

Palestinian Evangelicals and Global Evangelicalism

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Abstract: Palestinian Evangelicals and Global Evangelicalism

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The major concern of this thesis lies in the role of power in the negotiation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ in theology and practice within global evangelicalism. To investigate this question, I examine how the minority of Palestinian evangelicals in Israel-Palestine make sense of both their belonging to a ‘global’ evangelical faith community, as well as to the Israeli State, which the majority of evangelicals support uncritically. Palestinian evangelicals are an anomaly in a context in which many dispensationalist and Christian Zionist evangelicals understand the State of Israel as being divinely ordained for the ‘Jewish people’. The data which this thesis draws on was collected over nine months of immersive ethnographic fieldwork in Israel-Palestine, with a focus on Nazareth (between 2015 and 2016), as well as two years of textual research. The analysis focuses on the dynamics of encounters across difference (physical, and in media and text) between Palestinian evangelicals and predominantly North American and European evangelical visitors in Israel-Palestine, paying attention to processes of adaptation, mimicry, representation, curation, and resistance. The thesis explores the diverse subject-making of Palestinian evangelicals in light of dominant theological ideas and practices concerning Israel, as well as the context of Israel-Palestine itself. It examines how dominant evangelical theologies of Israel are curated and performed, for example in a living history museum of the first century, and the role of Palestinian evangelicals in these performances. It further explores how dominant theologies are resisted as cultural hegemony. Considering ‘Israel’ as both evangelical imagination as well as everyday reality for Palestinian evangelicals, the thesis discusses how the dimensions of ‘local’ and ‘global’ are imagined, co-produced, and circulated within global evangelicalism. Finally, the thesis demonstrates the unequal access to shaping ‘global’ evangelicalism between differently resourced evangelicals.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| CECI | Convention of Evangelical Churches in Israel |
| CUFI | Christians United for Israel |
| ICB | Israel College of the Bible |
| ICEJ | International Christian Embassy Jerusalem |
| IDF | Israeli Defence Forces |
| JNF | Jewish National Fund |
| NEC | Nazareth Evangelical College |
| NIV | New International Version (Bible translation) |
| PLO | Palestinian Liberation Organisation |
| WEA | World Evangelical Alliance |

1. Introduction: Palestinian evangelicals and ‘global’ evangelicalism

‘As a Palestinian Christian pastor and long-time peace activist, I have a confession to make: I’m guilty of despair.’ I read these heart-breaking words by Revd. Alex Awad (2018) while I was writing up this thesis in January 2018. Alex was one of the first Palestinian evangelicals I spoke to back in 2014 when I started to scope this research project. I had arranged a meeting with him during a conference organised by the Palestinian Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem, which challenged Christian Zionism¹ and was aimed at Western evangelicals. While even then there was a great urgency among Palestinian evangelicals to communicate their difficult social and political realities, and to develop a less Israel-centred evangelical theology than is popular among evangelicals worldwide, there was also a sense of hopeful activism: various sources seemed to suggest that young American evangelicals, one of the most influential groups of evangelicals in the world, were growing more and more suspicious of the fundamentalist and eschatologically focused beliefs of the previous generation of evangelicals (Guttman, 2014). The biennial *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference,² organised by Alex Awad and his colleagues at the Bethlehem Bible College in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,³ seemed to have gained the critical attention of large parts of the Anglophone evangelical world. It was discussed in influential Christian magazines and newspapers. Its organisers had travelled far and wide in North America

¹ A theology that considered the State of Israel a fulfilment of biblical prophecy and leads to heavy financial, political, and spiritual investment in the Israeli state. I explore this theology in detail in Chapter 4.

² This conference critically discusses Christian Zionism and was first held in Bethlehem in 2010, addressed mainly to a Western audience. In 2018, the first American counterpart was held in Oklahoma. I discuss this conference in detail in Chapter 7.

³ In this thesis I orient myself at the official United Nations terminology for the territories I describe. ‘Israel-Palestine’ consists of ‘Israel proper’ and the Occupied Palestinian Territories of the West Bank (conquered from Jordan during the 1967 war), East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The hyphenated version, ‘Israel-Palestine’, is a short form of the longer ‘Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories’, and denotes reference to both entities.

in order to speak to churches, denominational groups, and to policy makers in order to advocate for more balanced foreign policies towards Palestinians.

Yet, in 2018, the prospects for a fair solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict seemed even further beyond reach, or, as Awad wrote: ‘then came Donald Trump.’ Awad’s cry of despair, in the form of a blog post directed at Anglophone evangelicals, is a response to the US government’s announcement to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Landler, 2017). This symbolic move, scheduled for 14th May 2018, the day commemorating seventy years since the founding of Israel and the Palestinian *Nakba* (lit. ‘catastrophe’),⁴ reversed seven decades of US foreign policy. The US embassy move openly ignored the international law that protects the sensitive status quo of Jerusalem, a city of central importance to the three world religions Judaism, Islam and Christianity. The day of the embassy move itself turned into one of the bloodiest days in Gaza since the 2014 Israel-Gaza war, as 52 protesters were killed and hundreds injured by Israeli soldiers (Holpuch and Weaver, 2018). While many of the Palestinians I worked with had long been cynical of what has been referred to as the ‘peace process’, or the possibility of a ‘two state solution’, this move by the United States has quenched remaining hopes and fuelled fears of a third Palestinian *intifada* (following the devastating consequences of

⁴ The events around the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 are variously referred to War of Independence (by Israel’s Jewish citizens) and *Al-Nakba* by Palestinians. What was a triumphant event for many Jews (and, as we shall see later, also for many evangelicals) led to devastating loss of lives and land of Palestinians. Ca. 800,000 Palestinians were displaced as a result of the war, leading to one of the oldest and largest ongoing refugee crises. Today there are ca 4.3 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations as a direct result of their or their families’ displacement in 1948. The ‘new’ Israeli historians offer a critical account of the events of 1948 and their consequences, see for example Pappé, 1994; Shlaim, 1998, 2004, Morris, 2004, 2008. Acclaimed Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi (2007) provides a Palestinian perspective on the same events.

the first and second *intifadas* between 1987 and 1993, and 2000 to around 2005 respectively).⁵

Awad's despair regarding this destabilising move, however, lies not just in the embassy move and what it represents in itself. Rather, it is grounded in the sense of being betrayed by a large proportion of his fellow evangelicals in the United States. Trump's revised Jerusalem policy is in large part due to the political pressure of American conservative evangelicals, who also form one of his significant voter demographics (Oliphant and Whitesides, 2017; Martí, 2018). The opening ceremony in Jerusalem was framed by a public prayer by the pastor of the First Baptist Church Dallas, Revd. Robert Jeffress. His prayer clearly illustrated the belief of many evangelicals (not just American ones) that Jerusalem is Jewish Israel's capital, divinely ordained by God three thousand years ago – and that Trump is believed to be 'God's tool' in the unfolding of salvation history.⁶ Further, it illustrated the belief that the State of Israel itself is considered a fulfilment of biblical prophecy by many evangelicals, and a return of the Jews to its territory a sign that the end-times will be unfolding soon. Ironically, it was Revd. Robert Jeffress' predecessor and pastor of the First Baptist Church Dallas, Revd George Truett, who was instrumental in the conversion of the first Palestinian evangelical Christian, and later responsible for the raising of funds for the first Baptist Church built in Nazareth, Israel. Thus, while the alliance between US evangelical leaders and Israel is long-standing (Wagner, 1995), the American evangelical endorsement of the embassy move has thwarted the hopes of Palestinian evangelicals

⁵ The time of my fieldwork for this project coincided with a time of heightened tension in Israel-Palestine following the 2014 Israel-Gaza War. 'Operation Protective Edge', an Israeli military operation, began on 8 July 2014 and led to a seven week conflict that cost thousands of (civilian) lives, especially in Gaza. The tension has continued since then through increased violent acts and attacks (including knife attacks on people in Israel), which is also sometimes referred to as the 'Al-Quds intifada' of 2015.

⁶ See the full video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFVZxkoF4No> [accessed 07/09/2018].

Awad and his colleagues that a theological and political change among US evangelicals is imminent.

This bleak turn of events and the despair on the part of many Palestinian evangelicals I worked with demonstrate the importance of this thesis' topic. It combines a textual and ethnographic methodological approach to investigate how Palestinian evangelicals make sense of both their belonging to a 'global' evangelical faith community, as well as the Israeli state, which the majority of evangelicals support uncritically. I put the term 'global' in 'global evangelicalism' in quotation marks to indicate that the term itself includes a particular configuration of who or what shapes what is considered 'global evangelicalism': I examine this more closely in Chapter 8. I situate the centre of power of the evangelicalism I speak about in this thesis in the 'West', particularly in North America and Europe.⁷ I have immersed myself deeply into the everyday contexts of Palestinian evangelicals for nine months (over a period of thirteen months) between 2015 and 2016 in order to understand how they navigate their local contexts and belonging to 'global' evangelicalism. Being somewhat anomalous within dominant evangelical theologies of Israel, Palestinian evangelicals render visible the social and cultural factors that have shaped evangelical theology regarding Israel, as well as the broader faith aspects it points to: these include believers' understanding of biblical scripture, of salvation, of eschatology, and of the Kingdom of God, which impacts evangelical citizenship and politics. I conducted textual research to this end over a period of two years. The selection of data presented in this thesis' empirical chapters focuses on 'encounters across difference' between unevenly resourced Palestinian and

⁷ Some suggest that the gravity of especially charismatic Christianities (which could be encompassed by the term 'evangelicalism') has shifted to the global South (Jenkins 2007). However, as will be further developed in this thesis, attention to the historical linkages within the transnational social field of evangelicalism suggests that the centres of power may not have shifted in equal measure.

Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine. These encounters, both in ‘real life’ as well as in text and media, reveal processes of meaning-making, evangelical self-cultivation, curation, mimicry, representation, transformation, and resistance in view of dominant evangelical frameworks.

This thesis pursues several key aims:

- 1) It investigates for the first time the dilemma of Palestinians who identify as evangelicals, yet also suffer under the real political consequences of the dominant evangelical theologies and practices regarding Israel. The conceptualisation of Palestinian evangelicals as part of ‘global’ evangelicalism contributes to the Anthropology of global Christianity and the anthropological study of Palestinian Christianity and Palestine at large.
- 2) The thesis investigates the (historical and current) ‘flows’ across specific transnational networks of a faith community, and analyses how the scales of ‘local’ and ‘global’ are variously imagined and co-constituted within this faith movement. This contributes to the scholarship of transnational networked religions and globalisation.
- 3) The thesis explores ‘what we make scripture do for us’ (Wimbush 2016): it examines how scriptures are imagined and performed by evangelicals, and the geopolitical consequences of these practices.
- 4) The thesis interrogates the unequal relationships between evangelicals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and their uneven access to shaping ‘global’ evangelicalism. With this, it contributes to the Anthropology of Christianity by adding an emphasis on the role of power in the negotiation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ in theology and practice.

Palestinian evangelicals are at the receiving end of dominant pro-Israel theologies and practices. Some, like Alex Awad, actively try to counter these and develop alternative ways of engaging biblically with Israel, in the hope that this might bring about positive and tangible social and political changes to Palestinians' difficult everyday contexts. The central question this thesis seeks to answer is: **how is 'orthodoxy' in belief and practice negotiated within the transnational social field of evangelicalism?**

To answer this question, I suggest the following hypothesis:

The focus on the dynamics of encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine reveals Christianity as a 'discursive tradition', in which 'orthodoxy' in belief and practice is shaped by power. Inspired by Talal Asad's (2006) work on Islam, 'power' is understood here as the 'capability' to influence and shape the circulation of ideas, people, and resources within the transnational social field of evangelicalism. Resistance to dominant evangelical frameworks and a certain level of co-constitution of evangelical identities notwithstanding, it is argued that privileged financial and cultural resources and travel regimes lead to particular 'geometries of power' in global evangelicalism.

The remainder of this introductory chapter delineates the origin of, and rationale for, this project, and outlines the religious landscape inhabited by Palestinian evangelicals. This will be followed by two chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) providing further background of the theoretical and methodological contexts of this project, before I offer five empirical chapters (Chapters 4 to 8) detailing the difficult navigation by Palestinian evangelicals of their belonging to both 'global' evangelicalism and the Israeli state.

1.1 Project origin: ‘Is Israel a fulfilment of biblical prophecy?’

This research project developed out of my interests in nationalism, transnationalism and globalisation, Christianity, and postcolonial theory. Throughout my academic career, I have been fascinated by the ties that many believe to exist between ‘blood’ and ‘soil’, and the boundaries of nation-states. My background in the humanities (English/Postcolonial Literature) and postgraduate degree in Migration Studies have played a crucial role in interrogating the relationship between territory and identity, and the mechanisms of marginalisation it can engender. Together with my anthropological training, my academic work so far has raised questions as to the significance of borders, the boundaries of nations, and the cohesion of diasporas and transnational communities.

Although my own childhood church context was in a German Lutheran church, while a student in the UK I was a regular attendee at two evangelical Anglican churches, one in Leeds and one in Oxford. I became familiar with the affection for the Israeli state among many evangelicals especially while attending the church in Oxford. The church held regular ‘Israel Prayer Days’ and featured its own ‘Israel Prayer Group’.⁸ Given my interest in nationalism and postcolonial studies, the fierce ‘adopted nationalism’ for a state that so openly discriminated against part of its population, displayed in the rhetoric around these events and activities, astonished me. For those involved in these events, it seemed crystal clear that Israel belonged to the ‘Jewish people’, and that Christians ought to support it. This political stance was amplified since the Oxford church leadership otherwise refrained from openly promoting particular political viewpoints.

⁸ It is hard to obtain reliable numbers on European evangelical support for Israel, but overall the spread of Christian Zionism in Europe is less institutionally organised than in the United States. However, there are lobby groups of Christian Zionist evangelicals to national governments in Europe as well as to the European Union (King, 2016), and European evangelicals are also substantively involved in the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem ICEJ, which sees itself as evangelical representation to Israel. I delineate in Chapter 4 the European origins of Christian Zionism.

The prayers and talks were often one-sided, catechistically equated the current nation-state of Israel with the biblical ‘people of Israel’, believed that the founding of the Israeli state was a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and cast the Israel-Palestine conflict as a cosmic battle between ‘good’ (Israel’) and ‘evil’ (Palestine) – an assessment that was diametrically opposite to that I had encountered in my academic studies. In the following sections, I introduce how my interest in this research project developed. I return to a more thorough discussion of my own positionality in carrying out this research in Chapter 3, after detailing the methods and methodologies used for the data collection.

I experienced how highly emotive the ‘Israel-question’ was when I first started scoping work for this doctoral project. I met up with a respected couple from the church just referred to, who had longstanding connections to Israel. I was interested to find out about the practicalities of living there and possible contacts they might provide me with. However, rather than the friendly and engaged discussion I had expected, the couple was very concerned at my hesitation regarding the eschatological significance of Israel. With great emotional urgency, over several hours they led me through passages of the Bible to ‘demonstrate’ that God had ordained Israel to the Jews. At my concern about Israel’s existing Palestinian population, they claimed that the term ‘Palestinian’ in itself was ‘too emotive’, and that instead I should use the biblical term, ‘Philistines’ (and ‘Judea and Samaria’ for the West Bank); they also claimed that in fact more Jews were expelled from Arab countries than Arabs from the territory of Israel around the creation of the State of Israel,⁹ and that those Arabs who remained in Israel have the same rights

⁹ It is true that the conflict in 1948 led to the emigration or expulsion of around five to six hundred thousand Jews from the Arab countries surrounding the newly created state of Israel, a refugee phenomenon that is often forgotten in the recounting of the events (Morris, 2008: 212-214). However, the number of Jews expelled from Arab countries is actually less than Palestinians expelled from the newly

as Jews.¹⁰ To support their views, they showed me several YouTube videos, among them a video in which Israel's former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Danny Ayalon, (2011), disputed the idea that Israel had 'occupied' the West Bank ('Judea and Samaria') – rather, he claimed that it 'took back' from Jordan what was rightfully Israel's. He claimed that the 'Jewish people's historical right to their homeland' was recognised after the Ottomans 'relinquished' their right to the Middle East to Britain and France. He also pointed out that there had never been a state or nation by the name of Palestine by 1967 ('or ever'), and that therefore the 'security fence' around the West Bank was a legal act of self-defence. Our meeting went on until late into the night, and I was given booklets on the 'Legal Aspects of Jewish Rights in the Mandate for Palestine', and maps of Israel's history aimed at defending its right to the West Bank (both publications by the organisation *Christian Friends of Israel*)¹¹ to help me overcome my reservations.¹² This encounter – which was not the only one of its kind –

created State of Israel (ca. eight hundred thousand). While the individual sorrows of those affected by displacement due to geopolitical events should not be disregarded in such arguments, the comparing of numbers of people displaced disregards the foregoing aggression displayed in the creation of the Israeli State itself. It also disregards that, unlike most of the displaced Palestinians who fled to refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria (where they often remain to this day), the Jews expelled from Arab countries found a warm welcome in the newly created State of Israel where they could claim citizenship.

¹⁰ Arabs, or Palestinians, in Israel do not have the same rights as Jews. While they have more rights than their co-ethnics in the Occupied Palestinian territories, and their everyday reality in Israel is marked by considerably less brutality, uncertainty, and instability, they do still face discrimination. As Israeli citizens, they can vote and run for political office – yet their representation in parliament remains extremely limited. They also face bureaucratic obstacles in their participation in Israeli society in areas such as education, housing, and civil rights (Monterescu, 2015; Kimmerling, 2008; Pappé, 2011). For example, to join a university, prospective Jewish students have to pass a Hebrew test, while prospective Palestinians Israeli students have to pass a test in both Hebrew and classical Arabic (which is not taught in all Palestinian Israeli schools to the required standard). More recently in July 2018, the Israeli government passed a more outright discriminatory 'Jewish nationality bill': it declares the State of Israel officially as nation-state for Jewish people, downgrades Arabic from a national language to language with 'special status', and makes the building of nationwide Jewish settlements a priority. Critics have condemned the bill as racist, and reminiscent of apartheid (Lis and Landau, 2018).

¹¹ Christian Friends of Israel is a non-denominational organisation that seeks to 'bless' materially and spiritually all Jewish people and the 'modern nation of Israel, which includes both Jews and Arabs' (website). It understands itself to follow a biblical mandate for this. See <https://www.cfi.org.uk/who-we-are.html> [accessed 14/01/2018].

¹² The views of the evangelical couple I interacted with in this encounter are commensurate with Christian Zionist theology. I will consider the specific theological history of the views I encountered at that church, as well as the evangelical reading and interpretative techniques that lead to such strong

helped me realise that even to put a question mark behind the statement that Israel is a fulfilment of biblical prophecy can invite evangelical responses ranging from alienation, to rejection, to attempts at ‘conversion’.

Simultaneously with the encounters I had at the church mentioned above, I had become aware of a conference organised by Palestinian evangelicals in Bethlehem called *Christ at the Checkpoint* (Revd. Alex Awad, quoted above, was one of its founders), and decided to attend the conference in 2014, to continue the scoping for a possible research project. The biennial conference was addressed at a Western – mostly North American – audience of about three to four hundred Christians. Talks were given by Palestinian theologians, as well as some of their prominent Western evangelical supporters, and sought to challenge Christian Zionism by highlighting the Palestinian situation: their oppression and lack of rights and resources as a result of the Israeli occupation which was licenced and supported by evangelicals worldwide.¹³

support for Israel below and in Chapter 2. Here, I offer just a brief summary to help the reader to understand the importance of this project. Christian Zionism can be considered a politically active form of the older and more encompassing theology of Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a form of evangelicalism that was developed by Lord John Nelson Darby in nineteenth century Britain, and popularised both by the Scofield Reference Bible in the wider Anglophone world, including North America (Smith, 2013), as well as by supremely popular fictional accounts of the end-times in the 1970s and 1980s (Monahan, 2008). It divides world history into seven distinct ‘dispensations’ (i.e. eras), and counts our current time as the second to last one. The final one, the Second Coming of Christ, marks the end of the world, and is believed to be prefigured by various events prophesied in the Bible Israel and the ‘Jewish people’ play a significant role in the unfolding of the end-times. Dispensationalism and its political expression of Christian Zionism are at the heart of the continuing interest in the Israeli state by many of today’s evangelicals, as well as their political, financial, emotional, and spiritual investment in it. They are also at the heart of the idea that the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 was a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and its subsequent military victories (particularly in 1948-9, 1967 and 1973) a sign of the impending end-times and Jesus’ Second Coming. In terms of spread and numbers, the American lobby organisation Christians United for Israel (CUFI) counts 4.1 million evangelicals among its members alone. This does not include those evangelicals who may not belong to the organisation, but follow a pro-Israel theology regardless. Scholars of Christian Zionism suggest that Christian Zionist theologies are often only implicit in any given congregation and are far from monolithic (Durbin, 2014). I explain these theologies in more detail in Chapter 4.1.1.

¹³ Many speakers at the conference pursued a ‘covenant theology’ in contrast to dispensationalist and Christian Zionist theologies, which see no special theological significance in the Israeli state or Jewish people. I outline the development of this theology following my discussion of Christian Zionism in Chapter 4.1.3.

The setting of the conference in the Occupied Palestinian Territories further contributed to the challenge brought by Palestinian evangelicals to the real political effects of Christian Zionism: its Western attendees experienced first-hand the surveillance and searches at the few Israeli checkpoints that control movement into and out of the Palestinian territories, which are confined by the separation barrier (in red on map in Figure 1 – note how it cuts deep into Palestinian land, instead of following the ‘Green Line’ or 1949 Armistice Line, depicted in green). The conference was held in the shadow of the ‘wall’.¹⁴ The conference attendees witnessed the significant restrictions to Palestinians movement out of, and even within, the West Bank, and gained an understanding for the fractured nature of Palestinian-controlled land within the West Bank that is constantly threatened by expanding settlements: since the 1993 Oslo Agreements, the West Bank is divided into – originally provisional – different administrative areas. Area A and B, which make up only 39% of the West Bank’s territory, are controlled by the Palestinian Authority or under joint Palestinian and Israeli control (depicted in green on the map, Figure 1. Map of Israel-Palestine including Areas A and B of the West Bank which are under direct Palestinian Authority control. Figure 1) while Area C (Israeli settlements and ‘nature parks’) is under Israeli control (depicted in white on Figure 1). Area C is necessary to connect Palestinian urban areas with each other and also for agricultural purposes, but its Israeli control marks severe restrictions on access for Palestinians. The conference, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, received considerable traction in the Anglophone

¹⁴ The West Bank is fenced off by a separation barrier (or 8m high wall around major Palestinian cities) that roughly follows the armistice (or ‘green’) line drawn between the newly founded state of Israel and Jordan in 1948. However, the separation barrier also cuts deeply into Palestinian land in many areas, thus effectively confiscating Palestinian land. The term ‘separation barrier’ is disputed among the parties to the conflict: the Israeli government (and much of Western media) refer to it as ‘fence’ or ‘security fence’, while Palestinians and their supporters call it the ‘wall’. Prefiguring the term with ‘security’ legitimises its use for the Israeli government (Peteet, 2005: 165). I use ‘separation barrier’ as balanced term, but refer to it as the ‘wall’ where it actually has the appearance of one, as in Bethlehem.

evangelical world and led to discussion and contestation. On this first visit, I learnt of the two evangelical theological colleges that trained pastors and church workers in Bethlehem in the Palestinian territories and Nazareth in Northern Israel, where I would later focus my field work.



Figure 1. Map of Israel-Palestine including Areas A and B of the West Bank which are under direct Palestinian Authority control.

These two very contrasting perspectives on evangelical engagement with Israel – a dominant one that supports the Israeli state and its Jewish population as purported fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and a marginal one that points to the existing Palestinian Christian presence in Israel and advocates for a more balanced political

treatment of Israel by evangelicals – led me to ask how orthodoxy within evangelical theology and practice could be negotiated. How do evangelicals decide what the correct biblical interpretation is, or the correct ethical and political practice? Who has the ability to shape the discourse around these beliefs and practices?

To conceptualise the emerging research project, I took inspiration from a joint Israeli-Palestinian history textbook project developed by the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME), which I had studied for my Masters' dissertation. The pages in this history textbook are divided into three columns: one for the Israeli account of a particular event, one for the Palestinian account, and an empty section in the middle, inviting the students to position themselves in between (Figure 2). The Israeli and Palestinian account resemble the accounts by many Christian Zionist and Palestinian evangelical narratives we will encounter in the remainder of the thesis. It was the 'empty space' in the middle of this textbook project that continued to fascinate me. Are there really 'two sides to every story'? Or was it possible to tell a single narrative instead of two – an idea I articulated in my dissertation with Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of a 'nomadology' instead of national history? How ought such a story to be told – and who gets to do the telling? How does the negotiation of alternative views of reality unfold?

This thesis does not seek to analyse the political conflict in Israel-Palestine per se, even though it of course forms an important backdrop to this work. Yet, in a context that is so highly politicised, including in much of the academic literature on it, the idea of this history textbook rather led me to focus this current project on the question of how the 'empty space' between the two narratives of Christian Zionists on the one hand, and Palestinian evangelicals and their supporters on the other hand, could be negotiated.

How did evangelicals in Israel and the Palestinian territories and evangelicals elsewhere negotiate their different theologies and practices in relation to the Israeli state?

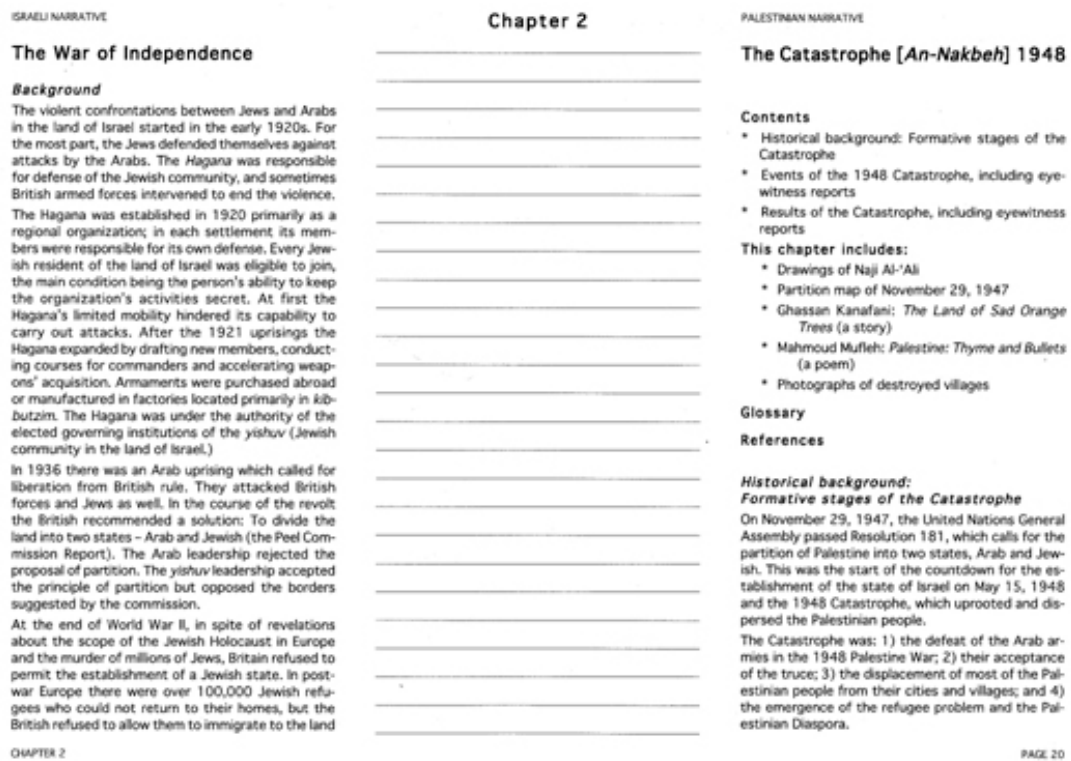


Figure 2. Page from PRIME history textbook.

To investigate the negotiations around the questions raised above, I used a lens of ‘encounters’ between Palestinian and Western evangelical Christians. My fieldwork was situated predominantly in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as two locations in North America and the UK. I will return to a more in-depth discussion of my methodology Chapter 3. In the next section, I will introduce the religious landscape of Palestinian evangelicals.

1.2 Project context: Palestinian evangelicals in Israel-Palestine

1.2.1 The religious landscape in Israel-Palestine

Palestinian evangelicals¹⁵ are a ‘minority of a minority of a minority’ in Israel-Palestine: as evangelicals among a Christian majority of established denominations, as Christians among a Muslim co-ethnic majority, and as Palestinians in a Jewish state. Roughly 21% of the population of Israel proper are Palestinian Israeli citizens (CBS, 2018: 2).¹⁶ The majority of these are Muslim, with a small minority of Druze¹⁷. By the end of 2017, there were only about 171,900 Christians (Palestinian and non-Palestinian),¹⁸ who make up just under 2% of the overall Israeli population of ca 8.8 million. Of the 4.7 million Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (West

¹⁵ I use the term ‘Palestinian evangelical’ to refer to both Palestinian Israeli evangelicals and the few Palestinian evangelical citizens of the West Bank and Gaza. Given the fieldwork context of Nazareth in Israel proper, most of those I work with might be more accurately described as ‘Palestinian Israeli evangelicals’ and I differentiate between these groups where important to denote their different political and social circumstances. However, there is much exchange between Palestinian evangelicals in the differently administered areas of Israel-Palestine, and the two Bible Colleges (in Bethlehem and Nazareth) I refer to in this thesis are closely linked (though, due to the restrictions on movement in the West Bank, staff exchange is one-sided from Nazareth to Bethlehem only; however, Palestinian evangelicals can interact freely at conferences etc. in ‘third countries’). While there are important differences between Palestinian evangelicals in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (which I will highlight appropriately in this thesis), these have not given rise to distinct forms of a ‘Palestinian Israeli evangelicalism’ or ‘Palestinian territory evangelicalism’ per se. Therefore, I use the term ‘Palestinian evangelical’ to describe evangelicals in either political entity.

¹⁶ It ought to be noted that, while I speak of ‘Palestinian Israelis,’ not all Palestinian citizens of Israel self-describe as such: some prefer to use the state-favoured term ‘Arab Israeli’. This term denotes belonging to the ‘Arab’ majority population of the wider Middle East, as well as a distancing from the distinct political connotations of the term ‘Palestinian’. I respect this choice when discussing individuals in the following chapters (for example in direct quotations), yet overall I refer to Palestinian citizens of Israel as ‘Palestinian Israelis’ to signify their recent shared history with Palestinians of what are now the Occupied Palestinian Territories as Palestinians in relation to Israel. Most Palestinian Israeli evangelicals I met have family histories of displacement, and many have relatives in the Palestinian territories or other areas where Palestinians were received following the *Nakba*. The exchange of the word ‘Arab’ for ‘Palestinian’ has been used by the Israeli state to deny any Palestinian claim to the land that is now Israel-Palestine (Peteet, 2005: 161). This is a highly political move in the face of the continuing demand of millions of Palestinian refugees to their ‘right of return’, i.e. their right to return to the places they or their forebears were forced to leave.

¹⁷ The Druze are not considered Muslim, but have some similarities with Shi’a sects. The Druze population in Israel numbered around 141,000 in 2017 (CBS 2018: 2). Many Druze Israeli men join the Israeli Defence forces and are Israeli nationalists (Kanaaneh, 2005; 2009).

¹⁸ According to a US Department of State report (2017: 3), in 2016, 134,000 of these are Palestinian Christians.

Bank and Gaza), ca. 46,850 are Christian (PCBS, 2018: 35)¹⁹, thus just short of 1% of the overall population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories are Christians (1.6% of the population of the West Bank and 0.06% of Gaza).

The Christians in Israel-Palestine are one of the oldest Christian communities of the world, claiming a presence in the territory since early Christianity (Raheb, 2014). Most of the Christians in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories belong to old and established denominations (Sabella, 2000: 2f): in Israel, the Greek Melkite Catholic community has the largest following (ca. 40%), followed by the Greek Orthodox community (35%), Roman Catholics ('Latins'; 12%), Maronites (6%) and smaller communities of Protestants, Copts, Armenians and others making up 7%. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (including the West Bank and Gaza), the largest denomination are the Greek Orthodox (51 %) followed by the Roman Catholics (32 %). Among these denominations, Protestants, let alone the more recently established community of evangelicals, are a small minority, yet important through their belonging to a large and powerful Protestant community worldwide.

A further community that does not always identify as 'Christian' but shares many evangelical characteristics (e.g. the belief that Jesus was the messiah foretold in the Old Testament, and the use of the New Testament) is the messianic Jewish community. There are roughly 20,000 messianic Jews in Israel-Palestine²⁰, organised in ca. 250 congregations (some of which meet in illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank).²¹ The messianic Jewish movement originated in the United States among evangelicals with a particularly strong affinity for Israel and Judaism, and who have taken on a

¹⁹ Less than 2,000 of these are located in Gaza, the rest in the West Bank.

²⁰ As with Christian denominations, numbers are hard to obtain. This number is cited in the US Department of State report (2017: 3) on International Religious Freedom.

²¹ According to the messianic Jewish news network in Israel which contains a directory of messianic Jewish congregations, <http://app.kehilanews.com/directory> [last accessed 30/01/2017].

‘Jewish identity’ (Kaell, 2015). Jews who convert to messianic Judaism in Israel are not regarded well by Jewish Israelis, and may lose their right to become Israeli citizens (US Department of State, 2017). Kaell (2015: 58-60) demonstrates convincingly the ways in which messianic Judaism, especially where it is largely made up of ‘gentile’ believers, challenges the genetic identity of ‘Jews’. There is one Bible College in Israel which teaches messianic Jewish theology, the Israel College of the Bible in Netanya. It is much more heavily financed by Western Christian Zionists due to its affinity for Israel, which means that it can offer scholarships to Palestinian evangelicals who want to obtain a theological degree – however, this also means they are not trained in a contextual Palestinian theology, which the Palestinian evangelical colleges promote. The relations with the Palestinian evangelical Bible colleges are strained therefore, even though there have been attempts at working together.

Palestinian Christians have responded differently to the political pressures they have encountered as minority in what is now Israel-Palestine. Historically, together with Arab Christians in Lebanon and Syria, Palestinian Christians were instrumental in the Arab cultural rebirth (*Al-Nahda*) of the late Ottoman period (O’Mahony, 1999). In the period leading up to, and since, the founding of the State of Israel, Palestinian Christians have been key to the development of Palestinian nationalism and Palestinian identity (Kårtveit, 2014: 4). In particular, the numerically small community of Protestant Palestinian Christians has produced two prominent liberation theologians since the late 1980s: the Anglican Revd. Naim Ateek, and the Lutheran Revd. Mitri Raheb. Their work is modelled on the Latin American (Roman Catholic) example of liberation theology in that it uses biblical language to develop a unique Palestinian identity, based on dignity for an oppressed people. It however differs from Latin American liberation theology by espousing a strong focus on non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation

(whereas the Latin American example sometimes justifies the use of violence in resistance). This was especially important during the First Intifada (lit. uprising) from 1987 to 1990, during which Christians played a leading role in practicing non-violent resistance. Both Ateek and Raheb critically engage with the biblical texts often quoted by Christian Zionists and reinterpret their message for a Palestinian audience (thus for example de-emphasising the motif of 'exodus' prominent in other liberation theologies, and Zionism for that matter). Their work continues today, for example in the issuing of published statements and manifestos to address Christians worldwide on the question of Israel (Ateek, 1989; Gräbe, 1999; Raheb, 2011, 2014).²²

The work of Palestinian liberation theologians, which encourages Palestinian Christians to positively engage with their political and social contexts, seeks to stem the tide of the wide-spread emigration of Palestinian Christians (especially from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but also to a smaller degree from Israel) as a result of the social and political pressures and constraints experienced. As anthropologists of Palestinian Christianity especially in the West Bank (Calder, 2017; Kårtveit, 2013; Lybarger, 2007b) have shown, cultural and economic factors have facilitated the emigration of Palestinian Christians more than that of Palestinian Muslims. For example, Palestinian Christians have tended to be more highly educated and wealthier, often through the institutional investment of their larger denominations in Israel-Palestine (e.g. in schools). This means, on the one hand, that they have more to lose (such as land) in the face of Israeli restrictions, and on the other hand provides the necessary means to travel and set up home elsewhere. Since emigration of Palestinian Christians has been ongoing

²² One example is the Kairos document of 2009, drafted by an ecumenical group of Palestinian Christians who fought for over a year about its phrasing. The end product, calling Christians worldwide to resist the Israeli occupation, has been signed by 300 Christian dignitaries and has been translated into several European languages. See <http://www.kairopalestine.ps/> [accessed 05/10/2018]

since the Ottoman period, there are now many transnational family networks, which further facilitate the migration process (González, 1992; Kårtveit, 2013).

While all of the above scholars, as well as the majority of Palestinian Christians themselves, emphasise that their emigration is a result of the challenges of the Israeli occupation, a further reason for Palestinian Christians to leave has been the increase in Muslim-Christian tensions. For example, the internal migration of Muslim villagers, or Muslims from Hebron into Bethlehem (all displaced by the Israeli Defence Forces IDF), who may have less appreciation for the long Palestinian Christian heritage in Bethlehem, has shifted the tone of sectarian engagement somewhat (Calder, 2017; cf. a similar development in Nazareth documented by McGahern, 2011, discussed further in Chapter 3). Further, the rise of Islamist movements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has led to an increasing framing of social conflict in sectarian terms (Lybarger, 2007). However, Palestinian Christians are hesitant about drawing attention to these tensions internationally, as they fear it will affect Palestinian unity and indeed deepen the existing tensions as a result. In any case, the rapid decline of Palestinian Christians is a great cause for concern among this population, who voice fears that there will soon no longer be a Christian presence in Israel-Palestine at all.

An additional, less common response to the political and social challenges of the Palestinian Christian community in Israel-Palestine is a decision to actively side with the Israeli government. A small minority of Palestinian Israeli Greek Orthodox Christians, centred around the priest Gabriel Naddaf, rejects the identity of 'Palestinian', and rather seeks to establish themselves as 'Aramaic'.²³ With this, they deny their

²³ Aramaic is an ancient Semitic language which belongs to the Afroasiatic language family. It is in the same language groups as Phoenician. It was used by Jesus in some of the texts of the Bible, and is still used as liturgical language in some Orthodox and Maronite churches.

belonging to the Palestinian community and any links to Palestinian or Arab nationalism. Similar to some Palestinian Israeli Druze (Kanaaneh, 2009), they encourage young Palestinian Israeli Christian men and women to join the Israeli Defence Forces, and take a strong stance against Palestinian liberation theology and the work of the Palestinian evangelical Bible Colleges. Palestinian Israeli Christians and Muslims are legally exempt from serving in the IDF, but Christians who are keen to do so may join it (while Palestinian Israeli Muslims are not permitted to do so). This is significant because of the central role of the IDF in Israeli society: military service is required for all other Israelis (male and female), unless they abstain from military service for religious reasons (as many Orthodox Jews do). In fact, the army has been dubbed a ‘melting pot’ for the different cultural and ethnic parts of Israeli society. It is highly respected among most Jewish Israelis and plays a strong role in giving identity and belonging to young Israelis (McGahern, 2011; Kuntsman and Stein, 2015), and for those who have served in the IDF, it improves their job and career prospects. Thus, for Palestinians to willingly join the IDF is seen by other Palestinians as a betrayal of their identity as a minority. Since the IDF is central in maintaining the military occupation of the West Bank, Palestinian Israeli IDF soldiers are accused not to be just uncritically complicit with, but also to advance the Jewish Israeli narrative.

1.2.2 Palestinian evangelicalism

Palestinian evangelicals, who are the focus of this thesis, are a relatively recent addition to the religious landscape of Israel-Palestine. Despite the long heritage of Palestinian Christianity in Israel-Palestine, dispensationalist American forms of evangelicalism were first introduced to Israel-Palestine as late as 1911. Shukry Musa, a Palestinian (originally Roman Catholic) Christian, had converted to Southern Baptist Christianity

during his stay in the United States, under the influence of Revd George Truett in Dallas. Musa was ordained as a minister in the United States and subsequently founded the first Baptist church in Nazareth on his return. He was a strong leader, and soon found followers among the established Christian denominations in Nazareth (Rowden, 2010).²⁴ In the 1920s, American missionaries joined Musa and developed the Baptist ministry in Mandatory Palestine (Ajaj et al., 2016: 56). They proselytised among Muslim and Christian Palestinians, considering Palestinian Christians of established denominations as ‘non-believers’ requiring conversion to the evangelical faith. Their work came to a halt during the upheavals of the 1947/8 war and the founding of the State of Israel. In the early 1950s, however, the missionaries returned and continued to build their ministry, specifically in the form of the first Baptist church, an orphanage, and a school.²⁵ Their work, especially through the evangelical school, will be further analysed in Chapter 4.

This excerpt of a letter from John and Marjorie Rowden (in a collection edited by their oldest daughter Rebecca Rowden 2010: 151), one of the first Baptist missionary couples in Nazareth, to their sending church in Atlanta, Georgia, gives insight into the presumed necessity for the Baptist mission work in Israel. It is dated August 1953, and after the first greetings immediately offers a defence of the significance of their mission.

We realise that some may ask why it is necessary to send workers to the land of the Bible. One trip here would answer that question for good. Here in Nazareth there are twenty thousand people. Most of them have never heard that they must be born

²⁴ Most Palestinian evangelicals are converts from established Christian denominations, rather than from Islam or other religious minorities. As Chapter 5 will show, there are attempts at evangelising among Muslims, however these attempts remain largely unsuccessful since the price of a conversion to Christianity is very high: it could mean having to fear persecution by family members and friends, having to relocate to a safe place or emigrate, and often being unable to sustain oneself or one’s family as a result.

²⁵ The Nazareth Evangelical College hosts a collection of letters and documents relating to the Baptist mission work in the newly established State of Israel, which is being analysed by its Azar Ajaj for a forthcoming history of Palestinian Baptists.

again. True it is a city of churches, bells, and feast-days, but it is still a city of extreme darkness. When a person is born here, he is born into a religious community; Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Moslem and that settles the matter. His salvation is left up to his religious leaders along with his religion. Consequently they know nothing of the Bible or evangelical Christianity. There is a great void of ideals and goals in life and many 'isms' have made a great headway. By our Christian homes, the orphanage, the school, and the church, we are holding the light of Jesus the Messiah up.

In overall numbers, and despite the enthusiastic work of the American missionaries, the evangelical community has remained small. Today, in its second and third generation, Palestinian evangelicals count around 5,000 believers (Ajaj et al., 2016).²⁶ The Baptists were later joined by more charismatic²⁷ Nazarene and Assemblies of God missionaries, who, however, each only founded only one or two churches. The majority of evangelical churches in Israel-Palestine belong to the Baptist denomination. As a result of the work of the American missionaries, most Palestinian evangelicals today are located in the Galilee area in Israel's North, with only a handful of evangelicals located in the West Bank and Gaza.

There are now ca. 35 Palestinian evangelical congregations, all of which are small (the largest congregation which meets in the Nazareth Baptist School has a membership of around 100 adults). Those Palestinians who remained in Israel after the 1948 War establishing the Israeli State were a mostly rural population, as most of the Palestinian social elite had been displaced or migrated elsewhere. Rather than migrating to larger urban centres, many of those whose villages had not been destroyed remained where

²⁶ This number is based on self-reports by evangelical churches, as the denomination is not part of the Israeli census (Ajaj, Miller, & Sumpter, 2016). It does not always include children that are part of a congregation, because Baptists stress the notion of being 'born again', i.e. a personal decision by the individual to follow the evangelical faith system. Only those who have been baptised in their youth or as young adults count as full members of the church.

²⁷ 'Charismatic' here refers to expressions of Christian faith that emphasise the work of the Holy Spirit in the believers' lives, such as speaking in tongues or miraculous healing. See Coleman and Hackett (2015) for a discussion of this faith form.

they were: this was due to the hostility of Jewish neighbourhoods towards Palestinian newcomers, but also to close-knit and patriarchal family structures and the possibility to commute easily to more distant places of work, because of the small size of the country (Masry-Herzalla and Razin, 2013). This is one factor that contributed to smaller Palestinian evangelical churches in the villages, often established around one or two families. It is only more recently that Palestinians have moved to Jewish cities and formed more mixed towns, such as Haifa, or have moved to Jewish areas adjacent to originally Palestinian towns, such as Nazareth Illit, Beer Sheva, or Carmiel.

Since 2005, Palestinian evangelicals of all evangelical denominations are organised in the Convention of Evangelical Churches in Israel (CECI) and applied for recognition as ‘official religion’, since the only other recognised Protestant denominations were the Episcopalian and the Lutheran Churches (whom they exceed in numbers). Their status is still uncertain (Ajaj et al. 2016), but in the meantime the churches that are part of CECI are registered as *amutat* (lit. ‘charity’). While the original Baptist church in the centre of Nazareth continues to host a congregation, most other congregations meet in buildings designed for residential use, small community halls, or schools. Yet, while the numbers of Palestinian evangelicals seem insignificant, their existence renders visible many of the social and cultural factors that have influenced the dominant evangelical engagement with Israel. As I discuss especially in Chapters 4 and 7, Palestinian evangelicals are an anomaly within dominant pro-Israel theologies, and challenge these through their mere existence. Their belonging to a global evangelical faith community potentially provides them with disproportionate opportunities for influence, despite their small numbers. A focus on Palestinian evangelicals is fascinating as they help to reveal how evangelical orthodoxy is negotiated.

Palestinian evangelicals have responded differently to the social and political challenges in Israel-Palestine. Some have developed a distinctly evangelical ‘liberation theology’, even as they have come to reject the term itself for its strong liberal and political overtones. However, similar to Ateek and Raheb, especially Palestinian evangelicals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have sought to develop non-violent resistance and challenge Christian Zionism. They are aligned with similar evangelical movements in other post-colonial contexts (Swartz, 2012a; 2012b), even if Palestinian evangelical critiques have developed much later than these. One such project, the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. However, the majority of Palestinian evangelical Christians, especially in Israel itself, but to a very small degree also in the West Bank (Sturm and Frantzman, 2014), are largely apolitical. The reasons for these dispositions will be explored in depth in the chapters to come, especially as they are developed in relation to their global, largely pro-Israel evangelical faith community.

1.3 Thesis organisation

In order to explore the difficult positioning of Palestinian evangelicals within ‘global’ evangelicalism and my resulting research question regarding the negotiation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’, I have structured this thesis as follows:

First of all, I conceptualise Palestinian evangelicals as part of ‘global’ evangelicalism in **Chapter 2**. This theoretical background chapter introduces the conceptualisation of Christianity as a ‘discursive tradition’, and highlights the limited consideration of the role of power in the Anthropology of Christianity. I go on to describe how I designed this research project, discuss the methods and methodology I used to collect the data on

which this thesis draws, describe my field sites, and reflect on my own positionality in **Chapter 3**.

Following the three introductory chapters (including the current one), Chapters 4 to 8 will discuss my empirical data. In **Chapter 4**, I will explore the surprising and counterintuitive fact that many Palestinian evangelicals in fact espouse apolitical, pro-Israel dispensationalist theologies, and will unpack the historical influence of Western Protestant ideas of Israel on Palestinian evangelicals from the first mission encounter until today. The dilemmas of contemporary Palestinian evangelicals will be revealed through the ethnographic example of a strike by the Christian schools in Israel in 2015. The chapter argues that the positioning of Palestinian evangelicals within the transnational social field of evangelicalism greatly influences the extent of their political action.

Chapter 5 will focus in more detail on narratives of identity construction by Palestinian evangelicals in Israel in relation to their local contexts, as well as the transnational social field of evangelicalism. Ethnographic portraits of four Palestinian evangelicals serve to analyse how Palestinian evangelicals variously foster their evangelical selves, curate their narratives, and mimic or resist dominant positions within evangelicalism.

‘Land’ is one of the key disputes in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and one of the key factors in dominant evangelical theologies of Israel. **Chapter 6** therefore explores how Western evangelicals encounter Israel’s natural environment and territory guided by dominant biblical interpretations, and how Palestinian evangelicals are implicated in these encounters. I rely on participant observation at *Nazareth Village*, as well as my participation in a ‘witness visit’ (an alternative pilgrimage focusing on visiting Palestinian Christians rather than biblical sites) to the West Bank to discuss how

Western evangelicals perform and impose their imaginations of 'Israel' on the Israeli territory itself.

Chapter 7 turns the attention to Palestinian evangelical resistance to dominant evangelical narratives about Israel-Palestine. Through participant observation at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference and an analysis of its manifesto, as well as participant observation and interviews with young Western evangelical volunteers in Nazareth, I explore how Palestinian evangelicals reinterpret dominant evangelical theologies and practices regarding Israel. The chapter argues that some Palestinian evangelicals challenge the dominant Christian Zionist engagement with Israel by pointing to themselves as the 'powerful side' of the encounter, as the descendants of the first Christians: rather than being 'heathens' to be missionized, as in other colonial encounters, they identify as the descendants of the ones who missionized others first. I conceptualise this as 'shifting the contact zone'.

Chapter 8 uses an example of the dissemination of Western evangelical resources and theologies concerning Israel, and their reception by Palestinian evangelicals, to show the role of power in the uneven co-constitution of global evangelicalism. Considering the reception of an album and subsequent concert tour by the Australian worship band Hillsong United, which was filmed in Israel-Palestine, in the light of a critical conference for young Palestinian evangelicals, the chapter argues that dominant evangelical actors create an imagination of the 'local' which enters the imaginary of 'global' evangelicalism and bears political and material consequences.

Finally, I conclude the thesis in **Chapter 9** by returning to a discussion of my hypothesis in light of the empirical chapters presented in the thesis. I argue that it is important to take into account the power dynamics at work in the negotiation of

‘orthodoxy’ within global Christianity, especially given the political implications of dominant theologies and practices in contexts such as Israel-Palestine.

2. The negotiation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ in theology and practice

One of the goals of this thesis is to investigate the simultaneous belonging of Palestinian evangelicals to their ‘global’ faith community as well as the Israeli state, which the majority of this faith community supports uncritically. In the context of Israel-Palestine, the pursuing of particular faith-inspired practices and beliefs has direct physical consequences on its population and on the state, and raises questions about *who* or *what* authorises certain theologies and associated practices within the evangelical tradition with no definitive overarching authority structures.²⁸ The thesis therefore investigates the competing imaginations, practices, theologies, and ideologies about what it means to be a ‘good’ Christian in the context of Israel-Palestine, and what the Israeli state signifies for the evangelical believer. It focuses on the negotiation of ‘orthodoxy’ regarding these issues, whose outcome has such significant consequences for Palestinian Christians.

The dilemma of Palestinian evangelicals in tension with dominant pro-Israel theologies has led me to engage with, and contribute to, three related bodies of literature: first and foremost, it is concerned with the way in which an evangelical faith community navigates their belonging to ‘global’ Christianity. This requires engagement with the scholarship of transnationalism and globalisation, especially in relation to the spread of Christianity and the circulation of resources, people, ideologies and theologies. Secondly, the navigation of an evangelical community’s place as part of a larger faith

²⁸ There are of course several ‘authority structures’ evangelicals may belong to, such as their transnational church movements and networks (such as Vineyard, Southern Baptist, etc.), international conferences such those surrounding the Lausanne Movement, or regional as well as the World Evangelical Alliance WEA (McAlister, 2018). However, in contrast to, for example, in the Roman Catholic tradition, these structures are more loosely connected and have less disciplinary power. One could arguably well be ‘evangelical’ without belonging to any of these bodies. In any case, there is not one single hierarchical body that has final authority on certain beliefs or practices, which is why the question of ‘orthodoxy’ is so pertinent within global evangelicalism.

tradition requires attention to processes of evangelical subject-making and self-cultivation. This involves, for example, the way in which evangelicals engage with their social and political circumstances. The emphasis by evangelicals on biblical scripture means that this subject-making is pursued with reference to interpretations of the Bible. This, in turn, makes it necessary to pay close attention to the way in which the Bible is read and engaged with, and how theology and practice are negotiated. To explore this, I engage with the literature on the ‘social life of scripture’ especially.

Thirdly, in a context where a dominant narrative is pitted against a more marginal one, it is necessary to consider the role power plays in evangelical negotiations of theology and practice. This situates this study among the literatures dealing with uneven or unequal ‘flows’ in a globalised world. Some anthropologists of Christianity have paid attention to the role of power in Christian subject-formation and negotiation of ‘orthodoxy’, especially in contexts of colonisation of previously non-Christian societies (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Hefner, 1993). However, the study of ‘global’ Christianity lacks a sustained focus on the role of power and unequal ‘flows’ in the negotiation of theology and practice. This thesis therefore contributes to the Anthropology of Christianity by exploring the uneven ‘flows’ of theologies, resources, practices, ideologies and people, and the role of power in the shaping of these ‘flows’. This chapter introduces the theoretical background for this thesis. I briefly introduce the literatures this thesis speaks to in the following sections, pointing to the theoretical contributions each of the empirical chapters will make to the discussions outlined here.

2.1 The Anthropology of Christianity and globalisation

The processes of globalisation of the last decades have led to an interest in how religious movements adapt to, profit from, or resist the challenges and opportunities

globalisation has brought (Csordas, 2009; Levitt, 2001b; Rudolph & Piscatori, 1997; Van Der Veer, 2002; Vásquez & Dewind, 2014; Wong & Levitt, 2014). One of the most important areas of research in this regard has been the effects of faith carried by mobile populations, such as migrants, missionaries, or pilgrims, who profit from globalisation's 'time-space compression' and facilitated travel. For example, scholars have focused on how faith can give meaning on migrant journeys or in exile (Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003; Levitt, 2008; Krause, 2011; Van Der Veer, 2002; Van Dijk, 2002; Warner and Wittner, 1998) , or form part of the reason to travel or migrate as (reverse) missionaries (Coleman & Maier, 2013; Howell, 2012; Knibbe, 2009; Ukah, 2009) or pilgrims (Badone & Roseman, 2004; Coleman & Eade, 2004; Coleman & Elsner, 2002, 2004; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990; Hammoudi & Ghazaleh, 2006; Hermkens, Jansen, & Notermans, 2009; Kaell, 2014). While some argue that mobility of religious people is not new (Coleman & Elsner, 1995),²⁹ the research in the light of increased transnationalism and globalisation has highlighted the capacity of religious movements and institutions to challenge the nation-state by not being solely rooted in territorial, ethnic or national locations. This argument is strengthened by scholarship of the transnational links between faith communities, be they through exchange of people (Levitt, 2001b), resources (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002), or online exchange (Schüler, 2008; Oosterbaan, 2011).

²⁹ Scholars of pilgrimage movements have pointed to the transnational movements of religious formations even before the most recent globalising processes (Coleman & Elsner, 1995; Rudolph & Piscatori, 1997). The founders of the field of pilgrimage studies, Victor and Edith Turner (1978), for example, considered pilgrimage sites as places where barriers between ethnically and culturally different people were broken down, and spoke of (in their case, Roman Catholic) pilgrims as forming a worldwide 'communitas'. They suggested that this 'communitas' comes to the fore in engagement with the sacred site, yet stands for a faith community connected well beyond the particular site. This notion was challenged by Eade and Sallnow (1991), who foregrounded contestation and competing discourses over pilgrimage sites instead, which however does not challenge the transnational sites of contestation per se.

Arguably, the subfield of the anthropology of Christianity itself has developed amid the transformations wrought by processes of globalisation. My concern with the role of power in the negotiation of evangelical orthodoxy contributes to this major field of research. The unprecedented growth especially of charismatic Christianities worldwide has meant that Christianity as a subject for ethnographic inquiry could no longer be ignored (Robbins, 2003a; Cannell, 2006; Coleman and Hackett, 2015). Pentecostal forms of Christianity counted around 250 million followers even in the year 2002 (Martin, 2002), and today this number can be assumed to be even higher. Indeed, the centre of gravity – but not of power – of Christianity has shifted from the global North to the global South (Lewis, 2004; Jenkins, 2007). Considering the physical and cultural circulations and exchanges within the cross-border movements of Christianity, therefore, has led scholars to investigate it with the help of the theoretical frameworks of globalisation and transnationalism, too (e.g. Anderson, 2014; Bialecki, Haynes, & Robbins, 2008; Coleman, 2000; Coleman & Hackett, 2015; Deininger, 2014; Hutchinson & Kalu, 1998; Robbins, 2004b).

The spread of charismatic Christianities is often led back to the ‘portability’ of the tradition’s practices of worship, prayer, and geographically un-bounded healing (Boddy & Lambek, 2013; Csordas, 2009; Vásquez & Marquardt, 2003), the possibility of independent church groups, minimal training requirements for a church’s leadership, and the expectation that all congregants are also evangelists (Robbins, 2004b). Mobility and travel regimes, as well as migration, have further accelerated the exchange of people, information, practices, and theologies across charismatic networks (Coleman & Maier, 2013; Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003; Huwelmeier, 2013; Krause, 2011; Levitt, Lucken, & Barnett, 2011; Wong & Levitt, 2014). Anthropologists have therefore been interested in the rapid cultural changes charismatic Christianities have brought about in previously

non-Christian societies, leading to re-examination of the themes of rupture and continuity (Bialecki, Haynes, & Robbins, 2008; Daswani, 2013; Hefner, 1993; Keane, 2007; Robbins, 2003a, 2007; Veer, 1996; Vokes, 2007). The establishment of the distinct field of an Anthropology of Christianity, and the study of Christianity in previously non-Christianized contexts, has also led to critical studies of Christianity in the ‘West’ itself (Bialecki, 2017; Bielo, 2009b, 2011; Coleman, 2000; Crapanzano, 2000; Elisha, 2011; Harding, 2000; Luhrmann, 2012; Strhan, 2015), as well as an exploration of the ‘Christian roots’ of the discipline of Anthropology (Asad, 1993, 2003; Cannell, 2010; Engelke, 2014). The focus on encounters across difference within ‘global’ Christianity in this thesis takes these studies into account, and is interested in their interaction with Christianity in non-Western contexts.

While the scholarship of charismatic Christianities has generated important academic purchase for the project at hand, it ought to be noted that most Palestinian evangelicals do not technically belong to the charismatic faith traditions that have led to the new interest in global Christianity, with some exceptions. Coleman and Hackett (2015) pointed to the difficulty of defining and differentiating charismatic, Pentecostal, and evangelical Christianity, since their expressions can be very similar. Each mistrusts hierarchical liturgies, clearly distinguishes between ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’ (Coleman and Hackett, 2015: 10), and shares to varying degrees the most commonly quoted markers of evangelicalism defined by David Bebbington (1993): the centrality of biblical scripture, the importance of the death and resurrection of, and a personal faith in, Jesus Christ (‘re-birth/being born again’), and the importance of evangelism or proselytization for the believers. While evangelicalism used to refer to Protestantism at large following the European Reformation in the 16th century, it now most commonly

denotes the revival movements in Europe, America and beyond from the 18th century onwards (Coleman & Hackett, 2015; Noll, 2011).

One of the struggles in pinning down a definition of evangelicalism is, of course, the tradition's great internal variation, which is evidenced for example in the varied evangelical approaches to the theological significance of Israel. For example, many charismatic or Pentecostal Christians could be identified by very similar markers, with an added emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit; yet, some of those I worked with, who clearly identify as 'evangelical', also believe in the importance of the gifts of the spirit and encourage other Christians to attain these. Further, it is debatable where the distinction lies between 'evangelical' and 'fundamentalist' (Coleman & Hackett, 2015: 11). Christian Fundamentalism developed in the United States in reaction to liberal Protestant tendencies, and was named after a series of pamphlets entitled 'The Fundamentals'. To the outsider, Fundamentalism looks like a sub-section of evangelicalism, yet those who self-identify as fundamentalists (for example as part of the movement of the 'Moral Majority' that emerged in the United States of the 1970s and 1980s) might refute this claim. Again, due to the strong American influence on Palestinian evangelicalism, some of those I worked with could perhaps more clearly identified by the term 'fundamentalist'. They bear resemblance to those Christians studied for example by Vincent Crapanzano (2000) and Susan Harding (2000).

Finding an accurate definition for the Christianity of those I worked with is all the more difficult since I did not study people who belonged to a particular movement (such as Simon Coleman's *Livets Ord* for example), but those who live in and interact with Israel-Palestine and identify broadly as 'evangelical'. To resolve these tensions, I suggest that it is necessary to excavate the genealogy of the term 'evangelical' in the contexts we study (cf. Harding 2000: 28), and, in my case, what it means for Palestinian

evangelicals (who broadly subscribe to the markers Bebbington put forward) to self-describe as such. This process forms part of the overall aim of the thesis of situating Palestinian evangelicals as part of ‘global’ evangelicalism.

One of the major contributions of this thesis is the conceptualisation of Palestinian Christianity in view of their belonging to a transnational faith community. Transnational religious movements, including global Christianity, have aided in challenging previous units of analysis in the social sciences (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002): rather than focusing on ‘homogenous’ societies or nation-states, the transnational lens highlights how their borders are challenged, permeated, or transcended (Pries, 2001; Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 2006). The interest in ‘flows’ rather than static ‘containers’ goes hand in hand with wider changes in Anthropology that challenged the idea of ‘bounded’ sites in which culture and ethnicity are rooted in one place (Marcus, 1995; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Transnational religious movements such as Christianity have therefore been conceptualised as ‘transnational social field’ (Levitt & Schiller 2004). Levitt and Schiller (2004: 1009) define ‘transnational social fields’ as sets ‘of multiple inter locking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed.’ They can render national borders blurry through transnational practices, while sharing a collective identity that is not tied to ethnicity, nationality, or a particular culture. In this thesis, I consider ‘evangelicalism’ as such a transnational social field that spreads across borders and is maintained through the circulation of people, resources, practices, and ideas. I develop in Chapter 4 how attention to the theological backgrounds of the evangelicals we work with helps to conceptualise them as part of the transnational social field of evangelicalism. However, I emphasise the unevenness in who gets to shape it and its local variations and place-making practices.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) famously theorised the global connections between different places and people as five cultural ‘flows’, which result in particular ‘scapes’: he distinguishes between ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas and ideoscapas. The suffix ‘scape’ denotes their irregular shapes, inflected by the situatedness of their actors (which are usually more than an individual). In all of these, the focus is on the movement which constitutes them – and through them, the world. Appadurai’s theory challenges binary (and stationary) models of centre-periphery, push-pull (migration), surplus-deficit, and consumer-producer, in an attempt to argue that the world is fundamentally ‘complex, overlapping, disjunctive’ (Appadurai 1996: 32). Like other scholars of globalisation, Appadurai sees the world as increasingly deterritorialised, leading to a decline of the importance of nation-states (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996). Appadurai’s theory is powerful as an all-encompassing theory about global cultural flows. He recognises the important notion that identities are variously impacted by disjunctured and intersecting social relations, and identifies the complexity of transnational lives.

Appadurai’s work has been built on to conceptualise Christianity as ‘religioscape’ (Hayden & Walker, 2013; McAlister, 1998), or ‘sacroscape’ (Tweed, 2006). This is meant to denote those who identify with the same religious tradition, beyond ethnic or national boundaries, with the added recognition that the identities of those it (partly) describes intersect with other, disjunctive, ‘scapes’. The academic lens of understanding Christianity as a border-crossing, resource-circulating, context-transforming, global formation has been important in accounting for its wide spread, transnational connections, and many local variations, including Palestinian Christianity. Palestinian evangelicals, or Arab evangelicals at large, have not featured in studies by anthropologists of global Christianity so far. Perhaps due to the small number of

Palestinian evangelicals, anthropological review monographs of 'global' Christianity have rarely mentioned evangelicalism in the Middle East (Coleman & Hackett, 2015; Freston, 2001; Lewis, 2004). In contrast, scholars of Palestinian Christianity (Bowman, 1993; 2011a, 2012; Kårtveit, 2014; Lybarger, 2007a) to date have conceptualised Palestinian Christianity largely as social and cultural marker, and investigated Palestinian Christians' positioning within their social and political contexts. They have usually treated Palestinian Christians as ethnically and nationally 'bounded', rather than studying their belonging to their larger denominational or religious bodies.

Their conceptualisation of Christianity as a social and cultural marker is perhaps unsurprising given the history of the millet system in the Ottoman era (Masters, 2001). Christianity was one of the *dhimmi*, i.e. minority groups that had particular rights and protection as such. As a result of this history, most of the Christian denominations present in Israel and the Palestinian territories today have developed distinct social identities. While their work has rendered important insights into the economic, social, and political challenges of Palestinian Christians, I make a case that Palestinian Christianity can be understood more productively by considering it as part of a larger, global faith community. This is an important innovation both for scholars of Palestinian Christianity and Palestine in general, as well as for the study of global Christianity which has rarely taken into account Christian communities from the Middle East. Even though the Palestinian evangelical community is very small, due to their residence in the (for evangelicals) highly important territory of Israel-Palestine, they are important to consider in conceptualisations of 'global' Christianity as they reveal fault lines in the making of evangelical orthodoxy.

One exception to previous work on Palestinian Christianity as social and cultural identity is Mark Calder's (2017) work on Syriac Orthodox Christians in Bethlehem. He

portrays them as belonging to a larger Syriac church ‘body’ through participation in the Eucharist (Qurbono), and argues that how Christians imagine the ‘church’ (as transnational body) could be a productive lens for the anthropological study of Christianity. While his conceptualisation places Palestinian Christians into the context of their Eastern faith family, I conceptualise Palestinian evangelical Christians as part of their ‘global’ faith family, with its distinctly Western Protestant roots. With their emphasis on religious liberty, the Western Protestant missionaries of the 1950s struggled significantly with the ‘hereditary’ denominational and sectarian identities in the Middle East context (Rowden, 2010). This struggle continues among Western evangelical pilgrims,³⁰ tourists, volunteers, missionaries, and even some Palestinian evangelicals today. On the one hand, Palestinian evangelicals share the belief in the necessity to be ‘born again’, i.e. make an individual decision to claim belonging to the evangelical faith system. On the other hand, they and their families are deeply connected to the historical sectarian identities and the ways in which they are administered by the Israeli state. For example, some evangelical couples decide to hold their wedding in the Catholic Church to which their larger families belong rather than in the small evangelical church they attend each Sunday, in order to honour their families’ identities. How Palestinian evangelicals navigate their minority status in Israel-Palestine and the wider Middle East is the subject of Chapters 5.

The existence of Palestinian evangelicals, a product of Western evangelicalism but also at odds with its dominant theologies by their very identities, raises fundamental questions about the dimensions of ‘local’ and ‘global’. The first sustained theorisation of what it means for Christianity to be a ‘global’ formation was developed by Simon

³⁰ How Western pilgrims enact the spatial element of a sacred site is the topic of Chapter 7, but recurs throughout the thesis as element of Western evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine.

Coleman (2000) in his study of the Swedish charismatic movement, *Livets Ord* (lit. 'Word of Life'). In an important nuance to the broad theories of cultural globalisation, such as Appadurai's, Coleman (2000: 6) argued that globalisation is both a social process as well as an embodied practice – it is 'a quality of action, a means of investing an event, object or person with a certain kind of translocal value.' In other words, globalisation can be 'a form of embodied disposition ... that is geared towards the transcendence of the local and yet can be articulated in specific contexts of belief and practice' (Coleman 2000: 6). One of the central aspects of Coleman's work therefore is the ethnographic investigation of the charismatic believers' global 'consciousness' or 'orientation' (2000: 62), i.e. the way in which they imagine and perform their belonging to a 'global' faith movement. Through his work, Coleman complicated Appadurai's (1996: 32) tension between 'homogeneity' and 'heterogeneity', by showing how charismatic Christians are both affected by globalising processes, as well as 'creat[ing] them in their own image' (Coleman 2000: 6).

Coleman's approach suggests that it is difficult to prise apart the different 'scales' of 'local' and 'global'. His work prefigures Henrietta Moore's (2004) suggestion that both the 'global' and the 'local' should be understood as abstract 'concept-metaphors'. While, as Coleman demonstrated, it is possible concretely to specify the concepts through ethnography (cf. Burawoy et al. 2001), Moore argues that the 'concept-metaphor' itself remains ambiguous. Like similar concepts (e.g. 'gender', 'the self'), 'local' and 'global' do not have a clear and empirically determinable referent, but rather point to an area 'of shared exchange' (Moore 2004: 73). This opens up a space for 'contestation, debate, and action' (Moore 2004: 74). To understand 'local' and 'global' as area of shared exchange has helped to avoid relegating Christianity as a hegemonic ideology that needs to be resisted (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff 1991) or that is entirely

unproblematic for the constitution of locally specific faith lives (Howell, 2008). The tension between processes of cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation within global charismatic Christianity has also been taken up by Joel Robbins (2004). With reference to the variation of positions within existing work on the new forms of charismatic Christianity, Robbins argues that these processes can happen simultaneously: when charismatic Christianity encounters traditional cultures, it enters into a relationship of rejection as well as preservation with these. Robbins and Coleman's work point to the complex processes of cultural translation, adaptation, and resistance in each locality that comes into contact with charismatic Christianity.

Similarly, rather than prising apart the elements that 'belong' to each of the 'scales' of 'local' and 'global' therefore, I am interested in this thesis in understanding how each of these units are *imagined*, and how Western and Palestinian evangelicals co-constitute each other against the backdrop of these imaginations. They all form part of evangelicalism as transnational social field. Yet, rather than feeding into a presumed 'grand story' (Robbins & Engelke, 2010: 625) of 'global' Christianity,³¹ this thesis seeks to understand how contemporary Palestinian evangelicals navigate their lives 'both in relation to and against the global frame' (Robbins and Engelke 2010: 625). I develop the varying imaginations of the 'local' and 'global', and the role of power within these conceptualisations and performances, in Chapter 8.

³¹ A 'grand story' has for example been suggested by Philipp Jenkins (2011), who predicts exponential growth of Christianity as growing further and especially in the global South. However, while growth may indeed happen, this does not mean that the cultural significance of Christianity wanes in other parts of the world such as the United States or Europe (cf. Wuthnow, 2009).

2.2 Theologically engaged Anthropology

I described in the sections above the purchase of conceptualising Palestinian evangelicals as part of a transnational social field of evangelicalism, and studying their ‘global’ orientation. This leads to the question as to how such a conceptualisation can be achieved, especially within a transnational social field that is so vastly different in its approaches to certain theological questions. A fruitful way of addressing this question was to pay attention to the ‘interpretative regime’ (Crapanzano 2000: 16) Palestinian evangelicals are part of: to study the theological backgrounds of those I worked with. It was helpful to explore how those I worked with understood God and his work, as well as their own relation to him. With particular reference to the debates about how Christians ought to engage with the State of Israel and the question of evangelical orthodoxy, it was further helpful to consider what kind of ‘Christian subject’ this understanding should foster – i.e. how Christians should relate to the world around them, including their notions of citizenship and politics as a result of their understanding of who God is and how he acts in the world (cf. Bialecki, 2009b, 2017; Daswani, 2015; O’Neill, 2009, 2015). This is explored at the example of four in-depth portraits of Palestinian evangelicals in Chapter 5.

One of the academic goals of the development of the subfield of the Anthropology of Christianity in light of globalising processes has been the critical reflection about how Anthropology ought to deal with Christian theology (Bialecki et al., 2008; Cannell, 2006; Coleman, 2015; Fountain, 2013; Fountain & Lau, 2013; Lemons, 2018; Meneses & Bronkema, 2017; Robbins & Engelke, 2010; Robbins, 2006, 2013). Before the establishment of the sub-field of the Anthropology of Christianity, there had been a long-standing unease with the study of Christianity due to its foundational presence in the anthropological discipline – which, after all, has been defined as an inherently

secular science (cf. Cannell, 2006). Christians had of course featured in anthropological work before the emergence of a distinctive subfield of the Anthropology of Christianity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Hefner, 1993; Brusco, 1995; Van Der Veer, 1996). However, scholars seem to have been uncomfortable with engaging with the theologies of those they studied, and rather highlighted how newly, often forcibly, Christianized populations resisted Christianity.

A prominent example of how Christianity used to be treated is that of the in-depth study of Christianity in the South African context by Jean and John Comaroff (1991). In a discussion of their work, Joel Robbins (2007) demonstrates the theoretical assumptions that seem to have led the Comaroffs – in an otherwise astute and rich study – to sideline Christianity, despite it appearing in their title. In particular, Robbins points to their commitment to ‘continuity thinking’ (Robbins 2007: 10), that struggles to come to terms with ‘Christian ideas about time, change, and belief’ (Robbins 2007: 6). Notions of radical rupture in a convert’s life are difficult to grapple with amid anthropological emphases on the slowness of cultural change. Thus, in their study on the encounter between British missionaries and Tswana in South Africa, the Comaroffs were interested in showing how the Tswana resisted what the Comaroffs considered a hegemonic ideology. Notably, they pointed to how Christianity ‘cast a shadow over Tswana cultural identity’ (1991: 219) – a shadow, presumably, that ought rather to be lifted. They considered Christianity therefore merely as ‘noise’ in the background (cf. Coleman & Hackett, 2015: 1) rather than a meaningful ideology which the Tswana could take part in shaping.

The discomfort with the epistemological shift, that does take seriously Christian commitments and theologies as ‘data’, is evidenced by the reactions launched especially at those who studied a Western form of Christianity, such as Simon Coleman’s work on

Swedish charismatics ('why are you studying such crap?' 2015: 275; cf. Harding, 1991: 375). Harding interprets this discomfort as a tension between the repugnance for evangelicals' anti-modern worldview, and the acceptance that one's own rejection of them goes against anthropology's premise of openness to the marginal (Harding, 1991:392; cf. Coleman 2015). Somehow, Christians and their theologies seemed to be the 'wrong Other,' or at least an uncomfortably complex 'Other' for many anthropologists.

The new attention to Christianity as a subject in itself has therefore opened up a productive space to interrogate both the theological heritage of the Christians we work with, as well as that of the anthropological discipline itself (cf. Asad, 1993; Sahlins et al., 1996). Scholars promoting a 'post-secular' anthropology argue that the engagement of anthropologists with Christian theology has significantly aided in self-reflection about their own positionalities: secularism as 'norm' needs to be questioned in the face of the Christian 'Other' (Fountain, 2013; Howell, 2007; Meneses et al. 2014; Meneses & Bronkema, 2017; Merz & Merz, 2015). These epistemological considerations have led to an interdisciplinary debate between theologians and anthropologists, in which anthropologists, in Joel Robbins' words, ought to admit that theologians 'get some things right about the world that they [anthropologists] currently get wrong' (Robbins, 2006: 287). Derrick Lemons (2018) has pushed the encounter between anthropology and theology to a more institutional level in his *Centre for Theologically Engaged Anthropology* (Atlanta, Georgia). Similar to Robbins' tentative suggestion, he promotes a 'transformative' encounter between the two disciplines. Such a transformative encounter is defined by Lemons (in press) as 'a deep engagement in which theological and anthropological questions, problems, issues, or topics pass through a process of mutual collaboration and new insights emerge'. For those engaged in this endeavor, the

hope is that a theologically engaged Anthropology can help to explore the connection between the study of humanity and humanity's various quests to understand the spiritual aspects of life.

I discuss in Chapter 3 my own positionality as anthropologist with a Christian background. However, I want to specify here that my own work in this thesis, while taking seriously the theological commitments of those I worked with, treats their theology as 'data'. This means I have refrained from taking over theological reasoning myself, as suggested by some in connection with Derrick Lemons' *Centre for Theologically Engaged Anthropology*. After all, theology is a 'committed' discipline in its very constitution' (Coleman, 2010: 797) and therefore ultimately pursues different goals to the discipline of anthropology (cf. Robbins, 2003b: 287). For many of those I worked with, their Christianity was more than a social and cultural marker, but rather a belief system that significantly shaped their ethical and political practices. My attention to their theological background and history, the genealogy of what 'evangelical' means in this context, has enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of Palestinian evangelicals who remain counter-intuitively apolitical amid the social and political pressures they are facing.

Engaging with the theologies of those I worked with has therefore also productively enabled me to approach this study through a lens of the *longue durée*. So, while situating my work within the theoretical achievements of the anthropology of global Christianity, I am also mindful of the fact that Christians have been interconnected transnationally for a lot longer than the rise of globalisation. Had I not been attentive to their theological commitments, I might not have understood the nuances of their positioning within 'global' evangelicalism, and the role of power in this process. I develop this argument especially in Chapter 4 through recording the example of a, for

Palestinian evangelicals, unusual activism in the form of a school strike. With this, I differ significantly from previous work on Palestinian Christianity, which considered the Christianity of those they worked with as social and cultural marker rather than ontological commitment. This means paying attention to the understanding of those I worked with of ‘who God is, how he works in the world, how people ought to relate to God, and what they can expect from him.’ (Haynes 2018: 266). A further dimension of theology, I suggest, is that it inspires how Christians should relate to the world around them, including their notions of citizenship and politics – their notion of God’s Kingdom. Yet, even as I explored these notions, my attention rested on how Palestinian evangelicals navigated their belonging to a ‘global’ faith community, and how they often wrestled with the demands of a dominant theological narrative and their political and ethnic identity in the Israeli state. This means that I did draw inspiration from the earlier work on Christianity, which considered Christianity as cultural ‘hegemony’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991) – however, I approached it critically and sought to balance their attention to power relationships with the fact that those I worked with follow their own theological commitments in their relating to the world around them.

2.3 Evangelicals and the Bible

A way in which evangelical beliefs become visible and are articulated is through evangelical engagement with, and reference to, the Bible (Bielo, 2009b, 2011, 2015; Crapanzano, 2000; Harding, 2000; Luhrmann, 2012; Malley, 2004). In the context of Israel-Palestine too, evangelicals used biblical references to justify their eschatological beliefs, their practices in relation to the territory and its inhabitants, and their resistance to dominant narratives. The Bible also featured in everyday interactions: for example, the Bible was used in a competitive game in a ‘chapel service’ at Nazareth Baptist

School, during which pupils had to find the correct chapter and verse as quickly as possible – a way, as the Bible teacher told me, to make them familiar with the content and structure of the Bible (Figure 3). The Bible also became a sign, for example in the form of a photo or word art image in the background of PowerPoint slides of lyrics projected during times of sung worship. Further, the Bible was rendered ‘material’, for example in the living history museum that sought to depict biblical stories, *Nazareth Village*, which will be the focus of Chapter 6. The Bible was important as object and as textual reference point for the evangelicals I worked with. In Chapter 4, I excavate the roots of the current affinity for the Israeli state among the majority of evangelicals. Here, I want to offer a brief introduction to the roots of Protestant engagement with the Bible as a background to the dominant theologies that have shaped my field site.



Figure 3. Bible game for school children at Nazareth Baptist School.

How, exactly, has this ancient text been made meaningful for the present moment by its evangelical users? The roots of today’s evangelical Bible use can be traced back to the

Protestant Reformation.³² While space does not permit a more detailed exploration of this important history, scholars of today's evangelical literalism have shown that the impact of Protestant Bible use of the past century lies chiefly in the fact that biblical

³² In advocating for a break with the authority of 'tradition', Martin Luther promoted lay reading of biblical texts in the vernacular, which he made accessible through their translation. Together with the development of what Benedict Anderson (2006) called 'print capitalism', which allowed for wide dissemination of the written word, Luther's translation of the Bible from Latin to vernacular German changed Protestants' engagement with text, and, as a consequence, their world (though some argue that this development actually triggered the Reformation (Eisenstein, 1980), while others see the Reformation as further establishing printing as a means of communication (Pettegree, 2015). Either way, one can safely assume that both spurred each other on). The consequences of this development were far-reaching: Graham (1987) demonstrated how through the facilitated distribution of texts, the individual moved from listening to engaging in private reading and learning. Ong (2002: 115ff) notes the resulting transformed communicative relationship: the visual printed word now dominated over the audible. This, he maintains, has created the possibility of a fixed text, in which the author has limited control over how the text is interpreted and used. It also changed the assumptions readers make about the nature of language, its relationship to reality and figurativeness, and its application (Boyarin, 1993; Crapanzano, 2000: xvi). The Reformation, with its emphasis of *sola scriptura* as authority, is thus at the start of the modern paradigm in which authority must be written and impersonal. These developments imbue the statement 'the Bible says...' with authority, by being referable to in the third person, and by empowering individual readers to use and, in theory, interpret its content.

However, the new hermeneutics which Luther famously referred to as *sola scriptura* were in fact – and perhaps unsurprisingly – also mediated by his own interpretations: his biblical translations were accompanied by commentaries, and together with his Bible translation he also distributed his essays and sermons in pamphlets. Further, Simeon Zahl (2018) develops the idea that in formulating theology, theologians tend to choose the tradition they draw on based on affect. This is of course equally influenced by their cultural and political contexts. Even what Luther himself believed the Bible said was influenced by 'tradition', i.e. influences from Christian past practices – in his case, the thought of Augustine. The point of this is the notion that 'theology is always an ethically valenced exercise' (Zahl 2018: 321).

Stanley Fish (1980) stipulates that the practice of reading cannot be about excavating pre-existing meaning from text that can be accessed 'if only one works hard enough'. Rather, he emphasises that meaning is constituted among readers in a discursive practice that interacts with the readers' social, historical, intellectual and political circumstances. Similarly, Luther's reading of scripture was strongly influenced by the political and cultural context of his day: the same year of the publication of his 95 theses, 1517, also saw the takeover of Jerusalem and Cairo by the Ottomans, who later besieged Vienna. Thus, Luther's writings did not just challenge Catholicism, they also responded to the threat of Islam, personified in the Ottoman 'Turk'. In a sermon entitled '*War Sermon Against the Turk*' (1529), for example, Luther pointed to the dual 'evil' of Islam and Catholicism: 'The Turk fills heaven with Christians by murdering their bodies, but the pope does what he can to fill hell with Christians through his blasphemous teachings.' (cf. Smith 2013: 50; cf. Luther, 1883). His interpretation was therefore greatly influenced by the context of his day. In his new hermeneutics Luther departed from the medieval practice of seeing scripture as literary, allegorical, moral and analogical (Pelikan, Hotchkiss and Price, 1996). Instead, he emphasised the 'grammatical, the literal, the historical, and, in very limited cases, the allegorical senses of scripture' (Smith 2013: 54). The printing of Bibles and their reorganisation by introducing chapter and verse numbers invited categorisation. One of the ways in which readers interacted with the text was to interpret history through a scriptural lens. For example, Luther's use of history to interpret scripture is reflected in his commentary on Ezekiel from 1530, where he identifies 'Gog and Magog as the Ottoman Empire (cf. Smith 2013). Similarly, Luther interpreted the book of revelation through a lens of history in order to determine what still ought to happen before the world could end. As will become clear in the discussion of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism in Chapter 4, this practice of inhabiting history through a biblical lens is still prominent among evangelicals today (Crapanzano 2000: 150ff), as is the idea of Islam as the 'enemy' in Christian Zionist world views, explored in Chapter 7.

interpretation is formed by cultural and political contexts of the Bible user (cf. Crapanzano 2000: 7). ‘Literalist’ movements exist in a number of areas of social life, from music, to law, to Qur’anic interpretation. In this thesis, I use the term ‘literalism’ to refer to evangelical ‘fundamentalist’ ways of reading the Bible, in contrast to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation of mainstream Protestantism. Both the theologies of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism at the heart of the dominant evangelical narratives of Israel belong to variations of the literalist tradition, and I show the way in which social and political context influence evangelical Bible use at the example of evangelical approaches to Israel in Chapter 6.

Brian Malley (2004) provides essential insights into evangelical literalism in his book, *How the Bible Works*. Importantly for this project, he shows that ‘literalism’ is in fact a discursive process in itself (Malley 2004: 92f; cf. Durbin, 2014). This discursive process arguably began in the composition of the biblical canon itself. Similar to the way in which Luther passed on the vernacular Bible with included commentary, Malley shows that rather than inheriting ‘hermeneutic’ tradition, evangelicals actually inherit an ‘interpretative’ tradition (Malley 2004: 73ff). They do not pass on methods for *reading* the Bible, but pass on *sets of beliefs* that are tied to biblical texts. The text is thus still the object of a hermeneutic activity of sorts, but

the goal of that hermeneutic activity is not so much to establish the meaning of the text as to establish transitivity between the text and beliefs. ... A great deal of ‘what the Bible says’ may be transmitted quite apart from actual exegesis. (Malley 2004: 73)

While the Protestant Reformation empowered the private Bible reader, it is important to point out that this discursive process of evangelical biblical interpretation can also be a collective exercise. In his ethnography of an evangelical Bible Study group, James Bielo (2009) demonstrated that this discursive process is directed at relevance for the

believer (cf. Boyarin 1993). The fact that the Bible is seen to ‘speak’ today points to the understanding that the texts and stories therein are used dynamically, and applied to everyday situations believers find themselves in. Direct links are made between characters in the Bible and the believers themselves.

To give an example for this that is relevant for this thesis, I point to Sean Durbin’s (2014: 83) work on Christian Zionism, which will be further discussed in the chapters to come. He demonstrates the connections conservative evangelicals make between the Book of Esther in the Old Testament and their role in today’s geopolitical situation. They see themselves as slipping into ‘the mantle of Esther’ to defeat ‘Haman’, by which they mean contemporary Iran.³³ The story suggests a particular role the United States is understood to play in current geopolitics in the Middle East. Within the collective experience of the group, believers ascertain the ‘correct’ interpretation of a text, and so, through censoring and promoting particular views, maintain an interpretative regime that is linked to their social and cultural circumstances. What the ‘Bible’ signifies in a common evangelical utterance of ‘the Bible says’ is already often imbued with a particular socio-cultural specific meaning. ‘The Bible says’ becomes an index for a particular theological framework in which meanings, rather than hermeneutical practices, are passed on. In Chapter 7, I explore the languages of ‘race’ that these interpretative regimes have given rise to, and the way in which Middle Eastern Palestinian evangelicals reject these.

³³ This story is recorded in the biblical book of Esther. Haman, a powerful advisor of the King of Persia, was angered by the refusal of the Jew Mordecai, and uncle of Queen Esther, to bow down to him. With the King’s permission, he decreed to kill all Jews under the King’s rule in revenge. The Jewish Queen Esther courageously and successfully reveals her faith and begs the King to thwart Haman’s plot. The King kills Haman when he hears of his plot. In Christian Zionist theologies, characters of this story are assigned to contemporary actors, including modern nation-states.

Vincent Crapanzano (2000) makes the case in his *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* that this interpretative regime, or literalism, is far more wide-spread than the evangelical approach to biblical scripture alone. I mention this by way of showing that literalists are both influenced by their social and political contexts in their use of the Bible, but also influence these in return. The intellectual and cultural heritage of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and its assumptions about a pre-existing ‘truth’ continue to influence areas that are otherwise no longer specifically ‘religious’, such as the judicial system. It may also play a role in the hesitance to make Christianity an object of anthropological enquiry in the first place (Asad, 1993; Marshall, 2014). Crapanzano postulates that ‘we [Americans] live under an interpretative regime, or interpretive regimes, which for the most part we take for granted. ... Seemingly removed from the moral and political dimensions of social life, they may in fact have enormous social and political consequence’ (Crapanzano 2000: 16). Such is the power of what we ‘make scripture do for us’ (Wimbush 2016). Webb Keane (2007) explored this dynamic – the ‘moralization of history’ (Keane, 2009) – in his book on the Indonesian mission encounter, in which he interrogated the meaning of ‘modernity’ from the perspective of a previously non-Christianized population. I follow a similar concern in this thesis (though on a smaller scale than Keane) regarding the negotiation of ‘evangelicalism’ between Christianized, however culturally different, evangelicals.

The biblical scholar Vincent Wimbush refers to the phenomenon Crapanzano described as ‘scriptural regime’. By this he means the ‘ideologies we hold about ourselves and our social relations and dynamics’ that have sprung from the use of foundational texts, such as the Bible (Wimbush 2016: 54). These ideologies are

about the ultimate politics of language use and communication in the form of the discursive regimes (scripturalisation) we create, forget we do so, and then project outward – always with profoundly mixed effects for our comity and flourishing, our humanness.

Wimbush emphasises in his work that this regime is created in the encounters between the ‘West’ and the ‘Other’, or ‘civilisation’ and the ‘savage’ (Wimbush 2017: 3; cf. Wimbush, 2012). The ‘scriptural regime’, or ‘interpretative regime,’ that has developed as a result of this encounter is thus a way of addressing fear and anxiety in humans (Wimbush 2017). It is meant to reassure the identity of the reader (in the widest sense). If meaning can be rooted in a text, and this text be passed on with a belief system, rather than openness for complete re-interpretation, the text becomes ‘at least the illusion of a secure reference point’ (Crapanzano 2000: 3). Eventually, this is how interpretative regimes develop, and is important to bear in mind in the following chapters depicting encounters between Western and Palestinian evangelical Christians, as they navigate a particularly dominant interpretative regime with regards to Israel-Palestine.

One way in which such interpretative regimes have been rendered visible is through the scholarship of the ‘social life of scriptures’ (Bielo, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) and ‘scripturalisation’ (Wimbush 2008, 2012, 2015, 2016). Paying attention to the ‘social life’ of scriptures can reveal the forces that monitor and legitimise certain interpretations of texts and practices. Wimbush calls this process ‘scripturalisation’: he focuses on studying ‘the work – and the consequences of such – that we make ‘scriptures’ do for us’ (Wimbush 2016: 54). He emphasises further that ‘the primary focus should be placed not upon texts per se (that is, upon their content-meanings), but upon ... the signs, material products, ritual practices and performances, expressivities, orientations, ethics, and politics associated with the phenomenon of the invention and uses of ‘scriptures’.’ (Wimbush 2008: 3).

Such an approach is a valuable addition to the debates of theologically engaged anthropology, because it suggests a useful way in which anthropology can ‘use’ theological data. By ethnographically studying what those we work with ‘make scripture do’ for them – how it inspires and is drawn on to justify their practices, investments, ethical and political commitments – one can understand better what aspects contribute to their ideas of what it means to be a ‘good Christian’. Further, the different performances and debates accompanying this process provide a window into who, or what, can render a particular interpretation more popular than others. Thus, by looking at the political and social aspects that influence how evangelicals read and interpret the Bible, and, consequently, what practices they count as thus authorised, I explore in this thesis how one can begin to gain an understanding about the ways in which evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ is established.

A particularly illustrative way to do this is to study how scripture is rendered ‘tangible’, such as in biblical gardens or theme parks (Bielo, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). Such reconstructions are instructive through the choices made in their creation, as well as through their ambition to form particular Christian selves through curations of biblical ‘truths’ in which visitors can immerse themselves. Biblical reconstructions, on the one hand, seem interactive and flexible by encouraging creative engagement with its content; on the other hand, they are set within particular socio-political contexts, and are aimed at being immersive and through appealing to all senses (or what Bielo (2018c: 32) calls ‘sensual indexicality’; cf. Ron and Feldman 2009) communicate often implicit (or ‘embodied’) ‘truths’ that can be difficult to prise apart and argue with: they can thus become a powerful medium in affirming particular biblical interpretations that are conditioned by particular socio-political contexts. I discuss the performances of the

biblical living history museum of the first century, *Nazareth Village*, and the associated processes of negotiations of meaning in Chapter 6.

2.4 Transnational ‘flows’ and friction

In the previous sections, I positioned this thesis within the scholarship of the Anthropology of Christianity and globalisation and explained how it led me to reconceptualise Palestinian Christianity as part of a transnational social field of evangelicalism. I discussed why it is necessary to understand the theological commitments of the Christians we work with, and how evangelical literalism continues to influence today’s evangelical Bible use and theology. Having laid these foundations, I now want to outline how these literatures converge in advancing the hypothesis of this project: that, similar to Asad’s (2009 [1986]) conceptualisation of Islam, Christianity is a discursive tradition in which orthodoxy in theology and practice is shaped by power.

To some, this may sound somewhat like a truism. After all, scholarship of globalisation and transnationalism has already shown that transnational ‘flows’ of people, resources, and ideas are uneven, asymmetrical, are held up by obstacles, and shaped unequally by different actors with different degrees of influence (Burawoy, 2000; Heyman & Campbell, 2009; Massey, 1994; Tsing, 2005; Vásquez, 2009). Geographers and historians have discussed the formation of space and place, drawing on different traditions. A prominent critique of Appadurai’s concept of unhindered ‘flows’ is, for example, that not all flows are ‘created equal.’ Heyman and Campbell (2009: 131) argued that especially flows of capital and ‘landscapes of centralised political power’ have a stronger capacity to shape a world of intersecting ‘scapes’ than Appadurai’s notion assumes. Their critique sought to explain the existence of continuing inequalities in a seemingly deterritorialised world. It is of course true that many aspects of social life

today are deterritorialised, but there are, they argue, continuing bastions of stable shaping power.

In many discussions of transnational ‘flows’ the historical dimensions of interconnectedness are under-emphasised. For example, Appadurai argued that ‘configurations of people, places, and heritage lose all semblance of isomorphism’ (1996: 46) – he argues that they were now completely ‘unbounded.’ This leads to a disregard for the perpetuation of historical inequalities in transnational ‘flows’. In contrast, Heyman and Campbell (2009: 143) point to the fact that ‘geographic spaces are constructed over time, and flows do not only erode geography; rather, they may create it, reproduce it, transform it, or undermine it.’ They echo historians such as Frederick Cooper (2001), who, too, argued that instead of contrasting the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, one should highlight that which is *in between*, and study particular configurations of power across time and space, i.e. ‘the channels through which power is exercised’ (Cooper 2001: 198). Cooper cautions to consider the historical dimensions of ‘flows’, which enlighten us as to the power dynamics at play in current conceptualisations of places.

Anna Tsing (2005) convincingly portrayed the ‘friction’ in the ‘flow’ of ideas about, and the formation of, a place, in her ethnography of the Indonesian rain forest. The metaphor of ‘friction’ demonstrates the disrupted nature of global flows of political ideas, capital, and scientific knowledge, for example in the economy of and activism against deforestation. Tsing highlights the social creativity, with its potential for surprises, barriers, and messiness, that is involved in shaping places wherever the ‘flows’ converge. Another, earlier example is Doreen Massey's (1994) seminal work on time space compression, illustrated at the example of her London borough of Kilburn. It is inhabited by a large number of people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds,

who all have a different ‘sense of place’. Kilburn is the result of a long imperial history and intersections. Massey (1994: 7) therefore conceptualises places as ‘articulated moments in networks of social relations’. She developed the notion of ‘geometries of power’ in how ideas about, and places themselves, are shaped by transnational ‘flows’. She argues that people have differential access to the benefits of globalisation, conditioned by their gender, ‘race’, religion, or economic status. These determine how and where they can travel, and how and where they can disseminate their ideas or shape political processes. Manuel Vásquez (2009) applies the caution of Massey, Cooper, and Tsing to the study of religion. He critiques the ubiquitous use of hydrodynamic vocabulary that suggests unhindered ‘flows’, and promotes an alternative conceptualisation of transnational connections through a network approach (Vásquez, 2008). Similar to Cooper he argues that ‘historically rich genealogical studies of the development of particular linkages’ (Vásquez 2008: 173) contribute to a ‘historicized and materialized perspective on religion which is attentive to the dimensions of power and resistance’ (Vásquez 2008: 177).

In my initial scoping for this project, it soon became clear to me that the ways in which ‘Israel’ was conceptualised by evangelicals, and the kinds of ways in which particular versions of it were performed and shaped, diverged widely. Evangelicals of different opinions tried to change each other’s minds about this issue – in which some (Western evangelicals) had more influence to push their agenda than others (Palestinian evangelicals). This alerted me to the notion that ideas, theologies, resources, and people do not ‘flow evenly’ within the transnational social field of evangelicalism. Moreover, it seemed that evangelicals pursued contesting ‘isomorphifications’ of people, places, and heritage: Christian Zionists claim the heritage of Israel for the Jews (and themselves as their descendants). This ‘adopted nationalism’ projects a dream of a singular nation with

a singular people onto Israel. It is pursued by means of foreign policy (e.g. United States funding for Israel, or the movement of the American embassy), but the idea stems from a religious imagination that has been in long historical interaction with specific social and cultural forms. Palestinian evangelicals whose identity is at odds with this theology (largely) claim Israel as heritage for themselves as descendants of the first Christians and as ‘original’ inhabitants of the country. Many do not pursue political agendas in creating this vision on the ground, but some advocate for this idea and try to change Western evangelicals’ theologies and practices in relation to Israel. I discuss the varying place-making projects, their ‘local’ and ‘global’ dimensions, and their contestations in chiefly in Chapter 8. To illustrate the kinds of obstacles in transnational ‘flows’, and the very real consequences of the ‘geometry of power’ in accessing the benefits of globalisation is to point to the fact that many Palestinian evangelicals cannot travel as easily as Western evangelicals: they have to undergo severe scrutiny and security checks at airports, have to be granted permission to leave the Palestinian territory, if not Israeli citizens, and are potentially viewed as ‘threat’ at their destinations due to their Middle Eastern provenance. This means they are less able to travel on advocacy trips and disseminate their ideas as speakers at conferences and other venues in North America and Europe. In a more conceptual sense, there are economic, cultural, and political barriers in Palestinian evangelicals’ capacity to disseminate their ideas of Israel, and thus shape ‘global’ discourse on it. This will be explored in detail in the chapters to come.

Amid the ‘explosion’ of charismatic Christianity worldwide (Jenkins, 2007) and scholars’ emphasis of charismatic Christianity’s ‘portability’ (Csordas, 2009), the attention to what shapes transnational ‘flows’ within global Christianity has been largely neglected. It is true that earlier scholarship on Christianity heeded relationships

of power, especially when discussing the colonial Christianization of previously non-Christianized people. But, as I argued above, this literature does not give credit to the actual or potential theological commitments of those who have become Christians in the process, i.e. their agency in shaping Christianity and negotiating orthodoxy. Those who have focused on the localisation of Christianity, including theology, in other contexts have usually either focused on how ‘foreign’ elements are taken over without much contestation (Howell, 2008), or on how those elements have been syncretised (e.g. Engelke, 2007; Keane, 2007; Robbins, 2004a). However, there is a lack of understanding of the actual processes of negotiation of orthodoxy of theology and practice across power differentials. I therefore seek to show in this thesis that, just as within other transnational social fields, there is no ‘even flow’ of people, resources, and ideas within the transnational social field of evangelicalism.

The lack of attention to the role of power in shaping evangelical orthodoxy is somewhat surprising, considering the evocation of the Anthropology of Islam as potential model for the recent anthropological inquiry into Christianity (Anidjar 2009; Robbins 2003). In this neighbouring field, the role of power has received much more attention (Asad 2009 [1986]; Asad 1993). In particular, Talal Asad’s idea of religion as ‘discursive tradition’ has proven insightful for the project at hand. Asad’s (1993) main contention in his work was that religion is formed by a concrete set of practical rules attached to processes of power and knowledge. These processes can be conceptualised as ‘discursive tradition’. Asad’s idea, formulated against attempts at finding a universal definition of religion as promoted for example by Geertz (1973)³⁴ casts any religious

³⁴ Though see critiques of Asad’s treatment of Geertz, e.g. in Engelke & Tomlinson (2006) or Caton (2006).

tradition as a historically developed discourse around a certain set of texts, in which orthodoxy (in doctrine and practice) is a relationship of power.

While Asad himself focuses on Islam in the working out of his concept, he already hints at the fact that Christianity, too, bears the marks of a ‘discursive tradition’ shaped by power in his essay on *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*: ‘I find it impossible to accept that Christian practice and discourse throughout history have been less intimately concerned with the uses of political power for religious purposes than the practice and discourse of Muslims’ (Asad 2009 [1986]: 5). Asad invokes the ‘long history since Constantine, in which Christian emperors and kings, lay princes and ecclesiastical administrators, Church reformers and colonial missionaries’ have used power ‘to create or maintain the social conditions in which men and women might live Christian lives.’

The questions of ‘what is a Christian?’, or even ‘what is Christianity?’, have of course received attention galore (e.g. Anidjar 2015; Bialecki 2012; Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008; Cannell 2006; Coleman and Hackett 2015; Jenkins 2012; Robbins 2014, 2003) in the wake of the establishment of the subfield of the Anthropology of Christianity. Some anthropologists of Christianity (Anidjar 2009a, 2015; Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008; Cannell 2005, 2006; Coleman and Hackett 2015; Keane 2007; Robbins 2003) as well as secularism (Cannell 2010; Engelke 2014) have begun to address the dynamics identified by Asad by grappling with Anthropology’s awkward relationship with Christianity. They have revealed some of the discipline’s past blindfolds in finding Christianity ‘too familiar’ to study (especially in its Western form), and the lack of acknowledgement that the concept of ‘religion’ has too often been modelled on aspects of Western Christianity (Asad, 1993; Marshall, 2014). And yet, few contributions have productively highlighted the idea of Christianity as ‘discursive tradition’ (in which of course our production of knowledge is implicated), and fewer

still have considered the role of power in determining the ‘orthodoxy’ of certain beliefs and practices within Christian traditions (beyond their own disciplinary implications in it).

The most detailed engagement with Asad’s concept of religion as a discursive tradition is William Garriott and Kevin O’Neill’s (2008) idea of conceptualising Christianity as a ‘dialogic’ tradition (cf. Bielo, 2011). Closely relying on Asad’s essay on defining ‘Islam’ in the *Anthropology of Islam*, they recommend for anthropologists of Christianity to ‘begin not with *what* their interlocutors do, but *as* their interlocutors do’ (Garriott and O’Neill 2008: 387; emphasis original) – i.e. *to begin as Christians do* (cf. Asad 1986: 14). This means refraining (as anthropologists) from seeking an overarching concept of Christianity in terms of content, but argue in relation to a starting point and consecutive discourse within the tradition. The authors proceed to provide ethnographic examples of situations of ‘*when, where, and how* Christians talk about *who is a Christian*’ (Garriott and O’Neill 2008: 388; emphasis original), in order to illustrate that ‘the dialogic quality of Christianity is present within formal debates among scholars and other religious elites, as much as it is in the everyday practices by which an individual attempts to live as a ‘good Christian’’ (Garriott and O’Neill 2008: 388). They thereby draw the important connection between both theology and practice as constituting parts of a discursive tradition. However, while their approach certainly has analytic value, there is not much consideration about *who* within Christianity in a wider, ‘global’, sense gets to shape the answers. This ethnography of encounters across difference between Palestinian and Western evangelicals will shed further light on this question.

A further helpful avenue has been suggested by Naomi Haynes (2014) in the *Current Anthropology* debate in 2014 on the Anthropology of Christianity.³⁵ She suggests that the disagreements among Christian communities and individuals (which Webb Keane (2014) calls ‘affordances’) are made in ‘a shared cultural and epistemological space’, a space Haynes conceptualises as ‘audiences’ (Haynes 2014: 358): Christians work out their orthodoxies in relation to each other (both within and outside a particular Christian tradition), ‘the world’ at large’ (Haynes 2014: 358), and God. Again, however, this model makes it hard to pinpoint who gets to have a say in the matter, and how orthodoxy is performed.

Another engagement with ‘orthodoxy’ that ought to be mentioned in this context is Andreas Bandak and Tom Boylston’s (2014) work on ‘correctness’ in Orthodox Christianity. The nature of Orthodox Christianities is less focused on text and the idea of the individual as embodying divine truth than Protestant Christianities (cf. Calder 2017). For this reason, Bandak and Boylston understand the notion of ‘orthodoxy’ within Orthodox Christianity as being both a combination of ‘doxa’ and ‘praxis’, as well as being able to exist as ‘mystery’ (2014: 30). In this more hierarchically organised liturgical tradition, ‘orthodoxy’ emerges in the relations between lay people and clergy – questions about correctness are typically ‘deferred’ to the priest or bishop. However, if there are no, or contradicting, answers, ‘orthodoxy’ is believed to lie eventually with God, and the tension of ‘not knowing’ is relieved through the possibility of communion. We will see later how some Palestinian evangelicals exhibit a similar capacity to endure the tension of contradicting notions of orthodoxy by counting themselves as part of a global faith community centred on the centrality of Jesus. Despite focusing on

³⁵ ‘The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity, Diversity, New Directions’, Wenner-Gren Symposium Supplement 10.

Protestant Christianity, similar to Bandak and Boylston I promote a focus on both doctrine and practice. Yet, due to the lack of an overarching authority structure within global evangelicalism, the question of ‘orthodoxy’ remains a more critical issue to resolve for evangelicals than for those belonging to an Orthodox (with big ‘O’) tradition.

Thus, Garriott and O’Neill’s, Haynes’, and Bandak and Boylston’s work has made important gains in firstly, focusing on those problems that are central to Christians themselves in defining what a Christian, and what Christianity, is – i.e. seeing Christianity as a ‘dialogic’, or ‘discursive’ tradition, and secondly, in drawing attention to the different audiences to which Christian claims can be directed. Bandak and Boylston have shown that the tensions of the question of ‘orthodoxy’ can be more easily resolved in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. However, in relation to Protestant Christianity especially the question remains of *who* gets to shape this discourse and what social and political circumstances allow some voices to be more impactful than others in the answering of the question of who a Christian is, or what Christianity we are talking about. We may have found ways around an ‘imposed’ definition by the anthropologist, yet have limited vocabulary yet to account for power differences in the answers to these questions among our Christian respondents. This thesis therefore explores the role of power in the working out of theologies and associated practices among people who already share the same faith tradition.

The notion of power has been approached differently in the anthropological as well as related disciplines. While some draw on theorists that focus on structures of power (e.g. Giddens 1981; Marx and Hobsbawm 1964; Bourdieu 1977) or the power reproduced through institutions (e.g. Durkheim and Simpson 2012; Weber, Parsons, and Henderson 2012), others consider power as both formal and informal, and see the individual as

both able to exercise power and as well as being under its influence (e.g. Foucault and Sheridan 1972; Foucault 1970; Foucault and Sheridan 1995). In this thesis, I adopt Talal Asad's (2006) Foucauldian understanding of power, who sees power as 'capability', i.e. as 'realisation of (internal) potentiality' (Asad 2006: 213). He goes beyond Foucault's theorisation by insisting that the way in which power creates religious 'orthodoxy' lies not just in a 'separate linguistic realm' (Asad 2006: 214), or text and theological debates, but in embodiment. While Asad does not refute the power of language, he considers discourse 'as a physical process' that is linked to a somatic process of 'hearing-seeing-feeling-remembering' (Asad 2006: 213f; cf. Asad 1993). Thus, power is apparent as much in debate as in the performance of particular beliefs and theologies, which is reflected in the discussion of literalism as interpretative regime.

Israel-Palestine is a particularly rich field site for the exploration of how evangelical orthodoxy in theology and practice is negotiated, because it has been of importance to the Christian tradition ever since Christianity first developed after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It continues to be the centre of many evangelical theologies and 'spiritual cartographies' (Coleman, 2013). Palestinian evangelicals and their supporters are part of a transnational evangelical social field that is cast against the powerful 'node' of evangelicals in the USA (and other countries), who support the State of Israel out of a faith commitment. Thus, Israel-Palestine is where the discursive nature of Christianity took its beginning, and also where Western evangelicals have introduced a version of Christianity that has had its 'gravity' in the West. This ethnographic study is therefore insightful for the question at hand not just because it is centred on an instance of theological strife between two unequal 'sides' of the encounter, but also because it geographically returns to the location of Christianity's origin. As Gil Anidjar (2009: 391) paraphrases in his discussion of Asad's work:

We should look again at the site from which the concept [of Christianity] is deployed - after the fashion of 'anthropology at home'. Back to the Holy Land, or, as Serge Margel has it, 'en terre de chrétienté'. After all, the reason why the concept of religion has to be 'cross-cultural' is because it emerges from a specific area, by the hands of specific agents. It is itself the result of cultural translations - discourses and practices.

Of course, Anidjar's call here is meant figuratively, denoting a starting point from which to consider Christianity as a discursive tradition, a 'historicity that shifts from place to place' (Asad 1973: 19). And yet, the ethnography of encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in a sense responds to this call by revealing it as a site where evangelicalism, with its origins in the 'Christian West' (or, to employ a much contested concept, the 'Judeo-Christian civilization', cf. Anidjar 2015; Smith 2013), meets Christianity's original birthplace, and finds a Christian 'Other' there that does not fit into its idea of what Christianity ought to be. Israel-Palestine, in this example, is both the location of a particular theological conflict, as well as the content of it. I therefore explore the role of power in the negotiation of its theological significance and associated practices that allow evangelicals to be 'good Christians'. I also explore how the place itself, and imaginations thereof, are shaped according to dominant ideologies. To do so, I pay attention to processes of curation, resistance, representation, and adaptation.

I referred to the PRIME history textbook in the Introduction, which is made up of two columns of the Israeli and Palestinian narrative respectively, and features a blank column in the middle to invite readers to form a new narrative. Those who see the potential of deterritorialised global flows might be excited at the prospects of the empty space in the PRIME history textbook. For them, it might suggest a move away from 'isomorph' ideas of history and people, and reflect a 'new' space for intersection and disjuncture. However, my focus on the negotiations of evangelical orthodoxy across

difference suggests firstly, that previous unequal stakes in a relationship might matter more than sometimes assumed; rather than moving onto the empty space or engaging with the ‘Other’, some of the students engaging with the history textbook might develop an even fiercer defence of their respective ‘side’. Secondly, rather than becoming meaningless, the narratives on each ‘side’ might in fact be continually co- and re-constituted as a result of global ‘flows’. The negotiations associated with the empty column in the middle might be resisted, manipulated, surpassed, or rejected. In short, what might look like an ‘innocent’ white space in the middle of two narratives might in fact (metaphorically speaking) be reflective of fierce struggles, or remain blank altogether. What this looks like in encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals is the focus of this thesis. The next chapter further introduces the methodological lens of ‘encounters’ and describes the activities through which I collected the ethnographic data on which this thesis rests.

3. Ethnography of encounter

3.1 Original research design

When I first embarked on this project on how evangelical orthodoxy in theology and practice is negotiated, I assumed there to be two broad ‘sides’ to the argument. As outlined in the description of the project origins, I took these ‘sides’ to be made up broadly of predominantly Christian Zionist evangelicals in the ‘West’, and Palestinian evangelicals who oppose the Christian Zionist narrative about Israel. Of course I had been prepared for the ‘sides’ of the argument not to be homogenous,³⁶ but I had been expecting a clear general direction each ‘side’ would defend in their approach to the theological question. After all, the appeal by Palestinian evangelicals to abstain from theologies that negatively impacted Palestinian evangelicals’ lives was what I had witnessed at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference on my scoping visit in 2014, and their position was also evident in their publications which I had studied (Awad, 2008; Munayer and Loden, 2012, 2014; Katanacho, 2013; Isaac, 2015). Consequently, I had designed this project to be a study of theological strife between Palestinian evangelicals and their supporters and their activism in both Israel-Palestine (e.g. through the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference) as well as at locations in North America and Europe, and the pro-Israel evangelicals they seek to address.

In my design of this project, I had taken inspiration from the anthropological methodological work that recognised that field sites can no longer be culturally, ethnically, nationally, and/or territorially ‘bounded’ if we wanted to capture complex, multiple, and mobile ethnographic contexts (Burawoy, 2000; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2003; Glick-Schiller et al. 2012; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Inda

³⁶ Or as Webb Keane (2007: 33) has it in his ethnography of the Sumbanese and Dutch Calvinists, ‘[i]t is an encounter in which each side extends away from the meeting place in numerous other directions.’

& Rosaldo, 2002; Marcus, 1995). In order to study evangelicalism as transnational social field as outlined in Chapter 2, I was initially drawn to Marcus' (1995: 105) idea of multi-sited fieldwork. He defined it as being

designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.

Marcus suggested 'following' the circulation of meaning, objects and identities in 'diffuse time-space' (1995: 96), and establishing one's site by 'following' people, 'following' things, 'following' metaphors, 'following' biographies, or 'following' conflicts. Considering evangelicalism a 'transnational social field' (Schiller and Levitt, 2004), I believed I would gain insights into the negotiation of theology and practice if I 'followed the conflict' around the question of whether the State of Israel was a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, at interactions between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine and on Palestinian evangelical advocacy trips abroad.

Yet, Marcus' approach soon begged the question of 'how multi-sited is multi-sited enough?' (Xiang, 2013: 282). What exactly should be followed in this endeavour, how, and when can the researcher 'stop' following? How do I include and exclude specific field sites and what knowledge of 'global' evangelicalism could these really render? To narrow down my field sites somewhat, I took inspiration from Gerharz' (2012) example of studying activism by and for indigenous people in Bangladesh. Gerharz (2012: 148) had defined her own field site around so-called 'knowledge interfaces', which she defined as

the sites of struggle where different knowledge systems clash and are negotiated between collective and/or individual actors. As a methodological tool, the notion of

interface helps to analyse dynamics of interaction in specific situations and brings into focus the negotiation of meaning in translocal space.

I had identified a number of theological conferences in Israel-Palestine, North American and the United Kingdom which I planned on attending, where Palestinian evangelicals were scheduled to speak and engage with Western evangelicals. Further, since I had been invited to get to know the Palestinian evangelical community *in situ* in Nazareth, I had decided to spend an initial five months there to conduct participant observation at local churches, and volunteer at a living history museum of the first century, run jointly by Palestinian and American evangelicals. These ‘knowledge interfaces’, I thought, would provide me with an understanding as to how the differing positions on Israel were negotiated by people who otherwise subscribed to the same faith system (evangelicalism).

However, once I began the field work for this project, I had to revise my methodological approach to adapt to the rather different circumstances I encountered once I had moved to Nazareth. Soon after I first arrived in Nazareth in March 2015, I realised that there was in fact much less ‘activism’ by Palestinian evangelicals around theological positions or their social and political situation than I had anticipated. The notion of ‘following the conflict’ seemed therefore somewhat obsolete, and while the attraction of theological conferences as ‘knowledge interfaces’ remained, I felt that they would not provide me with an adequate understanding of Palestinian evangelicalism by themselves, given their lack of social and political activism. I return to a description of my specific field sites below, but to make this point I offer a brief glimpse into what sparked my confusion regarding my planned research method when I first arrived in Nazareth in 2015.

Nazareth is located 25km north of the border with the West Bank and the refugee camps of its closest city Jenin. Its inner city is trapped in a perpetual traffic jam. At the designated prayer times, the rival muezzins were dissonantly calling Nazareth's Muslim majority to prayer, the sound of which resonated from the surrounding hills on which the city was built. At the Hope Baptist Church, the largest of the five Baptist congregations in Nazareth, each Sunday there were plenty of visitors, mostly from North America or Europe, and they were warmly welcomed. The respective visiting tour group leaders were invited to say a few words of introduction and greeting, sometimes preached, clapped along to the Arabic worship songs, and could enjoy the simultaneous translation of the service in specially provided headphones.

In the midst of these social and political contrasts, rather than being activists, the small Palestinian evangelical congregations maintained a focus on fostering their private, individual spiritual lives. The sermons at church services were dictated by themes such as the 'fear of the Lord', or developing a 'personal prayer life'. I was confused by the Thomas Kinkade³⁷-style images of little blonde children, heart-shaped tears, and sweet images of Jesus as shepherd used as background images of the PowerPoint slides at church services that projected the lyrics of songs onto a screen during the service (Figure 4). The living history museum of the first century, *Nazareth Village*, which I had assumed would assert the indigeneity of a Palestinian Jesus, in fact catered to the dominant Western evangelical imaginations of Israel as God-ordained country for the Jews. When I asked church members and Palestinian evangelical colleagues at *Nazareth*

³⁷ Thomas Kinkade (1958-2012) was one of the most widely known American artists, who self-described as 'painter of light'. His work focused on idyllic and pastoral scenes, painted in a realistic style, and has been mass marketed (and therefore widely disseminated) in prints. At his height, Kinkade generated sales of the equivalent of 81 million pounds (Glaister, 2012). One of my friends in Nazareth had one of his prints of a pastoral scene prominently displayed in her living room.

Village about their opinion on the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences, I was met with discomfort: ‘we don’t talk about politics here.’



Figure 4. Example of illustration used in PowerPoint slides for congregational worship.

How was I to make sense of the lack of social and political engagement of Palestinian evangelicals with the circumstances and theologies that discriminated against them? I quickly realised that in my preparations to study Palestinian evangelical activism that challenges Christian Zionism, I had perhaps been a little too swayed by confident indigenous evangelicalisms elsewhere (Engelke, 2007; Haynes, 2017; O’Neill, 2010; Robbins, 2004a). My study of the scholarly literature on Israel-Palestine and Palestinians had equally stressed Palestinian narratives as counter-narratives to the dominant frameworks they had been part of ever since the ‘arrival’ of Palestine on the ethnographic radar (Furani and Rabinowitz, 2011). Previously, Zionist anthropologists

had endeavoured to portray Palestinians from a functionalist perspective that highlighted their 'traditional' ways of life in tension with the modernising economy of Israel. One of the first of these studies which put Palestinian (or 'Arab') Israelis at its centre is Abner Cohen's (1965) work on Arab border-villages in Israel. He analysed the continuity and change within these villages following the political and economic upheavals around the creation of the Israeli state, arguing that the political shifts had encouraged the Palestinian Israeli community to strengthen their traditional social structures. In contrast to this, Talal Asad's (1973) edited volume on the relationship between Anthropology and colonialism was the first to highlight the structures of power that have led to the omission of anthropological engagement with Palestine as a subject in itself, published during a time of post-colonial awakenings and the demystification of nation-states. Asad's critique of the early works on Palestinians and Palestinian Israelis included the charge that their focus on traditional 'communities' had led to a lack of engagement with the political mechanisms of dispossession, nationalism, and class, that have led to these communities' marginalisation (cf. Rabinowitz, 2002). From the 1980s onwards, the State of Israel began to be viewed more critically in anthropological scholarship, and Palestinian counter-narratives received more attention.

Since then, research on Palestine and Palestinians has dealt critically with topics such as memory (Slyomovics, 1998; Feldman, 2006; Davis, 2011), national identity (Swedenburg, 1995), spatial segregation (Bornstein, 2002; Monterescu, 2015; Monterescu & Rabinowitz, 2007; Romann & Weingrod, 1991), how Palestinians cope with the occupation, its techniques of oppression, and its administrative obstacles (Bisharat, 1989; Hajjar, 2005; Kelly, 2006), refugees, migration, and the Palestinian diaspora (Feldman, 2008; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011; González, 1992; Mavroudi, 2007; Peteet, 2007), and gender (Faier, 1997; Kanaaneh, 2002). The work on Palestinian

Israelis (Davis 2011; Kanaaneh 2005, 2009) could have perhaps altered my lens slightly. Especially Kanaaneh's (2005, 2009) work on Arab Israeli (Druze) men who join the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) provides an example for Palestinian (Arab) Israelis who align themselves with a state that otherwise does not treat them as equal. She identified the reasons for their 'shifting loyalties' as economic pressure and a sense of empowerment. Moreover, after I had already encountered Palestinian evangelicals in Nazareth I became aware of an article by geographers Tristan Sturm and Seth Frantzman (2014), which highlights two Palestinian Christian Zionist pastors in the West Bank (albeit based on interviews only rather than ethnographic research). Previous work on Palestinian Christianity, as outlined in Chapter 1, had not focused on the theological commitments of Palestinian Christians at all, therefore equally did not give an indication for the lack of theological or political engagement of those I worked with. As it were, the existing theological and anthropological research I had consulted in preparation for my project had not prepared me for the fact that the majority of Palestinian evangelicals were not actively seeking to challenge dominant Christian Zionist narratives about Israel.

It became clear to me that the relationship of Palestinian evangelicals with the kind of theology that sees Israel as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, was more ambiguous than I had originally assumed. Where I expected activism, I encountered quiet, unquestioning hospitality towards Western visitors. Where I thought theologies that have little acceptance of Palestinian evangelicalism would be challenged, they were reinforced. Where I had expected the 'sides' of the argument not to be 'homogenous', I soon realised that those I had imagined to make up the 'sides' might potentially be altogether differently aligned. As a result, my attention shifted to why so many Palestinian evangelicals were less activist-minded than those I had met at the *Christ at*

the Checkpoint conferences, or those whose books I had read, sensing that this might perhaps provide even more profound insights into what shapes evangelical orthodoxy. While the overall concern with what shapes evangelical orthodoxy in theology and practice therefore remained the same, I was required to adjust my project design to accommodate the majority of less openly politically engaged Palestinian evangelicals. Rather than ‘following the conflict’ therefore, I decided to focus on ‘encounters across difference’ (Faier and Rofel, 2014) between Palestinian and Western evangelicals predominantly in Israel-Palestine. As I discuss in the following, this approach allowed me to pay close attention to the dynamics that shape the interactions between Palestinian and Western evangelicals, whether they shared their theological outlook or not. It therefore allowed me to respond to the unexpected context and had the potential to include all Palestinian evangelicals in my study, rather than only those who challenged dominant theologies and practices. The discussion of how I reframed my research will be followed by a description of my specific field sites as well as my positionality as female, Western researcher.

3.2 Reframing research: ethnography of encounter

The concept of ‘ethnographies of encounter’ has most eloquently been theorised by Lieba Faier and Lisa Rofel (2014) in an article for the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. In brief, ‘ethnographies of encounter’ focus on ‘how culture making occurs through everyday encounters among members of two or more groups with different cultural backgrounds and unequally positioned stakes in their relationships’ (Faier & Rofel, 2014: 364). Considering the significant presence of Western evangelical tourists, visitors, volunteers, and missionaries in Nazareth and Israel-Palestine at large, there was ample scope for studying such everyday encounters between Palestinian and Western

evangelicals in Israel-Palestine. An ethnographic investigation of these encounters, including participant observation and interviews, promised to provide a thick description of the dynamics and the various subject-makings that emerged in, or as a result of, the encounters. While Faier and Rofel (2014) provide the most systematic discussion of ‘ethnographies of encounter’ as methodology, anthropologists have long used this format to investigate cultural change or the co-constitution of space and place.³⁸ The crucial difference between these ethnographies, and previous ethnographies with the same thematic focus, is that the lens through which the themes are analysed is not (for example) ‘cultural change’ or ‘space and place’ itself, but rather the lens of ‘encounter’ itself. This means that the emphasis of the resulting ethnography is different and highlights the dynamics through which the themes under investigation are constituted, negotiated, and rendered meaningful for those involved.

The strategy of focusing on ‘knowledge interfaces’ (Gerharz, 2012), the way in which I initially conceptualised my field site, is comprised in the lens of ‘encounters across difference’. However, the lens of ‘encounters’ does not just zoom in on situations of struggle or conflict, but pays attention to any ‘engagement across difference’, including ‘a chance meeting, a sensory exchange, an extended confrontation, a passionate tryst’ (Faier & Rofel, 2014: 364). The focus on any, everyday encounters, rather than encounters restricted to debate or struggle, allowed me to include most Palestinian evangelicals in my research, even those who avoided direct confrontation or did not speak about politics at all. It also allowed me to note less obvious ways of resisting the

³⁸ Examples include ethnographies that deal with colonial and post-colonial encounters, such as the work of the Comaroffs (1991), Asad (1973), Massey (1994), and Tsing (2005) already referenced above, or the work of Timothy Mitchell (1988) on representation, and Mary Louise Pratt (1992) on contact zones, which is further discussed in Chapter 7 and 8. One could also list the work of scholars like Keane (2007), Ortner (2001), Rutherford (2012), or Sahlins, (1985) in this vein, all of whom look at processes of resistance and transformation as a result of the colonial encounter.

dominant evangelical narrative of Israel, and less pronounced ways of adaptation by Western evangelicals engaging with Israel-Palestine. I therefore decided, firstly, to immerse myself into the contexts of Palestinian evangelicals in Israel-Palestine for a longer period of time (rather than following Palestinian evangelicals on their advocacy trips), and pay close attention to the physical encounters between Western and Palestinian evangelicals there (I will describe my exact field sites and activities in the next section). Secondly, and in keeping with the attention to the theological commitments of those I worked with, I did not just focus on physical ‘encounters’, but also on mediated ‘encounters’ in text, such as theological books, letters, and blog posts. This approach situated the contemporary encounters I observed through my ethnographic fieldwork within the long histories of the discursive traditions of those I worked with. It sensitised me to how those I worked with conceptualised their contemporary physical encounters themselves, and how they imagined their relationship to the culturally ‘Other’, their ‘global’ faith family, or the territory that is at the centre of their theologies.

The lens of ‘encounters across difference’ can aid in perceiving different configurations of ‘sides’ and subjectivities than previously expected: they highlight ‘how meanings, identities, objects, and subjectivities emerge through unequal relationships involving people and things that may at first glance be understood as distinct’ (Faier & Rofel, 2014: 364). Ethnographies of encounter therefore pay special attention to the relational dynamics of the negotiations and emergence of such meanings, identities, objects and subjectivities, and through this allow a focus on the role of power within these. Rather than seeing power as uni-directional, the relational lens renders visible processes of ‘negotiation, resistance, awkward resonance, misunderstanding, and unexpected convergence’ (Faier & Rofel 2014: 365). Intrinsicly, ethnographies of encounter

recognise the reality of ‘unbounded’ cultural production and transformation, and the complex, multiple, and mobile ethnographic contexts we engage in. Further, the ability to investigate the power dynamics within the encounters sits well within a tradition in which traditional theoretical assumptions of the discipline are questioned (Asad, 1973; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Rosaldo, 1989). Importantly for my project on the negotiation of evangelical orthodoxy, the lens of encounters retains a commitment to ‘demonstrating how unequal cultural histories and forms of difference have material and political effects’ (Faier & Rofel, 2014: 364). This, in turn, centres the attention on the things, ideas, people, and resources that ‘flow’ (or do not ‘flow’) between the individual and collective members of the encounter.

As I outline in the following, the lens of encounters, and attention to negotiation, adaptation, or resistance to dominant narratives enabled me to investigate possible benefits of *not* challenging the dominant theological discourse, as well as the sometimes different narratives on the matter presented to internal and external audiences respectively. In this thesis, I investigate through the lens of encounter how Palestinian evangelicals navigate their belonging to a ‘global’ faith family, whereby the ‘global’ itself is the result of particular genealogies and conceptualisations, as discussed in Chapter 8. The lens of encounters also led to a deep reflection of my own role as a white, Western researcher with a Christian background, in a context in which the relationships to Western partners are often as important to Palestinian evangelicals as they are strained. I describe below how my role as a researcher in this settings, through the lens of encounters, generated insights I might not have had if I had focused on Palestinian evangelical activism alone. Significantly, the lens of encounters seemed the most respectful approach in a setting in which a particular population has been ‘over-scribed’ by dominant narratives (Pratt, 2008). Rather than attempting to present a

‘complete’ description of Palestinian evangelicalism in the following, therefore, I focus on the mutual co-constitution of those involved in the encounter, including myself as anthropologist.

3.3 Practicalities of fieldwork

The research on which this project is based consisted of two parts: a textual element, for which I studied the theologies and their histories of those I worked with, and an ethnographic element, for which I immersed myself for nine months (over thirteen months) in the everyday contexts of Palestinian evangelicals. I already outlined the rationale for the attention to the theology of those I worked with in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 will introduce the theological landscapes that are at the background (and sometimes foreground) of the physical encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals, the interpretative regimes within which the members of the encounter operate (whether they accept, adapt, or resist these). In the following section, I outline the details and rationale of my ethnographic fieldwork, as well as provide a general introduction to the specific field sites where I spent most of my time. Each of the empirical chapters will introduce in more detail the specific ethnographic data I use respectively to analyse and illustrate the topics at hand.



Figure 5. Overlooking Nazareth's Old Town and Nazareth Illit on the hill opposite from close to the English hospital.

Encouraged by Palestinian evangelicals I met at the first *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference I attended in 2014 when scoping for this research project, I based myself in Nazareth in Northern Israel for the majority of my fieldwork (Figure 5). Contemporary Nazareth has around 75,000 inhabitants, of which ca. 70% are Muslim and 30% are Christian. The town is almost exclusively Palestinian, and is known as the ‘Palestinian (Arab) capital of Israel’. Nazareth is known as the childhood home of Jesus, and therefore is of significant interest to Christian pilgrims. The Old City is made up of winding streets sloping up and down a hill, with a number of churches claiming to be built on sites important to Jesus. The largest one is the Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation, whose cupola dominates Nazareth’s ‘skyline’. It is a relatively modern building on two levels, built over a grotto which is believed to be Mary’s (Jesus’ mother’s) home. Another important site for Christian visitors is Mary’s Well (Figure 6), the water of which some believe to have healing qualities. It is one of the least changed sites in Nazareth, already featuring in accounts of nineteenth century British travellers (Thomson, 1876: 432).



Figure 6. Mary's Well in 2016.

While the town is of central importance for Palestinian and other Christians, the majority of its population is Muslim. The sectarian belonging was identifiable linguistically by a dropped ‘qaf’ in spoken Arabic between the two groups for example: where Muslims pronounced the word for coffee as ‘qahwe’, Christians pronounced the same word ‘ahwe’. This linguistic difference points to the strong sectarian identities which have developed over centuries. While there were no open confrontations between Muslims and Christians during my time in Nazareth, there had been significant tensions in the past. During what is known as the ‘Shihab ad-Deen’ affair between 1997 and 2000 especially, tensions between members of the Islamist movement and the municipality (led by Christian and Muslim politicians of the Communist party) ran high. The cause was the Islamist movements’ opposition to transforming a central plot next to the Basilica into a plaza in preparation for the influx of tourists and a visit of the Pope in the year 2000. The plot was also the site of the tomb of Shihab ad-Deen, a famous soldier, who died while opposing the Crusades in Nazareth (Israeli, 2002). Muslims felt that, in catering to the Christian population and tourists, Nazareth’s Palestinian majority

and their claim on the city's past was marginalised. Members of the Islamist movement occupied the plot in question and boycotted its intended development. As Una McGahern (2011) argues, the affair is remembered as an example of the disinterest of the Israeli state in intra-Palestinian affairs, and lack of will to manage multi-cultural contexts. By not wanting to upset the larger Palestinian Muslim electorate of Nazareth and potentially resenting the Christian claim on Israel's history, the Israeli state initially failed to intervene, leading to a lengthy and escalated conflict. At the time of my research, this conflict was around fifteen years in the past, yet the memories of it were still vivid in the minds of those I worked with. Friday prayers by those associated with the Islamist movement were held in the open on the spot in question, and well-placed banners signalled to Christian tourists that Allah was the one and the only God (Figure 7). However, the Christians I worked with emphasised that those Muslims who pursued this anti-Christian agenda were a small minority.

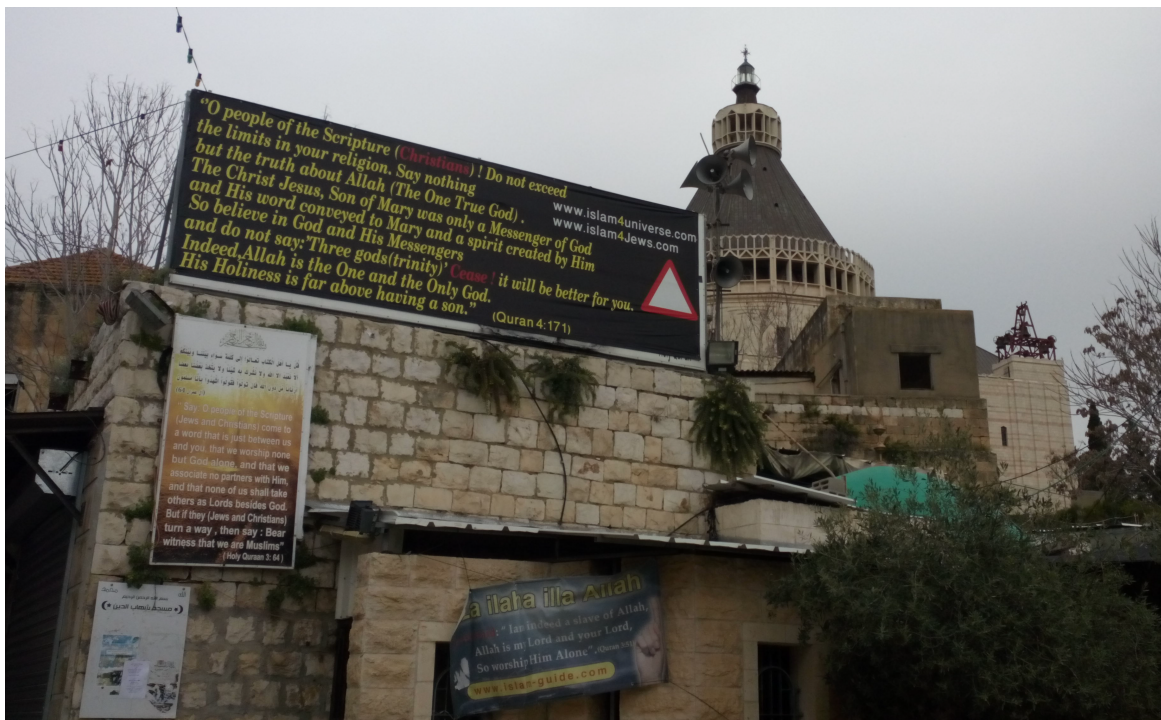


Figure 7. Location of Shihab ad-Deen's tomb in 2015 with Basilica in background.

I lived in Nazareth between March and July 2015, and again between January and April 2016, and continued to interact with some of those I had met via social media and skype in the time in between and subsequently. My activities during both periods of residence in Nazareth were similar, but my living situation was different, which provided helpful insights into different ways of living in and engaging with the town. Before I moved to Nazareth for the first stint of fieldwork, I had contacted an organisation called SERVE Nazareth. SERVE Nazareth is an internship programme run by the Nazareth Trust, which oversees the English Hospital in Nazareth³⁹ as well as the living history museum, *Nazareth Village*. SERVE Nazareth offers internships (formal 3-month programmes for 18-30 year olds, and more flexible ones for other candidates), with weekly chapel services and some one-on-one mentoring. To be affiliated with such an organisation was the recommended course of action by those I spoke with at *Christ at the Checkpoint* 2014, as it would have been seen as inappropriate for me to live by myself in Palestinian Nazareth as a young, Western, female researcher. It was also helpful to have this affiliation in order to explain my presence in the country to the Israeli state, which offered me a 3 month tourist visa which was later extended through the SERVE Nazareth programme. Moreover, by being affiliated with SERVE Nazareth, I could justify my presence in Nazareth more easily, while also getting to know more easily members of the Palestinian evangelical community. I had explained to the managers of SERVE Nazareth that I would do some ‘normal’ volunteering – at *Nazareth Village* – but would like to spend some of the ‘volunteering time’ at the Nazareth Evangelical College, which was not one of their usual placement options. I had already contacted the director of Nazareth Evangelical College and met some of the faculty at the *Christ at*

³⁹ The hospital was first set up by the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society (EMMS) in 1861 as four-bed clinic, the organisation has since grown into a full hospital with nursing school, and is since 2007 led by Palestinian Christians. There are also a French and an Italian hospital in Nazareth.

the Checkpoint conference, and they were keen for me to join them at the college. During this time, therefore, I shared a house with a changing set of other Western volunteers on the compound of the English hospital. This allowed me to interact closely with volunteers, and understand how they engaged with Nazareth and Israel-Palestine at large.

Nazareth Evangelical College was located at the other end of town to the English hospital, and since I could not afford a car while living in Nazareth I usually walked there from the house I shared with the other volunteers. The walk took around 40 minutes and led me through the winding roads of the Old City of Nazareth. While some decades ago the old town was bustling, today many of its businesses struggle to survive. With big shopping malls with ample parking being available in Nazareth Illit, the Jewish town founded in 1974 overlooking Nazareth (itself ethnographically explored by Dan Rabinowitz, 1997), the old city has lost its appeal for many of Nazareth's shoppers. Tourists usually only explore one or two of the main streets, which host souvenir shops. Due to its lack of access, I was told, the people who lived in the Old City were poorer, without cars and often without means to maintain the old houses. For me to walk through the town was fairly unusual, both because I was a white woman (and relatively unafraid during daylight, unlike many of the volunteers and tourists I interacted with) and because few local people in Nazareth actually walked anywhere (cars being status symbols, they were used even for the smallest of trips of a few hundred metres). For me, the walk through the old and new parts of Nazareth helped me to develop a stronger connection to the city itself, and to observe everyday interactions between shoppers and shopkeepers, and weave in and out of the 'tourist' and 'local' zones.

For the second period of fieldwork between January and end of April 2016, I was no longer associated with SERVE Nazareth, but arranged the same placements on my own

accord. I had obtained a study visa supported by Prof Amalia Saar at the Department of Anthropology at Haifa University, which helped me to navigate entry into Israel more easily. This time, my husband accompanied me, and we rented a small apartment to the east of the centre of Nazareth. My friend Miriam from the Hope Baptist Church was (unusually) renting a single apartment next to ours from our (Muslim) landlady, and introduced us to Dalia. To live there was both more financially viable for us (in contrast to the rather expensive⁴⁰ volunteer programme SERVE Nazareth), and proved valuable in giving us closer everyday interaction with both my Palestinian evangelical friend Miriam and our landlady Dalia and her family. Miriam features prominently in one of the portraits of Palestinian evangelicals in Chapter 5.

While being based in Nazareth, I divided my time between volunteering at *Nazareth Village* and assisting at Nazareth Evangelical College. I also attended many church services at the Hope Baptist Church located in the building of Nazareth Baptist School, and visited church services at other churches in Nazareth and the surrounding Galilee area. In addition, I participated in a ‘witness visit’, or alternative pilgrimage, as a researcher in November 2015, to understand how evangelicals critical of Israel engage with the territory and its people. Further, I attended three conferences in Bethlehem (West Bank) and interacted with the faculty of Bethlehem Bible College on these occasions. I conducted interviews with people associated with all of these different activities and places. I will describe each of these activities in turn.

⁴⁰ The programme at SERVE Nazareth provided accommodation and food, which the volunteers could eat in the hospital canteen. The cost also covered the salary of the administrators, who offered spiritual and practical support to the volunteers.

3.3.1 *Nazareth Village*

I spent much time at *Nazareth Village*, and return to it in more detail in Chapter 6. *Nazareth Village* opened its doors for the first time in March 2000, after a lengthy process of careful construction and fundraising. The project started when the medical director of the Nazareth hospital, Dr. Nakhle Bishara, dreamt of a way to show disappointed evangelical pilgrims, who struggle to connect with the traditional churches erected at sites of biblical importance (such as the Roman Catholic Basilica), what the territory at the time of Jesus ‘really’ looked like. At that time, Dr. Bishara had already noticed the land lying empty just below the hospital complex, which, according to anecdotal evidence, had never been built on since the time of Jesus. George, one of the current Palestinian evangelical managers of *Nazareth Village*, explained how his dream became reality:

But he still didn't have the ... money to start something, he needed to speak with some people about it. And that day came when I think in about 1994 he met somebody from United States ... He was a movie producer, Michael Hostetler. He came here to do a week in Nazareth about life between Jewish and Arabs, the relationships between Jewish and Arabs today. Because he had heard about the story that happened here, ... a Jewish soldier who was injured in Nazareth and a Muslim taxi driver drove him to be treated in the Christian hospital here, in the Scottish hospital [Dr. Bishara's hospital]. That was amazing to him. And this story reminded him of another story in the Bible which is so similar, which is the Good Samaritan story. And he wanted to do a story about those two stories, like the *old* Good Samaritan, and the *modern* Good Samaritan. So he got to see Dr Bishara to interview him in his office about this story [...]. When they spoke about this, Dr Bishara told him about his vision, he said, I have an idea to create a village to speak about all these issues and these things that you are now sharing with me about the life of the first century. Michael was very excited about the idea, and he told him, 'I will try to do something to help.' He went back to the States, he started speaking with many people, Christians, key people, businessmen, university presidents...

True to his word, Michael Hostetler returned a few months later with financial resources from the United States, and a 15-strong team of archaeologists, theologians and businessmen to assess the scope of the project. And so, after initial scoping, a steering committee was established that oversaw the recreation of a first century village on the plot Dr. Bishara had already discovered, with Michael Hostetler as the first director of *Nazareth Village*. Thus, the desire of an American film maker to link a modern news story to the Nazareth of Jesus' time equalled Dr. Bishara's dream of leading pilgrims to discover the first century hometown of Jesus, and was made possible by American funds and expertise. From its very conception, therefore, *Nazareth Village* was aimed at foreign pilgrims looking for the fulfilment of their imaginations of the 'Holy Land'. The *Village* features especially in Chapter 6, which discusses how evangelicals engage with the territory of Israel-Palestine.

In addition to the reconstructed village buildings and farmland, one of its main attractions is the costumed staff, who demonstrate first century tasks or serve a 'first century lunch' to the visitors. As part of the ethnographic research I conducted at *Nazareth Village*, I myself slipped into the role of a first century character for several days a week, and alongside other staff demonstrated first century domestic tasks such as harvesting wheat, shepherding, carpentry, and weaving to the visitors (Figure 8). This role allowed me both to understand how visitors engage with the displays and to interact with them as someone they imagine to be from the first century. For example, costumed characters are encouraged to interrupt their tasks for a photo with the visitors, or to invite visitors to pose alongside them, thus allowing them to fully immerse themselves into the experience of first century life as represented by *Nazareth Village*. I observed countless tours as they passed through the different stations, and, while never acting as a tour guide myself, I became intimately familiar with the narrative presented. On some

days when I was not in costume, I also joined different tour groups on their guided walk through the property, paying attention to what they chose to photograph, the questions they asked, and how they engaged with the displays in general. Crucially, my role in the *Village* also allowed me to get to know the local Palestinian evangelical (and the few messianic Jewish) staff, both while we performed our first century ‘duties’ together, as well as behind the scenes, for example during our lunch breaks. Moreover, as I got to know staff I interacted with them outside of our duties at *Nazareth Village*, for example by attending their church services together.



Figure 8. Researcher on a typical day at *Nazareth Village*.

3.3.2 Nazareth Evangelical College

When I was not working at *Nazareth Village*, I spent my day at Nazareth Evangelical College (Figure 9). The college is one of two Palestinian evangelical Bible colleges that trains pastors and other church leaders for their ministry – it is a sister college to Bethlehem Bible College, which hosts the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences. The degrees at the Nazareth Evangelical College (BA in Biblical Studies and MA in Leadership and Christian Ministry) are accredited through Bethlehem Bible College, which in turn is accredited by the Middle East Association for Theological Education (MEATE), Asia Theological Association (ATA) and the Palestinian National Authority PNA (the self-governing body of Areas A and B in the West Bank). Beside the degree courses, Nazareth Evangelical College also runs the only Arabic theological library in Israel which is open to the public,⁴¹ as well as shorter courses for churches, and an ‘International Study Programme’ for international, predominantly Western, visitors. With its faculty of seven lecturers, the college is small, and much of its tutoring happens in one-on-one sessions or evening classes due to its students usually having full- or part-time jobs.

I either worked in the small theological library or in a small office I was allowed to use during my time there. The time at the college was important in that I interacted with the few Palestinian evangelicals in Nazareth who were critical of the dominant evangelical narratives about Israel. Faculty at the college were not the only ones who pursued alternative theologies, but certainly were influential in formulating these. I conducted participant observation at the college, i.e. paid attention to the things faculty spoke about in their coffee breaks, the things that were important to them in their daily work

⁴¹ The librarian was in the process of acquiring Arabic books or translations during my time of fieldwork to exchange the primarily English-language resources with Arabic ones. The Arabic library was opened shortly after I completed my fieldwork.

life, etc. I was excluded from the official college meetings (such as one-on-one mentoring with students or board meetings), and did not offer any teaching myself. I thereby respected the boundaries of limited Western involvement at this more contextual college. Particularly insightful was the time spent as part-time administrator for a local pastor, Fadi, of a Palestinian Israeli village Baptist church, who was also one of the college's Master students. I helped him with research for his sermons, and our conversations about biblical commentaries and the topics of his sermons helped me understand more of what is important for a typical, small Palestinian evangelical church in Galilee. I return to Fadi in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7. To make myself useful during my time at the college, I assisted with proof-reading, conference administration, English translations, and some archival work. I also helped to design a brochure for an International Study Programme the faculty planned to offer. All of these activities helped me to understand how some of the Palestinian evangelical narratives are curated, and how Palestinian evangelicals understood themselves as part of a 'global' faith community.



Figure 9. Nazareth Evangelical College.

3.3.3 Church services

At weekends, I conducted participant observation at Palestinian evangelical church services. So as to get a sense of continuity, I focused mostly on the biggest Palestinian evangelical congregation in Nazareth, the Hope Baptist Church, which some of the managers of *Nazareth Village*, as well as some of the faculty of Nazareth Evangelical College attended. This allowed me to interact with different people I met during the week also on Sunday during and after their time of worship. The fact that staff from both the *Village* and the college, with its different theological orientations, attended the church, already suggests that its leadership was somewhat theologically mixed. The church had several years ago invited the current pastor to lead the church. He had grown up as a Palestinian refugee in Jordan, and followed a dispensationalist charismatic theology. However, his vision seemed quite different to that of the college staff (even though he actually had his office at the college and they always treated each other respectfully). Initially, the pastor and two of the college faculty had agreed to lead the church together, and the college faculty continued to give some of the sermons at times when the main pastor was preaching elsewhere or running courses for his international ministry to train church leaders. However, the main pastor had a more prominent role in leading the congregation. As is typical in Baptist churches, the congregation was also overseen by a group of male ‘elders’, who took responsibility for different areas of the church (youth, children, family, etc.). It also featured a women’s group and a youth group. The church had split off from the first Baptist church in Israel (Figure 10) soon after the American missionaries left in the late 1990s, among conflict over leadership and lay involvement. It now met in the school hall of the Nazareth Evangelical School,

and can only be found if one knows about it. The service times have been arranged so that congregants do not meet the congregants of the church they split off from.



Figure 10. First Nazareth Baptist Church with the building of Nazareth Baptist School to the right, which hosts the services of the Hope Baptist Church.

I usually sat in the back of the church and took notes of the format and content of the services. Participation from the front was quite controlled, which meant that there was not any obvious way for me to get involved ‘behind the scenes’. However, since I knew a good number of the congregation, beside my participation in the services, I also sought to get a sense of the church’s identity and activities in our many conversations. Almost every week, one or another Western tour group joined the small congregation in their service. The congregation had invested in equipment for simultaneous translation, so that each visitor was presented with a headset via which they could follow the sermon (usually translated by the pastor’s wife with a strong American accent due to her American parents). The presence of so many other Westerners meant that many times I was confused as belonging to the group by those congregants I did not know so well. They were cordial, but introduced themselves to me several times, or expressed surprise

when I answered them in Arabic. While Palestinian evangelicals of the church lingered over coffee after the service and interacted with the visitors on a small talk basis, it made it somewhat difficult for me to establish deeper connections with those I did not meet outside of the church services.



Figure 11. Church service at the Hope Baptist Church with Western visitors taking photos.

I also attended many of the other evangelical and other churches in Nazareth at least once during my time in Israel-Palestine (sometimes with colleagues from *Nazareth Village*), and also travelled to the surrounding cities and villages (Eilaboun, Kfar Yassif, Tur'an, Haifa), as well as Jerusalem, for the purpose of attending evangelical congregations. This provided me with a good overview of common practice, songs, as well as with insights into the way in which Western visitors were welcomed at other churches as well. Together with some of the Western volunteers from SERVE Nazareth, who typically showed great interest in messianic Judaism, I also attended the youth group of one of the three (small) messianic Jewish congregations in Nazareth Illit. This was insightful to experience how disconnected the messianic Jewish congregations were from the Palestinian evangelical churches in Nazareth and Galilee which formed the centre of my focus.

3.3.4 'Witness visit'

In November 2015, I was invited to accompany a 10-day trip 'witness visit' organised by Friends of Sabeel UK. The organisation is a partner organisation of Naim Ateek's liberation theology centre in Jerusalem, and exists to pursue advocacy in support of Palestinian Christians in the United Kingdom (similar organisations exist in other European countries, the USA and Canada). 'Witness visits', or 'alternative pilgrimages', are designed to directly engage Christians with the political realities of Israel-Palestine, instead of visiting its various holy sites. Thus, they are mostly focused on the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Gaza being mostly inaccessible for Western tourists in recent years), and have busy programmes of meetings with organisations and initiatives promoting non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation. Besides informing Western Christians about the realities of life in under the Israeli Occupation, the participants also imagine the visit as a way of 'standing with' and 'coming alongside' those who are suffering, through their 'witness'.

On this trip, we were based at a hotel in Bethlehem, and from there were driven to various projects and locations with our British evangelical tour group leader, a Palestinian Christian guide, and our Muslim bus driver. Among other things, we met with Omar Barghouti (founder of the BDS movement), representatives of Military Court Watch and Al Dameer Prisoners Society, Ermat Burnat who produced the film 'Five Broken Cameras' (Figure 12), visited the village Nabi Saleh to hear about non-violent resistance from the Tamimi family (who became a famous example of resistance in 2018), several Bedouin settlements in the Negev, Hebron, the Cremisan Monastery, the Dheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem, the Christian community of Zababde near Jenin, and the *Tent of Nations*, an organic farm run by a Palestinian evangelical. On one

afternoon of the trip, we even attended a question and answer session at a synagogue in the illegal Israeli Ephrata settlement near Bethlehem, invited by an ‘activist’ rabbi who, in a strange twist, was keen to present the ‘other side’ of the story of the West Bank to participants of alternative pilgrimages. The participants on this trip were mostly middle aged to retired, with only four of us below the age of thirty-five – and all of us younger participants had been invited via a subsidised participation by Friends of Sabeel UK.



Figure 12. Ermat Burnat shows the participants a tear gas canister in front of the separation barrier.

While the trip itself features strongly in Chapter 6, it formed an important counterpoint in investigating Western evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine. Although none of the trip’s participants attended the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences discussed in

Chapter 7, we listened to a lecture by the conference organiser on this trip. Some were moreover familiar with *Christ at the Checkpoint*, which suggests a more paradigmatic way of alternative Western engagement with Israel-Palestine than the dominant narrative.

It was helpful as an insightful way for me, as a single Western female, to travel to many locations in the West Bank and Israel proper that would otherwise have been more difficult for me to access, such as Hebron and several Bedouin settlements. During the trip, I conducted participant observation and wrote brief notes during the busy days on my phone, which I wrote up in the evenings. Similar to my accompaniment of tours at *Nazareth Village*, I also observed closely what people took photographs of, i.e. followed their gaze, and tried to capture this in my own pictures to understand how they see, and what they deem worthy of recording about, the trip (Figure 13).



Figure 13. Photographing a mine field at the border to Jordan from the tour bus.

3.3.5 Theological conferences

I also conducted participant observation at six different theological conferences on the topic of evangelical engagement with Israel: two *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences (2014 and 2016) in Bethlehem, a conference organised by Nazareth Evangelical College (2015) in Nazareth, a conference organised by Bethlehem Bible College for younger Palestinian evangelicals (2015) in Bethlehem, a conference by *Christian Witness for Israel* in Oxford (2015), and a conference by Friends of Sabeel North America in Vancouver, Canada, in 2015. Even though sites of ‘struggle’ were no longer the main focus of my methodology, conducting participant observation and interviews at these different conferences was still insightful in understanding how narratives were curated for Western visitors of different denominational backgrounds, and at different geographical locations. The two conferences in UK and North America provided helpful ‘background’ knowledge, whereas the conferences in Bethlehem feature prominently in Chapters 7 and 8.

3.3.6 Interviews and language

Besides participant observation at the activities described above, I conducted a total of 44 formal interviews, in addition to notes of many more informal conversations captured in field notes. 8 of the formal interviews were with Western volunteers, 20 with Palestinian evangelical ministry leaders, pastors, and *Nazareth Village* staff, 6 with Western conference or ‘witness visit’ participants, and 10 with Palestinian evangelical and Western conference speakers and international experts. I recorded and transcribed most of the interviews, unless the interview partner preferred me to take notes, which I wrote up in detail after the respective interview. All interviews were semi-structured,

which meant that I prepared a general set of questions beforehand, but allowed the conversation to be guided by the respective interview partner, i.e. did not insist on certain questions and encouraged the interview partner to expand on topics that seemed important to them. I have retained some of the names of churches and the school since they would be easily recognised by those with some knowledge of the context, but have anonymised most of the names of those I refer to in the thesis.

I had attended Arabic language courses at Heidelberg and Oxford University, which however only taught me High Arabic (*fusha*). This was helpful in reading written Arabic, even though my proficiency was still limited. I therefore regularly met up with a local Palestinian evangelical woman to study the spoken Levantine version of Arabic. I obtained enough language skills to operate in *Nazareth Village*, follow the worship songs and prayers at church services, and have basic conversations – which distinguished me from other Western visitors and showed my commitment to the local community. However, as many of the Palestinian evangelicals I interacted with were highly proficient in English, for interviews and more complex conversation we often resorted to English, a second language for us both. As a result of the many international, mostly North American, visitors to their churches, all services I attended, however small the congregation, had simultaneous translation into English, which I used but turned to a low volume so I could follow both the original and the translation.

3.4 Positionality

It will not come as a surprise that an ethnography focusing on ‘encounters across difference’ between Western and Palestinian evangelicals, conducted by a Western researcher with a Christian background, carries with it some specific opportunities and challenges. I carefully described my research project to all parties involved verbally

and, where possible, in writing, sought permission to conduct participant observation at church services, *Nazareth Village*, Nazareth Evangelical College, SERVE Nazareth, and at the conferences, and informed all of my interviewees of the scope of the project, how the interview would be used, and of their rights to withdraw at any point. Yet, as the initial scoping with the Christian Zionist couple from the church I attended in Oxford revealed, the mere questioning of dominant narratives often generates suspicion. The very idea of my project already suggested that alternative approaches to engaging with a global evangelical faith family existed, which is not usually highlighted by the majority of Palestinian evangelicals, especially not towards Western visitors (who for the most part expect alignment with pro-Israel theologies). It was therefore not always easy to gain the trust of those I worked with and to assure them of my genuine interest in their views (rather than using what they say against them, which happens all too often; I speak of this fear in the portrait of Hind in Chapter 5). My own identity in our encounters became a way of generating data in itself, for example through the ways in which particular narratives were presented to me by different people, the ways in which people interacted with me or reacted to my presence for example in church services, and through the various expectations people had of me in terms of support of, or advocacy for, their views.

Due to my age and ethnicity, at first encounters I was often taken for one of the college-age Western volunteers or young short-term missionaries who come to Nazareth. My association with SERVE Nazareth on the one hand gave me credibility, but also sometimes made it difficult to affirm my identity as a researcher to Palestinian evangelicals. This changed slightly when I lived in Nazareth with my husband, both because I stayed longer than other volunteers, and because I was no longer considered as a young, single volunteer. My husband's presence allowed us to interact with other

young couples and families in the churches, who had not previously interacted much with me. However, sometimes when I interacted with people I did not know well, while my husband was not present, the initial misunderstandings arose again. I sought to counter these expectations by staying longer than regular volunteers, and by learning as much Arabic as I could. Especially at *Nazareth Village*, I managed to communicate almost entirely in Arabic due to the repetitive nature of the tasks. While I may not have been taken for one of the local staff, the local staff themselves acknowledged my efforts by asking me sometimes to instruct new volunteers, i.e. suggesting they saw me as somewhere between ‘volunteer’ and ‘local staff’. When I attended church services, I was often taken for one of the frequent Western visitors, and led to the benches with translation equipment or asked to ‘bring greetings’ from a home church I attended. I usually introduced myself as currently living in Nazareth as a researcher of Christians there, hoping this would be honest enough while also not suggesting potential ‘sides’ I might be on. When I mentioned my involvement with Nazareth Evangelical College, for example, some assumed I might be critical of their own apolitical theologies. When I mentioned my involvement at *Nazareth Village*, some assumed I was a ‘typical’ volunteer, and related to me as someone who supported pro-Israel theologies (for example by telling me I was a ‘blessing’ to their church). In an ‘over-scribed’ (Pratt, 2008) population, my presence encouraged similar reactions to that of other Western visitors.

Many non-Christian anthropologists of Christianity experience attempts to ‘convert’ them to Christianity by the Christians they work with (e.g. Bielo, 2009b; Coleman, 2000; Harding, 1991; 2000; Luhrmann, 2012). Since I had a Christian background myself, which I neither hid nor emphasised in conversations, it was easier to forgo direct attempts at conversion to Christianity. Merz and Merz (2015), in their defence of

a post-secular anthropology, suggested that a shared faith between ethnographer and those they work with can increase relationships of trust. In my setting, this was expressed in the expectation that I would hold to certain moral codes and spiritual disciplines which were known to those I worked with, and to which they sometimes held me accountable in an expectation of mutual fostering of our Christian selves. For example, it was assumed that I would not lie, that I would not speak badly about people, that I would ‘put God first’ in everything I do, that I shared a high regard for family relationships, that I did not drink or smoke, etc. Many of these expectations were specific to the particular version of Christianity those I worked with belonged to, but not unfamiliar to me. This also meant, secondly, that less time was ‘lost’ in navigating conversion attempts, and more time spent exploring the nuances of the evangelical subjectivities of those I worked with. I was already familiar with the language they used to describe their Christian journeys, and was able to converse in the same with them (though I noted, for example, particular English evangelical expressions which were used and which suggest exposure to certain Western Christian resources).

While I therefore was not exposed to attempts at ‘conversion’ to Christianity itself, I was nevertheless targeted to ‘convert’ to particular theological stances instead. The theological significance of Israel points to a number of important Christian understandings of biblical interpretation, salvation, and the way in which Christians relate to the world around them – this is why the ethnography of Palestinian evangelicals as part of global evangelicalism is so salient. Where researchers studying Christians in other settings solicit sympathies or distrust on the basis of their non-Christian positionalities, I similarly solicited sympathy or distrust due to my specific (often assumed) faith positionality. In other words, it was assumed that, as a Western Christian, I must myself hold a Christian Zionist or Dispensationalist theology. While as

a Christian I remain critical of Christian Zionism, my strategy was to keep my own theological convictions to myself as much as I could, especially when engaging with those who I thought would disagree with me. Instead, I sought to understand what it meant for any evangelical I interacted with to be ‘good’ Christians according to their own frameworks, which I hope will become apparent especially in Chapter 5. Still, as mentioned earlier, the mere questioning of people’s beliefs regarding Israel raised suspicion on the part of some Christian Zionist or dispensationalist potential interview partners, despite my careful delineation of the research project and my ethical commitments. While a couple of pastors and volunteers preferred not to speak to me for that reason, in most cases I eventually managed to gain trust through common acquaintances or family members, who could vouch for me and the project I was working on.

Some anthropologists advocating for a post-secular Anthropology (especially around Eloise Meneses at Eastern University) argue that using insights from their own faith standpoints can uncover deeper roots of a problem, which ethnography in its current state is merely able to describe with implicit moral assumptions (Meneses et al. 2014b). They suggest that a Christian epistemology in particular can offer hope, which the discipline’s efforts to date have found difficult to do (cf. Robbins, 2006). While I am thankful to Meneses et al. for engaging a wider audience in the debates about the possibilities of a post-secular anthropology,⁴² I have hesitated to fully endorse their approach. Most importantly, I argue that it is not enough to identify simply as ‘Christian’, as Meneses et al. attempt to do, but to rather carefully delineate and self-

⁴² During the time of my research, I received a small grant from Meneses’ project ‘On Knowing Humanity’ to explore ways of conducting ‘ethnography through the lens of faith’. This allowed me to think through my positionality, even as I ended up respectfully disagreeing with Meneses et al.’s approach, as outlined here.

critically reflect on what has shaped one's theological subject position. Otherwise, the post-secular anthropologist runs into the same questions that have challenged anthropologists of Christianity since the development of the subfield, i.e., what exactly is the content and meaning of their 'Christianity' (Cannell, 2006)? Meneses et al. criticise the subconscious disciplinary bias towards secularism, however do not fully articulate their own contextual biases as Christians and anthropologists of particular traditions, denominations, and cultural backgrounds. The question is, *what* Christianity exactly is the foundation of a (Christian) faith-based anthropology? In contrast to Meneses et al.'s approach, I suggest Christian anthropologists must more radically acknowledge the genealogies of their (theological) orthodoxies and the way in which they relate to power.

In my own work, I was therefore very much aware of the fact that I myself was somewhat implicated in the encounters I studied. I too was implicated in the complexity of Christian approaches to Israel-Palestine, and in my engagement with those I worked with was aware of my complicity – by loose membership in the Western evangelical community – in their situation. The relational dynamics of encounters proved helpful in navigating this complicity: by engaging with the historical dimensions of our interactions, I was able to navigate the expectations of those I worked with on me, even if they were often aimed at different ends. In our common quest to become better Christians, I was exhorted by those I worked with to worry less about politics and society and instead trust God, or to fight for the cause of those suffering injustice. I navigated opposing demands by looking at the tension between biblical scripture and the culturally and historically derived demands of those interpreting it. This has allowed me to arrive at my own, evolving theological position, that is based on Christian ethics (and aware of how they might be influenced by other factors) and a self-critical

appraisal of whether I can manage to adhere to my frameworks. I was learning with those I worked with even as I did not agree with them in all aspects. By narrating a context of theological strife I refrained from passing judgement in the line of what anthropologists have considered ‘crap’ (as cited in Coleman 2015: 275), yet at the same time was able to ethically navigate positions that impinge on others’ freedom and rights. The lens of encounters seemed the most respectful approach to understand how Palestinian evangelicals navigated their belonging to global evangelicalism, of which I was seen to represent one part. Rather than attempting to present a ‘complete’ description of Palestinian evangelicalism in the following, therefore, I focus on the mutual co-constitution of those involved in the encounter, including myself as anthropologist. Overall, the fact that I had a Christian background helped me more than hindered me as I was let in on some internal debates that would have been less open to ‘outsiders’.

Having outlined the project design in **Chapter 1**, its theoretical foundations in **Chapter 2**, and my methodological considerations in **Chapter 3**, I will now move on to discuss the empirical data I gathered during my fieldwork. As a reminder, the following chapters proceed as follows: in **Chapter 4**, I explore the surprising finding that many Palestinian evangelicals in fact do not oppose, but support Dispensationalist theologies. How can this dilemma be explained? **Chapter 5** adds further nuance to this exploration through four ethnographic portraits of Palestinian evangelicals who embody different attitudes and tensions. In **Chapter 6**, I investigate how evangelicals from abroad engage with the territory of Israel-Palestine, honing in on the artificiality of their vision of Israel. **Chapter 7** portrays the challenge of a small group of Palestinian evangelicals to this dominant imaginary of Israel-Palestine, and examines their navigation of ‘global’ evangelicalism and its hegemonic discourse. **Chapter 8** focuses on the power

differentials at play in the shaping of what 'Israel' signifies among evangelicals globally. Finally, I conclude the thesis in **Chapter 9** by summarising the insights of the empirical chapters in light of the hypothesis, arguing that the Anthropology of global Christianity needs to pay heed to the role of power in the shaping of orthodoxy in theology and practice.

4. 'Citizens of heaven' and citizens of Israel-Palestine

Israel is both a place of the 'evangelical imagination' as well as an everyday, often brutal, reality for its Palestinian evangelical residents. Within dominant evangelical frameworks that see Israel as a divinely ordained country for ethnic Jews, Palestinian evangelicals are an anomaly. While they share an evangelical commitment, they have a complex and difficult relationship with the Israeli state – they are ethnically and politically at odds with the Jewish character of Israel. Yet, influenced by dispensationalist theologies, Palestinian evangelicals' political involvement is often stifled. How do Palestinian evangelicals navigate the 'dual citizenship' as 'citizens of heaven'⁴³ and as citizens of Israel-Palestine today? The aim of this chapter is to portray the counterintuitive belonging of Palestinian evangelicals to a larger faith community of 'global' evangelicalism and its dominant interpretative regime. The chapter argues that Palestinian evangelicals continue to be greatly influenced by dominant evangelical theologies, even if these negate the existence of Palestinian evangelicals or support policies that discriminate against them.

The chapter therefore firstly provides a detailed account of the development of the theologies of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and opposing evangelical theologies, which have significantly impacted Palestinian evangelicalism. It traces the historical Western evangelical involvement in Israel-Palestine, and then shows how this involvement has shaped the social and political engagement of Palestinian evangelicals in Israel-Palestine today, through the example of a strike by the Nazareth Baptist School in 2015. I explain that the level of political and social engagement of evangelicals is

⁴³ 'Citizens of heaven' is a reference from the letter to the Philippians 3: 20f, in which the St Paul cautioned the readers to focus on God's Kingdom and wait for Jesus' Second Coming. It has been used by dispensationalists to justify a withdrawal from earthly politics in exchange for a sole focus on spiritual matters.

related to their interpretation of the temporal position of the 'Kingdom of God' – if it lies in the future, evangelicals tend to withdraw from worldly politics, but if it is believed to have already begun at the coming of Jesus, evangelicals see more scope for political and social action.

The challenge of appropriate Christian 'citizenship' (understood here as level of engagement with the state and society Palestinian evangelicals are a part of) is amplified in my ethnographic context because the interactions of Palestinian evangelicals with the Israeli state are not merely expressive of a particular theological stance in general,⁴⁴ but are seen by many co-evangelicals as potentially directly impacting eschatological scenarios. The different theological stances therefore become acutely visible in this geographical context. Palestinian Christians in Israel-Palestine live out their faith in the centre of the Christian spiritual cartography (Coleman, 2013), in a landscape and among a people ('the Jews') that are often used as example of how God acts in the world (Durbin, 2014). They are, of course, acutely aware of this fact, as well as of the centuries of theologising about the fate of the territory they call their home. The way in which Palestinian evangelicals choose to interpret the 'Kingdom of God', and the extent of their social and political action, are indicative of the power dynamics at work within the transnational social field of evangelicalism.

⁴⁴ As is the case for Omri Elisha's (2011) church goers in Tennessee with their struggle to effect social change, or Jon Bialecki's (2009) Vineyard members and their differing possibilities for social action in response to different visions of God's Kingdom.



Figure 14. Nazareth Evangelical College library with a table-full of discarded English theological books, to make space for the new Arabic theological library additions.

I begin by recounting a conversation I had with my friend Fadi, which was instrumental in my understanding of the context I was working in. Fadi was already the pastor of a local church and part-time teacher at a local school. At the time of this interaction he was pursuing a postgraduate degree in theology on top of these commitments. He often came to the college to consult Bible commentaries to prepare for his sermons, and I sometimes helped him to conduct research for his sermons – a task I enjoyed doing, as it offered insight into what he deemed important to transmit to his church, and how he structured his sermons.⁴⁵ Moreover, even though he was extremely busy, Fadi enjoyed engaging in theological discussions. I often asked for permission to record our conversations so I could continue to think about them and look up some of the reference

⁴⁵ This task, and the environment of the college as such, was very helpful in that it enabled me to have in-depth discussions with male Palestinian evangelicals, when it would not have been appropriate for me to meet them in public coffee shops, etc. When I visited them in their family home, the dynamics were also different as I inevitably was taken ‘under the wing’ of their wives and helped to prepare food, or play with their children. The college library was a sufficiently ‘semi-private’ space to have conversations with male Palestinian evangelicals without either of us being seen to compromise our integrity.

he made to biblical texts. On the day of the interaction I focus on here, we were sitting in the tiny library of Nazareth Evangelical College, surrounded by stacks of books, and our conversation (also recorded) turned to Dispensationalism. I already briefly mentioned that Dispensationalism was established by Lord John Nelson Darby in the nineteenth century, and is one of the theologies behind the evangelical affinity for the Israeli state.

While I was theoretically aware of dispensationalist beliefs about Israel, I will always remember the following conversation with Fadi as the ‘moment in which the penny dropped’: the moment in which my understanding of the Palestinian evangelicals I was working with shifted significantly. Knowing that Dispensationalism originated from the English Brethren movement in the 19th century, during the course of our conversation I asked Fadi what the couple of local Palestinian Brethren churches thought about this – believing I already knew the answer.

L: How do they [the Palestinian Brethren church] stand in relation to Darby then?
What happens? They probably don't follow Darby?

F: they do follow him. He's like their pope!

L: [pause] but they're...

F: many Arab Israelis here are dispensationalist.

L: are dispensationalist?

F: are dispensationalist.

L: what?

At this point, relatively early on during my fieldwork, I was still under the impression that most Palestinian evangelicals were on the same page as those that organised the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences, which challenged Dispensationalism and

Christian Zionism. After Fadi refuted this notion, I mentally raced over the few Palestinian evangelical church services I had attended by the time of this conversation. Was there any hint that they, mostly Baptist, followed a dispensationalist theology too? While I had not heard any outright endorsement of the seven dispensations (which, according to dispensationalists, divide world history into seven distinctive time periods), I had certainly noticed a pietistic focus on personal virtues, which is another marker of dispensationalist theology. Could it be that it had much deeper roots than being a one-off sermon topic, as I initially assumed? I was perplexed. Fadi elaborated:

F: Now, you should understand that dispensational theology is at the very heart of the evangelical world. Or it was in the twentieth century, it's less now. But all – and this is another thing that you should know – all the missionaries that came here, Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, and Nazarenes, all of them were very dispensationalist. They brought their theology here and they fed it to the local people ... Now, this is the difference between a pastor like me, and a pastor who is seventy years old. Pastors who are seventy or sixty years, they were taught by them.

L: so they haven't moved away from what they –

F: [interrupts] – many of them. And also younger pastors, like many Pentecostals and Brethren, they're still *there*. They're interpreting the State of Israel as a fulfilment of God's prophecy.

L: do they learn this where they train for ministry?

F: they do learn this. They read the Bible by it, through it. For them, this is *romance*, this is *revelation*.

How was I to make sense of the fact that so many Palestinian evangelical pastors, both old and young, subscribed to a dispensationalist theology that revels in the notion that the Jewish State of Israel is a fulfilment of biblical prophecy? It was then that I realised that in my preparations to study Palestinian evangelical activism challenging Christian Zionism, I had been too focused on alternative narratives to Dispensationalism and

Christian Zionism. I had studied the work of the theologians around *Christ at the Checkpoint*, as well as the Palestinian liberation theologians and their supporters. I had also engaged with the work by other anthropologists of Christianity who had explored the ways in which Christianity has been syncretised and localised (e.g. Engelke, 2007; Haynes, 2017; Robbins, 2004a). Moreover, much of the scholarship of Palestine and Palestinians had focused on alternative narratives to the dominant Israeli one, and those who support it. That being said, Nazareth Evangelical College, where the conversation with Fadi took place, did not support a dispensationalist theology either, but emphasised a more contextual theological approach – which initially also confirmed my assumptions. Yet, as I later learnt, many of the younger pastors were actually trained abroad (mostly in North America), or at the better-financed messianic Jewish ‘Israel College of the Bible’ in Netanya, which is financially supported by Christian Zionists.

In reflecting on this question, I realised that neither my reading on the theological question of whether Israel is a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, nor my anthropological reading about Palestinian Christianity or Christianity at large, had prepared me for this scenario. The first led me to expect two theological ‘sides’ of the debate, which would be, if not homogenous, then at least roughly uni-directional. These I believed to be made up of Western Christian Zionist evangelicals on the one ‘side’ and Palestinian contextual evangelicals on the other ‘side’: and this is what I had come prepared to investigate further. After hearing from Fadi about the wide-spread influence of dispensationalist theologies on Palestinian evangelicals, my interest shifted to why Palestinian evangelicals chose not to challenge these theologies that essentially discriminated against them. I began to dig deeper into the history of the development of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, the theologies I will delineate further in the following. I already outlined in Chapter 2 how I approached theology in this research

project, but want to demonstrate here how it significantly changed my understanding of those I worked with. Had I not understood the historical background of the theologies that have so influenced the Palestinian evangelicals I worked with, I would not have understood the nuances of their social and political engagement. This will become clear in the example of the school strike which I discuss following the introduction to the theologies of Dispensationalism, Christian Zionism, and its ‘counter-theology’ that is commonly known as ‘covenantal theology’. The lingering impact of these theologies on Palestinian evangelicals can eventually help us understand the role of power in the shaping of evangelical orthodoxy.

4.1 Theologies that have shaped evangelical engagement with Israel

Christian theologians have grappled for centuries with the fact that they are not Jews, yet are embedded in Jewish history. Space and the scope of this thesis do not permit an exhaustive treatment of how Christians have dealt with this relationship (cf. MacCulloch, 2010). However, in this section I would like to develop an understanding of how a particular way of seeing the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, i.e. Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism, has emerged from the socio-political context of Western Protestantism. This task has been carried out by anthropologists, historians, and theologians before me: for example, Sean Durbin (2018), Robert Smith independently (2013) and together with Goran Gunner (2014), or Donald Lewis (2014). I rely on their work in the ensuing discussion, yet also differ in their approach as I am interested in how these theologies have travelled, and impacted the territory and its evangelical community that are at the centre of these theologies: Israel-Palestine. The key aim of this section is to understand Christian Zionism not just as ‘theology’ but also as ‘cultural transmission’ (Smith & Gunner, 2014) or ‘identity’ (Lewis, in press), which

allows political action to be cloaked as devotional practice (Durbin, 2014). This helps us to understand the power of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism in being often ‘ambient’ in congregations rather than fully articulated, making evangelical support of Israel a default position. I contrast Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism with an alternative but less popular evangelical theological approach to Israel called ‘covenant theology’, which claims that all Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled at the incarnation of Jesus. These insights will then be used to analyse Western involvement in Israel-Palestine and the emergence of Palestinian evangelicalism, and will help us to understand how Palestinian evangelicals continue to be influenced by these theological ideas.

Theological notions of how Christians ought to relate to the world around them are related to the ‘ruptures’ their belief system creates ‘between the past, the present, and the future’ (Robbins, 2007: 10f). The first such rupture is that which led first century Jews to see Jesus as their messiah, and which has led to the debates as to how to deal with this ‘Jewish ancestry’. However, how Christians understand the present and the future, as well as how the future and past relate to the present, has led to the development of vastly different ethics, and ways of being in the world (Robbins 2007).

Jon Bialecki (2009) has helpfully classified these ways as different ‘kingdom theologies’, i.e. ways in which Christians imagine God’s Kingdom to be operative on earth. He distinguishes between Dispensationalism, which expects a rupture between the present and the future at the Second Coming of Christ – this will be explored in more detail below, as it is the strongest influence on Palestinian evangelicals. The second ‘kingdom theology’, which was most wide-spread among those Bialecki worked with, believed in a ‘now and not yet’ kingdom: this means that God’s Kingdom already began with the coming of Jesus, but will be fully revealed only at his Second Coming.

James Bielo (2011) in his work on the emergent church movement observed a third understanding, Preterism, in which the Kingdom of God is believed to be already fully here and Christians have the responsibility to make it visible through their social action. It will be apparent to the reader that the second and third theologies of God's Kingdom fit more easily with a more social justice minded, left-of-centre political agenda. I discuss the approach to Israel by adherents to these theologies in the last sub-section.

4.1.1 The theology of Dispensationalism

In Chapter 2, I explored the literal tradition of evangelical Bible use, and argued that the Protestant Reformation was the starting point for lay engagement with biblical text that was often informed by the interpreter's social and cultural contexts. One can count the Reformation as one of the 'ruptures' between past and present which reshaped (some) Christians' engagement with politics and the world at large. I also pointed to the fact that the translation and structuring of the Bible led to increased categorisation. In particular, it saw the attempt to categorise and interpret historical events through a biblical lens in a way that is still prominent among evangelicals today, and significantly shapes Christian Zionism.

Historical interpretations of biblical prophecy (over against allegorical ones) were introduced into English Protestantism in the early seventeenth century. Historical theologian Robert O. Smith traces these developments by discussing the work of theologians such as Thomas Draxe, Thomas Brightman, Henry Finch, and Joseph Mede (Smith 2013: 69-94). Significantly, in its English and later British Protestant form, this historical prophecy interpretation became more and more Judeo-centric: Jews were discovered as bulwark against the Roman Catholic and Islamic 'enemy'. This was to be realised through a Jewish conquest of Palestine and return thereto, supported by English

and Anglo-American Protestants. Both of these notions quickly became believed to be God's will for the world, and Christians were believed to be required to assist in these moves (Smith 2013: 48). Smith notes the important nuance that, while English Protestants (returning from exile in continental Europe in the 18th century) credited Luther with their new prophecy interpretation, the difference and focus on Jews was also influenced by the development of English nationalism (Smith 2013: 50). In 1546, John Bale went so far as to develop, through a historical review of biblical prophecy, a revised history of Christianity to the effect of 'proving' that Protestantism (not Catholicism) was England's true heritage. Further, the first English Bible, the Geneva Bible of 1535, developed a notion of Jews as a nation in its integrated commentary, especially through Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter 11. Anderson (2006) claimed that the 'cultural' role of printing played a crucial role in moving from small-scale to large-scale societies, which enabled the notion of an 'imagined (political) community' or 'nation'. The idea that the 'nation' of the Jews ought to be 'restored' to Palestine was thus articulated in a milieu of the rise of nation-states.

This observation is important when it comes to following this theology to the 'new world': Smith (2013: 69-94) draws connections between the Puritan emigration to America, and the North American political activities and opinions that support the State of Israel today. He shows that, amid the British colonial project, the Judeo-centric prophecy interpretation of the time proved crucial to the identity of the early Puritans. Especially the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and its apocalyptic scenarios became important.⁴⁶ Most importantly, these new American Protestants interpreted their journey and colonising endeavour through their scripture reading, leading to the well-

⁴⁶ Millennial thought is also apparent in other context than the Anglo-American, and might be interesting to regard this alongside focus on Anglo-American Christian Zionism. However, this is not the scope of this thesis (Sweet, 1986).

known idea that Americans are a ‘chosen people’, a ‘city on a hill’ (taken from Matthew 5:14, a connection first made in a sermon by John Winthrop, governor of Massachusetts). This continues to contribute to American evangelical’s self-understanding, the views both that American and Jewish Israeli history is intertwined. The racial connotations of Protestant Christian constructions of Jews against the backdrop of ‘antichristian’ Muslims and Catholics will be further explored in Chapter 7. For the purpose of this section, it suffices to note that the Protestant Christians of the seventeenth century poured Muslims, Catholics and Jews into an ‘apocalyptic mould’ and cast them in ‘scripturally determined roles’ (Smith, 2013: 6).

The traditions of literalism, categorisation, and biblical prophecy interpretation through a lens of history have given rise to the detailed and somewhat technical theology of Dispensationalism in the nineteenth century. John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an ordained but disillusioned minister in the Irish Church, founded the Brethren movement and formulated a theology that neatly divided world history into seven ‘dispensations’: from Adam (‘Innocence’) to the Great Flood (‘Conscience’), the Tower of Babel (‘Human Government’), Moses (‘Promise’), to the crucifixion of Jesus (‘Law’). The present time is classified as the sixth and penultimate ‘dispensation’, ‘Grace’ or the ‘Church Age’ – which will be followed by the End Times, the apocalypse and ‘Great Millenium’, for which this theology has careful forecasts according to its interpretation of the book of Revelation. The attraction of Dispensationalism lies in its apparent power to reconcile many tensions found in the biblical text that challenge its coherence as historical framework. Due to its all-encompassing narrative of human history and typological theology, Crapanzano (2000: 175) calls Dispensationalism ‘a philosophy of history’.

A central feature of the imagination of the End Times is the ‘pre-tribulational’ ‘rapture’ of Christians, which translates into the belief that Christians will be spared and removed from the world, or ‘raptured’, before the world will suffer severe trials before Jesus will return for his Second Coming. Similar to earlier Anglophone theologians, Darby envisioned a special place for Jews in these unfolding events, even though scholars have shown that the implications of this theology actually resulted in a theology of contempt for Jews (Smith 2013). In Darby’s interpretation of the important section in St Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapter 11, the church had not replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people, but rather there were now two separate covenants between God and the Church, and God and the Jewish people. However, Darby understood Christians as the ‘heavenly people’ and Jews as the ‘earthly people’ of God, and maintained that the promises to Christians are far greater than those to the Jews. Darby firmly believed that God had promised the land of Israel to the Jews forever (a result of his literal reading of the Bible), and that the Jews had to return to this land before Jesus’ Second Coming. However, his construction of the Jews served a Christian apocalyptic end: if they did not convert to Christianity and accept Jesus as messiah, even after their return to the ‘land’ the Jews would be destroyed during the tribulations.

Darby’s ideas were popularised through the commentary of the Scofield Reference Bible, which was widely used across the Anglophone evangelical world, including in Brethren and Southern Baptist churches. Sean Durbin (2018: 25-53) provides a convincing account of the appeal of Dispensationalism to an American audience especially, citing the enabling environment of liberalizing trends of Higher Criticism in Christian circles (against which dispensationalist literalism was a reaction), as well as receptive Bible Institutes which formally disseminated Darby’s theology. Darby’s ideas reached an even wider lay audience in the 1970s through two popular fiction series, *Left*

Behind and *Late Great Planet Earth*, that depicted in gory detail the final tribulations, and were meant to serve as warning for Christians and not-yet-Christians (Monahan, 2008). *Late Great Planet Earth*, in fact, became the best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970s in the United States and beyond. Importantly, it ‘updated’ Darby’s theology by inserting contemporary nation-states into prophetic texts of the Bible (Durbin 2018: 37).

Following on from the discussion of literalism as interpretative regime in Chapter 2, it is important to note that dispensationalists do not just ‘read the Bible literally’, but in fact hand down texts tied to meaning, emphasising certain passages of the Bible over others. This is why Smith and Gunner (2014: 238f) conceptualise its politicised version of Christian Zionism not just as phenomenon, but as a ‘meme’, a ‘unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation’. This transmission began with the Protestant Reformation, has developed via influential theologians, and continues to influence how Anglo-American Christians view Palestinians, Arabs, and the Israel-Palestine conflict today. ‘Contemporary American Christian Zionism,’ holds Smith (2013: 184) ‘is an organic outgrowth both of America’s typological identification with the Children of Israel and its prophetic vocation to secure and preserve Israel’s homeland.’ The way in which this is expressed can vary from political lobbying, to prayer, and to transformation of the self along particular ethical lines that cloak political action in spiritual devotion.

4.1.2 Dispensationalism’s political turn into Christian Zionism

Darby’s idea of Christians as ‘heavenly people’, derived from a verse in the letter to the Philippians, 3:20 (‘we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives’) meant that he rejected any earthly political involvement of Christians. His statement, ‘we do not mix in politics; we are not of the world: we do not vote’ (cf. Smith 2013: 159) is

repeated almost word-for-word by one of the Palestinian evangelicals I worked with, who will appear in Chapter 5. How does this marry then with Christian Zionists' political advocacy for the State of Israel, which I often refer to in this thesis? Darby's popular theology alone cannot explain the political activism on behalf of Jews. However, its entanglement with a more general Anglophone evangelical identity allowed Darby's ideas to be adapted to a political programme.

To understand this development, it is important to point again to the role of prophetic biblical texts in guiding dispensationalists' expectations of geopolitics. As Durbin (2018: 34) demonstrates, Israel's geopolitical context especially 'enables Christians to continuously read current events as affirmations of the authority of the Bible'. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948⁴⁷ was therefore welcomed with excitement by

⁴⁷ Space does not permit a careful delineation of the creation of the Israeli state. However, it is important to note the involvement of dispensationalist and Christian Zionist Christians in this process. Amid increasing persecution of Jews in Europe and the general rise of nationalist ideologies in the nineteenth century, Western mainline Protestant and evangelical churches supported the rising Zionist movement in Europe (though some of the mainline churches were also complicit with fascism and the persecution of Jews). Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*, the core Zionist text, was published in 1896, and located a desired homeland for Jews in the territory of their sacred texts. While at first his ideas encountered a mixed reception, the gradually increasing support for Zionism can be traced back to influential dispensationalist leaders, such as the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (Lewis, 2010). In 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, himself raised in a Christian Zionist home (Awad, 2008), promised Lord Rothschild, a leader of the Jewish community, that a 'national home for the Jewish people' would be set up in the Levant. This became known as the Balfour Declaration, which set the agenda of the British Mandate in Palestine from 1922. This political and religious interest led to the facilitation of mass migration of tens of thousands of Jews to the area that was to become the Israeli state already during the time of the British Mandate. Land was bought from its existing Palestinian residents by the Jewish National Fund in preparation for yet much larger future in-migrations of Jews.

Following the culmination of Jewish persecution in Europe during the atrocities of the Holocaust, the Zionist dream gained more and more supporters, and the necessity for a safe place for millions of Jewish refugees became more and more urgent. The UN agreed on a Partition Plan (Resolution 181) in 1947, which sought to create a solution for both Jewish and Palestinian nationalists by decreeing the British

dispensationalists – despite it being accompanied by a violent taking of the land by Jewish settlers, and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages.⁴⁸ After all, it allowed Jews from all over the world to migrate to its territory and become citizens of its state, a perceived prerequisite for Jesus' Second Coming. Even mainline, liberal American Christians were initially in support of Jewish nationalism and the creation of the Israeli state (Carenen, 2012).⁴⁹ John Hagee, a well-known contemporary Christian Zionist and

withdrawal from Mandatory Palestine, and instead forming two separate but economically unified states in the area. However, the plan was rejected by the Arab league in hope of stymieing the partition of Palestine (Morris, 2008). This led to a civil war in Mandatory Palestine. On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel declared its independence: a date referred to by Palestinians as the *Nakba* (Catastrophe), and by Jews and Christian Zionists as 'Day of Independence'. However, the newly-declared Jewish State of Israel did not follow the proposed UN Partition Plan, which had allotted it 55% of Mandatory Palestine, but instead proclaimed its rule over 78% of it. The West Bank (territory west of the river Jordan) fell to Jordan, while Egypt retained what is today the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem was divided: East Jerusalem came under Jordanian control, while West Jerusalem became the self-declared capital of Israel. Armies of the surrounding Arab countries subsequently invaded Israel in aid of Palestinians, but their help came too late and was not coordinated, which meant that they were quickly defeated. Since the Great Revolt had weakened Palestinians, they were not able to resist for long the geopolitical shifts that were determining their fate.

⁴⁸ Of more than 500 Palestinian villages in what was to become the State of Israel, more than 400 were attacked by Jewish militias, their inhabitants expelled, and their lands confiscated (Davis, 2011). These villages were later mostly destroyed, and today only a differently coloured patch of trees in the forest (planted to cover the remnants of the villages), or a row of cacti previously planted for the protection of houses, reminds of the previous habitation (Pappé, 2011).

⁴⁹ However, it is worth mentioning that Western Protestant churches also offered humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees following the 1948 War, yet carefully avoiding getting involved in the politics (Cohen, 2014: 186). However, as Cohen analyses, the 'commitment to neutrality [on the part of the World Council of Churches WCC], however, could not keep politics at bay. Indeed, the hallmark of Protestant humanitarianism in the Middle East from 1948 to 1967 was a permanent struggle between claims of justice and impartial benevolence, universal human rights and Christian Zionism, empathy for Palestinian victimhood and identification with Jews as symbols of historical injustice.' (Cohen 2014: 186). The Palestinian refugee crisis challenged notions of impartial Christian humanitarianism.

founder of the organisation Christians United for Israel (CUFI),⁵⁰ remembers how his ‘father’s eyes filled with tears’ at the announcement of the United States’ recognition of the newly created Israeli state. Like many evangelicals of the time, he was profoundly shaped by the events, and, addressing Hagee is reported to have said: ‘son, today is the most important day of the twentieth century. God’s promise to bring the Jewish people back to Israel is being fulfilled before our eyes’ (Smith 2013: 11). At the creation of the Israeli state, the Western evangelical imagination of Israel and its significance was stronger than the fate of its Palestinian residents – a predicament that often continues when Western evangelicals visit Israel today.

When Israel further gained control of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in the Six-Day War of 1967, which dispensationalists believed had to be under Jewish control for Jesus to return, dispensationalists felt a sense of victory over liberal Protestants, and used this event as further ‘proof’ that the literal text of the Bible was inerrant. While Western governments were often cautious in view of Israel’s aggressive behaviour,⁵¹ and mainline denominations grew increasingly hesitant in their support of the Israeli State, Western evangelicals saw Israel’s strength as a bulwark in the face of communism and the perceived Islamist threat of Iran (Spector, 2009; on the significance of Islam as ‘enemy’ see Chapter 7). Israel’s military offensive in Lebanon in 1982, aiming to

⁵⁰ The term ‘Christian Zionist’ is both an emic and etic term. Sean Durbin (2018: 3) demonstrates that it is used by those in support of Israel as a self-descriptive adjective when talking to ‘outside’ parties they want to convince of their stance on Israel. However, since support of Israel is so intrinsic in the Christian Zionist belief system, they often also just self-describe as ‘Christian’ or ‘evangelical’, without highlighting their position on Israel as optional or special.

⁵¹ The Six-Day War, initiated by Israel, led to the capturing of East Jerusalem was accompanied by territorial gains in the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Sinai. These gains were followed by extensive building of settlements in the area of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and seizing of control of the West Bank’s water sources, and produced yet more Palestinian refugees (Shlaim, 2014).

destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and install a Christian government, cost thousands of civilian lives, yet was also received uncritically by a majority of Western evangelicals. Especially for American evangelicals, Israel became so-to-speak America's 'final frontier' (Carenen 2012). Yet in Europe, too, Christian Zionism had gained in popularity among evangelicals and even some mainline Christians (Ariel, 2006).

From the 1970s onwards, under the leadership of American fundamentalist⁵² preacher Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority movement, American evangelical engagement with Israel took on increasingly 'political' forms (Harding 2000; Durbin 2014). Jerry Falwell himself was 'converted' to Zionism following his first trip to Israel in 1967 (Durbin 2018, 39). It is important to highlight however, that, rather than linking Christian Zionists' political action directly to their beliefs, the core of their political action is the desire to 'cooperate' with God's plans that have already been determined. Philips (2014: 27) demonstrates that Christian Zionists believe God would carry out what they perceive his plans to be regardless of their involvement – but, knowing what these plans are requires them to fashion their Christian ethical selves in a way that aligns their actions with God. Durbin (2014: 68) shows that Christian Zionist political action can therefore be reframed as religious devotion. While the actual political outcomes that pertain to Christian Zionist views of the world are celebrated, not all Christian Zionism activism to achieve these ends happens in the secular political sphere. Like Jon Bialecki (2017) has shown, political outcomes (in his example, the events and

⁵² The Bible Institutes disseminating dispensationalist theology ensured that Dispensationalism became 'synonymous with fundamentalism and Pentecostalism' (Durbin 2018: 33; Weber, 2005: 13). Those belonging to the more united social formation of Fundamentalism in the US (named after their pamphlets *The Fundamentals*) identified with Dispensationalism (Harding 2000).

social atmosphere that led to the election of Donald Trump) can be viewed by evangelicals as being God-ordained, whether they had been actively lobbying in the public political sphere or not. Further, prayer for such outcomes itself constitutes an act of Christian citizenship (Marshall, 2009; O'Neill, 2010; Haynes, 2015).

Although Christian Zionist theologies are often only ever implicit in any given congregation and are far from monolithic (Durbin, 2014), a 2013 Pew Study⁵³ suggests that 82% of white American evangelicals believe that Israel has been given to the Jews. American Christian Zionists today are organised in the organisation *Christians United for Israel* (CUFI), which numbers 4.1 million evangelicals among its members. Further, the *International Christian Embassy* in Jerusalem (ICEJ) is a contact point for Christian Zionists from all over the world. Ironically but perhaps tellingly, the ICEJ has its headquarters in the former family home of the well-known Palestinian literary scholar and cultural critic Edward Said, which he and his family fled in 1948 (Wagner, 1995).

The ICEJ yearly gathers Christian Zionists together in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, *Sukkot*. This links international Christian Zionist activities directly with the Israeli government: Israeli prime ministers usually open the event and are greeted by warm applause and cheers. Attendees carry banners with biblical verses such as 'I will make my home in Zion' (Wagner 1995:99). Ariel (2014) adds that the event is accompanied by extended Holy Land tours. Even though the ICEJ is seen as the main representation of evangelical Christian interests in Israel, not all Christian Zionists support ICEJ's agenda: this is because, as Ariel notes, in order to enjoy close relations with the Israeli government ICEJ refrains from missionizing among Jews, which

⁵³ See: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/10/03/more-white-evangelicals-than-american-jews-say-god-gave-israel-to-the-jewish-people/> [accessed 21/02/2017]

however is a significant element in other Christian Zionist and dispensationalist theologies. The lack of such activities has meant that the Israeli government has welcomed the lobbying of ICEJ on behalf of the Israeli state to evangelicals worldwide, despite evangelical's desire to see Jews convert to Christianity, in a 'marriage of convenience' (Ariel, 2006: 94).

4.1.3 What of evangelicals that are not Christian Zionist?

I already noted that evangelical dispensationalist and Christian Zionist support for the Israeli state emerged alongside, or perhaps fueled by, a rise of liberal and progressive Protestantism. Sean Durbin especially highlights this co-development in his analysis of American Christian Zionism, arguing that the move away from a belief in biblical inerrancy by liberal Christian denominations aided in manifesting a stronger fundamentalist (and dispensationalist) evangelical tradition. However, at the same time as the rise of the evangelical right aligned with Fundamentalism and Dispensationalism, the politicisation of the evangelical left was also occurring. The evangelical left maintained the idea of biblical inerrancy, but eschewed dispensationalist and fundamentalist theologies. In the 'theological battles' (Durbin 2014: 25) that ensued between these two evangelical directions, the evangelical right emerged as stronger and dominant 'interpretative regime' (Crapanzano 2000: 16). In fact, David Swartz (2012b: 254), chronicler of what he termed the 'moral minority', claims that the evangelical left had been 'left behind', all but rendered inconsequential, in American politics by the 1990s.

Despite their lack of influence, it is important to sketch the theologies of the evangelical left in relation to Israel here as this will aid in understanding the activism of Palestinian evangelicals and their allies who oppose Christian Zionism. It is also important, in order

to refrain from considering Western evangelicalism as a homogenous ‘bloc’, as it has often been portrayed since the evangelical right has become so politically prominent (Swartz 2012b: 7). We will see in the following chapters, especially through the portraits in Chapter 6, how Palestinian evangelicals share sympathies with both dispensationalist theologies and the theologies of the evangelical left described here. I will return to an assessment of these theologies’ various impacts on Palestinian evangelicals and ‘global’ evangelicalism in the Conclusion.

In the America of the early 1970s, evangelicals became increasingly politicised in a Cold War context (Swartz 2012b). At that time, the political direction of evangelical politicisation of evangelicals was not yet clear, as Swartz argues: an important event that suggested that the evangelical left might lead evangelical political engagement was the ‘Thanksgiving Workshop for Evangelical Social Action’ in Chicago, which ended with ‘The Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern’ (see Appendix A). The workshop brought together leading figures of an emerging progressive evangelicalism, who understood themselves as intrinsically connected to the social and political contexts of their time (contrary to dispensationalist and fundamentalist a-politicism). They were concerned with injustice within American society and globally, including the structures that had facilitated Christianity’s complicity with racism, poverty, and oppression, and declared their dedication to work against these. Some of those connected to the Thanksgiving Workshop went on to influence biblical institutions to re-engage with contemporary culture and politics with effect for example on Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary,⁵⁴ as well as the influential magazine *Christianity Today*. Their contextual approach is in line with the ‘kingdom theologies’ identified by

⁵⁴ Theologians associated with both of these institutions have been involved with the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference, as we shall see in Chapter 7.

Bialecki (2009) and Bielo (2011) that consider God's Kingdom to have already begun with Jesus' incarnation. Some of those connected with the Chicago declaration became activists, joining African American evangelicals in their civil rights struggle (John Alexander) or in opposition to the Vietnam War from an evangelical perspective (Jim Wallis). Others sought to further the evangelical left agenda through seeking political office (Mark Hatfield).

Of interest for the purposes of this thesis is that the American evangelical left was inspired and propelled by evangelicals from less developed countries with distinct liberation theologies, such as Peruvian church worker Samuel Escobar. He critiqued North American evangelical conservatives for ignoring the exploitations of capitalism and American imperialism, for example at the international Lausanne Congress of World Evangelicalization in 1974 (Swartz 2012b: 5; cf. McAlister 2018). Such critiques were disseminated and reiterated for example through the worldwide network of Christian students, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (Swartz, 2012b). The work of other post-colonial theologians of course also feeds into this criticism (Jagessar and Reddie, 2007; Handman, 2010; Jennings, 2010; Jagessar and Burns, 2011; Joy and Duggan, 2012), and we will encounter the Palestinian evangelical example of this in Chapter 8. While dispensational and Christian Zionist theologies have become more dominant, the influence of non-Western evangelicals on the Western evangelical left is an important moment in the development of 'global' evangelicalism.

However, the American evangelical left failed to retain influence amid the rise of Falwell's fundamentalist Moral Majority. Swartz (2012b: 187-254) argues that this was due to 'identity politics', i.e. internal disagreements in theology and emphasis within the movement of the evangelical left. It was also due to the fact that the political left was suspicious of the evangelical left's otherwise conservative theology (for example with

regards to sexuality), and therefore remained indifferent towards this constituency – meaning that the movement became ‘politically homeless’ (Swartz 2012b: 6). Where Durbin argued that the politicisation of the evangelical right was a reaction to mainline Protestant liberalism, Swartz (2012b: 8) suggests that the evangelical right might have taken inspiration from the political activism of the evangelical left. In any case, the evangelical right became the dominant and most visible form of evangelical political engagement in the United States.⁵⁵

The evangelical left, however, has retained some influence within evangelicalism, shaping engagement especially with issues such as poverty, the environment, or inequalities in the global economy. Swartz quotes a Princeton University survey of 2000 which found that 45% of American evangelicals called themselves ‘moderate’ and 19% called themselves ‘liberal’ (Swartz 2012b: 7), suggesting that almost a third of evangelicals in America were actually left-leaning at that point. The movements studied by Jon Bialecki and Tanya Luhrman (Vineyard) or James Bielo (Emerging Church) can be counted among these non-fundamentalist evangelicals. Yet, despite the openness to political engagement around certain issues, Jon Bialecki (2009a) argued that the activism of those associated with those who saw God’s Kingdom as ‘now and not yet’ rarely resulted in tangible political agendas. He stipulates that their ‘practice is oriented to a vision of justice anchored in a redeemed but unreadable future rather than a fallen

⁵⁵ One of the key figures of the evangelical left, and arguably one of the reasons why the political influence of the evangelical left waned, was President Jimmy Carter. For many evangelicals he was not conservative enough, and therefore did not enlist their support. Carter was heavily involved in the Middle East conflict during his presidency and was able to negotiate a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 following the 1978 Camp David Accords. Importantly for Palestinian evangelicals, he supported the founding of *Nazareth Village* (which is the subject of Chapter 6). The president of the Nazareth Baptist School features a picture of himself and President Carter in the photo collage pointing to his important international contacts outside his office (Figure 15).

but legible present' (Bialecki 2009: 224). The hope of future fulfilment makes today's political action always only a first step. Some of the encounters examined in this thesis are between Palestinian and progressive Western evangelicals, where the difficulty of taking coherent political stances on the Israel-Palestine conflict comes to the fore.

The last point already points to the fact that even within a left-leaning evangelicalism, the question of Israel's theological significance and associated evangelical involvement in it is not always clear-cut. That is, where one might expect a focus on demand for justice for Palestinians and a condemnation of the Israeli occupation, the idea of Israel as God-ordained country for the Jews can sometimes trump the concern with issues of social and political justice of the evangelical left. There are only very few Western self-identified evangelical leaders who openly support Palestinian rights⁵⁶, which is part of the reason for Alex Awad and his colleagues' despair. Further, many fellow post-colonial and liberation theologians draw on the biblical motif of 'exodus' and parallel their plight with that of the ancient Israelites who were oppressed and expelled from their land – thereby rendering a biblical treatment of Palestinians more complex.

⁵⁶ Whereas some Protestant mainline churches (Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers – though some of these may identify as 'evangelical' too) have for example joined the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement that seeks to impact Israel's economy and thereby force Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian Territories. Durbin (2018: 6) claims that a lot of those on the mainline Protestant left who criticise Christian Zionism expose an overly simplified understanding of it. Their critique of Christian Zionism is levied almost exclusively at the ramifications of Christian Zionism's eschatology for the ethnic Jews as eventually falling prey to the bitter end predicted to them, thus accusing Christian Zionists of 'duplicity' (Sizer, 2006; Wagner, 1995; Weber, 2005). Such critiques posit Christian Zionism as 'unbiblical', and contrast its theology with a 'correct' interpretation of biblical text. In the process, Christian Zionism is portrayed as more 'political' than 'religious', and thus the discussion of it relegated to its influence on foreign policy. While such an eschatology may in fact be held by many Christian Zionists, Durbin argues that to separate the 'religious' from the 'political' in this movement is inaccurate and unhelpful.

One of the few evangelical theological writers on the subject who oppose Christian Zionism is Prof Gary Burge, who has been invited as a speaker at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences and routinely brings a group of his own students (from Wheaton College) to this event (Burge, 2010; 2013). The work of faculty at the two Bible Colleges in Israel-Palestine (in Nazareth and Bethlehem) itself also speaks to a progressive evangelical agenda, particularly Munther Isaac's (2015) exegesis of the theme of 'land' throughout the whole Bible. The theology which those evangelicals critical of Christian Zionism pursue is called 'covenant theology'. Ajaj (2012: 7) argues that this theology also has roots in the seventeenth century yet it never became as popular as Dispensationalism. In brief summary, covenant theology stipulates that the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus and the 'rupture' that came with his coming (cf. Robbins, 2004). This is why some Palestinian evangelicals also refer to it as 'fulfilment theology'. Rather than a literal reading of the Bible, covenant theology emphasises a lens of grace. The hermeneutics are determined by reading the Old Testament through the New Testament, and by seeing God's ultimate purpose as soteriological (salvation). This means that the establishment of the State of Israel or the 'return' of the Jews to its territory is of no further theological significance.

4.2 Anatomy of an anomaly: Palestinian evangelicalism, 'global' evangelicalism, and the Israeli state

I already outlined in Chapter 1 how the Palestinian evangelical community first came into being. I would now like to return to my initial question in this chapter: why do many Palestinian Israeli evangelicals *not* challenge the theologies of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism openly, but in fact support them? I already described my surprise

at Fadi's revelation of the prevalence of dispensationalism among Palestinian evangelicals. Having outlined these theologies in more detail, the reader might now understand my great surprise better. After all, Palestinian Israeli evangelicals who align themselves with these theologies effectively accept Israel's 'right' to the land that might have been taken from them or their families in 1948 or in the wars afterwards; they accept the fate of hundreds of thousands refugees that were displaced in the 1948 War, whose number has since exceeded four million; they accept the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, i.e. potentially of their own relatives and friends; they accept the illegal Israeli settlements and land theft associated with these; they accept the demonization of their own ethnic group, Arabs, that is intrinsic to dispensational and Christian Zionist theologies; and they accept that their own Arabic mother tongue has in effect been rendered second class by the Israeli state. Given the strong bias of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism against Palestinians, Palestinian dispensationalism was a puzzle to me.

To begin to understand why many Palestinians counterintuitively align themselves with these theologies, perhaps it will help therefore to begin with the following question: how and why did Palestinian Christians of other denominations convert to evangelicalism (Muslims rarely convert to Christianity in the Israel-Palestine context)? One of the most influential ways of evangelical missionaries that shaped the community in Nazareth was through the first and only evangelical Christian private school. It was founded in Nazareth in 1937, however became more established only following the creation of the Israeli state – and is referenced in the letter by John and Marjorie Rowden in Chapter 1 as one of the ways in which they held up the 'light of Jesus' in Nazareth. Most of today's Palestinian evangelical adults have attended the Nazareth Baptist School and its associated programmes, such as summer camps. Most of them

made the decision to follow Jesus mentored by Western evangelical dispensationalists associated with the school (cf. Mansour, 2011).

The school continues to have a significant influence on Palestinian evangelicalism. It currently counts around 1,000 students from primary school to matriculation age, ca. 30% of which are Muslim, and 90% of the remaining Christian students are of established denominations: with one of the highest matriculation rates of the country, the school enjoys a good reputation even outside of strictly evangelical circles. It differentiates from other Christian schools by compulsory chapel services taught by a Bible teacher, which include lively worship songs and prayer. Further, every year the school runs a weeklong ‘prayer event’ during which students develop their ‘prayer lives’ in creative ways. During the summer break, the school also hosts several summer camps in collaboration with their American partners, *Friends of Nazareth*. It is important for the school leadership that its teachers subscribe to an evangelical faith and maintain the school’s evangelical ethos.

Until the 1990s, the school was run in close collaboration with the organisation of its American Baptist founders. However, in the 1990s the official partnership with the American mission board of the Baptists came to an end (due to a change in their evangelism strategy, as well as the evaluation of Palestinian Israelis as being ‘reached people’, i.e. people who have already heard the gospel as opposed to ‘unreached people groups’). Since then, the school is even more reliant on the partial funding (ca. 65%) they started to receive from the Israeli government since 1987 as a ‘recognised but unofficial’ private school (the same status as ultra-Orthodox Jewish yeshiva schools). Together with the fees asked of parents and some donations by their American partner organisation, this is how the school has been funded to date.



Figure 15. Photo collage outside the office of the director of the Nazareth Baptist School depicting his international connections.

4.2.1 The dilemma of the Christian schools in Israel

It is for this reason that the Israeli government's move to reduce the funding to ca. 35% (from 65%) for Christian schools in Israel (which serve the Palestinian population), about half way into my time of fieldwork, was a critical turning point. But the government did not just cap the funding: it also prohibited the subsequent raising of the school fees, i.e. asking the parents to cover the remaining sum, in effect making it impossible for the schools to exist any further (Mansour, 2015). Beside the Nazareth Baptist School, this new regulation also affected the 46 other Christian denominational schools in Israel (including those run by the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox denominations and others).

The move must be seen in the context of the right-wing conservative Netanyahu government, which at the same time increased the funding of ultra-Orthodox yeshiva

schools (of the same legal status) to 100%. Thus, the cutting of the school funding in 2015 for Palestinian Christian schools played into a larger agenda to disadvantage ethnic minorities in Israel, and was seen as an attempt to bring the Christian schools under full government control (by forcing them to become state schools).

Demonstrations and lobbying notwithstanding, the conflict escalated so that at the beginning of the school year in September 2015, for the first time in their history, the private Christian schools went on strike and remained closed to their ca. 33,000 students for several weeks. While Palestinian Christians of other denominations have been politically engaged in other ways, including their role in pan-Arabism and the first Intifada (Kassissieh, 2003; Lybarger, 2007), in a Palestinian evangelical milieu that remains strongly influenced by dispensationalist theology, the evangelical participation in the protests was surprising to me. Both the missionaries' theological view on Israel (as being ordained by God), and their pietistic withdrawal from 'worldly politics' meant that they did not encourage Palestinians' critical citizenship in the Israeli state. Palestinian Israeli evangelicals who continued to follow their dispensationalist theology did not usually position themselves in contrast to the Israeli state, or engage in critical discussions as to how else they could interpret the biblical texts that have led to pro-Israel theologies. This still leads to divisions within Palestinian evangelicalism among those who prefer not to challenge this view and those who do.

Many times during my fieldwork I had been told that evangelicals 'don't talk about politics', or that 'politics is filthy'; rather than advocating for equal rights and engaging in contextual theology, like those associated with the Nazareth Evangelical College and Bethlehem Bible College, most Palestinian evangelicals did not openly support such activities. If members of congregations attempted to engage critically with their political contexts, they were often censored by their pastors or church leadership: thus, when a

friend wanted to advertise in his church for the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in 2016, he was refused a platform; and when the church's youth leaders wanted to gather a group of young people to attend the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference (a *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference for young Palestinian evangelicals in Bethlehem, which I discuss further in Chapter 8), they faced significant opposition by their pastor and other members of the congregation.

Yet, during the weeks of the strike, teachers, parents, and students from the Nazareth Baptist School took shifts in manning a protest tent in front of the local government building in Nazareth Illit, the Jewish town adjacent to Nazareth. Those who were not protesting provided protesters with meals. Members of the largest evangelical church in Nazareth packed lunches for those protesting at the tent, and evangelical protesters also profited from the supplies brought by other churches and schools. Some Palestinian evangelical friends (including Fadi) posted articles and links to petitions on Facebook, or changed their Facebook profile pictures to a black picture with the hashtag '#equality' written in English, Arab and Hebrew. Many also participated in the 8,000-10,000 strong protest march in Tel Aviv, which was supported by Palestinian Israeli Muslim schools in solidarity.

In their posts, blogs, and in interviews, Palestinian evangelicals frequently addressed American Christians, in much stronger terms than I had previously encountered. In an English blog post published on the 'Come and See' website (a portal for evangelicals in Israel), the authors lamented the non-involvement and lack of interest of American evangelicals in the issue, before issuing a direct call:

The Bible teaches us that the church in every place in the world is the body of Christ and when 'one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it' (1 Cor 12: 26). The part of the body that lives in the land that Jesus lived in is aching. This part has not been treated fairly by

Israel. It has been pushed into the corner through systematic actions against its 47 schools. The Israeli government has performed severe cuts in the budgets of these schools to a point they are not able to continue its work. So where does the Christian world stand in such moments? Does it stand with the brothers and sisters in the one body, or it turns a cold shoulder to the Arab Israeli brothers in Christ because of who is involved in this matter-the irreproachable state of Israel that should never be criticized?⁵⁷

The authors then urged the international readers to write to the Israeli Prime Minister, the President, and the Minister of Education, providing their contact details at the bottom of the post.

While the coverage of the Christian school strike remained limited in Israeli media, American news channels, including USA Today, slowly began to pick up on the story. When about a month after the beginning of the protest an agreement was reached between the schools and the government, many Christians traced this success back to the pressure of American evangelicals on the Israeli government. A temporary funding agreement (the government agreed to provide 50% of the funding) meant that the schools were able to reopen at least in the short term, until a more permanent agreement could be reached. While not necessarily the outcome hoped for by the protesters, for Palestinian evangelicals it meant that their call for action had been heard. When speaking with a staff member of the Nazareth Baptist School about this, she affirmed that ‘the Catholics say that the American letters moved things. [...] They say, it was *your* men who helped!’⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See: <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1293> [accessed 15/10/2018]

⁵⁸ It was known to many Palestinian Christians that Pope Francis supposedly touched on the issue in a pre-planned meeting with the Israeli President Rivlin. However, the content of this meeting remained undisclosed, and the Israeli President does not have much direct political power (as opposed to its prime minister) and the meeting did not lead to direct political outcomes. This meeting with the Pope may have had more influence on the temporary agreement than is given credit for by Palestinian Christians, though the general sense was that the American involvement led to the change in policy.

So what sparked this unusual political activism amid the evangelical population in Israel? Previously, they had mostly resigned themselves to the marginal place assigned to them in a Jewish majority society and state aggressively pursuing a Jewish identity. In the dispensational belief that Jesus would return quickly and therefore the pursuing of equal rights on this earth was not of primary importance, Palestinian evangelicals had rated more highly their belonging to their evangelical faith community than active participation in their state. Yet, my pursuit of an answer to the above question helped me to understand in greater nuance how Palestinian evangelicals navigate the dispensational heritage that has brought their community into being.

Firstly, the strike was seen as the 'better option' in a conflict between, on the one hand, being able to foster good Christian selves through the work of the evangelical school, and on the other hand, a withdrawal from politics and hesitation to criticise the Israeli state. Palestinian evangelicals framed their fighting for the continuing existence of the school, which was initially founded by American missionaries, by ensuring that their own ministry among the next generation of potential believers could persist. In the American context, temporary suspension of apoliticism is documented in Bialecki's (2017: 47) discussion of (Harding, 2000) work: 'apocalyptic fatalism did not preclude theologically conservative Christians from imagining effective short-term political action.' A similar dynamic seemed to be at work here. Temporary political action was permissible to ensure the fostering of evangelical selves in the future.

Amid these trade-offs, Palestinian evangelicals had to navigate a careful balance between resisting an American understanding of complete separation between church and state, and using their American evangelical contacts to intervene on their behalf. In some of the online exchanges I saw between Palestinian and American evangelicals on the matter, Americans assured Palestinians that they would 'pray' for the situation.

Under different circumstances, prayer was the preferred tool for action by Palestinian evangelicals, too. In this situation, however, many Palestinian evangelicals felt this was not enough: rather, ‘real’ political action was needed to change the Israeli government’s stance on the school funding. This was countered by American evangelicals with the argument that the state should not interfere in Christian education at all – instead of fighting for government funding, Palestinians should seek other sources of support for their schools. Following a long history of discrimination, however, Palestinian evangelicals recognized the school strike not as battle between church and state (as in the American context), but as quest for equality as ethnic minorities. Following this, some Palestinian evangelicals observed that the American advocacy on their behalf was effective because the Israeli state wanted to maintain the image of being a ‘democratic country’. This notion is often used by American evangelicals in their lobbying for the state (‘Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East’) and as justification for their support of its state institutions. The American support therefore was not necessarily framed as criticism of Israel’s exclusivist policies, but rather as reminder that demonstrations should be heeded in a democratic process.

Secondly, it was often emphasised to me by Palestinian evangelicals that this was a civil, not a (Palestinian) nationalist struggle. This meant that evangelicals did not have to reassess the more far reaching questions regarding the theological significance of the Israeli state, or the extent of their citizenship within in. Many Palestinian evangelicals equate the national struggle with violence and Islam, as well as a misplaced hope in citizenship rights, and so prefer not to associate with it at all. One of the pastors I interviewed went so far as to say that the even the Palestinian contextual theology developed at the two Bible colleges was ‘feeding Islamic thought’. He also believed that Christians in the West Bank suffered more under Islamic fundamentalism than under

the Israeli occupation – notions that bear striking similarity with the anti-Arab heritage of literalism. Effectively, this leads to disengagement with the Israeli Occupation's effects on Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. An elderly staff member at *Nazareth Village* had never crossed the barrier to the West Bank, and insisted to me that only criminals get checked and searched by Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints – suggesting an image of the 'dangerous' Arab, despite sharing the same ethnicity. Thus, by framing the school protests as civil, rather than nationalist, struggle – and carefully avoiding any support by nationalistic parties who wanted to re-interpret the struggle for a nationalist agenda – Palestinian evangelicals stayed clear of a more far-reaching clash with the government. The criticism of the government was phrased gently and respectfully, which led evangelicals afterwards to point to the example they set in how the demonstration was carried out. Their otherwise deep dispensational pietistic ethics otherwise might serve as an effort to distance themselves from the image of 'Arabs' as the 'enemy', which is so deeply entrenched in Western evangelical mind-sets as well as in the Israeli government.⁵⁹

Thirdly, participating in the protests raised the profile of the Palestinian evangelical churches among their fellow Christians overall – both in view of the established denominations and the messianic Jewish congregations. Palestinian evangelicals are sometimes accused of being 'traitors', and in league with pro-Israel American Christian Zionists by members of established denominations. Palestinian theologian Khalil Ajaj (2018) leads this back to the strong influence of Western evangelicals on Israeli policies, and explains that, as a result, for a long time, Palestinian evangelicals preferred to refer to themselves as 'believers' rather than as 'evangelicals' to refrain from direct

⁵⁹ This could be compared – even if Palestinian evangelicals are not actually criminal - to Kevin O'Neill's ex-gang members' efforts to clear themselves of the image of the 'criminal' (O'Neill, 2010: 339).

association with the these foreign evangelical forces. Hence, Palestinian evangelical churches are careful not to offend established denominations, for example by holding their services not in ‘competition’ on a Sunday morning (though this is also because Sunday is a work day and employees may not be able to attend services otherwise). In the protests, they both stood with other Christian schools of established denominations, and were proud that they could draw on their American evangelical connections to achieve positive change.

During the school strike, messianic Jews remained largely silent. Palestinian evangelical relations to messianic Jews are often strained, seeing that they tend to be openly Christian Zionist and therefore attract much of the American evangelical funding. In a sense, messianic Jews could be regarded as the ‘ideal’ Jew within Judeo-centric evangelical prophetic interpretations, since they accept Jesus as the messiah and yet maintain the biblical Jewish practices. While some efforts exist to find common ground between Palestinian evangelicals and messianic Jews, progress is minimal.⁶⁰ The silence of the messianic Jewish community was described as a missed opportunity for reconciliation by an anonymous messianic Jewish author on the Come and See Blog (W., 2016). At the same time, a Palestinian evangelical lady prominent within evangelical circles was keen to share with me that the messianic Jewish organiser of a charismatic women’s conference happening at the same time got up and repented of the Israeli government and the silence of messianic Jews on the topic. My friend felt that this ‘changed something in the heavenlies’, and that her repentance ‘released something’, which later resulted in the (temporary) solution to the funding battle. For her, this episode was a reminder that God is still in charge and has ‘his timings’. In a

⁶⁰ For example, several conferences between Palestinian evangelical and messianic Jewish leaders have been held on Cyprus to work towards reconciliation (Lausanne, 2018), and organisations such as Musalaha promote exchange between young people from these groups (Munayer and Loden, 2014)

sense therefore, at least for parts of the Palestinian evangelical community, there was a perception that the action and prayer around the school strike served to unify Christians from all background in the Holy Land.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the historical development of the theologies of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism and explored their continuing influence on Palestinian evangelicalism. I explained that historical prophecy interpretation led theologians like Darby to view history through a biblical lens, and that the literal reading of the Bible led to the application of this historical prophecy interpretation to the physical territory of Israel. Even though Darby strongly opposed Christians' involvement in earthly politics, the assistance with realisation of prophetic pronouncements from the Bible in the real, physical world was seen as a 'spiritual' act. Dispensationalists and Christian Zionists firmly believe that the territory of Israel is given to ethnic Jews by God forever, and that Jewish 'return' to this territory will ring in the End Times. Importantly, this enables Christians' political investment in the State of Israel to be seen as conforming even to an otherwise apolitical theology.

The first American missionaries in Israel-Palestine, who were central to the establishment of Palestinian evangelicalism, were Dispensationalists, and many Palestinian evangelicals are still strongly influenced by their teaching. According to dispensationalist theology, Christians are not supposed to be involved in political activism. Yet, if Palestinian wanted to be 'good' evangelicals, they are not exempt from supporting the Israeli state and Jewish 'return' to it either – even if this was to the detriment of their own rights. They, too, were supposed to fit into the scripturally determined roles assigned to Jews, Palestinians, and Christians in Dispensationalist and

Christian Zionist frameworks. Despite the early dispensationalist influence on Palestinian evangelicalism, I was extremely surprised to find that many Palestinian evangelicals were still strongly aligned with these theologies. Rather than being drawn to alternative, left-of-centre theologies and interpretations of the Christians' role in the world that might contribute to a critical engagement with the Israeli state, many Palestinian evangelicals are instead silenced by the dominant theologies they are influenced by.

The example of the school strike illustrated how Palestinian evangelicals navigate their simultaneous belonging to a dominant evangelical theological tradition that discriminates against them on the one hand, and the Israeli state that increasingly infringes on the rights of Palestinian Israelis, and maintains a military occupation of Palestinian territories, on the other hand. Studying the margins of an 'interpretative regime' (Crapanzano 2000: 6), i.e. those who are part of it, but also bearing the social and political consequences of the positions their readings translates into, highlights with clarity what Wimbush (2016: 54) calls 'the work we make scriptures do for us'. It shows the power of dominant interpretative regimes to influence and censor theology and practice of those who seek to be part of it.

While the school and Palestinian Baptist churches are formally independent, they still are reliant on financial partners, many of whom are associated with the theological traditions of their founders.⁶¹ It certainly is easier to find generous donors when one complies with what still is the dominant theological position on Israel. There are financial incentives not to speak out against Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism.

⁶¹ The reliance on outside financial partners is also partly due to the fact that – as many Palestinian pastors who struggle on a meagre salary have told me – congregations lack a culture of tithing following a long dependence on American missionaries, and a cultural background of established denominations with institutionalised funding structures (such as the Catholic or Orthodox church).

In the case of the theologically contextual Nazareth Evangelical College, seeking funding is difficult, and a matter of diplomatic negotiation of theology: I often overheard the college's faculty discussing the correct English formulation and tone in their many emails and letters to potential donors.

Some Palestinian evangelicals, as seen in the Introduction, admit to a sense of despair in the face of geopolitical support of the State that oppresses them, as well as the overwhelming Western evangelical support of the latter. However, Palestinian evangelicals have ambivalent relationships to the Israeli state and their larger faith family. The school strike demonstrated the contradictory nature of some of these ambivalences, and the difficulty in reconciling inherited notions of apoliticism with their challenges as citizens of the Israeli state.

Some members of this community highlight the strengths of their unique identity, considering themselves as serving as a 'bridge' between the different communities of which they are a part. Others experience their position as inherently weak and voiceless, and feel the threat of the majorities around them. This is – quite understandably – one of the reasons why friendship and partnerships with the most powerful centres of evangelical Christianity and the moral and emotional support as a result of these connections, is so attractive to many Palestinian evangelicals.

In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how the discursive tradition of evangelicalism with its various theologies of Israel (dominant and less dominant) has impacted individual Palestinian lives. In order to show the influence of the uneven 'flows' within transnational social field of evangelicalism on the everyday lives of Palestinian evangelicals, I offer four portraits of Palestinian evangelical men and women, who respond differently to these. This will provide nuance in our study of the dynamics of encounters between unequally positioned Western and Palestinian evangelicals.

5. 'Come and See': Narratives of Palestinian evangelicals

In chapter 4, I developed the notion that Palestinian evangelicals are an anomaly within 'global' evangelicalism, and discussed their position as threefold minority in Israel-Palestine and as minority with regards to 'global' evangelicalism. I focused on one instance of how Palestinian evangelicals navigated dispensational apolitical evangelical ideas, namely the school strike of 2015. This current chapter hones in on Palestinian evangelicals' everyday ethical self-cultivation. Ethnographic portraits of four individuals serve to demonstrate the diversity of Palestinian evangelical identities, as well as the different challenges and constraints they face as part of a larger global evangelical community. The 'close-up' moments of each of their lives shall give insight into how each of them makes sense of the 'scriptural regimes' that were 'fed' to their community by the American missionaries (as Fadi put it in Chapter 4), and how they navigate these in their daily lives; in the accounts, we will see how aspects of this 'scriptural regime' are rejected, mimicked, or adapted. Two of them support variations of the dominant dispensationalist theology, and two hold to more left-leaning alternative evangelical theologies. They may not use these classifications themselves (or the label I use as title to their portraits), but the categorisation will help the reader to make sense their theology and practice in light of the theologies discussed in the previous chapter. While their complicated citizenship in the Israeli state is always at work in the background, the portraits seek to show how Palestinian evangelicals also develop other key areas of evangelical self-cultivation, such as proselytization, Bible-reading, prayer, and social outreach. The chapter offers a close-up picture of the negotiation of evangelical orthodoxy in the lives of Palestinian evangelicals, and thereby provides a further layer in our understanding of the role of power in the negotiation of evangelical orthodoxy within global evangelicalism.

Specifically, the chapter seeks to speak to three questions. Firstly, how are Christian values negotiated within a ‘virtue-community’ in which opinions about what it means to be a ‘good Christian’ differ? The negotiation of Christian morality has been a central topic in the Anthropology of Christianity. As yet, it has mostly been studied with reference to encounters between Christianised and non-Christianised societies by way of highlighting the ‘moral narrative of modernity’ (e.g. Keane, 2007: 4; Robbins, 2004). As Quayson and Daswani, (2013) note, the practices of ethical self-fashioning by Christians in different parts of the world gesture to a belonging to an imagined ‘virtue-community’ (Daswani 2013:45f), even if they are in tension with the respective society they are a part of. However, how is morality negotiated in a ‘virtue community’ in which what it means to be a ‘good’ Christian differs between previously Christianized people with different cultural backgrounds? Each of the four characters portrayed here has different emphases and priorities in their faith lives, sometimes at odds with each other.

Secondly, how do Palestinian evangelicals deal with materiality in a faith system that de-emphasises earthly material wealth? Elisha’s (2011) work brought a challenge to previous models of Protestant Christian morality by highlighting the tension between material wealth as enhancement and inhibitor of the Protestant ideal of self-liberation. While typically, Protestant self-cultivation has been associated with a ‘certain dematerialization of the human world’ (Keane 2007: 271), there remains a tension with potential benefits derived from the world’s materiality (Elisha 2011: 109): ‘the desire to overcome or at least minimize the determinative influence of money and material wealth in one’s life is complicated by positive connotations frequently attached to wealth that is earned, spent, and invested in line with sacred virtues.’ A similar dynamic is at play in Palestinian evangelicals’ quest to live ‘good’ evangelical lives, in two

different ways: firstly, among those who are Israeli citizens, as first generation of Palestinian Israelis who have been able to acquire more material wealth in the Israeli economy; secondly, in still being somewhat dependent on, and having to vie for, outside funding to run and sustain their evangelical churches and ministries.

Thirdly, how do Palestinian evangelicals navigate their belonging to a 'global' faith community as they work out their evangelical subjectivities? This ties partly into the first question, yet also goes further than that. A second challenge Omri Elisha (2011) brought to previous work on Christian morality concerns the focus on the interior, personal dimension of Protestant subject-making, which pursues constant transformation (Keane, 2007: 50). He asks, 'do we not risk accepting too readily the proposition that Western Protestants, including evangelicals, are narrowly driven by moral individualism, to the exclusion of salient counter-notions?' (2011: 25). Instead of this narrow focus on interiority, he proposes a widening of the view of Protestant morality that includes values of relationalism and intersubjectivity. He argues that where Western Protestantism has been understood as creating an essentially individualist, interiorized moral subject, its simultaneous strong emphasis on relationality, accountability and social engagement has been neglected. However, within unevenly resourced parts of 'global' evangelicalism, who does this relationality and social engagement extend to? Who is included in this relationality? As is developed in the following portraits, Palestinian evangelical narratives do not just seek to mould themselves to suit (or reject) dominant evangelical frameworks, but are also an attempt to ask to be included in Western evangelicals' relationality on their own terms. My own (Western) presence in these interactions can be used as insight into how their narratives are curated in the face of a Western evangelicalism.

Considering not just the historical involvement of Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine (see Chapter 4), but also the continuing Western evangelical interest and involvement in the Israeli state, Palestinian evangelicals narrate their practices of self-cultivation in view of a larger evangelical world. Mark Calder (2015) argued in his thesis that a focus on ‘narrative’, rather than ‘identity’, is more productive to reveal the dialogic nature of self-articulation, especially in a situation of conflict. The following accounts should thus be read as examples of a ‘curation’ of Palestinian evangelicalism to a particular audience. Palestinian evangelicals have devised various strategies to deal with the ignorance, lack of sympathy, or pre-conceived ideas of what positive engagement with Palestinian evangelicals looks like. Often, and particularly in Nazareth, these encounters are framed under the heading ‘come and see’, in reference to a story of encounter with Jesus from the New Testament:

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ (John 1:45f, ESV).

‘Come and See – a title for alternative pilgrimage tours (see Chapter 6), as well as an English-language blog critical of Western evangelical involvement with Israel, run by a team of brothers in Nazareth – thus uses biblical language to entice visitors to engage with those Christians who live and worship in Israel-Palestine. It is also a tongue-in-cheek continuation of the biblical story of Nathaniel’s scepticism, reinterpreted for the present day. Just like in this biblical story, the invitation by Palestinian Christians to ‘come and see’ therefore asks visitors to see differently, at least to see *them*. They challenge Western evangelicals to include Palestinian evangelicals in their relationality, asking them to stretch their inclusivity to comprise those that ethnically exclusivist pro-Israel theologies have previously side-lined. While the alternative pilgrimages and the

‘Come and See’-blog share a critical stance on Christian Zionism, the desire to be seen and included in the relationality of Western evangelical is issued by those who support dispensationalist theologies as well.

The following four portraits are of people - Hind, Yusuf, Miriam, and Amin,⁶² with an age range from the late thirties to early seventies - currently involved in one of the evangelical churches in Nazareth or its vicinity. Even though in this thesis I speak of Palestinian evangelicals as comprising both those from the Palestinian territories, as well as Palestinian Israeli citizens, those portrayed here are all citizens of the state of Israel – the main reason being that I spent most of my time in Nazareth where I interacted with them, and am therefore most familiar with their everyday contexts. Yet, their relation to West Bank evangelicals is addressed, and I will talk more about the specifics of evangelicals residing in the Palestinian territories in Chapter 7. I conducted semi-structured or open-ended interviews with three of the four persons (I never formally interviewed Miriam, but spent a lot of time with her as my neighbour and took notes of our many conversations), with interviews held in English. This obviously means that their responses were in one way limited, as they had to express their views in a foreign language (though their English was good, and it is not my first language either, which might lessen the language discrepancy). Yet, it was also interesting to see how many ‘typically evangelical’ English expressions and phrases have been appropriated by my respondents in their English vocabulary, revealing something of the strong Anglophone influence on their faith. Apart from Miriam’s portrait, most of the data underlying their depiction stems from the interviews I conducted, in addition to other engagement with the respective persons where applicable.

⁶² I have anonymised their names.

I have chosen the people portrayed here because each of them represents well a particular narrative that is reflected in other groups of people I interacted with. While I do not want to reduce their subject-making to these specific traits, I have taken the liberty to categorise them as ‘activist’ (Hind), ‘fundamentalist’ (Yusuf), ‘pietist’ (Miriam), and ‘missionary’ (Amin). All these traits stand for a particular positioning within and towards both their local faith community, as well as their Western faith family, and demonstrate the diversity of Palestinian evangelical self-cultivations.⁶³

Naturally, my own positionality as a female, Western anthropologist with Christian background is an important factor in the encounters that led to these ethnographic portraits, which is partly why I focus on ‘curation’. While those portrayed here were clearly informed about my research, my background and ethnicity did play a role in these encounters. I often felt discomfort when asking Palestinian evangelicals for interviews as I knew about the heavy demands of time, connections, and stories on them by Western visitors. I hope that by portraying their stories here and demonstrating that I *did* listen to their stories and what matters to them, I may be able to ‘give back’ in a small way to these individuals and their communities.

This choice of presentation of the ethnographic data as portraits reflects the Palestinian evangelical narrations of themselves to Western visitors: the focus is in their narrations is usually on the individual story, reflective of Western Protestant ethical self-cultivation. They also acknowledge that for many (Western) evangelicals the structural context can seem too overwhelming to engage with. For example, one of the organisers of the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences once explained to me that, since the

⁶³ The style of presentation is adapted from Omri Elisha’s (2011: 72-97) fourth chapter in which he portrays different activists, also categorising them according to their main characteristic traits. I am indebted to his example.

evangelical faith is ‘very individualistic’ – people prefer to pray for *one* prisoner rather than for the *structure* that has unlawfully imprisoned them – his strategy has become to phrase his message into individual ‘cases’; if he wants to see Western evangelicals engage with administrative detention of Palestinian children, he needs to bring the case of one child and their story to the attention of his Western evangelical audience. The collection of ethnographic portraits also serves to complicate the idea of ‘homogenous’ sides in the encounters between Western and Palestinian evangelicals. They serve to show how individual lives were interwoven with the scriptural regimes they were part of, and allow for nuances in their respective navigations.

5.1 The activist: Hind

The interaction between Hind and I took place in her beautiful garden only a few steps away from Nazareth’s busy main road. The complex in which her house is located is remarkable in its peacefulness and spaciousness, considering it is situated only a stone’s throw away from Mary’s well, a famous pilgrimage site for those who visit locations of the biblical past. It was also just around the corner from the first Baptist Church in Israel. Her house stood next to those of her sons and in-laws, as is customary. Her husband’s family had a Coptic background, and so their complex adjoins Nazareth’s small Coptic Church. While we talked, two of her children walked by and greeted her with a few words, and she sometimes lowered her voice when talking about things that might seem offensive to, or critical of, them, as they might have been able to hear through the open windows of the adjoining houses.

Hind is one of oldest people I worked with, born before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and has known the post-1948 (re-)founders of the evangelical church in Israel personally. I had noticed this small, beautifully elegant, and energetic lady in her

seventies first when she made some challenging comments at the ‘Evangelicals and Peacemaking’ conference held by Nazareth Evangelical College that, despite its seemingly tame title, caused some upset and tension in Nazareth’s evangelical community due to being ‘too political’.⁶⁴ I soon learned that – far beyond what the conference sought to achieve – Hind was involved with the local branch of the organisation *Sabeel*, which promotes a Palestinian liberation theology and critical Christian engagement with the political situation in Israel-Palestine and was founded by the liberation theologian Naim Ateek. At the same time, she and her husband belonged to the Hope Baptist Church, whose pastor strongly opposes political engagement of his congregation – including the biennial *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in Bethlehem.

Curious therefore about how Hind straddled her political awareness and activism with her evangelical beliefs in a church that distances itself from anything ‘too political’, I had asked for an interview. A former researcher herself – and perhaps in the spirit of her many presentations to Western evangelical audiences, Hind was well prepared for our conversation and began by laying out her ideas of what she wanted to talk to me about, from her activism to her unusual childhood story. I mostly listened, asking only clarifying questions, through which I tried to encourage her to talk about what she had planned to tell me anyway. Later in our conversation, I sought her opinion on a few aspects about the evangelical community in Israel-Palestine I struggled to make sense of, and asked her about her vision for an ideal church.

⁶⁴ The conference took place relatively early on during my time of fieldwork, and was held in the same location where the Local Baptist Church meets. Its audience consisted of a visiting group of American pastors (among who were several Black Americans), a small number of evangelicals from Nazareth and the master students of Nazareth Evangelical College. The conference was held in English, which may have been why the latter group tended to sit at the back of the venue, and did not really engage with the talks and discussions. I found this dynamic odd at the beginning, but encountered a similar lack of engagement by Palestinian evangelicals (apart from the speakers obviously) at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences, which were also aimed at an international audience.

She began her narrative with a summary of her activity as head of Sabeel, and clarified quickly: ‘when I introduce myself, I say Christian – Arab – Palestinian – Israeli, to see the complexity.’ To explain what this means, she got up and fetched one of Sabeel’s yearly newsletters (‘Cornerstone’) for me in the middle of our conversation, which reports about the activities and identities of Palestinian Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in Israel. She told me her own story only at the end, but I have chosen to begin with her background as it helps the reader to understand the motivation of her activism better.

Hind lost her mother soon after her birth in 1944, and a few years later, when her father remarried, was adopted by one of the American Baptist missionaries living in Nazareth at that time, friends of her parents who were active in the new evangelical church. The family who took her in soon institutionalised their help by creating a small orphanage, in response to the violence riveting the country and tearing families apart during the war accompanying the creation of the Israeli state. Through the adoption, Hind became the first child in the care of what later became known as George W. Truett home, and today is simply known as the Baptist Village in Petach Tikvah: it now serves as the location of annual summer camps for children (where volunteers serve through the organisation *Friends of Nazareth*), and also hosts two messianic Jewish congregations. I found photos of a younger Hind in the book of letters by the Rowden family (Rowden 2010) as participant of summer camps and in the orphanage.

The American missionaries, Hind recalls, were ‘very, very conservative,’ and deeply influenced by dispensational theology. While they cared not just for Jewish victims of the war in 1948, but for Palestinian victims as well, they did not encourage any discussion of the children’s different ethnic origins. As one of the few children who knew her own background, being still in touch with her Palestinian father, but also

being surrounded by Jewish people and evangelicals who welcomed the creation of the Israeli state as fulfilment of biblical prophecy, Hind struggled to make sense of who she was. ‘That’s when I started to question,’ she told me, ‘because the Baptists never taught us about our background.’ Her schooling happened either in English or Hebrew, with some Arabic spoken among the children and her family – which meant that she had only recently learned to write in Arabic in a continued quest to reconnect with her family roots.

Hind is not resentful of the way the orphanage was run, or their lack of acknowledgement of her Palestinian identity. Instead, she recognised that the connections to the Baptist Village and thus the American missionaries opened opportunities for her she is unlikely to have had otherwise, such as finding a sponsor to support her studies up to a Master’s degree in the United States between 1966 and 1972. Yet during her studies, too, she encountered disinterest in her identity. While even at that time, she already wanted to go back to Nazareth and her family, she knew that she had to seize the opportunity to study ‘now or never’.

Her stay in the US coincided with the Six Day War in 1967, from which Israel emerged victoriously. For Hind, the triumphant atmosphere in the US provided further proof of the ethical blind spots of her Baptist benefactors.

People did not realise there were Christians Arab Palestinians living in Israel, all they knew about were Jews! And many of them, like Christian Zionists, they were just glorifying and justifying the military, because they felt this is a fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy: ‘*Oooh, Israel is coming together!*’ [she said in a mocking voice, imitating her conversation partners in the US] And when I told them that I have family - oh no, they didn’t bother, they didn’t realise. And this really hurt me, so I said when I come back, I’m going to do something.

‘To do something’ developed into a dream to work on reconciliation projects between Arabs and Jews, perhaps redeeming her experience of having her identity disregarded in the orphanage. Yet on her return to Israel-Palestine – which many of her relatives, who were preparing to leave the divided country, did not understand – she realised that the Israel she returned to was different to the one she left. The divide between the communities after the Six-Day-War, and the following Yom-Kippur-War in 1973, was much deeper than she had expected.

It meant a lot to her, therefore, when she met Naim Ateek in the late 1980s (during the first Intifada), who is originally from Nazareth, but gathered a number of like-minded Christians around him in Jerusalem, to engage with the difficult social and political situation and counter the mass exodus of Palestinian Christians – or, as Hind puts it, ‘to be proud and not to be overwhelmed with what’s happening around us.’ The Anglican priest Ateek later founded the liberation theology organisation Sabeel (literally: way), and set out his theology in his 1989 book *Justice, only Justice: A Palestinian theology of liberation* (cf. Gräbe, 1999). Hind summarises their approach as follows:

Identity is one of the most crucial issues. In one way we want our presence to be known, we want our identity to be stronger and this is what Sabeel tried to do. It set out to reunite the Christians – all the denominations. We have over thirteen denominations, plus some smaller ones, Protestants as well as the traditional churches. ... And to emphasise more the teachings of Jesus, so that we don’t get distracted with all the complaints, and the unrest, and the discrimination and the laws and all this. Try to put first Jesus, who taught us to live - he was under occupation when he was here, under Roman occupation. This is what the founder, Naim, tried to do. Get us back to focus on Jesus’ teaching, and to emphasise the nonviolence, reconciliation, justice. ... To be more spiritual in our analysis, because if you put Jesus in your life, it changes your perspective, you’re not so secular, you’re not so angry, resentful, and revengeful.

For Hind, the focus on nonviolent resistance and the ecumenical unifying of the church are the most important goals of Christian engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In the late 1990s, Hind – who was now married with two children of her own, and three of her husband’s children – was instrumental in organising a local branch of Sabeel in Nazareth for Christians there, too, to engage with their story of living in Israel - to ‘revive their heritage’. Together, the small ecumenical group visits villages that were destroyed during the Nakba/War of Independence, and recently they completed a project of life history interviews with those who lived through the events of 1948. The group also visits Christians in the West Bank to ‘encourage each other as Christians’, and often invites Muslims to their meetings. For Hind, these activities express best Jesus’ teachings, and also help to channel her frustration at the situation into a positive resistance.

Sabeel has a number of international groups of ‘Friends of Sabeel’, which organise ‘witness visits’ to Israel-Palestine (like the one I attended, see Chapter 7) or conferences in collaboration with the Palestinian group. Internationally, these groups are not usually comprised of evangelicals, but of members of more liberal denominations. Some of those I worked with suggested to me that, while Sabeel started ‘well’ (by which they mean biblically, as Hind expressed in the quote above), over time they have been ‘watered down’ (which means they lost their theological emphasis on Jesus at the centre). At a conference of ‘Friends of Sabeel North America’ which I observed in Vancouver, Canada, in 2015, this was thrown into relief when Naim Ateek himself sought to engage the audience in a bible study, yet was met with blank expressions – many of the participants were not used at all to engage with the Bible in navigating

situations of conflict. Rather, they were seasoned, often elderly, activists, who displayed a more humanist understanding of justice, typical of the liberal Protestant tradition.⁶⁵

Hind knew that her involvement with Sabeel was viewed critically by many other congregants and the leader of her church, and led this back to the lack of acknowledgement of their Palestinian identity by the Western missionaries.

So many evangelists [sic]⁶⁶ coming from abroad, they come to preach, but at the same time, as they did in Africa, and in India and many countries, they build schools and churches as well. But they were completely separate. They never let us know about our identity, never talked about the conflict, they did not bring it up in the church. All you have to be is a Christian, and a follower. I'm telling you, many people think quickly, 'oh you're political!' when I talk, they think I'm 'political'. I told them life is all political! You can't separate the politics from the everyday life, it's controlling us! I can tell you all the time if you want to know about Jesus and my Christian life, if that's what will please you, and not to criticize or to analyse the society – but that's not realistic! Many, many evangelists [sic] are like that. ... They come from countries where religion is separate, so if you talk, it's like you're a – revolutionary! But I tell them, you can't separate your life, Jesus was also in everything!

She told me that she often volunteers when groups come to visit the church to have them for lunch, and will make sure they do not leave without having engaged them in this conversation, presenting them with a similar narrative she told me.

I expressed my surprise about her activism as part of the Hope Baptist Church. The current pastor of it had opposed advertising the biennial *Christ at the Checkpoint*

⁶⁵ In his ethnography of John Hagee's Christian Zionist organisation *Christians United for Israel* (CUFI), Sean Durbin (2018) argues that much of the existing scholarly work on Christian Zionism misunderstands or mis-portrays its theology or motivations due to lacking understanding of the authors of basic evangelical values such as biblical inerrancy. Many of those who had previously studied Christian Zionism were critical of it due to liberal Protestant commitments.

⁶⁶ She means 'evangelicals'; 'evangelists' is a direct translation of the Arabic *injiliyyeh*, a term that came to be used to describe the born-again believers (cf. Bailey & Bailey, 2003: 97).

conference to his church (despite a small number of his congregants, who work for the Nazareth Evangelical College, being involved in its organisation), and in an interview expressed his dispensational views to me. Hind told me that she is indeed often criticised by her pastor when she shares posts on Facebook that are critical of Israel, and told me that even other members of the congregation told her to be careful. ‘But I don’t care!’ she says, however, repeatedly. When I asked why she thinks that Palestinian evangelicals often do not critically engage with the political context, she gave me two reasons beside the historical dispensationalist influence: fear and immaturity.

One example she told me about is that of a woman who was active in Sabeel, but also in an official role at a state school, was asked to resign her role from Sabeel if she wanted to keep her job. Hind lowers her voice and reminds me: ‘there is the secret service, you know. You have to be careful.’ She is not the only one who mentioned fear of spies even in their own churches, who will pass on information to the government, leading to loss of job or other positions. For Hind, who was retired, this was not enough of a threat to remain quiet; for many younger people in full-time jobs, it may well lead to hesitation in openly engaging with the political situation.

She also believes though that many evangelicals, even the more educated ones in her, in her words, more ‘liberal’ church (which seemed extremely conservative to me), do not have what she calls a ‘mature’ faith – they prefer to follow a religious leader, rather than think for themselves. Other respondents have affirmed this, and suggested that this could be due the background of many evangelicals in the Orthodox or Catholic Church, where the priest takes a much more authoritative role than in many evangelical traditions. Hind adds that the distaste of many Palestinian evangelicals with Christian political engagement could also be explained by fear of losing the favour of a global, predominantly Israel-phile church. ‘Sometimes, when you are in need of somebody, or

you don't have your basic needs, you depend on evangelicals or missionaries to support you,' she says.

I'm not talking just materially mainly, but with other benefits, or they stand with you. So many people are dependent on somebody emotionally, socially, religiously – that's how I analyse it. Because then people become just pleasing and – do what is expected of them from the person who is behind them.

The pull of the financial and emotional support on leaders and congregants is strong; she says that the organisers of *Christ at the Checkpoint* had offered to pay a large amount of the conference fees to make it as easy as possible for Palestinian evangelical leaders to attend, and still they preferred not to come – even if they privately might not be opposed to the movement.

At the end, I decided to ask Hind what her perfect church would look like if she could create one from scratch. I was unsure at first whether to ask this – not wanting to show disrespect for her existing one – but my worry was unfounded, as she had an immediate reply.

You know, the first thing is, I want it to be open to everyone. Open. And not to be bound, you know? They say you need boundaries, evangelicals need to be separate - but why not be like other Protestant churches in America – 'Universal Churches' they call them. Where they are not a denomination, but they include everybody! This would really be ideal. But it would also be founded in the teachings of Jesus and we would have him as our model, not any other church hierarchy, or any other so-called theology. You need the basics, you know.

Having been brought up Baptist, and continuing to belong to the Baptist congregation in Nazareth, Hind uses a different vocabulary to express her perfect church, and make sense of her social engagement, speaking of 'putting Jesus first'. Yet, she also feels drawn to open and ecumenical church models she encountered in the US (and among participants of 'witness visits') that do not draw as obvious lines around particular

theologies as many dispensationalist or fundamentalists, discrediting anyone who does not believe in these as non-Christian. I gently suggested that a lot of evangelical churches probably would say that they too have Jesus at the centre, and that *that* makes them exclude others with a different understanding of him. ‘This is why you need pastors who are open-minded,’ she responds, ‘who can work together, and not be just – narrow-minded.’

5.2 The fundamentalist: Yusuf

I first met Yusuf on a visit to the oldest evangelical church in Israel – the one founded by Shukry Musa himself (cf. Chapter 1), and the ‘mother’ of all the other Baptist churches (Figure 16). On the day I visited, Yusuf was the preacher, and he seemed quite

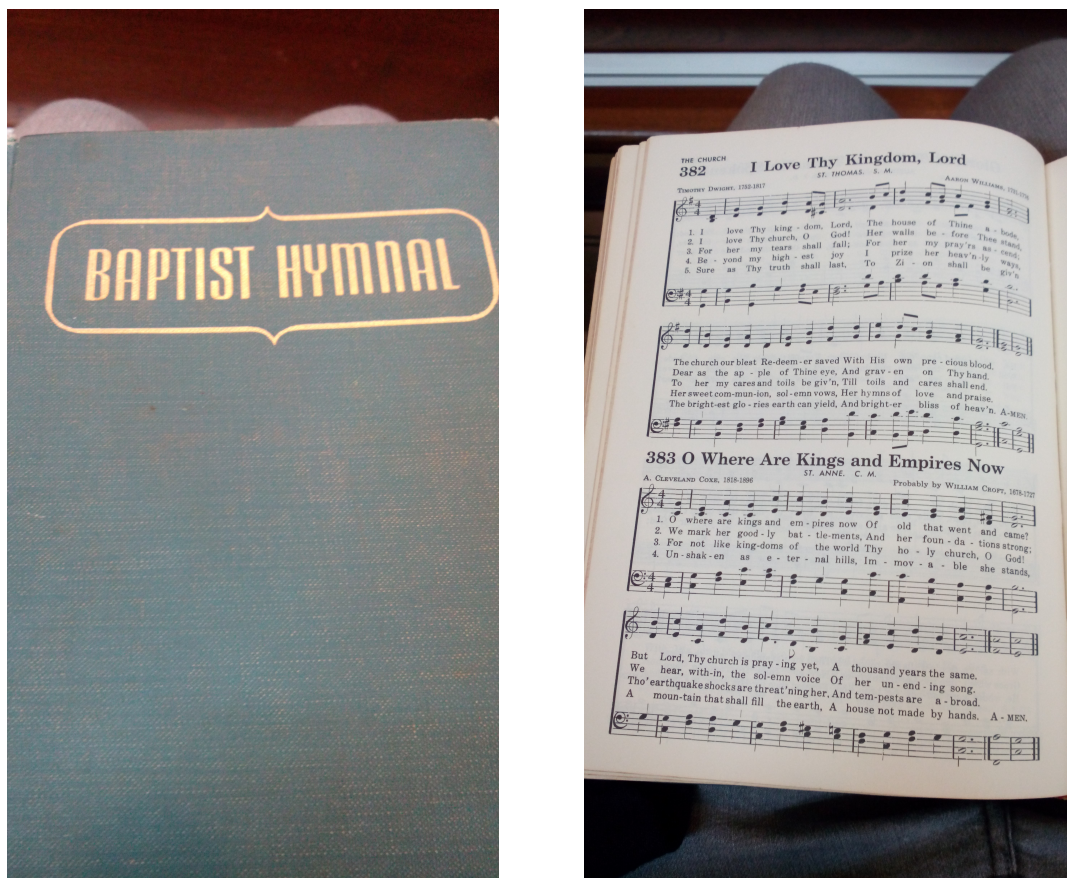


Figure 16. English hymn book I was given to use at Yusuf’s church.

nervous beforehand in the front row. When I entered the church and found a seat at the back, I was immediately greeted and relegated to a row at the left hand side of the small atrium-shaped church, to join a couple of other Westerners, and the thirty or so headphones attached to the seats: this is where Western visitors receive translation of the service into English. Kitted out with English hymn books and Bibles, we were made to feel welcome by the translator, who, due to there only being three visitors, preferred to whisper the service translations into our ears rather than use the sound equipment. If we had not already felt singled out by our special seats marking us as Westerners (which are obviously meant to be welcoming and facilitating access to the Arabic service), we were invited to stand up and introduce ourselves, and ‘deliver greetings’ from whatever our home churches were.

The rows of the church were not full, and most of the congregants elderly – a reminder of the many tensions this church had gone through. A few years earlier, a number of Palestinian evangelicals, including a few of the leading figures within Palestinian evangelicalism, had decided to leave the church and found a new one (which now meets next door). The reason for this was (as people affirmed independently of each other) that the main pastor – who had been installed by the American missionaries in the 1950s – refused to retire, or accept much help from younger staff. Since he was firm in his dispensational beliefs, there was a sense that those who desired to reassess this heritage did not find the appropriate space to do so. While the new church is still led by a dispensationalist pastor, there is a preaching rota and different voices and leaders have the ability to somewhat influence the congregation. Considering this history, I was therefore surprised to see Yusuf – a young man in his thirties – give the sermon today (eclipsed by a service led by the elderly pastor and his wife). He later told me that he is

an elder⁶⁷ in the church, and thinks they might ordain him to become a pastor in the future.⁶⁸ As emerged in our interview, he also seemed in line and supportive of the church's dispensationalist stance.

On the day I visited, Yusuf preached on Song of Songs, a love song in the Old Testament, due to it being Valentine's Day. He used the passage – which Christians have differed widely on in interpretation over the centuries – to compare the depicted lovers as Jesus and his church. In his example, the church was like a woman who patiently waits for her groom Jesus (referring to his Second Coming). Yusuf's main message was that during the waiting, the church ought to emulate Jesus in selfless love and holiness, especially towards sinners and 'people of the world.' Yusuf explained the different virtues this entailed, which according to him can be 'measured' in the Christian life. The gist of his preaching resembled the many messages I had heard at Hope Baptist Church, with an intense focus on the individual Christian's life, personal holiness, a gendered theology (scripted roles for men and women in a relationship), and a strict divide between those who are 'in' (born-again believers') and those who are

⁶⁷ In addition to pastors, Baptist churches place a lot of emphasis on the (often lay) leadership of a group of usually male 'elders', who aid in decisions affecting the congregation, administration, and sometimes other pastoral roles such as preaching. Their range of influence varies from church to church. To be appointed as an elder, one needs to fulfil certain criteria. In reference to biblical passages such as the list of characteristics for overseers in 1 Timothy 3: 1-10: 'Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons¹ are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.'

⁶⁸ The process of ordination in a Baptist church usually involves a special service during which the person to be ordained is prayed for by other pastors and important members of the church association in question, here the Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, by 'laying on of hands' usually on the shoulder or back. This process appoints and invests the person who is being ordained with authority to carry out the role of a pastor or 'ordained elder', i.e. lead a church, preach, and administer other rites specific to the church such as weddings, funerals, etc.

‘out’ (but need to be won over by evangelism and the example of virtuous lives). His sermon provided only generic examples – it did not make explicit how such virtues ought to be lived out in the context of the congregation’s daily life as Palestinian Israelis in Nazareth, and as evangelicals among liturgical denominations and their Muslim or Jewish neighbours.

When we mingled over Arabic coffee and left-over little wrapped Christmas sweets after the service, Yusuf introduced himself to me, and asked me, ‘who brought you here?’ expecting me to be a missionary or church representative. I explained my work to him, and took the opportunity to ask him if he would be willing to give me an interview. I had a sense that his theology might be much less ‘contextual’ than the evangelicals I met at the Nazareth Evangelical College, and so was keen to hear what it meant for him to be a Palestinian evangelical, associated with this particular church. At first, to my delight, he seemed keen and gave me his contact number. However, when it came to arranging a date, he failed to reply to my messages, and once we had arranged a time and date, he did not reply to me when I asked for his office’s address. He presented himself as very busy and asked me to remind him of our arranged meeting the day before, yet failed to show up even after I did.

At first, I was a little worried that he might not have felt as if he could have declined when I first asked if he wanted to be interviewed, and tried to get out of the arrangement in this way; or that he had had second thoughts because he was worried I was sent to ‘spy’ on him in some way. After all, I had encountered similar behaviour (enthusiastic openness at first, followed by suspicion) before – which is why I had not been able to interview a few openly dispensationalist minded leaders. In a space that was saturated with Western interest, it often seemed difficult to clarify that my goals were academic in nature, and that I was not out to ‘test’ or ‘evaluate’ their theology. Most of the outside

funding received by ministries in Israel-Palestine is tied to certain theological stances held by the recipients, or at least silence on controversial issues (such as the theological significance of the Israeli state). I was always open about my work, and shared where I had conducted participant observation and (often following a question) told future interviewees respondents who else I had interviewed. In this somewhat sensitive context, my association with Nazareth Evangelical College and simultaneous interest in the *Christ at the Checkpoint* movement seemed to prove problematic for some. Especially pastors or ministry leaders were very careful when it came to talking about politics, for fear of losing important funding.

In the end, Yusuf agreed to a time and date, and (after checking whether my husband would be willing to come, so we would not be seen alone together in a public space), even picked us up with his van. I found it notable that he chose a café in the mall area of the Jewish part of Nazareth, Nazareth Illit – a fancy coffee house with loud music, bakery and fashionable and funky ‘industrial-style’ interior (e.g. old sewing machines on shelves). I had never been to this café before, and it was never suggested to me as a meeting point by any Palestinian evangelical again afterwards. Yet, Yusuf seemed comfortable in its surroundings, and it left me wondering how much the choice of location contributed to the curation of his narrative to me: he presented himself as fashionable (Yusuf commented on the interior as ideas for his new living room), familiar with the latest trends, ‘of the world’ (he gave very specific instructions to the waitress regarding how he liked his coffee), and at home in predominantly Jewish surroundings. He did not know us well, and thus perhaps chose a setting he thought would appeal to Westerners interested in the Palestinian church and his ministry: a setting in which Palestinians get on well with their Jewish neighbours, where menus and

restaurant procedures (like ordering coffee) work similarly to ‘Western’ places, which emphasise a narrative that presents Israel as an innovative and cutting-edge country.

Our interactions did not extend much beyond the interview in this coffee shop, even though he was known to many of the other Palestinians I worked with and we kept in touch via social media. However, I still decided to write about him because Yusuf represents a ‘typical’ fundamentalist approach to ethical self-cultivation, which I heard much about and observed around me. I had told him before the interview that I wanted to know more about his church, his involvement in it, the ministry he had told me he worked for, and Palestinian evangelicals in Israel quite generally, thus attempting to show as unbiased an interest as possible and leaving the conversation open for him to shape as he wanted to. I guided the interview with questions eliciting this kind of information, but left it open for him to share what he felt important. Below is a summary of the points we raised, after he began by a prayer asking God to be glorified through our conversation.

Yusuf grew up in a Catholic family in a small village close to the border to Lebanon. A friend of his took him to a Bible study when he was a teenager, and he ended up converting as the first of his family and village to evangelicalism. He is proud to have led the way, and convinced many of his relatives of his new-found faith, so that the small church that emerged in the following years even became known under his family’s last name. For him, the most important goal in life was to evangelise, and he considered himself a professional missionary, having resigned his job as a judge assistant in Nazareth’s court house. He was a full-time senior staff member of the North Africa and Middle East branch of the global evangelistic ministry ‘Cru’ (short for its former name, ‘Campus Crusade for Christ International’). Like other conservative and millennial Christian agencies, Cru stresses the urgency of conversion of those who do

not believe, and the importance of changing a secular society according to Christian principles (Hancock, 2014). Yusuf was instrumental in building up the Middle Eastern branch of this organisation.

Yusuf juggled his role at Cru beside a busy family life, his role as elder in the church, and a PhD programme at the messianic Jewish 'Israel Bible College' (ICB) in Netanya (which is accredited by Boston Theological Ministry Seminary). Degrees at ICB require less demanding academic work than at the two Palestinian Bible colleges in Nazareth and Bethlehem (for his PhD, Yusuf had to hand in about five essays), and also teach a messianic Jewish theology only (whereas both NEC and BBC offer a more comprehensive theological curriculum). Many, if not all, Palestinian evangelicals become ordained pastors as a second career, and thus some are attracted to the quicker route to a degree that ICB offers, and which provides them with more credibility in the eyes of their congregations and possible funders abroad. ICB also fits well with a stricter dispensationalist theological orientation than the Palestinian Bible colleges. While this might not be the only reason Yusuf chose to study for a degree at ICB, it may certainly have played a role.

When I asked Yusuf about ICB, he acknowledged that there were tensions between the different theologies of ICB and the Palestinian Bible colleges, which he said he preferred not to get involved in as he follows his own 'calling' of evangelism: 'Politics is not my business. I leave it.'

This statement sums up his position on the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference as well.

He said that he had never attended the conference, and that it needed 'further research.'

He explained:

They [the *Christ at the Checkpoint* movement] want to tell everybody about the situation. 'We are believers, but this is our situation.' They're opposing the

occupation, they're refusing all the – I also oppose the occupation – but the way that they use it, it's their way. I have no comments on it because they believe that this is the way to tell the people about the situation. And for me... we need to test the things through the Holy Spirit.

He went on to give me a 'textbook answer', which sounded rather scripted and formulaic, but was expressed with fervour.

We need to ask three questions. It is glorifying God? First, are these things glorifying God or not? Answer the question first, and how, and if you said yes, how. If not, how. The second, is it building up the church? How? The third, is it building you up? [Does it] Make you more mature? Or not? Three questions: glorifying God, building the church, building you. If not, don't do it. And they need to ask themselves these three questions. If they answer OK, it's OK. My Kingdom is in heaven. I care about the people, but I don't care about the earth. If they value the earth more than what it's worth, it's a problem.

For Yusuf, *Christ at the Checkpoint's* engagement with the 'situation', and the way they oppose the Israeli occupation, felt too centred on earthly politics, and indeed, as emerged in the remainder of the conversation, a possible barrier to his three criteria of glorifying God, building up the church, and building up the believer. For him, the virtuous evangelical self-cultivation, which he preached about in his sermon, as well as evangelism, was more important than raising awareness of political problems, as he understands *Christ at the Checkpoint's* mission.

He explained Cru's approach to evangelism (which he fully endorsed) as one of numbers – in view of the impending End Times, Christians need to convert as many people as possible so they are 'saved' (cf. Hancock 2014). Concretely, Yusuf explains that the vision of his ministry stems from the biblical passage of 2 Timothy 2:2, in which the apostle Paul says 'what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.' The 22 staff

members (a coincidence?) envision there to be ‘four generations’ on the basis of this text, as Yusuf explains:

If I reach you, and you become my disciple, your goal is to reach him [he points to my husband], and make him your disciple, and his goal is to reach that guy [pointing to a man sitting outside whom he had previously greeted], to become his disciple. That one [the man outside] is my fourth generation, but you are my daughter, he is your son, and he [the man outside] is my grandchild.

For Yusuf, this is more than a ministry – it is a global movement, he says with pride, which bit by bit ‘adopts’ people into a global faith family. Besides converting members of the liturgical denominations (who are considered ‘Christians’ but not ‘believers’), one of the key targets for this kind of evangelism are Muslims (though Yusuf sensitively refers to them as ‘musicians’ because of my recording our conversation – he is the only one who took such precaution). The strategy he and his team employ is to invite people to a central event, such as showing the Jesus film,⁶⁹ and then ‘filtering’ out who is interested and who is not, and so form a small group with whom they conduct follow up Bible Studies: ‘six weeks of follow up, one lesson each week.’ After that, they ‘filter’ again:

If we have ten, from this we can get three or four that really commit. We continue from each ten, we have twenty per cent receivers. They commit their life to continue. Usually, it’s twenty per cent. Sometimes, it’s ten per cent.

Sometimes, Cru in Israel-Palestine receive Western groups who help with their evangelism, such as accompanying them to Muslim villages and thus sparking Muslims’ interest – who, according to Yusuf, do not feel they can decline hospitality to

⁶⁹ The Jesus film was one of Cru’s trademark sponsored projects and is a filmed version of the gospel of Luke, aggressively aimed at converting the non-believer, based on dispensationalist theology (Hancock 2014).

visitors from abroad and so invite them in, and possibly accept an invitation to an event from them.

While I had heard about this model before (a classical fundamentalist approach), I was curious whether many Muslims did not find it a barrier to accept a faith that considered the state of Israel a prophetic fulfilment. I had heard reservations like this before, and had noticed that evangelical Christians are often considered as synonymous with the occupier due to the Christian Zionist involvement in Israel (cf. Ajaj, 2018). To answer, Yusuf drew the connection to the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference again, which to him was unnecessarily concerned with matters ‘on earth,’ while failing to focus on winning people for Jesus.

The ‘musicians’ [his veiled term for Muslims] are more connected to the Arabs, the Christians are more connected to the heavens. Ok? Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not from here.’ That’s why our goal is to build the kingdom of *God*. Not the kingdom of ourselves. Not a kingdom on earth, but a kingdom in heaven. I care about people. But I don’t care about the earth. Yes, people need the earth. But if this care about the earth causes problems, I will stop to care about the earth. And because people now, the unbelievers, are fighting on earth, I will not squeeze myself in between them. Let *them* fight about it – but let us fight about the kingdom of God.

Yusuf displayed a strong affinity to the separation of church and state – seeing the church, and Christians, as separate from the world around them and ‘citizens of heaven’. He also had a clear preference between the two – the earth was just temporary, so the Christian should not become too caught up in it.⁷⁰ With this, he shared a similar worldview as Miriam, who is portrayed in the next section. However, in his case this view was tied to a more aggressive type of fundamentalism that focused on numbers rather than individuals, in view of the impending End Times. Within this type of

⁷⁰ Many fundamentalists for this reason oppose activism against climate change or what they see as overly emphasised climate protection policies.

evangelicalism, success is seen as blessing by God, and so Yusuf produced himself as highly successful in his ministry and academic achievements, with his time productively filled up:

I need to squeeze my time. One wife, one church and ministry and yeah, it's a lot of things. But thanks to God, I'm happy and - I like to study. I'm a researcher, I have that kind of that mind. I'm not taking things like that. No. Kind of like this machine [points to decorative Singer sewing machine on shelf behind me] – [I ask] who invented them, why, and *lalala* – this is my personality!

Yusuf presented himself to me as busy, integrated into life in Israel including the Jewish neighbourhoods, and with an exemplary intense mission agenda. From our interactions I also learnt that he was careful and savvy in 'politicking' around evangelical sympathies – even as he refrained from what he called 'earthly politics.'

5.3 The pietist: Miriam

Miriam stood out in the evangelical community in Nazareth. Unlike most other Palestinian women in her community, she did not spend fortunes on her clothing, but preferred to wear trainers and loose sporty outfits. She did not wear makeup, and had only a limited set of clothes which she rotated during the week. Unlike others in her community, she also preferred to live simply. Rather than live in the flat her late father had left her, next to the house of Hind, her aunt, Miriam decided to live a little walk away in a one-bedroom rented apartment, affording her the quietness and independence she desired. I had known her during my first stint of fieldwork, and was recommended the flat that adjoined hers for the second fieldwork trip. My husband and I rented from our joint Muslim landlady, and thus became Miriam's neighbours.

Miriam was just over forty, but, unusually for a Palestinian woman her age, not married – she was one of only two unmarried adults at Hope Baptist church. Unlike her other life choices, such as leading a simple life, she had never had the intention to stay single; yet, with both her parents deceased, and her rejection of a materialistic lifestyle, a typical Palestinian wedding seemed out of reach. The bride's parents normally expensively furnish the flat of the newly married couple, and the celebration itself consists of a week of finest feasting – driving many Palestinians into debt. Miriam did not have the means to hold a celebration like this, nor did she want to. To find a partner that matched her outlook on life in a driven society such as Nazareth's seemed unlikely. In spiritual terms, Miriam considered herself like modern-day Joseph, and often reflected on this biblical story. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, and so also found himself without family and support, and in often unjust circumstances, but through it all trusted God – who according to the biblical story, honoured his obedience and turned around his fortune.

Miriam nurtured her asceticism, and felt she had found a friend in me who also could not afford to drive a car or eat out a lot in Nazareth, like most others in the community do (who even use their car to drive to a shop 200m away from their house). She showed me how to cook simple and nutritious meals with local ingredients, like lentil soup with fresh lemons, which matched my student budget. Sometimes, we met in the evening to enjoy some of the traditional meals our landlady had prepared and shared a pot of with us.

Miriam described her preferences as being inspired by 'Western thinking:' in particular, she valued the personal privacy a Western lifestyle can afford. Rather than being required to be available all the time, and spending her days with her brothers' wives who are stay-at-home mothers and 'talk all day,' she valued returning to her flat after

work to rest. She had clearly designated ‘visiting hours,’ valued punctuality rather than spontaneous dropping-in’s, and refused to respond to work messages outside work hours.



Figure 17. Dinner with Miriam in her one-bed flat.

The privacy also, importantly, allowed her to do ‘quiet times’ – personal devotional times of prayer, Bible reading, and worship – regularly, and thus foster her relationship to God.

Miriam fought hard to keep God at the centre of her life, which is the reason why she only worked the number of hours absolutely necessary to sustain her simple lifestyle, and get enough rest to clear her mind for prayer. With this, she contrasted with Yusuf who valued productive busyness and a full life. Controversially for some of her relatives, Miriam also refused to participate in some of the social obligations of her community – feeling that she could take liberties because she was not married and therefore not quite part of the ‘normal’ society. For example, it is customary for a female host to serve visitors various meals and snacks one after the other, prepare the fresh food in front of one’s visitors’ eyes, and wash the dishes in the kitchen after every

course. Miriam, when she had visitors, instead prepared the food in advance, and spread it out on her table like a buffet, choosing to spend time with her visitors rather than work in the kitchen. For her, this meant still maintaining a sense of biblical hospitality, yet doing it in a way she felt benefitted the visitor (who after all came to see *her*) better. She also disliked the social obligations around weddings and funerals, which require careful dressing up, expensive gifts, lots of socialising amid (in the case of weddings) loud music and banal conversation, and late nights.

All of her pastimes were spiritually inspired; when she saw people, she sought to reflect Jesus to them, and would pray beforehand for each arranged meeting. When she read, she read spiritual books or the Bible. When she watched TV, she preferred to watch Christian movies. She also made room for people in her life who could not ‘give back’, such as an elderly neighbour whose son did not look after her well, and who suffered from dementia and was lonely. Miriam regularly checked in on her, and spent an evening a week with her despite the impossibility of conversation and the lady’s dementia-related lack of boundaries. She also tried to set up a rotating system of visitors to the lady in her Muslim neighbourhood. When Miriam rested, it was to look after her body well; the same applied to her regular exercise, and her discipline in eating healthily. She was careful not to be ‘lazy,’ though, and tried to rest only as much as she needed. For example, she did not sit or lie on her bed during the day or evening (even though the room in which it is located also serves as living room), in order not to fall asleep outside of the times she had set aside for sleeping.

She often critiqued the busyness, materialism, and strive to ‘be something’ she saw among the evangelical community in Israel-Palestine. Thus, for example, she struggled a lot with the way in which a project at her workplace was done. Miriam worked as a Bible teacher at the Nazareth Baptist School. Every year, the school offered a ‘spiritual

week,’ in which students are led through Christian activities relating to God, the Bible, and prayer. Miriam had been tasked to organise the prayer activities, and – feeling a great responsibility to the children she taught, wanting to enable them to follow Jesus, and be a good example to them – was keen to give her very best. However, the communication about the spiritual week happened on Viber chat groups only, and was chaotic. Miriam thought that the people involved were not conscientious, often not responding to her organisational requests, or only partially, making her planning difficult. She received messages about the planned events late at night, and had to check them as they related to events she was responsible for the next day. Miriam was frustrated that her colleagues did not seem to take this important week more seriously. ‘I don’t think people are having their quiet time,’ she concluded. She felt they were ‘not connected to the Lord.’

We talked about the leader of the project, who kept very busy, but for Miriam unnecessarily so – she was occupied with things that to her seem not essential to life: ‘does she ever even stop to think?’ She felt that with so much to distract them, others in the evangelical community, who were constantly on their phones and concerned with maintaining a good image to those around them on social media, struggled to keep their prayer life in focus. Considering the lack of overall preparation of the ‘spiritual week’, Miriam ended up using material she had prepared a couple of years previously to re-use as that years prayer activities (*‘Challas [enough]! I need time to prepare!’*), feeling torn between doing a good job but also ‘looking after herself,’ and her own calm. In the days following the event, Miriam continued with her criticism: ‘they don’t prepare, but then they post videos about it all over Facebook. They do it just for show!’ Yet the next day, Miriam too posted a video on her Facebook wall featuring her third graders singing whole-heartedly the worship song *‘ya ilahi [lit.: oh divine; hallelujah]’* – despite her

criticism of the unprepared worship band who she felt were ‘just singing songs, it’s not right!’, which to her was also evidenced by the fact that as soon as they finished playing the songs got out their phones to check them for new messages.

Many of these traits – the privacy and simplicity – Miriam associated with ‘Western values.’ She quickly clarified, however, that by ‘Western thinking’ she did not mean the American lifestyle. Nazareth had been a host to a number of American missionaries from the early stages of Southern Baptist missions to today. Those Miriam observed at work in Nazareth today – one of whom she shared a house with for a while – were extremely well funded, drove fancy cars, and received a higher salary than most Palestinians. Seeing them, Miriam mourned the ascetic European missionaries who she observed living sacrificial lives in service to those they want to win to their faith: she had a number of European missionary friends like this whom she had met at the Bible College she had attended in Jordan, and whom she greatly admired. What she liked about them were the values they lived by: quietness, simplicity, responsibility, humility.

Those values she also recognised in her favourite movies, which were stories set in the American frontier days and modelled on the prolific evangelical American writer, Janette Oke. Miriam often invited me over on a Friday night to watch one of these movies with her. They usually featured a Christian main character, who through their example reformed the conceit of another character. They showed raw emotions (often, just when one got to know and like one of the main characters, they died a horrific untimely death, followed by a show of the raw grief of their family), drawing the viewer into the emotional journey the characters go through and thus making the movie more impactful and memorable. They were also full of virtues such as hard manual labour (building up a life in the wilderness without much machinery), family cohesion (all of the relationships at the centre of the plot are around family relationships), simplicity (no

frills in the Wild West), diligence (many scenes featured learning, reading and schools), and godliness (showing characters during their ‘quiet times,’ at services, praying before meals, resisting temptations, persevering in suffering, and inserting the occasional sermon).

For me, watching movies that portray the colonisation of the Americas and the ‘civilisation’ of its native inhabitants in a positive way, in the middle of a Palestinian city in Israel, was not always easy. It was especially hard on the Friday on which I returned from the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in Bethlehem in March 2016, when I had just listened to several talks attacking Dispensationalism and its blind eyes to political and social injustice. For Miriam, these movies however were not ‘political’ at all, but a way to foster her own faith life and relationship with God. She did not follow the current news, nor did she know much about the political situation in Israel-Palestine. One of her priorities was to be grateful and joyful at all times, and she felt that political engagement would take her mind off her deep and, she would say, childlike spirituality. Talking about theology made things only complicated.

Miriam was a great friend and neighbour to me during my fieldwork, even if I found her lack of engagement with politics and her pietistic lifestyle challenging at times. While her narrative to my husband and I may have highlighted what she considered ‘European values’ (knowing we were not American, and also not particularly wealthy or willing to accumulate debt to match the materialistic lifestyle around us), I also witnessed her determination in living out what she believed in. Thus, while I struggled with her apoliticism and support of Dispensationalism, I also admired her generosity and fearlessness about judgement of others. She enjoyed ‘translating’ certain customs for me, like how to respond to the exceptional hospitality of our Muslim landlady.

Miriam told me once that she felt like a stranger in Nazareth – not because she was a Palestinian Israeli living in a Palestinian enclave, but because she did not connect well to the Palestinian evangelical community of which she was a part, which she considered too materialistic, too driven, and too much about themselves. She considered their asking for political rights (which many of them also did not do, but which she picked up from the *Christ at the Checkpoint* organisers) part of that selfishness. Her only concern was to lead a quiet and godly life, and she led by example – her lifestyle was a critique of the materialism and vying for social positions of the evangelical community, at the cost of engaging her faith with the social and political contexts around her.

5.4 The missionary: Amin

Amin pastored a small evangelical church in the Nazareth area. Becoming a pastor, however, had never been his goal, but was more a reaction to better fulfil another calling he had received: to be a missionary to Muslims. More than a decade ago he and his wife began to do evangelism in the Muslim villages of Northern Israel, which began by prayer walking and ‘listening to the Holy Spirit,’ to knocking on people’s doors, and, if received well, building a relationship with the families they visit. He resigned his job when they received some funding from Western donors, which enabled them to become full-time missionaries. This funding provided a stipend for their living expenses, like a salary. When more and more former Muslim families began to attend his church, which was lacking a pastor at the time, he felt responsible for their spiritual education, yet felt ill equipped for the task. This is why Amin enrolled in a BA at the Nazareth Evangelical College (NEC), whose faculty he already knew well and trusted (they grew up and attended the Nazareth Baptist School together). When we met for our interview, he was about to finish his final essay for the course, which he asked me to proof read as

(joking) ‘exchange’ for the interview time. The interview took place after one of his supervision meetings with one of the faculty at NEC, in the tiny office where I was based. This allowed us to speak in depth in a semi-public space with little interruption (apart from a few greetings through the open office door), yet also without compromising either of our integrity.

I had been aware of Amin’s evangelistic ministry ever since his wife gave me a little brochure about their work at the ‘Evangelicals and Peacemaking’ conference NEC put on early on during my fieldwork (where I also first met Hind). I had signed up for their irregular, about bi-monthly newsletters, which tell of the successes of their missionary work – and it had struck me from the beginning on what a small scale they seemed to be operating. Many newsletters did not have a lot of ‘newsy’ news at all – they told of yet another visit to a particular family, and small favours with people as they slowly inched closer to (perhaps) making a decision for Jesus. The main ‘new’ information in each letter concerned the various visiting groups that assisted in the ministry for a week or two. In our interview, I was therefore curious about Amin’s vision for his evangelism, and the way in which he involved these international visitors in his ministry.

The vision for Amin’s evangelistic ministry is closely modelled on the way in which he himself became an evangelical Christian. Amin became interested in the evangelical faith as a student of the Baptist school under an ‘exciting’ teacher, who mentored him, alongside many of his generation.

I believe in one-to-one evangelism. I believe in sitting with people and explain the message of the Lord, I believe in praying for people, even with non-believers, because often prayer will change hearts. ... We usually go out on Monday, and, first, if it’s a new case – a place we didn’t visit before – we just walk in the streets, and we pray. Many times we just pray in the streets for something to do ... and ask the Holy Spirit which place he wants us to focus on, where we can knock on the door, and say ‘hi, we’ve come just to visit you!’ ... And when we are inside the

house, we start to talk about our love for them. Because, you know, we cannot make evangelism a *business*. It's very easy, and it's very dangerous at the same time – evangelism is not business. It's not that I want to give someone the message, and 'buy' their soul. No, it's about care, you know, it's about showing love. And if you love, really, they will feel it. ... If we have poor people we will bring food, if we have other needs we will try to cover it, and through this showing of love, they trust you, and if they trust you, they will listen to what you are saying. If you say that Jesus loves you, and they know that you are honest, they will believe you. ... They will trust you because they know you.

Amin's approach varied significantly from that of Yusuf, who tried to reach a large number of people, put on events, and then focused mainly on those who showed initial interest. Instead of being about the urgency of conversion, Amin's ministry married the telling of the 'good news' with social action, such as supplying food for some of the poorer rural communities. Building trust was very important for Amin's work, and he connected social action, like bringing food or meeting other requests for help, with the message of Jesus' love for the families they were visiting. By 'one-to-one' evangelism, Amin meant the personal encounter between him and his team and the household of whichever house they were visiting, and he later explained to me the dynamics of how it affected the family if only one or two of them start believing.

While Amin's vision for evangelism differed from Yusuf's outreach, they share the use of international teams as 'door-opener.' Amin explained,

It's different than in the West. Especially among the Arabs in the villages, welcoming people is very different than in the West. Usually people cannot close the door straight away. Usually they open it and welcome you in and if you have prayers, encouragements, material, or anyone who is from the 'outside', this will be more exciting for them.

In his initial visits to new families, Amin took members of international teams to increase the attraction of their visit (the villages are typically not on the main tourist

routes, unlike Nazareth, so visitors were a curiosity), and said that often the villagers were curious about the different ‘language, colour, and mentality’ of their visitors.

However, Amin was also selective about those he allowed to come with him. Each new team first received an ‘induction’ in which he briefed them about the basics of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the situation of Palestinians within the State of Israel. He thus carefully balanced the usefulness of the visiting groups for his own evangelistic ministry, and their education on a more sensitive approach to Israel than many of them arrived with. One of the first things he taught them, he told me, was not to tell his congregation that they ‘love Israel’ when they first introduce themselves during a service.

They stand in the pulpit and they say ‘we love Israel!’ OK, we all love Israel, we all pray for Israel, we all want Israel to be safe place – it’s our world, and this is what they teach us. But when you stand and say, ‘we love Israel,’ do you love the policies of it – do you love the army, the politics, the Occupation? *What* do you love exactly?! For us, ‘Israel’ refers to the state, not the people. Israel is a hard issue. In some way, it’s an evil issue. So, I explain to them, ‘Please, if you want to say, ‘I love Israel’, just explain it, that you love the people who live here, you love the Arabs, you love the Jews, but mention that you understand there’s a conflict, and you want to bless all!’

Unlike Yusuf, he finds it important to encourage teams to engage with the ‘evil’ situation which those they want to minister to find themselves in. He puts this into clear terms:

Many who come don’t know the history of the last seventy-five years, and they don’t know that many Christians lost their families and their land and houses. Now *we* can forget this – I can forget the history, I bless the Jewish people, I don’t have any problem with them, Christ has given me forgiveness and brought forgiveness to my heart. But, in some way - this is what I say to the groups also - in some way you tell me as Christian that Jesus, whom I love, and who died for me, sent you to take my land! You see, you need to think about it, it’s not just *blablablablabla*, it’s

not just theory, it's not just nice theology that you build. *You need to give me answers as Palestinian about what happened since then when Jesus sent you to take my land.* It's similar if I claim that Hitler and all these evil people were planned from God. Can I say it? I can't say it! It's the same! So how can I explain Jesus to Arab Palestinians, especially in my village, where many have fled to during the War. You see, they still talk about it. When you ask them where you are from, they say we are from the village where they came from, not the new village. So if I say to them, 'What happened here is the plan of God!', and at the same time preach the love of Jesus, how they will understand it?

When I affirmed that I had encountered volunteers like this during my first period of fieldwork and how I sometimes had to explain the situation to them, Amin asked if I could come to introduce my research to his church – to provide a 'good' example of a visiting Westerner, who was more aware of the conflict (due to time constraints this did not work out in the end). Considering that his evangelistic ministry was the motivation to become an ordained evangelical pastor, I was interested in how the rest of his congregation interacted with this ministry – did they help him in the evangelism? Did they support him financially in any way?

Amin was open about the fact that his own congregation was hesitant in joining his efforts as missionary – partly due to discomfort with reaching out to one's neighbours (rather than strangers), and partly due to an overemphasis on the role of the pastors (as the one who 'does everything'). He was keen to change this attitude, but realised it took time – after all, many of his congregants were still influenced by their backgrounds in the more hierarchical Greek Orthodox church.

The fact that his congregation was more passive than he would have liked also meant that they did not financially support him. In the case of his ministry, this was deeply problematic, as Muslim converts to Christianity face extreme difficulties in their social surroundings, often leading to persecution, and therefore needed support: from help

with providing a house in a new setting, emergency aid if they have to flee, to physical and psychological assistance in dealing with their new circumstances after sometimes having lost everything. ‘Small churches don’t have solutions for big problems’, Amin said, and then talked about how the passivity of his congregation and even other congregations around him had required him to seek funding from outside.

As with the visiting groups, this required careful navigation of potential funders’ theological convictions on Israel – for how could they genuinely support a person who was facing displacement because of his new-found faith in Jesus, when they did not even recognise their most recent displacement during the Nakba, still so prominent in people’s minds? In principle, most evangelicals he reached out to were excited about Amin’s ministry to Muslims, yet were critical of his stance on Israel – he did not believe that it was a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, even though he preached love for the Jews as much as for Muslims. In fact, only a few weeks after our interview he was expecting a messianic Jew to preach to his congregation, a step he had gently prepared his congregation for over several years – because he wanted to confront them with the fact that even if they differ on many theological issues, they still need to find a way to engage with each other as followers of Christ.

Yet, many potential funders were hesitant on learning more about Amin’s insistence that the Nakba needs to be addressed and not brushed over in evangelical engagement with Israel. Amin needed funding for his ministry, but found it tricky to generate it from abroad, or accept funding that came with theological conditions – which he felt directly impacted his evangelism. At the same time, he was less driven by seeking justice for Palestinians politically like Hind, or those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint*. Amin summarised the conundrum in which many Palestinian evangelical churches and ministries find themselves:

We call us the ‘forgotten group’. It’s not that they don’t care because they are evil, but because they haven’t found us yet. They are not interested in us. If they support Israel, they go to the messianic. If they support Palestinians, they go to the West Bank. They wonder, so are you are Israeli, or not?! Are you Palestinian, or not?! Are you Palestinian in the whole sense?

Amin showed differences and similarities to those I portrayed before. My interaction with him demonstrated clearly the kinds of tensions Palestinian evangelicals have to navigate. Amin saw me as an opportunity – first as potential funder when his wife handed me a leaflet at the conference, then as potential proofreader for his essay, as well as example to his church that not all Westerners are ignorant about the situation of Palestinian evangelicals. Amin was connected to his ‘global’ faith family and sought to use these connections to further his own ministry.

5.5 Conclusion: Palestinian evangelical narratives

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked the following questions: how are Christian values negotiated within a ‘virtue-community’ in which opinions about what it means to be a ‘good Christian’ differ? How do Palestinian evangelicals deal with materiality in a faith system that de-emphasises earthly material wealth? How do Palestinian evangelicals navigate their belonging to a ‘global’ faith community as they work out their evangelical subjectivities?

Each of the portraits speaks to these questions, and informing each other, they provide a more detailed picture of the Palestinian evangelical community. While the portraits can be roughly aligned into supporters of dispensationalist (Yusuf and Miriam) and contextual theology (Hind and Amin), they also demonstrate to the reader that these ‘sides’ entail significant diversity, and that there are similarities and differences across and beyond particular theological orientations. Yusuf and Amin share a calling as

missionaries among Muslims, even if their approach is different. Hind and Miriam are related, yet embody very different relationships to the political situation they are in. Yusuf and Miriam share an apolitical theology, yet vary widely in how they view materialism (one as blessing, the other as distraction). Hind and Amin share an open recognition of the damaging and lasting effect of the Nakba and want to educate Westerners about it, yet one seeks more liberal supporters while the other frames his critique in typical evangelical terms of prayer and love.

All of those portrayed were deeply impacted by evangelicals elsewhere: in terms of the dispensational theology they were navigating (rejecting in the case of Hind, mimicking in the case of Yusuf and Miriam, and adapting in Amin's case), as well as in terms of the financial and emotional support their larger faith family can offer. Especially those who were leading a church or Christian ministry and were reliant on financial support from outside their congregations were careful about how they formulated their theology and approach – or had to bear the economic consequences. Her age and ensured provision by her family might have made Hind more immune to outside opinions on her theology, yet she too was actively seeking contact to Western visitors to share about Palestinian evangelicalism with them.

I consider the image of the Palestinian evangelical community that emerges from these portraits one that has been curated for me as a 'Westerner' myself, and those like me. Having followed the invitation to 'come and see', each of the characters presented their narrative in a particular way, and expected a particular response or engagement from me in turn. Taken together, they thus resemble more a collage, fractured, yet insightful. They show the narratives presented in the mirror of 'global' evangelicalism, and how this 'mirror' impacts their different evangelical ethical frameworks.

This chapter has sought to develop a deeper understanding of the hitherto obscured population of Palestinian evangelicals, in their complexity and diversity. It has positioned their negotiations of social and political involvement (cf. Chapter 4) into their simultaneous individual evangelical self-cultivation. In doing so, it has demonstrated the various historical and current influences of their ‘global’ faith family, and the powerful ways in which dominant theologies shape Palestinian evangelical lives, even as some (like Hind and Amin) resist their impact. Especially the curations of their narratives towards me reveal the dynamics through which power shapes evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ on a global scale. I was offered particular narratives, even staged in particular ways (in the case of Yusuf and the hipster coffee shop), in accordance to what those I interacted with imagined I expected of them, or the kind of support they expected of me. This act of uneven co-constitution will be further explored in Chapter 8.

The insights of this chapter are an important backdrop to the discussion of the next chapter on how Western evangelicals engage with the territory of Israel-Palestine. In Chapter 6, the processes of curation and representation take centre stage as I explore the material representations of the dominant theology of Israel on the territory in Israel-Palestine itself. I contrast this with how Western evangelicals further respond to the invitation to ‘come and see’ in the form of a ‘witness visit’ (an alternative pilgrimage that leaves out places of biblical importance and focuses on Palestinians living in the territory itself) and interrogate in what way their ‘seeing’ differs from that of the majority of pro-Israel Western evangelicals. The focus on the performance of beliefs and associated imaginations of territory and people will help us further to understand the role of power in the negotiation of evangelical orthodoxy.

6. ‘Walking where Jesus walked’: evangelical engagement with the territory of Israel-Palestine

The previous two chapters discussed the ambiguous relationship of Palestinian evangelicals to dominant Western forms of evangelicalism, as well as the various curations of Palestinian evangelical narratives to evangelicals from abroad. This chapter ethnographically investigates Western evangelical engagements with two Palestinian evangelical projects, both of which invite Western evangelicals to ‘come and see’ – albeit catering to very different theological perspectives: *Nazareth Village*, a living history museum of the first century in Nazareth, and the *Tent of Nations*, an organic farm in the West Bank run by a Palestinian evangelical. Through the analysis of the Palestinian evangelical curations of, and Western evangelical engagement with, these two ‘projects’, this chapter specifically explores how Western evangelicals engage with the territory of Israel-Palestine, that is central to much theology of Israel. The chapter will provide insight into the materiality and performance of particular beliefs regarding Israel.

‘Land’ is arguably the key theme for evangelicals engaging with Israel-Palestine. For those who support the dominant pro-Israel theologies, the ‘land’ of Israel (and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) is seen as divinely ordained land for a ‘Jewish people.’ All evangelicals recognise the ‘land’ of Israel-Palestine as the place that bore Jesus, around whom evangelicalism is constructed, and that still somehow bears his footprints. It is the stage for the biblical story, and according to some evangelical beliefs, the stage for the End Times, too. The theologian Walter Brueggeman holds that ‘land’ can serve as organising principle for all of biblical theology (Brueggemann, 2002). To ‘walk where Jesus walked’ is one of the main motivations for many Western evangelical tourists to visit Israel (Kaell, 2014). The scenes and sights of Israel-

Palestine are considered a ‘fifth Gospel’ (Kaell 2014: 84), an extra gospel beyond the four recorded in the New Testament, that is instructive and edifying. Palestinian evangelicals share the reverence for Israel-Palestine as the territory on which many of the biblical stories were set, yet also experience the current challenging ways in which the territory is administrated and variously accessible for those who live on it. The evangelical engagement with ‘land’, or the territory, of Israel-Palestine is therefore revealing – not least because much of the Israel-Palestine conflict is premised on the taking of land that is seen as belonging to the different groups involved, and continuing injustices in land distribution.⁷¹

In order to investigate evangelical engagement with the territory of Israel-Palestine here, I take literally the description of Israel-Palestine as ‘Fifth Gospel’, and consider the landscape as ‘text’. By engaging with scholarship on material religion, post-colonial studies, and tourism and pilgrimage studies, I explore how certain ways of ‘seeing’ result in particular ‘interpretations’ of this ‘text’. These interpretations determine not just what the territory ought to look like, but also who is supposed to feature in it and how. This approach closely resembles scholarship on biblical gardens or theme parks (Bielo, 2015, 2018b, 2018a), which focuses on how scripture is rendered ‘tangible’ in a curated landscape. In his afterword to Bielo's (2009) *The Social Life of Scripture*, Simon Coleman describes the book's project as transforming ‘text, transcendence, and semantics’ into ‘context, indexicality, and performance’ (Coleman in Bielo 2009: 210). Similarly, I seek to demonstrate how certain ‘readings’ of Israel-Palestine, i.e. engagements with its territory, result in particular performances. My discussion is premised on the fact that the (Western) evangelical desire to ‘walk where Jesus walked’

⁷¹ For example, the barrier or wall surrounding the West Bank often cuts deep into Palestinian land, essentially annexing it (instead of following the ‘green line’ that was the 1949 armistice line).

(Kaell, 2014) requires significant imaginative action and results in social and political consequences (cf. Feldman 2007, 2016). The territory itself serves as a stage for the way in which ideas about what it signifies are negotiated and contested. In light of the overall argument of the thesis, the chapter demonstrates the role of power in the negotiation of theological orthodoxy through engagement with, curation of, and performance on, the territory itself.

I have variously engaged with the two projects I discuss in this chapter. The living history museum *Nazareth Village* is located about 10min from the old town of Nazareth, on a slope just below the English Hospital. I conducted fieldwork at *Nazareth Village* throughout the duration of my time in Nazareth for several days a week. The attraction consists of a gift shop, a small museum, and most importantly, a reconstructed first century ‘farm’ with a few houses assigned to people with different ‘trades’ (carpenter, weaver, etc.). It also includes a wheat field with a threshing floor (a circle of bare ground where threshing is demonstrated in the summer), a sheep pen, a small vineyard, watchtower, an oil press, and a reconstructed small synagogue – the only full-size reconstructed synagogue of the first century in the whole of Israel-Palestine. Visitors are taken around the property in groups, guided by a tour guide supplied by the *Village*. At the end of the tour, many groups opt in for a ‘first century lunch’, consisting of salad, chicken, bread baked in a stone oven, various dips, apples and date paste, as well as tea. It is served by costumed staff or volunteers in a specially designed building with long wooden tables and benches. The *Village* does display a couple of ‘authentic’ first century features that have been carefully documented (Pfann 2007): a wine press hewn from the ground rock, and excavated agricultural terraces. In early writings of Protestant pilgrims, archaeology has been utilised to ‘proof’ biblical texts for a long time (Coleman 2007) – the land, as Bielo theorises, has been framed as ‘object lesson’

(2018b: 5f). The emphasis of the site as of ‘real’ archaeological interest therefore creates a powerful interplay between authenticity and fictional representation.

The *Village* is administered by Nazareth Trust, which also oversees the volunteer organisation SERVE Nazareth and the English Hospital. Through SERVE Nazareth, Western volunteers, who all live on the hospital compound, are supplied to help out at the living history museum – mostly as costumed characters on the farm land, but also to help in the kitchen, the gift shop, or on rare occasions, as tour guides. *Nazareth Village* itself has been developed by a joint American and Palestinian team, and is run by a local and international ecumenical board. The *Village* has about twenty permanent staff members, plus the varying amount of local and international volunteers.

The agenda of *Nazareth Village* is neatly summarised in a booklet commissioned for its gift shop: *Nazareth Village* aims to ‘peel back the twenty centuries of time, distance and culture’ that separate its visitors from the first century, the time of Jesus, and hence make it come alive again (Kaufmann 2004: 4). As a result, it is a wonderful example for the way in which the landscape is reconstructed to suit particular evangelical imaginations of what it ought to look like. It attracts those Western evangelical visitors who seek a most ‘pure’ representation of their Bible when they visit Israel – an expectation that is thwarted on encountering the shrines and churches (‘bells and smells’) of Orthodox and Catholic denominations at sites of biblical importance, as well as the modern cities, conflict, and infrastructure of Israel-Palestine (Ron and Feldman 2009; Kaell 2014). In this chapter, I unpack how it erases the current realities of Israel-Palestine to create a Western evangelical imaginary ‘Holy Land’ in Israel-Palestine.

The second ‘project’ that invites an international audience to ‘come and see’, and serves as contrast to *Nazareth Village*, is an organic farm in the West Bank called the *Tent of Nations*, to the South of Bethlehem. The *Tent of Nations* is built on a 100-acre piece of

land purchased by Daher Nassar in 1916, hence also known as ‘Daher’s Vineyard’ – its current occupants are Daher’s grandchildren. Daoud, one of Daher’s grandsons, is an evangelical Christian, who studied theology and tourism abroad before he returned to help run the *Tent of Nations*. Since the farm has been declared ‘state land’ by the Israeli state in 1991, effectively rendering the Nassar family’s presence on it illegal, the family has fought a continuing legal battle to remain on and regain control of their land. In the process, and to garner international support, they have turned the land into an ‘educational and environmental farm’. The name *Tent of Nations* denotes the welcoming of international supporters, but is also reminiscent of biblical passages like Isaiah 54⁷² which deals with the future restoration of ‘Zion’ and the land of Israel, and hence is often quoted by Christian Zionists. Thus, while opposed to Christian Zionism, through naming their project *Tent of Nations* the Nassar family claims a part in this prophecy and Israel’s future.

I visited the *Tent of Nations* as part of a ‘witness visit’ I accompanied as a researcher in November 2015. ‘Witness visits’, or ‘alternative pilgrimages’, are aimed at international, mostly Western, Christians and include visits to organisations and people involved in non-violent resistance or social justice projects in the Occupied Palestinian

⁷² Isaiah 54: 2-3; 11; 15 (NIV):
 ‘Enlarge the place of your tent,
 stretch your tent curtains wide,
 do not hold back;
 lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes.
 For you will spread out to the right and to the left;
 your descendants will dispossess nations
 and settle in their desolate cities. [...]
 Afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,
 I will rebuild you with stones of turquoise,
 your foundations with lapis lazuli. [...]
 If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing;
 whoever attacks you will surrender to you.’

territories in a show of solidarity. The 10-day trip I accompanied was led by the organisation Friends of Sabeel UK, a partner organisation to the organisation Naim Ateek founded in Jerusalem in the 1980s, which Hind (portrayed in Chapter 5) had been involved in. I draw on a number of observations from this trip, but focus particularly on the afternoon visit at the *Tent of Nations*.

The engagement of participants of the ‘witness visit’ with the territory of Israel-Palestine highlights the realities of the fractured and politically complex landscapes of the Palestinian territories over that of biblical sites in Israel. Yet, this chapter explores how the Western evangelical participants of the ‘witness visit’, too, project certain biblically-inspired imaginations onto the territory of Israel-Palestine, which invite particular curations of their Palestinian evangelical hosts who invite them to ‘come and see’. In the following, I share two vignettes of a typical visit to *Nazareth Village* and the ‘witness visit’s trip to the *Tent of Nations*. I will then analyse these with focus on Western evangelical ways of ‘seeing’, sense of aesthetics, expectation of who is on the landscape, the role of nature, plants and animals, and the curation of aspects of the landscape for the Western evangelical visitors. This will be followed by a discussion of how power shapes the performance of biblical interpretations and representations.

6.1 *Nazareth Village*: of representation and reality

From the dimmed lights of the museum of *Nazareth Village*, we emerged onto a slight upward slope flanked by fragrant rosemary bushes. In spring, the visitors are engulfed in an abundantly blooming wildflower meadow, and a flowering avenue of white-petalled almond trees. One of the first living creatures we encountered was a donkey tied to an olive tree to graze. For some of the American visitors, this was the first encounter with a real life donkey. ‘Oh look at them, aren’t they cute?’ – ‘Is this a

donkey?’ – ‘Is this what Mary would have used to ride on to Bethlehem?’ Sometimes, Nabil, the ‘manager of the land’, dressed in first century clothes, got the first century saddle (a blanket) out and let any children of the group have a short ride – but on the afternoon I depict here he was too busy.

Among lots of ‘aahs’ and ‘oohs’, we stopped at our first ‘station’, a gnarled olive tree. George, our Palestinian evangelical guide who attended a Brethren church,⁷³ explained that they had planted a hundred olive trees in the property, which are harvested each autumn. This particular example was the oldest with its 400 years, and was transplanted from the nearby village of Cana (the site of Jesus’ first miracle, where he turned water into wine). He explained how one can determine the age of an olive tree in the absence of the usual tree rings (by carbon dating). The next piece of information raised the tree onto a spiritual level:

Necer in Hebrew means ‘shoot’. Do you see these small shoots growing out of the tree trunk? Now, *necer* is related to the word ‘Nazarene’. And Jesus in the Old Testament was prophesied as the ‘root of Jesse’, just like these olive shoots – and he was a Nazarene! So we can see a fulfilment of prophecy here.

The olive tree was not the only example - throughout the tour, different plants growing in the fields were explained and highlighted, always with biblical reference and, in many cases, a short Hebrew language study.

When we entered the reconstructed first century kitchen later, George pointed out the picturesquely strung herb bundles on the wall. Of particular interest was hyssop, which features in the Exodus story, as the shrub which the Israelites used to paint their door frames with blood to be spared a visit by the angel of death just prior to their fleeing Egypt (Ex 12:22), and the psalms (‘Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean’, Ps

⁷³ The theology of Dispensationalism first emerged from the movement of the Brethren church.

51:7), both of which were well known passages for the evangelical visitors. The herb was also used in yearly Jewish rituals, and was used to decorate special first century meals offered at *Nazareth Village*. The group took in and admired the fragrance, and some took a few leaves with them to rub between their fingers as they moved on.

At the end of our hot hour through the grounds of *Nazareth Village*, George led us to the final station. Together with the group of visitors, I stepped into the welcome coolness of the reconstructed first century synagogue, where we were engulfed in the melody of Benjamin's surprise Hebrew worship song. When he finished, the costume-clad Benjamin translated the song as the prayer in psalm 51: 'Create in me a clean heart, o God'. George then invited us to sit on the stone benches against the walls of the building, picked up the recreated scroll from the small table in front of him, and began to re-enact Jesus' reading: '*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...*' The story of Luke 4 depicts Jesus giving his first sermon at a synagogue in Nazareth. According to the biblical texts, he had already begun his ministry by healing the sick in surrounding villages in Galilee, and in this scene returned to his hometown. Assuming we were familiar with how the story according to the gospel of Luke, chapter 4, unfolds – when Jesus finished explaining his reading, his audience angrily drove him out of their town and wanted to push him off a cliff – George explained what made Jesus' contemporaries so upset.

'There are certain things included in the passage of Isaiah 61 on the scroll,' he said, 'that Jesus did not mention'. He explained that the Nazareth of Jesus' time was built in the second century BC as an enclave of Jews in 'gentile Galilee', with a view to

eventually conquer the area and reclaim it for the Jewish (Maccabean) faith.⁷⁴ George went on to say that the Isaiah passage Jesus read would have been well known to the worshippers of his time as a text that depicted their dreams of a powerful messiah who would revenge their suffering and turn the rulers of their age into slaves. While Jesus, according to Luke 4, claimed that he was the very messiah they were hoping for (*'Today this scripture has been fulfilled'* v. 21), when he delivered the reading he stopped short of the verse following directly after the announcement of the 'year of the Lord's favour', one that proclaims 'the day of vengeance of our God' (Isaiah 61:2). Jesus also omitted the stanzas following his passage that spoke of 'repairing the ruined cities' (v. 4), 'foreigners being their ploughmen' (v. 5) and the Jews 'eating the wealth of the nations' (v. 6). Thus, George explained, by omitting to read the revenge-filled verses of Isaiah 61, he rendered the message, which his contemporaries saw as promise of material wealth and power, into a message of mercy, which becomes clear in Jesus' subsequent exposition as narrated in Luke 4: 23-27. Jesus' audience responded in anger, and accused him of blasphemy, the punishment for which was death.

At this point, George pointed out of the door of the synagogue, from where we could see Mount Precipice in the distance – the spot traditionally associated with the 'cliff' off which the angry mob wanted to push Jesus. 'But do you really think they made it that far?' George asked, and reminded us of the exhibit of a large stone he had shown us in the museum of *Nazareth Village* at the beginning of our tour. He explained that they probably just wanted to push him off a rock of that size (roughly 2,5m) which, with bound hands and subsequent stoning, would have been equally fatal. Thus, with one

⁷⁴ The intricacies of the context of this story are explored in a book commissioned by and on sale in the *Nazareth Village* gift shop: Kauffman, J., 2005. *The Nazareth Jesus Knew*, p. 50f. A more detailed rendering of the same story and its context, referenced in the book by *Nazareth Village*, can be found in Bailey's (2008) *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*.

sweep he brought us back to the materiality of Jesus' time and teachings that *Nazareth Village* aims to communicate, and renounced the places of pilgrimage of traditional denominations, such as Mt Precipice.



Figure 18. George re-enacting Jesus' reading of the scroll in the reconstructed synagogue of *Nazareth Village*.

6.2 Visiting the *Tent of Nations*

Seventeen of us – mostly Brits, with one 'honorary' American - filled the small, white bus on this third day of our 'witness visit' through the West Bank. Some group members were chatting to their seat neighbours, but most participants were peering through the windows at the passing landscape, camera at the ready. A few had spread out the DIN A3 printout high scale maps of the area we received at the beginning of our trip, and tried to closely follow the landmarks. Even though we had travelled in this area before, it took some time to recognise it: the landscape was quickly evolving through sprawling settlements not yet represented on the map, and we were not always able to travel on the most straightforward route with our Palestinian driver due to road blocks.

That afternoon, we were visiting Daoud and his family at the *Tent of Nations*. Despite having some less mobile members in our group, we were not able to drive all the way to the farm – the road leading to the farm had been blocked with large stones, which we had to climb slowly to walk up to Daoud’s gate. He and his mother welcomed us with a home-cooked lunch of lentils and rice. We enjoyed the food on a sunny veranda



Figure 19. Eating lunch at Tent of Nations.

overlooking the valley beneath, as well as the belt of five surrounding settlements. ‘This is the only hilltop in Palestine owned by a Palestinian!’ Daoud bragged with reference to the practice of Jewish settlers to occupy West Bank hilltops with their settlements, before a younger participant of our group commented on the ugliness of the pylons connecting the settlements – not the farm – to the electricity network.

When we had finished our meal and the herbal tea served afterwards, Daoud took us to the ‘meeting room’, a cave close to the entrance of the farm. As he later explained, the caves exist because the Israeli government had forbidden the family to build on the land of their farm after they had declared it state land. The Nassar family sought a way

around this by building *under* the land instead. Their cunningness is expressed further in the naming of the various caves they had constructed for themselves and their visitors, beating the surrounding settlers at their game: ‘Outpost 1’, ‘Outpost 2’, and ‘Outpost 3’. Connecting the caves, the property was lined with narrow paths and planted with flower beds. Despite this being something of an ‘outpost’, isolated and limited in resources, the farm had been planted up with care and loving attention to detail.

As we entered the cave, a welcome coolness enfolded us. Daoud switched on the light bulbs dangling from the ceiling, but Ella, one of our group, protested: ‘No! Please don’t put the lights on for us. You should save the electricity!’ However, Daoud assured her that it was fine (the generators were working), and we settled into the chairs arranged around the large table. Around us, murals of orange, larger-than-life shapeless figures transformed the bare walls into a burst of colour, and surrounded us in their vibrancy. Among them, words like ‘peace’ and ‘solidarity’ had been painted in various languages. A side table displayed brochures with more information about the *Tent of Nations* in different languages. The participants of the ‘witness visit’ had come prepared with pen and paper, and listened intently as Daoud told his story, and that of his farm.

‘In case you didn’t know, “Daoud” is Arabic for “David”’, he began. He knew we were a Christian group, and the connotation would not be lost: the David of the Old



Figure 20. Meeting ‘cave’, built into the hillside to accommodate visiting groups.

Testament was young and weak when he defeated the much larger Goliath. Even Daoud’s name therefore painted a picture of resistance in biblical language, which he drew attention to. Daoud told us that he finished school in 1989, and then went to study tourism and later theology at a Bible College in Austria and Germany, before he returned to his parent’s farm here in the Palestinian territories. He told us that their land had been occupied since the Roman times – and throughout the reign of the other empires that had laid claim on the area: the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, the British, and finally, the Israelis. ‘We are still living under occupation today,’ Daoud said, ‘but this is the only occupation that wants to take the land. They don’t want to just control the people, but also the land.’

He explained that in 1991, Israel declared the farm ‘state land’, and since then, it had been threatened to be confiscated. Unlike in many other instances in which Israel took land farmed by Palestinians, Daoud’s grandfather owned all the legal documents to ‘proof’ that the land was indeed his, having registered it with the administration of every mandate or period. After 28 years of court battles, the case of the Nassar farm was still under review. The farm had been attacked by zealous settlers from a nearby settlement, and many of their olive trees had been cut by the Israeli army after a ‘warning’ the family did not receive – they later found a small leaflet attached to some of the olive trees in a near-invisible spot. ‘Our case has been sent back from Supreme Court to military court – it’s like Herod and Pilate’, Daoud said.⁷⁵ He then made a reference to Naboth in the Old Testament – a vineyard owner who refused to give his land to Ahab, the King of Israel, and was later killed so that the King could take it by force. ‘We live in Naboth’s tradition,’ Daoud went on. ‘We have received seventeen demolition orders. At one point, they offered us an open cheque for the land, but land is a gift – you cannot sell it!’ He explained how they developed the farm without facilities – they built a compost toilet and cistern for water in 2009, and grew everything organically. He continued to outline his vision:

In this situation, people tend to act in three ways – they use violence, they accept the situation and wait for a political hero to liberate them, or they give up and leave – which is what most of the educated ones are doing. We channelled our frustration into the *Tent of Nations*. We do this because we believe in justice. We want to go legally on everything, even though the judge for our hearing next Wednesday is from Gush Etzion [a settlement in the West Bank] – how will he judge justly? But almost everyone knows about our case now, and we have lots of support, even from groups such as *European Jews for Justice in Palestine*, and many

⁷⁵ According to the Gospel of Luke (Luke 23), at the end of his life shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus was sent from Herod (the Jewish authority) to Pilate (the Roman authority) before he was eventually sentenced to death.

environmental people. Because of the international presence we are still here! It makes a difference – even if you only stop for ten minutes. Since 2002, because of the international presence, the settlers have not attacked us anymore. We offer summer camps for children from Bethlehem, and have many international volunteers. They help with the harvest especially, and we send them out to walk the land and look for demolition orders hid in the trees. We want to educate people, and build a bridge between the land and people so they are able to look after it better. Maybe one day we can build a school on sustainability and organic farming here.

When Daoud had finished, we took a tour around the land for further, more detailed explanations about the things growing on it – the vineyard, fruit, almond-, and olive trees, their recent cave building projects, and the geography of encroaching settlements surrounding it. When we left, most of our group stopped to take a picture of the painted rock at the entrance to the *Tent of Nations*, on which was written, in different colours, in Arabic, English, and German: ‘We refuse to be enemies’.



Figure 21. View from Tent of Nations to neighbouring settlement.

6.3 Seeing the landscape

Even though in effect similar in terms of overall climate and vegetation, evangelicals see very different landscapes in Israel and Palestine. *Nazareth Village* and the *Tent of Nations* are both evangelical endeavours, and on the surface, display similar scenes: they are beautifully tended farm land and gardens, on a small scale, and maintained with care. Both of them are dotted with simple house structures: one as rebuilding first century houses, the other as a result of a building ban and necessity to build caves with little stone walls to support them. The effect is strikingly similar. Both *Nazareth Village* and the *Tent of Nations* are surrounded by modern city-scapes that intrude the vista when not determinedly blended out, and which its visitors have to make sense of in their engagement with either place. While *Nazareth Village* is designed for play and entertainment, as well as spiritual edification, the *Tent of Nations* is distressingly ‘real’ – unlike the costumed characters in *Nazareth Village*, its inhabitants actually lived on its premises, and lived off the little produce they managed to grow in adverse circumstances. And yet, somehow, *Nazareth Village* (even merely based on the number of its visitors and financial support) is considered *more* real, more the Israel of the evangelical imagination, despite – or because of – it being a fictional representation.

So first of all, how do evangelicals see the landscape? I chose to focus on ‘seeing’ in this section partly in reference to literature on sightseeing (e.g. MacCannell, 2011), and because of the visitors’ tendency to take photos – visual representations – of virtually everything they came across. In fact, at some point during my fieldwork I started to follow their gaze and take photos of both the photo-taker as well as the vista captured. This will be apparent in some of the photos I chose to illustrate this and other chapters. Hence, there was a natural tendency to focus on how and what people ‘see’. Two things in particular stand out in the evangelical engagement with the landscape in both

Nazareth Village and the *Tent of Nations*: firstly, landscape was seen and taken in, or processed, by connecting it to an internal frame of reference of things familiar. This is similar for most tourists who are ‘sightseeing’, as MacCannell (2011: 45) states: ‘If nothing happens in the mind or heart of a tourist, the attraction takes no notice’. As I will expand in the following, the things triggering reactions are both scriptural referents, as well as referents from their own social and cultural contexts. Secondly, the popular saying, ‘seeing is believing’ can in this context perhaps be transformed into, ‘seeing is owning’ – in a practical sense, because visitors paid entry for the realisation of their imagination of Israel (*Nazareth Village*), but in another sense because what is seen and referenced is so familiar that it inspires an often more intimate connection, such that what they see ‘is there for *them*’. Let me explain.

6.3.1 Recognition of the familiar

On first glance, the strategy of seeing things that are familiar in a foreign place as a way of connecting with it is not surprising – we probably all do this when we evoke comparisons of a new place with scenes we have witnessed elsewhere. Both sites inspired the visitor to comparison with things and scenes familiar to them: a female visitor to *Nazareth Village* exclaims at the wine press hewn from ground rock that her grandfather used to pickle cabbage in the same way. The guide at *Nazareth Village* helps to draw connections to things familiar, for example by describing the drill in the carpentry shop as the ‘first century Black & Decker’, the coolness of the olive press as ‘first century air-con’. The guide helps to control and direct the visitors’ engagement with the exhibits and stations, and ensures to make them meaningful depending on the group’s background (cf. Feldman 2016). Similarly, the landscape in the West Bank inspires comments from the young visitors on the ‘witness visit’ that connect what they

see to things they saw in movies. For example, on a walk through a Wadi from St George's Monastery to Jericho, one of the participants exclaimed that 'it's got something of Indiana Jones about it!' On a visit to the Bedouin village Susya with the group from the 'witness visit', a female participant compared the low stone walls surrounding the village to the landscape she knew from Yorkshire. The comparisons familiarised a landscape that was otherwise alien in its aridity and colours, and connected it to the visitors' frameworks – which are inspired by their cultural and historical contexts.



Figure 22. 'It's got something of Indiana Jones'.

Yet, connecting things seen to things familiar to the visitor is significant in this context because the connections were often made to the visitors' scripture readings, and so, in a way, have a ring of truth and indisputedness about them. In the vignette this happens for example when the replanted olive tree becomes a sign for the fulfilment of prophecy – the tree 'proves' through its shoots ('necer') that Jesus was prophesied to come from Nazareth as the 'shoot of Jesse'. It is like a mutual legitimation of scripture (as

witnessed in the landscape) and a particular landscape (as legitimising scripture). Simon Schama (1995: 61) in *Landscape and Memory* expresses this as follows (cf. Peteeet 2005):

once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.

Let us consider the rest of *Nazareth Village* and its presentation of the Israel of the first century. Together with beautiful, seemingly ‘untouched’ (or at least, sustainably cultivated) nature, the *Village* portrays a pastoral, almost romantic agricultural life, guided by the seasons and unaffected by the stresses and anxieties of ‘modern life’, which obviously surround this little enclave but is mostly successfully blended out. Visitors can watch costumed staff and volunteers harvest and grind wheat in summer, and olives in the autumn. They can observe the dying of wool for the weaver over an open fire, and delight in new-born lambs in the spring. Female costumed volunteers are often sent out to leisurely walk past the visiting groups while carrying a bunch of flowers, or stop to pick herbs. There is a sense of undisturbed beauty that is protected by those working on the land, as well as by the costumed character waving to the visitors from the watchtower above the vineyard. The beautifully decorated and orderly first century stone houses create a sense of nostalgia and peace. This sense is frequently picked up by the Western volunteers who stay for several weeks to slip into the role of a first century character. Carrie, for example, a middle-aged lady on a sabbatical, enjoyed both sweeping the smooth earth floors in the first century houses, as well as strewing it with rosemary and other herbs afterwards to create fragrance when visiting groups step onto it (while local staff scoffed at the nuisance of having to clean up the mess afterwards). Both Carrie and Lara (a younger volunteer) enjoyed slipping away during their daily duties to spend some time at a quiet spot on the land to reflect and pray.

Other volunteers who stayed for only a day or two, ‘play house’ and decorate the first century houses with fresh flowers.

A sense of aesthetics is not only created through the visual however, which resonates with existing work on biblical representations (Bielo 2018c). The booklet mentioned before about *Nazareth Village* further guides the reader/visitor (it is available in the gift shop as memory of the *Village*) to slip into the time and customs of Jesus’ time by listing the ‘typical’ sounds of the night of the first century (Kauffman 2005: 41) – thus enlarging the experience from the visual to other senses as well.

Sounds of the Night

- The crackle and pops of the fire used for cooking, winter warmth, and for gathering about as the village elders pass along stories of God’s faithfulness
- Melodic sounds of lyre, harp and flute: rhythmic sounds of rattles and drums
- A trumpet call (cockscrow) during harvest that signals the end of the third watch and the beginning of the fourth
- Rowdy night-time celebrations from nearby city of Sepphoris, including crowds at its amphitheatre that rise in sharp contrast to the pastoral quiet of the village



Figure 23. Pastoral scenes at *Nazareth Village*.

Visitors are led to imagine Jesus' life as a romantic pastoral, without the presence of Roman soldiers or other signs of political oppression. The sense evoked from the description of night sounds, which (if blending out the traffic, screaming school children and occasional calls for prayer interrupting the scene) can be appreciated when touring through the *Village*, is that of a cosy, orderly life that is virtuous through hard work (getting up at 'cockscrow') and melodic music rather than 'rowdy nighttime celebrations', and respect for the elders (Figure 23).

The importance of allowing the visitors to immerse themselves in this experience is highlighted by the tight control of the staff members over their appearance. Since visitors pass through the stations in chronologically staggered groups, the costumed

staff posted ‘sentinels’ at the varying spots of the *Village* to warn the others of their approach. While during a lull in the tours they showed each other videos and pictures on their smart phones, at the first sign of an approaching group these were swiftly tucked under their costumes. They reminded each other to take off their glasses, or pull down the long first century costumes they had tied up while carrying out building jobs around the *Village*. Each of the long-standing staff members carried a walkie talkie under their costumes, via which they discuss whether there were enough costumed volunteers in the right places ‘on the land’, or whether there was time for a cigarette break before the next group would pass through.



Figure 24. Two *Nazareth Village* staff on their phone in between tour group visits.

There are plenty of opportunities for taking pictures of this romantic ideal of agricultural life. The ‘peeling back of time’ (Kaufmann 2005: 4) thus leaves the visitor with an image of a glorified past, where nature, as well as families, societies, and work rhythms, were seen as more intact than today, and provides a pietistic example for the modern believer. It speaks to a desire of perfect (Eden-like) nature and wholeness that

evangelical pilgrims might have been expecting to experience in Israel, the place where Jesus walked. It also draws a neat comparison to a pre-industrial past of the Western visitor, which is intentional, as George commented to me in relation to the conception of the *Village*: ‘it’s like your ancestors!’ The nostalgic presentation of first century life (which can easily be mistaken for any period in the pre-industrial past) in a village that sets out to represent Jesus’ context invites visitors to recognise the familiar, and in the same instance, legitimises their image of this particular representation. It easily makes ‘metaphors more real than their referents’, in Schama’s words.

6.3.2 ‘Seeing is owning’

Because Israel-Palestine holds such high significance for its Christian visitors, the landscape is recognised, and connected with, but also more: it is often seen as existing *for* the visitor. Many evangelicals consider themselves as having a spiritual birth right to it by being ‘descendants’ of the Jews, to whom, according to dominant readings of biblical scripture, ‘Israel’ was promised. I discussed this theology in Chapter 4, and will return to it in Chapter 7. This can be considered a spiritual ‘*ius sanguinis*’. Smith (2013) argues that during the height of the British Empire and American expansion, these beliefs have rendered Israel into a ‘final frontier’ of the Western world (especially the United States). This is reflected still in today’s foreign policy which casts the United States as Israel’s protector, while mixing modern ideas of democracy with biblical narratives and projections. In *Nazareth Village*, such ideas are undergirded by exhibiting hard work, pietism, and patriarchy as well as a focus on the individual and their immediate family – which can be associated with a ‘frontier spirit’, and the type of pietistic evangelicalism that emerged during that time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, even among the more dispensationalist Palestinian evangelical women, spiritual movies set in

the American mid-West of the nineteenth century were popular, as we saw in Miriam's portrait in Chapter 5. While participants of the 'witness visit' to the West Bank tend to adhere to different theologies on Israel-Palestine, the associations with a colonial frontier still surface, as can be detected from the throwaway comment on the landscape's similarity with that displayed in 'Indiana Jones'.

Of course, the set-up of *Nazareth Village*, from the gift shop offering English language media and shipping forms, to museum displays in English, is aimed predominantly at international visitors, and makes it easy to establish a sense of 'for us'. The way in which visitors feel free to enter into the representation can be seen for example at the reconstructed synagogue, where visitors pick up the scroll after George and recite the same verses for photographic effect: 'the spirit of the Lord is upon me...'. In many instances, when taking pictures with the costumed staff, visitors seek to resemble them by draping a shawl over their head, or joining in the action of, for example, grinding herbs, or spinning wool. These practices resemble the role play described by Vida Bajc (2007) of a mid-West American evangelical pilgrimage group who enacted the narrative of David and Goliath on in the Valley of Elah. Bajc analysed this practice as a 'ritual' that is designed to experience Christ's presence as the 'Word and the Land' (2007: 398) are conjoined. Similarly, in *Nazareth Village* visitors enter into the performance in order to conjoin the biblical texts and the territory of Israel (in its stylised representation in *Nazareth Village*). In contrast, only few Palestinian evangelicals visit *Nazareth Village*, and if so, they rarely go on the tours offered to international visitors. Rather, it is treated as a history museum to which children are invited to learn about first century practices, not always as deeply connected to the scriptural references offered to visitors. The only 'ritual' usage by Palestinian evangelicals I observed at *Nazareth Village* was a Good Friday service of one of the Baptist churches in the reconstructed synagogue. While this

may seem odd to an outsider, Protestant Easter celebrations are ripe with Jewish symbolism, and the holding of some of the Easter celebrations at *Nazareth Village* are focused on and reflective of the historical dimensions of these.

The power dynamic between photographing visitor and costumed staff deserves special mention, as they too demonstrated a dimension of ‘owning’. The tour guides encourage the visitors to take as many pictures as they want, and they instruct the costumed characters to invite visitors to take pictures of them. Sometimes, visitors simply ‘document’ the first century tasks as carried out by the volunteers, without disturbing the scene. Many however, have specific ways in mind in which they want to portray the costumed staff, which I experienced myself during participant observation (and thus my experience is particularly focused on how visitors treated females). For example, many visitors followed a gendered way of portraying female costumed characters, instructing us to smile, or telling us how ‘sweet’ or ‘beautiful’ we looked. Some of the long-time female staff workers even told me about how some visitors abused them by placing their arms around them in inappropriate ways. One of the few messianic Jewish volunteers instructed female volunteers like me to tell visitors inclined to do so that there was ‘no touching in the first century!’⁷⁶

The ‘claim’ on the landscape is also expressed in the photographic representations evangelical visitors take of it, to use in their Sunday school lessons (a common remark

⁷⁶ Even though I knew at any point that I could resist any inappropriate behaviour of the visitors, I often felt objectified even when being told how or where to look or stand for a photo, and had to muster a lot of patience to play my role as required; knowing that some of the local staff were reliant on the income of their work at the *Village* and therefore often failed to draw clear boundaries towards inappropriate requests by visitors made me quite uncomfortable. I raised this with the manager of SERVE Nazareth to teach especially younger female volunteers how to detect and respectfully draw boundaries in case they experienced such inappropriate behaviour by visitors of *Nazareth Village*. I also suggested to the manager of *Nazareth Village* to instruct visitors on what is appropriate behaviour when interacting with the costumed staff (i.e. no touching, etc.), but do not think this was followed up systematically.

when stopping for a snapshot). With this, they take this particular representation with them and use it in perpetuating the imagination of Israel-Palestine that has inspired it.



Figure 25. Visitor reading out scroll of Jesus' inauguration.

However, perhaps even the *Tent of Nations* is offering to Western evangelicals a sense of 'ownership' in offering tree sponsoring, active participation in the harvest, and by catering to the emphasis on creation care of justice-minded evangelicals and supporters. And certainly, a sense of 'ownership' of the landscape can be observed in the engagement of evangelicals on the 'witness visit', too. I observed a great urgency to intimately know the landscape by following it on the detailed maps we were handed out at the beginning of our trip, and understanding the intricacies of checkpoints and area administrations. While 'fact-finding' is part of their advocacy in the UK or USA in support of Palestinian organisations, even in this supposedly altruistic endeavour is a sense of indispensability of the Western evangelical advocate. Ella, for example, freely takes photos of adults and children at close range, without prior permission – for use in her talks and presentations in the UK, evoking a sense of them being 'hers' to advocate

for. This sense is also expressed at the *Tent of Nations* in the form of visible ‘inscriptions’ of signatures on the walls and murals planted on the property.



Figure 26. Map use on ‘witness visit.’

The ‘ownership’ of Israel-Palestine can also be detected from another representation, that of maps circulating among evangelical visitors. Space does not permit to discuss the power and ideology inherent in mapping and cartography in detail (Jacob and Dahl, 2006; Wallach, 2011), but I want to mention maps here as a particular way of ‘seeing’ and ‘owning’. On many maps used in tourist brochures, place names are those found in the English Bible rather than today’s Arabic renditions. A common example is the terminology of ‘Judea and Samaria’ for territories that include today’s West Bank, which is an active erasing of current territorial and political contexts (Feldman, 2011). Other maps simply do not mention major Palestinian conglomerations, such as Nazareth, or places in the West Bank. Maps do not merely describe political reality, but anticipate it. The very making of maps involves walking the territory, climbing its mountains, and touching every stone of the territory to be mapped (Macdonald, 1996).

It was interesting to note the use of maps on our ‘witness visit’ around the West Bank, in which even fragile and shifting Bedouin settlements are marked. While the participants still often mis-recognised landmarks or mislabelled places, there was a desire to ‘get it right’, and understand the shared map of Israel-Palestine (Wallach, 2011), including a ‘map-stop’ on our way to a Bedouin village to understand the landscape (Figure 26).

6.4 Aesthetics

The previous section alluded to different ways of ‘seeing’ the landscape. The following paragraphs explicitly hone in on the aesthetics applied in the evangelical viewer’s engagement with land and nature in Israel-Palestine. Aesthetics is used here in the sense of what is considered ‘beautiful’, and what principles underlie these judgements. In his book on *Landscape and Power*, Mitchell (2002 [1994]: 2) writes about how ‘landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity’. The contributions to his volume argue that landscape is ‘made’ through their representations, from 17th century landscape painting to modern photography. How they are represented in different media gives an insight into the prevalent aesthetics of the respective era, though these media also shape what is considered as aesthetically pleasing – and those who are in the position to shape it have the power to blend in and out those aspects of the vista they choose. Thus, for example, idealised landscapes in the English landscape movement are an expression of class and power: what is portrayed as ‘beautiful’ at the same time economically disenfranchised English peasantry, for example through enclosure of common fields (Mitchell 2002: 6). This section deals with the things that are blended in and out in my two empirical examples by way of achieving an ‘aesthetic’ view of the landscape, a way of further

interrogating what influences and guides the evangelical seeing of and engaging with the landscape of Israel-Palestine.

As mentioned at the beginning, to establish ‘where Jesus walked’ involved an active process of imagination. One of the ways in which this happens is influenced by aesthetics – evangelical visitors seek an ‘authentic’ experience with the landscape that is not impacted by different landscaping and building projects. Perhaps due to cultural traditions and notions of a link between beauty and spirituality, it is also hard to fathom for evangelicals that where Jesus walked is *not* beautiful, even though ‘beauty’ here is judged by a European/North American sense of what it entails. A common way of how Protestant visitors to Israel-Palestine overcome the obstacle of the ‘wrong’ aesthetics is by employing panoramic vistas, which do not highlight the messy and ‘inaccurate’ foreground, but focus on horizons and sightlines (Kaell 2014: 86; Feldman 2007, 2016; Ron and Feldman 2009; Coleman 2007; Bielo 2018b). Feldman (2007: 361f), himself a trained tour guide cum anthropologist, reports of the many mountaintop vistas that are employed in Holy Land tours for evangelicals. It suits, as Kaell (2014) notes, especially the North American ‘penchant’ for outdoor spaces, which, as a residue from nineteenth century romantic naturalism, are considered more spiritual (cf. Feldman 2016, Bielo 2018c). Part of the attraction to grand vistas and outdoor spaces by Protestants is the aversion of the more mystical and sensual sites of Catholic and Orthodox tradition. Coleman (2007: 338) portrays this favouring of the ‘Protestant gaze’ of ‘the land of the biblical past over the people of the contemporary present’. Lock (2003: 112) retells the story of nineteenth century Protestant pilgrims who prefer to stay upright in their saddle (‘vertical’) rather than immersing themselves ‘in the Orient’ and bow down before icons or relics (cf. Ron and Feldman 2009: 205). The panoramic desire for outdoor space and

natural beauty – not just in a single bush or flower, but on a more comprehensive scale, is reflected in *Nazareth Village*, too.

The panorama in *Nazareth Village* is what I call a ‘mid-range’-panorama. It is possible to take photos of the landscape while obscuring the surrounding high rise buildings and the hospital complex to the North, even though this requires some skill and work of ‘blending out’, by positioning the camera in a way that focuses only on what is in front. The panoramic vision at *Nazareth Village* is a constant balance between the larger panorama and the close-up materiality of Jesus’ life, and it is the task of the guides and costumed volunteers to keep the visitors focused on this mid-range vision. In the vignette, this strategy can be seen when George recognises the vista from the reconstructed synagogue to Mt Precipice, but because it does not contain what *Nazareth Village* wants to communicate and highlight, he draws the visitor’s gaze back to the materiality of Jesus’ time. The foreground here does not have to be categorically blended out, since it is highly controlled – while creating a panoramic vista, the visitors are allowed to look more closely. When, during my fieldwork period, the piece of land immediately adjoining the *Village* to the South was sold, some staff members were furious. Soon after the closing of the deal, builders arrived on the property and started constructing two several-storey houses on it. Cranes were erected that reached much higher than the walls of *Nazareth Village*, and the builders’ radios blasted pop-music that sometimes overrode the guides’ explanations. The building work inadvertently brought the ‘outside world’ closer, and made it harder as a result for staff to maintain the narrative of the panorama.

Panoramas are a way to blend out the unwanted and disturbing elements, yet, especially in the context of European and American imperialism, the panoramic gaze also has political implications. In his book *Colonizing Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell (1988) expounds

this brilliantly in his discussion of representations at the world exhibition in Paris. The representations of areas of the empire led to the creation of a miniature world, one easily grasped by a panoramic vista. The representation of this world can be known and easily organised, all the while suggesting that it is a miniature of the ‘real thing’, which, by implication, can also be ‘known’ and ‘organised’. It is insightful to evoke Mitchell’s discussion in relation to the miniature world of *Nazareth Village* and its representation of the first century. It is a contained site that is much more manageable than the confusing ‘outside’. It is not as overwhelming such as the big, loud, and conflict-ridden Jerusalem, for example. The fact that a significant number of visitors can be convinced to believe that the costumed staff actually live inside *Nazareth Village* (I was asked many times, in all seriousness, ‘Do you live here?’, ‘What is it like to live here?’ ‘Is this your house?’ when impersonating a first century character), unaffected by the busy city around us (which many evangelical tourists do not even visit), is proof of the success of *Nazareth Village*’s representation of the beautiful, first century place where Jesus walked. The possibility of the belief that this representation can be ‘real’, and being cut off from the world outside it, resonates with Mitchell’s discussion in *Landscape and Power*: the landscape ‘naturalises a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable’ – landscape *makes* something (Mitchell 2002: 2).



Figure 27. Reconstructed synagogue (foreground) and Mt Precipice (distance).

As part of my overall exploration of what shapes evangelical orthodoxy in belief and practice, my argument here is that the ‘making’ of a vista that happens at *Nazareth Village* continues as its visitors leave the premises. They take the representation with them as they travel through Israel-Palestine, and back home to their Bibles (cf. Ron and Feldman 2009: 202), where they often planned to use the illustrations for their Sunday school lessons. This is what Mitchell (1988) describes when those involved in the creation of the Paris representation of Egypt travel in the ‘real’ Egypt, but see it and engage with it as if they had never really left the representation at all: they see it as the ‘world-as-exhibition’ (Mitchell 1988: 29). With this, the Holy Land turns into a museum of scripture, of which *Nazareth Village* is perhaps the best representation. In this way, the Western evangelical visitor can justify to avoid taking any responsibility for the struggle visible elsewhere in Israel-Palestine’s landscape.⁷⁷ Whereas studies of

⁷⁷ Few evangelical tour groups actually do enter the West Bank, yet still manage to include Bethlehem (which is just across the border from Jerusalem) on their itineraries. They do this by stopping at a viewpoint still in Jerusalem that allows a beautiful panoramic view of Bethlehem, without the messiness

Holy Land pilgrimage have highlighted that evangelical Christian narratives that frame Israel in a certain way, thus ‘inscribing’ their narratives onto it (Feldman 2007, Ron and Feldman 2009), here they quite literally perform these narratives in the middle of a Palestinian town. The fact that it is located where it is – and not in, say, Kentucky, as other biblical museums (Biello 2018b) – facilitates the process of making ‘metaphors more real than their referents’ (Schama 1995: 61). *Nazareth Village* is closely oriented around a Western sense of aesthetics – and thus ‘peels back time’ between a (to the Western, Bible-rooted evangelical) unrecognisable landscape and the evangelical imagination of Israel.

The *Tent of Nations*, by contrast, ‘makes’ something else. Unlike at *Nazareth Village*, Daoud draws the gaze of his visitors intentionally to the farm’s surroundings, the ring of highly modern settlements (with up to 45,000 inhabitants – a long way from being the ‘outposts’ invoked by the term). In its contested existence, the farm is something of a ‘reverse panopticon’ that is observed from all sides – our group can just about make out the watchtowers inserted into the walls surrounding the settlements. Daoud is proud that theirs’ is the ‘only hilltop in Palestine controlled by Palestinians’. Looking out from his lovingly tended farm, the contrast to the industrial landscape surrounding it is stark, eliciting the comment of one of the evangelical participants on the ugliness of the Jewish settler’s electricity pylons. It is perhaps this contrast that brings his farm in line with evangelical criteria of what land and nature should look like, as explored above – beautiful, small scale and pastoral, lovingly looked after. While not wanting to minimize a real desire to work sustainably and care for creation, Daoud does tap into the Western evangelical aesthetic and expectation of the landscape of Israel/Palestine.

of refugee camps and the separation wall. This way, the image of the pastoral scene depicted in so many Christmas narratives can stay intact (Ron & Feldman, 2009).

Yet, Daoud's hilltop is not visited by the majority of evangelicals. Even though it matches the aesthetics of what the Holy Land ought to look like for the Western evangelical, exhibiting the same trees and plants as *Nazareth Village*, and is even owned by an evangelical who can draw connections to biblical scripture, it is on the 'wrong side of the fence'. It is interesting to note in this context that even the site commemorating Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River according to the gospels was moved several dozens of kilometres north, from its geographical and historical position at the Jordan in the West Bank to the Sea of Galilee. The site at the Sea of Galilee is adorned by trees planted by Christian Zionist pastors such as John Hagee, whereas the site in the West Bank is surrounded by a mine field, a result of previous tensions with Jordan. Thus, evangelical visitors do not have to deal with politics and embattled landscapes on their visit to Jesus' baptism site. Cunningly, and perhaps to make it more acceptable, the *Tent of Nations* plays with the idea of what is aesthetically pleasing to the Western evangelical gaze, and challenges its message by drawing a contrast between the beautiful farm and the 'ugly' surrounding settlements.

6.5 Inhabitants of the landscape

'Walking where Jesus walked' entails imagining who else populated the landscape at his time. Many evangelicals are not aware of a Christian presence in Israel, and do not even expect Palestinians to live anywhere but in the Palestinian territories. The dominant evangelical assumption is that Israel belongs to 'the Jews': in this narrative, Palestinians are often considered modern 'Canaanites' (referring to the population living in the territory Israel invaded after their exodus from Egypt) and therefore illegitimate squatters (Masalha, 2009; Goldberg, 2006). This section explores the ways in which this belief is maintained in evangelical engagements with Israel-Palestine.

Firstly, it helps to place this belief into the wider framework of the Zionist discourse, which is supported by Christian Zionists, and thus many visitors of *Nazareth Village*. Gabriel Piterberg (2008: 94) argues that the ideology behind settler-colonialism in Israel-Palestine is firstly, a negation of exile ('we are the first indigenous population'), secondly, a re-enactment of Exodus (in the 'return' of the Jews) and thirdly, the 'redemption' of the land through Jewish presence. One of the key aspects of Zionism is the tracing of a continuous Jewish history with claim to the territory that is now Israel-Palestine, which involves considering the existing inhabitants of the territory at the time of the creation of the State of Israel (and since) as irrelevant or intruders. Consider, against this background, the claim of *Nazareth Village* to 'peel back culture': to 'peel back' two millennia of history and the development of a Palestinian city in order to show what Israel once was, and perhaps, should be. *Nazareth Village* is located at the centre of a Palestinian town, where it represents a past that is void of Palestinians, in an Eden-like landscape. It is ironic that it is modern Palestinian evangelicals who slip into the role of first century Jews, and thus present a picture of what Western evangelicals imagine Israel to look like, both now and in the future: the 'restoration' of Jews to Israel forms part of dispensational end time projections, and a requirement for Jesus' Second Coming.

While the ideology of Israel-Palestine as 'land without a people for a people without a land' has been a motivating force to fund the population of Israel-Palestine with Jewish settlers (Phillips, 2008), it does not solve the problem of those who already exist on the land, and are invariably encountered. Noam Leshem (2013: 523) makes a convincing argument for the trope of emptiness being 'an ongoing process'. He shows with the help of core Zionist texts that there are and have been uncertainties around the ideology of emptiness. The texts he employs in his discussion show the realisation and

disappointment that the land Jews migrated to was in fact already settled and farmed, and displays the paradox of erasing physical presences in a land that was supposed to be empty. The ‘emptying’ of the landscape of its original inhabitants is another effect of the panoramic gaze described above. Kaell (2014: 86) notes about the view from Mt Precipice in Nazareth, similar to my reflections on *Nazareth Village*:

the panoramic gaze miniaturizes the city, effectively minimizing the Catholic Church of the Annunciation, eliminating contemporary technology and noise, and disengaging its Arab inhabitants from their particular cultural and historical circumstances; *all Holy Land people look picturesquely biblical from a distance.*
[emphasis mine]

Most Western visitors do not enter Palestinian towns; they might come across Palestinians on their stops in Jerusalem, but it is never clear-cut who is a Jew, and who is Palestinian? To cast Palestinians as ‘picturesquely biblical’ is in accordance with romanticising indigenous populations elsewhere. Andrea Smith (2013), in her work on Native American evangelicalism, explains how native Americans are often portrayed as ‘traditional’, intellectually incapable, and disenfranchised as a result. Piterberg (2008) points out that Palestinians were considered as a passive part of the landscape in early Zionism, with simple and colourless lives that simply ‘blended it’. In *Nazareth Village*, Palestinians are clothed in first century costumes and pass as Jews, or characters from an idealised past.

A further argument can be made as part of the ongoing process of ‘emptying’ Israel-Palestine of its Palestinian inhabitants in connection with *Nazareth Village*. Where visitors do make the connection that the costumed staff are in fact Palestinians rather than Jews, they often consider them as ‘traditional natives’. The first century costumes are reminiscent of often orientalisising images of Bedouins visitors might have come across, and so invite the connection between ‘traditional natives’ and the Palestinian

staff. Almost every other day at least one of the young costumed staff complained to me that visitors believed that they are displaying their *real* life as they performed the first century tasks. I myself witnessed visitors asking the costumed staff in charge of showcasing the first century oven whether this is how she makes bread at home (over an open fire). They admired their costumes, often in a way that objectified the wearer (for example, by talking about her in the third person while standing right in front of her, imagining they do not speak English). As Ron and Feldman (2009: 212) argue in their essay on Christian theme sites in Israel, the fact that many of the costumed characters are local Christians makes the site more convincing, and affirms an Orientalist Protestant gaze.



Figure 28. Costumed staff wandering the farm land at *Nazareth Village*.

Of course, one would assume differently of participants on the ‘witness visit’, who travel to Israel-Palestine to show support to those side-lined by dispensationalist and Christian Zionist theologies. They champion indigenous rights and tell the stories of those they visit in the Palestinian territories in their churches back home. And yet, some of the ways in which they engaged with the inhabitants of the territory is not so different after all. They, too, can slip into the assumption of ‘traditional natives’, perhaps by having been exposed to the simple and hard life of Bedouin villages and refugee camps without water and electricity. On the morning before we visited the *Tent of Nations*, we stopped at Susya, a small Bedouin village defying regular demolition orders. As we walked around, the British participants expressed their surprise at the solar panels on the edge of the village, which provided electricity in the absence of connectivity to the main lines. Our Bedouin guide for the morning, experienced in engagement with Western groups, laughed this off: ‘Yes, these are ancient solar panels!’ At a different Palestinian village under siege by settlers we had visited earlier on in the week, a member of the group stated, rather than asked his question: ‘So, most of the people in this village would be farmers?’ To which our host replied, ‘No, most of the village inhabitants in fact work for the government.’ Again, the participant of the ‘witness visit’ assumed a traditional and ‘intellectually incapable’ native.



Figure 29. At a Bedouin village.

While some participants of the ‘witness visit’ expose some orientalism in their expectation of Palestinians’ traditionalism, unlike visitors of *Nazareth Village*, they did not glorify the hard life Bedouins lead. In fact, the group members found it unattractive. When we entered yet another village, some group members delightedly took pictures of the sheep and goats in the pen – but then gingerly stepped around a dead sheep lying in the middle of the path to the village’s mosque. And yet, it remains to be said that in contrast to these experiences, Daoud from the *Tent of Nations* was highly praised for his care of the land, and, at least for the participants of the ‘witness visit’, presented a kind of ‘ideal inhabitant’ of Israel-Palestine, too.

6.6 Nature, plants, animals

Trees have played a central role in the discourse and realisation of Zionist ideology, as well as in its contestation. The planting of trees, such as the evangelical ‘one million

tree initiative' (Webster, 2013)⁷⁸ has been central to the desire to 'make the desert bloom' and transform Israel's territory into 'Eden', alongside similar Zionist projects, as a kind of agricultural activism. Trees, in particular olive trees, however, have also played a role in evangelical action against Christian Zionist imagination and action, as part of resistance projects, for example in assisting in the harvest at the *Tent of Nations*, or sponsoring the regeneration of olive groves after the Israeli military ploughed parts of it down. Thus, ideas of what is aesthetically pleasing play a role not just in what is blended in and out of evangelical's vistas of Israel-Palestine, but also in the transformation of the landscape. This section explores evangelical engagement with the vegetation and animals of Israel-Palestine.

Nazareth Village caters to an imagination of Israel as the land of the Bible, as the place 'where Jesus walked', and as a place of Eden-like beauty. Every aspect of the property has been carefully laid out and cultivated. In order to recreate a landscape as it might have been seen at Jesus' time, the staff dug out and replanted olive trees from the surrounding area, planted almond, pomegranate, and fig trees (Figure 31), and fostered the presence of different herbs and flowers on the slopes. It also houses several donkeys, sheep, and chicken in wooden pens, which are let out to roam during the opening hours of the *Village*. The land looks abundant and fruitful, especially in spring when the wild flowers are in full bloom (Figure 30). Many of the plants and trees in *Nazareth Village* can be easily found outside its walls, but great care has been taken to plant specimen of each of the plants featuring in Jesus' parables and the Bible in general right here, as part of the reconstruction of Nazareth at his time. It allows the visitors to fully immerse themselves into the vegetation he would have experienced and often drew

⁷⁸ See also the report of a CUFI tree-planting trip in 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Green-Israel/Community/500-Christians-for-Israel-Plant-Trees-in-the-Galilee-375914> (last accessed 24/01/2017)

on in his teachings, on a small, pastoral scale, rather than in the larger plantations visitors might encounter elsewhere in Israel. The meticulous care taken over the vegetation in *Nazareth Village* resonates with the tradition of the scientific study of biblical plants undertaken by the first Protestant Holy Land pilgrims (Bielo 2018b). Yet, while the latter focused on science rather than being ‘overtaken by devotional zeal’ like Catholics (Bielo 2018b: 5), evangelical visitors to *Nazareth Village* display a more ambiguous relationship between science and devotion.



Figure 30. Meadows at *Nazareth Village*.

To show just how important the sense of careful cultivation is for Western evangelicals engaging with *Nazareth Village*, consider Rachel: a British evangelical volunteer who returned in 2015 for the second year to work at *Nazareth Village*. The reason why she returned, she told me, was to look after the donkeys. She had noticed the year before that they had not received adequate care by the local staff (none of which had any veterinary training), and often suffered from illnesses or skin diseases. This caused enough concern for her to return to check on them. Every day she was scheduled to

work at the *Village*, she would wash, feed, and pasture the donkeys, and raise concerns with the manager of the volunteer programme about their well-being. As I heard later from infuriated local staff, the concern was passed on from the volunteer manager to the managers of *Nazareth Village*, who told the overworked local staff off – they ought to keep the donkeys in good health for the outside visitors, as it would reflect badly on the *Village* if visitors see them in bad shape.

Seeing *Nazareth Village* in the light of the planting of trees in other parts of Israel-Palestine, we are led back to the aesthetics of what is supposed to be on the land. As well as catering to an idea of a ‘blooming desert’ and Eden-like beauty, the (Christian) Zionist tree-planting has other reasons as well: it served to Europeanise the landscape and make it look more like ‘home’ for immigrating European Jews. This is reflected in the names of forests, such as the ‘Switzerland forest’ near Poriyah, and in the names of their sponsors. Thus, even the vegetation in *Nazareth Village* can be understood as creating a new version of what the territory signifies – a version that is influenced and caters to the Israel of the Western aesthetic tastes.

It is also no coincidence that those who donate amounts over \$1,000 to *Nazareth Village* are commemorated on a plaque fixed to a ‘tree of light’ in the entrance area. It is a tree recreated with bark and large branches that reaches several metres high against the wall of the stair case leading up to the entrance of *Nazareth Village*. Each donor receives a plaque underneath a light fixed to the branch. The symbolism in this is powerful – the donors literally make the tree grow, but are also symbolically rooted in place at *Nazareth Village*. It also bears reference to a famous verse in Paul’s letter to the Romans, in which he describes gentiles (i.e. all non-Jews), as ‘grafted in’ to the ‘family

tree' of the Jews, as fellow inheritors of the biblical promises (Romans 11:11-23).⁷⁹

Seeing this donor tree on the way into *Nazareth Village* elevates the rest of the vegetation to a spiritual level.

As part of our 'witness visit', we visited the botanical garden in Bethlehem, part of the 'Palestine Museum of Natural History' founded by Professor Mazin Qumsiyeh. The garden developed by him and colleagues hosts much the same plants as can be found in *Nazareth Village*, yet under an entirely different ideology. While at *Nazareth Village*, the planting of the herbs and trees was about restoration of a biblical past, and has Zionist connotations, in the botanical garden, the planting happened in order to protect the indigenous plants of Palestine and reclaim them as national heritage – for Palestinians. Participants of the 'witness visit' were supportive of this project due to their interest in environmental concerns not just in Palestine, but also at home. To celebrate indigenous vegetation was linked for them to supporting Palestinians at large, and one of the reasons why the sustainable farm of Daoud was so highly praised.

⁷⁹ Romans 11 is a contentious chapter in Paul's letter to the Romans, and is prominent in Christian Zionist theology about Israel.



Figure 31. Trees on *Nazareth Village* land.

6.7 How nature ‘speaks back’

The sections above discussed how land and nature are seen by evangelical visitors to Israel-Palestine, the mechanisms by which people and things are blended in and out to achieve an aesthetically pleasing vista, and how vegetation is used for political purposes. It discussed how and what things are inscribed onto a landscape, even in ways in which the landscape becomes secondary to its metaphors (Schama 1995). In both my ethnographic examples, the landscape is seen to embody a ‘truth’ that can be discovered when previous layers are peeled back. *Nazareth Village* makes this explicit even in its accompanying book (‘peeling back time, distance, and culture’). The fact that the *Village* is located in the Holy Land itself, it is easy to assume as the visitor that there is a real ‘unearthing’ going on, rather than metaphorical: this is what makes this representation so powerful. Yet this belief is also at work in Professor Qumsiyeh’s desire to re-indigenize the landscape by protecting local biodiversity, and in Daoud’s

appeal to fund his sustainable farm project. It is moreover displayed in various publication titles by Palestinian evangelicals, who, in the face of settlements that are ‘creeping’ or ‘galloping down’ (phrases used on the ‘witness visit’) like wild vegetation, see the land, or the stones, as crying out (cf. Munayer & Loden 2012, *The Land Cries Out*, or Yasemine Pernie’s movie, *The Stones Cry Out*). The ‘crying out of stones’ is a reference from biblical scriptures Habakkuk 2:11 and Luke 19:40. In this section, before concluding this chapter, I explore ways in which the landscape and nature are not always complicit in the ideologies inscribed on them in their encounters with evangelicals.

A striking example are the fires that ravaged hectares of forests around Haifa in the North of Israel in 2016. On our ‘witness visit’, our leader Emily alerted us to lighter spots in a forest, made up of different trees. She explained that these are non-native pine trees, commonly used by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and other organisations to obscure places where there once were Palestinian villages. By planting fast-growing pine trees on the site of abandoned or raided villages, their memory was soon obscured, and from a distance, no trace of a previous habitation could be made out. The same thing happened around Haifa, where the uncontrollable fires took place. In a twist of nature, non-native species are much harder to contain and burn more easily. The fires therefore burnt down many of the pine forests planted to eradicate the memory of Palestinian dwellings, only to reveal again the ruins that had been concealed: confronting not just the population of Israel, but through media also the world at large with facts that had been hidden for decades.⁸⁰ This is one instance in which nature

⁸⁰ See also <https://electronicintifada.net/content/carmel-wildfire-burning-all-illusions-israel/9130> [last accessed 24/01/2017].

destroyed a narrative imposed on it, and ‘spoke back’ – revealing what it had been forced to conceal.

A second instance defies the ways in which Western visitors have characterised and rendered the landscape into something aesthetically beautiful. Before our visit to the botanical garden in Bethlehem, Professor Qumsiyeh took us to a viewpoint near Bethlehem, where the course of the wall on Palestinian land is particularly contested. Overlooking the wide, lightly forested valley below, Emily exclaimed, ‘Oh how beautiful! What an amazing landscape!’ I enquired whether the trees we were seeing were of the ‘good kind’ then, and Emily affirmed. Later, I found out (in Emily’s presence) that they were in fact of the ‘bad kind’, the ‘invasive’ European pine species used to conceal Palestinian village ruins. For both of us, her earlier admiration of a ‘beautiful’ landscape, which in retrospect, according to her values and beliefs, was a ‘wrong’ judgement, threw open questions about our sense of aesthetics, and the possibility of ‘bad trees’ looking beautiful nevertheless. Thus, the landscape, subjected to so much ideology, is not always complicit with the ways in which evangelicals of different theological backgrounds like to see it.

6.8 Conclusion: Hyper-Israel and the representation of Palestine

This chapter has demonstrated that despite the similarities of the landscapes of Israel and the Palestinian territories, their respective territories have been engaged with differently by Western evangelicals: most starkly through the simple fact that the Palestinian territories are hardly set foot in at all by evangelical visitors. The sites found in the West Bank are either replaced (the baptism site) or seen from a distance, as part of a ‘trouble-free’ panorama (Bethlehem). A reason for the refusal to engage with the Palestinian territories is revealed in ideas about who is supposed to be *on* the land: most

evangelical visitors expect to see ‘Jews’, which is guided by the biblical promises that are interpreted as endowing the Jews with eternal possession of this territory, and indeed, need Jews to inhabit the landscape for history (and the End Times) to take its course. In this interpretation, Palestinians are cast as intruders at best, and ‘enemies’ of God’s plans at worst. The Palestinian territories thus turn into a no-go-zone, which is sometimes even transferred to Palestinian cities in Israel, like Nazareth.

Evangelicals who participate in ‘witness visits’ do not usually subscribe to these theologies. In an attempt to be ‘witnesses’ to Palestinian suffering, they seek out Palestinian activists like those at Bedouin villages, the botanical garden, and the *Tent of Nations*, and try to learn about the intricacies of their situations and landscapes, pen and paper posed, and maps unfolded. Yet, they, too, order the things they see according to their own frame of reference and aesthetics. Thus, certain activisms, like that of Daoud, are deemed more acceptable than those of the Bedouin villages, because Daoud cared for his organic farm, while participants encounter dead animals at the Bedouin pens. Also, the way in which the landscape is judged is guided by what, according to Western evangelicals, good ‘creation care’ looks like – the electricity pylon cutting through the valley below Daoud’s hilltop is perceived by some as potentially more troubling than the fact that Daoud’s farm is not connected to electricity at all (whereby he maintains a more unspoilt landscape). Moreover, both at *Nazareth Village* and on the ‘witness visit’, Palestinians are seen as traditional, often intellectually illiterate, natives, though through the *Village* this translates into a more coherent agenda of continuous ‘emptying’ of the landscape of its trouble-some existing inhabitants.

When I first began my research I had assumed that *Nazareth Village* was an ‘activist project’ that (being located in Nazareth and run mainly by Palestinian Christians) sought to affirm the indigeneity of a Palestinian Jesus, which in present-day Israel

would have been a challenging message for its Western visitors. However, I soon realised that I was quite wrong: *Nazareth Village* claims that it excavates the ‘real deal’ from two millennia of ‘time, distance and culture’, and curates a nostalgic pastoral that plays into Western evangelical imaginations of a glorified past both of the first century and the pre-industrial era in general. The fact that some features of the *Village* are indeed excavations from the first century lends credibility to those that were artificially created and inscribed onto the landscape. This interplay is enhanced by the fact that *Nazareth Village* is indeed located in Nazareth itself.

As my fieldwork progressed, I began to see *Nazareth Village* as a kind of ‘hyper-Israel’, curated by Palestinian evangelicals to suit the touristic and theological desires of Western evangelicals (cf. Mitchell, 1988). Ignoring the non-violent activisms that their faith family in the West Bank are engaged in (such as at the *Tent of Nations*), *Nazareth Village* is seen as ‘perfect’ (‘peeling back time’), as ‘empty’ (‘peeling back culture’), and ‘ours’ (‘peeling back distance’). By catering so closely to the evangelical imagination of what Israel should look like, *Nazareth Village* invites its visitors to strengthen their ties to Israel-Palestine (e.g. through the Tree of Light, photos with the costumed staff, etc.), and apply the way of seeing fostered at the *Village* to the rest of their engagement with Israel-Palestine – after all, *Nazareth Village* is the place where evangelicals feel particularly close to Jesus and are particularly able to ‘connect’ with the Holy Land. The expectation of Western evangelical visitors to Israel-Palestine of ‘walking where Jesus walked’ results in certain ways of seeing and not seeing, in transformation of a territory, in erasing, inscribing, and re-scribing. These processes are assisted in the curation of projects by Palestinian evangelicals who invite Western evangelicals to ‘come and see’, of course also propelled by the economic factor of bringing evangelical tourists to Nazareth who might not otherwise stop there.

In this chapter, I sought to highlight the role power plays in the creation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ through performance on the territory. The pedagogic techniques of *Nazareth Village* involve appealing to a particular Western sense of aesthetic, relieving the need for panoramas that blend out what does not fit within the visitor’s imagination of Israel, and casting 2,000 years of history as irrelevant in visitors’ engagements with Israel. I have argued that all of these techniques have been employed in situations in which power is used to keep the poor and disenfranchised at bay, or in which power is used to control a population as part of colonial endeavours (e.g. the World Exhibition, and mass migration to Israel following the creation of a Jewish state). Arguably, the pedagogic techniques used at the *Tent of Nations* equally appeal to a Western sense of aesthetics. The ‘witness visit’ in general is geared to a particular, faith-inspired approach of witnessing to and standing up against injustice, and the curation for example of the *Tent of Nations* fits closely with this aim. Thus, even the resistance of Palestinian evangelicals to dominant ‘interpretations’ of the ‘text’ of the landscape is shaped for a particular Western Christian audience.

This is important to remember as we move to the discussion of the resistance to dominant Western evangelical narratives by the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences in the next chapter. As a conference geared towards a mostly Western audience, it also features certain elements that would not be part of a conference aimed only at a Palestinian evangelical audience (one of which we will encounter in Chapter 8, where I also draw this comparison out further): for example, it is held in English, features famous North American evangelical speakers among the few Palestinian evangelical speakers, and, similar to the witness visit, offers excursions for the Western visitors to better understand the realities on the ground. Chapter 7 focuses in more detail on acts of resistance by Palestinian evangelicals and in particular analyses the alternative

theologies they develop in the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference about evangelical engagement with the territory of Israel-Palestine, and themselves as Palestinians.

7. Christ at the Checkpoint: shifting the contact zone

In the mid-1990s, the American Baptist missionaries withdrew abruptly from their work in Israel. After about fifty years of building Baptist churches and the Nazareth Baptist School, as well as the orphanage which became the ‘Baptist Village’ in Petach Tikvah, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States decided that Israel could be counted among the countries that were ‘reached’ with the gospel. This meant that the board considered there to be a large enough presence of Palestinian evangelical Christians to carry on the Baptist work.

Among the Palestinian evangelical population, the nature of the withdrawal of the American missionaries was not received well. They felt that the missionaries had not based this decision on adequate assessments of the local situation – rather, they withdrew programmatically when their ‘mission programme’ came to an end. A number of Palestinian evangelicals in leadership positions, independently of each other, told me that they felt the American missionaries had not trained or appointed the most suited leaders to take over their work before they left. One of the Palestinian evangelicals I spoke to this about was Fadi, whom I already introduced in Chapter 4. He felt that the sudden withdrawal and instalment of ill-equipped church leaders was responsible for the many schisms that ruptured the Baptist churches after the Americans left, which resulted in a number of split-off congregations (Nazareth alone now has six different, mostly very small, Baptist congregations. They are often organised around two to three extended families). When the official programme of the Americans came to an end, Palestinian Baptist evangelicals sought more informal partnerships with both American and British Baptist evangelicals to ensure continued funding for their churches and ministries.

Reflecting on the continued involvement of Western partners, in light of the previous involvement of the American Baptist missionaries which he characterised as coming ‘from above’, Fadi emphasised therefore the need for ‘relationship’:

we need to think about how we can help them not to be just the supporter. Hear that: *we* can help *them*! We can help them in opening our churches to them to understand the situation, to have a different theological idea about Israel, about believers here, about the ‘living stones’. We can help them with how to deal with Arab people, in Britain, in America, how to disciple, how to evangelise Muslims, you know, Britain and Europe now, they’re full with Arabs! So we can also help.

Fadi envisaged a full partnership between Palestinian evangelicals and Western partners, based on respect and mutual assistance, rather than a uni-directional ‘benefactor relationship’. Having discussed the ideologies informing Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism in Chapter 4, Palestinian evangelical subject-making in Chapter 5, and dominant Western evangelical engagement with Israel and its inhabitants in Chapter 6, I want to explore here how the underlying ideologies of Western evangelicals involved with Israel-Palestine are challenged by Palestinian evangelical Christians. This chapter explores further Fadi’s call for a transformational ‘relationship’ between Western and Palestinian evangelicals today, with the help of data collected at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences 2014 and 2016 organised by Bethlehem Bible College, as well as observations among, and interviews with, Western volunteers in Nazareth.

I had first become aware of the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences in Bethlehem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories when I was scoping for this research project in 2013, and subsequently attended the conference for the first time in March 2014. In contrast to the pro-Israel theologies I had encountered among members of a church in Oxford, the talks at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference rebutted Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism sharply. It was conversations with Palestinian Israeli

evangelicals during this conference which led me to situate my research predominantly in Nazareth, owing to the large presence of Palestinian Israeli evangelicals there. Nazareth Evangelical College, where I spent much of my time during fieldwork in Nazareth, is a sister college to Bethlehem Bible College, and faculties of both colleges co-organise, and speak at, the conference. While it is difficult for the faculty of Bethlehem Bible College living in the West Bank to offer teaching assistance at Nazareth Evangelical College due to exit restrictions for Palestinian citizens of the West Bank, there is an active exchange the other way round. I was therefore aware of the activities at Bethlehem Bible College during my time of fieldwork, and sometimes travelled with the faculty of Nazareth Evangelical College to attend events there, such as the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference discussed in the next chapter. Further, this initial exposure to the vocal and activist-minded personnel surrounding the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference had led me initially to believe that all Palestinian evangelicals share their theology and outlook - an impression that was significantly revised on encountering Palestinian dispensationalists in Northern Israel, as explained in Chapter 3. Thus, as I later learnt, the Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* are not representative of all Palestinian evangelicals – in fact, those who challenge the dominant theological narratives of Israel are a small minority within Palestinian evangelicalism. However, in a thesis exploring encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals, the ways in which dominant theologies and narratives are contested deserve careful attention.

I further contrast the contestation of dominant narratives by Palestinian evangelicals through *Christ at the Checkpoint* with data collected through participant observation among and interviews with Western (American and European) volunteers in Nazareth. Most of those I worked with were part of the SERVE Nazareth programme, which

supplies volunteers to the English hospital and *Nazareth Village*. Others I met during church services at some of the evangelical congregations in Nazareth, or during a lecture at Nazareth Evangelical College. The latter often offered lectures or study tours to international groups to highlight the existence and situation of Palestinian evangelicals in Israel, and I was invited to join these as a researcher.

The analysis of the data presented here focuses on the resistance of some Palestinian evangelicals to the theologies of Christian Zionism, which they consider culturally hegemonic. Indeed, dominant evangelical narratives concerning Israel are phrased in a language of ‘race’ and ethnicity that are associated with colonialism and cultural superiority. I already alluded to this in Chapter 4 where I explained how dispensationalists and Christian Zionists cast Muslims and Jews into ‘scripturally determined roles’ (Smith, 2013: 6) that are tied not just to their religion, but also to their provenance or skin colour. David Goldberg (2006: 334) suggested that notions of race are used as a ‘way of being in the world, of living, of meaning-making’. This is explored in the following section which examines the racialisation of Palestinian evangelicals by Christian Zionist ‘ways of telling their story’. I draw on the work of John and Jean Comaroff, David Goldberg, and Sean Durbin in my discussion of how dominant notions of Israel are resisted through the formulation of alternative theologies and action by Palestinian evangelicals.

7.1 ‘God has put Israel on my heart’

In order to situate the challenges of *Christ at the Checkpoint* to dominant narratives and conceptualisations, I want to first describe how many Western volunteers and

missionaries I interacted with approached their engagement with Israel-Palestine.⁸¹ While the following vignettes provide only a few examples, it is engagement like this that Fadi aspired to transform through a real ‘partnership’. Most of them understood the context they were operating within as consisting of three ‘sides’: Palestinians, Jewish Israelis, and themselves as third party ‘brokers’.

Consider, for example, a young woman called Linda, who I encountered after a church service at a small Baptist church in Nazareth. I learnt during our conversation that she (Norwegian) and her international team (from the organisation Youth With A Mission, YWAM⁸²) had been working with this Palestinian congregation for the last few days (i.e. planting flower pots in front of the church building), and they had led most of the church service I attended. The majority of the service consisted of testimonies of how they encountered God in difficult times, and a call for the congregation to keep following Christ. When I asked Linda about her team’s plans following this engagement, she replied that they would move on to ‘Haifa, then Egypt, Kosovo, and Iceland’. Following my surprised look at this seemingly random selection of places, Linda added, ‘you know, we pray, and these are the places the Lord put on our hearts.’ However, a little later in our conversation she confessed, that ‘actually, I would like to stay here longer, over Pesach. I feel God is putting Israel on my heart, the Jewish people. He has been speaking to me how the church has replaced all the Jewish feasts with Christian feasts.’

⁸¹ I alluded to the involvement of Western visitors already in Chapter 6, which however focused mostly on participants of Holy Land pilgrimages, who stopped at *Nazareth Village*, or ‘witness visits’, i.e. visitors with a slightly different agenda than volunteers who stayed for several weeks on ‘mission’.

⁸² YWAM is a well-known charismatic mission organisation that started in the United States in the 1960s, and is now at work in over 180 countries, with a staff of over 18,000 (according to their website, <http://www.ywam.org/>, last accessed 30/01/2017)

Many of the Western evangelicals I encountered in Nazareth, who travelled to Israel on an organised tour or visited the country for short- or long-term mission trips, claimed, like Linda, that ‘God has put Israel on their heart’. References to the ‘heart’ are common in evangelicalism: they evoke a sense of deep passion as well as, in identifying its root as God-given, the notion that this passion is outside of their control. Thus, the expression ‘ultimately places particular practices within the realm of God’s sovereignty rather than the individual’s’ (Durbin 2018: 101; cf. Bielo, 2004) ‘To have a heart for something’ is seen as a calling that is confirmed through affect. Melani McAlister (2008) notes how this call, when received by American evangelicals, often includes the draw to cross borders, leading to a ‘politics of affect’ (2008: 870), and an ‘enchanted internationalism’ (2008: 878). When it comes to Israel, the notion typically suggests an affinity for the ‘Jewish people’, and the desire to ‘protect’ Israel through financial or political means or prayer. In this particular setting, it inscribes those who pursue these acts into the biblical text (often by referring to themselves as ‘watchmen on the wall’, Isaiah 62:6), suggesting that they are chosen to carry out God’s will in this time and space (cf. Durbin 2018: 100-103; 2012: 76).

My conversation with Linda was interrupted before I could enquire more about what this meant for her, yet it made me reflect on the way in which the experience of young evangelical missionaries is shaped by particular imaginaries and affect. Linda seemed not to have been sensitised to the conflict going on around her – seemingly unaware that her presumed call to a messianic Judaism (i.e. those who follow Jewish festivals while considering Jesus as the messiah) might deeply offend the Palestinian congregation she had previously served. Despite her engagement with a Palestinian Israeli evangelical church, she interpreted the notion that ‘God was putting Israel on her heart’ as being a call to the ‘Jewish people’. This suggested to me that she followed a theology in which

notions of ‘Israel’ and ‘the Jews’ were isomorph – notions that are deeply intertwined with a particular Western evangelical way of making sense of their being in the world, as I explain in more detail below. What Linda made of the Palestinian evangelicals she had encountered in Israel I was not sure – yet it is possible that, like many others following a theology like hers, she thought they were there to be ‘witnesses’ to the Jews, and to help to convert them to Christ, i.e. as a ‘means to an end’. I had met other volunteers in Nazareth who, following the call of ‘Israel on their hearts’, had planned to engage in mission to Jewish Israelis. When they arrived in Nazareth, they were surprised that they had ended up in a Palestinian Israeli town, in fact were surprised by the existence of Palestinian Israelis themselves – for them, ‘Israeli’ and ‘Jew’ belonged intrinsically together, so much so that there were not aware of the existence of a Palestinian population in Israel. One of them in fact ended her agreement with SERVE Nazareth because she felt her work in Nazareth did not fulfil the calling she had received that had led her to Israel in the first place.

Others who felt the call of ‘Israel on their heart’ were more aware of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the ethnic makeup of the country. They interpreted this call as a desire to bring peace in the Middle East. Trinity Western University in Canada, for example, sends a group of students every year to volunteer with the reconciliation organisation *Musalaha* (lit. reconciliation), which brings together young Palestinian and Messianic Jewish Christians in summer camps to foster exchange. Up to and during my time of fieldwork, the group also spent time with SERVE Nazareth, where I interacted with their 2015 cohort. A college-age Norwegian group who attended a talk at Nazareth Evangelical College had also come to participate in a camp with *Musalaha*. I met the group just days after their arrival in the country on a brief tour of some of the biblical sites before they joined the *Musalaha* camp. One of their leaders knew Khalil, a faculty

member of Nazareth Evangelical College, and had brought their group there for a talk on the situation of Palestinian Israeli evangelicals. It was clear that the Norwegian group knew little of the complex contexts of Palestinian Israeli evangelicals, yet had strong theological ideas about Israel.

After Khalil's ca. 20-min talk underlined by a PowerPoint presentation, which discussed the identity of Palestinian Israeli evangelicals as threefold minority in Israel, their questions centred on Khalil's 'loyalty' to the Israeli state and what Palestinian evangelicals thought about joining the IDF. For them, it seemed clear that the Israeli state was a 'force of good' in the area, and there was an assumption that any 'good' evangelical, even if they were Palestinian, would want to assist the Israeli state in carrying out its agendas.⁸³ Yet, in conversations with participants of each of these groups I noted the sense of both purpose and confidence in the fact that their presence would indeed contribute to 'peace' in the area. For example, when I enquired of one of the members of the Norwegian group at Nazareth Evangelical College about their stay in Israel, he explained to me that they were there to 'build bridges' between Palestinians and Jews, to 'work as a buffer between the groups by listening and gathering around Jesus'. While members of each group had slightly different theological and even ethnic backgrounds, the overriding impression they left on me was that they saw themselves as third-party 'brokers' in a conflict made up of 'Jewish Israelis' and 'Palestinians'. Alluding to the image of the history school book project referred to in Chapter 1, they

⁸³ As I discussed in Chapter 4, most Palestinian evangelicals are apolitical – they do not condemn Israeli policies that discriminate against them, but they also do not actively support the IDF (with a few exceptions). When I talked to Khalil about the interaction with the Norwegian group on the car drive back to the part of Nazareth where we both lived, he said, 'I *am* loyal to the State of Israel! I don't join the army, but I vote!'

seemed to see themselves as being able to fill in the blank column in the middle, to act as ‘bridge’ between the two ‘sides’ they perceived to make up the conflict.⁸⁴

Scholars of short term mission trips of Western Christians to other countries, while pointing out the dynamics of historically unequal power relationships, have highlighted some of their potentially positive effects: the cultural exchange between Western evangelicals and people from radically different cultural, ethnic, and financial backgrounds can lead, practically, to a sharing of wealth and spiritual encouragement (McAlister, 2008; Howell, 2012; Hancock, 2014). It can also, more conceptually, lead to humility (Priest, Howell and Hancock, 2013) and a reframing of narratives, of spiritual formation of the missionary, as well as a deeper awareness of global injustice (Priest and Priest, 2008; Howell, 2012). Short term mission trips can further foster a better understanding of the global structures that shape injustices, and to activism for a fairer global system on return (Swartz, 2012b). Some of these effects, as I briefly mention below, can be observed in the context of Israel-Palestine as well. Overall, however, the biblical imaginaries that determine dominant evangelical engagement with Israel still largely shape evangelicals’ approach and attitudes towards it, and, I argue, fail to be challenged in involvement such as that of the Western evangelical volunteers I described above.

One of the 2016 *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference organisers claimed that the conference sought to expose Western evangelicals to what it is like ‘to be on the receiving end of the theology of Christian Zionism’. Having depicted two typical ways of engaging with Israel by Western volunteers and missionaries in the previous section,

⁸⁴ My friend Shadia, who features in Chapter 8, works for the organisation *Musalaha*. When I asked her about how they find working with the Norwegian organisation, which sends similar groups like the one discussed above every year, she told me that it is normally the Norwegian young people who undergo the most significant transformation as a result of their encounter with Palestinian evangelical and messianic Jewish youth.

the next section will describe the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in more detail. I will explore how it sought to challenge the dominant engagement of Western evangelicals with Israel and Palestinians. Considering Christian Zionism an ‘imperial theology’ (Isaac, 2016 conference), the conferences deconstructed the idea of Western evangelicals as ‘third-party brokers’ in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and articulated an alternative theology. Through this, the chapter argues, *Christ at the Checkpoint* sought to shift the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1991) between Western and Palestinian evangelicals. The conference positioned Palestinian evangelicals as ‘original’ Christians, and as the dominant ‘side’ of the encounter – and thereby reinterpreted what it means when ‘God puts Israel on someone’s heart’.

7.2 *Christ at the Checkpoint*: reframing the encounter

Christ at the Checkpoint was held for the first time in 2010. The conferences are an attempt to challenge dominant Christian Zionist and dispensationalist theologies⁸⁵ by drawing on, and reinterpreting, the same biblical scriptures as evangelicals who support Israel: its motto, which was displayed prominently on a banner in the entry area of the 2016 conference, is ‘challenging evangelicals to take responsibility to help resolve the conflicts in Israel-Palestine by engaging with the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God’. In sum, *Christ at the Checkpoint* stipulates that a biblical interpretation which

⁸⁵ I should reiterate here briefly that Christian Zionism, rather than explicit, can be ambient in many Western evangelical contexts. That is to say, as I sought to show in Chapter 4, that a certain positive relationship with Israel by Western evangelicals is a historical default position, even if the specifics vary from congregation to congregation and even person to person. Not all of the Western volunteers and missionaries described above would perhaps describe themselves as ‘Christian Zionist’. Yet, their understandings of a binary between ‘Palestinians’ and their conception of ‘Jews’, and the idea that ‘Israel’ and what they see as the ‘Jewish people’ are isomorph, point to an ambient acceptance of the dominant racialisations in Christian Zionist theologies. *Christ at the Checkpoint* challenges both the specific theologies of Christian Zionism, but also the more general ‘default’ evangelical affinity for the Israeli state and its underlying ideologies. Thus, when I speak of Christian Zionism in the following, it can denote more ambient interpretative regimes dominant in Western evangelicalism as well as its specific theologies.

sees the State of Israel as ‘God-ordained’ legitimises the state’s settler-colonialism, and the oppression and discrimination of Palestinians. The organisers emphasise key values of the evangelical faith, such as neighbourly love, justice, and care for the poor and oppressed – and pointed out that pro-Israel default evangelical positions go against many such deeply evangelical values. This section discusses how *Christ at the Checkpoint* reframes the encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals, both the physical (mission trips, touristic) as well as the conceptual (through challenging theology and ideology). While the call to ‘come and see’ (cf. Chapter 5) is issued by the majority of Palestinian evangelicals in Israel-Palestine to evangelicals elsewhere, *Christ at the Checkpoint* issues the call with unrivalled urgency and a clearly articulated agenda (see manifesto below). The 2014 conference challenged its mainly North American attendees with the opening question, ‘what would Jesus do or say if he stood in front of an Israeli checkpoint today?’ The talks, Bible studies, and excursions during the 4-day conference suggested answers to this question.

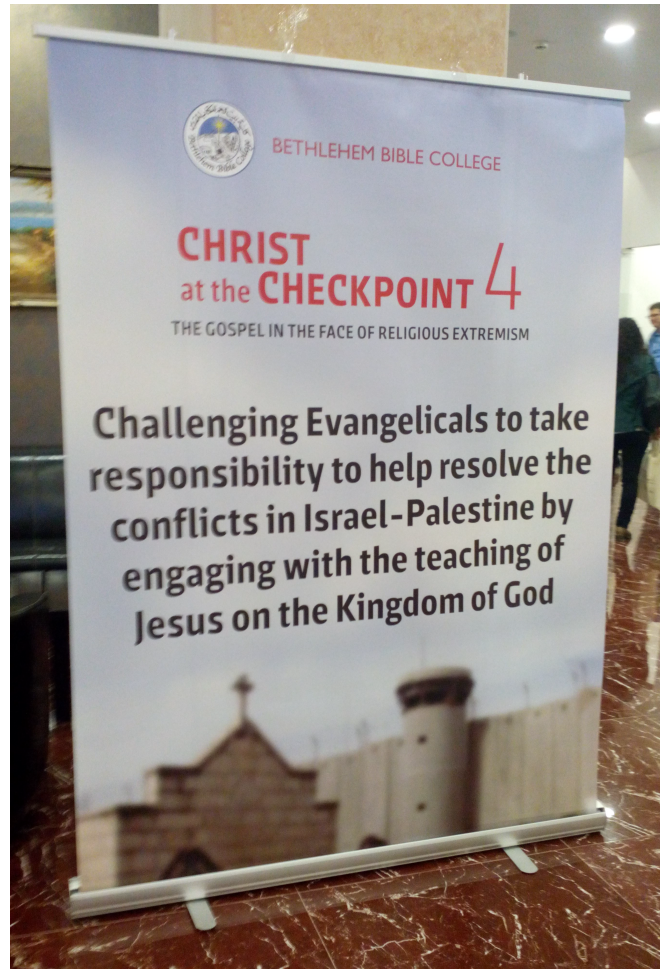


Figure 32. Conference banner in the entrance lobby at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference 2016.

Amid the encounters discussed in this thesis, *Christ at the Checkpoint* is one of the most ‘curated’ ones. Simon Coleman (2000), drawing on Gifford (1988), comments on the importance of the medium of conferences in propagating global (in his case, charismatic) Christianity. Conferences are a way of gathering congregations, often with a global reach, of exploring and strengthening doctrines. This is certainly one of the functions of *Christ at the Checkpoint* as well. For the first conference, the organisers had invited dozens of prominent evangelical speakers to Bethlehem in order to participate in the shaping of theology regarding the role of Israel in the evangelical faith. Many declined, but a few came – and with these, Palestinian evangelicals had found influential advocates for their cause in the United States. Among the speakers of the first conference was Lynne Hybels, wife of pastor Bill Hybels, who founded the

world-renowned megachurch, Willow Creek Community Church, and well as Tony Campolo, former spiritual advisor to President Bill Clinton. At the 2014 and 2016 conferences, even the respective Presidents of the World Evangelical Alliance (who represents about 200 million evangelicals worldwide) agreed to give a talk, thereby raising *Christ at the Checkpoint's* profile. Each year, famous American evangelicals are invited to speak – and if their theological work does not focus on themes of reconciliation or related theological issues itself, they are asked to lead the more generic Bible studies in the mornings (for example, Mark Labberton, the President of Fuller Theological Seminary, in 2016).

However, *Christ at the Checkpoint* is more than a conference at which congregations are forged and doctrines discussed. It invites evangelicals to the very geographical location of the Israel-Palestine conflict – for example, the 2014 conference was held at Jacir Palace hotel, 200m from the Separation Wall and a few minutes' walk from the checkpoint at Rachel's Tomb. On the Friday afternoon of the conference, the attendees could witness first hand through their hotel windows the clashes between stone-throwing, young, and frustrated Palestinian men and IDF soldiers, who countered the resistance with tear gas and rubber bullets. Inside the hotel walls, the discussion centred on an appropriate evangelical response to the Israeli occupation, now with a new edge. Due to the even more heightened security situation, the 2016 conference was moved to a hotel slightly further away from the checkpoint, and ended on Thursday so that attendees would not get caught up in the violent clashes that occurred on Fridays. However, the conference excursions remained in place, taking attendees on a tour of the tense and disputed geographies of East Jerusalem and daily early morning visits to the checkpoint themselves, where they could observe the long queues of Palestinian workers attempting to cross into Israel for their workday. Thus, the conference serves

the additional purpose of turning its attendees into ‘witnesses’ to the challenging everyday situations of their Palestinian Christian hosts.

Its location in Bethlehem, the birth place of Jesus, of course adds a further layer of significance for their Western audience. Its biblical location is marked by the opportunity to purchase gifts in the Holy Land gift shop set up in the conference foyer. Further, the conference’s international participants have the opportunity to add a post-conference study and sight-seeing tour through Israel-Palestine – mostly designed as a ‘witness visit’⁸⁶, but including typical evangelical tourist destinations such as Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee. This feeds into a sense of being truly invited by the community which claims descent from the continuous presence of Christians in the ‘land of Christ’.

Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* situate themselves firmly in evangelical semantics too, referring to the ‘heart’, just as those who claim that ‘God has put Israel on their hearts’. The Palestinian evangelical speakers pleaded with the audience to come with ‘open hearts’, and to ‘enlarge their hearts’, to listen to and engage with Palestinian evangelical narratives. The set-up of the conference too is wholly aimed at its ca. 300-strong international audience: the talks and presentations are held in English, with translations into Arabic offered to the few Palestinians who attend (via headsets). Each speaker is introduced through an upbeat video clip with a voice-over by an American speaker, picturing scenes from their work or family life, or previous speaking engagements – i.e. creating personas that match the way in which well-known pastors are presented in some mega-churches or at large conferences in North America. The pre-conference correspondence is written by an American volunteer in excellent English, and the conference has an attractive and up-to-date

⁸⁶ ‘Witness visits’ are an alternative form of Holy Land pilgrimage that take participants to meet NGOs and visit locations of conflict, see Chapter 6.

internet appearance. The participants are provided with branded paper for note taking, and are frequently reminded of opportunities to financially support Bethlehem Bible College and other Palestinian evangelical ministries.

Arguably, those who attend *Christ at the Checkpoint* are a self-selecting crowd, who tend to be already highly aware of the place of Palestinian Christians in the Israel-Palestine conflict. After all, the majority of Christian visitors of Israel tend to not set foot in the West Bank at all (cf. Kaell, 2014; Ron & Feldman, 2009). Further, rather than being the ‘classic’ evangelicals the *Christ at the Checkpoint* organisers seek to reach due to their influence e.g. on US foreign policy (i.e. conservative evangelicals such as Southern Baptists), many of the attendees actually belong to the conservative wing of more liberal denominations, such as Mennonites, Methodists, or Presbyterians (an exception to this is a group of mostly evangelical students from Wheaton College in the USA under the leadership of Gary Burge, who follow a specific ‘student track’ featuring additional excursions and meetings with students of Bethlehem Bible College). However, the conferences are live-streamed across the globe and can be followed by evangelicals from the privacy of their own homes, thereby reaching a much wider audience than those who are already sympathetic to their work – and importantly, reach the core evangelical audience *Christ at the Checkpoint* seeks to address. Further, the talks of the biennial conferences are filmed and can be re-watched on their website.

A further element which distinguishes *Christ at the Checkpoint* from other conferences is the way in which the issues discussed serve not only the furthering of theology, but also address profoundly matters of identity and practice. The issues raised affect the hosts of the conference significantly in their everyday life – they are, quite literally, at the ‘receiving end’ of Christian Zionist theologies. Thus, their challenge to their Western audience is personal and urgent, frequently pleading with them to not just

‘come and see’, but stand up for them and for justice in their situation on their return to the United States and elsewhere. To make this call all the more relevant, the organisers tie it to a challenge of *all* injustice resulting from imperialism, racism, and colonialism. The invited speakers consist not only of Palestinian Christians and powerful Western evangelicals, but also of theologians from other contexts of postcolonial or racial conflict, such as South Africa, Nigeria, Latin America, as well as Black American theologians. I will return to this point shortly.

The conference manifesto below, which ties the different biennial conferences together and summarises the programme, beliefs, and goals of the conference is included in each conference booklet, as well as published on the conference website. In the following, with help of the manifesto, I will explain in more detail the alternative theology promoted by *Christ at the Checkpoint*, which, I argue, seeks to shift the power relationships in the ‘contact zone’ between Palestinian and Western evangelicals by positioning Palestinian evangelicals as the ‘dominant’ side of the encounter.

7.2.1 The Christ at the Checkpoint manifesto

1. The Kingdom of God has come. Evangelicals must reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel.
2. Reconciliation recognizes God’s image in one another.
3. Racial ethnicity alone does not guarantee the benefits of the Abraham Covenant.
4. The church in the land of the Holy One has borne witness to Christ since the days of Pentecost. It must be empowered to continue to be light and salt in the region, if there is to be hope in the midst of conflict.
5. Any exclusive claim to land of the Bible in the name of God is not in line with the teaching of scripture.

6. All forms of violence must be refuted unequivocally.
7. Palestinian Christians must not lose the capacity for self-criticism if they wish to remain prophetic.
8. There are real injustices taking place in the Palestinian territories, and the suffering of the Palestinian people can no longer be ignored. Any solution must respect the equity and rights of Israeli and Palestinian communities.
9. For Palestinian Christians, the occupation is the core issue of the conflict.
10. Any challenge to the injustices taking place in the Holy Land must be done in Christian love. Criticism of Israel and the occupation cannot be confused with anti-Semitism and the delegitimisation of the State of Israel.
11. Respectful dialogue between Palestinian and Messianic believers must continue. Though we may disagree on secondary matters of theology, the gospel of Jesus and his ethical teaching take precedence.
12. Christians must understand the global context for the rise of extremist Islam. We challenge stereotyping of all faith forms that betray God's commandment to love our neighbours and enemies.

7.3 Manifesto point 3: rethinking racial categories

In this section I contrast the languages of 'race' Christian Zionists and Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* use or resist in their meaning-making. Many Christian Zionists (both self-described and 'ambient') see the Israel-Palestine conflict as a symptom of a much broader 'struggle' between 'Jew' and 'Arab', which, as I explain below, emerges through their scripture reading. Their concepts of 'race' also insert Christians into Jewish genealogies. Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* reject this binary, and point to their own identity in a

challenge to the idea of a ‘Judeo-Christian’ genealogy. What the *Christ at the Checkpoint* manifesto means when it claims that ‘racial ethnicity alone does not guarantee the benefits of the Abraham Covenant’ (manifesto point 3) is the way in which Christian Zionists use concepts of ‘race’ to tell their story. While Palestinian evangelicals share their evangelical faith, they cast the story in different terms.

The ‘story’ through which Christian Zionists tend to structure world history and current affairs – and which *Christ at the Checkpoint* challenges through its manifesto – begins with the key biblical text of Genesis 15-17: the recounting of the births of Abraham’s sons Isaac and Ishmael. This passage tells of an exchange between Abraham and God, during which God promises the childless Abraham offspring as ‘countless as the stars’, and assures him that his offspring will be given the land between Egypt and the river Euphrates (Gen 15: 18f) – the promise of land and God’s blessing are therefore at the centre of the ‘benefits’ of the Abrahamic Covenant. However, due to Abraham’s wife Sarah being past her child-bearing years, the couple decides Abraham should have a child with his wife’s servant Hagar. Hagar becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, Ishmael. However, even after Ishmael’s birth, God affirms his promise to Abraham that his wife Sarah too will conceive a son. While God promises to bless Ishmael, the promise of the ‘everlasting covenant’ (Gen 17: 19) falls to Isaac, the son Sarah eventually gives birth to.

This sibling rivalry depicted in this Old Testament text has led Christian Zionists to the assumption that Jews, who are considered God’s ‘chosen people’, are the descendants of Isaac, and Arabs (or Arab Muslims)⁸⁷ the descendants of Ishmael. With this, both

⁸⁷ There seems to be a conflation between Arab and Muslim in Christian Zionist worldviews, which arguably is part of the problem in their racial profiling. I problematize this below in the discussion of *Christ at the Checkpoint*’s challenge to it.

‘Jews’ and ‘Arabs’ are racialized, since both religions are considered hereditary through the ‘bloodline’ of Isaac and Ishmael (cf. Durbin 2018: 129). In his discussion of Christian Zionist use of this text, Sean Durbin (2018: 124) notes that it serves as a theological version of Huntington's (1996) contested theory of a ‘clash of civilisations’ between Islam and the West. For Christian Zionists, the Genesis text is also considered the origin of the Israel-Palestine conflict. By rooting the Israel-Palestine conflict in this biblical text, many Christian Zionists naturalise it as ‘God’s design’, and as impossible to be resolved by human solutions (Durbin 2018: 125). Following on from this, Christian Zionists interpret this story as cosmic battle between ‘good’ and ‘evil,’ God and Satan, whereby Islam is turned into God’s enemy (Durbin 2018). Referring to the prophecy God is reported to have given to Hagar according to Genesis 16: 12 regarding her son Ishmael, saying: ‘he shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen’, Christian Zionists construct Arabs (seen as ‘descendants of Ishmael’) as violent, power-hungry, and unreasonable. From there, it is only a small jump to justify the demonising of the Arab states surrounding Israel, as well as Palestinians (Spector, 2009; Durbin, 2018).

In a fateful twist, and in contrast to centuries-long persecution of Jews by Christian-majority societies, those supportive of Christian Zionism create a shared ‘genealogy’ between themselves and Jews through this text – i.e. they write Christians into this cosmic story by considering them, too, as Isaac’s children. Rather than seeing Jews as ‘eternal foreigner’, or as ‘wandering Jew’ (Mosse, 2009: 261), they are proud of reversing a history of Christian hatred of Jews (cf. Durbin 2018: 123). Sean Durbin makes this case well in his study of American Christian Zionism, yet does not interpret these alliances through a lens of ‘race’ as a way of ‘meaning-making’ (cf. Goldberg,

2006). This lens is of course implicit in his argument, so I merely draw it out further here for the sake of this chapter's argument: by seeking a 'racial' alliance with Jews, and reading the Israel-Palestine conflict through this biblical lens, Christian Zionism also creates an alliance between America and Israel as 'preordained' bulwark against Arab Muslim states (Durbin 2018: 121). They thereby empty the Israel-Palestine conflict somewhat of its local significance. Thus, while groups with interfaith agendas might use the same story to promote a shared genealogy between Jews, Christians, *and* Muslims, in the Christian Zionist interpretation Arabs and Muslims are excluded from this unity (Durbin 2018). As Durbin (2018: 124) notes, then, 'by separating Jew from Arab (and thus 'Judeo-Christian' from Muslim), Christian Zionists are able to attach themselves to Jews, despite their often-bitter historical relations.'

The idea of countering a 'joint threat' Jews and Christians are facing leads evangelicals to suspend other values of evangelicalism, such as love for the neighbour and justice (as *Christ at the Checkpoint* points out). For example, two college-age female evangelical volunteers of the Trinity Western University group told me in an interview about their untroubled support for an evangelical call for annihilation of Palestinians in the 2014 Gaza war. At the point of our conversation, they had already been somewhat shaken in their convictions following a homestay with families in Bethlehem and daily crossing of the checkpoint into Jerusalem. Yet, they still recalled clearly how they unquestioningly took the side of the Israeli military that bombed Gaza. They justified their view by referring to all Palestinians as ('evil') terrorists who were out to destroy ('good') Israel. They also relayed the difficulty of explaining their changing views of the Israel-Palestine conflict to their families in their phone calls, who remained firm Christian Zionists. Even in their phone conversations, their families seemed to continue to call for elimination of the 'evil' side of the conflict whenever they heard of stabbings or rockets

being launched from Gaza during the girls' sojourn in Israel-Palestine. Similarly, a Texan family (a Baptist pastor, his wife, and two sons) I met during fieldwork in Nazareth (they helped out at the *Nazareth Village* and stayed in the same house as the rest of the SERVE Nazareth volunteers) returned several times to Israel after their initial time in Nazareth; on one of their trips (on which they brought members of their Texan congregation), they proudly shared photos on social media depicting their participation in an 'anti-terrorism' camp run by Israeli Defence Force soldiers (called 'Caliber 3'). Essentially a propaganda tool, it invites tourists to learn from IDF soldiers and includes shooting training and practicing anti-terror operations – with the targets dressed in Palestinian kufiyahs (a checked Palestinian head-dress), i.e. clearly identifiable as Palestinians. Thus, by scribing themselves as Christians into a presumed cosmic battle between 'Jews' and 'Arabs', many evangelicals believe that Israel is 'fighting not only for its own existence but for the survival of the West' (Spector 2009: 50f).

After prolonged encounters with Palestinian evangelical Christians, some Western evangelicals feel embarrassed about their previous callousness towards Palestinians. They have learnt about their shared evangelical faith, and begin to see themselves as part of the same global faith family, for example through sharing the same resources, such as the music of Hillsong United discussed in Chapter 8. They enjoyed Palestinian evangelical hospitality, and witnessed the daily challenges and humiliations of Palestinians during raids or at the checkpoints (e.g. on homestays in Bethlehem), which affect Christians as well as Muslims. Through this, the binary between 'good' Jew and 'evil' Arab was complicated. Moreover, a perhaps unplanned by-product of Western evangelical volunteering as costumed characters in *Nazareth Village* was the empathy developed for Palestinians as objectified and orientalist, due to their own treatment by visitors. Some visitors of *Nazareth Village* recognised that the white skins of the

Western volunteers suggested they were indeed not Palestinian, which solicited interest in what they were doing at *Nazareth Village*, and sometimes gratitude for their voluntary efforts. Others, however, saw first century people as backward and naïve, and treated the volunteers as such too. I mentioned above the positive effects scholars of short term mission trips have pointed out as a result of Western encounters with people elsewhere, such as reframed narratives and some understanding of injustice. While some of these were evident results of the encounters between Western evangelical volunteers and Palestinian evangelicals too, it was striking that even in the situations described above, the image of Palestinian Muslims as ‘evil’ was not always challenged. Volunteers might have become shocked by a Jewish (and Christian Zionist) discourse of Othering Palestinians, but often this was because effectively it meant a persecution of Palestinian *Christians*. Western evangelicals’ involvement in Israel-Palestine led them to question Christian Zionist narratives of unwavering support of Jews due to their effect on their own Palestinian faith family, but did not always lead to an overcoming of their stereotyping of Palestinian Muslims.

Rather than ‘merely’ challenging theology (e.g. by refuting that the benefits of the Abrahamic Covenant are attainable through ‘racial ethnicity’), therefore, *Christ at the Checkpoint* seeks to challenge the very ideological foundations on which Christian Zionist theology rests. *Christ at the Checkpoint* sees Christian Zionism and its notion of a ‘Judeo-Christian civilization’ as a symptom of imperialism. In their critique, they point to a long history of Western mission and colonial enterprise in the Middle East (out of which Palestinian Protestantism has emerged). The dominant theological imaginations of Israel which emerged from Western Protestantism, *Christ at the Checkpoint* claims, contributed to the real partitioning of land and the creation of a biblically inflected, colonial nation-state. Those who were ‘found’ on this land

(Goldberg 2009: 107f), were, as Goldberg paraphrases, ‘conceived in the representational struggles as bloodthirsty and warmongering, constantly harassing modern-day Israelites, debauched and lacking altogether in liberal culture. Terrorists, it seems, historically all the way down, to the toe-nails of time.’ Christian Zionism, *Christ at the Checkpoint* claims, is in essence founded on a contrast between a Western imperial Christianity and a dehumanised racial ‘Other’ (cf. Goldberg 2006: 344; Alexander, 2009; Solomos & Back, 2009; Ware & Back, 2002).

A powerful way in which *Christ at the Checkpoint* resisted the racialisation of Palestinians by Western evangelicals consisted of alluding to strained race relations in the United States themselves (where many of the participants were from). *Christ at the Checkpoint* aligned themselves with other postcolonial theologians who similarly tried to reconfigure the vocabulary of race as it had been used by Western evangelicals. Among the speakers of the conferences are often theologians from other cultural backgrounds that have suffered under the effects of colonialism and especially its associated racial imaginations, such as South Africa, Latin America, and Nigeria. At the 2016 conference, too, the Black American theologian Regina Henderson gave a rousing speech in which she specifically addressed the white American audience in Bethlehem. She described how she herself was introduced to liberation theology in a context where ‘lynchings were sponsored by Christian dollars.’ Yet, she was raised to believe in the ‘white Jesus - the blonde haired, blue-eyed Jesus.’ Henderson accused Christians in the USA of not challenging racism enough, before thanking Palestinian Christians for joining protests following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson: ‘it was young men and women from the little town of Bethlehem who came to the aide of their brothers and sisters in Ferguson, an embodiment of the Christ child himself’. By giving African American theologians a platform in a conference in Bethlehem directed at a mainly

American audience, Palestinian evangelicals introduce a critique of white superiority, colonialism, and cultural hegemony to their own contexts.

Similar to other postcolonial theologians (e.g. the African American theologians Willie Jennings (2010) and Vincent Wimbush (2012)), those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* framed their challenge to Christian Zionism by interpreting it as cultural hegemony. The Comaroffs (1991: 23) define cultural ‘hegemony’ as

that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies-drawn from a historically situated cultural field-that come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world ...

The Comaroffs’ work on the Tswana encounter with colonial Christianity in South Africa sought to highlight the cultural project of colonialism, beside its political and economic dimensions. They described how white Europeans brought their own culture and Christianity and turned it into the standard for those under their control, and ‘naturalised’ it to the degree that it ‘no more appear[ed] as ideology at all’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991: 25). In a similar vein, the black American theologian Willie Jennings⁸⁸ (2010: 8) notes how Christianity and colonialism became intertwined: ‘other peoples and their ways of life had to adapt, become fluid, even morph into the colonial order of things, and such a situation drew Christianity and its theologians inside habits of mind and life that internalized and normalized that order of things.’ Jennings further critiques that the sense of hospitality, which he sees intrinsic to Christian theology, was inverted

⁸⁸ Though it is interesting to note that Jennings, like many other African American theologians, in fact build their theology on a rejection of ‘replacement theology’, i.e. the idea that the Christian church has replaced the Jews as God’s chosen people, and that the Old Testament promises now belong to Christians. Jennings sees replacement theology as a result of a white Christian racial imagination that differentiated itself from Jews and Muslims as the ‘Other’. He thus emphasises a different strand of historical Protestant prophecy interpretation, one that has led to the persecution of Jews throughout the centuries. Similar to other liberation theologians, Jennings identifies the history of African American slaves with that of the scattered and persecuted Jews, and draws parallels to the story of God orchestrating the Jewish exodus from slavery and the joy at their ‘return’. In his 2010 book he seems critical of secular Zionism, but, considering Jennings’ interest in race and white supremacy, somewhat surprisingly does not consider the situation of Palestinians, or develop a political theology of contemporary Israel-Palestine.

in the modern colonies: '[Christianity] claimed to be the host, the owner of the spaces it entered, and demanded native peoples enter its cultural logics, its ways of being in the world, and its conceptualities' (Jennings, 2010: 8).

Christ at the Checkpoint's criticism of Christian Zionism as culturally hegemonic and imperial can be understood in a similar way. They refuted the racial configurations of a 'Judeo-Christian' entity which created and defended the State of Israel, and is pitted against an 'Arab'/Muslim 'enemy'. The fact that pro-Israel theologies operating along those lines have become the default positions in most evangelical churches means that this configuration has become 'naturalised', and with it its notions of 'race', its 'way of telling their story'. In the words of Vincent Wimbush, these biblical imaginaries are 'the discursive regimes (scripturalisation) we create, forget we do so, and then project outward' (Wimbush, 2016: 54). *Christ at the Checkpoint* therefore does not just challenge particular doctrines, but a cultural system that has rested on a sense of racial superiority. Through this, *Christ at the Checkpoint* challenges the idea of 'white' evangelicalism and its dominant theologies as a 'prototype' (Bialecki 2017: 54). They challenge the underlying cultural hegemony of Western volunteers and missionaries who attempt to assist in brokering peace in the Middle East as 'third party' (like the Norwegian group), or share their faith with their racial Others (like Linda). Further, *Christ at the Checkpoint* challenges the lack of awareness of these volunteers' own racial imaginations, imposed on Israel-Palestine – what Ware and Back (2002) call white Western 'amnesia'. Volunteers like the Norwegian group at Nazareth Evangelical College seem to lack understanding of the religious and racial categories that have shaped the world around them, and, in a real sense the contexts they came to 'broker peace' in.

Unlike Christian Zionists, Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* do not see the ‘benefits of the Abraham Covenant’ rooted in what they call ‘racial ethnicity’, i.e. ‘Jews’ versus ‘Arabs/Muslims’. In their challenge of Christian Zionist’s racial theologies, as well as unreflective involvement of Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine, Palestinian evangelicals ask Western evangelicals to consider the real contexts of radical Islam (point 12): rather than considering Islam as ‘inherently evil’, as Christian Zionists do in a divinely pre-ordained way, evangelicals should understand the social and political contexts that lead to radicalisation of Muslims. The core issue, at least in the Israel-Palestine context, they claim, is the Israeli occupation. While clearly condemning any kind of violence (point 6), the *Christ at the Checkpoint* manifesto begs Christians to understand the colonial and neo-colonial reasons that have provoked the rise of extremist Islam.

7.4 Manifesto point 9: the occupation as core issue

In a Christian Zionist world view that has racialized ‘Arabs’ as Muslims, Palestinian or Arab Christians are an anomaly. If Western evangelicals do know Palestinian Christians exist, many press them into the racial ‘mould’ of the Christian Zionist binary, by (somewhat ironically) subsuming them into a Judeo-Christian racial category which *Christ at the Checkpoint* criticised as culturally hegemonic. With this, Western evangelicals insist that Palestinian Christians must be persecuted by their Muslim co-ethnics (cf. Kaartveit, 2013). *Christ at the Checkpoint* determinedly rejects this notion and its imposed ‘scripturalisation’ (Wimbush, 2015) of themselves and their community. One of the talks that received some of the warmest applause at the 2016 *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference (though the warm reception may have been due to the speaker being the son of one of the founders of the conference) was given by Jack

Munayer. Jack identified a strategy used by Christian Zionists that feeds the narrative of Palestinian evangelicals as suffering at the hand of radical Muslims, in a talk which summarised some of the common mechanisms of delegitimisation of Palestinian Christians.

In a context in which many of those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* are disinvented from international Christian conferences (which a number of different Palestinian evangelical interviewees confirmed), Western evangelicals seek to avoid being called out for ‘silencing’ Palestinian Christians by inviting what Jack called ‘token Arabs’ (or ‘Uncle Toms’). These selected Palestinian Christian speakers affirm what fits into the dominant Western evangelical narrative (i.e. ‘Palestinian Christians are persecuted by Muslims’), but are discouraged from speaking negatively about the Israeli occupation. Dissenters of these narratives are either delegitimised or ostracised. I observed another way in which the strategy of a ‘token Arab’ works at a conference organised by Christian Witness for Israel⁸⁹ in Oxford (at the church where I first encountered Christian Zionism). The organisers had invited Khalil, a faculty member of Nazareth Evangelical College, who did not stick to the set parameters of the dominant narrative, but clothed his gentle criticisms of it in an invitation to dialogue. When I was chatting to him during a break after his talk, a lady walked up to him and thanked him for apparently affirming that the Jews really should occupy the West Bank – a statement that had not appeared in Khalil’s talk. Thus, even if Palestinian evangelicals do criticise dominant narratives, their words can be re-interpreted to fit into the expected narrative. The conference by Christian Witness for Israel proceeded without any further public

⁸⁹ The organisation Christian Witness for Israel CWI is an interdenominational evangelistic society based in the UK, who is committed to evangelising among the ‘Jewish people’. The organisation operates in Israel, France, UK, Australia, Hungary, New Zealand and Bulgaria. On their website, they state that they ‘believe that to preach the Good News of Jesus to everyone but the Jews is an act of spiritual anti-Semitism.’ See: <http://www.cwi.org.uk/whoware/whoware.html> [accessed 27/11/2018]

dialogue between Khalil and the rest of the speakers or audience. At the very end, the church's pastor asked for a picture on stage with Khalil and the main speaker, a messianic Jew. He sent it to me a few days after the conference, with the words, 'this is what reconciliation looks like' – suggesting that, even though there had not been a sustained dialogue between a dominant narrative and the narrative Khalil represented, Khalil's mere presence at the conference as 'token Arab' had already achieved 'reconciliation'. To counter such experiences, Palestinian evangelicals in fact often emphasise in their talks and publications that before the creation of the Israeli state, Muslims and Jews coexisted relatively peacefully in the Middle East (e.g. Awad, 2008: 96). Jack identified these forms of delegitimisations as a form of 'religious extremism', thus accusing Christian Zionists of their own accusations.

The 'token Arab' strategy arguably also leads to lack of internal conversation about these issues in Israel-Palestine. *Christ at the Checkpoint* is contested within Palestinian evangelicalism itself. While the conferences are mostly aimed at a Western audience, the conference organisers offer discounted tickets to Palestinian evangelical pastors in order to encourage their attendance and embolden them to a deeper engagement with their social and political context. However, some, like Yusuf in Chapter 5, are theologically opposed to its message and prefer not to attend. Similarly, when a friend posted about the conference on his church's Viber group, his pastor called him immediately and ordered his post to be deleted. Others may fear that they will lose funding from their Western evangelical partners if they attend or are associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* in any way. This means that overall participation of Palestinian evangelical at the conference is low.

The *Christ at the Checkpoint* manifesto stipulates that rather than a cosmic battle between 'Jews' and 'Arabs', the core issue of the Israel-Palestine conflict is the Israeli

occupation. Yet, in private conversations with staff of the Bethlehem Bible College at the side of the conference, it became clear that Palestinian evangelicals are in fact sometimes targeted by radical Muslims in the West Bank as Christians, or fear that they might be; however, due to the bias of Western evangelicals, they prefer not to carry this fear publicly outside of their own contexts (cf. Kaartveit, 2013), so as to not distract from the problem they see as fuelling extremist Islam. This is why, rather than point to the dwindling Christian presence in Bethlehem, *Christ at the Checkpoint* organisers invite Western evangelicals to face the facts of the checkpoint regime. What many Western evangelicals in their binary thinking consider a ‘normality’ (the fact that Palestinians are subjugated to a checkpoint regime in the name of ‘security’, Kuntsman & Stein, 2015) causes deep and significant suffering to Palestinians, including Palestinian evangelicals. Western volunteers frequently reflected to me how secure they felt when they saw Israeli soldiers in the streets of Jerusalem, however were afraid of walking alone in the streets of Nazareth due to their imagination, and resulting fear of, a ‘Arab Muslim enemy’. In opposition to this, *Christ at the Checkpoint* states that ‘all forms of violence must be refuted unequivocally’ (point 6) – a point that can be addressed to proponents of violent resistance, but that also includes that of the Israeli military and its Christian Zionist supporters.

7.5 Manifesto point 10: relationship to Jews

Another one of the common strategies of delegitimisation of Palestinian Christians, according to Jack, is the accusation by Western evangelicals and Jews that they are ‘anti-semitic’. In fact, even the conference’s hashtag (e.g. #CATC2016) documents a veritable Twitter war during the course of the conference, with opponents attacking those associated with and attending *Christ at the Checkpoint* as ‘anti-semitic’, ridiculing

speakers or quotes, and supporters of the conference offering defence. The Israeli newspapers, as well as numerous Christian media outlets⁹⁰ were equally full of warnings and loathing of the *Christ at the Checkpoint* endeavour, accusing it of anti-semitism and Islamic fundamentalism. The resistance to the conference also translates into sanctions by the Israeli state, which is sensitive to any activism that is critical of its policies, or that seeks to alter unanimous Western evangelical support for the Israeli state. For example, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs issued a statement warning evangelicals about attending the 2014 *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference, which led to increased searches and questioning of potential participants at the airport,⁹¹ as well as disruptive meetings between conference organisers and the Israeli government during the first conference days. Some of those Palestinian evangelicals I worked with shrugged off this attack, referring to the fact that they themselves are ‘semitic’ too, and thus, slightly tongue-in-cheek, render the accusation meaningless.

However, ‘anti-semitism’ of course has had a long and bitter history, and thus should not be taken lightly where it does exist. As Goldberg (2006: 344) noted, ‘the figure of the Muslim, alongside that of the Jew, has historically bookended modern Europe’s explicit historical anxieties about blackness’ – the Christian Zionist ‘acceptance’ of the

⁹⁰ E.g. Timothy E. Morgan, ‘Evangelicals Defend ‘Christ at the Checkpoint’ from Israeli Critics’, *Christianity Today*, 12 March 2014. This article in one of the most influential Christian magazines in the world shows the debate around the conference – the reference is an ‘updated’ version in response to a critique by Christ at the Checkpoint organisers of a previous article condemning the conference.

⁹¹ I attended the 2014 *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference as a scoping trip for this project, and had never travelled in and out of Israel before – thus, did not know of the common practice of questioning especially single travellers on their exit. In my naivety I had not taken any of the precautions I took on subsequent visits, such as carrying any items that could be identified as ‘Palestinian’ in the bottom of my main luggage. In 2014, therefore I, too, was searched on my way out of the country, and when the security staff found the conference programme of the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in my hand luggage, was taken aside for about half an hour of non-stop questioning: ‘where have you been? Why? Why did you go there? What did this person say in their talk? Why? What was this talk about? Who else attended the conference? What are their names? What do you mean by ‘the current situation?’ I tried to explain I was a researcher, but understand in retrospect why this did not impress the security staff at all. My confusion and lack of coherent answers under the unexpected pressure of the uncomfortable cross-examination must have worked in my favour in this situation, but the experience gave me a small flavour of the way in which those who are critical of the Israeli state are treated when coming into contact with its authorities.

Jew is an exception within much Western Christian history. Yet, scholars of race and racism such as Solomos & Back (2009) have noted that anti-semitism has rarely been included in discussions about racism more generally – rather, it has been seen as a unique and exceptional instance of racism, perhaps racism ‘par excellence’ (cf. Bauman, 1989; Goldberg, 2006). To this, Goldberg suggests that each racism ‘reveals something both general and unique’. He maintains that ‘anti-semitism, alas, is neither the only experience of attempted racial annihilation nor the paradigmatic one’ (Goldberg 2006: 342).

In their rejection of criticism of Israel as being ‘anti-semitic’, call for respect of all humans (seeing God’s image in the other), and the notion that ‘any solution must respect the equity and rights of Israeli and Palestinian communities’ (manifesto point 8), the *Christ at the Checkpoint* manifesto places anti-semitism within the ranks of all racisms, including that experienced by black Americans, and that which has ‘scripturalised’ Palestinians themselves as ‘evil’. With this they render the Western evangelical accusations of the activities of *Christ at the Checkpoint* as ‘anti-semitic’ as somewhat two-faced – while they are quick to condemn (in this case, falsely) *Christ at the Checkpoint*’s statements as ‘anti-semitic’, they are blind to their own racial imaginations. Sean Durbin (2018) argues that within Christian Zionist theologies, while idealised, Jews are actually ‘empty signifiers’, mainly serving to advance evangelical ideas of eschatology. I pointed out in Chapter 4 that in some versions of dispensationalist and Christian Zionist theologies, the majority of Jews is actually predicted to die at the end of time if they do not convert to Christianity. While upholding equity and rights for Jews, condemning the stereotyping of all religions, and cautioning to see God’s image in one another, *Christ at the Checkpoint* actually seeks to

humanise Jews and ascribes value to them – even as they are accused of anti-semitism.⁹²

7.6 Empowering Palestinian Christians

The major goals of *Christ at the Checkpoint* then are to challenge dominant racial narratives that have given rise to and perpetuate the Israel-Palestine conflict by legitimising it as ‘God-ordained’; to challenge the roots of cultural hegemony in Christian Zionist ideology and other evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine; to place Christian Zionism among other racisms, including anti-semitism, and to counter the dehumanisation of all victims of racism; to challenge dominant narratives that ‘scripturalise’ Palestinian Christians as part of a Judeo-Christian tradition in (racial) opposition to Islam; and to highlight the colonial and neo-colonial contexts, such as the Israeli occupation, that have enabled the growth of (among other instances of resistance) radical Islam. With this, Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* situate themselves firmly and provocatively within the communities they are part of, including their wider evangelical faith family (in contrast to dispensationalist Palestinian evangelicals who oppose its goals), and reconfigure the racial ideologies they see at the heart of Christian Zionism.

By reframing the dominant evangelical narratives about the Israel-Palestine conflict and themselves as Palestinian Christians, Palestinian evangelicals of *Christ at the Checkpoint* highlight their own role and importance in attempts to solve of the conflict:

⁹² Another important aim of the Christ at the Checkpoint conference, which I do not dwell on in detail here, is in fact the work of reconciliation between (messianic) Jews and Palestinian Christians. At each conference I attended, a Jewish speaker was invited, or shared a panel discussion with a Palestinian Christian. Some of the conference staff are further involved in the reconciliation organisation *Musalaha* which I referenced above.

they call for evangelicals to ‘reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel’ (manifesto point 1) and for empowerment for the church in the land of the Holy One ‘to continue to be light and salt in the region, if there is to be hope in the midst of conflict.’ This is also reflected in the conversation with Fadi quoted at the beginning, who maintained that Palestinian evangelicals themselves, rather than just receive political, financial, and spiritual support from Western evangelicals, can participate in a true exchange and in ‘relationship’. Similarly, Khalil described the role of Palestinian evangelicals to the Norwegian visiting group I mentioned above as follows:

I don’t wake up in the morning and think, ‘Oh God, why have you made me an Arab?’, or, ‘oh no, and I am a Christian too – no one likes me!’ I wake up and think, ‘who can I serve today?’ As Arab [sic] Israeli evangelicals, we have the unique opportunity to respect and love Muslims and reverse this ancient hatred and enmity and unforgiveness. We are in a strategic position and can serve as a bridge between the people, and can help them to meet God because we share the same culture and ethnicity as Muslims, but also the same nationality and country as Jewish Israelis.

Contrast this statement with the limited impact Western evangelicals have in their involvement in Israel-Palestine, be it as missionaries or as ‘peace-brokers’. One example is Ina (from the Netherlands), who lived in the same house as I during my fieldwork with SERVE Nazareth. Like many of the volunteers I interacted with, it was the first time for Ina to have travelled abroad, lived in a country where she did not know the language, or shared a house with people she had never met. Ina helped out with one of the many summer camps for children, run by a local Christian ministry. I interviewed her about her experience, during which she explained her limited contribution:

L: how are you finding your own involvement in the camp? Do you share the vision?

I: I think it's really good to tell basic stories from the Bible, those stories everyone has to know. They know them already a little bit. ...

L: so when you ask the children questions about them, they already know the stories?

I: well *I* can't ask questions! But the Arabic leaders ask questions and the children know it. And they also teach verses from the Bible, so every day they teach a new one, which is really nice. They repeat it a lot, they really know them.

L: so you're just helping with that?

I: yeah. I try to remember the dance they do during the worship songs, that's the only thing I can do. Some kids speak English and translate stuff –

L: they translate *to you*?

I: yeah [laughs]

L: how do they relate to you as a foreigner?

I: they think I'm *really* interesting. And also the other counsellors [i.e. camp helpers], the teens, they're like, 'oh I want a selfie', 'I want a selfie here and there and this way!' or, 'oh wow, you're from Holland, and can you say something in Dutch, and...' and also the kids – they're so happy there's someone from outside the country. It's really interesting. And they all know 'thank you', so if you do something for them, they say thank you.... it's really sweet.

The example of Ina shows how Western volunteers were not really able to communicate much verbally about the Christian message they came to bring – instead, the children themselves had to translate the Bible stories to them, and the volunteers could participate in the programme merely by learning the dance moves to the Bible songs. They are 'interesting' because of their Western background, which the children associate with the centre of Christianity. Thus, while their activities are somewhat eclipsed (which is reflected in accounts by the first missionaries, Rowden, 2010), the historical power of Western Christianity does come to bear in this context. This is why

both Yusuf and Amin (featured in Chapter 5), too, take advantage of Western evangelical volunteers as ‘door openers’ in their own mission to Muslims. With this, they arguably rely on the historical connotations of the coloniser to whom hospitality cannot be refused. While they use the volunteers’ Western provenance for their own means (in order to build contact with people who would otherwise be alienated by their appearance on their doorstep), the practice was indicative of the continuing power of cultural hegemony in this context. In the following, I demonstrate how Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* counter this hegemony by attempting to ‘shift the contact zone’.

7.7 Shifting the ‘contact zone’

I began this chapter by recounting examples of the involvement of Western evangelicals who feel that ‘God has put Israel on their heart’. *Christ at the Checkpoint* – while not rejecting all Western involvement – seeks to redefine this involvement on different terms. Where Western volunteers consider themselves as ‘third-party’ peace-brokers for ‘reconciliation’ in the Israel-Palestine context, *Christ at the Checkpoint* points to the legacies of unequal power relations that render such an endeavour ineffective or problematic. Instead, *Christ at the Checkpoint* positions Palestinian evangelicals themselves as the most adequate peace-brokers and ‘bridge’ in the Israel-Palestine context. Pratt (2008) famously conceptualised the interactions between coloniser and colonised as ‘contact zone’. She theorised these as ‘the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.’ (Pratt 2008: 18). For her, a ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each

other' (Pratt 2008: 18). Pratt's approach demonstrates how to give voice to the narratives of those who have been 'over-scribed' especially in accounts of imperial encounters. Her approach contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge, and to the presentation of alternative readings of the contact between coloniser and colonised (cf. Parry, 1972; Ross & Arkel, 1982). In this thesis I explore this 'contact zone' from a *longue durée* perspective. I have shown that *Christ at the Checkpoint*, too, seeks to rewrite their own history in relation to Western evangelicalism by correcting doctrines and the racial ideologies on which these theological doctrines are built. However, rather than merely recasting contemporary encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in light of their historical interactions, *Christ at the Checkpoint* actually goes a step further.

Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* challenge the very terms of the 'contact zone' between Western evangelicals and themselves, by way of their own 'scripturalising' of themselves and their Western evangelical Others (i.e. 'what they make texts do for them'). In their unique position as Palestinian evangelical Christians they seek to establish that the 'original contact zone' was established much earlier than from the arrival of the first Protestant missionaries. They claim that the 'contact zone' between themselves and what are now Western evangelicals has been going on for much longer than the British colonial and American missionary encounters – in fact, it has been ongoing since the beginning of Christianity in what is today Israel-Palestine itself. The fundamental difference to the theorisations by Pratt and of other mission encounters is that 'mission' here takes place in a context that has already been 'Christianised'. David Goldberg (2009: 513) quotes a South African proverb that reads, 'when the Europeans came, they brought the Bible, and we had the land; now we have the Bible, and they have the land'. This is typical for many contexts that experienced

European colonisation. However, in the present context, the Bible itself emerged in Israel-Palestine – the Old Testament was present since before the time of Jesus, and the New Testament was first spread through the letters written by St Paul and other authors. Rather than being ‘heathens’ to be missionized, as in other colonial encounters (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991; Hefner, 1993; Keane, 2007, Veer, 1996), Palestinian evangelicals identify in fact as descendants of the ones who missionized others first. Thus, instead of offering a ‘subaltern’ narrative of the same history of the encounter, they recast themselves, as descendants of the very first Christian community in the world, as at the origins of Christian history.

In the view of *Christ at the Checkpoint*, the ‘frontier’ of the ‘contact zone’ began with the first disciples in Jerusalem, from where the contact zone slowly drew outwards: churches were founded through the work of the first apostles in Mesopotamia, Greece, and throughout the Roman Empire. The power of the Christian church shifted, and it split into an Eastern and Western part, which in turn split into Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. It was exported to the ‘new world’ of North America and other European colonies, where Christianity developed into new forms. At each of these stages, different forms of Christianity sought to influence and reform each other. Palestinian evangelicals are of course a ‘moment in time’ in this long history of Christianity, a product of the long history of forms of Christianity in the Middle East, mixed most recently with a Western form of evangelicalism. Yet, due to their location in the place where Christianity began, they consider themselves also as a ‘case apart,’ as at the heart of the conflict that has been raging because of the religious imaginations about the identity of the territory they call their home. As such, they present themselves as a challenge to the binary worldview of Christian Zionism, and as ‘bridge’ between the different communities they are a part of.

Palestinian evangelicals of *Christ at the Checkpoint* point to themselves as the ‘powerful side’ of the contact zone, as the descendants of the first Christians. A powerful argument in this is that the Middle Eastern Christianity depicted in the biblical texts (the gospels, letters, and acts of the apostles) is closely studied by Western evangelicals. By explaining the cultural background of the first Christians (e.g. Bailey, 2008), Western evangelicals seek to shape themselves according to the image of first century Middle Eastern Christianity, by continuously searching for relevance in the biblical texts for their own twenty-first century lives (Bielo, 2009; Luhrmann, 2012; cf. Chapter 2). Some aspects of the cultural background may be more accessible for Palestinian evangelicals due to their cultural history in the territory in which the biblical texts are set. Yet, naturally they too are part of a twenty-first century Middle East and world at large, and a product of the extended ‘contact zones’ of Christians everywhere across history. When Western evangelical missionaries came to missionize the ancient Christian communities of the ‘Holy Land’, they sought to change Palestinian Christians’ relationship to the Bible, as well as their Christian practice (Rowden, 2010). Yet, in the rhetoric of *Christ at the Checkpoint* there is a sense in which Palestinian evangelicals seek to ‘take back’ Christianity, and shift the contact zone to encompass the long history of Christianity, but also see it come full circle in their encounters with Western evangelicals in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ (cf. Raheb, 2014). The chapter argues therefore that Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* seek to *shift* the contact zone: by claiming that they were the ‘original’ Christians, they cast themselves as the ‘dominant’ side of the encounter, and redraw the temporal framework of the contact zone itself.

7.8 Conclusion

The title of the conference neatly sums up their endeavour: it points to a number of encounters that shape Palestinian evangelical articulation of their place in evangelicalism and their local contexts. Firstly, the title of *Christ at the Checkpoint* refocuses Christ's 'involvement' in Israel-Palestine towards the 'checkpoint' (rather than within eschatological Christian Zionist scenarios). The conference organisers claim that Christ is present *at* the checkpoint, i.e. aware of the measures of surveillance and control Palestinians are subjected to daily. Calling their movement *Christ at the Checkpoint* signals a belief that ultimately, the identity of those controlled by checkpoints is not their ethnicity or nationality, but who they are as part of God's Kingdom. Even though Palestinian evangelicals live in a context determined by the Israeli occupation, they understand Christ as a supernatural advocate for them in their subjugation to a checkpoint regime – thus refuting Christian Zionists' claim of Christ 'taking the Jewish side' in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Secondly, the title of the movement can also gesture to Palestinian evangelicals themselves as embodying Christ at the checkpoint: to their desire to live out Christian virtues such as love and forgiveness when confronted with the checkpoint regime and all it stands for, but also proselytising, and counter-intuitively bringing Christ *to* the checkpoint, to signal an inclusive Kingdom of God to those they feel excluded by. This highlights Palestinian evangelicals as 'adequate', and perhaps best, embodiment of Christ in Israel-Palestine, over and above that of white Western evangelicals who 'come from above' (Fadi). Fadi, like other Palestinian evangelicals on the one hand express their gratitude for the religious change Western evangelicals brought – without them, Palestinians would not be able to claim belonging to this global faith tradition and its 'focus on Jesus, the redemption, our message, our interpretation of the Bible, our daily

focus' (Fadi). Despite the fact that this version of Christianity has developed in colonial centre, the 'West', and has been brought to Israel-Palestine by Americans, Palestinian organisers of *Christ at the Checkpoint*, too, paradoxically identify as evangelicals. Yet, they re-appropriate the 'centre of Christianity' for themselves, and try and extricate what they consider the core content of evangelicalism (love, reconciliation, justice) from its culturally hegemonic genealogies that have marked the tradition for so long. *Christ at the Checkpoint* posits that Israel-Palestine is still the home of Christianity because they live in it, and not because Western evangelicals have a heightened interest in it. Palestinian evangelicals are 'born again' into a relationship with God, but reject the white Western mediation as to what that means: however, rather than rejecting their Western counterpart altogether, they seek a balance between Western and Palestinian evangelicalism (cf. their manifesto point on maintaining the ability for self-criticism as Palestinian evangelicals).

Thirdly and lastly, the title can be understood as call and invitation to the larger 'body of Christ', i.e. the 'global' church, to join Palestinian evangelicals in becoming a presence of Christ at the checkpoint – to witness to the situation of Palestinians and to bring the comfort of a larger faith community into their brutal reality. However, they are encouraged to do so on the terms of Palestinian evangelicals, and with the aim of empowering the Palestinian church. Through this, the title of the movement introduces the two main challenges of Palestinian evangelicals – how to be 'good' evangelical Christians in the face of injustice and discrimination, and how to deal with the fact that their larger faith family largely denies their existence. It is an attempt to 'speak back' at the powerful interpretations that promote a particular theology and practice in relation to Israel – however, as we shall see in the next chapter, one that has yet to achieve at a grander scale what it has set out to do.

Chapter 8 focuses on the limited reach of Palestinian evangelical resistance within global evangelicalism. While *Christ at the Checkpoint* and similar endeavours (such as the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference analysed in the next chapter) continue to formulate their challenges, and seek to rewrite Palestinian evangelical histories, the reach of their activism is tied to their limited cultural and financial resources. Chapter 8 explores therefore the role of power in the constitution of ‘local’ in ‘global’ evangelicalism.

8. Geometries of power in ‘global’ evangelicalism

In July 2016, the band Hillsong United launched a visual album called ‘Of Dirt and Grace – Live from the Land’. Hillsong United is a band of the charismatic evangelical megachurch Hillsong, whose first congregations in Sydney, Australia, now count more than 20,000 weekly service attendees (Wade and Hynes 2013: 174). Their worship music is used in congregations world-wide (Wagner, 2014). For the new album, the worship band travelled to Israel-Palestine to record and film a number of songs from their previous albums *Empires* and *Zion* at sites of biblical importance. It shows the band singing and playing music for example on top of Mount Arbel, on a boat on the Sea of Galilee, in Jerusalem, and in front of a military tank at the Golan Heights. The album quickly rose to top chart positions in Christian charts in several countries. Following the success of the project, Hillsong United offered a tour of Israel, with concerts at various locations, some of which feature in the filmed album.

In April 2017, Shadia, a Palestinian evangelical Christian from Nazareth, attended one of the Hillsong United concerts in the ancient ruins of Caesarea where, according to the book of Acts, a Roman centurion became the first non-Jewish follower of Jesus. As a fellow evangelical, Shadia was familiar with Hillsong United’s worship music and listened to it during her own devotional times. As she sat in the audience along with several thousand others, mostly tourists, she was however taken aback by the greetings that were extended by Hillsong United’s co-hosts Matthew and Laurie Crouch, a famous American evangelical couple, to notable attendees. One of them, she found, was Mike Huckabee: an American Southern Baptist minister and former Republican presidential candidate, who had only months earlier laid the cornerstone for a contested and illegal extension of the settlement Ma’ale Adumim in the West Bank. On that occasion he publicly pronounced that ‘Israel has title deed to Judea and Samaria’, and

that ‘there is no such thing as a West Bank.’⁹³ Shadia was torn – on the one hand, she was ready to join in with the sung worship, but on the other hand, she was deeply hurt by the embracing of the organisers of this concert of a Christian Zionist who denied her own – and her family’s – identity. She also felt excluded at the warm welcome to the messianic Jewish ‘locals’ (those who follow Jesus but adopt or retain Jewish customs, cf. Kaell 2015), and the failure to acknowledge the presence of local Palestinian believers like herself.⁹⁴

One of the goals of this thesis is to demonstrate how Palestinian evangelicals navigate dominant imaginaries of Israel within evangelicalism, and how Western evangelicals make sense of their Palestinian evangelical counterparts in Israel-Palestine. After having explored what dominant imaginaries evangelicals have, and how, for example, they construct a version of Israel in *Nazareth Village* through ‘peeling back time, distance, and culture,’ this chapter deals with how these dominant imaginaries are circulated globally. To exemplify this, I draw on fieldwork at a conference organised by Bethlehem Bible College for young Palestinian evangelicals, in light of the involvement of Hillsong United in Israel-Palestine. As in the portraits discussed in Chapter 5, my own presence at this conference aimed at Palestinian evangelical young adults sparked insights into how they conceptualised their belonging to ‘global’ evangelicalism, and how their evangelical identities were co-constituted in the encounter with evangelicals from abroad. The discussion of these observations is complemented by a reflection on the data presented in the previous chapters, from which I draw out the dimensions of how imaginaries of the ‘local’ and ‘global’ are co-constituted. Through this, I show how

⁹³ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/03/politics/huckabee-west-bank-settlements/> [Accessed 08/09/2017]

⁹⁴ Shadia later wrote an open letter to Hillsong United, reflecting on her experience: <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1331> [Accessed 08/09/2017]. I return to this in the discussion below.

dominant evangelical actors create an imaginary (and contribute to the material reality) of the 'local' (Israel-Palestine and Palestinian evangelicals) which enters the imaginary of global evangelicalism, at the expense of alternative imaginaries and materialisations.

I situate my analysis within the literatures on religious networks and flows (Coleman and Maier 2013; Garbin 2014; Knott 2008; Krause 2011; Vásquez and Knott 2014; Tweed 2006; Wong 2014), by exploring the power dynamics at play in religious place-making (e.g. Tsing 2000; Sassen 1998). To do this, I critically discuss the uneven co-configurations of ideas of the 'local' and 'global' within global evangelicalism at the example of Israel-Palestine: the main argument of this chapter is that the differential financial and cultural resources and travel regimes within the transnational social field of evangelicalism lead to particular 'geometries of power' (Massey, 1994). Applied to religious place-making (i.e. the way in which religious actors make places meaningful), the argument continues that these geometries of power define what imaginaries of places circulate within a global religious tradition such as evangelicalism, which in return has material and physical consequences for the locality in question. In making this argument, I recognise with Henrietta Moore (2004) that it is difficult to prise apart the elements that 'belong' to each of the 'scales' of 'local' and 'global'. Rather, both the 'global' and the 'local' should be considered as abstract 'concept-metaphors', lacking clear and empirically determinable referents. If they were to be definable, Moore maintains, this would suggest a 'pre-theoretical commitment' (2004: 76) towards a world that once was made up of a fragmented entities of the 'local' that, together, would form a coherent 'whole': a world in which the relationship between local and global was 'intact'. Instead, while it is possible to concretely specify the concepts through ethnography (e.g. Burawoy et al., 2001), Moore argues that the concept-metaphor itself remains ambiguous. The 'local' and the 'global' are areas of 'shared exchange' (2004:

73). With this in mind, if the constructions of place are globally rooted and locally realised, as Doreen Massey showed in her discussion of London's borough Kilburn, I argue that the very narratives about the 'local' that circulate 'globally' are imbued with differential power. The question here is thus not merely what 'travels well' or not (as explored by scholars of migration and religion, e.g. Csordas 2009; Tweed 2006; Knott 2008; Levitt 2001; Vásquez and Knott 2014; Wong and Levitt 2014), but how what travels has been shaped and continues to be shaped by power differentials.

What is commonly referred to as 'time-space compression' (e.g. Massey, 1994) has led to new ways of conceptualising cross-border religious formations. The sub-discipline of 'global Christianity' itself has developed in response to the fast spread of Christianity in the world (Howell, 2003; Robbins, 2004b; Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins, 2008; Robbins, 2009; Coleman and Hackett, 2015). The growth of Christianity is propelled, for example, by the sharing of resources, especially as made possible through the internet. Ingalls (2016) for example studied the effects of the broadcasting of worship videos on YouTube, arguing that this 'grassroots' broadcasting has strongly influenced congregational singing worldwide. Some satellite TV channels exist solely for the spreading of a Christian message, for example the media network SAT-7 which disseminates predominantly Christian material in the Middle East and North Africa, both via uncensored satellite TV and online. It operates in Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi to support the existing Christian communities in the Middle East, but also to reach and convert those who are not yet Christians.⁹⁵ More extensive traveling, too, has led to increasing exchange, for example through short term mission or traveling preachers, or even through pilgrimage (Coleman and Eade, 2004), as mentioned in Chapter 2.

⁹⁵ See <https://sat7.org/> [accessed 25/11/2018].

Processes of migration have received particular attention by those studying the ‘portability’ (Coleman and Hackett 2015; Coleman 2000; Corten 1997; Csordas 2009; Howell 2003; Robbins and Engelke 2010) of Christianity. While these studies provide important insights into how faith travels and changes both believers and their surroundings, as well as provides meaning among mobile populations, the role of power or differential movement is rarely regarded in this work. This chapter therefore develops the overall argument of this thesis that sees global evangelicalism as ‘discursive tradition’ in which power shapes the negotiation of orthodoxy in theology and practice by showing the unequal access among evangelicals of shaping ‘global’ evangelicalism.

I discuss below some of those who have researched specifically what it means for Christianity to be a ‘global’ formation in terms of the literatures of globalisation, but it is worth mentioning that most studies on Christianity and cultural change in general challenge ideas of what is ‘local’ and what is ‘global’, even if not expressly addressed in those terms. The focus in these studies is more on the appropriation, resistance or adaptation of ‘foreign’ elements in ‘local’ expressions of Christianity, rather than how the ‘local’ shapes the ‘global’ (e.g. Brusco, 1995; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Engelke, 2007; Hefner, 1993; Howell, 2008; Keane, 2007; Robbins, 2004a; Veer, 1996). Two very different ways of approaching these issues are those of the Comaroffs (1991) and that of Howell (2008), which I briefly contrast here. The main focus of the Comaroffs study on the Tswana in South Africa is on how the Tswana resisted Christianity. They point out the mechanisms of hegemony that came with the Christian colonisers, and argued that this Western ‘hegemony’ erased ‘local’ difference. In contrast to this, Brian Howell (2008), albeit in a different geographical context, is eager to demonstrate how and why Filipino Baptists draw on a rich repertoire of ‘foreign’ elements in their everyday faith lives, such as the English language, American visiting

speakers and resources, and illustration and examples from recorded sermons. Howell's main point is that those he worked with, rather than acting under compulsion, adopt foreign elements freely.⁹⁶ Unlike scholars of Christianity who are keen to show how Christianity has been 'indigenized' or 'syncretised', Howell seeks to show how 'locality is *created* (interpreted, experienced, negotiated) through the practice of Christianity' (2008: 5, emphasis original). This alternative perspective asks, what the 'meaning of 'foreign'' is 'where it seems to have been so willingly adopted and reproduced to the point that it is now 'local'?' (Howell 2008: 19). My own approach, as will become apparent in the discussion of the empirical material, is somewhere in between these two approaches: I do take seriously the theological commitments and self-understanding of those I worked with, yet also do pay attention to the power dynamics that influence their positioning within and influencing of global evangelicalism.

In terms of 'foreign' elements adapted by Palestinian evangelicals, a few examples are as follows: firstly, the Southern Baptist missionaries sought to change how Palestinian Christians relate to the Bible and associated Christian practices. As shown in Chapter 4, the legacies of their dispensational version of evangelicalism have deeply influenced how Palestinian evangelicals relate to their political and social situation. Further, church services and church leadership structures of evangelical churches are also closely modelled on Southern Baptism (including the resistance to women in church leadership). The missionaries also introduced American models of Christian summer camps for schoolchildren, which are now wide-spread in Israel-Palestine and one of the ways in which the evangelical Christian message is spread among children belonging to established Christian denominations (such as Catholicism or the Greek Orthodox

⁹⁶ Despite the fact that, as Howell notes elsewhere, the Philippines have often been understood as example of 'an almost perfect mimic of 'America' or Western-culture' (Howell 2003: 234; cf. Cannell, 1999).

church) as well as Muslims. Some of those I portrayed in previous chapters, such as Yusuf and Miriam, might argue with Howell that these elements are now 'local'. It is worth noting that however even the way in which some 'foreign' elements in Palestinian evangelicalism are resisted make use of other 'foreign' elements, such as conferences aimed specifically at a Western audience. The necessity to curate certain narratives for this audience in order to garner international support, potentially at the expense of 'local' internal discussions about how evangelicalism should be lived out in Israel-Palestine, could also be seen as making 'foreign' elements 'local', even in the resistance to more dominant imaginaries. I discuss below how imaginaries of the 'local' are circulated within global evangelicalism.

Some of those who have focused more generally on the cultural change Christianity brought to particular groups and localities have indeed addressed this in terms of power and hegemony, such as the Comaroffs. Yet, among those who specifically studied Christianity as a globalised faith form, only few scholars have recognised what theorists of globalisation have long paid attention to: the things that do not flow, or flow less easily – or, as Anna Tsing has it, 'the missed encounters, clashes, misfires, and confusions that are as much part of global linkages as simple 'flow'' (Tsing 2000: 339). Manuel Vásquez (2008), for example, argues that the prevalent use of hydraulic metaphors in the study of religious 'flows' needs to be complemented by a focus on the differential territorialisation of religious formations, as well as the hierarchical structures that emerge within religious networks. Thus, the concept of networks allows to pursue a 'historized and materialized perspective on religion which is attentive to the dimensions of power and resistance' (Vásquez 2008: 177). In particular, his approach highlights the dynamics of multi-scalar relationality, similar to Massey's conceptualisations of global connectivity.

8.1 Emic and etic understandings of ‘global Christianity’

Before beginning to analyse this aspect, a further clarification is in order for the development of my argument. There are two different dimensions to what is commonly referred to as ‘global Christianity’, both of which affect one another and are important for the discussion of its geometries of power: an etic and an emic one. The etic dimension refers to Christianity as a phenomenon that has spread quickly and has been translated into many different cultural contexts (Tweed 2006; Hefner 1998; Coleman 2000; Coleman and Hackett 2015; van der Veer 1996). It is referred to as ‘global’ because it connects new places in new ways, for example through (reverse) mission, migration, and pilgrimage. Scholars have argued that all of these were present before the recent ‘explosion’ of Christianity worldwide (Rudolph and Piscatori, 1997), yet from a simply numerical perspective, it is clear that adherents of Christianity have multiplied in the recent decades (Anderson, 2014; Jenkins, 2007). Yet, while especially evangelical Christianity has been thriving in many contexts outside of the North American and European ones (Jenkins, 2007), to speak of a ‘global’ phenomenon disregards the fact that it has spread unevenly, at different speeds, and within different networked geographies (see Coleman 2013). For example, Wuthnow (2009: 32-61) suggests that ‘global’ Christianity is more complex than often portrayed – while the gravity may have shifted to the ‘global South’, Christianity has retained cultural significance in the USA (and arguably the ‘global North’ at large), from where Western Christians still exert considerable influence through financial aid and mission. While the study of ‘global’ Christianity sums up a certain theoretical outlook (scholars often draw on concepts of transnationalism or globalisation), it is useful to ask what the ‘global’ in global Christianity really means.

The emic dimension of ‘global Christianity’ refers to how Christians themselves imagine their ‘global’ faith network. A ground-breaking study in this regard has been Simon Coleman's (2000) research on the Swedish *Word of Life* (‘Livets Ord’) movement. He demonstrates the embodied practices of Swedish charismatics in constructing the charismatic self against the backdrop of their ‘global’ movement. One of the central aspects of Coleman’s work is the investigation of the charismatic believers’ global ‘consciousness’, i.e. the way in which they imagine their belonging to a ‘global’ faith movement. While maintaining a global focus, he also analysed how this movement interacts with the Swedish nation-state and fosters its perceived distinct national calling. Drawing on Appadurai's (1996) theorisation of globalisation, especially his discussion of Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, Coleman develops a notion he calls ‘global orientation’ (2000: 62). The term ‘orientation’ points to both the cognitive as well as embodied way of seeing oneself in the world; further, implicit in the term ‘orientation’ is the possibility for change and mobility (2000: 58). Coleman agrees with Appadurai that locality must be ethnographically investigated as lived experience in a globalised world, and points to the embodied level of such subjective appropriation of locality: ‘Globalisation can offer not only expanded ways to develop the imagination, but also potentially new ways to experience and orientate the self towards the world in physical as well as aesthetic and broadly material terms’ (Coleman 2000: 61). Operating within a habitus in which actors share cultural traits and assumptions about social life as group and individuals, actors ‘react in culturally predisposed ways even to novel situations’ (Coleman 2000: 63; cf. Shilling, 1993: 129). In this way, the charismatic Christian tradition can socialise members into particular physical and cognitive orientations towards the ‘global’. Coleman’s theoretical contribution in this regard sheds light on how the local and global are intertwined in charismatic Christianity: how

a global frame of reference can coexist next to a dedication to embodied local experience (Coleman 2000: 65), and how the ‘global’ is reshaped by charismatic Christians’ ‘tribal’ reaction to globalisation (Coleman 2000: 59; cf. Bauman, 1998). Importantly, Coleman (2000: 5) shows how the emic self-understanding as ‘global’ Christianity is manifested not just as a ‘purely cognitive cultural system’, but also through ‘engagement in certain physical and material activities, including the development of a spiritually charged aesthetic that encompasses ritual movements, media consumption, linguistic forms and aspects of the external environment’.

In a different example, Coleman (2013) extends this analysis by showing how the Swedish *Livets Ord* movement and the Nigerian Pentecostal movement, ‘Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God’, pursue different kinds of mobilities on different global imaginary cartographies. Coleman draws on Vásquez’ approach to show how the church groups of his two case studies (the Swedish Word of Life and the ‘Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God’) share a ‘global’ outlook, which however differs in content and scope as a result of different colonial and postcolonial histories. He concludes that (2013: 387)

the ‘globe’ is not always imagined or accessed in strictly equivalent ways: it expands or contracts, reveals certain vistas and conceals others, according to one’s own subject position in the Prosperity landscape of both faith and citizenship.

Coleman shows the ‘hard’ factors that influence believers’ conception of and access to the ‘global’, such as VISA policies, the finances to travel, and cultural resources to translate their message into media that are accessible by a wide audience. Yet, while his work points into an important and much neglected area of inquiry, I seek to further develop here how an evangelical’s global orientation is not just determined by one’s

own subject position, but crucially through a process of uneven co-constitution that marginalises some evangelical communities more than others.

Examples beyond Coleman's work can be found in Hancock's (2014) analysis of media visualisations used in connection with American short-term missions. Hancock found that the maps used on mission agencies' web pages 'worked to affix spiritual and cultural attributes as well as degrees of modernity and tradition onto geopolitical space' (2014: 173; cf. Urry, 2011). Through these, she shows how a global faith community is constructed as both the same (as in sharing the same faith) as well as different (in racial, ethnic, and gendered terms). A global 'consciousness' is further fostered by virtual prayer networks, such as those studied by Sebastian Schüller (2008) (cf. Oosterbaan 2011). However, the content which this 'global' imaginary entails in each of these cases is marked by choices of inclusion and exclusion, as well as racial, national, and ethnic identity. All of these examples are moreover predominantly shaped by Western Christians imbued with financial, cultural, and geopolitical privileges, and along very real connections of the 'actual' global spread of Christianity. The geometries of power in evangelicalism therefore affect both the locations to which, and how, the tradition has spread (etic), as well as how evangelicals imagine their own position within it. To exemplify this, the following shows how the protagonists of the vignettes above, Shadia and the band Hillsong United, are positioned within these emic and etic contexts, which will then lead to a discussion of how this affects evangelical place-making and globally circulated narratives of the 'local' with relation to Israel-Palestine.

8.2 Hillsong – a branded mega-church

For the discussion below, it is important to understand some of the history and key characteristics of Hillsong. The predecessor of Hillsong Church, the 'Hills Christian

Life Centre', was founded in Sydney, Australia in 1983, by Brian and Bobbie Houston, and has since developed into a mega-church 'franchise' (Porter, 2017) and globally recognised 'brand' (Riches and Wagner 2012). The church is affiliated with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God church group, and, as its name suggests, has a strong focus on 'song', i.e. worship music. Beside its churches in now nineteen countries with 'an average global attendance approaching 100,000 weekly' (as noted on a 'Hillsong Media Factsheet'⁹⁷), its music has a far wider reach: Hillsong Church has three separate bands with different foci (from producing congregational to Christian pop music) and 'world-class performers' (Riches 2010: 6), which together have produced forty-two albums.⁹⁸ Nelson Cowan (2017: 93) states that fifty million worshippers in over eighty-seven countries sing from the Hillsong corpus (this can be tracked by following the self-reported usage on the Christian Copyright Licencing International CCLI database). Moreover, as Monique Ingalls (2016) has pointed out, Hillsong music can be consumed beyond the congregational setting or purchased music albums – its music circulates on official and non-official worship videos on YouTube (including the visual album 'Of Dirt and Grace' as well as the subsequent concerts in Israel by Hillsong United), thus creating an even more highly 'networked religion' (cf. Campbell 2012; Coleman 2000).

It is therefore not far-fetched to assume that 'every Sunday, Hillsong's songs are heard and sung in thousands of evangelical and non-evangelical churches around the world,' and that 'its music therefore exerts an outsized influence on both the Australian and global Christian sonic (and theological) landscapes' (Wagner 2014: 14; cf. Evans 2006). Hillsong has been analysed as 'homogenising' force on Christian music and theology all over the world: it 'projects a cultural and religious identity' (Evans 2014: 179). Thus,

⁹⁷ Factsheet, <https://hillsong.com/media/> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

⁹⁸ Ibid.

etically speaking, Hillsong does have a near global reach among evangelicals (provided believers can access the songs, social media, or Hillsong's various large city congregations).

Emically speaking, as Hillsong scholars have analysed, its church leaders do have the desire to see their music have a 'global' impact (Evans, 2014), and devise their marketing strategies accordingly (Wagner, 2014). The 'Hillsong experience' (Porter 2017; Wade and Hynes 2013) that is recreated at various church locations worldwide (closely modelled on the 'mother church') – including similar service structures and the associated 'production of affective spectacle' (Wade and Hynes 2013: 174) – seemingly fosters deterritorialised, cosmopolitan believers, who feel at home in any of the Hillsong churches they enter, wherever they may be (Porter, 2017). It is no coincidence therefore that the slogan which greets every visitor to any of the Hillsong branches reads, 'Welcome Home!' – it is carefully chosen to create a feeling of belonging to the church brand rather than the respective city or country the believers find themselves in, and fosters a tangible sense of belonging to a global faith family.

8.3 The *Kufiyah* and the Cross conference

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that at an evangelical youth conference in Bethlehem in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a worship leader suggested to sing the Hillsong classic 'Mighty to Save',⁹⁹ as a gesture to 'include' the Western visitor

⁹⁹ The full text of the song is as follows: '[verse 1] Everyone needs compassion / A love that's never failing / Let mercy fall on me / Everyone needs forgiveness / The kindness of a Saviour / The hope of nations / [chorus 1] Saviour, he can move the mountains / My God is mighty to save / He is mighty to save / Forever Author of Salvation / He rose and conquered the grave / Jesus conquered the grave / [verse 2] So take me as you find me / All my fears and failures / Fill my life again / I give my life to follow / Everything that I believe in / Now I surrender / [bridge] Shine your light and let the whole world see / We're singing for the glory of the risen king Jesus.

(myself) in the time of worship that was otherwise held in Arabic – publicly encouraging me in particular to sing loudly. Much smaller in scope than any Hillsong-associated events, the conference, *Al-kufiyah w al-salīb* [lit. ‘The Kufiyah and the Cross’] at Bethlehem Bible College is not dissimilar to the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences in its topics, and some of the younger organisers of *Christ at the Checkpoint* are also involved in the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conferences, among them Shadia who featured in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter. Like *Christ at the Checkpoint*, the conference is contested from within Palestinian evangelicalism. Due to its questioning of dominant evangelical theologies of Israel, many Palestinian evangelical pastors discouraged its attendance. Further, like *Christ at the Checkpoint*, the conference title, the *Kufiyah and the Cross*, is provocative, considering that the kufiyah – a checked and striped head-dress – has become a symbol for Palestinian nationalism. By using this imagery (reflected in the decorations of kufiyahs draped along the front of the stage, and, more provocatively, around a large wooden cross) the organisers invoked what for many participants have been irreconcilable opposites – to be an evangelical believer as well as a Palestinian.

While its topics are similar, the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference however also differs from the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences in important ways. The first difference is that the conference is held in Arabic, and aimed solely at young Palestinian Christians, to encourage them to think about faith-based engagement with their society. At first, I was unsure as to whether I should ask to be allowed to participate as a researcher. After all, this was the first attempt at reaching out to young Palestinian evangelicals in a context in which most of such engagement is stifled by dispensationalist pastors and congregations, or dispensationalist partners in the West. I was concerned that my presence as young white Western female would stand out and potentially distract from

the endeavour. Knowing what Palestinian hospitality requires, I was worried that attendees would feel the need to ‘host’ me, translate for me, or feel stifled in their engagement with the topic at hand. I had experienced often that, whenever Westerners were present, narratives of Palestinian evangelicals became geared towards them. While reflection on how the respective researcher potentially changes the settings they work in is intrinsic to ethnographic research, I sensed that this challenge was even more pronounced in my field site, due to the heavy involvement of white Western evangelicals in Israel. In the end, after discussing my attendance with Shadia several months before the conference, and being affirmed that I was welcome, I decided on a compromise: I arranged to drive to and from Bethlehem with two of the speakers from Nazareth Evangelical College, who were only attending for the day. In this way, if my presence did indeed cause any disturbance on the first day, the conference could proceed without my presence for the second and third day.

As evidenced from the inclusion of the Hillsong song in English during the time of otherwise Arabic worship, my presence did cause a difference in the proceedings. I was familiar with this way of including Western visitors from the Baptist church I often attended in Nazareth, which often recognised the presence of a visiting Western group with the inclusion of an English song. Shadia, who co-led the sung worship during the conference, used to attend this church when she was growing up in Nazareth (as daughter of Hind, portrayed in Chapter 5). I consider the inclusion of the Hillsong song in this situation as serving as a unifying anthem, that signalled belonging to a global faith family, as well as between the attendees from different cultural backgrounds (even if I was one of the only ones present with a ‘Western’ background).

The second difference to the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference was that the conference with its roughly fifty participants was much smaller than the *Christ at the*

Checkpoint conferences. It was held in a lecture room of the building of Bethlehem Bible College itself, and, also due to its young attendees, felt more like an extended theological seminar as might be typical for such a faith-based institution (including the elements of sung worship). Lunch was served in the college's canteen, and many of the attendees were indeed students at the college, though invitations had been issued to the young people of all evangelical churches across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The third difference to the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences, already briefly mentioned above, but requiring separate mention, is that the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference is entirely aimed at Palestinian evangelicals themselves. This meant that it differed in the curation of the narrative promoted through it, and did not take place under the pressure of a 'global' gaze (though some of the organisers did in fact present a report of this conference at the 2016 *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference). The conference opened meaningfully with a video of aerial shots of the Palestinian territories and Israel, underlined by Palestinian music, and the title, 'This is your home'. While attendance was discouraged by a large number of Palestinian pastors, the conference had a profound impact on those who did participate – be it out of curiosity, rebellion, or frustration at the refusal of many Palestinian evangelical leaders to address the political situation. Having grown up in an evangelical milieu in which the attendees' Palestinian identity had been either suppressed (in the case of Palestinian Israelis), demonised (to not associate with the violent resistance or nationalism of many non-Christians), or negated (as part of a pro-Israel global evangelical faith family), to discuss how their evangelical beliefs can co-exist with other identities was a watershed moment for many participants.

Reflecting on her experience, one young woman told me how, as soon as she entered the venue, the decorations unleashed an internal conflict in her. Steeped in a dispensationalist tradition, she had always associated kufiyahs with political activists, who symbolised 'evil'. For her, 'politics was a dirty game, something I don't want to get involved in as a child of God.' The reader will remember a similar statement uttered by Yusuf (Chapter 5) and the Palestinian evangelical pastor who felt that Palestinian theology was feeding Islamic thought. Thus, her reservations were common and related to what she had been taught in her home church. While certainly not inciting any form of violence, the conference sought to facilitate discussions around how one can be both an evangelical as well as develop a sense of critical citizenship as those against whom the Israeli state is cast. Moreover, it sought to offer a biblical approach to deal with discrimination (in the case of Palestinian Israelis) or the occupation (in the case of residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories) by reflecting on the Christian virtues of justice, forgiveness, and love for the enemy.

Following a time of sung worship, several talks, sketches, and other items was a question time to a panel of Palestinian evangelical theologians, which proved just how unheard of this biblical approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict had been for the young participants. The questions were to be collected on scraps of paper and presented anonymously to the panel. After a brief hesitation, the questions began to flow, one after the other. While the panellists were discussing one question, ten more were written and passed to the front. For many attendees, this was the first time they were able to openly discuss the political situation in light of their faith. Thus, to meet evangelicals who question the efficacy of their evangelical commitments if they do not also relate these to their ethnic and political identities changed how the young woman quoted above, as well as many other participants, understood the kufiyah. As a result of the conversations

had at the conference, it turned into a symbol of authentic faith, a symbol ‘redeemed’ and reclaimed from previous ‘un-evangelical’ usages. In fact, the young woman quoted above told me in a skype conversation a few weeks after the conference that she had put up a kufiyah on her dorm room wall (she was a drama student at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem), to remind her of what she had learned about her faith in relation to her Palestinian identity.



Figure 33. Entrance area of the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference displaying a wooden cross with kufiyahs draped around it.

Yet, even in the context of critical engagement with how a large majority of the world’s Christians view the Israeli state (as fulfilment of biblical prophecy), the worship leaders

at the conference drew on a resource such as Hillsong's worship music. Hillsong being a readily available resource in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as Europe, the song was used in order to find a 'common worship ground' between the different attendees. This is significant because it motions to both the emic self-understanding of Palestinian evangelicals as being part of a global evangelical community, as well as the 'homogenising' influence of the well-resourced Hillsong Church. It further also points to the tensions of the Palestinian evangelical community in navigating their belonging to a 'global' faith community that often ignores them and denies their existence. Yet, even in these circumstances, the worship leaders at the conference tried to include me as a Westerner in one of the few venues where their engagement with the Israeli state was critically discussed. Instead of using a Hillsong song, other ways of including me could have involved actually asking me whether I was able to participate in the sung Arabic worship (for the most part I was), or, if I had been struggling with it, by adding transliterations to the Arabic worship song lyrics. They could of course also have ignored my presence completely, as I had asked them to do. Yet, Hillsong clearly was familiar to the worship leaders and many of the attendees present, which led to the inclusion of an English song by a 'global' megachurch at a conference aimed solely at Palestinian evangelicals and otherwise held in Arabic.

8.4 'Israel' in local and global narratives

So why does it matter that Hillsong music was part of the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference described above? While it has been argued that Hillsong has a homogenising effect on worship and theology (Evans 2006), others suggest that its branding is a 'co-productive process' (Wagner, 2014): 11) that is fed both by Hillsong's artists who write and initially record the music, as well as those who consume it in various contexts. The

case of Israel-Palestine offers further insight into the power differentials of such globally networked faith communities. The argument of this chapter is that the power differentials at play influence religious place-making and guide the narratives that circulate ‘globally’ of particular locations, which of course has an effect on the population who lives in it. While Hillsong do not have a publically articulated theology of Israel, their recent and ongoing engagement with Israel suggests that they support a common ‘pro-Israel’ default position, the very position with which Palestinian evangelicals at the conference grappled with. This becomes clear in the Hillsong United album, ‘Of Dirt and Grace’, as well as the associated concert tour in Israel, and Shadia’s engagement with these.

The significance of Hillsong’s engagement with Israel is pronounced even further through their plans to open a church branch in Tel Aviv. As in other locations where Hillsong is present (Porter 2017), this new church plant raises questions as to their connection to local believers and existing churches, especially considering it might also bear the trade-mark slogan, ‘Welcome home!’ The image in Figure 34 accompanied the announcement of the church plant by Brian Houston, the co-founder of Hillsong Church, in Israel (dated 13 February 2017 – after the release of the ‘Of Dirt and Grace Album’, but before Shadia’s attendance at the Caesarea concert). It features the Hillsong logo, which is super-imposed on a drone-shot of Tel Aviv – thus ‘branding’ the city for Hillsong. As seen in the greetings extended at the concert in Caesarea, and I discuss in more detail below, there is a sense that Hillsong is not engaging with the imaginaries of the ‘local’ by those who are already Christians in the territory. None of their public announcements or material surrounding the church plant has any recognition of the political situation, the Israel-Palestine conflict, or the multiple Christian communities

already present in the country – which seems to suggest that it is a ‘clean slate’ for Hillsong to populate.



Figure 34. Brian Houston's announcement of a church plant in Tel Aviv on Instagram featured this photo.

8.4.1 Hillsong ‘come and see’

However, when the first videos, blogs, and press releases about Hillsong United’s visual album set at locations in Israel appeared in 2016, the Palestinian evangelical community was actually cautiously optimistic. Just like Shadia, many were familiar with Hillsong, and to have them close by as Palestinian evangelicals – an embattled threefold minority – was an encouragement. Shadia, for example, gives voice to many when she writes in an open letter reflecting on her experience at the concert,

I loved listening to your worship albums. As a teenager, whenever I had doubt, fear or uncertainty, your music helped me encounter Jesus. I imagine this is common for many teenage Christians in Australia (and around the world) too. When the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became violent; when war, tension and fear surrounded

me when I left my home; and when I feared for my family, your music reminded me that Jesus is with us. In this context, your music was hope.¹⁰⁰

Shadia, like others, was encouraged by Hillsong music in the sense that the song texts restated what she believed to be true, but sometimes lost sight of in the violence and stress of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The affirmation received through songs recorded at a studio in Australia and consumed in Israel-Palestine points to Shadia's sense of belonging to a global faith family – the encouragement came not just from her local church community, but also from a resource of people she did not know personally, but who she knew she shared her faith with.

When the album was released, some Palestinian evangelicals, moreover, knew that the Hillsong United band had visited the 'Tent of Nations', the farm owned by the Palestinian evangelical Nassar family in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I discussed in Chapter 5 that the farm was illegally declared 'state land' by the Israeli state in 1991, leading to a continued legal battle to enable the Nassar family to regain control of their land. The farm had been turned into an 'educational and environmental farm', as a way of non-violent protest of Israel's treatment. The presence of international visiting groups on the land and the international media attention protected the Nassar family from confiscation of their land by the Israeli authorities. Thus, Palestinian evangelicals were initially encouraged that shots of a tour of Hillsong United of the farm, and even Daoud's father himself (who also led a tour for the 'witness visit' group I participated in in 2015) featured in one of Hillsong's filmed songs, 'Prince of Peace' (however without being identified; Farhoud 2016).

¹⁰⁰ See <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1332> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

I discussed in Chapter 5 how Palestinian evangelicals of all theological persuasions seek the encounter with Western evangelicals, under the motto ‘come and see’. One of the aims I pursued in Chapter 5 was to portray the ways in which Palestinian evangelicals make sense of their belonging to a global faith community as they work out their evangelical subjectivities in their everyday lives. In a faith form that, despite its focus on interiority, also highlights relationality and intersubjectivity (Elisha, 2011), I asked to what degree Palestinian evangelicals consider themselves included in this relationality, globally conceived. I considered their narratives as curation towards those who previously side-lined their existence in favour of ethnically exclusivist theologies of Israel. In the light of the argument this chapter seeks to make, one could consider the Palestinian evangelical invitation to ‘come and see’ as an invitation to Western evangelicals to participate in Palestinian evangelical place-making. For some, who support dispensationalist theologies like Yusuf and Miriam, the ‘place-making’ envisioned entails merely that Western evangelicals know about their existence as Palestinian evangelical Christians, so that the latter can profit from the emotional and spiritual support a global faith community can provide. Others, who engage critically with their social and political circumstances, like Hind and Amin, hoped that ‘coming and seeing’ would lead Western evangelicals to join the imaginaries of the ‘local’ some native Palestinian evangelicals develop. Daoud and his family, too, invite Western visitors to join their ‘local’ place-making – to recognise that his farm continues to belong to his family, to support them as they fight the legal battle with the Israeli state, and even more practically to ‘claim’ the land through their very presence on it. For those who critically engage with Israeli policies, the knowledge that Hillsong United had visited the West Bank and Daoud’s farm raised hopes that they had ‘seen’ the situation in Israel-Palestine from Palestinian evangelicals’ own, critical perspective, and

would subsequently stand up for Palestinians' rights and justice: that they would join in the imaginary of the 'local' of Palestinian evangelicals. In their efforts to reach out to powerful evangelical actors in the West (as *Christ at the Checkpoint* does), to have the world-spanning church organisation of Hillsong on their side would have been an immense hope and encouragement.

However, a closer analysis of the visual albums, Shadia's experience at the concert in Caesarea, and her subsequent exchanges with Hillsong members in open letters and blog posts, as well as Hillsong's continuing involvement in Israel, show that Hillsong United, rather than raising awareness about the Palestinian plight, rather promoted the 'default' pro-Israel theologies. This is further affirmed by the announcement of the Hillsong church plant in Tel Aviv on Instagram: accompanying the photo depicted in Figure 34, Brian Houston (incidentally the father of one of the worship leaders of Hillsong United, Joel Houston, who features in the filmed album) wrote:

Let me to be the first to tell you this is happening. Hillsong church is going to add a room to our church family in ISRAEL. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and from the ends of the earth back to Israel. [#prayforhillsongisrael](#) [#TelAviv](#)¹⁰¹

The assumption of this post is that Hillsong is bringing Christianity 'back' to Israel, from where this faith tradition started. Thus, even though the band members of Hillsong United had met and interacted with Palestinian Christians (and messianic Jews), even seen their critical social and political situation, the existing presence of Christians in Israel-Palestine is not acknowledged in this post. The utterance stands in direct contrast to the way in which Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* conceptualise their presence in Israel-Palestine, as analysed in Chapter 6: they point to

¹⁰¹ See: https://www.instagram.com/p/BQcIt0GDFxb/?utm_source=ig_embed [accessed 23/11/2018]

themselves as those who missionized others first (which is partly recognised in Houston's post – 'from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth' – even though he did not make the connection to today's Palestinian Christian community), and who are best placed to embody Christ's presence in Israel-Palestine as 'indigenous' Christians. In fact, they challenge the attempts of those who try to 'bring Christianity back' to Israel, with the simple observation that Christianity has always had a presence there (even in its evangelical form since the 1950s), and they were themselves prepared to carry it further.

8.4.2 Why did Hillsong re-record songs in Israel?

The question to be asked in this regard, therefore, is why Hillsong United decided to film and re-record already existing songs in Israel-Palestine. Why did this particular territory matter, or matter enough to produce a new album with the same songs? The Hillsong Church 'franchise' (Porter, 2017) is often portrayed for its distinct lack of territorial boundedness, which seems to affirm those who speak of the portability of the charismatic tradition (which is also reflected of the 'branding' of a seemingly 'clean slate'). Yet, in this case, place matters. Israel is of central importance in contemporary evangelicalism, an importance which Smith (2013) traces back to movements as early as the Protestant Reformation, thus deeply connected with the emergence of a Western 'Judeo-Christian tradition'. Coleman (2013) aptly describes Israel as located at the 'centre' of the evangelical cartographies, i.e. the centre of the world in the evangelical imaginary of the global. As most evangelicals, including Hillsong themselves, would

attest, this is a ‘spiritual map’.¹⁰² Thus, when one of the album’s songs (‘Prince of Peace’) is filmed next to a military tank in the disputed territory of the Golan,¹⁰³ this is not believed to be a political act or message. Even the public greeting of Mike Huckabee who negates the existence of the West Bank altogether, at their subsequent concert, is not deemed ‘political’ – what concerns Israel seemingly operates outside of ‘normal’ political understandings of evangelical believers. I developed this notion with help of Sean Durbin’s (2018) work on Christian Zionism as cloaking political acts in spiritual devotion in Chapter 4. This is further strikingly displayed when, as a result of the initial recording trip to Israel-Palestine of Hillsong United, which led them also to refugee camps in Lebanon, Hillsong launched a campaign in aid of Syrian refugees – and not in support of Palestinian refugees. Israel is considered a spiritual place, a belief that has stifled the political engagement of Palestinian evangelicals for decades.

A potential reason for the fascination with Israel especially in cosmopolitan, seemingly deterritorialised, urban-focused evangelical/charismatic ministries such as Hillsong presents itself when reflecting on practices of place-making. In her essay on a global sense of place, Doreen Massey suggests that in an interconnected world, individuals and groups sometimes long for coherence amid the uncertainty of waning familiarity of places. A reactionary response to this is a ‘sentimentalised recovering of sanitized “heritages”’ (Massey 1994: 147). Christopher Tilley (2006: 14) argues similarly that ‘a

¹⁰² Hillsong United published a number of blogs on their experience of recording their music in Israel, which reflect on the significance of being in the territory ‘where Jesus walked’ to produce this album. For example, one of the musicians notes on seeing the temple mount and city of David, while preparing to play the song ‘Prince of Peace’, that ‘the right feel for these songs couldn’t come from a studio in Sydney,’ and that ‘this place and the Holy Spirit moved us all.’ The emotional impact seems to stem from this being the territory which has featured largely in the artist’s Bible reading, and he suggests that the landscape itself was of spiritual significance to him. See: <https://hillsong.com/collected/blog/2016/07/we-needed-to-rethink-these-songs-again/#.WgR3gnZpFhE> [accessed 09/11/2017].

¹⁰³ The territory of the Western part of the Golan was conquered and occupied by Israel in 1967. The Eastern part is claimed by Syria. The area is still disputed and features a buffer zone administered by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

symbolic return to the past often acts as a retreat from the uncertainties of the present,' and is reflected in the ways places are imagined and performed. He notes, too, that this is often done by 'non-local' pressure groups, which imagine an idealised place elsewhere (for example in the creation of particular cultural heritage sites). In light of this, for globalised church movements such as Hillsong and other evangelical ministries, 'Israel' can become such a sanitized 'heritage' – an anchor of a seemingly unchanging place in an otherwise changing world. The image of stasis, i.e. of biblical sites not losing their character in an otherwise turbulent country (after all, the Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the longest ongoing protracted conflicts), is upheld through exactly the kinds of ventures such as the 'Of Dirt and Grace' album and the kinds of locations chosen for the concert tour, which are disseminated widely across the globe.

I sought to show this dynamic already through discussion of the life history museum *Nazareth Village* in Chapter 6: its efforts of 'peeling back time, distance, and culture' sought to excavate a particular version of the 'local' which never existed, but which matches Western evangelicals' imaginations of the territory. In contrast to the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference, it is noteworthy that Palestinian evangelicals who are part of *Nazareth Village* are in fact complicit with creating and perpetuating this idea of the 'local', which so many visitors consume. The incentives might include an actual conviction that Jesus' times did indeed look like this, i.e. agreement with the dominant narrative of the 'local'; however, as mentioned above, simply being seen as Palestinian evangelicals as part of a global faith community by bringing tourists to Nazareth might also play into Palestinian evangelical support of *Nazareth Village*. Plus, of course, to offer the dominant version of Israel that Western evangelicals want to see brings money and jobs to a tourist economy that experiences significant ebbs and flows as a result of the political tensions.

What is important to note in the context of the Hillsong United album, too, is that this imaginary of the 'local' can only be upheld because it is connected to the appropriate resources – to power, financial backing, freedom to travel (for Hillsong United artists and tourists on their concert tour alike), and branding techniques that disseminate Hillsong's products all over the world. In the words of Massey, it is the very ones who most profit from time-space compression – those who are able to travel and exert influence through circulation of their ideas – who want to come back to a sense of *localised* place, their own spiritual 'origin' as they find it in their Bibles. 'Israel' (as evangelical imagination) centres the evangelical, and perhaps functions as reassurance of identity in a changing globalised world. This sense of place is circulated due to the resources attached to those who maintain this imagination.

To labour the point, I want to suggest two ways in which the circulation of this dominant imaginary of the 'local' works, both rooted in the way in which charismatic Christianity, and especially the Hillsong experience, functions. Firstly, Hillsong operates on the 'performance of the mega' (Goh 2008), which is achieved through sophisticated sound systems and huge numbers of worshippers at their events and services. For example, a Hillsong church cannot be founded unless there are a minimum number of a hundred worshippers present (Porter 2017), which is needed to create its distinctive experience (though this number could also be achieved by relocating worshippers from an existing Hillsong church to a new church plant). The numbers, sound and media at the concert-like worship events create an atmosphere of 'grandness' (Cowan 2017), which aims at reflecting to the worshipper an image of God as majestic and powerful. This experience is recreated at the concerts of Hillsong United in Israel. They drew thousands of worshippers on specially designed Israel-Tours following the band's performances at locations of biblical significance, including at the Eastern gate

in Jerusalem (where Jesus is believed to return), on a boat on the Sea of Galilee (featuring prominently in the four gospels), and in the ancient Roman ruins of Caesarea (where Shadia encountered them). At each open-air concert, huge sound systems were set up, including massive screens, lights, and amplification. With this, in Israel-Palestine, the desired effect of ‘grandness’ was projected onto the territory itself, and subsumed in the ‘performance of the mega’. The territory surrounding the concert location was elevated, and seen as pointing to God’s grandness as well – and effect that leads the believer to think that the territory itself is special and significant for their faith.

Secondly, the charismatic evangelical tradition places a lot of significance on their spiritual leaders. Musicians especially are believed to be ‘anointed’ by the Holy Spirit (Wagner 2013; 2014). During the worship times, the singers and musicians of the band were filmed and projected onto the large screens. Robbie Goh (2008) compares this practice with the prominence of high ceiling and icons in cathedrals, which are aimed at drawing the worshiper’s attention upwards; here, this function was fulfilled by what appears on the projection screens, which ‘magnify the human - albeit as it aspires to reach God through worship’ (Goh 2008: 298). This ties in with the evangelical belief that God is ‘immanent’ within the believer (Klaver 2015b; Maddox 2013), thus what the worshippers were really looking at was God at work in the anointed musicians. When this is happening in Israel-Palestine itself, while the territory is elevated through the ‘performance of the mega’, whatever is happening through the singers on the screen seems a divine affirmation. This authority matters in the acts surrounding their concerts – when they welcome a person like Mike Huckabee, or messianic believers, but fail to recognise Palestinian evangelicals. Like Shadia mentioned, she felt a stinging sense of exclusion at the concert when she came ready to join in the worship, led by God-‘anointed’ Hillsong United musicians, yet her identity was rejected by those on stage.

Hillsong United's album and subsequent tour thus 'brands' Israel-Palestine in their unique worship style and experience, and creates a particular imaginary of what it signifies. This imaginary ties in with the majority of evangelicals' belief that Israel is divinely ordained, and predestined for the Jews, through exclusion of Palestinians. Through their worship videos, which are accessed by a wide and diffuse audience (Ingalls, 2016), these imaginaries are disseminated across the world and continue to affirm a pro-Israel theology.

Another reason for why Hillsong United chose Israel to re-record their albums ties in with the practice of conservative Protestant to travel to the 'Holy Land' (Collins-Kreiner and Klot, 2000; Coleman, 2004; Belhassen and Ebel, 2009; Ron and Feldman, 2009; Kaell, 2014). In an essay comparing pilgrimage practices between Anglo-Catholics to Walsingham and Swedish charismatics to Israel, Simon Coleman (2004) argued that the movement intrinsic to Christian pilgrimage is itself a cultural performance. The team members of Hillsong United describe in some of their blog posts their own experience of encountering the territory, as if they too were on a Christian pilgrimage – their filming different songs at different sites of biblical importance, as well as the subsequent concert tour following a similar itinerary, certainly parallels what participants of typical evangelical Holy Land tours experience. By inscribing their songs on the territory of Israel and disseminating this experience, they thus provide a further resource for evangelical pilgrims for whom this experience is now rendered familiar through the example of Hillsong United. Hillsong United have created a moment of the 'familiar' for those evangelicals familiar with their music who visit the country.

8.4.3 Contesting imaginaries of the 'local' within global evangelicalism

Following the frustration and sense of exclusion at the concert, Shadia wrote an open letter to Hillsong United, which was published on the English-speaking blog, 'Come and See'. As emerged from the discussion above, Palestinian evangelicals have a difficult relationship with global evangelicalism (in the etic sense), while counting themselves as part of it (in the emic sense). The friction created between the famous Hillsong United band's engagement with Israel and its Palestinian evangelical community renders visible the tension between Israel being a nation-state with a military occupation and an ethno-nationalist 'democracy', and it being the centre of a spiritual evangelical cartography. There are obvious tensions with an evangelical ethic of justice, peace, and reconciliation in the way in which this state is run and its Palestinian citizens and residents treated, and the simultaneous investment in the state by a majority of evangelicals worldwide who consider it a fulfilment of biblical prophecy.

Shadia and others like her at the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference, as well as the larger *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences directly addressed at Western believers, try to influence the dominant imaginary of Israel-Palestine of pro-Israel theologies. Her open letter, the website, the material distributed around the conferences, and speaking tours of Palestinian evangelicals abroad, all seek to shape the imaginary of the 'local'. One of the main concerns with this imaginary is the recognition that the Palestinian evangelical community exists and, more importantly, has a right to existence without negating or demonising their identity. As Shadia puts it,¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ See <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1332> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

As a Palestinian Christian, I implore my fellow Christians from abroad to not only look at the stones that bear witness to our Scriptures, but also to the living stones who bear witness to Jesus' presence in the Holy Land today.

Similarly, the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conferences articulately reject Christian Zionist and dispensationalist theologies (or ambient versions thereof) by deconstructing the racial imaginaries and other forces that drive these. The *Christ at the Checkpoint* manifesto refutes ethnically exclusivist imaginaries of Israel-Palestine, as well as dominant notions of who the land belongs to. Further, it points to the need to empower Palestinian Christians in being 'salt and light' in their contexts, in a sense to control and shape the imaginaries of the 'local'.

However, due to lack of financial and cultural resources (for example the lack of a well-financed branding strategy) and restricted mobility (especially for those in the Occupied Palestinian Territories), Palestinian evangelicals are much less able to shape the circulation of what 'Israel' signifies. Shadia's open letter did indeed reach those concerned (and according to the 'Come and See' website, had been read ca. 20,640 times in November 2018), and some working for, or associated with, Hillsong have apologised to her privately (e.g. in tweets) indicating that the Crouchs' public greeting of Huckabee was beyond their control. However, there has not been an official statement or apology by Hillsong United on the matter.¹⁰⁵ To add a number for contrast, the official version of the song 'Prince of Peace' from the 'Of Dirt and Grace' album alluded to above has reached almost six and a half million views on YouTube by November 2018 – a number that excludes the times the album as a whole, or song in itself, has been sold. Unless Hillsong United openly addresses the differential imaginary

¹⁰⁵ Shadia outlined the developments following the publication of her open letter in an interview and follow up letter published as a blog post. See <http://www.anothervoices.info/blog/2017/5/14/qa-with-shadia-qubti-a-palestinian-christian-on-the-recent-hillsong-concert-in-israel?rq=shadia> and <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1332> [Accessed 09/11/2017].

of the 'local' between itself and the Palestinian evangelical community, and provides a platform for the contribution of Palestinian evangelicals residing in Israel-Palestine in shaping this imaginary, its own narrative, as outlined above, through song and film, will continue to dominate the global imagination of Israel.

The lack of success of Shadia's challenge to Hillsong United is paralleled with other endeavours of Palestinian evangelicals trying to bring their imaginaries of the 'local' into the consciousness of 'global' evangelicals, as discussed in earlier chapters. For example, Palestinian evangelicals associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* are routinely dis-invited from Christian conferences in the 'West'; or, if they are invited as 'token Arabs', their contributions are controlled and limited to feed into a dominant narrative: attempts at challenging a dominant imaginary of the 'local', for example by pointing to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, are rejected. Further, those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* are slandered in Christian media, or wrongly accused of being anti-semitic. This includes the Western supporters and advocates for Palestinian versions of the 'local', who, albeit their financial and cultural resources have less power to shape the imaginary of the 'local' within global evangelicalism – likely as a result of the marginalisation of left-leaning evangelicals from the 1990s onwards (Swartz, 2012b).

It is further significant to remember the school strike discussed in Chapter 4 in this context. In this situation, Western evangelicals seemingly supported Palestinian evangelicals' sense of the 'local' by intervening on their behalf with the Israeli government. The staff of Nazareth Baptist School played a significant role in this, by reaching out to the school's American partners and co-writing the call for American support on the 'Come and See' blog. Could this be considered a successful attempt of Palestinian evangelical shaping imaginaries of the 'local' within 'global'?

evangelicalism? In one sense, one could argue that it was. After all, Palestinian evangelicals secured the support of their American counter-parts, and achieved a real transformation of policy of the Israeli government by reaching at least a temporary agreement regarding the school fees. On another level, one needs to consider that the imaginary of the 'local' Palestinian evangelicals were asking for support for was already pitched in way that was acceptable to a Western audience: the battle was about maintaining the evangelical school that would enable them to continue to foster 'good' evangelical subjects. The school had been instrumental in forming a dispensationalist first and second generation of Palestinian evangelicals, and Western evangelicals rose to action to enable it to also form a third and fourth. Thus, the staff of the school seemed to be able to garner the support for a particular project that seemed to fit with the imaginary of the 'local' that was already acceptable to a 'global' evangelical community. Where he might want them to engage more deeply with a critical Palestinian evangelical agenda, his attempts, like Shadia's, so far have failed.

8.5 Conclusion

Coleman's (2013: 387) insight that the "'globe" is not always imagined or accessed in strictly equivalent ways', but that 'it expands or contracts, reveals certain vistas and conceals others' can be expanded to show that the differential vistas are achieved through differential power constellations within global evangelicalism. As demonstrated in this chapter, Hillsong United, through their resources, have the power to shape what is 'seen' in relation to Israel, at the expense of Palestinian evangelicals' vistas. The fact that Palestinian Christians were not welcomed at the Caesarea (and other) concerts on their tour, nor given credit for in the filmed songs, suggests that Hillsong controls the imaginary of the 'local', and excludes the evangelical population of Palestinian

evangelicals from their emic definition of global Christianity (cf. Wagner 2014; Hancock 2014: 160) – even though Palestinian evangelicals use their music in their church services and at Christian events. The lack of an official apology or distancing by Hillsong, or official engagement with Palestinian evangelicals in the aftermath of the event, suggests that Hillsong prefers to hold on to the dominant evangelical discourse on Israel. Where Hillsong believes that their music sung across the world is adapted in a ‘co-productive’ process (Wagner, 2013), the experience at the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference suggests that this process is still largely uni-directional: Hillsong is a dominant resource that is used to certain ends (here to include the Western visitor), but does not empower local imaginaries of the ‘local’.

This illustration suggests that, rather than evangelical or charismatic Christianity being a faith tradition that ‘travels well’, it is a tradition that travels well *along particular paths*, steered by powerful and privileged evangelical players. The chapter uses notions of particular geometries of power, drawing on Massey’s work, to explain these processes with reference to global evangelicalism. How the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ are imagined by its powerful players impact its place-making practices, and result in real material consequences for those who have less power to shape these imaginaries. Where Howell suggests that some ‘foreign’ aspects adopted by a ‘local’ faith community may become too ‘local’ that they are no longer considered ‘foreign’, I argue that there are still unequal power relationships that may lead to these adoptions. However, rather than identifying all of these as ‘hegemonic’ elements that ought to be resisted, as the Comaroffs did, I suggest that despite unequal power relationships, some Palestinian evangelicals try to make their faith meaningful in their context by defining a different imaginary of the ‘local’. Palestinian evangelicals consider themselves as part of an emic ‘global Christianity’, i.e. have developed a ‘global consciousness’ as an evangelical

faith community. However, the ‘flows’ within ‘global’ evangelicalism follow particular geometries of power, leading to dominant imaginaries of ‘local’ and ‘global’ that largely exclude Palestinian evangelicals. With this in mind, I turn to conclude the thesis, where I summarise the insights of the last five empirical chapters in light of the hypothesis I offered at the beginning.

9. Conclusion; the uneven co-constitution of ‘global’ evangelicalism

We have now arrived almost at the end of the journey of this thesis. In this last chapter, I will draw out the arguments I have developed in the previous empirical chapters, and examine them with reference to the literatures I introduced at the beginning of this thesis. I revisit the hypothesis I offered in the Introduction and consider, following the discussions of the preceding chapters, how we might answer the research question: how is ‘orthodoxy’ in belief and practice negotiated within the transnational social field of evangelicalism?

I began this thesis by reporting the despair felt by many Palestinian evangelical Christians due to the pro-Israel policies of one of the most powerful countries in the world, the United States. Palestinian evangelicals, however, do not just feel despair at the challenging circumstances these policies create for them. They also despair at what they perceive as ‘betrayal’ by many Western evangelical Christians’ disregarding of Palestinian evangelicals’ spiritual lives and physical livelihoods. Some Western evangelicals have even openly lobbied for the pro-Israel policies of their states, or one-sidedly pray for God’s blessing on Israel, while disregarding the oppression of Palestinians at this state’s hands. Even though some Palestinian evangelicals, like Alex Awad or the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference team, have advocated tirelessly for an alternative evangelical understanding of ‘Israel’, their activism seems not to have had sufficient success so far. While they identify as evangelicals and want to be counted among their ‘global’ faith family, they also have to navigate this faith family’s adverse theologies and practices. By identifying as part of the evangelical community, Palestinian evangelicals further become targets for other Palestinians who consider them

as ‘traitors’ for siding with those that (globally) promote policies that have such negative effects on their lives.

I suggested that the dilemma of Palestinian evangelicals’ navigation of ‘global’ evangelicalism could contribute to new insights in the Anthropology of Christianity, and our understanding of ‘global’ religious formations in general. In particular, the complex and counterintuitive belonging of Palestinian evangelicals to ‘global’ evangelicalism raises the question of how ‘orthodoxy’ in theology and practice is negotiated within global evangelicalism: who or what determines what a ‘good’ evangelical Christian is? If a theology and associated practices discriminate against, or even harm, another part of the global evangelical family, who or what decides what correct theology and practice is? While I have drawn on a wealth of existing research examining different aspects of Christianity from an anthropological perspective, I also noted that the question of what shapes the uneven ‘flows’ of theology, ideology, and resources across this expanding, transnational faith community has received limited attention.

I therefore explored the research question regarding the negotiation of evangelical ‘orthodoxy’ through studying encounters across difference between Palestinian and mostly Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine, hoping that the dynamics of these encounters would shed light on what ‘flows’, or is hindered from ‘flowing’ within the transnational social field of evangelicalism. Initially, given the activism I had encountered by those associated with the *Christ at the Checkpoint* movement, I had expected the two ‘sides’ of the encounter to be relatively homogenous, and diametrically opposing each other in their theology of Israel. However, as my fieldwork progressed, I realised that that many Palestinian evangelicals actually were in favour of pro-Israel theologies themselves – the number of those Palestinian evangelicals who

oppose Christian Zionism openly is extremely small. While I was surprised and somewhat shocked by this discovery, my explorations of why Palestinian evangelicals should decide *not* to confront theologies and practices that discriminate against them have been insightful in answering my research question. In the preceding chapters, I described a variety of reasons for the lack of critical engagement of the Palestinian evangelical majority with their social and political circumstances, and quiet acceptance of pro-Israel theologies all of which point to the ways in which evangelical orthodoxy is negotiated. I return to these reasons in the discussion below.

The focus on encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals - from everyday meetings in the town of Nazareth or at *Nazareth Village*, to heated debates at conferences such as *Christ at the Checkpoint*, to (historical) encounters in text and media – enabled me to consider various ‘constellations’ of sharing aspects of theologies and practices and rejecting others. Following Faier and Rofel’s (2014) conceptualisation of the methodology of ‘ethnography of encounter’, I paid attention to the dynamics in the encounters – to processes of meaning-making, resistance, adaptation, transformation, mimicry, and rejection. This lens allowed me to understand how the identities of those involved were co-constituted in these encounters, and how the meaning of what ‘Israel’ signifies for evangelicals (and thereby their conception of appropriate Christian political engagement) was negotiated. In each of these encounters, the different parties to the encounter strove to present themselves in certain ways to each other, or constructed the respective ‘Other’ according to particular imaginations. These highlighted the power of dominant interpretative regimes, and the various evangelical subject-making in relation to these.

Further, I highlighted from the beginning my own implication in the encounters I studied, as a female researcher of Western origin and with a Christian background. I

demonstrated this especially in the discussion of encounters with Palestinian evangelicals in Nazareth in the portraits of Chapter 5, and my participation in the *Kufiyah and the Cross* conference in Chapter 8. The critical reflection about my own positionality in the encounters I studied has aided me in exploring the expectations Palestinian evangelicals had of their Western faith family, the way in which they variously curated their narratives to an audience of evangelicals from elsewhere (including, by extension, myself), and how they saw themselves as part of ‘global’ evangelicalism – i.e. how they articulated their own global orientation (cf. Coleman 2000). I became a ‘research tool’ myself in these encounters through my very identity, and was challenged to reflect on my complicity (even if only by association) in the political and economic structures that have shaped the lives of the Palestinian evangelicals I worked with.

In my analysis, I relied on insights from the Anthropology of Islam, where the role of power in the negotiation of orthodoxy and orthopraxy has received much more attention, specifically in the work of, and engagement with, Talal Asad (Asad, 1993, 2003, 2009; Scott and Hirschkind, 2006; Anjum, 2007; Anidjar, 2009). Similar to Asad’s conceptualisation of Islam as a ‘discursive tradition’ (Asad, 2009), I suggested in the hypothesis that the focus on the dynamics of encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in Israel-Palestine reveals Christianity, too, as a ‘discursive tradition’, in which ‘orthodoxy’ in belief and practice is shaped by power. ‘Power’ is understood as the capability to influence and shape the circulation of ideas, people, and resources within the transnational social field of evangelicalism. Privileged financial and cultural resources and travel regimes lead to particular ‘geometries of power’ in global evangelicalism. Having engaged with a selection of encounters between

Palestinian and Western evangelicals portrayed in the previous chapters, how do we assess this hypothesis now?

9.1 Evangelicalism as a discursive tradition

In Chapter 4, I introduced the historical theologies that have shaped present evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine. While the prominent influences of Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism on today's evangelical theologies and practices regarding Israel-Palestine have roots that go back to the Protestant Reformation, there have also been theological counter-movements that place more emphasis on social justice, human rights, and equality. It is necessary to consider the theological backgrounds of those we work with in order to understand the historical dimensions and their power dynamics of the social fields they are part of. While my ethnographic focus was on contemporary, face-to-face or textual encounters between Palestinian and Western evangelicals in a specific locality, Israel-Palestine and two locations in North America and Europe, the historically rich genealogies of these linkages (Vasquez 2009) can reveal how each of the parties have 'made' each other over time.

Unlike most scholars of Palestinian Christianity before me (Lybarger, 2007; Bowman, 2011; Kårtveit, 2013, 2014), I considered the Christianity of Palestinian evangelicals not just as social and cultural marker, but as theological commitment that constitutes them as part of the discursive tradition of evangelicalism. This enabled me to conceptualise Palestinian evangelicals as part of a transnational social field of evangelicalism (Levitt and Schiller, 2004), which is constituted by a variety of (historical) 'flows': of people, resources, ideas, and theologies. Attention to these 'flows' reveals the uneven co-constitution of Palestinian and Western evangelicals in their encounters in Israel.

Understanding Christianity as such a discursive tradition, in which the present moment is seen against the backdrop of what has gone before, reveals the way in which power shapes evangelical orthodoxy. It is important to note that the ‘discursive’ element does not just refer to the written or spoken, but also to performance and experience (cf. Coleman 2000). The way in which Palestinian and Western evangelicals ‘see’, or imagine, both each other, as well as the territory of Israel itself, is informed by the discursive tradition they are part of: thus, Chapter 5 depicted different curations by Palestinian evangelicals of their lives to Western evangelical visitors in order to gain their interest and support; Chapter 6 demonstrated in the example of *Nazareth Village* how the territory itself is curated to fit dominant theologies and expectations of Western evangelical visitors; Chapter 7 introduced how some Palestinian evangelicals resist the racialisation of themselves in dominant evangelical theologies; and Chapter 8 highlighted the difficulty Palestinian evangelicals face in contesting dominant imaginations of Israel.

9.2 Power and knowledge in global evangelicalism

The main argument of this thesis is that **power shapes evangelical orthodoxy in belief and practice**. Evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine is particularly insightful in the development of this argument because Israel-Palestine is both the *location* of theological strife (between Palestinian and other evangelical Christians), as well as the *content* of it (as index for different theological conceptions of the Kingdom of God, and appropriate Christian social and political engagement). Israel-Palestine is seen in fact as the centre of a spiritual cartography for many evangelicals (cf. Coleman, 2013). Evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine thus affects how Palestinian and Western

evangelicals see each other, and how their evangelical identities, and ‘global’ evangelicalism itself, are co-constituted.

The dynamics of encounters depicted in the foregoing chapters have demonstrated that studying the interpretative regime of evangelicalism from the ‘margins’ visualises the power at play in shaping what counts as ‘orthodox’ theology and practice within evangelicalism. Some Palestinian evangelicals, like Yusuf and Miriam portrayed in Chapter 5, or some of the staff and management of *Nazareth Village* in Chapter 6, freely subscribe to dominant evangelical theologies. They appreciate being part of a global faith community, value the evangelical heritage introduced to Israel-Palestine in the 1950s, and by aligning themselves with dominant theologies on Israel also invite funding for their evangelical ministries. That being said, many Palestinian evangelicals I worked with expressed their deep gratitude to the American missionaries for bringing evangelical Christianity to Israel-Palestine. For example, even in my conversations with Fadi about the impact of the American evangelical missionaries on Palestinian Christianity, he felt it important to emphasise the following before he launched into his critical assessments of the American involvement (cf. Chapter 4 and 7):

I will not criticise firstly. ... They [the American missionaries] brought us our heritage of the evangelical church ... our focus on Jesus, redemption, our message, our interpretation of the Bible, our daily focus on Jesus. ... This is what makes us different to the Greek Catholic and the Greek Orthodox. This is our evangelical heritage.

Fadi was not the only one who, despite his or her difficult identity and challenging positioning within ‘global’ evangelicalism, was deeply appreciative of the fact that Palestinians were able to count themselves as part of the global evangelical community. The struggles both as threefold minority in the Israeli state and as a minority within

‘global’ evangelicalism were considered worth suffering by Palestinian evangelicals in order to count themselves as evangelicals.

There is, however, also significant resistance to this heritage, especially in its dominant dispensational and Christian Zionist form. The *Tent of Nations* in Chapter 6, the *Christ at the Checkpoint* movement in Chapter 7, and Shadia’s responses to Hillsong United in Chapter 8, all seek to reinterpret dominant evangelical theologies and engagement with Israel. Those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* even seek to shift the ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1991) by reinterpreting themselves as at the centre of the interpretative regime of evangelicalism, at the origin of the discursive tradition of Christianity itself. Some of those who critically grapple with their evangelical heritage may even prefer not to call themselves ‘evangelical’ anymore, even though they may hold to the central markers of evangelicalism (such as those identified by Bebbington (1993) – the centrality of the cross, the necessity of being born again, emphasis on the Bible, and on proselytization) and attend evangelical church services. For example, Shadia (Chapter 8) and Hind (Chapter 5) expressed their ambivalence about identifying as ‘evangelicals’. During the time of my fieldwork Shadia was unsure as to what expression and congregational style of her Christian faith she should seek. Hind expressed her attraction to United Reformed Churches in USA, and wished that the evangelical churches in Israel-Palestine showed more reflection of their tolerant and open-minded character.

Despite this resistance by Palestinian evangelicals, who actually reside within the territory of Israel-Palestine, they have had little impact globally on dominant theologies and imaginations of ‘Israel’. The discursive tradition of evangelicalism, on the one hand, comprises a vast variety of positions and has arrived at the present moment following a long history of making and remaking of each other, and of the texts at its

centre. On the other hand, it is not a unified, 'democratic' faith tradition which is shaped equally by its members. The above examples demonstrate that lack of influence of some of its members in shaping its dominant theologies might drive them to move away from describing themselves as 'evangelical' altogether.

The insight that 'flows' are often hindered, transformed, and uneven is not new in itself: scholars of globalisation have long pointed out these qualifications to the notion of space-time compression and deterritorialisation (Tsing, 2005; Heyman and Campbell, 2009). Even in the study of religion, the scholar Manuel Vasquez has advised caution in relation to the frequent usage of hydrodynamic terms: he suggested that the metaphor of networks is more accurate to depict the 'interplay between domination and resistance' between members of a transnational social field (Vasquez 2009: 441; cf. McAlister, 2018). However, these cautions have usually been issued with reference to obstacles such as state policies, limited mobility of individuals or members of a group, or the effects of capitalism. These are important factors of course and do bear on the present context, but I have extended the analysis here also to more conceptual 'flows' (including for example theologies or imaginations of place) that constitute the 'discursive tradition' of evangelicalism, and their impact in affecting evangelical orthodoxy. As we have seen, these conceptual flows have significant political and material ramifications, too. The focus on the co-constitution of Palestinian and Western evangelicals including their theological backgrounds has demonstrated that evangelical orthodoxy and 'global' evangelicalism itself are variously impacted by those who are part of this social field.

In contrast to Palestinian evangelicals residing in the West Bank, for example, Western visitors can travel easily and take the representations of Israel-Palestine in the form of pictures and experiences with them when they travel home or elsewhere. The real

effects of the ‘physical’ shapers of ‘flows’ also point to the fact that by ‘global’, I often mean ‘Western’: in this thesis, those who have had the historic capacity to shape imaginations of the ‘local’ were American Baptist missionaries, the Australian band Hillsong United and their church group, as well as American, Canadian, Dutch, or Norwegian volunteers. Other scholars have shown the influential imaginations of the ‘global’ by other Western actors, especially in connection with short term missions (McAlister, 2008; Howell, 2012; Priest, Howell and Hancock, 2013; Hancock, 2014). While historically, evangelicalism emerged from Europe and America as shown in Chapter 2 and 4, it is potentially possible to imagine that other evangelicalisms will become influential in the future, *if* they are also coupled to the financial and economic and cultural means to circulate their ideas and imaginaries globally.

The physical and textual encounters between Western and Palestinian evangelicals portrayed in the preceding chapters have demonstrated clearly the varying capability at the present time to influence and shape the emic and etic dimensions of ‘global’ evangelicalism. Most Palestinian evangelicals curated their narratives towards Western evangelicalism. Only few Palestinian evangelicals, like those associated with *Christ at the Checkpoint* in Chapter 7, included in their global ‘orientation’ other post-colonial evangelicalisms such as those in Latin America, of Black American or African theologians – though arguably the language they adopted as a result is also one that has been influenced by categories of Western evangelicals. However, despite this orientation, the ability to shape global evangelicalism in the etic sense, through circulation of ideas, people, ideologies, theologies, and resources, remained limited. I demonstrated in Chapters 7 and 8 that Palestinian evangelicals have had little success in the disseminations of theological ideas about Israel within global evangelicalism. These two examples show that power shapes what is ‘globally’ prominent and accepted.

What can we learn from this for the wider study of evangelicalism and globalisation? I noted in Chapter 2 that it is useful to excavate the genealogy of the term ‘evangelical’ in each context we study, to understand its content and different people’s belonging to it. This thesis demonstrated that a helpful tool for this is to study encounters across difference between unequally positioned parts of a transnational social field of evangelicalism, which reveal dynamics of meaning-making, adaptation, transformation, and rejection of dominant ‘flows’.

While I explored this through the example of evangelical engagement with Israel-Palestine, it is conceivable to use such an approach also to explore other contentious theological issues, such as the question of ordination of women, which is usually argued with reference to particular passages of the Bible, which, like the question of Israel, are the result of particular theological genealogies and interpretative regimes. Another potential theological debate for which this thesis could be productive is the question of human sexuality, and the discussions about whether to allow and bless church weddings of LGBTQ couples. These debates often take place within church associations and conferences both within a national context and internationally. Especially when it comes to debates across ethnic and cultural difference in ‘global’ church associations or movements (such as, currently, within the Anglican and Methodist Churches) the insights of this thesis could be valuable. One could also extend its methods to study movements other than evangelicalism or even Protestantism: even where a stronger hierarchical structure is present, as in the Roman Catholic Church, it could be insightful to use this approach to study everyday negotiations of meaning and practice, especially among Catholics from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

As in the example of this thesis that dealt with theological ideas of ‘Israel’ and associated practice, one could study such conflicts through the lens of a particular

moment or place. One could pay attention to the dynamics of encounters between differently positioned parties of the debate, and seek to understand the kinds of languages they use to make their arguments, how they adjust to each other, and how they ‘see’ each other. This would involve attention to the historical processes that have shaped their present contexts, theologies, and the debates about the theological issue at hand. I also suggest that in such a study of the ‘margins’ of an interpretative regime, it is important to recognise that the researchers themselves are implicated in the co-constitution of those they study. As a result, researchers need to clearly articulate their own starting points, but also recognize that they are often implicated within the structures that have shaped those they work with, and that they are shaped by these structures themselves – sometimes in ways that only become apparent in the process of the fieldwork encounter.

9.3 Final words

I showed in this thesis how those at the ‘margins’ of an interpretative regime, that is inspired by a default support for the State of Israel as the divinely ordained state for the ‘Jewish people’, are at the receiving end of theologies they can influence very little. I depicted the counter-intuitive belonging of Palestinians to the transnational social field of evangelicalism, and showed that many refrain from criticising theologies that discriminate against them, because their belonging to global evangelicalism counts more for them than a life free from political challenges. Yet, some Palestinian evangelicals and their international supporters keep advocating for a different evangelical orthodoxy. Thus, at the *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference in 2018, Revd Alex Awad aptly expressed his hopes that one day his and his colleagues’ efforts at making their voices heard within ‘global’ evangelicalism will pay off. In the hope that a

revised evangelical theology of Israel will have real political consequences that respect the rights of Palestinians, he exclaimed to the Western Christian audience: ‘I hope this is the last *Christ at the Checkpoint* conference. I want to keep Christ, but get rid of the checkpoint.’

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Appendix A. Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern (1973)

As evangelical Christians committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the full authority of the Word of God, we affirm that God lays total claim upon the lives of his people. We cannot, therefore, separate our lives from the situation in which God has placed us in the United States and the world.

We confess that we have not acknowledged the complete claim of God on our lives.

We acknowledge that God requires love. But we have not demonstrated the love of God to those suffering social abuses.

We acknowledge that God requires justice. But we have not proclaimed or demonstrated his justice to an unjust American society. Although the Lord calls us to defend the social and economic rights of the poor and oppressed, we have mostly remained silent. We deplore the historic involvement of the church in America with racism and the conspicuous responsibility of the evangelical community for perpetuating the personal attitudes and institutional structures that have divided the body of Christ along color lines. Further, we have failed to condemn the exploitation of racism at home and abroad by our economic system.

We affirm that God abounds in mercy and that he forgives all who repent and turn from their sins. So we call our fellow evangelical Christians to demonstrate repentance in a Christian discipleship that confronts the social and political injustice of our nation.

We must attack the materialism of our culture and the maldistribution of the nation's wealth and services. We recognize that as a nation we play a crucial role in the imbalance and injustice of international trade and development. Before God and a

billion hungry neighbors, we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote a more just acquisition and distribution of the world's resources.

We acknowledge our Christian responsibilities of citizenship. Therefore, we must challenge the misplaced trust of the nation in economic and military might – a proud trust that promotes a national pathology of war and violence which victimizes our neighbors at home and abroad. We must resist the temptation to make the nation and its institutions objects of near-religious loyalty.

We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.

We proclaim no new gospel, but the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, frees people from sin so that they might praise God through works of righteousness.

By this declaration, we endorse no political ideology or party, but call our nation's leaders and people to that righteousness which exalts a nation.

We make this declaration in the biblical hope that Christ is coming to consummate the Kingdom and we accept his claim on our total discipleship until he comes.

November 25, 1973, Chicago, Illinois