Being-in-Common

An Enquiry into the 'Common/s' as a Strategy to Rearticulate Humanness

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by poststructural discussions on subjectivities, borders, and practices of inclusion/exclusion, this essay draws a preliminary enquiry into the (neo)colonial and (neo)capitalist dichotomy of 'human'/'non-human', in order to envision radical rearticulations of humanness. Deploying *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) as the main theoretical framework, I argue that the matter of the 'human' is inherently embedded in dominant discourses of private property, according to which subjects 'exist' as 'human' only when they can exert their possession over *others*. My concern, then, develops around the necessity to configure claims for (recognition of) rights for dispossessed individuals and communities in ways that work to undo the oppressive equation 'being=having' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013). In this sense, this article investigates the concept of the 'common' (Federici 2010; Hardt and Negri 2009) as a strategy to rethink the 'human' in relation to 'others', and to the earth. To do so, it focuses on the Zapatista struggles for access to land and self-government, which from 1994 have radically transformed the community life of several indigenous villages in the Mexican region of Chiapas. Through the development of the concepts of 'being-in-common' and 'becoming-as-common', I will argue that the 'common' has the potential to transform humanness into an inclusionary site of multiple becomings.

> Secondly, I demand whether all wars, bloodshed and misery came not upon the creation, when one man endeavoured to be a lord over another, and to claim property in the earth one above the other? [...] And whether this misery shall not remove (and not till then) when all the branches of mankind shall look upon themselves as one man, and upon the earth as one common treasury to all […].
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> (Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of the Righteousness*, 1649)

> Behind us, you are us.
> Behind our masks is the face of all excluded women,
> Of all the forgotten indigenous,
> Of all the persecuted homosexuals,
> Of all the despised youth,
> Of all the beaten migrants,
> […]

Of all the simple and ordinary men and women,
Who don't count,
Who aren't seen,
Who are nameless,
Who have no tomorrow.

(Khasnabish, *Zapatismo Beyond Borders*, 2008, 127)

The thoughts presented above are an expression of different epochs and circumstances; the former being excerpted from a British pamphlet against the so-called 'enclosures',[1] the latter representing a salient passage of the Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neo-Liberalism, held by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)[2] in 1996. Despite their apparent distance in place and time, such quotations not only relate to but also speak to each other. By narrating how 'Western'[3] societies are constructed upon the dichotomy private/public, i.e. an exclusionary binary that necessitates hiding and/or appropriating common goods and knowledges to reproduce itself, they unveil that the matter of the 'human' is dramatically embedded in Western conceptions of property and ownership. Deploying Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013) as the main theoretical framework, this article not only attempts to recount the story of how the 'propertied' has come to signify the 'human' in dominant power economies, but also enquires about the epistemological potential[4] of the commons to blur multiple boundaries between 'humans' and 'non-humans' created under the logic of (dis)possession. The analysis presents a twofold aim: on the one hand, it addresses the dichotomy 'human'/'non-human' by questioning the 'human' as transcendental category that defines whose lives (or, indeed, deaths) count. What does it mean to be 'human' beings? What features make it possible to distinguish between 'humans' and 'non-humans', and how are such definitions (re)produced in ways that are always already embedded in power structures? How do dominant discourses create the 'human' and the 'non-human' as opposed domains of inclusion/exclusion? On the other hand, the essay investigates the 'common' in relation to its capacity (or, perhaps, inability) to open the 'human' to radical rearticulations of humanness. Conceived, according to various approaches and disciplines[5], as either utopian or realistic, archaic or revolutionary, the concept of the commons "evokes a cornucopia of socio-

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[1] As explained by Susan Buck (1998), the expression 'enclosure acts' refers to the legal assertion of individual property rights over lands that were farmed as common goods by groups of peasants. Broadly speaking, such phenomenon took a systematic shape in the current UK between the 17th and 19th centuries.

[2] The history and struggles of the EZLN is presented in the section entitled: The 'Common': 'One World with Many Worlds In It'.

[3] Drawing on Stuart Hall (2006), I use the term 'West' not as a geographical area, but as a hegemonic discourse (see footnote 7), which speaks of 'civilisation', 'progress', 'modernity'. According to the scholar, nowadays not only Europe is 'Western', and not all of Europe is in the 'West'. "By "western" we mean (…) a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern" (Hall 2006, 186). In this article, I aim at addressing how the formation of 'the Western society' is embedded in exclusionary accounts on humanness and property.

[4] Despite being aware that some scholars have criticised the economic and material limits of the commons (Ostrom 1990), I am interested in analysing the onto-epistemological premises and consequences of the conceptual domain of 'the common'.

[5] I will explore some of them while unfolding my analysis.

political ideas" (Stam 2015, 30) able to unmask the complexity of the relationships between 'human' beings, animals, and natural resources. In order to unfold my analysis, I focus on a particular case that, according to scholar and activist Silvia Federici (2010), has internationally increased the popularity of the commons: the struggle of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional – EZLN*) for governmental autonomy and access to land.

Drawing on several scholars, the first section of the essay aims to show how in the paradigm of a capitalist and colonial 'modernity' humanness is inherently interwoven with Western understandings of private property and ownership. Within such a framework, existing as a 'human' equates to exercising one's possession over something (or somebody). By depriving certain subjects and communities from the conditions of possibility for life (access to land, resources, and self-government), the logic of (dis)possession also detaches them from the very features supposed to define humanness: property and sovereignty. The second part of the analysis opens with a concern regarding how claims of recognition (of rights to land and resources, to autonomy and self-government) are closely, although not explicitly, related to subject-construction and representation. I enquire whether such struggles can "work to decolonize the apparatus of property and to unsettle the colonial conceit of proper and propertied human subjectivity" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 27) by analysing how the Zapatista movement of Mexico has re-appropriated lands and rendered them common resources owned by the community. Subsequently, mainly drawing from Federici (2004; 2010; 2011) and Hardt and Negri (2009), I develop an investigation into the common's potential to disrupt the equation '('human') being=having' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) by creating alternative forms of relationality between 'humans' and the earth. To achieve this aim, a combined reading of Butler and Athanasiou's concept of 'being-in-common' together with Hardt and Negri's 'altermodernity' is unfolded so as to understand to what extent the 'common' can be conceived as a strategy through which to rethink humanness.

THE 'PROPERTIED', THE 'HUMAN', AND THE 'WEST': HUMANNESS UNDER THE LOGIC OF (DIS)POSSESSION

In *Dispossession* (2013), Butler and Athanasiou engage in a deep conversation on politics, precarity, and performativity in neoliberal times. Seen within this framework, the concept of dispossession acquires twofold significance. On the one hand, it represents "an inaugural submission of the subject-to-be to norms of intelligibility" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 1), i.e. a process of subjectivation through subjection to the norm. Butler and Athanasiou argue that dispossession describes how subjects are materialised according to dominant discourses, thus being both effects and embodied vehicles of power. On the other hand, materialisation occurs

"through processes and ideologies by which persons are disowned and abjected by normative and normalizing powers that define cultural intelligibility" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 2). In this regard, not only is dispossession able to question the very idea of sovereign subjects, it is also accountable for the violence of exclusionary subjectivation that takes place at the expenses of non-conforming individuals. While marking the limits of the self-sufficient subject by unveiling its interdependency with its surroundings, dispossession is simultaneously the way in which dominant powers disavow some groups and/or individuals by excluding them from the domain of the 'representable' and 'recognisable'. Recognition and dispossession, thus, appear to be inherently embedded.

Further explanation on this has been developed by Brenna Bhandar in *Plasticity and Post-Colonial Recognition: 'Owning, Knowing, Being'* (2011). Here, Bhandar reads recognition as a conceptual framework through which the struggle to become 'full' subjects is articulated. In other words, recognition signifies "the imperative for individuals to exist as human beings" (Bhandar 2011, 228), whose exclusionary force lies in the power to determine which beings are recognised, as well as which ones are recognisable. In other words, recognition sets the conditions for the emergence of various gradations of 'beings' even before their actual materialisation; being recognised as 'humans' equates to 'existing' as 'humans'. In this respect, we can see that recognition and dispossession work together to qualify who is 'human' and who is not. Which features, then, are necessary to be both recognised and recognisable as 'humans'? In Bhandar's words:

> The philosophy of recognition imports a notion of the propertied subject; a subject for whom certain qualities or properties are prefigured as the bounds of intelligibility that are co-emergent with relations of ownership (2011, 228).

In Bhandar's view, under hierarchical power regimes property becomes the prerequisite to access the domain of humanness, whose emergence is mediated by representation. Along the same line, drawing from MacPherson's concept of 'possessive individualism' (1962), Butler and Athanasiou maintain that "land and property ownership has surely been at the heart of onto-epistemologies of subject formation in the histories of the western, white, male, colonizing, capitalist, property-owning, sovereign human subject" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 12). As MacPherson argues, possessive individualism as a theoretical account on subjectivities dates back to Hobbes and Locke, in that they explicitly linked (with different aims and results) the 'existence' of individuals to their possessive capacity. In this regard, not only was the 'human being' conceived as 'the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owning nothing but society for them' (MacPherson 1962, 3), but humanness itself was measured by property; 'being' equated to 'having', meaning that those who did not have possessions could not exist as 'human' beings.

In this framework, propriety-property relations have also structured Western liberal conception of identity and agency, according to which individuals are sovereign when they are 'free' to exert their rights to ownership. Consequently, under the intertwined equations 'being recognized=existing' and 'existing=having', the logic of (dis)possession and appropriation acquires a dramatic strength; communities and peoples violently marginalised through slavery, colonisation, and capitalist alienation are not only deprived of the access to the material conditions of life, but also deemed to the domain of the 'less-than-human'. Since – in the Western concept of 'possessive individualism' – they cannot own, they do not 'exist' as 'proper human beings'; rather, they are represented and materialised as improper and im-propertied beings, hence disposable by (neo-)capitalist and (neo-)colonial projects. In this regard, representation and dispossession simultaneously operate as crucial forces able to shape bodies and conditions their access to the matter of the 'human'. The violence of appropriation and assigned disposability is not merely a problem of marginalisation and material denial of rights, but also an ontological concern on the representation and (re)production of different gradations of humanness; (lack of) property has come to represent the 'human', the 'less-than-human', and the 'non-human'.

In *No Humans Involved: An Open Letter To My Colleagues* (1994), Sylvia Wynter enquires into the onto-epistemological meanings of the acronym N.H.I. (Non Humans Involved), which was used by public officials of Los Angeles to refer to cases involving discriminatory and degrading acts perpetuated against young black males. In Wynter's understanding, the expression 'Non Humans Involved' signifies that, since such cases do not concern any white, Euro-American, middle-class, college-educated, suburban individuals (Wynter 1994, 43), they do not involve any 'human' beings. N.H.I. is the token of an implicit hierarchy of 'human' gradations, based on what the scholar defines as a 'race code' and the absolutism of its economic categories (Wynter 1994, 50). In her words:

> The White/Black invariant Absolutism serves to provide the status organizing principle […] being based on the *superiority/inferiority* ranking rule according to which all other non-White groups as 'intermediate categories', place themselves, and are assessed on their relative 'worth' according to their nearness to the one and distance from the other. At the same time, it also enables the middle classes to institutionally legitimate their own ostensible *analogically* selected genetic superiority (1994, 51).

Wynter thus asserts that race and property operate as an intertwined logic (which we could see as the logic of dispossession) that has the power to determine higher and lower levels of 'human' worth; full and sovereign 'humans' are white and owners, 'non-humans' are non-white and disposable, and 'subhumans' might be white, but are non-proprietors. In her view, such hierarchy

has been inscribed in the "fallacy of supraculturalism"[6] (Wynter 1994, 47), which has provided the onto-epistemological justification for the marginalisation and exploitation of beings considered inferior because of an alleged lack of humanness.

In *The West and the Rest* (2006), Stuart Hall enquires how the discourse[7] of 'the West' has worked under colonial regimes. In his understanding, such discourse was essential to crystallising a dichotomous concept of 'modernity', according to which the 'West' signifies "a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular" (Hall 2006, 186) as opposed to the compound of other cultures conceived and represented as 'uncivilised', 'savage', and 'barbaric'. In this regard, the discourse of 'the West', on the one hand, reduces complex societies to generalised and superficial images, claiming that those pictures represent the 'essence' of such peoples; on the other hand, it collapses stereotyped images into hierarchies of 'good' and 'bad', 'we' and 'they'. Such splitting is directly embedded in systems of inclusion/exclusion in which humanness works as the exclusionary basis for practices of (dis)possession. Hall indeed asserts that, during the European Enlightenment, the Western (white) man came to represent "the pinnacle of human achievement" (Hall 2006, 187); he was the model of comparison according to which humanness was shaped as rationality, property, and whiteness. In this sense, colonised subjects were not conceived as 'full humans'; on the contrary "from the beginning [of colonialism] *some* people described the natives of the New World as "lacking both the power of reason and the knowledge of God'; as 'beasts in human form'" (Hall 2006, 214). The issues of the humanness of natives and slaves was crucial in every colonial project for its indirect consequences on property and assigned disposability; the violent exclusion of indigenous and enslaved people from the domain of the 'human' has been employed under oppressive regimes as an excuse for ferocious practices of exploitation of entire communities, as well of the lands they have inhabited for centuries. In both Robert Stam's (2015) and Bhandar's view (2011), an example of this process can be viewed in the colonial formula *terra nullius* (nobody's land), according to which European states were allowed by the papal authority to colonise lands that were 'uninhabited'. Under such permission, territories all over the world were invaded for the profit of the 'West', regardless for the ancient peoples that were already living there. Since those communities did not have any systems of monetary exchange or trade, they were considered to have no systems at all and, therefore, were dispossessed of their right to self-government. Assigned disposability was not only applied to lands and resources, but also to individuals excluded from humanness; they were nothing but commodities to sell, buy, and exchange.

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[6] The Judaeo-Christian narrative of the 'human' as the supranational being created by God.

[7] According to the scholar, "a discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way" (Hall 2006, 201). In this sense, Hall employs the term 'discourse' so as to describe the practice of meaning-making.

To conclude, despite the use of different theoretical concepts, the presented scholars maintain that in dominant economies of power Western notions of property and whiteness have been equated to the higher gradation of humanness. Such logic has operated in ('modern') colonial and capitalist regimes so as to dispossess colonised and black/non-white beings both from material resources and from humanness itself. Combining the scholars' thoughts, it could be argued that the only difference between 'humans', 'sub-humans', and 'non-humans' lies in their possibility to be recognised and recognisable as simultaneously white and capable to exert ownership over other beings.

THE 'COMMON': 'ONE WORLD WITH MANY WORLDS IN IT'[8]

Since the 'human' has become a mechanism of dispossession linked to "matrices of colonial expansion, phallocentrism, heteronormativity, and possessive individualism" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 32), Butler and Athanasiou ask whether claims for regained senses of humanity do not reiterate normative notions of humanness. Drawing on their thoughts, I am particularly interested in opening humanness to the subjects confined to the domain of the 'sub-human' and 'non-human' through a radical questioning of "the persistent racialized and sexualized onto-epistemologies of self-contained and property-owning subjectivity" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 27). In the current section I attempt to analyse how claims for right to land and resources can "work to decolonise the apparatus of property and to unsettle the colonial conceit of proper and propertied human subjectivity" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 27) by taking into consideration the case of the struggles for lands and autonomy carried on by the EZLN.

According to several scholars,[9] social organising in Mexico took place during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in mainly (but not only) indigenous peasant communities that had to confront highly difficult living conditions, oppression, and marginalisation. Although "long historical processes have no exact beginning or end" (Hall 2006, 189), such authors trace the origin of the uprisings back to the first Indigenous Congress held in 1974, which provided a model of bottom-up organising upon which independent peasant groups connected to nation-wide movements of agricultural workers and *campesinos/as*.[10] While grass-roots organisations were consolidating around crucial issues (such as the expulsion of indigenous communities from the access to land), the institutional answer was selective repression aimed at their eradication. Although it was in such context that the EZLN firstly emerged as a clandestine group, the very events causing the uprising in 1994 were strongly related to Mexico's adoption of neoliberal policies during the mid-1980s, which culminated in signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). After

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[8] According to Naomi Klein (2001), this is a Zapatista expression. Its meaning will be analysed further in this section of the article.
[9] See for example Collier (1994); Otero (1996); Speed et al. (2006).
[10] Spanish term for peasants.

numerous demonstrations in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Zapatista rebellion took shape on January 1, 1994, when armed and unarmed civil troops took over five county seats in Chiapas, one of the poorest regions of the country, claiming indigenous rights and self-determination. After this event, Zapatistas' negotiations with the government grew and eventually consolidated into a national network of indigenous communities. Peace talks ended in 1996 with the San Andrés Accords on Indigenous Rights and Culture – a treaty that, nonetheless, was not respected by governmental institutions. Since then, indigenous communities of Chiapas have declared themselves Autonomous Regions, implementing their own system of self-government, education, health care, and agriculture.

According to scholars Shannon Speed and Alvaro Reyes (2005), the around thirty[11] Zapatista independent municipalities currently present in Mexico operate under the logic of '*mandar obedeciendo*' (Rule by obeying) and '*todo para todos, nada para nosostros*' (Everything for everybody, nothing for ourselves). Against the framework of possessive individualism that characterises Western capitalist and (neo-)colonial projects, the approach to autonomy developed in Chiapas is articulated on the conceptual idea that the community lies at the centre of the struggles. Therefore, as argued by anthropologist George Collier (1994), such municipalities have implemented a system of self-government based on the method of consensus, in which local authorities (formed by members of the community in rotation) carry out decisions taken in bottom-up assemblies. In this regard, consensus means that all the members of the community reach an agreement that favours everybody; in other words, the community rules through its members' obedience to the system of consensus. Another interesting aspect of the Zapatista self-government concerns the fact that, after the occupation of lands, the communities did not proceed to a new privatisation amongst their members; on the contrary, they developed a common management of such lands for the benefit of all peasants and indigenous people. According to Collier, after the re-appropriation of lands, every community appointed a group of its members (both men and women) to implement sustainable ways of collectively farming without relying on neoliberal markets – an approach now known as "agroecology" (Collier 1994, 197-198).

In both Speed's and Collier's view, the Zapatista principle of egalitarian autonomy has been implemented through the development of alternative systems of administration of lands, resources, and community life based on the concept of 'common'. From this perspective, the reclaiming of the commons has necessarily required the unfolding of new social relations beyond the logic of (dis)possession, emblematised in the Zapatista expression 'a world with many worlds in it'.

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[11] Due to the fluidity and lack of static definitions of the Zapatista movement, scholars do not agree on the exact number of the Zapatista communities.

In Speed's words:

> The inverted power relations of *mandar obedeciendo* lead to complicated decision making processes, and the inclusiveness implied in "*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*" [a world with many worlds in it] […] is in many cases more of an ideal concept than an unfailing practice in these ethnically and politically diverse regions. Nevertheless, by positing these concepts as part of their autonomy project, Zapatistas do offer an alternative philosophy of social organization and rule […] by providing both symbolic and material alternatives to neoliberal rule (2005, 60).

Though far from having the pretension of being a model to follow, the Zapatista claims for autonomy and self-government nonetheless directly brings us to the intricate domain of the commons. Due to the difficulty of giving a full definition of what the commons are, Federici's work has focused on understanding what the commons do beyond a mere economic lens.

Lodged halfway between the "public" and the "private" but irreducible to either category, the idea of the commons expresses a broader conception of property, referring to social goods – lands, territories, forests, meadows and streams, or communicative spaces – which a community, not the state or any individual, collectively owns, manages, and controls. In contrast to the "public" which presuppose the existence of market economy and private property and is "typically administered by the state" (Anton 2000, 4), the idea of the commons evokes images of intense social cooperation (Federici 2011, 41).

In *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), Federici closely investigates the emergence of the commons by reading the history of class struggle as a permanent struggle over the commons. In this framework, the term 'commons' refers to communal social systems characteristic of the European Middle Age, and based on the existence of non-private lands farmed by rural peoples and peasants. However, as argued by several scholars,[12] nowadays 'the common' represents not only material resources that can be owned neither by governments, nor by private companies, but also – and, perhaps, more significantly – knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects (Hardt and Negri 2009). The struggle over the commons, which began during the 17th century when English lords and rich farmers enclosed communal lands in order to expand their properties, has not ended but taken different shapes. According to Stam (2015), in recent decades neoliberal policies have also attempted to privatise shared knowledges in a second round of enclosures.

As argued by Hardt and Negri in *Commonwealth* (2009), the appropriation of the commons either by states, or by private enterprises, has resulted in the apparently unviable dichotomy private/public, which corresponds to "an equally pernicious political alternative between capitalism and socialism" (Hardt and Negri 2009, ix). What the scholars affirm, however, is that

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[12] Federici (2004, 2011); Hardt and Negri (2009); Ostrom (1990); Stam (2015).

both regimes rely on a conception of property that needs to exclude *certain* communities and individuals from the access to common resources. Capital is "a social relation" (Hardt and Negri 2009, ix) that depends for its survival on both the creation and exploitation of social life through the establishment of hierarchies of economic value. In the words of Hardt and Negri:

> The ultimate core of biopolitical production […] is not the production of objects for subjects, as commodity production is often understood, but the production of subjectivity itself (2009, x).

Consequently, beyond a mere economic reading of the commons, Hardt and Negri emphasise their potential to subvert the logic of (dis)possession that materialises *some* bodies as properties, and others as proprietors. In their view, the ethical and political horizon of the commons relates to alternative ways of being and becoming 'human'. Similarly, in *Feminism and the Politics of Commons* (2011), Federici argues that the struggle over the commons is teaching "the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created" (Federici 2011, 6). It is in this framework that Federici situates the new challenges that the commons have to face; so as to represent a "logical and historical alternative to both State and Private Property, the State and the Market" (Federici 2010, 1), the politics of commons needs to be articulated in ways that defy marketization, instead of reinforcing boundaries and divisions. To achieve this aim, the scholar maintains that a feminist perspective[13] is fundamental to crafting the 'common' as a strategy for creating bonds of solidarity and mutual accountability. In Federici's own words:

> In other words, we need to overcome the state of irresponsibility concerning the consequences of our actions that results from the destructive ways in which the social division of labor is organized capitalism; short of that, the production of our life inevitably becomes a production of death for others. […] Overcoming this state of oblivion is where a feminist perspective teaches us to start in our reconstruction of the commons. No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject (2011, 6).

In this regard, the Zapatista concept of 'a world with many worlds in it' can be understood not only as resistance to the logic that equates being with having, but also as a transformative force able to open to radical re-articulations of humanness. Reading Federici together with Hardt and Negri, we can argue that the 'common' represents a third way beyond the "human" and the "non-

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[13] Through the expression 'feminist perspective', Federici argues that "women should take the lead in the collectivization of the reproductive work and housing" (Federici 2011, 9) due to the collective experiences, historical struggles, and shared knowledges through which women all over the world have questioned (neo)capitalist processes of exploitation of female work. Despite recognising the material importance of such project, as well as the scholar's argument that these experiences are not an attempt of essentialising female roles, the lack of further articulation of the terms 'women' and 'female experiences' could be a problematic stance for this essay, in that it could (unwillingly) perpetuate the dichotomy (female)'human'/(female)'non-human'.

human" constructed under the banner of possessive individualism, a third way that can be reached through the development of an alternative sense of community that does not rely on a gated identity, but rather on 'a quality of but rather as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and of responsibility to each other and to the earth' (Federici 2011, 7).

BEING-IN-COMMON AND BECOMING-AS-COMMON

Rather than maintaining that the 'common' has established a political model to follow, I am interested in further investigating how the principle of cooperation entailed in the commons can bring an alternative conceptualisation of the "human". To do this, I will combine Federici's understanding of community, with Hard and Negri's concept of 'altermodernity', and Butler and Athanasiou's idea of 'being-in-common'.

The authors of *Commonwealth* (2009) agree with MacPherson in asserting that the concept of modernity is inherently interwoven with private property. Antimodernity, in this sense, refers to the potential to resist processes of dispossession and assigned disposability by reclaiming the right of marginalised peoples to exist. However, even if in opposition to 'modern' exclusionary economies of power, such resistance holds on static identity positions that do not overcome oppressive epistemologies of sovereignty, property, and self-sufficiency. On the contrary, the two scholars see the 'common' as a way to develop the project of altermodernity, i.e. a process not focused on being, but on becoming together, in which humanness does not rely on immutable and oppressive onto-epistemologies. In this respect, the concept of becoming speaks of "the art of self-rule and inventing lasting democratic forms of social organization" (Hardt and Negri 2009, viii) by sharing and participating in the common. Similarly to Federici, Hardt and Negri read the commons as an altermodern mode of becoming that "focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world" (Hardt and Negri 2009, viii).

Hard and Negri see the Zapatista claims for autonomy and self-determination developed through consensus and commonality as a practical articulation of altermodern becoming. Their campaigns for access to land and indigenous rights do not follow a conventional identity politics; rather than demanding institutional recognition of static positions, the Zapatista movement claims "the right not 'to be who we are' but rather 'to become what we want' " (Hardt and Negri 2009, 106). The Zapatista movement is not based on the sovereignty of individuals and communities, but on the social interdependency between 'human' beings and 'non-human' resources: the earth, nature, biodiversity, knowledge, spirits; thus showing that the 'human' is an event of "multiple exposures" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 32). In this sense, since through the commons we can rethink the matter of the 'human', humannes becomes a project that implies being-in-common and becoming-as-common. While establishing alternatives to the logic of (dis)possession as relational

forms of being-in-common, the commons also entail the potential to blur exclusionary boundaries between the 'human', the 'subhuman', and the 'non-human' through processes of becoming-as-common; humanness is transformed from a static fact to a site of communal encounters, principle of cooperation and mutual responsibility (Federici 2011). In other words, the commons address the necessity to become dispossessed of sovereign selves, in order to articulate ways of being and becoming together able to oppose forms of dispossession that confine certain beings to the domain of the 'less-than-human'.

CONCLUSION

Far from answering my initial questions, in this article I have attempted to articulate preliminary thoughts around the onto-epistemologies of the 'human'. Drawing from a compound of different voices and disciplines, I have engaged with the implicit relations between ownership, representation, and subjectivation; according to the logic of (dis)possession and representation, 'proper human' subjects not only can, but have to exert acts of possession over what (or, indeed, who) surrounds them. Violent practices of dispossession, slavery, exploitation of peoples and resources are thus justified under the banner of the 'human' right to own – a right that becomes a need to possess, in order to be 'human'. In this regard, my main concern regards how struggles for self-government and access to land could work when seeking a regained sense of 'humanity'. Do they run the risk to re-perpetuate a normative idea of humanness, or do they have the potential to decolonise inherently white, propertied, male onto-epistemologies of the 'human'?

So as to engage with such issues, I have analysed the Zapatista claims for lands and autonomy, which since 1994 have led to the establishment of various independent indigenous communities in Chiapas. The Zapatista movement, still active, has characterised itself by the development of horizontal processes of administration centred on the concepts of consensus and commonality. By dismantling the logic of (dis)possession, they have also dismantled the equation being=having.

Such processes of deconstruction of the 'human' are represented by alternative ways to live together, which I have enquired through the concept of the 'common'. With its capacity to overcome property (both private and public), the 'common' relies on the idea that 'humans' depend on the resources and animals on earth, that therefore need not only to be protected, but also to be respected. By unveiling that the 'human' is a movement resulting from multiple exposures, rather than a sovereign and unitary essence, the 'common' asserts the necessity to dispossess humanity from normative ideas of humanness, in order to oppose acts of assigned disposability that oppress certain beings and communities. Being-in-common and becoming-as-common thus have the potential to transform humanness into an inclusionary site that envisions several worlds in one.

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