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# Kin-aesthetics, ideology, and the cycling tour: the performance of territory in the Israeli *Giro d'Italia*

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## ABSTRACT

Addressing the strange case of the Israeli Giro d'Italia – wherein the opening stages of the Italian cycling tour's 2018 edition were hosted 2000 km away, by a country with little cycling heritage – the paper poses the question, not 'Why Israel?' but 'Why cycling?'. In response, it draws on theory at the intersection of mobilities, aesthetics, and ideology, together with an empirical analysis of the Israeli Giro's TV coverage, to claim that the cycling tour – both historically, and in its contemporary form as a mediated 'mega-event' – is characterised by a uniquely 'kin-aesthetic' capacity. This capacity performs and orders territorial identities as coherent, self-evident wholes, thus enacting an ideological 'illusion of closure'. Consequently, the article calls for greater critical attention not only to mega-events in general, but to the cycling tour specifically: the ways in which it performs territory, and the potential of such kin-aesthetic devices to work ideologically, concealing division and debate.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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Kin-aesthetics; mobility; ideology; mega-events; cycling; Israel; territory

## Introduction: The Israeli *Giro d'Italia*

As many as a billion viewers will see the country on display, *the full country* ... Cycling takes place outdoors, and for three days, the cameras will be on us for 16 hours showing the country from north to south.

Sylvan Adams, co-owner of the Israel Cycling Academy. CNN 2018. (*Emphasis added*).

The 2018 edition of the *Giro D'Italia*, one of the three 'Grand Tours' of men's professional cycling – alongside the *Vuelta a España* and the *Tour de France* – began in unusual fashion. Rather than starting in any part of Italy, the cyclists set out from the Western, Israeli-controlled side of Jerusalem. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stages were also hosted in Israel, from Haifa to Tel Aviv, and from Be'er Sheva to Eilat, before the race returned to more familiar territory for the 4<sup>th</sup> stage in Catania, Italy. At first, this could simply be taken as an indication of the sport's increasingly global popularity. Indeed, this is by no means the first time a Grand Tour has set off from abroad. In its 101<sup>st</sup> edition, this was the 13<sup>th</sup> time the *Giro's* '*Grande Partenza*' had taken place outside Italy. Nor are the other Grand Tours strangers to foreign beginnings: the '*Grand Depart*' of the 2014 *Tour de France*, for instance, was held in Leeds, Yorkshire. However, two things make the Israeli *Giro* stand out. First, unlike the UK, where cycling as a sport (as well as a middle-class lifestyle; all lycra, sourdough, and frothed milk) has boomed over recent years – especially since Great Britain's success in the 2012 London Olympic velodrome, and subsequent *Tour de France* victories of British riders – Israel cannot be said to be in the grips of cycling fever. While a trendy way of getting

around in Tel Aviv, the country has little historical pedigree in biking as a competitive sport (Guardian 2016; CNN 2018). If the Israeli *Giro* is indicative of an infectious uptake of cycling in Israel, it is not the symptom but the first case.

Secondly, there is the matter of distance. Whereas the finish for the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of the 2014 *Tour de France* in London was 163 kilometres from the 4<sup>th</sup> stage start at Le Touquet, the trip from Eilat to Catania was over twelve times that distance: roughly 2000 km. Besides being a break from tradition – the first time any stage of a Grand Tour has been held outside Europe – this was also a significant decision in the sporting context of the race itself: one might imagine the delight with which a group of endurance athletes greeted the announcement that they would have to deal not only with complex team strategies, gruelling climbs and slippery descents, but also minor jetlag.

The official reasoning for the decision to stage the *Giro* in Israel was as a memorial to the Italian three-time winner Gino Bartali (b.1914-d.2000) who, during the Holocaust, had helped rescue hundreds of Italian Jews. This is clearly a fitting tribute. Nonetheless, it is the sort of justification which, while legitimate, also suggests a deficit of explanation; a ‘yes this, but also something more ...’. In answer to the question begged by this *something more*, one can look to Sylvan Adams, the multi-millionaire Canadian-Israeli cycling enthusiast behind the bid to host the *Giro*. In interviews carried out prior to the race, Adams cites two motivations (and Bartali’s legacy is neither): one, to boost the popularity of cycling in Israel, and two, to promote Israel to the world (CNN 2018).

It is this second motivation which – in the context of a contested city (Jerusalem), and the oft-touted role of sports tourism as a form of ‘soft power’ – begs further examination. The nature of the question I want to ask, however, is not primarily a question of Israel or Israeli-Palestinian politics. If anything, it is more about cycling, or the cycling tour as a type of ‘mega-event’ (Roche 2000; Boyle and Haggerty 2009). As I will later explicate with the aid of Natalie Koch’s work, such events are performances shaped, materially and discursively, by a range of actors (of which Adams is one influential example). The question, then, is not: ‘Why did Israel want to host the *Giro*?’, but rather: ‘Why would a cycling tour be selected as the vehicle of national promotion?’, ‘why is cycling so well-suited to doing this kind of work?’, ‘why cycling, rather than something else?’.

The paper hypothesises a particular spatial and aesthetic reasoning behind this odd phenomenon. Specifically, it puts forward the idea that the cycling tour, as compared to other more renowned ‘mega-events’, entails visual and sensory capacities of a uniquely mobile kind. The modes of perception associated with the cycling tour are characterised by a particular appreciation for, and embeddedness within, the aesthetics of mobility, which in turn provides commercially and politically-motivated actors with tools not found in other sporting spectacles. These tools have long been deployed by the hosts of cycling tours for the promotion of individual places, but the Israeli *Giro* draws attention to a more interesting possibility: cycling’s capacity for constructing territories by demonstrating them as coherent spaces: *sensible, unedited wholes bound together by the cyclist’s wheels and the technologies which bear witness to their rotation*. As such, this capacity exemplifies the link which Mustafa Dikeç (2012, 2015) makes between space, aesthetics and ideology, the naturalising function through which a contingent, contested identity or order is made to appear as ‘common sense’. Yet it also does more than this. Since the cycling tour is distinguished by its mobilities, what is at play, I argue, is a relation between *kin-aesthetics* and ideology, between the sensory and material process of touring and the (re-)production of accepted distributions.

This argument will be laid out across three sections. Section one will introduce the concept of the ‘mega-event’, drawing attention to the depoliticising tendencies of such spectacles. Elaborating on Koch’s (2018) critique of ‘soft power’, it will be argued, that there is often a lack of specificity in how such ideological processes are considered, typified by the vague notion of ‘sportswashing’. In particular, it will be proposed, echoing Dikeç’s (2012) reading of Laclau and Rancière, that ideology is not a cognitive phenomenon of distraction or deceit working at the level of content, but is rather ‘an aesthetic affair’ working to naturalise and order the limits within which any such content is presented and perceived. It functions through the spatial distribution of ‘sensible evidences’,

shaping the 'givens' of the situation – that which we take for granted, without the need for debate – thus foreclosing other possible interpretations. The illusion is that of the whole, the coherent, the settled, or the closed.

Furthermore, I will posit the cycling tour as a phenomenon which is distinguished, in both its commercial and political histories, by mobility. The meanings it constructs and the sensory evidences it draws into relation are not only articulated spatially; they are also performed through the very processes and sensations of movement. Consequently, the second section identifies an opportunity both to expand and amend Dikeç's reading by exposing it to mobilities scholarship, particularly that which explores the idea of kin-aesthetics. Further to being 'an aesthetic affair', as Dikeç (2012) puts it, I believe we can say that ideology is a *kin-aesthetic* affair.

The third section returns to the case of the Israeli *Giro*, employing an in-depth analysis of the race's TV coverage to elucidate the variety of ways in which the kin-aesthetics of the event works both to connect and cohere territory, and to distribute and order its parts, performing contested geographies as pre-given and 'common sense'. However, the section also highlights the tensions which emerge out of the cycling tour's particular aptitude for demonstrating spatial coherence. These tensions indicate the fragility of ideology as a kin-aesthetic affair, the potential for moments of dissonance that fragment the sense of flow.

Referring by way of brief example to the *Grande Partenza* of the (now-cancelled) 2020 *Giro* in Hungary, the paper concludes by calling for the need to address critically the hosting of cycling tours as specifically kin-aesthetic performances with the capacity, albeit fragile, for working ideologically to foreclose debates around spatial identity.

## Ideology as an Aesthetic Affair: Mega-Events, 'Soft Power' and 'Sportswashing'

Ideology ... may be seen as the consolidation of an aesthetic regime that puts in place – in common – 'sensible evidences' that suggest certain chains of inference while disallowing other associations, and present a certain situation as the naturally given one.

Dikeç (2012), 24

Boyle and Haggerty (2009, 257, following Roche 2000) define 'mega-events' as 'high-profile, deeply symbolic affairs that typically circulate from host city to host city'. Typical examples include sporting competitions – Olympic Games, World Championships – as well as political summits and commercial exhibitions (ibid.). The claim that 'mega-events' work ideologically demands immediate clarification, not least given the murky status of the term 'ideology' itself.

Initially, mega-events might be described as ideological in that they allow for the reframing of the host's identity through representational spectacle (ibid.), thus functioning as a tool of 'soft power' (Nye 2004). As Nicolau, Sharma, and Zarankin (2019) observe, the effects of curating a favourable brand stretch beyond the direct economic impacts of the event itself, leading to longer-term benefits associated with tourism and 'destination image'. One of the main factors which may hinder a positive image is political controversy (ibid, 1075), and as such a key ideological function of mega-events may be to depoliticise (intentionally or unintentionally) previously contentious issues. Indeed, it is often found that pre-event scepticism and debate give way to excitement over what is happening on the field of play, and praise for the hosts in orchestrating 'successful', 'fun' and 'safe' events.

One consequence of this effect is that the spectacle of the mega-event can be used to justify the implementation of socio-economic and security measures whose deployment would, in other circumstances, be far more controversial (on the 'spectacle of security', see Boyle and Haggerty 2009). On a more quotidian level, mega-events are perfectly-suited for what Edensor (2002, 85) refers to as 'staging the nation': the display of landmarks and landscapes symbolising beauty, cultural values, and 'moral geographies' (Smith 1991. Cited in Edensor 2002, 45]). The creation of this

spectacle invariably relies upon selective processes to determine what (and who) should be included within and excluded from the desired image, thus linking rebranding to intensive processes of purification (see e.g. Fussey et al. 2012, 261 on East London and the 2012 Olympics).

However, the notion of 'sportswashing' often used to refer to the political impact of such events is, I would argue, inadequate for comprehending the ideological, spatial, and aesthetic processes at play in something like the cycling tour. As Natalie Koch (2018) has argued of 'soft power' perspectives more generally, the notion of 'sportswashing' carries with it uncritical assumptions concerning the coherence and power of 'the state' as an actor. Rather than largely static, pre-determined episodes of branding conveying a unified message, Koch argues emphatically that events such as cycling races are 'sites of geopolitical encounter' through which 'subjects and spaces are ... actively constituted' (2018, 2011).

Thus ideology, if it is to be a useful lens of analysis, needs to be distinguished from the inadequacy of 'sportswashing'. There are two strands to this inadequacy, each of which correspond to the analysis of ideology undertaken by Mustafa Dikeç (2012, 2015). First, 'sportswashing' tends to give the impression that ideology is a matter of distraction, illusion, or fanaticism constituting an inability or unwillingness to perceive the 'truth' of a situation. These are precisely the trappings from which Dikeç (2012) has attempted to salvage the concept, building upon the work of Laclau and Rancière. From Laclau (1996), he obtains the idea that the 'illusory' quality of ideology lies not in the falsity of the explicit content presented by a given argument, but in the implicit assumptions constituting the *terrain* within which the argument is grounded (2012, 26–7). The ideological aspect of a mega-event from this perspective would not be that it erects a 'deceitful' façade which masks the 'real', but rather that it serves to produce what Laclau calls the 'illusion of closure', that is, the 'project[ion] into something which is essentially divided the illusion of a fullness and self-transparency that it lacks' (1996, 205). The 'impossible object' projected is 'the fullness of community' (ibid, 206). What is veiled, in other words, is contestation itself.

For Laclau, the illusion of closure is constituted discursively, through 'chains of equivalence' established between concepts. The relation of one concept to another in the chain thus stands in for the ultimate absence of meaning, building a self-referential network of signifiers that compensates for the lack of any decidable (whole, coherent) signified object or identity. However, Dikeç proposes that this operation cannot exist only as discourse. The equivalences established between concepts 'need to be made available to the senses' (2012, 29). As such, he turns to Rancière's 'distribution of the sensible' as 'the way in which the abstract and arbitrary forms of symbolisation of hierarchy are embodied as perceptive givens' (Rancière 2003, 7, quoted in Dikeç 2012, 26–7). The background assumptions which frame any given situation are, in other words, experienced not merely as shared ideas pertaining to an 'imagined community', but are crucially produced and reproduced through sensory perception, as 'self-evident facts' (Dikeç 2015, 91).

We can therefore say that the second shortcoming of 'sportswashing' is a failure to account for the spatial and aesthetic articulation of ideological operations. Previous spatial analyses of mega-events have understandably tended to problematise them as exceptional time-spaces characterised by exclusive zonings – the 'Athletes' Village', the stadia and so on (Coaffee, Fussey, and Moore 2011, 3312). However, from a Rancièrian perspective, the dominant spatial principle of ideological operations, what he calls the 'police' function, is not division and exclusion but distribution and saturation: its illusion consists in the neat, appropriate apportioning of functions, such that everything and everyone seem to have their place (Rancière 2013 [2001], 36; Dikeç 2015, 91–2). The consequences of such an order are expressed in the demarcation of the 'part of no part', the border between that which is seen to partake in the constitution of a given order and that which, as a part of the whole, merely carries out the functions expected of it. The question is how such allocations are naturalised, rendered 'common sense' – both cognitively (that which makes sense) and aesthetically (that which is available to the senses) – such that the order, with its implied relations of power, remains unquestioned. Mega-events can in this way be viewed as an intensified means of aesthetic ordering, curating the illusory, whole entity within which roles and places are neatly apportioned. They do so

by performing and naturalising a 'sensible' chain of inferences, not only through language or imagery, but also sensory cues, the familiar and evocative nature of certain patterns, colours, styles, sounds, textures, and so on.

As Edensor (2002) has observed, spectacular events and symbolic sites are an integral part of the process through which national identity more broadly is (re)produced. However, Edensor's main contribution is to highlight the significance of 'forms of spatialisation' and practices that are mundane, everyday and habitual, including representational aspects but also sensory, emotional, and bodily performances (Edensor 2002, 37). Already this leads us to question the straightforward categorisation of the cycling tour as a 'mega-event' (taken generically, as one among others) whose ideological potential is encapsulated by the idea of 'sportswashing'. Furthermore, in taking this together with Koch's notion of the event as a performative encounter, we realise that the cycling tour has always been marked out by the mobilities through which it functions, and as such by a unique ability to perform identities spatially and aesthetically, by touring, circulating, and thus making sense of territory. Theoretically, this suggests the need to expand Dikeç's understanding, taking heed of mobilities literature to claim that ideology is not only an aesthetic but moreover a *kin-aesthetic* affair.

### Ideology as a *Kin-Aesthetic* Affair: the Mobile Performance of Identity

Places are like ships, moving around and not necessarily staying in one location ... places are about relationships, about the placing of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform.

Sheller and Urry (2006), 214

Following the standard definition of a mega-event, we might analyse the Israeli *Giro*, as Nicolau, Sharma, and Zarankin (2019) have, according to its benefits for Israel's 'destination image'. They observe, for instance, that there was 'significant' and 'abnormal' growth in the market value of Israeli tourism firms on the day the event was announced. However, this paper argues that there are crucial qualitative aspects which separate the cycling tour from other kinds of 'mega-event', making it a unique device commercially and politically. Rather than a spectacle which works to construct and naturalise a (singular, pre-determined) place-image, the cycling tour is performative, mobile, and aesthetic, weaving together – whilst also distributing and emplacing – a range of different discursive and sensory elements into a (seemingly) coherent whole.

Like other 'mega-events', these spatial and aesthetic mechanisms are heavily mediated. However, unlike the focus of most other mega-events on *exceptional spaces* – static, contained sites such as stadiums and arenas – the cycling tour is notably mobile and dispersed (see Koch 2018). As we will see, its mediation involves a processual witnessing that follows the action across extensive tracts of relatively open space, drawing heavily on aesthetic cues from both within and beyond the bounds of the race itself.

Mobile aesthetics have always been crucial to the cycling tour, not only as a competitive sport, but also commercially and politically. The motives for the creation of the first national tours, the *Tour de France* (1903) and the *Giro d'Italia* (1909) were commercial in nature, attempting to capitalise upon the popularity of the bicycle to boost the circulation of two sports-focused newspapers: in France, Henri Desgrange's *L'Auto*, and, in Italy, Emilio Costamagna's *La Gazzetta dello Sport* (Reed 2015; Gallaher 2017). The cycling tour thus *emerged out of the methods for communicating it*. This suited its mobile and dispersed nature: by physically attending a tour stage, all one is likely to see is a single, minute snippet of the race; to really 'follow' such an event, therefore, one needs to do so at-a-distance (Reed 2015, 8–9).

Since the advent of the cycling tour, its mobile and mediated character has offered up unique promotional opportunities for both goods and places. With respect to the former, this is exemplified most clearly by the numerous uses of cyclists as quite literal *promotional vehicles* for the brand names carried on their bikes and bodies (Reed 2015, 65). Relatedly, 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations such as the

Caravan – a parade of advertising sponsors which precedes the riders along the route, propelling free samples into the roadside throng – have utilised the process of movement which the tour performs to circulate commodities around wider markets (see Reed 2015, 39–41). Such methods of promotion have raised political questions around what or who should be permitted to sponsor (or indeed own) cycling teams (*ibid.*). While it is not within the remit of the current paper to address the ethical *content* of such cases, what this indicates is the unrivalled promotional capabilities of the cycling tour as mobile *form*. This is both a symbolic/discursive, and a kin-aesthetic, affective capacity: as the brand names are carried upon the riders' frames, their image is sutured not only to ideals of humility, teamwork, stoicism, and so on (see Dauncey 2003), but also to the sensory evidences of such ideals in the angular, pained, quiet, taut faces and bodies of the competitors, their sheer exposure to the landscape, and the extremities of energy expenditure as they traverse it.

Regarding the promotion of places, the role of mobility is yet more pronounced. This has always meant not only advertising individual places but exploiting the motion of the cyclists to bind these places together performatively, conferring upon them a given order and thus mobilising the 'systems of difference' inherent to place-as-ship (Sheller and Urry 2006). For instance, the *Paris-Roubaix* one-day classic was devised in 1896 by two Roubaix factory owners looking to promote their recently-constructed velodrome (Cyclist Magazine 2018). Rather than hosting races within their self-contained track, the masterstroke was to show Roubaix's connectivity with Paris, the joining up of province and metropole, and the declaration of the province as the destination. Likewise, Reed (2015, ch.5) has observed, using Brest and Pau as examples, how the *Tour de France* enabled otherwise marginal towns to promote themselves through their integration into a national circuit.

As the Grand Tours have gone from events witnessed almost exclusively through the printed text, to being live and televised, the harnessing of their mobilities for promotional purposes has become still more significant. Particularly during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the tours became intertwined with emerging logistical technologies and forms of organisation, the primary purpose of which were to follow, capture and communicate every inch of the continuous, long-distance movement involved in the events (Reed 2015, 68–72). For instance, the 1950s and 60s saw the broadcasters of the *Tour de France* employ novel communications technologies such as telegraphs, radio transmitters, mobile cameras, zoom lenses and helicopter-mounting techniques (*ibid.*, 60). In the case of today's *Tour de France*, four helicopters capture the race from above, using gyro-stabilised systems to ensure image quality, whilst on the ground five motorcycles follow the action up close (Lowe 2016; see Figure 1). The transmission of the images depends upon a complex network of satellite relays in trucks and planes, together with the work of the broadcasting director – for the *Tour*, this is a man named Jean-Maurice Ooghe – who cuts together the pictures into a coherent stream (*ibid.*).

The advent of televised coverage in this way opened up new opportunities for promotion, feeding off the motion of the helicopter as it follows the cyclists across the terrain. For instance, it is not uncommon to see that the towns or regions the *Tour* passes through have set up elaborate visual displays, usually from carefully arranged flowerbeds, trimmed grassland, or ginormous pieces of fabric, which promote local culture or produce (see also Graham 2016 on vertical place-promotion). This is not mere opportunism – the host broadcaster coordinates with the French Farmers Union in advance, noting cultural monuments within a 15 km radius of the course, and registering precise GPS coordinates for where visual displays will be placed (Lowe 2016). The promotional aspect is thus much more than a sideshow: Jean-Maurice Ooghe describes his job as 'broadcast[ing] as exactly as possible the scenario of the Tour – both the sporting aspect and the touristic aspect, because many viewers are more concerned with discovering the beauty of France' (quoted *in ibid.*). Thus, the cycling tour's mobility enables a commercial, touristic itinerary of national 'beauty' to be performed and witnessed.

Furthermore, the acts of mobility and connection facilitated by the cycling tour have always functioned not just commercially but also politically, territorially. As Campos (2003) explains, whilst the *Tour's* explicit origins were commercial, its concept and etymology are rooted in other physical





**Figure 1.** A television helicopter hovers over the course of the 2019 Tour de France in Les Menieures, the Alps (source: author's photo).

and fictional 'tours' intended as means to unify and secure the French nation as a coherent geographical whole. The earliest example Campos gives comes from the 16<sup>th</sup> century 'tours of inspection' carried out by Charles IX at the behest of his mother, Catherine de' Medici. This was a period of uncertainty for the country's Catholic royalty, under pressure from both the resistance of Protestant groups, and the clout of Spain (ibid, 152). Therefore, the purpose of the tour was to check and reaffirm allegiances, to connect one space with the next and to inspect its interior and exterior bounds (ibid.). Secondly, Campos mentions the work of the French historian Jules Michelet, who in 1833 laid out his *Tableau de la France*, an imagined tour of the nation beginning and ending in Paris (ibid, 155). It is striking how, in glancing at this map – intended as a pedagogical tool for educating the population on France's historical and geographical identity – the modern reader sees, perhaps more than anything else, the hypothetical route for an edition of the *Tour*. Echoing the period of the 16<sup>th</sup> century tours of inspection, the era in which the *Tour* itself was conceived was similarly a time of uncertainty with respect to the national territory. Defeat by Germany in 1870 had left France shorn of the two provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. It is within this context that Campos (ibid, 164) reproduces the *Tour's* route from 1919, the first edition following the Great War's cessation and the return of the lost regions to France. The route celebrates the nation's recovered wholeness by 'beating the bounds' of the territory, the bikes appearing to retrace the lines of the map itself. The *Tour* therefore functions as a 'bounding device' (ibid, 154), bringing territorial continuity to the idea of the nation, and, moreover, materially performing this continuity on an annual basis, *for all to see*. As such, it retains its initial military meaning. As Campos puts it, '[t]he Tour is a series of conquests adding up to the whole of the national territory: a ritual annual reoccupation of France from within . . .' (2003, 151).

The kin-aesthetics of the *Tour de France's* 'conquests' should not be underplayed. According to Jean-Maurice Ooghe, the assortment of panoramas, displays, and sites witnessed along the route are concerned with national beauty. Yet the tour's role in making sense of the nation consists not just in the meanings of individual signs, but in drawing together a set of scenes, patterns, and typical environments into a kind of national stylistic montage (see TursiĆ 2019) which, as well as beauty, expresses the more material, infrastructural connections between different spaces. Critically, the mobile, aerial gaze alone cannot do this work of connection. Rather, the unique potential of the cycling tour lies in the interactions between that aerial view and the 'self-evident' and 'unedited' fact of the cyclists' contact with the road and exposure to the elements: with friction, muscular exertion,

and the tracing of the connections which cohere space. It is thus through (appreciation of) these embodied mobilities that the vast swathes of territory captured from above can begin to 'make sense' as an orderly whole. The 'illusion of closure' of which Laclau and Dikeç talk is thus present, but in a particularly kin-aesthetic and performative sense.

The cycling tour therefore brings into focus the tripartite relation between mobility, aesthetics and ideology. Dikeç himself has endorsed a Rancièrian outlook for its attention not only to space but to the more dynamic idea of 'spatialisation'. Space viewed in this way is not pre-existing, static or contained but always on the move and in the making through the distribution of the sensible (see 2015, 88). However, Dikeç does not go so far as to examine explicitly the relations between the aesthetics of ideology and processes of mobility. The mobilities literature is thus a valuable resource for conceptualising the cycling tour as a mutually constitutive process of mobility and space: an encounter which, while depending upon the features of the terrain for its sporting drama, simultaneously constructs and orders spaces in particular ways, investing them with meaning and power (see Jensen 2011). Furthermore, this scholarship also helps us consider relations between mobility and the sensory by bringing attention to the notion of 'kin-aesthetics'. This is often associated with the embodied experience of mobility, in contrast to its role as a political technology, as 'govern-mobility' (ibid.; Bærenholdt 2013). In Sheller and Urry's influential paper on the emergence of the 'new mobilities paradigm', for instance, they mention 'the recentring of the corporeal body as an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement, and construct emotional geographies' (Sheller and Urry 2006, 216). At first glance, this concept appears incompatible with the mediated 'mega-event'. After all, is not the spectator of such events relatively static and sedentary, *rooted to their seats*? Yet, as Sheller and Urry add, '[s]uch sensuous geographies are not only located within individual bodies, but extend to familial spaces, neighbourhoods, regions, national cultures, and leisure spaces with particular kinaesthetic dispositions' (Sheller and Urry 2006, 216).

Merriman and Pearce (2017) relatedly ask that a distinction be made between 'kinaesthesia' and 'kin-aesthetics'. Whilst the former refers strictly to 'the sensation of movement, particularly the sense of muscular effort relating to voluntary embodied movements', the latter indicates a broader 'aesthetics of movement . . . movement enacted, felt, perceived, expressed, metered, choreographed, appreciated and desired' (Merriman and Pearce 2017, 498; see also Davidson 2017 for a Rancièrian interpretation of literature's 'mobilities of form'). The cycling tour evokes multiple aspects of this definition, whether or not those witnessing it are physically present. Even if they are not the ones moving, this does not mean that they do not experience mobility, and in a way that is phenomenological as well as representational, involving the flow of sensory and emotive cues (see also Pink 2009).

While the study of ideology has yet to appreciate fully mobility as an analytical lens, from a mobilities angle it is the ideological which, perhaps due to its associations with a-spatial or sedentary analysis, tends to be neglected (see Bærenholdt (2013)). This article constitutes a small effort to bring these ideas into dialogue. For it is in being experienced kin-aesthetically – as a process of mobility that draws together, connects, orders and renders sensible a selection of cues – that the cycling tour functions ideologically, both performing and naturalising the impossible wholeness of identity.

The following section elucidates these processes by returning to the example of the Israeli *Giro*. The findings are based upon close analysis of approximately 11 hours of footage split across the three Israeli stages of the 2018 *Giro d'Italia*, as broadcast on the Eurosport network. This analysis initially involved 'thick' observations of how space, territory and identity were being conveyed through the coverage: which sites were being highlighted and why; but, more importantly, how and with what effects these spaces were brought into relation through the event itself. Close attention was paid here to both representational aspects – the linguistic and symbolic framing of narrative(s) – and to the sensory, affective, material, and essentially mobile characteristics of the cycling tour itself.

There is an obvious epistemological problem here, in that, as audio-visual material, TV coverage risks an exclusive focus on those two senses at the expense of all others. However, as Pink (2009, 97–101) has suggested, while audio-visual devices cannot *record* other senses such as smell, touch, or movement, this does not mean that they cannot *evoke* them. Indeed, acknowledging the interconnectedness of the senses, there is no reason why an image or, more accurately, a series of images, cannot conjure up a plethora of sensations. This is especially pertinent to the coverage of the cycling tour which, as we will see, depends upon a moving-*with* and a focus on the embodied work of the cyclists.

Drawing on these perspectives then, observations sought to trace the influence of kin-aesthetics as defined by Merriman and Pearce (2017). That is, how were the sensations of mobile embodied subjects – and the appreciation or witnessing of such – enrolled into processes of sense-making? Revealed in these observations are two key devices by which the tour makes sense of territory: first, by a processual witnessing of territory's continuity via the bodily mobilities of the cyclists; and second, by the distribution of sensible elements within that totality, giving the impression that everything has its place whilst simultaneously assigning what is essential and superfluous. What also becomes evident, however, is the fragility of ideology as a kin-aesthetic affair, that through the performance other connections are made possible, highlighting tensions which have the potential to unsettle any coherent order.

### **Kin-Aesthetics & Ideology in the Israeli Giro**

As stated in this paper's introduction, its key contribution is intended to be more about the kin-aesthetics of the cycling tour than about Israel per se. It is nonetheless necessary to give a brief (and unavoidably incomplete) introduction to the geopolitical context against which the staging of the *Giro* takes place.

Though tensions in the region far precede 1967, the Six-Day War of this year – fought between Israel on one side, and Jordan, Egypt and Syria on the other – may be considered as establishing the geopolitical order that, in spite of the numerous attempts to find a solution, roughly persists to this day. During the war, the Israeli Defence Force seized control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem's Old City, from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula (from Egypt), and a large proportion of the Golan Heights (from Syria). Since this time, what have come to be known as the Israeli-occupied territories have been the centre of Israeli-Palestinian tensions. While Israeli occupation of the territories has been condemned by the international community, various agencies (including but not limited to government actors) have continued to facilitate the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This is only the simplest manifestation of a multi-faceted infrastructural violence which Eyal Weizman (2007) refers to as Israel's 'architecture of occupation', constituting a series of attempts to render Israeli hegemony a *fait accompli* by inscribing it into everyday geographies.

The decision to stage the *Giro d'Italia* in Israel is particularly significant given the role of the tourist industry in normalising such uneven relations of power. Yang (2020, 1078), for example, has recently reflected upon international tourism's role in promoting juxtaposed geopolitical imaginaries of the West Bank and Tel Aviv. Whilst in the case of the former 'the dominant imaginative geography emphasizes its location in the Middle East by shaping an Orientalist depiction of [its selected tourist] sites as simultaneously spaces of insecurity and exotic otherness', the 'Israeli identity' of the latter space is presented as 'shaping its features of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and secularism'. As Yang (following Kuntsman and Stein 2015) sees it, this spatial and aesthetic ordering enables a coherent, democratic and 'European' Israeli state to exist alongside the military occupation of the West Bank, without one undermining the other. Crucially, by focusing on the representations of *international* tourism, Yang's study echoes Koch's work in resisting the temptation to attribute such constructions exclusively to the controlled intent of a singular, coherent state. Rather than an example of 'soft power' therefore, the moulding of Israel's image is influenced

by a plethora of actors both within and outside the country. In the case of the *Giro*, this includes the likes of Sylvan Adams, then-Mayor of Jerusalem Nir Barkat, the Israeli ministers for sport and tourism, as well as the race organisers RCS Sport, and the UK broadcaster, Eurosport. In juxtaposition to Yang's study, however, an event like the *Giro* additionally underscores that imaginaries are not just constructed but spatially and aesthetically performed, constituting, as Koch puts it, a 'geopolitical encounter' that negotiates among and makes sense of an array of sometimes contesting spaces and meanings. It is the act of connection, or of tracing connections, that is crucial here, mapping out a whole in relation to which certain parts are shown to be, not exiled, but superfluous.

### ***The 1st Stage Time Trial: Performing 'Jerusalem'***

Even before the first rider slid down the starter's ramp, battles over how the first stage would be represented were already being fought. For instance, when race organisers RCS Sport initially stated on their website that the first stage would be taking place in 'West Jerusalem', accurately portraying the course and implying the divisions of the city, they were immediately scolded by Israel's ministers for both sport and tourism, who threatened to withdraw Israel from the staging of the event if the language was not changed. RCS were then castigated by human rights groups for quickly bowing to the pressure (Telegraph 2017).

Turning to the coverage of the stage itself, this begins with a typical exercise in place-branding operated through a touristic gaze. The very first shot features the old city wall framed on either side by two Israeli flags. This is followed by a fast-sequence video in the style of a tourism advertisement, with 26 shots cut together over just 26 seconds, displaying a colourful montage of landscapes (mountains, the Dead Sea) and buildings (the Church of Transfiguration, for instance), together with typical leisure scenes depicting joyous individuals, couples, and young families smiling into the camera, relaxing in a park, or looking out over a sunset. This is the sort of film which might begin any mega-event, presenting an aesthetic of fun, beauty, vibrancy, youth and togetherness. However, it quickly becomes clear that the specific *kin*-aesthetic qualities of the cycling tour and its mediatisation have a unique role in making sense of 'Jerusalem' as more than just beautiful or fun, but without spatial division.

First, it can be observed that the route of the stage – coming away from the Old City, then back towards it, finishing up as close as possible to its gates – makes it inevitable that the air-borne cameras will stray from the action. It is thus no surprise when, at 4'41", the broadcaster's shot is taken up by the helicopter, which holds focus on the golden dome of Temple Mount – or what Muslims know as Haram esh-Sharif – for almost a minute. Despite the words of the commentator Rob Hatch, speaking to the images – '... as we get our first views from the air of the West side of Jerusalem' – what the viewer is looking at is the Old City, beyond the line of control, and beyond the bounds of the race itself. On this first appearance of the site, there is brief mention of the debates surrounding it and the city more widely. A caption in the bottom left-hand corner of the screen outlines the respective events with which Judaism and Islam associate the site, whilst Hatch goes on to describe Jerusalem as 'a city that is extremely holy to three religions'. However, as this particular landmark is returned to in the early parts of the coverage, the indecision over how to describe it is discarded. When it appears at 20'57", Hatch says: 'there's the Temple Mount again ... [long pause] ... ah, absolutely stunning', before returning to the action. The integration of monuments, memories and histories into a coherent narrative is therefore especially surreptitious for the fact that it happens off the side of the track, *away from the action*, but, importantly, *still within the frame*. The course is not just a track, even when it is officially bounded. It always remains a road, a part of the city and of territory.

Notably, this works not simply by selection or exclusion, but through a spatial and aesthetic process of connection. In this case, East Jerusalem is not hosting any part of the event. Yet it may still be drawn into the aesthetic order performed through the race. That the commentators

are so frequently cued to remark on such sites is, of course, facilitated by the mobility of the event itself. Moreover, as a time trial, this particular stage consists of a circuit tackled consecutively by each rider, enabling multiple iterations of space which gradually transform and consolidate meaning. It is thus through the very circulation of West Jerusalem by the riders that its complexity and contestation is eroded. If only tentatively or accidentally, the sensory mobilities of the stage and its coverage slip the Old City and East Jerusalem into a chain of equivalences with the sites, infrastructures, sights and sounds of its Western side, giving the impression of a stable entity we can call, simply, 'Jerusalem'.

As well as representing Jerusalem as a coherent whole, the coverage also makes visible a variety of symbols which tie this space to others. For instance, like many mega-events, the visual narrative is packed with flags. Unsurprisingly, it is Israeli flags that dominate. They make up the bunting which lines the route, they hang from lampposts, are wielded by fans at the side of the road, draped out of apartment block windows, and even, in one case during the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, reproduced across the panels of the Megalim Solar plant (51'30"). There are, however, other flags on show. During the 1<sup>st</sup> stage we catch sight of the colours of Italy, Poland and Ecuador, among others. These colours are common wherever in the world a cycling tour is held, representative of the prestige of the riders from these nations. One conspicuous absence is the Palestinian flag. And this absence highlights a particular capacity of the cycling tour, more than other mega-events, to be deeply embedded into or performed through a local environment, whilst at the same time being extracted from its contexts and contestations to be resituated within a benign cosmopolitanism. The spectacle of the *Giro* in this sense helps to position the entity known as 'Jerusalem' within a strongly defined national (Israeli) space, whilst in turn associating this space with broader Western imagined geographies.

Though more could be said about the symbolic coordinates of the race, more distinctive to the cycling tour are the kin-aesthetic mechanisms through which it can compile the 'whole' nation – that is, not just through linguistic or visual discourse, but moreover by demonstrating its unedited material and sensory connectivity.

### ***Kin-aesthetic Infrastructures: Connecting and Ordering the Negev Desert***

Today I think's going to be more about survival Sean ... This is an inhospitable landscape that we are cutting through ... [pause] ... there's one road, we're on it.

Rob Hatch, Stage 3, 8'21"

'Superfluous': exceeding what is sufficient or necessary (from Latin *Super-*: over or beyond and *fluere*: to flow).

Although the abovementioned symbols tend to be taken as relatively static objects of visual analysis, it is important to recognise that in actuality these elements are always perceived as mobile. For instance, rather than the specificity of 'Israeli flags', what is evident as the cyclists test themselves against the course is a background blur and flutter of colour and pattern – the distinctive light blue and the occasional flicker of the blue star set against white. On the finishing straight of stage 2, the flag even moves along the course itself, draped over a group of fans as they sprint up the steep gradient, just inches behind the Israel Cycling Academy rider who has made it to the front of the race.

Moreover, what comes across is more than a selection of images, but rather Merriman and Pearce's (2017) kin-aesthetics: the sensory perception and appreciation of movement. While the helicopter captures a strategic (albeit still mobile) perspective, this is frequently interspersed with the audio-visual input from the motorbikes which allow us to witness such sensations as the indistinct, momentary cheering and clapping of fans, the ringing of bells, the pained, vacant expressions of riders as they persevere through a difficult climb, as well as the gradients and vibrations of the road itself as the picture crackles and jolts. In contrast to the place-branding of the aforementioned 26-

second tourist video, this kin-aesthetic appreciation is not limited to simplistic representations of fun or beauty. Instead, it connects and makes sense of territory through the interplay between a roaming, expansive aerial viewpoint and an intensely grounded engagement with the riders' painful negotiation of the terrain.

Whilst to the cycling fan every stage of a tour has its points of interest, there are many where it is largely expected that very little can be achieved in the context of the overall standings, and the challenge as such is simply to reach the finish, to make the connection and avoid incident. A core motif, discursive but also in the performance itself, is that of endurance against or in spite of the challenges posed by the environment through which the cyclists pedal. In the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> stage, the co-commentator Sean Kelly refers to it as a 'lumpy time trial' (35'42"), and throughout concerns are voiced over the slipperiness created by the texture of the road surface. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, however, that provides a particularly strong example: a 229 km route across the Negev desert which, as Hatch regrettably informs the audience, is 'not packed with features' (4'40"). The stage coverage opens with a discussion of the thick blanket of cloud which is trapping the heat, and the dust that has been blown up onto the road. Later, we are shown images of camels and vultures, which, as Hatch mentions, have been known to circle above the peloton in tours of Spain (15'10"). The atmosphere of the stage (both material and affective) is thus one conditioned heavily by hostility towards human life, and a priority not to win – this can be left for another day – but simply to survive.

However, if this stage does not do much for the race, the cyclists are still doing certain work on behalf of territorial integrity. Akin to the 1919 *Tour de France* discussed by Campos (2003), this route 'beats the bounds' of the country, following a single highway, Road 40, which runs parallel to the border with Jordan to the east, while making its way to the Egyptian border in the south. While the road itself was already laid, the stoic and muscular struggle of the cyclists performs its infrastructural capacity to the tour's audience, rendering its connectivity sensible through both material demonstration, and via an affective invitation towards empathy for the athletes' plight. Especially on these long monotonous stages where fans, though present, are few and far between, there is a sense, alluded to in Hatch's use of the pronoun 'we' in the quote at the top of this section, that the audience is present less for entertainment than moral support, that their role is as a travelling companion who also endures. Alongside this affective relation, what is witnessed is a rhythmic, metabolic process, wherein the focus is to make sure one takes on enough fluids and calories to make up for the energy and moisture being expended. Such deeply human and bodily processes further imbricate the viewer's sensory experiences with that of the riders and, accordingly, with a felt understanding of the territory being traversed.

However, this stage does more than serve as a processual witnessing of the territory's continuity and boundedness. Providing an interesting parallel to the treatment of East Jerusalem in Stage 1, it simultaneously integrates whilst marking as superfluous another contested geographical identity, that of the Negev Bedouin population. As such, it draws attention to a second function of the tour's kin-aesthetics: that, as it connects spaces, it also orders them, rendering as common sense a certain (power-laden and hierarchical) distribution of roles or capacities.

In the sparse landscape, human life is picked out as a feature in itself. At 9'15", the coverage cuts from the smooth straight tract of the highway to shots, taken pre-race, of one of the region's Bedouin villages. The image itself is of a small tent, from which two women emerge, perhaps in response to the helicopter's noise and turbulence. At a later point in the footage, when another similar village appears alongside the route, Hatch observes that 'there is [human] life out here ... it's an extremely hard life' (28'25"). These instances appear at first to provide a relatively simple set of meanings, the primitive and sedentary aesthetic of the Bedouin contrasted to the modern, smooth, hard mobilities of the highway and the helicopter whose turbulent presence brings them out of their (soft, irregular) tent. In this sense the tour again orders territory as it cuts through it, both integrating the Bedouin within a coherent landscape,

and emplacing them as a benign presence devoid of political claims, a remnant of the nation's past which simply survives, to be passed by. Integrated into the kin-aesthetic tapestry of survival, these are lives to be endured, and they are lives which can be endured, without this disturbing the nation's 'wholeness'.

Such aesthetic ordering belies a set of tensions and geopolitical claims. The Negev Bedouin are Arab, formerly-nomadic tribes who have since the turn of the century been involved in a number of land disputes with the Israeli state, and have been subject to episodic evictions and displacements as a result of Israeli settlement-building, particularly in the West Bank. Therefore, the emplacement of the Bedouin through the *Giro* reflects the ideological role of the Rancièrian (2013 [2001]) distribution by demarcating those elements which, though *part* of the whole, do not *partake* in it. More than this though, the political effect is brought about through mobility itself: Laclau's (1996) 'illusion of closure' consists not in the dark spaces of the map but its *cul-de-sacs*, routes signposted and visible but inconsequential. Rather than Rancièr's 'part of no part', ideology as a kin-aesthetic affair depends upon the demarcation of the *superfluous*, that which is beyond the flow.

Interestingly, however, the kin-aesthetics of this process themselves lend to it the propensity to *overflow*, allowing for the tracing of connections which would not otherwise be exposed. Whilst the coverage bypasses the tensions surrounding the Bedouin, it inadvertently draws into relation two sites which highlight them: first, the Bedouin tent, and then, minutes later, a 'liman', an underground dam for collecting floodwater (32'20"). By making the connection between and showing the proximity of these contrasting aesthetics – one a tent in dusty brown barren desert; the other a lush, oasis-like pool of deep blues and greens, surrounded by palm trees – the tour produces a moment of dissonance or non-sense. In doing so, it brings attention to the controversy of limans in the Negev. These sites are funded by the Jewish National Fund, a non-profit organisation with a history of involvement in the purchasing of land for illegal Israeli settlements. The instance of kin-aesthetic dissonance thus betrays the political struggles of the region, disturbing assumed orders and questioning the coherence of the territory and the Bedouin's place within it.

Thus, if the particular power of the cycling tour to cohere territory lies in its mobile and unedited aesthetics, so does its potential for exposing fragility. As well as examining the lessons of the Israeli *Giro* for the conceptual development of ideology as a kin-aesthetic affair, the below conclusions offer some initial reflections on this fragility.

## Conclusions

These three stages will offer Hungary a fantastic opportunity to present its beautiful landscapes to the global community.

Mauro Vegni, Director of the *Giro*. Hungary Today 2019.

This paper has argued that the cycling tour, rather than a generic 'mega-event' or an example of 'soft power', represents a unique kin-aesthetic capacity to perform territory as whole and coherent. The above empirical study of the Israeli *Giro* coverage demonstrates the various manifestations of this capacity. In the first instance, it utilises the sensory evidences provided by the mobilities of the cyclists to connect a variety of spaces (the Old City; the Negev) into a coherent and continuous expanse of territory consisting of a whole 'Jerusalem' and a clearly bounded national space. It thus facilitates the performance of multiple geographical imaginaries at differing but complementary scales, drawing Jerusalem into Haifa, Haifa into Tel Aviv, Be'er Sheva into Eilat, and Eilat into (the European space of) Catania. In the second instance, it simultaneously connects *and orders* space, making sense of potentially contentious elements (the Negev Bedouin) by both integrating them and marking them as *superfluous*, as a 'part of no part'.

In both cases, the sensible evidences are all the more impactful for their flow, for the sense of continuity one gets between what might otherwise be perceived as separate sites. This is in part a result of the televisual editing which 'cuts together' a series of distinct shots. However, it is, crucially, also something far more material: the sense of connection is grounded at all times (inch by inch, metre by metre) in the contact of the cyclists' wheels with the tarmac. As such the work of performative binding done by the cyclists exceeds the (mis)conception of ideology as associated with the threat of the false or the fake (the doctored image, for example). Rather than cinematic 'special effects', the function they facilitate is that of connection, of rendering the ideal, whole space sensible by showing its unedited continuity through the bodily and exposed mobilities of the athletes themselves.

To comprehend these devices and their potential ramifications, the paper has argued that scholarship on cycling tours (and mega-events more broadly) would benefit from dialogue between mobilities studies – especially that with a focus upon the sensory – and work in political theory addressing ideology and aesthetics. It has been suggested that one useful way of doing so is to develop the concept of ideology as not just an aesthetic but a kin-aesthetic affair. In this way we can effectively critique the often-disquieting links between sports events and politics, whilst rejecting the reductive tendencies of aspatial analyses, instead insisting upon the performative nature of geopolitical encounters. Specifically, Laclau's 'illusion of closure' and Rancière's 'distribution of the sensible' gain analytical traction by being mobilised: taking 'closure' and 'distribution' as spatial acts rather than strategic nouns, and grounding sense-making (as well as its politically-uneven effects) in sensory experiences of movement.

As well as its unique faculties, however, ideology as a kin-aesthetic affair also bears a certain fragility. There is, after all, a strangeness to discussing the cycling tour as working on behalf of any kind of totalising vision, since it is an event that, in so many ways, is open, contingent, and fragmentary. The kin-aesthetics of the tour itself creates opportunities for alternative performances. There is no other professional sport, for example, in which so little prevents spectators from infringing upon the field of play. And this is reflective of its broader spatial dynamic: the fact that, in the kin-aesthetics of the cycling tour, track and territory flow one into the other, producing unanticipated encounters, connections, and dissonances among apparently superfluous elements. It is in part due to the availability of such modes of intervention that cycling tours have such a rich history of protest (see Polo 2003). Not only do their heavily mediated nature render them perfect platforms for airing grievances, but their spatial and aesthetic characteristics bring self-evidence to the claims being made. Unlike protests which exploit the spectacle of a mega-event to raise awareness for an issue taking place beyond its enclosures, cycling tours frequently feature claims wherein the points of contention emanate from the very spatial orders which the race is passing through and, in doing so, helping to perform.

With the continued growth of cycling's global audience, its significance as a device of kin-aesthetic politics is likely to grow. Though it did not court the same degree of controversy as the Israeli start, it was announced in April of 2019 that the (now-cancelled) 2020 edition of the *Giro* would begin with three stages in Hungary, a nation with a particularly contentious recent place in world politics. On the surface, this might be analysed as a purely symbolic problem: an episode of 'sportswashing' by a 'mega-event'. Awarding a televised spectacle like the *Giro* to Hungary might attract criticism for affording soft power to the Fidesz government of Victor Orbán, known for its fierce right-wing, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies (e.g. Vox 2018). However, the task of this paper has been to argue that it matters that this is a cycling tour, rather than something else, rather than another kind of mega-event. Interrogating it thus necessitates looking past the idea of 'beauty' suggested by Vegni's words. For instance, considering Orbán's consistent efforts to secure, both discursively and physically, a singular Hungarian national identity against what he sees as the destabilising force of migrants (Guardian 2018), we would be remiss not to consider the capabilities of the cycling tour as a 'binding device', and, relatedly, to ask how the mobile aesthetics particular to it might become complicit in performing and consolidating certain spatial distributions. At the same time, we should be wary of granting such orders a finality which they have not achieved, paying due attention to the fragilities which such long and winding encounters invariably expose.



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