Waterfalls, Goats, and Bombs:
An ethno-acoustic analysis of the Occupied Golan Heights.

“Everyone else was doing it.” -Me, justifying taking this picture at the ceasefire line

After a lunch of ful and pita, Sami and I rode together to the farthest border in Majdal Shams. Sami, originally born in Lebanon, migrated to Israel during the eighties as a child escaping the brutality of the Lebanese Civil war. I met Sami by chance at a Lebanese restaurant in the Druze village of Mas’ada\(^2\) in the Golan Heights while I explained my interest in the Druze to the proprietor. Sami volunteered to show me “real” Druze life in the Golan. Little did I know, his intention was to show me the ceasefire line that separates the most eastern edge of Majdal Shams from a Syrian outpost. As we pulled up to the barbed wired security fence, a small group of people were taking their turn with the border, listening to an explanation from a guide, before turning the cameras on themselves. It seems others had the same idea to come face to face with

\(^1\) Photo taken of author, July 8, 2017
\(^2\) The Arabic orthography of the town is erno\(^2\) while in Hebrew it is erno. In lieu of using the colloquial “3” to scribe the letter ayn in Arabic and Hebrew, I opted to use the single apostrophe.
the ceasefire line, and more accurately, Da’esh fighters\(^3\). We parked past their large forty-
passenger charter bus, and I stood nervously, not knowing what to expect from the site or from
my informal and impromptu tour guide.

We patiently stood waiting for the group of eighteen men and women to finish hearing
their tour guides’ explanation of the site and to take their photos. Some posed with the fence
behind them so you could still see the Syrian post on the other side. While we waited, I turned to
Sami and timidly asked how long we would be here. He didn’t answer, and instead, he
responded, unaffected as the sounds of mortar shells could be heard popping in the background.
“You hear? You hear that? That’s Da’esh!” Sami smiled, excited, and extended his hand as if to
gesture at some beautiful or romantic view. He gave the impression of pride and amusement as
he dragged me closer to the fence. Sami considered the border an important feature to see while
visiting the Golan Heights for someone like myself (a foreigner).

INTRODUCTION

The annexation and control of the Golan Heights following the Six Day war of 1967
remains a contentious international issue. With no established borders and with UN peacekeepers
afoot, the area feels settled and unsettled. While Jewish kibbutzim and moshavim continue to
successfully populate the volcanic terrain, the forms of citizenship and the status of residential
life of Druze remain unknown and precarious respectively. Increased volatility of the Syrian
Civil War has eroded previous forms of intersectionality for Druze refugees, who either identify
as Syrian or of Syrian heritage.

\(^3\) Daesh is an acronym used by Arabic-speaking opponents of ISIL, made of the first letters from
ISIL’s Arabic name: *al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah fī al-‘Irāq wa-al-Shām*. Together, the letters form
the acronym داعش, pronounced Da’esh. The US Department of State added Daesh to a list of
aliases for ISIL in 2014.
The sights and sounds of war (past and present) reside in assorted, seemingly peaceful, spaces. You may visit on old bunker or abandoned military base re-imaging its past use. You may sit at a ridge line at sunset listening for sounds of mortar shell explosions. From the top of Mount Bental to bomb shelters in Katzrin, regional skirmishes and civil war take up audible space for residents and tourists. Experiences with war and the acoustics of violence vary according to place, but I argue, in terms of Israeli statecraft, serve to deepen Israeli control of the Occupied Golan Heights and undermine the socio-political situation of Druze refugees living there.

This chapter explores the consumption, narration, and mediation of sound within the context of war tourism. It surveys the acoustic experiences for tourists and residents of the Golan Heights. I interrogate the spaces for consuming sounds of war and address the power dynamics involved in constructing knowledge around the sounds heard. I argue sensory experiences fall under forms of statecraft and that people ultimately co-opt sounds of past and present violence to legitimize violence of statecraft. Moreover, sound and its mediation can be carried far beyond the war zone. Sounds of mortar shells or pops in the background become topics of Instagram posts or conversations with fellow travelers on buses and in hostels. Mediating sounds of war make more tangible the experience of war for its participants. While others have studied sounds on battlefields and through military personal, in this chapter I focus on how the civilian population constructs and negotiates sounds of war that permeate everyday life in the occupied territories.

Even though this is a study of sound it also documents the absence of sound. It is in fact these experiences of silence that point to two things: 1) unmet expectations and 2) marginalized
people. With the rise of commercialized war tourism⁴ and the desire to see or hear violence, moments of silence expose unmet agendas of tourists. Desire and disappointment indicate a grotesque truth about war zones; spectators desire spectacular violence in real time. When expectations for this form of violence are not met, alternative narratives of violence by way Golan Heights refugees do not take their place. Silence also includes the absence of voices. For example, the exclusion of Druze experiences from war tourism narratives is a powerful act of silencing that in fact shields hearers from the violence refugees experience daily. This study is an opportunity to recover agency in the dialectical relationship between the occupied and the occupier⁵.

Scholars of sound argue that sound in fact shapes how we think, what we think, how we perceive our world; in turn, humans use that sound to create meaning. Meanwhile, tourism scholars note that dark tourism commodifies and romanticizes dark history and dark events in a way that is agreeable for participants. Dark and war tourism will often glide over the intense physical/emotional horrors of the past. I argue that we can combine sound and tourism scholarship in the case of the Syrian Civil war to understand how the consumption of civil war sounds functions as a form of tourism. The consumption of sound keeps the real dangers and traumas of war at bay but also distances the violences of refugee life from those participating in consumption⁶ because sound is mediated and understood through a dominant ideology, exclusive to refugees.

⁴ It is not that war tourism and dark tourism is new. Artists and reporters often went to battlegrounds to document ongoing battles long before its commercialization in the 1800s. ⁵ For more studies on silence and suppression, ethnomusicology and musicology has much to offer. See Dobbs (2013), McKinnon (2013), Giroux (2018), Wong (2014), Abe (2016), Bohlman (2016), Ó Briain (2017), Dave (2014). ⁶ Selling and consuming culture has been superbly critiqued in the Comaroffs’ study of the ethno-commodity (2009). Rather than cultural consumption and commodification being a
I bring these two bodies of literature together to make a point that consumption of sound is a form of war tourism. Tour site consumption of sound exploits the violence of a civil war for a dominant national narrative, but also more insidiously contributes to silencing the violence experienced by Druze down the street. The sounds of the Syrian Civil War inadvertently silence Druze refugees of the region by drawing focus and providing a larger problem to attend to. I argue that this embodied and sensorial act of consumption and all the various actions associated with it (specifically mediated representation of sound in new media and interpersonal experiences talking with UN Peacekeepers) furthers the entrenchment of Israeli statecraft ideologies (both of a territory and citizen-making perspective) by legitimizing the necessity for Israel’s dominance.

HISTORY OF THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AS OCCUPIED TERRITORY

The history of the Golan Heights as an Israeli-occupied territory goes subtly forgotten by the international community in comparison to the violent and public occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, the land itself has substantial political and geo-strategic significance to Israel and Syria. Towards the end of the Six-Day war of 1967, Israel seized the Golan Heights from underneath Syrian control. By acquiring the territory, Israel also acquired Syrian Arab/Druze inhabitants in the remaining five villages.\textsuperscript{7} In 1973 during the October war/Yom Kippur War, the Golan Heights saw battle once

\textsuperscript{7} Prior to the Six Day war, approximately 140,000 Syrians lived in the Golan Heights. The majority of residents fled during the seize, were driven out by the Israeli Army, or were evacuated by the Syrian Army. 139 villages and 61 farms have been reported demolished.
again precipitated by Syria, in alliance with Egypt. Unprepared for an attack on the Syrian front, sparse Israeli forces on Mount Bental fought back impending Syrian troops and tanks until the Israeli military was mobilized.


Fast forward thirty years, when the Arab Uprising began in the North African countries of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt before making its way to Syria. Environmental, economic, and political concerns culminated into anti-Assad protests to overthrow President Bashar Assad, who came to power following his father in 2000. Anti-Assad and rebel forces fought state forces throughout the country displacing nearly 6 million people internally and 5 million as refugees. The Assad government has used chemical weapons on rebels and civilians alike sparking international disgust towards the regime and its tactics (Shinkman 2013, Charbonneau and Nichols 2013, Gladstone 2018, Joseph and Caron 2018, Al Jazeera 2018).

The result of such a horrendous civil war has immediately affected Druze living in the Golan Heights as the possibility to return feels farther away with every passing day of uncertainty. Before the civil war, returning to Syria felt possible, it had been one of the more

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8 Al-Ghajar is the fifth Arab village, made up of Alawites, but it is unenterable for visitors due to its location straddling the borders of Israel and Lebanon. It is fortified by gates and Israeli security forces, although residents can leave and travel freely in Israel.
stable countries in the region (especially when compared to Lebanon’s civil wars and Egypt’s increasing poverty). Even negotiations between Syria and Israel in 1999-2000, 2007, and 2008/2009 made it seem up like the return of the Golan Heights to Syria was always on the table. Druze refugees had to constantly be ready to re-integrate back into Syrian society. Simultaneously, the worry that family members in Syria would be harmed or killed because of integration and citizenship into Israel kept Druze from accepting Israeli citizenship.

The Golan Heights Law or Annexation of the Golan Heights was an Israeli law passed December 14, 1981 that stipulated that “The Law, jurisdiction and administration of the State will take effect in the Golan Heights, as described in the Schedule.” Two months later, on February 14th 1982, Israeli soldiers came to deliver IDs to Druze residents who largely refused them. The attempt to impose citizenship failed and Druze refugees were instead classified as permanent residents with an unknown/unidentified nationality. This rejection of citizenship showed Syria that Druze refugees were still loyal to their pre-1967 homeland. As of 2019, they are in a stateless limbo. However, the state of Syria today, US policy towards the Golan Heights, and President Benjamin Netanyahu’s declaration that the Golan Heights will remain Israel’s forever has made it difficult to resist the current status quo (Eglash 2019, Al Jazeera 2019).

As our French fries arrive to our small table in Apri Ski, a popular restaurant in Majdal Shams with a skier and snowboarder vibe, Safa tries to explain to me her feelings. She chomps off half of a fry and clarifies, “We are automatically associated with Syria, but it’s not like we can go back.” Safa, who was born in Majdal Shams and now lives in Mas’ada, is pursuing a master’s degree in education at an Israeli university. She continued,

We are used to living in Israel. It’s comfortable here. If tomorrow Israel said we can go back to Syria I don’t think we would and I don’t think we could. We don’t know how to live in Syria any more. There aren’t even anymore flags of Syria, unless there’s independence or holidays. It used to be that if the religious leaders said something, we
walked with him and agreed. But now more people disagree [with the religious leaders] and do other things. Like, right now it’s forbidden to serve in the army but maybe in the future. The next generation will decide. Some already say we are Israeli because all of our life is in Israel. But they aren’t Syrian anymore. The older people will say they are but the younger ones say no.

Safa’s take on the condition of the Golan Heights today points to generations of slow assimilation. From language to labor, Syrian-Druze refugees have adopted some cultural markers of belonging that allow them to pass in Israeli society without the ideological commitment of serving in the army. But even that final frontier feels on the cusp of collapsing in the face of firmer national boundaries.

**OF SOUND AND TOURISM**

In the midst of this complicated geo-political area, a large tourism industry has taken hold in “Israel’s Texas”. Deemed “Northern Israel”, the Golan Heights is filled with opportunities to hike, pick fruit, and ski. One of the newer attractions that bring tourists to the area is to see and hear the Syrian Civil War from one of the peaks in the region, most specifically Mount Bental. While it is certainly worth exploring the ways nature is co-opted to further the occupation, I will address how sounds affiliated with war tourism become incredibly important in constructing border and forms of citizenship, but also limiting refugee intersectionality by conjuring a national imagination. In this chapter, I argue that sounds of war are in relation with people experiencing war leisurely and that this non-participatory role in war causes listeners to draw conclusions from the war while in their “safe space” of being a tourist. As Lisle (2000) writes, “if war is located ‘elsewhere,’ tourism can ensure the safety of its consumers, and if war happened ‘back then,’ tourism emerges as the principle mechanism by which subjects can access...

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9 See Korth 2016, Yi-fong 2012, and Peluso & Alexiades 2005 for innovative and activist work on ecotourism and empowering indigenous and native populations.
and commemorate already resolved conflicts” (92). The safety in consuming war/tourism promotes a national performance of stability and thus shapes tourist activity.

The concept of war tourism is closely linked to the activities of dark tourism, or thanotourism, in how they each draw from and commemorate aspects of gruesome spectacle. Dark tourism has historically been associated with places, events, and histories of death and tragedy. Examples of dark tourism include Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan, the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, and Ground Zero/One World Trade Center in New York City. The biggest critique of dark tourism is that it exploits the deceased for capital gains (Lennon & Foley 2000). And while there is certainly room to critique proprietors and tourists alike for manipulating death and tragedy for profit, I am more concerned with critiquing the political and cultural power that makes dark/war tourism so popular, particularly in Israel’s Occupied Golan Heights.

In contrast to dark tourism, war tourism focuses on sites of historical or present-day military action. Growing up in a southeastern town in North Carolina, I was socialized from a very early age to understand the importance my small town had in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Streets are duly named after Southern “patriots”, e.g. Robert E. Lee Drive, Stonewall Jackson Drive, and Greenhoe Drive (from ‘Rebel Rose’ Greenhow). No Wilmingtonian education would be complete without a middle school fieldtrip to the Battle of Moore’s Creek Bridge, a battle site of the American Revolutionary War. See? Even I am no exception to the draws of war tourism. However, war tourism is indeed insidious in its entertaining and educational properties.

In more recent works, dark tourism has been criticized for glibly covering atrocities of the past. In her Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the
Civil War Era, Tiya Miles (2015) analyzes the dark tourism that pervades in the South, specifically at plantations, manors, and cemeteries. Miles chronicles her own experiences on these ghost walks, elaborating on the stories that make them so popular. Her larger analysis draws our attention to the ways in which tourists acknowledge the existence of slavery, but that this acknowledgement often undercuts the violent and horrific reality that slaves really faced. She writes, “Historic sites that feature stories of black ghosts in bondage seek to engage and yet also avoid the troubling memory of slavery” (2015:17). Dark tourism preserves the privileged positionality of being the tourist by restricting the amount of emotional discomfort possibly experienced while one learns about atrocity. Similarly, war tourism of countries in a post-war period, like Croatia, capitalize on tourists’ desire for danger and darkness and take that opportunity to rebrand, presenting new narratives of a more European national identity.

While Miles is primarily concerned with how tourists avoid historical slavery, scholars like Lauren Rivera (2008) consider tourism of post-war countries to be a means of managing stigma following shameful historical events, like war. In the case of Croatia, war tourism developed swiftly after the wars of Yugoslav succession and Bosnian genocide. Rivera argues that, in fact, war tourism for the war sparking Croatia’s independence is left out entirely from state-sponsored tourist ventures. Rivera writes, “The CNTB [Croatian National Tourism Bureau]’s decision not to recognize the war is linked to a broader absence of state-sponsored commemoration throughout the country” (2008:620). Instead of incorporating their “reputation-damaging” history like Germany and Poland’s national tourism of concentration camps or Cambodia and Rwanda’s genocide museums, Croatia covers their history with a heighten assertions of their Europeanness (Rivera 2008). In this way, absent war tourism practices work to conceal and disguise historical truths from tourists.
Israel provides an example of war tourism on multiple fronts. Even as I focus on war tourism of the Golan Heights, it must be stated that research is needed on the war tourism next to and within the Occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel is a leading destination for war tourism, with particular attraction to the Golan Heights. In Debra Kamin’s 2014 article “The Rise of Dark Tourism” published in The Atlantic, she writes, “Tour groups, fresh from jaunts to the area’s wineries, cherry markets, and artisanal chocolate shops, stop here by the dozens each day armed with binoculars and cameras, eager for a glimpse of smoke and even carnage.” Crowds are drawn to the area to get a view of the civil war in Syria.

In addition to the sights of war, the sounds of the war become part of the sensory experience of touring war. Sound studies and ethnomusicology scholars allow us to think about sounds as objects that create knowledge about our world. Steven Feld’s concept of acoustemology outlines “what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening” (2015:12). Grounded in relational ontology, humans do not “acquire’ knowledge but, rather, that one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection.” (2015:13-14). The self obtains an understanding of the world through a cyclical exchange of experience and cognitive processing, processing determined by the values and norms of one’s context. This cycle of subjective experience and processing ultimately amasses into what we call knowledge. Relationality with sounds is a “condition of dwelling”, but also “produces consciousness of modes of acoustic attending, of ways of listening for and resounding to presence” (2015:15). Furthermore, Feld contends “listening as habitus, a forceful demonstration of routinized, emplaced hearing as an embodied mastery of locality” (2015:18).

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10 I make the distinction here between war tourism and solidarity tours, which seek to bring economic prosperity and political awareness to the Territories and specifically Palestinians through acts of tourism. War tourism, by contrast, focus on sensorial and historical permeations of violence and conflict as the main attraction instead of an influence on the main attraction.
Feld asks us to take seriously the relationality between humans and the sounds of others (nature, animals, objects). In the case of war tourism, sound then becomes relational to the experience of touring a war zone. There is a social immediacy to hearing mortar shells and gunshots of civil war fights. People then are in proximity to war without actually being in the military or victims of its violence.

J. Martin Daughtry’s (2015) work on sound in Iraq illuminates the consequences of human-sound relationality. He argues that the result of sound consumption in war is three-fold: auditory regimes, sonic campaigns, and acoustic territories. Auditory regimes reflect the different ways of hearing based on one’s experiences, education, and identity. This means that the simple act of listening is actually laced with conscious and unconscious impressions. So, the same sound can actually be heard differently by participants. Sonic campaigns refer to the creation and presence of sounds in certain contexts and the people responsible for making them. This gives sounds of war more intentionality, as it is not just a side effect of combat, but an actual weapon used by people (Goodman 2010). Lastly, acoustic territories refers to how sounds construct space and give it meaning. Daughtry argues that sound demarcates geographical places and creates a meaning associated with that space. Sound from the Syrian Civil War creates a space

11 Franz Boas wrote a fascinating piece about the misunderstanding of sound via physiological causes. He further explored the concept of “sound blindness”, which offers scholars now an interesting new paradigm through which we may analyze sound.
through a dialectic of “us = safe” and “them = unsafe”. These meanings correlate space to Orientalist views of the Middle East that further demonize and other Arabs.

Because sound is critical to our understanding of the world, it is included in the physical experience of war tourism. Tourists both international and local gravitate to the Golan Heights in order to see and hear the Syrian Civil War. In the case of touring the Golan Heights, sounds are co-opted from their original context and merged with other cultural and military narratives. These sounds of war construct a legitimate border for participants as they reside in a safe space. The long-term effect of this sensorially formed border narrows existing forms of citizenship for residents of the Golan Heights.

**VOLUNTEER-ETHNOGRAPHER**

Conducting fieldwork in the Occupied Golan Heights proved quite difficult. Because I received public grants, I was subject to certain national ordinances, including restricted access to areas east of the 98 highway. This travel restriction cut off entire Druze villages from being accessible, yet made visiting Jewish settlements and moshavim all too easy. Getting goat cheese from Ein Zivan, sure, delicious! Visiting refugees, out of the question—If you go, we can’t fund you. Take, for instance, the Druze village of Buq’ata, which is within two miles of two Jewish settlements, Odem and El-Rum. I could sip wine at the Odem Winery or grab a drink at The Porcupine Pub in El-Rum, further financially supporting settlements. But to walk down the road and buy snacks from the small shack in the center of Buq’ata was a breach of US State Department policy.

This restriction afforded me creative options in collecting data. My study of the Golan Heights included three main methodologies. I conducted participant observation at a major (war)
tourist destination and a minor location for war tourism. Mount Bental is a popular mountain peak visited in the Golan Heights; it is also the location of a battle between Israel and Syria during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. People visit it for its scenic view, but also its significance in Israel’s military history. I observed and often joined multiple tour groups at the top documenting narratives told and information relayed by tour guides. I also observed participant behavior with the border and UN soldiers. I conducted unstructured interviews in “Arabizi”, a mix of English and Arabic, with Druze refugees from each of the four villages in the Golan Heights, in addition to Human Rights activists, Jewish tour guides and UN Peacekeepers. Interviews surveyed the perception of Druze life in the Golan as well as the impact of war (both the Syrian Civil war and the Arab-Israeli conflict) on the area. Lastly, I participated in what I call “volunteer ethnography”13 as I volunteered in the region to learn more about war tourism and the naturalization of the Golan Heights occupation within the context of larger Israeli territory. Playing on these different roles and turning my “researcher” hat on and off proved very tricky at times but led to interesting conversations and interactions.

Intersectionality in ethnography remains one of the more interesting things a researcher can talk about in their writing. Ruth Behar (1996) addresses the emotional paradoxes of ethnography when she integrates memoir and ethnographic analysis, challenging the objective “observer-observed” model in anthropology. As research takes us across more diverse spaces many of us find ourselves occupying more than one role in our research; intern-ethnographer, employee-ethnographer, volunteer-ethnographer. Of course, our identity is of notable

13 I consider this form of research a microcosm of applied and activist anthropology as it directly works with informants and produces a form of knowledge that hopefully will contribute to the increased visibility and understanding of refugees in the Golan Heights. While applied anthropology seeks to solve social problems, it will take many more years of engagement with this population to influence long-term policy and tourism programs that respect the human rights of the Druze.
consideration, but our place within an organizational structure as well affords us different privileges. Little ethnographic research describes the experience of the volunteer ethnographer. In these intersecting roles, we have guessed at how best to manage the work. In her work volunteering at a nursing home, Tinney (2008) suggests a boundary maintenance that preserves one’s physical and emotional energy. Garthwaite (2015) concurs, documenting her ways of managing and negotiating social boundaries pre-established by the foodbank and its culture with her academic training. Still, the metaphor of a boundary lacks the membranous quality that ethnographers often have, moving fluidly across space and contexts. I personally struggled to find balance of my own boundaries in regard to my emotional and physical health while volunteering as I brought experiences from the field back to the kitchen I had to cook in.

Katzrin is the largest Jewish town in the Golan Heights, but second largest compared to Majdal Shams. My decision to volunteer is somewhat controversial as it legitimizes and contributes to the economic stronghold Israel is creating in the territory. However, it was the most sustainable way to conduct fieldwork and even created opportunities to convey facts about Druze living North (and Druze living south). Aware of the debates over the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), I certainly recognize my contribution to the settlement of the Golan Heights. It is my hope that I curated learning moments with individuals who otherwise would not have known of the situation in the Golan Heights for Druze. As well, this research speaks to their fight for life.

My success at breaking into and contributing to the tourism industry in the Golan Heights was more than coincidental. Having spent time each year visiting the (then) only hostel in the area, I had more contacts with volunteers and owners. One Canadian-Israeli volunteer had vouched for my “coolness” and arranged for me to join the new hostel further south in Katzrin.
that had just opened barely a year before. My expertise on the history and culture of the “Arab” side of the area made me one of the only guides who could guide visitors on local nature adventures and explain the customs of the neighbors to the North. Being proficient in Arabic and Hebrew and well informed on the area made me an odd asset to the hostel’s owner in comparison to the other volunteers. None of the other volunteers (including the Israelis) new much about the region, let alone the Druze still living in the mountains. Overtly interested in Druze and advocating for their recognition, I was game to suggest people drive the hour north to Majdal Shams for their own experience.

But the Golan Heights remains difficult to traverse without a car or the gumption to hitchhike. Car or no car though, Mount Bental is one of the closest sites for visiting. Frequently labelled as the epitome of Israel’s cockiness, Mount Bental reflected a time in Israel’s history when their arrogance following substantial victory in 1967 was at a high. Located next to Merom Golan, an Israeli settlement and kibbutz, Mount Bental is a large attraction for people visiting the area on their own and especially on Taglit-Birthright or tourist groups. It has an expansive view of the Syrian ceasefire line and the Sea of Galilee. You can see the tops of various mountains and the green pastures in the valleys. Every week, I took the first bus up to Merom Golan and trekked to the top of the Mount with my bookbag, canteen, and notepad. I spent hours of observation were spent meandering around the dozens of groups who would park there to hear their tour guide’s rendition of the Yom Kippur war of 1973 and the importance of the site.

Asking to join various groups, I followed tour after tour waiting for mention of Druze and refugees of 1967 (as you can see three of the four Druze villages from the top of Mount Bental). But following the historical narrative of the Yom Kippur war, tour guides made the connection to present day Syria and the Civil War, neglecting to speak about challenges facing Druze in the
Golan Heights. With young ladies sneaking off to the side of the tour guide to take their selfies and snapchats, the ceasefire line and the Syrian landscape becomes a naturalized background to subtle occupation. Flash—click. Syrian children are dying. Flash—click. 500,000 children gassed in the village. Flash—click. No food or clean water. While young people are taking their photographs, stories of the atrocities facing Syrian people are told in the background. The horrors of Civil War are simultaneously heard and unheard in the mediation of selfies. Stories of gassed villages are haphazardly attended to by selfie-takers in the moment and then re-entextualized in Instagram posts. The mediation of the border shrewdly affirms a non-existent international line in the Jewish imagination.

Volunteering in a hostel in the Golan Heights also meant fielding questions from guests as direct as “Where can I go to see bombs? I wanna see a tank.”, one Washington DC lawyer asked in June. Although he was more likely to see an IDF tank in the Yehudiya Nature Reserve at sunset, his request was not uncommon. Tourist inquisitiveness to see the border for its violence provides insight to what people imagine is the reality in the Golan Heights and in Syria. On December 19, 2014, VICE News released a video elaborating on the uniqueness that was and still is war tourism in the Golan Heights. The opening sequence shows a VICE News reporter on horseback taking a ride through Bental Mount with a Jewish-Israeli tour guide explaining how full the restaurants are there in the Golan Heights as people come to tour the landscape and “maybe also take a look at the war that is going [on] next to us”. 14 Consumed with the sound of war, VICE News correspondent Simon Ostrovsky stops to comment on the sound of explosions, “That was another big one.”

Meanwhile, my interviews in Majdal Shams, Masada, Buqata, and Ain Kenya were telling a different story of violence. With repeated pleas for just a normal life, young Druze men and women found themselves caught in-between narratives of Syrian nationalism and Israeli naturalization; between memories of life in Syria and opportunities in Israel. Human rights activists actively work to draw attention to the violence felt by the occupation and the forgetfulness of the Israeli government to acknowledge what was happening in the villages due to the occupation, not the civil war. Interviews with Druze informants often pointed to the “unknown” status of themselves, their land, but also their futures. Being unknown was their normal.

ACOUSTIC REGIMES AND ACOUSTIC TERRITORIES AT MT. BENTAL

When interviewing Kiko, a recent graduate college student, about her experience on Taglit Birthright she explained that she came to the ceasefire line via “nature”. Kiko and her group of fellow Birthright participants made their way to the Golan Heights fairly early in her ten-day tour of Israel. Coming up from a hike near the Sea of Galilee, Kiko and friends drove their forty-passenger bus to continue hiking near the border of Israel and Lebanon. The emphasis of their second day excursion was to embrace and explore the nature of Israel’s Golan Heights. Kiko’s guide did little to prime them for their experience in the Golan Heights outside of making explicit its inclusion inside Israel. As she explains it, “We just took in the beauty of everything. We focused on the beauty of all that and what our first impression of Israel was. And after all that, we went to the border, he dove into the more serious side of what was going on, especially at that time. Because that was, at the time, the height of the bombings that we knew about back
then”. Kiko’s orientation to the Golan Heights was rooted in its natural beauty and outdoor adventures that she and her peers could engage with before heading to the more serious reality of the territory.

Kiko’s experience of nature first, war second illustrates the dual tourism efforts within the Golan Heights. Known for its beauty, adventurers are invited to hike, climb, and rappel the natural playground (which many Druze help maintain in their jobs as park reserve rangers). But with the small proximity of the country, war is only a stone’s throw away. Following their hike to view the valleys and mountains of surrounding countries like Lebanon and Syria, Kiko climbed atop the edge of old barracks of Mt. Bental to get her photo of the border.

Caption: Day 2: At the border of Syria and Israel, view from Mt. Bental I found out today that my family on my Mom’s Mother’s side is from Syria, even though she was born in Egypt, making her technically Syrian.

15 Interview with author April 7th, 2018
While standing around with her peers, Kiko heard a “familiar” sound of the border.

**Kiko:** The biggest part of that day that I remember—it was, it was very tough…we were on the border and my friend Brandon said, “Did you guys hear that?” And some of us were like “No what was that?”—some little pops and such. And we didn’t think anything of it. And he’s like, “There was a bomb that just went off over in Syria”. And we look over and sure enough there was smoke coming up and it was the weirdest feeling in the world because you’re stuck in this place.

**Lindsey:** You just gave me the chills.

**Kiko:** Exactly! For relating it to Americans, it would be like hearing the noises of a school shooting from a distance, knowing what it was, and not being able to do anything about it. Because there’s nothing you can do. You are in this place. You are completely powerless in this place. There’s no way you can go over there. All you can do is hear what you know is going on. It’s a very sad experience, but also a very eye-opening experience.16

Kiko’s experience at Mount Bental points to a few nuances in Daughtry’s auditory regimes.

Daughtry describes the auditory regime as the different ways of hearing and listening that have been shaped by experience, education, background, and so on, meaning that the same sound is heard differently depending on the hearers. On one hand, Kiko challenges the dominant auditory regime of Birthright participants having intersectional identity as a descendant from Syrian-Jews. Whilst hearing the shells, she is paralyzed and sympathetic envisioning family she has never met before. Other Birthright participants include fervent Zionists or those of Ashkenazi heritage where there is no connection to Syria or the Middle East. They hear these same shells differently being part of a Zionist auditory regime. On the other, Kiko points to the shared experience of school shootings in America. Relating the sounds of mortar shells to the sound of gun shoots signals a feeling in the shared auditory regime of her American peers. Regardless of whether you have been in a school shooting, it is the perception that the sound gunshots at school triggers instincts of danger and a need for safety and distance. Moreover, as school and public shootings

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16 Interview with author April 7th, 2018 (13:00-14:33)
become the horrifying norm for Americans, gunshots conjure the sinking feeling of inevitability that we too will be in a shooting and implementing a run/hide/fight strategy for survival.

Similar to the emotional connection of gun shots to the American experience, here the state uses auditory strategies creating emotional conditions that craft a border and reinforce the state’s claim to territory. In this way, crafting borders do not require face-to-face interactions. A pro-Israeli state auditory regime is confirmed with the sensory emotion associated with danger and fear. Furthermore, hearing the mortar shells broker the acoustic territory, creating a non-existent border. The co-presence of verbal narration from a tour guide and the “pop-pop-pop” of bombs co-constitute the territory beyond the ceasefire line as dangerous and threatening to the Israeli state. Acoustic territories become visceral upon tour guides’ narration of past and current events. When Taglit-Birthright trips make their way to the mountain they are accompanied with Israeli trained tour guides. A part of seeing the view is having a tour guide explain what you see and how it came to be there generally starting with the Yom Kippur of 1973. As a stand-alone station, a small speaker sits where a recording set to patriotic music plays with a verbal description of how Israel acquired and settled the Golan after 1967.

With the Civil war in the news and part of news discourse, most guides feel they have to address the Syrian side of the ceasefire line. As one guide to a Birthright trip recalled to his group:

A year ago, I was in the reserves. One of my jobs as a medic in the army we were across the border every night and we brought Syrian wounded into hospitals in Israel; Syrian women and children. Da’ash wanted to establish a gate to Syria and actually take control over Syria and have a base facing Israel in Syria. So Israel decided, no, we cannot give the Syrians a front base at the border of Israel. That’s really- you know we cannot give a country that constantly says, “Our mission in life is to destroy Zionism and destroy the State of Israel and to wipe it—Israel—from the face of existence”…Unfortunately, the situation in Syria is way—there is no…I can’t see anything right now—I can’t see the end of it. 500,000 people were just killed with chemical weapons and it’s hard. Trust me I’ve seen what happened. I saw the wounded. Lots of them were children and if you ask
me what’s the solution—I have no idea. On the one hand, I cannot…I’m not sure. What happened in Libya or Yemen can happen in Syria. You saw what happened in Egypt..., but I can’t see…

This particular narration of the war and the ceasefire line (inaccurately referred to as a “border”) establishes a particular space loaded with meaning. The narration and auditory mediation of place creates a cyclical process wherein acoustic territories and auditory regimes co-constitute each other. In other words, what and how we hear sounds influence how sound creates space; and the sound connected to space establishes how we hear sound. In the case of the tour guide from my previous example, his reluctance to “see the future” only affirms that Israel needs a border in the Heights to protect itself from the monsters on the other side. As tour guides narrate the base and the Syrian Civil war, tourists and participants absorb these stories and mediate them in social media posts documenting what they heard (both aurally and narratively). Visually mediating sounds of war and acoustic territories get translated back to home publics solidifying a non-existent border to the larger international community.

THE ROLE OF UN PEACEKEEPERS

Part of the appeal of coming up to Mount Bental is running into UN Peacekeepers conducting observations of the ceasefire line. An international actor and attraction, UN Peacekeepers split their time between their binoculars and tourists’ cameras. On particularly sunny days they stay busy as visibility and the number of tourists present is highest. But the time to catch them is 8:00-5:00pm. While some visitors timidly walk around Peacekeepers and their observation point, others are direct in addressing any and all questions they have. For some, this is the first and potentially only time to meet a UN Peacekeepers since their missions take them to conflict zones that most people cannot visit.
In fact, the UN Peacekeepers present at Mount Bental recognize that this encounter is the result of circumstance. As one officer noted, “We really shouldn’t even be here [Mt. Bental]. We should be at a post further south, but we haven’t been there since 2014 when ISIS took it over. That’s why we’re here and until we can get that position back then we’ll move back there…we’ve got observation posts all along the valley but that specific one is over the fence from the technical base. Sort of right where the rebels can come through.” The officer is referencing a 2014 skirmish where Nusra militants/Syrian rebels crossed a ceasefire in the Golan Heights and surrounded Fijian peacekeepers, taking some hostage.

UN Peacekeepers find themselves at the nexus of auditory regimes of tourists and acoustic territories of tourism discourse around sound. In between patrols and shift switches, UN Peacekeepers see themselves as public relations representatives for the larger mission. A peacekeeper from New Zealand commented, “A lot of what we do here is a bit of PR type stuff. You talk to people—it’s not deliberate but it is part of it. It just happens.” Acknowledging his job was not to mediate the UN’s missions, by the nature of having an observation point at a site of tourism he feels it is only natural that he field questions.

While not in the job description a peacekeeper for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), one officer attributed the importance of communicating with the public as a side effect of tired large-scale communication techniques.

[T]he UN’s incredibly bad at public information. When they do it, it’s the same way every other government agency does it. One spokesman behind a pedestal talking at people. No one cares. Every government on earth does that and no one really trusts [them]. So having people deployed out here, it really does—I think one of the unofficial selection criteria is at least one person up here has to speak English fluently and express things clearly. And it’s a bit of a public information campaign by the UN saying, “Here’s what we actually do. You may or may not like it but by explaining the truth of what we’re here for—even the most hardcore anti-UN guys are like, “Ok.”
Explaining “the truth” has its differences though. Elaborating further, he says, “So you only answer if they ask. And if they ask, you figure out what they want to know. Yeah the top questions when they come here are: Where is the border? Where are you from? Where’s all the action? Those are sort of things people want to know.” In this regard, peacekeepers decipher the auditory regimes of their audience first and respond consciously in a way that validates and perpetuates the audience’s ideas. This extends further to acknowledging the refugees of Golan Heights. Again, auditory regimes take precedent. An officer from Canada states,

Generally, when people come here to ask us about things you’re trying to work out what they want. Because we could sit here all day and talk about lots of random stuff and you get random people like that. And so, if people ask about Druze, other than that we don’t sort of talk too much about the Druze unless they ask about it. Because people don’t really know about it here. They don’t know. And I’m not fully informed on it.

The Druze refugees in the Golan Heights are negligible in the hegemonic narrative associated with the territory. Their insignificance comes at the hand of an overwhelming draw for action and gunfire. UN peacekeepers recognize this sick appeal for the extraordinary violence of the civil war, recalling, “They kind of go, “Where’s the action?!” and it’s like, well, what do you mean by action? Because action means people are dying. Is that cool to you? So some people—they think it’s like sitting about, watching tv. War tourism. And it’s like stop and think about what you saying, mate.” This draw and desire for the action and danger of the Syrian Civil War points to the allure of extraordinary violence. Meanwhile, attention to Druze refugees goes largely unattended to. Few UN Peacekeepers read up on them in the area and when tour guides mention them its only in relation to the Druze of Israel who serve in the army.

**RESISTING VIOLENCE**
I was finishing up tea with Farah, my adoptive Druze auntie, who was adamant I postpone my trip to the “Hathbi” or the Heights. With tensions between Israel and Syria (re: Iran) at an all-time high, the previous day the countries exchanged fire. CNN played in the background of her foyer as she pleaded with me to wait, let the danger subside before heading up. President Trump had announced the US withdraw from the nuclear deal Obama had made. In response, Iranian forces and Israeli forces went head to head in the Golan Heights. Following Trump’s announcement Israeli forces targeted Iranian rocket launchers and conducted an air strike in southern Damascus. This prompted Iranian forces on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights to retaliate and fire rockets towards Israeli force in Israeli occupied Golan Heights.

Ignoring Farah’s warning, the day after the missile strikes I came off the number 52 bus in Qatzrin and walked the kilometer to the hostel I would volunteer at for the summer. Welcomed with the offer of hot tea or coffee, everything in the hostel seemed quite calm considering most of their week’s bookings had cancelled due to the recent skirmish. Employees and volunteers understood guests’ reservations but firmly stood by claims that all was safe. And rightfully so, as Qatzrin lies approximately 40 kilometers south and an hour car ride away from the action. However, as part of safety training, it was important the lead volunteer show me the nearest bomb shelter as they had to evacuate to it just the day before. Melody, a volunteer from New Zealand, walks me to the shelter. She’s been volunteering with the hostel for several months and walks with a strong spirit of experience down the street leading me across the neighborhood to a conspicuous cement building with spray painted walls and small murals that lead to stairs taking us underground. “Yeah we were here the other night and the sound…wow. I mean it was loud,” she explains. “But we’re totally safe. Nothing’s gonna happen in Katzrin. I mean it’s Katzrin for fuck’s sake.” The physical distance from the action matters in hostel
workers’ mentalities towards violence and the threat of physical. However, this mentality was not shared by tourists to the area. Quiet remained in the hostel for two days before one person from Britain arrived to hike the nature reserve, largely uninterested with the military history and present threats in the area.

When I went up to Majdal Shams on my day off, I met my friend and local informant, Reem, at the always-popular restaurant Apri Ski. I asked her about her experience with the rockets. Her eyebrows raise, eager to tell me how the sounds of the rockets pulled her out of her sleep. A high school senior and Druze from Majdal Shams, Reem had never heard such firepower before. As we sit over a plate of French fries Reem pulls up a video of the arms exchange sent to her in a Whatsapp group message. In the dark of night you can see small bright darts across the night’s sky before overwhelmingly loud explosions near a set of hills in the Golan. “It was terrifying. I have never heard anything like this before in my life!” Reem says. Days after the missile exchange, she still can’t believe it happened so close to where she lived. Previously, she had never worried about the Civil War reaching her. Instead, for the first time in her life she felt truly afraid that the conflict between Israel and Syria/Iran would directly hit her home in Majdal Shams.

Reem’s distinction between conflicts (Israel and the Middle East, and the Syrian Civil War) point to a large fallacy engrained in contemporary war tourism. War tourism and its spectacular sounds are predicated on the recent atrocities inside Syria; and these sounds are being used to establish borders and legitimize Israeli occupation. However, the lived experience of Druze points to a much longer conflict between Israel and the international community. Which is perhaps why the alternative tourism efforts of Druze focus more on the 1967 war and refugee status of residents in the five villages, not the Civil War.
The largest organization for alternative tourism comes from Al-Marsad. Al-Marsad: Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights was established 2003 and works to protect and promote human rights as preceded by international law. This includes documenting violations of international law by Israel. Some of the everyday challenges facing Druze refugees in the Golan include unstable infrastructure, consistent access to electricity, and removing land mines planted by Israel in its fights with Syria that slide into residential areas.

One specific effort al-Marsad makes to regain recognition from the impact of Jewish-Israeli tourism in the region is providing their own alternative tours. These alternative field tours challenge the scripts used by Israelis to explain the territory. Most tours include opportunities to speak with local residents to talk about life under occupation. Since much of the state-sponsored tourism is about land, alternative tours go to Syrian farms to talk about resource allocation and control of natural resources by the Israeli government and Israeli settlers. Even on hiking tours, Al-Marsad sees this as an opportunity to point out the many destroyed Syrian villages, minefields, and Israeli military bases and settlements.

These alternative forms of tourism mimics Israeli tourism, using the same points of interest as entry (land, nature, food). However, the desire for extraordinary violence is what keeps alternative tourism from thriving; it fulfills a desire for a different political narrative rather than violence. It uncovers and dissects the real grievances and violences impacting refugees living under occupation. But people don’t come to the Golan Heights en masse to hear about the violence that has been happening for fifty years. It is banal in comparison to the exceptional violence of civil war. The international and Jewish tourist’s disinterest in systemic and structural violence against refugees points to and supports what Kuntsman and Stein (2015) call Israel’s public secret, or “something that is known, but concealed, understood but protected”, of military
violence (2015:43). This public secret has “a normative structure of agreeing not to know that which everyone knows about the violent terms of Israel’s military rule […]” (Kuntsman and Stein 2015:43). Public discourse on social media is a means of secrecy maintenance and distracting Israelis and the larger international community from Israel’s public secret of expanding occupation in the Golan Heights. Attention to state-sanctioned violence is deflected, obfuscating Syrian-Druze victims.

Moreover, resistance to these forms of violence dwindle further at the interpersonal level for Druze refugee youth who have been integrated linguistically and professionally into Israeli society. Noor and her husband, residents of Buqata met me for dessert. Both religious, they disagreed over the state of the Golan stating when I asked them where we were. They laughed at each when they answered simultaneously “In Israel.” And “In Syria.” when I asked where the Golan Heights were. Noor’s husband was a farmer and chef who grows the food she uses in her restaurant.

Anan who acquired his father’s construction supply company in Buqata works twelve hours a day pouring concrete. By far the most nationalistic of his friends, Anan’s bedroom is decorated with the Syrian and Palestinian flag. Having never heard any Druze refugees speak of Palestinians, I asked him to explain how he felt connected to Palestinians. Anan’s energy changes and his voice becomes far more purposeful when he says,

I have nothing in common with Druze below. They don’t anything about me or my life. I have more in common with Palestinians—they know what it’s like to have their land taken, they know what it’s like to be under control, they’ve seen their grandfather cry when his house was taken from him and he would never see his family again. They know what it’s like be fucked.

CONCLUSION
The popularity of war tourism in Israel stands only to increase as Syria recovers from its long and bloody civil war. Looking at sites for war tourism, and specifically consuming sounds of war, I have shown how discourse within and around tourism narratives facilitates the creation of acoustic territories and legitimates the Occupation of the Golan Heights. Experience and mediation of sound is influenced by identities and ideologies (auditory regimes) held by individuals and organizations. When people discuss the sounds of war, they are often also excluding the voices of minorities, in this case Druze refugees. Sound and the discourse around it proves a fruitful means for analyzing how ordinary and extraordinary violence is consumed and repurposed to construct non-existent borders and bolster held beliefs. In my analysis, I show that consuming sound is a mechanism by which contemporary Israeli borders are imagined and the problems facing Druze refugees are ignored. Moreover, ignoring Druze refugees and the violence facing their lives has subtly made integrating Arab residents in the Golan Heights into Israeli society a “natural” pathway. As forms of resistance to the Occupation wane, Druze of the Golan Heights are reconsidering their intersectionality as undefined, Syrian-Arab-Druze. As Shams takes a long drag from his cigarette, he crosses his legs and says “All I want is a normal life. At this point, I don’t need to be Syrian or Druze or Israeli. I just want to live in peace. I can either be occupied or killed. Maybe if I have Israeli citizenship it’ll make my life simple. And it’s not like you can feel the occupation—you can get used to it. It’s integrated into our life.”

War tourism and its sound effects make tangible the uncertainty of contested spaces. Tours to hear the Syrian Civil War become microcosms of the national project to settle the Golan Heights and show various actors involved in this sensorial aspect of state formation. Tourism narratives and the reiterative and ephemeral sounds of war point to the repetitious and recursive strategy for performing the nation (Bhabha 1990). Sound and its narration/mediation is an
example of Israeli statecraft and making de facto citizens out of its refugees. This study and its many facets can and should be applied to other places of Israeli occupation, namely the Gaza Strip where sounds of air raids and the Iron Dome construct antithetical citizens in Gaza. For now, most Druze refugees of the Golan Heights remain “unknown” in their nationality.
Bibliography


