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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Urban commons from an anti-capitalist approach

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ABSTRACT: Many of the contemporary debates on urban commons lack an anti-capitalist approach. In addition, a number of misunderstandings regarding the common wealth, the city, the state, and the public sphere do not help to clarify the meaning of the commons. As a response to these problems, I first devise two useful concepts that stem from Marx's original insights: primary and extended commons. Secondly, I critically examine the institutionalist views on urban commons due to their limitations in advancing anti-capitalist perspectives while also identifying some problems with the Marxist accounts. The different expressions of cooperative housing and squatting serve to illustrate how anti-capitalist urban commons are actually highly developed, despite significant restrictions that are also examined here. Hence, I argue that both the analysis and politics of urban commoning should focus on the joint contentious, cooperative, and democratic practices of the global working class when they deal with essential reproductive work and means of production which are widely independent from state rule and exploitative capitalist relations.

KEYWORDS: Anti-capitalism, global working class, primary and extended commons, squatting, urban commons

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1. Introduction

As Federici (2012, 138) observed, reclaiming the commons has appeared as 'a ground of convergence among anarchists, Marxists/socialists, ecologists, and eco-feminists' since, at least, the 1994 Zapatista uprising. It is then worth asking, what are the theoretical and political bases of this convergence? I assume here that an anti-capitalist approach to the commons may support such an endeavour. Hence, we need to clarify the notion of the commons and its specific anti-capitalist features, which is the main aim of this article. In particular, I will focus on the specific domain of 'urban commons' and will refer to housing cooperatives and squats as key heuristic examples. The nature of this article is theoretical, but its purpose is to respond to the practical challenges faced by anti-capitalist social movements, organisations, and grassroots initiatives when reclaiming urban commons becomes a crucial component of their politics.

The first issue at stake is that the terms used by scholars concerning the commons are manifold. Some recover and update the meaning assigned by Marx and others to pre-capitalist commons (Caffentzis and Federici 2014; Federici 2012; Linebaugh 2008). In a similar tradition, some prefer to focus on the so-called processes of 'commoning' (De Angelis 2019; Stavrides 2016) or on general principles such as 'the common' (Dardot and Laval 2019) or 'the commonwealth' (Hardt and Negri 2009). Other contributors less inclined to adopt anti-capitalist critiques focus on more specific 'common pool resources' (Ostrom 1990) or more widespread forms of contemporary commons such as the so-called 'digital' ones (Bauwens et al. 2019; Bollier and Helfrich 2012). In urban studies, a noticeable knowledge gap is that scholars hardly make explicit which of the above notions they agree with when defining urban commons while usually taking a vague stance about some of them altogether (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014; Eidelman and Safransky 2020; Özkan and Baykal 2020). When they do attempt the effort (Dellenbaugh et al. 2015; Castro-Coma and Martí-Costa 2016; Huron 2018; Kioupkiolis 2018), it is mainly the contrast between Marxist and institutionalist approaches that is remarked upon, as I will review later.

The second controversy revolves around the view of the commons as a catch-all remedy for the faults of present-day capitalism. This means that many academic and political discourses emphasising the commons appraise self-organised forms of society as entailing immense revolutionary powers for overthrowing the dominance of capitalism and states alike. In short, by recalling Polanyi's (1944) terminology, almost everything which is done in the realm of social 'reciprocity' (all the social relations among family members, friends, and neighbours, even between distant citizens, foreigners, and other social categories) would hold the potential to overcome—or at least to balance—the power of markets (i.e., the production and exchange based on competition and private gains) and states (i.e., the central redistribution of resources and the regulation of both markets and civil society). I disagree with that view because, first, not everything that happens in the social realm is freely cooperative or produces egalitarian effects—especially because patriarchal, ethnic, and class divides regularly play out against that possibility. Moreover, the rule of capital has been so pervasive, to say nothing of the more than four decades worth of economic globalisation and neoliberal policies, that the social self-management implicit in the commons may also serve as inoffensive, subordinated, and complementary 'alternatives' to fuel capitalism with creativity for new businesses and cheap labour or as a mere alleviation of the overburdened state provision (Dardot and Laval 2019).

In the following pages I elaborate on the main tenets of an anti-capitalist approach to the urban commons. In so doing, I depart from the assumption that this is essentially rooted in the rich socialist, anarchist, and communist traditions of politics, although the role of state and property relations is very much disputed among them. This framework encourages distance from categories that are often associated with the commons but are, nonetheless, embedded in a liberal approach and deviate from the anti-capitalist driver of the commons in which I am interested. In particular, the notion of 'common good' is usually invoked in

order to pacify and reconcile opposed interests and groups but is rarely defined according to the subaltern ones. Concerning cities, urban life and public spaces are often superficially labelled as common features too, regardless of the uneven social geography that determines who shapes, produces, uses, and benefits from them (Chatterton 2010).

The revival of the commons has been triggered by intense and rapid processes of privatisation and the commodification of welfare services, housing, green areas, infrastructure, water and energy supplies, even information, knowledge, and nature at large, not to mention urban gentrification, touristification, and marginalisation trends, among other devastating phenomena, all in recent decades and at differing scales—across cities, states, and supra-national institutions (Carroll et al. 2019; Harvey 2012). It is thus justified to look at how society responds to these threats away from the state and capital forces that engendered them. This legitimate concern notwithstanding, it may wrongly lead to the promotion of the urban commons as a tool to achieve, at the same time, a reversal of profit-making activities, the fulfilment of everyone's needs, equity in wealth distribution, and justice in social and ecological conflicts. Even some Marxist scholars adhere to a vague programme that reclaims the whole 'common wealth' of society as a recipe to resist neoliberal governance (Hardt and Negri 2009) while conflating different meanings of the commons. Conversely, I propose to distinguish these meanings and the limited scope of their application, on the one hand, and to examine to what extent the emancipatory promises of the urban commons are realised by experiences such as housing cooperatives (Card 2020; Huron 2018) and squats (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Dadusc 2019; Di Feliciantonio 2017; Finchett-Maddock 2016). Towards that purpose, I argue that a central focus on class struggles and the livelihood of the global working class needs to be taken into account—a focus often overlooked by the literature on the topic.

In the next section I distinguish the notions of 'primary' and 'extended' commons according mostly to my reading of Marx's chapters on the so-called primitive accumulation of capital. Drawing upon them, I identify the main differences between the institutionalist and Marxist accounts of the commons by focusing on their 'restricted extension', the nature of the 'new enclosures', and the consequences for the reproduction of the working class. The final section deals with the features of the urban commons while scrutinising the conditions which favour or hinder their production and reproduction with an anti-capitalist orientation.

2. Primary and extended commons

This section mainly builds upon the original approach of Karl Marx (1867) in the final chapters (26–33, Part Eight) of *Capital* (vol. 1) in order to make a fundamental distinction between primary and extended commons. Marx does not use these specific categories, but I find they help to clarify his analysis of the primitive accumulation of capital through enclosures of the commons. I also recall Marx's problematic views on the historical development of non-capitalist private and communal property.

For him, above all, the 'common land' was one of the means of subsistence and production that feudal peasants and rural artisans co-possessed besides their privately owned pieces of land and livestock. Marx's main argument is that capital accumulation would not have been historically possible without the process of transforming those peasants into a 'free' labour force, which implied divorcing them from all their means of subsistence and production, including that common land— mostly valuable portions of nature, such as pastures, forests, fisheries, etc., appropriated and managed by a small community—which I designate as 'primary commons'. Deprived of everything except their labour power, they ended up selling it to those who could buy it. In this way, peasants and artisans became wage labourers because they were violently expropriated of all their own means of production and livelihood, from their petty properties and common

land to domestic animals, as well as other early forms of primary commons such as shared artisan tools, skills, knowledge, and social relations of mutual aid. Marx explains that this historical shift occurred throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries across Europe as the feudal regime of serfdom and 'the existence of independent city-states' (Marx 1867, 876) waned and the world-market unfolded. Implicit in the quote, and in a similar vein as argued later by Max Weber and Peter Kropotkin, these autonomous towns could also nurture the category of primary commons, at least to the extent that urban dwellers did not profit from the peasants who supplied them with food and raw materials (for more meticulous historical descriptions: Linebaugh 2008).

Marx also offers nuanced accounts of how the process of usurpation continues in England over the eighteenth century when the Crown, landlords, and capitalists not only forcibly evicted and enclosed the commons but also seized state properties (from the 'state domain': Marx 1867, 886) and Church estates. This massive theft engendered a dispossessed and poor population of proletarians who would sell their labour force, if lucky, in the rising industrial towns and cities. As Harvey (2004, 72) noted, the violence and legality of the state always played a determining role in the transition to capitalist development. Some scholars go even further by arguing that it was only the state who could execute those massive expropriations, not the capitalists: 'Capital requires others to do the dirty work of creating its preconditions' (Roberts 2020, 542). This is why Polanyi (1944, 37) described the enclosures as 'a revolution of the rich against the poor', in which the 'lords and nobles' (not the capitalists yet) were even 'tearing down the houses which, by the hitherto unbreakable force of custom, the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs', paving the way for their move to more urbanised areas.

Therefore, Marx shows that the primary commons consist, first of all, of the essential but not exclusive means of production of the pre-capitalist working class—peasants and artisans, in short. These commons were collectively managed and owned until the state, on behalf of the emerging capitalist class, cleared them off. Instead of targeting abstract private property as the driver behind the ascendant capitalist mode of production, Marx explained the latter according to the above mentioned processes of enclosures and expropriations of shared properties, knowledge, and various forms of social self-government (medieval towns and guilds, for example), on the one hand, and the formation of the industrial working class and its 'reserve army' (its unemployed factions that facilitate pushing wages down), on the other. Due to these joint processes, society became radically polarised between the buyers of labour power (i.e. the owners of money and the means of production, including land) and the sellers (the proletariat). Marx described these historical processes in order to understand how the capitalist mode of production gained strength and dominance, not to embrace the commons as a better world than capitalism or to recreate them in a communist future. Indeed, it has been argued that both the rural commons and the urban guilds became increasingly formalised as market institutions due to the 'social acceleration put in motion by feudalism' (Arvidsson 2020, 13). When the feudalist regimes entered into crisis because 'social inequalities and levels of exploitation intensified' (ibid.), the commons came to represent a 'nostalgic vision of pre-industrial life . . . as a social vision that combined market exchange and new kinds of solidarity and civic culture . . . untouched by capitalist exploitation' (ibid.). Both nostalgia and autonomy of the primary commons were alien to Marx's analysis and politics.

A case in point here is the issue of property relations around the commons. Primary commons were more or less legally formalised as a property right enjoyed by certain communities (or as a well-established social convention), but they took shape in a world where peasants and artisans also struggled to obtain recognition of their private property rights as workers who owned the means and results of their labour (Marx 1867, 927). These were named 'self-earned' or 'personal' private property: 'private property which is personally earned' (Marx 1867, 928). Obviously, this is a more legitimate form of property than that acquired by the

feudal lords and the emergent-by-then, and nowadays prevailing, capitalist private property, 'which rests on the exploitation of alien but formally free labour [wage labour]' (Marx 1867, 928), although, again, Marx had no interest in opposing one over the other as if it were possible to return to the good old times. On the contrary, he argued that the dominance of petty property relations experienced its own contradictions, limitations, and crises which facilitated its transformation 'into the giant property of the few' (ibid.). The enclosures of the commons thus meant a massive expropriation of shared land, means of subsistence, and means of production that widely replaced 'the dwarf-like property of the many . . . [with] the capitalist who exploits a large number of workers'. Hence, a Marxist approach to the primary commons has important theoretical and political implications.

On the one hand, the commons historically belong to pre-capitalist times, so we should know how they were suppressed by the state and appropriated by capitalists. This explanation debunks the myth of natural, legitimate, and peaceful capitalist profit. Should the commons persist over time under capitalist rule, we must determine their subaltern condition of existence and the forces that keep eroding them as they reveal how capital keeps expanding. For Marx, it is not the property regime of the commons or the petty forms of private property associated with them that are at stake in these shifts but the growth of capitalist private property, which begets the regime of capital accumulation at the expense of the previous forms. As for the future, it is capitalist private property, labour exploitation, and capital accumulation which must be annihilated once the system of production has completely changed—with a concentration of the means of production and the 'division of labour within each separate process of production' (Marx 1867, 927). The present conflict is not between capital and primary commons (and petty property) but between capital and wage labour. Wage labour has become the epitome of cooperation, socialisation, and 'the transformation of the means of labour into forms in which they can only be used in common' (Marx 1867, 929). At this point Marx introduces back the language of the commons but fully related to the needs and emancipatory aspirations of the working class.

To clarify his turn, I suggest considering a distinct concept: the 'extended commons'. These commons mainly refer to communism according to Marx and Engels' views, but I use a different expression to also include the generalisation of primary commons through various anti-capitalist struggles and possible transitions to post-capitalist societies. Marx envisioned communism as a future social system ruled by the principle of 'the common' which would replace capitalism, either due to revolutionary practices of 'expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people' (Marx 1867, 930) or because of its internal contradictions (overproduction, falling profit rate, etc.). The extended commons as communism would entail that the common labour and force of the working class, which has been forcibly concentrated and socialised by capital, will transform capitalist private property into collective or 'social property' (ibid.). Even while being subject to capital, workers develop their own commons on a large scale—they cooperate with each other, they share knowledge, they participate in common struggles against capitalist exploitation. These are the bases for engendering a communist society where the ownership of land, means of production and reproduction is predominantly communal. As noted in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, once 'all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly . . . can society inscribe in its banner: From each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs!' (Marx 1875, 531). This would suggest that the primary commons are completely left behind in communism. However, I would argue otherwise.

Although seen as a residue of the pre-capitalist era that would soon disappear, Marx did not consider personal property in essential opposition to communism (Marx and Engels 1848, 484–485). 'The lower middle classes, the small manufacturers, the shopkeepers, the artisans, the peasants, all these fight against the bourgeoisie in order to save from extinction their existence as parts of the middle class . . . they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history' (Marx and Engels 1848, 482). They do not

necessarily fight the working class, but their *petty bourgeois* character easily leads them to embrace capitalism, by growing into exploitative firms with waged workers or by engaging in speculative and rent extraction businesses. Self-earned or personal property would thus remain in a communist society when it is limited to the satisfaction of socially accepted needs.

This requires that egalitarian criteria in all the social, political, and economic realms are prior to individual freedom and private property that is not capitalist in nature, that is, neither based on the exploitation of wage labour nor capital accumulation. As a consequence, a society ruled by the extended commons and generalised forms of collective property would have to accommodate residual and modern non-capitalist private property as well, with strict demarcations by social, legal, and political regulations. Next to them, workers' co-operatives, as contemporary forms of primary commons—either regulated as private property or formally different from private and state property —may be seen as an efficient driver of the transition from capitalism to communism. In this regard Marx did not oppose them either, but he did reject that they were not aligned with (or subordinated to) the revolutionary struggles of the working class to create a classless and stateless society: 'As far as the present co-operatives are concerned, they are of value only in so far as they are the independent creation of the workers and not *protégés* either of the government or the bourgeois.' (Marx 1875, 531) In a socialist transition to communism, Marx also conceded that the Russian rural communities or *mir* (another kind of mutualistic primary commons) might serve that purpose as well (Linebaugh 2008, 275). Hence, co-operatives that resort to labour exploitation and market competition would not fall under the umbrella of the commons (Altuna et al. 2013; Dardot and Laval 2019, 567–571). More controversial questions are how democratic principles would carve a transition away from capitalism while providing sufficient welfare by the state (Dardot and Laval 2019, 80, 349), and how already sustainable and cooperative systems in agriculture, for example, based on both primary commons and petty ownership, would endure during this process (Federici 2014, 161–165).

Table 1 outlines the above theoretical framework rooted in Marx's insights. He provides specific materialist content to the notion of pre-capitalist primary commons according to three dimensions: (1) workers' ownership of the instruments of production and livelihood; (2) shared tools, knowledge, land, raw materials, products of labour, and struggles; and (3) self-managed resources, institutions, and territories. Many of these features remain nowadays in nonprofit, non-exploitative, and use-value oriented workers' co-operatives and even among communities consisting of petty owners, peasants, and middle classes who do not employ wage labour, despite Marx and Engels's prediction of their tendency to disappear. They were right in their assessment of their dependent nature under the dominant mode of production in each historical period—either feudalism and mercantilism, or capitalism. They also foresaw that primary commons could underpin the organisational basis of a stateless or communist society, especially in the transitional socialist stages. However, this is only possible if the primary commons coalesce with industrial action and labour movements in their pursuit to expropriate capitalists and establish wide forms of collective property. Isolated from that class and contentious character, the primary commons are easily swallowed or violently enclosed by capital, the state, and conservative middle classes, or just kept in a permanent subaltern position while functioning as a reserve army of cheap labour or a cushion to pacify social conflicts (Dardot and Laval 2019, 576; Federici 2012, 140). 'Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers' (Marx and Engels 1848, 481). Therefore, I argue that only by widening the primary commons in alliance with ever-expanding working-class struggles can the extended commons and communism be engendered. And vice versa, only by taking the extended commons as a guiding principle can the primary commons flourish in the anti-capitalist ground. Finally, the principle of the 'common good' applies well to state property but has little to do with the commons. In most state manifestations (authoritarian, liberal, socialist, etc.), workers as

commoners can seldom contribute to its definition with their own voice. Insofar as egalitarian social structures and democratic procedures are shaped in the primary and the extended commons, the criterion of the common good may be a fruitful complement to determine specific policies.

Table 1. Main tenure categories according to Marx and implications for a theory of the commons

Forms of Tenure	Relation to the Commons*	Relation to Communism	Relation to Capitalism
Self-earned / personal private property (i.e. self-built houses, full products of labour, small property)	Complementary	Residual and restricted to the minimum	Complementary
Capitalist, exploitative private property	Opposed	Opposed	Guiding principle and practice
State property (common good if not a capitalist instrument)	Opposed but compatible, although the commons are subordinated	Opposed but necessary in a socialist transition	Opposed but compatible, although the state is subordinated
Primary commons: Common land; shared tools, knowledge, and mutual aid; autonomous towns; cooperative property	Guiding principle and practice	Residual but complementary	Opposed but compatible, although the commons are subordinated
Extended commons: Communism; Collective, socialised property	Guiding principle	Guiding principle	Opposed

Source: Author. * Both primary and extended commons.

3. Restricted commons

Current debates about the commons often neglect the crucial distinctions made by Marx summarised above. I thus introduce the category of 'restricted commons' to show the limitations of the recent scholarship and political calls to revive the commons.

First of all, the institutionalist approach developed by Ostrom (1990) and colleagues focused on 'common-pool resources' as sustained long-term and efficient examples of the commons, usually in the form of the collective management of grazing pastures, forests, fisheries, and irrigation systems, rather than as a specific form of tenure. She contended that the self-regulation of these natural resources by specific human communities was less costly than the interference of either state rule or market privatisation. These communities have accurate information about the resources at stake and the users involved. They define the rules of access, the type of cooperation required, and the sanctions that prevent the overuse of resources 'where the temptations to free-ride and shirk are ever present' (Ostrom 1990, 15). Fine-tuned systems of conflict resolution are one of their crucial features.

On the one hand, Ostrom concludes that commons are efficient because they are based on face-to-face communication and mutual trust, usually at small scale—mirroring the liberal and pluralist ideals of local democracy. On the other hand, she argues that privatisation processes increase the costs in terms of security measures and market negotiations, especially when there are losses or surplus. Ostrom also showed that these resilient commons are compatible with other state institutions and capitalist dynamics of exploitation and

accumulation, despite their subordinated condition. However, due to her focus on a very limited number of goods subject to community self-management, Ostrom did not take into account the permanent threat represented by the state and capital to capture, enclose, and manage the commons after obliterating them through violent usurpation and despite the resistance of the commoners, as Marx painstakingly disclosed. Neither did she consider the merits of a general expansion of commoning practices, except with regard to some cultural products (free software, open access science, Wikipedia, etc.) (Dardot and Laval 2019, 100-104; Hess and Ostrom 2007; Huron 2018, 26). Hence, no class character and no interest in the relation of the commons and the movements to overthrow capitalism are part of her analysis.

The institutionalist perspective has been very influential insofar as it emphasised the communities and rules attached to some anomalous common pool of natural resources. Several institutionalist authors have even moved from different kinds of small-scale, nonprofit, and ecological practices to the large-scale of the 'common wealth', encompassing culture, universities, scientific knowledge, biodiversity, seeds, the atmosphere, water resources, public spaces, urban infrastructures, welfare services, and so on (Bollier and Helfrich 2012). However, this extension is still a very restricted one since it entails a vague boundary between actual and potential commons. The commons thus would represent a limited social sphere beside other nonprofit, cooperative, non-monetary, or ecologically sustainable endeavours, but without holding any essential contradiction with capitalism.

Likewise, the anti-/alter-globalisation or global justice movement (GJM) of the late 1990s and early 2000s adhered to a restricted expansion of the commons, ranging from public education and health systems to food sovereignty and car-free roads. However, critiques of global capitalism, international political organisations, and neoliberal policies across the world were at the core of their political agenda (Flesher 2014, 77; Klein 2001). This wave of pro-commons activism countered the ongoing erosion of the welfare state with claims favouring its reconstruction and a more just distribution of the common wealth (Hardt and Negri 2009). Furthermore, the recent collapse of authoritarian socialist states—mistakenly associated with communism—and their rapid transition to market economies softened the endorsements of the GJM to extended or generalised commons. Hence, primary commons as self-managed (and often occupied) factories and farms asking for legal recognition or state support or autonomous social centres (whether squatted or not) became key representatives of the horizontality, direct democracy, self-management, and socially-necessary features of viable primary commons. These are still practiced at a very local scale, but alter-globalists strove for a further extension wherever the welfare state failed. Certainly, local commons are thus interrogated in light of global political and economic processes instead of being merely assessed at their institutional or organisational level. Yet, their association with class struggles and the horizon of expanded stateless and collective property was not at the core of their approach either.

In a similar vein, another revival of Marxist concerns about the commons came in a dialectical manner—as a response to the 'new enclosures' and 'accumulation by dispossession' (Christophers 2018; Federici 2012, 76-84; Harvey 2004; Midnight Notes Collective 1990). The phenomena that triggered this alternative and more robust conceptualisation of the commons belong to the unprecedented wave of land grabbing, the privatisation of natural and intellectual goods as well as state assets and services, slum segregation and the gentrification of cities, forcible displacements of the poor, harsher border controls and migration policies, and the financialisation of housing from the mid-twentieth century onwards. An important remark to be made here is that not all the targets of those new enclosures were commons *strictu sensu*. Many were state-owned assets or services whose privatisation implies that the working class loses an essential legacy of past labour and struggles for social welfare (Caffentzis and Federici 2014, i102) and the 'power vested in landownership . . . actually or potentially delivering demonstrable public benefits' (Christophers 2018, 14). Nonetheless, there was no workers' control of those assets before their privatisation. They could be

designated 'restricted commons' as well insofar as they contribute to the reproduction of the working class, although they do not cover the whole range of primary commons features.

Other victims of commodification are goods or social relations in urban spaces, street vending, encounters on sidewalks and beaches, etc. that belong to the public sphere and are also regulated by the state. Access and use are regulated by monetary fees decided by capitalists, which implies a highly probable erosion of the conditions of reproduction of the working class, at least in terms of necessary sharing and mutual aid. New enclosures also sweep away grassroots relations of survival and production broadly independent from the state and the market, such as collective practices of building and sharing houses, cooking together, or the indigenous management of natural resources. There certainly are genuine commons and communities under threat (De Angelis 2014, i71–i77). Harvey (2004, 73-78) observed that 'predation, fraud and thievery' exerted by the powerholders are even more important now than in the past because capitalism experiences regular crises of overaccumulation. These crises can be solved internally, within nation-state boundaries, with 'spatiotemporal fixes' that absorb surplus (through real estate construction, infrastructures, and mega-projects) or via capital devaluation. Otherwise, there is an imperialist drive to look outwards and conquer new markets. This can occur brutally, with an iron fist, as in the oil wars, or with the velvet glove of international institutions (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and the so-called developmental states (Carroll et al. 2019). Global financial instruments, such as credit and stock manipulations, can also execute massive dispossession of assets like pension funds. All these enclosures helped the geographically expanded reproduction of capitalism by leaving 'behind a trail of devastation' (Harvey 2004, 66). Privatisations, in addition, have been identified as the hallmark mechanism of capital accumulation in the neoliberal era, from the late 1970s onwards, because there was 'no substantive public sector to be privatized' before (Christophers 2018, 18).

Compared to the institutionalist view of the commons, the Marxist analysis of the new enclosures is much more appealing. First, it contends that forcible enclosures of many types of commons (primary and restricted ones) are not only foundational to the origins of capitalism but a regular feature of all its stages. Second, enclosures shape the changing nature of class composition and class struggle. Third, all types of states, from the Global North and South, in collusion with local and global capitalists, have performed enclosures that have contributed to the deepening of class exploitation. My main objection is that the notion of the commons is unnecessarily stretched to include state assets without nuancing their value to the reproduction and emancipation of the working class.

The Marxist approach to the commons generates knowledge on how the working class has been forced to become more mobile, flexible, migratory (i.e. global), and 'mutant' (Midnight Notes Collective 1990), detached from secured contracts and working conditions. Their dispossession of the means of production has been historically reinforced under neoliberalism, with attacks on other means of subsistence and reproduction that hitherto had strengthened their bargaining power to increase wages and their control over the production process: Domestic farms and gardens succumb to bulldozers, food cooperatives and other traditional strongholds of unions (parks, social, and cultural centres, etc.) have been destroyed or commodified, social welfare benefits and state-backed pension funds followed suit, unpaid housework and family care have added to the burden of low-waged women and migrants, access to housing and higher education implies increasingly higher debts, and mega-extractivist projects condemn long-lasting and self-sufficient indigenous communities to displacement, poverty, and labour exploitation. Moreover, the spread of casual, informal, and unwaged work has also restructured the survival and political strategies of the global working class. These capital-driven enclosures and global division of labour do not end up uniting and socialising all the components of the working class but fragmenting it and making it more vulnerable, which contradicts Marx's predictions (Dardot and Laval 2019, 134-136; Federici 2012, 142).

Hence, the analysis and promotion of the commons in the neoliberal era demands a straightforward account of the means of social reproduction of the global working class (Bhattacharya 2017; Cammack 2020; Federici 2012). Social needs and use values beyond the premises of capitalist firms are as important as the struggle against the appropriation of surplus value in the capitalist workplace. This means that class struggles would be equally rooted in households, cities, squatted settlements, agricultural land, war-torn zones, or even mountains and oceans. The expropriation of these restricted commons thus entails an increase of exploitation by different means. On the one hand, if workers cannot afford housing, commuting to work, sick leave, education and care of children, cleaning and cooking at home, etc., the conditions for employment, for their performance as waged labourers, and for their struggle against exploitation worsen. On the other hand, the depredation of the commons leads to the exploitation of reproductive work due to its commodification and organisation by capital—waged domestic work is its utmost manifestation (Cammack 2020, 19–21).

As a result, class struggles beyond the 'factory floor' unfold across the whole metropolitan space and are also embedded in global spaces for the circulation of goods, services, people, and information, especially through the previously razed post-colonial territories. However, the global working class is not only defined by its opposition to capitalists but also subject to other crucial power relationships according to gender, sexual identity, race, religion, citizenship status, physical and mental abilities, housing tenancy, etc. Workers may be also internally divided due to differences of income; education; expertise; autonomy at work; life-cycle situations (for instance, studentship, parenthood, illness, retirement); the not necessarily capitalist nature of state employees; the unemployed and homeless population; economic migrants and asylum seekers; precariousness and casual work; substantial worldwide numbers of slaves, child labour, and prostitution; huge sectors of those engaged in the informal economy as street vendors; strongly female-gendered domestic and care workers; independent and waged farmers and peasants; and the work done by prisoners. In short, the global working class includes both waged and unwaged workers, formal and informal labourers, employed and unemployed ones as far as they are oppressed, directly or indirectly, by capitalist relationships. On the other end, the capitalist class includes not only the shareholders of for-profit firms and everyone who employs waged labour but also a specific transnational corporate class (Harris 2015), financial investors and speculators, large landowners, rentiers, military and political elites to some extent (as mediators, facilitators, and beneficiaries of capital accumulation), and, likewise, the rulers of the global criminal economy specialised in the trafficking of arms, drugs, human beings, body organs, animals, and minerals.

In this respect, I argue that the main target of all the enclosures is to destroy autonomous cooperation among the components of the global working class to manage their commons when these provide for their livelihood and nurture productive alternatives to capitalism and state rule. Marxist feminism has also argued that communal kitchens, the collectivisation of housework and childcare, subsistence and urban farming, and credit associations, to name a few, have proven to, at least partially, erect some resistance to such enclosures (Engel-Di Mauro 2018; Federici 2012). This, in turn, recovers the value of non-exploitative expressions of petty and communal ownership as key leverage in the ongoing class struggles.

In sum, the dialectic between enclosures and commons directly impacts (a) the exploitation rate of the working class at the sphere of capitalist production; (b) the conditions of reproductive work and shared means of subsistence independent from state and market interference; and (c) the changing configuration of the global working class itself, its internal unity or fragmentation, and its subjectivity. In contrast with the narrow institutionalist view of the commons as mere organisational features of some extraordinary communities and resources, the Marxist understanding defines the commons as a reaction of the global working class to new enclosures and as a long lasting protection against the expansion of capitalism. However, I have argued that both approaches fall short of addressing the relations between primary and

extended commons while being more eager to focus on some remnants of the former or on their restricted extensions. Table 2 offers a synthesis of the above contributions.

Table 2. Restricted commons

	Institutionalism	**Marxism**
Definition	Common-pool resources, a bounded community, and endogenous rules	Cooperative, direct or participatory democratic, and autonomous management of all goods and wealth where the welfare state and capitalism fail
Main features	Nonprofit, ecologically sustainable, long-term efficiency, and conflict resolution	Shared means of subsistence and production for the autonomy and emancipation of the global working class
Scale	Mostly small scale (extended to oceans, culture, etc. too)	Mostly small scale, but embedded in the local-global nexus and transnational movements that prefigure post-capitalism in accordance with use and egalitarian values
Structural contexts	Compatible with and subordinated to capitalist exploitation and state management of other goods, resources, services, information, and social relations	Reaction, resistance, and challenge to capitalist and state enclosures but compatible with, albeit subordinated to, a responsive, accountable, and sufficient welfare state
State	It should legalise, legitimate, facilitate, or promote commons without interference	The commons instigate a stateless society because they oppose the capitalist core of the state; the commons can also underpin a socialist state
Extension	Restricted from natural to cultural resources	Restricted from non-exploitative coops to all goods, resources, services, information, and social relations menaced by the extended reproduction of capital

Source: Author

4. Commoning the city in restricted and aspirational ways

Within the Marxist tradition, some authors suggest that the activity of reclaiming, creating, managing, defending, and expanding the commons can be captured with the notion of 'commoning': 'The activity of commoning is conducted through labor with other resources . . . it is labor which creates something as a resource.' (Linebaugh 2014, 13) Thus, commoning implies work—the production and care of common goods but also of common spaces and social relations. It refers to collective work, cooperation, and participation with rights and obligations. Commoning is about sharing work and its products with justice but also, in a reflexive turn, to teach about the commons and to preserve their memory (Linebaugh 2014, 14). According to Linebaugh, there are five principles of commoning derived from the thirteenth-century Magna Carta: anti-enclosure, neighbourhood, travel [originally for merchants but, today, as the right of all to cross national borders], subsistence, and reparation [for those subjected to enclosures, expropriations, and oppressions at large] (Linebaugh 2008, 83, 268, 275).

Other scholars define commoning as 'the social practice of co-producing, co-appropriating, and co-management' (Card 2019, 309). It has also been argued that the act of commoning produces the community (Castro-Coma and Martí-Costa 2014, 143; Huron 2018, 87) and 'new forms of life-in-common and a culture of sharing' (Stavrides 2016, 4–5). In particular, when applied to urban life, commoning consists of 'space sharing', 'sharing-through-space', and imagining 'representations of common spaces-as-thresholds' (Stavrides 2016, 7). Also in reference to the social production of space and housing in particular, Huron (2018, 29) distinguished between the institutionalist concern with 'managing' the commons and the focus of

the alter-globalisation/neo-Marxist approach on 'reclaiming or creating commons'. While reflecting on migrants' squats, for example, De Angelis (2019, 628) conceived commoning in a systemic fashion, as 'an activity that develops relations preoccupied by their (re) production and therefore crucially founded on their own autonomy vis-a-vis their environment: the state is one of the ever-present entities in the environment of the commons, and so as other commons, other social movements and other systems'. These interactions between commoners and their environment are called 'boundary commoning' (De Angelis 2019, 629).

The positive side of these conceptual attempts is that they represent commoning as a contentious collective action, as a struggle of commoners against powerful opponents (state and market forces) and the enclosures. 'The working class (including the unwaged!) were always struggling through commons, through some form of sharing resources' (De Angelis 2014, i72). Their downside is that crucial elements of the anti-capitalist approach are often missing: the configuration and reproduction of a global working class, the historical reoccurrence of enclosures, the local-global nexus of the commons, their shared and cooperative features, their democratic and self-managed rule, and the issue of egalitarian and use-value principles should the commons be extended. These flaws are especially problematic when investigating urban commons and commoning processes.

For instance, non-working class 'gated communities' may defend their own 'commons' to preserve their privileges (Stavrides 2016, 37). Middle-class cooperative housing projects have no hesitation when it comes to hiring waged labour and obtaining mortgage loans, let alone speculating with their living units and fostering gentrification processes (Card 2020, 165). Even limited-equity housing coops (LEC) are usually forced to regularly interact with state authorities (in relation to subsidies, urban planning, building regulations, etc.) and the market (to borrow money, purchase construction materials, etc.), which constrains their autonomy (Huron 2018, 70, 89). More extremely, fascism is well-known for its ability to promote patriotic and xenophobic views of the 'common' even by appealing to the working class, but 'without encumbrances of the rule of law or due process of law' as the Magana Carta tightly associated to the reparations of unjust enclosures (Linebaugh 2008, 276). In recent times the World Bank also aimed to preserve 'global commons' such as the rain forest by expelling 'the populations that for centuries had drawn their subsistence from them, while making them available to people who do not need them but can pay for them, for instance, through ecotourism' (Federici 2012, 140). In short, capitalists may embrace a certain type and notion of the commons if it serves 'as a means to socialize poverty and hence to privatize wealth' (Linebaugh 2008, 279), or if they 'cheapen the cost of reproduction [for capitalists] and even accelerate the lay-offs of public employees' (Caffentzis and Federici 2014, i98).

I thus contend that without its anti-capitalist core and apart from the process of the workers' needs of autonomous production, reproduction, and resistance to all forms of exploitation and expropriation of their shared work, knowledge, and tools, the commons are fetishised and used in ambivalent manners that either isolate their organisational features or neutralise their contentious development. In the urban realm, for example, a public square may be superficially identified as a common because of its reproductive function for the working class, but this consideration blurs the fact that it may equally help the reproduction of capitalists and real estate capital. If the design, construction, management, and maintenance of the square are done by the town hall and capitalist companies with wage labour rather than by a bounded community of working-class people able to democratically self-manage all those processes in an egalitarian and nonprofit manner, it is misleading to name it as a commons. Therefore, the traits of open access, inclusivity, spatial appropriation, non-monetary relations, and participatory co-design and co-management do not suffice for qualification as urban commons (Harvey 2012, 73). Nonetheless, a fight for the public character of a square, against its commodification and non-democratic socio-spatial production, might approach the restricted extension of the commons and commoning as a way to criticise state and market failures and to meet the

social needs of the working class. Even its occupation and temporary appropriation as a powerful protest device, as in the 2011 uprisings (Flesher 2014, 171–174), may yield resemblances to the commons (Harvey 2012, 161; Linebaugh 2014, 24), but it would also be more accurate to designate them only as a restricted, temporary, or aspirational commons to be expanded broadly under propitious conditions. The occupied squares staged unique deliberative arenas that could rarely, however, represent the vast interests and needs of the global working class. Similar issues arise when other urban goods, services, spaces, cultures, and spaces are invited to join the vague designation of the commons.

In general, the ambivalent notion of the commons applied to urban affairs usually conflates three dimensions: (a) the public domain, which is administrated by local, regional, and central governments; b) social life, in which different classes, groups, and organisations contribute to the social production of the city; and (c) different property regimes and arrangements that co-exist next to each other. Thus, many commoners aspire to frame the whole city or as many urban features as possible as a commons, without disentangling the conundrum. This is how streets (roads and sidewalks), supply infrastructure and water and energy services, municipal administration, heritage buildings, schools, health centres, playgrounds, street markets, parks and forests, rivers and ponds, land-use planning, and the like may all wrongly be taken-for-granted commons. They usually lie within the competence of state authorities unless outsourced to private companies. How can they become commons then?

From an anti-capitalist point of view, they should be fully self-managed by bounded communities led by the working class and according to agreed rules and social accountability. This is especially challenging in cites given the open nature of neighbourhoods with residents, workers, users of certain facilities, and visitors. They should also grant participatory and direct democracy, meet the productive and reproductive needs of the working class, and foster non-capitalist property relations. More often than not, the claim for commoning the city tends to merely oppose the privatisation that many urban goods are increasingly experiencing (Christophers 2018) or to establish 'municipalist' initiatives (Thompson 2020) to realise 'the right to the city' rather than fostering a political programme to turn the whole city into primary and extended commons as platforms of workers' counter-power and prefigurative experiences of post-capitalist urban politics. At best, progressive state authorities may value the commons as a contribution to socialism, change the applicable regulations, and outsource some urban goods to true commoners which, notwithstanding, requires as much social oversight as in the case of for-profit privatisations (Wright 2010, 154–167).

Likewise, urban life as a whole is often considered as a commons regardless of its class, gender, and ethnic divides, to name the most structural ones, for example, 'the city itself [can be seen] as the ultimate contemporary common' (Chatterton 2010, 627). In my understanding, the social conflicts at the heart of the production processes of urban space can be hardly regarded as a commons. In a similar vein, contrary to Linebaugh's claim (2014, 26), it will not suffice to reclaim every spatial *enclosure* of the city, or the city itself with respect to its surroundings—as expressed by walls, towers, buildings, shopping malls, roads, residential enclaves, and other boundaries—as commons. Rather, it is its capitalist nature, as a secondary circuit of capital accumulation and an expanded source of direct and indirect exploitation processes, that should be challenged by workers, women, and oppressed ethnicities. As argued by Federici (2012, 147), the walls of home could be a prison for women that deprive them of their basic needs and autonomy, or they could be a place away from commodified relations where they develop, and may share, reproductive activities. So too can daylight police raids against undocumented migrants raise invisible walls in the heart of the city, hiding prior expropriations in their places of origin (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013). Hence, not every bounded physical space represents an enclosure for the sake of capitalism.

Besides, an anti-capitalist agenda might also demand a better distribution of the accumulated wealth in cities across the world, both among their inhabitants and in relation to non-urban dwellers and workers. But,

again, the misleading view of the commons as 'common wealth' (Caffentzis and Federici 2014, i102) restricts its expansion to the edge of socialist policies. In this case, the egalitarian consequences of socialist policies replace the egalitarian organisation of primary and extended commons, although nothing prevents the latter from becoming the pillars of the former (a socialist transitional state).

5. Housing cooperatives beyond a property regime

The issue of property regimes and arrangements suggests recalling that early primary commons often existed as established customs, beyond the realm of state-backed law. If they endured throughout time without been evicted by enclosures, they could gain legal recognition and state regulation that might preserve their extraordinary or anomalous self-management character within a capitalist, or socialist, society. Some local markets and community watch initiatives over green areas illustrate these remnants too. But, as Linebaugh (2014, 19) notes, custom 'may be another guise of patriarchy and privilege'. This means that the existence of exploitative practices and other oppressive relations within those commons questions its anti-capitalist nature and effects, regardless of its legal status. The case of contemporary community gardens is more evidence of the fragile threshold on which they survive as both true commons for some members of the global working class and also branding urban resources for affluent gentrifiers (Engel-Di Mauro 2018).

A frequent strategic move consists of accepting the dominant property regime as a regulatory tool to prevent socially negative externalities. The most striking example here is a particular strain of housing cooperatives. Different studies (Card 2020; Díaz-Parra 2019; Hagbert et al. 2020; Huron 2018; Nahoum 2013; Vidal 2019) convincingly argued that it is not the legal recognition of cooperative tenure that turns housing cooperatives into commons, but additional measures they took (a) to provide affordable housing for the working class, (b) to set up strong self-managed communities, (c) to prevent property speculation, (d) to connect with larger emancipatory social movements, and (e) to decrease their dependence on external financial sources and wage labour. With regard to the LEC cooperatives in Washington, DC, Huron (2018, 89, 91) uses the term 'imperfect commons' because the role of the state in their initiation, financial support, and legal regulation became crucial for them to thrive. In relation to property rights, she found that 'cooperative residents view ownership as a source of political legitimation, secure tenure, collective control, and permanent low-income housing. . . . The purpose of ownership was not to gain the ability to sell their unit on the market' (Huron 2018, 80)

The case of FUCVAM in Montevideo (Uruguay) reveals a continuous struggle of the cooperative with state authorities to get financial support, but also a decisive contribution of the dwellers to supply their own labour and mutual aid in the construction process. 'The whole cooperative, not each individual member, owns the housing (and therefore is responsible for any debt). The families are collective owners and individual users' (Nahoum 2013, 196). The Mietshäuser Syndikat in Germany also leaned on the formula of collective-dual ownership to prevent further housing speculation by the dwellers. Their purpose was to 'create affordable housing in perpetuity' (Card 2020, 169) with rents set below market rates, loans supplemented through activists' crowdfunding campaigns, designs that privilege socialisation rather than private spaces, and where 'tenants had to finish the floors and other minor details themselves' (Card 2020, 169).

Cooperatives and other expressions of the social economy and grassroots organisations in cities can turn into urban commons inasmuch as they actively address not only the failures and enclosures of state and capital but also their own contradictions experienced due to their embeddedness in capitalist cities (Wright 2010, 204–216). In most cases they are only imperfect, aspirational or, in my terms, restricted commons.

When comprehensive struggles oppose the privatisation or state appropriation of essential resources for the working class, such as social housing or the water supply (as in the 2000 Cochabamba Water War in Bolivia: Dwinell and Olivera 2014), urban commoning processes are certainly underway, especially if a coalition of grassroots movements is called upon, despite their limited capacity to consolidate, recreate, and multiply the primary commons. The defence of public or subsidised housing may enable 'strategic' or 'hegemonic' commoning processes, in Hodkinson's terms (2012, 438–439), if cooperative tenants' control and prefigurative anti-capitalist commons are fostered too. This analysis, in sum, deems it necessary to distinguish the commons in their different degrees and qualities from the mere claim of public access and use of urban spaces, the state redistribution of wealth, and a specific—cooperative—property status.

6. Squatting as anti-capitalist urban commons?

The above considerations also apply when asking to what extent is squatting (i.e. the unauthorised occupation of vacant land, buildings, and houses) an expression of urban commons. Squats have been frequently pointed out as the epitome of urban commons (Cattaneo and Martínez 2014; Dadusc 2019; Di Feliciantonio 2017; Finchett-Maddock 2016), but I would argue that a confusion with the notions of 'autonomy' and the 'right to the city' pervades most analyses. Herein I briefly review this debate and identify the conditions which favour and hinder squatters in commoning the city.

Squatting buildings and land may have different manifestations. It could be practiced by isolated individuals and households or by larger social groups and militant organisations. Even isolated practices can be encouraged through social networks and communities where skills and knowledge about squatting is shared. This first distinction prompts us to qualify squatting as urban commons the more it is collective, cooperative, self-organised, based on mutual-aid, non-exploitative, and a survival practice of the working class. Regardless of how 'political' this direct action is according to the squatters' discourses, it holds an anti-capitalist leverage insofar as those who cannot afford access to shelter or urban spaces for their social reproduction and productive alternatives to capitalist wage labour are the ones who plan and run squatting according to use and egalitarian values. The more they connect their struggle to their environment by challenging capitalist (and real estate-based and state-backed) accumulation and by linking to broader social movements fighting for workers', migrants' and women's rights and struggling against privatisations and the commodification of urban life, the closer squatting becomes a primary commons. In this respect, the property struggles around occupied buildings and land settlements regarding their toleration or legalisation are of secondary relevance (one example is the loose and postponed debates about them in Can Masdeu, a squat in Barcelona combining housing, a social centre, gardens, and workshops in close interaction with the nearby working-class neighbourhood and in a highly communal fashion since 2001).

This approach applies to squatting for housing purposes, migrants' squats, squatted sociocultural political centres, informal settlements of self-built communities, and squatted community gardens but also, to a lesser extent, to occupied factories, hotels, hospitals, universities, schools, and other formerly-public facilities when squatters intend to remain and not just use the capture of these spaces as temporary protest events or repertoires (Martínez 2020, 148-152; Pruijt 2013, 21–22). It is their role within class struggles which needs to be raised to discern how useful these different squats are for the interests and cooperative practices of the global working class in order to constitute a commons. Occupations run by capitalists or for-profit mafias, for example, do not fit the criterion. If the squats do not benefit the working class and those groups oppressed by capitalist relations and dynamics, and, at the same time, if there is no shared and democratic self-management of the squatted spaces by them, it is questionable to categorise them as commons (Hodkinson

2012, 458). Another example from a squatted social centre in Madrid (CSOA Casablanca) is that the notion of autonomy was defined in such an essentialist way that no labour union or citizen association enjoying state subsidies was allowed to participate in the assembly, debates, campaigns, and regular activities of the squat. It was the direct relationship with neighbours, migrants, and many youngsters coming from all the areas of the city, and especially from working-class neighbourhoods, which was privileged, but in a poorly strategic manner (except when a squatting office, for instance, was launched, or when the squat joined solidarity campaigns with undocumented migrants), so it mostly depended on informal and spontaneous occurrences.

Despite usually being performed away from state regulations and capitalist relations, squatting certainly had a customary background that eventually became recognised and included in certain legal bodies, for example, as 'adverse possession' rights or 'anomalous institutions' (Martínez 2020, 213–218), or were tolerated under specific circumstances—in long empty properties, used exclusively for residential purposes, unless the owner showed feasible plans to renew, etc.—as was the case in the Netherlands during various decades (Dadusc 2019, 174; Fox et al. 2015). Nonetheless, most of the contemporary legislation in the Global North (and partially in the Global South: Díaz-Parra 2019; Neuwirth 2005) has evolved in the direction of banning, persecuting, and criminalising squatting, which, ironically, reinforces one aspect of its commoning nature—self-management—leading squatters to forge their own law (Finchett-Maddock 2016, 52). Many autonomous social centres that are either rented or owned, instead of squatted, may retain some of the features of anti-capitalist commons attached to squatted projects if they are community-driven, addressing the needs of their working-class fellows, and concerned about their impact on the local and global dynamics of gentrification, commodification, sexism, and racism. They can even serve as platforms for launching and supporting various squatting projects and housing cooperatives (as was the case of Can Batlló social centre and La Borda co-housing initiative in Barcelona: Hegbert et al. 2020). However, above all, non-squatted social centres are more constrained by legal and institutional regulations than their squatted counterpart, which also has its correspondent economic burdens (taxes, commercial contracts, bank accounts, etc.), not to mention the likely risk of establishing wage labour relationships. Therefore, the legalisation of squats or the allocation of social housing to former squatters may hinder or halt their commoning practices, although the squatters' durable sources of livelihood may improve as well.

It is also worth noting that squatting as a protest repertoire has been occasionally appropriated by far-right groups (Warnecke 2020). Fascist squatters systematically, and often violently, attack left-libertarian and working-class squatters as well as homeless people and many social groups viewed by them as 'inferior', including people with disabilities, migrants, and ethnic minorities as well as gay and transgender people. In addition, capitalist private property is not usually questioned by far-right groups despite the apparent radical outlook of their squats aiming to appeal to youngsters from the *national* working class. For them, squatting is only a tool to promote terror, violence, ethnic supremacism, and exploitative businesses. Since they abhor any democratic self-management of the occupied spaces and the social relations involved, these authoritarian practices of squatting are the most distant from the realisation of anti-capitalist urban commons. In a similar vein, those who occupy apartments or build shacks on occupied land for the purpose of selling the keys to other needy people and making a profit out of it, behaving away from state regulations, add to speculative markets that end up undermining the living conditions of the working class. As I was informed by housing activists in the peripheral areas of Madrid, these informal transactions may certainly offer cheaper housing for the poor, but neither true mutual aid nor democratic practices of commoning are ever shaped. Despite these practices being well extended in squatted self-built settlements by poor dwellers in the Global South (Brazil, Kenya, and India, for instance: Neuwirth 2005) and sometimes tolerated by the squatters' community, they tend to open cracks in these otherwise vital and multilayered commons. Only the

community regulation of these practices and a collective enforcement could prevent for-profit speculation and the individualisation effects attached to them (and to the property rights granted by governments when gained).

Another issue which is often noted by activists and observers alike is the isolation of the squats with respect to their surrounding neighbourhoods, other activist networks, and workers' struggles. Even if squatters ameliorate their own livelihood by setting up restricted commons, they may fail to extend them to the local urban area and the oppressed social groups living and working nearby. Additionally, squatters' abilities to cooperate, self-managed abandoned spaces, promote direct action to meet social needs, understand and disclose real estate speculation, and articulate anti-capitalist politics can suddenly come to an end when evictions occur. In this regard, the wider the gap is between squatters and the social environment next to them (sometimes due to nuisances caused by music, partying, drug trafficking, etc.), the more unlikely is the continuity of squatting practices and relations as primary and extended urban commons. As a rather unusual development, in the derelict districts where urban renewal is underway, squatters who do not resist together with the last remaining residents, might help corporate firms to accelerate the process of expulsion and displacement (Martínez 2020, 106–112). Casa Pumarejo in Seville, Spain represents well a successful case in point here.

7. Conclusions

The definitions of the commons in general and the urban commons in particular are still quite confusing in the literature, despite the abundant attention they have received in the last decade. My aim in this article was the clarification of the key misunderstandings and intricacies of these concepts by referring to the original insights provided by Marx and by engaging with the debates promoted by contemporary Marxist scholars. I thus departed from the assumption that urban commons are extremely valuable goods (resources, services, spaces, cultures, institutions, and social relations) for scaling up contemporary anti-capitalist practices and movements if defined with a consistent theoretical approach.

My distinction between primary, extended, and restricted commons has guided the discussion and criticisms of some views of the commons as common wealth, the common good, state assets, urban life, and public spaces. Early and modern primary commons consist of a combination of three main features: (1) workers' collective ownership of the means of production and subsistence; (2) shared tools, knowledge, space, raw materials, products of labour, and struggles; and (3) self-managed resources, institutions, and territories. They can be extended to the whole society if guided by egalitarian, democratic, and non-exploitative principles but also by the coordination and unity of all communal autonomous initiatives in order to underpin socialist transitions to communism (or libertarian communism) and even the emancipatory potentials of stateless and classless societies. The needs and interests of the global working class should be at the core of the commons. When neither most of these features nor its emancipatory extension is involved, I suggest assessing the degree and quality of the restricted commons at stake should a conceptual association still makes sense.

I have argued that it is not the common wealth but some portions of it that can be subject to commoning processes if the class and contentious character is addressed. By the same token, the city is not the commons. First of all, this is due to its social diversity and inter-class composition, but also due to its dominant capitalist and state-driven character. In particular, some scholars restrict the commons to the public sphere of urban life, especially those informal social practices and everyday life that is poorly or not at all regulated by the state or the market. Even when these practices may have a cooperative heart, the problem is that they

encompass disparate things, such as sharing public spaces, playing social sports, or small talk, affairs that are hardly related to the core of the autonomous productive and reproductive work of the global working class. On the contrary, some expressions of housing cooperatives and squatting practices are better representatives of urban commoning insofar as they manage to circumvent the major constraints exerted by the state and capitalist relations. Urban commons are hardly taken into account by the institutionalist approach despite their usually limited interest in the cooperative self-management of natural resources. The feature of self-management is implicit in Marx's insights on the primary and extended commons, but this does not suffice to explain their historical role. Primary commons have been dismantled or enclosed, both in the past and in contemporary times, for the sake of capitalists' interests by using state violence to enforce the enclosures, in order to increase and improve the conditions of working-class exploitation. First, a massive labour force was deprived of their autonomous means of production and livelihood so as to be transformed into wage labour. Second, the remaining primary commons and modern ones, such as cooperatives, are always threatened by similar processes for the sake of capitalist accumulation, although under different political and economic conditions across history and space given that the principles of the extended commons and some forms of socialism have already taken place. Marxist scholars have correctly emphasised that these are very contentious processes meeting various expressions of grassroots resistance. However, it is problematic to identify privatisations as the new enclosures. Above all, nowadays, most privatisations predate state-owned property, not the commons. Then, to be consistent, we can agree that commoning practices make sense as an opposition to both enclosures *and* privatisations only when workers' control of the assets at stake, through stirring stateless and non-capitalist alternatives, are key components of the contention.

In my view, the commons prevent workers from being exploited both directly, within capitalist firms and relations, and indirectly, at every space where the conditions of production are reproduced and maintained. The early primary commons referred to common land, shared tools, knowledge, mutual aid, and even to autonomous towns. Modern and contemporary primary commons are well represented by cooperative property away from exploitative relationships. Neither access nor tenure are the defining features of the commons, but Marx envisioned extended commons as a form of generalised collective property in which use and egalitarian values prevail. Hence, anti-capitalist commons are those that embrace the joint creation and defence of primary and extended commons. Due to the economic and political environment shaped by capitalist societies in which commoning practices unfurl, the definition of the commons may also include the material and symbolic conditions that allow the collective, self-managed reproduction of waged and unwaged workers' livelihoods plus their cooperative productive practices to be as much apart from the state and capital as possible. In sum, anti-capitalist commoners do not defend either the isolated autonomy of the commons or its existence as an inoffensive complement to the dominant forms of exploitative private property and state regulation within a capitalist system. Rather, commoning practices, as struggles to build new commons, reinforce existing ones, and coalesce them, hold a local-global or systemic nexus opposing the local and transnational corporate class while, simultaneously, experiencing prefigurative practices of a post-capitalist society and, if successful, a consistent convergence of most anti-capitalist forces.

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