

**Utopian visions, dream bridges and the disruption of capitalism**

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## **Abstract**

The purge of the utopian imaginary that condemns socialist ideals as totalitarianism, fails to acknowledge the grandest utopian vision of all: capitalism. Capitalism's utopian aspect and totalitarian tendency is disappeared by its apparent success on the global stage. However, ideals such as wealth for all, resource extraction without consequence and the abstract definition of value need to be challenged as utopian to reveal capitalism as totalitarianism by stealth. Ethnographic encounters in communities dominated by capitalist hegemony demonstrate the pressure of inevitability and elimination of alternatives that push people into the capitalist realm. Whilst the anti-capitalist movement works at being the antithesis of the dominating ideology, it too is vulnerable to co-option.

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## **About the Author**

I started my working life in 1994 as an IT consultant. I engaged in activism after taking part in the dot com boom and bust of the late 1990s. Initially as a protestor, volunteer radio producer and organiser of activist related causes, I came to work in the NGO sector using my skills as an internet analyst and project manager. I developed a particular concern for the environment when I had children and thought about the world they would inherit. As I was drawn deeper into activist and now anthropology worlds, my understanding of the issues that have shaped our planet matured and increased my determination to be part of the change for worldwide environmental responsibility. I now run a small business selling eco-friendly bags of my own design and work as a consultant in the sustainability sector. I am also hoping to do a PhD that combines anthropology with creative writing.

## Introduction

At the inaugural gathering of corporate and political interests hosted by the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999, a multiplicity of opinions and 50,000 voices coalesced around one key opposition: the focus on profit at the expense of people. In what came to be described as the 'anti-capitalist movement', a coalition of like-minded groups across the world found a common link to amplify protests against the increasing domination of social, environmental and political interests by corporations. This movement gathered strength and now represents a wide network of NGOs, activist groups and grassroots organisations working to overcome the capitalist hegemony. In *One No, Many Yeses*, journalist Kingsnorth travels across the world, visiting many of the movement's 'epicentres' to identify concerns and aspirations. While each community has a different set of issues, most believe that profit making corporations are responsible for their people's inability to achieve autonomy, security and a healthy environment. "Corporations? If we can, we will kill them...Freedom for us from these people of money who destroy our land," Goliar Tabuni, Timika, Papua (Kingsnorth 2004:196-197).

In 2002, as part of the 'capitalist movement', US President Bush put economic freedom at the centre of a strategy for achieving social order across the world, "The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. In the twenty-first century, only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to

unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity” (Bush 2002). Bush posits free enterprise and economic freedom against totalitarianism, alluding to capitalist vs communist ideology as one of the ‘great struggles’ of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His perspective appears to be an attempt to validate US government intervention in foreign countries.

In 2007, Gray argues that the invasion of Iraq by the US and its allies is revealed as the utopian pursuit of free market ideology. He claims that neoliberals in the White House are pursuing idealistic dreams of social order achieved through free market principles (Gray 2007). He joins Harvey (2006), Monbiot (2007) and many others in expressing the hegemonic emphasis on the free market as, at best idealism and at worst, a thinly veiled attempt at maximising capital accumulation on a global scale for the wealthy few, at the expense of the many. The accusation of totalitarian behaviour hovers, in turn, over the White House.

History is littered with visions of alternative ways of living that gather momentum or dust depending on the dynamics of context. Power runs through these social fields, inflecting, shifting and shaping the ways of living that emerge as hegemonic. Theorists and practitioners point fingers at each other, declaiming perspectives as utopian – idealist and unachievable - and leading to totalitarianism. At the same time, they claim their own way of life as achievable and likely to lead to happiness and social cohesion. They are all right and all wrong. Every proposed way of life has a utopian aspect, the dream that provides inspiration for action. It also has a dystopian tendency towards totalitarianism. Mannheim argues that there is always one utopia in play in any given society, but its utopian aspect is disappeared by its apparent achievability (Mannheim 1985

[1936]). As the global hegemony of capitalism extends its reach, the underlying utopian ideals are hidden by its application as it is normalised, accepted and unchallenged by many. This situation fosters totalitarianism by stealth.

Totalitarianism is not just a state *initiated* exercise in excessive control over a community's way of life. Capitalism in practice operates a form of totalitarian control over people's lives through dominating the public imagination, controlling practices of exchange and demanding a very particular conception of land, resources and people. It relies on an assumption: capitalists claim the right to define and possess capital, overruling where necessary, existing conceptions of ownership and social engagement. This 'right' rests on a series of idealistic propositions: the promise of wealth for all; the abstraction of value from social contexts; resource extraction without consequence; and autonomy achieved through the free market. I will show that these are utopian aspects of capitalism, through situations that 'denormalise' it and reveal its idealistic nature.

These utopian aspects are usefully explored through Tsing's idea of "engaged universals". She proposes that ideologies are universals or 'dream bridges' that arch out of current life towards a utopian future. For her, science, modernisation and freedom began as dream bridges for both Third World nations and also the West, providing routes to peace. While life for many in the South has disintegrated through war, social and environmental degradation and Western hegemonic manipulation, these universals continue to act as utopian visions and provide inspiration for action. By looking at such universals in their context, both to acknowledge their content and ability to mobilise but also the reality of their subjectivity, we bring the impact of utopian visions into view, showing how

context creates friction. This friction is the real, tangible moment where ideas, concepts and agendas resonate on and within the communities engaged.

“Even if our bridge aims towards the most lofty universal truths – the insights of science, the freedom of individual rights, the possibility of wealth for all – we find ourselves hemmed in by the specificity of rules and practices, with their petty prejudices, unreasonable hierarchies, and cruel exclusions. We must make do, enmeshing our desires in the compromise of practical action” (Tsing 2004:85).

An examination of frictions caused by capitalist impact on and engagement with communities reveals the rub of utopian visions in practice. These frictions are best uncovered through ethnographic encounters, rich with detail about social mores and inflected with respect for difference and uncertainty.

I will begin the discussion with an analysis of how the utopian imaginary has developed since its inception by More in 1515. This will draw out how utopia provides a forum for imagining alternative ways of life, but is always unachievable in the form imagined. I will consider how utopian thinking has developed from grand designs to incremental change and focus on ‘grafters’ who seek to adapt and incorporate utopian ideals into existing situations, using Green’s account of lesbian feminists in 1980s London and Lowe’s description of the utopian imaginary of female factory workers in Mexico (Green 1997, Lowe 2001). Through Taussig’s description of attempts to accommodate capitalism into non-capitalist communities in Colombia and Bolivia, I will reveal the underlying utopian and totalitarian tendency of capitalism itself (Taussig 1980).

A clash of utopian thinking between capitalism and alternative ways of living is then examined through Foucault’s *heterotopias*. These are situations that are

scene to and encapsulate sets of relations where ideals, practices and beliefs collide and coincide to create a new form of imagining. Foucault used the medical term, heterotopia, which denotes an 'organ out of place' (Foucault 2002 [1970]) to represent the utopian or ideal nature of certain conceptions of existence, which create situations that both challenge hegemonic mores and provide propositions for alternative ways of living. When real life situations happen under these conditions, they are 'out of place' and yet still part of social reality.

Heterotopias are a useful way of gaining insight into the ideals that underpin capitalism and how they are processed and incorporated into existing social contexts. I will focus on situations where attempts to directly challenge capitalism through the development of alternative ways of living, seem instead to extend its reach. The forests of India, Indonesia and Malaysia play host to confrontation between capitalist and the anti-capitalist ideologies, revealing the utopian nature of both (Baviskar 2004, Brosius 2004, Tsing 2004). I will also examine capitalism as utopia itself, demonstrated by attempts in China to achieve global harmony through consumerism (Schein 1999). Through these ethnographies, I will show the disruption caused by capitalism, rather than the prosperity offered by Bush. The development of these ideas are then captured by an allegorical discussion of the Mount Everest climbing community over the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ortner 1999). I will then briefly consider the nature of the anti-capitalist movement in its attempts to challenge capitalist hegemony.

Just as ethnography emphasises uncertainty and reflexivity, so my own analysis is partial and subjective. Lacan describes how a baby looks in the mirror and is

confused by the discrete whole being that s/he sees there (Heald and Deluz 1994). The baby knows itself to be a moving amorphous shape, constantly growing and reforming, and is therefore startled by the apparent stillness of its reflection. Following the baby's perception of itself, there are no absolutes but there are shapes that emerge, always growing, changing, distorted by their representation in the text, in my interpretation and in yours, but worth considering for the light they throw on our own perspectives. It is in this spirit that I want to explore ethnographically what happens when capitalist ideals impact on social, political, emotional and physical worlds, insights gained through messy, contradictory and unforgiving praxis.

## **Utopian Aspects**

### *From imagined ideal to totalitarian reality*

Utopia was conceived by Sir Thomas More in 1515 as an ideal society found on an imaginary Atlantic island. More was an influential parliamentarian in medieval England, who was later executed for refusing to support King Henry VIII's first divorce and remarriage to Anne Boleyn. He wanted to explore and inform on alternative social orders but since he was subject to a capricious and violent king, he couched his observations in a wryly observed society 'discovered' by the fictional Raphael Hythlodæus, an adventurer whose stories More 'just recorded' for posterity. By making the account flippant and amusing he was able to challenge serious issues of governance and criticise social attitudes such as superiority, the need for bowing or kneeling, gambling and hunting, all preoccupations of "illusory pleasure addicts" (More 1965 [1516]:74). *Utopia*, a term More fashioned from the Ancient Greek - ου not τοπ\_ος a place - has a

socio-political model based on Plato's theories of governance and More imagines an egalitarian, sociable and responsible community.

By creating a space that imagines an alternative, and better, way of being, More inspired a rich tradition in explicitly imagined utopias in Western society. Storytellers such as Francis Bacon (*The New Atlantis* 1626), poets, notably William Blake (*Jerusalem* 1804, *The Emanation of the Giant Albion* 1820), and philosophers such as Charles Fourier (*Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinees generales* 1808) created distinct worlds that propose alternative social structures as improvements to the existing way of life. These tracts pushed utopian thinking into areas that ranged from epistemological utopias, the search for perfect certainty, to philosophical ones, searching for the ultimate truth, to social ideals, in search of perfect living experiences (Kolakowski 1990). Initially, they shared in common, propositions that were aspirational but not necessarily achievable. Gradually however over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these "desirable regions of the mind" developed further into "ideological blueprints" (Wagner 2005). Ideals built on the Christian notions of how one 'ought' to live and through radical Protestantism gained ground as external standards based on "absolute, unassailable and objective reason" (Eisenstadt 1999 quoted in Alexander 2001).

Utopian aspirations therefore began to be seen as achievable. Early utopian ideals were often explicitly socialist, focused on egalitarianism and solidarity, and these ideas fomented over the 19<sup>th</sup> century to inspire the realisation of utopian communities across the world. Socialism was put in dialectic contrast with capitalism, rejecting the profit seeking motives of the few, in an attempt to answer the changes in social dynamics that came with industrialisation (Kumar 1991,

2005). Over two centuries, socialist theory inspired key individuals to use their position to motivate others and break away from capitalist arrangements to establish new societies in various models. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an initial flurry provided inspiration for action, for example: Robert Owen introduced a social practice based on ideals of education and fair treatment to cotton mills and the local village of New Lanark, Scotland in the 1850s; Victor Prosper Considérant, a contemporary of Charles Fourier, left France and collaborated with others to founded *La Reunion*, a socialist utopian community in Texas, USA; and in 1893, William Lane and almost 300 Australians set sail for Paraguay to found New Australia, a community based on a spirit of equality and collaboration<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, socialist models were attempted in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba with many groups in other countries observing and finding inspiration in their actions. These were methods of governance and opportunities to live out the previously only imagined, alternative ways of living.

However, most communities formed explicitly on socialist ideals failed among recriminations of autocracy. Indeed, this shift from theory to practice and the formation of such ‘revolutionary utopias’ are according to Kolakowski “ideologically poisonous”. He argues that utopia does indeed mean “no place” - they cannot exist because “radical and consistent egalitarian utopias are thus antihuman” (Kolakowski 1990:140). People have to be either identical so that they fit the utopian model of being, or they are forced to be identical in order to

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<sup>1</sup> I found details of New Lanark, La Reunion and New Australia on Wikipedia, the online community encyclopaedia which I have cross-checked with other sources such as the New Lanark Foundation website, Kumar (1991), Rieger et al (2005), (Walding, M. 1985. *The Paraguayan Experiment*. Penguin.) and Gray (2007).

be equal, so totalitarianism inevitably results. This perspective is reinforced by a documentary novel about the New Australia utopian settlement. Author Wilding wraps a fictional account round diary accounts and letters sent back to Britain and Australia at the time, to show how the community unfolded and disintegrated (Wilding 1984). Each individual in the New Australia community had a different perspective on how their 'ideal' community would manifest itself in the tropics of Paraguay. When they came to realise their utopia, perspectives clashed and conflict emerged. Wilding represents Lane as unable to cope with the development of vision into practice, becoming convinced that the community would succeed if all the people who did not share his ideals 'exactly' left. Lane tried to shape New Australia to his own utopian vision and would only offer dissenters his resignation when they tried to negotiate. Unlike the Russian and Chinese communist regimes, he did not deal harshly with dissension, ironically another point of contention with some of the other settlers. Eventually Lane retreated with a select group to found another utopian community, which also disintegrated soon after its formation.

These small-scale experiences, combined with the autocratic leadership of Stalin in Russia and Mao in China, led many to dismiss socialism as 'the God that failed' (Kumar 1987:421) and the utopian imaginary suffered also. Theoretical discussion now focuses on the 'death throes' of utopian thinking (Gray 2007, Johnson 2004, Kolakowski 1990, Kumar 1991, Rieger, Rösen, and Fehr 2005). Utopian visions that propose ideal societies as 'shells' into which people are expected to reshape must, according to Bauman, remain in the "realm of the possible" (1976:36) rather than something to be actively sought. Similar to Carrier's argument on virtualism, 'grand utopias' might work at a theoretical level

with a “uniformity and logicity that necessarily departs from the uncertainty of the real world with its unanticipated influences and unknowable futures” but as soon as they come to be manifested, the ideal disappears and reality emerges (Carrier and Miller 1998:7, Harvey 2001:193). Grand utopian visions are inspirational as discourse, but unachievable in practice because they lead to either totalitarianism or disintegration.

Utopian *discourse* meanwhile flourished over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, inspiring a literary genre of science fiction and fantasy and responding to failures in attempts to achieve utopia in practice by imagining nightmare worlds or ‘dystopias’. These dystopias depict totalitarian regimes resulting from utopian visions and range from *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932) and *1984* (Orwell 1949) to *Terminator* (Cameron 1985) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999), where people are kept by machines as a source of energy. Alternative ways of life imagined as improvements to current existence, or ‘eutopias’, however, have also endured from Huxley’s *Island* (Huxley 1932) to the egalitarian, machine/human/ecologically balanced, space hopping *Culture*, first created by Iain M Banks in *Consider Phlebas* (1987). Ecotopias emerge as imagined societies that focus on decentralised communities living in harmony with nature (Callenbach 1978, Le Guin 1974, 1985). While revolutionary utopias that demand large-scale societal change seem to inevitably result in totalitarian dystopias, the utopian imagination itself does not disappear. Instead people take inspiration from the discourse on alternative worlds to focus on changing existing society and themselves from within.

### *The idealising dimension of capitalist society*

Rather than dying therefore, utopian thinking has followed the postmodernist route of fragmentation. Revolutionary ruptures are dismissed as “simplistic thinking that distorts theorising by focusing exclusively on one track of society”, seeking to replace the messiness of real societies (Arendt quoted in Alexander 2001). Instead of outer containers into which people must fit, the emphasis focuses on “gradual idealisations that develop within the nature of practice itself” (Walzer 1987:282 quoted in Alexander 2001). Utopias maintain their relevance by claiming a “universalist position in a foundationalist way...to critically evaluate without fear and without pity, how mundane particulars measure up” (Alexander 2001:581). The emergence of nation states governed through liberal democracies creates dynamic, fluid societies that facilitate different and contradictory utopian visions as they develop and gain popularity. Habermas argues that as shared contexts give way to the interpretive efforts of participants, a reciprocal recognition of different forms of cultural life should be released in “the utopian horizon of civil society” (Habermas 1984:328 in Johnson 2004:271). Activists gravitate into “imagined communities” (Anderson 1999) focusing on personal concerns of race, gender, sexuality, physical ability, as well as wider topical concerns about the environment, religion, peace, political orientation and social preferences.

These ‘particularist’ utopias collate into the ‘counterculture’ movement where from *Where the Wasteland Ends* by Roszak in 1973 to *One No Many Yeses* by Kingsnorth in 2004, the multiplicity of individual and community identity is the key mobilising force behind the movement. Indeed the emphasis on autonomy and freedom of expression, effectively idealises difference in itself (Alexander 2001).

Drawing on Wegner who argues that narrative utopian visions are actually part of a long revolution bringing major social change, the focus of these protest movements on particular issues looks like utopias made real in that they have “material, pedagogical and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds” (Wegner 2002:xvi). Utopian *discourse* seems therefore to inspire and achieve change, without the autocracy of revolutionary movements.

Lowe draws this out to argue that the utopian imaginary allows mediation between the contradictions of life as a “property owning citizen of Western nation-states” and an activist challenging the “concrete particularism of modernisation and all the inequalities it generates” (Lowe 2001). Utopian ideas bring together diverse communities across countries and cultures to challenge perceived injustices. She shows how sexually harassed women workers in the *maquiladoras*, export-processing factories on the US-Mexican borders, can draw on ideals to enlist help from support groups on the border and in the US. The *maquiladoras* are a source of billions of dollars in export earnings for Mexico and employ over 850,000 people, of whom 50% are women. The women, with few workers rights, are exposed both to sexual harassment at work and also the “hyper exploitation” of an industry that attracts workers from all over the country, away from their dependent families and support networks, a situation which Lowe argues also constitutes sexual harassment. The women challenge their circumstances with walkouts, community groups and informal organising that reach out to international groups working to address the garment industry’s abuse of working women.

Lowe uses a parable to consider the ways in which women can engage with different methods of protest. The women contact an NGO to help them raise awareness of their situation, the NGO then contacts a group of university students to produce a survey that the women can use on the shop floor to develop an account of their experiences. This survey can form the basis of an international media campaign highlighting the plight of female garment workers in the South; as proof in challenging worker's rights abroad; and to critique US feminists' perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment. Lowe emphasises the utopian vision that leads women in the South and North to imagine alternatives and seek to have them realised by sharing resources in the context of a globalised world. She argues that utopian ideas do not need to come from "revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat" but from seeking to address issues in multiple layered ways, from actions on the shop floor to negotiations on international treaties such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (Lowe 2001).

According to Kolakowski, the danger of utopias is that advocates convince themselves that they have discovered "a genuine technology of apocalypse, a technical device to force the door of paradise" (Kolakowski 1990:141). However he also finds that the utopian imaginary could bring value to a society through a balance of 'diggers' who seek a perfect society and 'healers' who introduce doubt and scepticism. I propose an additional category of 'grafters' – people, such as Lowe's garment factory activists, who focus on utopian visions to be melded into existing social structures. 'To graft' has both a botanical meaning, to add a new shoot to an existing stem, and a vernacular meaning, 'to work, to work hard'.

These grafters work hard to realise particular ideals in the context of existing societies.

Strathern reminds us that in a supercomplex world, the ability to negotiate through competing and contradictory values and opinions becomes essential (Strathern 2001). Attempts to change existing society according to particular ideals are still vulnerable to the autocratic and divisive tendency of utopian visioning. While change might happen, the application of utopian visions continues to suffer from the vagaries of subjectivity and fragmentation, as each individual's interpretation of utopia differs. Giddens argues that social atomisation has resulted in an 'experiment in living' where individuals are expected to shape their identity in a 'reflective project of the self' (Giddens 1992). People have no choice but to choose protest movements, ideologies and even the quotidian in an attempt to locate "an anchor for the self, a narrative which gives meaning to all our disparate potential belongings" (Weeks 1998:45). Weeks proposes that people use 'fictions', drawing on the culture of storytelling, to create these anchors and suggests that sexual identity is one narrative through which an anchor point is defined. From notions of 'pure relationships' based on romantic love to political identities mediated through sexual preference, individuals can cluster together according to their 'fictions' of sexual orientation. However, while this might foster solidarity but it also risks alienation between groups and relies on assumptions that do not necessarily align.

In *Urban Amazons*. Green shows how a group of lesbian feminists gathered together in a loose community in 1980s London to carry out protests, particularly against anti-homosexuality legislation, social activities and knowledge gathering

(Green 1997). Green shows how the different sexual orientations within the lesbian community created alliances and cleaved out differences, where sometimes sexual activities mattered, such as S/M dykes (lesbian sado-masochism) and sometimes innate preferences were suppressed, such as political lesbians (women who claimed lesbianism out of protest towards a patriarchal society). The community was awash with anchor points that caused contradiction, upset and ultimately disintegration as women were torn between their feminisms - lesbian, libertarian, socialist, revolutionary, radical and combinations thereof, as well as other allegiances such as racial, socio-economic, personal relationships and ego.

Green does well to tease out the key issues that caused a dispute over the shared library where information provision was the tinder paper for a bundle of issues that had brewed over previous months. The female solidarity could not prevent a power struggle, with two key individuals marshalling support for their perspective. The dispute ends up at solicitors with much acrimony and distrust on both sides. Clastres emphasises the presence of power even in apparently non-hierarchical groups, where its nuanced negotiation relies on the integrated interests of all the individuals involved (Clastres 1987). Many of the women were drawn to the group because they wanted to actively dispute a new government clause prohibiting the teaching of homosexuality (now Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988). As the focus of their activities moved on, the need for solidarity diminished and other priorities allowed disagreement to develop and ultimately disintegrate the group.

Drawing on Green, while many counterculture movements have focused on changing society through incremental change, the inspiration motivating the counterculture activists comes from grand utopian visions turned inward. Initially people seek to change themselves based on an ideal of who they could be. They then base their engagement with counterculture and the outside world on these ideals of self, seeking out others who have similar identities to create communities of interest, develop solidarity and take action on issues that concern or threaten their sense of identity. However as people pull together multiple anchors to create an identity, the combination of characteristics that makes up an individual results in the same ambiguity in pursuit of a more specific vision as the so-called 'revolutionary' overarching utopian vision such as communism. The 'mini-me' utopias cause internal conflict over which view should dominate, reducing attention on the injustice that inspired action in the first place.

Utopias therefore are aspirational ideas of alternative ways of living which, when pursued, are revealed as unachievable in the form imagined. Just as revolutionary utopias failed because there was no clear agreement on the implementation of the vision, particularist utopias can never succeed because each person's idea of utopia is always different. Attempts to foster enough consensus to achieve change are hampered by both external and internal conflict. This dichotomy is reflected in disagreements over socialist inspired projects such as the future of the NHS, trade unions, the role of civil society, equal opportunities, religion, peace and through all the issues and concerns raised by the counterculture movement. Some progress may have been made in all these areas but they are patterned with the conflict and turmoil that surrounds attempted implementation of utopian visions, not a representation of the visions

themselves. Whether localised around the self or particular interests, utopias are unachievable because interpretations conflict and contradict, even within the same individual.

Particularist and mini-me utopian visions also rely on the ability of individuals to recognise the limitations of particular social aspects, to believe that change can happen and to seek to influence it. It places them in the centre, architects of their future. Underlying these ideals are ones of freedom, to choose and pursue visions as they arise. In this way, utopia turns a full circle, refocusing on the ideas of freedom that were central to Marxian philosophy. Walicki argues that 'ultimate liberation of the human species' was central to Marx and Engel's argument for socialism, to be achieved through scientific rationalism. He shows how this emphasis was subverted by Lenin segueing into totalitarianism through an insistence on one particular *type* of freedom, enforced by the communist state (Walicki 1997).

It is here that the totalitarian tendency of communism aligns with capitalism. Walicki defines totalitarianism as "a dictatorship that not only deprives people of political and civil freedom but also aspires to control their minds and conscience, demanding not only passive conformity but active participation as well, keeping people under ruthless ideological pressure, in a state of continuous mobilisation" (Walicki 1997:7). As people seek 'freedom of self' in multiple ways, in the background, capitalism endures as the 'reality' against which these imagined utopias are juxtaposed.

Johnson argues that counterculture movements do not challenge the underlying structure of their social environment but instead are the ‘idealising dimension of the liberal democratic imaginary’ (Johnson 2004). Society is challenged from within boundaries of what are ‘normal’ and acceptable levels of difference. Just as communist utopia insisted one particular type of freedom, so capitalist utopia offers another restricted set. Central ideals are the promise of wealth for all, the ability to extract resources without consequence, define value without context and facilitate autonomy through the free market. The communities subjected to capitalist rationale reveal these propositions as idealistic but dominating. It is to how these communities reveal the disruption of capitalist utopia that I will now turn.

### **Capitalism as utopia**

Capitalism is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “the condition of possessing capital” (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). Behind this rather bald term lies centuries of acquisition of land, resources and people, tomes of books challenging its philosophical and practical viability, and thousands of protests and movements opposing the ways in which capital is defined and possessed. The freedom to acquire capital for some severely constricts the freedom to live for others, particularly communities that are market dominated rather than market organised (Taussig 1980:10).

#### *An exchange with the devil*

Perhaps the communities worst affected by capitalism are those that centre social engagement on reciprocity, where the moment of exchange carries with it the social context of the people involved. Through his gift theory, Mauss showed

that exchange carries expectations between giver and receiver that reflect their social relationship (Mauss 1990 [1925]). His analysis of gift exchange in the Trobriander Islands in the Pacific demonstrated that social status and peaceful relations were sought through the ritual exchange of *kula*, shells that were presented as gifts from one islander to another across all the islands in a never-ending circuit of social engagement. By representing exchange as a 'total social fact' that encapsulates the traditions, assumptions and expectations of a community, Mauss demonstrates how social cohesion was achieved. In this way, he illustrates the Marxian proposition of 'use-value', where goods are exchanged based on the specific needs of the individuals involved, and 'exchange value' where goods are assigned a conceptual monetary value. Reciprocal exchange has a more cohesive effect on a community because it demands social engagement in a way that a monetary transaction does not, as Taussig's experiences in South America demonstrate.

In the southern Cauco valley of Colombia, Taussig highlights the differences between the indigenous communities' perspective and the ruling classes by showing how the former's tradition of reciprocal exchange conflicted with the colonists' emphasis on capital accumulation (Taussig 1980). Like Mauss, Taussig argues that reciprocity exchange requires a form of empathy that 'invigorates a social mode of production'. He contrasts this with the arrival of the Spanish who introduce the notion of use-value, where people are brought into the area as commodities and used as slaves to produce the commodity of sugar cane. The development of cash crops leads to acquisition of land, taking over existing homes and tended plots and converting them into commodities of space. The abstraction of land, resources and people into labour and objects that can be

bought and sold, eliminates 'personal' association and social responsibility. Taussig shows how the colonisers, plantation and hacienda owners violently resisted the slave rebellions, determined to keep people as commodities. When this became unviable through desertion, sabotage and eventually political change, their businesses failed due to lack of labour. Once free, the former slave community joined the indigenous community in basing the majority of their exchange practices on reciprocity and it was only when the extensive acquisition of land by the ruling classes made self-sufficiency impossible, that people returned to work on the sugar cane plantations.

Taussig draws on Marx to emphasise the reversal of use-value where wealth becomes the aim of production and production the aim of man rather than man using production for his own purposes. In this way commodities are fetishised as the role of the producer fades and the object is seen to be autonomous. Taussig argues that this subjugation of social relations to the economic laws of commodities is a *fiction*, a "fantasy systematically interwoven with the epitome of rationality" to give it weight (p29). He asserts that Colombian plantation workers and Bolivian tin miners show us the madness of the exchange-value practices through the way they associate it with the devil.

In the plantations, 'it is said' that the workers make contracts with the devil in order to cut more cane and therefore earn more money. The money can only be spent on luxury items and the root plant of any cane cut under the auspices of a devil pact will die away. Another devil arrangement is *el bautizo del billete* (baptism of the bill). A godparent-to-be hides a peso note in his hand during the Catholic baptism of a child effectively stealing the blessing. When spent, that

note is said to return to its owner bringing more notes with it. However the child is left without the spiritual protection that comes with baptism and the money gained is associated with the devil (Taussig 1980:121-3). Taussig also uses Nash's accounts of miners in Bolivia to understand the importance of Tio, the devil owner of the wealth of the mines. The miners bring the principle of reciprocal exchange to their work in commodity extraction by imagining that they are excavating the body of Tio itself. They demonstrate their respect and gratitude by feeding this devil, literally with tobacco and coca through an effigy, and metaphorically through ritual and sacrifice. The idea of the devil was introduced by the Catholic Spanish at the same time as slaves and violent suppression of the indigenous community. The colonists associated all beliefs other than Catholic ones with evil. The indigenous and former slave communities therefore absorbed the key message of evil but reflected it onto colonists' emphasis on exchange-value, revealing the latter's practice as commodity worship.

The specificity of response by the plantation workers and miners brings out the painful absurdity in stripping commodities of their social context. It shows how people in Colombia and Bolivia try to reincorporate reciprocity back into commodity exchange using rituals. They attempt to bridge the gap between the capitalist environment in which they now live with their own understanding of social relations. In this way the rituals reveal the utopian nature of capitalism as commodification. Social understandings of how resources should be used vary from one group to the next. The idea that commodities can be extracted from their social context and rendered anonymous is an aspirational proposition by the colonisers but unachievable without consequence. The devil association with

resource extraction and commodification acknowledges the land's presence as a participant in the exchange process. It also recognises the damaging effect of money as the focus of acquisition.

The idealisation of capitalists who avoid the 'total social fact' that demands appropriate reciprocation is revealed in the devastating social and environmental outcomes. In the Cauca valley, 50% of children are undernourished and rely on drinking water polluted with faecal matter and effluent from the sugar mills (p89). Many people are hungry and overworked, which affects their social engagement with each other, as described by this plantation worker,

"With food prices so high and wages so low, workers are forced to work their very hardest to make ends meet. Some don't even stop for lunch. When a man fell down with stomach pains the other day, a Saturday, people barely paid him any attention." The collapsed man was denied water by the foreman and left there for the rest of the weekend. He was taken to hospital on the Monday but died there. "The workers are so preoccupied with getting enough money to live on that they just concentrate on what they are doing" (plantation digger, Taussig 1980:84-5).

By ignoring the debt incurred to the land itself, the capitalists reveal the ideals that underpin their practice. Responsibility to the environment, the land and the people that provide resources for extraction, is not an optional extra. There are consequences that need to be mitigated through the reciprocal exchange context.

Precious metals and sugar cane as commodities are pulled out of the ground, chopped down and converted into monetary value but much like the cat's beating heart that a plantation worker cuts out as a sacrifice to do better at cutting cane,

they still come with strings attached. These trailing threads allude to Mauss's *hau*, as spirits that haunt commodities extracted through force. Through their attempt to include reciprocation into the exchange of commodities in South America, the indigenous and former slave communities acknowledge the debt of extractive capitalism, owed to the environment and to social cohesion. They reveal commodification of resources into anonymous capital therefore as utopian: it ignores the true impact of the extractive process. Even if the capitalists involved in extraction do not care about the consequences of their behaviour, the debt still exists.

Moreover, the capitalist method enforces the view of just one part of the community. The liberty taken to extract with impunity eliminates the freedom of others not to participate. Everyone is pulled into the demands of a market economy in order to survive. This situation echoes Kolakowski who dismisses revolutionary utopia as totalitarianism because everyone must be the same or forced to be the same, and Walicki's description of communist totalitarianism: capitalist hegemony demands participation.

This participation is supported through rationalisation and defence of commodification and resource use. In the *Skeptical environmentalist*, Lomborg downplays extensive environmental degradation in the developing world caused by resource extraction and manipulation by Western organisations, to assert that capitalist societies eventually address their polluted environments (Lomborg 2001). However his skewed representation of statistical data recalls the Foucauldian emphasis on the role of power in information generation. Access to unpolluted drinking water is possibly the biggest single issue for people living in

the South, affecting 1.1 billion people or 1 in 6 people worldwide (World Health Organisation/UNICEF 2005). Yet Lomborg chooses to focus mainly on air and sea pollution to prove his point that pollution concerns are over-hyped. He only covers drinking water pollution by focusing on how successfully Britain cleaned its rivers, overlooking the migration of polluting factories to countries in the South. By omitting the data indicating the extensive pollution of drinking water across the world, Lomborg makes the problem itself disappear. These sleights of hand by capitalist apologists perpetuate capitalist ideals of resource extraction without consequence and extend its hegemony. The promise of capital accumulation and wealth for all still glitters in the distance.

#### *Capitalism as a development tool*

Such is the confidence in capitalism that it has been actively promoted as a development tool in Africa for almost 100 years. Bryceson and Bank show how a neoliberal emphasis on individualisation and the use of market forces to stimulate social change has failed to secure the expected “economic take-off” (Bryceson and Bank 2001:5). Despite the failure of these policies to produce much collective good, there has been little recognition of it as a failure, or indeed its utopian nature. Instead, policy has moved on to focus on localised solutions, glossing over the cause of the consequences of previous decades. The proponents of ‘development’ powered by income generation through commodification, rather than reciprocal or subsistence living, have just shifted their emphasis from state-wide policy to localised and individual economic success.

The authors use the Foucauldian notion of heterotopia to claim that the 'age of heterotopia' has descended on Africa. Heterotopia is "an inherently ambiguous and unstable concept of remarkable resonance" (Heterotopia.ca ). It has been used mainly to indicate sets of relations that are brought together but are too different to cohere. Foucault developed the idea initially using a passage by Borges who creates a Chinese encyclopaedia entry that groups animals under a variety of unconnected and *unconnectable* categories such as "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." (Foucault 2002 [1970]:i). Foucault uses the alphabetic categorisation to demonstrate how an underlying order can be imposed, creating groupings that share only an externally defined classification in common.

In this way, Bryceson and Banks argue that the World Bank and donor organisations are struggling to develop policies that reconcile the 'irreducibility of difference'. Attempts to focus on local solutions ignore the impact of a century worth of colonial, and then neoliberal machinations: colonial policies carved up the country and introduced commodification and cash cropping; post-war brought a 'development' discourse promising modernisation through free market principles. The International Finance Institutions (IFIs), World Bank and donor organisations now dominate African economies who contort their policies and behaviour in order to curry favour. Further, in a world economy dominated by disorganised capitalism (Lash and Urry 1987), evidenced by the hegemonic rise of the multinational and the loss of control by nation states over corporate

intervention, the increasing disparity between wealth and poverty, environmental degradation and declining social cohesion echoes across Africa. Yet, these incredibly complex and subjective factors are brought together into an apparently single issue of how to ‘develop’ Africa using capitalist methods.

Bryceson and Banks focus on Foucault’s early definition of heterotopia as “the converse of utopia since they “dissolve our myths and sterilise the lyricism of our sentences” (Foucault 2002 [1970]:xviii). The authors demonstrate how shifts in discourse on policy reveal the ‘unspoken order’ of neoliberalism whose proponents assume the mantle of responsibility for ‘development’, even when their aspirations of modernisation result in an increase in deprivation rather than a decrease. As the delineation and definition of groups and the rhetoric on change evolves, the preconceptions that underlie them endure. With capitalism as the unspoken order, the alternatives shrink to only those that fit within its classification. In discussion with a former employee of Proctor and Gamble, an influential multinational, I found out about a water purification tablet they had invented to address problems with polluted water in Africa. The objective was to find a way to help and *make money at the same time*. The corporate imagination works within capitalist boundaries, creating ‘solutions’ that also have market value. In this way, commodities have become tools to address social problems.

It is not enough therefore for capitalism to dominate definitions of capital and its accumulation. It is now proposed as the panacea, creeping into all manner of social engagement. At the same time, it is normalised to the extent that its hegemony is unquestioned. Taussig’s informants adapt their behaviour in the context of the capitalist environment rather than outside it. Similarly, the

development policies in Africa rest on an assumption of market principles. This is the impact of totalitarianism by stealth, “controlling the minds and conscience, demanding not only passive conformity but active participation” (Walicki 1997:7).

*Multiple visions, one forest, no rules*

Foucault takes his conception of heterotopia further in *Of Other Spaces*, where he proposes it as “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (Foucault 1986). He identifies heterotopia as a set of relations that reveal the way in which utopias, as explorations of alternative ways of living, become manifested in ‘real life’. This configuration has been used extensively by theorists and practitioners alike. Architects and geographers develop the physical spatiality, looking for or creating heterotopic places that imagine different sorts of living spaces (Barnes 2004, Urbach 1998). Others work more with conceptual space or social spaces formed through a particular set of relations. Siebers edits a collection of essays that position heterotopias as utopias formed in response to post modernity such as ‘city-planning projects designed to defeat the unstable forces of nature and society’, ‘monuments of muscle envisioned by inveterate bodybuilders’ and ‘paradises of perfect health and sexual pleasure guaranteed by advanced medical technologies’ (Siebers 1994). Irving and Moffatt, concerned by excessive regulation and interference of teaching styles, argue for heterotopia in the classroom as “an amorphous space where change is possible and new meanings constructed” (Irving and Moffatt 2002). Similarly McNamee finds heterotopia in computer games for children which help them imagine alternative ways of being (McNamee 2000).

Hetherington argues that heterotopias as ‘spaces of alternate ordering’ come to being in relation to a tension ‘between ideas of freedom and ideas of control or discipline’. He describes the factory as heterotopia in how it emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as “an alternate mode of ordering to that found in domestic production” (Hetherington 1997 Ch 6). This concept is useful when thinking about how the ‘unspoken order’ of capitalism can disrupt the dynamics of a community and their landscape. Tsing gives a stark and startling account of how Suharto’s corrupt Indonesian government, using the army as enforcer, creates a ‘frontier’ of South Kalimantan, a terrain stripped first of its trees, then diamonds, coal and lastly sand, all sold on the international market (Tsing 2004). Each successive wave of extraction bringing desolation to the landscape, the forest host to the messy application of a capitalist ideology where forest resources are assigned values and extracted as wealth to whomever can get there first. From the 1970s onwards, large logging and mining companies, incoming Javanese prospectors and other speculators seeking their fortune have appropriated the traditional lands of the Dayak communities. With the forested landscape as “simultaneously the shaper of social networks and the material through which they are shaped” (p257), extraction disrupts and literally takes away a key source of sociality for the communities living there.

The Dayaks find this capitalist invasion difficult to resist and many participate, “You can get up to Rp. 150,000 for giving permission to fell a tree on your ancestral lands; you might as well give permission, because they will fell a tree whether you give it or not” Uma Adang, Tsing’s Dayak mentor in the Meratus Mountains of Kalimantan (Tsing 2004:25). Some Dayaks subvert traditional

activities such as tree marking to lay claim to the timber. They draw incomer loggers and miners deeper into the forest taking extractive practices back to their own communities. Illegal individual loggers are followed by larger state supported logging companies in a symbiotic relationship that ensures that every scrap of value is extracted from the land. With a corrupt government and local officials participating in the logging and mining, there is little recourse to figures of authority to protect the community's rights over the forest.

Some locals adapt to the capitalist regime by grafting new visions of market economy into their existing practices. They use an advantage over incomers due to their extensive knowledge of the forest's eco-cycle, to harvest and sell its resources in a flexible way, based on their availability. However, in a 'free-for-all' environment, the tendency to over-consume, deplete reserves and reduce the opportunity for the forest to replenish itself, makes it difficult for a balanced and sustainable use of the forest to emerge. Tsing shows that the rapid and violent enforcement of extraction creates such a sense of inevitability that the capitalist hegemony is normalised. Many accept the situation as the most likely status quo and make choices as if it will perpetuate. They observe that 'everyone else is doing it, so I might as well'. These people are the grafters, much like Taussig's plantation workers and tin miners, and the African governments that adapt policy to qualify for IFI loans. They work within the boundaries defined by the capitalist order.

Others however, follow different visions and attempt to create alternative spaces of ordering. Different groups emerge with ideals based on their own backgrounds and perspectives. A national network of 'nature-lovers', formed in

the absence of civil society, focus on environmental degradation to provide a kernel of rebellion to assist Dayaks in protesting against the forest's destruction and help raise awareness of it. National and international NGOs rally round promoting and assisting in forming a protest movement. Tsing shows how these different and competing visions interact with the local people and developing events. She emphasises the conflict of interests within individuals themselves who must negotiate village relationships, their own ambitions, a sense of inevitability and a desire to ensure that they make the most of the situation *whatever it might be*. At a meeting in 1986, a renowned shaman, Awat Kilay, gives a rousing speech calling to the community to fight the timber companies. The mixed response reflects how the young men must negotiate Awat Kilay's activist background and association with Communism, and their own political and entrepreneurial ambitions.

Even an achievement to stop logging, promoted as a successful direct action by Indonesian activists, is shrouded in ambiguity and contradiction. In the village of Manggur, a group of Indonesian environmentalists attempting to co-ordinate grassroots groups meet with village elders and nature lovers to plan a campaign to stop logging in the local area. While the loggers did leave the area for fifteen years, an elder in Manggur believes she stopped the logging by looking at a map of the area and pointing out that the loggers were in the wrong part of the forest; her brother describes his role through a metaphorical visit to President Suharto; the activists and Manggur villagers use the success to promote themselves as a nascent opposition movement but people from other villages locate the success with the sibling elders rather than the activist network or Manggur community. The opposition to the logging came together as a set of relations that

interconnect and yet do not cohere, an 'awkward coalescence' of 'power-laden but unpredictable collaborations' (Tsing 2004:249).

In her analysis, Tsing argues that ideals such as freedom and wealth for all act as dream bridges, promising people routes out of their current situation. Friction occurs when these dreams collide and engage with circumstances as they occur in communities. The Indonesians react to the resource extraction in the Kalimantan Mountains in various ways. Some incorporate or 'graft' it into their existing circumstances. They try to make sense and make the most of their situation as it develops. Others try to reach out of the capitalist context, but find it smothers, muddles and distorts alternatives, as they work with the people and situation around them. The differences in alternatives may vary widely but there is still an underlying order that ensures that their options are predefined, much like the categorised entries in the Chinese encyclopedia that inspires Foucault. They can a) become a logger, b) protest against the logging, c) leave, d) ignore the logging e) adapt forest foraging to the logging etc. The capitalist hegemony creates the classification, setting the terms for engagement, where the options available make sense only within the context of the capitalist extraction.

The parallels between Tsing's frictions and Foucault's heterotopias therefore are the moments when we see the rub of utopian visions in practice. The "possibility of wealth for all" is the 'universal truth' that provides the rationale for capitalist intervention in the forest. Once the capitalists arrive, all alternatives are shaped by the practice of resource extraction. The prospectors in the Kalimantan forests are joined by many Dayaks following the promise of wealth, who instead find social and environmental disruption. In this way, the forest reveals the utopian

aspect of extractive capitalism both as an empty promise of wealth for all and as unachievable in the context of social cohesion and environmental sustainability. In addition, totalitarian tendencies are revealed as the hegemonic tide of resources as commodities rolls over the communities, demanding participation or loss.

### *The wealth of experience*

Capitalist values can become so deeply entrenched that even when directly challenged through environmental activism, the 'unspoken order' still determines the terms of engagement. Underlying notions of value hold sway over how different people in the environmental movement interact to address concerns of environmental degradation. Baviskar shows how a dispute over assignation of ecological value causes a rift in Sangath, an activist group in Alirajpur, part of Madhya Pradesh in India. In Alirajpur, middle class activists work with a local *adivasi* (tribal) community to protect the latter's tradition of forest foraging and sustenance. While the *adivasi* seek autonomy and respect from the dominant groups around them, the middle class activists focus on the environmental sustainability aspect of *adivasi* tradition. They object to the *adivasi* seeking political power to gain control of all the resources in the area, including roads and mining. The *adivasi* struggle to subsist on land that is increasingly encroached, they take on exhausting wage labour to supplement their household needs and are subjected to violent and racist abuse. While the middle class activists tell them to focus on the ecological and social value of their subsistence living, the *adivasi* imagine the former's relative luxury, back 'home' in the city, even if they live an austere life while with the *adivasi*. The nuances of power show how the activists need the *adivasi* to participate in their own activism but at the same time

try to insist on the particular direction of the *adivasi's* emancipation. This causes consternation among the *adivasi*. During a dispute over the right of the activists to speak at tribal forums, the Sangath president expresses these concerns, “The wounds that the so-called upper class people had inflicted upon us and are inflicting on us even today, are still fresh. That is why we can doubt you without a qualm: where do these alleged well-wishers want to take our society? The tradition of using our society any way you like must be ended” (Baviskar 2004:312).

The ‘market’ as a mediator in social relationships extends its reach beyond matters of financial exchange. In this instance, the ecological value of the forest is incorporated into market thinking. The activists see it as a ‘resource’ to be protected, with the *adivasi* as guardians of that resource on behalf of the wider community. However, these notions of ecological value do not address the underlying assumptions of the right to determine one’s future, the freedom to choose. The *adivasi* are expected to engage in the protest movement within acceptable parameters defined by the middle-class activists, whose own situation is still mediated through the capitalist social arrangement to which they can ‘escape’ at any time.

The situation of the *adivasi* sits in contrast to the Colombian and Bolivian communities discussed by Taussig. He shows how reciprocity plays an important role in social cohesion with the plantation and mining communities representing commodity exchange as reciprocation with the devil. In Madhya Pradesh, the relationship between the *adivasi* and the activists is mediated through a power dynamic that also obliges a particular type of reciprocity. The

activists bring their time and attention to the situation of the *adivasi* in relation to environmental sustainability. The reciprocation expected is for the *adivasi* to fit the imagined model of forest protectors.

In this way the forest acts as a heterotopia. It reveals the clash between irreconcilable ways of being and it brings to light the utopian idea of value assignation. By determining an arbitrary and external value to the forest as an *ecological* resource to be protected, the middle class activists reduce the autonomy of the individuals involved. Their assumption of the right to assign value is drawn from their capitalist background. It has a totalitarian effect, demanding others to fit into a particular model of engagement for a particular space, and how that space should be defined.

#### *The co-option of value*

Brosius finds a similar delicate balance between power and perspective in his analysis of the Sarawak protest movement (Brosius 2004). The Penan community in Sarawak on the Malaysian territory of Borneo have seen their native forest destroyed by loggers over the past 50 years. Their situation was brought to international attention by a Malaysian NGO, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM - Friends of the Earth Malaysia) and rendered media friendly through a charismatic Swiss artist, Bruno Manser and images of the Penan and their landscape. This contributed to the development of 'international public concern' and the destruction of rainforests as a key theme of environmental sustainability in the early 1990s. Western NGOs became involved in a campaign to help the Penan, as did Hollywood celebrities, British royalty, musicians and politicians such as Al Gore. What began as a clear view of unfair destruction of a

community's habitat however, soon became mired in a muddle of opposing perspectives. The Malaysian government and media accused the Western NGOs of practising neo-colonialism and challenged their interference when the West causes so much environmental degradation. SAM came to endorse this position particularly when Western activists took part in demonstrations against their wishes. The protest eventually leads to international negotiations and the Sarawak state has recently declared large areas as a national park. However the Penan community now have to negotiate their rights in relation to principles of conservation (Anderson 2003). Meanwhile, as Western attention retreats scalded by the accusations of environmental imperialism, the power the Penan gained through their involvement also dissipates.

The Sarawak forest acts here as a heterotopia where an international community of interests collide and create a situation that reflects something different from the visions that initiate the engagement. The space created offers insight into the possibilities and potential of the anti-capitalist movement but also how inflections of power can distort proceedings. Just as the capitalist hegemony dominates, so too can Western activists whose position within capitalist societies compromises their oppositions. Their arguments are always mediated through their own lifestyles that prop up the very corporations they oppose. From the planes that fly them to the forests, to the media that carries images of their protests, to the timber on which they sit, sleep and shelter under.

This situation has parallels with Venkatesan's claim that the different craft interests in India come together as a heterotopia (Venkatesan forthcoming). She uses Foucault's analysis of the mirror, which he describes as 'placeless places'.

Foucault argues that the mirror functions as a heterotopia, acting as the location, the receptacle but also the medium through which relations are represented. It reflects a manifestation of the relations but not the relations themselves. For Venkatesan, the mirror reflects the network of partly conflicting craft interests as a cohesive 'craft industry'. While some participate actively in this reflection, others are less sure. "Those who can 'talk the talk', and 'work the image' are imaged clearly in the mirror. Those who are unable or unwilling to do so retreat to the margins even as the things they make find their way into the image." (Venkatesan forthcoming). The forests of the Kalimantan Mountains, the Alirajpur community and the Sarawak region therefore represent a mirror for the different interest groups involved in their preservation. The forest exists and yet is the medium through which people project their aspirations for the environment, for wealth, for sustainability, for community. Some people adapt to the new capitalist regime by participating in the resource extraction and others adapt by redefining the notion of value. However, those who do not wish to participate in the capitalist matrix, risk being sidelined and losing out altogether.

Civil society works to challenge capitalist hegemony therefore but it struggles to escape it altogether. Instead capitalism morphs to encompass concerns over issues such as environmental degradation or social disruption. While the Sarawak protest succeeded in broadening a capitalist focus out to define the land as property in non-financial terms i.e. as a nature reserve, the focus remains on property. The idea of the forest as containing items of commercial value transfers directly to ideas of the forest retaining ecological value (see Escobar 1998, Ulloa 2005). This bypasses the autonomy of the local community and their right to reinstate their own ideas of how to consider their living environment.

When attempts to include the local community in the definition of the forest's future, if the dynamics are negotiated through capitalist matrix, power inevitably rests with those who have control over the financial means for resolution. The Philippines has lost 60% of its forest in 70 years causing soil erosion, landslides, flooding and huge social upheaval. A substantial injection of international funds seeks to address these problems but the projects financed become subject to the requirements of the funders, much like the 'development' that overwhelms Africa. These specifications combine with local attempts to work regeneration to personal and political advantage to create a situation which pushes out the interests of the indigenous communities. Braganza describes how a pilot project in the small town of Mati in Claveria, a province of Misamis Oriental, Mindanao was set up by an incoming NGO who formed a co-operative of local interests. Lowland farmers interested in how the forest could be exploited and used to service their crop protection needs, quickly dominated the co-operative. The ideas of indigenous highland community, Higoa-nous, were sidelined by the demands of the lowlanders, despite project objectives that focused on indigenous communities (Braganza 1996).

The visions therefore that have the most chance of being fulfilled are usually those held by people in power, and in capitalist societies, those in power are those who control the most property and thus who have the greatest wealth, be they states, companies or people. Capitalism will accommodate the demands of a community, where profitable or convenient, but if alternative propositions cannot be incorporated into the capitalist ideal, they are eliminated or ignored.

The categorisation of land, resources and people in terms of abstract value to be acquired and exchanged extends therefore from the extraction and commodification of goods to be sold for financial gain, to the commodification of landscape into a resource to be enjoyed. From South America to Africa, India, Indonesia and Malaysia, capitalist emphasis on abstract value assignation participates in social and environmental degradation. However, the consequences are not acknowledged as an indication of the utopian nature of this emphasis. Instead capitalist principles are adapted and extended, used to try and achieve modernisation or protect landscapes. Capitalism extends its reach rather than retreating. It is through this “ruthless ideological pressure, in a state of continuous mobilisation” (Walicki 1997:7) that the totalitarian nature of capitalism is again revealed.

While Sangath and the Sarawak protests try to create a ‘space of alternate ordering’, the informants stay within the acceptable parameters of capitalist hegemony. They become, after all, grafters widening the definition of value to include the land and the local people as participants in the exchange process, or as ‘assets’. However the idea of value itself as something that can be assigned in an external and arbitrary way, negotiated and decided by people outside the local communities affected, remains. The ‘total social fact’ demanded by reciprocal exchange, such as accommodating the wishes of the local people, reveals a debt left unsettled.

### *Aspiring after Capitalism*

Within the boundaries of the capitalist hegemony therefore which ignores or mitigates environmental degradation and overlooks social disruption, capitalism

is hailed as a success offering 'material wealth for all' or at least, 'wealth if you can get it'. It contains within it the promise of a better world, through the assumption that wealth=happiness, and fosters love proposes Illouz (1997). The wealth and comfort of Westerners depicted in mass communication to the world at large represents this utopia, hiding the reality of life for many living in the West as well as the South.

American 'Soap operas' on television are perhaps the most insidious form of utopian imagining, with dramas depicting 'real lives' that even in crisis are comforting and aspirational - *Brothers and Sisters*, *Friends*, *Desperate Housewives* to name just a few. "Soap time is *for* and *of* pleasure, the time of consumption, of a collectivised and commercially induced American Dream" (Porter 1977:788). In these dream worlds, only bad people get hurt and everyone else is safe, warm and well dressed. Mass media is colonising the cultural and ideological sphere for communities who access it regularly and it offers a powerful narcotic representing an achievable utopia for all those who can afford it. (Spitulnik 1993, Hirschman and Thompson 1997).

This dominance of Western media, Schein argues, lures Chinese consumers in, promising closeness to the global community and a sense of equality. In her wide-ranging paper on 'imagined cosmopolitanism' she represents the experiences of the Miao minority in the Guizhou province as a paradigm for the challenges facing Chinese people navigating Western capitalist and Chinese state authority. She compares the Miao's desire for consumption with the cargo cults occurring mainly in the Pacific during the 1910s-1950s and characterised by "the desire for wealth, some sort of collective behaviour, and the use of

supernatural means to achieve collective ends” (Schein 1999:352). Then islanders aspired after the “fantastic wealth of the Whites” and when it failed to accrue through wage labour, they resorted to ritualised behaviour, some features of which were sexual in nature.

Chinese people were rapidly exposed to Western capitalism in “an abrupt, friction-ridden encounter with the engulfing market-driven economic mode” (Schein 1999). Consumerism descended on the communities through media and state endorsement. At the same time, people began to develop distinct identities, both individually and as “parts of discrete culturally defined communities – ethnic, regional, national etc”. Consumption therefore became an opportunity to express one’s identity. The Miao community have access to Western print and visual media, but little chance of physically browsing, let alone buying Western goods. One informant, Chang dismisses the Western-style outfits she has already made in favour of an outfit she wants to copy out of a Western magazine. She has scoured the markets looking for a fabric in exactly the same colour as the one worn by the woman in the magazine. The detail of her imitation becomes more important than the object itself because, Schein argues, it is the sense of equality that she aspires after, rather than (as well as) a garment to wear.

Ritualised consumption therefore becomes the utopia through which people mediate their sense of identity. Schein argues that this yearning for goods actually demonstrates a continued socialist attempt at solidarity. The inability to buy cleaves the disparities between communities both within China and beyond, so aspirations to consume become attempts to ameliorate such disparities. The

Chinese yearn for a better, alternative, *egalitarian* way of living apparently manifested by the 'perfect' Western capitalist society. While in *Urban Amazons*, the feminists centred gender and sexuality round solidarity, in China, the Miao use consumerism in a similar way.

It is here that capitalism engulfs the 'spaces of alternate ordering'. The dream bridge leading to equality is constructed with capitalist bricks. All bridges, all utopias become facilitated through the capitalist matrix. So Africa can be developed using the free market, the environment can be protected using the idea of ecological value, equality can be achieved through consumption.

#### *An allegory*

Ortner's account of climbing in Mount Everest provides an interesting allegory that brings together utopian thinking and how the capitalist perspective comes to dominate different ways of living (Ortner 1999). Ortner traces the development of the tradition of mountain climbing from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Driven by Western ambitions, at first climbing Everest was represented as achieving an extraordinary feat for mankind. When this was achieved, different climbers claimed they were climbing Everest for their country, their gender, their race. A film documentary follows Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind man up the mountain (Brown 2003). When no more firsts are available, eventually climbers conquer the mountain just for themselves. Although people might climb together, they climb for their own sense of achievement.

Similarly, the development of utopia began with dreams of solidarity and now rests on introspective self-determination. Just as climbing Everest has entered

the capitalist realm as a mainly commercial affair, with wealthy Westerners paying large sums to be led up the mountain by experienced climbers; so too environmental and social activism could be described as a luxurious pursuit for 'property owning citizens', who fly in to 'rescue' beleaguered communities in the South, using resources gained in a capitalist environment.

Ortner also details the differing perspectives between the Western climbers and the Sherpas and shows how Western conception takes priority. When climbing for one's country was the emphasis among the Western community, it was important to the early Western climbers that the Sherpa community were also climbing for the challenge rather than financial reward, at the time deemed an inappropriate incentive. They ignored or overlooked the pragmatic incentives that brought the Sherpas into climbing. In Sherpa communities, attempts to avoid excessive division of land for inheritance meant that younger sons were 'extra' to the nuclear family units. They were required to find work elsewhere to support themselves. This tradition combined with a competitive social environment and a reluctance to carry fellow Sherpas' loads for money, to lead young Sherpa men into climbing Everest for pay, despite its many dangers.

Early Sherpa guides and porters describe a combination of curiosity, pride and financial need that incentivised them to work for the emerging Western climbing community. The climbers however, focused on the *generosity* of the Sherpas, another tradition of the community. They interpreted a Sherpa's willingness to support and help other climbers beyond their prescribed duties as an indication of their enthusiasm for climbing itself. They overlaid their priorities and interests

onto the Sherpas and interpreted the latter's behaviour according to these preconceptions.

The Westerners were also largely indifferent to the religious importance of mountains to the Sherpas. The mountains were the abode of Sherpa gods who needed to be kept happy if "things are to go well for humanity" (p127). The Sherpas therefore want to avoid pollution of the mountain, caused by acts such as killing animals. For over 50 years, they expressed these concerns to Western climbers asking not to kill animals for dinner on the mountain. However few of the Western employers respected the Sherpas' wishes. Similarly, while the mountains are responsible for many deaths among the Western climbing community, the losses are within the context of climbing relationships and the accepted risks of pursuing the sport. On the other hand, Sherpas lose fellow climbers but also close friends, co-villagers and kinsmen on the mountain. Death affects wider social relationships, resonating through the whole Sherpa community. Many Westerners fail to recognise this extended social impact of death, considering the Sherpa reactions to death as fatalist and impassive. Ortner outlines the complexity behind Sherpas concerns about death as a combination of not wanting to show fear, professionalism in their role as guides and religious tradition. It seems that the Westerners, if not wilfully then casually disregarded or misinterpreted the attitudes and behaviour of the Sherpas.

Haraway's polemic punning on vision, as she reclaims the "sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into the conquering gaze from nowhere", reminds us that views come from some place (Haraway 1991:188). Westerners' painful lack of regard for the cultural needs of the host

community is similar to the capitalist disregard for different methods of exchange. Whether it is for enjoyment or profit, the interests and demands of Western incomers always seems to take precedence. Worse, the interlopers shape their perceptions of the communities to suit. Thus the Sherpas were not interested in money when the Western climbers wanted to see them as compatriots in climbing. Later when financial exchange becomes normalised and indeed Western climbers are accepting payment to lead others up the mountain, the insistence on defining Sherpa motivations as pioneering rather than financial, disappears. It is this lack of sensitivity to difference and disregard for others' alternatives that leads capitalist hegemony into totalitarianism by stealth.

### **The anti-capitalist movement: A real alternative to capitalism?**

“Anti-capitalism, then, begins with a commitment to the idea that capitalism cannot produce societies fit for all or even most of the people who live in them, and follows with a commitment to a realistic, achievable alternative” (Myers 2002:33). These alternatives proliferate among a “loose coalition of associations, affinity groups, revolutionary cells, unions, and civic and political organisations” (Brady 2002:58), to which I would add the ideas of unaffiliated individuals, activists such as myself or ‘celebrity activists’ such as Starhawk, Naomi Klein and George Monbiot. This resistance movement is a true heterotopia, with irreducible differences and contradictory but complimentary perspectives. Its ‘unspoken order’ is indeed its very opposition to capitalism and its strength lies in an ability to define its own terms of engagement, without promoting one particular alternative way of life but many. An influential figure in the anti-capitalist movement, Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN, the Zapatista National

Liberation Army in Mexico, argues that “non-hierarchical decision making, decentralised organising and deep community democracy” combined with free spaces will eventually create counter-powers to the state “simply by *existing* as alternatives” (Klein 2002:98, my emphasis).

These many alternatives and their contradictory nature are demonstrated by Kingsnorth, as he travels the world visiting movements from the ‘Church of Stop Shopping’ in New York to the challenges facing the ANC government in South Africa caught up in demands of a global economy (Kingsnorth 2004). His book is an entertaining read that captures the randomness of the movement where people meet by chance and make connections across wide gulfs of difference. Preconceptions and misunderstandings abound and yet there is still this strong sense of collaboration, of a determination to reduce a social emphasis on profit and wealth generation for the few.

During his time in Papua, Kingsnorth tries to meet a pre-arranged contact, Amunggur who turns out to have fled the country escaping the Indonesian authorities. Instead, while asking around, Kingsnorth meets Galile, Amunggur’s cousin. Papua is rich in resources and in the 1970s was invaded by the Indonesians who refused to accept the liberation promised to the Papuans by the departing Dutch colonisers. The same Suharto regime that supported logging companies in the Kalimantan Mountains, used force to facilitate mining in Papua by multinationals such as Rio Tinto and Freeport. The companies have extracted millions of dollars worth of ore such as gold and copper with little material benefit to the local communities. Galile arranges for Kingsnorth to see the Freeport mine

and meet Goliar Tabuni, a member of the armed wing of the Papuan freedom movement, OPM.

During the meeting, inspired by Rambo and the British bombings of Afghanistan, Tabuni asks Kingsnorth and his friend Steve if they could supply some guns. Steve explains that they can only help them with words and raise international awareness of their plight, which Tabuni readily accepts. Kingsnorth also meets with Willy Mandowen, a leading figure in Presidium, a non-violent lobby group for independence. Willy has different ideas about freedom, also partly drawing on American media imagery. He outlines how his vision for Papuan future is to 'localise globalisation' by developing Papua in context according to the needs of the community. Unlike Tabuni, Willy's group is funded by multinationals who want to ensure continued access to Papua if it gains independence.

Kingsnorth, Mandowen, Tabuni and Galile all share an opposition to the current status of extractive capitalism in Papua as stealing resources from the local people. However they differ on the nature of the opposition, let alone possible solutions. While some anti-capitalists might be grafters, trying to change capitalism from within, others are working towards a completely different future. It is through their insistence that their alternative way of living is not one that they proscribe for everyone, that they resist the utopian drift into totalitarianism.

## Conclusion

“And what about those people who accumulate superfluous wealth, for no better purpose than to enjoy looking at it? Is their pleasure a real one or merely a form of delusion?” (More 1965 [1516]:75)

Imagined futures arch as dream bridges out of current life, promising alternatives. People set off in search of their ideals only to find that they never arrive, as the chimera moves tantalisingly out of reach. More looked up out of 16<sup>th</sup> century England with its oppressive court and autocratic king, to imagine an alternative, egalitarian world. Much like Rousseau’s focus on property acquisition as the cause of social ills (Rousseau 1984 [1758]), More identified a desire for material wealth as a key prohibitor to a safe and just community. Five hundred years later, the anti-capitalist movement chants a similar refrain.

More’s *utopia* was part of a discourse that inspired revolutionary action over the 20<sup>th</sup> century but its practice seems to always result in totalitarianism. Even when attention turns to more localised and individual aspirations based on preference, the same conflict emerged over definitions and indecision.

Capitalism meanwhile endures as a ‘grand utopian vision’ disappeared as such by its global hegemony. It promises wealth for all through limitless resource extraction and production without negative environmental and social consequence. Capitalist ideas of defining value in an arbitrary way have extended from commodification of goods to commodifying ecological and social value. The difference between the court of King Henry VIII of England and capitalist rhetoric of today is that material, environmental and social wealth is not

offered to a privileged few but glitters in the distance for everyone, if only they can reach out and capture it for themselves.

Yet these promises are innately unachievable: there is no wealth for all, as Tabuni from Papua sees clearly through the impact on his community of corporate greed propped up by state endorsed violence; there is no extraction without consequence as demonstrated by the Colombian plantation workers and Bolivian tin miners who associate capitalist activity with the Christian devil and experienced by the Dayaks whose living environment is literally removed from beneath their feet; autonomy and 'development' has not come via the free market, as evidenced by people on the African continent. While attempts to extend the notion of value to protect planetary resources and people are to be commended, these solutions serve just to perpetuate capitalist hegemony. In China, the latest country to 'embrace' capitalism, consumerism becomes an aspirational source of equality, as capitalism itself becomes utopia.

Thus capitalism reduces the social field by defining and then imposing uniform parameters against which all relations are developed. Through the commodification of land, resources and people, and an emphasis on their acquisition, capitalism denies space and opportunity to explore other ways of living. It prohibits the very freedom sought through free market economics. In this way, it is totalitarian in nature.

The anti-capitalist movement, aimed so directly at the heart of the issue but at the same time emphasising the plurality of alternative autonomies, is the latest counter-hegemonic challenge. As an entity, it tries to avoid the capitalist net by

focusing on being its opposite - a dichotomy of harmonious discord, unlike the interrupting, corrupting, disruption of capitalism, which impacts on communities rather than collaborating with them. Anti-capitalism challenges capitalism's power by making new terms for definition, creating spaces and alternatives that range from ecotopias, to Marxist propositions, to anarchy. Some are utopian, others are avowedly anti-utopian but they offer hope for the diminishment of capitalist hegemony simply by existing.

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