

If lions could talk: attempts at mapping over the borders

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Abstract

How would you draw a map of the capital city of the United States of America that represented the human geography of that city? Some of those who have been there say:

“In Washington D.C. the invisible borders of segregation are now so wide that for adolescents, left on the wrong side of the tracks ... downtown does not exist. There is no talking over the border. The life experiences are so sharply different that it is not clear what the residents of the two sides could talk to each other about were they to meet and stop to converse. It is becoming again as if one side were animals, lions, suddenly given the ability to speak and (*) ... if lions could talk, we would not understand them. Tourists’ maps of Washington exist with areas shaded to suggest you don’t go there.”

This talk concerns mapping lives to try to make them comparable across borders. Globally, and within particular cities, people’s lives can be so different today that it is unlikely that two people taken from different sides of the borders could easily understand each others’ concerns. Maps of mortality worldwide, of cultural divides along the English midlands, and of wealth divides within the heart of London are discussed in this talk, which asks how we can better portray the extent and existence of both perceived and actual socio-political boundaries in ways that people from different sides of the divides can understand. The talk concludes with a justification for attempting to produce new world maps of what we think most people speak everywhere (taken from the website www.worldmapper.org).

(*) as Ludwig Wittgenstein apparently remarked, expanded upon in: Bauman, Z. (2000 (2nd edition)). *Globalization: the human consequences*. Cambridge, Polity Press. (page 86).