

SC2217 Visual Analysis Group Project

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Introduction

In this essay, we examine Israel's tourism campaign, Visit Israel. In this campaign, Israel uses the motifs of connection and exploration to sell an experience of limitless possibilities to Western tourists, which stands in stark contrast to the policies of highly restricted movement of Palestinian communities living in the area. Israel's portrayal of its close proximity to Western practices and liberal values like tolerance in this campaign serves to drum up Western support for its claim of jurisdiction over contested territory in the area.

Jerusalem: History, Religion, and Disputed Control



Figure 1: A scene from "Jerusalem: Heart of the World"

In a tourism promotion video titled "Jerusalem: Heart of the World", we see a young and vibrant lady dancing energetically throughout the different iconic places in Jerusalem as the main visual motif (Figure 1). The connective dancing motif suggests that tourists get to enjoy the freedom of moving around in Jerusalem. In the video, Israel promotes Jerusalem as a place of "spiritual adventure" where one can immerse themselves in the "3000-year history", and as "one holy place for all religions, where all people come together." Israel is capitalising on the rich history and religious heritage of Jerusalem, offering tourists unrestricted access to religious sites like Temple Mount, Western Wall, and Dome of the Rock. However, the history and right to access religious sites in Jerusalem is contested between Israelis and Palestinians.

Jerusalem has been a disputed city between the Israelis and Palestinians since 1967. As both Palestinians and Israelis claim ownership over Jerusalem, they see each other as a threat

(Jewish Virtual Library, 2010). This causes a chain of movement restrictions on sites by whoever has more authority (Berda, 2017). In Jerusalem, Israel controls the right of movement to the city, and within neighbourhoods in the city. For instance, Palestinians must apply for a visitorship to visit places in Jerusalem they used to call home which also stood their religious sites to pray such which are now controlled by the Israelis and yet, foreign tourists are privileged by the Israeli state, and are welcomed to freely access these places (Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2017). Control of entry to, and movement within Jerusalem is key to strengthening Israel's claims over the jurisdiction of this contested city. This tourism campaign works in tandem with Israel's movement control policies to advance its claims over Jerusalem.

Exploration, Discovery, and Managed Mobility

In another Israeli tourism video titled "Israel Is My Playground", Figures 2 and 3 depict contrasting scenes of Israel's landscapes.



Figure 2: "Israel Is My Playground", a scene showing a biker in the city of Tel Aviv



Figure 3: "Israel Is My Playground", a scene showing a biker in the outskirts of Jerusalem

Figure 2 shows a biker in the midst of Tel Aviv's city, a blend of historical and modern structures. Figure 3 shows the biker within the vast deserts near Jerusalem. The video and these scenes paint the picture of Israel as a world to be discovered by the fortunate tourist, who can traverse these landscapes with ease, relating again to the plight of Palestinians in

You do well to dwell on the significance of unhindered movement (represented through the cyclist) and that - traversing landscape - as the tourist experience being offered up by Israel. You tease out two aspects effectively - (1) claimsmaking over territory/sites through this depiction (2) managed mobility that underlies this promise of "discovery"

Israel, who still face uncertain and ambiguous legal recognition and therefore do not enjoy full legal mobility (Berda, 2017). In these two cities, though they are internationally contested territories, Israel promotes them as areas of exploration and leisure for tourists and exerts political and force over them, allowing them to grant favourable access to their intended audiences (Torpey, 2000). Furthermore, a section of Israel's official tourism website advises that "tourists continuing from Israel on to Arab countries officially request that an Israeli stamp does not appear on their passport", a stark reminder of the politicisation of borders and passports in the region. Minimally, the passports of tourists are subject to scrutiny by neighbouring countries who oppose Israel's claims, but the invisibility of Israel's Palestinian residents mean that any of their rights to travel remain uncontested and unseen.

Proximity to Western Values

Israel also showcases exciting activities such as beach parties and vibrant nightlife activities (Figure 4) in its tourism campaign, in a bid to pander to Western tourists. This is done to highlight the close proximity of Israel's culture and values to Western culture and practices.



Figure 4: Nightlife promoted in Israel's tourism campaign



Figure 5: Tel Aviv Pride Week in Israel's Tel Aviv promotion campaign

Furthermore, Israel's promotion of LGBT events such as Tel Aviv Pride Week (Figure 5) emphasises Israel's tolerance of the LGBT community, painting Israel as a bastion of liberal values and human rights. This practice of 'pinkwashing' and the promotion of its vibrant nightlife suggest Israel's desire to appeal to Westerners while diverting attention from their treatment towards Palestinians, including their restriction of Palestinians' rights of movement.

Conclusion

Through Israel's tourism campaign, we can see how the Israeli state attempts to pander to Westerners and claim ownership over the narrative of the deeply contested history of the area. This can be seen to be part of the Israeli state's attempt to subtly exert control over the contested areas and win Western support for its territorial claims.

Well done in highlighting a number of issues in this short analysis. Great choice too! I'm curious - what led you to this tourism campaign? While I can clearly see how Berda's work informs your reading, you could have made better/deeper use of Torpey. Nevertheless, plenty of complex aspects - historical claims to religious sites, picturing landscape, questions of audience, signalling liberal values through sexuality, etc - woven together.

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References

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Videos referenced:

Jerusalem: The Heart of the World

<https://youtu.be/nLKWDp5uA-U>

Israel is My Playground

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z0OoUqKkwwM>

Tel Aviv Pride Week - Book Your Trip Now!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hY02cj9FhdQ>