The Unrendered Road: Journeying between Real Places and Other Spaces

Tali Liberman
Design Department—Sandberg Instituut
March 2020

Unable to Change Location

There was a problem changing your location. Please try again later.

Okay

You woke up a few seconds before your colleague, Charlotte, told you that she thought you were in Germany. She wasn't sure because you couldn't really tell the difference. "The landscape in this part of Germany is very similar to the landscape in the Netherlands," she said. You asked her, "That's it? There's no border? No one is checking us? No security?" Surprised at you for being surprised, she answered: "Mmm... No?"

You are very aware of borders. The borders of your country, Israel, have been re-shaped and re-drawn by the tides of war and geo-political changes in the Middle East. There are borders that you can pass with your passport and borders that you cannot. After Googling "10 hot places you will never see as an Israeli" (in Hebrew), you search for these places on Google maps. Typing a location, zooming in and out, you use your 1334x750-pixel window to access an alternate reality, a portal to a new spatial dimension. You can be in the city dubbed "the oldest city in the world," Jericho, indulging in the sun, while the rain is knocking on your window in Amsterdam. Jericho is only 135.3 km from your hometown, but is easier to visit when you are 3,352 km away. Thank God for Google!

CAN'T FIND A WAY THERE, TRY AGAIN

CAN'T FIND A WAY THERE, TRY AGAIN, repeated the lady voice on my Google Maps App. As I know the road from my days as a student in Jerusalem, I tried again—SPEAK NOW, she shouted at me. JERICHO, I shouted back. Her answer was the same: CAN'T FIND A WAY THERE, TRY AGAIN.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is only 25.6 km long. It takes 38 minutes to get there by car. It even has a number: "Highway 1". [31°47'59.0"N 35°26'36.0"E. jpg]. On the way to "the lowest place on earth", we pass one checkpoint. [Entrando_en_Jerusalem_Israel.jpg] The scenery shifts unexpectedly from green to desert yellow. A sign by the road indicates we have reached sea level. [مستوى سطح البحر]. jpg] We can stop the car at a scenic viewpoint next to a few tourists waiting for their picture to be taken on a decorated camel [decorated-camel.jpg]. To enter the city of Jericho you turn left and pass another checkpoint. A checkpoint is a site of passage that determines who may pass national borders. But who is allowed to go through the checkpoint and who is not? Am I getting *in* or *out* as I move between areas A to B to C? This territory is so fragmented and entangled that it is sometimes hard to know if you are in Israel or in Palestine. Everything becomes a blur of checkpoints, areas, barriers and the letters A, B and C.[1]

Like the checkpoint, an interface can also be seen as an autonomous zone of interaction that mediates between different realities; it is a threshold between a variety of defined territories. It is impossible for me to travel all the way to Jericho, Palestine, because it is prohibited by law for Israelis to enter Area A. It is only through a virtual platform that I can access the road. Taking advantage of Google's use of user-generated geographic information, I collected images that were uploaded to

1   In 1993 Israel and the PLO signed The Oslo I Accord (peace agreement), which was intended to mark the process that would end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in three phases. The Oslo Accords established the Palestinian Authority (PA), enabled the construction of a state building and gave Palestinians permission to establish their own infrastructure. This resulted in the reorganization of Israeli power over Palestinians rather then its withdrawal. The 1995 Oslo II Accord fragmented the West Bank into three administrative divisions: Area A, 18% of the West Bank, under full PA civil and security control; Area B, 20% of the West Bank, under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli and Palestinian security control; and Area C, 62% of the West Bank, under full Israeli civil and security control. This territorial fragmentation also restricted telecommunications, and thus Palestinian internet access is dependent on Israeli 4G networks. See: Helga Tawil-Souri, "Technology's borders: Palestine's Digital Occupation and Egypt's Digital Revolution," in *American Studies Encounters the Middle East*, eds. Marwan Kraidy and Alex Lubin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 263–285. This phase was supposed to last no longer than five years, during the negotiations for permanent solutions to key issues, including territorial sovereignty. In the wake of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin's assassination that year, the accords never continued to the critical final phase.

Google Earth from the same route—on the same platform that "couldn't find" the route. Apparently, it's Christmas time in the church in Jericho (according to Andrew J's photo, captured in December 2013). [church.jpg] Not only does Google Earth create images of landmasses, oceans, 3D architectural complexes and entire cities, it also generates pathways, routes and tours. Through these pathways, or virtual portals (and through this essay), I will explore ways in which our perception of reality is shaped and narrated by these systems.

Recording a tour from Jericho's center to my university in Jerusalem, I formed a simulation of me traveling the road "that didn't exist". By simulating and documenting the road I created an experience that defined the landscape. I became the cartographer. Or did I become the "counter-cartographer"?

In "Yeats and Decolonization," Edward Said proposed counter-cartography as a critical practice that confronts the epistemic violence of imperial maps: "Geography can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map."[2] Counter-cartography attempts to map realities on the ground by creating representations of the daily lives of the oppressed. Therefore, political activism is possible through mapping platforms, as they empower users and challenge the traditional power relations of map making.

While digital maps can undermine the monopoly of official state maps, the power still lies largely with privately run and utilitarian platforms. My attempt to map the road is shaped by the choices of other users and by the user-generated data that has been uploaded on the platform. Although the pluralization or democratization of mapping practices can create a space for shared geography, and collective community building, these crowd-sourced platforms do not escape political and economic structures (one poignant example is the different names given to the same sites).

[Church.jpg]	31°51'22.1"N 35°27'22.9"E	Dec 2013	Andrew J
[יריחו.Jpg]		Jan 2019	Wesam Bukhari
[Jerikói utcarészlet.jpg]	31°51'17.60"N 35°27'28.71"E		Imre Horváth
[Mosque of Qabat Jaber.jpg]	31°51'17.60"N 35°27'28.71"E	Sep 2013	Анатолий Путченко
[Jericho.Date-palm plantations.jpg]	31°48'32.4"N 35°26'40.8"E	Sep 2013	Анатолий Путченко
[Levant.jpg]		Nov 2016	M2B Bozan
[Casele beduinilor din desert .jpg]	31°49'03.5"N 35°22'34.3"E	Oct 2011	Paul Ion
[Desert of Judah, West Bank.jpg]	31°49'20.1"N 35°23'15.3"E	Jul 2009	Nicola e Pina
[Ziemia Swieta dzis.jpg]	31°47'53.85"N 35°26'35.97"E		Apoloniusz Jakistam
[sulla via per Gerusalemme.jpg]	31°48'23.0"N 35°23'57.6"E	Mar 2013	Bartolomeo Giove
[Israel.jpg]	31°47'50.6"N 35°24'56.8"E	Aug 2010	Viktor Bakhmutov
[Highway 1.jpg]	31°47'57.8"N 35°26'34.2"E	Nov 2011	Nikodem Nijaki
[Надпись из синагоги в Эштемоа. Оригинал.jpg]	31°48'58.8"N 35°21'31.6"E	Mar 2013	Nadia Kushnir
[Jericho.Palästina.jpg]	31°51'22.42"N 35°27'34.34"E		Alexander Jung

Obviously, there is a difference between the real landscape and its simulation. A simulation generates a pictorial representation of the territory, reinforcing the perspective of the online platform and its user contributions. The simulation is an attempt to understand and grasp the world, but it is also a way of claiming it. Those who create pictorial representations of the world claim to portray objectivity; in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, maps were equated with scientific knowledge and considered objective representations of geographic reality.[3]

2   Edward Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, eds. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Press, 1990), 77.
3   David Turnbull, *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers: Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2005).

However, maps were (and continue to be) also a symbol of sovereignty and power, delineated by those who control information, and determine our orientation.(The most commonly used projection is still the Mercator projection, which shows us the world through sixteenth-century eyes: Europe is larger, and the colonised countries are smaller. Google, Apple and Bing map, are all based on this projection.) Geographic information systems and global positioning systems play substantial roles in the race to claim ownership over the earth or over the representation of it. Today we encounter and understand the world through the prism of digital apps owned by tech giants (first and foremost Google, followed by Facebook, Apple, and Amazon).

After a short daydream in the desert sun, I return to my phone, searching for directions. If the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is not on the map, or more precisely, if the road is not in the app, does it mean it doesn't exist? What is the relationship between the interface and the territory—does the digital portal or the interface, in this case Google Maps, precede the territory, or is it the conflicted and fragmented territory that precedes the map and the interface?

Some services adapt to the local laws. In the case of Google Maps, their stance on contested territories is guided by a technological pragmatism, wishing to appeal to a wide consensus among user bases. Their decisions are determined by users' expectations, protests and lobbies. Although Google's map carries no official authority, it is the decisive map of our time. When it comes to the right to self-determination in a specific territory, a choice regarding a border or a place's name, Google constitutes a weighty endorsement in the court of global opinion. This sometimes leads to situations where nation states petition Google over perceived bias or inaccuracies. In 2013, Google replaced the words "Palestinian Territories" with "Palestine" on all of its sites and products. The Israeli deputy foreign minister urged Google to reconsider their decision.[4] One might argue that the use of "Palestine" rather than "Palestinian Territories" (by claiming there is a border between Israel and Palestine) not only mediates a two-state solution, it already delineates its existence and perhaps shapes the states and their borders in many ways.[5]

CAUTION: THIS DESTINATION IS IN A HIGH–RISK AREA OR IS PROHIBITED TO ISRAELIS BY LAW.

Driving from Jerusalem to Ramallah with my friends Siko and Fran,[6] I inspect every detail of the road—as if it is the interface, and I am trying to interpret it. HIZMA JUNCTION 500 METERS AHEAD. BARRIER AHEAD. IT IS PROHIBITED TO HAND OVER OR TO DELIVER VEHICALS FOR REPAIR IN THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY. A woman with a headscarf is walking on the sidewalk. TALMON, BEIT EL, ALI, names of settlements I have heard only on the news. As we are passing the checkpoint I hide my camera. We are driving along the separation wall, or is it the security fence?[7] HIZMA, JERICHO, to the right. Siko explains: *"Actually, now I start to put my location again. But if you put the location from the hostel in Jerusalem it will bring you only until here, or to Calandia checkpoint."*

We are driving after a car with a yellow license plate. I am aware of the license plate colors. Yellow plate means Israeli car. I ask Siko: *"What is the color of the Palestinian license plate? White or Green?"* He answers: *"Taxis are green, private is white."* We see a settlement in front of us up the hill. GEVA BINYAMIN, RAMALLAH IN 250 METERS. TAPUACH JET. As we continue to drive Siko continues: *"But when we are in Ramallah it is best you do not put the camera here."* He means on the dashboard.

4   Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh, "Intifada 3.0? Cyber colonialism and Palestinian resistance," *Arab Studies Journal* XXII, no. 1 (Spring 2014):102-103.
5   Anat Ben David, Skype interview with the author, April 22, 2019
6   Fran is a Chilean-Palestinian artist and my classmate at the Sandberg. Over the summer we traveled together in Israel and Palestine. During our trip we met Siko, a Palestinian graphic designer from Haifa who also works in Ramallah and offered to take us there.
7   The wall appears in Waze under two names "security fence" and "separation wall". This Waze becomes an Israeli-Palestinian "virtual battleground," with users editing the term. Each term charges the structure with a different contextualized notion.

A big red sign. PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY, AREA A AHEAD. NO ENTRY FOR ISRAELIS. ENTRY ILLEGAL BY ISRAELI LAW. I look back to the screen hoping it will encompass me. The interface, using the same red color of the real sign, warns that I am in Area A.

I am stressed. What if something happens and I am in the middle of Ramallah. I still remember the photos of the man waving his blood-stained hands from the window to the angry crowd, even though it happened 20 years ago.[8]

...

Waze is a community-driven GPS navigation app that directs users based on crowd-sourced information. The app collects information on variables including traffic, speed, accidents, and police surveillance and broadcasts it out to users.[9] When passing from Israel into the West Bank, Waze will display the warning: CAUTION: THIS DESTINATION IS IN A HIGH-RISK AREA OR IS PROHIBITED TO ISRAELIS BY LAW. Waze by default is set to avoid DANGEROUS DRIVIG AREAS AND THE A, B TERRITORIES. If you press, CONFIRM DRIVE, Waze will offer directions, albeit only partially, since the GPS coverage is limited.

I use Waze in Israel all the time. I feel ambivalent writing about Waze because I know there is a good reason for it to provide this option. Since the second intifada in 2000, it is prohibited by law for Israeli citizens to enter Area A. But set legality aside, navigation in Israel and Palestine can be dangerous and a source of anxiety. It's already 14:00. I open the radio to hear the hourly news broadcast: "A violent riot broke out in the West-Bank village of Abu Dis on Friday after an Israeli man, 59, drove into the town by car. According to IDF, some 200 Palestinians threw rocks at the man's car after he drove into the village by accident. In coordination with the Civil Administration, Palestinian police forces proceeded to rescue the man and escorted him to safety. Meanwhile, the rioters burned the man's car. The man sustained light injuries in the incident."[10] I feel anxious. Am I allowed to feel anxious? Is it real? Or is it constructed? In spite of it, I continue going.

I never thought about the implications of the Waze default settings for its Palestinian users. In Area C, many of the roads are built only for settlers, to connect the illegal settlements to the rest of Israel. Since Waze bases its directions on crowdsourced information these are the main roads to which Waze will direct drivers. It could be dangerous for Palestinians to enter a settlement and it could also pose a problem if you are restricted from some of these roads because you don't have the right travel permit for them.[11] On 17 March 2019, at around 10:00 P.M., about ten settlers attacked Wasfi Zeita's car, who was on his way home. The settlers scattered rocks along the road, trying to block the car, beat Zeita with metal rods through the car windows, and tried to gain control of the car. Zeita drove faster and managed to escape. According to "B'tselem" website, these acts of violence have been occurring every month for years.[12] You don't hear about these acts of violence on the Israeli news.

Is the use of the phrase "dangerous areas" in the warning pop-up biased? Dangerous to whom? Approximately 2.9 million Palestinians[13] and 622,670 Jewish settlers[14] seem to inhabit the region of the West Bank, a tangle of differing jurisdictions, checkpoints, barriers, bypass roads and more. It's not an easy task to create an algorithm and an interface to navigate this area. When Waze uses the

8   Suzanne Goldenberg, "When they blundered into the baying mob they sealed their fate," *The Guardian*, October 13, 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/oct/13/israel6.
9   Waze was sold to Google in 2013 for US$1 billion.
10   Yotam Berger and Yaniv Kubovich, "Israeli Attacked by Mob, Rescued by Palestinian Forces After Driving Into West Bank Town," *Haaretz*, February 2, 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-attacked-by-mob-after-driving-into-west-bank-town-1.5786500
11   Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso 2007).
12   "June 2019: Another month of routine settler violence fully backed by the military," *B'tselem*, August 7, 2019, https://www.btselem.org/video/20190807_routine_settler_violence_fully_backed_by_military_in_june_2019#full
13   "PCBS: On The Occasion Of The International Population Day 11/7/2019," *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics*, July 11, 2019, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3503
14   "Statistics on Settlements and Settler Population," *B'tselem*, last modified January 16, 2019, https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics

term "dangerous" it refers to Areas A and B, not C, which is under full Israeli civil and security control, and includes the settlements. These settings create a completely new map by shutting down some of the roads and routes, making them invisible. This affects tourism, the economy and the daily life in the area. (Settlers also criticize Waze as a "Post Zionist app" because of the same settings. *"An Israeli should drive safe and proud in the land of Israel!"*)[15]

Doesn't the designer, as both the analog and digital mapmaker, have the power to determine what is and what is not included in the map? A pop-up, a button, a frame, the language and icons, all of these are interfaces and are part of the "path" the designer wants to navigate us through. These interfaces are fundamental to our visual perception and cognitive processing. We make sense of them by making connections that form a narrative for possible actions. Without the interface layer, users' actions can't affect or be affected by the infrastructures. This process is different for each user depending on their situated knowledge, cultural background and socially conditioned skills and attitudes.[16]

Our reliance on seemingly neutrally designed interfaces makes our interactions with devices and software feel natural but masks the fact that interfaces can be manipulated by those in control of their data and design, who can fix or limit access. There is no transparency as to how the decisions behind the design, experience and function of these interfaces are made. These interfaces are the effects of larger social and historical circumstances, and thus tell the story of the larger forces that engender them.[17] We need to question what we know as a result of these interfaces, how we know it, and more importantly, what we cannot know.

NO PROFILES AT THIS LOCATION.
TRY SEARCHING A DIFFERENT AREA.

[Left, Left, Right, Left], I navigate the car in perfect sync with the swipes of Ines's[18] finger across her phone screen. We are driving along the *green line*,[19] and as we get closer, the gap between us and the results only deepens. *"Things could be so simple,"* she says. *"If I weren't in Israel, and the guys nearby that Tinder's[20] search mode is suggesting to me weren't in Palestine. Tinder doesn't recognize that there is a physical border between these men and me. All it recognizes is that we are physically close to each other and a good match."*[21]

She decided to use her second (Argentinian) passport to cross the border. I drop her at the bus station in the old city in Jerusalem. She asks her Tinder date on the phone: *"Where does the bus take me to? Do you know?"* Her date answers: *"The bus takes you to downtown Ramallah, it won't stop anywhere, not even on the border. It passes through without any hassle. On your way out they are gonna search you. They will ask you questions where you have been and stuff like that."*[22]

15   Haim Har-Zahav, Facebook, March 1, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/photo.
php?fbid=10153927362036505&set=a.412545786504&type=3&theater
16   Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (Harvard University Press, 2014).
17   Alexander Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2012).
18   Ines Moldavsky, (born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1990), is an Israeli filmmaker and the director of the film *The Men Behind the Wall* (Israel, 2018).
19   Although Israel does not recognize the 1967 boundary, hence "the Green Line" as its official border, this boundary was an administrative and de-facto boundary between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, after signing the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. The first phase of the Oslo Accords avoided the question of final borders, a topic both sides agreed to discuss during the implementation phase, which never took place. Israel's boundaries with the West Bank and Gaza are therefore still described as "soft borders", subject to constant change. See: Anat Ben-David, "La Palestine et ses frontières virtuelles 2.0: Du 'non-lieu' à l'espace généré par les utilisateurs", *Réseaux* 159, no.1 (2010).
20   Tinder is a location-based dating app that allows users to use a swiping motion to like or dislike other users. When using "passport," the app relocates your phone to the destination you choose, relying on Google maps to support this service. If Google doesn't return any information to those particular waypoints, it prevents the tool from working in those places.
21   Kirsten Rulf, "This Israeli Filmmaker Swiped for Palestinians on Dating Apps – and It May Land Her an Oscar Next Year," *Haaretz*, March 4, 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/life/.premium-this-film-could-be-israel-s-best-chance-for-an-oscar-in-2019-1.5869416
22   Ines Moldavsky, *The Men Behind The Wall*, (Jerusalem: Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, 2018).

Ines, using her second passport as a way to find a loophole, reminds me of Tinder's premium service, which offers a *"passport"* option, allowing you to meet users worldwide. *"With Passport, we've created an entirely new way to facilitate global connections on mobile."* It's like teleporting to a different location. "Search by city or drop a pin on the map and you can begin swiping, matching and chatting with Tinder users in a destination of your choice."[23]

I wonder if I can explore countries that my real passport doesn't allow me to, meet people I would never be able to meet otherwise. I go to my Profile----> Settings----> Add a new location----> Search locations----> Gaza----> Gaza strip. The map opens until it stops above Gaza, an icon of an airplane appears with the word UNKNOWN next to it. When I press on the icon allowing the app to teleport me to Gaza an error message appears: UNABLE TO CHANGE LOCATION. THERE WAS A PROBLEM CHANGING YOUR LOCATION. PLEASE TRY AGAIN LATER. The same thing happens when I try to change my location to other destinations. It seems that Tinder's virtual borders follow the armistice line set in an agreement between Israel and its neighbors in 1949. The Golan Heights, part of which was annexed by Israel in 1981, is also *outside* "Passport's" borders. I use the app Grindr[24] to choose my next destination. I put my finger on the map, south to Hebron, very close to the same armistice line. I select VIEW NEARBY PROFILES and get the message NO PROFILES AT THIS LOCATION, TRY SEARCHING A DIFFERENT AREA. Moving only one kilometer outside the armistice line into Israeli territory is a completely different story.

Thinking about why this service has shut down or changed certain features in some conflict areas, as an Israeli, it is hard for me not to think immediately about past incidents. In the early days of the internet, in 2001, 16-year-old Israeli Ofir Rachum was lured in an online chat to a meeting with a 24-year-old Palestinian woman named Mona Awana, where he was murdered by her accomplices. It was Israel's first internet murder.[25] If the reason for shutting down this service was really to do with security, then a Tinder user wouldn't be able to look for love behind the wall. But the only limitations that the users of the free version of Tinder can set apply to age, gender and distance, which they can set by themselves – so someone in Jerusalem can see profiles in the near West Bank.

Although I discovered I could use "Passport" to go to places I could only dream of, like Iran, I also discovered that there are "virtual borders" that can't be crossed. Even dating apps meant to get people together and create connections are blocked by geo-political borders structured by technology and governments. What this means is that entire communities cannot meet, even if they wanted to: Palestinians and Israelis, Palestinians that live in the West Bank and Palestinians that live in Israel, Israelis and Israelis or even tourists that travel or live in the West Bank. Technological borders might not be as visible as physical borders, but they are just as politically significant. Helga Tawil-Souri, a media researcher and documentary director, claims in "Technology's Borders:" "Technologies bring about new forms of spatialities and new forms of bordering mechanisms while often keeping intact *older* forms of borders." Her study goes on to argue that technology must be understood within a historical and geopolitical framework, whether in the context of political occupation or capitalist-driven economy.[26]

23   "Passport," Tinder, https://www.help.tinder.com/hc/en-us/articles/115004490423-Passport.
24   Grindr is a geosocial networking and online dating application for gay, bi and trans people.
25   Tania Hershman, "Israel's first internet murder," *Wired*, January 19, 2001, https://www.wired.com/2001/01/israels-first-internet-murder/
26   Tawil-Souri, "Technology's borders."

YOU HAVE REACHED YOUR DESTINATION

A

Fran: Taalliii!
Tali: Haha, Fraann, Heyy!
Fran: How are you?
Tali: Good, wait, I'm trying to...ok enter full screen, okkk, how are you?[27]

It's 11:36 in Amsterdam and 10:36 in Bir Zeit. Fran and I are talking via Skype. For a moment, I am at the same time in two different places. I need to pack. I check the weather in Ramallah in the Apple Weather App but NO RESULTS ARE FOUND. In Tel Aviv it's going to be 32 degrees Celsius. As we are planning our journey to Israel-Palestine, I try to find more information so I can make better decisions. In other words, I am trying to understand if and how I can go to Palestine. All the information I need—any route, any weather updates—should be at my fingertips, but it's not.

How do I collect information about a place that is not rendered? How do I travel to a place that has disputed borders, which are constantly shifting according to the seamless algorithms of the platforms that make them available (or not) in the virtual realm?

New technologies can extend power and knowledge, increase our abilities, create new ways of interacting, but when applied unequally they also concentrate power and knowledge, enable and disable our access to places, and to certain actions. Technology is not mere tool making and tool use; it formulates metaphors and simulations. By making a tool we represent a certain understanding of the world that shapes our perceptions of reality. We need to think again about our tools, to understand their underlying mechanisms and to be conscious of the choices we make in their design.

B

It is 32 degrees Celsius and 70% humidity in Tel Aviv, exactly like the Apple Weather App predicted. I missed this weather. I am drinking ice coffee, waiting for Noga. Three years ago, she became a political activist after her daughter spent time in military prison for refusing to serve mandatory military service in the IDF. As we meet she explains more about areas A, B, and C. She thinks it's better to take Palestinian public transportation, rather then a car *"because of the Israeli license plate,"* she explains.

Yet Ayal, an Israeli tour guide that takes tourists to Palestine (despite the illegality of it), thinks that going by a car is the best way and that I should pass only from Hizma checkpoint (where there are a lot of Jewish settlers in the area) and not from Calandia checkpoint.

However, Saleem, a Palestinian from east Jerusalem (different in-between status; has an Israeli ID but not full rights) tells me: *"Trust me, I had a Jewish girlfriend and I passed with her many times from Calandia, and use your Israeli ID because you don't have a stamp on your other passport."*

Elinor, an Israeli activist, agrees with Saleem and says: *"Don't take chances at the checkpoint, take your Israeli ID and not your South African passport."* When I ask her if she was afraid to be in Ramallah, she says: *"I was cautious, first of all, I didn't speak Hebrew, and I was just aware of my surroundings, I tried to look European..."*

On our way to Ramallah Siko gives me instructions: *"In Ramallah, try not to..."* I quickly add, *"Film?"*, He answers: *"You can but do it wisely say you are from the film industry. And you are Dutch. Speak English."* I ask him half-joking half-serious: *"Am I Dutch or Argentinian?"*. He looks at me and asks: *"Do you speak Spanish? No? So, Holland. Because maybe there will be someone there that speaks Spanish... No one will speak Dutch."*[28]

---

27   Francisca Khamis, Skype call with the author, August 2019.
28   All conversations were in Hebrew and have been translated by the author.

C

As you stand on the rooftop of Hosh Jalsa in the town of Bir Zeit, the sunset paints the hilltops a pink-orange, while the Muezzin calls to prayer. A rush of emotions runs through your body while you look around, overwhelmed by the beauty. How can something look so familiar and at the same time be so different? This journey was not easy for you—emotionally, digitally or physically. It required finding loopholes in the system, finding other ways of "navigating". Not telling your family where you really were. Not telling people there who you really were. The blue GPS dot centers us on the map, shows us we are really here in Palestine, but for the meantime, you need to know how to speak Dutch, and to remind yourself—you are your virtual persona—Tessa. A tourist from Amsterdam.

Thank you to all of you who did with me this journey