

Post-colonial national atlases – celebrating independence or sustaining colonial structures?

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The bailing of colonial Empires in the aftermath of WW II with 50 colonies being released into independence by 1970 one of the most important political movements of the 20th century. In the process, not only were the oppressions of indigenous peoples by the colonial rulers eliminated, but self-responsible states were founded, often thanks to the generous assistance of the former suppressors.

The inescapable reorganization as national states reflecting former territorial boundaries, be it administrative allocations within the former colonial empire or demarcation lines between these empires represented a double-edged sword, strengthening the identity of specific ethnical groups by splitting others. Under these circumstances nation building became a rather difficult task that can be followed tracing the numerous post-colonial civil wars in former colonies.

The research shows that 80 percent of the postcolonial states produced a national atlases - in different forms, publishing houses and with different dissemination interests and target groups.

The paper will investigate this publication of initial post-colonial national atlases that often aimed to build national identity and construct national coherence in a systematic multilevel analysis by comparing visualization modes, elements of map languages, narrative structures and the production processes and milieus.

These elements will be compared to pre-independence atlases produced as territorial statements by the former colonial powers and to national atlases that have been produced as new editions 25 or more year after gaining sovereignty to trace the elements of nation building. In addition, the paper will unveil colonial and post-colonial narratives in the aforementioned atlases and relate them to different notions of the term nation as inclusive or exclusive construction.

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