One of the distinguishing marks of contemporary capitalism, indeed modern life in general, is a deep and abiding sense of insecurity, uncertainty and risk. One of the defining qualities of the rise and hegemony of neoliberalism is the idea of living precarious lives: precarity, of living life on the edge. This is true at both ends of the global system: whether being part of what Michael Denning calls the wageless class in the slumworlds of the Global South or being homeless or a refugee in Germany or Stockton,
California. The realities of precarity – Guy Standing describing the breakdown of Western European social democracy referred to the rise of a “precariat” who were denizens rather than citizens without the protections proscribed by full citizenship – has for the purposes of this class two aspects. One is an understanding of the political economy of the production and reproduction of insecure life: the body of work which has emerged for example around accumulation by dispossession (David Harvey) or the policy focus of say the World Bank (WDR 2011) on “new forms of violence” (militias, transnational gangs, terror) are examples. The other – its dialectical twin – is the way in which so much of life has become “securitized”: the new normal is a life in which virtually everything is a risk or threat and has become a security concern: the environment, diseases, immigration, climate, finance etc. The World Economic Forum produces an annual inventory of these risks: the World Bank, UNDP, the US government are all in the business of “risk management”. Security in short has become a defining aspect of modern liberal governance: its discourses, tactics, analytics and soon. Much of this – again whether we are talking about the Global North or South – has prescriptive aspects to it. None is more powerful than the set of ideas which point to how contingency and uncertainty as the nature of life itself which means that societies, communities, individuals need to see risk as a reality which is necessary to building “resilient lives”. Resiliency is now the watchword of our times: resilient families, resilient economies, community resilience and so on.

The focus of this seminar will be to explore this twofold aspect of the precarious nature of contemporary life and the forms in which the securitization of social life is promoted and achieved. One thread then will be the human geography of contemporary forms and regimes of dispossession. The word itself is an example of what Raymond Williams calls a ‘keyword’ related in complex ways to other keywords like property, ownership, foreclosure and expropriation (interestingly, William’s *Keywords* contains neither an entry for (dis)possession nor property). The renewed interest in primitive accumulation and its relation to the dynamics of neoliberalism – David Harvey’s notion of ‘accumulation by dispossession for example’ building upon the work of Hannah Arendt and Rosa Luxemburg – will be a point of reference for the seminar. Marx deployed the term primitive accumulation at the end of Volume I of *Capital* – he also laid out these ideas earlier in the *Grundrisse* – to refer to what we might call the preconditions, or conditions of possibility, for capitalist accumulation. Marx spends some time illustrating this process through the English enclosures, but his historical treatment clearly raises a number of other (and often larger) issues including the following:

- the enclosure of land and the freeing (and disciplining) of labor
- the development of private property and the role of law
- the criminalization of custom
- the attacks upon and character of various forms of commons and commoning
- the role of the state (and the law) in the transformation of relations of production and the accumulation of capital
- the relations between plunder and violence and capitalist accumulation
- imperialism as a form of capitalist dispossession
- the transition from feudalism to capitalism
• the agrarian question
• resistances to, and the politics of, anti-enclosure
• the relation between forms of dispossession and trajectories of capitalism (i.e. forms of accumulation by dispossession)

In this sense the field of what is being dispossessed and now is very broad. For example, the debate over finance capital and foreclosure, the dispossession of rights (homelessness and rights to the city), forms of displacement and dislocation both through violence and war but also through the effects of the humanitarian international and so-called ‘natural disasters’, and of course the growing centrality of ‘the wageless life’ (Michael Denning) and of the ‘precarious classes’ (Guy Standing) and radical forms of insecurity and ‘slow death’ (Lauren Berlant, Rob Nixon). One might invoke Edward Thompson and his work on the criminalization of custom, the Thatcherite disposition (privatization) of public housing, Naomi Klein’s work on ‘disaster capitalism’, or the ways in which ethnobotanical knowledge and practice is appropriated and redeployed by biotech companies. I want to interpret dispossession and resistance to dispossession (repossession) broadly – it certainly includes how new and uncharted commons are privatized in our epoch – but also to examine particular spaces of dispossession (the frontier, the ghetto, the enclave), and particular expressive forms of dispossession (homelessness, the disciplining of the poor, land grabs, unfree labor and so on). I’d like to work toward an understanding of what one might call regimes of dispossession (and repossession) and to grasp their dynamics, trajectories and forms of politics in the contemporary epoch.

I want in short to interpret dispossession quite broadly – in keeping with I think the multiple implications of primitive accumulation taken from Marx – as a way of thinking about the production of precarity and insecurity in different places at different moments (focusing in particular on what one might call the “neoliberal period”). Obviously one can be dispossessed in a variety of forms and modalities: one can be dispossessed of material objects, of property, of rights, of meanings and symbols, of identities and so on.

The second thread is to explore what one can call the ‘securitization of life’ as a form of governing. Security in this sense has a deep history as Foucault showed. I want to focus on recent history primarily and on how various problems and concerns becomes matters of security and the forms of governmentality which arise around securing life in the face of what are often now seen as “catastrophic threats” (what Ash Amin calls “catastrophism”). Securitization may of course speak to real and actual matters of public concern – the Paris attacks, drought in the West African Sahel, hurricane Katrina, transnational drug operations - but I want to focus on the ways in which, and the modalities of, securitization and what now passes as “building resilient lives” (the Rockefeller Foundation’s new initiative is “building resilience cities” and the Foundation’s President Judith Rodin has a new book on resilience). What type of governance, what sort of subjects, what sorts of practices are entailed in the liberal governance of managing populations in the face of radical threats?

Readings will include some or most of the following (the full course outline will follow shortly):

Articles will be archived on the class website on Bcourses in PDF format that can be downloaded.

Some materials (and most of the core monographs) are also on 2 hour reserve in the Earth Sciences Library and there are a list of books that I have placed on reserve including most of the key texts.

*Requirements*: this class will be run as a reading-intensive research seminar. Accordingly, it is critical that everyone come well-prepared for discussions. In virtue of the limits on the size of the seminar there will be no audits.

Each student will be expected to undertake the following:

(i) **To prepare a short one page critical commentary** on the week's core reading [the monograph or key articles under consideration for that week] and to circulate this electronically by the TUESDAY evening at 5pm (absolutely no later than 5 pm) prior to the WEDNESDAY class (a listserv and bCourses will be set up at the outset of the semester).

(ii) **To lead/chair one class discussion** (depending on enrollment this may be best undertaken in pairs or groups) which involves a short (5-10 minute) presentation of the key theoretical and conceptual issues in the readings pertaining to that week. In addition there will be some secondary readings that I would like groups – I shall break up the class into two or more groups – to read that will permit us to cover (albeit briefly) related materials and case studies that we do not have time to read collectively (see below).

(iii) **The submission of a paper/research proposal** to be handed in no later than May 15th. I am open to two broad sorts of submissions that in part depend upon where you are in your own graduate training. Some of you may wish to use the class to help you develop your dissertation prospectus or a draft of a preliminary research proposal in which you deploy some of the concepts and ideas we have been developing around an
empirical case or cases in which the dispossession or primitive accumulation themes has some bearing. There is a website that I developed while I was Director of IIS on campus devoted to the preparation of a proposal and can be loaded through my departmental website:

http://iis.berkeley.edu/content/dissertation-proposal-resources

In addition I shall be distributing a copy of a broadsheet [*The Art of Writing a Proposal*] prepared by the Social Science Research Council which is the best short discussion of how to structure a research proposal. At various points during the semester I shall discuss actual proposals and how to develop a compelling research question. I shall distribute my book chapter entitled “In search of the Holy Grail” on dissertation research at the beginning of the semester (it is available on the class website). Some of you may wish to make use of an excellent book: Michael Pryke et al., *Using Social Theory*. London, Sage, 2003.

Let me say that I strongly encourage ALL of you to take on the idea of a proposal WHATEVER your stage in graduate training: you CANNOT BEGIN TOO EARLY.

Others of you may wish to explore the key ideas in a paper that explores a particular case study or set of processes which can be productively explored from the vantage point of dispossession. This paper can take any form you wish and could be, if this makes sense for you, an annotated bibliography or a literature review. I happen to think you may get more out of exploring the concepts around a particular case or empirical issue.
Class Structure: I would like to run the seminar in the following way. The first period (1.5 hours) will be a discussion of the key reading/monograph for the week. This discussion will be led and chaired by 1-2 students (or more, depending on class size); it will involve an outline or of framing the book/articles and posing a key set of questions or provocations. The **framing part of the presentation should not take more than 10-15 minutes**. The student(s) are then responsible for chairing the subsequent discussion, i.e., trying as much as possible to provide some direction to the discussion. I expect that everyone will try to participate in the discussion. I shall make some observations but my input will be somewhat limited during this part of the class. At some point (there is no point in stopping the discussion at a specific time) we will take a coffee break. For the second period (an hour or so) I would like to focus on some of the secondary readings. You will see that every week—in part because of the scope of the class—there will be a number of substantive themes identified with other readings. Since it is impossible for everyone to read everything, I'd like to use the second part of the class for small groups who take responsibility for some of the readings to brief us on the readings. In this way we can hopefully extend the scope of our cases and discussions by sharing the work.

In addition, on occasion— for bodies of work that I am familiar with—I may give a mini-lecture. The function of this is to place our discussion and the monograph on a larger landscape of literatures, ideas, and theorizing about resources. The major function will be to situate our discussions and for us to provide something of a roadmap for related debates and literature.

In this way my hope is that we can explore in depth a monograph or a set of readings—research which has ethnographic, historical, sociological depth—and build up a comprehensive sense of how the themes we address around enclosure, dispossession, privatization and primitive accumulation might constitute an emerging field and a powerful optic for social science.

The class will be run as a reading intensive research seminar. I expect that people read systematically (a monograph a week minimally) and participate in the seminar fully.
COURSE OUTLINE
I. FRAMINGS

Week 2 January 27th  Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by Dispossession and the Secret Life of Capital


(*) Rosa Luxemburg, The Accumulation of Capital, Section III, Routledge, 1913/2004. This is available online: http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1913/accumulation-capital/index.htm, also pdf available see especially chapters 27, 28, 32.


(*) David Harvey, The New Imperialism, Clarendon, 2003, chapter 4 (see also http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a9TAbQHzjQ and a response by Robert Brenner and others published in Historical Materialism)


Massimo De Angelis, Separating the Doing and the Deed, Historical Materialism, 12, 2, 2004, 57-88 (you might also want to glance at his Beginning of History, Pluto, 2007, chapters 10 and 11.


Some empirical cases:


**Secondary Reading**


You might also peruse the Commoner website: http://www.commoner.org.uk/

**Week 3 February 3rd  Bare Life, A Precarity, Slow Death**


(*), Laurent Berlant, Slow Death in *Cruel Optimism*, University of Chicago Press, 2011.


(*), Guy Standing, *Tertiary Time*, *Public Culture*, 25/1 2013 (and reply by Andrew Ross, Occupy, and the Wages of the Future)

Franco Barichesi, Precarity as Capture, unpublished paper, Ohio University, 2012.


**Empirical Cases**


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 4 February 10th Security-Insecurity and Living Dangerously**


(*) Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Palgrave, 2008 (Lecture 3 and Lectures 9 and 10 are worth reading too).


**Case Studies**


M. Fourcade and Kiernan Healey, Classification Situations, Accounting, Organizations and Society 38, 2013, 559–572.

Secondary Reading


Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, Biopower today, BioSocieties, 2006, 1, 195–217


II. SPACES

Week 5 February 17th The Frontiers-Borders


Michael Watts, Frontiers: Power, Precarity and Insurgency at the Edge of the State, World Development, in press.

Talal Asad, Where are the margins of the State, in Veena Das and D. Poole (eds)., Anthropology in the Margins of the State, SAR Press, New Mexico, 2004.


Secondary Reading

Patrick Wolfe, After the frontier, Settler Colonial Studies, 1/1, 2-11, 13-52.

Eisenberg, M. 2014 Frontier constellations. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41/2, 157-182 (see also his working paper on vigilante justice).


**Week 6  February 24th  The Ghetto**


**Secondary Reading**


Loic Wacquant, What is a Ghetto?, unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley. 2003.

**Week 7 March 2nd The Camp**

(*) Erica James, *Democratic Insecurities*. University of California Press, 2010


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 8 March 9th The Suburb**


**Secondary**

III. FIGURES

Week 9  March 16th  The Migrant-Refugee


Secondary Reading

Thomas Nail, The Figure of the Migrant. Stanford University Press, 2015.


Spring Break

Week 10  March 30th  The Corporate Citizen


**Secondary Readings**


**Week 11  March April 6th The Combatant**


**Secondary Reading**


**IV. CONDITIONS**

**Week 12  April 13th  Homelessness**


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 13  April 20th  Lawlessness-Thug Life**


(*) Anthony Fontes, Extorted Life, forthcoming *Public Culture*.


**Secondary Reading**


William Reno, Order and Commerce in turbulent areas, *Third World Quarterly* 25/4, 2004

Week 14th April 27th  Terror-Threat


Secondary Reading


Week 15th May 4th  We’re Fucked: The Anthropocene


Secondary Reading


If we have time or energy......Disciplining the Poor

(*) Joe Soss et al., *Disciplining the Poor*, University of Chicago Press, 2011

Paper due no later than at May 15th at 5pm in my mailbox in 501 McCon
e and a soft copy please to my email.