


Concept Paper

Uncommon World Production: In Search of Freedom and Recognition

Antonio A. R. Ioris 

School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3WA, UK; iorisa@cardiff.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-2920874845

Abstract: 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 uncommuning. This article has several interconnected goals, especially, an interpretation of the meaning and practices of uncommuning—making use of classical, contemporary, and decolonial academic and grey literature—and a critical reflection on the frontiers of the modern world, where uncommuning 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.

Keywords: commons; dialectics; injustice; common property; grabbing



Citation: Ioris, A.A.R. Uncommon World Production: In Search of Freedom and Recognition. *Societies* **2024**, *14*, 274. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14120274>

Academic Editor: Cristóbal Fernández-Muñoz

Received: 23 October 2024
Revised: 15 December 2024
Accepted: 20 December 2024
Published: 22 December 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction: Socio-Spatial Uncommuning

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 [1]. 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. Marx identifies, here, the tension between material forces of production and “the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before” [2] (p. 12).

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*, which is the main object of this text. 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 [3]. 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.

This article has two interconnected goals. First, and more importantly, an interpretation of the meaning and practices of uncommuning, making use of classical, contemporary, and decolonial academic and grey literature. Second, a critical reflection on the frontiers of the modern world, where uncommuning is clearly the key socio-spatial driving-force underpinning a deceitful democracy and providing justification for the encroachment of private properties upon common assets. The entry point to this complexity is the sustained attack—the ‘real tragedy of the commons’—which has underpinned colonisation and capitalist expansion for more than five centuries. Contemporary national dilemmas are all vivid expressions of the actuality of uncommuning, which has become the main socio-spatial axis of such peculiar rendering of Western modernity. European self-criticism, in dialogue with other forms of science and philosophy, is crucial to understand the fundamental role of the commons and the yearn for more inclusive and fairer socio-ecological interactions. It will reveal that the attack on the commons has deeper and even more urgent consequences than what was appropriately described by Marx (primitive accumulation) and, among other contemporary authors, by Harvey (accumulation by dispossession). An exploration into the determinants and the functioning of the commons can be a heuristic and enlightening endeavour to recognise the most entrenched and subtly perverse consequences of the irrationality of commodifying, privatising, and negotiating the only planet available for us humans (and to realise that it is the long-lasting, collective interaction with this small blue planet that makes us what we are).

This text offers the reader an examination of the commons and its opposite, uncommuning, as a socio-spatial process of othering, grabbing, and reordering of reality. It is a multidisciplinary theoretical elaboration of the ‘worldless’ production of societies that crucially depend on the control and exploitation of the commons. The main message is that the systematic attack on the commons over several centuries was not merely the result of the European modernisation of the world, but it was a central element of capitalist modernity. Uncommuning has been a defining force of modern socio-spatiality, which has turned the human existence around the planet increasingly abstract, individualistic, and hierarchical. The specific tool to produce the impoverished spaces of modern societies—despite the illusion of Western progress and affluence that captured the public’s imagination—is the private property of practically everything, what is necessarily predicated on the disruption of things held in common. A related objective here is to demonstrate that a great deal can be gained from a serious, critical engagement with the philosophy and, in particular, the socio-spatial sensibilities of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. One only needs to climb on the shoulders of Marx and reach the argument of Hegel to begin to comprehensively investigate the genealogy and the consequences of sustained attacks on the commons. The Hegelian consideration of the dialectical totality of the world is unrivalled and can be extremely relevant to investigate connections, incongruities, and barriers to change.

The anti-commons rationality that is so prevalent nowadays—the propagation of the uncommon—basically moves in the opposite direction of what Hegel describes as the externalisation and actualisation of consciousness in the other that returns in the form of enhanced, interdependent subjects [4]. Reason and freedom, for Hegel, rely on interventions in the real, according to a morality of collective, self-conscious action. The defence of the commons is, therefore, directly related to reciprocated learning and collective plans of the whole of humanity. The commons are a part of a shared platform of higher reason and joint fulfilment: “common property of such a nature that it may be owned by separate persons acquires the character of an inherently dissoluble partnership in which the retention of my share is explicitly a matter of my arbitrary preference” [5] (p. 61). In trying to bring Hegel to the twenty-first century, we have the responsibility to transform and decolonise politics, science, and the economy through a genuine rethinking of the hopeless socio-spatial course of capitalist modernity under the perverse imperative of uncommuning. Along the same lines, the commons facilitate and radicalise the comprehension of how societies and communities deal with the allocation, use, and preservation of cherished elements of their material and immaterial reality—all that 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 in search of freedom and recognition (as demonstrated in the management of common systems).

2. The Uncommon Impasse

The last six centuries have been marked by the uncompromising and contradictory imposition of an impoverished version of modernity—the construction of a precarious sense of the modern predicated upon capital accumulation, engineered forms of alienation, and autophagic consumption of the world—which has both aggravated old trends (endless wars, cultivated ignorance, political oppression, gender-related violence, joint exploitation of nature and labour, etc.) and generated new problems that are even more challenging (widespread political passivity, production only for the market, colonialism, as well as climate change, mass biological extinction, nuclear weapons, and internet-impooverished lives). Modernity has been trumpeted in Western countries as a promise of abundance and self-realisation, largely based on technological advances and mass consumption behaviours, but always with mystifying, authoritarian, and exploitative inclinations. The modern world has been primarily based on the combined appropriation of value from labour and from the rest of nature, which is then accumulated and largely wasted by local, national, and international elites. Such trends were initially pursued in industrialised European countries but soon forced upon the rest of the world with mixed results and multiple manifestations of neo-colonialism (as in the case of the dominant agenda of international development). Institutional and scientific improvements have been largely used to preserve the interest of old and new oligarchs, while most of the population has benefited much less from the ill-advised European project of modernity. That is easily demonstrated by the fact that the extraction of surplus value and the accumulation of capital have expanded exponentially in the last few centuries, while mainstream politics leave no room for substantial, rational change, and the options on offer are all anti-social and anti-nature.

This version of modernity prevails through the nurturing of contradictions and the production of impasses turned into crises. The name of its main impasses is uncommoning, which constitutes a perennial attack on whatever is held in common and a main strategy to commodify reality and secure private benefits at the expense of the wider collectivity. People around the planet are led to believe that it is only through private property that they could conduct their lives and become valued members of society, but, contrary to the deceptive argument that European civilisation is ‘the best world possible’, Western modernity has, in effect, shrunk the collective existence and put in jeopardy the long-term prospects of nations and societies. Hegel argued that a fully realised existence depends on a firm, conscious engagement with the world—being there in the world, which mediation is explicitly expressed within the structure of existence itself [1]—but the affirmation of capitalist institutions has really entailed an abstract being because of the disruptive prerequisites of uncommoning. The seductive agenda of modernity requires the uncommoning of the shared (economic and non-economic) features of reality and their reconfiguration as private property and the locus of exclusion. In that process, life and the economy in common have become anathemas to a market-based modernity at the cost of great socio-ecological degradation. Against especially the neo-classical, marginalist economic theory of individual liberties leading to economic growth, when people make decisions over specific fragments of reality, the modern world has gradually become smaller and riskier (because of the disruption of crucial thermodynamic cycles and ecosystem functions).

Still, despite mounting evidence of this impasse, over the last six centuries or so, uncommoning has systematically expanded and conquered most spaces, policies, and ideas. “Modernity, in fact, was born with the destruction of the commons and the universal substitution of the paradigm of having for that of being” [6] (p. 32). There are

several interconnected antagonisms that converge to produce the ‘worldless’ sense of contemporary reality.

2.1. Individualism/Commonality

The uncommoning of the world operates as a reductionist power that disorganises long-established socio-ecological systems, aggravating risks and deepening inequalities. Those perverse movements enshroud the fact that humans and the rest of nature are inherently interdependent, from the moment of birth to every meal and learning activity (with very rare exceptions), and require reliable and inclusive spaces of commonality. The segmentation and hijacking of the world through uncommoning—which have been the basis of colonialism, nation building, and international development—entail a concerted attempt to force complex global interactions into the schematic mindset of conventional politicians, subservient scientists, economists, and moral philosophers. Under the dominant Western ideology, most of the global population aspires to have properties and assets that are only accessible to a small elite (e.g., lavish mansions, private jets, expensive cars, and helicopters) and remain, therefore, living at the margins of this fictitious, unrealisable version of the world. In that process, labour ceases to be autonomous and carried out in partnership to be treated as an individualised commodity that chiefly serves the objectives of those in control of production. To the same effect, countries in the Global South are coerced to embrace market-centred transactions, rentism, extractivism, and consumerism that partially replicate the Global North impasse that is encapsulated by uncommoning. The most perverse consequences are the grabbing of vital fractions of a shared existence and the conversion of the world to a farse or an antithesis of itself for the benefit of just a few. As pointed out by Aydalot, “*Un espace dominé est aussi, sinon d’abord, un espace qui abrite des forces sociales dominées*”, that is, spatialised inequalities that express the unfairness of social relations [7] (p. 23). Likewise, the more-than-human dimension of socio-nature [8] is inserted into the same market-based logic and reduced to a condition of the supplier of raw materials and sunk for what the economy has no further use or may have harmful effects (e.g., pollution, radioactivity, abandoned machinery, etc.).

With the industrialisation and intensification of capitalism since the eighteenth century, those trends have become the main axis of colonialism and eventually imperialism—both in its classical version or, more recently, disguised as international development and environmental governance [9]. The central anti-commons agent, nowadays, theoretically in charge of the common interest, is the national (typically liberal) state, given that it has also been captured by stronger groups and primarily represents the interests of the dominant social classes. The ultimate consequence is that the planet is increasingly less an oikos, a ‘house’ or a dwelling place, with the inhabitants living together and interacting with each other in some definite ways, but has become a diminished *σιφονιέρα* (sifoniéra), that is, a chest of drawers where things are compartmentalised and stored for the exclusive benefit of those segments of society able to impose their politico-economic priorities. While these problems proliferate, the interpretative capacity of our theories and the reach of European languages remain very limited and increasingly constrained by the dominant ideologies of production and consumption. The best contribution many so-called critical authors can provide is to add the prefix ‘post’ to what is already known (post-industrial, post-globalisation, post-truth, post-capitalism, and post-democracy) instead of a comprehensive interrogation of the causes and responsibilities for the obvious signs of failure and decadence of Western modernity. Most academic thinking, even among social scientists and philosophers, has become more and more reactionary, whilst post-modern mystifications have fuelled additional confusion and inaction.

2.2. Commoning/Uncommoning

To understand the full implications of uncommoning, it is crucial to begin with a consideration of the meaning and the importance of the commons and the range of socio-economic relations around them, which can help to elucidate the mounting threats

associated with fracturing reality through the imposition of exclusionary socio-spatial relations. Much more than a regime of ownership or state-owned assets and utilities, the commons constitute a different configuration of interpersonal and collective relations that, on the whole, produce an alternative organisation of reality based on a 'life in common'. The relational and collaborative requirements of personal and collective existence are rightly endorsed by Arendt, for whom the common, or the public, sphere is something fabricated by human hands for their own fulfilment, as "live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common" [10] (p. 52). Dardot and Laval further emphasise the Latin term *munus*, which is present in several Indo-European languages and designates both honours and benefits; that is, it is associated with reciprocity [*mutuum*] or co-obligation ('duties in common') [11]. For instance, if the population is the collective of many individuals, land is the resulting application of labour of that same collectivity, in the sense that land makes the people, who make land, and the interaction has gone indefinitely. Contrasting with that, uncommuning is precisely the unyielding force of modernity, which has unfolded through an aggressive combination of legal and illegal endeavours to break relations and transform the world according to privatist and exclusionary rules. The makers of the modern world eliminated old gods and myths to function in relation to a novel divinity that has taken the high altar of consumption and exploitation: the commodity. If the commons have contained, for several millennia, the idea of things managed together for the general interest of a community, the commodity retains the essential opposite notion of exclusion and private advantages.

Since the Lower Middle Ages, the ancient process of commoning—which was the basic politico-spatial institution that broadly regulated production and consumption in Europe, let alone the rest of the planet—has been gradually replaced by the uncommuning of the world, and, hence, the estrangement of humans from themselves and from their socio-natural condition. The spread of uncommuning has followed the shift from doing things in common for the benefit of all members to still doing things collectively but for a selective private gain and the reproduction of exclusionary advantages. The commons have been increasingly under attack and considered as obsolete and out of place in most public policies and economic strategies. Consequently, capitalist modernity gave rise to higher levels of exploitation, more hours and days of hard work, novel control systems (like the infamous disciplinary plans of Jeremy Bentham), child labour, and the criminalisation of the poor and unemployed [12]. In the last half-century alone, there have been even greater pressures for the removal of collective safeguards and the privatisation of what used to belong to society as a whole. This means that, despite the relevance of the commons for the survival of human societies over countless generations, their progressive loss and aggressive replacement by a normative individuality is one of the most serious contradictions of late capitalist society. This hyper-capitalist world is extensively mediated by the artificial institution (e.g., stock market shares) that set aside crucial elements of reality that are then placed under the control of companies and powerful individuals.

2.3. Conventional/Reformative Economics

The mystification of mainstream conservative development, as something that, in theory, benefits all social groups, has been contingent upon the quasi-sanctification of private property through the false claim that all people are entitled to own assets and can take part in the economy. Such uncommuning leads to subtraction, which aggravates uncommuning and reinforces subtraction in a vicious circle that has propagated the highly unequal and violent political economy of the current century. The power of uncommuning has led to an obsession with the preservation of the given politico-economic order at the expense of justice, democracy, and ecology. In that regard, one of the most misleading, but highly influential, hypotheses was launched exactly when environmental degradation had become evident: the pseudo-scientific hypothesis of the 'tragedy of the commons' famously proposed by the microbiologist Garrett Hardin. This so-called 'theory' is, in practice, the disguised incorporation of the logic of uncommuning into the management of ecological

systems, aiming to maintain operational control and facilitate further exploitation. Hardin asked his readers to picture a pasture that is freely accessible to all the shepherds in the area. Each shepherd can gain from grazing as many sheep as possible, given that each extra animal represents an additional source of profit, while the cost of its feed (the quantity of grass consumed) is shared by all the shepherds. There is no incentive, the argument goes, for any of the shepherds to invest individually in reseeded the pasture, because all the shepherds would share the benefits of the investment. In these circumstances, each shepherd gains by grazing as many sheep as possible, as quickly as possible, before the grass has been completely grazed. As a result of this logic, the pasture is supposed to be overexploited.

The inevitable depletion of the pasture is what Hardin calls 'tragedy', but it is not difficult to realise that it is a highly simplistic and over-schematic reasoning, which betrays a very superficial and pessimistic description of human attitudes and socio-spatial norms, as if individuals invited to a buffet were inescapably unable to restrain themselves and ended up eating relentlessly until all the food was gone. The whole argument clearly reveals a Hobbesian influence shaping the assumptions about human behaviour and what seems to be an impossible cooperation between individual owners of private property without a powerful authority. The set of presumptions behind Hardin's postulation fundamentally overlook how common institutions work in practice. It is unmistakable, here, that the impoverished language of rational choice (in effect, it is merely an uncommon version of scientific rationality) is typically informed by the prisoner's dilemma. Along the lines of an exacerbated individualism, the discussion of this 'dilemma' excludes context, politics, time, and space from the narrative of the ill-fated prisoners. This over-schematic 'game' has been widely used in the development of computer models and assumes that rational individuals fail to cooperate, even when it is their best interest, because they do not trust each other. That is, individuals fail to protect the commons because others are supposed to exploit it before them, hence the 'tragedy' of commoning. The whole contention is based on a fictional individualism, given that the commons are, in reality, exactly about a rational understanding of interdependencies and collaboration. Hardin's is a fable of cynical, self-interested individualists without any interaction with neighbours and unable to reasonably comprehend their shared circumstances. The commons are seen by conservative scholars as a 'market failure' and demand a different perspective beyond rivalry and individual economic decisions; that is, the answer is to commodify and privatise. It is curious that the very pessimistic perspective of marginalist economists, coherent with the original intents of Menger, Jevons, and Walras to prove political economy wrong, is always based on made-up problems with vague connection to reality.

According to the rational choice theory, the goal is to avoid the so-called 'tragedy of the commons' and free-rider behaviour. In economic theory, free riders are agents who take advantage of the efforts of others. It proves that economics is the most rigid and structuralist of the social sciences, increasingly dominated (undermined?) by mathematical abstractions and struggling to deal with empirical evidence and lived realities. That is why science is dominated by positivistic obsession with data and statistics: it is a reductive appeal to probability and correlation rather than necessity and explanation. From the dominant perspective today, the commons look feeble and irrational, but the locus of irrationality is exactly located on the artificiality of politico-economic trends. The supposed tragedy of the commons is, indeed, a very convenient excuse, often used by World Bank officials and related 'experts', to explain the failure of structural adjustment programmes: if a neoliberal policy failed, it is because it was not adopted to its full potential, and the remedy is to liberalise and privatise further. Many critics of the tragedy-of-the-commons metaphor have denounced its inaccurate description of reality and that the conclusions derived from it cannot point to any sensible solution. This is the neo-institutionalist argument made by Elinor Ostrom, the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009. Conventional economics, for Ostrom, responds to environmental problems through more government regulation, and neoliberal economics calls for the explicit definition

of property rights, both cases typically ignoring the reality of those dependent upon the commons. Contrasting with the dominant orthodoxy, communities envisage and enforce ingenious ways to manage the commons for both individual and collective benefit. Ostrom's argumentation is basically focused on a set of rules (institutions) and on the cooperation between those benefiting from the commons. However, the examples provided are rather restricted, isolated, and too focused on resource property and not enough on other political and ideological dimensions of environmental management. Despite the pertinent criticism of Ostrom and her institutionalist group, their main recommendation for dealing with the commons is to establish a central authority and to provide incentives to individuals to promote a sustainable model of exploitation, something that is similarly defended by Hardin. There is a distinctive technocratic tone permeating both approaches, which reduce the commons to the realm of local interactions and immediate outcomes. Instead of questioning the fundamental clash between the capitalist logic and rationality of the commons, such authors have advocated the management of socio-ecological systems (SESs) by focusing on 'second-tier' variables (e.g., resources, governance, actors, and outcomes) to handle various property regimes that require not only polycentric systems of governance, including state action, but also other entities. This corresponds to restricting the question of the commons to the arena of governance and sustainability promoted by economics and environmentalists making use of simple-minded analytical frameworks, such as 'institutional analysis', 'sustainable development', and 'evolutionary economics', as further argued by the winners of the 2024 Nobel Prize (Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James Robinson) in their work on the basis of national prosperity.

As a result of liberal or institutionalist proposals, not only the ideological bases of uncommuning are reinforced by its conservative approaches but also environmental policy and management adopt this formulation when dealing with the degradation of ecosystems, species, and resources. The market rationality responsible for escalating environmental impacts has been adopted as the response to the problems of its own creation and, crucially, via private property institutions. Certainly, the best example of the misperception of the commons and communing is the increasing adoption of the so-called 'payment for ecosystem services' (PES). It includes a variety of arrangements through which the groups that benefit from the 'services' (e.g., carbon sequestration, water quality, watershed protection, and forest and soil conservation) reward those whose lands and ecosystems provide these services. PES is considered as a proportionate and rational mechanism to influence individual behaviour, without the shortcomings of top-down regulation. However, it is normally 'lost in translation' that PES presupposes the quantification of 'services' and the identification of property rights over resources and ecosystems. The justification is the monetisation and payment of 'benefits' to secure the maintenance of these 'services' into the future. PES is considered as more efficient to stimulate conservationist measures and to facilitate 'greener' transitions. This reactionary environmental governance instrument, and its disguised rational choice ideology, has gained widespread prominence and attracted multi-billion-dollar annual investments; however, there is a clear presence of Global North institutions doing research and collecting data on the Global South. Its implementation regularly reproduces the colonialist tradition of remote and universal expertise, with researchers who helicopter into foreign locations and control research and governance agendas. More importantly, PES aggravates the broader forces of uncommuning responsible for environmental degradation in the first place. The more recent, but reductionist, handling of the commons by market-oriented environmental governance, as in the case of PES, and the privatisation of public utilities; the certification of products and technologies; and the creation of carbon, biodiversity, and water markets correspond to the political control over environmental thinking.

2.4. Pressures/Resistance

Uncommuning pressures target material factors, intellectual developments, and immaterial customs, which were traditionally owned, governed, and used by a distinct

community or social group with specific norms, responsibilities, and interconnected beneficiaries. The main result is that those who already own substantial assets can influence further technologies, laws, and theories. The same driving force operates at the geopolitical level, with the countries with higher stocks of capital and market-oriented expertise dominating the rest of the nations. There is scarce doubt that capitalist modernity is comprehensively marked by atomistic pressures that generate accumulated risks and disputes. We live, today, in a world of massive technological improvements and extremely detailed regulation, but most of it is centred around the need to reinforce private ownership and individual reward beyond restrictions imposed by the state (which has become the main agent of uncommuning) or the rights of most of society. The critique of uncommuning is, more than anything else, a reality check of great social and politico-economic relevance. The socio-spatial configuration of the contemporary world is a consequence of the far-reaching dialectical tension between the power of uncommuning and the reactions of commoning, which unfold both in the main capitalist societies and around the Global South. All that inevitably underscores the importance of the common institutions and the centrality of pro-commons politics to ensure social and ecological survivability. The anti-commons and pro-commodification pillars of modernity and neoliberalism have been evidently resisted and questioned, especially by those living in areas where commons-based relations are still the main set of rules. Resistance to uncommuning has created the prospect of growing self-consciousness and potential change; however, the politico-ideological obstacles are certainly not easy to overcome.

3. A Perceptive Commoner

As Marshall Berman sees it, “To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction. It is to be overpowered by the immense bureaucratic organizations that have the power to control and often destroy all communities, values, lives” [13] (p. 13). Modernity is asphyxiating, but it oftentimes provides opportunities to attempt changes in the world, or as Berman declared, quoting Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as the epigraph of the 2013 Mumford Lecture, “look the negative in the face”. This passing reference reminds us that the tortuous production of the modern subject, which was the main concern of Berman’s intellectual journey, was already brilliantly anticipated, much earlier on, by Hegel, a giant figure of European philosophy, who lived in a moment of transition to industrial modernity and was a privileged observer of rising bourgeois power in alliance with the decadent aristocracy. Hegelian political and ontological thinking did unlock the fundamental ambivalence of modernity in the form of growing extravagance and opulence but was irrefutably fuelled elsewhere by misery and ignorance [14]. Interestingly, “throughout his political evolution, Hegel never ceased to be intrigued by the political aspect of individuality and the realisation of individual potentiality through reconciliation with other conscious agents. In *Phenomenology*, we already encounter, in its finished form, his theory of the ‘moral’ individual who, in the name of moral consciousness (*Gewissen*) and personal conviction, is opposed to the existing social order” [15] (p. 228). Hegel saw an internal, determinate negation in mainstream modernity, which can pave the way to its overcoming through reason and ethical practice. The subject and its object are collapsed through transformative action (labour).

3.1. *Dialectic of Freedom and Recognition*

The insightful politico-moral agenda of Hegel is centred around the dialectical reconciliation of individual liberty with collective freedom through the interconnectedness of reason (it is, therefore, ironic that he has been most often, and most unjustly, criticised on this very topic and mistakenly considered as a philosopher of totalitarianism). Hegel’s concept of public life is, “as it exists in a properly established system of objective ethics (*Sittlichkeit*), the common practices or institutions that embody this life are seen as our doing... as the action of the Spirit through us” [16] (p. 16). This involves the individual and the community together, what Hegel described as the ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and the ‘We’ that is

'T' [17]. On this account, Hegel has offered a clear programme of action in favour of freedom and community-based recognition, permeated by the search for reason through ethical actions, for the mediation between individuals and the collectivity amidst the challenges of modernity:

In modern times, namely, on account of the reconciliation of the worldly principle with itself, the external world is at rest, is brought into order—world relationships, conditions, models of life, have become constituted and organized in a manner which is conformable to nature and rational. We see a universal, comprehensible connection, and, with that individuality, likewise attains another character and nature, for it is no longer the plastic individuality of the ancients. . . The circumstances of life are, in the true sense, private affairs, determined by outward conditions, and do not contain anything worthy of our notice. Life becomes scholarly given relationships and cannot represent or set itself forth as a form pertaining only to itself. . . The modern world is this essential power of connection, and it implies the fact that it is clearly necessary for the individual to enter into these relations of external existence. . . The real matter is to remain faithful to one's aims. [18] (pp. 168–169).

According to Hegel, the main attribute of modernity, as a precise socio-historical phase of the human trajectory, is the fact that subjects have, now, the possibility to reach mutual recognition and conscious integration into the totality of relations. That inevitably requires work on self-consciousness and dialectical thinking. "The dialectic is the unswerving effort to conjoin reason's critical consciousness of itself and the critical experience of objects" [19] (pp. 9–10). Nonetheless, the Hegelian dialectic is not defined merely in abstract terms, it is also comprehended through reflexive practice, through a 'philosophy of action' or a unity of 'poesis' and 'praxis'. Only the concrete whole, articulated and interrogated through the local and specific, provides explanations. "Nothing can be understood in isolation; everything is to be understood only in the context of the whole, with the awkward qualification that the whole, in turn, lives only in individual moments" [19] (p. 91). As observed by Skomvoulis, the Hegelian thought evolved from something heroic (in the post-French Revolution context) to a mature, more reflexive approach, which firmly considered the necessary mediation of the condition of human finitude and the historical responsibility to confront the shortcomings of modernity [20]. Unfortunately, the encouraging and revolutionary approach offered by Hegel (perhaps it was even more subversive than Marx's, as remarked by Adorno, because of the negative and dialectical core of the Hegelian system) was largely undervalued by mainstream academic circles. That started with the 'Old Hegelians' who misread Hegel to claim that the world had already essentially reached perfection (and were accordingly criticised by the Left Hegelians (*Linkshegelianer*)). In the twentieth century, there were also repeated attempts to ignore or downgrade Hegelian thinking to a sterile idealism or a domineering totality. What happened to the Hegelian philosophy over the years basically mirrors the fate of the commons, given that common institutions are now ordinarily considered as an impoverished version of their vibrant, resilient constitution.

3.2. Commons Through Hegel

Following the monumental contributions of Hegel to philosophy and science, the commons can be understood as a nexus of spatialised reason derived from shared experiences and from the self-consciousness of being together in an interconnected world. Certainly, the critical treatment of modernity's social inconsistencies was a part of Hegel's broad philosophical reinterpretation of reason and being [21]. "The whole of Hegel's philosophy (despite its paradoxes) is an effort to translate intellectual experience into concepts" [19] (p. 138), and those transformative conceptions can be found today in the language of the social mobilisation against an exclusionary modernity (as in its offspring, post-modernity). Nonetheless, the Hegelian system can also be expanded—which, needless to say, is one of our main aspirations—particularly taking into account the two centuries of intellectual

disputes and the consolidation of a reckless hyper-modernity since Hegel's own time. In effect, "no reading of Hegel can do him justice without criticizing him", as appropriately recommended by Adorno [19] (p. 145). In particular, the role of labour, as sources of life and value, and the importance of ethnicity and other markers of identity, demand special consideration. Then again, Hegel himself provides the intellectual foundation for a proper investigation of contemporary, even more reactionary, modernity. For instance, according to Hegel, and later expanded by Marx, labour has a sociological character, as it only becomes labour as something for something else, and, consequently, the over-specialisation of labour required for the intensification of production would result in alienation because of greater mechanisation:

This is the division of labour. By it, the labour of the individual becomes more simple, his skill in his abstract work greater, and the amount he produces larger. The result of the abstraction of skill and means is that men's interdependence or mutual relation is completed. It becomes a thorough necessity. Moreover, the abstraction of production causes work to be continually more mechanical. [22] (p. 163).

For the purpose of our neo-Hegelian analysis, it is germane to observe that the primordial objectives of capitalism—commodification, exploitation, and accumulation—were met at the expense of the commons. In other words, the attack on labour and nature presupposes the de-commonisation of reality, which alienates people and prevents them from fully realising themselves as free interrelated human beings. The rupture caused by the advance of uncommoning led to not only the consolidation of the highly specialised mass production of commodities and other tradeable goods but also the tighter control of the working class and their subjugation to a disorganised, alienated condition. Hegel described such circumstances as poverty, which is not just the absence of money and means but also a fundamental limitation of the human being when he/she is prevented from realising his/her full capacity for personality in the first place. For Hegel, the poor are barbarised in a modern society that blocks their human personality; they find themselves trapped in a condition of 'savagery' or 'barbarism' [23]. In Hegel's words,

The Spirit of wealth was an essenceless being-for-self, something to be sacrificed for others. But by imparting itself, it becomes *intrinsic being*. . . It does not, however, give itself over as a nature that has no self, as the uncontrolled surrender of the condition of life, but as a self-conscious being in control of itself. . . Wealth, thus, shares its dejection with the recipient, but in place of rebellion appears arrogance. . . In this arrogance, which fancies it has, by the gift of a meal, acquired the self of another's 'I' and, thereby, gained for itself the submission of that other's inmost being, it overlooks the inner rebellion of the other. . . It stands on the very edge of this innermost abyss, of this bottomless depth, in which all stability and Substance have vanished. [17] (p. 315).

In his ground-breaking *Science of Logic*, Hegel presents a very sophisticated and ambitious analysis of being, essence, and concept, which is of great relevance to scrutinise the commons [1]. As famously claimed by Hegel, 'being is thinking' [24]; hence, being in common is primarily thinking in common, given that the categories of thought are conditioned by language, practices, and culture (the most evident expressions of a collectivity). Being has first to be qualitatively assessed (determined as being in the world) to be then considered in quantitative terms (independent individualities), which evolve to meet quality again (in the form of measure, the quantitative determinacy that has returned to simple equality with itself) and eventually reach essence. Quality is different but also identical to quantity because quantity, in the end, is not only the realm of fragments but also beings that continue beyond themselves and remain, likewise, external to them. The dialectic of quantity leads to the true infinite in the form of quanta (infinitely self-relating without becoming another), which then give rise to measure, a quantum that constitutes a certain quality. After a long trajectory through Hegel's logical edifice, essence retains

an ambiguous relation to being, as it is different from being (a new sphere governed by non-immediacy), but it is also what being itself proves to be: it is being itself that no longer is being [25]. The commons demonstrate this formidable interplay between quality, quantity, and essence, which cannot be dissociated from each other. The commons are areas of quantitative production and means of subsistence, but they only function because of the qualitative organisation of rules and relations that, in the end, constitute their essence.

3.3. Beyond Utilitarian Commons

In addition to his intricate logico-ontological elaboration, Hegel's theory of moral politics is also crucial for a study of the commons because it is argued that individuality can only be secured through social cooperation and universal recognition, expanding the political blueprint of Plato, for Hegelian knowledge is not something exclusive of the political elite, who should merely be practical men who exert their leadership by capturing the reasoning of the community. Basically, Hegel links a theory of intersubjectivity with the agency of conscious individuals through ethical life. People are social beings, and their capacities are developed when they live in societies and follow moral rules, which are essentially what the process of commoning entails [5]. The commons are both shared and personalised, a complex politico-economic nexus of production and recognition of social beings (which is repelled by the impoverished privatistic rationality of capitalist modernity). Values, norms, and collective identity constitute what Hegel called Geist (spirit), which has a coherent scalar ethics in which individuals can identify the worth of shared norms and values. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel considers pre-Christian Greek society as a collectivity of citizens who pursued both their personal aims and goals through the action of the whole population [17]. To make it happen, these individuals had to respect the ethical order in which customs and laws were infused by a specific ethical substance. Not by chance, Hegel was very critical of the utilitarianism of the modern world, which was flourishing during his lifetime (e.g., the ideas of Bentham). Cooperation and reciprocity, much more than economic efficiency in narrow terms, were the main requirements of wellbeing and fairness. According to Hegel,

... utilitarianism represented an impoverished conception of man and of the roles of social and political theory. He believed that men were capable of desiring, and, indeed, needed for, the full development of their capacities, more than the endless satisfaction of interests, however sophisticated, were the means at their disposal and however comprehensive the theories of technical instrumental rationality, which guided them towards that satisfaction. . . he believed this development to be inextricably bound up with the character of men's relations with one another, which he regarded not just as a means to the achievement of personal ends but also as constitutive of essentially human powers and capacities and, therefore, integral to the growth of individuality itself. This interest in the significance of social relationships provides the back cloth to Hegel's characterization of the common good. [26] (p. 755).

Hegel basically proposed a rationalisation (or stabilisation) of the rapidly evolving modern institutions through a call for higher reason and ethical conduct. The main agent in charge of leading the ethical singularisation of the universal was the revitalised national state, while individuals should be more self-conscious and realise themselves through interactions with other self-conscious people sharing the same journey. For Hegel, nothing can be known that is not in experience [19], and finite beings are moments in the true infinitude of the world [24]. Crucially, all the positive categories described by Hegel in his search for an improved civic condition—reason, ethics, liberty, collectivism, transformative and ethical praxes, the progressive–regressive dialectic, rejection of a reified life, etc.—are expressions of the rationality that permeates the commons. As argued by Gutmann, if the old communitarians looked to Marx and his proposal to remake the capitalist world, the new communitarians (who believe that the community already exists in the form of common social practices and shared understandings) should now look to Hegel and his

attempt to reconcile people to their world (quoted in [27] (p. 464)). Following Hegel, commoning can be described as a comprehensive process of reflection, recognition, and change, able to connect the universal with multiple, interconnected local experiences for the liberation and fulfilment of all the members involved. Any socio-spatial reality is the result of the metabolism of negation, as the Hegelian logic is built around negation, as much as affinity and reconciliation. The commons are the embodiment of long-lasting interactions, which transformed socio-ecological systems through a trial-and-error negation that resulted in agreed, legitimised institutions. Instead of mere intuitional or empiricist thinking, however, there are structuring principles that organise the commons, which are the result of shared learning and gradually perfected reason.

4. Decolonial Commoning

The way forwards is to secure a space for critical thinking and joint North–South learning about the legacies of colonial mentality and practice as much as about the lived impacts and dead ends of contemporary development, globalisation, and ethnoclass oppression. Needless to remember, not only Marxism, Utopic Socialism, or Anarchism were European projects but also today's post-colonial and decolonial studies are, first and foremost, efforts of the main academic centres in Europe and North America to deal with monumental economic fissures and political biases associated with colonialism. The powerful intellectual influence of the West has, again, converted the wider debates about a self-serving modern society to unnecessary rivalries between post-colonial studies (considered as a reenactment of anarchist ideas, now combined with a touch of post-structuralism and subaltern studies) and decolonial perspectives (treated sometimes as invigorated socialist theorisation along the lines of eco-socialism). In effect, the dilemmas of modernity, capitalism, and colonisation require 'all hands on deck', that is, the coming together of a plurality of critical voices, with a clear role for all radical or anti-capitalism scholars. For instance, Quijano questions the simplistic decolonisation carried out after the last Great War, which merely expelled European rulers and some settlers, so the indigenous nations could govern themselves [28]. It resulted in a new governing nation state that was not able to question the political theory and political economy upon which the new countries came into being. Quijano called for deeper confrontation of the hegemonic totality of knowledge that constituted the idea of Western modernity and the conception of the task of decolonisation as epistemological reconstitution. This certainly remains a central task for societies and governments of the Global South, in articulation with marginalised segments in the neo-colonial powers, something that requires addressing the totality of the neo-colonisation process. More than just mobilising non-Western ideas and practices, which are important, what is also crucial is to confront the epistemological and political bases of neo-coloniality.

A proper critique of the profound consequences of uncommoning requires a thoughtful reconsideration of the contradictory politico-economic experience of the West, both there and in the rest of the world, which has been made (actually, forced) in its own image. Quijano properly identifies the colonial rationality as a core element of the generalised problem of modernity and insists on the importance of an epistemological decolonisation to de-instrumentalise the reasons of power. The coloniality of knowledge leads to the coloniality of being, what can be understood as the naturalisation of the non-ethics of war, which include the practices of eliminating and enslaving certain subjects, such as indigenous and black groups, as a part of the all-embracing enterprise of neo-colonisation [29]. Nonetheless, this fundamental constitution of the modern world cannot be secured without engaging with the genesis of and responsibilities for coloniality and without recognising the dialectical configuration of European modernity. Only a multitude of sensibilities and collective reflection, mobilising the best concepts and theories from all parts of the world, are going to produce the most acute and relevant responses to the exploitative forces of capitalist modernity, in particular, uncommoning. All regions and countries are subjected to comparable and complementary burdens for the benefit of national and international elites, which have remained effectively protected by brutal police forces and imperialist

armies, as well as by friendly media and domesticated academia. For all those reasons, the liberation of the Global South from the claws of imperialism depends on and facilitates the simultaneous liberation of minds and lives in the core imperialist countries, and vice versa. In that regard, inquiring about the commons is an important heuristic link to explore those connections because the land- and resource-grabbing that has happened in Europe since the Middle Ages continues to expand both in the North and South [30].

An unwavering endeavour is, therefore, necessary to listen, translate, and understand Southern voices, which deserve significantly more respect and attention; however, that does not mean that only those in the Global South hold the exclusive place to report their condition. Origin or circumstances of work do not automatically provide legitimacy for dealing with the effects of colonialism, as one has also to remember that many southern intellectuals with high impact work were trained by, or collaborated with, Northern authors. If, in the past, both mainstream anthropology and geography were instrumentalised for the advancement of empire-building and racist policies, there were other important Western authors who tried to acknowledge the full extent of past mistakes and paved the way for more inquisitive scholarship. Hence, academics in the Global North and in the Global South can jointly make a contribution that has both national and universal relevance. Any theory needs to be judged based on its merit and to the extent that it helps to explain and provide means to intervene in the complex reality instead of the mere association with national identities or any other such filters. The shortcomings of Western philosophy and social sciences have to be simultaneously addressed from the 'outside' (the politico-intellectual critics and social movements in the Global South) and, perhaps even more importantly, from the inside (Europe and North America), a distortion that stains even the work of critical authors when neglecting the importance of concrete social interventions. On the one hand, it is necessary to remove ill feelings against committed Western thinkers and, on the other hand, it is indispensable to maintain a prudent dialogue that is enriched by experiences and thoughts from all over the planet. Intellectual richness and socio-spatial justice demand a more nuanced effort from both the North and South, beyond the undialectical and unproductive replacement of (totally unacceptable) European hegemony with (also unacceptable) persecution of European ideas and authors merely because of their working location. Decolonisation presupposes a substantially different basis of interaction and joint rejection of capitalist modernity, given that its anti-human rationality affects both north and south in comparable ways. As observed by Corntassel, decolonisation evolves through practices and politics of renewal and responsibility [31].

Because of the above reasons, our study of the commons is not going to dispense with the contributions of great interpreters of European modernity and, in particular, those who have dealt with the power of its internal negativity. It would be not only unjust but also fruitless to close the door to critical Western academic authors and European protest groups. Without any claim of vain neutrality, this article is firmly situated in the Hegelian and Marxist traditions and follows a Marxist–Hegelian, or a Hegelian–Marxist, perspective on capitalist modernity, indigenous peoples, and grassroots alternatives to mainstream politics responsible for, among other pressures, the grabbing and exploitation of the commons. Hegel's consideration of the being, as the dialectic between the one and the many, will be decisive to theorise the social and civilisational importance of the commons. Just to, again, reinforce our framework, it may sound foolish to relate the dense, bewildering and encyclopaedic work of Hegel, published without much editorial coherence two hundred years ago, with the long and varied experience of the commons. Nonetheless, it is a quintessential Hegelian claim that philosophy is not for angels or sages dealing with atemporal abstracts but should be directly and creatively associated with the lived historical reality, such as the condition of those impacted by capitalist colonialism [32]. If Kant sponsored a transcendental argument (the conditions of knowledge can be determined from a perspective prior to all experience) and Descartes adopted a foundationalist stance (thought as the true condition of knowledge, 'I think therefore I am'), Hegel was a post-Kantian and anti-foundationalist philosopher who recognised no first principles to be

the inexorable foundation of truth. For Hegel, epistemology is cumulative and closer to everyday experiences, as much as only his system of knowledge without foundation was able to legitimate its claims through a circular exercise of justification that pointed the way for the ensuing methodological techniques adopted by Marx and many others [33]. In this sense, it is not the beginning that justifies the end, but the end that justifies the perennial beginning, which means that for Hegel, there is no specific starting point for reason, and the becoming is only real when it is completed through its realisation. In his own words, science is a demanding process of gradual consciousness that should lead to an understanding shared by all and not by just a few illuminated ones:

... the actuality of this simple whole consists in those various shapes and forms, which have become its moments and which will now develop and take shape afresh, this time in their new element, in their newly acquired meaning. . . Without such articulation, Science lacks universal intelligibility and gives the appearance of being the esoteric possession of a few individuals: an esoteric possession, since it is, as yet, present only in its Notion or in its inwardness of a few individuals, since its undiffused manifestation makes its existence something singular. . . The intelligible form of Science is the way, open and equally accessible to everyone, and consciousness, as it approaches Science, justly demands that it be able to attain to rational knowledge by way of ordinary understanding. [17] (pp. 7–8).

The interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic by Badiou, especially during his Maoist phase in the post-1968 years, can be of further assistance in our search for alternatives to uncommuning [34]. According to Badiou, the seminal contradiction of a capitalist world is between the prevailing structural totality (P, the place) and the elements that are included in the whole but remain subordinate and marginalised (A, the offsite or outplace). The element (e.g., the working class) is transformed by its placement in the whole, in other words, there is A and there is A in another place (in the space of the placement, which is P). In his idiosyncratic annotation, there is a crucial tension between A/Ap, that is, between the offsite and the placed offsite in the whole structure of reality (P). For Badiou, the main law of the dialectic is scission, One divides into Two, what can be perceived in facts and action. The main political opposition is not merely between workers and the capitalist class but also between those currently exploited and the basis of their exploitation. “The true contrary of the proletariat is not the bourgeoisie. It is the bourgeois world, imperialist society, of which the proletariat, let this be noted, is a notorious element, as the principal productive force and as the antagonistic political pole” [34] (p. 7). The antagonism between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is of lesser importance, and, for Badiou, Marxism begins already beyond this more restricted contradiction. More significant, the dialectic between itself and itself-that-is-placed is a powerful motor of change and has the potential to overcome a given reality. As prominently stated by Badiou, “*Everything that belongs to a whole is an obstacle to this whole insofar as it is included in it*” [34] (p. 12, italics in the original). The commons are certainly another form of offsite, insofar as they are constitutive elements of late capitalist society but systematically relegated to the margins because of the evolution of institutions, such as private property and the labour market. The institutions of the commons have remained broadly the same as those in previous centuries, but their positionality in an oppressive capitalist totality has consigned them to a condition of inferiority and triggered attempts to their own extermination. The commons (A) are now mainly treated as obsolete and placed as the negative version of themselves (Ap). Evidently, the downgrading placement of the commons is synergically associated with the placement of people who directly depend on their functioning and with the wider working class (including indigenous and non-indigenous workers). Badiou’s formulation is instrumental to a better understanding of the genesis of tensions and the political prospects following the power of placement and the disrupting force of what is contingently placed. Being in the world means, first of all, to be in common, and, in a reality that is profoundly anti-commons, it means to be in a place of antagonism and potential revolt. If the priority of the world is to be in common but that is unattainable, the centrality of the commons assumes powerful ontological relevance.

All that is relevant because one of the most revealing types of commons is exactly the knowledge and the practices to use and protect land and the (so-called) natural resources held by indigenous peoples and their communities. These are specific elements of reality shared solely by nations and communities for their own survival and reproduction but that have been, for centuries, the object of greed and expropriation (in the Badiouan sense, this is their placement in the modern world order, a pressure from A to Ap). The long-lasting and violent interference with indigenous societies and their livelihoods has been discombobulated by the advent of global environmental concerns, which have encroached upon indigenous peoples in complex ways (either positive or negative). Because of the simplistic stereotype of a life closer to nature and the eminent ecological ethics of native groups, indigenous populations are automatically supposed to protect the commons for the benefit of the whole humanity. That may be the case, to some extent, but it is normally missed that the commons are shielded by an indigenous nation primarily because of their demands and the invocation of their rights over resources and places. Hegeman further notes that calls for the defence or restoration of the commons often become awfully romantic, ignoring lived complexities and conflicts. For instance, the literature on environmental governance has promoted the ideas of a special relationship to the natural world to the concept of indigenous people as a global whole, but that tends to deny complexity and agency (the myth of the 'ecological Indian') [35]. Indigenous peoples fight for the preservation of the commons and the preservation of community life, but these are, first of all, their commons, that is, specific commons inserted either in wider commons or privatistic regimes. Following Badiou, the struggle of indigenous nations is not primarily against invaders, poachers, and land-grabbers but contrary to the anti-commons rationality of an increasingly market-dependent global society. There are, thus, major questions of scale and nested rights related to the indigenous commons. Commons are, above all, a political platform to challenge and transform a decadent world, and, more importantly, it will be shown that the Hegelian space of self-consciousness and moral action is one of the main commons available and under threat.

Colonialism remains a central force and is based on multiple rationalities and moral excuses, which all converge under the logic of uncommuning as its most candid substantiation. Both in the colonial past and in the neoliberal (neo-colonial) present, what happens is not merely a dispossession and grabbing of the commons but also there has been, in effect, an aggressive substitution of an entire world reasoning for another because of uncommuning ambitions. Socio-ecological disputes are the material expression of the conflict between antagonistic forms of reason that underpin the notion of ownership. One form or configuration of reason (*Gestalt*, following Hegel) is based on common rights for the members of a particular group or community, as something tested and consolidated over many generations according to the concrete socio-spatial reality. And the other—which emerged much later in human history as capitalism, tainted European societies and propelled colonial business—is based on the supposed superiority of individual property enforced by a centralised, powerful state that is organised according to abstract, generalist socio-spatial principles (the bourgeois state). Private property of the means of production and reproduction is more than simply the exclusive ownership of resources and devices; it entails the production of socio-spatialities in which individualist barriers prevail over the sense of the commons. It is a world where the anti-commons become commonsense because of the lessening of reason and its instrumentalisation according to the priorities of capital. This is the core element of uncommuning. The outbreak of private property in the last few centuries was the consequence of this attack on place-based reason and the imposition of shallow, abstract notions and concepts. It was based on the absurd belief that the land and natural resources of the natives will never realise its full economic potential as long as it is held as collective property and remains subject to political and collective management.

As a result, there has been a coordinated uncommuning that reordered the indigenous and non-indigenous worlds according to private property rights, which continue to be defended as the 'best' solution to the lack of housing and to low economic activity. There

is nothing new here. Already, the early theorists of international law, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, have provided the fundamental justifications for the conquest of foreign territories based on the spread of commerce, Christianity, and civilisation, the ‘three Cs’ that rationalised the right to enter a just war and secure a ‘legal’ title to territory [36]. Nonetheless, having identified the core reasoning that underpins capitalist modernity, it is also crucial to avoid any simplistic (non-spatialised) political economy that romantically underlines relations of reciprocity and convention to explain indigenous socio-economies (e.g., people belong to the land). The local commons do not exist in isolation or just because of specific institutional compromises but reflect the totality of a non-capitalist conceptualisation (i.e., the world belongs to all people, who rely on each other to produce this world together). Lived commons mirror the notion and the project of a shared world, even if these commons remain inserted in the variegated geography of capitalism [37]. In other words, common space is the realisation of the conscience of a common world. For example, the long process of uncommoning that pervaded the production of American spaces moved in the opposite direction of what Hegel proposed as the evolutive phenomenology of reason because it is a subjection of lived reason to instrumentalised, narrow reasoning. Self-consciousness and collective reason are the pillars of the commons (reason emerging from the commons and the commons as reason in life) and trigger a direct confrontation with modern, limited reason. In the same way, indigenous spaces are the amalgam of a construction of consciousness that resulted in the active decision to maintain the *loci communes*. The wisdom and science of indigenous peoples reverberates what Seneca, in his *Epistle 95*, had already recognised: “Let us possess things in common, for birth is ours in common. Our relations with one another are like a stone arch, which would collapse if the stones did not mutually support each other and which is upheld in this very way” [38] (p. 15).

5. Conclusions

The central message, here, is that if the trajectory of societies that rely on the existence of a vibrant, rich commons is of enormous importance in itself and should be analysed with the full extent of a decolonial version of the Hegelian dialectic, at the same time, it serves to reinvigorate Hegel’s critical philosophy by revealing its relevance for dealing with non-traditional issues and places, disrupting any supposed canonical thought. The rich political ontology of the commons encompasses more than just a question of property or shared resources and services, but it is an entirely different, antagonistic perspective on society and the economy. The revitalisation of the commons constitutes a radical alternative to capital’s cul-de-sacs, as it contrasts with the historical configuration of the capitalist order and its mounting contradictions, for instance, the lack of affordable housing, the overreliance on the private car, and the commercialisation of ultra-processed food in Great Britain. Likewise, specific forms of the commons reveal the problematic production of uneven local, national, and planetary spaces. In the hyper-individualistic and alienated relations of neoliberal societies, the commons are a network of resistance and a locus of the unity of the working class. Local commons are, in reality, the dialectical expression of the great commons that continuously challenge the decadent status quo. Commons-related institutions provide a splendid illustration of Marx’s optimistic political stance, as they help to prefigure a post-capitalist communist society. Bourgeois uncommon society creates the conditions for overcoming its antagonisms, and it “constitutes, therefore, the closing chapter of the prehistoric stage of human society” [2] (p. 13).

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 [39]. 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 [40–43]. Although many individuals feel powerless today because of the constraints of conventional institutions, the commons are “a germinal vision for reimagining our future together and reinventing social organization, economics, infrastructure, politics, and state power itself” [44] (p. 3). 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 [45]. 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.

Considering Hegel’s logic and his politico-philosophical argument, we can reach the conclusion that the commons constitute an internal negativity of the capitalist totality of relations and remain a crucial reference to overcome—sublate—uncommoning. Capitalism is form of existence that sets its own limits and tries to relegate to the external void all anti-capitalist critiques and non-capitalist social formations. But the commons are an internal force that entails opportunities of the expansion of both capitalism and tension, from the inside, its rules and institutions. The commons, thus, become a commoning potency that disturbs the apparent, but unstable, rationality of capitalism. If uncommoning is the brutal face of a capitalist society, commoning is the horizon of infinite life and reason. In the Hegelian terminology, commoning is Spirit, the unending convergence of multiple self-consciousnesses in search of mutual complementarity and recognition. Hegel’s edifice of consciousness and interaction, further refined by Marx and other neo-Hegelians, is undeniably of great value to make sense of spatial conflicts, inequalities, and the irrationality of today’s socio-spatial trends (e.g., North–South inequalities; the urban, agrarian, and climatic crises; alienation; racism; and violence). Overall, a Hegel-inspired investigation and its ability to systematically reevaluate local, national, and global trends represent some of the best interpretative ‘tools’ or ‘resources’ available for dealing with cumulative tensions and injustices at the local, national, and global scales. These ‘tools’ have been available for several generations but have been neither seriously nor sufficiently considered. The commons are, ultimately, an expression of a social order that functions in relation to freedom, which is the main priority of Hegel’s socio-spatial theorisation. The commons give an example of institutions that convert individuals to subjects able to realise their full capacity as free agents.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*; Di Giovanni, G., Translator; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2010.
2. Marx, K. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; Stone, N.I., Translator; Charles H. Kerr: Chicago, IL, USA, 1904.
3. Ioris, A.A.R. *The Political Ecology of the State: The Basis and the Evolution of Environmental Statehood*; Routledge: London, UK, 2014.
4. Ioris, A.A.R. Hegel’s Minor and Major Geographies: Space, Consciousness and Change. *Antipode* **2024**, *56*, 1357–1377. [[CrossRef](#)]
5. Hegel, G.W.F. *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*; Knox, T.M., Translator; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2008.
6. Mattei, H. *Bene Comuni: Un Manifesto*; Editori Laterza: Roma, Italy, 2011.
7. Aydalot, P. *Dynamique Spatiale et Développement Inégal*, 2nd ed.; Economica: Paris, France, 1980.

8. Swyngedouw, E. *Social Power and the Urbanization of Water: Flows of Power*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2004.
9. Ioris, A.A.R. Theorizing State-Environment Relationships: Antinomies of Flexibility and Legitimacy. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* **2015**, *39*, 167–184. [CrossRef]
10. Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed.; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA; London, UK, 1998.
11. Dardot, P.; Laval, C. *Commun: Essai sur la Révolution au XXI Siècle*; Éditions de la Découverte: Paris, France, 2014.
12. Perelman, M. *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*; Duke University Press: Durham, UK; London, UK, 2000.
13. Berman, M. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*; Verso: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 1982.
14. Hegel, G.W.F. *The Hegel Reader*; Houlgate, S., Ed.; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1998.
15. Fleischmann, E. The Role of the Individual in Pre-revolutionary Society: Stirner, Marx, and Hegel. In *Hegel's Political Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives*; Pelczynski, Z.A., Ed.; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1971; pp. 220–229.
16. Taylor, C. Hegel and the Philosophy of Action. In *Hegel's Philosophy of Action*; Stepelevich, L.S., Lamb, D., Eds.; Humanities Press: Atlantic Highlands, NJ, USA, 1983; pp. 1–18.
17. Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*; Miller, A.V., Translator; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1977.
18. Hegel, G.W.F. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume 3—Medieval and Modern Philosophy*; Haldane, E.S.; Simson, F.H., Translators; Bison Book/University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE, USA; London, UK, 1995.
19. Adorno, T. *Hegel: Three Studies*; Nicholson, S.W., Translator; MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1993.
20. Skomvoulis, M. Hegel Discovers Capitalism: Critique of Individualism, Social Labor, and Reification during the Jena Period (1801–1807). In *Hegel and Capitalism*; Buchwalter, R., Ed.; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2015; pp. 19–34.
21. Brooks, T.; Stein, S. *Hegel's Political Philosophy: On the Normative Significance of Method and System*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2017.
22. Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of Right*; Dyde, S.W., Translator; Batoche Books: Kitchener, ON, Canada, 2001.
23. Di Salvo, C.J.P. Hegel's Torment: Poverty and the Rationality of the Modern State. In *Hegel and Capitalism*; Buchwalter, R., Ed.; SUNY Press: Albany, NY, USA, 2015; pp. 101–116.
24. Houlgate, S. *Hegel on Being: Quality and the Birth of Quantity in Hegel's 'Science of Logic'*; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2022.
25. Houlgate, S. *Hegel on Being: Quantity and Measure in Hegel's 'Science of Logic'*; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2022.
26. Walton, A.S. Hegel, Utilitarianism, and the Common Good. *Ethics* **1983**, *93*, 753–771. [CrossRef]
27. Kymlicka, W. Community and Multiculturalism. In *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd ed.; Goodin, R.E., Pettit, P., Pogge, T., Eds.; Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 2012; pp. 463–477.
28. Quijano, A. Colonialidad del Poder, Eurocentrismo y América Latina. In *La Colonialidad del Saber: Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas*; Lander, E., Ed.; CLACSO: Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2000; pp. 201–246.
29. Maldonado-Torres, N. On the Coloniality of Being. *Cult. Stud.* **2007**, *21*, 240–270. [CrossRef]
30. Ioris, A.A.R. *Frontier Making in the Amazon: Economic, Political and Socioecological Conversion*; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2020.
31. Corntassel, J. Re-envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-determination. *Decolonization Indig. Educ. Soc.* **2012**, *1*, 86–101. Available online: <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18627/15550> (accessed on 10 April 2024).
32. Monahan, M. *Creolizing Hegel*; Rowman and Littlefield: New York, NY, USA, 2017.
33. Rockmore, T. *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought*; University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, USA, 1992.
34. Badiou, A. *Theory of the Subject*; Bosteels, B., Translator; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2013.
35. Hegeman, S. The Indigenous Commons. *Minn. Rev.* **2019**, *93*, 133–140. [CrossRef]
36. Gilbert, J. *Indigenous Peoples' and Rights Under International Law: From Victims to Actors*; Transnational Publishers: Ardsley, NY, USA, 2006.
37. Ioris, A.A.R. *Kaiowicide: Living Through the Guarani-Kaiowa Genocide*; Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, USA, 2021.
38. Stewart, S. *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA; London, UK, 2020.
39. Kirwan, S.; Dawney, L.; Brigstocke, J. *Space, Power and the Commons: The Struggle for Alternative Futures*; Routledge: London, UK, 2015.
40. Angus, I. *The War Against the Commons: Dispossession and Resistance in the Making of Capitalism*; Monthly Review Press: New York, NY, USA, 2023.
41. Federici, S. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*; PM Press: Oakland, CA, USA, 2019.
42. Mundó, J.; Soza, S.; Macedo de Medeiros Albrecht, N.F. Privatization and the Governance of the Commons. In *Capitalism, Democracy, Socialism: Critical Debates. Philosophy and Politics—Critical Explorations*; Azmanova, A., Chamberlain, J., Eds.; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2022; pp. 35–77.
43. Obeng-Odoom, F. *The Commons in an Age of Uncertainty: Decolonizing Nature, Economy, and Society*; University of Toronto Press: Toronto, ON, Canada; Buffalo, NY, USA; London, UK, 2021.

-
44. Bollier, D.; Helfrich, S. *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons*; New Society Publishers: Gabriola, BC, Canada, 2019.
 45. Ioris, A.A.R. *Geographies of Difference, Indifference and Mis-difference: The Guarani-Kaiowa People and the Myths of Brazilian Development*; Bloomsbury Publishing: London, UK, 2024.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.