

For the Scottish poet Norman MacCaig (1910-1996) Celtic art, with its reliance on repetitive figurative motifs, captures in an abstract fashion the essence of the Hebridean landscape with its herons, gulls, tangled weeds, its sands written on by winds. MacCaig writes: "Only men's minds could have unmapped into abstraction such a territory." The map, as opposed to the "unmap", is figurative or rather a configuration underpinned by conventions and projections. Maps can involve domination and violence. Interestingly the literary Arabic word for map – *kharīta* – can also mean "scar" in Tunisian Arabic. While living in Tunis between 1995 and 2010 and again in 2017-2019 I became aware that French colonial cartography was part of a wider project of scrutiny and classification. Closer to Iona, Brian Friel's 1980 play *Translations* traces the impact of the 1830 British ordnance survey of Ireland upon the Irish village of Baile Beag. The translating process which replaces Irish place-names with English ones surgically cuts off the local population from their culture. Playful cartographic constructions are one way in which I "subvert" control and established ways of seeing. I also seek to layer maps - such as my Iona map - with detail and text creating an effect of a palimpsest. As a city-dweller originally from Glasgow I tend to have a mental map in which there are "wild" or "remote" places on the margins. There are indeed empty places in Scotland, hill and moor and island, where one can see nothing intrusive and have challenging, solipsistic experiences if one is in quest of them. Boldly go!

In a 2008 review article of Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* in the *London Review of Books* Kathleen Jamie described Macfarlane as "delightful literary company, polite, earnest, erudite and wide-ranging ...In place after place, the length and breadth of the country, there is 'wildness'. There are no meetings, no encounters with intrusive folk. It is all truly empty, secret and luscious." Returning to Scotland and Iona after a period of absence in Tunis and Ohio I am struck by how Scottish land is now studied as a contested, negotiated space which has often been described by mediators or manipulators whose role in turn merits critical scrutiny. I think here of Andy Wightman's *The Poor had no Lawyers : Who owns Scotland (And how they got it)* published in 2015 and available in the Iona Community Bookshop. As a non-Gaelic speaker I read with interest Madeleine Bunting's *Love of Country a Hebridean Journey* (2014) which evokes the "hidden maps" crafted with dense topographical precision by past generations of Gaelic speakers (2016). In my maps and unmaps I seek to be attentive to smaller, more complex wildernesses in which one can lose and find oneself.

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