White But Not Quite: Normalizing Colonial Conquests Through Spatial Mimicry

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Abstract: The role of mimicry in the construction and deconstruction of social identities has enriched our understanding of power relations considerably. However, as a spatial practice, mimicry has received scant consideration. In what ways can space itself become an object of mimicry? What strategies and practices are involved in this process and with what political objectives? The current paper treats these questions by analyzing processes of mimetic spatial production aiming to transform the Israeli-occupied territory of Mount Hermon into an "ordinary" western ski resort. Yet this concerted effort produces a variety of tensions and contradictions that ultimately undo the normalization of the colonial space, comprising a test case of the convoluted ways in which mimicry of space, not merely in space, generates various forms of slippage, excess and ambivalence.

Keywords: mimicry, Zionism, occupation, colonialism, material incongruities, whiteness, Hermon

Couched in post-colonial critique, mimicry has been conceptualized as an act that reveals the inherent contradictions embedded in the effort to shape subjects according to political and cultural norms. By discussing the desire to become "white", mimicry underscores the colonized subject's aspiration to adopt settlers' customs and norms, as well as the concomitant inability to fully emulate settler "whiteness" (Bhabha 1984). However, mimicry can become a subversive strategy that exposes how identities are constructed and stratified through power relations. So although mimicry upholds hegemonic ideals and dominant modalities, it also inadvertently reflects the intrinsic flexibility, contingency, and context dependence of all social and political concepts.

Exploration of the various performances of mimicry has considerably enriched our understanding of power relations, modes of control, and ways of disciplining across a wide range of circumstances and through various prisms. Yet more should be said on the way in which space itself—not merely the subjects within it—can become an object of and for mimicry. Put differently, as a performed act, mimicry can be written on the skin, imprinted on the body, articulated by language, expressed in dress and uttered through gestures. Notwithstanding its various embodiments, however, mimicry tends to allude to a particular state of mind, the outcome, perhaps, of an internal conflict between one's desire to identify with the dominant group and inherent inability to become part of it, or else triggered by an anxiety of being exposed as an excluded minority while trying to pass as a member of a hegemonic society.

Either way, mimicry is concerned with construction of the self and as such may be examined methodologically in order to better understand the convoluted formation of human subjectivity. I am interested in the way space may itself become an object of mimicry. What strategies and practices are involved in the process of producing mimetic space? Of equal importance, what are the political objectives of this process?

The current essay approaches these questions by exploring the spatial manifestations of mimicry in Mount Hermon, situated between Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan at the northern tip of the Golan Heights. In June 1967, most of the Golan Heights (1250 km^2) was occupied by Israeli forces along with the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Sinai Peninsula (Zisser 2002). Israel currently controls 70 km^2 of the Hermon and regards it as a strategic military stronghold. Yet Israel has simultaneously transformed the mountain into a popular tourist destination, principally through the establishment of a ski resort attracting 400,000 Israeli tourists (over 5% of the country's population) each year.

Attempts to normalize Israel's occupation of Mount Hermon were contrived through a process of mimetic spatial production that aimed to transform the mountain into an "ordinary" ski resort, namely, through the intentional refashioning of the site in the style of the Swiss Alps. Here, normalization relates to the ways in which the Hermon's physical properties paradoxically enabled the colonizing force to render the space an attractive foreign destination and thereby shape it as an integral part of the state. The act of spatial mimicry was crafted first by cleansing the local population and then through control and manipulation of the space and visiting public. However, topographic conditions, climate, tension between the site as a tourist resort and its location within a war zone, and the behavior of Israeli visitors all served to accentuate the site's exceptionality, thus hampering efforts to govern the colonized area.

The paper's main objective, therefore, is to discuss the crafting of mimicry—a practice inherent to colonial contexts—as a spatial performance and relate this process to the practices and means through which Israeli colonial reality is manifested. Following a brief literature review, I utilize a range of archival materials and in-depth interviews to analyze the construction of the Mount Hermon ski resort, particularly the ways in which its "normalcy" was articulated, evaluated, and materially produced. Next, I explore the incongruity of the site's functionality as a popular ski resort, national icon, and actual war zone. The conclusion revisits relations between spatial mimicry and the geo-political.

Mimicry and Space

The role of mimicry in the construction and deconstruction of social identities (Bhabha 1984; Butler 1993) has been explored at length, in particular its subversive and disruptive potential and the limitation of its various transgressive effects in relation to sexuality (Andrade 1994), gender, and race (Ahmed 1999; Rottenberg 2003). Its various roles have been noted in the construction of national ideologies (Boyarin 2000; Boym 2008; Huggan 1994), as well as its functions in producing forms of disciplined knowledge such as archeology (Panja 2002), linguistics

(Hill 1999), international relations (Shani 2008), medicine (Langford 1999), and law (Lipset 2004).

The performance of mimicry has also been unraveled in seemingly mundane political processes, such as electoral campaigns (Fröhling et al 2001). In addition, its manifestation through various mediums of representation (Taussig 1993) has been treated in the fields of literature (Kien Ket 2002), film (MacKenzie 1994), and myriad other domains, including caricatures (Khanduri 2009), internet blogs (Abdul Jabbar 2003), and even as a paradigmatic frame for the radical rethinking of biblical texts (Leander 2010).

Despite its potential contribution to post-colonial scholarship on the various tactics, practices and strategies involved in the production of space (Harris 2008; King 2003; Sidaway 2000; Sparke 1998), critical analysis of mimicry as a spatial performance has thus far remained underdeveloped. This is intriguing, as mimicry is first and foremost a phenomenon dependent upon space, whose effect hinges upon location (Bhabha 1994), on being in the right or wrong "place" (Alcedo 2007) or position (Hoelscher 2003), from which one may transgress "normality" or alternatively, to pass as "normal" (Rottenberg 2008).

Jane Hill, for example, examines English speakers' use of "mock Spanish" as a form of mimicry, showing how language becomes figuratively and socially white through its deployment in space (Hill 1999). For Shompa Lahiri, mimicry is crucial in understanding how migrants gain inclusion into the diverse imperial and national spaces of Britain (Lahiri 2003), while James Ferguson discusses mimicry in a globalized world (Ferguson 2002), raising ethical questions on the geopolitical location of Africa vis-à-vis Europe. Mimicry has also been considered in states of siege and conflict zones as in the case of an embattled Muslim minority in Cyprus that "engaged in a form of mimicry, imitating the cultural fashions of Turkey, eventually even employing mimetic models of Turkish sovereignty" (Bryant and Hatay 2011:644).

Several scholars, such as Steve Pile (2000, 2011) and Gilian Rose (1995), have also pointed to the importance of gauging space's own potential to become an object of discussion in relation to practices and performances associated with mimicry. Edward Soja's (1996) seminal concept of *Thirdspace* is another example of how Bhabha's metaphorical conceptualization of hybridity and identification can be incorporated into a broader analysis primarily concentered on the decon-struction of space itself. Hence, more than simply a location *for* mimicry, space is also an object *of* mimicry.

The relations between mimicry and space have received attention from scholars who are interested in the ways in which colonial architecture recurrently produced replicas of the metropole's urban built environment while crafting monumental edifices that confer sovereign power (Metcalf 1989), as well as the subversive potential produced amidst the imitation of dominating norms (Le Roux 2004; Morton 1998). Mark Crinson, for example, provides a multifaceted account of the ways in which colonial built environments in the Middle East, Asia and Africa were negotiated through a constant interaction between officials of the colonial administration and the local population (Crinson 1996, 1997, 2003). Mia Fuller offers a nuanced reading of the inscription of Italian colonialism within Libyan

and Ethiopian landscapes through the construction of urban spatialities that imitated Italian cityscapes and sought to invigorate imperial memories of ancient Rome (Fuller 1988, 1996, 2007). A somewhat different approach is taken by Haim Yacobi, who stresses the importance of a post-colonial approach in the analysis of space production in Israel, taking into account that colonizers may emulate the built environments of the colonized and not only the converse (Yacobi 2008).

Indeed, it seems that becoming "like but not quite" is embedded in the production of built space, which reflects a particular image to be regularly imitated, whether through memorials, monuments and museums (Crinson 2001; Demissie 2003; Feldman 2007) , socialist houses (Lindenmeyr 2012) or the shopping malls of western capitalism (Erkip 2003; Schmidt 2012; Small 2011). These architectural edifices aim to project an ethos intended to be adopted by the inhabitant population. Spatial mimicry can occur in other various sites, scales and locations. The spatial organization of the American frontier, for example, became entwined with theological discourses that sought to shape a built environment that mimicked the "Promised Land" and thereby imbue the settlers with a certain sense of morality (DeRogatis 2003). During the 1950s, Turkey's casinos became disciplinary spaces where visitors were expected to perform prevailing "western norms" (Gürel 2011:168, 183). Israeli checkpoints in the occupied Palestinian territories are usually constructed as border terminals in order to evince a sense of contained sovereignty through which subjugated populations may be controlled and ruled (Amir 2013). In addition, they can transform into sites where mimicry is performed as a subversive strategy (Mansbach 2012).

However, just like the constructed and built environments which are often embedded with a distinct mimetic quality, "natural" landscapes (the central topic of this paper) can also become objects for imitation and emulation. The various manipulations employed to transform "natural" landscapes such that they correlate with and encourage a set of propositions, beliefs, dispositions and orientations have been discussed by several commentators (Cronon 1995; Grove 1995; Pratt 1992). An important aspect of investigation into the production of natural environments deals with efforts to render colonial space suitable or more "proper" for settler colonialists.

In his ethnography on European colonial experience in Zimbabwe, David McDermott Hughes discusses how the settlers' ascribed whiteness was negotiated by a physical alteration of the African landscape. The desire to become local, he explains, entailed a manipulation of space evident, for example, in irrigated waterscapes meant to transform African land into European hearth (McDermott Hughes 2010:29–69). Climate and location were determinants in locating European whiteness, not just through subjective identification with place but as a form of governance (Livingstone 1991; McDermott Hughes 2010:13–15). Judith Kenny (1993) discusses how select Indian highland regions gradually became the official temporary-turned-permanent commorancy of British officials and bureaucrats. She demonstrates that these "Hill Stations", chosen specifically because of their resemblance to the English countryside, were assumed to be suitable for English denizens due to their "European climate".

Investigating French reforestation schemes in Algeria, Caroline Ford (2008) draws similar conclusions in relation to the interaction between environment, climate, landscape, and race. She portrays how the practice of reforesting was linked to an anxiety that the French colonial project might succumb to the local climate and environment (much like the Roman Empire before it) and emphasizes how environmental norms suited to the geographical contours of France were imposed upon the Algerian landscape in a way that disenfranchised the indigenous population.

Although alluding to spatial mimicry, this concept remains beyond the central focus of argument of the abovementioned scholarship. Investigating the normalization of Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights through the construction of a site of mimicry (a ski resort), this paper discusses the ways that space can become an object of mimicry, the normative discourse involved in such an effort, and the ambivalence it stirs. Yet before delving into the particulars of the case, some consideration of "normalization" in the Israeli colonial context should be given.

Normalizing Spatial Jewish Whiteness as a Colonial Project

Racial or ethnic categorization of Judaism as a religion has not necessarily correlated with being white or European. Not only have Jews thrived throughout Asia, Africa and the Middle East (Shenhav 2006), but western Jewish communities were frequently categorized as an ethnic minority peripheral to normative definitions of whiteness (Rottenberg 2004). In European colonial territories, Jews' liminal status left them partially excluded from both the community of European colonizers and the local colonized community (Jarrassé 2011). For example, in 1905, the British colonial office mused about settling part of its East African protectorate with Jews from Russia. Yet English settlers there opposed the plan vehemently, claiming that their white colony might be "Jewed" and demanding the territory be preserved for settlers "of our own race" (Weisbrod 1968:81–98).

Notwithstanding this historical context, as a colonial movement led by European Jews (Shafir 1996), Zionism assumed a cultural identity that sought to reproduce "European white society in the new geographical setting" (Yiftachel and Segal 1998:478). Bar-Yosef (2006), for example, describes Israeli and Zionist involvement in Africa, illustrating that questions regarding an "appropriate" environment and climate for European settlement were salient in Zionist thinking. Paradoxically, the same Europe in which Jews were frequently regarded as a despised minority was fixed in the aspirations of a movement that not only lacked a distinct metropole (Elkins and Pedersen 2005), but claimed to be returning to an ancient homeland (Piterberg 2008; Zerubavel 1995). The ensuing confrontation with the local Palestinian population problematized the act of colonization even further as it refuted the myth of a "land with no people for a people without a land" (Leshem 2013).

In this context, "normalization" indicated that colonization entailed a physical reconfiguration of the colonized space from the oriental to the attractively white, European occidental. The result was the sweeping removal of Palestinians (Morris 1988; Pappe 2006), destruction of this community's built environment (Falah

1995; Shafir 1996; Slyomovics 1998), and marginalization of Jewish immigrants of North African and Middle Eastern descent (Tzafadia and Yacobi 2012; Yiftachel 2006).

The war of 1967 complicated matters further. Although control over the occupied Palestinian territories extended the colonial project (Gordon 2008; Khamaisi 1997), it was considered invalid internationally and served to intensify a messianic discourse of redemption (Rose 2005) considerably at odds with Zionism's predominant identification with the west (Feige 2009). Colonization of the Golan Heights, however, was only loosely related to this theological narrative of return; the challenge of normalization was instead rooted in the framing of the occupied territory as a vital strategic asset.

Although numerous studies have examined Israeli governance of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, only a limited number of studies have focused on the Golan Heights (Davis 1983; Kipnis 2009; Lavi 2013; Muslih 1999). This is unfortunate considering that postcolonial critique is relevant to the Golan, not least due to the particular mechanisms employed to materialize the normalization of this colonized territory. Through a discussion of the whitening of the occupation, the paper turns now to illuminate a particularly conspicuous example of the normalization of the Hermon.

The Colonial Geography of Mount Hermon and the Golan Heights

Israel's main reason for occupying the Hermon was its geostrategic importance as the highest point of observation in the area of the Golan Heights. However, immediately following the occupation, the Golan Heights, including the area of Mount Hermon, were extensively surveyed for potential civilian uses, primarily tourism and agriculture. Immediately after the 1967 war, the area was toured by civil engineers, rural planners, veterinarians, agronomists, agricultural advisors, hydrologists, and land preservation and drainage engineers who gathered information with the objective of enabling Israel to maximize its use of the territory. For instance, four distinct crop varieties were planted by the Ministry of Agriculture and a survey was conducted to inspect the terrain's mineral composition.[1] Such efforts became part of an array of tactics deployed to govern the newly occupied territory.

From the outset, efforts to normalize Israel's conquest of the region were entangled with the literal whiteness of the space. The snow on the peak of the Hermon Mountain became a major concern for the military and civilian teams. By January 1968, a mere 6 months after the war, an official at Israel's Nature Reserves Authority—the governmental branch charged with managing the country's parks and reserves—informed the military high command that snow made the Hermon "a unique site for the citizens of Israel" and an "exceptional treasure not found anywhere else [in the country]".[2] State officials and military personal, accompanied by civilian volunteers from a newly created Israeli ski club, surveyed the mountain by aerial reconnaissance aiming to identify the best skiing spots. The military was also involved in efforts to evaluate the mountain's climate, expected snowfall, and duration of the ski season, as well as to locate sites for a winter sports center and estimate the potential number of visitors.[3]

A new governmental body—the Hermon Authority—was soon established and placed under military jurisdiction. Composed of officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Israel Land Administration, Nature Reserve Authority and the Settlement Department of the World Zionist Organization, its principal role was to regulate movement to the mountain, set public tariffs, and ensure requisite conditions to allow private entrepreneurs to turn the mountain into a ski resort.[4] As part of this project, the military demolished the main village on the mountain's slopes, Jubata ez-Zeit, which according to surveyors' reports, was located at an important junction that seemed "suitable for developing activities in the Hermon, a fact that entails [its] destruction".[5] All Israeli representatives involved in the management of the Hermon pressed for prompt action. "I hear there is a lot of action going on in the Golan", wrote the head of the Nature Reserves Authority on March 1968 to the director of the Land Administration, entrusted with managing most of the Golan's occupied land through the military government; "Is it not possible to clear Jubata soon?" he asked.[6]

The destruction itself was not an isolated incident but part of a larger scheme to reshape the Golan's landscape, a territory of approximately 1250 km^2, populated by 147,613 residents of more than 270 villages and farms. Within a few months of the occupation, the region had been almost completely emptied of its indigenous inhabitants who fled or were expelled during the war (Harris 1980). Most of the region's villages were systematically destroyed during this "whitening process", ensuring that no one could return to them (Shai 2006). Only 6400 Syrian Druze residents were allowed to remain in the Golan. Some villages, like Jubata, were declared sites of "architectural, landscape, or archeological value" to be partly spared from demolition. Jubata was nevertheless evacuated, its 1500 residents driven into neighboring villages and into Syria, and its buildings razed to the ground (Kipnis 2009:338; Murphy and Gannon 2008:149, 160–172).[7]

A dominant feature of Israel's settler-colonial ethos, the ruination of built space and its portrayal as vacant is connected to a sense of anxiety arising from encounters with the indigenous population (Leshem 2013). Similarly, the occupation of the Golan Heights was premised on an articulated fear: the area had been used by the Syrian army to bombard Israeli settlements along the border and the space was perceived to pose a significant threat to the state. This anxiety also propelled the vast desolation of the Golan territory, which in turn entailed a need to whiten the occupation. Israel's insistence on destroying Jubata attests to its broader aspiration: through the development of a ski resort and transformation of a potential warzone into an investment opportunity, Israel could achieve a certain purification of the Hermon, turning this newly colonized space into a "proper" and "normal" region.

Like encounters in Zimbabwe and India, this notion of whiteness entailed negating the presence of the indigenous population. Unlike the other examples, however, this whiteness did not rely on the introduction of novel elements (such as forests or water reservoirs) but on existing resources. The colonized soil and climate engendered a sensation of whiteness among the colonizers, who envisioned an imagined European landscape foreign to both the territory and themselves. In other words, the construction of a ski resort on the cleansed Middle Eastern space recast it as European.

That the site was chosen to manipulate the production of a perceived European place may be discerned from the practices deployed in its construction. There was conspicuous involvement of western capital and knowledge, with the famous Jewish philanthropist Baron De-Rothschild hiring French experts to survey the site for construction. In the same vein, Israeli civil engineers were sent to Switzerland to acquaint themselves with the operation of motorways in conditions of snow and ice. The Austrian government even offered scholarship residencies for ski instructors. Such endeavors reveal an explicit desire to establish the site as a proper European ski resort.[8]

Sarah Ahmed notes that the colonizing mission assumes that the colonized subject may reflect the values and practices of the colonizer, but at the same time, limits must be drawn in order to secure whiteness (Ahmed 1999: 97). In the case at hand, despite the concerted effort to normalize the Golan Heights through spatial mimicry, myriad tensions and contradictions emerged and posed a distinct challenge to the attempt to secure the Hermon, as part of the Golan, as a literally white ski site.

First, the Golan's materiality did not readily lend itself to European mimicry. Second, the behavior of the thousands of Israeli tourists who frequented the region each year and were unaccustomed to the norms of comportment associated with the newly created "European" space turned the spatial mimicry into a subject of public mockery. Finally, the geopolitical significance of Mount Hermon, particularly its location in the midst of growing armed conflict, continuously undermined the efforts to reshape it as a pastoral European landscape. The following sections reconsider how these factors rendered the whiteness of the Hermon less secure—how the space was able to become white but not quite.

Material Incongruities

The desire to shape Mount Hermon according to western ideals became fully apparent with the designation of the Golan's first group of settlers—bound for the same spot where the now ruined village of Jubata ez-Zeit had stood. Whereas most of the new arrivals consisted of young Israeli volunteers affiliated with the Zionist labor movement, which established communes and collectives (Gorenberg 2006:72–99), the franchise to run the Hermon was handed to newly arrived immigrants from the USA, England, New Zealand, Denmark, France, Holland, Switzerland, Greece, and Brazil. Naming their new settlement "Ramat Shalom" (ie The Peace Plateau), the group presented itself as "a completely self-contained village community ... [that] is based on private enterprise. The founders of Ramat Shalom are a group of western immigrants possessing a wide variety of professional and business experience".[9]

Despite its professed free market ideology, Ramat Shalom received considerable support from the state. Representatives of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption personally chaperoned the group, smoothing any bureaucratic entanglements along their way. All members enjoyed prepaid housing. The land of Jubata ez-Zeit had been delivered to them without competition from other bidders and was leased at a pittance from the Israel Land Administration via the military governor.

The Ministry of the Interior dispatched a special planning team consisting of archi-
tects, engineers, economists, and even sociologists to assess the settlement plans
and set a reasonable timetable for the establishment of this "village of immigrants
from prosperous countries" (Dolev 1969).

The colonizing scheme formed part of a broader effort to transform the Hermon
into an attractive site for a broad variety of visitors, including families, hikers, and off
course, skiers. As part of this project, the Hermon Authority consulted botanists
regarding the optimal plant species for the area. All experts strongly objected to
the introduction of any kind of alpine vegetation on the grounds they would dam-
age the indigenous habitat.[10] So while efforts to mimic Europe were based on a clear
and conscious choice, they were also bound by certain material limitations.

Notwithstanding the case of the plants, wherein the indigenous prevailed, the
settlers' social composition clearly suggested that those chosen to fulfill the task
of constructing a ski site were those who seemed most likely to prosper in a
"western" environment.[11] The colonization of the Hermon therefore seemed
ensured through its allocation to settlers considered suited to the exploitation of
its physical white attributes. Scott, the group's leader, received flattering media
attention portraying him as the "prototype of the positivist [sic] American". He
explained that the idea of privately owned land would enable Ramat Shalom to
become "like a small New-England town" (Dolev 1969). In other words, the de-
clared objective was to design a quintessentially western site even while significant
attributes of the mountain, such as its flora and fauna, were recognized to be
distinct from those of Europe or New England.

Importantly enough, the professional planners who surveyed the Hermon
acknowledged from the start that the mountain would draw mainly, if not solely,
Israeli tourists. As a ski resort, they explained, the mountain's limited snowfall
limited its appeal among foreign visitors.[12] The whiteness of the mountain, it
appeared, was unique and appealing only to the local public.

From Mimicry to Mockery

Indeed, Israelis flocked to the mountain in their thousands directly on the heels of
the war, despite the territory's outstanding official status as a closed military zone.
Contestants in a ski tournament held the first winter following the occupation were
described as the kind of athletes "never seen on soccer fields or basketball courts:
doctors, professors, elderly citizens and rich business men", echoing and reproduc-
ing the sport's elitist reputation.[13] But complaints about the new skiing attraction
soon began to accumulate. Visitors complained of poor management, in particular
the untidiness and inefficient administration of the resort, but above all grumbled
about local weather conditions, which could change from snow to rain overnight,
leaving the site more muddy than snowy.[14]

In addition to the erratic weather of the mountain, the Israeli public was consid-
ered insufficiently disciplined to fully appreciate the snow. Echoing the wider sense
that the Israeli public was oblivious to "proper" conduct at a ski resort, one journal-
ist complained, "Bodies were crammed together, one person rubbing against
another, the noise and commotion rose to high heaven, and the Hermon resembled

a branch of the Israeli seashore" (Ya'acov 1969). A year later, another journalist concluded that the mountain had "gone white—from shame" (Shalev 1970). The Hermon Authority, a private tour guide complained, did not distinguish between informed athletes and the thousands of curious tourists who flocked to the resort dressed in summer clothing. His own tours included "information regarding proper ski gear and the Hermon's topography, as well as a short film on European ski centers".[15]

Reference to behavior more attuned to a perceived Mediterranean surrounding rather than to a European ski resort also appears in official correspondence of the Hermon Authority, describing the inappropriate conduct of visitors and the growing problems of "running the mountain". Authority officials complained that the Israeli public was "not very disciplined", which it cited as one of the main reasons for the frequent disorder.[16] As one reporter explained, "In the battle between the hot Israeli temperament and the cold snow, the former is so far outmatching the latter" (Peri 1970).

In Israel, the term "Mediterranean" is frequently invoked as a euphemism through which the orient is referred to in a derogatory and marginalizing way (Hochberg 2011; Nocke 2009). Normalization of the occupation through physical whiteness and the attraction of the masses accentuated instead the site's inability to become truly "European", drawing out visitors' supposedly oriental tendencies. Amazed by the sight of snow, Israeli tourists conducted themselves in ways regarded as inappropriate, highlighting that skiing was an abnormal practice and inadvertently transforming the performance of spatial mimicry into an act of mockery.

The Israeli visitors' professed desire to feel "like in Europe" as a way to perform physical whiteness underscores how the notion of "white but not quite" differs in this case from the conventional way it is discussed in the mimicry literature. In most colonies, the colonial powers produced space that mimics the metropole in order to encourage the colonized to mimic the colonizer, while in the Israeli case, the colonial production of space was designed to encourage the colonial settler society to mimic a western or European idea.

Of course, the assumed binary in the relations between colonized and colonizer are a bit more complex, as "Europe" serves here as a potent geopolitical image rather than concrete location; this image is used time and again to shape a national identity that regards itself markedly distinct from the cultural and social characteristics it recognizes locally in the orient (Newman 2000). From this perspective, the "Mediterranean" trope brings forth an interesting tension, albeit unintentionally; the Mediterranean also comprises a liminal space at the fringes of the orient and occident and as such serves as a middle ground between the two (Ohana 2011). By comparing the atmosphere of the Hermon to that of the Mediterranean coast, the former's own liminal positioning becomes apparent.

Yet Mount Hermon's potential to be transformed into a third space should be taken with a grain of salt, as it was shaped physically through the removal of the indigenous population. As a matter of fact, the primary interaction between Israelis, Palestinians and Syrians on the Hermon only accentuated its designation as a warzone. This became another notable aspect of the site's "whiteness's insecurity", which related to its status as an occupied territory.

Embattled Mimicry and Spatial Dissonance

Intermittently from the initial construction of the ski resort, the area had to be closed because of its location on the frontline of the ongoing military escalation between Syria and Israel. In addition, its vicinity to the border with Lebanon exposed the resort to the threat of infiltration by Palestinian militia fighters seeking to attack civilian and military targets. In one case, Palestinian militants launched a salvo of rockets from the Hermon's western slopes, which killed an Israeli civilian in a nearby town who, ironically, had recently become a ski instructor. In addition, Palestinian militia fighters managed to infiltrate the site and detonate a handful of structures, rendering the resort inoperative for an extended period.[17]

The fighting exacerbated the site's financial difficulties and testified to the suppressed fact that the ski resort was, despite all efforts, part of a warzone. A heavily fortified military outpost was built adjacent to the resort. Not only was the encampment constantly visible to tourists, but its placement also rendered a segment of the ski slope a closed military zone. Furthermore, the paved road leading to the military outpost at the peak served simultaneously as the main access road serving Israeli tourists, underscoring the seamless fusion of the Hermon's dual role —as both military observation point and lucrative tourist attraction.

After two years of inefficient management, the Hermon Authority was dismantled by the military, who then authorized the Government Tourist Corporation, an executive governmental agency, to oversee management of the site. The original settler group who had aspired to turn the Hermon into a quaint "New England" town sank rapidly into financial ruin and disbanded, demonstrating in the process that a western façade alone provides an insufficient foundation for successful colonization.

Operation of the site was handed next to a new settler group composed of military veterans. To lend touristic appeal to a self-professed act of commemoration, the group renamed the site Neve-Ativ, adjoining the Hebrew word for oasis with the acronym representing several fallen comrades. As part of the effort to combat the infiltration of Palestinian militiamen from Lebanon, the military deployed the settler entrepreneurs to stage ambushes along the border, further blurring the line between the mountain's function as a military outpost and tourist resort.[18]

The site's role as a strategic outpost prevented it from being fully embraced as western and indeed underscored the divergence between the site in actuality and as an object of imitation. "Israel seems to have turned the Hermon slopes simultaneously into a battle ground and a tourist center", reported one Lebanese correspondent.[19] "Skiing under the protection of armed soldiers", one newspaper declared, had, for too many visitors, come to seem "perfectly normal. Perhaps they think that this is also a common sight in Switzerland" (Peri 1970).

The constant tension between the conduct of warfare and longing for snow forged a spatial dissonance that reflected another aspect of the mountain's inability to become white. In October 1973, Syria, together with Egypt, orchestrated a well planned attack against Israel and managed to reconquer the Hermon. Unlike the Israeli conquest of 1967, which represented a relatively minor military undertaking, the battles waged in 1973—in particular the campaign to reoccupy the mountain—became a locus of the war effort. Upon conclusion of the war, the gradual enforcement of the ceasefire war ameliorated the security

threat in the Golan Heights. That the site became a symbol of the war also meant that the importance of the Hermon as a military asset would be perpetually emphasized. Israel's annexation of the Hermon will forever demand explanation; it simply cannot be accepted a priori.

Ostensibly, this disparity has been mitigated by the sight of snow, which served to obscure the occupation of the territory somewhat. Eventually, the resort managed to hold its ground; notwithstanding its status as an occupied territory, from the 1970s it has been recognized as one of Israel's most important tourist attractions. Indeed, the relative remoteness of the Golan Heights from most of Israel, the displacement of the majority of its population during and subsequent to occupation, and its reshaping as an open landscape with unique sceneries and cool winter climate have rendered the act of visiting Mount Hermon part of a paradoxical colonial enterprise through which the Golan Heights may be characterized as "the most 'Europe' it is ever going to get".[20] As an Israeli journalist recently observed, it is a place "more Israeli than Israel itself, an ideal version of Israel as we would like it to be: without Palestinians or intifadas but with breathtaking views, pleasing wines and agreeable residents, with horses, crocodiles, and skiing" (Shalev 2010).[21]

Yet the snow itself may also serve to alienate, as it shrouds a space that can be considered white but not quite Israeli. The capacity of the snow to render the mountain foreign to the Israeli landscape brings about another aspect of the Hermon's unsecured whiteness. In the 1990s, negotiations between Israel and Syria reached a critical stage; Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights seemed plausible. While public concerns were raised about the serious military disadvantage of withdrawal, efforts to Europeanize the mountain became a source of comic reflection on the alienated nature of the occupied space. The droves of visitors to the Golan in the 1990s were described as commemorating a parting of ways with the snow rather than asserting claims of sovereignty over it. "When the people of Israel flock to the Hermon", one reporter explained, "it is not a show of solidarity with the Golan's settlers but an attempt to play it like Europeans and to throw the snow a goodbye party" (Gviratz 1996).

This sardonic tone emphasized the blatant absurdity through which Israelis experienced the snow, one that still features prominently in the rationale for holding on to the Hermon. The mountain might be white and attractive, but in contrast to the West Bank which is portrayed as the biblical birthplace of the Jews, the Golan Heights is hardly considered integral to the national territory. The whiteness of the snow is therefore a source of ambiguity; it plays both into the effort to assimilate and normalize the space, but at the same time highlights its distinctiveness. Attempts to mimic a foreign landscape, as well as the crafting of the Golan Heights as a place for visitation rather than residence, have rendered the Hermon neither sufficiently white nor Israeli. Moreover, in the past couple of years, the Syrian civil war has also begun to spill over into the Golan Heights, exposing in the process the area's contested status. On a broader level, the unfolding violence also reflects the ways in which the colonial geographies of the Middle East, including that of the Hermon, problematize the process by which space may be conceived as "normal".

Conclusion

In her ethnographic work on Northern Cyprus, an unrecognized polity and international pariah state, anthropologist Yael Navaro Yashin invites readers to "sense" the underlying political contexts that normalize disruption (Navaro Yashin 2003). Yet rather than normalize the abnormal, she calls upon her readers to reflect on the abnormal qualities of the "normal". The present work explores the contours of normality formed in the rendering of a colonial space, Mount Hermon in Israel's occupied Golan Heights, white. What can be surmised from this contested whiteness of the way in which the materialities of "natural" and "neutral" environments are formed?

Frantz Fanon's conception of being black may shed light on such normal anomalies as the ascribed whiteness of the Hermon. For Fanon, colors become political only when juxtaposed against one another; the black man becomes "black" only in relation to the "white" man (Fanon 1967). As presented here, whiteness is not just a question of race but also of space (Linke 2013). Like race, class, and gender (Gibson 2012), so too the physicality of space embodies the interconnectivity between processes of normalization and whitening only in relation to an *other*. But like Bhabha's notions of mimicry, space can never be fully white; it can never fully emulate the ideal it aspires to become.

The analysis of the attempts to render Mount Hermon "white", provide four main contributions to the work carried so far on mimicry as spatial practice. First, rather than discussing mimicry as an act of human agency I underscore its relation to the production of space. Second, rather than exploring how "artificial" edifices imitate certain architectural styles, I explored how mimicry can operate in the production of spaces which are constructed as "natural" landscapes. Third, I demonstrated how mimicry is employed as a colonial practice in order to normalize contested territories, in this case, one which was occupied by military force and presented as a strategic threat. I showed, however, that the resistance of space itself as a certain materiality as well as the unexpected reaction of the population undermined attempts to govern the contested area and to normalize it by mimicry. Finally, in relation to mimicry in general and Israel's colonial present in particular (Gordon 2010), the case at hand marks a certain inversion of mimicry's performativity since it is deployed to shape the comportment of the colonizers rather than the colonized.

The desire to replicate Europe entailed the removal of the indigenous population, destruction of their lived environment, and construction of a ski resort. But the material whitening achieved through the act of cleansing remains incomplete and unsustainable. The Hermon's unfavorable climate, prevailing security situation, and even the local flora and fauna exposed the "desire to feel as in Europe", and accentuated the multiple ways in which this unfulfilled aspiration simultaneously rendered the mountain paradigmatically Israeli yet "not Israeli enough". Hence space, like humans, holds within it the capacity to rupture the normalization of the colonizer's presence and can trigger a disruptive challenge to prevailing discourses of power. Space, in other words, continually generates various forms of slippage, excess and difference, thereby yielding ambivalences incongruent with the ideal it is intended to embody and produce.

Endnotes

[1] Israel's State Archive (ISA) Gal 8262/4, "Summary of the reserve committee", 12 October 1967; ISA Gal 8262/4, Letter discussing the surveys from Avraham Yoffe, Head of the Nature Reserves Authority, to Meir Shamir, Head of the Galilee Division of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department, 28 November 1967; ISA Gal 8262/4, "Survey and regional planning in the Golan Heights", 26 November 1967; ISA C/51258, "Adjusting agricultural cultivations to the Golan conditions", *Haaretz*, 17 December 1967; ISA Gal 4589/7, Letter from the team of surveyors to the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel, 25 July 1967 (in Hebrew).

[2] Correspondence between officials from the Nature Reserves Authority and the Israeli military dated 8 January, 12 January, 8 March, 17 March 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19 (in Hebrew).

[3] "A survey of the option of winter sports at the Hermon", 30 November 1967, ISA Gal 11750/19; Letters regarding the survey on the Hermon from the Israeli Ski club to the Nature Reserves Authority and the Jewish Agency, 1 January, 6 March 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19 (in Hebrew).

[4] "Hermon Authority", 29 September 1968, ISA Gal8263/2 (in Hebrew).

[5] A meeting held at the headquarters of the Israeli military's northern command, 31 January 1968, ISA Gal 11750/19.

[6] Correspondence regarding "the clearing of Jubata ruins", between the Israeli Land Administration, the Israeli military, the Nature Reserves Authority, and freelance survey teams on the ground, 31 March, 15 May, 2 July; Report on the importance of the location of Jubata ez-Zeit, 22 May; Letter regarding salvageable sites in Jubata ez-Zeit, 23 October 1968, ISA Gal 8262/4 (in Hebrew).

[7] "The villages of the Golan", a review by the "Golan Regional Team for Landscape and Recreation", undated, ISA Gal 8262/4 (in Hebrew).

[8] A report by the Israeli Ski Club to the Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, 24 January 1968; Letter from the Foreign Ministry's Department of Culture and Science liaison to the Hermon Authority; "The development of winter sports on the Hermon", published by the Nature Reserves Authority, 29 April 1968; "Hermon Authority, press conference: main points", 22 December 1968. See also letters from the Jewish Agency to the Hermon Authority, 14 July and 11 September 1969, ISA Gal 8262/2.

[9] "What is Ramat Shalom?", undated, ISA G 2572/2.

[10] The correspondence between the Hermon Authority, the Nature Reserves Authority, and botanists from the Israeli academy began on 23 January 1969, ISA G 2572/2. See also "A summary regarding planting in the Hermon", 25 June 1969, ISA Gal 11750/19 (in Hebrew).

[11] Hermon Authority, press briefing, 22 December 1968, ISA G 8262/3; Hermon Authority, meeting regarding Ramat Shalom, 15 March 1969; Discussion held at the Deputy Prime Minister's office regarding Ramat Shalom, 26 March 1969; "Ramat Shalom: financial survey, preliminary examination", March 1969, ISA Gal11750/19 (in Hebrew).

[12] "Ramat Shalom: financial survey, a preliminary examination", March 1969, ISA G 2572/2.

[13] "Mumchim Le Sheleg" (experts on snow), author unknown, *Ha-Olam Ha-Zeh*, February 1968 (in Hebrew).

[14] Proceedings of the Hermon Authority, 6 March 1969, ISA 17274 (in Hebrew). See also reports in the Israeli newspapers *Maariv* 21 February 1969; *Haaretz* 5 March 1969; *Al HaMishmar* 18 December 1970; *Yedioth Ahronoth* 4 March 1971 (in Hebrew).

[15] Report dated 10 March 1969, ISA Gal 11750/19.

[16] Briefing note from the Hermon Authority's director to Israeli Radio, 16 February 1970, ISA Gal 8262/2 (in Hebrew).

[17] *Maariv*, 29 June 1969; Proceedings of the Hermon Authority, 29 October 1969, 2 January 1970, 20 March 1970 and 1 May 1970, ISA 17274 (in Hebrew).

[18] Author's interview with Rafi Lerman, the architect of the Hermon ski resort and head of the "Golan Regional Team for Landscape and Recreation", 28 April 2011; Author's interview with Yitzhak Zuella, a founding member of Neve-Ativ, 29 December 2008. The interviews were conducted by the author as part of the work on a dissertation research project

during the years 2008–2013. All participants were contacted by the author in person. Interviews were semi-structured and taped by the author with the interviewee's full consent.

[19] Reprinted in *Maariv* 11 July 1971 (in Hebrew).

[20] Advertisement appearing in *Maariv*, 12 January 2001 (in Hebrew).

[21] The allusion to crocodiles refers to Hamat Gader, a geothermal resort located on the border between mandatory Palestine, Syria, and Jordan which was under Syria's control between 1948 and 1967. It was subsequently reopened as a spa but was also turned into a large crocodile farm. Its location made the not-so-European crocs an integral part of the Golan's ascribed attractiveness as an exotic tourist hub.

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