

# The everyday geopolitics of Messianic Jews in Israel-Palestine.

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of PhD, University of London, 2015.

I Daniel Webb hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the geopolitical orientations of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem, Israel-Palestine, in order to shed light on the confluence and co-constitution of religion and geopolitics. Messianic Jews are individuals who self-identify as being ethnically Jewish, but who hold beliefs that are largely indistinguishable from Christianity. Using the prism of ‘everyday geopolitics’, I explore my informants’ encounters with, and experiences of, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the dominant geopolitical logics that underpin it. I analyse the myriad of everyday factors that were formative in the shaping of my informants’ geopolitical orientation towards the conflict, focusing chiefly on those that were mediated and embodied through religious practice and belief.

The material for the research was gathered in Jerusalem over the course of sixteen months – between September 2012 and January 2014 – largely through ethnographic research methods. Accordingly, I offer a lived alternative to existing work on geopolitics and religion; work that is dominated by overly cerebral and cognitivist views of religion. By contrast, I show how the urgencies of everyday life, as well as a number of religious practices, attune Messianic Jewish geopolitical orientations in dynamic, contingent, and contradictory ways. Taken together, I conclude that the imbrication of religion and geopolitics cannot be mapped in any simple or straightforward way.

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# List of Abbreviations

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| Hamas | <i>Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah</i> – ‘Islamic Resistance Movement’ |
| ICAHD | Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions                             |
| IDF   | Israeli Defense Forces  |
| IR    | International Relations   |
| NGO   | Non-governmental Organisation   |
| NIV   | New International Version   |
| OPT   | Occupied Palestinian Territories  |
| Shas  | <i>Shomrei Sfarad</i> – ‘Guards (of the Torah)’                           |
| UK    | United Kingdom  |
| US    | United States of America  |

# Acknowledgements

To my mind, the ‘Acknowledgements’ section of any PhD could (and perhaps should) be the longest ‘chapter’. This dissertation has only been possible due to the support and kindness of countless people over the last 5 years. Often, writing this thesis has seemed like a lonely task – but, in reality, it has allowed me to meet a great number of people, many of who have become life-long friends. For that reason, I am grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for awarding me the studentship that enabled me to undertake this PhD.

First and foremost, thanks goes to my supervisory team. I am profoundly grateful to Klaus Dodds who graciously took on the supervision of the project early in the first year. His encouragement and positivity towards the project, as well as his insightful comments and critical guidance, have been hugely appreciated. I also count myself fortunate to have had a supervisor who has shown incredible patience with my regular bouts of self-doubt and anxiety.

Nine months into the project, Noam Leshem agreed to join Klaus as a joint supervisor. In retrospect, Klaus and I both acknowledge this to have been an apposite appointment. Noam’s endless positivity, tireless support, insightful and critical comments, sharp wit, and intimate knowledge of the topic have been priceless. Noam has inspired and challenged me in equal measure. After I got attacked in Jerusalem, both Klaus and Noam went above and beyond the call of supervisory duty to support me. I will be eternally grateful for this.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to countless others in the Geography Department at Royal Holloway. I have received an exceptional level of support throughout the last 10 years. It is truly an amazing department. Special thanks goes to Luiza Bialasiewicz, whose belief in my work inspired me to undertake the project in the first place. I am incredibly thankful that she encouraged me to keep applying for funding – this adventure would not have been possible without her. I also feel indebted to David Gilbert – whose pastoral and academic support has gone above

and beyond the call of duty. Thanks also goes to Alasdair Pinkerton – I will carry a large bag of memories away from the last few years spent in your company.

I am far too disorganised to pull off something like this alone. My 16 months in Jerusalem would not have been possible if not for the administrative guidance of Alice Christie. More than this, Alice would always show a keen interest in my project. Indeed, I have hugely appreciated all the postgraduate administration and technical staff in the Geography Department. Thank you to Moya, Karen, Anne, Liz and Jenny who have made the process of doing the PhD so much smoother. Thanks also to Ben Credland for all his hard work in managing the studentship award, and answering my panicked questions regarding funding, deadlines, and proposals.

To my PhD cohort – especially Phil, Jo, Danny, Laura, Sof, Rach, Jen, Paul, and Jake - I count myself privileged to have worked alongside all of you. Phil - I have hugely appreciated - and often relied upon - your constant and witty encouragement to assuage my self-doubt. You have been a quiet inspiration to me throughout. Jo – you have been a tremendous support throughout the last 5 years. I feel incredibly lucky that I got to sojourn through the PhD process with you, and will miss working with you. It was often true that I was much more productive when you were in the office! Danny – your commitment and love of Geography has really been an inspiration to me throughout the last 5 years (although I would never admit that to your face)! You have been a great sport, and a great role model. Laura has pulled me out of some of the lowest lows experienced during the PhD. I really appreciate and admire your joy. Sof – I have huge admiration for your tenacity and love of life. The stories you would tell from your own research kept me going! I owe thanks and apologies to Rach - who had the unfortunate job of sharing an office with me in the last year of the PhD. In reality, I learnt much more from you than you ever did/will from me. Jen, Jake and Paul – my ‘physical geography friends’. In the last three years, you have made coming to work so much more bearable and enjoyable. I will miss learning from you about snails, proxies and the insignificant size of the Quaternary period. I will never forget our fieldtrip to Spain, Den, and Lincoln’s gaffes.

There are many people in Israel-Palestine who deserve mention. Louise Bethlehem at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and David Newman at Ben Gurion University, Be'er Sheva deserve thanks for their support during the research period of my project. Louise especially was extraordinarily kind and welcoming to me at a time riven with anxiety and worry.

To all the people at Musalaha – thanks for letting me join you for a year, and being willing to answer my naïve questions. All the folks at Café Etz – but especially JJ and Gab – you will always be family to me. Ben – I am so glad that we could hang out and explore Jerusalem together. Duncan and Sue – thanks for welcoming me into your home. We may not agree on certain things – politically and theologically – but I count you as great, great friends. Duncan – I have fond memories of all the hair-brained adventures that we found ourselves in during all the years I have spent with you in Israel-Palestine.

This PhD would not have been possible without all of my friends at the Nazarene Church in Jerusalem. I attended ‘the Naz’ for 16 months. I also lived in the church apartment for 9 months, and looking back, these were some of the happiest of my time in Israel-Palestine. Thanks to Lindell and Kay for being a constant source of support, friendship, guidance, and amazing food! I probably would not have stayed in Jerusalem very long if it had not been for a chance meeting that I had with Lindell on my very first weekend. In jest, Lindell appointed me Assistant Pastor of the Nazarene Church whilst he was away – an act that was indicative of his outlandish sense of humour! Thanks to Mario, Chris and Anna for being great friends in Jerusalem. Post-Friday meeting movie nights, and 6 nations rugby weekends, were some of my favourite times. Perfecting the bed-sheet big-screen brought us together. Mario - I have fond recollections of us ‘bumble-bee tuna-ing’ around Jerusalem. Eating dinner at Lindell and Kay’s house – whilst trying not to laugh inappropriately – will stay long in my memory also. Chris – I still cannot believe you jumped from the balcony through the open bathroom window the night we got locked out. Seth – your positivity and friendship got me through a lot of long Jerusalem days. Coming to JUC to work and hang out was much appreciated. Michael and Havvah – despite being American – I am incredibly thankful for your friendship! Your generosity still amazes me. During the latter months of my time in

Jerusalem, your open-door policy helped me get through some tough times. I miss trying to understand ND football games.

From my time in Jerusalem, special mention must go to Tim and Kate, and Megan. Megan – I count myself very lucky to have met you. I do not think I would have stayed the course in Jerusalem if you had not been there. Tim and Kate – I am not sure I can put into words just how thankful I am for you.

Back home in the UK, belonging to the Journey Church in Englefield Green has helped me at every stage, especially throughout the writing process. My thanks to all of you for showing (feigning) interest in my work, and helping me to relax.

Two families deserve special thanks. The generosity of the Andrews family set me upon this course six years ago and I will never forget it. The Emmett family has given me a home for the last 3 years and I will be forever indebted to their kindness.

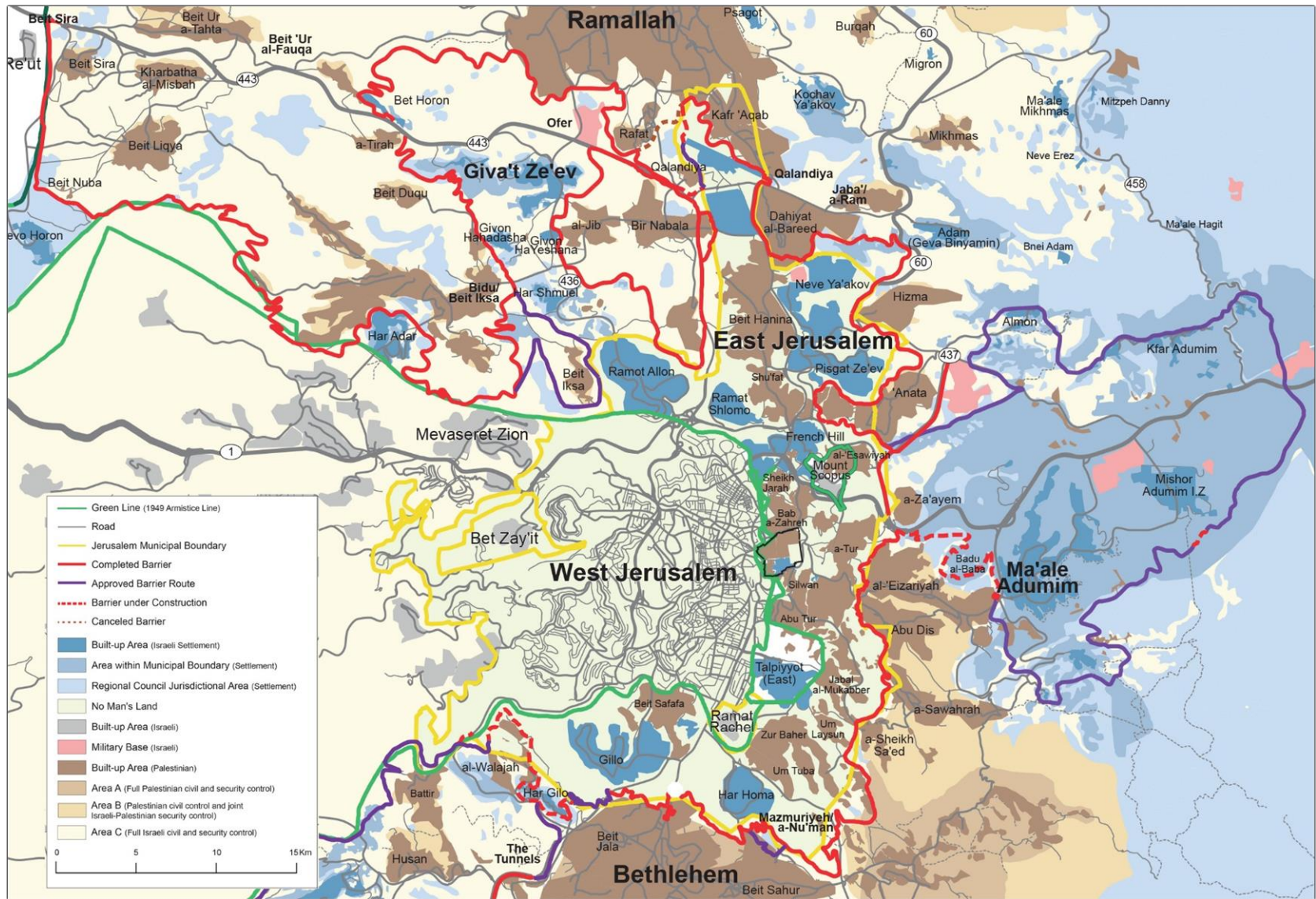
Individual thanks go especially to Rev. Lucy Nagel, Prof. Pete Gadsdon, Dr. Tom Tora, Dr. Andrew McNeil, Dr. Daniel Steel, Dr. Chloe Lee, Dr. Emily Smith, Dr. Jos Cole, Dr. Steve Aston, Dr. Ben Brzezicki, Dr. Jamie Gray, Dr. Andrew Colmer, Dr. Abi Goves, Dr. Joel Mitchell, Dr. Barney Aspray, Prof. Darren Paffey, Dr. David Hollow, and Rev. Dr. Jon Skinner for their tireless friendship, support and astute critical comments throughout the last five years.

Lastly, Mum, Dad, Aaron and Sammy, Kez, and James. I do not have the words to express my gratitude for all you have done for me. I hope this makes you proud.

# Maps



Map 1: Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and surrounding countries.



Map 2: Political map of Jerusalem, and surrounding settlements.

# Chapter 1:

## Introduction

‘If I can offer an alternative way of looking at the conflict, one which opens possibilities for resolution...I can empower the reader to critically reframe other issues that apply to other people and places as well.’

(Jeff Halper 2007:6)

### 1.0 Introduction

Early in the January of 2009 – whilst working for a Palestinian NGO in Ramallah<sup>1</sup> - I found myself travelling to Tiberias in the north of Israel (see Map 1) where I attended a congregation of devout religious Jews. These individuals were not, however, members of any group that one would automatically associate with religious Judaism; the Haredim or the Hasidic. Instead – for all intents and purposes – these Jewish individuals professed Christian beliefs, and engaged in liturgical and confessional practices that were largely indistinguishable from evangelical Christianity. Whilst some would call themselves ‘Jewish Christians’, most of the congregants self-identified as ‘Messianic believers’ indicating that they were Jews who believed in the messiah-ship of Jesus of Nazareth.

My visit to the Messianic congregation coincided with a period of extreme heightened tension in what is frequently termed the ‘Israeli-Palestinian conflict’.

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<sup>1</sup> I undertook a 6 month internship for Ma’an Development Center between October 2008-March 2009. During this time I also volunteered on a research project for ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions). On my return I had hoped to do Masters and PhD research on the developmental role of Palestinian NGOs, and saw this period as an opportunity to gain first-hand experience of living and working in the West Bank. However, this 6 month period had a radical impact upon my research interests, and sparked my interest in critical geopolitics.



With the purported aim of stopping rocket fire from Palestinian militant groups, Israel had just sanctioned a military operation in the territory of the ‘Gaza Strip’. Combining aerial bombardment with a ground force incursion, ‘Operation Cast Lead’ had been under way for just over a week and, despite international calls for restraint and cessation, it showed no signs of abating. By the end of the three-week operation, over 1,000 Palestinians and 13 Israelis had been killed – a large proportion of whom were civilian non-combatants.<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of this violence and bloodshed, the leader of the Messianic congregation<sup>3</sup> attempted to make sense of unfolding events in his weekly sermon. Specifically, he turned to the biblical scriptures in order to inform his geopolitical interpretation. He drew on the Old Testament narrative of 1 Samuel 15, which tells the story of the prophet Samuel recounting a message from God to Saul, the king of Israel, who was also embroiled in a military conflict:

<sup>1</sup> Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. <sup>2</sup>This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup> Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. <sup>8</sup> He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. <sup>9</sup> But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. <sup>10</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: <sup>11</sup> “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.<sup>7</sup>

(1 Samuel 15, The Bible, NIV)

Using these scriptures analogously, the pastor went on to justify the continuation of air strikes, and implored the Israeli Defense Force (henceforth IDF) to destroy

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<sup>2</sup> See Allen (2012) for a critical geographical analysis of Operation Cast Lead.

<sup>3</sup> The name of the leader and the location of the congregation are deliberately omitted. As Chapter 3 goes on to explain, the principle of total informant anonymity underpins the entirety of this thesis.

every member of Hamas (the controversial Palestinian organisation deemed by the US and UK to be a terrorist group), or risk incurring the judgment of God as Saul had. International pressure for an armistice was dismissed as a humanist ‘ploy’ running counter to divine will for military victory.

In the following days, I encountered similar theological and scriptural framings used by members of the congregation to understand and explain the variegated complexities of the current operation, and the wider issue of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Everything - from the big questions (the existential presence of the Palestinian and Israeli Jewish people) to the small (the strategic use of soldiers, tanks or helicopters) was filtered through their religious commitments. Geopolitical issues became infused with theological questions of territorial ownership, conquest, divine bequeathment, inheritance, justice and violence. It appeared obvious that for this group, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was primarily viewed – and experienced - through the lens of their religion. At other times, however, the very same congregants appeared completely disengaged from the topic of the conflict; it was pushed into the background of consciousness, and ignored or forgotten. This dynamic tension stayed long in my memory and motivated me to undertake this thesis because I wanted to better understand these contingent geopolitical positionings.

## **1.1 Introducing critical geopolitics**

It has been the mainstay of critical geopolitics to interrogate the ways in which political events and actors come to be described, ordered, spatialised and imagined (e.g. Dalby 1991, Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992, Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1994, Dodds and Sidaway 1994, Ó Tuathail 1996, Agnew 2003, Gregory 2004). This is not, however, simply an exercise in describing the ‘backdrop or setting upon which “international politics” takes place’ (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992:194). Rather scholars of critical geopolitics maintain that the creation of the discursive ‘setting’ is co-constitutive of the political itself. As Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992:194) state, the setting is ‘more than simply a backdrop but an active component of the drama of world politics’. Put otherwise, how we think about people and places – how we

construct them in our imaginations - affects the way we will act towards them. It is through contingent spatialisations, therefore, that people and places are constructed, made familiar, and political actions naturalised. As Dalby (1991:274) states 'specifications of political reality' always have 'political effects'. Similarly, Gregory (2004:3) argues, that 'rhetorical gestures' produce 'acutely real, visibly material consequences', and used examples from Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel-Palestine to illustrate that point.

Whilst early work in critical geopolitics focused attention almost entirely on statist articulations of geopolitics, recent moves beyond the formal politics of government institutions have opened and widened the field 'to thinking more carefully and imaginatively about who are the practitioners of geopolitics and how their practices produce particular spatial relations' (Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp 2013:7). In this spirit, recent critical geopolitical scholarship has turned to the ways in which religions are implicated in the production and reproduction of geographical and geopolitical knowledge (Nyroos 2001, Agnew 2006, Dittmer 2007a, Dittmer and Sturm 2010, Sturm 2013). It is clear, from the opening vignette, that religious narratives trade in moralistic framings of people and places, and offer value-laden scriptings of community, power, order, and sovereignty (Megoran 2004a, 2006a, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2014, Dittmer 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2013a, Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, Sturm 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2013). Cognizant of this, this thesis draws on the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of critical geopolitics in order to explore the ways - and extent to which - religion comes to be implicated in the formation and animation of individual and communal geopolitical orientations (Megoran 2004a, Agnew 2006, Dijkink 2006). I follow O'Loughlin, Ó Tuathail & Kolossov (2006), Martin Muller (2009), and Jason Dittmer (2013a:486) in using the term 'geopolitical orientations', which I define using a description that is more commonly employed for 'geopolitical imaginations'. In the following pages, geopolitical orientation relates to 'the way in which people experience, conceive of, or desire a particular

configuration of the relationship between space, ethnicity, nation, and political community' (Megoran 2006b:623).<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, I critically consider the ways that 'ordinary' Messianic Jews in Jerusalem encounter, engage with, understand, and negotiate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and its associated geopolitical dynamics - in the spaces of their everyday lives. Here, I follow O'Loughlin *et al.* (2006) and Ramadan's (2012:65) focus on 'ordinary' individuals to describe not 'homogenous subject groups' (Megoran 2006b:625) – reduced 'to culture industry drones, empty of agency and awaiting their regular injection of ideas' (Sharp 2000:362) - but rather those 'who are not professionally or actively producing public geopolitical knowledge' (Megoran 2006b:625). My informants were individuals who did not 'make a living' being religious or political, or from thinking/writing about religious or political ideas (Ammerman 2007). Geopolitics is not, after all, 'confined only to a small group of 'wise men'' (Ó Tuathail 1996:60). And so, the following pages are driven by the ultimate and overriding commitment to better understand this particular community, and the individuals that constitute it. Put otherwise, all that follows pivots around the everyday lives of the Messianic Jewish individuals I encountered during my research in Israel-Palestine.

To this end, my fieldwork remained expansive and inductive throughout as I attempted to observe traces of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the lives of my informants. I set out to explore the ways in which the conflict was (or was not) imagined, talked about, and experienced, and to ask how religious belief and material-practice intersected with, infused, and mediated these everyday realities. In doing so, the thesis makes a number of critical contributions, offering a distinctive perspective in three main areas; empirical, conceptual and methodological. These shall be taken in turn below.

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<sup>4</sup> Megoran uses this definition to describe 'political geographical imagination[s]'. However, I prefer the term 'geopolitical orientation' to the more commonplace focus on 'imagination' because, to my mind, the latter seems overly cerebral. The former injects not only recognition of our inherent embodiment, but also a semblance of temporal uncertainty and contingent instability into one's geopolitical commitments and subjectivities.

## 1.2 Empirical opportunities

The first and most apparent contribution is empirical. In recent times, critical scholarship has become alerted to evangelical Christian Zionists (predominantly American and British) and their religiously-inflected geopolitical commitment to the state of Israel (Chapman 2002, Weber 2004, Sizer 2007, Spector 2009, Braverman 2010, Megoran 2010, Dittmer and Sturm 2010, Burge 2010, Sturm and Frantzman 2015). Much of the ensuing work paints a telling picture of the ways in which certain Christian theologies are used to render a distant land - and a distant conflict – as familiar, as understandable, and as spiritually significant (Dittmer 2013a). Additionally, scholars have done much to show how these theologies prime Christian Zionists to offer a veritable smorgasbord of unquestioned support to the Israeli nation-state (Wallis 2005, Mearsheimer and Walt 2007, Sturm 2010, 2011, Dittmer 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2013a).

Whilst inspired by the critical interrogation of these theological attunements, the abstract, simplistic and distanced geographical representations employed by Christian Zionists are an ‘easy target’ for scholars to critique. After all, many of the subjects involved in such studies have never - and probably will never - set foot in Israel. It is unsurprising, therefore, that their distanced understandings of the conflict tend towards the reductive and/or spectacular (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992:191). My point is not to denigrate extant scholars or their valuable work, but to use their interventions as a stepping-stone from which to investigate the imbrication of religion and geopolitics in light of alternative empirical opportunities, and to show that there is greater complexity to this intersection beyond the specificities of the geopolitical conflict at hand.

There has, for instance, been a notable lack of critical scholarship exploring the geopolitical orientations of the indigenous ‘Christian’ communities in Israel-Palestine (although see recent works by Tristan Sturm and Seth Frantzman 2015). To me, these Christian communities – rather than American or European Christian Zionists - are worthy of in-depth enquiry because they encounter the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a much more immediate and grounded way. As a result, their

geopolitical orientations - whether religiously inflected or otherwise - have been attuned via direct and concrete conflictual experiences. They may also have been affected by very real and grounded conditions of conflict fatigue, conflict normalisation, and political disengagement.

Of that which has been written about indigenous Christian groups, the majority of the focus has tended to fall on the Palestinian Christian community (Raheb 2002, Sturm and Frantzman 2015). Consequently, Messianic Jews are an almost entirely overlooked community within mainstream academia.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this is understandable, given the community's diminutive size and influence (perhaps 15,000 members in Israel), and their marginalised position within Israeli society (Harvey 2009). Certainly though, few have addressed their quotidian engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a sustained and critical manner.<sup>6</sup> Here, then, this thesis makes a rare but significant empirical contribution.

This also points to a broader empirical oversight and, therefore, opportunity. It seems to me that - in general - the ways in which Jewish Israelis encounter the conflict is frequently overlooked or ignored in critical geopolitics.<sup>7</sup> Joanna Long's (2011) review paper on geographical scholarship and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a case in point. Whilst thorough and wide-ranging, she barely registers any works that address the Jewish Israeli experience or negotiation of the conflict. This points to the tendency to see Jewish Israelis - and Jewish Israeli spaces - as homogenous wholes; a point illustrated nicely by the differing availability - and presentation - of maps of East and West Jerusalem. Whilst there is a prolific collection of maps that depict the Eastern (Palestinian) side of the city, the search for similar maps of the West is much more difficult. It is almost impossible to find an up-to-date map that depicts the different communities and subtle complexities of West Jerusalem, and

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<sup>5</sup> Most of the available literature is written from within the community. Although American Messianic Jews have been gaining attention in recent times (Power 2011).

<sup>6</sup> There is, however, an increasing body of literature arising out of the Palestinian Christian and Messianic communities themselves. Often this is linked to two organisations. The first is *Sabeel*. This group seeks to forward the socio-political agenda inherent in Palestinian Liberation Theology (see Ateek 2014). They major on the Palestinian Christian experience of the conflict. The second is *Musalaha*. This organisation seeks to bring Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians together with the aim of fostering reconciliation. I volunteered for *Musalaha* for 6 months during my research in Jerusalem. See Munayer and Loden (2012) for an in-depth account of *Musalaha*'s work.

<sup>7</sup> Although, countering this statement, David Newman's (2000) chapter in *Geopolitical Traditions* was principally concerned with Israeli geopolitical imaginations.

that does not present it as a homogenous (uni-coloured) space. As Leshem (2015:36) suggests, almost every academic discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Jerusalem includes a map that ‘provides a striking visualization of the complex matrix of Israeli presence in East Jerusalem’ (for an apposite example, see Map 2). Yet, he goes on to claim:

‘...equally striking is the portrayal of West Jerusalem, the part of the city that was under Israeli control between 1949 and 1967, as a categorically separate territory: the entire western part of the city, with its social and ethnic diversity, religious tensions and history of violence, is presented as a homogeneous space where the ideal of the Jewish nation-state has been fully realized and is therefore empty of conflict.’ (Leshem 2015:36)

Maps aside, the broader marginalisation of Jewish Israeli spatial-experience occurs, in part, because of academics’ adherence to particular theoretical strands – such as feminism and/or subaltern-focused post-colonialism (Bar-Tal and Schnell 2012). Justifiably, these *en vogue* traditions seek to bring Palestinian voices to the fore of both public and academic consciousness. Whilst this is understandable and entirely admirable, the current omission of the Jewish Israeli experience constitutes a notable lacuna in recent critical geographical scholarship of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>8</sup> This is all the more surprising in a discipline that purports to show interest in ‘multiple’ and ‘situated perspectives’ on Israel and Palestine (Long 2011:263).

Yet there is now an established corpus within the post-colonial tradition that engages with the complex and ambiguous experience of the colonising community (Stoler 2009, Leshem 2013). Postcolonial scholars are increasingly revisiting the ‘settler colonial archives as sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than merely skewed and biased sources that establish and preserve rigid hierarchies’ (Leshem 2013:525). Much, then, has been done to show the fragility of settler colonialism. Noting the general impetus of this work, this thesis works as a corrective to critical geopolitics’ blind spot by exploring the geopolitical orientations of Israeli Jews. Metaphorically, I add different tones of colour to conventional, single-shaded portrayals of West Jerusalem. The following pages attest to the fact that Jewish Israeli geopolitical orientations are far from homogenous. Rather, their

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<sup>8</sup> This has not always been the case. See, for example, earlier and assorted works by Stanley Waterman, David Newman, Nurit Kliot, and Saul Cohen.

lived experiences of the conflict point to a number of geopolitical dynamics that would productively nuance conversations about the future of Israel-Palestine. For instance, one of this thesis' central and pivotal findings is that many Jewish Israelis do not appear to experience, encounter, or engage with 'the situation'<sup>9</sup> in their everyday lives in any clear or overt way. This lack of engagement, I argue, is generative of a geopolitical orientation marked by indifference, which, in turn, allows for the status quo to be managed and maintained.

Hence, exploring the geopolitical orientations of Jewish Israelis is more than a cursory exercise of academic inclusion. Rather, I concur with Long (2011:267) who - citing Oren Yiftachel's work - argues that a focus on Israel's 'treatment of its own citizens rather than its approach to the putatively 'external' Palestinians in the Occupied Territories' proffers an alternative writing of the geopolitics of Israel-Palestine, not through the well-trodden territory of the occupation, but by way of the spatial and ideological politics of citizenship. In doing so, one uncovers a sense of the 'contradictions and ambiguities that lie at the heart of the Zionist territorial project', and becomes aware of the weaknesses and fissures in the 'hegemonic production of [ethnonational] space' undergirding the protracted hostilities (Leshem 2013:522). This, in turn, challenges simplistic and reductive portrayals of an 'omnipotent [Israeli Jewish] colonizer' (Leshem 2013:525).

Beyond the specificities of my research community, I also seek to make an empirical contribution to conventional understandings of the geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by challenging the imaginative geographies through which it is commonly constructed and re-presented, in both media and academic work. In many ways, this is - for me - a confessional exercise. Prior to my research, I imagined the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a monolithic and disembodied 'thing' with a self-sustaining life-force of its own. I also assumed the conflict to be characterised by relentless and inevitable violence that wielded an overwhelming and all-encompassing power in the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians. These are, I expect, neither uncommon nor unconventional imaginaries.

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<sup>9</sup> 'The situation' seemed to be the catch-all term used by my informants to describe all facets of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Following my time in Jerusalem, it became increasingly clear that I would need to disrupt and disaggregate such an over-determined, macro-geopolitical perspective (Marshall 2014). The conflict is not a monolithic ‘given’. Instead, it entails a vast array of disputes between a number of different individuals and communities. This all takes place in a diverse range of spaces, often that are not customarily associated with protracted conflict or violence; from cemeteries (Leshem 2015) to malls and cafes (Ochs 2011, Busbridge 2014). For this reason, a growing body of work has begun to map the ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is both ‘foregrounded’ and ‘backgrounded’ in the intimate and everyday spaces of the home (Kallus 2004, Pullan 2011, Fenster 2014), the family (Harker 2012a), and liminal relationships (Marshall 2014). These intersect with the more familiar conflictual spaces of the border, the checkpoint, and the security wall (Weizman 2007). Long (2011:262) has described this as ‘the multiple, entangled geographies of Palestine-Israel’. This thesis joins these broader efforts to shift attention from the explicit sites of violence, to show that the conflict is found (or not) in a large number of social environments, and formed through ordinary, unspectacular (religious) events, objects, and agents (Konopinski 2009, Ochs 2011, Marshall 2014).

### **1.3 Conceptual opportunities**

Beyond these empirical opportunities, the thesis also seeks to make a number of conceptual contributions. I use the everyday lives in Messianic Jews to reflect on key questions in contemporary critical geopolitical research. The first is critical geopolitics’ on-going engagement with religion. As noted above, scholars have been nominally content to link certain religious beliefs to particular geopolitical practices, in particular the propositional beliefs that appear to incite political fatalism, militaristic violence or societal exclusion. The vignette that opened the chapter exemplifies exactly the types of warmongering religious beliefs often subject to the critical eye of the critical geopolitical scholar.

Indeed, if one were to scan the main pillars of Messianic Jewish propositional theology, one would quickly get the sense that their beliefs appear to attune them towards a very particular (exclusionary) geopolitical orientation. Indeed, taken in

isolation, their theological position regarding Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would align them closely with their Christian Zionist brothers (and sisters) (Munayer and Loden 2014). Most Messianic Jews hold to theologies of the land, covenant and election that afford the Jewish people divine and unequivocal ownership of the land of Israel (Harvey 2009, 2012). Competing national-territorial claims are, therefore, almost entirely refuted. Concomitantly, theology also intends Messianic Jews towards Palestinians in a manner marked by a significant amount of suspicion, and sometimes animosity, and leads to a distancing of the two communities (Munayer and Loden 2014).

Without doubt, theological explanations have some merit in accounting for the nexus of religions and geopolitics. Yet, whilst remaining disinclined to defend such beliefs - or the behaviours they purportedly engender - this thesis questions whether this conventional approach is fully sufficient in capturing religion's imbrication with the geopolitical. From experience, deterministic causality between belief and behaviour seems to break down, or might be productively nuanced, when the actual lives of believers are considered. It seems obvious that – for many – alternative theologies or everyday encounters work to smooth the sharp edges of much warmongering or exclusionary theological propositioning (Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, Gallaher 2010, Megoran 2013, Sturm and Frantzman 2015). For example, after the sermon recounted in the opening anecdote, some members of the Messianic congregation debated whether Jesus' fundamental directive to love one's enemies should disrupt such militaristic framings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Others – being caught up in the immediate urgencies and expediencies of daily life – appeared to pay little attention to the pastor's warmongering framings. A few, having encountered the colonised 'Other', would even go on to work for charities that explicitly supported Palestinian communities and livelihoods.

This simple illustration points to our need to better understand the confluence of religion and geopolitics from a perspective that does not afford straightforward primacy to the formative power of particular propositional belief utterances, but that remains open to the 'actuality and materiality' and 'slippages and omissions' caused by both alternative interpretative engagements with theology, and everyday religious practice (Kirby 2013:14, Leshem 2013:522).

As a rejoinder, this thesis seeks to offer a more populated account of geopolitical orientations of religious individuals (Kuus 2007, 20013b); not necessarily because it agrees with their beliefs or behaviours, but because without doing so analysis reprises, in many ways, the reductive and simplistic framings that scholars can adopt (Kirby 2013). In the following chapters, I follow an approach to religion that includes everyday practice as well as belief (Asad 1993). Here religion is taken to be a dynamic and lived phenomenon (Orsi 2002, Ammerman 2007). What people did, as well as what they said, was taken to be formative of their geopolitical orientations. In doing so, I often found that certain religious practices and beliefs had unintended geopolitical resonances by attuning individuals both towards and away from certain exclusionist, ethnonational positions in unstable and contradictory ways. Hence, rather than assuming neat causal links between professed theological beliefs and geopolitical orientations, this thesis argues for a much messier, processual and contingent view of geopolitics and its dissonant imbrication with religion.

Moreover, whilst religion played a significant role in informing the geopolitical lives of my informants – and therefore maintains a conceptual focus throughout the project - I seek not to over-determine its importance. Rather I take it as axiomatic that religious belief and practice compete with, and co-existed alongside, alternative geopolitical provocations in daily life. This uneasy empirical reality is not shied away from in the following chapters. Instead, this project allows space for the times when my informants appeared to set aside the lens of religion, and the conflict was apprehended - or not - in alternative ways.

The second and related conceptual contribution that this thesis makes to critical geopolitics is found in my underlying conviction that our geopolitical orientations – whether religious or otherwise - are always formed processually through complex constellations of everyday experiences, events, objects, practices and discourses (Kuus 2013a, Darling 2014). Often it is small ‘moments and acts’ that ‘negotiate and constitute’ broader geopolitical commitments (Ramadan 2012:67). Yet, to my mind, much work in critical geopolitics is still too neat and/or narrow. We tend to focus on one geopolitical provocation (a political speech, a popular film, or a banal object)

- or one distinctive or formative space (the school or the border crossing) - and over-determine its geopolitical influence. Instead, an emerging literature on 'everyday geopolitics' shows signs of being receptive to the everyday mess of counter-formation and process (Dittmer and Gray 2010).

Yet simple or singular explanations are insufficient. What motivates me is the idea that our geopolitical orientations are never static and never fully formed, but are constantly evolving; being shaped and re-shaped by a myriad of dynamic, different and surprising stimuli (Pain and Smith 2008). Often this occurs in surprisingly less than straightforward and non-linear ways. Hence, this project attempts to allow the 'cracks, slippages and margins' of everyday life to unsettle straightforward geopolitical analysis (Long 2011:263).

For example, I attend to the lesser-made – and potentially unsettling - observation that the conflict does not always loom large in the everyday lives of many Israeli Jews (Bar-Tal and Vered 2014). The conflict, it seemed, had a certain dynamic resonance; at times it was at the forefront of public conscious, at others it seemed entirely absent. I also pay sustained attention to the empirical reality that more pressing political urgencies appeared to demote the Israeli-Palestinian conflict down my informants' hierarchy of geopolitical concern. However, these other concerns still contributed – often in indirect ways - to my informants' overall geopolitical attunements. As Long (2011:268) argues, the conflict often acts as a backdrop to - and perhaps a player in – alternative political urgencies, 'but in a way that does not reduce the actors to one-dimensional political subjects'. They intersect with and yet 'exceed' the issue of the conflict itself (Harker 2009a, 2009b, Long 2011).

Stylistically, I attempt to recreate the dynamic resonance of the conflict throughout my writing. Sometimes, as in Chapters 4 and 7, the conflict takes prominent centre-stage. At other times, as in Chapters 5 and 6, it fades to background. It is also for this reason that I do not provide - in either this or the following chapter - a dedicated, in-depth historical contextual review of the conflict. To do so would act to foreground the conflict in a way that seems out of kilter with both my experience and those of my informants. Moreover, there is a vast amount of existing critical scholarship that provides thorough contextual reviews, and I do not wish to

reproduce this material here (Newman 2000, Kimmerling 2008, Shlaim 2010, Cohen 2011). Instead, this thesis has a very particular intellectual trajectory that is not wholly dependent upon some prior historical knowledge of the conflict.

In light of these empirical and conceptual foci, the third contribution of this thesis is methodological. Driven by a curiosity for the mess of everyday life - and inspired by feminist calls for more ‘committed’ and ‘peopled’ critical geopolitical analyses - I make use of a largely ethnographic methodology (Smith 2001, Megoran 2006b, Kuus 2007). Ethnography, in its broadest guise, is typically concerned with understanding ‘parts of the world more or less as they are experienced in the everyday lives of people who ‘live them out’” (Crag and Cook 2007:1). In contrast, critical analysis of religious geopolitics – and geopolitics more generally - has more commonly relied on the interrogation of (mainly written) discourse (Thrift 2000, Muller 2008, 2009). Scholars have, for instance, deconstructed religious literature, songs, sermons, tracts and talks (Sturm 2006, Dittmer 2007b, 2008, 2009b). However, the danger is that human experience of the religious or political is reduced to the scholar’s (or informant’s) interpretation of a particular text.

Ethnography, by contrast, attempts to collapse this ‘analytical distance that is a feature of so much work in critical geopolitics...This analytical distance elides that people's experiences lie at the heart of every state and that writing them out of accounts of world politics produces a somewhat lop-sided scholarship’ (Muller 2009:4). By presenting ethnographic material gathered from inside a religious community – with a focus on discourse *and practice* - my research proffers not only a new empirical perspective, but also an uncommon methodological approach to religious geopolitics. Drawing on sixteen month’s worth of observation, interviews, and ground level familiarity,<sup>10</sup> I attempt to provide an uncensored account of the difficulties of undertaking ethnography in critical geopolitics.

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<sup>10</sup> Occurring between September 2012 – January 2014.

## 1.4 A word on Jerusalem and urban geopolitics

Jerusalem is the geographical locus of the following chapters. This location was chosen as an appropriate field setting primarily due to the high concentration of Messianic congregations relative to other Israeli cities. An accurate number can only be estimated due to the fact that, as Chapter 5 attests, all are unofficial (in the eyes of the state) and many remain relatively concealed (Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott 1999). In this regard, Tel Aviv could also have been appropriate, as there are a good number of Messianic communities. However, more than simple pragmatics, Jerusalem was also chosen because it plays a central role in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian national movements covet the city as their state capital. Indeed, Jerusalem's disputed status is often cited as being one of the main obstacles to successful peace negotiations. In comparison, Tel Aviv exists in somewhat of a 'bubble' vis-à-vis the conflict (Blumenthal 2012, Pinto 2013).

For a relatively small city<sup>11</sup> – nestled away in the Judean hills - much is written of Jerusalem. In the beginning of his tome 'Jerusalem: A Biography', historian Simon Sebag Montefiore (2011:xxv) waxes lyrical:

‘regarded as the centre of the world and today that is more true than ever: the city is the focus of the struggle between the Abrahamic religions, the shrine for increasingly popular Christian, Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism, the strategic clashing of civilisations, the front line between atheism and faith, the cynosure of secular fascination, the object of giddy conspiracism and internet myth-making, and the illuminated stage for the cameras of the world in the age of twenty-four hour news...Jerusalem is the Holy City, yet it has always been a den of superstition, charlatanism and bigotry; the desire and prize of empires, yet of no strategic value; the cosmopolitan home of many sects, each of which believes the city belongs to them alone; a city of many names – yet each tradition is so sectarian it excludes any other...Jerusalem is the house of the one God, the capital of two peoples, the temple of three religions and she is the only city to exist twice – in heaven and on earth...’

For me, however, Jerusalem was just another overcrowded city. Much of the imaginative magic of it being a 'powerful' city at the 'centre' of the religious world

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<sup>11</sup> The population of the city hovers around 1 million inhabitants depending on how one defines the city's ever-changing municipal borders.

(Newman 2000:315, Massey 2005:112) was lost amid the choking traffic, throngs of tourists, and stinking rubbish skips (especially in the long hot summer season). Reading Montefiore's urban biography during my research, it was hard to subscribe to his penchant for the spectacular, the salacious and the superlative. As political geographer Noam Leshem (2012:n.p) argues, Montefiore's Jerusalem is far from 'an account of daily life or humble devotions...It's a little like learning about the American West by watching a John Wayne movie: everyone is a gunslinger or a sheriff, with nameless extras diving under the bar when trouble starts...Yet what Walter Benjamin called 'small histories' rarely result in epic tales or engrossing reads'. Similarly, my ambiguous and ambivalent feelings towards Jerusalem have driven me instead to privilege those 'nameless extras', their 'small histories', and their small geographies, as the main protagonists of this thesis.

A similar criticism could be leveled at urban geopolitical literature more generally. The relevance of urban environments to the study of geopolitics has garnered increased academic attention of late, as empirical focus expands beyond the sites of state borders and national territory to incorporate city spaces (Graham 2004, Yacobi 2006). Cities are increasingly being described as 'dystopic sites of conflict and war' (Konopinski 2009:14). Notably, the geopolitics of Jerusalem – and its imbrication in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – has been the focus of a number of works in this remit (Pullan 2011). However, again, I find that these have the propensity to offer disembodied analyses, where human bodies and everyday experiences are largely written out by accounts focusing instead on infrastructural services, architectural projects, urbicide, or abstract bureaucratic planning policies.<sup>12</sup> There is also the tendency to over-emphasise the 'divide' in Jerusalem; an issue I problematise in Chapter 4. As Konopinski (2009:15) asks, 'such depictions take a very spectacular view of cities and conflict. What about other calmer, less extraordinary and violent urban experience?'

For that reason, a spectacular(ist) urban geopolitics is not an analytical lens used in any primary or sustained way in the proceeding chapters. At points, of course, various details of Jerusalem's urban spaces move to the fore of analysis. But these spaces are afforded attention only due to the fact that my informants deemed them

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<sup>12</sup> Although see Hillel Cohen's *The Rise and fall of Arab Jerusalem* for a useful corrective.

noteworthy through their everyday praxis. Here then, the thesis makes only a modest empirical contribution to critical discussions of geopolitics, inter/intra-ethnic conflict, and the (re)production of urban space by inserting Jerusalemites experience of resistance, adaptation and survival. In doing so, it acts as a warning to those who would exceptionalise ‘divided’ and conflictual cities such as Jerusalem.

## 1.5 A word on Messianic Jews and the ‘Messianic’

Much like the twelve disciples of Christ, and other members of the early ‘Christian’ church, Messianic Jews are individuals who profess to be Jewish by ethnicity, but who hold to the belief that Jesus (Yeshua) was the Jewish Messiah. Indeed, present-day Messianic Jews often see themselves ‘in a direct line of continuity with first-century Jews who embraced Yeshua as Messiah and Lord’ (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p, Stern 2007). They view their ‘acceptance of Jesus as Messiah to be fully compatible with their Judaism’ (Harvey 2009:xi). Whilst to many, Jewish followers of Jesus appear largely indistinguishable from their ‘Gentile’ Christian brothers and sisters in belief and practice, most would not self-identify as being ‘Christian’, but ‘Messianic’ (Warshawsky 2009). There is a diverse number of personal, social and historicity reasons for this, foremost of all being the Christian Church’s potted history of anti-Semitism (Stern 2007, Harvey 2009).

The current Israeli Messianic Jewish community is - perhaps unsurprisingly - a relatively young community given that the nation-state is just over 67 years old.<sup>13</sup> Many of the early members - and crucially, early leaders - of the Israeli Messianic movement heralded from evangelical churches in the United States and Europe (Erez 2012). Indeed, the community still retains extant links to evangelical and charismatic churches in these areas. For this reason, the community - broadly speaking - displays similarities and often synonymity with the American Protestant Evangelical tradition (Harvey 2009, Munayer and Loden 2014).<sup>14</sup> However, the number of ‘*sabra*’<sup>15</sup> Messianic Jews is also increasing, as is the number of

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<sup>13</sup> That said, small congregations of ‘Hebrew Christian’ are in evidence in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and into the British Mandate (Munayer and Loden 2014).

<sup>14</sup> There is, however, a small ‘Hebrew Catholic’ community in Israel.

<sup>15</sup> *Sabra* is an colloquial term referring to Israeli *Jews* born in Israel.



independent *sabra*-dominated congregations, inculcating a more distinctive indigenous identity and praxis apart from evangelical Christian influences.

Messianic Jews are a tiny minority group within Israel. They are also ‘resistant to be surveyed’ (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p, Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott 1999). Hence, estimations of their numbers range from 5,000 to 23,000 depending on (often out-dated) sources (see Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott 1999, Harvey 2009, Erez 2012). Similar approximations suggest that there are between 80-200 Messianic Jewish congregational groups in Israel (Harvey 2009, Munayer and Loden 2014). Certainly, the Messianic Jewish community appears to be growing, although this is largely due to immigration (of Russian Messianic Jews) or natural growth in Messianic families (Kjaer-Hansen and Skjott 1999). For this reason, there can also be a high degree of internal cultural dissonance within congregations, let alone the entire Messianic movement; Messianic Jews – like any denomination of Christianity – are not uniform in belief or expression (Harvey 2009).

‘To varying degrees Messianic Jews observe the Sabbath, keep the kosher food laws, circumcise their sons and celebrate the Jewish festivals...They worship with their own liturgies, based on the Synagogue service, reading from the Torah and the New Testament’ (Harvey 2009:4)

However, as this thesis (and others) will attest, Messianic Jews are not considered acceptably Jewish either by Jewish Israeli law or society. Belief in Jesus destabilises and transgresses the acceptable boundaries that allow different Jewish and Judaic factions to exist conterminously. The hegemonic Jewish Orthodox establishment entirely rejects the legitimacies of Messianic Jewish belief and identity. Some see the community as a dangerous evangelistic group consisting of Christians in disguise. Others simply view Messianic Jews as a bizarre ‘cult’. As a result, they suffer from ‘a stigmatized and excluded status in Israel’ (Erez 2012:43).

That said, most Messianic Jews ardently subscribe to the Zionist and ethnonational principles underpinning the State of Israel (Harvey 2009, Erez 2012, Munayer and Loden 2014). Often this support is said to have scriptural basis; certain theologies of land, election and covenant, exile and restoration, eschatology, and soteriology coalesce to provide a comprehensive matrix of support for the modern-day Israeli

Jewish nation-state. These positions are said to be strengthened ‘as it is lived out against the background of, and in intimate relation with, the biblical context of the land’ (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p). More concretely, Messianic Jewish religiously inspired politics manifests:

‘...through their commitment to army service, weekly prayers for the nation of Israel, and enlistment of Christian support from abroad for Israeli policies. By emphasizing their patriotic Zionist stand, Messianic Jewish attempt to combat the Israeli notion that belief in Jesus is the same as conversion to Christianity.’ (Erez 2012:44)

Yet, as this thesis explores, the strength and outworking of this religeopolitical position may not be so clear-cut in everyday life.

Lastly, I cannot ignore the fact that the term ‘messianic’ – or the messianic moment – has long been a major topic of concern for political philosophers. There are, for example, both echoes and explicit references to the ‘messianic’ in the work of Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, and Giorgio Agamben on political theology and sovereignty. According to Benjamin (and latterly, Agamben), it is the messianic moment that will bring the political to an end. The messianic, therefore, is a threshold signaling the end of the reach of the earthly politics as we know it, and the beginning of something else – theocracy. Whilst I acknowledge this prevalent strand of thought in the philosophy of political theology, the parametres of this thesis do not cross over into these matters. The term ‘Messianic’ is, therefore, used throughout the following pages purely as a descriptive term; one with which my informants used to self-identify their distinctive beliefs.

## **1.6 Thesis outline**

Chapters 2 and 3 act to contextualise and elaborate upon the theoretical and methodological approaches of this thesis. Chapters 2 discusses the key literatures into which the research is situated, outlining and problematising some of the key conceptual themes in order to construct a framework for subsequent analysis. Chapter 3 details the methodological approach through which the research was operationalised. More than that, it also explores the particular challenges of

researching religion and geopolitics in the Israeli context. Taken together, both chapters act to critically examine the conceptual devices and methodological tools that are commonly employed to understand the imbrication of religion and geopolitics, and reflect on the ways that these limited accounts might be productively nuanced.

Chapters 4 to 7 are dedicated to the analysis of the empirical research. Chapter 4 connects the analytical section to the first three introductory chapters, and the broader conceptual and methodological discussion therein. In many ways, it acts to set the stage for the following three empirical-analytical chapters. Here, I briefly leave aside the specificities of the Messianic Jewish community and use my daily commutes on Jerusalem's brand new light-rail to explore everyday encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs in the city. Whilst many studies might emphasise antagonistic or violent encounters, I emphasise the predominance of non-occurrence in order to point to a geopolitical milieu of indifference vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Chapter 5 explores the ways in which the transgressive religious commitments of Messianic Jews have direct and difficult ramifications for their daily existence in Israel. I approach these difficulties through the conceptual and spatial lens of a quotidian citizenship border regime. Importantly, I argue that the immediacy of these adversities acts to relegate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict down individuals' hierarchy of concern. However, the point is made that the citizenship border regime experienced by my informants is exactly the same one that acts to exclude Palestinian non-citizens. In this way, the plight of the Messianic Jewish community is an alternative lens through which to write the geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which the Messianic community responds to the daily challenges noted in Chapter 5. These, I argue, are indicative and constitutive of the communities' uneasy and ambiguous position vis-à-vis the state and its geopolitical commitment. Whilst - in many ways - the community could be seen to push back against statist geopolitical positions, through practices designed to bolster their inclusion they also become complicit in an exclusionary geopolitical

ethnoculture. Therefore, the chapter highlights the paradoxical position of the Messianic community whereby they support a regime that entirely excludes them.

Whilst the previous chapters sought to explain why the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was largely background in my informants' lives, Chapter 7 brings it into a sharper, foregrounded focus. Here I give attention to the ways that the conflict was experienced through an interrogation of the commonplace religious framings employed by my informants. I show how these framings are both disrupted and bolstered in everyday life.

Chapter 8 briefly collates the main findings of the thesis and reasserts the importance of religion in future development of critical geopolitics. I suggest a number of directions for future research in religion and geopolitics, and everyday geopolitics more generally.

## Chapter 2:

# Religion and geopolitics: making religion relevant

‘Loud politics might grab the headlines, but soft, small stories also make a difference.’

(Pain and Smith 2008:249)

### 2.0 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this thesis examines the confluence and co-constitution of religion and geopolitics in the everyday lives of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem. In this chapter, I position this research vis-à-vis a number of different bodies of literature: geopolitics and religion, geographies of religion, everyday geopolitics, religion and international relations, and critical geographies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The chapter is organised into three main sections. The intention of the first section is twofold. First, given the topic of this thesis, I emphasise the central fact that despite the normalisation of secularism - both inside and outside of the academy - religion plays, and has always played, a significant and varied role in shaping the international political landscape. As an indication of this, I look to the resurgence of religion as a thriving topic of relevance within the bellwether discipline of International Relations (henceforth IR) (Petito and Hatzopoulos 2004, Thomas 2005). Second, I go on to question IR as a suitable framework for my research due to a proclivity towards macro-scale, state-centric focus and reductive over-generalisation of religion. I suggest that little has been done in IR to consider the

role that religion plays in orientating individual believers - such as my research informants - towards certain geopolitical commitments.

To remedy this, the second substantive section will outline both the opportunities (and omissions) of critical geopolitical analyses of religion. Political geographers have increasingly begun to interrogate the discursive constructions of geopolitics nested within certain religious worldviews and beliefs. I review some of the key debates and prevailing themes within this literature, especially those pertaining to my research on Israel-Palestine. I also identify a number of conceptual assumptions and lacunae present within critical geopolitics' engagement with religion. I discuss contemporary (re)conceptualisations of everyday 'lived' religion and argue that they provide a nuanced and grounded approach to understanding religion's imbrication in geopolitics.

The third substantive section draws on emerging research agendas and theoretical avenues within feminist inspired critical geopolitics and 'everyday geopolitics' in order to provide remedy to some of these aforementioned lacunae. I conclude by outlining my conceptual framework.

## **2.1 Religion and international politics: a neglected area of study?**

Religion, as Agnew (2006) suggests, is emerging as a 'political language of the time'. Its role and relevance in national and international politics appears to have become more pronounced in the last two decades (Phillips 2012), as (predominantly 'Western') states and citizens respond to the growing intrusion of religion in the public sphere (Olson, Hopkins and Kong 2013). In popular consciousness, the influence of religion in politics and society has arisen, due - in the main - to the fearful perception of increased religious militancy and the associated 'war on terror' (Cavanaugh 2009). At the time of writing for example,<sup>16</sup> the public gaze was fixed firmly on the geopolitical and theocratic pronouncements of the Islamic State movement and its increasing territorial control of vast swathes of Syria and Iraq. Arguably, however, it is the rather less spectacular process of transnational religious

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<sup>16</sup> June 2015.

migration, and the concomitant spread of new religious formations, that have more radically altered the ‘de-secularising’ global religious landscape (Kong 2001, 2010, Levitt 2003, 2004).

The ‘reappearance’ of religion is reflected in the interest that its entanglement in world affairs has garnered across academic disciplines in recent times (Kong 2010). Such intellectual curiosity is made even more noticeable in the context of its long-term academic marginalisation, especially in disciplines pertaining to the international political landscape (Hurd 2008). Before the 1990s, religion was relatively under-explored in Political Studies and the associated intellectual terrains of International Relations, Political Geography and Political Sociology (Lindsay 2014). This is understandable given the academy’s assent to the secularisation thesis and its superannuating exclusion of religion from public life and politics (Lindsay 2014). The secularisation hypothesis predicted the thorough disenchantment of modern society, the withdrawal of religion from the public realm, and its ultimate replacement by rationalism (Berger 1967). Hitherto, religion was often viewed as an outdated phenomenon, both antithetical and irrelevant to secular democracy and the development of modern, nation-statism (Cavanaugh 2009). Indeed, the ‘inevitability of secularisation’ was so broadly accepted within academia that, even until the 1990s, it was almost ‘taken-for-granted’ that religion’s significance would slowly decline (Casanova 1994:17, Sheringham 2011:25).

Yet the past decade has witnessed a ‘religious turn’ in the discipline of IR (Thomas 2005, 2010). This is significant because, as Kubálková (2009:14) argues, IR is often considered to be the ‘chief custodian and self-appointed gatekeeper of what is considered to be ‘knowledge’ in and of world affairs’. A cursory glance at the spate of recent publications addressing the ‘resurgence’ of religion in global politics and the debunking of secularism is indicative of this. As Philpott (2009:184) illustrates:

‘God is winning. God is dead. God is not great. The revenge of God. Crossing the gods. The Stillborn God. Terror in the mind of God. Terror in the name of God. The mighty and the almighty. Strong religion. Getting religion. Irreligion: the end of faith. The coming religious peace. The clash of civilizations. The global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations. Religion: the missing dimension of statecraft. Religion in international relations: the return from exile. Sacred causes. The ambivalence of the sacred. A secular age. Why I am not a secularist. The

desecularization of the world. Letter to a Christian nation. All are titles of books written in the past decade or so on the influence of religion in public life.’

IR authors look to a number of significant global events to explain the discipline’s resurgent interest in religion. Of course, the attacks of ‘9/11’, and the religio-political motivations that underwrote them, understandably stand as a prominent factor in IR’s reawakening to religion (Fox 2004, Snyder 2011). Fuelled, in part, by Islamic ideology and discontent, the attacks shocked Western academics into taking seriously the fusion of religion and politics in public spaces. The rhetoric of Jihad entered into common parlance and became one of the primary lenses through which many came to approach the Muslim faith despite its internal diversity and over 1 billion followers (Cavanaugh 2009).

However, other scholars re-visit earlier events and writings. Juergensmeyer (1993), for instance, points to the significance of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Here was a revolution not instigated solely by economic crisis, intra-state conflict or class-based struggle, but largely through a combination of political and religious motivations (Lindsay 2014). That entire structures of a domestic government were ‘Islamised’ suddenly highlighted the power of religion to influence the political life of an entire nation-state (Juergensmeyer 1993, Falk 2003, Philpott 2007). Following this, Haynes (2007), Philpott (2009) and Lindsay (2014) make the claim that Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilisations’ (1993) thesis should have reintroduced religious elements more strongly to the IR tradition. In the absence of Cold War antagonisms, Huntington predicted that future global conflicts would centre on clashing para-territorial ‘cultural’ civilizations; those being broadly demarcated in religious, transnational terms. However, whilst critics of Huntington’s thesis were prevalent, it was rare that the religious elements garnered any sustained academic attention. It was only after 2001 (and the events of ‘9/11’) that academics re-read and popularised Huntington’s prognostications.

Whatever the reason, now that attention has been redirected, it is increasingly obvious that religious elements, far from being dead, are pervasive within the global political landscape (Synder 2011). From the political leveraging of the religious Evangelical right in the United States (Wallis 2005), to the global spread of



liberation theologies and its underwriting of political reformation (Ateek 2014), religion remains a significant contemporary political force.

However, whilst this new array of literature is encouraging, IR tends to deal with the topic of religion in ways that make it an unsuitable approach through which to filter questions about a/my specific research community. Firstly, IR's dealings with religion have tended to revolve around warning of the danger posed by religious violence and fundamentalism in the international political arena (Cavanaugh 2009). Studies such as Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God*, or Bruce Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism* are – at base – an extended description of the manifestation of religiously-motivated idiosyncratic violence:

‘Within the histories of religious traditions-from biblical wars to crusading ventures and acts of great martyrdom – violence has lurked as a shadowy presence. It has coloured religion’s darker, more mysterious symbols... Why does religion seem to need violence, and violence religion, and why is a divine mandate for destruction accepted with such certainty by some believers?’ (Juergensmeyer 1993:6-7)

Of course, this focus is perhaps understandable because religiously motivated violence is the most obvious incursion of religion into politics, and fundamentalists do tend to be the most politically vociferous of all religious communities. Yet, in my mind, they do little more than offer a simplistic illustration of the obvious fact that religion can - at times - have extreme political expression.

This myopic focus on religious violence has not gone unchallenged from within the discipline; a recent review acknowledged that ‘the overwhelming majority of [IR] scholars...rely on assumptions about the ‘strangeness’ or ‘irrationality’ of religion and its consequent ability to legitimate violence’ (Lindsay 2014:203). It is taken as normal that religion is a regressive, negative and inherently violent force. Take, for instance, a quote from Damian Cox, Michael Levine and Saul Newman’s (2008) book *Politics Most Unusual: Violence, Sovereignty and Democracy in ‘the war on terror’*. In their chapter on religion and politics they state:

‘...religion, unlike other prejudices, feigns to regard itself as socially respectable and is generally taken to be so, it is able to mask certain

reprehensible attitudes and behaviours that may be more difficult for other prejudices to sustain...It manages this through every means at its disposal: self-deception, mendaciousness, hypocrisy, manipulation, force and others...once religion is seen as a prejudice rooted in narcissism, envy and a compelling need to feel special, the connection between religion and violence is easier to explain.' (Cox, Levine and Newman 2008:35-37)

Violence, they go on to suggest, is not a distortion of religion, but 'part of its very nature', the overall effects 'are not predominantly good, and religion is not a source for what is good or just or valuable' (Cox *et al.* 2008:37). Whilst many of their claims can be thoroughly problematised as 'modern myth' (see Cavanaugh 2009), my wider argument is simply that this predisposition towards religion will structure the questions asked of its role in politics, and the conclusions subsequently drawn. Such generalising claims distract attention from close and critical analyses of actual beliefs and behaviours. The more subtle, taken-for-granted and formative entanglements of religion and politics – entanglements that I go on to explore throughout this thesis - will often be sidelined. Whilst at times religious believers might lend support to violent statist actions, the informants that make up my research community have much more complex religious and political attunements than these IR authors account for.

Secondly, with a macro-level state focus, IR was deemed not best equipped to deal with the confluence of religion and politics at the scale of the micro or the everyday. In traditional IR textbooks, the empirics of idiographic and peopled religiosity are often ignored, replaced either by transhistorical and transcultural conceptualisations of religion, or by neat, formulaic and over-functionalist taxonomies of stable and unchanging 'world religions', and their concomitant impact on partisan politics (Cavanaugh 2009). For example, in *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion* Jeff Haynes (2007:12 my emphasis) argues that 'it is important to distinguish between religion at the individual and group levels, *because only the latter is normally of importance in international relations*'. Here, the concept of religion is treated as,

'...something that retains the same essence over time, retains the same essence across space, and is at least theoretically separable from secular realities—political institutions, for example.' (Cavanaugh 2009:9)

But, as will become clear in the pages of this thesis, I suggest that the grounded and lived faith of individuals plays a significant role in the construction of particular understandings of - and engagements with - the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here, religion's significance stems from its ability to provide explanations of the political world and the concomitant existence of violence, enemies, and threat. Religion also plays a central role in shaping the identity of individuals and positioning them in relation to these imagined worlds and the 'Others' that inhabit them.

Whilst there are nascent moves within IR towards more constructivist and critical approaches to religion (Thomas 2005), I did not feel that IR's dealings with religion availed me with adequate conceptual tools to speak of the complex beliefs or lived practices of religion, and how, in turn, these interact with political happenings. This is especially true of religious lives that do not revert to explicit violence, and are not unequivocally aligned with statist politics.

## **2.2 Critical geopolitics and religion**

With these ideas in mind, critical geopolitics was deemed to be a more appropriate analytical frame through which questions of religion, everyday life and politics might be explored. Geopolitics – in its classical conception - is concerned with the realist spatial laws that impact upon the power relations of state interaction, foreign policy, and geo-strategy (Megoran 2004a). Here, considerations of location, position, topography, and resource availability are held as geopolitically formative. However, scholars became increasingly wary of the realist reductionism and purported objectivism of 'classical geopolitics'; an approach that seemed blind to the power inherent in its disembodied truth claims (Kelly 2006). As a result, the sub-discipline of critical geopolitics has developed alongside - and often in opposition to - classical geopolitics.

In his seminal work *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996:1) argued that 'although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy and

administer space' (Ó Tuathail 1996:1). His critical geopolitical approach, informed by poststructuralist philosophy and theories of social constructivism, conceived of geopolitics not as the study of objective reality, but as a discursive construction 'that sets up places and regions in an imaginative mental geography, designating them as entities and imbuing them with qualities that provide a common-sense way of understanding the world' (Megoran 2004a:41). Similarly, John Agnew (2003:3) suggests that the project of critical geopolitics is concerned with the ways in which an unruly and complex political world is 'actively 'spatialized,' divided up, labeled, ordered and sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser 'importance'. The task of the scholar of critical geopolitics is to 'unpack or "de-naturalise" these common-sense understandings and reveal the assumptions behind them, explaining the way that they are used by practitioners and theoreticians of statecraft, and how they are reproduced in the popular sphere' (Megoran 2004a:4).

Importantly, these spatial demarcations, particularly those underwritten by reductive dualistic logics (us/them, security/insecurity), influence the ways in which individuals actively engage with peoples and places. As Dalby (1991:274) argued, specifications of 'political reality' have very real political affects. With a normative agenda towards creating more peaceable futures (Dowler and Smith 2001, Megoran 2011), critical geopolitics reserves particular concern for discursive imaginaries that underwrite violence, exclusion, conflict and fear, for it is within such discursive frameworks that 'warmaking and peacemaking occur' (Megoran 2004a:41). Scholars have explored the framing mechanisms through which people are cast as being affable or threatening (or, perhaps more powerfully, as nondescript); and how places are constructed as being safe, dangerous or unknown.

The early years of critical geopolitics saw a vast corpus of work unpacking 'formal' and 'practical' geopolitical imaginaries; that is geopolitical discourse espoused by intellectuals of statecraft including academics, political elites and policy experts (Ó Tuathail 1996:1). This focus reflected the prevailing assumption that such individuals occupied the 'driving seat' of global geopolitics; it is they who are most influential in shaping the way in which we imagine the global political system. More recently however scholars of 'popular geopolitics' have done much to show that geopolitical discourse comes to be (re)produced, circulated and consumed in the

everyday lives of ordinary citizens beyond academic and policymaking circles (Sharp 2000). This conceptual and methodological expansion opened up an avenue for scholars to explore the significance of social groups seemingly uninvolved in the creation of formal or intellectual geopolitical discourse; groups such as religious communities.

Thus, in *Critical Geopolitics*, Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996:276) made the passing observation that there were noticeable ‘connections between geopolitical thought and religious thought’. These connections, he suggested, had been negated due to the fact that geopolitics – like IR – is predicated on modern and secular assumptions (Ó Tuathail 2000, Dijkink 2006). The Westphalian Treaty of 1648 began a process where state-centric territorial imaginations would disrupt and then replace medieval religious cosmographies. Religious imaginaries - which organised space as a ‘vertical hierarchy in relationship to a Christian God’ retreated in favour of one that divided the world into ‘a horizontal set of competing territorial orders’ (Ó Tuathail 2000:187).

After Ó Tuathail’s (1996) early observations it took another ten years before a special edition in the journal ‘Geopolitics’ brought the close imbrication of religion and geopolitics to the fore (see Agnew 2006, Wallace 2006, West 2006, Dijkink 2006). In the following decade, a spate of subsequent work has gone some way to fill the early lacuna and refute the ‘secularizing reductivism’ of International Relations and geopolitics (Ó Tuathail 2000:208). In doing so, critical geopolitics has demonstrated itself to be an approach well suited to the interrogation of political and spatial constructions embedded within individuals’ religiously informed worldviews. Critical geopolitics was, therefore, considered suitable because of its commitment to denaturalise the commonsense ways in which people come to conceive of, construct, and encounter geopolitical phenomenon such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following Sturm (2013), this extant work can be roughly divided as being interested in two overlapping areas: ‘religious geopolitics’, and ‘the geopolitics of religion’.

### 2.3 Religious geopolitics

The notion of ‘religious geopolitics’ has been employed by political geographers to describe the ways in which secular geopolitical discourse is frequently (re)enchanted with the religion lexis (Sturm 2013). Consequently, leaders have increasingly voiced political struggles through the language of religion. For example, Ó Tuathail (2000:209) argues that the United States is perhaps the ‘most enduringly religious state in the postmodern world’ because religion is prominently drawn on to provide ‘certain narratological resources and discursive strategies for its leaders to represent and interpret the world’. Wallace (2006), Agnew (2006) and Dittmer and Sturm (2010) all argue that the Bush administration’s geopolitical response to 9/11 was underwritten and animated by numerous religious references and theological metaphors. Both Bush and Blair drew on religious references in order to justify political and strategic goals. Varied metaphysical citations of ‘freedom’ versus ‘oppression’, and ‘light’ versus ‘darkness’ meant that the ‘war on terror’ was constructed and scripted through Manichaeic mappings of righteous Good against malevolent Evil. Perhaps the rhetoric of an ‘Axis of Evil’ is most emblematic of the Bush administration’s deployment of ‘religious geopolitics’.

In similar fashion - with the geopolitical context of this thesis in mind – one should look no further than the religiously-inflected nomenclature of Israel’s 2012 military operation ‘*Pillar of Defense*’<sup>17</sup> for an excellent example of Israeli state ‘religious geopolitics’. Here, the operation name explicitly alluded to the divine protection and guidance afforded to the Israelites people as recounted in the biblical Exodus narrative. This constituted a clear attempt to insert divine legitimacy into the military action.

“<sup>21</sup> By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. <sup>22</sup> Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the

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<sup>17</sup> Operation Pillar of Defense was an 8 day Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip in November 2012, predominantly using aerial and naval bombardment. The Israeli government stated that the aim of the operation was to stop rocket attacks from Palestinian militants. Palestinian groups fired rockets towards major Israeli settlements including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Indeed, this was the first time in decades that Jerusalem had been targeted. Previously it was thought that the city was off-limits’ due to the high number of Palestinian residence. Twice I was involved in an air raid and had to scabble into the stairwell of my apartment building (said to be the safest place in the absence of a bomb-shelter or safe-room).

pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” (Exodus 13v21-22)

However, locating emotive theological discourse within political rhetoric - whilst a worthwhile critical activity - does much to batten a secularised obscurantism that veils the ways in which many modern political ideologies, values and norms are predicated upon, and deeply influenced by, theological precepts (Cavanaugh 2002, Gelot 2009). Here, Schmitt’s (1985:36) contention that ‘all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts’ is apposite. For example, Cox *et al.* (2009:82) draw on Schmitt’s claim to illustrate how the modern notion of sovereignty has repressed and disavowed theological roots. Similarly, Cavanaugh (2002:2) demonstrates that ideas of the modern, secular nation-state are predicated – in part - upon a ‘soteriology of rescue from violence’. These theological underpinnings of secular politics fundamentally challenge the core separatist assumption of secularisation; modern politics – far from being stripped of religion – is inextricably intertwined with it (Cavanaugh 2002, Cox *et al.* 2009, Lindsay 2014). Thus, they argue that the growing appropriation of religious language and ideation by political leaders signals a ‘return of the repressed’ rather than simply a convenient and powerful rhetorical strategy (Cox *et al.* 2009:82).

#### **2.4 The ‘Geopolitics of Religion’**

This early work in ‘religious geopolitics’ provided a natural segue into a more detailed study of the ‘geopolitics of religion’. The geopolitics of religion refers to theologically-inspired representations of how the world should be divided and ordered, and the subsequent orientations, attitudes and actions that these result in. Akin to Ó Tuathail’s (2000) ‘spiritual geopolitics’, Lari Nyroos (2001) coined the phrase ‘religeopolitics’ to emphasise this closer and more dynamic imbrication of religion, geography and politics. Religeopolitics, Nyroos (2001:135) suggested, described religious orientations that had an inextricably ‘geopolitical core’. Put simply, the beliefs and worldviews of most faith traditions inevitably trade in geographical and geopolitical imaginations. It is clear, Ó Tuathail (2000:188-192) argued, that ‘geopolitical traditions and religious traditions’ are ‘more often than not deeply interwoven and mutually constitutive’ of a ‘spiritual geopolitics’.

Religion – as I illustrate in the following chapters – involves the circulation of certain normative and explanatory imaginaries designed to make sense of worldly events, and the role of the believer in those realities (Wright 1992). Hence, religion - like geopolitics – has always asked foundational questions about the affairs of the world; of earthly manifestations of sovereignty, power, governance, ultimate allegiance and human purpose (Wright 2012).<sup>18</sup> These ‘fit easily into the study of codes, script and narrative as practices in critical geopolitics’ (Dijkink 2006:192). As Sturm (2013:138-139) states:

‘Geopolitics and religion are both ways of seeing the world. Geopolitics is a perspective on the world, a way of seeing the world, not a thing in the world: a way of expressing interests, categorising the world and signifying events. Religion too, analogous to geopolitics, can serve these same functions... Geopolitics satisfies a simple psychological function for understanding the world and its processes. It, like religion, is an arena for grand narratives that are bigger than an individual’s everyday life. Religion, like geopolitics, can be a mode of identifying with and excluding others. While geopolitics is not a performative arena for overcoming death or achieving heavenly salvation, it is often a site for formulating an earthly or immanent redemption, that if the world’s processes can be defined and mapped in this or that way, then we can save ourselves. One could characterise the similarities between the terms as worldviews that are inevitably politicised and called upon to interpret world processes and how to act in the world...Both derive from and form a set of myths and ‘truths’ about the world, for which one must have faith.’

It is not difficult, therefore, to concur with Connolly (2010) and Megoran (2004a:41) who argue that religious worldviews have long been implicated and formative in the co-constitution of geopolitical imaginations. Indeed, religious narratives often incorporate, interact and infuse with geopolitical ones (Dittmer 2007a, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b, Connolly 2008), involving similar characters, plots and locations. This is a mutually reinforcing process where religion and politics ‘fold, bend, blend, emulsify and resolve incompletely into each other’ (Connolly 2008:40, Dijkink 2006). On one end of the spectrum, it is no surprise that politicians regularly draw on religious discursive formations in order to acquire legitimacy. At the other end, it is clear that religious believers internalise the ‘geopolitical

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<sup>18</sup> Although normally this would be couched in the language of creation, stewardship, divine rulership and soteriological and eschatological purpose.



imaginations of the milieu in which they are located' and 'map these imaginations onto their understanding of scripture' (Megoran 2004a:43). The space in the middle is filled with examples of where religious and secular parties find that their political interest 'resonate together across a set of doctrinal differences' (Connolly 2008:41).

Hence, the religeopolitical imaginations of the faithful are constructed by way of complex theological and political forms; whether through ideas about the interventionist outworking of divine sovereignty and power, or through soteriological and eschatological teleologies (Megoran 2004a, Sturm 2006). Moreover, religious narratives involving 'transcendent struggles against evil, heresy and godlessness' have long been transposed onto the global political map by religious believers (Ó Tuathail 2000:209). It follows that believers come to an understanding of earthly geopolitical phenomenon through the lens of scripture, theology and belief. Consequently, the separation of religious and geopolitical reasoning is rarely possible; to think religiously is also to think geopolitically. As such, religeopolitical imaginaries are 'fair-game' for critical geopolitics, and its scholarly agenda to expose the 'codes, script and narratives' by which the world is divided up, ordered, spatialised and imagined (Dijkink 2006:192). Indeed, Ó Tuathail (2000:209) specifically tasks scholars with deconstructing 'the orders of power/knowledge found in (con)fusions of geopolitical and religious traditions'. It is into this corpus that this thesis is situated, draws inspiration, and contributes.

However, closer inspection reveals that the imbrication of religion and geopolitics is rarely straightforward or predictable. Some religious narratives tell dissident stories that are completely antithetical to the Westphalian assumptions (Nyroos 2001), whilst others sustain the current state system. For example, religious imaginaries have been shown to both legitimise and challenge statist and nationalist geopolitical visions and identities. They can be mobilised to repudiate instances of statist oppression and injustice, and create alternative spaces of belonging for marginalised or minority groups (Megoran 2013). But, as the beginning of this chapter noted, other religious worldviews envision anything but a peaceable world (Agnew 2006). Some are used to underwrite inter-state conflict, militarism, and colonialism (Megoran 2010). This is seen most obviously in territorial struggles where land claims are premised upon religious justification or divine bequeathment (Nyroos

2001, Dijkink 2006). Such is the case with Israel and its desire to (re)territorialise the biblical homeland premised upon the scriptural promise of territorial ownership (Shilhav 2001, 2007, Wallace 2006).

In sum, Ó Tuathail (2000:208) suggests that religeopolitical scriptings of the world order are, ‘exceedingly dangerous’ because they ‘refuse the complexity of international affairs and falsely reduce it to predetermined moral categories’. Whilst he is in many senses accurate, he does not fully explain why religious imaginations are particularly more dangerous than secular ones (Cavanaugh 2009). In this thesis I aim to pay attention to a much fuller range of geopolitically ambitious religious discourses and material practices, especially those that seem – at first glance – to be unconnected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **2.5 ‘Evangelical Geopolitics’ and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

Thematically, then, to what aspects of religion have critical geopolitical scholars afforded most attention? Some early scholarship attended to the geopolitically inflected discourse of institutional forms of the Christian Church. Here I am thinking of Agnew’s (2006) work on the Catholic Church, Megoran’s (2006a) work on the Church of England, and Sidorov’s (2006) work on the Russian Orthodox Church. Yet it is true to say that the lion’s share has focused on American evangelical and/or ‘Fundamentalist’ geopolitical orientations. An early – and largely unresolved – bone of contention centred on exacting the analytical and denominational parameters of the ‘Evangelical’ movement (Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, Sturm 2008a). Subsequent studies illustrated the close affinity and shared sensibility between contemporary Evangelical commitments and American statist geopolitics, especially in the fusion of spiritual and state militarism (Agnew 2006).

Dittmer and Sturm’s (2010) edited collection went a long way to illustrate how certain evangelical ideations and usages of space have salience in secular geopolitical formations of American national identity and foreign policy. The geopolitical significance of evangelical utopian/dystopian visions (Sturm 2010, 2011), its close collaboration in neo-liberal capitalism (Connolly 2008, 2010), its influence on

foreign policy and other facets of American statist politics (Sturm 2011), its salvific and interventionist missionary focus (Gallagher 2010), and its varied end time prophecies and apocalyptic theologies quickly became chief. For Agnew (2006:186), the sum of these is that evangelicals are providing ‘nothing less than a Bible-based geopolitics for US policy on a wide range of issues, from taking sides in the Israel-Palestine conflict and doing nothing about global warming to the obviously diabolical meaning of the terror attacks of September 11 2001’.

One specific evangelical leaning retains conceptual importance for this thesis. That is the ways in which certain Christian beliefs are formative of particular geopolitical understandings and imaginations of the modern day state of Israel, its political relationship the Unites States of America, and the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Sturm 2006, 2011, 2012, Dittmer 2007b, Dittmer and Sturm 2010, Gallagher 2010, Megoran 2010). Indeed, it is this swath of literature that initially inspired this dissertation. Here, work within the sub-discipline of critical geopolitics has drawn on a diverse range of critical scholarship in order to problematise the geopolitical orientations nested within ‘Christian Zionism’ (Weber 2004, Sizer 2005, Spector 2009). ‘Christian Zionism’ is a catch-all term denoting a largely Protestant movement which views the modern State of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and therefore deserving of political, economic, and moral support. According to Sizer (2007) and Spector (2009) the movement of Christian Zionism is most active in America where around sixty percent of evangelical Christians adopt supportive positions vis-à-vis Israel. Therefore Christian Zionists, Sturm (2011:4) claims, should be viewed as significant religious actors ‘in any study of Israeli politics...because of their material and discursive power wielded toward resolute support and defense of events of [Israeli] state violence in the names of truth and territory’.

Specifically, geographical studies have interrogated the geopolitical imaginaries of Christian Zionist preachers, congregants and organisations, examining the ways in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is understood, represented and legitimated through their various theological promulgations. The theological and hermeneutical

framework of dispensationalism<sup>19</sup> is frequently cited as priming Christian Zionists to take favorable stances towards the modern day State of Israel.

As a theological framework, dispensationalism holds central the notion that Israel (the Jewish people) and the Church (Gentile Christians) should be held as two distinct peoples with separate soteriological programs. Accordingly, dispensationalists believe that the divine promises made to the ancient Israelite people still apply to their Jewish descendents today. In particular, promises made to the Israelites relating to the land of Israel are seen as unconditional and enduring. This 'Holy Land theology' provides modern-day Jews with a 'sacrosanct title-deed to the land of Palestine' (Masalha 2007:3); lends 'moral and biblical justification for Israel's colonisation of Palestine' (Sizer 2007:19); and affirms exclusive territorial ownership, so that it is only 'Eretz Israel, that assures modern Jewry of its identity and separation as the chosen people' (Rowley 1985:133).

In line with certain Old Testament promises, many dispensationalists believe that Israel should occupy all of the land between the Nile and the Euphrates (even larger than contemporary Israel). Accordingly, they tend to approve Israeli efforts to expand their territory including lending support to Israel's expansionist occupation of Palestinian territory (Weber 2004:17). They are often slow to criticise Israeli state actions that would usually be deemed to be unjust or unethical. Their lack of opposition is premised upon the notion that Israeli state action is sanctioned or predetermined by God. Practically, Christian Zionist support of Israel can take many different forms, but takes practical shape through tourism (to Israel), tax-exempt financial gifts, and political lobbying in domestic settings. It is for these reasons that the imaginations and commitments of Christian Zionism and dispensationalism are frequently the (easy) target of critical geopolitics' investigative eye.

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<sup>19</sup> Dispensationalism as a hermeneutic framework privileges a literalistic (not - as is commonly stated - a literal) reading of the bible. Dispensationalism as a theological system is concerned with the dimensions of different temporal dispensations (periods of time) and how God's purpose and government is revealed and actuated on earth.

## 2.6 Empirical and conceptual concerns

Whilst I am inspired by the existing corpus of critical geopolitical work on religeopolitics, I do retain a number of concerns. Sturm (2013) voiced unease about the narrow topical focus on American Christians – and more specifically ‘evangelical’ – geopolitics in critical geopolitical studies (Dittmer and Sturm 2010).<sup>20</sup> This is clearly reflected in the literature on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where evangelical Christian (Zionist) geopolitical engagements dominate scholarly proceedings (Dittmer 2013a). Whilst this imbalance is acknowledged, the research community that constitutes the focus of this thesis is – in laymen’s terms – ‘Christian’ and certainly retains some evangelical leanings. Many of its members originated in evangelical churches in America and Britain before making *aliyah* to Israel.<sup>21</sup> Whilst it is clear that dispensationalism and Christian Zionism have been thoroughly explored in their American forms, scholars have neglected to investigate how these types of theologies and beliefs travel, and how they are shaped in and by different social and geopolitical contexts (Connolly 2010, Vincett *et al.* 2012).<sup>22</sup>

‘Geographies of Religion’ has, as Sheringham (2011:3) argues, a unique role to play in mapping how religious beliefs change ‘as they travel and are transferred across borders and adapt to new contexts’. This thesis joins this through grounded research within Israel. I am not interested in trying to analytically shoe-horn my research community into neat and identifiable denominational boundaries such as ‘evangelicalism’ or ‘fundamentalism’. Rather I am interested in exploring the varied religious beliefs and practices – many of which scholars may want to define as ‘evangelical’ – that play out in the Jewish Israeli geopolitical context. In Israel, unlike in America, Christianity is viewed by many as a minority religion and is associated with subordinate groups. Thus, as the thesis frequently attests, in the Israeli context – where Judaism stands as the hegemonic faith tradition – certain Christian beliefs, theologies and practices take on new importance, whilst others are backgrounded or entirely jettisoned.

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<sup>20</sup> This over-focus is slowly being rectified (see Nyroos 2001, West 2006, Yorgason 2010, Habashi 2013, McConnell 2013).

<sup>21</sup> ‘Making *aliyah*’ is the Jewish phrase for the process of securing some form of formal residency or citizenship in Israel by way of Jewish ethnicity.

<sup>22</sup> Although see Sturm and Fratzman (2015) for a fascinating investigation into the uptake of Zionist theologies amongst some Palestinian Christian communities.

Beyond concerns about topic and location, it seems to me that much geopolitical work on religion is shot through with much deeper and largely unacknowledged orientations towards the study of religion that I look to redress in this thesis. This is important to recognise because, as Hurd (2008:10) suggests, our assumptions about religion will determine - and delimit - the 'types of questions we deem worth asking about it, how we see it relating to politics, and the kinds of answers we subsequently expect to find'. Critical geopolitical engagement with religion has, I would suggest, been conditioned by the secular conceptualisation of religion, as something constituted primarily by private individual belief. This has, in turn, meant that we have been over-prone to associating religion as a phenomenon that traffics primarily in the cerebral and cognitive realm of ideas and their subsequent dissemination and pedagogy. Operative here is not only a modern notion of religion that has a deeply-rooted history in Western secularism and Enlightenment thought, but also an intellectualist and *Cartesian* philosophical anthropology that views human beings as primarily 'thinking things' (Smith 2009, 2012).

I would suggest that this adoption of the secular vision of religion as 'belief' has led to an academic over-attentiveness to the geopolitical significance of what I will term 'propositional' theology; that is with the articulation and content of cognitive belief statements, creedal claims, ideations and worldviews (Connolly 2010). Put simply, regardless of which religious groups we choose to focus on, we concentrate almost exclusively on what they say they believe. It is important to note that this attention towards propositional theology has not been helped by critical geopolitics' representationalist reliance on discourse analysis as its primary methodology tool. Jason Dittmer, one of a number of scholars leading critical geopolitics' engagement with religion concedes that:

'The literature on evangelical geopolitics has maintained a consistent strand of research that emphasizes scriptures and non-sacred texts as proxies for beliefs. This is a natural jumping off point for critical geopolitics to engage with evangelicalism because of the theoretical emphasis of critical geopolitics on discourse and representation. Therefore, just as scholars of critical geopolitics have traditionally dissected policy papers, speeches, and popular culture in order to triangulate the larger geopolitical discourses in which those media artefacts are embedded, here scholars engaged with the

texts that were available in order to compose an ‘evangelical geopolitics’ (Dittmer 2013a:480).

Much of Dittmer (2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) and Sturm’s (2006) early work focused critical attention on the dissemination of geopolitical significant theologies in various religious media including books, cartoons, sermons, and tracts. As Chapter 3 contends, by presenting ethnographic material my research adds a novel methodological – as well as empirical - perspective to this field, and challenges of conceptual emphasis of existing literatures.

It is clear that propositional theology will always play a formative role in shaping the geopolitical attunement of religious individuals (Sutherland 2014). I do not wish to challenge this, or jettison the formative power of theological discourse. As noted, dispensational theology clearly primes some Christian believers towards certain pro-Israel geopolitical orientations. However, this thesis challenges the primacy that theological belief is afforded in geopolitical scholarship. This predominance is problematic for two overlapping reasons. Firstly, it has oriented scholars to hone in on the articulation of some of the more seemingly abstract and extreme propositional theologies and worldviews. In doing so, theological nuance, hermeneutical interpretation, and individual dissonance are overlooked (Megoran 2013, Sutherland 2014). Secondly, it has primed critical geopolitics to view religious actors as intending the political world primarily through reflective and cognitive registers. This neglects the formative role of embodied, material religious practice, ritual and liturgy in geopolitical identity, knowledge and imagination. These two concerns will be explored in the following sections.

## **2.7 Propositional theology and extreme eschatologies**

The propositional theological focus of much critical geopolitics has tended to concentrate almost exclusively on the geopolitical significance of various prophetic, eschatological and apocalyptic Judeo-Christian teleologies to the neglect of other theological strands (Sturm 2006, 2008a, 2011, 2012, Dittmer 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, Dittmer and Sturm 2010, Gallaher 2010). The justification for this focus stems from the premise that evangelical geopolitical imaginaries, and the

political actions they instantiate, are driven almost entirely by eschatological orientations. Sturm's (2008a:931) claim that 'eschatology is the most politically decisive component of a theological system' makes this fundamental assumption explicit. It is a truism that eschatological and apocalyptic beliefs can lead to 'bizarre and dangerous geopolitical scenarios with real political effects, and [therefore] must be subject to rigorous scholarly critique' (Megoran 2013:146). The subsequent scholarly interest in the 'end times' has given rise to the subsequent notion of 'geo-eschatology' (Dittmer and Sturm 2010:8) or "geo-prediction" of the End Times' (Dittmer and Sturm 2010:13).

In particular, the eschatological framework of 'premillennialism' (and the consonantal 'premillennial dispensationalism') has been subject to sustained critical attention because it supposedly speaks of - and to - contemporary geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East, notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Sturm 2006, Gallaher 2010, Megoran 2010). Premillennialism converges with dispensationalism in believing that the Bible prophecies that the Jewish people must be restored as a nation-state in the biblical land of Israel prior to the actuation of the end-times and the second coming of Jesus. David Ben Gurion's declaration of the birth of the State of Israel in May 1948,<sup>23</sup> and the subsequent expansion of its borders seemed to point towards a key fulfillment of the interpretive schemas held by many premillennial dispensationalists. Israel's later victory in the Six Day War of 1967 did much to consolidate the idea that the State of Israel was indeed the realisation of God's plan. Crucially, there is a nested belief within premillennial dispensationalism that an apocalyptic war will be fought in the land of Israel prior to Christ's second coming. As Weber (2004:13) summarises, 'without a restored Jewish state, there could be no Antichrist, no great tribulation, no battle of Armageddon, and no second coming'. Hence, increasing violence in Israel is commonly viewed as indicative of the further fulfillment of premillennial prophecies. Similarly, premillennialists are often accused of lending support to Israel's frequent military endeavours in order to abet the coming 'end times' (Sturm 2011). Peace plans predicated upon a 'two State' solution, or 'land for peace' are often rejected as dividing the land is anathema to premillennial prophetic scenarios (Gallaher 2010).

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<sup>23</sup> David Ben Gurion was Israel's first Prime Minister. On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948, he officially proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, and signed the Declaration of Independence.



Tristan Sturm's (2006) earliest work, for instance, appraised the ways in which such a premillennial dispensationalist reading of Old Testament prophecy helped believers to reduce the complexity and messiness of the political world into simpler, more easily communicable forms. Sturm (2006) denounces the prophetic and eschatological musings of one particularly influential premillennialist preacher - Mark Hitchcock - by deconstructing the ways in which he used biblical prophecy to expound totalising visions of contemporary global geopolitics. Hitchcock claimed to be able to identify four contemporary 'evil' geopolitical containers; Russia, the 'Muslim alliance' (led by Egypt), the 'kings of the Far East' (Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, China, Japan, and/or Korea), and the 'Roman Empire' (a coalition of Western nations). These, he suggested, would form a military alliance in a major battle against Israel. Thus, Hitchcock used his interpretative prognostications to implicitly prescribe didactic action against the aforementioned 'evil' empires. Much of the Sturm's (2006) critique seems to centre on the detached ocularcentrism pervading premillennial prophetic imaginaries. Here, the professed ability to remove oneself from the world; to become an aloof and authoritative 'all-knowing observer', to know the 'Other' and map a metageography accordingly, is rendered problematic. At its baseline, Sturm is concerned that premillennialists reduce people and places to simplistic and totalising categories, and are wrong to do so not least of all because of the violence and militarism that is subsequently legitimised.

Of course geographical understandings of world politics that valorise violence should always be critically interrogated. The problem is that it seems to be the more 'colourful' or dominant provocateurs of particular theologies that are foregrounded by academics (Tse 2013). Sturm (2006), for example, deliberately chooses to explore the more extreme ends of the doctrinal spectrum and take the propositional belief claims of a few (in this case Mark Hitchcock) as representative of the whole.<sup>24</sup> Like Sturm, Jason Dittmer goes searching for the salacious views of a few to illustrate his studies. In one study, Dittmer (2010a) looks to discussion threads taken from the Internet website *Left Behind Prophecy Club*. This site requires users to pay a subscription fee in order to discuss various eschatological beliefs. Some participants,

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<sup>24</sup> That said, in a later paper, Sturm (2008) goes some way in discussing variations in premillennial and postmillennialism eschatological beliefs, calling for them to be 'parsed out, complexified and tackled, rather than avoided' (Sturm 2008:932).

Dittmer discovers, suspect that Barack Obama is the Anti-Christ. But it is perhaps unsurprising that he discovers extreme theological articulations from individuals with a vested (financial and theological) interest.

The beliefs of a certain few are, in turn, mapped indiscriminately onto vast cohorts of believers who are represented as homogenous and monolithic, despite - using Sturm's (2006:232) own critique - the 'multiplicity of dimensions therein'. One could argue, therefore, that Sturm and Dittmer employ the same kinds of reductive mechanisms that they themselves critique when they make representative insinuations about the millions of Americans who supposedly subscribe to these beliefs.

'For tens of millions of American evangelical Christians, the eschatology of God's plan for a Chosen People and a Chosen land-scape is essential to explaining the contemporary relationship. (Sturm 2012:333)

Whilst parts of this claim may be true, Gallaher (2010:229) is apposite in suggesting that 'most commentators on the evangelical phenomenon (whether in the media or academia) are extrapolating the views of a few' to an entire group. Whilst the apocalyptic rhetoric of certain evangelical leaders may be the most dominant, they are certainly not the most representative (Gallaher 2010). To this end, political geographer Nick Megoran (2013:141) sounds a warning:

'Although I welcome study of the geopolitical significance of religion, I am concerned at its relatively narrow focus on right-wing militaristic readings of the end-times theology. Following Susan Harding's argument about the field of the anthropology of Christianity, I suggest that the emerging geopolitics of Christianity is constructing fundamentalist/evangelical Christians as our 'repugnant cultural other' (Harding 1991, 374)

Megoran (2013) goes on to suggest that evangelical Christians are commonly portrayed as 'war-like, bigoted, racist, credulous, irrational, conspiratorially paranoid and right-wing' in critical geopolitical scholarship. Similarly, the Christian geographer Iain Wallace (2006:211) also warns against essentialising tendencies, stating that 'in focusing on extremes of religious belief and behavior, external observers (i.e., those outside the particular faith tradition) have generally been

oblivious to the active and substantive internal discourses which give religious belief systems a much more complex cultural expression than the actions of their fundamentalist adherents suggest'. Certainly, critical geopolitics' hitherto focus on propositional theology – and eschatology in particular – seems to have overlooked the internal theological dissonance present within evangelical congregations (Gallaher 2010, Megoran 2010). Critical geopolitics scholars rarely 'capture the variety of evangelical eschatological visions at work on the ground' (Tse 2013:94).

For instance, in work exploring propositional eschatology and Israel-Palestine, evangelical audiences are – more-often-than-not - magnanimously cast as passive adherents of one of two overarching theological frameworks (premillennialism or postmillennialism). But what, in reality, does it really mean to be a 'premillennial believer' (Sturm 2006:232)? Adherents may subscribe to certain tenets of premillennialism, without fully advocating others. Moreover, the fact that there are geopolitically significant variations within both theological frameworks is often neglected. The sharp geopolitical edges of dispensationalism become less pronounced in the theological variations of 'progressive dispensationalism', and the simplistic binary notion separating premillennial and postmillennial eschatologies are complicated by nuanced eschatological entanglements (Sizer 2007, Gallagher 2010). This is, of course, not to mention the fact that there are entirely alternative end time teleologies such as amillennialism that do not seem to 'depend on outmoded geographical norms' (Tse 2013:93), or that for many laypeople, the eschatological hermeneutics of pre, post or a-millennialism remain an untouchable theological mystery (Gerhardt 2008b). Hence, in emphasising the role of eschatology, political geographers overlook the geopolitical orientations of religious believers who do not give precedent to end-time theologies; to those, who, like Megoran (2010) are practicing Christians, albeit without a decided end-times theology.<sup>25</sup> The wider point is, of course, that there will always be alternative propositional theologies that prime believers away from violent teleologies and towards more progressive and care-filled geopolitical orientations (Megoran 2013, Sutherland 2014).

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<sup>25</sup> Dittmer (2008:283) accounts for these individuals in one sentence 'Premillennialism is perhaps weakest among the Pentecostals and among the conservative Lutheran and Reform traditions.'

As an aside, this points to the fact that theological competency appears somewhat lacking in recent geopolitical scholarship (although see Wallace (2006) and work by Nick Megoran for more astute and sustained theological engagements). It should be obvious that theology encompasses a far greater intellectual resource than most political geographers (and populist preachers) give it credit for. If our propositional theological focus is to continue, it seems certain that we must expand our theological capabilities. Indeed, I suggest that a more prolonged engagement with theological scholarship can productively nuance our critique of various religeopolitical beliefs. Often, for example, it seems entirely fruitless to critique religious believers on secular evaluative terms. There is a sense in which many academic critiques of evangelical religeopolitics only feed and strengthen those that it claims to attack. As a simple parody, I could argue, *contra* right-wing religious Jewish groups, that claims to the land of Israel should be governed and distributed according to international law. However, if the fundamental religeopolitical worldview of those individuals suggests that land is owned, administered and distributed by God (see Wallace 2006), then my critique will be distinctly unproductive in the sense that outright dismissal does nothing to engage the religious communities addressed. Perhaps a more productive and emancipatory critique may only emerge, therefore, from within the framework of the religious worldview itself, by using the internal beliefs, foundational stories and basic presuppositions to argue for a different interpretation of land ownership. Put otherwise, nuanced theological critique can at least provoke agonistic dialogue.

## **2.8 Propositional theology and the neglect of practiced religion**

The second and related limitation of critical geopolitics' propositional theological focus is that it primes us towards an overly-cognitivist and intellectualist approach to religion. Here the individual religious body quickly drops out of the picture, tangible embodied experience is rendered absent, and the specificity of place-based practice is ignored (Holloway and Vallin 2002, Gökarıksel 2009, Olson 2013). Again, this belies a Cartesian philosophical anthropology that reduces religious individuals to 'thinking things or 'containers for [religious] ideas' (Smith 2009:32). Hence, we usually apprehend religion through the deconstruction of a tapestry of

depersonalised propositions, ideations, claims and worldviews. But we get no real sense of how the fusion of propositional belief comes to be experienced or enacted by living, subjective human beings in their geographically situated and contingent lives.

Analyses often run up against the operative limits of this disembodied propositional approach exactly when they try to infer how certain cognitive beliefs – such as eschatology – are instantiated into geopolitical praxis, how they are ‘translated into being’ (Thrift 2000:380). Here it becomes problematic to simplistically infer direct and linear causation between a particular theology and a grounded practice. Often, it is only with some hard work and intellectual acrobatics that scholars come to impute causality between the eschatological geopolitical visions and the belligerent political behaviour of some evangelical congregants. For example, Sturm (2006:233) suggests that anticipation for the apocalypse, felt by *all* premillennialists invokes feelings of ‘human powerlessness’ that leads to individuals scorning ‘all efforts made in the name of religion to correct the ills of society’, because that would ‘thwart the divine purpose and to delay the advent of Christ’ (Sturm 2006:233). As a consequence, premillennialists are said to ‘valorise violence’ as they pine for the apocalypse (Sturm 2006:236).<sup>26</sup>

However, there appear to be problems with this picture. I find that generalised inferences such as these are unconvincing because a rich array of embodied and experiential contingencies will always trouble neat models of ‘basic causality’ (Sutherland 2014:23). *Pave* Tristan Sturm and Jason Dittmer, it is obvious that individual believers will interpret *and act upon* propositional theology very differently (Dittmer 2008, Megoran 2015). As Megoran (2004a:40) states, ‘Christianity does not - thankfully - offer a single blueprint or constitution about how we translate its [propositional theological] imperatives in the myriad political contexts in which we might find ourselves’. This process of individual interpretation will be further complicated not only by other propositional claims and theologies (as discussed above), but also by a raft of material encounters and embodied practices, emotions

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<sup>26</sup> Although Sturm’s (2011) work on the fusion of Christian Zionist belief and practice with regard to the ‘Free Gaza Flotilla’ incident is far more rigorous and convincing. Here Sturm (2011:4) illustrates how Christian Zionist beliefs led to believers to flood ‘radio, television, emails, and schools pleading with their listeners to take action and lobby their congressmen and women’ in support of Israel.

and affects (Sutherland 2014). These muddled ‘ways of being in the world’ intend us towards the world in contingent ways, and often in a manner that is not in alignment with our propositional beliefs (Wright 1992:124). Hence, Megoran (2010:5) and Sturm (2008a) acknowledge that ‘theological positions do not rigidly map onto particular political positions’ because there is a gap between ‘what is said and what is done’ (Dittmer and Sturm 2010:11). To say that we can analyse the geopolitics of religion successfully without reference to its possible public performance is, therefore, stunted (Dittmer 2013a).

Some work in critical geopolitics has acknowledged that the geopolitical significance of religion might lie beyond the simple articulation of theology and doctrine. When attention has moved away from a sole focus on the content of propositional theology and is directed instead towards the grounded, embodied praxis of religious believers, scholars have noted that totalising geopolitical beliefs are fundamentally – and unexpectedly - disrupted by ‘intimate geographical knowledge’ (Megoran 2010:1, Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b Gallaher 2010, C.Brickell 2012, Dittmer 2013a). As Dittmer (2013a:486) claims, ‘a strong strand of research has emerged looking at evangelical practices ‘in the field’ and how those experiences can alter subjectivities and consequently geopolitical orientations’. Postcolonial sentiments in critical geopolitics have, for example, led to the missiological practices of evangelicalism to be critically examined (McAlister 2006, Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, C.Brickell 2012, Gallaher 2010). Here, evangelistic encounters on the ground are shown to be marked by paradox, displaying both confrontation and control, and connectivity and care (Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, 2010, Gallaher 2010; Han 2010a, 2010b).

However, in these studies, I suggest that the analytical focus again falls far more on the prior theological beliefs and geopolitical imaginations motivating these practices, rather than the generative practices themselves. Praxis is simply taken to be ‘the expression or application of some cognitive set of beliefs already in place’ (Smith 2009:136). In this way, the practices themselves were reduced to a form of ‘second-stage representation of prior values’ (Bell 1992:43). Religious beliefs, worldviews and knowledge are always taken to precede – and therefore be prior to - practice, regardless of whether the latter turn out to be messy or not.

‘we have a tendency to think that doctrine and/or belief comes first – either in a chronological or normative sense – and that this then finds expression or application in worship practices, as if we have a worldview in place and then devise practice that are consistent with that cognitive framework. Such a top-down, ideas-first picture of the relation between practice and knowledge, worldview and worship, is often accompanied by a corresponding picture of the relationship between the Bible and worship. According to this model, we begin with the Bible as the source of our doctrines and beliefs and then “apply” it to come up with worship practices that are consistent with, and expressive of, what the Bible teaches.’ (Smith 2009:135)

## 2.9 A ‘lived’ approach to religion

In contrast, in approaching religion this thesis holds two factors as central. First, that practice – what people do – is an important constitutive part of individuals’ religious beliefs and orientations. I aim to disrupt the uni-directional relationship between belief and practice. Second, that religeopolitical practices are always situated; they emerge in concrete and contingent contexts. In making these claims, the thesis relies on more recent (re)conceptualisations of religion that cast it not simply as a set of beliefs, ideas or doctrines, but rather as a way of being in the world constituted by - and operative through – communal experience and embodied practice (Knott 2005, Smith 2009, 2012, Day 2010, Sturm 2013). This is what Ammerman (2007) has called ‘everyday religion’.

Famously, Talal Asad (1993), challenged well-established conceptual paradigms by illustrating that an understanding of religion as individualised propositional ‘belief’ rather than as communal practice and activity is a stunted, disenchanting and distinctly modern, European construction. Instead, religion is defined as ‘beliefs embodied in practice binding together communities of believers within the social body’ (Pabst 2011:165). Here religion, as Ammerman (2007:6) states, ‘is bigger than theological ideas and religious institutions’, it is not a ‘mere matter of words, but is embodied; it takes bodily form in the life of a community as people live together’ (Fiddes 2012:19).<sup>27</sup> In such a view, ‘religion is no longer essentialized and equated with abstract, generalisable beliefs to which believers give assent’, instead the

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<sup>27</sup> This has obvious methodological ramifications that are explored in the following chapter.

specificity of religious communities, and the formative and habitual practices of worship and sacrament are taken seriously as a reliable index to the constitution of 'religion' (Pabst 2011:163). As Wright (1992:128) suggests, religious practices of 'prayer, sacraments, liturgy, almsgiving, acts of justice and peacemaking' are not only expressive embodiments of belief, but are also formative because they act to attune the faithful towards a particular *telos* at the expense of others (Smith 2009).

Hence, as McAlister (2008:875) argues, a scholarly understanding of religion as experience cannot occur 'by focusing on the details of debates over doctrine; faith is inevitably richer, more multifaceted, and more sensuous than such debates can attest'. Of course, a recognition that religion is constructed more in terms of *how* one acts rather than *what* one believes is far more commonplace within religious communities (Woods 2012, Sutherland 2014). The Judeo-Christian tradition has long been aware that religion must be an entirely embodied affair, something that could only ever be 'lived out' and practiced, often in ways that have significant political ramifications (Cavanaugh 2009). Discussions within religious communities often centre on the authenticity of 'living faith out' in daily life rather than simply conforming to correct doctrine (Vincett *et al.* 2012).

Thus, scholars are becoming more aware of the fact that for many believers – my informants included – almost any activity can be infused and inflected with religious meaning or significance (McAlister 2008). As Knott illustrates (2005:43), believers often seek to re-enchant secular practices with 'religious meaning' as an act of worship (Knott 2005:43). Tse (2014:202) terms these 'grounded theologies':

'...performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent. They remain theologies because they involve some view of the transcendent, including some that take a negative view toward its very existence or relevance to spatial practices; they are grounded insofar as they inform immanent processes of cultural place-making, the negotiation of social identities, and the formations of political boundaries, including in geographies where theological analyses do not seem relevant.'

These insights are important for my study as they move the analysis of religion beyond the rigid propositional focus, and reveal how lived religion, 'cannot be separated from other practices of everyday life' (Orsi 2002:172). Religion, then, has



the potential to occur everywhere, playing a role in potentially all aspects of daily life. And yet, from experience, the opposite can also be true. What happens in the everyday lives of believers when religious identity or commitment recedes or is backgrounded? The presentism of everyday life is often taken up by immediate or mundane matters (Pain and Smith 2008). Religious belief and practice are – for all intents and purposes – negligible when one is simply riding the train into town. Or has religious commitment attuned individuals to act in certain automated but faith-filled ways at these periods?

To their credit, social and cultural geographers working in the burgeoning research field of ‘geographies of religion’ have moved ‘beyond the ‘officially sacred’ to include previously under-examined spaces and scales of religion and religious identities’ (Gökarıksel and Secor 2015:22). Scholars are now much more attentive to the varied, experiential and embodied aspects of religion, and have emphasised the ‘multiplicity and plurality of individual and collective religiosity’ (Olson, Hopkins and Kong 2013:6, Holloway and Valins 2002, Yorgason and Della Dora 2009, Lindenbaum 2012). Here, there has been an open and sustained engagement with the work of those who emphasise the ‘lived’ aspect of religion (Orsi 2002, McGuire, 2008). This has found most obvious expression in studies exploring the everyday lives of religious migrants (Sheringham 2011).

By approaching these religious individuals in an inclusive and attentive manner, scholars have been quicker to recognise the pervasive centrality of religious faith to individuals’ everyday identities and ways of life. They have also done much to draw attention to the varied ways in which religion comes to be expressed spatially, and how that, in turn, ‘affects its political expression’ (Sutherland 2014:24). Practiced religion disrupts ideas of discrete religious space, and instead blurs ‘geographical scales and conceptual boundaries: ‘those between the self and the world, life and death, the local and the universal, the private and the public, the introvert and the political, the fixed and the mobile, or, in Kong’s words, between politics and poetics’ (Yorgason and della Dora 2009:631). The religious appropriation of physical secular spaces is one simple indication of this (Wood 2012). Here, religion entails ‘sacred-making behaviour’ played out ‘in non-traditional spaces’ and practices (Vincett 2012:287). Moreover, one of the concerns of this scholarship has been to

examine how religion intersects with the secular and the political in public space, and how these neat categorisations might be called into question (Gökarkırsel and Secor 2015).

In the same manner, political geographers working outside of the subfield of critical geopolitics have also been much more attuned to practices of ‘lived religion’ and its imbrication with various political processes. Here, I am thinking of Peter Hopkins’, Giselle Vincett, Rachel Pain and Elizabeth Olson’s ongoing work on sociopolitical engagements and everyday lives of religious communities in Scotland. Within this corpus, they have explored the interplay between global political events, and the ways in which the religious practices, beliefs and identities of individuals adapt to such processes in more specific ways in daily life (Hopkins 2007, Sheringham 2011).

It would be beneficial, then, for critical geopolitics’ engagement with religion to pay greater attention to the formative power of grounded, material-practice in the shaping of religious belief, ideation and identity. Certainly, this thesis is enthused by such approaches to lived religion. But how does this dovetail with issues of geopolitics? In the following section, I move on to outline how recent notions of ‘everyday geopolitics’ undergird this thesis, facilitating a conceptual retooling of our understandings of the confluence of ‘lived religion’ and geopolitics. In doing so, the conceptual contours of the study are mapped.

## **2.10 Towards an ‘everyday geopolitics’ of ‘lived’ religion**

In recent years, a number of intersecting research agendas have culminated in the articulation of the notion of ‘everyday geopolitics’ (Dodds 2001, Dittmer and Gray 2010, Cowen and Story 2013). As this chapter has noted, discourses and representations have long been the primary object of study in critical geopolitics (Atkinson and Dodds, 2000). This wider analytical bias was quickly problematised within the sub-discipline. In 2000, Nigel Thrift (2000:380-381) suggested that, ‘geopolitics tends to be constructed as a discourse which can be understood discursively’ leading to a ‘mesmerized attention to texts and images in critical geopolitics, and critical geography more broadly, at the expense of other mobiles’.

To correct this, Thrift (2000) argued for a greater reflection on ‘the little things’ in the study of geopolitics. Thrift’s concerns instigated an interest in the ways that the geopolitical is grounded in, and impacts upon, the realm of ‘everyday’ lived experience (Muller 2009, Dittmer and Gray 2010, Wallace 2012, Fregonese 2012b). These include the social vicissitudes, non-anthropocentric elements, and more-than-representational registers made present in performances, practices, materialities, bodies, emotions and affects that exist ‘outside the realm of formal politics’ (Pain and Smith 2008:2)

Such a focus has coincided with an increased fascination with theories of ‘everyday life’ across social scientific disciplines (Highmore 2002). A wide range of theorists - from Walter Benjamin to Michel de Certeau - are commonly cited in contemporary approaches to the everyday. As a result, the notion of ‘the everyday’ has come - at times - to be either vague and all-encompassing, or unnecessarily abstract (Highmore 2002). Faced by this conceptual diversity, this thesis’ starting point is ‘everyday life’ as it has been developed in contemporary critical geopolitical scholarship. Far from attempting to reinvent the meta-concept of ‘the everyday’, this thesis looks to extend discussions already occurring within critical geopolitics, using methodological challenges and empirical examples to highlight various omissions and opportunities.

In retrospect, it seems clear that feminist geopolitical scholars advanced early explorations into ‘everyday’ manifestations of geopolitics by arguing for a relocation of ‘the political within practices of everyday life’ (Gökarkırsel and Secor 2015:22). Cowen and Story (2013:343) suggest that a large proportion of our daily lives are constituted by a ‘series of relations, forces, and events that we typically refer to as ‘geopolitical’. Often these remain hidden in and by the ‘normal’, peaceful micro-spaces in which we live (Pain 2008, Cowen and Story 2013). Hence, Dowler and Smith (2001:167) advocate a critical geopolitics that unveils ‘the hidden and insidious workings of power throughout the structures of everyday life’. They go on to suggest that scholars should draw attention to ‘the politicisation of the world around us’ (Dowler and Smith 2001:165), and show how the ‘micro-scale’ poetics of daily life - the tediums, dilemmas and mundaneness - come to be inextricably entwined with, and co-constitutive of, global geopolitics (Cowen and Story 2013).

Here, feminist scholars convoked political geographers to pay attention to the varied ‘materialities of everyday life as they constitute the substantive foundations - the bodies, the subjectivities, the practices and discourses - of constantly unfolding geopolitical tensions and conflicts’ (Dixon and Marston 2011:446).

Unpinning these calls were broader criticisms of critical geopolitics’ received wisdom of scale and agency. Feminists sought the disruption of the binary and hierarchical global/local scilism that appeared to structure much critical geopolitical work. Indeed, this binary sat alongside a number of stubborn others, including as public/private, inside/outside, and normal/exceptional (Cowen and Story 2013:344). Dowler and Smith (2001) highlighted the normative assumption that ‘universal’ geopolitical discourse and imaginaries filtered down from abstract global/statist realms into the local, private lives of ‘normal’ people (Pain and Smith 2008). This assumption has, however kept ‘concerns with the intimate and everyday at bay’ (Cowen and Story 2013:344). Scholars have often overlooked the ways in which our geopolitical orientations are formed through situated factors such as class, gender and religion, or the ‘influences of the local, regional or institutional contexts’ (Muller 2009:12). Thus, without wanting to reify the scale of the local, Dowler and Sharp (2001) advocated a reciprocal and co-constitutive relationship between the international and the local.

‘Lives are constructed and reconstructed around political and patriarchal boundaries through discourses which apparently operate at the global and national scales. Attempts to understand the complex relations between the international and everyday demonstrate the importance of ensuring that small, mundane daily practices of everyday life are understood in relation to the reconstructions of the nation and the international.’ (Dowler and Sharp 2001:174)

Thus, Kuus (2013b:383) explains, critical geopolitics needed to ‘open up our analysis of what constitutes geopolitics and how it matters in everyday life’ by attending to ‘the role of individual and collective actors in producing, resisting and transforming the practices that supposedly happen over their heads’. Feminist scholars were, therefore, motivated towards more rooted and ‘peopled’ studies (Kuus 2004, 2007, 2008, 2013a, 2013b) as an ‘everyday’ rejoinder to analyses that framed geopolitics as a field of disembodied relations between states (Muller 2009), or as the specialised domain of elite male actors (Dowler and Sharp 2001). Speaking

of this early elitism of critical geopolitics, Joanne Sharp (2000b:362) argued that ordinary people<sup>28</sup> were often reduced 'to culture industry drones, empty of agency and awaiting their regular injection of ideas'. Similarly, Nick Megoran (2006b) bemoaned the frequent erasure of ordinary people's experiences and everyday understandings of the geopolitical events under scrutiny. Even popular geopolitics' – which purported to foreground the ways in which geopolitical discourse suffused the everyday lives of people outside the realm of formal politics perpetuated an analytical focus 'on the elite visions of media moguls, movie directors, and lower-level yet still relatively empowered media functionaries like writers and reporters (Dittmer and Gray 2010:1664).

Answering these critiques, feminist scholars worked to show that everyday geopolitics 'is bursting at the seams with other actors' (Sundberg 2008:871) who all 'facilitate, contest, or simply experience geopolitics in a concrete and quotidian way' (Barrick 2009:7). Geopolitical actors now include NGOs and civil/social movements (Routledge 1996, Jeffries 2013), children and students (Benwell 2007, Muller 2009), journalists (Pinkerton 2013), activists (Davis 2009, Askins 2013), artists (Dodds 2007, Ingram 2013), and virtual communities (Dodds 2006, Dittmer 2010a). The scope of these studies primes this thesis to pay closer attention to the experiences and engagements of ordinary religious congregants who make up faith communities (Dittmer 2013a). This counters the current focus on patriarchal or elite religious figures at the expense of congregants and laypeople (Ó Tuathail 2000, Sturm 2006, Dittmer 2013a).

As well as pointing us towards the study of certain overlooked peoples, feminist scholars also paid increasing attention to what individuals did as well as what they said or wrote. Inspired by Dowler and Sharp's (2001:174) call to 'see how [geopolitical] discourses actually work in everyday life', scholars have drawn on a wide range of (often affiliated) theoretical approaches in order to expedite a move towards the practices of geopolitics. Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen (2008) look to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of practice. Others find theoretical purchase in Bourdieu's (1994) theories of practice (Haldrup *et al.* 2008, Sturm 2013). Others

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<sup>28</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, I follow Megoran's (2006:626) use of the word 'ordinary' to encompass not a 'homogenous subject group' but simply those who are not professionally or 'actively producing public geopolitical knowledge.'

have looked to Butler's (1990) notion of 'performativity' (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2007, Gallaher 2010). Performativity describes the process by which individuals 'perform the normative expectations that accumulate around the subject position they occupy' (Gallaher 2010:216). It is useful, she goes on, because it:

'provides a way to understand the paradoxes that stem from individuals holding different subjectivities. One of the key lessons to evolve from geographic (and other social science) forays into identity issues...is the idea that individuals often occupy multiple subject positions at once...The multiplicity of subject positions that people can occupy, and the variety of combinations that can ensue create 'paradoxical space'. (Gallaher 2010:217)

Whilst remaining cognizant of these works, I make use of Martin Muller's (2008, 2009) conceptualisation of 'everyday geopolitics' which relies on a reading of discourse as both language and social practice. Muller (2009) argued that critical geopolitics subscribed to an overly narrow conception of discourse as simply linguistic phenomena, relegating practice to an extra-discursive realm. Instead, inspired by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) work on the contingent nature of identity construction, Muller (2009) argued that discourse encompassed both language and social practice. In his empirical work on Russian geopolitics, Muller (2009) looked not only at what is spoken about Russia's place in world politics, but also at the everyday performances and practices through which these geopolitical identities were being co-constructed. Muller's approach is important because he does not jettison discourse from the analysis of the everyday, rather he views discursive practice as an important component in the construction of everyday life.

As many scholars of 'everyday geopolitics' have since noted, often it is the mundane and banal practices and utterances that seem to be the most geopolitically formative in everyday life. Michael Billig's (1995) work on 'banal nationalism' has acted as the commonplace entrance through which to think about these ideas. Billig's work explored how national identity comes to be reproduced through unspectacular everyday practices; often in ways that are so ordinary that they elude critical attention. Subsequent attention has been paid to the self-evident ways in which a number of geopolitical ideations become incorporated, naturalised and enacted in everyday life (Haldrup 2006, Haldrup *et al.* 2008). As noted, scholars have rejected a simplistic hierarchical model where geopolitical discourse is said to filter or scale

down into daily life from the elite realm of politics and media. Rather, geopolitical ideations are said to be co-constituted and re-produced through the enacting of 'banal, embodied experiences and practices' (Haldrup *et al.* 2008:118).

The significance of banality is frequently taken as pre-given, often with little accompanying explanation. To my mind, the power of banality is located exactly in the order, routine and repetition of certain practices. These instantiate formative processes of subconscious habitualisation and pre-cognitive automaticity (Haldrup 2006, Haldrup *et al.* 2008, Muller 2009, Staeheli *et al.* 2012) which, in turn, lead to the unacknowledged attunement of bodies towards certain geopolitical (dis)positions, ideations, orientations, and postures. I illustrate this in Chapter 4 through a careful reading of the entirely ordinary act of riding Jerusalem light rail, an act that attuned individuals towards indifference to the 'Other'. Moreover, as I have already noted, this type of embodied attunement is exactly what is at stake in the formative practices of religious sacrament and worship (Smith 2009). Here, for example, the bodily act of singing, praying or sharing in communion with other believers primes the individual towards certain ways ultimate allegiances that may have little to do with the actual discursive content of the songs, prayers and liturgy (Smith 2009, 2012).

Billig's work not only ushered scholarly attention towards the 'banal' practice of everyday life, but also encouraged in a more material approach to 'everyday'. Scholars are increasingly exploring the ways in which the geopolitical is coconstituted through our bodily interactions with various objects and material practices (Dittmer 2014). Most famously, Billig's (1995) work showed how 'flaggings' of the nation occurred in everyday life in both banal and overt ways. This was expanded to show that, for many, the geopolitical is mediated through seemingly mundane and innocuous 'things' (Thrift 2000), including currency, postage stamps, road signs, ice, and dishcloths. Others have shown that apolitical objects become imbued with geopolitical meaning, and work to co-constitute the political discourse (Sundberg 2008, Darling 2014). This focus on the material has much to offer studies of religeopolitics, especially as national projects often appropriate religious objects and symbols and vice versa (Wright 1992).

## 2.11 Summary

By employing an ‘everyday geopolitical’ lens, combined with a ‘lived religion’ approach, this thesis remains attentive to the multiple ideations, practices and objects involved in the contingent formation of religeopolitical subjects. Instead of focusing on a narrow range of propositional theologies that may, in some way, pertain to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this thesis looks to religion as a much more holistic and formative phenomenon in everyday day. I show that religeopolitical orientations are never static or permanent, but are processual, mutable and dynamic, impacted by a host of everyday encounters and changeable theological revelation. I interrogate the ways by which a wide range of religious experiences, beliefs, identities, meanings and resources attuned my informants towards certain geopolitical orientations and understandings.

To visualise my conceptual framework, it is helpful to draw on Pain and Smith’s (2008) visual metaphor of the double helical structure of DNA, which they use in their study on fear, geopolitics and everyday life. Pain and Smith’s (2008) two main conceptual strands - geopolitics and everyday life - wind into a single structure, bound together by a number of connectors. These connectors are ‘events, encounters, movements, dialogues, actions, affects and things: the materials that connect and conjoin geopolitics and everyday life’ (Pain and Smith, 2008:7).

In contrast, my thesis makes use of a more complex form of DNA; triple-stranded DNA (see Figure 1).<sup>29</sup> My three main strands are geopolitics, everyday life, and religion. These strands carry much of the same information and, in a similar manner to Pain and Smith’s diagrammatic metaphor, are bound together by connectors of events, encounters, and emotions. In order to explore the relationship between the three main strands, the following chapters investigate a number of these connectors.

But, I also still want to affirm and retain the dynamism of Pain and Smith’s (2008) model. DNA, whether double or triple-stranded, is never found in a static state, but

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<sup>29</sup> See work by Frank-Kamenetskii and Mirkin (1995), Bernués and Azorín (1995), and Soyfer and Potaman (2012) on DNA complexes that contain three strands.



it constantly in process of being made, undone, duplicated, and re-made. In the same way, I want to suggest that everyday geopolitical engagements – especially those shot through with religious undertones - occur in a processual and contingent manner. Using a more animated model of DNA, I affirm that the connective engagements are fragile; ‘the breaks and discontinuities that occur – both randomly and in patterned ways – might represent the awkward, unfinished, disunited, conflicting nature of relations between the geopolitical and the everyday; but ultimately they are inter-reliant and complementary’ (Pain and Smith 2008:7).

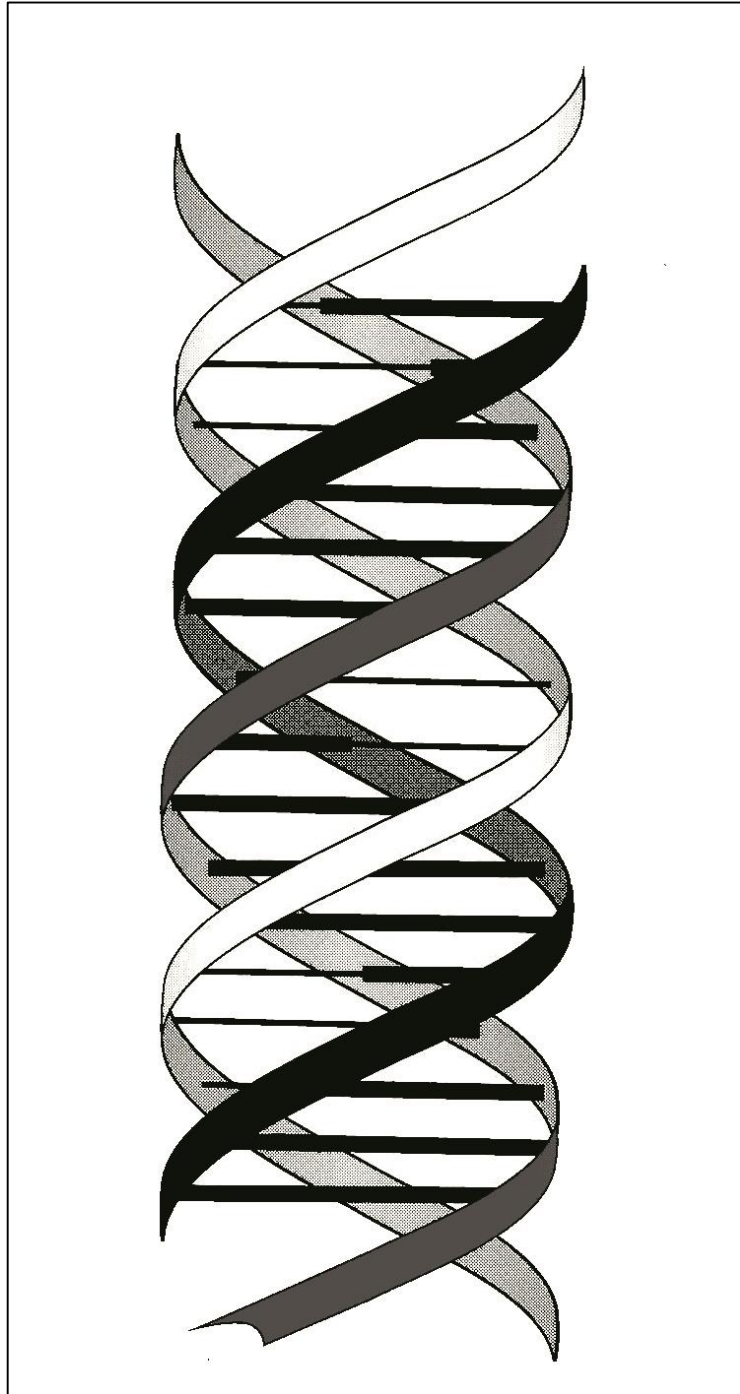


Figure 1: A triple helical vision of DNA.

## Chapter 3:

# Researching ‘religeopolitics’

### 3.0 Introduction

My methodology was informed by my initial conceptual commitments: to explore the confluence of religion and geopolitics in the everyday lives of Messianic Jews in Jerusalem. This chapter discusses the methodological framework that was employed in order to grapple with this broad research objective. In doing so I hope to contribute to a growing body of methodological literature in critical geopolitics that attends to the realities and challenges of grounded fieldwork conducted in ‘politically volatile and/or (post)conflict situations’ (Benwell 2014a:163, Dowler 2001a, 2001b, Megoran 2006b, Woon 2013). I provide a critical reflection on various methodological challenges faced during the course of the research, particularly focusing on the geo-politics of access. Methodological challenges are also used as a springboard from which to consider the gap between theoretical conceptualisations of ‘everyday geopolitics’ and the reality of attempting to research it. Finally, I reflect on various aspects of my positionality, connecting these up to feminist-inflected debates about embodiment and the researcher and researched.

Throughout my research I was often struck with how straightforward my doctoral colleagues’ fieldwork appeared to be. And other theses seemed to give sanitised methodological accounts where the prosaic challenges of boredom, insecurity, and frustration had largely been ‘written away’ (Punch 2012). Rarely, for example, do researchers - especially those in critical geopolitics - admit to periods of feeling utterly lost, afraid, or account for the times when motivation disappears and boredom reigns (although see Dowler 2001a, Benwell 2007, and Woon 2013). Seldom are quotidian - but pressing - issues such as securing housing or problems with housemates addressed (although see Chris Harker’s research blog - [www.familiesandcities.com](http://www.familiesandcities.com), and Dowler 2001b). These issues are relegated to informal conversations held with colleagues. Instead, quite understandably, the

‘risky’ or dangerous aspects of fieldwork are more likely to be foregrounded in the written accounts of research undertaken in violent or sensitive social contexts (Lee 1993, Dowler 2001a, 2001b). Yet, this left me without a clear sense of what it was truly like to be in the ‘field’ prior to my departure. And this, in turn, led to feelings of needing to ‘live up to the mythical, competent researcher’, and ‘cope quietly’ (Punch 2012:89-91). Hence, despite facing a number of direct risks to my personal security, this chapter attempts to account for some of the more banal and unsettling aspects of ethnographic geopolitical research.

At points this reflection takes the form of unedited and uncensored excerpts from my research diary. Following Markowitz’s (2013) edited collection *Ethnographic Encounters in Israel*, this chapter constitutes an honest and humble attempt to illustrate what it was like actually *doing* everyday geopolitical research in Jerusalem. Whilst this has some intrinsic methodological value, it is also important to reflect on the difficulties, limitations, and ‘failures’ of fieldwork in order to develop ‘a critical awareness of the inseparability of questions of methodology from the knowledge we produce’ (Muller 2009:69). Following Kirby (2013), I would suggest that facing significant methodological challenges, and even ‘failing’ in different ways – whilst not procuring the data that I may have hoped for – often allowed for other unexpected data to move to the fore. Consequently throughout, I use methodological challenges as a springboard from which to provide a constructive critique of everyday ethnographic research in critical geopolitics. Whilst retrospectively presented as distinct sections in this chapter, what I actually did in the field, the methods chosen, the challenges and difficulties, the ethical considerations, my various positionalities, and my emotional investments, all bled inductively into one another (Dowler 2001a).

### **3.1 Methodological considerations for new fields of enquiry**

As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest, the practicalities of research are always ‘foreshadowed’ by the theoretical and conceptual debates that influence and form how subsequent work is conducted. As the previous chapter illustrated, this study is interested with the ways by which geopolitical orientations are formed in

everyday life. As such, adopting notions of ‘everyday geopolitics’ as a conceptual framework with which to explore the confluence of religion and geopolitics had a significant impact on my methodological choices. The logical continuation and empirical substantiation of these concepts resulted in my employment of a qualitative ethnographic approach.

It is now broadly acknowledged that new understandings of ‘everyday geopolitics’ require not simply asking new types of questions about geopolitical knowledge and pedagogy, but also the development of alternative methods with which to do so (Megoran 2006b, Sturm 2008b, Dittmer and Gray 2010, Koopman 2011). A singular text-based focus on discourse and representation is no longer sufficient when analysing the empirically complex process by which geopolitical knowledge is produced, circulated, interpreted and practiced by different people in different places (Thrift 2000, Megoran 2006b, Muller 2009). Rather, methodological approaches in ‘everyday geopolitics’ must take into account a much wider range of non-traditional ‘ordinary’ actors and stakeholders, and attend to the multiple sites and spaces in which these diverse individuals live and learn (Muller 2009). Furthermore, methods employed to capture the ‘everyday’ must remain attentive to ideas of representation and discourse, as well as embodied and non-representational approaches to social practices, including ideas of performance, materiality, emotion and affect (Thrift 2000, Pain and Smith 2008, Dittmer and Gray 2010).

Hence, critical geopolitics has increasingly turned to ethnographic and auto-ethnographic techniques as appropriate (if challengeable) tools with which to capture the detailed complexity of individuals’ ‘lived experiences’, and the construction of everyday understandings of geopolitical phenomena (Herbert 2000:551, Megoran 2006b, Sidaway 2009, Muller 2009). The roots of the ethnographic approach lie in social and cultural anthropology, however, it has been increasingly embraced by disciplines across social sciences, not least of all Geography (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994, Herbert 2000, Dowler 2001b). Indeed, Muller (2009:72) commends ethnography for its ability to ‘gauge the specificities of place and how sociality and spatiality are intertwined in the reconstruction and deconstruction of social life’. Moreover, Dowler (2001b:157) argues that ethnography can dismantle ‘preconceived and stereotypical notions’ that

come to be associated with places. This was certainly the case in my investigation of Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Accordingly, political geographers have drawn on ethnographic techniques in a growing and diverse array of research contexts including Central Asia, Russia, the Falklands/Malvinas, Tibet, India, Lebanon, and Jerusalem (Megoran 2006b, Benwell 2009, 2014a, 2014b, Muller 2009, 2011, Ramadan 2012, Leshem 2015, and Williams 2012, 2013), and it is from this corpus that my methodology takes inspiration. In line with the project's research objectives, ethnography's primary advantage over other qualitative research methods is found in its ability to remain attentive to the 'routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994:2).

For all intents and purposes, this ethnographic uptake has been framed in largely positive terms (although see Kuus' (2013a) skeptical musings in the contexts of foreign policy making worlds). Megoran (2006b:627) claims that ethnography was a 'powerful way of illuminating emic categories' of geopolitical meaning, while for Dittmer (2013b), ethnography highlighted 'how bodies interact, meld, and constitute social spaces, and thereby create inclusions and exclusions'. Sturm (2008b:608) suggests that ethnography helps 'answer how everyday people interpret elite geopolitics, how they resist them, and how they make their own and have influence at state and international level scales'. That said, using ethnography in geopolitical research has resulted in a number of specific challenges and difficulties (Kuus 2013a). Practically speaking, these include identifying which 'little things' (Thrift 2000) to investigate, and how even to identify them in sites and spaces that maybe 'inaccessible by design' (Kuus 2013a:116).

It is evident that a similar ethnographic turn has been occurring in studies of religion and religious groups (Scharen 2012, Ward 2012). Exploring religion has long caused distinct methodological challenges not simply because of the practical difficulties posed by studying the role of belief in the lives of people, but also because of the 'act of analysing religion through the secular language and methods of social science' (Sheringham 2011). Yet, as the previous chapter demonstrated, there is a growing re-conceptualisation of religion as something formed not simply

through cognitive and propositional ‘belief’ statements but through a multifaceted array of embodied, individual and communal practices, habits, materials and ‘micro-liturgies’ (Smith 2009). This broader theoretical and definitional focus on ‘doing’ rather than ‘believing’ has had important methodological implications.

Crucially, it has attuned an ethnographic turn in studies of religion that closely mirrors that occurring in geopolitics (Ammerman 2007:5, Scharen 2012, Ward 2012). Subsequent studies in ‘everyday religion’ and ‘practical theology’ have attempted to capture the sheer mass of religious activity that occurs both inside and – crucially - outside the spaces of organised religious institutions or events. This has also disrupted the traditional divides between ‘empirical, cultural and theological analyses’ (Scharen 2012:4) as it focuses not simply on institutions, doctrines or discourses, but rather the subjective and embodied experience of religion’s practitioners (Ward 2012).

However, this ethnographic turn has presented methodological challenges similar to those being encountered by scholars of geopolitics. The first is that it has become more challenging to know *where* to look for manifestations of religion and *what* exactly to look for (Knott 2005). Attending to the former question of ‘where’, Smith (2009) suggests that we must broaden our sense of the ‘spaces’ of religion, for it does not stay neatly confined within the sites that modern definitions of religion designate (Gökarıksel 2009). As I go on to explore, in this chapter and elsewhere, the confluence of everyday religion and geopolitics occurred in a myriad of predictable and unpredictable places beyond the ‘official’ spaces of religion. However, in order not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater, Vasquez and Marquardt (2003) advise a methodological approach that attends to official and institutional religious spaces as well as everyday manifestations of faith. Indeed, for reasons of access, the official congregational space retained methodological importance in my study.

Attending to the ‘what exactly to look for’ question, Ammerman (2007:6) notes that ‘paying attention to everyday experience quickly explodes any assumption that religion is always (or ever) one thing, either for individuals or for groups’. With similar sentiments, McAlister (2005:875) states, ‘it is not that everything is religion, it

is just that religion can be virtually anything'. The challenge, it seems, is that just about any secular practice can be deeply infused with sacred commitment, sentiment or motivation. That the believer does not always articulate this exacerbates the challenge of identification. This demands a sustained and committed engagement with the lived social reality of the religious community, and an attention to ritual, habit, and material practice (see the edited collections by both Ammerman 2007, and Ward 2012). Again, this does not require entirely rejecting theological and propositional articulation, merely to situate it in relation to religious practices.

Driven by the two intersecting methodological agendas of 'everyday geopolitics' and 'lived religion', my research employed various ethnographic techniques in order to capture a varied perspective of Messianic Jewish religeopolitical orientations. In using ethnography as my primary methodology I aim to contribute to these methodological approaches in religion and geopolitics. Indeed, as I go on to discuss, the methodological particularities of ethnography have been particularly helpful in highlighting some of the theoretical and conceptual shortcomings nested within notions of 'everyday geopolitics' and 'religious geopolitics'.

### **3.2 Research timeline**

In the following section I provide a brief overview of my research period in Israel. Due to the relative lack of recent literature/research on Messianic Jewish communities, a six week pilot study was undertaken in May/June 2011 in a Messianic congregation in the north of Israel (Webb 2011).<sup>30</sup> Access to this community was secured through pre-existing links I have from living and working in the region in 2005 and 2008.<sup>31</sup> The ensuing study was formative of my decision to focus my research on Messianic communities in Jerusalem, a city with a number of growing and diverse Messianic congregations. Due to time and budget constraints, I planned to undertake sixteen months of 'fieldwork' (between September 2012 –

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<sup>30</sup> This research was written as a requirement for my Masters degree.

<sup>31</sup> In 2004-2005, I volunteered for an Israeli organisation that used sport to bring Jewish and Arab children together. It was during this time that I first became aware of the Messianic Jewish community in Israel. In 2008-2009, I was an intern at a Palestinian NGO based in Ramallah. I often visited Messianic Jewish friends during time off.



December 2013), broken up into four trips of four months. Arriving in Jerusalem to undertake the first four months of fieldwork was fraught with anxiety, chiefly because I knew very little about the city itself, or the communities in which I wanted to undertake research. To me, the city was not the enchanted place that spiritual pilgrims and tourists often write of (Montefiore 2011). Instead, it was just like most other cities; hectic, tense, suffocating, and spilling over with all kinds of often inconsiderate or ill-tempered people.

These early stages of the research process were lonely and frustrating, but invaluable. I always anticipated that I would get little ‘proper’ research completed, but rather saw it as a period not only to adapt to the change in culture and environment, but also as a time when all those expectations and assumptions derived from a year of reading about the field could be challenged and re-configured by the local and grounded reality. Accordingly, these early exploratory months were busied by the need to adjust the research design as more became known about the nature of the communities under study, the availability of informants, and the particular dynamics and sensitivities of the research topic. It was here that it became clear that I would have to be flexible and patient with regard to access and accrual of research ‘data’ – characteristics that can rarely be taught or honed during the prescriptive directives of a field method/techniques course (Law 2003, 2004, Bajc 2012). Despite my preparations, it seemed that serendipity, chance, contingency, and surprise structured my ethnographic engagement just as much as preparedness, planning, and routine.

During this period, I secured a rental room in an apartment shared with a Messianic Jewish man. I had hoped living with a member of the community would act as a fruitful avenue into my intended informants’ world. It would also allow me immediate access to the space of the domestic; a space that has garnered increasing conceptual attention in ‘everyday geopolitics’ (see K.Brickell 2012a, 2012b). In order to secure the room, I endured an interrogation from the man as to whether I drank alcohol, smoked, took drugs, watched pornography, and/or read my bible daily. Throughout my tenancy I was subjected to further questioning about my life-choices and academic study. He regularly asked me about my research plans and agenda. Often I would answer in vague terms because I knew we had very different

views on theology and politics. Halfway through the year I decided to move down into an apartment in Palestinian East Jerusalem. My former housemate had begun to act in an increasingly irrational and unusual manner. He complained that I was ‘spending too much time in the apartment’, and demanded that I not do my PhD writing during the day when in my room. As I go on to explore, perhaps this was due to an underlying suspicion of my work and myself. A police-raid on our apartment only encouraged my move to the east side of the city.

Practically, the initial months of my research focused on observing religeopolitical beliefs and practices occurring within the formal sites of Messianic Jewish congregations. Whilst I was keen to immerse myself in the everyday life of Messianic believers outside the formal spaces of the congregation, the reality was that at this early stage ‘everyday’ encounters were rather more brief and serendipitous. For the first six months, I attended as many Messianic meetings as possible – across seven different congregations - as well as additional bible studies, youth groups, and prayer meetings. As Chapter 6 explores, an initial challenge was posed simply in locating the congregations. Although a number of the larger congregations have websites with contact information, some of the smaller groups were much harder to find. I soon fell into some semblance of a weekly routine of visiting organised congregations, or congregational events almost every evening.

Attending and participating in congregation life was undoubtedly a useful source of information and allowed me to have some weekly contact with those I was attempting to research. However, it was the ‘ordinary’ times, spaces and practices in-between the formal gatherings that really interested me. I was constantly troubled that I would not be able to access the complex spatial and temporal arrangements that are implicated in the everyday geopolitical lives of these ordinary citizens. That said, congregational attendance was important in establishing the personal relationships necessary to access everyday spaces. My general approach to gaining access to Messianic Jewish informants centred around networking with existing contacts, repeatedly participating in particular community activities, and approaching individuals and introducing myself. During the year, I also volunteered at a joint Messianic Jewish/Palestinian Christian reconciliation charity. This, I hoped, would provide me with another avenue into some of the Messianic

communities. Indeed, volunteering or doing *pro bono* work was often one way that secured access to the everyday lives of informants (Billo and Hiemstra 2013).

Over time, as my network of contacts grew, I was able to spend more time with individuals outside the structural confines of the congregational setting. In the second half of the research year, I concentrated more on ‘deep hanging out’ (Clifford 1997:56, Dowler 2001b, Wogan 2004); undertaking ethnographic observations and interviews in the more day-to-day aspects of my informants everyday lives. I developed a varied social life across a diverse array of people and activities. Going against my naturally reluctant personality, I also tried to accept invitations from any potential new friendship. I found myself in Jewish settlements, at poetry reading performances, at a wedding, invited to Orthodox Jewish Sabbath dinners, in theatres, playing in football matches, and helping a tour-guide friend. It is amazing how many times I would be approached in coffee-shops if I happened to be reading an interestingly titled book. At times of boredom, I would ride the light-rail or take buses around Jerusalem, getting off to explore some unknown-part of the city. As well as my Messianic Jewish informants, I would converse with as many English-speaking Israelis Jews as possible. This occurred in coffee shops, in the bakery, at falafel stands, and at tourist sites.

However, I also continued to attend weekly congregational service at three Messianic congregations. Even late into the research process, I still discovered new congregations to visit. Periodically, I would be invited by informants to visit Messianic congregations or friends in other towns/cities across Israel. Hence, as well as Jerusalem, I also had varying levels of contact with Messianic communities or individuals in Eilat, Tiberias, Arad, Tel Aviv, Metula, Rosh Pina, and the Ramat Yishay region. Visiting these different areas was useful for comparative reasons and highlighted the huge diversity within the Messianic Jewish community with regard to religious and geopolitical practice and belief.

Six months into my research period I was violently attacked by five Palestinian men whilst walking to my apartment one evening. I was held and tasered multiple times, and left wallet-less in an East Jerusalem street. After a brief stay in an Israeli hospital I was discharged to nurse bruises and taser burns at home. It has, in recent times,

become customary for scholars to reflect on the ways in which certain emotions come to shape the research progression, and the subsequent knowledge produced (Widdowfield 2000, Laurier and Parr 2009, Gould 2010, Woon 2013). Whilst not wishing to engage in ‘over-indulgent academic naval gazing’ (Rabbitts 2013:138), in truth, both my relationship to the PhD project/research and my self-confidence took a significant denting after this event. Far from being a good ‘war-story’, for a long time I lost all motivation to engage with my topic and research. For a while I stopped caring about the conflict. At times I experienced a raft of sadness that the negative and essentialist stereotypes espoused by many of my Jewish informants about Palestinian men had been seemingly confirmed. Practically, for the rest of my time in Jerusalem I found it emotionally and psychologically demanding to walk through East Jerusalem by myself, especially at night. Emotions of fear and anxiety were never far from the surface, especially when walking past large groups of males. I avoided the site of the attack<sup>32</sup> – taking alternative routes whenever possible. Yet, whilst this single extreme event did affect me in significant ways, it was not singly formative of my everyday geopolitical orientation. It was just another processual building block in my engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, with time, a quote by Judith Butler in the introduction to *Precarious Life* seemed to resonate with me. To be victimised in this way attuned me towards the suffering of Palestinians (and some Israelis) caused by the protracted conflict.

‘To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways.’ (Butler 2006:*xii*)

### 3.3 Research methods

Having provided a general rationale for the use of ethnography and recounted a brief descriptive timeline of the research, I now account for the specific methods used. As my research is concerned with the everyday geopolitical and religious engagements of Messianic Jews, I opted for an entirely qualitative approach. As previously indicated, the types of methods used during the research fall under the

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<sup>32</sup> This was quite a difficult task, as the attack occurred on the road I lived on.

rubric of ethnography. 'Ethnography' is most commonly used expansively to describe a broad methodological sensibility comprised of a series of individual techniques such as participant observation and interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 1994). To supplement my primary ethnographic focus, I collected as many different forms of discursive literature produced by the communities *in situ*, including websites, sermons, newsletters, magazines, welcome leaflets, prayer request emails and books. In addition, I attempted to gather various forms of media coverage of the Messianic community in Israel. This secondary textual corpus not only acted as an initial point of familiarisation and reference, but also provided an invaluable source for revealing the articulation of key political and theological positions and attitudes.

### **3.4 Participant observation**

As Sheringham (2011) suggests, a central component of ethnography is 'participant observation'. Participant observation is one of the primary ways in which researchers attempt to understand the everyday lived experiences of informants by spending 'considerable time observing and interacting with a social group' (Herbert, 2000:551, Crang and Cook 2007). For this reason, Clifford (1997:56) and Wogan (2004) depict participant observation as 'deep hanging out', a description that accurately portrays the nature of my fieldwork. Over time, I was able to immerse myself in the everyday lives of certain informants, sharing everyday life experiences, including working, socialising, and leisure activities. This allowed various practices, behaviours, values, and social structures to become increasingly apparent.

Practically, I did not have a prescriptive approach towards the ratio of 'participation' to 'observation'. It is a truism that the presence of the participant-observing researcher will normally alter the behaviour of the informant in some way (Herbert 2000, 2001). The impact of the researcher's presence is usually thought to be comparatively lessened in situations where detached observation occurs above participation. However, detached observation would have engendered significant wariness amongst informants. Hence, at times I embraced the 'participant-as-observer' role (Flick 2006), and at others adopted a more detached position of the

‘unobtrusive’ researcher (Muller 2009). This fluid positioning is not unusual; ethnographers typically shuttle between insider/outsider, participant/observer roles (Herbert 2000:552). My level of participation was always contingent on my level of access, the individuals involved, and the activity at hand. On the whole, it was rare that my informants were undertaking any form of activity that I was not happy to participate in.

I initially recorded my observations through note taking on a Smartphone. Here, I noted my general impressions and significant quotations or practices alongside a brief description of the field setting (Emerson 2001). Using a Smartphone constituted an attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible, and imitated the everyday action of texting or emailing. Later I added detail to these rough notes in a more detailed field diary. Alongside my empirical observations, I would critically reflect on the constraints of the methods used, and note down moments where my positionality seemed to either constrain or further the research process (Spradley 1980).

As the research progressed, participant observation moved to the fore as my primary research method because it facilitated an exploration that was attentive to ‘emic (self-ascribed)’ rather than ‘etic (researcher-ascribed) categories and meanings (Megoran 2006b:626). As Sheringham (2011:80) indicates, an emphasis on emic data postures a more ‘open relationship between the researcher and the research context and participants’ eschewing the ‘fixed order, or imposition of pre-conceived ideas’. As I go on to explore, participant observation brought to the fore various religious and geopolitical orientations that would be missed by the structure and dynamic of researcher-led interviews. Participant observation - unlike interviews - allows the researcher to capture what informants do as well as what they say (Herbert 2000). By juxtaposing participant observation and interviews I was able to notice gaps between what people say they think and believe and what they actually do.

Crucially, participant observation forced me to account for geopolitical orientations that are too often overlooked by both informants and scholars of geopolitics (Herbert 2000). In my study, the ethnographic process not only helped me appreciate how my informants constructed understandings about the conflict, but it

also allowed me to experience the more routine and pervasive periods of quiet where no form of cognitive engagement occurred. As Dowler (2001a:415 my emphasis) states, ‘while conducting fieldwork in a violent social context, the researcher *for the most part* engages in ordinary actions even though she or he must always be prepared to negotiate the extraordinary’. Thus, as the proceeding empirical chapters go on to explore, instead of force-finding the conflict in daily life, my observational work revealed the unsettling reality that my informants were largely indifferent to it. It jumped out at me that most informants did not experience ‘the situation’ in their everyday lives in any clear or obvious way.

I found orientations of indifference unsettling because my education in critical geopolitics had armed me with a range of preconceived assumptions that were not matched by the empirical reality. To my mind, critical geopolitics socialises a disciplinary culture that affords primary credence to extreme geopolitical events or encounters, and the subsequent orientations. The non-occurrences, silences and disengagements that marked my observational work emphasised the shortcomings of what some have termed ‘eventism’ in the study of everyday geopolitics (Struckman and Sturm 2013); that is, our propensity to focus on extreme or extraordinary events as primarily formative of individuals’ everyday lives and geopolitical imaginations (Pain and Smith 2008). Often our presupposed expectations mean that we go searching for the extraordinary even in studies of the ‘everyday’ and, inevitably, that is precisely what we find. Hence, whilst scholars of ‘everyday geopolitics’ have commendably shifted their focus towards non-traditional geopolitical actors, there remains a tendency to afford most attention to the momentous events and encounters (Megoran 2006b) or fear-based affectivities (Pain and Smith 2008, Williams and Boyce 2013) that plague ordinary lives.

Barrick’s (2009:13-17) work on the everyday securitisation of the US-Canadian border is a case in point. Her work looked to ‘foreground everyday [border] enforcement encounters as constitutive of geopolitics...to identify how the people and places of the [Olympic] peninsula both impact and are impacted by border practices’. However, in her methodological account, she states ‘I realized that an ethnographic approach in terms of participant observation might not have been fitting for the context. By the summer of 2012, there was not much to observe as

far as border enforcement encounters...[a]s the most contentious border policing practices had ceased'. Instead of engaging with the present everyday reality of non-occurrence, and without a sustained reflection as to why there was 'nothing to observe', she rejects an ethnographic approach and recourses to retrospective interviews with local activists 'who had already spoken out publically about the topic'. Can this events-driven methodological approach truly proffer a nuanced representation of everyday border encounters?

Struckman and Sturm (2013:3) suggest that this 'events-driven' approach is especially true in geopolitical studies of Middles East. Here, it is argued that critical geopolitics 'needs to be less closely based in current events and presentism, as fluctuating interest in the Middle East inspired, for example, by violent events reduces the scholarship to a kind of journalistic reporting' (Struckman and Sturm 2013:5). If we continue to subscribe to this arbitrary orientation there exists the very real danger of over-determining spectacular moments of violence or over-focusing on the exceptional or the fearful as constitutive of everyday geopolitics (Das 2007).

Instead, in order to understand how individuals live with and through various geopolitical phenomena an exploration of the ordinary is just as important as the spectacular (Kelly 2008, Konopinski 2009). Some critical geopolitical scholars have noted this. For example, in her ethnographic work in post-conflict Northern Ireland, Lorraine Dowler (2001a:414) observed that 'uneventful encounters with one's respondents, even notorious ones, were the earmark of participant observation'. Far from being meaningless, uneventful encounters directed me to explore notions of geopolitical indifference (which I explore in detail in chapter 4).

Studies in 'everyday geopolitics' should, therefore, embrace methodologies - like participant observation - that do not facilitate a continued focus on overt political utterance or sensationalised extreme action, but that orient our attention towards the geographies of alternative empirical realities, to postures of silence and periods of non-occurrence. Crucially, as my time as an ethnographer in Jerusalem progressed, I also began to experience the dulling sense of disengagement on a much more personal level. My apathy and indifference towards the conflict almost came to match my informants. Frequent breaks away from the field, a constant



revisiting of my research diary, auto-ethnographic reflection and continued engagement with Palestinians served as helpful deterrents to this intellectual disengagement.

“This afternoon I walked up from my apartment in East Jerusalem to a coffee shop in the West. To get there I had to weave my way through the water cannons, police horses, and battalions of police/army who are waiting at the Damascus Gate for the protests to begin. I barely registered their presence. This has become normal to me.”

(Research Diary, October 11<sup>th</sup> 2013)

“Today I went to a lecture at a Palestinian advocacy NGO. They spoke about the conflict. But I haven’t heard anyone talk about it for so long that I experience a small sense of shock. I haven’t heard the term ‘occupation’ for ages. I’m not used to people talking about it in such stark and immediate terms. This points to an interesting politicisation of language, but – more worryingly – the fact that I am also falling into the sense that there isn’t a conflict.”

(Research Diary, September 17<sup>th</sup> 2013)

### **3.5 Locating the field**

Practically speaking, my observational work took place in a range of sites and spaces. I was inspired by both Konopinski (2009) and Ochs’ (2011) multi-sited ethnographic work that skipped between a vast range of everyday spaces in order to explore Israeli perceptions of security. I also followed Tim Cresswell’s (2011:647) suggestion of ‘mobile ethnography’:

‘...Crudely put, ethnography has moved from a deep engagement with a single site, to analysis of several sites at once (multisite ethnography), to ethnography that moves along with, or besides, the object of research (mobile ethnography). This is not to suggest, however, that the latter has replaced the former, but, rather, supplemented it.’

However, as my research progressed it became increasingly more difficult to define my ethnographic ‘field’. There was not, to my mind, a neat, singular space that I could mark off as containing my place of interest. Instead, the socio-spatial dynamics of the ‘everyday’ were limitless. Moreover, the individuals who constituted my research population lived, worked and worshiped in numerous and diverse places across the city. Subsequently my research took place in churches, over meals,

in homes, in shopping malls and grocery stores, whilst camping, in a charitable organisation, whilst hanging upside-down cleaning windows, on buses and on building sites. At one point I was invited to a Messianic wedding in the north of Israel. Despite seeing this as a time to forget about research for an evening, the content of the religious wedding sermon was packed full of political Zionist imagery. In Chapter 4, I draw on observations garnered from my daily commute on Jerusalem's light-rail; my attention was captured by unique spaces of the train and the geopolitical orientations it appeared to posture. This came about entirely serendipitously; it would be misleading to imply that it was intentionally planned. Rather, it was a discovery made on the ways to other research sites. Ethnography never seemed to stop; everything seemed to constitute potential 'data'.

More broadly, this pointed to the spatial fixity nested within much geopolitical research. Whilst embracing ethnography, the nascent project of 'everyday geopolitics' has appeared reticent to recognise the sheer variety of sites and spaces in which geopolitical knowledge and imagination is shaped in everyday life. Muller (2009:72) concedes that geopolitical ethnographies tend to unfold 'on an extremely limited fraction of physical space' but maintains that its reach 'can and should be far greater than this fraction'. Current research appears to firmly ground everyday geopolitics in single sites, such as the school (Benwell 2014b), the camp (Ramadan 2013), the university (Muller 2009, 2011), the church-building (Han 2010a, 2010b), or the office (Kuus 2013a). These tend to be spaces where political utterance or geopolitical pedagogy is expected to some degree. And whilst this work rightly gives a sense of the continuing and deep significance of these specific places, there is perhaps a danger of over-determining the depth of importance of each site in its own right.

It seems obvious to point out that people live and move through a vast array of spaces in their everyday lives. It seems clear, therefore, that 'everyday geopolitics' should involve research in multiple everyday locations (Davies 2009). Only then can we get a sense of the multifarious and often contradictory ways in which geopolitical imaginaries are processually (re)formed and negotiated through more variegated spatial and temporal arrangements. Of course, as consequence of this

methodological shift one has to acknowledge a probable ‘trade-off between depth and breadth’ (Hannerz 1998:248).

### 3.6 Interviews

In my original research framework, I intended for interviews to constitute my primary research method. Interviews have long been considered a crucial qualitative method for capturing the attitudes and opinions of research informants (Megoran 2006b). As Kuus (2013a:117) suggests, in reality much ethnography draws heavily ‘from interviews rather than participant observation’. Using interviews, I wanted to gain an understanding of how my informants understood the conflict as impactful on – and formative of - everyday life. However, as I go on to explore, interviews came to take on a dynamic and at times ambiguous role in my research.

Early on in my research, I managed to secure five interviews with nascent contacts in the Messianic Jewish community. In terms of sampling, due to the sensitive nature of the research and difficulties of access, my informants were ‘self-selecting’. My only criteria were that participants should be over eighteen years of age, speak English, and be a long-term congregant of the Messianic Jewish community<sup>33</sup>. These early interviews tended to last between 30 and 60 minutes and followed a semi-structured approach, containing more structure than a normal conversation but without pre-planning the precise wording or arrangement of the questions (Valentine 1997). Once permission had been granted, I conducted interviews in spaces chosen by the informants. Two were conducted in homes, two in coffee shops and one at the work-place of the informant. This constituted an attempt to account for the ways in which the spatial context of the interview can come to shape the ‘interviewer-interviewee dynamics’ (Sheringham 2011:83, Valentine 1997). For reasons that will become clear in section 3.7, none of my informants permitted me to audio record any research interaction.

On reflection, pressures to be seen to ‘achieve’ and ‘accumulate’ meant that I undertook these interviews far too hastily, without having properly experienced the

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<sup>33</sup> Arbitrarily I set this figure at 5 years.

everyday lives of the community member beforehand. Moreover, I had not yet understood the extent of suspicion that a questioning academic could provoke (see section 3.7). It often took the span of the interview to negotiate this wariness productively. During my research some individuals explicitly refused to be interviewed, whilst others simply ignored my written requests. Other interviews only took place after an initial ‘introductory’ meeting. Here the informant’s questions could be answered and (some) suspicions assuaged. Some informants asked me for a copy of the questions beforehand.

For a number of reasons, it became quickly obvious that interviews were not primarily suitable in gaining a direct perspective on the lives of the individuals in question, and the everyday significance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Firstly, whilst attempting to be flexible and responsive, my questions were entirely shot through with presuppositions and assumptions that I carried into the field. For example, asking informants to reflect on their ‘everyday’ lives is a relatively abstract request. As a consequence, this rarely resulted in the extended commentary that I would have hoped for. Serial interviews – with time built in for reflection and feedback – may have been more appropriate, however this would have been too time-consuming for my already wary and time-pressed informants.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews should – in theory - allow for unplanned deviations from set questions resulting in rich and nuanced discussion. Instead, the artificial situation of the interview seemed simply to engender answers that were perceived by my informants to be appropriate for the given interaction (Muller 2009). At times, I got the sense that individuals were used to answering the questions I was asking. They responded in a formulaic manner using stock answers and ‘party-lines’ that felt both pre-learned and undeveloped. I felt that I had reached empirical saturation almost as soon as I had started. It became clear that Messianic Jews - like other members of evangelical-inflected Christian communities - are well-versed in their own (political) theologies. Many articulated coherent theologies of the conflict, making sense of the on-going troubles through propositional belief statements. Not many deviated from well-established (Christian) Zionist theopolitical discourses and although I remained open to moments of dissent, few were forthcoming. This seemed to mirror Kuus’ (2013a:126) ethnographic

experience with foreign policy experts. She draws attention to the ‘danger for the researcher of being trapped in the echo-chamber of policy talk’. Perhaps, due to the relatively small size of the Messianic community, my informants were reticent to express dissenting views (see Benwell 2014a for a similar experience).

Hence, interviews limited the production of data to an etic form that foregrounded understandings garnered from retrospective and cognitive articulation. However, this seemed far removed from the everyday practices and orientations that I was observing. The problem with using interviews to research everyday geopolitics is that the researcher can raise issues that may be entirely familiar to the informant but ultimately not pertinent or pressing in the present. Informants are encouraged to talk about geopolitical issues that, in reality, they may rarely normally discuss (Eliasoph 1998). To this end, they may proffer a competent geopolitical analysis or even amplify, exaggerate and embellish their involvement in particular geopolitical phenomena (Ochs 2011). This certainly seemed to be the case with some of my informants vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They were, it seemed, well prepared to espouse opinion about the conflict. Israeli and Palestinian political philosophers, Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi (2009:15) describe a similar state:

‘Debates about the history of Zionism and of the Palestinian national movement, an even more so about possible solutions to the conflict, suffer from a blindness to the current state of affairs...People who tend to ignore the present often talk about the past as if it has never culminated in the current state of affairs, or they project into an indeterminate future what appears to be a devastating station – a humanitarian crisis, an apartheid state, Islamization, or the fragmentation of Palestinian society – that is actually taking place already. In the same vein, they read a speculative future...into the present, as if it has already happened or at least has been agreed upon and hence has become a historical necessity, something that will happen inevitably.’

I felt as though I was actively implicated in constructing the conflict as a daily problem as well as then recording it as such. Muller (2009:74) terms this ‘methodogenesis’; claiming that the ‘artificiality of the interview situation’ serves as a ‘special stimulus and thus can provoke the production of data’ which would otherwise not be produced.

If I had relied solely on these interviews, I would have constructed a view of individuals as politically engaged and wholly absorbed with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet, as I have stated, my observational work pointed to a completely opposite pattern of reality where silence, disengagement and indifference reigned. But it was exactly this silence that was excluded by the interview process. Competent theological utterance acted to cover the fact that my informants did not truly experience the conflict in any direct or immediate sense. There was a significant gulf between propositional religeopolitical utterance and everyday practice. Thus, interviews were useful because they acted to highlight what was left 'unsaid' by my informants. Here, the epistemological distance between participant observation and interviews was starkly emphasised. With time then, I came to view the role of interviews as a supplementary means by which to clarify and elaborate upon those aspects observed in everyday life rather than as a primary technique of 'data' gathering.

For the reasons noted above, I imitated Dowler (2001b) and Muller's (2009) geopolitical ethnographies by relying on conversational 'ethnographic interviews' in order to supplement my observational work (Hammersley 1983). As Hammersley (1983:58) suggests, most ethnographers accrue relevant 'data' in casual and naturally occurring conversations whilst 'hanging about'. Spradley (1979), Muller (2009), and Bernard and Ryan (2010) term these encounters 'ethnographic interviews'. Ethnographic interviews became useful in my research because they did not have to be obtrusively 'set up', but could be undertaken with informants whilst participating in everyday life activities. Hence, my ethnographic interviews took place in a number of different spaces; over coffee, during walks, in long car journeys, whilst working and so on. In terms of time, they also could be undertaken over longer periods, often stretched out over a whole day's activity. For obvious reasons, notes could not be taken during the ethnographic interviews, so – following Dowler (2001b) - I attempted to memorise key points or notable quotes and wrote them down as soon as possible. However, the time between having the conversation and being able to record my notes/thoughts was often extensive. Frustratingly, this often resulted in much information being forgotten, only to be remembered days later.

Indeed, ethnographic interviews made for a much more interactive and engaging mode of imparting everyday experience. Often these conversations occurred with more than one informant, leading to lively and ‘messy’ interactions (Law 2003, 2004). It was also helpful that these conversations were structured temporally by the activity at hand, rather than trying to work to a scheduled interview-slot. Because of this, individuals seemed to be more comfortable talking about sensitive topics in more expansive ways when done so in less formal situations or sites. Sometimes, the most potent geopolitical utterances were evident in what was not normally said, what was avoided, or through the natural hesitations or uncertain pauses (Thrift 2000). These may have been lost in the formulaic setting of a formal interview where answers are expected from questions. Moreover, if my informants did not wish to engage with a topic of discussion, we could easily revert back to the casual conversation or everyday activity taking place.

Sometimes I made use of surrounding everyday stimuli in order to facilitate further interpretative discussion. For example, I was asked to help an informant rebuild his parents’ house in a nearby Jewish Israeli settlement.<sup>34</sup> The immediacy and materiality of a building site allowed me to have a rich conversation about the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements. As we chatted, we hauled dirt from foundation footings into a nearby yard (see Figure 2). On another occasion, watching a film addressing American racism in the 1960s at a local cinema led to naturally occurring comparisons with racism in Israel. In both cases, in the sterile environment of an interview such conversations may well have been shot through with more suspicion and reluctance. Dowler (2001a, 2001b) describes a similar approach to her ethnographic interviews in post-conflict Northern Ireland; she suggests that ‘by getting to know respondents in a mundane setting I felt far more comfortable delving into more political and personal areas, including reflections on their participation in political violence’.

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<sup>34</sup> I had severe doubts as to the ethicality of this decision. Whilst I have not yet fully resolved my decision to partake in a practice that I fundamentally disagree with, it did give me insight into the mundanity of settlement building as an everyday Jewish Israeli geopolitical practice in comparison with the framing of this activity in international media and advocacy.



Figure 2: Ethnographic interviews on a building site.



Moreover, drawing on my participant observational work, I felt more comfortable in ethnographic interviews asking people about the disengagement and indifference I had been noticing and experiencing. Making an observation about the lack of engagement immediately lifted the expectation from informants to recount rehearsed logics or well-trodden and over-determined phrases. Hence, whilst I acknowledge Kuus' (2013a) scepticism about such a technique,<sup>35</sup> given the sensitive or controversial nature of the topics addressed, it appeared to be a more respectful and productive means of exploring my informants' beliefs.

Lastly, employing ethnographic interviews addressed, to some degree, the power relations inherent in the more formal interview process. Ethnographic interviewing required the relinquishing of my pre-set research agenda, instead allowing for informants to direct the majority of our conversations. Hence, I found that they allowed much more space for the informant's viewpoint to emerge in a less formulaic manner. Crucially, informants chose to use these conversations as an opportunity to discuss other more pressing topics in their lives. Instead of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was in these ethnographic interviews that issues of Messianic Jewish marginalisation, discrimination and self-understanding rose to the fore as primarily constitutive of the everyday hardships individuals faced. Informants went into detail about instances of social exclusion and how these made them feel, because they wanted me to grasp that which I could not directly experience. In doing so, my biases and agendas were challenged. Once highlighted, I began to 'see' the manifestation of these issues in everyday observations. Although such issues initially appeared to be unrelated to issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Chapters 5 and 6 explore, issues of citizenship and nationalism are nearly always interrelated.

Having accounted for the main research methods used, I go on to explore and unpack some of the methodological challenges faced during the project. The following section provides an extended account of the particular sensitivities involved in gaining access to the Messianic Jewish community.

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<sup>35</sup> In her doubt-filled account of ethnography and geopolitics, Kuus (2013:117) suggests that ethnography 'too often refers to little more than talking with people.'

### 3.7 Access

Perhaps the overriding methodological challenge that I encountered revolved around the issue of gaining ‘access’ to the Messianic community. Even the best laid methodological plans and techniques come to nought if the research informants withhold access. And, as Muller (2011:4) affirms, a lack of access leads to ‘too little participation’, which, in turn, can ‘compromise the validity of a researcher’s account’. The concept of research access has come to mean different things for different researchers. If one were to review a small sample of ethnographic literature, one would find that the term ‘access’ is used to encompass a whole host of ideas including initial entry, permission, recruitment, non-participation, ongoing contact, acceptance and informant rapport. I faced challenges in all of the above categories. This was by no means unique to my study. Indeed, Kuus (2013) argues that the use of ethnography in geopolitics will often come against issues of access, as spaces of geopolitical interest are normally closed or heavily guarded. To add to this, many researchers working on complex and sensitive topics – especially with ‘absolutist’ religious groups - face prolonged difficulties entering and maintaining access to the field (Chong 2008, Han 2010a, 2010b, Jansson 2010a, 2010b). Often when working with such groups, researchers cannot rely on ‘latent colonial discourses and power relations in order to gain access to research subjects’ (Woods 2012:74).

There have been only two recent and substantive ethnographic studies of Israeli Messianic Jewish communities. In the latest, Israeli anthropologist Tamir Erez (2013) experienced significant difficulties in accessing his Messianic Jewish research community and was eventually forced to leave after several months due to differences in religious belief. In contrast Keri Warshawsky (2008) secured in-depth access principally because she was an existing life-long member of the community. This insider affiliation afforded her with a number of (largely unacknowledged) research privileges such as unfettered access to research informants and the ability to record interviews. Warshawsky was able to undertake 60 interviews over an extended research period. As she states, ‘This research has extended over a period of 8 years, although the desire and concept behind it is more than twice as old’. By

comparison, my study, and the access I managed to secure was limited by my status as ‘outsider’, and by the time constraints of a relatively short 16 month research period.

Securing entry to the formal congregational setting would have involved a process of gaining permission from the leadership (Chong 2008, Erez 2013). However, two dilemmas disrupted this notion of ‘access’, one practical and one ethical. Firstly, as I have previously noted, the discourses and practices occurring within the congregational setting comprised only a minor component of my research; my primary interest was always the everyday lives of believers outside of the formal religious spaces of gathering. Secondly, the idea of securing permission from an authoritarian (all male) leadership in order to research the lives of congregants seemed to be underwritten by an outdated conception of religion; one predicated on the structures of patriarchal hierarchy (Chong 2008). Reproducing these structures did not align with my feminist-inflected research ethics. For these reasons, access was sought on an individual, rather than collective basis, without recourse to a formal introduction to the congregational leaderships (Woods 2012). This enabled me to retain a degree of control over which individuals became informants and how the research progressed.

Indeed, I found it more helpful to view ‘access’ not as a stable or static event but as an on-going process fraught with a diverse range of negotiations and activities unique to each informant. This process ultimately demanded a high level of flexible interpersonal skill; something that is rarely taught on a field techniques course. Hence, as I examine later in the chapter, my personality was both a tool and a limiting factor in this negotiation for access. Specifically, my commonplace strategy towards access centred around networking with existing contacts, repeatedly participating in particular community activities, and approaching individuals and introducing myself.

However, these avenues were disrupted by a number of contextually specific restraints and limitations, which I go on to explore. As Benwell (2014a:166) states, ‘it is critical to consider the wider historical, socio-cultural, temporal and (geo)political dynamics that may influence whether and how respondents participate

in research'. Although these impediments caused the research process to be stressful, the limitations they imposed acted to direct my attention towards other geopolitical urgencies faced by the communities under study. In this way, new meaning-making possibilities emerged through the spectrum of access/non-access.

As the Chapter 2 intimated, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the subject of a vast array of academic study. For some Israelis (and Palestinians), this results in a certain sense of being besieged by scholars. Some of my informants expressed frustration about having their lives perpetually (mis)represented or pathologised through the over-determined lens of the conflict (Kelly 2008)<sup>36</sup>. I had to remain aware of this research saturation when attempting to gain access to informants. Some informants were understandably reticent to talk about their experiences of the conflict to the lengths that I would have hoped. For example, during one early interview I was entirely thrown when the female informant admitted, quite early on that she was growing increasingly frustrated with academics coming in 'from the outside', trying to understand the conflict and then leaving again to write about it in 'far away offices'. The subsequent interview felt somewhat contrived and ended relatively shortly.

In a related fashion, Messianic Jewish congregations are subject to an extremely high number of international Christian visitors. Going to an authentic Israeli congregation is often viewed as an essential element of organised Christian tours to Israel. I visited some gatherings that had less than 20 people one week, and over 200 the next depending solely on which Christian tour groups were in Jerusalem at the time. This makes gaining access to research informants and penetrating the social fabric of the community relatively difficult because local Messianic Jews have very little incentive to get to know new faces in the congregation. There is also a large number of mid-length stay visitors; those who are studying or working (usually for one of Jerusalem's many organisations/NGOs) for 6 months - 2 year periods. Even some of these individuals find that local congregants largely ignore them. I realised that gaining access was going to be extremely difficult when a Norwegian

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<sup>36</sup> Whilst the conflict continued to form the underlying theme of my research, Chapter 5 and 6 were written to illustrate the ways in which Israel and Israelis are not simply split along the Palestinians/Jewish divide. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is patently not the only socio-political contestation occurring in Israel.

lady, who had worked in Israel for 2 years and had been attending the same congregation for that period, told me that people hardly ever spoke to her. Hence even repeat visits are not a guarantee of recognition, rapport and access.

Beyond general research saturation and visitor fatigue, a more specific and underlying suspicion of unknown outsiders magnified problems of access. As I explore in greater conceptual detail in Chapter 5, the Messianic Jewish community stands as a threat to the hegemony of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish establishment by challenging its monopoly to define Israeli Jewish identity/citizenship and provide ‘spiritual-religious solutions for Israeli “seekers” of faith’ (Erez 2013:45). For this reason, the Messianic minority exists in a cultural, socio-political, and legal climate where they are commonly delegitimised, discredited, and denied fundamental citizenship rights. Messianic individuals are frequently subject to ‘insult, harassment, discrimination, violence, and denial of equal legal rights, all fundamentally denials of recognition’ (Erez 2013:45). Crucially, certain anti-Messianic Jewish Orthodox groups surreptitiously infiltrate Messianic Jewish congregations in order to reveal individuals’ identities and group practices to the wider Jewish community or government officials.

The reality of this threatening context poses significant challenges to scholars seeking straightforward ethnographic engagement in the Messianic Jewish community. Understandably, unknown outsiders – especially those seen not to be fully participating, or asking probing questions - are generally treated with more than a good deal of suspicion. Similar to the experiences of a number of researchers, I was accused - on two separate occasions - of being a spy (Dowler 2001b, Herbert 2001, Simmons 2007, Gould 2011). One woman introduced me to a bible study group saying:

Informant: ‘This is Dan. He’s a spy...be careful, because we’ll all end up in his PhD!’

Although on this occasion the humour was evident, it was indicative of the wider context in which I worked where the presence of spies was even a distinct possibility. For this reason, photos were forbidden within Messianic Jewish congregational spaces.

Moreover, beyond the general wariness of academics and academic study described above, some members of the community held specific grievances against academic intrusion. In my first week, I visited a small congregation of about 15 people who were meeting on a Sunday night in an inconspicuous domestic apartment in central Jerusalem. The small size of the congregation, and its relative anonymity, meant that my presence garnered curiosity. People were keen to know who I was and how I had heard of the meeting. I explained that I had been invited by another congregational member who, thankfully, arrived just in time to 'vouch' for me. During the meeting I was asked to introduce myself officially, and tell people what I was doing in Israel. Careful to use their religious terms, I openly stated that I was a 'believer' from England, but that I was also a student researching Israeli believers. This initial admission was always a source of great anxiety for me as I could never be sure of how it would be taken. Due to the nature of the meeting, my explanation did not result in any further questioning. However, after the meeting, a woman approached me to voice her concern and displeasure that I had attended, and her suspicions of my academic study. She told me that I should research Christians in my own country, or 'somewhere like China'. I was able to explain some of my ethical commitment, including complete anonymity for research informants but this did not placate her obvious annoyance.

The woman's grievances were predicated upon the fact that, at some point, another researcher had visited the congregation and published an account in a book that she vehemently disagreed with. Specifically she took issue with the publishing of names and addresses of certain congregations. I subsequently discovered that the 'academic' study in question had taken place in the late 1990s and was undertaken by a collective of groups within Israel working under the auspices of the Christian/Messianic journal 'Mishkan'. This journal is, in its own words 'dedicated to biblical and theological thinking on issues related to Jewish Evangelism, Hebrew-Christian/Messianic-Jewish identity and Jewish-Christian relations' (Mishkan 2000). The journal is strongly supportive of Messianic Jewish congregations, and, as such, poses little threat theologically or otherwise. After the survey was published in a double issue of the journal, and later as a book, the negative reaction from some, was indicative of the suspicion that they felt. One of the strongest objections was

that people felt they had ‘opened’ and exposed themselves unnecessarily and dangerously to the outside world. In revealing information about the congregation – it was thought that ‘opponents’ would use the information against them – it might aid persecution and harassment (Mishkan 2000). In the survey a number of pastors refused to give out any information to the academics undertaking the survey.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, As Erez (2013) notes, there is a general fear that academic studies will expose sensitive or personal information about the Messianic Jewish community; information that could fall into the hands of pernicious Orthodox groups or State officials. As Chapter 5 explores, this is a reasonable fear. Hence, the anti-academic feeling is, understandably, aligned to the fear of further persecution.

This contextual suspicion of academic study was exacerbated by what appeared to be deeper underlying sense of anti-intellectualism within the community. This anti-intellectualism was driven by two motives; one theological and one political. First, Christian communities with evangelical bents have historically been marked by varying degrees of anti-intellectualism (Nañez 2005, Chong 2008). A perceived secular, positivist and humanistic academy is accused of constituting a threat to the enchanted evangelical worldview (Ammerman 1987). In Erez’s (2013) research with Messianic Jews, for example, academia was viewed as a prideful ‘intellectual shield that blocked the spirit and the emotions inside...that were crying out for salvation’. One of his informants went on to tell him that:

‘everything you are doing is really nonsense from God’s point of view. Maybe it’s good for your career, but I wish God will work with your personality, and hope that He will open your eyes, not through the brain but through the heart.’ (Erez 2013:51)

Although my informants never articulated theologically motivated anti-intellectualism in such strong terms, it was often implied in passing critiques of my intellectual endeavors. Secondly, and more specifically, there seemed to be an endemic wariness of ‘Western academics’, due to the perception that most are left-wing and pro-Palestinian. One informant pointed to the academic support for the Israeli economic boycott, and anti-occupation student protests as evidence of this.

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<sup>37</sup> Some justified their criticism, arguing that such a survey was contrary to God’s will, using a narrative from the Old Testament where God condemns King David for undertaking a census in ancient Israel – see 2 Samuel 24.

Because of these interrelated suspicions, the manner of my introduction to research informants significantly inflected the level of access I subsequently enjoyed. Keri Warshawsky's (2013) ethnographic research in Messianic Jewish congregations highlights the critical importance of personal contacts and gatekeepers in securing access to this type of religious community. My existing connections with certain well-known members of the Messianic Jewish community in other regions of Israel helped to dissipate some of the suspicion pertaining to my research. Indeed, a tactic of 'name-dropping' – or recounting time spent in other communities – went a long way to validating my presence.

More practically, it became clear that being personally introduced to potential informants by existing members – someone who could, in effect, 'vouch' for me as a 'character witness' - went a long way to reduce my anxiety, and the informant's suspicions (Ammerman 1987, Chong 2008, Dowler 2001b). It is one thing to tell someone that you have never met before that you are researching their community; it is another to have a mutual acquaintance prompt you to explain your research. This often appeared to benefit the interaction that followed, as it provided a more natural starting point for conversation. The threat of the research appeared to be significantly lessened if someone else in the community had already accepted and recommended it. For this reason, I tried to visit congregations with people I already knew in the hope that they would help integrate me into the existing community.

However, depending on other informants to provide legitimacy or introduction is a precarious position to inhabit. Gatekeepers are not, 'monolithic, neutral and static figures in the field' rather there are 'complex dynamics in which gatekeeping is operationalized in the field' (Crowhurst and Kennedy-Macfoy 2013:457). In everyday life, as opposed to the oft-sanitised world of textbooks, gatekeepers can directly influence the research in a myriad of unpredictable ways. For example, in the first four months of my research I spent a great deal of time building rapport with four individuals who I assumed would act as useful gatekeepers into the communities. After this initial four-month period, I travelled to the UK for a brief break, returning to Israel shortly after. In the meantime, three of those individuals had either unexpectedly left Israel for prolonged periods of time, or moved to



different parts of the country. Methodological techniques courses, whilst teaching the benefits of gatekeepers, do not prepare you for the disruptive realities of everyday life and the sudden loss of a promising research avenue.

This dependence on personal contacts points to a wider issue present within the nascent agenda of 'everyday' geopolitical ethnographic research; it explores the everyday lives of certain individuals and groups over others. It is true that it is often far more difficult to gain access to groups with whom the researcher does not already have some form of personal contact (Ayella 1990, Dowler 2001b). This has meant that everyday geopolitical research has primarily focused either on the victims of violence, or on collaborating with activists with 'progressive' political agendas. Constrained by limitations of access, combined with by a moralising imperative to 'speak out against injustice encountered in the field...and give voice to its victims' (Konopinski 2009:26) it is now more usual to hear subaltern geopolitical narratives. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, a growing number of scholars have (commendably) focused on the daily experiences of Palestinians living under occupation (Harker 2012a, 2014 Long 2011). Yet, one gets the feeling that this geopolitical work explores and foregrounds those who's views are already sympathetic to or in alignment with that of the researcher.

However, this often-admirable feminist-inflected work has the effect of orientating everyday geopolitical research in certain directions, usually away from a direct and discomfiting engagement with agents of violence, or those who are considered to be hateful, harmful, distasteful or unloved. Scholars also do not tend to afford direct attention to the ordinary citizens of states who perpetrate violence or prolong conflict. We might deconstruct the speeches of political leaders from powerful states, but ignore the citizen populous. Seldom, for instance, does one hear Israeli citizens' experiences of the conflict. This is because it is rare for political geographers – especially those with feminist leanings - to spend prolonged amounts of time with groups with whom they strongly disagree (although see Dowler 2001a, 2001b, Blee 2007, Wong 2008, Barrett-Fox 2010, 2011, Han 2010a, 2010b, Thiem and Robertson 2010). Instead, such groups - if researched at all - are usually observed from the distance of an 'ivory tower' (Dowler 2001b:154). In his studies of evangelical fundamentalists, for example, Dittmer (2007b, 2010a) was able to log

onto internet forums, browse the website of the International Christian Embassy, or read Jack Chic tracts without having to engage face-to-face with the individuals who produce or consume such material.

Yet, I suggest it is equally important for everyday geopolitics to explore the lives of individuals who are perceived to be perpetrators or supporters of conflict and violence (Crapanzano 1985). For me, this meant undertaking prolonged fieldwork with this what Chong (2008:370) would term an ‘ideologically “exclusivist” religious community. It meant involving myself in the everyday lives and experiences of people who I normally would not associate with. Smyth and Mitchell (2008:441) argue that this type of research – research that transgresses the researchers’ own political and moral boundaries - is essential in order to fully understand the ‘power dynamics of the societies we live in’. In the conclusion to work done on Christian fundamentalists, Susan Harding (1991:393) states ‘We - situated, implicated, and self-reflexive - can...come up with more nuanced, complicated, partial, and local readings of who they are and what they are doing and therefore design more effective political strategies to oppose directly the specific positions and policies they advocate’.

### **3.8 Positionality**

As with all forms of qualitative research, the social ‘reality’ under study is passed through the interpretive prism of the researcher. This is especially true of ethnographies, where the presence of a researcher will also alter the behaviour of the informants in some way (Herbert 2001). Therefore, however intimate an impression of informants’ lifeworlds we may proffer, ethnography is never ‘objective readings of social facts’ but ‘complex products of interactions between embodied persons’ (Markowitz 2013:5, Muller 2011). Refuting the notion of objective knowledge, the actors and actions recorded in ethnography are always underwritten by the ‘subjective understandings (previous experiences, values, assumptions, hopes, fears and expectations)’ of the researcher, these constituting the ‘social position from which the social reality is perceived’ (Barker 2003:23). As a result, Markowitz (2013:6) states ‘bias and partiality, underwritten by academic commitments, philosophical leanings, and political agendas, are part and parcel of

such an [ethnographic] enterprise'. Positionality is, therefore, a key consideration for the critical ethnographer (Thomas 1993, Madison 2005, Woods 2012).

For this reason, it has become *de rigueur* for researchers to account for the varied ways in which their situated social position has come to shape the research findings. The following section examines some of my own positionality and privilege that undoubtedly impacted the research process, and in turn, the proceeding production of analytical interpretation. I hope to account for as much of the context out of which this thesis was produced. As Kirby (2013) argues, no researcher can do more than proffer a partial overview of the idiosyncratic qualities that may have been influential or formative. I will be implicated in the knowledge production in ways that exceed my cognitive horizons, and there is, therefore, a certain futility in attempting to fully grasp every manner in which my subjectivity is interwoven into the research process (Rabbitts 2013:137). In reality, each individual research encounter was a mixture of ephemeral and elastic 'subjective and intersubjective dynamics' (Rabbitts 2013:138). Thus, it seems to me that a retrospective account of one's positionality assumes a certain sense of stativity that hides the ways in which identities, positions and power relations are always processual, fluid, and dependent on changing research contexts (Woods 2012). Simply listing some arbitrary elements of my subjective positioning entices and reifies 'assumptions about identity categories' rather than prompting more meaningful reflection on their specific implications' (Rabbitts 2013:138).

For this reason, self-reflexivity is never 'transparent' or free from 'the dynamics of power' (Rose 1997:316), rather they can be shot through with a 'privileged and self-indulgent focus on the self' (Kobayashi 2003:348). Mapping out one's perceived positionality often seems to frame informants as being passively 'acted upon' by some semblance of that positionality. Rather, as my discussion on access illustrated, participants are always active in co-constructing certain relationships with the researcher. Peter Hopkins foregrounds this 'politics of position', highlighting how both differences *and similarities* between the researcher and informants can result in an understanding of the 'multiple, interweaving and intersecting ways in which our various positionalities and identities are revealed, negotiated and managed in research encounters' (Hopkins 2007:388). Despite several differences, most of my

informants originated from Britain, America or other parts of Europe. Hence, I shared many similar characteristics with them, making the negotiation of positionality and power far less problematic than may otherwise be expected during different kinds of ‘cross-cultural research’ (Woods 2012:71, Benwell 2014a). And, whilst the intersectional nature of my age,<sup>38</sup> gender, sexuality,<sup>39</sup> and nationality were all – at points - formative in my research experience, I believe that two alternative positionings were of particular importance in routing and shaping the research, and allowing for some findings to emerge over others. These will be discussed in order: my academic affiliations and my own religious beliefs.

I have already noted the ways in which my position as an academic came to hinder the research process. However, there were times when this status was beneficial to me. For most of the duration of my fieldwork, I attained Visiting Scholar status in the Program for Cultural Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. I also had a similar affiliation in the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University in Be’er Sheva. Both statuses were enormously helpful in allowing me to acquire a year long, multiple entry/exit student visa. More importantly, despite my informants’ general misgivings about academics, Israeli academic affiliation seemed to afford me a certain semblance of legitimacy that was invaluable when attempting to gain the trust of particular individuals. Early in my research, as individuals’ inquired as to the ‘backing’ of my research, I explained that I was a student at the University of London. However, far from resulting in a ‘free-pass’, this seemed to emphasise my position as an outsider and potential ‘lefty’. Over time, I purposefully foregrounded my affiliation with the Israeli institutions. These institutions held credence with some of my informants, affording me particular authority and associated privileges.

Certainly this foregrounding militated against circumspect feelings and went some way to verifying my credentials as an acceptable researcher. In a similar fashion, I

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<sup>38</sup> Being a young researcher was seemed to be advantageous. In Israel, young people have to do two or three years of army service before going to university. Hence, that I was 26 and doing a PhD was relatively rare. Perhaps it was my imagination, but my relative youth seemed to render me less threatening. Some informants even treated me as naïve and out of my depth. This was a position that I did not rush to deny because it assuaged my informants’ suspicion.

<sup>39</sup> It was taken as axiomatic by my informants that I was heterosexual. I was, however, accused of being ‘gay’ by one informant when I articulated accommodating views vis-à-vis Palestinians.

often also explained that I had a Jewish Israeli supervisor in England which impressed and intrigued some; marking me as ‘different’ from ‘other academics’ and increasing interest in my project.

At points, therefore, I acknowledge that I traded on the favourable power dynamic associated with the academic position in order to overcome issues of access and suspicion. That said, there were times when my position as an academic afforded me no more privilege or protection than others. Visa renewal appointments and entry/exit at Ben Gurion airport were always precarious times. Here my research would subject to rigorous questioning. I often felt that a wrong answer would result in my deportation. Similarly, a police ‘raid’ on my apartment was the cause of some concern. Officers had searched my room whilst I was out and asked questions as to my whereabouts and purpose of being in Israel. Recounting this story, my housemate initially implied that they had been specifically looking for me; ‘where have you been and what have you been doing? The police have been looking for you’. After some clarification, they were looking for someone thought to be hiding in our apartment building.

Secondly, reflections on positionality in my field diary most often revolved around my shared Christian beliefs. These beliefs inflected the research process in a number of significant ways. As Rabbitts (2013) suggests, being a Christian and doing research on other Christians can often lead to the immediate assumption that one is automatically an ‘insider’. As this chapter has illustrated, this is a far from straightforward assumption. It is true that secular scholars of religion have often bemoaned the methodological and ethical challenges of studying religious beliefs and practices that are ‘remote’ from their own (Sheringham 2011). My religious positionality – as a practicing Christian – allowed me to circumnavigate some of these challenges, not least of all the constant negotiation of conversionist zeal (Chong 2008, Han 2010a, Erez 2013).<sup>40</sup> My shared core beliefs ultimately allowed me a level of access that I would not have otherwise enjoyed. In light of my discussion of access, I would speculate that a secular academic would be granted – at best – minimal access to the community. For example, secular Israeli

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<sup>40</sup> That said, whilst attempts to convert non-believing researchers are understandably disturbing, they do instigate an initial point of contact on the part of the informants; contact that I found very hard to orchestrate. In my case, I was often ignored in congregations.

anthropologist Tamir Erez (2013) attempted to undertake a period of ethnographic research in a Messianic Jewish community in Tel Aviv. In order to do so he adopted the role of a spiritual seeker. However, after several months, when members of the community saw no spiritual progression or conversion, Erez was asked to end his research and leave the congregation (Markowitz 2013).

These beliefs also afforded me with an automatic semblance of trust. My own faith undoubtedly cultivated some trust and rapport. Unlike Sheringham (2011) and Erez (2013) I was happy to participate in most aspects of Messianic Jewish religious life and practice, and did not have to engage in significant levels of ‘identity management’ (Chong 2008). Thus, any harmful anti-religious “agenda” that is often assumed to motivate non-believing researchers was a limiting issue (see Woods 2012). As Ammerman (1987:10) suggests, believers do not expect ‘anyone who is not saved to understand or empathize with their beliefs’. In contrast to Erez (2013), informants rarely raised doubts as to how I would represent the Messianic Jewish community.

My professed and practiced faith also allowed me to engage with sensitive questions about religion, as individuals did not view me as someone fundamentally opposed to many of their core beliefs. I also had a sense of familiarity with some of the esoteric oddities of evangelical-inflected Christianity, and a baseline level of theological competency. Like Ammerman (1987), I could speak the ‘language’ of both evangelical Christianity and what Warshawsky (2008:29) terms ‘Messianese’ with relative fluency. At times this probably allowed for a deeper level of understanding and militated against the tendency to make misplaced assumptions.

But whilst I undoubtedly traded upon my religious identity at points, this had some unexpectedly disadvantageous effects. It is important to note that whilst I do share some core Christian beliefs, most of my political and theological views vastly differ from those within the community. Thus, I had to constantly negotiate a dynamic tension between two seemingly opposed positions. On the one hand, inspired by feminist-inflected research ethics I wanted to act with honesty, transparency, respect and empathetic commitment towards my informants, and to militate against any prejudgments of my research community. On the other hand, as the research

progressed it became more evident that their theological and political positions were incompatible with mine.

However, at points during the research, it was clear that informants assumed that I was pro-Israeli and Christian Zionist. For example, similar to Rabbitt's (2013) research, on two occasions informants asked if they could pray for me. In different ways, both proceeded to thank God for my service to, and love for, the nation and (Jewish) people of Israel. One of my informants attempted to 'set me up' with another female English volunteer in Jerusalem. The point was made that most Christians in England have erroneous theological and political beliefs about Israel, and so finding a Christian Zionist man (apparently me) who had correct doctrine was a romantic necessity for this girl. I was, in the main, reluctant to divulge my vastly different theological and geopolitical opinions. Being guarded about these differences was an uncomfortable and insecure position to inhabit, and was often accompanied by feelings of guilt. If informants directly asked – which they rarely did - I was relatively happy to vaguely disclose some of my conflicting – even 'heretical' - opinions. In one notable case, this resulted in a prolonged and increasingly heated discussion where I was branded a 'terrorist-lover', a 'lefty', and finally – due to my commitment to pacifism – a homosexual.

In moments when I was privy to certain pernicious views or opinions, I relied on what Blee (2002:12) calls 'more indirect and fragile measures' of maintaining a relationship with informants, including strategies of 'silence, deflection, and reflective listening' (Barrett-Fox 2011:23). If something particularly evocative or outright outrageous was said, I often had to bite my tongue. In these times I felt weak for not offering a dissenting view for fear of risking my access.

Lastly, due to my up-bringing in an evangelical church, I remained vulnerable to overlook various naturalised evangelical phenomenon due to over-familiarity. Because I have grown up in an environment where evangelical tenets were relatively normal, I was comfortable but perhaps not conscious of the various conceptual nuances that non-Christian researchers skilfully elucidate. At other points, my informants mobilised a form of Christianity that I was not necessarily equipped by my own faith to understand better than a secular scholar. Moreover, there were

many occasions where my Christian beliefs and commitment meant that my critical distance to the topic and informants occasionally collapsed. Here, undertaking research on Messianic Jews was challenging, not because they were unfamiliar to me, but because I had so much in common with them. Because of this, significant differences in the areas of politics, theology and societal engagement were brought to the fore and experienced more sharply. My emotions were perpetually wrenched. On numerous occasions, I would leave a congregational meeting feeling enormously angry or frustrated at the theology being taught. My desire to correct theological incompetence is embedded in my analytical interpretations of the data gathered.

‘I walked home seething. The guy at this church preaches so much bullshit. His talk was massively theologically stunted – and people don’t seem to question any of it. I’m pissed off that this is the Christianity that is being lived by so many people – it seems too far from my beliefs. Tonight, I am ashamed to be a Christian – and angry that people can live like this.’

(Research Diary, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2012)

‘Tonight I am confused and frustrated. Not only is it another night where nothing ‘political’ is addressed, but I just don’t understand why people are attracted to the Christianity that is preached here. It feels overly-emotional, devoid from the realities of everyday life, self-centred, individualistic. The prolonged worship time annoys me – how can anyone worship for that long? The worship band just induces an overly-emotional response from the congregation in the way that they play music. I wonder if anyone actually thinks about what is being preached. Do they leave, walk home, and evaluate what has been said. Do they know that most of it doesn’t seem to make any sense in reality?’

(Research Diary, August 4<sup>th</sup> 2013)

Hence, as Rabbitts (2013:139) concludes:

‘Insiderness does not, therefore, somehow afford a more authentic or objective viewpoint. Instead, it implicates me in specific ways, to which I can critically attend but which I can never fully escape.... a more dynamic reading of the research encounter is needed, acknowledging the various implications imposed by the fluid, multiple presences of both my insiderness and my outsidersness’

### **3.9 Ethics and anonymity**

Although certain ethical and safeguarding issues have been intimated at throughout, I conclude this chapter by briefly addressing my overall approach to research ethics.



Conducting any form of ethnographic research requires a high ethical responsibility on the part of the researcher. Here, in order to safeguard both the researcher and the researched, the meta-ethical codes of ‘informed consent’ and ‘do no harm’ are often foregrounded as baseline prescriptive procedures (Hay 1998). Whilst the ethical sentiments behind both strategies – transparency and care - underpinned everything that I did in the field, both meta-frameworks had limitations when dealing with the contextual specifics of ambiguous ethnographic research settings. In ethnographic research, the requirement of informed consent often appears ‘detached from the reality of applied research’ (Hollow 2010:104). For example, as Muller (2009:75) notes, ‘for the most part, the semi-overt or covert nature of unobtrusive ethnographic research makes it impossible that it follows the principle of informed consent. That is, subjects are often not aware that they take part in a research project and that what they say and do is recorded as data’. Put otherwise, in reality, much ethnographic work combines covert and overt elements that might contravene the consent of the informant. In my project, certain contexts and forms of interaction disrupted the notion of complete research transparency or consent. Some interactions were fleeting and did not allow me to explain the research project I was undertaking. Others occurred in large group settings where informed consent would have been impractical. Certainly, as is evident in Chapter 4, it would have been impossible to obtain the permission of every individual riding Jerusalem’s train.

Similarly, as Hollow (2010) discusses, the Hippocratic maxim of ‘do no harm’ is no less problematic when undertaking forms of participatory research.

‘Regardless of intent, human beings consistently cause harm to one another. One potential approach to avoiding doing any harm is to remain in bed all day and circumvent taking any action or decision making. In doing this one would successfully avoid inflicting much active harm but it would not be possible to avoid passive harm through acts of omission.’ (Hollow 2010:106)

Therefore, it is more useful to concede that,

‘At various junctures decisions and interactions may unavoidably and often invisibly cause harm, offence, marginalisation and the reinforcing of power inequalities. This should be acknowledged as an unavoidable reality rather

than obscured under pseudo-protective codes and maxims.’ (Hollow 2010:106)

Hollow (2010:111) goes on to suggest that guidelines, rules and codes of conduct such as ‘informed consent’ and ‘do no harm’ enable researchers ‘to abdicate responsibility for something that should be driven and defined by individual and community-based reflection and analysis’. In a similar vein, Madge (2007:665) argues that, ‘without researcher commitment to ethical conduct, no amount of rules, regulations or guidelines will yield ethical practice’.

Hence, it is perhaps more helpful to recognise that:

‘effective ethics requires principles that prepare and guide the researcher for the constant dialogue, negotiation and decision making faced throughout the research (Edwards and Mauthner 2002). It is a significant challenge that cannot be addressed by filling in a form but one that is wrestled with internally throughout every encounter with another person. A vital dimension of this is found in trusting one’s own critical faculties to recognise in situ what constitutes appropriate behaviour and what is an abuse of power...This in turn is dependent upon a critical application regarding what is good and bad in a particular context rather than an abstract theory of what is right and what is wrong.’ (Hollow 2010:111)

Ethical concerns are also in evidence throughout the following analysis. When recounting specific or individual opinions and practices in the following chapters, I have included only those obtained from informants who were fully aware and informed about my research project. Here, I relied upon verbal consent from these participants instead of on written consent forms as these would have highlighted my role as an outsider academic. Moreover, as an attempt to mitigate against future harm and address endemic suspicion, all informants were guaranteed complete anonymity at every phase of the research (Dowler 2001a). In the subsequent chapters, various abstractions and redactions have been widely used in order to obscure the names, identities and locations of congregations. Furthermore, unlike much ethnography, the overriding need for anonymity has meant that I have not been able to include a significant number of photographs or detailed maps in the following chapters. In many congregational spaces, signs adorned the walls prohibiting the taking of pictures. My inability to record interviews, conversations or meetings means that I cannot rely on verbatim quotation. When quotes have

been used in the following chapters it is important to note that they have been assembled from the scratch notes taken during the interviews and more thorough notes written afterwards. I have attempted to the best of my ability to represent the quotes as accurately and truthfully as memory allows.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced and outlined the methodological approach that was implemented throughout the course of the study, and has outlined the various stages involved in the research process. Whilst this has some functional and descriptive value, I went on to draw attention to a number of methodological difficulties related to the process of researching everyday geopolitics and lived religion. These difficulties, I suggested, highlighted unhelpful presuppositions nested within extant critical geopolitical scholarship. Put simply, my experiences of fieldwork were entirely different from the expectations that I drew from critical geopolitics and research methods literature. For example, I suggested that whilst critical geopolitical research often pays close attention to concrete geopolitical events or utterances, it has been less keen to account for silences, omission and non-occurrences. However, if ‘everyday geopolitics’ is to have any conceptual longevity, it must be more prepared to explore these more common – but less concrete – phenomena. I argued that ethnography is particularly useful in emphasising potential differences between lived reality and the reality that is retrospectively articulated in an interview setting. I also suggested that ethnography opens up different – and often unexpected – spaces and spatial practices to geopolitical analysis; sites beyond those that normally populate critical geopolitical literatures. In this way, in line with the aims of the research, ethnography disrupted taken-for-granted assumptions, and encouraged critical engagement with the actuality of everyday geopolitics and its imbrication with lived religion.

The second substantive section of the chapter explored some of the contextual challenges arising from undertaking research in the Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem. Specific issues of access, suspicion and research fatigue – whilst not distinctive to my study – each brought unique difficulties. Following this, I briefly

outlined a number of ways in which my position and positionality shaped the research process. I also highlighted some of the ethical dilemmas that were brought to light in the field, in particular emphasising the difficulties of translating abstract ethical guidelines into practical reality in the field.

## Chapter 4:

# The geopolitics of Israeli indifference

‘But very often, nothing happens.’

(Bissell 2010:280)

‘Nothing need be spoken. Arabs simply don’t matter.’

(Halper 2007:44)

‘I came to a conclusion that the peril threatening human kind today is indifference, even more than hatred. There are more people who are indifferent than there are people who hate. Hate is an action. Hate takes time. Hate takes energy. And even it demands sacrifices. Indifference is nothing...we must fight indifference.’

(Weisel 1993)

### 4.0 Introduction

“I am riding the train back home from El Sal to the Damascus Gate after visiting a friend in Shuafat. It is about 4.45pm, and it is still swelteringly hot outside. A huge variety of diverse individuals are waiting on the platform station, huddling into the covered sections, or leaning on the shadow side of the station signs, to avoid the sun’s gaze. We are all waiting for the train to arrive – mainly to get into an air-conditioned carriage as soon as possible. The notorious Jerusalem traffic is starting to build as rush hour approaches. Car horns everywhere. At last the train arrives and I get on. The air is cool. The carriage is quiet. The noise of the outside traffic is muffled. It is relatively empty for this time in the afternoon. I wonder who all these people are and where they are going? I don’t normally ride this section of the line. I imagine that most of the Israeli Jews riding the line this far north live in settlements. I wonder what they think as they ride through Palestinian areas. Are they scared? Will anything happen? My ride is like most others. It is entirely peaceful, normal, boring, ordinary. People just get on, find a seat, mind their own business and get off again. The conflict is not here”

(Research Diary, July 17<sup>th</sup> 2013)

I was persistently surprised (and often frustrated) at how rarely members of my research community seemed to speak about or engage with the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Isolated incidents might evoke specific - but never protracted - comment, and often it was only my questions and provocations that would lead to overt political utterance. Even at times of heightened geopolitical tension, everyday life for my informants appeared to 'go on' as normal. Such observations seem wayward when compared with other recent ethnographic accounts of everyday life in Israel. Juliana Ochs (2011), for example, paints a picture whereby fear, anxious insecurity, and persistent suspicion saturates the everyday lives of Israelis. Similarly, Natalie Konopinski's (2009:283) ethnographic work argues that security practices are so pervasive in Israeli everyday life that they act to reproduce a sense of 'even more danger, uncertainty and insecurity'. What appears to be missing from both Ochs (2011) and Konopinski's (2009) accounts is consideration of the 'moments, spaces, situations, in which Israelis are not hyper-alert, corporeally afraid, or negotiating suspicion' (Pearlman 2012:455). One is left wondering whether there are any parts of the Israeli quotidian that are not marked by all-encompassing fear and the want of security. What about the lack of engagement and the non-occurrences that I was observing? As my research progressed, I could not escape the feeling that many of my informants displayed a good deal of political disengagement and indifference.

This chapter pushes back against a scholarly propensity to foreground extreme events and experiences, or fear-based emotions (Struckman and Sturm 2013, Pain and Smith 2008) by focusing on the unspectacular moments and emotions that filled my research diary. After all, fear is only one of the 'emotional geographies at work in the world', and extreme events 'are often little more than a wrinkle in the emotional landscapes of everyday people and places' (Pain and Smith 2008:xvi-2). Indeed, most of my time spent with members of my research community, for example, involved drinking coffee in American style coffee-houses, shopping in malls, visiting 'tourist' sites, playing soccer, studying, visiting friends, playing computer games, working, and volunteering in addition to attending various religious meetings and gatherings. Rarely were these shot through with considerations of security, or emotions of fear, suspicion and trepidation. And yet these insignificant spatial practices - that so often slip through the gaps of scholarly

attention in critical geopolitics – all seemed to play a generative and processual role in the construction of my informants’ geopolitical attunements.

Hence, this chapter accounts for a pervasive and overlooked Jewish Israeli geopolitical orientation towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; indifference. I initially examine Jewish Israeli indifference towards the presence of Palestinian bodies in everyday life. In order to do so, I present an extended empirical case study of one of Jerusalem’s newest and principal modes of public transport, the light rail. I draw on one unspectacular research diary entry (the extract that opens this section) to show how the mundane use of the inter-city train reflects and shapes the geopolitical attunements of those who ride it. I initially use the story of the train to point to various contextual geopolitical debates that exist in the background of everyday life in the urban spaces of Jerusalem. These are well-trodden contestations over security, settlements, borders, territorial continuity, spatial segregation and ethnic social interaction. I foreground such issues at the beginning in order to make the crucial point: while inextricably embroiled in these wider geopolitical struggles, daily encounters between Palestinians and Israelis on the train did not appear to be completely defined by them. Instead, drawing on Foucauldian notions of heterotopian space, I explore the unexpected skein of daily inter-ethnic encounters that are made possible in the spaces of the light rail. I argue that many of these ambiguous encounters were shot through with indifference. Moreover, I argue that the presence of Palestinian bodies is ignored in many other spaces of everyday life in Jerusalem, the train simply being a microcosm of this. I suggest that these moments of (non)encounter disrupt the simplistic framing of Jerusalem as the quintessential divided city.

I move on to argue that these ambiguous encounters were indicative of a much wider Jewish Israeli orientation of indifference – not simply towards Palestinian bodies – but to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. Simply put, the conflict no longer seemed to play an overtly significant or formative role in the ways Israelis orient their everyday lives in space and time. To admit this seems counter-intuitive in light of the devastating violence that is often held as motif-like of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Yet indifference is, it seems, becoming increasingly acknowledged as a powerful geopolitical orientation in Israel. For example, in his

recent book *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, political commentator Max Blumenthal (2013:357) coined the phrase ‘The Big Quiet’ to describe the current Jewish Israeli geopolitical culture. Here, the unequal distribution of violence and its diminishing impact on Jewish Israeli life, combined with the post-2005 unilateral disengagement from Gaza, and a reduction in Palestinian ‘terror’ attacks, has led to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being pushed further into the background of Israeli public consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

In setting up the key concept of indifference, this chapter is crucial in establishing the wider contextual stage for the following empirical findings. To this end, this chapter does not primarily address the specificities of my research community. Rather, the broader Jewish Israeli geopolitical culture of indifference must first be established in order for me to explore alternative forms and manifestations of geopolitical indifference unique to the Messianic Jewish community. Situating my research informants into this wider geopolitical milieu is also important because, as Megoran (2004a:42) notes, religious individuals’ geopolitical orientations are always influenced by and implicated in the prevailing ‘geopolitical imaginations of their day’. The lives and geopolitical attunements of my informants appeared little different from those of many other Israeli Jews living in Jerusalem. Messianic Jewish theologian Richard Harvey (2012) affirms this, suggesting that the Messianic Jewish community – broadly speaking - orients itself towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in ways that reflects current dominant Israeli Jewish political views.<sup>42</sup> To ignore this fact would only allow an unnecessary abstraction and separation of the Messianic Jewish community from wider Israeli attitudes and orientations.

Lastly, this chapter draws on ethnographic and auto-ethnographic observations throughout. The chapter is structured around an entirely unspectacular diary entry from July 17<sup>th</sup> 2013. Each sub-section revisits and expands upon an observation from the extract. I did not set out to explore the train as a microcosm of everyday geopolitics. I could have explored the everyday act of drinking coffee in Jerusalem’s Mamilla Mall, or the daily grind of working on a settlement construction site. The

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<sup>41</sup> Here I am referring to hostilities that would directly affect Israeli society. Violence and insecurity mark everyday Palestinian lives in much more direct ways – see, for example, Hammami’s (2004, 2006) work.

<sup>42</sup> The complexity and contingency of this geopolitical alignment is explored in the following two chapters.



indifference I go on to explore in this chapter was evident in both of these spaces. Yet the train was attractive because it was, at the time, wholly unexplored and under-discussed in critical geographical studies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (although see Busbridge 2014, and Nolte and Yacobi 2015). However, as the *coda* suggests, recent events of extreme violence occurring in the spaces of the train will inevitably change this.

#### 4.1 Jerusalem's light-rail

*"I am riding the train back home from El Sal to the Damascus Gate after visiting a friend in Shufat..."*

Jerusalem's light rail is the newest, cleanest, and fastest mode of urban transport in Jerusalem. At the time of research, the train had been fully operational for just over a year. The laying of the tracks was completed in June 2010, followed by a trial period – with no passenger fares – in August 2011. Normal service began in December 2011. The eight mile long track - roughly a 50 minute journey - cuts sleekly through the traffic of some of Jerusalem's busiest roads, servicing over 23 stations from Pisgat Ze'ev in the north to Mount Herzl in the west.<sup>43</sup>

The project - a public-private partnership - is currently operated by the 'CityPass' consortium; a varied group of international and Israeli financiers, infrastructural companies, the Transportation Ministry, and the Jerusalem Municipality. The consortium has a thirty-year concession to operate the train and plans to add five more lines in Jerusalem, increasing the daily footfall from 140,000 travelers to 250,000 (Schmill 2013). Only time will tell if these future plans come into fruition. The first line project was beset by prolonged delays due to technical faults, budgetary and staffing issues, and disruption caused by archeological findings along

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<sup>43</sup> The light rail is not Jerusalem's first urban train line. In 1910, the British Army constructed a light railway in the city that aided General Allenby's troops in their various conquests north of Jerusalem (Hasson 2011). Unrestricted by the concrete urbanism of the modern-day city, the British built 30 kilometers of track in four months; a stark comparison to the eleven years it took to lay the current line. When the British front advanced northward, the line became defunct. It is claimed that some of the metal from the tracks in 'downtown' Jerusalem were recycled, and used to construct bars to cover the windows in parts of the 'Russian Compound' – a building that is presently used as a notorious jail, mainly for Palestinian prisoners (Hasson 2011).

the excavated route (Sherwood 2014). Whilst the existing line has only recently become operational, construction began a decade earlier.



Figure 3: Jerusalem's light rail.



Figure 4: The route map of the light rail.

As well as the controversy caused by construction delays, the line has garnered significant political criticism. In official representations, the train was presented

simply as an infrastructural necessity for alleviating Jerusalem's notorious traffic congestion. It has, for example right of way at all traffic junctions. However, as Nolte and Yacobi (2015) argue, the train and its accompanying infrastructure can be viewed as spatial representations of a set of very particular socio-political relations. Despite the official functionalist representation of neutrality, modernism and efficiency (Busbridge 2014, Nolte and Yacobi 2015), the building of the line has been politically divisive and feeds into a number of geopolitical debates that feature heavily in critical geographical work about Israeli-Palestine.

Firstly, the route of the train line caused controversy for the simple reason that it connects areas of West (Israeli Jewish) Jerusalem to East (Palestinian Arab) Jerusalem. Accordingly, many Palestinians view the line as a type of 'infrastructural geopolitics' (see Weizman 2007) through which Israeli control and sovereignty will come to be extended and reified throughout the city (Nolte and Yacobi 2015). Whilst the politics of infrastructure and urban planning is not the lens through which this chapter approaches the train (see instead Nolte and Yacobi 2015), it is useful to acknowledge that urban infrastructural projects often reflect and constitute long-term accumulations of geopolitical power (Graham 2010) or ethnonational bias (Yiftachel 1998). Thus, Jabareen (2010), Busbridge (2014) and Nolte and Yacobi (2015) all make the argument that the train is part of an on-going hegemonic territorial 'master plan' that will extend, expand and normalise Jewish jurisdiction over the greater Jerusalem area through enduring infrastructural projects, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, and the exclusion of Palestinians from strategic urban planning decisions. The train line effectively smoothes space, giving the vague impression of a unified and uncontested cityscape. Hence, Busbridge (2014:95) argues that the train 'entrenches the occupation insofar as it enacts the Israeli claim to 'united Jerusalem'.

Specifically, the line connects the centre of Jerusalem with surrounding Jewish settlements. Here, the train appears to be part of a strategic planning process that facilitates Jewish control over the entire city through the extensive construction of 'an outer ring around Jewish neighbourhoods which now host over half the Jewish

population of Jerusalem' (Yacobi 2012:57).<sup>44</sup> As Zertal and Eldar (2007:xv) suggest, installing infrastructure to connect the settlements with urban centres is their 'elixir of life...the secret of their power'. The train line is, for all intents and purposes, similar to Route 1; a road that links the extensive settlement of Ma'ale Adumim to the city centre. Practically, the train constitutes a fast transport connection that allows Israelis to re-locate to settlements in order to take advantage of affordable housing.<sup>45</sup> In more abstract terms, settlements such as Pisgat Ze'ev or Ma'ale Adumim are now geographically imagined as inextricable parts of Israeli Jewish Jerusalem. Both Route 1, and the light rail, lend a 'sense of normality to the settlements, which suggests that they are not at the frontier' but simply 'a natural expansion of suburbia into the mainstream of Israeli life' (Pullan, Misselwitz, Nasrallah, and Yacobi 2007:182). Plans to extend the current train line mean that Israeli settlements even further north of Pisgat Ze'ev – such as Neveh Ya'akov - can be 'brought into' the centre of the city (Schmill 2013). New lines will also connect the other controversial settlements in the south of the city such as Gilo and Har Homa (see Map 2).

In 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council suggested that the light rail constituted an infrastructural element built to service surrounding settlements (UNHRC 2009). A year later, the Council adopted a resolution that condemned Israel's decision 'to establish and operate a tramway between West Jerusalem and the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Zeev, which is in clear violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions' (UNHRC 2010). Indeed, because of the controversial route of the modern-day line, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, supported by a French NGO, sued some of the French members of the CityPass consortium. The case was predicated on the claim that the train breached international law by providing infrastructure to Jewish settlements in occupied territories (McCarthy 2007). The case was rejected by the French court, which ruled against the plaintiff arguing that the train did not violate the laws. The PLO was made to pay \$117,000 in legal costs to the French companies involved (Haaretz 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013).

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<sup>44</sup> I take it as axiomatic that these settlements play a crucial role in 'establishing Israeli sovereignty over the east side of the city' (Busbridge 2014:84).

<sup>45</sup> As Pullan (2007) suggests, most Israeli residents of the larger settlements surrounding Jerusalem are classed as 'economic settlers'. Such individuals are not religious or political ideologues; but live there because of the economic benefits and perceived quality of life.

Whilst arguments continue about the route and its spatial representation of a unified city, the train can simultaneously be viewed as a curious form of mobile border/borderland as it both contests and concretises existing urban boundaries. As Elden (2013) rightly notes, a significant portion of the rail line runs roughly parallel to – or directly on top of – the Green Line,<sup>46</sup> northwards from the Old City/Damascus Gate – and out towards the areas of French Hill, and south past the New Gate towards the City Hall train station. Consequently, for most Israeli Jews, the Green Line no longer holds any semblance of geopolitical meaning as a ‘consistent differentiating marker’ (Leshem 2015:36, Newman 2012). The train helps exacerbate this growing obscurity/invisibility by running directly over its former route.<sup>47</sup> Yet, for others, the train also does the work of materialising and re-demarcating the Green Line and its urban logic of separation – albeit in a ‘soft’ way. As Pullan *et al.* (2007:178 *my emphasis*) suggest, the train is not simply ‘*on* the border, it *is* the border’. Here, the train concretises Jerusalem’s ethnic division between East and West more lucidly. It is, for example, relatively unusual to see Jewish Israelis on the north-east side of the train line from the Damascus Gate station onwards. Thus, for both Pullan (2011:20) and Busbridge (2014), the train constitutes a ‘frontier at the centre’. Moreover, as Sherwood (2014:n.p) states, ‘this section of the light rail’s route sits on what may in the future be a border between two states’.

Lastly, the train is also a form of public transport that exists within the Israeli state’s wider (im)mobility regime; a programme that seeks to restrict the movement of Palestinians through a myriad of interconnected measures. These primarily consist of a combination of physical infrastructural obstacles – walls, fences, earthworks, road and tunnels – and bureaucratic and biopolitical controls including the complex system of passes, permits and acts of closure (Pullan 2007; Harker 2009b). Much of Wendy Pullan’s recent work explores the ways in which asymmetric mobility policies are deployed in order that ‘Palestinian lives are dominated by an arbitrary matrix of spatial enclosures whereas Israelis appear to have freedom of movement’

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<sup>46</sup> Or is built on the ‘no-man’s land’ frontier of the Israeli–Jordanian border before 1967.

<sup>47</sup> During my time in Jerusalem, an Israeli left-wing NGO painted the Green Line on its route through the city. They began metres from the train line on Jaffa Street – see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=2KQkjvyMubA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2KQkjvyMubA)

(Pullan 2013:126). One consequence of this mobility regime, Pullan (2013) highlights, is the almost complete separation of Israeli and Palestinian modes of transport. The bypass roads that allow Israelis ‘safe’ passage through the West Bank are infamously emblematic of this type of segregation. But in the everyday fabric of urban life in Jerusalem, ethnic separation is manifest more obviously in the separate bus systems used by Israelis and Palestinians (Romann and Weingrod 1991). Hence, Wendy Pullan (2013:125) argues – perhaps prematurely - that the light rail is located within a wider mobility regime ‘has stamped out the fluid ‘relational’ space needed to enhance diverse interactions’. This has led, she suggests, to an urbanism undergirded by domination and separation that works ‘against the viability of even a basic level of shared Palestinian and Israeli life in the city’ (Pullan 2007:178).

In light of these multiple geopolitical controversies, it is clear that the train is a highly contested infrastructural element in a deeply conflicted and segregated city. Yet, the following section takes these claims as a provocation for a more nuanced engagement.

## 4.2 The ‘everyday’ train

*“...A huge variety of diverse individuals are waiting on the platform station, huddling into the covered sections, or leaning on the shadow side of the station signs, to avoid the suns gaze...”*

*‘...Will anything happen?...’*

For all the controversies alluded to in the previous section, it would be unsurprising for the light rail to be interpreted primarily through the lens of a geopolitics of conflict. Yet, while cognizant of these broader geopolitical contexts, the everyday encounters I observed on the train did not seem to be entirely defined by them. Consequently, I seek to shed light on a layer of everyday existence that emerges in the wake of these broader controversies and pushes against them, often working to diffuse and neutralise them. For the remainder of this chapter, then, I address the train from a more prosaic angle in order to illustrate its messy, ambiguous, and

often-contradictory geopolitical significance. I first describe the ways in which the spaces of the train – and the encounters they facilitate – appear to disrupt and unsettle broader geopolitical controversies and expectations. Second, I explore the forms, nature and significance of these inter-ethnic encounters as an example of one way in which individuals become primed towards geopolitical indifference.

Situated within such a divisive and geopolitically charged context, one might expect the train to be a site marked by frequent conflictual and confrontational interactions. The train is, after all, one of the only sites where Israelis and Palestinians come into proximate and sustained contact with the ‘Other’ in the urban fabric of everyday life in Jerusalem. As Nolte and Yacobi (2015:28) observe, ‘at face value, young and old, men and women, religious and non-religious, Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis and Palestinian Jerusalem residents alike hop on and off the Light Rail’. With the distinctive lack of ethnic segregation in the carriage, I would have expected – at the very least - to have experienced an atmosphere of mutual fear within train carriages. The conventional perception of proximity-as-risk is well established in the securitised psyche of communities exposed to terrorism, or more precisely, to low intensity conflict.

If one reads recent ethnographic accounts of everyday life in Israel one would imagine an environment of threat and tension, perpetual suspicion, and heightened anticipatory hyper-vigilance; hallmarks of a carriage full of un-policed ‘neurotic citizens’ (Isin 2004). The consortium owners of the train line evidently also expected conflictual encounters. Planners were initially disinclined to direct the tracks through the Palestinians areas of Shuafat and Beit Hanina for fear of deterring Israeli Jewish passengers, and the chance of increased terror attacks (Sherwood 2014). Indeed, even when the construction of the railway was entering its final phase, the CityPass group undertook a survey to ascertain Jewish Jerusalemites’ nascent attitude towards the new train. The last two questions directly addressed the potentially volatile social mixing that was to be anticipated on the train. According to Hasson (2010) the survey asked respondents to rank their concern on the following questions “The light rail includes three stations in Shuafat. Does that present a problem for you?” and “All passengers, Jewish and Arab, enter the train freely and without the driver’s inspection. Is that a problem for you?”



Figure 5: Inside a light rail carriage.

Crucially, my expectations for explicit manifestations of conflict were totally unfounded. In over fifty hours of riding the train, I observed no overtly conflictual encounters. More than that, I rarely recorded bodily gestures, or spoken articulations, of fear in my observational research diary. I did not know how to react to the space of the train. Its atmosphere was extraordinary because of its normality. For this reason, I have found it helpful to think of Jerusalem's light rail as a type of Foucauldian 'heterotopia'. Heterotopias are 'places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter - sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites...are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (Foucault 1984:24). For Foucault, heterotopias are particularly elusive spaces; spaces that defy singular interpretations and resist closed normative understanding of the social interactions that happen within. Heterotopias are spaces that allow for, and by their nature, enable a different set of social rules than those in surrounding social norms. As Hetherington (1997:*viii*) suggests, 'heterotopias organize a bit of the social world in a different way to that which surrounds them. That alternative ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things'. In Foucault's words, they possess 'the power of juxtaposing in a



single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other' (Foucault 1984:6).<sup>48</sup>

As I have already intimated, Jerusalem's train acts as a type of heterotopia because of its apparent ability to disrupt the ethnic segregation and ethnicisation of everyday life through the sudden presence of 'complexity, contradiction and diversity' (Boedeltje 2012:1). In Jerusalem, the ethnic identity of places and people marks space; practically everything is designated as either 'Arab' or 'Jewish', and individuals frequent these spaces accordingly. Yet the train is seemingly for 'equal benefit of all the people in Jerusalem, Israelis and Palestinians altogether' (Nolte and Yacobi 2015:29). Therefore, whilst Pullan (2007:191) suggests that Jerusalem's ethnicised public transport systems are predicated upon 'the rejection of difference through segregation', the train stands as a disruptive example (see Figure 5).

Moreover, the train can be conceptualised as a heterotopia because it exposes Israeli Jewish travelers – in a very immediate and visual way – to the very present and existent reality of everyday Palestinian spaces within East Jerusalem. Nolte and Yacobi (2015) argue that the train – and its assemblage of infrastructure and official representation – attempt to veil exactly this fact. However, when one rides sections of the train it is difficult not to acknowledge the reality of a competing national aspiration present in the city. Put otherwise, for individuals who would not otherwise travel in East Jerusalem, the train acts as a reminder that Palestinians and Palestinian (albeit fragmented) space still exists; 'that they [Palestinians] haven't gone away, that the would-be Jewish state is still not exclusively Jewish' (Makdisi 2010:528). This may seem like an obvious and simple observation, but it is important because other systems of Israeli transit commonly use architectural refinement and volumetric depth to render Palestinian areas invisible (Weizman 2007, Makdisi 2010). Israeli roads, for instance, commonly 'skirt around, bridge over or tunnel under Palestinian habitation to maintain Israeli territorial continuity' (Pullan 2007:176). Walls, sometimes with murals of picturesque but depopulated

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<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Foucault's notion of heterotopia have been sparingly used in political geography and geopolitics (although see Boedeltje 2012, and Cairo 2004 who both use it as a meta-theoretical framework, as opposed to more small-scale concrete examples). This is surprising given these discipline's purported agenda to critique disregard for geopolitical complexity. Here, the notion of heterotopia can provide an interesting approach to the contradictory and perplexing geographies of conflictual urban areas.

rural landscapes,<sup>49</sup> are built as blind-spots to conceal Palestinian urban centres. Such walls illustrate, ‘the long-standing wish of many Israelis to simply “disappear” the Palestinians along with the signs of their habitation’ (Mitchell 2006:590).

Hence, similar to Foucault’s example of a theatre as a space that draws together ‘a series of places that are alien to each other’, so the train makes Palestinian neighbourhoods such as Beit Hanina and Shuafat suddenly present in the cognitive geographies of Jewish Israelis. Crucially, the visual presence of these Palestinian residential areas stands as incompatible with popular Israeli geopolitical imaginations of an ethnically Jewish and ‘unified Jerusalem’ (Nolte and Yacobi 2015). Whilst Busbridge (2014:95) suggests that the train ‘enacts the Israeli claim to ‘united Jerusalem’’, in my mind, a train journey can act as a very mundane form of disruption to those who subscribe to such geopolitical rhetoric. Looking out of the carriage window, it becomes all too obvious that Jerusalem is not the united or undivided capital of the Jewish state; it is plainly not a fixed urban space, a given subject of Israeli sovereignty or ethno-national aspirations (Cohen 2011).

The train allows for more than a visual – but ultimately detached – encounter with Palestinian space. Crucially, as the extract below suggests, the train facilitated the frequent, sudden and proximate presence of a Palestinian body.

“A Jewish guy – probably aged about 30 - is sitting on the train, facing backwards from the direction of travel. He has a *kippa* on, and I think I can see the tassel of a prayer garment under his non-descript t-shirt. I wonder where he is going? He seems entirely bored – perhaps this is a journey like any other. There is a spare seat next to him. An older Palestinian man who has just got on at the City Hall station - in smart trousers and a faded yellow shirt is walking down the carriage. The only spare seat is this one. He sits down.”

(Research Diary, April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013)

The boundaries between bodies are ruptured as disparate individuals collide into one another when the train brakes suddenly or swings around a long bend. One is reminded of Foucault’s analogy of the cemetery as a form of heterotopia. Here, the

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<sup>49</sup> If mural painting is not employed to soften walls, then they are ‘smoothed into the [Israeli] landscape...disguised by shrubs, trees and landscaping that gradually rises and falls, offsetting the severity that is...naked on the Palestinian side’ (Makdisi 2010:535).

meeting between the bodies of the living and the dead is confined to, and acceptable in, that unique space. Thus, heterotopias – such as the train - allow ‘elements of existence otherwise unconnected to each other [to] connect’ (Dumm 1995:39). Such close bodily proximity between Israeli and Palestinian is rarely tolerated in other parts of public life, but the train facilitates an unintentional intimacy that is not found in many other everyday spaces in Jerusalem (Romann and Weingrod 1991, Sherwood 2014).

Certainly, the materiality of the train would appear to facilitate these bodily encounters. Whilst there are seating areas, these are not prominent. Instead, the carriages are relatively open-plan allowing for a lot of standing room. There are large spaces near the doors where people congregate. Individuals find themselves sitting or standing next to people they perhaps normally would not choose to.<sup>50</sup>

“Its rush hour, and the already crammed train stops at the City Hall station. This is the centre of the municipality and there are many governmental departments nearby. Above the heads of my fellow passengers I can see that the station is crowded with people. We stop and the doors open. People fight to get out, whilst others fight to get in. It is impossible not to get carried down into the carriages in the sudden momentum of moving bodies. People cram on, there is shouting. We are squeezed together, body on body. There is no choice but to stand and no choice who to stand next to.”

(Research Diary, May 9<sup>th</sup> 2013)

Rather more poetically, *The Guardian's* Jerusalem correspondent, Harriet Sherwood (May 29<sup>th</sup> 2014), describes it in the following terms:

‘Men dressed in ultra-orthodox monochrome, under hats and coats even in the Middle Eastern summer, squeeze on board, averting their eyes from young women tourists in shorts and skimpy t-shirts. Religious Jewish mothers, hair bound in long winding scarves, with a brood of small children clutching at their ankle-length skirts, stand alongside Palestinian women in skinny jeans and elaborate hijabs framing carefully made-up faces and groomed eyebrows. Israeli soldiers in uniform, some armed with guns and all apparently armed with smart phones, lounge on seats opposite Palestinian labourers heading for jobs in Jewish areas of the city. Christian pilgrims en route to Via Dolorosa and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Jesus's crucifixion, mingle with Muslims heading to the sacred

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<sup>50</sup> Other sites include hospitals (see Roman and Weingrod 1991), which Foucault (1984) also uses as an example of a heterotopia.

Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque, and Jews intent on praying at the revered Western Wall, the last surviving remnant of the Second Temple.’

One interesting result of this entanglement of bodies is a certain semblance of social leveling that is often concomitant with public transport, but which is not normally characteristic of everyday life for Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. In offering oneself up to join the mobile public, both Israelis and Palestinians become ‘equal patrons of the service’ (Busbridge 2014:96). Both must choose to acquiesce to the timetable of the train. Moreover, whilst Pullan (2007) suggests that Israeli and Palestinian mobility is marked by huge discrepancies in speed - the train, in contrast, seemingly runs at the same velocity for both.

But if these encounters do not appear to lead to antagonism or violence, can one express optimism at the seemingly idyllic incarnation of this peaceful ‘contact zone’ (Askins and Pain 2011:803), or hope for the ‘triumph of calm well-being where for two decades the sterility of a no-man’s-land<sup>51</sup> and, more recently, the fear of terrorist attacks had ruled?’ (Pinto 2013:103). Put otherwise, do these encounters on the train prime Jerusalem’s residents towards peaceful geopolitical orientations?

It is perhaps unsurprising that literature examining heterotopian spaces within the context of conflict tend to imbue such sites with transformative potential. Here, heterotopias are celebrated as they act to both affirm difference whilst unlocking the possibility for individual and social transformation through interaction with that difference (see Houtum and Pijpers 2008, Zembylas and Ferreira 2009). The language surrounding heterotopias is often optimistic and celebrates a relational ontology of connection. In their study of post-apartheid South Africa and Cyprus, Zembylas and Ferreira (2009:2-3) suggest that heterotopias hold the potential to ‘subvert dominant normativities’, allowing for ‘alternative set of values, emotions and beliefs’, contradict normalised and polarised identities, and ‘oppose the normalized conflicting ethos’. Similarly, Johnson (2006:87) suggests that heterotopias subvert hegemonic power relations; they ‘light up an imaginary spatial field, a set of relations that are not separate from dominant structures and ideology, but go against the grain’.

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<sup>51</sup> Part of the route of the light rail runs through territory that was once the ‘no-man’s land’ between Israel and the Jordanian controlled Old City.

These fragile optimisms appear to be underpinned by notions similar to the ‘contact hypothesis’ that emerged out of social psychology’s grappings with the problems of social prejudice in the 1950s. The ‘contact hypothesis’ was predicated on the idea that the most effective method for reducing prejudice was to bring disparate peoples together in proximate contact (Valentine 2008). Contact was seen as an effective ‘strategy because it lessens feelings of uncertainty and anxiety by producing a sense of knowledge or familiarity between strangers, which in turn generates a perception of predictability and control’ (Valentine 2008:324).<sup>52</sup> Similar ideas can be found in contemporary geographical writing about proximate encounters with difference in urban space (Amin 2002, Valentine 2008). This recent corpus re-visits and re-works earlier notions of ‘contact’ by accounting for the spatiality of distinct ‘contact zones’ (Pratt 2008, Askins and Pain 2011).

Indeed, some geographers have specifically explored encounters of proximate difference on modes of public transport, and also display a cautious optimism for transformative potential (Wilson 2011). Thrift (2005), for example, hopes that public mobile encounters lead to more positive affects associated with compassion and kindness. Similarly, drawing on Ranciere’s notion of the ‘politics of disagreement’, Bissell (2010:286) contends that even one’s response to negative encounters on public transport is indicative and invocative of a care for life. Here, ‘events of being rattled, shaken, or knocked...contain within them an ethical potential, opening up opportunities for repair and offering a potential to redraw and negotiate the field of what might be possible’.

It would be easy then to suggest that Jerusalem’s light rail could be envisioned as one of these transformative heterotopian spaces of coexistence. At first glance, the train does appear to be an unexpected site of peaceful contact that may allow for individuals to encounter plurality and possibility. Busbridge (2014:96), for example, states that the train ‘has emerged as one of a few sites of tentative coexistence unthinkable only a handful of years ago’ She goes on to suggest that ‘it is the

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<sup>52</sup> For critical reflections on the ‘contact hypothesis’ in the context of contact interventions in Israel-Palestine see Moaz (2011, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c)

possibilities of interaction and the reality of tentative coexistence that offers slivers of hope in an otherwise bleak landscape' (Busbridge 2014:78).

However, the train stands as a space of illusion to those who would herald it as site formation of harmonious geopolitical orientations. Spend enough time riding the line and one becomes aware that daily encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians are marked by near-total indifference. The remainder of the chapter uses the train to explore everyday orientations of Israeli indifference. I initially examine individual Israeli indifference towards the presence of Palestinian bodies, before exploring a wider societal orientation of indifference towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### 4.3 Encountering indifference

*'...My ride is like most others. It is entirely peaceful, normal, boring, ordinary. People just get on, find a seat, mind their own business and get off again...'*

I suggest that the heterotopian spaces of the train simply allowed for (non)encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs that were 'mooded' by an unstable negotiation of acknowledgment and indifference (Haldrup *et al.* 2008:118, Makdisi 2010:526, Sherwood 2014).<sup>53</sup> In micro-acts of 'voluntary segregation', both Israelis and Palestinians appeared to pay little or no attention to the 'Other' in the carriage; they were 'so close to one another in actual physical space, [yet] ...seem to be on different planets' (Romann and Weingrod 1991:5). Ash Amin (2013:4) describes the scene well:

'Strangers mingle or communicate with a degree of disinterest in each other, loyal to themselves, particular goals, and intimate others in and beyond that space...'

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<sup>53</sup> Here I take it as axiomatic that Jerusalemites are intuitively sensitive in recognising and identifying different ethnic markers.

Similarly, in her ethnography of Jerusalem, Pinto (2013:107) metaphorically likens these everyday spatial encounters to marine aquariums, where:

‘all types and sizes of highly colored fish, each going toward a specific destination, swim about while turning rapidly away to avoid the others, and all of this in utter silence.’<sup>54</sup>

These prosaic and unspectacular (non)encounters are rarely acknowledged in studies examining interactions between conflictual ‘Others’. Instead fear-filled, confrontational or transformative moments of contact are favoured (Shirlow 2008). Yet these are the everyday exception rather than the rule in Jerusalem. My research diary is replete with mundane normality and (non)encounter, and to ignore such moments would be to dismiss the majority of everyday life.

It is clear that indifference describes a complex social-psychological state (Lillehammer 2014). It is often used in ways that display significant overlap with notions of apathy (Eliasoph 1998), denialism (Cohen 2001), and repression (Zerubavel 2006). For this reason, Lillehammer (2014:561) attempts to distinguish between “apathetic indifference”; ‘blinker indifference’; ‘exclusionary indifference’; and ‘negating indifference’ (see Figure 6). Whilst the following analysis does not parcel out ‘indifference’ in such clear-cut ways, Lillehammer’s (2014) taxonomy will, at points, retain clarifying and explanatory value. It is obvious that in practice, acts of indifference are not so easily distinguishable or demarcated.<sup>55</sup>

From Lillehammer’s classification, it is, however, pertinent to note that indifference spans the spectrum of conscious and unconscious action (Cohen 2001, Zerubavel 2006). As the examples outlined below suggest, for some passengers, remaining indifferent towards the ‘Other’ entailed a conscious and intentional act of unnoticing (Helman 2015).

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<sup>54</sup> Of course, I acknowledge that train passengers are completely entitled to enjoy solitudinous journeys on the train. As Laurier and Philo (2006:199) contend, individuals do have the ‘right to be left alone in public.’

<sup>55</sup> Lillehammer’s (2014) list is also not exhaustive.

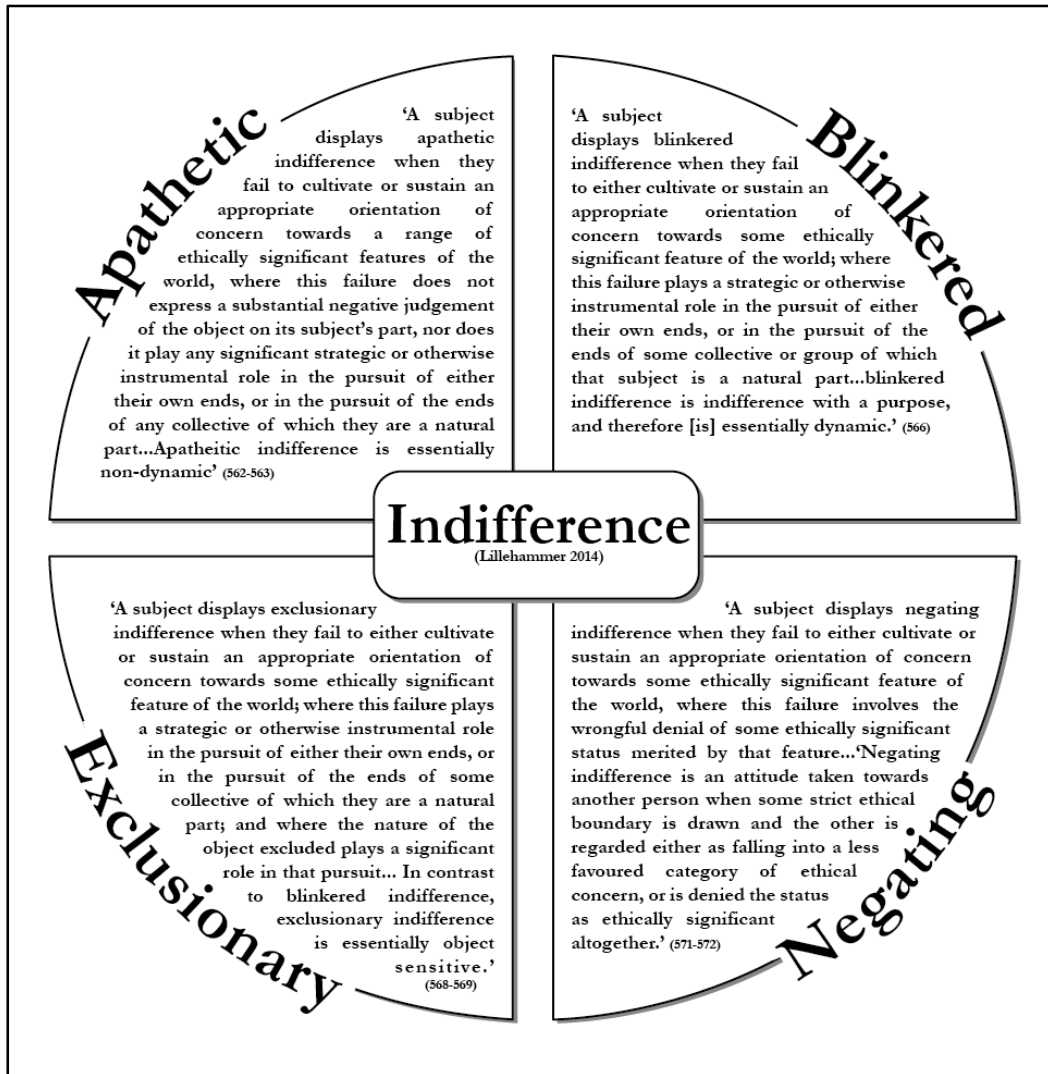


Figure 6: A taxonomy of indifference based on Lillehammer (2014).



“It takes only half a second. The Palestinian guy arrives at the seat. Glances at the Jewish guy and hesitates - as if waiting for some kind of permission. And then, remembering he doesn’t need it, he sits down. The Jewish guy glances at him, checking him out, a flicker of annoyance, and he starts to sink into his seat and press against the window...At the next stop, more seats become free. The Palestinian man moves to a different seat.”

(Research Diary, June 10<sup>th</sup> 2013)

“A Palestinian guy is sitting opposite an Orthodox Jewish guy. In my mind, he is trying to antagonise him by simply staring at him. Words are not exchanged, he just stares. The Jewish Orthodox guy – who has been looking out of the window – finally realises, glances up but quickly goes back to looking out of the window. The challenge has been met – but met with an apparent response of indifference. There was no apparent response of fear, no bodily withdrawal, or deferent aversion of eyes. He just went back to what he was doing before. It seems to disarm the potential for further antagonism - the Palestinian guy can do no more. Anyhow, he gets off at the next stop.”

(Research Diary, July 31<sup>st</sup> 2013)

“The train has just stopped at the ‘Shivtei Israel’ station. This station services one of the most Orthodox neighbourhoods in West Jerusalem, a neighbourhood that also bumps up against the seam road between East and West. The next stop down is the Damascus Gate – a predominantly Palestinian area. So this is an area of particular interest. There is a Muslim guy sitting on the train with his small family. They are located in the more open part of the carriage, where the seats run along the walls of the train – leaving a wider space in the middle of the carriage – where people normally stand when it is busy. His wife is gently rocking a baby in a push-chair, whilst he holds another small toddler. An orthodox Jewish woman gets on pushing a larger pram. She surveys the space – and it becomes clear that there will need to be a bit of re-shuffling in order to accommodate both the pram and the push-chair. The Muslim man jumps up, places the small girl on his seat, and goes to great lengths to make room for the Jewish mother – helping his wife to maneuver their pushchair further down into the carriage. The materiality of the train – the busy vestibule, and the awkward placing of the ticket machines facilitate this encounter. He even smiles at the Jewish lady. The Jewish lady pushes the pram into the newly free space – totally ignores the gesture of goodwill, and sits down. Nothing...she says nothing. Her face is expressionless. The Muslim guy sits back down and re-engages with his family. He does not seem to expect recognition or thanks. It seems to me that he is also used to this form of indifference – where he does not expect to be recognised. The encounter lasts 15 seconds – but I can’t help feeling that it embodies the lack of engagement, the lack of recognition that I see in wider Israeli culture.’

(Research Diary, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2013)

For others, displaying indifference towards the ‘Other’ appeared to have become much more habituated and automated action.

“We have just gone through the Shuafat stop. Around 12 Palestinian guys got on [to the train]. Nothing has changed. Nothing has happened. They are ignored by the existing passengers, and, in turn, the guys ignore them.”  
(Research Diary, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2013)

But what conceptual understandings can be gained from analysing such fleeting and routine (non)encounters? I go on to suggest that these mundane everyday non-occurrences disrupt certain taken-for-granted geopolitical representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; imaginaries that rely on visions of total division and ethnic separation. Instead, I argue that the (non)encounters described above are generative of a wider Israeli indifference towards Palestinians. Small practices of avoidance are not insignificant; rather they help to prime individuals towards a geopolitical orientation of indifference.

On the train, prolonged and close proximity with difference meant that individuals had to work much harder in order to remain indifferent to one another. Once I had noted this in the spaces of the train carriages, I began to observe it in many other sites in Jerusalem, in malls, in cafes, and on construction sites. The train, it seemed, was simply a microcosm reflecting similar forms of social avoidance and disengagement occurring in spaces across this contested – yet fully functioning – city (see Romann and Weingrod 1991).

These (non)encounters fundamentally challenge certain geopolitical imaginaries of Jerusalem as a highly contested city divided by complete ethnic *havrada* (Nolte and Yacobi 2015).<sup>56</sup> It was not unusual, for example, to hear my informants make the clichéd maxim that it was possible to live everyday life ‘without ever coming into contact with a Palestinian’. Yet, as my research progressed, it became clear this was a rhetorical construction that masked the reality that Palestinians populate the everyday lives of Jewish Israelis. Far from being totally absent, my informants had simply learnt to ignore the Palestinian Other. Israelis, Romann and Weingrod

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<sup>56</sup> *Havrada* is the Hebrew word for separation.

(1991:3) suggest, often know very little, if anything, about the Arab individuals who occupy their daily lives, allowing them to ‘live together separately’.

In fact, present-day Jerusalem displays ‘a tentative, albeit asymmetrical and uneven, mixing as Palestinians and Israeli encounter each other more often in the urban fabric of the city’ (Busbridge 2014:78). Palestinian bodies are more visible and more present in the spaces of West Jerusalem than ever before (Busbridge 2014, also see Leibovitz 2007). Aided by the train, Palestinians increasingly travel to the commercial spaces of West Jerusalem in order to work and enjoy leisure facilities.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, instances of contact occur every day in a myriad of interactional settings beyond the train carriages; individuals are drawn together and entangled in regular contact at the mall, in city parks, coffee shops, hospitals, offices, garages, at the ‘ethnic borders’ of residential neighbourhoods, on construction sites (Romann and Weingrod 1991). Whilst I do not wish to downplay certain acts of divisive, systematic and thoroughgoing ethnic segregation that occur in Jerusalem,<sup>58</sup> it does not take long to realise that imaginaries of complete separation are only part of the picture. As Busbridge (2014:81) similarly observed, ‘instances of ‘clear-cut separation...are not only anomalous, but largely illusory’.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.4 Israeli Jewish indifference and the Palestinian Other

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<sup>57</sup> The reverse is not occurring (Sherwood 2014). It is still rare to see Israeli Jews (who are not ‘settlers’) in East Jerusalem.

<sup>58</sup> Segregation occurs in many aspects of life in Jerusalem, including in education, religion, housing and work (see Roamann and Weingrod 1991).

<sup>59</sup> Having set out the train as a space of quotidian encounter between Israelis and Palestinians, it is crucial to ask why certain Palestinians are so readily allowed onto the train in the first place? This question seems especially important given the low priority that facilitating inter-ethnic is afforded in Israel. Hence, whilst Palestinian East Jerusalemites can freely ride the train, their admittance is predicated upon a wider, pre-existing system of Palestinians (non)entry. The filtered inclusion of *some* Palestinians (East Jerusalemites) both stands in contrast to - and yet fully relies on - the control, restrictions and separation that mark other forms of Palestinian (im)mobility (West Bank and Gazan Palestinians) (Makdisi 2010). Crucially then, Palestinian movement is segregated – not just from Jewish Israelis – but from other Palestinians in order to inculcate notions of privilege (Pullan 2007). For Cohen (2011), the separation of Palestinian from Palestinian - and concomitant notions of stratified privilege - is a central motif of contemporary Israeli Jewish control in East Jerusalem. The permission of entry and mobility granted to some Palestinian acts as a seductive/coercive form of disciplinary power deployed to restrict any form of behaviour that would threaten that ongoing permission.

If this is the case, it is an important political act when my informants claimed never to encounter Palestinians. It is significant that Israelis live within the bubble of their own socio-spatial worlds, constantly imagining that the ‘Other’ does not exist. But how is space made *de facto* void of Palestinians? Or, in the words of Israeli anthropologist and political commentator Jeff Halper (2008:39), ‘how do we render Palestinians invisible in a tiny territory where some 5.5million Jews live cheek by jowl with almost the same number of Palestinians?’

Halper (2008) goes on to suggest that Israeli indifference to the Palestinian Other is made possible by the presence of what he calls a ‘cognitive membrane’ that acts to screen out ‘anything not having to do with them [Israelis]’ (Halper 2008:66). Because of this filter, the Palestinians fade into ‘mere background’, rendered ‘entirely irrelevant if not invisible’, and ‘dismissed and ignored’ (Halper 2007:36-44, Hanafi 2009, Vick 2010). Halper’s observations touch on two important points pertaining to Israeli Jewish and Palestinian (non)encounters of indifference. Firstly, Halper’s (2007:44 my emphasis) notion of a ‘*cognitive* membrane’ implies that indifference relies – in some small way - on cognitive work in the site of encounter. Individuals choose what to ignore, a decision embodied and enacted through the turning away of the body or the aversion of the eyes. Here, indifference is understood as a conscious and spatial practice, one ‘lived over and over in the glancing encounters of the street’ (Tonkiss 2003:300). However, I would argue that there is a pre-cognitive or pre-reflective aspect to the everyday indifference that I observed on the train. Through small repetitive spatial practices – such as the ones described in the spaces of the train – insouciance comes to function at a more automated, habituated and subconscious level. It governs encounters in ways that individuals become less and less aware of, and, to a certain extent, have little control over. Through automaticity, one learns, as Tonkiss (2003:301) observes, ‘to look past a face’. *Contra* Weingrod and Romann (1991:220), encounters with ethnic difference are not ‘constantly in mind’ in Jerusalem. This gives too much credence to the process of cognitive noticing. Over time, practiced indifference solidifies into more complete detachment, denial and inattentiveness through embodied experience of daily life; positions that routinely bypass the cognitive or conscious (Cohen 2001).

One clear example of this automaticity comes to mind. In the July of my research year – amid intense summer heat and equally intense ethical anguish – I accepted an invitation to help one of my Jewish informants rebuild his parent’s house in a settlement on the outskirts of Jerusalem. For three weeks I worked alongside my Israeli Jewish informant and a number of Palestinians labourers. My lack of construction experience meant that I was a lackey of sorts. In the site of the settlement, I encountered two contrasting spatial practices involving the Palestinian Other; both of which told two different narratives about Israeli attitudes towards Palestinians. The intense fortress-like security could be read as a materialisation of the anxiety or fear that the settlers felt with regard to their Palestinian and Bedouin neighbours.<sup>60</sup> To enter one had to go through security checks at a large sliding yellow gate. In between vehicle checks, a guard with an automated machine-gun read the daily newspaper. The settlement was surrounded by a tall fence, lined at the top with barbed wire. In places, this perimeter fence was made solid using concrete. If any Palestinian had attempted to enter the settlement<sup>61</sup> – even peaceably through the front gate – suspicion would be raised, and the individual inevitably denied access. However, at the same time, for three weeks Jewish residents of the settlement walked past a troupe of Palestinian labourers – Arabic music blaring from mobile phones – without so much as a passing glance. How can these two spatial practices exist so conterminously? Clearly, through repetition and habit, the settlement’s residents had become accustomed to the presence of Palestinian labourers, and had judged them as unthreatening to the point that they were ignored at an automated level.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, Halper (2007) implies that indifference can come to act as a collective societal geopolitical orientation (Bar-Tal 2001). Put otherwise, whilst indifference, denial, noticing/ignoring are ‘neither fixed psychological ‘mechanism[s]’ nor universal social process[e]s’, they are never simply individuals acts (Cohen 2001:3). Instead, as Zerubavel (2006:20) argues, the individuals and objects to which we afford our attention are always grounded in much wider ‘social traditions of paying

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<sup>60</sup> Indeed, according to Israeli newspapers, earlier in the year ‘terrorists’ broke through the town’s security fence and vandalised a synagogue (see Lev 2013).

<sup>61</sup> In Israeli society – such as act would be discursively framed as an ‘infiltration’.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps – as my Jewish informant suggested - this is because rules state that construction sites employing Palestinian labourers must also have an armed Jewish guard present. My informant did not adhere to this rule.

attention'. Hence, what we come to dismiss or ignore is done as members of historically situated social communities; we are unmistakably socialised to pay attention to particular things in specific ways.

Indifference towards the Other has a clear genealogical history in Israel. From the very beginning, the Arabs (Palestinians) were afforded a highly ambiguous position in the Zionist narrative and archive (Leshem 2013). Early colonial (non)encounters established the clear 'irrelevance of "the Arabs" to Jewish rights and claims' (Halper 2008:37). The phrase 'a land without a people, for a people without a land' best illustrates the early Zionist settlers' indifference towards the indigenous population of Palestine before the State of Israel was founded. Although some took this idiom to be an accurate description of the promised territory, others knew full well that an indigenous population inhabited the space.

The social aspect of what we perceive or ignore is made evident in the ways that these change over time. As wider social attitudes shift, so does our focus (Zerubavel 2006). The outbreak of the second Intifada, for instance, made it impossible for Israelis to maintain the indifference that had been growing in the Oslo years. Instead Israeli awareness of the Palestinian Other was considerably heightened; their presence became the source of fear, anxiety and insecurity. Accordingly, the Israeli citizenry were marked by a hyper-vigilance that meant that the Arab subject was under constant gaze. Today, it is more likely that Israeli Jews 'walk by, unperturbed by the silent gaze of their Arab neighbors' (Pinto 2013:78).

That Israeli society is able to remain indifferent towards Palestinians in everyday life is indicative of an unequal balance of power. Here, orientations of indifference are redolent of positions of 'tolerance' because both are implicitly conducted from places of dominance. As Valentine (2008:329) argues, tolerance - like indifference - is a position 'that a dominant or privileged group has the power to extend to, or withhold from, others'. Israelis, for instance, have sufficient access to socio-political power and economic resources to allow them to choose when and where to interact with Palestinians according to necessity. Palestinians, by contrast, are more reliant on daily encounters with Israeli Jews; they depend on their dominant neighbours in the spaces of the labour market and institutional or administrative sectors. As

Romann (2006:299) notes, ‘the dominant majority sector generally has ‘first choice’ in choosing domains of integration versus segregation, as well as the form and level of interaction’. Everyday indifference, then, signals a structural and asymmetrical relationship of inequality – one infused with one-way dominance – where the Other is subordinated to an inferior position.

#### 4.5 Jewish Israeli indifference and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

*‘...The conflict is not here...’*

Thus far, I have argued that small, habituated practices of everyday insouciance are both reflective and formative of a wider societal disposition of indifference towards the Other. However, this indifference did not simply mark my informants orientation towards Palestinians. Crucially, at the time of research, I would argue that indifference had become a much wider geopolitical orientation that conditioned Israeli Jewish everyday (dis)engagements – not simply with the Other – but also with the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are used to thinking of Israeli society as being marked by a siege mentality; rife with fear, heightened anticipation, and security obsessions.<sup>63</sup> But, a shrugging of the shoulders is part of a political *raison d’etre* that dominates Israeli today. Crucially, none of my informants ever talked at length about feeling afraid of the conflict when going about their everyday lives. Instead, after almost fifty years of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, two Palestinian intifadas, several periods of intensified violence, a unilateral disengagement from Gaza and numerous failed political processes, the Israeli public appears to have become entirely disinterested in the on-going conflict. Of course, casting all Israelis as indifferent in this way is a simplistic and homogenising caricature. I certainly do not apply this definition in a rigid manner, or argue that it

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<sup>63</sup> I certainly do not wish to downplay these formative collective societal emotions. As Bar-Tal (2001) demonstrates, fear is a deep and historically powerful force in Israel; an emotion that can instantaneously override and flood one’s consciousness due to a number of conscious or pre-cognitive cues.

applies to every Israeli.<sup>64</sup> But political commentators in Israel are beginning to recognise that Israeli interest in the conflict is waning.

Max Blumenthal (2013:69), for example, argues that for many Israelis the conflict has been ‘recast as an utterly benign endeavor’ enabling them to take on the problematic role of the bystander; to ‘drape themselves in a mantle of normality’. This attitude was re-articulated by the critical Israeli journalist Linoy Bar-Geffen (2013) during a round-table exploring the lack of Israeli media reporting of the conflict:

‘...oh my God, I don’t remember when was the last time I heard a conversation about the conflict. These people [Palestinians] actually think we are thinking about them, that we’re talking about them...We don’t think about the Palestinians anymore, we don’t talk about them...We became indifferent’<sup>65</sup>

Israeli journalist Alon Idan (2011:n.p) agrees, arguing that ‘apathy reigns’ amongst the Israeli citizenry, ‘because the dispute has become a mechanized routine’. I point to three anecdotal events that circumstantially point to a more systemic collective orientation of Israeli indifference towards the conflict.

Early in my research, I was invited to dinner after a congregational service at a popular sushi restaurant in West Jerusalem. Over dinner discussion turned to the continuing necessity for security guards at Jerusalem cafés and restaurants; a practice that became widespread during the second intifada (2001-2005). These security guards – who, in both Konopinski (2009) and Ochs’ (2011) ethnographies played central roles in the generative normalisation of fear and insecurity - were now deemed entirely superfluous by my informants. At the end of the meal, one individual refused to pay the service charge that is added to the bill in order to pay

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<sup>64</sup> To do so would brush over a profound array of political engagements and socio-psychological positions within Israeli society due to the protracted conflict (Halperin *et al.* 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Recently, critical journalists also highlighted the decreasing column inches – or airtime – that the conflict receives in the Israeli press (see Editing (Out) the Occupation - <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/33533525>). Israeli journalist Alon Idan (2011) asked ‘No one really wants to know what goes on there. So is there any point at all to telling this story?’ Indeed, Halperin *et al.* (2010:64) suggest that, many Israelis ‘refrain from exposing themselves to media reports that describe the situation in the occupied territories and especially the suffering of the Palestinians’.



the guard's wages. As she scribbled out the amount, she angrily informed me that this was an optional – and unnecessary - charge.

In 2011, intense social protests flared in cities around the nation as Israelis denounced the prohibitively high cost of basic consumer goods and rental prices. As the protests grew, so did the range of social grievances voiced. Crucially however, apart from radically left-wing protesters, the Palestinian 'situation' was virtually absent from the agenda. As Pinto (2013:120) argued, 'the bubble that once used to protect only Tel Aviv...now covers the country as a whole', the activists 'sought merely to promote great social justice among those who live within its bounds. In order to maintain cohesion among the very different types of people inside the tent movement, no one dared to mention the 'Tartars next door'.

Indeed, as Dana (2011:n.p) describes:

‘The decision to exclude the occupation from the grievances of the July 14 movement was entirely organic. No hired gun consultant advised movement activists to avoid the hot button issue in order to broaden the appeal of the demonstrations. The mainstream of the Jewish public decided on its own, and without much internal reflection, that social justice could exist alongside a system of ethnic exclusivism. Thus, while the July 14 movement proceeded through cities across Israel bellowing out cries for dignity and rights, Palestinians remained safely tucked away behind an elaborate matrix of control — the Iron Wall. Ten years of separation had not only rendered the Palestinians invisible in a physical sense. It had erased them from the Israeli conscience.’

Eighteen months later, in January 2013, Israelis voted to send Netanyahu's incumbent Likud party back into power in the Knesset; the first time such an event has occurred in over two decades. The issues that dominate election campaigns are often a useful guide indicative of contemporary societal priorities and geopolitical positionings. Crucially, the run up to the elections was marked by 'the near-invisibility of the Palestinian issue and Palestinian citizens of Israel' (Yiftachel 2013:48). Whilst previous elections may have turned on the Palestinian 'issue', 'today 'the "Palestinian question" has been internalized in such a manner as to require scant attention or mention' (Yiftachel 2013:49). Even the left-wing Labour party leader, Shelly Yacimovich appeared to distance herself from any discussion of the conflict during the election. Instead, the attention of the Israeli public was

diverted towards other more pressing geopolitical considerations. Far from being located at the fore of public consciousness, the conflict was replaced by internal problems; issues of the economy, or the deeply-fragmented Jewish society. Iran and the Arab Spring replaced the ‘situation’ as posing the gravest perceived threat to Israel’s ongoing existence.

Certainly, academic focus on Israeli indifference also appears to be increasing. This is most evident, for example, in the on-going and healthy social-psychological literature addressing the effects of the conflict on Israeli society. Once this literature would be rife with accounts of societal fear. However, psychologists Greenbaum and Elizur (2012), and Halperin *et al.* (2010:67) all contend that Israelis have disengaged from issues pertaining to the conflict through a myriad of psychological defense behaviours that combine elements of ‘justification, rationalization, and dissonance reduction’ (Greenbaum and Elizur 2012:396). Mechanisms such as repression, denial, projection, rationalisation and avoidance ‘allow [Israelis] to avoid facing the contradictions between their group’s behaviors and the moral values that are acceptable in modern societies’. Halperin *et al.* (2010:62) observed that indifference has come to affect ‘a large majority of [Israeli] society members...and provides an orientation for the group’s behavior in the context of occupation’. Most recently, anthropologist Helman (2015) diagnosed a ‘culture of collective denial’ within Israel vis-à-vis the conflict. Whilst I would suggest that the term ‘indifference’ is more accurate than ‘denial’ (due to reasons of conscious/unconscious (un)intentionally), the baseline sentiments of a collective societal orientation marked by ‘unnoticing’ remain the same.

#### **4.6 An everyday geopolitics of indifference.**

Whilst these studies point towards the socio-psychological state of Israeli indifference, they do not proffer many suggestions as to *why* or *how* this condition occurs. What are the underlying causes for this collective orientation of indifference? Clearly it must be the result of a number of processual phenomena, the range of which is far beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I examine

some of the primary causes, and go on to argue that these are constitutive of a geopolitics of indifference.

Of course, for many, the situated immediacies of everyday life simply ‘get in the way’, causing one to forget about both the presence of the ‘Other’ and the wider conflict. After being shocked at witnessing an Israeli military court for the first time, Israeli journalist Alon Idan (2011:n.p) confessed:

‘Here's an example of the way you forget: At a certain point on the journey home [from the military court], a car behind me flashed its bright lights, urging me to switch lanes... For the next few seconds, I'll think about the barbarism of the driver who used the bright lights. That's where my thoughts will be. And then someone will call, and we'll talk about sports until I get home and park. When I enter my house, I'll give my child a bath and then I'll lie down to go to sleep. Later, I'll fall asleep. Tomorrow is another day.’

But apart from the immediacies of everyday life, are there other geopolitical causes that can be found for this growing orientation of indifference amongst the Israeli public? To my mind, it is clear that spatial and discursive strategies of separation and security are causative of Israeli indifference (Yiftachel 2005). As Azoulay and Ophir (2013:12) attest, ‘the ongoing [Israeli] control of the Occupied Territories is conceived of [in everyday political discourse] as incidental and, especially, external to the Israeli regime’. To enable the normality of everyday life, ‘the Occupied Territories are bracketed off, forgotten, and denied’ (Azoulay and Ophir 2013:18). Discursively, for instance, the conflict is veiled and distanced behind certain lexical rhetoric; it is simply a ‘situation’ that occurs – for the most part - in the abstract geopolitical legalese of the ‘disputed territories’.

More concretely, actual hostilities are often undetectably distant,<sup>66</sup> taking place out of sight, and hidden behind the concrete walls of the separation/security

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<sup>66</sup> This distance, however, can be manipulated; its importance can be strategically overstated – or underplayed - at specific times. For example, distance becomes vitally important during peace talks or negotiations over future borders. In 2011, in response to Obama’s increasing insistence that a just peace would be based on the borders of 1967, Netanyahu argued that these were not ‘defensible borders’. Much was made of the fact that - suddenly - the ‘situation’ was occurring only 7 miles away from Tel Aviv. The usually distant conflict was swiftly made near in order to rebut Obama’s suggestions.

barrier/fence/wall. Here, Israeli indifference grows as the conflict is rendered gradually invisible and distanced by security apparatus (Neve Gordon 2008). As Azoulay and Ophier (2013:17) claim, ‘Most Israeli citizens...usually enjoy the privilege of suspending the Occupation’s violent presence, distancing it from sight and heart and forgetting it exists’. Similarly, one of my informants stated, the conflict “may as well be happening thousands of miles away”. *Contra* Ochs (2011) and Konopinski (2009), fear of danger no longer saturates Israelis’ everyday lives. Instead Israel’s vast and complex security regime has allowed Israeli citizens to become increasingly comfortable – perhaps even numb (Pinto 2013). Speaking about Israel’s sophisticated anti-missile defense system, Israeli journalist Uri Misgav (2014:n.p) aptly describes this ‘security calm’:

‘The Iron Dome developers have created a technological wonder and saved many lives. But on the strategic level their brilliant invention is not without its damaging effects. It enables Israelis to feel protected while continuing their life almost without a hitch. They can blow up their feelings of victimization and misery to new heights, while going on about their business relatively comfortably. They can be glued to the radio and television while at the same time remaining exempt from any soul searching or critical scrutiny of the repeated, unending cycle of hostility and violence.’

Similarly, one of my informants astutely observed that indifference is indicative of the success of security and *hafrada*. Disinterest in the conflict probably existed, he suggested, because ‘we have grown in confidence during this *security calm*’.<sup>67</sup>

This begs the questions: what wider impact does indifference have on the conflict? What geopolitical practices does indifference facilitate? Does anyone benefit from indifference? Can it be managed or manipulated? In asking such questions, we have come a long way from those encounters on the train. Indifference is no longer presented simply as an everyday reaction. Rather, I want to suggest that indifference is a constituent part of the political apparatus. More than simply a reaction, indifference can come to be enrolled as an operational element within certain systems of power.

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<sup>67</sup> This relationship between indifference and security problematises the findings of Ochs (2011) and Konopinski (2009), who argued that practices of security only lead to greater societal fear and suspicion in everyday life. Whilst this may have been the case in the years directly following the second intifada, a decade on and certain security measures have become entirely normalised and no longer seem to invoke feelings of insecurity.

To my mind, indifference is often overlooked as being a powerful everyday geopolitical orientation with notable consequences. I would suggest that my informants' indifference towards the conflict was the most pervasive and dangerous of all attitudes I encountered during my research. Extreme prejudice or unsophisticated vilification of the Other was far easier to observe, evidence, cope with and critically disarm. But silent indifference, and an apparent lack of care were more difficult to swallow.<sup>68</sup> As Elie Wiesel (1999) stated indifference is never a 'beginning', it is always 'an end'.

Confident in their political and military power, Israeli indifference effectively secures the 'current pleasant status quo (for Israeli Jews)' (Pinto 2013:190). Indeed, Halperin *et al.* (2010), Greenbaum and Elizur (2012) and Bar-Tal *et al.* (2010) all imply that current Israeli indifference results in shoring up and perpetuating the conflict. I would suggest that this occurs in two overlapping ways. Firstly, indifference can lead to and legitimise violent practices through a lack of social critique, and secondly, indifference closes down the possibilities for peace. These will be taken in turn.

Firstly then, public indifference can so often be the basis from which State-sponsored acts of reactive or pre-emptive violence are mobilised, performed and justified. Wider indifference acts as a safety net of denial that translates into public legitimacy and, in turn, relative impunity (Cohen 2001). Crucially, indifference erodes one's impulse to know about the violence that is done in one's name. Woodward (2013:102) states the problem succinctly, arguing that 'apathy and indifference for the Palestinian cause could easily transition into...unconcern when military options are employed'. Accordingly, psychologists Greenbaum and Elizur (2012:396-398) suggest that there is real 'cause for concern' about the lack of Israeli public engagement because this signals 'apathy born of dissociation and justification...toward the suffering of others'. They go on to observe that 'when all is quiet, there is little regard to what is happening to people in the OPT, and [Israeli] life continues as normal' (Greenbaum and Elizur 2012:395). Most Israelis, Halper

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<sup>68</sup> Perhaps I did not have the conceptual tools to deal with this lack of engagement. As noted in Chapter 3, critical geopolitics had predominantly taught me to 'deal' with overt, extreme or explicit geopolitical articulations.

(2008:66) claims, ‘do not know a thing about either the realities on the ground in the Occupied Territories or what Palestinians think and want (and don’t really care)’. With violence rendered firmly, ‘out of mind’, it is easy to see how Israelis quickly ‘lose interest in the lives of the Palestinians’ (Gordon 2008:212). Whilst I agree with Benvenisti’s (2009, n.p) sentiments that ‘the situation in the occupied territories interests Israelis only when something violent takes place there’, he does not qualify just how violent an event it now takes to capture Israeli interest.<sup>69</sup> After all, as UNOCHA weekly reports illustrate, daily instances of violence persist unabated and largely unnoticed in the Occupied Territories.

Societal indifference has also been linked to escalations and cycles of violence and fear. For example, social psychologists Greenbaum and Elizur (2012:396) observe that:

‘the greater the repression [of the conflict] by the occupier, the greater the violence by the occupied peoples, leading to...intrasociety violence, and increased use of psychological defense mechanisms. We suggest that these processes are the basis for the cycles of violence that have been described by observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’.

Similarly, the Israeli political scholar Neve Gordon (2009:242) suggests that it is ‘lack of interest or indifference to the life of most of the colonized population’ that ‘helps to explain the recent surge in lethal violence in the Occupied Territories’. It is becoming clear that in recent years Palestinians have been caught in a cyclical paradox as a result of periods of Israeli indifference. During periods when Palestinian armed groups were committing acts of violence, the Israeli government refused to engage with Palestinians on account of the ‘terrorists’. However, with diminishing levels of Palestinian ‘terrorism’, the Palestinian ‘issue’ all but disappears from the Israeli agenda. Terrorism, it seems, made an otherwise invisible population visible. As Meron Benvenisti (2009:n.p) contends, ‘ignoring the situation is convenient for everyone [right and left wing Israelis], and therefore *all are partner to the concept that the Arabs are interesting only when they are violent*’. This was emphasised by a popular Israeli slogan that was prevalent during the Second Intifada ‘no Arabs, no

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<sup>69</sup> My Israeli informants seemed only to be interested in happenings in the West Bank if the violence directly affected Israeli Jewish settlers or army personnel.

terrorism'. However this works both ways; for many Israelis, 'no terrorism' equates to 'no Arabs'. As Uri Misgav (2013:n.p) states, 'when they shoot, you can't talk about peace. When they don't shoot, why should you talk about peace?'

Consequently, my Palestinian friends felt that they were left with few viable options for changing the status quo. At best Israeli indifference will force the increasingly disempowered Palestinian Authority into making unilateral political moves. This was most evident during my research with the push for – and acceptance of - Palestine as an observer state at the United Nations in 2013. At worst, Palestinians could point to Israeli indifference as a justification for revisiting more violent means. Then, Israeli indifference will be shattered by another Intifada or associated violent hostilities.

Secondly, if public indifference silently legitimises state violence due to a lack of strong resistant dissent, it also stands to reason that it acts as a significant psychological obstacle to peaceable alternatives (Halperin *et al.* 2010). In her ethnography of the political landscape of contemporary Israel, Pinto (2013:105 my emphasis) recounts a conversation with an Israeli informant; Israel, he suggests, is 'doing too well for the Israelis *to feel the need for peace*'. For Greenbaum and Elizur (2012:396-398), as long as the affects of the conflict continue to be minimal, 'so are the chances of ending the occupation'. This is because Israeli citizens have difficulty freeing themselves from the apathetic indifference 'in order to construct goals regarding realistic and concrete outlines of peace and plans for how to achieve them' (Bar-Tal 2001:610). Instead, individuals become 'locked inside their own silence' (Yiftachel 2001:2) and are more likely to accept the illusion of peace 'in the full knowledge that it is an illusion' (Hesse and Sayyid 2002:151). As I suggest in the following section, this may be beneficial to some.

#### **4.7 Manipulating/manufacturing indifference**

In critical geopolitics, we are used to claims that fear or moral panic are furthered – through a variety of political devices and mechanisms - to advance and justify certain geopolitical policies/practices or bolster incumbent administrations (Pain

and Smith 2008, Kirby 2013).<sup>70</sup> However, is there a case for arguing that indifference can also be manufactured, manipulated, or mobilised towards certain geopolitical ends? To my mind, there are some for whom an Israeli public consciousness steeped in indifference is desirable, or – at the very least – advantageous.

Certainly, for the current ruling parties, Israeli public indifference is valuable because it acts as a fail-safe that militates against the need to make significant or immediate geopolitical concessions.<sup>71</sup> Cohen (2001) points to the ways in which an indifferent public is also a public who lack the preparedness, capacity or willingness to make significant political changes. As history has shown, the political and electoral cost of reaching a peace agreement in Israel can be high. Halper (2008:88) illustrates this in his description of the sudden shattering of indifference that accompanied the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993:

‘Without being prepared in any way, Israelis turned on their TVs one day in September...and saw their Prime Minister shaking hand with the person whom they had been told for a generation was the arch-terrorist, the ultimate foe of Israel...Suddenly their whole world was turned upside down...within five months the Israeli public voted in Rabin’s antithesis, the very personification of the security framing, Benjamin Netanyahu’.

Similarly, Woodward (2013:96) recently argued:

‘The price [of peace] to be paid, both now and later, is greater than the benefit to be realized now. There is regrettably a short-term mindset pervasive in Israeli culture and government. The goal has been, and continues to be, conflict management, maintaining the status quo in perpetuity, and not conflict resolution. All policy is geared toward preserving and sustaining a functional normality. Israel thus plays an ad hoc game of meeting each challenge as it arises, keeping the lid on the boiling pot knowing that the heat will not be completely turned off.’

All this to say that, at present, the status quo appears to be viewed as being more advantageous. Under Netanyahu’s direction, there has been a consolidation of a

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<sup>70</sup> In the context of Israel, it is often suggested that a distinct politics of fear is at play where Israelis are perpetually reminded of a continual, existential threat in order to foster a semblance of political compliance (see Bar-Tal 2001).

<sup>71</sup> Public indifference is just one of many such fail-safes in the Israeli political system that will make territorial concession almost entirely impossible (Spruyt 2014)



gradual shift in Jewish public consciousness from ‘conflict resolution to conflict management’ (Yiftachel 2005:127, Blumenthal 2013). Netanyahu has advanced this quietist policy of conflict management predicated on the rhetoric strategy of ‘neither war nor peace’ or ‘peace without peace’ (Blumenthal 2013:401). Here, the conflict is ‘carefully managed – but never ended – to guarantee tranquility for Israeli Jews...As long as the one-way peace holds, Israelis [will] support the status quo, and by extension, Netanyahu’ (Blumenthal 2013:358). At the time of writing – six months after Israel’s Operation Protective Edge – it was interesting to note that on several occasions Netanyahu stated that the aim of the military intervention was to ensure a return to a state of ‘sustained quiet’.

Crucially, Israeli indifference can be manufactured by disseminating the seemingly dialectical ideas that, on the one hand there is no political solution to the conflict, and on the other, that it is only temporary and forever on the verge of being resolved (Azoulay and Ophir 2013). Halper (2008:65) points to Ehud Barak’s hugely influential contention that Israel had ‘no partner for peace’, a phrase coined by the Israeli minister after the failure of the Camp David Peace Talks. From that point on, the Israeli public - deprived of a permanent political alternative/solution - disconnected ‘itself from the political process’ and developed a ‘bunker mentality’ (Marzano 2013:96). All that was left to do was to ‘hunker down’ in an introspective geopolitical bubble, to simply ‘get on with our lives’ (Halper 2008:65).

However, at the same time, the Israeli public is fed the illusion of the temporariness of the conflict, and the deception of an impending possible peace (Azoulay and Ophir 2013). This amounts to what Yiftachel (2005:128) terms a ‘politics of suspension’. Joseph Massad (2013) lucidly points out that when the Madrid peace talks began in 1991 – the occupation of the Palestinian Territories had existed for 24 years. To date, therefore, there have been 23 years of peace negotiations to end a 24-year-old occupation. As a result, Israelis are orientated away from taking responsibility for peace as it is purportedly just around the corner. In reality, the Israel state continues to stall or freeze peace processes through various means. As Woodward (2013) states, ‘At times, the parties have come to the brink of peace and then pulled away, with each occasion serving only to reinforce that feeling of futility, leading to pervasive resignation, even apathy, in much of the general public...this

may be more prevalent in the Israeli public...’ The sum of these two dialectical narratives is the psychological condition of ‘permanent impermanence’ (Ginty *et al.* 2007:3); a condition that numbs the Israeli public to a protracted political standoff by keeping alive the ephemeral illusion ‘that the occupation is about to end, and at the same time to convince the majority that this cannot possibly happen overnight’ (Reinhart 2002:226). As Azoulay and Ophir (2013:14) claim, ‘the false temporariness of “the Occupation” generates perceptual blindness that is at one and the same time caused by the ruling apparatus in the Territories and one of its active mechanisms’.

In this way, indifference is created and maintained. And, under the ‘cover of this lack of interest, the Israeli rule over the West Bank is continuing to deepen’ (Benvenisti 2009:n.p). Indeed, increasingly there are those who argue convincingly that an indifferent Israeli public allows for the extension of territorial expansionist projects in the West Bank (Azoulay and Ophir 2013). For example, Oren Yiftachel (2005:128) argues that indifference allows for a ‘game of deception’ where ‘all actors turn a blind eye and continue to support the illusion of impending peace’. Meanwhile a long-term, strategic and domineering ‘political geographic order best described as “creeping apartheid” is allowed to occur; an order where ‘Jews continue to settle in the West Bank, the illegal wall is still being constructed, and the treatment of some groups among Israel’s Palestinian citizens increasingly resembles the fate of their brethren in the Occupied Territories’ (Yiftachel 2005:128).

Hence, to conclude, as Azoulay and Ophir (2013:17) claim:

‘Israeli citizens of Jewish descent take part in and are ruled by the regime of which “the Occupation” is one element; they contribute to its reproduction, not only as soldiers, settlers, or government officials, but also as its governed subjects, who tacitly accept its rules and perpetuate its legitimacy, mostly by ignoring how it rules others, non-Jews and noncitizens, letting it be inscribed and reinscribed in the movement of their bodies, the wording of their language, and the limited horizons of the political imaginations’

#### **4.8 Coda - A summer of war, an autumn of terror: what a difference a year makes**

Throughout 2014 – the year after my research - Israeli indifference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was momentarily shattered. In the summer, a prolonged and deadly war in Gaza led to an autumn that saw a spate of terrorist attacks across Israeli cities. At the time of writing, 9 fatal attacks had occurred, along with a small number of non-fatal attempts. Increasingly, it became clear that these attacks were being carried out by lone East Jerusalem Palestinians with little organisational affiliation. Soon, protests, riots and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli forces became frequent. These all moved the Israeli-Palestinian conflict back to the very forefront of public consciousness. The ‘security calm’ that had come to characterise everyday life after the ending of the Second Intifada had been ‘irreparably disrupted’ (Benn 2014:n.p). Jerusalem, according to one of my informants, ‘felt’ tenser than it ever had done.

Suddenly, the light rail became the target of both Palestinian protests and more violent attacks in East Jerusalem. Back in 2011, before the line was fully operational, Israeli journalist Joseph Dana predicted that:

‘confrontations will likely increase as the status quo currently looming over the conflict gives way to renewed movements of Palestinian civil unrest. Just as the ANC targeted railroads during the anti-Apartheid struggle, the Jerusalem light rail might just emerge as a primary target of Palestinian violence.’ (Dana 2011:n.p)

In the summer, in response to the kidnapping and brutal killing of a Palestinian boy from East Jerusalem, protestors targeted the infrastructure of the light rail, destroying ticket machines and signaling mechanisms, buckling tracks and throwing rocks at passing trains. The train service was disrupted for weeks. In the autumn, the lack of security - and the open-planned architecture of the station-stops - allowed for two separate terrorist attacks to occur within a month. In the first, a vehicle was driven along the light rail platform, killing and wounding several waiting passengers. In the second, a vehicle was used to ram the train. Protestors targeted the train because it concretised what they saw as creeping Israeli colonial territorialisation.

## 4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has worked to demarcate a particular geopolitical milieu of indifference into which my informants can be situated. I stressed that any investigation into the religeopolitical commitments of individuals or groups must always account for the wider societal geopolitical culture. Religeopolitical views do not exist in a socio-cultural vacuum, but will interact with – and reflect - many of the prevailing societal norms (Megoran 2004a).

Specifically then, I argued that my fieldwork occurred during a period described by one Israeli journalist in the following terms:

‘our situation, in many historic, strategic ways, has never been better indeed: Israel is more prosperous, more secure and more accepted in the international arena today than at any other time in its history...Israel faces no credible threat from any conventional army, its borders are unusually secure, terrorism is at record lows and military collaboration with the world’s greatest superpower is at an all-time high.’ (Shalev 2013)

It became increasingly clear, therefore, that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rarely impacted the everyday lives of most Israeli Jews in Jerusalem. I suggest that this extended period of calm had allowed a certain geopolitical orientation to predominate amongst Israeli Jewish individuals and society – one of indifference.

Far from being insignificant, I demonstrated that a societal orientation of indifference has both geopolitical causes and effects. Distancing the conflict from the consciousness of the Israeli populace relied upon certain geopolitical imaginaries, infrastructures and praxis. Crucially, like moral panic or widespread fear, I suggested that orientations of public indifference could be used as a platform for statist political maneuverings. I argued that Israeli Jewish indifference has allowed the state to enact various geopolitical agendas; predominantly the continuation of the status quo of occupation and the creeping colonisation of the West Bank. However, I also suggested that Israeli indifference would eventually encourage more violent responses from Palestinians. History shows that periods of relative calm – such as the one I experienced during my fieldwork - rarely last;

Israeli indifference will always come to be shattered. As the *coda* illustrates, this prediction was made manifest shortly after the cessation of fieldwork.

Furthermore, I have stressed that orientations of indifference should be given more consideration in critical geopolitical studies of the everyday. Research is instead much more focused on attention-grabbing emotions of fear, anxiety and panic. For example, Pain and Smith's (2008) edited collection *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life* paints a picture of daily life that is saturated by a geopolitics of fear. Whether it is scares about 'cot death, juvenile crime, internet porn, asylum, avian flu, or terrorism, the place of fear is as salient as material risk as a driver of political maneuvering and a constraint on personal well-being' (Pain and Smith 2008:1). I would argue, however, that orientations of indifference – and similar postures of disengagement, apathy, and denialism - are more prevalent in everyday life.

This also signals a broader shift in the interrogation of the geopolitics of indifference not as a specific condition of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but one that is perhaps a configuration of contemporary low-intensity conflict more broadly. What role, for example, did Western indifference play in the composition and continuation of the Bosnian, Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts, or the ongoing Ebola outbreak? Here, critical geopolitical scholars are quick to point out the pernicious effects of overtly essentialising, homogenising or dehumanising geopolitical representations but overlook our prior propensity to simply ignore. Whilst negative imaginaries of people and places will be formative of geopolitical praxis, is it not also true that a lack of imagination will be significant?

More broadly then, this chapter has contributed to an understanding of the formation of everyday geopolitical commitments. I illustrated the ways by which seemingly insignificant practices – such as the downing of the eyes, the turning of the body, or the ignoring of a certain individual – all accumulate in the processual and contingent attunement of our geopolitical orientations. Hence, I argue that studies of everyday geopolitics must widen their foci to include a broader array of daily practices, especially those that would appear – on the surface - to be geopolitical irrelevant. My research implies that more could be made of the

connections between normalised and mundane routines and postures, and wider societal geopolitical commitments.

For the purposes of the remaining chapters, it is crucial to understand that my research community was insolvably grounded in this wider collective position of indifference. In the following chapter I move on to explore more specific reasons for my research community's disengagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Chapter 5:

# Encountering the everyday border: religious identity and Israeli citizenship.

‘In the main, the Messianic Jewish community is apathetic regarding issues of injustice that are the daily fare of their Palestinian brothers and sisters. Messianic Jews’ preoccupation with their own community and its issues tends to overshadow active engagement with the volatile issues of justice, human rights, and peace that are vital for their Palestinian brothers and sisters.’

(Munayer and Loden 2014)

‘Indifference could be characterized by an absence of interest or attention caused by a personal or collective struggle in the face of adverse circumstances.’

(Lillehammer 2014:562)

### 5.0 Introduction

If Chapter 4 acted to set a context for the geopolitics of indifference, the following three chapters focus their attention on the variegated geographical and geopolitical specificities of the Messianic Jewish community. Building on ideas of Israeli Jewish indifference, this chapter investigates more particular reasons for the Messianic communities’ apparent disengagement from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In Lillehammer’s (2014:562) taxonomy of indifference (see Figure 6), he claims that certain forms of apathetic indifference can be caused by the presence of a more

pressing ‘personal or collective struggle in the face of adverse circumstances’. Here, indifference is not so much the ‘absence of concern with some ethically relevant aspect of the world’, but rather the ‘narrowness’ of one’s concerns caused by alternative ‘internal traumas or conflicts’ (Lillehammer 2014:563). This in mind, I suggest that the everyday lives of my Messianic informants reflected a particular hierarchy of concern in which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had become relegated below alternative and more immediate political urgencies. As the opening epigraph suggests, the community is often preoccupied with issues affecting its own existential survival, and – in doing so - foregoes a sustained engagement with the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Put more colloquially, one informant explained that the community is ‘too busy working out who we are, and where we fit into Israeli society’ to really ‘worry about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’.

Accordingly, this chapter explores the contested citizenship claims of Messianic Jewish individuals through the lens of ‘bordering practices in everyday life’ (Johnson 2014:251, Newman and Paasi 1998, Newman 2006, Johnson and Jones 2014, Jones 2009a, 2009b, Joseph and Rothfuss 2014). I explore the imposition of ethnicised *intra*-national borders that Messianic Jews encounter and negotiate in their everyday struggles for Israeli citizenship (Staeheli, 1997, 2003, 2010, 2012, Raijman and Pinsky 2011; 2013, Shapiro 2011, 2012). Currently, Messianic Jews are exiled outside the borders of the normative Jewish identity (Warwansky 2008, Pinto 2013). This formalised exclusion is predicated on the rejection of their Jewish identity on account of their transgressive religious beliefs (Warwansky 2008, Dein 2009, Caron 2011, Shapiro 2011, 2012). It is taken as axiomatic by Israeli state and society that a truly Jewish individual cannot believe in Jesus as a/the divine messiah. This rejection of Messianic Judaism is enacted and reified through persistent patterns of state and societal exclusion in the many spaces of daily life (Kimmerling 2001, Warwansky 2008).<sup>72</sup> As Erez (2013:45) states, Messianic Jews often experience ‘insult, harassment, discrimination, violence, and denial of equal legal rights, all fundamentally denials of recognition’.

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<sup>72</sup> Even those Messianic Jewish individuals who have surreptitiously obtained official Israeli citizenship are deemed ‘spoiled’ or ‘flawed’ citizens (Goffman 1963, Azoulay 2005). As Bartram (2011:241) notes, ‘Having formal [Israeli] citizenship by no means guarantees a high degree of social membership, particularly in a context where citizenship itself is strongly ethnonational’.



These experiences constituted the prior political urgencies of many of my informants' daily lives. I was privy to stories of small-scale bullying at school, or flat mates who suddenly moved out upon learning of Messianic beliefs. Some of my informants' had even been 'disowned' by their extended family. More extreme and distressing reports involved certain informants being fired from jobs, violent bullying in the army,<sup>73</sup> and a bomb attack on a Messianic family in the Israeli settlement of Ariel.<sup>74</sup> Negotiating these challenges of conflict, marginalisation and exclusion pushed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the background of their everyday lives.

The chapter has a number of overall aims. I hope to expand empirical knowledge concerning the everyday politicisation of religion as a marker of precarious citizenry identity in Israel. In the context of Israel-Palestine studies, religion is routinely analysed solely through the political salience of the Judaic/Muslim dichotomy (mapped indiscriminately onto Israelis and Palestinian communities) (Nyroos 2001, Luz 2013). Yet indigenous minority Christian groups must also pit themselves against the religious, cultural and political hegemony of Orthodox Judaism in Israel. The crux of the matter is the perception of the Messianic Jew as an anomalous coupling in Israeli citizenry politics. The key here is the political disruption caused by religious identity.

Moreover, through an examination of the socio-political challenges faced by a 'Jewish' minority group, the chapter works to disaggregate conventional framings of a homogenous and stable Jewish-Israeli nation-state that often characterise geopolitical analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In many ways, this chapter is inspired by Oren Yiftachel's work on *intra*-Jewish spatial relations. Focus on

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<sup>73</sup> Informant: "There was a Messianic guy who went to the army and because he was walking in the faith, two and a half years he was beat up in the army...knives, and you name it, anything else. And he does not stop believing in Yeshua [Jesus]."

<sup>74</sup> This latter story had – to my mind - become a central component in the identity of the Messianic Jewish community as a whole. It was often referenced when talking about everyday persecution and discrimination. This was the case of Ami Ortiz – a teenager from a Messianic home located in Ariel. In March 2008 he was the victim of a bomb attack that was concealed in a Purim gift left outside his house. Later, an American Jew Yaakov Tytell was arrested. As well as being convicted for the murder of two Palestinians, Tytell admitted carrying out the attack, accusing the Ortiz family of being "missionaries trying to capture weak Jews" (Edelman 2013). Unlike Jewish victims of Palestinian terror attacks, Ortiz was deemed ineligible to receive any state financial compensation as his attacker was Jewish. One informant argued that the State exploited this convenient loophole in order that they would not have to give money to a Messianic Jew.

minority Jewish groups, he suggests, works as an alternative angle from which to view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From this angle, one becomes more attuned to the spatial and ideological politics of Israeli citizenship, which in turn, are entangled in ethnonationalism and the Zionist project.

Lastly, the following pages also seek to portray Messianic Jews as religious believers who are not bizarre, separatist or other-worldly, but instead are ordinary individuals impacted by the concrete day-to-day realities of socio-political challenges. This converges with the work of Nick Megoran (2013:142) who seeks to reverse the scholarly propensity to demonise evangelically-inflected communities as the 'repugnant cultural other' through descriptions of 'war-like, bigoted, racist, credulous, irrational, conspiratorially paranoid and right-wing' communities.

## 5.1 Citizenship borders

Before attending to the empirical realities, this brief section outlines the conceptual framework through which my informants' everyday experiences of exclusion will be examined. I primarily look to Lynn Staeheli's (2012, 2010, 2003, 1997) relational reworking of the concept of (non)citizenship. Often, Staeheli suggests, citizenship is depicted as a *de jure* legal-political status, something that is conferred upon individuals through formal statist processes. In this way, the constitution of citizenship is detached from, and 'unencumbered by social relationships' (Staeheli's 2012:22). Instead, she suggests that citizenship is far more than formalised, legal 'membership', rather it is a political dynamic that emerges through sociopolitical struggle and contestation (Isin 2002). In this way, citizenship is constituted through a complex constellation of acts (Isin 2002), relationships, discourses, materials, agents, and spatial-practices (Darling 2009). It is through these messy entanglements that membership to a national community is constantly being made and re-made (Staeheli's 2010).

Staeheli's ideas parallel with Isin and Nielsen's (2008:7) social conceptualisation of citizenship as 'the art of being with others, negotiating different situations and identities...in our everyday lives' Here, citizenship comes to be 'experienced as

people move through their daily lives and as opportunities...are opened and forestalled for particular individuals at particular moments' (Stacheli 2012:4). What is attractive about these approaches is that they draw out the complexities of citizenship from an emergent, spatial, and everyday angle. Citizenship is taken as always being contingent, and never quite complete. Advocates take seriously the contested, gritty, grounded and material aspects of the practices and acts of citizenship in the lives of real people (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010).

For this reason, ordinary citizenship is also a deeply spatial affair. Here, space stands as central to the 'creation, embodiment and lived experiences of political subjects' (Elden 2015:n.p): it is a 'fundamental strategic property by which groups...are constituted in the real world' (Isin 2002:49). Quoting from the 'Contested Spaces of Citizenship Conference',<sup>75</sup> Stuart Elden (2015:n.p) states:

'It is in spaces of encounter and struggles that new and old political subjectivities are contested and resisted. Space is not only the neutral background of political struggles. It is actively and strategically used, as tool to disempower object subjects (Isin and Rygiel 2007), but also as a resource for enacting new scripts of activist citizens, not only through contestation but also through solidarity (Isin and Nielsen 2008). At the same time, space is constituted by political struggles and forms of citizenship, affecting the ways in which new political subjects come to emerge, for instance traversing and interstitial spaces can generate opportunities to rethink political subjectivities (Isin 2012).'

In emphasising the social-spatial tenets of citizenship formation, scholars have also done much to reduce the primacy of top-down, state-defined political conceptions of citizenship, especially those that view it as simply a legal attribute (Williams 2012). Yet, I also do not wish to entirely sideline the nuanced and formative role that the state plays in defining and conferring (non)citizenship onto certain bodies. As will be made clear, the statist legal framework of formal Israeli citizenship still played an important role in the lives of my Messianic informants, and social 'acts' of citizenship had diminutive purchase before the finality of the law. Driven by this empirical reality, the following pages attend to the ways in which social and statist conceptions of (non)citizenship come to be 'practiced' through spatial encounters with governmental apparatus, and through the enrollment of non-state social

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<sup>75</sup> This occurred at the University of Durham in April 2015.

practices and agents (Darling 2014:484). Staeheli *et al.*'s (2012:628) most recent concept of 'ordinary citizenship' usefully emphasises the ways in which ideas of (non)citizenship work through an interrelationship of daily interactions with the spatiality of law and with contingent social routines. The concept of ordinary citizenship draws attention to the entanglement of 'legal structures, normative orders and the experiences of individuals, social groups and communities' by which citizenship is conferred or not (Staeheli 2012:628).

Following Elden (2015), I offer a spatial analysis of my informants' struggles for citizenship by bringing recent ideas of interior borders and bordering practices (Coleman and Stuesse 2014, Johnson and Jones 2014, Joseph and Rothfuss 2014) into conversation with Staeheli's notion of 'ordinary citizenship'. Borders - in their broadest sense - are central to the construction of socio-political identity, designating inside/outside and self/other (Newman and Paasi 1998, Newman 2003, Megoran 2004a). Hence, Staeheli (2012) often draws on the language of borders, suggesting that the spatiality of citizenship involves the 'drawing of 'boundaries of belonging' and 'harden edges' that are 'delimited' and 'demarked' by encounters in daily life'.

Political geographical scholarship has long emphasised the spatial processes of inclusion/exclusion that occurs at the outer delineated edges of state territory (Newman 2008, Parsons and Salter 2008). This scholarship has made plain the ways by which territorial borders attempt to fulfill the statist requirement to spatially differentiate national citizens from non-citizens (Staeheli 2010). Despite predictions of an increasingly borderless world (Newman 2006), many states look to reinforce their external borders ever more tightly, 'bounding their territories and controlling the population within them, effectively making the entire country a border zone' (Staeheli 2012:16). In this work, exterior borders and bordering practices are linked to issues of sovereignty and territoriality.

However, more recent work on borders has attended to the ways in which statist bordering processes have moved away from traditional border sites and instead become diffused throughout the spaces of the nation-state. Termed 'interior borders' (Coleman and Stuesse 2014), these borders entail a broad range of social

practices, legal-discursive regimes, citizen engagement, governmental acts, and biopolitical technology (Newman 2006, Jones and Johnson 2014, Darling 2014, Joseph and Rothfuss 2014). Here, borders and bordering practices have much more to do with issues of citizenship, ordering ‘daily life practices, strengthening our belonging to, and identity with, places and groups, while – at one and the same time – perpetuating and re-perpetuating notion of difference and othering’ (Newman 2006:143).

Using the idea of internal borders to apprehend contested citizenship claims and everyday acts of Messianic exclusion is helpful for three main reasons. Firstly, thinking of (non)citizenship as an *internal* bordering process is particularly useful when speaking about Israel because contested citizenship claims – whilst frequently enacted – rarely come to be finalised or resolved at exterior borders sites. Israel’s ‘Law of Return’ permits any Jewish individual to cross the state’s external borders in order to apply for citizenship *in situ*. In other words, individuals who may ultimately be excluded from Israeli national citizenship can initially cross the state’s official, external borders with relative ease. Messianic Jews, for instance, often enter Israel on a 3-month tourist visa with the sole intention of applying to make *aliyah*. It is only once they are inside the external boundaries of the Israeli nation-state that the real exclusionary borders come into play.

Secondly, using the notion of interior borders in order to analyse contested citizenship claims allows us to remain open to the fact that border enforcements are often spatially and temporally inconsistent. Whilst borders are often framed as rigid and unmovable, when analysed more closely it is clear that they frequently allow for unexpected crossings and contraventions. Similarly, seeing citizenship as a practice of social bordering allows us to remain attentive to such ephemeral inconsistencies in everyday life, to contingent moments of inclusion and conviviality, and selective permeability. Staeheli (2012:14) terms these the ‘permeable boundaries of inclusion’. Throughout the following pages, I show how legal and social frameworks of Israeli citizenship were never materially neat, fixed or coherent, but allowed for surprising everyday extensions, crossings and closures.

Thirdly, borderscapes are now commonly thought of as spaces where both inclusive and exclusionary discourses are co-constituted by way of certain materials, agents, and practices (Sundberg 2008, Darling 2014, Jones and Johnson 2014). Put simply, borders are (re)produced through the entanglement of a vast array of objects and people. It is border studies' increasing attentiveness to materiality and mess that I wish to bring to bear on my informants' struggle to realise their claims to Israeli citizenship. Recent works in border studies have displayed a much more 'political sociological, and actor-oriented outlook' when analysing how 'divisions between entities appear, or are produced and sustained' (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009:586). Stylistically then, I take inspiration from grounded, anthropological, and everyday accounts of borders exemplified in the works of Megoran (2004b, 2006b), Burrell (2008), Reeves (2011), Jones (2012), and Dodds (2013). Geographically, the chapter attends to a broad range of empirical localities, spaces and practices in order to tease apart the 'messiness' of citizenship border politics. These spaces also incorporate and implicate a range of everyday border 'guards'. As Doty (2007) suggests, various non-state actors are engaged and enrolled into deciding who can be included or excluded in the nation-state citizenry. Hence, I emphasise the ways in which Israel citizenship in particular is enacted through various agents; state-sanctioned border agents, petty sovereigns, citizen detectives, families, and individuals (Jones and Johnson 2014).

## **5.2 The legal borders of Israeli citizenship**

My first experience of Israel's formal borders to citizenship began as soon as I stepped off the plane. I proceed to the vast, high-ceilinged passport control hall and joined what appeared to be the shortest queue. The segregated lines at passport control are, as Jansen (2009), Yuval-Davies (1999) and Burrell (2008:358) all suggest, an immediate and mundane reminder of the hierarchical significance of having the 'right type of passport'. The Israeli citizen-only queues always move quickly, whilst the international non-citizen lines remaining more-or-less static. Once at the passport booth, the usual security questioning takes an unusual turn; it evolves into a conversation. Having answered questions about the purpose of my visit, the border guard – a recent graduate of political science at Haifa University – asks about

my research. Unlike many Jewish Israelis, she was aware of the existence of the Messianic Jewish community in Israel (Erez 2013). Her opinion of them was one that I would encounter throughout the duration of my research. She argued that Messianic Jews were ‘absolutely not Jewish’ and simply ‘not welcome’ in Israel. In her view, an individual’s Jewish identity was legitimate only if they adhered to the Judaic religion. Messianic Jews, she suggested, were simply suffering from Jerusalem Syndrome<sup>76</sup>. In her summation, my community of study posed an unacceptable challenge to the acceptable boundaries of ‘Jewishness’ as both a religion and an ethnic community (Rosen 1996, Yangarber-Hicks 2005, Warshawsky 2008, Shapiro 2012, Ariel 2012).

As the airport guard implied, the borders of Israeli citizenship are drawn primarily along ethno-national and territorial lines in order that the ethnic homogeneity of the dominant Jewish majority is secured as paramount (Yiftachel 1999, Shair and Peled 2002, Ram 2011). For this reason, some critical Israeli scholars argue that Israel is an ‘ethnocracy’ by pointing to the ways in which ethnic privileging is often ‘at odds with the tenets of democratic citizenship’ (Yiftachel 2002:39). According to Israeli political scholar Oren Yiftachel (1999:276) an ethnocracy is ‘a non-democratic regime that attempts to extend or preserve disproportional ethnic control over a contested multi-ethnic territory. Ethnocracy develops chiefly when control over territory is challenged and when a dominant group is powerful enough to determine unilaterally the nature of the state’. It is, for this reason, uncommon for individuals deemed to be non-Jewish to be afforded Israeli citizenship (Friedlander 2010).

However, to complicate matters, Jewish Israeli citizenship does not simply revolve around ethnicity; religious identity is also brought into the mix. Currently, acceptable Jewish ethnic identity is primarily defined using one imprimatur Judaic framework, effectively allowing Orthodox Judaism ‘to play a central role in state power foci’ (Barzilai 2003:219). Crucially, in this schema Jewishness is seen as utterly incompatible with belief in the divinity and Messiahship of Jesus Christ’ (Shapiro 2012:2). Consequently, individuals professing ‘Christian’ beliefs do not

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<sup>76</sup> Individuals who suffer with Jerusalem Syndrome can believe that they are characters from scripture. There are a small number of Christian groups – considered to be on the very edge of the mainstream church - who intentionally locate in Jerusalem and actively seek to instigate the second coming of Christ. Some, according to Israel psychiatrists, suffer from one specific form of Jerusalem Syndrome (see Bar-El *et al.* 2000).

fulfill the current criteria for being acceptably 'Jewish' under the Law of Return. Under this law, Messianic Jews are said to have changed their religion, forfeited their Jewish identity, and subsequently are denied legal citizenship and concomitant state services (US Department of State 2009).<sup>77</sup> Each rejected application for citizenship is a legal and symbolic gesture of the hegemonic domination of the Orthodox Judaism.

However, it is important to understand the strength with which Messianic Jews self-identify as being entirely and unquestionably Jewish. Most Messianic Jews do not see themselves as having converted to Christianity. Rather, they look to the socio-cultural identity of the first century church. Here, the first believers in Jesus as the Messiah were Jewish, and continued to engage in Jewish cultural and religious practices (Stern 1991; 2007, Cohn-Sherbok 2000). Hence, whilst my informants expect to receive the right of full Israeli citizenship, their feelings of belonging to the Jewish nation are 'not reducible to legal status' (Staeheli 2012:14) Instead, their subjective feelings of belonging are constructed in and through a series of relationships and experiences, including historical-scriptural ones that once incorporated them in the community of Jewish citizens.

In contrast, for most Jewish Israelis, the figure of the Messianic Jew represents – not simply an outsider – but also an existential threat that endangers the socio-cultural identity and integrity of Israel. As Rouhana (2003:6) suggests, 'if Israel is structured (in reality and in the public mind) as an ethnic Jewish state, it is only natural that any rise in non-Jewish political and national consciousness will be construed as a threat to the Jewish public'. Hence, Canetti-Nisim (2008:91) argues that whilst Palestinians are cast as hostile 'realistic' threats – posing 'potential harm to tangible or concrete objects (e.g., money, land, human life)', Messianic Jews constitute a 'symbolic threat', posing danger to 'to relatively abstract aspects of the state, such as threats to the in-group's identity, value system, belief system, or worldview (e.g., language, religion, morality)'.

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<sup>77</sup> However, as Shapiro (2012:2) suggests, 'the fact that no similar repudiation is made, for example, of Jews confessing Buddhist or Hindu beliefs and practices, or atheism, which are no less theologically problematic than Trinitarianism, suggests the issue is at least as much sociological and historical as it is strictly theological.'



That said, the ever-changing prerogative of different Jewish religious-political parties results in a good deal of dynamic elasticity into the definition of religiously-acceptable Jewish identity. This is evident in the ways in which Israel's citizenship law - much like its external borders - are not fixed, but are continuously changing in response to the immediate, contextual and political needs of the state, or restructuring of the ruling coalition. Israel can, it seems, adjust its citizenship laws in order to accommodate the immigration of some non-Jews, whilst simultaneously restricting others (Amir 2013). Crucially, Israel's citizenship laws can also never be divorced from the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here, the Law of Return is wielded as a tool to constrain the Palestinian minority, and bolster and preserve the Jewish majority (Shair and Peled 2002, Barak-Erez 2008; Amir 2013). This is justified in popular public discourse couched with concerns over the 'Arab demographic danger' (Yiftachel 2002). Hence, amendments to immigration laws often follow instances where non-Jewish Palestinians have managed to enter Israel with the intent to reside and naturalise (Barak-Erez 2008). Crucially then, the macro-geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes to impact the everyday lives of Messianic Jews because it is formative of Israel's ongoing ethnocratic immigration laws.

In some cases, the elasticity of Israeli immigration laws has been beneficial to the citizenship applications of Messianic Jews, whilst harming others. For example, in the 1950s, the Law of Return contained an extremely loose and expansive definition of who legally qualified as being Jewish. Whilst the Law did not legally take into account an applicants' religious persuasion, it appeared that those charged with enacting the Law refused to recognize as Jewish those who held Christian beliefs – regardless of the demonstrable ethnicity.<sup>78</sup> In 1970, a more normative-objective *halachic* definition of Jewishness was codified into secular Israeli law designating acceptable Jewishness solely in terms of matrilineage. There was the additional

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<sup>78</sup> In 1962, for example, a case was brought before the Israeli High Court of Justice by Oswald Rufeison - a Jewish monk. Despite having a Jewish mother, 'Brother Daniel' had been rejected for Israeli citizenship due to his 'Christian' beliefs. The Court stated that, in such cases, it was not bound to the expansive and ambiguous definition of 'Jewishness' currently codified in the Law of Return, but instead could determine acceptable Jewishness based on an abstract "man-on-the-street" criteria. Appealing to the ambiguous notion of the opinion of the 'common' or 'ordinary' Jew, this criterion argued that if a person (in this case a monk with associated Christian paraphernalia) is not instantly recognized as Jewish by other ordinary and everyday Jews on the street, then he is not Jewish (Alexander 1994).

codification that individuals who had converted to another religion – such as Christianity - should be automatically denied Israeli citizenship.

However, due to certain demographic and political fears, the Law of Return was also expanded to allow for the non-Jewish children and grandchildren (and their spouses) of *halachically* Jewish individuals to obtain citizenship. This facilitated the immigration of many Russians who had previously been unable to prove their Jewishness *halachically* (Lustick 1999). Crucially, this amendment did not codify any religious prerequisites. This resulted in an unintended loophole that allowed some Messianic Jews to gain Israeli citizenship in spite of their transgressive religious beliefs. The amendment allowed a situation whereby a *halachal* Jew – who holds Messianic Jewish beliefs – would be denied citizenship due to his perceived conversion to another religion, but a Messianic Jew - who is deemed Jewish by virtue of non-*halachal* familial ties - could obtain citizenship. Put simply, those who are considered Jewish through patrilineage – rather than matrilineage – descent cannot currently be denied Israeli citizenship according to religion (Izenberg 2008). This curious paradox led to an, ‘absurd situation...in which Messianic Jews have to prove they are not [*halachally*] Jewish in order to make *aliyah*’ (Myers quoted in Wagner 2008).

### **5.3 The formal spaces of Israeli (non)citizenship**

For many Messianic Jewish individuals, the formal but abstract legalities of Israeli citizenship manifest and are encountered most concretely in the spaces of the *Misrad Hapnim* – the Israeli Ministry of Interior. It is here, more than at the external border of Ben Gurion Airport, where the state enforces and secures the ethnocentric borders of Israeli citizenship. On any given day, one finds all manner of visitors who do not meet the required ethno-religious characteristics for Israeli citizenship;

African migrants<sup>79</sup> and asylum seekers, tourists, volunteers and workers. Many of my informants had to visit the Ministry building at least once a year to renew their precarious residency status, or (re)apply for citizenship.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, the Jewish Orthodox political party ‘Shas’<sup>80</sup> officially controlled the running of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>81</sup> According to Shafir and Peled (2002:20), Shas most fully represents ‘the pull of [Jewish Israeli] ethno-nationalism’, and the demarcation of Jewish identity using Orthodox Jewish criteria. A Messianic Jewish lawyer explained the operational means by which Shas injected their legal-religious definitions of acceptable ‘Jewishness’ into the state’s citizenship policies.

Informant: “Shas – they want to make Israel the Jewish nation according to their Orthodox view. They don’t have internal elections – they are run by one leader. They don’t have strong views either to the left or the right – some of them are even anti-Zionist. They will easily join the coalition in the government. But they always try to get hold of the key ministry in the government – mainly the Ministry of Interior, because if they get that, they can control most of the internal affairs of the country....which means they can control who gets citizenship, who doesn’t get citizenship, which depends on their definition of who is Jewish.”

It became clear that the borders to Israeli citizenship were enforced and embodied in certain border agents located at the Ministry building. These border agents are not the hyper-masculine and militarised operators that often fill the pages of critical geopolitical literatures. Rather, Israel’s citizenship border agents are the (usually female) frontline clerical workers at the Ministry of Interior who are in charge of processing citizenship applications. To many, it is these eminently ordinary

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<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, there seems to be a separate waiting room for African migrants located in an outside courtyard. All other individuals waiting for visa processing wait in a room on the first floor. This reflects the growing racism towards African migrants in certain Israeli communities. Indeed, this social issue is increasingly moving to the foreground of public discussion (see Bluementhal 2013 for a shocking analysis of this trend). In many ways it has directed critical attention away from debates over the discrimination faced by Israeli-Palestinians and Palestinians. This, of course, is not an inherently negative thing, but highlights the ways in which social attention has a certain form of resonance.

<sup>80</sup> Shas is a Hebraic acronym for Sephardi Torah Guardians (Lehmann & Siebzehner 2006, 2008). According to Ram (2011:36), Shas is the ‘third-largest political party in Israel. A traditional, Jewish, ethnic (Mizrachi) movement, shas’s underlying ethos reinforces the neo-Zionist creed and its focus on Israel’s Jewish identity’.

<sup>81</sup> Shas lost their position in the Ministry of Interior in the January elections of 2013, having maintained control for almost half a decade. However, many of their clerical workers remain in frontline positions at the Ministry after the election defeat.

individuals who secure the nation-state, acting as the border-fixers and the gate-keepers of Israel.

These frontline registrars are charged with making ‘every effort not to register non-Jews or doubtful Jews as citizens’ (Shafir and Peled 2002:315). Hence, for Messianic Jews, it is the decisions of these ordinary individuals – much more than the political oratory of state politicians - that bear weight in their attempts to gain citizenship. As Friedlander (2010:431) recently noted, a ‘characteristic of the decision-making process [at the Ministry of Interior]...is the discordance between the intentions and declarations of the political echelon and the activities of the professional staff’. Informants suggested that on discovery of Messianic beliefs, clerks would immediately refuse to process applications, even for individuals who were legally entitled to citizenship according to the aforementioned loophole.<sup>82</sup> I also heard stories about lesser violations where workers declined to renew passports, or refused to register the birth of a child on suspicion of Messianic beliefs. James Scott (1995) rightly pointed to the small, insignificant tools of resistance that dominated groups employ in order to subvert or resist hegemonic powers. However, frontline Ministry workers also exercised state power through banal everyday mechanisms. Foot-dragging, feigned ignorance and passing between Ministries were all strategies used to resist my informants’ citizenship applications.

Informant: “there was one Messianic family, and the Ministry seemed to have some sort of personal vendetta against them. They said to him “we got rid of your father, we’ll get rid of you”. And in the end, they did, they had to leave in 2008 - and they weren’t allowed to come back for a certain number of years.”

Crucially then, it was suggested that these frontline workers have considerable leeway to ignore legal frameworks and processes in favour of their own arbitrary ethno-religious loyalties. Many, I was told, are unaware of the ambiguity of Israel’s immigration laws. Rather than being well versed in the complexities of Israel’s citizenship laws the frontline workers are allocated a certain unsupervised power to exercise judgment regarding who was properly Jewish, and therefore, entitled to full citizen rights. As Coleman (2007:56) states, citizenship borders often rely on the

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<sup>82</sup> This – quite obviously - begs the question; how can a governmental ministry discover the alternative religious beliefs of one individual? I explore this later in the chapter.

sovereign decision to be sequestered out to ‘proxy immigration officers at sub-state scales’ which, in turn, ‘constitute[s] new localized or rescaled geopolitics of immigration policing’. Whilst the frontline ministry worker gains legitimacy and power from the sovereign-state, they do not simply enforce Israel’s citizenship laws, but also their own ‘regimes of licit and illicit practices’ (Jones 2012:693). I was constantly reminded of Butler’s (2006:56) assertions that:

‘Petty sovereigns abound, reigning in the midst of bureaucratic army institutions mobilized by aims and tactics of power they do not inaugurate or fully control. And yet such figures are delegated with the power to render unilateral decisions, accountable to none’.

Petty sovereigns are not only located in spaces where extreme pronouncements of death or the ban are made, rather, as these frontline workers illustrate, they can be located in the fabric of everyday life.

Although Shas lost control of the Ministry of Interior in January 2013, many of their clerical workers remain in frontline positions. Therefore, although the macro-policies of the Ministry of Interior are contingent on ministerial control; this may not be implemented at everyday ground level.

Informant: “You can’t change the minds of a department – not like the Ministry of Interior – who are in charge of the Law of Return and visas, and citizenship, and passports, and all the rest of it. They’re like a massive ship – you can’t change their course. Shas may have lost the election, but it will take a while to filter down. All the little local offices – they act like little kingdoms. The people who work for this ministry are often very anti-Messianic.”

DW: “Why is that?”

Informant: “I don’t know. Ignorance. Huge pressure from individuals in the Orthodox community. And what’s worse -if you compare the Ministry of Interior in say Tiberias and Jerusalem, with the Ministry in Hadera –Hadera is secular and the other is Orthodox. Tiberias was the head place of the Sanhedrin – you have a history of religious orthodoxy there. This history affects everybody’s life - the people who work there.”

However, the imposition of borders by way of petty sovereigns can, in some cases, be advantageous to those struggling for citizenship. Even while the application

process may seem entirely impassable to Messianic Jews, they can – in very unspectacular ways - take advantage of gaps, contacts or serendipitous circumstances in order to instigate preferable outcomes. Because repeat visits to the Ministry are not uncommon, one’s horizon of possibility can be expanded through an implicit understanding of the individual workers (Scott 1985:*xiv*). Informants had, for example, come to have a working knowledge of which petty sovereign would be more likely to ‘freeze’ applications, and which would be more sympathetic. One family employed a form of false compliance, making sure that they were the first people through the door early in the morning. They also had pre-rehearsed answers to all the questions, and all the correct documentation so that they were less likely to catch a particular frontline worker in a bad mood.

Another informant ‘bumped into’ one of the ‘nicer ladies’ who processed his visa on the spot. The frontline worker also encouraged my informant to stop re-applying for permanent residency, but to apply for full citizenship instead, stating that she saw no reason why he should be denied. This type of information was frequently passed around the community. Hence, whilst Messianic Jews may lack the ability to completely overcome Statist exclusionary borders, petty sovereigns are often not as dark or unwieldy as some Butlerian adherents frame them to be (Jones 2009a). Indeed, as the compliant frontline worker described above illustrates, some petty sovereigns can choose to operate contradictory to the laws of the state and/or their petty sovereign colleagues. This affirms Staeheli (2012:14) that ‘some people will be seen as members under certain conditions or by certain people, and will be seen as outsiders under other conditions or by other people’.

#### **5.4 Border materialities**

However, statist imposed borders to citizenship extended far beyond the official spaces, discourses and agents of the Ministry of Interior. Rather these borders were (re)produced, practiced and experienced in a diverse array of everyday spaces and enforced by numerous state/non-state actors (Darling 2014:484). Reflecting critical geopolitics’ increased attention towards objects, artifacts, and matter, this section explores one particular materialisation of Israel’s citizenship borders. I argue that

the statist legal discourse described above is intimately bound up in the efficacies of mundane materialities. Here, both legal discourse and everyday objects become ‘coconstitutive in enacting relations that produce effects, thereby reflecting a concern with ‘material-discursive’ formations’ (Darling 2014:486).

Dodds (2013:569) contends that a border is never ‘simply a line on a map’, rather it will have a ‘material and experiential presence’. The materiality of border enforcement is usually approached in Political Geography with reference to new technologies of biometric scanners, electric gates, and fingerprint readers (Amoore 2006). The Israeli state certainly relies on a variety of technological materialities and logics recounted in these studies. Increasingly, however, scholars are focusing their attention on assemblages of the more mundane and anachronistic materialities that become implicated in the enforcement and crossing of borders (Burrell 2008). For example, via film, Dodds (2013) explores the specific precarious materialities of an icy landscape, noting how specific properties of ice and water shaped the meaning and negotiation of the US-Canadian border negotiation. Similarly, Sundberg’s (2008) work explores how quotidian encounters between US citizens and the material evidence left by undocumented migrants in the US-Mexico borderland (re)produced geopolitical orientations of exclusion and inclusion at the border. Intimate objects key to migrants’ survival, such as water bottles, medicine and clothing, were regularly framed as ‘trash’ by government officials, national media, and humanitarian commentators, constituting everyday notions of who belongs and who does not, and helping to reify political boundaries.

For Messianic Jews – as for most non-Jewish non-citizens of Israel<sup>83</sup> - the daily experience and negotiation of citizenship borders was mediated through various pieces of seemingly mundane paper. As Kelly (2006:89) suggests, ‘for many people in [Israel-Palestine] the forms of legal identification they hold are central to their life chances’. The vast amount and array of certifying documentation involved in an official citizenship/residency application goes beyond the passport or the visa; documents that have acquired much scholarly attention at the expense of other supporting papers (Salter 2006). Rather, a whole raft of paper documentation

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<sup>83</sup> This banality exists both in tandem with, and sharp contrast to, the harsh materiality of borders and border crossings experienced by both Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and African migrants on the southern Sinai/Egypt borders of Israel.

constitutes the ‘the primary paraphernalia of modern states and legal systems: they are its material culture’ (Navaro-Yashin 2007:84). Application forms, visa documents, *aliyah* forms, birth certificates, marriage certificates, bank statements, photographs, letters of invitation, letters of recommendation, passports, declarative affidavits, housing contracts, visa slips, appointment receipts, and identification cards hold the key to access or egress, inclusion or exclusion.<sup>84</sup> One family had crafted a scrapbook of their notable familial achievements whilst residing in the country. They hoped to submit this to the Ministry of Interior to bolster their citizenship application.

Clearly, certain documents were important because of the certifying information they carried pertaining to the citizenship application (Salter 2006, Navaro-Yashin 2007, Jansen 2009). Ultimately, after all, it is this information that allows the State to categorise and mark certain bodies as acceptable for citizenship or not. For this reason, documentation took on symbolic or emotional significance in everyday life. As Navaro-Yashin (2007) and Darling (2014) suggest, documents pertaining to border crossings often become charged with an emotive and affective resonance. Whilst interactions with state sanctioned border agents induced feelings of nervous anxiety and stress, I found that benign documents could induce similar emotions in my informants. People, Kelly (2006:89) suggests, often ‘come to embody the indeterminacies of the documents that they hold’. Moreover, the significance of documentation shifted unstably along with the material properties of paper, facilitating a range of diverse understandings and practices to occur around the borders of citizenship. As Anderson and Wylie (2009) and Darling (2014:486) suggest, the capacities of everyday political action are determined by ‘what ‘things’ are at any given point (their current configuration and expression) and what they may become’.

First, the sheer expanse of paper documentation involved in a citizenship or residency application inscribed statist borders as present and pervasive in the everyday lives of my informants. For example, at a crucial point of one family’s residency renewal process, application documents were strewn around the living

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<sup>84</sup> Paper and plastic identities cards and forms also mediate Palestinian mobility and border crossings (see Tawil-Souri 2012). It was not unusual to see Palestinians with ragged paper permits. Again, the mundane precariousness of the paper reflected Palestinians’ fragility to Israeli state processes.



room adding to, and reflecting, a particularly stressful time for certain family members. Through this material mess the borders of citizenship extended and materialised in the intimate spaces of the family's house. The embodied negotiation of this mass of papers comes to signify the gap between being at home and being homeless in the homeland. The quantity and intrusion of paper resulted in this domestic space offering little refuge from governmental practice and inscriptions of differentiation (Vaughan-Williams 2009, Darling 2014). Indeed, because of this material mess it was hard not to view the domestic space as an everyday site that had been enrolled in the State practice of citizenship formation (K. Brickell 2012a, 2012b).<sup>85</sup> This affirms Meehan *et al.* (2013:1) argument that certain objects become central to the 'production, organization, and performance' of state geopolitical logics.<sup>86</sup>

Second, the fragile materiality of paper reflected the uncertain state of my informants' position vis-à-vis citizenship claims. Visa forms could be temporarily misplaced, accidentally destroyed or permanently lost just as quickly or easily as they were formally rejected. One family recounted a story of the time when they mistakenly took the wrong forms to the visa office. They had undergone a process of drafting their applications, and had mistakenly taken an earlier version of the application to the visa appointment. On the day of another family's appointment, one son left for school with his identity card, prompting a panicked, last minute rush to retrieve it in order to submit the complete application. Here, objects took on significance as they stood as proof of one's stake in the process of citizenship. Indeed, I personally experienced the anxiety associated with the fragility of paper – albeit in reference to a student visa. For 6 weeks, it was only a small, handwritten piece of paper – declaring that I had an ongoing application at the Ministry of Interior – that allowed me to legally remain in Israel with an expired student visa (see Figure 7).

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<sup>85</sup> The implication of homes as geopolitical border sites has a long history in the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict (Kallus 2004, Harker 2009, 2011, Meade 2011, Chiodelli 2012). As Kallus (2004:341) argues, domestic space in Israel-Palestine are often marked by a certain duality; as both 'a personal space and a national domain... expos[ing] the [Israeli] state's intense involvement in the everyday'.

<sup>86</sup> Indeed, it is also worth noting that the materiality of some application papers – like the borders they come to materialise - are ephemeral; they can always be filed away and forgotten about until the next need (Navaro-Yashin 2007, Darling 2014).

Losing documents, as Darling (2014:491) suggests, has significance beyond the legal consequences, because these objects take on ‘a role as possessions critical to an individual’s sense of self’, a ‘critical orientation point’ in the process of citizenship. Documents were, then, kept safe in plastic wallets, paper-clipped together, filed away, and anxiously checked upon. For Navaro-Yashin (2007:83), this safeguarding of documents ‘emblemizes a containment and management of explosive affectivity’ amongst those interacting with processes of statecraft. Of course, documents submitted to the Ministry of Interior could easily be lost or misplaced by government workers, prompting various conspiratorial accusations of purposeful foot-dragging or targeted forestalling.

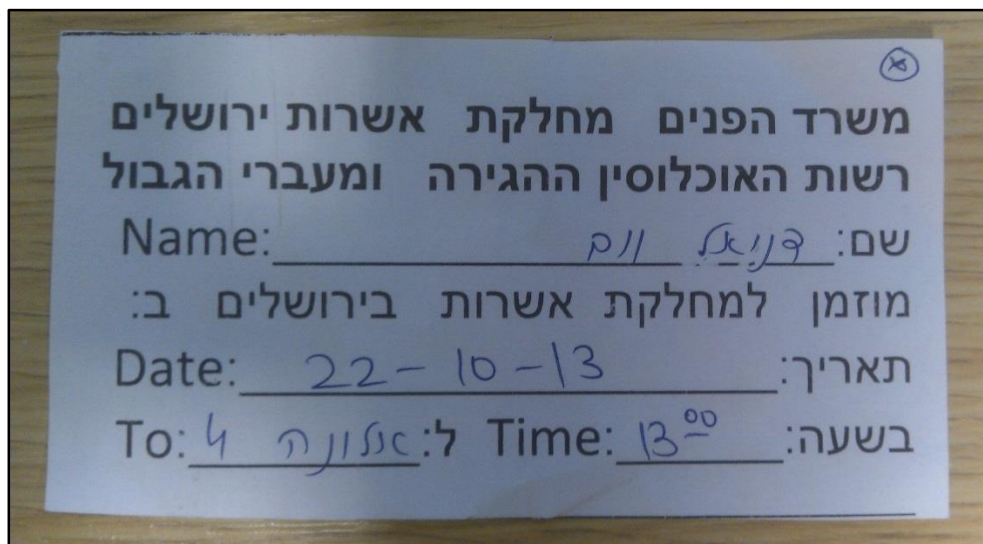


Figure 7: Visa appointment slip.

Thirdly, for other informants the longevity and resilience of paper – rather than its fragility – allowed for a certain temporality of citizenship. The material longevity of paper helped to co-produce and perpetuate the construction of the citizenship borders as non-traversable. For example, one informant told me that his visa application had been sat in a stack of documents on a desk at the Ministry of Interior. Each time he went to chase it up, the frontline worker pulled the form out from the pile of paper and informed him that the application was ‘frozen’, ‘in progress’ or ‘in committee’. Here, the permanence of the paper application continually worked against the individual by allowing for the emergence of a temporal politics where logics of delays, process, backlog, and deferral were deemed

normal. Darling (2014:488) would suggest that the sovereign authority and governmental discipline of the state is exactly reiterated through these temporal logics, by way of the ‘right to deliberate and defer’. He goes on to suggest that the ‘expectation of a decision serve[s] to govern’ the non-citizen almost as much as the ultimate decision itself (Darling 2014:488). Indeed, the aforementioned informant had resigned himself to deferentially waiting, checking back at the Ministry every few weeks. This ensured that informants remained passively and perpetually positioned outside, or upon, the border. Crucially, another informant bemoaned the fact that certain forms could be retained, referred to and crosschecked by state agents for many years. For some Messianic Jews, the wait at the borders of citizenship was measured in decades.

That said, the Israeli state’s anachronistic reliance on paper documentation revealed the porosity and vulnerability of Israel’s citizenship borders, because it allows non-citizens to ‘respond’ in various small ways that were outside of the sovereign’s control (Kelly 2006, Darling 2014). Certain material qualities of paper allowed informants to contest, manoeuvre around and creatively contravene the reach of statist practices. For instance, whilst state bordering practices are design to ‘fix’ the identity of the mobile body (Amoore 2006:340), paper documentation can always be used to disrupt this fixity. Individuals can take advantage of the fact that documentation veils the body it describes behind administrative detail. People can have both a ‘physical and a legal presence’ (Kelly 2006:91). This ‘doubling’ of subjectivity enables people to exploit the gaps between the ‘known’ and the ‘unknown’ aspects of their person, and documents become ‘objects to be manipulated as part of broader political and economic strategies’ (Kelly 2006:91). In this way, paper objects – instead of behaving as expected – as legally binding documents - ‘fundamentally transform the networks [of power] in which they are enrolled’ (Meehan *et al.* 2013:2).

At the most extreme levels, for instance, documentation could be forged (Navaro-Yashin 2007). As Vaughan-Williams (2010:1074) suggests, ‘paper-based passports and visas allow for identity fraud and the use of false aliases’. However, my informants used much more mundane forms of creativity. Applications were, for instance, re-worded, re-drafted and re-printed. Information could be omitted, re-

stated, left incomplete, or coded. Messianic beliefs could, for instance, be merely withheld on the citizenship forms. My housemate simply did not disclose his religious beliefs when going through the process of making *aliyah*. However, retrospectively, this is a risky tactic. If messianic beliefs are subsequently discovered, it is assumed that the applicant has lied on the forms and citizenship/residency can be denied/revoked.

Similarly, documents that had to be counter-signed and endorsed by another Jewish person gave leeway to my informants to choose an individual sympathetic to the Messianic community. For example, to ‘prove’ one’s Jewishness and make *aliyah*, declarative forms must be signed by a rabbi in the applicant’s country of origin.<sup>87</sup> However, if the rabbi chooses not to disclose the transgressive Messianic religious beliefs, and simply confirms Jewish ethnicity, the citizenship process can be relatively straightforward.

Informants: “Some in the Messianic Jewish community have not been brutally honest about their situations [their religious beliefs]. This hasn’t helped the rest of us. Well, the Ministry can turn around and say “you say we are deceptive in our practices, but you say you are ‘believers’ and you are being deceptive in yours? So you have a tension there that results in a number of people who should have been allowed to stay in the country – but they were kicked out. If you are super-critical of the community then the state had every reason to.”

Informants: “there are Messianic Jews who will tell them [the Ministry of Interior] that they go to a normal synagogue and that they are Jewish – that’s what they tell them. I understand why people would do that. Personally, I support the idea, but I guess morally it’s wrong – you’re living Christian ethics - you shouldn’t go around tricking people.”

Informants: “the Orthodox will see it as tricking the system – like fraudulent – like as bad as faking a birth certificate.”

In one case, incorrect documentation was strategically (and somewhat precariously) entered in order to buy time. Instead of rejecting his application, the frontline ministry worker asked the individual to return with the correct documents.

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<sup>87</sup> This appears to be another interesting and less formalised way by which Israel’s citizenship border comes to be ‘off-shored’ (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 2010). Here the Israeli state is relying on the truthful account of a foreign citizenship in order to make an informed decision on individual citizenship cases. Who, then, is the sovereign? And where is the sovereign decision being made in this case?

Unbeknownst to her, the next available appointment at the Ministry was in 6 weeks time, effectively allowing the individual to stay far beyond his tourist visa.

Clearly, these small-scale acts of mundane contestation do not render state border authorities completely powerless. Indeed, creatively using paper in order to secure citizenship should ultimately be seen as positioning that tacitly desires the acceptance of the state (Darling 2014). What's more, many times the surveillance-interdictory capacities of the authorities thwarted resistant maneuverings. For instance, one individual tactically alternated between the use of two passports in order to obtain successive tourist visas. Unfortunately, through a process of electronic cross-checking, the individual was found to be using two passports and was promptly detained and deported. As Coutin *et al.* (2002:827) argue, legal documents 'are deadly... Papers represent the power of someone else to choose one's existence or nonexistence'.

## **5.5 Israel's border agents**

In setting out the conceptual parameters of 'ordinary citizenship' Staeheli (2012:22) suggested that scholars must remain attentive to the 'variety of agents' who - 'drawing on different forms of power' - enforce the borders of citizenship. My discussion of frontline ministry workers emphasised the role played by a particular statist agent. However, in the border narratives recounted by Messianic Jews, a diverse range of border agents - beyond those of Ministry officials - enforced the everyday borders of Israeli Jewish citizenship. This points to the ways in which borders to citizenship are rarely guarded exclusively by government or state-sovereign agents, but rely upon the enrollment of non-state actors too (Staeheli 2012, Darling 2014).

One alternative set of agents consisted of the lawyers and judges to whom Messianic individuals could appeal or contest statist citizenship decisions. One informant family was in the process of deciding whether to upgrade their application from permanent residency to full citizenship. They had been approached by a law firm who was confident that they could obtain the full upgrade. However,

the lawyer's fees were extremely high, and the lack of guarantees of success brought a threat of economic insecurity that was, eventually, deemed too high. Ultimately, for those who are not afforded citizenship, there is the option of taking one's immigration case to Israel's Supreme Court. Indeed, in recent times, the Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld 'the right of Israeli Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah to retain citizenship' (US Department of State 2012). However, the Supreme Court, despite its seemingly liberal leanings is not immune from Orthodox influence. Barzilai (2003:219) argued that 'Despite its liberal appearance, the Court tends to be mindful and does not rile against Haradi interests because anti-Haradi rulings may result in legislation and government sanctions that could limit power'.

Informant: "Historically, some people have tried to challenge the rulings of the Ministry in the High Court and just made a big mess for everybody – maybe 30 years ago. Israel was less tolerant in those days. If you queer the pitch – you make it difficult for everybody...all these cases give a bad name to believers."

However, borders to Israeli citizenship are guarded most ferociously by certain civilian religious Jewish Orthodox groups. In many ways, these religious groups have much in common with the civilian border patrol groups that scout the US-Mexican border (Doty 2007, Kirkpatrick 2011). These local groups do much to shore up 'what may be perceived as the ineffectual borders of the nation-state' (Rumford 2012:897). In the Israeli context, one such group was Orthodox Jewish organisation Yad L'Achim.<sup>88</sup>

Informant: "Yad L'Achim has been – definitely in the last ten years – the definitive source of frustration. The problem is – they are violent. It's a spiritual thing – they are really unpleasant."

Yad L'Achim is a Jewish NGO based in an Orthodox suburb of Tel Aviv - Bnei Barak - that was initially established in order to 'liberate' Jewish women from relationships/marriages with Arab men. Yad L'Achim frame this work as an important retaliatory measure against an explicitly non-conventional form of

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<sup>88</sup> 'A Hand to Our Brothers'. Their slogan is 'We don't give up on even a single Jew'.

Palestinian warfare<sup>89</sup> (Blumenthal 2013:319). However, Yad L'Achim also undertakes significant 'anti-missional' work. According to their quasi-clandestine 'Counter-Missionary Department', 'the saving of each and every Jewish soul from Christian cults' [Messianic Jews] constitutes their 'sacred mission' (Yad L'Achim - <http://www.yadlachimusa.org.il/?CategoryID=196>).<sup>90</sup> This operation takes place across Israel, because 'every city has a missionary [Messianic Jewish] congregation that runs programs and activities aimed at luring Jews'.<sup>91</sup>

Again, central to Yad L'Achim's highly organised bordering work is the notion that Messianic Jews are, in essence, Christian missionaries posing a real and dangerous threat to the ethnonational and religious integrity of Israel (Ariel 2012, Van Dyke 2013). Yad L'Achim make the argument that Messianic Jews should be spatially 'marginalized and distanced from Jewish communities' so as not to 'be allowed to have an influence on Jews who might be too weak to resist [proselytising and attempted conversion]' (Aviner quoted in Wagner 2008). However, more specifically Yad L'Achim - reflecting the position of the wider hegemonic Orthodox Jewish establishment - feel threatened 'because they subvert its monopoly over defining Jewish identity' (Erez 2013:45).

Usually, Yad L'Achim's salvic and ethnonational bordering 'mission' was operationalised through constant, low-level, and pre-emptive harassment of Christian and Messianic Jewish communities. According to informants, Yad L'Achim also instigate spatial and societal exclusion by exerting pressure on Jewish landlords and business owners to deny Messianic Jewish individuals employment or

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<sup>89</sup> According to a quote on Yad L'Achim's website attributed to the founder – Rabbi Shalom Dov Lifschitz 'People must understand that Jewish-Arab marriages are part of the larger Israeli-Arab conflict...They [Arab men] see it as their goal to marry them [Jewish women] and ensure that their children aren't raised as Jews. This is their revenge against the Jewish people. They feel that if they can't defeat us in war, they can wipe us out this way. We must fight this threat as well; it's a matter of national security' (Lifschitz n.d - <http://www.yadlachimusa.org.il/?CategoryID=201&ArticleID=572>)

<sup>90</sup> They go on to explain their modus operandi 'One of our most important functions is to track the activities of missionaries and respond to them in appropriate ways. We are updated every time the missionaries schedule a conference, open a new center or schedule a baptism for Jews in the Kinneret and have a variety of means – all of them legal - to foil them. When we receive a report of a family that has gotten caught up in a cult we intervene with tried and tested methods.' (<http://www.yadlachimusa.org.il/?CategoryID=196>)

<sup>91</sup> Yad L'Achim vehemently oppose the religious activity of *any* non-Jewish group. Van Dyke (2013), for instance, explores Yad L'Achim's opposition to the construction of a Mormon University on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem.

residence. Accordingly, one of my informants stated that labour market discrimination against Messianic Jews constitutes the most pernicious societal border in Israel. Moreover, although none of my informants were subject to such abuse, I was also told stories of times when members of Yad L'Achim have physically assaulted Messianic Jewish congregants, and engaged in the destruction of property.

Informant: 'They could probably shut us down. Because we are supposedly 'dangerous' people in Israel – apparently! They can influence, they could influence us getting a new building, shutting down planning permission or permits.'

DW: 'Are they in local councils?'

Informant: 'They have access to people, you know, everyone is in everyone's pockets.'

Moreover, members of Yad L'Achim are examples of Vaughan-William's (2008:64) 'citizen detective' *par excellence*. Here, 'good' citizen subjects 'are constantly on the look-out for 'suspicious' or 'risky' subjects'. Such groups do the work of agents of surveillance; closely watching groups or individuals that they deem to pose a risk to the Jewish integrity of the Israeli nation-state. To undertake their mission, Yad L'Achim relied on banal and basic optic surveillance practices; practices that differ from the techniques and technologies that now bolster traditional external border sites. Rather, they track, monitor and record Messianic Jewish activity by physically standing outside congregational spaces and watching.

Almost all Messianic Jewish congregations had had some dealings with Yad L'Achim. At one congregational meeting I attended, members of Yad L'Achim had come to observe and take pictures of the congregants as they left the building. Ironically, a group of Palestinians had chased them away. Another informant recounted the time that Yad L'Achim had infiltrated their congregation and taken photos of some of the members. In an effort to generate public awareness, Yad L'Achim had printed out these photos and posted them around the local neighbourhood, with warnings that such individual were attempting to convert Jews.



Informant: “They send out these flyers, saying “these are dangerous people”...people like these old Russian ladies who come to pray. Dangerous?! Sure!”

Here then, lampposts and grainy, black and white pictures were the materials deployed in the imposition of citizenship borders. In some cases, these extreme citizen-detectives operate somewhat closer to home, surveying not only public spaces, but also the domestic dwellings of Messianic Jews.

Fregonese’s (2012a:658) concept of ‘hybrid sovereignty’<sup>92</sup> also has some analytical purchase because it accounts for the ‘cross-contamination of different state and nonstate actors’. The autonomous nature of Yad L’Achim’s work was called into question due to a perceived clandestine collusion between the group and the Ministry of Interior – the vigilante and the petty sovereign - to the extent that ‘the state and the nonstate [had] become difficult to distinguish’ (Fregonese 2012a:658).

For example, Yad L’Achim makes veiled claims about its ability to infiltrate the Ministry of Interior in order to influence the closure of religious meeting places, the denial of citizenship, or the expulsion of individuals from the country (US Department of State 2009). A Haaretz editorial revealed the extent of such work; ‘the orthodox organization Yad L’Achim locates “Messianic Jews” (who have accepted Jesus as messiah), gathers information on them and transfers it to the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry staff then summon them for an inquiry and turns their lives into a bureaucratic hell’ (Azoulay 2009). Hence, Yad L’Achim close down opportunities for Messianic Jews to slip under or around state borders to citizenship. In some cases, it is claimed that Ministry of Interior clerks have initiated contact; sending files to Yad L’Achim in order that they can carry out investigations. However, the Ministry of Interior insists that it ‘does not participate in any kind of activity in order to locate or receive information regarding Messianic missionary activity. All information accepted by us is received from organizations in Israel or private entities’ (Azoulay 2009).

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<sup>92</sup> Fregonese (2012a, 2012b) draws on various notions of hybridity to account for the non-elite, non-state actors embedded in the political sovereigntyscape (Sidaway 2003) of Beirut.

The bordering activity of Yad L'Achim adds to ongoing critical interrogations of borders as the loci of state territorial sovereignty; as sites where the sovereign decision 'to ban or exclude' is rendered most visible (Salter, 2008:366). However, as Doty (2007), Kirkpatrick (2011), and Dodds (2013) have argued, while the state may designate the legal framework of citizenship borders, other actors may decide upon and enforce border exceptions.<sup>93</sup> Actors such as Yad L'Achim disrupt the simplistic notion that states are the sole custodians of sovereignty in a neatly bounded territory (Fregonese 2012a, 2012b, Dodds 2013). Hence, in the lives of Messianic Jews there are always micro-geographies of hybrid sovereignty performed by varying (and not necessarily state-sanctioned) 'sovereignty regimes' (Dodds 2013:570).<sup>94</sup> As Doty (2007:124) states, 'There have been many dispersed decisions that have had real consequences for the lives of those migrants who are affected by them. These 'smaller' decisions are just as much 'the political' as are the more attention-generating decisions the discipline of international relations generally judges worthy of scholarly attention'. This shifts the idea of sovereignty to a more slippery, nebulous and uncertain realm where 'the sensibilities, ideologies, desires, and numerous other forces that constitute "statecraft from below" are played out' (Doty 2007:116).

My exploration of these actors does much to suggest that the state decision to award or deny citizenship occurs, not by way of a single, isolated border by elite state-sanctioned agents, but in numerous locales and by a number of non-elite individuals (Rumford 2012).

## 5.6 Receding borders and everyday life

And yet interior borders to citizenship also appeared to be contingent, temporal and permeable; they often receded in both occurrence and importance in everyday life.

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<sup>93</sup> Often these actors are motivated by the perceived failure of the state sovereign to enforce borders (Doty 2007, Kirkpatrick 2011).

<sup>94</sup> Although, Salter (2008:372) argues that the decisions made by certain citizen individuals/groups – such as Yad L'Achim – cannot be thought of as sovereign decisions. There is, he argues, 'a difference between a political decision – such as that by citizen groups to patrol the border themselves, which does involve definitions of security, perceptions of friend/enemy, self/other, and the condition of 'emergency' – and a sovereign decision to exclude from the protection of the law.'

For all of the struggles and stories recounted to me, the majority of my research with Messianic Jewish individuals was spent participating in extremely ordinary activities in entirely normal spaces; shopping in malls, riding the train, eating in cafes, playing in parks; undisturbed by the harsh imposition of interior borders to citizenship. This undisturbed normality – which characterised the majority of my informants’ everyday lives – is, as Goffman (1963:73) suggests, often ‘of minor concern’ to researchers. However, it indicated - at the very least - that the imposition of borders, and the concomitant exclusion seemed to be ‘situation specific’ (Lamont and Mizrachi 2012:366). There was a semblance of permeability to interior borders; some – whilst having the potential to be ever-present – could also disappear or be ignored for extended periods of time (Coleman and Stuesse 2014).

Take, for example, one of my less spectacular research diary extracts:

“Today I played football in the park (Gan Sacher) with a large group of individuals from a Messianic Jewish congregation. They play every week at the same time and the same spot. The group consists of mostly men – a whole range of ages – but there are also a few girls and a number of children too. It was good-natured and friendly, with a competitive edge. Here, the Messianic Jews are simply another group of Israelis enjoying the park. Here, in this space, there is nothing obvious to suggest that they are a minority religious group; a persecuted one at that. Perhaps – for very observant bystanders - the brief prayer offered in a huddle before the game would be the only indication that this was a ‘different’ group of people. Certainly nothing about the way they dress or look would indicate that they are anything other than Jewish Israelis. At one point the ball was accidentally kicked into a nearby group constituting of a number of Orthodox families. The ball was retrieved, an apology issued, initial annoyance turned to a good-natured exchange. The game continued.”

(Research Diary, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012)

On the surface, this entry was just another mundane example of an everyday, ordinary and unintentional encounter between two religious groups. However, it has to be held in tension with harsh imposition of societal borders by Orthodox Jewish

groups recounted throughout this chapter. What made this particular encounter – and many like it - so ordinary and non-conflictual?<sup>95</sup>

Perhaps – akin to the processes explicated in Chapter 4 - the concept of everyday indifference may again play a role in such amicable encounters. Just as they do with Palestinians, Israeli Jews can simply choose to ignore Messianic Jews. However, indifference assumes some form of prior noticing. Put plainly, indifference relies on Israelis being able to identify Messianic Jews in their everyday midst. However, unlike other minority groups– Ethiopian Jews, Mizrahi Jews, African migrants, ‘Black Hebrews’ and Palestinians Arabs – most Messianic Jews are not racially ‘other’ to the dominant Ashkenazi hegemon (Markowitz 1996, Markowitz *et al.* 2003, Mizrahi and Herzog 2012, Mizrahi and Zawdu 2012). Thus, border agents – both state and non-state - cannot rely on physical attributes as a marker of transgressive religious identity (Joseph and Rothfuss 2014). Messianic Jews do not stand out in everyday life unless they choose to.

Instead, the mundane and routinised fabric of everyday life - in public spaces such as the park - offered Messianic Jews a form of ‘lived’ camouflage from which to find protection from exclusionary bordering processes.<sup>96</sup> As Renfrow (2004:491) suggests, the spaces of everyday life enable ‘individuals to avoid detection and the negative treatment associated with these hated positions’. Through an act of ‘reactive passing’<sup>97</sup> (Renfrow 2004:489), Messianic Jews relied on other Israeli citizens’ ‘incorrect assumptions’ about their identity as acceptable Jewish citizens.

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<sup>95</sup> Moreover, whilst most Messianic Jews point to times when their religious beliefs have led to some level of exclusion or persecution, they do have to be balanced by the number of secular Israelis who hold no strong views on Messianic Jews and indicated a liberal interpretation regarding who is Jewish, and who is not.

<sup>96</sup> The presence of minority groups in public space – such as parks - is a contested issue in Israel. For instance, in the 2013 elections for the Jerusalem city council, one right-wing candidate - Aryeh King - framed the space of Jerusalem’s parks as a battle ground of import in the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The slogans on his campaign posters provocatively asked “Are you afraid in the park?” In an interview with the Haaretz newspaper, King suggested “The problem of Arabs in parks is a problem that spans beyond the seam neighborhoods...It starts with the fact that the government and the municipality did not invest in East Jerusalem like they did in West Jerusalem. The Arabs have no choice but to go west to the parks. The result is that many families stay away from the parks.’ King’s solution was to lock public parks in the evening, except for one that would be furnished with security cameras and adequate lighting. He claimed “This will be the best for everyone. If an Arab wants to come, he can, but he will know that the days of terrorizing Jewish girls in the park are over.”(King quoted in Hasson 2013).

<sup>97</sup> This has resulted in a growing literature on the ‘politics of passing’ - see Johnson (2002), Bursell (2012). Reactive passing is distinguished from proactive passing. The latter refers to an individuals’ self-presentation strategy, whereas the former focuses on the misreading of identity by an audience.

This notion of 'reactive passing' resonates with recent geographical work exploring how notions of presence/absence and visibility/invisibility enable forms of cultural camouflage. Attending to the inherently spatial dimension of protective camouflage, Robinson (2012:352) argues that everyday spaces such as the park 'can become transformed into and re-inscribed as places of sanctuary, safety and security'. Crucially, banal activities - such as playing soccer - constitute what Robinson (2012:351) terms 'mimetic resemblance' whereby the 'patterns and forms of the surrounding environment or, in some cases, the behaviours and habits of other[s]...may be simulated' allowing excluded groups to be present through a semblance of absence. This, in turn, leads to the deterrence of 'predators' such as Yad L'Achim.

For Vaughan-William (2009b) and Coleman and Stuesse (2014), everyday life is made up of spaces and practices through which interior borders can be momentarily forgotten (only to re-emerge at certain points). Coleman and Stuesse (2014) note that interior borders are always fitful in their imposition, resulting in 'inside' and 'outside' never being fully or clearly defined. Thus, in practice, some of my informants argued that they considered themselves full Israeli citizens exactly because gaps in the interior borders of Israeli citizenship allowed them to live relatively undisturbed lives. In sum, it is clear that Israel's interior borders to citizenship are both temporally and spatially intermittent, they 'modulate in fits and starts' (Coleman and Stuesse 2014:52). As Staeheli (2012:636) contends, the borders of citizenship never 'fully determine the way in which an individuals will live in a place'.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In an attempt to account for the backgrounding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Messianic Jewish community, this chapter has attended to the alternative political urgencies that troubled my Messianic informants' daily lives. I argued that religious contestations over Jewish identity and Jewish-Israeli citizenship were much more immediate and pressing in the lives of my informants. These concerns militated against 'active engagement with the volatile issues of justice, human rights,

and peace that are vital for their Palestinian brothers and sisters' (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p). In making these observations, this chapter offers a number of critical contributions.

Firstly, through a focus on the often-neglected plight of the Messianic Jewish community, it makes a nuanced contribution to existing understandings of the ways that religion and religious identity undergirds the ethno-national citizenry regime in Israel. Often, this religious and ethnonational regime is evidenced with recourse to the stark ethnic-religious boundaries that exist between Muslims and Jews. However, by disrupting the religious and ethnic aspects of Judaism, Messianic Jews fundamentally challenge the hegemonic definition of who is a Jew in Israel. This brings certain facets of Israel's ethnonational character into sharper focus, including the socio-religious construction of Jewish-Israeli ethnonational identity, the contingency of geopolitically responsive citizenship laws, and the complex legal loopholes that these result in. In a broader sense, therefore, this chapter has revealed a more complex political geography of Israeli citizenship.

Secondly, in order to attend to the subsequent reality of my informants' exclusion, I made connections between recent literature on interior everyday borders (Jones and Johnson 2014) and 'ordinary citizenship' (Staeheli 2012). In doing so, the chapter contributes to extant understanding of everyday bordering practices by demonstrating where, and by way of whom, citizenship borders come to be materialised in the realms of daily life. I highlighted the multiple ways that citizenship regimes come to be mediated through a wide range of social practices, themselves enacted through a myriad of actors and (often mundane) objects. I demonstrated that for every fear-filled but exceptional scramble across an international border, there are more mundane encounters with paper forms or ministry appointments. I also illustrated how citizenship regimes enroll and implicate a multitude of state and non-state actors. Through my exploration of Yad L'Achim and the Ministry of Interior, I pointed to the ways in which state and non-state actors cannot easily or neatly be defined. This answers Johnson's (2014:255) calls to identify 'how and where the state is in cahoots with non-state actors'.

Moreover, a focus on the mundane practices of everyday life allowed me to remain attentive to the times and spaces where the interior borders to Israeli citizenship were left unmanned and open. At a statist scale I argued that the borders of Israeli citizenship were liable to shift in relation to the expediency of certain geopolitical contingencies. Of course, an inclusive change in Israel's citizenship laws is the hope of many Messianic Jews. In the meantime, Messianic Jews find ways to exist in Israel without encountering difficulties. Some had even managed to gain official citizenship. Clearly, experiencing the imposition of internal social borders does not occur everyday. Yet the unspectacular moments of daily life where borders are not 'in play' often seem to be forgotten in recent border literatures (Jones and Johnson 2014, Joseph and Rothfuss 2014). Whilst studies often attempt to locate the contingent and nebulous imposition of interior borders in everyday life (Johnson and Jones 2014), such a focus runs the risk of framing them as totalising and complete. Whilst some borders can appear to manifest anywhere, others are still rooted in certain locations – and both forms display ephemerality or intermittent gaps. Thus, Balibar's (2009) oft-quoted refrain that borders are now 'everywhere' is only partially accurate. Interior borders do not ensnare everyone, everywhere rather they are 'sometimes not in play; they are not everywhere, but sometimes everywhere' (Coleman and Stuesse 2014:54). Whilst I have framed this fitfulness in largely positive terms (*vis-à-vis* my informants), others note that the 'patch-work' quality of interior borders pose 'very serious challenges to resident undocumented immigrant communities' around the world (Coleman and Stuesse 2014:54). They can, Coleman and Stuesse (2014:54) claim, 'loom over social reproduction practices and space, and in this way can...be described as social governance control'. However, interior borders are 'far from complete', and, in addition to benefitting from their fitfulness, there are also active 'opportunities' for 'creative acts' by minority communities to subvert interior borders (Coleman and Stuesse 2014:54). The following chapter goes on to explore some of the 'creative' opportunities available to my Messianic informants.

## Chapter 6:

# Precarious positionings: everyday acts of resistance and compliance in the Messianic Jewish community.

‘If you look hard enough, and ask enough people the right questions, you will find other places where Messianic Jews meet, engage in outreach, and worship.’

(Sarah Posner, *The Atlantic*, November 29, 2012:n.p)

### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter draws on notions of everyday geopolitical positioning, minority resistance, and complicity, to examine the ways in which members of the Messianic Jewish community positioned themselves in everyday life vis-à-vis the Israeli state and its ethnonational orientation. The preceding chapter is an account of the ways that Messianic Jewish individuals were marginalised and excluded in daily life through various bordering sites, processes and agents. But it would be erroneous to suggest that they were passive victims of ethnonational exclusion. Instead, as Warshawsky (2008:152) suggests, Messianic Jews in Israel engage in daily struggles for the right to self-identify ‘as a subject, rather than an object manipulated by historically hegemonic religious establishments’. Taking these claims as a point of departure, I explore the imaginative and spatial practices employed by Messianic Jews to contest, cope with, move around, and push back against the imposing ethnonational geopolitical agenda of the Israeli State. If the last chapter drew attention to State and societal attempts to (dis)place Messianic Jews from the



citizenry body, this chapter explores Messianic Jewish attempts to realise Israeli citizenship through varied – and often contradictory - positioning acts of resistance, self-provisioning, compliance and ethnonational participation.

In critical geopolitics, the idea of ‘geopolitical positioning’ relates not only to realist and classical geopolitical notions of physical location (Ó Tuathail 2013), but also to spatial imaginings ‘of status, power and aspirations for oneself and for others’ (Scott 2012:611). Whilst studies in critical geopolitics have accounted for the positioning strategies of different states in the international geopolitical order (Newman 2000, Scott 2012, Savić 2014), it is clear that non-traditional, non-state actors must carve out a place for themselves within socio-political hierarchies and position themselves vis-à-vis the state (Philpott 2007). As Ó Tuathail (2013:xx) contends, individuals are constantly learning and practicing ‘their own oppositional geopolitics’. Hence, Gallaher (2010:217) argues that:

‘Political geographers have expanded our notions of positionality to examine how social movements employ political identities, which are often resisting some configuration of hegemonic interests and spatial relationships that stem from them. They have also examined how social movements contend with the often competing interests that arise from members who occupy multiple subject positions or deal with the competing demands of personal and political forms of identification.’

This is especially true for minority groups whose ambivalent internal location and existential insecurity often lead to more overt and conscious social posturings (Williams 2012). Thus, in this chapter the notion of positioning refers to the ‘social situatedness of individuals subjects within particular sociospatial contexts’ and entails ‘relations to others that shape their knowledge, views, subjectivity, identity, imaginary, and conditions of existence’ (Leitner and Ehrkamp 2006:1616). I take it as axiomatic that Messianic Jewish geopolitical positioning occurs through discourse and practice, involving a constellation of imaginaries, ideations, aspirations, practices, spatialities and materialities (Muller 2008).

In the first half of the chapter I suggest that some of the Messianic Jewish communities’ positioning practices place them in direct opposition to the

hegemonic geopolitical logic that underpins the Israeli Jewish ethnonational citizenship regime. However, the second half explores the ways in which the community simultaneously positions itself in alignment with this geopolitical logic. In doing so Messianic Jews appear to position themselves in support of the very ethnonational ideations that sealed their exclusion. A central contention of this chapter is, therefore, that minority religeopolitical positioning often occurs in multiple, dynamic and paradoxical ways that both subvert and reify the formal geopolitics of the state (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a, 2000b, Kemp and Raijman 2003, Raijman and Pinsky 2011, 2013). Spatially, whilst the previous chapter jumped between an array of everyday sites, this chapter predominantly concentrates on research material gathered in the more formal spaces of Messianic Jewish congregations. Congregational spaces were, to my mind, meaningful sites of identity formation and preservation, in which Messianic Jews reproduce both themselves as a collective and their basic ambitions, to faithfully practice their Messianic beliefs and to affirm their identity as members of the Jewish Israeli nation.

## 6.1 Religious positionings

Before exploring the empirical realities of the Messianic community, this initial section critically accounts for the ways in which the positioning practices of religious minorities come to be framed in some (political) geographical scholarship. Kong (1993), Woods (2012) and Williams (2012) all suggest that religious groups – and religious minorities in particular - never remain passive impacted ‘objects’ in the face of the structural constraints that affect everyday lives. Instead, Kong (1993:39 my emphasis) suggests that religious groups assert criticality and agency in the face of ‘the state’s ideological hegemony either by adapting to and *accepting* the state’s arguments and actions or, conversely, by *resisting* as far as they can’. This acceptance/resistance framing seems to me to be a reductive and simplistic binary. It is too easy to portray religious groups as either blindly in league with the state, or dissident, separatist and resistant (Nyroos 2001, Dittmer and Sturm 2010). As Stadler *et al.* (2008:228) state, scholarly literature exploring the relationship between religious groups and statist politics are expressed ‘mainly through two prisms: a rejection of the state...expressed though hostility and resistance or an instrumental

approach towards the state expressed through pragmatic politics leading to accommodation according to the particular interests of the group'. Philpott's (2007:506) article 'Explaining the Political Ambivalence of Religion' exemplifies this approach to religious positioning. Here, he attempts to account for the ways that religious communities take one of two paths; 'democratization and political violence'. Of course, he gives a cursory nod to the fact that 'variations within and between local religious communities matter' but does little to nuance this observation.

In reality, however, all religious groups position themselves ambiguously vis-à-vis state politics because there is always a dynamic, processual and temporal tension between religious meta-narratives and statist ideologies (Kemp and Raijman 2003, Al-haj 2004, Leibovitz 2007, Megoran 2007). Put simply, religious communities can be both supportive and resistant to state authority at different times, and to different ends. Indeed, in some cases, these supportive or resistant positions are not always incompatible or incommensurable alternatives. Often there appears to be an uneasy and irresolvable inhabitation of both positions simultaneously.

The dynamic and uncertain tension between support, deference and resistance has a much longer and broader history especially in the Christian tradition. Christianity, from its very beginnings, had a very ambiguous relationship to the state, the sovereign, and to empire. The social values and hierarchical structures of the Roman Empire were 'diametrically opposed' to what the new Christian minority community stood for (Bartley 2006:26). Thus, questions and critiques of sovereignty and state power resonated throughout the activities and proclamations of the early Church. As Megoran (2014:98) identifies, the texts that constitute the New Testament have much to say on the 'presence of *archē* and *archōn*, variously translated from Greek as "powers", "governments", "administrations", "thrones", "kingdoms", "empires", "states", "forms of rule", and so forth'. As theologians NT Wright (2000) and James Smith (2009:73) have shown, the gospel story – the arrival of a new sovereign-in-waiting - was nakedly political, and 'deeply counter-imperial'. Paul's letters to the nascent church – letters that form a significant portion of the canon of the New Testament - are replete with seditious and subversive pleas to refuse, re-work and resist the sovereignty of Caesar. The early formation of the sacraments – such as the

Eucharist – were radically embodied and egalitarian practices that dangerously called into question statist social and geopolitical orders and hierarchies (Cavanaugh 2003, Keesmaat and Walsh 2006, Smith 2009, 2012). Hence, the early church consisted of networks of individuals who sought to abolish ‘all distinctions of ethnicity, class and gender and thus defied and subverted a social order that was actually built on them’ (Bartley 2006:17).

Moving forward, the history books of Christianity are writ large with the outworking of this ambiguous political positioning and ‘differentiation’ to the state (Philpott 2007). As Smith (2009:97) suggests, the unfolding meta-story of Christianity and its relationship to state politics has a certain ‘Hegelian rhythm to it: like a pendulum swinging from one extreme to another...from a kind of pietist stance of withdrawal and even suspicion’ to a ‘strident, triumphalist’ program of inseparable Constantinianism. At ground level, the outworking of this ambiguity results in religious minorities deploying a mixture of everyday spatial practices; practices that result in moments of empowerment and constraint, exclusion and inclusion, accommodation and resistance (Levitt 2008).

Indeed, the Messianic community resists its marginalisation, and positions itself in ways seemingly opposed to ethnonational Israeli state geopolitical culture. The community was rarely involved in direct or intentionally oppositional politics; instead I examine a number of less tangible everyday practices, distinguishing these as acts of resilient refusal, reworking, and resistance (Katz 2004, Jones 2012). These three oppositional orientations are explored in order to parcel out and nuance the popular but one-dimensional notion of ‘resistance’. Specifically, I explore how creative spatial practices of congregational invisibility, and the articulation of provocative alter-religeopolitical ideations worked to disrupt, subvert and rework ideas of statist authority and concomitant patterns of ethnonational exclusion.

## 6.2 Refusing borders: The (in)visibility of Messianic Jewish congregations

The spaces of formal Messianic Jewish gatherings were always of theoretical interest to me because they invariably took place in sites that were rarely obvious.<sup>98</sup> As Posner (2012:n.p) states, Messianic Jews meet ‘under the radar of most Israelis’. The physical placement of the congregational sites seemed to be a spatial indicator of the community’s ambiguous and often oppositional positioning vis-à-vis the State and societal exclusion. The empirical insights noted in Chapter 5 illustrate that the state not only fails to protect the Messianic Jewish minority, but also is – to some degree – complicit in their ongoing marginalisation.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that Messianic Jewish congregational spaces are positioned within a sociopolitical context where state policy and priority is not sympathetically structured towards to non-Jewish religious sites. Since the 1967 ‘reunification of Jerusalem’, the Israeli state has retained a rhetorical veneer of religious multiculturalism, claiming to make provision for the freedom of worship for individuals of all religions through spatial legal means such as the 1967 ‘Protection of Holy Sites Law’. However, broad discrepancies exist between religious multiculturalism as theoretical ideal and in everyday practice (Raheb 2002, Fox 2008, Eishah 2012). In the latter, the state appears to make a concerted effort to control and limit non-Jewish religious groups. According to a 2009 US Department of State report addressing Religious Freedom in Israel, the Israeli State provides ‘significantly greater levels of legal protection and government resources to Jewish holy places than to those of other religious groups and to Orthodox Jews over non-Orthodox Jews...Non-Jewish holy sites do not enjoy legal protection under it because the Government does not recognize them as official holy sites’ (US Department of State 2009). Moreover, whilst the State budget allows for the funding of the ongoing material construction of Judaic religious sites – such as Synagogues and Yeshivas - they do not provide funds for the building of non-Jewish places of worship. Sometimes state level discrimination is structured through more indirect policies. For example, in 2012 the Knesset finally revised municipal

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<sup>98</sup> This is somewhat redolent of the notions of everyday invisibility and inattention that I introduced in the last chapter.

and property law to grant full tax exemption to all religious institutions that were not using their space for commercial purposes. Up until that point, this exemption had only applied to Jewish synagogues (US Department of State 2012).

Indeed, that there are few overt and purpose-built Messianic Jewish congregational facilities is suggestive of a religious community positioned with little immunity against the dominant state-supported religious order (Posner 2012). Currently the state reserves the power to define which Christian denominations fall into the category of the officially recognised institutional church. Only these then 'have full rights to operate...including the right to bring clergy; to own land; to operate religious courts, theological, social and welfare institutions, and so on' (Saber 2004:417). During my research, even these supposedly protected spaces of institutional Christianity were being subject to anti-Christian vandalism.<sup>99</sup>

As a non-recognised 'Christian' group, Messianic Jews do not benefit from the 'existing arrangement of non-interference between state and religious institutions' afforded to the institutional church in Israel (Kemp and Rajiman 2003:296). Some Messianic Jewish groups rented space in one of the only purpose-built institutional Christian church buildings in West Jerusalem. This happened to be located on the border of one of the most Orthodox neighbourhoods in the city - Me'a She'arim. Here, congregants hoped to take advantage of the institutional nature of the church building as a form of protection against persecution or interference. Official church buildings are meant to fall under the protection of the State and are, therefore, 'free' or 'protected' spaces (Kemp and Rajiman 2003:311). But institutional fixity comes at the cost of visibility and potential contestation. It was interesting to map various practices of vandalism and graffiti that the building incurred throughout my research period. As Woods (2012:114) contends, physical attacks against churches belie a geopolitical significance 'that extends beyond the building itself; they represent an ideological affront to the spatial encroachment of marginal groups at the expense of the dominant religious order'.

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<sup>99</sup> This form of vandalism is specifically termed 'price-tag' attacks in Israel-Palestine. These are acts of violence or vandalism usually undertaken by right-wing Jewish Orthodox groups against minority groups in Israel. Whilst Palestinians are normally the victims of such attacks, Christian groups and places of worship are increasingly targeted. During my research two notable acts of vandalism occurred at the Dormition Church, and the Protestant cemetery. Both sites are located on Mount Zion. Although unconfirmed, the attacks were thought to have been perpetrated by religious Orthodox students/settlers from a nearby *yeshiva* (Hasson 2013, Hasson and Cohen 2013).

Messianic gatherings are frequently under threat from *in situ* harassment by certain Orthodox Jewish groups (such as Yad L'Achim). As one informant described, visible congregations faced clear challenges:

Informant: “One congregation in the south, they took a big hit. *Because their meeting place was initially very visible* – it all went to court. Guys turned up and...fifty people [Orthodox Jews] would turn up and turn it into mayhem, violence, everything. For some reason, the religious just target them. Relentless. The major rioting though, has been in Arad and Ashdod.”

Informant: “At least two congregations in Jerusalem have been fire-bombed since we’ve lived in Israel. Vandalism. You know. But that’s because they use a Baptist Church building. *They are visible*. And it looks like a church. Absolutely. The only thing that it doesn’t have round it is a graveyard. And the Messianic assembly on Ha-Nevi’im Street has been attacked at least once of twice since I’ve been there.”

Thus, the whereabouts of many Messianic Jewish congregations is ‘closely guarded’ (Posner 2012:n.p). Some Messianic Jewish congregations have employed spatial practices of obscurity, misdirection and camouflage, (Jones *et al.* 2012, Jones 2012, Robinson 2012, Robinson 2013, Forsyth 2013) in order to remaining invisible in the urban landscape. Many meet in inconspicuous locations, or by appropriating makeshift, secular sites in which to perform their religious services.<sup>100</sup> Such practices disrupt the simplistic approach that places the sacred and the secular in competition with each other. Religion – even in areas of hostility - is never simply divided into, and contained within, officially sacred spaces. Rather, like secularism, it is ‘lived as part of everyday life in a variety of spaces and scales’ (Gökarıksel 2009:669). For the Messianic Jewish community, the sacred and the secular intersect spatially and theologically in very beneficial ways. One informant described their position of invisibility through a biblical schema. He recounted well-known Psalmic verses regarding God’s physical protection for his people through means of hiddenness.

<sup>1</sup>Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. <sup>2</sup>I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” <sup>3</sup>Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. <sup>4</sup>He will cover you with his feathers, and under

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<sup>100</sup> There is a subtle geography to Messianic Jewish congregational locations. As Posner (2012:n.p) identifies, in Tel Aviv - a more secular city - the ‘activities of Messianic Jews are a little less clandestine’.

his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.”

(Psalm 91v1-4, The Bible, NIV)

In what sort of spaces did Messianic congregations gather? As Posner (2012:n.p) states, ‘If you look hard enough, and ask enough people the right questions, you will find places where Messianic Jews meet, engage in outreach, and worship’.

Two of the congregations were located in the same high-rise building in the centre of the city. One congregation was located in the basement space, and one on the very top floor; vertical locations that, I would argue, are not insignificant. For the congregation located on the top floor, vertical height offered a basic semblance of subterfuge and security. Recent geopolitical scholarship has almost exclusively explored vertical spatiality as a position from which power and control are enacted through technologies of panoptical territorial surveillance, aerial targeting, and militaristic violence (Elden 2013). Here I am thinking of the current scholarly agenda that assays the use of drones and Unmanned Ariel Vehicles (Weizman 2007, Gregory 2011a, 2011b, Williams 2011). Eyal Weizman (2007:253), for instance, advances a thorough analysis of Israel’s territorial control over the Palestinian Territories; one that relies on a ‘vertical axis’ of power, where height plays an important role in the ‘power relations of the fractured and contested spaces’ of the West Bank (Elden 2013:37). However, this scholarly agenda significantly overlooks alternative forms and logics of urban verticality that do not equate to performances of powerful politics (Harker 2014, Harris 2014). The normative positioning of powerful height against powerless depth was not an accurate map of the empirical reality I observed in this congregation.





Figure 8: Vertical protection in the top floor congregation

Instead, urban verticality placed the community in a position of protection from the ‘vertical depth’ of a clear line of sight (see Figure 8) (Anderson 2010). The building in question is the tallest in Jerusalem; no one could inadvertently (or otherwise) overlook or observe the congregational activity. Moreover, it would be unusual for anyone to accidentally make his or her way up to the fourteenth and top floor. This use of height is an example of what Harker (2014:318) calls an ‘ordinary topology’; that is the ‘lived practice of people in some of these fractured, hierarchical and urban spaces’ (Elden 2013:40).

The second congregation was located on the lowest level of a run-down shopping mall that occupies the basement and first two ground floors of the same high-rise building.<sup>101</sup> The congregation is located in the subterranean site of an old theatre; a priest-hole like space found in close proximity to a sex-shop (until recently, there were two independent sex shops) and a number of disused office units. It is hard not to read this as an appropriate spatial metaphor; the transgressive religious group

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<sup>101</sup> The appropriation of commercial space to construct spaces of religious activity is an interesting reversal of Western European trends whereby religious sites are turned into apartments, pubs and clubs (Hatherley 2012).

has been relegated to the basement floor, to exist alongside other places of *treif*<sup>102</sup> and taboo. Indeed, underground spaces, as Elden (2013) reminds us, have ‘long been seen as hidden, dangerous, risky or insecure’. However, as Rhys Jones (2012:337) contends, the vertical ontology of subterranean spaces is a beneficial position for minority religious groups because ‘invisibility is a key feature of the subterranean’. Underground locations provide refuge and subterfuge precisely because they positioned ‘out of *sight*, but not necessarily out of *site*’ (Jones 2012:337, Elden 2013).<sup>103</sup> This underground positioning was apposite to another congregation who took advantage of a building on a downward sloping valley side near Mount Zion. Due to the gradient, the roof of the congregational building lay at pavement level, and the neighbouring hotel used it as a terraced garden. The rooftop garden obscured the view of the congregation below. Consequently, the building below was almost entirely unnoticeable from street level (see Figure 9 and 10).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Treif* is a Yiddish term – derived from the Hebrew word for ‘torn’ - that refers to unclean, non-kosher foodstuff such as pork. Such food is forbidden and unacceptable. Drawing on these connotations, my use of the term is metaphorical. That said, later in my research period, the congregation opened a café that received a kosher license. However, the license was revoked when it was found to be run by a Messianic group.

<sup>103</sup> In contrast, there is an Ethiopian café located on the ground floor of the same building in a prominent and visible commercial space. On Sabbath this becomes the site of Orthodox protest because it stays open after the day of rest has begun.

<sup>104</sup> In the last weeks of my research, this congregation moved location into a nearby residential area. It was extremely difficult to find as it was located in the basement of a hillside apartment building. One had to descend around 20 metres of stairs in order to get there. The congregation justified the moved in theological terms. From their new location, they enjoyed a better view of the Old City and the Temple Mount; locations that they held as significant and central.



Figure 9: 'Private Property'



Figure 10: The view of the congregation from road/pavement level.

Indeed, during my research in this congregation, a journalistic piece on Messianic Judaism was published in the Atlantic. It specifically pointed to the clandestine and non-descript appearance of the congregation.

‘On Mount Zion, thought by some Christians to be in the vicinity of Jesus’s last supper with his disciples, a building is marked simply with the numbers "24/7." There is no other sign, nothing to identify what it is or what is inside.’ (Posner 2012:n.p)



Figure 11: An outdoor bar conceals the congregational entrance

Nearby, another Messianic congregation employed a different form of spatial obscurity by locating in building space on Hillel Street. Choosing to locate on this particular road indicates that it is a certain type of place. As anyone who lives in West Jerusalem knows, Hillel Street is an area where shops and bars do not shut for Sabbath. Here, Orthodox Jewish religious rules are ignored and one can get a cup of coffee, a beer, or grocery essentials. Most of these businesses are manned (but invariably not owned) by non-Jewish individuals; Arabs, Sudanese or Russians. They

are, therefore, undoubtedly ‘profane’ places; devoid of religious observance and rarely visited by the Orthodox. Here then the blasphemous is used to camouflage transgressive religious activity (See Figure 11). *Contra Luz* (2008), on Hillel Street it is the spaces of the profane – rather than the overtly religious – that serve as sites where minority identities can be expressed with more freedom and remain unchallenged by statist and Orthodox Jewish positions.

Similarly, three alternative congregations made use of misdirection by locating in the spaces of commercial warehouses in out-of-town industrial zones.

Informant: “We meet in a warehouse on the edge of town. That’s because of our history. We’ve had vandalism, massive vandalism, fire-bombing, bricks. I don’t know if you could say it was a deliberate conscious policy [to locate in an inconspicuous warehouse], it was more born out of expediency in some ways. Because traditionally in a town the meeting point was the synagogue – everyone would know where that was – and if you opened up a Messianic assembly next door – that wouldn’t go down well. So, and on Sabbath, there is very little movement anyway – there are very few people out on the streets – and so to go to an industrial area like ours – it’s all closed down anyway. The day before or after the place is heaving. So I don’t know if it’s an intentional policy, but I guess the patterns of locations reoccur enough to say that there's something in it.”

A member of the same congregation said:

Informant: ‘So far, the religious haven’t targeted this building. The building before – we had stones thrown through the window. It hit a lady on the head. They eventually burnt it down. Maybe its because they haven’t found it...’

Similarly, I also visited various homes and domestic spaces that were used to hold congregational services.

“The house is one of the last homes at the end of a dead-end street. Most of the front of the house is hidden by the trees of a well-tended garden. I walk into the house via an entirely ordinary side door and immediately I find myself in a small domestic kitchen/utility area. To the left of me there is a small set of stairs that drop down into a huge open plan living room that doubles up as the congregational space.”

(Research Diary, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2013)

Domestic houses are perceived as relatively unobtrusive spaces, allowing for Messianic Jewish activities to occur in a majority Jewish neighbourhood. The external facade of the house described in the diary entry above conveyed nothing but ordinary secularity. Much like the warehouse, the house's ordinariness - its lack of signage - was crucial to its inconspicuousness. Moreover, the security of the house church is found in the perceived social contract that enshrines the domestic as a private space. It is, for instance, relatively difficult to attend a house church without being known – at some level – to the congregants. I was able to attend the house church described above through entirely nepotistic means. The spatial phenomenon of house churches is not uncommon in countries where Christian groups are considered a religious minority. This has garnered increased scholarly attention from geographers of religion working in Singapore and Sri Lanka (see Kong 2002, and Woods 2012, 2013 amongst others<sup>105</sup>).

All of these various practices of invisibility - effacement, misdirection and concealment - point to the ways in which the congregations make use of various spatial logics in order to position themselves out of sight/site (Jones 2012, Woods 2012). Employing spatial tactics of dispersal, concealment, or absence is, to my mind, an overlooked form of creative geopolitical agency and positioning. I intentionally use the term 'tactic' to loosely invoke De Certeauan concepts. For De Certeau (1984:xix) tactics involved spatial practices that encroach upon or 'insinuates' into the territory of the powerful. Indeed, Forsyth (2013) argues that the tactical deployment of invisibility needs to garner further academic attention, especially in the body of critical geopolitical scholarship that too often affords primacy to notions of visibility or overt resistance. Adopting positions of invisibility have, hitherto, been framed as a defensive, acquiescent and reactionary strategy of disenfranchised communities.

Similarly, Jones (2012) argues that current literature on minority oppositional practices does one of two things; it either leaves little room for acts of resistance by

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<sup>105</sup> That said, it seems to me that these literature could be expanded to include the house-church phenomenon in 'Western' spaces and societies. The 'emerging church' movement is particularly finding expression through house based gatherings and communal living as a spatial means to addressing issues of social justice, politics and the city (Williams 2009).

overstating the reach and homogeneity of state sovereignty, or it renders every action as a potential defiant act of resistance thereby ignoring issues of intentionality. We cannot, Katz (2004:242) argues, fully understand ‘oppositional practice or its possible effects if we consider every autonomous act to be an instance of resistance’. As a result, there is little conceptual space for acts undertaken by ordinary citizens that are – for want of a better phrase - unintentionally resistive (Rose 2002, Katz 2004, Sparke 2008); acts that do not constitute overt political resistance but nevertheless refuse to abide by or accept the imposed state territorial order (Jones 2012).

Here invisibility acts as an everyday, counter-hegemonic position for excluded minority religious groups (Saber 2004, Hopkins and Smith 2008, Jones 2012, Woods 2012).<sup>106</sup> That said, whilst the spatial practice of ‘absencing’ (Robinson 2012:365) is a creative form of active political positioning, it is not – to my mind – immediately constitutive of political resistance. Some have argued that the ‘attainment of invisibility acts as a political ‘weapon of the weak’ that enables the subverting of established hierarchical power relations in favour of the ‘weak’ (Robinson 2012:354, Kemp and Rajiman 2003 Scott, 1985, 1990). Luz (2013, 2008), for example, argues that the sacred spaces of religious minority groups in Israel - such as Messianic Jewish congregations – are, by their very existential presence, sites of subversive and contentious resistance, sites that disrupt the normative spatial order constructed by an ethnonational nation-state. For Luz (2013:68) it follows that any spatialised identity that is ‘inconsistent or at odds with that of the Jewish-hegemonic majority calls for a highly politicised reading’, and must be conceptualised as meaningful resistance.<sup>107</sup>

Whilst I agree that a political reading is apt, it would be a mistake to automatically over-determine this type of physical positioning as either fearful withdrawal or dissident resistance. Rather, in the face of ethnicised exclusionary borders and

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<sup>106</sup> However, in contrast, in a study of Latin American migrant churches in Israel, Kemp and Rajiman (2003:302) suggest that these minority Christian groups ‘vaunt their presence’ and are ‘far from being underground organisations’. Indeed, these churches’ ‘public nature stands in stark contrast to the desperate attempts by undocumented migrants to disguise their presence in public arenas and thus avoid attracting attention of the authorities’.

<sup>107</sup> See Routledge (1997), Pile (1997), Rose (2002), Sparke (2008), and Luz (2012) for contrasting opinions on the intentionality of resistance – a decision that is, as Jones (2012:687) observes ‘often left to the researcher’ to decide.



‘monolithic encampments of religious hegemons’ (Woods 2012:111), I suggest that the presence and location of Messianic Jewish congregations acted as a more humble positioning of resilient ‘refusal’.<sup>108</sup> Jones (2012:687) deploys the notion of ‘spaces of refusal’ to conceptualise unspectacular spatial practices that disregard hegemonic rules, but do not amount to politically motivated resistance. In doing so Jones (2012:687) attempts to comprehend those quotidian actions that are more concerned with survival, with ‘simply getting by’ and avoiding confrontation or adversity in daily life. These are practices that are born out of pragmatism or expediency rather than critical oppositional consciousness. Jones’ ‘spaces of refusal’ are akin to Katz’s (2004:244-246) notion of ‘terrains of resilience’; which are inventive and creative acts that allow one to ‘shore up’ and to ‘just get by’ in the face of the ‘oppressive and increasingly mean-spirited circumstances’. Through invisibility, Messianic congregations refuse to cede to the exclusionary attitudes that arbitrarily categorise and fix the (un)acceptability of certain identities in space (Jones 2012). Crucially, it is the resilient survival of Messianic Jews that stands as an uncomfortable challenge to the borders of acceptable Jewish identity.

This unspectacular and humble act of resilient refusal lays foundations for more conventional forms of oppositional practices vis-à-vis the state (Katz 2004).<sup>109</sup> Kemp *et al.* (2000:98) argues that existential resilience is a baseline that will often ‘open new arenas for collective empowerment that may lead to potential collective action and mobilisation’. In concrete terms, the resilience of Messianic Jewish congregations has allowed the community to grow numerically.

Informant: “When our congregation started, there were probably only 6 congregations in the whole country. Maybe in 1980 or 1981 the Messianic community was around 250 people. If you sort of plot this on a graph, and today you are looking at somewhere between 15,000 – 20,000, not huge - but it’s definitely growing. So, there’s a critical mass here.”

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<sup>108</sup> The term ‘resilience’ is reminiscent of its use to describe Palestinian survival. Palestinian friends would often speak to me about a collective sense of *sumud* – or steadfastness – that seemed to have some similarities with the resilient refusal I describe here. *Sumud*, Leshem (2013:41) explains, ‘...emerged as a response to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 and Palestinian determination not to allow the mass expulsions of 1948 to repeat themselves...Yet what started as a passive steadfastness, soon took on a more dynamic form of *sumud muqawim* (resistant *sumud*), an ideology and practice that helped energize self-help local services committees...’

<sup>109</sup> And, as I go on to show, more supportive positionings from which to make claims to citizenship.

For this reason, placing oneself in a position conducive to existential survival was an extremely important act. There was a consistent view amongst my Messianic Jewish informants that it was only a matter of time before the boundaries of the 'Jewish tent' (Pinto 2013) would have to be extended. As Warshawsky (2008:153) states, 'when the community has grown enough in numbers and in presence in Israel, self-definition in Israeli Jewish terms (even in Orthodox Jewish terms), will be received with greater legitimacy; Messianic Jews will eventually succeed in expanding the borders of Israeli Jewishness'. Indeed, this is not an idealistic or naïve aspiration. As noted in the previous chapter, the borders of official Israeli citizenship do have the propensity to shift according to the expedient conditions of the various geopolitical conflicts that Israel faces.

Informant: "We hope that the psyche of the nation is changing. Maybe the secular Israeli is changing its attitude towards the Messianic community – it's changed the way secular Israel views the Messianic community. Maybe no longer they consider us a 'cult' – there's maybe more respect.

Moreover, the resilient positioning and existential survival of congregational spaces allowed for the advancement of more charged, subversive religepolitical imaginations that 'reworked' and 'resisted' state and societal hegemony more overtly (Katz 2004:247-257). As Jones (2012:687) contends, spaces of refusal are 'zone[s] of contact where state practices interact with alternative ways of seeing, knowing and being'. It is to these alternative oppositional ways of knowing and being that I now turn.

### **6.3 Re-working borders: Subversive religepolitical imaginaries.**

The ways in which certain religepolitical ideations and identities were selectively circulated within the congregations also acted to position the community as immune to state power. Here, Katz's (2004) second categorisation of oppositional practices – notions of 'reworking' – seem apposite. For Katz (2004:247), re-working entails the discourses and practices that 'alter the conditions of people's existence to enable more workable lives' without necessarily challenging the hegemonic social relations underpinning their 'problematic conditions'. Consequently, acts of reworking

explicitly attempt to ‘recalibrate power relations and /or redistribute resources’ (Katz 2004:247).

It was clear that Messianic Jews conferred higher meaning on their state-sponsored exclusion through various religious narratives and theologies that were frequently articulated in everyday life. This has resonance with Habashi (2013), who explored the ways in which Palestinian children used Islamic religious narratives in daily life in order to make sense of and combat Israeli oppression. Specifically, my informants understood their exclusion through the Messianic Jewish theology of a faithful religious ‘remnant’. This theological notion refers to the idea of there ‘always being righteous persons who choose to follow the truth, even if they are an invisible minority’ (Warshawsky 2008:143). Hence, many of my informants invoked this theology to position themselves as a righteous minority within Israeli Jewish society. In doing so, they (re)imagined their marginalised status and perceived religious deviance as a higher sacrificial calling predicated upon their faithfulness to the progressive revelation of God through Jesus. It is interesting to note, therefore, that Messianic Jews introduced the theological concept of sacrifice as the basis for their legitimate membership in the Israeli Jewish collective (Stadler *et al.* 2008).

Moreover, when necessary, my informants positioned themselves vis-à-vis State-sponsored exclusion by appealing to an alternative religeopolitical worldview of power and authority. For instance, it was often emphasised by my informants, that their God held sovereign power over any earthly political regime. The selective mobilisation of this worldview could be considered ‘dissident’, ‘anti’ or ‘alter’ geopolitical because it fundamentally called into question the normative primacy of Israeli State sovereignty (see Nyroos 2001, West 2006). One could find traces of this dissident geopolitics in songs, sermons, prayers, and in the embodied sacraments that expressed confidence in the immutable and all-powerful God (Smith 2012).

“Today we sang a simple song that had the repeating choral motif that Jesus ruled over everything – over the world and everything in it. It is hard not to hear this as anything other than an overtly political statement.”

(Research Diary, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013)

Hence - disrupting the anthropocentric logic of global geopolitics – my informants proclaimed the transcendent and immanent sovereignty of God over and above that

of any earthly state sovereign (De-Mar 1987, Boyd 2005). In this reworked imaginary, it is God who retains ultimate control, power and rulership over international affairs and global politics; the state is merely a delegated component ‘piece of a larger cosmological order’ (West 2006:295). For that reason, this imaginary is not, as Wright (2012:78-79) suggests, merely a set of abstract ideas or theories about the world. Rather, it is a ‘nakedly political’ worldview; a worldview that confronts secular geopolitical orderings by claiming ultimate allegiance to a God who is king (Keesmaat and Walsh 2006, Cornwall 2010, Wright 2012).

The circulation of such a radically alternative religeopolitical imaginary is understandable when located within the wider context of Israel’s biblical historical narrative. This view of transcendental sovereignty and power is replete in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As mentioned earlier, I take it as axiomatic, for instance that both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures are imbued with profoundly subversive and anti-imperial overtones (Wright 2000, 2012, Walsh and Keesmaat 2005, Smith 2013). The Old Testament abounds in political commentary whereby the sovereignty of God is shown to preclude that of earthly powers; where Yahweh challenges and defeats the sovereignty claims of rival kings in order to safeguard his chosen people. The Exodus story – and the defeat of the Egyptian Pharaoh - is perhaps the most emblematic of this worldview. In the New Testament, the resurrection of Christ is – at least in Pauline theology (and, as Wright (2012) argues, explicit in the Gospel narratives) - a Christian variation on these Jewish narratives. It is a story involving the incarnate God who confronts and defeats the rival power of Caesar by inculcating an alternative ‘kingdom’ (Wright 2002, 2012, Walsh and Keesmaat 2005). As Wright contends (2002:183), the crucifixion and resurrection ‘demonstrates that the true God has a power utterly superior to that of Caesar’. Accordingly, as Wallace (2006:218 my emphasis) noted, the early Jewish Christian Church developed as a persecuted religious community, ‘strategically threatening to the Roman political establishment because of *its refusal* to grant Caesar hegemony of allegiance’.

In his study of religious minority strategies, Woods (2012:112) appears to snub similar religeopolitical ideational positionings as naïve and blinkered ‘views of power’. However, he concedes that finding recourse in a higher level of sovereignty

problematizes and disrupts the efficacy and affect of ‘controls seeking to curtail the freedom of evangelical groups’. He goes on to suggest that mobilising such dissident imaginaries allows minority religious groups to take positions of ‘invariance towards the state, religious hegemony, and the territorial sovereignty claimed by each’ (Woods 2012:112).

Indeed, the circulation of this worldview radically altered the imagined geopolitical positioning of the Messianic community vis-à-vis certain practices of the Israeli state. Certainly, it allowed my informants to relegate issues of State-sponsored exclusion – and the concomitant existential fear and anxiety – below ‘questions of divine approval or the guidance of divine will’ (West 2006:295). Moreover, my informants frequently pointed to the ways in which the sovereign power of God directly confronted and subverted State authorities on behalf of the Messianic community. For example, when Shas lost control of the Ministry of Interior some saw it as the hand of God working to provide favourable conditions for the Messianic Jewish community. As a mocking and seditious prophetic act,<sup>110</sup> one informant inscribed the name of the incoming Likud Minister of Interior – Gideon Sa’ar – on a household broom. This was used to suggest that all the old vestiges of Shas – and the former Minister Eli Yishai – were being swept out of the Ministry of Interior by God.

Informant: “For the first time in living memory, Shas has been kicked out. They don’t have any more clout in – what you call a cabinet? They don’t control the Ministry of Interior. This is the first time. This is God.”

However, submitting to an alternative agent of sovereignty also inserted a good deal of unexpectedness into my informants’ positioning vis-à-vis State policy. In one fascinating example, one of my informants had been unexpectedly offered the opportunity to re-apply for full Israel citizenship with the accompanying quasi-guarantee that he would obtain it. This was an astonishing offer in light of his decade long struggle for legal recognition. However, the individual felt God directing him to turn down the offer – to trust Him – and wait for another time.

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<sup>110</sup> See Dodds and Kirby (2013) for a recent exposition examining various facets of a ‘geopolitics of humour’.

Secondly, this religious critique of earthly sovereignty seemed to underwrite an alternative and fluid sense of belonging, identity and citizenship, challenging and reworking the idea of the nation-state as the fundamental imaginary of political community or the primary guarantor of citizenship (Stephens and Squire 2012). Despite the challenges outlined in Chapter 5, the process of obtaining formal Israeli citizenship was approached on different terms when the sovereignty of God was pronounced over and above that of the Ministry of Interior. When certain Messianic individuals managed to obtain citizenship (or secured residency) – despite the tactics and work-around described in the previous chapter – such an event was attributed entirely to God’s sovereign providence. Similarly, when citizenship or residency status was rejected or denied, the community resorted to prayer and supplication on the individual’s behalf in the hope that God would intervene to reverse the decision. Failing that, the rejection or denial could always be re-framed as the mysterious and unknowable working of God’s perfect will. In both scenarios, the power of the state was relegated below the power and sovereignty of God. Here then, the position of Messianic Jews towards formal Israeli citizenship was injected with a real sense of ambiguity or indifference (Law 1997, McNevin 2013). As McNevin (2013:197) suggests, paying heed to the ambivalence that often marks claims to citizenship should makes us more attentive to those ‘political claims whose substance and effects cannot be captured on a register of subjection–agency that corresponds to an inside–outside relation with respect to sovereign power and normative regimes’.

While Messianic Jewish demands for and acquisition of formal Israeli citizenship posed a clear oppositional challenge to accepted ethnonational notions of Israeli citizenship, Messianic Jews also moved between and espoused an alternative trans/post-national form of political belonging. It was clear to me that at certain times, my informants’ identity as citizens of the kingdom of God<sup>111</sup> – and as members of the international ‘body of Messiah’<sup>112</sup> - took precedence over and above their ethnic national identity. Put otherwise, when necessary informants could temporarily circumvent official claims of belonging to the Israeli Jewish national collective, and reconstitute, reprioritise and reinsert themselves into the global

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<sup>111</sup> A distinctly New Testament term that has theological roots in the Old Testament narrative of the Israelites. See Philippians 1v27 and 3v20 for its most explicit – and perhaps radical - usage.

<sup>112</sup> This was the Messianic Jewish term employed for the transnational Christian community.

Christian community (Kemp and Raijman 2003, Sabar 2004, Sheringham 2010, Levitt 2004, 2008, C.Brickell 2012, Raijman and Pinsky 2013). Scholarship on the Messianic Jewish community tends to foreground their frequent eschewal of Christian identity. However, this fails to acknowledge their dynamic and strategic movement between and deployment of different religious and ethnic identity.

Crucially, moving between this dualistic citizenry imaginary – what Megoran (2007:44) calls ‘living with two passports’<sup>113</sup> – and the affirmation of a Christian identity is a distinctly oppositional position to take in Israel (Bartram 2011). In Katz’s (2004:247) conceptualisation, this would constitute an ideational act of re-working; the imaginative ‘retooling’ of oneself as a political and social actor. This ideational re-positioning also had distinct material benefits. Positioning oneself within the global Christian community afforded individuals with access to alternative and extra-territorial sources of social, cultural and economic capital beyond the nation-state. Indeed, the role and extent of foreign support and distant solidarity in buttressing the Messianic movement is hard to downplay (Warshawsky 2008). Drawing on the transnational Christian community for material support is redolent of Katz’s (2004:247) observations that oppositional positions of ‘re-working often entail the ‘recalibration of power relations’ through the ‘the redistribution of resources’.

Importantly, for example, positioning oneself as a member of the transnational church community provided various opportunities for Messianic Jewish to find employment in the plethora of Christian organisations working in Israel and Jerusalem in particular. Some worked for the Anglican International School, the Bible Society or GodTV. Others worked for international Christian Zionist organisations such as Christian Friends of Israel, Bridges for Peace, or the International Christian Embassy. Others travelled abroad to secure work or finance because of the celebrated status of Messianic Jews in the international Christian

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<sup>113</sup> Perhaps then, Messianic Jews had tripartite citizenship, as many retained passports from their countries of origin. Making *aliyah* did not lead to the severing of ties of belonging to one’s original nation-state. Indeed, it was seen as prudent to keeping one’s options open in case the Israeli state revoked or denied secure citizenship/residency status, or as ‘a personal risk-aversion strategy in the face of future threats of war’ (Moe 2012:198).

Zionist churches.<sup>114</sup> These employment avenues are vitally important because, as one informant described, Messianic Jews are frequently discriminated against in the work-place.

Another clear instrumental result of this reworking is the way in which Messianic Jewish congregations could garner financial support from the wider Christian church in order to meet material needs that may be otherwise prohibited by restrictive planning policies or societal exclusionary attitudes. Notably, other minority Christian churches in Israel did not garner nearly as much financial aid from the wider Christian church as the Messianic Jewish community (see Kemp and Rajjman 2003, and Saber 2004).<sup>115</sup> As Warshawsky (2008) noted in her study, international church missions ‘continue to provide generous funding, sophisticated programming, training, and materials which the indigenous Believers [Messianic Jews] have difficulty matching in scope and quality’. With a surprising amount of honesty, one of the leaders of a congregation admitted that renting the congregational space was only made possible due to distant solidarity and financial support coming from abroad.

Informant: ‘Everything that has been built – nearly everything that has been built in the land – and all the push to help has come from abroad. Even in the body [of Messianic Jewish congregations] in the land – the body of Messiah. We have over 150 Messianic congregations in the land, and you would not find – if it was 5 percent it would have been good – but you won’t find out of this 2 percent of the congregations in the land that are actually standing on their own two feet. This *kayleb*<sup>116</sup>, and this building that you are seeing today – how much do you think it costs to keep this place open? What it comes here monthly is 8 or 9 thousand dollars per month. And this is just the rent for the place. Who handles this? Do you think it is us? No. Maybe a small percentage is us. At least 60% is not us.’

To conclude this sub-section, a word of nuance. The application of this alternative religeopolitical worldview – and the grounded practices it engendered - was subject

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<sup>114</sup> See Spector (2009) for a thorough examination of this ‘peddle-stool’ phenomenon in the evangelical church.

<sup>115</sup> The financial backing of Messianic Jewish congregations in Israel stands in contrast to the self-funded African and Latin American migrant churches located in Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv. Here, as Kemp and Rajjman (2003) noted, the churches’ activities are funded by its members by way of tithing.

<sup>116</sup> *Kayleb* is the term that Messianic Jews used to describe their congregational meetings (and meeting places).



to a good deal of selective mobilisation. It was drawn on only when necessary to counter those state and societal practices that were deemed unfavourable or exclusionary to the community (Walsh and Keesmaat 2005).

#### **6.4 Resisting borders: Encouraging Messianic Jewish evangelism and *aliyah***

In the Messianic Jewish community there were two oppositional positioning practices - the encouragement of evangelism and *aliyah* - that approached more conventional acts of resistance. Resistance for Katz (2004) is overtly oppositional in character, and involves a critical consciousness that seeks to intentionally confront and redress instances of exclusion. In contrast to re-working and refusal, resistance is driven explicitly by 'a vision of what else could be' (Katz 2004:253).

As I argued earlier, the very existential presence of the Messianic Jewish community constituted a challenge to the ethnic borders of Israeli Jewish citizenship. Hence, any practice that would seek to actively strengthen or bolster the community was viewed with particular disdain by the Israeli Jewish state and society. For instance, Messianic Jewish evangelism was not viewed at all favourably. Whilst at state level, 'Christian' evangelism is not prohibited, there is a pervasive societal assumption that it is illegal.<sup>117</sup>

DW: "Can you perhaps tell me about how Israeli society views Messianic Jewish evangelism?"

Informant: "...They would see it as completely anti-social – whatever anti-social means now. *They would definitely see it as anti-Jewish...*"

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<sup>117</sup> Even academic scholars have perpetuated this belief. In Saber's (2004:421) ethnographic study of African migrant churches in Israel, he states "The churches refrained from missionary activity among Israelis because this was illegal, thus giving up a practice widespread among Pentecostal churches elsewhere'. This is patently not accurate. Whilst forced conversion and proselytizing of minors is illegal in Israel, general evangelism is not.

However, within the private spaces of many Messianic Jewish congregations I often witnessed congregants being encouraged to engage in sensitive and culturally-aware proselytising of non-Messianic Jewish individuals.<sup>118</sup>

Informant: “I want to see believers that are actually ministering the gospel in every place in society...that has the courage to go to any place in society and show their face. I want to see a *keyleh* that has influence in society. But we don’t do it. Where are we? Where are we in society?”

In similar fashion, in order to ensure the growth of Messianic Jewish faith and community, most informants strongly agreed that Messianic Jews living in the Diaspora should make *aliyah* to Israel.<sup>119</sup>

In light of the Israeli state’s rigid immigration and citizenship laws, both of these positions could be thought of as defiant practices of resistance to Orthodox hegemony (Ram 2011). Both the practice of evangelism, and the advocating of *aliyah* constitute an attempt to transcend – or at least redraw – the boundaries imposed by the state and enforced by Jewish religious groups by inviting Jews into a ‘trans-ethnic, trans-territorial faith community faith’ that is anathema to the ethnocentric state (Woods 2012:112).

In her ethnographic study, Warshawsky (2008:90) also observed the unsolvable tension between the ‘official legal position of the Israeli courts and the theological and ideological positions of the Believing community regarding the right and divine calling of Messianic Jews to Aliyah’. As she goes on to state, ‘despite the State’s efforts to legislate Jewish Believers out of the community of Israel, Believers refuse to accept this verdict, continuing to make Aliyah and to frame their returning to the land as a fulfillment of prophecy’ (Warshawsky 2008:135).

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<sup>118</sup> Scholarship exploring the evangelistic fervour of religious groups has tended to frame proselytising as a belligerent, strategic and formulaic obligation, devoid of authentic commitment, meaning or emotion - although see McAlister (2008) and Gerhardt (2008a, 2008b). But for the Messianic Jewish community, converting their fellow Jews is an extremely emotional topic.

<sup>119</sup> At the time of writing, significant civil unrest was occurring in Ukraine (Summer 2014). One informant told me (via email) that this was God’s way of stirring Ukrainian Jews to move to Israel. “Whether there are 70,000 Jews in Ukraine - or maybe three times that - it is clear that they need to make aliyah.”

Here, again, we see that Messianic Jewish theology rendered State policy entirely subordinate to the perceived plan of God to ‘call his people home’ and to ‘save all Israel’. However, it was also acknowledged that encouraging *aliyah* and evangelism was a particularly risky position because it invariably entailed some semblance of social visibility. Revealing ones transgressive beliefs through acts of evangelism or *aliyah* meant a deliberate choice to open oneself up to further discrimination or persecution. However, many of my informants would rather tolerate recrimination action rather than compromise the theologically salvic position they assumed for the nation-state (Loden 2008). Hence, Fox’s (1999:290 my emphasis) claim that ‘the main goal of the adherents of [minority] religions is *survival*’ and that members ‘usually do not attempt to spread their influence outside of their own geographical and social milieu’ is misplaced in this instance. Rather, as I have shown in the foregoing section, minority religious groups such as Messianic Jews often hold ambiguous views vis-à-vis their own survival and safety (Woods 2012:123).<sup>120</sup>

In conclusion to this first substantive section, it should be clear that many Messianic practices acted to position the community in opposition to Statist political regimes and logics. I have described material, discursive and ideational acts deployed in order to cope with, rework and resist the exclusionary ethnicised borders of belonging in Israel. However, these observations are complicated with the introduction of a paradox; one that becomes the subject of the second substantive section of this chapter. At times, practices within Messianic congregations appeared to affirm or reinforce the ethnicised and ethnonational logics that underpinned the communities’ exclusion in the first place. It is to these paradoxical practices that I now turn, with a focus on the geopolitical imaginations they made possible.

## 6.5 Reasserting borders

My informants did not simply look to oppositional and reactionary acts in order to position themselves vis-à-vis Israeli state and society. After all, whilst existing as a fundamental challenge to the boundaries of Israeli Jewish exclusion/inclusion, the

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<sup>120</sup> Woods (2012:114) discovered that similar evangelical Christian religeopolitical imaginations in Sri Lanka stimulated ‘a drive to realise Christianity’s geopolitical vision, irrespective of the consequences.’

Messianic Jewish community still strove for formal recognition as equal members and citizens in the national polity. As a result, they took every opportunity to reassert and foreground their ethnic and national identification. This primarily entailed positioning themselves in a way that complied with the hegemonic State-led geopolitical culture. In her study of Messianic Jews, Warshawsky (2008:104) noted that one of the immediate ‘goal[s] of Israeli Believers is...to exhibit practices which demonstrate allegiance to their Jewish nation’. One obvious example of this positioning was their voluntary conscription in the IDF. In a society with a strong militarist ethos, serving in the army acts as the ‘ultimate site for participation, contribution, and sacrifice to the [Israeli] state’ (Stadler 2008:215).<sup>121</sup>

However, the following substantive section focuses on the more everyday positioning practices through which Jewish Israeli ethnonational borders were *reasserted*. Specifically, I explore Messianic Jewish leveraging of Jewish ‘identity capital’ through the mobilisation of various Judaic materialities and symbols (Cote 1996, Levitt 2008). Although it remains wholly contested, the emphasis of one’s Jewish identity – through both formal and informal practices - constituted a vital positioning practice for Messianic Jews in the on-going struggle for recognition in the Israeli Jewish nation-state. Indeed, emphasising shared Jewish identity is a commonplace practice employed by members of other minority groups in Israel such as Ethiopian and Mizrahi Jews (Leibovitz 2007, Mizrahi and Herzog 2012, Blumenthal 2013). Both Kimmerling (2001) and Al-Haj (2002) term this form of positioning strategy ‘instrumentalized ethnicity’. As Lamont and Mizrahi (2012:373) argue, the assertion of a Jewish identity is an important ‘cultural repertoire that Jewish minorities mobilise in order to ‘empower themselves as essential members of the nation’ (Moe 2012:202). Hence, the following section critically explores the material celebration of Jewish ethnic identity in Messianic congregations as a positioning practice of ‘instrumentalized ethnicity’ (Al-Haj 2014). Although I retain my focus on the spaces of the congregation, it is worth noting that many of the material practices detailed below could also be found in Messianic Jewish homes (see Kallus 2004, Tzfadia and Yacobi 2011, K.Brickell 2012a, 2012b).

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<sup>121</sup> Indeed, serving in the IDF was one way of guaranteeing individuals and their parents Israeli citizenship or secure residency.

Furthermore, measures taken to be included in the hegemonic national groups often occur in parallel to the exclusion of other minority groups (Tzfadia and Yacobi 2011). Groups like Messianic Jews will often position themselves as distinct and distant from other marginal groups – such as Palestinians – in order to afford legitimacy to their own claims<sup>122</sup> (Yiftachel 2006, Tzfadia and Yacobi 2011). Moe (2012:148), for instance, noted how Mizrahi Jews reasserted and redeployed ‘oriental stigma and colonial racism in their descriptions of Arab and Russian others’ in order to differentiate themselves and smooth their participation into Israeli society. Similarly, Blumenthal (2013:18) argues that individuals ‘occupying the lowest social strata – working class Russians and the Jews of Arab descent...demonstrate their Israeli-ness before the wealthy and politically dominant Ashkenazi elite by acting out against Arabs in exaggerated displays of violence and racism’.

## **6.6 Reasserting borders: Symbolic politics in Messianic Jewish congregations**

The reassertion of Jewish ethnic identity was produced and consumed in congregational spaces through the predominance of Jewish cultural artifacts, symbols, representations, repertoires and rhythms within.<sup>123</sup> Many were drawn from traditional Judaic religious motifs in order to assert a strong continuity and shared unity with the practices of the historical religious Jewish community. A reoccurring symbolic artifact was, for example, the Jewish menorah. In several congregations these elaborate seven armed candelabras took centre-stage at the front of the congregational space. In addition, its pattern was stitched onto decorative flags and banners that adorned walls, its logo was used on congregational literature or as a background watermark to PowerPoint slides of talks or song words. Other pictures, replete with Jewish religious symbolism, hung on the walls of another congregation. One memorable painting depicted a huge Lion draped in a Jewish *tallit* sitting in

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<sup>122</sup> In Israel, social distancing has easily turned to more sinister spatial projects of dispossession and ‘de-Arabisation’ (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003:679).

<sup>123</sup> That said, I did visit two congregations that did not trade in either Christian or Jewish symbols. The lack of symbols was surprising and noteworthy. These exceptions should be kept in mind during the following discussion.

front of the Temple Mount. One congregation kept a large, imposing Torah scroll as its centrepiece.

Congregational spaces were also places of uniquely Jewish ritual and practice. The *shofar*<sup>124</sup> was blown in one congregation before the leader delivered the sermon. The priestly Levite practice of blowing two silver trumpets occurred at another. Jewish dance was incorporated into the worship of at least two congregations I visited and Hebrew worship songs were sung to music that employed Jewish motifs.

A number of congregations observed a unique weekly liturgical rhythm organised around the *parashah* – the weekly Torah portion.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, the Jewish *shema*<sup>126</sup> was dialogically recited or sung every week at some congregations. At another, the Aaronic blessing<sup>127</sup> was recited at the end of every meeting. Through these practices – with their own internal lilt and rhythms – Messianic Jewish congregations identified and (re)calibrated themselves with Orthodox Jewish temporality of life.

Holding celebration services for the litany of Jewish high holidays extended this unique cadence. Here, congregations would reinsert Christian holidays into their original Jewish contexts. Pentecost and Easter were celebrated as the Jewish holidays of Shavuot and Passover. Early in my research I visited a Messianic congregation in order to observe the start of the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Females and males sat separately in the congregational space. Men covered their heads with traditional Orthodox *tallits*. The congregants followed traditional Orthodox liturgy and practice but simply added the name Yeshua to certain dialogical sections. In practice, there were, it appeared, few differences from this Messianic congregation and the Orthodox Jewish synagogue across the street. Hence, Messianic Jews gathered in communities where time was conjugated and governed entirely in Jewish terms; where individuals related to, and inhabited, a

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<sup>124</sup> The *shofar* is an instrument made from the horn of a ram. It is usually sounded to mark various Jewish religious events.

<sup>125</sup> This was often supplemented with a reading from the New Testament.

<sup>126</sup> The *shema* refers to a Jewish prayer derived from Deuteronomy. Loosely translated it states ‘Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One.’

<sup>127</sup> Number 6:22-27. For a rich reflection on the ways in which the practice of ‘blessing’ implants certain socio-political imaginations see Smith (2012:167).

particular temporality that was largely out of joint with the traditional Christian calendar.

Similarly - and in stark contrast to section 6.3 - the need to emphasise Jewish identity resulted in a parallel desire to disaffiliate from various Christian materialities and practice. For example, I found that most Messianic Jewish congregations largely eschewed traditional Christian symbolism or material practice. I did not observe a crucifix in any of the congregations visited. Although basic Christian phraseological and theological constructions were common, most Christian lexicon was altered to re-emphasise a Jewish heritage. As Erez (2013) noted ‘Christian practices such as speaking in tongues, intercession, and baptism (known as immersion in the Messianic Jewish vernacular)...were presented as “Jewish.”’ In a process akin to the de-Arabisation of the Mizrahim (Tzfadia and Yacobi 2011), this de-Christianisation constituted a positioning strategy predicated on de-emphasising, denying or erasing transgressive religious identities.<sup>128</sup> It was hoped that this eschewal would transform the ‘negative meanings associated with their collective identity, to challenge stereotypes about their group and to reenact, enact, or demand new forms of personal interaction’ (Lamont 2009:155).

How was this extensive trade in Jewish material and praxis understood within the community? There is no doubt that they were interpreted by most as a positioning of ‘instrumentalized ethnicity’; self-expressions of a hitherto contested Jewish identity for the purposes of preservation and increased recognition (Kimmerling 2001, Al-Haj 2002).

DW: “I have noticed that Messianic congregations are places that are full of Jewish symbols – it seems quite strange for me – coming as a non-Jewish Christian from England. I wondered if you could talk to me about that?”

Informant: “It’s because we want to show our Jewish identity - to ourselves and to others - because we believe in Jesus. It’s an identity issue...We grew up with extreme persecution from other Jewish people...other Jews in this society. For us to be recognised as Jewish is a huge deal. You have to understand that we have to always fight so hard for this.”

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<sup>128</sup> This eschewal of Christian identity was partly the result of institutional Christianity’s prolonged legacy of anti-Semitism.

For others, proving the Jewishness of their beliefs played an extended role. These material practices were employed as a tool for culturally-relevant, indigenous evangelism of non-Messianic Jews.<sup>129</sup>

Informant: “We have those [Jewish symbols] because we want to build a culturally-relevant body of Messiah – a congregation where it would not be strange for other Jewish people. So there’s got to be something Jewish about it all.”

Certainly, none of my informants noted anything problematic in their extensive deployment. Whilst this material culture may have been largely innocent of intentional political motive it was significant because it helped to prime individuals towards certain geopolitical orientations. In the following section, I argue that the strong material reassertion of Jewish identity postured the community as complicitous in two interrelated geopolitical logics; Judaisation and ethnonationalism (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003, Yiftachel 2006, Ram 2011, Tzfidia and Yacobi 2011).

## **6.7 Reasserting borders: Banal Judaisation**

Taking account of the geopolitical context of an intractable and polarised ethnonational conflict, and in a society where ethnicity determines access to resources and power: the advancement of a dominant Jewish ethnic identity in Messianic congregations cannot be read as unproblematic or apolitical. Through ‘banal Judaisation’, the communities’ positioning practices left little doubt as to the primacy of Jewish identity and reinforced the imaginative boundaries of the dominant ethnonational group.

Invoking the term ‘banal Judaisation’ draws on Oren Yiftachel’s wide corpus of work on the spatial processes of Jewish ethnicisation that manifests throughout Israel-Palestine. Yiftachel (2006:7) focuses his critical attention on explicit macro-

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<sup>129</sup> This tactic is viewed with ambivalence by non-Messianic Jews. As Erez (2013) states, ‘their consistent efforts to blur the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity felt suspicious. It was clear to me that the spiritual rebirth that I was encouraged to undergo would mean transforming my secular-Jewish identity into a Christian religious sectarian one.’



scale manifestations of territorial ethnicisation in ‘the armed forces, the logic in the flow of capital and the location of development, the establishment of the legal system, the shaping of public culture and gender relations, and the conduct of politics’. However, he rarely examines the more mundane microspaces of ethnicisation and the ways in which its politics is incorporated in everyday lives. However, by bringing Yiftachel’s work into conversation with Billig’s seminal work on (1995) ‘banal nationalism’ I suggest that the congregational practices described above can be said to inculcate an exclusivist culture of ethnic homogeneity in an entirely unobtrusive and ordinary manner. In Billig’s (1995) formulation, orientations of national solidarity are powerfully reinforced in the everyday lives of citizen-subjects through subtle and repeating reminders of the nation. These reminders occur in manners that are ‘so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding’ (Billig 1995:8). In similar fashion, the Judaised identity of the congregation was impressed through the material and symbolic repetition of mundane objects and practices; many that were also pervasive and normalised in wider Israeli Jewish society (First and Hermann 2009).

The Messianic Jewish propensity to reassert and reproduce Judaised spaces was reminiscent of Nick Megoran’s (2006a) critical reading of a Church of England’s 9/11 national memorial service. Here, the service expressed genuine grief but - in Megoran’s view - unintentionally positioned the congregation in alignment with a very particular geopolitical scripting of recent events that advocated a militaristic response. Megoran (2006a:562) argues that, ‘although most of the parties involved in organising the service sincerely believed that they had crafted an apolitical event to enable grieving and provide comfort, the service articulated a geopolitical narrative’. Similarly, I suggest that Messianic Jewish congregational spaces – through the foregrounding of Jewish identity - are far from apolitical or neutral spaces.

Moreover, the ‘banality’ of the congregational Judaisation was impressed and directed through a pedagogical process of embodied habituation and formative practice (Haldrup 2006, Haldrup *et al.* 2008). It was crucial that many of the Jewish practices noted above were not simply representational or discursive. Rather, they were embodied, performed and corporeal, involving singing, dancing, shouting, hearing music, blowing trumpets, waving flags, or praying. The ethnic identity

claims entangled in such acts are cumulatively impressed upon - or absorbed into - the imagination in 'automated' and 'habitualised' ways; ways that remain unacknowledged as imaginatively formative (Haldrup 2006, Haldrup *et al.* 2008, Smith 2012).<sup>130</sup> As Smith (2012:109) claims, tactile routines posture 'habits of the imagination within us'. It is through these repeated rituals that our geopolitical loyalties come to be aimed, directed and shaped.

Crucially, it was difficult to distinguish many of these Judaised practices from a more intentional alignment with the dominant ethnonationalist culture in Israeli society.

Informant: "I can't really describe why I felt so uncomfortable [in the congregation]. It just felt very nationalist to me. Blowing the *shofar* and stuff...and the lyrics of the songs..."

DW: "Isn't that simply a culturally Jewish practice? Why do you describe it as nationalist?"

Informant: "Because in the context of the conflict it just felt really kind of exclusive and Zionist"

At times, congregational material practices overtly and intentionally aligned with nationalistic positionings. For example, in at least two of the congregations, the Israeli flag was placed in a central and prominent position. At times congregants would wave the national flag during times of musical worship. At other times, it was not so clear. Kimmerling (2001) and Yiftachel (2006) both attest to the fact that the boundary between ethnic self-determinism and ethnonationalism often becomes blurred in Israeli spaces. Whilst I acknowledge that it is problematic to reduce all Messianic congregational Jewish observances and symbols to examples of ethnonationalism, I – like previous researchers of Israeli Jewish spaces – found it difficult to 'disentangle Jewish rituals from struggles for Jewishness, traditions from ethnicity, and the rhetoric of Israeli nationalism from Bible-based liturgies' (Caron 2011:74).

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<sup>130</sup> The embodied action of singing a national anthem seems pertinent here. As Smith (2012:173) states, 'singing is clearly tethered to identity: what we sing says something significant about who we are – and *whose* we are.'

The problem arises in that many of the Jewish symbols used in Messianic congregations have palimpsestic political and ideological histories. Most have, at one time or another, been appropriated by - and put to work in the service of - the civil religion of the secular and Zionist Israeli nation-state (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983). As Ram (2011:35) states, the early secular Zionist project sought to forge an Israeli civil religion by appropriating the arsenal of Judaic religious symbols, blurring 'components of the ancient Hebraic past with the modern national project. In this frame the Bible became a kind of a secular geopolitical guide to the emerging national culture'. The ubiquitous presence of the menorah in Messianic congregational space is, for example, a powerful ideological symbol because of the ethnonationalist sentiments that it now carries. The menorah is one of the oldest and most quintessential Jewish symbols in existence. For most of its history it was emblematic of religious sentiments associated with holiness and the Jewish temple. Drawing on this centrality, the menorah was chosen as the emblem of the Jewish legion in World War 1 by Ze'ev Jabotinsky (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1990).<sup>131</sup> The early Zionist project secularised the artifact, drawing on its symbolism to inculcate support for a return to the promised land. The menorah was adopted as the emblematic insignia of the Israeli state after its independence in 1948 (Handelman and Shamgar-Handelman 1990). With its symbolic resonance of Israeli statehood confirmed, work was undertaken to further establish it a national symbol (Mayer 2005). Today, it is used on coins and stamps; standing as a symbol of 'continuity, hope, and power, and signified its peoples survival and revival in the Land of Israel' (Mayer 2005:10).

This material practice within congregational spaces betrayed a lack of recognition of the ethnic diversity within Israeli society. Expressions of alternative ethnic/national claims were backgrounded to the point of absence; if not absent, then certainly 'out of place' (Cresswell 1996).<sup>132</sup> There was, for instance, little or no feasible space for the mutual inclusion of Palestinian Christians in the construction and expression of

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<sup>131</sup> He would later use it on the emblem of his revisionist Zionist youth movement, Betar.

<sup>132</sup> The only time where Arabic cultural expression found its way into a congregational service was when one congregation sang a worship song in Arabic. The novelty of this occurrence was apparent and enjoyable; congregants sang along enthusiastically and jovially. In this act, the absence of alternative identities was suddenly and unexpectedly ruptured and made present. Different framings of Palestinians are addressed further in the following chapter.

Messianic identity and praxis.<sup>133</sup> As a result, only a few Palestinian individuals attended Messianic Jewish congregations. Often these were ‘good Arabs’ who, by way of theological conversion, forewent their ethnic/national claims and subscribed to pro-Jewish Israeli ethnonational sentiments.<sup>134</sup> Others – usually Israeli Palestinians – attended Messianic congregations as an intentional act of reconciliation. I asked two such individuals<sup>135</sup> about the ethnonational congregational spaces. Their responses indicated that congregations were a stark reminder that they had little chance for self-expression themselves.

Informant: “Of course, when I see these things in Jewish congregations, it’s sad for me. I’m sad about it. It saddens my heart. They are so attached to these things. In Palestinian churches, you don’t find Palestinian flags, or Palestinian symbols. I think they are attached to their culture more than they are to Christ unfortunately... At many points in the past these practices made me feel uncomfortable, but God has taught me how to look at these now. If I go to the congregations just to judge these practices, I will not enjoy it. I hope God changes this mentality.”

Informant: “It’s a boundary practice. Some of them know it. Some of them don’t. And some of them are beginning to awake to it because its heresy. It’s syncretism. It’s very hard for them to see it. When you put nation and religion together that leads to patriotism and fascism. That is dangerous. And that is where Israeli and Messianic Jews are moving into.”

In one conversation, a Messianic informant explicitly pointed to the presence of these ‘Arab’ individuals as evidence of his congregation’s progressive ethnic accommodation. The speed with which the “Arab” congregant was marked out was more indicative of the fact that this was considered extraordinary, rather than normal. Moreover, that attention was drawn to this individual as an example of inclusivity was redolent of the double-play of ‘selective openness’ that is often evident in ethnocratic societies (Yiftachel 2006:19). Here, a small number of

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<sup>133</sup> At a wider level, it was clear that there was spatial and mental segregation between Arab and Jewish congregations in Jerusalem. Palestinian Christians were rarely spoken of, or referred to, in Messianic congregations. I went to a joint Jewish-Palestinian service only twice during my year of research. One was an annual collaborative worship service aimed at young adults and organized by a Christian reconciliation organization. The other was a joint Easter service held at the Protestant Garden Tomb.

<sup>134</sup> See Sturm’s (2014) intriguing work on Palestinian Christian Zionists.

<sup>135</sup> This Palestinian informant told me, “In messianic congregations you will always find some Arabs, but in Arab congregations you will never find Jews. This is because Jews feel way way more superior than Arabs. Whereas Arabs feel more inferior to Jews. So Arabs are happy to go to their congregations. Maybe Arabs go there to feel more special – to feel less Arab – because they also have an identity crisis. Some Palestinian Christians are even Zionist”

inclusive spatial practices are introduced or emphasised in order to conceal or legitimise a greater number of exclusionary ones. Hence, whilst there was room for the recognition those “Arab” individuals deemed as non-threatening, there was little room for wider Palestinian concerns, collectivity or narrative.<sup>136</sup>

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which religious groups take up ambiguous and contingent positions vis-à-vis the dominant statist geopolitical culture. I illustrated the ways in which Israel’s citizenship borders and ethnonational *raison d’être* were both actively contested and reaffirmed in the everyday lives of my informants. I noted that religious minorities - such as the Messianic Jewish community – engage in a range of positioning spatial-practices to secure their existence and minimise everyday discrimination. These can include both oppositional acts used to challenge exclusionary norms, or practices that attempt to gain favour with the hegemonic population.<sup>137</sup>

In the first half of the chapter, I illustrated how my informants used locational positioning strategies – in conjunction with the resources, identity and theology of the Christian tradition - to refuse, rework and resist the effects of their societal exclusion. Drawing on Cindi Katz (2004) I parceled out and nuanced more generalised notions of everyday resistance – illustrating that it often takes ideational, material and discursive forms with varying effects. This contributes to an understanding of everyday religious practice as formative of a ‘dissident’ geopolitical position (Nyroos 2001, West 2006).

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<sup>136</sup> This is an attitude that is prevalent in both Israeli society (see Rabinowitz (2001) and Moe (2012)) and the state. As Ram (2011:65) argues “The state behaves as if there are “Arab individuals,” who compose the “Arab minority,” but there is no “Arab collectivity” in the formal political sphere.”

<sup>137</sup> In doing so, this chapter contributes to a growing corpus of work accounting for minority ethno-political positioning within Israel. Most of these studies assay how members of minority groups carve out a place in the political space of the Israeli ‘ethnocratic multicultural’ nation-state (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2003, Al-haj 2004:681, Leibovitz 2007). The positioning practices of both non-religious ‘out-groups’ (Kemp et al. 2000, Markowitz et al. 2003, Al-haj 2004, Yiftachel 2006, Bartram 2011, Lamont and Mizrachi 2012, Mizrachi and Herzog 2012, Mizrachi and Zawdu 2012), and religious minorities have been explored (Kemp and Rajjman 2003, Anteby-Yemini 2004, Sabar 2004, Liebelt 2008, Kalir 2009, Rajjman and J.Pinsky 2011, Rajjman and Y.Pinsky 2013).

In the second half of the chapter, I illustrated the ways in which excluded minority groups can incorporate into their everyday lives the symbols, discourses, and practices of the hegemonic establishment as an attempt to align themselves with, and assume, the identity of ‘insiders’. In the case of the Messianic Jewish community, this process entailed the mobilisation of certain Israeli Jewish ethnonational markers. However, by attempting to position themselves more favourably inside the Jewish camp by way of an ‘instrumentalised ethnicity’, the Messianic community drew their own exclusionary borders in accordance with the dominant ethno-national ideology (Warshawsky 2008, Erez 2013). As Yiftachel (2006) and Moe (2012) both argue, it is not unusual for minority groups to actively participate in ethnocratic projects by separating themselves out from, and excluding, other minority groups who are external to the dominant ethno-group.<sup>138</sup> However, Yiftachel (2006:38) argues, ‘both types of minorities are trapped in positions that allow them little space to mobilise political or identity projects that threaten, challenge, or even subvert the logic of the ethnocratic regime.’ Ultimately, this placed the Messianic Jewish community in a remarkable position whereby they affirmed - and were complicit in - the very ethnicised ideology that sealed both their own societal exclusion, and that of Palestinians.

Here, the notion of ‘complicity’ is useful in order to nuance simplistic binary accounts of resistance or deference, and proffer a more tangled reading of Messianic geopolitical positioning. As Probyn-Rapsey (2007:68) suggests, the notion of complicity connects individuals to processes, ideas and structures ‘not least of all that which [they] might hope to keep at a distance’. Moreover, notions of complicity and indifference have been shown to have a complex and overlapping conceptual relationship (Lillehammer 2014). The Messianic Jewish pursuit of their own societal inclusion both lead to – and in certain cases, depended upon, remaining indifferent to - and excluding - the Palestinian ‘Other’.

Exploring the communities’ everyday positioning practices has added to my ongoing account of Messianic Jewish indifference towards the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. My informants’ positioning vis-à-vis issues of identity,

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<sup>138</sup> Minority groups such as Mizrahi or Russian Jews have been enrolled in the ethnocratic project in order to face off the ‘demographic danger’ of an Arab majority in Israel (see Al-haj 2004).

citizenship, religious freedom, rights to employment and access to space were identified as far 'bigger' and more pressing issues than the conflict itself. However, my informants subsequently took positions vis-à-vis these issues in ways that had pertinence to the conflict. Put differently, the 'bigger things' that demanded my informants' everyday attention were still formative in the shaping of their ultimate geopolitical orientations. The wider argument is, therefore, that our geopolitical orientations will always be shaped and influenced by everyday situations that can seem – on the surface – to be entirely unconnected from broader geopolitical concerns. This adds to the thesis' broader claim that our everyday geopolitical orientations are processually attuned through a wide and unexpected array of daily encounters, interactions and practices.

## Chapter 7:

# Encountering the conflict: propositional theology and religious practice

‘Although the ancient Israelites and Judeans had sovereignty over the country for only 1,300 of its 10,000 years of recorded history...in Zionist thought our claims trump any others, including the 1,300 years of Muslim rule.’

(Halper 2007:71)

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

<sup>44</sup>But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

(Matthew 5v43-48, The Bible, NIV)

### 7.0 Introduction

My informants, I have argued, remained largely indifferent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead their lives were preoccupied with alternative place-based hierarchies of concern; with issues of ordinary citizenship, societal borders and positioning that affected them more acutely on a daily basis. However, at various points, the conflict did become the topic of everyday conversation. Often these



moments of geopolitical utterances were shot through with theological framings and religious narratives.

I have - until now - been relatively reticent to explore propositional theology as geopolitically formative in everyday life. This has been an intentional tactic used to disrupt the priority that discourse and representations holds in critical geopolitical scholarship (Muller 2009), especially in that pertaining to religion. However, theological narratives and framings did appear to hold significance in the formation of my informants' everyday geopolitical orientations, especially vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And hence, maintaining a commitment to the lived reality of my informants, but deliberately ignoring discursive religeopolitical constructions, would be disingenuous. I do not want to artificially set everyday, lived practice against discourse, rather - following Martin Muller (2009) – I view political utterance as a 'discursive practice' that should be incorporated into any analysis of the everyday.

In the first half of the chapter, I interrogate the biblical narratives and associated theologies that were creatively employed in everyday life in order to make the Israeli-Palestinian conflict knowable to Messianic Jewish believers. This serves as a call for political geographers to pay critical attention to a much broader array of theologies, especially those that are made manifest in specific cultural context and spatial formations. In the second half of the chapter, I look to the ways in which these commonplace religeopolitical framings were constantly being disrupted and/or reinforced by alternative theologies, beliefs and everyday encounters. Specifically, I investigate the potentiality that a theo-ethic of love carries to disturb the blunt geopolitical understandings of the conflict explored in the preceding section. This section does much to argue that propositional theology or belief cannot easily be mapped onto geopolitical practice in any simple or straightforward way.

## **7.1 Absent congregational geopolitics**

There was a distinct geography to the spaces where religeopolitical utterance occurred (or did not) during my research. The previous chapter argued that

congregational spaces were sites that were formative of particular geopolitical orientations through material-practice. Yet, I was frequently struck by the absence of explicit religeopolitical utterance in the spaces of congregations, especially that which addressed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Take, for example, this quote from a sermon delivered in the midst of heightened hostilities in November 2012.<sup>139</sup> During the previous week rockets had been fired from Gaza towards Jerusalem, the first time this had occurred in forty years. The conflict had forcefully broken into the everyday lives of Jerusalemites. I arrived at one particular Messianic Jewish congregation fully expecting to hear a religeopolitical interpretation of recent events. Instead, the pastor stated:

‘We will not be speaking about Hamas, or the violence, or the ceasefire. And the reason for not speaking about these matters is because these issues are not in the realm of responsibility of anyone in this room and it won’t really help you in a practical way. And I feel like, as a teacher in the *keyleh*, we need to give you tools and keys, some practical coping, of daily life. I know it may seem odd to you because I’m an Israeli, and every Israeli tries to be a Prime Minister better than the Prime Minister – but we will not enter these discussions today.’

My surprise belied my (mistaken) expectations that overt political utterance would/should occur in congregational spaces at such times. These expectations were predicated upon two prior assumptions. Firstly, as noted in Chapter 2, geopolitical literature exploring Christian Zionism foregrounds the sharp political discourse of its proponents. In terms of theological belief, Messianic Jews share much in common with Christian Zionists and thus I expected these beliefs to be articulated in similarly forceful ways. However, the pastor’s self-administered silence stands in stark contrast to the explicit religeopolitical utterances that Dittmer and Sturm (2010) explore. Secondly, the absence of overt political speech differed from the Messianic Jewish community I worked with during my Masters research. Here, overt geopolitical sermons/congregational meetings occurred even at times of relative peace (Webb 2011). My assumption that this would be normal for all Messianic Jewish was clearly misinformed.

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<sup>139</sup> Operation Pillar of Defense.

To my mind, the pastor's reticence points more generally to the hesitancy within some evangelically-inflected communities to engage in overt political discourse in congregational spaces. This ambiguous political positioning is perhaps more widespread in the evangelical tradition than (critical geopolitical) scholarship accounts for. Recently, for example, Sutherland (2014:27) observed that – despite a purported post-Christendom radicalisation of evangelical Christians - many evangelical churches actively ‘dodg[e] political material and choreograph[ing] meetings so that very few people have a remit to talk or participate in individually expressive ways’. In his year-long ethnography in a Glaswegian church, ‘only two issues related to politics were addressed to the whole congregation’ (Sutherland 2014:27).

In other ways, evangelical political disengagement should not be an unsurprising or unfamiliar position. It is difficult to imagine the fact that well into the latter half of the twentieth century some evangelical fundamentalists were criticised for being politically passive and socially disengaged (Harding 2001). Indeed, there is a long history of ambivalent political positioning that can often be missed due to our academic (over)focus on overtly political fundamentalist groups (Smith 2012). Even today, the Catholic and tradition church denominations seem far more at ease with political engagements than their evangelical brothers (Duncan 2011).

Hence, rather than encouraging socio-structural and political critique, much Messianic Jewish congregational discourse had a decidedly private and individualised bent; focusing primarily on the spiritual significance of personal salvation, devotion, obedience and relationship with God. This is emphasised in the quote above when the pastor avoids talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because ‘it won't really help *you* in a practical way’. Here, the indifference shown to the conflict within congregational discourse was a clear example of ‘blinkered indifference’ (Lillehammer 2014); that is, a lack of engagement or concern caused by the dynamic pursuit of one's own ends (see Figure 6). Congregants appeared to be more engaged in individual religious self-critique and betterment, often to the point of self-distraction. This individualistic focus finds its more immediate genealogy in the ‘Holiness’ tradition arising from 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodism; a tradition that has heavily influenced evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. This tradition is

influenced itself by the Reformation ideals of personal conversion/salvation, Wesleyan dissemination of German Pietism's 'heart-centred' spirituality, and the Anabaptist propensity for radical political withdrawal. The combination of these leanings culminates in an emphasis on personal purity and less on socio-political structural engagement. Moreover, such leanings are also encouraged by modern and secular-infused ideas about the continued privatisation of religion (Smith 2006, Tse 2014).

The religeopolitical views I go on to explore in this chapter were, therefore, gleaned not from congregational discourse but from ethnographic interviews and conversations that occurred outside of formal religious spaces. This points to the notion that the forming of religeopolitical attunements can never be located solely within institutional religious settings. Instead, individuals creatively constructed imaginaries of their life worlds outside the walls of the congregation.

As the remainder of this chapter deals primarily with theological narrative, it is important also to note that the Messianic Jewish community - as a formerly diasporic group - is made up of individuals heralding from a diverse array of Judeo-Christian traditions and persuasions. Messianic Jews – like any other denomination of Christianity – are individualistic and diverse, making it difficult to delineate theological and religeopolitical commitments in any clear way (Munayer and Loden 2014). As Rabbitts (2013:37) states, 'the intensities and stabilities of faith as a form of meaning-making are...multiple and unstable...rather than being essential or intrinsic, being performatively produced through social and embodied practice and discourse'. I was constantly made aware that individuals' theological beliefs were fragmentary, compartmentalised, inconsistent, and filled with gaps and tensions. This complexity should be held front and centre in critical geopolitics' dealings with people of faith.

## **7.2 Scripture as (flexible) geopolitical guide**

When the topic of the conflict did arise in everyday conversations, most of my informants invoked the authority of the Bible – and the Old Testament in particular

- as a primary source for geopolitical understanding and knowledge. This is unsurprising given the community's genealogical roots in evangelicalism, and the concomitant adherence to a doctrine of the perspicuity and inerrancy of biblical scripture.

DW: "Are there ways in which a Messianic believer would approach the conflict that would be different from non-Messianic Israeli Jew?"

Informant: "I try to look at it through the lens of the scriptures to understand it, to get perspective on it, because that gives you a different mindset. For the Messianic believer, that is the main difference, would be to see it through that context of scripture, to say, 'well, we *really* understand why it's happening.'"

As I argued in Chapter 2, much geopolitical analysis has explored the ways by which certain religious movements envision and encounter contemporary geopolitical events through a narrow set of eschatological and apocalyptic passages (Sturm, 2006, Dittmer 2007b, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, Dittmer and Sturm 2010). Whilst, at times, I was aware that my informants were prone to this form of eschatological geopolitical speculation, it was generally not something that was explicitly evident in everyday conversation about the conflict. Instead, informants sought more immediate scriptural explanations for the events that they saw occurring around them. Some even expressed theological wariness towards geopolitical eschatological imaginaries.

Informant: "We aren't stupid. We know that prophecy is complicated. I know some believers have crazy beliefs about prophecy. Their interpretations are easy to laugh at. I know this."

Hence, macro-territorial claims were predicated on Zionist theologies of land, and associated but assorted notions of election, covenant and calling. These inherently spatial theologies are widely explored elsewhere and stand beyond the scope of this chapter (see Davies 1982, Shilhav 1985, 2007, Wright 1990, Brueggemann 2002, Wallace 2006, Sizer 2007, Burge 2010, Stern 2000, Loden 2008, 2012, Juster 2012, Hedding 2012).

Crucially though, in terms of their everyday encounters with the circumstantial happenings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my informants would look to the bible as a geopolitical guide in an immediate, expansive and flexible manner. What has come to be known monolithically as the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict' – in reality – encompasses wide and often disparate range of events and actors. Therefore, making explanatory sense of these diverse manifestations is no mean feat. Accordingly, individuals drew on - and moved between - a varied range of biblical (meta)narratives and propositional theologies in order to understand their messy realities.

Importantly, my informants deployed a hermeneutical strategy of continuity and parallelism wherein they sought situational analogies in the Old Testament in order to inform their understandings of contemporary geopolitical events. Put otherwise, they matched and paralleled contemporary instances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to ancient religious stories and characters. Almost every event or actor pertaining to the conflict led to the invocation of a biblical narrative in order to explain the situation or justify a particular response. This hermeneutic was undoubtedly aided by the fact that the Old Testament canon recounts a lengthy, varied and unstable period of ancient near eastern geopolitical history. A cursory reading of the Old Testament shows that it depicts a wide range of conflicts, allegiances, conquests, exiles, invasions and occupations involving numerous tribes, nations and empires. This narrative diversity meant that contemporary geopolitical occurrences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were often found to have corresponding biblical antecedents. However, if one were to truly persist in forging geopolitical parallels between the ancient Israelites and the modern-day inhabitants of Israel, one would have to concede that there are just as many differences as there are similarities.

That aside, looking to these analogous stories played a number of different imaginative functions in everyday life. Firstly, the mapping of geopolitical parallels appeared to bring consolatory comfort to my informants. It was important that their current geopolitical insecurities were seen not to be new, but to have biblical precedent.

Secondly, identifying with/as the Israelite biblical characters and linking geopolitical milieus across time was part of a specific Messianic reading of the bible; one used to forge a sense of unbroken ancestral continuity to the ancient Israelites. In light of the contested Jewish identity of Messianic believers – as explored in the two preceding chapters - a hermeneutical reading that affirms Jewish heritage – if only in an imaginative way - is not at all surprising.<sup>140</sup> As Munayer and Loden (2014:n.p) state, ‘for the Jesus-believing Jew, the Scriptures are not only read, but are also experienced as an integral part of his or her history....this makes the relationship with the biblical text an existential reality experienced as a deep bond and a sense of continuity with the Jewish people throughout the centuries’ (Munayer and Loden 2014).

Thirdly, analogous stories were used to predict and direct the outcome of contemporary geopolitical happenstance. For example, many of my informants did not simply read scriptural narratives as analogous. Instead, they deployed a creative hermeneutic that allowed any biblical passage – regardless of literary genre - to have quasi-prophetic character. Put simply, any biblical narrative recounting an ancient geopolitical event could be viewed as a prediction that a similar incident would reoccur. One particular passage was frequently proffered in this prophetic manner as a way to understand the unstable regional geopolitical milieu in the wake of the ‘Arab Spring’. On several occasions it was claimed that modern day Israel was living in a ‘Psalm 83 time’. This particular Psalm recounts the geopolitical allegiances that were constantly arising against the Israelite people, and addresses the perpetual threat of invasion. The Psalmist beseeches Yahweh to fend off and deliver the Israelites from foreign enemies.

<sup>1</sup> O God, do not remain silent;  
do not turn a deaf ear,  
do not stand aloof, O God.

<sup>2</sup> See how your enemies growl,  
how your foes rear their heads.

<sup>3</sup> With cunning they conspire against your people;  
they plot against those you cherish.

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<sup>140</sup> As Messianic Jewish theologian Mark Kinzer (2012:44) states, placed-based contextual settings ‘will shape the question we address to the [biblical] text, the concepts and the terms we use to answer those questions, and our selection of the portions of the text that speak most directly to our question and therefore seem to be of greatest importance.’

<sup>4</sup> “Come,” they say, “let us destroy them as a nation,  
so that Israel’s name is remembered no more.”

<sup>5</sup> With one mind they plot together;  
they form an alliance against you—

<sup>6</sup> the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,  
of Moab and the Hagrites,

<sup>7</sup> Byblos, Ammon and Amalek,  
Philistia, with the people of Tyre.

<sup>8</sup> Even Assyria has joined them  
to reinforce Lot’s descendants.

(Psalm 83v1-8, The Bible, NIV)

Relegating the original theological intention below contemporary geopolitical need, my informants creatively harnessed this passage as a prophetic lens with which to illuminate Israel’s current positioning inside a ring of (predominantly) ‘Arab nations’. Individuals mapped Psalm 83 onto the present by arguing that hostile Arab nations would soon surround the Israeli nation-state just as they had in times described by the Psalmist. Many believed that there would then be a ‘Psalm 83 war’, whereby Arab nations would move beyond geopolitical alliance towards ‘all-out’ military aggression. It did not seem to matter that this ‘prophetic’ reading failed to acknowledge the significant literary functions that govern the ways certain biblical passages – such as the Psalms - should be used. Psalm 83 is not, for example, a piece of prophetic literature, and to read it as such is to read erroneously. Rather, in their commentary on the Psalms, notable Old Testament theologians Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger (2014:360) categorise Psalm 83 as one of ‘community lament’, a designation that resists prophetic reading.

The workings of this flexible hermeneutic of ancient scripture were in evidence in the way that many of my informants came to construct explanatory imaginaries of the genealogy of the Palestinian people, and the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is to these foundational myths I now turn.

### **7.3 Mapping beginnings**

In recent years, critical attention has been paid to the biblical narratives through which contemporaneous people-groups and places have come to be viewed, ordered, and understood as objects of geopolitical knowledge. For example, both



Masalha (2007, 2009) and Prior (1998) have attended to the ways in which particular proponents of Zionism conflate the Palestinian people with the ancient Philistine, Canaanite, and Amalekite tribes. The destruction and expulsion of these tribes is well chronicled throughout the Old Testament. Hence, Masalha (2007) argues that these genealogical framings lend support to contemporary exclusionary actions by both the Israeli state and Jewish settlers. Whilst my informants did not articulate this particular hermeneutic, a similar biblical aetiology was frequently invoked to explain both the ancestry of the Palestinian people, and the origins and longevity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many of my informants – like their Christian Zionist counterparts<sup>141</sup> - believed that present day hostilities originated not in a nineteenth century clash over national territory, but in an ancient clan quarrel as depicted in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis 16.

This biblical story suggests that God enters into a covenant with Abraham, promising him an heir out of whom a whole ‘elect’ nation would grow. However, in a moment of impatience, Abraham broke covenantal faithfulness and fathered a child – Ishmael - with his Egyptian maid-servant. Although Ishmael was Abraham’s first-born son, he was not deemed the ‘child of promise’ through whom God’s covenantal election would pass. Instead, Abraham’s second born son, Isaac, was chosen – apparently against Abraham’s preference<sup>142</sup> - out of divine providence. For this reason, the Abrahamic land promises did not apply to Ishmael, but were conferred only through the line of Isaac. Israel’s exclusive and irrefutable claims to *eretẓ* Israel, and their election as the ‘Chosen People’ also lies within this interpretation of the story (see Brueggemann 2002, Wallace 2006, Munayer 2009).<sup>143</sup> Concurrently, it was believed that Ishmael lived in a state of jealous antagonism with Isaac because of his subservient nature. Herein, it was suggested, lies the origin of the present day conflict.

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<sup>141</sup> See Spector (2009) and Sizer (2004).

<sup>142</sup> Genesis 17v18.

<sup>143</sup> Messianic Jewish theologians often advocate a much more theologically nuanced view of Israel’s ‘Choseness’ and election; one that does not automatically cast the ‘unchosen’ into a position of inferiority (Munayer and Loden 2014). However, this nuanced theological view does not seem to have fully permeated into the lay congregation. Here, the notion of divine choseness still often appeared to equate to feelings of exclusiveness or superiority.

Within the community it was not uncommon to hear the biblical anthropogenic myth<sup>144</sup> that Palestinians – indeed all Arabs - were descended from Ishmael.<sup>145</sup> Concomitantly, Isaac was taken to be the patriarch of all Jewish Israelis. Although the factual accuracy of this genealogical lineage is undoubtedly spurious, many of my informants affirmed an inextricable, trans-temporal continuum between the characteristics of the biblical character and the modern-day Palestinians. Crucially, in the Genesis story Ishmael is described as being ‘a wild donkey of a man’ and the author goes on to prophesy that ‘his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers’. My informants drew on this individual character reading and rendered it as representative, paradigmatic and allochronistic of the whole Palestinian people. In this way, Palestinians could be imagined as being inherently conflictual, and the roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict explained.<sup>146</sup>

Dittmer (2010a:86) argues that the aetiological linking of contemporary ethnic groups to one mythical person - especially someone seemingly cursed by God - justifies ‘the political and economic dominance of one ethnic group over another as simply the effects of God’s will’. Indeed, apart from its genealogical assumptions, the Ishmael/Isaac framing allowed for a myriad of geopolitical imaginaries and attunements. Firstly, representing the current situation as a familial quarrel - with roots in ancient primeval history – allowed for a distinct ‘chronopolitical’ understanding of the conflict (Klinke 2013, Aalto and Berg 2002). Here, a biblical perception of time – replete with ideas of eternity, reoccurrence and repetition - allowed for the construction of a permanent adversary and led to the notion that the conflict was predetermined and unavoidable. One informant told me in no uncertain terms that the Palestinians [Ishmael] are the ‘everlasting foe’ of Israel [Isaac]. This lowered the probability for self-critical debate regarding one’s own complicity in the perpetuation of animosity, and collapsed any real need to work towards a peaceable future (Halper 2008).

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<sup>144</sup> I invoke the term ‘myth’ not in a way that discounts or belittles the narrative, but in a manner that foregrounds the formative link between mythmaking and social formation (McAlister 2012). Here, mythmaking is a common, everyday process by which we come to ‘construct, authorize, and contest social identities’ (McCutcheon, 2000: 200).

<sup>145</sup> Genesis 21v13

<sup>146</sup> The Ishmael/Isaac framing was not unique to the Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem. This was also a commonly re-visited framing in a Messianic community in the north of Israel (see Webb 2011 for a comparison).

However, this ‘detached temporal gaze’ – where certain individuals purport to ‘know time’ - is a completely arbitrary and selective concept (Klinke 2013:686). A cursory reading of history shows that Jews and Arabs are not innately conflictual. Indeed, the Western Christian church has been far more susceptible to persecuting the Jewish people than a monolithic Arabic threat (Webb 2011). It is only in the recent context of Jewish Zionism and Arab nationalism that conflict, especially post-1948, has become more frequent and pronounced and recognised as such (Maalouf 2003).

Secondly, subscribing to this aetiological reading can reinforce the Orientalist and essentialising stereotypes of Palestinians that are already pervasive in Israeli culture (Blumenthal 2013). Many of my informants uncritically used the character descriptions of Ishmael to imprison Palestinians in a stubborn collocation of jealousy, backwardness, irrationality, and deceit. Any Palestinian behaviour that my informants perceived to be antagonistic could be understood - and dismissed - as an inherent genealogical characteristic rather than as a specific response to a grounded set of contextual geopolitical realities. All intransigent acts of resistance against Israeli occupation, be it terror attacks or protests, reinforced the aetiological explanatory narrative. Consequently, one informant conjoined the Ishmael/Isaac narrative with the commonplace argot that Palestinians ‘only respond to force’ and are prone to violence and aggression. This seemed to engender an implicit suspicion towards Palestinians. This was normally made manifest in seemingly negligible everyday actions; an articulated distrust of Palestinian builders or jokes about Arab backwardness. One informant nonchalantly admitted that she would purposefully plan her trip to the supermarket at times when less (Israeli) Palestinians would be there. However, the wider geopolitical implication of these instances of everyday distrust was evident in some of my informants’ instant dismissal of any Palestinian articulation of peace.<sup>147</sup>

Lastly, in the biblical account Ishmael was ultimately sent away from his familial land. In one conversation, the Ishmael/Isaac framing was mobilised to argue that

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<sup>147</sup> Such as the comprehensive Arab League peace initiative.

Palestinians (and Israeli Arabs<sup>148</sup>) could/should simply leave the West Bank/Gaza and live with other descendents of Ishmael in the surrounding Arab states. Subsuming the Palestinians into a monolithic ‘Arab people’ erases the notion of a separate and distinct Palestinian national movement (Edward Said quoted in Barsamian 2003). This allows members of the community to equate all Arab peoples, not simply Palestinians, as a threat, and perpetuates the geopolitical imaginary of Israel as a small beleaguered nation amongst threatening and belligerent Arab countries (Newman 2000).

It is important to note that recent biblical and theological scholarship has thoroughly critiqued this simplistic exegesis, not least of all calling into question the veracity of the characteristics that have been (mis)read into the Ishmael character (Maalouf 2003, Bakhos 2006). Indeed, defaulting to a negative view of an entire people-group based on a selective reading of the Patriarchal narrative ignores a wider biblical and theological view that refuses to cast the ‘Ishmaelites’ as the perpetual ‘baddie’ (Bakhos 2006). This narrative ignores the significance of the covenantal promise Yahweh makes with Ishmael and his descendents. The language of the promise - directed at Ishmael’s mother Hagar – is described in terms that explicitly evoke a form of ‘chosenness’.

#### **7.4 ‘Cosmic war’ geopolitics**

A second biblical meta-narrative<sup>149</sup> was held central to my informants’ everyday imaginary of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; this was a ‘cosmic war’ framing. This particular framing relied on the idea that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was much more than simply a physical, worldly battle. Rather, behind the scenes of perceivable earthly reality waged a wider ‘cosmic war’ between the divine and angelic forces of good, and the demonic forces of evil. This moral-metaphysical framing is rooted in a particular reading of the bible that views Yahweh as perpetually engaged in a meta-physical battle with Satan; an evil spiritual being seeking to wrestle ultimate

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<sup>148</sup> One informant claimed that when the next ‘big war’ occurred, Israeli Arabs would emerge as a ‘fifth column’ and fight on behalf of the Palestinians.

<sup>149</sup> See Dittmer and Dodds (2008) for a discussion on the role of narrative and narrativity in the construction of geopolitical imaginations.

control of the earth and found a kingdom of evil (Boyd 1997, Juergensmeyer 2003, Aslan 2013). This unseen Manichaean battle can spill over into – or be fought out in – the earthly realm. Space is, therefore, loaded with the potentiality of spiritual manifestation. As McAlister (2005:254) writes, ‘spiritual warfare is imagined to be in action invisibly on a spiritual and moral plane. A battle between good and evil is actually in progress and can be assessed through fortunes and misfortunes in the material world’.

The cosmic war framing appeared to be a popular understanding amongst the community because – as a grand, all-encompassing meta-narrative – it allowed for a vast amount of interpretative space into which any geopolitical event or detail could be inserted and collated. Put otherwise, the cosmic war framing constituted a conveniently empty theological shell into which one could arbitrarily fit anything one wanted to according to one’s particular understanding and perception of good and evil. This left the ‘production of geopolitical imaginations wide open’ (Dittmer 2007b:285). For my informants, any earthly action, belief or behaviour that was deemed unfavourable to the Israeli nation-state (or the Messianic Jewish community) was placed firmly on the side of evil. Hence, the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict was viewed as a clear earthly manifestation - or microcosm - of the cosmic conflict.

Moreover, the cosmic battle was understood to have a trans-temporal and trans-historical origin. It is a conflict that is thought to date back before the creation of the world. Hence, most of my informants would suggest that the only real conceivable hope for a peaceable end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will occur at the final and ultimate defeat of evil when Jesus returns to earth. This view, much like the Ishmael/Isaac imaginary abrogates any deep sense of human responsibility to work towards peace.

Crucially, the cosmic war framing is an inherently geographical imaginary (McAlister 2012). It assumes a view of earthly space whereby spiritual and physical realities overlap and interpenetrate; where battles in the heavenly realm can have profound physical effects on earth (Boyd 1997). It is left to the individual believer to map earthly manifestations of good and evil, and construct a flexible, moralistic, and

geopolitically-saturated interpretation of various places and spaces (Shapiro 1994). In practice, inter-mapping the cosmic war/Israeli-Palestinian conflict relied on a two-stage imaginative process. In the first, particular events, people and spaces were simplified, generalised or depoliticised through a process of de-contextualisation or abstraction. This allowed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be removed from the complex geopolitical, economic and socio-cultural realities operative on the ground. In the second stage, these events or actors were re-signified theologically and made more complex through a process of ‘sacralisation’<sup>150</sup>. Here, events, actors or places were subject a powerful geographical mechanism whereby they were elevated to the proscenium of the cosmic battle (Smith 2001). As Juergensmeyer (2003:166) describes; ‘incidents that might previously have been considered minor skirmishes or slight differences of understanding are elevated to monumental proportions...what had been simple [earthly] opponents become cosmic foes’.

Clearly, the ability to reactively identify and plot the sites where cosmic war is manifest (or not) relies on a certain level of imaginative ocularcentrism; the capacity to detach and distanciate oneself, to panoramically ‘see’ the entire world, and to morally map accordingly (Ó’Tuathail, 1996, Sturm 2006). This ‘God-like’ panoptical ability is combined with both narrative flexibility (Sturm 2006, Dittmer 2007b, 2008, 2010a) and evangelical improvisationalism (Dittmer 2007b, 2010a, Dittmer and Dodds 2008, Barkun 2010), so that any event, actor or space can be assimilated into the cosmic war cartography.

Whilst the cosmic war was conceived of as a universal battle, it was thought to incarnate most fully in certain earthly nation-states. It was taken as axiomatic that Israel-Palestine was one of the foremost. Amongst my informants, this maintained an imaginative geographical positioning of Israel as being at the very centre of spiritual and earthly events. Israel was fighting at the centre on behalf of the rest of humanity. This ideation of global centrality, Newman (2000) and Wallace (2006) argue, constitutes one of Israel’s primary imagined geopolitical identities and has two primary consequences. Firstly, I found that my informants displayed less

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<sup>150</sup> According to Juergensmeyer (2003:166) the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a typical example of ‘a struggle that begins on worldly terms’, but that is gradually imbued with religious significance – ‘sacralised’ - as ‘solutions become unlikely and awareness grows of how devastating it would be to lose.’

internationalist tendencies than their evangelical counterparts in America (McAlister 2008). Believing that one lives at the centre appeared increased insularity and reduced the need to look outwards. Secondly, many of my informants expected Christians around the world also to subscribe to this Israel-centrism. Hence, their fundamental imaginative geopolitical positionings of nations-states, governments, organisations, NGOs and individuals was predicated upon their political support (or lack thereof) of the Israeli state and its vanguard action in the cosmic war.<sup>151</sup>

At the regional level, specific places within Israel-Palestine were morally mapped as sites where the cosmic battle manifests more clearly than anywhere else on earth. Some places – such as Jerusalem - were thought of as sites yet to be captured in the ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil. As I lived in (Palestinian) East Jerusalem, one of my informants prayed for my safety during Ramadan when, he claimed, demonic spirits were particularly strong in place. Other towns, in contrast, were imagined as already lost in the cosmic war. These were strongholds of Satan; fallen spaces neglected by all good and ceded to the cosmic forces of evil. Predictably, many of these places were Palestinian. Whole towns or cities were imbued with a raft of negative characteristics and morally distanced from the Israeli spaces of ‘good’. For one informant, the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Jenin were thought to be particularly dark and wicked strongholds where the forces of evil were amassed. The informant held this view simply because Ramallah was the capital of the Palestinian Authority, and Jenin was a particularly volatile city. For another informant, Ramallah was in the ‘enemy’s [Satan’s] camp’, evidence through an incident that occurred fifteen years ago where two IDF soldiers were brutally murdered. This religeopolitical understanding of place - predicated on the notion of recalcitrant demon entrenchment - appeared to call into question the foundational theological precept of the omnipresence of God. When I pointed this out to one of my informants, it was brushed away as a theological point that was not easily resolved.

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<sup>151</sup> At the time of writing – during Israel’s Operation Protective Edge – one of my informants sent an email condemning the British and American government for their decision to halt arms trade to Israel. “Reports are that both the US and the UK are trying to manipulate Israel by not sending weapons to it if Israel continues to defend itself against the Hamas terrorists in Gaza. Although I write this in a very blunt way, yet this is exactly what these two ‘friends’ of Israel’s are saying... this is wickedness ruling in high places, especially in the White House and US State Department.”

Usually, a Judeo-Christian/Muslim good/evil binary – along with some fairly typical Islamophobic tropes – also underpinned my informants’ crude moral mappings of the cosmic war. This both mirrored and perpetuated a wider commonplace evangelical coding of global space that pits the West / Christianity against an inherently territorially expansionist Islam (Cavanaugh 2009). Messianic Jewish theologian Dan Juster states, for example, ‘it is this spiritual wrestling in the Israeli-Arab conflict which I believe is the primary root of the situation and the failure of the parties involved to acknowledge the Kingship of Jesus over this land. It is his land, not Mohammed’s!’ (Juster 2012:69).

In another conversation about Ramallah, one of my informants claimed:

Informant: “Ramallah is so full of rejection. They don’t have an identity, you know? It’s been robbed from them by Satan. Ramallah was originally founded by Christian families. It was founded for something good. And what’s happened? Now it is all Muslim. It’s the capital of the Palestinian State. There is so much rejection there. I do not want a Muslim nation. Islam comes from the pit of hell. Islam is binding that nation. It’s literally killing that nation - where God meant for there to be life.”

As a result, Palestinian individuals who inhabited these evil spaces were usually cast in one of two reductive ways. At certain points, I did witness the explicit and crude demonisation of Palestinian individuals – especially militants/‘terrorists’ factions. These individuals would be described as the very personification of Satanic ‘evil’. Speaking of the Islamic group Hamas, one informant said “Israel is at war to protect its citizens *against a demonic entity* that places its own citizens in situations where they could be killed by Israel.” In the religeopolitical imaginations of my informants, such rhetoric inevitably goes some way to logically justify certain responses, such as the complete destruction of the evil Other and the ‘militarisation of space and enmity toward the Other’ (Sturm 2006:231). However, most informants recognised that these were rough, unsubtle and unhelpful designations; and they were only in evidence in particularly emotive periods of conflict escalation.

It was more usual for Palestinians to be cast simply as proxy, puppet-like collateral caught up in, and under the influence of, the demonic forces of the cosmic battle. Some informants, for instance, mobilised this framing as a relatively progressive and



accommodating position vis-à-vis the Palestinians; it allowed them to partially justify the actions of violent individuals who were simply being manipulated by a greater evil spiritual being. However, this understanding effectively removes all political agency from Palestinian actors, and denudes any legitimate historical political grievance they may have. In imagining evil as an invisible, manipulative and more-than-human phenomenon, the cosmic war framing closed down a recognition of evil as a reality of human action and society, and entreats a limited awareness of the specific structural nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Informant: “I look at the spiritual side. The Devil hates Palestinians and he hates Israel. Age, age old roots of hatred and bitterness. He’s had thousands of years to build this up. He is trying to destroy God’s perfect plan for Israel. Even the Arabs – God has a plan for. But what has the Devil done? He has come in and tried to destroy that promise.”

Informant: “When I think of Palestinians, I think of Isaiah 42, which says ‘this is a people plundered and looted...They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, “Send them back.”’ The enemy has them and controls them.”

Informant: “The Palestinians are simply being used by Satan to turn world opinion against the Jewish people...to destroy our redemptive role in God’s plan”.

However, this all said, it was also clear that there was a more complex geographical paradox inherent in the moral mapping of the conflict. On the one hand, as I have described, informants reactively plotted what they perceived to be clear manifestations of the cosmic war in certain events, places and actors. However, on the other hand, the cosmic war was simultaneously understood as preemptively unmappable; an unpredictable and unavoidable battle that resisted clear earthly cartography. My informants knew that any site or space was loaded with the potentiality of being suddenly caught up in the cosmic battle. For example, in November 2013, the unexpected killing of an Israeli Jewish soldier by a Palestinian on a bus in the unremarkable northern Israeli Jewish town of Afula confounded my informants’ pre-existing mappings of the cosmic war (Ashkenazi, Khoury and Cohen 2013). Here, the illegal passage of the Palestinian perpetrator did not conform the clear binary coding of evil Palestinian space and good Israeli Jewish space. In response, one of my informants lamented that evil ‘could occur anywhere’. Here was an expansive (and expanding) religeopolitical meta-narrative that added to

and reinforced the already pervasive Israeli public imaginary of permanent existential threat (Newman 2000). In doing so, it seemed to me that it helped perpetuate underlying collective psychologies of suspicion, powerlessness and fatalism (Ochs 2011).

The everyday impact of this cosmological framing on the geopolitical attunement of my informants was potentially myriad. As I have suggested, my informants avoided Palestinian areas of Jerusalem, and most Palestinian individuals were viewed with a good deal of latent suspicion. It was also clear that a cosmic war framing - and its certain/uncertain geographical imaginaries – constituted a theological schema that was used to lend support to certain state-led geopolitical practices. My informants placed trust in the protection offered by state-sponsored security practices. Most supported Netanyahu’s heavy-handed approach to Palestinian intransigence. However, it was also taken as axiomatic that the state and the IDF could only ever be a secondary form of security in the cosmic war. As no human could fully predict or prevent the manifestation of the spiritual battle, many of my informants looked to God for ultimate protection.

Informant: “I am very thankful for the Israeli Defense Force, but we want to trust in the real IDF - Israel's Divine Father!”

In everyday life, trusting God to provide divine security was evident through prayer. Prayer could be practiced anywhere at any time; in congregational meetings, at mealtimes, before car journeys. Again, the prayers of my informants reflected the mappable/unmappable character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s entanglement in the cosmic war. The unmappable and anticipatory was reflected in theodical<sup>152</sup> prayers that asked for the spiritual battle not to manifest too near. Here, prayer functioned as an intimate form of everyday security; a form that Ochs (2011) argues is rarely captured in our rush to focus on more concrete and institutional manifestations of security. Informants used prayer to overcome geographical space and invoke powerful imaginary connections to mapped actors, events or places. Intercessors would then do ‘spiritual battle’ in these places, calling on God to

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<sup>152</sup> I use the term ‘theodical’ to describe theologies pertaining to the existential problem of evil and suffering.

directly and supernaturally intervene in the particular geopolitical instance in order to reclaim the world for good.

As Aslan (2013:260) states, notions of cosmic warfare often come accompanied by a belief ‘in the direct intervention of a deity on the battlefield on behalf of the deity’s tribe, nation, or people’. As the following quotes illustrate, for most of my informants, it was assumed with relative certainty that God would – and does – directly intervene in earthly geopolitics on behalf of Israel.<sup>153</sup> This assumption was rooted in a certain reading of Old Testament scripture that foregrounds Yahweh as an interventionist, militaristic warrior-king who directs particular forms of redemptive and judgmental violence. In one of the more bizarre accounts of this theology, one informant claimed that God administers a force of militaristic angels who, in times of geopolitical need, dress in IDF uniforms and fight on her behalf.<sup>154</sup>

Informant: “Psalm 124 talks about God being on Israel’s side. Some things change, and some things remain the same. For three thousand years our enemies have been trying to wipe us off the map. But it hasn’t happened. For three thousand years, Israel has been on the verge, but God has saved us. God is the same yesterday and today, and will be the same forever. He won’t suddenly just change his mind about us. We can go before him with confidence asking that he will lead us, and guide us for his holy namesake. He won’t let us down.”

Informant: “He is the only hope for Israel to come through victoriously”

That said, belief in God’s geopolitical intervention *through the vehicle of Israel* was also rife. In the Old Testament, it is frequently pressed upon the biblical reader that it is Yahweh, and not the Israelites, who makes war against certain people groups. The Israelites are, therefore, simply conceived of as the vehicle through which divine justice is metered out. Some informants argued that God’s judgment was still best enacted through the military might of the IDF. Hence, at times of conflict

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<sup>153</sup> Whilst Palestinians Christian might look to these passages using the hermeneutic of Liberation Theology; seeing a God who fights on the side of the oppressed, Messianic Jews – employing a hermeneutic that emphasises the Jewishness of the text - see a God who fights only on the side of his chosen people (Loden 2012).

<sup>154</sup> During Israel’s Operation Protective Edge – an Israeli military intervention occurring during the writing of this chapter in July-August 2014 – some of my informants circulated a news story on various social media. Here, a Hamas rocket, supposedly seconds from hitting Tel Aviv, was said to be unexpectedly blown out to sea by a freak gust of wind. This was taken as a clear example of Yahweh’s supernatural intervention. See <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/Default.aspx?tabid=178&nid=24811>

escalation, my informants used the cosmic war framing – and notions of divine intervention through human vehicles - to support and justify aggressive State-sponsored (redemptive) violence and/or military intervention. In the quote below, for example, the informant suggests that God waits for Israel to initiate military action before using it to enact his divine wrath.

Informant: “I wouldn’t be surprised if he doesn’t destroy them [Israel’s enemies]. God can destroy people like Hamas or Iran when we [the IDF] attack them, like in the Bible. Often when Israel attacked, he somehow just jumps in and says ‘I’ve been waiting for this’. Like when he tells Moses to go forward, and then he parts the Red Sea. We go first. It’s very important that it is in God’s timing – whether he uses Israel, or does it some other way.”

At times like these, my informants made it clear that what was at stake was nothing less than the salvation of the entire earth from pervading evil (Boyd 1997). In this imaginary, no compromise or concession to an evil enemy is tenable; a clear justification for the IDF to act in a ‘rigid and often confrontational manner’ (Gerhardt 2008a:918). As McLaren (2002:330) states, ‘You cannot name something as “evil” and then work out a compromise without you, yourself, being implicated in the very evil you ostensibly oppose’. Similarly, Juergensmeyer (2003:157) argues that, ‘the absolutism of cosmic war makes compromise unlikely, and those who suggest a negotiated settlement are as excoriated as the enemy’.<sup>155</sup> Hence, this meta-framing radically diminishes the potentiality for a peaceable orientation in individuals’ religeopolitical imaginations. However, the danger in such an understanding is self-evident. It stands to sanction any military action that the Israeli state chooses to undertake, co-opting God and his divine will as an ideological weapon of geopolitical legitimacy.

Informant: “Personally, I’m sick of it, I think we should just go in and wipe the whole thing [Gaza] off the map. I hope we hit them hard. I hope the government and the general staff are committed to getting the job done. No

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<sup>155</sup> That said, in his book *The Myth of religious Violence*, William Cavanaugh (2009:215-216) argues that similar logic is used in order to legitimise redemptive violence undertaken against religious groups (especially Muslims). If ‘religious people hold irrational beliefs so fervently that they will do violence for them, then there is no use trying to reason with them. They can only be dealt with by force. The myth of religious violence thus becomes a justification for the use of violence. We will have peace once we have bombed the Muslims into being reasonable.’ Therefore, ‘violence labeled religious is always irrational, peculiarly virulent, and reprehensible. Violence labeled secular, on the other hand, no matter how regrettable, is often necessary and sometimes even praiseworthy for the job it does defending us from religious violence.’

more truces that just let Hamas re-group and re-arm for the next rocket or tunnel attack. I hope this isn't a "short" incursion. All this does is give hope to Hamas...they just have to hold out for Israel to get tired and quit.”

In this section, I have illustrated the ways in which my informants' understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was mediated through a wide and creative range of scriptures and propositional theologies. I want to suggest that these propositional and abstract imaginaries acted as a form of distancing device that generated 'uncertain bonds of responsibility and detachment' from the conflict (Ó Tuathail 1996:190). Because the conflict did not directly impact upon their everyday lives, my informants had the luxury of using the Bible as an explanatory mediating device (Megoran 2012). In other words, a reliance on the Bible was both indicative and constitutive of my informants' isolation from the unmediated geopolitical realities of the conflict. Whilst theological and scriptural imaginaries made a normally invisible conflict visible, they appeared to (re)produce the psychological distance between my informants and the contextual and complex messiness of the on-going hostilities. This, argues Cox *et al.* (2009:83) amounts to religious 'obscurantism'. For example, if one could turn the conflict into an abstract propositional debate regarding the theology of land or the importance of Israelology, then the particularities of the conflict could be forgotten. In a process of positive feedback, this made individuals more susceptible to (re)turn to religious narratives and theological framings. A similar observation was made by Gerhardt (2008a:913) who suggests that the more religious individuals become insulated from local 'heterotopic, particularist geography', the more likely they are to rely on theological mediations of geopolitics. Hence, it appears that abstract theological debate often allows for the preclusion of 'any realistic grappling with difficult issues such as inequality, corruption, and oppression that are a constant backdrop in Israeli society and in the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians' (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p).

## **7.5 Practicing religeopolitics**

That all said, these religeopolitical beliefs could not (and should not) be mapped onto everyday practice in any straightforward or doctrinaire way (Megoran 2010). Instead, blunt and generalising religeopolitical imaginaries – such as the ones noted

above - were often challenged, disrupted, relativised or reaffirmed by messy and contingent everyday encounters, ethical impulses, and alternative theological commitments. Gallagher (2010:229) suggests that any inquiry into religeopolitical orientations should attend to the dissonance that exists between propositional belief and everyday practice. For that reason, the following section explores the spaces of everyday encounter created by one particular alternative theology - and the concomitant ethical impulse to practice love.

Such a finding has precedent in critical geopolitical work on religion (Gerhardt 2008a, 2008b, Megoran 2010, Gallaher 2010). In his exploration of American evangelical missionaries in southern Sudan, Gerhardt (2008a, 2008b) illustrated the dynamic interplay between simplistic and reductive religeopolitical imperatives, and the more immediate, particularist ethical impulses. Gerhardt explores how his evangelical informants moved away from relatively belligerent geopolitical positions (viewing the government in Khartoum as the intrinsic enemy of the Christian church), and instead took part in lobbying the US administration to work with the regime towards a peace process. This move was driven by a ‘translocation of care’ fostered through personal contact with Sudanese individuals (Gerhardt 2008a:923). Newly acquired care-filled ethical impulses, he argued, were ‘rooted in an attachment to and an understanding of a particular place’ unexpectedly causing ‘universalist geopolitical visions [to be] adapted to place-specific heterotopic geographical realities’ (Gerhardt 2008a:911). Similarly, Nick Megoran described how members of the ‘Reconciliation Walk’ – a YWAM<sup>156</sup> initiative – had entrenched Christian Zionist worldviews transformed by way of proximate encounters with Muslims and through apologetic and confessional postures. Members walked the original routes of the Christian Crusades apologising for the harm and violence carried out in the name of the Christian God.

## **7.6 Loving one’s enemy**

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<sup>156</sup> Youth With A Mission

It was hard to ignore the fact that for a growing number of my informants, the Christocentric injunction to love one's neighbour/enemy was increasingly influential in their religeopolitical attunement towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This problematised propositional imaginaries that engendered separation and suspicion. Many of these individuals claimed to be developing a 'heart for' the Palestinian people. Having a 'heart for' something/someone is a phrase - rooted in American Evangelicalism - that is employed:

'to evoke a passion that goes beyond mere predilection: it suggests an unplanned moment of contact with an issue that leads the believer to an understanding of the particular walk God has in mind for her. Having a "heart for" something is simultaneously God-given and unusual in its intensity. It often, although not necessarily, involves crossing national borders' (McAlister 2008:870).<sup>157</sup>

Indeed, the informants who made these claims of the heart sought to engage and encounter Palestinian individuals in a far more deliberate, meaningful and 'loving' manner in their everyday lives. McAlister (2008:878) terms these engagements 'enchanted internationalism' which she describes as a 'feeling-practice': 'not only or exactly an ideology, not only or exactly an emotion, but a combination of these. Enchanted internationalism is an orientation, a stance toward others and an expectation for the self'. These postures led to an increasing number of surprising ethnographic moments as the indifference and separation that I had come to expect was suddenly shattered. For example, I had little prior frame of reference when driving with two Messianic Jews into the West Bank in order to 'hang out' and eat *kenafeh* with Palestinian (Christian) acquaintances in Bethlehem.<sup>158</sup> I do not doubt that this germinal theo-ethical orientation of love was made possible by the current temporal conditions of relative calm noted at the beginning of Chapter 4. As McAlister (2008:878) suggests, emotions such as compassion only 'become available in particular historical moments' Practically speaking, the aforementioned trip into the Palestinian Territories was made easier by the more relaxed security at certain

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<sup>157</sup> Usually, this phrase is more commonly heard when used by Christian Zionists to describe their unwavering 'heart for Israel' (Spector 2009).

<sup>158</sup> On the drive into the West Bank, the two Israelis concocted alternative European identities in case Palestinian suspicion was roused in Bethlehem.

checkpoints. It is worth noting though that ten years ago, during the height of the Intifada (2000-2005), the practices and beliefs I go on to explore would be far more rare.

One particular group of Messianic Jews was seeking to outwork this emerging 'love' through opportunities to directly and personally engage with Palestinians. In the context of pervading indifference or exclusion, this decision was somewhat surprising. One individual articulated this in this way;

Informant: "There's no win-win, unless people stop hating and start loving. Love won't happen unless God is put in his place. So that's what I feel like on my part. Go and love them. That's what will be the change. What is love? Jesus died for them. He died for the suicide terrorist, the Hamas bomber. My sins are no less than that. So I don't go in as anything political, I go in as 'hey, you are loved, you are a brother or a sister...Before, I didn't see anything good about Arabs. I didn't think their woman were beautiful, I didn't think the guys were good looking. Nothing. You never see beautiful things in people you hate. But the Lord started working on my heart for the Arabs, and the Arab nations. But now I see the beauty, I see the love. And that is the problem. Because of the hatred, we don't see the beauty in them."

This burgeoning love found a more committed and geographical form through regular cross-border engagements and humanitarian practices.<sup>159</sup> Informants would visit Palestinian contacts, often taking the latter material provisions. This is quite rare as most Messianic Jews strictly adhere to state territorial injunctions that forbid Israeli Jews to enter Palestinian controlled territory in the West Bank (see Figure 12). Through their violation of these spatial laws, my informants moved towards challenging Manichean visions of space that pit dangerous/evil Palestinian cities in binary opposition to safe/good Israeli territory.

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<sup>159</sup> As Han (2010:201) suggests, such work exemplifies a religious philosophy of praxis – 'believing by doing'.





Figure 12: 'Area A'

Indeed, as the following quotes attest, visits to Palestinian cities and the ‘impact of actually meeting people’ (Megoran 2010:390) appeared to facilitate further expressions of Christ-centred love and compassion.

Informant: “We love them...We believe in just doing it low and slow, just getting to know people, really becoming their good friends. So, right now we are going there, we are eating with their families, we are finding out what their needs are and trying to supply food, and electricity and hanging out with their kids, and talking about how we can partner with different organisations to help the kids at school, stuff like that. It’s still very embryonic, but I just love that we get to go there, and share with them, and talk with them in half-Hebrew, half-Arabic, half English. They are so hungry for Jesus, they are so hungry for truth. I love it.”

Informant: “We went to Ramallah. And I just started feeling, ‘we need to love them.’ When God made his promised to Abraham – he was going to bless him and his descendents, but why? He blessed them to be a blessing to the rest of the world. And that doesn’t just mean a blessing to the Jews, but it means to be a blessing to his brother – to Ishmael. I started feeling that we needed to bring them life. Okay – politics is politics. But what did God call me to do, what did call my people to do? And they saw that we were there to love them, to help them. This is what God wants, this is want the promise is about. God gave a promise to Ishmael as well, to bless all of his descendents. He gave a promise to the Arab nation. I’m not pro-Palestinian,

but I do understand a lot more what God is doing for the Palestinian people.”

Here, a theo-ethic of love - combined with face-to-face encounters – forged a surprising ‘emotional connectivity’ to Palestinian individuals (Gerhardt 2008a:912). This resonates with Megoran’s (2010:1) observation that in contexts of conflict, geographical proximity and personal intimate interactions can hold the potential to challenge abstract and simplistic religeopolitical understandings and, in-turn, foster more meaningful engagements between conflictual individuals. Put otherwise, it becomes far more difficult to demonise a person ‘whom one knows and for whom one has no personal antipathy’ (Juergensmeyer 2003:175).

Moreover, these examples of care-filled encounters with Palestinians problematise commonplace framings of evangelically inflected groups. Here, individuals were not predisposed towards otherworldly or exclusionary geopolitical visions, and did not express interest in de-personal, neo-colonial proselytising practices (Rabbitts 2013). These informants appeared less reliant on stereotypical constructions of Palestinians, and were more reticent to lend partisan support to statist militarism. In some cases it was evident that there had even been a slight re-evaluation and revision in my informants’ propositional theology through their geographical proximity to Palestinian individuals and places. For instance, in the quotations above, the Ishmael/Isaac theological framing was still invoked, but was extended to include the theological directive to care for Ishmael, and honour the divine territorial promises made to him. Thus, the dissonance caused by an ethic of love revealed the highly contingent character of propositional theology as outworked in everyday religious praxis (Samson 2002, Rabbitts 2013, Smith 2013). Put otherwise, in different everyday contexts one propositional belief could trump another (Gallagher 2010, Megoran 2010). These examples also reverse the trend of wider Israeli – and Messianic Jewish – indifference. For that reason, there is much in the nascent beginnings of such potentially loving engagements that should be affirmed and encouraged.

However, the political valences of practices of love should be critically scrutinised (McAlister 2008). Megoran (2010:394) suggests that research dealing with such

encounters should always pay particular attention to the ‘ways in which being in certain places with certain people open or close the possibilities for transformative encounters’. Indeed, on further reflection, the encounters described by my informants differed from those depicted in Megoran’s (2010) work. There, remarkable transformative encounters were predicated on pre-existing and self-critical postures of apology. In other words, the individuals who signed up to take part in a ‘Reconciliation Walk’ were already oriented towards reconciliatory encounters. It is not surprising, therefore, that their existing theological views were radically challenged. In contrast, the encounters I witnessed had less compunctious intentions, leading to a more complex interplay between religious belief and practice.

The notion of having a ‘heart for the Palestinian people’ seemed to obscure a complicated array of geopolitical orientations and prescriptions. Hearts, McAlister (2008:870, 879) argues, will always enable certain political commitments, and religious feelings will always be made manifest in public practice. Thus, as Sara Smith (2009, 2011, 2012) and Cowen and Story’s (2013) work has shown, love – in its various guises – can be used as a powerful geopolitical tool. The bulk of Smith’s work demonstrates how love gets enrolled in state projects, used to engineer, demarcate and defend territory through fertility and population controls, and the fixing of certain bodies and identities in place.<sup>160</sup>

There was, for example, a political imaginary at play in the manner that different informants defined appropriate practices of Christ-centred ‘love’. Although the following opinions – gleaned from everyday conversations - form one extreme end of a broad spectrum, they act as a parody of the wider argument that Christ’s command to ‘love’ one’s enemy is open to arbitrary interpretation. Manifestations of love can, it seems, lend support to a broad spectrum of geopolitical practices.

Informant: “In context of war, loving our enemies can mean totally destroying them.”

Informant: “Christians misunderstand when Jesus was speaking to his disciples on the Mount of Olives and saying “turn the other cheek”, and

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<sup>160</sup> In Israeli, territorialising love and desire is most evident in state and religious anti-miscegenation laws designed to regulate marriages between Jews and Arabs.

they think that applies to nations. It doesn't...They think we are supposed to turn the other cheek and love enemy nations. We do love them - may all their plans fail, may they see that Allah is not God, that's how we want to love them."

## 7.7 Loving Gazans

I further explore the complex workings of this politics of love using the example of one particular congregational meeting that occurred half way through my research period. During this meeting, a Messianic Jewish woman – complete with a PowerPoint slideshow of photographs - detailed a recent ministry 'mission trip' to Gaza; a visit made possible by her dual American-Israeli citizenship and affiliation with an international Christian educational NGO. Visiting Gaza is clearly an uncommon practice for a Messianic Jew, and one motivated by Christ-centred notions of love. I want to show that whilst a theo-ethic of love holds the potential to resist and subvert the common-place religeopolitical understandings, it often simply battens them. The following critique should not invalidate the unusual sense of awareness for the Other that this informant displayed, but rather should make plain the conditional obligations and social relations that lurk behind such seemingly positive emotional attachments. Using Berlant's (2004:5) words, I seek to uncover the dynamics of 'loves' 'optimism and exclusions'.

It was a very strange evening. An evening of ambiguity, potential, transgression and disruption. The initial mention of Gaza fills the room with a charge of sorts. This is a word/place that usually evokes certain senses of fear or danger. There is complete silence in the congregation as the woman introduces her trip. The lights are dimmed, and she shows photos. The ensuing slideshow of 'cute' Palestinian kids breaks the tension, and descriptions of the trauma described through the children's drawings of tanks, jets and missiles seems to genuinely move people. The woman clearly felt passionately about the Palestinians she met – recounting their generous welcome and hospitality. She describes them as 'resilient' and 'strong'. On one level, she did much to humanise them. And there feels like there is a sudden impulse to care that rises up in the congregants - this overwhelms the more extreme and negative theology that is normally the mainstay of this congregation. I could feel it in the room - through murmurs of agreement, spontaneous clapping, and the growing interest on faces - that these people wanted to care for the Palestinians in the photos. I don't know what to do with that. It is not usual.

(Research Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013)

In the early stages of her presentation, the woman's narrative made Palestinians present and proximate in the physical and imaginative spaces of the congregants. As my diary entry suggests, the normality of Palestinian invisibility and absence was shattered. Moreover, the Palestinians in her photo slideshow did not conform to the usual militant stereotype; instead they were innocent, wide-eyed children, or smiling groups of women. The woman's articulations of love, combined with the recounting of hardship and poverty, appeared to open up a space of possibility, a critical moment, where both the hegemony of societal indifference and negative religeopolitical framings were momentarily suspended. As my diary recounts, the room seemed to fill with an unusual affective charge; a sudden impulse to care for the distant Other.

However, as her presentation progressed, I became more aware of the problematic aspects of her representations. I was increasingly uncomfortable with both the practical outworking of her theo-ethic of love, and the way that she reframed this to her fellow congregants.

“Whilst I was still genuinely surprised by the caring response of the congregants, a nagging feeling of doubt crept along as the meeting went on. Something was not right, something was being missed out from the woman's narrative, the story was not complete. At no point had Israel's complicity in the ongoing conflict been mentioned. The Palestinians were cast as victims – but victims of what? It soon became clear.”  
(Research Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013)

Both her practice, and representations of it, appeared to fix the Palestinians as geopolitically ‘Other’ in a number of ways. Firstly, conferring love to Gazans seemed to be underwritten by a certain posture of ethnocentric moral virtue (McAlister 2008). What was emphasised in the woman's presentation was how remarkable it was for the Messianic Jewish community to extend love to a largely hostile population.

Informant: ‘I was able to convey *the love of the Jewish believers to them*, and just to express our heart of prayer and concern for them.’

As the quote suggests, it was not just love that was shown – but a love that was qualified as being Jewish and Messianic. At the root of this was a specification of difference. It was difficult, therefore, not to view this as a self-congratulatory opportunity to reaffirm the moral mapping of the virtuous Self vis-à-vis the recipient Other.

Secondly, at a particular point the woman must have decided upon which Palestinians to love, and which to remain inured to. This choice, McAlister (2008:884) claims, is telling because the religious decision of who to love is rarely made outside of existing power relations, religeopolitical narrative conventions, and moral valuations. Palestinians who were strongly critical of Israel were rarely represented as the recipients of Messianic love; rather, it was apparent that most of my impassioned informants chose to ‘love’ poor Palestinian individuals, children, or Christian Palestinians.<sup>161</sup> This decision was made noticeable in the ways that the woman represented the lives of the Palestinians she met almost exclusively through stories of victimisation, poverty and suffering. At one point in her presentation, the Messianic woman told the story of a moment when she observed a number of small Gazan children playing in a schoolyard. Their apparent hopelessness impelled her to ‘target them’ with her ‘love’.

The problematic military metaphor aside,<sup>162</sup> the children – like other Gazans - were positioned both physically and metaphorically as passive recipients of benevolence; denied the agency to refuse or withstand the act of love. This seemed redolent of the imperialist-style imaginary of evangelical missionaries without the overt proselytising (Han 2010b, C.Brickell 2012). As such, my wider argument is that the conferral of love acted as an effective way to neutralise the possibility for any form of sustained subaltern political critique. No reciprocal or equal demands were made (at least ones that were acknowledged) of my benevolent informants by the recipients of love to revisit, unlearn or revise their fundamental religeopolitical

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<sup>161</sup> In the case of the latter, it seemed far easier to display love to those who share some semblance of a religious similarity; those who are like ‘us’. However, if we limit our love solely to such people, then it is becomes harder to ‘act on behalf of people who are very different from us, let alone people who are not very loveable’ (Roberts-Miller 2007:694)

<sup>162</sup> This mirrors a wider evangelical ‘militaristic penchant for envisioning the world or particular regions as a target’ (Han 2010b:200). The practice and technology involved in military ‘targeting’ has, in recent times, come under sustained critical attention in work on vertical and surveillance geopolitics (Graham 2004, Adey, Whitehead and Williams 2011).

worldviews. Moreover, the woman's practice of targeting was indicative of the unidirectionality and transience of her ethical impulse. Here was a love that could disappear back across the security Wall as quickly as it arrived. Here love reiterates and re-inscribes unequal access to resources, mobility and power.

For these reasons, I would argue that the woman's theo-ethic of love was represented through sentiments more akin to pity. McAlister (2008:883 my emphasis) warned that religiously-inspired love often attempts 'to frame the meaning of the others' suffering, to determine the moral categories and political valences at stake, and in the process to mute the sufferer, *insisting on making him or her an "object" of compassion*'. In an Arendtian formulation, any time compassion is generalised or represented on the public stage – such as in the woman's presentation - it mutates into sentiments of pity (Arendt 1990, Canovan 1992). Pity, Newcomb (2007:110) argues, 'is what happens when one removes the individuality of others and has feelings for the group as a whole'. In other words, pity depersonalises suffering and creates distance and asymmetry between the benefactor and the pitied. Crucially, for Arendt, the distance caused by pity acts to conceal the actual stories of suffering individuals might have (Newcomb 2007).

Indeed, the woman's profession of compassion/pity functioned exactly to denude politics from Gazan suffering. The woman's ethical-emotive positioning limited the possibility of hearing the narrative of the Other, and subsequently, closed down any real self-critical reflection on Israeli Jewish complicity in Palestinian suffering. Although the conflict was briefly referenced it was not subject to ethical or moral comment or evaluative judgment. As the following quote attests, the realities of the conflict were represented simply as scenic background.

Informant: "As we were travelling in the street, we started seeing bombings. Bombings like this. [shows picture] This was Palestinian police station that Israel had bombed. Next one. [shows picture of a completely decimated building] The next picture is the Palestinian Ministry of Interior. But you will see how the administration works at the moment. It would be hard to find your file in there. [laughter]. [next picture]. That is the school..."

Again, Arendt's musings are helpful. She viewed compassion/pity as an emotional response that removes or limits the potentiality for critical thought (Newcomb

2007). She believed that compassion/pity destroyed the ‘space and boundaries between individuals’ (Newcomb 2007:109); collapsing the space needed for politics through the elimination of agonistic debate and structural change. Compassion/pity, she claimed, shuns ‘the drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise, which are the proceeds of law and politics, and lend its voice to the suffering itself, which must claim for swift and direct action’ (Arendt 1990:86-87). Similarly, Roberts-Miller (2007:692) claims that when our responses to suffering are predicated upon compassion/pity ‘we do not necessarily seek justice through changing the political system that causes the injustice, but instead often look for methods of saving the individuals from the system’.

In this instance then, the plight of the Palestinian individuals represented in the congregant’s presentation was quickly re-inserted into the existing religeopolitical narratives cohering around the notion of cosmic Satanic/Islamic oppression. As the quotes below suggests, Gazan suffering was entirely spiritualised.

Informant: “[shows picture of a Palestinian boy] This boy started a revolution in my heart. I looked at him and thought to myself ‘the enemy [Satan] is not going to have you’. I want you. A holy anger rose up in my heart and I thought I will pray for you, because you have to become a child of the Lord.”

The congregation was quickly mobilised into prayerful action:

“The congregation is encouraged to pray together against the demonic spirit of Islam that was binding the people of Gaza into a life of poverty and suffering. The pent-up emotional tension is let loose. The compassion people felt suddenly found an active outlet and people shout out prayers against the oppressive forces of Islam with fervour and passion. The leader prays for the “shaking off of the lies of Islam in Gaza.” He shouts “are we all in agreement that Islam is not of the Kingdom of God?” [shouts of agreement]. He continues “Demonic spirits lay behind Islam. And two things that are characteristic of these spirits are oppression and lies. But Islam can be shaken. We are all too intimidated by Islam. And we begin to believe the lies that Islam is going to take over the whole world. But God will shake it. And God’s love will drive out the fear in our hearts. And we will not be afraid to share the love of Jesus with Muslims – because his love will drive out the fear.”

(Research Diary, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2013)



Again, Arendt (1990:86) suggests that the natural response to compassion/pity is immediate and direct action, rather than sustained critical ‘speech or discussion’ (Canovan 1992:170). The congregation’s urgent prayerful response was indicative of this. But in doing so, the immediacy of this action failed ‘to create any new conditions or actions, any change in the world, or any relationships or spaces for freedom’ (Newcomb 2007:113). The space of momentary potential that had been opened up by the woman’s theo-ethical practices of love – a moment that might have called into question or subverted taken-for-granted religeopolitical orientations – simply collapsed back into a reliance on distancing propositional theology.

Indeed, the more I scratched the rhetoric of other impassioned informants claiming to have a ‘heart for Palestinians’, the more it appeared that practices of ‘love’ were often used as a tool with which to garner support for pre-existing geopolitical worldviews and narratives. For example, one Messianic Jewish informant – who worked for an educational NGO in Bethlehem – admitted that his humanitarian work was undergirded by the underlying motivation to promote support for Israeli Jews amongst Palestinian Christians. There is, therefore, a paradox at play within these acts of ‘love’ or ‘compassion’; many have the effect of dehumanising and distancing the Other in ways that are less straightforward and less identifiable than explicit, demonising theological framings.

Informant: “So, whilst I mainly teach English to young Palestinian Christians, I’m really trying to strengthen those [Palestinian Christians] that are pro-Israel. For most Arabs, the idea that God would choose one people doesn’t compute with them. The Christians down there get stunted, because they will not see it. That’s my passion – to help them see this picture – to tweak their thinking – to see God’s way. Once they start cooperating with their brother – the Jews – then everyone will be happy. So, that’s my goal....To be honest, if I go to talk to people in other nations – at churches in the United State or Britain or whatever, I actually have more credibility in some ways. I can come and say “hey, I have worked on both sides of the fence”. I know - from personal experience of talking with these people - what I’m talking about. I know because I’ve been on the ground. So its giving me a credibility that I wouldn’t have had.”

## 7.8 Conclusion

Much critical geopolitical scholarship makes it clear that belief and theology stands at the centre of religion's geopolitical significance. Whilst the preceding chapters have challenged the primacy of theology's formative importance, it is also something that should not be overlooked in my investigation of Messianic Jewish geopolitical orientations. For that reason, this chapter has described and explored the theological framings that were commonly used by my informants in everyday life to explain various facets of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

That said, answering demands for closer attention to be paid to actual religeopolitical 'practices on the ground' (Dittmer 2013a), and avoiding simplistic claims of causation between theology and behaviour, the second half of the chapter illustrated the ways in which belief rarely mapped onto everyday practice in neat ways. It is clear that religeopolitical orientations are produced as much through social interaction and practice as they are through propositional theology. I demonstrated that the outworking of propositional theology often comes to be disrupted by everyday expediencies and alternative theologies. Specifically, I demonstrated how everyday encounters with Palestinians individuals, combined with Christ's command to love one's neighbours and enemies, had the potential to disrupt blunt or deleterious religeopolitical orientations. Love, it seems, has the potential to be a very powerful geopolitical force, connecting hitherto disparate people across time and space (Megoran 2010).

However, despite the fact that this attentiveness to practice has 'uncovered a layer of complexity beyond the already complex world' of Messianic Jews, the benevolent and love-filled practices that result from this theo-ethic must also be subject to critical scrutiny. Whilst Megoran (2010) and Gerhardt's (2008a) informants had their religeopolitical worldviews fundamentally challenged and transformed by proximate and peaceable encounters, my informants – more-often-than-not – simply re-inserted their 'love' for the Palestinian people into their pre-existing religeopolitical narratives. Put otherwise, the love offered did not require the benefactors to alter their religeopolitical orientations or to accommodate the narratives of the Other.

In sum, it is clear that religious believers should always be viewed as 'complex beings who act from a myriad of discursive and non-discursive practices, presuppositions, values, morals, motives, and impulses' (Sturm 2006:232).

## Chapter 8:

# Conclusion: religion, geopolitics, and everyday lives

### 8.0 Introduction

According to Gökariksel and Secor (2015:20) and Agnew (2006), the political role of religion is fast becoming the ‘most urgent’ question of our time. Extant scholarship has tended to investigate the political significance of religion and religious believers solely through their ideas, beliefs, doctrine and theology. However, often the actual lives of religious individuals are largely omitted from critical analysis. Therefore, it is often far from clear how the big questions of religion and geopolitics come to play out in the geographies of everyday life; in homes, workplaces, neighbourhoods and cities (Gökariksel and Secor 2015:21).

Recognising this lacuna, political geographer Tristan Sturm (2013:134) argued that what has been lacking ‘is any kind of sustained research agenda that takes religious movements seriously rather than reporting on the newest fashionable geopolitical worldview or event that needs to be debunked of its geographical assumptions’. In a similar vein, Nick Megoran (2013:142) convokes political geographers to ‘see how different (geo)political meanings’ are derived by active religious agents in ‘diverse local forms’. These calls have been answered by this thesis through a sustained and focused analysis of the geopolitical worlds of the Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem. Specifically, this thesis explored the imbrication of religion and geopolitics through the prism of ‘everyday geopolitics’ by way of an ethnographic investigation into my informants’ encounters with, and experience of, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unsurprisingly, I found that my informants' religious commitments were formative in the construction of their geopolitical orientations. However, as the preceding chapters have illustrated, this occurred in less than straightforward and often subtle ways. As such, the case study presented stands both as a contribution and a challenge to prevailing assumptions regarding the processes through which religion and geopolitics become entangled.

Taken in isolation, one might conclude that the propositional theological beliefs of Messianic Jews will attune them towards a very particular and identifiable geopolitical orientation. Messianic Jews, it would appear, hold theological views that are largely indistinct to those propounded by Christian Zionists (Erez 2012, Munayer and Loden 2014). They tend towards unequivocal support of the state of Israel, its exclusivist ethnonational project, and its territorial expansionism. Chapter 7, for example, illustrated some of the more common Messianic theological framings for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and hinted at the ethnonational political positions that these engendered. Concomitantly, it could be surmised that theology intends Messianic Jewish individuals towards Palestinians in a manner marked by a good deal of suspicion, and sometimes animosity (Munayer and Loden 2014).

Despite the obvious theological aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a full investigation into Messianic propositional belief or doctrine never constituted the primary focus of this thesis because – as noted - such a study would tend towards an overly-cerebral and un-peopled analysis. Theology is taken as geopolitically significant and formative, but it is not given ultimate primacy in this thesis. It is for this reason that propositional theology only came to be addressed in the final empirical-analytical chapter. Similarly, this thesis also differs from previous critical geopolitical studies of Christianity by its relative silence towards eschatology and apocalypticism. Again, this silence simply reflected the empirical reality experienced in the field. It was uncommon for my informants to overtly filter events of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through their 'end time theology'. Rather, as Chapter 7 illustrated, individuals more frequently drew on alternative and flexible beliefs and theologies to understand the immediacy and complexity of the situations they found themselves in.

Instead, this dissertation has augmented earlier studies by exploring the actualisation of those theological commitments. The foregoing pages sought to explore the ways in which spatial and material-practice of Messianic Jews intersected with, and exceeded, their propositional beliefs and theological positions. I have shown that the relationship between theological discourse and everyday praxis is complex, and resists any reductive explanation of cause and effect. Whilst other scholars of critical geopolitics give brief nod to the idea that there is often a gap between what an individual says they believe, and how they behave (Dittmer and Sturm 2010, Gallaher 2010), this thesis has explored this gap in a much more sustained manner. Broadening the scope of enquiry – by paying attention to the actual sociality and ‘stuff’ of lived religion - has engendered a number of empirical and conceptual contributions to critical geopolitics’ dealings with religion.

Chapter 4 showed that religion is not, as Sturm (2013:136) suggests ‘lived as a thing apart from other socio-cultural phenomena... It does not operate in daily life as an independently separate variable’ Hence, paying detailed attention to both geographical and temporal context, the Messianic community was located within what I argued was a current Jewish-Israeli geopolitical milieu of indifference. This pervasive geopolitical disposition has been constructed through the extant routinisation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Bar-Tal and Vered 2014). Crucially, the Messianic community – and its orientation towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - does not exist in isolation to these wider collective geopolitical attunements. The wider point is that culture will always shape the geopolitical orientations of religious individuals. It is impossible for individuals not to adopt, appropriate or inherit certain ways of thinking and being that are prevalent within wider society (Megoran 2004b, Lillehammer 2014).

More broadly, Chapter 4 also pointed to the reality that religious believers do not always filter geopolitical events and experiences through the cognitive prism of their religious commitments. As Dijkink (2006:202) states, ‘even a dominant role of religion in the daily life of a group does not inevitably evoke a religeopolitical vision of the world’. Rather, believers engage with geopolitics and society in an assortment of (often non-religious) ways. When my informants rode the train, or drank coffee

in the mall, their geopolitical orientations were constantly (and often unconsciously) being attuned, but often in ways that preceded conscious religious filtering. Put otherwise, everyday life was filled with immediacies where the lens of religion appeared to lie abeyant. To be clear, I am not suggesting that my informants completely removed their religious lenses, rather, I argue that religeopolitical interpretation and experience is far from simplistic or monolithic, but porous, contingent and dynamic.

Chapters 5 and 6 both suggested – contrary to what any salacious propositional belief statements may imply - that the Messianic Jewish individuals largely disengage from the topic of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in daily life. Instead, my informants' everyday existential insecurity and excluded position within Israel society tended to 'overshadow active engagement with the volatile issues of justice, human rights, and peace that are vital for their Palestinian brothers and sisters' (Munayer and Loden 2014:n.p). Put simply, Messianic Jews had 'bigger things' to worry about. Thus, Chapter 5 explored the ways in which the contested religious and ethnic identity of the Messianic community impacted the daily lives of my informants in a much more immediate and material way than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Religion and religious demarcation, I demonstrated, is central to the workings of Jewish-Israeli ethnonationalism. As a result, individuals in the Messianic community suffered from a geopolitics of difference because of their transgressive (in the Israeli context) religious beliefs. Their subsequent exclusion from the formal Israeli citizenry was enacted in and through various spaces, practices and materials. These I explored as an everyday, internal border regime (Johnson and Jones 2014).

Chapter 6 illustrated the communities' response to this exclusionary regime, and in doing so disrupts expectations of straightforward ethno-national religious correspondence (Sturm and Frantzman 2015). Critical geopolitics often presumes a linear and 'isomorphic overlapping of religion, nationalism, and territory' (Sturm and Frantzman 2015:435). However, Messianic congregations were shown to be places where the exclusive/inclusive character of the Jewish-Israeli ethno-nation was spatialised in unstable, and heterogeneous ways. I highlighted the ways in which religious spaces, beliefs, symbols and material practices come to be enrolled into and against statist ethnonational geopolitical cultures in highly contingent ways.

At times, Messianic belief and practice was mobilised as a way to refuse, rework and resist the dominant geopolitical ethnoculture in Israel. At other times, however, it reflected, reproduced and batted the ethnonational principles that underpin Jewish Israel geopolitics. Often this occurred through the uncritical enrolment of certain symbolic materials and practices that acted to emphasise a particular ethnonational attachment and assert the exclusive Jewish Israeli character of the congregation. Hence, this chapter goes to a long way to illustrate how difficult it is to fit religious identities into rigid geopolitical categories.

In the rush to embrace more-than-representational approaches in critical geopolitics, it often appears that ‘discourse’ is pitted against material ‘reality’. But I did not want to completely disregard the formative role that theological discourse played in the priming of my informants’ geopolitical orientations. Hence Chapter 7 illustrates some of the most commonplace theological framings mobilised by the Messianic Jewish community to understand the origins and longevity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I first had to account for the fact that overt theological propositioning vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was generally avoided by congregants. Instead of re-hashing the geopolitical implications of eschatological and apocalyptic narratives, I instead explored the ways in which the interpretation of scriptures – and Old Testament historical narratives in particular – were used as a flexible geopolitical guide. However, I went on to illustrate that theological framings of the conflict could rarely be mapped onto everyday behaviour in any straightforward way. Instead, following Gerhardt (2008a, 2008b), Megoran (2010), and Gallaher (2010) I argued that propositional theological belief was always disrupted by everyday circumstances. Whilst geopolitically significant theologies should always be subject to critical analysis, this should be done in conjunction with an examination into the grounded outworking of such beliefs.

## **8.1 Religion and critical geopolitics: Summary remarks**

The intriguing relationship between religion and geopolitics is, for some, a ‘zero-sum’ game. Religious groups are generally presented in the media or in academic



work as occupying clear geopolitical positions; they stand either radically against, or uncritically in support of, the nation-state; they encourage and are implicated in geopolitical conflict, or they are entirely opposed to violence.

However, this thesis rejects these binary views and has instead presented an alternative and nuanced account. It is my contention that for most religious groups, such extreme geopolitical positions are anathema to the everyday outworking of their interpretation of faith. Religion, I have shown, intends people geopolitically in ways that are far less straightforward and far more dynamic. Religious belief and practice work to both legitimate and disrupt state geopolitics in contingent and often contradictory ways. It is used to justify certain forms and instances of violence, whilst rejecting others. It is also clear that individuals grapple with the competing directives of a range of different theologies. For that reason, theological dogma is often eschewed in favour of theological flexibility (Gallaher 2010). Moreover, theology is always disrupted further by the imperatives and immediacies of site specific and everyday material-practice.

These chapters also stand as a useful corrective to the scholarly inclination to frame evangelically-inflected believers as persistently other-worldly, fanatical, ‘war-like, bigoted, racist, credulous, irrational, conspiratorially paranoid and right-wing’ (Megoran 2013:142). Whilst Megoran (2013) fronts this project through alternative and radical readings of certain propositional theology, I have shown how religion’s imbrication with geopolitics occurs in less than straightforward – and often less extreme - ways when viewed through the prism of everyday life. I began the thesis with a vignette recounting the ways in which a particular Old Testament narrative – 1 Samuel 15 - was mobilised by a Messianic Jewish pastor to nefarious ends. I speculated as to the ways in which certain Messianic Jewish propositional beliefs and theological positions would/could engender particular geopolitical orientations and behaviours. In many ways, the discoveries made in the subsequent chapters challenge, or at least nuance, both the views articulated by the pastor and their critical interpretation. I have told an arching narrative of my informants’ lives, committing to the daily realities of their political concerns and struggles, often to the disruption of my own academic foci.

## 8.2 Re-imagining the Israel-Palestinian conflict

Whilst religion and geopolitics constituted my primary focus, this thesis has also proffered an alternative writing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is my hope that this work will inform the engagement of political geographers with questions of everyday life in spaces of protracted conflicts, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First I have attended to the conflict's intermittent resonance in the lives of Jewish Israelis. Second, I have challenged monolithic and reified framings of the Jewish-Israeli ethnonational *raison d'être*. Both these foci and findings constitute a critical challenge to conventional imaginative geographies of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and commonplace assumptions regarding the lived experience of protracted conflict.

For example, earlier ethnographic studies of everyday life in Israel position the conflict front and centre, emphasising the omnipresence or potentiality of violent events and existential insecurities. In these writings, fear of danger, heightened alertness and pervasive suspiciousness seem to saturate Israelis' daily lives, dictating the lexical phrases they use, and informing minor decisions such as whether to stay in or go out for a coffee (Konopinski 2009, Ochs 2011). Such compelling and sophisticated accounts are certainly valuable. They point to the ways that Israelis experience statist geopolitical discourses at the level of daily, bodily practice (Pearlman 2012). They also show how security measures have become entirely normalised in everyday life. However, this thesis has also argued that they paint a picture that is not entirely representative of the majority of daily life in Israel. They tend, for instance, to overstate and over-determine the reach and impact of conflictual violence (Kelly 2008). They also have the proclivity of cohering around - and being enamoured with - the formative power of traumatic events. This discrepancy occurs because rarely does such 'eventism' attend to the prolonged periods where the conflict does not come to affect the lives of individuals (Struckman and Sturm 2013).<sup>163</sup> As Pearlman (2012:455) asks, is there:

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<sup>163</sup> Indeed, a neglect of the mundane and the ordinary, Kelly (2008:351) argues, marks ethnographic accounts of other political conflicts, not simply the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

‘any aspect of everyday life in Israel that is not pervaded by security. Are threat and protection the only, or always the most important, rubrics through which Israelis have daily life? ... analysis would have benefited from elaboration of moments, spaces, situations, in which Israelis are not hyper-alert, corporeally afraid, or negotiating suspicion.’

This thesis answers Kelly (2008) and Pearlman’s (2012) doubts, nuancing conventional ethnographic approaches to political conflict by giving due attention to the silence and disengagement that seemed to mark both my research community, and a large proportion of the Israeli Jewish population (Pinto 2013, Bar-Tal and Vered 2014). As noted, Chapter 4 explored the indifference pervasive in Israeli Jewish culture. Observations of everyday insouciance challenge the imaginative geographies through which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is generally constructed and re-presented in both media and academia. Most Israeli Jewish lives are not witness to extreme violent events, continual danger, or prolonged existential insecurity. Instead, I found it more unsettling to be faced with the reality that Israeli Jewish individuals were removed from, and largely apathetic towards, the ongoing conflict. This alone is an important contribution to general understandings about the lived experience of conflict.

On one level, Chapter 4 conceptualised indifference simply as an understandable - yet regrettable - everyday reaction. Taken in this sense, it is clear that there is a temporal and geographical facet to everyday indifference that necessitates further research. Geographically, the (Messianic) Jewish communities residing alongside the Gaza border – communities that bear the brunt of rocket attacks - may display higher levels of fear and existential anxiety even during periods of relative calm. Similarly, communities in Tel Aviv might exhibit stronger semblances of indifference even at periods of heightened tension. Temporally, my fieldwork took place at a period of relative calm in the long history of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Indeed, the year following my research was marked by an increase in terrorist attacks in Jerusalem. Research undertaken during this period would, perhaps, have encountered a very different collective geopolitical atmosphere. This does not invalidate my findings of indifference, rather it lends credence to the idea that the conflict is experienced in different resonances. Indeed, I suggest that a societal orientation of indifference is fully implicated into the cyclical resonance of

protracted violence. Periods of relative calm and indifference are often formative of outbursts of heightened tension.

However, on a different level, Chapter 4 also reflected on indifference as a constituent part of the political apparatus. More than simply a reaction, indifference can come to be enrolled as an operational element within certain political systems. Much of the formative power of indifference, I suggest, lies in the fact that it has quite often become automated and unconscious, and therefore is frequently unacknowledged and unquestioned (Bar-tal and Vered 2014). Therefore, I argued that indifference should be openly acknowledged as a powerful geopolitical orientation; one that does not exist in opposition to violence, but is, in fact, deeply implicated within it (Das 2007, Kelly 2008). Put otherwise, indifference and violence are, different sides of precisely the same coin.

I also argue that indifference does not simply produce geopolitics, rather indifference is also geopolitically produced and manipulated. Hence, I went on to explore the psycho-spatial orientation of indifference as both the result of security measures and discursive distancing. Crucially, in the Israeli case, public indifference allows for the perpetuation of the geopolitical status quo. That many Israelis show 'no interest in the details of ruling the Occupied Territories' is a crucial part of the on-going practice and apparatus of the 'silent occupation' (Ophir and Azoulay 2013:6). Indifference gives time and space for the Israeli state to 'manage' the conflict to an 'acceptable' level. Indifference allows the building of Jewish-Israeli settlements to proceed unheeded, and the confiscation of Palestinian lands to continue. Put otherwise, indifference facilitates the perpetual condition of 'neither two states nor one' (Yiftachel 2005:125). Recognising this supports Ophir and Azoulay's (2013:6) claims that the occupation is not a temporary political arrangement or an accidental historical situation that is external or incidental to the Israeli nation-state. Rather, it is an essential and structural element of the Israeli political system. In this view, the continued indifference of the Jewish Israeli citizenry is vital to the fragmentation of Palestinian space (Ophir and Azoulay 2013). Hence:

‘The Occupied Territories have been ruled ever since as a temporary “exterior”, whose inclusion has been denied...and this denial itself was part of the externalization of what has been contained.’ (Ophir and Azoulay 2013:13-14)

This, I hope, will encourage a shift to the interrogation of the geopolitics of indifference - not as a specific condition of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - but one that is perhaps a contingent configuration of contemporary low-intensity conflict more broadly. It seems obvious that indifference has a geopolitically formative role in many conflicts occurring around the world. A cursory glance would suggest that American indifference to the geopolitical conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq might be distinct from the Israeli indifference described above. Here, as in the Israeli case, indifference is still produced by geographical conditions – the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts occur in distant places. But, at the same time, American indifference will be contingently produced through the different demographic and social conditions of the US military (unlike Israel, there is no American conscription), and by distinctive political conditioning (for example, the Bush Administration’s imperative of not showing American military coffins in public media).

Chapters 5 and 6 also contributed to the project of challenging certain political geographical framings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As well as exploring more specific causes of indifference in the Messianic Jewish community, these chapters acted to disaggregate the all-encompassing term ‘Israeli’ in the idiomatic expression ‘the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’. It was clear, for example, that my informants’ lives – and state and societal reactions to them - posed a challenge to any framing of a homogenous and omnipotent colonising community (Leshem 2013). Here an examination of Israel’s treatment of its own (non)citizens - rather than its approach to Palestinians - proffered an alternative writing of the geopolitics of Palestine-Israel, not through the well-trodden territory of the occupation but by way of the spatial and ideological politics of citizenship (Long 2012). Instead, I have shown that Israeli Jewish geopolitical identity was reliant on the marginalisation of minority groups residing *inside* the undisputed ethnonational territory. Indeed, as Ophir and Azoulay (2013:13) suggest, a grounding principle of the Israeli state is ‘differential rule over populations of differing status’ within Israel itself. Put more starkly, the

Israeli journalist Amira Hass (2015:n.p) recently stated that ‘the political geography of the Israeli state is very similar on both sides of the Green Line’.

This fact disrupts critical geopolitics’ propensity to examine the construction of our geopolitical orientations as formed predominantly in relation (and contrast) to other states. It is also true, however, that geopolitical orientations are formed in reference to internal minority groups and contestable (non)citizens. Here, I drew on the work of Oren Yiftachel (1998), which sets Israeli-Palestinian identity relations aside in order to show that Jewish-Israeli identity is also formed through stark *intra*-Jewish ethno-religious stratification, segregation, and inequality. This thesis has attempted to empirically extend this critical project with reference to the Messianic Jewish community. Through the imposition of an ethnicised citizenry border regime, Messianic Jews experienced a similar form of societal exclusion and ethnicised marginalisation more normally endured by Palestinians and ‘Israeli Arabs’. This similarity is more than anecdotal or coincidental. Rather, Yiftachel (1998) suggests that there are clear connections between a unifying nation-building project and socio-spatial in-group relations within the nation.

Specifically he argues that there is ‘a clear nexus’ connecting the Judaisation and de-Arabisation of the country with the marginalisation of certain minority Jewish groups. Put otherwise, the spatial exclusion of Palestinians both relies on and in turn legitimises patterns of intra-national *ethnisation*. How is this nexus formed? Yiftachel (1998:34-40) argues that the persistent and calculated imperative to construct, present and maintain a unifying, ethnonational-territorial identity (‘predicated on the reconstruction of a Jewish indigenous identity and on the exclusion of Palestinians’) has, in fact, ‘created and reinforced social disparity’ between Jewish groups. Any person or action that undermines or threatens the mythical and symbolic unity of the dominant ethnonational identity is either marginalised (as in the case of Mizrahi and Ethiopian Jews, Bedouins, and ‘Israeli Arabs’) or excluded (Palestinians) (Yiftachel 2000). Consequently, the Jewish-Israeli majority, having internalised an orientation that treats the Palestinian Other as both inferior and threatening, uses similar geopolitical logic to control and marginalise minority Jewish groups in ‘the interests of the broader national-building projects’ (Yiftachel 1998:36).

Like Palestinians, Messianic Jews are seen to untenably violate and threaten the ethnonational collective identity of the nation. Therefore, the state seeks to entirely exclude them outside the borders of formal citizenship. It would not be inaccurate to say, therefore, that the citizenship borders that Messianic Jews face in everyday life are entangled in the nation-building project that undergirds, incites, and perpetuates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

These intra-Jewish divisions are constantly being produced and reproduced in space (Yiftachel 1998). Yet Jewish-Israeli national space often seems to be imagined as an unproblematic stage for coherent and unified socio-political process (Yiftachel 1998). However, Chapter 5 and 6 illustrate the ways in which Israeli space is far from a homogenous container of uncontested, ethnonational narratives. Instead it is populated with, and disrupted by, marginal 'Jewish' communities and their everyday, contingent efforts to refuse, re-work, and resist - but also secure - ethno-national ideologies (Leshem 2013). The Messianic Jewish community, and the spaces they inhabited, perfectly demonstrated the unfinished and unstable production of the Judaising logic.

Congregational spaces and the religious material-practice occurring therein were sites of both contestation and submission to hegemonic ideologies. From the uncritical prevalence of Jewish-Israeli national symbols, to the religious narratives that questioned the state's sovereignty, I was constantly confronted by spatial practices that resisted compartmentalisation into clearly defined binary conventions of nationalism or resistance. I also illustrated the ways in which ethnicised marginalisation was intermittent and contingent; it did not define the entirety of everyday life for Messianic Jews. Instead, individuals found – and were afforded with - interim ways to secure their surreptitious existence in the Israeli nation-state.

The broader conclusion is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Jewish-Israeli geopolitical orientations towards it, cannot be understood apart from discussions of domestic, intra-Jewish spatial-struggles. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not simply a contest of power relations between two (quasi)states, but a dynamic and unfinished outworking of 'ideological visions of who belongs within the state and

who does not' (Dodds and Sidaway 1994:199–202). It involves and engenders multiple lines of classification, stratification and separation; 'Jews from Arabs, and citizens from noncitizens' (Azoulay and Ophir 2013:19) and, as I have shown, Jewish citizens from Jewish noncitizens. The wider implication for future work in critical geopolitics is that we should not be too quick to pass over the groups or states that are usually presented as the homogenous coloniser/oppressor/perpetrator of geopolitical violence, exclusion and conflict.

### **8.3 Towards a 'Messy Geopolitics'**

This thesis makes a further disciplinary contribution through its openness to the complexity of lived reality (Dittmer and Gray 2010). I make a plea to critical geopolitics to acknowledge and take seriously everyday contingency and mess in the processual making of individuals' geopolitical subjectivities. This follows Ó Tuathail's (2013:xx) recent admission that accounting for geopolitical practices in a complex world is always 'harder and messier than it appears'. As each chapter has illustrated, a diverse entanglement of actors, events, materials, discourses and practices came to be formative in the shaping of my Messianic informants' geopolitical orientations vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Chapter 4 explored the ways in which the everyday, mundane and uneventful spatial-practice of riding a train contributes to the attunement of one's geopolitical orientation towards the Other. Chapter 5 noted a myriad of state/non-state actors, objects, spaces involved and implicated in the exclusion of my informants. Chapter 6 demonstrated that this exclusion initiated a chain of events whereby Messianic individuals enrolled another constellation of religious objects, narratives and spatial-practices in order to emphasise and enact their commitment to the Jewish-Israeli national-body.

Attending to these heterogeneous and processual interactions appears rare in critical geopolitics. Instead, I have suggested, we often over-privilege the formative significance of a single geopolitical curiosity; be it an event (9/11), emotion or affect (humour, fear), institution (university, school) or media (comic book, film). Whilst these have all be shown to be cogent in the shaping of geopolitical imaginations, a proclivity for singular focus limits our thinking about the complex and processual



development of geopolitical subjectivities (Kuus 2013b). Some critical geopolitical scholars, it seems, are reticent to open up to the theoretical and empirical common-sense of mess, but rather are still locked into narrow presuppositions of causality and determinism.

But, it is clear that individuals' geopolitical commitments are shaped in ways that do not necessarily convey singular cause-effect relationships. Instead, a multitude of stimuli incite, interact and intersect to produce contingent, dynamic and often compartmentalised geopolitical orientations (Sturm and Frantzman 2015). At certain times, different events, materials, discourse and actors moved - or were ushered - to the fore of my informants' geopolitical consciousness in sudden, surprising or contingent ways. I have, for instance, throughout the course of the thesis called into question the primacy of propositional theology in the formation of geopolitical imaginations. However, as Chapter 7 illustrated, at times doctrine was brought to the centre-stage. Similarly, sudden pangs of fear can cut through indifference, and traumatic violence will disrupt insouciance. Exclusionary borders are harshly imposed, but recede in time until they are ignored. Materials are adopted and co-opted, but their meaning and significance is subject to dynamic change. Hence, a messy geopolitics should always push back against our scholarly propensity to over-determine the impact of singular stimuli or space, and be appropriately reflective and emblematic of the untidy world in which we find ourselves in. I have shown that - instead of being tied to one particular theoretical tradition - we might need to draw on a number of theoretical, conceptual and methodological strands to more fully capture the lived reality of our informants.

We will need increasingly to find new ways to do research in order to attempt the momentary capture of mess and contingency. A 'messy geopolitics' requires a certain 'engagement with the world, one that experiments with methodological and presentational practices in order to attend to a lively world of differences' (Anderson and McFarlane 2011:126). I have argued that ethnography lends itself as a solid basis for such an investigation. The commitment of time that underpins ethnographic endeavour facilitates a thorough examination of temporal contingency and dynamic complexity across a range of sites and spaces. Moreover, ethnography can be productively married with a range of alternative methods, such as interviews,

performative research, discourse analysis, and site-spatial analysis in order to explore connections between different stimuli. Indeed, responding to the need for flexibility when working in such an array of challenging environments, this research utilised a number of methods. Employing methodological variety is not particularly unique within social and cultural geography, but it is still relatively rare in studies of critical geopolitics. Yet it seems obvious that broadening the ways by which informants' lives can be captured is vitally important in politically sensitive contexts, where open expression is limited, curtailed or simply unwise. As Chapter 3 attests, thought, ethnography in critical geopolitics is not without its challenges. It is certainly an ongoing challenge to make sense of the array of stimuli that prime our geopolitical subjectivities, especially given differences in the scale, dynamic, and temporality of particular materials, practices, and interactions.

#### **8.4 Future research**

One of the frustrations with long-term ethnographic research is that one is often left with a good amount of un-used empirical material. This, however, opens up many more avenues of enquiry than this thesis has been unable to explore.

Comparative studies exploring the geopolitical position and commitment of other marginalised Christian communities within Israel would be particularly interesting as part of any future research developments. Whilst there is some extant literature on Russian Christian Jews, these tend to focus on their experience of immigration, over and above any real political considerations. However, it is clear that these individuals – and the Russian Jewish Christian community in general - suffers from similar patterns of ethnonational exclusion. Some members look to enhance their inclusion into Jewish Israeli society through similar means noted in Chapter 6. However, unlike Messianic Jews, some Russian Jewish Christians are happy to retain their Russian identity as their primary sense of national belonging (Raijman and Pinsky 2013).

In the same way, the experience and position of the Palestinian Christian community would provide another intriguing comparison. New research from

Sturm and Frantzman (2015) provides a short expository of two Palestinian Christian movements; Palestinian Christian Zionists and Palestinian Liberation theologians. Whilst they lucidly detail the key tenets of each theological tradition, little is done to illustrate the everyday political orientations of members of each community. If one were to do so, I expect that there would be a number of surprising similarities to the Messianic Jewish community. Exploring these comparable communities would enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between ethnic, religious and national identities, illustrating the varied role that religion plays in forging different patterns of identity and positioning individuals politically. More than that, comparable studies might continue to help militate against our tendency to focus on the extremes of religion.

Attending to these communities - and others like them – are useful in highlighting the contested and flexible borders of political and social participation in Israel. As I have noted, in scholarly work this is predominantly illustrated with reference to the exclusion of Palestinians. However, as this thesis has shown, the reality is far more complex. As the Messianic Jewish community grows in number and significance, there is an opportunity to observe whether the Jewish Israeli state continues to exclude this (predominantly) supportive religious group, or moves to a more inclusive position of national enrollment. Whilst currently unimaginable, such a position may take on political resonance in light of the continuing discourse of the Arab demographic threat, or a one-state solution. In order to secure a Jewish majority, it may be the case that groups demonstrating questionable ‘Jewish’ identity are increasingly brought into the Jewish Israeli ethnonational fold, just as Soviet and Ethiopian Jews were two decades ago. Indeed, is it feasible that the Israeli state will ever be forced to enroll non-Jewish, yet supportive, populations – such as Christian Zionists into the national body in order to maintain its ethnonational status.

I also hope that this dissertation has pointed to the fact that there is much work yet to be done to explore the geopolitical claims embedded within various liturgical and sacramental practices. These claims are powerfully formative exactly because they do not give primacy to a particular didactic or propositional message, and are, therefore much more subtle. As Smith (2009:139) states, the Christian:

‘orientation to the world is still more fundamentally shaped by embodied liturgical practices than doctrinal disquisitions...Before Christians had systematic theologies and worldviews, they were singing hymns and psalms, saying prayers, celebrating Eucharist, sharing their property, and becoming a people marked by a desire for God’s coming kingdom.’

These embodied practices of worship are designed to prime believers towards an alternative socio-political ‘kingdom’ in ways that cognitive, propositional theology cannot. Through partaking in these practices, the faithful become attuned to remember and enact divine sovereignty over and above any anthropogenic authority. Political geographers must, therefore, become more adept at exegeting the (often dissident) geopolitical orientations and claims that are implicit in the practices of Christian worship.

It seems to me, therefore, that there are many aspects of religious life and community that warrant further attention in critical geopolitics. Many religious practices work as ‘counter-formations’ to those in surrounding political culture. For instance, one could explore the formative role of intercessory prayer as political protest or critique. Similarly there is much to say about the unique order and temporality ushered in through the calendrical celebration of religious liturgical festivals (such as advent or lent), and how this acts as a locator of Christian identity, hope, and ultimate citizenry allegiance in an alternative sovereign. In this vein, one could exegete the political role of baptism as an embodied initiation ritual into an alternative and transnational people-group, and the subsequent subversion of the primacy of national identification. As Smith (2009:186-187) suggests, baptism ‘articulates an antithesis with respect to the world’, it is a ‘subversive sacrament’ that is designed to reorder prior social and political allegiances.

## **8.5 Final remarks**

This thesis has explicitly sought to engage with, challenge, and nuance existing conversations about the significance of religion in geopolitical thought; conversations that often trade in narrow conceptualisations of religion, religious belief, and religious believers. By contrast, the preceding pages have drawn attention to the complex entanglement and co-constitution of religious and geopolitical

traditions (Ó Tuathail 2000), and have extended these ideas by accounting for the multiple, processual, and deeply contingent nature of this imbrication. In doing so, this thesis has looked to develop ways of writing about religious individuals that do not over-determine the significance of religion in everyday life, but gives due care to individuals' alternative quotidian concerns. Writing against a scholarly propensity to concentrate on religions' direct implication in geopolitical violence, I have drawn attention to the fact that religious believers are more likely to move between a range of (often contradictory) geopolitical positions, from indifference to complicity and many more. Religion, I surmise, both orders and makes messy the geopolitical orientation of the faithful.

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Figure 7: Author's own

Figure 8: Author's own

Figure 9: Author's own

Figure 10: Edited from GoogleMaps

Figure 11: Author's own

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