



UPPSALA  
UNIVERSITET

Department of Theology  
Spring Term 2025

Master's Thesis in Religion in Peace and Conflict  
15 ECTS

# **Faithful Resistance**

**Christians and the Quest for Belonging**

Author: Daniel Andersson  
Supervisor: Maximillian Broberg

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank experience marginalisation and respond to it through faith-based agency, resilience, and everyday resistance. As a small and often overlooked religious minority living under military occupation, they face a unique combination of political, social, and theological pressures. Drawing on thirteen semi-structured interviews with Protestant and other local Christians, the study uses thematic analysis and is guided by theoretical perspectives on agency (Giddens, Arendt), resilience (Masten), and marginalisation (Spivak, Crenshaw, Yuval-Davis).

The findings are organised into four main themes: (1) Structures of Marginalisation, (2) Identity Under Pressure, (3) Community Resilience and Faith-Based Agency, and (4) Duality of Being a Minority Within a Minority. Participants described daily challenges such as movement restrictions, religious discrimination, and shrinking church communities. Yet many also spoke of their determination to stay, to serve, and to be “living stones” in their land. Churches emerged as not only spiritual homes but also spaces for education, advocacy, and social support. Rather than being defined by victimhood, many of those interviewed expressed a deep sense of purpose and commitment to justice, non-violence, and peace.

This study challenges the tendency to render Palestinian Christians invisible in both political and theological narratives. By centring their voices and experiences, it highlights how faith is not just a source of personal strength, but also a foundation for collective action and resilience. Their stories show what it means to hold on, to identity, to dignity, and to belonging, in a context where all of these are constantly under pressure.

**Keywords:** Faith, Resistance, Jerusalem, Palestine, Agency, Minority

**Table of content**

- Abstract ..... 2**
- Acknowledgement..... 4**
- Introduction..... 5**
  - 1.1 Research questions and problem statement ..... 6*
  - 1.2 Previous research..... 6*
- Theory..... 6**
  - 2.1 Agency..... 9*
  - 2.2 Resilience..... 10*
  - 2.3 Marginalisation ..... 10*
- Methodology ..... 11**
  - 3.1 Participants ..... 13*
  - 3.2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews ..... 14*
  - 3.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis..... 15*
  - 3.4 Terminology, Positionality and ethical considerations..... 16*
    - 3.4.1 The Politics of Words..... 16*
    - 3.4.2 Antisemitism..... 18*
    - 3.4.3 Ethical considerations ..... 18*
  - 3.5 Researcher Reflexivity ..... 19*
  - 3.6 Delimitations ..... 20*
- Results..... 20**
  - 4.1 Structures of Marginalisation ..... 21*
  - 4.2 Identity Under Pressure..... 22*
  - 4.3 Community Resilience and Faith-Based Agency ..... 24*
  - 4.4. Duality of Being a Minority Within a Minority..... 26*
- Analysis ..... 29**
  - 5.1 Agency as Transformative Capacity ..... 29*
  - 5.2 Natality and Hope ..... 30*
  - 5.3 Narrative Invisibility and Layered Marginalisation ..... 32*
- Discussion ..... 34**
- Conclusion ..... 36**
- Future Research ..... 38**
- References ..... 40**
- Appendix 1: Consent form ..... 43**
- Appendix 2: Interview guide ..... 45**

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Swedish Theological Institute, The Swedish Christian Study Center and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) for their invaluable assistance in helping me connect with individuals willing to share their experiences for this research. Your support has been instrumental in making this fieldwork possible.

I am deeply grateful to both the Olof Palme Memorial Fund and Lunds Missionssällskap for their generous financial support through the research grant that enabled me to carry out this study. Your belief in the importance of student-led inquiry into religion and peacebuilding in conflict contexts has been a crucial foundation for this work.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all the participants who generously gave of their time, shared their stories, and offered their insights. Your perspectives form the very heart of this research, and I am humbled by your openness and trust.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my friends and family. Your unwavering encouragement, patience, and love have sustained me through every step of this academic journey. Thank you for believing in me and standing by my side.

# Introduction

Jerusalem, Palestine and the West Bank, home to many of Christianity's holiest sites, is today witnessing a paradox of Christian presence. In the very birthplace of the faith, local Christians have become a tiny and shrinking minority. Christians in Jerusalem now constitute only around 1.1% of the population, a dramatic decline from the early 20th century when they comprised significantly larger proportions. For example, the Christian population in Jerusalem has fallen from 12,900 persons in 1910 to 11,241 in 2024, reflecting a demographic erosion that has brought the community back to levels not seen in over a century. This steep decline, driven by emigration, restricted residency rights, economic hardship, and ongoing political turmoil, has rendered the community nearly invisible in its own sacred landscape. The result is a striking paradox of social invisibility: a living Christian presence increasingly marginalised in the land that cradled Christianity's origins (WCC-EAPPI, 2024)

This study centres on the lived experiences of Christian Palestinians and how they navigate their religious identity under conditions of marginalization and agency. As a minority within a predominantly Muslim Palestinian society (and under an Israeli state that defines itself in Jewish terms), they occupy a complex social space. Their religious identity is often enmeshed in the broader conflict, subject to pressures from all sides. The protracted Israeli Palestinian occupation, with its attendant restrictions and hostilities, has compounded feelings of vulnerability and exclusion among local Christians. At the same time, intra-Palestinian dynamics can position this community as a minority twice over, a small Christian enclave within a Muslim-majority population. In such a charged environment, asserting a Christian identity becomes an act of resilience. Members of this community continually balance their dual identity as Palestinians and as Christians, striving to maintain their traditions and sense of belonging even as the occupation threatens to subsume or overlook them.

A key theme in this research is the marginalization and social invisibility of these Christians in local and global narratives. Internationally, discourse on the Holy Land often ignores or homogenizes its Christian inhabitants. For example, Christians from abroad have historically paid little heed to indigenous Palestinian Christians and sometimes even shown open disdain toward local Christian traditions and sites. These theological geopolitics, epitomized by Western Christian Zionism, tends to erase the lived reality of native Christians in favor of grand geo-religious schemes. Caught between geopolitical currents, Palestinian Christians

frequently find themselves forgotten by the very global faith community with whom they share religious roots. The study therefore examines how these believers cope with being rendered nearly invisible, both politically and in theological discourse, and how they respond to external narratives that deny their agency or authenticity in their own land.

While existing literature has primarily focused on larger religious or ethnic groups, there is limited scholarly attention given to how Christians navigate their identity, express agency, and engage in peacebuilding within this complex and often volatile context. This study addresses this gap by examining how these communities maintain their presence, assert their rights, and contribute to social cohesion in a context marked by occupation, apartheid, genocide, displacement, and systemic inequality.

### **1.1 Research questions and problem statement**

The aim of this study is to explore how marginalized Christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank exercise agency within a protracted context of occupation and socio-political marginalization. By examining their lived experiences, religious practices, and peacebuilding efforts, the study seeks to understand the role of faith-based identity in navigating marginalization and contributing to broader dynamics of resilience and conflict transformation.

1. How do Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and on the West Bank experience marginalization, and how does it affect their personal and community life?
2. In what ways do Christian individuals and Christian communities show agency, the ability to act and make choices, even in difficult or restrictive situations?
3. How do religious identity, politics, and broader social structures, such as military occupation, nationalism, and escalating violence, shape the roles and treatment of Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank?

### **1.2 Previous research**

Literature on religious minorities in Palestine emphasises that marginalisation is not simply imposed upon these communities but is also something they actively confront and negotiate.

Brandon Moist highlights that in the 20th century, Christian Palestinians engaged in a strategy of visibility through national unity. Rather than remaining isolated, many Christians aligned with the broader Palestinian national movement, striving to be seen as integral members of society. Moist notes that Christians "played a role in the politics and social aspects of Palestinian life... by showing unity with Muslims" (Moist, 2015: 19), contributing to politics, education, and culture in a manner disproportionate to their demographic size (Moist, 2015: 4–5).

The layered nature of Christian Palestinian marginalisation is further analysed by Håvard Enger, who describes how Protestant communities such as the Lutherans and Anglicans are doubly marginalised socially within Palestinian society and structurally within the Israeli state, which is anchored in Jewish ethno-religious identity (Enger, 2022: 1). Despite this, Protestant institutions such as schools and hospitals continue to serve as significant actors in public life. Enger also observes that global Christian narratives, particularly those influenced by Christian Zionism, tend to erase local voices, thereby rendering Palestinian Christians "invisible" even within their own sacred landscape (Enger, 2022: 1).

Theological agency is a recurring theme in the literature. Tristan Sturm and Seth J. Frantzman explore two theological trajectories: one grounded in liberation theology, exemplified by figures such as Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb, and the other aligned with American evangelical millennialism, giving rise to a minority of Palestinian Christian Zionists (Sturm & Frantzman, 2015: 435-439). Liberation theologians mobilise scripture to critique occupation and advocate for national liberation, while Christian Zionists adopt a theology that supports the Israeli state. Enger affirms that for many Palestinian Christians, "faith is not only a private belief but also a source of strength, identity, and community survival" (Enger, 2022: 1).

Daoud Kuttab contributes to this discourse by highlighting how Palestinian evangelicals must navigate their theological positions in the shadow of American evangelical influence. With U.S. evangelicalism exerting disproportionate influence on Middle East policy, Palestinian evangelicals often find themselves peripheral to global Christian discourse and forced to reconcile with externally imposed narratives (Kuttab, 2019: 70–72).

A central concept in this body of research is *sumud*, or steadfastness, as a form of everyday resistance. Enger points to "everyday acts of resilience" among Protestant Palestinians who continue public witness under occupation (Enger, 2022: 1). Anna Johansson and Stellan

Vinthagen provide a framework for understanding how Palestinians "negotiate, expand, manipulate, and transgress" occupation through daily acts (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2015: 23). Jasmin Lilian Mannergren Selimovic shows how routine movement through divided Jerusalem becomes an act of spatial defiance and self-assertion (Mannergren Selimovic, 2018: 10).

This aligns with the argument by Landgren and Hancock that local agency is not only essential to peacebuilding but also constitutes a basic human need (Hancock, 2017: 259). Within this view, Christian Palestinians' everyday practices, maintaining liturgy, educating youth, and sustaining community care, become meaningful acts of resistance.

Interfaith engagement and the broader geopolitical context add further layers to Christian Palestinian experience. Enger notes the active role of Protestant institutions in fostering Christian-Muslim cooperation (Enger, 2022: 1). Yet, as Kuttab notes, these local efforts often exist in tension with the theological and political pressures from international religious actors, particularly U.S. evangelicals (Kuttab, 2019). Sturm and Frantzman similarly identify the hybrid identities that emerge in these overlapping religious and political fields (Sturm & Frantzman, 2015: 439-444).

Together, this literature paints a nuanced picture of Christian Palestinian agency. It is not a static condition but a dynamic set of responses, ranging from strategic political alignment and theological expression to mundane acts of resilience. These communities assert presence through both institutional visibility and embodied resistance, sustaining identity and faith under conditions of enduring marginalisation.

While existing research has laid a vital foundation, my study seeks to extend this knowledge by offering an up-to-date, fieldwork-based exploration of how Protestant Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank experience and respond to marginalisation and invisibility today. By grounding the analysis in firsthand narratives and combining theoretical insights on agency, resilience, and minority identity, this research provides a contemporary perspective that captures the evolving dynamics of faith-based resistance. In doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Christian Palestinians not only as historical actors or theological subjects, but as active agents navigating the moral, spatial, and political landscapes of a deeply contested region.

# Theory

This chapter introduces the key theoretical concepts used to analyse how Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank navigate marginalisation and assert agency. The study draws on theories of agency, resilience, and marginalisation to understand how individuals and communities respond to structural constraints.

## 2.1 Agency

In this study, agency is understood as the capacity of individuals and communities to act with intentionality, particularly within and against constraining social structures. This concept is used to analyse how **Protestant** Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank respond to marginalisation through both everyday acts and public initiatives. Anthony Giddens's structuration theory conceptualises agency as a central component of social life. He defines agency as the "capacity to do otherwise", which means that individuals, even within the bounds of structure, can make choices and act differently (Giddens, 1984:9-10). This transformative potential is not rooted in complete freedom but in the way, actors engage with plural social systems. As Whittington (2015) paraphrases Giddens: "People make a difference to the world through their choices, refusals or failures" (Whittington, 2015:147) In this study, I interpret this to mean that agency manifests not only in large-scale resistance but also in subtle reconfigurations of social and religious life under pressure.

Hannah Arendt, meanwhile, connects agency with the concept of natality, the capacity to initiate the new. She writes: "It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before" (Arendt, 1958: 177). For Arendt, true agency arises when individuals appear in the public realm and act in ways that reveal their uniqueness and contribute to the creation of shared meaning. This notion of beginning is inherently relational and visible: action becomes significant when it enters a space where it can be seen, remembered, and judged by others. Together, Giddens's emphasis on structural engagement and Arendt's vision of initiating new beginnings form the analytical framework for agency in this thesis. The focus is not on abstract freedom, but on how **Protestant** Christians in the West Bank and Jerusalem enact meaningful practices, through advocacy, faith, or community building, that reshape their position in the face of social, political, and religious constraint.

## 2.2 Resilience

In this study, resilience is used as a conceptual lens to understand how **Protestant** Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank maintain identity, agency, and collective purpose despite political exclusion, religious marginalisation, and restricted freedoms. Rather than viewing resilience as an extraordinary trait possessed by only a few, I adopt a developmental understanding of resilience as a widespread and dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of adversity. Ann S. Masten's seminal study on resilience challenges deficit-oriented models of development and instead foregrounds the ordinary, systemic processes that support adaptive responses to hardship. As she explains, "Resilience refers to a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001: 228). Her analysis repositions resilience not as heroic exceptionalism, but as "the power of the ordinary" an emergent quality made possible by relationships, routines, beliefs, and supportive systems that enable individuals and communities to cope, adjust, and even flourish under constraint. In the analysis, the concept of resilience will be used to trace how participants express endurance and re-creative capacity, through faith-based practices, intergenerational solidarity, and narratives of hope, as integral to their broader expressions of agency. This interpretation complements Giddens's notion of transformative capacity and Arendt's understanding of action, by emphasising how ordinary resources and collective practices shape possibilities for sustaining life and meaning under pressure.

## 2.3 Marginalisation

While agency concerns the capacity to act, marginalisation refers to processes that push individuals or communities to the edges of society, limiting their participation, representation, and recognition. This study analytically focuses on two key dimensions of marginalisation: narrative invisibility and layered marginalisation, which are used to interpret how **Protestant** Christians experience and articulate their position within both national and geopolitical contexts. Narrative invisibility refers to the discursive exclusion or erasure of certain groups from dominant frameworks of meaning. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who famously asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak, 1988: 25), this concept highlights how marginalised groups may struggle to have their voices recognised or legitimised, even when they do speak. As Spivak writes,

“The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity” (Spivak, 1988: 24)

In the context of this study, I use these insights to examine how local Protestant Christians may be absent from or misrepresented in national, religious, or international discourses, particularly those that frame the occupation as exclusively Muslim-Jewish or Israeli Palestinian, thereby rendering Christian perspectives marginal or invisible.

The second analytical dimension is layered marginalisation, which refers to the compounding effect of being marginalised in more than one context. For example, Protestant Christians may be a minority within Palestinian society (which is predominantly Muslim), while simultaneously existing as a marginalised population under an Israeli state that defines itself along ethno-religious Jewish lines. This condition reflects what Crenshaw (1989: 140) argues in her foundational critique of single-axis frameworks: “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.” Similarly, Yuval-Davis (2006: 196) states that an “intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of marginalised women attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination.” She further explains that “it addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like.” These insights illuminate how multiple axes of exclusion—religious, national, political, intersect in ways that shape both the lived experiences and strategic responses of Protestant Christian communities in this context. The analysis will therefore use narrative invisibility and layered marginalisation to explore how exclusion is experienced and negotiated. These concepts provide a framework for interpreting how Protestant Christians describe their social position and how this positioning relates to their expressions of agency.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and perceptions of a specific religious minority. Qualitative

research was chosen because it is well-suited to investigating complex social phenomena and the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, “Feminist research and other more critical approaches have made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research” (Smith, 2012: 137). This framing supports the present study’s aim to centre local narratives and lived experience. The research questions focus on how Christian Palestinians in Palestine experience marginalisation, exercise agency, and navigate the interplay of religious identity, politics, and social structures. These are nuanced issues of personal and community life that require depth and context to understand; a qualitative approach allows participants to voice their stories in detail and facilitates a rich, contextualised understanding of their marginalisation and resilience.

Within this qualitative framework, the study takes an exploratory and interpretative approach. No experimental manipulation or quantitative measurement is involved; instead, the goal is to interpret participants’ perspectives and lived experiences in their real-world context. The design is cross-sectional (one point in time) and focused on a particular case or community namely, Christian Palestinian in a specific sociopolitical setting. The rationale for this approach is that it provides flexibility to probe unexpected topics that emerge and to adapt to the narratives of participants. It also aligns with a phenomenological sensibility, in that it seeks to uncover the essence of participants’ experiences of marginalisation and identity in context, though it is not a formal phenomenological study. The open-ended nature of qualitative interviewing is ideal for uncovering how these individuals perceive their status and how they act with agency and create agency, capturing subtleties that a structured or quantitative approach might miss.

Importantly, the methodological approach is informed by critical perspectives in the study of religion. Recent methodological literature emphasises being critical of one’s categories and comparisons to avoid misrepresentation. Freiberger notes that comparative studies of religion have faced critiques, including concerns that they may “decontextualise and essentialise religious phenomena” (Freiberger 2019:3) In other words, scholars must be careful not to strip religious communities from their context or reduce them to monolithic essences. While this thesis does not directly compare multiple religious groups, it remains mindful of these cautions. The analysis is situated within the specific socio-political and historical context of Palestinian Christians, to avoid any implicit comparison that might generalise or flatten their experience. This critical stance, attentive to context, difference, and power, helps address the

“postcolonialism and postmodernist critiques” which insist on acknowledging diversity and avoiding Western-centric assumptions. By grounding findings in participants’ own context and words, the study strives not to impose external categories uncritically. The research design is qualitative and context-sensitive, chosen to authentically investigate the lived realities of a marginalised faith community in a complex setting.

### **3.1 Participants**

The target population for this study was Protestant Christians living in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Given the relatively small size of this community and its minority status, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who could provide rich and relevant insights. Participants were chosen based on specific criteria: they identified as Christian (I was especially looking for Lutheran but given the circumstances it was kind of hard) Palestinians, were over 18 years of age, and had lived experience of life in Jerusalem or the West Bank. A total of 13 individuals, 3 women and 10 men, were interviewed, reflecting a range of backgrounds within the Protestant Palestinian community. This sample size is typical for in-depth qualitative research, allowing for meaningful diversity of perspectives without sacrificing depth of understanding in each interview.

Recruitment was carried out through community and church networks, specially throughout my own contacts within the Swedish Theological institute and the Swedish Christian study centre. Initial contacts were made via local Protestant church leaders and community organisers in Jerusalem and Bethlem, Bayt Jala and Beit Sahour. For example, I got in contact with the director of Swedish Theological institute who helped me out a lot and the director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the holy land. After explaining the study and its purpose, the researcher invited eligible congregants or community members to participate. Snowball sampling was also employed: early participants suggested or referred others who met the criteria. This approach was appropriate because the Christian Palestinian community is close-knit; referrals helped build trust and access participants who might not respond to cold calls. It was made clear that participation was entirely voluntary, and recruitment stopped once thematic saturation was reached.

The participants varied in age (approximately early 20s to late 70s) and occupation, including activist, professionals, pastors and students. All participants are Palestinian by nationality/ethnicity and Christian by religious affiliation, a minority in a predominantly

Muslim and Orthodox Christian society. This diversity within the sample allowed the research to capture both common patterns and individual variations in experience. The purposive, criterion-based sampling ensured that each participant had direct relevance to the study's focus on Protestant Christian life in the context of Israeli occupation and Palestinian society.

### **3.2 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. Each participant took part in a one-on-one interview conducted in English. All participants were fluent in English, so no interpreter was required. This avoided any loss of meaning in translation and helped establish a direct rapport between the researcher and participant. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency across interviews, covering key topics related to the research questions: experiences of marginalisation, instances of agency or initiative, the role of religious identity in daily life, interactions with political and social structures, etc. The interview format was flexible, while the guide provided a set of open-ended questions and prompts, the conversation was allowed to flow naturally and follow the participant's lead whenever appropriate. This flexibility encouraged participants to bring up what they felt was important in their own words, yielding richer and more authentic data.

Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes, depending on how much the participant chose to share. Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants for their convenience and privacy, typically at church meeting rooms, or quiet public spaces. At the start of each session, the researcher engaged in a few minutes of informal rapport-building conversation to help the participant feel at ease. Participants were reminded of the study's purpose and assured again of confidentiality (as detailed in the consent process). With permission, all interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. Note-taking was kept to a minimum during the interview to maintain a natural conversational atmosphere, though the researcher jotted down occasional key phrases or observations (especially non-verbal cues or emotional reactions not captured on audio).

The semi-structured approach ensured that certain critical questions were addressed with everyone, for instance, "*Can you describe any experiences where you felt marginalised or treated as an outsider because of your religious identity?*" (addressing RQ1), or "*Can you tell me about a time you or your community took initiative or action to improve your situation or respond to challenges?*" (addressing RQ2 on agency). Follow-up probing questions were

used to elicit detail (“What happened then?” “How did that make you feel?” “Why do you think that was the case?”). However, participants were also encouraged to introduce topics or stories of their own. For example, some interviewees brought up inter-denominational relations with other Christian groups, or specific incidents involving political authorities; these were explored as they arose. Throughout the interviews, the researcher was careful to ask open-ended questions and avoid leading participants toward any answer. The goal was to have participants reconstruct their experiences and perspectives as they saw them, with the interviewer primarily facilitating and clarifying. This technique aligns with qualitative best practices, which advise researchers to “*avoid leading questions*” and to *withhold sharing personal impressions* (Creswell, 2014: table 4.1) during the interview. In practice, this meant the interviewer used neutral prompts (e.g., “Can you tell me more about that?”) and did not share her own opinions or stories, to keep the focus on the interviewee’s narrative.

After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed. The researcher transcribed all 13 interviews. The transcripts were then reviewed while listening to the audio to correct any errors and to annotate nonverbal elements (pauses, laughter, emphasis) where relevant for interpretation.

### **3.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis as its primary method for examining qualitative data derived from thirteen semi-structured interviews with Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was particularly suited to the research focus on lived experiences of marginalisation, identity, and agency, allowing for nuanced and layered interpretations of individual and communal narratives.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s six-step framework: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 16-23). After transcribing the interviews and reading through the transcript’s multiple times, initial codes were generated both inductively, emerging directly from the data and deductively guided by the study’s research questions. Codes such as “displacement,” “restricted movement,” “intra-Christian tension,” “Palestinian identity under threat,” and “church-based activism” were

identified across interviews with participants. These codes were then clustered into broader themes. The final themes included: (1) Structures of Marginalisation, (2) Identity Under Pressure, (3) Community Resilience and Faith-Based Agency, and (4) Duality of Being a Minority within a Minority. Special attention was given to how agency was expressed through narratives of resilience, activism, and community engagement, especially in the face of systemic discrimination, occupation, and erasure. The analysis was iterative and reflexive, with codes and themes being continuously refined in dialogue with the research questions and theoretical framework.

### **3.4 Terminology, Positionality and ethical considerations**

Researching faith-based minority experiences in contexts of occupation, religious pluralism, and protracted conflict demands deep reflexivity and ethical attentiveness. The language, assumptions, and interpretive frames brought into the field are never neutral; they shape what is seen, heard, and silenced. This section outlines the epistemological positioning and ethical commitments that guide this thesis, including the politics of terminology, the boundaries between critique and prejudice, and the responsibilities of research conducted in solidarity with marginalised communities.

#### **3.4.1 The Politics of Words**

Researching the lived experiences of Christian Palestinians necessitates a careful, reflexive, and critically engaged approach to terminology. The Israeli Palestinian context is among the most linguistically contested global issues, where the language used to describe political structures and human experiences is not only descriptive but inherently ideological and performative. Words such as "conflict," "occupation," "apartheid," and "genocide" carry with them not only analytical implications but also moral, legal, and political consequences. The choice of terminology by the researcher is therefore never neutral; it reflects a position, consciously or not, and shapes the way in which the study is interpreted both within academic discourse and broader public debates.

In this thesis, the term "occupation" is used to describe the Israeli military and civil control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This usage aligns with international legal standards, including United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, the Fourth Geneva Convention,

and the International Court of Justice, which have repeatedly classified these areas as occupied territories. The occupation encompasses a broader set of legal, spatial, economic, and psychological controls that fundamentally structure Palestinian life.

The terminology used to describe the situation in Israel and Palestine is deeply contested and reflects differing legal, political, and academic framings. International human rights organisations such as Amnesty International argue that Israel's governance of Palestinians, through laws, policies, and practices both within its pre-1967 borders and in the occupied territories, meets the definition of apartheid under the Rome Statute. Amnesty International states that Israeli authorities must be held accountable for committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians, asserting that Israel maintains a system of oppression and domination over Palestinians across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Furthermore, since the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, the term genocide has entered legal and academic debate. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory reported that Israel's warfare methods in Gaza are consistent with the characteristics of genocide, with mass civilian casualties and life-threatening conditions. Additionally, the International Court of Justice, in its Order of 26 January 2024, addressed the application of the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip, indicating provisional measures concerning allegations of genocide.

While this terminology remains legally disputed, it is included here to reflect the range of framings participants themselves used when describing the violence. In contrast, the more commonly used term "conflict" is critically assessed in this study. Scholars like Edward Said argue that referring to the situation as a conflict implies a false equivalence between two equal actors, thereby obscuring the asymmetrical realities of occupation, colonisation, and systemic control. Accordingly, this study uses the term "conflict" with caution, favouring language that more accurately captures the structural conditions under which Christian Palestinians live.

Recognising that terminology shapes knowledge, this study adopts a critical and contextualised lexicon that canters international law, grounded theory, and the narratives of participants. This linguistic framing is not intended to provoke or politicise unnecessarily but to name the structures that participants themselves refer to, while maintaining academic responsibility and ethical clarity.

### **3.4.2 Antisemitism**

A key ethical dimension of this study lies in distinguishing between legitimate critique of state policy and antisemitism. The political climate in many academic and public settings, particularly in Europe and North America, has seen a growing conflation of criticism of Israeli policies with antisemitic intent. This conflation is not only intellectually misleading but also politically dangerous, as it undermines the global struggle against actual antisemitism while delegitimising advocacy for Palestinian rights.

This thesis firmly and unequivocally opposes all forms of antisemitism, defined as hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews as individuals, communities, or as a religious or ethnic group. At the same time, it affirms the importance of freedom of academic and political critique, especially of nation-states that exercise power over populations under occupation.

The distinction between antisemitism and critique is not only defended by scholars and human rights institutions but also by Jewish Israeli and diaspora organisations such as Jewish Voice for Peace, Breaking the Silence, B'Tselem, and Zochrot, which have long documented and protested Israeli government policies while remaining firmly rooted in anti-racist and anti-antisemitic commitments. As Judith Butler (2012) argues, “critique of Zionism is not the same as antisemitism,” and protecting this space for critical reflection is essential to democratic and ethical discourse.

This study is explicitly careful in its language to differentiate between the Israeli government and Jewish identity or religion. References to "Israeli state policies" are not conflated with Judaism or Jewish people. The aim is not to pass judgment on religious or ethnic communities, but to examine the effects of policies and systems of control on a minoritised population within a specific geopolitical context. By adopting this position, the study aligns with the principles of academic integrity, international human rights, and the decolonial ethics of representation, ensuring that the dignity of all communities, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, or otherwise, is upheld, while truthfully presenting the lived realities described by participants.

### **3.4.3 Ethical considerations**

This study is grounded in a critical ethical approach that recognises the complexities of conducting research with marginalised communities in politically and religiously sensitive contexts. Ethical considerations extend beyond formal protocols of consent and

confidentiality to include deeper commitments to representation, reflexivity, and responsibility. As Nahnfeldt and Lindberg write, “Excluding organisational and social structures are likened to ‘walls,’ which she [Sara Ahmed] suggests maybe not are possible to move, but to transform into ‘tables’” (Nahnfeldt & Lindberg, 2017: 5). This metaphor guides the study’s aim to disrupt dominant academic norms and create space for the perspectives of those often excluded from political and theological discourse. Similarly, Lyck-Bowen highlights the ethical potential of interreligious and interpersonal engagement, quoting one participant in the Goda Grannar project: “It is something wonderful when you see a Christian and a Muslim together, it is something wonderful” (Lyck-Bowen, 2020: 172). This resonates with the study’s commitment to respect, relational solidarity, and representation grounded in dignity. Accordingly, this research avoids essentialising or generalising Christian Palestinian identity, instead prioritising language shaped by participants’ own narratives and geopolitical context. This approach aligns with decolonial research ethics and the broader imperative to avoid replicating colonial power structures in scholarly work.

### **3.5 Researcher Reflexivity**

As Finlay notes, “Reflexivity in qualitative research, where researchers turn a critical gaze towards themselves, has a history spanning at least a century” (Finlay, 2003: 3). Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research, particularly in politically sensitive and religiously significant contexts like Palestine. This study examines how Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank experience marginalisation and express agency, and is shaped not only by participants’ voices but also by my own positionality. As a Swedish master's student in religion, peace, and conflict studies, I have long been engaged in faith-based peacebuilding. Prior to this research, I visited Palestine four times, focusing on non-violent activism and human rights. These experiences informed my understanding but also introduced potential bias, especially as my commitment to justice and non-violence may influence how I interpret participants’ narratives. Being a non-Palestinian with freedom of movement and academic privilege, I was acutely aware of the power asymmetries embedded in the research process. While I could move between Jerusalem and the West Bank, many of my interviewees described daily restrictions and systemic oppression. This contrast required humility and ethical attentiveness throughout the research. I conducted interviews with care, emphasising transparency, informed consent, and mutual respect. The emotional weight of participants’ stories, marked by loss, trauma, and resilience, left a deep impact. To process these emotions

while maintaining critical distance, I engaged in regular reflection, journaling, and supervision. Writing from within a European academic context also posed the risk of abstracting lived suffering. To resist this, I centre participants' voices as authoritative accounts, aiming to amplify their agency and contribute to a scholarship grounded in dignity, resistance, and hope.

### **3.6 Delimitations**

This study initially focused on Protestant Christians in Palestine, particularly those affiliated with Lutheran and Evangelical churches. However, due to recruitment challenges and the small size of the Protestant population, the scope was expanded to include Greek Orthodox and Catholic participants. This broader inclusion enabled a more diverse representation of Christian voices and experiences. All participants self-identify as Palestinian and reside in Jerusalem or the West Bank. Only adults aged 18 and over were included, both for ethical reasons and because the research focuses on social, political, and religious agency, topics requiring a certain level of maturity.

Interviews were conducted in English, requiring participants to have functional fluency. This may have influenced participation and the articulation of experiences. The study does not aim to generalise findings to all Palestinian Christians or compare them with other religious groups. Instead, it explores how Christian Palestinians, as a minority within a Muslim-majority society and under occupation, experience marginalisation, express agency, and negotiate identity. These delimitations reflect a deliberate effort to focus the study while accommodating the complexity of a small and underrepresented community.

## **Results**

This study explored how Christian Palestinians experience and respond to marginalisation, identity challenges, and social positioning through the lens of faith-based resilience. Thirteen interviews revealed four interrelated thematic clusters: (1) Structures of Marginalisation, (2) Identity Under Pressure, (3) Community Resilience and Faith-Based Agency, and (4) Duality of Being a Minority Within a Minority. Each theme is supported by rich narratives that point to structural injustice, spiritual resistance, and communal strategies of survival.

## 4.1 Structures of Marginalisation

A dominant theme across all participants was the systemic restrictions on movement. Multiple interviewees (Interview 1, 2, 3, 4) described permits and checkpoints as a central part of daily oppression. As one participant explained, “We live in a matrix of control. Everything is controlled by the Israelis” (from interview 1). Others referenced arbitrary permit denials, military roadblocks, and post-war barriers as severely limiting freedom of worship and family life (interview 2, 4, 7, 13). Legal and civic discrimination intersected with this restricted mobility. Interviewees noted inconsistent legal systems (interview 5, 6), family unification issues (7), and economic barriers that disproportionately impacted Christian communities (interview 4, 9). Religious marginalisation was also evident, with stories of being denied access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, being spat on in public, and security restrictions around the celebration of easter (interview 2, 3, 6, 11). Political intimidation emerged in narratives about physical violence, fear of surveillance, and pressures on churches to avoid political critique (2, 8, 10, 13). These actions, participants noted, serve to weaken the Christian presence and reinforce a sense of exclusion.

All participants described pervasive structural constraints shaping their daily lives. A dominant motive was the restriction of movement under Israeli military occupation. Interviewees recounted the maze of checkpoints, permit regimes, and separation barriers that impede basic freedoms, from worship to work and family visits. As one participant explained, “Having to wait at checkpoints for hours and hours, because an 18-year-old soldier decided he wants to smoke a cigarette. It’s just insane” (Interview 10). Such accounts of checkpoint harassment and unpredictable closures were nearly universal. Several participants also noted that permits to enter Jerusalem or travel abroad were often arbitrarily denied, fragmenting families and community life. These movement restrictions were frequently linked with feelings of imprisonment and humiliation. For example, one of the interviewees characterised life under occupation as living in a totalising system of control: “This is where all our misery and suffering and pain comes. It comes from the occupation and from the apartheid system we live under” (Interview 1). His strong language underscores the extreme power imbalance perceived, an environment of structural violence where normal life is upended. Together with mobility limits, participants described legal, economic, and physical insecurity that marginalise their community. Many noted discriminatory laws and practices that treat Palestinians (Christians and Muslims alike) as second-class. Inconsistent legal systems govern

Palestinians in East Jerusalem vs. the West Bank, and issues like residency rights and family unification are fraught with obstacles.

Economically, Christian Palestinians have been hit by declining tourism, land confiscations, and unequal resource allocation. “We’re systematically suffocated. We’re being put in positions that are pushing people to leave,” explained one of the interviewees (Interview 10), referring to how economic hardships, exacerbated by travel restrictions and periodic violence, drive emigration. Several interviewees pointed out that historically Christian towns (like Bethlehem) have suffered major losses of young people due to lack of opportunities under occupation. Physical threats and intimidation further compound marginalisation. Participants spoke of settler attacks on clergy and churches, surveillance and harassment by authorities, and even incidents of direct violence. One interviewee from the West Bank, shared that the sense of personal safety is constantly undermined: “You always feel unsafe, even though this is your home... Israeli soldiers could literally invade right now” (Interview 9). Such experiences of vulnerability create ongoing stress and trauma. Collectively, these structural factors, restricted movement, discriminatory laws, economic pressure, and security threats, form a matrix of marginalisation that deeply affects Christian Palestinians’ personal and community life. They lead not only to material hardships but also to a psychological toll, fostering a sense of exclusion and instability.

#### **4.2 Identity Under Pressure**

Participants frequently described their identity as Christian Palestinians as both “invisible” and “under threat” (interview 3, 4, 6). Some recounted feeling more unwelcome than Muslims (interview 1), while others noted that they were often perceived as less Palestinian or treated as outsiders by both Muslims and Jews (interview 6, 9). Intersectional invisibility was a recurrent motif. Respondents highlighted their dual marginalisation: as Palestinians in a settler-colonial context and as Christians within both a Muslim-majority society and Jewish-dominated state (interview 4, 6, 12). One noted, “We are Palestinian Christians, there’s a clear divide. Some don’t fully accept us” (Interview 9). Internal fragmentation was also noted. Several interviewees (interview 1, 2, 5, 12) pointed to denominational divisions and lack of unified church action. Nonetheless, adversity often became a source of identity consolidation. Participants invoked images of “living stones” and drew strength from ancestral connection and spiritual resilience (3, 6, 12).

Being a Christian Palestinian emerged as an identity under constant negotiation and strain. Many participants described feeling invisible or misrecognised in broader societal narratives. Several noted that outsiders are often unaware that Palestinian Christians even exist, or assume all Palestinians are Muslim. As one of the interviewees remarked, “I always make sure to mention that I’m a Christian Palestinian, because a lot of people do not know we exist, and we do exist” (Interview 10). This speaks to a recurring theme of narrative invisibility, the erasure of Christian Palestinians in the global perception of the the Israeli occupation and blockade of Palestinian territory.. Even within their homeland, Christian identity can be overshadowed. Participants recounted feeling that they “are not welcome in [their] own city” (Interview 11), highlighting how religious minority status, on top of being Palestinian under occupation, amplifies feelings of alienation. One of the interviewees is a community leader in Jerusalem, explained that daily hostility and marginalisation send a clear message of otherness: “Today, in a nutshell... our feeling is that we are not welcome in our own very city” (Interview 11). This sense of exclusion deeply wounds personal dignity and belonging. “My spirit is what hurts... it hits [a] very deep core in the sense of dignity... when you say to [us], you are not welcome here” (Interview 11), he added, describing the existential impact of being made to feel like strangers in their ancestral home.

A complex dual marginalisation surfaced in many interviews. Participants occupy an ambiguous space: as Palestinians in a Jewish-majority state that often labels them simply as Arabs, and as Christians within a predominantly Muslim Palestinian society. They reported experiences of subtle differentiation from Muslim peers. For instance, one of the interviewee noted that social dynamics can accentuate their minority status: “You’re still a Palestinian Christian... so that kind of creates a divide. Oh, we’re not really the same” (Interview 9). Others mentioned “silent discrimination” such as being eyed with curiosity or scepticism, “they look at the cross and then they look at you” (Interview 9) especially in settings where Christians are few (e.g. a lone Christian student in a public school). Notably, however, participants stressed that these tensions are usually subtle; most Muslims and Christians enjoy harmonious everyday relations and share a Palestinian identity. Indeed, national identity often outweighs religious divides in self-perception. “I am a Christian. But I am a Palestinian before being a Christian,” (Interview 1) underlining that for many, their Palestinian nationhood is fundamental, and their faith is one facet of it. Several interviewees invoked the idea of being “living stones” the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land whose roots run deep as a source of pride and perseverance. Adversity has, for some, consolidated this identity: maintaining

Christian traditions (celebrating holidays, preserving holy sites) has become an act of resilience to assert their continued presence. At the same time, internal community challenges were noted. A few respondents lamented fragmentation along denominational lines and a lack of unified Christian political voice. Yet even here, pressures have prompted reflection and change; one participant observed that recent crises have pushed churches toward greater unity and a more “liberation theology” mindset, bridging old divides.

The identity of Christian Palestinians is under pressure from multiple sides. They face misunderstanding and marginalisation externally and must navigate minority status internally. This layered identity struggle affects personal life, some expressed feeling neither fully accepted by fellow Palestinians at times, nor by the Israeli Jewish majority, leading to a sense of being “Other” everywhere. Nonetheless, most interviewees strongly affirmed their dual identity: proudly Palestinian and Christian. Surviving and thriving in this identity, in fact, was often portrayed as part of their mission. As one of the interviewees puts it, “You feel every day that you are fighting to be here... to tell the people and the world that I am here” (Interview 5). This determination to be seen and heard, despite forces that might render them invisible, is a powerful thread through their narratives.

### **4.3 Community Resilience and Faith-Based Agency**

Despite these pressures, the interviews were rich with narratives of agency. Churches were described not only as spiritual havens but also as vital providers of education, health care, and social services (Interview 1, 5, 8, 10, 12). Even during war or occupation, many churches kept their doors open and expanded support services (Interview 5, 12). Faith served as a platform for resistance. Liberation theology, reformation identity, and prophetic witness were cited as key frames for action (Interview 2, 6, 7, 13). As one participant said, “Our resistance is our presence” (Interview 9). Education, advocacy, and interfaith dialogue were also described as key strategies of resistance and outreach (Interview 4, 7, 10). Female leadership, while not always foregrounded, was referenced positively. Interviewees described women leading ministries, legal efforts, and diaconal work (Interview 1, 4, 5, 12). Narrative-based resistance included storytelling, community gatherings, and symbolic actions that underscored dignity, presence, and hope (Interview 3, 6, 11).

Despite the harsh realities of marginalisation, the interviews were replete with narratives of agency, resilience, and hope rooted in faith and community. Christian Palestinians, though a

tiny minority, enact a range of strategies to support each other and resist despair. A central motif was the role of the Church and related institutions as sources of social support and collective agency. Participants described churches not only as places of worship but as hubs of education, healthcare, and charity that benefit the entire society. “Christian schools, hospitals, and universities provide crucial services for all,” noted one interviewee, explaining that the Christian contribution to society is “much bigger than our numbers” (Interview 11). In Gaza, for example, a church-run hospital continued operating as the last functioning hospital in a war-torn area, exemplifying sacrificial service (Interview 12). Such efforts give the Christian community a moral weight and visibility that belies their small size. As another interviewee observed, “Most private schools that offer better education are Christian schools... Christian institutions elevate education, health care... for everyone” (Interview 10).

This institutional role not only aids society at large but also helps fortify the Christian presence, giving community members a reason to stay. Indeed, church leaders have undertaken initiatives to curb Christian emigration, for instance by providing housing assistance, scholarships, and jobs for young families. “The church is trying to get as much funding as possible... to financially support families in order for them to stay” (Interview 10), explained one participant, highlighting a proactive approach to community survival.

On an individual and grassroots level, faith-driven activism and spiritual resistance emerged as key forms of agency. Many interviewees spoke of their religious faith as a source of strength and a call to action. Christian teachings of justice, love, and hope were frequently cited as motivators to remain steadfast. “Our hope comes directly from heaven... it comes from the empty tomb,” declared one of the interviewees in theological terms, framing perseverance as an article of faith. This eschatological<sup>1</sup> hope, that suffering will be overcome, helps believers combat despair. In practical terms, Christian Palestinians engage in what one termed “resistance through presence”: simply staying on their land and maintaining their communities is perceived as defiance of forces that want them gone. “Staying here in a system designed to make you leave is resistance,” one participant asserted (Interview 12). Others actively organise prayer vigils, intercessions for peace, and interfaith gatherings to build solidarity. Notably, because they often live in mixed neighbourhoods, many Christians feel they “live interfaith... on the streets” daily (interview 11), modelling coexistence with

---

<sup>1</sup> Eschatology is the branch of theology concerned with the "last things," focusing on the end of the world, death, judgment, heaven, and hell.

Muslim neighbours by default. This everyday peace-making is a subtle yet important form of agency, countering narratives of religious conflict.

Furthermore, several participants described taking on advocacy roles. They leverage their unique position as Arabic-speaking Christians to reach out to the international community. “We advocate; we travel on advocacy tours. We receive people. We try to mobilise on the local level and on the international level” (Interview 1), explained one of the interviewees, outlining a strategy of bearing witness abroad. By telling their story to Western churches, media, and civil society, they hope to muster support and counter their invisibility. In some cases, this has meant founding organisations: One of the interviewees is a human rights lawyer, co-founded a national Christian advocacy initiative to document abuses and engage in policy analysis, “to really try to respond to these challenges and solidify a Palestinian Christian presence here” (Interview 12). Such initiatives exemplify transformative agency, where individuals create new structures (NGOs, networks) to empower their community. Interviewees also spoke of nurturing the next generation’s leadership, for example, youth groups and student initiatives through the church to ensure continuity of their community’s role. Even the act of public storytelling was seen as resistance: “Despair is a luxury we don’t have; we pressure in every way possible,” one participant insisted, emphasising the importance of staying proactive and vocal (Interview 12). Through all these means, service, solidarity, advocacy, and spiritual resilience, Christian Palestinians demonstrate remarkable agency. They refuse to be purely victims of circumstance; instead, they leverage their faith and communal bonds as resources to act and adapt, preserving both their community and their dignity.

#### **4.4. Duality of Being a Minority Within a Minority**

This final theme illustrates the complex positioning of Palestinian Christians. Participants reflected on marginalisation within Christian spaces, especially for Lutherans and Evangelicals (Interview 1, 2, 4, 7). Institutional gatekeeping, liturgical exclusion, and governmental recognition disparities contributed to feelings of internal alienation (Interview 7, 10). Denominational power imbalances were highlighted, particularly around legal status and intermarriage restrictions (Interview 5, 8). Sociocultural distance was apparent in stories of cultural alienation, limited public presence, and emotional withdrawal from shared spaces (Interview 5, 6, 10). Inter-religious discrimination emerged in various forms: harassment in public spaces, state surveillance, and religious profiling (Interview 2, 6, 9, 11). Despite this,

several participants emphasised existing interfaith solidarity with Muslims, particularly in the face of shared oppression (Interview 8, 11, 12).

The findings highlight the persistent structural and socio-political challenges faced by Christian Palestinians, while also underscoring their resilience, theological agency, and deep-rooted connection to the land and community. Their narratives reveal not only what it means to survive under oppression, but how faith actively shapes that survival. The final theme captures the unique position of Palestinian Christians as a minority twice over, a small minority within the Palestinian people, who are themselves a minority under Israeli rule, and the dual expectations and challenges that come with this status. Participants often reflected on how their tiny demographic size, roughly 1–2% of the population (WCC-EAPPI, 2024), shapes their experiences and sense of responsibility. On one hand, being so few in number can engender a feeling of vulnerability and urgency. “When there are mountains of problems, we [minorities] seem to be more fragile... We worry about our existence much more,” (interview 6) explained one of the interviewees. Many voiced concern that their community’s very survival is at stake amid continuing emigration and low birth rates. Historical context was frequently invoked: several noted that the Christian presence in Jerusalem, for example, has plummeted over the past century. “In 1910 there were 12,000 Christians in Jerusalem. Today, only 11,000 remain, back to 1900 levels... Our community is shrinking... we feel we’re holding on alone,” one participant observed (Interview 1). This demographic decline places psychological and moral weight on those who remain, who see themselves as guardians of an endangered heritage. “It’s just by coincidence of history that the burden is on our shoulders... to deliver [Christianity] safely to the next generation,” (interview 5) said one of the interviewees with a feeling of legacy. Indeed, Christian Palestinians often perceive themselves as custodians of a 2,000-year-old tradition in the Holy Land, a “remnant” community carrying prophetic significance. This sense of mission can be a source of strength but also of intense pressure.

On the other hand, participants highlighted that small numbers do not equate to insignificance. In fact, many stressed the outsized impact and important bridging role of Christians in the sociopolitical landscape. “We are not talking about minority in number. We are talking about [a] huge impact to the society,” (interview 13) asserted one of the interviewees, emphasising qualitative influence over quantitative strength. Several interviewees noted that Christians often serve as mediators and “a voice of sanity” in a polarising “conflict”. Because they are a

minority, they have had to build coalitions and navigate between larger groups, which at times enables them to communicate across divides. “Despite our small numbers and despite the challenge, we are a beacon of hope, a voice of sanity, a prophetic voice,” (Interview 11) according to not only one of the interviewees but most of them. This statement reflects a commonly expressed pride in their community’s continued witness and moral stance in the face of injustice. Christian clergy and lay leaders frequently advocate for nonviolence, human rights, and co-existence, and participants saw this as an essential contribution to the broader Palestinian struggle. For example, multiple interviews mentioned how churches spearhead interfaith dialogue and charitable work that benefit Muslim communities as well, thereby strengthening overall social cohesion. Christian institutions often deliberately employ and serve Muslims, which “bridges gap and raises visibility” of Christians as an integral part of the nation (Interview 12).

However, occupying this dual-minority position also involves navigating complex political currents. Participants spoke of external and internal pressures that push and pull on their identity. Externally, the Israeli state at times seeks to single out or co-opt Christian Palestinians, for instance, by promoting separate Christian enlistment in the Israeli military or framing Christians as distinct from other Palestinians. “The Israeli government tries to split identities... targeting Palestinian Christians in Israel to join the army,” (interview 12), describing efforts to undermine Palestinian unity. Such manoeuvres are largely resisted by the community, but they do create strains. Internally, some participants critiqued the Church hierarchy for being insular or overly cautious. They pointed out a disconnect between some church leaders and the grassroots: “Churches tended to isolate themselves in a religious bubble, this weakened their connection to the national struggle,” one interviewee observed (Interview 1). Another noted that certain denominational leaders have at times prioritised denominational or foreign agendas (such as pleasing Western donors) over a united front with the Palestinian cause. These internal dynamics can marginalise the community’s influence, effectively making them “accessories in the city, but not... indigenous people in the city” as interviewee 6 describe it as. Nonetheless, the recent escalation of the Israeli occupation and blockade of Palestinian territory has, in many cases, prompted greater unity and realism among church leaders. Participants indicated that the survival mode the community has entered since the 7th of October 2023, the war on Gaza served as a catalyst for increased interdenominational unity among Christian communities, as they rallied around a shared experience of suffering and solidarity.

The dual minority status of Christian Palestinians shapes their role in complex ways. It means they are often overlooked or underestimated, yet they carry a historical and social significance that far exceeds their numbers. It forces them to constantly affirm “we are here” asserting their indigeneity and rights while also obliging them to work with others for common survival. Some of the interviewees, reject the very label of minority: “I don’t feel that we are a minority in any sense... I don’t get any feeling that I am a different minority in my own country” (Interview 12), insisting that they are an integral part of the Palestinian people. Others accept the minority reality but turn it into a collective calling to punch above their weight morally and socially. This duality infuses their community life with both a deep fragility and a profound resilience. The themes above illustrate that while Christian Palestinians experience multiple layers of marginalisation, they also find unique reservoirs of agency and faith to sustain their community and assert their identity.

## Analysis

This analysis explores how Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank navigate structural oppression and assert their identity through practices of agency, resilience, and resistance to marginalisation. Drawing on in-depth interviews, the chapter is organised around three key analytical themes: Agency as Transformative Capacity, Natality and Hope, and Narrative Invisibility and Layered Marginalisation. These themes are interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Giddens, Arendt, Spivak, Crenshaw, and Yuval-Davis, and are illustrated with direct quotations from participants.

### 5.1 Agency as Transformative Capacity

What stood out across the interviews was how many participants, quietly but firmly, described moments where they refused to give in, choosing instead to act, organise, and hold on.”In Giddens’s terms, agency is a “*transformative capacity*”, and participants exhibited this through proactive community engagement and faith-driven activism. Many interviewees refuse to be passive victims; instead, they leverage church and civil society roles to transform their circumstances. For instance, one pastor highlighted how Palestinian Lutherans amplify their voice through social initiatives, noting that “The Lutheran church was pioneering in establishing the environmental educational center... The gender desk is also one of the few... cooperating with women’s associations... So I think the clear example is: to be a minority... you need to be more **active.**” (Interview 1). This quote illustrates how a smaller lutheran

community compensates for its size by “being more active”, founding innovative programs (environmental education, gender justice) that both serve their people and assert their presence. Another interviewee described how the church’s public witness functions as a form of resistance: “Just being the church, having its pastors call for justice and having its ministries working towards the community... is how we respond to these challenges. It’s by having a voice.” (Interview 4). Exercising agency here means speaking truth to power and providing social services, using faith-based institutions as platforms to resist injustice and support the community.

Agency also emerges in everyday survival strategies and grassroots organising. Several participants emphasised bottom-up action: forming youth committees, women’s groups, and relief networks to cope with life under occupation. One described how “We hold meetings... talk about the stuff that goes on... and try to stay strong and keep the good spirit alive.” (Interview 9), highlighting informal community gatherings as acts of solidarity and empowerment. Others stressed political awareness as a means of self-empowerment, explaining that “We have to be politically aware... so that we know our rights... that the way we’re being treated is not right.” (Interview 9). By educating themselves and each other, Christian Palestinians assert control over their narrative and prepare to challenge unjust treatment. In these ways, participants enact what Giddens calls agency within constraints: even as military occupation and social pressures them in, they find creative avenues to effect change, whether through advocacy campaigns (one organisation prepared “advocacy material... about the war in Gaza” (Interview 4), interfaith bridge-building, or simply refusing to abandon their communities. This aligns with Arendt’s view of action as the capacity to begin a new: each initiative, opening a school, launching a protest, or starting a dialogue, represents a “new beginning” that subtly transforms their socio-political landscape. Through these myriad acts, however small, Christian Palestinians claim authorship of their own story and push back against the structures that marginalise them.

## **5.2 Natality and Hope**

Hannah Arendt’s concept of natality, the human capacity for beginning and for hope inherent in each new birth or start, provides a lens to understand the persistent optimism and future-oriented resilience among these communities. Despite facing what often appears to be an unending cycle of conflict and discrimination, many Christian Palestinians root their endurance in hope and spiritual conviction. They repeatedly voiced a refusal to surrender to

despair, framing their very survival as purposeful and hopeful. As one community leader passionately declared, “They beat the people, they beat the old sisters, even the clergy. And we, the Christians, we remain here. We are the living stones, and we will remain the living stones in this country. Never, never, you will see our chairs are empty. Never.” (Interview 3). This powerful testimony evokes natality as an act of faith: no matter the violence inflicted (“they beat... even the clergy”), the community continuously recommits to its presence and mission, renewing itself so that the “chairs” of their churches and institutions are “never empty.” The metaphor of “living stones” conveys both rootedness and renewal, they see themselves as living embodiments of their ancestral heritage, and each day they remain is a new act of hope against efforts to erase them. As another interviewee stated as well: “Christians are the salt and the light... their presence here is making a little bit of light.”(interview 2).

Interviewees linked this hope to both religious faith and a sense of responsibility toward future generations. In Arendt’s terms, each generation represents a new beginning, and participants consciously invest in the young as bearers of continuity. One interviewee explicitly framed her struggle in terms of generational duty: “We will fight for our Christianity... I’m working hard to bring back all the people abroad... to hold the holy candle for the next generation.” (Interview 3). Here, natality manifests as the hope of return and continuity, a determination to gather the dispersed community and pass on the “holy candle” of faith and identity so that the next generation can live and worship in their homeland. Even personal journeys of identity illustrate natality, as individuals overcome despair to find new purpose. A young woman recounted how she transformed internalised shame into pride and hope: “From birth, they are telling us Arabs are bad, Palestinians are bad... I used to pray to God, like, why was I created an Arab? But then... I learned that part of our identity is to stay here and remain here... Our identity as Lutherans is to carry the message of Christ, of love, even in the face of hatred.” (Interview 4). This quote shows natality at the psychological level, she experienced a kind of rebirth in her self-understanding, rejecting a narrative of inferiority and embracing a proactive identity “to stay and remain” and to witness to love amidst hate. Theological hope (“message of Christ, of love”) thus converges with political resilience (staying put in Palestine), enabling new beginnings in how Christian Palestinians perceive themselves and their role. Across many interviews, faith was described as a wellspring of inner peace and hope that sustains them when external “earthly peace” is unattainable: “In this country, it’s almost impossible to obtain the earthly peace... Therefore, we have to build up

our internal peace. I believe Jesus is our rock. And we're standing on that rock. That's peace." (Interview 2). Such faith-based hope undergirds their resilience, illustrating Arendt's insight that even in dark times people can initiate something new, here, new hope, new resolve each day, to refuse despair. This enduring hope, grounded in spirituality and communal solidarity, is a defining feature of Christian Palestinian resilience.

### **5.3 Narrative Invisibility and Layered Marginalisation**

The interviews also reveal a profound sense of marginalisation on multiple levels, along with frustration that their story remains largely invisible in dominant narratives of the region. Christian Palestinians experience what can be called layered marginalisation: they are Palestinians under Israeli occupation (facing the same oppressive structures as their Muslim compatriots), but as Christians they are a tiny minority within the predominantly Muslim Palestinian society, and within that Christian minority many are from smaller Protestant denominations (e.g. Lutherans) that historically sit at the margins of local religious power structures. These layers result in a feeling of "being in-between", excluded by multiple communities and narratives. One pastor poignantly described how they fall through the cracks of identity: "Every group looks to you as you belong to the other group. The Israeli-Jewish side... sees us as just Arabs, Palestinians. The Muslim fundamentalist side... they think we are the scum of society. And there we are in between, between the rock and the hard place." (Interview 2). This depiction shows Christian Palestinians caught between external oppression and internal marginalisation, seen as "Arabs" by Israeli Jews (thus an enemy within), but not fully accepted by some fellow Palestinians who view them with suspicion or contempt ("scum of society"). The result is a double (even triple) marginality: neither the occupying power nor segments of their own nation fully recognise them, and within global Christianity they are often overlooked as well.

Many interviewees spoke of invisibility and neglect. They feel that their narrative, as an ancient indigenous Christian community enduring conflict, is often erased or overshadowed. One interviewee lamented the dismissive label of "minority," noting that it effectively writes them out of the Palestinian story: "The word 'minority' also kind of excludes us from the Palestinian identity... sometimes we are forgotten." (Interview 4). This narrative invisibility extends beyond local identity to the international arena. Several participants spoke with visible frustration about the silence of global Christian institutions, a silence that, to them, felt like abandonment by those they expected to stand with them. In one blunt assessment, a

clergyman said, “We feel betrayed. The churches... did not stand for what they were supposed to do as prophetic voices... They just abandoned us.” (Interview 1). Similarly, others observed that Western churches and governments have turned a blind eye, asking “Where is the humanity of the world?” (Interview 4). Such statements reflect a painful awareness that their struggles, church closures, emigration, attacks on clergy, restrictions on worship, rarely make it into the international consciousness in a sustained way. They are fighting, as one put it, “the occupation by ourselves. We are left alone.” (Interview 3).

At the same time, Christian Palestinians must contend with marginalisation in daily life, imposed by both the Israeli state and social pressures within Palestinian society. The interviews recount numerous examples of structural and social exclusion: Israeli checkpoints and permits that limit their freedom of worship and movement (e.g. “Even during Easter, we are not allowed to come and worship in the Old City... even the ones who had the VIP cards could not enter.” (Interview 4); physical attacks and intimidation by extremist settlers; and institutionalised discrimination (one leader described “a systematic marginalisation... built up here to estrange the non-belonging, the non-Jews... others who come from I don’t know where in the world... tend to have more rights than we do.” (Interview 2) Within Palestinian society, they sometimes face social exclusion or pressure to assimilate into the Muslim majority. For example, a younger interviewee shared that “They tried to convert me to Islam... and this sort of thing happens a lot.” (Interview 9), and another noted the pain of feeling like outsiders at cultural events, “a little bit different, with your cloth, with your attitude, with your believing. It’s a little bit painful for us.” (Interview 5). Additionally, intra-Christian marginalisation surfaced: smaller denominations like Lutherans feel sidelined by older churches, “Sometimes... when people think about Christians in the Holy Land, they think about Orthodox... Roman Catholics... but they don’t think about Lutherans.” (Interview 7), and even face barriers like not being allowed to be a godparent in an Orthodox church without re-baptism (Interview 4). Such layered marginalisation means Christian Palestinians must constantly assert “We are here and we belong,” often in the face of direct or subtle signals to the contrary.

Despite these hurdles, bringing the concept of marginalisation into focus allowed the analysis to capture the complex, layered nature of their minority experience, what one participant called being a “minority within a minority.” They feel the weight of geopolitical conflict, religious discrimination, and demographic decline simultaneously. Crucially, though, the

interviews also show that they resist narrative invisibility by telling their own stories and by persisting. By sharing these testimonies, they break the silence that has long surrounded their community. The analytical lens of narrative invisibility and layered marginalisation illuminates how Christian Palestinians are pushed to the periphery in multiple ways, and yet how their very act of endurance and speaking out is a form of defiance against erasure.

## Discussion

This analysis offers both a confirmation of and a challenge to existing research and theories regarding minority resilience and agency under oppression. Previous studies of Palestinian Christians have often noted their declining numbers and vulnerable status, but our findings add nuance by highlighting their proactive agency and steadfast hope, not just their victimhood. The use of agency and marginalisation as analytical concepts proved insightful: Giddens's notion of agency as the ability to act within constraints helped interpret how interviewees find micro-level ways to resist (from community organising to sustaining traditions), while Arendt's idea of natality illuminated the enduring optimism and new initiatives that participants described. In line with past research, the data certainly underscore severe pressures, from political violence to social isolation driving some Christians to emigrate or feel despair. Yet, the strong emphasis our interviewees placed on maintaining a "voice" and mission suggests a more empowered narrative than typically portrayed. This challenges any portrayals of Palestinian Christians as merely passive or doomed. Instead, they emerge as active contributors to their society, aligning with resilience theory that oppressed groups develop adaptive strategies and even transform their environments in limited but meaningful ways.

The analysis also engages with theoretical expectations. The concept of layered marginalisation proved very effective in capturing intersectional realities: participants simultaneously negotiated their roles as Palestinians under occupation, Christians in a Muslim-majority context, and members of a minority denomination within Christianity. This layered approach builds on intersectionality theory and extends our understanding of marginalisation, it's not a single-axis condition but a web of social, political, and religious disadvantages. By applying this concept, we could appreciate, for example, how a Lutheran Palestinian might be denied rights by the state (for being Palestinian and non-Jewish), sidelined by local power structures (for being from a smaller church), and overlooked

internationally (due to global focus on other aspects of the Israeli occupation and blockade of Palestinian territory). Such findings contribute to scholarly conversations by empirically illustrating “minority-within-minority” dynamics in a protracted conflict setting. Moreover, the idea of narrative invisibility proved useful in interpreting the palpable frustration interviewees felt toward international neglect; it resonates with critiques in peace and conflict studies that some voices (especially Christian Palestinians) have been historically underrepresented in peace processes and media narratives. Our participants’ insistence that global churches have “abandoned” them or that they are “forgotten” validates these critiques and calls on existing theory to account for the role of recognition (or lack thereof) in sustaining minority resilience.

Reflecting on the research process, the use of in-depth interviews allowed for rich, candid engagement with these theoretical concepts, albeit sometimes indirectly. The interviewees did not explicitly speak in academic terms of “agency” or “natality,” but they vividly conveyed those ideas through stories and metaphors. It was noteworthy how responsive and passionate most participants were, many spoke at length, providing concrete examples and even theological reflections unprompted. Their engagement with the questions was generally strong; several interviewees, being community leaders or clergy, were adept at articulating community challenges and often went beyond the direct question to ensure their narrative was heard. This eagerness itself could be seen as an exercise of agency, an attempt to assert their story. There were a few unexpected insights that emerged. For instance, one younger participant offered a starkly pessimistic view, saying “Honestly, the idea of leaving is what gives me hope... The situation here is hopeless.” (Interview 9). This ironic formulation, where hope is placed in the option of emigration, was surprising and underscored the generational or personal differences in coping strategies: while many older leaders emphasised staying and resisting, some youth see a future only by escaping the environment entirely. Such candor about despair challenges any temptation to romanticise the community’s resilience; it reminds us that agency has its limits under grinding oppression, and that resilience can co-exist with profound weariness.

Another unexpected theme was the critical stance toward Western church and peace discourse. Hearing a clergy member assert that “peace is a bad word... weaponised against us by Western churches” (Interview 1) was striking, as it flips the usual narrative of churches promoting peace. This revealed a deep cynicism about international peace initiatives that, in

the view of local Christians, gloss over injustice and demand quietism. The research thus uncovered a layer of critique toward external actors that is not widely documented in earlier literature. In terms of methodology, these insights taught me the value of letting interviewees steer conversations to what they felt was important. Some of the most poignant data (such as feelings of betrayal by global Christianity or examples of women's leadership as resistance) arose when participants elaborated on tangents that initially were beyond our prepared questions. This flexible, listening-oriented approach enhanced the study's depth. However, it also required careful reflexivity: as researchers, we had to remain aware of our own biases, for example, our theoretical focus on "agency" had to be balanced with the lived reality that not everyone always feels equally agentic. Overall, the robust engagement of interviewees and the rich narratives they provided greatly strengthened the study, allowing us to ground abstract concepts in the texture of real experiences. The convergence of theory and testimony here not only supports existing frameworks of agency and resilience in conflict settings but also invites a critical re-examination of how concepts like "marginalisation" are often too simplistically applied, urging scholars to consider the multiple, layered oppressions at play.

## **Conclusion**

This thematic analysis demonstrates that Christian Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem experience marginalisation as an everyday reality, one that deeply affects their personal lives and the sustainability of their community, yet they also exhibit notable agency in responding to these challenges. Marginalisation manifests through the structural violence of occupation, checkpoints, permit regimes, land dispossession, and restrictions on worship, as well as through direct harassment and hate incidents aimed at their religious identity. These pressures have psychological, economic, and demographic consequences: they undermine feelings of safety and dignity, generate economic hardships that prompt emigration, and instill a constant worry about the community's future. Importantly, however, the research finds that this marginalisation is not primarily rooted in Muslim-Christian relations at the local level. On the contrary, Christian Palestinians largely feel a strong sense of belonging in the broader Palestinian society and struggle alongside their Muslim compatriots against a common political oppression. Internally, they are not "othered" as a religious minority to any significant degree; if anything, they are respected and even over-represented in social

leadership relative to their numbers. Thus, the marginalisation they face is chiefly a product of power asymmetries and exclusionary policies emanating from the Israeli occupation and blockade of Palestinian territory, rather than communal sectarianism. Religious identity does play a role, making them targets for certain extremist groups and placing them in the crossfire of an occupation that often has religious overtones, but it is their identity as Palestinians under occupation that most defines their marginalisation.

Crucially, the testimonies also illuminate a powerful narrative of resilience and agency. Roughly thirty percent of the analysis focused on how Christian Palestinians act in the face of adversity. They do not passively accept their diminution. Grounded in a rich spiritual tradition and a strong sense of civic responsibility, they engage in a variety of strategies to sustain themselves and assert their rights. These include community-based social support (from feeding programs for the poor to scholarships for students), active participation in non-violent resistance and advocacy (locally and internationally), and reforms within their own institutions (promoting youth and women's leadership, for example) that strengthen their community's adaptability. Faith is a double source of strength for them: it provides emotional-spiritual resilience, a belief that suffering can be redemptive and that justice will ultimately prevail, and it offers a moral framework that guides their actions toward non-violence, hope, and love even amidst provocation. The agency displayed by Christian Palestinians can be characterised as perseverance with purpose: a conscious decision to remain present in their land ("to exist is to resist," as some have put it) and to live out their values through helping others and speaking truth to power. Their communities have become adept at leveraging every available tool, cultural, educational, religious, and legal to cope with marginalisation and try to transform it.

The interplay of religious identity, politics, and social structures emerges as a defining factor in both their marginalisation and their agency. Their Christian identity, far from isolating them, is interwoven with their national identity, producing a unique standpoint: they are simultaneously guardians of an ancient religious heritage and active members of a modern anti-colonial struggle. This dual positioning gives them a unique role. They act as intermediaries and advocates. But it also leaves them exposed to what some called 'double jeopardy' of being viewed with suspicion by forces on all sides (by Israeli extremists as disloyal aliens, by a few Islamist elements as infidels, and even by Western apathy when they do not fit the usual narratives). Despite these challenges, the consistent theme is that Christian

Palestinians see no contradiction between their faith and their patriotism. In fact, many see their role as Christians as adding an important voice of moderation and universal values to the Palestinian cause. For many, words like justice and peace weren't just ideals, they were deeply woven into both their faith and their hopes for their people's future. Meanwhile, the social structures of the Palestinian community, relatively inclusive governance and a legacy of interfaith coexistence, have generally enabled Christians to flourish in public roles and mitigate feelings of marginalisation internally.

Overall, the key findings can be summarised as follows: Christian Palestinians feel the weight of marginalisation primarily through an oppressive external environment, which has led to infringements on their rights and a threat to their continuous presence. This marginalisation affects all aspects of life, from freedom of worship and movement to mental health and family unity. Yet, in the face of these trials, Christian Palestinians exhibit agency through resilience grounded in faith, robust community networks, and a dedication to non-violent action and solidarity. Their religious identity, when combined with the realities of occupation and their place in Palestinian society, shapes a distinctive experience, one in which they refuse to be merely victims, instead actively affirming their identity and rights.

These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how a minority religious community negotiates its survival and dignity amid conflict. The Christian Palestinians' experience underscores the importance of inclusive national movements, the role of faith-based narratives in conflict and peace, and the dynamic ways marginalised groups can exercise agency. It also serves as a **poignant** case study of "**creative** resilience", the ability to transform a position of marginality into an opportunity to exemplify values of coexistence and compassion. In the mosaic of the Israeli occupation and blockade of Palestinian territory, the Christians of Palestine prove to be small in number but significant in the principles and hope they carry. Their lived testimonies highlight not only the injustices that need to be addressed (such as restrictions on religious freedom and discriminatory state practices) but also offer inspiration in how communities can respond to injustice with courage, care for one another, and an undying hope for a better future in which all can live with equal dignity.

### **Future Research**

Building on these findings, several avenues emerge for further investigation to deepen and broaden our understanding of Christian Palestinians and similarly situated communities.

Future research could conduct comparative studies of other Christian groups or religious minorities in the region. For example, comparing Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Jerusalem with Christian communities inside Israel (or in neighboring countries like Jordan and Lebanon) would illuminate which challenges are shared and which are context-specific. Similarly, studies could look at other Middle Eastern minority groups (such as Druze, Samaritans, or Coptic Christians in Egypt) to explore how layered marginalisation and resilience play out in different socio-political settings. Such comparisons would help identify common strategies of agency among minorities and the unique factors that facilitate or hinder their resilience.

Further exploration is needed on the intersection between religious identity and political resistance. This study showed that faith can inspire and sustain political activism, for instance, through liberation theology themes or the church's role as a provider of social justice. Future research could delve deeper into how Palestinian Christians theologically frame their resistance to oppression. Ethnographic work or theological analysis might examine sermons, liturgies, and educational programs to see how concepts of justice, martyrdom, forgiveness, and hope are invoked in resistance narratives. Understanding the spiritual dimension of their political engagement could offer insights applicable to other contexts where religion and resistance intertwine.

Given indications that younger members of the community might feel differently (some inclined toward emigration, others engaging through new media or global networks), studies focusing on youth perspectives would be valuable. Research could investigate how the next generation of Christian Palestinians envisions their future, how they use social media or transnational connections to amplify their voice, and whether their forms of agency differ from their elders. This raises an important question: can the hope and persistence shown by the older generation be passed on, or will younger Christians find different, perhaps more digital or diasporic, ways of holding on?

Building on the theme of narrative invisibility, future research could also analyse international representations and discourse regarding Christian Palestinians. This might involve content analysis of media, policy documents, or church statements to see how (or if) this community's story is told. By identifying gaps or biases in the global narrative, such work could inform advocacy efforts and suggest ways to ensure Palestinian Christian voices are included in peacebuilding dialogues and scholarly debates. Additionally, exploring how Christian

Palestinians themselves are working to reclaim their narrative, through memoirs, community museums, or partnerships with international NGOs, would deepen our understanding of narrative agency as part of their resilience.

Expanding research in these directions will not only augment academic knowledge but also contribute to practical understanding of how marginalised communities sustain themselves. By comparing across contexts and focusing on the crucial link between identity and resistance, scholars and practitioners can better appreciate the resilient agency of minority communities and support their struggles for recognition and justice. The case of Christian Palestinians, as this thesis has shown, is rich with lessons, and future studies stand to learn even more by continuing the inquiry into their lived experience and beyond.

## References

Amnesty International. (2022). *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity*.  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>

Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. University of Chicago Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Butler, J. (2012). *Parting ways: Jewishness and the critique of Zionism*. Columbia University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.

Enger, H. (2022). *Protestant voices in Palestine: Christian marginality and agency under occupation*. [Unpublished article or report—provide publication source if available].

Finlay, L. (2003). The reflexive journey: Mapping multiple routes. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences* (pp. 3–20). Blackwell Science.

Freiberger, O. (2019). The problem of comparison in the study of religion. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 31(3), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341445>

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. University of California Press.

Hancock, L. E. (2017). Agency and peacebuilding. In O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda, & J. Ramović (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disciplinary and regional approaches to peace* (pp. 255–268). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40761-0\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40761-0_19)

Human Rights Watch. (2021). *A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

Johansson, A., & Vinthagen, S. (2015). Dimensions of everyday resistance: An analytical framework. *Critical Sociology*, 42(3), 417–435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514524604>

Kuttab, D. (2019). Evangelicals and the future of Palestinian Christianity. In M. Raheb (Ed.), *The religious other: A biblical understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad* (pp. 70–74). Diyar Publisher.

Landgren, K., & Hancock, L. E. (2017). Everyday peace and resilience. In O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda, & J. Ramović (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disciplinary and regional approaches to peace* (pp. 255–268). Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyck-Bowen, M. (2020). *Goda grannar: Fredsarbete genom interreligiösa initiativ i Sverige*. Svenska kyrkan.

Mannergren Selimovic, J. L. (2018). Everyday resistance in divided societies: The case of Jerusalem. *Peacebuilding*, 6(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2017.1368151>

Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>

Moist, B. (2015). *The changing role of Palestinian Christians in the 20th century*. [Thesis or publication details needed].

Nahnfeldt, C., & Lindberg, M. (2017). Walls and tables: Intercultural religious social work. *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice*, 8(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.13109/diac.2017.8.1.3>

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

Sturm, T., & Frantzman, S. J. (2015). Mapping the theological-political landscape of Palestinian Christians. *Religion Compass*, 9(10), 434–447. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12178>

United Nations Security Council. (1967). *Resolution 242 (S/RES/242)*.  
<https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>

Whittington, R. (2015). Giddens, structuration theory and strategy as practice. In D. Golsorkhi, L. Rouleau, D. Seidl, & E. Vaara (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice* (2nd ed., pp. 145–163). Cambridge University Press.

World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (WCC-EAPPI). (2024). *Annual report 2024*. [Exact publication link or source if available].

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752>

## Appendix 1: Consent form

### Informed Consent

**Title of Research:** Faithful Resistance – Christians and the Quest for Belonging

#### Principal Investigator:

Daniel Andersson, master's Student  
Religion, Peace, and Conflict Programme  
Uppsala University  
Email: [nilsgotedaniel@gmail.com](mailto:nilsgotedaniel@gmail.com)

**Institutional Contact:**  
Department of theology  
Uppsala University  
Email: [student@teol.uu.se](mailto:student@teol.uu.se)  
Phone: +46 19 471 22 95

---

### 1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank navigate life in the midst of political and social challenges. This study is part of a master's thesis in Religion, Peace, and Conflict Studies at Uppsala University. The research aims to understand not only how Christians experience marginalization, but also how they actively respond to it through faith, community engagement, and everyday choices that reflect resilience, initiative, and agency in a complex context.

This study will seek to answer the following questions:

- How do Christians in Jerusalem and the West Bank experience marginalization, and how does it affect their personal and community life?
- In what ways do individuals and communities show agency, the ability to act and make choices, even in difficult or restrictive situations?
- How do religious identity, politics, and social structures (like occupation or nationalism) shape the status, roles and treatment of Christians?

### 2. Description of the Research

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in one interview. The interview will include questions about your experiences, views on peace, and the challenges your community faces. You may also see the researcher at community events or religious services, where they will observe respectfully and take notes. With your permission, interviews may be recorded to ensure accuracy.

#### Subject Participation

This study will include 10 participants from christian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank. To take part, you must be over 18 and self-identify as part of a Christian community. Your participation is expected to take about 45–60 minutes.

### 4. Potential Risks and Discomforts

There are no known major risks from participating in this study. Some questions may touch on sensitive or emotional topics. If you feel uncomfortable, you may skip any question or stop the interview at any time. If needed, the researcher will help connect you to local support services.

There are no direct personal benefits to participating. However, your story may help raise awareness and contribute to academic and peacebuilding discussions that support marginalized communities in the region.

There is no payment or compensation for participating in this study.

### **6. Confidentiality**

Your identity will not be disclosed in any reports, presentations, or publications resulting from this study. While complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed, every effort will be made to protect your privacy and ensure that no identifying details are included. All interviews and field notes will be securely stored and coded, and only the researcher will have access to this material. Audio recordings will be deleted once they have been transcribed and the data has been analyzed.

### **8. Voluntary Participation and Authorization**

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time. This decision will not affect your relationship with any organization, church, or service involved in the study.

You may withdraw at any time. If you wish to do so, please inform the researcher directly. If you withdraw after the interview, any data you provided can still be used, unless you request otherwise.

---

### **Authorization and Consent**

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this study:

*Yes, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.*

**Name of Participant (print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2: Interview guide**

### **Practical**

Time: 1 hour

Position: Christian Study Center

Address: Jaffa Gate, Old City, 91141 Jerusalem

### **Papers to sign:**

Informed Consent Form

Inform the person that the interview will be recorded.

Interview questions

### **Personal and Identity**

Can you tell me about your background and your connection to the christian community here?

How would you describe your identity as a Christian living in Jerusalem / the West Bank?

What does it mean to be part of a minority within a minority?

### **Experiences of Marginalization**

Have you experienced or witnessed any forms of marginalization, social, political, economic, or religious, due to your Protestant or Lutheran identity?

How has the broader political conflict affected your daily life?

In what ways has the conflict affected your local church or Protestant community?

How do you think your community is viewed by other Christian denominations?

### **Agency, Resilience, and Resistance**

How do you and your community respond to the challenges you face?

Can you share examples of how your church or community has taken initiative to address marginalization or conflict?

What motivates your involvement in these responses, faith, necessity, solidarity, something else?

How has your community stayed strong and connected during difficult times?

### **Interfaith and Intercommunal Relations**

Have you or your community participated in interfaith or intercommunal activities?

What role do you see the Protestant community playing in building peace or mutual understanding across religious and ethnic lines?

**Role of External Actors**

How have international organizations, churches abroad, or foreign donors impacted your community?

Would you say these external influences have been mostly helpful, problematic, or a mix? Can you give examples?

**Reflections on the Future**

What gives you hope in this context and what creates hope?

What would you like international churches or policymakers to better understand about your community?

What does peace look like to you, not just politically, but in your everyday life and faith?