MAPPING THE BIBLICAL WORLD:
PERCEPTIONS OF SPACE IN ANCIENT SOUTHWESTERN ASIA

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Introduction

In this essay, I examine how biblical maps are created and how they affect our lives. The journey takes us across a number of disciplines and into spaces ranging from antiquity to cyberspace. We must remember that it is difficult to write about space because narrative goes against the spatial grain. Space is not easily translated into words and texts.

This fact is a major point of this essay. Since the nineteenth century, spatiality has been ignored in favour history and historical methods, approaches that are conducive to narrative expression. As a result, events and persons have been explained by tracing their history, assigning them a place along a path leading from A to B. By exposing cause and effect, causality has been made a substitute for under-standing and criticism.

But history does not fully explain human lives, and those who propose that it does may be hiding something. They may be sup-pressing or overlooking individuals and groups who do not fit into their history. They may be marginalizing large segments of humanity, denying them their legitimate space, and repressing information that would help the world be a more just and egalitarian environment. A thesis for this essay can be expressed in three statements:

- Maps, as representations of space, are governed by rules that allow map makers—cartographers—to control or influence the way maps are read.
- Accurate or informed readings of maps require knowledge of social theory that sometimes challenges assumptions of scientific accuracy.
- Recent studies on critical spatiality in fields such as geography, cartography, philosophy, and religion are expanding our under-standing of social space and spatial practice.

Although we can easily state that maps are biassed, just as texts are, and to read them intelligently we should know how to weigh the biases, doing so is difficult. In the biblical field, a single reason explains many of the misunderstandings. Although there are no maps in the Bible, there are thousands of biblical maps, or more exactly, thousands of maps that purport to be based on the Bible. This means that every biblical map comes from outside the Bible and is based on someone's reading of a text rather than a drawing. And yet, these maps' im-portance for both ancient history and modern life can hardly be over-exaggerated. Wars are fought, lives lost, property confiscated, families disrupted, and futures destroyed by the way that ancient space in the part of world I am calling Southwestern Asia is perceived and mapped.[1] The history of the region is imbued with assumptions about territoriality and spatiality, and in turn that history informs the way modern states are legitimated. But, in fact, the reasoning is cyclical because spatiality is presumed to be whatever the reader reads into the biblical text.

Map Making

Before turning to the Bible, a few comments about maps in general and several types of space that occupy our lives are in order.

When maps are made, a cartographer, perceives a "reality" and selects data for mapping. Note that "reality" is in quotation marks. What is perceived can be problematic. It could be physical geography, demography, or many other phenomena, and two persons extracting data about the same "reality" might select differing sets of information or apply differing emphases. As a result, the "reality" would be sub-stantially different. We will return to this point.

A cartographer produces a map based on the data that has been extracted. And eventually users interpret the map.

Although this seems like a fairly straightforward process, it is not. As already suggested, no map is neutral. Every map is the product of someone who brings a personal perspective. As other texts do, maps disguise social contexts and impose their own hegemonies of power and privilege. Therefore, map making is governed by its own rules.

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[1] Southwestern Asia (SWA) is a designation that I prefer instead of commonly used but highly Eurocentric regional terminology such as "Middle East," "Near East," and a host of other labels that represent attempts at neutrality but in fact perpetuate a problem rather than solving it.

The first is the "rule of ethnocentricity," the tendency of societies to put themselves at the centre of maps. The second is the "rule of social order," the tendency of cartographers to use verbal texts on maps as commentary in order to convey information and impressions about social and political factors beyond the physical and human landscape.[2] And we may add a third rule of a different order. Maps reflect the social worlds of both the peoples being mapped and the cartographer, sometimes more the latter than the former.

Examples of these rules can be found on almost all maps from antiquity down to the present. Maps centre on a people, group, or nation in a particular space. Order is defined by borders, boundaries, images, and texts that guide the user's perceptions. And maps reflect the times and settings of the map maker.

Regional maps issued by local tourist boards exemplify the processes. The province or state is surrounded by others that are portrayed in a different colour and with fewer details (rule of ethno-centricity). Cities and town are ranked according to size, and points of interest are symbolized by a system of signs and scales whose codes are described in a key at the edge of the map (rule of social order). While the map does serve as a mimetic device for the social world being mapped, the way in which that world is represented depends on the time and place of the map maker. In regional maps, the cities, roads, and railways remain relatively constant over time, but there are additions and deletions that reflect the date of the map as well as other temporal, social, political, and economic indicators such as the name of the governor or premier, the printer, the dispensing agency, and the advertisements that are often placed in the margins. These must be revised as circumstances change.

Kinds of Space

There is a second and, for our discussion, a more serious issue with mapping. It is the reality issue mentioned above. What reality is being mapped? What kind of space appears on a map? To illustrate the problem, we may recall Mrs Rosa Parks, a recent recipient of the US Presidential Medal of Honour.

Mrs Parks' simple gesture of refusing to relinquish her seat to a white male in the front of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, ignited the American Civil Rights Movement. Hers was an *action* against long-term discriminatory *practices* that occluded her and all other black people from particular *space*s. Her decision was a catalyst for racial change in the USA.

Several different kind of spaces were involved in her defiant act. The front of the bus was, of course, physically the front of a bus. It was a material space (Firstspace below). And the bus had been designed in such a way that the front was probably preferred over the rear because of comfort, ability to see, ease of access, etc. It was a designed space (Secondspace).

But these were not the spaces that gave the front seats their meaning and significance. Culture, law, US history, slavery, racial discrimination, and the bus's being in a southern city meant that Mrs Parks and all African-Americans were by practice and policy mar-ginalized, excluded, and denied access to that space. The "separate but equal" doctrine of racial separation in public transportation that was enshrined by the US Supreme Court in *Plessy* v *Ferguson*[3] had been overturned in favour of desegregation a year before Mrs Parks' action in *Brown* v *Board of Education,*[4] but with little practical effect. Mrs Parks' rights and dignity, indeed her entire life, remained spatially circumscribed and controlled in such a way that we cannot understand the Civil Rights Movement, US culture, or the trauma in that society during that period if we ignore space and its meaning on that bus. The space Mrs Parks claimed for herself was lived space, a space that we will eventually identify as Thirdspace.

To be sure, history was an issue, and so was law and society. But it was space and the contesting of space with a spatial practice that triggered change in the course of life in America's southlands. Segregated *praxis* was overwhelmed by integrating action. It was spatial actions not just words that began the transformations known as the Civil Rights Movement. The same must be said for the strikes, marches, and sit-ins that followed in those painful years.

This is clear evidence of several very important points for under-standing space that carry over to biblical mapping.

- Spatiality is constructed through social practice (Mrs Parks' actions changed the meaning of space on and beyond that bus).
- There is more than one kind of space at work in peoples' lives (her lived space had been denied; and she asserted it by physically moving to a prohibited material and conceptual space).
- Physical, material space is often not the most important (it wasn't the front of the bus per se that was at

[2] J B Harley, "The Map and the Development of the History of Cartography," in *The History of Cartography*, Vol 1, eds J B Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 6.

[3] *Plessy* v *Ferguson* 163 U S 537 [1896].

[4] *Brown* v *Board of Education* 347 U S 483 [1954].

stake).

I use the story as a step in understanding so-called postmodern critical spatiality and to insist that history and society are not understood if space is omitted.

Parks' action raises an important question. If a historian, journalist, or anyone with power and access to the public who was born, raised, and living in that time and place had been asked at the time of this event to portray their society, perhaps even to draw the designated areas on a bus, would such a scene have entered the record? The answer is surely negative. The persons compiling the record would undoubtedly have been the same as those deciding where Mrs Parks could not sit. They would appeal to history, custom, and society as reasons for maintaining the status quo and assigning seats in spite of the legal change intended in *Brown* v *Board of Education*. The inter-play of the material and social designer's space over against lived space would continue unchallenged and unscathed. We would be told the reasons why whites sit in the front and blacks in the back, and probably why "separate but equal" norms were not segregation. Power and space would remain intact.

Critical Spatiality

The three dimensions of space—call them three kinds of space— like those in Mrs Parks' case, have been studied in detail in recent years. Several of the most influential studies have been written by Edward W Soja, a geographer and urban design specialist at UCLA.[5] Soja defined what he calls a trialectic of spatiality, each spatiality having its own epistemology. They are Firstspace (perceived space), Secondspace (conceived space), and Thirdspace (lived space).

> Firstspace epistemologies tend to privilege objectivity and materiality, and to aim toward a formal science of space. The human occupance of the surface of the earth, the relations between society and nature, the architectonics and resultant geographies of the human "built environment," provide the almost naively given sources for the accumulations of (First)spatial knowledge. Spatiality thus takes on the qualities of a substantial text to be carefully read, digested, and understood in all its details. As an empirical text, Firstspace is con-ventionally read at two levels, one which concentrates on the accurate description of surface appearances (an indigenous mode of spatial analysis), and the other which searches for spatial explanation in primarily exogenous social, psychological, and biophysical processes.[6]

This is the space that has dominated geography. It is positivist, materialist, and becomes increasingly detailed with technologies such as Global Positioning Systems and LANDSAT imaging. It is the space of the physical world, but can also be that of social entities that geographers study. Alone, however, it is fundamentally incomplete and partial.[7] The boundary separating it from Secondspace is blurred.

> Despite the overlapping, Secondspace epistemologies are immediately distinguishable by their explanatory concentration on conceived rather than perceived space and their implicit assumption that spatial knowledge is primarily produced through discursively devised rep-resentations of space, through the spatial workings of the mind. In its purest form, Secondspace is entirely ideational, made up of projections into the empirical world from conceived or imagined geographies. This does not mean that there is no material reality, no Firstspace, but rather that the knowledge of this material reality is comprehended essentially through thought, as res cognito, literally "thought things." In em-powering the mind, explanation becomes more reflexive, subjective, introspective, philosophical, and individualized.[8]

Secondspace is the domain of artists and architects who present the world of their imaginations. It encompasses the cognitive maps which, in some cases, become substitutes for "real" maps that plot Firstspace. If Secondspace images were taken seriously, Firstspace would collapse into Secondspace as the latter becomes the substitute for the former.

Although he does not refer to Mrs Parks, Soja emphasizes the importance of distinguishing the first two spatialities from Thirdspace, and he stresses lived space as a neglected space.

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[5]For examples of Soja's works see: *Postmodern Geography: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Theory* (New York: Verso,1989); "Postmodern Geographies and the Critique of Historicism ," in *Postmodern Contentions: Epochs, Politics, Space* eds John Paul Jones III, Wolfgang Natter, and Theodore R Schatzki, (New York: Guilford, 1993); *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

[6]Soja, *Thirdspace*, 75.

[7]Ibid., 78.

[8]Ibid.,78-9.

> Thirdspaces are also vitally filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection. They are the "dominated spaces," the spaces of the peripheries, the margins and the marginalized, the "Third Worlds" that can be found on all scales, in the corporeality of the body and mind, in sexuality and subjectivity, in individual and collective identities from the most local to the most global. They are the chosen spaces for struggle, liberation, and emancipation.[9]

They are spaces/places filled with meaning, emotion, and struggle.

> Places are constructed and experienced as material ecological artifacts and intricate networks of social relations. They are the focus of the imaginary, of beliefs, longings, and desires (most particularly with respect to the psychological pull and push of the idea of "home"). They are an intense focus of discursive activity, filled with symbolic and re-presentational meanings, and they are a distinctive product of ins-titutionalized social and political-economic power.[10]

Thirdspaces, i.e. the lived spaces and spaces of representation, command Soja's attention. They (or it), he insists, have been lost or suppressed and need to be restored. The dialectic joining physical space to mental conceptions of it is inadequate and foreclosing. A trialectic that brings lived space into tension with the other two is required, and Soja believes that postmodernism is doing so. This is the space that I have attributed to Rosa Parks. It is the spatiality that must be examined critically the same way scholarship has examined history and society in order to understand, as best we can, what happened in the past and is happening in our world today.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Soja draws heavily on the experiences of minorities, the marginalized, and women when making his case for what he calls critical spatiality. He insists that Thirdspace is socially constructed through social practice. That is, space is not an empty container, as Kant may have thought. Rather, things people do create spatiality.

Outer Space and Cyberspace

From the beginning, I have been insisting with Soja and others, that space is socially constructed and the way space is experienced affects the way space is perceived. Many studies make this case, arguing that space is a subtext or presupposition that we bring to our view of the world. Soja himself made this point more than a decade ago:

> The generative source for a materialist interpretation of spatiality is the recognition that spatiality is socially produced and, like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups, an 'embodiment' and medium of social life itself. . . As socially produced space, spatiality, can be distinguished from the physical space of material nature and the mental space of cognition and representation, each of which is used and incorporated into the social construction of spatiality but cannot be conceptualized as its equivalent.[11]

If these statements are true, we must ask what is our experience of space today? We may suggest two powerful experiences that aid in answering that question.

Most of us are familiar with the image of the so-called "Spaceship Planet Earth." This is the photo of earth taken from the surface of the moon showing the planet in colorful splendour against the dark background of the universe. It is today's *Mappa Mundi*—according to the theme of this series and volume—the modern "map of the world."

We must try to comprehend what this photo has meant for our lives and how quickly it has affected our consciousness. The earth is 3.9 billion years old in geologic time, and *homo sapiens* 400,000 years old, but no human being had seen a full image of our home planet until December 1968 when William Anders, Frank Borman, and James Lovell orbited the moon in Apollo 8. Their trip and this photo transformed our perceptions of space, ourselves, and our world. Studies insist, in fact, that everyone's perception of space, not just that of the astronauts, has been transformed by NASA's lunar program and the images of earth it and other space programs generate.[12]

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[9]Soja, *Thirdspace*, 68.

[10]David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 316.

[11]Soja*, Postmodern Geography*, 120.

[12]See Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the Tenth Dimension* (New York: Oxford University, 1994).

Today, Southwestern Asia is captured in photos and LANDSAT imagery every few days if not every few hours by NASA, the French SPOT program, and other intelligence gathering agencies throughout the world. There is hardly a rock or a riverlet, a house or a hut that is not recorded and re-recorded, studied and reviewed in the intelligence bureaus of centralized governments around the globe. We may contrast this with the claims of biblical maps that position and define peoples and territories and with scholars, politicians, and militia who then struggle over a few kilometers or hectares.

While these images presumably offer increasingly "accurate" records of the region, they are not without their problems. For one thing, they record only Firstspace or in some cases Secondspace. I will return to this difficulty later, but here, we must note the absence of boundaries and peoples on the seemingly seamless landscape of planet earth contrasts sharply with images that we conjure up for the region that was home to the Bible. Divisions and boundaries come from somewhere else. As is often forgotten, they and peoples' experiences of them are not etched on the face of the earth.

However, important as images from outer space are, for most of us, first-hand "global" experience does not comes from space travel. Not many of us will be astronauts. Similarly, the experience does not come from world travel that only allows us to visit one region of the world at a time.

For most the analogous "moon-experience" is the internet and world-wide web that lets us travel and communicate instantaneously with every region of the globe, simultaneously if we wish, without regard for political boundaries. The technology of cyberspace, like the space program, is changing our perception of space. It creates globalized spatialities and transforms our lived space. Software exists that can "map" electronic traffic and visualize patterns of use by country, company, or comrade.[13] Seeing such maps demonstrates that categories like territoriality and nationhood have been either diminished or transformed or both.

Before leaving this discussion, I must point to another problem. I am arguing that human perceptions of space have changed dramatically in the last quarter of our century because of the emergence of computer-based technologies that support both the space program and the world-wide web. But in spite of the "universalizing" and "globalizing" aspects of life made possible by these technologies, they have not equalized access to resources. In fact, they may be increasing the disparities. Maps of internet traffic illustrate the disparities.[14] Like its predecessors, internet technology and its transformed spatiality do not innately avoid or overcome the hegemony and relationship among power, knowledge, and space that excludes some and includes others.

This review of modern technology reaffirms a few things about mapping spatiality. First, spatiality changes in conjunction with changes in human experience. Second, shifts in technology cause changes in human experiences and spatiality. And third, the way we map reality depends on the perspectives and technologies available.

Mapping the Bible

Finally, we may turn to a brief review of the way that Southwestern Asia, including the biblical lands, have been mapped. The illustrations must be highly selective, but they do show the biases that are passed down under the label of reality.

Cartographers' spatial perspective is evident from the beginning of map making. One of the earliest maps, the ninth-century BCE map of Babylon now in the British Museum[15] exhibits two rules that we mentioned earlier: the "rule of ethnocentricity," the tendency of socie-ties to put themselves at the centre of maps, and by the "rule of social order," the tendency of cartographers to use verbal text on maps as commentary.[16] In the case of the Babylon map, Babylon is at the centre, and texts explain the portions.

Fifteen hundred years later, many of the same characteristics were employed on the famous Madeba Map found in a church in the small town of the same name south of Amman, Jordan.[17] The religious per-spectives of the cartographer are obvious in the prominence of the Dead Sea with the City of Jerusalem on the west (lower) side.

Among the early attempts to develop projections of a spherical earth are the *rota terrarum* or *orbis terrae* that depict three continents.[18] The earliest extant example of what came to be known as T-O (*terra-oceanus*)

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[13]See, for example, http://www.cybergeography.org/atlas/geographic.html

[14]See: http://www.mids.org/mmq/204/.htmldir/af.i.gr.c.html.

[15]See: www.british-museum.ac.uk/highlights/highlights.html [forthcoming].

[16]J B Harley, "The Map and the Development of the History of Cartography," *The History of Cartography*, Vol 1: 6.

[17]See: http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/fai/FAImadmn.html

[18]See: http://geography.about.com/education/geography/library/weekly/aa
082597.htm?rnk=r1&terms=t-o.

mapping may be Isidore of Seville's seventh-century diagram. The dual processes of ethnocentricity and social ordering continued as T-O maps proliferated. In these Christian attempts to organize and theologize space, Jerusalem stands at the centre.

It is interesting how controlling the T-O image has become, especially in association with the stories of Noah's family, including both the Table of Nations in Genesis 49, and the re-use of Genesis in the second-century BCE Book of Jubilees. In fact, a twentieth-century scholar used the template anachronistically to depict the Jubilees text.[19] The author suggests, in fact, that a drawing such as this might have been lost from the original text. Such attempts to interpret T-O maps literally, by the positioning of the families of Noah's three sons so that each is allotted a distinct portion, not only imposes later historical criticism on ancient spatiality, it also confuses the several types of space that we are trying to disentangle. The best way to describe such efforts is as mistaken.

Ethnocentricity and social ordering reached their zenith in the cos-mographical-theographical territoriality of *mappae mundi* such as the famous World Map of Richard of Haldingham in Hereford cathedral.[20] There the rules of ethnocentricity and social ordering overwhelm the viewer, demonstrating convincingly the almighty power and presence of the Christian deity. All the known earth is within divine grasp and control.

Ptolemy of Alexandria (second century CE) is credited with shifting humans' gaze from the heavens more directly toward the earth and attempting to understand and plot physical geographical space in an organized mathematical way. He was the first to attempt to impose a grid-like organization on the globe. But his ideas were lost for more than a millennium until they were brought to light in fifteenth-century Florence. From then onward, accompanied by advances in exploration, mapping became increasingly scientific and presumably accurate, leading this specialty in the direction of scientific accuracy, along with the rest of cartography.

It is this quest to make maps scientifically accurate that causes problems today. While a worthy goal in itself, the desire presumes an objectivity that current studies question. It is for this reason that many spatial specialists today insist that social theory, that is, understanding the social perspectives of the societies producing a map, must be en-tertained in any interpretation.

With this in mind we must return to a matter postponed earlier, i.e. the assumption that newer technologies such a satellite photography, remote sensing, global positioning systems, and the like, can assure greater geographic **and** cartographic accuracy. We may recall the standard maps in most Bibles that show the routes of the patriarchs, Moses, the Conquest, and Israel's boundaries at various points in history. Leaving aside questions about the historicity of characters like Abraham and Moses, the popular assumption is that the maps ac-curately represent real places, personalities, and events from the biblical eras. They imply that the biblical authors saw the world and space in this way.

These presuppositions have modern consequences not only for religion but also for politics and nationhood. For example, they stand behind present day claims for the modern State of Israel and the tensions that now confront the peace process in that region.

But are these assumptions valid? Do we know that the biblical authors were making precise territorial claims and intending to plot specific boundaries and routes?

Words of Caution

Although cursory and biassed, our summary raises a number of cautionary flags. In the first place, it points out the prominence of religious perspective throughout western cartography. The tendency to blend spatiality with religious belief, especially biblical, is evident, as is the fact that higher degrees of scientific accuracy in the modern world cannot protect mapping against confusions caused by religious beliefs, especially when these rest upon views of the ancient past. To believe religiously that something occurred in the past does not guarantee the accuracy of a map.

Beyond that, our review shows that maps, space, and power go hand in glove. Like texts, maps portray what the cartographer believes or wants. It is difficult to escape one's own biases and the desire to use the tools at hand to achieve one's own ends. Biblical cartographers share this human failing.

Third, we have insisted repeatedly that increased technology and the "accuracy" it affords does not assure any greater equality or object-ivity. Again, issues of power and spatiality come into play, but so does the fact that Firstspace, the kind that can be measured by scientific instruments, is only one kind of space, and in many instances not the most important. How does one map Thirdspace? Of if we see Thirdspace mapped, how do we avoid reading it as Firstspace? It is hard to know.

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[19]Philip S Alexander, "Notes on the *Imago Mundi* in the Book of Jubilees," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982); and "Early Jewish Geography," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary,* vol. 2, ed David Noel Freedman, (Garden City:Double-day,1992), 982.

[20]See: http://www.britannia.com/history/herefords/mm-exhib.html.

Muslim Mapping

The fact that all borders on maps are not boundary lines can be easily demonstrated. Modern states in Southwestern Asia such as Saudi Arabia often do not define all their boundaries. The reason is not only that the terrain is relatively impassible and the region sparsely populated, rather it has to do with these factors in combination with a third. The social systems of the region are segmentary systems. This is where social theory comes into play.

In such a segmented social system, it is not where people are that counts, but who they are, who their kin are, who members of their group are, and who their enemies are.[21] The ability of one unit or branch of a kin group to defend and provide for itself against all others is what counts. This has led some to say that "territoriality" in such societies depends on kinship relationships rather than land. Or again, that in such societies, people move through people not through space.[22] Spatiality and people are organically linked. Therefore, space in a segmented society means something different from space in a centralized society. And biblical societies were mostly segmented societies.

The monograph, *Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography*, by the medieval Islamicist Ralph W Brauer, exhibits an appreciation for such social theory.[23] Brauer documents a number of maps that do not contain clear boundary markers or lines separating territories. In his view of Muslim geography, "border zones" existed where boundary lines did not. These were areas where the sovereignty of neighbouring powers competed and overlapped at the outer reaches of the sovereigns' domains.

His illustrations show conical lines that overlap to illustrate that power diminishes in proportion to the distance from the power centre. On the margins, neighbouring powers compete and/or share "control". The maps represent the political reality on the ground.

> It was demonstrated that in fact medieval Arabo-Islamic geographers, . . . if they admitted the existences of political boundaries at all, did not conceive of the margins of adjoining individual states as sharp borderlines . . . . Geographers described all such borders in terms implying boundary zones of significant depth surrounding a core area of any given political entity within which its capital was located. Transition zones associated with external frontiers were shown to be occupied by a mixed border population differing in its composition from that of the core areas of these states.[24]

A central polity's power diminished in proportion to a region's dis-tance from the centre, and the maps reflect this. Brauer insists, as well, that the geographical concept of transition zone was widely shared by the people of the time and was not restricted to the cartographers. Geographers between 820 and 1320 CE, nevertheless, did not seem to have a concept of area even though Arabo-Islamic mathematicians of the day were already using area as an abstract concept. From this he poses a hypothesis:

> With these data we concluded that, in accordance with Ibn Khaldun's dictum, medieval Muslim states were indeed conceived of as being surrounded on all sides by boundary zones and hence lacked the sharply defined territory that would require border lines. Clearly, one could conclude that such states cannot have been conceived of as territorial states by the people of the time.[25]

Although he does not develop his insight, Brauer strongly implies a linkage between boundary lines and state or nationhood. In other words, as many others have argued, boundary lines are constitutive parts of nations, states, and empires, but are lacking in less centralized political structures. Boundaries are associated with a particular kind of knowledge, power, and spatiality so that, in non-state environments, spatiality bears a different meaning.

I may cite a modern example from personal experience. In the early 1980s, after the Camp David accords but before the Sinai had been transferred to Egyptian control, I visited the penninsula. I went with Johnnie's Desert Tours operating out of Eilat. Johnnie was an Israeli who loved the Sinai and greatly admired its Bedouin, at least most of them.

Overnight was spent in a Bedouin encampment, a simple barbed wire and cane fence surrounding a hectare

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[21]Robert D Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19.

[22]Bruce J Malina, "Apocalyptic and Territoriality," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, eds F Manns and E Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing, 1993), 370-372.

[23]Ralph W Brauer, *Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society,1995).

[24]Ibid, 65

[25]Ibid, 67.

of the desert floor forty kilometers from Jebel Musa. The highlight of the evening was when the Bedouin "owner" arrived on his camel with a sack of flour and flask of water to bake bread, make tea over an open camp fire, and play a primitive musical instrument. As he crouched stirring the tea and baking the bread, Johnnie became nostalgic.

"Mohammed," he said, "do you know that in a few months the Israelis are going to give the Sinai back, and I won't be able to come here any more?" The Bedouin continued to stir in silence. So Johnnie repeated only louder, "The Sinai will be Egypt, and I won't be able to visit here." Still no reaction. Finally, and near shouting, in frustration he yelled, "There will be a boundary and border, and probably a fence and patrols, and they will keep me out." With that the Bedouin rose slowly. Standing erect and gazing into the darkness, he brushed one hand against the other as if to wipe the discussion away and said, "I have my camel, my water, and my flour. I go where I want."

Two worlds, two perceptions, two experiences of spatiality: one capturing the Bedouin diction, "freedom is lost when the first fence is built;" the other worrying about spaces controlled by centralized political, military powers.

The story illustrates the differing views, understandings, and ex-periences of territorial space. To Johnnie it was limited, bounded, and carved into units. To Mohammed, it was open, accessible, identified only by a people's wanderings. Both were constructed through praxis. Neither, probably, could fully understand or appreciate the other even in this close environment. Their experiences and life paths were too diverse.

Consequences of Biblical Mapping

Biblical history is not exempt from the same prejudices and problems that we have been describing. It is someone's history, and it is written against someone else. Both biblical testaments are filled with accusations against their enemies. For the most part, the peoples of the Bible are presented favourably, while others appear unfavourably or are ignored all together. In passages where the tables are turned and the biblical peoples criticized and the enemies praised, critics are quick to explain the shift as the deity's attempt to teach the people a lesson or lead them to reform. It is still their story.

A similar case was made in a recent book by a professor in Scotland entitled, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History.*[26] Obviously, the book was provocative and perhaps inten-tionally so. The British press carried a flurry of charges and defenses; Israeli journalists appeared in England to argue against the book's thesis. And the author's wife feared for her husband's life.

I cite this publication only as an example of the degree to which people are wedded to a particular history, their history, or at least their history as they understand it. Challenge that history and you will be accused of attacking their belief and identity.

Perhaps as important is a series of current debates within biblical studies over the origins and nature of early Israel. Where did the first Israelites come from, and when did they first become an identifiable people? These arguments, sometimes heated, are carried out in the language of history versus myth. One group claims to be holding on to history while accusing the others of abandoning it. The other group charges neofundamentalism against their adversaries and proposes a more theological, rather than historical, reading of texts. The debate is too extensive to be analysed here, but one way to understand it is by the broad categories adopted by the two sides. As suggested, these come close to, or actually are, history and myth. The first group claims the Bible is very historical; the other group, while admitting some history, is not afraid to admit that some of the Bible is also myth, i.e. beliefs that sustain a community in its endeavours.

In light of our discussion, I would like to propose an alternative, a different set of categories that may explain why this debate cannot be resolved as it is now cast and offer a means for resolving, or at least transforming, it.

Those who are arguing for strict historicity of biblical claims are consciously or unconsciously presuming that biblical territorial claims are claims made for Firstspace, the material, physical world and its territory in Southwestern Asia. Those who have been labelled as favouring theological or mythological interpretations, may, in fact, be suggesting— perhaps without knowing it—that biblical territorial claims are claims for Thirdspace, the lived space that is often denied mar-ginalized and disenfranchised minorities. The Bible is claiming the front of the bus—in this case the land of Canaan—as a place denied but wanted.

There are biblical grounds for this interpretation. It is found in the multitude of texts that portray a people longing for their homeland. Peter Machinist has provided a convenient catalogue of these in a recent article on the Jew as Other. He claims that

> the biblical story tradition of Israel entering as outsiders to take over Palestine should not be dismissed historically, despite the buffeting it has taken in the wake of recent study of Israelite origins. . . . The pervasiveness of this

[26]Keith W Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*: *The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

> tradition in the Hebrew Bible, and the multiple historical contexts in which it seems to occur there, suggest a protean adaptability to the problems and crises that ancient Israel had to face. Particularly crucial in this regard, as we may now see, was the *sense of marginality and contingency inherent in the tradition*. . . . This explanatory power of our story tradition, it may be added, did not cease with the end of the biblical period. As the Passover Haggadah makes clear, Israel in a sense *is always emerging from Egypt and the Wilderness to enter its promised land;* the desire is only that it should stay there and live an exemplary and prosperous life.[27]

Machinist's remarks clarify many of the issues of biblical mapping. The claims of peoples living in a segmentary social system where ter-ritoriality is measured by kinship relations and not by a plot of ground are the same peoples who are convinced of their marginality. Like Mrs Parks, they see themselves as a people whose lived space is denied. Their book makes a claim for that space, but it is not a space fully acquired. It is space longed and hoped for at some future time. History, in this instance, is not the basis for a territorial claim, critical spatiality is.

Nothing said here will change the Bible or its use. Nevertheless, I suggest that current studies on spatiality, especially the lived spaces of marginalized peoples, offer another avenue to be explored in trying to find a more just way to distribute land and space. Maps based on biblical assertions, read without regard for critical spatiality, are not adequate bases for deciding rights. They are highly prejudicial even though persuasive. If we want again to have a *mappa mundi*, a true map of the world, we might investigate postmodern spatiality.

[27]Peter Machinist, "Outsiders or Insiders: The Biblical View of Emergent Israel and Its Contexts," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History, Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity,* eds Laurence J Silverstein and Robert L Cohn (New York: New York University, 1994) 54 [emphasis added].