

Equality without equivalence: an anthropology of the common[★]

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This article elaborates an Amazonian conception of the common and the challenge it poses to Western thinking about individualism and equality. It is suggested that a number of distinctive features of Amazonian Urarina sociality may have their basis in a shared refusal of factors that give rise to relations of equivalence between people. This kind of singularism, or ‘individualism without individuals’, results from an orientation to the common as a collective resource that is antithetical to property, in which subjectivity is shaped in relation to wider ecological and affective resources that are continuously and collectively produced. This embraces not only shared economic resources, such as land or game animals, but also ways of organizing and producing affective, cognitive, and linguistic relations, ‘commonalities’ of various kinds which never reduce differences to an abstract subject, such as the individual of liberalism or the collective of socialism.

In *Coral gardens and their magic*, Malinowski railed against two grand themes of nineteenth-century anthropology: the notion of ‘primitive communism’; and the idea of a general evolution of social forms from communal to individual. ‘There is no more jejune and fruitless distinction in primitive sociology’, he concluded, ‘than that between individualism and Communism’ (1966: 380). The Trobrianders exemplified a subtle blending of the two: while almost all work was done by co-operative groups, for example, these were cross-cut by individual land titles, a highly developed sense of individuality, and strong desires for individual distinctions (e.g. 1966: 378).

Malinowski’s insight was nevertheless coloured by his own political commitments, especially his faith in the superiority of capitalist individualism over the rival collectivist ideologies of his age. His hostile attitude towards communism in the Europe of his day almost certainly informed his propensity to describe Melanesians in terms more appropriate to Western individuals (Hann 1996), and while later generations of Melanesianists have done well to rectify this (with individuals and so forth), it would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater to just ignore the individualism that

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Malinowski astutely discerned: not a concept of the person as a bounded, asocial individual, but a recognizable moral stance emphasizing the primacy of the person and of personal interests and prerogatives, though not grounded in private property and its acquisition, nor straightforwardly opposed to communal claims and responsibilities.

The concept of ‘individualism’ has negative connotations for many people today, conjuring ideas of social isolation, competition, and the free market (see, e.g., Lukes 1971). And yet – as Dumont (e.g. 1980 [1966]) and others have shown – it lies at the heart of Western self-identity, anchoring liberal ideals of freedom and equality. It also underpins that amazingly resilient axis of cultural comparison between Western individualism and non-Western ‘collectivism’ – even though Malinowski’s own critique of such comparisons has since been echoed by countless others. So-called ‘possessive individualism’ may well be a peculiarly modern invention, but references to ‘individualism’ are actually scattered throughout the literature on small-scale, non-state societies. Presumably because of the concept’s bad publicity, however, these alternative individualisms and their political implications remain poorly understood.

As for primitive communism, Malinowski rightly found the concept wanting, and indeed who would wish to revive it now, in the face of ever-growing recognition of the sheer diversity of property regimes in existence? And yet, as he also made clear, a reflection on individualism would be inadequate without serious attention both to regimes of property and to the various communal arrangements and collective claims that contextualize and enable it. I don’t want to argue for primitive communism here, though I do want to take up the growing academic as well as public interest in what’s sometimes referred to as ‘the commons’: that is, in the use and management of resources that are (or could be) enjoyed collectively (e.g. Caffentzis & Federici 2014). Taking my cue from Hardt and Negri (2009), among others, I shall use the term ‘common’ here, rather than the more familiar ‘commons’, to suggest an expanded sense not only of the common wealth of the material world which people may share – land, water, and air, for example – but also a range of cultural or immaterial resources, such as languages, knowledges, affects, and so on – the so-called ‘new commons’ that potentially includes things as diverse as ‘music, policing, highways, public housing, digital libraries, and cyberspace’ (Wagner 2012: 618). Importantly, though, the common is not to be confused with public property. It is a collective productive resource that is antithetical to property, whether ‘public’ or ‘private’.

In proposing a specifically anthropological theory of the common, my starting point will be the particular conceptions of a historically situated group of people. As such, I am necessarily relying on ethnography from the part of the world with which I have most familiarity, namely native Amazonia. While the Amazon rainforest might seem far removed from our own political struggles, a central aim of my article is to reveal something of the reach and power of Amazonian social philosophies, and thus the potential of ethnography to enlarge our political and ethical imagination. Following a certain Amazonian logic, I shall attempt to outline an enlarged and potentially more radical vision of the common – to be sure, just one of infinitely many possibilities – that destabilizes its generally unquestioned foundation in the idea of common humanity: that essential horizon of similarity on which we have built our most cherished values of equality and justice. I shall propose an Amazonian conception of the common in which subjectivity is shaped in relation to wider ecological and affective resources that are continuously and collectively produced, as well as held in common. This embraces

not only shared economic resources, such as land or game animals, but also ways of organizing and producing linguistic, cognitive, and affective relations, ‘commonalities’ of various kinds which never reduce differences to an abstract subject, such as the individual of liberalism or the collective of socialism.

Working with such a conception of the common, I hope to move beyond some of the limitations of our current thinking about the nature of ‘community’. I am building here on a body of work that has already begun to question the assumptions of similarity, unity, and homogeneity that have for too long dominated our understandings of small-scale, non-state peoples. A recent example is Rupert Stasch’s (2009) analysis of social relations among the West Papuan Korowai, which are characterized by a pervasive sense of distance and alterity: a ‘society of others’, as he calls it – somewhat akin to what Evan Killick (2005), in an Amazonian context, called ‘living apart’ – and which is certainly not compatible with the long-standing notion of community as *Gemeinschaft*. In this emerging line of thought, otherness or difference can be a bond rather than a division, and a form of connection can occur in the very act of refusing to connect (e.g. Ahmed & Fortier 2003: 254). The wider challenge here is that of finding new ways of understanding forms of being-in-common that refuse or exceed the logic of identity, state, and subject. In other words: how to be in common without creating a community? Or: how to say ‘we’ otherwise than as a ‘one’? (Cf. Nancy 2010: 102.)

The question recalls Hobbes’s (1983 [1641]) famous distinction between the people and the multitude. Hobbes maintained that the multitude is not a political body, because it is plural and therefore incoherent, unable to rule itself. For it to become political, it must become a people, defined by a unity of will and action. The many must be reduced to one. Inspired by their reading of Spinoza, Hardt and Negri (e.g. 2009) have emphasized the radical potential of the multitude, as a kind of emergent political body characterized by its dependence on the common, rather than on property. Far from presupposing a blanket sameness or identity, this notion of the common hinges on an affirmation of difference, and points to a necessary and intrinsic connection between commonality and singularity. This allows us to revisit what Malinowski perceived as the curious coexistence of individualism and communism, or individual and communal claims, while at the same time to interrogate the specific forms of individualism and equality bequeathed to us in the Western liberal tradition, in which the spectre of ‘collectivism’ threatens to override individual liberties. As Joel Robbins (1994) has pointed out, it is because our understanding of equality presumes sameness, or an essential equivalence of individuals, that it inevitably comes into tension with ‘liberty’, understood as the right to differ. I would add that this is part of a broader failure to imagine being-in-common except through the lens of private property, the market, and the state.

One of my purposes here is therefore to show that there exists a different kind of individualism – we might call it ‘singularism’ – which is linked to a form of equality grounded in difference rather than sameness, or, more precisely, in non-equivalence.¹ Amazonia today is characterized by rapid change, spearheaded by Christianization, marketization, and the increasing presence of the state. These changes are revealing: for example, contrary to some pervasive assumptions since Dumont (1983), Christianity did not invent the individual. Amazonian society has always been highly individualistic; what is perhaps truly new here – for many Amazonian peoples at least – is the group. The idea of the bounded group allows for the establishment of an equivalence between its members, and thus a shift to a universalizing, homogenizing, categorical logic of

identity. This leads to a conception of the common good that is potentially in tension with individual interests, and thus to collective forms of organizing that can appear to threaten individual liberties.

Amazonian singularity, by contrast, rests on very different ideas of what it means to be or live in common with others. I seek to elucidate it here as an incitement to rethink the conceptual foundations of our own ideas of equality and justice. One way of posing the question might be as follows: what do individualism, equality, and justice look like when developed outside the contexts of Christianity, the market, and the nation-state? What if Western civilization – as Marshall Sahlins (2008: 112) claims – turns out after all to have been founded on a perverse and mistaken idea of human nature? ‘Sorry, beg your pardon; it was all a mistake’. His conclusion is blunt, though perhaps of little help.

While I am deeply interested in equality – which I would argue is still far less well understood than inequality or hierarchy – I am reluctant to use the term ‘egalitarian’, for reasons that will become clear. What we find throughout much of Amazonia, I think, is not egalitarianism but a tendency towards what I shall call ‘equality without equivalence’, corresponding to a kind of ‘individualism without individuals’, where a strong sense of the common leads directly to a politics of alterity and singularity: to a politics of the multitude.²

The horizon of similarity

Allow me first briefly to justify and elaborate my claim that the principle at the core of Western notions of individualism, equality, and justice has historically been that of the equivalence of individuals: that is, the possibility of comparing or measuring people on the basis of some external criterion, which can lead to various forms of ordering and evaluating. As Pierre Rosanvallon (2013) has argued, this conception was forged above all in the American and French revolutions, where equality was first and foremost a democratic quality: a way of making a society of similar individuals, in direct opposition to aristocratic society. The nation-state contributed to this homogenization; the term ‘adunation’ was coined to describe the movement whereby a group of individuals ‘make a nation,’ that is, achieve unity in equality. As one commentator put it, at the time of the French Revolution, ‘the [revolutionary] festivals impress a single, uniform character on the social mass, and this creates a single, uniform spirit . . . which therefore moulds all members of the state into a single, uniform whole’ (cited in Rosanvallon 2013: 43).

Such a mode of equality leads to a quite specific understanding of social justice. A society of similars is one in which each individual, at least in principle, can imagine him- or herself in the condition of every other individual. This capacity for psychological comparison leads to the hope of improvement, as well as the fear of degradation of one’s own position. As Rosanvallon argues, this is where the notion of equality of opportunity originated. Unequal situations were counterbalanced by a strict equality of rights. Formal moral equality therefore became a way of legitimizing material inequality, because differences among individual situations were increasingly blurred by a powerful ideal of united, communal existence. Hence the central contradiction of liberal capitalist democracies: the coexistence of an egalitarian founding philosophy with a social reality marked by substantial inequalities (Rosanvallon 2013: 104). In other words, inequality prospers when attached to the idea that all are created equal.

It is sometimes said that we have collectively opted for ‘liberty’ and all but abandoned ‘equality’ as a serious social goal, at best resigning ourselves to the attempt to alleviate

ever-growing disparities of wealth. Yet as I mentioned earlier, the very idea that liberty and equality stand in tension largely comes down to the particular vision of equality invoked by those who have taken it most seriously. Despite Marx's own emphasis on individual self-actualization (for discussion, see Elster 1986), equality for proponents of communal ownership in particular came to rest on the deindividualization and homogenization of society, prioritizing unanimity while allowing little space for conflict or deliberation or discordant voices.

But perhaps the most significant expression of equivalence as a basis for justice is the overarching conception of a common humanity that orientates our ability to recognize the moral claims of others, even those living at a great remove from ourselves. Martha Nussbaum has stated the notion succinctly:

At the heart of our societies' conception is the idea of human equality. All human beings are of equal worth, and that worth is inherent or intrinsic: it does not depend on a relationship to others (such as being the wife of X, or the vassal of Y). This worth is equal: all human beings are worthy of equal respect or regard, just in virtue of their humanity (2013: 119).

Equivalence is also the logic of commodity exchange. As we know, capitalism is predicated precisely on the equivalence of the different products of labour. This is epitomized by money, whereby inherently unlike things are made commensurable, that is, equal. Yet if anthropologists have fruitfully explored the creation of equivalence in spheres of exchange as markets penetrate subsistence economies (e.g. Bohannon 1959), the creation and subversion of equivalence between *people* is far less well understood. I do not believe the latter can simply be read as a consequence of the former: as David Graeber (2011) has argued, the idea of equivalence embodied in money is far from obvious, and to really get a foothold it probably had to build on the prior establishment of equivalence between people. This, too, requires some work, because in so-called 'human economies', where human life is the ultimate value, there's relatively little scope for treating two people as equivalent: 'Even the notion that a person can substitute for a person, that one sister can somehow be equated with another, is by no means self-evident' (Graeber 2011: 159). No one can be considered exactly equivalent to anything or anyone else, because each human being is a unique nexus of relations with others. Only when removed from those relationships – ripped from their context, as it were, as happens in slavery – can a person become an object of exchange, legitimately and precisely substituting for another person, or some precise quantity of goods. This is why, according to Graeber, the spread of money – and thus the logic of equivalence – has historically been bound up in violence.

I find this argument quite compelling, especially insofar as it pushes us to examine equivalence a little more carefully, and at the same time to move beyond the paradigm of exchange and reciprocity that has been dominant in anthropology for so long, and which takes for granted precisely what needs to be established. At the same time, however, the focus on violence and slavery risks overshadowing the various other ways in which forms of equivalence between people are established or undermined. This is what I wish to explore.

The logic of non-equivalence

I now want to turn to my fieldwork with the Peruvian Uruarina, a group of 4,000 or so hunter-horticulturalists who inhabit the banks of the upper Chambira river in the department of Loreto.³ Acknowledging that the generation of relations of equivalence

is ubiquitous and inevitable to an extent, I shall highlight ten interrelated ways in which such relations are nevertheless undermined or destabilized among Urarina people. Many of these characteristics are also present to a greater or lesser degree among other (though of course not all) Amazonian peoples. That said, I would emphasize that what follows is not an attempt to offer a general account of the distinctive features of Amazonian sociality per se, an ‘Amazonian package’ (cf. Londoño Sulkin 2017), and the list is deliberately suggestive, covering a lot of ground and thus sacrificing depth for breadth. Yet the argument is a simple one: what these diverse characteristics share is a general refusal of equivalence which emerges from a particular conception of the common. Such a refusal is not based in some essential schema or abstract mode of being, but primarily in the doubts and uncertainties that pervade assessments of the capacities or natures of others. It is the culturally sanctioned recognition of such doubt, I suggest – as opposed to its concealment or erasure – that inhibits the totalizing judgements and calculations of worth on which relations of equivalence are established.

This observation further underpins the particular kind of comparison implicit in the article as a whole. Ultimately, all ethnographic work involves comparison, because that is how we make sense of what we learn; and yet, as Peter Van der Veer aptly put it in his call for a revitalization of comparative approaches, comparison ‘should be conceived not primarily in terms of comparing societies or events, or institutional arrangements across societies, although this is important, but as a reflection on our own conceptual framework as well as on the history of interactions that have constituted our object of study’ (2016: 28). This helps to mitigate the risk that our own concepts and concerns will dominate the analysis and distort the results, given that most comparisons are inevitably enmeshed in unequal power relations and intellectual and academic hierarchies (Fox & Gingrich 2002: 8). The aim here is thus not to compare abstract ‘Western’ and ‘Amazonian’ cultural forms, on our own (asymmetrical) terms, but on the contrary to explore how the Urarina ethnography might cast new light on some of our theoretical and common-sense assumptions, including the very concepts that underlie our study of society as such.⁴ As a critical intellectual project, this means taking ‘otherness’ seriously while being careful not to exaggerate it, identifying both connections and disjunctions together, moving conceptually back and forth at multiple levels of analysis. Even if we never fully escape our ‘own’ images or concepts, such a strategy of mutual differentiation at least has the advantage of undermining their hegemony (Bird-David 1995: 303). For at its best, anthropological comparison offers us a kind of conceptual pivot that can help us to discern the most effective ways of challenging existing structures of power and authority. As David Graeber (2015: 11) points out, moreover, a particularly good strategy in this regard is to take seriously people’s scepticism as interesting in itself, finding common ground with others precisely in the recognition of common limitations. In the last analysis, we all must come to grips with what we cannot know.

Intensity

Urarina social organization – as in much of Western Amazonia and the Guianas – is strikingly fluid and amorphous, even atomistic, which accounts for much of its individualistic character (Overing 2003; Rivière 1984: 4; Thomas 1982: 1). Even where clans exist in this part of the region, they often do not function like corporate descent groups, and social life is structured in terms of the fabrication of the body, not the definition of groups or the transmission of goods (Rivière 1984: 95–6). In fact, social groups may last only as long as the individuals who comprise them. Unlike in, say,

Melanesia, men in many parts of Amazonia tend not to form a community as such, with vested interests to defend collectively, as in their joint control over women (Descola 2001: 100). Social roles – which hinge on the idea of equivalence (e.g. Doreian 1988) – are similarly subject to relatively little definition and elaboration: beyond the gender division of labour, there are limits to how far another can be expected to behave in a particular way simply because they are one's uncle or brother-in-law, for example. People tend to be defined more through their specific relationships with others; thus while roles and categories can of course be important in some contexts (marriage, say), greater emphasis tends to be placed on the relational rather than the categorical components of identity (see Minnegal & Dwyer 2017).

This social fluidity is related to the fact that people can often trace their genealogical relationship to each other in many different ways. Two of my closest Urarina friends, for example, were related to each other as classificatory brothers, as uncle and nephew, and as father-in-law/son-in-law. This follows from the quite deliberate reiteration of marriages over several generations within loosely endogamous groups, consolidating existing alliances rather than using marriage to expand them, resulting in a high density of overlapping ties and a corresponding intensity of relational possibilities. Moreover, the fact that people live in such close proximity to each other for long periods, and grow to know each other extremely vividly and intimately, further breaks down objectification and abstraction such that it becomes rather difficult to impose patterns on relationships. This, too, is a form of social intensity, one which effectively inhibits the development of roles, institutions, and statuses, which are all simply more vulnerable to personal interferences than in 'remoter' forms of interaction where there is greater anonymity (Bird-David 1994). Such intensity feeds on a reluctance to suppress relevant differences between people in order to focus on their similarities. This effectively amounts to a rejection of corporatism, and its logic of interchangeable, equivalent, or substitutable people taking on roles or positions in the firm. A 'society against the corporation', perhaps?

Homosubstitution

Should you ever need a canoe among the Urarina, but are unwilling or unable to make it yourself, everyone knows that you can purchase one with a dog (and vice versa). In 2010, at least, this was simply the going rate. Neither item is easily cashed out into a universal medium of exchange; even those Urarina who did use money couldn't really tell you how much a dog or canoe 'costs'. Exchanges more generally, where they occur, are often limited in scope in this way, and coded, meaning that only specific objects are interchangeable with each other. Unlike in other parts of the world (Melanesia again, let us say), material wealth doesn't function as a carrier of social relations, and there is nothing like pigs or yams that can be converted into general exchange values. As Philippe Descola (2001) observed, homosubstitution (or 'like-for-like') is the general rule here: that is to say, animals and material artefacts cannot be made to stand for labour or for persons. Hence there is virtually no brideprice, only brideservice, where individuals mobilize a variety of claims on the acts of others (Dean 1998), and this does not work through an idiom of property.

Predation

Amazonian peoples are often said to locate the creative power of their societies – the source of vitality and novelty, as it were – in the predatory relation with the outside.

This is expressed in hunting, warfare, and shamanism, all of which are symbolically as well as materially significant for Urarina (as for others throughout the region) and often draw on images of capture and predation. But the defining feature of predation is that it constitutes a negation of exchange, at least in the short term: it is by definition a one-way transaction. Even though ‘vengeance’ is widely offered as a motive for warfare, and may contain a meaning of repaying a debt, there is not really any deliberate exchange of lives. Instead, ‘mutual predation is actually the unintentional result of a general rejection of reciprocity’ (Fausto 2012: 175). Reciprocity, in turn, relies on a calculation of equivalent values.

Singularity

Urarina people’s attention to individual rather than collective or group identities corresponds to a pervasive sense of individual uniqueness and particularity. This respect for individual differences is often further grounded in explicit ideas of interiority, or a core inner self. Thus people often talk about the ‘heart-soul’, associated with a private, inner ‘voice’, or conscience, and as something always hidden to others (see also Course 2007: 94; Yvinec 2014: 25).⁵ ‘His heart-soul is just different’, people might say in relation to someone else’s persistently unusual behaviour. Such ideas seem widespread: thus we read of ‘radical singularism’ among the Mapuche, arising from a profound emphasis on the value and uniqueness of personal experience (González Galvez 2012: 160); or ‘the Huaorani’s great interest in, and profound respect for, individual differences’, related to the ‘social recognition of idiosyncrasies in oral expression, child socialization and productive work’ (Rival 2002: 100); or the fact that Sanema like to conclude their stories by saying, ‘I’m just like that’, thereby emphasizing their unique and individual personalities and perspectives (Penfield 2015).

Respect

For a long time, not knowing any better, I would ask my Urarina companions about the actions of others. ‘Why doesn’t José want to go with them downriver?’ ‘Why did Juana leave the party so suddenly like that?’ People would invariably reply by saying something along the lines of, ‘Oh, I have no idea. You’d have to ask them!’ Given that they almost certainly did have a pretty good idea, I wondered, what is the significance of such claims? As has been noted in parts of Oceania (see, e.g., Robbins & Rumsey 2008), several scholars have discerned among Amerindian peoples a distinctive tendency to downplay the significance of individual intentions in interpretations of actions or utterances, or to construe persons as opaque rather than legible (e.g. Course 2013; Danziger 2006; Groark 2013; Walker 2015*b*). If in Melanesia this accords with the pervasive cultural concern with concealment, the Amerindian variant might instead be interpreted in contrast to the emphasis on the legibility of the subject that James Scott (1998) has shown to be one of the main goals of state-building. Note, too, in this connection, my earlier point that ‘equality of opportunity’ stems from our sense of being willing to project ourselves psychologically into the situations of others.

Perhaps more importantly, though, this strategic illegibility has much to do with the cultivation of a particular form of respect. The Urarina often insisted on the importance of ‘mutual respect’, their term for which means literally ‘to each defend the heart-soul of the other’. Now this reference to the heart-soul – which, as I mentioned earlier, refers to the hidden ‘inner core’ of the person – is important because it links respect to the quality of concealment, and thus to a concept of dignity. The outward dignity of a

person – their composure, calmness, restraint, and so on – is effectively lost when they are inappropriately *exposed* – not only physically, but psychologically – for example, to forms of evaluation (Carter 2011: 555). The preservation of dignity, by contrast, requires maintaining a certain distance, and insisting on the intangibility and inaccessibility of the person – which is to say, their opacity. Urarina would often respond to my questions by saying, ‘Who knows why he’s like that? His way is different’. Or as the neighbouring Shuar often say, ‘We’re not all the same!’ (Natalia Buitron, personal communication, 2015). I think this is a compelling way of expressing respect for human dignity. Unlike love, where ‘coming closer’ seems to be the goal (and which must typically be expressed through visible, material signs), there is a sense of proper distance in the concept of respect, and this is probably a key part of its appeal.⁶ In immediate social environments like this, close proximity to others is a given, to the extent that people can all too easily feel like their personal boundaries are being eroded. Connecting with others is easy; differentiation, on the other hand, must be actively affirmed.

Volatility

People’s periodic opacity is significant when attributing responsibility in cases of wrongdoing. The ‘guilty mind’, or *mens rea* (the intention to commit the crime), which is central to the Western tradition of criminal law, does not appear to be especially relevant among Urarina (as indeed in many other parts of the world) – which is perhaps unsurprising if we consider that the epistemological foundation, historically speaking, for an investigation of the state of mind of the accused was precisely the belief in the moral equality of all participants in legal proceedings (Berman 1983: 182). The Urarina take this still further with their general lack of collective mechanisms for the negotiation of disputes. This results in high levels of factionalism and fissioning, or villages splintering, and so a kind of centrifugal tendency, a resistance to centralization.

Emotionally speaking, this corresponds to rapid fluctuations between love and rage, with little in between. My friend one day is my enemy the next. There is none of the impartiality – or, better, *indifference* – which lies at the heart of Western notions of justice. This somewhat dichotomous nature of much Urarina social life, these sudden emotional transitions, are again grounded in an absence of principles of equivalence, which are required if there is to be a middle ground of disputation and argument, a space where people can openly disagree but without resorting to violence. In other words, there is none of what Luc Boltanski (2012 [1990]) calls ‘disputes in justice’, where people can be compared or measured on the basis of some criterion of merit or worth. Much as love entails an absence of calculation and reciprocity, so, too, is pure hostility ‘outside equivalence’, ungoverned by calculation or proportionality.

Immanence

Urarina people tend to avoid formulating explicit rules, which require evoking categories of person and behaviour. They don’t make explicit predictions about what will happen if some behavioural expectation is infringed, and they’re reluctant to speculate about what another person might or should do in a given situation. As Elizabeth Ewart (2015) observes of the Panará, a person would be unlikely to say, ‘Wives should look after their husbands and children’, but might well say of a specific woman, ‘Suakje is beautiful. She looks after her husband and looks after her children’ (2015: 210). People don’t ‘break rules’ or violate norms of conduct *per se*, because there *are* no norms conceived as separate from the person. Instead, people might behave as animals – like a savage

jaguar, say, who doesn't know respect – and so in a sense they literally become less than human (Ewart 2015; Walker 2015*b*). The moral norm is immanent in the situation or point of view.

This relative lack of legalism means not just the absence of formal law, written statutes, courts and tribunals, or other collective mechanisms of mediation, but something even deeper, namely categorical ways of dealing with the consequences of actions. As Paul Dresch tell us, legalism is grounded in categories and makes them explicit: 'a "mother's brother" does this and a "sister's son" does that; . . . if a "free-man" should lie with a woman not his own then one thing, and if a "slave" should do so then another' (2012: 11). One category of persons, and its attendant rules, can be contrasted explicitly with others to produce arguments about proper conduct: the duties of kinsmen, say, could be set against those of neighbours. It can do this because 'law stands apart from the flux of events and personalities, suggesting an order of affairs that outlasts the moment' (Dresch 2012: 16). In other words, law and legalistic thought more generally are founded on transcendent values in terms of which conduct is judged, and thus again on a logic of equivalence and equality. People can be measurable by an equal standard only insofar as they're brought under an equal point of view.

Partiality

Like many hunting peoples, Urarina hunters are very self-deprecating when they have just returned home with a successful kill. Generally speaking, people downplay their prowess while others studiously ignore it. This prevents differences of talent from becoming socially significant, and is directly opposed to our own idea of meritocracy (see also Graeber 2011). To take a different example, offices and formal positions of authority among the Urarina were not necessarily awarded to those who displayed the best capacities for leadership – which often meant that the real authority usually did not lie with the 'official' leaders. There is a sense in which a person's capacities are unknowable in their totality, and in any case not entirely their own, for many other individuals have contributed to their development. This insistence on socializing rather than privatizing individual talent goes a long way in legitimizing expectations of sharing resources.

In sum, norms of fairness or moral desert have little purchase. I have seen little evidence of a principle of equity: that is, the idea that rewards should be proportional to merit or contribution (e.g. Morris & Leung 2000: 107). This is because equity, too, rests on a principle of equivalence according to which the contributions of people can be calculated and ranked in relation to some external standard. There is some experimental support for this claim. One of the most well-known tests of people's senses of fairness – the ultimatum game⁷ – was run among the Amazonian Machiguenga. In contrast to results from Western, industrialized contexts, where participants tend to reject offers of less than around 30 per cent, the Machiguenga were found to almost invariably accept every offer, no matter how low – leading researchers to conclude that they appeared to possess nothing like the same sense of 'fairness' that Western economists had come to expect (Henrich & Smith 2004).

Love-pity-compassion

Instead of fairness, equality, or justice, among the Urarina we find a pervasive emphasis on love, pity, and compassion: forms of emotional attunement that are so closely related to each other that I will call them (following Hollan 2012) a 'love-pity-compassion'

complex. Their common starting point is the difference, inequality, or asymmetry of persons, and a relative absence of reciprocity. Take the Urarina word for 'love', *belaiha*, which also means 'to give as a gift': that is, without an element of strategy or calculation, without expectation of an equivalent return. In a regime of love, past conflicts or judgements of worth are wilfully forgotten. There is no word meaning 'to forgive' in the Urarina language, to the best of my knowledge, but people are almost always ready to 'forget' past grievances.

Pity, too, is outside equivalence, and certainly not an emotion experienced among status equals. This can lend an element of strategy to its evocation: hence the preponderance of self-deprecating remarks (like 'Oh, poor little me!') as a way of eliciting the pity – and therefore generosity – of better-situated others (see, e.g., Bonilla 2005; Gow 2000; Surrallés 2003). Similarly, it is common to hear comments like, 'Oh, I gave him some meat because I pitied him'. This is what drives the sharing of resources, not an ideology of egalitarianism. Nor does empathy appear particularly relevant here; straightforward compassionate helping is in any case probably much more effective than empathetic distress (Bloom 2014).

Concreteness

While formal democratic principles have made inroads into everyday Urarina life, they still appear to encounter resistance. Consider, for example, the 'elections' for local leadership positions they now hold every once in a while. In accordance with the legal requirement imposed by the Peruvian government, when a position such as Lieutenant Governor becomes vacant, a ballot is held and every member is entitled to vote. The votes are duly tallied and the winning candidate is instated. In most cases I witnessed, though, there was only ever one candidate, or, if more than one, everyone present would vote for the same candidate. I eventually realized that the actual decisions about who would fill the positions were already made by the time of the elections, because for several days beforehand a consensus would be established through countless discreet face-to-face discussions. (The neighbouring Aguaruna appear to have come up with an even better solution: in one election witnessed by the anthropologist Shane Greene [2009], everyone put up their hands for every candidate on the list.)

In short, the idea of 'one person, one vote' seemed to be well understood, but politely ignored, when it came to decisions about leadership and representation. As Jorge Gasché Seuss and Napoleón Vela Mendoza (2011) have put it, democracy is active and practical rather than formal. Even the idea of representation itself sits uncomfortably for many people, insofar as it involves speaking on behalf of others – something incompatible with a far more radically democratic form of individualism based on people's radical unknowability and non-equivalence. I guess singularities can't be represented.

At issue here is a broader aversion to producing a sense of commonality through abstraction, or the production of a sense of common humanity as an abstract essence, present in each individual and in virtue of which all are equally worthy of respect. In our own institution of universal suffrage, citizens enjoy the right to be represented by virtue only of the qualities they share in common, and not those which differentiate them. For this reason, the citizen symbolizes the generality that exists in each individual who, in exercising the right to vote, is stripped of all his or her defining characteristics and associations, back to a kind of 'degree zero of sociality'. Abstraction is what drives the Western idea of political equality, which is precisely why it was once so radical

and exemplary: it emancipated the individual from all the social distinctions by which people are usually ordered and classified. At the same time, it opened up a new horizon for the collective imaginary: one of radical, immaterial equivalence between people (Rosanvallon 2013: 34). For this reason, formal democracy is ultimately still an example of government by ‘the one’, whether that one be the monarch, the state, the nation, the party, or the people. The multitude, on the other hand, cannot be sovereign: it cannot be reduced to a unity and does not submit to the rule of one.

Let me summarize my argument so far. I have proposed that some of the most distinctive features of Urarina sociality can be understood in terms of a far-reaching moral stance which is characterized by an unwillingness to produce or assert equivalence between people. This is often expressed as a general scepticism of judgements in which persons or things are compared, not just to each other, but to some third term that transcends or stands apart from them both.⁸ It plays out in terms of – among other things – social organization, characterized by intensity, fluidity, and instability; personhood, characterized by singularity and interiority; cosmology, centred on predation and other forms of non-reciprocity; an intense emotional life characterized by oscillations between love and anger; and forms of justice that emphasize specificity, respect, and partiality over abstract rules, fairness, or ‘merit’. The list could easily be expanded to include, for instance, the well-known Amerindian insistence on the differentiation and non-equivalence of twins (see Lévi-Strauss 1995); and what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014) discerns as the ‘equivocality’ at the heart of indigenous perspectivism, the incommensurability between perspectives that points more broadly to a sense of relationality grounded in difference rather than identity: the sense that ‘no point of view knows its like or equivalent’ (2014: 157–8). Yet I do not think recognition of this should preclude attention to how people think about what they have in common. Far from it: it is precisely in and through the common that non-equivalence flourishes.

Forms of the common

Let me begin with the words of one of my Urarina interlocutors, an old man I shall call Tiburcio who spoke to me once about their continuing need for shamans (or as the Urarina call them, more simply, ‘people who drink ayahuasca’):

We were created together with our land. Our Creator created our land, and also created ayahuasca, for the defence of our climate and our children. He left us ayahuasca for our defence against all kinds of illnesses, and so that those who drink it can make a bridge for the game animals to come over here. Like this, we can live well. It’s not just anything.

Tiburcio’s statement – entirely typical of what many people told me throughout my fieldwork – points to the role of shamanism in producing a complex and multifaceted common that is at once corporeal, ecological, and affective. To begin, we should note that one of the most important contributions of the so-called ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology has been its radical working-through of the key insight that other people may have radically different ways of recognizing the basis of their own commonality. In stark contrast to the classic Western emphasis on ‘culture’ or ‘mind’ as the basis of social groups, or even of species, Amazonians have been famously said to draw on ideas about the body when articulating their own sense of similarities and differences. This makes sense of the cultural emphasis on the material fabrication of the body

rather than the symbolic construction of groups, mentioned earlier, as well as an apparently widespread sense that nonhumans may be as sentient as humans, even though they're said to inhabit radically different worlds because of their nonhuman body.

My starting point for elucidating an Amazonian common is therefore the body, which is continually worked on throughout the life course by a range of different people, and is in many ways a communal project. Feeding, training, and adorning the body are what frequently turn people into kin, as well as into humans – for humanity is a highly unstable position, never taken for granted, and continually sought after through repeated acts of care for the body. Hence one's kinfolk are almost by definition more human, or more 'real people', than others. Yet there is more at stake here than simply creating a 'community of similars', because the body is thought of less as 'substance' and more as a bundle of habits, affects, and capacities (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998). Indeed, even blood is better seen as a capacity than as a substance per se (Bonelli 2014). Having a particular body means acting in particular ways, exploiting certain environments, and consuming certain foods. That is why, for example, ensuring that babies turn out fully human requires that they (or their parents) eat the right kinds of food (e.g. Vilaça 2002). It is also why in myths a man who goes to live with anteaters, say, gradually turns into an anteater, a bodily transformation always exemplified by his propensity to eat ants.

In short, the body corresponds to, and indexes, a particular ecological niche: a common environment. When it comes to those natural resources upon which life depends – game animals and fish, wild plants and the like – it is difficult, if not impossible (at least it was until recently), for individuals or groups to establish anything like exclusive rights of ownership over them. There is a sense of collective belonging to the land, and of the land as something for the benefit of everyone, despite the temporary use-rights established through cultivation. Hence Tiburcio's insistence that people were created together with the land and that, by drinking ayahuasca, shamans create a 'bridge' for animals in order to lure them from the sky to the earth so that people can eat them and live well. One of the central aims of shamanism is in fact to ensure a steady supply of the animals and other resources, such as a stable climate, on which life depends. So the ecological common is also considered to be the product of human action.⁹ Of course, the same terrain is inhabited and exploited by other species, which may have their own corporeal common, and coexisting species may be at once reliant on and threatened by each other in different ways. Yet there is also a sense of inclusivity, even in the face of mutual suspicion, not least because certain forms of communication can cut across species barriers, linking people together in shared communicative networks, such that this ecological common explicitly encompasses a sense of radical difference.

There is a crucial difference here from the traditional Western commons, though, since people often claim that all animals, and many trees and plants, have a spirit 'master' or 'owner'. Throughout much of the region, a pervasive discourse of 'owners', both human and nonhuman, might seem to imply something like a native theory of property (see, e.g., Brightman 2010; Cesarino 2010). Nevertheless, Amazonian 'ownership' relations have little to do with property as we understand it, because they are a way of conceptualizing a world of asymmetrical relations between subjects, rather than juridical relations between subjects and objects, and don't rest on anything like rights of exclusion (Fausto 2008). To the extent that ownership exists, it is always

individual, never collective or communal, suggesting an ecological common cross-cut by myriad personal bonds of protection. The idea that animals and other resources may have owners of one form or another does not prevent them from being spoken about as for the benefit of humans, nor from being central to how people speak about their world in common. In practice, the impossibility of establishing juridical ownership over wild resources like game is precisely why there is such a strong imperative to share those resources as widely as possible.

A further dimension of the common centres on that shared affective state often glossed by Amazonian peoples as ‘well-being’ or ‘living well’, another central theme in the regional literature and widely cited as a kind of ultimate goal in life, and of people’s productive efforts; as that which imbues life with purpose and direction. Among the Urarina, a dynamic state of ‘tranquillity’ (*raotojoeein*) is the precondition and end goal of meaningful human labour, which is always directed at the satisfaction of the needs and desires of loved ones. Central to many people’s sense of purpose in life, even if only momentarily achieved, tranquillity would seem to be the outcome of work conducted in the right kind of way (Walker 2015). As Tiburcio’s comment earlier suggested, tranquillity is also a goal of shamanism, and encompasses things like abundant knowledge, good health, and absence of misfortune. Most importantly of all, perhaps, it is necessarily shared: one simply cannot be tranquil on one’s own. Like language or a good idea, tranquillity as a collective resource, a source of benefit, is not depleted or divided when more people share in it, but actually enhanced.

These three dimensions of the common, which for convenience I have labelled corporeal, ecological, and affective, are ultimately just different perspectives on the same thing. After all, well-being emerges among cohabiting intimates in a context of natural abundance, and reflects a sense of the common as both product and precondition of production processes. Restoring health and fertility, conserving the climate, and replenishing game animals are all equally the focus of shamanic action. This is not to ignore the fact that shamanism also has a dark side, occasionally feeding an ethic of suspicion that can lead to hostility and fissioning, which disrupts the emergence and stability of the group. As such, we could conclude that shamanism – one of the central and defining institutions of Urarina society – is at base precisely a set of practices for the production of the common, even while it undermines the very possibility of community. In other words, shamanism destabilizes the community precisely as it produces the common.

More generally, because human labour is directed at crafting and nourishing the body (and thereby fabricating a particular perspective), and creating a particular set of feelings, or affects, what is ultimately being produced is not objects for subjects so much as social relationships, or even subjectivity itself. This is why the common is not opposed to singularity. More than merely a set of institutional property rights arrangements, we might see the common as a kind of social imaginary, though one quite unlike the nation-state as imagined community (Wagner 2012), and the opposite of *Gemeinschaft*, or the organic community. It works against commensurability, equivalence, reciprocity, and exchange; it breaks down divisions between natural and artificial, material and immaterial, production and reproduction, work and life.

Conclusion

Amazonian societies were once famously described as ‘societies against the state’ (Clastres 1989 [1974]) because they seemed to have developed ways of reining in the

power of their leaders and preventing it from evolving. It has to be said, though, that Amazonian peoples today seem, if anything, pretty enthusiastic in their dealings with the state and its representatives, who are all too easily incorporated into the webs of asymmetrical relationships that characterize life in the region. In my opinion, 'libertarian' would usefully describe the Amazonian outlook, but 'egalitarian' would be quite misleading. Where 'egalitarian' is used in a political or democratic sense, to describe an ideology in which all are equal participants or citizens, this invokes notions of equivalence and a bounded polity which are precisely opposed to Amazonian sociality. Alternatively, if by 'egalitarian' is meant an ideal distribution of resources such that each person has an equal share, this, too, rests on an economics of scarcity that is at odds with the non-competitive nature of the common. An emphasis on material equality can all too easily end up highlighting the way in which people are at odds with each other, rather than seeing themselves as members of a supportive common enterprise (Wolff 2010: 338). In Amazonia, at least, many of the most desirable goods – well-being, say, or companionship or belonging – are generally not the so-called 'rival' goods usually studied by economists, which, if possessed or enjoyed by one person, cannot be possessed or enjoyed by another. This shifts attention towards the enjoyment of what can be shared rather than privately consumed.

This logic of the common undermines the development of political or moral equality founded on the equivalence of persons. What is common is not a natural or fixed substance, but produced, open, and multifarious, largely external, grounded in the individual's material historical positioning. It is thus opposed to 'likeness', which implies definition in relation to characteristics internal to the individual. In other words, if likeness appears as the prime ingredient of unity (Benhabib 1996: 32), commonality avoids reducing heterogeneity and difference to a chain of equivalence. As such, the 'community', as we understand it, is never fully constituted – and so never becomes opposed to individual liberty. This implies a conception of persons as singularities rather than individuals, opaque and largely illegible, potentially infinite, unknowable. Yet unlike the purely spiritual or psychological distinctiveness proposed by Western cosmology (and including such theorists of singularity as Hardt and Negri), such incommensurability is fully and literally embodied.¹⁰ There is no abstract notion of common humanity here; in fact, humanity remains little more than a possibility, a potential, perhaps never fully realized – which is why it remains open to everyone, even nonhumans. The firm distinctions between subjects and objects, or between humans and nonhumans, that characterize Western property regimes are eroded when personhood rests on a concept of the common that is external, concrete, and collectively produced rather than abstract and innate. In this perspective, it is clear that personhood, property, and ontology form an inseparable whole, each implying the other.

Nowhere is this better illustrated, perhaps, than in the case of animism. Much has been made of the fact that animals and other nonhumans are fully sentient beings, according to Amazonian ontologies, with thoughts and feelings and cultures just like ours. But careful examination of the ethnography reveals that such claims are actually highly context-dependent, and perhaps more often something thought of as a possibility, rather than treated as a certainty. In other words, people just leave it open that animals might think and speak or have culture. I would argue that animism is the logical consequence of a more fundamental insistence on the radical unknowability of the individual. Whether people are talking about a human, a jaguar, or a kapok

tree, what is important to them is recognition of uncertainty and of the possibility of a deep interiority that we simply cannot judge or pronounce upon. Who knows what animals are capable of? In other words, animism is the outcome of a form of individualism predicated on singularities within the common rather than equivalent individuals within a regime of property.

Following from this, it may not be coincidental that the Western conception of equality coincided with the enclosure of the commons and the rise of private property. This is not only because private property and the law work hand in hand to produce a sense of individual subjects as formally equal. As the grounds of what we share with others – our common habitat, the land and water – has been privatized and enclosed, it is tempting to speculate that this has itself prompted an internalization and essentialization of the common, under the guise of universal humanity. In other words, if enjoyment of the common as a collectively produced, relational good implies a multiplicity of singular differences, its erosion and privatization compel people to find the source of their common being elsewhere, to posit an equivalence of essences to overcome the ever-widening gap that isolates them from each other.

The ancient Western concept of the commons is a quite simple idea that forms the basis for a kind of economics run by neither state nor market. It is also an idea that we have perhaps never needed so urgently. Around the world today we find people mobilizing around the commons framework, which is proving to be a powerful concept for connecting many disparate struggles and issues.¹¹ The attempt to recover and enlarge, in some way, the common and to thwart its capture by capital is now virtually a necessary component of any radical political project. The nature of the common is changing, however, as production increasingly takes on an immaterial form. That is to say, what is produced under the conditions of late capitalism in the West is, increasingly, ideas, knowledge, forms of communication, affects, images, and so on. Such immaterial labour thus moves out of the strictly economic domain and directly produces not just objects but social relationships and even subjectivity itself: who we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other are all created through this social, biopolitical production (Hardt & Negri 2005: 80). Yet this new form of the common, according to Hardt and Negri, brings with it a radical potential, as it increasingly exceeds the ability of capital to control it, resisting legal and economic efforts to privatize it or copyright it or bring it under public control. The common simply functions better when it is not owned or privatized. Under these conditions, the undifferentiated unity of the people is thus said already to be giving way to the plural singularities of the multitude, opening up a new terrain of struggle (Hardt & Negri 2005: 111).

In seeking to understand what these changes might mean, while enlarging our sense of political possibility, anthropology has a crucial role to play. In the words of Lévi-Strauss: ‘Anthropologists are here to witness that the manner in which we live, the values that we believe in, are not the only possible ones; that other modes of life, other value systems have permitted, and continue to permit other human communities of finding happiness’ (2011: 51; cited in Hage 2012: 288). This is the radical potential of anthropology to demonstrate other realities and, at the same time, to mount a critique of our own current reality: to teach us how to be other than what we are. This can work, in part, by showing us that we already are other than ourselves: as Ghassan Hage put it, ‘our otherness is always dwelling within us: there is always more to us than we think, so to speak’ (2012: 289). There is much common ground to be found

in the uncertainties – perhaps more so than in the certainties – that we share with others.

What Amazonian ethnography offers us here, to be clear, is not a model for a way of life, but a different perspective, one that brings into focus an encompassing and enlarged image of the common, which at the same exposes the nature of equivalence as anything but inevitable. At a time when the revolutionary democratic ideals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are floundering, and new forms of the common are beginning to flourish, embracing this logic could not only better equip us to defend this new common against new forms of enclosure, but also reorientate us to the ways in which people are incommensurable, unknowable, and illegible. This could in turn help to shape initiatives aiming at equality in practice rather than in theory, or to legitimize projects of redistribution grounded in respect rather than fairness, or to foster more personalized models of justice in which vengeance and compassion might both play a legitimate role. Valuing the individual while still managing to connect individuals as a community, or imagining a society made up of relations between very different individuals, and maintaining tolerance alongside a heterogeneous, differentiated understanding of the general good, is a challenge no modern democracy has managed to meet (Zournazi 2002: 71–2). Undoing the horizon of similarity that constitutes our conception of life in common, with its politics of representation and its ideologies of equality of opportunity, might open up all kinds of possibilities. Ethnography clearly has an important role to play in reconstructing an affirmative politics of the common. There are many ways in which equivalence can be thwarted, just as there are many ways of thinking freshly about individuality and collectivity. The basis of human similarity and difference might just be the oldest question in anthropology, and now is the time to revisit it.

NOTES

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¹ On the singularity of the subject and its intrinsic connection to relationality, see (*inter alia*) Basso (2012); Hardt & Negri (2009); Irigaray (2002). On the need to avoid reducing (sexual) difference to a neutral 'economy of the same', see Irigaray (1985).

² The expression 'individualism without individuals' implies here a moral stance emphasizing the autonomy and freedom of the individual human being but without the connotations of isolation, weakening social bonds, or withdrawal from public life that characterize some Western usages (cf. Lukes 1971: 52) and not predicated on a concept of the individual as 'a human being considered as a single member of the human kind' (Harris 1989: 600).

³ Fieldwork totalling around twenty months was conducted from 2005 to 2007, with follow-up visits of one to two months in 2012, 2013, 2017, and 2018.

⁴ It may be emphasized that comparability does not itself imply equivalence or commensurability. On the contrary, it is precisely incommensurables that are most worth comparing. Or as Viveiros de Castro put it: '[C]omparing the commensurate . . . is a task best left to accountants' (2014: 90).

⁵ The cultural recognition or elaboration of individuality, or singularity, has unfortunately received far less attention from ethnographers than the emphasis on the relational or 'dividual' constitution of persons, though these are of course not in contradiction.

⁶ Conversely, animals and moral inferiors are often characterized in terms of their 'lack of respect'. Jaguars, like the enemy Jivaro and Candoshi, are virtually defined by the fact that they 'don't know how to respect'.

The Cocama, by contrast, are seen as relatively 'good people' in virtue of the fact that 'they really know how to respect'. See also Gow (1989) on respect as a form of distance among the Piro.

⁷ The ultimatum game, widely used in experimental economics, involves a proposer who can offer a fraction of some valuable good such as money, and a responder who can either accept the offer or reject it. If they accept, both players keep their shares according to the offer; if they reject, neither player receives anything. For a critical discussion in relation to anthropology, see Chibnik (2005).

⁸ This aversion to equivalence might also usefully be understood in relation to what Maurice Bloch (2008) has termed the 'transcendental social', which consists, in the first instance, of essentialized roles and groups which exist separately from the individual who holds them. Bloch gives the example of the nation-state as an imagined community, and also of a professor who should act 'as a professor' irrespective of the kind of person she is. He then goes on to emphasize the inseparability of this transcendental social from religion and, ultimately, the state, which effectively feeds on the transcendental social to produce its own image of cosmic order. How the transcendental might be destabilized or averted is not a question he addresses, but it would seem to me to be extremely interesting and pertinent. Still, that is not the direction I want to take here.

⁹ Research demonstrates that large parts of the Amazonian landscape, far from being pristine wilderness, have actually been significantly transformed and manipulated through human activity, which has enriched soils, altered species distributions, and increased biodiversity.

¹⁰ Cf. Shildrick, who (in relation more specifically to sexual difference) proposes 'viewing all bodies not as either reducible to the same or as the absolute other, but as non-assimilable, and yet finally as undecidable' (2006: 37).

¹¹ As Ivan Illich has written:

Those who struggle to preserve the biosphere, and those who oppose a style of life characterized by a monopoly of commodities over activities, by reclaiming in bits and pieces the ability to exist outside the market's regime of scarcity, have recently begun to coalesce in a new alliance. The one value shared by all currents within this alliance is the attempt to recover and enlarge, in some way, the commons. (1982: 18).

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Égalité sans équivalence : une anthropologie du commun

Résumé

L'article explore une conception amazonienne du commun et les difficultés qu'elle pose à la pensée occidentale concernant l'individualisme et l'égalité. L'auteur suggère que plusieurs traits distinctifs de la vie sociale des Urarinas d'Amazonie peuvent être fondés sur un refus partagé des facteurs établissant des relations d'équivalence entre les personnes. Ce type de singularisme, ou « d'individualisme sans individus » résulte d'une orientation vers le commun comme ressource collective à l'opposé de la propriété, dans laquelle la subjectivité est modelée par rapport à des ressources écologiques et affectives plus larges, produites de façon continue et collectivement. Ces dernières incluent non seulement les ressources économiques partagées, par exemple la terre et le gibier, mais aussi des manières d'organiser et de produire des liens affectifs, cognitifs et linguistiques, des « communalités » de différentes sortes qui ne réduisent jamais les différences à un sujet abstrait tel que l'individu du libéralisme ou le collectif du socialisme.

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