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**Place-making
Mapping Territories, Landscapes, Lives**

Nessa Cronin

From, *'The Map is Not the Territory':
Parallel Paths – Palestinians, Native Americans, Irish*
(Boulder, Colorado: Baksun Books, 2015), Edited by Jennifer Heath, pp. 89-96.

Exhibition Catalogue for International Touring Exhibition,
The Map is Not the Territory (2015)
<https://themapisnottheterritory-artshow.weebly.com/>

This new map, unrolled, smoothed,
Seems innocent as the one we have discarded,
Impersonal as the clocks in rows
Along the upper border, showing time-zones.

The colours are pale and clear, the contours
Crisp, decisive, keeping order.
The new names, lettered firmly, lie quite still
Within the boundaries that the wars spill over.

It is the times.

I have always been one for paths myself.
The mole's view. Paths and small roads and the next bend.
Arched trees tunnelling to a coin of light.
No overview, no sense of what lies where.

Pinning up maps now, pinning my attention,
I cannot hold whole countries in my mind,
Nor recognise their borders.

These days I want to trace
The shape of every townland in this valley;
Name families; count trees, walls cattle, gable-ends,
Smoke-soft and tender in the near blue distance.

--*We Change the Map*, Kerry Hardie,
in *The White Page/An Bhileog Bhán: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets*

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The framed space of any map encloses a space that speaks to a spatial understanding of the human world. It frames possibilities that have been opened up and displayed for all to view

on the map itself, and possibilities that have been closed off with the silencing of other ways of viewing the same territory. Maps then operate on two levels: as artefacts of a given material culture and as cultural and ideological expressions of the map-producing and map-consuming society. The map is therefore a visual iteration not just of places plotted and marked out across lines of longitude and latitude, but a spatial register of intersecting social, cultural and political relations that have marked the history of places and cultural heritages -- it is a spatial register that can in many ways also determine the shape of their future.

The History of the European Map

In the European tradition of historical cartography, the development of what is known as map literacy is often associated with the rise of the nation-state, the processes of positivist science and modernity, and the expansion of the colonial world, during the so-called Age of Exploration. In such a context, knowledge codified by the map is an "official" knowledge marked, regulated and legitimized by a given authority (for example, the nation-state), whereas "unofficial" knowledge (such as 'picture books', illustrated manuscripts, oral literatures, local place-making practices) does not gain a visual or material presence in the final map imprint. Such "knowledges" offer a competing narrative of history and geography, and demonstrate other ways of knowing place often by foregrounding local, regional and indigenous ways of being in the world and knowledge formations that are particular to place. In *Mapping the New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geograficas*, Barbara E. Mundy highlights the point that "The colonizers were not the only ones to map their surrounding worlds, making it visible through maps; the colonized also did this," the issue being that "they shared few of the same formal and conceptual constructs."¹ The maps she examines from colonial Mexico show us "the indigenous world – how its inhabitants, still reeling, no doubt, from the blows of conquest, reshaped their once insular maps to keep pace with the rapid changes in their understanding of the surrounding world."²

Such "alternative" histories, viewpoints and perspectives may challenge and contest the dominant rhetoric and are often written in another code or language that needs translation and interpretation. Such mappings often operate at a spatial level "below" that of the nation, and often are focused on particular places or regions that have significance and meaning for their audiences and communities. Issues then of history and memory, tradition and heritage, become intertwined with knowledge-making and map-making, and contestation over the

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meaning and significance of the places marked on any map are necessarily a part of any cartographic practice. Staking a claim to the land often means staking a claim to a certain mode of language and, more importantly perhaps, to history as well.

Culture and Value: De-coding the Colonial Map

As a visual statement of space, the map can be defined as a symbolic image of geographical “reality” as briefly described by the International Cartographic Association.³ In Western Europe, traditional geographic thought has foregrounded the positivist belief that land and territory can be properly mapped, and that progress toward increased accuracy is a feature of advanced cartographic technologies and cognitive development. In this context, the map is an accurate representation of the territory, demonstrating a point-for-point likeness between the geographic “reality” of the land and its material re-presentation on the map. A map in this sense is a scientific abstraction of reality that is visually represented in material (manuscript/print/digital) form.

Recent work in historical cartography and cultural geography has, however, opened up critical discussions as to how politics, culture and history have shaped not only what is included in maps, but how such cultural processes shape the very way maps are created in the first instance. Scholars such as J.B. Harley, Matthew H. Edney and John Pickles, use critical social theory to closely analyse the processes involved in map-making, and argue that as an enterprise embedded within a Eurocentric model of time and space, that it is very much embedded within the context of colonial expansion and the rise of the European nation-state as a discrete geopolitical entity.⁴ In “The Idea of the Map,” cultural geographer Anne Godlewska argues that maps represent a simplified form of reality, which has been given a particular ordering and hierarchical coding in the western tradition.⁵ Maps are not neutral zones of communicating spatial realities, but are by definition intrinsically subjective (connected to the cultural code of the cartographer and the map-producing society), and construct a particular geopolitical knowledge that is then “refracted” back into the space of the map. It is the guise of scientific accuracy that lends maps their cloak of objective reality. For Godlewska, maps are geographic visual representations of specific cultural values and are as much about particular cultural values as they are about ‘universal’ geographical ‘facts’.

For such scholars, colonial maps are the “tools of empire” supported by monarchs and ministers and have a use that is both symbolic and functional in terms of the appropriation,

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exploitation and consolidation of territory, resources and populations. The content of what is contained within the map, in addition to the acknowledgement of their origins and subsequent uses, therefore opens up the question as to the objectivity of maps, and their claim to being a neutral representation of a geographical “reality,” Maps simultaneously reflect the world and create it.

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In the Americas, in the early colonial period, the visual and verbal rhetoric of the colonial map reflected the context of land possession and ownership and this cartographic rhetoric was as much an expression of an Old World view of space as it was about the American continent itself. It can also be argued that the map preceded the territory, in that colonial maps were produced that enabled the expansion of colonial power to enter further into, and take control of, indigenous space. An idea of what that space, and what those places looked like, was already in the mind’s eye. The processes of military incursion and land dispossession were rendered silent or invisible, and what was foregrounded (in historical and geographical narratives alike) was the possession of this new territory, this *terra nullius* as empty, virgin territory, land passively waiting for inscription, plantation and colonization. This is described by the environmental historian William Cronon in his work, *Changes in the Land*, which investigates the dynamics of colonial ecologies and biopower in early modern New England.⁶ Maps were then not only tools of conquest (useful for explicit military purposes, as well as for more low-key paths of individual way-finding), but also served to legitimize conquest of the land, its people and natural resources. The map, then, was the territory.

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Place – Landscape – Territory

As displayed throughout the artworks in the exhibition *The Map is not the Territory*, maps and imagined cartographies show how maps are in many ways less about the representation of a given reality, and more about the *contested terrain* of competing historical and political narratives. The artworks displayed here are an expression of the cultural practices and processes through which places are created, made and rendered as being meaningful at a particular time and for particular viewers, audiences and communities. The works will take on a different resonance and character in turn according to the site’ of the exhibition, where it travels and, according to the various constituencies that engage with, read and interpret the artworks involved.

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The legacies of invasion, occupation and colonization have been part of the stories of the Americas, Ireland and Palestine, and such legacies are evidenced in various ways throughout the exhibition. One challenge is with the idea of "original" or "originary" inhabitants, as such a formulation seeks to rightly recognise the role of indigenous populations, but can also (within a different register of meaning) privilege a narrative of "origins" and "authenticity," that can easily slip into an ethnocentric narrative of race, purity and ethnic exclusivity. Yet, a balance must be struck between a place maintaining a distinct cultural identity and the need to recognise the **interlocking histories** of places and the peoples that have inhabited them for millennia. This often entails balancing an acknowledgement of a difficult and often deeply traumatic past, with the ever-pressing and urgent needs of the present. Between the pull of history and politics, is also the need to recognize the primary human need for place- and home-making, and this is particularly felt in communities that have been displaced, and unhomed, for whom a sense of place and belonging is a vitally important part of their cultural, political and spiritual identity. As ethnographer Keith Basso noted in the introduction to *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, a sense of place only becomes particularly important to us when we lose it and become deprived of our attachment to that place.⁷

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With this in mind, there are three distinct ways of thinking about mapping (whether "real" or "imaginary") that have a resonance for this exhibition. The first is the importance of place and of a **sense of place**; how place comes to hold specific meanings for communities that are attached to, or associated with, a certain space. This entails thinking about place in terms of physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually "being in" or "attached to" place," which foregrounds the primacy of the lived experience. Place, for cultural geographer Tim Cresswell, is both conceptual and real; it is both "a way of understanding the "world" and "a meaningful location."⁸

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The second concept is that of "landscape," which has been traditionally defined as "A portion of the Earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance."⁹ W.G. Hoskins, one of the key thinkers on English landscapes in the last century, described the landscape as being "the richest historical record we possess," for those who knew how to read it "correctly."¹⁰ The concept of landscape has of course a particular aesthetic register and genealogy in that it emerged from a mercantile capitalist sensibility in the Low Countries during the Renaissance,

and was used to refer to the vision/view/perspective of a particular portion of land. It was adapted for use in terms of landscape painting and architecture, and as the cultural historian Simon Schama has noted, the term also implies the role of the human hand on the land. Reading and interpreting landscapes involves in many ways an acknowledgement that often we have a preconceived image of that landscape at play in our minds, before the encounter with "the real." As Schama explains, "Before it can ever be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."¹¹ Landscapes are therefore culturally constructed, and are not merely [natural] phenomena to be viewed at a distance. Finally, places and landscapes differ as to the concept of territory, in that "territory" is often primarily associated with a political context. William Connolly notes the etymological traces of the word of the word "territory," where the Latin noun *terra* refers to "land," and the verb *terrere* is "to frighten," "to terrorize." "Territory" holds the dual resonance of sustenance and terror in being largely defined by Connolly as "land occupied by violence."¹²

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A Colonial Geopolitics: Roots or Routes?

The conquest and occupation of land by violent means, through the creation of colonial territories, was largely justified by the concept of *terra nullius* (a concept shaped by this dual resonance of sustenance and terror), while the expropriation of land also served to detach or dispossess indigenous populations from their complex social and cultural landscapes and histories. The question of what this loss entailed (and still entails in many instances) when the vital connection between people and place was/is forcibly severed, is what is at stake in many formerly colonized countries today. And it has a particular resonance for populations that have endured forced migration and relocation to different homes, reservations, territories, nations, for a myriad of reasons.

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The question of retrieving, authenticating and legitimising a previously silenced history is an important project of cultural memory and recovery, and it can be an enabling narrative through which progressive and alternative futures can be imagined. However, there is a dangerous slippage between cultural retrieval and cultural ossification, when certain narratives become privileged over others, and so a hierarchical process of memory and active forgetting can also take place within such operations of cultural retrieval and recuperation. This is particularly evident in the Irish case with the re-creation of foundation myths of a

nation-state undergoing decolonization, as noted by the literary scholar Declan Kiberd in his postcolonial reading of modern Irish nationalism and the cultural revival at the turn of the last century.¹³

Marxist geographer Doreen Massey has also noted this problem of the privileging of roots over routes in her discussion of what she terms “a progressive sense of place.” For Massey, a focus on the idea of “roots” for a given locale or culture necessarily entails an exclusionary politics of “insider/outsider” dialectic, which can become very problematic in that it does not allow for the movement of people and ideas, and for the processes of cultural exchange and traditions that happen in societies in different ways at different times. Massey allows that “there is the need to face up to – rather than simply deny – people’s need for attachment of some sort, whether through place or anywhere else.” The question is “how to maintain to that geographical notion of difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness if people want that, without it being reactionary.”¹⁴ If people have multiple identities, it is argued, then so can places. The problem for Massey is when enabling discourses of resistance and affirmation become reactionary and exclusive narratives of place, people and belonging. The balance to be struck then is one that simultaneously recognises the need for many people to have an attachment to place and for that attachment to be legitimised, while also allowing for an open, progressive sense of place that also welcomes mobility, diversity and difference as strands that add to the web of place-making.

Deep Mappings and Socially Engaged Art Practices

Cresswell’s formulation of place as “a way of understanding the world” is important as it puts the emphasis on the processes of understanding and knowledge and our subjective relationship to the world, as well as our place in it. In recent years, different ways of mapping different and often contested relationships to places have been rendered visible particularly in the realm of the visual arts. The close connection between the art and science of cartography and socially engaged art practices has been a fruitful ground for many artists, academics and writers in Ireland and Britain in particular. The engagement with the idea of “deep maps” and “deep mapping,” stemming from the writings of William Least Heat-Moon (and more recently through the performance/archaeology works of Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson within a Welsh context), has also had a particular resonance and influence in terms of exploring different ways and forms of mapping the lived experience of distinct places and

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landscapes. Such deep mappings operate with an almost transversal movement into place that is then registered in various interconnected forms and platforms, be they visual, oral, textual, digital or embodied. Artist and scholar Iain Biggs argues that “deep mapping aims, broadly speaking, to engage with, narrate and evoke 'place' in temporal depth by bringing together a multiplicity of voices, information, impressions and perspectives as a basis for a new connectivity.”¹⁵ The new connectivities that such “deep maps” exhibit open new ways of viewing old spaces, of legitimizing counter-cartographies, of foregrounding mapping as a collaborative process, and, most of all perhaps, to question the authority of any map of any time, and of any place.

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What can be easily forgotten in an increasingly homogenized and seemingly globalized world is that *places are different*, and that we live with such differences in the spaces we create and move through every day. And so maps of those places must be different too, and in this way the map is most certainly not the territory but can display an approximate view of that space and of that experience. As Clifford Geertz remarks, “Like Love or Imagination, Place makes a poor abstraction. Separated from its materialization, it has little meaning.”¹⁶ Specificities of vocabulary and color, sound and touch, are necessary to understand the contour, range and register of a place and the people who create it. What can be perceived as a difficulty in documenting what these places mean to people, and how that experience can be accurately and sensitively represented, is testament to the plurality of lives, experiences, histories and personal memories associated with such places. The representations of such cartographic imaginings on display in the exhibition *The Map is Not the Territory* speak to all of these issues -- the importance of place and place-making, the distinctions between landscape and territory, the ethics and politics of recovering a colonial past -- and serve as a collective reminder that our way of imagining our relationship to place also entails a consideration how places have shaped the people, the communities and the nations that we are today.

¹ Barbara E. Mundy, *Mapping the New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1996), xi-xii.

² Mundy, *Mapping the New Spain*, xix.

³ As noted on the ICA website, cartography “is a symbolized representation of geographical reality, representing selected features or characteristics, resulting from the creative effort of its author’s execution of choices, and is designed for use when spatial relationships are of primary relevance.” It is also “the discipline dealing with the art, science and technology of making and using maps.” As cited from, <http://icaci.org/mission/> - accessed 10 January 2014.

⁴ See J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, edited by Paul Laxton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001); Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁵ Anne Godlewska, "The Idea of the Map," in S. Hanson, ed., *10 Geographic Ideas That Changed the World* (New Jersey: Rutgers Press, 1997), 29.

⁶ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983).

⁷ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), xiii.

⁸ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2004), 7, 11.

⁹ J. B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

¹⁰ W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 14.

¹¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 6-7.

¹² William Connolly, "Tocqueville, Territory and Violence," in M. Shapiro and H. Alkers, eds., *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 144.

¹³ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

¹⁴ Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," as cited in Cresswell, 66-67.

¹⁵ Iain Biggs, "The spaces of 'Deep Mapping': A partial account," *Journal of Arts and Communities*, Vol. 2, No. 1. (July 2011), p. 5.

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, "Afterword," in Keith Basso and Stephen Feld, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research, 1996), p. 259.