Un/Commoning toxicity

The notion of commoning is associated with a 'social good' "to make resources administered by the state, or marketed by the private sector, the basis for new communities of solidarity of varying scales and scopes." Commoning, therefore, comes close to ideas of equal access to resources and gains connected to them. However, recent debates on late industrialism and the Anthropocene have drawn attention to the flip side of resource extraction and use. Invoking the notion of "toxic commons" global environmental historian Simone Müller refers to the contemporary moment "when our common-pool resources have become increasingly toxic and the experience of toxic exposure has become—while unequal—increasingly common" (Müller 2021, 444). While commoning goods is widely accepted, commoning toxicity appears less straight forward. On the one hand, citizens and activists affected by or fighting against slow violence exercised by toxic leaks and spills but also everyday exposure to chemicalized environments struggle to make often invisible chemical worlds and worldings visible and known in order to raise attentions to their effects. On the other hand there are multiple attempts to increase not only responsibility but also long-term liability for those who benefit from more short term profit from and with toxic substances and their residues.

In this panel we seek empirically grounded contributions addressing the tension outlined above by thinking with and through practices of un/comming toxicity. We are aiming at a joint discussion to explore the usefulness of toxic commons for ethnographic inquiries and to discuss especially its political and ethical implications.

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