



# **The two faces of the common? Communal forms of government from below as counter-hegemonic alternatives**

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## **abstract**

This paper attempts to analyze rising debates of commons highlighting contrasts between neoliberal's views and new horizons on Communal forms from below as counter-hegemonic alternatives. If (new) neoliberal perspectives of Commons are trying to positioning ideas like 'Common-pool recourses', 'public-private Partnerships', 'governance', a way of thinking embodied by the so-called: Common without Community; in contrast, anti-hegemonic Communal thoughts based on Civilization Matrixes aims to develop popular creative capacities and resistances against neoliberal capitalism through Alternate-and-Native, alternatives propositions, 'Care' of communal property for 'good-living-well', in other words: a way of thinking and living personifying the Commons with Community. In this sense, struggles and debates surrounding the common open up perspectives of reflection on the transition and the construction of a new world that allows for the re-appropriation of socially produced work and wealth that has been systematically usurped by the dominant rationality.

## **Common(s) or communal? Introductory remarks**

It is necessary to differentiate a community practice later turned functional by capital, from one that is created, from the onset, for the capital.

Raquel Gutiérrez and Huascar Salazar.

*Nuestra América*<sup>1</sup>, during the first decade of the 21st century, saw an intense process of critical mobilisations against neoliberalism, the current form of capitalism. The people of this region rose up to demand Justice, Dignity, Freedom and Democracy in their territories.

From this perspective of social and popular movements, the implementation of the neoliberal project had: (i) put in question the ethical foundations of life in society; (ii) radicalised violence against citizens; (iii) intensified the devastation of natural ecosystems; (iv) deepened social inequalities, and did not guarantee a dignified life for all<sup>2</sup>.

The scope of these popular rebellions was heterogeneous but two main trends can be identified.

In some countries, popular uprisings supported by social movements provoked ruptures at government level; in others, it politicised and strengthened autonomy within communities and in certain territories. Ultimately, the rise of a reactionary right resulted in a withdrawal from social mobilisation.

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- 1 We prefer to adopt Cuban José Martí's term *Nuestra América* – 'Our America' - (Martí, 1891) rather than the classical reference: 'Latin-America', originally penned by Colombian writer José María Torres Caicedo in his poem: 'Las dos Américas' (1856). At the time, Torres Caicedo was looking for a suitable replacement for the term: "América Española" (Spanish America). In Martí's *Nuestra América* is thought out from the bottom upwards.
  - 2 According to figures provided by OXFAM: "Extreme inequality in the world is reaching unsustainable levels. Today, the richest 1% of the world's population has more wealth than the remaining 99% of people on the planet ... At the same time, wealth in the hands of the poorest half of humanity has been reduced by one trillion dollars over the past five years... by 2015, only 62 people had the same wealth as 3.6 billion people (the poorest half of humanity). Not so long ago, in 2010, it was 388 people" (see OXFAM, 2016: 1-2). Indeed the Oxfam's report: "Time to Care" (2020), outlines that 22 richest men in the world have more wealth than all the women in Africa. Similarly, Piketty points out that, "(...) Since the 1970s, inequality has grown significantly in rich countries, especially in the United States, where, in the decade of 2000-2010, the concentration of income recovered - even slightly exceeded - the record level of the 1910-1920 decade ... the increase in inequality since the 1970s and 1980s is largely due to the political changes of recent decades, especially in fiscal and financial matters" (Piketty, 2015: 29-30 and 36).

Whatever the scope of the individual rebellions, this decade of struggle opened up a new emancipatory outlook in the region.

The creative capacity and resistance of the peoples of Nuestra América fed this perspective, and it was expressed throughout the multiplicity of communal practices and in popular knowledge that added to a systematic critique of modern, developmentalism, and neoliberal thought.

Since these times, the subversive dynamics and concrete struggles for the defence of life has continued, transformed and given new meaning to the lives of these people.

Communities have organised crucial rebellions in defence of territory, water, seeds, ancestral knowledge, and work, among other fundamental components needed to build a *Buen-vivir-Bien*, to put it simply: ‘Good life’, or a life that is worthy for all. It is precisely within the framework of this process that these disputes around *the common, the commons and the communal* have taken a strategic place.

In view of these issues, this document reviews debates that have been developed over the last decade on *the common*, common goods and communal forms of policies and politics (see Jiménez et al., 2017). This document aims to contribute to further reflections on social movements, popular organisations and other social and political actors who seek through their efforts and struggles to build new communal organisations for living.

This text is organised as follows. First, general arguments are put forward concerning the centrality of the dispute of the common in the current conjuncture. Second, conceptualisations on the Common and Common goods are presented. Next, certain debates will be presented on issues related to the public, the private and *the Common*. A fourth section in which a critique of (neo)liberal governance is developed and the concept of Communal skills of government (from below) is presented. Finally, there will be a reflection on communal initiatives and the construction of new projects and ways of organising life.

Here, the main objective is to promote theoretical reflections on popular struggles and forms of government today. So, this paper must be understood

in relation to potential alternatives ‘from below’ in the course of recent history of Nuestra América, ranging from anti-neoliberal (defensive) oppositions to anti-capitalist resistance (offensive struggles)<sup>3</sup>, invoking the need to differentiate a community practice later made functional by capital from social practices that is realized for capital:

The first type of practice can be understood as efforts to produce life beyond capital - even against it – and although it manages to appropriate, through different mechanisms of exploitation and dispossession, the human energy exerted in such practices, insofar as they exist, there is always something else, that is to say, that a material and/or social product is produced or regenerated that is not for capital and that, in one way or another, will fulfil the purpose of reproducing life. (Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2015: 22)

### **The argument surrounding the Common and the Commons and the defence of life**

Arguments related to *the common* (singular) and *commons* (plural) is not novel and, much less, is not utopian. There is a long tradition in social movements and critical thinking in their defence<sup>4</sup>.

However, the intensification and enlargement of the process of dispossession, alienation<sup>5</sup>, and privatisation of *the Common and the*

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3 It needs to be stressed that this text could not collect all the ‘emancipatory experiences’ at all levels that already exists in the region. Our analysis is rooted in cases (paradigmatic and representatives) by attempting preliminary findings about such phenomenon in Nuestra América as a theoretical synthesis.

4 We are aware of differences between the terms common (singular) and commons (plural) (see De Angelis and Harvei, 2014). However, in principle, we are agree with the generic use of the word: common(s) to launch this discussion.

5 It should be noted the double connotation that Marx made between alienation (in *The Grundrisse*) and alienation (in *Capital*) which was emphasized by Jameson (2013: 11) when he stated: ‘... the most restricted and ‘legal’ sense of alienation of property ... [and] the broader sense that also includes personal alienation,’ and in the case in which we are concerned, the communal. Echeverría (1986: 44), develops this idea in the following terms: “In the capitalist modality of production in terms of a global social life, the self-production by the community only takes place to the extent that it is subordinated to the satisfaction of the needs of the capitalist system and that are heterogeneous with respect to its own needs: this is determined by the

*Commons* that has characterised contemporary capitalism has led to a centralisation of projects and social resistance in the current situation,

(...) As Massimo De Angelis says, there has always been *communal movements* “outside” capitalism that have played a key role in class struggle, fuelling radical thinking as well as the physical action by many community members [De Angelis, 2007]. Aid societies of the nineteenth century are an example of this kind of action [Bieto, 2000]. What is even more important is that new types of communal movements continue to emerge because of things like “free software” and the “solidarity economy” movement. A whole new world of social relations is emerging that is based on the principle of communal sharing [Bollier and Helfrich, 2012], reaffirming the observation that capitalism has nothing to give us except misery and division. (Caffentzis and Federici, 2015: 57).

Thus, the dispute around *the Common* usually involves a confrontation with capitalism. It upends the individualistic matrix of societal organisation. It proposes, among other things, the recovery of dignity, freedom, justice, autonomy and the capacity for cooperation (Gutiérrez, 2015) as principles of organising community life.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, this type of human experience, having an ethical foundation in human dignity for the community-biotic, aims to break relationships of exploitation and subordination and instead allow for the organising of

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reproductive and cumulative dynamics of capital. ... for the community member to produce in a capitalistic way is, therefore, to realize their own survival, but to do this- and here is the contradiction – the member is exploited (ignored) both in the physical (in his/her right to enjoy the products of his/her labour) as well as specifically human (in his/her autarchy or faculty of self-determination)”.

- 6 Some examples of popular social projects in Nuestra América are illustrative of this issue: community aqueducts, seed custodians, reserve areas run by rural farmers, popular education projects, and economic cooperatives, among others. The network of community aqueducts in Colombia, for instance, it’s a project developed in this way: ‘Community aqueducts are managed socially and publicly ... we come from an ancestral legacy that has been passed on from generation to generation which promotes the idea of consolidating and defending the identity of our territories. We work towards the common good and towards preserving the cultural and environmental heritage of our nation... community water management organisations construct spaces for peace, social and environmental justice, and we demand respect for social and community autonomy in our territories’. (National Network of Community Aqueducts in Colombia, 2016).

various kinds of social and natural relations. Thus, practices associated with the commodification of human life, competition, consumerism, peak performance and individualism are displaced, and they are replaced by practices that focus on the satisfaction, wishes and needs of the community. These kinds of practices focus on respecting life, and on communal enjoyment, among other things.

These kinds of experiences are constituted in alternate-and-native perspectives, that is to say, *alternative*, abstract guides, but also concrete ways of bringing about the materialisation of popular community expectations.

Therefore, this has made the common and commons the main supports for new emancipatory perspectives involving the reorganisation of lives, the building of a new type of sociability, the readjusting the energetic metabolism of nature, and a way of recovering the ethical foundations of *Justice, Dignity, and Freedom*.

The deepening of the current crisis of the neoliberal capitalist system (which has been described as having caused a crisis that is imminent and terminal for human civilization<sup>7</sup>) increases the value of communal perspectives as a basis for organising other forms of government and administration that come from below.

### **What is the common(s)? A brief review**

The epistemological debate on what is *the common* (and what it is not) has a long tradition in political philosophy and other disciplines of the social and human sciences.

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7 'When we analyse the multiple causes of the contemporary crisis, we come to the conclusion that the paradigm of the organisation of the economic system, today globalised, goes much further than the simple production of the material basis of collective life. That is why this is a crisis of civilization, which involves all aspects of life, both the nature world and the human race' (Houtart, 2013: 240).

It is not the aim of the paper to delve into this debate, nor to revive the multiple conceptualisations that have emerged related to this framework. In this text, we put forward some concepts -elaborated by intellectuals closer to popular movements- that contribute to the discussions on social movements by putting forth arguments for the *the common and the commons*<sup>8</sup> in order for new emancipatory perspectives to materialise.

In the language of the movements of the '60s and '70s [says Silvia Federici], the concept of "common" did not exist. They fought for many things, but not for the concept of the common as we understand it today. This notion of the common is a result of privatisations, attempts at appropriation and the complete commodification of the body, knowledge, land, air and water. This has caused not only a reaction to present realities but has also created a new political consciousness. In fact, it is linked to the idea of our common life, and it has provoked a reflection upon the communal dimension of our lives. Hence, there is a very strong relationship or correspondence between expropriation, common production, and the importance of the common as a concept of life, and of social relations. (Federici quoted by Gago, 2011)

Federici's approach links *arguments for the common(s)* with the exploitive processes by contemporary capitalism.

This is so because, at present, dispossession is a central feature of the molecular dynamics in the accumulation of resources by global capitalism. Hence the names given first by Caffentzis, Federici and Linebaugh (*The New Enclosures*), and then by Harvey to this new imperialist phase (*accumulation for dispossession*) are key references. Therefore, the movement of common property rights to the private domain, the forceful new waves of enclosures on common goods, the persecution and the criminalisation of community based movements which work towards the organisation of their territories, among other cannibalistic economic practices, has been a threat to the reproduction of the life to these subordinate sectors.

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8 Although discursively some social movements do not explicitly refer to the defence of the common and the commons, their struggles are a response to the different types of enclosures that support the accumulation of wealth under the current paradigm. Popular struggles over the course of this century seek, among other things, to curb the process of deprivation and privatisation under the current neoliberal order that limits the management, access and use of certain fundamental goods, which are needed to ensure a dignified and good life for communities and their territories.

These types of actions have resulted in the current situation and struggle by community organisations.

The common(s) is then explained and comes from relational logic. It is not a natural feature of certain objects, nor is it a particular feature of a specific historical moment. Much less is it an attribute of certain social groups. The common is something connected with a kind of vital social relation,

The common is not to be construed, therefore, as a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process, but as an ever changing and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and aspects of its existing or yet- to-be-created social and/or physical environment which are deemed crucial to its life and survival. There is in effect a social practice of communalisation. This practice produces or establishes a social relation with a common whose uses are either exclusive to a social group or partially or fully open to all without exception. At the heart of the practice of the common lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that part of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified-as-off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations. (Harvey, 2013: 116)

There are three central findings in Harvey's analysis: i) the common has a substantial relationship in the preservation of life; ii) common goods may be either material or immaterial; and iii) communalisation practices do not have a mercantile character.<sup>9</sup>

From this point of view, it follows that the defence of *the common* is in turn a condition of life for the subaltern classes, and it is seen an alternative model for these people in building an anti-capitalist world. The political and disruptive power of *the common* lies in the creative and productive capacity of society and nature. Hence, it is not possible to characterise the common in a fixed and immutable way, and it can vary according to historical conditions.

The social practice of communalisation firmly places the discussion of the common in the hands of the community. Thus, it would not be a minimalist

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9 It is important to outline that before Harvey, Nick Dyer-Witheford (2007) proposed: 'If the cell form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular form of a society beyond capital is the common' and the notion of Commonism.



interpretation of the common where a group of individuals met to manage a good / an object / or merchandise, but this would allude to a process in which social bonds assume a community character. Therefore, the commons are a product of social cooperation,

The commons are not given, *they are produced*. Even if we say that we are surrounded by common goods- the air we breathe and the languages we use are eloquent examples of goods we share - we can only create these goods through cooperation in our productive lives. This is so because common goods are not necessarily material objects, but can also be social relations, or constitutive social practices. This is why some people prefer to talk about 'communalising' or 'the common'. It is precisely to emphasize the relational nature of this political project. [*own emphasis*]. (Caffentzis and Federici, 2015: 67)

Therefore, the commons refers to a production in and of the community. A community understood in a broader sense<sup>10</sup> including humans, nature, the biosphere, the electromagnetic spectrum and the universe (Linebaugh, 2009).

The approaches hitherto mentioned (Caffetzins, Federici, Nick Dyer-Witford, then Harvey among others) are influenced and encouraged by the Marxist tradition. Therefore, the ideas that they propose concerning the common heads in the direction of an anti-capitalist and class struggle perspective. Neither is the common a matter of making capitalism more human through the recognition of some common good, nor is it to construct a social order in which public, private and common goods co-exist organically as a result of a consensus between classes. Here, the aim is to fight for the collective right to build a new system of social relations and organisation of life.

The discussion here is then a discussion concerning anti-capitalist commons.

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10 Communities are not limited to human communities. Communities are biotic communities if we are not talking about other forms of associations. We are talking about richer and more complex forms of community that require vital forms of correspondence (Prada, 2013).

In Latin American thought, the debate around the common has gained momentum over the last few decades.

This can be explained, amongst other reasons, by the richness of popular struggles that took place near the dawn of the 21st century, and in particular, those struggles related to the mobilisation of popular and indigenous peoples. These popular and indigenous struggles include the community proposals for ‘Good living’ (*sumak kawsay* in quechua) and for ‘Living well’ (*suma qamaña* in aymara), as well as other libertarian traditions of the region that have fuelled these movements.

For the purposes of this section, we will look to the concepts that two Latin-American thinkers: Raúl Prada and Raúl Zibechi propose concerning the common.

In the broader sense, the common is not property, not a possession, it is access. Access of all to natural goods, to the products of collective work, as well as to language, general intellect, knowledge, science, and culture, which are also common goods. The common belongs to the community; therefore, it forms part of the territoriality or the territorialities of the community. The common makes us intimately interdependent and complementary. We are integrated in the sharing of what is immediately accessible and without any mediation or cost except for the required energy needed to access it. (Prada, 2013)

From this perspective, the common is defined by the act of sharing in a community, and the intertwining of lives among the beings of the mother earth that collectively construct a territory. In short, the common is life itself, in all its complexity (Prada, 2013). Hence, the common embodies a political power capable of propelling social transformation. In this same sense, Zibechi suggests understanding the common as the fundamental bonds needed in the development of life,

The ties we build in order to continue being, to have life continue being life are links that cannot be limited to institutions or things (water, land, nature). In this sense, the so-called ‘common goods’ are not objects, or separate entities of people, but are bonds (common, communitarian) that make it possible things like water and land to continue to benefit people and/or the community. ‘Common goods’ are what we make for the use of the whole community. (Zibechi, 2015: 76)

Thus, the common expresses the action of the community, and their collective work. Therefore, at the centre of this reflection lies the practices that allow for the organisation and reproduction of life.

The conceptualisations expressed on the common and the commons denote the capacity of transformative action that characterises them. In this case, its defence implies a frontal attack on the necro-economic order of neoliberalism and capitalism. Hence the importance they have in the struggles of social movements over the course of the twenty-first century.

The common and the commons are concepts associated with the ability of: relating, cooperating, sharing, producing, communicating, accessing, complementing, and linking, among other things; these things make it possible to move society to a political perspective of transformation and towards the construction of a good life, a life of dignity and a life of solidarity for all. This movement implies questioning the ways of organising life in and of capitalism.

Radical feminist thinking have contributed significantly to this discussion,

Capitalist markets are not deities; nor are they socioeconomic institutions that articulate power relations that privilege concrete subjects... They are a set of structures that permit a few lives to be imposed upon others as the ones that are worthy of being supported by everyone else, and also as the only lives worthy of being rescued in times of crisis. Capitalist markets are a series of mechanisms that hierarchically place concrete lives and establish as a reference and top priority the life of the privileged subject of modernity, the ones who, following María José Capellín, we will call WBEAHM: the white, bourgeois, entitled, adult heterosexual male. Power and resources are concentrated around him, life itself is defined by him. Faced with this starting point, arises the need for the feminist to put sustainability of life at the centre. (Pérez, 2014: 25)

Therefore, it is a question of radically transforming this system of the organisation of life,

To make a community -produce in common- is, then and in the first place, to de-naturalize the identity imposed by the capitalist configuration of social reproduction. It orients itself towards the needs of the concrete subject, and not to the automatic subject of capital, or of value valuing itself; it is, instead,

oriented towards a value of a basis of a system of needs by the community member. (Millán, 2015: 190)

We can say that recognising that ‘common goods can be produced, protected and used for social benefit’ and managed communally, and they can generate conditions of possibility to resist capitalist powers and to rethink anti-capitalist transition policies (Harvey, 2013).

### **Neither public nor private, nor common without community**

In the debate over the common and the commons there emerges a central issue associated with the relationship between the common, the public and the private.

Some theoretical approaches propose that there is a complementary relationship between these three spheres. For these approaches, there could be clearly delimited fields that could define when a good must assume any of these characters. Moreover, for these postulates, the symbiosis between them could be considered a condition of systemic stability.<sup>11</sup>

While the commons from a market standpoint can be seen as vestiges of old forms of labour co-operation, interest in the common can come from a wide range of social-democratic forces that are concerned with the extremes to which neoliberalism recognises the advantages of communal relations needed for the production of everyday life. In this context, the commons appear as a possible ‘third’ space in addition to and at the same level as the state and the market economy. (Caffentzis and Federici, 2015: 64)

In this kind of approach, the common does not compromise on genuine communal relationships. These types of perspectives tend to destroy communal relationships and hinder the development of already existing

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11 ‘The general objective has to be the reconceptualization of the neoliberal market and the state and to give rise to a “triarchy” with the common: a common market-state, in order to redirect authority and to obtain sustenance from new forms of organization which are more beneficial. The State would maintain its commitment to representative governance and public property management, just as the private sector would continue to own capital for the production and subsequent sale of goods and services in the market’ (Bollier and Weston, 2012: 350).

ones. Of course, it does not seek to create communal ties based on socio-political solidarities or around a general and broad goal of forming a 'unity-in-common' community. These approaches subsume collective social construction in individualism, and in the end, facilitate the subordination of the communal - its production and reproduction - to the needs of the logic of capital.

Other approaches compare the public to the common. In discussing these perspectives, the common has a public character; therefore, it is and must be managed by the state or by actors who are designated to its management<sup>12</sup>. In this way, we can witness a common state. These approaches disavow the constitutive features of the common as it is and how it belongs to the community - more so than the state - and does not recognise that the common has a character which is immediately accessible and without mediation.

It is difficult to understand the expropriation of the common by the 'public' if we do not mediate upon its institutionalised representations. These institutionalised representations would mean that one becomes the ruler of everything, the absolute owner of everything, and for that very reason, the giver of everything as the concessionaire. The "public" is then the supreme representative, the sovereign, and the absolute ruler, as the principle basic institution. ... at the birth of these capture devices, will later and retrospectively be called a state, in the broad and not modern sense of the word. The expropriation of the common is the mechanism of the institution and the constitution its form of power which can be understood as the availability and the monopolisation of forces and resources, goods and bodies. (Prada, 2013)

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12 This approach proposes a limited interpretation of the public. From this perspective, the public is synonymous with the state, or at best, as the place where the national state and the citizens are intertwined. Unknowingly, as proposed by Múnera (2001: 10), this will result in 'the absorption by the state of what was previously considered as communal and the institutionalisation of collective processes within the limits established by the private dimension of society. Consequently, the public in contemporary societies does not simply refer to the state as a systemic regulator of individual activities, but to the way in which the community and the collective are conserved and transformed under its domination'.

Approaches that tend towards the nationalisation of the common do not consider the way in which the commons are being devastated by public powers and by moneymaking private initiatives. Public-private initiatives and privatisation of common goods are examples of this phenomenon.

This perspective has been questioned on several fronts. Positions like these do not recognise the inability of individualised private property rights to satisfy the interests society at large.

Finally, we find an important number of deliberations that establish a clear distinction between the public, the private and the common. The conceptualisations proposed in the previous section are illustrative of this perspective. The common refers to autonomous spaces that are fundamental for the reproduction of life and are bodies that are beyond the sphere of action by the state.

The elements presented here are intended only to place the debate into the public, the private and the common sphere. In terms of critical thought, both from anarchist and Marxist traditions, there are important positions upon these issues. Arguments referring to the public as a disputed sphere and as a scenario of possibility for social emancipation view this as a possibility if it opens the way to popular socio-political action (Oliver, 2009).

### **From (neoliberal) governance to Communal skills of government (from below)**

Among the debates that have emerged during the 21st century, the issue of forms of government has been subject to different assessments. The notion of Communal Skills of Government (CSG) aims to highlight forms of government from below, associated with modalities of political command and socio-territorial administration based on communal-popular ties.<sup>13</sup>

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13 It seems useful to walk-through communal-popular expressions, as a clear allusion to 'community-popularity' (see Linsalata 2015), since, as Gutiérrez and Salazar (2015, 26) state, it is more encompassing and flexible when it comes to thinking; above all, it gives a productive context that is more deeply crossed by capital'.

There are at least two great theoretical paths for interpreting socio-political forms of organisation and contemporary modes of government. We have synthesized both tendencies that are characterised by the contrast between the hegemonic current of conventional options *vis-à-vis* the counterhegemonic potentials of emerging alternatives.

It is important to emphasize that although it is possible to note nuances with respect to the notion of governance, both in a conventional<sup>14</sup> and apparently contentious<sup>15</sup> perspective, gradually ‘sub-types’ of the term *aggiornados* -something old which is adapted for a new use- can be recycled with new adjectives: corporate, good governance, ‘green’, socio-cybernetics. These terms deserve to be deployed in future ontological critiques, that is, the meaning of these words at the root and under ethical-material principles.

It is always useful to remember that as paradigmatically within the field of ideas and debates about ‘development’ and its endless and deceptive contemporary extensions: ‘sustainable in a strictly environmental sense’ *versus* ‘sustainable in a more holistic sense- the crucial challenge for these

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14 A well-restrained classical conventional understanding of governance is provided by Kooiman (2005: 74): ‘(...) To put it plainly, it is the private sector (market) that normally takes on the responsibility of governing the primary interactions which are carried out. It is the task of the private parties outside the market to take responsibility for the governing of the more organised interactions that accompany these primary processes. It is the task/responsibility of public organisations to ensure that the problems and opportunities in and around the processes and the primary and secondary structures of these actors are carried out according to the principles and rules that reflect common and the broader social systems/interests which relate to these processes’. [own emphasis].

15 In the Latin American debate, a methodologically erroneous and politically misleading contrast has been promoted between supposedly conflicting currents of governance. On the one hand, conventional interpretations are called ‘governmental and economic-instrumental’, and, on the other hand, those considered ‘critical’ and who self-proclaim themselves as ‘democratic-radicals and citizens’. Within the currents of ‘democratic’ governance, one of the special references is to Democracy fully realized: an alternative progressive thinker which doesn’t seem to notice the ideological affiliation to its author, the neo-liberal-developmental Roberto Mangabeira Unger (1998), who aligns himself structurally with conventional perspectives which were previously denounced.

discussions is not to continue to support, as Misoczky (2010: 16) says: ‘(...) a domesticated criticism, which remains within the limits of management, and at best is only able to produce micro-emancipations that do not put at risk the order of capital.’

It is a question of ‘producing, reproducing and developing human life in a community, and, lastly, the life of all humanity’ (Dussel quoted by Misoczky, 2010: 19) as the guiding ethical-material principle of reflective thinking and as an active praxis which tries to transform what currently exists.

### **Governance and ‘Common goods’: the hegemonic trap**

The first type of government is associated with the foundations of thinking and the practices of the so-called new neoliberalism (Puello-Socarrás, 2008a, 2013) which is supported by pro-hegemonic socio-political, ideological and economic forces, and by global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (although most visibly by the World Bank Group in different machinations of international public policies).

This *neoliberal governmental* mentality is centred around the notion of (polycentric) *governance*.

Recently, the work of Elinor Ostrom (2011) has been playing a crucial role in discursively reviving arguments – which implies influencing different social practices – on how it would be possible to govern common goods ‘beyond the market’ (and their private interests) and ‘Beyond the State’ (and its public powers).

When Elinor Ostrom (2005: 1-2) asks, in whose hands should ‘common property’ be, she insists that:

(...) in the provision of urban services and resources for common use, we have repeatedly found that *communities of individuals* in rural and urban areas who have *self-organised themselves to provide and co-produce* ... local goods and services and given the restrictions they face ... public entrepreneurs work closely with citizens who often find innovative ways of shaping services with a mix between local talent and local resources.



In this ideal type of hegemonic governmental mentality, there is no possibility of constructing a government outside of market dynamics and inter-individualist relations. Interpretations such as this, under the oxymoron: “common goods” gives a bias to the broad notion of the communal and systematically hides contradictions that would occur to mercantile logic in the construction of ‘the common’.

Although Elinor Ostrom’s theories have been (self) promoted within the framework of ‘common goods’, they should be rigorously redefined within the topic: *Common-pool recourses* (CPR).

Particularly because it raises different technical and especially political questions. E. Ostrom<sup>16</sup> persists in insisting that it has not been sufficiently recognised that the argument of ‘the shared’ alludes to a partition based on the conjunction of (public) entrepreneurs individuals.

On different occasions Marx has described these types situations thoroughly. In *Capital*, for example, he referred to the *private enclosure of the commons* as an event which is better known as original or primitive accumulation (an idea which was reiterated in the text Rosa Luxemburg by David Harvey which discusses the idea of accumulation by dispossession).

Silvia Federici (2010: 108) describes in detail these types of situations which she says cannot be viewed as archaeological vestiges of the capitalist past, but rather must be analysed as conditions which are constantly being updated and are actively in force today,

In England ... privatisation was mainly achieved through the use of ‘enclosures’, a phenomenon that has been very closely associated with the expropriation of workers from their ‘common wealth’, and at the present moment is used as an example by anti-capitalist militants as an indication of attacks on social rights.

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16 Unlike the first (orthodox) neoliberalism that homo economicus (‘economic man’) extols as an anthropological principle, the new (heterodox) neoliberalism promotes the idea of homo redemptoris, entrepreneurial man. Entrepreneurship is the new base that supports different types of contemporary reforms – ideological, institutional, public policies, etc. – to renew neoliberalism as a political class project in the 21st century (see Puello Socarrás 2008a, 2008b).

In the sixteenth century, 'enclosure' was a technical term that indicated the set of strategies used by lords and wealthy peasants to eliminate communal land ownership and to expand their properties. It referred, above all, to the abolition of the open field system, an agreement by which villagers possessed non-adjointing plots of land in a field without fences. Enclosures included the closing of common lands and the demolition of huts of those who did not have land but were able to survive thanks to their customary rights.

For this reason, the perspectives of governance in general, and the polycentric in particular, based on theories of well-known thinkers and intellectuals of neoliberalism such as Friedrich A. Hayek, Vincent Ostrom<sup>17</sup> and Ronald Coase, have been rightly characterised by Caffentzis and Federici (2013) as cases of the *commons without community*.

The main subject, actor and agent in this (new) neoliberal perspective is not community but the entrepreneurs or individuals that although in appearance promote the narrative of 'cooperation', they in fact continue to act and use individualistic logic<sup>18</sup>. In fact, they try to 'coordinate' action from a different modality of the price system through regulated negotiations. 'Cooperation' is thus not supported by ties of reciprocal solidarity, or communal identification, but is based on individualistic selfishness.

Here the skills to govern, therefore, depend on individual entrepreneurial abilities and not that of the collectives in the communal and popular meaning.

It is no coincidence that one of the contemporary pioneers of the notion of governance, Ronald Coase (1937), has emphasised that this is a form of 'collective' action that seeks and makes it possible to maximize production for exchange purposes.

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17 Co-director of The Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis founded at Indiana University in 1973 with his wife.

18 We must note that recently the notion 'Common' has aroused renewed interest both in the counterhegemonic and hegemonic circles. One of the arguments intended to impose hegemonic narratives on the common is to (falsely) compare the idea of 'competition' to the idea of 'coordination'. Both turn out to be essentially individualistic and do not intend to go beyond the neoliberal ideas that are in force today; Paradigmatic examples of this are, amongst others, J. Sachs's *Common Wealth* (2008: 3) and J. Tirole's *Commons good* (2017).

In this version, governance ignores the dimension of social needs and genuine collective interests but instead operates based on exchange by adjusting the logic of quasi-markets.

This is why the ‘common property’ (Elinor Ostrom’s version) is governed by a set of individual actors who are the private side of the formula. Common property is often uncritically called civil society without explicitly alluding to organised interests in the socio-economic sense. The state, for its part, appears as a background to government action (the ‘public’ side in this story) which is always limited to the mandate of monitoring agreements between individuals and to enforcing the *rule of law* to ensure that the rulings in the management of ‘shared’ resources are satisfactory to private individuals. It also tries to avoid (falsely) what Hardin calls the tragedy of the materialisation of the common.<sup>19</sup>

For this reason, the Ostromian motto synthesizes the viewpoint: *neither market nor state* which means public-private hybridization (epistemologically speaking), or ‘public-non-state’ spaces (see Bresser-Pereira, 2004).

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19 Federici (2010, footnote 32) is right in referring to the tragedy of the Commons (Hardin, 1968): ‘(...) it was one of the pillars of the ideological campaign to support privatisation of the land in the seventies. Hardin’s version of ‘tragedy’ points to the inevitability of Hobbesian selfishness as a determinant of human behaviour’. Elinor Ostrom interposes, on the one hand, a critique of Hardin’s argument, and on the other hand, enshrines models of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship itself under the ‘public-private’ formula. The latter, in particular, is a caricature of community-based associative relations, and as Garcia Linera puts it in relation to Marx’s Studies on the Ancestral Community (‘Kovalevsky Notebook’): ‘Marx... also pointed out the existence of internal and external antagonistic forces that push for the dissolution of real communal ties: external forces such as capitalist relations that, in the uninterrupted process of incorporating the field into their laws, seek to strangle the community or, in some other cases, formally subordinate community work to capital by transforming the former associative relations into a caricature of itself. Internal forces such as the tendency to control individual and certain lands, inequality in the control of livestock, possession of ‘service Indians’ for the cultivation of lands of communal authorities [sic] before and in the colony, individual work plots or, finally, private property, which push the community to its own dissolution’. [own emphasis] (García Linera, 2015: 119).

Forms of action and use of instruments in ‘public’ policies resulting from the above are, for example, the recurrent public-private partnerships that today are registered in the realities of institutional life and are increasingly frequent in traditionally communal spaces and territories which aim to recreate forms of post-privatisation (see Stolowicz, 2016: 1035-1108).

The key idea of governance is to give incentives so that the state can ‘unite’ individuals who can then find the appropriate terminology needed to coordinate their own interests and actions when seeking particular goals in public spaces<sup>20</sup>.

### **Communal skills of government (CSG): Counter-hegemonic potentialities?**

In contrast, Communal Government Skills (CGS)<sup>21</sup> is a second type of government that is far removed from pro-hegemonic choices.

In general, this type of government from below could be based on different alternating and native worldviews<sup>22</sup>. These differing worldviews envisage the consolidation of historic and currently existing forms of government, and they envision the administration of community territories under an unconventional and therefore counterhegemonic mould.

Many popular movements throughout *Nuestra América* that could be characterised as CSG have been constructed from organisational systems based on values and practices such as the *de-commodification* of social relations (in serious situations such as the Colombian one, this perspective

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20 As Laval and Dardot (2016: 19) states: ‘(...) public property is not a protection of common but a kind of “collective” form of private property, reserved to dominant classes, whom can dispose of it... and plundering the people in the line of its desires and interests’.

21 Also: Political Governments from below fostered by Communal forces itself.

22 Our analysis will be to take into account theoretical reflections as a result of a ‘new wave’ of *Nuestra América* thinkers about Commons as a matter for examination. However, this does not suggest that all scholar’s theoretical perspectives and epistemological orientations have been standardised. We prefer to speak about the ‘discursive coalitions’ and refer to the set of (critical) ideas in the Latin-American socio-political Thought.

necessarily implies its demilitarisation) and communal solidarity and reciprocity<sup>23</sup> among others.

They have also been more broadly and more complexly organised around civilizational matrices like the communal *Buen-vivir-Bien* ('Good-living-Well') (Puello-Socarrás, 2015a and 2015b).

The general characteristic of these cases can be translated into a governmental framework aimed at 'the reproduction of human beings within a social and natural home' (Mies and Bennholt-Thomsen quoted by Federici and Caffentzis, 2013).

Solon and Esterman (quoted by Solon 2016: 19-20) summarise the above by specifically referring to *Living Well* (aymara's *suma qamaña*) which is the *Pacha's* conception and criticism of 'development.' Let us look back at an eminently neoliberal idea:

This spiral vision of time questions the very essence of the notion that 'development' is always moving towards a higher point and is always trying to improve. This idea of upward movement is a fiction in the eyes of Living Well. Everything that moves ahead turns, there is nothing eternal, and everything is transformed and is reunited to the past, the present and the future.

In the *Pacha*, there is no separation between living beings and inert bodies, all have life. Life can only be explained through the relationship between all parts of the whole. The dichotomy between beings with life and simple objects does not exist. Likewise, there is no separation between humans and nature. We are all part of nature and the *Pacha* like everything has life.

According to Josef Esterman, the *Pacha*,

(...) 'is not a machine or a giant mechanism that is organised and is moved simply by mechanical laws, as has been said by modern European philosophers and especially by Descartes and his followers. The *Pacha* is rather a living organism in which all parts are interrelated and in constant interdependence and exchange. The basic principle of any 'development' must then be life (*kawsay*, *qamaña*, *Jakaña*) in its entirety, not only that of human beings or animals and plants, but of all the *Pacha*' [own emphasis].

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23 Cf. Its what Aymaras calls: *Ayni* (something near to 'mutual aid') as a dimension of complementarity.

The point here would not be to converge on objectives and make them a 'shared business'. On the contrary, it is a matter of organising social life as a whole or living in the framework of collective autonomies while preserving individual nature (not individualism which is a different situation) of people's thought as a natural social metabolic process (Marx, 2015). It is precisely what many popular Latin American and Caribbean communities experience in their own way. They have translated to a *conviviality* -a category developed in its beginnings by Ivan Illich.

García Linera<sup>24</sup> invokes this characteristic by condensing it into the notion of "community-form":

Each natural element involved in the natural cycle of the community exists before it is a living being, therefore it is changing, sensitive and treatable. But at the same time, each element is an integral part of a supreme natural being encompassing the totality of the visible and the non-visible. It is a palpable and conceptual natural force which designates each of its parts specific functions within the recreation of life of the nature-total of which the community and its members are acting components. *Each member of nature, including the community*, is thus seen as an active and necessary part of the total natural metabolism. This holistic concept recreates the intimacy and divinity of nature vis-a-vis the human being. While this is impelling, in what we have come to call communal technological ethics, an active understanding of the deep and respectful interdependence of all the elements while working within the natural whole that groups everyone. It is being between what the communal individual does and everything that other living natural components do and need. There is, therefore, in natural scientific thought a unilateral concept of nature that is much less cosmic or able to be usurped, but rather is *agreeable* [Note: in the sense of 'conviviality'], *retributive*, and *utterly-universalistic* [own emphasis]. (García Linera, 2009: 311-311).

At this point, it is crucial to introduce the notion of *Abigarramiento*<sup>25</sup> (a category closer to the English word: 'variegation').

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24 We appreciate the intellectual contributions of A. García Linera as to avoid ad hominem arguments related with his activity in governmental positions since 2006 in Bolivia.

25 The notion of *abigarramiento*, originally by V.I. Lenin and renewed by René Zavaleta Mercado, can be understood through the following operational definition provided by Antezana (2009: 132): '(...) is the mutual qualification of economic-social diversities in such a way that, in concurrence, none of them

Looking at the arguments of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, it is useful to make a fundamental distinction between the (complex) notion of *abigarramiento* -in her own terms: *ch'ixi*- and the (simple) notion of hybridization:

The notion of *hybridism* as proposed by Garcia Canclini is a genetic metaphor which denotes sterility. The mule is a hybrid species that cannot reproduce. *Hybridity assumes the possibility that the mixture of two different elements can leave a completely new third element*, or a third race or a social group that is capable of fusing the traits of their ancestors in a harmonious but above all unprecedented mix.

...The notion of *ch'ixi* ... is the equivalent to that of the 'variegated society' of [René] Zavaleta [Mercado], and this notion proposes a *parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not merge, but instead, antagonize or complement each other*. Each difference reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to the others in a contentious way. [*emphasis added*]. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 70).

In contrast to the models of the new neoliberal syntheses ("public-private" hybridizations), alternative modes of government and authority involve spheres and societal spaces referred to as 'motley plots' or 'community frameworks' (Gutiérrez and Salazar 2015: 21-22).

These modes evolve under 'juxtaposed inter-action dynamics' where individuals and communities in social life co-exist simultaneously while ensuring *unity-in-diversity* without privileging any higher level or subordinating one to the other<sup>26</sup>.

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maintains their form (previous). The reference to concrete societies object of knowledge would allow it to characterise the diverse histories in game, or the diverse degrees of social constitution (relative) involved therein. The evaluation of one another's diversities would result in the concept of intersubjectivity and would recognise in social crises the degree of unity of the diversity achieved in such competition" [own emphasis]. About special logics of the notion of *Abigarramiento*' (see Puello-Socarrás, 2017).

26 Gutiérrez and Salazar (2015: 21-22), for example, understood the communal as 'motley plots' or 'community frameworks' that are 'made visible and become intelligible in indigenous, native, peasant communities, especially in times of struggle or in festivities'.

This also implies creative and not less contentious forms of socio-political autonomy and practices of self-government *from within* and *from below* within communities.

Communal skills of government (from below) could be summarised from the joint proposal of *Buen-vivir-Bien* ('Good-Living-Well' [*suma qamaña* + *summa kawsay*]), as follows:

The administration of the biosphere is understood as 'physical and spiritual care'. 'Care' in the sense of English care in which Arne Naess explains the meaning of 'deep ecology': care, diligence, attention, delicacy, caution. In short, this is a respectful and quasi-reverential relationship of the human being with nature. Torrez uses two concepts to further explain this sense: *Qaman*: 'care in the how of raising life', and *Pacha-qamana*: a responsibility of care for the Earth understood as time/space, and as parity of matter/energy. Thus, the administrator/caretaker works in a territory which is understood as a living dynamic system ('*bewegliche Ordnung*', Goethe, '*Holomovimiento*', Bohm) made up of biotic networks ranging from the cellular world to the *ayllu*, the *marka*, the *suyo*, depending on the particular case. (Medina 2011: 48-49)

And in addition:

(...) Capital (and its heterogeneous processes of its production) abstracts the values that make up social wealth and makes it possible to subject social groups to mercantile relations; only in this way can the value of capital be valued in endless loops. On the other hand, the reproduction of life (human and non-human) or the polymorphic processes of community reproduction are based on the attention and production of an enormous multiplicity of links and values of use that guarantee the satisfaction of a wide variety of human needs. The production of such physical riches and their management are not, at first, split off, but there are multiple ways of attaining balance. Political action then is not necessarily an autonomous activity of reproduction. (Gutiérrez and Salazar, 2015: 25)

Table 1 summarises the contrast between pro-hegemonic government mentalities (*Common-pool* recourses) and counter-hegemonic communal skills based on the categories discussed above (*Communal*).



	<b>COMMON-POOL RECOURSES</b> <b>Pro-hegemonic</b>	<b>COMMUNAL</b> <b>Counter-hegemonic</b>
<i>Emergency</i>	New neoliberalism	Civilization Matrixes
<i>Origins</i>	Semantic dispossession and ideological ‘recycling’ Hegemonic and conventional	Alternate-and-Native, <i>alternative</i> pro-positions
<i>Spaces / Spheres / Logic</i>	Public-Private Partnership [Hybridism]	Communal <i>Abigarramiento</i> [Variegation]
<i>Types of Government</i>	‘GOVERNANCE’ (polycentric) of common assets of <i>shared</i> use [“common-pool recourses”]	‘CARE’ of communal property for <i>good-living-well</i> [ <i>suma qamaña, summa kawsay</i> worldviews]
<i>Horizons Visions Development</i>	Common <i>without</i> Community Conjunction (‘Inter-individual community’) “Neither State nor Market”	Commons <i>with</i> Community Live-together ( <i>Con-vivir</i> ) (‘Communal-units’) “Another form-State, another type of Market”
<i>References theoretical practices</i>	Neo-liberal synthesis (Conventional ‘renewed’ thinking)	Discursive Coalitions (Critical Latin-American Thought)

Table 1. Pro-hegemonic COMMON-pool recourses *versus* Counter-hegemonic COMMUNAl. Source: authors.

The presence of alternative perspectives and varied CSG experiences are certainly linked to the recent recovery of coalitions based on indigenous and local knowledge, says Fals Borda (2013), in convergence with different currents of critical thinking and, particularly, in the processes of the reconstruction of popular resistance in the middle of the so-called anti-neoliberal wave at the regional level.

Using different rhythms and intensities, counter-hegemonic forces have generated, in the words of Gutierrez and Salazar (2015), ‘trans-formations’

in many places and times in the Global South and in *Nuestra America* from the socio-political reconfigurations of government and to what we call in this text: CSG.

### **Communal initiatives and a new organisation of life**

The extensive field of resistance and rebellion that has been woven into *Nuestra America* over the last two decades demonstrates the transformative political power of the subordinate social classes and sectors that have been systematically excluded and humbled under the dominant mode of social organisation.

The transformative, and in some cases, clearly anti-capitalist character of these counter-hegemonic spaces depends on the meaning given to their disputes. This text is in the defence of a good and dignified life for all. Visions of prosperity will never materialise as a result of necro-economic streams of thought that drive capitalism, and these necro-economic streams are responsible for the crisis of civilization that is happening in the planet today,

The multiplicity of acute crises in recent times are the result of the same basic logic: (1) a conception of development which ignores 'externalities' (i.e. natural and social damage); (2) the belief that the planets resources are inexhaustible; (3) allowing exchange values to predominate over the value of a good in use; and (4) relating economic success with profit and the accumulation of capital and thus creating enormous economic inequalities. The model that has produced spectacular growth in world wealth has come to its historical functional end due to its destructive nature and due to the social inequalities it has caused. In short, this system cannot be reproduced, nor is it sustainable. 'The economic rationality of capitalism,' writes Wim Dierckxsens (2011), 'not only tends to ignore the lives of large majorities of the world population but also destroys natural life around us'. (Houtart, 2014: 269)

The fundamental ecological and political process of resistance in the region expresses a systematic rejection of the predatory and unnatural characteristics of capitalistic social relations. For these postulates, there is a critical consensus in favour of life and a recognition of the organic link that exists between the human and the natural world.

The understanding of the natural world as a fundamental dimension of vital activity and as a material and symbolic support of human praxis allows us to understand the critique of capitalism brought by the socio-territorial movements of the region. In this sense, it is not simply a matter of superficially questioning the way life is organised under capitalism.

These are substantial questions which challenge the commodification of life; it is a rejection of the multiple risks - biological, military and economic - that threaten the reproduction of human life and nature, in short, it expresses the vital need to build a post-capitalist way of life from other places and on other budgets.

The goal cannot be to reform the current system, it is perverted in a multitude of ways. This system perverts the very notion of a life that is worth living and denies ecological vulnerability and eco-dependence as basic conditions of human existence. It imposes an ideal of self-sufficiency that is not universally attainable because the very system is only achievable by managing interdependence on the bases of exploitation. It perverts the proper functioning of socio-economic structures by placing the majority into a servitude of a process of accumulation where only a few individuals merit consideration and are guaranteed economic security by the whole of society. In the face of this crisis, we do not want employment, we do not want a salary, and we do not want a welfare state. We want to question the salary relationship itself, and the capitalist structure as a whole. There is no going back; there's a potential future to build. (Perez, 2014: 53).

Betting on a new democratic organisation of society, nature, and life, is central to the defence of the common and the commons in social and popular mobilisation today. In fact, the commons, as a material and social dimension, greatly assists in the reproduction of life in the community and is fundamental axis for social commentary and in the construction of a new way of organising life.

There is no city, nor viable society, that has not benefited from the goods, knowledge and wealth and even life that has been made possible by the common. These communal goods are essential to the maintenance of life. These goods include natural elements such as land, water, forests and air, as other resources managed, thus far, by public and private entities who have little respect for their conservation or improvement in areas such as public spaces, health, education, collective care, culture and knowledge. (The Charter of Commons, 2011)

The struggle for the common is a movement, which is built on ethnic, secular, sectoral, cultural, civic, popular and gender diversity present in the regions mentioned. This struggle is, on the one hand, a rejection of mercantile and imperialist forms of appropriation of life, and, on the other, an affirmation to a commitment to forms of solidarity and community management where everyone belongs. In this way, the dispute is usually, as suggested by Raquel Gutierrez (2014), 'a re-claimant perspective of material wealth which is created and preserved socially' that has been systematically deprived under the forms of capitalist domination and accumulation. The common, as a perspective of possibility, is a way of recovering *the capacity to do* what has been alienated and made impossible by the molecular dynamics of capital.

Therefore, it is not only a struggle against neoliberalism or, much less, a struggle against the triarchy of the state-market-common. It is a question of recovering what is common for the community and thus advancing the perspective of good living. Therefore,

The commons we intend to build are aimed at transforming our social relations and creating an alternative to capitalism. They are not only focused on providing social services or buffering the destructive impact of capitalism, but also are much more than a communal management of resources. In short, they are not paths towards a capitalism with a human face. The commons must be the means for the creation of an egalitarian and cooperative society, or they risk deepening social divisions by creating havens for those who can manage it and would, therefore, easily ignore the misery of those by whom they are surrounded. (Caffentzis and Federici 2015: 66)

This *alternative-and-native* proposal which is in contrast to the inescapable neoliberal model, implies bringing together the common and the community, as suggested by Federici and Caffentzis:

*The common requires a community.* This community should not be chosen on the basis of some privileged identity but, rather, on the basis of the work that has been done to support and care for the reproduction of the common and also what has been done to regenerate what is taken from it. The common in fact presupposes rights and obligations. Thus, the rule has to be that those who belong to the community must contribute to its maintenance, its reproduction ... when we say, '*There is no common without community*'. We need to think about how a specific community establishes the relationships of

production and how the common will come into being and how it is to be maintained. (Federici and Caffentzis, 2015: 68)

To achieve these goals, it is necessary to take into account the communal skills needed to preserve the living-common, and the living-with.

Thus, the struggles and debates surrounding the common open up perspectives of reflection on the transition and the construction of a new world that allows for the re-appropriation of socially produced work and wealth that has been systematically usurped by the dominant rationality.

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