

EDITORS' NOTES

Countermaps and Geostories as Folklore



“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter” or so says the African proverb. How stories get told also depends on the storytellers and their access to power and differently calibrated privileges to make utterances and command hearing. Some stories have to be codified for them to gain legitimacy in circles that favor similar mindsets and entitlements. Stories about difficult senses of place, labor precarities, violent geographies and those that occupy in-between and mid-flight liminalities often find solidarities in collective, emergent and relational spaces of storying even if the initial wayfinding is done in solace.

If stories are maps of meaning and of multi-layered engagements with socio-spatial realities, how do we capture the multiple, plural and diverse? How does the muted or unheard gain some listening room? As the Storying Geography Collective says of vignettes and tiny geo-stories told and shared by the collective, they are: “not to assert authoritative knowledge ... but simply to draw attention to some specific, and shared, concerns that we envisage will resonate with those of others” (Storying Geography Collective et al, 2023, 2). In storying the mapping and map-making stories of marginalized forest inhabitants of Kalimantan, Nancy Peluso advocates for the production of counter-maps that upend the legitimacy of ‘official’ narratives of the state apparatus. Peluso opines that maps can be stories that understand the various and entangled political, social, economic and cultural dynamics. Or as she argues: “local groups can claim power through mapping by using not only what is on a map, but what is not on it” (Peluso, 1995, 386)

In the polemic writings of Filipino folklorist Isabelo Delos Reyes (1864-1938), folklore is always grounded on competing stories and contestations rather than an indexical catalogue of collected stories. Stories from 'common' folk thus possibly defy categorical or definitive logic. Using a Gramscian theoretical base, Diosa Labiste asserts that “[f]olklore, as a “conception of the world” is systematized and inflected with reflections upon a reality” (2016, 31). One that maps and illuminates the interplay of the dominant, the insurgent and emergent stories.

The stories contained in this volume are tiny stories - the ones that Emilie Cameron calls “the small, the personal, the mundane, and the local” (2012, 575). These tiny stories are lived-in experiences by the ten writers contained in this collection - localized stories that locate trends, specificities and particularities which contribute to experiential and theoretical debates and intervene in knowledge co-production. These stories map rhythms, flows and textures that disavow an “end-result” mindset or insist that spilling past marked off space is key to sharing territory. These counter mapped vignettes offer various place biographies, intimate experiences of relational entanglements, and retold geographical knowledges.

What we have here are stories about fluvial flows that interrelate local population, archival data, and art maps (Amorsolo), imagining defamiliarized quotidian spaces (Eligue & Macagba) and several iterations of mobilities that particularize cycling of pandemic-era safe spaces (Pawilen), walking that recuperates contemporary flânerie (Bolata), and commuting via public conveyance (Concillado). There are also narratives of becoming that story-tell the creation of invisible spaces in staking territorial ownership (Landicho) and enabling maps as storying voices for emancipatory cartographies (Sy). Then there are introspective stories reflecting on creative practices that focus on liminal space beyond museum walls (Legaspi-Ramirez), and a reconfiguration of performance

spaces through the collective making of sonic-environmental interference to evoke shared pain and hope (Baes).

If the lion in the aforementioned proverb gets to tell the story instead of the hunter, one wonders what will happen if the story of the hunter still gains greater traction. It should not stop stories like the ones in this volume to transgress boundaries of the ‘official’ and the grand narratives to continually intervene in telling the lifeworlds of humans, more-than-humans and their various entanglements as well as the unstable and liminal spaces that are their own maps of meanings seeking fair hearing.

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