attending these various religious events since they are ingrained into her life. Importantly, she briefly hints at the presence of “people from outside” during holidays like Ashura in Ghazieh, which suggests that the community receives and hosts neighbors from different religious communities during these religiously-important days. By participating in these events where the Christian neighbor may come and “talk about the *adat* of Islam,” Fatima accesses Christian voices that are outside of her daily reach within the Shia village, which means that the Islamic religious ceremony introduces her to external Christian voices. Rather than closing her away from such voices, the religious holiday serves as a context of interaction and engagement with the religious neighbor even if these are only brief interactions.

Amira, who is also from Ghazieh, chooses to abstain from participating in Shia holidays, which introduces a different type of relationship with religious time. As discussed in Chapter 4, Amira removed the veil in her late teens after having worn it throughout her early adolescence. Today, she is not drawn to participate in religious events, feeling a detachment from these practices. I ask her whether she visits Islamic spaces such as the Ghazieh mosques, and she admits:

I used to go when I was younger, with my parents. But now, no I don't. Ok, my parents give me some talk, trying to get me to go, but they can't force me to go. It's as I want. I don't go if I don't want to.

When I ask about whether her parents support her choice, Amira tells me,

No, not exactly. They tell me, haram, they say you must pray, you must do that, you must go to the mosque. But it's my choice, I do it at my will. In the end, it's my thing. They try to convince me, but it's my decision and my comfort.

Amira roots into her agency, choosing not to engage in these religious spaces while simultaneously maintaining a deep faith in Allah and alignment with Islam, as I show in Chapter 4. Amira's interpretation of the Divine is not related to the mandate of praying and celebrating an Islamic holiday. She has visited religious spaces throughout her childhood, just as she wore the veil as a girl. However, as a young woman, Amira commits to doing "as I want," which includes the ways she honors Allah. The sociocultural expectation of visiting the mosque does not have authority over Amira, for she understands that her life and her faith are her own, and not others' to be controlled and shaped. Interestingly, young women in Ghazieh and Maghdouché like Amira and Adèle superficially do not appear to have strong faith based on preconceived notions that Amira as a Muslim should wear the hijab and Adèle as a Catholic should attend church. However, both these women have strong faiths. They reject the institutionally-religious space as they discover how to enact their faiths with satisfaction and integrity.

I also speak to young adults whose perspectives on religious holiday lie between Amira's and Fatima's stances. Arthur and Baasim from Maghdouché and Ghazieh respectively share a similar experience of attending some, but not all, ceremonies and celebrations of their religious communities. They both express that they do not attend these ceremonies if they are an inconvenience, which contrives these events as practical matters. For instance, Arthur tells me, "I observe the holidays and attend the ceremonies, but not all of them... Just the ones I'm able to go to." Similarly, Baasim explains:

I'll observe a certain event, especially if it's my own religion. But not all events, even here in Ghazieh, I do the ones that are most important to me, do you understand? So, for example, we observe Ashura for ten days. Every day there are a lot of events. So perhaps I commemorate

Ashura for four or five of those ten days. The other days I let go of them. Whatever I can do, I do. If I am able to do it.

These men do not necessarily go out of their way to attend religious events, even the events in their respective villages, because they focus on other aspects of life. Neither of the two men are completely absorbed in the religious tradition. Perhaps this is what Blaise means by practicing religion “in a balanced way.” Through this perspective, the religious and the practical intertwine and compromise with one another. Baasim and Arthur do not stress to participate in all events. Baasim in particular asserts that he mainly prioritizes the events that are most important to him. He chooses how he spends his time, and he focuses on choosing what is important to him, rather than conforming to a social pressure of experiencing everything deemed “religious.” He independently chooses what he would like to do, not unlike Amira’s decision to withhold participation from Islamic spaces and refuse wearing the hijab. I emphasize that this does not minimize Baasim’s faith, but rather, shows that he does not recognize these religious celebrations as crucial parts of life. Baasim and Arthur do not see religious temporalities and spaces as exigent on or controlling of their time. They do not allow religious concepts and entities to take on this role in their lives. Rather, young men like Baasim and Arthur participate in events and places based on whether the experience fits with their schedules and needs. This reformulates religion not as a source of demand on, but of flexibility and harmony with, daily life.

Cross-Religious Participation During Ceremonies and Holidays

In this chapter, I am mainly interested in exploring when and how youth of Ghazieh and Maghdouché participate in one another’s religious ceremonies and celebrations. Do they invite their Abrahamic siblings to their own ceremonies and

celebrations? How do the Muslims of Ghazieh interpret and participate in Christian holidays? And vice-versa? I come to realize that just as youth re-imagine their social identities (which I describe in Chapter 4) to exert agency and cross-religious unity, so too do many youth creatively re-conceptualize the religious holiday as a time of inclusion, making it the extra-sectarian to ultimately combat religiously-justified community divisions. This is solidly exemplified by Rami's response to my first mistake as a researcher—and by mistake, I mean poor choice of words. I ask him whether he has ever invited “outsiders” to the ceremonies and religious events of Ghazieh. Immediately, he responds:

Outsiders, really? What is this word in the first place! They are not outsiders. They are brothers, family you don't share the same bloodline with. I live in Ghazieh and there are several religious occasions going around at the moment. And of course, I try to enjoy these with my family.. I go out, celebrate with them, I see the rest of my extended family. Like *Eid al-Adha*, *Eid al-Kabir*. As for the outsiders, no, no come on. I love to share the happiness I have with them. So of course I am going to invite those who are closest to me, who are from different religions, different sects, and share this kind of happiness with them. What is the importance of *Eid*, which is a time of happiness, if you're not sharing this happiness with everyone? So yeah, I do invite my extended family from different bloodlines.

Rami designates his religious neighbors as “family from different bloodlines.” Similarly to how Blaise asserts that he is Lebanese before being Christian, Rami unites religious groups by formulating a familial kinship and erasing the sectarian identity. He enjoys participating in religious events with his interreligious family, a family that consists not only of his immediate Muslim family, but of his Christian one as well. Here, Rami is verbally destroying—not only ignoring, but fully demolishing—a religious barrier that I have naively put up myself by using the term “outsiders” in our interview. In Rami's eyes, *Eid*, a Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan, is a holiday for all, not only

Muslims. The purpose of Eid, Rami insists, is for happiness to flourish. And this happiness is unauthentic if it is not shared with everyone of all sects. This happiness hinges on inclusionary practices. He deconstructs the interpretation of religious holidays as days of intra-religious gatherings that consequently exclude the religious other. Rather, Rami repaints them as days when people of all religious identities are invited and brought together.

In this way, Rami takes a Shia Muslim day and conceptualizes it as a day of inclusion. Religion becomes a tool to unite rather than to label and sectarianize, as politicians misuse it. This is the religious sublime that Kanafani-Zahar (1997) mentions, in which the religious becomes the social, the inter-personal. With Rami's logic, religious days are not exclusionary, but become places of human connection beyond any artificial border. The para-religious manifests in these interreligious events, which does not indicate its non-religious nature, but its extra-sectarian. The para-religious is the spiritual and the social in harmony, combatting religiously-justified segmentation.

This understanding epitomizes the progressive mentalities about religion I notice to varying degrees in other young adults. For example, Jacques, a young man from Maghdouché, shares how he honors both Christian and Muslim holidays alike via his social practices:

I go to all religious holidays. For example, on Christmas, my whole family gathers, and even during Eid al-Musme, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, we go visit the families of my friends who are Muslim and we salem.²³

²³ *Salem* is a word to respectfully say “hello” to another, to greet or welcome another. This word is not only used in contexts of receiving someone as a guest, but is also employed when visiting another out of respect.

It is interesting that Jacques says “I go to all religious holidays” without precisizing if he means Christian or Muslim ones, blurring the distinction between the two. By framing his participation in this ambiguous way, he honors all holidays as sacred without explicitly choosing which are most important to him, which may be a variation of “non-decision” implemented for the sake of everyday peace (Yoshizawa & Kusaka, 2020). Jacques raises one example of a thoroughly-celebrated holiday in Maghdouché, Christmas, and immediately associates it with family gathering, which unveils the social manifestation of the spiritual. Jacques follows this statement with three Muslim holidays that he recognizes and also honors. During these Islamic holidays, Jacques and his family visit friends’ families as a show of respect, crossing a religious boundary that seems to be nonexistent in the way Jacques speaks with ease. Although he does not employ the same radical language as Rami (“extended families from different bloodlines”), Jacques emphasizes the social, inter-personal, intra- and inter-familial nature of these holidays. After all, to honor Eid, he chooses to visit the families of his Muslim friends. Jacques chooses to *salem* not because his Christian religion recognizes Eid al-Adha, but because his friends’ religion does. This again is the “sublime religious” marked by the inclusion of other religious communities into a community’s religious events or during a community’s religious holidays. In the process, an open system of proximity and interaction between religious groups is supported with the basis of reciprocal knowledge and understanding of one another’s religions. By honoring Eid not only by acknowledging it but actually participating within it, Jacques turns the religious day into a social, inclusive one. The religious expands to become the

sublime, the all-inclusive, the inter-communal, the inter-human. Jacques' words demonstrate a deep appreciation and respect for the other's culture and beliefs.

Jacques' is not an exceptional understanding among Maghdouché's young population. Claude from Maghdouché echoes Jacques' point and adds:

Of course I celebrate with them; I invite people from outside Maghdouché. It's nice to mix with other people from different villages. Again, this shows open-mindedness and desire to expand beyond the closures of sectarian divisions to incorporate "other people." Claude extends an invitation to people beyond the Maghdouché community, which encourages the small community to open up beyond itself. As Mac Ginty (2014) discusses, everyday peace encompasses the activities that challenge the fixities of conflict, and I interpret this interreligious celebration of Christian and Muslim holidays as a form of resistance to sectarian narratives that upholds peacemaking and peacekeeping. Claude's philosophy that it is "nice to mix" encourages an easy and fluid relationship between religious groups.

Mona, the young mother of three young girls in Ghazieh, offers an example of how young adults not only honor another religious group's holiday, but actually adapt to the religious community's norms. She tells me about Jean, one of her Christian friends from Maghdouché, who attended the same Islamic university as her. Jean often visits Ghazieh during Ashura and watches the commemorating processions and ceremonies. Even when they were in university, Jean wore black to school during this week of Ashura, because "everyone else in the university wore black." Jean felt it was wrong for him to not wear black, Mona explains to me, because he was one of the only Christians in an Islamic university. In this way, Mona's friend conforms to a social and religious norm of dressing in black during Ashura. Perhaps he does so because it is

personally important for him to honor the holiday, or perhaps he does so to avoid offending or crossing an unspoken rule. This act exemplifies the “sensitive perception and intuitive responses” central to everyday peacemaking by so-called ordinary people (Heyd, 1995, p. 218). Jean’s actions reveal a nuanced and intuitive understanding of the religious neighbors’ practices. While neither his Christian religion nor his village Maghdouché mandate that he dress in black, Jean does so while in university. This allowed him to surmount the domain of the religious dogma to actualize the social requirements for respectful engagement at his university. He actively adapted himself as an individual, extracting himself from his village and religious community to independently conform to a different religious community’s practices. His respect for Ashura is ongoing today, as he continues to visit Ghazieh to commemorate Imam Hussein.

Jean demonstrates the interreligious compromise (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997), and in Mona’s example, he is the one to bear the weight of the compromise. Jean is the only member adapting to the other religious community’s conservative standards and norms, for the Islamic community at university does not change its practices for his sake. Jean does not transgress the codes of his Christian religion, nor is he caged within them. His dressing in black to observe Ashura does not, in any way, detract from his faith. Perhaps it galvanizes his faith more, for he deeply respects and learns about fellow adherents of an Abrahamic religion. And clearly, Jean makes a positive impression, as Mona gushes to me about how kind and easy-to-welcome her friend is. I find that the university community’s accepting him is, in itself, an opening towards the religious neighbor.

A couple of other young adults in Ghazieh mention that they often see Christians attending the annual Ashura ceremonies in their village. When I talk to Majd one morning of Ashura, he tells me:

I have seen many Christian people and also priests attend in previous years. They come and say a word in front of everybody and we listen to them and they talk about their religion and Imam Hussein. They stay and hear the stories of the Battle of Karbala and everything. Some of them cry and some celebrate like everyone. Not everyone participates, they can watch, they can listen, they can come and sit with us. Not very many people come, it's less than like 20.

Nadia, a full-time member of Ghazieh, adds:

I think once I saw a Christian at Ashura. And sometimes Reverends come. And even Sunni Sheikh come. And my Sunni friends sometimes also come, they want to attend, they want to see.

Majd and Nadia describe the integration of Abrahamic neighbors into their village's rituals and ceremonies commemorating the Imam Hussein. Not only do religious figureheads such as priests attend the ceremony in Ghazieh, but ordinary Christians and Sunnis from neighboring villages do too. Majd's descriptions that "some of them cry" while hearing the stories of Imam Hussein is significant. Although Ashura is an Islamic holiday, it touches the hearts of people of different religions. This means that religion and religious holiday are expansive, beyond the sectarian. Because multiple young adults report Christians' presence in Ghazieh during Ashura, I get a sense that in Ghazieh it is common, normalized, and accepted for the Abrahamic neighbor to be integrated in local religious rituals. After all, the religious leaders of other communities are even given a platform on which to speak during Ashura, which is notable. As Majd describes, there is an exchange of words during which the priests talk about the Imam while Ghazieh residents like Majd "listen to them." Afterwards, these visitors from

other religious communities stay and hear the stories that the Ghazieh Shia present. This epitomizes the reciprocal sharing of words, experiences, and sacred meanings.

I personally did not notice if there were any Christians in Ghazieh during Ashura, although there may have been fewer visitors overall because of the pandemic. I also do not have sufficient knowledge to identify others as members or non-members of Ghazieh. But because he is a full-time resident of Ghazieh, Majd explains that he can recognize and identify visiting communities:

I think I know them. I know these people, I know their names and where they come from. Just like that. They come dressing like us. In Ashura, they come dressing in black like us. I don't know where the priest came from. But the people yes came from Maghdouché, Mayrieh.

Majd highlights a central dynamic in small villages: people know one another and develop an intuition to recognize where someone is from, perhaps based on dress or last names. Because Maghdouché and Ghazieh are so intimately connected on a geographic level, villagers such as Majd who have spent their entire lives in Ghazieh recognize the people of the neighboring village. Majd's comment that some of these Christians visit Ghazieh on Ashura "dressing in black like us" resonates with Mona's description of her friend Jean in university. This signifies respect on the part of the Christians who not only know how Muslims honor Ashura but also have so much respect that they too adopt these practices. Rituals involving multiple faiths encourage these communities to transcend cultural difference (Horstmann, 2011), and these traditions open to all religious groups to facilitate coexistence.

But not all young Christians from Maghdouché participate in the Islamic holidays of Ghazieh, and not all young Muslims from Ghazieh participate in Maghdouché's holidays. Léa tells me that she celebrates all Catholic religious events

and holidays in Maghdouché because she is Christian, but she adds, “my friends are Muslim, but they have never invited me to any celebration or holiday related to Islam. So every event or holiday I have witnessed in my life is related to Christianity.” She does not have a problem with Islam, nor Muslim holidays, she adds afterwards, but she has never had the opportunity to attend a Muslim celebration or ceremony. This is not because of intolerance or disinterest. While she may be awaiting the invitation, she does not actively seek out the religious experience in Ghazieh. She respects the Shia members but does not share an urge to actively participate in their rituals.

No human experience is universal, so I am not surprised to hear that Asma has never seen Christians in Ghazieh celebrating religious holidays or commemorating any religious date like Ashura. This contradicts what Majd and Nadia share with me previously, but ultimately, these young adults do not see everything. Perhaps these Christians go to different villages, Asma theorizes, but she has never seen a Christian attend a religious ceremony in Ghazieh. She holds the belief that Maghdouché residents do not visit during Muslim holidays, but she does not show any resentment. When I ask her why she believes Christians do not feel inspired to honor holidays like Ashura, she offers me a mature, understanding response:

Because everyone follows the path they're on. If I am Muslim; I don't go to Christian celebrations, I don't go to Church. So they also don't go to ours, they don't care. They didn't grow up on these beliefs, these teachings, with these exigencies; it doesn't match them. They don't have to do that. This is why they don't care to come to Ashura or anything like this. And also I don't reciprocate and feel that I need to participate in their events. I don't know their ideas so I don't meddle. But it is not because I don't like them or because I think they're following the wrong path and because they're wrong. I don't think their beliefs are unimportant. Each is right in their own beliefs. We all work together, and we are all good together. It does not make sense; so if I am a Christian I don't go to Muslim celebrations. They don't have to go there they didn't

grow on these teachings so they don't have to do these things. Their religions don't mandate these Muslim celebration so they don't have to go to them. All are right in their own path. They are not on the wrong path. We are all right.

Asma demonstrates an open understanding that every human is right in their beliefs.

She holds an appreciation for the Christians who honor their faith in different ways than she does, demonstrating her flexible understanding of spirituality. Interestingly, Asma is also a supporter of Hezbollah and in previous conversations has commented enthusiastically about the Islamic group, which reveals that she can be open-minded while also supporting the militia group. Asma proves that no matter how conservative she may be with religion, she still believes others have the right to practice their religions differently. Asma's justification that Christians "didn't grow on these teachings, so they don't have to do these things" reveals that she understands human connection to the Divine as non-monolithic. She embodies the religio-relative person who believes that other religions have the right to be practiced and humanizes those religious groups (Abu-Nimer, 2004, p. 497). There are multiple ways of exercising one's faith, she hints, and these vary according to one's religious upbringing. "We are all right," Asma concludes. This epitomizes respect for the religious neighbor. While some of Asma's peers from Maghdouché and Ghazieh sway more towards syncretism (emphasizing common elements of religious traditions) and transformation (altering one's understanding of religion through interacting with other religious individuals) according to Abu-Nimer et al.'s definitions (2007), Asma simply acknowledges differences between faiths while affirming the legitimacy of each. She values religious pluralism. Asma does not need to de-identify with Shia Islam, as Nadia does, to show that she is an accepting and open-minded person. She can claim her religious identity

with her whole being and simultaneously be respectful towards the religious neighbor. This raises an ambiguity that the West often overlooks in the immediate, reductionist categorization of Hezbollah supporters as fanatics.

There is an important distinction to be made, however, between Asma's perspective and that of her peers who participate in the religious ceremonies of their religious neighbors and invite other religious communities to their own religious events. Asma explicitly stresses that she does not care to go to Christian events, nor should Christians feel the need to come to Muslim ones. She establishes that people of these two communities do not need to participate in one another's celebrations, for there is little purpose to this. Certainly, this is not true to the experiences of other young people, like Rami who believes deeply in the interreligious participation of his "extended family" during religious times and spaces, but this is how Asma feels. Her perspective is of course completely justified and does not contend with other young adults' views. Rather, I understand that youth choose to act in ways that they believe expand their faiths and allow them to better connect with the Divine and one another. Unlike her peers, Asma does not see that the interreligious interaction in the religious space would add to her experience of her faith. While she recognizes all religious individuals are "right in their own path," she does not indicate that she believes that these paths need to cross and intertwine.

Using similar reasoning, Anaïs from Maghdouché offers justification for why some Muslims may not attend the Christian ceremonies and festivals in Maghdouché. She tells me that while some Christians come from outside Maghdouché to attend the

commemoration of Eid al Saydeh,²⁴ “of course the Muslims don’t come to our village because this day does not concern them, really.” Importantly, both Muslims and Christians alike in Lebanon consider Eid al Saydeh to be a national religious holiday. However, Anaïs interprets the holiday as irrelevant to Ghazieh villagers’ way of life and religious practice—which obscures the real appreciation many Muslim villagers have for this Eid. I do not believe Anaïs intends to exclude Muslims from Eid; rather, it seems that she may not have witnessed Muslims honoring this holiday. Perhaps she has simply not observed Muslims from Ghazieh visit the statue of the Virgin Mary in Maghdouché during this holiday. Perhaps she forgot that this is a national holiday for both Abrahamic communities. Or perhaps this is simply an example of limited knowledge about the Abrahamic neighbor’s tradition. I do not read any animosity or resentment in Anaïs’ voice. Indeed, she even adds that Muslims visit her village during many Christian holidays, although perhaps not for spiritual reasons:

There are plenty of times, like at Christmas, when people from Ghazieh and other Muslim villages do come to Maghdouché. They come to visit, but not to visit the church and the manger and all that has to do with our religion. They come to look at the decorations, it's like they walk around. They take pictures.

Anaïs recognizes the frequent visitation of Ghazieh residents on religious days, but hints at a lack of interest on their part to observe the religious aspects of the village. Anaïs interprets the visit on Christmas as limited to touristic reasons focused on the village’s aesthetics (which are indeed absolutely beautiful).

²⁴ Known as the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Elise confirms that she often notices visitors from Ghazieh coming to the statue of Maryam and the central church on sacred days like Sunday or Christmas, although she also underscores the visitors' curiosity to learn about these religious sites:

In the community we have seen Muslims who come to discover, look at, and appreciate the statue of Maryam we have here. They sit, they enjoy, they walk, they take some pictures; and even they ask about the statue. Not every time, but on some occasions when I go to church on Sunday I see Muslims. But especially during Christmas holidays, I will encounter Muslims from Ghazieh. I think they come because there are nice decorations, so they come to enjoy the site even more.

The fact that so many Muslim people spend time at the statue of the Virgin Mary (Maryam) and the church "to enjoy the site" and even ask questions about the statue is important, because it shows attention, appreciation, and commitment to learn about the other's culture, which is foundational to everyday peace between the village communities. Certainly, as many youth point out, the Virgin Mary is a figure for all religions. And while Elise does not always see Muslims from Ghazieh at her church every Sunday, she notices their consistent presence on major holidays like Christmas. Ghazieh members' casual visitation to the church indicates that these sites are open to all religious communities, not only Christians. These spaces have become shared spaces, where some people enter out of curiosity and where others enact their spirituality. Having myself spent many days in Maghdouché, I understand why so many are drawn to this space. It is absolutely beautiful. Even sitting under the statue of Maryam, I feel immense peace that I am certain attracts people from neighboring villages, including Ghazieh. In Chapter 6, I reveal more examples of Muslims from Ghazieh choosing to visit religious spaces like churches in Maghdouché not only for social or practical reasons, but also spiritual ones.

From this spiritual angle, a couple of Muslims from Ghazieh tell me about a joint event that occurred in Maghdouché a few years ago, during which Ghazieh and Maghdouché collaborated on a religious platform to bring villagers together on the religious axis. Mona describes this with excitement, remembering the event:

Once in the church of Maghdouché, they had an event, and we the Muslims, we came up to the church to celebrate Maryam and Nabi Mohammed. We came together, a joint celebration with both Muslims and Christians. Us Muslims, and the Christians of Maghdouché, we got along together very much.

Warda adds:

Twice, they did it in the Maghdouché church — there was Shia and Christians at the same time. Those years, the birthdays of the Prophet and Maryam lined together, and so the Christians and Muslims collaborated to do a joint celebration in the church. A lot of people from Ghazieh went up to Maghdouché. So it was something very beautiful. This was in 2016, 2017, I think. I don't remember exactly, to be honest.

I wish I could have attended this joint celebration to observe the ways in which both groups participate and honor one another's Holy figures. This celebration was made possible by the unique temporal alignment of both holidays in 2016 and 2017. The residents of Maghdouché use the Christian Calendar, whereas the residents of Ghazieh observe the Lunar Hijri Calendar to determine the specific holiday dates. Thus, there are years during which Christian holidays and Muslim holidays align on or around the same date. Warda and Mona refer to a joint event that honored both the Prophet Mohamad and the Virgin Mary, since that year the holidays lined up. In this example, Islam and Christianity appear to be quite compatible so long as their adherents are willing to accommodate one another and share the spiritual space. Because community members from both Maghdouché and Ghazieh organized this joint religious event, we can read a willingness and enthusiasm to collaborate in the religious sphere and include the other

in one's tradition. These communities are committed to bringing their members together, which underscores everyday peace in the religious setting. The Prophet Mohammad and the Virgin Mary are not two figures that contest one another—far from it—and so at this joint event both Muslims and Christians opened themselves to reconfiguring and harmonizing their holidays. In this way, holiday is a day of negotiation against strict sectarian boundaries, connecting religious groups together to create cross-village solidarity and spiritual unity.

Many of the Muslim youth in Ghazieh have visited Maghdouché's statue of the Virgin Mary at least a few times throughout their lives, particularly during Christmas as Anaïs mentions. Mona tells me that every year, she and her three daughters drive up to Maghdouché on the 25th of December to look at the decorations pinned to the homes and the big Christmas tree at the center of the village. While this can be interpreted as simply an outing to look at lights and ornaments, I find that there is a curiosity to observe how the religious neighbor participates in their tradition. Mona and her family do not visit the church, nor do they attend ceremonies for Christmas, but they engage by looking into the community, even if focused on the aesthetics of the tree and the colorful lights. The appreciation for the decorations is not superficial nor simplistic. Rather I interpret it as an appreciation for Maghdouché's culture. There is no hostility or perception that the Christians are following the wrong path. If this were the case, I assume Muslim villagers would not care to visit the Christian village. Instead, by visiting and spending the day in Maghdouché, the Shia of Ghazieh hold respect and interest in the Christian community's practices.

Because so many Muslims visit Maghdouché during Christmas, I become curious about whether any of the Christian youth from Maghdouché have visited religious spaces in Ghazieh. Juliette and Adèle both tell me bluntly that they have never visited a mosque in Ghazieh or anywhere else. Their tones of voices are neutral, neither excited nor regretful. I realize after sixteen interviews in Maghdouché that none of the other young adults have visited mosques in Ghazieh, but many have in other regions and countries. Blaise nods in appreciation at the topic:

When I went to Turkey, I visited a mosque. In Beirut, in Saida, in Ghazieh, I see the mosques but I haven't been inside. My parents have told me – although I don't know if it's right – that I can't enter if I'm not a Muslim here. But I am very drawn to history, to the Muslim culture. The sultans and stuff... how the Islamic religion started. I like it a lot. I am not a person of barriers. On the contrary, I appreciate acculturation.

Blaise shares his curiosity for his Abrahamic neighbors' religions, even revealing his interest in Islamic history and culture. His respect for the other religion, which is foundational to coexistence, manifests in his knowledge about Islamic history and his desire to learn more. He does not oppose visiting these religious spaces, for he has done so in a different country, but rather he has been told by others that the spaces are solely designed for Muslims in Lebanon. They are perceived as spaces of exclusion. Frankly, I am thrown off by Blaise's final word, "acculturation." Blaise says this word in French to me, *acculturation*, which has the same meaning in English. I wonder if he truly means that he appreciates assimilation, or if he is signaling to a cultural sharing or cultural universalizing. In any case, he pushes for the disintegration of barriers, whether these are invisible (in the form of knowledge, since he appreciates Islamic history) or literal and geographic (in his visiting the religious spaces rather than looking from outside).

Anaïs also mentions her visit to a mosque in Egypt. She explains:

I was on vacation with my friends and they asked us if we would like to visit the mosque and we agreed and left. The mosque in Charam el Sheikh, it is well-known. Before we got in we had to wear what they were wearing. So our whole body had to be covered. Hidden, even our hair. And so we respected their culture, we put on long clothing and a veil. For this reason they made us come back. It was beautiful. I like to visit these places and discover a new culture and their values.

Anaïs openly adapts to wearing culturally-appropriate clothing in the mosque, eager to experience the sacred site. Even though her Christian religion does not mandate it, Anaïs respects the Islamic tradition so she chooses to present herself in an inoffensive manner to gain access to this space. She negotiates her way of dress to acquire an experience related to another religion. Anaïs understands that to enter this environment in its sacred nature, she must submit to the environment's requirements, and she is willing to do so. This is open-mindedness in its rawest form. Anaïs does not close herself to the religious space because she must change her appearance. She does not feel hostility. And she does not sacrifice her religious beliefs to witness the other's, for nothing about the Christian faith bans her from visiting the Islamic space. The fact that she is eager to see this Islamic space reveals a curiosity similar to Blaise's. These well-intentioned, respectful curiosities are the seeds of everyday interreligious peace. Anaïs even describes the mosque as "beautiful" and longs to visit more of this kind of site to learn about the world. She imagines the Islamic space as something from which she can gain. She can learn from all religions, not only her own. In this sense, she can learn a lot from the adherents of those religions as well. Like her peers, she demonstrates a knowledge about her religious neighbor and a desire to be invited into the other's religious spaces as a means of understanding them.

In this chapter, I explore how youth exert their agency as non-sectarian actors to

render religion inclusive—just as youth reformulate social identities to foster cross-religious solidarity. I begin by uncovering young adults’ participation in their own village’s religious events and sites, through which I notice that youth demonstrate active decision-making over whether to personally participate during a religious holiday or religious space, and to what depth. Young adults from Ghazieh and Maghdouché choose the religious practices that offer them fulfillment, so that religion complements—not overwhelms—daily life. While many young adults commit to attending all religious holidays aligned with their religions and express eagerness to do so, others choose not to engage in certain holidays and spaces, whether due to inconvenience or a belief that it is unnecessary. For these young adults, the sociocultural expectation of practicing religion in a specific way does not have authority over their lives.

Additionally, I find that just as young adults re-imagine social identities to emphasize nationality, many young adults also reconstruct the religious holiday as a time and space of inclusion. Some young adults emphasize the extra-sectarian nature of spirituality, so that religious spaces and times become the religious sublime (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997) absent of sectarian divisions. This religious sublime flourishes with the interpersonal, interreligious collaboration. Cross-religious visitation by some young adults to one another’s religious sites or villages during religious holidays also demonstrate how sectarianism is resisted and everyday peacekeeping is reinforced with curiosity, appreciation, and respect for the religious neighbor. In this way, young adults also come to understand the other’s religious tradition through direct experience and observation. However, this is not always the case, as some young adults refrain from

visiting the neighbor's religious spaces. Even in this case, young adults show that it is not out of disrespect of the other's religion, but disinterest. They do not find it necessary to share or blend religious practices. In the following chapter, I present the interreligious relationship between young people from Maghdouché and Ghazieh, exploring the nuances of their daily interactions to better understand how youth relate to one another and connect on a daily basis across religious borders.

Chapter 6: Maghdouché-Ghazieh Intercommunal Interactions & the

Daily Interreligious Relationship

Once there was a five-year-old girl who lived in Ghazieh. She woke up every day to the sound of her parents praying. To get to her Islamic school, she walked through the village's narrow streets and passed by women in hijabs and burqas. Her instructor taught her to memorize passages of the Qur'an in addition to the alphabet and numbers. This was the young girl's daily rhythm. Until one day, while she was braiding friendship bracelets at recess, she heard one of her friends talk about an Anna and how much she loved this Anna. What is an Anna? Ashamed she didn't know this word, she held it in her mind, repeating Anna over and over until she came home that evening and asked her mother: "What is an Anna? I've never heard this word in my entire life."

— Raimy's diary on 07/15/2021

A young woman in Ghazieh tells me the story excerpted above about her friend's daughter. It is important. As you may have guessed, the five-year-old girl I describe in the vignette has never been exposed to the Western name Anna, which in Lebanon is a name given to children in Christian communities, whereas most Muslims give their children Qur'anic names. We have to consider the social consequences of sectarianism and religious segregation not only on the government, but on people's day-to-day lives. What does it mean for a young Muslim girl to not recognize a common Christian name? Certainly, we can point to her conservative upbringing, since her parents may not have many Christian friends, to her school where her classmates are Muslim, and to her young age, since she has not been able to visit other villages on her own and meet friends at the beach and at youth clubs. During my interviews, none of the young adults—including those whose childhoods were submerged in religiously-conservative norms—tell me that they have a life experience completely isolated from other religious communities. The majority of youth in Maghdouché and Ghazieh have

grown up visiting neighboring Christian and Muslim villages, and most have formulated friendships with people from those villages.

Alajami (2016) argues that coexistence between Muslims and people of other religions begins with mutual trust, respect, and desire to cooperate with humanity for the good in areas of common interest. To support stable peace, a positive attitude toward understanding and interacting among all world religions is crucial today (Naz et al., 2018). While previous efforts have centered on eliminating differences shaped by religions through the imposition of a uniform religious structure, as expanded on in Seligman et al. (2015)'s analysis of the aestheticization of difference, this is not imperative. As the youth in Ghazieh and Maghdouché prove in their interreligious relationships, religious differences and unique identities do not need to be eliminated to establish a healthy society of peaceful relations.

This lengthy chapter interprets the cross-village visitations, interreligious interactions, and intercommunal relationships between the youth of Ghazieh and Maghdouché. I divide this chapter into two main parts, although they are deeply interrelated and inform one another. Part I considers the relationships between young adults of different religious identities, including the circumstances that prompt interreligious, inter-village interactions and relationships. I contemplate both moments of coexistence and harmony and moments of tension inherent to interpersonal relationships. In Part II, I turn to focus on young adults' comfort within the other village, utilizing cross-religious visitations and free movement between villages as lenses through which to comprehend the inter-village relationship. As I do in Part I, I aim to acknowledge both the inter-village cohesion and the inter-village distrust.

Part I: The Interreligious Relationship

People of different religions and cultures live side by side in almost every part of the world, and most of us have overlapping identities which unite us with very different groups. We can love what we are, without hating what and who we are not. We can thrive in our own tradition, even as we learn from others, and come to respect their teachings.

— Kofi Annan, 2001 during Nobel Lecture

We must have acquaintances and friends of different religions so that they can learn about us and we can learn about them.

— Jacques, 2021 in Maghdouché

Daily Cross-Religious Encounters & Friendships with the Religious Neighbor

As a whole, the vast majority of young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché engage in interreligious relationships and formulate interreligious friendships, induced by shared educational spaces, work, sports, and virtual platforms. Throughout our conversations, most highlight the perceived normality of these relationships. For instance, Laurent from Maghdouché tells me:

I know a lot of people of different religions! I have a lot of Muslim friends; I have a lot of Muslim friends from Ghazieh. I met them at school, in the village, I meet them through people... I don't care what my friends' religions are, whether they are Muslim or Christian or Druze. My friend Ahmad, for example, he is Muslim and I feel closest to him out of all the people, truly.

Laurent skims through different methods of forming his interreligious relationships, which start organically in his village, through mutual friends, or at school (I expand on the common interreligious attendance at schools in Part II). As if anticipating my next question, he explicitly states that he does not care about his friends' religious identities. It is unclear whether his friend Ahmad to whom he feels closest "out of all the people" lives in Ghazieh or another Muslim village, but regardless, this Christian-Muslim

relationship epitomizes the friendships that surpass village and religious identity—and that ground everyday peace between the villages’ young adults. The breadth of types of friendships renders them a daily aspect of life, occupying the academic and extracurricular spheres. Laurent’s openness to discuss his friendship with Ahmad also demonstrates its casual nature in his mind. He does not show any reservedness, thus deconstructing any presupposed taboos in Lebanon’s sectarian context.

Corentin, also a Christian man from Maghdouché, tells me:

In my work I meet people of all religions. A lot of them are from Ghazieh. I have a lot of Muslim friends and they are very friendly and are like brothers to me, since we were young we have known one another. We visited one another a lot and we have gone out and celebrated with one another. We talk every day. Even if they are from other religions, the religious identity doesn’t matter to me—it won’t differentiate between us. This is Lebanon.

Corentin holds a similar perspective to Laurent that religious identity does not matter in his friendships. Work serves as a space within which he meets his neighbors. But these friendships clearly extend beyond the work space and become daily parts of his life, which hints at Corentin’s active effort to maintain the relationships and turn them into central friendships. There exists a genuine, daily connection with, as well as a social dependency on, these friends of different religions with whom he experiences and celebrates life. I find it particularly important that Corentin verbalizes that religious identity does not differentiate himself from his Muslim friends. He compares his friends to “brothers,” similarly to Kaamil, his male peer in Ghazieh, who claims “we are like siblings of different religions” when referring to his Christian friends. Not only do these young men from Maghdouché and Ghazieh cross divides in their everyday peace (Yoshizawa & Kusaka, 2020), they tear those barriers apart by blurring differences.

Reconstruing the interreligious relationship into an interreligious brotherhood, Corentin

and Kaamil enforce a kinship with the religious neighbor, drawing them closer into their lives in the process of slashing sectarian barriers. Furthermore, Corentin justifies his numerous interreligious relationships with the logic that “this is Lebanon.” I wonder whether Corentin is hinting specifically at Lebanon’s eighteen officially-recognized religions all living within a small country, meaning that the country must be stitched together with interreligious relationships, contrary to the sectarian conception of religious communities’ isolation from one another. Or whether Corentin suggests, as Blaise does in Chapter 3, that the Lebanese identity comes first, which is why the religious identity does not isolate people from one another. By accentuating “this is Lebanon,” Corentin dissolves competing labels and centers in on the nation.

When I meet Rami from Ghazieh, he immediately and very eagerly tells me about his Catholic best friend who he met and bonded with on his first day of university. “I just love being friends with this guy,” Rami tells me, showing me pictures on his phone of him and his “buddy.” Some of the pictures are taken in Maghdouché, while others are taken in Ghazieh. The two men wear similar dark jeans and button-up short-sleeve shirts, smoking hookah at the Corniche in some pictures, or in a more artistic one, sitting in a Hyundai dramatically looking over the sunset. At his university, Rami has met many friends of different religions, including many young men from Maghdouché, so he visits the hilled village almost every day to hang out, smoke hookah, and drink with them. Rami emphasizes respect as a foundational component of his friendships, coupled with a deep understanding and desire to see his friends flourish:

Being Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jew, being anything, well it doesn’t affect my relationship with a friend, let’s put it this way. If we go into details about Christianity, well first of all, it’s a mutual relationship built off of respect. I respect them, I respect everything that they do and

believe in. Not only respect, but understand, and encourage them on weak points. I love to see my friends in strong positions, and if they keep questioning their faith and what they belong to, no matter what their religion is, I keep supporting them and direct them into a right way from a Christian perspective, because that is their religious basics and that is what makes them stronger to get them through this life.

Rami's feelings for his Christians friends surpass politeness and thoughtfulness; he feels deep love. Part of his love is his encouragement to challenge his friends "on weak points" so that they are directed into a "right way from a Christian perspective." This is a pure act of care. Rami, who has strong faith as a Shia, does not attempt to alter the perspectives of those he has befriended and trusted. Rather, he encourages them to be the best versions of themselves as Christians. His knowledge about the other's religion equips him to empower them from the context of their spiritual background. Rami displays a deep fraternal connection with these friends, no matter their village and religious backgrounds.

As Rami explains to me (in Chapter 3), religion is a "tool" that defines and facilitates the relationship between a human and God. "Without faith, there is no hope," Rami tells me, and "without hope, there is no happiness in the first place." From this perspective, supporting his Christian friends from a Christian lens and with the Christian "religious basics" is a way for Rami to nurture his friends' hope in their life and community. He cares for their wellbeing. While he is from a Muslim community, he focuses not on perpetuating Muslim teachings, but on Christian ones. This reveals an intuitive, fluid understanding of the other's religion that he is able to connect with and enact in his close relationships. Rami wishes for his friends to be happy, and so he supports them by adapting to their religious lenses, which he sees as tools for happiness. Just as he invites his "extended family" to Islamic events in Ghazieh, he also immerses

himself in the Christian perspective. I find that Rami's words hint at a universal faith, a mother culture (Kanafani-Zahar, 2000) in which the two Abrahamic variants (Christianity and Islam) share the same root. No matter the types of religious tools used to strengthen one's faith, Rami insinuates that faith is faith. It will enable one to be happy in this lifetime, no matter whether one employs Christian or Muslim teachings to enact their faith. Rami understands this, and more importantly, manifests this philosophy in his tender treatment of his friends from different religious backgrounds.

It is tempting to exceptionalize the peaceful nature of these interreligious relationships between the young residents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché. After all, we tend to divide the world into categories of "us" and "them," which naturally often entail prejudiced views against members of other groups. This is facilitated by the alienation of the other using constructed stereotypes to exaggerate differences with the "them" and amplify similarities amongst the "us" (Cammett, 2019). In Lebanese society, these constructed stereotypes usually run along sectarian divides to emphasize differences between Muslims and Christians, or Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. Yet most young adults like Laurent and Rami speak about their religious neighbors with loving, fraternal language. Yet these young adults do not seem to perceive their interreligious relationships as atypical. When discussing their relationships, most youth speak in a casual tone, as if it were silly for me to inquire about their friendships that seem so mundane to them. These interreligious friendships are normal and even integral to life in Southern Lebanon. They certainly play a foundational role in everyday coexistence among Muslims and Christians but also allow young adults to surpass basic coexistence and attain proximity and intimacy with their religious neighbors.

Amira, the woman from Ghazieh who removed the hijab as a teenager, exhibits the facility with which she bonds with people of different religions.

Generally I have friends who are Shia, Sunnah, and Christian. I used to have Druze friends [...] In terms of my closest friends, and I have four or five Christian friends who I am very, very close with. But in my school, we had many different religious groups, so I became friends with all different kinds, but I don't go out with all of them. With my close Christian friends, we *ushar*²⁵ in their houses up in Maghdouché and we sit and talk. Or we play cards. Or we smoke hookah.²⁶ Or we go meet outside at a café. It's normal between me and my friends of other religions. We drink coffee. We don't talk about religion with one another. We don't talk about this kind of thing, ever. We also don't talk about politics.

While she has befriended people from various religious communities including her own, Amira feels most connected to a group of Christians from Maghdouché. Their activities are standard in the Lebanese context. It is very common for both male and female friends to stay up late with friends (to *ushar*), play cards, and smoke hookah on a daily basis. Since Amira is a less-conservative member of Ghazieh, she has had more opportunities to meet youth of other religions at her non-Islamic school. Her friendships blossom beyond the school space, as Amira actively visits Maghdouché about twice a week to connect to the people with whom she feels close. It is notable that she and her friends do not focus on religion, nor on politics, which de-sectarianizes and de-politicizes her friendships. I do not see this as a “coping mechanism” to avoid controversial subjects for the sake of peace (Mac Ginty, 2014). Given her disinterested tone as she dismisses these topics, I sense that Amira views these potentially inflammatory topics as irrelevant to her friendships rather than socially destructive. Her friendships are, at their core, apolitical.

²⁵ To stay up late

²⁶ Water pipes used to smoke tobacco

Kaamil, who like Amira is from Ghazieh, shares a similar routine of connecting with his friends from Maghdouché:

I go to Maghdouché every day. I go to my friends' homes. We sit, we play cards, like that... we *ushar*. I met these friends through mutual friends from school, for instance. These friends also always come down to see me in Ghazieh, all the time. Of course I also see a lot of Christians from Maghdouché in Ghazieh; they come down here a lot. It's *ahde*.

Kaamil and his friends engage in a mutual visitation as they each go to the other's village to maintain their friendships. Their relationships are relaxed, as both parties travel fluidly between villages. To *ushar* quickly becomes a main theme appearing in the descriptions youth offer me when discussing their bonds with their religious neighbors. As they *ushar* and stay up late to connect with their friends, young adults utilize the evening as a time to nurture their relationships. These evening hangouts are frequent among both men and women, as both Amira and Kaamil engage in this social practice.

When describing their friends of other religious identities, I notice that many young adults employ the word *ahde*²⁷ to emphasize that they do not consider these friendships to be particularly unique. Almost every young adult I interview who has friends in the other religious community insists that their interreligious, inter-village relationships are *ahde*. Liberally employing the term *ahde*, Camille expresses enthusiasm about spending time with her Muslim friends. After telling me about her best friend who is a Shia woman in Ghazieh, Camille admits "It's *ahde*! I actually have more friends outside of my religious group than my own. It's a normal thing, a normal occurrence. *Ahde!*" She gushes:

²⁷ Normal, casual, fine

The friendship with them is so nice, because... personally, I don't discriminate. It's not like "oh, she's Muslim so I won't talk to her or go down to her." Actually, it's the opposite. It's soooo nice, it's so so nice. And they are truly really good people. And I don't even notice a difference between us. If I had a Christian friend and a Muslim friend, I don't feel that I should behave better with the Christian friend than the Muslim one. No, it's normal. I forget that they are of a different religions. Really, my best friend is Muslim and I go to her house a lot and she comes up to my house a lot.

Camille's interreligious friendships offer her joy. She discusses the absence of religious discrimination between her and her friends, erasing the possibility that religious identity determines a friend's importance. The religious identity does not guarantee or detract from the worth of a friendship, nor does the religious identity influence the way she interacts with a friend. It is interesting, although perhaps coincidental, that Camille has more friends outside of her religious group than from within her own. Perhaps she simply has met more Muslim friends who share her values than the Christians she has met. She clearly derives satisfaction from her friendships with people of different religions because these friends are "really good people" with whom she has bonded and gotten attached.

In Ghazieh, one cultural barrier that interrupts the interreligious relationship is gender. Although friendships between young men and women in Maghdouché are relatively common, friendships between young men and women are rarer in Ghazieh, considering that most villagers in Ghazieh are conservative and such friendships are considered *haram*. During my visit, Nadia tells me that she desires to spend time face-to-face with a young man from Ghazieh and walk by the beach with him, but she is hesitant to do so because "people talk," especially since so many of her relatives work close to the beach. Instead, Nadia chooses to text this young man through WhatsApp, forming an online relationship to resist the unspoken restrictions placed around her.

This is very common amongst young adults in Ghazieh who are less religiously-conservative than their parents and desire to interact with people of different genders and villages without facing judgement.

Léa from Maghdouché crosses this Ghazieh-based gender barrier in her close friendship with a Shia man from the Muslim village:

I know a guy from Ghazieh, we go to restaurants, we go shopping, we go to the beach, we do everything together. We have a very close relationship. I have a lot of close friends who are girls from Ghazieh, and we meet in school but we don't go out a lot. It's not like with my very, very close friend who is the boy from Ghazieh.

This friendship between Léa and the young man from Ghazieh is rare in the context of Southern Lebanon, particularly since the two go to the beach which is technically in Ghazieh and avoided by people like Nadia when interacting with people of the opposite gender. While most young adults in my research cross religious barriers by establishing relationships with their village neighbors, I find that the majority befriend individuals of the same gender. In fact, Léa's open friendship with the young man from Ghazieh is the sole example of a Ghazieh-Maghdouché male-female friendship explicitly shared during my thirty-three interviews. While Léa has female friends from Ghazieh, she does not engage with them outside of the school context and does not invest in these relationships. Rather, her closest friend from the Muslim community is a man, not a woman—which exemplifies a unique manifestation of the interreligious relationship defying the status quo and blurring previously-set social and cultural boundaries.

Jaafar also defies the status quo in his interreligious interactions, and he specifically shares an example of an interreligious relationship he recently established that challenges generational divisions, rather than gender divisions. Although he is a young Muslim from Ghazieh, Jaafar attended a Catholic high school in Maghdouché. It

is not rare for parents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché to enroll their children in a school located in the other religious community, which shows an openness on the parents' part as they expect their children to be instructed and befriended by people of other religious identities. Since he went to Maghdouché every school day throughout his adolescence, Jaafar made a lot of Christians friends with whom he remains connected. He shares the following experience with me concerning his most recent visit to Maghdouché:

Actually, I went last weekend to Maghdouché to hang out with friends and I was going back home and I saw an old Christian guy on his porch. He invited me to drink coffee with him. He was so nice. He told me that politicians are using most of us for their own benefits. He said that, and he said that they are exploiting our religions under the guise of “we are Muslims” and “we are Christians.” Under those titles, they are controlling us and trying to make us afraid of one another. And actually I enjoyed talking to him SO much. There was no conflict, nothing, that happened. We really enjoyed it.

Unlike Amira who attempts to avoid political conversations with her friends, Jaafar engages in them openly with an elderly individual he meets for the first time in Maghdouché. The randomness of the situation may seem a little odd to a Western audience considering that Jaafar did not previously know this man, but this kind of invitation is quite common in Southern Lebanon, where generosity flows abundantly from homes. Jaafar describes himself, a Muslim man, and a newly-befriended Christian man sitting together and talking about politicians' attempts to manipulate religion to spur sectarian divisions. By accepting a stranger's invitation to drink coffee and engage in a conversation that challenges mainstream politically-infused narratives, Jaafar crosses the boundary placed between strangers. The two men surpass identity markers of religion, village, and age. They defy the broader contexts that many news outlets place upon these religious groups with buzzwords like “religious tensions” and “sectarian clashes.” I propose that this is why so many young adults resist the identities

of being “religious people” (as I describe in Chapter 3), for to accept “religious” as a primary identity over nationality may mean ingesting and reproducing the “we are Muslims” and “we are Christian” sectarian identity narratives adopted by politicians that have historically resulted in violence. Through his daily actions, such as attending a Catholic high school and visiting friends in Maghdouché, in addition to opening himself to new conversations and relationships with religious neighbors such as the elderly Catholic man, Jaafar supports and reinforces everyday peace between Maghdouché and Ghazieh. He befriends a stranger, which in itself is a form of resistance against the pervasive fear-based narratives politicians spread as a means of control. And, Jaafar says, he and his new friend “really enjoyed” this connection.

Importantly, today’s young adults—members of the postwar generation—have access to new platforms that were unavailable decades ago to their parents and grandparents. Through virtual spaces such as social media and online class, youth formulate friendships with people from other communities. Anaïs, a young woman from Maghdouché, mentions that her university courses have all been online this past year because of the coronavirus pandemic, which means that travel is no longer a barrier to education (although electricity shortages obstruct access to education). Consequently, Anaïs meets people from more villages, and thus perhaps from more religious backgrounds. However, she also explains that because school is virtually-based, it is harder to decipher her classmates’ religions:

I don’t really think there are people of different religions in my current class, but the truth is... I don’t really know what their religions are! We are online, so it’s harder to tell, and honestly we are at a point where we don’t ask each other these kinds of questions.

The virtual setting makes religious identity more ambiguous, obscuring the lines between Maghdouché and Ghazieh, between Christian and Muslim. This creates a neutral space, in which social identity is less clear, and so sectarian divisions disintegrate as students connect with the purpose of learning. Anaïs defines the “point” she is at with her peers: “a point where we don’t ask each other these kinds of questions [about religion].” Religious identity seems to be irrelevant for these young adults in the school space. The online platform is not what sparked this irrelevance; Anaïs is implying that the postwar generation has reached a “point” different to their parents, one that rejects the absorption with religious identity and label. This is understandable, considering the social, economic, and political challenges her generation faces.

The online platform has also enabled Fatima to meet people of different religions without leaving her village. She has always attended Islamic institutions, including Shia Islamic schools, so Fatima tells me that she would not have normally met people of different religious identities in her everyday life. The virtual world of both social media and online school has gained momentum since the start of the pandemic and translates Lebanon into a virtual setting. Fatima mentions that, particularly during Lebanon’s fuel shortages that impede cross-village visitations, youth can connect with friends of different religious identities via the online platform. These youth can now easily learn about the world beyond their villages, a resource that the war generation never had during their adolescence. Furthermore, by taking online university courses, Fatima meets Christian friends online. She confirms, “my relationship with the Christians in my classes is very, very good.”

On the other hand, some young adults experience discrimination in their interpersonal encounters and daily interactions. Asma, who is very religiously-conservative and who also supports the Islamic militant group Hezbollah, tells me frankly that she is not friends with any woman or man from Maghdouché. I cannot explain this solely by pointing to her conservative religious upbringing, for it may just be coincidental that she has never befriended a person of the Christian faith. Still, when I ask her to tell me more, she points specifically to the following tense relationship between her cousin and her cousin's Christian friends from Maghdouché:

My cousin has some Christian friends from all over. Like from Maghdouché. I don't. But my cousin told me that her Christian friends, some of them, look at her in a weird way because she wears the hijab. They see it with disdain. Or some Christian acquaintances choose not to talk to her. My cousin has made Christian friends, and some of them she does not like, but others yes she likes others a lot.

Although Asma does not have Christian friends, she elaborates on her cousin's experience of being judged and discriminated against in her friendships because of her way of dress. This opens Asma to understanding that some Christian individuals may, in some cases, discriminate against her because of her religious practice. Asma also wears the hijab, so her cousin's story may spark the thought that she herself may also be judged, although Asma does not verbally articulate this possibility. Still, this demonstrates a complexity to the interreligious relationship between Shia and Catholics in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, as prejudice and intolerance are realities (as they are in most social contexts globally). However, Asma is still eager to tell me about her experiences meeting a couple of Christian people throughout her life, including the secretary at her father's electric utility company, which reveals that her cousin's story has not sparked a distrust in Christians altogether:

When I met her, I learned about her life. I like her a lot, and she really loves Shias and Muslims and al-Sayyid Hassan. And she.. Her sister was Christian, who married a Shia. She told me about how much she loved Shia, she said even her sister was with a Shia.

Asma genuinely likes this secretary, but she does not consider her to be a friend and has not maintained close relations with her. Curiously, Asma insists on how this Christian secretary “loves Shias and Muslims and al-Sayyed Hassan.” Al-Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, current leader of Hezbollah, is a Lebanese cleric and political leader who has been condemned by many Western countries and many Christians in Lebanon for being a terrorist leader. However, it is not uncommon for Christian communities in Southern Lebanon to support Hezbollah because the group offers protection throughout the South (Cambanis, 2010). I sense that it is important for Asma to feel that the Christian secretary supports Islam and Hezbollah. She insists that the Christian secretary’s sister married a Shia and that the secretary herself supports the Islamic political-militia group. In these ways, Asma ties the secretary to Shia Islam, perhaps as a means of bridging differences and contextualizing the Christian woman within her own religion. Asma aims to foster a bond between them—although to foster such a connection, she makes an effort to portray the woman as someone specifically on her political and religious sides. Asma seems to find it necessary for the Christian woman to be part of her ideology and community. At the same time, Asma does not deny the woman her Christian religion or speak negatively about it, nor does she discriminate against her on the basis of her Christian religion.

In fact, Asma demonstrates knowledge about the Christian religion and her neighbors’ practices:

I know about Christmas but I don't know a lot specifically. I know on the New Year, they set up a Christmas tree. I know Papa Noel.²⁸ I know how they pray. I know that they go to Church and they see a priest; I know how they practice their religions. I know how they fast. I know that in Christianity, there is something called Orthodox... and there is something else... Um, there are different sects. Like for us, there is Shia and Sunnah, so I know that they have Orthodox, Catholic... They don't all do the same thing. Like some Orthodox fast during the day, others don't fast and say it's not required. This is what I have heard, but I don't know if it is right. So they have fasting. But they don't fast all day like we do, since Muslims fast all day; they fast until twelve on the things they dislike; like if they like chocolate, they will give it up. And I know that they have sacred texts like the Qur'an.

I see Asma's enthusiasm to share her knowledge about Christians' practices. Despite not having close Christian friends, she is not unlike Rami, who has utilized his knowledge of Christianity to support his Christian friends. Asma too is open-minded and does not reject the religious others' values and perspectives. Notably, Asma does not find Christianity to oppose Islam, since she attempts to compare both religions by verbalizing similar elements, such as fasting practices and the existence of different sectarian branches. Coexistence requires a knowledge about the other group (Messarra, 2021), which is what Asma shows. She does not personally know many Christians, but she observes their rituals and customs, and is capable of connecting these to her own.

When I remark that she knows a lot about Christianity, Asma laughs:

Yes, I love to hear, I love to know some details; like how their life is, compared to our life. But this isn't wrong, to know what their life is like. This way, I get to know about them... I learned about these practices from hearing people's stories. I like to learn their customs.

Asma emphasizes her curiosity to know more about Christians. She even tells me that by hearing their stories, "I get to know about them." She justifies her curiosities by saying, "it isn't wrong, to know what their life is like." Her desire to learn about

²⁸ Santa Clause

Christianity is not at odds with her Shia faith. There is no question that she can maintain a deep faith while also opening herself to others' different practices.

Asma's appreciation for the other's way of life reminds me of one of the stories Mona shares in her kitchen, with her young girls twirling around me. She reminisces:

Once, among some university friends, we had a picnic in Maghdouché. The Christian friends brought meat from Ghazieh. As Muslims, we do not eat meat from Maghdouché because it is not cut in a halal way. We don't eat their meat. But they are able to eat our meat. And these Christian friends knew this, so they told us "Come, come up to Maghdouché and have a picnic with us. We got meat from Ghazieh so you can eat too." They know our customs and practices.

This example demonstrates a knowledge about the religious neighbors' practices that supports interreligious coexistence. Shia only eat *halal* meat, which is obtained by following a specific ritual when killing the animal, for which the animal's head is turned towards the direction of Qibla. To render the meat *halal*, the butcher pronounces specific phrases of the Islamic Basmalah and Takbir. In order for the Shia to participate in the meal, the Catholics of Maghdouché must provide *halal* meat, which Mona's Christian friends do to incorporate her into the event. This is beyond politeness and is done with the desire of bringing people together through food. In the process, they implement the necessary measures to allow this interreligious meal-sharing to happen. This circumstance reminds us of Kanafani-Zahar's (1997) research in the mountains of Lebanon, where Shia participate in a Maronite ceremony because the Maronites accept to sacrifice their sheep in a *halal* way. This interreligious compromise is central to the interreligious bonding in Lebanon.

Mona's friends in Maghdouché transform the picnic into an inclusionary space when it could have easily been made an exclusionary one. Honoring, respecting, and appreciating the other religious group is rooted in knowledge of the other's way of life.

The Christians in Maghdouché understood the Shia group's rituals and were eager to adapt to them in order to enjoy their company. While the people of Maghdouché themselves did not kill the animal in the way required by the Shia, they went to Ghazieh to buy the licit meat. Notably, while Kanafani-Zahar (1997) analyzes a religious ceremony during which the sacrifice is made, Mona refers to a casual hangout on a non-holiday. However, the same social context applies and demonstrates that adaptations are made to ensure the inclusion of the religious other in an activity. By engaging in this interreligious picnic, neither group disobeys the rules of their religion. Even though the Christians are not mandated by their religions to consume the meat in its *halal* form, they open to the Islamic ritual so that the Shia may participate in their activities.

I end this section with the following excerpts that Mona shares with me during our interview:

I used to have a Christian maid from Ethiopia named Sarah. My Sunni colleagues were in disbelief, because I let my maid see me without the veil. They told me, "Oh, how can your Christian maid see you without the hijab? It's *haram*!" They believed that a Christian mustn't see you without the hijab, even though we were both women. I told the colleague, "but God made us the same way, as two women. What does our religion matter? She is a woman, like me." But they said that no, I mustn't even give Sarah my hand to shake. The Sunni are good people, but they think in wrong ways. Religion isn't like this. The sunnah also say that if they kill us, the Shia, they will go to heaven. All the people, not only Lebanon. The maid, Sarah, told me that in Ethiopia the Sunni believe that if they kill Christians they will go to heaven. But here they say that if they kill Shia they will go to heaven. They think they are right and we are wrong. But we don't say this. We believe that all people are right and that Allah will judge. Like now, I don't think that Christians will go to hell. They will go to heaven. But no, we appreciate all religions. This is why I take Sarah to the church in Maghdouché on Sundays, so that she can practice her religion. God made her.

In this case, Mona shares an example of the interreligious relationship between employer and maid, where power dynamics are present but where religion does not

seem to be instrumentalized as a justification to exploit her other and limit their religious practices. Mona counters the sectarian narratives of fear and exclusion that her Sunni Muslim colleagues propagate. I will avoid a discussion about the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Lebanon and instead focus on Mona's interpretation of religion. Mona does not stop her maid, Sarah, from attending mass and practicing her religion in a manner deemed religiously-correct. On the contrary, Mona ensures that her maid Sarah goes to church and actually drives her herself to Maghdouché on Sunday. Mona sees her body and her maid's as the same, as she tells her colleague, "God made us the same way, as two women. What does our religion matter? She is a woman, like me." With these words, Mona surpasses religious identity to return to female identity, to the woman's body. She directly points to God as Creator of both her body and her maid's: the same Divine hand produced the Muslim and the Christian. Mona, who wears the veil and prays five times a day and sympathizes with Hezbollah, sees herself as very similar to the Christian woman. She insists the Christians "will go to heaven," which demonstrates her open mind that opposes that of her colleagues'. She is not a woman with fundamentalist beliefs. She wholeheartedly accepts and values religious pluralism (Abu Nimer et al., 2007), affirming the legitimacy of both Islam and Christianity. The fact that Mona ends the excerpt by reaffirming "God made her," insinuates that *because* her maid was created by God, she has respect for her. Mona has deep faith, so whatever He makes, Mona appreciates and sees with light. Mona conceptualizes the Divine as a force for all humans, honored in different ways through different religious traditions.

Mona expands:

It is really beautiful to not solely think about religion with people. Think about their character. Their religion is between them and Allah. Don't think that the most religious is the "right one." Allah doesn't want you to be constantly praying and fasting and only doing that to the extreme. Allah wants you to be good with people, to help people. Helping others and loving people is more than just praying and fasting on your own. If all people thought this way, it would take away the strict rules. We would realize that there is one Allah for all of us, and we all honor and love Him in different ways. It's a shame people think that they are the ones who are always right and that the others are wrong. But no, the Christians are also right in their practices. And they will go to heaven. And maybe before us. We don't know.

Like her peers, Mona does not see Allah as a figure of exclusion. She imagines the Divine in relation to ethics, more so than to religious practices like praying and fasting. While she is a strict Muslim who follows the Islamic tradition carefully, Mona recognizes the plurality of paths to do "what is right" and she honors that plurality in her comment that Christians may even go to heaven "before us." There is no certainty. She is humble in her acceptance that no answer is perfect, in any religion, including hers. Faith is not a monolithic, duplicable path that must be followed by all human beings. Faith manifests differently in the various traditions, enabling humans to honor God in different ways. I end with Mona's voice because it emanates maturity, open-mindedness, and love for her Abrahamic neighbors.

Mona exemplifies the genuine commitment to the religious neighbor that many other young adults of the postwar generation demonstrate in this chapter. Although a few of Mona's peers do not have direct experience with the interreligious friendship, all young adults with whom I speak in Maghdouché and Ghazieh reveal their appreciation for religious pluralism and commitment to combat sectarian barriers politicizing the interreligious relationship to varying degrees. Many showcase a knowledge about the

religious other's way of life that extends beyond politeness and manifests as genuine understanding, which is foundational for the villages' coexistence. Because of this appreciation for their neighbors, most young adults emphasize that they do not choose their friends based upon their religions and that they do not care about the religious affiliations of these friends. Most show genuine love for their neighbors, which some demonstrate with their daily visitations to their friends' homes in the other village, and which others demonstrate by learning about the other's religion to better support them.

Conflict Between Youth of Both Villages: Alcohol & Harassment

Despite the stable and ongoing interreligious relationships and friendships that ground everyday peace in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, recent events have sparked resentment and hostility between villages. While these may not threaten the foundational layer of interreligious coexistence between the villages' youth, it does fuel distrust, wariness, and hurt among some young adults and has real impacts on their perspective of the religious neighbor. Almost all Christian young women in Maghdouché whom I interview articulate a very specific issue that occasionally emerges and explodes into conflict among youth. I am referring to the verbal, and sometimes physical, harassment of the young women in Maghdouché by the young men of Ghazieh. This harassment often leads young men of Maghdouché to get involved and confront the men from Ghazieh to protect the young women, who are their sisters, friends, and girlfriends. Here, I elaborate on this issue with an intersectional lens grounded in the nuances of the village contexts, and also connect this issue of harassment to other occasions of disrespect felt by Maghdouché's villagers. This

problem is not religious in nature, but as I show in this chapter, it risks taking on a sectarian form.

Concerning the harassment of Maghdouché's young women, the social and cultural context is pertinent. There is no alcohol in Ghazieh, as it is prohibited by the Muslim leaders of the village for being *haram*, so many young men from the Muslim village visit Maghdouché to drink. Laurent tells me that most of his male friends from Ghazieh drive to Maghdouché to drink alcohol. Unfortunately, many young adults from Maghdouché claim that these young men from Ghazieh often get drunk, sometimes extremely drunk, during their visits and proceed to act in inappropriate ways. Young women like Elise, Adèle, and Léa list various ways these men from Ghazieh harass them and their friends. For instance, they flirt with women who wear shorts and tank tops, since the men are not accustomed to seeing women dressed in this manner in their village. Sometimes these young men initiate physical contact, which spurs drama and escalates into the young men of Maghdouché intervening to defend their sisters and female friends. Hence, these conflicts ultimately turn into a battle between the men of both villages.

I offer Elise's rendition of the conflict:

It's not a problem with people dating between villages. The problem is that, here the teenage girls in Maghdouché, because they are Christians, they wear as they wish. And a lot of the Muslim boys in Ghazieh, those who I consider to be bad, they think in strange ways. They come up often to Maghdouché and will get drunk. They want to get to know those girls who dress in ways they don't see in their own village. Problems emerge, ugly problems. There are many girls from Maghdouché who tell their friends that boys from Ghazieh do ugly things to them. Ugh... so these problems emerge. This happens often.

Elise is clearly disturbed by the men's harassment, considering these men "to be bad."

These frequent experiences shape Elise's perception of the young men in Ghazieh, as

she believes many treat her peers badly. Interestingly, she recognizes that the cultural norms of one village influence the way in which its villagers think and act. Because the men from Ghazieh are not accustomed to seeing women dressed in revealing clothing in their own village, Elise argues that they think in “strange ways” when they see women dressed this way. Still, she does not blame the religion of these young men for their behavior; rather, she seems to understand the nuances of the situation. This is not unlike Yoshizawa and Kusaka’s (2020) analysis of everyday peace in Southern Philippines, in which Christian women do not blame Islam for their husbands’ unfaithfulness, but instead blame the patriarchal culture (p. 69). Elise does not generalize the men’s actions to symbolize Islam, but she does hold these men accountable in her narrative, which reveals her maturity. Reports of this harassment are spread by word of mouth between the young women of Maghdouché, which explains why all the young Christian women to whom I speak raise this issue during our interviews. While some have not directly experienced the conflict, their sisters and friends have.

Adèle tells me that she has personally experienced such harassment, adding to Elise’s description:

I have experience in this. Many men from Ghazieh come up and will say words to the girls.. Raimy, you know what... and so fighting will start verbally between them. You know, like me and other girls will say “why would you say that to us” and “you don’t have the right to say that to us”.. so this conflict starts...

Notably, Adèle does not explicitly tell me “what” the young men from Ghazieh tell her; instead she speaks to me as a fellow woman and gives me permission to imagine the comments. When verbally harassed, Adèle and her friends try to stand up for themselves and challenge the young men, enacting their agency as they resist the harassment. I notice that most women use third person when discussing the situation

rather than explicitly implicating themselves in the retelling. For instance, Elise refers to “the girls” and Adèle too says “the girls will say [...]” instead of involving her “I” in the descriptions. I interpret this as an attempt to foster solidarity, since Adèle indeed tells me she has experienced this harassment in her daily life. Rather than signalling her individual experience, she collectivizes it so it appears to be a fight not against her “I” and the young men, but between the young women and the young men.

Léa uses a similar tone:

It is because of the flirting that the guys of Maghdouché get upset and go and fight the guys of Ghazieh. They want to defend the women of their village. The problems start when the men from Ghazieh come up, drive around, flirt... and then maybe they will insult the Saydeh Maryam²⁹. All this inflates the tensions between the groups, it culminates in the guys of Ghazieh and those of Maghdouché really fighting.

I myself did not witness any of these fights because I only spent a few nights in Maghdouché, but it is clear that these different young women paint similar stories based on a similar situation that repeats itself. I share Léa’s excerpt to highlight that the young men not only insult the young women, but also the Saydeh Maryam, the Virgin Mary, who appears in Maghdouché as a marble statue. Since this statue is considered to be Holy to the residents of Maghdouché, insulting it is a profound offense. It can be considered an insult towards one’s spirituality and culture. In this sense, harassment about clothing choice can escalate into harassment about religion, culture, and values, which intensifies the nature of the inter-village conflict. However, while these young men may insult her religion, Léa—like Elise—does not reciprocate with insults about Islam. She specifically designates the men’s hurtful and disruptive behavior as the problem, expressing, “the problems start when the men from Ghazieh come up, drive

²⁹ Lady Maryam

around, flirt [...]” The harassment does not stem from their religion; it starts entirely with their immature actions. This restraint against criticizing Islam exemplifies the young woman’s efforts to rescue everyday peace between religious groups. Her aggressors ridicule her Christian faith by insulting the Virgin Mary, which threatens religious coexistence, but Léa does not respond and insult an Islamic figure. In this scenario, I perceive Léa’s maturity. I stress that not all young men in Ghazieh act in this way; it is a small group of young men. However, young women like Léa and Elise take in this behavior and certainly feel disrespected.

When I return to Ghazieh after spending an entire day interviewing women in Maghdouché, I ask to visit Amira, the young woman who spends the majority of her free time in Maghdouché. Since she has many friends in the Christian village, I am curious to hear about whether she has also heard of these tensions or if she herself has experienced this violence. She shares a very similar story to her peers, explaining:

Yes, the boys from Ghazieh really annoy the girls from Maghdouché. The boys in Ghazieh will come up and drink in Maghdouché, because they know that drinking is normal and not judged up there; they can’t drink in Ghazieh because then they are talked about and judged here. So they go up, and you know they’re not used to seeing girls in Ghazieh in crop tops or in short skirts. So, when they go up to Maghdouché, they flirt with girls and try to get their attention. The girls get annoyed and frustrated so they respond to those boys with angry words. And so then the boys answer, and fighting starts that involve a lot of people. Often, the brother of one of the girls will start fighting with the boy from Ghazieh... this sort of thing will happen.

As I explore in Part II of this chapter, Amira visits Maghdouché frequently because she is judged in Ghazieh for her supposedly revealing way of dress. In Maghdouché, she is able to wear the dresses, skirts, and crop tops she likes. With this personal experience undergirding her perspective about the Muslim village, she believes that the men of Ghazieh will also be “talked about and judged” if they drink alcohol in their home

village. Using this language, Amira re-emphasizes Ghazieh as a suppressive environment if one chooses to censor their actions (whether in clothing choice or alcohol consumption) to avoid being “talked about.” To escape this judgement, the young men use Maghdouché as a place to feel free. Simultaneously, they are the ones who trouble women for their way of dress. In the process of seeking the freedom to drink, they infringe on women’s freedoms to dress as they would like without being harassed. I ask whether Amira knows people who have experienced this and she immediately rolls her eyes. “All girls hear about this kind of thing,” she tells me. As a non-veiled woman, she gets comments from young men in Ghazieh if she wears a tank top or shorts. Certain forms of dress place women in precarious situations in which they may become subject to verbal attacks or unwanted physical touching. At the same time, women like Amira may feel even more uncomfortable wearing conservative clothing, since this means she cannot express herself as she would like. Amira is positioned in a difficult situation, as she may almost always feel varying degrees of discomfort based on clothing.

As a result of this harassment, some young women avoid visiting certain villages to be safer. Even though she has never actually personally experienced harassment from the men of Ghazieh, Juliette tells me that she has witnessed it:

I see a lot of flirting and a lot of my friends tell me about their own experiences. I witness these things in front of me. It occurs a lot. This is why my father doesn’t allow me to go down to Ghazieh often, often our clothing even is so different when we are in Maghdouché compared to when we go to Saida or Ghazieh. If I wear shorts in Maghdouché, I can’t wear this to go down there.

Juliette indicates that harassment by some of the Muslim men occurs to the point that she feels unable to wear her normal clothing when she goes “down” to Muslim villages

like Ghazieh. Of course, she may want to dress conservatively when visiting Muslim villages in order to be respectful of the village culture. However, I believe that fear, rather than respect, motivates Juliette's decisions. Her father even restricts her movement because he worries she will be hurt. While some may say that this is an exaggerated measure taken on his part, it can be interpreted as the war generation's reaction to fears about the religious other. Her father may even resort to greater sectarian narratives that categorize entire villages as unsafe due to religious culture.

Adèle shares an experience of harassment that is different from the one shared by the other women of Maghdouché. First, she does acknowledge that women endure significant in-person harassment by some of the drunk men from Ghazieh:

Personally, I never experienced it, but I know a lot of women who had this experience and it wasn't nice at all.. so you know there is a lot of problems between these groups of people. For me, my experience was over social media; so it was hidden speech.

She continues to describe this invisible virtual harassment that she has suffered:

My social media experience was so, so disturbing. I post pictures on my Instagram of me in the clothing I normally wear, like in nice shorts or dresses. There were many men from Ghazieh and other towns next to ours who were messaging me on Instagram, saying things, saying words that weren't very beautiful... flirting, but they crossed the line with their words. Their ugly words.

Adèle's experience is one that many women may unfortunately relate to, and her particular experience with online bullying is extremely "disturbing" because many Muslim men targeted her with their "ugly" comments. Adèle clearly defines their words as having "crossed the line" and feels discomfort by the men's online provocations. This example also refers to the new virtual space uniquely accessible to the postwar generation, who meet one another without physically crossing village borders. Just as Fatima describes online university as a space to meet others of different identities

(which carries a positive implication), the online sphere becomes one of bullying and harassment, as Adèle experiences. This informs the relationship between the villages, as women may feel reserved with or untrusting of certain communities of young men in Ghazieh. Ultimately, this tinges the existing inter-village coexistence.

As a young man from Maghdouché, Blaise has female friends who tell him about these sorts of experiences. He shares a specific story about two of his female friends who were walking in tight skirts. They met a young man from Ghazieh, who was not necessarily drunk but still said some flirtatious things to get their attention, including a comment about their clothing. When they heard this man's words, some young men who were nearby came to defend the women and yelled at the man from Ghazieh. Analyzing this experience, Blaise determines:

These young guys weren't mature enough. The man from Ghazieh didn't say sorry, and the guys from Maghdouché insisted on fighting. And so these problems continue until today... They don't just end. For example, two days after this drama with the man, some young people from Ghazieh came up to celebrate a birthday. Young people from Maghdouché destroyed their car, although I don't know if it's related to the previous incident, or whether the tensions were just really acute. These problems occur and are resolved without maturity. And then these problems between the young people influence their parents. And from the parents, to the whole village. And this is how there is the notion of "Maghdouché vs Ghazieh."

While Blaise disapproves of the way the young man from Ghazieh acted towards the young women in skirts and does not blame the women for their choice in clothing, he also criticizes the violent actions adopted by the young men of Maghdouché and Ghazieh. He does not defend the young men of Maghdouché for fighting and, instead, he labels the men of both villages as not "mature enough." He hints at the necessity to have diplomatic conflict resolution measures, rather than these violent responses. Blaise himself demonstrates a maturity in his disapproval of the intercommunal violence.

These cycles of violence continue, evolve, and escalate over time since the fights are not appropriately addressed. For example, when youths' narratives and experiences of violence touch their parents, the latter also become aware of the conflict and side with their children, and so conflict is further spread. And as I show in Chapter 7, parents may integrate a sectarian logic into their regulation of their children's behavior—such as prohibiting their children from visiting a village on the basis of the religious-political affiliation.

Although Blaise and the women from Maghdouché offer me explicit answers about this problem of harassment, the men in Ghazieh are a lot vaguer when I question them about this issue. After first hearing about the case of harassment in Maghdouché, I make it a point to ask the young men of Ghazieh about it to hear their perspective. In agreement with Blaise's point that youth act in immature ways, Rami tells me that the conflict is the fault of "the villages' teenagers getting into fights and who should probably act in better ways." He concludes these youth need "to be more respectful." While he does not give me details about the conflict itself, he disapproves of the violence and, like Blaise, is critical of the young adults on both sides.

Because Baasim mentions to me that he and his male friends go to Maghdouché on a weekly basis to drink alcohol, I ask him whether he ever notices any harassment by the men of Ghazieh towards the women of Maghdouché. He immediately excises the religious element out of this intercommunal fight:

The boy, look, if he is drinking and he goes to Maghdouché.. maybe okay. But it's not an issue related to religion, or to Christianity in Maghdouché. Look, I know girls in Maghdouché and I don't feel that they are different than the girls in Ghazieh. Yes, the girls here cover up more and differ in this one thing. But I've never had any problem with a girl up there. No girl I know up there has shared that kind of experience

with me. No guy friend of mine has shared that they've experienced this or done this.

Although he is hesitant, his words slow and vague, Baasim does not deny that this issue occurs between the young women of Maghdouché and the young men from Ghazieh. In his explanation, Baasim claims that he does not see a difference between the women of both villages other than their form of dress. He attempts to obscure the problem by sharing that the women he knows do not experience this harassment. Certainly, he may be oblivious to the inappropriate flirtations and violence on account of his gender, which is why he reduces the intensity of the problem in his narrative. Additionally, he argues that the harassment does not represent an interreligious conflict. He believes the fighting is unrelated to the religious identities of the communities and that the young men do not harass the young women on the basis of their religion. With this argument, Baasim protects the name of religion in these inter-village politics. This is different from the sectarian Civil War narratives with which the war generation justified violence. To contest these narratives, Baasim erases religious motivation from the conversation about harassment. Similarly, Fatima tells me that, "there are people who do bad things wherever, in any religion or any village there are people who do this ugly thing." Like Baasim, she recontextualizes tensions between Ghazieh-Maghdouché so they are not blamed on Shia Islam and Catholicism, nor on the specific villages themselves. This dynamic superficially seems to be an interreligious problem when in reality it is not, and may happen between any religious community and any village in the country. In this way, these young adults like Blaise aim to maintain religion's purity, resisting the violence it may inspire.

In this chapter, I consider the roles of gender and religious conservatism in youths' perception of their neighbor and the creation of interreligious relationships. In particular, I report on how some young adults challenge the sectarian status quo not only by engaging within intimate interreligious friendships, but also by crossing culturally-set boundaries concerning gender and age. Conversely, I also feature a discussion about the harassment of some women of Maghdouché by some men of Ghazieh to demonstrate the type of tension emerging between the young residents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché. It is notable that, whether during moments of friendship or during inter-village conflict, the majority of the young adults I interview resist the politicization and sectarianization of religion. Even as conflict emerges between the young communities, many members attempt to distance religion from the intercommunal tension and instead emphasize the conflict's non-spiritual nature.

Similarly, young adults claim that they do not use religious affiliation as a criteria with which select their friends. As they engage within their interreligious relationships in person and online, the vast majority of young adults demonstrate respect, care, and open-mindedness for their religious neighbors. Not only do they show a basic knowledge about their neighbors' way of life and religious practices and rules, but some actually utilize this knowledge to connect with them on a deeper level. Such an intimate understanding of the religious neighbor nourishes the everyday peace between the young villagers and equips the young adults to empower one another from the context of one another's spiritual backgrounds. Some young adults go so far as to label their neighbors as "family" or "brothers," emphasizing a kinship that refutes the sectarian divisions perpetuated by Lebanon's confessional politics (which I describe in

more detail in Chapter 8). While other young adults do not go so far, they still emphasize the irrelevance of politics in friendships, which de-sectarianizes the nature of their bonds.

Part II: Greater Village Community Relations

Ghazieh and Maghdouché are right together; I think anyone who wants to go to Maghdouché has to go through Ghazieh anyways. We go down to Ghazieh a lot, buy stuff, go to the supermarket, sit in the café, eat the food, a lot, a lot we go to Ghazieh, and so on... seventy-five percent of our lives are interconnected.

— Julien, from Maghdouché

In societies suffering from religious cleavages, everyday peace requires “routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life” (Mac Ginty, 2014, p. 549). Lebanon indeed suffers from interreligious tensions that episodically erupt into conflict, demonstrated by the October 14th 2021 clashes in Beirut, so it is important to explore how residents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché enact these “routinized practices” to navigate the complexities inherent to life in Lebanon. As explored in Part I, the youth of Maghdouché and Ghazieh foment relationships at school, work, restaurants, cafés, the beach, through mutual friends, and online—many of which develop and thrive as intimate, trusting, and supportive friendships. To complement Part I’s focus on youths’ interreligious relationships, Part II focuses specifically on the relationship of the greater communities of Ghazieh and Maghdouché. Similarly to Part I, I consider the community relations influenced by Lebanon’s socioeconomic and political crises, and I offer an analysis of the spectrum of tolerance, respect, and love undergirding the villages’ interreligious coexistence and interreligious tensions.

Daily Interconnectedness Between Villages

As a regional business hub, Ghazieh draws young adults from neighboring villages including Maghdouché for practical reasons such as errands and work rather than touristic purposes. There are more pharmacies and markets in the Muslim village, including an office for federal insurance (*daman*) that Maghdouché youth regularly visit because no such office exists in their village. I often see Christian youth in Ghazieh's grocery stores, particularly in the recently-opened, two-story supermarket that attracts neighboring communities excited to find their favorite brands in one location. On the other hand, Ghazieh does not have many touristic sites or coffee shops to visit with friends, so I find that many young adults from Ghazieh visit Maghdouché for leisure and entertainment. Maghdouché has a center garden, a nature path, and a beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary that is regularly visited by neighboring communities including Ghazieh's young members. In fact, when I visit the Catholic village for interviews and participant observation, I sometimes recognize youth from Ghazieh walking in the garden and visiting the statue of the Virgin Mary to take pictures. Often, these youth visit with their families for a few hours or socialize at nearby cafés with local friends.

During our conversation, Rami discusses the various supermarkets in Ghazieh, the alcohol shops in Maghdouché, and the gaming centers that he visits with friends to play billiards and table football in the evenings and weekends. Echoing my personal observations, Rami describes how youth travel between villages for leisurely and productive visits to satisfy their needs and desires:

We have common interests between these two villages. We support each other, we are inseparable. We have an *aysh al-mushtarak*³⁰ to go

³⁰ *Aysh al-mushtarak*, "living together," is a common expression for coexistence

through and we are in this common life together. Our interactions stem from mutual jobs together, friendships, business, basically all sorts of life... we just like interact with each other in this way.

Rami marks the relationship between the two villages as mutual, since each community depends on the other. The notion of *al-'aysh al-mushtarak* indicates that both communities experience and rely on a common life together. Maghdouché and Ghazieh are not separate villages whose residents occasionally intermingle; rather there are “common interests” between both communities that manifest in daily practical and interconnected activity hinging on a shared existence in the South—as Julien describes, a substantial “seventy-five percent of our lives are interconnected.” Young adults like Rami and Julien perceive the relationship between the villages as deeply integrated not only socially, but professionally and economically.

Like her peers, Adèle takes advantage of the open and safe movement between villages and descends to Ghazieh when she has to buy something or has a medical appointment, although she does not go to Ghazieh “just to visit for fun, no never.” Ghazieh is a space specifically of convenience where she accesses markets and clothing stores every day, but it is not a space she chooses to visit for entertainment purpose. Still, in resonance with Rami’s comments, she describes the interactions between both villages’ residents as “an exchange between us and them,” explaining:

If I go down to the stores in Ghazieh and I want to buy clothes, they sell to me. It’s not like they say that “oh no, you’re from Maghdouché, you cannot buy these clothing.” No, they allow me to buy. We give and take from one another. We live in the same society.

These are signs of coexistence and fluidity between the villages. Adèle considers her village and Ghazieh to be part of “the same society,” linking the two communities with their daily exchanges of goods and free movement of people. She has open access to the

stores in Ghazieh, which enables her to purchase whatever she desires without feeling restrictions because of her village or religious identity. Additionally, Adèle does not discuss any tensions within these daily business exchanges of “give and take” which render the business hub an inclusive space. As Mona tells me, “We have lived alongside the Christians for a very long time,” since Ghazieh is surrounded by three Christian villages, Maghdouché being the nearest one. Throughout history, the community of Ghazieh coexisted with its neighboring Christian ones, which allowed it to exist and grow in stability. The commercial and social exchanges between Maghdouché and Ghazieh have occurred throughout history and are today ingrained in the villages’ peaceful functioning.

Offering an example of the inherent interconnectedness of both communities, Anaïs shares her practical and professional motivation to drive to Ghazieh from her home in Maghdouché on a weekly basis. Every Saturday, she visits the home of a Shia Muslim family to tutor their ten-year-old boy in French. Anaïs relies on the boy’s parents for employment and work experience, while the family relies on her for French lessons at an affordable price. This exchange is made possible by the free movement between Ghazieh and Maghdouché, since Anaïs can drive back-and-forth without facing any physical barrier or threat to her safety. Furthermore, the fact that this Muslim family trusts the young Christian woman to tutor their child exemplifies the confidence and casualness in these two villages’ relationship.

On a daily basis, Jacques visits Ghazieh for both practical and social reasons, such as going to the gym and hanging out with friends. He addresses the interactions

between the two communities by emphasizing the solidarity, fluidity, and openness in the members' relationships:

Now in particular, we go down to fill up with gas, they may come up to fill up; and other times, now it is summer, we go to the beach of Ghazieh. A lot of people from Ghazieh come up to buy stuff from us. These are most of the things that happen among us.... Both villages must visit one another. Especially the parents must play a role in educating their children 'yes, he is Muslim, and he is Christian, but it's okay and there is no difference.' We must take care of one another. We mustn't attach to politics, nor to labels.

He encourages these mutual visitations between villagers and interprets the cross-village interaction as important. For instance, Jacques briefly mentions the dire search for gasoline during fuel shortages, as villagers travel across Maghdouché and Ghazieh to fill their tanks during the summer of 2021. This open movement allows for villagers to search for oil between the two villages, which broadens their abilities to find resources (as I discuss later in this chapter, this may conversely spark tension). Jacques believes these communities depend on open movement for their successful functioning, and he even stresses the communities "must visit one another." Most importantly, he designates specific responsibility onto the villages' parents to educate their children to see beyond religious labels. As a young person of the postwar generation, Jacques understands the consequences of identity politics. He does not consider the Christian village to be separate from the Muslim one but rather, in his oral narrative, Jacques chronicles inter-village, interreligious solidarity. By emphasizing the need to "take care of one another," Jacques simplifies a situation that often becomes complex when entangled with politics and sectarian labels. The interreligious interactions and cross-village support are important for the health of both communities.

At a personal level, Amira relies on Maghdouché. She visits this village frequently to spend time with her friends, and I soon discover that she feels more comfortable there than she does in her own village:

In Maghdouché, I mostly just go to my friends' house. We used to go visit the statue of Maryam and sit below her. I feel more comfortable in Maghdouché because the people's thinking is different there. They don't judge others; I feel they are not the kind to be so strict. I am more comfortable wearing what I want to wear there.

Her purpose in visiting Maghdouché is not to run errands, but to stay connected with her friends and exist in a space where she feels "comfortable." As I showed in Part I, Amira feels less judged by people in Maghdouché compared to those in Ghazieh, attributing this to a "different" kind of thinking in the village's culture that accepts for her to wear the clothing she desires. While I am surprised to hear her say that she feels more comfortable in a neighboring village than her own, I reflect now on my own experiences in Lebanon as a young woman who is not veiled. It is true, I do feel generally more comfortable in villages and cities where I am surrounded by other unveiled women because I stand out less. I feel a little less intimidated in Beirut, for instance, where women walk around in tank tops and skirts, compared to my time in Ghazieh, where I am constantly aware of what I am wearing and how much skin I am showing.

When I ask whether she feels comfortable in Ghazieh, Amira tells me:

No, not at all. Because I wear a lot of short clothing, and when I pass people on the streets in Ghazieh, everyone looks at me. So, of course I'm not comfortable. I don't wear short clothing all the time, but sometimes I do, and during those times I don't feel safe.

In Ghazieh, she cannot express herself in the ways she would like, feeling suppressed by her village's culture. She continues:

So I don't feel peace here in Ghazieh. People make a lot of problems down here! Like about my clothing. Or boys, men, they create problems out of basically everything. They close the streets when it's crowded, they hit one another. These kinds of things.

Because of the highly-explosive “problems” in Ghazieh concerning women’s dress and periodic violence instigated by men, Amira does not experience peace there. She describes Ghazieh in a rather violent manner by emphasizing the flashpoints of conflict that emerge during street closures and fights. Not unrelated to Part I’s discussion of the men of Ghazieh harassing women in Maghdouché, Amira also blames these men for “creat[ing] problems out of basically everything.” During our conversation, she sounds exasperated by her village. For Amira, Maghdouché is not only a space where she develops her friendships, but also a space of physical and emotional comfort where she can dress in less-conservative ways and feel shielded from parental and societal judgement. There, Amira feels she can present herself as she would like, in the clothing that makes her comfortable. Certainly, she still may encounter harassment, as I describe in Part I, but in the excerpts above she elaborates on a freedom specific to Maghdouché that she does not feel in Ghazieh. This freedom is valuable to a young woman, and Amira’s relief in Maghdouché unveils the importance of having open access to the other’s village. She relies on the unrestricted movement between Ghazieh and Maghdouché to escape a space where she feels stifled.

While she differs from Amira in that she is very religiously conservative, Warda also recognizes a lack of judgement in Maghdouché. She feels welcomed and accepted there, sharing an example of the Catholic villagers’ open-mindedness:

Them, up there, they are open minded so they don't mind coming and they like Shia. Once I went up to Maghdouché and I saw that there was a poster blessing us for the Islamic holiday *Eid-ul-Adha*. It was like they were blessing us for the *Eid*. Our communities are so close together.

Warda is expressively grateful for the gestures taken by the Maghdouché community, such as hanging the poster with the kind blessing for the Islamic holiday, because they make her feel cared for and acknowledged in her religious identity. Gestures like these inform her belief that “our communities are so close together.” Because she feels comfortable in Maghdouché as a conservative Shia woman, she chooses to return often to the village. She even visits during Christmas to explore the decorated garden path and the statue of Maryam. “We see beautiful things there. The decorations. It’s really beautiful,” Warda adds. Just as she feels valued by the Maghdouché community, Warda also appreciates the Catholic village. The community has gained her respect for its welcoming atmosphere. She sees the village as aesthetically beautiful, and more importantly, senses that “they like Shia” and therefore enjoys being in the community. Again, the fact that both Amira and Warda (two women who are very different from one another) feel comfortable in the Catholic village reveals the importance of welcoming and accepting others as they are to nurture everyday peace.

Perhaps because young adults from Ghazieh perceive Maghdouché as open and welcoming, many are drawn to spend significant amounts of time there. Just as Amira spends the majority of her free time in Maghdouché, Jaafar and Nadia also frequently visit the neighboring Catholic village. Jaafar is a Shia from Ghazieh, but his family lives at the border between the two villages. Jaafar even studied in Maghdouché throughout his youth and adolescence because Maghdouché’s school was located closer to his house than the one he would have attended in Ghazieh. In other words, his enrollment in the Maghdouché school was based on convenience and not on whether it matched his family’s religious background. This is different from the experiences of young Shia

women like Fatima, Warda, and Asma, whose families are also Shia and who were enrolled in Islamic schools in Ghazieh where they obtained a religious education. Jaafar's parents perhaps see education in Maghdouché as equally as valuable to one in Ghazieh, and perhaps even more favorable because of its proximity to home. This demonstrates a lack of hostility from both Jaafar's parents and Jaafar.

In a somewhat similar situation to Jaafar's, Nadia's family resides in Ghazieh but owns a stretch of land in Maghdouché that was purchased by her grandfather fifty years ago. One evening, Nadia agrees to take me to this land. It is beautiful, surrounded by marble homes with a direct view of the statue of Maryam. Twice a week, Nadia visits the land with her family to plant seeds and plan the home they would like to build there. During these visits to the hilled village, Nadia typically visits the church and gardens. I find it fascinating that her family has land in the neighboring religious village, and that this family makes plans to build a home there, besides the marble homes of Christians. When Nadia describes this land, love and excitement emanate from her words. She tends to this land, this land on Christian soil. This is another element of coexistence I uncover within Nadia's story: she has a willingness and a desire to live among the religious others. This does not signify that everyone who is Muslim must be willing to live among Christians in order to prove that they respect their religious neighbors. Rather, it is the indifference about the religious identity of the community, the lack of discrimination, and the excitement for a future in a home among the hills that make me believe Nadia and her family reinforce everyday coexistence with their neighbors.

Conversely, there are also many young adults who rarely visit the other village, even if they have friends there. For instance, Marius, a young Muslim from Ghazieh who was orphaned by Catholic parents, explains that he has not visited his friends in Maghdouché in recent months:

I haven't seen my friends in Maghdouché recently, because I went to Beirut and then came here to Ghazieh. And then the cruelty of life made me separate from them... But it's nothing personal that has made me not go there.

“The cruelty of life,” as Marius says, impedes him from actively visiting his friends from different religious backgrounds. We can interpret this “cruelty” in various ways, but I believe Marius is referring to the disastrous economic crisis and fuel shortages that make it difficult to find transportation in the summer of 2021. Many other young adults tell me that they blame the fuel crisis for impeding their visits to neighboring villages, since the Lebanese now need to spare as much fuel as possible. “The cruelty of life” also hints at the business of life, the constant productive chug forward that inhibits humans from maintaining relationships with those who matter to them. I certainly can resonate with this and do not see Maghdouché and Ghazieh as the only places where this “cruelty” manifests.

Although a few other young adults express a similar situation to Marius', in that they rarely visit the other village, I conclude that the majority of young adults do. I find that each village plays a general role for the young communities. Although young adults frequent both villages to socialize with their friends, Maghdouché's young residents tend to treat Ghazieh as a business hub where to run errands, whereas Ghazieh's residents tend to visit Maghdouché for touristic and recreational purposes. Each village is important and relied upon. On a whole, free movement and open borders enable

unrestricted access to the religious other's neighborhood, which allows young adults to drive back-and-forth between villages without any physical barrier or threat to their safety.

Shared Spiritual and Mundane Spaces

Since the morning, my ears have been ringing with children's squeals. I visit Ghazieh's summer camp, where kids of all ages and religions and villages have been gathering these hot July days... Today they invite the neighboring villages to watch their dance performance, and the small turf field is filled with mothers and fathers. I can immediately tell that we are a mix of various villages, because the woman to my right wears a necklace with a cross. The teenage girl to my left wears a hijab. I wasn't sure how to dress to attend this event, so I went with a long green dress and a white cardigan to cover my shoulders. I feel more at ease in this space to take the cardigan off, perhaps because I am surrounded by other women my age wearing short clothing.

The young children dance to Western songs, jumping and twirling and stomping their feet. The final dance is more solemn, with the Lebanese National Anthem playing from the speakers to honor the Lebanese Armed Forces. Suddenly, the young boys pull on camo jackets with the Lebanese flag ironed onto the chest. I think it's important that the Lebanese flag is printed across these youths' clothing. They wear a Lebanese uniform, not a Maghdouché uniform or Ghazieh uniform, not a Catholic uniform or a Shia uniform.

While I watch these cute children, I also watch their instructors: young men and women from neighboring villages who dance the choreography at the back of the room so that the children can follow along. I recognize one of the instructors as a young woman from Ghazieh, but others introduce themselves as men and women from Maghdouché and neighboring Christian villages. Three of the young girls wear off-the-shoulder white tank tops, another wears a white veil and white long sleeve shirt to match her colleagues. This is how everyday coexistence manifests among the youth. Not as formal dialogue sessions, nor as interreligious programs introduced by development agencies. But as young men and women from different villages and different religions coming together to teach young children how to dance. I leave the performance smiling and laughing.

— Raimy's diary, 08/06/2021

As I previously describe in this chapter, cross-religious interactions and visitations between the young religious communities of Ghazieh and Maghdouché are very common, particularly in spaces of convenience like stores and gyms. The unrestricted movement between villages and generally inclusionary, welcoming nature of the communities enhance everyday coexistence, cohesion, and peace. Because these two villages are very close together, practically intertwined in certain areas, I wonder about the spaces that are construed specifically as shared spaces for both villages' young adults. I define these shared spaces as neutral, non-sectarian places of leisure and connection upon which actors from Maghdouché and Ghazieh engage and play, where village identity is not a divisive factor.

For example, while the ocean is not technically owned by a single village, Ghazieh sits beside the water while Maghdouché is located on a hill above. Thus, residents of Ghazieh—who are mostly Muslim although levels of conservatism vary—own many shops, cafés, and juice stands along the Corniche beach visited regularly by Ghazieh youth. Many Christian men and women also descend their village to hang out at these spaces by the water. When I visit the beach of Ghazieh, I see young men and women huddled at tables along the sand, drinking fruit juices, and smoking the hookah. Not a lot of people swim in the sea, for the water is “not even that beautiful and it’s not that clean,”³¹ but young children splash in the water and poke at jelly fish with plastic straws. Throughout my visit in Southern Lebanon, I spend a substantial amount of time with groups of young adults at the beach, and at various instances notice crosses on chains hung around some of their necks. The Ghazieh beach serves as a space for

³¹ Fadi tells me this, jokingly, but other young adults echo this sentiment.

various religious groups to congregate and enjoy, turning it into a neutralized space despite its technical location in Ghazieh.

As I have mentioned throughout this chapter, schools are also shared locations that introduce the interreligious relationship and offer it time and space to develop. After all, not only do young Muslims and Christians from Ghazieh and Maghdouché meet in the academic space, but they also occupy this shared environment five days a week. Many of the young adults of Maghdouché and Ghazieh attended middle and high schools in the religious other's village, so this exchange of students between villages has become widely normalized and routinized. Addressing the daily religious plurality in his high school classes, Claude explains, "they come up to our schools, some of us go down to their schools, so there is a mix. We are in their schools and they are in ours."

Mona expands on school as a shared space:

We are entangled together, and so we of course get along fine. We don't see them as different to us. They're all the same. The Christians come down to us for school. And all our children go up to Maghdouché for school as well. Our kids go up there, their kids come down here. Both villages' kids are the same.

School offers youth a reason to intermingle, connect, and collaborate on academic projects. Even if a school is situated in a specific religious community, I interpret it as a shared, neutralized space where religious divisions are not erected between students. It is a de-sectarianized space. Certainly, there are Islamic schools in Ghazieh where many conservative parents send their daughters and sons, but there are also many parents in Ghazieh who send their children to gain a French education in Maghdouché, where there is a well-recognized French lycée. Similarly, children of Maghdouché often go to Ghazieh for schools and summer camps, since the bigger village offers more opportunities. As part of my research, I attend a dance performance at a local summer

camp in Ghazieh, which I describe in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. Here I meet parents from the village as well as parents from Maghdouché and other neighboring Christian villages who enrolled their children in the camp. Watching the young children dance, I notice mothers around me wearing burkas and hijabs, as well as mothers wearing spaghetti-strap dresses and tank tops. This contrast reflects the interconnectedness of the various villagers, who unite in this summer camp space. The fact that parents of Ghazieh and Maghdouché enrolled their children together demonstrates an open-mindedness and a lack of hesitancy for their children to engage with other religious groups. Interreligious hostility may have driven a Christian parent to enroll their child in a Christian program on the basis of the instructors' and village community's religion. I do not feel mistrust or hostility in the summer camp dance performance, sitting among people of different religious backgrounds.

Rather than pointing to a single space that is shared between villages, Majd highlights an unofficial compromise leading to daily interreligious interactions on the sports' fields. Majd is an avid soccer player, so he pays attention to the following:

In Maghdouché there is no soccer field for soccer, there is only one for basketball. We have a field here in Ghazieh for soccer. People who like to play basketball, they go to Maghdouché and people in Ghazieh who like basketball join them and play with the Christian people in their terrain. But people in Maghdouché who like soccer come here to Ghazieh and play in our fields with us. I have many friends from Maghdouché who come and play soccer with us. But we are friends; we go to other villages and we play with others. Me and my friends play soccer in Ghazieh; we are Christians and Muslims together, many of those Christians are from Maghdouché.

This is a revealing example of shared sport-related spaces. Christians descend to Ghazieh to play soccer, just as Muslims go to Maghdouché to play basketball. The geographical proximity of these villages allows for a sharing of resources and land.

Once, while visiting Maghdouché, I learn that there is actually a small soccer terrain nearby, but this realization does not take away from the power of Majd's example. I reach back out to Majd and ask about the new soccer terrain. He is surprised and tells me that he did not know this was the case, since he still plays soccer with people from Maghdouché every day. This exchange of athletic spaces is important because it allows for youth to play the sports they enjoy rather than being forced to play a sport they are not enthusiastic about. The mutual exchange is made possible by the free movement between villages fomenting interreligious coexistence. The soccer and basketball fields are available and accessible to most youth, regardless of religious and village identity. Furthermore, because they practice sports in one another's villages, they are bound to meet people of the other religion who are also practicing, which de-sectarianizes and neutralizes the social space of interreligious interaction, collaboration, and competition. Discussing his experience, Majd does not describe any tension that exists between soccer players on the basis of religion; in fact, Majd is welcoming toward those who visit his village. He insists they are his "friends."

Marius, as can be inferred from his name, had a Christian upbringing although he was orphaned by his mother, father, and adoptive mother, who all died during his youth. He lives in Ghazieh and considers himself to be a Muslim, although I do not ask him about how he came to Islam and at what age. Because he has Christian roots, I am curious to hear about whether he interprets the statue of Maryam in Maghdouché as a shared space, since this sacred site is visited regularly by both Muslims and Christians. He emphasizes:

Maryam, peace be upon her, is not just for Christians. She is not only for Muslims or Christians, but she is for humans. She is for mankind.

Marius considers himself to be a Muslim, he tells me at the beginning of our conversation, but his bloodline connects him to Christian ancestors. He recognizes Maryam as a figure present in both the Christian and Islamic traditions, and he universalizes this figure as Mother to both communities. The statue of Maryam is not a figure of exclusion, nor a figure who belongs to one group of people on the basis of her location in a Christian village. Maryam is for all of humanity. By asserting this universality, Marius connects all religions together. He asserts similarities. He asserts a common Mother. While Maryam's statue is erected in Maghdouché, she is for all. The spiritual nature of this figure surpasses geographic boundaries. She transcends earthly borders, becoming sublime in the sense that Kanafani-Zahar understands. She offers love to all humans, no matter their religious identities. Maryam is the sublime Divine. Muslims and Christians unite under her guidance. Affirming Marius' comment, Adèle tells me that Maryam's statue is "inherently a shared space." Because Adèle is a Catholic person who has lived her entire life in Maghdouché, her comment welcomes Muslims who visit the statue. She does not label the statue as Maghdouché's, but as "shared."

As I share in Chapter 5, some young adults participate in one another's religious spaces during holidays as a means of connecting with the religious neighbor, highlighting their understanding and support of their way of life, and resisting sectarian divisions that place them in different religious categories. Some members, as I describe in Chapter 5, visit one another's religious spaces even on non-holidays—whether for leisurely purposes, out of curiosity, or specifically to unite with their friends of different religious identities—and in the process transform the religious space from an

exclusionary environment into a cross-religious inclusionary one. It is worth expanding on this concept of shared religious space to understand how the religious space can become a neutral space beyond religious identity and religious division. In this way, the religious space can turn into the sublime. For instance, Baasim from Ghazieh tells me that he visits Maghdouché's church, gardens, grave yards, and the statue of Maryam on a regular basis. Specifically, he shares that he frequently attends mass:

I go up to the church and light candles very often. Both my friends and I, my friends from up there, David for instance.. I go up there sometimes and go inside the church with these Christian friends. I go on Sundays, but not every Sunday. It depends. Some Sundays yes, some Sundays no. My Christian friends invite me. They are up in the village, and they will tell me "today I'm going to the church, and if you can, come and we are waiting for you; we can go inside together." This is what happens. Inside the church, we light candles, we pray, you know? Whatever is in our hearts, we speak it... Me, I am the kind of person who likes to attend and appreciate all religious spaces, no matter the religion, so that I can understand it and open my mind. Because it makes me think, okay if I travel one day and live in a Christian space – or whatever religious space – I will be able to understand their beliefs. Be fluent in their beliefs.

I sense that Baasim visits these Christian spaces for personal reasons beyond pleasing his friends and spending time with them. He certainly acknowledges that his friends openly invite, encourage, and welcome him into this space. But in during my conversation, I understand that Baasim is genuinely interested in experiencing Christian religious rituals like lighting candles and attending mass. I do not equate his spiritually-motivated visit to the visits of Ghazieh residents who go to see the decorations during Christmas time, which I describe in Chapter 5. Although these residents show a respect and appreciation for the Catholic village through their visits, Baasim exhibits a unique respect and belief in the Christian faith that he exhibits through practice. He is not only curious about learning about Christianity by visiting a Christian space, but he actually craves to participate within it. Importantly, Baasim's rituals in Maghdouché do not

negate his Islamic faith. There appears a multiplicity of faiths, or rather, a single faith that manifests through various religious rituals, including rituals of different religions. Baasim carries a faith that accepts and involves both Muslim and Christian practices. This does not necessarily mean he identifies as “Christian,” for he tells me that he does not, but rather that he honors the Divine through many paths. This opens religion to encompass multiple sects so that one can practice multiple manifestations of faith without minimizing the meaning or value of any single tradition. This re-imagining of religion contests the strict sectarian lines imposed by politicians who benefit from identity politics. In the process, the shared space of the Christian church becomes a neutralized space, not where religion is erased, but where the sublime extra-sectarian comes alive. The space is not composed of religion according to divisions and labels, but religion in its spiritual and expansive form. The “relative secularism” about which Kanafani-Zahar (1997) writes does not insinuate that the church is a non-religious space, but a space where faith is invited in all its manifestations. Attending church as a Muslim man enhances Baasim’s experience of faith. I write this because I understand that Baasim approaches these rituals with authenticity. He shares, “whatever is in our hearts, we speak it...” to show his heartfelt participation in the practice.

Because Baasim visits the Maghdouché church on Sunday (although not all Sundays), there is also a possibility of neutralized time, that is, the extraction of sectarianism from temporality that otherwise erects religious divisions. These include holidays that, through the inclusion of the religious other, become the para-religious foundational to everyday peace between Ghazieh and Maghdouché. As Baasim engages with the Christian tradition on Sunday, he transforms the day to be a time of the cross-

religious. Furthermore, as shown in the excerpt, Baasim uses the term “we” when describing the rituals, candle lighting, and praying. He does not describe the Christians’ actions by saying “they” do something. He includes himself in the description of rituals, becoming a part of the village-religious community. When he attends church, he does not observe, but transforms into an active participant. He fully engages in the spiritual experience. He interprets these opportunities as ones of growth that will ultimately benefit him. Baasim is motivated to understand the Christian tradition because, as he reflects to me, he might “travel one day and live in a Christian space—or whatever religious space.” To be “fluent” in the religious neighbor’s beliefs means to know, understand, accept, and even participate and honor those beliefs. This epitomizes his open-minded respect for other religious groups. He considers the possibility of living in a space where the majority of the population is not Shia Muslim, like him, but Christian. Like Nadia’s family, Baasim is willing to live amongst people of different religions, and not resentfully or with hesitancy; he actually imagines it as a possibility in his future. He wants to “understand their beliefs” with a desire to connect with them, not be isolated from them, and break all barriers of identity. Beautifully, part of understanding these beliefs includes integrating these beliefs into his life on Sundays. The church serves as a shared space for Baasim to advance his mission, where religion is not a barrier. This is why I am surprised—when I ask Baasim whether he invites his welcoming Christian friends to the mosque, believing that perhaps Baasim is committed on making the mosque a shared space—he says:

I don’t actively invite them to any Muslim spaces or events. No, if he wants to he can come on his own terms, and he will know that I’m here. No Christian friend of mine though has ever come down to a mosque or

anything religious-related. While I go up often to visit them and go to church, my Christian friends, it just has never occurred.

I emphasize an important nuance: while Catholics in Maghdouché usually go to church every Sunday, Muslims in Ghazieh do not typically go to the mosque to pray. Rather, they pray five times a day in their own homes, although some certainly also go to the mosque to enact these prayers. Thus, the situation is not exactly the same and so we cannot immediately blame Baasim's friends for not reciprocating with visits to these religious spaces, nor can we blame Baasim for not inviting these friends to the mosque. In this specific case, the mosque does not serve as a shared, sublime space as the church serves for Baasim and his friends. I do not know if Baasim has ever considered inviting his friends to Muslim spaces like the mosque to commemorate Ashura, but in any case, I think his reply to my question is interesting. Perhaps Baasim's Christian friends have told him that they are not interested in visiting Islamic spaces. However, Baasim insists that if a friend visits the space, "he can come on his own terms, and he will know that I'm here," which unveils his openness to welcome the friend. He does not resist the possibility of this visit.

Similarly, Maghdouché's church also serves as a shared space for Kaamil, who finds time to visit when it conveniences him. His visits absolve the church of religious divides and unveil instead the sublime religious that extends beyond religious identity. As I share in Part I, Kaamil sees the Christians of Maghdouché as "siblings of different religions," which certainly motivates him to visit his friends in the Catholic community with ease. However, he visits Maghdouché's church specifically for personal, spiritual reasons—not social ones:

I have been going to the church, but not with my Christian friends. I myself go to church by myself, I light a candle and I sit down. Like this.

I don't go often to the church, it depends. If I'm in the area, or if it works out, yes I go. But it depends.

Kaamil does not go to the church with his friends, as Baasim does, but by himself. This is an independent practice that he exercises when he is "in the area, or if it works out." He does not afford too much effort in making this opportunity occur, similarly to how some of his Shia peers approach Ashura and other Islamic holidays (as I show in Chapter 5), but Kaamil still honors the opportunity to visit the church if it arises. He lights the candle and sits in the church not to please his many Christian friends, for they are perhaps even unaware that he does this. Just as his self-articulated siblinghood with Christians resists sectarianism and enforces a cross- and para-religious kinship, his ritual in the church also challenges preconceived divisions. Like Baasim, Kaamil sometimes engages with parts of the Christian faith in conjunction to his own Islamic faith. He crosses artificial religious barriers, and he does this alone, not needing to prove anything to anyone. He ignores notions that one must only practice a single religious path, instead allowing himself to follow various practices from two Abrahamic religions. The Maghdouché church becomes a shared space in which his village identity does not impede his participation and engagement. His Shia background does not stop him from lighting a candle at church. Sectarian identity is thus transcended, as this shared space becomes a sublime one.

In this section, I echo and expand on Kanafani-Zahar's (1997) consideration of neutralized spaces, or spaces of relative secularism, to refer to the shared religious space. Indeed, I show how religious sites are neutralized and rendered religiously sublime, as Kaamil and Baasim demonstrate in their visitation of churches. I specifically build on Kanafani-Zahar's interpretation of neutralized space so that it not

only signifies the shared religious environment but also any space engaged upon by Lebanese actors of different religious identities, where religion does not serve as a basis for division. These shared spaces, I conclude, are very important in Lebanon, where sectarian identity is hyper-inflated in all areas of life, including business, employment, and recreation (Reiche, 2011). Not only can religious ceremonies become neutralized, but young adults can de-sectarianize mundane spaces via the interreligious interaction and interreligious sharing of space. Yet, as I show in my next section, tension can often surge in the inter-village dynamic.

Intercommunal Peace & Tensions: Rooting in the Lebanese Context

Because I target young adults' relationships and tensions in Part I of this chapter, I am curious here to explore the greater community relations between the villages amid Lebanon's socioeconomic and political crises. I center this section on both moments of peace and tension. After reading through my interview transcripts several times, I remark that all individuals have different understandings and definitions of peace according to their histories and lived experiences. For instance, while some young adults acknowledge problems in inter-village relations, others claim there are no "issues." For instance, Claude optimistically tells me:

Of course, in every village there is peace! There is peace between Ghazieh and Maghdouché. There are no problems between us and them, and all the villagers love and care for one another, of course!

Claude sees that peace exists because "there are no problems" between the communities, although this is an optimistically vague generalization. In his eyes, all villagers get along and "love and care for one another" so there exists peace. His positionality as a young man has shaped his perspective—as I show in Part I, women

are particularly vulnerable to harassment and may not offer such a sweeping claim about the absence of problems. However, Claude may mean because there is no active armed conflict between the villages, there is peace. In this sense, he forgives the occasional sources of tensions (such as the harassment of women) and sees the village relations as peaceful, particularly when compared to Lebanon's past of sectarian clashes. Contextualized in a history of Civil War, today's relations are peaceful.

While she does not claim that there are no problems in inter-communal relations today, Asma specifically bases her understanding of peace on the shared experience of life in Southern Lebanon. In this sense, peace stems from solidarity. She describes:

There is so much peace between our two villages. Because we are together. When something happens in one village, the other village feels it. So if something happens that is big in Ghazieh, they hear about it and vice-versa. We like one another. We like the people of Maghdouché and they like the people of Ghazieh. You know? We have a nice relationship together. But for the Christians who are far away, I don't know. And besides there is no problem with the Christians who come visit Ghazieh. And actually, in Ghazieh there are women who don't wear the hijab. So there are times when we don't know if someone is Christian or Muslim.

In this excerpt, Asma obscures the geographical distinction between the villages. The villages are not isolated from one another; their interconnectedness results in a shared experience. Asma describes an intercommunal relationship in which one community "feels" the effects of an event in the other community. Religious divisions do not isolate the communities from one another. If there is fighting between militia group members in Ghazieh, the people of Maghdouché often hear about it because of the villages' proximity. During my time in Southern Lebanon, Hezbollah and Amal sympathizers occasionally get into disputes. Members of Maghdouché are often present in Ghazieh to witness this small-scale violence and spread news to their village. Asma also raises the point that sectarian divisions between communities are sometimes not obvious, since

some individuals' identities are more ambiguous than others. For instance, not all women in Ghazieh are dressed in a hijab or burka, so an unveiled woman may be from either Ghazieh or a neighboring Christian village. This blurs clothing-related distinctions between the women of both communities.

Moreover, Ghazieh and Maghdouché face similar challenges during the summer of 2021: price inflations, failed banking systems, electricity shortages, gas shortages, diesel shortages, and missing medicines. Laurent interprets that these all “connect us to one another.” These crises bind the communities together. Laurent raises an interesting example of grassroots solidarity to survive through these hardships:

For instance, perhaps in one home in Maghdouché there is a certain medicine, but a home in Ghazieh doesn't have it. People post on social media to help and to ask for help, and very quickly people are eager to help. They are giving these from the homes, not from the stores. This is *aysh al-mushtarak* between these two villages.

This is a salient show of care between the Christian and Muslim communities that surpasses a baseline level of coexistence. Using the resources at their disposal amidst many crises, people of both villages find ways to seek help and offer help. This exemplifies home-to-home, community-to-community support, as villagers grow less dependent upon the pharmacies and stores that fail to supply them with much-needed resources. Instead, villagers create this on-the-ground, localized network using various communication channels to help one another. Solidarity emerges from challenges to the life in Lebanon.

Yet these socioeconomic and political challenges may also result in increased competition, resentment, and hostility between villages. Life in Lebanon revolves around *wasta*. This term literally translates to ‘intermediary’ but is used to signal that one has ‘internal connections.’ In Ghazieh, this *wasta* may take form as connection to

Hezbollah or Amal. To access important medicine, *wasta* is beneficial. To get a job, *wasta* is beneficial. To work for the government, *wasta* is beneficial. It is completely undemocratic, and most painfully, has a profound impact on people's lives as some are excluded from opportunities and resources based upon their connections. Particularly in a politically corrupt country like Lebanon that also suffers from economic collapse, to have *wasta* means to have a somewhat easier life with easier access to resources.

Camille raises a point of which I had been unaware: that the Ghazieh and Maghdouché communities may perceive the other as having *wasta* and consequently feel resentment.

She explains:

Look, if for example, Ghazieh has asphalt and we don't have any asphalt, we will start in Maghdouché to say 'Oh my god, look, they have asphalt. They must have *wasta*' – and this will give birth to a new problem and new tensions.

This example is not about religious conflict and is more about surviving in a country with few resources. Maghdouché residents, Camille explains, may notice inequalities between their village and Ghazieh's and then blame Ghazieh for having internal connections with Islamic political groups. The truth is that indeed Ghazieh has connections with Iran-backed Hezbollah and Amal and thus has access to resources other communities may lack. Although Hezbollah claims that they offer resources to all religious communities in the South, they concentrate them in Shia villages. However, Christians also get many resources from their Christian figureheads, such as President Michel Aoun. Warda herself theorizes that Maghdouché is so clean compared to Ghazieh because it receives more funding from the central government, which would be a form of *wasta*. She shares, "I feel like the government supports Maghdouché more, because they are Christian. Like when you go to the Christian villages you feel in awe

of how pretty and clean they are. But here in Ghazieh it is less clean.” Regardless of the truth of these claims, the fact that some young adults vocalize these theories demonstrates that they sense a level of difference between the conditions of both villages.

As a consequence to this perceived unequal access to resources, conflict sometimes surges between communities in *el-Jnoub*. At the gas stations in Ghazieh, I have personally witnessed disagreements turn into violent disputes and result in serious injuries. This occurs when people cut lines or bribe workers to fill their tanks with an extra gallon of gasoline. Recently, one gas station shut down in central Ghazieh after the owner got hurt while trying to appease a fight. Anaïs shares a similar story about one of the two gas stations in Maghdouché, where fighting broke out at the end of the summer between the Catholic village residents and the Muslims of a neighboring town called Ankoun. Anaïs explains that while, at the beginning of the fuel crisis, Maghdouché residents were open to sharing their gasoline with the residents of Ankoun (an example of the solidarity Laurent previously describes), the favor was not reciprocated by the Muslim village. One day, some Maghdouché residents visited Ankoun to find gasoline, but the Muslim residents refused to give them any. “This is a religious discrimination,” Anaïs tells me indignantly. A fight subsequently broke out between the two communities at the Maghdouché gas station.

But does this conflict define the interreligious relationship between villagers? The high-pressure economic situation is the context within which the Lebanese react and engage with one another. I sense that these clashes between Maghdouché and Ankoun did not start because of religious conflict and discrimination, because such

fighting did not occur before the crisis. Rather, the dire fuel shortage has led to villages distributing fuel in discriminatory ways to ensure their own community members have fuel. The grave circumstances of scarcity ignited community divisions whereas they were previously silent or nonexistent. These villagers react to a situation that is all-too-unforgiving, one that is literally life-or-death as they wait at the fuel stations. Life in Lebanon has paused indefinitely because of these fuel shortages, which exasperates village divisions. Yet, as a long-term resident, Anaïs specifically sees this situation as religious discrimination against Christians from Maghdouché. When I question Anaïs' interpretation by asking her whether the conflict has more to do with village identity than religious one, she still insists, "religious identity, our faith, plays a very big role. Even religion in relation to village or political party. It all plays a role." She sees religious hostility as a source of conflict, rather than the shortages being a source of hostility. Notably, no such major tensions have occurred between the Maghdouché and Ghazieh residents thus far concerning oil or other scarce goods.

Echoing Anaïs' comments, Léa argues that identity politics of "Christian" versus "Muslim" erupt quickly in Southern Lebanon, although she believes peace exists between the two villages at the moment. Léa acknowledges that respect and tolerance exist between some people of Maghdouché and Ghazieh, but that there "are also always problems." When I ask her for clarification, she repeats the sectarian narrative that the people of Ghazieh and the people of Maghdouché "are not together; they are separate." Léa tells me that today there is peace between the villages, but when tensions arise, problems quickly escalate and manifest along sectarian axes. Despite this, Léa mentions that no such tensions exist in her personal relationships. She lives in an apartment

building where many Christian families live alongside two Muslim families. None of my other interviewees express this sort of living composition, as there are very few Muslim families who live in Maghdouché. Léa insists “there are no problems in our building and there is actually very peaceful coexistence here.” This exemplifies a personal example of harmonious cohabitation between the Christian and Muslim villagers in the otherwise homogeneously-Christian village. In her day-to-day life at home, Léa experiences peace with people from other religious groups, but on a greater communal context, she senses highly-inflammable tensions among the greater communities that run deep.

On the other hand, Camille describes the opposite: that tensions are concentrated in personal relationships and never erupt into community-wide tensions or animosity. She describes peace as political stability and safety to go between the villages without being harmed or experience discrimination, which grounds her perspective that there is successful everyday coexistence. She argues that because people from Ghazieh can come to Maghdouché “without worries” to buy stuff and stay at their friends’ homes, “there is this sort of peace between them.” And vice-versa. In Ghazieh too, people from Maghdouché may move freely. In this sense, peace is established as a lack of hostility and the means to travel fluently between villages. Camille reflects on the tensions that do occur between the two villages:

If something happened, it would be about some personal tensions, like someone from Maghdouché felt tension with someone in Ghazieh. But when it comes to a whole community of Maghdouché being against a whole community of Ghazieh, no, this hasn’t happened. But when it comes to personal problems, yes these may emerge. Maybe someone misunderstands another, or someone says a weird comment.

Here, Camille designates a difference between community tensions and personal tensions, since she believes that the latter exists whereas the former does not occur. No community-wide tensions or hostility exist, since there is no active conflict between the villages. Rather, Camille argues that problems occur within and are limited to personal relationships.

Many other young adults agree that fights between the communities of Maghdouché and Ghazieh are not typically interreligious conflicts, but just personal conflict erupting due to tensions between individuals. Marius adds:

I think there is only personal conflict that occur between our villages. Maybe concerning women, or concerning food things come up. Only personal conflicts. You can't be happy with everybody. You can't be good with everybody. So, same goes with all of Lebanon. Personally, I'm okay with everybody. I have my own experience. I know how to deal with every single person, due to my experience... I see that there are people who really love each other. But on the other hand, there are still people who hate each other due to some aspects or family issues, maybe economic issues, who knows? So it's not in my shoes to talk about it.

Marius' life experience taught him how to act around certain people to maintain politeness and order, and from this experience, he has found that there is both love and hate between people. Universalizing the case study of Ghazieh and Maghdouché to encompass all relationships worldwide, he warns against exaggerating tensions occurring between people of different faiths. Conflict does not usually appear because of religious differences, but because of mundane problems. After making this comment, Marius concludes "it is not in my shoes" to discuss other villagers' relationships with one another. All he can speak about is his own personal relationships, in which he feels "okay."

Reflecting on the interpersonal and communal level tensions, Blaise suggests that traditional mentalities—rather than the summer 2021 crises—hinder the greater coexistence of his village and the Muslim one:

Nowadays, we confront traditional thought as a challenge to peace. What are the patterns hindering peace? Maybe a Muslim can't talk to a Christian and even girl-boy relationships and marriage are made awkward. These are problems that both religions are now facing because of traditional thinking and in the traditional society in Lebanon, now, we are not a liberal society. It is a traditional society with traditional thoughts and traditional ideas and following customs and values.

I ask Blaise about how he describes this traditional thought. He clarifies:

I would say conservative. This mentality does not accept change. It does not accept new values. I, as a young Christian, accept the values of Muslims, their customs, but the traditional thinking does not accept change. It considers that your values as a Muslim, and your values in Ghazieh, will introduce, will create a conflict. They don't accept change.

In the last excerpt, Blaise employs “your” by directly referring to me, the researcher, whose family is Shia Muslim. He highlights a difference between the traditional mentality of his parents’ generation and the new open-spirited mentality of the postwar generation that includes both himself (“as a young Christian”) and myself. The latter accepts change, just as much as it accepts religious variation and plurality.

Blaise pushes against the traditionalist mindsets that he blames for tension, conflict, and interreligious “awkward”-ness. Because of these, he anticipates an emergence of a conflict of values:

There is and will be a conflict of values between Maghdouché and Ghazieh, because between the different religions, there are conflicts of values, of customs. Muslims have a way of life that is different from our way of life. That’s why it’s going to contribute to a conflict of values. So the government has a very essential role in making us see - if you will - the priority and the importance of living together, between us and Muslims, or Muslims and other religions.

Blaise perceives traditionalist mentalities pervading Maghdouché as “conservative” and resistant to changes in society, including changes in people’s interactions and connections across villages. While Amira and Warda (as Shia women from Ghazieh) consider Maghdouché residents to be open-minded, Blaise (who is *from* Maghdouché) feels that traditionalist mentalities impede progress in the interreligious relationship. He finds that traditionalist thinking in Maghdouché sparks alarm about Muslims, and encourages the interpretation of Muslims as provokers of violence. A clash of values will occur, Blaise seems to suggest, because Muslims have a way of life different from “our” way of life. He does not specify what this sort of conflict will look like (whether it will be armed conflict, resource competition, etc...) and he does not attempt to play down differences between the two communities by emphasizing similarities. He refuses to participate in the process of aestheticization (Seligman et al., 2015), the homogenization of the Christian and Muslim lifestyles, to trivialize the existence of difference. In Blaise’s mind, the differences are real and threaten the stability of intercommunal relations if traditionalist thinking continues.

While Blaise concentrates on the dichotomy between culturally traditionalist and progressive thinking, Camille frames a difference between the older and the younger generations’ thinking:

People can do what they want to do in Maghdouché... but older people may not think this way. But us, young people who think like me, yes we think this way – we think people should do and act and believe as they wish. I want to go outside in shorts, and no one bothers me, so I feel there is peace.

She establishes a dichotomy between the “older” mentality and the mentality of the “people who think like me.” The “we” refers to the youth who are not part of the older generation, since they do and act as they wish. The “we” believes in freedom, and

Camille feels that this freedom is tangible in her village because she can dress as she desires without being bothered on the streets. She hints at what Blaise calls the “conservative mentality that does not accept change,” alive in the minds of her village’s older population. Although she focuses specifically on Maghdouché, her perception of the dichotomy in the war and postwar generation’s thought relates to the dynamics occurring in Ghazieh. For instance, Camille shares that she, as a young person, agrees people should “do and act and believe as they wish,” whereas her parents, the war generation, enforce traditionalist judgements that her way may be *haram*.

Camille and Blaise extract inter-village from the religious context to place it into the generational context. They emphasize a difference between the perspective of traditionalist generations, which often are the older generations, and the approach of the young generation that abandons traditionalist preconceptions and values. In this sense, peace and tension between the greater communities of Maghdouché and Ghazieh is not as simple as conflict occurring or not occurring, or animosity existing or not existing, but includes a generational component that intersects with these axes. When change or conflict occurs, Camille will understand it through a different lens than an older community member.

In the midst of our conversations about the two communities’ relationships and recent episodes of fighting, Ali reminds me of the human-to-human relationship rather than the Muslim-to-Christian one. He tells me simply:

Look, you are asking me all these questions. But if I were on the street driving, and I saw someone who has a problem with their car, of course I won’t leave him. Of course not, whether he is Druze or Sunnah or Christian.

Ali knows he will help whoever is in trouble, no matter the individual's religion. He refuses to abandon the person. The religious identity is not necessarily trivialized or erased, but it does not surface as a factor in Ali's decision-making to support someone who has a problem. Although it is easy to speak in generalizations and community-to-community conflict, Ali reminds us of the personal impact of peaceful and compassionate relations. Importantly, Ali speaks as a young man from Ghazieh who may not be in tune to the discrimination and struggles faced by people from other genders and religions. Although some of his peers point specifically to areas of inter-village tension and manifestation of sectarianism, particularly those emerging during Lebanon's socioeconomic collapse, other individuals like Ali simply focus on their own commitment to helping the religious other. This does not erase or minimize the tensions others feel, but recenters us on an ethic of kindness that, throughout my fieldwork in Southern Lebanon, I notice the majority of young adults also adopt.

A Spectrum to Coexistence: Tolerance, Respect, and Love

I notice a spectrum of tolerance, respect, and love that is constantly evolving in the Ghazieh-Maghdouché context. Relationships between villagers are not stagnant. They are inherently dynamic and take on new forms as the social, political, and economic situation evolves on a daily basis. In the context of coexistence, I understand religious tolerance as the appreciation of spiritual values, beliefs, and practices which are different from one's own. Respect for the religious other manifests as a consideration for the other's wellbeing and understanding of their beliefs. Respect in the religiously plural context signals a regard for the histories, traditions, rights, and norms of another's religious community. Finally, love consists of kindness, care, empathy, and

compassion for those who live by one's side. When love is at practice, one pursues the well-being of others. In this section, I share the perspectives of those who interpret a positive relationship between Maghdouché and Ghazieh, and then move on to share the voices of youth who feel hostility, tension, and distrust in the intercommunal relationship.

Just as young adults interpret peace differently based upon their lived experiences, so too do they feel tolerance, respect, and love in their daily lives at different levels. Rami argues that because his community, Ghazieh, and his neighboring community, Maghdouché, continue to exist and succeed in a cross-village daily collaboration and integration, there is tolerance, respect, and love:

Well, if they are not that respectful, tolerant, and love – I'm talking about both villages – we would have seen destruction of those two villages and that destruction would have expanded. But they are just full of love, full of joy, full of respect for each other. No matter how different they are through the religious lens, they are the same people through the humanity lens.

Rami interprets the continuation of both villages' existence as proof of the tolerance, respect, and love existing between both. Had there not been these conditions, these villages would have experienced some sort of destruction, which could take the form of armed conflict or economic competition and isolation. Based on his lived experience, Rami finds that these villages are "full of love, full of joy, full of respect for each other." He also indicates that while the men and women of Ghazieh are different than those of Maghdouché "through the religious lens," they are "the same people" when acknowledged "through the humanity lens." He resists the categorization and exceptionalization of individuals based on religious identity, which he does by universalizing the Muslims of one community and the Christians of another so that they

embody one identity: human. The specific instrument used to enact their faiths, the religion, does not influence how human they are.

Majd uses the argument that the communities “don’t do anything disrespectful” and “no one [has] got[ten] hurt” in Maghdouché or Ghazieh to claim that there is respect between the villages:

These two villages don’t do anything disrespectful towards one another. Even in every club here or there, there is mixed religion, in every club, sport, school... even in Christian schools, like my niece is in a Christian school. There is no disrespect. They don’t do anything bad to us. There is peace between the two villages. No one ever hurt the other one. The youth here spend the night with one another, they go out, there are a lot of people who are best friends.

He paints a picture of peace in which the communities are integrated and interdependent, exemplified by the “mixed religion” in clubs, sports activities, and institutions, including the Christian school his niece attends. The interactions seem plentiful as Majd shows in his description of the various ways youth interact with one another and formulate friendships. He insists that there are even “best friends” between villages to show the proximity of both communities, in which relationships are not strictly professional and neutral, but are often intimate. This perceived lack of violence and lack of resentfulness, as well as the abundant integration and collaboration, contributes to Majd’s belief in the mutual respect between the villages.

Likewise, Jacques does not report negative occurrences between the two communities and eagerly shares that “there is peace and love between our villages.” He tells me, “we must rise above narratives of ‘he is Muslim, he is Christian’. We are starting to marry from one another, we could say. Thank God, we go up, they go down. There is no difference between us.” He does not want to see hostility or anger between the villages. He cares for both and hopes to see a future of good, in which there is more

intermingling and bonding. Jacques' desire for interreligious interactions is revealing: he wants the religious neighbor to visit his village, and he wants to visit the religious neighbors'. He sees the interreligious relationship as positive. Jacques even thanks God that there are these mutual interactions and visitations, rooting peace with the necessity to "rise above" divisive narratives about religious differences. Love for the religious neighbor is clear in Jacques' response.

As he also describes the love between Muslim and Christian villagers, Baasim from Ghazieh emphasizes the social interconnectedness of the communities:

We like to be on good terms with the people of Maghdouché because they are so close to us; we reach out to them. Some of the people I love most are in that village. Our villages love one another. Our roads pass through their villages; their roads pass through ours. Friendship happens. This is something that helps us a lot; they are very good people, their roads are very clean. Their village is beautiful – I go up a lot and take pictures up there.

Baasim employs the word "love" very casually, offering the metaphor of the villages' interconnected roads (although it is also a literal truth) to show how the villages' systems are interdependent. One will not function as fluidly without the other. Baasim has love for Maghdouché not only because it is a beautiful place, but because his loved ones inhabit the village. He loves the space because it is the space of his friends. Furthermore, he asserts that interreligious friendships with people from Maghdouché residents are "something that helps us a lot." There is meaning and value in these relationships that enhance the experience of life in Southern Lebanon.

Fatima has a similar perspective centered on tolerance and respect, although she shows hesitancy to speak for the other's side:

I don't know if the people in Maghdouché like us, or if they love us...
But I personally don't have any problem with them. I feel no hostility.

There is no problem. I don't mind living in a village where there are Christians, or if our neighbors are Christians... no, on the other hand, it is a beautiful thing. I don't see anyone who hates us. If he hates us, it's because of his character. Baba has friends who are Christian from Maghdouché, and maybe we don't visit one another all the time, but when we do, we do bring them some stuff, and they also bring us figs and grapes.

Fatima admits that she does not know how Christians feel about her and her community. This hesitancy reveals her respect for Maghdouché, since she refrains from assuming that she can speak for its villagers. She does not have frequent access to insiders' voices, since she does not have close friends in Maghdouché. But based on her lived experience, Fatima has not felt "any problem" or hostility with the community. She feels peace, or at least, a lack of conflict. She even asserts that she would not mind living within a Christian community, characterizing the religious mix as a "beautiful thing," which reveals a recurring theme in this microanalysis' coexistence: the willingness and excitement to live with the religious other. She perceives religious diversity as beautiful. Importantly, her father offers a healthy model of the interreligious relationship, since he has a caring friendship with a group of Christians from Maghdouché. Observations of her father's relationships shape Fatima's perspective on the interreligious dynamic.

As a young woman in Maghdouché, Adèle offers an alternative perspective based on her lived experience that contests with the answers reported by her peers in Ghazieh. As I share in Part I, many young women in Maghdouché have been verbally and physically harassed by some men of Ghazieh, which is certainly a form of inter-communal conflict that diminishes perceived respect between communities. As a woman who has suffered from online harassment by men from Ghazieh, Adèle

interprets an imbalance between the Christians' respect and love for Ghazieh and the Muslims' respect for Maghdouché:

There is respect between us and them; the tolerance... maybe from our part more than theirs. Love for the others? I think yes. I think yes. We respect them on so many levels, but they.... They do respect us but not on the same level as we do.

While Adèle acknowledges that there is respect “between us and them,” she senses that her community offers more tolerance and respect to Ghazieh than the other way around. This belief is likely informed by her hurtful experiences with harassment that make her feel disrespected. She senses an imbalance in which the members of Maghdouché offer respect “on so many levels” that is not reciprocated. In this sense, Adèle may feel general tolerance between the communities but does not consistently feel the additional layers of coexistence: respect and love.

Anaïs, who is also a young woman from Maghdouché, offers an example of an imbalance in respect:

There's a place here called *wa'her* in Maghdouché, it's a garden with lots of trees. There are a lot of people who go there, they walk there, they do things, they eat lunch. This site is a place for Maghdouché and the people of Maghdouché. The problem is that there are people from Ghazieh and other villages next to us who visit the *wa'her*. When these people of different religions come, the people of Maghdouché get upset because they believe that this is a place for them and them only, because those people spoil this place. Many throw trash on the ground. So the people of Maghdouché do not believe that they respect this place enough to deserve to come here.

The people of Maghdouché feel disrespected by the ways in which some visitors from Ghazieh and other villages abuse their garden, the *wa'her*. Based on Anaïs' description, I understand that Maghdouché residents see the garden as their own property, “for Maghdouché and the people of Maghdouché.” This means that the *wa'her* is not an inherently shared space, like the statue of Maryam. Maghdouché residents feel

disrespected when their space is not appreciated or honored, exemplified by visitors trashing it. Resentment because of this occurrence may fuel tension and apprehension when Ghazieh residents visit the Catholic community. Even if the villagers of Ghazieh are open-minded and demonstrate tolerance and understanding about the Maghdouché community members' spirituality, irresponsible behavior within the community of Maghdouché makes this community feel that it is not respected "on the same level" as it respects Ghazieh. This specific example reveals the importance of showing respect and care for physical space and environment—not only respect for the religious beliefs—of communities to support and reinforce coexistence.

Interestingly, Anaïs employs the third person, describing what the "people of Maghdouché" feel as though she were a mediator reporting her observations to me. She does not position herself within the tensions; rather she notices them on the outside without feeling (or at least, without sharing that she feels) personally attacked. This demonstrates a neutral maturity that is crucial to everyday peace, for Anaïs does not reproduce the tensions, frustrations, and anger in her calm response. Still, she does not romanticize the village relations, and she offers me an honest description of the limits to the love felt between Maghdouché and Ghazieh:

I think some people in Maghdouché and Ghazieh love one another, but some don't. It is because of the old problems that have occurred before, in the past and that until now have been held in the heart. Whether in Ghazieh or Maghdouché. In my opinion, there is tolerance, respect, love. But this love is limited especially when a person is disrespectful to religion. Maybe someone from Ghazieh comes to Maghdouché and says a bad thing about the Christian religion, or maybe he says something about the Saydeh Maryam. They hurt the people of Maghdouché; and the Christians hold onto it as a thing that is done. It creates a problem, it causes a problem in the mentality of all the people who live in Maghdouché. And even the mentality of the people in Ghazieh. So, there is respect, tolerance, love, but when something happens between

Maghdouché and Ghazieh, they come back to the identity: “we are Christian and they are Muslim. We have different values, etc...”. So it’s kind of sensitive, this relationship. Like, an hour like this, an hour like that. It’s like a very fine thread that can at some point break.

Throughout her life, Anaïs has witnessed disrespectful actions done onto her community by some Ghazieh members, like the trashing of the *wa’her* and insulting of the statue of Maryam. These stain her vision of relations between the villages and ultimately leaves her with an understanding that the inter-village relationship oscillates from tolerance, respect, and love to disrespect. The relationship teeters between peace and tension. She articulates the sensitivity of this relationship in her description that it is a “very fine thread that can at some points break.” Not only do certain actions “hurt” Maghdouché’s residents, but these “Christians hold onto it,” meaning the memory of being disrespected stays plastered in the minds of Maghdouché’s residents. When the interreligious relationship is at a low point, both communities’ villagers return to traditionalist, divisive, and sectarian identity-based narratives. This wavering peace impedes the deeper inter-village integration.

Like Anaïs, other women from Maghdouché express ambiguity about the Maghdouché-Ghazieh relationship as there is never an absolute sense of respect and love between the two villages. Perhaps it is because of their particular positionalities as women who have themselves experienced harassment from men, as I show in Part II, but, during my interviews, the women from Maghdouché often emphasize that the intercommunal relationship is in a perpetual state of fragility. These women are hyper-aware of power dynamics, and their past experiences of discomfort shape their focus on the imbalances in the inter-village relationship. They notice that their community is sometimes disrespected in ways that a young man from Ghazieh, like Rami, does not

mention in his enthusiastic comment that the villages “are just full of love, full of joy, full of respect for each other.” Rami’s previous comment, although genuine, overlooks certain nuances that the young women perceive. These young women offer an important analysis of obscured imbalances that are otherwise overlooked when only seeking Ghazieh members’ perspectives.

Camille, also a young woman from Maghdouché, shares her approach to avoid being hurt by disrespectful people in her personal life:

You must be picky with who you talk to and accept in your life – whether from Ghazieh or another village – and be aware of whether he is stuck in his religion, in his village, in everything.

Camille introduces the importance of “being picky” to find relationships that make her feel respected. In this comment, Camille implicitly recognizes the existence of both kind and unkind people, careful not to generalize all residents of Ghazieh and other villages as good or bad. To engage with members of the other village, one must be selective with friends and choose only to maintain relationships with those who show respect. This philosophy accentuates Camille’s agency. She does not passively discuss the harms done to her community by members of another, but instead focuses her attention on maintaining relationships with certain members of a community and not others. “You” must be aware of whether the person “you” befriend is “stuck” within religion and does not open to others. She calls her peers to action, asking them to be aware and analytical of the people they befriend. I notice that many other young adults in Lebanon employ the term “stuck” to refer to small-mindedness of the religiocentric person, who denies other religions’ “truth” and conceptualizes the existence of an absolute correct path (Abu-Nimer, 2004, p. 497). Camille takes responsibility to avoid these people so that her close friends are individuals who support her, not insult her.

Perhaps this means that she approaches her religious neighbors in Ghazieh with hesitancy or reservedness at first. This is a measure she takes for her own wellbeing, because she believes people must be “picky” to only take positive, supportive energy into their life.

I offer this mosaic of reflections and opinions from young adults of Southern Lebanon who generally feel an openness toward and respect for the other community, although some also discern asymmetrical respect. I want to point out that none of the young adults tell me that they do not respect or dislike the other religious community. While some, such as Adèle and Anaïs, share examples of being hurt, they do not share negative feelings about the other community. Each young man and woman from Maghdouché and Ghazieh carries different experiences, all of which combine to formulate a holistic image of Ghazieh-Maghdouché relations. Impressions of disrespect are crucial to consider when exploring interreligious coexistence. While cooperation and caring emerge as grounding elements of these interpersonal and intercommunal relationships (which I describe in both Part I and Part II), perceived asymmetry of respect adds complexity to these relationships and reminds not to romanticize the relations. For some like Camille and Anaïs, distrust tinges their perception of coexistence.

This second part of Chapter 6 offers an in-depth analysis of the greater community relations between Ghazieh and Maghdouché and focuses on young adults’ comfort within the other village, discussing cross-religious visitations and free movement between villages. I shed light on the various motivations to visit one another’s villages, as excursions to Ghazieh are motivated more by errands and

convenience, whereas those to Maghdouché are inspired by leisurely purposes of visiting sacred and aesthetically-pleasing sites. Many young adults perceive the villages as intrinsically intertwined on the basis of their contemporary solidarity, physical proximity, and mutual dependence upon one another. This dependence runs deep, as certain young adults necessitate the other village not only for practical and social reasons, but also for comfort and emotional wellbeing.

Some of the spaces visited by young adults, in turn, have the potential of becoming shared spaces when religious divisions are eradicated in exchange for a de-sectarianized, interreligious participation. Shared spaces like the statue of Virgin Mary or the Maghdouché church are not absent of religion altogether, but rather absent of religious divisions to enable the sublime, interreligious participation. These spaces allow young adults to connect with the Divine in new ways, as they have the opportunity to enact rituals that their religion may not necessarily require. This in itself challenges the status quo of religious tradition and introduces the possibility of a blending of religious practices enacted by an individual with faith. Furthermore, conventionally non-religious spaces, like school and sport fields, that inherently take on a sectarian nature in Lebanon due to the politicized religious, all have the potential to serve as neutralized, shared spaces, where the sublime interreligious interaction comes alive.

Ending Part II with an examination of greater community relations during the summer of 2021, I account for the impact of Lebanon's socioeconomic and political crises on the two small villages. While the current situation offers a chance for intercommunal solidarity to develop via grassroots networks, many young adults also

point to competition for resources increasing as a result. This leads me to establish a dynamic spectrum of tolerance, respect, and love representative of Maghdouché-Ghazieh community relations. Certainly, young adults vary in how they describe Maghdouché-Ghazieh relations. Although many young men from Ghazieh and Maghdouché sense there is respect and love between villages, emphasizing a lack of active conflict and abundant cross-religious integration, some young women of Maghdouché reveal hidden power imbalances and experiences of disrespect that taint their perceptions of everyday peace and inter-village trust. These voices offer a nuanced understanding of the potential limits to the communities' peaceful relations, which proves that everyday peace necessitates a mutuality of respect, not only of religious beliefs, but of people and places as well. For these women in Maghdouché to feel more at ease with the other community, they need to feel that their spaces are honored.

Chapter 7: Youths' Master and Personal Narratives about War and the Religious Neighbor

During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), interreligious conflict between political militias turned religious communities against one another, particularly in Beirut and the mountains. Christian communities like Maghdouché sided with the Lebanese Forces, a Christian-based militia and political party, whereas Shia Muslim communities like Ghazieh sided with Amal Movement and later, Hezbollah. These militia affiliations corresponded with different political agendas. Likewise, Ghazieh's residents supported Palestinians fighting Israel from the South, whereas Maghdouché's did not. Khalaf (2015) speaks to the salient symptoms of "retribalization" that emerged across Lebanese communities during this time. Reawakened communal identities pushed people to seek shelter within their religious communities, inspiring the emergence of the pejorative term "Lebanonization" to signal heightened sectarian polarization and national disintegration exemplified by the Lebanese Civil War (Righi, 2014). Today, some scholars (Upadhyay, 2008; Demichelis, 2016; Bordenkircher, 2020) employ "Lebanonization" to describe intractable sectarian conflicts in countries other than Lebanon.

To those in Ghazieh and Maghdouché, like those anywhere in Lebanon, the Civil War was harsh. Throughout my informal conversations with village leaders and business owners who lived through the war, I hear about destruction, displacement, and death. Some lost their brothers, sisters, and parents. Some lost their homes. In Maghdouché, Christian political parties played a role in the war by participating in some battles in the South and supplying civilians with goods like wheat. Blaise tells me

that many “big-name families” fled to other countries because of the violence, emptying Maghdouché of its inhabitants. Even today, many of these families have not returned to their lands. This is “the deep inconvenience of war,” Blaise mourns. Maghdouché lost young inhabitants who instead grew up in France and the U.S. The experience in Ghazieh is quasi-identical to that of the neighboring Christian village. During the war, some men of Ghazieh joined the Amal and Hezbollah forces to resist Israel’s occupation. The militias also provided food and other resources to the village’s Shia population. Walking through the streets of Maghdouché and Ghazieh, even today, the ruins of the war manifest in the bullet-riddled homes and demolished sites. A middle-aged woman tells me that as a child, she and her sisters would hide in her uncle’s apartment below theirs during shelling to avoid getting hit. Grandmothers recall their fears of sending their children to school in other villages. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, many Shia from Ghazieh faced detention and harassment from Israeli soldiers. This was the life of the war generation, composed of Lebanon’s adults today.

Lebanon’s postwar generation, the “postwar youth” (Larkin, 2010), did not experience the war’s decades of violent sectarianism, foreign occupations, and armed conflict. These youth grew up during informal and formal reconciliation processes and infrastructure reconstruction. They live in the new Lebanon, the product of the Civil War in which corrupt warlords now hold governmental positions. This generation lives in a Lebanon that faces new sectarian challenges to interreligious development, collaboration, and peace, epitomized by the most recent sectarian militia shootings on October 14th, 2021 in Beirut. The Civil War is over, but another war is alive in the daily life of today’s youth: a daily war against the legacy of sectarianism.

In this chapter, I aim to understand how memory of war is translated across generations and today shapes the postwar generation's understanding of the interreligious relationship and the notion of being a united "Lebanese." I call to the concepts of master narrative and personal narrative as I analyze youths' understanding of the Civil War, the religious other, and interreligious relationships. McLean and Syed (2016) define master narratives as "culturally shared stories that tell us about a given culture, and provide guidance for how to be a 'good' member of a culture; they are a part of the structure of society." Master itself insinuates "compulsory discourses—stories language that individuals feel compelled to internalize and reproduce to maintain a particular social order" (Hammack and Toolis, 2016). Master narratives call to broader stories maintained in communities as material that humans utilize when reflecting on how to live a good life. However, these master narratives can also reproduce conditions of conflict, which Hammack (2008, p. 230) suggests occurs with youth specifically in Israel and Palestine. While master narratives serve as the material of the personal narrative, the personal narrative also stems from personal experience and reflection (Hammack, 2009). As individuals construct personal narratives, they negotiate with and internalize master narratives while also drawing from direct experience. The personal narrative is alive and evolving, as it is constructed and reconstructed, imagined and re-imagined, across life's course.

I turn to the Southern Lebanese young adults who are in their late teens and twenties to uncover their personal narratives, which may hint at the master narratives learnt from family and community. My goal is not to take an psychoanalytical approach to distinguish between the personal and the master; rather, I aim to hear youths' voices

through a nuanced lens that accounts for the stories they ingest while formulating their own perceptions. In this way, I contemplate how youth interpret contemporary religious tensions and assert their agency within their interreligious relationships. I strive to uncover the extent to which parents' perspectives on religion and the religious other dictate young adults' perspectives. How do stories and community memories of the Civil War, a time of intense sectarian conflict across Lebanon, shape youths' perspectives about religion, the religious other, and interreligious relationships? What other wars and episodes of violence, such as the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, touch youth today and shape the ways they interact with one another across village and religious divides? How do parents (who reproduce war-era narratives in the household) influence their children's perspectives? Most deeply, I explore whether young adults believe they align with, or diverge, from their parents' narratives about the religious other.

The Civil War: Youths' Conceptions of a Previous Generation's War

Throughout my conversations, most young villagers of Ghazieh and Maghdouché do not voluntarily bring up the Civil War. Ironically, many of the youth from Maghdouché laugh when I ask about the historic violence's impact on their relationships with the religious other, as if to express dismay at the thought of allowing such a dark history to corrupt their contemporary friendships. I interpret their push away from war-related topics as a rejection of the legitimacy of the Civil War's violence. For example, in response to my question ("Do you ever think about the Civil War?"), the majority of young adults offer me responses like Laurent's:

Haha! Noooooo, of course I do not think about the Civil War, hahahaha. Look, how will I explain it to you? Haha! A lot of my friends, they're unable to fathom that this war happened in the past. My friends are of

different religions, I can't even fathom siding against my friend. My parents don't talk about it to me, of course not. Maybe because it's not important in this time, because now is different than it was before. These are different times. We are all one people now. Haha!

In this life, "we are all one people," Laurent asserts as a means of establishing cross-religious solidarity when confronting the theme of war. Laurent understands that the Civil War divided his country across religious identity, but he considers the present moment to be an entirely different time than the war period, and thus chooses to detach from the historical sectarian violence. He is confident that "now is different than it was before," which means that "now" is a time of unity. He does not deny the history of violence, but he moves past it. Likewise, Laurent's parents do not offer him material in the form of stories and memories from which he could imagine the war. This absence of parent-perpetuated narratives shows that his parents do not cling onto the past and feed him accounts of the violence. This hints at a not-looking-back mentality, a sort of amnesia, that other young people also describe. Laurent even repeats "of course not" various times between laughter, insinuating that it is unimaginable to think about the war and to be emotionally caught in it.

Because young adults offer me very similar responses in terms of tone, language, and content, I decide to string together a handful of responses I receive from the young men and women from Ghazieh and Maghdouché when I ask about the Civil War. In this chapter, I lean heavily on youths' voices. Although I could summarize the similar responses in a couple of paragraphs, I prefer to directly share their words, because they are impactful and demonstrate youths' widespread determination to overcome legacies of sectarian conflict. I begin with responses from Maghdouché, starting with Adèle's voice:

I.. as a person, no. I don't talk about the Civil War; nor do I think about it. It's in the past. I also didn't live the war. So I don't think about it...My mom, no not at all, no, she doesn't talk about the Civil War. She only tells me some of her memories from living during the war. But my father, yes, he tells me "Oh, us Christians we stayed behind..." but they never tell me "oh they killed us and blah blah blah..."

When I ask about whether she has more information about the war's background and motivations, Adèle insists that she truly does not know about the war. The limited details she has received or desires to receive include narratives spread within her family, such as her mother's memories about lifestyle and her father's description about Christians who "stayed behind." The latter hints at lingering resentment about the losses Christians may perceive to have faced, but Adèle emphasizes that her parents do not propagate mournful rhetoric of "they killed us," which would certainly inflame sectarian tensions and demonization of the other. Generally, her parents choose to remain neutral, or they at least do not point fingers to predators. In her life, Adèle does not ingest and reproduce dark narratives about this war, distancing herself from it by explicitly designating it as "in the past."

Jacques from Maghdouché says:

I don't think about the Civil War. I feel like Ghazieh and Maghdouché never had problems together. Especially now, I think that most of our thoughts are not centered on war, and we don't want war; we don't think about the Civil War, because no one wants to lose their parents.

During the Civil War, there were no major outbreaks of interreligious clashes between the villagers of Maghdouché and Ghazieh, despite general fighting in *el-Jnoub*, so Jacques is correct in saying that the two villages "never had [war-related] problems together." Jacques does not believe that war is on the villagers' minds. He cannot envision the eruption of a second war because he does not want to see death. His justification that "no one wants to lose their parents" refers to his understanding that

war requires sacrifice of the self. This sober perception is entrenched in lived histories of family death and displacement. We will be hurt if we attack the other. Jacques does not want his parents to live through another period of destruction. To maintain our family's wellbeing, to secure the lives of our own parents, we must promote peace with our neighbors. Out of love for ourselves, we must love the neighbor.

Similarly, Camille adds:

Okay, of course no. First of all, because I wasn't born during the Civil War. And second of all, it happened and is done. We cannot take a thing of the past and keep remembering it.. because if we do keep hanging on to the past, to this Civil War, it will happen again. So of course no. Maybe there are some people who still think about the Civil War, they are still hung up on it.

Camille believes that clinging onto the past and actively remembering our pains leads us to repeating those very mistakes. To hang onto the past will ensure that another war begins. She insinuates that the best way to end cyclical violence is to forget about it and erase it from the collective conscience. To survive requires amnesia. Detaching from the past—moving on—is a requisite for peace. This is why “of course no,” she does not think about the war. In her mind, the war “happened and is done.” The war has ended. She sees this war as separate from today. The survival of the Lebanese people necessitates that they forget how they have been hurt and betrayed.

In resonance, Khalaf (2005) discerns a “collective amnesia,” composed of lethargy, indifference, and weariness of war memories in Lebanon after the 1990s. Carole Dagher's discussion of “national amnesia” (2000, p. 8) in addition to Michael Young's interpretation of “state-sponsored amnesia” (2000, p. 42) reveal a cultural push to forget the war. Barak (2007, p. 56-8) also argues that a policy of “don't mention the war” was manifest in postwar reconstruction efforts. Most actors from within the state

and political society chose to remain silent with regard to the conflict, only taking subtle actions like strengthening the state and its institutions or creating more ethnically-balanced political institutions. However, the state did not openly reflect on the war. I sense that the young adults of Ghazieh and Maghdouché reproduce this policy of collective amnesia in their responses, as most do not know or discuss their parents', grandparents', and communities' memories of the war. Some parents also seem to project this collective amnesia in their reserved descriptions of the war to their children. I interpret this amnesia—this push to “not mention the war”—as a master narrative from which youth draw and shape their own vision of the Lebanese past and memory.

Juliette, Elise, and Léa offer me the following responses, respectfully:

I don't really feel I have resentment concerning Civil War. I don't really think about the Civil War, it's not for my time. I never lived it. Of course my parents tell me about it, but not a lot; and I don't concentrate on it.
(Juliette)

No, no never have I thought about it. It's in the past. At the time, it was an issue but now things are different. My parents sometimes talk about the Civil War, but I don't listen to them. I don't ask them questions.
(Elise)

Of course, no, I don't think about the Civil War. I didn't experience this war, I am young. My parents talk a lot about this war that happened, but my parents have never influenced me to not like Muslims from this talk... and actually, no, I care for them. My parents, they try to tell me about the Civil War, about the fighting... they try but I honestly I don't like to talk about the war and all of this. I prefer to not talk about them, so I don't engage in those kinds of conversations. But between themselves, they do talk a lot about the previous wars and fighting. (Léa)

Like their peers, Juliette and Léa emphasize that they do not think about the Civil War because they do not have lived experience of this period. Thinking about it is “not for my time,” as Juliette asserts. None of her personal experiences are rooted in this war, so she constructs a personal narrative that detaches herself from the war that her parents continue to discuss in a limited manner. She does not focus on these stories. Although

they both also have access to narratives about the war through their parents' memories, Léa and Elise also admit that they do not like talking about these issues. In their personal narratives, they demonstrate a disinterest in and resistance against learning these stories from their parents and communities. Likely, they could obtain information if they tried, but they reject this opportunity, which demonstrates their refusal of a history that can refuel divisions.

Perhaps the cost of "moving on" and establishing everyday peace with the religious other is to lose history, to miss out on hearing parents' experiences about the war, the fighting, and Israel's occupation. Still, while their parents discuss the war, the three women from Maghdouché do not get lost in the memories or carry their weight. These women retract from their parents' storytelling, and their personal perceptions about their religious neighbors are not negatively impacted. Elise says that she simply does not listen or ask questions, closing her ears and eyes to the stories. And even though Léa may still hear her parents talking about the Civil War, she does not see her religious others through a negative lens. In her comment that she cares for Muslims, Léa explicitly resists the assumption that parents' Civil War memories may make youth turn against religious others. These youth from Maghdouché conceptualize war as a distant part of their country's history, not as a factor that defines how and with whom they may formulate their friendships. In their personal narratives, Juliette, Elise, and Léa push against parents' memories of the war to recreate their own conceptions of what this war means. Generally, the answer is: nothing. Their own agency inspires them to reject war narratives.

Blaise continues:

As a young person, I have not witnessed the Civil War. I wasn't born, in this life, during the Civil War. So I don't feel anything. It's the opposite actually, I never think about it... but yes, my parents tell me about this war. It was a war between different religions, it was a very severe war. We talk about what was happening, how the religions were against each other, how people were killing each other. This war is based on values and customs.

Blaise uses similar language as his peers in his personal narrative, although he reframes the war through the lens of clash of values and customs. He reproduces the sectarian narrative that the war was an interreligious battle, although many of his peers argue that it was an essentially political war exacerbated by religious divisions. Blaise sees the Civil War as genuinely grounded in religious and cultural differences. At the same time, this understanding does not make him “feel anything” about the war. These cultural narratives do not spark hatred or anger in himself toward any person or group of people. Ultimately, I perceive him as neutral.

Claude acknowledges the possibility that the villages' parents, those who were alive, hurt, and displaced during the Civil War, still carry dark feelings about the past:

Maybe our parents still have resentment about the Civil War. But us, the youth, we definitely don't have this kind of thinking at all. (Claude, Maghdouché)

The Civil War is alive in their memories. Claude re-introduces the dichotomy others have verbalized in Chapter 6 between the war generation and the postwar generation. “Us, the youth” do not think with resentment about the Civil War, Claude says, whereas the parents and grandparents may. This detachment from the violent past defines the postwar generation. They did not personally experience pain in their lifetimes because of this war. They do not carry the burden of lived experience, as their parents do. This again re-iterates the difference between personal narratives of youth and those of their

parents' generation. "Us, the youth" are eager to connect with neighbors of various religious backgrounds.

I now turn to a few of the many excerpts from my interviews with the young adults from Ghazieh, which are very similar to the ones from Maghdouché. The fact that similar language is employed by both young communities shows that, collectively, the Southern Lebanese postwar generation of Shia and Catholic faiths have similar perspectives about the significance of the Civil War on their daily lives and interactions with neighboring religious communities.

Fadi and Kaamil, respectively, say to me:

Of course I don't think about. Because I have Christian friends and I don't think they're like that. My parents taught me not to think about this war. I was not alive during the Civil War. My parents talked to me about this war, but I don't like to think about this war, this fighting. This happened a long time ago. (Fadi)

No, I don't think about it. My parents also never talk about it with me. This topic never just comes up; there is no reason to open the subject, do you understand? And I, I don't even see my parents that much. I learned about the Civil War in school. They talked about how people lived, how the war was hard on people. They talked about the fighting. (Kaamil)

Fadi's relationships with his Christian friends inspire him to resist their vilification.

Demonizing the other is generally the impediment to redemption of collective memory (Righi, 2012, p. 244). Fadi's friendships actually galvanize his personal narrative that "I don't think they're like that." Although "that" is undefined here, I believe Fadi refers to the conception of the other as ruthless, cruel, and anti-Muslim, which is a divisive characterization inherent to sectarian narratives. He refers to his interreligious relationships as experiential proof that such narratives are untrue. While some young adults' parents like Fadi's share information about the Civil War with him, others like Kaamil's do not because "there is no reason to open the subject." With this phrase,

Kaamil frames the Civil War as irrelevant to today, something that can create more pointless damage if discussed. The subject must be closed.

Four other young adults, Mona, Warda, Baasim, and Nadia, repeat similar perspectives:

I wasn't living. So no, I never think about the Civil War. (Mona)

We were not living. We don't talk about it. (Warda)

No, I don't think about it. My parents also don't talk about it with me. I don't know a lot about the Civil War. (Baasim)

Sometimes the Civil War crosses my mind. We studied a lot about it in school, in history. How... how the people lived, everything happened.. I think it was caused by religion, or religious people.. or people not wanting to accept others because of their religion. But I think that what we are going through now, it is even harder than a Civil War. Because everything we are going through, it is worse. I think it is worse than a Civil War. I don't know how bad it was, but what we are going through today – it is worse than hell! (Nadia)

The first three excerpts from Mona, Warda, and Baasim, which are brief and vague, cloak the Civil War in secrecy. Whether because it occurred before their births, or because their parents are closed to the topic, these young adults show no interest in discussing the war. In the fourth excerpt, Nadia is open to engaging with the topic as she shares the very little information she knows. Like Kaamil, Nadia also learned about the Civil War in school, and she immediately utilizes the topic to introduce Lebanon's deteriorating political and economic situation today, which she interprets to be a harder period than the war. She admits that she does not know "how bad it was" during the Civil War, but that today she lives in a period that "is worse than hell!" She cannot imagine living in worse conditions than today's volatility.

Nadia's answer reminds us that the postwar generation faces unprecedented challenges that are daunting, heartbreaking, and terrifying. The current situation is more

than enough to keep the youth preoccupied; why would they spend energy thinking of a war they never lived through?

Amira adds:

My parents never talk about the war to me, never once. I have heard about the war, but I don't know a lot about it. I do think about the war a little... oh! I do know. They used to kill people of different religions. I have watched a documentary about it at school. No, of course I don't think about this. As of right now, all is well between people of different religions in this country. I don't know if another religious war would appear, but considering the political state we are in now, in which one community is with "him" and the other community is with "them," I feel that yes, problems may start appearing. I think a war could possibly start between the religions. Now, we have a lot of conflict between the Hezbollah and the Harakat Amal. With the people of the Hezbollah and the people of Harakat. So I feel like yes, something might appear between the people of different religious groups in all of Lebanon.
(Amira)

Amira, Kaamil, and Nadia have absorbed narratives about the Civil War from an official lens since they learned about it at their educational institutions rather than through the lived experience of their parents and grandparents, which would have rendered the conflict personal and real. When confronting personal lived experiences about the Civil War, youth may resort to collective victimization or feel heightened threat to their group identity (Righi, 2014, p. 246). Since the topic is taught in class like any other historical subject, youths' interpretation is not necessarily personally-rooted. They may not be spurred to victimize themselves and demonize the sectarian other.

Curiously, even though Amira does not think about the Civil War, she predicts that another sectarian conflict will emerge between the religious groups in Lebanon. She justifies this prediction on the basis of ongoing conflict between two militia groups in Ghazieh, Amal and Hezbollah. Her personal observations and experiences living in Ghazieh contribute to this theory. Because sectarianism persists and tensions simmer, a

sectarian war is not impossible, she contemplates. In a strange way, Amira does indeed predict the future. She and I conversed in mid-August of 2021, but I write this chapter in October 2021 after a breakout of sectarian conflict exploded in Beirut, which involved both Amal and Hezbollah sympathizers and supporters, and resulted in the deaths of seven Lebanese. I fear the other sectarian clashes that may occur, since politics in Lebanon often take on an interreligious nature even if unrelated to the Divine. In fact, sparked by fears about another sectarian confrontation, Amira tells me that her parents do not allow her to travel to certain religious communities in Lebanon. However, she insists that these family-enforced restrictions are motivated by concerns about safety rather than concerns about communities' religious identities. For instance, Amira's parents prohibit her from traveling to Tripoli, not because the religious community there is Sunni, but because there have been various violent episodes in recent decades involving the Daesh.

Turning back to the Shia-Catholic relation between the community of Ghazieh and that of Maghdouché, I ask Amira whether she thinks any differently about Christians due to the history of Civil War, and she tells me:

We shouldn't think about religions in this way after the war. Every human has their religion and every person has their beliefs, and so we shouldn't interfere or meddle with the others' lives.

This moralistic remark reveals a diplomatic perspective respectful of different sides.

Amira is unfazed by the history of Civil War because she does not believe that it defines humans' religions. Christians' faith has not become different since the Civil War (although politics may have) because the violence had nothing to do with humans' spiritual beliefs. This reinforces the perception of religion as inherently un-political, which shows youths' resistance to master political-cultural narratives embedded in

sectarianism.

Fatima is the only young adult I interview who expresses enthusiasm to learn more about the Civil War, treating her parents' experiences as important memories to hold onto. Likewise, Fatima's parents openly share their recollections with her, which Fatima describes in vivid detail in the narrative below:

I read about the Civil War, of course. I ask my parents, of course.. because, look, the people in Lebanon who led and fought in the Civil War are still here. They are still hung onto that war. And they are still in power. If it isn't them, it is their children. If it's not their children, it's the same kind of person. The politics have remained the same, even though they say that things have changed, nothing has changed, and they still speak in the same way and with the same rhetoric, same tongue. Maybe they don't have guns and maybe they don't have the same influence as before, but they speak the same tongue.

My parents of course talk about the Civil War. My mother lived in Beirut, and she told me about how she would walk back from school and see the helicopters and missiles flying over her heads. How on her way back from school, she would have to hide behind buildings and bushes; they couldn't walk normally out of fear of being found. When she went to school, she didn't know if she would come back home or not. Her friend died during the war... Once they had to break the school wall to run away from another exit, so that they didn't exit onto the street where the fighting was happening. Even Baba tells me about this things, about the violent life, how all people hated each other. If you weren't in your village and you were in a different village where the people are different than you, you weren't safe. You could be killed. You shouldn't be outside, you only belong to your own village, in your own neighborhood, in your own street, in your own home, in your own life. This is different than when Israel, an outside force, comes inside and bombs us. The Civil War is different, because you're in your own country and your neighbor shoots you, the men across the street shoot you and want to kill you. The Civil War is very hard, I didn't live it but I feel how difficult it was.

Fatima insists upon the importance of learning about the Civil War because—while other young adults insist that today is a new era—Fatima sees today as an extension of the war era. The same leaders remain, now wearing prestige as politicians to hide their previous positions as warlords and army commanders. The same faces and family

names hold onto power today, as they did thirty years ago. For example, the 90-year old Lebanese President Michel Aoun is a former general of the Lebanese army. Fatima asserts that today these leaders do not have their weapons, nor the same support bases, but they “speak the same tongue.” The same divisive rhetoric continues to live in the words of those in power. In this sense, to learn about the Civil War is to learn more about the government and those who today lead the Lebanese people.

Fatima’s discernment of this war is heavily influenced by the memories her parents offer. Her elders’ narratives shape her conceptualization of the war’s violent unpredictability that scarred people and made them hate one another. Because the war took place within one country, the lines between enemy and neighbor blurred. Fatima reflects on this reality, discussing the disturbing nature of the *civil* war. The friend is no longer the friend, but the sectarian other in this reality. Compared to her peers, Fatima has a vivid understanding of the tangible effects of war on people’s lives, since she knows how her mother and father lived, the risks they took, and the harshness they endured. She sees this dark reality with open eyes. She can place her mother and father within this war, and this personal tie molds her understanding of history and prods her to learn more about this past in order to better understand Lebanon’s today.

Like Fatima, Asma also shares significant detail about her parents’ experience of the Civil War, but she does not focus on sectarianism. Rather, she broaches the subject of Israel’s occupation, shifting the interreligious war narrative to focus on the foreign invader and occupier of her land. I notice that she soaks in, processes, and reiterates master narratives centered on the threat of Israel that I often hear in Southern Lebanon.

She centers on this threat, rather than the threat of the sectarian other, when describing the past:

This war was more than 30 years ago... They would say that Israel walked right beside them.. That they were living with the Israel. That the Israel would walk into houses, walk on the streets, arrest anyone, hurt them.. But there wasn't a lot of war, exactly, except for detaining men. It wasn't like war; they didn't take homes and they didn't do anything to the women. But they would just walk on the streets, do whatever they wanted, kick a person off a land and take their place. The husband of my aunt, he is Harakat Amal; Israel took him because he was killing and shooting others. He killed someone, someone killed another, etc... Before, we lived in a horrible way, there were a lot of weapons... there used to be many Shia against one another. But now we are all together, we are all against Israel. All Shias are now against Israel.

Asma's stories about her family's direct experience of war are very alive. These are not imaginary stories and distant events dating centuries ago. These are real stories, running through her veins and accessible at the tip of her tongue. She tells me that she does not know anything about the war between sects, except for what happened during Israel's invasion. This reveals that the stories she ingests concern her parents' experience living under Israeli occupation. These are the stories her parents choose to share and the ones that she absorbs. Her parents do not tell her about the sectarian other's role in the war, and instead they focus on the danger of Israel. This speaks to the experience of the Civil War in Ghazieh, where villagers mourned the occupation. Asma listens to cultural anti-Israeli and anti-occupation narratives and herself recounts these stories. In the process, she emphasizes the hurt her family endured.

Very differently from Fatima and Asma's detailed retelling of their family's war memories, Rami shares:

I DON'T think about the Civil War. NO, NO, NO! Both Maghdouché and Ghazieh know that Civil War is a political war. It's not a war based on religion. So of course I never think about this war. First of all, the

Civil War IS a product of the Lebanese confessional government. Second of all, the system creates jealousy and reasons to fight among religion. And it's extremely disgusting. And finally, it will destroy the coexistence of all religions together and living together peacefully. That's the confessional system. Religious identity is just a tool to get you closer to God. But political groups use the same tool, but not to get you closer to God, but to satisfy their needs. People use religion for their own benefit. So the two are extremely different, so there is nothing in common. They are just fighting in the name of God, but they are literally only fighting. They are not fighting within themselves, within the same person, to fight the Devil inside him, to get closer to God. Actually, they are creating the Devil and involving this tool called religion in politics. (Rami, Ghazieh).

Rami speaks to me with fire. He blames the Civil War on the Lebanese government's confessional system that manipulates religion to gain supporters, as I discuss in Chapter 8. These leaders abuse the name of God to justify their wars. They do not fight the justified battle, Rami argues, which is a battle within oneself to *internally* beat the evil and achieve the good. Rather, the politicians create and reproduce the Devil and the dark in their wars, exploiting the "tool" of religion. Religion was not used as a means to mediate one's relationship with God during the Civil War; rather, it was used to mediate one's relationship with the political sphere. According to Rami, religion is abused during sectarian conflict to the point that it brings one closer to Hell and further from God. Rami defends the Maghdouché and Ghazieh communities' mature understanding of war as political, and not religious, which places these communities above reductionist interpretations of the Civil War as an interreligious war. I find that Rami repeats master narratives of postwar amnesia that his peers and leaders also demonstrate. But importantly, while some politicians are responsible for promoting the "forget the war" sentiment, Rami is intolerant of these very leaders for the identity politics they represent. He criticizes their actions directly, while also looking forward.

In the formation of his personal narrative, he does not submit wholly to any one state-produced cultural narrative and maintains criticism of those in charge of his country.

Most of the young villagers, like Rami, are detached from Lebanon's violent past, as they did not personally experience the Civil War in their lifetimes. Many argue that remembering the war is pointless and that Lebanon has entered a new era. I sense that these young adults play into a narrative of collective amnesia, which itself is a cultural story from which youth understand the Lebanese past. However, this amnesia is not an intellectual or ethical numbness, as youth push towards a new narrative rejecting the validity of sectarian violence. Even those who find importance in remembering the war to preserve their parents' and grandparents' memories do so without perpetuating sectarian stories. Rather, they aim to better understand Lebanon's today, which they recognize as a sectarian extension of the Civil War's realities. These two approaches—one of erasing memory, and the other of preserving it—ultimately both center on a rejection of sectarian politics in Lebanon.

Tangible Violence: The 2006 War

*Suddenly rockets bit into the skin of my land.
Mortality danced on the tips of my fingers.
Mother Moon shined down on us, as we
drove home under her belly. I was scared
but then you told me that anyways, we were together.
If we die, we die together.
And I felt better, enormous relief.
Mother Moon telling us that the rocket
would not reach us.*

— Raimy's diary, 08/04/2021

While the young adults of Ghazieh and Maghdouché do not have personal memories of the Civil War, all have lived through the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war as children. This was a brutal period of 33 days from July to August 2006, during which Israel attacked Southern Lebanon after Hezbollah militants abducted two Israeli soldiers (which I describe in more detail in Chapter 1). I wonder how the violence of 2006 informs young adults' perspectives about everyday peace in Lebanon, and whether they feel that the war has encouraged solidarity or resulted in more divisions among the population.

Even during my time living in Ghazieh throughout my fieldwork, the threat of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel is present in the villagers' minds. Contemporary tensions between Israel and Hezbollah follow decades of conflict starting with the South Lebanon Conflict between the IDF and Lebanese militias led by Hezbollah. Recent examples of conflict include the 2000-2006 Shebaa Farms conflict, the 2015 Shebaa Farms incident, and confrontations between Israel and Hezbollah in Syria. As a Lebanese woman, I myself have experienced the consequences of Israel-Hezbollah antagonism, having lived through the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war and witnessed the horrors inflicted upon humans in the Southern Lebanon. Homes destroyed, infrastructure collapsed, 1,200 Lebanese dead, blood pouring from villagers' limbs. While I saw this war's destructive impact in Lebanon, I am also aware of and regret the deaths caused to 160 Israelis (Kershner, 2008). Throughout my formal and informal conversations, residents of Ghazieh perpetuate fear-based narratives about Israel. Sometimes they do so to illustrate their resentment, other times to flaunt Hezbollah's power. At other times, simply to be vulnerable.

In August 2021, about halfway through my time in Lebanon, an exchange of rockets and airstrikes occur between Hezbollah and the IDF. Tit-for-tat cross-border attacks are not new for the two forces, and every time these occur, they re-highlight a regional tension that merits more attention. On August 5th, I was visiting one of Lebanon's most southern villages when Hezbollah launched a volley of rockets over the border and into Northern Israel. In previous weeks, other rockets were launched, ostensibly by Palestinians in Southern Lebanon. Israel responded with airstrikes. This marks one of my experiences in Lebanon, as a village I was visiting was situated near the site of attack.

Most young adults hold onto and are impacted by their memories of destruction, displacement, injury, and death, which have the possibility of adding either to anti-Israeli or anti-Hezbollah rhetoric in the South. Although this war was mainly fought between Hezbollah and the IDF, Christian villages in the South of Lebanon like Maghdouché felt the effects because of their proximity to Shia villages. Elise from Maghdouché, for instance, focuses more on the pain and loss she endured, as well as the destruction inflicted upon her village:

Sometimes I think back to this war. I was three years old at the time. I lost some of my relatives, my aunties – they were trying to run away from the South and they were killed. I didn't stay in Maghdouché, I went to the mountains to find safety. I think some buildings were destroyed in Maghdouché.

The 2006 war touched Elise at a very young age, thrusting her into the ugly experiences of displacement and family deaths. These first-hand experiences render the violence more real, and may tinge the way she thinks about both parties: perhaps she blames Hezbollah for supposedly provoking the attacks and Israel for invading her country.

Like most villagers in Maghdouché, she did not stay in her village during the violence and fled with her family to a neighboring village.

Laurent, too, escaped:

I remember we escaped from Maghdouché, and went to Jezzine. Israel didn't really bomb Maghdouché, but they bombed Ghazieh, and they bombed Sour, a lot of the South of Lebanon. So my family went to Jezzine and we stayed up there. We could hear the bombing. I didn't feel like I was in danger, actually. Since we were so little, and my brother was even younger than me, six months old.

Laurent still remembers the sound of the bombing, which he heard even from the village where his family found refuge that summer. Maghdouché indeed was not directly targeted by the IDF, but because it sits right beside, and in some cases is indistinguishable with, the Shia village of Ghazieh, Maghdouché suffered deeply.

Damage was done onto infrastructure and families. Consider the trauma weighing on these youths' childhoods.

Asma shares her haunting memories of the war's impact on her life in Ghazieh, which experienced more bombing than Maghdouché:

I remember everything. I heard everything. There were a lot of ugly days.. Sad days, truly. Buildings falling onto the ground before our eyes, we didn't sleep. We all slept in the same room so that we would die together. We would cry together. Our neighbors died. We heard noises, a lot. Morning, afternoon, and night. Baba would go to work in the day and we didn't have phones at the time, we didn't have WhatsApp. So we wouldn't know if he would come back later or not.. And... we lived a lot of bad days. We didn't stay in Ghazieh the whole time, only a few days. We were told to leave, so we left to Saida, to Aabra. Where there are Sunni. This was a different kind of life, over there without bombs. Even though it was so close to Ghazieh, but because it was full of Sunnah rather than Shia, there were no bombs. I stayed at my mother's friend's home. Everything was open, it was a normal life there. We didn't hear any noise of the bombs. They knew it wouldn't come to them. It was a different life; but we watched on the TV and heard of people dying. We were so bothered. It was truly the worse days, I don't know what to tell you. It was so hard. Even my aunt, her home was gone. All of her home

was gone. Everything is different now. Allah, thank Allah. It is better, Allah has blessed us.

Asma's description is heartbreaking. At seven years old, she witnessed destruction and violence. She felt the fear of losing family and the fear of dying. Mortality was on her young mind, exemplified by her memory of sleeping in the same room as the rest of her family members so that they "would die together." Youth in *el-Jnoub* are no strangers to these reflections, forced to process through them at such young ages. At the end of the excerpt, Asma returns to Allah, thanking Him for the current stability she feels in her life. She recenters to Allah during moments of gratitude; I sense that reminders of her brutal past root her deeper into her faith, since she attributes today's peace to Allah's blessings. Asma is a sympathizer of Hezbollah, but she does not mention the militia's actions when discussing her painful memories of war. She focuses solely on the darkness of destruction and death.

Similarly to Asma, Warda is also a conservative Muslim who sympathizes with Hezbollah. She shares her anti-Israeli perspective with me, arguing that the 2006 war made "everyone" turn against Israel:

Everyone in Lebanon is against Israel now. I am. I remember the sound of the bomb during the war. I didn't know who the bomb was attacking and why — I was little and I just knew it was Israel.

To escape the conflict, Warda was forced to temporarily move to Canada, where her father lived. She was only six years old during the 2006 war, so the politics contextualizing the war were unclear to her. At a young age, she only focused on the perceived perpetrator: Israel. Her blaming Israel— "I just knew it was Israel" — is a cultural narrative very common in Ghazieh particularly among conservative religious members who sympathize with or support Hezbollah. Because she was so young, I

assume that Warda's parents and immediate community offered her this narrative of blame. This is the demonization of the other, but rather than demonizing the religious other, this cultural narrative demonizes the national other, the Israeli.

Mona, who knew me when I myself was a child, recalls:

Do you remember that war? I remember you and your mom were by the doors, and we saw you by the doors in front of our house, as you were getting ready to flee. Do you remember when you escaped? We were like "Oh we don't know when or if we will ever see each other again." It really was very hard. This is the kind of thing that makes us not like them. I think about it a lot, a lot. I remember that when they bombed this building {she points to the direction of Central Ghazieh}, they started to pull out body parts from beneath the building. Literally hands and legs from the rubble. We saw this. I saw the pieces of humans. I was young. We saw a lot of people dying before our eyes.

Mona refers to a goodbye that she and I shared over a decade ago. These memories and trauma make her "not like them." By "them," she is referring to Israel. At a young age, she saw the human body in its most fragile form fragmented into hands and legs. She associated this brutality with Israel. Her personal experiences with Israeli forces have been violent and dramatic, so this is what informs her personal perspective today. And even though she hears societal narratives about Israel on a daily basis, she also has lived experience of violence that inform her personal narrative of Israel's brutality. Certainly, cultural narratives may cement these personal narratives as truth.

Unlike Asma, Warda, and Mona, Blaise does not sympathize with Hezbollah and sees the militia's war with Israel as purposeless. He reflects on the 2006 war's deep impacts on him and his conception of the Lebanese identity:

Well... we can see the consequences of this war so far. This political war, if you will. The Lebanese people are the ones who paid dearly. I was very little. It was a war without a goal. Only between two political parties: Lebanese party and external party. This war was trivial, but we lost people; we lost our self-confidence. The Lebanese spirit is

destroyed. Lebanon destroyed itself ... the explosions during this war. There are always problems between these political parties. The war changed my perspective so much. Until now I don't know why this war happened. Why? To fight for Lebanon? To kill the Lebanese people? This war happened ... there is a lot of this war that happened because of a Lebanese party, I'm not going to say its name, but you know what I mean. I think we've lost too many people. Our cousins, our friends. Our homes were destroyed for nothing. It was one of the most mundane wars and you could say it was a failed war. There were no good results; on psychological and moral level, it affected us. The 2006 war was a very bitter war.

Even though this war was part of a political party that belongs to the Muslim religion; that's nothing to have what happened. I consider it a war against Muslims and Christians and against all Lebanese. Yes, the war created solidarity between Christians and Muslims. We can give a small example: Christians and Muslims shared wheat, food, water, even in hospitals, there was solidarity. This war was against Muslims and Christians, even though it was from an Islamic party.

Blaise mourns the war between Hezbollah and Israel. Not only did the war damage Maghdouché and Ghazieh's infrastructure, but it also hurt the psychology of the Lebanese people. Blaise shares his bewilderment and skepticism about the war's purpose. Even though it happened and is part of his lived past, the reason for this war is still blurry. Despite mainstream historical explanations, Blaise honestly does not know why the violence happened. In his mind, no reasoning justifies the bombing of a people, the displacement of families, and the demolition of villages. Blaise generalizes this Israel-Hezbollah war as an Israeli-Lebanese war. A war not against the Shia of Southern Lebanon, but against the Muslims, the Christians, the Druze, and the Lebanese as an entity. Blaise fuses the religious sects under the country's name, which in itself is a means of enacting everyday peacemaking and solidarity-forming among his people, no matter their religious identities or political affiliations. This challenges sectarian and political barriers. An attack against one village is an attack against all; an attack against the Shia is an attack against all.

People from Ghazieh may not necessarily agree with Blaise's generalization, since they saw immense and unique destruction and death launched primarily onto their village and other Shia villages due to their religious and political affiliation—Israel, after all, attempted to target Shia villages during the summer of 2006. Perhaps to these Shia communities, Blaise's interpretation is offensive. But from his perspective, Blaise unveils the uniting power of the war's misery, as it bolstered solidarity between the Christians and Muslims who adopted small measures to support one another throughout the violence, not unlike contemporary measures adopted during the pandemic and economic crises to support one another across communities as described in Chapter 6. The 2006 violence destroyed, but it also united.

Some, like Blaise, may be wary of Hezbollah's role in the 2006 war; however, no young adult explicitly enemizes the Shia conservative civilians for their support and sympathy for Hezbollah. The vast majority of Christians from Maghdouché do not support Hezbollah, but instead conceptualize the tensions between Hezbollah and Israel as the main source of instability. On the other hand, many young adults from Ghazieh solely construe Israel as the massive threat pervading their lives and thus perpetuate cultural narratives that enemize the other—who is not the religious other, but Israel. In both cases, I conclude that young adults abstain from blaming the religious other, but instead point to greater political entities to explain the security threat. This fuels everyday peace, as the Lebanese neighbor is not blamed for trauma and loss.

The Influence of the War Generation on the Postwar

Throughout my conversations, the young adults in Maghdouché and Ghazieh seem very open to, and most of their parents seem to encourage (or at the very least, not

impede), the formation of interreligious friendships. No family or community narratives seem to inspire young adults to feel hostility towards their religious others. For instance, Fadi tells me that his closest friends from Maghdouché are family friends, who are the children of his parents' friends. In other words, Fadi's parents connect with religious neighbors, and likely had an influence in introducing Fadi to these friendships with the religious neighbors' children. His parents organically established a warm, positive example of the interreligious relationship.

Using Phillip Hammack's work on cultural narratives, I consider the stories youth articulate during our conversations as they share personal narratives about interreligious relationships. My aim is to understand how young adults' perspectives are shaped by their families' mentalities about the religious other. To do so, I ask young adults to share some of the narratives that their parents and grandparents have told them throughout their lives. In particular, I am curious about whether parents feel fear or distress about the sectarian other as a consequence of the Civil War, which may or may not be ingested by the children they raise. By far, most young adults claim that their parents encourage them to respect and love people of different religious identities, which opens them to these interreligious relationships. Although some parents reintroduce war-era narratives to emphasize threat in the religious other's community, most young adults insist that their parents intend to de-sectarianize their understanding of religion and the religious other. For instance, Corentin tells me:

My parents told me Islam is a religion like ours. Muslims are like Christians. In Lebanon, there are different religions, and we have to respect them and live with them. That Muslims are like Christians and they love each other and forgive each other, like Christians. I believe both Christians and Muslims love and forgive each other.

Corentin's parents equate Christians with Muslims, emphasizing fundamental similarities between both groups not necessarily to make differences ambiguous, but to ground the religions in equal value. Corentin switches from his parents' beliefs, which is one of love and forgiveness between religious groups, to his own belief that the groups must love and forgive one another. He validates and repeats his parents' narrative, for he seems to be influenced by his parents' words and actions. Even though the war generation lived through significant violence, there are some members like Corentin's parents who see forgiveness between religious groups as a necessity.

Some parents, like Laurent's, even ensure that their children befriend people of different religions, which demonstrates the active parental influence in creating multireligious relationships:

My parents don't have problems with different religions. In fact, my parents were the ones who made sure I got friends of different religions in different villages. My own parents have many friends of different religions in work, in their social lives.. But they still get scared when I go to foreign villages or go to new places. They worry for my safety, they worry about dangerous or unsafe people. They are worried because before, during the time of my parents' youth, when someone would go to a new village and people would know they're from a different village, there would be some problems and fighting perhaps.

Laurent's parents support him in his interreligious relationships with people from different villages, as his parents also maintain such relationships. However, they also worry for Laurent's safety when he travels to villages that are far away, which resonates with a normal concern for a child's safety in unstable villages. Laurent acknowledges that this fear stems from the persistent worry about safety during the Civil War's dangerous period, during which people were not safe traveling between villages. According to Laurent's interpretation of his parents' fears, their past memories cause

them to be untrusting of other villages, exemplifying a real-world psychological manifestation of Civil War trauma.

Parents' expectations and concerns vary from family to family, of course. For example, Baasim from Ghazieh finds that his parents do not restrict the villages he visits:

When I go to Christian villages, like Maghdouché, my parents don't say anything or care where I'm going. It's like if I'm going to just the place next door. My parents taught me there no difference between Muslims and Christians for them to have said anything.. they said it's just a religion; I mean, there's nothing to be said. Same thing, it's *eid wahde*³²; there is no difference.

Baasim has learned from his parents to overlook differences in religious identity by understanding that these are limited labels. His parents tell him "it's just a religion," which minimizes the importance of religious affiliation when determining a person and community's goodness. This singular social identity does not guarantee that a person is kind or unkind. It does not define the person. This mindset allows Baasim to visit other villages without fear, and his parents also "don't say anything or care." Visits to neighboring religious communities are normalized and interpreted as safe. As he echoes his parents' perspectives, Baasim adds that the people of Lebanon, no matter their religion, are *eid wahde*. They are together in solidarity. He blurs geographical and religious borders. In fact, Baasim describes Maghdouché as "just the place next door" which emphasizes casual familiarity of the region and absence of tension. With this language, he tightens the distance between religious communities. He also tightens the distance between his thinking and his parents'.

³² Literally translates to "one hand," but is used to mean "one team" or "one alliance."

Baasim's words remind me of Rami's:

In simple terms, my parents told me they are human, as we are. They have their own religion, and we have our own religion, we just have to respect them and honor them. My parents taught me that religions aren't walls between people. We mustn't look at our neighbors with judgement. Everyone lives in his own way and we don't need to meddle in other people's problems and issues.

Rather than saying "Muslims are like Christians" (as Corentin's parents do), Baasim's parents choose to inaugurate the adherents of both religions as "human." Part of being human is having faith, which is practiced differently according to one's religion.

Baasim's parents also ingrain an open-minded mentality in his upbringing, as they teach him to respect and honor his religious neighbors. His parents resist sectarian narratives by pushing against the notion of religion as "walls between people," which informs the open way Baasim interacts with his friends in Maghdouché. Ultimately, both Baasim and his parents counter the politicization of religion.

I sense that parents like Baasim's who break down divisive barriers between religious communities are local peacemakers. They inform the peaceful environment within which their children grow up, and usually, they transfer social peacemaking strategies to their children. For instance, Amira speaks about her father's interreligious relationships:

My parents don't talk about religion in Lebanon. But my parents are the kind who don't discriminate between religions. They don't really talk to me about Christians; but my father has a lot of friends who are Christians and he is very close to them and he tells me that they are the best kinds of people.

Amira witnesses her father's friendly interactions and hears her father's positive affirmations about the Christian community. Amira's closest friends, as I discuss in Chapter 6, are Christians from Maghdouché, which leads me to imagine that her father

approves of these friendships and encourages her in these cross-village connections. Her father bases his opinions on his personal positive experiences with Christian friends, rather than focusing on war narratives about interreligious violence. Like her father, Amira embraces her interreligious friendships.

Unlike the parents of her peers, Camille's parents do not explicitly talk about the religious other in a positive or negative light. While Amira's father tells Amira that Christians "are the best kinds of people," Camille's parents "never said anything about Muslims" to Camille. They do not tell her how to act and with whom to be friends. Rather, they offer her freedom to make these decisions without imposing their opinions:

My parents have never said anything about Muslims. But they did put me in a school with different religious groups, both Muslims and Christians. So since I was little, there were different people. But my parents never told me: 'You mustn't discriminate between them and you must treat them well.' Rather, my parents put me in a certain environment so that I could make up my own thoughts and decide what I want. I mean, it could have been that I decided I didn't want friends of different religions. Or that maybe, I wanted Muslim friends, but my parents didn't want. No, instead my parents didn't walk me on their exact path. They put me in an environment of both Christians and Muslims and they allowed me to decide how to act.

Camille's parents allow their daughter to choose her friendships without advising her on how to behave. They placed her in an educational environment attended by Muslims and Christians, which certainly shows their respect and lack of animosity towards the religious neighbor. In this interreligious educational space, Camille chooses the friendships she wants to maintain. Camille interprets her family's actions as open-minded, since they do not lock her on "their exact path." They also never lecture her to not discriminate, which other parents do (as shown in this chapter). Instead of imposing verbal narratives about how to act, her parents are neutral and allow her to engage with people directly. Through these personal experiences, Camille formulates personal

narratives. This offers her independence and prevents her from blindly reproducing her parents' way of life. She curates her life based on her own experiences and desires.

As I share, most of these young adults indicate that their parents encourage the interreligious relationship. However, other youth hint that their parents continue to reproduce war-era, fear-based narratives about danger in the religious other's community, which young adults resist via their everyday activities. Youths' resistance to these narratives exemplifies the generational difference in thinking, as youth are not traumatized in the same way as their parents, who lived through fifteen-years of religious groups fighting one another. Although the core of my research focuses on young adults, I make an effort to talk to their mothers if the circumstances allow for me to meet them. This happens naturally, as I often visit young adults' homes and am greeted by a welcoming mother offering me sunflower seeds and tea. During our informal conversations, I ask the mothers to tell me about the Civil War, curious to hear their memories because they directly experienced the conflict themselves.

One Muslim mother who grew up in Ghazieh explains that throughout the Civil War, people got trapped in different areas of the country, since the capital became divided by the Green Line. This demarcation line separated majority-Muslim factions from predominantly Christian factions controlled by the Lebanese Front. As the war progressed, this demarcation line also separated Sunni and Shia factions. The mother tells me that while she was giving birth to her first child, her husband needed to travel from one side of the country to another to meet her at the hospital but he did not have a permit necessary to cross the sectarian borders. So her husband drove without one, risking his safety. "He would've gotten shot if they saw him," the mother tells me.

This particular Muslim mother from Ghazieh demonstrates an openness to all religions and an intolerance to religious divisions. I am drawn to share an excerpt of one of our conversations, because it exemplifies the kinds of progressive narratives adults in Southern Lebanon may pass onto their children. Between tears and laughter, the mother tells me about her daughter's attempts to get hired at a company. After the daughter's interview, the company called to ask a clarifying question. Since the daughter was not home, the mother answered the phone instead:

They asked me my daughter's religion! I said "why do you want to know that? What does my daughter's religion have to do with her employment?" They asked me what her religion was again. I said Muslim. They said, "okay but what sect?" I said, "what does that matter? It matters nothing. Write that she is Buddhist." So he laughed and wrote she is Buddhist and soon after she got the job. Religion mustn't be embedded into society like this. No other country is like this. Even in Syria, there are both Muslims and Christians, but there is no focus on the sect of Islam or sect of Christianity.

The mother looks at me with tears, but her words are angry. They do not forgive her country that has wronged its people by tying religious identity into all axes of society. Rather than submitting to this social system, she defies it in her small actions such as refusing to tell the company whether her daughter is Sunni or Shia. The mother establishes her agency as a para-sectarian human, and she tells me there needs to be a systematic reconfiguration. "Hezbollah needs to get out of here!" she says pointedly. "Why are they fighting in Syria before they help their own people?" She sees how Hezbollah operates in unproductive ways, and criticizes it for its foreign goals by insisting on the need to focus on supporting local Lebanese people during today's poverty. Disenchanted by her sectarian leaders, she adds:

The Lebanese army should take over! I trust the army. I like the army. They are better people, humble young men, Lebanese men.

This mother calls for a coup-d'état to reform the government with the army in power. She sees the Lebanese soldiers as regular men, not the elites, but the young men from Ghazieh and Maghdouché, Saida and Beirut. They are men who cannot afford meat and who ride buses along with the rest of the population because of their deflated salaries. They are truly Lebanese, she argues, which shows her desire for leaders with whom she can relate in the government. I mention this mother's perspective on religion and politics because it is one example of Ghazieh parents' way of thinking that certainly feeds their children's perspectives about religion and politics. Compared to her culturally-conservative community, this mother has a progressive view about religion demonstrated by her resistance to sectarian influence on employment and by her confidence in criticizing Hezbollah. Her voice is similar to that of the young adults I interview. This mother also has a radical understanding of politics as she defiantly calls for a coup d'état—and many of the young adults from Maghdouché and Ghazieh can relate to her desire for significant change. As I do in this next section, we must juxtapose the war generation's perspectives with the postwar generation's to better understand how their views on politics and religion align or oppose.

War and the Postwar: Generational Similarities and Differences

There's been fighting between Hezbollah and Israel. I heard rockets earlier, one after the other, from afar. While driving back home, death is on my mind. But it feels less daunting to me, although so much more real, here than in Oregon. Meaning is everywhere, here, spirituality is in all places. There, there isn't a lot of clear meaning entrenching my life...

— Raimy's diary, 08/06/2021,
referencing an exchange of missiles
and artillery fire between Hezbollah
and Israel

Most young adults have shared that their parents offer open-minded narratives about their religious neighbors, which may in turn inform young adults' interreligious relationships, and I now explore whether youth in Ghazieh and Maghdouché believe that they think similarly to or differently from their parents. I desire to better understand the generational divergence some young adults may feel between the war and postwar groups. Particularly in a society where family relationships are central to social life, how do young adults relate their perspectives about religion and politics to their parents'?

For some background on this divergence, Anaïs shares the distinction between the old and the new generations' mindsets that allow for less and more open-mindedness respectively:

When you speak of a society that is old, or that is made up of people who have lived in the past and lived in a time of war, of problems, these people have experienced many challenges. They experienced the difference of religious identities. It wasn't too much ... We haven't lived that. In a society where new standards are being introduced, young people accept these values more than older people. We, as young people, accept the Muslim religion more than the elderly. Because older people have had a lot of problems with this religion. Whereas we find that few people have these problems. But these thoughts are inherited from their parents or grandparents. So if there is a problem that happened before, these kids take their parents' advice.

Anaïs implies that the war generation, which includes her parents, are those who see the religious other through a fear-based lens because of past suffering. They have a harder time accepting religious differences compared to the young generation. I am surprised that Anaïs notices that some older people in her community “have had a lot of problems with this religion” (in reference to Islam), because most young adults in this chapter report that their parents express nonjudgement toward the religious other. Anaïs' comment reflects her personal experience with the older villagers. She senses that her

generation—the postwar generation—accepts social evolution more easily.

Simultaneously, Anaïs believes that the philosophies of her parents and grandparents can pass onto their children. While there is a difference between parents' and youths' perspectives, as the latter is more adaptable to change, youth still consume their parents' mindsets as they formulate their personal perspectives.

As someone who has relied heavily on her elders' perspectives in the formation of her life, Asma attributes a personal importance in continuing her parents' path:

Look, I am very alike with my parents. The way my parents speak, think, and walk, and do, I follow the same thing. When I see on social media and speak to friends and realize my parents are right, I realize we are right. It's not like my parents and I think differently than everyone else, and we are alone in our thoughts. NO, we are all thinking similar in this environment, in Ghazieh. We don't differ from one another.

As she expresses the ideological and behavioral similarities she shares with her parents, Asma's voice emanates pride. Asma finds that, as she grows older, the religious and political views of her parents are increasingly validated by the numerous posts she finds on social media (which can be explained by Facebook's algorithm). Because of this, Asma senses that the villagers of Ghazieh share a collective thinking, and that her own thought system unites her with them.

Similarly, Jaafar's political beliefs resonate closely with those of his parents:

I think my thinking is so close to my parents'. Because my parents never supported any party out of all the Lebanese parties. I was born in an environment that didn't accept any party. To not be used, to be precise.

He chuckles with his last statement. The Lebanese understand what he means by being "used" by political parties. Jaafar follows his parents' path of resisting the existing political parties. He joins their rejection of sectarian politics. He does not blindly accept community support for a party. Rather, because his parents are critical of all parties, he

learns to be critical as well. Like his parents, he too challenges political sectarian narratives in his fight to “not be used.”

Asma and Jaafar are some of the few adults who express a thinking similar to their parents,” but the rest of the youth I interview feel differently. In fact, Rami urges his peers to think differently from their families:

If I or anyone else think similarly to our parents... well, who are we? We aren't just supposed to be our parents. Of course I think differently when it comes to my parents. They are religious and I am not; their lifestyle, their way of thinking, and how to go with this life. It's all different. So yeah, in every aspect I am different than my parents, but we share common values. I think completely differently than them. And my grandparents, parents were in the 20th century. I'm in the 21st century. So HELLO, there's been development going on here. Of course I'm going to be extremely different than them.

Earlier in this chapter, Rami tells me that his parents taught him to respect and honor people of different religions. However, Rami also insists upon a generational difference distancing him from his parents, arguing that youth are inherently not meant to be like their elders. While they may share values (to respect and honor the religious other), he sees his way of life, his mindset, and his thoughts as completely different to those of this parents. If we copy our parents, “who are we?” he asks. He wants a distinct identity created independently by himself, which does not mean becoming a replica of his parents. He wants agency to determine who he is and what political groups (if any) he stands for. The postwar generation grows up in an era that is different than the one in which their parents grew up, so of course their mentalities have evolved in the context of the 21st century.

Adèle also discusses this generational difference between her and her parents:

I think differently than my parents, because my parents think a lot from their generation, from 1900s, me no, I live and think in the 2021. They

lived in the war, I live in a war not of guns, but.. the life here is very different, the lifestyle.. so of course I don't think like them. And of course I think differently than my grandparents; we can't think like them! They had a system of life differently than ours! And how.. my grandma thinks a lot about religion more than the practical.. I think more about the practical..

Adèle establishes the generational distinction between the wars faced by both groups.

While her parents grew up during a war of militias and foreign occupation, Adèle grows up during a war of intangible things. She implies that her experience of life in Lebanon's contemporary situation is a struggle. This is a struggle between people and the political elites, between the Lebanese and corruption. While her older family members focus on the religious perspective, she focuses on the practical. There is a difference between theorizing and doing, she suggests. Similarly to Rami, Adèle seems to argue that youth cannot, and must not, think similarly to their parents, for this would be inorganic. Life experiences vary. She insists, "I live and think in the 2021." While her parents think "from the 1900s," Adèle is rooted in the present moment, open-eyed to tackle today.

Laurent also expresses a disconnection between his thinking and his parents', whose perspectives on the religious other's community are influenced by their violent childhoods and adolescences:

I think differently than my parents about a few things. Like if I want to go to Ghazieh, my mother and father tell me "be careful, Mama, there are a lot of *haram* down there." But I tell her "No, Mama, it is a different time, and people are different than the way they used to be." Yes, before, when my parents were younger, they wouldn't leave the village in which they lived. People didn't really visit other villages, they would stay in their own village.

Laurent compassionately understands that his parents grew up in a different time to his, during which they took precautions to shelter themselves from violence. This explains

why his parents are fearful when he visits other villages, since there may be *haram*. But Laurent does not give into his parents' fears to appease them; instead he rationalizes with them and chooses to not restrict his movement. He understands that today "is a different time" in which his mother's fears are outdated. In this way, he relates the generational differences in thinking to his parents' trauma. As a postwar young man, he does not suffer from the same trauma his parents suffered in their adolescence.

Léa shares an important personal example that epitomizes the difference between the war and the postwar generations in Maghdouché:

My parents criticize both Christians and Muslims, without targeting only one of the groups. I was in a romantic relationship with a boy in Ghazieh for a very long time. But when my parents found out about this relationship, they didn't think twice. They told me to leave the relationship. They didn't care about how I felt for him, how I loved him. They refused this relationship. In Lebanon, in Maghdouché, in Ghazieh, in Ankoun, wherever, whatever village, such relations happen and are taboo.

A duality comes alive in Léa's words. First, she tells me that her parents do not singularly criticize Muslims because they criticize all people—which would suggest a lack of discrimination against Muslims specifically. Simultaneously, her parents do not allow her to date the Muslim boy from Ghazieh with whom she was romantically involved. Her parents see this as a taboo that must not be challenged. Interestingly, Léa's parents are also some of the few parents who openly talk about the Civil War, although Léa is not interested in these conversations. Perhaps her parents are still stuck in sectarian narratives stemming from the fifteen-year-long war, afraid of what could happen to their daughter if she engages in a romantic relationship with a boy from a Shia town. Léa shows that she is beyond these narratives, since she herself really liked a young man from Ghazieh and wanted to be with him. Despite Léa's feelings, sectarian

politics inflame in her parents' minds and ultimately restrict Léa from forming a relationship with the man she likes. The parents "refused" this relationship, showing a definite lack of negotiation. This makes us believe that while some parents see the religious other with openness, they may not fully accept the religious other into their lives. They do not trust the religious other with their daughter. Taken further, they do not want the religious other to become part of the family. This raises the possibility that parents in Southern Lebanon identify a difference between the interreligious friendship and the interreligious romantic relationship—as the latter can turn into a marriage for which the religious other is integrated into the family.

Elise interprets this behavior as "stuck in the confines of the past." She argues that the younger generation is no longer "tied" to this past. Rather, she believes "the important thing for us is to have fun. To feel happiness." As a member of this young generation, Elise cares more deeply to feel satisfied with life than to reproduce the same practices as the previous generation, using the lens of interreligious relationships as an example:

For instance, about relationships, if I was talking to a guy from a different religion, it would feel very normal from my own end. But from the parents' side, it is forbidden, they tell me "no he must be from your religion, from the same customs." So we think differently. And sometimes, even, they say things about people of different religions. They say, "That person isn't good, distance yourself from them." Or, if someone is good, they may tell me "Okay, you can talk to them, but don't be too close to them. Don't make them a close friends with the Muslims."

Elise re-iterates the normalcy of romantic interreligious relationships from the youths' perspective, which she juxtaposes with the war generation's refusal to permit these partnerships. From Elise's parents' perspective, the interreligious relationship with Muslims is forbidden no matter how normalized they are in the minds of young

adults. In her life, her parents insist her romantic partner must be Christian, “from the same customs.” A religiously-mixed relationship is not tolerated by her elders. This universalizes Léa’s experience of being restricted from dating a Muslim man, for her situation is not unique but felt by other young women in Maghdouché. Perhaps parents attach stigma to the young men from Ghazieh because some may sympathize with Hezbollah or because there have been cases of harassment by Muslim men toward Maghdouché’s women (as I show in Chapter 6). Elise explains that parents even tell her and her peers to “distance” themselves from their non-Christian friends. This level of hesitation on the part of parents in Maghdouché is common.

Another young woman from Maghdouché, Juliette, shares that her parents consider Muslim regions like Ghazieh to be unsafe and limit her movement:

My parents don’t have a problem with Muslims, but of course, my Baba doesn’t let me go to regions or places that are only Muslim places, because there are a lot of men who aren’t good with girls... things like this. Not everyone thinks that we as humans can talk to both Christians and Muslims. Often, problems open up.

Just as Elise is prohibited from dating Muslim men, Juliette is prohibited from visiting certain Muslim places, even though her parents “don’t have a problem with Muslims.” Although her parents respect Muslims on the basis of their religious beliefs, they may not trust their communities as safe spaces for their children. This may explain why, as I discuss in Chapter 6, most young adults from Maghdouché only visit Ghazieh for errands rather than for leisurely visits. Fear-based narratives about possibilities of being harmed by the religious neighbor inform the limits set by Maghdouché parents to protect their children, even if their children (like Elise and Léa) disagree with the justification behind the rules. Curiously, while many young adults from Maghdouché share that their parents do not like them visiting Muslim villages, no person from

Ghazieh says that they are restricted from visiting the Christian village. This reveals an imbalance in comfort, since more Muslim parents from Ghazieh feel comfortable with their children visiting Christian villages than vice-versa. Perhaps this is because Maghdouché is a generally safe village without militia activity, unlike Ghazieh. Ultimately, Elise shows frustration that some people, perhaps her parents (although this is unclear) do not believe that “we as humans can talk to both Christians and Muslims.”

Nadia from Ghazieh has a very different perspective on religion, politics, and life than her mother. She tells me that she rejects the majority of the comments her parents make. If you do not personally know Nadia, you would not guess that she is a Shia Muslim from Ghazieh, since she has a Western name and Western appearance, sporting tank tops and skirts (when she is not in Ghazieh). She explains to me:

My mom is quite religious, she has these thoughts that I can't dress in certain ways. She wears a veil and she has thoughts that I can't wear short skirts... But ultimately it wasn't parents who shaped my view on politics and religion. It was society. My school where I grew up, and the people I saw, so... different things played a role.

Nadia's mother attempts to restrict the ways she dresses, which is a resurging theme drawn from women's experiences in Southern Lebanon. Still, Nadia finds ways to dress as she would like when she is not in the presence of her mother. She challenges her mother's beliefs through her actions. She does not accredit her thoughts about politics and religion to her mother, but to her social environments. In fact, she explicitly clarifies that her personal perspectives were not shaped by her parents, but by greater society.

Majd considers parents' imposition of religion on young adults, sharing an example of a friend who today does not believe in God despite his parents' strict

enforcement of Shia Islam. This emphasizes, yet again, young adults' agency in resisting the beliefs that do not align with them:

Some parents here are strict and tell their children in a strict way to be Shia. Some parents are open and tell their children they can be whatever. My friend who was raised in a strict way; he was here in Ghazieh with me, he was Shia like me. We went to the mosque a lot. Now he does not believe in God because he went to Beirut and in Beirut there are different thoughts and people tell you many things. I don't know, many of my friends after they went to Beirut and studied there, they started to stop believing in God.

Majd contrasts the religiously-conservative way in which his friend was raised to the new way in which his friend lives in Beirut, where "he does not believe in God." Majd's friend grew up ingesting strict narratives from his parents about how to be a good Shia. Now, living in Beirut where "there are different thoughts and people tell you many things," Majd's friend crafts a new perspective that is different from the dominant story in Ghazieh, likely drawing from new narratives in his new environment. Although his parents forced Shia Islam on him, Majd's friend did not ultimately stick with this belief system. Like Nadia, he seems to reject the notion that parents determine youths' mentalities.

Since Majd himself was raised in a religiously-mixed household of Sunnis and Shia, I ask Majd how his mother raised him and his brothers:

She just want us to pray and be to be a good person, that is all what she needs. My brother who is in his twenties, he did whatever he wanted. My brother went to Syria and he worked there, and I think he did many bad things there. He lived a life that everyone wants to live, he went out at night, he went to the casino, he got drunk, he had fun... That's not acceptable in our religion. But my mother, till now, tells him to be a good person and pray. And now he is a good person after he had a family and kids.

Majd shares his mother's expectation for him to pray and be "a good person": to be ethical. Although being "good" is ambiguous, Majd seems to interpret goodness as

being restrained, calm, and not participating in stereotypically Western activities like going to the casino and getting drunk. In viewing these activities as “bad things,” Majd also repeats the culturally conservative narratives from Ghazieh. He literally verbalizes “That’s not acceptable in our religion,” when discussing his brother’s behavior, which hints at boundaries he establishes to define religiously-appropriate behavior. As I discover during other interviews, some Shia people from Ghazieh enjoy drinking and do not consider this to be “bad” as Majd does, which marks a difference in thinking between the culturally conservative and the less-culturally conservative members of the postwar generation.

Finally, I end with an excerpt from my conversation with Blaise, because it focuses not on religion, nor on politics, but on the dreams he has for his society—which he specifically says are different from his parents’ dreams:

I think in a different way than my parents. Life has changed. Today, as an 18 year old, my dreams, my goals are different from those of my parents. I dream of a Lebanese country, I dream of a LEBANON. I don't dream of a Christian Lebanon or a Muslim Lebanon. That's it. Our religion educates us like that. I dream of a LEBANON. I am a LEBANESE citizen. We are LEBANESE citizens. I dream of a Lebanon which is based and constituted on technology, on development, on communication, on work, to educate children in a more developing way and Lebanon should be lived with the relationships of everyone. The world is changing and Lebanon is taking a remarkable step backwards.

Blaise is clearly heartbroken by the state of the Lebanese nation. But his dreams are alive, centered on a productive Lebanon, a creative Lebanon, a revived Lebanon, a unified Lebanon. In this reflection, Blaise does not focus on discussing his parents’ mentalities with which he disagrees. He detaches from them completely when imagining his future. Instead, he sheds light on his desires as a young person in a broken land that he wants to see heal and progress forward. His dreams are different than his

parents' because his entire future as an adult is blurry. It is an immense question mark. The Lebanon of today may not have a solid tomorrow because the national situation is deteriorating. Blaise dreams of a better Lebanon, in which he is a Lebanese, not a Christian or Muslim. While the latter would be the reality of his parents, he hints, this is not the life he lives and chooses to continue living. He is like many of his peers, who stress a fundamental divergence from their parents' perspectives on religion and politics. While some parents consider the religious other and their community through a fear-based lens due to past sectarian violence and suffering, most young adults do not adopt this lens.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how the vast majority of youth are disinterested in and resist learning about the Civil War from their parents and communities. Even though they could obtain information and memories dating to the Civil War, most youth reject this opportunity as a means of moving past and forgetting the violence. While these young adults understand that the war divided their country across religious axes, they construe the present moment as unrelated to the war period. They do not deny the violence, but they attempt to move past it. The few who do reflect on the war and seek their parents' stories are those who reasonably conceptualize the present as an extension of the past: after all, similar sectarian leaders are in power, using similar sectarian narratives. Regardless of their approach to understanding the Civil War, none of the young adults resort to discourses of collective victimization, nor do they demonstrate perceived threat to religious group identity when discussing the war. This is important, as it reveals that young adults' relationship with Civil War memories does not disintegrate the possibility of interreligious coexistence. Young adults in Ghazieh and

Maghdouché have the capacity to live in the present moment with their neighbors. While they may mourn their parents' suffering and trauma, they are not obsessed by the sectarian nature of the past conflict. As I have shown in this thesis, interreligious friendships, in which youth have direct contact with the neighbor, enhance the possibility of postwar peace, as these friendships offer youth direct understanding of the religious other's behavior and lifestyle (rather than relying solely on master narratives about the other) and offers them a chance to foster a care-and-love-based relationship.

Additionally, in this chapter, I offer youths' vivid narratives about the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, which sparked immense trauma, suffering, and displacement. The 2006 war hurt and confused young adults, and although Shia communities were largely targeted, Catholic communities like Maghdouché were also victim of the war's violence. Thus, some young adults interpret that a Southern Lebanese solidarity stems from this mutual suffering, further informing the everyday peace of Maghdouché and Ghazieh. Most importantly, young adults refrain from repeating master narratives against the religious other, which the Catholic youth would expectedly do considering the Shia community's support of Hezbollah. This demonstrates youths' maturity and commitment to live in peace with their neighbor.

Finally, Muslim-Christian friendships are generally encouraged by the war generation, but this encouragement is limited as some parents' perspectives are tainted with sectarian fears. Such fears manifest daily as parents restricting visitations to villages and prohibiting certain interreligious relationships, most notably the interreligious romantic partnership. This clarifies the limitations to some parents' tolerance of the religious other. Yet youth continue to enforce their agency as they resist

sectarian narratives in their reflections and, in many cases, in their actions if they continue visiting the neighboring village despite their parents' concerns. In fact, the vast majority of young adults claim a divergence from their parents' mindset about religion and politics, revealing the postwar generation's break from the war generation's approach. Youth have recrafted—and continue to recraft—their parents' master narratives to ultimately produce a de-sectarianized understanding of the religious other. In this next chapter, I consider the postwar generation's ideological abandonment and confrontation of the war generation's sectarian political system.

Chapter 8: Youth Perspectives on the Religious-Political Knot

They imprisoned us in the name of religion

They burned us in the name of religion

They humiliated us in the name of religion

They blocked us in the name of religion

Religion is innocent, Oh Mother

— Sudanese folkloric poem,
chanted during 2019 Sudan
uprising

Zionist Judaism converted God into a real estate agent and land investor, Christianity had its share of authoritarianism in the name of religion, and Islam could be experiencing the same thing today with the Arabism of jails and the Islamism of jails.

— Antoine Messarra (2014, p.
106)

There is a difference between religion as a social identity and religious groups that are politically mobilized. The Lebanese government serves as an example par excellence of a political system structured explicitly along religious lines, as religious difference becomes politicized under the name “sectarianism,” which I call the religious-political knot. Lebanese leaders are sectarian leaders, and Lebanese parties are sectarian parties. As I describe in Chapter 1, positions of presidency, premiership, and even parliament are filled based on sect. Most dangerous is when sectarianism intersects with corruption and institutional unaccountability, as this leads to politicians appointing ministers on account of religious identity and abusing state resources for their benefit. As they distribute resources unevenly across sectarian lines, Lebanese politicians contribute to uneven development, neglect, and marginalization of minority communities. Furthermore, politicians today exploit sectarian identity and memory of

the Civil War to convince constituents that they can protect them from the undefined “other.” Consequently, sectarian leaders have the power to mobilize communities through the magnification and politicization of religious identity (Khodr, 2021). They become more powerful than the state itself.

Transparency International (2020) finds that Lebanon scores a very laughable 25/100 in the Corruption Perceptions Index measuring public sector corruption. To date, almost \$100 billion have been squandered from Lebanon’s banking system in corrupt deals (Karam, 2020). The recently-released Pandora Papers—an international project investigating millions of leaked documents about secretive world tax havens—include 346 files concerning Lebanese bankers, businessmen, and politicians who hide their wealth in offshore tax havens (Elamin and Nasreddine, 2021), at a time when millions of Lebanese cannot even access their savings (Chehayeb, 2021). Among those mentioned in the leaked documents are Najib Mikati and Hassan Diab, the current and former prime minister respectively, former member of Parliament Amal Abou Zeid, a presidential advisor, and Marwan Kheireddine, a leading banker and former minister (Elamin and Nasreddine, 2021). Lebanon’s sectarian leaders and corruption go hand-in-hand. The very officials representing the country are those responsible for the country’s demise.

The infrastructural destruction, human injury, and terrible loss of life caused by the explosion at the Port of Beirut on August 4th, 2020 is a most obvious example of the systematic issues plaguing the country due to the sectarian state’s corruption and mismanagement. Even with hundreds of dead and thousands of injured, Lebanon’s leaders have attempted to escape the blame for this disaster by resisting international

investigations into the explosion's causes and culprits (Karam, 2020). Two sides of the sectarian political divide, the Sunni and Shia parties, accuse Judge Bitar of having a vengeful political agenda (El Hourri, 2021). Yet the truth is that individuals from all sects, including the President Michel Aoun, former Prime Minister Hassan Diab, as well as other senior political, judicial, security, military, and customs officials, knew that volatile materials were store at the Beirut Port and did not take safety measures to remove the threat (Abouzeid, 2021). Politicians' corruption, secrecy, and mismanagement are not met with consequences. As even the topmost Lebanese officials perpetuate unjust systems, how are youth supposed to maintain their faith in their leadership?

Interreligious tensions are aggravated by these conditions, as religious groups are quick to point fingers to sectarian leaders of other religious communities and blame them for the country's current conditions. For instance, many Christian groups including the Lebanese Forces blame Hezbollah and its local allies for the rapidly deteriorating economy and worsening relations with neighboring Arab countries (Mroue, 2020). Consequently, these Christian groups call for Hezbollah and its Shia allies, including Amal, to leave the government. Simultaneously, many Lebanese Shia argue that Christians are impeding Hezbollah from bringing development to the country. This sectarian antagonism manifests in the civil sphere and impacts Lebanese civilians, as demonstrated by the armed clashes involving sectarian militias in Beirut on October 14th, 2021, during which seven people died and at least thirty were wounded.

Identity politics ignite easily in Lebanon on account of the Lebanese state's insecurity and disintegration. Andreas Wimmer (2016) argues that state-building

processes condition the subsidence of ethnic politics, and that states' strong support across national territory minimizes the risk of the politicization of sectarian identities. However, the Lebanese government's almost-absent services coupled with fuel, food, and medicine shortages lead to an atmosphere in which non-state leaders can easily inflame and manipulate sectarian identity. Sectarian actors including Hezbollah, Amal, and the Lebanese Front have consequently played an increasingly dominant role since the Civil War and have "vested interests in the status quo," since they actually profit from the underdevelopment of public welfare institutions (Cammett, 2019). By offering resources and security to civilians, these militias accumulate supporters who may not necessarily align with their ideologies but desire stability and protection amid an absent state-sponsored social safety net. Thus, state insecurity and insufficiency contribute to sectarian groups' increasing control of the country. In this context, religious identity becomes the politicized tool of categorization and polarization.

At the beginning of this chapter, I insert the Sudanese folkloric poem not to homogenize the experiences of the Sudanese and the Lebanese people in relation to the exploitation of religion. I share the poem because its words echo with those of the young adults I interview for my project. The majority of youth from Ghazieh and Maghdouché express their disenchantment with a sectarian system that does not benefit them, referencing their state's corruption, lies, and theft to characterize a deeply felt betrayal. I sense that because the majority of the Lebanese feel the effects of the ruined economy and political fragmentation in their daily lives, youth recognize the on-the-ground realities of their negligent government. During my interviews, young adults insist upon the government's corruption, criticizing the leaders who are enabled by a

sectarian system to employ undemocratic measures. In this chapter, I present youths' perspectives about the confessional government's religious-political knot, in which sects and politics are dangerously braided together and practically indistinguishable.

Youth Perspectives on the Sectarian Government

My aim in this section is to understand how youth discern the blending of religious identity (and religious divisions) with their political system. Although I encounter a variation in responses to Lebanon's sectarian system including a few advocating for confessionalism, the majority of young adults emphasize the limitations and dangers of the religious-political knot, as well as the failures of the specific government leaders who have been appointed on the basis of sect over competency and credibility.

During one of my conversations with Ali from Ghazieh, he asserts: "Politics have betrayed us. I think we live a beautiful life with Christian people of Maghdouché. People just want to live." Confessional politics in Lebanon have "betrayed" the Lebanese citizens who suffer the consequences of sectarianism (and also reproduce it) in their daily lives. While Ali considers his life beside the neighboring Christian community as "beautiful," Lebanese politics have encouraged a social atmosphere that inflates the importance of religious identity to define communities and pit them against one another. This is the difference between religion as an identity and religion as a tool of political mobilization. The latter betrays the true coexistence, the true cohesion, of people of different religions. For interreligious coexistence to flourish, religion does not necessarily need to be erased as an identity, which Ali hints in his direct reference to "Christian people." He highlights his neighbors' religious affiliation as he mentions

them. The social identities of Christian and Muslim do not need to be sacrificed for the sake of the interreligious relationship. It is not these religious labels that cause pain to a country. Rather, the instrumentalization, exploitation, and politicization of these labels deteriorate Lebanon.

Jaafar specifically criticizes the government's exploitation of religious difference:

The government has religious influence. They are using our religions to control most people; they say "we have to protect you." They think that Christians will eat us alive if we have no one to protect us, if we don't have weapons. They are using our religion for their own benefits as politicians.

Lebanese politicians imagine and advertise themselves as protectors of religious communities. Jaafar is half-joking when he says that leaders tell him that Christians will "eat us alive" without their political protection, but the reality is that narratives not-so-different from these are perpetuated at both the government and local levels. For instance, while in Lebanon, I hear many youth in Ghazieh claim that if they visit Tripoli, where Daesh reigns, they would be killed on the basis of their being Shia. Thus, Jaafar's comment about the religious other who will "eat us alive" is not so exaggerated. These sentiments reproduce divisive, fear-based narratives stemming from sectarian conflict. Jaafar is clear-eyed in his critique of his government's manipulation of people by creating and abusing fear of the other. Since insecurity ignites identity politics, leaders milk people's emotions by using the promise of "protection" to earn people's trust.

Like Jaafar, Nadia comments on sectarianism's real effects on people's lives and relationships:

I think the political set-up is really bad, it is the worst thing to ever happen. It is separating people from one another and bringing people who shouldn't be in the government into the government. Just because they are of a certain religion, they can gain access to official positions even if they aren't suited for the government. And they don't do anything. I think they should bring people, regardless of their religion, who want to act and improve the country. It's clear religion and politics are one in this country. In Ghazieh, for example, if you are Shia, you are either with Haraket Amal or Hezbollah. Or if you're Sunni, you're either with Hariri, or I don't know who else. There's not a lot of freedom.

First, Nadia is baffled by her government's establishment of religious identity as the basis for a Lebanese person's qualifications for political appointment. She ridicules the government officials who "don't do anything" on the basis of their obvious incompetency, unproductivity, and unprofessionalism. Sectarianism enforced by the sectarian setup has deeply divisive effects on the population, as the government is "separating people from one another." With this phrasing, Nadia seems to lessen the responsibility of individual Lebanese citizens and put the bulk of the blame on the government leaders themselves for the disappointing sectarian model they present society. Furthermore, Nadia points out that "religion and politics are one in this country," which explains why so many youth avoid defining themselves as "religious" (as I show in Chapter 4) even if their beliefs align with Catholicism or Shia Islam. The truth is that religion in Lebanon manifests in the form of politicized sectarianism. To define oneself as "religious" in Lebanon risks tying politics and sectarian violence to one's identity, and these are far from youths' beings and beliefs.

As Nadia describes, the political and the religious in Lebanon are synonymous. One predicts the other. In the eyes of the government, Lebanese people are tied not only

to religious identity, but to a political identity based on sect. The people of Nadia's village are of one religion, Shia Islam, and are funneled into either Amal or Hezbollah's political movements. Notably, Nadia ties the lack of political flexibility to a lack of freedom. Lebanon's freedom is under attack as sectarian politics dominate all axes. One day, while we walk together in central Ghazieh, next to *el-Ein*, Nadia points to the black and green flags of the Amal Movement hung on the village's lampposts. She exclaims, "We don't even hang the Lebanese flag in Ghazieh!" Rather than decorating the village with the cedar tree, Lebanon's national emblem, village leaders hang Amal and Hezbollah's symbols and colors on every corner. Posters of Hezbollah martyrs are plastered on buildings. This is what Nadia means by not having "a lot of freedom." Ghazieh villagers are subject to the militia group's influence daily on the basis that they are of Shia faith. The sectarian system suppresses the humans of Lebanon from acting freely or voting for a party outside of their sect. As long as religion and politics remain "one in this country," Shia villagers in Ghazieh will continue voting for the same political movements.

Laurent from Maghdouché also mourns the unfairness of the religious-political knot for its role in marginalizing and excluding certain religious groups from political positions:

Our government isn't just. The right thing is that whatever one's religion is, they can obtain whatever position in government they work for. Whether he is Druze or Shia or Sunni, he should be able to gain any position. The system we have is wrong, it's not the correct way of ruling a country. Of course I want the government to change; it should be for all religions, so that religions do not determine the position you obtain.

Like Nadia, Laurent connects the government's inflexible structure to a systematic unfairness, which he sees is "not the correct way of ruling a country." The Lebanese

people are wronged by the government that limits leadership positions to certain religious identities. Laurent wants his government to feel like a true democracy, where any human can be in government and can be represented by their government, regardless of their religious identity. The existing structure does not allow for a Druze man, for instance, to gain premiership or presidency. Laurent does not see reason in restricting some religious groups, which are mostly minority groups, from running for central political positions. Elise agrees:

Honestly I don't know much about politics. But I think there should be a sharing of political leadership between religions. We shouldn't determine positions by religious identities. In Lebanon, there are many religious groups. I feel like they should share all positions, they should change this system. It doesn't matter to me, at all, if the president is Christian or Druze or Sunnah.

Elise admits that she does not keep up with politics, which is an honest reminder that she, like the other young adults I interview, is in her twenties and focused on other things, like university, friendships, and the future. However, even with limited knowledge, she does not believe politics should be tied to the religious. As a young woman from Maghdouché, a Christian-majority village, Elise does not believe her president must be a Christian. Even though President Michel Aoun is a Christian, which means he may favor the development of Christian villages like hers, Elise rejects the confessional system. The religion of her president “doesn't matter” to her.

Echoing Elise, Blaise finds it unacceptable that a person cannot run for certain positions simply based on their religion:

We will have to change the government system from 0, from A to Z. We have to make a modification for this system because it is not for this century. This is a system for previous years, for a century before. This system was created in the nineteen—I don't know what. Ok, it worked

yesterday. But today, no no no it will not pass! For the years in which we live, we want a very developed government system that evolves with each generation. The system maintained does not evolve. It is fixed by the generation of our parents, of our grandparents ... I don't care if the president is a Christian or not. But our president today who is Christian doesn't have an idea to develop anything. What do I want with a president who doesn't know anything, who doesn't give us decisions or orders that help us grow? I don't care if my president is Muslim and he has a doctorate, he helps us, he gives decisions. I want a young president. Who sees things from the local perspective. Who goes down to people. Who supports young people. It's not that I want an Christian, a Muslim, etc... I want a president who works and not just a speaker. And not even just the president, but the whole government. The president, even...in Lebanon we have 128 members of parliament. These 128 members...they do nothing to us. I don't know them all. There are unknown members; and they decide the budget. Lebanon is very small. There are very large countries where there are only 30, 40 members of parliament. 128?! The government system is really a system that leads us to failure.

Blaise is evidently disturbed by the entire system of the Lebanese government, calling for a foundational reconfiguration. The system was made in the past and perhaps was appropriate for the Lebanon of the past, but today it does not suffice. Today, it harms his country. Blaise characterizes the government as inadequate because it “does not evolve.” Instead it remains entrenched in the war generation’s mentalities. He explicitly condemns his Christian president who “doesn’t have an idea to develop anything.” His president is stagnant, his ideas are stagnant. Blaise wants a system that is adaptable, flexible, and compatible with contemporary democratic movements. He loses respect for the religious-political knot because of the sluggishness he perceives.

Religion has nothing to do with leadership, Blaise says; education, productivity, evolution, and direction must instead determine who is in power. Such criteria—rather than solely sect—would spur motion in his government. Blaise also points out the absurdity of having 128 parliament members in a small country of 6.8 million citizens.

The entire government structure must be changed rather than solely the selection

process for the highest posts. As it is, the government system is unviable and “leads us to failure.” The current system guarantees that the country will not succeed.

Rami also gives up on his government in its current form:

This system is a very terrible idea, the worst among the worst. As a government, they should encourage the coexistence of any religion, sect, or community. If you want to go to the army and join, you have to belong to a certain group... there's only a specific number of troops that join the military and they belong to this sect from this religion. So, it's just.. a very terrible idea. There's nothing to change with this government system. It shouldn't exist in the first place, that's it. Of course I don't support this.

The sectarian system is “very terrible,” particularly since the government has an inherent responsibility to encourage coexistence and interreligious cohesion among the Lebanese population. But Rami believes the government does the opposite, as it promotes sectarian divide and contributes to community fragmentation. Even the army, the very entity meant to defend all Lebanese citizens no matter their sects, is tinged with sectarianism (like the government, it was composed on a fixed ratio of religions). In resonance with Blaise's comments, Rami does not believe this system can be modified because its very conception was a mistake. Rami's reflection generates the question of whether it is necessary—and even possible—to recreate the Lebanese government from scratch.

Jacques also expresses a need to reconstruct the government to increase unity and productivity in the country. In particular, he faults his current leaders for not producing any tangible results:

The government...in these days...it's absent. It needs to be changed, it needs to be reformed. They only talk a lot, no action. But we cannot do anything, that is the problem. Of course, considering my age, I'm aware. I am thinking a lot about the government and how it is not supporting me at all. And how we are losing so much; we are losing from our lives

many days... because of this government. Of course, I don't support this government, we must change it; we must change it so we are a country in which we are all united politically. The roads must be built better. But ours is a stagnant government.

Because of his young age, Jacques is aware of his government's limitations and its absent support of civilians. As a young man, he must envision his future in a country where the infrastructure, the economy, and politics have all crumbled. The reality that he has many years ahead of him—his future as an adult—forces his eyes open to his country's conditions today. He sees youth as “losing from our lives many days,” since the stagnant, non-transformative government makes youth suffer. They are alone as they graduate from school and begin their careers. The government has abandoned them. The government's negligence is also literally costing youth their lives, exemplified by the explosion at the Port of Beirut that displaced, injured, and killed thousands of young people. Prior to the explosion, the state did not take appropriate measures to address the ammonium nitrate stored at the port, and after the explosion, the state did not offer considerable support to the Lebanese population suffering from injuries and displacement. Youths' lives are cut short through this negligence, greed, and inhumanity. Their wellbeing is not made a priority by their very leaders.

Majd addresses the undemocratic and inhumane nature of *wasta* that further causes the Lebanese people to suffer and renders his government unjust:

Everyone who gets their political position, they are just the same people, same thoughts, and same actions but they change the person. They all have *wasta*. But they all belong to the Big Ones, like Hariri, Aoun, you know? Maybe they change their people but they are the same kinds of people moving in and taking action. Yes of course they should change it, it would be better for everyone. I think it should change so that every person in a position—like the Minister of Health and the Minister of Sports—is studied for the topic they lead so they can benefit us. Minister of Health should be tested for it, not just a normal man who takes the position who doesn't know anything about health or sports.

Government leaders may have different faces and names with the passage of time, but they all carry the same voice returning to the “Big Ones,” which refers to the main political figureheads like President Michel Aoun or Prime Minister Nabih Berri. Majd conceptualizes *wasta* as the internal connections to these Big Ones who offer exclusive access to the political system. If one is connected to and submits to these Big Ones, they may gain power. Majd envisions a future state system in which leaders, including national ministers, are tested to ensure they are truly educated and competent in the fields they are elected to represent. It is not enough to align with a certain sect. Leaders must merit their positions. Is it not astounding, Majd is arguing, that any figure can become Minister of Education no matter their academic background, so long as their sect matches the position’s requirement?

Warda discusses the social consequences of living under this kind of sectarian leadership. Not only are government positions divided by sect, but so are all professional positions. When applying for jobs, many Lebanese apply to organizations within their own religious communities. For instance, Shia Muslims tend to apply to work for stores that are owned by fellow Shia Muslims or for newspapers owned by Shia Muslims. Similarly, Warda tells me, most employers choose to hire people from their own sects. In Chapter 7, I present the example of an employer asking a Shia mother from Ghazieh for her daughter’s sect before agreeing to hire her. As a religiously-conservative Shia, Warda has had difficulty finding internships to work as a physiotherapist. The religious-political knot touches her personally. She expands:

In Lebanon it’s ugly. In other countries, this kind of religious-political mix wouldn’t be considered normal, even if those countries have even more religions than here. Like in the U.S.! I don’t feel this system will change. Change is hard in Lebanon, it needs a lot of time. The people in

Lebanon are this way. But if people don't change their mindsets, we can't change anything.

Warda is aware of the peculiarities of her country, where specific historical and political roots render the religious-political knot central to daily life. Despite the population's frustrations, change is hard to achieve in Lebanon. Unlike other youth I interview, Warda does not solely blame the leaders; she also blames the Lebanese people. The system will not change if the people of Lebanon do not change. With this commentary, she suggests that citizens are also responsible for religious discrimination in both the professional and political fields. So it is not only about the leadership, but about ordinary people who also perpetuate divisive narratives.

On the other hand, there are a few young adults who show favoritism toward a certain sectarian group and desire for them to be in power. I share these voices not to dismiss the previous ones, but to highlight the nuances of this topic. For example, while Amira agrees with her peers that the government system must change, she seems to prefer Christian leadership, which shows that she does not necessarily trust all religious groups in power:

I'm from a Muslim background, but I feel like Christians are stronger. Their minds are stronger, more flexible in many things. The leaders focus on religion a lot; they use religion in the name of politics a lot. I feel like it's better to have Christians in power? I don't know... But if only one religion governs the government, there will be problems. Like if all political positions are taken by Muslims, I don't know, I feel like issues will start popping up. We need a new system; I don't know a lot about politics. But of course we mustn't tie religions with politics.

I theorize that Amira's experience of suppression in Ghazieh and freedom in Maghdouché shape her perspective on who should be in power. In resonance with her critique of the Ghazieh community being narrow-minded and judgmental, which I explore in Chapter 6, she again tells me here that Christians are "more flexible in many

things,” which she previously has said about Christian people in Maghdouché. Perhaps the very fact that Amira favors Christian leadership despite coming from a Shia village is in itself a challenge to sectarianism. She sees the other religious group as “stronger” and “more flexible” than her own, which leads her to wanting this religious group, and not her own, to be in power. She is critical of her Shia representatives. Still, her response is infused with generalization and categorization about people in her own group. She also contradicts herself by saying that religion must not be tied to politics. The lack of clarity in Amira’s response underscores the complexity of the situation.

Differently from Amira’s reliance on Christian leadership, Asma calls to Islamic leadership to substitute government leaders like President Michel Aoun and Prime Minister Najib Mikati. In particular, she interprets Sayyid Hassan, Hezbollah’s leader, as a source of comfort in these times of instability:

I don’t like anyone. Not the president, not the prime minister. Because ALL of them, they are not living with us in mind. None prioritize us. They are all involved in theft, to our discriminate. It’s so ugly. To the point where I want to get away, leave the country. Because no one thinks about us. No leader thinks about us, truly. But Sayyed Hassan thinks about us, he works for us. But those government leaders, they are all bad. I don’t like any one of them, they are all wrong. They all like one another, they all steal and put the money away, and we live so poorly. Look at Facebook to see the reality of the streets in Lebanon. It takes hours to get gas, the currency’s value is depleting, the people are dying, no one is able to buy goods. So we are all against all of them. So if there are elections, I wouldn’t participate because I don’t care for any of them.

The scale to which Asma feels betrayed by the government has inspired her to not participate in further elections. She does not feel hope that elections will resolve Lebanon’s crises. In her mind, the greedy government leaders do not care about her or her peers. In this excerpt, I understand that youth crave representatives who genuinely care for them. While many of Lebanese young adults give up on existing forms of

politics altogether, such as Blaise who calls for a complete reconfiguration of the state, Asma turns to Hezbollah when envisioning a stable future. The government has failed her community, but she considers Sayyid Hassan to be a true leader, distinguishing him from the government leaders who “are all bad [...] all wrong.” However, Hezbollah operates as both a Shia militant group and a political party, and so it has government representation. Perhaps Asma is distinguishing between all politicians and the Hezbollah leaders she admires. This makes me wonder whether she also criticizes the elected Hezbollah officials in Parliament. Compared to her peers, Asma is one of the most conservative-leaning, which demonstrates how Lebanon’s dire situation leads youth to either reject all politics in their existing forms (which some young adults like Blaise and Rami do) or to seek alternative voices of groups like Hezbollah.

Interestingly, Asma shares that she used to actually support the confessional system:

Before I used to like this system. But now no. But still I believe that there should be a system where there is balance between us. If we got all positions and they lost theirs, what would happen? What would the Christians take? Our confessional government is one where everyone has access to power. So Amal have power, Aoun’s party has power... I used to think that there wasn’t anything wrong with this system, as it brought peace to the country Lebanon. Before, I said it was for the sake of religious balance. Now, though, I say that elections should be based on a person’s wisdom, intelligence, and ability to gain a position without *wasta*. So it must be someone who can bring us electricity, who can help our sanitation. Put someone who really is most capable in the specific sector, not someone who came in through *wasta*. This is how I think now. But before, I thought it was normal to have the confessional government; that Lebanon has to be split up according to religious groups. Now it is so ugly, they destroyed our land.

While others seem to have long rejected confessionalism, Asma describes her evolution in thinking, which reveals a reasonable perspective as to why some may support the notion of sectarianism. Warda used to see an importance in cleaving power along

religious axes because Lebanon has historically been divided in this way. Now, Asma notices the unprofessionalism and randomness of sectarianism as experts do not gain government positions, which are allocated with *wasta*. Every day, Asma observes and is impacted by the dangerous consequences of not prioritizing professionals and experts in official positions, exemplified by electricity shortages and weak social welfare. She condemns the politicians who “destroyed our land.” Their impact is personal.

Moreover, there are some young adults who reveal to me that, while they want new leaders who are moral and honest, they do not disagree with the confessional foundation of the political system. They see a benefit to the sectarian political divide, although not to the exploitation of the sectarian identity to fuel corruption and competition in the system’s current form. These youths’ thoughts parallel with Asma’s previous way of thinking. Arthur from Maghdouché explains to me:

I agree with having the religious divides in politics. I like the confessional system. The system doesn’t need to change, but we need to change the people within those systems. The Christian president must have more reforms to his power. My family is with Aoun, for many years has supported.

Arthur’s family supports the Christian President, Michel Aoun. In this sense, we can hypothesize that he may not want to change the system because he is satisfied with the current presidency of Aoun. If the confessional system were not in place, a Shia or a Sunni could theoretically become president. We can only wonder what Arthur’s family’s reaction would be. Would he and his family then advocate for systematic change to confessionalism? I do not over-analyze Arthur’s words too far in this direction, for he also acknowledges that the Christian president’s power must be reformed. Perhaps the confessional system must be altered, but its foundational structure must not be reversed.

Arthur is not the only young adult who sees the confessional system in this way.

Kaamil from Ghazieh says:

The Sunnah, Shia, Christians all have roles when it's cut up this way. I feel that it is fair, this system, for all religious groups. Of course, some stuff must change in the government—the current heads of all political positions are not good. They must bring in better political leaders, some who are representative of the country present as it is. But the system itself, no. I think that the president should remain Christian etc... I mean, stop, this is how the system was cut up since a long time ago. People are used to this kind of confessional system.

Kaamil focuses on the major religious groups of the country: the Christians, the Sunni, and the Shia who have specifically appointed power in the roles of presidency, premiership, and speaker of the parliament. He does not consider the Druze, the Baha'is, the Buddhists, the Hindus, nor does he consider the Syrian and Palestinian populations. From this perspective limited to majorities, Kaamil sees the system as fair “for all religious groups” even though minority groups do not actually have a fair chance of being represented in the government. Kaamil justifies the perpetuation of this system by emphasizing people's comfort with it. Because this system was founded a long time ago, people have grown accustomed to it. Change is difficult in Lebanon, as Warda says, so to change the political structure in an already-crumbling country may be too difficult for people to handle. They are too accustomed to the current conditions. This pre-established confessional structure gives order, providing consistency in a country where everything else is blurry. Because Kaamil is from a Shia community and has Shia family, it is interesting that he believes the president should remain Christian, as Amira does. He does not call for his own religious community to gain more power in the government, which may reveal a lack of confidence in his religious community or simply a satisfaction with the current structure of power-sharing.

Marius is in his late twenties and has worked in various villages in Lebanon, which means he has been exposed to multiple village dynamics and can speak to various communities' perspectives. During one of our discussions about the Lebanese government, Marius tells me, "it's all corrupted, what else?" To clarify, he tells me:

I'm not talking about the government here. I'm talking about the capitalism worldwide. And it's a fact, it's not a matter of believing or not believing. If you read enough, and seek enough, you will see how this fact is so truthful. I'm not saying leaders should leave and a new government should reappear. I believe that it is so complicated here in Lebanon; I don't think it will be smoothly resolved. Firmly because, I just said earlier, here in Lebanon, we are living in a government that is all categorized with groups. Because of what happened ages ago during the Civil War, people are worried that another war may happen. To defend themselves, they go to the groups of people they think they belong to and support it, so that when time comes, that group will support them.

Marius expands beyond Lebanon, contextualizing our conversation in the injustices of a global capitalist system that has destroyed and subordinated many developing countries like his. He rationalizes Lebanese support for a sectarian government by reminding us that fear inspires identity politics and leads people to curl into their sects for security. Perhaps because Marius is older and has lived in more regions than most of the youth I interview, he believes that sectarianism will prevail even if a new government is created. Change is limited. He grounds his perspective in what is realistic, not what is ideal.

Curious to hear about what he dreams for, I ask, "Regardless of what is realistic, what do you envision then; what do you hope for?" Marius answers passionately:

No borders, love, peace, I believe that peace is possible - the world is big enough not just for all humans and for all creatures, no poverty. I know it sounds imaginary, but this is what I think would someday happen. I believe that.

Marius holds hope in his heart. He envisions a future of peace, in which there is love and free movement. He recognizes the “imaginary” feel of this vision, but it is real to him. Although he has a realistic understanding of the Lebanese government and potential political change, he still dreams and has faith in a better future for all humans. But most young adults do not think as far ahead, or as universally, as Marius. As I share in this section, most spend their energies focusing on the corruption in their country. Although the majority accuse the knot for its senseless discrimination, a few advocate for the sectarian establishment’s continuation due to perceived systemic stability. In both cases, youth recognize the crimes of the current leaders who have wronged the Lebanese people. All directly criticize the politicians, many of whom have been in power for over thirty years and do not represent youths’ dreams and struggles.

Youth Perspectives on Hezbollah

As my interviews come to an end, I become curious about the perspectives of the postwar generation on Hezbollah’s presence in both the government as a political party and the South of Lebanon as a military entity. Unsurprisingly, none of the Christian young adults are willing to engage in a conversation about this militia group. One man from Maghdouché refers to Hezbollah as “you-know-who” and “you-know-what,” fearful of linking his voice to the group classified as a terrorist organization by many Western countries. This hesitancy makes sense, particularly since most of these young adults hope to immigrate to other countries. However, a few of the Shia young adults in Ghazieh are eager to share their thoughts with me. I share these with you not because they are representative of the majority of the postwar generation. I offer these excerpts as a glimpse into the minds of young adults who are open-minded and

accepting of their Abrahamic neighbors, while still being religiously conservative and aligning with an Islamist group.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Asma sees Hezbollah as the solution for the country's pain:

Sayyed Hassan really knows how to take care of us. Hassan does a lot for us; he brings stuff for us. Electricity, he brings us electricity. But other parties don't want this electricity because it is Hezbollah's and they don't want Hezbollah, so we stayed without electricity. So we say that the solution is in the Sayyid's hands; that he will change everything. If other parties accept him and listen to him, we live better. We wouldn't have problems with gas, the dollar's value would be lowered, but this is all in their hands. He helps all Muslims and even the Christians, he loves all the good people. He is not only for the Hezbollah or the Shia, he is good to all of people.

I interpret Asma's answer as heavily shaped by her Shia community's narratives, for she repeats the master narratives I hear mostly from conservative adult men and women in Ghazieh who idolize the Sayyid Hassan. Additionally, Asma's answer is a desperate one. She sees that every year "is worse than the last one," and this distress seems to fuel her faith in the Sayyid Hassan. She considers him to be the sole solution to the deteriorating Lebanese situation. In her response, she implicitly blames people who critique Hezbollah for Lebanon's underdevelopment. She claims that the Sayyid Hassan would have brought oil to help "all Muslims and even the Christians" had non-Shia sectarian groups not rejected his efforts. This assumes that Hezbollah would support the Lebanese population equally rather than favoring Shia communities and disregarding non-Shia villages where there is no support for the militia. By emphasizing that Hezbollah will help all Lebanese, Asma shows her concern for all religious groups, including the Sunni and Christians. She does not discriminate and say that Hezbollah

will or should only support the Shia. Still, she may be overlooking the reality of lived sectarianism in Southern Lebanon—of which Hezbollah is a contributor.

Warda also sees Hezbollah as an ally to all communities:

Well, Hezbollah doesn't only like Shia. It helps everyone. And another thing: Hezbollah doesn't steal. Not like the government. So everyone supports Hezbollah. But at the same time, there are some people who only support Hezbollah for resistance. Only for Daesh and Israel. Not for politics.

Warda distinguishes between the political elite and Hezbollah leaders, claiming that while the former betray the Lebanese public, Hezbollah does not. Warda is certain that this group will benefit all people if the country accepts its leadership. To emphasize her point, Warda offers me various examples of Hezbollah's support for all religious groups. For instance, the Islamic militia recently founded a supermarket chain called "Al-Sajjad" and stocked the stores with Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian products at reduced prices. As food shortages deepen, many Lebanese have welcomed this initiative. In April 2020, a Hezbollah party official announced that "anyone in need can shop with us, regardless of their religious affiliation and even if they are not Hezbollah supporters." In any case, the vast majority of the customers are from the Shia population (Antonios, 2021).

Majd also mentions the subsidized food sold at the Al-Sajjad markets, but he does not emphasize Hezbollah helping all religious groups, as Warda does. Rather, Majd states:

Hezbollah helps its people a lot. It really helps a lot. That's what I think, now it wants to bring fuel for the people. And people here are getting a salary at the end of the month from Hezbollah.

Majd maintains a careful perspective to explain that Hezbollah helps "its people"; in other words, its sympathizers and supporters. At a time when the economy is in ruins,

Lebanese people are desperate for financial support. Hezbollah offers unique support to “its people” with the new supermarket chain and summer shipments of subsidized fuel. In the midst of the state’s failures, the militia acts as a vast social welfare network. While Majd does not dramaticize the positive impact of the militia on the non-Shia, as Warda does, he argues that Hezbollah members’ needs are met. For instance, if a fighter requires hospitalization but lacks the means to be admitted for treatment, the party often provides financial coverage and often handles the paperwork. One Hezbollah member who fought on the front lines in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war was even rewarded with a grant of \$40,000 (Blanford, 2011). When states like Lebanon do not or cannot provide stability, people naturally turn to alternative structures of political order, including religious institutions like Hezbollah (Cammett, 2019). Young adults like Majd recognize this pattern.

On one of my first nights in Lebanon, I get juice at the Corniche beach with a few individuals from Ghazieh. Naturally, as often happens in Lebanon, the conversation turns to politics. Here is an excerpt from a conversation referencing Person A and Person B (with permission, of course, to transcribe the conversation on conditions of anonymity):

A: Dude, people are so brainwashed here. I swear to God. They’re so brainwashed. Look at all the shit that Hezbollah has done. They’ve done bombings and assassinations.

B: Wait, but look at all the shit that Israel has done. You can’t be weak in front of Israel. That’s the only way.

A: They’re doing all this in Iran’s interest though. Not in Lebanon’s interest.

B: Israel conquered the South, and Hezbollah was the one to free it.

A: Yeah, but why did Israel conquer the South? Because of the Civil War, because of the Palestinians. The Christians were like “Oh we have all these towel heads coming after us.” They hit up Israel and they came to help them out.

B: You know in our village, they used to poison our lands. Israel would spray poison onto our lands. Children were kidnapped from our village, Ghazieh. They used to kidnap us every day.

A: It's war, it's war. Shit happens.

B: No, but you can't just say it's war and shit happens and they're good guys.

A: I'm not saying that they're good guys. I'm saying that Hezbollah isn't operating in Lebanon's interest.

B: No but listen, their interests are just aligned with Iran's. They're the only Islamic country sending them weapons.

A: What good does bombing the US embassy in Saudi Arabia do to Lebanon?

B: Look, but this is just what they put in the news. How do I explain it? It is propaganda, it is about making the enemy look bad. News is about making the enemies look back.

I offer this excerpt to give you a taste of a casual conversation between two young Lebanese people from Shia families. Perhaps it is clear from this brief transcript, but Person A opposes Hezbollah's presence in Southern Lebanon. It is complex and clearly not a black-and-white issue. Some young adults from Ghazieh, like Warda and Asma, are very aligned with Hezbollah's ideology. For example, Warda tells me that if Hezbollah had all the national power, she would feel very safe. She trusts wholeheartedly in the militia's mission and protection. But there are also many people like Person A who recognize Hezbollah as an illegitimate force and mock its logic. And finally, there are people like Person B in Ghazieh who acknowledge the nuances that complicate the situation and choose to instead mediate between both perspectives.

Youth in the Government

As the majority of young adults call for new, uncorrupt leaders to take power in their country, I decide to ask them who they want to see in government. I am inspired to ask this because of Blaise, who insists on youth representation throughout our conversations. At numerous points, he voices his disappointment in adults' handling of

his country. I ask him, “if the men in power, in the government, were you guys, the youth, do you really believe there would be more justice?” He answers enthusiastically:

Not one hundred percent! One million percent... Now our NGOs, they are filled with young people. These are youth who work, who help, voluntarily... they make so much change. And they are focused on helping, and they are so productive. Imagine if those young people were in the government, how much change they would instigate. It would be a powerful change. Today the NGOs are what helped Beirut reconstruct after the explosion. The government did nothing whatsoever. How much those NGOs, how they are helping.. and if those people would be in government and have power to make actual decisions.. imagine what would change! I want a revolution against our parents, against the political parties. If you look in the government, there are young people... Sami Fatfa, if you know him... he makes decisions which are ideologically flexible. I don't want a minister who chooses just anything to make money. Lebanon doesn't have an industry that does recycling... for instance. We want young people; I want young people who have just finished their Master's. Okay, maybe they have mentors or coaches who are older than them, but I want the young people... You, for example, you are doing this thesis and studying International Studies. Imagine if you were in the Parliament or in the Government, how much you would bring! In journalism, and in the TV, who cares about youths' voices? No one! No one cares about youths' voices. This system is wrong, all of it.

As I hear Blaise's words, a fire in me re-ignites and reminds me why I choose to study the youths' perspective in my research. Their voices are severely underrepresented in government institutions, and yet they are doing some of the most productive work in the country. Blaise discusses their contributions to NGOs, where they receive extremely low salaries and work in dire situations. For instance, after the explosion at the Port of Beirut, many NGOs run by young people completed the grassroots search-and-rescue and reconstruction work. The youth are motivated; the youth are full of passion and desire to change their country for the better. Blaise craves youth representation in the government, briefly mentioning his approval for a thirty-year-old member of Parliament. He craves young representatives who can authentically represent him. The war generation betrayed today's youth because it did not impede political parties from

breaking the country apart. Rather, this war generation continues to elect the same officials, year after year. Blaise wants “a revolution against our parents, against the political parties.” He is not against older people’s wisdom, which he underscores in his comment that youth can have older mentors. However, Blaise wants those in power, those who have access to government tools, to be YOUTH. He even points to me, a young Lebanese woman writing this thesis on interreligious coexistence, to show that youth have ideas, knowledge, and expertise that need to be accounted for in the government. It is the postwar generation’s turn to create a postwar Lebanon.

In a humorous tone, Nadia adds to Blaise’s point:

We need younger people in power, because they know how to improve and are up-to-date; not like our president who is now ninety and will die and is about to die.

Youth are models of progress and modernization, unlike the president who is indeed almost ninety and has held office for decades. If leaders of previous generations stay in power, perspectives and solutions from the previous generation will dominate, impeding development in the country. Youth are fluent in the world of today, for they grew up in it and live in it daily. They will push Lebanon into the era of today.

As I show in this chapter, the young Southern Lebanese in part blame their sectarian government leaders’ illegitimacy, corruption, stagnancy, and incompetency for Lebanon’s ruin. The vast majority of adults voice their concerns about sectarianism and the related *wasta* hindering individuals’ freedoms and rights of being authentically represented by their state. These same young adults highlight the sectarian system’s unfairness as it excludes certain religious groups from specific political positions. These young Lebanese call for a reconfiguration of the confessional system. Conversely, I find that a minority of young adults favors specific sectarian leaders, and some actually

desire for confessionalism to persist as it offers stability. This variation of responses is important to digest, as each young adult offers a critique of Lebanon's current political situation and determines a different vision for the country's future. Some young adults find space for Hezbollah in Lebanon's future, whereas others resist the presence of this group. It is pertinent that the overwhelming majority do criticize the confessional sectarian government, as this insinuates that most young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché are ready to move past the religious-political knot and enter the secular political realm. In this mixture of young voices, a vision of Lebanon's future is crafted centered on transparency, accountability, and youth representation.

Chapter 9: Summary & Lebanon's Future

Conclusions

As I show in this thesis, everyday peace exists between the villages Ghazieh and Maghdouché and reinforces the continuation of interreligious relationships despite mainstream narratives focused on ongoing sectarian violence and militia activity in Southern Lebanon. Because of their organic emergence and formation, non-formalized examples of postwar peacekeeping in Lebanon have been under-explored and under-reported. Yet these are very important, as they show how local individuals of various faiths contribute to an everyday peace. Southern Lebanon is particularly absent from studies about interreligious coexistence despite the presence of both Christian and Muslim villages. Furthermore, although some scholars consider Lebanese young adults' role in postwar Lebanon (Khalaf, 1993; Jeha, 2008; Larkin, 2010; Righi, 2014), most focus on Beirut and none to my knowledge have dedicated a study specifically to Southern Lebanese youths' voices about the interreligious relationship in the postwar era.

Responding to this gap in knowledge, my deep ethnographic research project serves as a microanalysis of interreligious coexistence and cross-religious engagement among young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché. Using an on-the-ground lens focused on non-formalized spaces and times, I observe how youth exert their agency as spiritual actors—not sectarian subjects—through their resistance to the divisive forces of sectarianism in their day-to-day lives and through the employment of social measures ensured to foster interreligious coexistence, and in many cases, interreligious relationships. Despite eruptions of occasional conflict and persisting tensions between

the Shia of Ghazieh and the Christians of Maghdouché, peace reigns between these two Lebanese communities. As a whole, I find that the interreligious relationship, manifesting frequently as friendship, is foundational to the villages' coexistence. Empowered by their knowledge about and care for the other, young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché reject sectarian, divisive war-era narratives. In this sense, direct contact and friendship are vehicles for de-sectarianization.

According to Mac Ginty's (2014, p. 549) definition of everyday peace as the "routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages," the youth of Ghazieh and Maghdouché demonstrate everyday peace via their daily cross-religious interactions, reflections, and friendships amid nationwide sectarian tensions and occasional violent clashes. Rather than focusing on the peacekeeping work of those whom Mac Ginty (2014, p. 551) calls "conflict resolution 'gurus'," I focus on the efforts of ordinary young people who establish a healthy relationship with the religious other through intuitive measures. I advance Mac Ginty's understanding that ordinary people have the profound ability to enact and bolster long-term peacekeeping and I offer a vivid village-level case study of this process throughout my microanalysis.

I find that first, young adults identify themselves as Lebanese, deleting the explicit religious identity in order to accentuate the national one. I interpret this as the postwar generation's rejection of the sectarianism that resulted in widespread violence throughout the Civil War. In their emphasis on nationality, youth detach from the weight of sectarianism embedded in the politicized religious of Lebanon. However,

youth do not deny their spirituality, for they establish a friendly connection with the Divine absent of political implications. Both Christian and Muslim young adults from Maghdouché and Ghazieh see the Divine as a reason to live and a source of daily inspiration, experiencing it in its purely spiritual form rather than its sectarian. Just as youth reclaim their Lebanese identities as their own to separate themselves from war-era and state-reinforced sectarian divisions, youth also reclaim faith as their own to separate themselves from hegemonic sectarian narratives. This frees them to live on their own terms, as Lebanese, which facilitates their connection and identification with fellow Lebanese of different faiths.

Similarly to Farrah-Haddad's (2017) finding that devotional practices observed at sacred sites are shared by both Christian and Muslim communities in Lebanon, I also find that many Christian and Muslim young adults in Ghazieh and Maghdouché attend one another's sacred sites to enact specific rites and practices. This echoes with Farrah-Haddad's analysis that religious spaces and temporalities can be a locus of negotiation differences, rather than of irreconcilable differences. Youth in Southern Lebanon oppose the notion that the mosque and church (Islam and Christianity) are incompatible by actively visiting, participating, and honoring both spaces to varying extents. In resonance with scholars working on interreligious participation and interaction during ceremonies, religious rituals, and pilgrimages (Kanafani-Zahar, 1997; Horstmann, 2011; Bagus Laksana, 2014), I find that religious events, celebrations, and commemorations also serve as opportunities for interreligious interaction. Many Southern Lebanese young adults repaint religious holidays as times of interreligious connection so that they are transformed into moments of expansion and disintegration of religious barriers. In other

words, many young adults reformulate the religious space and time from exclusionary to cross-religious and inclusionary. Many young adults visit the religious others' spaces as a means of showing respect and intuitive comprehension of the legitimacy of others' religious practices. Religion becomes a tool to unite rather than to sectarianize, which is how politicians in the confessional government have misused it. Youth absolve sacred spaces and times of political exploitation. Certainly, a few young adults do refrain from visiting the neighbor's religious spaces. But even in these cases, they show that it is not out of disrespect of the other's religion, but from a sense of irrelevance that does not dismiss the legitimacy and truth in the other's way of practice.

Moreover, I add to Yoshizawa and Kusaka's (2020) finding that Christians and Muslims may regard those who practice other religions as companions sharing the same "paths to happiness," especially when they are in direct contact with one another. I note an insistence on a shared "happiness" in my interviews with youth from Southern Lebanon. For instance, Rami tells me, "I love to share the happiness I have with [my Christian friends]." Lebanese youth perceive a shared experience of life—one that is arduous in the summer of 2021—that grounds their solidarity with and care for their religious neighbors. The young Christians and Muslims from the Ghazieh-Maghdouché communities do not advocate for religious exclusivism, nor are they religiocentric people (Corsini, 1999, 827) who see their religion as superior to others'. Southern Lebanese young adults exemplify humility in their perspectives that their own spiritual beliefs are not more accurate than those of their religious neighbors'. For instance, Mona comments that Christians may even go to heaven "before us." These youth do not

see faith as a monolithic, duplicable path. Such humility and open-mindedness bolsters everyday peace.

Messarra (2021) asserts that coexistence requires a mutual knowledge about the other. Foundational to their everyday peace, youth from Ghazieh and Maghdouché hold a knowledge about their Abrahamic other that extends beyond politeness and manifests as genuine understanding of the other's way of life. Many young adults utilize this knowledge about the religious neighbor—which they often acquire through the interreligious friendship—to better connect with the other and include them in activities that abide by their religious rules. For instance, Christian youth may offer *halal* meat at a picnic so that the Shia are able to eat. Thanks to this deep understanding of the other, many young adults easily reconstrue the interreligious relationship into an interreligious brotherhood/sisterhood, which enforces a kinship with the religious neighbor. In such cases, there occurs a transition from the Divine to the human, from the sacred to the sublime, from the religious to the social. In the process of drawing them closer into their lives, youth slash sectarian barriers. Likewise, most youth consider the interreligious relationship as casual, normal, and organic—not as exceptional. Many of these interreligious relationships develop within the shared spaces of social media, school, work, and sports, and then blossom into deep and lasting friendships. Importantly, the majority of young adults I interview engage in these interreligious friendships, and they note that they do not care if their friends come from other religious backgrounds. This flexibility and non-exclusivity enables them to bond with individuals from various religious communities at an intimate level.

The motivations to visit one another's villages are various, beyond solely to visit friends. I find that excursions to Ghazieh are motivated more by errands and convenience, whereas those to Maghdouché are inspired by touristic purposes to visit sacred and aesthetically-pleasing sites. The peaceful coexistence of these two communities allows for free, easy movement from which youth benefit. Some youth do not even consider the villages as separate, but as inherently intertwined due to their everyday solidarity, physical proximity, and mutual dependence upon one another. Not only do youth rely on the neighboring village for practical and social reasons, such as buying supplies or visiting friends, some youth such as Amira even rely on the neighboring village for their emotional wellbeing.

In relation to Kanafani-Zahar (1997)'s interpretation of spaces of relative secularism within communities of religious pluralism, I find that there exist shared spaces engaged upon by youth from both villages where religious identity is not grounds for division. Religious sites like the statue of Maryam or the church in Maghdouché become shared and neutralized spaces where the sublime interreligious interaction comes alive. Furthermore, I find that these spaces offer an opportunity to connect to the Divine in new ways, as young adults may enact new rituals from different religious traditions (like Kaamil and Baasim attending mass at Maghdouché's church). They challenge the status quo of monolithic religious tradition and introduce the possibility of a blending of religious practices practiced by an individual with faith.

While Kanafani-Zahar (1997) refers to neutralized spaces to describe shared religious temporality and space, I expand her definition to signify any de-sectarianized space engaged upon by Lebanese actors of different religious identities. After all,

sectarian identity is hyper-inflated in all areas of Lebanese life, including education, business, employment, and sports. Not only can religious ceremonies become neutralized, as Kanafani-Zahar shows in her fieldwork and as I show in Chapter 5, mundane spaces that are culturally sectarian can also become neutralized in the interreligious interaction. In this way, young adults from Ghazieh and Maghdouché demonstrate what Kanafani-Zahar (2002) describes as the religions' "intrinsically integrative nature." Finally, amid the political crises and economic hardships in Southern Lebanon, I find a fluctuation in the tolerance, respect, and love felt by young adults in Maghdouché and Ghazieh within the intercommunal relationship. Women from Maghdouché in particular emphasize the tensions and unreciprocated respect they feel toward the community of Ghazieh. I conclude that everyday peace relies on a sense of mutuality of respect, not only of religious beliefs, but just as importantly of people and places. Without this mutuality, one party or both may feel resentment and distrust.

With a framework of master vs personal narratives (Hammack, 2009; 2010), I find that youth ingest and process the cultural stories around them to ultimately foment their personal views about the religious other. In their personal narratives, which draw partly from master stories as well as from direct experience with the religious other, many young adults demonstrate a disinterest in and resistance against sectarian war stories of their parents and communities. Likely, they could obtain information about the Civil War from their families if they tried, but they reject the opportunity. None of the young adults I interview resort to discourses of collective victimization, nor do they demonstrate perceived threat to group identity (Righi 2014, p. 246). They refuse a history that can easily fuel divisions, which resonates with interpretations of collective

amnesia in postwar Lebanon (Dagher, 2000; Young, 2000; Khalaf, 2005; Barak, 2007). Southern Lebanese young adults face the cost of “moving on,” which is to lose lived memories of history, to miss out on hearing about parents’ suffering from the war, about the sectarian fighting, and about the Israeli and Syrian occupation. Conversely, I also share the voices of young adults who do in fact seek to learn about the Civil War, not to reproduce sectarian tensions, but to better understand today’s Lebanon in which former militia leaders and warlords now hold power. They reflect on the past to understand their government today, not to blame the religious other. In both cases, young adults produce personal narratives that resist the sectarian urge of demonizing and blaming the religious other.

Importantly, I offer youths’ vivid narratives about other conflict including the 2006 war that exemplify Khamis’ (2012, p. 2009) claim that most adolescents from Southern Lebanon have been exposed to various types of trauma due to this war. I find that while youth repeat narratives about suffering, trauma, displacement, and death, they do not blame these harsh experiences on the religious other. While some criticize Israel for this violence, no Christian or Muslim young adult explicitly enemizes Shia young adults who sympathize with Hezbollah. These young adults refuse to repeat fear-based narratives that blame the religious other, which supports their everyday peacekeeping with neighbors of different religions. This may be due to the fact that their parents teach them to think with open-mindedness to overcome sectarianism, which many youth indeed report. However, some parents’ perspectives are still instilled with politics of fear and tinged with sectarianism. Youth recognize the polarizing effect of these mentalities, which they attempt to resist in their everyday activities by visiting nearby

villages and friends of other religions. In fact, the vast majority of young adults accentuate their divergence from their parents' thinking about religion and politics—hinting at the postwar generation's break from the war generation.

Likewise, while religion and politics are inherently intertwined in the confessional government, youth recognize, criticize, and break free from the religious-political knot in their daily actions and perspectives. Just as Couland (2005), Haddad (2009), Nahas Calfat (2018), and Shaery-Yazdi (2020) point to the limitations or dangers of Lebanon's sectarian system, young adults also recognize that their state leaders are not transparent, nor are they true representatives of the Lebanese, as they take advantage of a sectarian government that impedes true democracy. Throughout my conversations, I learn what youth do want: evolution, direction, productivity, democracy, tangible results, and youth representation. Most importantly, across levels of religious conservativeness, the vast majority of young adults question the confessional government's sectarian formation. Because they are today experiencing the consequences of a failed and unfair sectarian state, most (although not all) acknowledge the dangers and unproductive nature of the religious-political knot. Many advocate for leaders who are experts in politics, economy, education, and infrastructure, rather than inaugurating men on the basis of their religious identities. Considering the failed leadership of Lebanon's politicians, in addition to the consequent political-economic chaos, it is no surprise that so many young adults are willing—and desperately desire—to leave the country.

Finally, I reiterate that just as I, an ethnographer and writer, have my own vantage point that I discuss in my Methodology chapter, so too do the young adults I interview in this thesis. This is the beauty of ethnography. The way I write this thesis is

informed by my lived history of destruction and death, which allows me to connect to young adults' own lived histories in an intimate manner. I empathize with youths' trauma from living during a time of war. I empathize with their nightmares. I empathize with their genuine desire to see a more peaceful future in Lebanon. I am not absolutely neutral, nor do I claim to be, because I write and research from a space of dark trauma and radical hope. And really, I do not believe any ethnographer, any human with a lived stake in a specific context, can be neutral. There are times, particularly in my diary entries inserted, when I am idealistic. I humbly claim that I have the right to be. I have the right to be hopeful for the present and future of intercommunal relations in my country. This does not deny my legitimacy as a scholar. Rather, it bolsters my passion as a human being. Simultaneously, I emphasize that what I write in this thesis is authentic. I write the truth from my perspective as a young woman with my background and my dreams. If a non-Lebanese person, or even a different Lebanese person, had written this thesis, they may have produced a different text. All I can offer is my own interpretation.

Likewise, if I had interviewed more individuals, I may have heard different perspectives. What I present in this thesis are the truths of those with whom I speak and interview. Some of the young adults I interview for this project may seem romantic or overly hopeful, particularly to a Western audience. But personally, I do not label their truths as dramatic or too-good-to-be-true, for they speak to me with honesty, humility, and authenticity. I trust them. It is my decision as an ethnographer to trust their words wholeheartedly, while certainly keeping in mind that they, like myself, may be hopeful for the present and future of intercommunal peace. In any case, to know that the youth I

interview highlight everyday peace in their personal narratives, regardless of the on-the-ground realities, reveals their narrative- and reflection-based commitments to a peace that surpasses legacies of sectarianism. I also acknowledge youths' sober and grounded understanding of the corruption, destruction, and spiraling crises that continue to weigh down their country. Although they may be optimistic about their interpersonal relationships, they do not romanticize the Lebanon in which they live. They see and verbalize its gradual collapse.

A Disappearing Nation

It's the tight moments
Where language separates from meaning,
Form separates from content,
The body separates from the soul,
Night from day,
Lover from the beloved.

It's the tight moments
Where time separates from space,
time from Time,
Space from its limits.

It's the moments of absolute,
The moment of nothingness.

— Samir Sayegh, 2016 (“Ma Baad” - “Beyond”)

I want to go to a country maybe that respects everyone, where the government respects people and does things for the people. The government here does nothing for the people...

— Fadi

I first read Samir Sayegh's poem on a piece of notebook paper taped to the wall of an art store in Achrafieh, a neighborhood of Beirut substantially hit by the Beirut explosion. Even though these words were written four years prior to the heartbreaking event at the port, the shop owner hangs them to remind himself of the pain that he and fellow community members felt during and after the explosion. In this art store, I reread the poem over and over again, then write the words down carefully in my journal. I think about the moments of nothingness this country and this world experience today. Throughout my time in Lebanon, I constantly refer back to these words as desperation, sadness, hope, joy, love, anger, and fear play in my heart. In these moments, as Sayegh writes, I feel the absolute and the nothingness.

Lebanon's financial crisis strangles the state, and more heartbreakingly, the people. At the time I write this thesis, the state is unable to supply twenty-four-hour electricity to most households, most of which only receive one to two hours from the state per day. Consequently, access to technology becomes difficult and food rots in the fridges. Fuel is a rare commodity, increasingly expensive since the government stopped subsidizing prices. Garbage waste collects on the streets and valleys of the country because of the non-functioning disposal system. Youth mourn the lack of educational and professional opportunities. Farah Abou Harb (2020) asks: "Can the youth once again breathe life into this movement? Can we band together to resuscitate Lebanon? Is it too late?"

On one of my final evenings in Lebanon, I sit in my grandfather's garden and watch him pick lemons. He shoos away the stray cats that meow small pleas. In the past, my grandfather would have given them a sliver of chicken. These cats latch easily

onto their generous donors. But now the Lebanese are unable to afford these delicacies of the past, meat being one of the first luxuries they let go of. Sitting beside me in the backyard, a thin seventeen-year-old talks eagerly of his plan to study in the U.S. once he graduates high school in one year. He is my grandfather's neighbor and visits daily to share meals with him. His older brother, he tells me, is preparing to travel to Germany for his Master's. He, on the other hand, has been dreaming of studying in "the USA" since elementary school. He asks me detailed questions about the student visa application process. I answer each question patiently, since I have worked for an immigration attorney and am familiar with the processes of obtaining visas. I have found myself answering the same questions on a day-to-day basis, as various individuals approach me asking for information on how to study in the U.S. or immigrate for work. It seems every young adult I meet—whether formally for an interview or informally at coffee shops, stores, and parties—is ready to flee. I certainly would be too, had I felt locked in the circumstances plaguing Lebanon. I am lucky enough to have my American passport. I ask the young adults what their plans are for the future. Do they hope to stay? To leave temporarily? To leave for good?

Is Lebanon your forever? Laurent, a Christian from Maghdouché, immediately answers my question with bitter laughter. "*Akeed*, no. *Akeed*, *akeed*, no," he chuckles.³³ "I want to go wherever, to whatever country, as long as it's not Lebanon. I'd go to the Philippines, so long as it isn't Lebanon." This answer is striking, as most Filipino people in Lebanon are maids who are over-worked. Many maids in the country are also unfortunately mistreated and suffer a great deal of abuse, both verbal and physical. To

³³ Of course; certainly

hear Laurent so casually mention the Philippines reveals his desperation to get out of his country, even resorting to the developing country he knows as a supplier of domestic labor.

Fadi adds:

I want to go to a country that respects everyone, where the government respects people and does things for the people. The government here does nothing for the people, they stole our money. Like Riad Salameh. I would like to travel outside Lebanon and work there. Later, later I will leave. I don't have any immediate plans.

Fadi is betrayed by his government. It is an absent, counter-productive institution that has not served him or his friends. Over the past few years, there have been numerous scandals of corrupt Lebanese politicians stealing public funds and mismanaging the country. Fadi specifically blames Riad Salameh, who has headed Lebanon's central bank for three decades and has long faced allegations of corruption and misconduct (El Dahan, 2021). In 2016, Salameh urged the IMF to remove fourteen pages of vital information from a dark assessment about Lebanon's financial system. The central bank had a massive \$4.7 billion hole in its reserves by the end of 2015—a hole which Salameh attempted to fill with a lucrative “financial engineering” products partly responsible for the current financial crisis (Nakhoul, 2021; Blair, 2021). This February 2022, Salameh seems to have gone into hiding to avoid the State Security forces after a Lebanese judge ordered him to appear for questioning on allegations of embezzlement (England, 2022). Fadi's motivation to leave is this sort of corruption, which he interprets as a profound disrespect for the Lebanese public. His leaders' actions have hurt and offended him. He wants to live in a place with a government unlike Lebanon's, where the representatives have something to offer the citizens.

Some of the young adults, both Muslim from Ghazieh and Christian from Maghdouché, already have their travels planned. In fact, Léa's departing flight is on the same day as my own: August 28th. We pass one another in the airport, and I give her a knowing smile as I watch her roll two big suitcases. She will be studying for her Master's in Poitier, France. I read the excitement—and mostly, the relief—in her voice as she describes the program she will join abroad. Her friend Elise highlights the tension between her love for Lebanon and the necessity to escape the circumstances all youth endure:

In these circumstances, I prefer to be abroad... but I would love to be in Lebanon. My parents, my family, my friends, all the people I love are here. I don't want to be in a place that is so far away from them.

“These circumstances” encompass the economic, political, infrastructural, and social collapses. To enumerate all the crises would be too much, too difficult, too complex. As a non-resident of Lebanon, it is difficult to completely grasp how interrelated each crisis is, although I soon learn that even full-time Lebanese residents have lost words to describe “the circumstances.” Youth are heartbroken as they attempt to reconcile their deep love for their land with the knowledge that there is no future there. Youth must decide between staying and leaving.

During one of our first conversations, Blaise reflects on the tension:

I'll be honest with you, I don't hesitate to tell you the truth. Yes, as a Lebanese, I am putting together a plan to continue my life and emigrate. Because in Lebanon, it is not only poverty that reigns. There is no peace. I am not in an environment which is full of peace. Lebanon is a country where day to day illiteracy is on the rise. Lebanon is retreating. As a person who wants to dream, I have to be in an environment that is flexible, an environment that allows me to learn about my dream. If the fish is not in a jar full of water, it is not going to swim, it is not going to live on. The man who dreams is like a fish. If we are not in an environment that allows us to learn about our dreams and develop

ourselves, we cannot be successful in our social, family life. This is why I, as a Lebanese, yes I make a plan to emigrate out of Lebanon. On a personal level, to go further, this situation bothers me and the whole country ... we like to live according to our values, how we are used, in our culture to which we are accustomed, we are not happy at all have to leave; it is better to stay in the environment with which we are comfortable.

I speak with reality. I am real. My work is going to be outside Lebanon. Only if there is a war in Lebanon; because I, as a future journalist, my work goes where there is conflict. But my work would be outside Lebanon, in another country. Me, I feel more flexible, malleable, in my own country. If I want a family, I want to get married... Of course I am not going to get married outside Lebanon. My family is here, my cousins, my neighbors. Even the little details, they matter to me. So I'm thinking of going out, continuing my professional life, and then maybe coming back if Lebanon is better.

Lebanon is retreating. The man who dreams is like a fish; he relies on water to survive. This water is an “environment that allows us to learn about our dreams,” but Lebanon does not offer this water to its inhabitants. Blaise pronounces these words without pause. He is rooted in Lebanon because of his family, his friends, and his neighbors. He is most comfortable in Lebanon, where his life aligns with his values. He is even considering returning if the situation ameliorates or if his foreign job allows him to be located in the country. But Blaise, now, is prioritizing his own survival and growth. He is prioritizing his development. He tells me, “I, as a Lebanese, yes I make a plan to continue and emigrate out of Lebanon,” and I understand the nuance in his emphasizing “as a Lebanese.” He will extract himself from the space where he spent his entire life. He is Lebanese, but he will leave Lebanon. Blaise sees Lebanon as an environment that will impede him from learning his mission and living his dream. If he remains, he does not believe he will be successful. It is as if a fish were to say “I, as a fish, am planning on leaving my empty fish tank that I have grown so used to.” This fish wants to find clean water, healthy water, pure water where it can survive and flourish. But in the

process, the fish abandons its home. Blaise does not want to live in a fish tank—he wants the ocean. He is consciously making a decision to leave because he does not feel that love alone for a land justifies staying in that land. He loves Lebanon deeply, but who will he become if he stays? What will he do, what will he dream, if he does not leave? Perhaps in choosing to leave, he chooses to love himself and his family more than if he were to stay. To leave will allow him to support himself and them. To choose himself and them.

Ghazieh, Maghdouché, Beirut, Sayda, Sour... I wonder what will become of it all. The young adults I meet fill me with profound hope. Throughout each one of my conversations (and I say this truthfully), I recognize tolerance, love, respect, and inspiration in the youths' voices. I do not hear discrimination, nor animosity because of religious difference. While there are many narratives about “youth radicalization” in Hezbollah-dominated regions of Lebanon like Ghazieh, the young people with whom I speak are not extremists. They are open. They do not hold one truth in their minds, but rather, very openly acknowledge multiple roads of life. They are religio-relative, valuing their faith and understand the existence of multiple paths to worship and honor the Divine. For instance, Asma and Warda are conservative Shias who support Hezbollah, and simultaneously, both respect their Abrahamic neighbors and do not exhibit any hostility toward them.

But ultimately, these young adults will leave. At least the majority of them will try. Most of the youth tell me that they will attempt to leave as soon as possible, within the span of the next few years. In fact, out of the thirty-three young adults I speak to, only four tell me that they are not considering leaving. This is significant. This means

that a country's young population, the majority of its youth, are planning on emigrating.

What is Lebanon's future if its youth abandon it, both literally and metaphorically?

Blaise theorizes:

First of all, at the logical and social level, there will be destruction. From the economic perspective, when the workforce leaves .. the destruction comes. Everyone is leaving, so the population will decrease. Then, that's it, we will have destruction. Maybe people from another country will come to inhabit Lebanon, I don't know, like Syria. Lebanon will disappear. If you look at the statistics, 43% of Lebanese are in different countries, and the rest are actually in Lebanon. I received a visa refusal from France, but maybe because a lot were applying... 1,600 students applied in France in one year. Think about the number of students Lebanon is losing. The workforce. Of course, I respect the seniors, but that's it, we need the young people to take charge. All the consequences are negative...

Blaise sees the future of Lebanon as "destruction." The workforce of the country will decrease, particularly as time goes on, since Blaise insinuates there is no future for the Lebanese people in the country. He has even already tried leaving for France but his visa was rejected. He will keep trying, I am certain. Since our interview, Blaise has applied to various European universities. Nadia, who is currently studying to take DALF (Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française) proficiency language exam to study in France, imagines what will happen to her country:

All of us young people want to escape. The only people who will stay are those whose visas are rejected. That or, those who stay with their political parties and support those political parties – those are the only ones who will stay in Lebanon. Also Palestinians, because they don't have a nationality. And Syrians, I think. I don't know, the situation is bad. I have to get out. I don't think a lot of people will stay in Lebanon. Whoever is able to escape will take the chance. It's unbearable here.

Ghazieh and Maghdouché is today filled with open-minded, intelligent, and compassionate youth. But most of them will leave. As Nadia predicts, the young Lebanese who will stay are those who are unable to leave (perhaps those who cannot

acquire foreign visas) or those who are supporters or members of a political-religious group like Hezbollah. So what will Lebanon become? Who will populate the country once its core leaves? Will politics change, if those who remain are those who benefit from the sectarian system? Will the religious-political knot ever become undone? I interpret this mass youth emigration as a filtering process that will empty Lebanon of its educated, innovative, progressive, critically-thinking polyglots.

These youth want to “escape,” Nadia tells me. To escape their own country. Desperation entrenches this word. Their monster is the motherland. The recurring theme of life feeling “unbearable” in Lebanon emerges in various conversations of mine. Another young woman with whom I spent a significant portion of time consistently reminds me of how lucky I am that I leave Lebanon by the end of the summer. At various points, she shares statistics with me: “Eight million Lebanese are in Brazil and God put me here in Lebanon!” or she simply repeats over and over again, “I want to leave this country. I need to leave this country. This country is killing me.” The desperation is tangible in her voice, void of hope for this country, convinced there is no other solution than to leave.

So Who Will Stay?

Very few young adults tell me that they are committed to staying. Fatima, one of the young women who outwardly supports Hezbollah, is among those committed to staying, which reaffirms Nadia’s theory that supporters of militant groups will remain:

Of course I want to stay in Lebanon; I don’t think about leaving. I think about traveling, I think about doing small trips or to another country. But to pack my bags and leave Lebanon? Never, I never think about this at all. I don’t want to live outside of Lebanon, as horrible as the situation is and is getting. I feel the need to stay in my country and work in my

country and try to fix it in whatever way I can, with others of course. I never have the instinct to leave; in fact I get annoyed or upset when I learn that someone is planning on leaving. Of course, every person has their own life and lots of people leave and help support their parents inside Lebanon. And this is good and helps Lebanon. But me, personally, never do I think about leaving.

The circumstances are “horrible,” Fatima understands this. She feels this in her day-to-day life. She also recognizes the importance of immigrant remittances to support the Lebanese population, since many people leave “and help support their parents inside Lebanon.” Truly, with a majority of the Lebanese population living below the poverty line, only “fresh dollar” (U.S. dollar) remittances from family abroad save the Lebanese from dangerous levels of food scarcity (Chulov, 2021). Almost every household relies on a family relative abroad to support them. But Asma is committed to stay in her country. The current state does not deter her, but inspires her to “work in my country and try to fix it in whatever way.” Notably, she does not refer to Hezbollah in her justification to stay. Rather, she emphasizes her commitment to her land. She sees Lebanon as her country and her responsibility. She does not want herself nor her peers to give up on it. Yet among the young adults with whom I speak, Asma is a minority. Most cling to the hope of fleeing Lebanon.

The postwar generation must reconcile its love for its land, heritage, and family with the dark understanding that Lebanon is headed into a sectarian, socioeconomic cyclone. Most youth from Ghazieh and Maghdouché, who are brilliant, productive, full of light and life, dreams and missions, will leave. Some temporarily, some for good. Although Righi (2014, p. 70) claims that by examining today’s group of youth, we gain “a glimpse into the future cultural, social and political dynamics of a society,” this glimpse into the future of Lebanon is fractured—for these youth will leave and thus not

be present to build a new tomorrow. The nation's children, many of whom have committed to the interreligious relationship, to supporting the religious other across time and space, to challenging the fears and hatred sparked by Civil War narratives, are leaving. The nation is being emptied of her peacemakers. Who will remain? What will become of Lebanon?

When I ask him whether he hopes to leave or stay, Marius looks me directly in the eyes and tells me:

I don't mind staying here. If my future is to be happy and it will be in Lebanon, that is my main goal. To be happy and satisfied. So I don't mind. I'm not going to say that my future life is going to be here, I'm just saying that if it was here, I will accept it. But that doesn't mean that I'll work to go abroad to another country.

He is open. He is courageous. He wants happiness. Location is not the issue for him; he simply wants to find joy and fulfillment. This fulfillment is what the youth ultimately want. Blaise understands that he will not be happy in Lebanon, for he wants a chance to discover and enact his dreams. Fatima sees that her joy is Lebanon, for it is her country, so she has committed her life to improving conditions within it. Marius is open to either leaving or staying. He is open to either path so long as he finds happiness and satisfaction. We are reminded, ultimately, that these are human beings seeking wholeness. Seeking joy. Seeking love. I wish them the best, today and tomorrow and forever.

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