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Maps as Politics: Mapping the West Bank Barrier

Christine Leuenberger

AAAS Science & Technology Fellow and Senior Lecturer, Department of Science and Technology Studies, Cornell University, 131 Rockefeller Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-2501, USA

ABSTRACT
The West Bank Barrier increasingly reshapes Israeli and Palestinian land- and cityscapes. Its physical infrastructure - which consists of walls and an elaborate fence system - is depicted prominently in some maps, but disappears or is omitted in others. This article examines how different Israeli, Palestinian, and international governmental and non-governmental cartographic institutions delineate the West Bank Barrier in maps. The focus is on how various visual and textual devices as well as spatial markers are used to communicate certain social and political concerns, construct particular spatial orders, and portray the West Bank Barrier as either a negligible feature of the landscape or as a significant obstacle to the freedom of movement. The cartographic construction of the barrier in maps shows how cartographers’ assumptions concerning its function, the map’s target audience, and the adequacy of various national and trans-national cartographic standards may provide an authoritative and legitimate, yet, an inevitably political and locally produced, representation of the West Bank Barrier.

Introduction: Maps as Arguments

The West Bank Barrier—also known as “the security fence” or the “Apartheid Wall”—that snakes along the Green Line, the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the West Bank, consists of elaborate physical infrastructures, including fences, walls, trenches, roads, checkpoints, and intricate surveillance systems. Yet although such structures have reshaped Israeli and Palestinian land and cityscapes, some maps omit them, whilst others visually emphasize their presence. Indeed, Israeli, Palestinian and international mapmakers produce maps that represent the Barrier and its geopolitical context in profoundly different ways. The focus here is on how various cartographic representations of the Barrier that are produced by an array of mapmakers reflect certain social and political assumptions about its function, politics, and impact.

Common-sense would suggest that maps are objective depictions of a material reality. Certainly, when we consult maps to navigate unfamiliar territories we hardly want to doubt their objectivity. Conversely, scholars have increasingly questioned the objectivity
of mapping practices. Critical cartographers have analyzed maps in terms of their social, cultural, and political context of production and consumption (e.g. Crampton 2001; Crampton and Krygier 2006; Edwards 2009; Perkins 2004). Maps have also been shown to serve various political projects. For instance, states emphasize their nation’s territorial shape turning it into a recognizable “logo” that helps create national sentiments. Political protagonists also use maps to depict preferred boundaries or emphasize potential threats and disputes (Anderson 1983). Such social and political concerns can be embedded within the design of maps in various ways, such as by including or omitting certain visual and linguistic information, by reducing or exaggerating some visual elements, and by selecting particular symbols and scales. Indeed maps reconstitute landscapes as socially meaningful signs that have been selected, classified, abstracted, and simplified (Pickles 2004). A combination of various visual and textual elements can shape the spatial order and hierarchies represented in maps and inspire particular collective spatial imaginations (Harley 1989, 1990, 1991; Pickles 1991, 2004; Wood 1992). Maps, therefore, do not reveal, but produce reality; and they do not represent, but become continuously inscribed and re-inscribed onto a land (Kitchin and Dodge 2007).

While maps used to be the domain of experts in much of the 20th century, they have become “democratized” in the 21st century (Schnell and Leuenberger 2014). As a result of the rise of a “people’s cartography” (Crampton and Krygier 2006, 18; Monmonier 2006), not only governments, but also non-governmental and civil society organizations, bloggers, and political activists are increasingly designing maps to make territorial claims, produce “counter-maps” (Crampton 2009), and disseminate alternative geopolitical images (Perkins 2004; Radcliffe 2009). Such diverse mapping practices have only accentuated the need to understand maps not as objective representations of reality, but as products of particular social, cultural and political contexts. Therefore, both official governmentally-sanctioned maps as well as “counter-maps” produced by bloggers on the Internet, “are necessarily selective, contingent and contextual … to solve relational, spatial problems” (Kitchin and Dodge 2007, 343). Critical cartography’s analytical lens that perceives all maps as a kaleidoscope of selection, perspective, context, and politics also informs Science Studies’ commitment to studying science in context.

Science Studies scholars have similarly analyzed spatial relations as part of sociotechnical and geopolitical realities (see e.g. Carroll 2006; Harvey 2009; Mukerji 2002), contributing hereby to the “spatial turn” that has been unfolding across many of the social sciences and the humanities (Warf and Arias 2009). Science Studies has also long focused on scientific controversies in order to understand the social context of knowledge production (Collins 1981; Jasanoff 2004). Map-making in Israel and Palestine—the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley—is a compelling case study, as cartographic delineations of the region remain controversial because territorial claims are still unsettled and Israel’s national borders continue to be disputed (Biger 2008). Maps of Israel/Palestine thus provide insights into the social and political context of knowledge production as well as the visual and textual rhetoric employed in cartographic claims-making.

The turn to the “rhetoric of inquiry” in Science Studies (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1987) points to the importance of language and rhetoric in the sciences (Billig 1989; Berkenkotter, Huckin and Ackerman 1991). As the Greek philosopher Protagoras pointed out, as there are two sides to every argument, rhetoric becomes a vital skill in order to persuade others of particular knowledge claims. Yet we common-sensically assume that
“rhetoric” is as the stuff of politics and that science is immune to rhetorical embellishments. However, facts do not speak for themselves, but we do the speaking. Rhetoric is therefore inevitably part of communicating effectively. Scientists use rhetoric to construct the objectivity of their findings, invoke the authority of their expertise, and use analogies and metaphors to communicate particular concerns effectively (Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman 1991; McCloskey 1990). Maps do likewise. They are, indeed, not unlike scientific texts:

the map is actually a system of propositions (a proposition is a statement affirming or denying the existence of something), an argument … the map has gone on to a long career rich in the affirmation of the existence of a bewildering variety of things, some whose existence we continue to affirm … some we have come to deny (the island-continent of California, the Northwest Passage, the open polar sea, etc.), but, in any case, things very hard to imagine without the creative intercession of the map … (Wood and Kryger 2009).

If maps can be understood as arguments for the existence and the affirmation of certain features and not others, we need conceptual tools in order to understand their visual rhetoric. As Leuenberger and Schnell (2010) point out, maps can be analyzed in terms of three recurrent elements, such as visual signifiers (including features such as a map’s projections and scale, levels of cartographic detail, and choice of colors); textual signifiers (including the naming of places and other signifiers that load an image and reveals its target audience); and the demarcation of the space (by selecting certain geographical or infrastructural features such as roads, maps can creates a specific spatial hierarchy) (see also Harley 1991; Pickles 1991). Moreover, maps have to also be understood within their wider socio-historical context of production, circulation and usage (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). By selecting an array of maps of the Barrier the focus here is on how the visual rhetoric of these maps is closely intertwined with the geopolitical context of their production.

The data presented here are part of a long-term sociological study of mapping practices in Israel and the Palestinian Territories that commenced in 2008. The data includes: a corpus of maps collected in Israel and the Palestinian Territories from commercial, governmental and non-governmental sources; over 64 in-depth qualitative interviews with surveyors, cartographers, academic experts, political protagonists and local stakeholders; a collection of archival and library resources, as well as ethnographic observations in numerous cartographic governmental and non-governmental organizations.

In the following I will investigate how different Palestinian, Israeli, and international cartographic institutions and organizations depict the West Bank and its geopolitical context in varied ways. Various governmental or non-governmental institutions use numerous visual and textual signifiers and spatial demarcations to either emphasize or omit the Barrier. The map’s underlying social and political assumptions, functions, and target audiences not only determine how the Barrier is represented, but also help construct particular spatial orders and ethno-social spaces for Israelis and Palestinians, respectively.

**What is the West Bank Barrier?**

The Israeli government unilaterally started to construct the West Bank Barrier in 2002. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the purpose of what is referred to as the
“Fence” “is … security” and is a direct “response to suicide bombers who enter into Israel” (UN OCHA 2007, 46). They maintain that 3% of the Barrier consists of a concrete wall in certain high-density population areas (in cities or along highways) in order to prevent shooting and sniper attacks, and 97% consists of a fence, which includes a secured zone that is usually 45–70 meters wide containing a patrol road, sand tracks, a ditch and outer fencing on each side (see Figure 1).

The ‘Fence’ is said to present a temporary, rather than a permanent defense measure, that can be moved or destroyed after peace negotiations. When finally completed, the Barrier is projected to be 721 km long (525 km of which is to run within West Bank territory) and will be more than twice as long as the internationally recognized Green Line marking the boundary between Israel and the West Bank. While the Israeli government insists that security concerns determined the construction and routing of the Barrier, various Israeli, Palestinian, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) argue that other factors were equally, if not more, influential, such as: demography, location of water aquifers, as well as the inclusion of (what under international law are considered illegal) Jewish settlements within the Occupied Palestinian Territories, inside Israeli-controlled territory. Assessments of the Barrier’s function can thus quickly become mired in controversy.

The terms used to describe the Barrier are also iconic examples for performing cultural meanings and political stances (see also Wills 2016). Its Israeli proponents call it the “Security Fence” or “Anti-Terrorist Fence” to signify its association with security, and emphasize its supposed temporariness, permeability, and transparency. The term “fence” is seemingly less associated with dictatorial power, but rather with the notion that “good fences make good neighbors.” On the other hand, for its Israeli opponents and for Palestinians it is the “Apartheid-,” “Demographic-,” “Segregation-,” “Separation-,” “Colonization-,” or “Annexation Wall,” as it encroaches on Palestinian territory, restricts freedom of movement, and destroys Palestinian communities. The term ‘wall’ evokes negative connotations associated with dictatorial power and permanent separation. However, while such terms as “fence” versus “wall” are used politically to connote different meanings of the Barrier, the difference between walls and fences are increasingly being erased, as modern high-tech border systems link physical barriers to electronic warning devices, surveillance systems, radar, ground sensors and remote control cameras.
Therefore both walls and fences can inhibit trespassing equally effectively (Rosière and Jones 2012).

The international community also struggles to find the appropriate term to describe the Barrier. In an advisory opinion on the Barrier, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (2004) used the term “Wall” as the most accurate term if understood in terms of its material effect.6 The BBC news service as well as the United Nations and Human Rights Groups use the “Barrier,” “Separation Barrier,” or “West Bank Barrier” as acceptable generic descriptions, instead of more politically charged terms (such as “Security Fence” or “Apartheid Wall”).7 Such idioms, ranging from “walls,” “fences” to “barriers,” thus disclose their perceived functions, purposes, and consequences, and divulge particular ideological and political alliances.

Maps of the Barrier as a cultural Rorschach Test8

Aerial photographs of Israel and the Palestinian Territories reveal that the West Bank Barrier’s momentous material infrastructure “has created a physical and emotional scar running through the heart of this bitterly contested landscape” (Newman 2003) (see Figure 2).

Given the visible “scar” (Newman 2003) running through the landscape, common sense dictates that the Barrier can be observed, located, measured and depicted in a reliable and objective fashion. However, while for logical positivists, observable data provides the very basis of valid scientific knowledge, scholars have pointed out that scientific observations are not self-evident and transparent (Mulkay 1985). Rather, “the very act of observing is interpretative, for to observe is to choose a point of view” (Harper 2000, 721). Observers classify, code, and select certain aspects of the observed phenomenon, whereby they transform it into an object of knowledge that has been filtered through the observer’s professional vision, knowledge, theories and discourses (Goodwin 1994; see also Kuhn 1962). In other words, observations, rather than being based on pure sense perceptions, are guided by the problems at hand as well as by theoretical and analytical frameworks “that act as nets for sifting through the infinite details of reality” (Gieryn 1995, 397). Consequently, observations and the way they are rendered meaningful provide “a kind of ‘cultural Rorschach’ test” (Harper 2000, 725). They are configurations of texts and symbols to

Figure 2. Aerial Photo of West Bank Barrier. Source: BBC News. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/photo_gallery/3108635.stm.
be read. At the same time, these readings are always inevitably intertwined with society, culture, politics, and knowledge.

Ways of seeing the Barrier also present a cultural Rorschach test. There are many ways of seeing, apprehending, and contextualizing the Barrier that are intimately tied to observers’ social, political, and historical assumptions, as well as their beliefs concerning the Barrier’s functions and legality. Cartographically representing the Barrier thus becomes a form of making claims concerning its meaning, function, and impact, and presents an exemplary case of how society, politics, and culture can impact map-making.

**What is there to Map?**

How then do various Israeli, Palestinian and International cartographic institutions map the Barrier? The following section will first elaborate on different Palestinian-produced maps of what is most often described as “the Wall,” as well as discuss their aims, functions, and politics. Secondly, the focus will turn to Israeli-produced maps in which—what is frequently termed “the Security Fence”—is made visible or invisible in different ways depending on the maps’ producers, target audience, and political assumptions. Lastly, I will examine various maps that attempt to delineate the “Barrier” according to the precepts of international law; yet such supposedly neutral depictions of the “Barrier” nevertheless become mired in politics, and within varied assumptions of what constitutes the Barrier’s infrastructure and how to be map it.

**Mapping the “Segregation Wall”**

It was not until the ICJ declared the wall to be illegal under International Law that the Palestinian government designated a national committee, the Palestinian National Committee for Register of Damage (PNCRod), to monitor the impact of the Barrier. Mapping the Barrier and showing its social, economic, and environmental impact on Palestinian society in a scientific manner was to be a high priority. According to a United Nations specialist:

> we know the kind of expression you can give to a community if you can map it … If we want to tell the world what is happening here with this wall … then how are you going to do this? We cannot ask people to come here and look for themselves so we need an instrument by which we can show this on a map … if we talk about advocacy—if we want to strengthen Palestinian NGO’s to speak about the wall … we need at least one map that all these people can use … (Stakeholder meeting 2011)

Palestinian stakeholders also argue that mapping the Barrier and providing accurate and scientifically verifiable assessments of its impact is crucial in advocating for a Palestinian perspective on the Barrier, including in international forums, such as UN committees. Mapping Palestine has thus become part of what UN officials call “capacity-building.” According to a Palestinian NGO representative, the aim is to:

> go beyond the usual emotional [language] and [provide] documentation of this Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We are trying to … put more facts into our research, or in our publications, in our presentations to the world, or how to see the conflict on a factual basis from the Palestinian perspective—because—apparently we have not been doing so good in the international arena when it comes to showing and exhibiting the facts on the ground … the first question
Evidence-based documentation is therefore seen as crucial in order to effectively advocate for Palestinian interests. In the attempt to provide a body of credible evidence, maps are perceived to be representative of the “facts on the ground” and their design to be beyond the reach of social and political interests. It is thus the very perception of their neutrality, factuality, and objectivity that gives them the power to reveal and represent the “facts on the ground.” The powerful allure of objective mappings thus also induced various Palestinian cartographic units to make concerted efforts to map the Barrier. Yet in an interview, a spatial planner pointed to the very contingencies of map-making: a discursive shift not uncommon in scientific communities (Gilbert and Mulkay 1982). Indeed, depending on the audience, scientists switch between the “empiricist” discursive repertoire, in order to ascertain traditional notions of scientific validity, rationality, and legitimacy, and a “contingent” repertoire, that is more often employed in informal interactions to point to the fallibility of interpretive work in science. According to this interviewee therefore, the first question that needs to be addressed when attempting to map the Barrier is “what sort of physical obstacle is it?” (Interview A11). He explained, that Palestinians often describe “the Wall” as a “Wall System” so as to indicate that it is part of ever more exclusionary Israeli infrastructures and policies. The “Wall System” includes Israeli infrastructures inside the West Bank, 490 (as of September 2014) closure mechanisms (such as manned checkpoints, temporary roadblocks, and physical obstacles), no-go areas under Israeli military control, Jewish settlements, as well as the “Forbidden Road System,” which is primarily for Israeli use and tends to regulate or prevent Palestinian access (UNOCHA 2007; UNOCHA 2011; UNOCHA 2013). Arguably, the “Wall” does not constitute one continuous physical line, but is to be understood and represented as part of a system of exclusionary mechanisms. Some Palestinian-produced maps thus represent the “Wall” as an integral part of various segregation and buffer zones as well as closure mechanisms, which hinder Palestinians’ freedom of movement. The map produced by the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ) entitled “The Geo-political Status of the Palestinian Territories” exemplifies these sorts of maps (Figure 3).

According to this map’s legend “Israeli barriers” include: checkpoints (depicted as no-go sign), roadblocks, earth mounds, road gates, agricultural gates, observation towers, already existing and planned tunnels, as well as Israeli outposts. What is referred to as the “Segregation Wall” is clearly differentiated in terms of parts of the Wall that are already existing, under construction, planned or subject to change based on legal rulings. The map also depicts Israeli military bases (in gray), Israeli settlements (in blue—the color of the Israeli flag), and Israeli built-up areas (in off-white). It clearly demarcates a Western “Segregation Zone” (along the western terrains of the Occupied West Bank). Arguably, the “Wall” can only be understood as part of the Western “Segregation Zone:”

[we use the term] Segregation Zone because it is not only wall, because 250 meters from the Palestinian side no construction is allowed—so it is a zone (Interview J10)

This map also incorporates the internationally agreed upon territorial divisions based on international law. Not only does it clearly demarcate the internationally recognized Green
Line (as a green dotted line), but it also incorporates the territorial division agreed upon in the Oslo Accords in 1993 between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). These include Zone A (under full Palestinian control), Zone B (under Palestinian civil control and Israeli military control) and Zone C (under full Israeli military control). Moreover, the name “Segregation Wall” is used to describe the Barrier. While the use of the term “Wall” is in line with the ICJ’s advisory opinion, the word “Segregation” is
added, so as to indicate the Wall’s assumed function of racism and Apartheid. Signifiers for international legitimacy, such as the ICJ ruling, are thus interspersed with local understandings of realities on the ground. This map thus uses various textual and visual signifiers to emphasize the juxtaposition of the “facts on the ground” as defined under international law and the Israeli governments’ infringements of these rulings. At the same time, the “Wall” is demarcated as part of an extensive system of exclusionary mechanisms which speaks to the politics of how to demarcate space and what to include or exclude when delineating particular special configurations (see Leuenberger and Schnell 2010).

Another genre of Palestinian maps is Palestinian Road Maps. Given that the West Bank is de facto annexed to Israel (Kretzmer 2012), producing such a map can be interpreted as an act of defiance against Israeli rule. Indeed in an interview, a map-producer recounted being questioned at an Israeli checkpoint about the name of the map he had with him: “The Palestine Road Map.”

According to the soldier, “Palestine” did not exist, therefore how could he use a road map of a non-existing place?

While Palestinian roadmaps are hardly to be found in local Palestinian shops, they can be purchased in tourist shops, where they are frequently displayed as a stranger’s guide to Palestine (see Figure 4). James Scott (1987, 1998, 2002) points out that, historically, maps—that represent space as calculable and measurable units—were not produced for locals, but they have always been crucial instruments for rulers, colonialists, and administrators. Also in the West Bank, maps are hardly the document of choice for locals when in need of directions. They tend to ask other locals who direct them based on what are considered relevant landmarks, such as the local kebab shop. The target audiences for the “Palestine Road Map”

Figure 4. Tourist Shop. Photo: by the Author.
(Figure 5) are therefore international visitors; it serves not only as a guide to navigate the West Bank, it is also a tool for political advocacy; it illustrates realities on the ground from a Palestinian perspective, emphasizes the impact of the Israeli occupation, and reveals the West Bank’s territorial fragmentation.

Figure 5. Palestine Road Map. Source: Applied Research Institute Jerusalem. http://www.arij.org/ (Courtesy of ARIJ).
For instance, the map prominently displays the “Segregation Wall” (in strong thick red lines with white sections) so as to point to its location inside the West Bank, which emphasizes its discrepancy from the Green Line (portrayed as a broken Green line). “The Wall” is also shown as part of a system of exclusionary mechanisms such as temporary Israeli checkpoints (indicated by the use of “no-go” signs), Israeli-controlled security zones (in blue), Israeli built-up areas (in gray), and “Jewish colonies” (in light blue). The Israeli-controlled Zone C (in white) blends seamlessly into Israel indicating its de facto annexation. At the same time, Palestinian “built-up areas” and Palestinian controlled Zones A and B (in complementary yellow and brown colors) appear as isolated islands in a sea of white.

The function of these kinds of Palestinian-produced cartographic representations thus supersede navigational purposes (Schnell and Leuenberger 2014). They tend to integrate international territorial agreements with local understandings on the ground; and they depict the wall prominently and present it as part of a system of exclusionary mechanisms. The selection of various textual and visual signifiers (such as colors, level of detail and naming practices) serve to illustrate the effects of Israel’s occupational policies, its violations of international law, and its infringements upon Palestinians’ freedom of movement. In Israeli-produced maps, however, the Barrier lives sort of a half-life. While for Palestinians, making the Barrier visible has become a political imperative, for many Israeli organizations, making it invisible has become yet another form of politics.

The Half-Life of the Security Fence

Within Israeli discourse, politics determines not only the Barrier’s name, but also its cartographic visibility. While “left-wing” Israeli human rights organizations such as B’tselem, Ir Amin, or political interest groups like Peace Now design maps that trace the Barrier/Wall, maps produced by such organizations as the Yesha Council (that represents Jewish settlers residing in the Palestinian Territories), the governmental institution the Survey of Israel as well as the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (which all produce maps for the general public and are aligned with political positions held by the Israeli government), either omit the Fence/Wall or represent it in line with its purported function of security. In the following I will focus on maps produced by the Yesha Council, the Survey of Israel and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority.

The Yesha Council produced a map for the publishing house Carta entitled: “Transportation Routes in Judea, Samaria and Gaza” (Carta n.d.) (Figure 6). It was the authoritative map for Judea, Samaria and Gaza (the Palestinian Territories) and could be purchased in bookstores across Israel from 2001 until it was no longer available by 2012.

This map is aimed to help Israeli citizens and foreign visitors to navigate the Palestinian Territories. In line with a post 1967 Israeli governmental decree, it eliminates the Green Line; describes the West Bank by its biblical name “Judea and Samaria” (making it thus part of four different regions within the Israeli national space “Judea, Samaria, Benjamin and Gaza”), presents the road system as continuous with Israel’s national road network, and represents the West Bank as part of Israeli national space (by using the same set of colors, symbols and level of details in both the Israeli and Palestinian territories). Like some Palestinian maps, this map also incorporates Zones A (in brown) and B (in yellow) as “Palestinian autonomous areas,” while Zone C (in white) blends seamlessly into Israeli national space. For Israeli drivers it is crucial to be aware of the Palestinian
controlled Zone A, as under Israeli law, they are not allowed to enter such areas. This map also depicts military roadblocks (through black triangles), yet does not differentiate between major and minor checkpoints, not least because Israeli drivers are urged to

Figure 6. Map of “Samaria Scale 1:136,000.” Source: Map of “Samaria Scale 1:136,000”—part of a tourist map entitled “Judea, Samaria & The Gaza Strip: Major Routes, Settlements & Civilian Outposts” (Carta n. d.) (Source: Carta).
only travel on “main roads and security bypass roads” which would enable them to cross easily between Israel and the West Bank. Furthermore, this map delineates what is called the “Security Fence” (with a black-yellow broken line) and differentiates between already constructed and planned sections of the fence.

This Yesha Council-produced map thus represents features on the ground that are relevant for its target audience. For instance, while entering Zone A is “strictly prohibited” to Israeli citizens, foreign visitors are not bound by these rules, yet they are encouraged to follow the same regulations. The map’s target audience is also reflected by the part of the road network that is represented. While the map clearly illustrates the Israeli road network, which spans the West Bank, it does not include a detailed road map of the Palestinian-controlled areas. Thus international travelers who transverse both Zone C and Zone A quickly find themselves falling off the map. Not only does the target audience become reflected in the make-up of the map, but the cartographic pastiche of international territorial agreements and local understandings speaks to locally relevant social and political issues. For instance, like Palestinian maps, this map also selectively draws on internationally agreed upon territorial statuses of the territories (by, e.g. depicting Zones A and B). However, the map also includes official Israeli definitions of the territory (by omitting the Green Line) and aligns itself with the official Israeli stance on the Barrier by naming it, by the descriptor preferred by the Israeli government, the “Security Fence.”

By 2012, however, the tourist map for “Judea, Samaria & The Gaza Strip” was no longer available. Instead, Carta published a “Physical Map of Israel” which included, what were referred to as “Autonomous Areas.” It provided the most comprehensive map of these areas, yet the geographical detail was minimal. While the previous map was produced during the period of the second Intifada, it accounted for the presence of what were perceived to be hostile elements within “Judea and Samaria and Gaza.” Subsequently, however, these elements seemingly no longer presented the same level of threat and had become contained by small shaded areas indicated in the legend as “Palestinian autonomous areas.” They faintly decorate the background of the physical map, yet, clearly demarcated road networks, connecting the Jordan valley to the Israeli coast, are visually emphasized. Some Palestinian cities survived their cartographic eradication and were marked by name, such as Ramallah (the administrative center of the State of Palestine), which is also indicated in the legend as a “built-up area.” The mapmakers also finely delineated a yellow line with black markings symbolizing the ‘Security Fence’ (the lines were either continuous or intermittent depending on whether the wall was already built or planned). Yet the black on yellow lines do not appear in the legend. Thus while the Barrier’s route is demarcated, an explanation of its symbols is omitted. Such omissions can have political implications, as only those who have detailed knowledge of the geopolitics of the region would know what these faint yellow line with black markings stand for (Leuenberger 2013b).

Besides the Yesha Council, which produces many of the publically available maps of “Judea and Samaria,” the Survey of Israel, as Israel’s most authoritative cartographic institution, prints some of the most widely consulted maps. Indeed, it exemplifies the officially sanctioned Israeli perspective on the territorial status of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley.

According to the official viewpoint, there is no need to integrate the Green Line into regional maps. Not only was its cartographic elimination stipulated by a governmental
decree post 1967, but also, according to an Israeli cartographer who is aligned with the official governmentally-endorsed perspective, the Green Line:

was the Armistice Line between Israel and Jordan. Once … there was a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan … there can’t be an armistice line … an armistice line is a military line for an intermediate period, but after you have a peace agreement there is no armistice line. So this is obsolete anyway as an armistice line. … but they see it, they claim it … the Palestinians (Interview S10)

Hence, Palestinians’ territorial claims are not recognized as legitimate. Accordingly, until 1967, the land was under Jordanian control and was subsequently de facto annexed by Israel. Israel’s peace agreement with Jordan is therefore seen as having obliterated the status of the Green Line as an armistice line between Israel and Jordan.

While protagonists who represent the Israeli governmental stance on territorial matters argue that there is no need to mark the Green Line, they maintain that good professional practice demands that the “Security Road” (name is written alongside the gray discontinuous line) and some of the bigger checkpoints (termed “passages”) are depicted on official Israeli maps. As one respondent maintained:

it is in the area. A map has to show the physical geographic reality. Once it’s there—this road—I mean if somebody comes today and he sees the road, the fence and … he cannot move there because of the fence and he doesn’t see it on the map then the map is wrong, it’s not reliable (Interview S10)

Therefore the map (see Figure 7) accounts for some of the physical features on the ground. However, it emphasizes certain features, while eliminating others. What for some is a

“Segregation Zone,” “Separation Wall” or “Security Fence” has been reconstituted as a “Security Road” which selects one feature of an elaborate barrier system (the road used by military and border police vehicles to patrol the Barrier) as the only accountable feature. Moreover, what on Palestinian maps are designated as “checkpoints” (which imply militarization, control, and repression), appear on this map as “passages” (which signify the smooth flow of traffic and citizens throughout the land of Israel). The use of such diverse textual signifiers evokes the very politically contested nature of the Barrier’s infrastructure.

As interviewees maintained, good cartographic practice includes making a map readable, decipherable, as well as aesthetically pleasing, by virtue of its simplicity and lack of visual and textual clutter. Therefore while marking Zones A and B in this map is important, they are delineated with faint yellow dots (see Figure 7) so as not to destroy the map’s integrity and aesthetics. The “Security Road” is therefore also only dimly marked and virtually disappears into the background. Undoubtedly the virtual invisibility of Palestinian-controlled areas as well as “the Security Fence” could be interpreted as having a political effect, as any Palestinian presence is minimized. Arguably, it is less important for Israeli citizens—the target audience for this Atlas—to know the exact location of the Barrier and the various closure mechanisms, such as “passages,” as most do not venture into these territories. The spatial segregation of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis is hereby embedded within the cartographic representation of space. Moreover, just as the construction of the Barrier was hardly part of Israeli public discourse (B’Tselem 2002), its physical infrastructure also appears only inconsistently in officially sanctioned Israeli maps; indeed, while they appear to be visible, they remain largely invisible.

Lastly, the Israel Nature and Parks Authority also produces various tourist maps that are widely available and can be found in Israeli tourist shops (Figure 8). Like the government-produced maps, these sorts of maps do not depict the Green Line.

Moreover, despite the fact that the construction of the West Bank Barrier has been underway since 2002, tourist maps distributed by the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority continue to omit the “Security Fence.” Instead, “red” Israeli-controlled roads crisscross the land from the Mediterranean to Jordan, seemingly enabling smooth and unhindered passage. Zones A and B tend to be eliminated in favor of “Palestinian autonomous area” and a few self-contained and seemingly unobtrusive Palestinian autonomous cities (including Jericho) which are not connected to any of the major Israeli controlled “red” roads. Palestinian population centers and roads are separated off and overlaid with an Israeli road network that is part of the extensive Israeli infrastructure inside the West Bank. The West Bank is thus “physically partitioned into two separate but overlapping national geographies” (Weizman 2004, 18) and ethno-social spaces, as Palestinian spaces do not impact Israelis, who move within the confines of the Israeli-controlled territories and infrastructures within the West Bank (UN OCHA 2008). Emphasis on the “red” roads, crisscrossing the land, also seemingly eliminates the need to depict the “Security Fence.”

These officially sanctioned Israeli-produced maps therefore use various visual and textual signifiers to unify the Israeli national space, visualize a Jewish topography (Collins-Kreiner, Mansfeld, and Kliot 2006) and infrastructure, whilst minimizing many Palestinian spaces and infrastructures. At the same time, what is referred to as the “Security Fence” or the “Security Road” is delineated spatially as a line on the ground whereby its
impact on people and landscapes is diminished. At the same time, these maps integrate various infrastructures and spaces that are considered relevant to their target audiences, and they draw on various territorial agreements that are elaborative of the Israeli governments’ political position on the “Security Fence” and its geopolitical context.

Mapping the Wall According to International Conventions

Internationally-produced maps emphasize yet different aspects when seeing, mapping, and representing the Barrier and the contested land of Israel/Palestine. How then do international cartographic institutions and the United Nations’ cartographic unit represent the Barrier and its geopolitics? Does the view from beyond the borders of Israel/Palestine, which transcends local protagonists’ visions on both sides, provide us with an accurate mirror of the physical structures on the ground? In the following I will discuss a map

Figure 8. Israel Nature and Parks Authority. Source: Upper section of map of Israel (Source: Israel Nature and Parks Authority).
produced by one of Austria’s leading cartographic firms “Freytag & Berndt” (which has subsidiaries all over Europe) as well as maps produced by the United Nations.

The Freytag & Berndt-produced map entitled “Israel—Palestine—Holy Land” (Figure 9) exemplifies the basic delineations of borders as well as of the West Bank Barrier that tends to be represented in maps produced in Western Europe.

The map’s title encapsulates its function, target audience, and its politics—it serves an international audience in search of holy sites. The map therefore includes all relevant biblical, Hebrew and Arab cultural sites. As the map’s heading indicates, it recognizes the land of Israel, the separate territorial status of Palestine, as well as claims that the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley represent the Holy Land. Where relevant, towns and cities tend to be marked by their biblical, Hebrew and Arab names, recognizing the lands’ Christian, Hebrew and Arab heritage.

One of the most prominent visual signifiers used in this map is the thick light and darker green lines adjacent to a broken gray line that, according to the legend, marks a “national boundary, international border-crossing, local border-crossing.” The West Bank is thus, like Jordan, spatially differentiated from Israel with such boundaries and border markers, which clearly establishes its separate territorial status. At the same time, the Israeli-controlled road system appears less visually prominent than in many Israeli-produced maps (see e.g. Figure 8) as it is side by side with the Palestinian road network. Additionally, the Green Line and the prominently displayed “wall” (marked with a red spiky line), “checkpoints,” and “checkpoint barrier” (marked by the sign Y) indicate that these roads do not provide unhindered passage between the West Bank and Israel. By visually emphasizing these closures, the map reflects the ICJ’s advisory opinion on the “wall” as embodying physical characteristics that hinder the freedom of movement. Moreover, as this map’s target audience is international tourists, who are likely to navigate Palestinian and Israeli territories in search of holy sites, it is vital for such map users to be aware of the “wall” and “checkpoints” as physical features that will impede their travel. On the other hand, Zones A, B and C, which are usually displayed in Palestinian and many Israeli maps, do not appear in this map, as they are not consequential for the maps’ target audience.

This map hereby incorporates its own criteria of relevance: it recognizes the Green Line as a border and it follows good cartographic practice by incorporating biblical, Hebrew and Arabic names of cities and sites. Hereby the map neither “Arabizes” nor “Hebraizes” the region, but points to the divergent naming practices relevant to different social groups within the region. Moreover, the features that are emphasized, such as the “wall” and “checkpoints,” and those that are omitted, such as the territorial divisions according to the Oslo Accords, speak to the make-up of this map’s target audience.

Lastly, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territories (UN OCHA oPt) office in Jerusalem produces an array of very detailed maps that are regularly updated.

UN OCHA oPt office’s mandate is to be strictly neutral, non-political, and to share their data with Israeli as well as Palestinian organizations. Their maps not only carefully include relevant internationally ratified territorial agreements, but they also use, what is considered, value-neutral terminology. For instance, the West Bank Barrier is prominently displayed as “the Barrier” (see Figure 10(a/b)). The use of such
“neutral” terminology reflects UN OCHA oPt’s mandate to be impartial. According to one UN cartographer:

we call it the Barrier … it is a neutral word … that is why we chose that word … the Barrier is a neutral technical word for it … we have to be neutral … so Palestinians and Israelis recognize you as neutral … for a humanitarian organizations like OCHA it is essential … we don’t have a political mandate (Interview F10)

Moreover, such maps tend to delineate all the relevant internationally recognized treaties, such as the territorial divisions as specified during the Oslo Accords as well as the Green Line. They also emphasize the separate territorial status of the Palestinian Territories by naming the areas of the “West Bank” and “Gaza,” whereby they clearly indicate their distinctiveness from Israeli territory. Yet, despite such comprehensive representations of the intricate legal and territorial status of disputed lands, a disclaimer to the side of a map on “The Barrier Route in the West Bank—July 2011” (see Figure 10(a)) states:

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

For various humanitarian agencies, such as UN OCHA oPt, a neutral and impartial stance has a strategic and operational value: it provides a basis for action, helps gain access, and
reduces risk (Redfield 2011; Shetty 2007). However, in situations of conflict seemingly universalistic notions of neutrality can quickly become mired in controversy and politics (Fox 1995; Redfield 2011; Scott, Richards, and Martin 1990). While the purported neutrality of the UN OCHA-produced maps has a range of advantages—for instance, they may serve as a base map both for Israeli and Palestinian NGOs—local protagonists frequently critiques UN maps.

According to an Israeli cartographer, the UN is far from a neutral arbitrator. Rather, he considers UN maps to be “top-down” maps that fail to portray the local realities on the ground. For instance, he maintains that marking the Green Line is: “a political decision—based on wishful thinking … not on the facts” (Interview S10). On the other hand, left-wing Israeli NGOs as well as Palestinian cartographic experts are more favorably disposed towards UN-produced maps. They tend to use UN-produced maps as base maps, as the very assumption of their neutrality, impartiality, and universalism provides their political struggle with international legitimacy.

Even though using UN-produced base maps may be a useful currency in international dealings, when it comes to local geopolitical understandings on the ground, they are often considered far removed from the gold standard. Indeed, some Palestinian experts disagree with some of the information, terminologies, and cartographic details included in such maps. For instance, they contest the terminology used and the definitions employed to specify what constitutes “settlements,” “outposts,” and “bypass roads.” They also point out that, although UN OCHA maps depict the wall and closures, these appear self-contained, and are not represented (by either name or visual clues) as part of a system of exclusionary mechanisms that makes the “wall” an intricate part of a “Segregation Zone.” For one interviewee, therefore, disagreements and inconsistencies across Palestinian and international maps are inevitable as “we use our terminology and the world uses their terminology [and] the UN uses their own terminology” (Interview J10). The selection of certain visual and textual signifiers, such as the use of certain colors, the naming of infrastructures, and ways of delineating objects and spaces, hence remains contested across all these maps. Translating between various maps—whether they appeal to universalism or localism—thus always remains a matter of translation, interpretation, and selective appropriation.

Conclusion

As Benedict Anderson (1983) observed, maps serve as powerful socializing agents into notions of space and territory. They can shape citizens’ sense of national belonging as well as their taken-for-granted notions of the territoriality of their nations. Yet, rather than representing “reality,” maps always reflect society. They are an amalgam of collected, classified and encoded information that represent particular geopolitical visions. A map’s embedded function, target audience, and socio-political assumptions dictate what sort of data is omitted, selected, or included. Maps of Israel/Palestine provide an exemplary case of what critical cartographers call the emergence of “alternative mapping practices” (Crampton 2009) as various Israeli, Palestinian, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations produce visually powerful arguments for particular and—frequently diverging—geopolitical and territorial visions.

The West Bank Barrier, which remains a materially and cartographically contested object, compellingly reveals how maps can become politics by other means. Indeed,
how the Barrier is cartographically rendered is intricately linked to its perceived meaning, function, and consequences for different communities. Protagonists’ social and political concerns may impact how the Barrier is spatially demarcated and contextualized, which visual and textual signifiers are included, and how they determine what there is to be mapped: a “Security Road,” a “Wall” or a “Segregation Zone?” Therefore what is seen on the ground and how this vision is represented is always “a matter of interpretation” (Interview A11). Ways of seeing and mapping the Barrier thus becomes inevitably linked to diverging political discourses that either construct it as increasing Israeli security, or as negating humanitarian law, impeding freedom of movement, and fragmenting Palestinian lands and communities. “Seeing” becomes thereby filtered through political discourses that become reflected in a map’s visual and textual configurations.

Yet, we commonly assume that we can eliminate politics and bias from maps if only scientific standards, internationally approved cartographic conventions, or international law would be drawn upon more rigorously and objectively in the making of maps. After all, standardization, objectivity, and verifiable knowledge-claims should eliminate politics from science. However, “standards do not remain standards for very long, and one person’s standard is another’s confusion and mess” (Bowker and Star 1999, 293). Not only do standards have their own politics, but also the frequent lack of their enforcement speaks to the inability of trans-national institutions to dictate local and national practices.

While there are a number of national and trans-national organizations that encourage standardization in the construction of geo-spatial data, cartographers are well aware that standardized categories have to be supplemented with country-specific categories that account for the unique local environment. Moreover, they are also not obliged to use certain standards, categories, or conventions; rather, which particular conventions they adopt for use in national and local maps remains a cartographer’s pejorative. For instance, Palestinian and Israeli mapmakers selectively incorporate various international cartographic conventions as well as some territorial agreements as stipulated by international law. To do so has advantages: it may provide international legitimacy and signals willingness to incorporate internationally recognized conventions. As one Israeli cartographer pointed out that, while his primary alliance is to the Israeli state, it can be important to attend to international cartographic conventions

you adopt different things and adapt because we speak Hebrew- and sometimes we have things that don’t exist in other places, but I want to also improve the dialogue between us and the international community so it is better to use it (Interview S10).

Trans-national standards, jointly with locally relevant conventions and categories, are thus creatively combined so as to provide a “tool-kit” (Swidler 1986) to construct a narrative that may speak to both local and trans-national concerns.

Yet there is also always a politics to which standards, categories, and conventions are selected.21 While Palestinian mapmakers emphasize the internationally recognized Green Line in order to point to its divergence from the Barrier’s route, their Israeli counterparts tend to eliminate it; also while Palestinians include Zones A, B, and C, Israeli mapmakers often only demarcate Zones A and B, or merely delineate Palestinian population centers. Moreover, whereas Palestinian and Israeli maps use names and terms that either “Arabize” or “Israelize” their territories, internationally produced maps may incorporate Arab, Hebrew and biblical names side by side.
Science Studies Scholars have pointed out that whilst we have come to increasingly expect homogeneity, universalism, and standardization across the sciences, multivocality and “cultural specificity survives with astonishing resilience” (Jasanoff 2004, 14). Also Cultural Studies Scholars (Bryman 1999) have affirmed the resilience of local cultures in the face of globalization and standardization as new hybrid cultures emerge that combine local and global customs. Visions of a standardized science and homogenized world cultures have therefore increasingly given way to an understanding of how global and local forces combine. Just as popular as well as scientific cultures are heterogenous products that always escape homogeneity and uniformity, cartographic practices, too, may align with formal standardized stipulations, but they do inevitably combine with local traditions, customs, and cultures. The flexible interpretation of standards, codes, and classificatory systems does not provide for one unified story to be told about the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan valley, but attests to the lands’ contested nature and the inevitable failure of commonly shared standards, categories, and conventions to account for the diversity of local understandings and practices.

Notes

1. Due to the United Nation decision in November 2012 to grant observer status to the “State of Palestine,” the term Palestine will be used interchangeably alongside other terms used by the international community to describe the same territory, such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Opt), Palestinian Territories as well as West Bank and Gaza. The terms “Judea and Samaria” to describe the West Bank will be used if employed by protagonists.
2. For instance, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab and internationally produced maps continue to depict the region differently. While Israel falls off some maps produced in the Arab world, the West Bank is frequently omitted from Israeli-produced maps. Maps produced in Europe, on the other hand, tend to carefully depict Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza according to the legal status of these territories under international law.
3. See also Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. www.mfg.gov.il
4. However, most recently, some protagonists argued that there is no need to finish the Barrier as other security measures, including 490 checkpoints inside the West Bank (as of September 2014) have been effective in securing Israel from terror attacks (for updated closure maps see UN OCHA http://www.ochaopt.org/mapstopic.aspx?id=106&page=1). Others argue that the reason for the Barrier’s stalled construction is the fact that the alleged geopolitical aim to annex land, water and natural resources to the Israeli-side of the Barrier has been achieved.
5. The UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have confirmed that all Jewish settlements in occupied territories contravenes international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits the transfer of civilian populations into occupied territory. The Israeli government argues that the Fourth Geneva Convention does not apply to the Palestinian Territories (ICJ 2004; UN OCHA 2007).
6. In the 2004 ruling the ICJ declared the construction of the “Wall” as illegal under international law (see ICJ 2004).
8. The Rorschach inkblot test is a psychological test in which subjects’ perception of what is represented in various inkplots are understood as reflective of their psychological functioning and thought processes.
10. See the Wall Committee. http://www.pncrod.ps/

11. There are various Israeli, Palestinian and International non-governmental organizations that monitor barrier-related issues as well as the impact of Israeli policies on the ground. They include amongst others: Palestinian organizations such as The Wall Committee http://www.pncrod.ps as well as the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem http://www.arij.org/. Israeli monitoring organizations include e.g. B’Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories http://www.btselem.org/ and Ir Amin http://www.ir-amim.org.il/en/issues_1. International monitoring is expensively carried out by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) http://www.ochaopt.org/, amongst others.

12. Palestinian experts argue that despite such efforts, cartographic units continue to be plagued by lack of resources, lack of access to mapping technologies, and lack of data sharing amongst various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Moreover, the maps produced lack a standardized coding and classificatory system. Nonetheless, these maps can still serve as tools for advocacy and consciousness rising in various institutional contexts (Leuenberger 2013a).

13. For instance, a restrictive permit system administered by the Civil Administration’s District Coordination and Liaison Office (DCL) governs the populace and administers their movement (Keshet 2006; see also Zink 2009). For regularly up-dated closure maps and other maps see UN OCHA http://www.ochaopt.org/mapstopic.aspx?id=106&page=1.


15. For discussions of the Judization and Israelization of space and the designification of Palestinian Arab topographies see Yiftachel 2006; Leuenberger and Schnell 2010.


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