

Dear Reader,

This issue of the Newsletter is on the theme of land. Land is so important that it is one of those things that is always present just under our feet but difficult to get into focus. Land is the meeting point of most of the crises and movements in the world today. It has always been important but never so much as it is today.

The question of land is closely related to the topic of nationalism which was the theme of our January issue (gabrielmoran.net). The problem of “white nationalism” has been much in the news. It is often a puzzle why the people who attack blacks, Jews, Muslims or anybody perceived to be not like them are called nationalists. It is not the nation they are defending but some turf that they consider to be theirs.

The international character of these white terrorist attacks is making this clear. The shooter in New Zealand was not a New Zealander defending the nation; he was an Australian. (For U.S. readers who think that Australia and New Zealand are the same place, it should be noted that these two quite different countries are 1500 miles apart). The shooter was inspired by a cast of racist characters, many from the United States. These people are not defending their nation but instead are defending the land of white people that is being invaded on all sides.

We are aware of land when we study wars most of which have been fought in defense of the “homeland.” Even there, however, wars were imagined to be contests between two armies. The land itself was off limits to destruction. Plato argued that in wars between Greeks, the land and its capacity to produce food should not be destroyed. Eventually, peace will come, and the defeated people will need to be able to feed themselves.

Starting with World War I civilians were no longer protected nor was the land itself. The United States took the lead in aerial bombing. There was almost no movement of the armies on the Western front, but a war of attrition was waged on the civilian population. The United States raised the stakes in World War II. The war was brought to an end with the carpet bombing of 257 Japanese cities.

Land is where people live. Humans are earthlings; the word earth interestingly refers both to the planet earth and to the dirt that everyone stands on. We are aware that human beings cannot live without breathable air and drinkable water. But it can slip below our conscious awareness that land is just as indispensable for the survival of human life.

THE EMPIRE OF LIBERTY

By Gabriel Moran

The United States of America was from its beginning a land hungry country. The thirteen former British colonies on the east coast of America had their eyes on the whole of America. They liked the word “continental,” a word that indicated their aspiration to spread their ideas of liberty to the continent of America. Even after a huge expansion of U.S territory by way of the purchase of Louisiana, the country was hungry for completing the taking of America.

There were two American civil wars, that is, wars for the control of America. The first war, which was a disaster, began in 1812. President James Madison, with an army of seven thousand troops and a navy of sixteen ships, declared war on the British Empire. A British historian writes: “Defeat was practically guaranteed from the moment Madison and Congress stepped onto the warpath with risible preparation that undercooked the navy and put a half-baked army in the field.”

The prize was all the land that the British held in America and would later become the Dominion of Canada. The war fever was led by Irish immigrants who were the majority of immigrants to enter the nation since its founding. The Irish newspaper, *Shamrock*, proclaimed: “Ireland will be rescued from British bondage on the plains of Canada.” The war was resisted by New England; all of its representatives voted against going to war. During the war New England continued to trade with the enemy. In 1814 New England was prepared to secede from the nation.

The United States was humiliated by having its capital burned down. The war ended with the same borders and no increase of land, although the British abandonment of the native peoples opened the gates to the west. President Madison proclaimed a glorious victory that the country could be proud of. U.S. history books picked up that theme and covered over the actual war with the myth that “America” had defeated the British empire.

The second American civil war in 1846 was for conquest of American land to the south. The United States had more success in this war. The United States still had the same size army as it had in 1812 but it was now well trained; the navy was small, but the US was fighting a country with no navy. Of the actual war, George Meade said: “Well may we be grateful that we are at war with Mexico. Were it any other power, our gross follies would have been punished severely.”

When the United States entered the 150 miles of disputed land between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers, Mexico opened fire. President Polk declared that “American blood had been shed on American soil.” Only a few senators resisted what became known as “Mr. Polk’s War.” There was never a unity in the country and after a year the population was tired of war. The United States easily overwhelmed Mexico. The only question at the end of the war was how much of Mexico the United States would take. There were some people who thought that the U.S. should take the whole country since it was a part of America.

What stopped that annexation from happening was racism; the land was desirable but the people on the land were considered a liability. The fear was that Anglo-Saxon blood would be corrupted by Mexican blood. The United States took almost half of Mexico. Eight million Mexicans came along with the land. John Calhoun said “I protest against the incorporation of such a people. Ours is the government of the white people.”

The United States did not wish to rule the countries to the South of Mexico as colonies; it was more efficient to control their economies and politics. In 1820 President James Monroe issued a “doctrine” that America, that is, the western hemisphere, was closed to new settlements. The British, for their own purposes, enforced the doctrine.

The immigrants who try to enter the United States by crossing the Mexican border are asserting that they are part of the American land. Such markers as the Rio Grande River were imposed arbitrarily by the United States.

The United States did not have an empire in the usual sense until the end of the 19th century. In a famous speech in 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner declared that the frontier was closed; the country was full. The frontier could be a line to stop but it was also a line that could be crossed. Two other frontier theorists, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, linked progressive reform at home with war abroad. The United States launched itself overseas. It annexed Hawaii and declared war on Spain, after which it took Puerto Rico and Guam. It built a canal across Panama which it had separated from Columbia. It invaded Nicaragua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The United States had already acquired Alaska in 1867, a move that stimulated the Canadians to form a nation.

The United States has always considered the Caribbean Sea an “American lake” which it naturally has a right to. No Caribbean island would be allowed independence. When Cuba first moved to become independent in 1868, the US squelched the attempt and it has successfully opposed every Cuban movement for independence ever since. In 1898 the US promised to help Cuba to oust the Spanish in what was called “a splendid little war.” The US reneged on the promise of independence.

One of the most disgraceful wars in US history is hardly mentioned in the country’s textbooks. In 1898 the Philippine leader Emilio Aguinaldo thought he had US support for independence. In return, the United States was promised a coaling station for its increasing Asian trade. But President William McKinley had a dream in which he decided that “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” What followed was a war in which more than a hundred thousand U.S. troops tried for four years to suppress the rebels who wanted freedom for their country.

Since the Second World War the United States has found a way to control the lands of the world without employing colonial governments. Technology has made it possible to produce most goods without dependence on foreign raw materials. The two big exceptions are oil and coffee. If the government in a country that produces oil or coffee is

not friendly to US policies there are ways to depose the government, such as happened in Iran in 1954. Iran has never forgotten.

Coffee is the second most traded commodity in the world. The southern hemisphere is concerned with producing coffee for the northern hemisphere while its own people are sometimes starving. South America has more land to grow food than does the United States, but it has to import most of its food.

The United States is very good at producing food, but it has an overfed and undernourished population. Its percentage of overweight and obese people is scandalous in a world where millions are starving. Barbara Ward said in 1970 that for the first time in human history there is enough food for everyone but most of the world is starving.

The US maintains 800 military bases all over the world (Russia has 9). Its military is ready for battle anywhere in the world. When the United States talks of a war with Iran, North Korea or anyone else, the assumption is that the war will be on their land not US land. That is where things might be different in the future.

The bombings in 2001 in New York and Washington shockingly warned the United States that its land is now more vulnerable than at any time since 1812. There was no war between the United States and Vietnam or the United States and Iraq. Instead, there was a US war in Vietnam and a US war in Iraq. But we might have a war in the future between the United States and North Korea.

Immigration has become a big issue in the United States and Europe; millions of poor people are on the move. The colonizers are now experiencing the reversal of the cycle as land becomes more scarce. Most of the people who deny climate change know very well that the land is disappearing. They would like to keep that fact in dispute as they grab up whatever they think will survive, at least during their lifetimes.

What is uncertain is how long it will take for all that beachfront property to disappear. Rich people are still putting up mansions along the coast line. When the floods come, as come they will, the owners of such property expect the rest of us to subsidize the rebuilding of their mansions.

Battery Park City in lower Manhattan was built out of landfill from the original World Trade Center. The sea is ready to take back what belongs to the sea. The sea's conquest may take a few decades, but the southern part of Manhattan is surely doomed. There have been proposals to build a wall to protect that valuable property which includes the street where the Dutch built a wall to keep the British out. Instead of the British army attacking from the north, the British came by the sea and overwhelmed the Dutch behind their wall.

Good luck with that trillion-dollar wall to keep the sea from taking Wall St.

AND AS FOR LAND, AN ABSOLUTE NEED

By Anthony J. Fasano

Quite probably the saddest pages I have ever read come from the book, *Grapes of Wrath*. That is the masterpiece John Steinbeck wrote about the Great Dust bowl of the 1930's, created by drought and over farming in the plains of Oklahoma. The farmers and their families were forced into destitution, degradation, even into hunger.

There is the promise of work, and even of land, in California. So they begin the long, uprooted journey. But the farmers are deceived; there is little work, and no land. The banks and the moneyed class have bought up the land. Through the fences, the "Okies" now see orchards where the oranges fall to the ground and rot. It is not profitable to harvest the fruit. In grief and despair the farmers want desperately only an acre, just one acre, and they can feed their families.

Reflection on United States history, in its "land grab" of Mexico's territory, as well as on Britain's "restocking" the North of Ireland with Scottish Protestants, leads to the conclusion that much of a nation's expansion is on the unwilling backs of native populations. Of course, we do not have to confine our reflection to the past. Presently, Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank number 131. Plans for continued expansion into the territory around Bethlehem have received government approval.

The maxim holds true: control of the land means control of food, and control of food means control of the people. That much is obvious. But control of the land can also mean the extinction of a people. Sadly, this was true for the Native peoples dwelling within the borders of what would become territory of the United States. It was pursuing "manifest destiny," to create a nation from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific.

Another important aspect of "land grab" is the loss of farmland to "development." "Development" here means the construction of human habitation. In the period from 1992 to 2012, 31 million acres of US farmland fell to "earth movers," that is, bulldozers and derricks. With the loss of arable land comes the increasing power of fewer companies, the enormous growth and power of controllers of "agri-business."

There seems to be little effect that individual citizens can have on "national expansion" and loss of farmland. What is needed is meaningful discussion of land not as "private property" but as land "for common use." The Boston Common boasts of a 350 year history. Once a common area offering pasture for cows, it became the first urban park in the United States.

It's a hard discussion to enter. The "American Dream" has as its cornerstone, a private house with private land. Probably at one time in our history it was possible to offer private land to any citizen who could pay for it. The payment of course might have been beyond the means of many citizens.

There are European experiments restricting the loss of land to over-development. Some wisdom can come from studying how other nations seek to keep land as a resource for all people. And we do know of land conservancies that seek to keep large patches of land free for common use.

For now, perhaps the best one can do is to follow the advice of the tiny sparrow, kicking up his legs to prevent the sky from falling down. When Mr. Crow laughs and says, "Hey stupid, you're not helping," Mr. Sparrow replies, "We all do what we can do."

DOWN TO EARTH

By Bruno Latour

The question of landing somewhere did not occur earlier to the people who had decided to “modernize” the planet. It arose – ever so painfully – only for those who for four centuries had been subjected to the impact of the “great discoveries” of empires, modernization, development, and finally globalization. They knew perfectly well what it means to find oneself deprived of land. And they even knew quite well what it meant to be chased out of one’s land. They had no choice but to become experts on the question of how to survive conquest, extermination, land grabs.

The great novelty for the modernizing people is that this territorial question is now addressed to them as well as to the others. It is less bloody, less brutal, less detectable perhaps, but it is indeed a matter of an extremely violent attack destined to take away the territories of those who had up to now possessed land – most often because they had taken it away from others during wars of conquest.

Here is something that adds an unexpected meaning to the term “postcolonial,” as though there were a family resemblance between two feelings of loss. “You have lost your territory? We have taken it from you? Well you should know we are in the process of losing it in turn...” And thus bizarrely, in the absence of a sense of fraternity that would be indecent, something like a new bond is displacing the classic conflict: “How have you managed to resist and survive? It would be good if we too could learn this from you.” Following the questions comes a muffled, ironic response: “Welcome to the club.”

Have you noticed that the emotions involved are not the same when you’re asked to defend nature – you yawn, you’re bored – compared to when you’re asked to defend your territory – now you are wide awake suddenly mobilized? If nature has become territory, it makes little sense to talk about an ecological crisis, environmental problems or a biosphere to be rediscovered, spared or protected. The challenge is much more vital, more existential than that – and also much more comprehensible, because it is much more direct. When the rug is pulled out from under your feet, you understand at once that you are going to have to be concerned with the floor.

It is a question of attachment, of lifestyle, that’s being pulled out from under us, a question of land, of property giving way beneath us, and this uneasiness gnaws at everyone equally, the former colonizers and the former colonized alike. But actually, no, it upsets the former colonizers much more, as they are less accustomed to the situation than are the formerly colonized. What is certain is that all find themselves facing a universal lack of shareable space and inhabitable land.

But where does this panic come from? From the same deep feeling of injustice felt by those who found themselves deprived of their land at the time of the conquests, then during colonization, and finally during the era of development: a power from elsewhere comes to deprive you of your land and you have no purchase on the power. If this is

globalization, then we understand retrospectively why resisting it has always been the only solution, why the colonized have always been right to defend themselves.

The new universality consists in feeling that the ground is in the process of giving way. Isn't this new universality enough to allow us to understand one another and prevent future wars over the appropriation of space? Probably not, but it is our only way out: discovering in common what land is inhabitable and with whom to share it.

The alternative is to act as though nothing were happening and to protect ourselves behind a wall while we prolong the waking dream of the "American way of life" – from which as we know, nine or ten billion humans will be unable to benefit.

Migrations, explosions of inequality, and New Climatic Regime: *these are one and the same threat*. Most of our fellow citizens underestimate or deny what is happening to the earth, but they understand perfectly well that the question of migrants puts their dreams of a secure identity in danger.

Don't be fooled for a second by those who preach the call of wide-open spaces, of "risk taking," those who abandon all protections and continue to point to the infinite horizon of modernization for all. Those good apostles take risks only if their own comfort is guaranteed. Instead of listening to what they are saying about what lies ahead, look instead at what lies beneath them: you'll see the gleam of the carefully folded golden parachutes, of everything that ensures them against the random hazards of existence.

The most basic right of all is to feel safe and protected, especially at a moment when the old protections are disappearing.

This is the meaning of the history that remains to be discovered: how can we reweave edges, envelopes, protections, how can we find new footing while simultaneously taking into account the end of globalization, the scope of migration, and also the limits placed on the sovereignty of nation-states that are henceforth confronted by climate change?

The political question is how to reassure and shelter all those persons who are obliged to take to the road, even while turning them away from the false protection of identities and rigid borders. But how can they be reassured? How can these migrants be given the feeling of being protected without relying at once on an identity based on an idea of origins, autochthonous races, secure borders, insurance against all risks?

To reassure them, we would have to be able to succeed in carrying out two complementary movements that the ordeal of modernization has made contradictory: *attaching oneself to a particular patch of soil* on the one hand, and *having access to the global world* on the other. Up to now, it is true, such an operation has been considered impossible: between the two, it is said, one has to choose. It is this apparent contradiction that current history may be bringing to an end.

END OF THE MYTH

By Greg Grandin

The idea of a border wall might have missed its moment, considering that what is now called the border is just about everywhere, much like the frontier used to be. Immigration and defense officials are quick to say that the United States' true border is found not in Arizona and Texas but at Mexico's southern border with Guatemala. There, Mexican agents, subsidized by Washington, police the first line of the multitiered border against Central American migrants heading north. In fact, all of South America is our "third border," according to a defense analyst, and so also, says the Pentagon, is the Caribbean.

The immigration posts that have proliferated at airports around the world and are also now considered part of the U.S. border, as are all the random inspections that take place on Amtrak and Greyhound lines, and airports within the country. Federal agents have "extra-constitutional powers" in what are called "border zones," defined as one hundred miles in from the international boundaries which covers as many as two hundred million citizens – about 65 percent of the country's population and about 75 percent of its Latino residents.

All of Michigan is a "border zone," as are Hawaii and Florida. "It really is a kind of constitution-free zone," as one policy analyst put it. Border patrollers can seize vehicles anywhere in these zones, conduct inspections. and demand to see papers.

Every country has borders and boundaries and now many of them have walls. They have gone up everywhere since the one in Berlin came down: protecting the rich in Rio, containing Palestinians in the West Bank, separating India from Bangladesh, Greece from Turkey, and Belfast Catholics from Protestants. The "great world frontier" is how historians and economists, not too long ago, described the spread of U.S. style democratic development. Today we have walls the world over.

For over a century, the frontier served as a powerful symbol of American universalism. It not only conveyed the idea that the country was moving forward but promised that the brutality involved in moving forward would be transformed into something noble. Frontier expansion would break every paradox, reconcile every contradiction between, say, ideals and interests, virtue and ambition. Extend the sphere and you will ensure peace, protect individual freedom and dilute factionalism; you will create a buoyant resourceful people in thrall to no received doctrine, transcend regionalism, spread prosperity, and move beyond racism.

Today the frontier is closed. Whatever metaphor one wants to use, the country has lived past the end of its myth. Where the frontier symbolized perennial rebirth, a culture in springtime, those eight prototypes of a wall in Otay Mesa loom as tombstones. All the things that expansion was supposed to preserve have been destroyed, and all the things it was meant to destroy have been preserved. Instead of peace there's endless war. Instead of a critical, resilient citizenry, a conspiratorial nihilism, rejecting reason and dreading change has taken hold. Factionalism congealed and won a national election.