

Primitive Accumulation, New Enclosures, and Global Land Grabs: A Theoretical Intervention*

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ABSTRACT Recent critical analyses of global land grabs have variously invoked global capitalism and neocolonialism to account for this trend. One line of inquiry approaches land grabs as instances of “primitive accumulation of capital” whereby lands in the Global South are “enclosed” and brought within the ambit of global capitalism. Another perspective invokes the history of Anglo-American colonialism for critiquing the developmentalist discourse that depicts Africa as the “last frontier” to be tamed by the techno-industrial civilization of the North. This essay integrates these two perspectives by elaborating capitalism as an irreducibly colonial formation with global inceptions. I begin with a discussion of “primitive accumulation” and, counter to many, question the suitability of “enclosure” for interpreting land grabs. The second section delves into the theoretical origins of primitive accumulation, proposing to situate it in a global and colonial genealogy of capitalism. A final section charts the theoretical and historical contours of this global genealogy and arrives at a more capacious reconceptualization of primitive accumulation. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of contemporary land grabs for *in situ* displacement, the fungibility of land, and new enclosures in the contemporary reconfiguration of global value chains.

What one today calls world history in the West and the East is the history of development in the objects, means, and forms of appropriation interpreted as progress.

—*Carl Schmitt*, *Nomos of the Earth*

Introduction

The critical conjunction of the financial crisis and the spike in global food prices in 2008 has ushered in a new episode in global land relations that crystallizes in the annexation of vast expanses of farmland in Africa by powerful transnational actors. Concerns about food security by import-dependent countries, compounded by the search for new investment instruments relatively insulated from the vagaries of financial markets, have propelled governments, sovereign wealth funds, and

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corporations to search for agricultural land in Africa, via purchase or long-term lease, for food and fuel production. The 2010 land report of the World Bank observes that

the demand for land has been enormous. Compared to an average annual expansion of global agricultural land of less than 4 million hectares before 2008, approximately 56 million hectares worth of large-scale farmland deals were announced even before the end of 2009. More than 70 percent of such demand has been in Africa; countries such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan have transferred millions of hectares to investors in recent years. (Deininger and Byerlee 2010:xiv)

While the World Bank report evinces a cautious optimism about the “opportunities for poor countries with large agricultural sectors and ample endowments of land” (Deininger and Byerlee 2010:xv), a growing scholarship strikes a much more critical tenor attuned to the actual and potential displacement, impoverishment, and precariousness visited by offshore land acquisitions on local populations who subsist by small-scale agriculture (Hall 2011a). The staggering proportion and the resource (as opposed to market) orientation of these acquisitions have predictably echoed “the land grabs that underwrote both colonialism and imperialism” and raised the specters of another “scramble for Africa” driven by global capital (Borras et al. 2011:209).

It is not the intention of this essay to examine the manifold drivers, mechanisms, and implications of this process (see Zoomers 2010). Rather, I offer some systematic reflections on the conceptual apparatus that informs the critical scholarship on land grabs, in the hope of clarifying and expanding our focus on this phenomenon. To this end, I examine two interrelated arguments that structure the critiques of global land grabs, namely, global capital and (neo)colonialism. The first of these arguments approaches land grabs as instances of “primitive accumulation of capital” whereby African lands are “enclosed” and brought within the ambit of global capitalism. The second argument invokes the history of European (and specifically Anglo-American) colonialism for unveiling the developmentalist discourse behind land grabs as akin to the justifications of colonial expansion, this time aimed at Africa as the “last frontier” to be conquered and tamed by the techno-industrial civilization of the North (which is a somewhat imprecise term, since the actors of land grabs now include the Gulf countries, China, India, and Brazil). The objective of this essay is to integrate these two perspectives by elaborating a historically grounded understanding of capitalism as an irreducibly colonial formation with global inceptions

and map out some of the implications of such an understanding for thinking about contemporary land grabs.

Specifically, I aim to clarify and refine the concept of “primitive accumulation,” which figures prominently in the critical accounts of land grabs. While this concept is indispensable for an analysis of the question at hand, its various deployments in political economy and social theory have been riddled by problems of imprecision, which stem from Karl Marx’s coinage of *primitive accumulation* in simultaneously descriptive and analytic registers. Perhaps more importantly, a close adherence to the analytic valence of primitive accumulation risks falling prey to the shortcomings of a narrow formalism and “methodological nationalism” (Goswami 2004:13) that haunt Marx’s seminal formulation of the concept in the last section of the first volume of *Capital* ([1867] 1976).

If “primitive accumulation” is to perform any theoretical heavy lifting in the analysis of contemporary land grabs, its conceptual intension (what it *means*) and descriptive extension (what it *covers*) need to be clarified, and the problems of formalism and methodological nationalism addressed. In what follows, I attempt to provide such a clarification of primitive accumulation by situating it in a global genealogy of capitalism, in which colonialism occupies an originary and formative role. I conceptualize primitive accumulation as a frontier phenomenon that arises at the interface of accumulative and nonaccumulative logics of social reproduction and consists in the assimilation or subordinate articulation of the latter to the former through the deployment of extraeconomic and extralegal force. Put more simply, primitive accumulation marks the conceptual locus of political violence operative in the capitalization of social reproduction. This reconceptualization, I argue, explodes Marx’s formal definition of primitive accumulation as the destruction of various social forms to the effect of establishing a uniform capital-relation between proletarian free labor and capitalist private property. A colonial perspective populates the putatively homogenous space of capital relation with multiple and heterogeneous social forms that primitive accumulation transforms and articulates into fluid networks of capital accumulation. Such a capacious concept of primitive accumulation, which is attentive to the inherent heterogeneity of global capitalism and the formative role of political force in its colonial genealogy, can refine our analytic framework for studying contemporary offshore land acquisitions.

The space of an essay does not allow me to address the entire expanse of the subject. My observations have to remain abstract, which I hope is partially mitigated by ad hoc historical illustrations selectively culled from my ongoing research on the history of “colonial capitalism”

between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. I hope that these observations provoke some reflection on the global genealogy of capitalism, in which I believe we should situate the dynamics of primitive accumulation currently at work in land grabs.

The essay proceeds in three parts. I begin with a discussion of the notion of “primitive accumulation” as applied to global land grabs, and specifically question the suitability of the term *enclosure* to designate this process. The second section delves into the theoretical origins of primitive accumulation through a critique of Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, and proposes to situate primitive accumulation in a global and colonial genealogy of capitalism. The third and final section charts the theoretical and historical contours of this global genealogy and arrives at a more capacious reconceptualization of primitive accumulation. The essay concludes by drawing out the implications of the discussion for thinking about contemporary land grabs around the nodes of *in situ* displacement, fungibility of land, and new enclosures.

Primitive Accumulation: Vicissitudes of a Concept

A cursory survey of the twentieth-century discussions of primitive accumulation leaves one with the impression that this is a hopelessly imprecise and confounding term. A major thread of Marxian interpretation originating in the 1970s has treated primitive accumulation as a concluded phase in the development of capitalism, which historically *preceded* the emergence of capital’s autonomous expanded reproduction (Wood 2002). This interpretation has found support in Marx’s own declaration in *Capital* that “[i]n Western Europe . . . the process of primitive accumulation has more or less been accomplished” ([1867] 1976:932). More recent scholarship, inspired by Rosa Luxemburg, has held that *ongoing* primitive accumulation is indispensable for capital’s expanded reproduction, which depends on the capitalist domain’s assimilation of a pre- or noncapitalist outside for maintaining conditions of profitability and realization. In this account, primitive accumulation is cast as a cyclical process that intensifies notably during times of capitalist crisis (Arendt 1968; Harvey 2003; Luxemburg [1913] 2003). Finally, a third position construes primitive accumulation as immanent and ever present in the capital relation, and posits the capital relation itself as nothing but the quantitative extension of the original separation of direct producers from the means of production (de Angelis 2004, 2007). Compounding this disagreement over the temporal coordinates of primitive accumulation are divergent views on the *nature* of primitive accumulation, with some scholars consigning primitive accumulation to

the “plunder” of resources necessary for getting capitalism off the ground (Banaji 2007:56), others conceiving it as the “capitalization” of the means of labor or the destruction of noncapitalist forms of sociability (Chatterjee 1993; Sanyal 2007), and yet others altogether dismissing the relevance of the concept for understanding capitalism (Blaut 1993).

As noted earlier, part of the imprecision undoubtedly stems from Marx’s usage of *primitive accumulation* in simultaneously descriptive and analytic registers. On the one hand, the term encapsulates the story of the early-modern social transformation in the English countryside and the Scottish highlands qua the enclosure of common lands and the eviction of the peasantry. On the other hand, it functions as an abstract concept that expresses the forcible divorcing of direct producers from the means of subsistence, which simultaneously engenders capitalist private property and free wage labor. It is arguably the descriptive-historiographical dimension of this account that underpins the historicist understandings of primitive accumulation as a transient phase on the road to capitalism proper, and we need not pursue this point here. The more important point I would like to make here is that the specter of historicism continues to haunt even those efforts to grasp primitive accumulation by its analytic handle and explore its ongoing reiterations, especially in regard to the contemporary politics of land. The application of the term *primitive accumulation* to land appropriations in the Global South exude a curious sense of *déjà vu*, as if one were watching a drama that made its debut somewhere else. The “original” performance of the drama is, of course, the English Enclosures and the Scottish Highland Clearances between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, poignantly recounted by Marx in the section “The So-Called Primitive Accumulation” ([1867] 1976).

In the preface to this section, Marx acknowledges that the expropriation of the peasantry, which he designates as the “basis of the whole process” of primitive accumulation, varies across different countries and historical epochs. Such variation nonetheless does not prevent Marx from concluding that “[o]nly in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it [primitive accumulation] the classic form” ([1867] 1976:876), and it is perhaps suggestive that even when Marx ventures beyond England to discuss modern theories of colonization, it is mainly to shed brighter light on primitive accumulation in England; 931–40). What I would caution against is an uncritical adoption of this “classic” case and a turning of it into a “trope” of enclosure for contemporary analysis. For when shot through with the trope of enclosure, the African peasantry assumes the part once played by their English predecessors, while national governments, multinational corporations, and

international financial institutions replace British landlords. The actors change but the script remains quaintly familiar: the enclosure of common lands, the expropriation of the peasantry, and the rise of free labor. Whether it is the structural-adjustment-driven titling programs of the 1980s and 1990s or the commercial land acquisitions of the late 2000s, analyses of primitive accumulation in the Global South appear overlain with the image of the English Enclosures redux (Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa 1995; Midnight Collective 1990). In this picture, we behold global capitalism *finally* arriving in Africa, a capitalist inside poised to devour the last remnants of a capitalist outside at the “last frontier.”

I should make it clear that I broadly subscribe to the position that the notion of primitive accumulation remains indispensable for any analysis of capitalism, historical or contemporary, and I have incurred intellectual debts to the recent efforts to bring into focus the continuous and structural nature of primitive accumulation. However, I am wary of the predilection for the language of “new enclosures” in critiquing primitive accumulation in the Global South, which might be inadvertently sneaking a subtle form of historicism back into analysis (Chakrabarty 2000), a form that had ostensibly been ousted by the rejection of stadial interpretations of primitive accumulation as a historically consummated process.¹ Behind this crypto-historicism, I believe, lies the intimate connection between Marx’s formal definition of primitive accumulation and the specificity of the British historical experience. By modeling primitive accumulation on the forcible separation of the peasantry from land, Marx magnifies a particular, local instance of primitive accumulation, and privileges it as the grammar in which to express other instances. The Platonic idealization of the English Enclosures ultimately risks miring the concept of primitive accumulation in a diffusionist historical imaginary: first in Europe, then elsewhere.

One way to cast primitive accumulation in a nondiffusionist mold is to decenter the British experience and train our focus on the *global* topography of primitive accumulation. Such a theoretical move, in turn, calls for disentangling our understanding of capitalism from its methodological-nationalist moorings. As a modest attempt in this direction, I suggest that we replace the nation-state with the early-modern “colonial empire” as the politico-legal framework within which to examine the development of global capitalism. This is not least because,

¹ In this respect, the coinage *new enclosures* shares a resemblance with the more recent neologism the *Arab Spring*, in that each apprehends an event only in the image of an authentic precedent—respectively, the English Enclosures and the Prague Spring.

contrary to Westphalian fictions, “European constitutional states, as state empires, developed within global systems of imperial and colonial law from the beginning” (Tully 2008:200). If, as Geoff Eley remarks (2007:157), “we can grasp the import of globalization if we see it unfolding inside one kind of political framework or another,” then the early-modern colonial empire presents itself as one such framework in which to trace the global inceptions of capital from the seventeenth century onward. Surveyed through imperial lenses, capitalism reappears as a historical formation that has emerged in and through colonial networks, alive with the political power of empires and various actors therein, including metropolitan and colonial governments, chartered companies, and settlers. The crucial corollary of a colonial perspective on capitalism is a heavy emphasis on the role of institutional and military force (exercised by the imperial core or by colonial agents who assumed or usurped it) in effectuating the “authoritative political ordering of space” (Steinmetz 2006:147) in which capitalism as a historically specific “mediation of exploitation and accumulation” germinated (Dussel 2011:109). The capacious notion of primitive accumulation I elaborate here captures the element of extraeconomic coercion and extralegal violence operative in the reorientation of relations of social reproduction in metropolitan and provincial sites, as well as in the formation of imperial flows of people, commodities, and knowledges that interlace these sites into global archipelagoes of accumulation. Partha Chatterjee offers an insightful departure point for such reconceptualization when he defines primitive accumulation as “nothing else but the destruction of the precapitalist community, which, in various forms, had regulated the social unity of laborers with their means of production” (1993:235). To fully expound on this originary element of extraeconomic coercion, we need to embed it within a genealogy of capitalism as an inherently political and historically colonial formation.

Between Metropolitan Theory and Colonial History

Since *capitalism* is a notoriously protean term, I begin with a working definition. The term *capitalism* operative in the analysis I present here denotes a heterogeneous and contradictory global social formation composed of diverse relations of production and exchange that are sutured by (1) the mediation of access to the conditions of work and subsistence by the imperative to generate value, itself monetarily expressed in the profit principle (Postone 1993); (2) the overall orientation of the productive activities to the constant accumulation and expansion of value thus generated, via the reinvestment of profits (Wallerstein 2004); and

(3) the omnipresence of compulsion and coercion, overt or tacit, in the creation and reproduction of relations of surplus generation. These abstract principles belong to what Dipesh Chakrabarty, extrapolating from Marx, labels the “universal logic” of capital (2000:63–66), which makes possible the delineation of what I call the “global genealogy of capitalism.”

A good starting point for situating this global genealogy in relation to colonialism is Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s notion of “colonial empire,” which refers to “a particular type of empire that is fundamentally characterized by the exploitative relationship between an imperial core and a subject periphery” (2006:220). Empires based on conquest, domination, and tribute extraction had been around for millennia. What distinguishes the modern phenomenon of colonial empire is that it “did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries it conquered—it restructured economies of the latter, drawing them into complex relationship with their own” (Loomba 2005:9). If the structural transformation of economic relations sets modern colonialism apart from premodern empires, then the presence of formal structures of political and legal rule over colonized peoples and territories differentiates colonialism from modern imperialism. As Ronald Robinson and others have forcefully argued, imperialism as a global system of uneven power relations is historically entwined with, yet distinct from, colonialism, as attested by imperialism’s capacity to work through “free trade” and persist well beyond formal “decolonization” (Gallagher and Robinson 1953; Robinson and Louis 1994; Semmel 1970). We can thus define colonial empire as a politico-legal formation that hinges on the forcible “takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation,” which weaves the economies of the colonizers and the colonized into a unified yet heterogeneous system (Loomba 2005:11).

The idea of colonial economic exploitation is hardly novel; however, a lot hinges on where one situates colonial exploitation in the historical development of capitalism. Appending colonial exploitation to the fringes of the capitalist mode of production effectively excludes it from a *theory* of capital, as it assigns the genesis of capital to the European metropole and traces its *post factum* repercussions in the colonies. In contrast, if we designate colonialism to be coeval and intertwined with the *origins* of capitalism, then we not only expand the terrain of social relations that ought to be analyzed for understanding the inner composition and dynamics of capital but we also displace Europe as the putative cradle of capitalist modernity.

Since my reappraisal is susceptible to a certain misunderstanding, I would like to emphasize that adopting a colonial perspective on the origins of capitalism amounts neither to denying the revolutionary reorganization of social reproduction that occurred in Europe and boosted the productivity of social labor nor implying that the place of colonialism in the history of capitalism was restricted to the inaugural plunder of resources. Capitalism is not simply the hoarding of what eighteenth-century political economists called “stock,” but an epochally specific constellation of social relations. While the colonial mobilization of raw materials *was* essential for the vision and materialization of global capitalist structures, as meticulously demonstrated by Kenneth Pommeranz (2000), the significance of colonialism in the history of capitalism goes beyond simply amassing material supplies. More importantly, colonial sites and networks were central as social spaces providing the concrete conditions for imagining and experimenting with new ways of organizing social production for profit, which would be difficult to conceive, even harder to implement, in Europe. For example, Robin Blackburn and Sydney Mintz’s pathbreaking works compel us to consider the Atlantic slave plantation, which hinged strictly on global commodity chains and a mode of labor control too brutal to be viable in Europe, as the forerunner of capitalist agriculture as well as the factory system in Britain (Blackburn 1997; Fischer 2004; Mintz 1984, 1985). Plantation slavery, far from being an atavistic anomaly in an essentially wage-labor-driven economic system, produced the “first modern proletariat of large-scale, highly organized, and integrated capitalist production” (Eley 2007:165).

The enlarged field of socioeconomic experimentation arose from the status of the colonies as outside the customs and conventions of *jus publicum Europaeum* that restrained the use of force in conquest, enslavement, and appropriation among European powers. Situated “beyond the line,” the colonies represented not only the abode of the “savage” or “barbarian” peoples but also spaces where the European colonists could confront the indigenous peoples and each other with a savagery and barbarism unfettered by Europe’s “civilized manners” (Schmitt 2003). This goes a long way toward explaining why colonial entrepreneurs found a much freer hand in establishing regimes of bonded labor, extirpating indigenous inhabitants, and wreaking havoc on the forms of land tenure they found in place, from America to India to Australia. Accordingly, it was in the slave plantation that capitalism first “revealed the power of the profit motive to override any cultural inhibition to gross exploitation” and “introduced sustained and systematic brutality in the making of goods on a scale never seen before” (Appleby 2010:124). Put more dramatically, “the earliest phase of the Industrial Revolution was so

crude, undeveloped, and indeed barbaric that free labor could not be used, if the output was to be profitable” (Blaut 1993:204).²

Finally, natural resources and unhindered socioeconomic experimentation for profit were compounded by fresh fields of investment, expanded markets (themselves spurred by colonial settlement and investment), and novel forms of economic enterprise called forth by colonial ventures, such as colonial joint-stock companies that prioritized the interests of their “shareholders” over the well-being of the “stakeholders” (Kelly 2006). Taken together, these planes of possibility imbricated in a global social topography, in which new modes of imagining, thinking, planning, and practicing humans’ relationship to one another and their relationship to the nonhuman world coalesced into the global and historically determinate cosmography of power and property (Raffles 2002) that we call capitalism. This is not so much to assert that the “industrial revolution” of the early nineteenth century did not take place in Britain as to argue that its historical conditions of possibility lay well beyond the island, or more generally “beyond the pale” of Europe.

The co-constitutionality of colonialism and capitalism necessarily directs us to the moment of primitive or “originary” accumulation and therefore to a critical engagement with Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg, whose works seminally braid metropolitan and colonial histories around the axis of primitive accumulation. Marx’s elaboration on primitive accumulation evinces a peculiar tension. On the one hand, most of the exposition in *Capital* is dominated by a rigorous formal definition of primitive accumulation, which represents the “complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labor” whereby “social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-laborers” ([1867] 1976:874). As noted before, this definition neatly folds onto Marx’s narration of the English Enclosures and the Highland Clearances. In this narrative, which has since informed the methodological-nationalist theories of “agrarian capitalism” (McNally 1988), the expropriation of the peasantry epitomizes the “process that creates the capital-relation . . . the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labor” (Marx [1867] 1976:874). On the other hand, Marx’s account is interspersed with fleeting remarks that overflow the term’s narrow formalism, precisely at

² It is at this point that the adjective *primitive* in *primitive accumulation* reveals a second valence, namely, its perception as atavistic and barbaric when judged by the relatively “liberal” and “civilized” perception of capitalism in the metropole.

those moments where Marx includes the colonies in the history of primitive accumulation:

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 that characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. (915)

Marx freely moves between historical instances of direct appropriation of natural resources, forced labor, and unequal exchange, from the “plunder” of Indonesia and India to the British slave trade and the Caribbean plantations, all of which he subsumes under the rubric of primitive accumulation (916–25). Aside from a common element of extraeconomic coercion (to which I return below), these processes of appropriation and exploitation are characterized by a glaring heterogeneity in their objects and mechanisms that do not fit in the unitary logic of the separation of direct producers from instruments of labor, which engenders capitalists and free laborers who then confront each other on the market as juridical equals. In other words, the history of colonialism pushes against Marx’s formal definition of primitive accumulation. This dissonance between the conceptual intension and the descriptive extension of primitive accumulation, I think, is symptomatic of the contradiction between, on the one hand, Marx’s inclusion of colonialism in the “prehistory of capital,” and on the other, his historicist inclination to imagine the rest of capital’s history as one of homogenization of social relations across the planet under capital’s onslaught. Unfortunately, this contradiction is resolved in Marx’s narrative in favor of homogenization: all that is solid melts into air, social and historical particularities are dissolved in the polarization between capitalists and wage laborers, and the internal contradictions of capital are universally consummated.

A similar tension is also manifest in Rosa Luxemburg’s excellent study of the constitutive role played by political violence in the history of capitalism. While Luxemburg refines Marx’s analysis of the expansionary pressures of capital on noncapitalist social forms (such as subsistence farming, petty commodity production, and feudal and “Asiatic” agrarianism), her real theoretical contribution lies in her designation of “colonial policy as primitive accumulation” ([1913] 2003:349–50). Luxemburg’s crucial insight that capital is structurally dependent on the exploitation of noncapitalist social relations remains a guiding beacon

for contemporary studies of imperialism (Harvey 2003).³ However, Luxemburg's horizon, like Marx's, is circumscribed by a teleology of homogenization in that she proleptically posits the end of the capitalist world system the moment it devours the last remaining noncapitalist domain and realizes itself fully.

I think the incommensurability between the formal theorization and the historical description of primitive accumulation in Marx and Luxemburg offers a promising departure point for cracking open the historicism latent in their narratives. Specifically, the instances of *colonial* primitive accumulation in both accounts embody an excess that explodes the formalism of primitive accumulation and the diffusionism implicit in its abstraction from the Anglo-European experience. The historical and theoretical fragments thus released offer us the material with which to construct a notion of capitalism as an irreducibly colonial and inherently political notion. Such reconstruction, I argue, involves straddling two theoretical positions. The first is to relocate Marx and Luxemburg's observations on capitalism, primitive accumulation, and colonialism to a theoretical register in which "capital" functions "not so much as a teleology of history as . . . a perspectival point from which to read the archives" (Chakrabarty 2000:63). The second is to hold on to a conception of capital that is "global in its territorial reach and universal in its conceptual domain" (Chatterjee 1993:235) against the easy way out of historicism by denying the existence of capital *tout court* (Foucault 2008; cf. Chakrabarty 2000:63–70). With these theoretical wards in mind, I propose reconceptualizing capitalism along three main axes. These axes are (1) the global and colonial inceptions of capitalism, (2) the multiplicity and heterogeneity of interdependent and contradictory social forms it comprises as a world system, and (3) the "originary," that is, both foundational-historical and structural-quotidian element of extraeconomic coercion and political force that directly and indirectly reproduces it. We now turn to the explication of these revisions.

Global Genealogy of Capitalism

The first of these reconceptualizations takes issue with the internalist schemas of methodological nationalism, which hypostatize the nation-state as the ultimate politico-legal context for explaining the emergence of capitalist relations. This position is best exemplified by the idea of autochthonous capitalism that structures the histories of "British

³ The same insight informs incisive feminist critiques of capitalism's "internal colonies," first and foremost, unpaid reproductive labor both in the household and in global chains of care (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Hochschild 2000).

capitalism" (Aston and Philpin 1985) and the "English working class" (Thompson 1964). The contrasting position, on which I build here, considers capitalism as emerging *in and through* hierarchical, uneven, and discontinuous colonial networks in direct contrast to narratives that posit colonialism as external, subsequent, and instrumental to autochthonous capitalism. I have elaborated on this nondiffusionist perspective above and need not repeat it here. I would simply like to reiterate that in this nondiffusionist approach, capitalist reproduction structurally operates on a world scale. Imperial metropolises are less autonomous national capitalist engines than privileged hubs or epicenters in rhizomatic networks of accumulation, which exert a preponderant influence in organizing value chains and claim a disproportionate share of the surplus produced globally. Put obversely, colonial networks that span the globe from the Americas to the antipodes constitute the conditions of possibility of capitalism, rather than auxiliary conduits through which autochthonous metropolitan capital flows to the rest of the world. What we have here is the "global inceptions of capital" in emphatic contradistinction to "capitalist globalization." The first perspectival revision of our account of capitalism is thus to view it in a nondiffusionist mode that has informed groundbreaking studies in colonial history (Abu-Lughod 1989; Chaudhuri 1990; James 1963; Subrahmanyam 1997; Williams 1944) and critical political economy (Amin 1974, 1977, 1989; Blaut 1993; Braudel 1993; Wallerstein 1975, 1995).

Following from the first, the second theoretical move takes us beyond the understanding of capital as a homogenizing social force that necessarily obliterates noncapitalist, especially "traditional" or "indigenous," relations of social reproduction. Instead of a tidal-wave image of capitalism surging outward from imperial-capitalist cores and flattening all social difference in its way, this global perspective draws our attention to the heterogeneous and interdependent multiplicity of relations of production and exchange that configure into a planetary system of capital accumulation. The historicist bias that Marxism shares with mainstream developmentalism and globalization narratives judges the extent of capitalist maturation by the degree to which wage labor regulated by free markets becomes the predominant form of organizing production. This occludes a crucial historical fact and a structural feature of capitalism, namely, its capacity to "articulate" a plurality of ostensibly noncapitalist social forms. The notion of articulation as used here refers to the interlocking and mutual configuration of a multifarious array of legal and political forms of labor control and surplus extraction, whereby local social structures that do not figure as immediately governed by the logic of capital relation nonetheless become a moment in the broader circuits

of capital's circulation and realization (Banaji 2003; Bhandari 2008; Brass and van der Linden 1997; de Angelis 2007; Prakash 1990). According to the same import to the "articulation" of social diversity as to its "assimilation" registers an objection to both liberal and Marxian equations of capitalism with "creative destruction" (Arrighi 2007; Schumpeter 1950).

In this "global articulation" one encounters a plurality of noncapitalist social forms, including unfree proletarian labor, be it actual (plantation slavery) or virtual (sharecropping), free nonproletarian labor (family labor in cottage industries and commercialized peasant agriculture), and neither proletarian nor free labor (debt peonage in petty commodity production). After examining antebellum slavery in the United States, nineteenth-century Indian family labor recruited through the "advance system," and labor tenancy in South Africa, Jairus Banaji concludes,

In short, *historically*, capital accumulation has been characterised by considerable flexibility in the structuring of production and in the forms of labour and organisation of labour used in producing surplus-value. The liberal conception of capitalism which sees the sole basis of accumulation in the individual wage-earner conceived as a free labourer obliterates a great deal of capitalist history, erasing the contribution of both enslaved and collective (family) units of labour-power. (2003:85–86)

Set in this topography of heterogeneous productive relations, wage labor figures as only one form extracting surplus value, which is relatively (and only relatively) salient in the imperial metropole (Bhandari 2008:85). For example, if we add to modern colonial slavery the

importance of domestic servitude for the overall labour markets and regimes of accumulation prevailing inside the eighteenth-century Anglo-Scottish national economy at home . . . then our conventional understanding of the histories of political economy and working-class formation will surely have to change. . . . [T]he claim of waged work to analytical precedence in the developmental histories of capitalism no longer seems secure. (Eley 2007:165–66)

In short, the global motley of formally non-capitalist labor regimes, when articulated to the loops of capital accumulation, reproduce and augment the total social capital. The critical point is that once articulated to global capital circuits, these social forms are rendered endogenous to capitalism, as opposed to persisting as a static noncapitalist outside on which

capital parasitically feeds. In other words, such noncapitalist social relations do not represent failed or stalled capitalist transformation, as suggested by the notion of “underdevelopment,” but part of the internal heterogeneity or striation of capitalism. “[D]easantization, proletarianization, and urbanization at home, and peasantization, ruralization, and superexploitation of coerced labor in the colonies” equally belong to capital’s history (Araghi 2009:122).

The world-systems approach deserves great credit for confronting theories of autochthonous capitalism and recentering our focus on diverse relations of production and exchange held together by a world market (Arrighi 1994, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Arrighi and Silver 1999; Wallerstein 1975). However, in order to adequately inform a theory of colonial capitalism, two principal shortcomings of the world-systems perspective need to be addressed. First, while this perspective does not merit the derogatory label “neo-Smithian Marxism” imputed by Robert Brenner (1976), Brenner’s diagnosis that this approach analytically prioritizes the sphere of circulation is not unfounded. Designating the expansion of the world market as the prime mover of historical capitalism risks occluding the forcible reconstitution of relations of production both in the metropole and in the colonies, which have been vital for the formation of global value chains. In other words, the world-systems perspective tends to skirt the question of primitive accumulation. Second and related to the first, the world-systems portrayals of capitalism suffer from a schematism that Kalyan Sanyal labels the “capital’s need” theory (Sanyal 2007:21). Diverse relations of production are hypostatized under the rubrics of “core,” “periphery,” and “semiperiphery” that snugly fit together to cater to the global reproduction of capital. Put summarily, the world-systems approach expunges the “metaphysical monism” of capitalist globalization theories by highlighting the heterogeneity of capital, only to encrust this heterogeneity in a stylized “functionalism” (Araghi 2009:113).

I believe a careful wielding of Marx’s theory of “formal and real subsumption” can help construct an analysis of colonial capitalism that, while resisting “path-dependent” capitalist globalization theses, accounts for the structural heterogeneity of capital in more flexible and fluid terms than furnished by the world-systems paradigm (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009:17). In the appendix to *Capital* volume 1, Marx distinguishes between, on the one hand, the “real subsumption” of labor whereby legally free proletarian labor comes into being and, on the other, the “formal subsumption” of labor in which “capital subsumes the labor process as it finds it, that is to say, it takes over an *existing labor process*, developed by different and more archaic modes of production” ([1867]

1976:1021). Under formal subsumption, labor is articulated to global value chains through the mediation of locally rooted regimes of surplus production and extraction in which multiple forms of extraeconomic coercion play the part that the “silent compulsion of the market” performs under real subsumption. The principal role of extraeconomic coercion is to create and maintain the conditions under which access to the means of subsistence is mediated by the imperative to produce a surplus that can be commodified and realized as profit, often taking the colonial form of “export-led exploitation” (Bagchi 2009:83). The concrete social relations of production that capital has to contend with in specific colonial contexts shape the extent and modality of capitalist articulation as well as the forms of resistance and insurgency available to those whose livelihoods are threatened by the capitalist reconstitution of the social. The history of colonialism presents us with fecund grounds for observing these dynamics by virtue of the vast range of social forms encountered by colonial entrepreneurs and the intensity of the struggles over the incorporation of this diversity into the logic of accumulation. Above all, whereas the “visible foot” of extraeconomic compulsion retreats to the background in the metropole after real subsumption has established the workings of the “invisible hand,” it remains constantly visible in the colonies that are formally subsumed under capital (Araghi 2009:111).

Looking at the history of colonialism through the lens of formal and real subsumption can help us discern several sources of the socio-economic heterogeneity that characterizes the global genealogy of capital. Part of this heterogeneity stems from the plurality of social systems and ecological conditions that capitalist enterprise had to navigate in the colonies. The other part owes to local and contingent struggles that resisted the attempts to redesign property relations, labor regimes, and exchange systems in line with the profit motive. Such resistance significantly delimited and shaped the social terrain on which profit-seeking activities had to operate, compelling them to adjust to the circumstances they could not afford to alter. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century strategies of “colonial indirect rule” perfectly encapsulate social struggles that confronted the aspirations of the colonial-capitalist enterprise. Various attempts at real subsumption qua reconstituting the socio-economic fabric of the colonized were curbed by the prospect of social upheaval threatened by such transformations. For instance, the British colonial administrators, Bernard Porter remarks, were “nervous of the sorts of liberal ‘reforms’ that the middle classes favoured, but which were likely to unsettle their ‘natives’ and consequently make them more difficult to control” (2006:51). George Steinmetz likewise notes that

“[a]lthough the quest for markets and raw materials was certainly a leading motive in the *acquisition* of many colonies during the late nineteenth century, the problem of native regulation became paramount once these regimes were up and running, often overshadowing immediate economic considerations” (2006:144). Colonial conundrums of social stability and economic transformation were common to vast colonial possessions ruled by leading imperial powers like Britain and relatively small colonies acquired by latecomers like Germany (Steinmetz 2007; Washbrook 1981). Most tellingly (and ominously), social stability and economic transformation coincided and real subsumption found traction only under forms of settler capitalism that thrived on the extreme marginalization, if not extirpation, of indigenous populations, such as in the “neo-Europes” of North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2000).

Such tensions between the imperatives of capitalist transformation and colonial rule also highlight the contradictory unity of the territorial logic of power and the deterritorializing thrust of capital accumulation (Harvey 2003), which can be observed in the vagaries of governing the colonial capitalist enterprise. Social actors on both sides of the colonial frontier (itself permissive and shifting to begin with) competed and collided as much as they collaborated and colluded (Canny 1979). Imperial centers, colonial governors, planters, settlers, merchants, and missionaries held very different and even conflicting social and economic aspirations that were often frustrated; colonial extraction and exploitation did not always pay off; economic considerations always had to be negotiated against local ecology and indigenous societal structures; plans to restructure production and exchange to maximize profit ran into frequent resistance. The Caribbean planters had to rely on the legal and military resources of the metropole for securing their property in land and slaves, yet were wary of direct Crown rule (Craton 1995). Smallholders and large-scale planters were often at odds over the distribution of colonial land. Local producers, merchants, and middlemen in British India found opportunities to collude with British investors at times, only to find themselves shoved aside at others (Guha [1963] 1996). Colonial settlers who flocked to the Antipodes with dreams of landownership and broke ground for the British Empire soon fell prey to dispossession through legal means (Belich 2005). Settler expansionism often ran counter to the British Crown’s policy of concluding treaties with the indigenous peoples. Wars on colonial frontiers and revolts by the colonized were common, and especially dramatic where the colonizers did not have demographic predominance. In short, the formation of global networks of capital conformed less to an image of smooth

outward expansion from Europe than to a jagged genealogy of local struggles and strategies interconnected by imperial flows of people, commodities, and information, as brilliantly chronicled by Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh (2000) in their history of the early-modern Atlantic.

The management of these territorial and deterritorial tendencies was secured in the political domain through a range of local strategies that included forming alliances with indigenous rulers; intensifying extant structures of political domination; instrumental promulgation and selective application of colonial laws; and in the last instance, deployment of military might (Bagchi 2005, 2009). In more abstract terms, these strategies coalesced into what Couze Venn has labeled “imperial governmentality,” which combined the disciplinary augmentation of the productive powers of the social body with the sovereign right to kill with legal impunity (2006, 2009) and relied on a pervasive logic of the “colonial exception” (Chatterjee 2012). Underwriting the deployments of imperial governmentality were multiple (and not necessarily compatible) ideologies, ranging from visions of cosmopolitanism and universal human progress to ideas of insurmountable cultural difference and racism, which were mobilized to address the specific problems of economic restructuration and governance in the colonies. In sum, the continuing presence of extraeconomic coercion in formally subsumed colonial territories relied on a complex configuration of governmental techniques, political balancing acts, and ideologies of imperial rule.

Taking the analysis a step further, colonial-capitalist processes of restructuration and articulation themselves constituted a source of heterogeneity insofar as the strategies of incorporating noncapitalist social relations into global circuits of capital engendered novel practices of production and social control. In its starkest instances, formal subsumption generated some of the social structures that have been interpreted from a modernist perspective as the residues of precapitalist, “backward” or “traditional” lifeworlds, or as signs of “failed development.” The most illustrative case in point is the famous “deindustrialization and peasantization” of colonial India. David Washbrook notes that if the British rule in India is approached from the angle of *global* political economy and uneven development,

its character begins to take on a very different appearance. The predominant effects which it had (both intended and unintended) were less to transport British civilization to the East than to construct there a society founded on the perpetuation of “Oriental” difference as Edward Said has put it. India became a

subordinate agricultural colony under the dominance of metropolitan, industrial Britain; its basic cultural institutions were disempowered and fixed in unchanging “traditional” forms; its “civil society” was subjected to the suzerainty of a military despot state. (1999:397)

A focus on the global inceptions of capital thus discloses the modern empire as “an agent of both modernization and traditionalization, of both global integration and regional peripheralization,” which served to “deepen the social forms of ‘backwardness’ it simultaneously sought to reform” (Sartori 2006:642).

The third and final axis for rethinking capitalism targets the idea of capital as an “economic” category conceived in the liberal image of the “market.” The economic conception of capital assigns it to a domain of production and exchange structured by the crystal of voluntary transaction between juridically equal persons (Wood 2003). In contrast, a focus on the colonial origins and imperial moorings of capitalism inscribes the element of political (that is, extraeconomic and extralegal) violence at the heart of the process of the capitalization of social relations. Luxemburg’s quip “[i]t is an illusion to hope that capitalism will ever be content with the means of production which it can acquire by way of commodity exchange” ([1913] 2003:350) distills the essence of the imperial endeavors that established the slave-plantation complex in the Americas, rendered India a deindustrialized agricultural hinterland, and “opened up” China to free trade. As Amiya Bagchi concludes in his overview of nineteenth-century imperialism, “in most colonized countries force was used extensively to dispossess earlier occupiers of land, and coercion and slavery remained major instruments for the control and exploitation of labor” (2009:105). The employment of “force as a permanent weapon” in the formation of colonial sites of surplus extraction and networks of accumulation stamps capitalism with a political imprint, “not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day” (Luxemburg [1913] 2003:251). The originary status of political power in the formation of capital relation can thus illuminate the “history of the present” by highlighting the enduring legacies of imperial power in the genealogy of capitalism. As James Tully puts it somewhat brusquely, “As in earlier phases of Western imperialism, the lineage that underlies all the rest is the global military paramountcy of the leading imperial power. For the majority of the world’s population would not acquiesce in the present dependency, exploitation, inequality, and ‘low-intensity democracy’ for a minute if it were not backed up by the overwhelming force of arms” (2008:28).

A perspective that treats political violence as truly originary (*ursprünglich*) in the genealogy of capitalism, a system that compels most human beings to reproduce their lives on the condition that they produce surplus for global value chains, refuses to relegate it to a concluded chapter of history after which the pacific mutualism of the market, “Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham,” reigns supreme (Marx [1867] 1976:280). What Dipesh Chakrabarty contends for the “victory of the modern” also holds true for capitalism, that is, it has “always been dependent on the mobilization, on its behalf, of effective means of physical coercion . . . ‘always’ because this coercion is both originary/foundational (that is, historic) as well as pandemic and quotidian” (2000:44). The genetic relationship between capital and political force finds its systematic expression in its identification with the state, or in Fernand Braudel’s words, “capitalism triumphs only when it becomes identified with the state, when it is the state” (1977:64; cf. Nitzan and Bichler 2009).

The multiplicity and variance of the colonial processes of expropriation and exploitation effectuated by political violence shatters the narrow confines of Marx’s formal definition of primitive accumulation as the creation of legally free proletarian labor and necessitates a more capacious redeployment of the concept. I think one way of increasing the extension of “primitive accumulation” while maintaining it as adequately rigorous is to define it as a (1) political process of forcible transformation whereby (2) noncapitalist relations of social reproduction are restructured through extraeconomic coercion (3) in ways that assimilate or articulate them to the global networks of capital accumulation. Conceived as a global “historical invasion and restructuring of the non-European world,” primitive accumulation signifies a political process that has “dispossessed non-Europeans of political and legal control over their resources and economies, and modified, subordinated, or replaced their forms of organization with the institutional preconditions of western legal and political domination, economic exploitation, and military control” (Tully 2009:14). This process comprises not only radical and traumatic overhaul of the relations of social reproduction (for example, the reconstruction of property systems or labor organization) but also the articulation of existing social forms (such as the market, commodity, and money) to the logic of capital by destroying them as independent social forms, by which even the ostensibly noncapitalist or “feudal” social practices (peasant proprietorship, serfdom, slavery) become moments in the global reproduction of capital (Marx [1863] 1971:468).

The magnitude and profundity of these historical transformations carries them beyond the bounds of the simply “economic,” dramatically

attested by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century histories of slavery and dispossession. In a brilliant study on the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, Thomas Holt describes how the emancipated slaves in the West Indies shunned wage labor even if it meant higher income, and opted for small proprietorship and petty commodity production organized in autonomous villages. These and similar observations lead Holt to conclude that “life’s goals for most humans who have walked this earth are better described in terms of the relative absence of scarcity and peril than in the full achievement of satisfaction and security” (1992:5). Likewise, following Karl Polanyi, David Brion Davis cautions against reducing the socioeconomic transformations wrought by the Parliamentary Enclosures to the economic question of rising or declining “real wages,” instead emphasizing the lacerations in the social fabric inflicted by the displacement from land (1975:464–68). It is not coincidental that both authors are describing traumatic processes of primitive accumulation (enclosure and enslavement), which exceed the “economic” categories of commodity, market, and growth, and more fundamentally comprise the destruction or subjugation of ways of life and forms of social reproduction that are inimical to the accumulative drive of capital. Expressed in starker terms, primitive accumulation marks the historical process that introduces a forcible reordering and reorientation of social reproduction toward the logic of capital accumulation.

Conclusion

The notion of primitive accumulation as situated in the global genealogy of capitalism presented above opens up a number of avenues for thinking about the current global politics of land, and I would like to conclude with brief reflections on three such interrelated trajectories: *in situ* displacement, fungibility of land, and new enclosures. First, expanding the conceptual domain of primitive accumulation by including processes of capitalist articulation (or formal subsumption) of agricultural land and labor sensitizes us to a dimension of land grabs that elude attention when viewed strictly through an “enclosure” perspective. In a recent essay on land acquisitions in Southern Africa, Ruth Hall (2011b) has offered a typology of shifts in agriculture from subsistence to capitalist imperatives. In addition to the “familiar” models of colonist and enclave economies that are predicated on the displacement of primary producers and the establishment of large export-oriented agricultural estates, Hall highlights “outgrower” and “commercialization *in situ*” models whereby “small producers and other land users are incorporated into new or transformed commercial value chains” (204). What is at work in

Southern Africa is less a replay of the English enclosures qua eviction of the peasantry but an articulation of different social forms of production mediated and overdetermined by global circuits of capital. Hall asserts, “[T]he presumption that land grabbing produces ‘development-induced displacement’ of smallholder farmers may obscure the degree to which, in parts of Southern Africa at least, it incorporates smallholder producers in new social relations and patterns of accumulation” (206). The same dynamic is diagnosed by Fouad Makki (2012) in Ethiopia, where smallholder commercialization of agriculture in the highlands is interlocked with enclosure and large-scale mechanized farming in the lowlands (predominantly at the expense of pastoral communities), coalescing into an “archipelago” of surplus generation.

The social effects of smallholder commercialization and of displacement from land are, while certainly divergent, not antithetical. Contrary to neoliberal discourses of “empowerment through [the] market,” Hall observes that the “conversion from independent producer to contract farmer to labourer involves rapid rural proletarianization” (2011b:206). Primitive accumulation in this instance operates not through the absolute dispossession of the producer and the accumulation of land as “stock,” but through the capitalization of agriculture-based social reproduction by rendering it dependent on the compulsion of the market and the imperative to generate surplus for securing access to the means of subsistence.⁴ While the process of agrarian capitalization via commercialization appears to operate through noncoercive channels of voluntary market transactions, paying attention to the colonial lineages of such commercialization reveals that this is only superficially so. Certainly, the production of commodifiable agricultural surplus in Southern Africa today is a far cry from the nineteenth-century use of “*corvée* labour or coercive taxes . . . to force rural people into labouring for the colonial state or European private enterprise” (Bagchi 2009:86). However, coercive taxes, debt-induced dispossession, and various schemes of land reform pushed through by colonial and postcolonial sovereign states have structured the enduring conditions under which “global depeasantization” has been unfolding for the last two centuries (Araghi 2009:138). The legal institutionalization of the visible foot of capital-positing violence into the invisible hand of capital-preserving

⁴ A useful analytic distinction at this point is between access to the means of production and access to the means of subsistence. Formal ownership of the means of production is distinct from the conditions under which the means of production can be operative for producing a subsistence for their owners, as evidenced by colonial and postcolonial forms of debt peonage as well as smallholder agriculture dependent on the global markets for inputs (Araghi 2009:134).

violence simply obscures rather than annuls the element of extraeconomic coercion constitutive of capital. In Araghi's powerful words, the invisible hand itself is "rooted in political power, and its power is to make its politics invisible" (111). Contemporary outgrower strategies in Africa can appear voluntary (and primitive accumulation can be confined to the spatial displacement of agricultural producers through "new enclosures") only if viewed from a narrowly presentist perspective that overlooks the institutionalized and quotidian presence of this originary coercion in capitalist transformation. In contrast, if we adjust our lenses to the colonial genealogies of the current politics of land in the Global South, we bring within the ambit of primitive accumulation what Shelley Feldman, Charles Geisler, and Louise Silberling (2003) have called "*in situ* displacement." *In situ* displacement captures moments of capitalist transformation in which people are not physically driven from their land or dwellings but find their livelihood increasingly precarious due to the loss or diminution of entitlements and resources. In other words, they are displaced socioeconomically but not spatially. "Semi-dispossessed peasantries" and "dispossession by differentiation" can be understood to belong to this terrain of socioeconomic displacement (Araghi 2009:134; Makki 2012:82).

The second avenue of thinking about land grabs through the prism of primitive accumulation is the role of the latter in rendering land "fungible." From the perspective of global capital, the modus operandi of global land acquisitions is less the enclosure, privatization, and fixation of land in space than the trope of "enclosure" would suggest. Rather, while the spatial coordinates of land remain constant, its socioeconomic coordinates and valences in global value chains shift dramatically, from a means of subsistence to a means of accumulation. This point is argued powerfully in Philip McMichael's essay in this issue around the postwar discourse of "feeding the world," which reduces food security to global market supply of food and accordingly conceives of land as an abstract and fungible "factor of production" in scientific agriculture. The history of colonial capitalism can inform a broad perspective on this phenomenon, as it was John Locke who first compared "an acre of land in England" to "another in *America*" in terms of the "value" and "profit" each would generate if "improved" through commercial agriculture ([1689] 1960:316). Locke's reduction of land to the monetary value of its yield was aimed at justifying the colonization of America by the English, which he argued would be in the "benefit of mankind," Native Americans not excluded. Harkening back to Locke in this instance illuminates the global genealogy of capitalism and its originary imbrication with colonialism, as Locke's proclamation reverberates through the

contemporary discourse of “global commons,” which touts land grabs to be in the interest of the globe’s population as a whole, Africans not excluded (Geisler 2012). The narrow predication of “universal interest” on the extent of the “value” potential of land animates a capitalist historical imaginary that ousts all other systems of meaning and practice in which land everywhere comes embedded.

Finally, the global and colonial genealogy of capitalism opens to question the novelty of the “new enclosures.” Once we abandon the English enclosures as the model and the baseline by which to comprehend what is transpiring today, manifold, continuous, and interlocking cycles of primitive accumulation effectuated by multiple and shifting vectors of political power come into focus. Placed in this genealogy, Africa ceases to be a precapitalist outside, the last frontier *finally* visited by primitive accumulation. Instead, it stands as a continent that has already been integrated into global networks of accumulation, violently and unevenly, through the brutality of slave trade, resource extraction, and financial dependency. The vast “wastes” of Africa allegedly awaiting to be improved through commercial agriculture lose the Lockean connotations of “wild nature,” and reappear as a wasteland created by the very global development of capitalism (Sanyal 2007). Concomitantly, we can locate the expropriatory power of the African states operative in land grabs in genealogies of colonialism, namely, the postdecolonization policies of “permanent sovereignty over natural resources” and nationalization of land (Pahuja 2011). In a dark irony of history, the extraeconomic and extralegal power inherent in primitive accumulation, which was initially wielded by colonial powers and then by postcolonial states against the former colonists, once again locks hands with global capital in the name of “development.” To end with the epigraph that opens this essay, the most recent phase in the “history of development in the objects, means, and forms of appropriation” is once again “interpreted as progress.”

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