



# **”This is our land”: The good life in a Lebanese village**

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## ABSTRACT

Ebel Es Saqi is a village in Southern Lebanon, close to the border with Israel. Since 1978 UN peacekeeping troops have been placed here because of the tension in the area deriving from the Lebanese Civil War. This is a thesis about people's everyday lives in this village: how they live there, how they perceive it, and how they apply meaning to it. People in Ebel Es Saqi are very loving of their homeland despite of it being an area with a fragile history. Through a very self-reflexive and personal viewpoint I have written this thesis based on my background as a half Norwegian, half Lebanese, student doing research in this area. What I discovered was that people in this village, despite of the history books and media coverage implying differently, are living the good life. With topics such as reciprocity, coffee drinking, Heimat and neighborhoods, the reader will hopefully get an understanding of how life in this village is constructed and end up seeing Lebanon framed in a slightly different way than how the global public (news or other informational sources) usually frames the area.





## PREFACE

Marianne Gullestad, a Norwegian anthropologist, once wrote in her book *Everyday Life Philosophers*:

*"To write one's life is to increase one's own understanding of self by creating a self-image. It is a form of knowledge, a way of tuning in to an understanding of social and cultural structures and one's own placement inside these structures. An analytical interest for the relation between the writings and the author might prove to be an important contribution from the social sciences to the text analysis, as a part of a more precise understanding of the relation between text and society." (Gullestad 1996, 243)<sup>1</sup>*

With these words in mind I would like to begin this thesis by stating that this is not only an academic text, but also a story about my own adventure of discoveries and transformation of ideas and perceptions as a student of Visual Cultural Studies doing fieldwork in a village called Ebel Es Saqi in the southeastern parts of Lebanon, and also as a 'Halfie' – one "[...] whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage."<sup>2</sup> (Abu-Lughod 2006, 466). Much as Gullestad indicates, writings of a more personal and self-reflexive sense might be a good way of conveying cultural understandings both out to society and to the author herself or himself. Having said this I would like to continue by explaining my background for the fieldwork that as the reader by now might have figured out is a quite personal one.

I was born and raised in Norway to a Norwegian father and a Lebanese mother. Because of this I have been to Lebanon on several vacations during my upbringing. The way I have experienced this country, and especially Ebel Es Saqi as this is my mother's own home village and the place we spent most time in, was very different than what apparently my other friends and neighbors here in Norway have. The difference is that I had been there and they had not. They received their information about Lebanon from watching or reading the news, not by being present there. As I grew older and started to expand my social network, what

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<sup>1</sup> My own translation

<sup>2</sup> Abu-Lughod notifies that she has borrowed this term ('halfies') from Kirin Narayan.

struck me as the common denominator in the casual conversations I had meeting new people was that when I told them about the fact that I was half Norwegian, half Lebanese, most of them asked me questions like “Isn’t that where all the bombings are happening?” or “How’s the situation there now?” implying that Lebanon was directly connected to war related issues. And who could blame them, really? Nowadays the media, and especially the news coverage, is a huge part of the global flow of information.

Anthony P. Cohen states that: “[...] as ethnographers we should begin to make the cultures we study intelligible to us through the terms in which they are meaningful to their members, rather than by attempting to isolate their putatively ‘objective’ manifestations.” (Cohen 1982, 3) This quote will be my motivation when I tackle the issue of war in between the pages of my thesis. Overall, my main interest is that I am writing about this village in Southern Lebanon that, despite of being in the crossfire of different conflicts during the history of the area surrounding and including this country, have managed to show me a different side of Lebanon and the Middle East which has a tendency to be overshadowed by these tragic events.

With this background information about my motivations in place, I would like to continue by stating that when the time came that we had to think about our fieldwork options I was inspired to do as Anthony Cohen wrote about in the quote above that all ethnographers should do when trying to convey a part of a culture to someone: I wanted to frame the other part of Lebanese culture – the part expressed by the Lebanese people themselves and that I had seen. Moreover, it felt extremely unfair that there was a part of Lebanon missing in the news coverage: the other side of Lebanon that I had been lucky enough to experience because of my travels there, and that was left out almost every time the country’s name was mentioned on television or in newspapers. It was essentially because of this homogenous news coverage that I got these responds from people here in Norway. They did not know about this other part, and I now had an opportunity to change that – to frame it differently, so to speak.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To continue in the mental footsteps of Marianne Gullestad I too think it is possible, and even preferable, to [...] *feel the pulse of today's modern society by listening to 'regular people's' experiences.*<sup>3</sup> (1996, 243) The difference between our methods used<sup>4</sup> to gain information is that she made people send a written text to her where they wrote about their lives while I was in the field observing people's everyday lives, engaging in them, taking notes and filming. Still, I think her way of thinking about anthropological research in general, especially considering the quote above, is of great importance when it comes to doing fieldwork nowadays. Connecting it to Cohen (c.f. quote in preface) and his way of formulating this, I felt it important to start my fieldwork by going into it with as much respect to and care possible for the inhabitants of Ebel Es Saqi and those of them who I would eventually have as my informants.

Nevertheless, I had to begin somewhere and so it all started with a few ideas I developed before entering the field itself. This is the start of my story.

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<sup>3</sup> My own translation.

<sup>4</sup> In this case I talk about the methods Gullestad used for her book *Everyday life philosophers*.

## 1.1) Before going on fieldwork



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During the start up phase of the Master Program of Visual Cultural Studies I had an early idea about *where* to conduct my fieldwork. **Ebel Es Saqi** is a village in the southeastern part of Lebanon, which is a country placed in the Middle East. I would normally call Ebel a small town considering that the number of inhabitants is around 2600, as well as the fact that there are several shops here. The reason I call it a village in this thesis is because it is what the inhabitants called it. Also, in a more general Lebanese context it is indeed considered a village if one compares it to for example the more cosmopolitan capitol city Beirut or the small towns surrounding Ebel Es Saqi.

Because this is the birthplace of my own mother, I had already been here several times during my upbringing. We have, as a family, spent a month or so in this village during summer vacations throughout the years. There is a huge variety of people in this place, but still what

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<sup>5</sup> Image gotten from website: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/middle-east/lebanon/> (Self-made alterations) Last entry date: Monday November 26, 2012.

caught my attention the most each time I went there was that it seemed that they were connected to each other on a level of strong togetherness despite the differences in their everyday lives – whether that would be economical, occupational, political and/or religious status.

My initial ideas were, as I have touched upon, based on observations I had made prior to the fieldwork. I had, in addition to the issues raised above, noticed that there was a locality division according to religious belonging. The Druze, a monotheistic Islamic religious group of people mainly living in the mountain areas of Lebanon and the countries around, where dressed differently<sup>6</sup> than those wearing modern ‘regular’ clothes and so I could easily point them out in the village. What had struck me as most interesting about the Druze over the years was that they were all living next to each other as a group in the upper parts of Ebel Es Saqi. They had made a village within the village, so to speak. But even though they were locally separated from the rest of the village (which I at the time figured consisted solely of different Christian communities), the inhabitants altogether as one collective group were interacting with each other on the different arenas of everyday life. This made me wonder: *what, despite all the differences in the inhabitants’ everyday lives, differences that seen through a historical lens might imply the opposite, makes them even more connected to each other? What is the root of their togetherness?* In other words, I wanted to find this sameness in between all the differences in the people’s lives, and how this sameness is constructed and organized within the social arena of Ebel Es Saqi. These were a few of my main ideas to focus on before going into the field. I felt that there was something special about the togetherness in this place, despite the differences in the inhabitants’ lives. I just focused on the wrong aspect of it, which I eventually came to understand were vague generalizations made on my part and which were the same homogenous and assumed ideas about this place as my friends back in Norway had.

While my initial feeling about togetherness in Ebel Es Saqi was the basis for my project, my focus point was based on my biased assumptions stemming from my previous experiences as a tourist and daughter. The differences according to religious belonging were not as prominent, or talked about as an important way of differentiation amongst the inhabitants, as I had expected. During those previous times I had been here I had not really spent much time

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<sup>6</sup> I recalled the men wearing black harem pants and a white little, white ‘hat’ on their head while the women wore black cloaks/dresses with long, white headscarves.

with many of the villagers as my main reason for being there was solely to have a relaxing vacation, and so I focused on spending most of the time with my family whom I never see except during these vacations every other year. Therefore, one can say that these somewhat preconceived ideas I had in the beginning were based on my background as a 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod 2006).<sup>7</sup> For me, as a half-Norwegian-half-Lebanese young woman, doing research in a familiar place to the extent that I already knew something from before and could analyze these issues based on my own memory; there was no surprise that I had those ideas prior to entering the field as opposed to one who is not familiar with this place from before in this 'halfie' way. As a result this particular place was partly incorporated in me in the sense that it was hard for me to be or not to be fully objective or subjective about this place because of my 'halfie' position, which had created a split selfhood in me: I have, according to Abu-Lughod, multiple accountability in relation to the different audiences and because of it I tend to speak with a complex awareness of and investment in reception (Abu-Lughod 2006). This paper is a result of my attempts to grasp and convey the life in this village that was and still is, with this accountability issue of Abu-Lughod in mind, not easy.

As an example I can mention a situation I experienced when I had just arrived back to Norway after fieldwork. I met a family friend who lives here in Tromsø, but who is originally from Ebel Es Saqi. She asked me about my fieldwork project and what kind of thoughts I had made about what to write in the thesis. I told her that I would write about the village as I experienced it on an everyday life basis and that I wanted to come up with topics without making Ebel sound either too idealistic or romantic nor too clinical. I told her I found that people were living somewhat of a vacation life in Ebel Es Saqi. I had observed that they did so little and their lives were characterized by routines, and I concluded by saying that I felt they were stagnated. She got upset with me for using the word 'stagnation' whilst talking about Ebel. In the beginning I did not understand why. After all; stagnation, routines, boredom; these were all terms that could explain the feeling I got in the field. People did not do much and it seemed like they were stuck in a rut: it was in the beginning the only way I could describe it without romanticizing the place too much. After some time thinking about this word, and this extreme feeling of guilt in the Lebanese half of my split selfhood, in addition to this concept not being well received by my fellow classmates and professors, I

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<sup>7</sup> As I explained in the preface a 'halfie' is according to Abu-Lughod one "[...] whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage."<sup>7</sup> (2004)



started to rethink my thesis' topics. The whole process of doing this fieldwork, writing up the thesis and editing the film has been a back-and-forth cycle of self-awareness about the different audiences to whom I have accountability, and ending in what I hope is close to the self-proposed anthropological truth of my actual experiences in the field.

I had not, up until this point, spent time in Ebel doing anthropological research. As a result, this time I was for the first time able, or trying, to see things with *their* eyes and I tried to apprehend the world of Ebel's inhabitants from *their* viewpoint, not according to my own cultural background or previous experiences. In addition, my fellow classmates and my professors did not as mentioned accept my theory on stagnation either, so I had to start working on my findings and analysis as well as change my anthropological perspectives. Looking over what I observed and experienced in this place, I can and did start to develop new ideas and theories to these empirical observations and descriptions. Let us continue by looking more closely at the way I entered the field.

### ***1.2) Entering Ebel with a different role***

The house I stayed in during fieldwork was my late uncle's house and also the house where my grandparents lived before they passed away, which means that it was the house my mother grew up in. It is here that I have been spending summer vacations throughout the years of my life. My mother, currently not having a job because of age and health, decided that me going to her home place was a nice excuse for her to join as well on my fieldwork trip. This way she could say her proper goodbyes to my uncle since she was not able to be there for his funeral that took place a few months earlier. So, during the four months of fieldwork I was actually living with my mother – just like during those previous summer vacations. In other words: there was nothing special in particular about the physical appearance of my presence this time. The difference now was in the way I chose to be present in the village. Before, I would mostly stay in the house or walk around with my mother, father, sister or other relatives. Now I was walking by myself, I was engaging more in the people to search for a story, I was (eventually) filming, and I was making myself present in the village.

From the first time I walked from our house up in the hills to downtown in the center, people were engaging themselves in me, answering my greetings and even stopping me to ask questions like “Who are you?”, “Where are you from?” “Is your family here with you?”, and later on, when I started to film; “Why are you filming?” and “Are you from TV?”. The people of Ebel Es Saqi are used to international personalities entering their village for example because of the fact that UN peacekeepers from a diverse range of countries throughout the past thirty to forty years or so have been established in the area, but also because of reasons like mine, despite conducting fieldwork; international family ties.

After some time people got to know me as ‘bint Noha, bint Wadih’ – daughter of Noha, daughter of Wadih (my grandfather). They often asked me to come visit and bring my mother as they wanted to catch up, but most of the time I was on my own because my mother didn’t want to interfere with my project. I talked with people, got to know their everyday life activities and routines, introduced myself as half-Norwegian-half-Lebanese as well as a student doing a project there. I don’t know if people at first quite understood the purpose of my project since I was seemingly only walking around and talking with people, mingling, as this was my way of doing participant observation in the beginning. Participant observation, in Spradley’s sense of the term is how as ethnographers we don’t only make observations of people and how they behave – both in and out of social situations – but how we also participate as well to experience the people’s everyday life activities directly, to get to feel what events are like for them, and to record our own perceptions (Spradley 1980). This was how I was starting my fieldwork, how I was beginning to map out the differences between people’s everyday lives in Ebel Es Saqi, and how I slowly gained access to different arenas (places) within the arena of Ebel and different actors in these arenas – which along with a third ‘A’; activities; Spradley writes are the three terms that identifies a social situation. (Spradley 1980)

After a while people got more used to my presence in the village as ‘the girl with the project’ or ‘the girl with the camera’, always walking up and down the streets. In a way I became a part of their daily lives, which astonished me as very routine-like. It was nice for me to be there in the beginning, and I loved it because it was just as I had imagined and experienced it the previous times I have spent time in this place. Life was really like a vacation there, for both visitors and the people there. Seemingly they did not do much. It looked like they had fun and relaxed on most occasions. Even while at work. Because of little customers

shopkeepers could be found sitting outside their shops drinking coffee and what could be considered slacking off in Norway. In Ebel this was not looked upon as something bad. It was just the way it was, and I enjoyed it like that. However, after a month or so I got fed up doing nothing, walking up and down, shouting greetings to the same man sitting on his porch drinking coffee with his neighbors, filming the streets or other people walking. I was extremely bored and I started questioning how the villagers could possibly handle living their lives like they were stuck in a never-ending cycle of routines. Every day I would meet the same people doing the same things knowing that the next day would be the same all over again. Simultaneously, they did not seem to mind. How could they not be bored?

### ***1.2.1) Ethnography of the particular in the study of a village***

As I have briefly touched upon being a ‘halfie’ made me in the beginning of the fieldwork take some of the observations I made for granted. The particularities of Ebel life were not important to me, as these were things I had seen before. I already knew about this ‘other side’ of Lebanon, the side that was not shown to the western audience who had no other input of knowledge about this place other than getting the information from the media. I knew about the togetherness, the hospitality and the kindness of people that seemed to be erased or forgotten in the stories about war and conflicts. I knew because I had experienced it. I was as mentioned earlier, because of my ‘halfie’ identity and background knowledge, in a way both privileged and restricted when it came to doing anthropological research here.

Reading Lila Abu-Lughod’s perspectives on doing ‘halfie’ anthropology, I can strongly relate to the fact that I now see how my positionality in the field can be questioned as an observer with a bias. My whole reason for doing this specific fieldwork was motivated by the lack of everyday life descriptions that I felt was important to be presented to a western audience. Because the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) can be connected to political and religious issues, one can say that I was biased here in the way that I was so wrapped up in trying to prove the opposite; how people of religious belonging and political standpoint can still live side by side peacefully; that I did not see what the important clue was in order to find the root of the togetherness I was searching for. I was looking for ways to differ people, not for ways in which I could connect them to each other. Therefore, I categorized and put people into

boxes labeled ‘Druze’ and ‘Christian’ since this was the easiest way to separate them by differences. Religious difference was the most visual one because of clothing styles and localization, and as a result I concluded that this was the more prominent, if not only, relevant difference between the inhabitants. I would come to discover that I was wrong.

After some time in the field I noticed that the locality division according to religious belonging was not as clear-cut as I had imagined before arriving in Ebel Es Saqi for fieldwork. The nuances in this locality division appeared after I entered the field: I quickly discovered that Druze people were living next-door to Christians downtown in Ebel as well as in the upper parts of the town. They were not *only* living uphill, even if a lot of them were. But, the biggest discrepancy was discovered when I found out that not all Druze people were wearing the traditional Druze clothing. I was told that if you are not ‘very religious’ and haven’t accepted the faith properly, to its fullest, then you won’t be able to wear the religious clothing nor go to the religious meeting house to pray and so forth. For example, I was really surprised to find out that both Haifa and Amal were Druze<sup>8</sup>. I figured that all three of these informants of mine, ladies sitting outside their shops, were Christians because they all wore what I would consider as ‘regular’ clothes. In addition to their clothes, discovering that there were Druze as well as Christians having shops downtown Ebel was not corresponding with the previous ideas that I had brought with me coming from Norway: I had been generalizing by placing the Druze in the ‘Druze neighborhood’ *only*, while I placed the Christians *anywhere but* the ‘Druze neighborhood’.

The symbolic borders of religious belonging were overlapping and vague. I met people downtown, wearing ‘regular’ clothes and maybe even owning shops there, thinking they were all Christians because this was fitting with my previous imaginations about the villagers when it came to their localities. I then discovered that there were Druze people among these shop owners and people with ‘regular’ and fashionable clothing, and so it was at this point that I realized the differences related to religion was not making this border between the inhabitants in the way they interact with each other that I was imagining at the beginning. Therefore, it was at this moment that my project’s focus was changed. I decided to look more into the everyday life activities of the inhabitants in general and emphasizing on how each and every one was creating understanding or meaning in their activities instead of separating them in

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<sup>8</sup> C.f. chapter 2.2.3 – *The people*.

relation to religious belonging, since this in some cases didn't have much to do with how people led their lives on a daily basis. People were still, despite of which religion they belonged to or which job they had, displaying togetherness through various forms and activities.

Druze and Christians in Ebel, even if the history books would imply differently, are living together as one community here.<sup>9</sup> Around the same time that I travelled to Lebanon, the Lebanese Easter celebration took place. I found an interesting article online about how, although this celebration is a Christian one, everyone in Ebel joined in on one of these annual rituals: the egg cracking tradition.

*[...] "It's a friendly way for Druze in Ibl al-Saqi to share in the holidays and occasions celebrated by Christians in south Lebanon," Ghabbar said. "People young and old take part, in a type of 'formal' gathering in the public square of the Druze neighborhood of the village," he said. Each "contestant" takes a colored, hard-boiled egg and cracks it gently – or not so gently – against the egg held by a competitor. The losing egg is the one that cracks in the collision, and by tradition should go to the winner.[...]"<sup>10</sup> (Online newspaper article by The Daily Star)*

This is one of the examples that I can think of when it comes to the official neighborhood events, showing that this is a place where religious belonging is not a dividing factor but rather that people are through activities like these trying to erase this outside view of separation between the two. Ebel Es Saqi has for example been in the Lebanese media a few times exactly because of the togetherness of the inhabitants there.

Further into my fieldwork I continued to mingle more with people outside my family, being there in their everyday lives. This is how my fieldwork developed: by asking questions to try to map out the reasons behind my initial feeling of togetherness that I experienced in this place. I started to look more on the similarities among the differences between people instead

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<sup>9</sup> It's notable that even though the imagined tension is not there, people still talk about 'the Druze village or neighborhood' inside Ebel though this is merely an expression of characterization or placement rather than a statement of religious division or tension. This might again be something connected to the past when the existence of the division and tension was, according to writings on history, a reality.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Apr-14/170256-egg-cracking-tradition-isnt-just-for-easter-or-christians.ashx#axzz28ng4Faww> Last entry date: 11.12.12

of differences that separated them according to religious belonging. When it came to which aspect of difference I was going to focus on I figured the best way to do this was to look at individuals in their particular everyday lives rather than looking on groups of people as one entity, like I did in the beginning with religion.

Lila Abu-Lughod writes about ‘ethnography of the particular’ in her article *Writing Against Culture* (2006). Reading this article one can understand that what she means by this phrase is somewhat related to the art of looking at details in societies, particularities, which can be described as specific puzzle pieces belonging to a huge puzzle. By looking at these specificities separately, mapping them out in relation to the whole and identifying them piece-by-piece, one can be able to gain knowledge about the whole puzzle, or society, altogether. This is only my, perhaps complicated, way of putting it. Abu-Lughod herself explains the phrase like this:

*[...] the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words. What I am arguing for is a form of writing that might better convey that. (2006, 474)*

This actor-related perspective of hers made me understand that I had to move from my general experience of boredom to describe the particular lives of people by looking at the different actors’ activities, how they used space or place, to discover the sameness and differences. Then, by looking at the meaning people put in these particularities I would perhaps understand the reason for the inhabitants’ togetherness. Furthermore, I fully support Abu-Lughod’s way of thinking, especially considering my already expressed critique against the media and news coverage in particular. What had motivated me to do this fieldwork in the first place can on the flip side be supported back by Abu-Lughod’s critique against generalizations in the way that what I am doing, or did, is related directly to what she is arguing for: ethnography of the particular. Additionally, this can also be related to or support the visual aspect of my fieldwork, which I will discuss later in this subchapter.

In the previous subchapter, however, I wrote how I in the start of this fieldwork, compared to earlier visits to Ebel, tried to mingle more with the inhabitants to make them acknowledge my presence there. By doing this I was getting more and more recognized among the locals,

which ultimately led me to expand my knowledge about the place from focusing on generalizations to be more aware of the particularities. Hence I stopped generalizing so much and started to rather look more closely at the little details in the everyday life activities of people. For, as Abu-Lughod puts it so eloquently:

*When one generalizes from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenize them. The appearance of an absence of internal differentiation makes it easier to conceive of a group of people as a discrete, bounded entity, like “the Nuer”, “the Balinese”, and “the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin’” who do this or that and believe such-and-such. (2006, 475)*

Exactly because of the representational dilemmas I have from being a ‘halfie’ with multiple accountability, I in the beginning found it easier to generalize the villagers into ‘the Druze’ and ‘the Christians’ since this was how I thought I could please the different audiences I had in mind while elaborating my findings. Why? Because then they could become, like Abu-Lughod writes in the excerpt above, ‘a discrete, bounded entity’ and thereby I figured I would not step on anyone’s toes. In addition, as I have mentioned earlier, I did not recognize other internal differences right away. This might derive from the Norwegian part of me as I have been born and raised there. Not being used to the Ebel lifestyle as it is quite different than Norway, the easiest option of doing fieldwork was by starting with generalizations. Therefore, I thought the religious differences in Ebel should have the primary focus because of the strong, visual differences between people when it came to this exact issue. Abu-Lughod strongly criticizes anthropologists who work with these types of generalizations as they can lead to homogenous descriptions of a society, enhancing issues like coherence and timelessness. People are not stuck. They are not stagnated. I know that now, and I completely agree with Lila Abu-Lughod when it comes to this.

Since I was doing visual anthropology I was carrying a big, semi-professional video camera with me in the village, filming the daily lives of my informants. This way I was emphasizing on some parts of the lives of the villagers and choosing not to film other parts. For example: the way I chose to introduce Sara’s daily life in the film was enhanced by me emphasizing her domestic activities. She spent a lot of time out with friends or family as well, but what struck me the most was that when she was at home she could spend hours doing ‘simple’ routine-

like things like cooking, cleaning, making and drinking coffee, and relaxing. She told me that she was doing this to ‘fill up her time’. I filmed her over and over again doing these seemingly arbitrary activities, and the way I have chosen to represent her in the finished film is by letting the audience look at these daily activities of her, this ‘filling up’ of time, to understand the whole character of Sara as well as showing other individuals in Ebel with their own particular activities. Like this the audience can catch a glimpse of the diversity of the people living there through looking at their common activities and ideologies which I will come back to discuss in later chapters. Looking for confirmation of this way of doing visual anthropology, I can mention that I have found a great deal of inspiration in the introduction of David MacDougall’s book *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography And The Senses* as the quote below has become one of my favorites:

*[...] framing people, objects, and events with a camera is always “about” something. It is a way of pointing out, of describing, of judging. It domesticates and organizes vision. [...] It is what lifts something out of its background in order to look at it more closely, as we might pick up a leaf in the forest. (2006, 3-4)*

Going back to the way Lila Abu-Lughod argues for an anthropological way of writing called *ethnography of the particular*, the way MacDougall talks about framing can in this sense strongly relate on a visual level. By filming, or framing something with a camera, one is more aware of the details – the specific particularities in front of you. Conclusively, these two ways of doing anthropology are different in the sense that we are talking about written text versus film, but in the end they complement each other and have – at least to me – been very helpful to this learning process of doing a longer anthropological fieldwork in a partially unexplored place<sup>11</sup>. Both of these perspectives, which essentially relate to framing in one way or another, deal with the awareness of framing and of being aware of the particularities as well as how it adds to the knowledge production.

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<sup>11</sup> I here write *partially unexplored place* with my ‘halfie’ self in mind, which I already discussed earlier in the introduction and preface.



## 2. "YOU ARE WELCOME IN EBEL ES SAQI"<sup>12</sup>

### 2.1) Short history of Lebanon

I would like to begin this chapter by taking a small trip down history lane, as having some background information about the Lebanese Civil War is a good way for the reader to get more familiar with the place discussed as well as the analysis I will present later.

Politics and religion in Lebanon goes somewhat hand in hand. The historical division between the 'pan-Arabism' supporting Muslims (Shia, Sunni and Druze as well as other Islamic communities) and the 'Lebanese particularism' supporting Christians (Maronite, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox, as well as other Christian communities) mirrors how Lebanon is a unique Middle Eastern country where Islam is not the only or primary religion people in the country identify themselves with, and how this is part of the conflicts since the country is placed in an otherwise Arab area where pan-Arabism plays a huge role in the sense of its ideals about a unified Arab nationalism. This was not something the Lebanese state could come on reasonable terms with. Reading Kamil Salibi's book *A house of many mansions: the history of Lebanon reconsidered*:

*"[...] a force called Arabism, acting from outside and inside the country, stood face to face with another exclusively parochial social force called Lebanism; and the two forces collided on every fundamental issue, impeding the normal development of the state and keeping its political legitimacy and ultimate viability continuously in question. [...] it was certainly no accident that the original proponents of Lebanism in the country were almost exclusively Christians, and for the most part Maronites, while the most unbending proponents of Arabism, as a community, were the Muslims." (2003, 37)*

Ebel Es Saqi is placed in the southern parts of Lebanon. Being close to the border with Israel has therefore had its consequences during the Lebanese Civil War. The Lebanese Civil War started when thousands of Palestinians came from Jordan to Lebanon in the 1970's after they had some clashes with the state there during what is now known as The Black September.

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<sup>12</sup> C.f. photo on front page. A cement wall on the main street in Ebel that had been written on before drying, with the words: "you're welcome in Ebel Es Saqi".

They, along with Palestinian military and PLO (a Palestinian political group) were given refuge in the Lebanese capitol, Beirut, on a few conditions made by the Maronite Christians, who at the time had most of the political or decisive control in Lebanon: there were places assigned for them and streets that they could and could not use. They were not given a free right to operate whichever way they wanted to inside Lebanon – to be a state within a state, so to speak (Salibi 2003). After some time the Palestinians rebelled because of these restrictions and so the war began, lasting from 1975 to 1990. It was Arabism and its supporters against those who supported Lebanism. This outbreak led to Israel entering the south on several occasions, eager to keep the Palestinians away in fear of them being a threat if they would to come further south. Because of this tension in the southern area the United Nations sent a peacekeeping force here to try to stabilize the tension between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the Lebanese military if they were to get involved.<sup>13</sup> The only condition is that the peacekeeping forces – UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon) – cannot do anything else than try to stabilize the area and keep the peace. They are not there to fight for any parts of the conflict:

*“The whole point about peacekeeping is that it cannot create the conditions for its own success. It can act boldly and imaginatively on the spot. But it cannot alter the local situation to its advantage. Instead it has to work with what it finds, and the basic requirement for its success is local co-operation.”* (James 1983, 634)

To sum up, this religious, and also political and/or ideological, division is as I’ve mentioned earlier part of the reason behind the disturbances in and around Lebanon’s borders. However, despite all these ideological differences the people of Lebanon have throughout history shown a sense of unity in relation to both natural and human geography (Salibi 2003, 57). This is something I found very much relatable and factual being in Ebel Es Saqi during my fieldwork in 2012, and it is a big part of my findings that I will discuss further in this thesis. It is also notable that Ebel during the war was affected as it is placed near the border with Israel. This made the inhabitants move away or escape and return according to when the war was at its worst when it came to bombings or attacks in the area.

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<sup>13</sup> All this is general knowledge that I have gathered through readings and communication with my informants and my mother, and have tried to condense it the best way possible. I make no claim to completeness.

The issue of the war is something I have had hard time writing about, as this is a topic that was difficult to discuss in the field with my informants. The reason behind it has more than one-sided. First of all, during the time of my stay my mother told me not to ask or talk to people about the war in any relation. “This might upset people”, she said. I did not understand why, but as I did not want to do something that could potentially jeopardize my research I kept quiet. Of course, if someone started talking to me about the war then I asked questions. I just did not initiate conversations with this topic. Secondly, and relatable to the previous, people in Ebel apparently do not like to talk about the Lebanese Civil War. During my whole stay no one spoke to me about this, except Sara’s mother on one occasion, and Lena. Lena told me stories about how her house in Beirut was bombed down to the ground three times due to the Civil War and expressed great sadness as she recalled the incidents. Lena, however, was the only informant or inhabitant that I met who was not originally from Ebel Es Saqi. One can therefore see a correlation between shared ideas of non-topics and home place because Lena is the only person not originally from Ebel.

What I have recently discovered, however, is that although this information about the war that I have presented over the last paragraphs is true, it is as my initial ideas were: vague generalizations. What I have now come to know is that *particularly* in Ebel things have always been the way I experienced. People have always displayed togetherness. Paradoxically, the Druze and Christians in Ebel were not on respective sides during the war like the Druze and Christians in Beirut were. Neither before, nor during, nor after the war were the people of Ebel Es Saqi characterized or divided by religious belonging. The reason for this was that because this was a village with somewhat one big neighborhood, people knew each other there, and their relational roles towards each other were friends, family, neighbors, and not Druze and Christians. Yes, they were affected by the war by being close to the Israeli border. However, the threat did not come from inside. The inhabitants of Ebel, despite of religious belonging, were personally agreeing with the different political groups in the battle, and more importantly: they did not want to fight each other because then the risk of destroying their home place, their friends, their families, came as the price they had to pay of the hypothetical conflicts. They wanted peace, so they did not care for the events happening in Beirut. According to my informants, the people of Ebel cared for themselves, each other and their village. The war did not, as I said, develop from inside the village – it came from the outside. It was mainly Palestinians and Israeli fighting each other near the border. Ebel happened to be placed nearby, unfortunately. This is why people fled and later returned. It

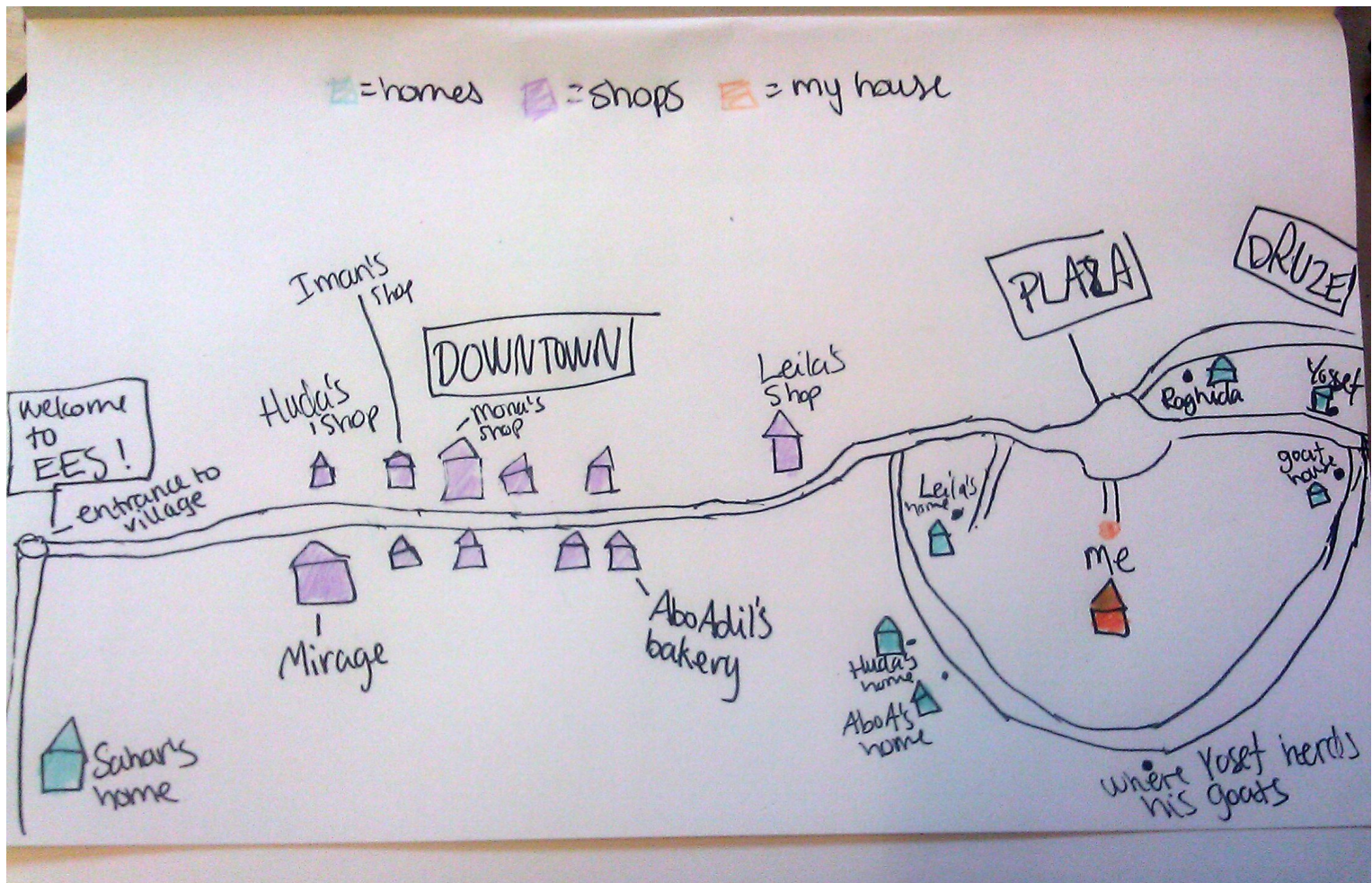
seems like the media, the history books and the other sources of information I have had to learn about the war were not completely valid as they only showed me one part of the history. They showed me the general overview, not the particular realities that in fact took place in the villages. Now I understand why my mother said that any talks about the war might upset people. It was not because it was a sore subject in the sense that they might start quarreling 'again'. It was rather a sore subject in the sense that this was something they were not proud of and that they want to put behind them.

Having the background information about Lebanese and Ebel Es Saqi history in place, I will now continue the story by jumping ahead in time to last year during my fieldwork.

## **2.2) The different categories in Ebel Es Saqi**

I will now go into the different social categories I discovered, and later found relevant to this thesis, in the field during the almost four months I spent in Ebel Es Saqi. I hope that after exploring these mental mappings of the village life, the reader will be able to have sufficient background information to contextualize my empirical data, analysis and conclusions.

### 2.2.1) The place



Ebel Es Saqi is a place in the inlands of Lebanon. They don't have access to water all day. Electricity is also a scarce resource. Still, people have learned to adapt to these lacks of basic material goods, as this is their reality. Our house was among the ones that got affected most by these lacks, both because of being placed on the 'top' of the village and because no one was living there on a regular basis. I could not take a shower whenever I wanted, like back home in Norway. Sometimes, especially in the beginning of my fieldwork, it was frustrating having to wait and hope for the electricity to come so that I could start heating up the water. This, of course, was depending on the electricity being there for more than an hour. Not to mention the fact that we had to have enough water in the tank on our roof to actually take a shower and still have water left for other areas of usage. We never knew when it could go a

<sup>14</sup> A poorly made drawing of Ebel Es Saqi seen through my eyes. Do not read too much into it, as this is purely my individual mental map of this particular place. It's mainly so the reader will have more contextual information about the physical place: to connect it to my descriptions.

day or two without getting any water at all, so when it first came we had to store it up in bottles just in case. Even though this was tough in the beginning, I managed to adapt after a while, and at one point during the fieldwork I found myself able to predict the arrival times of the electricity even better than some of the locals. I could therefore plan my day even if the mentality of people in Ebel, which I came to know and be a part of myself, could be described as a ‘go-with-the-flow’ kind of mentality: many people did not plan their days in particular, they just lived them.

Ebel Es Saqi can be, in my eyes, described as a compact village. I stayed in the upper parts in my late uncle’s house where the driveway starts directly from the plaza. The plaza is a meeting point in the village, where the municipality building is placed, as well as a few houses (like the one I stayed in) and also one of the three Christian churches in the village: the Roman Catholic Church. In addition, right behind the municipality building, the Druze’s religious building is located. The plaza is round and kind of big, like a crossroad roundabout, with roads going in different directions out of it. One road leads downtown in the center of the village where most of the shops and all restaurants are. Here the atmosphere is noisier because of more movement, more traffic and people, than in the upper parts near the plaza. Most of the time the plaza is used as a turning point for cars or busses than it is a meeting place as this happens only on formal occasions. Another road leads the opposite direction, into the ‘Druze Neighborhood’, by which it is named by the locals because it is a neighborhood where mainly inhabitants with Druze faith are living.<sup>15</sup> Here there are also some grocery stores and shops. Other smaller roads lead to various neighborhoods.

Most of my fieldwork days were spent walking downtown to film Lena in her shop, Ibrahim in his bakery or Sara in her home, or to walk down the other direction into the ‘Druze Neighborhood’ to film Nasser (though his whereabouts were mainly centered on the outskirts of Ebel, in the streets along the fields where he could herd his goats). The walk downtown to the center takes about fifteen minutes, and another fifteen minutes to Sara’s house. Along the way I met a lot of people who greeted me. In the beginning people were curious as to who I was and why I had a camera, but as word spread around the village people frequently stopped me to have a chat or to ask if I wanted a ride in their car so I wouldn’t have to walk so much. There was always someone walking the roads of Ebel (apart from myself): elderly taking their

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<sup>15</sup> It was because of this particular neighborhood I thought there was a locality division connected to religious belonging.

daily walk around the neighborhood or children playing with each other, running up and down the streets. There was one 83-year-old woman, my neighbor, who used to walk up and down the streets literally every day. She was doing her ‘visiting route’ in the neighborhood. Very often she would come visit my house, just to sit and have a chat drinking coffee and eating snacks – which could take at least one or two hours at times. Then she would leave to go to the next residence. You never knew which day or at what time of the day people would come over for a visit, so I was not always able to leave the house at any preferable time which in the beginning was extremely annoying for me as I felt that I had a research job to do. I still felt bad if I left when someone came over, as this was not the way to treat people here regardless of your reason for leaving. I knew this because my mother told me during all the visits people paid to our house. Some times I could have been packed and ready to walk downtown and then someone came to visit, which meant that I had to stay to make coffee for them and sit and listen to their talks. These little neighborhood gatherings were an important observational aspect of my fieldwork, which I came to understand were a part of the Ebel community I took for granted in the beginning of my fieldwork. I had to discover the people’s own categories before writing them off as my generalized ones (c.f. Cohen).

Downtown Ebel was usually filled with people, loudly chattering and laughing. Cars were driving by on the streets, some with more speed and music blasting through the stereos than others. The windows on the cars were normally rolled down so the drivers could wave and shout greetings to the people walking on the street or to the shopkeepers sitting outside in the sun in company of visitors or other shop keepers while drinking coffee and talking about trivial, everyday life topics. The pace of the life here was calm and quiet. The people seemed happy and content with their lifestyles.

### **2.2.2) UNIFIL**

Norwegian UN peacekeepers were placed in the village between 1978 and 1998. When they arrived the area was affected by being in a war-ridden area: houses were bombed and people had fled in fear. During the time of the Norwegian peacekeepers’ stay the village experienced economical growth, and many shops and restaurants were established during this period.

After NORBATT<sup>16</sup> left in 1998, a lot of the shops closed due to the lack of income that the Norwegians provided seeing most of them could afford to spend a little extra money on trivial luxury products. The Indian UN forces; INDBATT; who took over after NORBATT, I was told were not able to provide as much economically as the Norwegians. As a result, many of the shops closed. Nowadays, what I discovered myself, the village is characterized by this lack of extra internal income which paints the picture of inhabitants living most days like their lives is a continuous vacation<sup>17</sup> because consumers don't buy a lot of items from Ebel's shops. Of course, this does not concern all shops. There are examples of shops doing good business as well. These are however mostly niche shops that are not common in Ebel – like Ibrahim's bakery (c.f. subchapter *the people*). Moreover, if the inhabitants have the possibility to go shopping in Beirut or Saida/Sidon<sup>18</sup> or if they don't have money to buy much else than the necessities like food, electricity and water, they would rather save the rest of their money for later. However, the money flow is still present even if it is less than when the Norwegians were there. People sustain themselves by means of agriculture, administration work (i.e. municipality work) or some even travel back and forth to and from Ebel because they work outside of Ebel (e.g. as a doctor at the nearest hospital in the neighboring town). The houses look nice because of the non-existing continuous bombing and the people still afford living expenses as well as the occasional treats. One might ask how come this is possible. In the field I discovered that even if for example the shopkeepers do not all earn as much as they spend on keeping the shop open they manage because of a different type of economy than money economy: reciprocity or non-market exchange of goods or labor, which I will discuss further in chapter 3 of this thesis: *being neighbors in Ebel*.

UNIFIL today, as I experienced them during my fieldwork is that they are still very much a part of the Ebel everyday life as the born-and-raised inhabitants are. They come from different parts of the world in cycles, i.e. change of contingents after their peacekeeping serving time is done. When I was there I met Spanish, Malaysian, Indonesian and Indian UN peacekeepers with the plurality being the Spanish and Indian.<sup>19</sup> As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, the peacekeepers' task is to maintain the peace in the area were they are stationed. They are not to interfere with any conflicts, but just take care of the civilians and the place.

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<sup>16</sup> What the Norwegian Peacekeeping troops were called.

<sup>17</sup> At least it did to me, as this was how I viewed vacation life was like.

<sup>18</sup> One of the bigger cities closest to Ebel.

<sup>19</sup> I do not have the exact numbers, but this is what I heard and saw in the field.



They are, in other words, not in the business of enforcement when it comes to these issues but rather in the business of simply peacekeeping. UNIFIL contributes a lot to Ebel in the sense of security and comfort when it comes to their main task for being there. What I also experienced was that their humanitarian ways was reflected into the everyday life activities in the village by offering their expertise, or labor, to the inhabitants of Ebel. Correspondingly with the particularity of reciprocal activity or economy of the villagers themselves, UNIFIL in that sense added to this part of Ebel life. The Spanish UN soldiers held language courses in Spanish each week on different levels for all the inhabitants of Ebel Es Saqi who were interested in learning their language and the Indian UN soldiers held weekly yoga classes. This was, in the spirit of Ebel mentality, all for free so that anyone in need or desire could join in. Personally I joined both out of boredom at the time I was there, but also because I wanted to see how the inhabitants received these initiatives from the UN contingents. There were a lot of villagers entering both the language course and the yoga class: young, old, women, men, shopkeepers, children and unemployed youth. It was a place of gathering, giving people something to look forward to and talk about.

The UN forces also contribute to the circulation or flow of people entering and exiting Ebel. By having this continual change in actors, both by the UN soldiers' entering, exiting and returning, and by the work migrants from Ebel leaving and returning, one might draw the conclusion that this is a place to which people are attached on a contemporary basis. What I experienced is the opposite of this. People, and especially migrants or UN veterans, still feel emotionally attached to Ebel Es Saqi and there is still a level of connectedness to both place and people despite of this ever-changing cycle of actors. For example the fact that Norwegian veterans still return to Ebel every year to celebrate the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, which is Norway's national day, with the inhabitants! Furthermore, when we had the premiere screenings of our films at Verdensteatret Cinematek here in Tromsø in March 2013, there were both veterans and migrants from Ebel in the audience to watch my film. Most of them grabbed ahold of the microphone to speak, displaying engagement in the topic of the film and how life in Ebel was and is now.

Ebel as a place where togetherness stands as a face of stability through unstable or changing times can be one reason as to why people have this strong attachment, or even connect part of their identity, to it.

### **2.2.3) The people**

The people of Ebel Es Saqi are, as hinted to, many in variety. It is a place where people know their neighbor and they often go to visit each other during the day or evening to sit around a table, drink coffee or mate (‘tea’)<sup>20</sup>, eat snacks or dinner and have a chat about anything that comes to mind. Variation is a good word when it comes to describing the people of Ebel Es Saqi. They are leading different everyday lives. Still, they all have routines in each of their particular lives. Either if it is a retired old man walking the streets every day to meet people and get to know what is new, or if it is a young unemployed woman cleaning her parents’ house just to have something to do during all her spare time. Reflecting upon this along with the history of Ebel during the Lebanese Civil War, it seems like stability is something the people here desire. When their countrymen in big cities are fighting and making the conditions unstable by putting their lives – and even the whole country – at risk, it looks as people in Ebel are reluctantly sticking to what might be considered as safe, routine-like and harmonious simple activities.

In Ebel there are people who live by doing agriculture or herding, people who own a shop or a restaurant, and others might be students struggling to find a job. Their everyday lives are therefore very different, but I still experienced togetherness between them that I later found was rooted, or even outplayed, in these simple lifestyle ‘rituals’ of theirs. The inhabitants, even if they are not close friends or family, always greet each other when they pass on the street taking their daily walks. Sometimes they for example simultaneously speak and walk by each other, unless they only say ‘hi’ or they stop to talk for a longer time. I frequently observed people greeting each other without stopping, and at the same time managed to have a whole conversation within seconds:

*“Hi!”*

*“Hello!”*

*“How are you doing? Good?”*

*“Good. And you? Your family?”*

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<sup>20</sup> *Mate* is a form of Argentinian tea that is frequently consumed, in addition to coffee, amongst the Lebanese people.

*“Good. Good. Greetings to your family!”*

*“Yours too, greetings!”<sup>21</sup>*

Before my arrival to EES I didn't have any specific informants, but after a while I got to know a few individuals that eventually became my main informants. Here, I have tried to describe their qualities both as individual persons with their own particular lifestyles, but also as contributors to the village with roles and tasks.

- *Sara*: a 26 year old student and unemployed woman living at her parents' house, trying to find a job that can help her build a career. When I met her she expressed a strong desire, or dream, to have a career so that she could earn money for herself and her family. Her daily activities are mostly of the domestic sort, like cleaning, making dinner or snacks and drinks for visitors or herself and her family or picking fruits from her family's garden and so on. Sara also leaves the house if there is an opportunity to visit people in the village or be with her friends or family. She often went out to, for example; visit other neighbors, hang out with friends at the local restaurants/pubs, help villagers with their households, drive around to the neighboring towns or go to Beirut for day-/weekend trips with her sisters. Her youngest sister, Sabrina, was at the time studying in Beirut so if Sara had money she could impulsively travel to visit her over a weekend. Sara's contribution to, or role in, the village was one of the more subtle kinds. She was helping people who needed help. For example I once filmed her spending a whole day cleaning and picking vegetables from the garden of a villager. I asked her why she did it. She told me it was because the old lady who lived there was ill and could not do this herself, so she did it for her. I then asked her if she was a relative, to which Sara responded:

*No. She is not a relative. But here, you know, you help people who cannot help themselves. She can't clean and there's no one helping her, so I should do it. Poor her.*

It is also noteworthy that after doing this Sara got to bring some of the vegetables she had picked from the woman's garden back home to her family. She also made coffee for us in the

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<sup>21</sup> One example of the many, many casual conversations I observed happening in the streets of Ebel.

woman's kitchen, which was completely okay for the woman herself who was not able to get up and do it herself anyways.

In addition, Sara helped me with my project when I first took contact with her. She got very engaged in my work, mostly because this automatically meant that she got something to do by helping me, which she at one point implicitly expressed, and later admitted to, while I filmed her on her bed writing questions for me to ask my informants:

*Rita: What are you doing?*

*Sara: I'm writing down questions. For you to ask Lena and the others, you know.*

*R: Why?*

*S: Because I want to help you. I have time.*

Seeing that Sara had more inside knowledge than me as well as spare time, she eagerly offered to help me in the field with whatever I wanted. During my fieldwork, Sara got a job interview with Emirates (airplane company) to work as ground staff at the airport in Dubai. Her family is Druze, which I already knew from before as we are old family friends.

- *Ibrahim*: a 74-year-old Druze baker with his own bakery downtown in the village's center. A regular day in Ibrahim's life consists of opening the bakery at 7 a.m., working until noon or even 2 p.m. if there are many customers, and then going home to spend rest of day there by resting and making dough to bring for the next day in his bakery. Ibrahim used to live in Kuwait when he was younger. He moved there from Ebel Es Saqi to work as a truck driver, but moved back to his hometown when he did not succeed in his job there and got too old to drive trucks. He has success running this niche business in Ebel as it is the only bakery there so people often run into each other early in the morning when buying breakfast for their family, friends or neighbors. During the fieldwork, for example, I met the mayor of Ebel in the bakery while filming. He was buying a bunch of Lebanese pizza called Manoushi – common as breakfast or lunch in Lebanon. After talking to the others inside the bakery for a while he suddenly asked Ibrahim if I had eaten, to which he got the respons "I don't know", followed by him turning towards me asking me the same question and adding "Do you want a Manoushi?". I kindly thanked him and said no although it took a while before he finally gave

up asking me.<sup>22</sup> Taking these characteristics into consideration one might say that Ibrahim's personal career is also his role as baker towards the village society as a neighbor by having a business where people meet at a specific time of day – like a village morning hub.

- Lena: a Christian 62-year-old woman who owns a shop in the upper part of downtown Ebel Es Saqi. She is struggling with few, almost no, customers. Because of this she tries to alter her products and interior from time to time to make the shop more appealing to new customers, and to keep herself happy and busy. She usually works in shifts: a few hours in the morning, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at which point she goes home and eats dinner. She opens again every now and then in the evening according to the weather conditions and her mood/health.<sup>23</sup> Like many other shop keepers in Ebel, Lena doesn't do much or earn much selling products and so her shop is mainly to keep her days busy doing *something*. Lena is originally from Beirut, but she and her husband moved to Ebel Es Saqi during the war because their house was demolished three times due to bombings. She likes living in Ebel Es Saqi because it's calm and that makes her happy, but she also told me that if you want to have a good income you should go to Beirut to open a store because there are few customers in Ebel. Lena opened the shop after her husband died so that she would have something to do besides sitting at home by herself all day. She told me that she misses the economical income Beirut can offer, but prefers the calmness of life in Ebel. Her role in the village is not that of for example Ibrahim: contributing with a niche business so that people can gather in the morning while getting breakfast. However, the hospitality is still present as I experienced it myself when she welcomed me into her life and her home as well as the fact that I received products from her during the fieldwork – hair accessories and jewelry from her shop, and let us not forget all the cups of coffee I got! Lena might be from Beirut, but she certainly has adapted well to Ebel life considering the differences in pace and activity.

- Nasser: a 55-year-old Druze man who is a goat herder. He is the only one I could specify as a Druze from the beginning as I knew he lived in the 'Druze neighborhood' next to our home, and that this was the place I met him for interviews. Nasser works 13-14 hours each day, either in the goat house or outside on Ebel ground herding. He looks upon his goats as his

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<sup>22</sup> In Lebanon you are supposed to say yes if offered something. One can say no, but it is looked upon as respectful and nice if one says yes. People can to some extent argue heavily until you do say yes, which I experienced quite some times.

<sup>23</sup> Lena has diabetes, so the walk from her house to the shop is a bit far, especially when it is hot outside.

extended family. Nasser used to work in the military when he was younger, but he likes this 'new job' a lot. He also has names for each goat according to his or her appearance. Nasser's wife, Tina, usually helps him during the day: when Nasser comes home for lunch break, after cleaning the goat house, Tina prepares coffee and snacks for him and potential visitors. She also receives a bucket from Nasser containing freshly milked milk that he has brought with him from the goat house. She then puts this in a casserole and heats it up to boiling point.<sup>24</sup> To point out a part of Nasser's life where the neighborhood role or societal contribution is displayed, I can mention that the milk that is produced from the goats is something that would either be sold or given away to neighbors or friends in the village. One time when Sara and her family were visiting Nasser at home during his lunch break, Sara's mother asked to get a bucket of milk and when she asked how much she had to pay, Tina's answer was something like this:

*A million! \*Laughing\* No, of course it's nothing. You don't have to pay.*

*- Haifa, Amal and Maria:* three middle-aged women who each work in their own shops next to each other downtown in Ebel Es Saqi: Haifa has a clothing store which is very common in this place, but not very economically beneficial. Amal has a craft shop/antique shop, and Maria works in her brother's UN clothing and sports shop<sup>25</sup> – which is doing well. The three ladies generally have little customers during the days, so they normally sit outside their shops; in an area they have made their common break area; drinking coffee and mate, chatting and looking for occurring events they could talk about while on their 'break'. When I walked downtown I usually stopped by these women to hear stories about their days and what had happened in the village that day, if something unusual or interesting had taken place. They knew almost everything. Because of them sitting outside like this almost all day, they were bound to see and hear a lot of things. In this case that was their particular roles or tasks in the neighborhood; to watch over it and gain information about things that occurred and about people.

Amal and Haifa are Druze, while Maria is a Christian.

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<sup>24</sup> This, Tina told me; you do to pasteurize the milk so that the bacteria disappear.

<sup>25</sup> The products here are aimed at the UN peacekeepers, like camouflage wear etc. in addition to football jerseys.

- Rima: a 31-year-old Druze woman who is making jewelry and is trying to sell them to other villagers, but almost no one is buying them. She gets the beads from her brother in Kuwait when he is coming home for visits. Rima is living in her parents' house and she is in a wheel chair because of an illness she had when she was a child. Sitting inside the house most days because of her immobility, she tries to make a living on her hobby: making jewelry. Even if people rarely buy her handmade stuff, which I would say are quite nicely made considering she taught herself this through watching TV at home, she still does this to fill up her spare time. Because of her immobility she is not able to contribute in a public way to the collectivity, but as everyone else in Ebel she displays the hospitable mentality by means of reciprocity. For example, the first time I filmed her she was determined to make me a necklace with my name on it, and one for my sister back in Norway, free of charge – again, as a gift.

- Akram: Sara's father who is a Druze man. Akram used to work in the Lebanese military like Nasser, but is now retired. He has cancer so because of this he is not able to do much work. It all depends on his daily shape if he is able to work, but if he feels good then he is usually found in his garden where he grows a lot of vegetables, fruits and some flowers. Because of having a big garden, his family has a lot of food available to make dishes and so they are able to invite neighbors, friends and family to come over for dinner as well as having a lot of fruit to offer as snacks to guests. I myself ate a lot of dinners at their place even though I in the beginning felt like I was intruding on their intimate family time, which in their minds were silly thinking on my behalf. Akram often gives vegetables to other neighbors, friends or family members as well. This is his, and in a way his whole family's, task in the neighborhood.

Summing up: after reading through the list of my main informants one can start to wonder why I chose exactly these people. Narrowing down from a general perspective or framing I decided that, after understanding that religion is not a prominent factor when it came to organization of everyday life, I would observe and select a handful of people across the scale of age, gender, religion and occupation. In other words: I chose people of a variety in age, gender and occupation. To get to the root of how this village is constructed as a community with a strong sense of togetherness I figured the obvious first choice was to have more than one person because of the social aspect. That way I could study the relations between people. Further I found it important to have as different people as possible so that I would get as close

as I could to finding the common denominator between the inhabitants. That is why I chose to ask Nasser – the old content goat herder *as well as* Sara – the young, emotionally torn, unemployed woman to be among my selected informants. I told them I wanted to film their everyday life in the village, which I did.

What surprised me the most was that even if I did not get to film my informants on many occasions *together*, their common love of their home place and their care for each other as neighbors in a village was something they expressed in each of their particular lives through their talks, their interactions and their activities which inspired the title for this thesis as this was a sentence they all expressed at one time or another. The way they think and express themselves about their home place, as well as the fact that several of them have been away from Ebel for many years i.e. Ibrahim migrating to Kuwait for work, ending up living there for forty years before finally returning back to his beloved village again to work as if no time had passed or nothing had changed, is quite common. There was an overwhelming continuity in how people, despite of age or gender, expressed as togetherness in the love of the land that is Ebel Es Saqi. I would consider my outcome of choosing this selection of informants as good seeing that despite of their differences and my effort to separate them by not forcing them to be together physically in addition to picking people who normally would not interact on a daily basis, I could still catch a glimpse of the connection between them that I was searching for through the way my informants expressed their social identity in their own particular everyday lives. This was the quality and strong side of looking at individuals, at particularities or differences in my case: I got to explore and unveil the shared sameness in between all these differences – the villagers togetherness through the common understanding of the sharing of land.

Looking at the reciprocal aspect of building up and sustaining the feeling of community or togetherness in the village, it is a quite prominent part of the particularities of people's everyday lives in Ebel. In the next chapter I will try to argue for how this constant reproduction of belonging is possible.



### 3. BEING NEIGHBORS IN EBEL

I have up until now discussed my discovery process going from generalizations about Ebel Es Saqi life to doing ethnography of the particular, and introduced the reader with specific information about individuals in this place to present a context of what I am about to further discuss and explore: how these individuals make meaning of their life *together*, and how this is organized within the social arena(s) – which is related to my initial pre-fieldwork questions (c.f. page 3)

#### 3.1) *Neighborhoods*

Reading *The African neighbourhood: An introduction* (Konings, van Dijk and Foeken in: Konings and Foeken 2006) what defines the ‘distinctiveness’ of a neighborhood, apart from the name and geography, and what is relevant for my thesis, is that:

*[...] a neighborhood shows a certain degree of social cohesion and is a source of social identity. (2006, 1)*

What I experienced in Ebel Es Saqi from the very beginning, and what I have underlined strongly throughout the pages of this paper, was this strong continuity in the inhabitants’ ideology of the good everyday life – something that created a togetherness that I could not put into words, and that baffled me a bit especially considering the history of the two religions, to whom the inhabitants were belonging to either one or the other, opposing each other during the civil war. After looking at some of the observations I have made about the particularities of the individuals in Ebel as well as the community, in addition to exploring the history of this place in particular, I will now discuss how I find this ‘distinctiveness’ of neighborhoods an important factor for the definition of togetherness among the villagers in Ebel Es Saqi.

When I think about neighborhoods in a Norwegian context I imagine my home village in northern Norway where there are around 300 inhabitants spread out over a quite large area. My parents’ house shares a driveway with two other houses. These two, along with a few

other houses placed 50-100 meters further away from us, I consider my neighbors. So, in that sense, one might say that these neighborhoods of mine are formed in small clusters that put together constitutes a village. Of course there are differences between small villages and urban cities, but since I am writing about a village it is only fair and right to compare it to another village despite it being much smaller in comparison and not placed in the same country. Nevertheless, Ebel Es Saqi has this neighborhood mentality of togetherness that for example my smaller home village does not – at least not in the same way.

Arriving in the field I did not find the same neighborhood clusters in Ebel as those in my home village in Norway. The houses in Ebel are made in a way so that it is hard to look from one house to another without physically trying to do so on purpose. What I mean here is that it is not often that you meet your neighbor by staying at your own home, perhaps while working in your garden or barbecuing, shouting greetings as you see them also in their garden outside. At least this is what I experienced, or did not experience. People in Ebel do not share driveways in the same way we do at home in Norway. Of course, if you are able to *hear* your next-door neighbor outside in their garden, there's nothing that prohibits you to shout greetings or go to the brick wall between your houses, look over and talk to them. However, what is more common is that if you want to talk to someone, you go to visit them in their house. If we take these observations into consideration we come to the conclusion that Ebel Es Saqi is not a cluster of neighborhoods, but rather one, large neighborhood. This of course not counting the fact that the 'Druze neighborhood' exists in people's everyday talks as a geographical identifier. To sum up: Ebel is a place where people rather go visit each other than shout greetings over a fence or call each other on the telephone. This helps to build up on the feeling of togetherness as one often brings or receive gifts, goods or labor support, mostly in form of the visitor receiving one or two cups of coffee, alongside with the casual and frequent neighborly visits.

Going back to Konings, van Dijk & Foeken we see that in a globalizing world where borders between continents and people are no longer separating, but that are rather crossable, flows of people are entering and exiting places with almost no restrictions. Small, familiar neighborhoods are therefore places where people find security and comfort (2006, 2) and where people find themselves – their identity, which is mirrored in the society by their neighborhood role. Considering the particular history of Ebel during the Lebanese Civil War this feeling of security and comfort provided by being a neighborhood is in fact valid as this

was demonstrated through people not wanting to risk their home land for reasons of the ideological or political differences that generated the war. This notion of a secure neighborhood where people find themselves through having particular tasks is also strongly connected to **reciprocity**, or **non-market exchange**, which I now will discuss further with examples like the activity of coffee drinking.

### ***3.2) Reciprocity***

To begin this subchapter I would like to briefly discuss the word ‘economy’. Modern economy, seen from my western point of view, is money economy. What I experienced in Lebanon on the other hand was that there exists more than one type of economy. For example, not only do they have money economy, but they also include economical processes or structures that do not necessarily include money but rather the exchange of goods or labor. This dualism of the economy phenomenon can be reflected in the academic world with social economy on one side and social anthropology on the other. In the end, despite of major basic differences, according to Finn Sivert Nielsen these two sides agree upon something: that what is empirically meant by economy is the fact that it is about processes connected to the production, the circulation and the consumption of goods and labor.<sup>26</sup> (In: Smedal and Nielsen 2000, 78) In this regard the reciprocity, or non-market exchange, that I observed in Ebel Es Saqi is something one may call ‘economy’ though this is not what one in a western way of thinking initially would consider it as. At least that was not what I myself used to connote the word ‘economy’ with before I went on fieldwork.

Marcel Mauss works with the theme of reciprocity when writing about how gifts are exchanged in societies as a form of social and psychological aspect with underlying obligations to give, receive and reciprocate. He writes about an exchange-through-gifts and how these object exchanges eventually strengthens the relationship between people. (1990) What my empirical observations adds to Mauss’ analysis is that in Ebel Es Saqi they do not only exchange through gift-giving, but also through expertise. I will now elaborate on this aspect a bit further.

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<sup>26</sup> My own translation and formulation from Norwegian

Since what I observed was not only exchange-through-gifts, but also exchange-through-expertise<sup>27</sup>, the reciprocity does not exist in the exact same manner in Ebel as it is explained in Mauss' analysis. In addition to this gift-giving way of non-market exchange, which is actually what Mauss is writing about and which I was witness to do exist in Ebel, there is a slight difference from Mauss' viewpoint in a sense that gift-giving here is executed with the goal in mind of strengthening the togetherness of the neighborhood in this place without necessarily any form of *obligational expectations* of getting something in return. This last point to which Mauss explains is partly the goal of gift-giving and that I feel is in a way true while at the same time not always the case in Ebel according to my observations. As an example I can mention that a woman in Ebel got a stroke. Her family is poor so they could not afford medical expertise or help in form of potential medication or such. In events where a neighborhood crisis like this occurs, the people in the village who are wealthy all pitched in and gave the family money so that the woman and her family could afford paying for rehabilitation and medical expenses. Because the woman is poor it is therefore doubtful that she will be able to reciprocate the same amount of money, but that is not the goal of this exchange. She and her family can give some other way, even if it would not be of the same capitalistic value or prize. Anyway, that is, as I have stressed, not the important reason for this type of exchange. To specify this I can mention that a woman in Ebel who is poor gets money from some relatives abroad to manage the living expenses since she does not have any form of stable income in the absence of a job because of age and health. The way she pays them back is through looking after their olive trees, from which she is harvesting herself.

What I have tried to describe is that what I experienced in Ebel was a *non-binding act of executing individuals' expertise or neighborhood roles* to keep the community together and content. It was not ultimately aimed at individuals, but through these one-on-one exchanges the neighborhood as a social entity was strengthened. To further explain this I would like to describe a situation that occurred in the field while I was talking to Haifa and Amal. Sitting outside their shops, drinking mate and coffee while chatting with me about everyday life topics, there was suddenly a car pulling up to Amal's shop. A villager, not family related to Amal, was asking for her and she went inside her shop with him. At first I thought this was just a regular customer who was interested in buying some antique items from her, but after

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<sup>27</sup> Example will be given on the following page.

she returned I got to know the real reason for his visit:

*Haifa: Amal, she is also a nurse. So she helps others if they need her to. She helps a lot. Either if it's here, they come to her shop, or she drives around to their homes...*

*Amal: without any payment.*

*H: For free. Free service.*

*Rita: Why?*

*A: Because in the village it is said that one should do that for free.*

*H: Because we are in the village. And people know each other here, you know?*

*Because here... it's like one family. That's why. She gets to help them for free.*

Conclusively, reciprocity issues in Ebel with exchange-through-gifts is strongly related to Mauss' perspective on the topic, but not as roughly when it comes to his statement about how the act of giving is done with the expectation of for example making the recipient look weak if he or she could not reciprocate, giving them an obligation to do so. (Mauss 1990, 39-42) It is more nuanced than that. As long as the act of giving is done with the ultimate purpose of keeping the togetherness in the village alive and strengthened then the act itself would have been successful **whether or not this 'gift' was reciprocated in the "right amount", to the original giver or to other villagers.** It's not an exchange between two individuals, but an exchange between an individual and the neighborhood *through* another individual in the sense that when for example Amal gives nursing help to another individual she receives gratitude and acknowledgement for playing out her neighborhood role in the village and thereby strengthens the togetherness of the society. People in Ebel help each other in the best way they can, considering the fairly low flow of money, compared to the time when NORBATT was present. Ebel Es Saqi is a society where they have adjusted to economical changes so that they can still sustain themselves the best way possible through reciprocity or non-market-exchange as an important addition to money-economy.

### ***3.2.1) The importance of coffee***

As I have discussed earlier in this paper there were some particularities of Ebel everyday life that I took for granted. Among these particularities was coffee drinking. It might sound simple or banal, but drinking coffee is a big and important part of the daily routines in this village. Not only that, but I have now discovered that this activity has a deeper meaning to it than just being beverage consumption. Like one Norwegian UN veteran told me on the evening of the 17<sup>th</sup> of May in Ebel Es Saqi: “There lays so much more in a cup of coffee than what you see with your bare eyes.” I will explain this statement with my personal empirical observations followed by trying to analyze and show how this is connected to the togetherness of the people in Ebel.

Looking back I now realize that even if I at one point experienced the lifestyle in Ebel as boring, along with its particularities like drinking coffee together on a frequent basis, this does not mean that the inhabitants there felt the same way. Looking at an article about boredom, time and modernity in Aboriginal Australia by anthropologist Yasmine Musharbash we can question if boredom is some sort of ‘westernization’ of indigenous people, which in her case study where the Aborigines of Australia (Musharbash 2007). Turning the gaze towards myself this might explain why I asked why the inhabitants of Ebel did not feel the same boredom I felt while being there (c.f. page 7). I was after all half Norwegian as well as half Lebanese. Furthermore, Musharbash goes on by quoting Peter Conrad with the phrase “boredom is in the eye of the beholder”, and later goes on by writing:

*[...] many common experiences with boredom potential (meetings, classes, car travel, etc.) are not labeled boring. To elaborate, I discuss boredom in the context of something never considered boring: ritual. (2007, 311)*

Much in the same way as the Aborigines in Musharbash’s research, the people of Ebel Es Saqi might not look upon for example the morning neighborhood gatherings where they drink coffee and chat for a few hours as a boring routine. Though people might experience boredom during this activity or ritual, it inherits a shared understanding for the people involved that *[...] rituals have a social purpose and are undertaken with others – in short, that they are socially and emotionally engaging. (Musharbash 2007, 311)* In other words: the morning coffee drinking ritual, which I will empirically present in the following paragraphs, is

something that is highly respected and enjoyed in Ebel culture. It just took me a while to understand the importance of and the meanings behind this, to me at first, seemingly arbitrary activity.

Sbheyeh in the local Arabic language is the name of the morning coffee drinking ritual. People; neighbors, friends, family, strangers; go to visit each other in the early morning hours to sit and have a chat while drinking coffee which those who are visited, the hosts, are preparing and serving. Sometimes there are also some snacks; either fruits, nuts and seeds; or Lebanese pastries or sweets alongside the coffee. One is never prepared to have visitors or to go and visit others at a specific time or date as it is rarely planned beforehand. Still, you always have coffee and some snacks available in the kitchen. To go visit someone is a decision one makes when the morning first arrives: if you feel like it you do it. If not then you probably will have someone coming over at your place anyway while they are on their morning walk around the neighborhood looking after someone available for visits: either by seeing people sitting outside their home, by hearing their voices from inside their house or by spotting chairs in their driveways. All these things indicate that there is someone home and most likely available for Sbheyeh. If you go to someone and they are not home, you leave a napkin on their door to let them know someone has been there when they were away.

Drinking coffee is not only related exclusively to the morning hours. People visit each other during the whole day and in the evening as well, and except from during dinner time<sup>28</sup> coffee is being served regularly. When I arrived in the field I was often invited in to people's homes for a chat, that being their driveways, porches or balconies because people wanted to get to know who I was. So, even if most houses are separated physically, like I have pointed out earlier, the people and their homes are always open for neighbors to come and go and it is always visible or auditable if someone has visitors. Returning to the beginning of my fieldwork I knew about the extensive amount of coffee people here are drinking and I knew about the traditional way they served it and how coffee might be considered an authentic part of the Arabic culture heritage. I figured that this might be a good observational aspect to start from, as well as it being nice filmically, but knowing these things did not help much when entering the field because I did as with many other things look upon it with a generalizing

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<sup>28</sup> Even though coffee is not served during dinner, it is often served as a complimentary dessert along with various sorts of fruit.

view. Just *after* I decided to look into the particularities of people's everyday lives did I then begin to realize the meaning that lay behind this perhaps banal activity.

The reciprocity that I was arguing for in the previous subchapter is strongly expressed in this ritual of coffee drinking. Through this ritual people show how they are there for each other, available and hospitable. People take morning walks, often ending up at one or two places having a Sbheyeh. Then they might stay at home the next day and get visitors at their place, having a Sbheyeh. It is not the same people coming over every day, though this is also a reality in some cases, but in the end there is a cycle or circulation of actors from one Sbheyeh to another. It is extremely rare that you have the same actors in every Sbheyeh of every day. Considering this observation my argument about the non-obligational and non-individualized aspect of the reciprocity in Ebel can be said to have a point. It is ultimately, as I have pinpointed up until now, the togetherness that is taken into consideration even on a micro level when you are giving one person something of yourself – in this case: a cup of coffee. Or three.

The inhabitants are helping each other through being useful with their particular expertise, and if you don't have any practical knowledge in particular to contribute with you at least have coffee to serve to visitors. The villagers, as I have touched upon, were really considerate and caring of each other. This was an important factor and the meaning behind the little activities like coffee drinking. You gather to show your support and respect for each other by for example bring something; various resources you have, or expertise or knowledge you inherit; while at the same time help if there is anything that is needed from you and you respectfully accept the coffee being served for you.

Marianne Gullestad writes about the difference between 'being at use' and 'finding oneself' or 'self-realization' (1996) where 'being at use' is connected to the social community while 'self-realization' is connected to the individuals' wishes and dreams. Further she writes that 'being at use' is constructed as being obedient towards the society and its needs, and how this is "[...] *constructed as continuity and an open and legitimate transfer of values between generations, while 'self-realization' is constructed as discontinuity and the individuals' separation from each other.*" (1996, 225) <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> My translation



This is clear in the way people act as one neighborhood in Ebel Es Saqi by the mentality of ‘being at use’ to the society. It is additionally clear as to how people choose to leave the village for their own sake of self-realization. What is the difference between my project and Gullestad’s analysis is that in her writings she stresses how these values changes between generations, but in my case these values changes due to location: inside Ebel you are ‘being at use’ and outside Ebel you are ‘finding yourself’. Take Sara, for example. She was being at use by helping other villagers cleaning and helping her family to pick fruits from their garden. On the other side, she expressed a longing for leaving Ebel to be able to attain her dream of having a career. She wanted to, in that sense, ‘find herself’. Reminding the reader of the reference I made to Konings, van Dijk & Foeken, where they express how people ‘find themselves’ in the neighborhood through their social identity or playing out their neighborhood roles, this is therefore contradictory as I have found this to be true as well. Arguing for both Gullestad’s, as well as Konings, van Dijk & Foeken’s, sides I would like to present to the reader with an event that occurred towards the end of my fieldwork.

Sara had, as I mentioned when presenting her in subchapter 2.2.3, gone to a job interview with the airline company Emirates. She expressed feelings to me about how she wanted to get this job more than anything else – this was her dream. When she then got offered the job and realized she would have to move to Dubai to work at the airport there, she became really sad. (Svendsen 2013, 00:32:18:00). This melancholia she was now expressing over leaving her life behind, her social identity in Ebel, her neighborhood role, was something one initially would not expect. But, taking both of the theories I discussed in the last paragraphs into consideration, this is not so strange after all. She found herself in Ebel as having a particular role in the neighborhood, like van Dijk and Konings states. In addition, she wanted to go out to find herself individually through having a professional career. Controversially, Sara’s dual feeling of finding herself both by staying in Ebel and leaving Ebel can be explained by Gullestad’s notion of anchor points:

*[...] the idea of ‘anchor points’ implies that people today are compared to boats at the open sea with the need for a port. (1996, 225)*

Continuing on the metaphorical lines of this quote, it seems that the emotional attachment existing among both inhabitants in Ebel – present or previous – and among UN peacekeepers

and veterans, and to which I referred to in chapter 2.2.2 about UNIFIL, can be explained as an identity anchor that can be found safely placed in Ebel Es Saqi while one is busy exploring the world out there on the open sea. It is therefore always possible to return here and still have this comfort of ‘finding yourself’ as being a part of this place in addition to ‘finding yourself’ outside the village. This way the coffee cup in Ebel represents an anchor in people’s lives. They find themselves; meaning, security, comfort, recognition, hospitality, initiation, support and respect; laying at the bottom of the cup of coffee. When they have a Sbheyeh in Ebel they are welcomed as being at home, reunited with a part of their identity.

## 4. Mobility

People in Ebel Es Saqi are not physically bound to the place. They can choose to leave; by car, taxi or bus; to the neighboring villages or to the bigger cities further north in Lebanon – like Saida/Sidon or Beirut (c.f. map on page 2). A ride to Saida takes about two hours, and to Beirut it takes around three hours. The prices by bus are not very expensive either, but you have to plan ahead when to leave and come back as the buses are not driving at all times each day. Many villagers from Ebel might take a day trip to Saida or Beirut, but unless you have relatives or friends you can stay with while you are there it will be expensive to stay more than one day. Some of the shopkeepers in Ebel go on these trips when they want supplies for their store, like Lena. Lena has relatives living in Beirut. Therefore it's easier for her to take a weekend trip when she needs supplies. Her daughter Sophie, who also lives in Ebel with her, knows a merchandiser who is coming regularly with new items to sell to them so Lena can sell it herself from the shop. This makes the travels less frequent, and it's a relief for Lena as she usually takes a taxi, which is very expensive. Lena told me that she usually goes to Beirut three times a month, maybe less, which is more than enough for her.

Ebel people are also able to travel abroad if they want or need to. As the reader might have noticed reading through this paper, Ebel is a village with lots of international ties in many different forms. To mention a few examples: my mother travelled to Norway to pursue an education and career. She then met my father there, got married, had children and stayed. My aunt, my mother's sister, also lives in Norway. This is the connection my mother had to the country, as my aunt was the first one migrating there due to marrying a Norwegian UN soldier. Related to this example is Lena's second daughter who married a Spanish UN soldier and now lives in Spain. Conclusively, people move away from Ebel for familial reasons. Another example may be work migration, which was among others my own mother's initial reason for leaving. A few other empirical examples on this are Sara and Ibrahim. I will now present these three cases of work migration, how these are related to each other and later: how these individuals are all connected to Ebel in the same way despite of different particularities in their everyday lives.

#### **4.1) The case of Sara, Ibrahim and my mother**

To confirm my previous findings on migration and mobility, I find it suitable reading the geographer Russell King's introduction in *Migration, globalization and place* (in: Jess and Massey 1995):

*Migration is a dislocation from one place and a physical attachment to another – although the emotional attachment may well remain with the place of origin. At an individual level, migrants' experience of displacement raises complex psychological questions about their own existence and self-identity. [...] A further point I should like to stress in this introduction is that migrants are not 'exceptional' people – 'others'. On the contrary, migration is something which touches the experience of most of us. (1995, 7)*

To connect my findings on this topic I will now briefly present some cases to which I find empirically supporting, both when it comes to showing the mobility of people in Ebel, specifically internationally, as well as when it comes to showing how Ebel is an anchor point for those who are linked to the place in one way or another.

Starting out we have Ibrahim: the 74-year-old baker who migrated to Kuwait to seek fortune in work. As I have written already, he worked as a truck driver there for forty years, but he did not succeed in gaining a lot of money, and he missed his home place, so he returned to Ebel where he opened up a bakery in which he works today. His income from the bakery is good since it is a niche business in Ebel, and he is home; close to his family, friends, neighbors; so he is content with the way his life is now. He can grow old in his home village, playing out his neighborhood role as a baker until he is no longer able to do so physically.

On the other side we have Sara: the young, unemployed woman living at home with her parents. She got a job in Dubai, and by the end of my fieldwork she was preparing to move away from Ebel to start her new job – her dream was coming true. What surprised me was that she was conflicted about the fact that she was moving away from her home place. What I have now come to realize, and especially considering my previous analysis as well as the one to come, is that the reason for her melancholic reaction was her emotional attachment to Ebel as her anchor point and her love of home land (i.e. next chapter where I discuss the concept

'Heimat'). Sara also told me that she did not want to stay in Dubai. She wanted to work for some time, earn money to send back to her family, have her self-realization (c.f. Gullestad) dream come to life, and then return back to her beloved home place.

Thirdly, we have my mother who is currently residing in Norway. She left Ebel to visit her sister who had married a Norwegian UN soldier and moved to Norway to live with him. She was additionally looking for work so she went to school to learn Norwegian and to get an education to work in the postal service. She finally got a job in Hammerfest where she eventually met my father who was working on a fishing trawler that was temporarily docked here. They eventually got married and had children so she stayed in Norway. When I ask my mother how she feels about Ebel Es Saqi she tells me that every opportunity she has to travel there and stay for a month or so, she embraces it and goes. She loves her home village, and she always misses it. Her anchor point is there, but she is busy now living her life where she moved and she is not moving back because of familial reasons, i.e. my father, my sister and me. Her emotional attachment to Ebel is still present as it her anchor point, but her life is now here.

Even if these three cases are fundamentally different in relation to locations or the fact that my mother did not return as Ibrahim did or Sara plans to do, the individuals described share the same feeling of Ebel Es Saqi being their anchor point and to where a part of their self-identity is constructed. They can all move out of Ebel, but for some reason they always come back – either if it is for a month's time every year like my mother, or if it is returning after forty years of living away from the place like in Ibrahim's case. As I have already explained: when my mother heard about me going on fieldwork to Ebel Es Saqi, she joined me as this was a good opportunity for her to return back home for a little while. I did not know back then that she would be an important empirical part of my thesis.

After the fieldwork I have been in touch with Sara to hear how things are going for her. She still works at the airport in Dubai with her sister, but she says that she misses Lebanon and Ebel a lot. She has been back on a few occasions like to celebrate her birthday with the family in Ebel and one time just to be back home on vacation for a few days, but she does not get the opportunity too often to go. When she does, however, I always hear from her about how happy she is seeing her family, friends and neighbors again.

There is in a way a huge sense of continuity in this place when it comes to the idea of a shared homeland and the organization of social identity. This exists despite of the ever-changing cycle of mobility with both Ebel inhabitants migrating and returning for longer or shorter periods of time. In addition, the changes in contingents or countries from which the UN peacekeepers are representing in the village.

I will now go deeper into the idea of homeland, or moreover the German notion of 'Heimat' through going deeper into Sara's story, which I in the end hope will explain the title of this thesis along with all the other topics I have discussed up until this point.

## 5. "This is our land"

*R: Where do you go all day? Here or over there?*

*N: Here, over there, at the spring – you know the spring?*

*R: Yes.*

*N: ...down behind the small hill... On Ebel land, this means. I don't go anywhere else.*

*It means I'm not allowed to go to another village. Their land is not ours, not Ebel's.*

(Nasser talking about 'Ebel land' the first day we met)

Nasser's statement about 'Ebel land' can be read as an important aspect of the connectedness between the inhabitants in Ebel according to the place they are living in and the identities that are constructed there. Ebel people are, as I have pointed out several times already, clearly strongly connected to their home place, and I could see a correlation between place and identity when talking with my informants. Like Cuba & Hummon writes:

*"Place identity can be defined as an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity. Like other forms of identity, place identity answers the question, "Who am I?", doing so by countering, "Where am I?", or more fundamentally, "Where do I belong?"." (1993, 548)*

&

*"Identification may involve self-conceptions in which people appropriate the meanings of place to articulate a sense of self. Often it includes significant affiliation of self with place, producing a sense of belonging – of feeling at home in one place, out of place in another." (1993, 549)*

I realize that belonging constitutes as being opposed to something else: if you are belonging to one social entity, you are automatically not belonging to others. I think that a lot of people would tend to feel that if one is talking about belonging it has to be opposed or against something else, much like in Anthony Cohen's view when writing about the rural villages in Britain *as opposed to* the urban cities and the nation in general in his article 'Belonging: the experience of culture'. (Cohen in: Cohen 1982) This resulted in the term 'local distinctiveness' which in his view has to do with the community's self-expression in opposition to other communities. Rather than moving in that which I would consider as a negatively or competitively inspired direction of thought, I would suggest to think of

belonging to a place as something *in comparison to* someplace else, which for me at least means something completely different and more in the direction of inspiration and dreams. The people of Ebel Es Saqi did not have a hostile undertone when talking about other places. They were comparing and reflecting in a way that told me about how place identity implied the feeling of belonging to home – to not belong, or to feel misplaced, anywhere else – even if they often on some occasions would talk poorly about their home place (c.f. second quote from Cuba and Hummon above).

One of the talks I had with Rima is a good empirical example of this feeling of being misplaced. Occasionally Rima's family goes to visit some relatives in one of the neighboring towns, which she herself considers a subconsciously 'unsettling' event:

*"I love Ebel a lot! I don't want to go anywhere else! I'll tell you: when I go to Rashaya to visit my brother, my heart can't rest before I am back in Ebel again."*

I've now established how the Ebel people are connected together through the shared feeling of place identity. What is interesting though is what I never got to understand while being in the field, but that I now can see clearer: why is it that, for a group of people who are so anchored to their home place, they don't have a word in their own language for 'home'?

After my fieldwork I discovered something about the Arabic language I didn't notice before, mostly because I was not very skilled at Arabic as I would have liked to be before arriving there. I noticed that in the Arabic language there is no specific word for 'home'. They either say 'village', 'room', 'house', 'place', 'land', 'country', etc. This is something I found interesting, especially since the villagers have this strong identification towards their home and their neighborhood. I could not explain this togetherness I have been discussing in only one word before I stumbled upon the German notion of 'Heimat', which can be lightly translated to 'homeland' in English. Heimat, according to the German linguist Peter Blickle (2004), is a very omnipresent and many-sided word that has made it difficult for scholars to define and grasp. It contains connotations such as: self, I, love, need, body and longing. Because of being able to shape the notion of Heimat in so many different ways, having it to be so many things at once, not many scholarly thinkers have been able to write about this phenomenon:



*“Language, identity, geography, politics and notions of self and reference intermingle in Heimat in a manner that rationally trained thinkers find discomforting. The German idea of Heimat is emotional, irrational, subjective, social, political, and communal. [...] When dealing with it [Heimat], intellectually and rationally trained minds have to work with an idea that often seems to defy rational analysis.”* (Blickle 2004, 8)

In other words, throughout his book, Blickle cannot describe Heimat in one sentence. He does however give the reader a deep look into the many-faceted ways of describing this notion, from which I’ve taken a few descriptions that I found useful in my case. I will try to show how Heimat as a notion is central to what I experienced in Ebel Es Saqi, and try to back up my empirical findings and finally conclude my thesis with a brief elaboration on this concept. This does not mean that I will look at Heimat in the way for example a German would do, but I will use this German idea of Heimat and apply it to what I experienced among the people of Ebel Es Saqi in Lebanon. Despite of the lack of academic writings upon this notion, I will try to handle it the best way possible as this is what I found most applicable related to my empirical findings in the field.

### **5.1) Heimat**

I constantly experienced people telling me how much they miss Ebel when they leave it, and how much they love their home place – even if they sometimes expressed how little they enjoy the material lacks of it. Rima liked staying at home because she felt uneasy going away from Ebel, and Nasser loved his freedom being with the goats the whole day and expressed a normative feeling of it being forbidden for him to go to other places which according to him was not ‘Ebel land’. Meanwhile, Sara had not expressed these feelings of place identity and the love for home place in the same way the others had during the first two months of my fieldwork. I was starting to think that I might have taken on two different stories or projects: Ebel people as a whole group, content with their simple everyday lives and their common love for their village, and Sara as a young woman desperate to find a job and get away because she felt she was not getting anywhere:

*“I stay happy, laughing. But there’s stress because one is studying to get a job. [...] It’s important I don’t get upset because if I get sad I will feel like there’s nothing left. I feel like everything is work because it fills up one’s time. If there is no job, there’s nothing, your life is ordinary. Very ordinary.”* (Sara talking to me about her aspiration to find a job in the beginning of my fieldwork)

Amongst other talks with Sara, she also told me that even if she could get a job as a sales person in one of the shops in Ebel, she would leave the opportunity for someone else who maybe did not have education, needed the job more than her or wanted it more. This was because her goal was to build a career for herself, and she felt that to work as a seller wouldn’t be challenging enough: she ultimately wanted a job where she could eventually climb the positional ladder. For this, she had to move out of the village. So she applied for a job at the United Arab Emirates, an airplane company, to work as ground staff at the airport in Dubai. She expressed longing for this job during the whole process of applying and doing interviews.

Right when I felt like I should change my project again, to maybe make it about Sara and her struggles of unemployment, she was offered the job in Dubai and suddenly her mood changed drastically which I have shown in my film *This is our land* (Svendsen 2013). The night she got the job offer she was ecstatically joyous. She went celebrating with her sister and friends in one of the local restaurants. After some days I had spent filming Ibrahim and Lena, I visited Sara again to film her excitement for getting the job. What I discovered was something completely different than I had expected. Sara was in the kitchen making coffee. She was abnormally quiet and her movements were slow, almost drowsy. I started filming and asked her about the job, congratulating her, making it sound like I was the one getting the job being all excited and happy for her. She thanked me and returned to her silent behavior. I was puzzled, so I decided to keep talking in my happy voice, maybe making her talk to me about the excitement over her ‘new life’: “Your life will change now!”, I said. She didn’t look up, just kept on stirring the coffee in the pot on the oven. I could hear her think about what to say. After a moment of silence she turned to me and said: “Yes, my life will change a lot.” Her answer was filled with bittersweet emotions and I wondered why. She walked towards the kitchen window, leaning against the wall, looking out on her father in the garden: “Look at father, always gardening.” We talked about how she was going to pack her suitcases and I

congratulated her again and asked if she was happy. She nodded, still looking out the window. She quickly turned to me and shook her head ‘no’.

*R: Why?*

*S: I don't know.*

*R: Aren't you happy you got a job?*

*S: Of course, yes, but I'm also not happy because I'm leaving. I have to leave everything and go. And I'm also happy I found a job. That's it, there's nothing else. Because I have to leave my whole family and go. I got used to them. But I'm also happy because I will have money. I can buy things I want. I'm buying things now, but this way it's better. The coffee is done.*

Later, when we were sitting in her bedroom, she continued explaining her mixed feelings to me, telling me that her father had cancer and that she was sad for leaving him as well as the rest of her family. She also expressed how she would not only miss her family, but also the life she was living in Ebel – and the village itself:

*“[...] I don't want to stay for long. I will return and finish the last year of law studies, get a job and live here in Lebanon. Also, Lebanon... It's my place ('home'). Lebanon is the most beautiful country. Indeed it's very beautiful. The first time I went to Dubai and returned to Lebanon, I felt like there was something... That there was something ripped out of you heart and put aside. And when you return to Lebanon you put it back. [...] Now I'm thinking about when I'm returning, not leaving. I'm still in Lebanon and I'm thinking about when I will return to Lebanon! **\*Laughing\*** By God's will it's good.” (Svendsen 2013, 00:34:08:00)*

When she realizes she has to move to Dubai from her beloved home place, she negotiates her sense of identity and belonging to place in terms of family connections, friends, neighbors and her everyday lifestyle. In a way she feels like she is leaving a piece of herself behind by leaving her Heimat; Ebel Es Saqi. The ambivalence of Sara's feelings from the moment she got the job offer until she sat down and actually thought about the process of leaving home is much like the ambivalent feeling I got from most of the other inhabitants in Ebel: they dislike the disadvantages related to electricity, water and work opportunities and activities, but overall they love staying there despite of their routine or vacation kind of slow pace life. This,

I would say, is strongly connected to the notion of place identity, especially because it is a Heimat, a homeland, to the people there – a part of one’s self if I would put it like Blicke did:

*“[...] Heimat is where one feels at home, where one’s language is spoken, where one has absorbed the climate so much that it is part of oneself without one’s being aware of it. One becomes aware of it only after one has lost part of it through moving, education, a change in the fortunes of that geographical region one calls Heimat, or some other form of distancing.” (2004, 55)*

To further explain the notion of Heimat and how important it is to the individual, and in Ebel’s case – the society, we can take a look at another extract from Peter Blicke’s work on this phenomenon:

*“[...] Heimat constructs are counter-phobic conceptualizations expressed in regressive, imagistic terms. They are wish-fulfillments without a price; **they provide a world where wars and destruction do not exist or are so far away that they do not matter**; [...] and they provide a world where the experiences of alienation are magically healed in this feminine and feminizing construct. We see Heimat – like concepts of nature, nation or family – as **an attempt at unity and centeredness** in the face of disjunction and fragmentation.” (2004, 62)<sup>30</sup>*

Heimat as an analytical term is applicable here, not only when it comes to the ambivalent subjective emotions of the people talking about their home place, but it is also useful for the objective dualistic view between the imaginary world (how things might be) and the real world (how things are) regarding the history and the present of the place, war-related. Because, despite being people of different religions with history books and media coverage that indeed would imply tension between them<sup>31</sup>, people in Ebel are united as a harmonious community living together and sharing Heimat, as they have always been doing according to my sources. It is through this physical place where they have made their common Heimat that they have found meaning in, and are integrated in, the togetherness that is shown within and between the inhabitants of this village. Their Heimat is in a way therefore their anchor point

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<sup>30</sup> I made the bold parts bold to show the most relevant sentences in the quote to my project.

<sup>31</sup> Tension that I have made clear in subchapter 2.1 was unreal in Ebel’s particular case.

(c.f. page 37), and it is furthermore an imperative aspect of people's identity in relation to how they organize and live their lives.

### ***5.1.1) The good life in Ebel Es Saqi***

When a Norwegian friend back home asked me about what my master thesis was about, I told him that I was writing about Heimat and 'the good life' in a village in southern Lebanon. His immediate reaction was a little chuckle, following the statement: "*Is there a good life in Lebanon, really?*" I smiled, thinking that this was exactly the reason and my motivation for going to Ebel Es Saqi in the very beginning: people who think wars and bombings are the only events occupying people's everyday lives in Lebanon. At the same time, I remembered how bored I was being there, thinking "*Is this all there is to it [their lives]?*". I needed more action in my everyday life, more activity, being used to my Norwegian urban student lifestyle. My final answer to him ended up being something like this: "*Well, yes. In this place people are happy, content. They are living a very routine-like life, and even if I would say that gets boring after a while, **for them** it is not. It's a good life.*"

I experienced this yearning for the good, calm, quiet life in conversations with all my informants in the field. Lena, for example, being originally from Beirut, telling me heartbreaking stories about how her old house in the capitol was bombed down to the ground three times during the war, and how she and her husband in the end decided to move to Ebel and build a house there to start living there as a fresh start. She seemed happier about living in Beirut when it came to following one's career and earning money from work. Additionally one can say that Beirut is her original home place or Heimat, so her feelings towards the bigger city were of the lovable kind. That might be why most of her answers to me about preferable livelihood were vague and ambivalent some times. Still, when I had talked with her for a while about where she ultimately prefers to live, she in the end gave me a straightforward answer:

*L: "Here. I like to live here."*

*R: "Why?"*

*L: "Because it's calm, quiet. Not as stressful as in Beirut, you know? There's a lot of noise and stress there. No. Here it's calm and nice. Don't you agree?"*

Lena, along with the other informants I had during this fieldwork, expressed a comforting feeling of belonging in Ebel and how this routine-life for them is considered a good life. Another example, which strengthens this statement about the inhabitants' view on 'the good life' can be drawn from early in my film when I first introduce the audience to Haifa and Amal (and Maria) sitting outside their shops like they normally do:

*You asked us whether we come to our shops every day. Of course we do because we're working. But work is more like this, you know? We sit, chat and enjoy ourselves. More than the work-type-of-work they do in the city. In the city it's not like this. If you go to Beirut you don't see people sitting like this, happy. People in Beirut are all work.*

(Svendsen 2013, 00:03:25:00 - 00:03:53:00)

Haifa then goes on by describing to me a normal day that which she concludes with is common and routine-like – as if this day repeats itself over and over again. Their lives are a routine, she explains. Still, even if I at the start looked upon this lifestyle as boring and not good, I learned from my informants that for them it actually *is* a good life. What they expressed to me during fieldwork, and what I have heard and read throughout this process is that people here are not fighting, they are alive and at the moment of me writing this thesis living in a stable period of time with security brought to them by the UN peacekeepers, and so they are content and they are sustaining themselves reciprocatively to deal with the low flow of money. They continuously get acknowledgement and praise for being a part of a community where they are being at use for each other. This way they are, in their eyes, living the good life.

## 6. Conclusion

*One of the functions of art, and often of science, is to help us understand the being of others in the world. However, art and science are only part of this; it depends as much on how we go about the daily practice of seeing. In this, the meaning we find in what we see is always both a necessity and an obstacle. Meaning guides our seeing. Meaning allows us to categorize objects. Meaning is what imbues the image of a person with all we know about them. But meaning, when we force it on things, can also blind us, causing us to see only what we expect to see or distracting us from seeing very much at all. (MacDougall 2006, 1)*

I have lived more or less my whole life in Norway, and I have been traveling a lot as well as spent half a year living in Scotland. Nothing comes close to the feeling I had when I was visiting Ebel Es Saqi. Beginning this whole fieldwork process and developing my film and thesis I was analyzing my findings from the field by making generalizations because of my applied *meanings*, which David MacDougall refers to in the excerpt above, and which were deriving from my ‘halfie’ background. After I realized this was not the right way to go, I got to looking more closely on the particularities or *seeing* instead of applying my general meanings on what I had previously noticed.

What I discovered in Ebel was a togetherness, that through neighborhood roles, reciprocity and the UN’s presence – giving the people a sense of security and comfort to return back to Ebel during the war and stay there – is the basis of the good life they all expressed was a reality despite of the country’s history or the material lacks present in the village. This continuity of place identity regardless of the flow of actors leaving, entering and returning, justifies my applied theories on Heimat (Blickle 2004) as well as on neighborhood roles: being at use and finding oneself (Gullestad 1996; Konings and Foeken 2006). In addition to this, what I find shocking and ironic as well as relatable to my findings, especially considering the particular history of Ebel during the Lebanese Civil War, is how the media, the history books and all the other sources one has on ‘common knowledge’ all present the part of Lebanon that historically took place mostly in Beirut as it was the same situation all over Lebanon as a whole. Even if the facts they are presenting are indeed true they are also only partially presented. How things were in Beirut and in Ebel during the war differed, but

this is apparently not coming through to the global public as a reality since all I ever hear people connote Lebanon with are words like ‘war’ or ‘bombings’. It is therefore in that sense, and parallel to my discussion on ethnography of the particular, generalized knowledge.

Peter Blicke argues that one can only have one true Heimat (2004), but I bet that if he had spent some months in Ebel Es Saqi, much like I have or the thousands of UNIFIL veterans have during the past forty years or so, then he would reconsider his own argument. The way I see it Ebel is not only a Heimat for the ‘native’ Lebanese individual, but also for everyone who visits this place regularly. If I did not see Ebel as my Heimat before, in addition to my home village here in Norway, I definitely see it as my other Heimat now. To further the conclusion: the way Heimat is constructed in Ebel Es Saqi is, as mentioned earlier, through reciprocal rituals like Sbheyeh or exchange-through-expertise and gifts.

What I have also found is that even if life in Ebel is routine-like, with people appreciating the stability and continuity that derives from this, they can still move around to seek their fortune elsewhere, like migrating for work. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan held a lecture at the University of California in 2011 where he stated the following:

*Mobility, like individualism, are two features of modern life. The two being closely linked. An individual dissatisfied with his community’s settled ways moves out to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere. (Tuan 2011)*

On one hand I find this relatable to my own findings in Ebel Es Saqi, but what I on the other hand found in addition to this was that when people who for example migrated to find work were unfortunate or did not succeed they were still able to return to the village and continue their lives there. This is something Tuan mentions in his book *The Good Life*, which I along with the quote above from his lecture, find complementing and that they together describe the situation I experienced in a good way:

*For most of humankind, land is the foundation of security and stability. Without property in land the good life cannot withstand the buffets of misfortune. (Tuan 1986, 90)*



All in all, Ebel Es Saqi is a particular village in a particular country with its own history and present. What I came to understand was the reason why people did not talk about the Civil War was that they simply want to move past it and enjoy their good life. I say we should take inspiration in the Ebel peoples' way of thinking as a community and put aside our generalizations, put aside the past, and live in the moment while trying to make the best out of what we have. For to them, only then is it truly the good life.



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