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Jodi A. Byrd

University of Illinois - Urbana-Champaign

Alyosha Goldstein

University of New Mexico

Jodi Melamed

Marquette University, jodi.melamed@marquette.edu

Chandan Reddy

University of Washington - Seattle

Marquette University

e-Publications@Marquette

English Faculty Research and Publications/College of Arts and Sciences

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Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities

Jodi A. Byrd is a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and associate professor of English and gender and women's studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she is also a faculty affiliate at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications. She is the author of *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011).

Alyosha Goldstein is associate professor of American studies at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action during the American Century* (2012) and the editor of *Formations of United States Colonialism* (2014).

Jodi Melamed is author of *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011). She is associate professor of English and Africana studies at Marquette University. Her current book project is titled *Dispossession by Administration*.

Chandan Reddy is associate professor of gender, women, and sexuality studies and the Comparative History of Ideas program at the University of Washington, Seattle. He is the author of *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (2011).

Abstract

This essay introduces and theorizes the central concerns of this special issue, “Economies of Dispossession: Indigeneity, Race, Capitalism.” Financialization, debt, and the accelerated concentration of wealth today work through social relations already configured and disposed by imperial conquest and racial capitalism. In the Americas broadly and the United States specifically, colonization and transatlantic slavery set in motion the dynamics and differential racialized valuations that continue to underwrite particular forms of subjection, property, commerce, and territoriality. The conception of economies of dispossession introduced in this essay draws attention to the overriding importance of rationalities of abstraction and commensurability for racial capitalism. The essay problematizes the ways in which dispossession is conventionally treated as a self-evident and circumscribed practice of unjust taking and subtractive action. Instead, working across the lethal confluences of imperial conquest and racial capitalist predation, this essay critically situates the logic of appropriation that organizes and underwrites predatory value in the historical present. Against the commensurabilities and rationalities of debt and finance capitalism, conditioned through the proprietary logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism, the essay gestures toward alternative frameworks for building collective capacities for what the authors describe as a grounded relationality.

Keywords

[dispossession](#), [racial capitalism](#), [financialization](#), [value](#), [empire](#)

Financialization, debt, and the accelerated concentration of wealth today work through social relations already configured and disposed by imperial conquest and racial capitalism. In the Americas broadly and the United States specifically, colonization and transatlantic slavery set in motion the dynamics and differential racialized valuations that continue to underwrite particular forms of subjection, property, commerce, and territoriality. Racialization and racism further colonial dispossession just as the colonization of Indigenous peoples and those subjected to colonial rule contribute to the specific conditions and practices through which racialized subordination are enacted. Racialization—manifesting in systemic and everyday forms of devaluation, exploitation, and expendability, as well as the violence of racial terror and carceral regimes—and ongoing colonial modes of settlement, occupation, governmentality, and jurisprudence work in tandem with more capacious forms of US global militarism and empire. This special issue of *Social Text* examines these entanglements in conversation with Indigenous critical theory and Black and critical ethnic studies scholars whose work seeks to reframe the contemporary moment of predatory accumulation through the deeper temporalizations of colonization, settlement, and racialization.

In this special issue, each of the articles offers ways to understand the tensions, reciprocities, and confluences among racialization and colonization as intersecting through contemporary conditions of dispossession. Dispossession is an insatiable predatory relation that entails a specific manner of world making that is at once predicated on and generative of a dialectic of biopolitical sorting, a division of what Denise Ferreira da Silva describes as transparency versus affectability and Elizabeth Povinelli calls the autological subject versus genealogical society.¹ We take the United States as a shared site of reference not because it is exceptional with regard to the topics at hand but because it offers one salient geopolitical juncture around which the accumulated violence of colonial and racialized appropriation and contestation accrue present-day significance and circulation. Although not exceptional, the United States and the scope of its imperial formations are especially useful for addressing the specificities of how and why colonialism and racial capitalism have been historically co-constitutive and are of necessity together confronted by Indigenous peoples and the racially subordinated.

By *economies of dispossession* we mean those multiple and intertwined genealogies of racialized property, subjection, and expropriation through which capitalism and colonialism take shape historically and change over time. *Economies* in the plural here indicates both the economic as a particular kind of material fulcrum—a mode and relations of production, distribution, consumption, and reproduction with all this entails—and economy as a specific systemic organization or logic of circuits of interaction and exchange. Our intention is to problematize the ways in which dispossession is conventionally treated as a self-evident and circumscribed practice of unjust taking and subtractive action. As we further elaborate in this essay, the concept of economies of dispossession differs from David Harvey’s notion of “accumulation by dispossession” in

a number of important ways, perhaps most significantly because of how this analytic underscores the constitutive and continuing role of both colonization and racialization for capitalism.²

Colonization and the economies of racial subjection serve as conditions of possibility in the United States for the ways in which financial institutions and land and market speculators have produced and profited from those most economically disenfranchised. Imperialism provides the vectors of economic speculation and the enmeshment of administrative, plantation, and multiple colonial formations that have underpinned the rise of the world economy. It is precisely in this overdetermined configuration of dispossession that the speculative and crony capitalist expropriations of the crisis this time have accelerated. As the US imperial nation-state adjudicates itself through an economy of inclusion intended to signify “debts paid,” Indigenous dispossession continues unabated to provide the logics that order power, violence, accumulation, and belonging for all those who find themselves on lands stripped from Indigenous peoples. Debt and financialization continue to constellate the subordinated social relations that are constitutive of late liberalism and how “race” itself is deployed to obscure the lasting ethical and material indebtedness settlers and arrivants have to Indigenous dispossession. Not only has land made territory made property in this sense provided the foundational relations of colonial accumulation and profit, but dispossession has also remained a perpetually incomplete project that continues to strive toward conforming and confirming these terms of value and belonging.

Among our primary contentions is that capitalism is not only constitutively racial capitalism but also, likewise, a way of hierarchically organizing and disposing social life predicated on and operationalized through empire and colonialism as a counterformation to Indigenous peoples and the recalcitrance of racialized lives that refuse and exceed its totalizing aspiration. We argue that dispossession not only presupposes and configures possession itself but also is a relation of taking and violence that works at once to produce and delimit subjectivation, property, and value. Because of the ways in which various iterations of liberal capitalism have historically conceived of personhood in terms of the property relation, dispossession in this sense is an ontological proposition. Colonization, Indigeneity, racialization, and chattel slavery and its afterlives, along with the heteropatriarchal household economy, are among the primary conditions of possibility for this proposition. Economies of dispossession variously addressed in this special issue are organized around logics of “propriation” as the pivot of appropriation and expropriation.

Propriation is a conception and practice of the proper, propriety, proprietorship, and proprietary claims that instantiates property as a relation to private and public. Propriation suggests a double movement of making one’s own and making one proper to or properly oneself.³ It is a supposition of civilization and civility. In feudal Europe the property relation was fundamental to the maintenance of ostensibly proper social hierarchies. Subsequently, the ascendance of bourgeois liberalism made property ownership constitutive for privacy and personhood. Under feudalism property was commonly understood as “properly” consisting “in whatever resources one needed to do one’s part in keeping good order.”⁴ Liberal thought emphasized ownership in oneself and private property as a freely alienable commodity as essential to individual freedom and self-determination. Yet, property as a means to privacy and autonomy and private property as foundational to the propriety of social order have been neither chronologically distinct nor mutually exclusive. In this regard, Jacques Derrida theorizes propriation through a reading of Martin Heidegger’s linking “the question of being to the question of the property [*propre*]” and an analysis of sexual difference.⁵ The logic of propriation instantiated through dis/possession works in tandem with the production of colonial, racial, gender, and sexual categories that change over time. And indeed, as a normative practice that strives to conform legible sexual difference, the human and nonhuman, savage and civilized, public and private, inside and outside, propriation conforms bodies, land, and material and immaterial “objects” or objectives in an especially predatory and violent manner.⁶

The sexualized and gendered logics of conquest in the so-called new world and transatlantic slavery in this sense have been formative in operationalizing the specificities and predations of possession. The “doctrine of discovery” along with its putative subsumption of Indigenous peoples as “domestic dependent nations” and processes through which abducted and racially abjected human beings were rendered private property are together historically inseparable from how the white masculinized bourgeois public sphere and feminized private sphere animated the heteropatriarchal household economy as a model for national order in the US context. Moreover, under capitalism, property is always a means to further

accumulation, a relentlessly acquisitive relation to land, to being in place, to people, to here and elsewhere. As conceived by Jeremy Bentham, “Property is only a foundation of expectation—the expectation of deriving certain advantages from the thing said to be possessed, in consequence of the relations in which one already stands to it.”⁷ But this economy of expectation is likewise predicated upon the abstraction, consumption, and disposal of other people and places—attributed discrepant value by logics of resources and racialization, and subordinated by the settler colonial desire for presence, habitation, and permanence. Economies of dispossession are at once epistemologies of commensurability and differential devaluation.⁸

The shift in dominance between two coexisting logics of appropriation, between Obama-era multicultural neoliberalism and the plutocratic, more overtly white supremacist capitalism advanced under Trump, illuminates the varieties of and continuities in logics of appropriation and their repertoires of racialization and colonial praxis. As dominant racializing and colonizing procedures shift between Obama-era reformism, upwardly redistributive multicultural neoliberalism, and the taking and abuse of land in the name of austerity, on the one hand, and Trumpist repertoires of criminalization, renewals of the wages of whiteness, crony capitalism, and white settler “blood and soil” claims to place and land exploitation, on the other, the logic of appropriation itself remains naturalized, while the renewal of white supremacy’s relevance to capitalism reveals the thinness of capitalist civil rights (cum property rights), thoroughly shaped by and shaping appropriation since the 1970s.⁹

Economies of dispossession and conceits of possession are perpetuated by what Lisa Marie Cacho describes as the “differential devaluation of racialized groups.”¹⁰ These are the conditions today under which those rendered expendable, living what Neferti Tadiar calls “remaindered life-times,” struggle to survive.¹¹ These are the circumstances in regard to which Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva ask, in light of the 2006–8 financial crisis, “How could the predatory targeting of economically dispossessed communities and the subsequent bailout of the nation’s largest investment banks, instantly and volubly, be recast as a problem *caused* by the racial other (‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘state-dependent minorities’)?”¹² And at the center of the collective critical inquiry we pursue, these are the conditions for the multiple collisions, frictions, complicities, and disavowals among colonized and racialized peoples subjected to this differential devaluation.

The essays assembled here thus emphasize relationality rather than comparison. In making this distinction, we seek to differentiate those forms of inquiry attentive to the dynamics of co-constitution, interaction, and friction from those conventional methods of comparison—comparative literature, comparative politics, and so forth—that insist upon disconnection and equivalence as their point of analytic departure. More specifically, we have in mind conceptions of relationality that have been central to Native American and Indigenous studies that emphasize relatedness, polymorphous kinships, human reciprocities with and of land, and the other than human—generative recent theorizations of which include those of LeAnne Howe, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Glen Coulthard, Mishuana Goeman, and Sarah Hunt.¹³ Although this emphasis has certain affinities with the archipelagic Antillean imaginary of Édouard Glissant’s “poetics of Relation,” for us the shoreline not only is a new horizon that comes into view through the Middle Passage, colonial world making, and the plantation—however crucial these remain—but also must always already be a collision with Indigenous presence.¹⁴ Conceiving of relationality in this way, we ask how it might be possible to think and work for a relationality grounded both in place and in movement, which simultaneously addresses Black geographies, dispossessions, and other racialized proprietary violences as incommensurate to yet not apart from Indigenous land and sovereignty.¹⁵

Imperial Accumulations of Racial Capitalism

In his theorization of racial capitalism, Cedric Robinson argues that the development of capitalism has been historically inextricable from processes of racialization. The conception of racial capitalism seeks to trouble the developmentalism and racism that underwrites Marx and Engels’s belief that European bourgeois society would rationalize social relations, moving through and beyond differential humanity attributed to racial difference.¹⁶ Deploying racial capitalism as an “activist hermeneutic” requires understanding that capitalism is racial capitalism from its inception and in its various instantiations.¹⁷ Using the hermeneutic of racial capitalism to critically read Marx’s own writings on “so-called original

accumulation,”¹⁸ we can better grasp the epistemic conditions at the fulcrum of US liberal and radical thought and politics that continue to disavow settler colonialism and racial violence as determinate conditions of and immanent to US capitalism and modernity, including this moment of financial globalization. The historical processes of colonization and racialization here are simultaneously distinct and reciprocal, yet mobile rationalities of priority more often than not have themselves been appropriated on behalf of settler colonial governance and the profit margins of racial capitalism. Moreover, colonialism—like other modes of “so-called original accumulation”—is frequently treated as merely a historical precursor to the subsequent depredations of racism rather than an ongoing relation of theft, displacement, foreclosure, and violence that cannot be reduced to one determinate relation to racialization.

Marx closes the first volume of *Capital* with a discussion of “so-called original accumulation,” reminding his reader that capitalism as we know it begins in the sixteenth century, in the creation of a world market with the invasion and exploitation of the new world. Addressing slavery, imperialism, and colonialism in his systemic account of capitalist social relations—where “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force plays the greatest part”—Marx temporalizes these practices even in his own time as the original source of bourgeois wealth by which modern capitalist social relations are established out of heterogeneous “primitive” and feudal societies across the Anglo-European world. As he writes, “In the history of original accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as *levers [Hebel]* for the capital class in course of formation.”¹⁹

Remarkably for Marx, while slavery, forced relocations, colonization, and imperialism are levers of the industrial mode of production, they are not constitutively an aspect of what he terms the “enslavement of workers.” In the first volume of *Capital*, the figure of the enslaved worker is instead reserved for the European immigrant and his relatives, the internal vagabond, the propertyless, the former serf. Marx writes, “The wave of immigration from Europe throws men onto the labour-market there more rapidly than the wave of immigration to the West can wash them away.”²⁰ The high concentrations of finance capital, the national debt from the Civil War, and the government giveaways (in his time, of Indigenous land rights; in our time, of disaster capitalism contracts for the control of colonized societies and areas, e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan, and New Orleans) are meaningful explanations for the centralization of capital that propelled the “wage slavery” of the European working classes. Colonialism is for Marx one point of transit on the way to large-scale capital-intensive European industrialization for a worldwide market. Too often subsequent work has further misconstrued the relationships among slavery, colonialism, and capitalism as a linear historical development that leads from “so-called original accumulation” to industrialization to imperialism and finance as, in V. I. Lenin’s terms, the “highest stage” of capitalism. Even Harvey’s formulation of “accumulation by dispossession,” which he describes as the driver of the “new imperialism,” though critical of Marx’s stagist account of original accumulation, preserves an analytical separation between the practices of primitive accumulation that institute and expand commodification and capitalist development, such as colonization and Indigenous dispossession in the Americas, and those practices of accumulation by dispossession that are developed to manage crises immanent to expanded reproduction, such as the post-1970s crises of capitalist overaccumulation.²¹

We ask instead how the terms of academic and political debate today would be transformed if an understanding of colonization as ongoing and the lived experience of colonialism as a condition of possibility were prioritized and considered as something that critical analysis had an enduring responsibility to address.²² To think of racial violences through colonial violences not as an “originary past” but as ongoing conditions of possibility is not to immobilize political agency. Rather, it is worth remembering that any set of material forces that operate as the condition of possibility for national and radical ways of knowing and political practice are also precisely the nation’s conditions of impossibility. That is, the sources of critique of national formations and the site for alternative ways of seeing contemporary struggle come precisely from the very conditions of possibility out of which the US nation-state became both dominant and hegemonic.

Logics of Dispossessive Financialization

Our conception of economies of dispossession is intended to draw attention to the overriding importance of rationalities of abstraction and commensurability for capitalism.²³ These are the rationalities that enact and disavow racial and colonial

violence by constituting people, land, and the relations of social life as translatable into value form, making incommensurate histories, experiences, and forms of social being commensurate by reducing them to their meaning and value within “the capital relation,” placing them within the ontology of dis/possession. For instance, K-Sue Park argues that predatory lending and mortgage foreclosure as a means of taking land for debts past due—with land made property abstracted into monetary value—was innovated in the colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples in North America during the sixteenth and seventeenth century and only subsequently adapted to transactions between settlers.²⁴ In the current conjuncture, we can trace the remaking, revising, and adapting of the capacities of rationalities of abstraction and commensurability within the registers of neoliberal financialization. That is, we can catch hold of the restructuring of epistemologies conditioned through racial capitalist and settler colonial logics for financialization.

On one level, financialization restructures familiar logics of appropriation that have used liberal idioms to make human bodies abstractable into value forms, abstracting concrete and specific human lives into kinds of human capital. For example, we can readily juxtapose slave-backed bonds, a common antebellum strategy for raising investment capital by selling shares in the bodies of bondspersons and their labor, with the contemporary leveraging of shares in ventures relying on coerced or literally enslaved labor or in enterprises that profit from warehousing or controlling remaindered human bodies (private prisons, detention centers, global security firms, and human trafficking). The commensurability between persons and property that antebellum finance mediated through racialization and exclusion from liberal personhood is reordered and expanded in financialization, such that the abstractability of humans as tools for capital continues but profit is structured around the “human capital” of laboring and nonlaboring bodies alike, whose transactability and insertion into circuits of capital valorization are mediated through racialization, law, social contract, and direct coercion.

On a second level, there is something new at play, a new violence of commensurability that does not require the same mediations, where the force of the rationality of financialization itself—numeracy, abstractions, proceduralism—operates as its own mode of valorization and violence. For example, in the case of stock markets rising or falling with the dropping of Israeli bombs on populations in Gaza or austerity regimes imposing regulations on populations in Greece, the human is not connected as human capital (a laboring or remaindered body from which value can be extracted) but through virtuality and numeracy, a blip in the algorithms of complex financial instruments whose outcomes, enacted through chains of derivatives, dark pooling, mutual funds, and speculation, cannot finally be correlated with nonnumerical outcomes.

We might think of finance capital’s efficiency in converting its rational capacities for abstraction, commensurability, and measurability into capital and violence as the apotheosis of the formalism Lisa Lowe describes as the formalism of “modern liberal humanism ... that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom.”²⁵ The register of Lowe’s formalism is primarily hermeneutical, identifying the forgetting of slavery, settler colonialism, indentureship, and empire as constitutive conditions for European political philosophy and modern liberal forms of freedom. These liberal modes of defining the human hinge upon the notion of civility, and freedom—both in its political modes of autonomy and in its societal modes of individuality—is often framed as equality within the flattened terrains of access, privilege, property ownership, and inclusivity into the very categories from which some subjects, rendered other, objects, or dead, have always already been denied, foreclosed, and precluded. Yet in the era of financialization, we might think of this formalism as being economized, of Lowe’s economy of affirmation and forgetting converted into literal economy, by the capacities of financialization to spin out chains of abstracting speculation from conversions of past and present liberal violences (dispossessions, killings, land thefts, and containments justified as right by liberal ways of knowing that are internal to racial capitalist and settler colonial logics) into economic value. Under the administration of Donald Trump, the formalism that coordinates violence and capital for dispossessive financialization has metastasized, spreading a mania of deregulation that augments the power and profits of every stripe of corporate conquest—extractive industries, media consolidation, and ever more invasive and militarized private intelligence and security ventures.

Techniques of Debt and Austerity

Debt has been and remains a supreme technique of financial capital's commensurate making. A kind of analytic trap, it produces a language of commonality, which constitutes a singular world-historic subject of debt and the debtor as a single political actor into which anyone can be slotted. The conceit of debt and the politics it anchors is that everyone and everything can be incorporated into the game of appropriation and thus into racial capitalist colonial worldings.

This is abundantly clear in the contemporary case of austerity regimes and the ascension of *austerity* to an unifying discourse, in Stuart Hall's sense of a regulative narrative linking diverse political, economic, and cultural tendencies to a dominant configuration of power.²⁶ When we perceive financialization as always already predisposed and configured by settler colonialism and empire, today's austerity becomes legible as a new civilizing discourse, another iteration of appropriation, a civilizationism redux for neoliberal times. We see that austerity makes full use of debt's flattening, homogenizing, and incorporating capabilities to subject heterogeneous social formations to the overriding logic of financialization.

Austerity discourse recycles and modifies repertoires of racialization, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism by articulating them in registers of economic necessity. Using such repertoires, it legislates the health and fitness of populations on scales from the national to the neighborhood, remaking flexible new versions of what Lowe calls the "colonial divisions of humanity" by carving up and differentially devaluing human groups on the basis of economic criteria determined by relations of accumulation that benefit financial-asset-owning classes.²⁷ As the implacable logic of debt takes over for the implacable logic of the white man's burden, the former speaks the latter's language of delay, of the need for people cut off from circuits of capital accumulation to develop their capacities, to adjust to the standards of the more advanced world, to reform their backward ways. In this way, through the alibis of debt and scarcity, austerity regimes produce commensurability for dispossession.

As a technique of dispossession, debt further functions within liberal capitalist discourses to suppress the legibility of how settler violence creates the material conditions that form the base of the discursive appearance of Native "indebtedness." Because within the episteme of debt the present can be understood only in capitalist terms of relation, land theft, conquest, and coercion (past and present) become irrelevant as conditions of the "social ills" that appear before the eyes of the settler as disproportionate Native poverty, ill health, unemployment, and so on. Conversely, liberal and radical calls for reform or revolution in the face of capitalist crises further disavow settler colonialism as a determinate condition of capitalism. Discussions about redistribution, the Keynesian state, and the 99 percent secure what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls "the logic of the white possessive" by reinforcing the "materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession."²⁸

In suppressing the knowing of settler colonial logics as relevant and in play in financialization and its crises, debt continues to fulfill its historical function of counterinsurgency; its rhetoric diminishes the politicization of struggles against ongoing settler colonialism, both in general and as a face of struggle against racial capitalist violences. Debt epistemologies also serve the function of counterinsurgency in the dissimulation of African American dispossessions as apolitical (bureaucratic) proceduralism. Articulated as "welfare dependency," as a "debt to society," or as "fines owed" (to municipal governments for so-called poverty violations), repertoires of debt represent the violent outcomes of racial capitalist procedures as apolitical acts of administration, as the result of law and policy.²⁹ In this way, debt, as a technique of dispossession, undermines the consolidation of political agencies that might otherwise be invoked in the case of racial and colonial oppression. It also stigmatizes resistance, when it does occur, as politically irrational or apolitically criminal.

One of the most egregious traps of debt discourse is the framing of African American and Native American responses to dispossession as at odds or in competition with each other. This follows from how discursive formations articulated around debt represent a politics of appropriation (of the world as translatable for property ownership and of personhood as self-ownership) to be the only political real. Under such political and discursive conditions, familiar notions of political redress, namely, reparations and sovereignty, appear as exclusive, as limiting conditions for one another. Politically and intellectually, this produces a stalemate. Or, worse, incommensurable violences are claimed as the grounds for competing

grievances: Native decolonization praxis is accused of having an anti-Black orientation; African American survival through colonial slavery and citizenship is taken as full complicity with white settler colonialism. The epistemology of debt makes incommensurate demands for justice appear impossible.

Grounded Relationalities

Against the commensurabilities and rationalities of debt and finance capitalism, conditioned through the proprietary logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism, we seek alternative frameworks for building capacities for grounded relationality. By *grounded* we mean quite literally situated in relation to and from the land but without precluding movement, multiplicity, multidirectionality, transversals, and other elementary or material currents of water and air. This is a being grounded and living relationalities in which the nonhuman world and the materiality of land and other elements have agential significance in ways that exceed liberal conceptions of the human. If the grounded relationalities of Indigenous philosophies might tell us anything, then, they remind us that knowledge must always remain grounded as the land calls to us and for us to find our place within the ongoing acts of interconnectivity that surround us.

A number of questions arise with this shift from the epistemic trap of debt to the possibilities of relationality as affective and grounded alternatives to economies of dispossession and systems of extraction and exploitation. How might we apprehend relationality across systems of capitalism, colonialism, and chattel slavery and its afterlives? What happens when land is understood not as property or territory but as a source of relation with an agency of its own? How might reconceiving of land as relation shift the ground of racialized and embodied histories away from the territoriality of the state? How might building capacities for relationality outside the logics of appropriation make it possible to handle incommensurate demands for justice? In other words, is there a way for land in itself to serve as an ontological condition for a different concept of the political that refuses conquest, doctrines of discovery, and the appropriations of the propertied self? Finally, can land as the source of relation rather than the site of boundaries define a politics under which Indigenous sovereignty and Black reparations movements can (re)build capacities for relationality (aberrant to logics of appropriation), rather than enact exclusivity or inclusion?

In these times, when it is clear that liberal freedoms, misnamed *democracy*, fail to halt the expropriation of collective life by financial capitalism and its extractive resource mining, it is critical to turn our attention to ongoing praxes that build capacities for relationality beyond the logics of appropriation. Because they have long understood inclusion in the liberal capitalist state as an unmaking of collective social being, as whitewashing ongoing violence, Black radical philosophy read alongside Indigenous critical theory may help us to think alternatives that are both transformative and realizable and, in fact, already manifest and discernable. Work by such scholars as Glen Coulthard, Saidiya Hartman, Shona Jackson, Tiffany Lethabo King, Lisa Lowe, Fred Moten, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Denise Ferreira da Silva offers energizing responses to global predatory formations of debt-driven accumulation, each drawing on Black radical traditions, critical ethnic studies, and/or Indigenous critical theory for epistemic-material activism. As Saidiya Hartman observes, “Skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” are all the afterlife of slavery.³⁰ That afterlife persists as we are all asked to confront the ontological, political, economic, and moral implications and entanglements of colonization and slavery as they ostensibly compete for originary source within dispossessive regimes.

In his work, Moten confronts the predatory formation of subprime debt speculation and foreclosures from the point of view of the Black radical tradition, which constellates around the anticapitalist norms of “consent not to be a single being” and “preservation of the ontological totality” (the survival of Black collectivity). Moten celebrates the subprime debtor for enacting a guerrilla “collateral agency”³¹ when he writes:

For a minute, by way of policy that accompanied another of those periodic attempts to deconcentrate that mass and its ongoing project/s, home ownership was infused with and disrupted by a kind of carnival, a country-ass hoedown, an embarrassing barbecue. This disownership renewed an old experiment that moves at the intersection of squatting and “the imposition of severalty” (... to eradicate the Indian who was not vanishing quite fast enough by liberal conferral of the gift of

private property.) That imposition [was updated] ... in the name of “the ownership society” ... so that it could continue its brutal, violent habit of enclosing our common capacity.³²

Moten refuses to compare and oppose Black and Native dispossessions in racial capitalist settler colonial modernity and instead offers a way to conceive of debt as disownership that links contemporary forms of foreclosure to the enclosures of settlement, severalty, and allotment. As home ownership and its subsequent subprime mortgage within the existing structures of a well-established settler colonialism became “a kind of carnival, a country-ass hoedown, an embarrassing barbecue,” Moten acknowledges how “the ownership society” continues its brutal drive toward enclosing our common capacity and our capacity for the commons.

Building on questions of the spatialities of settler colonial geographies, Tiffany Lethabo King, in her recent work on Black fungibility, argues for an analytic framework through which to consider how “Blackness mediated the ways the natural world could be imagined as manipulable and an open landscape in flux.”³³ Such a framework disrupts the spatial and embodied boundaries that have at times separated Indigenous and settler colonial critique from Black studies by demonstrating how “Black bodies in the fluttering, stretching, and changing states became a symbol of unstable borders, processes, and the shifting power relations ... [and where] Blackness, as expansion and spatial possibility, becomes a constituting feature of the spatial imagination of the conquistador/settler rather than just another human laborer exploited as a mere technology to produce space.”³⁴ Such moves help us decenter bodies as the site of pure labor within the proprietary logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism to think more fluidly about the porousness of those same bodies as they are made to move and remove, build and destroy, relate and tear asunder.

Dene scholar Glen Coulthard confronts the debt-driven predatory formations active in Canada, where austerity provides alibis for renewed thefts of Indigenous lands and resources and more indebtedness and precarity generally. Inspired by Frantz Fanon’s belief that those struggling against colonialism must turn away from the colonial state and find in their own transformative praxis the source of their liberation, Coulthard calls for the reinvigoration of land-based norms, of “indigenous laws ... that uphold the relations of reciprocity that shape our engagement with the human and nonhuman world—the land.”³⁵ He refers to this transformation praxis as “grounded normativity” in *Red Skin, White Masks*. Recently, writing with Michi Saagig Nishnaabeg poet, intellectual, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, he has reframed this praxis as a baseline for anticolonial solidarities against the proprietary and possessive regimes undergirding settler colonialism in North America. “Our relationship to the land itself,” Coulthard and Simpson write, “generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which *we practice solidarity*. To willfully abandon them would amount to a form of auto-genocide.”³⁶ Grounded normativity, as Coulthard and Simpson explain, provides an ethical way of knowing and being that is more expansive than those ontologies that prioritize the human as exceptional, and it is a placement that extends memory through vast kinship networks that assume life, vibrancy, and agency beyond the limits of enlightenment notions of self, liberty, and property. Such Indigenous interventions to the categories of being codified by settler law, policy, and territoriality are also fundamentally critiques of colonialism as they reorient knowledge and power within and through Indigenous returns to land, philosophy, diplomacy, activism, and kinship. By decentering the human, such theories require us to consider further how colonialism has already inflected our understanding of nature, memory, and history through the production of archives and certain kinds of knowledge production that favor hegemonic white possession.

Here, as a way toward ending this introduction, we’d like to offer a series of provocations and questions that arise when Black and Indigenous intellectual traditions are held simultaneously as offering disruptions to appropriation and possession: How might we develop Coulthard’s fruitful concept of “grounded normativity”—the ethical framework “informed by what land as a mode of reciprocal *relationship* (which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way”?³⁷ What would it be, then, to think and work for a *grounded relationality*, at once addressed to Black placemaking, geographies, and other racialized diasporas, as well as to proprietary violences incommensurate to yet not altogether separate from Indigenous land and sovereignty? What would it mean to consider the land itself as a site of an agential fungibility that has been conscripted into the proprietary spatialities of colonial

possessiveness and constrained into geographies of exploitation that no longer serve the relationalities of presence and care that have for so long been its domain as a common for all? The loss of land is not just a loss of property, territoriality, power, nation, or sovereignty; it is the loss of those philosophies that derive from the relationships the land itself activates, fosters, and nourishes. Working across the lethal confluences of imperial conquest and racial capitalist predation, the essays that follow engage such questions and the logic of appropriation that organizes and underwrites economies of dispossession in the historical present.

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1See Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; and Povinelli, *Empire of Love*.

2See Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 116–51. Our understanding of dispossession is akin to Robert Nichols's theorization of dispossession as a recursive mode of colonial "property-generating theft" and similarly distinct from Harvey in this sense. See Nichols, "Theft Is Property!"

3See Balibar, *Equaliberty*, 90–94.

4Rose, *Property and Persuasion*, 59.

5Derrida, *Spurs*, 115.

6Gayatri Spivak discusses Derrida and appropriation in "Feminism and Deconstruction," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 134–57. Judith Butler provides a useful theoretical context for further analysis of appropriation in terms of sexual difference, embodiment, and normativity in *Undoing Gender*.

7Bentham, *Principles of the Civil Code*, 182.

8The racialized link across *making commensurate, equivalence, and abstraction* can be usefully thought in relation to Bhandar and Toscano, "Race, Real Estate, and Real Abstraction."

9See Connolly, "Black and Woke in Capitalist America."

10Cacho, *Social Death*, 13. As Cacho writes: "Ascribing readily recognizable social value always requires the devaluation of an/other, and that other is almost always poor, racialized, criminalized, segregated, legally vulnerable, and unprotected. ... A comparative analytic centers relational, contingent, and conditional processes of devaluation, which makes it particularly useful for examining how interconnected processes of valorization, devaluation, and revaluation (i.e., race, gender, sexuality, class, nation, legality, etc.) work interdependently to reify value and relations of inequality as normative, natural, and obvious" (17).

11See Tadiar, "Life-Times of Disposability."

12Chakravartty and Ferreira da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt," 364.

13See Howe, *Choctalking on Other Realities*; Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Goeman, *Mark My Words*; and Hunt, "Ontologies of Indigeneity."

14See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. We have similarly in mind vital connections to the conception of Black geographies theorized by Katherine McKittrick in *Demonic Grounds*.

15Important recent contributions to the theorization of relationality that do not necessarily or extensively focus on the term *relationality* itself include Byrd, *Transit of Empire*; Barker, *Critically Sovereign*; Day, *Alien Capital*; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein, "Colonial Unknowing"; King, "New World Grammars"; and Feldman, "On Relationality, on Blackness." On critically rethinking comparative methods, see Hong and Ferguson, *Strange Affinities*; and Shih, "Comparison as Relation." On intersectionality, difference, assemblage, and relationality, see Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal*; Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*; and Puar, "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess."

16See Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

17See Melamed, "Racial Capitalism."

18We use "so-called original accumulation" for Marx's phrase *die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation* rather than what has become its standard rendering as "so-called primitive accumulation," both because this is a more accurate translation and because it better approximates the terminology of Adam Smith, which

served as Marx's point of critical reference. The German word *ursprüngliche* translates as "original" in the sense of "at the origin," or "the base" or "source" of something. One of its usages is as a noun for *fountain*. For further discussion, see Vimalassery, "Wealth of the Natives"; Coulthard, "From Wards of the State to Subjects of Recognition?"; and Nichols, "Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation."

19Marx, *Capital*, 873; emphasis added.

20Ibid., 940.

21See Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. Harvey writes, "I also think it plausible that the second step did far more damage to the long-term hopes, aspirations, and possibilities of the mass of the impoverished population than did the first. The implication is that primitive accumulation that opens up a path to expanded reproduction is one thing, and accumulation by dispossession that disrupts and destroys a path already opened up is quite another" (137). See also Lenin, *Imperialism*.

22See Byrd, *Transit of Empire*.

23In our critique of the modes of rationality, equivalence, and abstraction we nonetheless do not intend to suggest a valorization of the concrete ("real") over the abstract, as Lyko Day has so insightfully analyzed at length in *Alien Capital*.

24See Park, "Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America."

25Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 39.

26Hall, "On Postmodernism and Articulation," 143.

27Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, 6.

28Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, xiii.

29See Joseph, *Debt to Society*; Harris, *Pound of Flesh*; and Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough*.

30Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

31See Moten, "Subprime and the Beautiful," 238.

32Ibid., 241.

33King, "Labor of (Re)Reading Plantation Landscapes," 1023.

34Ibid.

35Coulthard, "For Our Nations to Live, Capitalism Must Die."

36Coulthard and Simpson, "Grounded Normativity," 254.

37Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 60.

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