Humanitarian Salafism
- A Contradiction in terms?

A study of the Salafi organisation ‘the Book and the Sunna Society’ and their efforts in relief work in Jordan

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Abstract

The Arab uprisings not only brought new political opportunities to the Arab world; it also brought a violent civil war to Syria, causing a flow of refugees into its neighbouring countries. The Jordanian Salafi organisation the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) immediately started a massive campaign to bring relief to the Syrian refugees in their country, mobilising donors in their transnational network. Now they are one of the biggest native contributors to relief work among Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Salafism usually draws negative attention from Western media and academia, due to some Salafi jihadi-terrorist groups’ efforts to wage war against the West. Rarely do we hear about their charitable efforts to help the poor and needy. This study aims to gain an understanding of Salafi efforts in the field of humanitarian aid.

The main objective of the thesis is to analyse what are the BSS’ strengths and weaknesses when measured by international humanitarian standards, represented by the ‘Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief’ (ICRC Code of Conduct). The study concludes that although the relief work presented by the BSS contains weaknesses when it comes to universality, impartiality, independence and professionalism, they have great strengths when it comes to respecting culture and customs and building their work on local capacities. Their indigenous character also gives them a great advantage by providing a large network of supporters and workers that contribute voluntarily, or at low costs, in a cultural and religious sensitive way. Thanks to their Salafi affiliation, they harvest support from like-minded groups in their trans-national network, most notably wealthy Gulf-based donor organisations. This way they utilise funds that would otherwise not reach the fields through conventional humanitarian organisations.

Given that they are Salafi, one would expect a strong emphasis on the missionary side of their work. This assumption proved correct, from the fact that they have set up numerous mosques and a religious centre, holding courses on Sharia and the Quran. Still, their religious work does not hinder them from making a humanitarian contribution to the relief sector through meeting the basic needs of the refugees, like housing, health treatment, food, clothes, as well as psychological support through support centres for women and children. Their relief is above all conditioned upon need - not faith or religion, although these are the primary factors of motivation for their efforts in the field.
Preface

This thesis presents an analysis of the relief efforts of the Jordanian Salafi organisation ‘the Book and the Sunna Society’ (BSS). This organisation caught my interest when I was a student intern at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Amman the autumn of 2012, conducting a study on the Jordanian Salafi movement. I interviewed Salafi individuals from a range of locations and branches. When approaching the BSS I found that this organisation and its members represented something different from other Salafi trends in Jordan. They claim to represent the golden mean between the traditional purist Salafis on the one side and the violent jihadi current on the other. They are registered as a cultural association and have political aspirations. Yet, they have turned most of their resources and efforts to providing aid and relief to the Syrian refugees pouring into Jordan. Local Salafi organisations are not known for doing humanitarian relief in cooperation with the UNHCR. Now that they do, one of my first questions to the subject was ‘are their relief efforts really a sincere engagement in humanitarian relief, or is it only a way for them to promote their Salafi agenda?’ I therefore decided to conduct a first-hand study of the BSS in order to examine where they stand in relation to international humanitarian standards.

My first visit to their headquarters was carried out under strict precautions, with my Embassy colleague tracking my locations with GPS to see that I was not abducted. After getting to know them, I soon understood that such precautions were as redundant as GPS tracking when shopping groceries. I was met with an unconditional hospitality and openness that made me humble when thinking of my own prejudice in approaching them.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this study was only possible due to the generosity and kindness of my informants in BSS: Zayid Hammad (President), Ahmad Dhuwayyib (Executive Director), Musa Abd al-Rahman (Director of the Charity department), Osama Shihadeh (Director of the ‘the Good Word committee’), Hassan Abu Hanieh (one of the founders of BSS). I thank you for your time, and wish you luck and success in your pursuit of a better world.

This study could not have been realised without the generous support from Ambassador Petter Ølberg and First Secretary Roar Haugsdal and the rest of the staff at the Royal
Norwegian Embassy in Amman. Thank you for your hospitality, encouragements and facilitation!

Furthermore, my thanks go to my supervisor Dag Tuastad, for your invaluable feedback and quick replies. Thank you to my 2-year-old son, Laurits for numerous playful and amusing breaks from my writing. My wife Anette for your support. Anders Myklebust for helping me realise I was on the wrong track when giving up my academic aspirations. Thanks to my friends and colleagues Heidi, Jørgen and Erling, for your invaluable comments on my work.

Sturla Godø Sæther,
Oslo, 26 November 2013
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Introduction

‘Salafism is one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing Islamic movements. It is impossible to understand contemporary Islam without taking it into account’, writes Zoltan Pall (2013). During the latest developments in the Arab world, Salafism has proved to be a societal force that cannot be overlooked. During the political crises in the Arab world, Salafis in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya joined the battle for political power hoping to take advantage of the situation to Islamise their states and societies (McCants 2013). The Arab uprisings not only brought new political opportunities; they also brought violent crackdowns and a fierce civil war to Syria, causing a flow of refugees into its neighbouring countries. The Jordanian Salafi organisation, the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) immediately started a massive campaign to bring relief to the Syrian refugees in their country, mobilising donors in their transnational network. Now they are one of the biggest indigenous contributors to the relief work among Syrian refugees in Jordan.

Salafism has only recently caught the interest of academics, and although the amount of research is growing, there are still blind spots in the academic knowledge of the movement. Most attention has been given to perspectives like security studies and political science. This study aims to gain understanding for Salafi efforts in the field of humanitarian aid.

Even if there have been few studies on Salafi relief work as such, the body of literature on Islamic relief organisations has been growing the last decades. One of the most recent contributors in the field, Marie Juul Petersen (2011), has divided Islamic relief organisations into two main groups: Western Muslim NGOs and Middle Eastern Muslim NGOs. In her analysis, the latter group is dominated by Salafi-leaning organisations that tend to be more concerned with the ‘Islamic cause’, while the former is focusing on the ‘humanitarian cause’ (Petersen 2011). Although both groups have been facing scepticism from the conventional humanitarian sector, the former group has largely succeeded in building a reputation as effective contributors dedicated to humanitarian principles. On the contrary, the latter group is criticised by academic literature and media for being unprofessional, arbitrary and having ‘religio-political’ agendas (IRIN 2012).

The aim of this thesis is to test the heavy criticism of the Middle Eastern NGOs by investigating the work of an indigenous Salafi relief organisation in Jordan. Is the work of this NGO supporting or contesting humanitarian standards of international relief? This will be done by studying the work of the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) from the perspective
of the basic principles of International humanitarian work standards, represented by the ‘Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief’ (ICRC Code of Conduct).

I am going to present how the Salafi organisation ‘the Book and the Sunna Society’ (BSS) works, measured by the framework of the ICRC Code of Conduct. What are the strengths and weaknesses of their efforts when analysed as humanitarian relief?

**Delimitations**

Salafism might be seen as a small stream among different Islamic movements. Why focus only on Salafism in relief, and not Islamic relief as a collective phenomenon? During the last years, research on Islamic relief has revealed that there are considerable differences between the various Islamic organisations. They range from almost secular Islamic NGOs such as Islamic Relief Worldwide, to terrorist jihadi organisations designated as ‘terrorist’ by the US government for supporting Al Qaeda (Petersen 2012a pp.135, 149). That is why studies on “Islamic relief organisations” become very general. By focusing on Salafism in relief, I hope to present something more tangible and specific.

In order to limit the study, I decided to focus on the most relevant of the ten principles in the ICRC Code of Conduct. Thus I have used the six first principles of the Code.

**The structure of the study**

In the first chapter, I give a description of the methodological foundation for the qualitative fieldwork conducted during the first phase of the study, and discuss ethical implications and considerations.

The second chapter introduces Salafism and presents different typologies set forth by the most recognised academic authorities on the topic. Furthermore, I present zakat as a foundation for aid in Islam and offer an overview of the ICRC Code of Conduct as an international standard of humanitarian aid.

In chapter three, I employ the ICRC Code of Conduct as a framework to analyse the work of the Book and the Sunna Society and pursue to answer what their main weaknesses and strengths are in comparison to humanitarian standards of relief.

The fourth and last chapter concludes the study and summarises its main findings.
**Abbreviations and Arabic words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ</td>
<td>The first three generations of Muslims that lived from the time of the prophet until around the year 810 AD (Meijer 2009 p.viii)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSS</td>
<td>The Book and the Sunna Society, <em>jamʿīyyat al-kitāb wa-l-sunna</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daʿwa</td>
<td>Call, spreading of faith (ibid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBO</td>
<td>Faith-Based Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRF</td>
<td>Human Relief Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICCS</td>
<td>The Islamic Charity Centre Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICRC Code of Conduct</td>
<td>Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIROSA</td>
<td>International Islamic Relief Organisation of Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRW</td>
<td>Islamic Relief Worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWL</td>
<td>Muslim World League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>Shaykh Thani bin Abdullah Foundation for Humanitarian Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadaqa</td>
<td>Voluntary charitable donations encouraged by the Quran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECA</td>
<td>Sheikh Eid Charitable Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunna</td>
<td>The exemplary habits and ways of the Prophet, transmitted through the Hadith (Encyclopædia Britannica 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakāt</td>
<td>An obligatory tax required of Muslims, one of the five Pillars of Islam (ibid)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Methodological approaches and ethical implications

This section will present the methodological approaches and ethical implication of the research conducted during the study.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted during the early spring of 2013, as part of a ten-month stay in Jordan from July 2012 to May 2013. The first half of this period, I served as a student intern at the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Amman, a position that allowed me to conduct a qualitative study on the Salafi Movement in Jordan. One of the findings that caught my attention was the fact that the only organised Salafi association was actually devoting the bulk of its work to help the Syrian refugees, receiving considerable donations from influential donor agencies throughout the region. An organisation mainly concerned with teaching and preaching the salafi doctrine had turned 70-80% of it’s activities to helping the Syrian refugees with shelter, food, clothes and more (Hammad 2013a). Struck by the rapid change in focus, and ability to mobilise massive donations quickly, I decided to study the work, values, agenda and strategies of the BSS in order to find out more about this Salafi contribution to humanitarian aid.

One of my worries was that the BSS would be so busy with the Syrian crisis (that escalated even further in the beginning of this year) that they would be hard to reach and overloaded with work, making it difficult to arrange interviews and visits. I therefore decided to stay in Jordan the whole semester January – May 2013, instead of a short field trip. The Embassy generously provided me with an office and facilities to work effectively and equally important, a formal affiliation that seemed to increase peoples’ interest in assisting me. They also hired me to work with their archives, enabling me to pay for a professional interpreter. My general perception was that my embassy affiliation attracted a positive interest that made it easy to make appointments on a short notice. Almost all the organisations I contacted were eager to help me and seemingly had a great need to share their experiences from the field and promote what they were doing.
Methodological approach

Previous research

The topic of Salafi relief covers two areas of academic study: the study of Salafism as an Islamic movement, and the study of Islamic relief as a part of (or contestant to) humanitarian relief. I will be relating my study to literature from these two academic discourses.

The study of Islamic movements

On the one hand, this study deals with Salafism, an Islamic movement usually analysed within the academic fields of religious studies and social sciences (political science in particular). The literature on Salafism as an Islamic movement focuses on its distinct character compared to other Islamic movements, like Sufism, Shia or the Muslim Brotherhood.

As a main source for background information about the Salafi Movement I have used Roel Meijer’s book ‘Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement’ (2009). This anthology has become one of the most important references to Salafism in academia. The works of Joas Wagemakers (2012), Martin Bruinessen (2007) and Saba Mahmoud (2012) have also been used as informative and theoretically illuminating sources.

The study of humanitarian relief

On the other hand, this thesis deals with relief work, particularly the relationship between the Islamic tradition of charity and the western tradition of humanitarian aid. Aid and relief is regularly analysed under the umbrella of development studies and research conducted by actors in the field of humanitarian work. Jonathan Benthall is one of the most prominent academics who has put considerable effort into the analysis of Islamic relief work. Together with Jérôme Bellion-Jourdan he has written the book ‘The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World’ (2009), which is regarded as a guide to understanding politics of Islamic aid. In addition to this I have used Benthall’s article ‘Financial Worship: The Quranic Injunction to Almsgiving’ (1999) as a theoretical source to the background on the roots of aid in Islam.
A recurring theme in studies on humanitarian relief has been the role of religiously motivated organisations, so-called Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs). FBOs are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that by way of their distinct religious profile allegedly offer a set of ‘added values’ to the work. For this study I draw on the research of Nida Kirmani & Ahmad Khan (2008) and Elisabeth Ferris (2011) for perspectives on how Islamic relief work may be seen as contributors to humanitarian relief. Elisabeth Ferris (2005) separates FBOs from most of their secular counterparts on the basis of two characteristics: They are motivated by faith and they have a constituency which is broader than humanitarian concerns (Ferris 2005 p.316).

Not much has been written on Salafi relief in particular. It has usually been analysed together with the broader context of Islamic aid and relief. In studies on this topic,¹ it has been revealed that Islamic relief is a very diversified phenomenon, often not displaying other commonalities than the general ‘family resemblance’ that comes from their common affiliation with Islam (Benthall 2007 p.6). Petersen (2011) postulates two distinguishable strands within trans-national Muslim NGOs: those within the Western culture of development aid, and those within the Middle-Eastern culture of Islamic aid. In her analysis, 9/11 marks a historical watershed. Whereas these two cultures existed parallel to each other before it, the Muslim NGOs were forced to relate explicitly to the culture of development aid after it.

Within this dichotomy, Salafi NGOs like the BSS belong to the Middle Eastern culture of Islamic aid since they rely on support from trans-national Salafi networks and not international humanitarian or development agencies. They are however forced to work with Western agencies like the UNHCR on the ground, simply because they are in charge of the refugee situation in Jordan.²

¹ For studies on the topic, see Petersen 2012a; Petersen 2011; Petersen 2012b; Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2009; Benthall 1999; Benthall 2007; Kaag 2011; Ghandour 2003; De Cordier 2009; Bruinessen 2007; Bellion-Jourdan 2000; Alterman and Von Hippel 2007
² There are other approaches that display Salafi NGOs as radical, unprofessional and arbitrary organisations. Especially within security studies, Salafi relief is usually designated as a potential breeding ground for terrorism. This approach will not be discussed in this study.
Interviews

This study builds on empirical data collected during autumn 2012 and spring 2013. The 17 interviews from 2012 were conducted as part of a research on the Salafi movement in Jordan, which introduced me to the most active Salafi organisation in Jordan: the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS). This fieldwork included five interviews with different representatives from BSS.

In the course of the current study, I conducted an additional seven semi-structured interviews with directors and employees from the local offices of this and four additional Islamic relief organisations present in Jordan. Apart from three interviews with representatives from BSS, I interviewed representatives from The Islamic Charity Centre Society (ICCS), Human Relief Foundation (HRF), Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW), and International Islamic Relief Organisation of Saudi Arabia (IIROSA). In addition, I visited BSS’ work in Zaatari Refugee Camp in Mafraq Governorate.

Selecting my sources

I originally set out to conduct a broad study on Islamic relief work in Jordan during the influx of Syrian refugees to the country. The idea was to conduct interviews with six Islamic relief organisations: two local (BSS and Islamic Charity Centre Society (ICCS)), two regional (International Islamic Relief Organisations of Saudi Arabia (IIROSA) and International Islamic Charity Organisation (IICO)) and two Western organisations (Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) and Human Relief Foundation (HRF)). I had difficulties getting an appointment with the IICO.

When analysing my interviews with the above-mentioned organisations, I realised that the data collected was too comprehensive for a thesis of such a limited time and scope. Furthermore, similar research projects had been undertaken, e.g. Petersen(2012b; 2011). It was necessary to narrow it down. The Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) was the only organisation that represented an overt Salafi approach to relief, an understudied although significant section of the relief sector in the Middle East. I therefore decided to rely mainly
Formal approach

Studying organisations require a more formal approach than studying informal movements, such as my prior experience with studying the Salafi movement in Jordan. My approach to informants in the Salafi movement (to a great extent including sheikhs and imams), would go through informal personal networks. I encountered Salafis that would introduce me to other Salafis, that again would direct me to influential figures in the movement.

When contacting formal organisations, I had to take a direct approach that implied contacting the influential figures without an introduction from an insider. This meant making unannounced phone calls to the organisations, presenting the research project and asking for an interview. To make sure this was done in an appropriate way, both professionally and culturally, I did this through the secretary at the Embassy. This way I assured that the contact was made in a culturally appropriate way, and that the Embassy affiliation would create a sense of importance and create goodwill. Rarely did I experience to be rejected, on the contrary: they all expressed gratitude and gratefulness for my visit, and offered to help me as much as I needed. Although I lacked an insider that could ask on my behalf in order to avoid scepticism and misunderstandings, the Embassy secretary represented a culturally appropriate go-between and a local institutional connection.

Field visits

I initially planned to conduct several visits to the organisations’ work, conducting interviews with the employees and voluntary workers. However, I found that the limited scope of the study – both time and scale - did not allow for interviewing both the main offices and their branches. Consequently, most of the interviews took place in Amman during work hours in the informants’ offices far removed from contact with the needy and poor refugees in Jordan. Still, I managed to make two field visits. One to the BSS’ distribution office in Hay al-Nazzāl

3 See Sæther 2012 for my previous study on the Salafi movement in Jordan. I conducted 24 interviews during my stay in Jordan, and the twelve I referred to in this thesis are listed in chapter five.

4 The embassy secretary is a local Jordanian that knows exactly how to approach influential Jordanian personalities in a brilliant way.
in Amman, where crowds of refugees were in line to register in order to receive supplies including cooking devices, mattresses, food and clothes. The second visit was to BSS’ work in Zaatari refugee camp near the Syrian border. This camp has grown to a population of around 120,000 inhabitants and has become the second largest refugee camp in the world – and one of the most populous cities in Jordan (UNHCR 2013). I visited BSS’ work inside the camp where they distributed food and non-food materials, installed caravans and mosques.

The interviews

From previous experience, I knew most interviewees would not be comfortable with or able to express themselves in English. Thus, most interviews were conducted in Arabic, with a professional interpreter. Even though I master Arabic well, I chose to use an interpreter from the fear that my lack of fluency and potential misperceptions could cause irritation and hinder a precise communication during the interview.

In the first visit to the main office of the BSS, they provided an interpreter for the interview. This turned out very unfortunate, and in the course of the interview, it became evident that my Arabic was better than his English, although he was an English student in university. Not only were there language problems, but the interview situation seemed foreign to the so-called interpreter. To avoid the disadvantage of unprofessional interpretation, I thus decided to employ a professional interpreter that was recommended by a colleague.

The use of an interpreter adds an extra link to the chain of communication from the informant to the researcher, thereby adding an extra danger of meanings being lost or distorted in the communication process. On the other hand, translation gives both the interviewee and the interviewer time to reflect on the topics. The fact that my translator was a Jordanian Salafi also served as a help to establish the interview situation in a culturally and religiously suitable way. This was likely to increase the positive experience for the informants, again creating an atmosphere to express oneself freely and sincerely. His familiarity with the Salafi nomenclature made his interpretation of their terminology especially well.

5 He belonged to the traditional purist current, and had previously worked for some of the most respected sheikhs in the movement.
6 Often we used the Arabic terms, because there are no immediate equivalents in English, and the Arabic terms are used also in Western academic discourse.
Compensating for the potential loss, or distortion, of valuable information through interpretation, all interviews have been recorded and carefully transcribed.\textsuperscript{7} Although I decided my Arabic language (and cultural sensitivity\textsuperscript{8}) was not fluent enough to be an effective tool for conducting interviews, I actively used it when listening to the recordings. Hence, I have been able to pick up details missed by the interpreter during the process of listening to, and transcribing the recordings.

My last interview was conducted without an interpreter. The objective of this interview was to ask clarifying questions about some of the topics we had treated before. After one year in the country, I felt a lot more confident about my Arabic, and knew my interviewee well. An interpreter would therefore be redundant.

\textbf{Ethical perspectives and considerations}

\textbf{Written consent}

I chose not to acquire a written consent from my informants, as it would be likely to provoke suspicion, and thereby decreasing their confidence and trust in the interview situation. In stead, I focused on explaining the objectives of the study and the interview in the beginning of the interview and made it clear that their anonymity would be protected according to their wish.\textsuperscript{9}

There is a danger that recording the interviews may cause the informant to hold back on information out of fear that the recording might be abused or end up in the wrong hands. Still, my main impression was that interviewees actually didn’t give much attention to whether or not they were recorded. If any consequence, my impression is that they appreciated being recorded, possibly because it testified that I took them seriously and wished to cite them accurately. The usage of a voice recorder has been done discretely, although never without verbal consent and my own conviction that the interviewees were comfortable

\textsuperscript{7} With the exception of interviews conducted in Zaatari refugee camp, that were not recorded due to noisy and stressful conditions.

\textsuperscript{8} Doing a formal interview in Arabic does not only require language proficiency, but also familiarity with cultural norms and customs tied to this situation. Since my main informants were local Jordanians, not accustomed to meetings with westerners, I could not assume that they would adjust to me – I had to adjust to them.

\textsuperscript{9} From all the 24 interviews I conducted during two fieldworks, only one informant requested anonymity.
with it. The interviews done in Zaatari did not allow for it, as they happened in a noisy and busy environment.

In addition to recording, I always took notes. Taking notes is a way to record information during the interview, as well as a nice way to provide time to relax and reflect upon the topics raised. It also gives the interviewee the possibility to rephrase himself/herself or to emphasise a certain aspect by dictating how I should put it on paper. Additionally, notes may serve as a backup in case the voice recording is damaged. Because they represent a risk of confidential material ending up in the wrong hands, I took notes in Norwegian so that they would be hard to understand if they got lost.

I always made efforts to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after the interview, in order to write it as accurately as possible, as well as to get as much as possible from my own observations, impressions and immediate interpretations written down. This was important to recall it as exactly as possible, and to redigest the content in order to interpret and extract the main points from the interview.

**My position as a researcher**

As a researcher, it is necessary to reflect soberly and realistically on one’s own position in relation to the phenomenon under scrutiny. Being a Christian and Western researcher influences not only the way Muslim Jordanian informants view me, but also the way I view them. As a stranger, foreigner and non-Muslim I will be dealt with as an outsider perfectly dependent on their goodwill, hospitality and favour. Approaching them I could only hope that they would see participation in my research as something expedient. Since Islamists have been struggling with a bad reputation in the media, I anticipated that they may have seen it as their task to convince me that Islamic aid is something good. Through my relatively short encounter with my informants, I would not be able to figure out their motivation to join in my research. Thus I would not have any guarantee that the information they gave me is relevant or even trustworthy. In the same way as my informants, I myself came to the research field with certain academic aspirations and preconceived ideas that provide the basis for my ‘agenda’. My way of perceiving, interpreting and analysing the empirical material depends on my own preconceptions. These reflections forced me to acknowledge that there are limitations to my research and that I need to take precautions in order to ensure the reliability of my research.
Combining research with a foreign political affiliation – having had an office in the Norwegian Embassy - poses some challenges related to how the informants view the researcher’s motives and position. Especially since Norwegian relief agencies have a strong position on the ground in the Syrian refugee crisis, and the fact that the Norwegian government has made pledges to contribute with a serious amount of funds to relief in the Syrian crisis. It will only be speculations as to whether or not this might have affected my informants’ motives in helping me.

**Limited chance to generalise – good chance to indicate**

A qualitative fieldwork based on interviews with a handful relief workers does not represent grounds to say something about Salafi relief organisations in general. I have interviewed five of the leading figures in the BSS and some of them more than once. I have followed their activities on their web pages and Facebook pages for almost a year.\(^{10}\) This gives an empirical foundation to ascertain a true representation of the organisation. However, I cannot assume that they speak on behalf of the Salafi Movement as such, or even the haraki branch that they belong to.\(^{11}\) In my previous research I interviewed Salafis that were critical towards the BSS, claiming that they were not real Salafis, because of their political, institutional and activist attitudes. This only demonstrates that the BSS represents but one out of many interpretations of Salafism, and it is therefore impossible to generalise about a general Salafi relief approach from this limited scope.

However, these interviews represent statements from real full-time workers with considerable experience from working in a local Salafi relief organisation. In addition, they represent a joint in the chain of the transnational Salafi network comprising several of the most significant Salafi donors worldwide. They therefore represent legitimate voices that are likely to indicate values and viewpoints circulating in their network.

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\(^{10}\) They frequently update their homepage and Facebook pages (sometimes on a daily basis) with pictures, reports and invitations to their activities.

\(^{11}\) See the section 'What is Salafism' below.
2 Theoretical background

As a tool to analyse the relief work of the Salafi organisation BSS, I chose to use the ICRC Code of Conduct. This is the most fundamental standard for humanitarian relief that present its conventional basic values. The ICRC Code constitutes a framework for discussion of whether Salafi relief work may be seen as a contribution to humanitarian work, or as a contestant to it.

To be able to understand Salafi relief work, it is necessary to have general knowledge about Salafism, Islamic roots of charity and international humanitarian relief. In this chapter, I will give an introduction to these three topics. The first part will give a short presentation of the Salafi movement and how it is defined. The second part will present the Islamic principal duty of zakat. The third part will give a short introduction to the ICRC Code of Conduct as an international standard of relief.

What is Salafism?

Unlike other contemporary Islamic movements, Salafism has generally ignored and even despised modern ways of interacting with society. Their obsession with the ideals of pre-modern, so-called original Islam has resulted in a reluctance and scepticism towards modernisation, secularisation and institutionalisation of society. Therefore, they have always favoured informal and traditional models of structuring, thus evolving around prestigious Salafi personalities and mosques. The main point on their program has been the salafi da’wa, calling people to the Islam of the pious predecessors, al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ.

Salafism, politics and humanitarian relief

Contemporary Salafism has generally speaking been a movement confined to the “purely Islamic” arenas in society, like mosques, religious educational institutions and private learning circles around great Salafi personalities. In the wake of the proliferation of mass media and social media, Salafi networks have found new arenas to meet and exchange views.

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12 In Jordan, the renowned Salafi scholar, Nāṣir al-dīn al-’Albānī (1914-1999), was banned from preaching in public mosques but taught students in his home. In addition, his sermons and teachings were recorded and distributed as cassette tapes. (Sæther 2012 p.10; Lacroix 2009 pp.63–67)
Over the recent years, the myriad of Salafi TV-channels, blogs, forums, online literature collections and facebook pages has constituted a new powerful tool in harvesting support among young Muslims. Thus, the new generation of Salafis seems to bring new perspectives about how to deal with society.

One of the most conspicuous manifestations of this was the sudden formation of three Salafi political parties in Egypt before the elections in 2011. Although Salafis have been engaged in politics other places before this, the sudden change from no politics to 25% of the seats in the Egyptian parliament made many observers realise what a potent political force Salafism might be.

In Jordan, Salafis with similar political aspirations have not succeeded in entering formal politics. Yet they have made themselves noticeable in another sphere of society: humanitarian relief. The BSS demonstrated the same potential of sudden change as their peers in Egypt. They suddenly went from working almost exclusively with teaching, preaching and distribution of literature, to turning the majority of their focus to relief work among the Syrian refugees pouring across the borders from Syria (Hammad 2013a).

Why do Salafis suddenly change their strategies? According to Hassan Abu Hanieh, one of the founders of the BSS and a researcher on Salafism at the Friedrich Ebert Institute in Amman, the sudden changes in the Salafis’ relation to politics and institutionalisation, is no fundamental change. It is simply a manifestation of their ability to adjust to their changing circumstances. Abu Hanieh’s explanation is that they make the strategic considerations that they think fit their purpose and interests best (Abu Hanieh 2012). A striking example is the Lebanese haraki-salafis’ alliance with the secular political block’s Future Movement. This move is based on the consideration that they are the ‘lesser evil’ that best protect them from the Shi’ite threat (Pall 2013 p.58). Generally, harakis have shown a considerable ability to adapt and adjust to their circumstances in order to protect their own interests.

If Salafis change their approach according to their specific context, how do they manage to adapt to the context of humanitarian crisis?

13 i.e. Kuwait’s Islamic Salafi Alliance and Bahrain’s al-Asalah Islamic Society (Monroe 2012)
Salafi typology: A multifaceted movement

Roel Meijer’s book ‘Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement’ (2009) has become one of the most important academic references to Salafism. He defines Salafism as ‘the movement that believes that Muslims should emulate the first three generations of Islam referred to as the pious forefathers (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ), as much as possible in all areas of life’. In this study, I will use this definition as a basis for how to understand Salafism, with a focus on the popular movements in the Muslim world labelling themselves Salafi.

While studying the Salafi movement in Jordan, it became clear to me that the term Salafism is indeed vague and ambiguous. For outsiders, the word ‘Salafi’ may induce feelings of contempt, because it is often associated with terrorism or extremism. The same word is for insiders conceived as a noble and honorary title, tied to following the example of the prophet and pious first Muslims.

Many of the Salafis I interviewed, pleaded that I should not portray them as jihadis, whom they contended were not Salafis at all. They claimed that Salafism does not endorse the use of violent force. Most of them were also sceptical to Salafis engaging in political activities, and even Salafis working through formally established organisations. These things show that Salafism is a multifaceted movement with different ways to engage with society.

Although one of the basic principles in Salafism is tawḥīd, unification, most Jordanian Salafis I met, recognised that there are three different strands of those claiming adherence to Salafism. These strands were called ‘traditional Salafism’, ‘reform Salafism’ and ‘jihadi Salafism’ (Abu Hanieh 2012). Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006 p.225) has followed the same lines of classification, although given them the slightly different names purists, politicos and jihadis.

The first group (purists/traditional) is the group that sticks to the purely scriptural ways of organisation, which implies reluctance to, or indeed prohibition of creating any formal organisations or institutions, including political. They believe in a strict obedience towards the (Muslim) ruler and are therefore reluctant to engage in the political game. The second

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14 The Traditional Salafis do not acknowledge the reformists or the jihadi as true Salafis, but they recognise them as distinct groups originating from Salafism. (Interview with Abu Hanieh 2012; Taha 2012; Shihadeh 2012; Hammad 2012; Ziadeh 2012; Al-Turbani 2012)

15 Al-salafiyya al-muhafīza, al-salafiyya al-‘īslāhiyya and al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya (also given the less noble term takfīriyūn)
group (politicos/reformists) allow organisations and political engagement, and even allow criticism of the regime. The third group (jihadis) are different in that they believe in an armed revolt against rulers and regimes that they see as apostates.

Pall (2013) criticises this typology as too shallow and propose a new typology on two levels: the theological and the strategic. On the theological level, he distinguishes between the purists and the activists (harakis). The purists reject any criticism of the ruler and may be classified into two currents. The first group, the ‘purist-rejectionists’, oppose any political participation and stick to purely traditional ways of spreading the da’wa through teaching and preaching in mosques and conducting the proper daily religious practice. The second group, the ‘politically oriented purists’, see political participation as a way to promote their understanding of Islam, although strictly forbid any criticism of the ruler (ibid).

The harakis refuse to obey the ruler unconditionally, and are also classified into two groups: the ‘politicos’ and the ‘jihadis’. The haraki politicos differ from the politically oriented purists in their commitment, not only to ban alcohol and sex segregation, but to promote political freedom and accountability of political leaders. The jihadis seek to change reality through even harsher means, namely by propagating the use of violent force (Pall 2013 p.26).

**The Islamic duty of zakat**

*Every year, somewhere between $200 billion and $1 trillion are spent in ‘mandatory’ alms and voluntary charity across the Muslim world, Islamic financial analyst estimate. [...] At the low end of the estimate, this is 15 times more than global humanitarian aid contributions in 2011 (IRIN 2012)*

According to IRIN (2012), the global circulation of Islamic alms amount to at least 15 times more than global humanitarian aid contributions in 2011. This shows the large potential of Islamic charity. Although it is not in the scope of this paper to give a thorough account of the historical and theological roots of Islamic aid, this section will give a basic overview of the most central principle of Islamic charity: the duty of zakat. This is what Jonathan Benthall labels the ‘family resemblance’ of Islamic relief organisations (2007 p.6).

Like the other Abrahamic religions, Islam contains certain principles that commend giving alms and helping others. In fact, Muslims are obliged by their religion to give a certain

16 The Kuwaiti al-tajammu` al-salafi al-`islami is an example of the politically oriented purist current.
17 The Kuwaiti Salafi movement (al-haraka al-salafyya) is an example of the haraki politicos
amount of their resources to charity. As one of the five pillars of Islam (‘arkān al-īslām), the giving of alms, zakāt, is among the basic duties that all able Muslims must abide by paying 2.5% of one’s assets.18 Along with sadaqa and the general recommendations to care for others, zakat is given considerable attention in both the Quran and the Hadith.19

Since zakat is one of the mandatory duties of all able Muslims, its collection and distribution creates a need for institutions dedicated for this purpose. In some countries, they do this by incorporating zakat into the state apparatus, like in Pakistan and Sudan. Other countries have completely surrendered it to the private sphere, disconnected from all state institutions. In the case of Jordan, a directory of zakat has been set up within the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but local committees are also allowed to collect and distribute charitable funds (Benthall 1999 p.29).

Zakat is mentioned frequently throughout the Quran, often in connection to prayer, stating that negligence of zakat will degrade your prayers. The prophet set a threshold (nisāb) of wealth so that the poor should be free from the obligation to pay zakat, and in stead be eligible to benefit from it. The threshold standard was set to either 87.5 grams (20 dinars) of gold or 612.3 grams (200 dirhams) of silver, meaning that if you have assets higher than these values for more than a lunar year, you will be liable for zakat. Today, the threshold calculated with the silver standards are significantly lower than that of gold, which has lead to the question of which standard should be followed (Human Relief Foundation 2013).

Who are eligible to benefit from the distribution of zakat? One of the key verses in the Quran is 9.60 (Surat al-Tawba), that lists eight categories of people or causes legitimately funded by zakat: the poor (al-fuqrā’), the needy (al-masākīn), the administers of zakat (al-‘āmilūna ‘alayhā), people about to convert, or recently converted to Islam (al-mu’allaqati qulūbuhum), captives (fī l-riqāb), debtors (al-ghārimūn), God’s purpose (fī l-sabīli l-llāh) and travellers (ibnu l-sabīl). Most of these categories open up for multiple interpretations, and the greatest disputes among scholars evolve around whether non-Muslims may benefit from zakat. It is also disputed whether zakat funds may finance political and military goals as well.

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18 The five pillars of Sunni Islam are belief (shahāda), prayer (ṣalāt), alms (zakāt), fasting (ṣawm) and pilgrimage to Mecca (ḥajj). Other orientations of Islam have additional pillars, like twelver shia’s additional tax khums, charging one fifth of their income to imams or poor people (Vogt 2013b).

19 The Quran is Islam’s most important textual source that contains the revelations of the messenger Muhammad. Hadith are orally transmitted reports about the actions, sayings or tacit consent of Muhammad, and are the second most important textual authority in Islam. Together they constitute the undisputed sources for Islamic doctrine and practice (Vogt 2013b)
as ‘missionary activities’ like building mosques, preaching and distributing religious literature (Benthall 1999 p.31).

Most Islamic relief organisations seem to prioritise aid to Muslims, a view originating in the Hadith stating that zakat is ‘to be taken from your rich people and to be distributed to your poor people’, where ‘your’ in this view refers to ‘Muslims’. Although they are not eligible to support from zakat, non-Muslims may be supported through Muslim donations other than zakat, such as sadaqa, general charitable giving (Visser 2009 p.29). Such differences in interpretations are reflected in the policies of Islamic relief organisations. According to Benthall (1999 p.31), Islamic Relief Worldwide extends zakat funds to non-Muslims, while Muslim Aid (another big UK-based Islamic charity) supports Muslims only. However, through their webpage, IRW only mentions “poor Muslims” as eligible to receive zakat (Islamic Relief Worldwide 2013). Although these statements show that they prioritise zakat for Muslims, they do not exclude parts of it going to non-Muslims. According to Zayid Hammad, the director of the BSS, his organisation does not discriminate between Muslims and Non-Muslims (Hammad 2013b).

**The international standards of humanitarian relief: the ICRC Code of Conduct**

*The Code of Conduct, like most professional codes, is a voluntary one. It lays down ten points of principle which all humanitarian actors should adhere to in their disaster response work... (IFRC n.d.).*

‘The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief’, commonly referred to at as the ICRC Code of Conduct, was first drafted almost twenty years ago in 1994. At that time there was a shift of donor attraction from development assistance (official donations to development countries) to humanitarian action (Ferris 2005 p.317). The former way of contributing to development of under-developed countries showed few tangible results, whereas the latter produced an immediate visible impact.

This shift led to a host of new humanitarian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) emerging in order to serve the increasing aid demands and donation supplies. According to Bruce Biber, Deputy Head of Division, Policy and Cooperation within the ICRC Movement, many of these “launched operations in the field according to questionable, vague or
sometimes nonexistent ethical standards”, that threatened the integrity of humanitarian action itself (Biber 2004).

It was under these circumstances that the ICRC Code of Conduct was formed, as an attempt to establish a common standard to protect the integrity of humanitarian action as impartial, independent, neutral and universal. The Code of Conduct reaffirms the relevance and applicability of International Humanitarian Law and identifies the alleviation of human suffering as the prime motivation for humanitarian assistance.

After the formation of the ICRC Code of Conduct, other codes have been designed to complement and supplement it, such as People In Aid’s Code of Good Practice, the Sphere Project and Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) Standards. Because of the limited scope in this thesis, I will only give attention to the ICRC Code.

**The Code**

The ICRC Code of Conduct includes the following ten principles:

i. The humanitarian imperative comes first

ii. Aid is given on the basis of need alone, without discrimination.

iii. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint

iv. We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy

v. We shall respect culture and custom

vi. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities

vii. We will try to involve beneficiaries in the management of relief aid

viii. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities

ix. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources

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To facilitate ease of reading, I have simplified the wording of some of the points.
x. In our information we shall recognize victims as dignified humans, not hopeless objects.

Although general in their wording, this list gives a clear picture of what is expected from the side of humanitarian action and international law. Relief is to be all about the alleviation of human suffering. It is to be universal, impartial, independent, non-discriminatory, culture sensitive, locally based, sustainable, accountable and promote respect and dignity. The scope of this thesis is limited to the six first principles.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined what Salafism is, how the Muslim duty of *zakat* affect Islamic relief work and outlined the ICRC Code of Conduct. This section shows that the Salafi movement is indeed a divided and heterogeneous movement. The most obvious distinction between the different groups is the divide between the apolitical purists and the political reformists/harakis. However, the recent events of the Arab spring have shown that the lines between them are not as fixed as one might assume. Just as suddenly as the apolitical Salafis in Egypt dove into politics with both feet, the Jordanian haraki Salafi organisation BSS engaged in humanitarian relief. These events demonstrate that Salafi groups are able to adjust to new circumstances by completely changing their strategies towards society.

The Jordanian organisation BSS belongs to the haraki politico current described by Zoltan Pall (2013), and has deep connections to haraki organisations elsewhere, like Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Still, there is no ‘Chinese wall’ between the different fractions of the movement. Zayid Hammad, the president of the BSS, and Hassan Abu Hanieh, one of the founders, both said they have common interests with the purists and the jihadis, differing on the strategic and practical level on how to implement their vision (Hammad 2012; Abu Hanieh 2012).

The Islamic duty of *zakat* is by Benthall labelled the ‘family resemblance’ of Islamic relief organisations. There is a dispute among scholars as to whether the distribution of *zakat* only should benefit Muslims, or if it may benefit non-Muslims as well. The BSS claim that they do not discriminate on the basis of faith nor any other affiliation.

The framework for the analysis of BSS in this study is the first six of the ten principles in the ICRC Code of Conduct. They deal with universality, impartiality, independence, non-
discrimination, culture sensitivity, and being locally based. These values represent ideals that all humanitarian relief organisations are meant to pursue. My assumption is that the BSS, like any other relief organisation, will prove strong in some of these principles and weak in others. In the following chapter, I will analyse what are the strengths and weaknesses of their relief work when analysed through the principles of the ICRC Code of Conduct.
3 Salafism and humanitarian relief

In this chapter, I will present and discuss the main empirical findings of this study. The first part presents the Salafi relief organisation the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS). The second part discusses the empirical data collected, with the objective to study how the BSS work measured by the framework of the ICRC Code of Conduct. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this Salafi relief organisation in the face of these principles?

As presented in the previous chapter, the Code consists of ten principles for humanitarian relief. As a framework for this analysis, I focus on the first six principles in the Code.

Presentation of the Book and the Sunna Society

We have no ambitions in this work, except to please God. No personal goals, no political goals or popular goals. That’s why we hope that we’re sincere to God. (Interview with Zayid Hammad 2013b)

The Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) emerged out of the ‘reformist’ trend of the Salafi movement in Jordan, which may be categorised in what Zoltan Pall (2013) calls the haraki current. Related to similar groups in Lebanon, Qatar and Kuwait, it is not fundamentally apolitical like traditional puritan Salafism. As a matter of fact, during the so-called ‘Arab spring’ in 2011-2012 some of its members tried to establish a Salafi political party in Jordan aspiring to unite the different fractions in the Salafi movement to use political reforms as a means to Islamise society (Hammad 2012). This political project has thus far not succeeded due to internal disputes in the movement, and unfavourable political circumstances in Jordan. Despite the reformist Salafis’ political aspirations, BSS does not have any stated political goals, and is registered as a cultural association (BSS 2012). The managing director, Zayid Hammad, stated that its main purpose is ‘to promote the righteous awareness about the Sharia and the religion’. However, since its establishment in 1993 it has founded eight

21 In Arabic: jam‘iyyat al-kitāb wa-l-sunna
22 The Jordanian political system is characterised as a SNTV-system (Single Non-Transferable Vote), only allowing voters to cast one vote for one person. In a Jordanian context, this helps maintain the tribal structures and undermines party politics, because voters tend to vote according to their tribal affiliation rather than their political affiliation.
committees, each with its own objectives. Among these is the relief committee ‘the Call to Goodness’ (nidāʾ al-khayr), working specifically with relief (Hammad 2013b).

Hammad told me how the Syrian crisis drastically changed the focus and resources of the association. They were approached by ‘local, regional and international organisations’ who wanted to donate to the Syrian cause. This increased their resources 20-30 times and thus changed their focus from being primarily concerned with teaching and preaching, to becoming a significant contributor to aid to the Syrian refugees in Jordan (ibid). Now they are one of the biggest Jordanian NGOs providing relief to Syrian refugees in the country.

The BSS has nine regional offices with 50 employees and 500 volunteers with 30,560 Syrian families (approx. 150,000 refugees) benefitting from their work both in refugee camps and outside camps in all governorates in Jordan.²³ Their work includes distribution of food and non-food items (blankets, clothes etc), financial support (including housing), health and education. Most of their resources come from Gulf organisations in addition to a few Islamic organisations in Europe and independent individual donors (ibid, BSS 2013b p.48).

**Salafi relief and International Humanitarianism**

The ICRC Code of Conduct is ‘a voluntary code, enforced by the will of the organisations accepting it to maintain the standards laid down in the code’ (ICRC 1994 p.1). The BSS are not signatories of the Code, and therefore are not formally committed to any of these principles, although they disclaim any discrimination between Muslim and Non-Muslim beneficiaries. However, working in the world’s second-largest refugee camp, governed by the UNHCR, means they need to respect the standards of international humanitarian aid. Are they?

Despite the fact that they might be working in conflict with some of the principles of the Code, I argue that their work is highly successful in important areas, some of which are regularly neglected by conventional humanitarian aid organisations.

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²³ Numbers are from statements made early 2013 and have most likely increased. During my visits to their office in Amman, there were always long lines of refugees waiting to be registered in order to receive relief services from the BSS.
The BSS and the ICRC Code of Conduct

In this part, I will discuss the work of the BSS compared to the standards of the ICRC Code of Conduct. What are their strengths and weaknesses when analysed within the framework of humanitarian relief?

Principle 1: The humanitarian imperative comes first

The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such (ICRC 1994 p.3).

The BSS dedication to humanitarian relief

The vision of the BSS is ‘to promote the righteous awareness about the Sharia and the religion’. How does humanitarian relief fit into this? Is the BSS really dedicated to humanitarian relief, or is this only a way to promote their own agenda?

Like most religions, Islam has a strong and profound humanitarian tradition. It is a religious duty for every able Muslim to give a certain amount of one’s assets as zakat (alms) to the poor and the needy. It is also encouraged to give voluntary donations, sadaqa. When I interviewed Islamic relief actors, they often emphasised the general principle of human solidarity in Islam. There is a famous hadith\(^\text{24}\) that someone is not allowed to live well, eat and relax if his/her neighbour does not have enough food. Another hadith teaches that a Muslim will be rewarded even for helping an animal in need. These examples were used to show that charity in Islam is not only about the giving of alms. It is a general duty for every Muslim to help people in need according to his/her ability (Interviews with Hammad 2013b; IRW 2013; Al-Dweidar 2013; Daak 2013).

However strong the duty of zakat has been in traditional Islam, this has not been given a lot of attention in all circles. Among Salafis in Jordan, it has been treated as a way to utilise Islamic funds for traditional Islamic activities, like funding mosques and religious education. The fact that BSS has launched a relief branch that deals specifically with the material needs

\(^{24}\) Second to the Quran, the Hadiths are the most authoritative sources to Islamic doctrine. They comprise reports of the deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad.
of refugees must therefore be seen as a positive development in the light of the ICRC Code of Conduct. From being strangers to the field of relief and aid, they have now engaged with great zeal to help as many as possible regardless of their faith. They have even established a relationship to the UNHCR, attending and contributing to information meetings together with all relief organisations working among Syrian refugees in Jordan (Hammad 2013b). This shows that the BSS has a real interest in, and dedication to, the progress of humanitarian relief work in the Syrian crisis, and not only in serving their own ‘Salafi agenda’.

The BSS dedication to the Salafi da’wa

I have established that the BSS has a clear humanitarian agenda to fight human suffering, motivated by their religious duty to help fellow humans. Still, this is not their only priority. We also need to acknowledge that they have not ceased their strong dedication to fight the religious ignorance among the same refugees. When talking about the need, Zayid Hammad addresses both the material need; the lack of basic resources, and the spiritual need; the lack of knowledge (about Islam):

\[
\text{Getting engaged in this work, one feels the dire need, for both the da’wa work and the relief work. When it comes to the da’wa-related work, it’s concerning teaching people the religion, because the ignorance is great... And if we speak about the relief-related and societal issues, we consider it a great thing to help people. (Hammad 2013b)}
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It is clear from his statements that the humanitarian imperative is an important factor, although not the only factor for BSS’ work. Before the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, the BSS focused mainly on da’wa-related activities, such as arranging courses for teaching the Quran and the Salafi doctrine. They did not have a focus on humanitarian issues at all until the Syrian refugees started pouring into Jordan. Since the beginning, their stated purpose to ‘promote the righteous awareness about the Sharia and the religion’ has not changed. Therefore, their work among the refugees is not limited to catering to the material needs, but also to caring for what they conceive as the refugees’ spiritual needs. They are setting up mosques, employing imams, holding Quranic and Sharia courses and distributing religious literature among the refugees.
Does their religious work interfere with the humanitarian imperative?

At the time of my fieldwork (spring 2013), the BSS had completed the erection of 5 mosques\textsuperscript{25} in Zaatari Refugee Camp\textsuperscript{26}, and planned on building 20 more supported by grants made by the MWL\textsuperscript{27}. The grants included the building process, and even more importantly, the operating costs of employing 20 imams. A legitimate question would be; how can they build mosques in a camp where refugees do not even have their basic needs met, such as shelter, food and security? Should they not prioritise the most urgent material needs first, and then serve religious needs later?

To answer these questions, we need to consider some of the facts on the ground. Firstly, almost all inhabitants of Zaatari are Sunni Muslim. Even though not all would be very religious, many would turn to their religion during desperate times like this. Secondly, there were no religious arenas in the camp, as it was governed by a western, secular organisation: the UNHCR. There was originally nowhere to pray, so people would have to pray in their muddy tents or streets, or walk to the nearest mosque in the town Mafraq, 10 km away. Not being able to practice their religion when they need it the most, adds to the already desperate situation and causes more frustration. The level of frustration is already high and consequently unrest and crime is a growing problem in Zaatari. Therefore, there is a real need for places to pray and religious arenas to treat some of the frustration and grief that the inhabitants have to deal with. Since the western humanitarian organisations do not prioritise meeting this spiritual need, it is up to Islamic organisations to do so.

Indeed, when taking the psychological suffering of the Muslim refugees into account, building mosques and offering Quranic courses might not be a waste of money. It may restore some of their dignity and offer an arena to treat their inner needs. In addition, religious activities might be seen as a meaningful way to spend their idle time in the camp. There is a need for organised activities to prevent idleness. At the time of my research, the BSS had also recently started a project for psychological support for women and children in

\textsuperscript{25} The mosques erected by BSS in Zaatari are not permanent fully-fledged mosques. They are mostly erected in the shape of large tents. They are sometimes referred to as ‘musallāyāt’
\textsuperscript{26} Zaatari is the worlds second largest refugee camp with an estimated number of 121,776 as of 17th October 2013 (UNHCR 2013). It has become one of the most populous cities in Jordan, and the second largest refugee camp in the world.
\textsuperscript{27} Muslim World League, a large Saudi Arabian Islamic NGO, with close ties to the Saudi state.
the camp. Together with the mosques, these services offer an alternative for the refugees to treat their spiritual and mental needs.

**Evaluation of principle 1**

Although the BSS is a religious society, they do not only focus on religious activities. They have a strong and real faith-based motivation to meet the basic material needs of the Syrian refugees in Jordan. However, the same Salafi faith that motivates relief also motivates *da’wa* work. These two go hand in hand as a complete Salafi approach to meeting what they see as the urgent physical, mental and spiritual needs of the refugees. Are their religious activities a deviation from international customs or standards of relief and aid? Nida Kirmani and Ahman Khan (2008 p.45) claim that the importance of faith is a factor that needs to be understood in order to provide effective humanitarian assistance, precisely because believers in a traumatised and sensitive situation have religious needs. In this perspective, the religious contribution of BSS might be seen as a contribution to the ultimate humanitarian goal of alleviating suffering, not a deviation from it, even though they are not following the conventional customs of international humanitarian organisations.

**Principle 2: Aid is given on the basis of need alone, without discrimination**

*Aid is given regardless of race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone (ICRC 1994)*

**Universality**

Islamic relief organisations are often accused of discriminating between non-Muslims and Muslims, prioritising the latter. These accusations must be understood in light of the fact that Islamic organisations to a significant degree make use of religious Islamic funds. Islamic funding presupposes practises that comply with Islamic doctrine. As mentioned in the section about *zakat*, Islamic donations are in general classified into two groups: *zakat* and *sadaqa*. Although most scholars permit giving *sadaqa* to both Muslims and non-Muslims, there seems to be dispute among scholars as to whether *zakat* may be given to non-Muslims. Some interpret that *zakat* may benefit non-Muslims so that they may become Muslims (Benthall 1999 pp.31–32).
This ‘discriminatory’ doctrine contradicts the universality required by the ICRC Code of Conduct. All my informants however claim that they do not discriminate between Muslims and non-Muslims. Hammad said it like this:

*God urged us even to help the animals, and even more human beings. There is a hadith where the prophet said that a woman entered paradise because she helped a dog to drink. That’s why, when we present our help, we don’t discriminate between any human beings. We don’t ask about anything that has to do with their occupation, sect, religion or dhimma.*\(^{26}\) So even if a Jewish person would come across the border together with the other refugees, we would help him. (Hammad 2013b)

He told a story from his visit to one of their offices where refugees stood in line for provisions. He noticed a couple with a small child standing on the side of the line when he arrived. An hour later, they were still there, and he asked them why they didn’t get in line to take aid. The man replied that they were Christians and not Muslims, assuming he was not entitled to any help from them. Hammad brought them to the front of the line and gave them the full package. After that, they stayed in touch for more than a year, and the man was very thankful for their help.

The fact that Islamic jurisprudence lacks consensus on the subject, makes it easier for the Islamic relief organisations to justify a universal approach to aid when approaching non-religious donors (Benthall 1999 p.31). However, when approaching Muslim donors to trust them with their religiously motivated donations, such as *zakat*, they need to convey trust that Islamic donations will go to the legitimate purposes outlined in the Sharia. Therefore most Islamic organisations create a separate department for projects funded by Islamic donations such as orphanages, mosques and religious education.

Through my interviews, it was not clear if the donations to the BSS were considered Islamic and thus subject to limitations by the Sharia as to whether non-Muslims might benefit from them. The abovementioned remarks by mr. Hammad indicate that the intentions of their material relief are indeed universal. These funds are channelled through their sub-organisation Nidā’ al-Khayr (Call to Goodness). Most likely, the purely Islamic donations are channelled through other sub-organisations like the Sharia committee, Courses committee, Qur’an committee and The Good Word Committee. These organisations handle religious activities.

\(^{26}\)The word *dhimma* is an Islamic judicial term that refers to non-Muslims (mainly Christians and Jews) living in a society governed by the principles of Sharia, Islamic law (Vogt 2013a)
The BSS thus formally distinguishes between their da’wa activities and their relief activities. In the field however, the lines between them are blurred. They seem to work closely together, and are hard to distinguish from each other. They deny that their assistance is dependent upon the recipients’ attendance to the da’wa activities or adherence to the Salafi creed (Hammad 2013b). Their relief is therefore not contradictory to the universality of the ICRC Code of Conduct although non-Muslim beneficiaries might perceive that some response is desired from them.29

While denying any discrimination against non-Muslims, almost all of BSS’ recipients and beneficiaries in Jordan are Muslim, simply because most Syrians are Muslims. In a crisis where most beneficiaries were Buddhists or Christians, would you find Salafi relief work there? And if you did, would they be able to mobilise the large donors in the Gulf? Such hypothetical questions are impossible to answer, yet it is obvious that one of the primary motivations for helping Syrian refugees is that they are seen as Muslim brothers and sisters in need of both material and spiritual help. Most donor agencies are also Arabs, so they may consider it a duty to help their brothers in both faith and ethnicity.

Despite their denial of any discrimination against non-Muslims, most resources from Salafi organisations, both internationally and locally, go to crises in Muslim areas. Although they often explain this by referring to the fact that most crises happen in the Muslim world, it seems that they prioritise solidarity with Arab Muslims.

**Impartiality and independence - The impact of 9/11**

Islamic organisations have been subject to suspicion from Western society since the late twentieth century. This peaked in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the USA, with the following US-led ‘war on terror’, that resulted in western governments giving increased attention to Muslim organisations as potential terrorists. Many of the Islamic relief organisations were accused of being affiliated with al-Qaida or other armed groups.

Several Muslim NGOs, Salafi NGOs in particular, were designated by the US government and others, accused of being related to al-Qaida or similar radical organisations. One of them, the Saudi Al-Haramain Foundation was one of the most significant Islamic NGOs worldwide with a budget of USD 40-50 million. It was closed down, charged with

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29 According to Hanan Albalkhe, an independent Syrian philanthropist and exile politician who has collected and distributed aid in Jordan, most refugees do not care if their provisions are from religious or non-religious organisations. She said: 'they take whatever assistance they get, regardless of its affiliation' (Albalkhe 2013)
supporting terrorist networks in Somalia and Bangladesh (Petersen 2011 pp.100–101). This negative attention to Islamic NGOs hurt their reputation, causing a plunge in donations from individuals anxious not to be associated with terrorist-affiliated organisations. Furthermore, the ‘war on terror’ resulted in measures implemented by governments and international organisations like the UN. These measures included a tightening of government control over money transfers in the US, Europe and the Middle East. Collecting donations in the streets or in mosques was outlawed in Kuwait, and Saudi Arabian NGOs had to obtain a government-licensed bank account through which they had to channel all their funds. Such restrictions were meant to increase transparency and professionalism (ibid pp.101-104).

The Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) was officially established in 1993 as a cultural organisation to promote Salafi doctrine through lectures, small publications and seminars. They applied several times before that, but the Jordanian government was reluctant to issue their license. Even after the political liberalisations in Jordan in 1989, it took the Ministry of Culture four years before they would issue a license. These years the group were under strict supervision by the government, who regularly interrogated, threatened and imprisoned its members and leaders. These conditions continued after the official establishment and made it hard for the organisation to recruit supporters and expand its work (Wiktorowicz 2000 p.227). Hasan Abu Hanieh, one of the founders who himself had been imprisoned several times, explained that this period of trials made a lot of their members leave and ‘cleansed the group from jihadi elements’ (Abu Hanieh 2012).

The society started its work in a time when the Jordanian regime reconsidered their relationship to Islamic groups in the country. The government’s close relationship to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) since their foundation in 1945 gradually grew colder after they issued a new electoral law in 1993 and signed a peace treaty with Israel the following year. Another group that was increasingly favoured, and in some aspects replaced the MB as supporters of the regime, were the traditional Salafis (Sæther 2012 pp.11–13). The Salafi movement was distinguished from the MB by their (at that time) fundamentally apolitical

30 In 1989, Jordan held its first elections in 22 years, in which the MB’s political party, the Islamic Action Front, won more than a third of the seats in parliament. To limit the influence of the MB and the Palestinian Jordanians (estimates claim 60% of the Jordanian population is of Palestinian origin), the government changed the electoral law through gerrymandering and introducing a ‘Single Non-Transferable Vote’ system (SNTV). This resulted in paralysing political parties, of which The Muslim Brotherhood’s party was by far the most influential, and led to an East Jordanian (tribal) majority in parliament, reducing the MB seats to a minimum. For an introduction on Islamists in Jordanian politics See Wagemakers 2012 p.191.198
attitude and a doctrine of allegiance to the ruler. Since 1979, when the renowned Salafi scholar Nasir al-Din al-Albani settled in Amman, this movement has gained a lot of supporters throughout the kingdom, among whom the founders of BSS consider themselves (Lacroix 2009 pp.63–67; Abu Hanieh 2012).

The Salafi support for the ruler made them an increasingly important ally for the state. They perceived the king as a legitimate Muslim ruler who should not be opposed. Not all Salafis however would agree to the unconditional loyalty to the ruler. The jihadis (also called Takfiris) see the king as an illegitimate ruler because of his friendship with the West and Israel. They claim that the king, and the government, although Muslim in name, are infidels that should be fought whenever necessary and beneficial to their cause.

According to Zayid Hammad and Hasan Abu-Haniyeh (founding member of BSS and writer on Salafism), the BSS represent the middle ground between the traditional and the jihadi trend in Salafism: reform-salafism (al-salafiyya al-‘islāhiyya). In the start, this meant that their position towards the government and their motives in general were not very clear. Indeed, during the first seven years, parts of the group had political ambitions and according to Zayid, ‘their views were closer to those of a political party than those of a cultural association’. However, when Zayid became president of the organisation in the year 2000, the organisation committed to a clearly cultural program in order to work within the Jordanian legislative framework. Many of the members left the BSS, some of whom allegedly had jihadi leanings (Abu Hanieh 2012; Hammad 2012; Hammad 2013b).

Contrary to international Islamic relief organisations, the BSS experienced positive consequences after 9/11 and the following war on terror. According to Hammad, they were ‘the ones who benefited the most from the consequences of 9/11’. One of the measures that were taken in Jordan and most Arab countries was prohibiting informal donations to unauthorised groups or individuals working in relief, da’wa or culture. This lead to a boost in donations to BSS, who were legitimate recipients of donations since they were authorised by the government. Many donors in the Gulf or elsewhere, that used to donate money to

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31 The principle of allegiance to the ruler (waliyyu l-‘amr) is a debated topic within Salafism that builds on the notion that loyalty to the ruler is required as long as he is Muslim. Consequently, Salafis would not revolt or fight against a ruler unless they find a legitimate reason to excommunicate him (declare him an infidel, kāfir). The traditional Salafis claim that as long as anyone profess the shahāda (there is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger) no one can deny that he is Muslim. Other strands of Salafism however add other criteria that make excommunication a lot easier. Excommunication is called takfīr, and the Salafis that apply it are often called takfiryūn, (plural of takfīr) or more commonly jihadis. For more on takfīr and jihadism, See Hegghammer 2009.
informal groups or persons in Jordan now turned to the BSS to channel their funds (Hammad 2013a).

As mentioned, a group of the initial members of BSS had connections with jihadi networks in Jordan. Today the organisation disclaims violence as a legitimate means to promote the Islamic cause. Yet rumour has it that BSS are taking care of fighters and their families in the refugee camps in northern Jordan. Their director, Zayid Hammad, denies all such allegations. However, it may be noted that their most faithful donors are closely affiliated with the Qatari government – a government that also gives military support to the rebels in Syria (Hammad 2013b).

**Evaluation of principle 2**

To sum up the argument, the BSS claim universality, impartiality and independence and there are no evidences that they distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim beneficiaries. In their *da’wa* activities however, they are specifically working to disseminate their Salafi brand of Islam in order to fight what they perceive as ignorance (jahl) among the refugees. Although the lines between the relief and the *da’wa* work of the BSS are blurry, their beneficiaries are not required to attend their *da’wa* activities or to adhere to Salafism. There is therefore no overt contradiction between their *da’wa* activities and the humanitarian principle of universality.

While the US-led war on terror caused problems for most Islamic NGOs engaged in *da’wa* activities, these events have led to a growth in income to the BSS and actually strengthened their *da’wa* approach. The BSS belong to a trans-national network that espouses certain political standpoints in the Syrian crisis, and their donors are strongly affiliated with the Saudi and Qatari governments that support the Syrian opposition. Indeed the BSS themselves have political aspirations in the local Jordanian context. The ICRC Code of Conduct does not prohibit having political or religious opinions, but if the aid is depending on the recipients’ adherence to these opinions, it becomes problematic. In the following section, I will discuss to what extent their political and religious positions affect their relief.
Principle 3: Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint

*Humanitarian aid will be given according to the need of individuals, families and communities.*

*Notwithstanding the right of NGHAs32 to espouse particular political or religious opinions, we affirm that assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of the recipients to those opinions. We will not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed (ICRC 1994)*

Da‘wa and relief go hand in hand

As mentioned in the previous section, most large international Islamic relief organisations have become careful to limit their activities purely to relief and aid, leaving da‘wa-related work to other Islamic organisations dedicated for this purpose. The local organisations however do not have this clear distinction. BSS is registered as a cultural society in the Jordanian Ministry of Culture, with the vision to ‘promote the righteous awareness about the Sharia and the religion’ (Hammad 2013b). However, they have established other organisations dedicated to different purposes, like the Appeal to Goodness (*Nidā’ al-Khayr*) dedicated to relief work and the Good Word Committee (*Lajnat al-kalima al-ţayyiba*) for distribution of literature, as well as the Courses Committee (*Lajnat al-dawrāt*) for holding religious courses. Nevertheless, on the operational level, in their work among the Syrian refugees, there seems to be little distinction between them.

In my visit to their work in Zaatari refugee camp, I visited their project to exchange the tents with caravans and their mosque-projects. Sponsored by donors from the Gulf and religious societies elsewhere, they have managed to install thousands of caravans33 and five mosques in the camp. At the time of my interview with BSS they had just received donation pledges from the MWL to fund 20 more mosques and 20 imams (Hammad 2013b). In addition, they recently set up a centre for religious teaching and distribution of religious literature called ‘the Abdullah bin al-Mubarak Project for Education and Da‘wa of the Syrian

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32 Non-Governmental Humanitarian Agencies
33 Caravans are mobile home units installed in exchange for tents in order to protect from the cold and rain during winter. According to their web page, by the 12th march 2013, they had collected donations equivalent of 2697 caravans (BSS 2013c). According to Hammad MWL donated a thousand and RAF donated another thousand. The rest came from smaller donors.
Refugees’. Through this office, they plan to hold 20 religious courses, finance 10 full-time staff for da’wa work inside and outside the camp, and distribute 50,000 brochures among the Syrian refugees (BSS 2013a). On their facebook page it is explicitly stated that ‘this is an educational and da’wa-related project that has nothing to do with relief or politics’ (Abdullah bin al-Mubarak Project 2013).

Da’wa and relief – a harmonious relationship?

Since most, if not all, refugees in Zaatari are Muslim and Jordan is a Muslim country, erecting mosques and holding religious lectures are not very controversial acts. At the time of my visit, Zaatari had grown to become one of the five greatest cities in Jordan. In every sizable city or town in Jordan there will be a vast number of mosques and religious centres. The fact that BSS erect mosques, does not necessarily contradict their dedication to relief. Although it is clearly in their interest to facilitate increased Salafi spiritual influence through da’wa, they are (at least formally) separating between da’wa and relief.

When asked about his view on the relationship between faith and work in their relief, Mr. Hammad answered:

> In my view, it is a harmonious relationship. Because the intention of faith and religion is what motivates you to work in relief, and the one that makes it successful as well. [...] If the motivations behind this work were not something related to faith, I would have left it long ago. (Hammad 2013b)

Evaluation of principle 3

Arguing that spreading their doctrine, or garnering support for a certain political view, is the main objective of BSS’ relief work would be very inaccurate, simply because most their resources go to serving the basic material needs of Syrian refugees in Jordan, such as housing and food. The question of political or religious ambitions could rather be forwarded from BSS itself to its donors. Its most significant donations come from the organisations RAF, MWL, SECA and the Islamic Call Organisation, who tend to earmark their donations for specific purposes, like erecting mosques or replacing tents with caravans in the refugee camps (Hammad 2013b). In most large projects, the BSS’ are directly funded by these wealthy Gulf donors. The indication that they have a strong dependence on few semi-governmental donors

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34 Abdullah bin al-Mubarak was a great scholar in the eighth century AD, known for his zeal for Islamic knowledge and efforts in military jihad against the Romans (Yahya 2010)

35 RAF is short for ‘Shaykh Thani bin Abdullah Foundation for Humanitarian Services’. MWL stands for ‘the Muslim World League’. SECA stands for ‘Sheikh Eid Charitable Association’.
weakens their claim to be independent. In the following section, I will discuss whether this also weakens their claim to impartiality.

**Principle 4: We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy**

*NGHAs are agencies which act independently from governments. We therefore formulate our own policies and implementation strategies and do not seek to implement the policy of any government, except in so far as it coincides with our own independent policy.* (ICRC 1994)

**Serving the political agenda of the Gulf?**

One of the main criticisms against Islamic relief organisations in general, and the Salafi relief organisations in particular, is that they have an Islamist agenda, working to expand Islamic influence, or their own political interests. Salafism is known for its strive to Islamise society through any means possible, be it violence, politics or peaceful preaching. Is their engagement in relief simply another means to expand their influence?

Martin Van Bruinessen (2007) writes that charities based in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf are ‘widely criticized for pushing a political agenda that serves the interests of the Saudi regime and of being oblivious to the basic economic needs of the poor in Muslim societies’. Critics are contending that the wealthy Gulf organisations are spending much of their enormous resources to spread the Salafi version of Islam in order to combat other deviant beliefs and practices such as Sufism, Shi’ism or secularism, and to contain the revolutionary influences emanating from Iran. The criticism points at Salafi charities that finance mosques but not modern schools, provide students with grants to study religious subjects but not other sciences, and their distribution of literature in order to ‘educate’ the ignorant commoners. Such education allegedly convey simplistic Salafi messages containing a conspiratorial, dichotomous worldview, in which Islam is under attack by ‘a coalition of Crusaders, Zionists, Freemasons, Orientalists, and a fifth column of liberal Muslims’ (ibid).
Influenced by or driven by Gulf donors?

When studying BSS in Jordan, the allegations made above seem true. BSS builds mosques and da’wa centres, distributes Salafi magazines, booklets and books. They utilize Gulf money to install Salafi preachers that conduct Quranic and Sharia courses separately for men, women and children, while neglecting modern education. In other words, they raise funds to do the same activities among the Syrian refugees in Jordan, as they have done in Jordanian society since they started as an official organisation in 1993.

Unlike the organisations criticised above, the BSS actually support 59 Syrian students with scholarships for non-religious university degrees, thus not entirely neglecting modern education. And most importantly, they do not neglect provision of the basic material needs of the Syrian refugees (BSS 2013b p.32). The BSS were one of the first groups to engage in supporting the Syrian refugees in Jordan with shelter, food, financial support, health and education. The way Hammad narrates it; it seems that the initiative was actually from the donor side and not themselves: ‘[In the beginning of the Syrian crisis,] many organisations – either local, regional or international – presented us with aid services for the refugees’ (Hammad 2013b).

At the same time, some projects were initiated by the BSS and then made known through their network in order for the donors to support it. Hammad explained that their campaign to exchange tents with caravans in Zaatari was created by himself and three others who were gathered one day for a meeting. One of them tweeted about it and after just one hour, they had received donations equivalent of 300 caravans. He continued, ‘this encouraged us a lot. The idea circulated in the Gulf, and by the grace of God, after less than twenty days, we had collected donations for more than 2000 caravans’ (Hammad 2013b).

Evaluation of principle 4

The criticism of Salafi networks for their alleged political agenda is understandable. But is it justified by the facts on the ground? The BSS does indeed rely on monetary support form a few Gulf donors, although they are not entirely donor-driven. The BSS clearly appears as an autonomous organisation that follows its own judgements. Still, most their funds come from a handful of Saudi and Qatari donors that are closely affiliated with their respective governments. It is reasonable to say that the BSS are to a considerable degree influenced by
their donors, yet not controlled by them. The priorities of the BSS are focussed on relief and da’wa, not promoting the political agenda of the Gulf governments.

In the first four sections, I have discussed the principles of the humanitarian imperative, universality, impartiality and independence. Although these are the weakest points for the BSS, because of their political and religious profile, they also show that the BSS has a needs-based approach, contributing with significant material supplies. In some aspects their religious profile might also be seen as a positive side in as much as it contributes to the dignity and psychological and spiritual wellbeing of the refugees.

**Principle 5: We shall respect culture and custom**

One of the main strengths of the BSS is that they are an indigenous organisation that knows the culture, customs and religion of the Syrian refugees better than most international relief organisations.

**Respect for the beneficiaries**

Bruno De Cordier (2009) writes that International organisations – and Western ones in particular – are often depending on local staff ‘that resemble themselves’. They hire highly educated professionals that are proficient in the English language and communicate well with expatriates. Such candidates are usually individuals from privileged, westernised and secular social strata that have little in common with beneficiaries from lower social strata. Therefore international organisations often suffer from ‘a social and psychological gap between Westernised and highly secular country office staff and the rural or suburban beneficiaries’. This becomes problematic when translated into visible contempt, arrogance, a patronising attitude or cultural insensitivity towards beneficiaries, their surroundings and living conditions. He claims that there often is ‘little knowledge save social prejudice about the reality outside of the said staff members’ privileged surroundings’ (ibid p.10).

For the BSS this is an unthinkable situation. Their members and workers are all local Jordanians and very few, if any, come from a privileged westernised urban elite. Their preferences when recruiting workers are not professional or educational skills. In fact, Zayid Hammad said that the most important trait they look for in a relief worker is that ‘he has to devote all his work to God’ and that he should ‘have a great sense of self-control, always
smiling, not denying anyone who is asking for help’. In his opinion, ‘computer skills, command of English and skills to use the internet and so on are secondary’ (Hammad 2013b).

**Evaluation of principle 5**

One of the great advantages of the BSS, is that it is an indigenous Jordanian organisation, not relying on expatriate professionals or employees from the westernised urban elite. Because the employees and voluntaries of the BSS are from rural and suburban, less privileged backgrounds, they identify easily with the refugees from Syria. They share the religious, economical and educational background, and hence they are able to determine their needs and to treat them with dignity and respect.

**Principle 6: We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities**

The BSS is a local indigenous organisation and therefore has a relatively large support base in Jordan. In addition to the 50 employees and 500 voluntary workers, Zayid Hammad claims ‘thousands of supporters’ (Hammad 2012). With a large network and good connections in society, it is relatively easy for them to recruit workers that work either voluntarily or at minimal wages.

This comply with Jonathan Benthall’s (2007 pp.6–7) assertion that ‘Muslim FBOs enjoy a high degree of trust and approval, being run with minimal administrative costs and having unrivalled grass-roots knowledge about the needs of the most vulnerable.’

**Minimal administrational costs**

The cheap and locally based work force of the BSS and other local organisations stand in sharp contrast to many Western and international organisations working in relief. According to De Cordier (2009 p.8), Western NGOs and international organisations are commonly criticised for being too expatriate-driven and using expensive international personnel for tasks that can be fulfilled by local staff or partner organisations. First of all, such strategies lead to distancing the aid providers from the beneficiaries, thus decreasing the level of mutual understanding and respect between them. Additionally, it causes imbalances between the portion of budgets that go to meet the high fees of foreign consultants, producing little added value, and the amount of money that ends up serving the needs of the beneficiaries.
From the donations collected by the BSS, a minimal proportion go to administrative costs, and most of their budget goes almost directly to the beneficiaries.

**Highly motivated staff and popular support**

Since the wages are low, and the level of professionalism is low, the workers of BSS are not likely to have a career-related or money-related motivation to work in relief. They are working for a greater cause than earthly wealth and status, looking to the eternal spiritual reward from God. Zayid Hammad said that even if he would be offered a job ten times as well-paid, he would refuse to take it, stating that ‘we hope in this work to be sincere to God, not asking for any reputation among men, only for God’s reward’ (Hammad 2013b). He told me that many of his workers have gone through difficult times caused by long days of hard work. The health care director got a heart stroke and others were struggling with family problems because of the long work hours. He claimed that ‘those who do not have a strong religious motivation would not last long in this’ (ibid). In addition, it is not unthinkable that there is a religious prestige in this work, that also motivates personnel to work hard.

Being an indigenous religious organisation has three main benefits in relief: Highly motivated staff working hard at low wages, knowing the culture and customs of the beneficiaries and treating them with respect and dignity.

**Lack of professionalism**

However, Muslim organisations like BSS have been criticised for a lack of professionalism. Marie Juul Petersen (2012a p.149) quotes staff of Islamic Relief Worldwide saying ‘the [Middle Eastern NGOs] are led by religious people—not development professionals. They are good people, but they don’t know’. Allegations that Muslim organisations in the Middle East hire their leaders and workers because of their piety and not their professional skills and knowledge, seem to fit the picture presented by the BSS. Their lack of professional competence in aid and development implies a lack of long-term development strategies for their work. They tend to focus on immediate tangible results rather than long-term development. Although they might be considered weak in this aspect, their indigenous nature also represent a strength. At some point, the urgency of the Syrian crisis will diminish and the international attention will move on to other more urgent crises in the world. At this point, the indigenous organisations will stay when international organisations leave.
Evaluation of principle 6

In this section, I have discussed the BSS’ dependence on local capacities. Their strength lies in being an indigenous organisation, because they have a large indigenous network enabling them to rely exclusively on a local, effective and low-cost workforce. These workers are not motivated by money or career, working long days at minimal wages (or voluntarily). Their prime motivation is faith, and perhaps some religious prestige. This means that most of the resources of the BSS go directly to the beneficiaries, and minimal resources go to cover administration costs. Being an indigenous organisation also implies that they will stay, when the international organisations leave, thus assuring continuity in their work even after the most urgent phase of the crisis.

Their main weakness lies in their lack of professional capacity because they recruit workers based on their religious and moral capacities, not their skills. This gives them a workforce evidencing piety, dedication and good morals, but not one capable of developmental strategy, sustainability and long-term development.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed what are the strengths and weaknesses of the BSS, when measured by international standards of humanitarian relief.

Salafi organisations like the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) do not work independently from the wider transnational Salafi network. Representing the haraki-trend in Salafism, they enjoy partnership with financially strong organisations in the Gulf, like Muslim World League (MWL) in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Thani Bin Abdullah Foundation for Humanitarian Services (RAF) and Sheikh Eid Charity Association (SECA), both from Qatar.

In the wake of the Syrian crisis, when refugees started flowing into Jordan, the BSS became an implementing partner for these organisations. Their entrance into the field of humanitarian relief, attracted donations that according to their director, Zayid Hammad, increased their resources 20-30 times (Hammad 2013b).

The BSS went from being an organisation mainly concerned with teaching the Salafi interpretation of Islam to young people in Jordan, to dedicating most their energy to alleviating suffering amongst Syrian refugees in Jordan. They see their work as part of their Islamic duty to help the needy, and do not use the ICRC Code of Conduct or any other
standards as guidelines for their work, except the Quran and the Sunna\textsuperscript{36}. However, this does not necessarily mean that their work directly contradicts the ICRC Code.

**Weaknesses**

The ICRC Code’s first, second, third and fourth principles build on dedication to the humanitarian imperative, universality, independence and impartiality. These are the main weak points for Salafis.

First of all the BSS’ fundamentalist religious orientation and doctrine make them spend large amounts of resources on da’wa activities that could otherwise contribute to basic material supplies. Among the core tenets of Salafism, is the belief that society needs to be purified and Islamised through the Salafi da’wa. This implies that it is the Salafis’ responsibility not only to follow the pure Islamic doctrine, but also to persuade others to do the same. Only when people turn to the true doctrine and denounce the false ones, the ideal Islamic community will emerge. This has led the BSS to establish a project to build more than twenty mosques and one centre for da’wa in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. The shortage of mosques in the camp ensures the popularity of BSS’ mosques, giving them an important religious position in the camp. The building of mosques and da’wa centres may however also be seen as a way to diminish frustration and alleviate the mental and spiritual suffering of the Syrian refugees.

The ICRC Code of Conduct leave room for organisations ‘to espouse particular political or religious opinions’ as long as the aid of the organisations is not depending on the adherence of the recipients to these opinions (ICRC 1994 p.3). The BSS is walking a fine line here since their religious profile permeates everything they do. Still, although obviously desiring to influence beneficiaries in the direction of their creed, they are denying any discrimination on the basis of faith or any other criteria when distributing relief.

Secondly, the BSS’ political aspirations and strong ties to semi-governmental organisations in the Gulf weaken their claim to be independent, impartial and politically neutral. The BSS admits that in the beginning of the so-called ‘Arab spring’ they attempted to form a Salafi political party in Jordan. Still, having political aspirations does not mean that everything they do serve political means. The BSS do however have strong financial ties to

\textsuperscript{36} The word *sunna* denotes the example of the prophet. Muslims, and Salafis in particular, are dedicated not only to following the Quran, but also to following the example of the prophet.
above-mentioned Gulf donors that often designate donations for specific purposes, such as housing, mosques and salaries for imams. This means their work is only political to the extent that it gives semi-governmental Gulf actors access to expand their religious influence, reputation and doctrine among the beneficiaries.

The question of their independence and impartiality needs more study in order to be fully answered. In this study, I have focused primarily on the local Jordanian organisation BSS, and not their donor organisations and networks in the Gulf. Studying their donors and networks would provide a more complete understanding of what factors and actors are the driving ideological force behind their aid priorities. The findings of this study only serves to indicate that there are strong trans-national ties between haraki-salafi groups and organisations in various countries.

Thirdly, the BSS lacks professionalism. Although this serves to keep salary expenses low, it keeps them from achieving long-term developmental goals. In addition, it prevents them from being taken seriously by international conventional humanitarian organisations like the UNHCR that run large operations in Jordan. Their lack of English skills, prevent good communication and coordination with foreign non-Arab organisations.

**Strengths**

This thesis has shown that there is not necessarily a contradiction between being Salafi and doing humanitarian work. On the contrary, being Salafi – or at least Muslim - does have certain advantages in terms of effectiveness in the field and sources of funding. Despite the fact that the BSS might not be working in complete harmony with all principles of the conventional standards of humanitarian aid, I argue that their work is highly successful in important areas, some of which are regularly neglected by conventional humanitarian aid organisations. An example of this is their acknowledgement of the spiritual and psychological needs of the refugees. While the conventional humanitarian organisations ignore the religious needs of the refugees, the BSS meet these needs.

The ICRC Code’s fifth and sixth principles encourage ‘respect for culture and custom’ and ‘to build disaster response on local capacities’. In this respect, BSS represent three aspects that might be seen as advantages: being indigenous, being Muslim and being Salafi. Being indigenous enables them to know and respect the cultural and customary norms of their beneficiaries and easily gain access to extensive networks of voluntaries on the ground. This makes it easier to keep administrative costs at low levels, and is likely to increase the trust
from the beneficiaries. Among practicing Muslims, Salafis are usually well respected for their dedication to religion. BSS therefore easily recruit hard-working voluntaries or low-cost workers that not motivated by money or career, but by their pious faith in God and His reward. By virtue of their Salafi profile, they mobilise wealthy donors in the Islamic world who are actively seeking Salafi charitable organisations to sponsor. This way they generate funds from sources outside the conventional donor networks. Furthermore, being Salafi also means that they are not perceived as a political threat by the authorities in Jordan, as are the Muslim Brotherhood, who have the largest political party in Jordan.
4 Conclusion

This study has presented an analysis of the Salafi organisation the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS) and their relief activities. The main objective of the analysis has been to discuss what are the BSS’ strengths and weaknesses when measured by international humanitarian standards, represented by the ICRC Code of Conduct. I assert that although the relief work presented by the BSS contains weaknesses when it comes to universality, impartiality, independence and professionalism, they have great strengths when it comes to respecting culture and customs and using local capacities. Their indigenous character also gives them a great advantage by the fact that they have a large local network of supporters and workers that contributes voluntarily, or at low costs, in a cultural and religious sensitive way.

Thanks to their Salafi affiliation, they harvest support from like-minded groups in their trans-national network, most notably wealthy Gulf-based donor organisations. This way they utilise funds that would otherwise not reach the fields through conventional humanitarian organisations. From the fact that they are Salafi, one would expect a strong emphasis on the missionary side of their work. This assumption proved correct, since they have set up numerous mosques and a centre for da’wa, holding courses in the Sharia and the Quran. Still, their da’wa work does not hinder them from making a humanitarian contribution to the relief sector. Their relief projects are many and focus on providing the basic needs of the refugees, like housing, health treatment, food, clothes, as well as psychological support through support centres for women and children. Their relief is conditioned upon need - not faith or religion, although these are the prime motivators to their efforts in the field.

This shows that a Middle Eastern Salafi NGO involved in relief work and motivated by religion and faith, in important aspects, serves humanitarian values and principles although not officially approving of them. Although weak in some areas that are emphasised by the conventional humanitarian relief sector, they prove strong in other areas where international organisations are often weak, such as respecting local culture and customs, and utilising local capacities.

Their religious piety, which may awaken scepticism among western humanitarian NGOs, is something that builds trust and confidence among their Muslim beneficiaries, because it represents high morals and hope in a desperate situation. Contrary to conventional humanitarian negligence of the refugees’ spiritual needs, the BSS offer religious services and arenas that serve to alleviate suffering also in the metaphysical sphere.
The conclusion of this thesis suggests that a closer cooperation including exchange of expertise and knowledge could be fruitful between locally based religious organisations like the BSS, and conventional humanitarian relief agencies such as the UN-organisations. That way the indigenous religious NGOs might adopt a greater awareness of impartiality and professionalism, while the conventional NGOs might gain a more culturally and religiously sensitive approach on the ground. The recognition of the BSS by the UNHCR in Jordan, and the BSS’ determination to share experiences with the UNHCR, are steps in the right direction.

Final remarks

In the global context, The Book and the Sunna Society is a small organisation. With its 500 employees and ‘thousands of supporters’ they are a small piece in the larger puzzle of organisations and groups in a regional and trans-national Salafi network. Their donors include both agencies in the Gulf and smaller societies and private donors throughout the Middle East region, as well as Europe. The relationship between the BSS and its donors seems to be one of mutual dependence. On the one hand, they are totally dependent on their donor friends, especially the wealthy and generous Gulf organisations. On the other hand, these donors are dependent on having local societies as implementing partners grounded in the local context.

This very limited study of the relief efforts of the Book and the Sunna Society, kindle a myriad of new research questions. Are the factors unifying these organisations doctrinal, relational, political or philanthropical? Do they base their cooperation on a common Salafi religio-political agenda, or is their partnership simply founded on a set of common values? Why do the Gulf organisations donate so generously? Is it a matter of purifying their wealth through conducting their Islamic duty, the zakat? Or is it the quest to disseminate the Salafi doctrine throughout the world? And if so, is the objective to gain political influence for the Gulf monarchies in the region, or is it the pious desire to save their Muslim brothers and sisters from religious ignorance and Western influence?

I do not expect any single or simple answer to these questions. The chance to study the work of a Salafi organisation through getting to know the individuals behind its work has left a lasting impression in my life. I deeply admire their personal dedication and enormous

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37 In Zaatari, I met representatives from the Ibn Taymiyya Society in the Netherlands that donated at least 300 caravans to Syrian refugees, installed by the BSS.
efforts to the cause. The study of such movements from academic institutions in the West, far away from the true reality of its members, might cause an objectification of its actors. Living in Jordan for a year, regularly meeting the individuals involved made me realise that the differences between us are not that big. And the reasons behind their dedication to relief are not any simpler than for my dedication to study it.
5 List of interviews

Abu Hanieh, Hassan 06/09/2012, Amman
Founder and former member of the BSS and a researcher on Islamic groups at the Friedrich Ebert Institute in Amman

Albakhe, Hanan 15/09/2013, Oslo
Syrian philanthropist and exile politician

Al-Dweidar, Fayiz Ahmad 12/02/2013, Amman
Jordan Orphans Supervisor in International Islamic Relief Organisation of Saudi Arabia

Al-Turbani, Sharif 10/10/2012, Jerash
Salafi scholar in Jerash

Anonymous 10/03/2013, Amman
Two Jordanian staff in Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW)

Daak, Saleh 04/03/2013, Amman
International Programmes Director of Human Relief Foundation (HRF)

Hammad, Zayid 03/10/2012, Amman
President of the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS)

Hammad, Zayid 04/05/2013a, Amman
President of the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS)

Hammad, Zayid 12/02/2013b, Amman
President of the Book and the Sunna Society (BSS)

Shihadeh, Osama 10/10/2012, Amman
Director of the BSS’ ‘Committee of the Good Word’ (lajnat al-kalima al-ṭayyiba)

Taha, Saleh Abu Islam 10/10/2012, Amman
Salafi imam at Ibrahim al-Haj Hassan Mosque in Amman and renowned scholar of traditional Salafism in Jordan

Ziadeh, Akram 15/10/2012, Amman
Salafi imam and renowned scholar of traditional Salafism in Jordan
Abdullah bin al-Mubarak Project 2013. The Facebook page of Abdullah bin al-Mubarak Project for Education and Da'wa of the Syrian Refugees [Online]. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86/139534686216474?fref=ts [Accessed: 21 April 2013].


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