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Privatizing conditions of production: trade agreements as neoliberal environmental governance

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Abstract

Recent multilateral trade agreements are among the major manifestations of neoliberalism. They are also emerging as some of the most important sites of environmental governance in the 21st century. I argue here that these trade agreements, particularly the sweeping new protections they provide for investors, are redefining property rights and environmental governance in fundamental ways. I suggest that in addition to furthering the centuries-long process of the enclosure of nature under capitalism, the neoliberal agenda of NAFTA and similar trade agreements also involves something new: the privatization, or primitive accumulation, of conditions of production as an accumulation strategy. I explore these dynamics through examination of two cases, one in the United States and one in Mexico. I also explore the roles of social movements in these dynamics.



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Keywords

Neoliberalism; Environmental governance; Primitive accumulation; Conditions of production; Trade

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