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Placing Possibility

The Community Land Conference, 29–30 September 2009, Isle of Harris, Scotland

On 29 and 30 September 2009, representatives of the 20 largest community land owning trusts, responsible for the management of over 400 000 acres of land in Scotland's Highlands and Islands, met in the Harris Hotel, Tairbeart, Isle of Harris, in the Outer Hebrides, to discuss how to take forward community-centred land reform.[1] Delegates at the Community Land Conference shared a concern that despite the well-publicized successes of the community land ownership movement – underway since the historically unprecedented purchase by the Assynt Crofters' Trust of the North Lochinver Estate in 1993 and supported, a decade later, by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 – momentum had been lost (Table 1.1).[2] A beginning had been made in reversing the extraordinarily skewed distribution of land in Scotland,[3] but the process of democratizing land ownership was far from complete. Funding streams that were essential to communities seeking to purchase land that had been held as private estates for hundreds of years, frequently by absentee landlords, were no longer guaranteed, and land reform itself seemed to have slipped from the Scottish Government's agenda. The task for delegates was to consider how to take the land reform process forward such that other communities could search out its political possibilities.

Table 1.1 Community land ownership in Scotland, 2010 (Property over 2000 acres).

Property	Owner	Acres	Hectares	Date of acquisition
West Harris Estate	West Harris Crofting Trust	16 255	6 578	2010
Galson Estate	Urras Oigreachd Ghabsainn	56 000	22 662	2007
South Uist Estate	Stòras Uibhist	93 000	37 636	2006
Glencanisp and Drumrunie Estates	Assynt Foundation	44 578	18 047	2005
North Harris Estate	North Harris Trust	55 000	22 267	2003[i]
Gigha	The Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust	3 694	1 495	2002
Little Assynt Estate	Culag Community Woodland Trust	2 940	1 190	2000
Forest of Birse	Birse Community Trust	9 000	3 642	1999
Knoydart Estate	Knoydart Foundation	16 771	6 787	1997
Eigg	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust	7 263	2 939	1997
Melness	Melness Crofters' Estate	12 522	5 067	1995
Borve and Annishader Estate	Borve and Annishader Township	4 502	1 822	1993
North Assynt Estate	Assynt Crofters' Trust	21 132	8 552	1993
Stornoway Estate	Stornoway Trust	69 400	28 085	1923

[i] In 2006, the Loch Seaforth Estate was added to the North Harris Estate, bringing the total acreage to 62 500 (25 304 ha).
Source: Adapted from Wightman, 2010: 150.

In his introductory keynote address to the conference, renowned historian James Hunter reminded the audience of John McGrath's immensely popular play *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, performed throughout the Highlands and Islands in 1973. "For all its entertaining format" – the play was staged in the vernacular idiom of a ceilidh – Hunter emphasized its serious message, spoken in the final scene by the full cast: "The people do not own the land. The people do not control the land" (Hunter, 2009: 1). He expanded,

> Whether by clearing lairds, by the absentee owners of sporting estates or by the multinational corporations then beginning to be involved with North Sea oil, the resident population of the Highlands and Islands, or so McGrath contended, had been denied any jurisdiction over their area's natural assets – just as they'd been deprived, McGrath argued, of any

substantial share of the profits and revenues deriving from the commercial exploitation of those assets (Hunter, 2009: 1).[4]

That was now changing. Since that "revolutionary moment" in the summer of 1992 when the Assynt crofters decided to bid for the North Lochinver Estate (now the North Assynt Estate), placed on the market by the liquidators of Scandinavian Property Services Ltd, which had owned the land since 1989 (see MacAskill, 1999), people had begun to question what had previously been taken for granted – namely, "that private estates would forever be bought and sold without reference to, or interference from, the people living on them" (Hunter, 2009: 3).[5]

Hunter summarized the remarkable successes of community land ownership. In material terms, achievements included the provision of new housing and the upgrading of existing housing, increases in population, the establishment of new businesses and job opportunities, "more environmentally-sensitive management of a whole range of natural habitats" and renewable energy schemes (Hunter, 2009: 4). Less easy to measure, he noted, but "hugely important", was evidence of growing "self-esteem" and "self-confidence" (Hunter, 2009: 4). He challenged those present to raise the political profile of community land ownership in Scotland and to lobby the government for a renewed commitment to land reform. This government, minority though it might be, was after all formed by the Scottish National Party, a party that, while "far from power" in 1973, had invited McGrath to stage a performance of *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* at their annual conference (Hunter, 2009: 10).

Unanimously, representatives of the community trusts present adopted a series of proposals designed to further community land ownership in the Highlands and Islands.[6] They mandated the working group of three who had organized the conference to take these proposals forward to the Scottish Government and to lead an investigation into the possibility of more formal political representation of community land owning groups. The name C-20, lightly quipped at the first meeting in Inverness of a steering group where the idea to hold a conference was first mooted, provided an interim collective identifier for this purpose. With a measure of irony, the name's verbal resonance with the G-20 conjures an identification with the global, but simultaneously undercuts any claim to a global defined through the reductionist deliberations of finance ministers and the governors of central banks from 20 economies. The name C-20 suggested a claim to an alternative, place-based and more generous politics to that of a neoliberal imaginary.

Places of possibility

This is a book about the land reform process in Scotland's Highlands and Islands, which so inspired those present at the conference to seek ways of ensuring its continuation. It is also an engagement with the broader questions – of property, nature and neoliberalization – through which this struggle is constituted. The book considers how community land ownership opens up the political terrain of particular places through the reconfiguration of practices of property and of nature to more socially just and sustainable possibilities than those prefigured through prevailing norms of neoliberal practice, specifically enclosure and privatization. More precisely, it explores how the complicated and contingent process of "commoning" the land through community ownership troubles binaries – of public/private and nature/culture – and through these disruptions creates a space/place where neoliberalism's normalizing practices are countered. The islands of the Outer Hebrides (or the Western Isles, as these islands are also known) are shown to be places of possibility where norms that had previously confined political possibility are now unsettled and new imaginaries configured.

Within Scotland, at "the cusp", globally, of "community-centric" land reform (Bryden and Geisler, 2007), the Outer Hebrides provide an exceptionally rich area in which to explore the political possibilities that are created as ideas of property and nature are reworked through community land ownership.[7] First, after a lengthy history of dispossession – of the enclosure and privatization of rights to the land associated both with the Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and, more recently, of the collapse of fish stocks, the decline in the price of sheep and the vicissitudes of the (primarily Norwegian) corporately controlled fish farms – it is these islands that are at the forefront of the land reform movement. Well over one-third of the land in the Outer Hebrides is now in community ownership and over two-thirds of the population resides on community owned estates (West Highland Free Press (*WHFP*), 19 January 2007: 1) (Map 1.1; Table 1.2). Further community purchase of land is the subject of ongoing discussion, Pàirc Estate on the Isle of Lewis being one example (Chapter 4) and the island of Scalpay, Harris, another. Places that had long been considered "peripheral" to economic life in Scotland are now, ironically, at the forefront of initiatives to achieve more sustainable futures – economically, ecologically, socially and culturally.

Second, it is in these islands – arguably the windiest and certainly among the "wildest" areas in Scotland – that struggles over nature are acute. On the one hand, the Outer Hebrides are caught up in globalizing
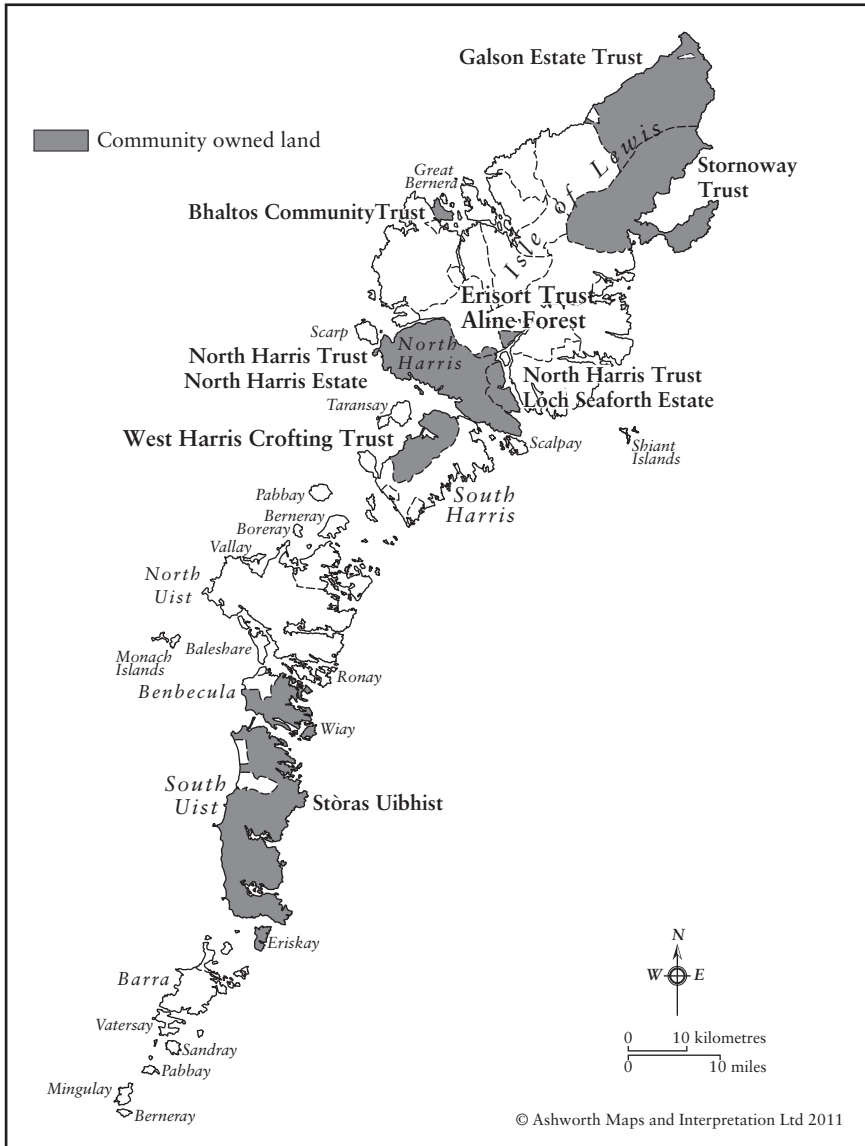
Map 1.1 Community land ownership in the Outer Hebrides. © Ashworth Maps and Interpretation Ltd 2011. Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right 2011.

Table 1.2   Assessment of the Western Isles population living within a community owned estate, 2010.

Community owned estate	Approx. population	% of Western Isles population[(i)]	Area[(ii)]	
			Acres	Hectares
Galson	2 139	8.1	56 000	22 662
Stornoway Trust	12 015	45.3	69 400	28 085
Bhaltos	98	0.4	1 705	690
North Harris	704	2.7	62 500	25 293
South Uist	3 200	12.1	93 000	37 636
West Harris	123	0.5	16 255	6 578
Total	**18 279**	**69**	**298 860**	**120 944**

[(i)] Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Local Authority Area's total population – 26 502 (2001 Census).
[(ii)] There are 758 844 acres in the Western Isles (38.6 per cent of land is community owned, excluding Ath Linne forests).

discourses of biodiversity and conservation of "wild" areas. Large areas of the land (and adjacent seas) are subject to multiple and overlapping protective environmental designations of national, UK and European provenance. On the other, the islands are the site of community and corporate initiatives to harness the wind's energy and sell electricity generated from wind farms to the national grid, mobilized in turn by discourses of climate change, renewable energy targets and local/national/global sustainability. In a struggle over the wind that has to do with the assertion of rights to property and to a sustainable future, community is pitted against corporation or private syndicate. In turn, all three are party to a complex decision-making process where the other main players are the local planning authority (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar/Western Isles Council, referred to commonly as the Comhairle by Gaelic and English speakers alike), the government agency responsible for conservation matters (Scottish Natural Heritage, SNH), and environmental non-governmental organizations, particularly the John Muir Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Who has the right to define the meanings of nature may, in these circumstances, be hotly contested.

Third, these islands share common challenges of social, cultural and economic fragility and thus hopes that community ownership of the land can reverse this situation are high. A recent study commissioned by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar/The Western Isles Council drew attention to alarming population trends (HallAitken, 2007). Overall, in these islands, data indicate that the population fell by 40 per cent between 1901 and

2001, with the steepest declines in Harris, the Uists and Barra (HallAitken, 2007: 1). The population of Harris, for instance, fell by 60 per cent over this time period, from a total of 5271 in 1901 to 2120 in 2001 (HallAitken, 2007: 12). Between 1991 and 2001, a 12 per cent decline was recorded (Bryden *et al.*, 2008: 25). More recent data for the islands as a whole suggest a small increase in population of 1 per cent between 2003 and 2005, with an uneven spread among age groups and geographically (HallAitken, 2007: 13). The largest increase (10 per cent) was in the age group 55–59, characterized by the report as "lifestyle in-migration"; disturbingly, over the same time period, the number of children under the age of 15 continued to decline (HallAitken, 2007: 13, 19). The ageing of the population is evident – in 2001, 35 per cent of the population of Harris and Scalpay were aged 60 or over, a figure that compares with 26 per cent for the Outer Hebrides as a whole (Bryden *et al.*, 2008: 25). On Harris itself, there has been a reversal of the downward population spiral since 2003 and, between 2003 and 2005, an increase of 10 per cent in the primary school roll (HallAitken, 2007: 17, 16).

Outmigration, particularly by women, who leave in greater numbers than men, is singled out as significant in explaining population trends (HallAitken, 2007: 2). The report cites as the main reasons for outmigration the limited number of job opportunities, particularly those that fall into the category of "skilled", the search for further education and then employment on the Scottish mainland, and the lack of affordable housing (HallAitken, 2007: 2). The acquisition of houses as second or holiday homes, as well as demand from older people (often retirees) moving to the islands, notes the report, pushes up prices such that the young, in particular, can no longer afford to buy (HallAitken, 2007: 30). Against a Scottish average of 1.3 per cent of the housing stock in second or holiday homes, the figure for the Outer Hebrides is 7.2 per cent; in West Harris, this figure rises to 17 per cent (HallAitken, 2007: 30–31). The report lists five "factors" as critical in the reversal of these trends and in the creation of "sustainable communities": sustainable employment, private-sector led economic diversity, the provision of affordable housing, "self-determination" and "clean energy" (HallAitken, 2007: 4–5), issues to which I return later. It is also the case that the islands face the threat of cultural loss. As the "heartland" of the Gàidhealtachd, it is here that is found the highest proportion of Gaelic speakers in Scotland, but this number is declining. On Harris, 81.7 per cent of the population (1861 people) spoke Gaelic in 1991; this was reduced to 69.9 per cent (1447 people) in 2001 (Bryden *et al.*, 2008: Appendix 5: 21).[8]

Among the several communities that now own land in the Outer Hebrides, I place particular attention on Urras Ceann a Tuath na
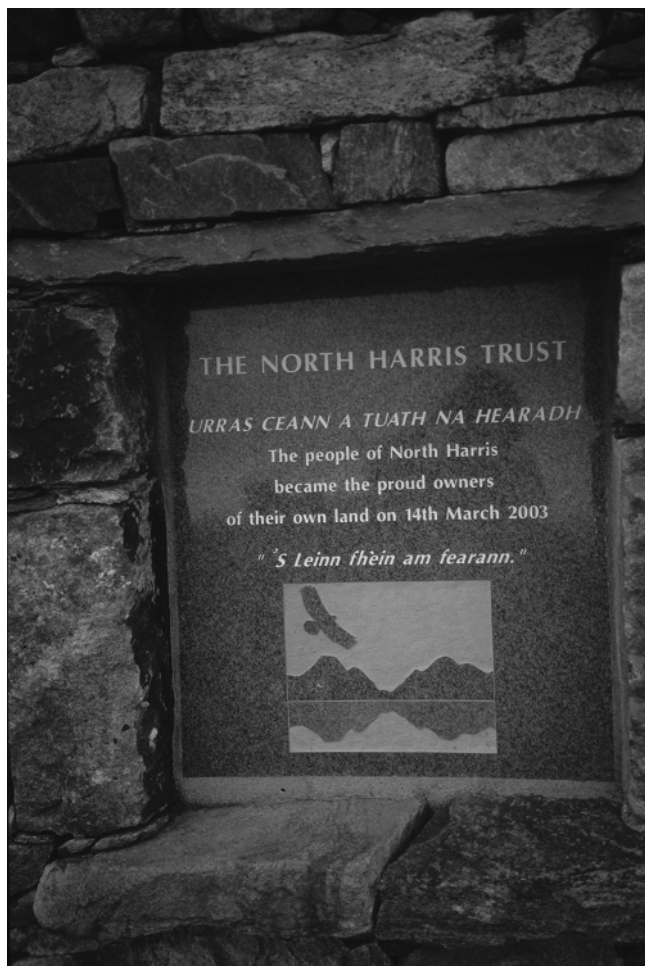
Photograph 1.1   Cairn marking the North Harris Trust.
Source: author.

Hearadh/the North Harris Trust (NHT), which bought the 55 000 acre (22 267 ha) North Harris Estate from Jonathan Bulmer in 2003, to which was added the 7500 acre (3036 ha) Loch Seaforth Estate in 2006 (NHT, 2007: 6). In total, the NHT owns 62 500 acres (25 304 ha) of land, 29 300 acres (11 862 ha) (46.9 per cent) of which are under crofting tenure and 33 200 acres (13 441 ha) (53.1 per cent) of which lie outwith crofting tenure (NHT, 2007: 18). The population is about 700, the majority living in Tarbairt; about 250 live in the various crofting

Photograph 1.2   The hills of North Harris from Ben Luskentyre in South Harris. *Source*: author.

townships located along the coast (NHT, 2007: 6). In addition to some income from crofting, the main sources of employment are public service, fishing, fish farming and construction (NHT, 2007: 28). In addition, tourism is a major income earner (NHT, 2007: 28).

In one sense, the strongest methodological reason for this choice is that, of the three largest land owning community trusts in the islands (the other two being Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn/the Galson Estate Trust, Isle of Lewis, and Stòras Uibhist/South Uist Estate, South Uist, Eriskay and Benbecula), the North Harris Trust is the oldest (Photograph 1.1). It is thus here that the negotiation of the political possibilities of community land ownership has occurred over the longest period of time. It is also the case that it is on the North Harris Estate that some of the most visible struggles over nature – as "the wild" and with respect to the wind – have occurred (Photograph 1.2). However, the more immediate rationale for this choice is that I have carried out research in the Isle of Harris since 1995 – a time when a multinational corporation's proposal for planning permission for a superquarry at Lingerbay, in the south of the island, was the subject of a public inquiry (Barton, 1996; Owens and Cowell, 1996; Mackenzie, 1998b; McIntosh, 2004). I thus have extensive research experience in this area. An

agreement to conduct research with the North Harris Trust grew from this earlier and ongoing research and was negotiated in 2002, at which time the property was first placed on the market (Mackenzie, 2006a).

This is, then, a case study. Through the particularities of in-depth qualitative research, I document and then analyse the ways through which community land owning trusts rework ideas of property and nature such that their political possibilities are made visible. As a case study, and in line with the direction of thinking outlined in the next section of this chapter, the research seeks not to provide the grounds for generalization – for the impact of or resistance to processes of neoliberalization. Instead, it uses the particulars of a place as "windows into constitutive processes, and a means for reconfiguring understandings and practices" (Hart, 2004: 97). Specifically, it searches for the ways through which normalization – produced by totalizing narratives of property and nature – is disrupted. It does so, primarily, by questioning the "self-evidence" or "givenness" of categories – of property and nature, exploring how these categories are produced materially and discursively in the interest of a particular politics. As an "evidence-based" or "contextual" study – Castree (2008a) uses the two terms interchangeably – of the political possibilities of community land ownership, its broader import lies in its identification of political openings where the "inevitability" of neoliberalization and, specifically, practices of enclosure and privatization are troubled, and new, more hopeful, futures may be imagined.

With the intent of making visible the intricacies – the complexities, the contradictions and the contingencies – that are part and parcel of the process of negotiating the political possibilities of particular places, I have employed a range of research methods. These have involved, first, participation in community-initiated events, North Harris Trust directors' meetings, community-led or community-focused workshops (for example, on housing and renewable energy), relevant meetings of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (for example, when proposals for wind farms were being discussed) and annual gatherings of the Scottish Crofting Federation. In addition, I have participated in meetings of the Cross Party Group on Rural Policy and the Cross Party Group on Crofting at the Scottish Parliament. Second, I have carried out semi-structured or in-depth interviewing, on a regular basis, with North Harris Trust directors, employees and members who have responsibility for specific initiatives since 2003. I have also carried out interviews with key informants from the Galson Trust, Stòras Uibhist, the Knoydart Foundation, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Cairngorms National Park Authority

and the John Muir Trust. Third, I rely on primary documentary material from the organizations I have just identified and from the Scottish Government. With respect to the Comhairle, documents pertaining to applications for planning permission for wind farms from communities, corporations and individuals have included letters of support or objection from the public as well as from statutory authorities such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. Fourth, I also draw on newspaper reports and letters to the editor, particularly those from the two main local papers, *The West Highland Free Press* and *The Stornoway Gazette*.

Fifth, in places, I call on literature, particularly poetry, from the Gàidhealtachd, as the evidential base for exploring both the historical beginnings of contemporary struggles over, and current thinking about, land and nature. Poets, writes John MacInnes (2006: 3), "are the spokes[people] of Gaelic society. … It is not a different awareness so much as a difference in artistic convention that makes the Gaelic poet concern him [or her]self with the national dimensions of a given issue". It is Gaelic poetry, emphasizes Donald Meek (1976: 309–310), that provides the historical evidence for people's experience of the Clearances and the "Land Agitation" that followed. It was song in particular that was "until recently", he recalls (Meek, 1976: 310), "the principal medium of popular journalism", and "Gaelic society had for long afforded considerable prestige to the poet as a commentator on current ideas and events". For twentieth-century Lewis-born poet Iain Crichton Smith, songs and poems provide "a kind of history lived on the bone rather than an intellectual creation" (cited by Hunter, 1995a: 26). Congruent with Edward Said's (1994) broader theorization of "a culture of resistance" against imperial rule, Hunter (1995a: 26–28) argues that the collective poetical archive of a people – their songs, poems and stories – provides a more reliable barometer of local experience than the dispassionate reconstructions of the past by historians where this is unmediated by postcolonial theorization.[9] It is also the case that, limited though analysis remains, women poets provide a means of balancing what are undoubtedly male-centric productions of history. Despite social conventions of the times, "Highland women", writes Michael Newton (2009: 158), "have enjoyed surprisingly prominent roles in the creation and transmission of Gaelic literature in nearly every century".

As a final methodological note, in analysing the material cited, I have been concerned to focus both on words – written and oral – and on the visual. The search for a new politics of the possible with community land ownership is bound up with troubling the visual as well as the verbal

order through which property and nature are "*given* to be seen, how [they are] '*shown*' to knowledge or to power" (Rajchman, 1991: 69–70, emphasis his). A counternarrative questions the "exclusionary geographies" (Gregory, 2000: 314) through which the land was normalized, re-mapping it in ways that are visually at odds with narratives of a sporting estate empty of people or a place of "wildness" that must be protected from people. It replaces this colonizing optic – "the sole scopic regime" (Jay, 1994: 589) of neoliberalization – with one that is more complex and contingent or, in Martin Jay's (1994: 592) language, "polyscopic".

Opening theoretical places

The theoretical – and methodological – initial reference point for probing the "givenness" of property and nature is Michel Foucault's (1979, 1985, 2007) writing on the "workings" or the "how" of power in so far as it concerns the production of norms, processes of normalization and their reversibility. This "analytics" (Foucault, 1985: 82) traces how power is exercised and resisted. "Power produces", writes Foucault (1979: 194), "it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth". It proceeds, as he shows in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *The History of Sexuality* (1985), through the creation of norms which, since the eighteenth century, have served to regulate society. "Like surveillance and with it", he asserts, "normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age" (Foucault, 1979: 184). It homogenizes but at the same time "individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (Foucault, 1979: 184). It creates abnormalities – in Foucault's work, for example, of criminality or sexuality – which must then be "treated". It operates as a "political technology", removing from the political domain something that is basically "a political problem", reinventing it as a politically inert "technical problem" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 196).

As John Rajchman (1991) explains in his analysis of "Foucault's Art of Seeing", visuality is internal to the process of normalization. There is, he writes, with reference to *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979), an "interconnection between seeing, doing, and practical self-evidence" (Rajchman, 1991: 79). Normality "becomes 'visible' through an expanding network of practices" (Rajchman, 1991: 79). Visibility is thus "one of the great 'self-evidences' of the workings of power" (Rajchman,

1991: 84). "Power conceals itself", he continues, "by visualizing itself. Its workings become acceptable because one sees of it only what it lets one see, only what it makes visible" (Rajchman, 1991: 84).

The process of normalization does not go uncontested. In "What is critique?", Foucault (2007: 66) emphasizes that power may not be "understood as domination, as mastery, as a fundamental given, a unique principle, explanation or irreducible law". Rather, it has to be "considered in relation to a field of interactions, contemplated in a relationship which cannot be dissociated from forms of knowledge" (Foucault, 2007: 66). He continues, "One has to think about it in such a way as to see how it is associated with a domain of possibility and consequently, of reversibility, of possible reversal" (Foucault, 2007: 66). Reversibility and the creation of what Julie Katherine Gibson-Graham (2006: xiv) calls a "politics of possibility" have to do with disturbing "the acceptability of the system", of disrupting norms (Foucault, 2007: 61).

Taking Foucault's theorization of the norm into the realm of feminist politics, Judith Butler (2004) traces how new political possibilities are created when prevailing norms of gender and what counts as "human" are "undone". Particular ways of "doing" gender, she shows – as drag, butch, femme, transgender and transsexual persons – trouble prevailing norms of what counts as human, which depend on the binary male/female. What are the consequences, she asks, "if the very categories of the human [exclude] those who should be described and sheltered within its terms?" (Butler, 2004: 36). "If we take the field of the human for granted", she continues, "then we fail to think critically and ethically about the consequential ways that the human being is produced, reproduced and deproduced" (Butler, 2004: 36). While disturbing the category gender is not the focus of this book's attention, Butler's ideas provide an analytic template for undoing the categories property and nature and tracing the ways through which they are both constituted through the binaries public/private and nature/culture and unsettled when these binaries are questioned – by a commoning of the land.

In line with Foucault's reasoning, Butler (2004) argues that a politics of new possibilities proceeds by opening up or "undoing" such categories as human and gender, by interrupting the norms – "the settled knowledge and knowable reality" (Butler, 2004: 27) – through which the notion of human and the binary of man and woman have been constituted and, through this opening, to imagine a new reality. Drag, butch, femme, transgender and transsexual persons, she proposes, do precisely that. "They make us not only question what is real, and what 'must' be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of

reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted" (Butler, 2004: 29). They "rattle" norms, "display their instability, and … open them to resignification" (Butler, 2004: 28). They show how what it means to be human or of the gender man or woman is always "in process, underway, unfulfilled" (Butler, 2004: 37).

For the analyst, this means that it is necessary both to trace how a particular "nexus of power and knowledge" works "to constitute a more or less systematic way of ordering the world with its own 'conditions of the acceptability of a system'" (Butler, 2004: 215–216, with citations from Foucault) and "to track the way in which that field [of intelligible things] meets its breaking point, the moments of its discontinuities, and the sites where it fails to constitute the intelligibility it promises" (Butler, 2004: 215–216, drawing on Foucault). "[O]ne looks *both* for the conditions by which the object field is constituted", Butler (2004: 27, emphasis in original) argues, "and for *the limits* of those conditions". The limits, she continues, are found "where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, the site where conditions are contingent, transformable" (Butler, 2004: 27). It is this contingency and transformability, I suggest in this book, that are found where categories of property and of nature are opened up through community ownership to new political possibilities.

Gibson-Graham (2006) develops the idea of a politics of possibility or what William Connolly (1999: 57, cited by Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxiii) terms "a politics of becoming" by "queering" capitalism. She traces the interruptions – the openings – in the economy to trouble the norms through which capitalism is produced and how, through a process of economic normalization – where what counts as "economic" is defined through a "capitalocentric" imaginary – subjects are themselves "normalized" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 25). The dislocation of "the unity and hegemony of neoliberal global capitalist economic discourse", she writes (2006: 56), is carried out "through a proliferative queering of the economic landscape and the construction of a new language of economic diversity". While my focus in this book is not on the economy *per se*, Gibson-Graham's ideas about a politics of possibility which she develops through the idea of a community economy and her use of Foucault's (1990) writing on "modes of subjectivation" and "practices of the self" are useful to take forward in the pursuit of the new politics of property and nature that, I argue, is instigated through community land ownership.

To turn first to the idea of a "diverse economy", Gibson-Graham (2006: 55) draws from such experiences as those of Mondragón in the

Basque region of Spain and her own research in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, Australia, the Connecticut Valley in the northeastern United States of America and the Jagna Municipality in Bohol, southern Philippines, to unsettle the idea of capitalism as the sole economic signifier, as "extradiscursive, as the ultimate real and natural form of economy", effectively evacuating all other economic possibilities. Her counterhegemonic politics depends on "liberat[ing]" alternative economic languages from their "discursive subordination" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 57) and creating a language of economic diversity – "a less capitalocentric, more inclusive, more differentiated language of economy" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 2) that expands the idea of market exchange and includes alternative and nonmarket transactions (Gibson-Graham, 2006: Chapter 3). This language, she writes in the conclusion to *A Postcapitalist Politics*, is "our principal technology for 'repoliticizing the economy'" (2006: 195). It provides "a fragmentary and incoherent starting place" for the production of a new narrative of "a diverse (becoming community) economy" (2006: 195) or what, in a later work, is referred to as "a new econo-sociality" (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010: 330).

Gibson-Graham's research demonstrates that displacing subscription to a capitalist economic discourse may not be an easy task, even where the consequences of economic failure are as visible and devastating as in Argentina in the crisis of 2001. Members of the unemployed workers' movement who took over empty factories, she writes, had to do battle not with the state or capital but with "their own subjectivities" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxv). They had to reject "a long-standing sense of self and mode of being in the world [as workers, rather than managers or entrepreneurs], while simultaneously cultivating new forms of sociability, visions of happiness, and economic capacities" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxv). Gibson-Graham extends this discussion through the details of her work with the Community Partnering Project in the Latrobe Valley, Australia. She shows how their search for "openings and possibilities" at a time of massive unemployment caused by privatization and retrenchment in the electricity and mining industries began by unsettling "the naturalness" of the "Economy". By deconstructing and making visible the discourses through which the Economy was made "thinkable and manipulable" in the valley, their collaborative research project created the discursive grounds for an alternative. Privatization and retrenchment in the case of the Latrobe Valley or factory closures in the case of Argentina, she suggests, provided "a moment of interruption in ritualized practices of regional economic subjection" (Gibson-Graham,

2006: 25) and thus a moment where the process of rethinking what it means to be an economic subject might begin.

Resubjectivation – the process through which people reposition themselves *vis à vis* the economy – depends on new "practices of the self" (the phrase is Foucault's, 1990: 28).[10] In Gibson-Graham's (2006) work, this has to do with the performance of subjectivities other than those singularly and exclusively defined through a capitalist economy. For participants in a discussion group carried out in the context of research in the Latrobe Valley, it meant a refusal to position themselves as "subjects of insufficiency who need[ed] proper economic identities in the formal economy" (Gibson-Graham's, 2006: 143). The research tried to create spaces where people could position themselves as part of a more plural, diverse and "generous" economy than they had previously envisioned. One outcome was what Gibson-Graham (2006: 15) refers to as "the awakening of a communal subjectivity", one where, through recognition of their interdependence and the (already) rich diversity of their "economic" lives, people began to build a community economy.

In contrast to "the structurally configured Economy with its regularities and lawful relationships", the community economy is not a "blueprint" but "an unmapped and uncertain terrain that calls forth exploratory conversation and political/ethical acts of decision" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 166). It is a place where the meanings of the economic and of community are never foreclosed but are kept open to "continual resignification" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 98). It relies on a notion of "community" as constantly "a-doing", as always in the process of "becoming", or, in Linda Singer's (1991: 125, also cited by Gibson-Graham, 2006: 99) words, as "a call of something other than presence" rather than as "a referential sign". It implies a collective identity that is created in and through specific circumstances and in particular places, "a becoming in common" rather than "a common being" (the last phrase is Jean-Luc Nancy's, 1991: 4).[11]

Place in Gibson-Graham's conceptualization of a community economy is open, "not fully yoked into a system of meaning ...; it [is] the aspect of every site that exists as potentiality. ... It is the unmapped and unmoored that allows for new moorings and mappings" (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii). "Place, like the subject", she continues (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxxiii), "is the site of becoming, the opening for politics". As such, places are not seen as simply "victims" of neoliberal globalization; nor are they necessarily "always politically defensible redoubts *against* the global", to draw from Doreen Massey (2005: 101, emphasis hers). Understood relationally as "criss-crossings in the

wider power-geometries that constitute both themselves and the 'global'" (Massey, 2005: 101), places may provide sites where "the inevitability" (Massey, 2005: 103) or "normative insistence" (Massey, 2000: 283) of neoliberal globalization may be questioned and a narrative of political possibility kindled. Its "progressive" possibilities, Massey (2009: 415) states in a recent conversation, have to do with critically examining the meanings of "the local" and how the local relates with other places – in her words, "a politics of place beyond place" (Massey, 2009: 415).[12]

"Undoing" property/nature

I draw on these ideas of norms, processes of normalization and the political possibilities that are created through their disruption in order to position a discussion of community land ownership in relation to contemporary debates about property, nature and neoliberalism. My specific concern is to contribute to a literature defined broadly in terms of poststructural political ecology that has documented, with increasingly analytical rigour, the social and environmental injustices produced (if not ubiquitously, then certainly overwhelmingly) through processes of neoliberalization, but in which counternarratives are, with important exceptions, far less visible.[13] There has been, as Noel Castree (2008b: 168) remarks, at least with respect to research on "neoliberalizing nature", more focus on "understanding actualities" than on tracing "potentialities". Through an analysis of the principles and practices of community land owning trusts, primarily in the Outer Hebrides, my intention, through the detailed documentation of the potentialities of a particular place, is to further a geography of hope that is suggested by Castree's comments.

While its intellectual underpinnings go back a great deal further (Harvey, 2005), neoliberalism as a political economic project has gained ascendancy since the early 1970s as both institutional practice and hegemonic discourse. Its critics point out that, as Keynesian modes of social regulation were increasingly called into question at a time of lowering rates of profitability in the largest capitalist economies (Heynen *et al.*, 2007b: 6), neoliberal policies were adopted "to expand opportunities for capital investment and accumulation by re-working state-market-civil society relations to allow for the stretching and deepening of commodity production, circulation and exchange" (Heynen *et al.*, 2007b: 10). Governments employed a series of measures that supported the further penetration of the market, economically, socially,

culturally, politically and environmentally – a process that has become known as neoliberalization. The well-rehearsed litany of measures includes more regressive forms of state taxation, cutbacks in social services, the privatization of other services for which the state previously had responsibility, the "reinforcement and extension of private, exclusive, and individuated property rights", trade liberalization (albeit, as Heynen *et al*., 2007b: 6, remark, in contradictory ways, as subscription to an ideology of free trade was pitted against particular political interests), "workfare" and other efforts to "discipline" workers and civil servants together with the "deregulation and re-regulation of labor markets" (Heynen *et al*., 2007b: 6), decentralization of government and the conscription of civil society organizations to plug the vacuum in social support created through state cutbacks, and "the restructuring of state regulatory apparatuses" such that significant authority for environmental matters, for example, passes to private and corporate institutions (Heynen *et al*., 2007b: 6).

While this process of neoliberalization has, as Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002: 384), point out, been "neither monolithic in form nor universal in effect", they argue that a broad trend may be discerned between those measures that they characterize as "roll-back" neoliberalism in the 1980s and the more recent "roll-out" neoliberalism. Whereas "roll-back" neoliberalism might be seen as focusing on "the active *destruction and discreditation* of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions", "roll-out" neoliberalism is defined by "the purposeful *construction and consolidation* of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations" (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 384, emphasis in original). The strategic deployment of "community" is one among several "extramarket forms of governance" (Peck and Tickell, 2002: 390. See endnote 16).

The process of neoliberalization, in turn, is supported and indeed propelled by a discursive formation that produces neoliberalism and the market as the most efficient, or "*best*" (Castree, 2008a: 143, emphasis his), means for creating and distributing wealth globally. What critics regard as a deeply political project is thereby recast in the politically neutral and normalizing language of economic technicality, of obviousness, of common sense. "[T]he hegemony of neoliberalism", write James McCarthy and Scott Prudham (2004: 276), "is made most evident by the ways in which profoundly political and ideological projects have successfully masqueraded as a set of objective, natural, and technocratic truisms". However, political action against neoliberalism in its diverse forms "gives the lie to such disguises", they continue, "exposing the

political negotiations and myriad contradictions, tensions and failures of neoliberalizations" (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 276).

I return to the question of resistance shortly but, in order to situate community land ownership and debates about property and nature more precisely with reference to processes of neoliberalization, I focus initially on enclosure and the privatization of property rights, before considering the ways in which the move from common rights to individual or private rights to property is at the same time about the reconfiguration of nature/society relations.

Privatization, which follows processes of enclosure, writes Becky Mansfield (2007a: 396), "is not merely one of several shifts promoted under neoliberalism, but instead is the central assumption and precursor to other market-based reforms". It is "a precondition for capitalist commodification" (Castree, 2003: 279). It refers to

> a process through which activities, resources, and the like, which had not been formally privately owned, managed or organized, are taken away from whoever or whatever owned them before and transferred to a new property configuration that is based on some form of "private" ownership or control (Swyngedouw, 2005: 82).

This mode of expanding capital – "primitive accumulation", or what David Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession" – is, Erik Swyngedouw (2005: 82) argues, "nothing less than a legally and institutionally condoned, if not encouraged, form of theft". It "equates [with] a process of 'dispossession'", he continues, impelled by discursive formations that "[render] such acts of theft not only legitimate, but normatively desirable" (Swyngedouw, 2005: 82). On the one hand, these mobilize ideas of "state failure" or, more generally, the "'failure' of non-private modes of social organization of production"; on the other, they call on such "moralistic arguments" as those of Garrett Hardin's (1968) "The tragedy of the commons" in order to justify a move towards private ownership (Swyngedouw, 2005: 82–83).[14]

The process of dispossession proceeds on the basis of a model of property that recognizes, primarily, private rights of ownership, viewing these rights as exclusive, absolute and alienable, the state having the right to "intervene" in the exercise of these rights only where they "threaten harm to others" (Blomley, 2004: 2). Through this construction of property rights in the either/or terms of private/public, other rights that do not involve ownership – of use, for instance – or that are held in common become "invisible", "unintelligible" (Mackenzie, 1998a) or, in

James Scott's (1998: 37) words, "illegible" to the state. Where they do appear, it is only to be dismissed as "dysfunctional" or "anomalous" (Blomley, 2008: 317). The research by Tom Flanagan and Christopher Alcantara (2004) into property rights on First Nations' "reserves" in Canada is a recent case in point. "Markets work best", these authors write (2004: 529), "when property is privately owned". Thus, their study concludes, collectively owned land must give way to private ownership if the land if is to yield its "maximum benefit" to First Nations peoples (2004: 530).

This view of property – called by Joseph Singer (2000) "the ownership model" – draws on an intellectual trajectory traceable to John Locke's treatises of the late seventeenth century and his conjecture that processes of enclosure which lead to private ownership are "not simply inevitable, given the unfolding telos of property [but they are] also normatively *good*, to the degree that [they express] divine will" (Blomley, 2004: 85–86, emphasis in original). For Locke, "individual, private property rights guaranteed by the state constituted the foundation of a just and efficient social order", "a society better for all" (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 277). It was this construction of political economic order, together with the accompanying normalizing discourses of "betterment" or what has more recently been cast as "development" and "progress", that underpinned the imperial project (Cowen and Shenton, 1996; also, see Mudimbe, 1988; Escobar, 1995; Mackenzie, 1998a). It is "a vision", McCarthy and Prudham (2004: 277) argue, entirely compatible with neoliberal claims, whether these concern the land or water, genetic resources, environmental management (tradable carbon credits and fishing quotas are examples) or local knowledges.

As evident in the violences of colonial rule as well as those perpetrated in "the colonial present" (to extend the use of Derek Gregory's, 2004, troubling phrase), the ownership model of property "polices" the boundaries of what counts as property and who counts as owner (Blomley, 2008: 321). Where private ownership does not prevail, the existence of any (collective) rights to property may be refused, on grounds that are far from innocent. What Nicholas Blomley (2002) refers to as "the master narrative of property" erases or renders unseeable other claims and, through the imaginary construction of a *terra nullius*, acts as a political technology, legitimating the dispossession of peoples with long-standing rights to particular territories and other "resources". That this act of dispossession may be gendered as well as being constituted through constructions of race and class is evident (see, for example, Mackenzie, 1998a).

A counterhegemonic narrative of property requires destabilizing the ownership model by disrupting the norms – the binary private/public – through which it is constituted and by tracing the ways through which people thereby reposition themselves, as subjects, towards property. Destabilizing this model involves two interwoven processes. First, it is necessary to make visible those processes that were silenced through the "master narrative". It involves recognizing that there are other rights than private rights to property, that these rights might or might not involve ownership and that there might well be overlapping rights to any particular territory. Centrally, it involves counterposing "the commons" or, more precisely, rights held in common or collectively, to the binary. Following Blomley (2008: 318), common property is used here to refer to a situation where "a resource is held by an identifiable community of interdependent users, who exclude outsiders while regulating internal use by community members". Defined thus, common property is distinguished from "open access" regimes, which are not subject to any form of ownership or control (Mansfield, 2007b: 67), and which were the subject of Hardin's (1968) polemic.

While many forms of commons exist – within as well as outwith state law (Blomley, 2008: 317), some politically progressive, others regressive (McCarthy, 2005a: 18–19) – the common property regime literature has tended to focus analytically on the economic and institutional dimensions of common property (for example, Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom *et al.*, 1999), informed, as Blomley (2008: 318) points out, by rational choice theory. One result of this "economic logic", he shows, is that "crucial political and ethical dimensions" of the commons are ignored (Blomley, 2008: 318) and political possibilities compromised. To illustrate the point, Blomley (2008) refers to the struggle over rights to the site of Woodward's, a store in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (British Columbia, Canada), closed in 1993 and subsequently caught up in plans for "redevelopment" and gentrification in the mid-1990s. The interests of private developers were pitted against Downtown Eastside's community of long-standing, (predominantly) low-income residents, who feared displacement with a rise in property values. Countering the private developer's claim of a right "to exclude" (Blomley, 2008: 316), Blomley (2008: 318) shows how residents drew on "a moral and political commons, justified and enacted through a language of rights and justice", not "an instrumental commons, governed by rules", to assert their claim to the site. Such commons, he continues, are "sustained by deeply entrenched values and beliefs" (Blomley, 2008: 319). In the case of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Blomley (2008: 320) proposes, the claim of the poor "is based

upon and enacted through sustained patterns of local use and collective habitation, through ingrained practices of appropriation and 'investment'". Recognizing this commons, he continues, "is a crucial political task through which non-capitalist possibilities can be discerned and revalorized"; it "prise[s] open" a "space of hope and potentiality" (Blomley, 2008: 322). In addition, locating particular claims, such as that of Woodward's, within the wider "global commoners' movement", he adds, is "ethically useful" (Blomley, 2008: 324). A politics of a local commons is not necessarily progressive: it may support a neoliberal agenda – a point also made by McCarthy (2005a: 18–19), whereas "sutur[ing]" local claims to a commons to a global movement protesting against a neoliberal form of globalization can work against this (Blomley, 2008: 324, drawing on Klein, 2001).

Karen Bakker's (2007a) research into water provision in the global south provides a further example of how this more complicated view of the commons plays itself out politically in the struggle against privatization. She shows how activists disturb the public/private binary through which struggles over water provision are customarily waged by countering the state's and corporate interests in water as a commodity with "a commons view" of water as "a flow resource" essential for the mutual well-being of people and ecosystems bound together, collectively, through the hydrological cycle, as "non-substitutable", having cultural meaning and spiritual value (Bakker, 2007a: 441). Activists, she recalls, position their claim against the conscription of water as a commodity in both state and corporate discourse as a common property right rather than as a human right, as "'rights talk' resuscitates a public/private binary" producing only two unsatisfactory alternatives – "state or market control" (Bakker, 2007a: 440). Human rights, she notes, are "individualistic, anthropocentric, state-centric, and compatible with private sector provision of water supply; and as such, a limited strategy for those seeking to refute water privatization" (Bakker, 2007a: 447). It is rather the commons that is the appropriate "antonym" in the struggle against the commodification of water, not human rights, and it is a commons-based claim that thereby contributes to the production of a place-based "alter-globalization" movement (Bakker, 2007a: 436).[15,16]

Destabilizing the hegemony of the ownership model of property, as shown by the research I have cited, involves a search for places where old commons (water) are recaptured or new ones (Woodward's) conjured. But, second, it requires undoing the terms of the binary through which it is produced. Private property is presented in the ownership

model as an individual or corporate right – absolute, or allodial, exclusive and alienable – to a "thing", a move that, as Blomley (2005: 126) explains, allows property to be depoliticized. But, as he and others point out, property is very much bound up with social relations and, at times, political struggle. It is, Blomley (2004: 13) writes, "simply inaccurate" to suggest that an "owner" is able to exercise "absolute control" over his or her property. There may be "mortgage lenders, neighbors (who may have rights recognized by law), spouses and those granted easements" who also have particular rights to a property. In the postcolonial city, as well as in countless non-urban territories, "ownership" rights may be caught up in struggles over aboriginal title and who can claim the right of sovereignty. There may, in other words, be competing and overlapping claims to property. Whether in urban or rural spaces, not only are notions of "private rights" and outright "ownership" profoundly disturbed, but what counts as "the state" and who has jurisdictional authority over land are called into question.

The distinction between private rights and the state is also less precise than that presumed in the ownership model. Blomley (2004: 13) gives numerous examples, some sanctioned by the state, others not. One example of the former concerns zoning laws, such as those that involve building codes or place restrictions on tree removal. However, also included here are examples where collective claims to property are made, as discussed above. Where these trouble the right to alienate – i.e. where property is removed as a commodity from circuits of local or global capital, as in the case of community land trusts (see Abromowitz, 2000) – there is, of course, a direct assault on processes of enclosure and privatization. Squatter settlements provide a further example of the muddying of the boundaries between the private and the public. Their complexity and ambiguity *vis à vis* the ownership model is illustrated by a case in the UK. "Normally" cast as operating outwith state sanction, Blomley (2004: 21) indicates how an "inversion" occurs when the UK Advisory Service for Squatters provides squatters with "a template 'legal warning'", which cites the Criminal Law Act (1977) and which can be used by them to assert rights to their squat. As a final example of troubling the boundaries between public and private rights, and one that I will discuss further in Chapter 2, under feudal law – as pertained until very recently in almost all privately owned land in Scotland – there is no "separation", "at a technical level", between public and private rights, because of the rights retained by the Crown (Callander, 1998: 33). The owners of the land, writes Robin Callander (1998: 9), "do not own their land outright and their authority over that land has always

been constrained not only by the general laws of the country, but also by their feudal title to their land". The result is that private rights are always "inherently conditional on the public interest" (Callander, 1998: 33), a characteristic that both Callander and sociologist David McCrone (1997) argue provided openings for rethinking land rights in future land reform.

In this discussion, the idea of property is rendered more "capacious" and "heterogenous" than is the case in the ownership model (Blomley, 2004: 15). The binary public/private, which is produced as stable and predetermined, common sense and natural, in that model, is called into question. Whether "private", "state" or "common", property is shown to be always and actively "doing" (Blomley, 2003: 122), its enactment bound up in the complications and complexities of social relations. It is, in other words, deeply political. It may be about "theft"/privatization and commodification; it may also, Blomley (2004: 15) argues, contain within it "radical potential", moments of political possibility when the dominant norms are interrupted and ongoing practices of enclosure reversed or at least troubled. What is then needed in analytical terms is to keep open to continuous resignification the complex, frequently contested and constantly changing meanings of property as land is brought into community ownership in order to explore the political possibilities of the commoning of the land.

In this book, I take these ideas about the "doing" of property to trace the ways through which bringing land into community ownership "undoes" dominant norms of property that rely on practices of privatization and enclosure and on land as a commodity with exchange value in circuits of global capital (Chapter 2). To extend Gibson-Graham's (2006) theorization of a diverse economy, rethinking property in this way opens up the political possibilities for people to reconfigure their individual and collective subject positions in the search for more just futures. It contributes to the re-creation of the "commonweal", a Scots word meaning the common good or common well-being.[17]

This disturbance of the neoliberal norms through which property is so frequently produced is not only about reversing processes of enclosure that began hundreds of years ago. It is also about the creation of material and metaphorical space through which people's relationship with "nature" can be reworked. Privatization is about property, as I have shown, but it is additionally about the reworking of the relations between people and nature such that the process of capital accumulation is deepened. It is through privatization – of property – that, to borrow Cindi Katz's (1998: 46) phrase, nature becomes "an accumulation

strategy for capital". Here, I identify first, briefly, the ways through which nature is produced through neoliberalization in the interest of capital accumulation before, second, indicating how troubling property opens nature to new, more socially just, significations.

"[N]ature's neoliberalisation", suggests Castree (2008a: 150, emphasis his), proceeds in ways that appear paradoxical: it is at once "about conservation *and* its two antitheses of destroying existing and creating new biophysical resources". To consider, first, conservation, nature is conscripted as part of a neoliberal agenda in two ways. The first, referred to as "free market environmentalism" by its supporters, involves the privatization and marketization of environmental management (Castree, 2008a: 147). Examples include wetland mitigation banking in the USA (Robertson, 2007), the provision of water supplies in England and Wales (Bakker, 2007b), and the conservation of fish stocks by the USA through Individual Transferable Quotas in the case of the North Pacific (Mansfield, 2007b) or, in the case of New England fisheries, through a series of measures that include restrictions on licences for specific species, on type of gear permitted, on access to fishing grounds and on the number of allowable days at sea (St. Martin, 2007).

The second way through which conservation reworks nature concerns the growing number and extent of parks or biosphere reserves, particularly in the global south. "Debt-for nature" swaps, where the debt of an impoverished country in the global south is exchanged, at a discounted rate, by states or non-governmental organizations in the global north for the "preservation" of a particular area, provide another example (Katz, 1998: 50). The "intent" of these areas of conservation, to paraphrase Katz (1998: 47), is to effect the enclosure of specific territories in ways such that there is the simultaneous erasure of specific histories and the production of a space for "bio-accumulation". She writes:

> Underwriting these strategies are deeply problematic constructions of nature that turn around peculiar and problematic tropes of wild and wilderness; a class-based, racialized, and imperially inflected notion of the "public" and its "commons"; and a paradoxical understanding of material social practices as somehow outside nature (1998: 48).

For Arturo Escobar (1996), such conservation strategies work, discursively as well as materially, as a form of "postmodern ecological capital". Distinguished from the "modern [i.e. exploitative] form of ecological capital", which proceeds through such normalizing discourses as those of science and progress, the postmodern form, advanced by discourses of

sustainability and biodiversity, opens up new territories, new communities and local knowledges to capital (Escobar, 1996: 56–57). People and communities, argues Escobar (1996: 57), may be valued as "stewards of nature" or as the repositories of valuable knowledge (for example, for bio-prospecting by pharmaceutical companies), but the cultural complexity and embeddedness of this knowledge – including its frequently gendered and generational dimensions – are ignored. It is coded in ways that are economically reductionist.

The neoliberalization of nature also proceeds through the exploitation, or degradation, of biophysical resources – Escobar's modern form of ecological capital. Through ongoing processes of enclosure and privatization of land, forests, oil, fish stocks and, for the purposes of producing energy from renewable sources, the wind and water from rivers and the sea, nature is recruited in the interest of capital accumulation. Exposing more of the "nonhuman world" to the market, as Castree (2008a: 147) notes, "overlaps closely" with the strategy of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003) identified earlier. Examples based on detailed case study research abound and include contributions to special issues of *Geoforum* (2004, 35(3)), *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (2005, 16(1)) and *Antipode* (2007, 39(3)), some of which have been re-published in modified form in the book *Neoliberal Environments* (2007a), edited by Nik Heynen, James McCarthy, Scott Prudham and Paul Robbins.[18]

The creation of new biophysical resources provides a final way through which nature may be enlisted in the process of neoliberalization. Genetic engineering is one obvious instance of the extension of property rights to new forms of nature. Sarah Whatmore's (2002) forensic examination of the soy bean details the precise ways through which nature is reinvented in the interest of capital. Genetically modified seeds, as is evident from her analysis as well as from globally diffuse protest that has greeted their field trials and distribution, are firmly inscribed in political process – in dispossession. Parallel arguments can be made through Scott Prudham's (2007) work on patents in the cases of Harvard College's oncomouse and Monsanto Corporation's "Roundup Ready" canola heard by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2002 and 2004 respectively.

Critical scholarship such as that identified above disputes the idea, still prevalent within as well as outwith academia, that nature is ontologically separate from, or external to, society. Projecting the origins of this dualism back to Francis Bacon in early seventeenth century England, Neil Smith (2008: 11) refers to this conceptualization of nature

as "a thing, the realm of extra human objects and processes existing outside society. … [It] is pristine, God-given, autonomous; it is the raw material from which society is built, the frontier which industrial capitalism continually pushes back". It is this construction of nature, as Katz (1998: 48) identifies in the quotation cited earlier concerning conservation practices, that underpins processes of enclosure and privatization. As its counter, captured through the phrase "social nature" to which I turn shortly, it comes with political baggage. Claiming legitimacy on the grounds of "scientific method" with its normalizing procedures of "measurability", "objectivity" and "replicability", a politics of nature as external allows the pursuit of particular interests while at the same time silencing others. In ways that parallel the operation of the ownership model of property, a politics pursued through the dualism nature/society hides the ways through which power operates. It acts as a political technology (Foucault, 1979), casting as asocial and apolitical a relationship between society and nature that, its critics insist, is deeply and interrelatedly social and political – with respect to class, race, gender, among other axes of social differentiation. Dangerously so with respect to the practice of "wilderness", or so William Cronon (1995: 80–81, emphasis his) argues in his influential essay on the subject, the dualism produces "wilderness" as the place where people are not, as the only place where "true" nature is found, leaving us with "little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honorable* human place in nature might actually look like". He continues:

> In its flight from history, in its siren song of escape, in its reproduction of the dangerous dualism that sets human beings outside of nature – in all these ways, wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century (Cronon, 1995: 81).

"The costs of retaining the dualism", write Castree and Braun (1998: 34), have simply "become too high; as Latour explains, too much is left unseen".

Theorists of social nature who, like Castree and Braun, recognize that, at every turn, the social is inevitably and integrally intertwined with the natural, seek both to expose the political and social practices through which nature is constructed and to suggest what a different politics to that based on the binary society/nature might look like. Researchers such as those identified in the earlier discussion of the neoliberalization of nature draw variously on a theoretical repertoire that includes insights from poststructural critiques of Marxian theorizing of the production of

nature, from Butler's work on performativity and (following Foucault) the productivity of power, and from the field of the sociology of scientific knowledge, where writers such as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway interrogate the "hybridity" of social natures (Castree and Braun, 1998: 15–33). Although the political possibilities that may emerge from these richly diverse investigations are frequently not traced to any substantial degree, as Castree (2008b) has noted, it is evident that the concept of social nature provides both "analytic and political hope" (Braun, 2002: 10) in a context of the ongoing processes of neoliberal globalization. Analytically, this approach requires that attention be given to "the *specific historical forms* that nature's production takes" and "the specific *generative forms* that shape how this occurs" (Braun, 2002: 11, emphasis his). In terms of politics, working with the idea of social nature, argues Bruce Braun (2002: 13, emphasis his), "forces us to take responsibility for *how* this remaking of nature occurs, in *whose* interests, and with *what* consequences (for people, plants, and animals alike). It brings together ecology and social justice".

As a reminder to those environmentalists who are sceptical, Braun (2002: 14) insists that this is not a matter of condoning "all human environmental practices". "There is no reason", he argues, why an environmental movement informed by social nature "should be any less concerned with the health of the planet and its many inhabitants, human and nonhuman alike, than any other ecopolitics" (Braun, 2002: 14). Instead, such a politics may lead to "a reinvigorated environmentalism":

> [Social nature] brings society and ecology together into a single analytic field, allows us to critically examine and evaluate the many ways that nature is socially produced, and draws attention to the ways in which nature's production – including its preservation – is always entangled with much more than nature, including questions of class, race, gender, and sexuality. It does not dictate to us what future natures *should* look like, nor does it provide a template for developing normative statements about nature and its transformation; these are open-ended questions that will be decided by the play of historical forces and political struggle (Braun, 2002: 14).

This different politics is not then about "policing boundaries" between an ontologically separate "nature" and "culture" (Castree and Braun, 1998: 34). It is about disturbing the norm of nature as external to the social and opening up the meanings of the terms "nature" and "the

social" to allow new ways of thinking critically and creatively about how to move forward, about "what kinds of marks we wish to leave", to borrow Cronon's (1995: 88) phrase.

I employ the concept of social nature as a way of exploring the ways through which nature is reworked once the land is brought into community ownership. I am interested in the political possibilities of a nature that is now produced through a reversal of practices of enclosure and privatization of the land. There are two parts to the argument. First, I am concerned to trace the extent to which a disturbance of the norms captured in the binary private/public with respect to property rights troubles the dualism nature/culture in so far as it concerns practices of conservation (Chapter 3). As I show later, substantial areas in the Outer Hebrides and specifically the Isle of Harris are subject to protective environmental designations whose provenance lies elsewhere – at national (Scotland), UK and European levels. To what extent do new practices of nature by land owning community trusts – that have to do with these areas of conservation – write against "the scientific colonialism" of "'core' conservationists" (Mather, 1993: 374), underpinned as this approach to the preservation of "wild" places is by the dualism nature/ culture? Examining such recent practices as the planting of "native" woodland, the management of environmentally protected areas, and the proposal for a national park on Harris, I consider how a community land owning trust "undoes" a norm of nature produced through this dualism. I demonstrate how the land owning trust extracts the idea of the "wild" from colonizing – and class-based – configurations of conservation and opens up the meanings of nature and the wild to new configurations, thereby creating the space for the renegotiation of a community subjectivity.

Second, I draw on social nature theorizing to investigate the process of commodification of the wind, now a highly valued resource both in the effort to turn around local economic (mis)fortunes in the Outer Hebrides and in the attempt to achieve renewable energy targets within Scotland and, more generally, the UK and its commitments to international protocols (Chapter 4). Through plans to build wind farms and thus capture the wind, nature enters the political arena in complex ways that centre on the question of land ownership. Who owns the land has the right to work the wind, as I have discussed elsewhere (Mackenzie, 2006b). Unlike many other struggles over a commons, it is not simply a case of (local) resistance to a process of enclosure – the commodification of a resource – although there is indeed substantial opposition to attempts by corporations and private individuals (land owners) to erect

large-scale wind farms. Such attempts may unequivocally be analysed as a process of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2003), legitimated through the planning process on account of a gesture towards a local community. However, where the surplus from the production of electricity and its sale to the national grid is distributed according to the priorities of a community land owning trust, rather than to distant shareholders or to an individual owner's bank account, the norms of commodification are disrupted. Here, aligned with a collective rather than corporate ethic or individual interest, the process of commodification of the wind reinforces collective rights to the land rather than undercutting them. It is at this point of troubling the norm, I argue, that the political possibilities of a new social nature emerge.

In Chapter 5, I extend the argument about the political possibilities created when norms of property and nature are disrupted through community land ownership by examining a series of initiatives that work together to re-create community and place. I show how the activities of the North Harris Trust – by building houses, reducing the community's carbon footprint, promoting local food production, conducting archaeological research, and restoring a network of footpaths - produce a new way of seeing the estate. The activities, as those I have discussed in previous chapters, conjure an optic and a counternarrative that call into question the hegemony of processes of neoliberalization. They suggest the exercise of a right that, to borrow from Castree (2004: 136), allows people, collectively, to "make their own places, rather than have them made for them". By reworking the meanings of a land now held in common, they point towards a more radical, socially just, and sustainable engagement with the future than was possible before community land ownership.

Notes

1   The figure of about 425 000 acres in community ownership is more than the acreage owned by the National Trust for Scotland, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the Highlands and Islands, the John Muir Trust and the Scottish Wildlife Trust combined (Cameron, 2009: 15).
2   I am excluding here the Stornoway Trust set up in 1923 after the owner of Lewis and Harris, William Hesketh Lever, Lord Leverhulme, offered the estate to the Stornoway Town Council (see Hutchinson, 2003). The Assynt Crofters' Trust is generally considered to be the reference point for the contemporary community land movement in Scotland. For a discussion of the origins of the Stornoway Trust – at a time of land struggle

within Lewis and of the fiscal crisis Leverhulme faced – see the work of Joni Buchanan (1996) and Roger Hutchinson (2003). Its detailed story remains to be told. The Stornoway Trust is now a member of Community Land Scotland (Chapter 6).

3 According to Wightman (2010: 106–107), of the 15 722 287 acres of rural land in private ownership in Scotland (out of a total rural acreage of 18 924 516), 9.4 million acres are owned "by a mere 969 landowners" and over 10 million acres are held by 1550 private land owners in estates of 1000 acres or more. With 83.1 per cent, the private sector is by far the largest land owner. The public sector owns 12.1 per cent of rural land, the heritage sector 2.5 per cent and the community sector 2.2 per cent (Wightman, 2010: 106).

4 The play was staged by the 7:84 Theatre Company, whose name refers to the percentage of the UK population, 7 per cent, that owns 84 per cent of the wealth.

5 A croft is often humorously referred to as "a small area of land surrounded by regulations" (a crofter's son, cited by J. MacDonald in *A Short History of Crofting* (1998) in Busby and Macleod, 2010: 602). As a tenant of an estate under crofting tenure, a crofter has use rights to inbye land, ranging in extent from under half a hectare to over 50 ha, but averaging about 5 ha (Crofters Commission, 2011) and rights to common grazings, which may extend to thousands of hectares. These grazing rights are shared with other members of the crofting township. (For a definition of a crofting township, as given in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, see Chapter 2.) Security of tenure, the right of succession, the right to the value of any improvements carried out on the croft and the right to a fair rent have, among other measures, been assured since the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act 1886. There are at present 17 923 crofts in Scotland supporting a population of about 33 000 (Crofters Commission, 2011). Crofts extend over about 17 per cent of Scotland's land base and are located in what are generally referred to as "the crofting counties": Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire and Argyll (Committee of Inquiry on Crofting, 2008: 16). The Crofting Reform (Scotland) Act 2007 expanded the area under the jurisdiction of crofting law to encompass the entire Highland Council area, Moray, the parishes of Kingarth, North Bute and Rothesay in Argyll and Bute, and the islands of Arran (including Holy Island and Pladda), Great Cumbrae and Little Cumbrae in North Ayrshire (Macleod *et al.*, 2010: 97). By extending the area where new crofts and common grazings could be designated, the 2007 legislation also extended the potential reach of Part 3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (see Chapter 2).

6 First, the delegates proposed that public funding be once again made available for land purchase by communities. They called on the Scottish Government to re-establish the Scottish Land Fund that had been so key to the earlier community land buyouts and to finance it through taxation

revenue. Second, they proposed that the Community Land Unit of Highlands and Islands Enterprise – so central in providing financial and logistical support for community land purchase – be given the necessary resources by Scottish ministers once again to take up this task (for an evaluation of the Community Land Unit, see SQW, 2005). And third, recognizing the particular difficulties faced by communities wishing to purchase land owned by the government, the delegates proposed that ways be found to facilitate this process at no, or minimal, cost.

7   The Council retains the title of the Western Isles or, more usually, its Gaelic equivalent, *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*, but with the current "re-branding" of the islands they are commonly referred to as the Outer Hebrides or, in Gaelic, *Innse Gall* (The Isles of Strangers, so named after the period of Norse settlement) (MacAulay, 1996: 6–7, cited by McIntosh, 2004: 18). The earlier name, *Innis Bhrighde* (Isles of St. Bridgit), John MacAulay (1996: 6–7) notes, disappeared a long time ago.

8   These figures compare with an average of 61.1 per cent for the Outer Hebrides, "the Gaelic heartland of Scotland", as a whole (Bryden *et al*., 2008, Appendix 5: 21, 23).

9   It is necessary, of course, to recognize that Scotland's Highlands and Islands were not colonized in the way that, for example, many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa were (see Hunter, 1995a: 28). It is nevertheless the case that the same discourses – of "progress" and "development", as examples – that propelled the imperial project in places farther afield were deployed with devastating material effect in the Highlands and Islands, at times directed from London, at others, from Edinburgh (Hunter, 1995a: 28).

10 Foucault's (1990) focus here is on "morality". He distinguishes between the meaning of morality as "a code", "a set of values and rules of action" and "the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values" (1990: 25). With reference to the second, he writes that, "There is no forming of oneself as an ethical subject without 'modes of subjectivation' and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them" (1990: 28). Modes of subjection he defines as "the way in which the individual establishes his [sic] relation to the rule and recognizes himself [sic] as obliged to put it into practice" (1990: 27).

11 In order to capture more precisely the ongoing process of resubjectivation, I have replaced Nancy's (1991: 4, emphasis his) words, "being *in* common", with the phrase, "becoming in common". Gibson-Graham (2006: 85, emphasis hers) notes that for Nancy there was no "common being", as that phrase recalls a community identity that is "already known [which] precludes the *becoming* of new and as-yet unthought ways of being".

12 Massey (2009: 415) makes it clear that such a politics is not "necessarily progressive" – as evident in Bush's and Blair's war in Iraq.

13 For an excellent introduction to poststructural political ecology, see Peet and Watts (2004).

14   These "moralistic arguments" frequently confuse, as did Hardin, "open access" situations with common property regimes. It is the former, rather than the latter, where the "free rider" problem emerges (see, for example, Ostrom, 2005: 80).

15   The "most progressive strategies" for the provision of water, Bakker (2007a: 446) suggests, are those that involve both government reform and the building of local, community-led, institutions for resource management.

16   In the effort to deploy the commons politically in the struggle against privatization, Bakker (2007a: 443–444) is concerned to distance herself from a "romantic" view of "community" – an entity that is socially and economically homogeneous, beyond the fray of politics and always successful in sustainably managing resources. She points both to literature that supports claims of effective community management of such a resource as water and to research that documents its shortcomings (Bakker, 2007a: 446). In addition, it is also necessary to recognize how frequently "community" is now conscripted in neoliberalizing discourse. In reference to Wendy Wolford's (2007) research into the land struggle in Brazil, Michael Watts (2007: 277) notes that "the invocation of 'community' as a counter-force to market-led reform fails to come to terms with the extent to which the community has become the neoliberal form *par excellence* of modern governmentality". The critical issue to explore is whether calls for "community" and a new "commons" are indeed part of a counterhegemonic imaginary to that of enclosure and privatization or whether they are thereby coopted into the prevailing neoliberal imaginary (see McCarthy, 2005a: 18–19), whether they contribute to the creation of a more diverse, less capitalocentric economy as suggested by Gibson-Graham (2006), or to the furthering of neoliberal norms. There can be no "global, universal evaluation" of this issue, writes McCarthy (2005a: 19).

17   The term has recently gained increased political visibility through The Commonweal Project of the Caledonia Centre for Social Development. The project aims to document and disseminate knowledge about common property rights in Scotland, and thereby contribute to the political case for asserting common property rights, particularly for those whose well-being is at risk with their loss (see, e.g., Reid, 2003).

18   For a critical discussion and synthesis of some of this published work, see Castree, 2008a, b.