Citation: Lynch, Casey R (2017) “Vote with your feet”: Neoliberalism, the democratic nation-state, and utopian enclave libertarianism, *Political Geography*, 59, 82-91. 10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.03.005.

TITLE: “Vote with your feet”: Neoliberalism, the Democratic Nation-State, and Utopian

Enclave Libertarianism

ABSTRACT

This paper examines a series of emerging utopian discourses that call for the creation of autonomous libertarian enclaves on land ceded by or claimed against existing states. These discourses have emerged in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and can be seen as a response to the crisis on the part of free-market advocates who critique previous waves of neoliberal reform for failing to radically transform the existing structures of the state. Enclave libertarianism seeks to overcome neoliberal capitalism’s contradictory relationship to the liberal democratic state by rethinking the state as a “private government service provider” and rethinking citizens as mobile consumers of government services. Citizens are thus called to “vote with their feet” by opting-in to the jurisdiction that best fits their needs and beliefs. The paper argues that these utopian imaginaries are key to understanding specific new manifestations of post-crisis neoliberalism, and calls for more research into the diversity of discourses and

imaginaries that circulate through networks of neoliberal actors beyond specific policy

initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Following the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, a number of observers speculated that the crisis could signal the end of the neoliberal era (Peck et al., 2010; Springer, 2010; Dumenil and Levy 2013). Yet, eight years later there is growing consensus that neoliberal doctrine continues to drive much political, economic, and social policy across the globe. Processes of neoliberalization have accelerated, reached into new areas, and been pursued through new strategies, increasingly authoritarian means and emergent logics of securitization (Peck et al., 2013; Abrahamsson and Ek, 2014; Amar, 2013). For this reason, despite an abundance of literature on neoliberalism as a set of economic policies (Harvey, 2007), a logic of economization and financialization (Brown, 2015), a situated practice and process (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner et al., 2010), and a form of governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta, 2005), there is a continued need to unpack neoliberalism in its various guises, spatial and temporal manifestations, and complex and contingent relations (Peck, 2013).

In this paper, I build on existing literature from geography and related disciplines that approach neoliberalism as both a discourse and set of situated practices to highlight the internal debates and dialogs within what is too often described as a singular hegemonic ideology. While scholars have examined the multiplicity of “actually-existing neoliberalisms” in practice, this article contributes to a literature that examines the emergence and evolution of multiple and divergent neoliberal discourses and utopian imaginaries (Ettlinger and Hartmann 2015; Jones 2012; Steinberg et al. 2012; Davis and Monk 2007; Bonnett 2001). I examine the utopian discourses around several related proposals for autonomous libertarian city-states: Seasteading, Startup Cities, Free Private Cities, and LEAP Zones. These utopian imaginaries have gained influence since the global financial crisis, as their proponents seek out new opportunities to

influence policy in moments of crisis. I argue that in order to understand the complex processes of post-2008 crisis neoliberalization, scholars must pay closer attention to the different sub-movements that operate through a broad neoliberal framework, the variations in their ideologies and visions, and the diverse strategies they employ in pursuit of these visions.

The remainder of the paper is organized into three sections. In the first section, I situate utopian enclave libertarianism as a response to the contradictions and tensions between the material reality of neoliberalism in practice, in which the state is a necessary actor in the production and reproduction of purportedly “free” markets, and aspirational neoliberal discourses in which the state is seen as a limit to “freedom” and a structural barrier to continued capitalist expansion. In the second section, I consider how notions of sovereignty, territory, democracy, and citizenship are reconceptualized within emerging libertarian discourses in an attempt to bypass the contradictions inherent in neoliberalism’s relationship with the state. In these discourses, the territorial nation-state is supplanted by a fragmented geography of smaller jurisdictions governed by privatized so-called government service providers. This model structurally forecloses the possibility of a political public and bases its conception of “democracy” on the manipulation of territory and space—referred to by some as “dynamic geography” (The Seasteading Institute, 2014)—and the assumed mobility of the abstract resident/citizen who is encouraged to “vote with her feet.” In the final section, I consider the ways these utopian discourses circulate through transnational networks of investors, activists, economists, consultants, policy-makers, and others, and come to inform actually-existing political projects and proposals. I use the case of Honduras’ Zone for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDE) to demonstrate how enclave libertarian discourses get taken up in a particular political context, and then briefly discuss three other sites in which enclave libertarian

discourses circulate—a greenfield city-building project in the Republic of Georgia, the Syrian refugee crisis, and a border dispute in the Danube River.

I base this work on a close reading of documents, articles, visual material, and manifestos written or published by key actors in the enclave libertarian movement, including Mark Klugmann (2013a, 2013b, 2014), The Seasteading Institute (Friedman, 2013; Friedman and Taylor, 2010; Seasteading Institute, 2014; Balloun, 2012), Titus Gebels (2016), and the Startup Cities Institute (Caceres, 2013; Marty, 2015). I also draw on interviews with leaders of the enclave libertarian inspired ZEDE project in Honduras. My focus on the ideational aspects of enclave libertarianism does not abstract from the diverse material and lived realities that undergird such imaginaries and projects, but rather highlights how particular utopian ideas emerge and circulate, often independent of particular policy prescriptions or governmental projects. Even when these imaginaries do not have immediate policy implications or material effects, they help shape important conversations about the future of how the world may look politically, economically, and socially—and about what forms of social organization are seen as possible or desirable.

NEOLIBERALISM, LIBERTARIANISM AND THE STATE

Ettlinger and Hartmann (2015), through their reading of Foucault's lectures titled *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), examine “post-neoliberalism” in Latin America's “pink-tide” governments at the level of its professed principles and situate it discursively in relation to both liberalism and neoliberalism. They show that “post-neoliberalism” does not so much constitute a break with a previous liberal or neoliberal era of governance, as no ‘pure’ moment of liberalism or neoliberalism has ever actually existed. Rather, post-neoliberalism represents a new (and often

contradictory) articulation of aspirational discourses and policies that continue to be framed and assessed in relation to liberal principles. In examining the foundational principles and proposals of enclave libertarianism, I too point toward a new discursive articulation of liberalism as it takes shape in the utopian imaginaries of libertarian activists and their emerging attempts at political intervention in Honduras and elsewhere.

Neoliberalism as Discourse and Practice

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault (2008) examines the internal logic of (neo)liberalism and its emergence as a discursive site of power and authority. At an abstract level, he writes that—in contrast to other governmental logics—in liberalism “the market constitutes a site of veridiction... a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice” (Foucault 2008, 32). In this logic, the market is no longer understood as the object of governmental practice, but becomes discursively reconstituted as a “regime of truth,” with the price-value relationship as its fundamental law and guiding principle. Government policies are judged not on whether they are deemed just or representative of popular will, but by their adherence to this constructed economic truth and on their ability to produce economic growth and capital accumulation.

In his discussion of the emergence of German ordo-liberalism at the end of the 1940's, Foucault expands this argument, claiming that “the market” becomes the foundation on which political authority is exercised in post-war Germany, replacing democratic representation as the discursive basis of political legitimacy. He writes that, in this case, “the economy, economic development and economic growth, produces sovereignty” (Foucault 2008, 84). A paradoxical relationship thus emerges in neoliberalism, by which the state is in practice a necessary, constitutive actor in the production and reproduction of markets, while discursively painted as the limit to truly “free” markets. In this way, the neoliberal discourse—in which the state as we

know it dissolves, leaving behind truly “free” markets—can be seen as a utopian fantasy. As Mannheim (1936, 341) writes “A state of mind is utopian when (a) it is incongruous with the immediate situation and (b) when passed onto actions, tend to shatter the order of things.” In *The Birth of Politics*, Foucault references Hayek’s own call to create liberal utopias: “It is up to us to create liberal utopias, to think in a liberal mode, rather than presenting liberalism as a technical alternative for government. Liberalism must be a general style of thought, analysis, and imagination” (Foucault 2008, 219).

Recognizing the utopianism of neoliberal discourses, Ettlinger and Hartmann (2015), Brenner and Theodore (2002), Peck (2013) and others distinguish between neoliberalism as discourse and neoliberalism as practice. Neoliberal policies and practices can never produce the political, economic, and social outcomes projected by the utopian discourses of neoliberal thinkers and planners. As these new techniques of rule seek to create self-regulated, entrepreneurial subjects, they are met with resistance, as diverse elements of society react to the excesses and contradictions of the (neoliberal) capitalist model. Following Polanyi (1944), scholars of neoliberalism have thus examined how the market is always “re-embedded” in its social context, producing a “double movement”, as the ideology and utopian imaginaries of the capitalist class must confront and negotiate myriad complex and competing interests in practice.

In this way, neoliberalism in practice can be understood as an ongoing process of re-regulation, as “free-market” proponents seek to overcome the contradictions and conflicts inherent in their ideology and produced by their policies (Lipietz 1992; Tickell and Peck 1992). Thus, scholars have highlighted how—in Joyce’s (2003) words— neoliberalism constitutes a kind of paradoxical “rule through freedom.” Invoking Foucault’s notion of governmentality, Hart (2004, p. 92) writes that:

Rather than less government, neoliberalism in this view represents a new modality of government predicated on interventions to create the organizational and subjective conditions for entrepreneurship – not only in terms of extending the ‘enterprise model’ to schools, hospitals, housing estates and so forth, but also in inciting individuals to become entrepreneurs of themselves.

Key here is the notion that—in contrast the claims put forward by its supporters—neoliberalism does not constitute a process of deregulation, but rather a re-regulation that more fully subordinates all aspects of life to a capitalistic rationality.

Recognizing the complexity of neoliberalism as a contested and an inherently contradictory economic doctrine and governmental logic, Brenner and Theodore (2002) call for an approach that conceives of neoliberalization as a set of related, historically and geographically-situated processes of reform. They write:

In contrast to neoliberal ideology, in which market forces are assumed to operate according to immutable laws no matter where they are “unleashed,” we emphasize the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects insofar as they have been produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles. (Brenner and Theodore 2002, p. 351).

Previous work on “actually-existing neoliberalisms” (Collier 2005; Cahill 2010; Ruming 2005) have found that neoliberal policy frameworks tend to “produce a range of new hybrid and mutant socio-spatial formations” (Boyle et al. 2008, p. 313), distinct from the aspirational and utopian discourses mobilized to support and justify them.

While ample literature examines the proliferation of diverse neoliberalisms in practice (Brenner et al. 2010) and the circulation of particular policy frameworks through networks of ‘experts’ and policy makers (Peck 2011; Peck and Theodore 2015), this article considers how neoliberalism as utopian discourses is also splintered and diverse. As neoliberal doctrinaires rethink their approaches and respond to the tensions and contradictions that arise in practice, they

are producing new utopian imaginaries and developing new perspectives and strategies through which to pursue their aspirational principles.

Neoliberalism and Crisis

Harvey (2011) and others (Jones 2012; Peck et al. 2010) explain how crisis is an inherent attribute of cycles of capital accumulation, illustrating how crises present opportunities for further accumulation while simultaneously laying bare the contradictions, irrationalities, and utopian visions of capitalism. As such, the emergence, evolution, and spread of neoliberal doctrine can in many ways be traced to a history of crisis. Brennetot (2015) traces the emergence of neoliberalism to Lippmann Colloquium organized in Paris in 1938, showing how the ideas of the earliest neoliberal theorists emerged in response to the economic crisis of the Great Depression and the impending geopolitical crisis of World War II. Neoliberalism's emergence in mainstream discourse arrived as a result of a series of crises of the 1970's, brought on by—among other things—the breakup of the Bretton Woods international monetary system in 1971 (Jones 2012; Harvey 2007). Mirowski and Plehwe (2015) examine how particular networks of neoliberal visionaries tied to the Mont Pelerin Society strategized to promote their political economic discourse as a solution to these crises by cultivating relationships with leaders and policy makers across the globe. Supporters of a neoliberal economic model sought to capitalize on specific political crises—such as the 1973 coup d'état in Chile—in the context of broader global economic crisis to find fertile ground to experiment with their abstract and utopian ideas in practice (Fischer 2015).

The onset of a new global financial crisis in 2008 prompted questions from academics, activists, and others about the future of neoliberalism (Peck et al. 2010). Large-scale public bailouts of banks and other industries, among other forms of government intervention and

corporate welfare, seemed to clearly expose the myth of “free” markets independent of the state (Harvey 2011). While neoliberalism’s flexibility and ability to adapt to moments of crisis had long been noted (Peck and Tickell 1994), as the crisis unfolded scholars began to speculate about the possibilities for a coming postneoliberal era (Peck et al. 2010). Some began to argue that the “neoliberal era” leading up to the financial crisis was simply a particular moment in long term cycles of capitalist development, predicting dramatic shifts away from neoliberal policies globally in the following years (Wallerstein 2008; Dumenil and Levy 2013). Yet, it has become increasingly clear that neoliberalism has not only survived the crisis, but processes of neoliberalization have accelerated in many areas, and have been pursued through new strategies and increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic means (Peck et al., 2013; Abrahamsson and Ek, 2014; Amar, 2013; Brown 2015; Mirowski 2014).

Recognizing the proliferation of multiple neoliberalisms in practice—perhaps especially in the wake of the financial crisis—Brenner et al. (2010) thus note that neoliberalism has been poorly defined in academia, often referring to any action, doctrine, logic, or policy that calls for “free market” rule. The breadth of the existing literature on the topic and the lack of a single concrete definition have led some scholars to reject neoliberalism as a useful concept and object of inquiry (Clarke 2008). Yet, as the global financial crisis of 2008 has brought about a redoubling of neoliberal logics, others have called for continued research into “neoliberal”-style reforms and policy initiatives but with a greater focus on local, hybrid manifestations and mutations (Peck 2013; Peck et al. 2013). This approach offers a greater degree of specificity by paying attention to the uniqueness of neoliberal practices and policies in place and their emergence over time. Yet, while recognizing differences in practice, this view continues to posit

neoliberalism as a singular *discourse*—just one with uneven and contradictory applications and effects.

Peck et al. (2010, 95) write that “[m]oments of crisis always reveal a great deal about the nature of neoliberalization as an adaptive regime of socioeconomic governance.” Yet, less has been written about the emergence and evolution of utopian discourses in moments of crisis. How, in moments of crisis, do neoliberals seek to develop and spread new styles of “thought, analysis, and imagination” (Foucault 2008, 219)—that is, new liberal utopias—that may or may not be immediately recognizable in the local, material, and contested processes of neoliberalization? By focusing on neoliberal discourses and paying attention to the different strains of neoliberal thought—that is, the various utopias produced by neoliberal and related thinkers—and their emergence over time and in response to crises, scholars can offer more fine-tuned analyses of multiple neoliberalisms in practice and neoliberalism’s adaptability in the face of crisis.

Libertarianism and the State

In the years since the financial crisis, there has been a resurgence of activity around libertarian capitalist ideology. Defining libertarianism in a clear and concise way can be difficult as the term encompasses several sub-movements with quite distinct objectives and ideals. Libertarianism is often associated with a strict adherence to the principles of “classic liberalism” described by economists like Friedrich von Hayek (1944), Milton Friedman (1962), and others, as well as the anti-state utopianism and techno-optimism of writer Ayn Rand. Its primary tenets include the belief that all human associations should be voluntary, that private property is a fundamental and natural right from which all human freedom is derived, and that the sole function of the state should thus be to prevent coercion and protect private property (Boaz, 2015;

Schuelter, 2014). In this way, libertarianism can be understood as a particularly purist and utopian strain of liberal thought, critiquing previous neoliberal reform movements for not going far enough in transforming the traditional structures of the state and society.

Yet, libertarianism is often associated with a range of rather distinct political movements.

As Steinberg et al. (2012, p. 1537) point out:

While libertarianism as espoused by Rand is most typically associated with unleashing humanity's entrepreneurial potential, the philosophy has also been taken up by many with a more bohemian bent, who seek out a society with few legal restraints not to make money but simply to do their own thing (Gibson 2009; Nozick 1974, 1981).

As examples of this latter group, Steinberg et al. highlight the libertarianism associated with the Burning Man festival and those who adhere to the philosophy based on a desire for legalized recreational drug use. On the other end of the spectrum, the Tea Party Movement in the United States—as well as its predecessors, like the American Patriot Movement (Gallaher 2003)—is typically associated with libertarianism for its anti-state, pro-capitalist rhetoric, often combining similar economic doctrine to that espoused in Silicon Valley with xenophobic and racist discourses, extreme nationalism, and conservative and reactionary social values more broadly.

As part of the broader trends of post-crisis neoliberalization, libertarian organizations and activists have been particularly vocal in promoting their visions for a free market future unhindered by the regulatory roles of existing states. Over the past several years, certain libertarian thinkers and organizations have begun advocating for the creation of autonomous jurisdictions carved out of the territories of existing states. This movement, which I term “enclave libertarianism,” draws inspiration from the ideals of classic political economy, as well as the work of Ayn Rand and a fetishization of the rapid urbanization and economic success of certain modern-day city-states, like Dubai, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

I use the term enclave libertarianism to group together a related set of utopian imaginaries that have emerged and developed over the past years under the monikers LEAP Zones, Start-Up Cities, Free Private Cities, and Seasteading. The concept of LEAP Zones—autonomous legal, economic, administrative, and political jurisdictions—has been developed and promoted by former Reagan speechwriter Mark Klugmann, in his role as an adviser to governments around the world in the years following the financial crisis. The Startup Cities Institute (SCI) at Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City is a research and development organization that hosts workshops and events promoting an enclave libertarian approach to urban development. German entrepreneur Titus Gebel founded Free Private Cities Ltd in 2016 in order to develop and offer private governance services according to the enclave libertarian vision. Finally, The Seasteading Institute—a San Francisco-based think tank—promotes the creation of autonomous communities on floating platforms in the open ocean or in the calm territorial waters of a “friendly nation.” Steinberg et al. (2012) expertly examine and critique the discourses and forms of organization on which The Seasteading Institute (TSI) is based, from its understanding of libertarian philosophy, its critique of state-regulated capitalism, and its turn toward the ocean as the ideal abstract space on which to project its utopian visions. The authors present the seasteading vision not “as a potentially practicable model for recovering the originary spirit of capitalism” but more as “a critique that—its organizers hope—will spur fellow believers into action” (Steinberg et al., 2012, p. 1545).

In the past several years, these “fellow believers” have indeed begun to act. At least partly inspired by the seasteaders, the LEAP Zone, Startup City, and Free Private City visions have emerged as more practicable (though no less contradictory) means of pursuing autonomous libertarian development, and have begun to have real effects on policy. Since 2011, the

government of Honduras, with the assistance of Mark Klugmann, has slowly been moving toward the creation of its first LEAP Zone, known in Honduras as the “model city” project or according to its legal moniker, Zones of Economic Development and Employment (ZEDE). In recent years, enclave libertarian models have also been proposed as solutions to refugee crises around the world, as a strategy to attract investment for and govern emergent greenfield city-building projects, and as a model of asserting sovereignty over purportedly unclaimed territory.

In order to examine how enclave libertarian discourses circulate in practice, I draw on Butler’s discussion of performativity and citationality. Butler (1993) defines performativity as the “reiterative citational practice” through which hegemony is continually constructed—and therefore can be contested, reworked, or undermined. Butler writes that:

If a performative provisionally succeeds... then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because the action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or *citation* [my emphasis] of a prior authoritative set of practices. (Butler 1993, 173)

While Butler’s use of performativity was originally developed around discussions of gender and sexuality, there is now an abundance of critical work that “takes Butler elsewhere” to examine questions of the market (MacKenzie and Muniesa 2007), space (Gregson and Rose 2000), and law (Braverman et al 2014) among other topics. Butler herself has recently examined the performative nature of political practice and public assembly (Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Butler 2015). I draw on this notion of performativity to understand how attempts by utopian libertarian thinkers and activists to promote their visions occur through series of moments or events in which their discourses become inscribed in particular citational chains of meaning and authority. As Nakassis (2013) and Gregson and Rose (2000) stress, it is important to consider the situated, relational, and inter-discursive character of these events and thus their instability and potential to fail or have unintended effects and influences.

ENCLAVE LIBERTARIANISM: AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIO-SPATIAL IMAGINARY

In the previous section, I examined the contradiction between neoliberalism's anti-state discourses and the state's role in producing and reproducing markets in practice. Likewise, I examined Foucault's (2008) reflections on the logic of neoliberal governance in which the market becomes the 'site of veridiction' for governments—that is, political legitimacy becomes tied to the relative ability of a given state to foment economic growth. Enclave libertarians take this logic one step further, seeing the current nation-state system itself as an impediment to continued economic growth and capitalist expansion—and thus illegitimate. This is due to an apparent lack of competition among different forms of governance. In this logic, states must not only obey the independent laws of the market, they must also become part of the market—effectively dissolving the state into the market—in order to incentivize efficiency and innovation. Enclave libertarianism thus seeks to rethink and transform the basis of the liberal nation-state through the manipulation and contestation of existing regimes of territoriality in an attempt to overcome the inherent contradictions in free-market ideology.

This is made explicit in *The Floating City*, a preliminary plan and strategy report for founding a libertarian city-state on a floating platform in the ocean. The authors write that The Seasteading Institute's "supporters tend to view government as an industry, lacking competition due to high 'barriers to entry.' In other words, it's exceedingly difficult to enter the government industry and offer a government startup" (The Seasteading Institute, 2014). This sentiment is also reflected throughout publications by the Startup Cities Institute: "Startup Cities bring the dynamic of agile, competitive entrepreneurship that works well in technology but is absent from politics. The autonomy of Startup Cities' jurisdictions create competition between zones" (Startup Cities Institute, 2014, p. 4). By creating a "government startup," these thinkers hope to

disrupt the existing “government industry” with its barrier to entry, thus prompting increased competition and innovation in governance. The metric on which these competitive governments would be measured is, of course, economic growth and capital investment.

In this discourse, the role of government is solely to create and enforce the basic rules and rights deemed necessary for the functioning of the market economy. As discussed previously, in libertarian philosophy more broadly, private property rights are seen as the most basic and fundamental of rights from which all others derive. The right to property secures the material basis by which the rational, autonomous subject is able to pursue happiness and self-fulfillment (Boaz 2015). This belief is reflected in enclave libertarians’ utopian discourses, in which the sole and primary role of government is to enforce private property rights. Klugmann (2013) argues that protection of property rights is *the* necessary foundation for private investment and economic growth. Klugmann (2013) writes that:

Capital flows to, and remains where property rights are strong. Despite thousands of locations around the world where investment is free of tax, most of the planet's productive capital is located within jurisdictions where it actually must pay taxes but where there is adequate defense of property rights.

The classic libertarian claim is therefore that states do too much, and that citizens are willing to sacrifice certain “freedoms” in exchange for the state’s protection and security. As Titus Gebel of Free Private Cities Ltd writes:

Let us analyze the market for governance: states exist, at least in part, because there is demand for them. A functioning state offers a stable framework of law and order, which enables the coexistence and interaction of a larger number of people. This is so attractive that most people are willing to accept significant limitations on their personal freedom in exchange... However, if you could offer the services of the state and also avoid its disadvantages, you would have created a better product. (Gebel 2016, 8)

Enclave libertarians thus recognize the importance of governance for the functioning of the economy, but rather hope to transform the way these ‘services’ are provided in order to overcome the market’s unfortunate reliance on the state.

While libertarianism holds that the right to private property is fundamental to human freedom, the freedom of association among autonomous individuals is another basic tenet of the philosophy (Boaz, 2015). Individuals’ sole responsibility is toward themselves and there is no recognition of “society” or any other form of collective responsibility. As Gebel (2016, 9) writes: “All adult residents are responsible for the consequences of their actions, not ‘society’ or the operator [the private government]. Again, there is no ‘human right’ to live at the expense of others.” This principle of free association and individual responsibility is reflected in the redefinition of “nation” offered by some libertarian actors that sits implicitly at the heart of the libertarian enclave project. In a 2015 interview with the *The PanAm Post*, David Mondrus, the founder of iNation, a libertarian “start-up” that plans to be “one of the first companies to address the coming unbundling of the government services market,” proclaims:

What is a nation? There are three different things to talk about when we talk about nations. There are nations, there are governments, and there are locations. They are all different. To me, a nation isn’t the government that you belong to or the physical location where you live. Not anymore. It used to be that way; now a nation is people who think like you think. (David Mondrus, quoted in Marty, 2015)

One of the primary goals of enclave libertarians is to fully realize the libertarian ideal of free association of individuals by creating spaces characterized by ideological homogeneity rather than the “critical rational debate” of Habermas’ (1989) ideal public sphere or the agonism of traditional democratic politics and struggles over hegemony (Mouffe 1999; Staeheli 2011).

Rethinking and manipulating space is at the heart of this project. Mark Klugmann (2014) claims that: “We have confused the constant (K) and the variable (v). In the orthodox approach

to economic reform, we have inverted the factors of ‘time’ and ‘space.’” In this way, Klugmann and others argue that trying to implement a series of different policies slowly over time through the existing political and legal process is the wrong strategy for pursuing true “free market” reform. Instead, reformers should focus on implementing an entirely different system all at once, but in a smaller space. Space thus becomes the key variable in the libertarian strategy. Hong Kong and China’s Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are held up as an example of this approach to reform. Rather than moving all of China to a market economy at one time, the designation of Shenzhen as an SEZ allowed wide ranging reform at a local level, which was eventually replicated throughout the country.

This new strategy has led supporters of Startup Cities and LEAP Zones to seek out spaces in existing countries deemed “too small and too empty to fight over” (Klugmann 2013b; Klugmann 2014), where existing states may be willing to cede most formal authority. Manipulating existing political borders and boundaries theoretically offers libertarians the chance to carve out a space of their own and thus “start from scratch” building an entirely new legal, economic, administrative, and political system—and physical space—in which markets can rule unhindered. The Seasteading ideal takes this notion of variable space one step further. While Klugmann, Gebel, and the Startup Cities Institute look to manipulate existing borders to carve out their own autonomous space, seasteaders imagine the ‘smooth space’ of the ocean as an opportunity to experiment with and seek the potential freedom of “dynamic geography.” In their ideal visions, individuals will be private owners of detachable platforms that can be rearranged or moved at the owners’ will. The authors of *The Floating City Project* (2014, 62) write:

a seastead can enable greater freedom at a city level, on the community level, or individual level. This can be achieved by possibilities for moving inside the seastead with one’s own house as an individual, or even moving away from the community with a group of inhabitants. The Seasteading Institute refers to this as ‘dynamic geography’.

Preferably, this would be enabled on as fine-grained a scale as possible, allowing movability all the way down to the size of a single autonomous house.

In this formulation, space—and the ability to easily and quickly manipulate and reconfigure that space—is fundamental to seasteaders’ ideal of freedom of association and private property.

Other enclave libertarians have taken these same principles and imagined ways to pursue this vision on solid ground.

This notion of variable space or ‘dynamic geography’ is the basis for enclave libertarians’ reconception of democracy. While Wendy Brown (2015) examines the multiple ways that neoliberal logic is gradually hollowing out democratic institutions and mentalities, the proposals put forth by enclave libertarians are far more explicit about their goal of “disrupting” traditional democratic imaginaries, processes, and structures. Much of the discourse around libertarian enclaves is based on a profound contempt for elections and the political public sphere as a site of agonism, contestation, negotiation, or critical rational debate. Indeed, Mark Klugmann (2013a) sees LEAP Zones as a way of moving beyond the “politicization” of governance, and Octavio Sanchez (personal interview, 4 August 2014), one of the leaders of the ZEDE project in Honduras, has confirmed that the new jurisdiction he is working to create is designed to be insulated from any changes brought by national elections as a way of offering greater security and stability for investors.

More explicitly, Patri Friedman (2009), citing Caplan’s *The Myth of the Rational Voter* (2007) and Olson’s (1984) *The Rise and Decline of Nations*, writes:

Democracy is not the answer. Democracy is the current industry standard political system, but unfortunately it is ill-suited for a libertarian state. It has substantial systemic flaws, which are well-covered elsewhere, and it poses major problems specifically for libertarians: 1) Most people are not by nature libertarians... [and] 2) Democracy is rigged against libertarians. (Friedman 2009)

Friedman argues that while libertarian government would be the most rational, efficient, and “free,” this cannot be achieved through a traditional conception of politics. The majority of the population is too easily swayed by politicians’ promises, and politicians have an inherent self-interest in enhancing their power and staying in power. Gebel (2016, 10) echoes Friedman’s disdain for traditional democratic institutions, writing: “if the government provider sticks to a few core issues, there is no need for political participation. The idea is to have the greatest possible self-determination, not to ensure maximum participation... representative bodies are a constant danger to liberty.” The role of public participation, debate, negotiation, and compromise—seen as the basis of democratic decision-making, and perhaps also as a constitutive component of Polanyi’s “double movement”—is opposed to enclave libertarians’ desire for ideological purity.

Enclave libertarians instead present an alternative conception of democracy and model for individual choice based largely upon their previously discussed ideals of freedom of association (nations of like-minded individuals) and ‘dynamic geography.’ By fragmenting existing territories into smaller competing jurisdictions, residents and investors can ‘opt-in’ to the jurisdiction and governing framework that best fits their needs or reflects their values. According to the Startup Cities Institute (2014, 4), in this situation “[c]itizens are able to ‘vote with their feet.’ People can move between cities much more easily and safely than they can cross into another nation.” This reconception of government as a market and democratic citizenship as consumption of services is also reflected in The Seasteading Institute, which claims that “seasteads, by their very nature, would provide citizens with the technology to move fluidly among governments. In the seasteading model, citizens would take on the role of customers, choosing their government according to their unique preferences” (The Seasteading Institute

2014, 8-9). In this way, enclave libertarians seek to dissolve the state into the market, redefining the state as a private enterprise that offers the needed services to support a market economy, and redefining individuals as mobile consumers of state services.

UTOPIAN LIBERTARIANISM IN THE WORLD: INTERDISCURSIVE ARTICULATIONS

Social Capital and Discursive Circulations: Individuals, Organizations, Publications

Holt's (2008) discussion of the embodied and performative character of social capital points to the ways the particular identities, statuses, positions, and relations of libertarian enclave promoters become key to the process of disseminating and legitimating these utopian discourses. While a complete portrait of the enclave libertarian community is not possible here, it is worth tracing some of the primary individual and institutional actors in the movement in order to highlight how these discourses circulate and take root. Among the key individual actors propagating enclave libertarian discourses internationally are: Patri Friedman, Peter Thiel, Mark Klugmann, Titus Gebel and Frank Karsten. The subject positions that these individual actors embody in the networks in which they are associated facilitate the articulation of enclave libertarian discourses within existing citational chains of authority.

As the grandson of Milton Friedman, one of the intellectual founders of neoliberalism, Patri Friedman—co-founder of The Seasteading Institute—is able to cite a family legacy of spearheading experiments in economic policy and neoliberal governance. Meanwhile, his partner at The Seasteading Institute, Peter Thiel, draws on his personal history as a successful Silicon Valley venture capitalist, including his involvement in the founding of PayPal and his early investment in Facebook. As of December 2016, Thiel's influence has even reached the White House, as he has become a key player in Donald Trump's transition team. A former adviser and

speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Mark Klugmann is able to cite his connections to and role in a key period of economic and political transformation both in the United States and globally. Before founding Free Private Cities Ltd in 2016, Titus Gebel was an entrepreneur and founder of mining company Deutsche Rohstoff AG. Frank Karsten, the lead spokesperson for Free Private Cities Ltd, is known in European libertarian circles as the founder of the Mises Institute Netherlands and the More Freedom Foundation. These legacies and experiences are continually *cited*, whether explicitly or implicitly, through individuals' embodiment of them in attempts to promote these libertarian visions. In this way, these visions become positioned as the next generation of reform following the initial steps taken by Milton Friedman, Ronald Reagan, and others like them, as the continuation of innovations coming out of Silicon Valley, or linked to purportedly successful legacies of entrepreneurialism.

Organizations that have been working to promote enclave libertarian ideas include: the Cato Institute, the Mises Institute, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the Mont Pelerin Society. These organizations all have established reputations in transnational networks of free-market activists, economists, and policymakers. The role of the Mont Pelerin Society in developing and propagating the discourses and policy frameworks for the first round of neoliberalization in the 1970's and 1980's has already been discussed and has been well documented elsewhere (Harvey 2007; Mirowski and Plehwe 2015; Brennetot 2015). Several key actors in the enclave libertarian movement are affiliated with the Mont Pelerin Society, and the society's general meeting in 2014 included multiple presentations and discussions around enclave libertarian proposals.

The Cato Institute is a Washington DC-based think tank founded by libertarian billionaire Charles Koch and consistently tops international rankings of the most-influential and

well-funded think tanks in the world. The institute's journal *Cato Unbound: A Journal of Debate*, has featured numerous articles and discussions on the possibilities for private states and libertarian enclaves. Since 2009, the institute has also hosted several events with Klugmann and Friedman, and Cato Institute fellows have written articles supporting enclave libertarian initiatives for *Forbes*, *The Washington Times*, and other large media outlets (Bandow 2012; Rahn 2015). Likewise, the Ludwig von Mises Institute is a home for libertarian thought in Europe, whose list of former scholars include numerous influential economists, journalists, and political leaders—including American libertarian leader Ron Paul and Fox News pundit Andrew Napolitano. The institute has been active in recent years around the growing right-wing opposition to the European Union and actively campaigned in support of the 'Brexit' referendum in 2016, while also sponsoring several events with Mark Klugmann, Frank Karsten, and other promoters of enclave libertarianism. The mission of the Foundation for Economic Education is to promote libertarian ideals by offering online courses to members, sponsoring speaking events, seminars, and retreats for libertarian thinkers, and publishing books and a magazine on libertarian thought, called *The Freeman*. The magazine has featured numerous articles supporting enclave libertarian experiments in recent years, including regular updates on the ZEDE project in Honduras (Bell 2012; Bell 2013), and the founding of Liberland between the borders of Serbia and Croatia (Tucker 2015)—both discussed below.

Beyond these organizations, several publications popular with free-market advocates more broadly have featured numerous articles promoting enclave libertarian discourses and experiments, including *The PanAm Post*, *Reason* magazine, and *ReasonTV*. Many of the contributors to both publications maintain close ties to the think tanks discussed above or related organizations. Among its coverage of libertarian ideas over the past years, *ReasonTV* produced a

four-part series in 2014 titled “How to Grow a City in Honduras” praising Honduras’ move toward founding a libertarian enclave as a possible solution to endemic poverty, violence, and illegal migration, and promoting it as a viable route for other governments in the region (*ReasonTV*, 2014).

Post-Coup Honduras and the Zone for Economic Development and Employment

In the networks traced above, enclave libertarianism remains at an abstract level, with utopian discourses and ideal models circulating through networks of generally likeminded actors. Yet, pursuing such visions in practice requires the formation of new kinds of relationships and discursive re-articulations. As the Honduran case shows, despite enclave libertarians’ disdain for the state, they must necessarily negotiate with existing states and subvert existing state mechanisms in pursuit of their goals—exploiting political and economic crises to push their agenda.

In the aftermath of the 2009 coup d’état that overthrew left-leaning President Manuel Zelaya, enclave libertarian development—referred to colloquially in Honduras as the “model city project”—has been posited as a ‘silver bullet’ solution for all of the country’s direst social, political, and economic problems. Since 2009, Honduras has consistently registered one of the highest—if not the highest—homicide rate in the world, has been a primary transport point in the international drug trade, has seen slow economic growth and an increase in emigration to the United States and other countries, and has been embroiled in corruption scandals and overall political instability. In this context, the instability of existing governance structures is used to discursively justify enclave libertarians’ model of reform; the existing situation is so dysfunctional that reformers argue they need to simply “start from scratch” (Klugmann, 2013a, 2013b, 2014).

In national elections immediately following the coup in 2009, Mark Klugmann acted as one of conservative candidate Porfirio Lobo's primary advisers. As the elections were boycotted by the opposition, the conservative National Party was able to win both the presidency and a large majority in the National Congress. Throughout the campaign, Klugmann sought to promote his LEAP Zone agenda. As another campaign adviser and Honduran LEAP Zone advocate, Octavio Sanchez, recalled:

When we were in the middle of the campaign to win the national presidency, Klugmann used to tell then-candidate Lobo... he used to grab a piece of paper and he used to draw a map of Honduras and he'd put a dot in the middle and say 'we should create something like Hong Kong in that small dot.' (Octavio Sanchez Barrientos, personal interview 4 August 2014)

Sanchez recognizes the importance of the context of the 2009 coup d'état—which he calls the “political crisis”—and the subsequent elections in creating a unique opportunity to pursue enclave libertarian development. Sanchez told me “as you know, there was a mandate to bring changes. It was impossible to draft a new constitution with the political process, but this [the ZEDE] was the plan that we could do to bring change into the country” (Octavio Sanchez Barrientos, interviewed 4 August 2014). Ironically, it was the suggestion that the Constitution be rewritten through a constituent assembly that led to Manuel Zelaya's removal from power. While the incoming administration had similar ambitions, they understood the political difficulty of pursuing such a project. For certain key players in the Lobo administration and the National Party, pursuing some version of Klugmann's LEAP Zone proposal was seen as another way to radically alter the structures of the Honduran state in favor of their interests.

In June 2010, Octavio Sanchez was contacted by the Provost of the Universidad Francisco Marroquin in Guatemala City to invite him to a conference on “free cities” organized by the University's “Free Cities Institute” (now the Startup Cities Institute) at a resort on the

Honduran Caribbean island of Roatán. After attending the conference, Sanchez and other actors within the Lobo government formed an advisory relationship with economist Paul Romer (now Chief Economist of the World Bank), who at the time was promoting his own vision of “Charter Cities.” Romer’s initial vision also sought to create a kind of special political enclave excised from the rest of Honduran territory, but would not be characterized as libertarian as it rather aimed to cede authority to an existing foreign state (Mallaby 2010). While this partnership ended abruptly in September 2012 when the Honduran government signed a memorandum of understanding with libertarian activist Michael Strong, Romer was key in getting the Honduran project off the ground.

The establishment of these contacts, between Lobo, Sanchez, Klugmann, Romer, and the Free Cities Institute, linked powerful actors in the Honduran state with a broader network of thinkers, institutions, and activists capable and eager to assist in developing and attracting investment for such a radical reform project. With a solid bloc of supporters spread across several countries capable of contacting and potentially enrolling investors, the project gained momentum within the Honduran state, leading to the drafting and passing of the *Ley de Regiones Especiales de Desarrollo*, a law allowing for the creation of “Special Development Regions” or RED (its Spanish acronym). The RED law laid the foundation for a privatized governance model, led by an appointed Governor, an international Transparency Commission, and privately contracted foreign judges.

In October 2012, the Supreme Court of Honduras ruled the RED law and amendments unconstitutional, finding that they threatened the three “essential elements” of the rule of law: the people, the government, and territory. The ruling states that sovereignty emanates from the people and is exercised through their representative officials in the three branches of the

government, with authority over a determined geographic area, its territory. With this understanding, the RED threatened the principle of popular sovereignty on which the Honduran state claims legitimacy by granting authority to a small group of unelected, non-Honduran individuals. The “form of government” characterized by a separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches was equally threatened by the RED, which replaced these branches with privately-appointed officials. Finally, it was determined that the “territorial integrity” of Honduras was threatened by the RED framework which had no stipulated limits to its territorial expansion. The Supreme Court ruling claimed that the RED could over time lead to the complete dissolution of the Honduran territory into a fragmented series of autonomous city-states.

Several months later, the four Supreme Court justices who ruled against the RED law were illegally removed from power in what came to be seen as a kind of ‘judicial coup d’état.’ Soon thereafter the National Congress amended the constitution to allow for the creation of what came to be called ‘Zones for Economic Development and Employment’ or ZEDE. The amendment effectively exempts the ZEDE from all national laws and allows for the creation of an autonomous governing body led by free-market ideals. The amendment was followed by laws outlining the governing structure of the ZEDE, led by a Technical Secretary and the Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices (CAMP, for its Spanish acronym), and appointing the initial twenty-one members of the CAMP. The appointment of the Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices worked to further position the enclave libertarian imaginaries within broader networks of actors with significant influence and authority in international policy and investment circles. The CAMP is composed of individuals with significant social capital from economics, politics, and industry, largely drawn from the organizations discussed in the previous section. The list of

members includes Ronald Reagan's eldest son Michael, Archduchess of Austria Gabriela von Habsburg, several former Reagan administration officials, prominent libertarian lobbyists like Grover Norquist, managers of large free trade zones, and representatives from the transnational banking and energy sectors.

Tracing this process highlights how utopian enclave libertarian discourses that circulate through transnational networks of actors and organizations become entangled in complex, real world political processes. It further shows how enclave libertarianism seeks to move beyond neoliberalism's contradictory relationship to the state. While enclave libertarians may engage with state actors and pursue their visions through existing state structures, they seek to subvert existing state models and liberal constitutional rule of law by exploiting moments of crisis. Enclave libertarians in Honduras thus seek to secure the legitimacy of the project by writing an exemption into the Honduran constitution, despite—as the original Supreme Court justices argued—the model's direct contradiction to traditional liberal constitutional principles.

New Cities, Refugee Camps, and Border Disputes

Beyond Honduras, enclave libertarian activists have identified other opportunities to pursue their utopian visions in practice, hoping to exploit a recent wave of greenfield city-building projects across the globe, the Syrian refugee crisis, and a border dispute between Croatia and Serbia over a small tract of marshland in the Danube River.

In recent years, master-planned city-building projects following the example of Songdo, South Korea, have been promoted as a strategy to jump-start rapid economic growth in many countries throughout the world—from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to build 100 new cities in India, to Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Economic City, and countless other projects in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America (Datta and Shaban, 2016; Moser, 2015; Datta,

2015). Enclave libertarians have tried to position their visions as potential strategies for pursuing this kind of ‘new city’ development. The planned city of Lazika was one such project planned and under construction along the coast of the Black Sea in the Republic of Georgia until it was abandoned in 2012 with a change in national government. Before the project was abandoned, however, Mark Klugmann was hired as an adviser to the Georgian government and lobbied for Lazika to be turned into a LEAP Zone. While the city was already imagined as a special economic zone of sorts, Klugmann called on Georgian leaders to also establish legal, administrative, and political autonomy for the city, including the adoption of British common law, as a way of attracting investors (Klugmann, 2012).

Indeed, many ‘new city’ projects are already developed around alternative governance frameworks. Many are planned and managed by public-private partnerships between national governments and large corporations, while others are entirely private cities and operate in a similar way to homeowners’ associations in the United States. So far, in none of these projects (with the exception of Honduras’ ZEDE) have national governments agreed to cede autonomy to other institutions in the way envisioned by enclave libertarians. Yet, it is clear that these kinds of projects open opportunities for enclave libertarians to articulate and promote their vision to those who are already undertaking the ambitious goal of building a new city “from scratch.” Even if developers do not adopt the enclave libertarian model completely or if national governments are not willing to cede the kinds of authority they imagine, the model may still influence the way these cities are imagined, planned, managed, and governed by pushing the boundaries of what is considered possible and desirable.

Visions of libertarian enclaves—or some variation of them—have also recently been suggested as one way of dealing with the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. Both Egyptian

billionaire Naguib Sawiris and American real estate mogul Jason Buzi have publicly discussed founding new city-states to house Syrian and other refugees. Similarly, a recent interview with Kilian Kleinschmidt, the former director of the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, called on the international community to rethink refugee camps as “the cities of tomorrow.” He argues that: “you could redevelop some of these empty cities [in Europe] into free-trade zones where you would put in a new population and actually set up opportunities to develop and trade and work. You could see them as special development zones, which are actually used as a trigger for an otherwise impoverished, neglected area” (“Refugee camps,” 2015).

While Kleinschmidt’s promotion of free-trade zones and Sawiris and Buzi’s proposals are quite vague, proponents of Startup Cities are pushing such thinking further. In a September 2015 article published by the Foundation for Economic Education, Mark Lutter considers the possibilities of creating a Startup City to be populated by refugees. In the article, titled “A Place for the Stateless: Can a Startup City Solve the Refugee Crisis?”, Lutter (2015) argues that:

To create a sustainable, livable city, where refugees want to move, there must be jobs, and for there to be jobs, there must be enterprise, and for there to be enterprise, the law must encourage it. In practice what this means is that a refugee city must have economic freedom. Entrants must be free to own property, trade with each other, start businesses, and become productive citizens.

Lutter points to the Startup Cities Institute and The Seasteading Institute as organizations that can help lead the effort to create a refugee Startup City. While it is unclear if either organization will eventually become involved in refugee resettlement plans, considering the similar views expressed by people working for international humanitarian organizations and by wealthy investors interested in the subject, the articulation of the enclave libertarian vision within these discourses should not be ignored.

Finally, in April 2015, Czech libertarian activist Vít Jedlička proclaimed the Free Republic of Liberland on a seven-square-kilometer parcel of marshland in the Danube River. The area is part of an ongoing border dispute between Serbia and Croatia, though Jedlička claims the particular area has been claimed by neither nation and is thus *terra nullius*. While the land remains uninhabited, and recent news stories suggest the area is currently inaccessible, Jedlička proclaimed himself president of Liberland, drafted a constitution, and appointed an initial government, complete with Ministers of Justice, Finance, and Foreign Affairs. Through an online call for citizenship applications, Liberland's government has recruited over 100,000 fully-registered citizens from around the world and according to its website has appointed individuals to act as unrecognized diplomatic agents internationally ("Liberland" website, accessed 12 December 2016).

A Liberland brochure released in August 2016 shows that Jedlička and his government have partnered with Titus Gebel and Frank Karsten's Free Private Cities Ltd. The brochure lays out the basic structure of Gebel and Karsten's enclave libertarian model, including their call for "private state service providers" that compete with other governance models and their belief in freedom of association through which residents vote with their feet (Gebel 2016). While Jedlička and supporters face clear material, diplomatic, and logistical barriers to settling and developing the land they claim, they have worked since Liberland's founding to lobby foreign governments to recognize the micro-nation. Further, as recent journalistic accounts show, Liberland supporters are actively holding conferences near the site and strategizing ways to move forward with their vision (Childs 2016). While Jedlička's project may seem unrealistic, enclave libertarian's willingness to meddle in complex and tense border disputes—particularly in a region of the world with a recent history of conflict—should not be dismissed. With the rise of right-wing

movements across Europe and unprecedented challenges to European unity in the wake of the Brexit, enclave libertarians seem to be on the lookout for moments and sites of crisis to exploit in pursuit of their goals.

CONCLUSION

Enclave libertarians imagine a world of fragmented and flexible territories in which private “government service providers” compete for a mobile population and investment capital, thus leading to ideologically homogenous communities formed through the free association of individuals in an open market. While these discourses may appear utopian and contradictory, they circulate through transnational networks of policy makers and think-tanks and have been endorsed by individuals influential in policy, economics, business and philosophy. Increasingly, these visions are being promoted as solutions to complex and large-scale problems and, in some cases, inspire actually-existing projects—as has been the case in Honduras since 2011.

In examining the content of these utopian libertarian discourses and the interdiscursive relations they form through their circulation and the practices and positions of their supporters, I hope to have highlighted a need for critical scholars of neoliberalism to engage more deeply with variations in neoliberal thought. While scholars have long noted the variations in neoliberalism in practice across space and time, there has been less attention paid to the internal discussions and debates and utopian and aspirational visions that may fall under the broad umbrella of “neoliberal” thought. While sharing many common assumptions, logics, and goals with other neoliberal movements, I argue that there are also important differences and unique characteristics of libertarianism overall—and enclave libertarianism, more specifically—that may be overlooked by unquestioningly framing these projects as “neoliberal.”

Thus, I agree with Peck (2013), Springer (2015) and others who argue that, despite its shortcomings, the term “neoliberalism” cannot be abandoned altogether. Yet, I also argue that there is a need to differentiate between competing schools of thought, political movements, and trends that may be characterized as neoliberal but profess quite different visions of the future and pursue different strategies. This requires a closer analysis of and engagement with the many academic journals, think-tanks, magazines, online forums, conferences, and other networked spaces in which “neoliberal” thinkers and policymakers discuss and experiment with new ideas and projects. While recent literature on policy mobility has begun to address this need in some way, I argue that critical scholars need to also look beyond policy to consider the more abstract, aspirational, and utopian discourses that seek to push the boundaries of what is considered possible and desirable. These discourses may not have immediately obvious influences on policy—though the case of Honduras shows that in some cases it may—but they are shaping important conversations about what the future of the world may look like politically, economically, and socially. Political geographers, and critical theorists more broadly, cannot afford to ignore these conversations.

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