

## Geometries of Power in ‘Global’ Evangelicalism

***Abstract:** This article explores the power dynamics at play in religious place-making. It critically discusses the uneven co-configurations of imaginaries of the ‘local’ and ‘global’ within global evangelicalism. Specifically, the article analyses the recent recording of a live album by the famous charismatic Australian band Hillsong United (of Hillsong Church) at various locations in Israel-Palestine, which was followed by a concert tour in Israel. This endeavour has been critically received by Palestinian evangelical Christians, who feel marginalised and excluded as members of their global evangelical faith family. The frictions between the Palestinian evangelical community and Hillsong United illustrate how dominant evangelical actors create an imagination of the ‘local’ which enters the imaginary of global evangelicalism (and bears material consequences). The article thus argues that privileged financial and cultural resources and travel regimes lead to particular notions of geometries of power in global evangelicalism.*

***Keywords:** global social movements, religious networks, place-making, power, Israel-Palestine, Christianity*

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 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."<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

This article is concerned with the spatialities of transnational networks (Featherstone et al. 2007). Specifically, it seeks to add to the literature 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, it critically discusses the uneven co-configurations of ideas of the 'local' and 'global' within global evangelicalism: the main argument of this article 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. If the constructions of place are globally rooted and locally realised, as Doreen Massey has shown 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. To exemplify this, I draw on fieldwork among the Palestinian evangelical Christian community with particular regard to how they understand and experience their being part of a 'global'

faith family, in this article illustrated by the friction with Hillsong United's engagement with Israel-Palestine. I thus show how 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.

Recent literature on evangelical, especially charismatic, Christianity, has generally focused on the characteristic of the faith tradition's 'portability' (Coleman and Hackett 2015; Coleman 2000; Corten 1997; Csordas 2009; Howell 2003; Robbins and Engelke 2010). Most of the case studies used focused on migrant religion and traveling faiths, and associated place-making (Wong and Levitt 2014): thus, Schiller et al. (2006) have focused on migrant incorporation on the basis of their faith in small-scale cities, Krause (2011) investigates the emergence of cosmopolitan moments alongside Christian moral missions within transnational Christian networks, while Coleman and Maier (2013) investigate the role of diasporic religion in the expanded city-scape of London-Lagos, which migrants traverse both as believers and as urban dwellers. David Garbin (2014) explains the dynamics of religious territorialisation of migrants with faith, concluding that they inhabit 'sacred-scapes' in which money, people, objects, ideas and values circulate. While these studies render 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.

Only few scholars of religion 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. Simon Coleman (2013) grounds this conceptualisation in the enactment, as well as imagination, of global Pentecostal networks, and shows how a Swedish and Nigerian Pentecostal movement 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, Coleman does not pay attention to the actual material constitution of the 'local' through his respondents' global imaginaries.

Before beginning to analyse this aspect, a further clarification is in order for the development of my argument. As the above examples indicate, there are two different dimensions to what is commonly referred to as 'global Christianity', both of which affect each other 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). Yet, while especially evangelical Christianity has been thriving in many contexts outside of the North American and European ones (Jenkins 2011), 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). 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 refers to how Christians themselves imagine their 'global' faith network. Examples beyond Coleman's discussion above can be found in Hancock's (2014) analysis of media visualisation used in connection with American short-term missions, which play on ideas of a 'global' faith family to which American Christians are connected. Further, Sebastian Schüller (2008) discusses how emic ideas of a global faith family are realised in virtual prayer networks (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’.

### Hillsong – a branded mega-church

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’<sup>3</sup>), 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<sup>4</sup>. 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, 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.

### **Palestinian Evangelical Christians – a “threefold (fourfold?) minority”**

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’, as a gesture to ‘include’ the Western visitor (myself) in the time of worship that was otherwise held in Arabic. Much smaller in scope than any Hillsong-associated events, the conference, *Al-kufiyah w al-salīb* [lit. ‘The Kufiyah<sup>5</sup> and the Cross’] at Bethlehem Bible College was a first attempt at getting young Palestinian Christians to think about faith-based engagement with their society. Shadia, featured in the first vignette, was one of the main organisers. The Hillsong song in English here served 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).



*Figure 1. Entrance area of 'The Kufiyah and the Cross' conference.*

The roughly five thousand Palestinian evangelical Christians (Ajaj et al. 2016) both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel have traditionally been politically withdrawn. While evangelical Christianity, with its focus on the individual, rarely pursues collective political agendas (cf. Elisha 2011), Palestinian evangelicals face further constraints in their engagement with the Israeli state and their own citizenship within it (if applicable). Firstly, they are a minority of Palestinian Israeli citizens or residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories in a Jewish 'democracy', in which critical political engagement is sanctioned, with consequences ranging from diminished career opportunities to imprisonment. Secondly, they form only a small percentage as Christians among a Muslim Palestinian majority, the relations to whom are not always without difficulty (Kaartveit 2013), which however is not usually publically addressed for concern about Israel's 'divide-and-rule' policies. Types of

political engagement between these two groups vary however, with Christians generally supporting non-violent activism, if any (Lybarger 2007). Thirdly, most Palestinian evangelicals distinguish themselves from other Christian denominations and their more liberal 'liberation theologies' (e.g. Ateek 1989) for their lack focus on evangelical priorities such as proselytization, together with a more general restraint in political engagement (in the tradition of a strict separation of the "world" and the "Kingdom of God", or "heaven", which they should instead strive after). Thus, within their society, Palestinian evangelicals form a "minority of a minority of a minority", which impacts any political activism.

And yet, when considering Palestinian evangelicals as part of a larger social field of 'global' evangelicalism, they face a fourth constraint in engaging meaningfully with their society. Namely, a majority of their global evangelical faith family believe that the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the possibility of 'return' of the Jews to its territory is a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and a sign for the impending end times. While Robert Smith (2013) traces the roots of this belief as far back as the Protestant Reformation, it has gained particular prominence among lay believers in the Western hemisphere from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the 'dispensationalist'<sup>6</sup> biblical commentary, the Scofield Reference Bible, and later through fictional accounts depicting the end times (Monahan 2008). Politicised as Christian Zionism, for example by the American organisation *Christians United for Israel* (CUFI) or the *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem* (which is located in what used to be Edward Said's family home), these theologies have become a 'default' position among evangelicals, and led to significant interest in the Israeli state, as well as in political, financial, emotional, and spiritual investment in it. It is also reflected in frequent travel or pilgrimage to its territory, such as those of the international attendees at the Hillsong concert at Caesarea (Kaell 2014). The first Palestinian evangelical churches were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by British missionaries interested in converting Jews, but who gained followers mainly from the liturgical denominations of Palestinian Christians that already existed in the area. They were revived by American Southern Baptist missionaries with a distinct dispensationalist theology, to which was later added a charismatic Christian Zionist influence. Thus, Palestinian evangelicals have to navigate their identity and affiliations with reference not just to a Jewish State, their Muslim co-ethnics, or liberal Christian denominations, but also to a dominant evangelical theology that ties an ethnicity (Jewish) to a nation-state (Israel-Palestine), often at the exclusion of Palestinians (cf. Mike Huckabee's statement).



In this context, and amid the often ongoing financial dependence of Palestinian evangelical churches and ministries on Western evangelical partners, the 'Kufiyah and Cross' conference inhabits a contested space, with many Palestinian evangelical pastors discouraging its attendance. On those who did participate – out of curiosity, rebellion, or frustration at the refusal of many Palestinian evangelical leaders to address the political situation – the conference had a profound impact. Having grown up in an evangelical milieu in which their Palestinian identity was 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.

The title itself, 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. Thus, 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". 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." While certainly not inciting any form of violence, the conference (with around fifty participants) 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. 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 (such as proselytization, a focus on the Bible, a personal relationship with God, cf. Bebbington 1993) 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.

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.

### 'Israel' in local and global narratives

So what 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) 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 article is that the power differentials at play influence religious place-making and guide the narratives that circulate globally of particular locations. 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.

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 cautiously optimistic. Just like Shadia, many were familiar with Hillsong, and to have them close by as 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.<sup>7</sup>

Some Palestinian evangelicals moreover knew that the Hillsong United band had visited the 'Tent of Nations', a farm owned by a Palestinian evangelical family in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and under constant threat of confiscation by the Israeli authorities – in fact, shots of the farm feature in one of Hillsong's filmed songs, 'Prince of Peace' (however without being identified; Farhoud 2016). 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 render visible the dynamics that shape the material realities as well as narratives circulating globally of Israel-Palestine as a result – narratives that need to be seen in connection with the 'default' pro-Israel theologies sketched above.

The first question to be asked in this regard is why Hillsong United decided to film and re-record already existing songs in Israel-Palestine. 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. Yet, in this case, place matters. As briefly outlined above, 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'.<sup>8</sup> 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, 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, at their

subsequent concert, is not deemed 'political' – what concerns Israel seemingly operates outside of 'normal' political understandings of evangelical believers. This is 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). 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.

What is important to note here is that this imaginary 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.

The way in which this works is twofold, 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. 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 have drawn 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. At each open-air concert, huge sound systems are set up, including massive screens, lights, and amplification. With this, in Israel-Palestine, the desired effect of “grandness” is projected onto the territory itself, and subsumed in the “performance of the mega”. The territory surrounding the concert location is elevated, and seen as pointing to God’s grandness as well – an 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 are filmed and projected onto the large screens. Robbie Goh (2008) considers this practice in relation to the high ceiling and icons in cathedrals, which are aimed to draw the worshiper’s attention upwards; here, this function is 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 are really looking at is 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, but 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 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.

Following the frustration and sense of exclusion at the concert, Shadia wrote an open letter to Hillsong United, which was published on an English-speaking website ('Come and See') of blogs that critically reflect on the situation of evangelicals in Israel-Palestine. 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 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 more directly addressed at Western believers (Alexander 2012), try to influence the dominant imaginary of Israel-Palestine by pro-Israel theologies. Her open letter, the website, as well as the material distributed around the conferences 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,<sup>9</sup>

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.

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. This is further evidenced in the fact that, while Shadia's open letter did indeed reach those concerned, 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, there has not been an official statement or apology.<sup>10</sup> Unless Hillsong United openly addresses the differential imaginary 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.

## Conclusion

Coleman's 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 thus be expanded to reveal that the differential vistas are achieved through differential power constellations within global evangelicalism. As shown in this article, 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 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 to the dominant evangelical discourse on Israel.

This case study 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 article 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. Thus, soon, Hillsong will open a church branch in Tel Aviv, which will bear the trade-mark slogan, 'Welcome home!' It is perhaps here that this

slogan acquires its powerful significance – it is a home on Hillsong's terms, and not on the terms of those who are 'local'.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/03/politics/huckabee-west-bank-settlements/>

<sup>2</sup> 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]

<sup>3</sup> Factsheet, <https://hillsong.com/media/> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

<sup>4</sup> Factsheet, <https://hillsong.com/media/> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

<sup>5</sup> The kufiyah is a symbol of Palestinian identity and nationalism.

<sup>6</sup> The main tenets of dispensationalism divide world history into seven 'dispensations', the current one being the last one before Jesus' second coming, for which a 'return' of the Jews to the territory of Israel is a prerequisite.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1332> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

<sup>8</sup> 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].

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.comeandsee.com/view.php?sid=1332> [Accessed 07/08/2017]

<sup>10</sup> 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.anothervoice.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].