Rethinking national atlas: finding tools to create a decolonial atlas

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Abstract: The phenomenon of a national atlas inherits colonialism's features, such as silence about indigenous knowledge and using Western tools and methods. Counter-mapping and cybercartography tools may help to construct a decolonial atlas.

The idea of a national atlas is to represent a "nation-state" and to claim sovereignty. The problem is inside the nature of the "nation-state" that claims the nation as a monolith, although it is a synthetic ideological construct and cannot be uniform (Edney, 2009). For minorities, the external colonialism of empires is not different from the internal colonialism of nation-states (Craib, 2017). The national atlas representing a nation-state as a monolith conceals the colonial implications. For instance, Gavrilova (2022) exposed the colonial rhetorics and features of the only and the latest *National Atlas of Russia*[1]. In particular, some maps show the Russian ethnic group as a core of a nation, silence historical facts such as ethnic deportations in the first part of the 20th century and represent the environment as a resource container. The national atlas draws the Russian nation as a monolith, although it is a federative state, which includes the national states – national republics and ethnic minorities without states. It does not represent the history and traditional lifestyles of the indigenous people.

Black (1997) and Edney (2009) declare that cartographic methods and tools belong to Western practices and have not changed since the colonial epoch. The attempts reveal the indigenous cartographic practice connected to the critical approach in cartography, such as a counter-mapping movement. A notable example is *'This Is Not an Atlas,'* – a collection of maps and descriptions of counter-mapping practices (orangotango+, 2018). Its name opposes the idea of an atlas and protests against the conventional cartographic practice. Another stream that contributes to indigenous cartography is cybercartography. Taylor (2020) described the outcomes of their cybercartography atlas framework for mapping with indigenous people, which has spread among numerous communities over the 15 years. The framework uses a storytelling approach, which allows indigenous people to store multimedia documents. The traditional visual methods are not enough to preserve the indigenous oral or non-verbal culture. Moreover, it allows communities to control the data, so the Western "experts" do not dominate during the mapping process.

The "national atlas," which demonstrates an idea of a monolith nation and uses only Western cartographic practices, does not sound well from the indigenous people's perspective. There are tools and methods of involving indigenous people in cartography, but so far, mainly on the local level. Imagine a task to make an atlas of a country, which will not reproject the imperial and colonial ideas and contains different perspectives on the country. Cartographers must learn how to use the new tools in conjunction with multiple perspectives of the communities involved. They could be multimedia, storytelling or different kinds of art with a spatial reference. The concept of such a decolonial atlas will be shaped and defined in future research.

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