

GRABBING “GREEN”: MARKETS, ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND THE MATERIALIZATION OF NATURAL CAPITAL

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the incorporation of market logics into environment and conservation policy has led to a reconceptualization of “nature.” Resulting constructs like ecosystem services and biodiversity derivatives, as well as finance mechanisms like Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, species banking, and carbon trading, offer new avenues for accumulation and set the context for new enclosures. As these practices have become more apparent, geographers have been at the forefront of interdisciplinary research that has highlighted the effects of “green grabs”—in which

“green credentials” are used to justify expropriation of land and resources—in specific locales. While case studies have begun to reveal the social and ecological marginalization associated with green grabs and the implementation of market mechanisms in particular sites, less attention has been paid to the systemic dimensions and “logics” mobilizing these projects. Yet, the emergence of these constructs reflects a larger transformation in international environmental governance—one in which the discourse of global ecology has accommodated an ontology of natural capital, culminating in the production of what is taking shape as “The Green Economy.” The Green Economy is not a natural or coincidental development, but is contingent upon, and coordinated by, actors drawn together around familiar and emergent institutions of environmental governance. Indeed, the terrain for green grabbing is increasingly cultivated through relation-

1 All of the authors contributed substantially to the conceptualization, writing and organization of the manuscript and organization of the issue so we chose to list the authors alphabetically.

ships among international environmental policy institutions, organizations, activists, academics, and transnational capitalist and managerial classes.

This special issue of *Human Geography* brings together papers that draw on a range of theoretical perspectives to investigate the systemic dimensions and logics mobilizing green grabs and the creation of new market mechanisms. In inverting the title – “grabbing green” instead of the more conventional green grabs – we explore how “the environment” is being used instrumentally by various actors to extend the potential for capital accumulation under the auspices of “being green.” Using a diversity of empirical material that spans local to global scales, the papers reveal the formation of the social relations and metrics that markets require to function. They identify the “frictions” that inhibit the production of these social relations, and they link particular cases to the scalar configurations of power that mobilize and give them shape.

Keywords: Green Grabs, Green Economy, International Environmental Governance, Enclosure, Neo-liberal conservation

El saqueo verde: Mercados, gobernanza ambiental y la materialización del capital natural

Resumen

En las últimas dos décadas, la incorporación de la lógica del mercado en las políticas de medio ambiente y conservación ha llevado a la re-conceptualización de la ‘naturaleza’. Las categorías resultantes de este proceso, tales como los servicios ambientales y los créditos de biodiversidad, junto con mecanismos financieros como la reducción de emisiones por deforestación y degradación forestal, los bancos de especies y los mercados de carbono, ofrecen nuevos caminos para la acumulación y establecen el contexto para nuevos cercamientos sobre los bienes comunes. Mientras estas prácticas se intensifican, la geografía ha estado al frente de la investigación interdisciplinaria resaltando los efectos del ‘saqueo verde’, en los que

‘credenciales verdes’ se utilizan para justificar la expropiación de tierras y recursos en lugares específicos. Mientras que los estudios de caso comienzan a mostrar la marginalización ecológica y social asociada con el saqueo verde y la implementación de los mecanismos del mercado en lugares particulares, el análisis acerca de las dimensiones sistémicas y la ‘lógica’ de estos proyectos ha recibido menos atención. El surgimiento de estas categorías refleja una transformación en la gobernanza ambiental, en la que el discurso ecológico global ha acomodado la ontología del capital natural, culminando en lo que se conoce como la ‘economía verde’. Esta última no es consecuencia de una coincidencia o de un desarrollo natural, sino que es un fenómeno contingente y coordinado por actores entrelazados por instituciones emergentes dedicadas a la gobernanza ambiental. De igual manera, la preparación del contexto para el saqueo verde se cultiva cada vez más mediante relaciones entre las instituciones político-ambientales internacionales, organizaciones, activistas, académicos y capitalistas transnacionales.

Esta edición especial de *Human Geography* reúne artículos que desde un amplio conjunto de perspectivas teóricas investigan las dimensiones sistémicas y la lógica que moviliza al saqueo verde y la creación de nuevos mecanismos de Mercado. Aquí exploramos cómo ‘el medio ambiente’ es utilizado instrumentalmente por varios actores para extender el potencial para la acumulación del capital bajo el auspicio del concepto ‘verde’. Utilizando una variedad de material empírico que incluye la escala global, los artículos seleccionados demuestran la formación de relaciones sociales e indicadores que los mercados requieren para funcionar. Asimismo, identifican “fricciones” que inhiben la producción de dichas relaciones sociales, y conectan casos particulares con las configuraciones de poder a las múltiples escalas que las movilizan y les dan forma.

Palabras clave: Acaparación verde, Economía verde, Gobernanza Ambiental Internacional, Cercamientos, Conservación según el modelo Neoliberal.

Green grabs are the *dark side of the green economy*... If market-based mechanisms are to contribute to sustainable development and the building of economies that are not only green but also fair, then fostering an agenda focused on distribution, equity and justice in green market arrangements is vital.

-- Melissa Leach, Director, Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability Center, Press Release June 15, 2012 (emphasis added)

Introduction

If we are to foster an agenda focused on distribution, equity and justice in green market arrangements, there is a need to closely attend to how green grabs—the dark side of the green economy—became so prevalent. What logics have been deployed in green grabs? How did they achieve dominance within the institutional contexts ostensibly meant to protect nature from the rapacious effects of accumulation? And with what effect for emergent practices of environmental governance and management? Addressing these questions requires not only analyses of grounded cases where market-based mechanisms of environmental management and conservation have been implemented—with the consequences that Leach highlights. It also requires close attention to the institutional and organizational realms and the systemic dimensions through which the “logics” behind such mechanisms secure their legitimacy and capacity to operate.

This special issue of *Human Geography* brings together articles that draw on a range of theoretical perspectives to investigate the systemic dimensions, logics and mechanisms mobilizing the implementation of market mechanisms in particular sites. They present a diversity of empirical material on: the values, ambitions, intersubjectivities, and narratives through which individuals are enrolled; the formation of social relations and metrics that markets require to function; and the “frictions” that inhibit the institutionalization of these relations. In doing so, they link particular case studies to the scalar configurations of power that

mobilize and give them shape. In inverting the title—“grabbing green” instead of the more conventional “green grabs”—we invoke both localized instances of land/resource grabbing and the ways in which various actors are using “the environment” instrumentally to extend the potential for accumulation.

The substance of these papers reflects the degree to which economic and ecological epistemologies have aligned within institutions of environmental governance to produce what is increasingly being called “The Green Economy.” While the phrase has been in circulation for decades (Jacobs 1991), “The Green Economy” has risen to institutional prominence over the last four years and is positioned to supersede sustainable development as the hegemonic discourse in global environmental governance (Brand 2012). With promises of “green growth,” grounded in environmental technologies, and alternative fuel economies, it recasts the environment as *the* driver for the global economic recovery and introduces new opportunities for capital accumulation under the auspices of “being green.” Its rapid ascent and claim to what Fairhead et al. (2012: 242) call, “the economy of repair” reflects a larger transformation in which the discourse of global ecology has accommodated an ontology of natural capital, recasting environmental problems as the result of market failures rather than specific outcomes of market-based ideologies, practices and relations (McAfee 1999).

Defining market failure as the source of environmental degradation allows “solutions” to be cast in terms of “improving” market “efficiencies” through new modes of data collection and dissemination, valuation practices that claim to integrate externalities in monetary terms, and mechanisms to create the commensurability required by markets for exchange and to allocate “efficiencies” (Robertson 2012). The incorporation of these market logics into environment and conservation policy over the past two decades has led to a reconceptualization of “nature” as an entity that can pay for its own reproduction through constructs like ecosystem services and biodiversity derivatives, and finance mechanisms like REDD+, species banking, and carbon trading (Sullivan 2012). These

initiatives promote the privatization of new rights to nature, the creation of new commodities, and the establishment of new markets for their exchange. In doing so, they enclose formerly common resources, draw nature into financialized markets, subjecting it and its governance to their fluctuations, and offer investment opportunities for over-accumulated capital (Harvey 2003; Corson and MacDonald 2012; Fairhead et al. 2012).

Grabbing green: the “dark side” of The Green Economy

A dark side of The Green Economy, as Leach et al. (2012) argue, is the associated green grabs in which “green credentials” are used to justify expropriation of land and resources (Fairhead et al. 2012: 237; see also Borras et al. 2010; Peluso and Lund 2011), and which comprise an important component of the current explosion of global land grabs, or “large scale (trans) national commercial land transactions” (Borras et al. 2011: 210). Green grabs can encompass appropriation of land and resources for biofuels (McCarthy et al. 2012), carbon (Leach et al. 2012; Osborne 2011) and biogenetics (Neimark 2012a, b); and while in some instances, they entail complete alienation of peasants from the land, in others they involve changes to rules, institutions, and the configuration of authority that determines access to and control over resources (Sikor and Lund 2009; Corson 2011; Fairhead et al. 2012). As environmentally and socially destructive processes are increasingly enacted under green cover, geographers (and other social scientists) have been at the forefront of interdisciplinary research that has highlighted the emergence and mobilization of green grabs in specific locales (See the *Journal of Peasant Studies* special issues on biofuels 2010; land control 2011; green grabbing 2012, respectively).

While contemporary green grabbing is grounded in colonial histories of land alienation and enclosure, it also is the product of and brings into being new constructs and relations—forms of creating surplus value and transnational networks across private, nonprofit and public sector actors. It encompasses

not only physical land grabs, but also the privatization of rights to nature, the creation of new commodities and markets, green sanctions for otherwise declining forms of capital accumulation, and the disabling of institutions that could pose threats to these processes. As over-accumulated capital seeks new investment opportunities it discovers environmental protection as a new direct and speculative opportunity for investment through the production of mechanisms like carbon trading and wildlife derivatives (Harvey 2003). At the same time, transnational environmental institutions and many actors associated with them become enlisted in a dominant perspective that “there is no alternative” to neoliberal capitalism (Büscher 2009: 91; see also Büscher et al. 2012) and are reconfigured as critical sites and processes for enabling and structuring new green market opportunities (Corson and MacDonald 2012).

Through this entrainment, the potential of transnational environmental institutions to contain capital expansion is diminished as “environmentalism” is transformed into “a politics that can be enlisted, contained and directed to the interests of capital accumulation” (MacDonald and Corson 2012: 180). Even environmental institutions that might have once challenged the subordination of “nature” to “the economy” are increasingly engaged in creating new commodities and the conditions for the emergence of markets for their exchange, as well as in supplying, through corporate partnerships, stamps of environmental stewardship for otherwise declining industries (Corson 2010; MacDonald 2010a, b). Indeed the rise of market-based environmentalism has been contingent upon, cultivated through, and coordinated by international environmental policy institutions, organizations, activists, academics, and transnational capitalist and managerial classes. It is the processes through which this enlistment and redirection occur that we call “grabbing green” and that constitute the cauldron in which an environmental expression of neoliberalism—“The Green Economy”—is brewed.

Making the Green Economy

The Green Economy—understood as the assemblage of market logics and market-based mechanisms systemically applied to environmental management and governance—is not a “thing” then, but rather something in the making. Economies are not “natural” formations but relational phenomena. They need to be brought into being through the invention of new regimes of measurement that make objects commensurate and subject to market exchange (Bakker 2010; Castree 2010, 2011). They require the centralization and accumulation of information, translation and circulation of knowledge, the production of interpretive frames, and the alignment and articulation of networks of enrolled actors through which new commodities can be distributed. They are, in short, socio-political-technical relations that are produced through the conscious intentional work of aligning and articulating models, mechanisms, metrics, actors, interests, and institutions in order to lend them coherence and to create their ability to act in and on the world (Dumont 1977; Buck-Morss 1995; Callon 1998; Miller 2003, 2005; Mitchell 2008; MacKenzie 2003, 2009; Robertson 2012).

Accordingly, the production of The Green Economy is a project of translating “sustainable development” into practices disciplined by market mechanisms and logics, and the creation of its associated green markets requires: new forms of calculating, measuring and monitoring nature; new social relations among investors, politicians, bureaucrats, technicians, and activists; new circuits for the transmission of capital into new commodities (e.g., wildlife derivatives) and enterprises (e.g., green venture capital firms); and new representational practices with which to enlist new actors in these processes (Scott 1998; Miller 2003, 2005).

Grabbing green, we argue, is both a manifestation of environmentalism’s transformation and a constitutive force in producing The Green Economy. Indeed The Green Economy relies on green grabs, broadly defined, to create new material and virtual commodities as well as speculative frontiers and the institu-

tional sanctions to legitimate that creation. It also requires the enlisting of environmental institutions to provide the moral legitimacy (green sanction) to transform the material environment into commodities subject to market-based exchange (green materiality). Studies of ‘grabbing green,’ then, complement studies of localized grabs by analyzing the inter-relations, systemics, logics, and mechanisms used to extend the possibilities for accumulation through green grabs.

The collection of papers gathered here was first presented in a series of paper panels that we co-organized at the 2012 *Annual Association of American Geographers* meeting in order to bridge conversations that had occurred the previous year at two landmark conferences, *Nature™ Inc.? Questioning the Market Panacea in Environmental Policy and Conservation* and *The International Conference on Land Grabbing*. Both explored separate but related phenomena surrounding the contemporary political economy of land and the dynamics of peasant access to, and control over, natural resources. *Nature™ Inc.*,¹ sought to critically engage with the market panacea in environmental policy and conservation (Arsel and Büscher 2012), while the *Global Land Grabbing Conference*² aimed to bring academic and public attention to urgent questions around large-scale commercial land acquisitions and land speculation, including green grabs (Borras and Franco 2012: 34; Fairhead et al. 2012). Although cross fertilization did occur, missing was a coherent and theoretically grounded approach to understanding the connection between green grabs and the transformation of environmentalism that has taken place in the last 40 years culminating in The Green Economy.

In their introduction to the volume on green grabs, which emerged from the conference on land grabbing, Fairhead et al. (2012: 240-241) set out to explore the relationship between “the world that establishes commodities and markets, and their effect

1 Held in June 2011 at the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands

2 Hosted by the Future Agricultures Consortium at the Institute of Development Studies UK, and organized by the Land Deals Politics Initiative (LDPI) in collaboration with the Journal of Peasant Studies.

on agrarian settings.” By analyzing the effects on changing agrarian relations of new and diverse appropriations of nature, they interject specifically to counter some of the critical literature on neoliberalizing nature, which, they contend, “adopts a rather uniform position, assuming a singular hegemonic project.” While the volume offers a superb collection of case studies that reveal the variegated manifestations of neoliberal natures around the world, missing is an analysis of the logics, systemics, and mechanisms through which new forms of appropriating nature conceived of and implemented through the making of The Green Economy are related to increasing alienations of peasants from land and resource rights.

The systemics, logics and mechanisms of grabbing green

We seek here to address questions such as how and why do actors engage instrumentally with institutions to embrace market logics and then to establish new metrological regimes, regulatory devices, and programmatic targets in their pursuit? What motivates actors to sanction particular forms of nature as a commodity? Through what narratives do they rationalize their choices? How do global environmental institutions structure and align public-private relationships so as to shape who benefits and how in specific locales from new modes of commodifying nature? To address these questions, we bring into dialogue grounded case studies that illustrate how The Green Economy is manifest differently in distinct locales (Shapiro, Chen, Sullivan, Osborne, Ramírez-Cover, this issue) with analyses that explore the motivations, perspectives, ideologies, institutions, and narratives through which The Green Economy is produced and its subjects enrolled (Igoe, Fletcher, MacDonald, Suarez and Corson, this issue).

In what follows we borrow from institutional theory to complement political economic analyses of the commodification of nature and transformation of associated relations of governance. We refer to **logics** as the cognitive and, therefore, interpretive schemes that provide a system of assumptions shared by groups of individuals to make sense of, and act on, any par-

ticular context (e.g., environmental degradation). These schemes depend on the establishment of principles and precedents—or models—that individuals and groups can use to infer and attribute motivations behind actions, and to engage in “sense-making.” Logics, however, are not simply strategies or rationales for action. They simultaneously provide legitimacy, a sense of order and ontological security that provides the platform for action (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). We see logics, not as predetermined, but rather as dynamic and continually contested, manifested in variegated ways in different historical and cultural geographies. Yet through political and economic contingencies, they come to focus the attention of actors on particular ways of defining problems and, accordingly, solutions. In doing so, they ascribe value to different actors, actions and governance structures (Friedland and Alford 1991). The dynamics of logics and this valorization by differentiated actors, behaviors and structures provides an analytic base for investigating contestations within and between institutions and organizations.

It is the temporary resolution of tensions between shifts and their harmonization within an institutional field like environmental governance that we refer to as **systemic dimensions**. The dynamics of logics achieves a form of homogeneity—albeit one that is always contested—within institutional fields like environmental governance as the configuration of power relations draws subordinate actors into alignment and articulation with the interests of dominant actors. In the case of the extension of market logics into environmental institutions and organizations, for example, a shift can be traced to the expansion of neoliberalization and a transformation in the core interests of the state, statist institutions, and the forums—like the international system of negotiations—that saw them embrace market logics and realign with market actors. The homogenization of logics within the institutional field creates the conditions in which social or ecological dynamics in any locale are conditioned by (even as they influence) decisions made at a distance. These scalar relationships are mediated by power. As more powerful organizations in that field (typically those with greater material resources and political authority)

embrace particular logics, subordinate actors also shift as a function of intersubjectivity and the need for organizational legitimation and material support. The resulting alignment and articulation create the relations through which those objectives are put into practice.

The implementation of those objectives, however, is reliant upon and carried out through **mechanisms, instruments, and techniques**, that—even as they can be used in divergent ways by actors in diverse organizations and locales—are developed in accordance with the interpretive schemes of dominant logics, and the accordant definitions of problems and delineation of solutions. These instruments include the reconfiguration of existing, or the development of new, metrics, the generation of information commensurate with those interpretive frames, and the design of regulatory practices and programmatic targets consistent with those objectives.

The systemic implementation of mechanisms is also dependent on the concentration of authority and material support within institutions. Given the tendency for dominant logics to shift within institutional and organizational settings, an explanation for the rise in green grabs needs to address how **market** logics have come to define the rule of order within the realm of environmental governance to the extent that “market failure” can be broadly agreed upon as the cause of environmental degradation, and market-based mechanisms prescribed and widely adopted as the solution. A starting point in configuring a response requires an assessment of just how environmentalism became a politics that could be enlisted, contained, and directed toward the interests of capital accumulation.

Enlisting Environmentalism

While the birth of global environmentalism lies in a post-1968 critical stance on the expansion of capitalism and the consumption of resources (MacDonald 2010a, b), the past few decades have witnessed a transformation in environmentalism that is intimately intertwined with the rise of neoliberalism (Harvey 2006;

Smith 2007). The 1970s environmental movement, to which we can trace the emergence of public environmental organizations and policies, hinged on a belief in the role of the state in regulating private activities and protecting human welfare. Environmental protection was “one of the major achievements of the Keynesian state” (McCarthy and Prudham 2004: 278). 1970s environmentalism also embraced the idea of natural resource limits to economic growth, and in 1972, the same year that the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm met to discuss industrial pollution in the developed world and launched the era of global environmental policy, the Club of Rome published its *Limits to Growth* study, which predicted that economic growth could not continue indefinitely due to the limited supply of natural resources.

By the Thatcher/Reagan era of the 1980s, neoliberalism—with its ideological and material antipathy toward state regulation and worship of the market—had been manifested, not only in deregulation, but also in re-regulation to create new commodities and new governing structures that sustained neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002). This transformation first began with the 1980 World Conservation Strategy embrace of economic development as a way to achieve conservation, rather than an impediment to it. The idea that economic growth and environmental conservation were compatible spread rapidly among environmental organizations and by the time the Brundtland report released the oft-quoted definition in 1987 of sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN1987:43), it was entrenched in conservation thinking (Redclift 1992; Adams 2008). In the 1990s, as neoliberal ideology penetrated global environmental policy, aided by the rise of global environmental institutions, numerous advocates embraced the “win-win” idea that market-based conservation could simultaneously conserve biodiversity and promote economic growth (Büscher 2009; Brockington et al. 2008). Ecotourism, public—private partnerships, payment for ecosystem services, corporate social and environmental responsibility, and green consum-

erism represent some of the forms that emerged as a result (Heynen et al. 2007; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Castree 2008). The rise of the internet in the 21st century has led to the production and circulation of virtual environmental commodities, in which buyers purchase of carbon offsets, endangered species, and rainforest plots, rather than experiencing nature itself, and ecotourist sites and theme parks offer virtual opportunities to experience idealized natures (West and Carrier 2004; Carrier and West 2009; Igoe et al. 2010; Igoe 2010). Finally, in the wake of both the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, with its emphasis on market-based mechanism for climate mitigation, and the global financial crisis, we see increasing speculation on nature commodities through carbon trading and wildlife derivatives, for example (Sullivan 2012).

The proliferation of green commodities has been mutually constitutive with a transformation in which environmental governance is increasingly cultivated beyond the state through transnational networks of public, private and not-for profit organizations. The privatization of state services and the state's withdrawal from social protection measures under neoliberal reforms left a vacuum in which private and non-profit organizations took over many former state functions (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Jepson 2005; Igoe and Brockington 2007). This articulated with the 1990s rise of modified version of neoliberalism that emphasized civil society assistance in state policy formulation and implementation (Mohan and Stokke 2000; Hart 2001) to set the stage for the rise of transnational environmental non-governmental organizations in environmental policy and associated growth of NGO-sanctioned green corporatism (Corson 2010). Increasingly, historically important environmental actors, such as states, indigenous and local communities, and environmental NGOs, have begun aligning their interests with new players from multinational corporations, the financial sector and the entertainment industry in an effort to attract broader attention to the environment. These processes have culminated in the contemporary containment of environmental actors and institutions that could have posed threats to expanded accumulation (Corson and MacDonald 2012).

For this reason attending to international environmental governance institutions and negotiations, which have become critical sites and processes for enabling, structuring, financing, and disseminating new green market opportunities and practices, becomes crucial. These arenas provide a stage for the framing of resources—such as carbon—as part of a global commons, thereby justifying global claims to resources, as well as the authority to manage them. Such narratives mask responsibility for degradation (such as for carbon emissions), delegitimize claims to resources for subsistence use, and distance “contests over the authority to mediate competing claims to resources from those who live with the immediate consequences” (Corson and MacDonald 2012: 279). International institutions also maintain a sanctioning authority that directs material resources national and local organizations depend upon, and provides organizational legitimacy for associated organizations, all of which encourage the alignment and articulation of related actors with sanctioned political projects (Harper 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Lewis 2003; Coronil 2000; MacDonald and Corson 2012; McCarthy 2004). Finally, in these institutions, actors articulate and circulate the conceptual bases for commodification and develop the mechanisms of market exchange, so as to create the enabling conditions for transforming market rhetoric into actual market transactions (Corson and MacDonald 2012; see also Robertson 2007; Sullivan 2012). This is but one example of why accounting for the scalar-dimensions of human-environment relations that emerge from the penetration of transnational organizations and capital into the everyday social and ecological relations of communities is paramount (MacDonald, in press). A number of the authors in this issue have come to focus on transnational and global institutional analysis out of a “...grounded engagement with places, people, and ecologies” and “provide a powerful way to check the idealist tendencies of neoliberal discourses and ideologies” (Heynen et al. 2007: 12). The articles in this issue explore grabbing green techniques and practice that result in the “submission” of nature by capitalism (Büscher 2009: 91) from large environmental policy institutions and to small-scale social movements.

Contributions and Themes of Grabbing Green

The collection builds on previous work on green grabbing (e.g., Fairhead et al. 2012) and the respective debates of *Nature™ Inc.* (e.g., Arsel and Büscher 2012), neoliberal conservation (e.g., Igoe and Brockington 2007), and market-oriented conservation governance (e.g., Roth and Dressler 2012) by underscoring the importance of understanding the systemic dimensions and “logics” mobilizing how state, private, and non-state actors use “the environment” to expand potential for capital accumulation across diverse sites. Using a range of theoretical perspectives and drawing on empirical material from diverse locales and across scales, they reveal both the variegated manifestations of neoliberal conservation and the systemic dimensions and logics mobilizing green grabs and the creation of new market mechanisms.

The first three articles explore the logics of market-based environmentalism by drawing on Slavoj Žižek. **MacDonald’s** piece traces the bringing into being of The Green Economy, subsumed within the terrain of a transnational managerial and capitalist class, and the exercise of cynical reason. **Igoe** draws on Žižek’s critiques of cultural capitalism that consumers buy redemption through consumption to explore how people see and believe connections between consumption and nature conservation in various contexts. **Fletcher** then also picks up Žižek to analyze the role of fantasy and desire in sustaining faith in the potential of market-based environmentalism despite the contradictions of “ethical consumption” as the solution to environmental problems that are exacerbated by the process of capitalist accumulation. Using the practice of ecotourism, a quintessential market-based conservation strategy, which is sustained through its promise to provide a transcendent experience of nature-culture unity, Fletcher pursues a comprehensive theoretical framework that understands the body as a crucial nexus of convergence among Marxian, Foucauldian, and Lacanian perspectives. He finds that ecotourism offers a mere “pseudocatharsis” that paradoxically intensifies the very desire that it promises to satisfy

and thereby supports the twin neoliberal fantasies of consumption without consequence and accumulation without end in which body itself becomes a prime site of capitalization.

Igoe’s questions are also informed by Debord’s concept of spectacle: the mediation of relationships by images (1995 [1967]), which operates through visual interfaces that are ubiquitous in post-industrial societies. Computers, iphones, televisions and digital billboards continuously offer visually compelling stories about shopping our way to a healthier planet. These, he argues, are part of globally interconnected milieus of cultural capitalism, in which the push of a virtual button or the swipe of a plastic card appears to initiate chains of technocratic causation that unproblematically result in outcomes like the protection of rainforests in Guatemala or elephants in Botswana. What these presentations systematically conceal, however, are the material dispossessions and ecological paradoxes that accompany their production, and on which their putative efficacy depends.

Although the theoretical foundation of these three papers are drawn from similar foundations, their sites of analysis are quite different. MacDonald, for example, observes how this translation reflects on what Sloterdijk has termed “cynical reason” (1988: 5)—an enlightened false consciousness enlightened because actors know the “falsehood” and the particular interest behind an ideological universality and yet continue to attach themselves to it (Žižek 1989). The Green Economy, and its coincident instrumental ethics, MacDonald argues, is an iteration of cynical reason and an expression of institutionalized power. He argues that, “centers of accumulation” (e.g., the Convention on Biological Diversity and its funding mechanism the Global Environment Facility) (Latour 1999) facilitate the containment of environmentalism as an oppositional politics. MacDonald addresses shifts taking place through a redefinition and redeployment of environmentalism from a space of hope (Harvey 2000) to an instrumentalist mechanism in rationalist projects of accumulation.

The next set of papers delves into case studies of how these logics are manifested in market-based approaches and new nature commodities. Building on the themes of techniques and green market measurements, **Sullivan** offers a lucid demonstration of how biodiversity offsets are becoming part of a new suite of conservation instruments designed to mitigate the impacts of economic developments on species, habitats and ecosystems. Employing the term "green rush," she refers to both this interest in conservation activities that can be marketed, and to an associated appetite in business and financial sectors for incorporating biodiversity offsets as part of a strategy for "greening" the environmental harm caused by developments. Through a case-study connecting the extraction of uranium in Namibia for the generation of nuclear power in the UK, in which biodiversity offsets are invoked for the off-site mitigation of environmental harm at both ends of this commodity chain, she argues that principles and standards for biodiversity offsets, as encompassed in the Business and Biodiversity Offsets Programme enable the apparently unavoidable harm caused by development to be offset against investment in conservation activities at both different geographical locations and in the future.

Biodiversity offsets, as demonstrated by Sullivan, marks a distinctive point of departure in how nature is being re-conceptualized within new commoditized forms. However different in scope and scale, the networks of power embedded within this new chain of market relations follow similar patterns of access control, territorialization and re-regulation in other studies of neoliberal conservation. For example, **Ramírez-Cover**, **Osborne**, and **Chen's** articles show the manifestation of environmental power dynamics, in the valuation, measurement, and capture and control of new commodified forms of nature. For Ramírez-Cover, this includes services produced by prime beaches and wetlands for ecotourism in Costa Rica. He describes a process by in which, in a neoliberal context, processes of state and non-state territorialization tend to involve institutions and organizations that seek to secure the means for capital accumulation, as well as environmental conservation. In the end, what we are left with are detailed studies

of "the dark side of green grabs" where political-legal institutions working at different scales and functions of governance compete in gaining legitimacy and authority before their respective constituencies.

We can observe similar access dynamics in Osborne, where carbon forestry working through the community is reshaping and facilitating a type of *de facto* privatization of formerly communal property relations of the social sector in Chiapas, Mexico. Osborne details how Payment for Ecosystem Service (PES) programs designed to secure communal land tenure result in shifts in land access and control away from participating communities as environmental (trans)national governance institutions and organizations armed with technologies and scientific rationalities articulate with land tenure reforms to encourage privatization of land through market-based conservation. These papers represented by Ramírez-Cover and Osborne dive a sharp wedge into the apolitical framing of the conservation community-based approaches to sustainable development by highlighting the dis-articulations of social relations that are manifested through green initiatives.

Strikingly missing from much of the critical literature on The Green Economy are studies of new and emerging regions, including China, Chen remedies the gap with an important contribution on urbanization and industrialization through China's countryside. As with Sullivan's work, it is this process of state (or non-state) spatial environmentalization which constitutes a mode of production into global market-based solutions to climate change, development, and modernization. As a basis for theorizing the relationships between Chinese models of green development, forms of environmental governance and new circuits of accumulation, the article utilizes a case study of Yixing city, where eco-city, renewable energy and ecological conservation projects are enclosing rural land and displacing residents. Through an examination of technical and discursive practices of "dividing practices" (Foucault 1972) by government officials to construct rural land as a fungible national resource for renewable energy and building on Marx's primitive accumulation and state-territorial projects (Thompson

1975; Harvey 2003; Hsing 2010; Peluso and Lund 2011), Chen demonstrates how rural land enclosure functions as a “circuit of accumulation” corresponding to constructed scales of environmentalization and rural transformation.

How are people reacting to, resisting and reshaping market-based environmentalism? Addressing this question, **Shapiro** explores initiatives to pay upstream landowners for management practices that increase the production of hydrological services. As with Osborne, Shapiro follows how institutions develop and reframe logics, set programmatic targets, and provide legitimacy for those involved in promoting PES at the international level. She identifies narrative strands employed in promoting or contesting these programs and examines the actors, origins and motives associated with each to show how contrasting narratives display a legitimizing framework through which environmental governance institutions now act to articulate goals of market-based conservation in ecosystem services.

Suarez and Corson maintain the focus on narrative by exploring its role in transforming the conservation governance landscape. Drawing on data from a Collaborative Event Ethnography of the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP-10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), they situate international conferences as critical moments in the production of hegemonic environmental discourses. In their analysis, they parse a narrative that presents The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity’ project (TEEB) as the solution to the conservation community’s self-perceived ‘failures.’ Using ethnographic examples of key events, they show how the conference offered a stage to perform and circulate this narrative to an audience primed to adopt ecosystems services as ‘the way forward’. They read this as an abandonment of an oppositional environmental politics and a consequent consent to the political project of capitalism underpinned by the pursuit of a pragmatic accommodation in which power is yielded to rather than resisted. It is through this conscious and strategic choice that environmental institutions are enlisted in the orthodox perspective that ‘there is no alternative’ to market-based environmentalism.

Conclusion: Moving towards an Analysis of Grabbing Green

The contributions to this special issue offer a spectrum of theoretical views and rich empirics articulating the vicissitudes of environmental and conservation policy and governance that defines access to, and control over, nature’s new commodities and for whose benefit. They identify the systemics (neoliberal discourse and institutional performance), logics (legitimizing practices that justify action), and instruments (techniques, calculations, metrics) that facilitate the abstraction and alienation required by markets created to exchange the virtual and material commodities produced from a re-envisioning of nature. In this way, grabbing green complements studies of localized dispossession (i.e., green grabs) by providing a lens through which to view the inter-relations, systemics, logics, and mechanisms used to extend the possibilities for accumulation through green grabs. It foregrounds the institutional conditions required for their production. Indeed, the “fixing” of natural capital brought into being through various forms of green grabbing is contingent upon, and to varying degrees coordinated by, actors drawn together around emergent institutions of governance engaged in processes of enclosure by circulating legitimizing narratives and institutionalizing specific mechanisms for enclosing land and resources across the globe.

We argue that political ecologists are well-placed to pursue studies that integrate assessments of localized dispossessions with an analysis of the systemic dimensions of environmental governance behind these forms of alienation. Indeed, if political ecology is to expose how diverse interests in “nature” configure relations and sites of power – such as international institutions of environmental governance – it is these relations and sites of power that need to be identified, accessed and subjected to study (cf., Hannerz 2003). It is within these spheres of authority and bounded relations that agendas are set, classifications generated, mechanisms designed and knowledge circulated. The role of these institutions in creating the conditions for both grabbing green and green grabs is central to understanding and redressing the dispossessions occurring

across the globe. Of course, these studies should not just complement, but should connect to continued analysis, grounded in field work, on the manifestations and reshaping of market logics, techniques and systems in specific locales.

As research begins to grapple with modifications to research design and ideas of "the field" required to address the institutional dimensions of alienation and dispossession, significant research questions surround the reconfiguration of scale brought into being by the emergence of transnational institutions of governance and their capacity as a vehicle for the expansion of capitalism. Others concern the ways in which the policies, practices and mechanisms produced by market logics encounter complex cultural and historical geographies in diverse locales around the world and how diverse forms of accommodation and resistance shape the constitution of a Green Economy in any given institutional context. Finally, another area of possible inquiry is emerging dissent **within** a dominant institutional logic (e.g., market logics) and the differentiated responses of institutional actors (e.g., states) to the forms of resistance encountered in distinct cultural-political domains. All of these tend to shatter the homogeneity typically ascribed to constructs like "The Green Economy," and open fruitful ground for an effective analysis of the complexities engaged in the valorization of natural capital.

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