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## **Sacred Rhythms and Political Frequencies: Reading Lefebvre in an Urban House of Prayer**

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### Abstract

In recent years, Lefebvre's concept of rhythm analysis has been implied in various ways to critically examine how rhythms are formed, disrupted, and reformed through different urban venues. One theme that this body of knowledge has yet to comprehensively examine, however, is how changes in the urban sphere impact the spatial rhythms of religious institutions in cities, which can be pivotal for understanding how religious institutions are formed as urban public spaces. This article addresses this issue with a rhythm analysis of a particular religious urban locus: a synagogue in the mixed Palestinian and Jewish city of Acre in northern Israel. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and an urban survey, the article discusses how different forms of rhythm making undergo a process of contested synchronization with linear and cyclical rhythms of the city. More specifically, how the ability to forge a space hinges on the ability to maintain a rhythmic cycle of attendance, which, in turn, is not only dependent on the ability to achieve synchronization amongst the needs of the different participants but is also intertwined with the larger linear cycle of urban life as a rhythmic equation that fuses the personal with the political, the linear with the cyclical, and the religious with the urban.

Keywords: [Rhythm; Analysis; Urban; Religion; Israel-Palestine; Mixed Cities; Synagogues]

### Introduction

In *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), Henri Lefebvre argues that a comprehensive study of the spatial manifestations of rhythm leads to a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which social space is produced. Rhythm analysis, he contends, should become a new field of research through which we can interpret movement and action within the city. In recent years, considerable attention has been given to Lefebvre's provocative assertions about how rhythm should be conceived, inquiring into the multiple ways in which rhythms are formed, disrupted, and reformed through different urban venues (Edensor, 2010). One theme that has yet to be comprehensively examined, however, is how changes in the urban sphere affect the spatial rhythms of religious institutions in cities, which can be pivotal for understanding how religious institutions are formed as urban public spaces.

This paper addresses this gap in the academic literature by offering a rhythm analysis of a religious urban locus, namely a synagogue in the ethno-nationally mixed city of Acre in northern Israel. Instead of analyzing the rhythms of different locations in the city, we will present the different locational rhythms, of time and place, inside the synagogue. We will assess how the rhythm of the synagogue corresponds with significant sociopolitical alterations in the pattern and landscape of Israel's contested urban geography (Yacobi and Yiftachel, 2003) and how these alterations shape the functions and meanings attributed to the synagogue. We will focus on two forms of

rhythm making: the *tempo* of the prayers—the relationship between the rhythm of the self and the rhythm of the other—and the *frequency* of the prayer. We then discuss how these forms of rhythm making undergo a process of contested synchronization with linear and cyclical rhythms of the city.

Our analysis mainly focuses on an ethnographic study based on participant observations of the devout believers attending the synagogue and residents of the neighborhood in which the synagogue is located. The ethnography aims to reflect on how communal existence—which is sustained through the rhythm of the synagogue in our context—manifests in intra-communal relations, in the spiritual aspect of the synagogue as a place of worship, and in the relationship between temporality and space.

We begin by situating our discussion in the general literature on rhythm analysis and religion and the city, followed by a methodological discussion, and continued by a presentation of the rhythm analysis of our ethnographic study findings. We conclude by reexamining the ways in which rhythm analysis enables a better understanding of the reciprocal relations between the urban environment and religion.

### **Analyzing Rhythm in the Urban Sphere**

Rhythm, Lefebvre says, has a certain logic: “Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm” (Lefebvre 2004, 15). Rhythm, therefore, is an inherently vital component in the production of space and is bounded to spatial practices and temporal recurrences (Lefebvre and Régulier 2004), for it forces us to think about the temporal dimensions entailed in producing everyday space (Hubbard and Lilley 2004).

Despite being deemed as possibly too indefinable for actual implementation (Simpson 2008, 425), rhythm analysis has been at the focus of an ongoing scholarly

effort studying its different applications in urban studies. As Tim Edensor and Julian Holloway (2008) argue, a geographic reading of rhythm entails engaging with a multiple range of scales in contexts. This means determining whether and how rhythms can be institutionally inscribed (through official ceremonies, national commemoration days, and sanctioned parades), locally organized (for example, through the establishment of a communal costume), or performed as a collective habit (through the informal synchronization of meal times, leisure activities, and rest hours).

As a methodological tool, rhythm analysis broadens the scope of scholarly inquiry by compelling researchers to develop a more holistic reading of spatial practices by being attuned to the recurrence of various temporalities, different sounds, unique smells, and certain touches in a specific spatial environment—how they appear, disappear, and reappear (Labelle 2009; Crang 2010). Monica Degen suggests that a rhythm analysis must “sense bodies brushing past us, hear and smell bodies, perfumes, activity” (Degen 2010, 23). Rhythm analysis, therefore, seeks to understand the currency, pulse (Qviström 2013), flow (Potts 2010), and pace (Hubbard and Lilley 2004) through which space is constructed and reconstructed as “architectures of sensation, narrative and embodiment” (Edensor and Holloway 2008, 499; Simonsen 2005).

Indeed, rhythm analysis has significantly contributed to the conceptualization of a general theory of motion and movement (Cresswell 2010), by addressing how walking (Middleton 2009; Edensor 2010b), jogging (Qviström 2013), cycling (Spinney 2006), and dancing (Duffy et al. 2011; Heddon and Myers 2014; Edensor and Bowdler 2015), generate or disrupt urban rhythms.

Other studies have applied rhythm analysis to assess the spatial effects of commodification dynamics as they materialize in advertisement (Cronin 2006), tourism

(Edensor and Holloway 2008), commercial consumerism (Hubbard and Lilley 2004; Degen 2010), and nightclub culture (Shaw 2015). Some works have used rhythm analysis to investigate how recording techniques, such as photography (Simpson 2008) and cartography (Hornsey 2012), enable a better understanding of place-making strategies. Rhythm analysis has also been employed to study physical changes in the city through urban regeneration (Hubbard and Lilley 2004), ruination (Batuman 2012), gentrification (Kern 2015), and abandonment (Gibas 2012).

One notable field of inquiry in which rhythm analysis has yet to be extensively applied is religion and its manifestation in the urban sphere. The study of the geographies of religion has developed quite considerably over the last decade, particularly the literature on the spatial manifestation, formation, and construction of religion in the urban sphere (Kong 2001; Sandercock 2006; Yorgason and della Dora 2009). Several scholars have delved into the ways in which public space in contemporary cities has been shaped by the conflicts between religious beliefs and secular norms (Khondker 2009; Beaumont and Cloke 2012; Kuppinger 2014; Chiodelli 2015). This literature has provided important accounts of the ways in which religious sites shape intercommunal relations (Dionigi and Couroucli 2012; Hayden 2013), by investigating the ways in which religion shapes and affects urban surroundings, such as suburban neighborhoods (Wilford 2012), popular nightclubs (Schwanen, Van Aalst, Brands, and Timan 2012; Middleton and Yarwood 2013), and cemeteries and graveyards (Morris 1997; Leshem 2015).

Yet despite the literature's richness, the notion of rhythm has not been widely applied in relation to the urban properties of religion and religious institutions (Batuman 2012). This is quite surprising given that these places generate the ultimate, almost ubiquitous rhythms. Religious loci are formed through the collective congregation of

people who make repetitive gestures at designated points of the day, every day (Hubbard and Lilley 2004, 282). Thus, most rhythm researchers discuss rhythmic material effect within different dynamics of urban political economy, consumption culture, and phenomenological attributes of movement in space. At the same time, discussions of religion of and in the city have not engaged with the theme of urban rhythm making and its attribute.

The current article marries both fundamental aspects of city life—belief and rhythm—exploring how these aspects generate ripple effects in the practice of faith, taking place in the city. But here we need to be more precise. Understanding the forms of religious rhythm making is more than an effort to understand occurrences “taking place in the city,” but rather an attempt to unravel how the city life shapes religious rhythms *as* urban occurrences. However, before moving on, we wish to expand briefly on our research methodology and our decision to focus on synagogues in general, urban synagogues in particular, and the specific synagogue selected as the focus of our discussion here.

### **Conducting the research**

This research focuses on a rhythmic venue of religious action: the urban synagogue in Acre, an ethno-nationally mixed city in Israel. Beyond the historical and social significance of the synagogue, we also need to understand its urban importance as a rhythmic site. The synagogue offers a moment of pause between one rhythmic movement (into or out of the city) and another rhythmic movement (participation in a ritual). Also significant is the fact that the space of the synagogue—which, as a matter of Jewish law, is a flexible space—is defined in the context of the human body.

There are no binding regulations regarding a synagogue's location, nor are there any crucial limitations on its structure.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the main prerequisite for an operating synagogue is a "quorum" (*minyan*) of ten men to conduct prayer services. The *minyan* enables the moment of prayer—the collective gathering of different individuals at a predetermined moment of the day to recite known verses—to be considered a *tzibur*, the Hebrew word for "public." The ability to assemble and maintain a minyan depends more on the repetitive arrival and participation of bodies in space than on constructing an edifice that will remain static in space. The synagogue, in other words, is a rhythmic temple that depends on bodies more than on brick and mortar.

Our main input is the product of ethnographic research involving participant observations in several synagogues, aimed at unraveling the intricate ways in which these places of worship are used and maintained by the communities that operate them. Participant observation entailed the regular attendance of prayer services and taking part in informal conversations before and after worship. It was important to attend the synagogue's daily prayers, as well as its special festivities, other notable occasions, and community celebrations such as weddings, ceremonies commemorating deceased relatives, and Bar Mitzvahs.

The field work was conducted over an eight-month period. The bulk of this paper is based on the numerous informal conversations carried out during the period in question, as well as on twenty semi-structured interviews with synagogue attendees, municipal officials, and residents of Acre who are active in the city's faith-based communities. Although we did not take up residence in the building block adjacent to the synagogue, we made daily visits to the site and excursions into its vicinity. We also kept in constant touch with the individuals who attend services there.

Second, we note that although gender relations are not the focus of this study, they were nonetheless part of the process of entering the field. Officially, orthodox synagogues are spaces that are segregated by gender, with women permitted to be present within only a small and marginal space. In a synagogue that is physically small, like the one considered in this article, the space reserved for women can be virtually nonexistent—quite literally, leaving little room for female involvement. Moreover, orthodox synagogues only recognize male bodies as eligible to participate in a *minyan*, which, as noted, renders worship a public event. For these reasons, participant observations were carried out by the male researcher.

Third, and closer to the heart of the article, entering the field shed light on the challenges of conducting ethnographic research in such an intimate community and on the forms in which we can engage in rhythm analysis. In this sense, the synagogue becomes an intimate rhythmic space with participants who perform acts that are both personal and collective: personal in the sense that they must be individually performed, and collective due to their role in turning prayer into a public assembly. Such acts may include properly wearing *Tefilin*,<sup>2</sup> or standing and being seated during the prayer service in accordance with the instructions of the *Siddur*.<sup>3</sup> Attendees were expected to know the rituals—when to say God’s name aloud, and when to quietly recite the proper verses.

As we will show, it was during this complicated process that the social and political attributes of the synagogue became most apparent. The male researcher who engaged in participant observation is in his late thirties, which is significantly younger than of most of the researcher’s interlocutors in the synagogue. This age difference enabled attendees to assume the role of sharing their life stories to a younger audience



that lacks actual experience regarding the city's history and current situation as a form of validation.

In addition, the researcher's acknowledged inexperience with some matters of religious observance created an opportunity for devout attendees to teach him what it means to recite the proper blessing over food and drink, and to wear the proper garments for prayer. These were the main, if not only ways in which the researcher's presence was acceptable. Furthermore, because the attendance of a sufficient number of men is a daily challenge for the synagogue, such moments enabled the researcher to become part of the public and of the collective praying rhythm, transforming him from a nuisance into an asset.

Fourth, while conducting the ethnographic research, we also compiled a spatial analysis designed to reflect the spread and location of the city's synagogues (as presented in Map 1). To this end, we mapped and documented the currently existing synagogues in Acre and analyzed their role vis-à-vis issues of internal ethnic migration and external immigration to the city (a thorough examination of this spatial analysis appears in a different article, Ram and Aharon Gutman 2017).

The cartographic endeavor of mapping the existing synagogues was challenging due to the relative lack of official records (e.g., from a municipal archive, repository, or other state authority) documenting their locations, years of establishment, and status. The process of documenting the location of urban synagogues that was ultimately followed involved cross-referencing the existing, albeit scant, public records with field visits and geographic analysis. This process provided us with important insight about how synagogues are inscribed within the urban environment as concrete edifices that lack formal recognition or supervision.

Finally, the methodological challenges discussed above help explain our selection of a small synagogue for the purpose of conducting a rhythm analysis. Precisely because it is such a small place it presents a unique opportunity for thinking about the intimate paths to urban place-making that are hidden in plain sight. Although synagogues like the one explored here are scattered throughout Acre and many other cities in Israel, they have yet to be the focus of an ethnographic effort to decipher their properties as urban sites. Indeed, most literature on the subject has been limited to the ethnic context of these places of worship (Bilu and Ben Ari 1997; Leon 2010).

To be sure, places of worship exist in various forms, and this article addresses several architectural formulations of urban synagogues. However, the ethnographic perspective, and the decision to focus on one specific place and the people who make it allows for a more precise understanding of the difficulties echoed by interviewees in other synagogues (which we discuss in a different article, REFERENCE #2).

Moreover, the informal nature of the synagogue also means that it has little to no recorded history. For instance, despite our efforts to locate any record of the synagogue in its earliest days and of its development, we found little to no documentation regarding the site and most of the synagogues explored by the research project as a whole (on informality and religion in Acre, see also Luz 2015). This informality is another potent aspect of the synagogue's informal character, a fundamental element of its fragile nature, and one of the main reasons why we undertook this research in the first place, as it created a sense of urgency to document these spaces by providing a snapshot of the lived rhythmic action taking place within them.

### **Mixed Tensions, Coalescing Rhythms, and Urban Prayer**

Acre is one of Israel's mixed cities: an urban area in which a considerable Palestinian population remained after the 1948 Israel-Arab War during which about 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes in Israel/Palestine (Abbasi 2010). The prevailing view amongst the Israeli public is that Acre is a provincial town in the geographic and social periphery of the state. However, the city has a rich and long history as an important hub of maritime activity in the Levant (Galili, Rosen, Zviely, Silberstein, and Finkielsztejn 2010). Acre's population was historically predominantly Muslim and Christian Arab, with a small Jewish minority (Phillipp 1990; Waterman 1971). In the aftermath of the 1948 war, most of the Palestinian population was driven out (Abbasi 2010).

The city's architectural landscape was quickly remodeled in line with the modernistic Zionist architectural vision (Yacobi 2004). Apartment blocks were erected throughout the city to settle and accommodate the wave of Jewish immigrants who arrived in Israel after the establishment of the state in 1948 (Malis 1949; Waterman 1975), while the remaining Palestinian residents of Acre congregated for the most part in the Old City, which soon became a marginalized urban ghetto (Shoval 2013). Acre's designation as a peripheral town referred to more than its geographical location, becoming a cultural and social marker as well. This was much like the rest of Israel's mixed cities, which had to adapt their economic and political rhythms to the needs and objectives of the new political order after 1948 (Monterescu and Rabinowitz 2010; Weiss 2011; Piroyanski 2014).<sup>4</sup>

Similar to the case in other peripheral cities, Acre's synagogues were initially established by ethnic communities seeking to commemorate their places of origin and shape an urban space of their own within everyday city life. Significantly, there is no clear information on the exact number of synagogues currently operating in the city. A

municipality official responsible for the promotion of social and cultural activities stated in an interview that she could physically count at least ninety sites currently being used as synagogues. However, an official list we obtained from Acre's religious council enumerated "only" sixty-three registered synagogues (Map 1).<sup>5</sup>

We should note that at the same time there only seven mosques serving the Palestinian population (which is about 26 percent of the city's population). Most of the mosques are historical buildings and were established before the establishment of Israel in 1948. A recent effort to reopen one of these mosques encountered resistance from the municipality and Acre's Jewish residents (Luz 2015). The discrepancy between the number of synagogues and mosques is both revealing to the political power relation in the city and telling as to the nature of the synagogue as an urban public institution. As the religious council representative explained to us, establishing a synagogue entails no mandatory registration.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, a prominent feature of most urban synagogues is their informality alongside a clear, concrete presence: while the structures themselves are not officially registered as synagogues, they are easily visible as such in the urban sphere. But beyond visibility, it also means that these synagogues are embedded in the city's urban fabric and are part of its circulation.

Map 1: Synagogue dispersal in Acre

The majority of interviewees in our study commented that one of the first services they requested of the state and the municipality when they arrived in Acre was a site for a synagogue. As one interviewee noted, "A Jew cannot remain for even two hours in a city without a synagogue." Indeed, the lack of a synagogue when they arrived in Acre led to occasional uproar amongst some of the Jewish communities that immigrated to

the city (Maariv 1950). The assertion that a Jew cannot remain in a city for more than two hours without a synagogue captures the degree to which an institution such as a synagogue is pivotal to understanding how religious rhythms becomes a cardinal part of city life.

Our study of the informal synagogues in Acre revealed three primary types of synagogues: those operating out of private homes, those operating out of local bomb shelters or other former public spaces that were converted to places of worship, and those operating out of specially designated structures built by the community (See also Aharon Gutman and Ram 2018). The synagogues are dispersed throughout the city, each with its own nucleus consisting of a small group of attendees (between ten and twenty) who constantly struggle to draw in additional participants. The large number of synagogues and the various forms they assume, despite the fact that most operate without any official sanctioning, suggests tacit municipal acknowledgement of their importance and approval of their existence.

*Rakia Marom* (“Heights of Heaven”), the synagogue we researched in our ethnographic study in Acre, belongs to the type of synagogues operating out of local bomb shelters or other former public spaces. The synagogue was founded by Elisha,<sup>7</sup> who immigrated to Israel from Morocco in 1960 and settled with his wife and six children in Acre. When the municipality began to build new apartment blocks in the 1970s, Elisha purchased an apartment in Acre’s northern neighborhood. He initially organized some of his neighbors to pray together in a nearby retirement home, but ultimately it was too far from their own homes to be an optimal solution.

When Elisha applied to the authorities for land to construct a synagogue, they advised him to instead set up a temporary makeshift synagogue in the bomb shelter of his apartment block. The synagogue is not supported by any formal association, and it

operates without any attendee registration or bookkeeping, sustained solely through Elisha's personal funds and contributions from attendees.

Here we must also note that while synagogues like Rakia Marom are first and foremost urban loci, ethnicity is still an important element in their analysis as places in the city. Most of Acre's Jewish immigrants originated from North African and Middle Eastern countries. In Israel, these immigrant communities became known as *Mizrahim*, and they often had a strong traditional orientation toward religion as a common communal denominator (Deshen and Shokeid 1971). As a significant number of the *Mizrahi* immigrant communities were culturally and politically marginalized by the Israeli social elite, which was by and large of *Ashkenazi* (Jewish-European) ethnic origin, the synagogue became an important social institution for their integration and negotiation with the state (Desehn 1974). Synagogues were a key factor in the formation of a new, consolidated *Mizrahi* identity from out of the hundreds of different groups that came from different ethnicities and cities of origin (Ben Ari and Bilu 1997; Bilu 2000; Yacobi 2008; Leon 2009, 2010).

During our participant observations we became acquainted with the small group of attendees who tend to the synagogue. One frequent attendee of Rakia Marom is Joseph, who, like Elisha, was born in Morocco and, in the early 1950s, moved to Acre. There, he was settled in a *ma'abara*: a transitional settlement established by the state to house immigrants. The *ma'abara* eventually became a neighborhood in Acre, but Joseph moved out of it and settled in the same neighborhood as Elisha. Elisha and Joseph are typically joined by Shlomo, who has been living in the neighborhood for more than twenty years and occasionally arrives with one or two of his sons. Like Elisha and Joseph, Shlomo immigrated to Israel from Morocco in the 1950s and is a respected

member of the synagogue's community with significant knowledge of religious customs, even though he has no formal rabbinical training.

The three are also typically joined by Jacob, who used to live in the area but eventually moved elsewhere in Acre. Jacob operates a small factory on the outskirts of the city, which enabled him to move to a more affluent neighborhood, although he maintains his "allegiance" to Rakia Marom as part of his bond to the urban locus where he grew up. And finally, there is Aaron, who hails from the same city in Morocco as Elisha and knew him back in their country of origin. Like the rest of the synagogue attendees, Aaron holds no official position in the synagogue but makes sure to attend prayers every morning, in order to bolster the number of participants and to tend to the site.

None of these attendees hold an official position in the synagogue but all are highly committed to it, regarding it as an essential site for practicing their faith. All except Jacob have retired from their low-income professions, are over the age of sixty-five, and have been living in Acre for more than forty years. Like the other attendees of Rakia Marom, they are not part of a distinct ultra-orthodox circle or an official yeshiva. Politically speaking, they espouse right-wing views that conform to the ideas of the religious right.

The small group of devout believers join Elisha in a daily effort to sustain the synagogue that, for more than thirty years, has remained temporarily housed in a converted apartment building bomb shelter in a neighborhood whose ethnic texture has slowly become more heterogenic. The status of the synagogue as a "provisional" solution renders it an exemplary "temporalized space" (Lefebvre 2004, 89), and assessing its different rhythms could enable a better understanding of the relationship between time and space.

We will now turn to the question of how the rhythm of a site like the Rakia Marom synagogue can be discussed, presenting two possible investigative directions based on differing but interlocking rhythm forms: first, the synagogue's rhythmic *tempo*; and second, this rhythm's *frequency*. We will then discuss how these rhythm forms are connected to the political and social rhythms of the city of Acre.

### **The Praying Tempo of the Self and the Other**

Lefebvre has observed that rhythm analysis should be sensitive to two types of rhythmic expressions. The first is the rhythm of the other: the rhythms of activities turned outward, toward the public as a form of representation. The second is the rhythm of the self, which is based on more “deeply inscribed rites, organizing a time turned . . . towards private life” (Lefebvre 2004, 95). The moment of communal prayer in the synagogue is based on the interaction between these two rhythms. The rhythm of the self is inscribed in the texture of the praying of each synagogue attendee, in the manner in which each individual attendee engages in prayer. The communal prayer is an occasion of great intimacy, in which every participant is seeking to create a private space of his or her own, insulated from the rest of world, in which he or she can partake in a well-rehearsed ritual.

The rhythm of the other is the representational effort to be part of the public: to conform by repeating together the same verses, chanting them every day in the correct order and at the proper time. This togetherness constitutes the *tzibur* (the public) that transforms into intimate social spaces for the praying individuals. The synagogue thus becomes a space where participants collectively perform certain personal acts as part of the rhythm of *dressage*, which is the effort to pass as natural and conform to accepted models and habits valorized by a tradition (Lefebvre 2004).



These acts include proper attachment of the *tefillin* during morning prayers, or rising and sitting down during prayer in accordance with the instructions in the prayer book. The acts are personal in that each must be individually performed, and mutual because their performance turns the prayer into a public gathering. Attendees are expected to be familiar with the rituals—for example, to know when to call out loud the name of the Lord and when to recite verses silently. All of these acts consolidate to turn the individual into part of the *tzibur*. It is during the performance of these acts that we can begin to understand the rhythm of the synagogue. The convergence of the rhythm of the self and the rhythm of the other is contingent on a synchronized action of “movement, representation and practice” (Creswell 2010, 18).

In the case of the synagogue, the participant’s rhythm of the self is part of a communal praying rhythm that is built on repetitiveness. However, this repetitiveness reorients in relation to different aspects of the communal praying rhythm. Rakia Marom is a small synagogue, with only seven or eight men who regularly attend the daily morning prayers and other attendees who come sporadically and inconsistently. When we raised this issue with the regular attendees, they explained this by the fact that the synagogue has no appointed *hazan* (cantor) or *shliach tzibur* (public messenger) to lead the prayer services. And indeed, while conducting observations at the synagogue, we noted that various people, not all of whom were familiar to the regular attendees, led the morning prayers.

Nevertheless, we observed that on most mornings, one regular attendee, David, tended to read aloud the verses that must be chanted publicly prior to the main public prayers. David lives in the apartment building that houses the synagogue. He arrives at the synagogue every morning at about 7:05 and begins to recite these verses, chanting so quickly that it is hard to distinguish the words. One morning, when David was late,

the people who had already arrived for the services asked Shlomo, who is the unofficial liturgical authority at the synagogue, to begin the prayers.

Shlomo hesitated, saying, “I don’t want to upset David,” likely because the attendees viewed this to be David’s unofficial “official” role at the synagogue. Shlomo was eventually persuaded to begin the prayers and recite the verses, which, in contrast to David, he did very slowly. David arrived moments after Shlomo had begun. Although he did not seem to mind that Shlomo had performed his “role,” he was upset that the chanting was too slow. At that pace, David would have to leave before the completion of the prayer services. He therefore chastised Shlomo for being too slow, and Shlomo snapped back at David, “If you want to leave, then leave!” David was insulted and shouted back, “This is not your place! You have no right to tell me to go!” Thus, the routine was broken, while the attendees, dismayed, shifted awkwardly in their seats. Eventually, the praying resumed.

The confrontation between the two men was an instance of conflictual inner rhythms and converging tempos. Shlomo is from the older generation of attendees, who are often irritated by the fact that the younger generation prefers to finish the prayers as quickly as possible in order to continue with their daily routines. The older generation prefers a less hurried chant. “It is not a proper prayer if you cannot understand what you are saying,” we heard an older attendee mutter after one of the morning prayer services, when the attendees had asked a visiting *yeshiva* pupil to act as the *shliach tzibur* as no one else had volunteered.

In this moment of convergence of the communal rhythms of the older and younger generations, the issue of speed and coherence emerges: Should the public prayers be chanted as quickly as possible to enable people to begin their daily work, or should they be enunciated clearly and slowly so that they will be properly heard and

understood? The moment of the communal chanting is thus a conjunction between two generations that have to calibrate to a proper tempo in order to engage in day-to-day life. While the synagogue is dependent on the continuing presence of the younger generation of attendees, the latter challenges the rhythm of the self of the older generation.

In addition to its generational aspect, synchronizing rhythm tempo is also characterized by a spatial-geographical aspect. The municipality has intentionally constructed two major synagogues: one that is classified as Sephardic, meaning, a synagogue in which the prayer service is consistent with the customs of Jewish communities originating from the Middle East and North Africa; and the other that serves as the official main Ashkenazi synagogue, which uses a prayer format developed by European Jewish communities. The Ashkenazi/Sephardic distinction is the state's official way of distinguishing between different Jewish communities.

Yet despite the centrality ascribed to these synagogues, the majority of Acre's devout population opts to pray in their own synagogues. Some were established by communities wishing to commemorate their place of origin, as in the case of some attendees of Rakia Marom, who also frequent the "Georgian" synagogue (established by a community of Georgian Jews) and do so whenever they miss morning prayers at Rakia Marom. They do so even though they are not of Georgian descent but rather because the Georgian synagogue is closer to the place they live in.

Their decision reveals three important factors determining the rhythm politics of synagogues in the city. First, places of worship that were originally established to commemorate a certain ethnic identity have become more "localized," as they now accommodate the devout population living in close proximity to the synagogue and do not necessarily function as a site of communal commemoration. Second, there is no

mandatory connection between a synagogue's physical size and the number of people who attend it. Third, the decision of which synagogue to attend is based on the interaction, or synchronization, between devout dedication to faith and the daily interactions among believers in the city. To understand how this interaction shapes the synagogue as an urban locus, we now turn to another rhythmic aspect of the synagogue: its frequency.

### **Matters of Frequency**

The reason why David was so agitated by Shlomo's rhythmic tempo was his concern that the slow pace of the chanting would prevent him from staying at the synagogue until the recitation of *Kadish*, a hymn praising God that can only be uttered when there is a *minyan* (a quorum of ten Jewish males). At the culmination of prayer services one morning, we overheard two attendees, Shlomo and Nathan, chatting, during which an interesting explanation was given for the crucial importance of praying in public. Shlomo asked Nathan why he had not come to the synagogue the day before.

After hearing Nathan's reason for his absence, Shlomo stated simply that praying in public (*tzibur*) is always preferable to praying in private "because God only accepts a prayer uttered in *tzibur*; otherwise the prayer is useless." The validity of Shlomo's explanation can, of course, be argued, but regardless, it is illustrative of the interaction of three elements that render the synagogue a public space.

First is the administrative aspect, which relates to the number of attendees and extent of their attendance: How many people attend the synagogue and how often, and when and how should attendance be managed, particularly from a liturgical perspective? Second is the communal element, namely the fact that the formation of a *minyan* is contingent on a certain congregation of attendees, which forms a

community—in this case, an urban community, since the Rokia Marom *minyan* is dependent on the neighborhood’s residents. Finally, there is the spiritual aspect. The inherent purpose of the synagogue is, in the eyes of its attendees, the ability to be heard not just by their fellow neighbors but also by God. These three elements that make the synagogue a public place and enable it to be sustained as such are directly dependent on the constant attendance of congregants.

Two key components of Lefebvre’s rhythm analysis are measurement and frequency of the rhythm. “The measure of the rhythm (notion and practice),” he explains, “passes through a frequency” (Lefebvre 2004, 10). The rhythms of urban everyday life can be broken down into different frequencies, which must be isolated and interpreted. How can we identify these frequencies, and how can we chart them and set their units? By analyzing the rhythm frequency of the prayers, we can perhaps provide a better understanding of the ways in which the synagogue is formed as a public place.

More specifically, we can understand how synchronization becomes a vital element in producing urban rhythms. In Lefebvre’s terms, Shlomo’s comment to Nathan addressed the issue of the proper frequency for communicating with God. What is necessary for a prayer to be heard by God? One condition according to Shlomo is that the rhythm of the prayer, both of the self and towards the other, is performed in the proper tempo and correct tone, well intentioned, and occurring at the proper moment. It is a moment of synchronization between oneself and one’s environment.

But Shlomo adds another element: the need for ten male attendees to form a *minyan*. Only if this requirement is met, it arose from his explanation, will a prayer be acknowledged by God. In other words, the *frequency* of the prayer is dependent on how *frequently* people attend the synagogue and how frequently this attendance amounts to

a *minyan*. Hence synchronization attains here a greater importance: the ability to bring together enough able (and Jewish) bodies at the time.

In his work on enchanted geographies, Julian Holloway (2006) called on geographers of religion to study the “sensuous, vitalistic, and effectual forces through which spaces of the religious, spiritual, and the sacred are performed” (182). Holloway focused on the ways in which spiritual spaces are shaped by the bodies that occupy them, looking at the specific context of séances in nineteenth-century England. This is part of the process described by Chidester and Linenthal (1995) whereby: sacred space is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests” (15).

In the case of the synagogue, the body occupying this sacred, spiritual space can be used as a unit of measure for analyzing the synagogue’s rhythm. In his introduction to Lefebvre’s *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), Stuart Elden explained that Lefebvre “believes that the rhythm analyst does not simply analyze the body as a subject but uses the body as the first point of analysis, the tool for subsequent investigations. The body serves as a metronome” (xii). And indeed, the *synchronization of bodies* in any given space is pivotal to understanding different rhythm dynamics (Edensor and Holloway 2008).

Synchronizing the arrival of people to the synagogue and organizing them within the overall rhythm is intrinsically related to how the synagogue can constitute a public space, which is contingent on the materialization of ten male bodies in the synagogue. However, in this context, absence and synchronization are crucial issues. Bodily absences can be a key source of disturbances (or changes) to the “polyrhythmia” of a public space (Gibas 2015, 489). In relation to the synagogue’s provisional endurance, the bodily absence is related to the dwindling of bodies that threatens the endurance of the synagogue’s community and that of the Jewish community in the city

of Acre in general. The next part will demonstrate how the dearth of regular worshippers at the Rakia Marom synagogue is interrelated with the general political situation in Acre and contextualized into the overall effects of the city's religion rhythms.

### **Synchronizing Rhythms and Politics of Urban Faith**

A prominent yet elusive theme in rhythm analysis is the distinction between linear and cyclical rhythms, which are two different sets of temporal movements (Lefebvre 2004, 8). Cyclical rhythms are associated with primarily natural occurrences, such as the constant change of the solar and lunar positions and seasonal and geological changes (Edensor and Holloway 2004, 484), whereas linear rhythms are associated mainly with everyday human activity. Moreover, in contrast to the constant potential for chance encounters with linear rhythms, cyclical rhythms entail a constant possibility of change. As Paul Simpson argues, a linear rhythm is more mechanically repetitive in nature, whereas a cyclical rhythm “presents a strong sense of evolution and change” (Simpson 2008, 426).

Like other social institutions, Rakia Marom synagogue is based on the two forms of temporal rhythms. The cyclical rhythm is the praying: Each morning, as an almost natural occurrence, the prayer services take place at a relatively set time. The prayer procedures are familiar to all the participants, and the course of the prayer is easily recognized by them. The daily occurrence of prayer services provides the synagogue with religious content.

In contrast, the linear rhythm becomes apparent immediately after the prayer has concluded. Some people set out on their daily routines, while others linger at the

synagogue and converse about current events, share happy or troubling personal news, and voice opinions on social and political issues.

However, this division between the cyclical rhythm of the synagogue and the linear rhythm of the city is artificial. As demonstrated in relation to the prayer frequency and time, the convergence of the private needs of attendees and the perpetual need for public assembly in prayer is contingent on the linear rhythm of the city. Therefore, instead of trying to differentiate between the cyclical and linear aspects of the synagogue's cyclical rhythm, it is perhaps preferable to address its synchronization between the linear and cyclical rhythms of the city.

Furthermore, the synagogue's functioning is shaped by two kinds of urban rhythms: one cyclical and the other linear. The cyclical rhythm, generated by the everyday recurring activities that take place in the city, is the rhythm that impacts the different forms of participation in the synagogue in accordance with the daily schedule of each attendee. As previously noted, this can occasionally cause tension between the attendees. It is here that we can locate the conflict between the younger and older generations of the synagogue, exemplified by the conflict between Shlomo and David.

The city's linear rhythm is more political in nature, stemming, as it does, from the steady transformations taking place on a larger scale—especially the demographic changes that have served to change the city's national identity. Beginning in the 1960s, Acre's Jewish population has steadily declined in number while the Palestinian population has gradually increased (Falah, Hoy, and Sarker 2000). This increase in the city's Palestinian population was related to Israel's ethnocentric policies (Yiftachel 2006) and the state's strategy to strengthen the Jewish population primarily in the geographical peripheries and restrict construction by Palestinian citizens in their own localities (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003), which forced many Palestinians to immigrate



to regional cities such as Acre. In addition, the constant marginalization of Acre's Old City district, where most of the Palestinian population was concentrated, led them to internally immigrate to more developed parts of the city, which were populated primarily by Jews (Falah 1996, 831–832; Garzuzi 2006).

The shift in demographics in Acre exacerbated the tension between Jews and Palestinians, in which religious and national themes were intertwined. A religious struggle was the catalyst for a violent clash between Jews and Arabs in Acre in October 2008, during the Yom Kippur holiday, which many Jews consider to be one of the most sacred days in the Jewish calendar. On this day, a Palestinian resident of Acre drove his car into a neighborhood predominantly populated by Jews in order to pick up his daughter, who was attending a family event.

The Jewish residents of the neighborhood threw stones at the Palestinian vehicle as it drove by. Rumors that the man was killed soon spread through Acre's Arab neighborhoods, leading to protest marches that quickly turned into violent clashes with the police. The driver whose entrance into the Jewish neighborhood triggered this chain of events in fact apologized for ostensibly disrupting the Yom Kippur holiday (Shragai, Khoury, and Stern 2008). Nevertheless, the police arrested him for "violating religious sensitivities" (Khoury 2008). Fearing that religious institutions would also become targets of attack by either community, the Acre municipality placed armed guards at synagogues and mosques, on which random attacks were indeed made (Baranes 2008).

In a sense, this eruption of violence was the product of the disruption of the synchronization between a religious holiday observance and everyday urban life. On Yom Kippur, Judaism's most sacred day, religious law prohibits travel in any vehicle. Out of respect for the holiday, public transportation in Israel halts on Yom Kippur, and private drivers abstain from using their vehicles. Since most urban settlements in Israel

are predominantly Jewish, this means that, on Yom Kippur, almost every city in Israel comes to a virtual standstill. In this way, Religion imposes a certain rhythmic pause on the urban sphere. However, cities with a dominant Palestinian minority, like Acre, are characterized by a counter-punctual rhythm. And in the specific case of Acre, the resulting arrhythmic tension is also related to the broader context of the conflict and the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians.

Hence, the “Yom Kippur incident” was not just an instance of urban contest or a neighborhood feud. It was a moment at which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a national (and asymmetrical) struggle between two rival group identities, emerged in the city as an instance of conflicting rhythms. For the dominating majority group, the day is a moment of sanctity when all other forms of rhythms are expected to stop. The other group demands that, despite the day’s sanctity, urban life be allowed to maintain its rhythmic cycles. The ensuing violence reflected the volatile nature of the conflict, as well as the ethnonational changes in the urban landscape of Israeli cities.

The neighborhood in which the Rakia Marom is located has become significantly more heterogenic over the years. Between 1995 and 2008, the overall population in the area declined significantly, from 17,356 to 12,800. However, at the same time, the Palestinian population in this neighborhood has increased from 2,544 to 3,078, while the Jewish population has dropped from 14,436 to 9,722, resulting in a 10 percent shift in the ratio between Palestinian and Jewish residents (CBS 1995, 2008). The sensation of (Jewish) absence in fact turns the synagogue into a place that cannot be abandoned by its congregants, a sort of perceived outpost of Jewish existence in the city (Ram and Aharon Gutman 2017).

Indeed, the ability to form a *minyan* emerged as a consistent concern of synagogue attendees. Over the course of our field research, Elisha, the unofficial

caretaker of Rakia Marom, stopped attending the synagogue because of a deterioration in his physical condition. Since Elisha stopped attending the synagogue, the overall number of attendees has steadily declined. One morning, when an insufficient number of men arrived to form a *minyan*, we observed a conversation about this situation between David and Shmuel, another regular attendee, with David remarking that this was the second day in a row that they had been unable to form a *minyan*. “If it continues like this, in one week, no one will come,” David concluded. “No one wants to be where there is no *minyan*. The place is falling apart.”

It is noteworthy in this context that the significant number of synagogues in Acre is not necessarily indicative of an increase in the number of Jews in Acre. In fact, these synagogues have a limited number of attendees, who are in a constant struggle to sustain their community. The result is that people tend to prefer to remain in their community’s synagogue so that it will continue to operate. Reflecting this, Jacob tends to chide attendees who do not come regularly by calling them “*nifkadim*,” which means “deserters” in Hebrew and, in the Israeli cultural context, is used to refer to people who evade military duty. The analogous reference to army deserters exemplifies how the synagogue is construed by its congregants as a military outpost in the urban struggle in Acre: the synagogue attendees associate the absence of worshippers to the overall decline in the Jewish population in the city.

After the prayer services, a small group of more frequent attendees usually remain to drink a cup of coffee and talk about daily events. They reflect on their current condition, convey their concerns about the changes in Acre’s ethnoscape, and discuss their views on the state of the synagogue. One morning, we observed an intense debate over the changing demographics of the city, at the end of which Joseph stated, “We will

never leave Acre.” He elaborated, “If we aren’t here, then only the Hamas will be here.”<sup>8</sup>

Notably, from an institutional perspective, the municipal and state authorities are marginalizing the Palestinian community in Acre. While they go to great efforts to maintain the Jewish majority in the city, the public means and avenues through which Acre’s Palestinians can express their identity are limited (Shoval 2013; Luz 2015). Nevertheless, whenever we raised the issue of intercommunal relations in interviews, the (Jewish) interviewees expressed a consistent sense of either a potential or actual threat of depletion, evacuation, and absence of Jewish residents in the city.

There is also no doubt that Joseph’s right-wing views regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict affect his perspective. Yet at the same time Joseph is also attentive to the difference between the city’s cyclical rhythms and linear ones. Significantly, when we asked Joseph, as well as other Jewish interviewees whether they had ever experienced personal injury or insult from their Palestinian neighbors, they responded that it was quite to the contrary. “They are very nice to me,” Joseph stated. “One is a banker; the other is a physician. They help me carry the groceries up to my apartment.” However, when our focus shifted from the of everyday encounters with Palestinians in the city (as part of its urban cyclical rhythms) to the context of their collective presence in Acre and the city’s linear rhythm, the interviewees’ attitudes were harsher, as the statement on Hamas illustrates.

Thus, while Joseph’s view can be dismissed as an exaggeration of the situation, it nonetheless hints at how the synagogue is envisioned by the people who sustain it. In Israel and Palestine, places of worship are deeply embroiled in the geopolitical tensions associated with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Mosques and churches, for example, have become sites of Palestinian protest and organization (Luz 2008), venues of

intercommunal strife both within the Palestinian community inside Israel's borders (Rabinowitz 2001; Jabareen 2006; Collins-Kreiner, Shmueli, and Ben Gal 2013) and in the West Bank (Bowman 2012), arenas for preserving memories that the state seeks to suppress (Peled 2010; Yiftachel and Roded 2010).

Here we observe an additional layer of the politicization of the synagogue, one embedded in the question of rhythmic cycles. The ability to forge a space hinges on the ability to maintain a rhythmic cycle of attendance, which, in turn, is not only dependent on the ability to achieve synchronization among the needs of the different participants but is also intertwined with the larger linear cycle of urban life in Israel. "Either us or Hamas" is therefore articulated as a rhythmic equation that fuses the personal with the political, the linear with the cyclical, and the religious with the urban.

## **Conclusion**

A central premise of rhythm analysis is that there is no rhythm without repetition (Lefebvre 2004). As Peter Horton (2005) has observed, Lefebvre's rhythm analysis is an effort to understand how repetition produces difference in time and in space. Rhythms are imprinted in our social fabric through moments of change, whether social or political (Edensor 2010, 11). The repetitive rhythm of the Rakia Marom synagogue's community beats in accordance with the demographic shifts in Acre's urban environment.

As the demographics slowly change, so too does the rhythm of the synagogue. For the synagogue's attendees, repetitiveness produces security. The knowledge that a *minyan* can be convened every day provides them with the sense that the communal presence is secure. In contrast, the inability to form a *minyan* threatens their notion of

community, and this insecurity is linked to the general social and political struggle in the city.

However, we need to be careful in regard to the rhythm analysis we have presented. Most of Acre's synagogues are small, and some, like Rakia Marom, are the smallest of places. This issue of scale enables multiple readings of rhythm dynamics, but prevents an holistic argument that speaks for the city. Instead we try to offer a reading of religious rhythm making and its shaping by urban dynamics. In other words, the urban environment is a matrix of different rhythms. Some collide with others; some correspond with one another. The rhythms of the synagogue that we have described here do not necessarily represent the definitive rhythm pattern of Acre's urban environment. Moreover, we in no way presume that we would find such a pattern in other urban synagogues. Instead, we propose thinking about what can be understood from the ways in which the specific rhythms of the Rakia Marom synagogue are composed and structured, to gain insight into the nuances of the synagogue as a locus in the city.

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1 For a different discussion on flexibility and religious institutions, see Kuppinger (2014).

2 Tefilin are a set of small black leather boxes that contain scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah. The tefilin are worn during weekday morning prayers.

3 The Jewish prayer book in which the set order of daily prayers is specified.

4 The most notable of these was Jaffa, which is now incorporated into the Tel Aviv municipality (Monterescu 2011).

5 Author's Interview with Moshe, a representative of the Acre Municipal Religious Council, 13 September 2013.

6 Ibid.

7 All names have been changed to ensure participants' confidentiality.

8 This dominant Palestinian resistance movement, which is based on Islamist ideology, currently controls the Gaza Strip.

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