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Conflicting Missions? The politics of Evangelical humanitarianism in the Sahrawi and Palestinian protracted refugee situations

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Abstract

This paper analyses the contradictory motivations, actions and implications of a network of American Evangelical organizations which is actively involved in humanitarian and political projects directly affecting two groups of protracted refugees in the Middle East and North Africa: Sahrawis and Palestinians. Following a brief introduction to typologies and key characteristics of 'faith-based' and 'Evangelical' humanitarian organisations, this paper examines how, why and to what effect American Evangelical groups provide relief aid to Sahrawi refugees in their Algerian-based refugee camps, and vocally advocate in favour of the Sahrawi quest for self-determination over the Western Sahara before the US Congress and the United Nations. While this first mode of Evangelical humanitarian and political intervention explicitly invokes a human rights discourse and international legal frameworks, the second case-study underscores the ways in which these same actors effectively render Palestinian refugees invisible, implicitly negating international law and UN resolutions enshrining their right to return and the right to meaningful Palestinian self-determination. Ultimately, the paper addresses the implications of these contradictory Evangelical interventions through reference to international humanitarian principles, interrogating the proposed 'humanitarian,' 'political' and 'religious' dynamics in such initiatives.

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Keywords

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Introduction

American Evangelical actors have long been active across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), both during periods characterised by relative peace and stability, and in contexts of conflict and forced migration. Throughout the 2000s, Evangelical groups have played increasingly visible and controversial roles in relation to the humanitarian crises emerging from 'new' wars, including the invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and the war in/on Iraq (2003).[1] Responding to such 'new' conflicts, these groups have provided various forms of material assistance to displaced individuals, families and communities, whilst engaging in what Olivo Ensor (2003) refers to as 'disaster evangelism' amongst particularly vulnerable populations. Indeed, proselytisation by organisations providing humanitarian assistance in such situations has been vocally criticised by diverse observers (i.e. Christenson, 2003; Cottle, 2003; Sikand, 2003; Thaut, 2009), paralleling broader concerns regarding Evangelical interventions in conflict and displacement situations outside of the MENA region. In addition to vehement critiques by secular groups, Ferris notes that 'the humanitarian work of some Evangelical groups is frequently criticized by traditional faith-based organizations which are committed to respecting the religious beliefs of those whom they assist' (Ferris, 2005:317). Challenges to 'disaster evangelism' often denounce the extent to which proselytisation directly violates international humanitarian principles, including Principle 3 of the Red Cross Code of Conduct, which asserts that 'Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint'. Many have also argued, on a more pragmatic level, that 'the activities of Evangelical groups which combine assistance with a missionary message can have repercussions on all faith-based humanitarian organizations' (Ferris, 2005: 317), leading to increased suspicion and potentially violence towards non-Evangelical Christian agencies (de Cordier, 2009: 620).

In addition to intervening in recent and ongoing conflict situations, many American Evangelical church groups have also been actively involved in humanitarian and political projects involving and directly affecting protracted refugees in the Middle

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1 American Evangelical support for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan must also be noted; indeed according to the 2006 Baylor Institute of Religious Studies Survey, 'Evangelical Protestants (60.3%) are the religious group most likely to approve of the Iraq War, followed by Catholics (46.7%)' (2006:36). US Evangelical actors' role in promoting the end of conflicts in Southern Sudan, for instance, must also be recognized (ie. Gerhardt, 2008).

East and North Africa, including approximately 155,000 Sahrawi and over five million Palestinian refugees who have been displaced for over 35 and 60 years respectively. The core of this paper draws on insights derived from a combination of primary and secondary research to analyse the motivations, actions and implications of Evangelical church interventions in these two protracted refugee situations,[2] moving beyond popular fears that 'disaster evangelism' (Olivo Ensor, 2003) may lead to refugees being 'brainwashed' by powerful proselytizing donors (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). While the paper recognises well-established and well-documented concerns regarding the inherent power imbalances that exist between displaced populations and their aid providers, I argue that the overarching attention given to the impact of Evangelical actors' *proselytising* activities amongst displaced populations on the one hand, and displaced populations' agency in embracing or rejecting such activities and initiatives on the other (ibid and Horstmann, 2011), have left a range of essential questions and dynamics pertaining to the implications of Evangelical interventions affecting refugees *beyond* proselytisation unexplored to date.

Complementing an earlier study of the ways in which Sahrawi refugees' political representatives (the Polisario Front) actively encourage the humanitarian, political and religious engagement of American Evangelical actors both inside and outside of the camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011), the main aim of this comparative study is to critique the intrinsically *political* nature of Evangelical interventions. In particular, it will contrast the ways in which human rights discourses and international legal frameworks are invoked to support 'good Sahrawi refugees' in their quest for self-determination and independence from Moroccan occupation, while these same actors effectively render Palestinian refugees invisible and implicitly negate international law and UN resolutions vis-à-vis the Palestinian right to return and the illegality of Israeli settlements. As such, the paper examines the extent to which Evangelical net-

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2 The Sahrawi case-study draws on insights derived from four field visits to the Sahrawi camps, over 100 interviews with refugees in the Algerian-based camps, Cuba, Syria, South Africa and Spain, over 50 interviews with humanitarians and the observation of American Evangelical interventions in the camps, supplemented by a detailed review of materials publically available online regarding Evangelical activities in the Sahrawi refugee camps and in support of their quest for self-determination at the US Congress and UN Decolonisation Committee. The Palestinian case-study is informed by observations and analyses of humanitarian and solidarity programmes designed to support Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, and a review of materials publically available online vis-a-vis Evangelical humanitarian activities in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

works may oppose international humanitarian principles of neutrality, universality and impartiality *both* in their quests to fulfil their religious aims of proselytisation *and* in broader interventions, which transcend proselytisation and advance broader politico-religious aims. In conclusion, the paper highlights the inconsistencies that are prevalent within Evangelical networks, and the conflicts that Evangelical actors might accentuate within and between refugee groups in the MENA region.

Before turning to the case-studies which provide the foundation for this paper, a brief note is necessary regarding emerging conceptualizations of faith-based organisations in general and Evangelical humanitarian organisations more specifically.

Evangelical Humanitarianism: typologies or overlapping motivations

A faith-based organization (FBO) can be defined as 'any organization that derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith' (Clarke and Jennings, 2008:6). In order to differentiate between the aims and objectives of diverse FBOs, Clarke identifies five main 'functions' that guide different organizations' activities, and proposes the typology outlined in Table 1.

While Clarke's typology assists us in recognizing the diverse aims and modes of operation of organizations broadly motivated by 'faith'[3], in the context of this paper I refer to organisations and networks that simultaneously fall under the category of *faith-based charitable organisations*, which aim to respond to the humanitarian needs of displaced populations, and *faith-based missionary organisations*, which combine the provision of humanitarian support with spreading 'key faith messages beyond the faithful, by actively promoting the faith and seeking converts to it' (Clarke, 2006:835).

Indeed, such cases problematise the classificatory system advanced by Clarke and others (for instance, see Sider and Unruh, 2004), by centralising the difficulties that arise when attempting to discern the primary 'organisational motivation' (singular) of faith-based (and indeed non-faith-based) organisations. Rather than viewing

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3   Lunn defines faith as 'human trust or belief in a transcendent reality' (2009:937-938).

Table 1: Typology of faith-based organisations

TYPE OF FAITH BASED ORGANISATION	Faith-Based **Representative** Organisations or Apex Bodies	Faith-Based **Charitable or Development** Organisations (including Faith-Based **Humanitarian** Organisations)	Faith-Based **Socio-Political** Organisations	Faith-Based **Missionary** Organisations	Faith-Based **Radical, Illegal or Terrorist** Organisations
KEY FUNCTION	'rule on doctrinal matters, govern the faithful and represent them through engagement with the state and other actors'	'mobilise the faithful in support of the poor and other social groups, and which fund or manage programmes which tackle poverty and social exclusion'	'interpret and deploy faith as a political construct, organising and mobilising social groups on the basis of faith identities but in pursuit of broader political objectives or, alternatively, promote faith as a socio-cultural construct, as a means of uniting disparate social groups on the basis of faith-based cultural identities'	'spread key faith messages beyond the faithful, by actively promoting the faith and seeking converts to it, or by supporting and engaging with other faith communities on the basis of key faith principles'	'engage in illegal practices on the basis of faith beliefs or engage in armed struggle or violent acts justified on the grounds of faith'

Source: Derived from Clarke, 2006:840.

organisations as promoting a singular motivation through the separate categorisation system presented by Clarke, it may be helpful to conceptualise these motivations as potentially overlapping in different ways:

Figure 1: Alternative representations of the types of faith-based organisations and an example of different degrees of overlapping motivations for a given FBO
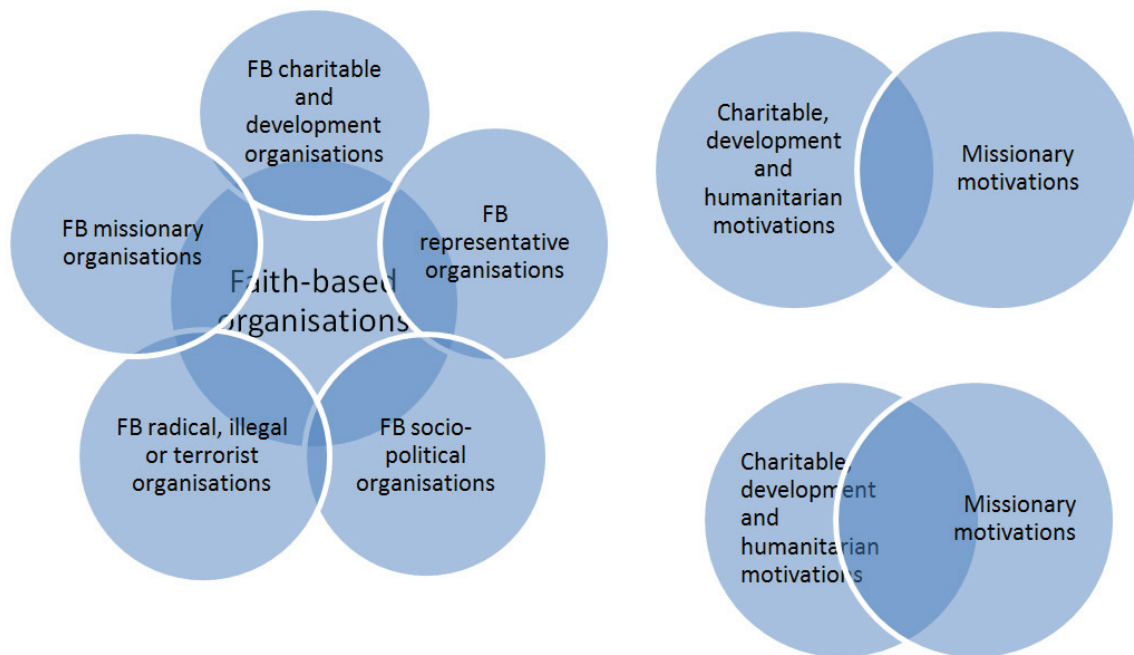
Source: Image on left modified from Clarke, 2006; images on right are author's own elaboration.

Such a depiction allows for the recognition that motivations may be fluid and interpenetrating, with one particular set of motivations taking priority over others at specific points in time and in particular spatio-political and geo-political contexts.

Although Clarke's typology addresses faith-based organisations from all faith traditions engaged in a wide variety of 'functions', Thaut focuses on *Christian* faith-based organisations engaged in *humanitarian* activities, proposing 'three distinct Christian theologies of humanitarian engagement': Accommodative-Humanitarianism, Synthesis-Humanitarianism, and Evangelistic-Humanitarianism (2009:321). In line with the combination of charitable and missionary functions outlined above, Thaut's category of Evangelistic-Humanitarianism is the most appropriate given this paper's focus on American Evangelical groups active in the MENA Region.

In this context, Evangelists can be defined as 'Protestant groups that emphasize the authority of the Bible, salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, personal piety, and the need to share the "Good News" of Jesus Christ with others (i.e., to evangelize)' (Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2006:9).[4] The Baylor Institute's 2005 survey suggests that over a third of Americans (approx. 100 million people) belong to the Evangelical Protestant tradition (ibid:8), and both Clarke (2007) and Thaut (2009) note that American Evangelical development and humanitarian activities have 'expanded exponentially' in the 2000s (Clarke, 2007). By 2004, it is estimated that 'Evangelical organizations accounted for 33% of all relief and development agencies and 48% of the total number of religious humanitarian agencies' (McCleary and Barro, 2004:10, quoted in Thaut, 2009); many of these organisations are active in conflict and displacement contexts around the world, including in the MENA region.

Thaut argues that Evangelistic-Humanitarian groups believe that 'by combining explicit Christian witness in the operations of humanitarianism, the gospel of Christ can bring the spiritual transformation that is at the root of the world's problems' (2009:341), concluding that 'the primary mission of the Evangelistic-Humanitarianism is to meet the needs of and expand the fellowship of Christian believers' (ibid). However, despite asserting that 'the *primary mission* of the Evangelistic-Humanitarianism' relates to proselytisation (emphasis added), the case-studies explored in the following pages further problematise the feasibility of separating 'charitable' and 'missionary' motivations or of identifying an organisation's clear 'primary mission'; ultimately the paper argues that Evangelical humanitarian groups not only promote a '*spiritual* transformation' via conversion (Thaut, op cit), but may also, in specific geopolitical and historical contexts, advocate direct *political* transformations that are simultaneously conceptualised as being at the root of the world's problems, and as the route to the ultimate solution for humanity's problems.

I therefore argue that American Evangelical humanitarian organisations active in the MENA region simultaneously correspond to Clarke's third category of 'faith-based socio-political organizations, which organize and mobilize social groups on

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4   The BISR report indicates that 'a long list of theologically conservative denominations define this tradition, such as Anabaptist, Assemblies of God, Bible Church, Brethren, Christian Church, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Free Methodist, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Mennonite, Pentecostal, Presbyterian Church in America, Seventh-day Adventist, and Southern Baptist' (ibid).

the basis of faith identities but in pursuit of broader political objectives' (2006:840). As such, they may be perceived to embody overlapping motivations including 'charitable', 'missionary', and 'socio-political' objectives which may be difficult if not impossible to separate in either theory or practice.

Figure 2: Possible representations of the tripartite motivational overlap of certain Evangelical humanitarian organisations
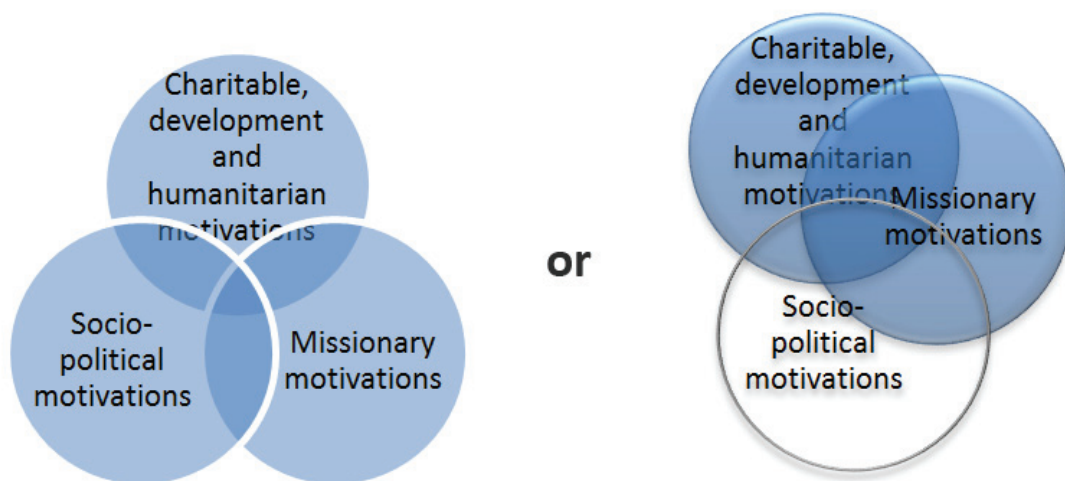
Source: Author's own elaboration.

Importantly, I would also argue that not all of these motivations are equally visible to all actors and observers at all moments of time and in all contexts, with specific motivations coming to the foreground, or being 'footnoted' or relegated to the background, depending on the situation (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, under review). Indeed, the temporal and geographical fluidity of FBOs' motivations has increasingly been recognised by USAID, which since the 2000s no longer bars religious organisations from applying for government funding per se, but rather holds that 'USAID-funded activities must be separated "*by time or space*" from "inherently religious activities"' (Clarke, 2007:82, emphasis added). As noted by Clarke, however, 'commentators fear that such distinctions will be blurred in practice' (ibid), and in the remainder of the paper I will extend this insight vis-à-vis the blurred and overlapping nature of FBOs' activities and motivations to an analysis of Evangelical humanitarian initiatives in the Middle East.

In the following section I explore how, why and to what effect a network of Evangelical humanitarians provides relief aid to Sunni Muslim Sahrawi refugees in their

Algerian-based refugee camps, and vocally advocates in favour of the Sahrawi quest for self-determination over the Western Sahara (a non-self-governing territory commonly referred to as 'Africa's last colony') before the US Congress and the United Nations. I then contrast this mode of Evangelical humanitarian and political intervention, which invokes a human rights discourse and international legal frameworks, with the ways in which these same Evangelical actors implicitly refute international legal frameworks by dismissing Palestinian refugees' right to return and claims pertaining to meaningful Palestinian self-determination, at times effectively negating Palestinian refugees' very existence.

Evangelical/Humanitarian/Political Support for Sahrawi Refugees

Throughout the 2000s, American Evangelical churches have become increasingly active in providing both humanitarian assistance and political support to approximately 155,000 Sahrawi refugees who have been living in protracted refugee camps in south-western Algeria since the mid-1970s. As the Sahrawi refugee situation is perhaps one of the MENA region's least known protracted displacement contexts (while the Palestinian refugee situation is one of the most widely known and recognized around the world), a brief overview of the Sahrawi situation is necessary at this stage in order to contextualize the subsequent analysis of Evangelical interventions with/for Sahrawi refugees.

A brief introduction: 'good' Sahrawi refugees[5]

Whilst almost entirely dependent upon externally provided support, the Sahrawi refugee camps have been managed by the Sahrawi's political representatives, the Polisario Front, since the camps' establishment in 1975 (see Map 1). In February 1976, the Polisario established the camp-based 'Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic' (SADR), the Sahrawi 'state-in-exile', which has been recognized by over 70 non-Western states and is a full member of the African Union (formerly the Organization of African Unity).

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5 The following paragraphs draw upon sections of Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011; for a detailed history of the conflict over the Western Sahara, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2009.

Map 1. UNHCR map of the Western Sahara, indicating the location of the four main Sahrawi refugee camps in south-western Algeria; inset image of the small 27 February Refugee Camp
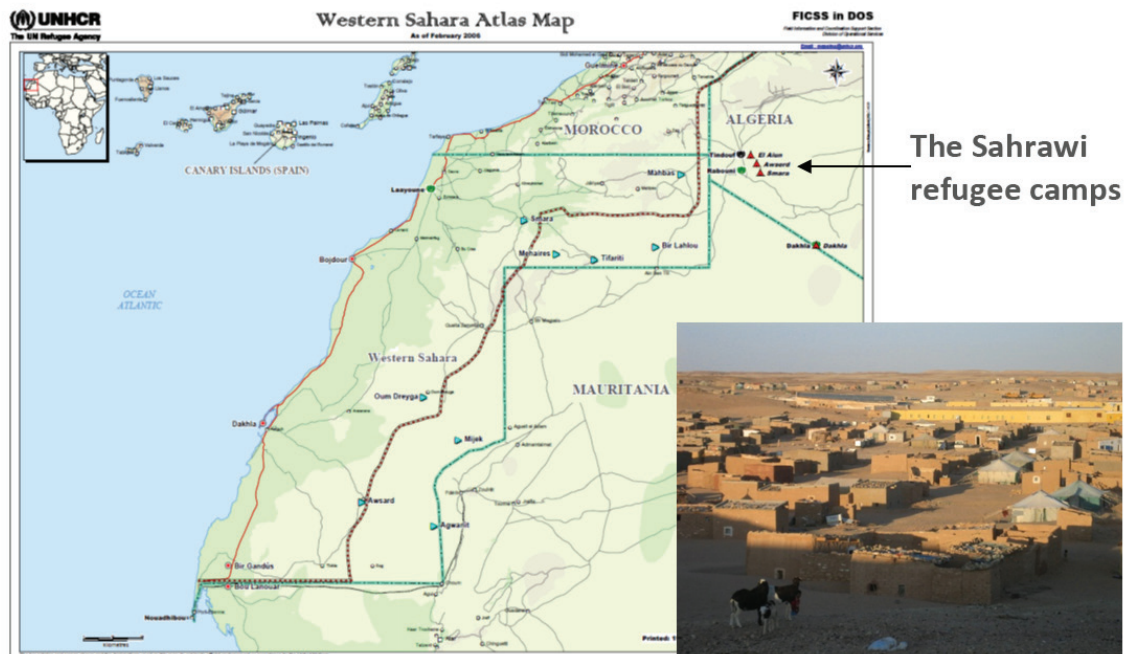
Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Western Sahara Atlas Map*, 19 June 2006, available at: **http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46398b1b2.html** (last accessed 15 April 2012); author's own photograph of the 27 February Refugee Camp (April 2007).

The Polisario/SADR is 'the only authority with which camp residents have regular contact' (Human Rights Watch, 2008:9), and it has developed its own constitution, camp-based ministries, police force (and prisons), army and parallel 'state' and religious legal systems, the latter implementing a Maliki interpretation of Islam.

With Islam identified in the Sahrawi Constitution as the explicit fundamental source of the Sahrawi legal system (Art. 2 and Art. 3 of the 2003 and 1976 SADR Constitution), and the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs having joint functions, the Sahrawi 'state', law and religion are intimately interconnected in the camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). However, despite these interconnections, the Sahrawi refugee camps have habitually been heralded by Western observers as 'ideal' spaces and locales of 'best practice' through explicit reference to the 'secular' and 'democratic' nature of the camps (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, and 2013a). Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that during encounters with secular and Christian audiences originating from European countries, the Polisario mobilizes two inter-

secting strategies: firstly, a tendency to 'silence' and render invisible the multiple, and at times contested, roles of Islam in the camps; secondly, when religion *is* mentioned, the Polisario systematically projects an image of 'secular Sahrawi Islam' that is resolutely different from any Other Islam (2010a, 2013a). The Sahrawi camps therefore emerge as stages from which particular discourses and political campaigns are projected internationally to convince non-Sahrawi audiences of the justifiability and necessity of their support for the Sahrawi 'quest' for self-determination (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009). Simultaneously, they emerge as microcosms in which contemporary and shifting debates and dilemmas surrounding the 'acceptable' face of Islam and the desirability of inter-faith relations are enacted (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011 and 2013a).

As such, public declarations made by and on behalf of the Sahrawi people apropos religion (through the tropes of 'secularism' and 'religious tolerance,' for instance) must therefore be viewed not only in relation to the geo-political (in)security context and the West's intensified rejection of Islam, but also more localized concerns about an 'Islamically dominated North Africa', 'Islamic fundamentalism' in the Saharan desert and Maghreb (see Keenan, 2004; Zoubir, 2002), and the purported emergence of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (see Darbouche, 2007:2; del Pino, 2003). Directly opposed to these characterizations of the region as inherently imbued with threats and danger, the Polisario and its supporters directly present the Sahrawi as fulfilling a range of non-economic priorities associated with contemporary notions of 'good governance' ('peaceful', 'secular', 'tolerant', and 'democratic'), and therefore as a prototypical example to be followed by other actors in the international arena (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009, 2010b). The Polisario have therefore successfully projected the Sahrawi camps as 'ideal' spaces inhabited by 'good' refugees, in part by reflecting mainstream European and North American normative preferences for the development of a 'good' and 'progressive' Islam. While Soares and Osella note that 'insufficient attention is devoted to how the state intervenes to promote, co-opt, thwart, or isolate various forms of Islam and ("good" or "bad") Muslims' (2009:10-11), this article builds upon an earlier study (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011) to present insights into the ways in which non-state actors such as Evangelical humanitarians have promoted a particular image of the Sahrawi as 'good' refugees worthy of diverse forms of assistance and support.

Evangelical interventions in the Sahrawi refugee camps

In addition to significant aid provided to the desert-based Sahrawi refugee camps by international agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme, and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department, different forms of assistance have been channelled through and delivered by Evangelical organizations of all sizes. These include major international Christian Evangelical organizations such as Samaritan's Purse[6] and networks drawing together local level American Evangelical congregations including Christ the Rock Community Church, Rock Fish Church, Mars Hill Bible Church[7] and the Landing Community Church.

With the approval and active invitation of the Polisario Front (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011), this network of churches and associated Evangelical organizations such as Teach the Children International have coordinated the provision 'of millions of dollars of humanitarian aid for the Sahrawi refugees,'[8] providing Sahrawi refugees with humanitarian aid packages which are often enveloped in Evangelical imagery and translated extracts from the Gospel. Alongside shipping humanitarian containers to the desert-based camps, aid packages are also personally delivered by church members during regular visits to the camps to participate in bilingual 'prayer services', 'inter-faith dialogues', and 'worship concerts' organized by American Evangelical actors (Kustusch, 2009). It is worth noting the limited degree of direct interaction that exists between American visitors and Sahrawi refugees *per se* during such events: hence, during the 2008 'inter-faith dialogues' organized by Christ the Rock, in order '*to avoid potential tension* [with the broader refugee population], only a few

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6 On assistance and programmes run by and in association with Samaritan's Purse in the Sahrawi context, see **http://www.defenseforum.org/news/article15.html** (last accessed 15 April, 2012), **http://operacionninodelanavidad.org/index.php?option=com_content&view =article&id=23&Itemid=28** (last accessed 15 October 2011). Thaut identifies Samaritan's Purse as a quintessential Evangelist-Humanitarian organization, alongside World Vision (2009:331); it reportedly held total assets valued at over $244,100,000 in 2010 (Samaritan's Purse, 2010).

7 Members of Mars Hill Bible Church participate in operations which are often associated with Samaritan's Purse (i.e. Operation Christmas Child, see **http://www.marshill. org/pdf/students/service_Operation_Christmas_Samaritans_Purse.pdf** – (last accessed 15 April, 2012), while others are separate from such international Evangelical agencies (such as organising the Sahara Marathon).

8 See **http://www.arso.org/Abdelaz260304.htm** (last accessed 15 April, 2012). Representatives from Teach the Children International have more recently expressed concerns vis-a-vis conditions in the camps and the interception of humanitarian aid destined to the camps.

political leaders from the Polisario Front (the independence movement of the Sah-rawi people), local religious leaders and volunteers from Christ the Rock were invited' (ibid, my emphasis). Equally, a two-hour 'worship concert' and barbeque organized by American Evangelists in 2002 was held on the outskirts of the refugee camps, attended solely by key political leaders (including the Sahrawi President, Moham-med Abdelaziz), members of the Polisario's Youth Union (UJSARIO), and Span-ish NGO staff who had been invited to attend '*a barbeque*' (personal observations, March 2002). While the Spanish audience members were visibly angered by the pros-elytizing content of the 'worship concert', denouncing the event in Spanish amongst themselves, this scepticism was not shared by the UJSARIO and Polisario represent-atives who simultaneously welcomed and thanked the American Evangelists through an English-Hassaniya on-stage translator, whilst informally indicating directly to the Spaniards in the 'wings' of the performance that they were grateful for the humani-tarian and political support they received from the Evangelists, but that attempts to spread the Gospel to the Sahrawis would never succeed and were therefore insig-nificant in that regard. In this context, the Polisario attempted to diffuse the anger and frustration felt by their Spanish supporters towards the American Evangelists, benefitting from the linguistic barriers between these groups which enabled multiple performances to take place in the same spatial context. Equally, through a range of measures including selective invitations, and physically separating Evangelical events from the general refugee population, Polisario has ensured that most refugees have not directly experienced or witnessed these prayer-related activities (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). The underlying rationale for maintaining this separation is alluded to in Christ the Rock's recognition that selective invitations were necessary 'to avoid potential tension' (op cit) with the refugee population.[9]

In contrast, a variety of initiatives have entailed a great degree of contact between American Evangelical actors and Sahrawi refugees, including a range of programmes which focus specifically on Sahrawi children: indeed, one member of Christ the Rock Church is reportedly 'affectionately known as the Mother of the Sahrawis for her work on behalf of their children.'[10] While *Es-Salam*[11] English language school was

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9 This 'tension' is explored in greater detail in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2011). Although it is beyond the scope of this article to address the ways in which different Sahrawi refugees perceive Evangelical interventions in the camps, on the heterogeneity of Sahrawi refugees' religious identity and practice see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013a).

10 See **http://www.defenseforum.org/news/article15.html** (last accessed 15 April, 2012).

11 *Salam* means 'peace' in Arabic.

established by missionaries associated with Christ the Rock Church in 2004 in order to provide free English lessons to Sahrawis aged over 17, a range of activities and services are also organized within the camps through the Sahrawi Children's Program and the Left Behind Project. Outside of the camps, members of Christ the Rock and other churches have hosted approximately 20 Sahrawi children every summer since 1999, with several hundred Sahrawi refugee children having travelled to the United States since the programme's inception. During the children's visits to the US, these and other churches organize political demonstrations in support of the Sahrawi's quest for self-determination, in addition to directly advocating for the Sahrawi 'cause' through national campaigns including Be Their Voice (2007) and Not Forgotten International, and prominently through statements and oral interventions presented before the US Congress and the United Nations' Decolonisation Committee.

Broadly speaking, the activities run by these and other Evangelical organizations in support of Sahrawi refugees can thus variously be classified as 'humanitarian' in nature (i.e. providing aid to Sahrawi refugees), 'prayer-related' (i.e. organizing worship concerts and interfaith dialogues), and directly 'political' (i.e. undertaking lobbying and advocacy work in the international arena). Importantly, I would argue that the visibility of these diverse dimensions or motivations varies according to the location of the Evangelical actors themselves, and of diverse observers (i.e. inside or outside of the refugee camps); such overlapping will vary significantly, with two example scenarios represented as follows:

Figure 3: Possible representations of intersecting motivations viewed from inside the camps (left) and outside the camps (right)
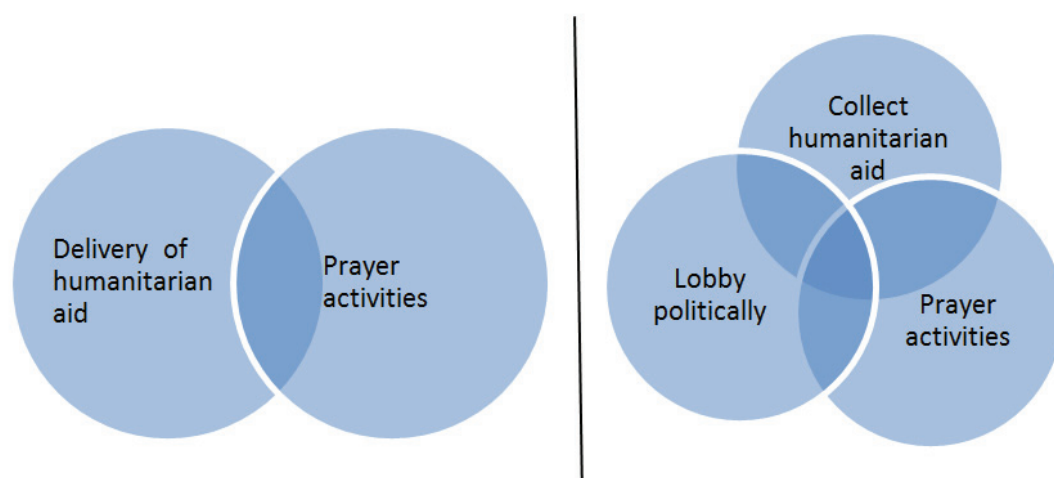
Source: Author's own elaboration.

As I will now discuss, the humanitarian, religious and political dimensions are deeply inter-related, including through the invocation of human rights and international legal terminology throughout all modes of (inter)action with diverse Evangelical and non-Evangelical audiences.

Humanitarianism and Prayer as Politics by Other Means?

Following almost a decade of fact-finding missions to the Sahrawi refugee camps organised by the (Republican) Defence Forum Foundation 'to give participants the opportunity to learn first-hard [sic.] about the on-going struggle of the Sahrawi people, whose country, Western Sahara, is the only African nation that has not yet been de-colonized,'[12] in 2002 high-profile pro-Sahrawi Christian activist Suzanne Scholte of the (Republican) Defence Forum Foundation, Christian Solidarity Worldwide-USA and the US-Western Sahara Foundation, and Dan Stanley of Manna Church

> helped organize a delegation of Christians from all over the United States to visit the camps and have a prayer service *with and for the Sahrawi people and for the liberation of their homeland.* It was the first Christian prayer service held in the camps and included Christians from the USA, Spain and Muslims from Algeria and the Western Sahara.[13]

In addition to those visiting the camps holding Christian prayer services 'for the Sahrawi people and *for the liberation of their homeland*,' members of the broader Evangelical network in the US are invited through a range of online and direct interventions to support the Sahrawi by praying 'for the peaceful return to their homeland.'[14]

In this way, while prayer activities and Evangelical initiatives in the camps (such as distributing the Gospel in translated version) are conceptualised by American Evangelists as a means to encourage the conversion of Sahrawis from Islam to Christianity, prayer is also directly presented by these Evangelists as a means to promote 'the liberation' of the Western Sahara, which is identified as the Sahrawi's rightful 'homeland.' Importantly, such accounts implicitly or explicitly assert that Sahrawi refugees have an intrinsic moral and legal right to return to 'their homeland', which is, pro-Sahrawi Evangelists explain, under illegal, brutal, and totalitarian Moroccan 'occupation.'[15]

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12 http://www.defenseforum.org/news/article14.html (last accessed 15 October 2011).

13 See http://defenseforum.org/latestnews/article11.html and http://www.defenseforum.org/news/article15.html – last accessed 05/09/2010, emphasis added (both last accessed 15 October 2011).

14 http://www.christtherock.org/saharadesert (last accessed 15 April, 2012).

15 Notably, the United Nations does not use the term 'occupation' to refer to the Moroccan system of governance in the Western Sahara.

Indeed, Evangelists' prayer-activities and accompanying accounts of conditions in the camps are regularly supplemented by references to conditions in the Sahrawi homeland, the Western Sahara, which are deeply imbued with terminology derived from human rights discourse. For instance, prospective missionaries preparing to travel to the refugee camps for the first time provide clear historical overviews to their congregations, which are also intrinsically political in nature:

> The 160,000 inhabitants of this refugee camp are Saharawi people forced out of their homeland of Western Sahara 34 years ago. Once a colony of Spain and now occupied by Morocco, Western Sahara is waiting for a UN-supervised referendum so the people can choose independence or integration with Morocco. They are hoping for their right to self-determination. They have been waiting since 1976… Part of what we do as a team from all over the US is to advocate for the Saharawi people in their plight; to help tell their story.[16]

Such accounts refer to the occupation of Sahrawi's homeland (the non-self-governing territory of the Western Sahara) by Morocco, the referendum for Sahrawi self-determination, which the United Nations has been mandated to hold in line with international legal principles (i.e. UN Res 1541/1963, ICJ, 1975, UN Res. 690/1991), and the understanding that Sahrawi refugees 'are hoping for their right to self-determination'. It is their right to return to their homeland and determine their own future (self-determination), which is identified as the Sahrawi's plight.

Historical details and references to international legal principles are transmitted to 'new' missionaries and other members of faith-based networks by long-standing Evangelical supporters from the abovementioned Evangelical churches and associated organisations who have visited the camps on dozens of occasions, and also vocally advocate for the Sahrawi in international arenas such as the US Congress and the UN Decolonization Committee (i.e. UN General Assembly, 2009). Indeed, Polisario's proven determination to activate Evangelist-Humanitarians' presence and activism within the Sahrawi refugee camps is arguably, at least in part, also as a result of these organisations' vehement dedication and efficiency to so prominently represent and lobby on behalf of 'the Sahrawi people'.[17]

For instance, in her representation to the UN Decolonization Committee in 2008, a representative from Christ the Rock Community Church, describes 'the human

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16 **http://www.holyfaithchurchsf.org/Faithway/2009.Faithway.11.pdf** (last accessed 15 April, 2012).

17 American Christian organisations are increasingly recognised to be amongst the most powerful political lobbyists on foreign policy issues in the US (i.e. Gerhardt, 2008).

tragedy' of 'the harsh desert life of the camps', which are the birthplace of refugee children who have 'only the memories of others to hold onto for the hope of returning to their homeland' (cited in UNGA/SPD/397, 2008). She subsequently denounced conditions in the Western Sahara itself, in which Sahrawi are depicted as living 'with an 'oppressive blanket of fear', owing to the [Moroccan] occupying forces' (ibid). Referring to the international community's failure to hold the mandated UN referendum, her intervention also 'drew attention to [the Sahrawi's] lack of freedom to self-govern and to "be who they are"' stressing that they '[possess] their own unique language, culture, history and heritage' (ibid). Noting that Sahrawi refugees in the camps and in the Western Sahara 'want to simply have their vote', the Sahrawi are portrayed as an intrinsically democratic people with a combined moral, political and legal right to return to 'their homeland' (ibid).

The qualities that are centralised in such accounts are those which are widely circulated by American Evangelists to justify humanitarian and political support for the Sahrawi as a people and not only as a 'victim diaspora' (Cohen, 1997) but as 'good refugees' (see above and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011) attempting to return to their rightful homeland:

> The issue is a classic struggle between democratic values [ie. held by the Sahrawi] and totalitarianism [ie. held by the Moroccan state]. The Sahrawis have adopted a constitution modeled after the U.S. constitution, they renounce all forms of terrorism and have openly embraced democratic values including individual rights, freedom of religion, and equality of women.[18]

Importantly, Church-led campaigns have both reached and subsequently been supported by Evangelical members of the US Congress, including Oklahoma's Republican Senator James Inhofe who has visited the Sahrawi refugee camps and asserted in 2009 that:

> I strongly support the independence movement of the Saharawi people of Western Sahara, which demands the fulfillment of a 1991 United Nations resolution calling for a referendum on self-determination in the Western Sahara. The Saharans [sic] are not refugees because they enjoy it; they are refugees because their homeland has been taken from them and they believe that, with help, they will return to their homeland; but only if they are granted the right to self-determination.[19]

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18 **http://www.defenseforum.org/news/article14.html** (last accessed 15 October 2011).
19 **http://inhofe.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressRoom.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=6fd9f6d8-802a-23ad-441e-a89a99d06673** (last accessed 15 April 2012).

Evangelical civilians' and politicians' motivations to develop intersecting humanitarian, political and religious interventions are therefore underpinned by a declared commitment to supporting a democratic people who are struggling for their right to self-government and their right to 'be who they are', whilst denouncing the 'oppressive blanket of fear' which Sahrawi live under in the Western Sahara 'owing to the occupying [Moroccan] forces' (op cit).

At the same time, however, it is also worth noting the extent to which other factors may have at least partly motivated a desire to intervene in the context of the Western Saharan conflict. Hence, as demonstrated in this extract from an Evangelical webpage, certain groups identify that 'Current Needs' include the following: '[the m]ain need is for the stabilisation of the political situation *so that easier access may be gained for the placement of long-term* [Evangelical] workers in Western Sahara'[20] In turn, members of the networks are asked in the 'Prayer Requests' section to 'please pray…[t]hat the upheaval of their society *may cause a spiritual hunger*….'[21] In this organization's view, prayer may offer a means either to ensure that the 'upheaval of their society may cause a spiritual hunger', which would thereby maximize what the organization already classifies as a 'considerable [spiritual] openness among the Sahrawi to change due to the political unrest' in the Western Sahara, or for the political context to be 'stabilized' in order to facilitate long-term missionaries' work amongst the Sahrawi in the territory. The power of prayer in this context is intimately related to promoting particular political outcomes, which are in turn directly correlated with providing the means to fulfil a, if not *the*, 'primary mission' (to quote Thaut, 2009) of expanding 'the fellowship of Christian believers'.

Prayer in both of these scenarios can be seen as 'politics by other means' and as a means for 'spiritual humanitarianism', and vice-versa, with the provision of both political and humanitarian support potentially enhancing opportunities for evangelism in the refugee camps and in both the 'occupied' and/or a future, independent Western Sahara.

Returning to the network of initiatives run by Evangelical groups such as Christ the Rock, a question which emerges from this brief overview is whether these interventions are effectively 'humanitarian' in nature, or whether their clear 'political' support for self-determination ultimately undermines claims to the term 'humanitarian'.

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20 **http://www.gosahara.org/demographics/people-groups/saharawi/**, emphasis added (last accessed 15 October 2011).

21 **http://www.gosahara.org/demographics/people-groups/saharawi/**, emphasis added (last accessed 15 October 2011).

Being clearly positioned in favour of the Sahrawi plight for self-determination, and against Moroccan 'occupation' and 'oppressive blanket of fear', these activities and campaigns are neither neutral nor impartial, and yet it could potentially be argued that these interventions uphold international human rights norms and are in line with international rulings such as that of the International Court of Justice (1975) and numerous United Nations Resolutions. Despite this correspondence between political action and legal frameworks in the context of the protracted Sahrawi refugee situation, which could potentially be mobilised to justify the intersection of political and humanitarian interventions, I will now explore a second Middle Eastern case-study, which illustrates the extent to which these same organisations may prioritise political and religious agendas that are neither 'in favour' of refugees' humanitarian needs or human rights, nor in line with international legal norms and UN resolutions.

Politico-Religious-Humanitarian Interventions in Israel and the Invisibility of Palestinian Refugees[22]

Despite strongly supporting the right of Sahrawi refugees to return to their homeland in line with international resolutions and mandates to hold a referendum for self-determination, and simultaneously challenging the oppressive occupation of the Western Sahara by the Moroccan state, an apparent contradiction emerges in numerous Evangelical humanitarian initiatives affecting Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and Israel. In essence, as explored below, the actions of many such groups often implicitly dismiss Palestinian refugees' right to return and claims pertaining to meaningful Palestinian self-determination, including through supporting illegal Israeli settlements occupying land adjacent to/in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.[23]


22 For an historical overview of the Israel/Palestine conflict, see Pappé (2004), for contemporary reports of human rights conditions see Amnesty International's reports available from **http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/israel-occupied-palestinian-territories** (last accessed 15 April, 2012).

23 On the illegality of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land, see OCHA (2007 and 2011) and below.

Map 2: UNRWA map of operations in support of Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank
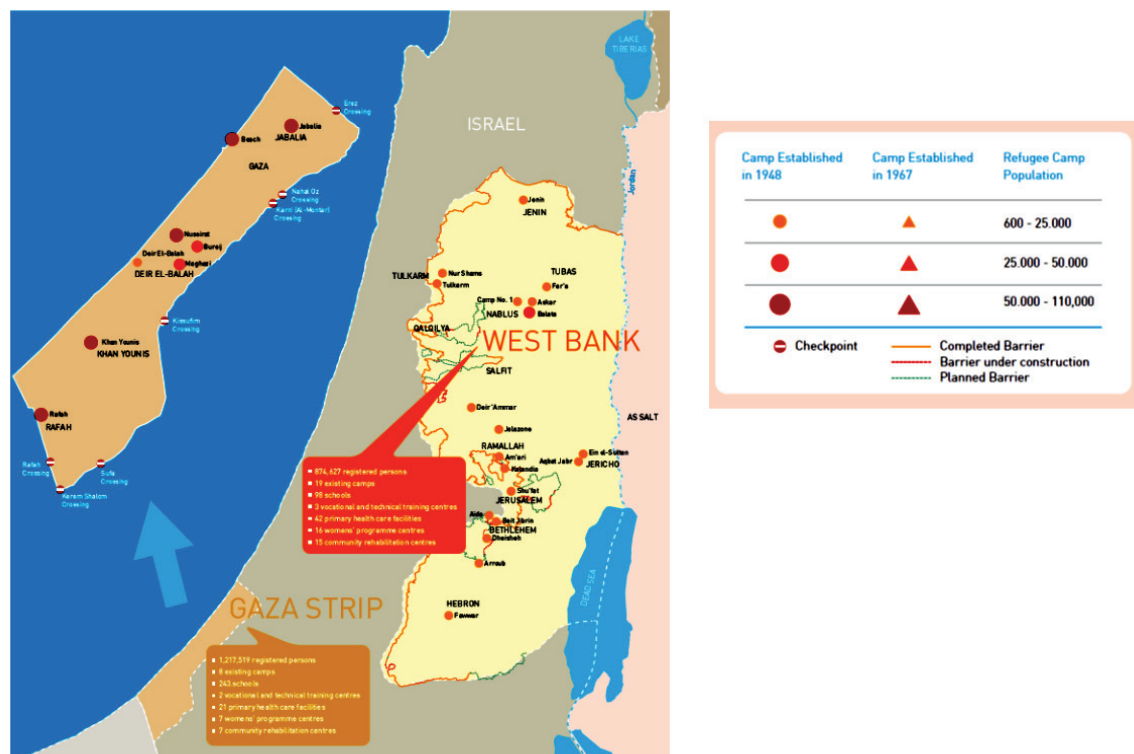
Source: Derived from United Nations Relief and Works Agency, *UNRWA Fields of Operation Map, January 2012*, available at **http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20120317153744.pdf** (last accessed 24 April, 2012)

It is essential, at the outset, to stress that the discussion below does not intend to homogenise political or religious opinions amongst Evangelists as individuals or groups regarding Palestinian refugees and Israel.[24] Whilst recognizing the diversity that exists both within and between Evangelical congregations and networks vis-a-vis Palestine/Israel and Palestinians, and the extent to which many Christian Evangelical and non-Evangelical congregations support Palestinian refugees in numerous humanitarian and political ways, the following discussion develops around a set of initiatives designed by key churches and organisations active in both the Sahrawi refugee camps and in Israel/Palestine. I complement this overview with insights derived

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24 It is also pertinent to stress that the analysis below is framed in line with international human rights frameworks and diverse United Nations Resolutions passed by the General Assembly and Security Council vis-à-vis the Palestinian question.

from broader studies of the politics of Evangelical humanitarian visits to Israel and analyses of the politico-religious motivations of Evangelical interventions there.

Three key intersecting modes of Evangelical intervention enacted by groups which are also active in the Sahrawi refugee camps are briefly explored (humanitarian support to children and adults, Evangelical visits and prayer activities, and political lobbying), before turning to the overlapping and at times contradictory humanitarian, Evangelical, and political motivations underpinning the development and implementation of these and other programmes.

Evangelical missions in Israel: praying for humanitarian, spiritual or political transformations?

Just as Evangelical actors provide humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees in their desert-based camps, so too do many of these same groups implement a range of programmes in Israel. For instance, Samaritan's Purse, which has provided significant aid to the Sahrawi refugee camps has also established programmes 'amid the violent conflict in the Middle East…' to bring 'God's comfort to the people of Israel… helping provide food and other aid to thousands of the most vulnerable victims – women, children, the sick, and the elderly'.[25] Since 2006, their projects have provided food and other emergency aid to the inhabitants of locations including 'Kiryat Shmona in the northeast, Nahariya on the Mediterranean coast, and Carmiel in central Galilee'.[26] In turn, Teach the Children International, which has coordinated Samaritan's Purse's humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees, had first developed humanitarian projects in Israel before establishing its projects in support of the Sahrawi. Teach the Children International reportedly prioritises 'working with children who are oppressed by governments, abusers, war, famine, and poverty',[27] asserting that it 'is committed to providing children with a place to go where they can be children, have a childhood and grow up with good memories of play times with friends'. As such, its website explains that TCI's '*first* playground was in Israel' (emphasis added), announcing that in the 1990s, 'TCI built a new playground in a safe place for the [Israeli] children to play'.[28]

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25 See **http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/articles/crisis_in_the_middle_east/** and **http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/articles/bringing_gods_comfort_to_the_people_of_israel/** (both last accessed 15 October, 2011).

26 **http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/articles/bringing_gods_comfort_to_the_people_of_israel** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).

27 **http://d17746.u24.diverge.com/meet-nancy** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).

28 **http://teachthechildreninternational.com/playgrounds/playgrounds-for-israel** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).

Also paralleling the Sahrawi context, such initiatives are often developed and imple-
mented during humanitarian visits by Evangelical groups. Christ the Rock Commu-
nity Church – which has established the *Es-Salam* English School, a new community
centre, and desert gardens in the Sahrawi refugee camps – organizes regular visits to
Israel, with their website outlining their programmes there. Actively encouraging its
congregation to visit Israel, CTR's webpage refers to a 'special friendship' which has
developed since 1996 between CTR and 'the little community of Alfey-Menashe',
described by CTR as a 'lovely town in the hills of Biblical Samaria'.[29] Since 1996,
CTR has 'helped [the community of Alfey-Menashe] to establish a youth activity
center, planted trees on a barren hilltop, and provided children's books to the Eng-
lish classes of their elementary school'.[30] The website continues by noting that 'Each
time a CTR group visits Israel, we make a visit to our friends in Alfey-Menashe,
where we are treated to Israeli music, shared meals and overnight stays in the homes
of people in the town'. In addition to their friends' welcoming attitude paralleling
that of the Sahrawi families with whom members of CTR stay during their visits to
the Sahrawi refugee camps, the community of Alfey-Menashe has, like the Sahrawi,
also supported CTR's prayer activities. While inter-faith dialogues, prayer sessions
and worship concerts are jointly organized by CTR and the Polisario Front in the
Sahrawi camps, Alfey-Menashe has reciprocated CTR's support in numerous ways,
including by 'commission[ing] a beautiful stained glass window which was given to
our church's prayer room when we moved into our new church building'.[31]

These and other collective initiatives are supported by Evangelical Senators,
including James Inhofe who is quoted above with reference to his strong support
for the Sahrawi independence movement and Sahrawi refugees' quest to return to
their homeland through their right to self-determination enshrined in UN resolu-
tions and international legal principles. However, while noting that the Sahrawi are
not refugees 'because they want to be', but rather 'because their homeland has been
taken from them and they believe that, with help, they will return to their homeland'
(Inhofe, 2009:n.p.), the help and political support offered by Senator Inhofe to Sah-
rawi refugees is not paralleled in his interventions vis-à-vis Palestine/Israel, which
include no references to the causes of Palestinian protracted refugeedom and their
expropriation from their homeland, nor to Palestinians' right to return as enshrined

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29 **http://www.christtherock.org/israel** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).
30 **http://www.christtherock.org/israel** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).
31 **http://www.christtherock.org/israel** (last accessed 15 October, 2011).

in UN Resolutions 194 and 3236.[32] Indeed, in a statement before the US Senate in 2002, Inhofe presented 'seven reasons why Israel is entitled to the land' encompassing Gaza and the West Bank (Inhofe, 2002), 'through prophetic and historically based territorial rights to these areas' (Sturm, 2011:n.p.), concluding that 'Hebron is in the West Bank. It is at this place where God appeared to Abram and said, "I am giving you this land" -- the West Bank. This is not a political battle at all. It is a contest over whether or not the word of God is true' (Inhofe, 2002:n.p.).

Despite Inhofe's dismissal of political contestation and his centralization of religious imperatives, however, the humanitarian programmes run by the Sahrawi's Evangelical supporters in Israel have clear intersecting political *and* religious motivations, which reflect the ways in which particular groups of Evangelical humanitarians not only proselytize in order to achieve a 'spiritual transformation that is at the root of the world's problems' (Thaut, 2009, op cit), but may also advocate for direct *political* transformations, which are conceptualised as the route to the ultimate, divine solution.

It is first necessary to note that a number of the villages and towns prioritized for support by CTR, Samaritan's Purse and Teach the Children International, including Alfey-Menashe[33] and Karmiel[34] (both in the West Bank) are considered to be Israeli settlements,[35] which are in breach of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 46 of the Hague Convention,[36] and UN Security Council Resolution 465/1980 (also see the 2004 ruling of the International Court of Justice).[37] Interestingly, CTR's refer-

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32 Art. 11 of UN Res. 194 (1948) '*Resolves* that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible'. It then '*Instructs* the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, though him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations'.

33 See OCHA (2007:15).

34 See ICRC (2010) and OCHA (2011).

35 While TCI does not name the location of this playground, the website refers to the location as a 'settlement'.

36 The Geneva Conventions and the Hague Convention have become part of international customary law.

37 The ICJ notes that 'since 1977, Israel has conducted a policy and developed practices involving the establishment of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, contrary

ence to visiting Alfey-Menashe in Biblical Samaria (West Bank) also resonates with research conducted by Belhassen and Almeida-Santos with American Evangelical groups before and during their visits Israel. During a pre-visit briefing,

> the speaker showed the audience a map of Israel without making any reference to the Palestinian authority. She said that they would be visiting Samaria and Judah—controversial regions within the Israeli society and among the international community. In short, these territories became part of Israel after the Six-Day War of 1967, and they are known as the occupied territories. Nowadays, there are some Israelis who do not travel to these areas for political and/or security reasons. It was, therefore, quite surprising that the speaker did not mention these problematic aspects (i.e., security, political) in travelling to these areas.
>
> Belhassen and Almeida-Santos, 2006: 437

In line with Belhassen and Almeida-Santos' research vis-à-vis the politics of Evangelical tourism to Israel, the information provided by Christ the Rock encouraging its congregation to join a forthcoming visit to Israel fails to recognize that the area to be visited is a settlement that is considered to be illegal under international law, centralizing the religious significance of the visit whilst erasing the political 'controversies' surrounding the settlements, and rendering Palestinian refugees entirely invisible in such accounts.[38] Indeed, the contemporary invisibility of Palestinians in such accounts presented by Evangelical actors offers a continuity with the broader

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to the terms of Article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention which provides: "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." The Security Council has taken the view that such policy and practices "have no legal validity" and constitute a " flagrant violation" of the Convention. The Court concludes that the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (including East Jerusalem) have been established in breach of international law' (ICJ, 2004: 10).

38 In effect, in these organisations' materials no reference is made to needs or rights of Palestinian children, who are, for instance, entirely invisible from the TCI account of vulnerable children deserving of international humanitarian support. In turn, Palestinians are solely present as violent actors in Samaritan's Purse's website, and are entirely absent from Christ the Rock's webpage or account of its visits to Israel. See Massad's 2011 article which addresses the invisibility and/or demonizing of Palestinian children in international political and media accounts, guided by the question 'Are Palestinian children less worthy?' In contrast with the depiction of the Sahrawi as 'good refugees', Palestinians are variously *repress-ented* as 'a-refugees' or as 'bad refugees' who are not worthy of humanitarian or political support (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013b). Further research is required to establish the extent to which Palestinians (including Sunnis, Shiites, Christians and Druze) have been approached by Evangelists across their hosting countries in the MENA region, and how they have experienced and negotiated such interactions.

erasure of Palestinians from historical accounts of Palestine, with Inhofe arguing, vis-à-vis the early-1900s, that the 'Palestinian nation' 'did not exist. It was not there. Palestinians were not there. Palestine was a region named by the Romans, but at that time it was under the control of Turkey, and there was no large mass of people there because the land would not support them' (Inhofe, 2002:n.p.). Inhofe's depiction of Palestine throughout the 1800s and 1900s as an empty territory with no inhabitants who could claim it as their own, underpins the broader political assertion that Palestine was 'a land without a people for a people without a land' (also referred to as the *terra nullis* hypothesis). The continuity of this discourse in the erasure or footnoting of contemporary Palestinian refugee populations in turn clearly negates Palestinian refugees' right to liberate and 'return to their homeland' by refusing to acknowledge Palestine *as* Palestinians' rightful homeland, or Palestinians as having the right to 'be who they are' and to fulfil their right to self-determination. Such accounts directly contradict the ways in which these same Evangelical humanitarians invoke human rights and politico-moral rights discourses to support Sahrawi refugees in their quest to return to their Western Saharan homeland.

Evangelical visits to Israel therefore transcend both a humanitarian and a prose-lytizing-qua-religious agenda, and can be understood as relating to combined politico-religious motivations (also see Belhassen and Almeida-Santos, 2006; Gallaher, 2010; and Sturm, 2011). Indeed, we may extend Belhassen and Almeida-Santos' argument that 'tourism is used by Evangelical pilgrims to promote their ideology in Israel', to argue that humanitarian visits are used by Evangelical actors to promote their religio-political ideology. While the combination of evangelical, humanitarian, and political motivations in the case of interventions with and for the Sahrawi can be identified as supporting 'good', 'democratic', and 'freedom-loving' refugees whilst facilitating attempts to bring the Good News to Sahrawis in the refugee camps and in their occupied homeland (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011), initiatives pertaining to Israel are arguably strongly guided by 'the prophetic place of Israel in dispensational eschatology' (Gallaher, 2010:213). As such, a key politico-religious 'premise' guiding many Evangelists' activities in Israel/Palestine 'is that the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral land is an essential stage before the second return of Christ and the beginning of the Messianic age' (Belhassen and Almeida Santos, 2006:432). Since 'this ideology can be summarized as a wish to support Israel to bring about the second arrival of Jesus' (ibid:436), utilizing political transformation is a means of reaching their ultimate religious 'mission', which far transcends what Thaut identifies as Evangelist-Humanitarians' 'primary aim' of proselytism per se.

In conclusion, the belief 'that territorial claims to the land by any other group [i.e. Palestinians] are against God's will,' means that many 'Evangelical leaders also tend to be unsympathetic to the Palestinian people who lost their homes and land when the state of Israel was created (Cimino, 2005; Weber, 2004)' (Gallaher, 2010:213).[39] Rather, many Evangelical groups and individuals such as Inhofe consider 'the acquisition of Gaza as a prophetic inevitability' (Sturm, 2011:n.d), despite such forms of occupation being deemed illegal by the international community, and directly contradicting their national and international lobbying and advocacy in support of Sahrawi refugees' right to self-determination in line with UN resolutions and international legal principles.

Conclusion: Conflicting Missions?

By virtue of their expansive mission to actively promote and seek converts to their faith (Clarke, 2006:840), Evangelical groups form a part of transnational religious networks which mobilise a multi-ethnic membership base across the global north and south. Beyond proselytisation, Evangelical interventions in 'new wars' and in protracted refugee situations in the Middle East and North Africa also embody a form of politico-religious internationalism which, critically, is formed by overlapping, and often contradictory, political, humanitarian and religious motivations, actions, and implications. By comparing the initiatives of a given Evangelical network in two geopolitical contexts (the Sahrawi refugee camps/Western Sahara and Palestine/ Israel), this paper has highlighted the extent to which organisational motivations and core functions may vary significantly across time and space, with their activities having highly divergent impacts on the territories' respective refugee populations. The case-studies analysed in the preceding pages therefore directly unsettle organizational typologies and classificatory systems that purport to identify 'the primary mission' and key 'functions' of faith-based organizations active in displacement contexts. Rather, the paper has argued that it may be neither possible nor desirable to identify

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39 In this way, Palestinians may be considered to be the ultimate 'victims' in the sense of the original definition of this term as used in the 15th century to denote a victim killed as a religious sacrifice (ODE, 2005) – the suffering and sacrifice of Palestinians could therefore be interpreted as a necessary step to fulfil the ultimate religious aim of securing Christ's Second Coming.

'the primary mission' of an FBO, arguing, firstly, that such an identification may detract attention from other core 'missions' and, secondly, noting that the visibility of and degree of dedication to a range of core, overlapping, and subsidiary missions will be highly context dependent, relying not only on the geopolitical situation under-pinning the conflict, but also on the identity and (real or imagined) characteristics of the refugees involved.[40]

Both the Western Sahara and Palestine/Israel can be perceived to be spaces 'in becoming', with Evangelical interventions designed to support these territories' development in particular, and at times contradictory, directions. On the one hand, Evangelical interventions support Sahrawi refugees' quest to return to an independent Western Sahara which will, Evangelists anticipate, be pro-democracy, pro-US, and open to future evangelism – indeed, the Sahrawi are perceived to be 'good refugees' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011) who both 'openly welcome Christians into their refugee camps' and have explicitly 'ask[ed] Christians to establish churches in their home-land once the refugees return [to the Western Sahara]' (Scholte, 2005). In contrast, the initiatives developed by these same Evangelical groups in Israel/Palestine do not aim to support Palestinian refugees, who are typically either rendered invisible or are dehumanized as inherently violent and anti-democratic actors (see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2013b), but rather support 'the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral land' which is considered to be 'an essential stage before the second return of Christ and the beginning of the Messianic age' (Belhassen and Almeida Santos, 2006:432). In this regard, the history and the future of the territory, in addition to the purported characteristics of the displaced population in question, are firmly invoked as a means of determining the moral, political and religious validity of Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees' claims to the right to return to their homelands and to meaningful self-determination, therefore establishing whether these refugees deserve to be assisted and supported through diverse means. As such, although both spaces are conceptualized as urgently requiring humanitarian, political, and spiritual intervention,[41] particular interpretations of history, politics, and religion mediate the nature and aims

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40 Furthermore, not all motivations and underlying values are equally visible to all actors involved in all affected spaces, with refugees in the Sahrawi camps, for instance, observing the actions and activities of Evangelical humanitarians in their camps but unable to directly observe and evaluate the primary and subsidiary motivations of these same groups as they purportedly act 'on their behalf' in local level congregations, at the US Senate or before the UN Decolonization Committee (on refugees' unequal fields of vision, see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011).

41 Also see Gallaher (2008) vis-à-vis Southern Sudan.

of interventions in these contexts and reproduce specific spaces and specific refugees as deserving assistance whilst systematically excluding others.[42]

Despite the existence of international humanitarian normative frameworks, and established international legal and human rights principles, these case-studies demonstrate the geo-political and religious specificities of Evangelical actors' modes of intervention, thereby resonating with studies by human geographers who have explored the 'apparent disconnect between normative universalistic projects and particularist geographies' (Gerhardt, 2008:913, discussing Harvey, 2000).[43] The visible disconnect between international norms and the politics of humanitarian activities with relation to the refugees displaced from the Western Sahara and Palestine therefore highlights key intersecting questions regarding the processes of selective inclusion and purposeful exclusion of potential refugee beneficiaries, and, in turn, vis-a-vis the extent to which such activities can, or should, be considered to be 'humanitarian' in nature given the fluidity, interpenetration, and contradictory nature of humanitarian, political and religious motivations, aims, and implications.

In the Sahrawi context, refugees have arguably been selectively included by Evangelical actors as beneficiaries and 'friends' in their role as potential believers whose 'good' characteristics situate them firmly as 'worthy' recipients of humanitarian, political, and religious support.[44] However, while the selective *inclusion* of particular beneficiaries may be justified in a number of ways, including through reference to human rights and international principles such as the right to self-determination, the selective and purposeful *exclusion* of Other refugees (whether politically or religiously speaking) from the realm of humanitarian support, and the negation of international legal frameworks and rights, becomes untenable if the action in question is to be categorized as a *humanitarian* as opposed to a political or politico-religious

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42 Indeed, in other MENA contexts, it is notable that Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Lebanese internally displaced populations are supported by Samaritan's Purse, while Palestinian refugees in Jordan and in Lebanon are excluded from interventions, as is the case in Israel/ OPT.

43 Gerhardt argues that 'It is precisely this inability of universalist ethical theory to embrace geographically specific difference and alterity that has led to calls for more poststructuralist ethical frameworks for being in the world' (2008:913).

44 Other 'good refugees' outside of the MENA region include North Korean refugees and Burmese Karen refugees who are actively supported by transnational Evangelical networks – see a summary of Scholte's '*effots for the people of people of North Korea as President [of the] Defense Forum*' at **http://www.defenseforum.org/presidents-body-of-work-for-north-korea.html** (last accessed 15 April, 2012); vis-à-vis Evangelical interventions in support of Burmese Karenni refugees, see Horstmann (2011).

intervention per se. In conclusion, beyond wide-spread concerns that proselytisation in contexts of displacement directly challenges humanitarian principles of neutrality, universality, and impartiality (op cit), the implicit and explicit classification of communities as *deserving* and *non-deserving* refugees,[45] the effective erasure of certain refugee populations, and the prioritization of politico-religious 'missions' (beyond proselytisation), ultimately undermine the essence and aims of these principles and frameworks.

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45 In addition to excluding specific groups from assistance, I would also argue that such initiatives may ultimately lead to animosity between refugee communities themselves, since evaluating refugee (and indeed non-refugee) situations through comparative frameworks and notions of positional superiority (Nader, 1989:324) by necessity constitutes 'other' refugee groups as 'bad,' thereby re-victimising these individuals and groups, inducing antagonisms and solidifying hierarchies rather than encouraging observers (and the observed themselves) to contest such processes (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009). One area requiring further research pertains to refugees' views of the ways in which their 'humanitarian friends' might purposefully exclude other refugees – for instance, to explore Sahrawi refugees' views of their humanitarian and political supporters exclusion of Palestinian refugees from their spheres of action.

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