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Accepted Paper:

On the question of 'territory' in approaches to participatory mapping

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Paper short abstract:

This paper considers how approaches to participatory mapping that employ digital tools may draw upon ethnography and experiment with design in order to become more responsive to the way territories expand, shrink, and move in relation to kinship dynamics and ecological shifts.

Paper long abstract:

What does land use and tenure mapping mean for people whose access to land has historically been determined not by hereditary titles but by shifting relationships, not only with the land itself but with the people one shares it with? Can the participatory design of mobile mapping tools contribute to more appropriate ways of recording these relationships? Leading up to Namibia's independence from South Africa, participatory mapping served as a crucial means through which historically marginalised populations were able to claim ancestral rights to land and resources that had fallen under the purview and control of the apartheid regime. These efforts had the effect of devolving power and securing forms of political and economic self-determination, but also of fixing, in time and in space, what were once more flexible forms of territory. Approaches to participatory mapping have developed significantly, from specialists working with local people to produce paper maps and lay GPS waypoints, to local people engaging with very high-resolution aerial and satellite imagery using accessible mobile mapping tools. These technologies make land use and tenure mapping possible not only for professionals but for lay people with low levels of literacy, but they are not, in themselves, responsive to what ethnography reveals about the way territories expand, shrink, and move in relation to kinship dynamics and ecological shifts. As an anthropologist and a GIScience researcher, we have been experimenting with how to approach this issue. This paper reports our current thinking on how to go about this.

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Session 1 Tuesday 15 September, 2020, 13:00-14:30

