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Dispossession and the Anthropology of Labor

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Abstract ■ This article develops an approach to the anthropology of labor that seeks to transcend the North/South and working class/poor oppositions that have long framed our understanding of social inequality. Drawing upon David Harvey's understanding of the ways in which capitalism always creates its own Other through dispossession, as well as historical case studies of struggles against dispossession, we emphasize the mutability of class relations in both the global North and South, and point to the complex interconnections of the social movements of waged and unwaged laborers across the globe. This focus on the connections between peoples who are differently marked by processes of dispossession, we argue, simultaneously enriches our understanding of social inequality and furthers the project of decolonizing anthropology.

Keywords ■ difference ■ dispossession ■ labor ■ neoliberal globalization ■ working classes

At the present moment, when the human cost of economic liberalization and political revanchism rises daily, it is especially urgent to address the continuing recreation of inequality and class polarization. Yet the neoliberal present is a time when the study of class and social inequality has fallen out of favor in anthropology (see Friedman, 2004; Smith, 2006). It is not the case that anthropologists have ignored or been indifferent to the brutality of neoliberal globalization. Nevertheless, it seems that the structural adjustment programs, political violence and 'creative destruction' of entire regions of production that today constitute the main avenues of dispossession have created a growing uncertainty about how best to categorize the disparate working people who bear the brunt of these practices. In part, this uncertainty reflects the degree to which the social polarizations accompanying widespread economic liberalization render obsolete the overarching oppositions of working class/poor and global North/global South that have long framed our narratives of class and social inequality.

The current neglect of class in anthropology is also explained by the fact that many contemporary scholars mistake the transformation and decline of the Fordist working class, a specific historical formation, as the end of

class itself. This seems to be a recurrent theme in social and historical scholarship, not least, as Michael Denning suggests, because cultural images and understandings of class last longer than actual class formations within capitalism. He argues that:

While a capitalist economy continually reshapes workplaces and working populations, destroying old industries and working forces while drawing new workers from around the globe and moving industry to new regions, we remain caught in the class maps we inherited from family, school, and movies. (2004: 229–230)

A central feature of the class maps we have inherited is the opposition between ‘the stable working class’ and ‘the poor’. This opposition, in turn, evokes a whole chain of signifiers – the affluent worker, aristocracy of labor, labor elite, on the one side; dangerous classes, the great unwashed, lumpen-proletariat, on the other. Moreover, this opposition between ‘the stable working class’ and ‘the poor’ is frequently mapped on to all-encompassing distinctions between skilled industrial workers in the global North and the racially marked and super-exploited laborers of the South. These nested typologies, whatever the particularities of their enunciation, greatly reduce our ability to apprehend the fluidity of class relations and experience.

There is a long line of historical and social-scientific scholarship, for example, that uncritically accepted Lenin’s labor aristocracy thesis as an historical given. Lenin’s thesis was revived by new left scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, who chronicled the ways in which consumerism bought off the US working class (and to a lesser extent its European counterparts), and gender and race privilege structured the worlds of Fordist workers. Studies of the Fordist working class emphasized its integration into the culture of consumption, yet ignored the looming and real processes of dispossession that were already undermining its alleged solidity. Consequently a historical moment of class stability (which turned out to be short-lived) was transfigured into an evolutionary type (see e.g. Aronowitz, 1991 [1973]; Ewen, 1976; Goldthorpe et al., 1969). At the same time, concerns about the underclass yielded numerous studies of the so-called ‘culture of poverty’, which focused on the purported cultural attributes or social pathologies of the poor (see Kelley, 1997). This research endured, despite the fact that many scholars roundly criticized the ‘culture-of-poverty’ thesis for overlooking the structural causes of poverty and misusing the culture concept (see Leacock, 1971). Thus, studies of ‘the affluent worker’ in the 1960s competed for attention with studies of ‘the poor’, with few connections drawn between the two. As Ida Susser (1996) incisively captures, poor people thus appear poor rather than unemployed or underemployed. Reciprocally, this representation of ‘the poor’ made ‘the working class’ seem all the more distinct and privileged for its apparent lack of relation with impoverished or marginalized groups.

We are not arguing that there are not now nor have ever been any hierarchies within and between different working classes. To be sure,

unevenness – especially gender, race and geographical hierarchy – is the lifeblood of capitalism and empire. We suggest, instead, that our inherited class maps leave disparate working classes within a state of suspended animation. The uncritical acceptance of static typologies, as Eric Wolf (1997 [1982]) reminded us, reduces working people from all areas of the world to ‘people without history’. Although the ‘trajectories of the “people without history” on the various continents of the globe dovetail and converge within the larger matrix created by European expansion and the capitalist mode of production’, anthropologists have steadfastly ignored these relations of connection and mutual constitution (Wolf, 1997 [1982]: 355). Consequently we have had, with notable exceptions, little to say about the relationships of power and force creating historically specific hierarchies and differences.

In thinking about these connections, we find David Harvey’s attention to the ways in which capitalism always creates its own ‘other’ and his focus on the ‘inside/outside’ dialectic of capitalism to be particularly valuable. As Harvey sets out in *The New Imperialism* (2003a), this other is continually recreated by dispossession. It is, he argues, the continuing dialectic between the expanded reproduction of capitalism and dispossession that, at one moment, places people ‘inside’ the sphere of capitalist accumulation and, at another moment, undercuts their forms of livelihood and social reproduction.

We believe that Harvey’s focus on dispossession as a recurrent process in the lives and cultures of working classes allows us to capture the mutability of class relations. Certainly, this insight helps us to recapture E.P. Thompson’s understanding of class as a fluid movement of real people in real contexts, trying to make sense of their common experiences and relationships. Harvey’s analysis of the connections between the accumulation strategies of expanded reproduction and dispossession can provide the opening we need to move beyond oppositional types, as well as the simultaneous nostalgia for *classes past* and dismissal of *classes present* that has long hindered the study of class and inequality. It provides a useful framework for placing the differently valued and spatially distinct laborers of global capitalism within a web of connection.

We show, however, that Harvey ultimately recreates the very dichotomies his theory might otherwise undo. Our aim is to reveal the anthropology of labor that is obscured by Harvey’s ahistorical presumptions, a task to which we turn in the next section of this article. In following sections, we consider cases that suggest the mutability of relationships among and between working classes, and we draw on material from Europe and the US (our own areas of specialization) to do so. We are neither representative nor exhaustive in our selection; rather, our intention is to elucidate the processes by which hierarchies and divisions are created. We also historicize the notion of ‘the privileged worker’ both in historical and contemporary contexts. Finally, we suggest that by focusing

on global processes of dispossession we can at once enrich our understanding of inequality and further the project of decolonizing anthropology. Though there have been many and varied efforts to tackle our discipline's roots in imperialist governance and modes of thought, we have yet to fully challenge the academic division of labor that allocated the study of the working class, trade unions and theories of class formation to sociology and other fields. By making the connections between peoples who are differently marked by the processes of accumulation, we can confront also anthropology's historic identity as the discipline that studies those 'outside' of capitalism or those most recently or brutally ravaged by capital's expanse, a new expression of our heritage as purveyors of 'the primitive' (see Trouillot, 2003).

Reconsidering struggles against dispossession

We begin by exploring the framework Harvey develops in *The New Imperialism* (2003a). Harvey focuses here on the relationship between dispossession and imperialism. Following in broad outline Marx's theory of capital accumulation, Harvey links capitalism's periodic crises of over-accumulation to the cyclic search for fresh sources of land, labor and resources. These 'fixes' to the problems of accumulation create new temporal-spatial matrices of production, investment and circulation. For our purposes, an extraordinarily important feature of Harvey's argument is its attention to the twofold dispossession accompanying these temporal-spatial fixes. This double movement involves stripping working people of the means of their social reproduction and commodifying resources and forms of labor that had hitherto been outside of capital's realm. Both entail the plunder, terror and enclosure associated with primitive accumulation. But Harvey argues that it is more appropriate to call this 'accumulation by dispossession' rather than 'primitive' or 'original' accumulation, as it is an ongoing process.

Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg's insight that capital requires 'others' or something 'outside of itself', Harvey demonstrates the various ways in which capital's others were made through dispossession during the neoliberal era, both in the global North and South. For example, liberalization in Latin America, South Africa and India involved the privatization of communal land, water and public works, thereby creating new avenues for private investment. Similarly, the Thatcher-Reagan revolution in Britain and the US opened up the public sector – i.e. housing, services, rail-lines and government training programs – to private investment and the vagaries of the market, and facilitated the abandonment of whole regimes of labor and regions of production. According to Harvey, this mode of accumulation represents a major departure from the expanded reproduction of the post-Second World War Keynesian epoch, when mass

consumption, a burgeoning welfare state and vast government expenditures for infrastructure absorbed excess capital.

Harvey's account of accumulation by dispossession during the neoliberal era offers a useful perspective for moving beyond the overarching typologies that frame the study of social inequality. As we will show, his attention to the persistence of dispossession and its organic relationship to capitalist accumulation allows us to more clearly see the connections between the struggles of industrialized working classes against plant closures, peasant resistance to land enclosures, and the urban poor's opposition to the privatization of government services. By identifying these disparate situations as associated efforts to confront dispossession, Harvey places them within a common relational field. This is more than a strictly academic exercise. It is a continuation of his work, begun in *Spaces of Hope* (Harvey, 2000), to define the commonalities among these various struggles, and thereby to explore and articulate the wider political possibilities inhering in these fights.

At the same time, Harvey's rather uncritical acceptance of a historical conceits undermines his efforts to identify these commonalities. As Harvey shows, dispossession takes various forms around the globe: in advanced industrial regions, workers lost pensions, welfare, national health care and jobs. Elsewhere, communal lands in indigenous and peasant communities were lost, environmental and genetic materials were patented, and water, communications and other public utilities were privatized. According to Harvey, these varied processes of dispossession can be traced to the shift in dominance to finance capital that accompanied the rise of neoliberalism. Although these multiple forms of dispossession may all have their origins in the overriding interests of finance capital, Harvey attaches distinct logics to the disparate struggles they engender. Workers in advanced industrial areas fought to defend the gains they had won in the previous, national/industrial/colonial phase of capital accumulation: union wages, job security, pensions and other entitlements of the welfare state. Harvey terms this bundle of rights, obligations and social conditions 'expanded reproduction' to convey that they enhanced the social reproduction of those working classes. While he sees capital flight as a key feature of neoliberalism, he does not consider the struggles of workers to maintain jobs, wages and benefits to be a key dimension of the process of dispossession. In fact, he views them as misguided and backward looking:

A wave of labor militancy swept the advanced capitalist world during the late 1970s and the 1980s . . . as working-class movements everywhere sought to preserve the gains they had won during the 1960s and early 1970s. In retrospect, we can see this as a rearguard action to preserve conditions and privileges gained within and around expanded reproduction and the welfare state, rather than a progressive movement seeking transformative changes. For the most part this rearguard action failed. (Harvey, 2003a: 63)

Harvey sees more potential in the struggles against accumulation by dispossession that have erupted in the global South. The list of struggles cited by Harvey is long:

The Ongoni people against the degradation of their lands by Shell Oil; the long-drawn-out struggles against World Bank-backed dam construction projects in India and Latin America; peasant movements against biopiracy; struggles against genetically modified foods and for the authenticity of local production systems. (2003a: 166)

For Harvey, 'resistance in this sphere, rather than through labor struggles typically spawned by expanded reproduction, became more central within the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movement' (2003a: 67). We do not wish to minimize the power of these struggles against dispossession. Certainly they have been crucial to the survival of local populations, and for producing a worldwide debate over economic rights, gender inequality and access to basic resources. Instead we seek to point out that attributing radically distinct logics to these different forms of struggle makes it harder to trace their emergent affinities and potential connections.

While lamenting the seeming political disconnect between struggle in the North and South, Harvey attributes blame to the opportunism of the labor movement in the global North. He suggests that unions effectively collaborated with imperialism by turning a blind eye to the mass displacements in the South.

The relation of internal struggles for social betterment to external displacements characteristic of imperialism tended to be ignored (with the result that much of the labor movement in advanced capitalist countries fell into the trap of acting as an *aristocracy of labor, out to preserve its own privileges, by imperialism if necessary*). (2003a: 171, emphasis added)

Harvey uncritically accepts the concept of the aristocracy of labor here, and he substantially restates Lenin's view of the impact of imperialism on the British working class. Lenin argued that imperialism divided the international working class into upper and lower strata. The upper stratum was made up of unionized, stably employed workers and members of cooperatives, while the lower was comprised of non-unionized and unemployed workers. According to this thesis, working classes in metropole regions generally supported imperialism because it intensified their opportunism, and the bourgeoisie bought them out (Lenin, 1984 [1917]: 99–108). Yet, as Kiernan showed (1974: 54–9), Lenin drew upon an economic and *ahistorical* concept of imperialism that elided the very transformations of class it was meant to address. Consequently, Lenin missed the rapidly declining social position and prestige of the 19th-century labor aristocracy in the era of monopoly capitalism. Likewise, Lenin credited capitalism with 'too universal and omnipotent a direction of events' (Kiernan, 1974: 38).

At the very least, it is difficult to reconcile Lenin's image of a prosperous, complacent British labor aristocracy with the degraded, impoverished

figures populating London's East End, whom Jack London – deploying a common early 20th-century trope of 'native/Empire contrast' – describes as worse off than the 'howling and naked savage(s)' (di Leonardo, 1995: x). We want to suggest that Harvey's similar use of ahistorical comparison undermines his analysis of the ways that capitalism 'necessarily and always creates its own "other"' (2003a: 141).

The fuller implications of this *othering* for working-class life and culture in the North become clearer if we turn to a passage in Harvey's *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, published in the same year as *The New Imperialism*. Between 1848 and 1871, he tells us, an interpretive grid, with categories like 'civilized', 'barbarian' and 'savage', was repatriated from the colonial empire and superimposed on the relationship of the Parisian bourgeoisie and the working class.

The bourgeoisie routinely depicted the workers living on the 'frontiers' of Belleville as savages. If the workers were 'savage,' a 'vile multitude,' mere criminal and 'dangerous classes,' as the bourgeoisie was wont to depict them, then 1848 had showed all too clearly the kind of danger they posed and the kind of savagery they had in mind. Victor Hugo, however, proudly proclaimed the workers, 'the savages of civilization.' But the general drift of this association, in 1848 as well as in 1871, was that the forces of 'civilization' and 'order' assumed a moral right to shoot revolutionaries down like the dogs and savages they were presumed to be. Representing 'the other' of working class Paris in such racialized terms explains how class war could be conducted with such extraordinary ferocity and violence. (Harvey, 2003b: 271–2)

Here, then, just decades before Lenin theorized fundamental distinctions between a European aristocracy of labor and the lumpenized workers of the colonies, the othering of European workers was taking place. The dramatic view Harvey offers of the economic, political and cultural consequences of this process never quite makes it into his analysis in *The New Imperialism*. This omission is unfortunate, as Harvey's approach to the racialization of the mid-19th-century Parisian working class could be usefully applied to the intensified indigenization (the imposition of localized or rooted identities) and imputed primitivism of the new, globalized lumpen-proletariat of the 21st century (see Friedman, 2004).

From capital logic to the politics of dispossession

Harvey's identification of capitalism's recurrent need to produce its own other points to a politics of dispossession, which remains somewhat under-theorized in *The New Imperialism*. At least part of the reason for this seems to stem from Harvey's capital-logic approach. We would certainly not be the first to point out that Harvey's starting point and emphasis is the economic logic of capital accumulation (see Herod, 1997; Mitchell, 2005), and Harvey's most recent book suggests that he has heard this critique. In

A Brief History of Neo-liberalism (2005), Harvey focuses on the ways that the move to neoliberalism in the 1970s–80s restored power to the capitalist class after two decades of working-class empowerment through labor and urban social movements; that is, he stresses the political dimension of accumulation by dispossession, and he indicates that neoliberalism entails the disempowerment of working classes in distinct parts of the globe. Nonetheless, the book is in the main a study of the ways that capitalists remake the world, as one regime of accumulation is superseded by another.

We do not intend to downplay the enormous power of capital. But for our purposes, it is worthwhile to turn the inquiry on its head and begin with the experiences and struggles of working people that capital had to contend with, a point made by E.P. Thompson (1978) in his fierce engagement with Althusser in *The Poverty of Theory*. Towards this end, we find Jerry Lembcke's (1991–92) analysis of capitalist crisis a useful point of departure. Crises of capitalism, Lembcke argues, are caused as much by the growth of working-class institutional, political and cultural power as by falling rates of profit. From this perspective, US capital's flight beginning in the 1960s, for instance, can be understood as a decision to flee a domestic working class that had won position and leverage. Beverly Silver (2003) similarly charts the dialectic of working-class empowerment and cycles of capital investment and disinvestment on a global scale. Dispossession, in these readings, is thus a combined political and economic phenomenon, as capitalists and elites attempt to appropriate, co-opt, confront and/or supersede the manifold achievements of working classes. As Harvey himself points out, we can see the politics of dispossession in, say, the 1973 coup in Chile, or the New York City fiscal crisis of the 1970s, when, in a very short time, working-class New Yorkers and their institutions were sidelined from their role in shaping the city's social, economic and political future (2005: 15–16, 46; see Freeman, 2000).

Lembcke uses the term 'disorganization' to capture the way in which the successes of working classes are episodically undermined. This approach to social change resonates with the one that members of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute initiated in the Rhodesian Copperbelt during the 1930s and 1940s. Godfrey Wilson, especially, approached 'detrribalization' as a process of economic dispossession, cultural displacement and disorganization (Wilson, 1941, 1942; see Richards, 1939). A similar emphasis on the connection between dispossession and political disorganization emanated from scholars working in Mesoamerica in the 1920s and 1930s (see Nugent, 2002). We believe that the idea of disorganization enriches our understanding of dispossession, for it speaks to the ways in which the alienation of political position, culture and consciousness are entwined with economic setback.

Though common academic wisdom argues that the Keynesian/Fordist form of expanded reproduction represented the consolidation of privilege for a segment of the North American and European working classes, in

important ways it also dispossessed these workers of international alliances and class power. Antonio Gramsci made this observation with regard to the introduction of Fordism. The system was able to rationalize production and labor through:

... a skillful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. (1971: 285)

While anthropologists commonly turn to Gramsci for his elegant discussion of persuasion, culture and ideology, it is important to be mindful of the dialectic of force and consent – or dispossession and privilege – he sets out. Fordism destroyed trade unions, as well as other institutions that working classes built as they navigated capitalist social relations. The creation of the new, Fordist working class in the US – the labor elite of its day – depended upon the defeat of a prior geography and social relations of power (Carbonella, 2005).

Similarly, working-class social institutions – unions, communities, families – which had been vehicles for insurgence in the 1960s and early 1970s were undermined by capital flight (see e.g. Susser, 1982). The rise of a neo-conservative political agenda, and the move toward individualism and enterprise values in the 1980s, deepened the attack. Thus the cultural, social and political achievements, along with the economic gains won during the Fordist era, were chipped away. An effort to protect these victories is also and simultaneously a struggle against dispossession.

Dispossession and the production of difference

These processes of cultural displacement and political disorganization are rarely the sole features of political dispossession; instead, they are frequently compounded by structural violence connected to the re-categorization and reclassification of working classes. We turn now to a focused reading of selected instances of dispossession to illustrate the state of play between dispossession and the remaking of difference.

The concept of dispossession has a long history in political-economic theory and in the historical anthropology of working classes. Marx's justly famous sketch of primitive accumulation in *Capital* remains the paradigmatic formulation of dispossession and class formation within modern social theory. The story Marx tells has to do with the centrality of force, dispossession and enclosure in creating both the pre-conditions for capital accumulation and the reduction of human beings to commoditized laborers. This process of 'conquest, enslavement, robbery, [and] murder', in Marx's remarkably succinct summary, 'is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire' (1977: 874, 875). Marx assumed that

the plunder and terror that marked the earliest phases of capitalist development would subside with the steady advancement of capitalist relations. Once this had occurred, the continuing exploitation of labor would be secured both through the silent compulsion of economic relations and the inculcation of tradition and habit.

As Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944]) pointed out long ago, primitive accumulation (Marx's 'original sin' of capitalism) could not be so easily relegated to the past. Polanyi's discussion in *The Great Transformation* of the contradiction between 'habitation' and 'improvement' during the Industrial Revolution points instead to the tendency of capital to episodically strip working people of the means of their own social reproduction (habitation) in pursuit of new sources, means and landscapes of accumulation (improvement). Waves of dispossession, however, do not wash evenly over whole communities, rather they are important moments in the production of difference and hierarchy (see Perelman, 2000).

An illuminating example of dispossession as the production of difference is found in Peter Linebaugh's (2003) pioneering study of the regularization of London dockworkers' wage payments at the turn of the 19th century. As Linebaugh demonstrates, dockworkers at that time were only nominally compensated for their labor with wages. Instead of regular monetary wages, dockworkers received their chief remuneration in 'chips', the scraps and waste left over from ship building. More specifically, though, chips referred to the prescriptive right of workers since the early 17th century to appropriate a certain amount of the wood as payment. Chips, along with the 'takings' from other workplaces and trades along the Thames River – coal, silk, sugar, coffee, tea, pins, cloth and tools – constituted the central medium of exchange among a network of marine-store dealers, grocers, street-sellers, peddlers, sex-workers, alehouse keepers and pawnbrokers. Efforts in the 1790s to regularize the money wage followed a dual strategy of criminalizing the dockworkers' customary takings and eliminating what Linebaugh calls the non-monetary community. Individuals found guilty of illegal appropriation were subject to public whipping, imprisonment, deportation and even hanging. At the same time, the non-monetary community was physically destroyed through the construction of hydraulic dams to make way for a new, massive system of docks and canals. Linebaugh captures this destruction and dispossession in a heartbreakingly apt analogy: 'To paraphrase Sir More's famous dictum about sheep and enclosure, where once East End people had lived by the water, after the construction of the docks the water lived upon them' (2003: 434).

As the existing material and cultural forms of everyday life and labor were destroyed, new forms of social reproduction centering on the money wage were installed and forcefully regulated. Indeed, the newly formed River Thames Police were charged primarily with determining who would receive wages and who would not. The literal policing of the division between waged laborers and the wageless poor effectively separated the

struggles of workers within the labor process from those outside it. Significant forms of social hierarchy developed among the river working class as a result of this reclassification of waged and unwaged work, thereby intensifying gender, ethnic and racial hierarchies.

These dispossessions were not simply a response to a bottleneck in capital accumulation. Coming as they did at a moment of anti-Jacobin hysteria in Europe, the state's obsessions with categories were an integral part of a larger assault on the transatlantic political culture of what elites of the time called the 'many-headed hydra'. As Linebaugh, together with Marcus Rediker, more recently explained it:

From the beginning of English colonial expansion in the early seventeenth century through the metropolitan industrialization of the early nineteenth, rulers referred to the Hercules-hydra myth to describe the difficulty of imposing order on increasingly global systems of labor. They variously designated dispossessed commoners, transported felons, indentured servants, religious radicals, pirates, urban laborers, soldiers, sailors, and African slaves as the numerous, ever-changing heads of the monster. But the heads, though originally brought into productive combination by their Herculean rulers, soon developed among themselves new forms of cooperation against those rulers, from mutinies and strikes, to riots and insurrections and revolution. Like the commodities they produced, their experience circulated with the planetary currents around the Atlantic, often eastward, from American plantations, Irish commons, and deep-sea vessels back to the metropolises of Europe. (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000: 4)

Policing and categorization were thus integral to a sustained effort to individualize and localize identities and affiliations that were becoming collective and global. Studies by Sylvia Federici (2004), Sidney Mintz (1985) and Raymond Williams (1974) similarly point to the damage inflicted upon these transatlantic networks and collectivities by dispossession and the state's categorical fixes. In her exposition of the patriarchy of the wage, Federici argues that the money wage concealed women's unpaid work under the cover of natural inferiority, enabling capitalists to massively expand the unpaid part of the working day by using the male wage to accumulate women's labor (2004: 115). Similarly, Mintz drew our attention to the increasingly obscured but important contributions of slave and colonial labor to the reproduction of the 19th-century working class in Britain, and elsewhere. Paying particular attention to the etymology of social classification, Williams suggests that the transformation of class relations in the late 19th century corresponded to the emergence of a 'separate class of the "poor"', who were then 'separated out for cold and harsh treatment' (1974: 104). This history of the wage well illustrates the spiraling social differences and cultural redefinitions of labor that are produced during waves of dispossession.

These studies expose the intertwined processes of dispossession, cultural displacement and political disorganization involved in the making

of modern class relations at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The processes to which Linebaugh refers were not localized to the informal networks along the Thames; rather they reflect a more fundamental transformation of inter- and intra-class relations as the wage became a badge of honor for primarily white, male and industrial workers.

We want to suggest, as well, that dispossession and its associated forms of structural violence remain lingering, ghostlike presences in the lives and cultures of laborers long after the event itself. A focus on the social memory of dispossession is thus essential in order to adequately understand how working-class people and organizations comprehend and react to the fluidity of class experiences and social position. W.E.B. Du Bois' brilliant 1919 survey of race riots in post-First World War East St Louis comes readily to mind as illustration. Du Bois' essay centered on an intriguing set of questions: 'Why does hunger shadow so vast a mass of men?' 'How may we justly distribute the world's goods to satisfy the necessary wants of the mass of men?' For Du Bois, the 'mass of men' was the international working class of all colors, and the colonized and oppressed peasantry, 'predominantly yellow, brown, and black' (1999 [1920]: 56–7). He posed a global question about the obstacles to building a new world of freedom and equity among the masses and addressed the problem by examining the local implications of dispossession in the political cauldron of East St Louis. He was particularly interested in how the 'shadow of starvation' informed the political responses during the race riots of a highly segmented working class – recent eastern and southern European immigrants, southern Black migrants and more established white, skilled workers. And he asked why southern Black migrants and southern and eastern European immigrants, each with the recent memory of dispossession fresh in their minds, reacted so differently to a new round of dispossession and the simultaneous attempts of white, skilled workers to reassert their control in the aftermath of the war. His answer considered the responses those different segments of the 'disinherited' saw as their best avenue for staving off further hunger. The not-quite-white ethnic groups, he ventured, placed their hopes in alignment with and mimicking of the more established northern European skilled workers, an attempt to access what Du Bois would later call the 'wages of whiteness' (see Roediger, 1999). The deeply etched racial fault lines in the US precluded this as an option for the Black migrants. As Du Bois saw it, Black workers' best hopes lay in linking their struggle to that of all colonized people. Here we see dispossession, difference and privilege simultaneously in the making, both within the conditions of daily life and in struggle.

'The defense of privileges' revisited

Our historical discussion shows the value of Harvey's concept of ongoing dispossession for understanding the web of connections among disparate

groups of working classes. Yet, even as Harvey provides this opening, he undercuts its potential with his emphasis on an overarching opposition between struggles to defend the gains of expanded reproduction and those against dispossession. As we said earlier, these distinctions build on Harvey's rather uncritical reliance on ahistorical presumptions, seen especially in his understanding of 'the privileged worker' as a static type. Harvey's emphasis on types, at least for one part of the globe, prevents us from fully appreciating the enormous contribution he has made to a historicized and spatialized anthropology of labor. Here we address the misrepresentations of contemporary struggles over space and place that follow from the deployment of these typologies.

In *Spaces of Capital* (2001), David Harvey tells a compelling story about his involvement in the late 1980s with a campaign against the closure of the Rover automobile factory at Cowley. Harvey co-edited a book on the campaign and, while his co-editor aligned herself with the militant shop stewards who led the fight, Harvey stood back a bit from this allegiance. He was concerned that the effort to save jobs at Cowley was backward looking since it sought to protect the privileges of Rover workers and preserve the social relations of capital rather than imagine a more inclusive, universal struggle for human betterment. Harvey even questioned whether he should support the auto jobs campaign at all, since there was overcapacity in the industry, the plant was a notorious polluter and Rover manufactured luxury cars for the rich. Harvey's lengthy list of concerns indicates how thoughtfully he weighed his participation in the campaign (2001: 158–88).

Most significantly, Harvey is torn between the 'militant particularism' (a term he takes from Raymond Williams) born in and around the plant and his hope for a more general social movement. The question of universality vis-a-vis particularity is one of Harvey's long-standing concerns. Here it is expressed via his interrogation of the relationship between socialist theory and local struggle. Socialist theory, Harvey tells us, holds that the local struggles of workers in particular factories and places combine in the interest of the universal. However, the translation from the particular to the general requires abstraction:

And here is the rub. The move from tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life organized in affective and knowable communities to a more abstract set of conceptions that would have universal purchase involves a move from one level of abstraction – attached to place – to another level of abstractions capable of reaching out across space. (2001: 173)

In the process, the identities and loyalties of place or 'our people' are sacrificed for the cosmopolitan concepts of 'the proletariat' or 'the working class'. Throughout the essay, Harvey contends with questions of space, place and scale, and he uses Williams' fiction to think through these issues. Harvey's pause with regard to full support for the Cowley workers is out of regard for a higher level of abstraction and broader geography of struggle.

Harvey is right to point out the problems that particularism presents for building a social movement, yet struggles are always dynamic, and strategic alliances can rupture local identities, as local loyalties can give way to wider vision.

Harvey came to fully appreciate these points after completing the Cowley book. He had wanted the conclusions to reflect the dual nature of the campaign as both a necessary battle against the company and one that might at the same time foreclose a broader struggle, but his co-editor prevailed and wrote a more partisan chapter in favor of the shop militants. After reading Williams' novel *Second Generation*, in which the characters experience the contradictions of local loyalties and socialist aspiration, Harvey believed he should have held out instead for a Brechtian conclusion that exposed the contradictions of the campaign but also acknowledged the possibility that other kinds of struggles might emerge from this one.

The 'Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open' is instructive in this regard. Eric Mann (1987), a worker in the General Motors (GM) plant and leader of the campaign, wrote a detailed account of the struggle that began in 1982, after a wave of plant closings claimed several California auto factories and thousands of jobs. This was, in turn, just a part of the mass displacement of autoworkers throughout the US in the 1980s. Leaders of United Automobile Workers (UAW) Local 645 feared that their plant was slated for closure and they began to plot a strategy. Mann described how the union president and political action committee tackled the very question Harvey asked himself about Cowley: 'why,' they wondered, 'except for the most narrow self-interest of its 5,000 workers, the plant *should* be kept open' (1987: 108). Their answers were on the one hand local and economic: Van Nuys was profitable and GM still had a sizable share of the car market in Los Angeles, making the plant's location advantageous. But their answers were also international and political: they envisioned theirs as a fight for worker and community control over economic planning and investment. They also saw themselves as mavericks within the UAW. The UAW leadership had responded to plant closures with resignation, and by offering concessions and facilitating the movement of workers from plant to plant. Local 645 activists hoped to set a different course that could be followed by other UAW locals and that would pressure the international to take a more political stance. They built a campaign that modeled militant particularism – it moved from the local to the general, developed alliances across ethnic and racial lines and geographic space, and had political aspirations beyond saving jobs.

GM Van Nuys opened just north of LA in the San Fernando Valley in 1947. Its original workforce was predominantly white, but in the 1950s labor shortages during the Korean War brought immigrants from Coahuila, Mexico. By 1978, Chicanos were the largest ethnic group in the plant, and Local 645 members elected their first Mexican-American president, who later became the leader of the campaign. Few African-Americans worked

in the factory until 1980, when GM Southgate closed. Southgate had a largely Black workforce, and hundreds of its workers transferred to Van Nuys. When the campaign began, 50 percent of Van Nuys workers were Chicano and 15 percent were African-American. The workers' neighborhood, church and political ties were not exclusively local. For the most part, Chicano workers lived in the communities surrounding the plant. Having already experienced displacement, however, the former Southgate workers were reluctant to move, and in the main they commuted the 40 miles to work. They therefore retained their ties in South Central Los Angeles, and the campaign had links in several communities, a fact that proved significant for building the movement (Mann, 1987: 98–100, 105–8).

According to Mann, one of the campaign's strengths was its emphasis on the disproportionate impact that the plant closing would have on minority communities. Organizers portrayed Local 645 as a vital institution for the Chicano and Black communities. By publicizing the threat the plant closing represented to the small businesses, tax revenues and political bases of these communities, the campaign expanded its base of support outside of the workplace (Mann, 1984: 163). Activists enlisted Reverend Jesse Jackson of the Rainbow Coalition, and US Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who represented the Southgate district. In addition, the campaign pursued two main tactics outside of the plant. It demanded and won a meeting between then-GM president F. James McDonald and the community-labor committee comprised of politicians, clergy, community leaders and union members, and it threatened a boycott of GM products in LA unless the company pledged to keep the plant open.

The factory did indeed remain open for many years; it was even spared during a second round of GM closures in 1986, all of which Mann credits to the broad support the campaign was able to mobilize. We would add that the organization of support and multi-ethnic and multi-racial alliances that were so central to the campaign should be considered in light of the recent history of civil rights, anti-imperialist, anti-war and labor struggles within the Chicano and African-American communities in Los Angeles during the 1960s. The memory of these struggles, and the trenchant analyses of political economy, imperialism and class relations that emerged from them, would have been especially vivid among Chicano and African-American workers, both in the plant and in the wider communities, perhaps explaining why the 'shadow of starvation' produced a much different result in Los Angeles than in post-First World War East St Louis (see Horne, 1997; Mariscal, 1999).

The autoworkers' particular histories of struggle also help account for the wider movement that grew out of the campaign. As Mann tells us, Local 645 activists brought their agenda to the 1986 UAW convention, where they joined the opposition New Directions Movement to fight concessions. The protest slate did not prevail, but the activists were part of an ongoing effort to reform their union and build a more progressive working-class

organization. For instance, they criticized the UAW for pursuing a Japan-bashing strategy that mobilized workers to smash Japanese cars and engage in other forms of jingoistic protest and discourse, while the union sought peace and compromise with GM. Mann wrote years later that the Van Nuys campaign was an example of anti-imperialist organizing because it educated workers on global accumulation, built multi-racial and multi-national alliances, and moved workers away from xenophobia toward an expanded and internationalist perspective (Mann, 1998).

It may be a vast overstatement to say that Harvey's hoped-for 'Brechtian' possibilities in the Cowley struggle were realized, if incompletely, across the Atlantic. But the struggle of autoworkers in LA does show that the production of spatial scale is an ongoing process of contestation. Equally, it suggests that workers' vision of the geography of labor and capitalism emerges from social actions to ensure their own social reproduction. The spatial strategies and visions rising from these struggles is always an open question, to be answered by historical and ethnographic analysis.

The struggles in Van Nuys, London and East St Louis, taken together, illustrate the need to move beyond static types and historicize the institutions and struggles of working classes. In each instance, a certain confluence of particular histories and general processes created either new forms of intra-class hierarchies and divisions or cross-cutting alliances. Each case shows how seemingly static distinctions between different sectors and spaces of labor are produced and dissolved in specific struggles against dispossession.

Conclusions

At the apex of the national liberation struggles of the 20th century, Eric Wolf (1971) drew our attention to dispossession and differentiation as inextricably conjoined processes fueling the rebellions and revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the 'peasant question' was Wolf's immediate concern, his call for a decolonized anthropology also brought together the disparate places and temporalities of global labor into a common field.

First, in primitive accumulation, the expanding capitalist system ransacked the world in its search for capital; later, in ever widening circles, it converted the tribesmen and peasants of the world into millhands, rubber-tappers, sugar-cane cutters, miners, or scavengers and beachcombers on the slag heaps of civilization. It 'created the world' as a social system, but it did so by converting human labor and natural resources into 'free-floating' factors of production, ready-made for allocation within the capitalist market. Yet labor and resources are not abstract conceptual categories; they are human attributes and the attributes of human groups – and their conversion into commodities also liquidated age-old institutions upon which [humans] had long depended for safety and identity. Hence the triple crisis of the nonindustrial world of our time which I see as the key to peasant rebellion and revolution. (Wolf, 1971: 3)

Wolf's refusal of imperialist and elite narratives that placed these differentiated working classes outside of history contributed in profound ways to the decolonization of anthropology. Similarly, his emphasis on the connections among these populations effectively opened a way to finally dispense with the typologies that are an integral part of the colonial legacy and to recapture the dynamism and mutability of class relations.

In the end, though, Wolf teased out the implications of his profound insights in *National Liberation* (1971) only, if fittingly, for the 'non-industrial world', identifying peasants as actors in world history but stopping just short of doing the same for laborers in the metropole regions. At another moment of imperial adventurism, we find in David Harvey's identification of an inside/outside dialectic of capitalism the necessary conceptual tools to similarly renarrate the intertwined histories of these waged and wageless laborers and to re-map their complex interconnections. Within Harvey's historical-geography of the new imperialism, we find the key to new class maps of connection and mutual constitution, rather than evolutionary typologies and ahistorical divisions.

This new anthropology of labor builds upon the proposals of Wolf, Gough, Leacock and others to decolonize anthropology. Harvey suggests that the US empire of military bases is becoming a political unit that transcends national borders, as was the case for earlier empires. It remains to be seen what types of political inventiveness and synthesis will emerge from the particular struggles of laborers in different regions of the US empire, and beyond its expanded borders. The struggles may be in favor of exclusions and difference rather than solidarity, as the anti-immigration movement in the US suggests (Silver, 2003: 168–79). Even seemingly hopeful moments, such as the protests at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, which brought together environmental activists and US trade unionists in opposition to the normalization of US–China trade relations, may really point to a nationalist-protectionist move by the AFL-CIO to shore up the North/South divide, and with it the privilege of North American workers, rather than an upsurge in internationalism (Silver and Arrighi, 2000). Still, we see indications of a new inventiveness in the 'migrating unions' that are responding to the globalization of labor by following migrant laborers back and forth across national borders, in an emerging 'peasant' internationalism and in the global boycott of Coca Cola for its gross violations of workers' human rights (see Edelman, 2002; Gill, 2006; Lovato, 2006). Labor community coalitions and the new social movement unionism, such as the 'Justice for Janitors' campaign in Los Angeles, portend closer links between workers' struggles, immigrant concerns and community issues (Davis, 2000: 143–51). Similarly, the moves by UNITE in Canada and the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia to organize homebased workers, and the attempts of the General Agricultural Workers Union in Ghana to organize informal workers, suggest important challenges to the divisions between formal and informal workers (Gallin,

2001). Further, trade union internationalism is being revitalized by a surge of activism. The Inter-American Regional Organization is pressuring the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to overcome its Cold War legacy that divided East and West, and new international trade union federations (e.g. SIGTUR) are being formed (see Jakobson, 2001; Lambert and Webster, 2001; Moody, 1997: 227–49). Such boundary-crossing movements and networks as these are connecting distinct struggles against dispossession and creating an interlinked set of political and moral discourses. These webs of connection suggest the need for a decolonized anthropological imagination, one that dispenses with our disciplinary emphasis on the ‘outside’ of capitalism and encompasses the dynamic interconnections that constitute global society.

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