

Uncommon Production of the World

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The socio-spatiality of capitalist modernity is the embodiment of pressures to eliminate common, spatially adapted institutions in the name of an allegedly more rational world demarcated by the prospect of having everything private and predisposed to be exploited. The vital element of these pressures to legitimise economic inequalities to extract more and more value from labour and nature is the phenomenon of uncommoning. This article has several interconnected goals, especially, an interpretation of the meaning and practices of uncommoning making use of classical, contemporary, and decolonial academic and grey literature—and a critical reflection on the frontiers of the modern world, where uncommoning is clearly the key socio-spatial driving force underpinning a deceitful democracy and providing justification for the encroachment of private properties upon the commons. This focus on the commons facilitates and radicalises the comprehension of how societies and communities deal with the allocation, use, and preservation of cherished elements of their material and immaterial reality. It can be constructively reached from the perspective of Global South societies, indigenous nations in particular, with solid experiences and knowledge of the commons. They have the outstanding intellectual and moral authority, and the main job for most is to listen, learn, and act together.

inequalities

property

commons

politics

socio-space

social transformation

social justice

The world is what we can currently see and experience, but it also contains vestiges of the past and, more importantly, what it could have been or may one day be. Scraps of history and the potentialities of human life are also integral parts of reality and constantly disturb what seem certain and settled. Something exists in relation to what has disappeared or the non-existent that still can or shall exist. What exists (being), following Hegel, is interconnected and affected by what is not existent (the non-being), and vice versa, in the sense that being has the limitless capacity to be and not be depending on a series of circumstances and relations. The construction of certain socio-spatial phenomena entails the disappearance of some features of reality that are replaced or consumed in the process. And what did not materialise retains agency according to the power of memory and prefiguration. It means that the lived reality of the world is perennially disputed, prone to contestation, and tending towards reconfiguration. Politics permeates present dealings, as much as the mobilisation of past and the anticipation of future interactions. In that process, some social groups are able to ascertain their power and safeguard their interests, whilst others suffer losses and accumulate defeats. Space is the result of those contentious relations, it is a transitory arrangement and ultimately a compromise of multiple possibilities, which are resolved over time and according to the specific circumstances. Humans have created their own geographical settings, since the beginning of social history, and have tried several different socio-economic rules and institutions.

Any socio-spatial configuration is the synthesis of experimentation and compromise, as the transient realisation of the dominant potentiality realised out of the partial suppression of other possibilities.

Our present-day reality, particularly in (socially and economically) decadent Western countries, such as Great Britain, Italy, the USA, and France, is very much the result of monumental social and ecological losses and missed opportunities to have democratic, inclusive, and truly feasible socio-economies. With the consolidation of capitalist modernity over the last half-millennium, a vast range of possibilities became increasingly reduced to a single and narrow socio-spatiality based on generalised commodification, idiotic production for the market, and accumulated waves of exploitation. More than any other regime, capitalism has cannibalised difference and suffocated alternatives. Local and traditional knowledge and practices, which were developed by social groups over generations, have been eroded in the name of homogenised procedures and, more significantly, the privatisation of everything possible, which nowadays includes the spurious ownership of air (e.g., carbon markets), human health and education (e.g., private hospitals and market-oriented universities), and God himself/herself (e.g., money-making churches and the theology of private economic prosperity). The socio-spatiality of capitalism is the embodiment of pressures to eliminate common, spatially adapted institutions in the name of an allegedly more rational world demarcated by the prospect of having everything private and predisposed to be exploited. The most perverse consequence is that the economy and production may thrive, especially financial markets and the oil–military industry, but the majority of the global population increasingly struggles to have decent jobs and meet the cost of living. After several major tragedies and recurrent trans-continental wars since the Renaissance, the politico-economic reality was, by and large, recreated according to privatistic pressures and the corrosion of inclusive communitarian institutions.

The vital element of these pressures to legitimise economic inequalities to extract more and more value from labour and nature is the phenomenon of , which is the main object of this Encyclopedia entry. Before the world could become capitalist, it had to be disrupted and converted to the realm of fragments and individual possessions, which is to say, become increasingly uncommon. Capitalist modernity is not just an economic and a social regime but also a highly contradictory, multiscale socio-political compromise resulting fundamentally from the pressures to eliminate the spaces of life in common. The powerful force of uncommoning has affected contemporary reality all the way through, from interpersonal to geopolitical relations. The main ‘trick’ has been to convince most of the population that they have fully benefited from economic modernity and could dispense with deeper political and ideological liberties as if economic freedom in liberal bourgeois democracies could compensate for the loss of social, ecological, and political constraints. The more conspicuous economic and political ambivalences of capitalist societies—what is offered in common become, in effect, hijacked from the majority—are predominantly revealed in the structure, commitments, and interventions of the state apparatus. It is no coincidence that the bourgeois state is now the main holder and manager of most commons, which are somehow protected for the maintenance of individualised lives and asymmetric power relations. The transfiguration of uncommon goals to questionable, but rationalised, public policies has been demonstrated in recent decades by the election of politicians calling for budget austerity and the prioritisation of individualistic gains in the name of ‘development’ and ‘democratic’ safeguards. The same British administrators who persecute desperate migrants and criminalise protestors (e.g., republican activists being detained at Trafalgar Square on the day of King Charles III’s coronation

in 2023) have pushed for legislation to denationalise utilities; built more motorways primarily for private cars; destroyed the public health service; stimulated the speculative housing market; preserved the fiscal privileges of London-based billionaires, banks, and corporations; managed environmental degradation through payment for ecosystem services; and create new markets for fictitious commodities (e.g., water, biodiversity, and carbon). Behind all that is the perverse metabolism of uncommoning.

The emphasis on the commons is, thus, the recognition of the common basis of production and the importance of other spheres of life beyond the economic and the juridical. The commons constitute material and immaterial spaces where elements of the pre-capitalist past and of the margins of the present coalesce with a prefigured post-capitalist future that is free from the reductionism of the private property of the means of production and reproduction. If capitalism depends, fundamentally, on the abstraction of labour and nature through the imposition of artificial private borders, which are not only physical but also social and interpersonal, the reaction against such suicidal proclivities should be based on the defence of labour and nature as commons. Although many individuals feel powerless today because of the constraints of conventional institutions, the commons are vision for reimagining our future together. The commons are certainly nothing like leftovers from the past or obstacles on the way to national integration and global development but constitute the nexus of accumulated experience and refined thought. These rely on an acute sense of holding and belonging that is stronger than the narrowly economic attachments of private property. The commons are strategic institutional clusters contrasting with the broader individualist hegemony consolidated over the last few centuries. Despite their heavy discriminatory legacy, the commons continue to enrich the lives of a large proportion of global society and are a main source of labour and survivability to numerous communities and nations. The unexpected resilience of the commons is not something that happened by chance but indicates their vitality and superior rationality. The commons are reminders that feasible alternatives do exist and that the future of the planet is currently impounded by the persistence of the exploitation, alienation, and fragmentation of the world ^{[1][2]}.

References

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2. Ioris, A.A.R. 2025. Uncommoning, Difference and Politics: Worldless Production of Paraguay. Routledge: London and New York.

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