

Akerman, James R.: *Decolonizing the Map. Cartography from Colony to Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2017. ISBN: 9780226422787; 392 S.

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This edited volume situates itself within more recent theoretical debates about decolonisation, advocating for a clarification on the temporal and spatial scope – in this case from the late 18th to the mid-20th century and countries that were subject to European imperialism. And it advocates for paying closer attention to how historically the politicisation of the concept happened alongside a process of nation-building. Following the timelines of national independence from colonial rule the chapters explore the nature of maps as complex documents of these chronologies. More specifically, they highlight the relevance of maps as sources in historiographies of political thought, nationalism and national identity which comprise unique information on how the nation was imagined by its protagonists as well as antagonists. The well written individual chapters thus further illuminate and well-known histories of the colonised past and the decolonisation process of countries in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America.

The first chapter, by Raymond B. Craib, introduces and complicates the concept and related terminology of decolonisation and the various roles cartography – as a technology, as a way to visualise and historicise identities, and, most notably, as a „dialogic, transcultural engagement“ (p. 30), not a diffused, Eurocentric creation. Through an extensive review of several decades of debates on decolonisation, it provides a common framework for the contributions in the book, and may also serve its own purpose as a starting point for spatial-visual-related research of decolonisation processes; notably it covers some of the regions which are missing in the chapter selection. Especially in regards to processes of independence and liberation, the nation often emerged as a persistence of the colonial form rather than an emancipation from it. The chapter, in its declining exercise of reviewing episodes of colonial, anti-colonial and post-

colonial mapping from Africa, North America, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania, brings attention to decolonisation as historically contingent. In highlighting concrete examples of a range of maps beyond the Western scientific ontology, such as the Marshall Islands stick chart or Guy Debord's dissemblage of Paris, the author agrees with those voices which argue for the value of decolonisation as a broader concept to analyse a change of power initiated through various forms of insurgency – and the relevance of mapping and cartography as tools that can be used for and against power and as a distinct visual element through which these moments can be understood better.

The seven individual chapters on colonial late 18th century Mexico, 19th century Colombia, 19th-21st century Guatemala, 19th/20th century Gold Coast/Ghana, post 1922 Egypt, post 1947 India and Pakistan and Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa each work as standalone compelling stories. They are detailing and zooming into the cartographic construction of national spaces which draw on the symbolic, but not the geographical distinction from colonially created territories. More strongly, however, they lend themselves to comparison between them, through those points in which they are connected and related to similar questions and findings.

One such point is that the rendering of the cartographic imagination into drawn and illustrated maps commences from top to down. Yet, the „ontology of map making and map culture“ develops in exchange between map makers and map users. Localist mappings in colonial late 18th century Mexico used the social and economic planning tools introduced by the Spanish empire to articulate and narrate their viewpoint. There are some striking parallels in how, several decades after the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, leading to the creation of both states as independent nations, artistic engagement with the seemingly static dictatorship of the artificially created border-lines seemed to help disintegrate the enduring materiality of the line.

If in the exchange between map makers and map users, the latter are discriminated, this limits their ability to engage and will perpetuate their marginal status in society, pol-

itics and planning. For example, interpreting and portraying available data under colonial administration had racial implications, as illustrated by the case of mid-20th century roadmapping in South Africa. In those maps, the classification of cities was commonly practiced in favour to whites, by basing it on quality of infrastructure and service, rather than on population count. This practice continued in post-Apartheid South Africa, with negative impact on the national integration process. The enduring legacy from colony to nation-state in map making can be observed elsewhere in Africa, and in this volume the example of maps produced in newly independent 1960s Ghana gives insight that this was largely because the post-colonial map makers continued to work with the same methods and categories. The local Africans trained as surveyors and draftsmen under British rule in Gold Coast/Ghana understood their work to be apolitical and themselves as part of an international scientific community, including a persisting believe and value set related to cartographic knowledge production.

Quite often, another reason for the legacy of colonial mapping practices was political manoeuvring, ensuring, in a first step the sovereignty of the nation and the international recognition of the outer boundaries. In the case of Colombia, circulating versions of the national map and negotiating the future state territory in European and trans-Atlantic Diplomatic circles during the 19th century premeditated independence. This first step was not intended to decolonise the minds of the new nation's citizens, but to build up the nation as an idea and to convey the dominant themes and images constituting the nation. In Colombia, this was closely linked to maintaining the colonial order and the position of the insurgent leaders as social and political elites. In a comparable manner, the Egyptian nationalism, which focused on the recent past and the anti-colonial and anti-imperial identity, unfolded from the 1930s on as a discourse on official maps produced at all scales, be it national, supranational, urban or regional. Yet, in other cases, such as in Guatemala, after establishing the idea of the nation, by invoking national unity and communicating the strong visual language of the „geobody“ p. or

outline map (also referred to as island-map or logo-map) in a second step internal divisions more accurate to the diverse communities were introduced to replace the administrative divisions of the colonial times.

This investigation of establishing the national map of Guatemala stretches over 200 years and, together with the chapter studying the lives and biographies of Ghanaian map-makers, demonstrates the necessity to study decolonisation practices as a process spanning a longer period, and the particular explanatory power maps have in these inquiries.

The special value of this edited volume lies in the effort to provide a range in regions, methodological approaches, and, most notably, different categories of maps, including commercial roadmaps and artworks, propagandistic drawings, educational maps and more traditional scientific maps. This range makes the volume a worthwhile point of reference for the academic disciplines interested in theoretical and practical research related to maps and cartography. Beyond that, it succeeds in confirming that any historical research aiming at understanding decolonisation and post-colonial nationalism in more complexity and depth, should include a study of cartographic sources and could take this volume as a starting point. An important research avenue only briefly touched upon in this volume would be an investigation of the implications of technological change and the drastic knowledge-transfer and change in map-literacy throughout the last centuries.

The few more unusual and unexpected examples, such as stamps, newspaper advertisements and topographic maquettes given throughout the book point to the next steps and impulses desirable for the well-established and thriving field of historical and critical geography studies: the inclusion of even more alternative and counter-cartographies which operate at the margin or outside of the conventional standard and idea of what comprises a map.

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