EDITORIAL

Maps > Representation

How a place, region or country is portrayed matters, particularly its geography. We look to maps to provide secure, immutable definitions we can trust, yet we see each one through the lens of our own experience. Far from being passive representations, maps are agents for change and continually shape our attitudes and values. They are powerful tools for encapsulating, constructing, and communicating identity (Kent and Vujakovic, 2017: 425).

Earlier this year, Tavish Scott, Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for the Shetland Islands, won his case to amend the proposed Islands Bill to include a 'Shetland mapping requirement' for official maps of Scotland to ensure that 'the Shetland Islands must be displayed in a manner that accurately and proportionately represents their geographical location in relation to the rest of Scotland' (The Scottish Parliament, 2018: 9). According to Scott, 'Shetlanders are rightly irked when they see Shetland placed in a box in the Moray Firth [which reiterates] the perception that the islands are an afterthought' (quoted in MacNab, 2018).

As an established cartographic device designed to lend geographical meaning (e.g. to highlight and associate) in static media, it is perhaps surprising that the use of an inset box should cause such concerns today, when technologies of multi-scale digital globes arguably free mapmakers from having to rely on such artifice to convey location. Political and cartographic motives may have combined to free the Shetlands from their inset box, but it is questionable whether this will fully remove the Shetlanders' sense of under-representation. For example, emphasizing the islands' isolation by extending the map, or misplacing them altogether by casually removing their inset box, may achieve the opposite instead (Figure 1).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE – i.e. BOTTOM HALF OF FIRST PAGE]

Figure 1 Three maps which summarize common results from an online image search for 'Map of the UK' using Google. The resulting maps tend to either place the Shetland Islands in an inset box (A); extend the northern extent of the map to include them (B); or show the archipelago lying off the west coast of Scotland without an inset box, which, presumably, once existed on the map (C).

More broadly, it seems difficult to escape the view that maps offer fixed representations, and that it is the state's cartographic perspective of its territory that truly matters – even if distinguishing this has become more difficult with greater accessibility to mapping technology. The three maps in Figure 1, however, do more than simply locate (or mis-locate) the Shetland Islands within the geography of the United Kingdom. They are more than representations. The political emergence of the Shetlands is demonstrated through the process of their mapping. Maps create their own spaces that do not end with the map-maker but are re-created by each of us as we encounter them. If maps have no secure ontological status and mapping is a process of constant reterritorialization (Kitchin and Dodge, 2007: 331), we make of these spaces what we will, regardless of whether the state is the agency behind the map. As identity, territory and the state are also in flux and continue to emerge, so do their mappings that we encounter, and all are in the process of becoming. Challenging the visual tradition of the inset box is part of that process. As Lorimer (2005: 84) points out, so much ordinary action gives no advance notice of what it will become. The Shetlanders had to wait until 2018 to emerge from their inset box.

If we go along with the view that the author of the map is dead (Del Casino and Hanna, 2016: 51) and the process of mapping extends beyond the map, where does this leave the cherished perspective of the state? How can the state guarantee the veracity of its maps when so many

cartographic alternatives are available – and not all of them committed to communicating truth? I was contacted by the BBC recently to comment on the renaming of Swaziland to eSwatini, following the announcement by King Mswati III on 19 April: 'African countries, on getting independence, reverted to their ancient names before they were colonized. […] So, from now on the country will be officially known as the Kingdom of eSwatini' (quoted in Baraniuk, 2018). Beyond discussing the king's stated intentions to accelerate the country's post-colonial trajectory and to eliminate the apparent confusion between Swaziland and Switzerland, the reporter wanted to get a general sense of the cost of updating maps. (A curious question to ask, perhaps, in a digital age of multiple cartographies when map revision cycles are less monumental.) The real issue, I explained, was the cost of making eSwatini a reality for people living within this landlocked country in southern Africa and beyond. Whether the change will lead to greater economic prosperity or serve to enhance its citizens' own sense of national identity remains to be seen, but at the time of writing, the website of the country's Surveyor General (Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy, 2018) still refers to Swaziland, while OpenStreetMap had been updated. Maps are only superior to one another through how we use them, and that use includes how they continually re-construct our world.

References

Baraniuk, C. (2018) "The cost of changing a country's name" Available at: http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180621-the-cost-of-changing-a-countrys-name (Accessed: 7th June 2018).

Del Casino, V.J. and Hanna, S.P. (2006) "Beyond the 'binaries': a methodological intervention for interrogating maps as representational practices" *ACME* 4 (1) pp.34–56.

Kent, A.J. and Vujakovic, P. (2017) "Maps and Identity" In Kent, A.J. and Vujakovic, P. (Eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Mapping and Cartography* Abingdon: Routledge, pp.413–426.

Kitchin, R. and Dodge, M. (2007) "Rethinking maps" *Progress in Human Geography* 31 (3) pp.331–344.

Lorimer, H. (2005) "Cultural geography: the busyness of being 'more-than-representational'" *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (1) pp.83–94.

MacNab, S. (2018) "Put isles 'in the right place' on Scotland's maps, demands Shetland MSP" *The Scotsman* Available at: https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/put-isles-in-the-right-place-on-scotland-s-maps-demands-shetland-msp-1-4708192 (Accessed: 3rd August 2018).

Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy (2018) "Surveyor General" Available at: http://www.gov.sz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=286&Itemid=364 (Accessed: 7th June 2018).

The Scottish Parliament (2018) *Islands (Scotland) Act* (2018 asp 12) London: The Stationery Office.

Notes on the contributor

[Please use photo as per editorial 55.1]

Alexander J. Kent is Reader in Cartography and Geographic Information Science at Canterbury Christ Church University in the UK, where he lectures on map design, GIS, remote sensing and on European and political geography. His research explores the relationship between maps and society, particularly the intercultural aspects of topographic map design and the aesthetics of cartography.

Alex is also the Immediate Past President of the BCS and the Chair of the ICA Commission on Topographic Mapping.

Notes on the cover

The cover image is the *Nova Totius Terrarum Orbis Geographica ac Hydrographica Tabula* (New Geographic and Hydrographic Map of the Whole World), dated 1635, by Willem Blaeu (1571–1638). It is discussed in this Issue by Marina Viličić and Miljenko Lapaine as a source for their investigation to establish the prime meridians used on Stjepan Glavač's (1627–1680) map of Croatia from 1673.