When the Carob Tree Was the Border:

On autonomy and Palestinian practices of figuring it out[†]

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Introduction

"How did they know where the borders were?" I ask, "If people didn't have maps, how did

they know?" Ahmed Al-Noubani opens his arm out and points. "It was that carob tree," he says, "to

that carob tree." "Neighbors," he shrugs. They figured it out.

Al-Noubani and I are in his office at Bir Zeit University's geography department, discussing

histories of Palestinian map-making.[1] Palestinians did not really start making maps, he says, until

after Oslo.[2] When the leadership first began negotiating with Israel over sovereignty in the West

Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian side had no maps of its own. In fact, the first maps of the country

that Yasser Arafat signed in the negotiations were ones that belonged to, and had been fully drafted

by, the Israeli side.[3] Recognizing the new urgency to map, the Palestinian leadership would later

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[1] Interview with Ahmed Al-Noubani, 18 January 2011. Bir Zeit, Palestine. I am grateful to Ahmad El-Atrash for helping arrange this meeting.

[2] "Oslo" is shorthand for the Oslo Accords, which is in turn shorthand for the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government. Also known as the "peace process," Oslo was an attempt in 1993 to set up a framework that would lead to the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. First negotiated in Oslo Norway and then signed by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993, the Oslo Accords are now commonly understood by the Palestinian movement as having provided only an "illusory perception of peace" (Hanieh 2013) to the world while Israel continues its colonization of Palestinian land.

[3] These maps were those accompanying the Gaza-Jericho Agreement on Self-Rule in 1994 and the Interim Agreement (Oslo II) in 1995. The Gaza-Jericho agreement negotiated a timetable for Israeli forces to withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho, installing the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA) in its place. A problem arose minutes before the signing in Cairo when Arafat refused to sign the attached maps, contesting the size of the Jericho district on the maps the Israeli side had drafted. Under pressure from then-Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Arafat agreed to sign with a verbal agreement from his Israeli counterpart, Yitzhak Rabin, that the two

bring in Al-Noubani as part of a Palestinian map-making team "to help us with pull" under the Oslo framework, he recounts.

That Palestinian society did not make maps until recently is not to say that Palestinians did not know of or care about their own land until they began inscribing it on paper (*c.f.* Wood 1993). It is to say, rather, that Palestinian society did not need to make maps until a shift in political strategy would call for them. Modern maps, as Denis Wood has shown, began proliferating worldwide only relatively recently with the rise of the nation-state and its concomitant centralization of power (Wood 2010). It is true even for Palestine, a place so highly revered for millennia by the three largest monotheistic religions, that it was not until the needs of the modern imperialist powers in the 19th century, and later the establishment of the State of Israel and the parallel development of Palestinian nationalism in the 20th, that maps of Palestine were to become ubiquitous (*Ibid.*, 236). The leadership's shift away from a strategy of liberation and toward independence under the "two-state solution" (*c.f.* Al-Hout 2010) translated into a territorialist politics. Delineating the borders of a would-be State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza was to become paramount, and maps became essential for the task.

"Land was used for pastures and herders," Al-Noubani continues, recalling a time when maps were rare. "Tribes knew their borders." Claims to property, he explains, were made through the *Hujja*, a land transfer paper agreement where boundaries were descriptions of natural landmarks that villagers understood between each other. "But today," he says, "the Israeli courts ask, 'What are

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would renegotiate the size of the district over the next three months (Qurie 2006, 289; Ross 2004, 133-136). As the PA sought to later expand its authority beyond Gaza and Jericho in a phased approach, under the Interim Agreement (Oslo II), it would propose carving out of the Occupied Territories today's cantons (Ross 2004, 195-196). When Israel outlined three zones in which it intended to retain security control even after the transfer of internal security powers to the PA, the PA proposed instead dividing the West Bank into three areas they suggested would gradually all phase into full-PA control: one under full Palestinian control (Area A), one under joint control (Area B), and one under Israeli control (Area C). Israel agreed. Arafat signed the maps, drafted by Israel, on 28 September 1995 at a second White House signing ceremony. The phasing of all areas into full-PA control would never materialize. And as Al-Noubani describes, no one on the Palestinian today can say they know the exact borders of what was signed on the maps.

the coordinates? What are the borders?' You can't say the carob tree is the border. They don't accept it."

In this article, I would like to present us with a question: What might it mean for us to value people's practices of figuring out for themselves the spatio-political arrangements that directly affect their lives? For prior to this becoming the task of professionals seeking to draw precise lines on paper, Palestinians, as we learn from Al-Noubani, figured it out. I suggest that making visible examples of such autonomous practices and their creative potentials might provide some preliminary observations. I take our relationship to cartography as a lens and Palestine as a case study to critically examine how—far too often—our engagements with liberation struggles have difficulty taking seriously peoples' capacities to best decide for themselves how they might live.

The Palestinian Left *contra* the Palestinian left?

I begin developing this argument by placing it in conversation with the present condition of the Palestinian leftist landscape. I take us here first because, as we seek to link our struggles to Palestinians in a meaningful way, we must be careful not to assume too quickly that the Palestinian leadership presents any real alternative to things as they are. My argument will be that it does not. Like much of the Left has been apt to do in striving for sovereignty, the assumption remains that exercising political power must translate into exercising a power that dominates (Reyes 2009). This entails a radical separation between the government and the governed, whereby those that govern must comprise a privileged political class (e.g., the Party or career politician), wholly distinct from those they purport to represent (James 1956; Kaufman 2010). Such a political class is deemed necessary when the fiction prevails that people without formal education or professional training are deficient in deciding how to make their own lives (Fasheh 1990; Esteva et al 2005).

In recognizing these prejudices we can be in a better position to grasp the reasons for the mounting tensions between Palestinians and the leadership today. More and more forcefully, it is said on the ground that the next Intifada's task will be to overthrow a leadership that has forgotten the refugees' cause and has morphed into Israel's proxy police force. Meanwhile, the institutionalized Palestinian Left is in disarray: its leaders take neutral stances as the right-wing battles it out between secular (Fatah) and Islamist (Hamas), and fear reorganization lest the change disassemble their seats of prestige and privilege (Hilal 2010). While the story has its specificities, it is not unique.

The Left "from above"

It is said that the decline of the Left in Palestine began in the late 1980s, and in many ways, mirrored the global unraveling of a Left closely tied to the Soviet Union for financial and ideological support. At the regional level, the Left's weakening was also ushered in by a U.S.-Saudi alliance, inaugurated during the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, that financed right-wing Islamist movements to deliberately crush the region's leftist currents (AbuKhalil, 2003). Because Palestinian Leftist parties belonged under the umbrella structure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), they were shielded from many of the pressures and harassment their counterparts experienced under neighboring regimes (Hilal 2010). But this protection eroded with Oslo's sidelining of the PLO in 1994 in favor of the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA), a body heavily represented by Yasser Arafat's right-wing Fatah.

While these objective factors are central to understanding the Left's demise, it would be subjective factors that would ultimately have "the greatest impact on the dwindling role and influence of the Left," as Jamil Hilal finds from interviews with 108 Palestinian leftist figures (Hilal 2010). Although limited to views gathered in the West Bank and Gaza, Hilal's study provides

valuable insights on how internal party organizational structures were such that a gaping chasm perpetually existed between theory (as embodied in the party leadership) and practice (as lived by the people). "[O]ne of the most important and real reasons for the decline of the Left is the lack of communication with its constituency," Hilal reports. "This is due to its elitist understanding of its own role; a populist understanding of an imagined social constituency, [and] an understanding based upon transforming Marxism into a rigid doctrine alien to human practice" (Hilal 2010, 6).

Reliance on the Soviet Union as a reference to Marxism kept the Left unprepared to address the specificities of Palestine and the broader regional context (Hilal 2010, 3). For the Palestinian movement, the figure of the industrial worker as the revolutionary subject was remote from Palestinian realities whose rebel subjects were largely composed of landless peasants living in refugee camps.[4] Moreover, as Soviet doctrine could only consider race a derivative of class struggle, it proved itself inadequate in confronting (indeed, in simply admitting) that Palestinians were battling a Zionism that was, in practice, profoundly racist at its core.[5]

The left "from below"

Palestinian leftist currents are not alone in coming up against these limits. In Latin America in particular, many have responded by shifting away from prescriptions, whether they be recipes for revolution or dictates on living life. This has entailed a rejection of a Left "from above" that focuses on Party doctrine and the taking of State power, and toward a left "from below" that affirms peoples' collective capacities to self-determine in their contextually specific settings (Holloway 2002).

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[4] This inadequacy is being confronted more than ever today as Israel has, since the 1990s, replaced large numbers of Palestinian workers inside Israel with migrant labor.

[5] The inability to account for race in the required depth has led to confused suggestions about the nature of Israel. The kibbutzim, for example, have often been hailed as evidence of the State's leftist credentials. That these exclusively Jewish collective agricultural communities were made possible in the first and final instances through the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is a fact that is brushed aside as unfortunate rather than one understood as a central structuring axis. Although the kibbutzim may produce a community fighting for commons, they are against the idea of liberation for both in theory and practice, their notion of commons is an enclave community of exclusion and privilege.

The Zapatistas in Chiapas, who began as Marxist-Leninists and remade themselves after undergoing

a long period of questioning, are exemplary in this regard (*see* Ramírez 2008). A politics "from below

and to the left" as they term it; coupled with a desire to "create a new world where many worlds

exist." It is a world that comes into being not by given prescription, but by "asking questions as we

walk," *caminando preguntamos*. Through their own analyses, the Zapatistas have found that these

practices and desires are irreconcilable under the project of sovereignty (Reyes and Kaufman 2011).[6]

Accordingly, they reject seeking it.[7] They recognize that their participation in sovereignty's relation

of command-obedience itself helps perpetuate the oppressive relation (Reyes 2009); thus they seek

to dismantle it by disengaging and simultaneously going on to create the world anew (El Kilombo

Intergaláctico 2008; Kaufman 2010).

Black movements, too, have long run up against the limits of Marxist doctrine (Robinson

2000). Yet without rejecting Marxism, they have been able to expand the definition of the

revolutionary subject to include the unemployed, landless, imprisoned, colonized (Fanon 2004).

Writing specifically on the Left's failure to articulate with the Black condition in the United States,

George Jackson taught us from his prison cell to recognize that the potential subjects of revolution

will be, quite simply, the subjects who need revolution most:

> Who has done most of the dying? Most of the work? Most of the time in prison (on Max
> Row)? Who is the hindmost in every aspect of the social, political and economic life? Who
> has the least short-term interest—or no interest at all—in the survival of the present state?
> (Jackson 1971, 123).

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[6] For a careful treatment of the distinction between self-determination and sovereignty as recognized previously within the Black radical tradition in general, and by Frantz Fanon and the Black Panther Party in particular, *see* Reyes 2009.

[7] This is to say that the Zapatistas remake their relationship to the given political structures under sovereignty. When they engage with them, they do so strategically. For example, they are able to deploy international law as a tool insofar as it advances their autonomous project, never allowing international law to define or compromise it (*see* Speed and Reyes 2002).

A subjectivity rather than an identity. This broadened "definition" allows change to hail from even those devoid of political or union representation. Indeed, it sees value in the creativity practiced by those managing to somehow survive under hostile conditions through the guidance of nobody but themselves (Reyes 2009). Such is the present state of many sectors of the Palestinian movement today, still committed to the liberation project even in the face of a leadership that has given up on them.

Might we then find it analytically useful to also distinguish between the party-centered Left (that has been similarly taken by the Right's project of independence) and those leftist Palestinian desires that continue to persist? Those Palestinians, as George Jackson might put it, who *need* liberation? If so, we should make these distinctions and be prepared to hold onto them. We cannot begin this work, however, by continuing to mirror our scholarship and action with a leadership class that (1) dismisses self-organized action outside of traditional organizational structures; and (2) cannot see how the capacity of people to resist also can translate into the creation of new organizational structures.[8] But this will need to go well beyond denouncing these prejudices and blind spots, for they are difficult to shake off. This is especially so for those of us who make a living from their existence.

Cartography and the professional political class

Returning to the map, we can learn from experience how preserving the status quo can easily reproduce itself even among the well-intentioned. In the drive to help indigenous groups secure land rights, many have gone into the field genuinely believing that, "[since] more indigenous territory has

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[8] I am less inclined to believe that the State of Israel shares the leadership's blind spot to the capacities of those from below. On the contrary, examining how often Israel's projects may be in fact reactions to Palestinian creative action might provide us with a broader view of the below. As an example, we may find that Israel's checkpoint scheme, which has had the effect of fragmenting Palestinian society for the past generation, might be read as the State's fear of reliving the First Intifada, an uprising sustained for years through the wide reaching social networks Palestinians had long cultivated between each other in the Occupied Territories.

been claimed by maps than by guns, more indigenous territory can be reclaimed and defended by maps than by guns" (Nietschmann 1995). But in doing away too quickly with the role violence has played in establishing the map's authority, these projects advance an incoherence: namely, that the holding of legal title to land can justify settler-colonialism and genocide.

In their examinations of indigenous counter-cartography projects in Central America, Joel Wainwright and Joe Bryan show instances of how these strategies can too easily morph into the preoccupation with securing state recognition of legally-enshrined rights—what they refer to as a "cartographic-legal strategy" (Wainwright and Bryan 2009). This has led to greater adherence to cartographic conventions accompanied by an increased tendency to conceive of space in terms of property rights, therefore reproducing the state and capitalism as hegemonic forms of power and economy (*Ibid.,* 155). In the process, an "expert corps" of lawyers and geographers is elevated to a position of privilege, leading to differential empowerment within the community. "It is hard to imagine how this could be otherwise," they write, "since in order to qualify as legitimate in the courts the maps and the case must adhere to the disciplinary norms of cartography and western law" (*Ibid.,* 162).

Over the past two decades, the Palestinian leadership has similarly become linked to a heavy reliance on professional cartography. As is necessary of state-building projects, its goal has been to make claims to a precisely bounded territory in negotiations with Israelis. And while the negotiations have consistently hovered at an impasse, and the leadership's maps have remained unthreatening proposals, the confidence in professional cartography has done much to shape ideas of what constitutes the legitimate political realm. The effect has been a reliance on specialists and the concomitant assumption that people not occupying positions of authority or holding formal "expertise" are deficient in addressing their political situations. That Palestinians had not made many

maps until recently is discussed in embarrassment and, startlingly, is sometimes blamed as a central cause of their own dispossession.

Titling, Partitioning, and *Musha'* Collective Ownership

But before land was to become parceled out into individual ownership, societies placed little value on cartographic representations of landed property.[9] It was under the emergent capitalist societies of Renaissance Europe when cadastral mapping would become an important aid for developing the new systems of exclusive land rights (Kain and Baigent 1992). Similarly, land surveying in the colonies would become an instrument by which colonial governments replaced non-capitalist land-use practices with absolute proprietary rights. And for settler-colonial regimes in particular, surveying and cadastral mapping were especially significant: communicating the "availability" of land in the colonies was an important draw for European settlement.

In the case of Palestine, the surveying and mapping system established under the British Mandate in the 1920s was heavily encouraged by the Zionist movement to facilitate the settlement of European Jews into Palestine through legally binding land ownership and title (Gavish 2005). Although a centralized land registration regime had earlier been ushered into the region by the Ottoman Land Law of 1858 under Istanbul's *Tanzimat* reforms, accompanying maps were rare.[10] Its land registration documents consisted of verbal descriptions of boundaries. For Europe's Zionists, who sought alienated parcels of land for purchase, descriptions of boundaries would render the task arduous. Foreigners, unlike villagers, would require "proper locational reference" (Gavish and Kark

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[9] Cadaster maps existed in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Romans used them as a "means by which they could exert and maintain control over the land resources of their far-flung dominions" (Kain and Baigent 1992, 4). With the fall of Rome, cadastral maps were effectively discontinued throughout feudal Europe.
[10] Any maps the Ottomans had made were not part of a standard reference system similar to a triangulation network, and none were part of a cadastral system (Gavish and Kark 1993).

1993). Villagers, unlike foreigners, possessed intimate knowledge of the land. Maps, for them, were not necessary.

The musha' as a social relation

The mid-19th century's *Tanzimat* reforms sought to transform the Ottoman Empire into a modern centralized government, and in many respects, the changes were for the convenience of European trade and industry (Firestone 1990, 99). Nonetheless, the 1858 Ottoman Land Law provided space for the collective land ownership system, the *musha'*, to persist. Arabic for "commons," the *musha'* was characterized by the periodic redistribution of agricultural plots among peasant cultivators who held claims to parts of the land in the form of shares.[11] Contrary to the notion that land claims should be made to permanently partitioned parcels of land, under *musha'* arrangements land partition was never permanent—allotments changed as needed in order to preserve the cultivator's right to subsist. Ya'acov Firestone illustrates this system of land-equalization:

> The community acts not as repository of rights to land but as a custodian of the right to produce (i.e., to subsist) to which each member is entitled by virtue of kinship or residence. Since every child who is born or comes of age must accordingly have a plot to embody this right to produce, locations must be reallocated periodically if only to preserve the contiguity of lineage and sublineage lands, quite irrespective of any land shortage. (1990, 109-110)

Musha' practices could continue after the Land Law came into effect because its registration system recorded the name of individuals, not of specified parcels. In this way, it kept with peasant conceptions of land as forming a whole divided between cultivators through shares (Mundy 1994).

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[11] المشاع in Arabic, the *musha'* is sometimes transliterated as *mesha'* or *masha'a*. On both the classical and contemporary usage of the term, *see* Firestone (1990, 103-104). On *musha'* practices in Palestinian refugee camps today, *see* Campus in Camps (2012).

Importantly, the *musha'* must be accurately understood as collectively owned land rather than communal land where, under the latter, villagers would only be "users of property belonging to some juristic collectivity" (Firestone 1990, 104). Under the *musha''s* collective ownership structure, on the other hand, the continual practice of negotiating land redistribution placed emphasis on relationships, accountability, and affective ties between villagers. The *musha'* lands are thus resources as well as social relations. They are managed by people directly accountable to each other and who will have to live daily with the consequences of whatever decisions they make. Understanding such commons as merely resources, on the other hand, cannot allow us to recognize the importance of practice and direct negotiation. It cannot allow us to recognize that the commons are also a verb, as Peter Linebaugh has written; they exist through "commoning" (Linebaugh 2008).

Defending the musha'

Musha' practices survived the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and would continue to characterize the majority of agricultural land-use when Palestine came under British rule (El-Eini 2006, 292). That it was not easily amenable to permanent partition proved to be the greatest obstacle the Mandate government faced in attempting its "land settlement" project through survey and cadaster.[12] In 1923, when the Mandate drafted plans to partition the lands into permanently fixed parcels, the proposal was suspended in the face of resistance (Smith 1993, 111). Nonetheless, Ernest M. Dowson, Lands Adviser to the Palestine and Trans-Jordan Governments (1923–28), would continue to advocate abolishing the *musha'* and, upon his recommendations, the Mandate government began to systematize land settlement in 1928.

The project adopted the Torrens system of registration, first developed in colonial Australia and later replicated in other British colonies, including neighboring Egypt where Dowson had

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[12] "Land settlement" in this context is the process of settling individual title to permanently partitioned land and should not to be confused with "population settlement."

previously served. The system required a cadastral survey that would precisely measure and permanently divide the land into parcels to be uniquely numbered. Any parcel's precise location would be referenced in relation to adjoining lands linked to triangulation points forming a national network. A "quasi-judicial" investigation would be carried out on the spot in order to determine ownership and rights to each plot.

True, the Zionist movement had done much to encourage the British to systematize land settlement (Gavish 2005). But the project was not completely determined by Zionism. Although it would come to play a major role in the dispossession of the peasantry in favor of the creation of exclusive Jewish areas, that the Torrens system travelled from colony to colony is testament to the fact that similar projects were being enforced throughout the British Empire irrespective of Zionism. Integrating the land into the modern market economy by making agricultural land-use efficient and profitable for the colonial government was a general concern the Empire shared of its colonies. In Palestine, the *musha'* once again posed a major obstacle. As a government report put it:

> Biennial redistribution hinders progress by discouraging personal initiative and preventing the expenditure of capital and by stereotyping the methods of cultivation … ownership of detached lots, separated from one another by the land of other proprietors, is very general … and places a serious obstacle in the way of an exact determination of the boundaries and the acquirement of a clear and valid title. The consolidation of such lots into continuous properties is a condition of the satisfactory economic development of the country. (Government Report 1920, 250-251 *cited in* Atran 1989, 725)

This conception of land was one the British had developed in earlier contexts, as Martin Bunton points out (Bunton 2007, 7-21). That land was a commodity; that it could be defined by individual plots; and that its engagements must be primarily wealth-generating were part of a political philosophy harkening back to England's own bloody history with enclosures as well as to the Crown's need to justify rule over foreign lands under the tutelage of "progress" and "development."

The inability to conceive of land as anything more than simply a resource renders it impossible to recognize how social relations go into collectively managing land-use.[13] What often goes ignored about the land settlement project, as Bunton also points out, was that the survey sought to discipline the native population into using and trusting the Mandate's court system. Although communal government structures regularly managed the breaking up of new lands, generated knowledge about soil quality, and regulated the cooperative working of shares, Mandate officials assumed that Palestinians possessed a knowledge deficiency when it came to their own spatio-political concerns. As a government report put it:

> There should be no difficulty in allowing the police to decide whether any given individual has any rights in the land or is a trespasser. The maintenance of the record … may be difficult under existing circumstances in Palestine, where the village tax collector or *Mukhtar* does not always possess sufficient education. (Royal Commission 1937, 232)

Thus, while the British hostility to the idea that resources should be shared in common was informed by a desire to maximize agricultural profit through individual initiative, its hostility to *commoning* stemmed from its inability to accept that Palestinians could "figure out" for themselves how to collectively make a life without the need for colonial mediation.

But it is also worth noting that, when they reported back about the resistance they faced by Palestinians, British officials could then get themselves to admit that peasants possessed sophisticated understandings of how the Mandate's policies were affecting them in detrimental ways. Surveying and titling had, indeed, facilitated the Zionist movement's efforts, for holding legal title

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[13] Along a similar vein, misconceptions of the commons as a mere resource rather than also a social relation persist. Garrett Hardin's influential essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin 1968) is exemplary. Under the tutelage of environmentalism, Hardin argues that the earth's resources would be overused and the environment destroyed without a privatization regime in place that would ostensibly regulate their care. Not unlike the colonial government under the Mandate, Hardin's thesis assumes a human nature that is profit-driven, holds a short-term view, and is inherently selfish (for critiques *see* De Angelis 2010; Clark 2010).

to parcels now provided them with the backing of the British military to expel peasants from the land. The peasants recognized that preventing the permanent partition of the *musha'* could be a strategy against this. As British officials wrote, "in certain areas, the Arabs regard this system of tenancy, destructive as it is of all development, as a safeguard against alienation […] the Administration had been reluctant for political reasons to abolish it by legislation" (Royal Commission 1937, 219).

Peasant resistance to land settlement took the shape of sabotaging survey work, and other times in the form of direct force. The majority of foreign land sales under the Mandate were made by absentee non-Palestinian landlords who, if known, became despised and ostracized. Some were forced to flee abroad; frequently, many were shot (Abu Sitta 2010, 44-45).[14] The uprisings in 1929 further slowed down land settlement; and the Arab Revolt of 1936-39 fully suspended normal government activities: "The roads became unsafe for use," explained one official report, "and the economic and social life of the country was seriously disrupted" (*cited in* Bunton 2007, 6). Procedures in the field came to a standstill: "I have no intention of taking up settlement work," the commissioner for lands and surveys to Haifa insisted in 1938, "until public security markedly improves" (*Ibid.*).

Land settlement was also delayed by "a growing tendency to dispute every claim where there is a shadow of a case, and often where there is not" (Royal Commission 1937, 230). During the first year of the Arab Revolt, "it was only found possible to settle 1,490 claims out of 9,333, leaving 7,843 disputes outstanding" (*Ibid.*). By the end of the British Mandate, the land area whose title was settled

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[14] Salman Abu Sitta writes that over 90 percent of all Jewish acquisitions between 1878 and 1936 were purchased from large land owners: 52.6 percent was sold by non-Palestinian large land owners, 24.6 percent by Palestinian (or resident) large land owners, 13.4 percent by churches and foreign bodies, and 9.4 percent by peasants (Abu Sitta 2010, 44).

would only make up 20 percent of Palestine (Figure 1), with those areas in which land settlement

was not completed being almost wholly Arab (Abu Sitta 2010, 26)[15].

Figure 1: Completed Land Settlement 1947
By the end of the British Mandate, the land whose title was settled was about 20% of Palestine.
The area in which Land Settlement was not completed was almost wholly Arab (Abu Sitta 2010,
26). Map by Tamar Soffer; based on Department of Surveys, *Report for the Years 1940-1946*
(Jerusalem: Palestine Government, March 1948).

Partitioning or conquest?

The uprisings led British authorities to look into their causes, for which they appointed the

Palestine Royal Commission to investigate. Also known as the "Peel Commission," its report

famously concluded that Palestinian nationalism was fundamentally at odds with Jewish nationalism

and—following the partition logic now to a macro scale—the Commission inaugurated into the

country the recommendation that Palestine should be parceled into two: one Jewish state, one Arab

state (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Peel Commission partition plan (1937)
The Peel Commission put forth the first proposal to partition Palestine into two states (one Arab,
one Jewish). Its delineations paralleled much of the Survey's land settlement (*see* Figure 1). The
Jerusalem area and a connecting port at Jaffa were to be kept under British rule. Map by author;
adapted from OpenStreetMap; source: PASSIA.

The Commission's map was never implemented, but once the British left in 1947 the United Nations

resumed the logic of partition. With an eye for greater Jewish immigration following the Holocaust

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[15] Nevertheless, the *musha'* dramatically declined under Mandate rule. In 1914, during the final years of Ottoman
rule, the *musha'* had made up about 70 percent of the land. By the end of the Mandate in 1947, it had been reduced
to 25 percent (El-Eini 2006, 292).

in Europe, its revised incisions allotted for the Jewish state an area significantly larger than the Peel

Commission's maps had provided. It followed the pattern of completed land settlement and an

assumed neat fit between national identity and territory in carving out two non-contiguous states

side by side (Figure 3). Although the Zionist leadership accepted the plan, Palestinians rejected it in

full. The United Nations had created the conditions for war.

Figure 3: United Nations partition plan (1947)
The UN Partition plan adopted the Peel Commission's logic of partition: an Arab State and a
Jewish state existing side-by-side. The Jerusalem area was set as an internationally administered
zone. The boundaries were similarly informed by the land settlement as completed by 1947 (see
Figure 1). Map by author; adapted from OpenStreetMap; partition source: PASSIA.

After the State of Israel declared its independence in the midst of violence on 15 May 1948 and

fighting ceased in 1949, the map was redrawn with armistice lines loosely resembling the UN

partition plan (Figure 4). A majority Jewish state was created; an Arab one was not. Israel's

independence was to be the Palestinians' *Nakba* (catastrophe), for more than half of the native

population was ethnically cleansed to create Israel as majority Jewish (Pappé 2006).

Figure 4: Armistice lines (1949)
Map by author; adapted from OpenStreetMap

Shuffled into camps established by the United Nations in neighboring countries and in the

remaining areas of Palestine that would become known as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank,

Palestine's peasantry had now become refugees.

Concluding with an opening: When the rooftops are streets

They started out as tents, as one would suppose refugee camps would—a temporary space for people fleeing war. But for many who have never seen a Palestinian refugee camp before, it often comes as a surprise to see that camps consist of crowded buildings now rather than tents. A second startling realization: the refugees have been here long enough to need all of this concrete. It took a few years for them to agree to houses, however. The first compromise was walls only—no roofs. Roofs implied a permanence they could not agree to. But as families have grown, and as the camp's spaces have not, roofs have been added—many roofs—most serving at once as one family's ceiling and another family's floor. But anyway, these buildings are their houses, not their homes. Their homes are inside what became the State of Israel after their expulsion. And while the official maps want to tell them it that is impossible to go back home, those same maps also communicate that home is only walking distance away.

In Bethlehem's Aida Refugee Camp, in the West Bank, I am learning to agree with a common Palestinian refrain: "The map here is useless." The way the map tells the story, distance is space only, not time. And also not violence. Checkpoints and borders are lines and dots to travelers like me. For Palestinians, those same lines and dots are testament to the Israeli military's brute force. Outside of Lajee Center, a place I have been volunteering with at the Camp, there is a ceramic sign that announces that *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem) is 7.34 km away, about 4.5 miles. The sign is correct if we assume Cartesian space. Indeed, Nidal, one of Lajee's organizers, remembers when he and his friends would walk from Aida Camp to Al-Quds in the evenings to eat *ka'ak* (sesame-covered ring-shaped bread), and could walk back home in time for bed. That was before Israel began closing off

the city to most Palestinians years ago. Before the Second Intifada. Before the Apartheid Wall.[16]

Now, Al-Quds is too far; the distance has become impossible for most. Most do not qualify for

special entry permits. It is what the ceramic signs like these, about eighty throughout the West Bank,

provide reminders of in claiming the distance to Al-Quds: the map here is useless.

     Nidal's wife, Amahl, is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and he hopes to get special permission

to enter '48 to visit her family.[17] We once made a map of the permit maze, following him through

various visits to different offices over several weeks, each of his movements taking him farther and

farther, in the opposite direction. He was denied.

     But from the refugees themselves, I am learning that the map isn't always so useless. Every

day, walking past the maps of Palestine they have painted and graffitied all over the Camp's

buildings, I learn to agree. They are the maps of Palestine before 1948, before the UN Partition,

before the Peel Commission, before land settlement. Their Palestine maps have zero authority on

the ground, but for the Zionist project, they are terrifying. This is how I can learn to agree with

Aida's refugees: the map is not always so useless.

     Nidal and Salah at Lajee Center ask me to work with them on making some maps of Aida. I

will learn some things about myself from this project. One, I hadn't known how to think of the map

strategically before. When friends would ask me what I was learning from my research on the map's

life in Palestine I often joked, "The map has ruined everything!" I would laugh as I said it, but

sometimes I think I believed it. But no, it turns out that the map itself is not inherently bad or good.

The map is a strategy. The question to be answered is, how and when to deploy it?

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[16] Although alternatively called a "Separation Barrier," or a "Security Fence," using the term "Apartheid Wall" is most accurate if we follow democratic geographic convention which states that the proper place names are those names that the people who live there use.

[17] The term "'48" is the common Palestinian expression for the portion of Palestine carved out by the 1949 armistice lines for the creation of the State Israel, which declared statehood in 1948.

I am also learning that I am highly risk-averse. Fearful that Israelis might get a hold of the maps we make, I suggest that we shouldn't make any. "They already have the maps," Salah says, reminding me of the military's frequent night raids and arrests in Aida. It is how the soldiers know precisely which house to raid. "When they arrest us they even show us the name of our house on their GPS," he says.

True, mapping would be a risk. But what does that mean in a place where going home at night to sleep in your own bed is a risk?

Nidal would like to map Aida's lives of struggle, he says. He has many of these lives, Nidal does: his First Intifada life, his Second Intifada life. Once, when I asked him to check to see if I had traced the Camp's streets accurately on the computer, he nodded but remarked, "You know, the rooftops are also streets." Overlaying a sheet of translucent paper onto a printed aerial image of the Camp, Nidal would dot a road network on the roofs as he had maneuvered them while under curfew during the Second Intifada. He had needed to get around, but Israeli soldiers were guarding the streets. So he got around instead by jumping the rooftops.

Figure 5: Aida's Streets (2011)
Professional map of Aida Camp's streets, as traced from an aerial photograph by me with a Geographic Information System (GIS).

Figure 6: Rooftops as Streets (2011)
Nidal Al-Azzraq's map of Aida Camp's "other" streets, as he improvised while under curfew during the Second Intifada (c 2002). This map is possible only through Nidal's lived experience in the Camp.

Nidal's was a map no amount of professional training could ever teach me to make. Placing my map of Aida's streets (Figure 5) next to his map of Aida's other streets (Figure 6), I am reminded of Amilcar Cabral's concept of "class suicide." It was a proposal he put forth to the petty bourgeoisie:

either they preserve their privileges and betray the revolution, or they begin identifying directly with the people by committing suicide as a class (Cabral 1968).

Cartographer suicide, maybe?

If Nidal had followed the streets as proposed by the map's given wisdom, he might be dead today or imprisoned for breaking curfew. But Nidal did not follow the streets. Instead he created his own, improvising each length, direction, and turn with every jump.

Like people can create a border by identifying a carob tree, they can also create streets by jumping roofs. For the external mediators of spatio-political questions, however, for those of us cartographers, lawyers, police, judges, courts, politicians, and academics committed to an elitist geography, an elitist politics, any whisper that such democratic potentials exist must be dismissed, ridiculed, or ignored so that we may preserve ourselves as a mediating class.

We talk about the mapping project in Aida and wonder what sharing these maps might do. We are not sure yet. Will allies in struggle know to read them for the significance we intend? We do not know. Will adversaries redeploy them back against the Camp? We hope not, but it's possible. Will some people hate us? Probably. But resisting entails risks.

What we do know about moving an emancipatory politics forward is that pre-set answers and pre-given recipes have proven themselves inadequate. The Zapatistas have suggested to us that, instead, we ask questions as we walk. Palestinians can show us to do the same, and that even sometimes, we might have to ask those questions as we jump.

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