

... *ve yas tutanlar sokakta dolaşacaklar*

... and those who grieve will roam the streets *

Lâle Müldür, Kuzey Notları

Rana Kelleci
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* Translation by the author from its Turkish original

Nida, Curonian Spit

I took some time off today, wandering between the silent library shelves. I flipped through the pages of random books. I came across copies of manuscript maps inked on leather, where gods watched over terras incognitas and devils swarmed distant waters. I glanced over maps that charted oceans, the safest routes for ships and lands yet unknown. One thing that lingered with me from one of these books was about a description of a brain function called the cognitive mapping, our internal way of making sense of space, just as these ancient maps once helped people navigate the unknown.

It explained, from early childhood onwards, we make sense of ourselves in relation to the wider physical world around us. And cognitive mapping is the mental mechanism with which we do this. Namely, our brain collects, arranges, and retrieves knowledge about our spatial surroundings and continuously forms a map within our mind, helping us locate and define ourselves within a vast, unknowable world.

That’s why, I ponder, most of us get mad when the historic locations in our cities are demolished to make way for larger construction projects, or worse, when they are renovated and transformed into something else to cater to profitable ventures. That’s why, a few years ago, I kept finding myself extending my regular route home to pass from the street that my childhood house stood. Or that’s maybe why in the beginning of my twenties I made a decision to not date my journal entries but only mark the location at which I wrote it.

Istanbul

After five months, I am back in my city. I walked idly on the streets, I sat under the winter sun to watch passersby. The descriptions of a "terrifying and unknowable world" I came across in the library at Nida felt oddly out of place. For a brief moment, the world felt just the opposite, it was one of those moments you sink into yourself and enjoy the quiet comfort of being familiar with a place.

At the cafe, I overheard the waiters chatting about whether it would snow soon. I remembered how, two years ago, we were eagerly waiting for snow when we heard the news of the major earthquake that hit Southeastern Turkey, leveling down vast areas around the city of Hatay. I remember days of continuous scrolling on social media to get the news on rescues from the earthquake zone. The images that filled our screens for weeks and months showed landscapes rendered unrecognizable even to those who had once lived there.

I realized I hadn’t checked the news today. On my feed there were photos and videos taken by Palestinians while trying to guard against continuous genocidal attacks by Israel. I often recall journalist Bisan Owda’s videos she took around her home city, Gaza, walking on rubble, pointing to razed buildings while speaking about what they were used for before or what has happened there. I thought about how maps in our memories are not always updated and how remembering can activate our location services despite the jamming of connections.

Berlin

I saw snow in Berlin for the first time. We were sitting in a bar that resembled a living room. The guy whom I had just met was sipping cold beer as he talked to us about his recent trip to Nicosia. “The GPS is fucked up there” he said. I couldn’t focus because I was a bit tipsy but I couldn’t let this information slip by. I asked for further details. He went on to explain that when you look at Google Maps on the island, it shows your pin in Oman or Beirut. Then he repeated the information I later read on many English language Cypriot news media: that Israel is using signal jamming technology to confuse GPS signals in the region and its affecting Cyprus too, the regular navigation apps, drones and even civil aircraft navigation systems. It’s not only Israel as far as I learnt, it’s also the British bases located on the island and almost all national militaries around the world, of course under the name of protection.

Still Berlin

I looked up the city of Maikop from Google Maps. My mother’s side has many stories from after they left Maikop and arrived on Turkey’s northern coasts, fleeing the genocide of Circassians by the Russian state. But I’ve heard no stories from before, about Maikop, how it looked or what it was like to live there. I scrolled my cursor on Maikop’s satellite view. The small city is composed of neatly constructed grids, all streets repatedly intersecting each other. Then I switched to street view, first things I saw were Lenin and sleek granite surfaces.

Later in the day a brief phone call with my father revealed information about the technical workings of the GPS jamming technology. Apparently there are many ways to do it but the main one is through confusing or blocking the signals reaching the land from the satellites. Blocking the view from the top, the satellite view, the bird’s eye view, the god’s perspective, an all-seeing, omniscient point of view. The gaze that our brain replicates to construct a map within our mind and place a pin on it that represent us, to identify our position, our physical and symbolic place within the world in which we inhabit.