This essay will examine the relationship between the capitalocene, coloniality, and theology through the political philosophy of John Locke. I will illustrate that Locke’s labour theory of property is a key feature of orienting global colonial-capitalist value relations in the long-sixteenth century towards labour productivity via a colonial plantation model. Specifically, I will examine the colonial and theological filiations of his labour theory of property and locate it as a constitutive feature of abstract social nature, that is, the knowledge regimes and practices that identify, measure and survey human and extra-human natures as externalized sources of labour-power, food, energy, and raw materials.

However, while I locate Locke’s labour notion of land appropriation as constitutive feature of abstract social nature, I argue his theory is not reducible to a singular materialist logic of capital accumulation. Rather, it was co-produced by Protestant theology and the colonial logics of British empire vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The three vectors of abstract social nature characterized by linear time, flat space and externalized nature are not simply transposed onto “empty” natures for capitalist accumulation, but are rather continually re-made through eclectic and historically contingent economic, cultural, social, theological and intellectual sites of articulation. Abstract social nature, as a result, can be understood as a flexible discursive praxis that is continually (re)produced through shifting and interwoven registers of global capitalist accumulation, colonial productions of human difference and theology. The world-ecology perspective is particularly useful for bringing in

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1 York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J1P3, zahir.kolia@hotmail.com
questions of coloniality and theology because of its focus upon constitutive knowledges and practices of externalizing human and non-human natures for colonial-capitalist expansion and accumulation.

To date, Locke’s theory of property has been largely circumscribed by two main frames of analysis; first, the socioeconomic frame that situates his thought as an economic justification for English empire. This frame locates Locke’s theory of property as emerging from individualist property rights, capitalist accumulation and self-interest shaped by the relationship between mercantilism and incipient capitalist relations.iii

The second major frame focuses upon Locke’s moral sensibilities shaped by Protestant theology and how his articulations of property are wedded to the Christian natural law tradition. This frame emphasizes Locke’s belief in natural law as a divine structure linked to the intrinsic will of God’s design, God’s workmanship that authorizes human equality, and the ethical commitment for the common good over the hording of individual property.iv On the one hand, the socioeconomic frame that suggests Lock’s theory of property is predicated upon individual self-interest and unrestrained acquisition of property and wealth. On the other, the theological frame emphasizes the divinely authorized natural law tradition of bounding individual self-interest and accumulation to a moral duty of serving others and maintaining common grant.

This paper will situate the socioeconomic and theological registers of Locke’s theory of property with the decolonial concept of coloniality and world ecology concept of abstract social nature as an alternative to the notion that these two domains are in opposition. I will illustrate that Locke’s labour theory of property via the plantation model was, in part, produced in opposition to the dominant mercantile economic doctrines that shaped English imperialism as well as Spanish, Dutch, French and Portuguese maritime imperialist paradigms. However, rather than reducing Locke’s thought to an economic justification for the theft of resources and territory, I will highlight the constitutive role of Protestant theology for the production of his theory of property. Hence, I will not reduce the theological to an ideological justification for a deeper underlying materialist motivation that underpinned imperialism and capitalism; instead, I will argue these two registers are entangled. I will argue that Locke’s theory of property is an exemplary formation of abstract social nature that was dependent upon a) the production of the individuated self-owning body through Protestant theological notions regarding the self-governing and inward looking subject; b) casting Indigenous people as incapable of sovereign self-ownership through theologically inscribed discourses of human difference (race); and c) the de-mediation of transcendent forms of extra-human agency from land, which was an epistemological pre-condition for enabling the colonial expropriation of territory from Indigenous people.

This paper will be split into three principal sections. First, I will examine Locke’s theory of property as it relates to formulating a defense of an English style plantation system in opposition to other colonial maritime powers. Second, I will also examine how Locke, in order to authorize English colonial possession of the Americas, was also informed by the Protestant Christian notion of de-mediating extra-human agencies from land. Third, how a disenchanted and externalized conception of nature is necessary for a cartographic regime of identifying, mapping, quantifying, and enclosing land for a plantation model vis-à-vis the colonial-capitalist system of accumulation.
Before addressing the particular domains of Locke’s theory of property, I want to briefly sketch out the importance of the world ecology approach in relation to the decolonial notion of coloniality and its attendant register of theology. My aim is to suggest that the capitalocene argument of world ecology, in directing attention to the epistemological registers concerning abstract social nature and symbolic regimes, are domains that decolonial theory has also been grappling with. In a very broad sense, decolonial approaches examine the heterogeneous and interwoven domains of the colonial-capitalist global system of power organized by an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge and cosmology above non-Western knowledge and cosmology.

Like decolonial theory, the capitalocene approach does not locate its analysis of the modern world system, and corollary modern ecological transformations, from a two centuries view popularized by the approach of the Anthropocene. This perspective suggests that origins of modernity and modern environmental changes are traceable to shifts that took place primarily in England during the nineteenth century; namely, the industrial revolution. The privileged sites of examination, besides its Eurocentric focus upon internal processes unique to the European experience, concern the reliance upon combustible organic materials and industrial technologies, while central agent is held to be the Anthropos: humanity as undifferentiated category. Critics of the Anthropocene approach argue that it fails to account for complex streams of human, cultural, material and ideational dimensions of differentiation organized by relations of power linked to global colonial-capitalist accumulation.

Jason Moore, for instance, challenges the Eurocentric methodological erasers of the Anthropocene approach and shifts the location of analysis from the nineteenth century industrial revolution and undifferentiated humanity to a relational historical approach indexed by the rise of capitalist civilization in the long sixteenth century (1450-1640). For Moore, the Anthropocene occludes the historical conditions of possibility for transforming and appropriating global human and non-human natures prior to the emergence of technological rationalities and resource dependency schemas.

The capitalocene approach shifts the conceptual terrain away from the erasures of the Anthropocene towards a longue durée of five hundred years whereby humans do not simply act upon nature, but develop through nature. For Moore, the antecedents of early modern capitalism and modern ecological transformations are found in a complex web of relations between power, capital and production. For instance, he highlights the shift from value relations from land productivity to labour productivity and radical landscape transformations of after the Black Death of 1450. Moore further draws attention to the main organizing principal of capitalism, which is based upon a fundamental separation of society and nature indexed by the Cartesian mind-body dualism. No other civilization, Moore suggests, has been organized upon this fundamental capitalist sensibility exemplified by Descartes dictum, “to make ourselves as it were the masters and possessors of nature.” By highlighting the sensibility of mastery of nature, Moore traces the antecedents of capitalism in the historical dimensions of accumulation by appropriation and abstract social nature: the knowledge systems, practices and sensibilities that continually identify cheap natures. Moore poses the question,

Are we really living in the Anthropocene, with its return to a curiously Eurocentric vista of humanity, and its reliance on well-worn notions of resource- and technological-determinism? Or are we living in the Capitalocene, the historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital?
The main intervention, or supplement, from a decolonial approach concerns how the endless global accumulation of capital organized by the Cartesian dualism of mastery over nature and abstract social nature imbricates with the constitutive domain of coloniality. Consequently, Bikrum Singh Gill, drawing from decolonial thinkers Enrique Dussel and Nelson Maldonado Torres suggests that Cartesianism is underpinned by a sensibility of conquest traced to Hernan Cortez’s notion of the conquering Ego. Hence, from this perspective, an examination of the modern world system cannot assign priority to an economic system whereby the extraction of surplus value and world-scale accumulation of capital alone determine behaviours of major social and institutional actors.

From a decolonial perspective, the capitalocene is necessarily about connected global histories because the emergence of early modern capitalism is co-produced through colonial processes of territorial expropriation, resource extraction and labour exploitation related to the colonization of the non-European world and slavery. In this regard, a racial hierarchy organizes the different forms of human and non-human natures that are articulated to global capitalist accumulation. For instance, coercive labour is designated primarily to the periphery inhabited by non-European peoples while free wage labour is assigned to the core. Moreover, a global gender hierarchy is also organized by race whereby women of European origin are assigned higher status and access to resources than racialized women of non-European origin. Ramon Grosfoguel states,

The idea of race organizes the world’s population into a hierarchical order of superior and inferior people that becomes an organizing principle of the international division of labor and of the global patriarchal system. Contrary to the Eurocentric perspective, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and epistemology are not additive elements to the economic and political structures of the capitalist world-system, but an integral, entangled, and constitutive part of the broad entangled "package" called the European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.

Hence, my discussion thus far is an attempt to gesture towards the need to bring together questions of world ecology, coloniality and theology as co-produced points of power, or “plural points of enunciation”. Doing so reorients our understanding of the colonial-capitalist world system, and its material and epistemic inscriptions of violence beyond monological frames of analysis that reduce complex relations of power and circuits of appropriation to a singular undifferentiated humanity and reductionist couplet of coal and steam. By drawing attention to the historically contingent character of the colonial-capitalist world system one can examine the circulation of multiple co-dependent vectors of people, goods, technologies, institutions and beliefs.

In attending to the relationship between world ecology, coloniality and theology, it is not an attempt to fetishize the fragmentary, partial and ludic nature of the colonial-capitalist world system, but to productively think through the tensions and locations of divergence between different analytical and methodological frameworks. Consequently, this paper, in part, poses the question of how a world ecology framework can be enriched by thinking about the constitutive co-dependent domains of coloniality and theology and visa-versa without assuming that different respective frames of analysis can be subsumed into the other. Combining the ecological, colonial and theological through an integrated and co-produced approach it can index the relationship between a) large-scale and global dimension of colonial-capitalist accumulation; b) the colonial power formations and organizing logics of human difference that invalidate Indigenous cosmologies, knowledges and practices concerning human/nature relations; and c) the role played by individual actors, namely Locke, regarding his
personal religious sensibilities and how they came together through bounded sites of articulation concerning abstract social nature.

**Locke’s Labour Theory of Property:**

Instead of attempting to elucidate Locke’s whole theory of property in relation to the state of nature in this section, I shall outline the basic structure of his theory in order to set the parameters of the argument in this paper. Rather than focusing upon the details of his theory of property, I am most interested in revealing some dominant epistemological and ontological assumptions of coloniality for Locke during this juncture in order to better trace how his labour theory of property can be understood as a formation of abstract social nature. I will highlight two main domains: individual property accumulation and how theological notions of God’s common grant mediate it.

Locke starts his theory of property with a theological authorization that God provided the earth to all of mankind through common grant and he ties this to a particular reading of Genesis authorizing man to subdue nature, Genesis 1:28 states, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’” Locke states in his Two Treatises, …it is very clear, that God, as king David says…has given the earth to the children of men; given it to mankind in common…God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho’ all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state.

Locke, therefore, suggests that the earth has been given to all mankind in common – the main task he sets out for himself is to argue “how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.” In other words, Locke seeks to justify the appropriation of uncommodified natures despite the theologically authorized notion of common ownership. Consequently, while Moore traces early modern materialism through Cartesianism and Singh-Gill through the “Cortezian” conquering Ego, I suggest the traces of the sensibility concerning mastering nature can be traced to Biblical exegesis. However, I am not suggesting one can simply trace the antecedents of abstract social nature to singular origin of Genesis that maintains an uncontaminated full presence and finds expression through Cortez, Descartes and Locke. Rather, I am gesturing towards the complex genealogy of the knowledges, sensibilities and practices that come to entangle through contingent sites of articulation for mobilizing theological discourses for colonial-capitalist accumulation and expansion. In other words, in highlighting the theological citations that co-contaminate Cortezian, Cartesian and Lockean expressions of mastery over human and non-human natures, I am attempting to index the polyvalent and historically grounded points of enunciation that enabled their particular forms of thought to be made possible.

For Locke, one can appropriate what is held in common grant by all people through labour – this is known as the labour theory of property which underpins this vintage of primitive accumulation. Locke contends that because a person owns one’s body, they, therefore, own the product of labour generated by the body (I shall discuss the importance of this notion of the self-owning individual in
the final section). Consequently, a person can come to possess property from the common grant through the mixing of their labour and enclosing it through fixed boundaries; however, as a proviso, there still must ostensibly be enough property for others and it must be used and not go to spoil. As I will discuss below, this labour theory of property that is wedded to the fixed boundary/enclosure is a particular English symbolic regime of possession that was, in part, constituted in opposition to the other Atlantic colonial powers – each of whom each had differing prescriptions of colonial tenure.

Locke states,

God gave the world to Adam, and his heirs in succession, exclusive of all the rest of his posterity... Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property (emphasis original).  

As Kristen Shrader-Frechette suggests, the theologically authorized starting point of common ownership of land is often missed by various thinkers (Robert Nozick, Sibyl Schwartzenbach) who argue Locke offers a labour theory of value in order to provide a general schema concerning the acquisition of private property. Others suggest Locke seeks a specific justification for unowned and uninhabited land; further, some thinkers claim that Locke’s theory of property is based upon arguments of social utility, sufficiency and merit of personal labour. However, it is vital to contest this Eurocentric narrative and stress that Locke was not merely outlining a process of appropriating land that was not inhabited through notions of social utility, or recompense for hard work. Rather, Locke’s task is a combination of two interrelated processes to authorize colonial possession. First, to extinguish Indigenous conceptions and relations to land in order to authorize his theory of property; second, he seeks justify the enclosure of land via private ownership despite having clearly articulated that God has provided land for all “men” in common grant.

**Colonial and Economic Relationship to Locke’s Theory of Property:**

The contextual underpinnings of Locke’s conceptions of British empire concerning the Americas can be centralized around four main co-dependent domains: first, the reliance upon of travel writing of the New World. The second domain concerns metropole English economic political debates concerning the profitability of the plantation colonial model. The third domain is centralized around Locke’s commitment to establishing labour via cultivation as the basis for establishing natural right to land proprietorship in order to subsume natural law jurisprudence concerning prior occupancy held by Amerindians. The fourth domain concerns the role of Protestant Christian theology for establishing a notion of the self-owning body and evacuation of immaterial extra-human agencies from land vis-à-vis Indigenous conceptions.

1. **Colonial Travelogues and the Americas:**

Linking Locke’s philosophy to historical and political domains opens up investigations into some of his personal connections with various colonial institutions and the constitutive role they had in influencing his overall thought. For instance, recent scholarship has discussed his financial interest in the slave trade including monetary investments in the Royal African Company and the Company of Merchant Adventures, which was created to develop the Bahama Islands. Further he owned
thousands of acres of land in the province of Carolina and was the secretary to the Lord Proprietors of Carolina from 1668-75, secretary to the Council of Trade and Plantations from 1673-76, and commissioner of the Board of Trade from 1696-1700. Locke also co-drafted with his patron Lord Ashley the Carolina Constitution, and Hermon Lebovics suggest that his contemporaries in England considered him as one of the most knowledgeable men with regards to the colonies.\textsuperscript{xxii}

John Harrison and Peter Laslett have studied the books contained in Locke's personal library in order to assess the role of colonial travel literature in shaping his thought of the colonies. They published the contents of Locke's library and they listed 195 titles concerning voyages and travels, 80 devoted to geography and a voluminous 870 related to theology. Harrison and Laslett even sought to elucidate which books Locke may have read and consulted the most by examining Locke’s makeshift book markers constructed from old letters,

The presence of these markers shows that the work has been read and that something in it had to be remembered. Indications such as this, and all the evidence of Locke’s having actually read a volume, are commonest in his books of travel, exploration, and geography…Everyone who has had occasion to comment on Locke’s books has pointed out that works of this sort were the great strength of his collection. Here we can be quite certain, even without numbers of private libraries to compare with Locke’s, that the presence of 195 titles which can be called Voyages and Travel made it a very remarkable collection.\textsuperscript{xxiii}

The majority of the travel titles were related to voyages made by European explorers to the Americas. From these travel books, Barbara Arneil suggests, Locke derives much of his primary material for his notions of the state of nature and natural man. For instance, Sir Walter Raleigh’s History of the World, Samuel Purchas’s Pilgrims and Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations comprised some widely circulated travelogues in seventeenth century England.\textsuperscript{xxiv} The main point to be derived from gleaning some of the texts found in Locke’s library is to emphasize that his notions of the New World and its inhabitants were primarily generated from an existing discursive tradition of travelogues constituted by a historical colonial archive of representations concerning the savage.

2. English Political Economic Debates: Mercantilism and the Plantation Model:

The second major contextual location concerns Locke’s positions on English colonization of America that emerged through economic debates during the latter half of the seventeenth century in England. These debates relate to the opposition to plantation settlements from English proprietors and politicians who held economic interest would be best served by a colonial model that could yield faster returns on investment and not drain vital resources of the empire.\textsuperscript{xxv} Locke’s relationship with the production of colonial policy took place when various economic pressures weakened English interest in the mid seventeenth century. For instance, Britain sought to secure resources in order to finance their ongoing mercantile and maritime rivalries with the Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The main vehicle privileged by mercantilist doctrines was the overseas trading company, which was used by the British, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. These state owned companies that flourished in the mid seventeenth century were the principle entities that British metropolitan economic authorities felt should direct the growth of the metropole. The British trading companies were created by private brokers, but were closely affiliated to the state through joint stock capital, monopoly privileges granted through royal decree and state incorporation. This state-company
relationship operated in specially selected global zones in order to make sure state power was increased through overseas trade for the direct fiscal interest of the metropole.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Drawing from Mignolo and Dussel one can trace the historical antecedents of the English economic pressures vis-à-vis other mercantile rivals within a global-historical frame of analysis. For Mignolo, commercial trade circuits were emerging in the incipient mercantile economy as far back as between 1250 and 1350. However, he identifies key events that index the link between theology, imperialism and the justification for possession of space. First, as mentioned in chapter one is the \textit{Romanus pontifex} bull of 1455; the bull \textit{Inter caetera} of 1493; the Tratado de Tordesilla of 1497, which, by papal decree authorized “discovered” lands to be allocated to Spain and Portugal. Finally, the Spanish \textit{Requerimiento} of 1512 was read by authorities of the Castilian crown and church to Indigenous peoples of the Americas in order to license possession.\textsuperscript{xxvii} According to Mignolo, “These bulls clearly linked the Christian church with mercantilism and added a new and important element: the right of Christians to ‘take possession.’”\textsuperscript{xxviii} These proceedings, which link Atlantic commercial circuits with divine papal decree and territorial expropriation constitute the grounding for the emerging modern colonial-capitalist world system and the beginnings of competition for territorial expansion among emerging imperial powers.

The trading companies and the British state comprised a mutually co-dependent relationship: the companies were held to be the most lucrative financial institution while the companies relied upon the state for military and political support for the extraction of overseas wealth and to gain leverage over other maritime rivals. As Eli Heckscher and Partha Chatterjee suggest, the British overseas mercantile trading companies flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth century through a highly regulated fiscal-military nexus. As a result, many wars occurred among maritime rivals causing further strain upon the financial infrastructure of England.\textsuperscript{xxix}

Due to the intense rivalry between the maritime powers, the political economic climate did not allow much space for advancing arguments, such as Locke’s, concerning the investment in the plantation colonial model. Arneil suggests that in the late seventeenth century it was only a minority that viewed the colonization of the Americas via a plantation system as the answer to the economic crisis facing Britain. In fact, the majority of Britain’s economic elite saw the prospect of plantations as contributing the problem and widely denounced Locke’s arguments. For instance, Mun wrote in his widely read \textit{England Treasure by Forraign Trade} that support for the plantation model was a minority view, “This Position is so contrary to the common opinion, that it will require many and strong arguments to prove it before it can be accepted of the Multitude, who bitterly exclame when they see any monies carried out of the Realm.”\textsuperscript{xxx} The main concern that the majority of those who opposed plantation colonialism was due to the dominance of mercantile philosophy; consequently, it was feared that the colony would become an independent entity and compete with the core. England faced protracted wars with the other mercantile states and mercantilism’s central tenant was that trade directly benefit the mother country. For example, New England was viewed as a renegade colony that was competing with British interest.\textsuperscript{xxxi}

Further, the ability to maintain their military advantage against the Dutch and other navel mercantile powers was hampered by the Great Plague of 1665 and the great fire of London in 1666 which decimated the British economy. As a result of these economic pressures, the Americas were conceived by the majority of those with interest in the vitality of English empire as an abyss of loss revenue and hazard. During the 1670s, therefore, the colonization of the New World via the plantation model was ridiculed by British political pundits as an unattractive solution to the imperial aspirations
of the nation, and hardly a solution to immediate fiscal requirements. The plantation colonial model was held to be inefficient and draining during a juncture when trade was conceptualized as the best model for capital accumulation.xxxii

However, for a small number, including Locke, the New World held promise for the expansion of the empire’s sphere of influence and to increase revenue needed to quell its pecuniary problems. Locke’s writing can be located along with English economic writers Thomas Mun, Sir Josiah Child, and Charles Davenant, who defended against metropole skeptics of the plantation colonial model, “Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, most of England’s politicians were opposed to English settlements in America, because it was perceived to be a drain on English fortunes.”xxxiii For Arneil, Locke used his Two Treatises to support the development of the plantation model in America deploying supporting arguments from Child and Davenant in order to launch a robust defense of English colonialism in the Americas. Colonial policy was held to have been a particularly acute concern for Locke from 1668 to 1675 where colonial records from Carolina illustrate that he endorsed most correspondences between the Lord Proprietors and the Council in Carolina. Further, specific laws, such as the Temporary Laws of 1674 that were hand written by him, and, along with his patron Shaftesbury, he wrote the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina.xxxiv

With competition between the mercantile powers fierce, England lagged behind the Dutch in trade with the Americas. As a result, the House of Commons in 1667, the House of Lords in 1668, and the King in 1669 erected various committees to examine the decline in overseas trade and for possible solutions. Prominent among the figures who offered the plantation colony and settlement as the best solution to generating wealth and trouncing the Dutch and other maritime constituents were Mun, Davenant and Child.xxxv

While Mun was the first to propose the plantation model as the most suitable form of overseas expansion of British empire, Child provided voluminous expositions aimed at combating the hostile majority of public opinion that detracted from the idea. Child further argued that colonialism based upon agriculture was preferable over seeking to expand markets for the distribution of British manufactured goods, capital and labour intensive extractive industry, or outright conquest.xxxvi Child’s arguments concerning the superiority of English style farming vis-à-vis Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and French forms of colonial practice relates to what Patricia Seed names “rituals of possession.” Seed provides an important symbolic dimension to the political economic matrices of coloniality and allows us to further situate the emergence of Locke’s theories on property.

What becomes clear from these debates is that Locke was a key figure in shifting British systems of colonial-capitalist accumulation from mercantilism towards the plantation colonial model. Moreover, his plantation system did not follow a linear trajectory, but was being produced through contestations and negotiations concerning colonial expansion. His plantation model as such was not fully formed within England, in isolation from colonial and capitalist strategic processes, and simply diffused outward to the New World. In the next section I will examine the third major register that underpinned Locke’s theory of property, that is, establishing cultivation as the basis for a settler colonial claim of land proprietorship over the Americas.

3. Symbolic Regimes and the Enclosure of Common Land via Fixed Boundaries:

Seed suggests that analyses of empire usually conceptualize the five main powers as a single monolith of “Europe” and that each of these nations shared the same imperial logic of possession
over the New World. However, while the effects of death, enslavement, and expropriation carried out through acts of colonial violence can all be ascribed to the imperial logics that sustained their actions, they differed and had conflicting understandings concerning the discourses of “legitimate possession” over the New World. Seed examines the differences in colonial notions of establishing authority over the Americas through rituals, ceremonies, and symbolic systems – what Seed terms “rituals of possession.” Put into the conceptual vocabulary of world ecology, “rituals of possession” can be understood as the particular localized expressions of “symbolic regimes” that mobilize the uncommodified frontier as external sources of cheap natures within the global circuits of colonial-capitalist appropriation. As Moore states, “one of the first things great empires and states do is establish new ways of mapping, categorizing, and surveying the world.”

These strategic rituals included lodging the cross, banners, statements or coats of arms in the newly “discovered” frontier; moreover, there were procession marches, speeches, map sketches and handling the soil. Each act corresponded to a symbolic process concerning attempts to establish “legitimate authority” in order to acquire human and non-human natures in the New World. Seed argues these rituals of possession emerge through common national traditions related to the shared cultural practices of everyday life; language systems that constitute social meaning; and legal codes that provide the basis to authorize colonial ownership. Because each colonial power had a particular and shifting configuration of these national traditions, each colonial power articulated and substantiated the manner in which they felt possession could acquire legitimate license. Seed states,

While all Europeans aimed to establish their right to rule the New World, their means differed substantially…What Europeans shared was a common technological and ecological platform – trans-Atlantic ships bearing crossbows, cannon, harquebuses, horses, siege warfare, and disease, but they did not share a common understanding of even the political objectives of military action.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fierce debates and conflicts between each power centred on discursive assumptions concerning the validity of their own cultural and legal traditions that were used to authorize colonial tenure. Consequently, I intend to provide further context concerning how the symbolic regime of English of colonial possession via agriculture espoused by Mun, Child, Davinant and Locke emerges as a critique of the competing maritime powers.

The English rituals of possession can be gleaned from reports from Plymouth, Massachusetts and Jamestown, Virginia in the early seventeenth century. For instance, William Bradford and other settler accounts from the English describe the act of gazing upon the new land and subsequently deciding where to build a dwelling. This seemingly innocuous act of building a house, fence boundary or gardens in addition to planting and harvesting crops from cleared landscapes was the means through which the English generated their “authority” to possess land in the New World. These acts of establishing political license over space through the production of houses and planting is not insignificant because it contrasts with the Spanish, French, Portuguese and Dutch methods that deployed distinct symbolic acts of possession such as speeches, written pronouncements and symbolic forms of consent.

2 For Moore, symbolic regimes act as the strategic manifestation of abstract social nature. For more see, Jason Moore, “The Capitalocene Part I: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis,” Fernand Braudel Center and Department of Sociology, Binghamton University, 2014
For Seed, the English act of possession via establishing houses and boundaries is related to the geographic typology and demographic registers of the village structure of English society that is not found elsewhere in Europe. The island nation is without contiguous territory to expand and has a long tradition of the village settlement that can be documented in some instances—such as Devon and Lincolnshire—to have established habitation for over a thousand years. This structure of the village system with fixed objects, that is, dwellings and demarcated boundaries established legal right to space under English law.

In addition to houses, another kind of fixed object also created similar rights of possession and ownership. By fixing a boundary, such as a hedge around fields, together with some kind of activity demonstrating use (or intent to use, i.e., clearing the land), anyone could establish a legal right to apparently unused land. As with the house, mundane activity rather than permission, ceremonies, written declarations created ownership. The ordinary object—house, fence or other boundary marker—signified ownership.

The object boundary was a normative model of enclosure and ownership by English colonizers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and comprised some of the first laws passed in the colonies. For instance, the Rhode Island Quarter Court in 1639 passed legal ordinance for fences, hedges, posts or rails in addition to harvesting corn to establish legal boundary. Also, some of the first laws passed in Virginia concerned the production of fenced enclosures in the Virginia assembly in 1623 and was reiterated in the legislature in 1632, 1642 and 1646 and even included specified heights of four and a half feet. Similar legal requirements for fixed objects that established ownership was passed in the Connecticut River valley and in the Maryland colony.

There are some problems with Seed’s thesis. First, her account of rituals of possession suffers from a Eurocentric form of diffusionism discussed in chapter one; consequently, English acts of possession become centralized around a logic of “first in Europe and then outward.” This fails to account for the various acts of appropriation of Indigenous knowledge systems concerning relationships with land.

Second, Seed’s account concerning the national tradition of the village system established through the fixed boundary to establish political authority contrasts with Arneil’s account of the fierce opposition towards the plantation system by the English establishment. If land ownership established through the English style village were part of the dominant cultural ethos and semiotic structure in England, it would seem unlikely that the opposition to Mun, Child, Davenant and Locke would be so pronounced. However, the two explanations can be reconciled, perhaps, by suggesting that while mercantile economic doctrine set the dominant agenda for the method of overseas capital accumulation, the fixed dwelling and boundary characterize the particular localized rituals of possession, or symbolic regime. Moreover, the particular English style of establishing authority over

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3 Seed does attempt to illustrate the cross fertilization of knowledge by way of highlighting Portuguese appropriation of Arabic navigational knowledges and technologies, but unfortunately produces a very problematic Orientalist reading of Spanish appropriation of Islamic notions of *jihad*. For a discussion concerning how English rituals of possession, specifically how Locke’s labour theory of property were produced through appropriating Indigenous acts of planting and enclosures see Hsueh, Vicki, “Cultivating and Challenging the Common: Lockean Property, Indigenous Traditionalisms, and the Problem of Exclusion,” *Contemporary Political Theory*, 5, 2006
the New World were assumed to be superior and used by the proponents of the plantation against Spanish, French, Dutch and Portuguese symbolic regimes. Let us now move back to how some of Locke’s contemporaries framed these other ritual acts of colonial possession by the rival maritime mercantile powers.

Child argued that the methods of possession via trade, mining or conquest were inferior to the plantation based upon English style agricultural practices. For instance, he criticized the Dutch for their warlike posture and emphasis upon trade and the building of castles upon the coast in order to secure exclusive trading rights within the conquered space, and, further, for not making any improvements to the land by planting. Moreover, he lambasted the French for not making any discernable progress by planting and sowing crops, and, also he attacked the Spanish, “The English...have cleared and improved fifty plantations for one, and built as many houses for one the Spaniards have built.”

The Spanish emphasis upon surveying large areas of land in order to establish extractive mining projects was not conceptualized as beneficial to the national interests, but rather primarily served private capital gain. Also, grazing large sections of land and grazing cattle by was also discouraged because it was seen to facilitate inter-colonial trading networks within the Americas itself rather than promote trade between the metropole and the colony. Child and other English merchants employed within the farming sector argued that the establishment of export structures between the Americas and England would facilitate the growth of the navel and shipping capacities and therefore create more jobs and dependency networks than other models of labour. Child states,

Davenant, who argued that tilling and planting was the only form of securing legitimate title of possession, further supported Child’s economic arguments for the plantation. In developing his support for the plantation model, he juxtaposed the English with the despotic Muslim Turk for establishing title through conquest rather than through “Arts of Peace”, and further suggested that the search for gold undermined the vitality of the empire. Moreover, like Child, Davenant argued for the tilling and planting of land as the optimal form of labour to insure the dependency of the colony and to limit the colony from competing with England. He argued,

We see in the later section of the passage Davenant’s conceptual location with English discourses of possession, that is, the production of the fixed boundary by fences, erecting building and tilling land. Davenant articulated the distinction of English discourses of land proprietorship in opposition to other colonial modes of possession and production by way of setting up zones of manufacture that do not benefit the mother country. Similarly, Locke focused particular attention to Spanish forms of imperial expansion through a critique of conquest, railing against the disregard of human life and the
failure to “improve” the land rendered *terra nullius*. Along with Child, Locke contests Dutch and Spanish forms of conquest that he suggests is a “strange Doctrine”, in Locke’s *Some Considerations* he states,

> There are but two ways of growing Rich, either Conquest, or Commerce…no body is vain enough to entertain a Thought of our reaping the Profits of the World with our Swords, and making the Spoil…of Vanquished Nations. Commerce therefore is the only way left to us…for this the advantages of our Situation, as well as the Industry and Inclination of our People…do Naturally fit us.

Locke would also write to colonists in Carolina, “Neither doe we thinke it advantageous for our people to live by rapin and plunder which we doe not nor will not allow. Planting and Trade is both our designe and your interest and…shall lay a way open to get all the Spaniards riches.” As Mignolo reminds us, the condemnation for Spanish cruelty and greed articulated by the English cannot be separated from their own attempts to secure hegemony over the Atlantic, and the emerging capitalist-colonial world system. Mignolo states,

> The “Black Legend” of Spanish corruption, which the British initiated to demonize the Spanish Empire in a ploy to get a grip on the Atlantic economy during the seventeenth century, was part of a European family feud over the economic, political, and intellectual (in the general sense of accumulation and control of knowledge, including science and technology, of course) riches of the “New World.” Therein originates the *imperial difference* that would become widespread in the eighteenth century and shape the conception of “Latin” America.

The inter-imperial rivalry of the eighteenth century that produced new strategic formations for appropriating cheap natures – namely, the plantation colonial model – was a manifestation of the co-produced relationship between capitalism and coloniality because the pre-condition for advancing labour productivity within the commodity system depended upon expansion to new frontiers for appropriating uncommodified life/natures. In other words, the inter-imperial rivalry was directly constituted by the attempt to generate surplus capital from the expropriation of resources and labour from the overseas colonies.

Over the last several pages I have attempted to provide a detailed backdrop of the broader political and economic landscape of the seventeenth century that helps us to better contextualize Locke’s theory of property within a frame of world ecology and coloniality. Locke generates the right of possession via English notions of agricultural labour. As I have argued above, he develops his theory of property rooted in the plantation model in opposition to English detractors and in opposition to other colonial rituals of possession. Yet a closer reading of Locke’s Two Treatises suggests that his thought cannot be so centralized around a constellation of defending the economic viability and profitability of the plantation colonial model. Rather, if we analyze his theory in relation to both the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas and Locke’s religious commitments to Protestant Christianity, we can see how both domains inform each other. In the next section I will move to the fourth register of Locke’s thought in relation to coloniality, that is, the role of Protestant Christian theology in constituting his labour theory of property.
4. Locke and the Symbolic Regime of Protestant Theology and De-mediation of Extra-Human Agency:

My argument thus far centered on the broader political context of maritime colonial power, mercantilism and the specific symbolic regimes of the fixed boundary enclosure that helped to constitute Locke’s development and defense of the plantation model. Hence, unlike the French, Dutch, Portuguese or Spanish, the English farmer is the “‘industrious and rational’ being that, Locke claims, God gave the world.” However, in the largely materialist account offered above, the theological and embodied coordinates of Locke’s theory of property is largely subordinated to the economic registers of colonial-capitalist accumulation. In my reading, the limitation of focusing upon the political economic contexts of Locke’s theory of property is that does not adequately explain why Locke centralizes the body as the vital category for his value relation of labour productivity via appropriation, nor does it adequately explain the role of theology in mediating his notions of the body in abstract social nature.

In this section, I will examine how Locke’s theory of property, as a constitutive formation of abstract social nature, was informed by Protestant Christian notions related to the self-owning body and de-mediation of transcendent non-human agencies from land vis-à-vis Indigenous conceptions. This requires a three-fold process of inquiry into Locke’s embodied theory of property. First, for Locke, the acquisition of private property is centralized around the labour theory in which property is held to be possessed through what is produced by the labour of one’s body. The main ontological assumption within this formulation is that one owns one’s body, which, in my reading, is related to Protestant theological notions regarding the self-governing and inward looking subject. Second, and also related to Protestant Christian reading practices, is that in order to produce a direct relationship with the divine, it is necessary to de-mediate extra-human agencies from objects – such as land. For many peoples, land cannot be separated from immaterial transcendent forms of agency related to ancestors and the divine – for Locke land has no agency. Land was created by God, yes, but it can be alienated for private ownership by rational individuals to enter into the circuits of colonial-capitalist accumulation. Third, Locke’s production of the self-owning body simultaneously constructs a colonial representation that Indigenous people are incapable of corporeal self-ownership; they are not self-governing and hence not capable to use their body’s labour in order to acquire land. The Amerindian is permanently wedded to the state of nature and unable to move out of the past and into the future of civil society.

The Self- Owning Body, Protestant Theology and Abstract Social Nature:

In this section I will explore the embodied coordinates of abstract social nature through Locke’s notion of the self-owning body, that is, the notion of the body as property. Accordingly, I focus upon the link between Christian Protestant theology, the increased inward focus of religious belief, and the de-mediation of extra-human agencies from land, which for Locke creates the conditions for the appropriation of cheap natures into the global flows of colonial-capitalist accumulation.

How does Locke arrive at his unique conception of the self-owning body? This notion of the body as individual property has its lineage in readings of Platonic, and, later, Augustinian notions of inward reflexivity and care for the soul. Further, Locke’s notions of the self-owning body relate to a complex genealogy regarding Cortez’s conquering Ego and Descartes notions of the mind/body split. As Charles Taylor reminds us, during the juncture of the seventeenth century, a notion of the
self-owning body represented a significant epistemological departure from the dominant theocentric epistemological structure. As such, reason was defined through a schema of divine cosmic order, and, ontologically, the human was conceptualized as the property of God alone. However, what we find in the work of Locke, and other theorists of the seventeenth century, is the emergence of a conception of the human that exercises instrumental forms of control over the self and the surrounding world through a discourse of partial disengagement from heavenly provenance. Before the seventeenth century, the structure of the world was understood through divinely mediated relationships between man and society. Consequently, social hierarchies in addition to the king’s power, ecclesiastical authority and the natural world reflected God’s perfection and harmony. Hence, the epistemological conditions of abstract social nature characterized by Moore, that is, human conceptions of linear time and flat space emerge through transformations in spatio-temporality related to the political philosophy of Locke.

Accordingly, Locke’s notions concerning the self and embodiment were quite radical for his time. Concerning the body, he states:

Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property (emphasis original).

A crucial domain of Locke’s theory of property, therefore, is to be found in his notion of embodiment. In my reading, the notion of the self-as-property is derived from two related domains of his theory of epistemology and the Protestant notion of having sovereign direction over the self in matters of faith. For Locke, the notion of “no body having right but to himself” indexes a link between embodiment and Protestant Christian theological notions of powers of self-responsibility, individual consciousness, and sincerity in matters of faith.

Charles Taylor argues that Locke is an important thinker in the emergence of modern individuated subjectivity through his focus and subsequent development of inward reflexivity and disengagement – Taylor examines Locke’s theory of epistemology in order to illustrate these processes. In Locke’s Essay, he argues that our knowledge of the world is the product of syntheses of ideas we receive from sensation and reflection; however, due to our appetites, socially embedded customs and education these syntheses are generated without legitimate grounding or conscious awareness. Consequently, the ontological grounding of these syntheses appears to be solid and natural, yet, for Locke, they have not real validity. Because these conceptions are the mediums of all our thoughts, it is difficult to question them and stage a process of radical reflection concerning their foundations. Locke states that knowledge, generated by custom and reflection often “have, by prescription, such a right to be mistaken for deep learning and height of speculation, that it will not be easy to persuade either those who speak or those who hear them, that they are but the covers of ignorance, and hindrance of true knowledge.” For Locke, therefore, knowledge is not a priori, but rather is contingent upon socially produced forms of habituation and institutions such as educational and customary authority; however, through individual reflection the mind can suspend, detach, and reform them.

According to Taylor, Locke proposes a process of “demolition” through a radical form of disengagement in order to remove “some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.” Put differently, Locke suggests that one can suspend and then disengage from invalid forms of knowledge.
produced through the base passions, customs, and education so that true knowledge can be achieved. The significance of Locke’s theory of epistemology for Taylor is that he reifies the individual mind in a radical way for his time. Locke suggests that the mind has “a power to suspend the execution of any of its desires; and so all, one after another; is at liberty to consider the objects of them, examine then on all sides, and weigh them with other.”

The emphasis upon the processes of suspending, reflecting and demolishing preconceived notions as well as the subsequent reassembling of our conceptions of the world upon stable and genuine foundations of knowledge establishes the primacy of self-responsibility and individuated self-consciousness. Taylor states,

In effecting this double movement of suspension and examination, we wrest control of our thinking and outlook away from passion or custom or authority and assume responsibility for it ourselves. Locke’s theory generates and also reflects an ideal of independence and self-responsibility, a notion of reason as free from established custom and locally dominant authority.

For Locke authentic knowledge is generated through a process of reflective self-comprehension. His emphasis upon the role of disengaged reason and self-responsibility concerning knowledge emerges, in part, from Protestant theological arguments concerning a direct and unmediated relationship to the divine. As such, he was subject to the larger theological contestations of his time vis-à-vis perceptions of Catholic clerical authority, and their hegemonic grip over truth and knowledge. Seth states Protestant theology has a position of the “privileging of individual conscience, which imbued each Christian subject, possessed of reason, with the authority to gain access to and interpret the Word of God and his natural laws.” Consequently, Locke’s thought is constitutive of Protestant theological notions of personal adhesion, he states, “I have not made it my business, either to quit, or follow any Authority in the ensuing Discourse: Truth has been my only aim.”

For this reason, Locke often stages his conception of reason in terms of the opposition between freedom and bondage. His reading of Protestant theology emphasized that one cannot submit the inner spirit to the outward dictates of men – if one does, this creates a relation of slavery and not self-authorization. He states, for instance, “faith only and inward sincerity are the things that produce acceptance with God” and “liberty of conscious is every mans natural right” – in order to be truly sincere in matters of faith, therefore, one must have liberty of conscious. As we can see from the passages above, Locke’s process of individual self-remaking cannot be divorced from theological domains because it remains bound by the limits set out by God through natural law – he remains situated in the tradition of theological voluntarism aligned with the natural law tradition of Pufendorf and Grotius.

Locke continues to centralize individuated self-consciousness in his use of embodied metaphors of detachment. Locke makes use of thought experiments that attempt to illustrate that individual self-awareness is separate from the body. He asks the reader to consider the idea of a prince awaking in the body of a cobbler in order to index his conception of independent self-consciousness and individuated control over the body. Taylor states, “The stance of detachment generates the picture of ourselves as pure independent self-consciousness, which underpins and justifies this stance and is the basis of the radical promise of self-control and remaking it holds out.” Crucially, if we trace Locke’s theory of knowledge and individual remaking via detachment of self-consciousness from embodiment, we can trace Locke’s conception of the body as being a type of vessel, or property of the person. In other words, the body, because it is separated from consciousness, can be conceptualized as the property of the detached self-conscious subject. Locke carries this notion of the
body as property into his *Two Treatises* that I quoted earlier where he states, “every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself.”

Radhika Mohanram reads Locke’s conception of the body as reproducing a set of binary oppositions that finds its lineage in Cartesian mind/body split. While Mohanram does not deal with the theological dimensions of Locke’s thought concerning self-consciousness, she, like Taylor, suggests that Locke represents the body as a static form. Accordingly, for Locke, only the consciousness has the ability to transmute the self and enact the process of self-reform. Accordingly, she notes how Locke represents the body through the use of atomizing characteristics: “particles of matter”, “one organization of life”, “an embryo.” These notions serve to generate a hierarchy of the mind over the body, and, as a result allows Locke to conceptualize the body as individual property, Mohanram states, “The body has no identity on its own except insofar as it is property, functioning as object to provide subject status to the individual...It is in function in the interstices of ontology and political philosophy that the body becomes property.”

For Mohanram, the abject “poor body” without property – and I will suggest below the Indigenous subject and other enslaved peoples – is not capable of transcending the state of nature through self-conscious transformation into a fully individuated subject. Locke produces an ideal conception of comportment that underpins the ontological grounding for the ideal subject of civil society, that is, the individuated and detached self-conscious subject. As I have attempted to argue, this maneuver of conceptualizing the body as property is not arbitrary for Locke, it is constitutive of his theories concerning knowledge and theologically informed notions of self-reform, and is central to his theory concerning the acquisition of private property.

**De-Mediation of Extra-Human Agency and Indigenous Irrationality:**

In Locke’s *Two Treatises*, he states that Indigenous peoples are “needy and wretched inhabitants” because they fail to improve the “wild woods and uncultivated waste of America” by English methods of tillage and husbandry. The “needy and wretched” Indigenous subject is held to be irrational because they cannot undergo the aforementioned process of self-reform and achieve the status of pure independent self-consciousness. Consequently, Indigenous subjects are not self-authorizing, do not own their bodies and therefore are incapable of appropriating the product of their labour. For Locke, the inability and failure of the Indigenous subject to acquire land allows the Americas to be constituted as uncultivated, unenclosed by fence or garden, and, therefore, rendered an externalized wasteland and common – *terra nullius*. Locke states,

…he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen, but increase the common stock of mankind: for the provisions serving to support of human life, produced by one acre of inclosed and cultivated land, are (to speak much within compass) ten times more than those which are yielded by an acre of land of an equal richness lying waste in common. And therefore he that incloses land, and has a greater plenty of the conveniencies of life from ten acres, than he could have from an hundred left to nature, may truly be said to give ninety acres to mankind.

The Americas were apprehended through Locke’s ego and theo-political representational schema as *terra nullius* until the rational, self-authorizing individual appropriates it with his labour. As result of this maneuver, the Amerindians failure to cultivate land was conceptualized by Locke as a crime against God, because, as mentioned, Genesis 1:28 was interpreted by Locke as a divine decree to
subdue and cultivate land and domesticate wild beasts. Locke states, “… God, by commanding to subdue, gave authority so far to appropriate: and the condition of human life, which requires labour and materials to work on, necessarily introduces private possessions.” He further states, “God gave the World to men in Common; but since he gave it them for their benefit,…it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the Industrious and Rational, (and Labour was to be his title to it,) not to the Fancy or Covetousness of the Quarrelsome and Contentious.” In Vanita Seth’s reading, the Amerindrians failure to cultivate land and leave it as waste indexed their “Quarrelsome and Contentious” nature that breached “the Common Law of Reason.” As I will argue below, this allows Locke to authorize unlimited English settlement of the Americas via the plantation model.

Indigenous conceptions of land become subsumed by Locke’s English notions of colonial possession, which include Protestant reading practices concerning de-mediating non-human agency from the material world. For many Indigenous nations, land cannot be separated from transcendent forms of immaterial agency. Accordingly, Locke completely invalidates Indigenous sacred conceptions of time and space in order to render land bereft of extra-human forms of agency so that human and non-human natures can be organized as externalized sources of labor-power, food, energy, and raw materials. Once again we see that while he suggests God created the world for common grant, Locke nevertheless conceptualizes uncultivated land as “waste” that must be subdued, enclosed, cultivated and ultimately privately owned by rational men. As such, Locke’s theory of property represents an epistemic and material practice that indexes the dialectic between “expanded reproduction” and “accumulation by dispossession” through techniques of mapping, quantification and enclosure of human and extra-human natures for colonial-capitalist expansion.

For Web Keane, “Protestant semiotic ideology” is a key site for exploring the invalidation of transcendent Indigenous life-worlds through the entangled domains of Protestant reading practices and European colonialism. In his study, Keane argues Protestant missionaries attempted to distinguish between the “true faith” of Protestantism from the “false faith” of Indigenous traditions. Protestant semiotic ideology holds that rational human beings do not conceptualize land as embodiments of the divine, but only stand in for the divine through an act of human encoding and interpretation. Practices that encode the material world with extra human agency were contested as external constraints on the individual’s path to salvation. Through detaching from forms of external spiritual mediation, Protestant missionaries held that this would open up a vastly expanded vision for individual inward self-creation. For various theorists such as Keane, Taylor, Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, Protestant hermeneutics indexes a modern formation of individual agency; however, as Talal Asad suggests, this does not so much “free” the individual, but rather put in place new forms of discipline and relations of power.

Understood in this light, Protestant semiotic ideology facilitated shifts in the conception of authentic spiritual life towards practices of detachment and re-signification of material mediation. While the genealogy of “Protestant semiotic ideology” can, in part, be traced to the Reformation and constitutive arguments of self-adhesion mentioned above via Taylor, we must also situate its emergence within the matrices of colonial-capitalist expansion and accumulation. For Protestant missionaries, the notion that land indexed transcendent forms of agency and as ontological extensions of the self was a false imputation of divine agency upon the material world. As missionaries understood it, to ascribe land with supernatural agency was a false and confused gesture because signs and symbols are arbitrarily encoded with sacred properties. Rather, as mentioned above, Protestant theology emphasizes a personal and inward relationship with God that is not mediated by a clergy, rituals or
other material mediations such as printed prayer texts, holy water, crosses, so on. According to Indigenous cosmological practices that link land with ancestral and supernatural agency, such activities were held to be nothing more than confused and heretical forms of primitive fetishism.

In Kean’s reading, Protestantism does not introduce agency, or individualism into a conceptual world that may have lacked them. Rather, he suggests that such a claim presumes a dubious view of subaltern life-worlds before the globalization of Protestant semiotic ideology by colonialism. Further, he argues that the effects of Protestant semiotic ideology enforced through missionary activity is constitutive of multifarious historical processes – as I have argued, Locke’s conceptions of detachment and theological voluntarism. Keane suggests, therefore, that Protestantism generated powerful arguments for the theological value of agency by generating “correct” imputations of transcendent agency informed by self-conscious inward belief. He argues that these processes form a moral narrative of modernity, a type of script of theological liberation and conversion to authentic forms of spiritual life for both Christian Europeans and non-Christian peoples globally. I argue that the aforementioned processes of self-adhesion and the de-mediation of extra-human agency from land converge in Locke’s theory of property as a formation of abstract social nature. The entanglement between Protestant semiotic ideology, capitalism and colonialism reorients land as bereft of transcendent agency and represents it as “common” and “waste”, that is, terra nullius so cheap natures can be cultivated and enclosed in order to advance labour productivity of the rational, self-owning individual. The consequence of Locke’s formation of abstract social nature goes beyond a mere failure to take into account “the Indian’s perspective.” Rather, it is the epistemic violence of invalidating Indigenous forms of worlding and self-understanding that emerge through concrete embodied practices and semiotic forms of a given community.

In the following passage we see that Locke deploys a universal conception of reason and industry via cultivation in order to increase life’s “conveniencies”, and in the process invalidates Indigenous conceptions of human-land relations,

…several nations of the Americans…who are rich in land, and poor in all the comforts of life; whom nature having furnished as liberally as any other people, with the materials of plenty, i.e. a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance, what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy: and a king of a large and fruitful territory there, feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day-labourer in England.

While Locke seems to leave open the possibility for Indigenous peoples to enter the domain of reason and industry by improving land via labour productivity within the commodity system, I have suggested that the paradox in his thought is that the Amerindian is unable to do so. As such, the Amerindian is permanently held to inhabit the state of nature, unable to achieve pure individuated self-consciousness, and, hence, unable to remake the self into a rational individual who can appropriate cheap natures and form a civil political community. Having subsumed Indigenous conceptions of land within English and Protestant semiotic ideology, the only possibility of human-land relations that Locke can image is through abstract social nature – surveying and quantifying land and other “conveniencies” via cultivation in the service of colonial-capitalist expansion and accumulation.

In this reading, Locke’s thought emerges through plural points of enunciation of the Capitalocene, coloniality and theology rather than any singular register. On the one hand, Locke brings
together Protestant theological notions of detached self-consciousness, accumulation of cheap natures via labour productivity, and, as a result of these processes, the formation of civil political society. On the other hand, the Indigenous subject is put in an impossible position; they are represented as irrational by imputing land with false and heretical forms of supernatural agency and fetish rituals. Indigenous peoples are then held to have committed a crime against God by their inevitable failure to “subdue common wasteland”, that is, uncommodified land/life rendered terra nullius, and transform it into enclosed and cultivated parcels authorized by Genesis and English symbolic regimes. As a result, they are permanently held to inhabit the static temporality of the state of nature.

What emerges in Locke’s thought is theological license for English planters to colonize the Americas by rendering Indigenous peoples outside the common law of reason and as “Quarrelsome and Contentious” criminal enemies that can be destroyed by a just war if they resist settlement. Locke states,

I should have a right to destroy that which threatens me with destruction: for by the fundamental law of nature, man being to be preserved as much as possible, when all cannot be preserved, the safety of the innocent is to be preferred: and one may destroy a man who makes war upon him, or has discovered an enmity to his being, for the same reason that he may kill a wolf or lion; because such men are not under the ties of the common law of reason, have no other rule, but that of force and violence, and so may be treated as beasts of pretty, those dangerous and noxious creatures, that will be sure to destroy him whenever he falls into their power…Thus a thief, whom I cannot harm, but by appeal to the law, for having stolen all that I am worth, I may kill…

By universalizing a conception of the human upon the axis of the industrious and rational individuated self, Locke enunciates his position that claims for itself truth and objectivity. Consequently, the Amerindian is not simply excluded from Lockean conceptions of the universal individual, rather they are constitutive of it – there is no industrious and rational individual that can advance labour productivity within the commodity system without the irrational Amerindian that is incapable of industry. In this reading, Locke’s theory of epistemology, Protestant theology and capitalist interests in instituting a plantation model of colonialism in the Americas cannot be reduced to either a materialist, theological or abstract philosophical reading. Rather Locke’s labour theory of appropriation represents the entangled registers of the capitalist-colonial world system that precedes the two centuries view of the Anthropocene. Accordingly, Locke’s formation of abstract social nature places him within the tradition of global linear thinking, which is the central logic of colonial-capitalist designs for global domination.

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