Mapping al-Quds
Reassembling the Online Cartographies of an Unjust City

A Research Proposal by:

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ABSTRACT
This research explores the geoweb mappings of Jerusalem (in Arabic, ‘al-Quds’), focusing on the underrepresentation of Palestinians. Through this case study, I investigate the interplay between web-maps and offline geographies, and fairer ways to reconfigure this relationship. Drawing on Critical Cartography and Feminist Technoscience, I examine the mapping-assemblages distributed by Google Maps and OpenStreetMap (OSM), today’s most popular map providers. The project is divided into two parts. The first comprises four independent inquiries, each addressing one of the following research problems: a) OSM’s democratic potential in contexts of inequalities; b) the reasons for the absence of Palestinians from OSM; c) the differences between Google Maps and OSM, and their cartographic implications; d) the ways in which different actors use, tweak, reinforce or contest Google Maps and OSM. In the second part, I take a more action-oriented approach, and experiment with ways to support Palestinian efforts to create an alternative map of Jerusalem. From a theoretical point of view, this project contributes to the geoweb literature by problematizing prevailing narratives about Google and OSM through an ‘ANT-inspired’ individualizing case. In the spirit of STS and Critical Theory, I view research as a performative practice: the way in which we study and understand these maps can make a difference, however modest. Thus, I also hope my project can point at ways to make web-maps more just, and help us see how Jerusalem could be otherwise.