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**Alexander Reid Ross (Ed.). *Grabbing Back: Essays against the Global Land Grab*.
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Grabbing Back is a collection of essays essentially about theft, but not just petty theft. The volume is in essence a litany of the ways humans have devised to take advantage of other humans, particularly in the years since the beginning of the Columbian Exchange¹, beginning in the late 15th century. Since that time, there has been a steadily growing program centered on the theft of land and resources from their original and often aboriginal utilizers/occupiers/owners, and turning those lands and resources over to external and, sometimes, especially in later centuries, internal exploiters. The exploiting parties inevitably use their perceived cultural and ethnic superiority to rationalize the exploitation of local or indigenous groups. The anthropologist Melville Herskovits must have had this inevitability in mind when he wrote that ethnocentrism "...has been rationalized and has been made the basis of programs of action detrimental to the well-being of other peoples" (1959, p. 1). Ethnocentrism was originally primarily directed toward non-Europeans: Africans, Native Americans, and Asians. As capitalism tightened its grip over the world system, however, this phenomenon came to include ethnocentrism projected onto "other" social classes and castes within the same society; hence the two superficially different but underlyingly similar types of land grabs: those between states/territories, and those within.

In his introduction, titled "The Global Land Grab," Ross identifies five major factors that operate in support of the global land grab. First, there is climate change, which can lead to food scarcity, which, in turn, leads to attempts to gain control over new land suitable for food production. The second is financial speculation, which, through the manipulation of deregulated markets can cause food producers to lose the ability to sell their products. Third is the great recession, which made it possible for investors to look both within and outside the US for cheap properties whose previous occupants had been forced into foreclosure. Fourth is resource scarcities and extractivism. Here resources that become scarce or difficult to exploit in one area are snatched from people in other areas who, for one reason or another, are unable to resist. And finally, the fifth factor is imperialist history, the legacy of the previously mentioned Columbian Exchange. The cases of Mali (where exploiters are after access to water and natural gas) and the Central African Republic (where land grabbers seek diamonds and uranium) are offered as illustrative case studies of land grab. As Reed writes at the end of this section:

With *Grabbing Back*, the authors hope to recover and reclaim the language, thought, and collective memories of marginalized people, moving beyond Occupy to produce decentralized and localized power in solidarity throughout the world. Women struggling for place, workers fighting for land and stability amidst neoliberalism, indigenous peoples generating self-determination, farmers and concerned citizens blocking forced displacement and environmental devastation—all of these we see as united in the popular movement against the Global Land Grab. (p. 35)

"Part One: Struggle in the South" presents nine chapters detailing land grabs and struggles against them in (more or less) the southern hemisphere, where the origins of these grabs can usually be traced back to actions taken in the global north (*i.e.* the US and Europe), more often than not extensions of previous colonial relations in a post-colonial context. Chapters in this

¹ The Columbian Exchange refers to the massive movement of plants, animals, ideologies, and peoples between the Old World and the New World following 1492. See Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*. Praeger, 2003.

section are Shiva's "Land Wars and the Great Land Grab," with a focus on India; Anseeuw and Taylor's "Factors Shaping the Global Land Rush"; Peebles' "Destructive Development and Land Sales in Ethiopia"; Ross' own "Biofuels, Land Grabs, Revolution"; "Environmental Group Events in Today's China," by the organization Yangtze River Delta Earth First!; Federici's "Women, Land Struggles, and Globalization: An International Perspective"; P. Delgado's "Land, Territory, Entropy"; Dangel's "A Coup over Land"; and Perry and da Silva Caminha's "Black Women on the Edge." Between Part One and Part Two, there is an Interlude, titled "Exit and Territory: A World-Systems Analysis of Non-State Spaces," by Andrej Grubačić. This section argues for "exilic spaces" as attempts by people to create communities outside the world system. These spaces may be literal, separate places, such as the space occupied by maroon communities in Jamaica. Alternatively, they may be "interstitial" spaces, operating figuratively, found within, around, and between the webs of relationships and interactions dominated by larger political and economic entities. The Zapatista movement, which since 1994 has struggled to wrest control over local resources from the central government in favor of local (mostly indigenous) people in Chiapas, Mexico, is an example of the operation of interstitial space.

Where Part One's central theme has to do with land grabs resulting from forces external to the states within which the land grabs occur, Part Two, "Crisis in the North," focuses on land grabs that take place as the result of processes mostly internal to states. The theme here is "taking back the commons," the title of the introductory chapter by editor Ross. Chapters in this section include Ross' own "Taking Back the Commons: An Introduction"; Chomsky's "Reconstructing the Poor People's Movement"; "A Detroit Story: Ideas Whose Time Has Come," by Boggs et al.; Umi's "Capitalism, Racism, Resistance"; Rameau's "Take Back the Land"; Crow's "Organizing Through Disaster for Liberation and Solidarity"; "Occupied Mountains," by Osha et al.; Howe's "Mi'kmaq against the Gas Grab"; Herod's "Ports as Places of Stickiness in a World of Global Flows"; "Resistance to Alberta Tar Sands Megaloads in Idaho and Beyond," by Yost and Ross; Barnard's "Demanding the Land at a Public University?: Space, Place, and Occupation at the University of California, Berkeley"; and Hardt's "Advancing the Alter-Modern."

An especially illustrative case study from this section is Osha et al.'s "Occupied Mountains." The southern Appalachian Mountains have been, almost since their settlement by Europeans, a site of conflict between mostly absent capital and locals trying to eke out a living as small farmers under generally less than ideal conditions. The presence of coal attracted industry designed to extract the coal, with no regard for the well-being of those who lived on the lands above the coal and who, through various manipulations, often lost their land even as they became workers for the coal companies. In recent times, the coal companies in some places have turned to not only digging under the earth, but also simply removing the mountain tops that block access to the coal they so voraciously seek. In the process, local ecologies are destroyed and people's lives continue to be ruined. Recent attempts to prevent the removal of the top of Blair Mountain, West Virginia are especially poignant, as this was the site of a bloody 1921 battle between local and federal troops and miners struggling to unionize the coal fields.

Grabbing Back is a well-researched compendium of the important issues presented. The book is not easy to work through, however, because it presents, unrelentingly, one case after another of humans behaving badly toward other humans. Nonetheless, there is optimism in the stories of popular movements taking actions of various kinds to slow down, halt, or even reverse the global land grab. As editor Ross writes in the Epilogue, "There may not be much time left to

act, but there are countless ways to get involved. As we move forward, we must never forget that the world is still being created. The future is ours to imagine and bring to life” (p. 342).

There is no lack of empirical evidence supporting the claims made by the authors; indeed, the evidence is pounded home, again, and again. “Land grab deniers,” to coin a term, might be annoyed by the apparent bias toward the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, but as “deniers,” their minds, like those of climate science deniers, are not likely to be changed. Other readers, however, will almost certainly find this text to be a useful resource, particularly in courses focused on the anthropology, sociology, or history of the effects of the globalization that began, in earnest, in 1492. The good thing is that there are quite a few chapters, and they are relatively short, which is handy for assigning readings in a course. The book consists of 358 pages; there is an index, and a section of brief biographies of the authors.

Reference

Herskovits, M. (1959). *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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