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MARI PARKKINEN

Fragmented Religion in a Turbulent Context

The Personal and Communal Dimensions of Christianity
in Palestinian Christians Lifeworlds

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the personal and communal dimensions of Christianity in fragmented Palestinian Christian lifeworlds. Religion is one of the most influential forces in human society. For example, religion influences personal and social life, such as family, community and economic and political lifeworlds. This study focuses on how religion is experienced and what meanings the Palestinian Christian study participants give to their religiosity in relation to these lifeworlds.

The study comprises four individual articles. Each approaches the main research question from a different perspective, thus broadening the understanding of the multifaceted role of religion in the lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians. Particularly, the study focuses on the meanings the interviewed Palestinian Christians give to their personal religiosity and their Christianity in relation to family, community and society.

The data were collected in Palestine and Israel in the spring and autumn of 2017. The data consist of thirty-five semi-structured face-to-face interviews with Palestinian Christians from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. The transcribed data were analysed with qualitative methods by applying a data-driven content analysis.

The main findings highlight the multifaceted role of religion in the lives of Palestinian Christians. Religion is not perceived as a personal and individual matter as it might be in the Western context but as a family and communal matter. Religion is interwoven in and comes between the personal spirituality, socioeconomic situation and psychosocial life of Palestinian Christians.

The study sheds light on personal spirituality in the midst of the ongoing Israel–Palestine conflict. The data reveal that prayer has a significant role in personal and communal religiosity; however, the conflict environment does not increase personal prayers for peace but for the safety and wellbeing of family members and close ones. The findings also highlight religious practice and church attendance as the primary means of religious socialisation. However, the data indicate that the younger generation leaves the choice of religious activity, such as church attendance, to their children.

Furthermore, the data indicate that denominational mobility is reality among Palestinian Christians, and one of the main reasons for mobility are personal beliefs and marital or family matters. Additionally, the data reveal that the primary identity marker is being Palestinian and the second is being Christian.

The research concludes that religion is a major factor in socioeconomic, psychosocial and personal lifeworlds of Palestinian Christian study participants. According to the data there are no indicators that the religion would fade away; however, it is changing to a more personal and individual choice.

Keywords: Palestinian Christians, Christian lifeworlds, denominational mobility, religious socialisation

Parkkinen, Mari

Pirstaleinen uskonnollisuus levottomassa ympäristössä - yksityisen ja yhteisöllisen kristinuskon ulottuvuudet palestiinalaiskristittyjen elämismaailmoissa
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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää kristinuskon henkilökohtaisia ja yhteisöllisiä ulottuvuuksia palestiinalaiskristittyjen elämismaailmoissa. Uskonto on yksi vahvimista vaikuttajista yhteiskunnassa. Uskonto vaikuttaa esimerkiksi henkilökohtaisissa sekä sosiaalisissa ja yhteiskunnallisissa elämismaailmoissa kuten perhe, yhteisö, talous ja politiikka. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy siihen, miten uskonto koetaan ja millaisia merkityksiä tutkimukseen osallistuneet palestiinalaiskristityt antavat uskonnolle omissa elämismaailmoissaan.

Tämä tutkimus koostuu neljästä artikkelista. Jokainen niistä lähestyy pää-tutkimuskysymystä eri näkökulmasta laajentaen käsitystä uskonnon monimuotoisesta roolista palestiinalaiskristittyjen elämismaailmoissa. Tutkimus keskittyy erityisesti niihin merkityksiin, joita tutkimuksessa haastatellut palestiinalaiskristityt antavat henkilökohtaiselle uskonnollisuudelleen ja kristinuskolle suhteessa perheeseen, yhteisöön ja yhteiskuntaan.

Tutkimusaineisto on kerätty Palestiinassa ja Israelissa keväällä 2017. Tutkimusaineisto käsittää kolmekymmentäviisi puolistrukturoitua teemahaastattelua palestiinalaiskristittyjen kanssa, jotka asuvat Länsirannalla, Itä-Jerusalemmissä ja Gazassa. Tutkimuksen analyysimetodi on kvalitatiivinen sisällön analyysi.

Päätutkimustulos alleviivaa uskonnon moninaista merkitystä palestiinalaiskristittyjen elämässä. Uskonto ei ole vain henkilökohtainen asia, kuten usein länsimaissa, vaan uskonto on perheen ja yhteisön asia. Uskonto on kudottu palestiinalaiskristittyjen henkilökohtaiseen hengellisyyteen, sosioekonomisiin tilanteisiin ja psykososiaaliseen elämään.

Tämä tutkimus valottaa henkilökohtaisen hengellisyyden merkitystä myös käynnissä olevan Palestiina-Israel konfliktin keskellä. Tutkimusaineistosta käy ilmi, että rukouksella on merkittävä sija henkilökohtaisessa ja yhteisöllisessä uskonnollisuudessa. Konfliktiympäristö ei kuitenkaan lisää rukouksia rauhan puolesta, vaan läheisten ja perheenjäsenten turvallisuuden ja hyvinvoinnin puolesta.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat myös, että uskonnolliset tavat ja kirkossa käyminen ovat ensisijaisia uskonnollisen socialisaation tapoja. Toisaalta, tutkimusaineiston mukaan nuorempi sukupolvi antaa lastensa itse päättää osallistuvatko nämä uskonnollisiin tapoihin, kuten kirkossakäymiseen ja näin uskonnollinen socialisaatio näyttäisi olevan muutoksessa.

Tutkimusaineisto osoittaa, että kirkkokuntien välistä liikkuvuutta tapahtuu palestiinalaiskristittyjen keskuudessa ja suurimmat syyt siihen ovat henkilökohtainen usko, sekä perhettä ja avioliittoa koskevat asiat. Lisäksi tutkimusaineisto osoitti, että tutkimukseen osallistuneiden ensisijainen identiteetti on palestiinalaisuus ja toinen kristillisuus.

Tutkimuksen loppupäätelmä on, että uskonto on merkittävä tekijä tutkimukseen osallistuneiden palestiinalaiskristittyjen sosioekonomisissa, psykososiaalisissa ja henkilökohtaisissa elämismaailmoissa. Tutkimusaineiston mukaan ei ole nähtävissä, että uskonto olisi häviämässä, mutta se on muuttumassa kohti yksityisempää ja on yhä henkilökohtaisempi valinta.

Avainsanat: Palestiinalaiskristityt, uskonnolliset elämismaailmat, kirkkokuntien välinen liikkuvuus, uskonnollinen socialisaatio

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"Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant"- Psalms 135:3

Imatra, 19.10.2021

Mari Parkkinen

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

This dissertation is based on the following publications and a manuscript:

ARTICLE I

Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2018). Prayer practices among Palestinian Christians in occupied Palestinian territory. *Approaching Religion*, 8(2), 54–69. <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.70464>

ARTICLE II

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ARTICLE IV

Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2020). Being Palestinian, Christian, and Arab—fragmented identity of Palestinian Christians. Manuscript submitted to *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 04/2021

The publications will be referred to in the text by their Roman number.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I was standing at a bus stop next to a Bethlehem checkpoint, waiting to be picked up for a Christian family trip in 2015. The bus was two hours late. When it arrived, the family worker explained that there had been difficulties with the permits to leave Bethlehem and travel to Israel. I had been working in Jerusalem for over a year, yet this trip was intended to broaden my understanding or, should I say, multiply my questions on the life situation of the Palestinian Christians in Palestine. The bus was full of families from different denominations, and many of them shared with me how this common family trip was the high point of their year.

As we travelled north, it became clear that many of them wanted to share their life stories. During the trip, Palestinian Christians shared their stories about how their families are separated because of the barrier between Israel and Palestine, how many of them have lost family members in the conflict and how some families are thinking of emigrating because of the socioeconomic difficulties. However, I also heard stories of prayer life, religious community support and the importance of one's church. This fascinating patchwork of religion in the lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians pushed me to search deeper into the manyfold meanings and relevance of religion in their fragmented lifeworlds.

Growing from this experience, the current study examines the multifaceted role of religion in the lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians. Religion is one of the most influential forces in human society. Religion influences, for example, one's personal and social life, such as family and community, but it also plays a role in economic and political lifeworlds (McGuire 2002, 1). The present study focuses on Palestinian Christian perspectives of their religiosity in these contexts.

We need to keep in mind that until there is a political settlement in the region, the definitions of the area change. We can identify several different definitions such as Ottoman Palestine which refers more to the region and not to a specific state, post 1948 state of Israel refers to the partition plan that was executed by the British governance, the Occupied Palestinian

territories(oPt) refers to areas the state of Israel occupied after the 1967 war and two state solution includes the 1993 Oslo accords (Bunton 2013). In this study I have chosen to use the term that rises from the research data. The definitions varies throughout the study. When talking about prayer life, the study participants referred often to the occupied Palestinian territories whereas when talking about their identity, the definition was Palestinian and referring to the historic Palestine and the modern time state of Palestine.

There are a little over 50,000 Palestinian Christians living in Palestine, that is, the areas of West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. In the state of Israel, including the occupied Palestinian territories, there are about 120,000 Palestinian Christians, and they make up less than one and a half percent of the Palestinian population and less than two percent of the Israeli population. Additionally, more than 80 per cent of the half a million diaspora Palestinians living in Latin America are Christian Palestinians making this community the biggest Palestinian Christian community in the world, even over the original homeland (Sabella 2018, 142; Raheb 2012, 9). The current study, however, focuses on Palestinian Christians living in Palestine.

The historical, political, and religious aspects of Palestinian Christians lifeworlds are unique. The historical aspects show the rich Arab cultural background in Palestinian Christians lifeworlds. Arabization of the area in the 7th century (Lockman 2010, 21–24) moulded the language and the cultural customs of the Palestinian Christian community. The political aspects shed light to the reality of Palestinian Christians modern time everyday life challenges such as the restrictions of movement and separations of families due to the barrier Israel constructed since 2002 (Sabella 2018, 145–146), and wars and violence that affect the families. The lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians are also affected by the colonialist aspects such as the partition plans of the Land, military and religious control exercised throughout the modern history by the Western states and religious groups (Raheb 2017, 261). Furthermore, the religious mosaic, living as a religious minority between majority Muslim and Jewish communities, being the heirs of the original Christian communities and sharing the Christian identity through manifold of Christian churches shape the religious life in the Palestinian Christian communities (Sabella

2018, 140–41). Thus, it is particularly interesting to study the personal and communal aspects of religion in these fragmented lifeworlds.

The present study stands at the crossroads of sociology of religion and psychology of religion. The focus is on personal experiences in different lifeworlds, for example, the meanings between individual, community and value systems given by an individual. A lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) refers to the body of meanings between the individual, community, social interactivity and value system that are given by the individual (Varto 1992; Porter and Cohen 2012, 181–182). In an individual's life, religion can be perceived from different aspects, such as religion as practice, religion as belief or meaning, religion as identity, religion as social structure (McGuire 2002) or as coping method in a difficult life situation (Pargament 1997). In this study, I will use a concept of religious lifeworlds referring to the personal experiences and meanings the study participants give to their lifeworlds in their personal and communal religious life and in their religious interactions in the family, community or society.

It is essential to keep in mind that some of the study concepts and methods used in this study have been created in the Western context. Mahmood Saba (2012) discusses religious minority identity in the context of Christianity in the Middle East and argues that the concept as such is a product of Western thinking and is often used for the benefit of Western political powers. Furthermore, the concept of belonging to a church has different connotations in Western and Middle Eastern context. The Western understanding of belonging is very individual whereas the Middle Eastern is very communal. Also, the ways of gather study information may be affected by different cultural or political situations. In the midst of a conflict trust plays a major role and this needs to be taken into consideration when arranging the face-to-face interviews. On the other hand, Mahmood (2016) points out that for example when talking about religion and secularism it is important to understand the same structures of private and public dimensions of religion that shape the religiosity are present both in Western and Middle Eastern context. Keeping this diversity in mind, the present study tries to be true to the local experiences of religion in the different lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians.

The Palestinian Christian religious context is heavily influenced by the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has been going on for over fifty years and has caused anxiety while affecting different aspects of life. Palestinian experience, for example, oppression, restrictions of movement, deteriorating living conditions and vast emigration because of these challenges (OCHA Factsheet, 2017). Previous studies suggest that religion is a major coping method in the midst of a volatile life environment (Pat-Horenczyk et al. 2009, 700–2; Sousa 2013, 515). Furthermore, studies indicate that personal and institutional prayer help to cope in volatile situations (Sousa 2013, 514–515; Häkkinen 2014, 38). However, these studies fail to examine the contents and factors in the prayers that help. One aspect of the current study is to examine these issues.

Religious lifeworlds also include relationships in family and community (McGuire 2002, 53–58). In the heart of religious family and community life is religious socialisation, which directs religious behaviour and the belief system. Religious socialisation can be perceived from individual, communal or societal perspectives (Bronfenbrenner 1981, 3–4). Palestinian society is patriarchal and traditional, and these aspects are also present in the life of Palestinian Christians. Family matters and religious traditions are highly regarded; previous studies indicate that family has the strongest influence on religious socialisation (Ozorak 1989, 460–461; Niemelä 2006, 164–165).

Furthermore, if the religious community is a minority religion in society, as Palestinian Christians are between the major Jewish and Muslim religions, it often strengthens religious socialisation and expression of religious identity (Kuusisto 201, 52–53). The Palestinian Christian community is multifaceted, and the families often include members from different denominations. Thus, religious socialisation may have special features, which the current study sheds light on.

The religious lifeworld also includes connections, interactions and religious mobility in the community. Previous studies have indicated there are general influences on denominational mobility, such as geography, personal life events such as marriage or conversion and status (Kluegel 1980, 26–39). Furthermore, research indicates four different aspects in denominational

mobility: *stability, crossing, switching* and *apostasy*, all of which have possible personal, communal or institutional reasons (Suh and Russel 2015, 25–41).

The Palestinian Christian community is diverse and relatively small. The 50,000 Christians in Palestine are divided into thirteen traditional denominations and several nondenominational congregations. The interactions, relations and connections among Palestinian Christians are tight and diverse. Because family members may belong to different denominations and the community is relatively small, denominational mobility is almost inevitable. However, this matter has not been studied among Palestinian Christians, and thus, the current study is ground-breaking regarding denominational mobility and the motives for it in this community.

Meanings and value systems can also be observed through one's understanding of identity. Identity is multidimensional because it is individual and subjective, yet at the same time, it is embedded in the social realm. A modern understanding of identity is flexible and variable, not just something that is given to us, but also something that can be created (Chaffee 2011, 100). Previous studies suggest that identity is an inward understanding of oneself that is in contact with outworld realities, such as culture, religion or society (Wearing 2011, vii–ix). Palestinian Christian identity is like a patchwork quilt, as Amin Maloof describes it (Maloof 2012). Palestinian Christians identify as Arab, Christian and Palestinian. The identity is knitted of ethnic, religious and national identities, and this multifaceted structure can cause personal, communal and societal challenges.

These many aspects of Palestinian Christian lifeworlds are the prime focus of the current study. However, the lifeworld also includes the surrounding context: the ongoing conflict and religious plurality. Thus, it is necessary to understand the different factors, which are explored next.

2. MULTIFACETED ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE PALESTINIAN CHRISTIAN LIFEWORLDS

2.1. Palestinian Christian context

Many Palestinian Christians trace their ancestors back to the first centuries of Christianity's existence. They are proud to say that Christianity started from their backyard, and they are the ones who have been keeping its history alive. Thus, you hear them quite often refer to themselves as 'living stones', a community of people that keep alive a heritage of history that is often connected to the ancient stone buildings and historical sites. (Sabella 1999, 82–83). Christian communities are found in fifteen different localities in Palestine; the biggest ones are in the Beit Shaour and Beit Jala villages next to Bethlehem and Bethlehem City.

There are two main features that have drastically shaped and moulded the modern Palestinian Christian community: the manifold of different churches in a relatively small geographical area (Sabella 2018, 140; Raheb 2017, 250–252) and the political development of the State of Israel (Raheb 2018, 381–384). These major features have also affected the lived religion in the personal lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians, such as marital life and personal religiosity; they also contribute to fragmented identity between being Arab, Christian and Palestinian. To understand the mosaic of lifeworlds in which Palestinian Christians live, it is essential to understand the impact of these different features.

The mosaic of the different rites and denominations in Palestine began to form in the beginning of the fourth century when new churches were built on ancient Christian places; Calvary was identified, and Basilica of Nativity in Bethlehem was built above the grotto venerated as the birth place of Jesus (Colbi 1988, 10–11). Many Christian communities had emerged in Armenia, Egypt, Antioch, Ephesus, Ethiopia and Syria. In the beginning of the fifth century, the Holy Land and Jerusalem saw pilgrims coming and eventually staying in the land. Many monasteries, convents and hospices were established.

The Greek Orthodox Church is considered the oldest organised church in Palestine; however, other national churches were also represented (Colbi 1988, 14–18; Cross 1988, 7).

The Protestant churches arrived in Palestine in the nineteenth century following the craze of global missions. A joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric was established in 1841 but already in 1886, the two churches continued as individual churches. The Protestant church family also included the Church of Scotland, Baptist Church and several nondenominational churches. Establishing the new churches and living side by side was not always easy. Accusations of proselytism have been heard from many churches (Sabella 2018, 141; Raheb 2018, 254–257).

Nowadays, there are thirteen traditional churches in Palestine, and they are often grouped into Greek Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox (Oriental), Roman Catholic (Latin) and the Evangelicals and Anglican. Additionally, there are several nondenominational churches in Palestine (Raheb 2012, 34). This kind of manifold of denominations creates a certain richness and challenges as well. For individual Palestinian Christians, it can mean ecumenical marriage or living their religious life in several communities because the Palestinian Christian community is relatively small overall and people often cross to other denominations for personal or family matters.

The other main feature that has affected—and still is affecting—Palestinian Christian communities is the political development of the State of Israel. The aftermath of the withdrawal of the British mandate forces and the declaration of the State of Israel by the Jewish community hit the Palestinian Christian community hard in May 1948. During the Arab-Israeli war, more than 50,000 Palestinian Christians had to leave their homes in areas that would be the State of Israel, and these individuals became refugees. Around thirty-five percent of Palestinian Christians lost their land, possessions and work. Half of the refugees fled to Lebanon, and the other half settled in the West Bank and Jordan. The percentage of Palestinian Christians in Palestine dropped from eight percent to just under three percent in a few months (Raheb 2018, 381).

The Palestinian Christian community is also affected by socioeconomic challenges as the Israeli occupation continues, and internal political division in the Palestinian Authority causes challenges, such as corruption and political

power struggles. The continuous wars, blockades and intifadas have further weakened the socioeconomic situation. The barrier that Israel has built around the West Bank and the Israeli-controlled restrictions of movement between Israel and Palestine and within Palestine reduces the possibility of reaching workplaces outside of the West Bank. The unemployment rate is high, at over forty percent, among Palestinians, and Palestinian Christians are no exception (West Bank – The World Factbook (cia.gov)). The barrier also continues the forcible displacements of family members.

Because of the deteriorating socioeconomic situation and lack of freedom and security, emigration among Palestinian Christians is vast. The emigration of Palestinian Christians can be seen as part of a larger mass emigration in the world or the Middle East; however, the Palestinian context has its own special features. Raheb (Raheb et al. 2017) points out that the emigration of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has mostly been forcible displacement and because of British mandate colonial policies and the ongoing Israeli occupation. As the socioeconomic situation has deteriorated in Palestine, many Palestinian Christians have fled in pursuit of a better livelihood and security. Research conducted in 2017 shows that the main reasons for emigration are lack of freedom and security, here because Israeli discriminatory policies obstruct Palestinians from pursuing certain degrees such as medicine and technology, and discriminatory employment policies that hinder Palestinians from obtaining employment possibilities (Raheb et al. 2017). Recent research by the Diyar team in 2017 shows that twenty-eight percent of Palestinian Christians are considering emigration. Thus, emigration is a real threat to the Palestinian Christian community vanishing (Raheb et al. 2017).

This mosaic of different Palestinian Christian lifeworlds also includes a layered identity. Identity includes nationality as Palestinian, ethnic identity as Arab and religious identity as Christian. Historically, Palestinian Christians have identified themselves as Palestinians and Arabs. However, because of the recent changes in the political and religious atmosphere in the Middle East, religion has become more important. The political turmoil has caused a sense of marginalisation among Palestinian Christians. The shared Palestinian and Arab identity with the Muslim majority is challenged because of the politisation of religion (Sabella 2015, 53–59). Attitudes and changes in

society also challenge the personal view of one's identity and may cause life revolutions. Layered identity also includes the socialisation of children, what aspects are important in how the religious or cultural heritage is passed on to the next generation.

Palestinian Christians live their religious lives in all these different lifeworlds. Religion can be a source of personal relief in the midst of ongoing conflict, and it can be a challenge or richness in a family's religious life or in a fragmented identity forming.

2.2. Religion in a conflict context

Religion is a multifilament (diverse) factor in a conflict context. It can be seen as the reason for a conflict, and at the same time, it can provide coping in the midst of a conflict. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is not a religious conflict per se. However, religion is a major factor in the present situation in the area and plays a major role in the context of the conflict. It is argued that historically, the rivalry is based on religiously coloured nationalism and partition of the land (Bennet 2008). During recent decades, religion has gained a significant role in the conflict as an identity marker (Munayer and Horenczyk 2014, 368).

Religious violence has been studied widely during the last decades. Juergensmeyer introduces in his widely cited *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (2017) the notion of cosmic war. The true believers, Juergensmeyer argues, see themselves as a religious weapon in the God's military fight between good and bad on Earth. Appleby provides three categories; *strong religion* referring to deadly violence that is justified by religion, *weak religion*, presents religion as dependent variable in the religious violence that has its source in secular premises such as nationalism and *pathological religion* that shapes the religion violence depending on the psycho-social variables (Appleby 2015, 33-49). These different aspects of religious violence can be found in the midst of the Palestine- Israel context. Religious extremists on both sides use the harsh language of God's war and

the acts of violence can be seen as strong religious statements or result of for example, the socio-economic reasons.

Religion and violence can be viewed from the empirical perspectives too. Wright and Khoo (2019) argue in their study on religion and violence that the links between aggression and religious violence include general psychological processes. It is also argued that religious behaviour may breed or reduce religious violence. Religious identity is a major factor in religious violence and if there is threat to collective identity, i.e. religious group identity, it can trigger emotional and aggressive behaviour (Beit-Hallahmi 2015, 54). On the other hand, there are studies that indicate that participating religious activity such as praying for the counterpart, reduces anger and aggression towards this person (Bremner et al. 2011).

It is argued that it is not only religion that causes the conflict. Quite often, it is pointed out that socioeconomic, identity, tribal or political issues are the reasons behind the conflicts that sidelines religious lines (Bennet 2008, 7). Even if these other factors can be proven, it cannot be denied that religion plays a role in many conflicts and is a factor in violence (Bennet 2008, 7). Clinton Bennet also argues that it is the manipulation of religion that causes violence; for example, the distribution of power, wealth or—in the Palestinian case—partition of land stays unresolved, thus causing tensions between religious groups (Bennet 2008, 11).

It cannot be denied that religion has caused many conflicts and is a source of disagreements. For example, in the Northern Ireland conflict, however political the conflict was, there were two Christian denominations fighting with each other, and in the Balkan conflict, there were two different religions fighting (Bennet 2008). The consequences have been devastating.

On the other hand, religion is seen as a coping method and relief in the midst of a conflict. Wars and deteriorating possibilities for livelihood cause anxiety, fear and health issues, among other things (Thabet et al. 2002, 1802–3; Dubow et al. 2012, 841–2; Hobfoll 2012, 16–18), and in a conflict or war situation, people use religion as a coping strategy and turn to religion or religious organisations for material or immaterial help (Häkkinen 2014; Sousa 2013; Pargament 1997; Parkkinen 2018).

Personal religious coping can include personal prayer for the safety of oneself and one's family in a volatile environment. Religious coping can also include institutional and organisational support in the midst of a conflict (Sousa 2013, 514–15). Furthermore, praying with others can also create a collective identity that supports the individual (Fuist 2015, 528, 533). This kind of collective religious identity is increasingly evident in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, too.

2.3. Religion in a social context

Religion is a multifaceted phenomenon and the debate on how the concept of religion should or could be defined is going on. Furthermore, the concept of religion has been argued to be a modern concept that narrows the understanding of the deeper and wider meanings of what religion is (Barth and Green 2006). The concept of religion has also been argued to be too Christian (Luckmann 1974) or too Western and colonial biased (Asad 1993).

Religion has numerous definitions and meanings, depending on the research field. The sociology of religion seeks to understand the different meanings of religion for an individual and how religion influences society and vice versa (McGuire 2002, 1). The psychology of religion emphasises personal experience (James 1902) or personal beliefs, practices and rituals (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997). Anthropological approach emphasises a somewhat ethnographical approach to religious culture and rituals (Lambek 2013, 2–4), while religious education emphasises issues such as teaching religion in schools or faith-based organisations (Broadbent and Brown 2002). Without saying, it is obvious that in all these fields, there are numerous definitions and meanings of what religion is.

Sociologist Linda Woodhead argues that it is not so important to clarify the term or even the concept of religion but to have critical awareness of how these different forms of religion are in play in research (Woodhead 2011, 122). The present study stands on sociological grounds; however, there are some echoes of the psychology of religion, especially in the section concerning personal prayer.

Religion can be perceived from individual, social and institutional perspectives. Individual perspective includes aspects such as personal meaning making, belonging, identity and religious experiences. These are all personal aspects yet are experienced or created in social interactions with, for example, family, friends, religious organisation or a 'higher being', if that is what the person believes (McGuire 2002, 52–73). This personal religiosity is situated in the social realm; if interpreted in a very Durkheimian way, religion maintains social cohesion (Wilson 1982, 33) because the experiences and religious symbols are interpreted socially. The institutional perspective taps the organised religiosity that includes aspects such as doctrine, ethics and formal membership (McGuire 2002, 99–102).

I find Linda Woodhead's (2011) five different aspects of religion rather suitable for the study of religion because the aspects in religion intersect and overlap. Woodhead talks about religion as culture, identity, relationships, practice and power (Woodhead 2011, 121–122).

Religion as culture includes aspects such as religion as belief or meaning, doctrines and believing in supernatural beings, a system of meanings making sense of the world (Berger 1967), along with religion as societal values, religion as discourse or narrative embedded in culture and collective memory and tradition (Woodhead 2011, 123). Hervieu-Léger describes the roots of collective religious tradition as a chain of memory, yet she notes that the subjunctivisation of religion challenges the collective approach (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 138–141).

Religion as identity includes, for example, the creation and maintenance of social bonds and one's personal identity-claiming as an individualised and psychological account of identity. It also refers to organisational belonging, such as being a member of a church or attending services or an affiliation with a certain group of believers (Woodhead 2011, 127–132). However, we need to bear in mind that the questions of identity and belonging are different in patriarchal and clan-based communities, such as Palestinian Christians, from the Western kind where there is a rather individual approach. Additionally, Palestinian Christians are a religious minority between the Jewish and Muslim majorities, and minority identity is often expressed in one's individual social lifeworlds.

Religion as a relationship includes not only human relations, but also nonempirical beings, such as God or other supernatural beings such as angels. Religious experiences are usually counted as nonsociological phenomena; however, religious experiences take place in the sociosymbolic setting of the religious realm (Woodhead 2011, 127–132; McGuire 2002, 18–19). In the field of the psychology of religion, following in the footsteps of William James (1902/2005), Gordon W. Allport emphasises the large variety of subjective and personal religious experiences arising, for example, from a person's personality, temperament and personal meaning-making. Allport acknowledges personal experience as being important as any other interpretation of religion (Allport 1950, 1–30). Additionally, Kenneth Pargament has done groundbreaking research on psychology of religion and coping (Pargament 1997, 6–14, 24–33).

Religion as practice refers, for example, to the rituals that engage individuals in formalised social performances; however, it is also important to understand the domestic or intimate practices that have significance for the participants. Religious practice also includes folk religion, which quite often has been seen as an opposite to literate theology or the official doctrine. These aspects have been studied in current studies under lived religion or practised religion (Woodhead 2011, 132–134). As Greeley argues, institutional churches play a significant role in religion; however, religion emerges from the daily life of a religious individual (Greeley 1982, 1–3). It is also noteworthy that the official or approved collective narrative may differ from a personal unofficial or hidden version of the religiosity in the community (Droeber 2014, 1–3).

Religion as power can refer to aspects such as relationships with some higher power that can be worshipped, drawn upon or manipulated. Furthermore, these transcended powers are often linked to certain individuals or religious organisations that have an acknowledged relation to these higher powers and, thus, exercise power as well. Additionally, religion often offers worldly and other-worldly rewards that may be obtained only by the religious. Religion can also be a resource of social capital that may bring resources, status or recognition to the life of an individual. Finally, religion has played a major role in political power as a motivative and legitimating force (Woodhead 2011,

134–137). It is noteworthy that in the Palestinian context, religious laws such as sharia in Islam and the clerical courts of Christian churches affect the lives of individuals.

3. RESEARCHING RELIGION IN THE FRAGMENTED LIFEWORLDS OF PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

3.1. Aim of the research and methodological approach

The aim of the current study is to explore the role of religion in the lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians. To achieve this aim, I examined personal religiosity in the midst of prolonged Israel-Palestine conflict and in the context of family and community. Furthermore, the aim was to explore the experience of religious, cultural and ethnic identity. Four research questions were formulated, and each research question was explored in an article, as follows:

1. How prayer helps in prolonged conflict environment, what kind of prayers are prayed, and how these different kinds of prayers are utilised across generations? (Article I)
2. How Christianity is lived in families, how the religious socialisation happens in Palestinian Christian families, and how does religious socialisation affect the formation of religious identity? (Article II)
3. How does denominational mobility happen in Palestinian Christian families, and what are the motives for it? (Article III)
4. How are Christian, Arab and Palestinian identities experienced, and what aspects are highly regarded? (Article IV)

These different research question shed light to the role of religion in the lives of the study participants. As the aim of this study is to understand the role of religion in different lifeworlds, it was justified to start from the private aspects and work towards the public sphere. I chose the personal prayerlife as the starting point as the data showed it was the first thing participants mention when talking about their religiosity and it was a religious practice all the participants mentioned. The exact subjects for the different articles rose from the data, however, as the interviews were semi-structured, I had

developed ten different themes for the research according to the experiences I had with the Palestinian Christians when living and working there. I chose these four themes as individual articles because they reveal the personal, communal and societal lifeworlds in interaction. Thus, I wanted to explore specially these aspects as they seemed to be the most important ones to answer the research question.

The current study uses qualitative methods to answer these questions. The current thesis discusses the findings of the four articles and sets them in dialogue with each other and the wider research on religious lifeworlds. This matter is approached from personal and social perspectives. To explore these two premises, I chose to approach the matter from the perspective of the psychology of religion and sociology of religion. Article I focuses on the personal experiences of prayer and, thus, the psychological approach to religion, but personal religion is lived in relation to society. Thus, I also needed to explore the issue from a sociology of religion perspective. The first article on personal prayer life revealed issues such as praying with family and community, which then led to the next article on religious socialisation in family. The answers about socialisation included several mentions of ecumenical families, and these then led to the next article on denominational mobility. The article on denominational mobility included several signals of identity; thus, the fourth article taps the fragmented identity that was present in all the previous articles.

For the personal experience approach of prayer life as a coping method in the midst of the ongoing conflict, I chose hermeneutic phenomenology as the epistemological premise of the study. A lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) refers to the body of meanings between the individual, community, social interactivity and value system that are given by the individual (Varto 1992; Porter and Cohen 2012, 181–182). An individual's personal experience, the knowledge and a direct report of these experiences are the central points in phenomenology. A hermeneutical approach refers to the interpretation and understanding of this phenomenon (Porter and Cohen 2012, 182). Thus, the hermeneutic phenomenology approach is to study how people interpret their lives and what meanings they give to their experiences (Cohen et al. 2000, 5).

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is considered to be the founder of phenomenology (Husserl, 1964), and his assistant, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), developed hermeneutics. There are three key elements in phenomenology: intentionality, essence and reduction. Intentionality refers to the mind's natural conscious relationship to an object, in other words, to something other (Sokolowski 2000, 8–16). Essences refer to the importance of the original nature of the experience as it was conceived. Bracketing or reduction refers to general practice and attitude where the researchers put aside their previous assumptions of the phenomenon at hand (Porter and Cohen 2012; Husserl 1906/7/2008, 222–227). The hermeneutic approach includes a *hermeneutic circle* where the researcher returns to the data over and over again seeking possible meanings and interpretations, and through this, parts of text are understood in relation to whole text and vice versa (Porter and Cohen 2012, 181).

The sociology of religion approach enabled me to explore how individuals and their religious actions relate to other people and all society, whether it is the Palestinian Christian community or the surrounding Palestinian society. When individuals put their private beliefs into action, it puts the individual into the realm of the social (Christiano et al. 2002, 3). The Palestinian Christian religious context is very communal, and personal religion is strongly attached to the religious life of Christian community. Thus, it was essential to combine these two psychological and sociological premises of religion.

In the current study, the echoes of hermeneutic phenomenology are present throughout the research process. The subject of the research arose from a shared experience with Palestinian Christians. I lived and worked in Israel and Palestine for three years. Living and working with the community and hearing about their many life situations confirmed the necessity for further study. It was essential to understand the living environment of Palestinian Christians and the meaning Palestinian Christians give to their Christianity in the midst of a turbulent context. One of the main focuses of the research was to hear and explore the first-hand experiences of the people. It was also important to distance myself as a researcher and work without prejudice. This comprehensive Heideggerian attitude (Cohen et al. 2000) was applied in every step of the research.

Especially in the first article on prayer practices, the starting point of the ontological understanding in the psychology of religion approach is theological relativism, or the understanding that there are other grounds that people base religious beliefs on and that these grounds support their beliefs. This other ground can be perceived as God (Alston 1991, 286). The study data revealed that the participants experienced God as an existing entity or a personal being with whom they could be in contact with. Thus, it was appropriate to choose theological relativism as the ontological starting point for the study.

3.2. Data

The data for the current study consist of thirty-five face-to-face interviews with Palestinian Christians. Gathering data in a volatile environment requires firm preparations and the building of trust before the actual interviews can take place. In a volatile environment, trust is an essential aspect of research, and gaining access to the possible participants takes time and effort. Access to possible participants happened mostly through gatekeepers, the individuals who knew the community or organisation or a group of people (Padgett 2012, 84; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 49–53). Via e-mail, I contacted these individuals, for example, the head of the university, leading pastors, club leaders and so on and visited them in person. These gatekeepers then introduced me to the people in their churches after services, during club meetings or after class.

The data gathering process started in spring 2016 when I visited these different gatekeepers. During these meetings, it became clear that it was not possible to send an online circular invitation for the parishioners but that I would have to visit the congregations in person and give a spoken invitation. This was because of trust issues in volatile environments and a lack of internet access. In April 2016, I conducted three pilot interviews to test the research questions and adjust them if needed. These first contacts happened in 2016 when I was still living in Jerusalem. Before returning home in August

2016, I had arranged church meetings for January 2017 when I would return to the field for three months.

To recruit participants for the current study, I visited four Sunday church services (mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic). I also visited three church organisations (Greek Catholic, mainline Protestant and Greek Orthodox) and one Christian social club. In all these locations, I announced an open invitation. I also visited four Christian schools and one university, where I was introduced to the staff and students and was given an opportunity to invite participants to take part in the study. I offered an open invitation to participate in the research and gave my contact information for later contact.

One-fourth of the participants were recruited via the snowball method, where a participant introduced me to the next possible interviewee. This allowed access to the smaller communities and also helped recruit people who were not active church goers. The challenge with the snowball method is that it might lead to same-minded people; however, in a conflict environment, the effectiveness of the snowball method is recognised because in volatile situations, mistrust is very common and the snowball method increases the likelihood of trusting the researcher (Cohen and Arieli 2011). The interviews were conducted in various places, such as my office, school libraries, restaurants and private homes. For the sake of security, the specific places are not mentioned.

Most of the interviews were conducted in February, March and April of 2017. I also conducted three interviews on the Israeli side; however, during the interviews, it became clear that the circumstances of the lifeworlds were so different between Israel and Palestine that it would not be possible to have both in one study. Thus, I decided to focus on the Palestinian Christians living in Palestine. During the three months, I conducted thirty-one interviews and, after returning home, started to transcribe the interviews verbatim. During the first close reading, I realised that I did not have any participants from the Oriental Orthodox church, so I planned a new field trip for autumn 2017 and conducted four more interviews in East Jerusalem. The interviews were held in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and via Skype to the Gaza Strip. I travelled

to the West Bank by local transportation, and this offered the possibility to observe where the Palestinian Christians lived.

The criteria for recruitment were identifying oneself as Palestinian or Arab Christian and age over 18. Seventeen participants were women and eighteen were men. They were from Beit Jala, Beit Shaour, Bethlehem, Qalandiya, Ramallah, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. They represented nine different denominations; eleven were from the Greek Orthodox family, nine the Catholic family, eleven the mainline Protestant family, two from the Evangelical family and two from the Eastern Orthodox family of churches.

The language of the interview was English; however, an option to have an interpreter was offered, and one participant chose this option. Many Palestinian Christians are skilled with languages, English is widely studied, and many Palestinian Christians are fluent in English. The average duration of the interviews was from forty to fifty minutes. Such long interviews reflect the willingness of the participants to share their life stories. The verbatim transcription of the data comprises 323 pages (*Calibri Body 11*, 1.5 paragraph spacing).

The interviews included individual and pair interviews. Twenty-seven of the interviews were conducted with individuals and pair interviews with four pairs (eight persons). The pair interviews included young adults who did not want to participate on their own and an elderly couple. After oral permission, the interviews were recorded on tape; however, each participant was given an opportunity not to be recorded, and three study participants chose this option. In this case, the interview was conducted with paper and pen.

The quality of the interviews was affected by the place and situation of the interviews because they were conducted in several different places. Because of the restrictions of movement, most of the interviews were conducted in the West Bank. Fourteen of the interviews were conducted in the workplace where the interviewee worked, such as schools, travel agencies and handicraft shops. All the university students (eight) were interviewed in the university meeting room or library. Six interviews were conducted at the homes of the interviewees, three in a public cafeteria, two at my office and two via skype to Gaza. The atmosphere was more relaxed when the interview was conducted at the interviewees' homes. It also offered time for lengthy conversations and

in-depth discussions. The interviews in the school or university environment meant a structured one-hour timetable. During the interviews, it became clear that one hour was sufficient for the research questions because after that, the answers started repeating. It is also noteworthy that even in a public cafeteria, the interviews were very personal, and the interviewees openly shared their life situations.

In addition to the interviews, I kept a separate diary for personal reflections during the data collection. The diary was not used for the analysis but to reflect the personal thoughts during the research process. All the materials were kept under protection and carefully stored in a locked office during the fieldwork, and special measures for security were carried out.

The data collection method was face-to-face semi-structured interviews. I chose the face-to-face interview because it allowed more complex questions than plain questionnaire (Lawrence 2012). Meeting face-to-face also allowed interpersonal interaction which is important for possible explanations and clarifications. Furthermore, meeting face-to-face was chosen due to trust issues in conflict environment, thus meeting face-to-face was essential for this study.

The interviews were semi-structured, open-ended questions, and the discussions were rather informal. As I wanted to ensure that the research interviews would be credible and consistent, I chose to use a semi-structured interview. I used a semi-structured guideline of the selected themes, which I chose and tested with pilot interviews based on the aim of the study and my previous knowledge of the context (Kallio et al. 2016). I started the interviews by inviting the participant to share something about her/himself and continued with ten different themes, such as practising religion, religion and family, coping in the midst of the ongoing conflict, God and the Bible, interfaith, ecumenism and the future. The questions began with phrases such as 'What do you think of...?' or 'Please, tell me about...?', followed by clarifying subquestions.

Open-ended semi-structured questions offer a possibility to address specific topics while providing the space for the interviewee to offer new insights into the matter at hand (Galletta 2013; Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2014). Semi-structured interviews also enable the interviewer to deepen the insight

with improvised follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses (Rubin and Rubin 2004). Semi-structured open-ended research is time-consuming to conduct and analyse; however, one strong motive for choosing open-ended questions was to give a voice to the Palestinian Christians and provide an opportunity for grassroots Palestinian Christians to speak about their lives in their own voices. It is also noteworthy that much research on the sociology of religion relies on quantitative surveys, and the categories used may limit the ability to illuminate the multifaceted role of religion in different lifeworlds. Qualitative open-ended interviews, as used in this study, allow an opportunity to explore and broaden understanding of the significant meaning of religion in Palestinian Christian context.

The challenge with semi-structured interviews is how to ensure the credibility of the research. Some pitfalls include issues such as selecting the interviewees, believability of the interviewees, position of the interviewer and transparency of the analysis (Rubin and Rubin 2004, 65–77; Cleary et al. 2014). Additionally, there is an 'interviewer effect', where, for example, the background or sex of the interviewer might influence how much the interviewee is willing to share information (Wilson 2013, 26–27). In my case, this came up twice when the interviewee referred to me being a minister and hesitating to share negative thoughts about their church ministers.

3.3. Analysis

The current study used qualitative methods. In qualitative research, there are many possible analysis methods, and this is the strength and, at the same time, the challenge of it (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018). Describing the analysis process is challenging because the process is multifaceted and there are multiple practices that constitute the analysis (Gibson and Brown 2009, 3). The analysis starts in thinking of the research plan and continues throughout the data collection and conceptual reflections and final report. These features overlap during the analysis because the different phases are revisited during the analysis. The analysis process is even more complex in a study such as this one, which comprises four different articles.

The aim of the present study was to examine the experiences and meanings the study participants gave to their religiosity in their life situations. Thus, for the analysis, I chose to apply an inductive data-driven content analysis throughout the whole study. The content analysis starts by reading the body text several times and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the matter. Content analysis also involves understanding of the context where the body data is produced and the previous knowledge the researcher brings to the project (Klenke 2015, 96–98). I started the content analysis with close reading the whole data word by word and line by line. I had conducted and transcribed all the interviews by myself, thus I had a good understanding of the whole research data.

During the reading phases, it became clear that manual close reading would be the best way to approach the data because English was not the mother tongue of the study participants and the expressions were inconsistent and scattered. Additionally, it became clear that the analysis units should not be cut into too small a section for the sake of understanding the dependencies and connections between the different religious aspects in the lifeworlds of the study participants.

After several closereadings, I started coding the whole research data. For open-coding, I used single words and short sequences of words (Klenke 2015, 99). The coding included also highlighting specific words and using top word lists. I then organized the data according the research questions and did more specific coding in each different data which are explained below. The semi-structured interview themes led to structuring the analysis; however, the original data was a determinative source for arranging the data.

The methodological choices in each article rose from the data. I started the analysis in every article with specific content analysis, however, for example, the Article II examines religious socialization and using thematic analysis (Nowell et al. 2017), I was able to detect patterns and themes in the religious socialization.

As part of the analysis, I conducted a content breakdown in each article data and thus, some of the results are also offered in numerical forms. I have done this quantizing in order to emphasize the importance of the meaning. The usage of numerical data in qualitative research is, however, controversial

(Maxwell 2010). During the past decades the support for using numeric data in qualitative research has grown (Schwandt 2007, Heath & Street 2008, 92–93). It is also argued that even the expressions such as “some” and “most” that are often used in qualitative research include numerical data (Becker 1970).

The content analysis through the whole data revealed that every research participant discussed praying; thus, this became the starting point of the research. I started the analysis for Article I with a close reading of the data and formed categories based on what the actual prayer was, that is, if the person asked for material or immaterial things, was indicating gratitude or expressing thanksgiving, using written or ritualistic prayers such as the ‘Our Father’ or prayers from prayer books or if they expressed silent adoration or physical sensations during the prayer. I formed four different themes: petitionary, ritualistic, meditative and religious experiences. I then closely reread the data and detected what kind of varied prayers each theme included. I also examined the results from an age perspective. I arranged the data on age in three categories—young adults, middle-aged and elderly—and then examined how prayer life varied in these different categories. As the background theory in Article I, I used Pargament’s (1997) religious coping theory. The answers to prayer included several mentions of praying for and with the family in church or the family home. This led me to examine how religion was presented in family life.

I started the analysis for Article II with a close reading of the whole data and formed a new text file with all the entities where the participants talked about religiosity in their family. I conducted word searches through the whole data for words such as ‘family’, ‘church’, ‘children’, ‘prayer’ and ‘holy communion’. I then simplified the expressions and found thirty-nine simplified expressions, such as going to church with the family, family devotion and teaching prayers. I then formed different themes, such as practising religion, religious education, and Christian ethics. Through analysing these themes, I then formed three final themes on religious socialisation: religious socialisation through practising religion, the influence of religious socialisation on identity forming and religious socialisation in activities outside of the family. The answers to religious socialisation included indications of multiple denominations in families and the challenges caused by this in religious socialisation. This led

me to examine denominational mobility among the Palestinian Christian community.

The analysis for Article III started with studying the background information. I organised the data by the denominations, age and gender of the participants and created worksheets including information such as the childhood denomination and current self-reported denomination, denomination of the spouse and church attendance. I then closely read the data and formed an understanding of the prevalence of denominational mobility among the Palestinian Christians. After a close reading of the data, I created new files for those who indicated being stable in their denomination, those who indicated crossing to another denomination from their self-reported denomination and those who indicated switching their denomination. I then closely read these data again and explored the different motives for possible crossing, switching or being stable in one's denomination. I then deepened the analysis by studying the motives from a gender and age perspective. The background theory in Article II is the rational choice theory of religion (RCTR), which suggests that individuals also make religious choices by weighing the costs against the benefits, which can be, for example, eternal life or material benefits, such as economic help (Stark and Finke 2000). Because the answers on denominational mobility included answers indicating denomination or religion as identity, I then examined how the concept of identity was present in the data.

The analysis for Article IV started with a close reading of the original data. I created new files based on the meanings the study participants gave to their identity. These categories included impressions of being Palestinian, Christian, Arab and a minority. I formed three categories: national identity, religious identity—in which I included the minority identity—and ethnic identity. I created tables on the different primary identities the participants indicated and compared this with the tables on denominational mobility. I then deepened the analysis by exploring the meanings or reasons the participants gave to their identity, such as tradition, personal belief or socioeconomic reasons. The background theory in Article IV is Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, which emphasises the relation between an individual's self-concept and the social groups one belongs to.

3.4. Ethical considerations, trustworthiness, quality and rigor

3.4.1 Ethical considerations

When conducting the data collection in Palestine, I visited one bookshop in East Jerusalem. I explained my study to the shopkeeper and hoped to find books concerning the topic. The shopkeeper looked at me and asked one of the most essential ethical questions that a researcher can hear: 'Are you again one of those who come here, do their study and then forgets us?' It was a very straightforward question that caused me to go back to it again and again during the study. What right would I have to interfere with people's lives and ask very personal questions? Does neutrality mean not hearing people's suffering? What can I do so that I will not forget? As researchers, we also need to hear the research fatigue that people may be experiencing (Clark 2008).

Ethical considerations should be the cornerstone of any research concerning human behaviour, even more so if the research is conducted in a conflict environment (Wood 2006). The ethical considerations should be part of the research from the planning to the end, including the perspectives of methodology, executing the research—including the conduct of the researchers—and, finally the reporting (Carpenter 2017, 4). The importance of ethical considerations was obvious from the early stages of planning the research. I had lived and worked in the area prior to the research and was familiar with the complexity and volatile nature of the situation.

At the heart of research is the understanding of 'do no harm', which refers to the fundamental aspect of avoiding any harm to participants or the researcher in all instances (Sleat 2017, 40). The challenges are myriad, and especially in a conflict environment, the possible harm needs to be carefully considered. The range of issues include, for example, power structures, confidentiality, trust and mistrust, gender issues, community representation and the politisation of research (MacKenzie et al. 2007, 300). Equally, the 'do no harm' should apply to the researchers. For example, their physical safety, working conditions, emotional burden, role conflicts and the interests of informants should be considered (Kaplan et al. 2020).

At the same time, we also need to consider to whom the researcher is responsible because there are at least three agents: the individual participants, the researcher and society. Especially when doing social science research, the researcher is responsible for informing the public or societies, for example, for better decision making (Sleat 2017, 39–40).

In the present research, one of the major issues was trust. In a conflict environment, trust needs to be built carefully, and the researcher needs to be trustworthy. Conflict causes mistrust between people (Cohen and Arieli 2011), and it was also visible during data collection. Some of the participants indicated participating in the research only because someone had told them I was a trustworthy person or because I was a minister and, thus, could be trusted. Trust was also discussed during the interviews, and the need for total anonymity was underlined several times.

The current study taps into family location issues and the movement of the participants, and this could cause physical harm and problems with the Israeli authority. Because of these challenges, the interviews were mostly conducted in the West Bank so that the participants did not have to cross the checkpoints or apply for permits to enter Jerusalem.

The four-principle approach (Beauchamp and Childress 2013) of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence and justice are the key ethical principles that need to be considered during any research. Participation in the research was voluntary and a permission was asked in the beginning of each interview. When the interviewee introduced me to the next possible interviewee, as it happens in the snowball method, I explained the voluntary to these participants too. Beneficence refers to the fundamental aspect of research; it needs to be useful and meaningful. The research should aim to do good; it can refer to, for example, knowledge that helps to alleviate suffering or mistreatment (see, e.g., Sieber and Tolich 2013; Iphofen 2017). The present study was discussed with professionals living and working in the Israel–Palestine area and the broader academic world. It was concluded that the difficult situation of Palestinian Christians that needs attention and exploration of their personal views would be attributed to the wider understanding of their situation. A review of previous studies revealed that there was a lack of empirical research

on personal experiences; thus, the research was justified, and the planning of it could start.

Ethical considerations should also include the position of the researcher. Before the study, I had been working as a Lutheran minister in Israel and Palestine for three years. Therefore, I was familiar with the local Christian community. Some of the participants indicated that they participated in the study only because they knew I was a minister and outsider. Furthermore, as the community of Palestinian Christians is relatively small, some of the participants indicated they felt more comfortable sharing matters that may be challenging or controversial within a small community with an outsider. Being a female clergyperson and a researcher, may have shaped the recruitment process and, to some measure, the interview answers. We can only trust that the participants have shared their personal thoughts truthfully. It is noteworthy that despite my personal position, many interviewees from different denominations were willing to participate, and during the interviews it became clear that it was meaningful for them to share their life stories.

In the beginning of the interview process, I explained to the interviewee where and how I would use the data and that it would be kept in my office and that the recordings would be destroyed after transcription. I also asked oral permission for the recording or written material. I also explained that it is voluntary to participate, and that the interviewee could stop the interview at any time and deny the usage of the interview.

The attitude of emphatical respect is important when conducting research in a conflict environment. Wikan (2012) describes this kind of attitude using the concept of resonance. When questions tap into personal sensitive issues, such as suffering and challenges in life, it is pivotal to understand the other person's situation, even if the full understanding can never be fully grasped. This became visible in the study at hand, for example, when the participants shared their thoughts on prayer. The resonance between the interviewees and their situation can be obtained only if the researcher is willing to silent her/his own voice and focus on the person who is sharing their life. It is also vital to control one's own emotions so that they do not affect the research (Wikan 2012).

Different kinds of safety measures need to be executed when working in a volatile environment. The safety of both the interviewee and the researcher needs to be ensured. This includes things like choosing a safe meeting place, checking safety alerts and looking into checkpoint closures. Some of the meetings had to be changed because of safety issues, and it took more time to rearrange the interviews. It was necessary to be flexible to change the plans on a daily basis.

To gain and maintain access to the research community, the researcher needs to establish rapport, that is, to build trustworthy and respectful relationships with the study participants. This means that the researcher needs to act in culturally appropriate ways (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, 93–95). Behaviour, appearance such as dressing and gender issues need to be taken into consideration. For the current study, this meant, for example, modest dressing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. After one interview in East Jerusalem, the study participant instructed me to take a male companion with me on the interview trips in the West Bank.

3.5.2 Trustworthiness

Evaluating qualitative research is multidimensional. Research validity often refers to two main aspects in the research: first, the ability of the chosen research methods to measure what is meant to be measured and, second, validity concerns the relevance and accuracy of the study from the researcher's, study participants' and readers' perspectives (Cho and Trent 2014, 686).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research rises from the whole research process. The research aiming at credibility has to address: 1) the theoretical positioning of the researcher that include the ontological and epistemological assumptions and personal history the researcher brings to the process, 2) consistency between method and methodology, 3) strategies to employ quality and rigor, and 4) the analytic approach the data is examined (Caelli et al. 2003).

The present study follows the four trustworthiness criteria formed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba propose four criteria for trustworthiness: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. In their criteria, *credibility* refers to accurate findings from different perspectives, *transferability*

refers to the generalisation of the findings in other contexts, dependability refers to the followable decision traits in findings and *confirmability* refers to valid interpretations and researcher's self-critical attitude.

The *credibility* of a study is guaranteed through aspects such as triangulation, that is, multiple perspectives of methods and theories), in-depth understanding of the context and member checking. Additionally, the credibility is formed with peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 219, 301). In the current study, all four individual articles have been peer reviewed and corrected according to the feedback of the reviewers. The semi-structured interview questions were checked by several researchers before the study interviews, and the questions were also tested with three pilot interviews with the Palestinian Christians and corrected as appropriate before the actual research (Eskola and Suoranta 1998). I used several theories and methods to gain a broader understanding of the study matter. In some cases, I returned to the participants to ensure the correct interpretations. This was done via telephone and emails. Returning to the correct interpretations was particularly important because of the study language (Bielenia-Grajewska 2018, 1696). English is not the native language of the participants, so it was essential to ensure the understanding of the questions and interpretations made by the researcher.

Transferability refers to the possible generalisation of the findings. A case study is an in-depth study from multiple perspectives of a unique and complex situation in a specific sociopolitical context. A case study may be, for example, a personal experience or a collective experience in a certain time and place (Simons 2014, 455–456). In a case study, the aim is to understand the case itself rather than generalise to the whole population (Simons 2009, 19–21). In the current study, the case consists of dimensions of religion in the Palestinian Christian lifeworlds in a specific time frame of years 2016–2017. The situation in Palestine changes rapidly, and the context is never exactly the same; thus, the results may differ as well. The group of participants was not expected to be representative of all Palestinian Christians but a rich sampling of age and gender, which it is. Thus, the *transferability* concerns more of the theoretical generalisation more than empirical generalisation.

Dependability concerns, for example, the decision trails the researcher has used and how other researchers can discern them. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key factor in trustworthiness, and the presuppositions of the researcher need to be taken into consideration. The followable decision trails and the description of the research process increase the trustworthiness. The replicability in qualitative research refers more often to aspects such as the status of the researcher, choice of respondents and methods of data collection and analysis (LeCompte et al. 1993, 334 cited in Cohen 2011, 202). I have described the research process in each article. Identical repetition of the research is rather impossible in qualitative research (Flick 2018); however, previous studies, for example, on religion in a conflict context (Häkkinen 2018; Sousa 2013), were taken into consideration before the formulation of the current study's questions.

Confirmability refers to the equivalence of the study at hand with other studies that have examined the same kind of phenomena (Eskola and Suoranta 1998). The studies implemented in the same kind of environment gave similar results on, for example, the importance of religion in a conflict environment (Sousa 2013). Furthermore, the results of the study indicate similar challenges of religious socialisation in a family as previous studies show (Niemelä 2006). These parallel findings increase the validity of the current study.

In the present study, aspects of cultural validity also need to be taken into consideration because the researcher and participants are from different cultures. Cultural validity taps into issues such as the sensitivity of the participants, culture and gender sensitivity (Cohen 2011, 194). Issues such as understandability of the questions, gender issues (me being a female clergy) and the possible effects of the study or the results on the participants were carefully discerned in preparing the research, in the field work and in the final writing of the study report.

3.5.3 Quality and rigor

The quality of the research concerns the whole research process (Eskola and Suoranta 1998). When evaluating quality in qualitative research, the researcher bias needs to be considered. The researcher is the key factor in rigor and quality; thus the researcher bias is a potential threat to the quality

of the research (Klenke 2015,43). Aspects such as knowledge of prior theory, personal ideological context and knowledge of the local power structures may disturb the researchers bias. Furthermore, the personal aspects, such as gender or race can close some avenues of access to data gathering.

In the current study, it is possible to review the quality, for example, in the data collection and analysis process, status of the researcher and choice of respondents. If the data are collected via interviews, it is possible to view quality and rigor through the structure of the interview and placement of the interview (Cohen 2011, 204). In the current study, data were collected with semi-structured open-ended questions. This enabled the participants to share their personal thoughts and insights on the matter at hand. In a conflict environment, trustworthiness and safety are essential. Thus, the interview situations were not equal, but the places were chosen by the participants where they felt safe to discuss personal matters.

An interview is a shared and dynamic social moment, and the status of the researcher is essential. In the interview method, it is particularly important to minimise bias, such as the characteristics of the interviewer and content of the questions. These include aspects such as the attitudes and opinions of the researcher, misconceptions of the meanings and misunderstanding the content of questions (Cohen 2011, 204–205). The present study was conducted in a conflict environment, and it was particularly essential to minimise personal opinions or feelings. The language of the research caused some misunderstandings of the questions because it was not the native language of the interviewer or the participants. However, the open-ended questions allowed both the interviewer and interviewee to clarify their meanings.

4. ARTICLE BASED FINDINGS

4.1. The relationship between the articles

The four articles explore different aspects of religiosity in the different lifeworlds of the Palestinian Christians. The starting point is personal religiosity, in other words what kind of meanings and experiences are attached to the personal religious practices. Then the aspect inductively expands to the family, community and lastly to society. Religion is widely interwoven into many fields of the lives of Palestinian Christians, thus it is vital to make the main connections and interactions where religion is involved visible.

Because the interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, the thoughts of the interviewees on a particular theme were often found under other themes, too. Thus, it was very important to read the entire research data several times and organise the answers accordingly. I have organised the themes and key topics of the study in a schematic diagram.

The schematic diagram shows the coverage of themes and key topics that emerged in the interviews that also have religious connection. These are: family, community, conflict, religious rituals and economic. The table show how these themes emerge in the four articles.

Table 1. Schematic diagram of the coverage of themes and key topics that have also religious connection. Articles with extensive coverage are marked with √√

Article	I	II	III	IV
Family	√√	√√	√√	√√
Community	√	√√	√√	√√
Conflict	√√	√		√√
Minority	√	√	√	√√
Religious rituals	√√	√√	√	
Economic	√		√√	√

When we examine the table 1 we see how religion is connected to many lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians in this study. Family is the most widely present through out the study. Family is part of personal prayer life, religious socialisation, denominational mobility and identity. Thus, it is fair to say that family is a strong influence in personal religious life and in communal dimensions of religious life. The importance of family is present also in the religious rituals. Religious rituals play a significant role in personal religious life and also in religious socialisation.

Community is present mostly in religiosity that is connected to religious socialisation, denominational mobility and identity forming. Community does not have significant role in personal prayer life. So, according to data, it seems that prayer life is very private and the surrounding society does not have strong influence in it, however, the dangers connected to the conflict do have a role in personal prayer life.

The conflict is also very present in the identity forming and it is said to be one of the strongest characters of collective identity (Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007, 1449). Being religious minority was also strongest featured in the identityforming. So, the minority identity was strongest visible in connection to public sphere of religion. Socioeconomic issues were mostly related to denominational mobility and showed how religion has a role also in economics in personal life.

4.2. Article I: Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2018). Prayer practices among Palestinian Christians in occupied Palestinian territory.

Article I explores prayer practices among Palestinian Christians. The article discusses how prayer is utilised in stressful life situations in the midst of ongoing conflict and how different prayer types are utilised across generations. The approach focuses on religious coping.

Prayer was a major coping device for the participants. All the participants indicated that they pray, and the frequency varied from every day to sometimes. Prayer brought feelings of safety and relief in a stressful life situation. Most also reported gaining emotional support such as relief, strength, inner peace and stress relief. Many of the respondents also reported that praying together with other Christians in the church brings relief and support.

The content analysis revealed four different prayer types: petitionary, ritualistic, meditative and thanksgiving. There were some differences in utilising these prayer types across generations. Petitionary prayer includes asking for something, including both materialistic and immaterial petitions such as asking for guidance, protection or intercession for others. Ritualistic prayer is a prepared prayer read from a text or recited by heart. Meditative prayer includes expressions such as 'listening to God' or 'presence of God'. Thanksgiving includes offering thanks to God for material or immaterial things.

Petition prayer was the most often used prayer type, and most often, the prayers were intercessory prayers for safety and protection of one's family and children. The second most often request was about one own's life situation. When the prayers were examined across the age groups, it was revealed that young adults requested more for personal issues, such as guidance in their studies or future marriage. The middle-aged participants prayed more for protection and strength and the elderly for their health. It is noteworthy that prayers for peace or the conflict situation to ease were mentioned only by six out of thirty-five participants. It seems that even in volatile contexts, the issues of personal life were considered to be more important than the

common conflict situation. This might indicate a sense of hopelessness in a situation that has been going on for too long and seems not to be ending.

The second most common prayer type was ritualistic prayer. This prayer type was used in personal devotions, such as praying the rosary or reading a prayer book and in church services. The ritualistic prayer was utilised most often among the elderly, and it was compatible with frequent church attendance. The third most often used prayer type was thanksgiving, and it was present in the midst of everyday life, even in the midst of all the challenges in life. It was seen as the core essence of Christian life. In the age groups, there was no explicit difference in utilising the thanksgiving prayer. The least often used prayer type was the meditative prayer. The mentions of this prayer type included spending private time with God and contemplating the words of a prayer. Meditative prayer was most often used in the middle-aged group.

Most of the participants had prayer experiences such as feeling the presence of God, warmth or light during the prayer or other physiological experiences. Many of the participants also reported prayer answers. Prayer experiences seemed to be a source of coping. Likewise, the intercessory prayer for others and praying with the church community were experienced as sources of coping.

One distinct finding was that living in a volatile context does not have an impact on personal prayers for peace. It would be anticipated that the prayers for peace would be more present in the midst of a conflict context; however, this was not the case. The personal issues and safety of loved ones were more often prayed for than peace. Life span religiosity was apparent even in a stressful conflict context. The study participants were trying to live their lives despite the volatile environment. The results suggest that the middle-aged and elderly groups were following the life course religiosity more than the young adults group. The middle-aged group had the most petitionary prayers and intercessory prayers, and they attended church the least. The elderly group had the highest prayer frequency, and the prayers often concerned their own health. It is also noteworthy that the elders prayed most often for peace. This may be because of their experiences with wars and intifadas. The young adult group differed from the life span religiosity in that they were

more religious, attended church more frequently and would pray more often than young adults, for example, in Europe.

The findings contribute to the study by describing the personal prayer practices among Palestinian Christians and pointing out the importance of prayer as a major coping device in the midst of the ongoing conflict. The results suggest that personal and shared prayer life provides emotional support and relief. One's personal prayer life is an important part of the participants' lives, and it is also experienced with one's family and community.

4.3. Article II: Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2020). Uskonnollinen sosialisatio palestiinalaiskristityissä perheissä.

Article II explores the religious socialisation of Palestinian Christian families. The article focuses on religious socialisation through three different themes: religious socialisation through practising the religion in the family, religious socialisation as part of identity forming and religious socialisation through other activities outside the family. The study investigates what kind of religious practices and beliefs the participants learned in childhood family and what they want to pass on to their children, how religion affects identity forming in family and what kind of religious activities families participate in outside of the family. Religious socialisation was examined in the childhood family context and in the adulthood family context.

The most common method of religious socialisation was practising religion together with the family, and this most often meant going to church as a family. This activity had been passed down from the childhood family to the adulthood family and was the strongest signal of religious socialisation. It was, however, striking that in some of the adulthood families, church attendance was not an obligation but a voluntary choice for the children. This kind of break was only present in the adulthood families and, thus, can be understood as a marker of a more individualistic approach towards religion. Prayer was the second most frequently mentioned activity with family. In the childhood family context, ritualistic or prepared prayers played a major role because in the adulthood family context, 'free speech' prayers were more

prominent. In adulthood family, the parents wanted to teach their children the habit of prayer during challenging life situations, and in some answers, prayer was a more important aspect of religiosity than going to church.

Religious socialisation outside of the family context included, for example, schooling in a Christian school and activities organised by the church. In some answers, schooling was more important in religious socialisation than in the childhood family. It was also mentioned that Christian ethics and leadership were learned at school. Activities organised by the church included, for example, clubs for children and family activities. These were mentioned mostly in the adulthood family context, and parents saw them as builders of Christian identity and a safe environment for their children.

Religious socialisation as part of identity formation included mentions of being a minority, a collision between the ethnic Arab identity and Christian identity, denominational identity and ecumenism in a family. Their minority Christian identity was strengthened through teachings to be a good Christian. The denominational identity was both a supportive and destructive aspect in one's identity. There were mentions of one's denomination as the real root of identity, and on the other hand, it was also mentioned as a means of oppression by the older generation. Christian sacraments such as baptism and Holy Communion were often mentioned as sources of disagreements between the generations. Marriages between the denominations were very common, and there were several indications that the children were taught to identify primarily as Christian and not by their denomination.

The results suggest that religious socialisation in Palestinian Christian families is still somewhat strong; however, it might not be as traditional as it used to be in the childhood family context. The importance of Christian identity is increasing, and the institutional importance of the church is decreasing. The boundaries between different denominations are becoming lower because of ecumenic marriages, and churches will face a multifaceted congregation more often. The data suggest that for the study participants, communality is more important than dogmatic perspectives.

These findings contribute by describing the religious socialisation in Palestinian Christian families, what aspects of personal religiosity are considered important and what parents want to pass down to the next

generation. The findings also reveal a change in letting children choose themselves if they want to attend church or not. This is an indicator of changes in the religious lifeworld in relation to family and institutional religiosity.

4.4. Article III: Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2020). Denominational mobility among Palestinian Christians.

Article III examines denominational mobility among Palestinian Christians. The matter is approached with three different aspects: switching, crossing and stable denominational affiliation. Denominational mobility is relatively common among Palestinian Christians. A little over half (54%) of the participants reported being flexible in their denominational affiliation, meaning having a switching or crossing affiliation. Having a stable denominational affiliation was reported by forty-six percent of the participants. Women and young adults were more often flexible in their denominational affiliation than men or the elderly.

A content analysis revealed three different motives for denominational mobility: marital and family reasons, personal beliefs and work or status related. Personal beliefs were the most often mentioned reason for denominational mobility; thus, it seems that mobile denominational affiliation is more of personal experience than social. Personal belief was the most common reason for denominational mobility among men. Marital and family reasons were the second most often mentioned reason for denominational mobility, and work- or status-related reasons were the least often mentioned reason. Marital reasons were the most often mentioned by women.

Crossing was more common than switching, and the reasons included aspects such as personal spiritual nourishment, the understanding of Christian identity being more important than specific denomination, marital reasons, familiarity with the liturgical and the language of the other church because of the schooling. The reasons for not switching but only crossing the denomination included reasons such as supporting the minority church and the family tradition. According to the data, the women crossed more often than men because it is no longer mandatory for women to switch for

marital reason. It was also revealed that young adults crossed denominational borders more often than other age groups.

The reasons for switching one's denomination included issues such as personal belief, alienation from the denomination of origin because of unfamiliarity with the liturgical language or practices, marital reasons and work-related reasons. Switching was equally common among both women and men. For men, the reason for switching was most often changes in personal beliefs, and for women it was marital reasons. Most of the switchers were middle-aged and above; young adults did not report denominational switching.

There were some reports of challenges and tensions in the family and the church because of crossing and switching one's denomination. Especially marriage ceremonies, baptisms and confirmation of the children and the Holy Communion caused disagreements in both the nuclear and extended family.

A stable denominational affiliation was connected to family tradition and a strong denominational identity. The data reveal that men had a more stable denominational affiliation than women. All the young adults reported having a stable affiliation; however, this might change when the young adult women get married.

These findings contribute by exploring the multifaceted religious context in which Palestinian Christians live. The multifaceted denominational surroundings are affecting the lives of Palestinian Christians, and here, lay ecumenism is very common. The denominational mobility challenges churches to face multifaceted congregations, and it seems that this kind of mobility is growing.

4.5. Article IV: Parkkinen, Mari, J. (2020). Being Palestinian, Christian and Arab—fragmented identity of Palestinian Christians. *Manuscript submitted*

Article IV addresses the identity of Palestinian Christians by exploring the three major aspects of Palestinian Christian identity: the ethnic identity being Arab, the religious being Christian and the national being Palestinian. Over forty percent of the participants identified themselves primarily as Palestinian. Thus, national identity seems to be the most important aspect of identity for most of the participants. Nationality was related to being born and living in Palestine and being the original inhabitants of the land. The data suggest that the collective narrative of Palestinian or Palestinian Christian identity was relatively strong. Palestinian identity was also seen as an inerasable aspect of identity. National identity was connected to tradition, and there were several mentions of inherited understanding of the importance of national identity. National identity was also shared with the Muslim majority in the shared struggle under Israeli occupation, and some of the participants mentioned that they do not wish to be separated according to their religion but be as one nation.

Religious identity was the second most often mentioned as the primary identity. Religious identity was seen as a core essence of one's being and, thus, the starting point of one's identity. Some participants experienced their Christian identity to be heavenly and as connecting with the Christian family globally through this identity. The Christian identity included some mentions of incoherencies with other aspects of identity, such as how to be Christian in an Arab culture or being a Christian minority in the midst of Jewish and Muslim religious majorities. Some of the participants felt that as a minority, their identity was strongly associated with the church. Christian identity had relevance as a personal faith-based identity and social identity as part of the Christian community. Christian identity was also politicised in some answers because it was viewed as resisting the Israeli occupation. Three of the participants identified themselves primarily through their denominational identity. They all belonged to the Oriental church family.

Only four of the participants identified themselves primarily as Arab. Arab identity included mentions about the Arab language, culture and connection to the larger Arabic community. However, if a situation needed, for example, in foreign countries, the Arab identity was cleared with the Christian definition. There were also uncomfortable experiences of others questioning the Arab Christian identity.

The findings indicate that the Palestinian Christian identity is very multifaceted and fragmented. Palestinian Christians gave different kinds of importance to the three aspects of identity, and the group was not homogenous. These findings emphasise the multifaceted Palestinian Christian identity and contribute by describing the Palestinian Christian identity from the personal identity perspective, as well as from the collective sociological perspective.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the current study is to explore the multifaceted role of religion in Palestinian Christian lifeworlds. The interviews with the Palestinian Christians created an exceptional opportunity to hear the voices of the local Christians. The findings of the four articles provide a new understanding of the diverse aspects of religion in different lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians. The sections above explore different lifeworlds by discussing themes such as personal religiosity in the midst of the ongoing conflict, religious socialisation in family life, denominational mobility in the Palestinian Christian community and the fragmented identity among Palestinian Christians.

The current study is based on four individual articles, which caused some limitations. The four articles were written consecutively, and because the study as a whole was data-driven research, it was difficult to adjust the direction of the study when facing new perspectives. This led then to some discrepancy in the terms and theoretical perspectives in the articles, such as the naming of the geographical area as Palestine or occupied Palestinian territory. Furthermore, the research data are vast, and the experiences and life situations of Palestinian Christians study participants were manifold and diverse; thus, it is essential to have narrative humility (DasGupta, 2018), and it is not possible to make an exhaustive presentation. However, writing four individual articles from the same data enabled me to make the connections and interactions of religion visible in the lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians.

The findings indicate that religion is a major factor in the lives of the study participants. Religion is said to be one of the most influential and powerful forces in human life. Religion affects personal life in aspects such as personal belief, identity formation, marriage and family life. However, religion is also a significant factor in community life, economics and politics (McGuire 2002). I will first discuss how religion is present in the personal lifeworlds of the study participants and then continue to the more public spheres of religious life.

The results indicate that religion is a major personal coping method in the midst of the conflict and that it provides substantial personal emotional support through prayer. Previous studies have indicated that religion is a

source of support in the midst of wars and conflict (Pat-Horenczyk et al. 2009, 700–2; Sousa 2013, 515). This is also the case in the current study, too. Many of the participants reported gaining relief, strength and inner peace through prayer. Religion also has a role in forming one's identity. Identity forming can be seen as a personal but also communal concept (Tajfel 1981, 255). For the study participants, their religious identity was connected to a specific denomination or to Christianity in general.

Second, religion is a factor in Palestinian Christian's psychosocial sphere. Religion is a significant factor, for example, when choosing a spouse. It is not only a personal choice, but family traditions are also involved. Religion has a significant role in child rearing and religious socialisation (Casanova 1994, 43–45). Most Palestinian Christian children are schooled in Christian schools, and Christian socialisation happens both in families and schools. Living according to the Christian tradition was valued, and Christian socialisation of the children was regarded as high.

Furthermore, the religious community is a source of support for the study participants. The church or denomination is referred to as a home or identity. It is not just about Sunday service; religion has more relevance to it. However, some of the participants indicated tensions between personal and family traditions. Thus, communal religiosity can also be a source of conflict. The boundaries between religions and Christian denominations may be relatively high. Changing or crossing Christian denominations may cause tensions in the community or between family members (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990, 1211–1229). Thus, religion was a connecting matter and, in some cases, a separating matter in the family among the study participants.

Third, religion plays a significant role in individual's socioeconomic status among Palestinian Christians. This starts with education because Palestinian Christians educate their children in Christian schools, which are known for high-quality education, thus providing a wider possibility to continue the studies and achieve a better position in life or the possibility to emigrate for a better life in other countries. Religious commitments and communities also offer social networks and personal benefits, such as job opportunities or social status (Sherkat 2014, 57–58). Some of the participants reported gaining these benefits, for example, through changing their denomination.

According to the findings, it is fair to say that religion has a significant role in the different lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians and that religion is interwoven into and between the personal spirituality, socioeconomic and psychosocial spheres of life, as Figure 1 shows. In addition to these more personal aspects of religious life, the results show how religion is a factor in the turbulent context of Palestinian Christians lifeworlds. The findings indicate that ongoing conflict and religious minority status are present in the religious lives of the study participants. Furthermore, the results suggest that there are some tensions in the relationship between personal and communal religiosity. Next, I discuss these findings.

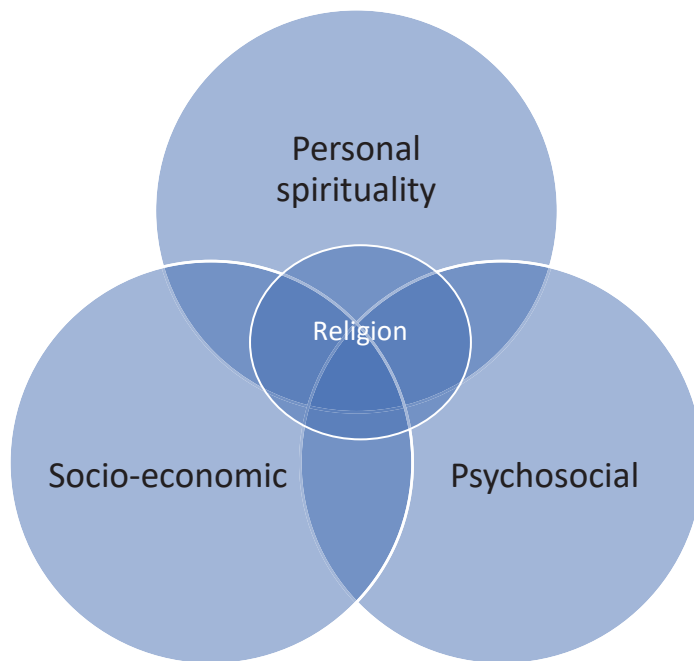


Figure 1. Religion is interwoven in and between the personal spirituality, socioeconomic situation and psychosocial lives of Palestinian Christians.

Conflict as a part of religious life

The impacts of the conflict on an individual's religious life were very present in the study. These included, for example, personal prayers connected to conflict (Article I), identity forming (Article IV), religious socialisation (Article II), the politisation of religion and the collective narrative of religious community (Articles III and VI). Previous studies have shown that living in a conflict environment affects one's life on many levels, for example, health, relationships and resources in life (Thabet et al. 2002, 1802–1803; Dubow et al. 2012, 841–842; Hobfoll 2012, 16–18).

Overall, the conflict seems to raise experiences and feelings of fear. Conflict was present in one's personal prayer life in the form of asking for protection and safety for ones' family and loved ones. As one of the participants explained, you need to pray every morning because you do not know what the day brings. Fear also was found stemming from the decrease of the Christian community and possible consequences of this as a religious minority.

The conflict was also evident in the politisation of religion. Living as a Christian in Palestine was seen as a means of resisting the Israeli occupation. Christian identity was, in some cases, a means of fighting the political environment but also questioning the cultural Arab environment. Some of the participants were thinking about how to raise Christian girls in a very patriarchal and traditional Arab environment.

A collective narrative of Christian identity was common. There were several indications where the participants started with 'I' and continued with 'We'. Religion is one of the most important characteristics of collective identity in the midst of a conflict (Hassassian 2002), and the conflict environment often strengthens collective identity (Mana et al. 2015, 76–77). Among the study participants, the collective identity narrative included perspectives such as being oppressed by Israeli occupation, being a religious minority and being forgotten by the global Christian community.

Palestinian Christians as a religious minority

Being a religious minority was mentioned in several contexts. The idea of being a minority was articulated as being a denominational minority in the Christian community (Article III) and as a religious minority in the larger context of Judaism and Islam (Article IV). When talking about denominational minority in the Christian community, it was pointed out that especially if the denomination of the childhood family was a small denomination, it was expected that even if the individual would participate in another denomination's church, it was not accepted to leave the childhood church. These minority issues in the Christian community were also present as a religious clan identity and as disagreements between families.

In the larger religious minority context, the idea of being a minority was present in the religious socialisation in the teachings of parents that the children need to respect and think highly of the Christian traditions and minority identity. This was also evident in the attitude of training the youth to be active part of society, even if they are a religious minority. Having a Christian identity included an understanding of the Christian community being an important and influential entity in Palestinian society.

The politisation of being a religious minority was present in the general narrative of having a good relationship with the Muslim majority; however, it was articulated that there are some discrimination and tensions between the religious majority and minority. Being a religious minority and staying on the land was also seen as a way of fighting the Israeli occupation.

Between personal and communal religiosity

Taken together, the findings in the current study show a challenge between personal and communal religiosity. Personal religiosity and spiritual life are important (Article I); however, the traditional and tribal family traditions demanding a certain way of religiosity or socialisation of the children causes challenges in family and personal life (Articles II and III). This challenge between personal and communal was also experienced in the larger context of identity: being Arab from the Middle East and global Christianity (Article IV).

The contradiction between personal and communal religiosity was particularly visible when talking about the religious socialisation of the children and living in the ecumenical family. There were expectations that women would switch their denomination if they married outside of their own denomination. Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, the children follow the father's denomination. However, some of the women were not ready to switch their denominations yet to cross between the denominations. Thus, the personal conviction often ruled traditional communal expectations. Here, we can also find that in ecumenical families, the children were reared according to both denominations.

The contradiction of personal and communal positioning was also present in denominational mobility (Article III). Some of the participants revealed going to denominational churches other than the family church, and this caused tensions in the family and churches. There was even some pressure from the family if a person had switched or participated in the other denomination on a regular basis. This was experienced negatively; however, there were also indications of personal positive experience when it came to restoring the tradition yet seeking personal spirituality.

As a closing remark, it can be said that religion penetrates the lives of Palestinian Christians very widely. The current study draws attention to the importance of understanding the significant role of religion in different lifeworlds. In the Palestinian Christian context, religion is not fading away; quite the contrary, religion is a relevant factor in many areas of life. However, according to the results, it can be said that traditional religiosity may be changing among Palestinian Christians. It seems that the global trends of religion becoming more of a personal issue are also reaching the Palestinian Christian community.

One very interesting follow-up research would be to explore how religious practices and meanings change among Palestinian Christians if Christianity gains more importance as an identity marker in the midst of the ongoing conflict and not so much as a form of personal conviction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.

Semi-structured interview plan spring 2017

This is a research for University of Eastern Finland. The supervisors are Professor Paavo Kettunen and Docent Jouko Kiiski. The information is gathered for the research called Spiritual Coping Mechanisms under occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. The research is done for a doctoral thesis. This is a semi-focused interview. I have an interview plan that has certain themes I would like to talk about. This will be one time interview with a possibility to contact me or you later if needed. The participation to this research is totally voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time if you want. The data will be kept in my computer and afterwards in my office in Finland. The data will be achieved but all the personal details will be erased. The final results of the research will be published in English. The information will be confidential and all the possibilities to recognize the informant will be erased. Only gender, age and religion will be mentioned in the publications. The anonymity is guaranteed. The names and places etc will be changed.

Is it ok that I´ll record this interview? (If not, can I then use pen and paper?)

1. Background information:
Pease tell me about yourself.
Name? Year of Birth? Where do you live? Family? Denomination?
2. Identity:
How do you identify yourself?
What does Christian, Palestinian, Arab mean to you?
What other layers of identity you want to point out?
What kind of ID do you have?

3. Church:
What church do you belong to?
Do you go to other churches? (if yes which ones, why)
Have you changed your denomination? (if yes why, family reaction)
What is your childhood family's denomination?
What did you learn about religion/spirituality/faith in your childhood family, youth? What aspects of religion were / are important for you?
Have your thoughts changed about religion of belief? (if yes, in what way?)
4. Challenges in the midst of the conflict:
Tell me about your life in midst of this conflict, what kind of problems/ challenges it brings to your life?
5. What frightens you?
6. What brings you comfort?
7. Practicing Spirituality
Do you pray? (yes/ no, why, how often, in what situations, what do you pray for, how do you feel when praying)
Do you go to church? (yes/no, why, how often, which one)
Do you read the Bible? (yes/no, why, how do you feel when reading the bible)
Do you seek guidance/ help from your pastor? (in what situations)
→ How do you feel when practicing your spirituality / what does it give you?
8. Do you feel God has helped you? (if yes, in what ways)
9. Is religion more personal or communal for you? There are many interreligious marriages, what are your thoughts on that?

10. What do you think, how living in the midst of the conflict has affected your religion/spirituality/faith?
What about your identity, has it shaped your identity, how?
11. Do you ever doubt God? Has there been moments when your faith has been challenged? What kind of situations?
12. How do you see your future in here?
Have you thought of emigrating? (reasons to stay, reasons to go)

APPENDIX 2: PUBLICATION I

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Artikkelit

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2018

Prayer practices among Palestinian Christians in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Parkkinen, Mari

Approaching Religion

Tieteelliset aikakauslehtiartikkelit

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Prayer practices among Palestinian Christians in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Arab Palestinian Christians face many challenges living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; restrictions of movement, a poor employment situation and rising emigration. According to previous research, religion and prayer provide strength and hope in the midst of the ongoing conflict. This research has used qualitative methods and the data was collected in the occupied Palestinian Territory in February–April and November 2017. Thirty-five participants were interviewed about their practice of prayer. The interviews were semi-structured. The aim of this paper is to examine how prayer is utilised among the Palestinian Christians to cope in stressful life situations and how prayer types are utilised across generations. Content analysis revealed four prayer types: petitionary, ritualistic, meditative and thanksgiving. The results suggest that prayer is major coping device and the utilisation of prayer varies across the generations.

Introduction

Prayer is probably the most often-used personal type of religiosity and the most commonly-employed coping device (Hood *et al.* 1996: 394). In recent decades prayer as a coping strategy has been studied comprehensively. Many scholars have emphasised the importance of prayer in the coping process (Carver *et al.* 1989: 279; Bänzinger *et al.* 2008: 112) and different theories and practices have been developed (Stroebe and Schut 1999; Pargament 1997; Pargament *et al.* 2000; Janssen *et al.* 2000).

Numerous studies provide evidence of a positive effect of prayer on general well-being (Fabricatore and Handal 2000: 225; Maltby *et al.* 1999: 373; Poloma and Pendleton 1989: 51), facing severe illness (Ai *et al.* 2000: 215–17; Cardella and Friedlander 2004:

31–3) and adjustment to mortal illness or near-death life situations (Phelps *et al.* 2009: 1145–6; Fry 1990: 746–7). However, the effects of religion or prayer in coping are not always positive. Research reports suggest that for example for those with mental health issues religious forms of coping may not be optimal (Bryan *et al.* 2016: 50–1; Strawbridge *et al.* 1998: 122–3). Negative correlations of religious coping have also been reported in relation to the death of a friend (Park and Cohen 1993: 572–4).

Coping in the midst of the Israel–Palestine conflict has been studied comprehensively. In the field of psychology and health research, the research has been focused on the effects of exposure to violence and war-related environments. The results indicate that living in a hostile environment may cause post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTS), anxiety, and have negative impacts on health (Thabet *et al.* 2002: 1802–3; Dubow *et al.* 2012: 841–2; Hobfoll 2012: 16–18).

Studies on coping in the midst of the prolonged Israel–Palestine conflict suggest that the experience of coping is personal and individual even if the hardship, such as occupation, is experienced collectively. Coping can include internal and external resources such as personality, proactive problem solving, support from ideological or religion based groups, family support or religious sources (Punamäki 1990: 79–82; Pat-Horenczyk *et al.* 2009: 700–2). Research findings further suggest that religion can be protective against the harmful effects of political violence. The general level of health improved among those who relied on religious support (Sousa 2013: 515). This study will examine prayer as a coping method in the midst of the prolonged Israel–Palestine conflict.

Personal and institutional prayer is one of the most often-used coping devices in stressful situ-

ations in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict (Häkkinen 2014: 38; Sousa 2013: 514–15). Religion as a means of coping is measured by the frequency of prayer or church attendance, but studies fail to answer the question what is it in prayer that helps a person to cope in stressful life situations? This study is set forth to fill that gap. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand how prayer helps in the midst of prolonged conflict and examine how prayer is utilised among Palestinian Christians across generations.

Prayer, prayer types and lifespan

Religion – and prayer particularly – is multidimensional and thus difficult to measure (see a review of the literature in Finney and Malony 1985) and there are numerous definitions of prayer. William James defines it as ‘the very soul and essence of religion’ (James 2002: 505). Moving closer to contemporary times, definitions emphasise prayer as a form of communication or connection. In modern times encyclopedias have defined prayer, for example, as ‘human communication with divine and spiritual entities’ (Gill 1987: 489). Definitions in inspirational writings focus on such phrases as ‘loving God’, ‘praise’ or ‘adoration’ (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 11).

Scholars have provided a spectrum of types of prayer. The classical model of prayer (ACTS) includes four types: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Adoration focuses on praise and worship of God; confession includes acknowledgement of one’s shortcomings, misdeeds or sins; thanksgiving includes expressions of gratitude, and supplication includes requests for God’s intervention in life’s situations and events. Mary Whiton Calkins (1911) identifies six types of prayer; petitions for material and immaterial things, penitence, thanksgiving, fellowship, contemplation and adoration. Following the work of Friedrich Heiler (1932), scholars Margaret Poloma and Brian F. Pendleton (1989: 47–50) have identified four different types of prayer; meditative, ritualistic, colloquial and petitionary. There is a considerable overlap among the descriptions of prayer types and, as prayer is multidimensional, prayer types, or prayer itself can never be fully grasped in words (Janssen and Prins 2000: 49–50).

Religiousness and prayer as part of it, is conceived of as a lifespan-development process (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 62). Personal beliefs and religious activity may change with age. However, it is not only the

age that matters; we need to consider also period and cohort effects. The period effect concerns a specific time in history that affects everyone, and the cohort effect involves people who were, for example, born around same time or have fought in the same war (Voas and Doebler 2011: 43). There is some debate about how, or if, religiousness changes during the life course when all these variables are taken into consideration (Schwadel 2011: 184–92). In this study age is the primary variable.

It is argued that there is a fall in religiosity and religious activity between the ages 18 to 30 (Allport 1950: 31–83; Levenson *et al.* 2005: 144–58). Previous studies indicate that church attendance and institutionalised religiousness is declining; however, the practice of personal prayer is not; it remains important for the young (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 78). Even those young adults who are not members of any church, or who don’t attend religious services at all, do pray (Janssen and Prins 2000: 10).

During middle age personal prayer seems to increase, although church attendance seems to decrease (Peacock and Poloma 1999: 328–32; Chaves 1991: 512–13). Changes such as getting married and forming a family seem to be factors in increasing prayer activity (Wilson and Sherkat 1994: 155–9). Research findings further suggest that personal prayer, parental religiosity, devotional practices and frequency of prayer increase (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 80; Paloutzian 1996: 127–35; Smith and Denton 2005; Levin and Taylor 1997: 80). However, middle age can also be characterised by growing doubt and a questioning of inherited religious views (Fowler 1981).

During old age religious activity tends to increase again; however older people may not necessarily become more religious, or attend church more often if they have not been ‘church goers’ earlier. Nevertheless, their private devotional activity and interest in religion does seem to increase (Levin and Taylor 1997: 80; Paloutzian 1996: 133). Previous studies suggest that near the end of life, religion and personal prayer become more important. Prayer is a major coping device for dealing with one’s personal health, safety and the uncertainty concerning life after death (Fry 1990: 744–7; Dunn and Horgas 2000: 344–8).

Prayer is said to be an active, cognitive coping strategy (Watts and Williams 1988: 109). A person who prays may attain, for example, feelings of inner peace, relief, understanding, relaxation, and emotional energy (Johnson 1959: 122; Bänzinger *et al.*



West Bank Barrier surrounds Ramallah and makes it difficult for Palestinians to move around. Photo: Riitta Luume.

2008: 103). In this article I will discuss the utilisation of prayer and prayer types as coping devices during the life course from young adulthood to old age in the midst of a context of conflict.

Religious background

The region of the Middle East is the birthplace of three major religions in the world: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. All three have sacred places in the area. The estimated population of Israel is 8.3 million people (including the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem). The population is 75 per cent Jewish, 20 per cent Muslim, and Christians constitute less than 2 per cent. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the estimated population is 4.5 million. The population is 84 per cent Muslim, 13 per cent Jewish (approximately 600,000 Israelis live in illegal settlements in West Bank), whilst Christians form a little over 1 per cent (The World Factbook 2018; Raheb 2017: 17–18, 21).

Studies of attitudes towards religion in the region show that in Israel 43 per cent of the Jewish adult population consider themselves to be secular, although 82 per cent attend Passover Seder and 67 per cent light the Hannukkah candles. In the Arab population in Israel 35 per cent identify themselves non-religious or not so religious, and the percentage of those who identify as religious is 57. Both Jewish and Arab people say they have become more religious in recent years (Social Survey, Israel 2010). In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Muslims seem to be more

religious than the Christians; they attend the mosque, pray more often and see religion as an important regulator of social and political life (Sabella 2000: 17–19). Compared to Western Christian youth, Palestinian Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have a higher level of religiosity (Munayer 2000: 70–3).

In the surrounding countries the population is mostly Muslim. Lebanon has the largest Christian community; 36 per cent of the population are Christian and 58 per cent are Muslims (The World Factbook 2018), however, as the rate of emigration is vast there are some challenges in counting the population (Faour 2007: 912–13); the numbers can vary. In Jordan the Muslim population is 97 per cent and Christians 2 per cent and in Syria Muslims make up 87 per cent of the population with Christians at 10 per cent (The World Factbook 2018). As the statistics indicate, Christianity is the minority religion in the region.

Palestinian Christians

Many Palestinian Christians trace their ancestry to the earliest centuries of Christianity. They are proud to say that Christianity started in their backyard. Thus, you hear them quite often refer to themselves as the ‘living stones’; as a community of people that keep alive the heritage of history and faith that is often connected to the ancient stone buildings and historical sites. They consider themselves to be indigenous Christians (Sabella 1999: 83–4; Sabbah 2007: 21–5).

Palestinians, and thus Palestinian Christians, face many challenges living under Israeli occupation. They confront violence, confiscations of their land, forcible displacements and hostility arising on the basis of illegal settlement activities, among other things (B’Tselem 2018; WCC 2017; OCHA Factsheet 2017: 16). Israel restricts movement between the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel as well as within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which makes it difficult for Palestinians to reach workplaces outside of the West Bank and separates family members who are obliged to live apart from each other (OCHA Barrier portal). Earning a living becomes harder. The impact of the occupation, prolonged conflict and the inefficacy of the Palestinian Authority brings challenges. The unemployment rate for Palestine in 2017 was 25.7 per cent (PCBS 2017: 5).

The scale of emigration in the region is vast, and the prolonged forced displacement continues. The impact of the 1948 and 1967 wars (Bunton 2013:

64–74; Pappé 2006: 128–35, 184–91) on Palestinian Christians was harsh; over 80,000 Palestinian Christians were deported or left their homes in the areas of what was to become the state of Israel and became refugees, settling in the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (Tsimhoni 1993: 11; Colbi 1988: 163; Mansour 2012: 11–12). The biggest Palestinian Christian diaspora communities are found in Latin America, where the estimated number is around half a million, surpassing that of their original homeland (Raheb 2012: 9; Raheb 2017: 11). The reasons for leaving concern mostly safety and economics (Collings *et al.* 2012: 60).

The following numbers of the Palestinian Christians are estimates. As the extent of emigration is vast, there are no exact statistics available. The numbers of Palestinian Christians in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory are *circa* 175,000, of which around 120,000 live in Israel and a little over 53,000 live in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 1,200 in Gaza. Christians constitute less than 2 per cent of the population (Collings *et al.* 2012: 15; The World Factbook 2017).

The local Christian churches are mostly Palestinian, Arabic speaking congregations. Christian

churches in the Occupied Palestinian Territory can be grouped into four categories: The Eastern Orthodox Church, the Oriental Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches. This study is limited to Palestinian Christian Communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the statistics are as follows: the Greek Orthodox Church (53%), Catholics (36%), Orientals (7%) and Protestants (5%). The numbers are estimated and vary in different studies (Sabella 1999: 90).

Data

The data collection was conducted in February–April and November 2017. The total number of participants was thirty-five, of whom seventeen were female and eighteen male. The age range was from eighteen to eighty-one. The participants are from seven different locations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel and belong to nine different denominations: eleven belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, nine the Catholic churches, two the Oriental Churches and thirteen the Protestant Churches.

The Protestants thus were over represented. This may be due to familiarity with and trust of the



Graffiti done by Banksy greets people in Bethlehem. Photo: Riitta Luume.

researcher among the Protestants, as the researcher had lived in the area and was familiar with the community. The focus of this study is on prayer in general, not on the denominational utilisation of prayer; thus the over-representation of Protestants is not a fatal error. It is also noteworthy that the denomination of each participant was recorded by means of self-identification and might differ from possible Church records which tend to record families, not individuals. Several participants indicated that they had belonged earlier to another Church, however now identified themselves with another denomination.

The data collection method was focused interviews. The interviews were recorded on tape; each interviewee was given the opportunity to decline being recorded in which case paper and pen would be used instead. Three interviewees chose this option. The language of the interview was English; however, it was also possible to use an interpreter. Only one of the interviewees chose this option. Additionally, a diary was kept of the researcher's personal reflections.

Respondents were recruited in various ways. The researcher attended four church meetings and was introduced to the congregations to whom an open invitation to participate was announced. Three Christian organisations and one Christian social club were contacted and asked to send out an open invitation. Participants were also recruited through four Christian schools and one university. Participants were also found by means of the 'snowball method' whereby an interviewee introduces the researcher to the next participant. The participants were recruited if they met the criteria of identifying themselves as Palestinian or Arab Christian and were over the age of 18.

Half of the young adults were university students, studying religion. This is not necessarily a fatal fault as the primary task of the research was to examine the content and utilisation of prayer, thus it was desirable to interview people who would be expected to pray. This applies to all participants as the recruitment was mostly done within faith-based organisations and churches. This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the results.

All the interviews were conducted by the researcher. The average duration of the interviews was around 45 minutes. The interviews included individual and pair interviews. Individual interviews were conducted with twenty-seven participants and pair interviews with four pairs (eight persons). The

pair interviews included young adults who did not want to participate alone. The participants were divided into three different age groups; young adults (18–34 years), middle-aged (35–59 years) and elderly (60+ years) adults. The age groups are intentionally rather large for the sake of anonymity. The distribution of the age groups is as follows: nine participants were young (YA 18–34 years old), eighteen middle-aged (MA 35–59 years old) and eight elderly (E 60 onwards).

Interviews were conducted as semi-structured, focused interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to address specific topics, while leaving space for the participants to offer new insights on the research focus. It also provides an opportunity for clarifications of the deeper meanings of everyday words (Galletta 2013; Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2014). One of the motives for using open-ended questions was to give a voice to the Palestinian Christians and allow the participants to speak about their lives. In this study the open-ended questions were particularly important as the language of the study was neither the mother tongue of the respondents nor the researcher and clarifications and explanations were needed.

The interviews were conducted very freely, following however a structure of questions divided into ten different theme groups. The themes were; identity, fears and challenges, coping, God, the church, the Bible, practising religion or spirituality, ecumenism, interfaith and the future. The questions began with such phrases as 'What do you think of...?', 'Please, tell me about...' followed by clarifying sub-questions. In this paper, I will focus on the answers concerning prayer. The questions about prayer were included in the theme of practising religion and were formulated thus: Do you pray? How often? What does prayer mean for you? Does it help and how does it help you? What do you pray for? Do you think your prayers have been heard? Open-ended questions were transcribed word for word, categorised and tabulated and finally analysed inductively to discover and to understand how prayer is utilised among the respondents.

Findings

All participants (N=35) said that they pray. The frequency varied from every day to sometimes. Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that they prayed every day. Seventeen per cent said that they

prayed weekly in the church and eleven per cent indicated they they prayed, but did not indicate the frequency. When looking at the answers from the age-group perspective the results show that five out of nine (55%) young adults pray every day, thirteen out of eighteen (72%) of the middle-aged respondents pray every day and six out of eight (75%) of the elderly pray every day. Church attendance analysis

shows that most of the respondents attend church on a weekly basis; six of the young adults (66%), eleven of the middle-aged respondents (61%) and seven of the elderly (87%). One young adult and one middle-aged respondent indicated that they do not attend church.

Most of the participants report that prayer helps them in stressful life situations. Thirty out of the thirty-five respondents reported emotional support such as relief, strength, inner peace and stress relief. This interviewee describes how prayer is a form of stress release for her:

But I pray a lot at home. It is part of my daily chores, every morning I pray for half an hour at least. So, I wake up early for this and I think it is helping me a lot. It helps me to cope with the difficulties of the day, to cope with the huge difficulties we are living with here, stresses. All this, thinking about the future and the darkness of the future we are seeing. So, it's a way out for me. And it's stress release. (F12, MA)

Many of the respondents also told how praying in church with others is helping them to cope, as this respondent describes:

Well, it's a relief. Like, even if you are praying by yourself, but being there [in the church] united, and everyone is praying. It's also way of, it's like meditation. It's a relief. You only think about praying in a church. That moment on Sunday, you will have nothing in your mind ... So, being in church is giving like an hour, one hour and a half from your whole week, to give it to this holy moment and you pray. So, it is also a relief. And you come out relaxed. (F14, YA)

	Young adults (YA) n=9	Middle-aged (MA) n=18	Elderly (E) n=8	Total
Petitionary	11	24	9	44
Ritualistic	5	6	6	17
Meditative	1	5	1	7
Thanksgiving	3	6	3	12
Total	15	38	18	80

Table. Prayer types and age groups. The answers are not exclusive; one participant may have indicated several types.

Content analysis of the responses revealed four different prayer types: petitionary, ritualistic, meditative and thanksgiving. In this study petitionary prayers include requests for something; both materialistic and immaterial petitions (for guidance, protection, power, intercession). Ritualistic prayers are prepared prayers recited from a text or by heart, Meditative prayer concerns expressions such as 'adoration', 'listening to God' and 'privacy with God'. Thanksgiving includes offering up thanks for materialistic or immaterial things. The table below shows the prayer types and age groups.

Petitionary prayer

Petitionary prayer is the most-often used prayer type in the study (44 mentions). Prayers included requests for material and immaterial things, but prayers for immaterial things were the most common. They included asking for protection or safety, power, strength or help in difficult life situations, guidance, prayers for peace, healing or good health, intercession on behalf of others, forgiveness of sins and material things.

Intercession was the most-often used petitionary prayer (11 mentions). An intercessional prayer is one offered on behalf of someone else and summons God to intervene in a life other than one's own (Tloczynski and Fritzsich 2002: 731). The intercessional prayer includes requests for the protection of, or general well-being and good health for, others. Praying for others is considered by participants to be a part of being Christian, being called upon to pray for others, but also as a means of coping. Most often the intercessional prayers were offered for the safety of one's family and children, as this respondent indicates:

But sometimes I think about my children. They are still young ... So, I think a lot about their future. But then I reach a point where I cannot do anything. I can't help anything. So, I say, God you know what you are doing so, please keep them safe and keep us so also. (M17, MA)

Intercessional prayer can also be experienced as a coping device, as this respondent mentions:

It's my communication with Jesus. He is my brother. And Mary, of course. I start with Mary and then I mention the names of all my friends, especially those who are sick. I put them on my list. On my way, I pray ... The more I pray for the others, the more I am happy, and my pain is gone. (M20, E)

Praying for others was mentioned by two young adults, seven of the middle-aged and two of the elderly participants. The middle aged respondents mostly offered intercessional prayers. Three of them mention praying for someone and it having a positive outcome, however, it cannot be proven whether it was the prayer or something else that helped the situation. Intercessional prayer is complex and controversial. It can also be a coping device for the person praying. S. O'Laioire's research (1997: 38) suggests parallel findings. There was only one elderly participant who indicated that they were being personally prayed for.

The second most-often used form of intercessional prayer involved the participant asking for help, protection and power or strength for themselves to continue in the midst of the stressful life situations (10 mentions). Living under occupation can be very stressful and safety is an everyday issue, as this respondent explains:

You have to pray, you see; when you wake up in the morning you don't know what is going to happen to you during the day, or if you go to the checkpoint or something, so I pray on a daily basis. (M03, MA)

Living under the occupation also has an economic impact and everyday life can be a struggle, as this interviewee describes:

I ask God to give me strength to continue because I have a lot of stress, family. I need money to bring them up and secure everything. ... And I ask God to give me the strength to continue. (F13, MA)

When all the answers were examined across the age groups, it was shown that one of the young adults, eight of the middle-aged and one of the elderly participants pray for their own safety and protection or help and strength in stressful situations. It seems that the middle aged pray more often for power and help to continue in the midst of challenges.

Asking for guidance (7 mentions) in life included decisions about work, studies, life in general or a difficult situation in life. Young adults asked for guidance in choosing a career and a spouse:

I pray in everything, everything. Before I chose theology, I said, God be with me to choose what I want. So, after the first year I think God was with me, so I chose it. Before I got engaged I think God helped me, that is the person who will be with me. (F05, YA)

The middle-aged participants used prayers for guidance concerning work and difficult situations in life or with family. Praying can include verbal praying or reading the Bible and 'hearing God's Word' through reading. One woman pointed out that it is very difficult to find a job in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and she prayed for guidance from God by means of reading the Bible in between two jobs:

So, I decided that I will open my Bible and read God's answer to me. And then when I closed my eyes, prayed a lot, and then when I opened my Bible, it was from Isaiah; who will go for us and then I said here I am Lord, send me. So, I knew at that time He wants me here. (F01 MA)

Family seems to be one of the biggest issues in prayer. When the knife attacks started in Jerusalem (in the autumn of 2014), this father asked for guidance as to what to do with his daughters going to school:

For example, when the recent events with knives started to happen everyone here was really afraid. And the first two, three days we

didn't send our daughters to school. Then on the same night we prayed, and we felt God, and we read Isaiah 43 where God says, if you walk in water I'm with you, if you walk in fire I'm with you. And we felt that God is talking to us, telling us, why are you afraid, I'm with you. So, next day we sent them to school. And I started to go to my work. (Mo2, MA)

Petitionary prayers tap into the conflict context on a more general level also. Six of the interviewees mention praying for peace or praying for the situation to ease:

But we will stand with high morals and looking for the end of the siege and we pray for peace with our neighbour Israel, or equal rights as in the UN resolutions and to live side by side in peace. (M11, E)

Praying for peace can also come through personal experience and a change of a person's own understanding, as this middle-aged respondent describes. In his younger years he had been fighting and confronting the Israeli soldiers and was beaten many times by the soldiers, thus ending up being bitter and hostile. A personal relationship with God, as he describes it, changed his attitude:

So, now I'm really praying for peace, I'm seeking for peace, I'm trying to do whatever I can do. That I will have peace, my family will have peace and my people as well, will have peace. So, and the Israeli soldiers as well. I look at them in a different way now ... I really pray for them. It's not what God intended for us, to be enemies. (Mo2, MA)

When the responses were examined across the age groups it was shown that only one young adult mentioned peace; three of the respondents who did were middle aged and two were elderly. This might indicate the impact of the experience of war among the middle aged and the elderly. One of the middle-aged interviewees pointed out that there had been many wars during her life:

Living under occupation is not something easy at all. Since I was born, we have been through too many wars. Actually, every two-three years,

we have a war. When I graduated from the high school the First Intifada started in 1986, 1987 and in 2000 we had the Second Intifada and every other year we have a war either on the Gaza Strip or on the West Bank. (Fo1, MA)

Petitionary prayers included also requests for forgiveness of sins (two mentions), general 'what do I need' prayers (four mentions) and health or healing (four mentions). It is noteworthy that half of the prayers for health were mentioned by the elderly. During late life prayers for health seem to increase. Only one specific material petition was mentioned.

Five of the participants indicate wrestling with God, being angry with Him and asking why?

Sometimes I get angry with him and I ask him: why? Concerning many things I would say why. But then if it's not me it would be someone else, so I just shut up and – it's evil and you have to fight. (Fo3, MA)

And sometimes you just say God why this is happening? You know, we are normal people, we are not theologians, we are not pastors. We don't understand the religion in that way, in that real way. So, we ask God, why this is happening to us? (M13, MA)

Ritualistic prayer

The ritualistic prayer was the second most-often used prayer type. Respondents mentioned utilising ritualistic prayer such as praying with the rosary or reading from a prayer book or Bible during the course of one's own devotional practice and in church services. Prayer books were utilised quite often, as this respondent indicates:

And they have the book from the Lutherans ... This is good, every day we do it with (xxx). We thank God that we have Facebook; the only things I like to read are the Catholic prayers; words from any prayer will help. (Fo4, E)

As the Greek Orthodox Church has some of its liturgy in Greek, being able to join the prayers in Arabic was a reason for four of the respondents to attend a church of another denomination. This Greek Orthodox young adult had studied in Latin Catholic

school and was familiar with their prayers and attended their acts of worship in order to be able to join in and understand the ritualistic prayers:

So, for me, I prefer to pray, to go to the Latin Catholic because I practise, not to practise but I know the prayers there, so it's easier for me ... Yes, when I go the church I want to be one who participates in the prayer. Not to feel like I am asleep. No, I want to participate. When I go to the Greek church, I participate, but not like when I go the Catholic. When I finish it, I will be happy. (Anonymous interviewee)

For this participant the ritualistic prayer was the one that helped her during the most difficult times:

During my hardest time I prayed a lot using Psalm 23, God is my shepherd. That is my favourite. I just keep repeating it. Then I count up to the number of sixty-nine; that's the number of the words it has. (F03, MA)

This parallels with the research evidence showing that, when a person feels sad or is very stressed they may quite often engage in ritualistic prayer; the prayer you know by heart (Poloma and Pendleton 1989: 51). When the ritualistic prayer was examined according to the age groups it was shown that it was most utilised in the oldest age group (67%), followed by the young adult group (55%) and lastly in the middle-aged group (33%). Ritualistic or traditional prayer is understood to correlate with church attendance (Bänzinger *et al.* 2008: 110), which is also

evidenced by the present study, as the elderly group mentions ritualistic prayer the most often and attends church the most often. The content of the ritualistic prayers was not examined from the denominational perspective; however, it is noteworthy that most of the respondents belong to traditional churches and this may partially explain the high occurrence of ritualistic prayer.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is one of the oldest and well-known Christian prayer types. Many of the respondents mention thanking God in everyday life. Thanksgiving was the third most-often utilised prayer type and altogether made up 15 per cent of all the prayers. Sometimes the gratitude is deeply touching; as with this interviewee, who recollects initially having a lot of trouble in life and then a wonderful family trip in the midst of all the stress:

We had a very, very nice summer holiday. And then when I came back I just wanted to pray to say thanks for all the good I had received. So, we went to the Gethsemane Church, the one where he [Jesus] said his last prayer. And I just couldn't stop crying. It was really, that year was one of the toughest years in my life. (F17, E)

Even if there are disappointments or difficulties in life, thanksgiving is present, as this interviewee explains. She feels God is giving her many challenges, yet she is grateful for everything:

He [God] likes to challenge me a lot [laughing], He does. He does, yeah. But again, I always thank God for everything. Always, always, always. But again, I feel like He pushes me to the edge. Yeah. He likes to do that [laughing] I don't know why... I mean we can always be ungrateful if the thing doesn't work out. That means we just complain. I do complain a lot to him. But no, of course not. Nothing, nothing will sort of stop my faith or change my thinking. Nothing, nothing. (F17, E)

Thanksgiving was also seen as the primary essence of one's spirituality, as this respondent explains. He defined him-

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Jerusalem is a holy city for the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Photo: Shmuel Spiegeman.



Easter worship at the Mount of Olives. Photo: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

self as a spiritual person rather than religious, thus thanksgiving is practising his spirituality and it is the core of his faith:

Yes, He [God] knows everything, so if you want to knock on His door, He knows why and when. And He knows what to do with you. So, you have to be thankful. I am, you know. I think I practise my spirituality every minute, every second when I'm thankful to God ... I feel that I am very thankful for everything. You know, even though you meet things that you can't understand. One of the people who is always thankful. Mainly for my family, even being in Palestine under occupation. (M13, MA)

When examined through the age groups, it showed that there is not an explicit difference between the groups. Three of the young adults mention thanking God (33%), compared to six of the middle-aged group (33%) and three of the elderly (37%).

Meditative prayer

Meditative prayer was the least-often utilised prayer type (9%). Meditative prayer, or contemplation, is often described with phrases such as 'being in the presence of God' or 'feeling God's presence' and it is often seen as a subjective religiosity. Meditative or contemplative prayer is 'experimental knowledge' (Aumann 1980: 329–30) of 'being in the presence of God' rather than just reading or reciting the prayers. It doesn't necessarily include words, but involves just

being in the presence of God or feeling intimacy with God as this interviewee describes it:

So, when I go to church, I go with this idea that I want to go there, meditate, have some time between me and God. And, I just close my eyes and be with that, you know, it's just travelling into a different world. You know, that's the feeling coming from it. Yeah. (F17, E)

Contemplative or meditative prayer can also be verbal, but the approach to prayer and the experience are deeper, as this respondent reflects:

Each time I pray, I feel that is the first time I'm praying. When I feel that I'm praying for the first time, I read more the prayer, without just reciting it, but more on contemplating what I'm reading and this gives me like a spiritual, it fills my spiritual needs ... Not just reciting and saying words without not really feeling what I'm saying. (M16, MA)

Meditative prayer was utilised mostly by the middle-aged group (5 mentions) and it is only mentioned once in both of the other two age groups.

Prayer experiences

Religious experience has been extensively studied. There is a wide variety of religious experiences from deep and profound feelings of peace and unity to sensations of light, warmth and sound (James 2002; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997: 73–9). It is a subject of debate what the experiences are and if they really exist (Spilka *et al.* 1985: 154–68). However, in this study the starting point is the experience of the participants and how they talk about it. In this study the prayer experiences also include the prayer answers. Positive prayer experiences were reported by twenty-three participants (65%). The participants report prayer experiences such as answers to prayer requests, a deeper understanding of one's life situation, the strong presence of God and physiological prayer experiences.

This young adult describes a prayer answered in relation to a family issue:

And I'm telling you, three years ago we faced as a family a very big matter, but now, after praying and believing, we pass over it. Because we believe in God, we pray and I believe that God is standing by us and protecting us, so our believing in God is getting bigger and bigger. (F11, YA)

Prayer experiences can also include dreams, as this young adult describes: he had been praying about his future and where to go to study. He felt God answered him through a dream:

Many things happened but I don't know if it's true or just dreaming; like, one day someone came to me in my dream and told me to come and follow. And I was like very peace and I was crying from happiness. Yeah, but, I don't know if it is psychological, inside deep in my soul, or if its true that God wants me. (M15, YA)

Many of the interviewees also mentioned feeling the presence of God during prayer. This elderly man had to have a medical operation. He was not a strong believer previously, however, surviving the operation and cancer impacted on his faith. He describes the presence of God like this:

During my operation, I felt that God was holding my hand and guiding my steps. Believe me, the doctor who detected the trauma, you know, the cancer, the tumour in my stomach, he told me that in your case nobody can detect the cancer, but miraculously it was detected. It was very small, it was in its first stage. So, it was a miracle. Whenever I go to see him, he says, you are one per million who was safe from this disease. So, I think God is with me. (Mo5, E)

The prayer experiences can be very physical, as this member of a traditional church explains. He attends weekly mass and the prayer experience is very deep during the ritualistic prayer:

When we invoke the Holy Spirit come to change the bread to body of Jesus and the wine into blood, this, I cannot tell you, I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit ... The Lord's prayer I feel my hands very, very, very warm. All my body is warm. And when I cry of Him, when they ask

the Holy Spirit to come. And you say the mass, you say thank you Jesus for this voice at your heart. You cannot resist, you cry. Cry of happiness, you cry because you feel you are loved. You are chosen, you are important ... And when we ask the Holy Spirit come, depends on the person, all my body shakes, sometimes I cry. Why I tell you this? This gives me strength to continue my week and if I miss the Sunday, I don't feel good. (M20, E)

When the responses across the age groups are examined, it shows that five young adults (56%), twelve of the middle-aged group (66%) and six of the elderly (75%) reported having experiences during prayer.

Discussion

The present findings suggest that prayer is used as a major coping device among the participants. All participants mention that they pray, and most of them indicate that prayer is helpful in stressful life situations. Thirty of the thirty-five participants report that prayer provides positive emotional support such as relief, help and release of stress. This finding parallels previous studies that suggest that personal prayer correlates positively and supports one's well-being (Fabricatore and Handal 2000: 225; Maltby *et al.* 1999: 373). I will first discuss in general what the results revealed about how prayer helps practitioners to cope and then in detail how the utilisation of prayer occurs across the generations.

It is not possible to make any generalisations on the basis of the results gathered here as the number of participants was relatively small ($n=35$). However, it is possible to draw some conclusions concerning this particular group of people and see some traces of trends at a more general level.

More than half (65%) of the participants report having experiences during prayer. These included possible answers to the prayer, feelings of divine presence and physical experiences of light and warmth during the prayer. According to the previous research, it seems that prayer experiences support one's coping even if there is doubt as to whether the source of the prayer experience is God or not. The psychological experience of receiving help is valid for the receiver, whether the ground is psychological or divine. Research findings (Maltby *et al.* 2008: 127;

Poloma and Pendleton 1989: 50) suggest that prayer experiences are related to subjective well-being. Previous studies further suggest that prayer experiences may precipitate in a stressful life situation such as losing a job or the impending death of a relative (Hay 1982; Hardy 1979 cited by Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997: 84–5). Prayer experiences seem to be a source of coping among the respondents and the high occurrence of the prayer experiences may point to the stressful life situation they are in.

Participants report positive support in praying for others. Previous studies indicate that praying for others, or offering religious support, has a positive effect on the well-being of the praying person (Koenig *et al.* 1998: 513–21; O’Laioire 1997: 38). Intercessional prayer was the most often-used petitionary prayer. The high occurrence of intercessional prayer is in correlation with previous studies (Koenig *et al.* 2012: 53–4), showing that people tend to pray for others. In the present study most of the intercessional prayers concern safety and the protection of family and friends. The prayers are more outspoken about protection and safety rather than merely the general well-being of others. This may be due to the volatile context.

Praying with others is reported to help in the midst of challenges. Cindy A. Sousa (2013: 514–15) suggests in her study on women in Gaza that it is not only the act of praying, however important it may be, but also the institutional and organisational aspect of religion that supports the person praying. Previous studies further suggest that collective prayers build collective identity and expressions of who the participants are as a community (Fuiist 2015: 528, 533). Ritualistic prayer was the second most-often used prayer type. Being together in the same church and saying the same prayers together seems to support the participants’ ability to cope. It seems that the church community plays an important role in coping.

One striking finding was that living amid conflict does not seem to have an impact on personal prayers for peace. Only 7 per cent of all the prayers made were for peace. However, it would be anticipated that people living in volatile or conflicted contexts might pray more for peace than people in other situations. This is not the case among these participants. This might indicate a sense of hopelessness in the midst of what seems to be a situation that will not change. Previous research suggests that when a person has no control over a situation and it becomes chronic



Via Dolorosa, 9th Station in Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.
Photo: Berthold Werner.

the person may rely more on emotion-based prayers, such as thanksgiving, rather than problem-focused prayers such as petitions (Laird *et al.* 2004: 253). The occupation has been going on for fifty years and intifadas and wars have occurred one after another. The age cohorts reveal that even the youngest members of the young adult cohort have experienced at least one intifada and many wars in the Gaza Strip. Some participants in the oldest cohort have seen all the wars since the Israel’s War of Independence in 1948.

Across-generation analysis showed that there are some parallel findings and some differences with previous research findings. It seems that over the life course religiosity is apparent even in stressful conflict context. People still try to live normal lives amid the challenges, and prayers concern one’s personal life. It seems that the prayer life of the young adult group differentiates in some aspects from what tends to be the general life-course religiosity, and the two older age groups follow the pattern more closely.

It has been argued that there is a sharp decline in religious belief and activity between the ages 18–30 (Pratt 1949: 115; Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997: 152). This is not the case with the present study. Sixty-

six per cent of the young adults attend church on a weekly basis and all of them report praying. Religious activity among young adults seems to be higher in the present study than is shown in other studies tapping the religiosity of youth in non-conflict context (Voas and Doebler 2011: 47; Janssen *et al.* 1990: 102). The results of this study suggest that religion and prayer are important for the young adults. The finding is in consistent with previous studies (Munayer 2000: 71–3).

Most of the research on youth and religiosity in non-conflicted contexts has been conducted in Western countries within fairly stable political situations and quite a different social and cultural setting; thus comparisons cannot be made. However, the results concerning personal prayer life do seem to be parallel. Personal prayer is important for young adults regardless of the context in which they are living, or their religious orientation (Munayer 2000: 70–2; Nance *et al.* 2010: 341–3; Maltby *et al.* 1999: 373). In a study conducted among Palestinian youths in Israel, in the 24-item questionnaire the claims ‘Prayer helps me a lot’ and ‘God means a lot to me’ have the highest correlations (Munayer 2000: 71–2). The content of petitionary prayers seems to be of the same type; personal issues and needs-based prayers are most common. These findings indicate more of a lifespan prayer life than a conflict versus non-conflict context.

In general, the Palestinian young adults seem to become more secular in the context of institutionalised religiosity (Sabella 2000: 17–19), but a personal prayer life is important to them. At the same time their Christian identity is becoming more important (Munayer and Horenczyk 2014: 368). Research from former Yugoslavia indicates that in a conflict where nationalism and religion are involved the religion becomes more important among the youth (Voas and Doubler 2011: 46–7). The Israel–Palestine conflict is not a religious conflict; however, religion is very visible in the conflict. Palestinian Christians are not a minority on ethnic grounds; however, they are a very small minority in terms of religious numbers. This might be one of the explanations as to why religious identity has become more important among the Palestinian young adults.

Findings concerning the two oldest age groups reveal that these groups seem to be more in line with what tends to be a more general lifespan prayer life among the middle-aged and elderly. The middle-aged

group prays the most petitionary prayers and attends church the least. This high occurrence of petitionary prayers may correlate with the stage of life, as midlife involves many different aspects, such as family, children and work and provides many reasons for prayer (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 81; Peacock and Poloma 1999). Church attendance tends to decrease during the middle-age years and then increase again in later years. This might indicate a life-course pattern that during midlife church attendance is lower due to the business of work and family (Peacock and Poloma 1999: 332).

The results further suggest that the highest prayer frequency is among the elderly, as previous studies also suggest (Spilka and Ladd 2013: 78, 83–4; Levin and Taylor 1997: 80–2). The utilisation of the prayer types follows what tends to be the general life-course pattern. Petitionary prayers concern mostly health and intercession for family and friends. However, it is noteworthy that among the elderly the percentage of prayers for peace is the highest (25%), compared to the middle-aged (17%) and the young adults (11%). This may be related to the age cohort experience of wars and intifadas. Ritualistic prayer is most often used among the elderly. This is in correlation with church attendance, which is also the highest among the elderly.

As a conclusion it can be said that prayer is a significant coping strategy for the Palestinian Christian participants living under occupation. Patterns of lifespan religiosity and differences in the utilisation of prayer in age groups is apparent. However, the conflict may explain some of the differences in the results compared to previous studies; such as the importance of religion for the young adults, the importance of the church community and petitions for safety. ■

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MARI PARKKINEN

This dissertation examines the personal and communal dimensions of Christianity in fragmented Palestinian Christian lifeworlds.

Particularly, the study focuses on the meanings the Palestinian Christians give to their personal religiosity and their Christianity in relation to family, community and society. The research concludes that religion is a major factor in socioeconomic, psychosocial and personal lifeworlds of Palestinian Christians, nevertheless, religion is changing to a more personal choice.



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