Handbook of Landscape Archaeology

Bruno David, Julian Thomas

The Archaeology of Territory and Territoriality

Publication details
María Nieves Zedeño
Published online on: 15 Dec 2008

How to cite :- María Nieves Zedeño. 15 Dec 2008, The Archaeology of Territory and Territoriality from: Handbook of Landscape Archaeology Routledge
Accessed on: 20 Jul 2023

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
The concept of territory has been variously used by scholars of many fields to denote a specific space or spaces to which individuals or groups of animals and humans are attached on a relatively exclusive and permanent basis. Here, discussion of territory is confined to modern humans, even though many useful things may be gleaned from the spatial frameworks of other species. The conceptual treatment of territory and territoriality, as well as relevant examples, focuses on non-industrial or non-nation-state societies, because these provide the most parsimonious analogs for interpreting the majority of Indigenous archaeological contexts.

**Fields of Inquiry**

Germane to any discussion of human territories is a consideration of the field of inquiry. Which discipline can best provide the theories and methods needed to unpack territory? Geography, sociology, psychology, ecology, anthropology, and biology are among the disciplines wherein territories have been defined and territorial behaviors systematically studied (e.g., Bakker and Bakker-Rabdau 1973; Casimir and Rao 1992; Graham 1998; Harvey 2000; Kelso and Most 1990; Malmberg 1980, 1983; Sack 1983, 1986, 1997; Saltman 2002; Soja 1971). In his treatise on human territoriality, geographer Torsten Malmberg (1980: 16) went as far as to propose that the study of territory or “territorology” could become a legitimate field if it were approached with a solid comparative and multidisciplinary framework for the study of human behavior with respect to spaces of various shapes, sizes, and qualities. A science of territory, he thought, should encompass a broad scientific base, in which ethology, animal psychology, and ecology could be successfully combined with ethnology, physical anthropology, and sociology.

That such a field of inquiry would require the intellectual contribution of so many disciplines attests to the complexity of territory-making behaviors and partially explains why no discipline has, on its own, fully addressed all aspects of human territoriality and territory formation; nor has there been a strong push toward achieving this goal. One notable exception, and perhaps also a promise for the future of studies of territory, is archaeology, which not only uses material traces to identify human territories but also adapts models from “living disciplines” to reconstruct actions, events, and processes associated with the emergence, maintenance, and transformation of a territory (Zedeño 1997). The ability to draw concepts and models from a broad and sometimes disparate range of scientific and humanistic fields and build them into a single
interoperative framework about human societies is a unique characteristic of archaeological practice that manifests itself in contemporary studies of land use and territoriality.

Although territories encompass a vast range of human actions, archaeologists generally seek solutions to the problem of identifying territories from the material record by adapting the scale, content, and historical relevance of frameworks lent by other disciplines in order to fit them into particular theoretical perspectives and research topics. For example, territorial models that employ principles of evolutionary biology and evolutionary and behavioral ecology (e.g., Allen and Hoekstra 1992; Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978; Winterhalder and Smith 1981) are popular among archaeologists interested in territory formation vis-à-vis hunter-gatherer adaptations (e.g., Bettinger 1991; Binford 1982; Eerkens 1999; Kelly 1995; Lee and DeVore 1968) and adoption of agricultural economies (e.g., Rosenberg 1990, 1998). Inquiries into long-term change in land-use strategies incorporate geological and ecological models (e.g., Rossignol and Wandsnider 1992), whereas spatial analyses of land and resource use draw heavily from geography (e.g., Holl and Levy 1993; Morehouse 1996). Geographic Information Systems (GIS), in particular, have opened new avenues for comprehending and interpreting land and resource use at unanticipated scales (e.g., Aldenderfer and Maschner 1996; Graham 1998; Heilen and Reid 2006). Recent advances also include agent-based modeling of land use efficiency (Kohler et al. 2000).

Those interested in sociopolitical organization, in contrast, approach the study of territories and territorial behaviors from neo-evolutionary perspectives to address the effect of spatial circumscription, social and environmental stresses, conflict, and warfare (e.g., Bender 2001; Chrisholm and Smith 1990; Keeley 1996; Kim 2003; Saltman 2002; Walsh 1998). For the most part, archaeologists have combined anthropological models with elements from geography, ecology, and biology to interpret differential spatial distributions of material items as indicators of social, political, or ethnic boundaries (De Atley and Findlow 1984; Graves 1994; Provansal 2000; Stark 1998; Sampson 1988; Wobst 1974). Postmodern social theories of structuration, power, and identity (e.g., Calhoun 1994; Forsberg 2003; Giddens 1984; Saltman 2002) also contribute to developing an understanding of the social and political construction of territories as well as the development of territorial boundaries and identities.

An innovative trend in contemporary archaeology is the integration of cultural landscape research into the study of territory (Garry and Ohnersorg In press; Heilen and Reid 2006; Whittlesey 1998). Research on power struggles, inequality, and contested landscapes (Bender 2001) also tackles the development of territorial strategies in the face of class and ethnic differences. Symbols and memory, too, are strongly linked to the prevalence of attachments to land and resources and to the maintenance of status quo in power relations (e.g., Knapp and Ashmore 1999; Lane 2003; Meskell 2003 Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). In this chapter, connections between territory and landscape are explored, as are other perspectives relevant to understanding human territoriality.

Concepts and Frameworks

Chief among key concepts used to discuss human-nature interactions is territory as object aggregate (land + natural resources + human modifications) (Zedeño 1997: 69) and territoriality as the sum of actions and emotions toward a specific space, with an emphasis toward influence, control, and differential access (Malmberg 1980: 10; Sack 1983: 55; Soja 1971: 19). Commonsense usage of territory presupposes the existence of more or less homogeneous spaces with recognizable boundaries or at least some type of distinctive marking intended to prevent access by those who do not own or possess them. This view derives from modern Western geopolitical thought; however, the existence of diverse forms of human territoriality observed by anthropologists, geographers, and ecologists show that this usage does not directly apply to non-nation-state societies (Zedeño 1997, 2000).

Also key in conceptualizing archaeological territories is the distinction between territory as space and territory as land. Scholars of various disciplines who focus on territorial behaviors address territory in terms of space, which allows them to discuss a broad range of behavioral contexts, from personal space to a state’s territorial base (Cieraad 1999; Malmberg 1980; Sack 1983; Valentine 2001). Land is, therefore, a type of space. Inconveniently enough, land has many an ambiguous meaning. Here, land is used as synonym of terrain, upon which lie natural resources and objects of human manufacture. Perhaps the most useful result of decoupling land from resources is finding that human actions vary in nature, extent, and intensity according to the properties and significance of specific resources and singular landforms (Zedeño 1997, 2000; Zedeño et al. 1997). At least in prin-
the emergence of different forms of territoriality and corresponding object aggregates. Furthermore, and as demonstrated by Bradley (this volume), land is rich in meaning, and meanings differ among peoples and cultures. Land is thus always more than abstract space (see Casey, this volume) and always more than a universally recognized source of resources. More is thus at stake than “space” and “land” when it comes to defining territory (see below).

It is important to keep in mind, particularly in archaeological research, that territorial actions and emotions do not necessarily result in the formation of a territory as a material manifestation or object aggregate. By the same token, a territory inferred archaeologically by the presence of differential distributions of human modifications on the terrain does not necessarily imply exclusive behaviors or effective control over that specific space. Although human modifications are generally interpreted as a form of ordering and claiming land, research by Whitelaw (1994), Belanger (2001), Stanner (1965), and Myers (1988) among many others, demonstrates that there are enduring principles of spatial order that neither require the construction of permanent facilities, nor necessarily result in the patterned distribution of portable artifacts. As Thomson (1939) has also shown for parts of northeastern Australia, neighboring peoples of different territorial groups (such as those divided by a river that marks a territorial boundary) have more in common culturally than geographically distant individuals of the same territorial group.

Contemporary studies of territoriality in past societies have moved beyond spatial distributions of portable artifacts to evaluate previously ignored features such as shrines (Mather 2003), megaliths and statuary (Kalb 1996; Shepardson 2005), and rock art (Dematte 2004; Taçon, this volume) as material signals of ancient territories. In reality, it is the combination of a host of human modifications as well as natural features that allow archaeologists to identify not only territories in general but also specific forms and stages of territoriality (Zedeño 2000: 107)—hence the importance of carefully and thoroughly incorporating salient characteristics of the natural setting, as Bradley (2000) and Williamson (1982) suggest, into archaeological inferences of land use, order, and territory formation.

### Unpacking Object Aggregates

A weak understanding of territories as the material manifestations of human territoriality may be blamed for the lack of a useful framework for reconstructing territories in archaeology. Additionally, over-the dynamic nature of human-land interactions that form territories. Conceiving a territory as an object aggregate allows one to integrate formal, spatial, and temporal dimensions in a single “empirical” life history framework (adapted from Schiffer 1987: 13, as the sequence of formation, use, and transformation of objects and aggregates), where each object in the aggregate has its own life history. It may be said that territories follow specific trajectories that result from the combined natural history of land and resources and social history of land and resource users (Zedeño 1997: 73). In this non-anthropocentric approach, any object in the aggregate can potentially affect behavior; land and resources (for example, volcanoes, seasonal floods, or migratory herds), in fact, have played active roles in shaping changing human territories. Even objects of human manufacture, such as ruins left by previous occupants, can inform and determine territory formation among many other activities (Schiffer 1999).

### Dimensionality of Territory

Human territoriality, in all its economic, social, political, and ritual realms, is enacted in three dimensions: (1) the formal or material dimension, which refers to the physical characteristics of land, resources and human modifications; (2) the spatial or relational dimension, which encompasses the loci of human action, as well as the inter-active links that, through the movement of actors, connect loci to one another; and (3) the temporal of historical dimension, which is characterized by sequential links resulting from successive use of land and resources by individuals and groups (Zedeño 2000: 107). Specific properties of territories, including structure (for example, continuous or discontinuous), organizing principles (kinds of activity loci; classificatory systems; layering or nesting of activity loci; boundaries), and transformative processes (for instance, expansion, contraction, consolidation, abandonment, reclamation) may, in turn, be identified across one or more dimensions.

Territorial strategies of mobile hunters and foragers, which have generated so much scholarly debate over the years, illustrate the importance of examining territories as object aggregates dimensionally and inclusively. A basic and sound observation is that foragers’ territories relate primarily with resource distributions rather than fixed land tracts, so foragers may control noncontiguous resource patches or water sources (Dyson Hudson and Smith 1978; Kelly 1995; Malmberg 1983). This is the case for territories of historic buffalo hunt-
and trappers of the Subarctic interlakes (Belanger 2001), which were defined by the habitats of target species. The wide-ranging buffalo herds of the 19th century, for example, frequently forced hunting groups to anticipate the seasonal movement of herds; hunting often required penetration beyond their familiar and exclusive hunting grounds, leading to violence along territorial boundaries of competing groups (Bowers 2004; Ewers 1958). Facilities associated with resource uses—including, for instance, buffalo caims and offering locales, drive lines, impoundments, jumps, and camping circles—were scattered across the landscape where they would be most useful logistically to approach, hunt, and process game. Key landscape features, such as buffalo jumps, may have been used over long periods of time by successive hunting groups.

Cross-cutting buffalo herd ranges of 19th-century northern Plains hunters were territories of other animal species that required alternative territorial strategies. For example, bear dens and trails were considered exclusive to bears and thus were avoided by those groups with religious taboos against bear consumption (Ewers 1958: 85). However, eagle trapping rights belonged to individuals with ceremonial rights to them and their trapping territories were strictly respected by the community at large (Wilson 1928). Many plant habitats (for example, berry patches), as well as mineral sources (for instance, flint and pigments, salt licks), were also approached from the perspective of individual and group use rights (Bowers 2004). Among historic interlake hunters and trappers, ownership of wild rice beds was a family affair; however, the actual harvesting process was orchestrated by supra-family leaders (Veenum 1988: 176) just as buffalo hunts were in the plains. Territories formed around specific resources and, therefore, criss-crossed land tracts and often overlapped, each representing a particular realm of life—economic, social, political, and spiritual. Spirit beings, too, had exclusive rights to spaces (ravines, certain springs, certain landforms, river pools), to which people did not have granted or unconditional access. Nevertheless, for these and many other hunter and forager societies (e.g., Williams 1982: 151), rules of knowledge acquisition and boundary-crossing regulations (which are rooted in social and in religious principles), facilitated individual or group access to important places and resources owned or controlled by another entity. When combined, all these relations among people, land, and resources paint a complex, fluid, and highly dynamic picture of territorial strategies and corresponding object aggregates.

Territory Life Histories

Perhaps because many fields of inquiry lack the benefit of long-term views that archaeology furnishes, territories are rarely conceived as dynamic units. Yet, territoriality is a process whereby individuals or groups develop and even inscribe attachments to a particular place over a given period of time (see Taçon, this volume). Although it is true that not all actions are territorial in the conventional sense that presupposes control, exclusion, and defense (Sack 1983: 55), for humans to be able to interact in a three-dimensional space that may eventually become a territory, they must at least possess access, opportunity, and freedom of disposal of that space.

Territory aggregates, then, are the material expression of the territorial process, or what Ingold (1986) and Mather (2003) call appropriation or domestication of nature. Territory formation may also involve the process of appropriation and domestication of another's territory. A generalized territory life history, as sketched in Figure 19.1, shows relationships among three main formation stages—establishment, maintenance, and transformation—as well as processes within each stage that may or may not result in the successful generation of a territorial unit (Zedeño 1997: 86). A further consideration for future studies of territory is the application of life history approaches to the modeling of territory life spans relative to specific forms of territoriality that do not follow the old social evolutionary model but that consider agency, practice, and historical contingency alongside systemic processes of territory formation.

Landscape and Territory

Human-nature relations that result in the social construction of landscape, including individual and group identity as well as memory, imply that individuals and groups were able to engage in direct interactions with their surroundings. These, in turn, may have introduced temporary or permanent modifications into the natural setting (Gil García 2003; Zedeño and Stoffle 2003). Heritage landscapes, for example, assume that the ancestors of the group who inherited a landscape had access and opportunity for effective interaction (e.g., Freire 2003; Larsen 2003). There is little doubt in the mind of contemporary Palestinian, Siouan, Athapaskan speakers or of any conquered, dispossessed, or relocated people for that matter, that the landscape, as expressed in oral tradition, historic documents,
Although archaeological and historic landscapes contain the history of past interactions among humans and the natural and supernatural worlds, landscapes belong in the present, as they are reified in memories about past interactions and present practices aimed at preserving ancestral connections and land-based identities (see also Bradley, this volume). Hence, a landscape begins at the time people come into contact with land and resources; it extends as people develop territorial attachments and strive to possess land and resources; and, through memory and action (e.g., pilgrimage, storytelling), it continues to change long after people have rescinded possession of a territory (Zedeño and Stoffle 2003: 75). Landscapes tend to be cumulative, incorporating past and present territories. Thus, landscapes and territories have parallel life histories with common beginnings rooted in actual experiences, with overlapping spatial and formal dimensions, but with distinctive temporal scales and territory histories being generally shorter or narrower than landscape histories.

Examples of territory-to-landscape transition abound in origin and migration traditions among North American tribes. The Great Lakes Ojibwa, for example, have clearly mapped on the land the journeys they took, people they fought, spirits they encountered, and many other actions and events that took place along the journey to their present reservations. In fact, Ojibwa maps, such as Redsky’s bark scroll of the migration myth (Dewdney 1975), depict actual loci of interaction among humans, nature, and the supernatural in a not-so-distant past (1700s–1800s), when the historic Ojibwa bands were advancing west and contesting territories then possessed by the Dakota Sioux and other groups (Zedeño and Stoffle 2003). Redsky’s bark scroll illustrates how places were added to the migration

---

**Figure 19.1** Territory life history and landscape formation.
possession of the land peacefully or through war, and began to form their own territorial units. At the same time, the old territories became part of that large, storied, and mythical space that is the fabric of a human landscape.

Conclusions

Essential to any archaeological study of territories is the understanding that these spaces encompass the historical record of human interactions with land and resources and are multidimensional and even non-anthropocentric. Through time, humans may create different kinds of object aggregates that require specific forms of access and that represent multifarious individual and social relationships with land and resources. Although territories undergo transformations often leading to abandonment, attachments to territorial units of different ages and geographies generally remain and evolve in the history, memory, and practice of individuals and groups—these are socially constructed landscapes.

Thus, landscape formation cannot be fully understood without explicit reference to territory. While it is tempting to explain territory simply as a special kind of human landscape—that which represents effective use, influence, and control of land and resources over a specific period of time, it is more useful to argue, instead, that for landscapes to exist they had to have been effectively and even exclusively used or experienced by individuals and groups. Given the ambiguity and multifacetedness of the landscape concept as it is used in archaeology, this argument is all the more compelling because it proposes that the study of territory can furnish insights into the ways in which humans socially construct landscapes as places rich in meaning and experience.

References


Gil García, F. M. 2003. Manej e sabiales, construcción de paisajes, y legitimación territorial: En torno al con-


