



Critical Adult Education in the (Neo)colonies: Racial/Colonial Capitalist and Social Movement Ontologies of Land

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INTRODUCTION

Critical theories of society and education seek to advance the pursuit of a new world without dogmatic anticipation and through a relentless “criticism of existing conditions”, “not afraid of its findings and just a little afraid of the powers that be” (Marx, 1967, p. 212). Education in any space, when informed by critical theory, seeks to unveil these ontological possibilities (existing conditions), while actively addressing them through the development of a “revolutionary/transformational praxis” which generates a “critical dialectical understanding of our present conditions” (Allman, 1999, p. 58). To this end, critical theory is a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized, clarifying the meaning of concepts and issues, describing and explaining social relations and articulating and defending ideals and principles. Unlike positivist social theory, which purportedly separates social facts from value (claim of value neutrality), critical theory with a practical interest in emancipation relies on critical description and explanation. The *given* is evaluated in normative terms so that questions about what occurs in a society

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and why, who benefits and who is harmed are asked and social theory is then unlikely to reify the *given* social reality of domination and exploitation. Critical theories of society and education universalize the capacity for critical inquiry of oppositional and autonomous thought and education and are constitutive of learning, activism and social movement pedagogy (Choudry, 2015).

A radical education is one which links pedagogic processes and practices to a project of social transformation. Euroamerican Marxist critical theory or socialist praxis (Allman, 1999) understands “existing conditions” (the *given*) and related revolutionary praxis in terms of the labor-capital (relations) dialectic and the disruption of the reproduction of capitalist class/social relations of production (and society) including hegemonic capitalist/liberal education as a moment within the process of the social reproduction of labor power in/for capitalism. Marxism grounds the project of radical education in the interests of establishing socialist relations.

Indigenous and anti/decolonial critical theories germinating from European settler colonies (Canada, US, Australia, New Zealand) (Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; Grande, 2004, 2015) and the (neo)colonies or colonies of exploitation (Veracini, 2015) in Africa, Asia and the Americas/Caribbean (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1970; Guha, 1997; Nkrumah, 1965; Quijano, 2000, 2005; Rodney, 1982) understand existing and recurring conditions in terms of the land-based settler/neocolonial-anti/decolonial (relations) dialectic, respectively, and a related anti/decolonial revolutionary praxis vis-à-vis racial/colonial capitalist relations. Anti/decolonial projects ground radical education in the interests of (Indigenous) sovereignty and/or self-determination/autonomy, working toward socio-cultural, political-economic and subjective transformations.

This chapter stretches critical adult education, which is predominantly associated with western Marxist and/or post-structural variants, by engaging an anti/decolonial critique (critical theories) of Euroamerican racial/colonial capitalist ontologies of land, wherein land is construed as being vacant and therefore available for enclosure as private property and treated as a tradeable market commodity. The main proposition thereof is that a materialist ontology of land as private property and a (fictitious) commodity for accumulation at the expense of a resident population (racial/colonial relations) enables Euroamerican settler colonialism and recursive (neo)colonization in the colonies of exploitation (Veracini, 2015) to the present day. Construed on onto-axiological assumptions from the Papal *Doctrine of Discovery* and the instrumental philosophical ruminations of John Locke in *The Two Treatises of Government*, the current land grab has been described as being unprecedented since the time of Euroamerican colonization (fifteenth–twentieth century) (Araghi & Karides, 2012). These colonial dynamics warrant continued critical consideration in terms of their neocolonial structural specificities (Nkrumah, 1965; Trask, 1999) given Patrick Wolfe’s assertion pertaining to the settler colonies—“invasion is a structure, not an event” (2016, p. 33) and for

informing and learning from Indigenous-peasant anti/decolonial social movement land ontologies.

Anti/decolonial critiques of this racial/colonial capitalist ontology of land for accumulation predicated on recursive dispossession inform the onto-epistemological grounds for anti/dispossession social movement pedagogies addressing food/land sovereignty and popular indigenous, forest-dweller, pastoralist, fisher and small/landless peasant movements in the (neo)colonies. Contrary to Euroamerican racial/colonial capitalist ontologies of land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Nichols, 2020; Wolfe, 2016; Wright, 2015), land in these contexts of subaltern social action is generally not understood in anthropocentric terms as a possession or property form, except where racial/colonial capitalist hegemony has been reproduced. Nor is land an object of control but one of (historical) relationships with territory and place, including the responsibility to ensure against *Victorian holocausts* (Davis, 2001/2017) and (neo)colonial projects of racialized dispossession and attempts at Indigenous eradication (Fanon, 1967; Galeano, 1972; Rodney, 1982; Wolfe, 2016).

RACIAL/COLONIAL CAPITALIST ONTOLOGIES OF LAND: DISCOVERY AND PROPERTY

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest of the looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. (Marx, 2007, p. 823)

The Papal *Doctrine of Discovery*, initially formulated in response to the conquest of the Americas, came to be known as the law of nations and later, international law whereby European sovereignty was first asserted over the lands and inhabitants of the New World. While establishing European sovereignty over these dominions, the Native right of occupancy entitled Natives to use a territory that Europeans had (ostensibly) discovered (Wolfe, 2016, p. 141). The “culture of conquest—violence, expropriation, destruction and dehumanization” in the Americas, however, began in the 11th to the thirteenth century when Europeans conducted the Crusades to conquer North Africa and the Middle East, well before the Atlantic crossing and Columbus’ departure for the Americas. That is, the institutions of colonialism and methods for relocation, deportation and expropriation of land had been practiced and perfected by the end of the fifteenth century within Europe (enclosures) and during the crusades (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, pp. 32–34; Robinson, 2000). The process of colonial capitalist accumulation and organization under the profit motive by European states expanded overseas thereafter encompassing the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and the

Andes followed by West and South Africa, North America, and the rest of South America. Then came all of Africa, the Pacific and Asia. As Dunbar-Ortiz goes on to note, the only difference between these western European voyages and prior seafaring ventures by the Inuit (Eskimos), Norse, Arabs, South Asian, Chinese, Japanese, Peruvian and Melanesian and Polynesian fishing peoples of the Pacific is that “they had developed the bases for colonial domination and exploitation of labor in those colonies that led to the capture and enslavement of millions of Africans for transport to the American colonies” (2014, p. 34).

The Papal Bulls of Discovery (*Doctrine of Discovery*) Romanus Pontifex (1455) issued by Pope Nicholas V and *Inter Caetera* (1493) pronounced by Pope Alexander VI provided the framework for colonization by Spain, Portugal and England and for the Atlantic slave trade. King Alfonso of Portugal, for instance, was exhorted in Romanus Pontifex to invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdom and all goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery and to convert them to his and their use and profit (Wright, 2015). From the mid 15th to the mid-twentieth century most of the non-European world was colonized under the *Doctrine of Discovery*, one of the first principles of international law Christian European monarchies promulgated to legitimize claiming the land of non-Europeans (Wolfe, 2016; Wright, 2015), initially dividing the globe between the two Iberian monarchies of Spain and Portugal. The Pope gave the Americas to the former and West Africa to the latter under the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 199).

The *Doctrine*, as Robert Miller (2006, pp. 3–5) describes it, is constituted by 10 elements which define international law then and to date (Wolfe, 2016) to varying degrees in different colonial contexts (and especially in British colonies),¹ including the following:

- (1) **First Discovery** (the first European country to “discover” new lands unknown to other Europeans gained property and sovereign rights over the lands);
- (2) **Actual occupancy/possession** (first discovery claims could only be made into title via actual occupancy);
- (3) **Preemption** (the discovering European country had sole right to buy the land);
- (4) **Terra nullius** (lands actually owned, occupied and/or utilized were considered “vacant” and available for “discovery claims” if they were not being “properly used” according to European and American law and culture);
- (5) **Christianity** (only Christians had the right to land, sovereignty and self-determination);

- (6) **Civilization** (God had directed Europeans to bring civilized ways and education and religion and to exercise guardianship powers over the uncivilized); and
- (7) **Conquest** (military victory over and a “term of art” when used in relation to the element of “discovery”).

Unsurprisingly, Frantz Fanon (1967/1963, p. 32) subsequently concluded that “When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies, the economic sub-structure is also a superstructure and the cause are the consequence”; an observation subsequently taken up by the Black Radical Tradition and the development of a critical theorization of “racial capitalism” (Robinson, 2000).

Referring to settler colonization in the US, Patrick Wolfe elaborates by noting that the White man’s discourse of property was “color coded on the colonial ground” wherein “Black people’s labor and Red people’s land produced the White man’s property—a primitive accumulation if ever there was one. Native and enslaved were of antithetical but complementary value to White society” (2016, p. 3). While Black slaves were valuable commodities (labor) and hence demographically fostered, Natives obstructed the expansion of settlement (land) and no effort was spared to eliminate them. While for Durkheim, religion was society speaking, for Wolfe, “race is colonialism speaking, in idioms whose diversity reflects the variety of unequal relationships into which Europeans have co-opted conquered populations” (p. 5).

This racial/colonial Anglo-European system of “land ownership” subsequently worked as a tool of “legalized theft”, in the apprehension of Indigenous territory whereby in the nineteenth century alone, 9.89 million square miles of land or 6% of the land on the earth’s surface had been colonized by Anglo-settlers (Nichols, 2020, p. 51; Weaver, 2006). The colonial empires of the west—Portugal, Spain, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands/Dutch, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the United States—eventually claimed possession at one time or another to all of the Americas and Australia, 99% of Polynesia, 90% of Africa and nearly 50% of Asia (Townsend, 1941), i.e., by the 1930s, ex-colonies and colonies under formal European government included 85% of the earth’s land surface (Fieldhouse, 1989, p. 373). Europe is “literally the creation of the Third World, an opulence that has been fueled by the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races” (Fanon, 1967/1963, p. 76). Alternately and in keeping with the Lockean (John Locke, 1632–1704) narrative and the wider discourse of the *Doctrine of Discovery* which the British philosopher and Oxford academic provided in the *Two Treatises of Government* (1698), one that would profoundly influence Euroamerican colonial ideology, private property accrued from the admixture of (Black) labor and (Red) land (Wolfe, 2016).

John Locke was deeply enmeshed in the administrative webs of racial/colonial capitalism and the ideational texture of this political-economic

vision as Secretary of the Council of Trade and Plantations (1673–1674) and later via membership to the Board of Trade and Plantations (1696–1700). The Earl of Shaftesbury involved him in his designs to found a colony in Carolina (America) and Locke helped draft its Fundamental Constitutions (1669). Locke invested in colonialism as he held shares in the Royal African Company that traded in slaves, was a merchant adventurer of the Bahamas (1672–1676) and engaged in stock-jobbing in East India Company bonds. According to Herman Lebovics, Locke was the wise organic intellectual of the seventeenth-century British elite and future generations of British ruling classes and a great philosopher of the developing world system which linked the old world with the new with ties of domination and subordination. This Atlantic economy, as incubator of global capitalist relations, conceived, justified and defended by Locke, hinged upon the “slave plantation complex” that was developed on land taken from Native Americans, was run by slave labor imported from Africa and existed for the sole purpose of producing a cash crop for export. Those at the helm of the state knew that there would be no English Empire without the Caribbean (sugar), slaves and demand for mainland staples and English manufactures (Ince, 2015, pp. 5–8).

The first theoretical move of the Lockean *Treatises* and the defense of colonial appropriation of land was to assert the Christian theological declaration that the earth is an open common, i.e., the common inheritance of “mankind” (*res nullius*). Locke inverted the meaning of this (the commons) to a negative sense re-describing “common inheritance = inappropriable” to “common = not yet appropriated” (Nichols, 2020, p. 156). “God gave the World to Men in Common but since he gave it to them for his benefit and the greatest conveniences in life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated” (Locke quoted in Ince, 2011, p. 40). The fulcrum of Locke’s theory of (land as) property thereof then becomes the basis of the theoretical assault on Indigenous (and subsequently, in the neocolonies) land/territory wherein he proposed that enclosing and improving land by “mixing labor” (superior productivity/utilization) yields private property or entitlement to land, thereby disqualifying Amerindian hunting and gathering practices. The Devonshire farmer described in the *Second Treatises* is the only legitimate proprietor and citizen, i.e., the “industrious and rational” being to whom, Locke claims, God gave the world (Arneil, 1994, p. 609).

He then proceeds to establish the (alleged) “universal benefits” (including for the dispossessed/colonized) of enclosure for improvement (moral rationale for private appropriation) via the notion of production for the “common stock of mankind” along with the restrictive (limiting) moral provisions pertaining to the “proscription of spoilage” (waste) and leaving to others “enough and as good” of the common. The introduction of his concept of *money* (presented as a universal with tacit consent) thereafter, however, by unmooring (land) appropriation and value creation from the limits of a subsistence economy (while overcoming the spoilage limitation), unleashes the power of obligatory

labor to increase the “common stock of mankind”/maximalization (economic growth), potentially circumventing these restrictive provisions, for (alleged) universal benefit (Arneil, 1994, 1996; Ince, 2011, 2015). In James Tully’s words (in Ince, 2015), “the Aboriginal peoples are better off as a result of the commercial system of private property” thanks to “not only finished products but also the opportunities to labor”; in short “they are more than compensated for their loss” (of land/territories); a justification for appropriation based on “universal benefit” and the Catholic principle of non-exclusion (Ince, 2015, p. 12).

Layers of conceptual ambivalence generated by these theoretical maneuvers enable Locke to configure inclusionary and exclusionary provisions in ways that authorize the dispossession of Native Americans at the same time it captures them in myths of natural equality and mutual consent and a global vision of prosperity. Locke’s theory of property subtly co-articulates socio-spatial displacement and exclusion on the one hand and liberal values and the promise of development on the other. It thereby recasts in a liberal mold the fulcrum of 17th century Atlantic capitalism, namely, colonial land appropriations and indigenous dispossession. (Ince, 2015, p. 17)

These metaphysical and practical assumptions are compounded by Locke’s assertion that Native Americans do not live under institutionalized governments and absence of proper political societies and sovereign authority renders America vacant territory (*terra nullius*) and therefore open to colonial appropriation (Ince, 2015, p. 10). Locke is skeptical of violent conquest however and in chapter sixteen of the Second Treatise, he establishes his preference for appropriating land by industry rather than force wherein English colonization, as per his theory of property is concerned, is justified “not just by the command of God and natural law but because each colonist has a natural right within himself, through his labor, to appropriate land” (Arneil, 1996, p. 74) as private property. But as Robert Nichols elaborates, property is normally/logically prior to theft but in the colonial (Lockean) context, “theft is the means by which property is generated” or “dispossession is effectively a form of property-generating theft” (2020, p. 9).

Discovery and Lockean notions of land and property while providing the ideational basis for the transatlantic process of enclosure authored a global vision of material and historical progress underpinned by a universalist liberal ideology of improvement and prosperity beyond America, repainting colonial capitalist land appropriations as peaceful, commercial and universally beneficial acts of settlement and development (Arneil, 1996; Galeano, 1972; Ince, 2011, 2015; Rodney, 1982). Mike Davis (2001/2017), in *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, to consider but one illustrative application, demonstrates the implications of the Lockean liberal capitalist (including Smith, Bentham and Mills) ontological and axiological position on land/property and production (labor-capital) for the exploitation

colonies by elaborating on the connection between colonialism, capitalism and global climate patterns (and ecological racism) in the golden (colonial) age of liberal capitalism. He links the impositions of colonial capitalist development to climate change and the spread of famine in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century (in India, China, Brazil, Ethiopia, Korea, Vietnam, Philippines and New Caledonia) wherein millions of Indians, according to Davis, were murdered by the theological application of the sacred principles of these Anglo-European philosophers; a genocide wherein 30–60 million died worldwide while being forcibly incorporated into the political and economic structures of this modern world system.

Given the five-hundred-year history of Euroamerican colonization and colonial structuration, North–South relations were marked by what the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano references as a continuous “global coloniality of power” (2000; 2005, pp. 56–57) defined by:

- (a) a new system of social domination built around the idea/foundation of ‘race’ (a modern European mental construct bearing no relation to previous reality) and racialization of relations between European colonizers and the colonized in order to normalize the social relations of domination created by conquest and the new system of capitalist exploitation;
- (b) the formation of a new system of exploitation (capitalism) which connects in a single combined structure all the historical forms of control of work and exploitation (slavery, servitude, simple commodity production, reciprocity, capital) to produce for the capitalist world market—a system with a racialized division of labor and control of resources of production is foundational; and
- (c) a new system of collective authority centered around the hegemony of the state or a system of states with populations classified in racial terms as “inferior” being excluded from the formation and control of the system.

Euroamerican colonialism, however, was dialectically imbricated with anticolonial struggles in the colonies of exploitation or (neo)colonies which included: (1) the defense of, and by, pre-existing states of their polities against western expansion; (2) popular and often violent nativist uprisings and reactions to western interference and imposition of institutions and customs via militant or missionary Christianity; (3) slave revolts (e.g. African and Creole) against plantation owners and masters; (4) issue-specific ameliorative uprisings exposing a colonial injustice in the interests of reform/concessions; and (5) organized movements and violence against colonial regimes for national independence (Benjamin & Hidalgo, 2007, p. 59). Subsequently, between 1940 and 1980, more than eighty colonies achieved their independence and were eventually recognized as sovereign nation-states.

RACIAL/COLONIAL CAPITALIST ONTOLOGIES OF LAND: POST INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENT AND NEOCOLONIALISM

Considering the “global coloniality of power” (Quijano, 2000), as soon as the colonies of exploitation gained their legal independence, they found themselves tethered to the imperial powers by the post-war UN “development project” (Kamat, 2002; Kothari, 2005; Langan, 2018; Rist, 2014), currently pursued in terms of the MDG/SDG initiatives (2000–2030), prompting Walter Rodney (1982), in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, to urge for an extensive investigation of the phenomenon of neocolonialism in order to formulate the strategy and tactics of African emancipation and development. The essence of neocolonialism, according to the architect of the concept Kwame Nkrumah (1965, p. ix), President of the first Sub-Saharan African state (Ghana) to achieve independence, is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty but in reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed by outside. Through foreign aid for instance, even after formal empire had been dissolved, “the hesitancy of cutting ties from former colonizers is fostered by the sugared water of aid which is the stop-gap between avid hunger and the hoped-for greater nourishment that never comes...imperialism, having quickly adapted its outlook to the loss of direct political control, has retained and extended its economic grip” (p. 33).

In fact, Frantz Fanon (1967) saw neocolonialism as affecting the “Third World” as a whole. The racial/colonial capitalist ontology of land as property and marketable commodity and its neo-Lockean logic found continuity in UN initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regimes and the agrarian policies of the World Bank promulgating the corporatization of land and agriculture; a food for profit model. Racial neocolonial capitalist logics in relation to land are reproduced in the post-independence period through a combination of free trade agreements, corporate investment, western aid programs and development aid agents (international development agencies), structural adjustment and the debt mechanism (1980s onwards) and the moral rhetorical imperatives of the MDG/SDGs (Langan, 2018; War on Want, 2012).

“Land grabbing” (Marx, 2007, p. 470) in the name of the post-independence “development project” (see www.grain.org or www.oaklandinstitute.org) from indigenous peoples, small/landless peasants, fishers, nomads and pastoralists in the contemporary period flags “a vast expansion of bourgeois land rights...through a global land grab unprecedented since colonial times...as speculative investors now regard ‘food as gold’ and are now acquiring millions of hectares of land in the global South (70% of which is in Africa alone—*my addition*)” (Araghi & Karides, 2012, p. 3). An Oxfam study in 2011 suggests that an area in the size of Western Europe (227 million hectares) has been sold or leased since 2001, involving mostly state-corporate investors (125 million have been grabbed by rich countries for outsourcing

agricultural production alone in Africa) (Kapoor, 2017). Indigenous scholars recognize this process as an “ongoing colonial relationship between ourselves and those who want to control us and our resources... we are surrounded by other, more powerful nations that desperately want our lands and resources and for whom we pose an irritating problem. This is as true for the Indians of the Americas as it is for the tribal people of India and the aborigines of the Pacific” (Trask, 1999, pp. 102–103). “Once again, such a project exalts white bodies, capitalist investment and private property and while simultaneously condemning brown and black bodies, subsistence production and collective and customary property arrangements (Mollett, 2015, p. 425).

Lorenzo Veracini (2015, p. 26) goes so far as to suggest that “even if colonial and settler colonial formations should be seen as ontologically distinct (antithetical modes of domination), their ultimate complementarity within imperialism should not be minimized”, i.e., they could be construed “as compatible yet different forms that routinely interpenetrate and affect in complex ways colonial and postcolonial situations” (p. 53). He goes on to observe that given so-called post colonies engage in settler-colonial projects of their own in relation to their peripheries, this should be seen as confirmation that settler colonialism is a foundational characteristic of a “global settler contemporaneity” (p. 57), i.e., settler-colonial phenomena are “globally constitutive of liberal modernity” and current “international governance” practices (p. 62). For instance, contemporary “land grabbing” in the neo(colonies) by corporations and foreign states who acquire semi-sovereign rights over extensive tracts is still premised on *terra nullius* (aka *Doctrine of Discovery*) and (neo)Lockean notions of land as property for those who maximize utilizations/efficient use (underutilization/inefficient use is a property regime which is fundamentally defective) of land and labor.

The affinity between resource underutilization and ill-defined private property is organic to neoliberal development thinking. Only a small fraction of African farmers has proof of ownership, giving some the impression of a quintessential Lockean landscape ‘owned by all’, that is none, and awaiting immanent enclosure. ... More recent allegations that property lacking private title and ‘regularization’ contributes to under-utilization are widespread in development agencies such as the World Bank (see the latest push in 2018 under the Enabling the Business of Agriculture-EBA- project—*my addition*). In this view, even property that is nominally private but insecure due to weak or unrecorded title amounts to ‘dead capital’ and is a barrier to the ‘highest and best use of land’. (Geisler, 2013, p. 21)

This leads Charles Geisler to conclude that “*terra nullius* remains a viable international legal doctrine and is stirring again as a justificatory logic in north-south land relations. It is neither narrow in scope nor static in application. The line between what is ‘cultivated’ and ‘under-cultivated’ is blurring, opening whole continents to new narratives and complex core-periphery interventions” (2013, p. 16). The justificatory claims for land grabs are “a comprehensive

rehearsal of *terra nullius* as a doctrine, premised on security concerns, namely food and energy and the threat of war and natural disasters, and treat African land and resources as global commons awaiting legitimate and benevolent enclosure” (p. 16). Low population density is a keystone in enclosure logics in Africa and elsewhere, along with the ascription of underutilized African land and labor, i.e., “African land is abundant but fallow (allegedly) for reasons of mismanagement, corruption, ethnic conflict, indifferent elites, failed land reforms and a plague of social problems” (2013, p. 20).

Settler-colonial logics of *terra nullius* and a global settler-colonial present are also apparent in the post-independence period in green (conservation) grabs wherein programs like REDD+ or Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation seeking to address climate change via carbon trading deals (green capitalist interventions—see Corporate Watch, A-Z of Green Capitalism) (No REDD in Africa Network, 2015). While the mode of climate legislation itself typifies settler-colonial modes of changing and appropriating land, REDD deals also often bypass indigenous peoples and are negotiated between imperial powers, postcolonial states, speculators and corporations and do not need their involvement to proceed, i.e., settler colonialism persists in the ‘sovereign effects’ of global financial capital, which has now acquired an unprecedented capacity to dictate policies from above. Thus like settler-colonial discourse in the nineteenth century, the REDD economy is based on notions of ‘universal progress’ that systematically exclude indigenous constituencies and indeed displace them. No wonder that indigenous organizations have mobilized and tried to coordinate internationally on these issues” (Veracini, 2015, p. 65). The global alliance against REDD+ in its Declaration to Decolonize the Earth and the Sky states:

After more than 500 years of resistance, we, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, peasant farmers, fisherfolk and civil society are not fooled by the so-called Green Economy and REDD+ because we know colonialism when we see it. Regardless of its’ cynical disguises and shameful lies, colonialism always results in the rape and pillaging of Mother Earth, and the slavery, death, destruction and genocide of her peoples. (No REDD in Africa Network, 2015, p. 38)

Terra nullius land-property-enclosure justifications of colonial rule have survived, prompting Lorenzo Veracini to suggest that while land grabbing in the exploitation colonies is typically seen in neocolonial terms, it should also be seen as a settler-colonial phenomenon in certain respects. Alternatively,

much like our understandings of European conquest in the Americas, contemporary land grabbing is not simply an economic project. We would do well to remember that the myth of empty lands (*terra nullius*) is a racial metaphor marking the racialized dispossession of and genocide of the regions first inhabitants by European powers... understanding land grabbing as a critique of (post-independence-*my addition*) development demands recognition of the spatial and temporal continuities of grabbing as a historical geography of race. (Mollett, 2015, p. 427)

LEARNING FROM INDIGENOUS-PEASANT ONTOLOGIES OF LAND AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTIVISM IN THE (NEO)COLONIES

Some of the most radical critiques and understandings about our societies, our world and its power structures and dominant ideologies and the fragility of the environment—indeed the most powerful visions for social change—emerge from ordinary people coming together and working for such change. (Choudry, 2015, p. 172)

Terra nullius continuities (e.g. land grabbing) have been met with numerous social movements in the (neo)colonies (Third World) in the rural regions and urban periphery (slums) (Caouette & Turner, 2009; Kapoor, 2017; Kapoor & Jordan, 2019; in press; Moyo & Yeros, 2005; Oliver-Smith, 2010). In the Americas alone, the struggles of 210 million indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples over two decades and more pertaining to ancestral territorial claims have by some estimates gained legal recognition to over 200 million hectares of land (Bryan, 2012, p. 215), although such state titling arrangements (especially those involving the World Bank) require continuous struggle in order to ensure that “extra-legal” (land systems that operate outside the state/institutional system) indigenous lands remain inalienable, collective and unindividuated and cannot be sold or used as collateral (Mollett, 2015, p. 422).

Given the critical exploration thus far, the figure is a rudimentary attempt to map out the dialectical relation between racial/colonial capitalism (land as private property/commodity) and its processes, agents/beneficiaries (citizens) and dispossessed/exploited denizens and associated land-based (and other) activism/resistance (actors and politics) through colonial time and space (Fig. 32.1).

Social movement pedagogies (Choudry, 2015; Foley, 1999) addressing racial/colonial capitalist dispossession informed by ontological and axiological commitments pertaining to land that are often antithetical to *terra nullius* and Lockean property conceptions and colonial capitalist justifications are foundational to the germination, growth and longevity of these movements in the (neo)colonies (Kapoor, 2009; Langdon, 2020; Masalam, 2019; Tarlau, 2019). While there are diverse ontological conceptions of land and related teleology of struggle across the tricontinental, including struggles over rural labor/exploitation and not just land/dispossession, this concluding segment considers some key political learnings from indigenous-peasant anti-colonial/decolonial social movement ontologies of land.

The term dispossession, for one, applies to processes of ongoing settler colonization and/or land grabbing in the (neo)colonies as Indigenous Peoples, peasants and land-based social groups are being divested of their lands and the territorial foundations of their societies. The social movement

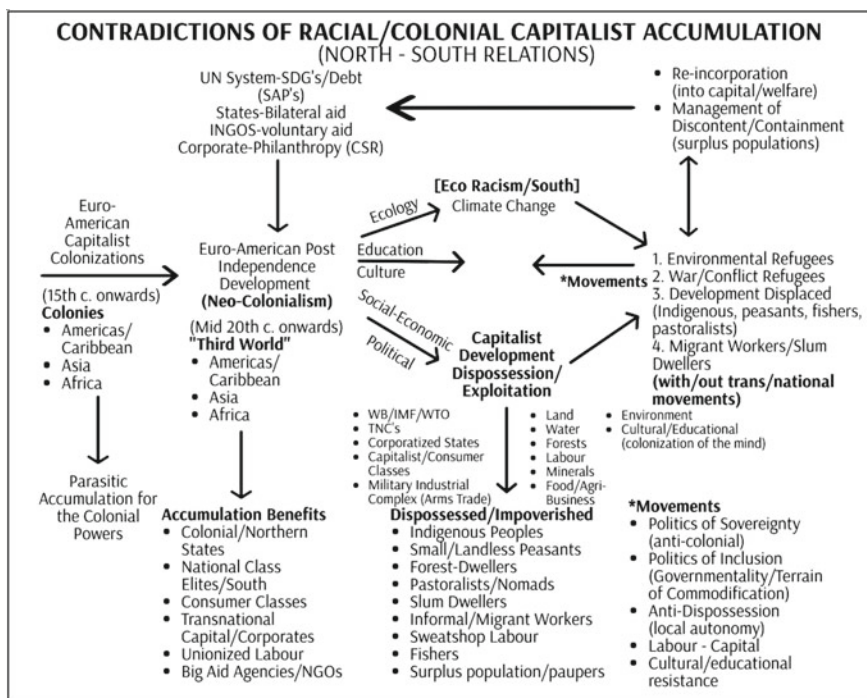


Fig. 32.1 Contradictions of racial/colonial capitalist accumulation (By author)

struggles against dispossession are subsequently sometimes framed (in a discursive politics to undermine anti/decolonial politics) as a struggle for possession which opponents argue is supposed to be contrary to the onto-epistemic and axiological convictions (pertaining to land) of these movements. However, as Mohawk legal scholar Patricia Monture-Angus explains, thereby implying that these struggles are less about dis/possession (anthropocentric land = property implication) than they are about seeking to intervene (responsibility) to prevent desecration of the Earth (which is more than land—biocentric conceptions):

Although Aboriginal Peoples maintain a close relationship with the land...it is not about control of the land... Earth is mother and she nurtures us all... Sovereignty, when defined as the right to be responsible...requires a relationship with the territory (and not a relationship based on control of that territory)... What must be understood then is that Aboriginal request to have our sovereignty respected is really a request to be responsible. I do not know of anywhere else in history where a group of people have had to fight so hard just to be responsible. (1999, p. 36)

Alternatively, La Via Campesina (LVC/peasant way), a global indigenous and peasant movement network or movement of movements spanning virtually all continents (including the “Third World”) advances an onto-epistemology of land and food sovereignty in a counter and/or parallel project to the land grabbing corporate agro-industrial capitalist agricultural model predicated on materialist ontologies of land and food for profit. LVC is guided by a pedagogy which assumes a cosmic vision of the territories of communities of peasants and landless, indigenous peoples, rural workers, fisherfolk, nomadic pastoralists, tribes, afro-descendants, ethnic minorities and displaced peoples (together referenced as “people of the land”), who base their work on the production of food and who maintain a relationship of respect with Mother Earth and the oceans. LVC is fighting for: food sovereignty; land–water-territories; agro-ecology and peasant’s seeds; climate and environmental justice; peasant’s rights; dignity for migrants and waged workers; and international solidarity (www.viacampesina.org).

Contrary to the Lockean and Discovery doctrine’s exclusionary and racial/colonial capitalist justifications for occupation, private property (tradable commodity) and distributive inequities (monopolies) concerning land, LVC’s perspective on land, for what and for whom and why affirms that:

Land is a good of nature that needs to be used for the welfare of all. Land is not, and cannot be a marketable commodity that can be obtained in whatever quantity by those that have the financial means. We defend the principle of the maximum size of the social ownership of the land per family (patrimony is not just in the name of men) in relation to the reality in each country.

Access to the land by peasants is to be understood as a guarantee for survival and the valorization of their culture, the autonomy of their communities and a new vision on the preservation of natural resources for humanity and future generations. (Desmarais, 2007, p. 36)

Adivasi (original dwellers/India) worldviews suggest that “there is an ontological relationship to land governed by a principal of mutuality where land, river, mountain, animal, plant and spirit are all entwined as an interdependent community of beings. It is this relationship that is at the foundation of resistance against loss of land, not an intrinsic claim to own and use land” (Nirmal, 2016, p. 243). Adivasi resistance to land grabbing in the Western Ghats region is based on an interwoven ontological scheme or synthesis of the ecological, socio-cultural and the political-economic/material (Nirmal, 2016, p. 241), contrary to Lockean approaches which reduce land to a property/commodity form. Adivasi and related ontological politics including that of LVC, by speaking from outside the racial/colonial liberal legal framework, pose fundamental and system destabilizing (counterhegemonic) questions (Kohn & McBride, 2011) including: do the people who inhabit a space have the ability to determine its use in order to fulfill their needs, i.e., are the

economic activities in a given area supporting its inhabitants? Is it wrong for foreign corporate capital to occupy/purchase/lease large swaths of land, mechanize production and export food when the inhabitants of that land are going hungry/malnourished?

Frantz Fanon (1967/1963, p. 9) understood that “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity”. The history of colonization after all, can be read as the hegemonic application of conceptions of property, territory and sovereignty wherein European powers “made maps, drew boundaries, decided which spaces were ‘empty’ and which were already occupied, introduced different forms of agriculture and even imposed cultural conceptions of how views and landscapes should be perceived” (Kohn & McBride, 2011, p. 100). Furthermore and when all is said and done, the Age of Discovery prescriptions and Lockean colonialism wherein the term colonialism (coming from the Latin word *colere*) means to seek to cultivate-inhabit-guard land, continues to be reserved for Euroamericans and the emergent transnational state-capitalist and consumer classes in the post-independence period.

An aspect of Indigenous-peasant anti/decolonial ontologies of land struggle engaged by these contemporary movements then is to challenge these colonial categories and imposed transformations through colonial space-time, i.e., land provides a materialist basis for revolutionary struggle against ongoing racial/colonial capitalism while an ontological politics pertaining to land forms the basis of an

expressive insurgency: a long term multigenerational struggle that operates under radically asymmetrical power conditions to reorient the very terms of contestation by forcing us to confront the possibility of relating to the earth as something other than an object to be possessed. (Nichols, 2020, pp. 159–160)

NOTE

1. The Doctrine of Discovery reared its head as recently as 1982 when Spain and the Vatican proposed 1992 as a year of celebration in the United Nations as an “encounter” (where Europe brought civilization and Christianity to Indigenous Peoples) between Europe and the peoples of the Americas (proposal supported by the North Atlantic states, including the US and Canada), wherein the African delegation staged a walk out and returning with a statement condemning the celebration of colonialism in the UN by a body that was ostensibly established for the purpose of ending colonialism. Only 5 years prior, the Indigenous People’s Conference of the Americas at the UN’s Geneva headquarters had proposed that 1992 be made the UN “year of mourning” for the onset of colonialism, African slavery and genocide against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 197).

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