

# INTRODUCTION: NEW ENCLOSURES

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*Ashley Dawson*

But I do not think that this necessity of stealing arises only from hence; there is another cause of it, more peculiar to England. ‘What is that?’ said the Cardinal: The increase of pasture, said I, by which your sheep, which are naturally mild, and easily kept in order, may be said now to devour men and unpeople, not only villages, but towns; for wherever it is found that the sheep of any soil yield a softer and richer wool than ordinary, there the nobility and gentry, and even these holy men, the abbots!, not contented with the old rents which their farms yielded, nor thinking it enough that they, living at their ease, do no good to the public, resolve to do it hurt instead of good. They stop the course of agriculture, destroying houses and towns, reserving only the churches, and enclose grounds that they may lodge their sheep in them. As if forests and parks had swallowed up too little of the land, those worthy countrymen turn the best inhabited places into solitudes; for when an insatiable wretch, who is a plague to his country, resolves to enclose many thousand acres of ground, the owners, as well as tenants, are turned out of their possessions by trick or by main force, or, being wearied out by ill usage, they are forced to sell them; by which means those miserable people, both men and women, married and unmarried, old and young, with their poor but numerous families (since country business requires many hands), are all forced to change their seats, not knowing whither to go; and they must sell, almost for nothing, their household stuff, which could not bring them much money, even though they might stay for a buyer. When that little money is at an end (for it soon will be spent), what is left for them to do but either to steal, and so to be hanged (God knows how justly!), or to go about and beg?

Thomas More, *Utopia*<sup>1</sup>

1. Thomas More, *Utopia*, New York, Adamant Media, 2005, pp19-20.

So Raphael Hythloday, the protagonist of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, describes the corruption and avarice that has infected the Church in the early-sixteenth century. Not content with the income gained from tithes and rack-rents, the clerisy set about enclosing their lands, turning their sheep into devourers of men, ousting both tenants and owners from their homes, and transforming farmers into brigands and beggars. More’s indictment of this unpeopling of the countryside resonates powerfully today, at the end of what Eric Hobsbawm calls ‘the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half’ of the twentieth century: the death of the global peasantry.<sup>2</sup> Capital requires a constitutive outside, and the history of the modern era is one of waves of enclosure and the production of vast floating populations of landless and often

2. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: A History of the Twentieth Century 1914–1991*, New York, Vintage, 1996, p289.

illegal people.<sup>3</sup> Our present historical moment is characterised by hitherto unparalleled acts of enclosure. Compare More's account of enclosure with that of Lee Kyung-hae, a South Korean farmer and peasant organiser who climbed atop a truck near the barbed wire surrounding the 2003 World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting in Cancún, Mexico, flipped open a small pocketknife, and stabbed himself in the heart. Before his death, Lee handed out a pamphlet in which he wrote:

My warning goes out to all citizens that human beings are in an endangered situation. That uncontrolled multinational corporations and a small number of big WTO Members are leading an undesirable globalization that is inhumane, environmentally degrading, farmer-killing, and undemocratic. It should be stopped immediately. Otherwise the false logic of neoliberalism will wipe out the diversity of global agriculture and be disastrous to all human beings.<sup>4</sup>

As Lee's statement makes clear, we live in a new age of globe-girdling enclosures, one in which the unpeopling of the English countryside described by Thomas More has been magnified dramatically, as part of a process which, as will become clear, no longer affects family farmers alone. Given this continuity and intensification across the ages, it behooves us to turn back to the historical record to examine the ways in which these original acts of enclosure, which Marx famously termed 'primitive accumulation,' were legitimated.

The liberal philosopher John Locke, who owned plantations in colonial Ireland and Virginia, offered one of the most powerful justifications for the dispossession of common lands in both Europe and the Americas in his *Second Treatise of Government*. In this treatise, Locke argues that collectively owned land becomes private property when it is subject to improvement through manual labor:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature has provided and left it in, he has mixed his labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational - and labor was to be his title to it - not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious ... He who appropriates land to himself by his labor does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind; for the provisions serving to the support of human life produced by one

3. For a discussion of the production of these 'superfluous' populations of migrants, refugees, and outcasts, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, Malden, MA, Blackwell, 2004.

4. Quoted in Rajeev Patel, 'International Agrarian Restructuring and the Practical Ethics of Peasant Movement Solidarity,' *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 41.1/2 (2006): 71-93.

acre of enclosed and cultivated land are - to speak much within compass - ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of equal richness lying waste in common ... I ask whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage, or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life as ten acres of equally fertile land do in Devonshire, where they are well cultivated.<sup>5</sup>

5. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, Peter Laslett (ed), New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp291-293.

Locke writes with the arguments of seventeenth-century revolutionaries such as the Diggers in mind. Consequently, he acknowledges the strain of radical thought concerning the commons found in the Biblical notion of a God-given collective birthright to the land. Challenging such arguments, however, Locke argues that when he mixes his labor with this God-given land, and so develops it, the industrious man gives birth to private property. Such individual enterprise moreover benefits all mankind, Locke asserts, for it transforms 'waste' land, rendering it a thousand times more productive. In a remarkable *avant-la-lettre* version of neo-liberal trickle-down theory, Locke argues that the bounty produced by such development will benefit all. Clinching his argument, Locke suggests that God really intended to give his bounty not to all human beings, but to the industrious and the rational - note the linking of the two terms - rather than the quarrelsome and contentious. There's an interesting slippage in Locke's argument at this point, for the antithesis of his busy landowners would seem to be the lazy and the irrational. In Locke's account, however, the undeserving are marked not simply by such implied lack of industry, but also by their fractiousness; by, in other words, their purportedly irrational resistance to the claims of private property. While seeking to legitimate acts of enclosure in both England and her colonies, Locke thus also records a negative image of the suffering and struggles catalysed by this first great unpeopling.

6. For critical history of development discourse, see Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, New York, Zed Books, 2008 and Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994.

7. The full text of the treaty is available at <[www.wto.org/english/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/27-trips\\_02\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/27-trips_02_e.htm)>, accessed July 5, 2009.

8. Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, Boston, MA, South End Press, 1997, p10.

9. Ibid.

Three and a half centuries later, such arguments - which we might think of as constituting the basis for the 'development' *episteme*<sup>6</sup> - are repeated nearly verbatim in one of the central documents of the current round of enclosures: the Trade-Related Intellectual Property (TRIPs) treaty of the Final Act of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).<sup>7</sup> The preamble to the treaty limits intellectual property rights solely to private rights, thereby excluding all forms of knowledge and innovation developed in what Vandana Shiva calls the 'intellectual commons' - among indigenous people whose land claims are based on custom rather than title, among farmers in villages throughout the global South, and even among scientists and scholars who continue to believe that the fruits of their (often publicly funded) research should be available to all.<sup>8</sup> As Shiva notes, the TRIPs treaty is therefore 'a mechanism for the privatisation of the intellectual commons and the deintellectualization of civil society'.<sup>9</sup>

Legitimizing this enclosure of the intellectual commons is the argument, rolled out in Article 27.1 of the treaty, that innovation has to be capable of

industrial application in order to be considered an intellectual property right. As was true in Locke's day, knowledge and rights are recognised only when they generate profits within a capitalist framework. Not only does this dispossess people, it also renders them and their practices illegal. Thus, when people attempt to assert their customary, collective rights to knowledge and resources, when they grow 'quarrelsome and contentious', the TRIPs accord renders them culpable of 'piracy' and 'theft'.<sup>10</sup> The development *episteme*, in other words, systematically produces invisible and illegal people. The great modern project of elaborating a concept of uniform, homogeneous citizenship is paralleled by a project of cadastral surveying and regularisation of landholding that simultaneously transforms a significant percentage of the body politic into unpeople.<sup>11</sup>

The continuous process of unpeopling that I have been discussing has, until quite lately, been remarkably opaque to critical analysis.<sup>12</sup> As David Harvey argues in *The New Imperialism*, materialist theory has tended to follow Marx's assertion that the acts of predation he dubbed 'primitive accumulation' were a kind of original sin of the capitalist system, amassing the capital necessary to jumpstart the system but not recurring subsequently.<sup>13</sup> According to Harvey, theorists of anti-capitalist struggle tended to focus on conflicts over the expanded reproduction of capital through the extraction of surplus value from workers. Historically, this resulted in a wrong-headed strategic emphasis on the exclusive revolutionary capacity of the proletariat within the advanced capitalist economies. Forward-thinking revolutionaries of the last century such as Lenin, C.L.R. James, and Frantz Fanon of course repeatedly worked against the grain of this strategic marginalisation by stressing the insurrectionary agency of the oppressed in colonised nations. In addition, the blindness to acts of enclosure imposed by Marx's theory of primitive accumulation also obscured what David Harvey describes as the 'organically linked, dialectically intertwined' character of struggles in the field of expanded reproduction and around new enclosures.<sup>14</sup> If we agree with Harvey that 'a general re-evaluation of the continuous role and persistence of predatory practices of "original" accumulation is in order',<sup>15</sup> we might wonder how exactly the dialectical relation between expanded reproduction and enclosure has played out during the capitalist era.

Although I obviously do not have space to present a fully developed historical periodisation of enclosure here, I would like to offer a brief discussion of what David Harvey calls 'accumulation by dispossession' that hinges on four crucial phases. Although, as More's *Utopia* suggests, enclosures stretched back to the early modern period, the first phase of truly systematic enclosure dates from the late-sixteenth to the early-nineteenth century. This was the period of the Inclosure Acts in England, but also of the massive growth of the trans-Atlantic slave economy, pan-European witch-hunts that robbed women of their autonomy, and the establishment of private property rules by the East India Company in Bengal.<sup>16</sup> This period is characterised by some of the first acts of fraud and rapine on a world-historical scale. As Marx put

10. Ibid.

11. On cadastral surveys and the standardisation of land holdings, see James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1998, pp29-50.

12. For recent discussions of the history of enclosure, see J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure, and Social Change in England, 1700-1820*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996 and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, the Primitive Accumulation*, New York, Autonomedia, 2004.

13. David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, p144.

14. Ibid., p176.

15. Ibid., p144.

16. On enclosure in the colonial context, see, for example, Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1996 and Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land: Law and Power on the Frontier*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press, 2007.

17. For a discussion of the complicity of the philosophers of *laissez faire* with 'primitive accumulation', see Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2000.

18. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, 'Chapter XXXI, Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist', in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 2005, p738.

19. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, op. cit., p42.

20. This reading of the rise of bourgeois imperialism is derived from David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, op. cit., pp42-46.

it in his scathing critique of liberal theories of the origin of capitalism:<sup>17</sup>

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.<sup>18</sup>

If these initial global acts of enclosure provided the wealth that fuelled the capitalist system in its incipient phase, the contradictions of the system emerged relatively quickly. As David Harvey argues in *The New Imperialism*, the first major trial of bourgeois rule consisted of a crisis of over-accumulation that resulted in the European economic collapse of 1846-50, convulsions that catalysed the unsuccessful revolutionary movements of the era.<sup>19</sup>

It is at this moment that we can begin to make out the dialectical relation between struggles over expanded reproduction and acts of enclosure. The defeat of the bourgeois revolutionary movements of the mid-nineteenth century led to the consolidation of nationalist political currents in the developed capitalist economies of Western Europe. Although some of the surplus capital that led to the economic collapse of mid-century was absorbed through long-term infrastructural investment such as Baron Haussman's rebuilding of Paris under Louis Napoleon, European elites were reluctant to sink excess capital into a massive domestic spatio-temporal fix. With the path to a sweeping structural transformation of European society and the levelling of class differences blocked, surplus capital, with nowhere to go domestically, was forced outward in a massive wave of speculative investment and trade.<sup>20</sup> The state was forced to protect these investments, leading to the rise of a seventy-year long period of bourgeois imperialism, jingoistic inter-imperialist rivalry, and the carnage of the world wars during the first half of the twentieth century. Crucial to this phase of bourgeois imperialism was a fresh wave of enclosures, evidenced most clearly in the 'scramble for Africa' and in the gory escapades of regimes such as that of the Belgian King Leopold II in the pursuit of ivory, rubber, and colonial glory in the Congo Free State. The denouement of this wave of imperial expansion was the auto-destruction of the major European powers and the rise of the United States to global hegemony.

With most of Europe in ruins and a vast internal market within the US to develop, the crises of preceding decades receded and the so-called American century commenced. The Fordist compact between labor, industry, and the state ensured domestic tranquillity and the continuous expansion of capital accumulation and consumption after 1945. During these halcyon years of American power, the US distanced itself from the racist imperial and colonial policies of the European powers, drawing on its anti-colonial

lineage to represent itself as a beacon of freedom to the post-war world. The US constructed itself as a developmental state in these years, relying relatively little on the extraction of value from the rest of the world that had characterised the era of European imperial power.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean to say that the US did not take steps to secure its hegemony; but privileged trade relations, clientelism, patronage, and covert coercion rather than overt imperial occupation and colonisation were the primary means of securing American power.

Nonetheless, the US model of development, adopted by many postcolonial nations, exacerbated policies of enclosure established by the European colonial powers, this time primarily to the benefit of indigenous elites. Rural development was aimed at reducing poverty and averting famine by improving agricultural technology and increasing production; thereby, 'Green Revolution'<sup>22</sup> theory maintained, increasing rural people's incomes and consumption power. While innovations such as the introduction of high-yield varieties of wheat, rice, and maize more than doubled cereal production in the global South during the period from the 1960s to the 1980s, these Green Revolution technologies required intensive use of fertilisers and pesticides. Those without the capital to purchase such expensive inputs were pushed off the land in the millions as the monocultural Green Revolution varieties were substituted for the less high yielding but locally adapted and low input crops developed by peasant communities over millennia.<sup>23</sup> The result was the gradual globalisation of the culture of industrialised agriculture pioneered in the US.<sup>24</sup> In addition, increased production translated into a market glut, leading to a decades-long crash in the price of agricultural commodities. If the Soviet model hinged on a process of collectivisation by force that deracinated millions of peasants, the culture of the Green Revolution championed by the US involved a more subtle but nonetheless sweeping confiscation of the peasant surplus.<sup>25</sup>

This new wave of enclosures, which paralleled and yet dwarfed those that took place in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was ratcheted up massively with the crisis of Fordism in the developed nations. By the 1960s, former powers such as Germany and Japan had reconstructed their industrial infrastructure and were seeking to grow through exports. Within a decade, the ability of the US to absorb the resulting global surplus internally began to flag.<sup>26</sup> Plummeting profits prompted the ruling class in the US to scrap the Fordist compact and switch from production to financialisation in order to discipline domestic working class movements and thereby restore rates of profit. In tandem with this renewed class warfare, Bretton Woods institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), set up to maintain the stability of the global economy following the Great Depression, were unleashed on developing nations. During the debt crises of the late 1970s and 1980s, measures intended to shield these countries' economies from global competition and thereby promote indigenous development were dismantled, and postcolonial nations were

21. *Ibid.*, p56.

22. 'Green Revolution' is the term often given to the wave of implementation of new agricultural technologies which characterised commercial agriculture in the late twentieth century.

23. For a discussion of the imperial technologies of knowledge implicit in the Green Revolution, see Shiva, p107.

24. Annette Aurélie Desmarais, *La Via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants*, Ann Arbor, MI, Pluto, 2007, p46.

25. Walden Bello, 'Introduction,' in Desmarais, *La Via Campesina*, op. cit., p3.

26. This is, of course, a tale told in many places. I draw once again on Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, op. cit., pp59-74.

cracked open to global capital.

Key to this new phase of enclosure was the structural and ideological transformation of the state. Where once the developmentalist state had purported to be engaged in a project of redistribution and uplift, now the neo-liberal state imposed by IMF-mandated structural adjustment policies and, in many cases, by US-sponsored military coup, became an explicit handmaiden of enclosure.<sup>27</sup> In countries throughout the global South, the social wage was slashed, government assets were liquidated at fire-sale prices, currencies were devalued, and market access for foreign corporations was locked in. Similar policies were pursued by ideologically assertive and rapacious elites in the global North, with moves to privatise hard-won public assets such as housing stock, education, health care, water, and other infrastructures becoming commonplace during and after the Reagan-Thatcher era. These neo-liberal policies reached an ideological high point in the mid-1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 perhaps constitutes the culmination of these policies of neo-liberal enclosure. While international accords had previously liberalised trading rules regarding manufactured goods, the WTO rules covered agricultural trade, services, intellectual property rights (IPRs), and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).<sup>28</sup> In addition to opening the global South as a sink for surplus agricultural commodities from the US and European Union, the WTO regulations on IPRs and GMOs constituted a truly breathtaking act of enclosure. Legitimated once again through the argument that integration into international markets would ensure the conservation of biodiversity by promoting increasing GNP in poor nations, WTO IPR regulations reinforced state control of genetic resources throughout the global South while mandating legal mechanisms for the exploitation of those resources by transnational corporations.<sup>29</sup> Not content with attempts to enclose the commonly held land of farmers throughout the global South, capital now seeks to enclose the genetic codes of their crops and, in some cases, of the people themselves.

It is precisely this new wave of unprecedented enclosures that contributors to this issue of *new formations* explore. This is a particularly appropriate venue for such an exploration because the history of these new enclosures is not, as the previous hastily sketched genealogy may perhaps suggest, purely economic. To the contrary, acts of enclosure always take place on cultural terrain. This does not always appear to be the case, however, primarily as a result of what Pierre Bourdieu called the *doxa* of neo-liberalism.<sup>30</sup> Encapsulated in Margaret Thatcher's infamous quip that 'There Is No Alternative,' the cultural rhetoric of the new enclosures typically masquerades in the putatively objective, universalist jargon of neo-liberal economics. Yet hiding behind the bluster concerning 'efficiency' are sweeping, highly partial cultural and political attitudes. IMF-mandated structural adjustment programmes are an obvious example. These policies were deployed based on the bald

27. For an analysis of the imposition of neo-liberalism by force, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York, Picador, 2008.

28. Desmarais, *La Via Campesina*, pp48-49.

29. *Ibid.*, p52.

30. Pierre Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market*, New York, New Press, 1998, pp30-31.

assumption that the expansion of export crops would not impact food security in nations of the global South. Today, according to a recent report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 1 billion people (1 in 6 people on the planet) go hungry every day.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, what the peasant organisation *La Via Campesina* terms 'food sovereignty' is in peril. Moreover, the universalistic presumptions behind 'slimming down' the state that are so central to neo-liberal nostrums conveniently ignored the fact that agriculture in the US and EU benefits from massive state subsidies. If, in other words, neo-liberal *doxa* attempts to portray itself as a non-moral, supra-cultural order, a whole series of moral premises are implicit in the technicising language deployed to legitimate such *doxa*; among these, as James Ferguson suggests while discussing the imposition of what he calls 'scientific capitalism' on Africa, are 'notions of the inviolable rights of individuals, the sanctity of private property, the nobility of capital accumulation, the intrinsic value of 'freedom' (understood as freedom to engage in economic transactions) ... [and a] puritan tone of austerity as punishment for past irresponsibility'.<sup>32</sup> Just as in John Locke's day, culturally specific assumptions are portrayed as universal and logical, setting up a series of binary relations between reason and unreason, science and superstition, modernity and the archaic which work ineluctably to legitimate acts of enclosure. The only alternative to neo-liberalism, this framework suggests, is irrational reaction and stagnation, so there really is no alternative.

Just as was true in previous epochs, the new enclosures are generating massive suffering and significant contention. Several decades of structural adjustment policies and WTO-induced global competition have led to an unsustainable surge of urbanisation throughout the global South, producing what Mike Davis calls a 'planet of slums'.<sup>33</sup> Residents of these mega-cities of course had no part in catalysing the financial crisis that has rocked the developed world in recent years, but they nevertheless are particularly vulnerable to the severe economic buffeting their countries experience as a result of the economic crisis. People living in the least-developed countries spend an average of 70-80 per cent of their incomes on food; as a consequence, food riots have shaken over thirty nations over the last year and a half.<sup>34</sup> Women and their children, the poor, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and migrant workers are suffering disproportionately as, after decades of uprooting people from the land and the means of autonomous subsistence, the contradictions of neo-liberalism surface, destroying livelihoods, spreading hunger, and sparking violent reaction. Moreover, increasing levels of food insecurity are speeding the process of enclosure. Over the last two years, wealthy nations have bought nearly 30 million hectares of farmland - an area half the size of Europe's total farmland - in poor countries such as the Sudan, Madagascar, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to cushion themselves from the next wave of food shortages.<sup>35</sup>

The Marxist tradition has tended to see the global spread of capitalism as a process of 'creative destruction'.<sup>36</sup> In the *Communist Manifesto*, for example,

31. 'World Hunger Reaches the 1 Billion People Mark,' *The New York Times*, June 19, 2009, sec. World, <[www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/06/19/world/AP-EU-UN-World-Hunger.html?ref=global-home](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2009/06/19/world/AP-EU-UN-World-Hunger.html?ref=global-home)>.

32. James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2006, p80.

33. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, New York, Verso, 2007.

34. 'Global Food Crisis Increases Instability in World's Poorest Countries,' *Least Developed Country Watch*, 20 April 2008, Accessed July 6, 2009, <[www.ldcwatch.org](http://www.ldcwatch.org)>.

35. 'Fears for the world's poor countries as the rich grab land to grow food | Environment | *The Guardian*,' July 3, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jul/03/land-grabbing-food-environment>.

36. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, New York, Harper Perennial, 2008.

37. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York, Verso, 1998, p38.

38. Retort, *Afflicted Powers*, New York, Verso, 2005, pp140-141.

39. Notes from Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism*, New York, Verso, 2003, pp20-21.

40. Notes from Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere*, op. cit., pp63-68.

Marx and Engels emphasised the potentially progressive character of the bourgeoisie's constant revolution of both production and society.<sup>37</sup> It is certainly true that significant strands of resistance to the new enclosures have hardly been progressive in character. A wave of religious and ethnic fundamentalist movements has been one of the most prominent outcomes of the new enclosures. Yet these movements should not be seen simply as relics of a bygone world. Contemporary Islamist movements, for example, typically react to the culturally destabilising impact of enclosures by advancing doctrines that are anything but inward looking and orthodox. As the Retort collective underlines in their incisive reading, revolutionary Islamism draws on typically twentieth-century political technologies, ideas, and practices (including vanguardist Marxism) while instigating a relative democratisation of religion by opening sacred texts up to interpretation by a variety of lay actors.<sup>38</sup> Of course, although they make use of the latest digital technologies and military hardware, such movements also cast their eyes backwards to the putative purity of primitive Islam. Their project is essentially one of purging what adherents view as a corrupt orthodoxy. Like other strains of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, these vanguardist movements, fired by the evident venality and compromise of many postcolonial secular states, have won significant numbers of followers from among the hordes of migrants crowding into slums in the mega-cities of the global South and North. Driven by a zeal to restore invented traditions, such movements tend to install a highly patriarchal and repressive new order to replace the corrupt old one.

In tandem with such fundamentalist movements, however, the new enclosures have also sparked social movements dedicated to tearing down the fences established by the neo-liberal order and reclaiming the commons in an egalitarian manner.<sup>39</sup> These struggles emerged first and foremost among those most impacted by the new enclosures: the peasants and indigenous peoples of Latin America, Africa, and Asia whose ways of life were most threatened by measures such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Groups such as Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to contest the new processes of enclosure. Their emergence helped name a new enemy - neo-liberal globalisation - at a time when the Left was otherwise demoralised by the collapse of communist alternatives and the apparent bankruptcy of grand revolutionary narratives. In the process, these movements articulated new oppositional cultural and political forms, drawing on a compelling brew of pre- and post-modern organising tactics intended to democratise sites and structures of power. Crucial to such new social formations were decentralised, anti-hierarchical organisational forms that were just as likely to draw inspiration from indigenous village councils as from theories of emergent networks grounded in computational science.<sup>40</sup> The point was to deepen practices of participatory self-management that challenge the technocratic, anti-democratic character of organisations such as the WTO. The rhizomatic cultural politics of these organisations were

spawned, in other words, not simply by an affinity with postmodern theory but through a recasting of autonomous traditions in reaction to the novel global architecture of governance and expropriation that arose during the neo-liberal era.

The new enclosures have also helped catalyse radical democratic experiments in the global North. Indeed, one of the signal developments of the last several decades has been the increasing (though never unproblematic) articulation of struggles across borders separating city from countryside, nation from nation, and South from North. Confederations such as People's Global Action (PGA) and meetings such as the World Social Forum have been animated by the goal of uniting computer hackers, precarious workers, and environmental organisations in the North with indigenous people's organisations and peasant movements from the South. This project of articulating pre- and post-industrial social formations goes some way towards realising Antonio Gramsci's enduringly timely vision of uniting workers and peasants across geographical and cultural divides and draws crucially on a powerful common rhetoric of resistance to enclosure. Indeed, an organisation such as *La Via Campesina* confounds even these dichotomies between North and South by uniting French peasants and American family farmers with Mexican *campesinos* and Indian farmers' unions.<sup>41</sup> Over the last two decades, this rhizomatic movement of movements developed into a remarkably flexible and effective force on the world stage, winning major rhetorical and even some concrete material concessions from powerful organisations of global governance like the WTO. In the process, the anti-capitalist movement developed a novel culture of networked organising and protest that we are only just beginning to understand and evaluate critically.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to offering theoretical evaluation of these new commoning movements, cultural studies has important work to perform in linking these struggles to the historical archive of symbolic repertoires and organisational strategies adopted in past struggles against enclosure. Such analogies will necessarily pose crucial strategic questions: If economic systems are always culturally (as well as materially, socially, and physically) constituted, what are the specific rhetorics through which dominant 'development' institutions represent themselves to various global publics during the neo-liberal era? To what extent do analyses of the workings of imperialism in previous historical periods remain relevant today? Are we simply witnessing a repetition and intensification of previous forms of dependency, or are there important analytical distinctions to be made between contemporary enclosures and the forms of 'primitive accumulation' described by Marx and subsequent commentators? What, finally, are the unfolding contradictions that bedevil contemporary forms of expropriation, and what openings do such contradictions offer groups struggling to reclaim the commons?

A crucial part of this work of articulation will consist of underlining the dialectical link between struggles in the field of expanded reproduction and those against the new enclosures.<sup>43</sup> A key weakness of the contemporary

41. For a discussion of the strengths derived from such diversity, see Desmarais, *La Via Campesina*, op. cit.

42. An example of such recent efforts to understand the cultural logic of networking within the anti-capitalist movement would include Jeffrey Juris, *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2008.

43. Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, op. cit., p170.

44. Notes from Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere*, op. cit., p387.

45. For theories of radical democracy, see Hilary Wainwright, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*, New York, Verso, 2003, and Heather Gautney et al., *Democracy, States, and the Struggle for Global Justice*, New York, Routledge, 2009.

46. Neil Smith, 'Introduction: Altered States,' in Heather Gautney et al., *Democracy, States, and the Struggle for Global Justice*, op. cit., p3.

47. Bourdieu, *Acts of Resistance*, op. cit., p2.

48. For discussion of the need for strategic thinking within the anti-capitalist movement, see Jeremy Gilbert, *Anti-Capitalism and Culture*, New York, Berg, 2008.

49. See, for example, Midnight Notes Collective, *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-1992*, New York, Autonomedia, 1992.

anti-capitalist movement has been its assumption, in the words of the Notes from Nowhere collective, that the old anti-systemic formula for taking power is dead.<sup>44</sup> While it certainly is true that the *dirigiste* visions of toppling capitalist stooges from the levers of simplistically-conceived state power have prevented many previous anti-capitalist movements from developing in a radical democratic direction, to ignore the complex, multi-scalar character of state power today is to abjure a long-term strategy of social and political transformation.<sup>45</sup> If the state today is a congeries of interlinked institutional sites rather than a simple singular object - as neo-liberal theory and far too many anti-capitalist activists conceive of it - it is a plural site that is produced by struggle from both above and below.<sup>46</sup> To use Pierre Bourdieu's metaphor, the state is not only a mailed fist of oppression; it also has a left hand made up of the spending ministries which, peopled by teachers, youth leaders, family counsellors, and so on, are the traces of past social struggles.<sup>47</sup> Along with the land, resources, and people of the global South, this left hand of the state has been and will continue to be one of the principal targets of the new enclosures. Cultural studies has a vital role to play in developing the radical democratic tactics pioneered by the anti-capitalist movement of movements into effective transformative strategies on a theoretical and practical plane.<sup>48</sup>

This issue of *new formations* endeavours to define the nature of the new enclosures more precisely and to articulate some of the strategies adopted to halt or reverse these enclosures. The collection begins with an essay by George Caffentzis, a member of the Midnight Notes Collective that pioneered analysis of the new enclosures at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>49</sup> In 'The Future of the Commons: Neo-liberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital,' Caffentzis suggests that one of the challenges faced by the contemporary anti-capitalist movement is the cooptation of commons thinking by institutional voices tasked with saving neo-liberalism from its worst excesses. The World Bank, for example, has now officially embraced common property resources as a vehicle for development, reversing decades of emphasis on private property as the sole means to economic success. In a trenchant critique of the new New Deal policies advanced by the Obama administration, Caffentzis argues that a distinction between a pro-capitalist and an anti-capitalist definition of the commons is crucial if we are to understand and challenge new forms of hegemony. For Caffentzis, Obama's stimulus plans are designed to restore the global capitalist system back to a pre-crisis state of minimal government intervention rather than to proliferate permanent commons, and need to be criticised accordingly.

Turning to the food riots that have been one of the most prominent symptoms of the economic crisis across the global South in recent years, Crystal Bartolovich dismantles dominant perceptions of such uprisings as a form of pre-modern, reactionary protest. For Bartolovich, riots over the price of tortillas, rice, and bread during the last two years constitute the return of an emancipatory project grounded in a radical commons. Her 'A Natural History of "Food Riots"' interrogates prominent readings of anti-capitalist movements

as developing primarily from post-modern forms of immaterial labour (aka 'the cognitariat'). The anti-capitalist movement should, Bartolovich argues, be seen as equally energised by the forms of material deprivation experienced by subsistence farmers and slum dwellers in the global South. To support her discussion of the radical commons, Bartolovich offers a critique of Garrett Hardin's influential 'tragedy of the commons' thesis. Challenging this fundamental neo-liberal credo, Bartolovich asserts that contemporary food riots open a fissure in time back to the radical claims of the Diggers for land and autonomy during the English revolution.

Bartolovich's corrective discussion of food riots raises the question of why resistance to the new enclosures has been represented in the dismissive terms she so skilfully assaults. In his 'Unimagined Communities: Developmental Refugees, Megadams, and Monumental Modernity,' Rob Nixon sets out to deconstruct the rhetorical and material moves that render the victims of enclosures invisible. For Nixon, the modern nation-state - and here he very much includes postcolonial states - is sustained by systematic acts of exclusion. Indeed, the very discourse of national development is one that is dependent on selective vision. In order to claim and develop 'natural resources,' the postcolonial state had first to engage in a real and symbolic evacuation of the inhabitants who had hitherto been stewards of these environmental riches. The result is a form of spatial amnesia, a process of inventing surplus people that finds its paradigmatic form in the production of ghosted communities by the apartheid regime in South Africa. Developing his understanding of this form of apartheid through Arundhati Roy's powerful essays on the megadams built on the Narmada River over the last three decades, Nixon focuses on the spectacle of modernity constituted by India's interwoven nuclear and dam-building programs. According to Nixon, Roy's pithy essays constitute a powerful form of political resistance to the Hindu fundamentalist state's project of exclusionary development. Articulating local struggles to global water wars and underlining the role of technocratic discourse in rendering environmental refugees invisible, Roy's essays work against the unpeopling of the land.

Like Nixon's essay, Peter Hitchcock's 'Oil in an American Imaginary' seeks to unpack the complex cultural rhetoric that inevitably subtends conflicts over resources. Oil, Hitchcock contends, is special. It is both ubiquitous and yet virtually invisible. As such, it offers a perfect symbol for the predominantly informal character of US empire, an empire that, as I have already argued, operates primarily through patronage and covert operations, and therefore seems to be both everywhere and nowhere. Yet oil, like the blood that is so often spilled in the course of its acquisition, is also a material substance vital to virtually every facet of life in the global North. Hitchcock's argument here recalls that of Fredric Jameson in his characterisation of the present absence of imperialism in modernist representation.<sup>50</sup> For Jameson, imperialism constituted an unrepresentable horizon for modernist literature inasmuch as everyday life came to be dependent on a geographically and culturally

50. Fredric Jameson, 'Modernism and Imperialism,' in Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p52.

distant elsewhere: the colony. In his essay, Hitchcock follows Jameson's lead by arguing that struggles over the production and consumption of oil, whether represented in an epic novel based in Saudi Arabia such as Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* or by a domestic muckraker such as Upton Sinclair, remain a kind of missed encounter. This is not simply, Hitchcock suggests, because of the machinations of ruling classes to suppress working class struggles over oil, but also because its very ubiquity in the body politic makes it and its influence virtually impossible to contain in representational terms.

Morten Tønnessen's essay focuses on a substance even more ubiquitous than oil, one that has perhaps also been more essential to the reproduction of our species: non-human animals. Approaching analysis of human-affiliated life forms from the perspective of the *long durée* and developing the concept of *ecosemiotics*, Tønnessen argues that the historical process of globalisation can perhaps be best understood through analysis of the planet's colonisation not simply by human beings but also by the accompanying proliferation of species we favour. Alongside this process of planetary diffusion, human beings have introduced a schism in nature, Tønnessen suggests, one that divides biological life into favoured and non-favoured species. Life and death have been apportioned around the planet for centuries according to this anthropocentric matrix of biological utility. The result is a global colonial organism or ecological empire, with human beings at the apex of a massive pyramid of fauna and flora that we privilege because of their utility to our species' expanded reproduction. While acknowledging the primary role played by Europe and the United States in diffusing a particularly unsustainable model of development around the world over the last five hundred years, Tønnessen explores the provocative question of whether there may be something ecologically imperialistic in our behaviour as a species over a much longer time span than that of Euro-American-dominated modernity. Drawing unnerving conclusions from this historical retrospect, Tønnessen argues that the serried ecological crises we currently confront are linked inextricably to the forms of biopower we exercise not simply over human populations but over the mammoth global pyramid of flesh and grain upon which we depend.

Sian Sullivan's work directly addresses these ecological crises through its analysis of so-called ecosystem services: the commodification, marketing, and trading of the planetary environment during the neo-liberal era. Perhaps the key newly invented commodity in this regard is carbon, trading of which is now a multibillion dollar industry. Although the breakdown of negotiations to establish a global climate regime at Copenhagen last year has quashed some of the hype surrounding this emerging market, the long-term outlook for the commodification of the Earth's atmosphere still looks bullish. As Sullivan argues, the planet is becoming increasingly essentialised as a carbon matrix. The United Nations Environmental Program's proposed scheme for reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD), for example, hinges on translating the world's forests into carbon sinks, their value to be

determined based on their sequestration capabilities. Polluting industries could purchase carbon offsets - contemporary equivalents of the medieval pardon for the commission of a sin - and continue with business as usual. As Sullivan explains, this market in carbon offsets depends on the reduction of environments and emissions to forms of equivalency, interchangeability, and substitutability. Specific initiatives such as REDD, that is, are part of a broader trend towards the construction of nature as a provider of commodifiable 'eco-system services' to human populations. Sullivan's essay documents the stages through which this reductive conception of nature has been advanced, underlining the extent to which environmental conservation organisations have been complicit in such strategies. In a tantalising concluding section, Sullivan explores an alternative, non-reductive approach to nature that she terms an immanent ecology of intersubjective sentience.

Turning to another key technology of neo-liberal governance, Leerom Medovoi's essay discusses the rhetoric of sustainability. Building on Wendy Brown's important deconstruction of notions of 'tolerance,' Medovoi argues that 'sustainability' contains a comparable range of contradictory meanings: it suggests care for the Earth, but also an act of wounding. Following this etymology, Medovoi demonstrates how dominant accounts of sustainability are framed by a contradictory desire to protect the planet while also continuing to engage in forms of production and consumption that deplete our resource base beyond the point at which they might be regenerated. The language of sustainable development typically asks us, Medovoi suggests, to think about humanity and nature in purely economic terms, terms that offer no critical perspective on whether the continuing expansion of capitalism might ultimately require the complete consumption and destruction of nature. Expanding on James O'Connor's important theory of the second contradiction of capitalism, Medovoi argues that capital seeks to extract 'living energy' from a wide variety of social relations (rather than, as orthodox Marxist theory would have it, just from labour). Sustainability discourse is thus essentially a kind of deployment of biopower that seeks to determine what must be and what cannot be killed so that the process of surplus value extraction can continue indefinitely into the future. But, as Medovoi suggests, sustainability is structured around a process of disavowal since it must both admit and repudiate the potentially mortal damage that capitalism inflicts on human life and the natural world alike.

In the issue's concluding essay, Brett Neilsen and Ben Dibley introduce the concept of the 'actuarial imaginary' as another way of understanding the complex process of disavowal that Medovoi anatomises. For Neilsen and Dibley, the actuarial imaginary constitutes an assemblage made up of the institutions, technologies, techniques, and ethics that seek to measure the contingencies of the atmospheric, geological, financial, and social processes gathered under the rubric of the climate crisis. The goal of the actuarial imaginary is to maximise security, profitability and well-being, but always within the terms of a prudentialism that hinges not on the Keynesian welfare

state but rather on the individualised and dispersed risk regimes of the neo-liberal subject. The strategies for environmental mitigation proposed by the International Panel on Climate Change and other similar bodies thus globalise the biopolitical strategies of security that Michel Foucault first diagnosed in relation to urban administration. While seeking to secure the climatic health and security of certain populations, however, the actuarial imaginary inevitably generates climate apartheid through its privatised and individualised mode of operation. Indeed, as Neilsen and Dibley suggest, the governance of risk itself seems to be in crisis in the face of a triple crunch: the meltdown of the financial sector so central to neo-liberal accumulation strategies over the last three decades, fast-depleting sources of fossil fuel, and an increasingly unhinged climate that imperils not simply smooth accumulation but civilisation itself.

As the essays in this issue underline, the task facing the gathering forces of anti-capitalist resistance around the globe is daunting. If, as Marx put it, the history of enclosures is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire, then this narrative of expropriation is destined to become increasingly apocalyptic. The current economic crisis has laid bare the contradictions of neo-liberalism, and yet the dominant solutions adopted by the leaders of the wealthy nations have essentially hinged on an attempt to return the system to the *status quo ante*. As in previous crises of over-accumulation, it is likely that a savage new round of enclosures will be unleashed in order to secure accelerated rates of profit. The outline of such a strategy is already visible in the negotiations for a post-Kyoto treaty agreement on global warming. Despite the inconclusive negotiations at the COP15 conference in Copenhagen, the dominant trend remains toward privatisation of the last and greatest of the Earth's commons: the atmosphere.<sup>51</sup> Yet capitalism is increasingly beset by its own limits. With hundreds of millions of people rendered surplus by recent rounds of enclosure, a system founded on ceaseless expansion is choking on its own waste.<sup>52</sup> Atmospheric pollution produced by two hundred years of intensive exploitation of fossil fuels is tipping the global environment away from the relatively stable state that has sustained life since the Neolithic revolution. As climate change alters the environment away from these relatively benign conditions, all will suffer, but those who will endure the most grievous adversity are the same subsistence farmers who have been subjected to the most intense waves of enclosure in the global South during the neo-liberal era. If we continue on the present course, the defining experiences of this still young century are likely to be crop failure, hunger, and displacement on a scale that is hard to fathom.<sup>53</sup>

51. Patrick Bond, 'The Global Carbon Trade Debate: For or Against the Privatization of the Air?' *The Commoner*, 13 (Winter 2008-2009), Accessed July 7, 2009, <[www.commoner.org.uk](http://www.commoner.org.uk)>.

52. My comments here are informed not simply by the latest scientific research on climate change, but also by work on the ecological contradictions of capitalism. See, for example, James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, New York, Guilford, 1997 and Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?*, New York, Zed, 2007.

53. 'Poor face more hunger as climate change leads to crop failure, says Oxfam' | Environment | The Guardian, July 5, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jul/05/crops-farmers-climate-change-oxfam>

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