Chapter 16
Green Zones from Above and Below: A Retrospective and Cautionary Tale

Charles Geisler

Abstract This chapter acknowledges the antipodal nature of red and green zones while cautioning against casting green zones as a uniform response to human or 'natural' disturbances. Land allotments for gardening and farming are staple green zone behaviors and have deep historical roots. Carefully considered, these roots reveal that green zones originate from above, as social control, as well as from below to protect citizens and subjects against state misadventures, industrial dystopias, land enclosures, and environmental crises. The chapter seeks to show that green zone land policies can be top-down or bottom-up, are historically contingent, and will continue to evolve and hybridize as they have done in the past.

Keywords Homesteading • Military allotments • Resistance • Green zones • Anarchism

Sociologist Charles Geisler provokes us to place 'green zone' and red zone movements in a historical context, dating back from the Roman Empire, which used land allotments to garner loyalty as part of its expansionist policies, and continuing up to nineteenth century British and twentieth century American back-to-the-land movements as a response to rampant industrialization. He shows how green zones can originate from above, as social control, and from below as attempts to protect citizens and subjects against industrial dystopias and environmental crises.

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Introduction

To a large extent, red zones and green zones are antipodal. The former refers to places characterized by danger and disturbance in the aftermath of disasters, war, or accumulating unsustainable lifestyles. In the latter, people struggle to create 'green' niches of resistance and resilience. They are informed by biophilia and commitments to self-sufficiency and sustainability. Today, green zone constituents regard land as a capital resource that, with wise management, can generate 'interest', meet basic needs and aesthetics, and protect them against dangers and excesses of the red zone. Homesteading, broadly understood, might be thought of as a green zone experiment and a response to social crisis. This chapter will consider homesteading over several historical periods with the goal of more fully appreciating the different forms and meanings of 'back to the land' green zones.

A year or two ago a friend working with immigrants in Toronto told me of a man who arrived from Eastern Europe with only the proverbial clothes on his back. With much determination he set about looking for a small amount of land to garden. The clothes on his back, it happened, were his key to survival. Prior to leaving his homeland he sewed familiar seeds into his garment hems as an insurance policy. If all else failed, he intended to plant this modest collection of seeds in the patch of land, gambling that Toronto's rain and sun would invigorate his small green zone. The lesson here, seemingly about perseverance, is about survival in alien places. Immigrants and other vulnerable people across the globe have warded off the slings and arrows of adversity by returning to the soil in these all but invisible ways.

Useful as such examples are, they perhaps dull critical inquiry into where green zone activism originated and to what ends. What we label 'green zone' may have significant variability and come from elites complicit in red zone activity and adept at social control. Or green zones may arise from below, from victims or reformers committed to transforming red zone control and hegemony. Using homesteading as a green zone analogue, I review four distinct historical cases in which land allotments 'green the red zone', sometimes from above and sometimes from below. The first two—the late Roman Empire and the post-Westphalian era of nation-building—showcase homesteading as social control; the latter two are responses to capitalism, both its early industrial dystopia form and its later, much celebrated 'Fordist' variation. In each era, land becomes a shield against calamity—empire overextension, nation-state insolvency in war time, and urban squalor and alienation associated with burgeoning capitalism. In each instance large populations are allotted land on which to settle and live. The first two examples are decidedly top-down—elites making land concessions to placate masses and avert social disorder. The latter two chronicle a more complicated restructuring of society-nature relations and, as we shall see, force us to think beyond the top-down, bottom-up simplification with which we started.

Homeland Security, Roman Style

Not infrequently accounts of societal evolution contain homesteading narratives. In the grand narrative of post-Pleistocene survival, nomadic people surviving the ice-age find sedentary life-ways that include crop domestication and primitive private property (North and Thomas 1973). As these settlements spawn surpluses and a complex division of labor, subsets of the population are weaned from agriculture and construct ever more complex settlements. Civilized life comes eventually to mean city life; to remain rural is to be a rube or rustic. And so, in much western thought, homesteading and farming are a point of departure, of initial surplus generation, and of eventual accumulation. Modernization becomes indexed by the proportion of people clustered in cities and divorced from the toils of the countryside.

Yet this recurring narrative is inattentive to existential crises (and red zone inclinations) of the metropolis in history (Wallerstein 1983). A telling example is Roman civilization which, during the Republic, experienced its share of urban problems and concentration in ownership and, during the Empire, outgrew its ability to police its growing realm.[1] The *Imperium Romanum* eventually grew to 6.5 million km^2, the protection of which eventually fell to military generals whose legions were being reduced (Goldsworthy 2003). The wisdom of these reductions was tested in the year 9 AD, when Germanic tribes annihilated the Romans in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest and unleashed an internal crisis in governance. Thereafter, Rome rebuilt its legions using land allotments as a lure.[2] Land allotments in the provinces were an important tool of frontier pacification and integration—intentional social control. The crisis of homeland overextension was met with a homesteading solution calculated to re-secure the Empire (Weber 1947).

So the green zone logic is more complicated than it might seem. In times of crisis Rome used a land allotment strategy to settle, sedentarize, and pacify the frayed edges of its realm. In the process, it assimilated certain Germanic adversaries and established land as an early cornerstone in treaties and social contracts. It was a logic that would evolve further in feudal and post-feudal Europe.

[1] Though some commoners held land during the Republic, much of it passed into patrician hands. Roman elites also usurped public lands, causing further tensions between the two classes and eventual civil war in the last century of the Republic (Hopkins 1978).

[2] Max Weber wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Berlin on Roman agrarian law and land policy in the Empire, exploring Rome's strategy to use land surveys and ownership opportunities to stabilize peripheral areas (Weber 1891). Inspiration for this thesis came in part from August Meitzen (see Roth and Wittich 1978: 3).

Land as Green Gold for Soldiers

Land allotments for military service, an emergency measure in the late Roman Empire, would become a hallmark of European feudalism. The Roman practice of *commendation* was an early version of knighthood wherein a Roman soldier gave himself to a superior officer or liege-lord, promising service in return for support in the form of a land allotment known as a *benefice*, complete with serfs (Ganshof 1964). In return, each warrior would use the land to empower himself and elevate his status, until he himself had retainers with fealty to him. Thus, feudalism grew on itself, devouring land to support a military pyramid that survived thanks to reciprocal responsibilities and layers of expanding land allotments.[3]

Feudalism was decidedly top-down, resting on the hierarchical control of subjects through complex land obligations—a hive of self-sufficient 'green zones' consisting of castles and commons, knights obedient to a lord, and serfs working the lord's lands. Its land needs produced constant skirmishes and protracted wars. Life happened behind walls in villages and on fortified homesteads; cities tended to be trade centers and were less of a 'red zone' than were the menacing nobles of neighboring kingdoms.

This changed markedly in the Seventeenth Century. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 ended the 30 Years War, the Holy Roman Empire, and much of the architecture of feudalism. Governance shifted to state-centric rule and monarchies began their decline. Yet the land-for-service customs of feudalism died slowly. The states that emerged from Westphalia often compensated their militias and officers with bounty lands seized in military campaigns (Bockstruck 1996, 2007). Land and spoils were an inducement for armies to dispossess other nations and homestead their lands (Tilly 1985). Though such 'green zone' instigation came from above, in the absence of victory, states released crown or public lands at home to pay their armies, thus avoiding disaffection or mutiny.

Quid pro quo land arrangements of this sort found their way into both British and American history in the New World. From Nova Scotia to Florida, the British Crown awarded land to approximately 6,500 soldiers and sailors for service in its colonial wars. Grants of land were generally made on the basis of rank and at times sparked migrations (when veterans' allotments were in distant colonies). After losing its American colonies, Britain established the Swan River Colony in Australia in 1829, and used land grants to attract military and non-military settlers alike (Appleyard and Manford 1979). Settlers were granted land in proportion to their assets and labor potential; full title was often withheld until they had sufficiently 'improved' their allotment and created a revenue base for colonial administrators. Starting in 1803 in Tasmania, land allotments were given to free settlers, convicts whose sentences were completed, and military personnel in such places as Sullivan's Cove, Hobart Town, Port Dalrymple and Launceston.[4]

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[3] http://historymedren.about.com/cs/knightsarmor/a/kl2origins.htm

[4] The Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office holds indexes for these early land grants (see http://www.statelibrary.tas.gov.au/familyhistory/fillinggaps/land).

With its vast endowment of frontier lands in North America, the United States established military districts as land banks from which to pay officers and soldiers of the Revolutionary War. Connecticut, the Carolinas, Virginia, Rhode Island, Georgia, and New York all met their war debts to soldiers through military bounty lands (Orfield 1915). The first Continental Congress framed the federal government's land disposal policies within the Articles of Confederation and the Land Ordinance of 1785, and in 1796 Congress provided 2.5 million acres for veteran settlement.[5] The parallel between American handling of land on contested frontiers and that of the late Roman Empire was probably not accidental. Jefferson read widely about Roman land survey and allotment practices in their *Imperium* during his ambassadorship to France in 1784 and may well have imported this crisis management strategy—the new nation was deeply in debt after the Revolution—into US law upon his return (Marschner 1959; Kennedy 2003). Military districts were later used in Minnesota and Illinois to accommodate the land needs of soldiers following the War of 1812 (Chenoweth and Semonis 1992).

As late as World War I nations continued to use land allotments as an enticement to would-be soldiers. But by now the red-green complexion had begun to change and, perhaps because of the bottom-up green zone agitation rippling across Europe (more on this below), allotments were becoming a means of pushing back, especially when those allotted land had military training. For example, in 1916 Britain passed the Gifts for Land Settlement Act for Scots volunteering to serve in His Majesty's Forces against Germany. The urgency of such a law was heightened by persisting agitation for land reform in the Highlands (Leneman 1989). The government's commitment slowed following the war, however, in part because promised allotments were to come from large estates. Yet when war veterans protested, reminding the government that they had experience with weapons, the government complied. Between 1915 and 1930 some 3,600 new holdings were created in Scotland for veterans (Mather 1978; Leneman 1989). In the United States land allotments for military service all but ceased in the twentieth century, though the GI Bill of 1944 (granting World War II veterans mortgage subsidies) was a stepchild of earlier allotment policies.

The lens of history, then, suggests that green zones have often been mobilized from above for reasons of social control, land allotments being a relevant and recurrent tool. For the Romans and their successors, such land policy and military expansion went hand-in-hand. In bestowing land to soldiers, knights, and veterans, elites got allegiance, new recruits, and the spoils of war. Those receiving land got sustenance, protection, new rights to the realm, and land for their heirs. Land allotments were more instrumental than aesthetic, more linked to control from above than to agitation from below, and largely unrelated to biophilia and conservation as we currently understand these terms.[6] This was soon to change, however, with the spread

[5] http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=1312

[6] If Simon Schama (1995) is correct, the Romans associated the German tribes—their esteemed but mortal enemies—with nature and forest and viewed them as all the more barbarian for it.

of the urban-industrial capitalism. In the hands of artisans, laborers, and civil society organizations awakening to the value of forests, soil, water, open space, and plants and animals green zone dynamics would take a profound new turn.

Land Is the People's Farm

Late eighteenth century Britain bore witness to yet another 'army' yearning for land and born of expanding industrialization and proletarianization. Time and again, working people and their bourgeoisie spokespersons (including capitalists such as Robert Owen and Henry Ford) proffered new community blueprints that combined 'factories and fields'. Land allotments were organic to these blueprints. Now the red zone became the factory floor, the squalid city, and the scarred environment. From its inception, the industrial revolution and related enclosures of rural landscapes were reproached by poets, artists, and intellectuals lamenting the disappearance of nature and the alienation of working people. Green zone allotments became the grail of the artisans, proletarians, and those dispossessed of their landed birthrights. Their land reform prophets included William Godwin and William Morris, Robert Owen and Thomas Spence, Peter Kropotkin and George Henry Evans, and their followers extended to Chartists, Zionists, utopians, and social engineers of many descriptions (Sakolski 1957).

In contrast to the top-down resettlement schemes granting homesteads to soldiers, these 'factory in the fields' proposals tended to be bottom-up, self-styled, and deeply normative—questing for the moral economy of an Edenic past. Their advocates shared communitarian visions of horticultural-industrial harmony in which artisans and working people met their creature needs through a factory system interspersed with gardens and farms. This back-to-the-land crusade had complicated roots. Early factory sites, many of which were in cities, produced brown-fields with tragic social consequences.[7] Commentators of the era noted the high incidence of cholera, urban epidemics, and poor nutrition. Factory smoke and smog assaulted public health and prevented adequate intake of vitamin D. Noting that the working man was 'most sadly cheated of his fair proportions', Gaskell (1833: 161–62) wrote that London inhabitants were of lower height and stature than their country counterparts by several inches, in part due to bowing of their legs. Such diagnoses caused due alarm and gave reformers a new logic for urban exodus. Gould (1988: 5) summaries these urban-rural tensions:

> The rise of London pointed up the contrast between town and country in Britain more clearly than ever. It was widely held that the sense of social responsibility found in the country was absent in the metropolis. It was commonly regarded as a place of debauchery

[7] Of the many depictions of this era, few capture it better than the British-Irish author, Oliver Goldsmith in these words in *The Deserted Village* (1770): 'Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey, where wealth accumulates, and men decay'.

and danger. The view that London existed primarily as a place of the rich for luxury and entertainment and as a commercial centre that produced little of tangible benefit was reflected in William Cobbett's accusation that London was the 'great Wen'. Friedrich Engels drew attention to some of the more pleasant aspects of rural life: permanent settlement, leisure for healthful work in garden and field, recreation and games.

The idea that self-reliant small-plot farming was a defense against squalor was eloquently articulated by Thomas Spence, who moved to London as industrialism was unfolding. More than once Spence would go to prison for his radical postulations, among them the principle that 'the land is the people's farm'. Though an advocate of land nationalization (Rudkin [1927]1966), Spence viewed the local parish in green zone terms—the potential embodiment of democracy and an arena for social ownership and reform. The parish itself would become the 'landlord' and its lands would be equally divided among parishioners, with rents to cover maintenance and defense. This national blueprint, which Spence immodestly christened 'Spenconia', gained such traction among commoners that in 1817 the government passed an Act of Parliament suppressing Spencean societies as conspiratorial (Dickinson 1982).

Within a generation, similar thrusts 'from below' produced the Chartist Co-operative Land Society, a legacy of Spence, Godwin, and other reformers (Goodway 1982). The Chartists proposed agricultural allotments for urban laborers sick of fetid hovels and unemployment. At its height, the plan had 70,000 subscribers and 600 branches across England (Walton 1999). Energized by the ideas of Fergus O'Connor, the Society generated the National Land Company and a proposal that the government establish 40 estates totaling 20,000 acres (5,000 families with 4-acre allotments each) that in time would multiply across the whole of England (Chase 1988). This was not to be. Among other reasons, socialist supporters were internally divided over the allotment plan (some viewed back-to-the-land as archaic), non-socialists threw their support to private tenure alternatives, and still other reformers redefined 'the land question' as fundamentally a tenancy or taxation issue (Gould 1988).

Late in the nineteenth century green zone leadership passed to William Morris and his critique of urban-industrial culture. Morris, whose thinking about *refugia* for artisans and workers was influenced by Ruskin, saw artisans as the soul of humanity and the guardians of art-in-nature (Gould 1988). His contempt for urban existence was clear in his attacks on both capitalism and parliamentary democracy ('dung heaps'). Like Edward Carpenter, whom he much admired, Morris developed a quasi-religious attachment to artisan communities where poetry, art, and architecture would nourish enlightened design and human fraternity (Goodway 2006). Though his land-based experiment near Sheffield, England (a guild in which simplicity and human labor were valued over complexity and steam power) was a disappointment, he forged ties between socialists and anarchists, thus inflecting green zones of the day with hues of red and black.

Although Morris personally rejected anarchism, he valued and disseminated the writings of Peter Kropotkin and thereby influenced the land ideas of urban reformers such as Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes, and Lewis Mumford. Kropotkin's

Fields, Factories and Workshops (1888/1912) and *The Conquest of Bread* (1907) were landmark texts among anarchists and many others. In the introduction to the former, Kropotkin states that people show their best ideas when they have joint pursuits in farms, factories, workshops, and studios, instead of any one of these (Girardet 1976; Payne 2000: 50). His emphasis on radically localized social organization with a significant reliance on land evoked a practical harmony between town/country, work/leisure, discipline/autonomy, and production/consumption. One can only marvel at Kropotkin's synthetic abilities, his premonition of ecological modernization applied to small farms,[8] and his pervasive influence on contemporary social planning and decentralized land use planning.

Ebenezer Howard, an intellectual son and soul-mate of Kropotkin, took green zone thinking to new levels of respectability. He was known for his seminal contributions to the garden city movement and his bridging role between centuries and continents (Britain and United States). A land allotment experience in his early life marked his later thinking. Howard was born in 1850 in Britain and emigrated to Nebraska at 21 to try his hand at homesteading.[9] While in the US, he read and then met both Whitman and Emerson. Once again in England, Howard set about imagining ways in which cities could escape their modernist contradictions and revealed his answer in a single text in 1902: *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (later re-titled, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*). Echoing others, he wrote that the answer to slums and their social pathologies was the beauty, health, and low rents of rural living and that such existence could be brought to urban edges though urban design interventions. Howard integrated these amenities in his famous *Three Magnets* imagery and operationalized them in his well-known spherical landscape plan for society.

Howard also depoliticized what for two centuries had been a self-conscious resistance movement to land (mis)use and industrial dystopia. Former enclaves of green resistance now became suburbs with meticulous planning, density guidelines, municipally-owned agricultural belts, and decentralized management (Howard 1965). They were environmentally precocious: green zone lands ('green belts') would receive and recycle the organic refuse from elsewhere in the suburb; each garden city would determine the mix of large or small allotments and their ownership—cooperative, corporate, or individual. Garden city thinking infected green belt planning laws in England after World War II, influenced planning curricula

[8] To these ends Kropotkin advocated irrigation and growing under glass to boost local food production ability. Today, his work has a progressive ring in its critique of industrial reliance on fossil fuels and the need for clean energy alternatives.

[9] Space does not allow treatment of the Free Soil and Homestead movements in the United States nor the great debates about the western frontier as a safety valve for the eastern working class—an image made famous by Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous paper read in Chicago in 1893 (Turner 1920). At base, this continental campaign by labor, abolitionists, nationalists and others was a protest against slavery, both racially and occupationally defined. The role played by working mechanics such as George Henry Evans and journalists such as Horace Greeley is astutely summarized in Zahler (1941).

world-wide, and, with some modifications, found suburban expression in the United States, Argentina, Australia, Canada, and Israel. Such institutionalization signaled broad social acceptance, green zone professionalization, and a blurring of the lines between top-down and bottom-up green zone directionality.

Among the people captivated by Howard's vision in the twentieth century was Henry Ford. Chastened by the recession of 1920, Ford rededicated himself to an earlier dream of harmonizing industry and agriculture, famously saying: 'When it comes to sustaining life we go the fields. With one foot in agriculture and the other in industry, America is safe' (Grandin 2009: 58). Like Morris, Kropotkin, Howard and others, Ford believed that returning to the land would solve urban poverty problems and set about establishing a model town in Michigan (Greenfield) and another in the Brazilian Amazon State of Para (Fordlandia). Unlike the communities and garden enclaves of his predecessors, both communities were company towns run by professionals chosen autocratically by Ford. Both communities were financially whiplashed by the Great Depression and their patron's revulsion for the New Deal. But both incorporated gardening and enthroned the belief that working the land was ennobling and ultimately the solution to urban decay.

This brief chapter leaves untold many additional 'back-to-the-land' episodes wherein the interests from above and below mixed, evolved, and energized a 'revolutionary middle' in society—educators, local governments, professional planners and lawyers, nongovernmental volunteers, and other catalysts for greening the red zone. The heterogeneity is intriguing, extending to nineteenth century Zionists seeking a homeland, to members of groups dedicated to saving nature, and eventually to military strategists seeking 'green zone' safe-havens in war zones. Besides their high profile community experiments, Howard and Ford promoted school curricula that incorporated their integrative visions; the latter gave his employees garden plots, created a private Garden Education Service, and sponsored home garden competitions among his employees (Booton 1970; Grandin 2009). In the aftermath of World War II, as rubber production shifted to Asian plantations and non-plantation synthetics, Ford withdrew from Fordlandia and granted severance pay to its Brazilian workforce. Though an abrupt ending to his famous project, the workers there survived for years on their subsistence plots (Grandin 2009: 335), a testimonial to the sustained buffering green zones can offer in the face of capital flight.

Conclusion

This chapter has construed land allotments and related back-to-the-land impulses as an abiding expression of green zones. The antipodes of red and green zones, useful in thinking about social and environmental resilience today, have a complicated, non-linear history. This longer view suggests that green zones are not a uniform response to human or 'natural' disturbances, and at times have originated from above in pursuit of social order and control. The rise of capitalism and industrial dystopia seems to have changed this agenda. In recent centuries green zone activism

has migrated from the hands of elites to those of reformers who see land policies in liberatory terms. By the nineteenth century, ‘land as the people’s farm’ became a shorthand for resisting modernity, particularly high urban-industrialism with its heavy tolls on human and natural communities.

Clearly, the red zone-green zone dialectic is fluid and evolving. It can be top-down or bottom up, the dominance of one over the other being historically contingent. And at times the two intertwine, mediated by groups and forces that are neither subaltern nor elite. Green zone proponents must guard against thinking that the era of social control and manipulation from above is a relic of history. At least when construed as land allotments, attempts by red zone managers to orchestrate the green zone are on-going and ever-present.

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