

## Imaginative Cartographies: Mappings of Dispossession in Historical Perspective

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In terms of most communications theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality. A map represents something that already exists objectively. In the history I have described, this relationship was reversed. A map *anticipated* spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model *for*, not a model of, what it purported to represent.

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In the revised edition of his influential study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson admitted overlooking a critical factor giving rise to the modern nation-state—the changing apprehensions of geographical *space*.<sup>2</sup> Complementing his earlier argument about changing perceptions of time as the basis of nationalist consciousness, Anderson revealed how, from newly-forged understandings of space, individuals otherwise unknown to one another come to perceive themselves as a community with an identity anchored to a common language spoken within fixed territorial boundaries. In this way, nations are *Imagined Communities*, horizontal fraternities built upon a shared outlook of belonging created from speaking a common language within territorially fixed coordinates. These coordinates formed the boundaries of modern nation-states.

1. Thongchai WINICHAKUL, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 130. All italicized words in this article are those of the author.

2. Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), xiii-xiv. For the next two paragraphs see *ibid.*, 170–78.

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In order to argue his point and elevate the role of the geographical imagination in the creation of nationalist consciousness, Anderson reinterpreted the meaning and function of a seemingly benign artifact—the *map*. Rejecting the idea of maps as passive reflections of territory, Anderson argued that maps function as texts communicating arguments about the geographical world, showing how cartographic imagery shapes collective thinking about the character of territorial space. Similar to other forms of cultural representation, mapping involves selection and classification that renders a point of view about the reality being described. Anderson also emphasized how mapmakers, in selecting, classifying, and assembling geographical information, often engage in projecting a territorial reality not yet realized. According to Anderson, these projections of territory provided groups of people with ways of seeing themselves as nations anchored geographically to states. At the same time, not only did maps enable communities of people to imagine themselves anchored to national territories, they also inspired members of communities to *act* in order to realize their imagined vision, thereby mediating an historical route from the formation of a nationalist consciousness to the actual creation of a nation-state. In this way, maps and mapping are much like their representation in Chinese. In the Chinese language, the word for map, *tu*, denotes ‘a chart or plan.’ When used as a verb, however, the word for map reveals a somewhat different emphasis. As a verb, *tu* means ‘to covet, to plan, to scheme,’ a set of associations that imbue maps with a somewhat covert if obliquely conspiratorial character.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 The Argument

Drawing upon Benedict Anderson in developing an argument about maps as instruments used by groups with territorial ambitions to dispossess other groups, I argue that dispossession is a form of conspiracy but one with its own unique attributes.<sup>2</sup> Dispossession is the outcome of a shift in the collective outlook of groups with territorial ambitions who come to imagine themselves as the rightful owners of the territory they covet by reinventing the meanings of

1. John Rennie SHORT, *Representing the Republic: Mapping the United States, 1600-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 13.

2. I define conspiracy as the concerted effort of a group to undertake collective action in pursuit of a specific aim. One of its fundamental dimensions is the notion of *human agency*. Most definitions of conspiracy emphasize its secretive and extra-legal attributes; as conspiracy, dispossession reveals elements of secrecy and illegality, but the groups engaging in it also take advantage of open and legal channels.

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these areas and engaging in a set of actions to realize their imagined vision of ownership. In a spirit similar to Anderson, Edward Said described this process of meaning-making about territorial landscapes as 'imaginative geography.'<sup>1</sup> For Said as well as Anderson, imagining territorial landscapes is but a prelude to remaking them. While Said focused on the literary sources of imagined geographies, Anderson draws attention to the power of maps in enabling groups with territorial ambitions to think of geographical landscapes differently.

This essay explores the influence of maps in the shift of collective thinking about territory and in the outcomes of dispossession stemming from such discursive shifts. Maps, I argue, play a decisive role in the way groups with territorial ambitions come to realize a different vision about the land they covet and how they might engage in a collective effort to secure it. I liken this process of dispossession to notions of conspiracy, choosing the term *imaginative cartography* to describe how maps influence the collective imagination and inspire the collective activity fundamental in the transfer of land from one group to another.

In order to make this argument, I examine three cases of territorial appropriation and dispossession: the enclosures in England, the American frontier, and Zionist colonization in pre-state Palestine. In each case, maps function as instruments of power providing groups with territorial aspirations with ways of seeing how territory that they covet can be seized and remade into their own. English estate maps commissioned by estate owners, American continental maps, and maps of Palestine created by the Jewish National Fund projected such territorial visions to these groups enabling them to imagine how they might accomplish their territorial aims.

## 2 Conspiracy and the Cartographic Imagination

In his discussion of maps as instruments of nationalist imagination, Anderson describes 19<sup>th</sup>-century European cartographers creating a different idea of Siam for both the European powers colonizing the area and the people of Siam itself.<sup>2</sup> Pre-European maps of Siam, drawn at eye level, referenced visible markers emphasizing a territorial space associated with actual topographical features. By contrast, European maps, drawn from the Western preference for a plan view, created territorial space from lines affixed to defined numerical

1. Edward SAID, 'Invention, Memory and Place,' *Critical Inquiry*, 26, no.2 (2000): 175-92.

2. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, 171.

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coordinates independent of physical markings. Such linear cartographic representations communicated a vision of Siam abstracted from its topographical attributes and reconstructed geometrically as a sovereign space wedged between other similarly constructed sovereignties. This cartographic projection of territory transformed the collective imagination of Siam as maps became objects of mass consumption. Anderson reworked Walter Benjamin's insight about 'mechanical reproduction' in arguing that 'print capitalism' enabled the mass distribution of maps promoting new ideas about the nation.<sup>1</sup> Noting how earlier maps of Siam were hand drawn, Anderson describes the advent of print and the widespread distribution of the new maps as transforming the collective imagination of Siam into a new territorial entity—that of a 'country.'<sup>2</sup> In this way, maps helped forge a new notion of territory and a new collective identity associated with the idea of the country and nation-state.

In framing these observations about the power of maps, Anderson revealed the influence of two related perspectives, one from the field of cultural studies inspired by Edward Said, the other within geography inspired by the work of Brian Harley. What Anderson borrowed from Said was the idea of geographical landscapes as discursive constructions. Although landscapes might appear as inert collections of elements existing objectively on the land surface, Said argued that landscapes exist as objects 'made by the mind.'<sup>3</sup> For this reason, geography itself is something imagined. As he developed this notion more fully, however, Said came to assign the practice of imagining landscapes to groups with imperial aims and thus his later iterations of imaginative geography had a more explicit association with the forcible seizure and remaking of territory. Although conceding the incentives for territorial expansion to be material, Said argued that the inspiration for controlling other places and people has roots in culturally-shaped attitudes and ideologies. Re-imagining places, he insists is but a first step to remaking them.<sup>4</sup>

Anderson also reflected the influence of a trenchant critique of traditional cartography that emerged within the field of geography itself, owing primarily

1. Walter BENJAMIN, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) in Jessica EVANS and Stuart HALL (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 7–79.

2. As evidence, Anderson traces the decline of the Thai words *krung* and *muang*, denoting centers of population on the landscape, and the ascendancy of a new word in the Thai lexicon, *prathet*, denoting 'country.' ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities*, 173.

3. SAID, 'Invention, Memory and Place,' 183. See also Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

4. Edward W. SAID, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

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to Harley's pioneering insights. According to Harley, traditional cartography accepted the precepts of scientific positivism and philosophical empiricism that objects are real and have an existence independent of the observer. Mapmakers thus believed themselves to be reproducing a supposedly objective geographical world. Beginning in the late 1980s, Harley rejected this approach, insisting that maps are not, and cannot be, objective and value-free transcripts of the earth's features; they are instead *arguments* about the geographical world.<sup>1</sup> The steps in creating a map—selection, omission, simplification, classification, creation of hierarchy—are all inherently propositional and thus argumentative. For Harley, the key task of cartography is uncovering these arguments and discerning how maps correspond to a chosen rather than objective view of the geographical world. In communicating a chosen rather than objective view of the world, maps become instruments of power for pursuing certain desired outcomes. It is in this role as instruments for achieving certain outcomes that maps take on a certain conspiratorial character.

One of Harley's followers, Denis Wood, expressed these pioneering insights even more forcefully. 'What other than a virgin birth would convince us of the map's objectivity,' he caustically observes. Emphasizing the role of the map as projection rather than reflection, Wood writes how '*maps are weapons. . . . marching orders, commandments, injunctions, decrees.*' The map actually helps bring into being the world that it purportedly seeks to reflect. In the words of literary critic Jean Baudrillard: 'It is the map that precedes territory,' serving as an instrument not for defining or representing land, but for claiming land and controlling it.<sup>2</sup>

What is the relationship of imaginative geography, critical cartography, and conspiracies in history? All three of these phenomena describe a relationship of thought to action, involving the formation of a certain collective vision about the world, and collective human agency in implementing such visions and shaping historical outcomes. The three cases that follow reveal the role of maps as fundamental instruments used by certain groups to achieve specific territorial

1. J. B. HARLEY, 'Deconstructing the Map,' *Cartographica*, 26, no. 2 (1989), 1–20; J. B. HARLEY, 'Maps, Knowledge and Power,' in Denis COSGROVE and Stephen DANIELS (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277–312.

2. Denis WOOD, 'How Maps Work,' *Cartographica*, 29, nos. 3–4 (1992): 66–74 (66–67); Baudrillard quoted from Gregory NOBLES, 'Straight Lines and Stability: Mapping the Political Order of the Anglo-American Frontier,' *The Journal of American History*, 80, no. 1 (1993): 9–35 (10–11).

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outcomes and as the centerpiece of an ongoing narrative shaped by imagined geographies, critical cartography, and conspiracies to take territory.

### 3 Imagining Property

An evolving discourse about the virtues of land improvement, spearheaded by a new generation of agrarian writers during the 16th and 17th centuries, provided the catalyst for a new phase of enclosure in England after 1575 and an ensuing process of dispossession on the land.<sup>1</sup> As this discourse evolved, what emerged with increasing urgency as the key to both enclosing and improving land was the notion of property rights. Cartography, most notably estate maps, played a pivotal role as a technology in helping redefine land as property.

By revealing the land on estates to be a bounded and measurable 'thing,' in contrast to its traditional representation as textual descriptions of freeholds and tenancies, estate maps reshaped the idea of land as something tangible and capable of being possessed. As bundles of freeholds and tenancies, the land of estates admitted to constraints on how it could be reorganized for improvement. By contrast, land represented cartographically as measurable plots of ground was more easily given to imagination on how it could be reconfigured, that is, enclosed. Cartography thus enabled estate owners to perceive routes to enclosure and improvement otherwise concealed while at the same time impressing upon this group the imperative of, and possibilities for, seizing greater control of land in order to enclose and improve it. (As examples of this new cartography, see Figures 1 and 2 below.)

By the late 17th century, improvement, enclosure, and new notions of property rights had essentially converged, assisted by the new technology of mapping. Not surprisingly, when the surveyor/mapmaker appears as an historical actor in the late-16th century plotting lines on the estate in the employ of estate owners, small farmers considered him a 'Quartermaster' for enclosing landlords, reserving for these individuals nothing short of scorn and antipathy. By enabling estate owners 'to know one's own,' estate maps emerged as instruments of power by giving the lords a visual picture of how to reorganize their

1. Andrew McRAE, 'Husbandry Manuals and the Language of Agrarian Improvement,' in Michael LESLIE and Timothy RAYLOR (eds.), *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1992), 35–62; Joan THIRSK, 'Plough and Pen: Agricultural Writers in the Seventeenth Century,' in T. H. ASTON *et al.* (eds.), *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 295–318.

## This is a detailed historical map of Wantage Field, showing various land parcels, roads, and landmarks. The map includes labels such as "WANTAGE FIELD", "DOWN'S", "THE HIVER", "WEST FIELD", "EAST FIELD", "SHOOTING ON", "LOCKING", and "FIELD". It also features a small illustration of a person in the bottom left corner.

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The map is a historical document, likely from the 18th or 19th century, and is a valuable resource for understanding the town's history and geography. It shows the town's layout, including its streets, buildings, and landmarks. The map is oriented with North at the top. The town is divided into several sections, including 'THE TOWN OF NEW BEDFORD', 'THE TOWN OF DARTMOUTH', and 'THE TOWN OF WESTPORT'. The map shows the coastline of the town, with the harbor and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The map is a detailed representation of the town's physical and human environment at the time it was created.

ownership.<sup>1</sup> As a non-moveable, land was understood not as an object or thing, but as bundles of use rights and tenancies documented in manor courts through written description. By the 16th century, however, commensurate with breakthroughs in cartography, land began to assume a new identity as a territorialized object. As a measurable piece of earth, land could be more easily possessed much like a moveable good and thus sold or traded. What was needed for this transformation of land into measurable plots of ground was for land to become unhinged from its traditional description as text. What emerged to unhinge land from its representation as *rights* and facilitate its transformation into *plots* was the work of the estate surveyor/mapmaker, along with the estate map. The work of the surveyor/mapmaker, in effect, helped transform land into property.

1. Information in this paragraph comes from David J. SEIPP, 'The Concept of Property in the Early Common Law,' *Law and History Review*, 12, no. 1 (1994): 29–91.



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surveyor and mapmaker enabled these owners to see in graphic format the actual shape of their tenancies and freeholds along with common lands on the manor and how these lands could be enclosed.<sup>1</sup> In this way, cartographic representation provided an instrument for the estate owner to re-imagine the estate not as landscape of common rights attached to open fields, but instead as a landscape enclosed and therefore improved. Perhaps more importantly, cartographic representation, by transforming land into plots, played a critical role in the evolution of land into property that was essential for enclosing the landscape. As property, land had more capacity for being controlled and was more easily transformable through choice and human agency.

Owing to the breakthroughs in estate mapping, the discourse of land improvement began to converge much more forcefully with the theme of property rights. Consequently, a new argument began to pervade agrarian thinking during the course of the 17th century that privileged rights of property in land as the central element of improvement and agrarian reform. Undoubtedly, the most articulate expression of this new thinking occurs in John Locke's remarks on property.

What Locke succeeded in accomplishing by the end of the 17th century was to synthesize ideas about land improvement and enclosure into a coherent system of property rights. In developing this system, landed property emerged more clearly as a bounded and measurable thing capable of being possessed. At the same time, whether by accident or by design, Locke established a potent moral and philosophical argument for *taking* land considered unimproved and possessing it for the purposes of improving it. In effect, the idea of land as a measurable piece of property that had been emerging within cartography, received a philosophical defense in the work of Locke.

Locke begins his analysis by insisting that 'the chief matter of property' is 'the earth itself,' admitting to the idea of property in land as plots of ground, and observing how, at the dawn of humanity, land was common, absent property rights. 'God gave the world to men in common,' he wrote, 'but it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common . . . He gave it to the use of the industrious . . . and labor was to be his title to it.' For Locke, land improved through labor had two attributes: it was *cultivated* and it was *enclosed*. 'As *much* land as a Man tills, plants, improves, cultivates . . . so much is his *Property*. He, by his labour does, as it were, inclose it from the commons.'

1. P. D. A. HARVEY, *Maps in Tudor England* (London: British Library, 1993), 15–17; Chandra MUKERJI, 'Visual Language in Science and the Exercise of Power: The Case of Cartography in Early Modern Europe,' *Studies in Visual Communication*, 10, no. 3 (1984): 30–45 (31–32); McRAE, *God Speed the Plough*, 169–97.

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Thus for Locke, 'cultivating the earth' and enclosing it from the commons is what 'introduces private possessions.'<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, if improved land was defined by cultivation and enclosure, land that was unimproved—uncultivated and unenclosed—was defined as *waste*. On the traditional English manor, waste was uncultivated land used as a common resource, mostly for pasturing animals, or if wooded, for the collection of fuel or foodstuffs. By designating improvement as the condition for ownership and by defining improvement as cultivation and enclosing waste from the commons, Locke imbued common land and waste with a status as land available for taking by those willing to cultivate and enclose such areas. He insists that the person who appropriates land through labor and improvement benefits all people. 'The provisions serving to support human life, produced by one acre of inclosed and cultivated land,' Locke writes, 'are ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of equal richness lying waste in common.'<sup>2</sup>

Throughout, Locke acknowledges a divine purpose in this relationship between improvement and entitlement to land. For Locke, it is God who commanded humans to overcome their condition in the state of nature, improve the land by working it, and thus lay claim to it. 'God and his reason commanded [humans] to subdue the earth, *i. e.* improve it for the benefit of life,' he writes. By improving the land, human beings stake a claim upon those portions of the earth where they have labored and made improvements and in this way make such portions of the earth their own. If land could be improved through labor, then the maker of that improvement had a private right to the plot of ground where the improvement was made—and the blessing of a Higher Authority to claim it.

Although notions of property in land preceded Locke, his *Treatise* marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of property.<sup>3</sup> More forcefully than anyone before him, Locke enjoined owning land, enclosing land, and improving land. Those who would improve land by cultivating and enclosing it were, in Locke's view, entitled to possess it. Where previous writers had assumed the necessity of new forms of control over land as the precondition for improvement, Locke argued for improvement upon measurable plots of the earth as the foundation of ownership.

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1. John LOCKE, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 21–22.

2. *Ibid.*, 23.

3. SEIPP, 'The Concept of Property,' 30.

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In the aftermath of Locke's *Treatise*, land improvement evolved still further with a new sense of purpose as part of the *national interest*. Promoters of this outlook, agrarian writers and landowners alike, contrasted the virtues of improved land with areas of unenclosed open-field farming tied to common rights that still prevailed over roughly one-third of English farmland at the time of Locke. What distinguished the new period was the zeal with which the advocates of improvement promoted their cause and the moralizing antipathy they revealed for those commoners still taking advantage of common land.<sup>1</sup> In this new period, not only was the economy of common right represented as unproductive and thus inferior, but commoners emerged in the improvement discourse as a 'sordid race . . . uncultivated as the land that fed them.' Among the most well-known and fervent advocates of improvement in this period was the celebrated agrarian pamphleteer Arthur Young, whose writings contain numerous references to commoners as a 'mischievous race' of 'Goths and Vandals.' Young sought to spread improvement and property rights to those areas of the landscape still encumbered by common rights. Already under assault as the improvement discourse expanded, common rights eventually succumbed to virtual extinction.<sup>2</sup>

What was in effect being imagined among promoters of an improvement discourse and reframed as a national imperative was an agrarian landscape absent the remaining vestiges of commoners farming in open fields with common rights to land. From this effort to re-imagine the landscape emerged the single greatest change in the history of the English countryside, *Parliamentary Enclosure*.<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary Enclosure represented the final phase in a longstanding lineage of enclosure mechanisms, all of which were fundamentally similar in the aim of making private property of the landscape. Parliamentary Enclosure, however, was distinguishable by its association with the largest estate owners. It was essentially a 'landlord's revolution' that transferred the remaining portions of common land, along with most of the land still in the hands of small holders, to the large estates, consolidating ownership of the landscape in a new insti-

1. Susanna Wade MARTINS, *Farmers, Landlords, and Landscapes: Rural Britain, 1720-1870* (London: Central Books, 2004), 7-17; J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18-52.

2. Arthur YOUNG, *Arthur Young and His Times*, G.E. MINGAY (ed.) (London: MacMillan, 1975), 99.

3. William G. HOSKINS, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 177-78.

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tution, the large-scale, 'rent-maximizing' farm. As late as 1688, roughly commensurate with Locke, at least 33% of English farmland land was still owned by small holders. By 1801, this figure had dropped to less than 10%.<sup>1</sup>

From a discourse promoting improvement emerged a set of cartographic images revealing more clearly to estate owners how they might reconfigure their estates. These cartographic images, in turn, inspired the owners of estates to imagine the landscape differently. What they imagined as improvements became enclosure and private property. More importantly, what they imagined became part of the landscape.

#### 4 Imagining 'Destiny'

While Locke's work marked a pivotal moment in the making of property on the English landscape, culminating in Parliamentary Enclosure and the final dispossession of commoners from rights to common land, his theory of entitlement to land, culled from a longstanding discourse about land improvement, was arguably even more compelling as a philosophical defense of England's right to the land of Native Americans.<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, the example of Amerindian society that inspired much of what Locke would argue in developing his improvement-driven theory of ownership based on cultivating and enclosing wasteland. For Locke, the experience of the American colonists in the earlier part of 17th century in transforming a landscape of waste, provided the most visible example of putting land to productive use through labor, cultivation and improvement, and was thus the justification for taking possession of such land.<sup>3</sup>

When Locke had insisted that humanity in a state of nature held common land absent property rights, he likened such beginnings to Amerindian society. In the beginning, Locke insisted in his oft-quoted statement, 'all the world was *America*,' a characterization intended to emphasize the primitive nature of Amerindian society, which lacked property rights, commerce, or money. As noted, Locke saw English land differentiated from Amerindian land by the two

1. Robert C. ALLEN, *Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 85.

2. Barbara ARNEIL, *John Locke and America: The Defense of English Colonialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 169.

3. Ken MACMILLAN, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.