

“A paradoxical motion of the map”: Re-connecting cartographic and postcolonial humanities¹

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Recently, we have witnessed a huge expansion in the field of so-called ‘map studies’. The definition of the field, as given in the “Manifesto for Map Studies” (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins 2009, 220-243), allows for a renewed, multifaceted and increasingly transdisciplinary consideration of mapping and cartography, one that reaches well beyond the wave of critical and highly influential cartographic thinking that emerged during the late 1980s. In that period, the field of cartography entered a cultural turn through the works of key thinkers, such as John Brian Harley (Harley 1989). Critical cartography adopted the method of discourse analysis to deconstruct the political and ideological content of cartographic text. However, it has been recognised (Edney 2011) that one of the main problems with the critical cartographic theory of the 1980s and 1990s was its tendency to universalise ‘the Map’. Treating cartography as a unified, single practice mainly linked to power, institutions and social/political elites, this approach downplayed the myriad modes of actual diverse and specific mapping practices. Several factors, such as the digital shift in cartography, the pervasiveness of mobile locative devices, the growing convergence between cartography and other forms of media and the consequent new status of mapping practices and spatial imagination in a particularly rich contemporary cartographic culture (Cosgrove 2008) have led to a much more diverse consideration of disparate forms of maps, mapping practices and cartographic experiences.

The interest in cartography, mappings and cartographic metaphors is advancing consistently within several cultural domains and academic fields (Roberts 2012; Brunn and Dodge 2017; Winther 2020), thus contributing to the reshaping of what we consider as the objects of study of cartography as an academic discipline (Kent and Vujakovic 2018). Whereas in the past decades, particularly with the spatial turn, the humanities have been charmed by the figure of the map (Mitchell 2008), we are now seeing the liveliness of a varied realm of ‘cartographic humanities’ that is offering additional research angles from which to consider cartography in all its aspects. Within this trend, the Arts have been particularly lively (Reddeman 2018; Duxbury Garrett-Petts and Longley 2019; Zdebik 2019).

In the last decades, there has been a close relationship between postcolonial studies and cartography. Maps, literally and metaphorically, are dominant features of colonial as well as of postcolonial cultures (see the lemma “Cartography [maps and mapping]” in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998, 31-34). In a seminal 1989 paper, Graham Huggan significantly wrote:

The fascination of Canadian, Australian and other post-colonial writers with the figure of the map has resulted in a wide range of literary responses both to physical (geographical) maps, which are shown to have operated effectively, but often restrictively or coercively, in the implementation of colonial policy, and to conceptual (metaphorical) maps, which are perceived to operate as exemplars of, and therefore to provide a framework for critique of, colonial discourse. (Huggan 1989, 115)

Despite this statement, we should note that since the late 1980s a critical reading of cartographic reason and the cartographic gaze has fed a growing “cartophobic attitude,” which gradually led to a “disfiguration of the map as the evil side of geography” and, ultimately, to an enduring form of the “exhaustion” of cartography (Lo Presti 2017, 8; Lo Presti 2019a). However, in more recent times, a new trend has emerged that provides more diverse and post-critical approaches to cartography (Perkins 2018). Writing in 2004, Pickles effectively expressed the impatience that was slowly arising in map theory:

The still deeply rooted desire for totalizing monochromatic accounts that explain the map in terms of it being a socially produced symbolic object, a tool of power, a form derived from a particular epistemology of the gaze, or a masculinist representation, seem to me to miss the point of the post-structuralist turn: that is, that not only are maps multivocal, [...] but so also must be our accounts of them. (Pickles 2004, 19)

Postcolonial studies have actually been in the vanguard in pushing map conceptualisation beyond the restrictive interpretation of critical cartography, thus paving the way for the unfolding of a multiplicity of mapping practices and the reimagination of the carto-sphere in which we are immersed.

Returning to Huggan’s seminal paper, despite the fact that cartography is seen here as a technology that provides “an analogue for the acquisition, management and reinforcement of colonial power” (Huggan 1989, 115), we should emphasise that the author sees cartographic deconstruction not only as an exercise of cultural critique but also as a form of resistance to cultural domination. In fact, part of the paper is devoted to showing the “treatment of maps as metaphors in post-colonial literary texts, the role played by these maps in the geographical and conceptual de/reterritorialisation of post-colonial structures, and the relevance of this process to the wider issue of cultural decolonization” (Huggan 1989, 122). The map, thus, is involved in ‘reconstructive’ readings, recognised as a transformative agent and a means of imaginative revisioning.

The new spaces of postcolonial writings advocate a cartographic discourse “whose flexible cross-cultural patterns not only counteract the monolithic conventions of the West but

revision the map itself as the expression of a shifting ground between alternative metaphors rather than as the approximate representation of a 'literal truth'" (Huggan 1989, 125). While showing how postcolonial writings came to mobilise and creatively revise the colonial map, thus producing a "paradoxical motion of the map," Huggan puts an emphasis on the Deleuzo-Guattarian definition of the map as "a rhizomatic ('open') rather than as a falsely homogeneous ('closed') construct" (Huggan 1989, 125). In sum, he sees the fascination of postcolonial writers with the map trope as an instance of "creative revisionism" (Huggan 1989, 127):

So while the map continues to feature in one sense as a paradigm of colonial discourse, its deconstruction and/or revitalisation permits a 'disidentification' from the procedures of colonialism (and other hegemonic discourses) and a (re)engagement in the ongoing process of cultural decolonisation. The 'cartographic connection' can therefore be considered to provide the provisional link which joins the contestatory theories of post-structuralism and post-colonialism in the pursuit of social and cultural change. (Huggan 1989, 128)

Postcolonial literary studies have remained particularly concerned with cartographic debates (Howard 2009), and some analyses by literary scholars have addressed key questions of the cartographic debate. For example, Heggund situates James Joyce's reworking of the form of the map beyond the critical binary opposition between an imperial complicity and a revolutionary postcolonial mapping of resistance, stating that since "[map] power can be circulated and rerouted in unpredictable ways [...] maps are perhaps more fluent than many critics have allowed" (Heggund 2003, 188-189). Close readings, such as those devoted to Igiaba Scego's emotional maps in *La mia casa è dove sono* (My Home Is Where I Am), are other examples of more recent interventions (Benini 2014 and Parati 2017).

In its turn, the field of film and media studies has been particularly proactive in establishing a dialogue with cartographic theories (Avezzù 2017; Avezzù, Castro and Fidotta 2018; Lukinbeal et al. 2019). Famously, in her book *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, Giuliana Bruno explicitly went beyond the critical stance in which the map was a totalising concept produced by a distant eye and reacted to the persistence of a purely negative notion of mapping and the enduring efforts devoted to deconstructing and decolonising maps:

All too often, mapping tends to be dismissed as a commanding, hegemonic instrument. Yet to persist in this position is to risk producing a notion of mapping that is restricted, placed wholly in the service of domination. What remain obscured are the nuanced representational edges of cartography, the diversity of cartographic practices, and the varied potentials of different mapping processes. (Bruno 2002, 207)

Within map studies, the interrogation of colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial/decolonial issues has remained crucial in the research agenda. The 2020 Special Issue titled "Decolonizing the Map" of the leading Canadian journal *Cartographica* is a particularly salient example of a

renovated interrogation of indigenous mappings and decolonial cartographies, intended as both a decolonisation of data and a decolonial cartographic reading (Rose-Redwood et al. 2020). In addition, there is the emerging multidisciplinary body of literature on maps and the migration crises in the Mediterranean Sea (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019; Lo Presti 2019b; Adams 2019; Tazzioli 2016). Moreover, activist and creative practical counter-cartographies have grown exponentially (see the global collection of Kollektiv Orangotango 2018).

This Special Issue is edited by two scholars of different backgrounds who developed a dialogue by means of cartographic interdisciplinary connections. Tania Rossetto is a cultural geographer and map scholar who has worked on cartographic epistemologies (Rossetto 2015b), visual cultures of racialised/ethnicised Others in connection to cartographic imagination and activism (Rossetto 2015a; Del Biaggio, Rossetto and Boria 2019) and the nexus between cartography and literature (Rossetto and Peterle 2017). Farah Polato is a film scholar who has extensively investigated the relations between territories, identities and audio-visual narratives/representations from a postcolonial perspective on local (Costa, Lavarone and Polato 2018), national (Polato 2020, Polato and De Franceschi, 2019; Polato, 2017) and transnational scales (Polato 2016), and questioned the notion of identity and citizenship in the frame of ‘Italian cinema’ (Polato 2013, 2014). The basis for this collaboration was established at a co-organised one-day colloquium titled “Featuring Maps: Cartografie emergenti nel cinema contemporaneo,” held at the University of Padua in 2017, with the aim of exploring more-than-critical approaches to cartography and cinema.

Issue 8 of the journal *From the European South* similarly reflects a transdisciplinary move towards critical/post-critical map thinking. In fact, this Special Issue originated from a call for submissions aimed at grasping the motion of maps in the transdisciplinary arena of the cartographic humanities, with a particular interest in how this germinative field intersects with the postcolonial humanities. We solicited pieces theorising and forging the connections between cartographic and postcolonial humanities, offering cultural readings of colonial cartography and postcolonial mappings, exploring the role of cartographic practice and aesthetics within the contexts of multicultural societies, interpreting cartographic imagery in different media and presenting creative interventions mixing map-like imagery and postcolonial/migration/diversity issues. The call was aimed at endorsing a pluralistic style of thinking about – and also making! – maps. Indeed, our sense is that this Special Issue reflects in full this pluralistic style as well as the multiple possible entanglements of the cartographic and the postcolonial humanities.

Maps, mappings and cartographic imaginings opens with a consideration of how maps, mappings and cartographic imaginings differently intrude upon and are implicated in the experience and narratives of migrant journeys. In “On the migitude of maps,” Laura Lo Presti suggests that there is not a singular or dominant way through which maps of migration can

be critically analysed today. She develops this statement by introducing a conceptual triad around the ‘migritude’ of maps. Cartographic ‘transitude’ evokes the multisensorial experience of undetected border-crossing; cartographic ‘digitude’ refers to the very practice of using navigational digital devices as life-line tools; and cartographic ‘finitude’ relates to the commemorative traces of the current necropolitical regime of migration. Most importantly, the article states that the present cartographic media culture is not exclusively dominated by the aggressive capture or representation of the migrant crisis. Maps are also appropriated in unpredictable ways by the many subjects involved in the migration experience. Thus, the paper invites us to be attuned to the suggestive ways in which maps, once embodied, endowed with personal meanings and put into action to respond to human needs, may disrupt the mainstream cartographic system and open up different spaces of imagination and critical thinking.

In “(Deep) Mapping postmortem geographies in the context of migration,” José Alavez, Lilyane Rachédi and Sébastien Caquard propose the first step of a sensitive, experimental deep mapping of posthumous geographies. They show and discuss the tracing of the postmortem geographies of three migrants who lived and died in Quebec, through the stories told by the relatives of the deceased. When migrants die where they have settled, their families and friends might be mobilised to provide emotional or economic support, help in the administrative burden of repatriation and burial, organise ceremonies or reconnect family memories. A network of travelling bodies, objects, memorial practices and social connections is thus activated. Drawing from recent developments in the geographies of remembrance, grief and mourning, the authors focus on bodies’ transnational mobilities and the networks emerging after death, calling for – and practically adopting – alternative ways of merging maps and stories to study and tell the geographies of death in the context of migration.

In “Data colonialism: the census, the map, and the software,” Tommaso Grossi and Lucilla Lepratti problematise the study of the technologies of management, such as cartography and the census, in relation to both colonial and postcolonial contexts. By drawing from theories of data colonialism and digital politics, the authors trace the genealogy of data extraction in colonial contexts and discuss the relationship between such colonial technologies and the current global forms of data-based governance in postcolonial contexts. In particular, they consider the shift from the census to biometrics through the case study of current practices of digital identification by the Unique Identification Authority of India. Moreover, they expand the notion of data colonialism to the digital mapping of human mobility by the European Union, taking into consideration software of migration mapping, such as Eurosur and Jora. They argue that the management, recording and archiving of migration make data an instrument for the government of people on the move that shares the bio- and necropolitical powers of colonial cartography, but also that migration evades such predictive calculations.

In “Paris ‘bande à part’: sguardi cartografici e tessuti cinematografici nel cinema di banlieue (e dintorni),” Paola Cosma and Farah Polato focus on the recent developments of the so-called French *cinéma de banlieue* (banlieue films). The first section questions the irruption, in the 2000s, of filmic narratives characterised by female directors or with female protagonists, investigating the ways in which female characters re-map the spaces of a cartography centred on a male dominant subject. Starting from the event of the 2019 film season, *Les Misérables*, by Ladj Ly, and then drifting to the independent film, *La vie de Château* (2018), by Mody Barry and Cedric Ido, the second part investigates the notion of the *cinéma de banlieue* as a representation of ‘a world apart’ and the different cartographic models called upon to build the spaces of this representation. Despite the in-depth analyses of the works, the focus is on the space ‘in-between’ them, looking at the plural visual strategies implemented with respect to an asymmetrical field of forces. In this perspective, the annexed maps related to the films are less aimed at verifying the relationship between the filmic space and the ‘real’ one than to encourage the users to produce, themselves, the relationships between the images and itineraries.

In the paper titled “The cartographic impulse: post-representational cartography practices in contemporary visual art,” Diana Padrón Alonso refers to a recent paradigm that has emerged within the field of cartography. This conceptual shift explores the ontogenetic nature of cartography, moving from a representational to a processual understanding of mapping. From a post-representational perspective, maps are conceived of as contingent, relational and embodied entities that are performed by users in their meanings, as well as in their concrete material consistency. In other words, maps are practices, rather than representations. Padrón Alonso suggests several connections between this new attitude towards maps and the ways in which maps and mappings have been involved in artistic practices, showing how these practices have opened up a new form of dynamic, postcolonial and performative cartography. In valuing the connections between the geographical humanities and the visual arts, she highlights the results of a project carried out at the Art Globalization Interculturality laboratory of the University of Barcelona.

Edoardo Boria’s “Confini coloniali e performatività della carta geografica” reviews how critical cartography and the deconstruction of cartographic texts have been recently enriched by more practice-based and phenomenological approaches. In the last 25 years, map studies have emerged from the neopositivistic approaches to embrace a critical reading of the linguistic, semantic, technical, communicative and aesthetic features of maps. The author discusses the case study of the history of Ethiopian borders in Italian cartography during the Fascist period, showing how those borders were progressively erased on maps well before Italian settlement. Through archival research and by adopting a deconstructionist methodology, the author nonetheless problematises such an approach, showing how the powers of maps are less mechanical than they are assumed to be. Considering in a more complex way

the contexts of map production and use, Boria values the contingencies beyond the ideological assumptions on authority-led processes. Enlightening the force of cartographic imagination, the performativity of specific maps and the frictions they encounter once put in motion within particular historical social contexts, he complicates the reading of map production during the Fascist Regime.

With “The ‘lost colony’: Italian colonial irredentism (1864-1912),” Gabriele Montalbano reflects on the role of Tunisia in Italian colonial imagination from the Majba Revolt until the Italo-Turkish War. In particular, he refers to how geographical imagination influenced colonial aims in the development of the imperialist idea of Tunisia as geographically (and so ‘naturally’) tied to Italy. Indeed, Tunisia occupied the particular status of an ‘unredeemed’ colony, linking the nationalist irredentist narration of the north-eastern Italian border with the colonialist one on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The paper does not employ actual cartographic visualisations but significantly shows how maps hold a force in making worlds not only as material visual objects but also as imaginary narrative and ideological devices.

In addition to research articles, this Special Issue hosts five other pieces. Simona Martini responded to the call of this Special Issue through a poem. “Uncharter’d memories don’t fade” was inspired by a coffee stain on a tablecloth resembling a map of alternative paths. A victim of the “caporalato” (a sort of agricultural neo-slavery) in Italy imagines how it would have been if he’d had a mapped, charted, and therefore reliable and safe route to follow along his journey through the sea. The creative intervention “Mapping memories, charting empathy: framing a collaborative research-creation project,” authored by Martina Melilli and Piera Rossetto, is written in the form of a dialogue between an audio-visual artist and a social anthropologist of Judaism. The conversation unfolds the research-creation practices through which the authors experimented in telling the difficult stories of Jewish migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Cartographic visuals are variously and deeply implicated within these experiments as the activators of memories, narrative tools and agents endowed with an affective and material force.

Maps, Mappings and Cartographic Imaginings also hosts two interviews. The first is with the artist Jean-David Nkot, the author of the cover image of this Special Issue. His aesthetic research questions the issue of violence in the contemporary age by giving a central stage to space and its relations with representational regimes, as well as with human sufferings. In particular, the interview addresses the role of maps and stamps in his poetics. The second interview is with Dagmawi Yimer, filmmaker and co-founder of *Archivio delle Memorie Migranti*. His works combine the attention to subjective experiences with the need for their reworking through audio-visual language. The participatory approach, which is typical of his projects, emerges once again in his last work, developed under the frame of *WAIT (Waiting for an uncertain future: the temporalities of irregular migration)*, a research project of the University of Bergen, with which the interview starts.

Finally, this Issue closes with a review of the comic book *Quartieri: viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane*, edited by Adriano Cancellieri (an anthropologist) and Giada Peterle (a geographer-cartoonist). As Juliet Fall writes in concluding her review of a book that showcases five stories and five peripheral neighbourhoods in five Italian cities, *Quartieri* “is a beautiful invitation to stop writing dry academic prose, and instead grab some pencils, a friend or two, a notebook, and go and listen to the voices around us and invent new ways of making them heard.” As the selected illustrations show, cartography intrudes into the stories as a generative storytelling device that helps in making subaltern voices be heard.

The call for this Special Issue was launched before the Covid-19 outbreak; however, the submissions, reviews and processing of the journal issue were carried out during a period in which the lives of tenured, and, above all, non-tenured, academic scholars were heavily impacted by the pandemic situation and its effects on our working condition. Thus, we would like to extend a special thanks to all those who contributed to the Issue, and, in particular, to the authors, reviewers and artists, for their willingness to take part in this endeavour, the enthusiasm they expressed and, most of all, the tenacity they showed in carrying on with their commitments.

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Note

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