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SHIFTING EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOSITY: GENERATIONAL CHANGES WITHIN THE URBAN MARONITE COMMUNITY IN LEBANON AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE COHESIVITY OF MARONITE PUBLIC OPINION

by
JOY SAADE

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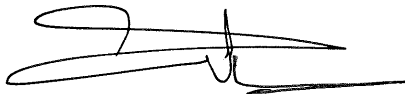

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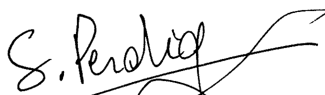

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

<u>Joy Saade</u> for <u>Master of Arts</u>
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Title: **<u>Shifting Expressions of Religiosity:</u>**
<u>Generational changes within the urban Maronite community in Lebanon and its implications on the cohesivity of Maronite public opinion</u>

This paper examines religious expression within the Maronite community by analyzing the shifts in religiosity since the period of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991). This is explored through a collection of qualitative data that contrasts the opinions and experiences of two generations of Lebanese Maronites: the youth of today, in juxtaposition to individuals who are between the ages of 45-60, who were categorized as youth towards the end of the Civil War period. The aim of this study is to steer away from reverting to general indicators of religiosity (i.e. frequency of church attendance, and registration records such as baptism, marriage, and funerary documents), and instead invoke ethnographical approaches to explore symbolism, rituals, storytelling, religious-naming, and self-decoration, among others, to develop a textured and detail-oriented narrative on the progression of religiosity within the Maronite community. Understanding the shifts in religious expression and the tensions that exist between generations reveal the discrepancies in Maronite public opinion, which is traditionally deemed unified and singular on topics related to social and political issues.

Contrasting religiosity and public opinion initiates a fresh conversation on the impact of Maronite religious expression in relation to group consciousness, individual religiosity, and religious self-fashioning. This implies delving into the discrepancies between individual religiosity versus communal religious expression, as well as exploring what prompts potential differences between the two. This paper additionally investigates the ways in which religiosity seeps into other aspects of individual and collective lives including commitments, world views, and relationships (including those with individuals of other sects). Moreover, it emphasizes the practices and extent of the transfer of religiosity between the two generations under analysis; before finally suggesting how religiosity impacts political opinion and the existence – or lack thereof – of a unified Maronite public opinion.

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PREFACE

Thought inspiration

The topic of religiosity as a concept has become a recent interest of mine. In 2017, I was introduced to the term "religiosity" in the context of a lecture on sectarianism at the American University of Beirut, hosted by Dr. Fawwaz Traboulsi, a renowned historian and writer on Arab history, politics, social movements, and popular culture. While the topic of the lecture was unrelated to the practices of religiosity, Traboulsi made a passing statement that I did not know then would be the fuel to my current research interests. As an interjection in his lecture, he had made the statement that: "Everyone knows religiosity across all sects in Lebanon has increased since the end of the Lebanese Civil War until now." After interrupting his lecture with this sentence, he swiftly proceeded on to the intended topic.

I, on the other hand, was unable to shake the statement as abruptly. *Who is everyone? What does religiosity mean? And in all sects in Lebanon, really?* These are the notes I quickly scribbled down in my notebook, in an effort to catalogue my immediate reaction to the statement. After conducting preliminary research, speaking to professors and researchers, and pursuing casual conversations with family and peers, I realized that the statement is a popular belief among scholars and the Lebanese public alike; however, there is no factual or academic precedent giving validity to this claim. Rather, it appeared to be an assumption, materialized by the experiences of each individual that I had interacted with.

This quickly shaped my interest in understanding the distinction between theory and practice with respect to religiosity and its functioning in the Lebanese Maronite community. Moreover, I began to consider how – and even if – the expression of religiosity within the Maronite community is relevant to the sustainability of the existing sectarian state, and the policies that promote current decision-making strategies. If there is no correlation between politics and religiosity, then what purpose does public religious expression serve? These questions are not unique to the Maronite community and may be re-fashioned to address any other sect within Lebanon. Nevertheless, for the sake of this specific study, the focus will be on exploring Maronite religiosity and positioning its relevance to the public realm in Lebanon. This may also prompt further studies on religiosity, focusing on the other sects of Lebanon.

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon hails Mary!

The 25th of March has been marked by the Lebanese state as an especially important day for the nation. March 25th, also known as Annunciation Day, is a national holiday in celebration of Angel Gabriel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary revealing the miraculous conception of Jesus. The demand for the formalization of this celebratory day began with Sheikh Mohamad Nokkari and educator Nagy el-Khoury, who sought for an opportunity to unify Christian and Muslim communities on the premise of a shared theological narrative (Conte, 2010). As a revelation described in both the Bible and Quran, this national holiday is intended to stir faith-inspired sentiment among both Christian and Muslim societies in Lebanon, with the aim of igniting inter-sectarian solidarity (Grandchamps, 2019).

Gestures such as the one mentioned above is not unique within the political fabric of Lebanon. In fact, Lebanon is home to many versions of interfaith dialogue and cooperation initiatives on the principle that it is a country constantly combating intercommunal hatred and conflict. Unlike its neighboring countries, Lebanon is governed via a state system which allocates power-sharing constraints to different sectarian entities within the country. The proclaimed intention of this state system is to guarantee the highest level of freedom and justice for all 18 state-recognized sectarian societies in Lebanon. Despite this state-led initiative for multi-sectarian cooperation, the Lebanese population continues to entertain sectarian-based insecurities that are manifested into acts and opinions

of prejudice, fear, discrimination, etc., against individuals outside one's sectarian community. By extension, these insecurities are transferred to next-generation Lebanese, who continue the cycle of sectarian-based insecurities to the following generations to come.

The need for Annunciation Day is derived from the expectation that inter-communal hatred is an unfortunate drawback to the country's overall progress, and thereby needs constant suppression and confrontation. Addressing the multi-sectarian nature of the country as a constant problem generates the state-inspired need for laws and policies that force populist sentiments of inter-sect dialogue onto the public. Moreover, Annunciation Day is an initiative by the state that claims to overtly encourage multi-sectarian religiosity, thereby feeding into the sentiment that religion and politics must be interlinked to best serve the Lebanese people. Thus, with the cooperation of Lebanese politicians of all sects, the will of the Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, and his cooperation with Vatican authorities, Annunciation Day was formally established in 2010 as a means of rectifying existing tensions between religious communities (Null, 2019).

Nine years have passed since the initiation of Annunciation Day and despite the virtuous intentions of this gesture-turned-policy, very little can be said about the genuine impact of this national holiday on interfaith cooperation between Lebanon's many communities. More importantly, Annunciation Day has failed to prove whether it truly serves the authentic religious expression of the Lebanese. While the presence of the Virgin Mary acts as a point of reference for both Christians and Muslims, religion and religious expression has evolved away from the interpretation of holy texts, and instead has shifted

towards the acceptance of cultural and social indicators as equally important tools to defining religion and its practices. With that said, it may be plausible that the creation of a day like Annunciation Day is intended to actively mold or shape the future of religious expression within Lebanon. Nevertheless, this does not excuse the reality that such policies are created through the invocation of histories related to national insecurities, as opposed to through vigorous studies on the reality and requirements of today's religious communities. Unlike policies made for other state sectors, policies related to religion tend to be created without the credentials for legitimacy (despite the fact that they are expected to be treated as such). Many Lebanese would argue that days like Annunciation Day lack legitimate influence and are only a symbolic effort by the state to showcase to all those interested (Lebanese and foreigner, alike), that concerns related to religion are not gone overlooked in this multi-sectarian nation.

Paradox and study objectives

Such instances of religious invocation are often imposed on the Lebanese public sphere by religious authorities and the state. However, the frequency of religion-inspired policies and their inclusion in public discourse is not an indication of its relevance or impact on religious expression among the Lebanese people. Moreover, such state-led events or proclamations in the name of religion do not indicate the value of sectarianism as perceived by the various religious communities populating Lebanon. Instead, we may find that institutions invoking religion and religious discourse are conducted with the intention

of legitimatizing preconceived notions of institutionalized religion as a necessary means to national security, stability, and inter-sect cooperation. In practice, sectarianism would best be defended – or discredited – through the process of identifying the ways it truly serves the population. Rather than analyzing broad policies that invoke religious discourse, it may be constructive to instead study the unique qualities of each religious sect; identifying the ways they choose to define and express their faith, and to then apply such qualitative findings in juxtaposition to existing or developing policies that claim to support the religious expression of a vastly multi-sectarian population. This study aims to do just that and is therefore challenging the current top-to-bottom trend characterizing the practice of religion-based policy creation in Lebanon. To this end, the objectives of this dissertation are:

1. To identify the shifts of religiosity among a single sectarian community, and how those shifts are being included – or excluded – in the creation of emerging relevant religion-based policies, and
2. To determine how accurately current religion-based gestures and institutions serve the authenticity of everyday religious expression.

To narrow this study down to a single sect, this paper will examine religious expression within the Maronite community by analyzing the shifts in religiosity since the period of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991) to today. The research question pertaining to this study is threefold: (1) What encourages the mobilization of symbols and iconography, ritual practices, oral narration, etc., among Maronites of different generations? (2) How does religiosity seep into other aspects of individual and collective lives, including relationships,

commitments, and world views? And finally, (3) how does one's religiosity impact their political opinion in Lebanon and how genuine is the existence of a "unified Maronite public opinion?" This will be explored through a collection of qualitative data that contrasts the opinions and experiences of two generations of Lebanese Maronites: the youth of today, in juxtaposition to the youths of the end of the Civil War period, or individuals who are now between the ages of 45-60. The aim is to go beyond general indicators of religiosity (i.e. frequency of church attendance, and registration records such as baptism, marriage, and funerary documents), and instead invoke what is ethnographic approaches to explore symbolism, rituals, storytelling, religious-naming, and self-decoration, among others, to develop a textured and detail-oriented narrative on the progression of religiosity within the Maronite community. Understanding the shifts in religious expression and the tensions that exist between generations will indicate the relevance – or lack thereof – of religiosity in conversation to the worldviews that continue to support the sustainability of a state system based on sectarianism.

Concurrent to the aforementioned objectives, this dissertation will initiate a fresh conversation on the impact of Maronite religious expression in relation to group consciousness, individual religiosity, and religious self-fashioning. This implies delving into the discrepancies between individual religiosity versus communal religious expression, as well as exploring what prompts potential differences between the two. I will also investigate the ways in which religiosity seeps into other aspects of individual and collective lives, including commitments, world views, and relationships (including those with individuals of other sects). Moreover, I will look into the practices and extent of the

transfer of religiosity between the two generations under analysis; before finally studying how religiosity impacts political opinion and the existence – or lack thereof – of a unified Maronite public opinion.

Thesis outline

Before outlining the research design, limitations, and method of analysis, this thesis will begin by introducing briefly the literature on religiosity, religiosity in the context of Lebanon, and offer an overview of the historical, cultural, and political motifs that have impacted the created-identity of the Maronite community. The subsequent chapters are organized by themes that were repeatedly raised throughout data collection. These themes consist of rituals and traditions, storytelling, and self-fashioning through symbols. Chapter 3 speaks on rituals and traditions and explores the disenchantment of religiosity through an identified bitterness to the restrictions and irrelevance of traditional rituals. Also explored here is the emergence of new rituals and traditions relevant especially to the Maronite youth generation. Chapter 4 introduces specific stories that are told among Maronites in defense of the benefits to narrative crafting on the individual, family, and community level. Chapter 5 continues the exploration of narrative crafting but situates the investigation beside the personification of Christian icons (through sculptures) as an aid to religiosity. The emphasis on symbols and religious expression draws an interesting dynamic on the value of art as an aid to religiosity. Chapter 6 briefly covers the various ways self-fashioning customs are exhibited (exploring the how, where, why and when religious self-fashioning takes place)

and aims to further this description by identifying the contradictions behind self-fashioning practices in a multi-sectarian nation. The final chapter, before the conclusion, investigates the politicization of religiosity and the transition of religio-culture between generations. By looking into the manipulation of religiosity as an emphasized cultural-marker, Chapter 7 is able to highlight major discrepancies within the image of a unified Maronite public opinion.

Moving away from the sectarianism vs. secularism debate

It is habitual to discuss religion and politics in Lebanon as a phenomenon entwined. Often, these discussions are situated in a pro-sectarianism versus pro-secularism setting, where one option is intended to out-weigh the second on the premise of what will best serve the religious freedoms of the Lebanese public and the future of a sustainable nation. What is often overlooked in the context of these debates is the similarities between sectarianism and secularism. Contrary to popular belief, secularism is not the separation of the religious and the political; rather, it is the *regulation* of religion and power relations between the state or dominating/imposing powers and the public. Secularism is often understood as transcending religious differences, and that is why it is overlooked as a regulator. Since coming to this realization, the debate of sectarianism versus secularism is rendered quite paradoxical. Nevertheless, debates on how best to “include” or “exclude” religion from the Lebanese political sphere continue to encompass the thoughts of political,

civil, and foreign entities alike. This constant debate may be attributed to a question of value and the reality of overall discontent with the existing political system.

The birth of a policy occurs in response to a problem that lacks a current solution (in which case a policy offers the resolution needed), or a problem that has arisen in response to a preexisting solution or policy. Questions of value or overall civil discontent, for example, are excellent reasons to develop new policies. Here, we may revisit the creation of Annunciation Day, and reiterate its purpose as a policy strategically created with the intentions of uniting Lebanon's (un-unified?) multi-sectarian population through the forced (needed?) implementation of a day worth celebrating. Policies like this are created without the evidence and expertise needed to render it truly beneficial to the public. The greatest failure to such poorly thought-out policies is the impact it has on the youth and the natural evolution of religious expression in future generations. Questions related to spirituality, inter-sect unions (i.e. marriage) and other civil concerns that may challenge state/religion boundaries are marginalized during true-to-life discussions on the role of religion in the state. This may also be why some critics of sectarianism are quick to seek refuge in the idea of secularism.

Removing oneself from the debate of sectarianism versus secularism allows for a new discussion to take place on the foundation of the reality of religious influence in Lebanese communities. Often, studies conducted on the topic of religion and religiosity are pursued for the purpose of greater knowledge production in academia and are typically reserved for discussions in academic circles in disciplines such as (but not limited to),

sociology, anthropology, religious studies, or philosophy. Unfortunately, the participation of policymakers is included symbolically in such academic presentations. From the outset, most of Lebanon’s initial policies are created to ensure continued respect to institutionalized religion; yet research on religiosity is rarely considered of value to policymakers. This may be due to a lack of existing discourse on the cooperation of religion-based research studies and public policy. My hope for this study is that it will capture the attention of policymakers, who in turn will come to value their compatriots' religiosity as key indicators to future policies made concerning religion.

CHAPTER 1
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The tangibility of religion: Religiosity

Religion and religiosity: An overview

Religion as a general phenomenon has the capacity to engage several institutions and fields due to its inherent boundless characterization. Michael Lambek brings this point to the forefront of his work titled, "What is 'Religion' for Anthropology? And what has Anthropology brought to 'Religion'," where he identifies that building definitions about religion is often impacted by the particular social context of religious functioning. This is why in some cases religion is understood as a concept synonymous to motivation (Weber), or a defining quality that gives meaning to a society or community (Durkheim), or even as a cultural means of affixing a reality and/or sense of truth (Berger and Luckmann, Geertz, Rappoport). Freudian theory would understand religion as a product of fantasy, projection, and even dreamwork. On the other hand, anthropologists like Levi-Strauss and Douglas define religion as a tool of rationality which distinguishes, classifies, compares, mediates, and even unifies different concepts in the world. Marxist traditions would situate religion as an institution intended to veil assertions of legitimacy, power and exploitation, as a means intended to validify social hierarchy. Kant argues that concepts of time, space, cause, and person are revisited questions within the field of religion due to human experiences (i.e. oppression, freedom, exploitation, subjection, etc.). Studies of ritualism as an integral characteristic of religion have also prevailed through the works of Durkheim, Van Gennep,

Victor Turner, and Kapferer, as aspects of social practices that extend outside of the realm of religion. Moreover, religion has been expressed (by Macoherson; Sahlins) as an exercise of human culture and their culture-making capacities (Lambek 2013, 1-32).

Some suggested definitions of religion and religiosity stem from an "objective toolkit" that uses Christianity as an acting prototype for the concept of religion (Asad; Canell). As an acting prototype, Christianity and Christian thinkers have set the precedent for the use of "religious terms" in efforts to standardize religion into a recognizable institution. Terms based on experiences and habits, i.e. tradition, ritual, symbols, prayer, etc., thereby make up intentionally crafted institutions, limiting religion to the interpretation of Western thinkers and a Christian-religious understanding. It is possibly more relevant to dispute Lambek's claim that Christianity has not been under scrutiny of ethnographic analysis like other religions have, by arguing that it is the findings and standardization of Christianity as the status quo that has designed ethnographic studies of other religions into the shapes they take today (Boddy and Lambek, 2015). The Christian lexicon has therefore acted as a foundational norm for the understanding of other religions, thereafter, imposing its lexicon as the status quo for religious studies. From the perspective of Talal Asad, the Western view of religion as an institution may be traced back to medieval Christianity, where the creation and integration of different pockets of legalities were devised to solidify a set of regulations into what is now perceived to be "religion" (Asad 1993, 161). The solidification of this title, when attributed to the discursive outcome of specific historical eras, indicates the illegitimacy of "religion" as a standardized and objectified institution.

Nevertheless, the outcome of religion as an institution, derived from the traditions and practices of Western definition-making, has re-casted the value of religion in the public sphere. By altering the place of religion in the public sphere through evolving conceptions of discipline and regulation, the space for "belief" has been reorganized to suit the emergence of the modernity era (Pillay 2008, 9). Modernity vouches for the specified allocation of space for belief, by suggesting limitations to where belief "belongs." This is translated practically in conceptions of public and private spheres that indicate where sensibilities like belief and faith are best validated. This is further emphasized through the conflicts between science versus faith, which are each suggested to belong to differing spheres of the public and private divide. Modernity discourse therefore reverts religion to notions of ignorance, viewed as ultimately inessential, and a force which separates humans from one another on the philosophy of dissimilar belief (Jager 2006, 307). Paradoxically, religion is also perceived as an "aspiration of sensibility that all humans share, as something that has a core or essence irreducible to other domains of knowledge" (Jager 2006, 307). To this end, the concept of secularism takes its form.

It is a misconception that mainstream secularism or secular thought disregards religiosity as senseless. On the contrary, secularism as an institution is not concerned with erasing or placing judgement on religiosity. Its aim is to control the outputs of religion in the public sphere by subjecting it to the limitations of private practices. Secularity thus offers a political opportunity to censor public communication and to contain the exercise of rights granted by democracy (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood 2013, 328). Saba Mahmood identifies this tool to serve the notion of the liberal political order, identifying

secularism as a tool exercised in the hands of political figures and civil society actors alike (Mahmood 2006, 328). Secular culture as a political practice not only offers the separation of religious rule from political rule, but it creates an opportunity for subjectivity of religiosity. The transcendental nature of Christianity in discourse has evolved from institutionalized religion to modernity, and more recently, secularity (Asad, Mahmood). This shift in discourse, attributed to Christian evolutionary thought and their thinkers, has altered the practices of religiosity to suit the increase of spirituality as opposed to institutionalized practices and interpretations of faith.

According to Leigh Schmidt, the distinction between identifying as "spiritual" versus "religious" is located in the rejection of the "moral correctness and the institutional apparatus of conservative Christianity" (Popp-Baier 2010, 39). While this is a plausible explanation, it is not the sole reason for this distinction. Ulrike Popp-Baier in "From religion to spirituality," identifies a list of potential explanations for the meaning of spirituality which include: personal relationships with God (or multiple Gods), an identification or pursuit for the divine (in whatever form they may take), a discovery of the divine within oneself, awareness of the inner self, a feeling of being connected to the universe, a sense of awe, mystery or curiosity in the universe, and / or an exploration of the meaning of life (Popp-Baier 2010, 39). Such curiosities or intentions may be translated into practices which include meditation or yoga, and a realization of paranormal experiences. I would like to add here that efforts such as environmental care and humanitarian initiatives when intentionally and regularly practiced are forms of spiritual expression as well. However, identifying as "spiritual" as opposed to "religious" is not limited to those

individuals whom reject the conservative nature of institutionalized religion; and may also include in its classification people who identify with the institution of religion (as a commitment and pillar of community development), but seek to couple their religiosity with spiritual intentions and non-institutionalized forms of religious expression.

Unfortunately, the distinction between spiritualism and religion in political discourse is rarely discussed, let alone identified as valuable or relevant data to potentially inform policy (Popp-Baier 2010, 22). Rather than looking into cultural components to the definitions of religion, policymakers tend to focus on the quantitative measurements derived from findings located within general religiosity (Habermas, 2006). General religiosity thereby includes measurements of religiosity through demography, such as the attendance records of holy sites, church attendance, religious initiations (i.e. baptisms, weddings, etc.), and registration records (Streib and Klein, 2018). Studies that highlight general religiosity as a key indicator to the increase or decrease of practiced faith tend to find that "personal piety in Lebanon has declined dramatically in the past decade," (Arab Barometer 2018, 15). As indicated in the Arab Barometer report of 2018, 24 percent of participants described themselves as religious [in 2018] in comparison to 44 percent in 2010," (Arab Barometer 2018, 15).[1] While religion is often applied as a term to define the rigid structure and institution of faith-based traditions, my use of the *term religiosity is the acknowledgement of the relationship between religious expression and the institution of*

[1] The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that conducts public opinion surveys on social, political, and economic attitudes in the MENA region. This specific report was published after the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections. Data collection for this report was conducted in September-October 2018 and consisted of 2,400 computer assisted personal interviews with a margin of error of 2 percent, (Arab Barometer 2018, 2).

religion as one that can be concurrently related and disconnected. Religiosity refers to the level of belief and feeling one expresses, in correlation to the practices of faith within that religious community. It is subject to change, and evolves in respect to social, political and economic influences. Expressed religiosity may be inspired by the individual's faith or may simply be a characteristic and/or practice of shared experiences between the religious society. The juxtaposition of self-identification and community development within the scope of religion as an institution may influence the individual and/or community's intentions of religious expression, thereby making religiosity both an active and passive practice, respectively.

Lebanon's institutionalization of religion

In the context of Lebanon, religion as an institution and social practice has been integrated into state formation and public policies as a direct characteristic of the state's sectarian foundation. By definition and in respect to the Lebanese proclaimed practice of consociationalism, sectarianism ("*taifiyya,"* in Arabic), is a tool and title that promises to prioritize power-sharing between different religious sects in Lebanon. It claims to allow for the inclusion and accommodation of different religious communities in state decision-making and public institutions, as well as to support the freedom of expression of Lebanese citizens. As previously mentioned, there are 18 sects officially recognized by the Lebanese state. Representing these 18 sects is an extensive list of political parties that hold identities appealing to the sect they aim to represent. Positions within government are specifically

allocated to ensure there is a balance between sectarian political-actors and that this balance "reflects" the population of the country. This is the justification offered for what is today called a confessional-distribution of seats within the Parliament; and an explanation to the "3-tier presidency" which allocates by law that the president of the country is to be Maronite, the Prime Minister must be Sunni, and the Speaker of parliament to always be a Shia. Despite the alleged goals of a sectarian political system, Lebanese scholar Ussama Makdisi would use the terms "exclusionary, undemocratic and disordered," to define Lebanon, "a nation projected as inclusive, stable, and democratic," (Makdisi 1996, 23). Religion in the context of Lebanon is therefore a structure, institutionalized by the individual authorities/institutions of each sect, and then entrenched by the governing state constitution, the Taif Agreement (1989). The Taif Agreement, in Part 1 Section C, thereby identifies the capacity in which religiosity may be expressed. It reads: *1.C. Lebanon is a democratic parliamentary republic founded on respect for public freedoms, notably the freedom of opinion and belief, on social justice, and on equality in rights and duties among all citizens, without discrimination or preference* (Government of Lebanon, 1989). The relationship between religion and religiosity – or, the institution and the practices – in Lebanon, is often convoluted due to the melding of the realms of politics and religion.

The melding of state politics and the institution of religion, as well as the outcome of its influence on the faith of the community, may be traced through the impact of the patriarch. In the case of Lebanon, the patriarch plays a significant function within state affairs and holds juridical authority pertaining to the personal statute laws of the community. This legitimate power has been bestowed to Lebanon's patriarchs through the

Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium (CCEO) and can only be challenged by the authority of the universal church: the pope. The allocation of a political role for the patriarchs of Lebanon has naturally created an opportunity for the leadership of the church to fulfill both spiritual and civil roles. This is also why Christian sectarian communities tend to expect the church to defend or represent their political concerns, which include sovereignty and their advocacy for a strong (or "traditional"), Maronite presence within the state. The patriarch therefore acts as "the father of the flock, symbol of the faith, and figurehead of the community" (McCallum 2007, 926). The institutional value of a patriarch is therefore to serve the community as a "leader," invoke the "identity" of the community in civil affairs (thereby politicizing the communal identity of the community), and by extension, invoke the memory of Lebanon as a distinct homeland for the Maronites (McCallum 2007, 936). Nevertheless, a study by the Arab Barometer reveals that in 2018, 47% of their participants agreed that religious leaders are likely to be as corrupt as non-religious leaders (Arab Barometer 2018, 9). As both a political and religious figure, it is assumed that the patriarch's personal views have a large impact on the opinions of the public, particularly those within the sectarian communities he represents. The expectation of "respect" bestowed to patriarchs exceeds sectarian boundaries and is first and foremost practiced by the Lebanese government in the form of encouraging and valuing the contributions and views made by religious figures on all matters. This is a heavily indoctrinated practice by the Lebanese state to overtly show Lebanese civilians the "partnership" that exists between religious and political affairs in the country.

Brief religious and historical background of the Maronites

The Maronite Church is a sect of Christianity which originates from the Melchite Church, belonging to the Eastern Catholic Church. They are formally linked to the Roman Catholic Church through their formal inclusion in 1213, and their recognition of the Catholic Pope's authority; however, they maintain their autonomy through distinct traditions inspired within the region (Henley 2008, 355). The name of the sect, *Maronite*, traces its origins to Mar Maroun (c. 400), who is the patron saint of the sect. Its first patriarch, John Maroun, was elected in the seventh century, to fill the Patriarchal See of Antioch and appease the monastic traditions that derive from the authority of Apostle Peter, founder of the See of Antioch (Henley 2008, 355). Born in the northern regions of modern-day Syria, the Maronites concentrated in the mountains of today's Lebanon after their encounter with the Crusades (Hage, 2018).

The Maronites were originally peasant communities in the days of their early settlement in Lebanon, governed first by Shia overlords ("*muqata'jis"*), followed by the Druze during the seventeenth century (Salloukh, et al., 2015). During this period, the Maronite communities expanded and migrated south from the northern mountains into central Lebanon. All the while, the Maronites possessed the freedom to openly practice their religion, building churches and monasteries (Hage 2005, 185-205). This freedom paved way for the establishment of the Maronite church as one of the biggest landowners in the Mountain. Moreover, the accumulation of wealth by the Maronite community developed in the form of education, the production of silk, olive oil, and wine, all of which

were mobilized for profit by the monks of the monasteries (Moosa, 1986). Such developments allowed the community to rise out of their peasant status and develop into artisans and cultivators of market towns that no longer depended on their *muqata'jis* for services and support (Hage 2005, 185-205). This autonomy grew directly in correlation with the businesses between silk merchants from European industries, whose capitalist social relations developed "almost exclusively" within the Christian community (Hage 2005, 185-205). During the Ottoman Period and through the trade-based alliances set between the French people and the Maronite community, France was able to assert its role as an "outside friend" to the Maronites until the institutionalization of their relationship following the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 (Faruki 1974, 21). By the grace of the French Mandate, Greater Lebanon was established in 1920 as a "haven for minorities" – a title which was heavily influenced by the Maronite's insistence of a homeland that separates Christianity from the imposition of other religions (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003, 37-65).

It is no coincidence that Maronite customs closely entwine with French culture. Previous to the establishment of Greater Lebanon, French cultural influence spread habitually through the many trade-based partnerships that existed between the Maronites and the French. However, the largest form of cultural dissemination occurred through missionary activism in the form of institutionalized education (Kaufman 2001, 177). Missionary education in Lebanon not only served in shaping and monopolizing the country's education system, but also in influencing culture and generating a selective elite society (Kaufman 2001, 177). The Saint Joseph University (USJ) founded in 1875 is an example of such establishments. With the partnership of the elite members of the Maronite

community, USJ was able to preserve the customs of the Maronites while simultaneously entrench French indoctrination within its curriculum (Herzstein 2007, 752). To this day, many of Lebanon's Maronite elite have graduated from USJ, symbolizing the continued value of Western-heritage to Lebanese intellectual thought and the direction of thought-leadership within the Maronite community.[2]

Lebanese independence from the French in November 1943 brought forward a change in official power dynamics but had little impact on a cultural and social front. French-based educational and social institutions continued to function, and social etiquette still highly depended on the norms of French practices after 1943. The Maronite community, as one of the leading sects in the Independence of the state (as both advocates of – and leaders to – the Independence), continued to reinforce their ties to the West by upholding Western cultural norms and the practice of French as a national language. This was to emphasize the concept of "a people apart, of having a special mission," and of being unique from both Western and Eastern cultural entities (Hagopian 1989, 110). It was not until the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), that the French identity of the Lebanese state was overtly obstructed. What was originally portrayed by the Maronites as a fight for sovereignty, security, and independence against an armed Palestinian presence evolved into a multifaceted 15-year conflict that changed in purpose, tactic, leadership, and resolution throughout the years of violence. What resulted from the Lebanese Civil War, in the case of the Maronite community, is not only the decline of formal Maronite power within the state

[2] Some of these notable alumni include: Camille Chamoun, Rene Moawad, Elias Sarkis, Bachir Gemayel, Samy Gemayel, Samir Geagea, Michel Chiha.

but a schism in a “unified” Maronite public opinion. This schism is best identified through the events taking place in March 2005. In response to the existing Syrian presence in Lebanon, and more immediately the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri (on the 14th of February, 2005), two alliances formed contesting one another on the premise of the inclusion/or exclusion of Syrian intervention within Lebanon.[3] This separation of thought has grown to encompass divisions on topics such as government monopoly of weapons and overall matters of foreign policy. While the separation of these two opposing alliances (identified as “March 8” and “March 14” factions), may be predominantly based on a Shia-Sunni divide within Lebanon, prominent Christian political parties are pledged to each coalition and as a result, have splintered their unity as a holistic Christian community.

Cultural and political motifs impacting Maronite identity

The history of the Maronite community shows the intertwined relationship of politics and faith, even prior to the discussions and formation of an independent Lebanon. Much of the early history written on the Maronites have been written by religious leaders and prominent social figures within the community, as opposed to scholars in the field of historical studies. Due to this discrepancy, much of what has been developed into “factual historical narratives” have actually been derived from stories and poetry that situate themselves in the non-fictional setting of the time they are being written, and so possess the illusion of being non-fictional as opposed to myth (Hojairi, 2011). The works of Maronite

[3] The March 14th alliance advocates against Syrian intervention of any sort within Lebanon. In opposition to this, the March 8th alliance takes a pro-Syria stance in affairs not limited to internal Lebanese affairs.

priest Gabriel Ibn al-Qila'i (1450-1516), are an example of myth turned to historical legitimacy. As mentioned by Simon Haddad, Ibn al-Qila'i's contribution to the development of Maronite historiography is the influence he has had on historical depictions of the Maronites (Haddad 2002, 27-50). Ibn al-Qila'i's poetry and epics focus on celebrating the Maronites as a heroic community which unified in its defense of freedom against insurgents and tragedies that challenge their faithfulness to their religion. He speaks of a haven that is exclusive to the Maronite community, powered by the church and centered around the preservation of the community (Haddad 2002, 27-50). Kamal Salibi and Ghassan Hage identify Ibn al-Qila'i's use of historical material, in combination with legend, as a production of folk legends that establish the Maronite community as one that thrives when it is unified. Despite the truth – or lack thereof – of the narratives presented within Ibn al-Qilai'i's works, the themes of unity, strength, protection and security, have flourished in later works about the Maronites (Salibi, 2003). Early Maronite historiography may be attributed to the works of Patriarch Istifan al-Duwayhi, Bishop Nicolas Murad, Bishop Yusuf al-Dibs, and Fathers Pierre Dib and Butras Daw. To a certain extent, the fallacies found within Ibn al-Qila'i's works have trickled down into early Maronite historiography, and have developed into new motifs which include: rebellion (al-Duwayhi, Murad, al-Dibs), social order and hierarchy (Daw), a connection to eastern traditions and rejection of the Arab identity (al-Duwayhi, Murad, al-Dibs, Dib and Daw), and the evolution from refuge community, to ethnic community, to finally, nation-community – introduced through Murad (Hojairi, 2011). Such motifs have continued to develop in the social, political, and religious narratives of the Maronite community, as characteristics related to the origins and historical characterizations of the community. The writers'

positions as both imagined historians and concurrent leaders within the faith/community provide legitimacy to their writing as a product of Maronite history, notwithstanding the historical inaccuracy that exists in the texts themselves.

The development of the Maronite identity, in association with the political and social landscape during the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920, was predominantly shaped by Michel Chiha and Charles Corm. During this time, collective cultural identity of the Maronites was being juxtaposed to what would define Lebanon as a nation. Specifically, issues of Lebanese vs. Arab nationalism arose, in which case Maronites actively advocated for the "Lebanese" title, as identifying as an "Arab" directly opposed their core beliefs. The concept of Phoenicianism (Corm), emphasized the Phoenician heritage of modern Lebanon and positioned that narrative against the rival narrative of the Muslim communities (Salloukh, et al., 2015). Simultaneously, Chiha drew on the legacy of trade and commerce within the Phoenician heritage to justify the modern alignment and relationship between the West and Lebanon (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003, 37-65). The revival of the motifs of the past strengthened ideas related to racial differences between the two (Christian and Muslim) communities. Leading up to and during the Lebanese Civil War, these differences were clearly emphasized and stimulated to power the conflict with the prescribed purpose of protecting one's religious community.

Bashir Gemayel was a key figure in introducing and inspiring Maronite-collective action through violent mobilization. To this day, his legacy remains a key reminder of the potency of ethno-religious discourse. Bashir Gemayel is remembered and spoken of by the

Maronites for his approach to sovereignty, way of resistance, charisma, and the potential that was left behind during the event of his assassination in 1982 (on the 14th of September). To a certain extent, much of what is considered modern day myths of the Lebanese Maronite community is born from Bashir as a character who had the "sole power to establish the order of law and a state-structure based on the values of Christianity" (interview with Gemayel 2019). From a political perspective, Bashir is meant to represent a period where the "pillars of a strong Lebanese state" – i.e. religion, values, and community – were at their peak as a result of his ability to strengthen all three fronts to ensure the security of a Lebanese nation (interview with Gemayel 2019). His presidential slogan of 1982, "10452 sq. km," once implicit of the area he intended to serve, is today a symbol of the values he advocated for and a reminder of the "essence" of the nation (interview with Gemayel 2019).

Preserving stories and history is achieved via several practices in Lebanon. While some efforts take the form of oral history, passed down among friends, between generations, and within families, Maronite cultural and political motifs may be grasped through institutional forms aimed at obtaining retention. Among such examples of institutions exists those within academic circles. The Universite' Saint Espirit of Kaslik (USEK), which is home to institutes such as the *Phoenix Centre for Lebanese Studies* or the *Bashir Gemayel Archive Collection Campaign*, operate with the intention of preserving and publishing content to further saturate Maronite heritage narratives. Less formal methods of preservation and dissemination may be seen through the work of NGOs or social activism initiatives that aim to generate discussion and offer insight to the current cultural practices

of the Maronites in Lebanon. Such initiatives may be hosted by church communities, or through the creation of organizations such as *The Maronite Foundation*, who host programs like the "Maronite Academy" to introduce Maronite diaspora to their Lebanese heritage. Other methods may be informal efforts to publicize images of prominent Maronite figures (both religious or of political origins) and are piloted specifically in majority-Christian neighborhoods where there is greater potential for an already interested or informed audience. Preservation and dissemination are an intentional exercise aimed to remind – or introduce – members of the community to "better days," through the invocation of a powerful legacy. More likely than not, it is also an effort to invoke hope within the community. Additionally, it may be an effort to reignite a new struggle for a unified Christian identity in Lebanon, by reintroducing the values and benefits of such struggle through a reflection of historical "best practices."

To conclude

Cultural and political motifs have come to inform the practices of religiosity relating to the Maronite faith. While the distinction between religious expression on a communal level and the politics of the community (referring to social, political, and economic concerns), have been traditionally described as closely connected; the institutionalization of religion has seldom been associated to the impact on the practice of faith and religiosity among Maronites. Definitions of popular terms and narratives told to ignite religiosity have been fashioned and disseminated from the top echelons of the

institution, down to those who have applied the prescribed guidelines to their religious practices. This has generally been the shape of religion. Nevertheless, this begs the question of how narratives of tangible faith (i.e. religiosity) told from the ground-up may firstly, reveal the falsity of prescribed stories and “religious” characteristics and secondly, introduce a more authentic account of religiosity within the Maronite community.

CHAPTER 2

Research Methodology

Research design

The data retrieved was collected using a mixed methods approach of two qualitative methods, each designed with the intention of revealing specific aspects of religious expression and understanding among the Maronites in relation to group consciousness, inter-group and intra-group interaction, and religious self-fashioning. The two primary methods consisted of:

1. Semi-structured faith development interviews, and
2. Focus group discussions

Despite the variety in methodology, the participants involved in data collection were faced with the experience of both approaches. This was designed to allow participants the opportunity to interact with their religiosity in different circumstances, in order to invoke alternative or possibly even contradictory responses to what they would state in a different setting. Moreover, this allows for the opportunity to conceptualize the shifts in individual's responses and measure the impact of a changed setting. The aim of using the same participants within these diversified methods was to ultimately study two generations of Maronite youth communities: the youth of today juxtaposed to the youth who grew out of the Lebanese Civil War period.

A total of 30 individuals have been selected to participate in the study. The participants were divided by generation into two dominant groups. The first group, comprising of 15 participants, consisted of Lebanese Maronite youth who have lived more than half their lives in Lebanese cities. Youth in respect to this study are defined as individuals between the ages of 18-24. The second group has been categorized by those who were youth during the Civil War era. Therefore, this category is characterized by participants who today are between the ages of 45-60 years old. Participants for the second category are also limited to individuals who have lived more than half of their lives in urban areas within Lebanon. Preference was given to those adults who have children of their own who fall under the classification of current-day youth. This allows for a cross-examination of the ways in which religiosity has been taught, interpreted, and transferred between generations. This study has also been conducted with an eye to gender, language, sexual orientation, social class, and ability; however participant selection was limited to individuals who have spent the majority of their lives in urban geographies. Participants were selected through the snowballing technique, which allowed for the fluidity of constantly engaging with the possibility of new research participants. Unfortunately, this method unintentionally limited participant selection to a network of individuals derived by the nature of the snowballing technique.

1. *Semi-structured faith development interviews*

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted for this study are inspired by and heavily mimic a pre-existing question set model prepared by James Fowler. The concept of

a faith development interview (FDI) was formally introduced by Fowler (Fowler, 1991; Fowler 2001, Fowler, 2004), to explore faith "as a universal quality of human meaning making," (Fowler, 1991: 31; cited by Streib and Klein, 2018: 69) through the process of a semi-structured one-on-one interview with an estimated duration of thirty minutes to 2 hours for completion. It is an interview split into four sections with the intention of motivating participants to speak broadly on their worldview before closing in on the topic of religiosity. According to the Fowler FDI model, the first section of the interview invites participants to speak on their lives and reflect on the development of their life (thereby creating an overview of their *life tapestry*). The second section asks participants to reflect on their relationships, both past and present. The third section begins to suggest questions related to values and commitments, and the final section connects all the above sections to the concept of religiosity. The interview is a structure of twenty-five questions in total.

I have recreated the format of Fowler's FDI by integrating questions that I believe will be better suited for the specific aims of my study as well as the cultural demographic that will be under analysis. Unlike Fowler's original intentions to explore the qualities of human meaning making through faith, this study looks to mobilize questions about one's life tapestry, relationships, present day values and commitments, worldviews and religion, in efforts to firstly understand what areas of religiosity and religious discourse may penetrate an individual's everyday way of living; and secondly, in what ways those experiences are actively recognized as an element of religiosity, either derived from experiences, passed down from generations, or as both. The overall structure, which encourages participants to speak generally before delving into the specifics of religiosity,

has been maintained. This model not only allows participants the time and space to develop their comfort in discussing the topic, but persuades autobiographical narratives, motivated by narrative-like questions that have the potential to encourage more revealing responses than simple, outward questions related directly to religiosity. This structure ultimately releases the participant from any defensive predispositions and allows the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee to develop freely. For the sake of or relevance to the study, questions are slightly altered between the two categories of participants in order to ensure that each category of participants is being probed effectively for the purpose of relevant data collection. *See Appendix One for the Interview Question Set in English and Arabic.*

Interviews have been conducted face-to-face and are recorded for the sake of ensuring that the participant's contributions are collected with utmost accuracy and clarity. Interviews were conducted in English or Arabic, upon the preference of the participant. Before the start of the interview, participants were asked to complete a form which asks general intake questions (e.g. name, age, general area of residence, etc.). This is for the sake of affirming the individuals participating in the study are selected consciously in respects to gender, sexuality, social class, and language, and that they fit the criteria related to age, residency (and status of parenthood for the second category of participants), as necessary for the soundness of the research. The form was one page and took no more than 3-5 minutes to complete. *See Appendix Two for a sample of the Participant Information Form in English and Arabic.*

2. *Focus group discussions on storytelling, ritual practices, and worldviews*

The second method of data collection took the form of a focus group discussion (FGD). The aim of this method was to engage participants, who have previously reflected on their religiosity in a one-on-one semi-structured interview, to now join in a discussion on religiosity with other participants. A total of three focus groups were conducted, with seven participants present in each FGD. Each focus group took a unique shape based on age group. One FGD comprised of only the youth category, a second FGD was made up of the youth of the Civil War era category, and the final group discussion featured a combination of both generations in one discussion. The purpose of separating the categories from one another in the focus group discussions was to promote a conversation that tackles controversial topics or generation-based insecurities that would be more fluidly discussed in a homogenous setting. Such topics that may be fruitful when discussed in a homogenous group setting may be the topic of gender, sexuality, and religiosity, in respects to the youth category. For the youth of the Civil War category, a topic that would be better hashed out in a homogenous setting would be concepts related to identity politics and 'Maronitism' as a phenomenon that resonated forcefully during the Civil War period. The focus group that combines both categories of participants aimed to incite contradictions in perceptions of popular narratives and ritual practices, as well as symbolism as an expression of religiosity between the two generations under question. *See Appendix Three for the Focus Group Discussion Question Set in English and Arabic.*

Beyond these two intentional methods, there are my own ethnographic experiences and passive fieldwork that have been in ongoing progress since early 2016. Passive

fieldwork consists predominantly of first-hand experiences and observations at Christian pilgrimage sites in Lebanon. At such sites, i.e. Harissa, Mar Charbel monastery in Annaya, Mother of Mercies in Miziara, and Saydet el Nourieh, I have focused on recording the ways in which pilgrims interact with the space as a spiritual haven, by observing their interaction with the structures, statues, and installations present, while concurrently bringing attention to their dress, behavior, company, and the language mobilized while in "prayer" as well as in conversation with others. The ethnography additionally includes experiences with family and friends that have resonated with me in respects to my study on religiosity. Discussions during family gatherings during Christian holidays, as an example, or mere comments made in response to current social or political events that have inspired a "religious reaction" have been recorded. The purpose of my ethnography and passive fieldwork has thus far been an exercise in channeling my curiosity and structuring the path allocated for my formal data collection.

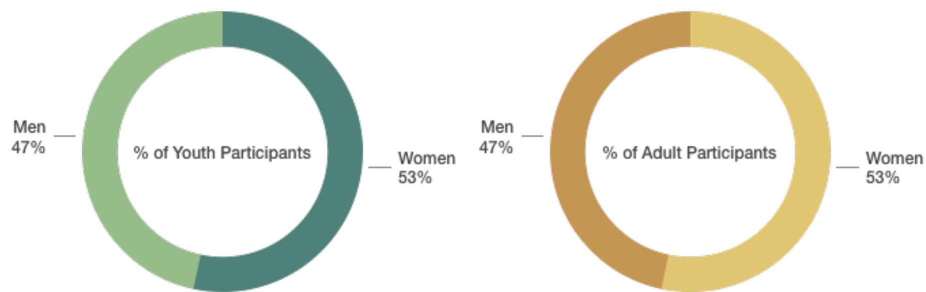
The intention of this study is not to produce an overarching claim or definitive description and analysis of religiosity among the Maronites of Lebanon. Due to the sample-size of the participants and the limitations of time dictated by the dissertation's guidelines, this study is exercising these various research approaches to create a texturized, detail-oriented, qualitative study based on anecdotal experiences of individuals who identify themselves as Maronite. All contributions made by participants are anonymized and have remained confidential.

Data collection

The period of data collection took approximately one month and a half for completion. During this period, interviews were conducted at a location of the participants choosing, often times in their place of residence or workplace. Focus group discussions were hosted in an office space in Achrafieh. All participants came from distinct Christian cities or villages within Lebanon and have lived the majority of their lives in contextual urban spaces within the country. Such identified regions include Dbayeh, Antelias, Rabieh, Baabda, Jbeil, Sin el Fil, Dekwaneh, Mansourieh, Zalka, Jeita, Ballouneh, Ain Saadeh, Bourj Hammoud, and Achrafieh.[4] Despite their urban nature, almost all of these locations are considered non-cosmopolitan in population with a majority, if not the total population, made up of Lebanese Christians. Each participant, youth and adult, differed in regard to their profession and social class. Some identified professions include but are not limited to: designers, artists, seamstresses, construction workers, bankers, priests, entrepreneurs, government officials, clergy administrators, teachers, journalists, stay-at-home moms and self-declared unemployed individuals. The youth were predominantly students – undergraduate, graduate, trade school students, law school students – as well as young music curators, architects, filmmakers, Lebanese Army soldiers, and freelancers.

Figure 1: Percentage of male and female ratios of adult and youth participants

[4] Note: it was pure coincidence and not at all intentional selection to have all participants originate in a region that is overtly categorized as "Christian."



Shared in common by all thirty participants, despite the differences in age, profession, and social class, is their decision to self-identify as Maronite. Many individuals chose to identify themselves as Maronite from birth, while a limited number within these participants acknowledged their inclusion into the sect as a result of their First Holy Communion, typically performed at the age of eight. This distinction was made specifically among youth participants. All participants located the church they attend most often to be the one situated closest to the proximity of their current residence, or the central church of their village/city of origin. Among the 15 adults interviewed, half of the participants (seven) stated that they attend church weekly on Sundays. Three participants attend mass twice a month, one attends once a month, and two attend mass only on holidays or special occasions. Unlike the adults, youth participants revealed that only two youth, as opposed to the seven adults, attend church as frequently as every Sunday. Three youth stated they attend mass twice a month, one youth stated they attend mass once a month, while the majority of youth, a total of seven participants, identified that they only go to church for holidays or special occasions. An equal number of two adults and two youth, amounting to

a total of four out of thirty participants, stated that they never attend mass, despite their identification as Maronite.

Figure 2: Depiction of the frequency of church attendance, based on data collected from the intake form

Frequency of church attendance

HOW OFTEN DO YOU GO TO MASS?	EVERY SUNDAY	TWICE A MONTH	ONCE A MONTH	HOLIDAYS/ SPECIAL OCCASIONS	NEVER
ADULTS	7	3	1	2	2
YOUTHS	2	3	1	7	2

Six adults and four youth claimed they belong to a church group or organization. Church groups and/or organizations may include choir groups, bible studies sessions, and church-led group outings including environmental, peace building, or recreational activities aimed at personalizing religious solidarity. When asked if these participants supported any

political party or organization, 12 out of the 15 adults responded by saying no. Unlike the adults, who showed that the majority does not prescribe to a political party, the youth showcased a relatively balanced split, recognizing eight youth who do not identify with a political party, and seven that do. The political parties mentioned included the Kataeb Party, Lebanese Forces, and the Free Patriotic Movement. Despite the collected data results specific to political parties, when asked if political affiliation and religiosity are connected in any way, eight out of 15 adults responded yes, five responded no, and two participants chose not to answer the question. Among the youth, there was a nearly even split, with seven youth saying that political affiliation and religiosity are in fact linked, while eight youth participants chose to claim the opposite.

Limitations and internal contradictions

Formalities such as identifying the limitations of the study and data collected are an important and respected part of the research process as they ensure accountability, confidentiality, and professionalism between the research team and the participants.

The limitations facing this study have restricted the form of the research to its qualitative and texture-oriented shape. As mentioned above, the limits set by the dissertation guidelines, specifically in respects to time limitations and funding, has only allowed for a participant size of thirty individuals to take part in the research and data collection portion of the study. This size characterizes only a sample of what could be the

urban Maronite population of Lebanon. Due to the minor number of participants, the analysis portion of the dissertation and final findings will not reflect the Maronite population as a whole, but will rather be a close-focused study on the texture – symbols, language, anecdotes, relationships and social influencers – that complement a greater understanding of the community's religious expression in relation to group consciousness, individual religiosity, and religious self-fashioning.

A shortcoming of the collection of theory on the Maronite community – based on the literature review and initial findings brought forward by other scholars on the topic – is the number of sources that exist in English print. Much of the writings and studies that have been conducted on the Maronite communities in the past have been strictly completed in French and Arabic. This has limited my ability to collect and interpret preliminary data based on preexisting literature on Maronite history and cultural development specific within Lebanon. The ways in which I have worked to overcome this limitation is to pay special attention to scholars, such as Ghassan Hage, who have access to the texts written in French and/or Arabic and have integrated them into the final products of their studies. In this way, I am able to trace the thoughts of scholars who wrote in the languages inaccessible to me, by following the interpretations of scholars who have written in English.

It is challenging to consider whether these characteristics and findings identified through the data collection process are unique to the Maronite community or if they are attributes that characterize all Christian communities within Lebanon. Although the

Maronites are formally recognized as the largest Christian sect among all others in the region, Lebanon remains home to Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Copts, Assyrian Catholic, Latin Catholic, Melkite Greek Catholic communities, that may or may not participate in similar cultural practices and forms of religious expression as the Maronite Catholics. While this dissertation is focused on understanding Maronite religiosity, the quality of the result will reveal the potentiality of generalization to other Christian communities. The reality that characteristics of religiosity are fluid between the differing Christian communities in Lebanon is one that should be kept into consideration, particularly when conducting initial fieldnotes at popular pilgrimage sites, where the specifics of the guest's sect was not clearly identified. Thus, it is important to mention that the ethnographic findings may not be exclusively attributed to Maronites, however they have been highlighted and reintroduced as characteristics of religiosity by the Maronite participants involved in the qualitative data collection process.

An inevitable gap will exist in respects to understanding the relevance of regional influence on religious expression among the Maronites. While the shape of the study has been formulated to address and understand the urban Maronite population of Lebanon, this categorization of "urban" has been left generally broad, and intentionally so, to include an array of participants living in various urban regions in the country. While this promotes the inclusive nature of participant recruitment in the data collection phase, it jeopardizes any definitive understanding of the impact on specific regions (i.e. Ashrafieh, Rabieh, Antelias, Dbayeh, Mansourieh, etc., all characterized as predominantly urban Christian residential areas) to religiosity.

With respect to data collection, discrepancies in language and terminology between the participants and the researcher may have impacted the quality of the data. This is a limitation that was considered during the practice of both methodologies. Despite the provisions taken to avoid such language and terminology discrepancies – i.e. the creation of a "Frequently Asked Questions" sheet with general definitions, all communication protocol sheets offered in English and Arabic, as well as an Arabic-speaking research assistant available during the implementation of both methodologies – discrepancies may have arose and were to be anticipated nevertheless.

Despite language discrepancies, a limitation specific to the study of religiosity includes hesitancy and dishonesty from the participants during the data collection process. Scholars who have previously conducted research on measuring religiosity have identified the tendency for participants to respond in "socially-desirable ways," particularly when completing self-report assessments (Gillings & Joseph; Sedikides & Gebauer; Trimble, referenced by Streib and Klein, 2018). This may be due to the operationalized social pressures of obedience and conformity to core teachings and expectations within a religion (Watson, Morris, Foster, & Hood). Moreover, socially-desirable responses may have arisen from a fear of revealing personal information to an interviewer assumed to be outside of the community or who may be critical of the interviewee. This paranoia was identified during a few semi-structured interviews, where the participants were cautious to first ask the interviewer or research assistant for their sectarian affiliation before sharing their responses to the questions asked. The expectation that socially-desirable responding may impact the

honesty of the participant's responses during data collection had been taken into consideration and was combatted by encouraging the participation of the same participants during both practices of data collection. This assisted in revealing discrepancies related to socially-desirable responses during and between the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

There is an internal contradiction facing the legitimacy of this study, which may controversially be viewed as having either a positive or negative impact onto the research and final product of the study. This limitation correlates directly with the assumed status and identity of the researcher as a member of the Maronite community, and more overtly, as an individual possessing a "Christian" last name.[5] My personal status as a Maronite – derived from my father's religious background, passed down to me and presented on my Lebanese status identification card – may encourage the sincere and authentic participation of the participants, who may be comforted that they share the same community origins as the researcher. While this assumed status may promote the reliability and quality of the data collected by participants, it may negatively impact the engagement of readers to the final product of the research, as it may create initial impressions that the writer has a bias towards "her community." Nevertheless, this will only negatively impact the work between the moments of identifying the topic and the name of the author – for any reservations the reader may have will be consolidated after engaging with the content of the study, that surely holds no bias that was not a direct cause of the data and analysis procedure.

[5] Often times in Lebanon, family names are clear indicators of which religious community an individual belongs to and from what region their ancestry derives from.

Data analysis

Preliminary data analysis began with the initiation of a codebook, created from the themes derived from an initial literature study. Such themes and motifs characterizing the codebook during pre-data collection included: security concerns, minority complex, paranoia, preservation concerns, superhero complex, and communal political consciousness. This deductive coding approach served as a preliminary strategy to detect potential links between the literature review and newly collected raw data. After the data collection period was completed, interviews and focus group recordings were transcribed and compiled into two batches, organized to distinguish the two generations under analysis. A scan through of the data to identify overarching and leading concepts characterized the phase of initial coding, which concurrently allowed for the solidification of three major research questions, created before the identification of the research methodology and originally designed to respond to the overall objectives of this study. These confirmed three research questions are:

1. What encourages the mobilization of symbols and iconography, ritual practices, storytelling, etc., among Maronites of different generations?
2. How does religiosity seep into other aspects of individual and collective lives, including relationships, commitments, and worldviews?

3. How does one’s religiosity impact their political opinion in Lebanon and how genuine is the existence of a “unified Maronite public opinion?”

The process of inductive coding has been completed with NVIVO software, due to the value of the interpretive act of capturing the essence of the themes and motifs emerging from the data collected. Patterns linking codes to categories, and categories to themes, have been identified through the consideration of similarities and differences between the responses collected from participants; frequency of how often certain ideas reemerged within one single interview or between different participants; the sequence or patterns that existed within a string of responses or codes; the level of correspondence referring to codes identified in relation to events or activities; and finally, any identified forms of causation shared among participants. Conclusions drawn in relation to the consolidation of public opinion and religiosity have been identified as a major opportunity for further study.

CHAPTER 3

Disenchantment: A product of misshapen rituals and traditions

> *"How do you feel about your children not believing in what you believe?" "As long as they behave like I do… society will believe [that] they believe."* – Maronite adult, mother of two children

From general religiosity to textured religiosity analyses

Indicators of general religiosity have traditionally been used as reference to gage the increase or decrease of religion-based participation within a given community. These indicators, e.g. church records detailing baptisms, marriages, first communions, etc., are intended to signify the level of inclusion religion has on an individual's daily life by offering concrete, quantifiable data to denote the growth or decline of religiosity within the designated sect. Other forms of quantifiable data detailing general religiosity may even include calculations of the number of individuals present during Sunday mass. The Arab Barometer, for example, has recorded a drop of 21 percent in weekly church attendance from 2007 to 2018, with only 24 percent of their participants identifying as religious, in comparison to the 67 percent derived from 2007 (Arab Barometer 2018, 16). Despite the information provided via quantifiable methods, these methods are unable to capture the value of said religious experiences. While quantifiable data may show how many people celebrate Christmas or how often they may pray, it fails to detail *how* Christmas is celebrated, or *why* and *when* prayers are made. The texture of religious rituals and their corresponding traditions are omitted in traditional measurements of religiosity. Moreover,

limiting an analysis of religiosity to traditional methods neglects the potential of valuable learnings related to the evolution and shifts of religious expression. This chapter therefore aims to explore the texture and tones of traditional and emerging customs among the Maronites, by looking into trends related to prayer, and the values attributed to general religious holidays and events (e.g. Christmas, Easter, marriage, funerals, etc.), in hopes of exploring why traditions are perpetuated year after year. Moreover, this chapter presents significant changes that have occurred between generations in relation to ritual-upkeep and introduces faith-inspired rituals and traditions that may have been formerly omitted as non-religious in nature. Overarching perspectives regarding practiced rituals and the dissemination of religion-oriented traditions appear to be in sync between adults and youths, who both claim that these experiences have lost their authentic value among the Maronite community as a whole.

"Religion is an experience – not a belief"

The up-keep of religion-based rituals and traditions plays a large role in the designation of community norms among Maronite societies. Observing yearly holidays (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Saint's days, etc.) and sporadic religious rituals (e.g. baptisms, first communions, weddings, funerals, etc.) are not only predetermined expectations among the society, but are characterized by a set of specific guidelines enacted to ensure a level of unity in such celebrations. Simply stated, these "guidelines" indicate that such holidays or events are reserved for family, friends, and loved ones, as an opportunity to show love,

reflection, and care for one another under the presence of God. They are days characterized by an abundance of food, leisure-time where family and friends can rejoice in each other's company, and a time for prayer and church visits. The exercise of said guidelines, while creating a standardization in the expression of the aforementioned rituals, also consequently gives birth to the disenchantment of religion-based traditions.

Christmas and Easter are the two most prominent holidays celebrated among the Maronites, described as being the "roots" of Maronite religious practice. Consensus between youths and adults' detail that Christmas and Easter are family-oriented holidays, celebrated often in the comfort of a relative's home, amidst a table full of food, reflective of the day's intentions through prayer. The divergence between youths and adults is accredited through the value placed on these holidays and the diffusion of what resonates with the two generations thereafter. In respects to Easter holidays, there is a standardized description characterizing the "tone" of the buildup to Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. There is a sadness, echoed in the way individuals dress and decorate their homes and bodies. On Good Friday, individual's act as if they are attending a funeral, and dress accordingly in all black, in respect of Jesus' death. Moreover, Easter decorations are not applied months in advance as done in anticipation of Christmas, but rather, is brought forth the day of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, in lieu of the "reality" of the celebration born out of the sadness that took place only two days before. Easter is articulated as an opportunity for rebirth. It is a Christian's lived experience of dying and being reborn, perpetuated each year to "renew the soul" of the individual. Despite the symbolic (or literal?) religious connotations initiated by Easter, what resonates most with youths and generates their

interest in the holiday the following year is their recollections of the cultural customs attributed to the celebration of this holiday. The anticipation of wearing one's best outfit and decorating candles to be mobilized in the reenactment of Jesus' walk through Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, or the friendly-family competition inhabited by the "egg-game" initiated on Easter morning as part of a traditional activity played by Maronite families, is what orients Maronite anticipation for the following year's celebration. Similar cultural customs generate excitement for Christmas. A holiday anticipated months' in advance, intended to exhibit the birth of Jesus, is predominantly remembered year after year as an opportunity to give and receive gifts, eat decadent foods, whilst enjoying the extended leisure afforded by the excessive days off from work and school.

There are differences between the allure and/or discontent found in yearly-repeated holidays versus events sporadic in nature. The largest difference comes from the inclusion (or exclusion) of family and friends during ritual celebrations and how that impacts the modesty of the celebration itself. Yearly repeated holidays like Christmas and Easter, are said to be "known" as family-only holidays, while sporadic events outstandingly expressive of joy or sorrow are said to include friends (and sometimes even distant acquaintances). Marriages and funerals, for example, are events that necessitate the inclusion of friends alongside family. Nevertheless, sporadic events and holidays tend to receive the most criticism from the Maronite community for being shallow in essence and void of authentic religious value. This is in part due to the increased number of participants/guests hosted at such gatherings and the social pressures to appease or impress said guests. Both adults and youths acknowledge an increase in extravagance; particularly in weddings, where the value

of the party has increased weight exceeding the importance of the religious ceremony of matrimony. Brides no longer oblige to wearing wedding dresses that cover their shoulders in the church; instead opting to wear whatever design is considered most fashionable in the moment. Concerns related to venue, food, décor, and entertainment, are thereby secondary to the appearance of the bride and groom, however, they operate with the same intention of showing boast. Such pretentious concerns are taken into consideration when preparing for baptisms and first communions as well. Cultural considerations situated to flatter religious events generate a divide between Maronites thus far left unmentioned. This divide is related to economic comfort and its designation of an individual's class, which ultimately serves to impact one's ability to commit to ostentatious practices of celebration. Many Maronites express that what is meant to be a religious-holiday or event have become celebrations characterized by excessive financial expenses and burdens, unavoidable due to the nature of cultural customs designating how such events should be celebrated today.

Cultural customs may be born out of religious holidays, to compliment the celebration of the day's ritual. However, there are traditions and rituals born out of events and experiences, unrelated to designated Christian holidays. Arguably, these hold more value because they are initiated in isolated commemoration of one's faith. For example, many share the practice of driving to Harissa upon the purchase of a new car to either tap the car bumper against the church walls or retrieve an artifact/souvenir from within the site to "bless" the new car. Other practices less extensive are the lighting of incense or candles to set intentions for a wish or prayer. Sometimes, wishes made to God, Mary, or a specific saint are fortified through the practice of a "debt" originally instated upon the making of the

wish. In Arabic, this practice is referred to as a "*n'der*," and often times is paid when the wish is fulfilled, by either donating to a church or religious institution, or by act of penance paid to the deity who fulfilled the wish (e.g. committing to an extensive list of prayers said at a specific location; a challenging pilgrimage sometimes completed barefoot, etc.). These practices are recognized in degrees within the Maronite community as examples of religiosity separate from the dissemination of traditions from religious authorities. Instead, they are perceived as practices grown within the family and smaller community to fortify the presence of God in everyday experiences. Religion is therefore legitimatized via the set intentions that characterize or give value to a lived experience.

The fluidity of prayer

Trends pertaining to when, where, how often, and why Maronites pray appear to be relatively in sync between adults and youths, who both claim that the role of rituals and dissemination of religion-oriented traditions has lost its authentic value. Despite this reality, both generations acknowledge the continued value of prayer as an apparatus that offers relaxation, strength, company, enlightenment, support and validation. In addition to these advantages to prayer, youth emphasize the role of prayer as an expression of wants, an activity practiced when in need of forgiveness or to make a confession, and/or when in search of answers or to solve problems. Youth therefore add to the rationality of prayer the purpose of divulgence. While there are generalized prayers included within the institution of Christianity (e.g. "Our Father," "Hail Mary," "Apostles Creed," etc.), many individuals

of both generations emphasize the value of fluid/creative prayers arguing that their benefit out-ways the sentiment experienced while reciting standardized prayers. Personalized prayers best attest to the aforementioned purposes of why people pray to begin with. Some of these prayers may be introduced orally, as prayers passed down or between family members, however, may also be found in books intended to offer prayers “for every occasion.” These books range in variety and may also be written in specific dedication to a saint or deity, or in respect of a particular event or emotion. Creative, subjective prayer in the shape of “conversations,” are practiced sometimes complimentary to standardized prayers or influenced prayers. These types of prayers have no rules or guidelines and are generally fluid in where and when they are practiced. By their nature, they supplement an individual’s desire to confess or ask for their wants and wishes, or to get their questions answered. Trends related to prayers and praying is therefore following a model emphasizing fluidity, in order to meet the needs of those conducting prayers.

The time in which prayer is specifically allocated is also shifting to accommodate the trends of everyday life. According to the Bible, the patriarch, and most work schedules, Sunday is the day of God and rest. For some, the combination of God and rest amount to what has been retitled as “family day.” A traditional “family day,” as articulated by Maronite youths and adults, includes taking the time to go to church as a family, followed by enjoying a family lunch or dinner in the family’s village of origin. Despite the verbal attestation given in definition of “Sunday/family day,” many youths and adults reveal that there is no practiced truth to this “objective reality.” Rather, Sunday is reserved for unwinding from the week’s stress and regenerating for the start of a new week. While this

is often done in the company of family and the comfort of one's home, it is no longer perceived as a mandatory element of Maronite religiosity to spend Sunday's dedicated to faith in the traditional ways of the past. Instead, Sunday religiosity can be exemplified by expressing the values of Christianity in everyday acts, i.e. simply resting at home with family as a means of showing love and care for others and oneself, whilst fulfilling the elements of a "traditional" Sunday by playing a recording, radio, or TV viewing of a Sunday mass (however, this added adherence to Sunday mass is a step initiated by adults rather than youths). To a large extent, traditional "Sunday religiosity" has been removed from the lived experiences of Maronites. A secondary reason for this may also be attributed to the community's overall skepticism of the church. Both generations attest to the church's existence as a sort of business, interested in proselytization, collecting money, and maintaining their authority as the leaders of Christian thought and understanding; all the while acting hypocritically by participating in what they deem "*haram*" ("blasphemous") behavior (e.g. introducing drugs and leisure sex within the congregation). Such skepticism dissuades any further Sunday participation outside of those considered "mandatory" by the institution (i.e. holiday-mass and special events).

Despite the decline of church attendance and traditional Sunday religiosity, the relevance of prayer in the everyday lives of Maronites has not faltered. In addition to the method of "conversation," prayer can also take the form of meditation and fasting (in a traditional and non-traditional sense). Traditional fasting in the institution of Christianity refers to subjecting oneself to a diet devoid of animal products and by-products (as a minimum requirement), for the span of forty days and forty nights. This period of fasting is

broken on Easter Sunday. Today, fasting practices are not validated by the adherence to non-meat diets but rather, are generated by an individual's conscious decision to restrain themselves from a temptation dear to their way of living. Restricting oneself from swearing and using foul language is an example of a fast. Abstaining from swearing, for one particular Maronite adult, means to replace the temptation of using foul language with prayer. While driving home from work – in the heat of a five o'clock Beiruti traffic jam – praying helps this adult release the frustration otherwise subdued by lashing out in curse words. Other forms of prayer, i.e. meditation, offers individuals a similar opportunity to reset and begin their day/hour/moment anew with a transformed purpose. While prayers and praying are oriented in a standardized model of how, when, and where praying should be performed, the reality of this ritual is that it is one often practiced out of necessity rather than obligation.

Family influence on the upkeep and evolution of traditions

Building on the importance of family relevance to rituals introduces the positive and negative impact of ritual practices onto child development and ritual dissemination. A Maronite mother of two shared the impact of her mother's religiosity as an explanation to her current religious practices. She revealed that as a child, it was a habit of her mother's to light candles and incense whenever she felt nervous, insecure, or in need of divine support. Often times, she would do this in moments where she felt these sentiments on behalf of her children. Knowing that her mother was lighting candles on her behalf perpetuated a lack of

confidence within herself and her abilities to thrive. Despite the pure intentions of the ritual, what was born in the mother during her youth was an anxiety related to her abilities to succeed or grow without any support from divine intervention. Now that this woman has her own children, she continues to practice the tradition of lighting candles and incense, however, is aware of when and who is around when she chooses to do so. She continued to profess that she finally understood her mother's anxieties and intentions now that she was a mother herself, and disclosed that when she feels her children are in need of divine support and blessings (sharing the example of days where they may have exams at school or basketball games), she lights a candle in secret. By practicing this ritual away from the awareness of the children, she explained that her children benefit in two ways: by (firstly) maintaining the confidence that they can accomplish their task without external encouragement, whilst (secondly) still having divine support by their side.

Nevertheless, one must question how this will impact the children's perpetuation of this tradition in the future. Will the children grow to light candles in secret as well? Or will the tradition die due to their unawareness of the value (or potentially, even the existence) of this tradition within the family? Despite the role schools and churches play in relaying the teachings and experiences of religion-based rituals, the tradition of practicing rituals is largely attributed to the upbringing and exposure within the home environment. Much religiosity through the practice of rituals is generated through habit and personal morals, derived from/in reaction to the exposure of family traditions. Taking part in mundane family hobbies may even be a discreet method of disseminating religiosity. For example, one youth explained how a large part of her childhood environment was fashioned around

singing. This youth and her mother share the enjoyment of singing together and would tend to sing many church choir songs in practice of their religiosity. Through song and singing with her mother, she attested to her faith. Reflecting on this, she detailed that still today these songs resonate with her. Despite the fact that she is less inclined to sing them, they continue to give her memories of how she was subconsciously integrating religiosity into her everyday life by partaking in mundane activities originally perceived as experiences of family bonding.

The emphasis placed on family quality time may sometimes overshadow the purpose of religious expression. Comfort, support, validation, relaxation – and other qualities – mentioned in justification of ritual practices are easily attainable via family support and may even replace the purpose of religious expression with non-religious family traditions that compensate for the qualities claimed via religiosity. This is exemplified in many of today's Sunday/family day activities related specifically to quality time, rest, and rejuvenation with loved ones, as separate from the context of religion. Family quality time and traditions may therefore be complimentary to the upkeep of religious rituals, however, may also contribute to the neglect or demise of the preservation of religious-based traditions within the family.

The conception of a "schizophrenic society through outdated rituals"

A change in ritual practice is often a response to outdated traditions that no longer hold relevance to a community. This is not to say that the traditions do not retain their value as a symbolic element of the community's history. Rather, an emergence of new rituals with shared values take its place, encouraging the replacement of outdated traditions. But what happens when outdated rituals are forcibly perpetuated within a society that no longer desires them or requires their practice? Moreover, why are these rituals continued if they are largely considered outdated by the community? The imposition of Maronitism as an institution is the first to be addressed in response to the aforementioned questions. While the Maronite sect is founded on the principles of a religious institution sanctified by Vatican authority, Maronitism is a coded-culture within Lebanon that imposes a set of expected guidelines and expectations on all who identify within the scope of "being Maronite." As mentioned above, specific traditions and the submission to said traditions are largely caused by social pressures that are passed down between generations through family obligation, requirements for community inclusion, and mock-regulations (i.e. rules that are imposed as mandatory elements of the religion) set by the Maronite church. Social pressure to conform to outdated rituals and traditions may even be promoted by Maronites who do not believe in the necessity of perpetuating outdated rituals but continue to do so in fear of challenging the image of unity generated to satisfy the community's public persona.

However, the attempt to force the relevance and practice of outdated traditions within the Maronite communities has inadvertently perpetuated what many Maronites have labelled a "schizophrenic society." Imposing traditions to grow within the constraints of standardized dimensions is correspondingly making space for contradictions and inconsistencies derived from the habits and reasons attributed to various forms of ritual practices. Many complaints are directed against what have become base characteristics of the larger Christian holidays (e.g. Christmas and Easter). The commercialism and focus on gift-giving/receiving has sidelined the traditional/religious intentions of Christmas and Easter and as a result has made these holidays a cultural-experience as opposed to a religious-oriented one. Many adults mention that the reason they do not attend mass during holidays is due to the fact that they are busy preparing elaborate food arrangements or are decorating their homes and streets, leaving them with no time or energy for the mass. Nevertheless, they continue to impose the "necessity" of attending holiday masses as a requirement of their faith and conclude their confession with an: "*insha'Allah* ('God willing') we will make it next year." Moreover, the emphasis placed on opulence and showing-off has limited individual's ability to celebrate and experience rituals/traditions with the entirety of their extended families. Many Maronite families actively choose to keep their celebrations small so to be able to "afford the luxury of the experience," and avoid any judgements passed between extended family on the economic stability of the host of the celebration. These examples allude to the sidelining of family and religion-oriented traditions for the accommodation of emerging cultural components that are generally favored and carried forward to following generations. Despite the acknowledgement of the sidelining of traditional religiosity expressed largely through acclimations of guilt or

promises to commit to the requirements of the religious institution (articulated not just by the Church but in the boundaries drawn from generations before), the reality through practice shows that many Maronites have abandoned the rigorous rules set by the institution on "how" religiosity should be expressed and instead have opted to conform to the requirements set by the emergence of a culture that prioritizes opulence and facades.

Religious-based rituals and traditions in Lebanon are also popularly performed and promoted for "practical reasons" not necessarily related to expressions of religiosity at all. These practical reasons refer to the deliberate positioning of an individual within the subcategories of Lebanese citizenship, in defense of the sectarian system in place. Many parents confess that a motivating factor for baptizing their children is to ensure that they are granted "complete citizenship" within the scope of Lebanon (where citizenship criteria includes identifying and declaring one's sectarian affiliation on their legal documents). Many institutions – both public and private – use the sectarian affiliation designated on a Lebanese ID to measure the inclusion or exclusion of an individual to a given post (e.g. job opportunity, inclusion in certain academic programs or clubs, special access within certain health-care facilities, etc.). Several Maronites argue that although it may be inopportune to have their sect identified as a subcategory of their citizenship, it is even more dire if an individual is acknowledged as "godless," for it not only creates a gap in an otherwise "complete" Lebanese citizenship, but would exclude such a person from belonging to any type of society relevant in the eyes of the state. In other words, being deemed as a "legalized" atheist possess the threat of complicating one's civil existence and security. This is why youths – despite the rejection of this passive adherence to the institution of

religion for the benefits of conforming to sectarianism – generally agree that this is a practice they too will push forward with their own children, irrespective of their spiritual connection to Christianity. It is ultimately in the best interest of Lebanese citizens to be identified as belonging to a sectarian community regardless of their genuine connection to the faith and its practices (note: this conclusion, of course, would not be drawn if the state had been one void of sectarianism altogether). Thus, returning to the purpose(s) of a baptism: it may be argued that a baptism in Lebanon not only introduces a child to the Maronite-Christian community and faith, but solidifies their status as a Lebanese citizen under the protection of a sectarian order. Moreover, one can surely expect that this baptism will be designed around a luxurious show beginning with the paper quality of the invitations, to the color scheme of the venue décor of the baptism's after-party, down to the extravagance of the baby's (and the baby's parents') outfits.

The combination of placating social norms and expectations, while behaving in a way to secure a full sense of national belonging through the confinements of the sectarian system, explains in brief the "schizophrenia" identified by Maronites who complain of the contradictions embedded in the practices of religiosity within Lebanon.

The veracity of Maronite ritual practices today

Ritual practices and traditions within the Maronite community have largely depended on the evolution of guidelines disseminated by the Maronite institution. This institution is generally represented by the church as well as a cultural history that has set

precedent for what Maronite religiosity should reflect in practice. While the institution solidifies and unites individuals to conformed religiosity, it limits the potential for new rituals and traditions inspired by faith-based sentiment to be included in what may be deemed Maronite religious expression. The limitations of the institution may be explored in two overarching categories. The first category, which was already discussed, embodies the characteristics of "schizophrenia" in relation to the disintegration of traditional religiosity, an adherence to boast-culture and excessive consumption that actively replaces the authenticity of family-quality time and celebration. The second category, not yet explored, is the exclusion of certain behaviors, habits, and emerging rituals and traditions that are omitted from the category of religiosity due to their failure to match the boundaries set by the institution of the religion and confines of social Maronitism.

What unites emerging rituals to traditional religiosity is the equivalence of values and intentions set behind evolving practices of religious expression. What is popularly categorized as "Christ values" – referring to principles identified through the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ (e.g. kindness, honesty, forgiveness, love and generosity) – can be identified in practices not necessarily mimicking those of Christ's, but of those that take these values as the core intention of emerging customs that better suit the living conditions of one's existing environment. Many who are attached to traditional religiosity as the "authentic" form of religious expression refuse to accept the evolution of religiosity and the reinterpretation of values in association with popular practices related to social philosophies of equality (social, economic, etc.), justice, and environmental sustainability. On an outstanding level, Maronite adults claim to avoid passing judgement on what they perceive

as the weakening of traditional religiosity among the new generation, on the premise of following Jesus' practices and value of acceptance. With that said, there is a direct action by these same adults to remove any responsibility for the "weakening of religiosity" that they have identified, instead positioning this phenomenon of waning religion as a sole result of the religio-political environment within the country. Youth, on the other hand, are well aware of the impact their parents and surrounding adults have on their intentional or unintentional rejection of traditional religiosity, and commonly reference the affects the Lebanese Civil War (popularly disguised as a sectarian-based conflict, omitting the socio-economic factors and impact foreign affairs had in the matter), as a dominant cause of their parent's interpretations of religiosity and the evolution of religious expression within the country. To combat the inherent segregation prevalent within the generation forced to live the Lebanese Civil War during their youth; Maronite youths focus today on reiterating "Christ values" in a way that actively captures the values common to other sectarian faiths within Lebanon. By doing so, they are able to practice religiosity within the spirit of "Christ values," without deterring the participation of other religious communities who wish to join in, thereby simultaneously and naturally forming unified expressions of religiosity among inter-sect communities in Lebanon.

At the same time, the practices of unified religiosity and fusion of inter-sects attests to the complaint of waning of intra-sect religiosity. A common example repeatedly shared in this context are the controversies attached to the practice of yoga in Lebanon. As a method of self-care, many who practice yoga advocate for its purpose as a psychosocial comfort and means to spiritual nurturing (among other benefits). "Self-care," as a popular

philosophy outside of the immediate scope of religiosity, is strongly advocated for in secular fields of physical, psycho-, social, and emotional health, with the immediate goal to strengthen one's positive connection with and in themselves. Due to the spiritual connotations often attributed to the practice of yoga, many individuals (regardless of their religious affiliation) fear the impact yoga may have on one's spiritual connection to an institutionalized religion; claiming that individuals who practice yoga are removed from the institutional teachings of a given religion. Truthfully, this is not an entirely incorrect perception of what happens when one practices yoga, for it may indeed give individuals the opportunity to reflect and come to their own conclusions of what spirituality means to them; thereby widening their potentiality of religious expression away from the boundaries set by institutionalized religion. What is not clearly articulated by anti-yoga spectators is the fear exemplified by religious institutions due to the paranoia generated from the freedom of expression promoted within yoga. The Maronite institution has plainly shown their sentiment of paranoia by sporadically running campaigns discrediting the "legality" of the practice of yoga in juxtaposition to the teachings of Maronite Christianity. Their focal argument claims that yoga practitioners are averted from forming a true connection with their Maronite faith, due to the infiltration of other spiritualities (classified commonly as other Eastern religions or even misconceptions of "demonic energy transfers" during meditations). What yoga truly offers, according to Maronite youth and adults who practice, is an escape from the pseudo-religious environments created by religio-political leaders and a chance to recreate non-binary definitions and experiences of one's faith. For individuals who identify as Maronite and identify as yoga practitioners, the experience of yoga is heightened to its spiritual form through the connections made to their Maronite faith. To a

Maronite yogi, the practice of yoga is a self-imposed ritual of religious expression because it not only connects them to their faith but reignites their spiritual sentiment after each practice.

Reflecting on the perception of yoga as an expression of one's religion alludes to the nature of multiple realities perpetuating the authenticity of religiosity. It is not to say that some forms of expression – whether they be traditional or emerging – are more genuine than others. Rather, it is a statement on the relationship between the guidelines set within the religious institution and a given structured environment that together is able to impose certain limitations dictating the "correct" or "incorrect" methods of expressing one's faith. To be less hypothetical, we may say that the Ten Commandments prescribed in the Bible is indicative of certain behaviors, and that a community, through its social structure, implements those Commandments in a way deemed suited to the community in efforts to create a normalization of religious practices. In discussions related to the question of "right versus wrong," both generations are quick to agree that the foulest "wrong" is murder. Their justification for this belief is often derived from its solidification as a "wrong" by the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, pushing the assessment of murder to take the shape of suicide creates a discrepancy in position regarding whether murder is truly a "wrong." With the question of suicide in play, individuals review their initial objective stance on murder to consider the social, economic, etc., factors that could have led an individual to the act of suicide. While some people thus take into consideration the structured environment that leads to the decision to commit a murder (suicide or otherwise), others are adamant that murder – regardless of the social context leading to the

act –remains wrong, as prescribed in the Ten Commandments. Neither perspectives should be condemned as "right" or "wrong" objectively. Rather, this example alludes to the reality of the existence of multiple realities coexisting to generate different versions of social practices inspired by both religious and social cultures.

Unfortunately, the idea that there are multiple ways to practice religiosity and that all methods are authentic in their own respect is a reality not accepted by the institution of religion and conservative Maronite circles. This is a result of the threat individualized practices of faith have on the authority disseminated by the institution. An exercise of authority by the "middle-men" (i.e. patriarchs, priests, and other religio-political figures or elites) who monopolize and impose their interpretation of religion onto others would lack any significant weight if its audience prescribed to an individualized-interpretation of religion (that is also dually accepted by an overriding institution). Accepting the multiplicity of religious expression is therefore detrimental to the control mechanisms imposed on the public by religious institutions. With that said, there are structures within the state of Lebanon that limit the Maronite population's ability to fully escape the constraints of the Maronite institution. Most repeatedly mentioned by Maronite youths is the refusal of the state to allow for civil marriage and the legalization of abortion. Both laws feed the perpetuation of sectarianism by allowing each sect to designate their own set of laws while simultaneously ensuring that laws designated by the state pose no opposition to the popular wills of religious institutions in Lebanon (Maronite, but also all other sect-based institutions). A complaint generated largely by female Maronites of both generations is the perpetuation of legalized oppression directed especially towards females through the

endorsement of state laws that privileges religious institutions above human rights. Both the state and religion as patriarchal institutions habitually normalize the practice of inequalities against disenfranchised Lebanese citizens; and each sect plays its own role in furthering those inequalities by infusing their religion's indoctrination to ensure the obedience of the people.

In truth, the Lebanese population is skeptical of the relationships between religion and state powers – and the Maronite communities are no different. The hypocrisy of inequalities and the perpetuation of submission through the manipulation of rules that promote social disparities is often challenged by Maronite youths. Advocacy has thus emerged as a practice of religiosity for Maronite youths, who claim that through advocacy they are prescribing to the values of Christianity that have generally become lost by the maneuvering of religion for political gains. Concurrently, as advocates for causes such as equality, sustainability, and education, the Maronite youth are actively subverting the corruption perpetuated by the state. An act as simple as rolling down the car window for a beggar and offering them water (as opposed to ignoring the beggar all-together by keeping the window shut and raising the volume of the car radio), attests to "Christ values" of kindness, generosity, and care for the less fortunate. Simultaneously, many Maronites believe that offering the beggar water as opposed to the money they are likely begging for is an advocation for the rejection of the system that exploits refugees to the structure that has forced them to beg for their survival. While using this example of the beggar, many youths additionally reflect on the hypocrisy of concentrating on traditional religiosity as the most authentic form of religious expression. This is done by painting the picture of the

"ideal religious man/woman," deemed so for attending Sunday mass regularly, however, on his drive home makes the conscious decision to keep his car window closed from beggars. From a perspective devaluing independent spirituality and alternative modes of practice, this Sunday church goer – despite his rejection of the poor – is regarded as "religious" in comparison to the Maronite who doesn't attend Sunday mass, but opens their window regularly for refugees and the poor. Similar judgements may be made to those who consciously choose to replace the hours dedicated for mass to social or environmental volunteer initiatives. One youth mentioned his constant battle with his parents, who attend Sunday mass routinely and do not understand why he chooses to plant trees every Sunday instead. To this Maronite youth, planting trees as opposed to attending Sunday mass is a form of appreciation to God for life, an opportunity for solemn reflection, and his contribution to the rebirth of the earth. Despite not suiting the conventions of religiosity, planting trees is a form of environmental activism and this youth's form of exercising his connection to his faith. Who is one to dictate the authenticity of his spiritual experience?

Enchantment (re)ignited by nonconformity

Let us draw once more on the example of fasting as an expression of religiosity, to generate a final exploration of how both tradition and emerging rituals may be applied to defend the authenticity of various experiences of religiosity. An individual (who we will call Rita for personability-value), has decided to dedicate her fast to the restriction of all sweets and desserts. In accordance to tradition, this means she is expected to refrain from

eating sweets and desserts for forty days at all costs. Breaking this fast has no immediate or physical repercussion, however, would traditionally be deemed negatively by the community (as a consequence of religious institutional norms). Despite this, Rita chooses to alter the limitations of her fast by allowing herself to enjoy a cookie with her mother, whom she visits every morning before work for an Arabic coffee on the veranda of the house she grew up in. Her mother bakes often and is always ecstatic to share her homemade goods with her grown daughter. Despite Rita's commitment to her fast, she continues to enjoy the sweets her mother offers her daily, as a show of affection and respect to her mother. Rita continues her day avoiding sweets until the next morning when she returns to her mother's house for a morning coffee and baked good, as per her routine.

Personalizing her fast (to accommodate this tradition shared with her mother) in no way impacts the authenticity of Rita's faith. In fact, by acknowledging the conditioning and personalization of religious practices, the value of the multiplicities of religious expression and the intersectionality within traditional religiosity is revealed. Despite efforts to institutionalize religious expression by religio-political authorities, the reality is there is no singular way to practice faith. Imposing a limited parameter for religious expression only works towards rendering traditional rituals outdated and inapt. However, when people are given the liberty to personalize their illustration of faith in accordance to their interests, values, and daily habits; traditions and rituals become reignited as ever more relevant to one's proclamation of faith. Unfortunately, though it is popularly understood that religiosity takes many shapes and practices, it is not popularly accepted (due to the stigma enforced within the community, solidified by institutional pressures). Many Maronites of both

generations feel the pressures of conforming to institutionalized religiosity and feel excluded from their faith if they deviate from the expectations of the institution. Nevertheless, and as we saw with the example of Rita, not conforming to the expectations that dictate what is and is not authentic forms of religiosity in no way impacts a person's faith on an individual level – so long as the pressures from society to conform are dually ignored. Values of kindness, honesty, forgiveness, love, and generosity – as advocated within versions of Christianity – can be expressed without the guidelines enforced by the religion.

Final thoughts on the significance of rituals and traditions

While a brief overview of rituals and traditions offers the image of cohesive religiosity within the Maronite community; the sentiments of Maronites on the relevance of some of these rituals and traditions reveals the outdatedness of institutional rituals to personal religiosity. Some may argue that the legitimacy of a ritual or tradition should be based on the individual who gives the ritual value through its practice. In this way, individuals or families are able to generate their own values to classic prayers or religious holidays, rather than conform to the prescribed experiences dictated by the institution of religion. "Religion is an experience – not a belief," and for many, the freedom to create their own experiences and connect them to their values is how they attest to their spirituality. Rather than feel obliged to practice a ritual or tradition in order to uphold a conventional community image, some prefer to emphasize the presence of God and value

of prayer/reflection to create traditions personal to oneself and to their family. However, despite the trend (particularly favorable among youth) to move away from traditional indicators of religiosity, many individuals continue to impose the structures and expectations of traditional rituals and traditions to emphasize the presence of the community within the country. Conforming to traditional religious expectations is therefore a tactic – both self-imposed and pressured from within the society – to ensure the presence and security of the Maronite community. However, Maronites who critique and/or conform to this realization acknowledge that by practicing rituals for the sake of appeasing inter- or intra-community spectators, they are not only accountable for the disenchantment of their community's traditions, but for setting limitations disallowing the acceptance of new community-wide traditions.

CHAPTER 4

"Religious reasoning" part one: An insight into the practices of storytelling among the Maronite community

"Muslims are very faithful, very nice [people], but they are scared...
We are pampered by Jesus – this is [what is] nice about us."
– Maronite adult male, unemployed due to health conditions

The ideation of the divine through oral traditions

Having a strong sense of faith often assists the placation or erasure of mundane rights within the scope of social and economic justice. Those who may find the terms "placation" and "erasure" cynical or harsh may reinterpret the role of faith to suggest that faith (i.e. religious loyalty) supports the facilitation of one's "acceptance" of their existing social and economic conditions. In both cases – whether one chooses to look into the role of faith with cynicism or optimism – storytelling assists in revealing the subliminal role religion plays in the story-teller's life. Religion-based storytelling is not limited to the regurgitation of religious narratives located within the Bible. Rather, (and more often than not, in the case of the Maronites), the dissemination of stories with religious (or Maronite-specific) connotations are products of oral history and anecdotes in the form of stories. The purpose, audience, relevance and rationalization of stories is then subject to change in accordance to an individual's necessity for the narration (necessity, in this case, being derived from one's comfort level in relation to their social and economic standing). Whether the necessity for the story is acknowledged (or not) by the storyteller or story-hearer is another question entirely. Due to its frequency of application, the

conceptualization of the divine through storytelling is so common in the Maronite community that it often goes unnoticed as an act of religiosity, and instead is interpreted as a form of speech or typical diffusion of language. Extracting a series of unique anecdotes told by and between Maronites to gage why stories are told, to whom, what may be the benefits and negatives to narrative crafting, and the role of storytelling within the family and community reveals deeper implications for the overall value of storytelling within Maronite communities.

"To question inequality is to participate in an evil act"

In midst of discussing the conceptualization of evil, an adult Maronite woman began to explain her definition of "evil" through the presentation of a personal anecdote on the relationship dynamics within her family. She confessed that her father is nearing the end of his life, and in preparation of this, her family has begun organizing for the distribution of his inheritance. She is a daughter among two sons, and despite the fact that there are no legal laws restricting her access to equal inheritance, her father has chosen to give both her brothers a larger (and equal) share of inheritance, leaving her with a lesser (i.e. unequal) set of assets than her brothers. When sharing this story, she was brief to mention her disappointment in her father and anger towards her brothers, and quick to move to the justification of why expressing sentiments of either disappointment or anger were deconstructive to her wellbeing. According to her, disagreeing with the decision taken by her father to give a larger portion of assets to her brothers is a sign of disrespect to her father, and expecting her brothers to come to her defense by acknowledging this inequality

would be disrespectful on their parts. She maintains that fostering negative sentiments towards her male family members would ultimately be an act of evil, working against God's wishes to cherish the family above all else. It was then that she expanded outside her narrative to include "lessons" she learned from God during this period in her life, which she presented in the form of dialogue: *"When God speaks to me, he tells me not to turn on my father and brothers. He reminds me that I love them and that there is more to this life… for what is my anger worth?"* Replaying these "words of God" in her head brings her to the conclusion of what is deemed "evil," but more importantly, helps pacify her frustration and move forward in acceptance of the condition (i.e. injustice) she faces.

The role of storytelling in the above example is evident through the constructed imagination of the Maronite woman, who invokes "words of God" to pacify her sense that an injustice has been done to her. It is important to note that she does not deny that she has been placed in a situation where she is victim to a social injustice. Rather, she acknowledges the feelings of disappointment and anger attributed to the injustice done to her. She understands that societal discrimination towards women has supported her father to limit her inclusion in his will and to favor her brothers as his successors, (noting also, that while I am drawing on a specific case, the issues related to unequal inheritance distribution based on gender is not unique or limited in Lebanese practice). Despite concluding the unfair circumstances of her situation, she insists that the best approach to address this injustice is to placate her sense of disappointment by drawing on her faith for support and guidance. By positioning her disappointment and anger towards her male family members as inherently paradoxical to the will of God, she is not only justifying her

silence to a culture that condones the oppression of women but is also accepting her status as inherently "unequal" within her family, to preserve the dynamics of family loyalty prevalent in Lebanese Maronite culture.

Narrative crafting in the form of incarnating language "stated" by God, may be applied to other forms of social or economic injustice unrelated to inheritance. Most frequent practices of the incarnation of language is done among the lower class who earn less-than/or just enough to "get by," and are therefore in need of silencing or justifying their socio-economic conditions with testimonies of gratitude to God and an acceptance of their situation. A second Maronite adult woman living alone in Bourj Hammoud (popularly considered to be the "Christian slums" of Beirut), explained how she invokes God regularly because by doing so, she has neither sense of being alone nor poor. Very casually, she drew on an Arabic proverb she claims to be popular among disenfranchised women like herself, which goes: *"For every woman who is born poor, God makes her a seamstress."* At face value, this saying implies that God is watching over and protecting women born in poverty by ensuring that through a skill, basic to many Arab women, they may find prosperity and secure their independence. However, as mentioned by our seamstress from Bourj Hammoud, this proverb may also be applied sarcastically – to represent the repression of women who are not fit or simply have not fulfilled their "role" as mothers and wives, and are therefore doomed to their "only other option" of living in poverty through a career with little financial growth opportunity. The difference in interpretation of the proverb depends on the audience receiving the story, and whether it is interpreted as a religious statement to appease or ridicule the subject matter of the statement. Nevertheless, those who proclaim

such stories or statements reaffirming God's "opinions" onto themselves are doing so to pacify their confusion and discontent regarding their socio-economic positions within society, and to continue living in the conditions they are in without searching for answers outside of religion, (i.e. the "answers" provided by God) for further explanation.

Miracles, modesty and the female storyteller

The application of narrative crafting is not limited to contexts of social or economic integrity. Rather, the most basic and frequent application of extended storytelling occurs when individuals attempt to reason a situation/condition they deem unexplainable or mysterious. Anything unexplained through reason and/or science is often classified as a work of God in the eyes of the faithful. The cure of terminal illness or the sudden stop to a natural disaster may be considered potential events superseded by the divine and thereby productions of miracle work. In Lebanon, and among Maronites specifically, there is a tendency to not only allocate the responsibility of a miracle to the divine, but to interject details regarding which saint may have acted as an interloper on behalf of God. Varieties of stories thus emerge hyper-emphasizing the role of saints in events deemed miraculous in accordance to that saint's role as a healer or protector. These stories are many and unique, but all tend to share the same pattern of (1) revealing an insecurity within the storyteller, that is (2) soothed through a narrative removing responsibility from the storyteller and into the hands of the divine, and (3) concluded with an expected or materialized outcome.

A grandmother's tale of her sick granddaughter attests to this pattern. When sharing her granddaughter's story, she began by describing a red-purple rash that covered the parameter of her upper back and shoulders. Although the young girl was born with this rash, with age, it began to change in texture causing the girl to itch and the scar to richen in color to a darker red. Eventually this itch turned into a pain that limited the girl's ability to rest her back on any surface. One day, when the young girl was attending Sunday mass (at a church named after St. Rafqa), she dipped her finger into the holy water offered at the entrance door of the church, as per her usual practice. Her grandmother caught sight of this and realized that no water dripped down from the girl's fingers. Instead, the water was immediately absorbed by her skin in what the grandma stated to be an "unexpected outcome of the water." The grandmother took a mental note of this but chose not to speak out loud. When she saw her granddaughter two days later, it was revealed that her back and shoulders no longer bore the rash she was born with. Without any added medication or treatment, the marks were gone! The grandmother immediately attributed this healing to a miracle conducted by St. Rafqa and pinpointed the passage of divine intervention to the moment the holy water was absorbed by the young girl's fingers.

Sharing stories of healing is a show of humbleness to the divine. Moreover, it encourages belief among people who may be looking for similar solutions to insecurities they may be unable to face on their own. A young Maronite explained that although she does not identify as religious, she still trusts in what is stated to be miracles of Mar Charbel. She attributes her beliefs as an effect of a story her mother once told her. Based off a dream her mother had while she was pregnant, this short story goes that Mar Charbel revealed

himself during a dream to tell the mother not to worry about the safety and wellbeing of her future daughter because he would be there to protect her. The conjuring of Mar Charbel in the mother's dream may here represent the mother's modesty and acknowledgement of the challenges she anticipated at the start of motherhood. Growing up with this story and acknowledging that it is a story told in reference to her, the young Maronite girl thereby grew respecting and admiring Mar Charbel for the security he continues to give both her and her mother. It is common that new mothers, expectant mothers, or women in hopes of conceiving a child draw heavily on storytelling to support these emerging transitions in their life. This is due to the ambiguity and overwhelming possibilities (both positive and negative) present at the outset of motherhood. As a result, many women completely attribute the success of their conception and pregnancies to God and "the power of His will," which they hold accountable for the miracle of birth.

Overall, a central purpose of storytelling and sharing such stories comes from an acknowledgement of humanity's meekness and need of support. It also comes from a place of bewilderment and insecurity in the capabilities of humanity alone. Studying the distribution of stories also reveals the emphasis of the female role in oral traditions and dissemination. While not to say that storytelling is a strictly female sport, it is nevertheless clear that females have an awareness of storytelling as a practice of religiosity due to the frequency and diversity of its dissemination. Unlike men, women are disenfranchised by the nature of the patriarchal institutions (e.g. family, state, and religion), that govern their access to resources, opportunities, freedom, security, etc. Similar to the comfort and release attributed to prayer, storytelling therefore offers women the opportunity to socially express

the doomed realities of womanhood without overtly mentioning the concerns or insecurities generating their narratives. Furthermore, it gives them the chance to take leadership in identifying solutions or constructing analyses on their own living conditions that concurrently compliment their relationship to their faith. In both cases, storytelling allows women to be both in and out of the patriarchal systems currently oppressing them, by releasing their burdens derived from them – by telling stories that remove responsibility from the mundane – without challenging or placing themselves in positions deemed rebellious against patriarchal institutions.

And where is God when one's security is threatened?

The awareness of human meekness, our bewilderment, and our constant need for support, are not, however, reactions limited to the oppression of a state entity. Rather, this understanding arises in moments when we feel our physical safety is threatened. Stories concerned with pacifying safety concerns appear to be more generally told by adult men who have participated in the Civil War. Stories that reflect on an individual's strength, perseverance and survival during those fifteen years of conflict help reaffirm their faith by suggesting that the characteristics of strength are a result of God's support. Such stories are even told by those who do not consider themselves to have been active in the war, but still faced the consequences of the violence that was rampant during those times. Among these stories is a specific one of a priest who saw death during the late years of the Civil War. At the time, he was a seminary student already committed to becoming a priest, and conflict

between Christian factions was prominent. His commitment to God and to the church did not, however, protect him from becoming collateral damage. Despite representing both sides of the conflicting Christian parties, the priest was taken hostage and tortured on account of his familial relationship with an individual from the opposing faction. The priest reflected on his time in captivity by saying blatantly: *"I saw death there with my own eyes,"* and continued to attest to his exposure to violence that, at the time, made the potential of his survival truly uncertain. Not knowing if he would live or die, the priest explained his only clear course of action during those atrocious days was to grasp tightly on the rosary he always carried, and to speak to God as if there was no one else present, to ask him for his protection and to alleviate him from his suffering. He effectively summarized his reflection by concluding that he, *"handed* [his] *life to God."* (Note: The Priest's commitment to serving God on earth was not enough to regard him as a neutral being during intra-Christian conflicts of the War. Rather, his position as a priest was nullified to perpetuate the war-instincts of allocating "positions" with or against aggressive factions, despite the paradoxes of forcing a religious-figure to choose sides between two opposing parties fighting on behalf of the "same" faith).

The story shared by the Priest paints a picture of a near-death experience in the context of war-time Lebanon. It reveals the comfort brought to him when he invoked God by his side, despite the fact that it was violence in-the-name-of religion that brought him to fear death. The sense of powerlessness and sheer desperation in a moment which he thought would be his last encouraged a sort of conjuring of the Holy Spirit to help secure within himself a sense of peace before death. While this experience may be unrelatable to a

youth-audience who has never experienced near-death experiences as a result of war, experiences like the one shared by the priest are prominent and resonate strongly among the older generation. Equivalent sensations of "powerlessness" for the Maronite youth who have not experienced war is the feelings derived from near-death experiences brought forth by events imitative of potential daily accidents, i.e. car-accidents and severe sport or health accidents. While the cause that initiates the sense of powerlessness and need for comfort is incomparable, the sensations are reflected in the similarities of the language used to project the need for comfort and support in times where individuals of both generations fear the security of their life. Phrases immediately drawing on requests or expectations of the divine such as, *"forgive me," "don't leave me alone," "help me out of this," "take me to you," "place me under your wings," "deliver me,"* among others, are examples of petitions made to the divine in search of security and support. Nevertheless, these statements alone do not generate the narrative. The story is born in two ways: (1) through the subsequent conjuring of the "response" of the divine, made after the initial plea by the individual who has summoned divine support, and (2) when the story is later shared with others and immortalized after-the-fact. In both cases, the expectation and fulfillment of a "response" from the divine implies that the sense of "security" sought by the storyteller was satisfied; thereby implying that the experience, disseminated as a holistic narrative, will show to society a complete experience of insecurity followed by the attainment of security through divine mediation.

Land, sea, and air: Overlooking environmental injustice

Interviewee: *"Do you know where Jesus was born?"*

Interviewer: *"Yes. He was born in Bethlehem."*

Interviewee: *"Yes, but where in Bethlehem? Where exactly?"*

Interviewer: *"In a manger?"*

Interviewee: *"Yes, exactly! Jesus was born in a manger! Can you imagine? The first smells that our Lord Jesus smelt was the smells of animal feces and waste!"*

This is the start of an argument made by an adult Maronite woman in defense of national passivity towards the various environmental crises that characterize the dire ecological circumstances in Lebanon. Over the years, Lebanon has deteriorated into a region with little water supply, overflow of garbage and poor disposal practices in urban and rural spaces, lack of a nation-wide practice of recycling and sustainability efforts, deforestation (a result of wildfires, nonexclusively), not to forget the poor sewage systems that create mass city floods and add to the perpetuation of polluted sea water (that is additionally generated from a lack of human sensibility and responsibility to solving the aforementioned problems). Thus, if we are to build on the themes defending the purpose and value of religious storytelling (e.g. gratefulness, protection, comfort, security, etc.), a conclusion may be drawn that suggests religious storytelling also furthers ignorance and the removal of responsibility ranging from the mundane to environmental concerns. In the excerpt above, an interviewee explains why it is justified that the Lebanese population endure the negative repercussions of the country's environmental crisis. This excerpt is

specifically drawing on the sense of smell, to invoke the foul odor of rotting compost and dewy manure – that is sometimes burned to mask the vastness of its magnitude in city centers, against the sea, and in the mountains, inclusively – to suggest that it is similar to the smells Jesus endured during his birth in the manger. The argument hinges on the premise that if the son of God was born in an environment that poisoned his sense of smell and challenged his comfort, than we as the "followers of Jesus" are in no position to complain, but rather, should look at Jesus as an example of how to accept such dire circumstances and live on without complaining about the world that has been offered to us.

This sentiment may be argued to pose an interpretation of positivity and optimism in face of clear adversity; however, it also removes any accountability or call for activism from the individuals who prescribe to supplementing their struggle with such passivity. Unlike most narratives told, this specific story is implemented to pacify oneself rather than to be shared as a case of comfort or security among the masses. This use of "religious reasoning," genuinely attempts to "explain" the disasters faced on earth while simultaneously acting to remove oneself from the responsibility of owning even a portion of that disaster. However, the acceptance of Lebanon's grim environmental conditions through "religious reasoning" is not subjected solely to negation via stories that rationalize why we live in the conditions that we do. Rather, "religious reasoning" may be applied in contexts were the Lebanese state and divine intervention is invoked as offered "solutions" to the environment crises faced within the region. Based on an experience of my own, I have come to question just how deeply storytelling acts in releasing human culpability and replacing it with a sense of innocence.

While traveling in October 2018, I received a message from a friend with a casual update on the latest news from within Lebanon. In this message was a photo of a TV screen showing the evening news on MTV, a channel popular among many Lebanese Christians. This broadcast displayed a picture of a statue of one of Lebanon's most renowned Christian saints, Mar Charbel, three meters long in size, immersed in the sea, with two scuba-divers hovering near it. The image was sent to me with no text, and so I assumed that the blurry Arabic news crawl complimenting the photo at the bottom of the screen read something like: "Mar Charbel Statue Found Sunken at Bottom of the Sea – Retrieved by Two Local Divers." I sent a message back to my friend with my analysis of the photo, to which he responded by explaining the true context of the scene. Contrary to my original assumption, the statue was not being retrieved from the sea. Rather, it was being dropped into the farthest end of the Lebanese maritime borders of Tabarja, by the two divers, with the help of the Lebanese Army. My curiosity was thereon sparked by the social implications of this act and its relevance as an undertaking of religiosity.

While those who do not believe in the miracle powers or Christian reverence of Mar Charbel perceived this to be nothing more than an event aired on the news channels for lack of better content, those that do believe in Mar Charbel saw this to be something worthy of celebration. Some have expressed their belief that this is no mere statue dropped into the sea, but rather, saw it to be a brilliant effort to combat water pollution, support the re-emergence of the thinning fish market, and protect the Lebanese shore from naval invasions. All these conclusions were drawn from the belief in Mar Charbel as a miracle-

worker dedicated to the fruition and protection of Lebanon. Moreover, the role of the Lebanese state as an overseer of this deed suggests to the public that they are taking action against environmental crises and fisherman decline. For some, supporting the drowning of a “miracle statue” is enough to soothe their discomfort towards a growing environmental crisis and failing fishing industry by accepting this to be the best approach to relieving the crises. However, most Lebanese Maronites critique this gesture and acknowledge it as an undertaking aimed to distract the Christian public from the state’s role of resolving environmental issues through legitimate policies. State provocation of religious sentiment to pacify government responsibilities left unmet is a practice of government deception – strongly identified and opposed by Maronite youths – to encourage ignorance, passivity, and a redirect of responsibility away from the mundane – inclusive of government entities.

Intra-Christian differences and sectarian sentiment implored through oral traditions

Individuals who do not believe in miracles and the relevance of storytelling as an indicator of religiosity and community development draw on the injustices of the Lebanese state to further their claim of the illegitimacy of storytelling. Youth, in particular, challenge the actuality of miracles by questioning why they are always proclaimed by adults or the elderly, or why they are conducted on an individual-to-individual bases, as opposed to being miraculous through impacting a large mass of people. One creative youth asked rhetorically why God continues to heal a singular sick person, or lift individual beings out

of poverty, when he also has the power to offer justice to the entirety of the Lebanese population by ousting the current political state in need of a corruption-cleanse. Moreover, Maronite youths challenge the positive impact story-sharing has on the community by highlighting the negative effects of storytelling onto inter-Maronite sects. Maronite-specific narratives have a tendency to not only diminish the value of non-Christian sects, but even act to belittle intra-Christian sects including Greek Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, etc., on the premise that the Maronite sect is more authentic in practice and legitimate in spirituality than the rest. While this may be an unintended repercussion, or a "joke" disseminated without vile intentions (as many Maronite adults rebut); the sentiment that stimulates this desire to show separation from others is derived from the sense of feeling "pampered by Jesus." Convincing themselves that they are prioritized and therefore special in comparison to other sects, is in part, what places the value of importance on the continued dissemination of stories invoking Maronite-specific culture, history, and superiority. The second part of added importance comes from an innocent exemplification of religiosity, which will be explored further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

"Religious reasoning" part two: The manifestation of the divine through sculpture and the personification of Christian icons

> *"When I see the statue of Jesus opening his arms, I immediately go to Him and pray because I see that He is saying "come to me" with His body [language]"* – Young Maronite female, USJ student

Art as an aid to religious expression

To continue the exploration of oral traditions and storytelling initiated in the preceding chapter, I now draw on selected ethnographic experiences to gage the connections between religiosity through religious icons and symbols, paying close attention to sculptures representing divine figures. Already, we have explored preliminary reasons explaining why individuals resort to storytelling. Whether it be a show of gratefulness, a sign of comfort, an explanation of a mysterious or unfortunate event/experience, a reaction to insecurity or powerlessness, or a show of human humility (or ignorance) and a testament to what one believes is truth, myths and stories are disseminated to and by adults and youths of both generations, to children, family members, and within society, as a form of enrooting the culture of Maronite religiosity. As expressed in the previous chapter, socio-economic conditions, gender dynamics, and the impact of the Civil War heavily influence the regularity and dependency on storytelling. However, in what ways do Christian icons and symbols inspire the creation of narrations? An abundance of Christian pilgrimage sites exists in Lebanon, each characterized with their own set of standardized myths and

opportunities for the invention of more narratives to come (based on the individual experiences of the person in contact with the pilgrimage site). This chapter looks at the personification of Christian icons to better understand the effect of art and sculpture on the practices of "religious reasoning" and overall religiosity of the Maronites.

Super Charbel to the rescue! How does a hero come forward to social pressures?

Towards the end of summer, in August 2018, I took a drive in my grey 2004 Peugeot to visit the Mar Charbel statue in Faraya with two of my Maronite-Lebanese friends. These friends are family-friends, around my age, who were enthused to see the Mar Charbel statue for the very first time. Unlike Mother of Mercies and Harissa, which are established Christian pilgrimage sites in Lebanon, this space remains to be an informal pilgrimage site as it is still "under construction," with the expectation of a church to be built in the coming years. After all, it was only in November 2017, when the colossal statue of 24 meters was first erected in the Mountains of Faraya (Blog Baladi, 2017). Nevertheless, faithful Christians and curious onlookers alike have been visiting the statue since its erection to engage with the enormous portrayal of Mar Charbel.

The statue occupies top of a mountain, that requires a long, steep, swiveled drive with sharp turns to reach the very top. Despite the cool and dry weather, ideal for a safe drive up the mountain, my Peugeot momentarily failed me and began to swerve during a sharp turn, leading to what could have been a threatening situation. Nevertheless, in just a moment I was able to regain control of the car and continue driving upwards, all signs of danger averted. While I like to claim responsibility for steering the car back to safety, my two friends only consider me to be a passive actor in securing our wellbeing. They refuted my interpretation and responsibility, staging the event to be completely in the control of Mar Charbel, whose spirit manifested to directly procure our protection and safety on the drive up to his statue. They argue that he [the statue] had been watching us, and that his

Photo of the Mar Charbel statue erected in Faraya, taken from the perspective of directly below. Saade, 2017.

direct sight of us allowed for his immediate spiritual intervention, which manifested physically through me. My friends spent the rest of the car ride to the site dedicated to thanking and praising Mar Charbel audibly through speech and giggles, while developing deep hypotheses rationalizing the connection between our visit to the statue as a motivating factor for Mar Charbel's spirit to intervene in what would have been a threatening car accident. The statue of Mar Charbel, being assigned imaginary intent (as, after all, it is a statue incapable of its own manifestation of intentions), was spoken of in such a way that it transformed into a hero.

What are Christian statues saying to those who believe in them as physical manifestations of the divine? Moreover, how much does what they *want* said to them impact what it is they hear? This formulation attributes an agency to statues not usually discussed in scholarly literature as "wanting" anything from humans. Yet, this is exactly how they are discussed during instances of insecurity. The threat derived from feeling insecure and vulnerable during a dangerous situation inspired the need for a hero, which is what predominantly inspired the discussion of heroism in the car that day. Karl Marx has discussed the concept of heroism and the role of a hero in the context of class struggle in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte.* Here, he identifies the rise of a hero, and its promotion by the masses, to be a product of circumstances and conditions consequential to class struggle (Marx and Engels 1973, 10). Conditions that challenge the comfort and wellbeing of an individual therefore inspire the need for a "hero" to alleviate them from their perception of suffering. The hero (a category already pre-existing and waiting for an individual to fill its mold), classified as savior, protector, and leader, thus emerges in

response to conditions invoking fear, stress, insecurities, and even the inability to rationalize. Such conditions contribute to an individual's inability to feel empowered and secure, thereby encouraging them to transfer their confidence and reliance on another who they believe can carry the burden of their suffering in a way that will manifest relief. Although Marx's discourse on heroism is intended to shed light on the person of "mediocre and grotesque personality [who] play[s] the part of [a] hero," it is interesting to ask in what ways Marx's "hero" resembles the personified Christian icon (Marx and Engels 1973, 10). (Then again, what could possibly have more of a mediocre personality than an inanimate statue?). Despite the statue's inherent inanimate nature, formally it resembles an individual who once lived, and – as per oral history – had the powers of healing only attributed to the divine. The personified characteristics that are often attributed to statues of Mar Charbel therefore mimic the characteristics that were once possessed of the individual while he was alive. The worth of the statues merit is thus derived from the myths that characterize the man in which the statue is shaped to resemble.

Mar Charbel is a saint, well known for his miraculous interventionist powers, through church sermons, international media, and oral history, in Lebanon and abroad.[6] During his lifetime, and even after death, stories have emerged of his healing and protection powers among Christian and non-Christians alike (Dahdouh, 2010). Often times, stories of his miracle work after-death emerge through the figuration of spirits, or in people's dreams

[6] A well-known miracle-story is the experiences of Raymond Nader, a Lebanese man who woke up from a sleep with the finger markings of Mar Charbel on his upper arm. These markings are said to have healed him from an injury / or disease, that was in need of surgery the following day. "Apparition of Saint Charbel to Raymond Nader leaves a trace of five fingers imprinted on his arm." December 2018.

that then manifest themselves into actuality; while stories of his time on earth tell tales of his prayers provoking him into physical levitation (Dahdouh, 2010). People speak about statues of Mar Charbel in ways that revive the popular stories of his miracles and healings, as if the statues themselves have the power to heal and create miraculous wonder. While such conversation is inspired from the circumstances that create insecurity and dependency on a hero, Christian icons are also spoken of this way simply because this is the language that has traditionally and historically been used in the context of speaking about Christian figures. When discussions of the statue, as a personified image of Mar Charbel, invoke the use of terms like "hero," "miracle worker," "blessed," "savior," etc., there is a revival of where these terms have come from and been used before, which ultimately solidifies his [the statue's] merit as a hero. Reaffirming interpretations of the past and concurrently developing the discourse that currently exists, gives legitimacy to the statue as a channel where the divine – who in this case is Mar Charbel – may function.

Kneel below His Hands for atonement: The process of liminality

Mother of Mercies in Miziara is a public garden that takes the shape of a long pathway, with statues of different religious scenes from the Bible, positioned three meters apart from one another all along the pathway. Towards the end of the Miziara pathway, on the right of the chapel, is an octogen-shaped glass gazebo with an orange rooftop, large enough to fit no more than ten people inside the gazebo. Within the circumference of the gazebo is a flower bed of only green plants and palm trees/leaves, accentuated particularly

Photo of the Jesus-kneeler, taken from the door of the gazebo. Photo credits to Ahmad Beydoun, 2018.

in what would be described as the rear side of the gazebo. In the center of the gazebo, facing out from the bed of plants in the rear, is a larger-than-human-size statue of Jesus, painted in full color, dressed in red and blue as classically depicted in most photos. With collar-length long brown hair falling down his shoulders, matching the color of his beard, the statue stands with its two arms out, hands positioned downwards in front of a kneeler that would be traditionally located within a church. This kneeler is a light yellow-wood color, with a deep red cushion characterizing the base in which an individual would place their knees. At the arm rest of the kneeler, where people are expected to fold their hands in prayer or rest their forehead, is an open slot, the width and height of an envelope turned vertically. This slot is available for the acceptance of donations, that goes towards the maintenance of the church, garden, and village of Miziara. The distance between the Jesus figure and the kneeler is such that when people kneel onto the red cushion and place their head above the arms rest

of the kneeler, their head would fall directly into the hands of Jesus, which are positioned in a way to receive the individual.

The Jesus-installation was not only the site of highest traffic amongst visiting guests of the Miziara Garden, but was also the site where guests lingered most and naturally engaged with the installation in more ways than just through speech. [7] Spectators took turns physically engaging themselves with the statue by situating themselves beneath the hands of the Jesus, while always asking the next person waiting for their turn to take a picture on their behalf. The majority of spectators who engaged with the sculpture on a physical level participated in emphatically taking the time to say a prayer while kneeling beneath the hands of the sculpture. Parents with infants too young to engage independently with the sculpture played with the child and included them in physically connecting to the statue with high-fives or handshakes. Many of the comments made in the presence of the statue were applied terms expressing adoration and awe in English, Arabic, and French, or projected an "aim" to the existence of the statue. For example, spectators commonly believed that the purpose of the statue was not for passive admiration but rather, to engage individuals in atonement, by physically repenting their sins before the sculpture.

Equally captivating to me were the observations made during the individual's retreat from the installation. For individuals who had been in prayer, as opposed to simply on the kneeler for pictures' sake, their faces appeared washed, with relaxed expressions as

[7] Within one hour of observation, over 15 families gathered around the gazebo, taking turns waiting to enter and physically engage with the Jesus sculpture and kneeler. When inside, families took generally over 5 minutes touching the sculpture, kneeling, and taking pictures while inside.

they walked away from his [the statue's] extended arms. The process of engaging with the installation compliments the concepts of ritualism introduced through Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process*. In this book, Turner conceptualizes culture and its struggle between structure and anti-structure through the concept of *liminality*. Liminality, which he identifies to be the second step in the Rite of Passage (introduced by Van-Gennep), is the process in which an individual is suspended from the limitations of social norms and the margins of time, space, and identity. It is during this phase when an individual is removed from the context of their every-day life, when they enter the phase of *communitas*, which is the place where norms of social structure are removed. Individuals who took the time to physically engage with the Jesus sculpture were therefore entering the phase of communitas by removing themselves from the limitations of the everyday world and engaging with the ritual of speaking to the divine through sculpture and art.

The post-engagement expressions of tranquility, made by the spectators at the installation, may be attributed to the senses revived through the *status-reversal ritual*. Here, Turner explains that a status-reversal ritual pertains to the practices that challenge the normal order of everyday social norms, by creating a momentary break in the order and norms of structure (Turner, Abrahams, Harris 2017, 167). Such popular examples of this today would include Halloween or Thanksgiving celebrations, where despite the reality that the practices of such rituals are breaking away from the everyday norms of life, they are in fact reinforcing and preparing the individual to reenter the realm of social norms anew. Status-reversal ritual, which here can be perceived as the interactions with the sculpture, allow for a structured escape to the daily patterns of life, and prepares the individual to re-

immerse themselves into the social norms of structure. Turner's understanding of the purpose of invoking rituals, occurs predominantly during "crisis moments," where individuals feel the dire need to invoke rituals for comfort. This is perhaps where we can draw the difference between individuals who were compelled to engage with the sculpture physically, as opposed to those who simply enjoyed it for its aesthetic value. The desire to immerse oneself into physical engagement with the sculpture implies the necessity of status-reversal rituals for the sheer purpose of reaffirming one's role within the greater social structure.

Statues have feelings, too: Art as a deposit of social relations

Before the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991), Harissa used to look out unto Ras Beirut. Under the surveillance of Harissa, Beirut was peaceful and calm, and Harissa was happy with what she saw. When the war erupted, Beirut was a site of violence, and bloodshed; a conflict caused between sectarian clashes. Harissa was so disappointed and hurt by what she saw, that she turned her face away from Beirut, forever. This is why, today, she is seen to look down on the port city of Jounieh, instead.

This is a story popular among Lebanese Christians, that has been shared with me on several occasions, by Christians from diverse regions, different age groups, and Christian sects within Lebanon. While the details and language used to communicate the story varies per storyteller, the core features of the tale remain the same. The personification of the

statue, through emotions and physical movement, drives a story that reveals the opinion of the divine Virgin Mary during the Lebanese Civil War. The prescribed opinions given to a religious statue in the context of social, political, and economic turmoil, indicate the inherent assumptions and insecurities people hold within themselves. The personification of a statue is therefore used as a mechanism for individuals to express their own reservations towards the struggles facing them. Another example of this is depicted in Nadine Labaki's film, *Where Do We Go Now?* (2011). The film is a satirical drama which portrays the difficult relationship between a Muslim and Christian community coexisting in a rural village (The New York Times, 2012). Towards the end of a scene in the film where religious conflict between the two communities is spurred, the scene is closed out with a feature of a statue of the Virgin Mary, who is inanimate except for the tears of blood that drip from her eyes. Similar to the oral narrative shared about Harissa, the film draws on the practice of personifying sculpture to invoke sentiments of the divine regarding sectarian conflict. The story of Harissa looking away from Ras Beirut, and the film's depiction of the Virgin Mary statue crying tears of blood, communicate the condemnation of violence between sects by the divine.

Photo of the Harissa statue, taken from the steps of the tower. Saade, 2018.

Photo of Harissa, taken from within the grounds of the sanctuary. Saade, 2019.

When prescribed intentions are forced onto Christian sculptures, or for that matter, any work of art, what happens to the opportunity for alternative meanings and interpretations to form? Bourdieu and Darbel in *The Love of Art* explain the limitations to the perception of artwork when it is condensed through human intervention to project a specific view or message. While Bourdieu and Darbel mention that the perception of art is a personal experience where preferences and interests are based on innate subjectivity, their main argument rests on exploring the limitations related to who is invited to interact with the art and what constitutes as an invitation. In other words, Bourdieu suggests that cultural objects, including art, require the possession of cultural codes for them to be deciphered. They study art as a component of cultural capital, that is exclusionary in essence due to the

definitions and social conditions disabling the art from reaching all classes and members of society.

The statue of Harissa as an art piece is not exclusionary due to any physical restrictions that limit its access to the general public. On the contrary, Harissa has been made known as a popular touristic destination site for all people – Lebanese Christians, non-Christians, and foreigners of all backgrounds – and has restaurants, expanded parking lots, and a cable car service that compliments the visit to the site.[8] Rather, Harissa becomes exclusionary through the narrative crafting that compliments the statue. Stories, like the one presented above, imply the attention of a specific audience, and are passed on between members of the same community, thereby excluding those who are outside of the community from understanding the implied context of the statue. There is a sense of entitlement that rests with individuals who believe that the artwork is exclusively "for their community." During one of my visits to Harissa, I caught a young woman, between the ages of 20-30, commenting on the presence of Muslim guests at the site, to one of her female friends of the same age range. Although she stated it in a whisper, my proximity to her allowed me to hear her say: "*For what purpose do these Muslims come here? Harissa isn't for them, she's ours, and they are polluting the sanctity of her space*." To this comment, her friend responded with a nod. The speaker spoke like she was defending Harissa, as if these were feelings that she [the statue] had expressed to her personally. There was a certainty in her speech which communicated that those who do not understand or cannot relate to the sculpture and her "intention" as an indicator of Christianity, are

thereby excluded from the experience of grasping her true purpose and therefore restricted from enjoying her as a piece of art. Storytelling therefore contributes to a group consciousness that separates the spectators of an artwork into groups of educated and uneducated perceivers. Despite its location in a public space, individuals who have a spiritual connection to the sculpture understand it to be a space reserved for them.

Final thoughts on art and religiosity

"Art aids religion in its mission to unveil the magnificence of the creator and draw man closer to God by opening a wide window for us, out of which we may view nature and discover its treasures, which remain hidden from the sight of he who worships matter... Thus, he breathes his light into our confused hearts and weary souls, filling them with piety, serenity, and peace," (Museum of Modern Art (NY) Primary Documents 2018, 81)

Moustafa Farroukh, a Lebanese painter from the 20th century, recounts the purpose of religion as a tool for the transmission of religious discourse, and an opportunity for the mundane to connect with the divine. This connection develops through material engagement – when one is absorbed by physical pieces of art – as well as through the effects of that material, that joins the spirit of the individual to the divine through a renewed sense of expressed religiosity. The ethnographic samples introduced in this chapter have alluded to the abduction of individuals by Christian sculptures. The practices of storytelling and the personification of art, as analyzed through theories suggested by Marx, Turner, and

Bourdieu, indicate the impact of social pressures, group consciousness, and individual insecurities on the reception of Christian statues. Not only does the form and proximity of a sculpture impact how an individual interprets its relevance to their life, but these Christian sculptures allow people to enact a space of liminality, where they may connect directly to the divine in ways that are impossible on a regular day. Furthermore, Christian statues have the potential to both help people grapple with their lives through subtle support, or directly shape life events, as interpreted through Marx's application of the categorical hero figure. With respect to the work of sculpture as an art, spectators engaging with these Christian sculptures are bypassing the role of artists' as creators (who designed the statues and therefore contribute to actualizing the potential for affect), and are instead crediting their experiences of abduction to the religious icon resembled physically in the sculpture. As suggested by Farroukh, art – presented here through Christian sculpture – is, indeed, aiding religion's mission to draw man closer to God.

CHAPTER 6

Problematizing self-fashioning customs in a multi-sectarian nation

"How do you show your faith?"
"Show to whom?" – Young Maronite female, from Harissa

Introducing "George Ali"

What first impressions would you have of a young man whose name is "George Ali"? What questions may you have for him in regard to his upbringing or community affiliation (knowing that each name is a clear indicator of one's religious identity and community in Lebanon)? Potentially, you may have none and may not give him a second thought. However, you may be curious to ask if this is his family name or a chosen name; why and by whom was it chosen; why he actively introduces himself with both names as opposed to one; how he is received after revealing his name, among other questions.

The social norms within Lebanon insinuates that such a name challenges the normative binaries of Lebanese sectarian culture. The name "George Ali" activates not only a shared existence between Christian and Muslim cultures but signifies a political bond between opposing March 14 and March 8 pacts. Gags related to political and religious affiliation are made, even in bureaucratic settings, as a response to being unable to identify the individual's affiliation or from pure amusement that this individual inherently lacks an affiliation by the nature of his name, (note: it is an added inherent characteristic of

Lebanese culture to assume all Lebanese belong to a community/affiliation or sect, as designated by their family heritage). Moreover, presenting himself as fluid between sects/affiliations opens "George Ali's" social and economic opportunities, and offers him a stable sense of security for lack of an immediate "enemy" or "rival" sect/affiliation.

"George Ali" seemed quite proud to introduce himself upon our meeting and enjoyed explaining to me the advantages of belonging to neither an "us" or "them" community. The political sectarian makeup of the nation ultimately promotes his dual identity, while it in no way impacts or alludes to the reality of his faith and religious practices. To this extent, religious-naming works in "George Ali's" favor because it presents him with the sole liberty to not only designate where he belongs within the Lebanese national framework, but to practice his faith removed from the social norms of Lebanese religio-cultural structures. This fluidity is an imagined reality for most Lebanese, who feel withheld from the freedom of designing and living their individual identities as separate from sectarian associations and limitations.

As indicated above, religious-naming plays a large yet subtle role in designating an individual's belonging to a community/affiliation or sect and restricting an individual's overall universal freedoms within Lebanon. Nevertheless, the restrictions existing between religio-political and social conditions are not an entirely imposed structure. Rather, they may be also understood as a community-generated construct, advocated and promoted by the individual.

Religious-naming is not the only way individuals – intentionally or accidently – subject themselves to social categories. The mobilization of symbols and practices of self-decoration often coincide with religio-cultural structures and community expectations. The term "self-fashioning" is thereby used in recognition of the practices of designing identity in accordance to socially accepted principles (Greenblatt). In the case of the Maronite community, self-fashioning adopts the application of symbols, language, and icons, etc., to generate a community-fashioned identity. While there are socially accepted principles that have remained standard throughout generations; there are also indications of change implied by an emerging awareness of the community's impact and/or footprint on cultural and social development outside of the sect. This chapter will identify a variety of techniques of self-fashioning practices within the Maronite community as well as explore why certain symbols and relics are mobilized. The chapter will continue by delving into family influencers in the realm of self-fashioning and conclude by exploring the barriers and implications Maronite self-fashioning has on inter-sect relationship building.

The "how" and "where" of Maronite self-fashioning

Exploring how and where Maronite self-fashioning takes place in Lebanon may be separated into categories of public, private, and personal spaces. Public space is characterized by institutions or areas designated and upheld by government entities. However, public space for the sake of unfolding Maronite self-fashioning practices also includes public-private institutions (e.g. universities, shopping centers, hospitals, etc.), that

are privatized but accessible to almost all individuals who require the functions of the space. The private sphere is in reference to a designated area that has no purpose pertaining to public needs and is strictly operated and used by those who own the rights to the space. Simply put, this refers to an individual's home and its encompassing area. Personal space is synonymous to the bodily form and the ways it is embellished, altered and decorated. Within these three distinctions exists a variety of self-fashioning techniques generally practiced within the Maronite community.

Religious symbols in public space is not a uniquely Christian practice, nor is it a practice unique in Lebanon. In fact, many forms of public-space décor are inspired by pagan traditions for purposes of beautification as well as protection. In Lebanon, posters/billboards, wall-pictures, miniature figures, large statues, shrines (accessorized with candles, incense, pictures, figures, rosaries, etc.), graffiti, and religious slogans, are actively placed in hospitals, car garages, highways, restaurants, schools, street corners, buses and taxis. This is not on exclusive list and may be missing many forms and locations of public self-fashioning techniques not yet identified or perhaps limited to unique areas within Lebanon. In accordance to religious holidays, some of these public decorations are altered by means of the municipality and/or locals to accommodate for the season or given event/holiday. It is thus common practice to find both temporary and permanent uses of symbols in the public sphere. For example, the death of a community member would be commemorated with candles, white ribbons, and pictures of the deceased throughout the neighborhood, placed temporarily during the period of mourning. Lifelong inaugurations are more likely placed in the form of street-corner shrines, designating the majority

demographic of the neighborhood. Both examples provided above suggest common ways in which Maronite self-fashioning is practiced in the public sphere.

Both photos were taken in the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael. The photo to the left shows a glowing cross hanging by electricity cables in the middle of an intersection. Photo to the left shows a public shrine adorning the statue of Mary with candles, rosaries, and flowers; and graffitied with the Lebanese Forces symbol below. Saade, 2019.

Private space practices of religious self-fashioning consist of similar applications of pictures, miniature figures, statues, and shrines as those practiced in public spaces, however, is conducted with an expectation of engagement between the relic or symbol and the individual for whom the relic/symbol is intended. For instance, a painting of the Last Supper placed above the dining room table is intended to refresh the sentiments of Jesus' last meal with his disciplines among the family eating at the table below the painting. Or, a

pocket-picture of a saint with protective or healing characteristics, such as a picture of Mar Charbel, placed under a bed pillow is intended to protect the individual sleeping above it from uneasy sleep or nightmares. The engagement between the symbol and individual gives personal weight and purpose to the decoration, rendering it more than just a household symbol but an act of religiosity. Religious symbols within the household may be placed above any work-station (e.g. kitchen tops, office desks, even household gyms), above doorframes, nightstand tables, as center-piece décor. Houses may even host a corner dedicated as a shrine for religious artifacts (e.g. the bible, rosaries, incense, candles). Religious relics may also be placed around the house in subtle locations. For example, within drawers or in closets one may find a small picture of the Virgin or tucked within books or as mentioned earlier beneath pillows and bedsheets. Often times, the application of a specific symbol is duplicated in separate areas of the house (for instance, a miniature cross hanging on the entrance of the door frame, may be also found placed on a bedroom dresser), and may even be made mobile as an accessory. Mobile religious décor is normally located in wallets or purses, and even more commonly in car interiors either above the dashboard, below the AC, or hanging from the rearview mirror. Popular accounts made by youth indicates the discrepancies between the role of adults and youth when it comes to self-fashioning in the private sphere. Youth acknowledge their role as decorators significantly less in the context of private space and designate much of the religious self-fashioning of private spaces to adults, arguing that household décor is not an attestation of their religiosity. Rather it is a normalized tradition continued in efforts to uphold household traditions.

Nevertheless, Maronite youth seem particularly fervent to practices of personal self-fashioning. Unlike public and private space self-fashioning techniques, youth have a personal role in authenticating their religiosity through the use of jewelry, apparel and body art (i.e. tattoo). While practices of self-fashioning in the sphere of personal space may be largely inspired by current fashion trends, the mobilization of jewelry as a key indicator of religiosity does not falter between generations. Both adults and youth of both genders revert to bracelets, necklaces, and even earrings (particularly in the case of women) to showcase their religious expression and affiliation. These pieces of jewelry may show miniature pictures (of the Virgin or a cherished saint) in the usage of engravings or religious quotes in the forms of gold, silver, copper, knit-beading, etc. Of all symbols to be worn as accessories, the most popular is the cross. Again, there is no limitation to the material, size, and style of the cross accessory. In fact, many individuals tend to have multiple cross accessories in order to swap in accordance to what best suites the day's outfit.

Photo of a young girl wearing a cross embellished necklace made of gold. Saade, 2019.

However, there are also those who choose to have one significant piece – whether that be a cross or any other symbol – that is worn on them at all times. The way in which the accessory is worn has significance to the overall purpose of the accessory, as designated by the individual wearing it. For example, individuals may choose to wear the accessory as an item concealed beneath clothes or as an article fully exposed. Similar considerations are made when making decisions on where to position a tattoo and its size, color, etc. Getting tattoos designating one's religious affiliation or beliefs is not a common practice across the Maronite community as a whole but does generally still occur among both youths and

adults, and may be artistically positioned anywhere on the body, at the discretion of the procurer of the tattoo.

Among the public, private and personal spheres described, religious fashioning shares the characteristic of being unique in form and sporadic in display. Moreover, the overall forms and irregular practices of self-fashioning via symbols, icons, etc., cannot be distinguished between Maronite youth and adults. Thus, the physical practices of self-fashioning between generations appears to remain the same despite the contextual differences between eras.

The "why" and "when" of Maronite self-fashioning

The metamorphosis of self-fashioning is introduced not in the *"how"* and *"where"* of Maronite self-fashioning, but rather in the exploration of *"why"* and *"when"* symbols, icons, and other visual depictions of religiosity are mobilized. While the application of symbols may remain the same between generations, the thought-process applied when justifying why symbols are exercised is mostly distinct between adults and youth. Active and passive perspectives of self-fashioning may differ between generation, or may in fact resemble each other, but diverge at the point of justification. Active self-fashioning refers to the awareness that the use of symbols and other decorative embellishments helps create a designed identity that is public to others. In comparison, passive self-fashioning is the unawareness of the impact of religious décor outside of the community. To reiterate, both

active and passive perspectives conform to a level of justification or awareness for the role of religious symbols; however, the rationalization that looks outward past the personal and community-based benefit and onto a grander scope that considers inter-community impact reveals the differentiation between an active or passive perception. The most common defenses for the use of symbols and religious décor fall into four broad categories: aesthetic enjoyment, tradition, community development, and comfort.

Décor, whether it be religious or other, serves the function of beautification. It is therefore no surprise that religious décor intrinsically follows the same expectation. Individuals active in displaying religious symbols are making the testament that there is an aesthetic appreciation for that given symbol. This justifies why some people select specific materials, stones, or fabrics when purchasing or designing their personal jewelry or household icons. This also explains the reason to have many forms of one particular item (i.e. necklaces, bracelets or other types of jewelry), on the premise that they will be selected and worn in accordance to what flatters the day's outfit or what suites the fashion-trend of the season. Even items selected to be displayed in the public or private sphere are chosen with the intention of embellishing the designated space. Interestingly, aesthetic considerations also play a role in critiquing the use of religious symbols. A Maronite artist commented on the contradiction between "love" and "violence" as depicted through the image of Jesus on the cross by reflecting: *"it's so violent this image of love. Imagine how people don't see [it]...you have a man crucified, [with] blood and suffering [hanging] on your walls [at home]."* She proceeded to draw a comparison to the Laughing Buddha, a symbol of abundance, peace and blessings, which she describes as a "happy" and overall

aesthetically pleasing décor. Removing oneself from the spiritual or symbolic essence of these icons, one may view Jesus on the Cross as a showcase of a bloody man approaching an unjust death, in comparison to the Laughing Buddha, which depicts the smiling face of a body-positive character. This begs the question of how aesthetically pleasing a symbol or icon can truly be without the attachment of its spiritual or religious essence. Questions and reflections related to aesthetics and beauty in the scope of public and private space shown most relevant with adult women, who often take lead in beautifying such domains. Youth, in response, seem most impacted by aesthetics when it directly correlates with their personal space (this, however, is expected seeing as most youth don't have private spaces of their own).

A testament to the perpetuation of tradition and an invoked sense of belonging also justifies the purpose of religious self-fashioning. The act of mobilizing symbols is a performance in self-affirming one's connection to the faith (i.e. self-reminder), but also their connection to the community. Using icons and symbols as signifiers of faith has traditionally been practiced among the Maronites. The customs of traditional self-fashioning practices have been disseminated from within the family as well as within the community equally. In fact, the sway of community inclusion begets a purpose for religious self-fashioning on its own. At times when individuals are physically removed from Lebanon (i.e. travel, temporary relocation, etc.), Lebanese Maronites tend to emphasize the need for relaying religious symbols within their new or temporary environments in efforts to maintain a connection to their homeland. This not only reaffirms their inclusion with Lebanese Maronite society, but reignites their sense of belonging by restating their faith

through practical means as a sort of self-reminder. This active desire to perpetuate one's religiosity through tangible objects appears best explained by adults, who justify the role of symbols by invoking concepts of memory (i.e. self-reminder), inclusion, and belonging, in efforts to explain the purpose of why disseminating symbols and icons is viewed as a tradition in Maronite cultural practices.

Youth, however, interpret the concepts of memory, inclusion, and belonging under the scope of protection, preservation, and "marking territory" constraints. Unlike adults who pose an intra-faith perspective on the benefits of symbols, youth critically consider the benefits of symbols from an inter-faith perspective and extend their rationalization by considering the cultural values of self-fashioning as opposed to simply assuming that religious self-fashioning is rooted in the religious institution itself. Many youths, for example, have highlighted that they carry or wear religious symbols that correspond with affiliations they're connected to. Faith-based schools, community or sport groups, scout associations, etc., often give their members a piece of "inclusion jewelry" or a patch to indicate their participation within the association. While this serves to create commonalities between individuals of similar organizations and introduce youth to social networking, it also clearly marks the individual and limits them to a symbolic "territory" where they have resolvedly been placed and are expected to remain. Symbols unrelated to associations, but which are in essence symbolic of Christianity, possess similar limitations however continue to be prized due to the premise of community preservation. The perpetuation of religious self-fashioning not only alludes to the "unspoiled" nature of a persistent Christian presence in Lebanon but moreover, presents the allusion that there is Christian unity within and

across various Christian sects, despite the reality that conflicting religio-political opinions cause inter- and intra- Christian sect tensions. According to youth, this may possibly be the largest added value of religious self-fashioning, due to its ability to erase political differences within the community and revert Lebanese Christians back to the "essence" of their faith, void of political manipulation. In other words, tangible objects lack the political connotations rampant throughout Lebanon and are only doused with spiritual essence. This idea introduces a fresh perspective on symbols as a "protection" method. While traditional discourse relays symbols as a protective force against non-Christian sects (through process of self-imposed alienation), Maronite youth see religious symbols as a form of protecting the overall Christian community from the escalation of inevitable political tensions, by constantly reminding them of their commonality.

The clearest justification for the mobilization of symbols and icons is as a testament to the act of religiosity itself. Some adults in particular struggled to understand why the use of symbols and icons required justification to begin with. The nature of a passive approach to explaining religious dissemination is by attributing it solely to a practice of faith. It is the fulfillment of rites attributed to belief, and a form of saying, "I appreciate you, I love you, I respect you, and I believe in you – let me show you." It is also a method of appeasing superstition and warding off evil, on the premise that such symbols are not only "symbolic" in representation but possess spiritual potential to protect the faithful from harm. The level of comfort received from religious symbols and icons also contributes to their use and overall purpose. However, comfort is not only generated through the sole existence of the symbol. Rather, it is the experience of engagement that allows for a release of comfort (e.g.

touching the symbol in moments of insecurity for support and/or using a public or personal shrine as a prayer space). A Maronite priest once explained how the need to engage with tangible, visible items also impacts self-fashioning in the personal space. He explained that Christian society is comforted by “role models” who act as “tangible symbols” to hold and seek comfort in. This, for example, is why he actively chooses to remain dressed in his priest attire at all hours of the day, so to reaffirm to the community the existence of religious role models.

This is only a sample of the many different reasons attributed to the “why” and “when” of religious self-fashioning and does in no way cover all potential “explanations,” nor begin to conclude why self-fashioning is a standardized practice within Lebanese Maronite Christianity. However, what this does entail is the connection (and confusion) among both youth and adults between what is considered religious practice by institutional guidelines and what is oriented in the religio-cultural scope of everyday sectarianism.

To George Ali, With love from Mom:

Translating self-fashioning motives to concepts of respect & protection

Sometimes the perpetuation of self-fashioning comes down to the significance of the object, unrelated – to a certain degree – to its implied religious symbolism. Often times,

religious symbols, icons and relics are received as gifts given from significant individuals and/or on special occasions. Gifts, including but not limited to, religiously symbolic jewelry, pictures and paintings, bibles, rosaries, candles, and holy water, may be given to commemorate a religious holiday or event, or also as a gift separate from any connotation of a religious date. These gifts obtain high significance because they become attributed to two symbolic meanings: (1) that of its religious worth and (2) as a commemoration to the individual who had gifted it. Such gifts are often offered by loved ones, whether that be family, friends, a significant partner, a mentor, etc., and are therefore cherished differently than symbols and relics that were not obtained as gifts. In other cases, religious symbols and icons may be passed down from generation to generation as a family heirloom and operate as a family-specific tradition. In lieu of this purpose, family heirlooms or highly esteemed religious gifts may be left unworn, but instead kept safe and on reserve, as a sort of collectible. Many individuals critical of the customs of Maronite self-fashioning symbols and icons defend their use/wear of symbols as a form of showing respect to the sentiments of the gift-giver.

Respect is a popular concept that continuously emerges among youths. Equivalent to the topic of respect with youth is the concept of protection among adults. But how to draw a comparison between the two? In the context of self-fashioning, youth relaying their respect for their family is sometimes enough justification for why they participate in certain forms of self-fashioning. A young girl expressed this rational by sharing a story of a time she found an unexpected religious relic in her pencil-case at school. She had been opening the case before an exam, when she came to find a piece of foil, the size of her thumbnail,

folded neatly in concealment of what it was holding. After assessing the foil by unfolding it, she revealed the true contents within and knew immediately that the incense and oil found between the foil came from none other than her mother. Why and when her mother had placed this foil in her pencil-case was never revealed to her. However, the sentiment was appreciated and respected, despite being unclear in essence. She concluded her narrative by revealing that she will likely perform similar customs to her future children, in honor of her mother. Based on this story and other similar cases it is clear that tangible objects are not the only entity passed down from generation to generation.

There is an overall "monkey see, monkey do" attitude towards family religious practices that remain misunderstood or unexplainable. The motive to continue these unexplainable habits come from a place of respect for parents and family traditions. Parents, on the other hand, are in full awareness of the justification for what their children perceive as "unexplainable," and characterize these measures as acts of protection. The relationship between respect and protection is therefore drawn in the intentionality placed behind habits of self-fashioning. It is nearly impossible to generate the assumption that youth will revert to imposing self-fashioning techniques onto their own children in the future due to a desired sense for protection that emerges with age. At the same time, it is unreasonable to assume that the desire for protection expressed by adults today is a complete result of war-time trauma and insecurity. Nevertheless, the miscommunication regarding the intentions and purpose of current day self-fashioning habits is inevitably generating a "new purpose" or "new intention" to the act of religious self-fashioning in the Maronite community. The customs of self-fashioning between generations are not

diminishing or nearing extinction. Rather, they are changing in meaning and purpose to symbolize sentiments of “respect,” as opposed to “protection,” and thereby have become largely orientated in the scope of cultural expression, as opposed to being acts of pure religiosity. While themes of protection still invoke divine shield and blessing, themes of respect are entirely oriented in the material-world – completely removed from elements of spirituality and grounded in tangible and mundane connections.

Self-fashioning social barriers

There is a practiced hypocrisy expressed by the Lebanese state that, on the one hand, advocates for religious equality and freedom of expression, while on the other hand, calls for complete religious erasure. This can be witnessed through the rules imposed on Lebanese public servants, e.g. the national army, who are forbidden from showing signs of religiosity via symbols and personal décor. A young girl newly admitted into the army expressed her concerns regarding this rule, arguing that she takes pride in wearing and showing the rosary regularly worn around her neck; however, she does not argue with the regulation restricting her from wearing her rosary during on-duty hours. Public offices are not the only institutions targeting the restriction of religious expression. In some cases, it is not complete religious erasure that is the goal, but an intentional fashioning of religious conformity. In certain well-known enterprises and franchises, company employees are selected – or transferred – based on their adaptability to the location of the applicable franchise. For example, a veiled Muslim woman would find difficulty obtaining a job

position in a Christian-majority area, for being unable to fit the branch-specific characteristics that cater to both the clientele and the branch-image. Sometimes, all it takes is the categorization of the applicant's name, in order to conclude their (lack-of)-qualification for the position.

While "George Ali" may not have these concerns (as he is able to adapt to multi-sect environments due to the ambiguity of his name), both adults and youths reflect on the dilemmas of job opportunities and the restrictions posed by socially fashioned pseudo-religious barriers. Interesting enough, these concerns are only voiced on behalf of non-Christian communities in their efforts to integrate within Christian-majority societies. Public, private and personal modes of religious self-fashioning thereby create environments of disaffection for non-Christian communities, making these individuals feel unwelcome and unsafe in such given areas. An observation made predominantly by youths argues for the undesirability of self-fashioning customs for the principal reason of creating barriers and continued separation between various Lebanese communities. Moreover, modes of self-fashioning perpetuate stereotypes, linking the Maronite community back to insecurities related to security, preservation, and power. These insecurities are what todays emerging young Maronite community aims to destroy, fitting to their drawn conclusion that Christian self-fashioning limits one's overall social liberties and freedom of association. In this regard, it makes sense why public/state positions encourage the erasure of indicators of religious affiliations, especially when taking into consideration the normalization of self-fashioning and its direct influence on barrier-making. Many youths suggest that the practice of erasure should be extended to the public sphere, continuing to suggest their role in

installing public statues, icons, shrines etc., will be minimal in the future. Despite this, they also emphasize a general reluctance to remove current public indicators of religiosity, on the premise that it is a testament to their parents' and ancestor's history and culture. Nevertheless, many articulate that the process of alienation (as a result of self-fashioning in a multi-sect nation), outweighs the benefits of religiosity via the mobilization of publicly visible symbols, icons, relics, etc., because religious expression and belief are not limited to the practices of self-fashioning.

To conclude

There are many factors that influence self-fashioning practices. Questions related to the how and where of Maronite self-fashioning is best addressed through the scope of descriptive categories that present public, private, and personal environments as arenas for self-fashioning practices. Identifying the environment of self-fashioning practices thus provides the foundation for an analysis of why and when Maronite self-fashioning unfolds because it allows for the investigation of how self-fashioning practices are rationalized. As explored, both active and passive perspectives on self-fashioning justify the role of religious symbols and their relevance to aesthetic enjoyment, tradition, community development, or comfort. The significance of objects with religious connotations can also be generated through the mundane relationships drawn from the object (i.e., a gift, a memory of a loved one, an indicator of an experience, etc.). Unlike passive perspectives, an active perspective towards self-fashioning acknowledges the impact religious symbols and

décor have on the inter-community. Considering the divisive nature of fashioning oneself as Maronite or Christian is a concern reiterated among the youth, who consider self-fashioning practices synonymous to barrier-making against non-Christian communities.

CHAPTER 7

Politicization of religiosity and the transition of religio-culture between generations

> *"It is as they say in the bible: 'Give us our daily bread!"*
> – Maronite adult seamstress, living in Bourj Hammoud

Allusions of a unified intra-sect public opinion

Sectarian politics in Lebanon often imply cohesion and unity among intra-sects to combat the delusions of inter-sect disunity. The image of this "disunity" between different sects is disseminated by political sectarian elites, who lead the continued separation of sectarian communities in Lebanon in efforts to sustain the current political structure. The emphasis of intra-sect unity is therefore justified as a strategy to ensure community survival and is legitimated as an existing experience through the histories written about the community. Invoking community-based histories is not a Maronite-specific approach to instilling the allusion of intra-sect unity. Rather, perpetuating historical motifs (e.g. strong leadership, respect for religious values and community-specific traditions, loyalty to traditional allies, etc.), that have supposedly sustained sectarian communities up until the present, encourages the community to continue striving to maintain those same motifs for the sake of the sect's sustainability. Community/sect sustainability is a concern to all sectarian communities within Lebanon, and the paranoia of being erased as a community (both culturally and politically) has traditionally played a large role in the implications of a unified identity within sects. Thus, if the intra-sect is perceived to be united in their

perceptions and experiences, then it is likely for them to survive as a thriving sectarian community within Lebanon because their security is less likely to be challenged by other sects. Nevertheless, how can the reality of intra-sect "unity" be revealed if there is an awareness that the "disunity" between inter-sects is disseminated by the political elite as a state-construct? In other words, can the authenticity of intra-sect unity be a social construct, created by those wishing to revive motifs that invoke sectarian security, or is intra-sect unity truly a characteristic of the Maronite community? This chapter thereby explores how religiosity impacts political opinion and investigates the existence – or lack thereof – of a unified Maronite public opinion, in efforts to investigate the interloop of politics and religiosity between generations. Common themes traditionally invoked by the community (such as the importance of strong religio-political leadership, identification of the presence of "evil," and the procurement of security) will be explored as case studies to reveal the discrepancies in public opinion that would have otherwise been assumed unified if left unstudied.

"Christian people need a leader – especially the Maronites"

This was a short statement made by an adult Maronite male while justifying the "legacy" belonging to the Maronite people and its current relevance to the community. As mentioned earlier, written documents recounting Maronite heritage speak on the unity of the community, the power and perseverance of a Maronite presence despite the sect's existence as a minority in the greater region, and their constant strife as a community to

ensure their security and safety from alleged threats attacking their being. This adult Maronite male was drawing on popular Maronite history to present what he views as a "weakness" that has come to characterize today's community, tarnishing their claimed reputation as a strong, powerful, united people and replacing these qualities with what he argued is a loss of community values. He concluded his argument by suggesting that a Lebanese-Maronite leader must not only be a capable political leader but, in order for the community to feel confident entrusting him with their care, he must be an example of "outstanding religiosity." To be a sectarian leader, one must possess the qualities of a political figure with the soul of a religious figure. Thus, the element of religiosity is what bestows the legitimacy of leadership to the individual in power.

A show of a leader's "outstanding religiosity" may be exercised in the invocation of stories that legitimatize the magnetism of a leader through the approval of God. To showcase this, I will use a popular story told among the Christian community in Lebanon as an example. While there are different retellings of this story, the base of the story tells the tale of Camille Chamoun (former president of Lebanon and a prominent political figure highly esteemed by the Lebanese-Maronites), to justify the longevity of his life which spanned from 1900 to 1987. The durability of his life is deemed peculiar, given that common stereotypes and myths among the Maronites suggest "successful" political leaders in Lebanon tend to live short lives (as they are intentionally killed off so as to be removed from the political arena early in their careers). The story thus aims to explain why Camille Chamoun lived for 87 years and was not killed earlier by rivals. According to the tale, Camille Chamoun at a young age travelled to Jerusalem, where he encountered what was

said to be the remains of the cross Jesus was crucified on. Popular tales characterize this relic and claim that anyone who inserts a splinter of the wood from the cross beneath their skin cannot die and will, in effect, live forever. It is said that Camille Chamoun on this day, took a small piece of the wood from the cross and inserted it beneath the skin of his forearm. For the duration of his life, he was protected by the security of immortality bestowed upon him through the holy splinter. Only at his old age, when he was 87, did he take it out, and thus died as a result of no longer being protected by the holy relic. However, his ability to withstand wars, political turmoil, economic crises, health complications, etc., all indicate that God had supported his existence and leadership throughout the country. Maronites thus project this narrative to indicate that the decision to trust Camille Chamoun as their leader is one that was suggested to them by God, for had he not been a disciple of God, he would not have been protected by the mysticism of the blessed splinter.

Narrations used to legitimate the leadership of the political elite are invoked to justify the rulership of current politicians. This reality can be seen amidst the anti-movement protests (advocating against the Lebanese Revolution that began on the 17th of October 2019) where defense of current political leaders has been articulated through the use of religious expressions. Despite the statistics that reveal overall public opinion stating that corruption is rampant in today's government (with only 19 percent stating that Lebanese have "a great deal" or "quite a lot of trust" in today's government in the Arab Barometer), individuals still flock to their *"zaim"* (the term used in Arabic to refer to the leader of a political/sectarian group) to defend their claims to their political seats (Arab

Barometer 2018, 10). Political leaders and sectarian leaders are interchangeable in the Lebanese political arena. Almost all politicians are affiliated with or belong to a sect, and often begin their state-oriented careers by leading sectarian-based political parties first. Thus, before these leaders join state politics, they are already beloved within their communities. Notwithstanding the clear failure of the state to uphold its duties to the people they are indebted to serve, many individuals still attest to the legality of the (corrupted) political leaders on the premise that there is divine intervention supporting their claim to power. In a TV interview conducted live during an anti-revolution protest in December 2019, a middle-aged woman appeared in front of the microphone to share her pledge legitimating the current president, Michel Aoun and his son-in-law and/Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gebran Bassil. She claimed to address "the people who are not used to looking up at the sky," and explained with determination: "*In the sky, there is God and he sits at the center. On his right-hand side, there is Michel Aoun, and on his left-hand side sits Gebran Bassil, and below them all, there is us on the ground."* This pointed statement is a clear invocation of the alleged relationship Aoun and Bassil have to God, as well as the relationship these two politicians have to the Lebanese population. This testimony is not solely challenging the humanity of Aoun and Bassil by suggesting that they possess a divinity that qualifies them to govern over the Lebanese population (and hence their seats being placed to the left and right of God's chair), but also serves to validate the bestowment of power to these two figures by the divine. "The people who are not used to looking up at the sky" are individuals who have chosen to stand against the rulership of the current president and foreign minister, and by correlation, have waned the legitimacy of their faith to God by advocating against them.

But how accurately can we claim “Christian people need a leader – especially the Maronites” through such tales? In truth, such stories cannot measure the need for a leader. Rather, they indicate where leaders get their power and the legitimacy to govern. The *zaim* in Lebanon are more than just leaders of a political/sectarian group. They are the focal point of belief systems that have been passed down through generations. In Lebanon, individuals are not only born into their religious institutions – but are also born into political groups designated by the political affiliations and “beliefs” of their parents or community. To break away from a political group is sometimes similar to revoking one’s religion (and may have dire consequences depending on the severity of the family and/or community’s attachment to their *zaim)*. From an alternative perspective, asking or attempting to convince someone who “believes” in their *zaim* to identify the corruption that lurks from within their cause is synonymous to asking someone to question the truths of their religious identity. In both cases, the experience of disengaging from one’s *zaim* has religious connotations, if not for the sake of “belief” that is often attributed to the leader of a political/sectarian group, then for the social backlash that is to come afterwards from within the community. Disengaging from a *zaim* additionally implies that the traditional form of protection attributed to the sectarian community is lost, leaving the community vulnerable to losing the sectarian values that have characterized the community thus far. This final reason may potentially be the cause to the Maronite’s “need” for a leader, if nothing more.

Religion as a means of security or submission?

The tendency to tie religion and politics together is a feature of years of paranoia, mistrust, and insecurity generated within the country's sectarian communities and extended outwards to the nation of Lebanon. These characteristics encourage individuals to seek security, comfort, and answers in the only authority higher than that of the state – religion. Thus, political/sectarian leaders are often interpreted as human liaisons between religion and state affairs, which allows them to exercise a legitimacy that is perceived as *"haram,"* (an Arabic term for "shameful," with religio-cultural connotations) if ever challenged. In part, this is why the 2019 Lebanese Revolution is considered blasphemous to many who see Lebanon's current politicians as extensions of religio-cultural authority. The desire to "believe" in a *zaim* mimics the expectations one has when placing their faith in a religious institution. This means that despite the poor policies or events that unfold during the reign of these leaders, the "belief" that these individuals are extensions of their religious/sectarian institutions garners the legitimacy to keep them in power. It is thus suggested within the Maronite community that believing in a sectarian *zaim* is a form of religiosity. While it borders political intention rather than spiritualism, not believing in a sectarian leader certainly mimics the penalties of not believing in religion (in Lebanon). This fact may be attributed to the reality that religion as an institution and the state as a political entity are tied as one. Despite national security being the responsibility of the state, ensuring the protection of sectarian communities has become the assumed responsibility of each sectarian leader. Thus, statements such as "I may not like Aoun nor his politics, but I stand by him because he is the protector of Christian existence in Lebanon," is a statement

commonly said among Maronites who choose to accept Aoun as a leader, not because of his qualities nor policies, but because of his identity as a Christian and the legitimacy that comes with having a Christian individual as President of the state. Security of religious expression is therefore heavily entrenched in the existence of a sectarian leader who ensures the community's wellbeing by operating from within the state.

Despite the value of importance that has been placed on a strong religio-political figure to spearhead the sustainability of the Maronite community, only ten out of the 30 Maronites who were interviewed for this study confess that they prescribe to a political party – 7 of those ten being youth. Adult Maronites are clear to justify their reluctance to support any political party by explaining that their hopes for a strong Christian leadership left them during the Civil War. Youth, on the other hand, who have not experienced the direct impact of the Civil War, are keen to place their trust in a party they believe will give birth to a strong Christian leader.

Figure 3: Depiction of political party support among interviewed Maronites

Do you support a political party or organization?

RESPONSE:	ADULTS	YOUTH
Yes	3	7
No	12	8

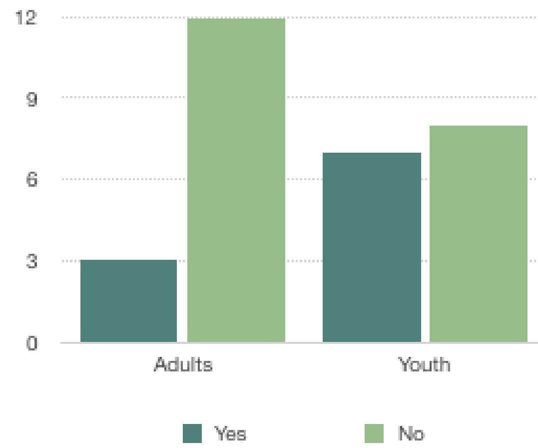
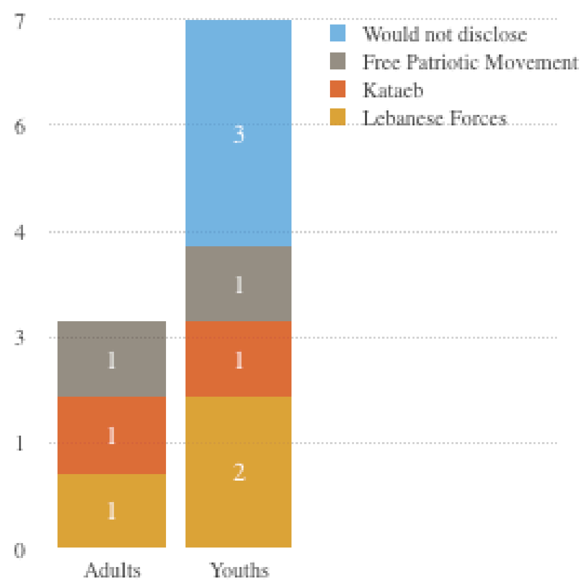


Figure 4: Representation of political affiliation among interviewed Maronites

What political party do you support?



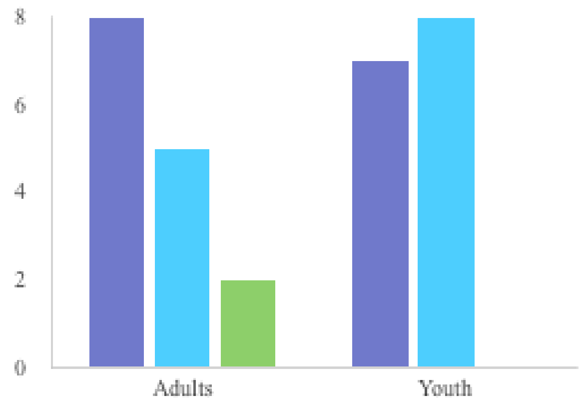
However, the spectrum measuring the relationship between political affiliation and religiosity is wide. From one perspective, there are youths who have never experienced the turmoil of a civil war and are thus hopeful for the potential of a strong leadership that will endorse the desires of the Christian community in Lebanon, as once did the Kataeb/Lebanese Forces, Marada, etc. during the Civil War, or the Free Patriotic Movement against Syrian occupation (a picture so often painted by the parents of these youths in heroic stories told of the past). A second perspective from within Maronite youth circles emphasizes the detachment from sectarian-based desires, and therefore dismisses any value of political parties that host sectarian histories, due to their inability to address nation-wide issues without exercising sectarian agendas. However, there is a third opinion among youths, that advocates for these political parties – not due to their sectarian tendencies, but for the potential they may have to overcome their sectarian histories to address issues related to the economic and social concerns of the nation. The hope expressed in the third opinion articulated by youths is one strongly disregarded by adults who express that the position of today's political/sectarian parties is to (1) defend the rights of their sectarian community above all else, and (2) exclude the rights of individuals not fitting to a sectarian community.

Figure 5: Sample depiction of the correlation between political opinion and religiosity

Would you say your political affiliation and religiosity are connected in any way?

RESPONSE:	ADULTS	YOUTH
Yes	8	7
No	5	8
Would not disclose	2	0

Yes No Would not disclose



Both adults and youth suggest the largest benefit of supporting political parties is the sense of protection one feels against the feeling of mistrust and insecurity generated from other sectarian parties and communities. While many Maronite adults view this reality as solely fact, some agree with the majority of youths who criticize the disproportionate emphasis political parties place on sectarian identity politics versus economic, social, and infrastructural concerns. The dynamics of "security" versus "submission" may be invoked to question the intentional role of Lebanon's sectarian parties. Youths critically acknowledge the manipulation political parties implore against those who strongly prescribe to the traditions of Maronitism and its institution (the church). Unlike individuals who prioritize spiritualism and practice religiosity in accordance to their own reality and definition, more traditional Maronites are provoked to submit to political parties as part of their duty to uphold their Maronite identities. Thus, while a sense of identity *security* is provided to the traditional Maronite people who feel the desire to be protected and represented as a Maronite community – the reality of community *submission* is granted to

the political class, who uses this submission to garner the legitimacy of the sectarian community to speak on its behalf. Maronite public opinion is thereby stolen and represented by the political class who lead sectarian parties and speak on behalf of what they deem to be the interests of their sect. The "weakness in leadership" that is so heavily criticized by the Maronite community is not an acknowledgement of outdated or irrelevant policies and concerns that continue to generate political platforms. Rather, it comes from the conclusion that the existence of conflicting Maronite political parties, divided among political opinions generated by the March 8 versus March 14 political factions, have created a divergence within the "united Maronite community," which has thereby forced a multitude of leaderships that no longer represent the alleged collective voice of the group. Many traditional Maronite adults thus blame the community's decrease in religiosity on the divisions created through this political divide.

Redefining "evil" in the Lebanese context

Condemnation for what is considered "right" and "wrong" is a popular matter during the upbringing of a Maronite child. Parents and grandparents focus much on instilling the definitions of what is perceived as "wrong" from the traditional definitions and examples located in the Bible, as well as through religio-cultural experiences depicted in Maronite histories. Thus, classic questions regarding abstinence, abortion, thievery, etc., can be quickly answered by consulting the Ten Commandments, while questions such as "what political party should I support?" or "is it *right* to date someone outside of my sect?"

are expected to be answered by consulting the traditions of the family or community. In both cases, concepts that have the potential to be civil concerns, remain dominated by religio-cultural and religio-political settings. To many, the monopolization by religion of answers concerning questions of "right" and "wrong," is perceived as a true *evil* among Maronites who choose not to conform to the limitations set within the expectations of traditional religiosity. Ironically, the use of the term "evil" is one often attributed to discussions concerning mysticism or divinity, where the concept of "evil" is metaphorically represented in forms of disturbing creatures or figures that symbolize the gravity of the evilness discussed. For many adults, the term "evil" is still interpreted in this way and is therefore not used as a term to be applied to the mundane. However, and in strong contrast to adults, youths are adamant to apply this term to condemn the corruptions and wickedness they see and experience daily in Lebanon. Hence, the use of the term "evil" to describe the partnership between religious institutions and the state (who through this partnership, aim to silence the development of secular thought among youths), is applied intentionally and with irony, to condemn the pacification of the people, by the state, via religious jargon.

Youth are quickest to criticize corruption. Whether belonging to a political party, religious institution, or possibly neither, political activism among youths has shifted from the advocacy of identity politics and security, prevalent with the older generation during their time as youths, and instead, are reflective of issues of development. Development concerns, such as economic, social, and environmental, are matters that should be non-sectarian in essence. In different degrees, all individuals living in Lebanon, notwithstanding their religious affiliation (and including refugees, expatriates, and domestic workers), are

subjected to the same infrastructural struggles. Nevertheless, state and sectarian politics still attempt to disguise Lebanon's deteriorating infrastructure by forecasting sectarian strife – that, according to them, must be contained and verified as a constant top priority. Despite this attempt to placate the public, Maronites, when asked to identify causes of evil within Lebanon, all respond by using the term "greed" to describe the abuse of power practiced by the state against the people. Both adults and youths attribute Lebanon's poor state of economy, environment, education and health services, not to mention poor basic infrastructure, to the greed of the political elite, who exercise narratives of identity crises to placate the public from testifying for their basic rights as citizens. By extension, the exaggeration of identity politics has become proven to be a tool of the political elite, to distract the population from procuring the liquidity of their greed (this has been emphasized during the Lebanese Revolution, especially as the caretaker government continues to be paid full salaries for work left incomplete – while the population suffers from the inability to withdraw their money from their banks). This tactic is not a secret to today's generation, nor is it a secret for the youth of yesterday. However, unlike the youth who are quick to criticize, adults condone their reluctance and silence to a debt they feel is owed to current politicians. Despite their acknowledgement of political corruption at the hands of the ruling elite, many feel they are indebted to the protection current politicians provided for their given sectarian community during the war. Thus, personal attachment to a religio-cultural identity inspires silence – a silence that youth interpret as a second definition to the term "evil."

Though it may appear harsh, silence is condoned as an “evil” by Maronite youths because it is the enabler of corruption. Thus, it is not exclusively the political class that are condemned as “evil” for their greed, but the everyday Lebanese citizen who, through their silence, allow different forms of corruption to cultivate. “Evil” therefore classifies those that are dishonest and steal – in the traditional, religious definition of the term, but also – the opportunity of collective action from those who wish to join causes void of sectarian undertones. “Evil” describes individuals who litter and disregard their responsibility to the environment, as well as those who take advantage of sectarian culture to extract responsibility from themselves and instead place it on the “other.” Silence towards political greed enables public disempowerment, exploitation, racism (between religious groups but also of social groups and minorities who lack political representation such as women, LGBTQ+, refugees, and domestic workers), and normalizes the practice of “evil” among different classes and sects without questioning its impropriety. This may be why sectarian prejudice is identified as an inherent characteristic of all of Lebanon’s sectarian communities, and why many individuals do not realize the differences between racism, jokes, and stereotyping along religious topics pertaining to other sects. Blaming “evil” exclusively on the political class or other sectarian communities is an identified problem among those who follow their own definition and practice of religiosity. Many believe that a normalized thread within the fabric of Maronite religiosity attests to characteristics of “evil” that traditionally have not been interpreted as such. Using the term “evil” to classify certain habits or experiences within the Maronite community, therefore brings an awareness to the political manipulation placed in the name of religion, in efforts to regulate sectarian dynamics in accordance to what will benefit the political elite. In other words, by

encouraging sectarian individuals to draw the conclusion that the cause to their problems are the direct responsibility of other sects, the ruling elite are eclipsing their responsibility and are able to continue their practices of political exploitation.

Emerging characteristics of the Lebanese inter-sectarian

The irony of using the term "evil" to classify state corruption is an exercise in showing those who reserve the definition of "evil" to religion-based contexts that the limitations of sectarian institutions are no longer esteemed by the population. Religiosity is thus not only an exercise of self-fashioning tactics and adherence to rituals, but it is the redefinition of traditional religious terminology to cater to the community's authenticity. However, when terms which were traditionally defined with respect to their sectarian confinements are stripped of their "sectarian essence," they widen the range of who they may pertain to – thereby losing their relevance to the sectarian community as a "sectarian-specific" term, and encouraging the concept/term to resonate with people from outside the community.

This gives birth to inter-sectarian unity on the premise that there are realities shared between various sectarian communities within Lebanon. While identity politics aims to emphasize the divide between sectarian communities, politics of civil concern specific to development and justice show the unified interests of the public, and concurrently erase divides created through identity politics. To identify a unified public opinion specific to the

Maronite community is thus redundant because it discredits the reality that other communities may have the same opinion – thereby rendering it no longer a Maronite-specific public opinion, but a public opinion by individuals who share similar concerns. For example, the destructive wildfires that broke out in the mountains of the Chouf region, which expanded for over two days in length (beginning on the night of October 13th, 2019), stirred two narratives that can be differentiated between their ability to unite the population versus their intention to create national separation based on a sectarian premise. During the outburst of the fires, individuals – including some politicians – chose to suggest that the location of the fires was peculiarly exclusive to areas home to a Christian-majority and a rich Christian history. This skeptical suggestion instigated a viral wave on social media that showcased public deliberations regarding the intentionality of the fires and aimed to conclude a threat to the Christian communities in Lebanon. But by breathing life into this narrative, the more pressing reality of why the fires were left uncontained by the state civil defense, or why state resources and equipment to contain fires were malfunctioning (despite the extraction of tax-payer's dollars allocated to the alleged upkeep of such resources), were downgraded on a spectrum of relevance. Instigating a concern for security on the premise of identity among the Christians, and a sense of self-defense among non-Christian communities to combat the insinuations presented, thereby reignited sectarian strife for the evenings when the fire prevailed. Violence against the sectarian-other may have been a potential response, had these tactics been exercised in a time where individuals were more trusting of their religio-political leaders. However, the attempt to divert the issues related to a lack of adequate resources and the failure of the state to attend to the needs of the people during the fire, re-emerged as the highest point of concern after a viral

coverage of the multi-sectarian civilians who were united during their efforts to put out the fire and protect one another in the aftermath of the disaster.

Only a few nights after the start of the fire did the Revolution begin, emphasizing the demand of the public for economic, social, and environmental concerns to be addressed without sectarian balances and inclinations. This is not to say, however, that the role of religiosity has lost its weight within Lebanese public life and opinion. Rather, just as it is popularly interpreted in respect to self-fashioning, rituals, and storytelling, the role of religiosity in the political sphere is transforming to allow for the validity of multiple realities to unfold. With the emergence of the Revolution there has come a differentiation between an "opinion of the sect" and "a sectarian opinion," in which case the latter refers to an opinion that invokes sectarian jargon and sentiment, without claiming to speak on behalf of the sectarian community. Sensitivity to negatives of sectarian-based public opinion has emerged with an increased national-public emphasis placed on state corruption and the deterioration of Lebanon's resources and institutions. Political identity, as a construct that feeds aspects of cultural religiosity, is thereby no longer on the agenda of Maronites asking for "thy daily bread."

Final thoughts on the politicization of religiosity

Discussing the impact and relevance of political parties and sectarian leaders among Maronites sheds light on the impossibility of identifying a unified public opinion within the

Maronite community. Although broad conclusions may be drawn suggesting that adults lean towards supporting political parties and leaders with passivity and condone corruption with little action; while youth, in contrast, support political parties and leaders only with complete confidence and condone corruption with assertiveness – neither statement can be made in accurate characterization of either generation. The limitations of this truth suggest that within both generations, there are conflicting opinions regarding the role of religiosity within the political sphere. How one's religiosity connects to one's political affiliations and opinions therefore cannot be measured on a public scale. While attesting to a political leader and/or political party is a form of religiosity to Maronites who tie their political existence and spiritualism to together, those that choose to keep religiosity and politics separate identify the ties between religiosity and politics to be imposed by the political elite. The monopolization of concepts and ideas that take religious forms are done so to reaffirm sectarian differences between inter-sect communities and to simultaneously project the image of a unified Maronite public opinion, represented by religio-political leaders. Consequently, the reality of a "unified" Maronite public opinion is a social construction that has continued to stifle the diversity of sentiments that exist within the Maronite community.

CONCLUSION

Shifting expressions of religiosity

This study has explored the shifts in religiosity between two Maronite generations to identify how accurately present religion-based gestures and institutions serve the authenticity of everyday religious expression by those who self-identify as Maronite. Qualitative data collected from Maronite youths and Maronite adults (who were youth during the Civil War period) reveal the importance of textured opinions and individual experiences of religiosity among the community. Moreover, it reveals the relationship between the two generations and the influence each generation has on the other. Often times, religiosity is understood in the context of general indicators of religiosity, that speak on behalf of the community as a whole, to generate a conclusion on religious expression within a community. However, by steering away from general indicators and instead, seeking texture-based responses by individuals who self-identify as Maronite, this study is able to project the reality that **religiosity is an evolving construct that is reborn in accordance to each individual's subjective experience.** Exploring symbolism, rituals, storytelling, religious-naming, self-decoration, among others, suggests the agency of religiosity as an experience of identity creation. Outdated state-generated gestures that invoke sectarian sentiment are thus a result of state avoidance of this reality, and unfortunately, subjects the Lebanese population to conform to sectarian-based stereotypes that fit the inclinations of those who benefit from upholding sectarian traditions and institutions.

Throughout this text, the concept of religiosity is used to acknowledge the relationship between religious expression and the institution of religion as one that can be concurrently related and disconnected. In chapter 3, this is exhibited in adherence to rituals and traditions among Maronites who emphasize the practice of their traditions to be purely cultural and in correlation to their family legacy. The definitions of rituals and traditions are broadened to include experiences dedicated to preserving family legacy and/or respect through an exercise of values that are prioritized above the ritual itself. Thus, the tradition remains to be the value placed in the *values* of the ritual, rather than the ritual itself. Attending mass alone, for example, has less meaning to an individual who is used to attending mass with family. Likewise, entertaining a "family night" on a Thursday may be just as significant as a "family night" celebrated on a Sunday (which is traditionally expected to be of higher value, as it is known as the day of God). Guidelines enforced within religious institutions prove to be less relevant in the practices of authentic religiosity, inspired by values and religio-cultural morals passed within and among family. Furthermore, the emphasis placed by religio-political institutions to uphold traditions according to their parameters limits the authenticity of religious expression within Maronites who no longer relate to what they perceive to be outdated traditions.

In chapter 4 and 5, stories and the impact of narrations introduce the role of storytelling to suggest religiosity is a practice of shared experiences within the sect. Narratives that invoke religious sentiments offer people the opportunity to express gratefulness and comfort, as well as explanations to events that may have inspired a sense

of insecurity or powerlessness. Storytelling offers the opportunity to rationalize the irrational, or to create an imagined "better tomorrow" on the premise of religious intervention. Thus, religious-based storytelling may be interpreted as a testament to one's faith and a social experience shared between believers. However, religious-based storytelling (when practiced by people within the sect) is unintentionally a source of relieving social responsibility from the political elite charged with securing the rights and freedoms of Lebanese citizens. Therefore, when religious-based narratives are disseminated by the political elite, they are done so to ensure the submission of the sectarian community who – in accordance to the expectations of political leaders – will feel obliged to respect the narrative disseminated, as it is a duty within their religious responsibilities to act in reverence (according to the traditions of the religious institution).

Religiosity is also a self-fashioning mechanism that designates one's identity via the use of symbols, icons, and religious artifacts. In chapter 6, contrast between self-identification and community development is introduced to suggest the multiplicity of purpose and method to self-fashioning. Religiosity through fashioning practices is introduced in the realms of public, private, and personal space, and may be classified as active or passive, depending on one's outlook of the role and impact of the décor. Although the use of symbols holds purpose to aesthetic enjoyment, upholding traditions, securing community sustainability, and providing comfort, among other reasons, a religious symbol may also hold value without the religiousness it is meant to symbolize. Meaning, religious symbols given as gifts, in representation of a loved one, or as an indicator of a memory/experience, may remove the religious symbolism of the décor and replace it with a

social commemoration void of any spiritual indication to one's religiosity. Nevertheless, just the mere portrayal of a religious symbol or décor may negatively impact the merger of inter-communities who may feel alienated, threatened, or insecure by the self-fashioning practices of another community. The awareness that self-fashioning is synonymous to barrier-making implies that the application of symbols, icons, etc., for decorative purposes is a practice in cultural expression rather than a testament to one's faith.

Nevertheless, self-fashioning in political contexts continues to be treated as a key indicator of religiosity within the community. Self-fashioning practices thus have the potential to support the construction of religio-political identity. As mentioned in chapter 7, the politicization of religiosity is influenced by the histories of the community which emphasize a series of motifs glorifying the Maronite community for its sustainability (these motifs are also deeply explored through an analysis of Maronite historiography, presented in chapter 2). However, such motifs, including the importance of a strong religio-political leader, security, and unification, are all indicators of tools which perpetuate a sectarian community on the premise of a religio-political identity, rather than an apparatus for religiosity based on faith. This explains why many individuals merge their political identity with their religious identity. The promotion of sectarian affairs among the public by sectarian/political leaders encourages this type of behavior, so to ensure distractions and fear of imagined threats to communities' identity – on the premise of religious defense, of course – keeps civilians restrained and tied-up with defending their (religio-)identity. Accordingly, defending religio-political identity is perceived as an expression of religiosity, despite it being a highly politicized experience.

Shifting expressions of religiosity are therefore not only identified between generations, who identify religious practices and habits according to the distinctive experiences dictated by the time period in which they are raised. Rather, both generations showcase the realities of what traditions and rituals continue to resonate as specific indicators of one's faith, versus what has evolved to represent cultural tendencies born out of outdated expectations of religious institutions. The emphasis placed on the imposition of defined religiosity versus the freedom to dictate for oneself what and how religiosity is experienced is a concern reserved among Maronite youths, who distrust the institution of religion due to their reflections of their parents' experiences from the Civil War. Many Maronite youths suggest the sectarian system has abused their parents by manipulating religion and religious discourse to force the population into fear and compliance. This fate is one youths wish to avoid, hence their constant contestation to the definitions of religiosity set by the institutions dictating the characterization and behaviors of a "Maronite." Thus, I insist on outlining four conclusions drawn from this study:

1. There is limited homogeneity to the "Maronite identity"

The dimensions of identity attributed to "being Maronite" reveal the vagueness of self-imposed versus compulsory identification. "Maronite," as a term, indicates subcategories of identity that include, but are not limited to, family, culture, community, region, politics, and religion. To identify as Maronite may thus suggest that all

subcategories are complimentary to one another, thereby creating a "holistic" definition of a Maronite identity. However, what does it mean when only one or two of the subcategories resonate with an individual who perceives themselves as Maronite? Are they considered "less" Maronite than those who embody all the mentioned subcategories? For the self-identified Maronite who classifies their sense of identity without referring to the categories listed above, what is their relation to the authentic definition of "being Maronite?" (And what is the *authentic* definition of being Maronite?). Many who participated in this study outwardly stated they are not religious, but that they continue to identify as Maronite. The justification behind this contradictory statement indicates that "being Maronite" can be a cultural perception rather than an indicator of one's religious or spiritual affiliation. Many confess that their role of "being Maronite" is limited to upholding cultural traditions orchestrated within the family to sustain family customs and nothing more. Others suggest that they are Maronite because they were "born that way," (and thus do not have the liberty of choosing their own identity), which contrasts the rationale of individuals who were not baptized Maronite but attest to a Maronite identity because it corresponds to their political ideologies. Nevertheless, among all these classifications of "Maronite" are the individuals who prescribe to "being Maronite" because they are devout Christians. Indeed, the construction of a Maronite identity is founded on its correspondence to the Maronite faith, hence the name "Maronite" in reference to the Maronite sect. However, the development of the Maronite identity overtime has morphed to allow political and cultural inclinations. This development certainly occurred through the legitimatization of sectarianism as a political entity, its emphasis within state politics, and the way resources and institutions are divided in accordance to sectarian balances. The position of religiosity within the

identification of “Maronite” thus morphed concurrently to accommodate the cultural position of a “Maronite” within Lebanon’s multi-sectarian national fabric.

2. “Religiosity” does not merely represent one’s faith or sense of spiritualism

As mentioned, the position of religiosity within the identification of “Maronite” has morphed to accommodate the politicization of sectarianism and overtime, has become further removed from its essence as a descriptive term used to define an individual who practices the religious traditions of a Maronite Christian. Thus, rituals, traditions, practices of self-fashioning, and the use of language or storytelling with religious connotations, all indicate that religion may not be the only explanation to these indicators of “religiosity.” Rather, political identity and cultural dispositions play a strong role in influencing one’s sense of Maronite religiosity. This means that even the mere proclamation, “I am Maronite,” may be an indicator of one’s religiosity if we take into consideration the potential implications that lie with the identity “Maronite.” However, this may also suggest that a Maronite individual, who appears to practice the traditions and rituals of a religious Maronite may be fulfilling such customs out of habit, community pressure or family obligation, and therefore may be acting in complete isolation from their spirituality. Yet again, there are cases where people behave in a way perceived “non-religious” and yet attest to their behavior or action as one connected to their spiritualism despite its lack of conformity to traditional Maronite religiosity. The scope of “religiosity” as a descriptive

term must therefore be widened when discussed and studied in the case of Lebanon's Maronites in order to capture the many streams that authentically define the term as one not confined to the sole expression of religion.

3. There is no "unified" Maronite public opinion

It is nearly impossible to speak on the "unified" opinions of the Maronite community after revealing the many experiences and opinions Maronites' hold in respects to political, social, and religious affairs. Realizing that the classification of the identity "Maronite" is itself contested further legitimates the reality that a unified public opinion shared within the intra-sect is a constructed invention rather than a practiced reality. Differences in experiences generate a variety of opinions that are classified as a "Maronite opinion" because they are *expressed by individuals who identify as Maronite.* This is different, however, from the allegation that a "Maronite opinion" *represents the opinions of all individuals who identify as Maronite.* The reality shows that the discrepancies of identity within the sectarian community on the premise of politics, class, family proximity, gender-based experiences, etc., dictates the differences of religiosity among Maronites. To therefore suggest that a unified public opinion exists from within a community so divided by cultural, social, and economic differences is to ignore the diversity within the community (as done so, by Lebanon's current political elite, who through this tactic succeed in limiting the nonsectarian-based growth of the Maronite population).

4. The institutionalization of religion – i.e. sectarianism – has stifled the authentic voices/experiences of the Maronite community

Although the "authenticity" of religiosity is subjective to the experiences of the individual, religious institutions only identify religious-based behavior as genuine when it is in accordance to the guidelines disseminated by the institution. Practices of religiosity outside of this scope are deemed blasphemous and inauthentic, according to the experiences of Maronites who feel illegitimate when practicing their faith as seen fit to their spiritualism. Institutional indicators of what religiosity entails, or what it should look like, is therefore an imposition that stifles the organic evolution of religiosity in harmony to the cultures of the community. Rather than disseminate culture in accordance with the interests of institutions and those who run them, religiosity – informed by cultural experiences – should be acknowledged, studied, and protected by those institutions, charged with protecting the cultural rights of the sect. Outdated gestures introduced by the state to appease the expectations of sectarianism do not resonate with the majority of Maronites and are only viewed as tactics to secure silence or submission from the community by introducing God into the equation of basic rights and freedoms (this is a conclusion drawn from both generations, respectively, proving that despite generational differences, opinions regarding the imposition of institutionalized religion on the community are the same). Nevertheless, governing institutions continue to rely on the strategies of the sectarian system without seeking any confidence of the relevance of their gestures. Perhaps then, the

importance of a unified voice within the Maronite community may be for the sake of suggesting to the government that their strategies of manipulating religion are outdated. Then again, publicizing the reality that a "unified Maronite public opinion" in itself is a mythical creation, may be the start to exploring how institutions may better accommodate the religiosity of inter-sect communities.

Looking forward: The foreshadow of a new national ambition

The current unfolding sentiments of the Lebanese Revolution may be viewed as a key conclusion drawn from the findings collected for this study. Only six months before the initiation of this mass movement, Maronites spoke of the necessity of an all-inclusive awareness of social, political, and economic corruption by the Lebanese state onto the population. This plea has since materialized through the demands of the Lebanese Revolution. A mass call to action has captured the attention of the Maronite Lebanese population, as a Christian community beyond the borders of their intra-sect, and has rallied them against the abuse of religion for political profit. Public discourses on the premise of collective disparities among all sects have publicized the shared concerns many Maronite youths and adults have expressed on topics concerning the irrelevance of outdated rituals, the inherent exclusion of other communities through self-fashioning practices, and the distribution of stories that release political figures from their responsibility to address infrastructural and development-based concerns. The research collected for this study therefore inadvertently foreshadowed the absurdity of intra- and inter-sectarian conflict in

the face of state-disseminated destitution. Pursuing this ethnographic study further may reveal the national impact of the Revolution’s denunciation of the political institution of religion, and it’s influence on shifting expressions of religiosity within the urban Maronite community.

POSTSCRIPT

A warning on secularism

As mentioned throughout this paper, the Lebanese Revolution began to unfold while completing the process of data analysis dedicated to this thesis. On October 17th, 2019, an exasperated plea by the Lebanese population swept the nation in the form of peaceful protests to request the removal of a corrupt political class, that – since the culmination of the Lebanese Civil War – has retained political power to continue manipulating state institutions to advance their own personal interests. Among the demands of the popular movement is the establishment of a technocratic government, void of all traditional/past political affiliations based from within the sectarian system. This demand, if/when actualized, would result in the annulment of a sectarian government all together; and in its place would emerge a civil and secular state system.

It is quite remarkable to be reflecting on the data collected as a sort of "foreshadowing" of the current uprisings taking place in Lebanon. Maronite youth's distaste in the sectarian system and the political elite who enforce sectarian-state policies was made unmistakably clear through the mention of pseudo-religious traditions disseminated by the state; the manipulation of religion as a "solution" to pacify, or distract, the public and replace authentic policies; and the insistence of personal status laws to remain a concern of one's designated sect – among others. While these same concerns were identified through adult testimonies as well, youth were quicker to condemn the system for its corrupt nature and to hold political leaders accountable for the desolation sweeping

Lebanon, (desolation, if I may add, derived from a pseudo-call to "preserve the heritage" attributed to the sectarian state system).

In light of this, it appears that we are at the start of a long farewell to the sectarian system in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the prolonging of this hopeful farewell may be incidentally caused by an optimistic expectation of a secular-state, especially when placed in juxtaposition to sectarianism. As insinuated by the introduction of this paper, the similarities between sectarianism and secularism is often overlooked and overshadowed by the belief that secularism offers the luxury of religious freedom (particularly within a nation heavily characterized by a religious presence, like in Lebanon). Secularism, however, does not transcend religious differences, and like sectarianism, is a tool mobilized by an institutional body to regulate religion and power relations between the state and the public. I emphasize this, not to discourage the shift towards secularism (for ultimately, it is the better of two evils), but to caution the public from expecting this system to be the "solution" to existing problems within the country. Simply stated: implementing a secular system may bring forth clearer policies regarding environmental, economic, social, education-based, health-based, etc., concerns (as they would no longer be forced to endure sectarian checks and balances), but sectarian-derived damages (embedded in sect-based historical legacies), related to religio-political identity, minority complexes, fears of the "other," as well as preservation and security concerns, may not necessarily be dissolved through the introduction of a secular state system.

APPENDIX

Appendix ONE: QUESTION SET: **ENGLISH**

LIFE TAPESTRY/LIFE REVIEW

1. Reflecting on your life thus far: identify its major chapters (if your life were a book, how would you name the different chapters?)*
2. Are there past relationships that have been important to your development as a person?*
3. Do you recall any changes in relationships that have had a significant impact on your life or on your way of thinking about things?*
4. How has your worldview changed across your life's chapters? (how has this affected your image of God or of the Divine? What does it mean to you now?)*
5. How would you describe your personal sense of style and decorum? Is it influenced by your faith in any way?
6. What traditions or rituals would you say you most look forward to? In what ways do these traditions or rituals impact your life?
7. During times of crisis, hardship, or even sadness, what or who have you turned to for comfort?

RELATIONSHIPS

8. Focusing now on the present, how would you describe your parents / children and your current relationship to them? (have there been any changes to your relationship over the years? If so, what caused the change?)*
9. Are there any other current relationships that are important to you?*
10. How would you describe your relationship with your neighbors? In what way are they part of your community?
11. In what ways do you interact with individuals outside of your sectarian community?
12. What groups, institutions, or causes do you identify with? (why are they important to you?)*

PRESENT VALUES AND COMMITMENTS

13. What makes your life meaningful to you?*
14. Are there any beliefs, values, or commitments that seem important to your life right now?*
15. When or where do you find yourself most in harmony with the universe? (where do you find your peace?)*
16. What does "being religious" mean to you?
17. When you have an important decision to make, how do you generally go about making it? (can you give me an example? If you have a very difficult problem to solve, to whom or what would you look for guidance?)*
18. Do you think that actions can be right or wrong? (if so, what makes an action right in your opinion? What makes an action wrong?)*
19. Are there certain actions or types of actions that are always right under any circumstances? (are there certain moral opinions that you think everyone should agree on?)*

RELIGION AND WORLDVIEW

20. Do you consider yourself a religious, spiritual or faithful person? How would you say you express your faith?*
21. Are there any religious, spiritual or other ideas, symbols, icons, saints, or rituals that are especially important to you, or have been important to you?
22. Do you pray, meditate, or perform any other spiritual discipline?*
23. What is sin to your understanding?*
24. How do you explain the presence of evil in our world?*
25. If people disagree about issues of worldview or religion, how can such conflicts be resolved?*

QUESTION SET: ARABIC

استعراض الحياة:

1. خلّينا نحكي عن حياتك لحدّ هلّأ: إذا كانت حياتك كتاب، شو هيّ برأيك أهمّ أجزائه؟*
2. كان في عندك بالماضي علاقات مهمّة لنموّك أنت كشخص؟*
3. بتتذكّر أي تغييرات بعلاقاتك أثّرت بشكل كبير على حياتك أو طريقة تفكيرك؟*
4. كيف تغيّرت نظرتك للعالم بأجزاء حياتك المختلفة؟ (كيف أثّر هيدا الشيء على تصوّرك لله؟ شو بيعنيلك الله هلأ؟)*
5. بتقدر توصفلي الـ"ستيل" (style) تبعك؟ بأثّر عليه إيمانك بأي شكل من الأشكال؟
6. شو أبرز التقاليد أو الطقوس بالنسبة إلك؟ كبف بتأثر هذه التقاليد أو الطقوس على حياتك؟
7. لمين لجأت، أو لشو لجأت، لما قطعت بصعوبات؟

العلاقات:

8. خلّينا نحكي عن الحاضر. بتقدر توصف أهلاتك / ولادك وعلاقتك معن هلأ؟ (تغيّرت علاقتكم مع الوقت؟ إذا ايه، شو يللي خلّاها تتغيّر؟)*
9. عندك هلأ علاقات ثانية مهمّة إلك؟*
10. بتقدر توصف علاقتك مع الجيران؟ كيف هنّي من نفس البيئة تبعك؟
11. كيف بتتعامل مع عالم من برّا طائفتك؟
12. شو القضايا أو المجموعات أو المؤسسات يللي بتنتمي لها؟ (وليش مهمة هي بالنسبة إلك؟)*

القيم والالتزامات في الحاضر:

13. شو يللي بيخلّي حياتك لها معنى؟*
14. عندك معتقدات أو قيم أو التزامات مهمّة بحياتك هلأ؟*
15. ايمتى أو وين بتلاقي حالك أكثر شيء مرتاح بحالك؟ (وين أكثر شيء بتكون مرتاح بحالك؟)*
16. شو برأيك يعني الواحد "يكون متديّن"؟
17. شو بتعمل لمّا بدّك تاخذ قرار مهمّ؟ (فيك تعطي مثل؟ مين أو شو بتستشير إذا كان عندك مشكلة صعبة؟)*
18. برأيك في تصرّفات صحّ وتصرفات غلط؟ (إذا ايه، شو بيخلّي التصرف يكون صح برأيك؟ شو بيخلّيه يكون غلط؟)*
19. برأيك في تصرّفات بتضلّ صحّ لو شو ما كان؟ (برأيك في أمور أخلاقية لازم الكلّ يتّفق عليها؟)*

الدين والنظرة الى العالم

20. بتعتبر نفسك متديّن أو روحاني أو مؤمن؟ كيف بتعبّر عن هل إيمان؟*
21. عندك أو كان عندك بحياتك أي أفكار أو رموز أو ايقونات أو قديسين أو طقوس، إن كانت دينية أو روحانية أو غيرها، بتعتبرها مهمّة إلك؟*
22. بتصلّي؟ بتتأملّ؟ بتعمل أي شيء روحاني من هل نوع؟*
23. شو برأيك يعني "خطيئة"؟*
24. ليش برأيك في شرّ بهيدا العالم؟*
25. لمّا الناس ما تتفق على مواضيع مثل الدين أو نظرتهم للدنيا،، كيف فينا نحلّ هيك نزاع؟*

* These questions come directly from James Fowler's "Faith Development Interview" model (Klein and Streib 2018, 92).

Appendix TWO: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM: **ENGLISH**

Shifting Expressions of Religiosity: Generational changes within the urban Maronite community in Lebanon and its implications on the cohesivity of Maronite public opinion

Participant Information Form

Name (optional): _____________________________

Age: 18-24 45-60 Other: _________

Do you have children? Yes No

Gender: Female Male Other I rather not say

Profession: ____

What city do you currently live in? __________________________

What village/city are you originally from? ____________________

Do you self-identify as Maronite? Yes No

How long have you self-identified as Maronite? _______ years

What church do you attend most regularly? __________________________

Do you belong to a church / faith-based community? Yes No

How often do you attend mass?

Never. Holidays / Special occasions. Once a month. Twice a month. Every Sunday.

What is your favorite religious site to visit in Lebanon? __________________________

Do you support any political party or organization? Yes No

If yes, you may choose to disclose the name here: ____________________

Would you say your political affiliation and religiosity are connected in any way? Yes No

Do you wish to be contacted with the final results of the study? Yes No

Email: ____________________________ Phone: __________________________

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM: **ARABIC**

التغييرات في التعبير عن التدين:
استكشاف التغييرات بين الأجيال في المجتمع المارونيّ الحضريّ في لبنان وآثارها على تماسك الرأي العام الماروني

استمارة مشاركة:

الاسم (خياريّ): ____________________

العمر: 18-24 45-60 غيره: ________
هل لديك أطفال؟ نعم كلا

الجنس: انثى ذكر غيره أفضل عدم الإفصاح عنه

في أي مدينة تقطنون حالياً؟ ____________________

من أي قرية / مدينة تأتون في الأصل؟ ____________________

هل تعتبرون نفسكم موارنة؟ نعم كلا

منذ كم من الوقت تعتبرون نفسكم موارنة؟ ________ سنة

ما الكنيسة التي تقصدونها بأكثر شكلٍ منتظم؟ ____________________

هل تنتمون الى كنيسة / مجموعة أساسها الإيمان؟ نعم كلا

كم تشاركون في القدّاس؟
أبداً في الأعياد / المناسبات الخاصة مرة في الشهر مرّتان في الشهر كلّ يوم أحد

ما هو الموقع الديني الذي تفضلون زيارته في لبنان؟ ____________________

هل تأيّدون أي حزب أو منظمة سياسية؟ نعم كلا
في حال أجبتم بنعم، تستطيعون تحديد الحزب أو المنظمة إذا شئتم: ____________________

هل تعتبرون أن انتمائكم السياسي وتديّنكم متّصلان ببعضهم بأي شكلٍ من الأشكال؟ نعم كلا

هل تودّون أن يتم التواصل معكم لمشاركة نتائج البحث النهائية؟ نعم كلا

البريد الالكتروني: ____________________ رقم الهاتف: ____________________

شكراً لكم!

Appendix THREE: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION SET: **ENGLISH**

RITUALS
1: Let us begin discussing religious holidays and events that are traditionally practiced within the Maronite community. Can you describe what Christmas, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Baptisms, Holy Communions, and other religious holidays look like? What traditions characterize these holidays? What similarities exist? Who do you spend them with? What do you look forward to?

2: What Christian pilgrimage sites do you visit most often in Lebanon and why? Who do you go with? What do you take out of these experiences? And in what way does visiting these sites increase or strengthen your connection to God?

ORAL NARRATION
3: There is a story that I've heard before, that I want to know if you've heard too: The story speaks of Harissa, and says that before the Civil War, Harissa used to look out onto Ras Beirut. During the Civil War, she was so displeased with the violence that she saw, that she turned to face Jounieh instead. This explains why today, she continues to face this direction.
My question is: have you heard this story before? Who told it to you? Or, do you know of any other versions of it? Or stories similar to it?
What other "miracle stories" can you share with me?

4: Thinking of the story mentioned in the previous question (or the stories just mentioned by you): what do you think inspires these stories to exist and get passed on and retold?

SELF-FASHIONING
5: Do you, or people that you know, represent their religiosity through their personal style? When I say personal style, I am referring to religious tattoos, necklaces, bracelets, or other accessories with Christian symbolism. Why do you think such people wear their faith in this way? How do you think individuals of other sects perceive this?

6: I've noticed another way in which we express our faith is by decorating public spaces or areas that can be viewed by individuals outside of the sect. For example, we may see cars and designated streets with images of saints and Christian icons, clearly indicating the religion of the individual who either drives the car, or lives on the street. Why is this something that we do here in Lebanon?

TRANSFER OF RELIGIOSITY
7: What Christian traditions derived from your parents continue to resonate with you? What specific traditions, rituals, or practices do you wish to pass on to the next generation of Maronites?

8: Have you ever considered how names can act as indicators of religiosity? Why do you think some parents choose to name their kids names that directly invoke a relation to Christianity? i.e. Elie, Charbel, etc. How do you think this impacts their opportunities in Lebanon?

MAKING SOLUTIONS OUT OF RELIGION
9: A couple of months ago, I was watching the news and saw something very interesting that I would like your thoughts on. In the month of November, a statue of Mar Charbel was brought to the farthest end of the maritime boarder in Tabarja and sunken there with the help of the Lebanese army. Why do you think this municipality and the state decided to sink a Mar Charbel statue underwater?

10: Do you think it is beneficial to the Lebanese people when the government invokes religion in efforts to solve problems? If yes, can you give some examples of best practices?

11: What does secularism mean to the Maronite youth community? In specific, what is popular opinion regarding inter-sect marriages?

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTION SET: ARABIC

الطقوس

1. بدي نبلّش نحكي عن الاعياد الدينية والاحداث يللي من مارسها بالمجتمع الماروني. فيكن تخبّروني وتوصفوا عيد الميلاد والشعنينة والجمعة العظيمة والفصح والعمادة والتناول وغيرها من الأعياد؟ شو التقاليد يلي بتعمل بكلّ واحد مهنم؟ مع مين بتقضّوها؟ شو اكثر شيء بتحبوه فيها؟

2. شو هي الأماكن الدينية المسيحية يلي أكثر شيء بتزوروها بلبنان وليه؟ مع مين بتزوروها؟ شو بتستفيدوا من هذه التجارب؟ كيف هذه الزيارات بتقوّي أو بتزيد من صلتكم بالله؟

قراءة شفهية

3. في قصة سمعت عنها من قبل وبدي اعرف اذا انتوا كمان سمعتوا عنها: القصو بتحكي عن حريصا، وقبل الحرب الاهلية كانت حريصا بارمة لميلة رأس بيروت، وخلال الحرب زعلت من العنف فبرمت لميلة جونيه، وبعدها لليوم بهذا الاتجاه.
سؤالي هو: سمعتوا بهذه القصة من قبل؟ مين خبّركم عنها؟ بتعرفوا غير نسخات من نفس القصة؟ أو قصص بتشبهها؟
عندكم غير "قصص أعجوبات" تخبرونا إياها؟

4. خلونا نفكر بهذه القصة (او القصص يلي ذكرتوها): ليش برأيكم هذه القصص موجودة وبتنتقل لغير عالم والناس بخبّروها لبعض؟

أسلوب الأزياء وتزيين النفس

5. انتوا أو الناس يللي بتعرفوهن، بتعبّروا عن تديّنكم من خلال أسلوب ليسكم أو تزيين نفسكم؟ يعني التاتو الدينية أو السلاسل أو الأساور أو غير أكسسوارات إلها رموز مسيحية. ليش الناس بيلبسوا هذه الأمور يللي بتدلّ على الإيمان؟ كيف برأيكم بيفكّروا فيها الناس من غير طوائف؟

6. لاحظت أنه في ناس بتعبّر عن تديّنها من خلال تزيين الأماكن العامة أو الأماكن يللي في يشوفها الكلّ والناس من غير طوائف كمان. مثلاً في سيارات، أو شوارع فيها صور قديسين وأيقونات مسيحية بتدلّ على دين الشخص يلي عم يسوق هل سيارة أو بيعيش بالشارع. ليش منساوي هيل بلبنان؟

نقل الدين

7. شو التقاليد الدينية يلي تعلّمتوها من أهلاتكم بعدها بتعنيلكم لهلأ؟ شو التقاليد او الطقوس او الممارسات يلي بتتمنوا تعلّموها للجيل الماروني الجديد؟

8. فكّرتوا شي مرة كيف أسماء الأشخاص بتدلّ على دينهم؟ ليش برأيكم في أهل بينقّوا أسماء لأولادهم بتدلّ على الدين المسيحي بشكل واضح؟ مثلاً إيلي، شربل، إلخ. كيف برأيكم هذا الشيء بيؤثر على الفرص المتاحة أمامهم بلبنان؟

إيجاد الحلول من خلال الدين

9. من شهرين، شفت شيء مثير للاهتمام على الأخبار وحابة أعرف رأيكم فيه: بتشرين الثاني، أخدوا تمثال لمار شربل لطبرجا بآخر الحدود البحرية ونزّلوه تحت المياه مع الجيش اللبناني. ليش برأيكم قررت البلدية والدولة أن تنزّل تمثال لمار شربل تحت المياه؟

10. برأيكم شيء مفيد لمّا الدولة تدخّل الدين بجهودها لحلّ المشاكل؟ إذا ايه، فيكم تعطوا مثل عن الممارسات الفضلى؟

11. شو بتعني العلمانية بالنسبة للشباب الماروني؟ تحديداً، شو الرأي العام بخصوص الزواج بين الطوائف؟

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