Call for papers
Exile and Enclosure
International conference
Cornell University, May 13-15 2016

Organizing committee: Raymond Craib (History, Cornell University), Andrej Grubačić (Anthropology, California Institute for Integral Studies), Geoffroy de Laforcade (History, Norfolk State University)

Keynote speakers: Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Andrej Grubačić and Denis O’Hearn

What, if any, is the relationship between enclosure and exile? This conference addresses this broad question. By enclosure we refer to two reinforcing processes associated with passages to modernity: the rise of the territorially-bounded nation-state and the development of global capitalism. The process of enclosure has been historically more closely linked to the latter of these two passages. Captured with poetic force in Marx’s examination of the “blood and fire” of primitive accumulation, enclosure referred to the long, relentless process by which commoners lost rights to the lands they worked through bloody expropriations later legitimated on paper by ruling governments. The development of agrarian—and, later, industrial—capitalism was dependent on such expropriations, the brutality of which were subsequently expunged from the dominant historical record through the sanitized language and ideology of improvement. Less common has been the linkage of enclosure to the simultaneous rise of the nation-state. Yet nation-state formation itself was an act of material, political, and symbolic enclosure. The assertion of rule over dispersed territories, regardless of contiguities, meant the physical enclosure of lifeways, forms of identification, modalities of political practice, and pasts.

The enclosure of nation-states and their capacity to physically control borders has historically been challenged by archetypes of physical and symbolic itinerancy. To the legal and conceptual incarceration of citizens (and nomads, slaves, etc.) into bounded territorialities and objectified identities, a suggestive response is that “spaces in-between” are not just the itinerant transgressions of migrant peoples in a globalized world, as post-colonial and post-national critics would have it; they also hark back to the multiplicity of forms of social action, political praxis and representations of freedom that accompanied pressures on communal societies and fragmentations of empire, preceding and accompanying the rise of modern states, eluding and undermining bonds of terror, servitude and colonialism. Fugitive and subterranean forms of historical agency are often uncategorized in academic and intellectual discourse because they defy preconceived notions of power, modernity, liberation and agency. One might argue in fact that the nation-state itself is an imperial formation, and that resistance to it was historically a response to manifestations of exile that its emergence provoked. A fundamental aspect of this conference will be to address these two aspects of enclosure – expropriation and the rise nation-states - and to weigh such narratives against the historical and contemporary record.

And what of exile? A range of terms have been deployed to address what happened to peoples who experienced varying forms political, economic and material expropriation: among others, displacement, colonization, proletarianization, alienation and expulsion. Each has its particular historical and sociological meanings. We use ‘exile’ as a means to draw such terms (and the experiences they seek to describe) together under a unifying premise: that displacement, colonization, proletarianization, expulsion, alienation, imprisonment and placelessness all bear perhaps more than a passing family resemblance to each other. They are, collectively, enclosure’s underbelly. The second fundamental aspect of this conference is to interrogate that assertion, again pulling from the historical and contemporary record.

Details
The conference will take place at Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York, May 13-15, 2016. The conference will not follow a paper presentation format but rather discussion of pre-circulated papers. Full papers (of no more than approx. 9,000 words) for pre-circulation will need to be submitted by March 30 in order to give participants, discussants and others attending the conference time to read. Interested participants should submit an abstract of than 300 words and a c.v. by midnight January 15 (EST) to Raymond Craib (rbc23@cornell.edu). Selected papers/participants will be notified by early February. Housing and dinners will be covered by the conference. We do not have funds to cover travel expenses. The organizers expect an edited volume to result from the gathering. Questions can be directed to Raymond Craib.