Extraterritorialities in Occupied Worlds

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What would it mean to be outside territory? I’m going to discuss this question in three registers: conceptually; historically; politically. The first two will be brief; the third literary.

BEING OUTSIDE TERRITORY CONCEPTUALLY

Territory, for me, is actually quite a specific concept. If territory extends from a room, a building, a group of them, to a campus, an urban area, a city, a region, a nation-state, and so on, it seems to me that the term becomes so general that it becomes not especially helpful. If we extend a human notion of “territory” to understand animals, as ethologists did in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this may yield some fruitful insights. But it does not seem, to me, to be especially helpful then to take that notion of animal behavior, a notion of territoriality, of hunting and mating areas, to understand humans. Thus, for me, territoriality is a consequent notion to that of territory; not the means to understand it. Territoriality is one of a number of strategies that produce territory, but conceptually it succeeds it. Territoriality is that which produces territory. The latter term still needs conceptual unpacking. It does not seem especially helpful to understand territory simply as the outcome of territoriality.

Nor are standard definitions of territory as a “bounded space” or the state as a “bordered power container” especially helpful. This might open up the kinds of questions we need to ask — What do we mean by boundary? What kind of space? What relations of power? — but only as a spur to further questions. Conceiving of territory as the bringing together of a range of different political phenomena — economic, strategic, legal, and technical — is not an attempt to offer a better single definition of territory, which can be con-

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trasted with other ones. Rather it is an attempt to raise the kinds of questions we would need to ask to understand how territory has been understood and practiced in a range of different times and places.¹

Territory is then, a historically and geographically limited notion, one that needs to be understood and comprehended in its specificity. This means that there is a role for other concepts such as area, region, place, space, domain—these, it seems to me, open up ways of understanding geographies that are, in an important, conceptual sense, outside territory.

In my book *The Birth of Territory*, I try to account for the emergence of this concept of “territory.” There is no time today to sketch the aspects of the history of the concept of territory in Western political thought. Nonetheless, on my terms, and contrary to many accounts, territory is not that central or even general a category of geography; not all problems should be seen through a territorial lens; and while it is certainly of fundamental importance in the modern period, territory historically is not the key concept of political theory and its relation to place. Rather we should recognize the emergence of a concept out of a complicated and multi-layer set of chronologies, fragments and aporias.

**BEING OUTSIDE TERRITORY HISTORICALLY**

Following this, if territory has a history, and emerged at a particular conjuncture, then it follows that before this there were political-spatial orderings that were not territory. We can therefore think of examples of configurations of the relation between power and place that were not territorial, that is what is outside territory historically.

One thing that is worth noting is that, initially, “territory” was the outside. *Territorium*—an extremely rare word in classical Latin—was the area surrounding a place, perhaps a town or a colony. The suffix -orium means area around; a notion we maintain in words like sanatorium, auditorium, and crematorium. The territory was the area around a settlement, the surrounding agricultural lands. This is the way it is used in Cicero, in Varro—who claims it is the area trodden on most—and in Seneca. (Of the other uses of the term in classical Latin, Pliny the Elder uses it in the neutral sense of an area.) In the

later Roman Empire, Ammianus Marcellinus makes the point that while they avoided the towns, the Germanic tribes frequented their territories. So, there is a story to be told about how territory moved from being the thing that was outside, outside the city walls and external to the urbs, to becoming the thing within which the city was located, within which the law was exercised.

There are political spaces, then, that were other than territory. This could be polities such as the Greek polis, which had surrounding lands, khora, but was not inside them in a complete way; the Roman urbs or the empire, which while divided into territoria did not see the areas outside as such; the medieval church or kingdom. Did the native Americans or African tribes have their own territory, in the specific sense, before Europeans reordered the spaces of their lands? Or did they have a different way of experiencing, ordering and understanding that was transformed into territories and through “territory”? Each of those different configurations would need to be understood through the words, concepts and practices that would have made sense to those who lived in, fought over, worked in and wrote about them. Equally there are areas that are outside territory in the spaces between such designated and designed sites.

**BEING OUTSIDE TERRITORY POLITICALLY**

This is what I meant by being outside territory politically, which I am going to explore through some literary examples.

If the first text of the Western tradition, the Iliad is about struggle over a city and its lands, or what we might today call territory, Homer’s Odyssey, where Odysseus journeys home after the Trojan wars, is about what it means to be outside it. In Sophocles’ tragedy Oedipus at Colonnus, one of Oedipus’s most plaintive pleas in exile is when he asks “will they even shroud my body in Theban soil?”3 In the play about one of his daughters, and the fate of his sons, Antigone, the whole story is around the question of burial and site, and the dislocation of familial and political relations.4

In the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf there are isolated human settlements such as the village of Heorot where the mead hall stands. But outside, espe-

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4 For a reading of Antigone in this regard, see Stuart Elden, “The Place of the Polis Political Blindness in Judith Butler’s Antigone’s Claim,” Theory and Event 8 (2005).
cially after dark, there are spaces of great danger, what we might today call the wild. Grendel, for instance, is described as a *mearcstapa*, a march-stepper or border-walker; a figure who prowls the margins, the edges, the limits, the liminal. The *mere*—the pool of deep water—where his mother dwells is similarly beyond the reach of ordinary man, though not the hero Beowulf himself. Similarly dangerous places, outside territory or dominant ordering of political space, puncture the Norse myths of the *Edda*.

So it is with Shakespeare. Perhaps the most famous of such places is the heath in *King Lear*, where Lear in his madness, Kent in his exile, Edgar in his disguise as Poor Tom, and Gloucester in his blindness all end up. All are outside, outsiders in some way, all are outside territory, the political space that was divided by the King between his daughters in the famous opening scene: “Since now we shall divest us both of Rule, / Interest of territory, cares of state.”

Such a sense runs through a number of Shakespeare’s plays. Exile is a recurrent theme. Take, for example, *As You Like It*, where the deposed Duke ends up in the Forest of Arden, a kind of site that is a place outside of enclosure. But the play is ambiguous because the new society is, at the end, replaced by the return of the old, and the exiles, with the exception of Jacques, return to the place they left. Enclosure was, of course, a key issue at Shakespeare’s own time, explored perhaps most interestingly in Edward Bond’s play *Bingo: Scenes of Money and Death*.

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8 William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act I, scene i. For a discussion of the complexities of this scene and the play as a whole, see Stuart Elden, “The Geopolitics of *King Lear*: Territory, Land, Earth,” *Law and Literature* 25, no. 2 (2013): 147–65. For Shakespeare’s plays I have used the most up-to-date version of the Arden Shakespeare.


trying to work out if he should accept William Combe’s offer of protection for his own lands at the expense of local farmers. Bond himself writes of Shakespeare that while he “created Lear, who is the most radical of all social critics.” “His behaviour as a property-owner made him closer to Goneril than Lear. He supported and benefitted from the Goneril-society — with its prisons, workhouses, whipping, starvation, mutilation, pulpit-hysteria and all the rest of it.”

Another play where the forest plays an important role is Titus Andronicus. Much of the initial action takes place in the forest, a wild site, which relates to the homeland of the Goths Tamora and her sons, in contrast to the urban Rome. It is in the forest, this outside to the city, that Titus’s daughter Lavinia is raped, muted and mutilated; that her lover (and brother to the Emperor) Bassianus is murdered; and that Titus’s sons Martius and Quintus are framed for his death. It is here that we discover than Aaron the Moor is lover to Tamora, now married to the Emperor Saturninus. I won’t go into the details of all the deaths in the play, one of Shakespeare’s most shocking, but at the end Tamora’s body is thrown outside the city to be devoured by wild beasts; and Aaron is buried chest-deep within it to starve and thirst to death.

Coriolanus works with the figure of exile in a related way. Despite his military prowess on behalf of the city, when he stands for political office he so outrages the people that the tribunes end up expelling him. Sicinius declares:

And in the power of us the tribunes, we,
Ev’n from this instant, banish him our city,
In peril of precipitation
From off the rock Tarpeian, never more
To enter our Rome gates.

Yet Coriolanus’s response is forthright and characterizes his attitude to the city — “I banish you!”
You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek o’th’rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air: I banish you!
And here remain with your uncertainty!
... Despising
For you the city, thus I turn my back.
There is a world elsewhere! 15

When he does leave, it is to the Volscian city of Antium. In the compressed
dramatic action of the play, his journey is short and his arrival, disguised,
follows quickly after. But the recent film version directed by and starring
Ralph Fiennes, captures this effectively in showing a lengthy journey whose
passage of time is tracked by the transformation in Fiennes’s appearance.
Shaven head and face become ever lengthening hair and a thick beard. By
the time he arrives in Antium, the transformation is such that stage devices
such as a hooded cloak are unnecessary. But the geographical complications
are shown in this version. The play is set by Shakespeare in early Republic-
nan Rome, not long after the uprising against and expulsion of the Tarquin
kings. The play is written in early 17th century England. The film is set in a
near contemporary pseudo-Balkans. It was shot in Serbia and Montenegro.
The film, making effective use of newsreel and TV, shows that the Volscians
are in close proximity to the “place calling itself Rome.” The initial war foot-
age, of the siege of the Volscian city of Corioli which gives Coriolanus his
name, talks of a “border dispute.” That implied a more proximate location,
or at least, a contested front between the sides that appeared largely absent
when he is making his way to Antium. The means used to mark the tran-
sition at other points in the film, where a motorway is punctuated by road
blocks, with a kind of no-man’s-land between them, was more effective. But if
this is so, and the two neighbors share a narrow, effectively modern border, a
boundary, where does Coriolanus go when he moves into exile? Why does it
take him so long to move between these places?

And yet, in republican Rome, it is indeed the case that there would have
been areas outside of Rome that were not yet part of its neighbors. Places that
were not yet spaces; lands that were not yet cultivated, not yet territory. In

15 Ibid., 117–35.
the early seventeenth century, Shakespeare could effectively play this spatial politics. Exile was still a potential punishment, and features importantly in his history plays. The transportation of convicts to the new world or slavery were merely modern examples of an age-old practice. In the later 17th century John Locke would discuss the “Indian who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common” and yet still laid claim to private property and thus a nascent form of civil society; Locke declaring that “in the beginning, all the World was America.” Not all places within Shakespeare’s England were yet enclosed, much less if Scotland and Ireland were included.

But in the late 20th and early 21st century, and especially in the Balkan setting which is otherwise so effective in Fiennes’s adaptation, the idea of a place outside territory is harder to grasp. Where is Coriolanus as he moves through that sequence of locations, sleeping rough and his hair growing ever longer? He could be in isolated locations. He is undoubtedly making his way through war-ravaged landscapes, contested places in the present or recent past. But given the modes of modern warfare and territorial settlements, he is either still within the “place calling itself Rome,” or behind enemy lines. It’s hard to conceive of a no-man’s-land of such extent that the time could have passed in such a way. He is effectively either in one territory or another. It’s hard to imagine him outside of territory, but for early Rome, or even in Shakespeare’s England, it’s not so difficult.

Richard II is another play where banishment is a crucial element. The King wants to prevent bloodshed on the land between the feuding noblemen Bolingbroke and Mowbray: “For that our kingdom’s earth should not be soiled / What that dear blood which it hath fostered.” As as result he stops their duel and banishes them. The punishment is for life for Mowbray; shorter for Bolingbroke.

Therefore, we banish you our territories.  
You cousin Hereford, upon pain of life,  
Till twice five summers have enriched our fields,  
Shall not regret our fair dominions,  
But tread the stranger paths of banishment.

17 Ibid., V, 49.  
18 Shakespeare, Richard II, I, iii, 125–6.  
19 Ibid., I, iii, 139–143.
He wants to make sure they do not plot against the land. But Bolingbroke’s father, John of Gaunt, makes the powerful and famous speech where he both praises the land and deplores what it has become:

This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war, [...]
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, [...]
Is now leased out — I die pronouncing it —
Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of wat’ry Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.20

This is a play suffused with the language of soil, land, earth, and ground. The King is condemned for selling rights and farming the realm. He is condemned as “Landlord of England... not king.”21 He has also, crucially, disposessed the exiled Bolingbroke of the lands and title he inherits from Gaunt. He thus creates a legitimate grievance in Bolingbroke, who returns to England at the head of an army. He does this while Richard is abroad seeking to pacify the Irish rebellion. This is part of the reason Richard needed the funds he raised by such illegitimate means, suggesting “We are enforced to farm our royal realm.”22

While Bolingbroke claims to only be after his own title and lands, he ends up with Richard’s crown and kingdom as well. The King complains that “Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke’s.”23 And then, in one of their final exchanges, Bolingbroke states “My gracious lord, I come but for mine own,” to which King Richard replies “Your own is yours, and I am yours and all.”24

21 Ibid., II, I, 113.
22 Ibid., I, iv, 42.
23 Ibid., III, ii, 251.
24 Ibid., III, iii, 196–7.
Returning to one of the opening images, Carlisle says that if Bolingbroke is crowned King “The blood of English shall manure the ground.” And then, in two of the final lines of the play, King Henry IV, the former Bolingbroke, looks for redemption through geography; through the voluntary exile of pilgrimage: “I’ll make a voyage to the Holy Land / To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.”

*The Tempest* is another play in which the question of inside and outside, possession and dispossession of territory or land, take a crucial role. Four key figures are important here: Prospero and Caliban, naturally, but also Antonio, the usurper, and Gonzalo, the advisor.

Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan, but has been dispossessed of his lands. He is banished but becomes the colonizer of the island; removing it from Caliban. Of his own dispossession, Prospero is eloquent:

To have no screen between this part he played
And him he played it for, he needs with be
Absolute Milan. Me, poor man, my library
Was dukedom large enough. Of temporal royalties
He thinks me now incapable; confederates,
So dry he was for sway, wi’th’ King of Naples
To give him annual tribute, do him homage,
Subject his coronet to his crown, and bend
The dukedom yet unbowed (alas poor Milan)
To most ignoble stooping.

This needs a little explanation. Antonio wanted no distinction between his own role and the position he aspired to, occupied by Prospero. He needed to be absolute ruler of Milan. Prospero suggests he—“poor man”—had otherworldly concerns. (We hear later how Antonio had paid off Prospero: “Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom.”) “Temporal royalties’ are secular, as opposed to spiritual, powers; incapable means that he is both unable to exercise them but also unable to pass them on: the standard lineage has been broken.

26 Ibid., v, vi, 49–50.
28 Ibid., I, ii, 166–8.
So thirsty for power, Antonio has entered into an alliance with the King of Naples, to whom he pays allegiance, and has bound his rule (the coronet) to the larger kingdom (the crown). A previously proud and superior Milan now bows to Naples.

Caliban is the son of the “foul witch Sycorax,” and Prospero recounts to the spirit Ariel how “the blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child/And here was left by th’ sailors.” While Prospero thus acknowledges that Caliban was born on the island, and before he, Prospero, arrived, he does everything he can to diminish his birth-right. After Sycorax died, Prospero contends that “Then was this island/(Save for the son that she did litter here,/ A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honoured with/A human shape.” Ariel responds in a more humanizing way: “Yes, Caliban, her son,” but Prospero seeks to deny the humanity. While he too uses the word “son,” he uses the verb “litter,” more commonly used of animal births than human; “freckled whelp” suggests a canine pup; “hag-born” again demeans the mother. He even denies that Caliban shares the shape of humans. Shortly after, Prospero calls Caliban “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam [mother].”

Caliban is thus the dispossessed, and directly claims this of Prospero. “This island’s mine by Sycorax, my mother,/Which thou tak’st from me.” He notes that at first Prospero treated him with kindness, and that he responded by love and showing him “all the qualities o’th’isle:/The fresh springs, brine pits, barren places and fertile.” Now, Caliban alone is “all the subjects that you [Prospero] have,/Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me/In this hard rock, whiles though do keep from me/The rest o’th’ island.” Initially he was his own master, a king, ruler of and able to roam over the whole island, but now he is imprisoned within a specific site, a slave, the only subject of a new master, reduced to an animal—sty again implies a bestial dwelling. Prospero responds that he is only imprisoned because of what he has done, which we learn is an attempted rape of Prospero’s daughter Miranda. Caliban dreams of colonizing the island for himself, wishing

29 Ibid., I, ii, 258.
30 Ibid., I, ii, 269–70.
31 Ibid., I, ii, 281–284.
32 Ibid., I, ii, 284.
33 Ibid., I, ii, 320–1. Slave, service, and servant are frequently used of both Caliban and Ariel.
34 Ibid., I, ii, 312–3.
36 Ibid., I, ii, 343–5.
this had been done, with the idea of how he would have “people else / This
isle with Calibans.” Shakespeare uses the phrase “violate / The honour of
my child.” Rape, of course, while today having primarily a sexual sense,
comes from the Latin word *rapere* meaning to seize, to abduct, to capture.
The rape of Caliban's island through Prospero's actions is paralleled by Cali-
ban's attempted rape of Prospero's daughter.

Caliban continually stresses his dispossession: “As I told thee before, I am
subject to a tyrant,/ A sorcerer, that by his cunning hath / Cheated me of the
island.” And he uses these to try to persuade the butler Stephano and the jester Trinculo of his
right to the island, and to get them to help him re-seize it. Caliban's initial
welcome of Prospero is paralleled by that he shows to Stephano and Trin-
culo: “I’ll show thee every fertile inch o’th’ island,/ And I will kiss thy foot.
I prithee, be my god. ... I’ll swear myself thy subject.” For Vaughan and
Vaughan, Caliban is “in tune with nature and lord of the island until over-
thrown by Prospero and later corrupted by Stephano and Trinculo.” It is the
latter that may perhaps be most important in the long run, but the former is
the spur to his immediate grievance.

Antonio has seized the territory of Naples from Prospero, but then is lost
at sea. His old counsellor Gonzalo speaks for them all when he declares:

Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren
ground—long heath, brown furze, anything. The wills above be done,
but I would fain die a dry death.

We thus have a triumvirate with relations to territory: the one who is outside
territory who creates it anew, truly a place he can be master of the domain;
the one who is dispossessed and enslaved but dreams of a biological coloniza-
tion of his own; and the one who dispossessed but then himself loses all. All

37 Ibid., I, ii, 351–2.
38 Ibid., I, ii, 347–8.
39 Stuprum—defilement, dishonor, disgrace—is the more common Latin word for “rape” in the
modern, sexual sense.
40 Ibid., III, ii, 40–2.
41 Ibid., III, ii, 50–1.
42 Ibid., II, ii, 145–49.
43 Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cam-
three figures have colonizing tendencies; all three have moments when they are set outside of territory.

There is an unusual interlude in the play when Iris and Ceres appear in Prospero’s masque. Their speeches are profoundly geographical. What Prospero’s masque accomplishes is the idea of agri-culture, of improving the land more than those who merely lived in it, of—in the language of a modern colonial project—making the desert bloom.\(^45\)

Later Gonzalo wishes he had “plantation of this isle,” with its clear colonial connotation of the plantations first in Ireland and then in the new world; though Antonio and Sebastian (brother to the King) respond with more agricultural ideas: “He’d sow’t with nettle-seed. / Or docks, or mallows.”\(^46\) But Gonzalo has loftier ideals:

I’th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things, for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard — none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women, too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty — [...] 
All things in common should produce
Without sweat or endeavour; treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people. [...] 
I would with such perfection govern, sir.\(^47\)

Despite Antonio and Sebastian’s interruptions, and often modern editor’s accusations of hyperbole, Gonzalo is actually outlining a near-utopian

\(^{45}\) In *The Tempest*, II, I, 37, Adrian says this place “seems to be desert,” which while he most obviously means deserted, relates the idea of a place that is un- and under-inhabited.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., II, i, 144–45.

\(^{47}\) Ibid, II, i, 148–65.
commonwealth. There are many aspects to be noted. The commonwealth or body politic will not be ruled by the market or commerce (“traffic”); no bureaucracy or written records (“letters”); no discrepancy of wealth or indentured servitude; no inheritance; no “bourn” (a boundary or limit) or “bound of land”—again, a critique of enclosure—and no agricultural working of the soil; no occupation—a multi-faceted term that means a literal sense of seized presence, and employment, but also marital cohabitation; no sovereignty; but instead shared property, an absence of ills, producing abundance and happiness. But if this is a commonwealth without internal divisions, it is still hard to imagine it without boundaries on the outside, to imagine it entirely outside territory.

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare was writing at a time when the modern conception of sovereign territory was emerging and so he helps us understand its variant aspects, tensions, ambiguities and limits. In his own England the dominant form of political power was absolutism, conducted in a space that was, by his time, relatively ordered and bordered. But its recent past—explored in the history plays such as, notably, Richard II—was anything but. The earlier setting of King Lear shows a place that is historically distant and spatially disrupted. In that it is more similar to the Europe in which he set most of his tragedies, and comedies. This was a space that was contested and fractured, both politically and spatially. We see that, especially, in Coriolanus. And in The Tempest he explores what this might mean when Europe came into contact with its outside. Shakespeare helps us to understand what it means to be outside territory, conceptually, historically, and politically.