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### Wagering against TINA: Nothing to lose but our...

*Apostando contra TINA: Nada que perder salvo nuestrxs*

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#### ABSTRACT

In a context dominated by TINA ("There Is No Alternative" to neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy), the notion of the wager, as conceived by Pascal and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, constitutes a potentially crucial means of re-igniting our capacities for taking action toward social and cognitive justice. This article proposes to further develop the theory and practice of wagering by (1) critically engaging with some of Santos' propositions; (2) putting him into dialogue with the work of Alain Badiou, in particular his notions of fidelity and courage; and (3) suggesting a decolonized reading of Kant's and Foucault's What is Enlightenment?.

**Keywords:** Wager, Courage, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Alain Badiou, Sapere aude.

#### RESUMEN

En un contexto global dominado por la lógica destructiva de TINA ("There Is No Alternative" al sistema capitalista y la democracia liberal), la noción de la apuesta, ideado por Pascal y Santos, tiene mucho potencial para reanimar nuestras luchas por la justicia social y cognitiva. Este artículo propone profundizar la teoría y práctica de la apuesta mediante (1) una investigación crítica de la propuesta de Santos; (2) un diálogo entre Santos y la obra de Alain Badiou, en particular sus nociones de fidelidad y coraje; y (3) una lectura descolonizada de ¿Qué es la ilustración?, de Kant y Foucault..

**Palabras clave:** apuesta, coraje, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Alain Badiou, sapere aude.

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## PROLOGUE: RANTING AGAINST TINA

Anger emerges at social regulation disguised as social emancipation, individual autonomy used to justify neoslavery servitude, and the reiterated proclamation of the impossibility of a better world to silence the idea, very genuine if diffuse, that humanity and nature both are entitled to something much better than the current status quo.  
(Santos: 2014, p. 106)

The truth is that TINA and I have never been friends. Quite the opposite. Ever since the first time I came across the mantra of "There Is No Alternative" (to free-market capitalism and liberal democracy) and its equally nauseating, post-communist offspring, the "End of History" during the course of the 1980ties, I have felt a strong, visceral rejection of everything it stands for: among others, the radical neoliberal restructuring of the world, the constant undermining of democratic practices, the blatant disregard for humans as social beings and/or the insistence that the market economy is the only system that works and is hence no longer up for questioning or debate. It goes without saying that it was particularly the people who constantly regurgitated the mantra that most made my blood boil.

Let us call them the *genocidaires* of our human capacity to dream collectively. People like former British primer minister Margaret Thatcher, former US president Ronald Reagan and former German chancellor Helmut Kohl, followed in the 1990ties and the new millenium by an always-well financed, well-spoken reserve army of riders of the apocalypse on all continents, emphatically backed by neoliberal ninjas and cultural spin doctors of the likes of Henry Kissinger, Milton Friedman or Mario Vargas Llosa. And neither should one forget the neoliberal chameleons, i.e. those who started their political careers rebelling against "the system" only to eventually renounce their "youthful radicalism" in order to be born again as staunch defenders of the status quo. Given that I grew up in Germany, the first name that comes to mind is former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer but the list is disgracefully endless.

Then there are those who (privately) continue(d) to oppose the hegemony of capitalism (and to some extent "Western Values") on ideological grounds but who simply no longer believe(d) it was possible and/or had the strength to do anything about it, in what has aptly been called "left melancholia" by (sympathetic) comrades such as Wendy Brown and Enzo Traverso. For the former, citing Walter Benjamin's text on the same theme, "[...] left melancholy is Benjamin's unambivalent epithet for the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal - even to the failure of that ideal - than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" (Brown: 1999), while the latter, referring to Benjamin, Brown and Sigmund Freud, defines it "as the result of an impossible mourning: communism is both a finished experience and an irreplaceable loss, in an age in which the end of utopias obstructs the separation from the lost beloved ideal as well as a libidinal transfer toward a new object of love". (Traverso: 2016, p. 45) A little later in the same text, Traverso goes on to argue for a potentially liberating type of melancholia, but at least throughout my first political socialization in the time immediately before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the *Zeitgeist* I experienced was one of the Left licking its wounds, wallowing in the sorrows of its historic defeat, and the Right celebrating its victory before moving on to pursue the further consolidation of their capitalist utopia of infinite growth, profits and (mindless) consumption, and the simultaneous attempt to reify the *homo economicus* as the unquestionable ontological truth of human existence.

Needless to say that the current context is not one of simply left melancholia, as there have been both a wide range of theorizations of alternatives such as E.O. Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Paul Mason's *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* or J.K. Gibson-Graham's *Take Back the Economy: An Ethical Guide for Transforming our Communities*, as well as a great number of counter-hegemonic institutional and grassroots initiatives across the globe (e.g. the "Pink Tide" in Latin America/Abya Yala, the various square movements, Black Lives Matter) that suggest that not all is lost in our struggle for social and cognitive justice. On the other hand, the dangers of (political) depression, activist suicide and giving up the struggle are equally

real and have in recent times received increased scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> And while the reasons for this are many, overwork and political infighting among them, one can presume that some of us give up (wagering on) the good fight because, in spite of all our efforts, the reality of TINA shows itself much more resilient than it deserves to be.

Returning to my personal relationship with TINA, the fact that I have lived in a TINA-centric world all my life has not only caused me innumerable epistemological and ideological nightmares but has also impacted profoundly on my relations with others. That is to say, my persistent undertaking to convince people around me that the time has come to finally put TINA to rest has generally not been received very favourably. On the contrary, one quickly experiences the dubious pleasure of being accused, by friends and foes alike, of being arrogant, intransigent and obviously too “radical”. And while I certainly take responsibility for my stubborn insistence that there is life beyond TINA, I must also admit that what feels like 24/7 (largely unsuccessful) arguing with others has gradually taken its toll, especially with regards to my waning capacity to do justice to the Beckettian “try again, fail again and fail better” as well as my dwindling readiness to listen to other people’s excuses why there is nothing we can do about the persistent existence of injustice in the world, and why it therefore, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, makes sense to keep wagering on the day we will all live the American Dream.

And it is at this point of feeling increasingly caught between fight and flight that Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Alain Badiou come in. Or more precisely, their seemingly unshakable conviction that another world is possible and that we hence urgently need to develop the type of theoretical and practical tools, “knowledges born-in-struggle” (Santos), that will encourage and enable us to overcome our “[resignation] to live in a world that nevertheless appals you”. (Badiou: 2016) Ideological differences between the two notwithstanding (e.g. Badiou’s professed universalism), on a personal level, the two men’s embodied “tragic optimism” (Santos) has been for me a source of encouragement to continue the struggle and at the same time reinforced my confidence that putting the two of them into conversation with each other could strengthen some of their arguments. Among the many ideas both of them have elaborated and resurrected, I believe that it is the notion of the wager and its consequences that presents a suitable entry point for them to combine their strengths.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is the age-old question of political subjectivation which is at stake again in today’s unacceptable times and both authors agree that for something radically new to emerge we are condemned to “[act] on the basis of limited calculations”. (Santos: 2009, p. 122) *We are hence asked to assume the precariousness of our situation and take a leap of faith in our individual and collective capacities to confront and go beyond TINA. Badiou and Santos are convinced we can do it. It is now time we convince (and wager on) ourselves. This paper is my first attempt to wager on our wager.*

### **ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE: THE WAGER IN THE WORK OF BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS**

The two main publications in which the wager appears in the oeuvre of Santos are his 2008 (Portuguese)/2009 (English) article “Is there a Non-Occidental West?” and his 2014 book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, in which the original English text figures as a chapter complemented by further elaborations on the wager as part of the preface, the “Manifesto for Good Living/Buen Vivir” and the book’s introduction.

For the purpose of this paper, I have decided not to engage in a detailed critique of Santos’ argument and conceptualization of the wager, but rather to focus on a number of key elements proposed by the author that

1 See, for example, Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (2009) & *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (2014), Rezi Malzahm, *dabei geblieben* (2015) and Timo Luhmann, *Politisch aktiv sein und bleiben* (2019).

2 Apart from Santos and Badiou, there have been a number of other intellectual-activists who have theorized Pascal’s wager since the middle of the past century, in particular Lucien Goldmann (1913-1970) and Daniel Bensaïd (1946-2010), as well as a number of crucial secondary readings of them by Michael Löwy and Enzo Traverso.

have been intellectually and emotionally stimulating, and mobilizing for me as a political activist coming from a post-colonial background. Furthermore, I will present a number of doubts and differences of perspective that have emerged as a result of my repeated reading of the texts. The two main questions I will attempt to answer are the following: a) What is it in Santos' use of the wager that enthused me both theoretically and non-cognitively? and b) What are the passages in the texts that I feel merit expansion and deepening?

Before presenting my response(s), however, a brief summary of Santos' main argument is needed. In "Is there a Non-Occidental West?" he starts off by introducing the concept of the wager, originally developed by French theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), as one of three conceptions (the other being Lucian of Samosata's "Philosophy for Sale" and Nicholas of Cusa's "Learned Ignorance") historically "discarded, marginalized, or ignored because they did not fit the political objectives of capitalism and colonialism that act as a foundation for the construction of the uniqueness and superiority of Western modernity". (Santos: 2014, p. 99) Santos then suggests to resurrect these "three eccentric figures" and some of their key works as a possible opening for thinking a non-Occidental West as part of a larger epistemic effort to promote an "Epistemologies of the South" (EoS) with the potential to "guide us in the construction of a noncapitalist, noncolonialist, intercultural dialogue". (Ibid.)

Regarding the key aspects of Santos' adaptation of Pascal's wager, the author affirms that since we live in uncertain times with "no necessity or determinism in history, there is no rational way of knowing for sure if another world is possible [...]" (Ibid., p. 112), leading to the question "what reasons could lead us to fight for such a possibility if the risks are certain and the gains so uncertain?" (Ibid.) Santos' proposition for this dilemma is a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the wager, which he defines as:

[...] the metaphor for the precarious yet minimally credible construction of the possibility of a better world [...]. It is the metaphor for social transformation in a world in which negative reasons and visions (what is rejected) are far more convincing than positive ones (identifying what we want and how to get there). (Ibid.)

Santos goes on by giving concrete shape to how a contemporary wager might look like, emphasizing the similarities with Pascal's original notion (e.g. the limits of rationality, the precariousness of calculations, and the awareness of risks) but suggesting the following crucial changes:

1. today's "wagerer is the excluded, discriminated against, in a word, oppressed class or social group and its allies" (Ibid., p. 113);
2. "the possibility or impossibility of a better world depends on the wager and the actions resulting therefrom" (Ibid.);
3. the risks involved in wagering on a better world are twofold: "risks deriving from the struggle against oppression and risks deriving from the fact that another and better world is, after all, not possible" (Ibid.);
4. the multiple risks one runs create a scenario, in which there are "many reasons to hesitate and not to risk everything [...which consequently demands that] to become convincing, they must be the object of argumentation and persuasion [...]" (Ibid.), and
5. the "radical uncertainty about a better future and the risks involved in fighting for it result in privileging actions focused on the [...] concrete improvement in the everyday and the signals they give of far larger possibilities" (Ibid., p. 114), what he calls *actio in proximis* and *actio in distans*, or the everyday and utopia together.

Santos concludes by affirming that "[u]ntil we confront the uncertainties and perplexities of our time, we are condemned to neo-isms and post-isms, that is to say, interpretations of the present that only have a past" (Ibid.) and that the wager and other marginalized traditions, both in the West and beyond, while not "bring[ing] about a kind of social emancipation [...]" what comes forth is simply reasonableness and the will to fight for a

better world and a more just society, a set of ways of knowing and precarious calculations, animated by ethical exigencies and vital necessities". (Ibid., p. 115)

Moving on to what being interpellated by Santos' conception of the wager has meant for me as a member of various social struggles, I shall return to the two questions posed above. Theoretically and non-cognitively, my first response was predominantly the latter. In fact, the strongest emotion I felt when I first read the text was an immense, visceral sense of joy and an immediate re-charge of my activist batteries, which were running quite low at the time. The next feeling, or rather an attitude, that emerged was a renewed conviction that our struggles for a better world and my own involvement in it, are indeed worth continuing. Finally, the combination of joy and conviction instilled in me a new sense of hope that not only is it worth struggling for what one believes in, even if the odds are against you, but also that if only enough of us can persuade ourselves that it makes sense wagering on a more just world, then the chances that we will eventually succeed are indeed quite favourable. In other words, I quickly began making sense of my strong emotions by putting them into a larger, theoretical framework of the need for political subjectivation in an overall context still largely dominated by the logic of TINA, and the seemingly widespread doubts amongst individual activists and social movements that another world is possible.

Concerning the passages in the texts that I feel are in need of critique and/or expansion, three main elements come to mind. The first is related to the question who wagers and Santos' strong insistence that it is the oppressed,

since the possibility of a better world occurs in this world, [and] only those with reasons to reject the status quo of the present world will wager on this possibility [whereas] the oppressors tend to experience the world in which they live as the best possible world. The same is true for all those who, not being directly oppressors, benefit from oppressive practices. As far as they are concerned, it is rational to wager on the impossibility of a better world. (Ibid., p. 113)

In fact, I argue that it might be precisely the opposite. That is to say, given the constant struggle for survival of the majority of the world's population, I would suggest that fighting to see another day and acting *in proximis* (with or without the belief that a radically different world is possible) is something that millions of people are forced to do every day of their lives, and as a result one could speak of their wagering as being an ontological necessity rather than a choice one makes based on precarious calculations of one's possible success. And while clearly even those who are forced to wager on their survival can potentially decide not to do so, the result of not wagering is already decided in advance, i.e. not wagering on their survival will simply increase the risk of dying (unless, of course, they decide to wager on strengthening the status quo). Therefore, I tentatively propose that concerning the relationship between the wager and the world's oppressed, the main function of the former might in fact be to support those on the verge of giving up wagering on their survival to continue to do so.

The oppressor and those who benefit from oppressive practices, on the other hand, are those for whom wagering on a different world that would threaten their privileges is precisely a choice to make, in which the latter is not based on ontological necessity but runs the risk of having negative ontological consequences that are likely to produce the type of hesitation and resistance that the oppressed can generally not afford. In other words, I agree with Santos that for the oppressors it is more rational to wager on the impossibility of a better world, but it is precisely the rationality of the decision which is at stake when wagering, and in line with Santos' affirmation that "the reasons for the wager on social emancipation are not transparent" (Ibid.) and what is needed is therefore a "wager's pedagogy" providing convincing reasons that are the "object of argumentation and persuasion rather than the wager's demonstrative rationality" (Ibid.), I argue that those who need to be convinced are clearly those who have something to lose as a result of wagering (the oppressors) as opposed to those who, whether convinced or not, can only ever decide not to wager since wagering on their survival is

the default mode of their individual and collective existences (the oppressed)<sup>3</sup>. Needless to say, I am not arguing in favour of a simple binary of who should or should not be wagering, and neither do I intend to minimize the agency of the oppressed by over-ontologizing the choices they can make. What I am convinced of, however, is that at some stage in our struggle we will have to wager on the possibility of the oppressors giving up their privileges and join the ranks of those who want to create a better world for everyone. Nonetheless, given that this wager is not likely to emerge spontaneously, some of us will have to do the epistemic labour to put the decision to wager before the oppressors. A question that hence deserves to be asked is who will be those who support others (whether oppressor or oppressed) to wager, which is in fact the second element of Santos' text, which I believe merits further thoughts.

One possible answer is given by Santos himself in the original Portuguese version of "Is there a Non-Westernist West?", which is curiously absent from the English text. At the very end of the article, Santos asks the following two questions: "So what are the institutions of learned ignorance, the ecology of knowledges and the wager?" and "who are the suitable political forces that can promote the wager in articulation with learned ignorance and the ecology of knowledges?" His response is tentative. Regarding the former, he says:

Based on the preceding analysis, it becomes evident that there are no specific institutions where these can be exercised independent of the social practices that mobilize them. Instead there are learned ignorant, gnoseo-ecological and wagering contexts. This does not mean, however, that those institutions that were shaped by orthopaedic thinking and lazy reason - universities, research centres - are condemned to be hostage to them. (Santos: 2008, p. 40)

For me, the most stimulating invitation here is to envision such a "wagering context" in practice. How does it look like? How does it feel like? What are the rituals involved? What is the role of democracy in it? What is the relationship between the context and the time of wagering?<sup>4</sup> What seems evident to me is that, given the fact that wagering is a concrete yet extremely delicate action in time and space, a wagering context will necessarily have to provide the appropriate physical and emotional safe/robust spaces as well as take into consideration the appropriate timing of the act of wagering, so that people can be encouraged and encourage each other to make the decision to wager in an environment that makes this decision more of a fragile pleasure rather than a reluctant duty. Regarding the second question, Santos proposes:

Certainly they will be very different from those who have been promoting orthopaedic and lazy conceptions of social emancipation. They will surely be organizations that are learned ignorant, politically ecological and decidedly wagering on the emancipatory potentialities of the everyday as *actio in proximis*. (Santos: 2008, p. 41)

That is to say, what is clear for Santos is that those who support the promotion of the wager cannot be the same people and institutions who up to now promoted the epistemological and socio-political status quo. On the other hand, given the urgency of expanding our struggles in the current scenario, the rather vague identification of "organizations that are learned ignorant, politically ecological and decisively wagering" seems to me an overly modest proposal. In response, I would like to put forward two concrete figures that I believe could be well-suited to play the role of the "encouragers": 1.) The rearguard intellectual and 2.) The eternal wagerer. The former is a notion conceptualized by Santos himself, and refers to "those trained in academic

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3 Santos' concept of the "abyssal line" might be useful here. According to Santos, "abyssal lines [are] drawn by the dominant abyssal thinking of our time through which both human and non-human realities existing on the other side of the line are made invisible or even actively produced as non-existent" (Ibid., p. 106). From the perspective of the wager, I argue that the type of wager one makes as well as the process of taking the decision to wager depends on which side of the abyssal line one exists.

4 "Time" is understood here as "strategic time" in the sense of the ancient Greek *kairos*: "opportune or adequate time, the right moment, when special events take place" (Antentas: 2016, p. 75)

knowledges but solidarily involved with the social actors, their task is to retrain themselves in such a way as to be able constantly to translate academic knowledge into nonacademic knowledge, and vice versa [...]" (Santos: 2014, p. 360) While any wager on the figure of the intellectual always runs the risk of reproducing the age-old, highly skewed division of intellectual and manual labour, with the former historically attaining much higher status, the notion of an intellectual rearguard who is curious, open to be surprised, to learn from others and to reflect on what was collectively learned in order to mediate and translate between academic and nonacademic knowledges seems like someone equipped with the knowledge and the sensitivity to support acts of wagering. The eternal wagerer, on the other hand, is the incorrigible wagerer who has spent her entire life wagering individually and collectively, *in proximis* and *in distans*, in good times and in bad times, against and beyond all odds. He is the ultimate encourager because she has weathered all storms and not given up after countless bitter defeats. On the contrary, she still wagers because tomorrow is another day, and so is the day after and as a result he has the precisely the kind of moral authority that allows her to engage in acts of truth-telling (in the sense of *parrhesia*, as described by Foucault in his *The Courage to Truth*) with those in the process of deciding to wager or not.<sup>5</sup> In short, undoubtedly, those who ask other people to wager must be wagerers themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the figure of the eternal wagerer brings me to the third element that deserves further thought, namely the fact that wagering does not happen just once but requires constant repetitions in the form of affirmative decisions to keep wagering. As a matter fact, there is just one reference on this theme by Santos himself. In the preface of his book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, he states:

To resist against closure, the wager on the new has to be followed by the wager on nonclosure, on the Not Yet. The second wager requires that the analysis always be as open and incomplete as what is being analyzed. It goes along with the ongoing processes in analytical real time, so to speak. What is being analyzed today may no longer exist tomorrow. (Santos: 2014, p. 32)

This, if read on its own, rather cryptic passage needs to be embedded as part of Santos' effort to give thought to what he calls the difficulty of "analyz[ing] new or innovative social, political, and cultural processes". (Ibid.) He then goes on to suggest that "the political choice to consider such processes as new rather than as extensions of old processes [are ultimately based on] a wager, an act of will and imagination, rather than an act of speculative reason". (Ibid.) However, shortly after Santos insists that even "a successful wager on novelty does not imply the sustainability of successful novelty. In other words, an unequivocally new or novel process may fail precisely on account of its being new." What is needed therefore, he reminds us, is to distinguish between "waging on the new" and "waging on nonclosure". Unfortunately, Santos himself has not yet further developed what might be the precise differences between the two in terms of the act of wagering.

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5 I propose that one element of this truth-telling needs to be the formulating of what Santos calls "strong questions", defined as questions that "address not only our specific options for individual and collective life but also the societal and epistemological paradigm that has shaped the current horizon of possibilities within which we fashion our options, the horizon within which certain options are possible while others are excluded or even unimaginable". (Ibid., p. 20)

6 A counter-hegemonic reading of a concept from psychoanalysis may further clarify the figure of the eternal wagerer: the subject supposed to believe. In "The Interpassive Subject", Slavoj Žižek builds on the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his concept of "the subject supposed to know". What is the "subject supposed to know"? "When the analysand enters into a transference relationship with the analyst, [having] absolute certainty that the analyst knows his secret" (Žižek) What is the "subject supposed to believe"? "The profound need to find another subject who would believe in his or her place [...] It is the logic of "subject supposed to believe" that is effectively "conservative" in its reliance upon the structure of belief that must not be called into question by the subject ("whatever you think you know, retain your belief, act as if you believe.')." (Žižek) Contrary to Žižek's rather cynical definition of the "subject supposed to believe", I would argue that from within the logic of the wager, we need to identify precisely those people who have believed and wagered on the (precarious) possibilities of radical social change all their lives, and who at least initially can support us to believe in this possibility ourselves by believing through them until we ourselves have enough affective and material evidence to serve as "true believers" for others. (Žižek: 1998)

Consequently, I propose that it is urgent that we develop a theoretical category that allows for the understanding of multiple wagers in time, with different decisions and risks at stake. In fact, one such possible category has already been developed by Alain Badiou: the notion of fidelity.

### **BEING FAITHFUL TO THE WAGER: ALAIN BADIOU, FIDELITY & COURAGE**

It is with regards to the question what happens after the original wager where I suggest that the work of Alain Badiou might be of use, and in particular his notion of fidelity. Yet, before engaging in more detail with this concept, a brief, simplified description of some of his other key concepts is needed, starting with one of the key philosophical questions he investigates: "How, in political terms, can we move from non-necessity to possibility?" (Badiou: 2010) Badiou's emphatic answer is what he calls an "event". Concretely, the fundamental distinction that Badiou theorizes is that between being and event. Of the numerous definitions that Badiou himself provides of the difference between the two, the following might be the most relevant to our discussion:

It is necessary both to think the long-term stability of oppressive regimes, and that which cuts into them, that which leads to the possibility of different forms of practice and thoughts. This can be referred to as: being and event. (Badiou: 2006)

In other words, Badiou distinguishes between "to be ('being')" and "to happen ('event')", with the latter, the event, defined as an opening of "a new situation, a new possibility [...]", and "something [that is] happening but [whose] consequences [are] incalculable". Regardless of the precise nature of the event, generically speaking, Badiou affirms that every veritable event produces something new, which he calls a "truth (procedure)". A "truth" is "an ongoing organization [...] of the consequences of an event" (Badiou: 2010), and "the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity produces." (Badiou: 2001a) Badiou calls "the bearer of a fidelity" a "Subject", "which in taking a wager on the event develops ways of maintaining a fidelity to it" (Badiou: 2006), thereby becoming "a militant of this truth". (Badiou: 2010)

Significantly, apart from the concepts just outlined, the notion of the wager is also used by Badiou. Concretely, he proposes a strong correlation between the wager and subjectivation:

*A subject is, to begin with, what fixes an undecidable event, because he takes the chance of deciding it...Such a subject is constituted by an utterance in the form of a wager. This utterance is as follows: This has taken place, which I can neither calculate, nor demonstrate, but to which I shall be faithful. (Badiou: 2001b, p. 250)*

Two elements are worth mentioning in this passage: i) According to Badiou, a subject constitutes itself by deciding to wager on something that happened to him or her, even though in the moment of making the initial decision to wager, the event does not yet provide the necessary "facts" that would allow him/her to decide based on reasonable certainty, and ii) the constitution of a subject is the result of a discursive act: I accept what happened to me as something to which I will now build a relationship through repeated acts of fidelity.

That is to say, Badiou's subject is nothing but "consciousness in its purest forms: decision, action, and fidelity". (Hallward: 2003, p.12) And it is this three-some that reconnects us to Santos' notion of the wager and the question what happens once the original wager has been made. One of the possible answers, I argue, lies in the construction of individual and collective fidelity to this original wager. In order for this fidelity to be constructed, however, what is needed is that those who wager experience this wager as an event, in the sense given to it by Badiou. That is to say, not only do we need, in line with Santos, to create a wagering context, in which the decision to wager can be taken, encouraged by people and institutions that support the potential wagerer, but the wager must also be experienced by the first-time wagerer as something that truly happened



to them, i.e. the wagerer needs to experience the event as a new truth around which to build her life through the future creation of continuous actions in proximis.

In this regard, the first two big questions we have to ask is what is the name of the truth that will carry a political subject to continue his struggle and what is the concrete utterance that moves us to experience ourselves as subjects of a process of social transformation? Next, once the naming of a truth has been carried out, we immediately have a new sequence with a new question that the wagerer will henceforth have to ask herself repeatedly: to continue or not to continue. And it is at this moment that the issue of fidelity comes in.

It is not a matter then of desperately awaiting a miraculous event but rather of following through to the very end, [...] and of being as prepared as possible to take in subjectively what will inevitably come about [...] To be prepared for an event means being subjectively disposed to recognize new possibilities (Badiou: 2001a).

In other words: fidelity means being prepared to recognize, and I would add, *create* new possibilities that keep constructing the truth of the event. This process, however, is by no means seamless. On the contrary, according to Badiou there is likely to emerge an “ontological clash between post-evental fidelity and the normal pace of things”. (Badiou: 2001a) Some of the key questions for fidelity we hence have to ask are how much longer can I/we be faithful to that what I/we have decided to wager on but also “how do we identify and resist the various forms of corruption or exhaustion that can beset a fidelity to truth?” (Badiou: 2001a) The answer to the first question will heavily depend on the type of answer we find for the second and we will therefore have to be continuously vigilant towards those aspects of our struggles that tempt us to wager on the rejuvenation of the status quo. In short, fidelity “is never inevitable or necessary” (Badiou: 2001a) and what is hence required from within the EoS is the creation of an ecology of post-abysal fidelities<sup>7</sup>, i.e. the development of different types of fidelity capable of responding both to certain kinds of corruption (e.g. the invitation to take on a leadership role in a particular social movement or government structure) as well as to certain types of wagers that need to be exercised after the original wager against TINA and for global social and cognitive justice has been made.

Finally, the construction of fidelity is both an external and an internal process. That is, while on the one hand fidelity is the concrete attempt to create the material reality for a new truth to emerge, on the other hand fidelity also contains an affective dimension. For Badiou, two of the key affects *fundamental in the construction of fidelity are anxiety and courage*. In concrete terms, “anxiety is associated with the instability of an event and courage with both the strength to endure this anxiety as well as the ability to respond to this upsetting affect in ways that entail faithfully tarrying with the evental cause of anxiety”. (Johnston: 2008, p. 128) In fact, “Badiou characterizes courage as a putting-to-work of anxiety” (*Ibid.*), thereby suggesting that the two affects mutually constitute each other, with anxiety producing the type of hesitation to wager and/or be faithful to a truth that only courage can overcome<sup>8</sup>.

In summary, though more work needs to be done in identifying and developing those elements in the work of Santos and Badiou that might enable a process of cross-fertilization, I believe that the arguments just presented in relation to Badiou’s notions of fidelity and courage and how they may strengthen Santos’ concept of the wager allow us to affirm that the two indeed have something to say to each other. In fact, I argue that

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7 In line with Santos’ concept of the “abyssal line”, I propose that those wagers that support the hegemonic status quo be considered as “abyssal wagers” whereas those decisions that affirm a commitment to the construction of non-capitalist, non-patriarchal and non-colonial futures should be considered “post-abysal wagers”. Consequently, it makes sense to also conceive of “abyssal fidelities” and “post-abysal fidelities”.

8 It is important to stress that the type of courage Badiou and like-minded colleagues such as Frank Ruda theorize is not the kind of “masculine” courage we have come to associate with rather patriarchal figures such as the “hero” or the soldier. In fact, Ruda specifically cites the work of Wendy Brown and what she calls “post-masculine” courage (Ruda: 2017)

the possibilities for Santos' wager on global social and cognitive justice will improve to the extent that the adherents of the EoS are determined enough to create the necessary approaches that can sustain such wager(s) in time and space. Our motto must hence be: Dare to create!

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: COURAGE IS A VERB, DECOLONIZING SAPERE AUDE**

*For some people there comes a daylight  
when they are obliged to say either Yes  
or No. It is immediately clear who has  
the Yes ready within, and saying it goes  
far beyond to honour and conviction.  
Refusing, the other has no regrets. If asked again,  
he would still say no. And yet he is beset  
by that no – though right – throughout his life.  
(Cavafy: 2015, p. 68)*

I would like to conclude this paper by introducing three more philosophers into the discussion about the wager and the ongoing struggle to overcome TINA: Immanuel Kant, Diogenes the Cynic, and the reading of (elements of) their work by Michel Foucault. Starting with Kant, his 1784 *Was ist Aufklärung?*, in which he argues for the free and autonomous exercise of one's rational faculties epitomized by the motto of the enlightenment, "Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!" (Kant: 2004, p. 5), continues to generate debate to this day, including from Badiou and Santos. In fact, both of them have repeatedly critiqued Kant, the former, among other things, in relation to him being "the thinker of stifling 'limits, rights and unknowables'" (Hallward: 2003) and the latter when naming him as one of the key Enlightenment thinkers who contributed to "a single conception of knowing and of social rationality that demands that everything that is not identical to this conception be sacrificed". (Santos: 2018, p. 29)

From the perspective of the contemporary importance of the wager, however, it may be a passage in Foucault's version of *What is Enlightenment?*, that is of particular relevance, namely:

Significantly, Kant says that this Enlightenment has a *Wahlspruch*: [...] a motto, an instruction that one gives oneself and proposes to others. What, then, is this instruction? *Aude sapere*: 'dare to know,' 'have the courage, the audacity, to know'. (Foucault: 1984, p. 34)

Two elements are crucial in this short paragraph:

1. Foucault's conceptualization of the German *Wahlspruch* as a maxim that one gives oneself and proposes to others. Among the many possible readings, the one that appears of potential value for our discussion is the fact that the *Wahlspruch* prescribes both an action to oneself as well as the responsibility to go beyond an individual process of wagering by inviting other people to engage in a similar process in order to then collectively engage in societal transformation. This responsibility to share one's convictions with others dialogues well with what First Nation scholar-activist Leanne Simpson calls "building a community around an idea or seed":

And I think we all have that responsibility to find those seeds, to plant those seeds, to give birth to these new ideas. Because people think up an idea but then don't articulate it, or don't tell anybody about it, and don't build a community around it, and don't do it. (Klein: 2013)

In other words, wagering must not endure in isolation but necessarily involves the (wagering on the) creation of a community of wagerers, which in turn could be one possible way of envisioning and putting into

practice Santos' as of yet underdeveloped call for a "context of wagering".

2. Foucault's emphasis on Kant's proposed *Wahlspruch* for the Enlightenment, *Aude sapere*, translated by him as "dare to know", and translated by Kant himself as "Have the courage to use your own capacity to reason". Here, we have a number of possible entry points, particularly through the lens of a deepening of the notion of courage as a key aspect of any wagering process: a) The relationship established by Kant between courage and knowing, the fact that knowing is always an act of courage and that in situations of generalized obedience it takes courage to use one's own reasoning capacities, and to know differently; b) a non-eurocentric, counter-hegemonic use of the *Wahlspruch* from within the logic of the EoS: in today's times of a crisis of Western, eurocentric thinking and knowing, it takes an act of courage to know beyond the limits of what the dominant mode of thinking permits; c) a decolonized reading of the Latin verb *sapere*, translated as part of the Enlightenment as "to know (rationally)", whereas the etymological roots of the word are much more closely related to embodied and affective ways of knowing in line with what Orlando Fals Borda has called *sentipensar* (a neologism composed of the Spanish verbs *sentir* and *pensar*, meaning feeling and thinking). Literally, *sapere* refers to the act of tasting and smelling something, i.e. to experience and know something through the senses, with no direct connection whatsoever to knowing rationally; and d) a return to the original semantic context, in which *sapere aude* was embedded, namely the following sentence attributed to Roman poet Horace *Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet; sapere aude, incipe*. The sentence translates as "S/he who has begun is half done, dare to know, (dare to) begin". In connection to the wager, the act of re-embedding *sapere aude* thereby allows us to make a crucial relation between knowing and taking action through the beginning of something as-of-yet unknown or unpredictable, i.e. through the opening up of new, precarious possibilities through a double act of couraging, that is of wagering: "dare to know, (dare to) begin", make a decision to start wagering. What is needed, hence, is to complement a decolonized *sapere aude* with a second *Wahlspruch*, *agere aude* ("dare to act"), that invites us not only to know in new ways and to create a community around these new ways of knowing, but that also encourages us to dare to act upon our new knowledge.

It is this combination of *sapere aude* and *agere aude*, which, in turn, invites Diogenes the Cynic onto the scene. Once again, it is Foucault who is of particular value. In *The Courage of Truth* he cites the example of Diogenes (404-323 BC) as someone who truly embodied this courage of knowing *and* acting as a way of living, as a permanently lived manifestation of the "scandal of truth". (Foucault: 2012, p. 229) Besides, Foucault highlights the importance of Diogenes' efforts to develop the type of perseverance and courage necessary to accept and deal with the risks this way of living entails (Ibid., 272-274 & 303). In short, I suggest that the example of Diogenes allows us to expand on our understanding of the role of courage in the sequence of wagers (the wager on the new & the wager on non-closure) that we will have to faithfully create in order for our actions *in proximis* to radicalise in a way that our *dreams in distans* can begin to be tasted. That is, what is formally required are two separate sequences of courage: one leading up to the point where the decision to wager is finally made, and the second as a repeated act of couraging after the wager, i.e. in the process of being faithful to what one is wagering on. As a result, even a decolonized *sapere aude* combined with *agere aude* is insufficient without a third and final *Wahlspruch*, *audere aude* ("dare to dare"), the constant harnessing of our individual and collective capacities to (continuously) courage. Courage hence transforms itself from a noun to a verb.

In conclusion, in times in which "a sense of exhaustion haunts the Western, eurocentric critical tradition [...]", (Santos: 2014, p. 19) the moment has come to develop our capacities to speak, wager on and live the "courage of truth". A truth that includes swallowing such bitter pills as the fact that we increasingly "know everything, but cannot do anything" (Garcés: 2018, p. 9) but also that many of us have comfortably self-exiled in our identity as interpassive subjects, outsourcing our much-needed personal involvement in political struggle to others. On the other hand, we are well-advised to occasionally allow ourselves to *sapere* those happy pills of history that remind us that "another world is possible" and that the historic defeats of the Left "[...] possessed a great and glorious taste [that] compelled admiration, inspired courage, and reinforced

loyalty". (Traverso: 2016, p. 50) Admiration for whom? For those who wagered. Inspired courage for what? To wager again and again. Loyalty to what? To our dreams *in proximis* and *in distans* of one day enjoying our lives in times of global social and cognitive justice.

In short, today more than ever we need to have the courage to start "going where the fires are - either where they need putting out because there are fires that threaten to burn us down, or where they need stoking because there are fires we need to ignite sometimes". (Littler: 2018, p. 23) Perhaps even more importantly, we need to have the courage to start dancing "to a tune for which no music has been invented yet", (Couto: 2012, p. 221) i.e. whether *actio in proximis* or *actio in distans*, just like Santos and Badiou we need to wager on the wager:

*Sapere aude, incipe!*  
*Agere aude, incipe!*  
*Audere aude, incipe!*

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## **BIODATA**

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