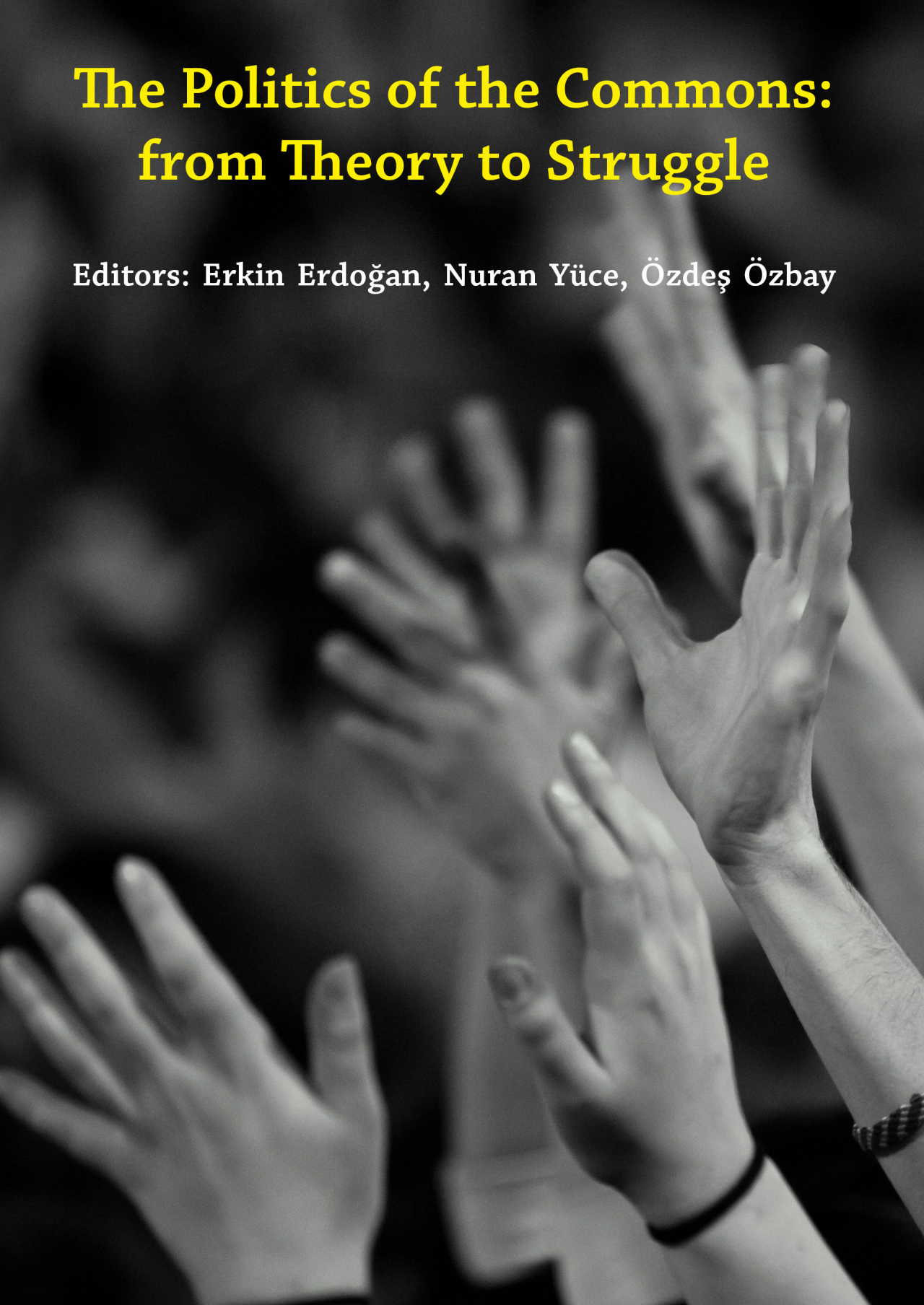


# The Politics of the Commons: from Theory to Struggle

Editors: Erkin Erdoğan, Nuran Yüce, Özdeş Özbay



# The Politics of the Commons: from Theory to Struggle



Sivil ve Ekolojik Haklar Derneđi, December 2018, İstanbul

## **The Politics of the Commons: from Theory to Struggle**

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# Biographical Information

## Professor Aykut Çoban

Aykut Çoban was born in Karabük in 1965. He graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Political Science, Department of Public Administration. Upon earning a scholarship, he completed his Doctoral Program in Sociology at Essex University (UK) in 2001. He became a professor in 2011. He began working at Ankara University Faculty of Political Science in 1991. His employment at this faculty was terminated due to an emergency decree enacted on February 7, 2017 due to his signing the petition “We will not be a party to this crime” organized by Academics for Peace. His research area is political ecology, environmental policies, climate policies, society-nature relations, environmental theories, eco-Marxism, embryo rights, and biotechnology. His work publications can be accessed at [www.aykutcoban.org](http://www.aykutcoban.org).

## Associate Professor Begüm Özden Fırat

Begüm Özden Fırat is currently a faculty member at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Department of Sociology. She studied urban and cultural sociology, visual culture, and culture and social movements. She is an editor of the books entitled *Commitment and Complicity in Cultural Theory and Practice* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2009), *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas, Possibilities* (Rodopi, 2011) and *Resistance and Aesthetics in the Age of Global Rebellion* (Küresel Ayaklanmalar Çağında Direniş ve Estetik, 2015, İletişim). Her book entitled *Encounters with the Ottoman Miniature: Contemporary Readings of an Imperial Art* was published in 2015 by I.B. Tauris.

## Associate Professor Bülent Duru

Bülent Duru was born in Ankara in 1971. Following his graduation from Ankara Atatürk High School in 1988, he won a place at Ankara University, Faculty of Political Science, Department of Public Administration in the same year. He received his Bachelor’s Degree in 1992. He completed his Master’s Thesis “Voluntary Environmentalist Agencies in Turkey in the Developmental Process of Environmental Awareness” in 1995 and Ph.D. dissertation “Integrated Approaches in Coastal Zone Management and National Coastal Policy” in 2001. He was employed by Ankara University, Faculty of Political Science in 1993 as a research assistant, and lectured on local management, urbanization policy, rural development, and environmental management. He was dismissed from the Faculty of Political Science in 2017 due to his signing the petition “We will not be a party to this crime” organized by Academics for Peace. He has produced papers, books, compilations, translated works, and studies on urbanization, local management, environmental politics, and political science.

## Can Irmak Özınanır

Can Irmak Özınanır graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Communication, Department of Journalism, in 2006. He earned his Master’s Degree from the same

department with his thesis titled “Anti-capitalist Movement and New Media Technologies” in 2009. He became a research assistant at Ankara University, Faculty of Communications, in 2011. He was discharged from his position on February 7, 2017, pursuant to the Decree Law No. 686, due to his signing the petition “We will not be a party to this crime” organized by Academics for Peace. He is currently pursuing his doctoral work in the field of media studies and hegemony.

### **Fırat Genç, Ph.D.**

Fırat Genç completed his Ph.D. at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History in 2014. He has given courses at Istanbul Bilgi University and Boğaziçi University. He is a co-author of the book *Indivisible Integrity of the Nation: Disintegrating nationalisms in the Process of Democratization* (Milletin Bölünmez Bütünlüğü: Demokratikleşme Sürecinde Parçalayan Milliyetçilikler, 2007, TESEV). He has published articles on urban studies, space policy, social movements, and international migration in various journals and compiled books.

### **Luke Stobart**

Stobart is an activist in social movements in London, Barcelona, and Madrid, and is a writer and academic, specializing in Catalonia and Spain. He writes for *The Guardian*, *Jacobin*, *Contexto*, *Viejo Topo*, and *New Internationalist*. He lectured in political economy at Birkbeck and Richmond Universities. He has a PhD in immigration politics in Catalonia. He is currently writing on recent challenges to the status quo in Spain for Verso Books.

### **Lülüfer Körükmez, Ph.D.**

Lülüfer Körükmez completed her Ph.D. thesis on “Labor Migration from Armenia to Turkey” on the USA Doctoral Program, Ege University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, in 2012. She worked as a faculty member at the Sociology Department of Ege University until January 2017. Due to being signatory of the petition “We will not be a party to this crime”, she was discharged from the university. She has been working as a researcher at Turkey’s Human Rights Association since December 2017. Her academic research interests include international migration, migration movements in Turkey, irregular migration, and discrimination.

### **Özdeş Özbay, Ph.D.**

Having graduated from Ege University, Department of International Relations, Özdeş Özbay completed his Master’s Degree at Lund University, Department of European Studies, Sweden. He earned his PhD title from Bilgi University in 2016 upon completing his dissertation “The Changing Working Class: A New Repertoire of Collective Actions and Organizational Practices in Istanbul”. He has worked in various non-governmental organizations and research projects. From 2016 to 2017, Özbay worked with the Right to Water Campaign. In 2018, he worked for the project “Defending and Gaining the Commons in Turkey” organized by the Civil and Ecological Rights Association (SEHAK).



## **Umut Kocagöz**

Umut Kocagöz holds his Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Boğaziçi University and Master's Degree in Philosophy and Social Thought from Istanbul Bilgi University, where he completed his thesis entitled "Rationality of the Politics of Commons". He was involved in production of the documentary *Against the Flow* (Akıntıya Karşı, 2012). He is a contributor to the book *For Everyone: A Critical Anthology on the Commons* (Herkesin Herkes İçin: Müşterekler Üzerine Eleştirel bir Antoloji, 2017). Kocagöz is a PhD student at the Institute of Social Studies located in Hague. His areas of interest are rural social movements in Turkey, peasants' struggles, food sovereignty, commons, and political theory.

## **Associate Professor Ümit Akçay**

Ümit Akçay is currently lecturing at Berlin School of Economics and Law (HWR Berlin). He has previously worked for Istanbul Bilgi University, Middle East Technical University, Atılım University, New York University, and Ordu University. He is co-author of the book *Financialization, Debt Crisis and Collapse: Future of Global Capitalism* (Finansallaşma, Borç Krizi ve Çöküş: Küresel Kapitalizmin Geleceği, 2016, Ankara: Notabene,) and the author of the *Money, Bank, State: the Political Economy of Central Bank Independence* (Para, Banka, Devlet: Merkez Bankası Bağımsızlaşmasının Ekonomi Politikası, 2009, İstanbul: SAV) and *Planning Capitalism: the Transformation of Planning and the State Planning Organization in Turkey* (Kapitalizmi Planlamak: Türkiye'de Planlamanın ve Devlet Planlama Teşkilatının Dönüşümü, 2007, İstanbul: SAV). He is currently interested in international political economy, central banking, and financialization. He also writes opinion columns for the online newspaper *Gazete Duvar*.

# Preface

Since its first introduction in 1968 by Garret Hardin, the concept of the commons has changed considerably both in terms of its influences and its conceptual content. However, Hardin's article, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, gained a wider meaning during the post-1980 neoliberal era. In fact, his approach based on the idea that excluding the commons from property relations would lead to their destruction found its concrete practice in the post-1980's world. In his 1978 article, *Political Requirements for Preserving our Common Heritage*, Hardin explicitly writes that there is already a need for 'a coercive force' in a crowded world. Thus, as he puts it in the *Tragedy of the Commons*, he sees the increase in the world's population to be the main issue and asserts that the only way to preserve the commons is through the forceful limitation of population growth and the inclusion of the commons in private or public ownership. The most prominent objection to Hardin's interpretation was raised in the work of Elinor Ostrom, who won a Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009. Notwithstanding Ostrom's critical refutation, the discussion was largely confined to an academic level.

It was in the 1990s, when neoliberal hegemony was established and its negative consequences began to appear on a global scale, that the politics of the commons came onto the agenda of social movements. At a time when market capitalism declared its ultimate victory upon the disintegration of the USSR (the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), firstly natural resources, such as waters and forests, then services like sanitation, water, education, and health began to be commodified and privatized. Objections at a global level were raised to neoliberal policies that were implemented on the assertion of 'There is no alternative'. In particular, the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, which was blockaded by unions and activists, marked the dawn of a new era of an emergent global anti-capitalist movement. It was



during this period that the concept of the commons began to appear. The movements that primarily opposed the commodification of ecological resources, arguing that these resources were commons, proposed that they should be considered external to market relations. And what's more, these movements gradually went beyond fighting in defence of the commons and began to advocate that those who use the commons and are affected by them should participate in their governance through commoning practices. Opposing the wave of privatization, the politics of the commons later expanded its political sphere by arguing that services such as education and health are the very commons of society. Following the massive, global occupation of the squares, particularly in 2011, the politics of the commons extended its demands concerning the defence of the urban commons and argued that the city itself is a common and thus should be managed by its citizens through commoning practices.

In this collected work, you will find articles that seek to analyze the politics of the commons within this framework. The unifying element of the articles is that they address the potentials of the commons not only as an academic field of study, but also by their inherent potentials and prevailing limitations as regards the anti-capitalist struggle. In addition, these articles chiefly seek to follow the traces of the politics of the commons throughout the social movements in Turkey. This book aims to fill a gap for activists, who not only want to understand the world but also to change it, by providing experiences of social movements and conceptual debates.

The first article is written by Bülent Duru with the title *"What are the Commons? On Natural, Urban, Social Commons and their Effects on Urban Social Movements"*, in which he discusses the potentials of the politics of the commons. He divides commons into three main categories: natural commons such as air, water, and soil; urban commons such as streets, parks, squares; and social and cultural commons that comprise social facilities such as social security, the internet, and traditions, as well as cultural values such as science, art, and music. Notwithstanding the increasing hegemony of cities, he states that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish urban commons from rural commons. Duru examines the transformation of these three domains of the commons during the AKP's rule. He conducts a debate on the possible reasons why movements fighting to defend the social and cultural commons tend to be much weaker than other social movements that have emerged in the field of natural and urban commons. He points to the relationship between the politics of the commons and the working class. He explores the constraints of these movements together with their inherent potentials for an anti-capitalist alternative.

Aykut Çoban begins his article, *"Ecological Commons and Enclosure Policies in Turkey"*, with a discussion on the concept of the commons. He prefers to use the term 'ortaklaşım', which focuses on the commonalities of the commons, rather than the more widely used 'müşterekler'. With a focus on the ecological commons, Çoban expounds the historical role of primitive accumulation in the enclosures of the commons, and moves on to the specific types of policies implemented as regards the enclosures of the ecological resources in Turkey.

In “*The Crisis of Capitalism and the Commons*”, Ümit Akçay lays much emphasis on the potentials inherent in the politics of the commons for an anti-capitalist movement during financial crises. Akçay begins his article by touching upon the causes of the global financial crisis of capitalism in 2007-8, the mainstream economic policies implemented so as to exit the crisis, and its short-term consequences. Scrutinizing the alternative policies devised to curb the crisis, he focuses on the contributions that the politics of the commons have to offer.

Begüm Özden Fırat reads the concept of the commons through social movements in her article entitled “*Global Movement Cycles and Commoning Movements*”. Although it is quite possible to find previous movements on commons, she explains in this article that there are mainly two global movement cycles that have certain effects on the present. The first of these is the anti-globalization movement, which began with the blocking of the WTO (World Trade Organization) meeting in Seattle in 1999 by protesters. The second is the squares and occupation movements that started in 2011. Fırat indicates that the experiences of commoning practices within these two cycles play a crucial role in organizing anti-system alternatives; nevertheless, she further explains that such movements begin to lose their global networks and interactions as they experience difficulty in gaining continuity, which leaves them in isolation from movements.

Fırat Genç, in his article “*Urban Opposition and the Politics of the Commons in Istanbul*”, addresses the urban commons in the context of the gentrification that Istanbul has endured in the 2000s and the emergent urban resistance movements specific to this period. Genç explains three urban movements within this framework: neighborhood solidarities that emerged against urban transformation projects, mobilizations that have arisen so as to defend public spaces, and the Gezi Resistance.

Can Irmak Özınanır, in “*Where do the Solidarity Academies Stand in Relation to the Commons?*”, provides a discussion on whether or not the organizations such as solidarity academies and the Street Academy, which emerged out of the campaign “We will not be a party to this crime” by Academics for Peace, are expected to generate a new form in terms of the politics of the commons, as well as the potentials and limitations that it presents.

Lülüfer Körükmez, in her article entitled “*Thinking Migrant Solidarity Movements within the Commons*”, poses the question of how approximately four million refugees, who remain excluded from the social movements in Turkey, could actually be included in the politics of the commons. She highlights the experiences of a limited number of migrant solidarity movements that are trying to include migrants in their struggles and a number of networks in that area.

In his article entitled “*The Commons Politics of Food*”, Umut Kocagöz discusses the possibilities of describing food as a common through the critique of the industrial food system. After presenting a discussion on why and how food should be defined as a commons, Kocagöz offers an insight into the origins of the food issue in Turkey together with the commons politics of food. Finally, he expands on the commonization of food

and the strategy of creating commons politics of food through four key tactics.

In his article entitled "*The Politics of the Water Commons*", Özdeş Özbay outlines two landmark struggles, namely the Italian Forum of Water Movements and the Cochabamba Water Wars, which recognize water as a common and bring the issue of the water commons onto the agenda of social movements. He then introduces the Blue Communities Project and the Barcelona in Common movement, which are municipal experiences that recognize water as a common by dint of the struggles of social movements from below.

Luke Stobart, in the book's final article, "*The Commons Experiment in Barcelona*", points out the experiences of the Barcelona in Common movement, which won the local elections in Barcelona in 2015. Stobart discusses the origins of the movement, the theories that influenced it, its ensuing practices after winning the elections, and the problems it had to deal with. Finally, he poses the question whether the movement is in need of different political strategies.

# **What are the Commons? On Natural, Urban, Social Commons and Their Effects on Urban Social Movements**

**Bülent Duru**

This article deals with social movements that originated from the commons. It attempts to analyse the kind of contribution that can be made to the process of creating an emancipatory, participatory, and just governance form of politics developed for defending mutually beneficial, commonly used and shared resources, and values and opportunities of urban life. With this in mind, an introduction will be provided into the concept, content, and narrative of the term 'commons' that has recently been added to the Turkish language; next the situation in which these resources and values are included will be presented; then the movements that have arisen from urban commons will be described both quantitatively and qualitatively; and lastly the issues arising from consociational and participatory movements, initiatives, and experiences desired for the urban commons and the opportunities they offer will be elaborated.

Largely due to political, legal, and managerial policies recently adopted, the distinction between urban and rural has become ambiguous as the gap between quality and quantity of urban and rural has widened, and negative developments on both sides have begun to affect each other. Therefore, this article analyzes the commons by encompassing ecological resources and urban spaces together.

## I. A new concept: The commons

It is not easy to immediately grasp the full content of this new concept of the English term ‘commons’, recently translated into Turkish as ‘müşterekler’.<sup>1</sup> The underlying reason that makes the meaning of this word quite ambiguous is that it is such a new concept that has only recently come into use and there are also some morphological difficulties as it is derived from an old word ‘iştirak’. In addition, semantically it has a rather multi-layered content and this obstructs the association of ideas.

The word commons, which refers to shared places, communal property, or things that cannot be appropriated, refers to a set of three core meanings: firstly, **natural resources** such as air, water, soil, forests, and seeds; secondly **urban areas** such as roads, streets, parks, squares, and coasts; and lastly, **social and cultural values** such as science, internet, arts, languages, and traditions.<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, quite natural for such a concept that sometimes touches on tangible assets and sometimes intellectual and social assets not to have an exact equivalent in Turkish.

Taking into consideration the economic, legal, and geographical conditions of Turkey and words that may be deemed similar in Turkish, we can see that it is not so easy to grasp the exact meaning of the term ‘commons’ or even to remember it for that matter. It is a concept that sometimes refers to ‘concrete’ concepts, such as pastures, coasts, and city centres, and ‘abstract’ notions, such as social values, traditions, and tales. Hence, it can be said that the most important attribute of the resources and values that this term embodies is that they are beyond market rules and have no monetary value or price whatsoever (Bollier, 2014). In a way, the commons can also be considered as goods, spaces, and social relations with which the left wing defends principles such as “justice, sharing, solidarity” against those of the right, i.e., “family, religion, nation” (Haiven, 2018: 35).

The song below, For Free, which was written by Orhan Veli Kanık and set to music by Özdemir Erdoğan in 1949, actually refers to today’s notion of the commons.

### For Free

We are living for free;  
The air’s for free, the clouds are for free,  
Hills and creeks are for free.  
Rain and mud are for free.  
The outside of cars,

---

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to say that Ernst Reuter was perhaps the first person to articulate the term ‘commons’ in Turkey. In his article published in 1941, the word “commons” was translated into Turkish as ‘serbest sahalar’ -meaning *free spaces*: “The concept of «free spaces» called the *commons*, generally owned by the much-appreciated municipalities, is actually an old one.” (See Reuter, 1941: 381-411.)

<sup>2</sup> For the areas that the concept refers to see <http://yourthings.org/tr/news/m%C3%BC%C5%9Fterekler>

The foyers of cinemas,  
Shop-windows are for free.  
Not bread and cheese,  
but hard water is for free.  
Freedom costs you your head;  
Slavery is free;  
We are living for free.  
For free.

by Orhan Veli

Even though the term ‘commons’ is at first not an easy one to grasp and the whole concept appears foreign to Turkish literature, the issues it refers to and the problems it focuses on are not that new at all. City and environment-oriented developments such as the loss of forests, the deterioration of protected areas, the collapse of agriculture, GMO foods, the plunder of coastlines, zoning of lands for construction, parking problems, and urban transformation are just some of the issues that belong in the realm of this term.

As the name implies, ‘the commons’ refers to, for example, ‘the whole of a community, or common meals, etc.’, as well as to non-privileged masses, public places, sharing, and cooperation. We can say that this term, which shares the same root as other words such as community, communication, and commonwealth (Haiven, 2018: 79), in a way includes spaces, resources, and social relations that can be excluded from the influence of the capitalist system. For this reason, these areas, that is to say the commons, are, of course, going to be the first places for governments that are seeking to enlarge their economy to attempt to possess in order to consolidate more power, increase their oppression, and support their cronies.

Behind the conflicts and movements initiated by the commons are the common values and natural living environments that people, animals, and other living things encompass. Pastures and natural resources such as forests, shores, and seas can host large masses of people and other creatures. What’s more, the community can freely benefit from many aspects of these areas without having to resort to the monetary system. These areas can further be used to accommodate social demonstrations and political movements, for example in parks, streets, squares, or, as we see in the case of the internet, provide communication and thus the necessary conditions for solidarity. Additionally, they can even play a vital role in promoting awareness in music, art, and education. In other words, the commons carry a wide range of functions involving the establishment of life, maintenance of livelihoods, sustainability of the economy, and the development of culture.

These three main areas, i.e., common natural resources, urban elements, and social-cultural values, are all vital for the capitalist system in one way or another. With the more common use of the word commons, common spaces and common properties have



begun to have a much stronger voice as these three values are the mainstays of capitalism and capital accumulation.

As should be clear from the above description, each and every area, environment, value, and cultural asset evaluated within the concept of the commons is regarded as a resource for capitalism. Everything utilized and shared by the common space described by the word 'commons' is of pivotal importance to the existing system, in that they could also be seen as a great threat to the existing system of values and form of social relations. With the discourse that says "rivers, which do not belong to one single person or rather belong to everyone, flow for no reason and are therefore pretty much wasted, and that public squares are not safe anymore or that the urban neighbourhoods are corrupted by crime", it has been possible to introduce necessary regulations to appropriate these values for private property (Firat, 2011; 2012). In a way, the commons actually represent areas that can be excluded from traditional and 'modern enclosure movements',<sup>3</sup> i.e., the control of the sovereign economic system and capital. Hence, by their very nature, these areas can certainly be expected to be a target of capital and integrated within the capitalist system.

Generally speaking, the commons, that go unnoticed under normal circumstances, start to gain importance and take on vital functions, especially in periods of crisis, since they are considered naturally existing, and there is simply no cost in their utilization phase. Some examples of this are the use of natural resources in order to sustain daily life during economic depression, or in the development of alternative forms of production and consumption (such as barter markets and food cooperatives) to the existing economic system, as well as the gathering of people in the form of urban commons or via the internet amidst political crises (McGuirk, J., 2015). Calling the communal tent in the park 'commons' during the Gezi protest is a good example (Güner, 2014). In a sense, in moments of economic and political crises, commons tend to become a rather vital element for a vast majority of the public. And yet for capitalists and financiers, they are merely seen as an opportunity in terms of 'primitive accumulation' in order to strengthen their existence (Caffentzis, Federici, 2015).

Nevertheless, it should not be concluded that the current economic and political structures are based on the immediate destruction of the commons. In the search for ways to make maximum use of these assets and values, which are the mainstay of capital accumulation and economic growth, appropriate methods such as 'sustainable development' are devised. A number of mechanisms, such as 'precautionary principle', 'public participation', and 'polluter pays', which are referred in the literature today as the basic principles of environmental management or environmental law, also shed some light on the ways and methods that are in a way capable of protecting the

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<sup>3</sup> During the emergence of capitalism, the first enclosure movement took place in the form of appropriating common land for private ownership and the destruction of common goods. Similarly, legislation such as privatization and patenting of the basic essentials for life such as water and food together with the expansion of intellectual property rights are considered modern enclosure movements. See Haiven, 2018: 27, 79.

commons.<sup>4</sup> As an extension of the same approach, the process of appropriating, harming, and destroying the commons, which are assumed to be common property or value, is expressed within the concept known as ‘negative externality’ (Walljasper, 2015: 77). This concept, which is used to describe the positive or negative effects of any one activity on others, has particularly stuck in our mind with the example of environmental pollution caused by factories. As regards the commons in Turkey, the concept refers not only to air, water, or environmental issues such as soil pollution but also to the destruction of forests, the deterioration of food, and the difficulties of transportation and climate change. Preparing statutory measures mainly based on intra-system material elements such as legal measures aimed at preventing the negative effects of externalities, for example, additional taxation, compensation, fines, and emission permits, etc., has not actually been effective in compensating for the damage done to the commons.



### **The distinction between commons and open spaces**

It should be noted that some consider commons as something different from a ‘public spaces’ or ‘common property regimes’. Garrett Hardin is a leading pioneer in the formation of the commons literature. In the *Tragedy of the Commons*, written in 1968, he explained that public spaces and assets would enter into a process of wear and tear after a while, which would lead to their ultimate destruction, as each beneficiary would only be concerned with his own gain. As a precaution, he proposed to either nationalize or privatize these places (Adaman et al., 2017: 15). Elinor Ostrom, who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009, has strongly opposed Hardin’s views in her work. Ostrom says that those benefiting from common assets have developed unique methods to prevent uneven and unbalanced use. And she adds that when pressure increases with outsiders and changes in the form of established management begin, problems quite naturally follow (Brent and Sharma, 2015; Akbulut et al., 2015). According to Ostrom, the areas that Hardin mentions should not be regarded as commons but as public spaces with no rules of joint use and with ‘open access regimes’<sup>5</sup> (Angelis and Harvie, 2017: 115). To put it another way, in order for any space, resource or asset to be considered a common, some certain issues need to be clarified such as who is expected to benefit from them and what the rules of use are. What’s more, the type of customs pertaining to their supervision and sustainability should be established.



## **II. Commons in Turkey**

The main reasons why there is a considerable increase in the level of the quantitative

<sup>4</sup> <http://yourthings.org/tr/news/m%C3%BC%C5%9Fterekler>

<sup>5</sup> res nullius

and qualitative importance of the commons in Turkey, and also why natural, artificial, or cultural commons have a rather strong place, are that a significant portion of the country's land is still state-owned (thanks to the manorial system and heritage of Ottoman land law), forests take up a relatively large area, the country is regarded as a transit country in terms of its history, geography, and culture, and finally there is still an ongoing urbanization process. To be more precise, most of the state-owned land reclaimed from migrants who lived in substandard housing (*gecekondular*) for urban transformation have created many commons-centred problems. In addition, forests have begun to be damaged by the energy and housing sectors, and tourism is having an increasingly negative impact on both culturally and historically rich areas.

It is possible to say that economic policies are typically being developed in such a way that they are likely to result in some loss of or damage to common urban elements and natural resources. This approach, which currently is a priority of the AKP's energy, transportation, housing, and tourism investments, stems from viewing natural resources such as water, land, and forests as unlimited. In other words, the fact that Turkey is quite a wealthy country in terms of the commons has inevitably led to an overwhelming pressure on them.

## **The end of the urban-rural divide?**

Since the title of this study contains the term 'urban commons', you might think that the sole focus will be on common spaces and values within the city. However, over the course of time, the urban-rural distinction has blurred as the distinction between managerial and political differences have gradually become vague and developments in these areas have affected each other in a rather negative fashion. In this regard, it is more meaningful to evaluate the commons in terms of natural resources and urban spaces together.

There is a correlation between the damage and destruction processes of rural and urban, as well as natural and artificial commons. The best example that clearly shows that these two concepts are not really separate from each other is the closure of rural and subnational municipalities in small districts. With the help of legal regulations, the area covered by metropolitan municipalities has been extended to the borders of the city. Consequently, thousands of villages and municipalities have been put under the control of metropolitan areas. Transferring the management of rural areas over to urban administrations has created the strongest intervention in the commons in recent years. With this legislation, peasants' common goods, such as water, soil, and pasture, have been appropriated by the metropolitan cities. In this way, the commons that the indigenous populations of the region traditionally used to share have been taken away from them and the administration of them handed over to external central units, often situated many miles away. It is not surprising that these assets are and will be transferred to the use of certain companies. It is possible to say that the abovementioned regulations, which are bound to have considerable legal, administrative, and ecological effects, have planted the first seeds of the centralization of property and the deterioration of natural resources.

The policies that put pressure on both natural and artificial environments seem to accelerate the process of obscuring the distinction between urban and rural commons and, what is worse, they are not the only ones. Large-scale energy, transportation, housing, and tourism developments have not only damaged natural resources, such as water, forests, seas, and coasts, but also forced some of those living in small villages and towns to migrate to the suburbs of metropolitan areas. The last few years have seen extensive damage to olive groves and a rapid increase in the number of coal mines that has led to disastrous landslides. What's more, villagers have been diagnosed with diseases such as asthma, bronchitis, and cancer, which has led to the evacuation of 48 villages (Eroğlu, 2018).

That such small governmental units begin to lose their power and are threatened with closure can be seen as a step paving the way to the destruction of the commons. In particular, considering the administrative, decentralization, and solidarity regulations of Village Law, it is recognized that the management of each element, from squares to mosques and from forests to wetlands, is, in effect, left to the common will of the people of the village. Hence, it would not be wrong to see villages and similar small emancipatory settlements as some of the examples of the commons.

### **Examples of commons: Villages and Village Law**

The term 'commons' includes three sets of meanings: natural, urban and cultural values. It refers to a wide variety of tangible and intangible elements, ranging from unclaimed property to common traditions. It has become a truism to claim that the commons are either directly or indirectly related to innumerable legal regulations. Leaving the basic legislative regulations such as the Penal Code, Environmental Law, Forest Law and Misdemeanour Law aside, it can also be said that the most powerful notion of the commons can be found in the Village Law of 1924. The law clearly states that "the gathering of male and female villagers who have the right to choose the village headman and council of elders is called a village". Article 15 of the Law states that "most of the village work is carried out through collective participation of all villagers". Article 2 states that "people who have the right to shared goods such as mosques, schools, pastures, highlands and coppices and who live in nucleated or dispersed settlement patterns with their vineyards, gardens, and farms are the constituents of a village". These lines refer to both common beneficiaries (shared goods) and collective management (Village Society), as well as solidarity (collective work). Although the rules for sharing of public spaces and the continuation of life with solidarity were established primarily to ensure integrity within the country and to strengthen local governments, in effect the state turned out to be unable to take all of its local services to all corners of the country (Duru, 2013).

## **The AKP and commons**

It has been mentioned that the commons in the urban and environmental areas in particular are important beneficial resources in terms of sustaining economic growth, capital accumulation, and empowering the government. Thus, these areas in countries where there is uncontrolled economic development, such as is the case with Turkey, are under greater threat in that natural commons such as pastures, forests, and water can be appropriated for economic operations without any limitations; urban areas such as roads, squares, and parks can be closed to the public due to political fears; facilities such as the internet and social security can be regulated in accordance with the rules of capitalism; and lastly, art and music activities can be suppressed by oppressive means.

### **a. In terms of nature and the city**

Since the establishment of the AKP, and especially as their effects went wide of the mark regarding the European Union, the first and foremost important negative impact of the economic policies they have pursued has been on the natural, urban, and cultural resources called the commons. The aftermath can be seen in the deterioration, pollution, degradation, and destruction of common resources and values such as forests, parks, squares, and seas which have previously been used as shared public spaces. Another problematic is seen in terms of the use of the commons by the general public in the city. For instance, some regulations oblige individuals to pay for the use of the commons, often restricting or even preventing people from using them. Consequently, with regard to the rights of solidarity, demands for the right of access to the environment, right to the city, housing, transportation, education, and health, all of which are evaluated, have all come to the fore.

It would not be wrong to say that under AKP rule, the overall economy has been built upon the commons, natural and urban in particular. The traces of this approach, known as 'a construction-based one, rather than production' can be detected in the construction of apartments, skyscrapers, bridges, and dams, all of which are on the rise. Ignoring agrarian and rural spaces, opening rivers to innumerable HES (hydroelectric power plants) activities, increasing the number of projects carried out in forest areas, starting new developments that will put heavy pressure on nature such as the Third Bridge, the new airport, and Kanal Istanbul, eviscerating preventive and supervisory instruments such as EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), supplying unlimited amounts of natural resources to industry and trade, zoning lakes and coasts for the tourism sector with no supervision, encouraging mining, transferring copyrights and patents related to natural resources to certain fractions and groups are just some of the major issues that come to mind.

Almost all of the recent economic activities concentrated in roughly four sectors, i.e., energy, transportation, housing, and tourism, are carried out in such a way that they harm and suppress natural, urban, and cultural spaces. The methods applied to overcome protection measures, juridical decisions, developmental restrictions, and implementation difficulties are as follows: 'centralization in the exercise of power',

‘disabling the institutions responsible for protection’, ‘creating loopholes in regulations that require protection’, ‘misuse of legal procedures outside their purposes’ and ‘rendering legislature ineffective’ (Duru, 2015).

It is fair to say that the commons that have urban characteristics tend to be under two kinds of constraints. To start with, nearly all areas open to public use have been invaded by roads, overpasses, skyscrapers, and shopping centres. And secondly, with the state of emergency imposed after the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, the streets, parks, and squares have been subject to the strict conditions of a new period of repression. Zoning most of the earthquake assembly areas in Istanbul for construction is a good example of the first type.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Ankara is the most striking example of the second type, with the city centre being exposed to endless inspections, prohibitions, and restrictions.

## **b. In terms of society and culture**

As mentioned earlier, commons are not limited to natural resources and urban areas. There are also some other types of commons that carry differing attributes in terms of society and culture such as languages, traditions, sciences, the internet, and arts. While it is relatively easy to make evaluations in terms of natural or urban commons, it is necessary to make a more detailed analysis of the commons related to social and cultural values.

In Turkey, when we think of the concept of ‘commons’, the first issues that come to mind are the problematics of natural resources and urban areas. There are mainly two reasons for this. First of all, due to fact that the country is still in the process of modernization, ties with the countryside still survive in some ways, and religious networks and kinship relations are strong, and even if there is no formal organization, a significant number of people can still realize their economic and social needs without entering market relations. In addition, a wide range of services and facilities such as transportation of supplies from villages, fundraising, matchmaking and marriages, hospitality, childcare, and sharing one another’s sorrow can be accessed freely, whereas in developed capitalist countries, these services can only be accessed by paying a price. At first glance, such commons are not considered to be very strong or great in number. This is because they are carried out without formal organization and without a name.

In other words, the distinction between rural and urban has begun to disappear in a very short period of time, roughly half a century, as the migratory flows to large cities have accelerated and capitalism has started to take root. On the one hand, it has also led to the decay and destruction of the urban commons, but on the other, it has also led to a continuation of traditional community behaviour patterns in urban life. In a sense, various forms of cooperation, solidarity, and sharing, all of which Mübeccel Kıray has coined ‘buffer mechanisms’, have been factors that have made it possible for social and cultural commons to stay relatively strong.

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<sup>6</sup> See “İstanbul’daki Deprem Toplanma Alanları Halktan Gizleniyor”, (The Earthquake Assembly Areas in Istanbul are Hidden from the Public), *Cumhuriyet*, 17 August 2017.



The second reason why social and cultural commons are not considered a major problem is the lack of efficient royalties and intellectual property rights and the fact that despite the tough restrictions and prohibitions imposed on them, they still have open and free access to a significant portion of the internet. It is possible to access works of art, literature, and music, for which you would need to pay in other countries, by means of copying, imitation, and reproduction.

During AKP rule, not only have the natural and urban commons opened themselves to the functioning of the economy without limit but also customs, traditions, and conventions regarding production, cooperation, sharing, and utilization have begun to fade away, losing their function and becoming meaningless in the face of the power of the market. Needless to say the pressures on facilities such as the internet, Wikipedia, and social media and their cultural values such as music, art, and science, which constitute the more intangible aspects of the commons, have been negatively influenced by the gloomy atmosphere created after the failed coup attempt.

### **III. Commons-based social movements**

On the one hand, the resources, processes, and facilities that we call the commons refer to the very conditions that have created capitalism, such as ‘enclosure’, and on the other hand, it also reminds us of the wealth and values that people and other living creatures commonly benefit from, as well as showing the direction of new life styles built on solidarity and sharing in the future (Haiven, 2018: 35). These easy-to-access, free-to-use areas constitute the starting point of the nature of opposition movements. The movements that feed on the problems created by class, ethnicity, and gender inequalities become more and more evident in urban commons since they provide the necessary space while hosting them.

Opposition activities, demonstrations, protests, and resistances, which constitute the driving force of urban and environmental concerns, have generally been seen as new social movements. Some of the reasons for this are as follows: being guided by motives arising from cultural spaces rather than political ones; resorting to specific methods such as civil disobedience, ecoterrorism and direct action rather than traditional means of struggle such as strikes and armed conflict; aiming to change society in terms of the problem it deals with, not all aspects; generally being supported by urban and educated middle-class members; and lastly, aiming to enable participants to choose a platform and community-like temporary organizations rather than traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical mechanisms such as political parties and unions.<sup>7</sup>

However, although it might seem that they should be considered as a new social movement due to the abovementioned attributes, this is not the case. Owing to the fact that the commons are the source of urban social movements in a period when they are the driving force of natural and urban resources as well as the economy, they are not actually far from being class-based social movements. As David Harvey analyses in his

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<sup>7</sup> For class-based movements and new social movements, see: Coşkun, 2007: 99-114.

proposition of 'accumulation by dispossession',<sup>8</sup> it is fair to say that as new social movements, urban and environmental responses, in essence, originate from the same causes as traditional, economic, and political movements.<sup>9</sup> Analysing urbanization movements in capitalist societies within the framework of capital accumulation processes,<sup>10</sup> Harvey explains the situation as follows: "Urbanization is itself produced. Thousands of workers are engaged in its production, and their work is productive of value and of surplus value. Why not focus, therefore, on the city rather than the factory as the prime site of surplus value production?" (2013: 187). The realization of this accumulation process today is as follows: rural evacuation, eviction of farmers from their land, prevention of traditional or alternative forms of production, privatization of public goods and services, appropriation of natural resources and values, commodification of nature and culture, as well as transformation of various types of property rights (common, collective, public) into private property (Adaman, et al., 2017: 18).

Generally speaking, inter-class conflict is seen not only in business but also in everyday life. The effort to provide capital accumulation and unearned incomes seems to be the strongest driving force that triggers urban social movements (Harvey, 2013: 187). In contrast to movements arising from culture and identity, such as ethnicity, race, and gender, the main problematic in terms of urban social movements emerging over the commons is, of course, the appropriation of shared resources. However, it should be noted here that there are certain interactions between the origins of movements; and even in cases where the basic purpose is to obtain unearned income and accumulate money, those who are in a rather vulnerable position, such as women as well as linguistic, religious, and cultural minorities, will experience the greatest harm.<sup>11</sup> The initiators of suppression on the commons and those who create the accompanying administrative and legal conditions and those affected by the negative consequences of such suppression are not of the same class, sex, or ethnicity. As a result, emergent urban conflicts and environmental crises will not affect society as a whole. In that, those of a higher economic and social position will be able to access the methods needed to overcome these problems more easily (Çoban, 2013: 243-282). For example, in the case of damaging the commons in Turkey through appropriation or destruction, it will be women, Alevis, and Kurds who suffer the most, having to face far more challenges in their quest to find ways to avert the imminent outcomes.

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<sup>8</sup> The first movement, coined by Karl Marx as 'primitive accumulation', refers to capital accumulation through the enclosure of public spaces for communal use such as arable lands, forests and pastures as well as turning them into private property. These days when capitalism is experiencing a crisis, David Harvey has referred to Marx's concept of 'primitive accumulation', and used the term 'accumulation by dispossession' in order to describe the process of adopting methods, such as privatization of common areas, restriction of access routes and promotion of commodification. See Adaman et al., 2017: 17.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the fact that the two struggles, i.e., the struggle against the exploitation of labour and the struggle against the plundering and exploitation of nature, cannot be separated, see Çoban, 2013: 244, 250.

<sup>10</sup> For the views of Harvey and Marxism on urban spaces, see Şengül, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> For example, for the impact of local politics and municipal services on women, see Alkan, 2004.

## The current situation in Turkey

As mentioned above, the word ‘commons’ encompasses natural resources, such as air, water, and soil, and urban spaces, such as streets, parks, and squares, as well as social facilities, such as social security, the internet, and traditions, together with cultural values, such as science, art, and music. Nevertheless, in a country such as Turkey that is still in a transitional stage economically, culturally, and geographically, the word in question is more related to the state of natural and urban commons. To put it in another way, commons-based social movements mostly stem from urban and environmental problems at large. As mentioned earlier, among the reasons for such movements are the continuation of the urbanization process, appropriation of common land, the subsistence of a portion of the population being dependent on natural resources, emergent problems in socio-economic development, insufficient social facilities, and lastly, sluggish laws and legislations pertaining to science, the internet, and copyright and patent rights.

What is meant by the word commons is the view that every single space, entity, and relation is seen as a resource that can provide capital accumulation. In a country like Turkey, whose economy is fraught with inadequacies and whose growth is not based on production but unearned incomes, it is not actually surprising to see that these areas will be the first targets to be utilized. As seen in the construction sector, which is building more and more mines, dams, and houses, the increasingly unbearable pressure on some commons may damage the livelihoods of inhabitants. Thus, as the common natural resources such as water, pastures, forests, and olive groves are taken away from these people, on the one hand they will have to acquire the resources they need for themselves, their animals, and their products from the market, and on the other, they will take a step closer to proletarianization in these places where their livelihoods are doomed to utter destruction (Akbulut, 2017: 286, 287). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the current economic order and the social differentiation it has created are the culprits behind the rising opposition to natural and urban commons.

Even though the urban commons movement sprawling from Gezi Park is still at the back of our mind, it does not have a strong presence in terms of quality and quantity. As can be seen in the signature campaign of the 1980s with the slogan “Güvenpark not parking lot” in Ankara, as well as the protests held against the construction of the Artillery Barracks on Taksim Square and the demolition of Emek Cinema in 2010, it is fair to say that these movements of the urban commons should not actually be underestimated.

Generally speaking, the movements over the urban commons have been initiated with the intention of protecting city squares, defending the slum areas, preventing the destruction of green areas or standing against the demolition of historical buildings at large. From this point of view, it would not be wrong to say that capital accumulation and reconstruction are the underlying causes behind such movements. And yet, as mentioned previously, it is necessary to interpret such movements that arise from urban commons from a much broader perspective. The fact that urban commons are the actual

target when it comes to the settlement of cities not limited to the centres of industry, energy, and transportation but continuing to spread onto rural and natural areas, there has been an increase in the number of movements at differing levels of diversity. With this development accompanied by certain legal and administrative regulations, the resources, relations, and problems in urban and rural areas are intertwined and, in turn, have begun to affect each other. Therefore, it is no longer possible to distinguish between urban and rural movements.

In short, it may be rather misleading to focus solely on the challenges that arise from the uses of commons within the city while assessing urban commons-based social movements. In addition, excessive interventions on natural resources in rural areas are now among the factors motivating urban social movements in order to sustain urban life. There are two essential reasons for this: due to recent legal regulations and political enterprises, as urban and rural areas have begun to converge, on the one hand the spatial differences between them have begun to lose their meaning, and on the other hand emergent problems in rural areas have begun to have a negative impact on urban life. In particular, as a result of economic and managerial policies that solely target the maximization of unearned income and strengthen capitalist powers, the boundaries of metropolitan municipalities have extended as more and more villages are enclosed and agricultural land is lost, and, together with HESes (Hydroelectric Power Plants) destroying water resources, massive development projects destroy forest areas and more roads are constructed by filling seas and coastlines with nothing but concrete. Problems related to such natural resources emerge in urban life mainly in the form of water scarcity, water pollution, air pollution, and climate change as well as food shortages.

## **Challenges of defending the commons**

With a country of economic and democratic deprivation such as Turkey, there are significant structural challenges and barriers in terms of defending cultural, ecological, or urban commons.

According to public opinion, the commons with regard to the city and environment are often considered together with more prevalent and superficial problematics such as the decrease in the quality of life, as well as the increase of pollution and the deterioration of health. More structural causes such as class relations and ownership status often tend to be ignored. A similar situation is seen in limiting food security only by providing healthy and adequate food with a sole focus on production, cleaning, and storage. It can be said that the same situation has been observed in traditional food and agriculture understanding that is far from addressing the real dangers generated by wars, conflicts, states, and food giants.<sup>12</sup>

There are certain factors that limit the success of social movements stemming from the

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<sup>12</sup> İrfan Aktan's interview with Bülent Şık, "War is the biggest threat to food security", *Gazete Duvar*, 20 January 2018.

commons, be it urban or rural. For example, it is sometimes believed that developments and initiatives that could harm natural resources and urban spaces will provide livelihoods and jobs for local people in poverty-stricken areas. Similarly, educated urban activists are often willing to protect natural resources, historical values, and occupied urban areas that are at high risk and, what's more, do not want to see any kind of development of these areas. And yet sometimes they are also the ones that can perceive these projects as an opportunity for development and progress for local people.

A further factor constraining the progress of commons-based movements in some places where forests, streams, and damaged commons are located is that the indigenous population might be quite conservative. For instance, they might remain indifferent to existing problems or they might have close ties to the AKP. Alternatively they may be concerned with the economic aspect of the crisis rather than the ecological one, or they might participate in protests in order simply to defend their livelihoods.

We can also add that the urban, educated, middle-class left-leaning activists who participate in protests and demonstrations initiated in response to some damage to the commons are not appreciated by local people at times. Furthermore, they could be kept at a distance and seen as outsiders, which, in turn, can stand in the way of solidarity and commoning.

## **The opportunity of the commons**

Turkey is a country that does not thoroughly run on the ideal principles of democracy, with a limited participation level owing to heavy-handed barriers to the freedom of expression. In this regard, as we saw during the Gezi Park resistance, it can be thought that the commoning initiatives have a significant role in revealing alternative forms of living, management, production, and sharing experiences, rather than just yielding long-lasting results.

Every now and then, public institutions, local governments, or the private sector can be effective in preventing projects that could harm the city and nature. And yet it is necessary to say that in most cases the commons-based ventures tend to be spontaneous, instantaneous, irregular, temporary, and fragmentary. In that regard, there are a number of reasons why many of these attempts no longer exist: firstly, they are generally local in nature, such as community councils, solidarity networks, occupation movements, cooperative initiatives, and seed exchange festivals; secondly, some of them last only for a period of time; and lastly, the rest are still in their trial phase with no hope of continuity, expansion, or growth and social recognition.

Factors such as the financial burden of subsistence in the city, living in apartment blocks, chaos caused by traffic and noise, pollutants generated by industrial activities, the crisis that the agricultural sector is in - for example, shelves are full of products with additives and the proliferation of genetically modified foods - in short, moving away from everything natural in our everyday lives have brought inhabitants closer to rural values

and have increased interest in the natural commons. On top of that, they have accelerated the formation of new life styles that are more in touch with nature, so to speak.

Social movements rising from a small number of commons that can escape ruling economic relations and the pressure of the capitalist system have, in a way, aided local people, ordinary citizens, and university students in their attempts to enter the realm of politics that encompasses professionals, the wealthy, and the elite. It is possible to see some examples of this in the Gezi Resistance in particular.

It would not be wrong to say that these movements that are limited due to their structural deficiencies, weaknesses, and the heavy pressure under which they operate all meaning they fail to have an effective impact on the government are doomed to failure or to remain dysfunctional. But as long as they shed light on the ways of new life styles, alternative ways of construction, different forms of solidarity, and possible sharing opportunities, these movements can actually fulfil expectations.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

When the economy is in trouble, commons are the first places where the government tends to intervene. Furthermore, bearing in mind the fact that the economy is expected to worsen in the future and daily life will be filled with much bigger problems, it can be said that urban commons-based movements are not only bound to increase in number but also gain more prominence. The fact that metropolises tend to spread toward rural areas on which they are economically and ecologically dependent, legal arrangements pertaining to this process have been realized, and also the gradual disappearance of urban and rural differences are all confirming this idea.

Thanks to the new metropolitan system, those who live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture are now subject to city centre municipalities. This will ultimately trigger the need for such commons-based social movements in these areas in the near future. We can actually see this just by looking at the fact that metropolitan municipalities, whose natural and material resources are limited, see agricultural areas as a possible income channel and they start to make significant investments - from the food sector to energy and from cemeteries to dumps - to sustain the lives of large populations dwelling in the city. However, it may also be said that the more importantly the feeling of participation in the management of enclosed villages and small municipalities has not yet been lost to the new metropolitan system.

In Turkey, spaces that are of pivotal importance for the commons to emerge and maintain their presence out of the social movements have been under threat for a very long time. Some parts of city squares, parks, and green areas have been appropriated for construction, some have been buried underneath roads and bridges, others have been zoned for commercial activities, and the rest have been barred with heavy security

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<sup>13</sup> For a more complete explanation, see Haiven, 2018: 94.



measures and restrictions. Therefore, both the shared commons that needs to be fought for and the places to host and sustain any such movement are either lost or damaged.

With the state of emergency launched after the coup attempt, the movements related to the commons have largely entered a period of stagnation. These years will be referred to as times filled with strict measures such as prohibitions, restraints, denial, and detention. What is worse is that natural commons are being appropriated for the service of the economy without any supervision whatsoever, while heavy security measures and restrictions are employed to prevent possible movements in response to this destruction.

It can further be said that the coffee houses project of Tayyip Erdoğan - who occasionally brings a wry smile to our faces - was started upon the realization of the gap arising from these natural and intangible commons. We can see the not-so-bizarre connection between the disappearances of streets, squares, and meeting points one by one and his promise of opening coffee houses offering free cake and tea.

There are obviously a number of challenging obstacles when it comes to protecting and improving the commons in a society where the majority of people feel excluded from the existing system, recognize the current order is not egalitarian, suffer from deeply entrenched forms of relationships, are challenged by obstacles in order to protect and develop the commons, and realize that there is no fair distribution of common resources. Furthermore, it may be expected that significant deflection and hardships could arise from adopting the values and opportunities based on common resources in a society where people believe that it is, at times, necessary to violate the laws, to stretch the rules, to behave opportunistically, to create personal exceptions, and to make the acquaintance of people in a position of power in order to make a living or to survive on a daily basis in social relations and in the urban order.

This trend, however, jeopardizes the very future of the commons in the political world, the economic structure, the education system, and everyday life, as well as in the urban order. And what's worse, it bears the power of creating the opposite result. Last but not least, it should be noted that those who are excluded from the established order and those who feel discomfort from the dominant values and who see social injustice are much closer to searching for new ways of living, solidarity and sharing and to revealing other ways of utilizing the commons as a critical reaction to the current general tendency in society.

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# Ecological Commons and Enclosure Polices in Turkey

**Aykut Çoban**

The term commons has recently been transformed into something similar to that of the parable of the blind man and the elephant, which has given the concept its widespread popularity. And yet, it is impossible to conduct a scientific discussion with a 'concept' to which everyone can attach a different meaning. Moreover, Ostrom, who begins from the same concept, distinguishes her perspective from Hardin, and Marxists distinguish theirs from both. Nevertheless, even in texts that tend to emphasize such theoretical distinctions, the commons is at times reduced to a simple understanding of 'free resources for all'. Of course, it goes without saying that everyone could have a different understanding of the commons. But still there is no need to get lost in theoretical distinctions and slight academic variations if, at the end of the day, we are to come back to Hardin's description of the commons.

Commons and enclosures could be regarded as twin concepts; that is to say, the way we conceptualize the commons determines the way we understand enclosures. The very idea of enclosure is all about taking the commons away from working communities. In situations where there is commoning, the act of expropriation, which is usually performed by capital and often with the help of the state, is called enclosure. In addition, I would specifically like to use the term 'the effect of enclosure' for situations in which there is no commons but resources freely accessed by the general public. In this case the expropriation of ecological resources by capital destroys both the possibility and the potential for communities to transform them into commons.

Hereby, this article will first focus on the conceptions and theories of commons. Then the concepts of commons, enclosure, and the effect of enclosure will be clarified. The discussion mainly focuses on ecological commons in accordance with the subject of the paper. Following that, regulations and implementations pertaining to various enclosures and their effects in Turkey will be examined. Examples covered include pastures, summer pastures, forests, waters, and coasts.

## **The concept of commons\***

Generally speaking, when we use the term commons, the first examples that spring to mind are the land, forests, summer and winter pastures, highlands, air, streams, seas, coasts, pavements, children's playgrounds, and urban parks. However, some new examples such as the atmosphere, space, ocean floor, internet, languages, and information have recently been added to the somewhat long list. According to some, the commons, in its broadest sense, is all that everyone shares and that belongs to everyone at the same time.

Yet, for others, commons should be considered as "a form of co-activity, rather than seeking to develop a mode of property right such as co-ownership, joint-property or collective ownership." As they note, "it is necessary to affirm that it is *only* the activity in practice which can make things common. Likewise, it is *only* this activity which can produce a new collective subject, who is very different from the subject who could exist before this activity, the [individual] subject seen as [just] a bearer of rights" (Dardot and Laval, 2018: 27-28).

In its broadest sense, a common is reduced to its natural essence because of its natural characteristic as a physical source, space, and entity to be open to everyone's use. On the other hand, in the narrowest sense a common is reduced to social relations if one considers every commoning practice as a condition of a common.

An understanding of commons that is reduced to such a degree is to claim that a common can only be realized when an activity creates a collective subject and one that does not contain any natural essentialism. In terms of politics, it leads to nothing but a dead-end: when such an understanding is reached, no one, including ordinary people, will be able to put forward any political opposition against attempts in which capital and the state decide to expropriate open spaces, thus close them to public access, because they will assume liability for the protection and maintenance of the commons after the contributors of the same event have formed the collective subject. In cases where there is no collective subject but still various social activities and actions waged to protect pastures, forests, and coastal areas, the legitimacy of these political demands of sensitive people will also be disputable.

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\* In this section, the author discusses how the word 'commons' should be translated into Turkish. Since this discussion has lost its meaning in English, two paragraphs at the beginning of this chapter have been omitted.

Whether it is weak or strong, there must be some sort of a commoning activity in place for any common. And yet, when only a specific sort of commoning is the condition of a common, then due to a narrow definition, the politics of commons will be confined to the field of brilliant but rare commoning practices. In particular, how commoning or cooperation is understood determines the political equation here. Is commoning a notion that entails the traditional rules and sanctions adopted by the forest village when using the forest, or a fishing activity with a governance model, or is it a collective production and distribution process that does not necessarily have to produce a commodity? Let's leave this discussion aside for now. Let's just say: If the conception of commoning - when the act of commoning is a prerogative of a common by nature - derives from a maximalist notion that obliges all of such qualifications to be present simultaneously, then the politics of the commons umbrella becomes too limited.

A common is undoubtedly a co-activity of some sort, but this does not necessarily mean lining up to dance the halay or having a football match either. A common refers to the social interaction of the community with a physical entity. A relationship can be established with a forest ecosystem, a fishing area, agricultural land, or an urban park as a settlement. When this physical entity is not taken into account, the subject of the interaction between people disappears. Therefore, what we are left with would be an ordinary sort of community activity without the existence of a common. On the other hand, a group of trees that people do not have to use or assume any liability for is still a grove, but not a common. Similarly, an ocean floor is by definition an ocean floor (contra Ostrom). In other words, an ecological common consists of both the presence of a natural resource that is independent of human activity and a social activity that is independent of this very natural resource. That is to say, its natural and social components are inseparable.

Nature, which is subject to commoning, cannot only be something that people create through social interactions, and that they assume responsibility for afterwards either. It is a continuum of other species as well, that is living or non-living things besides human beings. From this point of view, it is true to say that a common is not merely an area of human relations or human-centred activities. For instance, the enclosure of a common may not only limit or completely destroy the activities of the human community but also those of other creatures with which human beings may also interact as well. In this regard, a common can be defined as a socio-natural relationship.

The subject of this article is natural commons. And yet, the term natural commons may give you the wrong impression that there are no social relations involved in it whatsoever. However, there are various ecological interactions observed in natural commons. Not only does it refer to the classical definition of an ecosystem that covers the interactions of organisms with the environment, but also it incorporates the interactions of people forming the commons within those relations and local ecological conditions. That's why, instead of categorizing them as natural commons, referring to them as *ecological commons* would be much more appropriate.



## Theoretical differences

In the process of a common, the social interaction with a physical entity may occur in different forms. In other words, the common that entails an activity to which people are associated and the understanding of that common may differ. Theoretical approaches, which also point to this diversification, can be divided into two distinct groups: approaches that home in on the resource and those that focus on the social interaction. Garrett Hardin can be given as an example for resource-oriented approaches. One branch of the social interaction perspective emphasizes the involvement of the community, such as Elinor Ostrom, while the other attaches more importance to the commoning practice.

In Hardin's conception, commons refers to the very idea that people are free to use open resources for their own benefit. While the number of people using them (population) increases on a regular basis, the resources that they depend on gradually diminish for they are limited, i.e. finite. Everyone will also increase the amount of resources they consume in time as people are typically interested in their own gain. Therefore, due to excessive use, commons such as grasslands, fishing areas, and national parks will not be of any use to anyone after a while because of the fact that excessive use will eliminate the carrying capacity of the resource. As Hardin points out in his *The Tragedy of the Commons*, the resource ends up being destroyed. This tragedy seems to be rather inevitable as the population (i.e. poor people's access to resources) will continuously increase. What leads to this tragedy of the commons is that they are equipped with absolute freedom in terms of the use of resources. According to Hardin, one of the solutions is to limit the use of open resources via restrictive regulations through state ownership. But, as a believer in the 'free market', Hardin's actual proposal is to convert the commons into private property. That is to say, the commons should not be open to the general public, but only to the property owner. This clearly creates injustice. And yet, he would prefer social injustice to tragedy whereby the resources are destined to ultimate destruction (Hardin, 1968; 1998).

It seems that the only way to overcome the annihilation of resources is through the destruction of the commons with the help of enclosures! Thus it is no longer a common, but an enclosed property -nothing other than a natural entity that only the proprietor has access to.

The effect of people in Hardin's commons has much in common with the interactions that the followers of Adam Smith had with natural resources, trying to maximize their own interests under conditions of capitalist competition. In this type of commons, there is no feeling of social responsibility towards the resource. However, this assumption is not always valid. In most cases from past to present, the rules based on the use of village pastures, fountains, and threshing floors have always been determined by the village community. The very existence of these rules squarely shows that Hardin's principle, which is based on the idea that the use of resources with absolute freedom and with no supervision or responsibility leads to the ultimate tragedy of the resources, is not

actually a valid one.

Moreover, the social control element is engraved in the historical roots of the word. According to English etymology, the word 'commons' comes from 'communis'. Its root, 'com' means 'together, common' and 'munis' means 'under the obligation of.' Thus, looking at its etymology, it can be said that the word 'commons' means 'subject to common obligation'.

Indeed, taking the community's obligation into account, Ostrom (1990) refutes Hardin's view of the tragedy. According to Ostrom, the examples of commons that are subject to set rules and imposed obligations have always been historically long-lived. Therefore, she does not accept the dilemma of privatization or Leviathan (state) intervention as a remedy for the tragedy. What lies at the heart of the third option is the community's collective, participatory resource management, which actually seems to be the ideal alternative for her. Just like Hardin, Ostrom is also interested in common pool resources, and yet she does not sacrifice social interaction with resources in order to prevent their ultimate destruction. On the contrary, she explores the framework for the sake of community so that they can establish certain social interactions with the resource, obeying the rules of fair use and thus protecting it at the same time. As a joint management activity, a common is a system in which the users of the resource create their own order, acknowledge their responsibilities, and fulfil their obligations so as to use, maintain, and sustain the resource in question.

However, Ostrom's suggestion of a third way between the market and the state has, in turn, led a number of authors to the concept of a society of the commons. They argue that this new society is ideologically different from capitalism and socialism (e.g., Walljasper, 2015, Rowe, 2015). Here the commons is considered as an activity different from market relations. However, in a capitalist society, where the commons exist, demands such as the abandonment of labor exploitation, private property, and market instruments are not expressed in this view. It opposes the idea of the privatization of shared resources in common spaces, not private ownership itself. On the other hand, there is no enmity toward state regulation, unlike for liberals. The state's arrangements to support the commons are defended. Such an approach strives to expand the practice of commons while maintaining the existence of capitalism. Interestingly, such views find the politics of commons compatible with capitalism but not socialism. It is stated that socialism in the Soviet Union is archaic, centralist, and hierarchical, and that local diversity is often ignored (e.g., Bollier, 2015). It is as if capitalism offers an order of decentralism, heterarchy, and is full of local diversity. Nonetheless, it is rigorously emphasized that the commons movement is not yet an attempt to update socialism.

We should also address theories that differ from the concept of commons as a social democratic alternative to the state and market, as does Ostrom's. This new perspective is shaped by the anti-capitalist position expressed by its defenders. Although it is rare, there are also those who make positive connections between commons and communism (e.g. Hardt, 2017: 158). The emphasis on commoning and the opposition to commodity production are the two fundamental elements that stand out in these approaches.

In an anticapitalist approach, the commons are a new mode of production, autonomous from the state and the market. It is a new sense of community based on the principles of social cooperation, equal access, and co-sharing. It is a social ground on which the community provides self-governance of production activities, and at the same time is able to oppose the enforcement of enclosure (Caffentzis and Federici, 2017: 133, 140).

Non-commodity social production systems are organized in commoning practices, which avoids production with a commodity value, market logic, and pursuit of commercial purposes. Provided that the principles we see above are applied, in Ostrom's model a fishing area is considered as a common. And yet the fish that fishermen catch in accordance with the rules is not a common. The beneficiaries of the source have the right to decide about the fish they catch. However, in terms of commoning, products from the source as well as physical resources are also a matter of sharing. In addition to the fishing area, decisions about the distribution and circulation of fish caught should also be jointly made (De Angelis and Harvie, 2017: 118).

In this context, commons are created through commoning practices. Producers share resources, production tools, production, products they acquire, their distribution and circulation, and decision-making in a democratic and horizontal organization. It is this understanding that puts the commons in the position of conflict between capital order and commoning, ensuring the struggle between the common and capital other than its own. Commoning practices allow social forces in search for an alternative to capital, to emerge and flourish (Caffentzis and Federici, 2017: 143; De Angelis and Harvie, 2017: 105, 124-126). It is fair to say that such a commons approach can only be reached through commonism ideals.

## **From primitive accumulation to enclosures today**

Examining the historical development of capitalism, Marx (1976: 873-930) refers to the concept of primitive accumulation, which is meaningful in two aspects: the second one concentrates on the fact that the peasant turns into a laborer while the first aspect, which renders the second one possible, ensures that the means of production are taken away from agricultural producers. Agricultural lands, forests, and fishing shores that peasants cultivate were seized by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. The rural population, who used to work on land of their own, that of the landlord, that of the state, or on public spaces with open access, became wage laborers when deprived of means of subsistence. The villagers' access to the land was transferred to private ownership by methods such as the use of force, extortion, unmanning, selling state-owned areas, and implementing special laws. As we move onto such examples in Turkey below, we will see that these methods are still in use today.

As mentioned earlier, the converting of the land where the farmer used to live into the private property of capital is called enclosure. This process does not only result in the collection of the peasants' means of subsistence and production into the hands of capital. It also leads to the farmer's alienation from nature with which he used to make a

connection through his daily labor. Subsistence production under feudal exploitation is replaced by capitalist commodity production based on the exploitation of wage labor in the countryside and the city. While enclosed nature becomes an element of capital accumulation, peasant community is detached from holistic relations with nature. Peasants, who previously baked their own bread and made their own thread using the means they had obtained from nature, become laborers in the countryside or city, consuming food and clothing in the meta form. When this is the case, we can no longer talk of the existence of nature, from which the community benefits, due to the enclosure process, or the existence of a traditional community, due to laboring activities, and hence the nonexistence of the commons as the interaction that community has with that nature.

Therefore, enclosure should not be considered separately from the commons since the enclosed is nothing other than the commons itself. As a result of the process of enclosure, the community is cut off from its commoning activities within the physical environment. Hardin's proposition on private ownership of the commons is an attempt to prevent the non-capitalist sections of society from commoning practices. In this respect, this is a call for enclosure. When the commons is understood as a new mode of production based on self-governance and community-control, the policy of enclosure is politico-economic regulations that put an end to the commons. A similar case appears when the commons is merely assumed as Ostrom's model of governance. Whether or not it is possible to consider 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century England, which Marx examined, as an example of enclosure depends on our understanding of the commons. We would not call the spaces that the Enclosure of the Commons Laws have transferred to capital as commons if a 'certain' type of commoning is claimed to be the condition of the commons. The process of primitive accumulation, as coined by Marx, is not just a thing of the past or a page in the history of capitalism; it still continues today in its updated version (Perelman, 2000: 34; Glassman, 2017: 90; De Angelis and Harvie, 2017: 106). Therefore, we are obliged to consider the concept of commons and thus enclosure from a much wider perspective.

However, there should also be some limits to conceptual flexibility. Whether conducted in a weak or strong fashion, the critical aspect of commoning is the existence of social responsibilities that emerge from the principles of solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation, and from the traditional or modern obligations to protect the physical environment associated with the commons and their beneficiaries. Let's say capital has decided to build a quarry on a pasture. It is possible to observe these obligations and responsibilities clearly in defensive struggles against such an attack that enclosure displays.

The limits to the use of resources should be in line with the production limits required for subsistence. This is important because utilizing public resources for the production of commodities creates an enclosure effect. In a way, the difference between subsistence and commodity production is the difference between appropriation and expropriation, as Marx puts it. Based on this distinction, the ones produced from nature by means of labor in order to meet needs are to be appropriated. In contrast, expropriation is

appropriation without reciprocity or equivalence, which is in a way called theft. The metabolic relationship between humans and nature includes equivalence. The interaction between the feudal landlord and the land, and the exploitation of labor by the capitalist have no equivalence. That is why it is called expropriation (Foster and Clark, 2018). In addition, subsistence is compatible with social obligations so as to avoid damages to the resource, for damage to the source is the loss of the means of subsistence on which the beneficiaries are dependent. It should be noted that it is acceptable for the excess surplus product to be subject to exchange between individuals. And yet this is something totally different from commodity production and circulation. The production of commodities is based on creating value for the market. Solidarity is replaced by individualism, whilst cooperation is replaced by competition. In such a case, commodities as fetishized objects, which transcend the individual, are subject to exchange.

Thus, questions, such as “For what purpose will the common resource be used?”, “To whom will it be of benefit?”, “Whose interests will be protected whilst using the resource?” or “Who will use it?” (Helfrich, 2009: 3) emerge as conceptual boundary stones of the commons. With regard to the commons, the social interaction of people with physical resources cannot simply be based on the logic of commodity production.

## The role of property

A few concepts within Roman law can be mentioned about the legal status of environmental assets. *Res privatae* stands for family, personal relations, and private property whereas *res publicae* refers to public spaces, such as public service buildings and squares, other than natural resources. The most fundamental concepts in terms of ecological commons are the following two: *res communes* and *res nullius* (Ricoveri, 2013: 37). Both of the terms refer to what nature gives, and assert that no private property can be established over those natural entities. However, there is a significant difference between them. *Res communes* are those that people cannot establish as private property, and that do not belong to the state, or cannot by nature belong to anyone and belong to everyone at the same time, and that do not lose any value when they are used as in the case of air, rivers, seas, and coasts. *Res nullies* are unclaimed things like wild animals and untreated patches of land. Despite the fact that they had not yet been established as private property, they were still regarded as natural entities that could one day be appropriated (Dardot and Laval, 2010: 16). For example, the man who catches a deer, makes it his own. On the other hand, even though the sea, as *res communes*, does not belong to anybody, the fish caught is owned by the fisherman as if fish are *res nullies*.

Although it may seem easier to establish a connection between *res communes* and common, the common can also appear without depending on any form of ownership. Unclaimed lands may easily be converted to the commons. As we can see in the example of Gezi Park in Istanbul, a public sphere can be associated with the commons through political and social activities. Or, as a private property, the farm can be transformed into an agricultural common within the community of which the owner is a member.

The community itself can acquire a private property that can then be transformed into a common. With the consent of the landlord, villagers can also turn his land into a common. Therefore, contrary to what Hardin argues, the existence of private or public ownership of an asset, which is the subject of social activity, is not a categorical obstacle to do the commoning and use it commonly.

However, nowadays examples of converting a private property into a common in contravention of the consent of the owner are very few. We do not come across many examples of occupying a private forest or an olive grove on a private land in order to commence commoning practices. In this respect, Hardin's privatization/enclosure proposal is highly functional in itself since a property is a social interaction secured by the state rather than just a social relation between people and things. The commoning could be very challenging on private property protected by hefty methods of the state such as courts and prisons, functional in accordance with the property owner's request.

In view of these considerations, a notion suggesting that the commons are entirely independent of the ownership structure would be misleading. A commoning relation with a natural entity emerges in the economic, political, and legal structures of the current mode of production. Firstly, the claim that capitalism, in which private property is preserved as a divine order, is suitable for the spread of the commons is highly questionable in this respect. Secondly, the capitalist state can change the allocation decision of a place reserved as a public good into a private property. Thirdly, the production of commodities by the commons would only result in reproducing market relations in spaces considered to be a public good under capitalism. Lastly, as it is possible in commons practices to enclose public spaces to exclude the public outside the community of the commons, this sort of enclosure also damages the idea of the commons.

## **Some examples of enclosure policies in Turkey**

The discussions conducted so far have shown that what is understood as the commons reveals what is actually enclosed. I have dealt with the concept of the commons in order to determine the object of my research with regard to enclosure policies in Turkey. Nevertheless, as should be clear from the above description, the commons is quite an ambiguous, multifaceted, and expanded concept. That being the case, it is theoretically quite difficult to analyze current policies implemented in Turkey in line with the existing commons/enclosure literature.

In order to overcome this challenge, I have tried to address ecological commons from a rather minimalist perspective based on the interaction of community with natural entities, an interaction circumscribed by obligations. These obligations include taking joint decisions when necessary, conducting shared activities, and defending the commons against possible threats, all of which are also considered as commoning practices. Such an interaction, as may be expected, can usually be established on a local scale. In the case of production, we can speak of a wide range of processes within the



commons such as subsistence production, which is largely for the needs of the individual, or the commoning of production processes as well as the means of production and the product. As we have seen before, the reciprocal relationship within community and between the community and nature dissolves due to the shift towards commodity production, whereby the obligations toward the physical environment and the community - and therefore toward the commons - also starts to fade away.

Enclosure is the seizure of the commons for the benefit of capital and private interests, against common sharing. In addition, the state and capital are able to close public areas to access at any time. This in turn eliminates the possibility and potential of transforming these accessible spaces into the commons. In this respect, this situation leads to an enclosure effect. Thus, we have enclosure in the case of the commons and an enclosure effect in the case of publicly accessible places. The fact that I am dealing with commons and enclosures in this way does not relieve the ambiguity in the relevant literature; on the contrary, it could worsen the ambiguity problem. Nevertheless, in my opinion, such a theoretical framework will serve as the academic focus for research on enclosure policies.

Now, let's continue where we left off. What is the legal basis for Turkey's ecological commons? In the context of ecological commons, the legislations refer to it as "places under the authority and at the disposal of the State". These include unclaimed spaces and public goods (the Civil Code, art.715; the Cadastral Law, art.16; the Pasture Act, art.4; the Village Law, additional art.12). State forests (the Cadastral Law, art.16/d) and coasts and mines that are considered among unclaimed property, are also referred to as places under the authority and at the disposal of the State (Söyler, 2011: 60). Indeed, the Constitution clearly states that the coasts, natural wealth, and resources shall be *under the authority and at the disposal of the State* (the Constitution, art.43 and 168).

*Unclaimed territories* are places that are open to everyone's enjoyment without the need for a specific allocation. These include the rocks, hills, mountains, and glacier-like places that are not suitable for agricultural purposes, as well as resources extracted from these places, such as waters, seas, lakes, rivers (the Civil Code, the Cadastral Law), coasts (the Coastal Law), and lastly natural wealth and resources (the Mining Law). Unclaimed territories are not registered in the Land Registry. No private property can be established on them (the Civil Code, art.715). As you can see, the resources that are under the authority and at the disposal of the State are a mixture of *res communes* and *res nullies* of the Roman law, and yet are separated from the latter by the principle that no property can be established on them.

*Common goods* are places that are open to a section of the public or for everyone's common use such as the pastures, highlands, winter and summer pastures, threshing floors, funfairs, bridges, and squares. The difference between common goods and unclaimed territories such as mountains and hills is that common goods are allocated for the benefit of the public. Allocation is made either by the state or by the people that have benefited from the land since time immemorial. Therefore that patch of land is considered to be allocated according to customs and traditions. Although the focus

hereby is on public spaces that are largely publicly-owned, such as squares that everyone can benefit from, it is not the case for common goods such as highlands, and summer and winter pastures that can be mainly of benefit to only villagers or municipal inhabitants.

In Turkey, less than one-thousandth of the places that are considered to be forest land is located on private property; and the rest are state-owned forests. State forests shall be under the care and supervision of the State. The ownership of state forests shall not be transferred (the Constitution art.169). So the ownership of the forests, as set by law, cannot be transferred to private property through methods such as sales or clearance and so on. Treasury lands are private properties of the state and thus can be sold.

As emphasized above, it is burdensome to establish commons in spaces that are regarded as private property. It is relatively more apparent in areas that are under the care and supervision of the State. But then in this case, the 'economic value' of a natural entity determines the degree of state supervision, which is an obstacle to the commons. Governments are not keen to let the poor keep a valuable asset in their hands as they would rather want it be a resource for capital accumulation and 'development'. Since it is also difficult for people to develop resistance in areas where the commons are found to be quite weak, enclosure under the state's supervision and control can easily be achieved.

## **The enclosure of pastures and highlands**

In Turkey, pastures are historically the most appropriate examples of ecological commons. Highlands and summer and winter pastures have long been used by village communities for livestock activities. Both sociologically and according to legislation, this utilization itself is sufficient to leave them as they are. In addition, after conducting a thorough investigation of requirements, these summer and winter pastures can be allocated to the common use of villagers, several communities, or municipalities. However, the right to use is not an unlimited one. In the Pasture Law, grazing capacity and grazing rights are clearly regulated. The term grazing capacity refers to "the volume of cattle units that can be grazed without disturbing the vegetation, soil, water, and other natural resources in a certain area and at equal time intervals for many years". In the allocation decision a grazing right is determined by the number of cattle that can graze in accordance with grazing capacity. In order to prevent overgrazing, a number of animals higher than the number already determined may not be let into the area. These rules in the Pasture Law also apply to pastures and meadows that the public in general benefit from.

Commoners have certain obligations. For example, a peasant cannot exceed the number of animals or grazing time; nor are they allowed to plough the area or cultivate it. What's more, except as stipulated by the Village Law, the construction of houses and barns is also strictly forbidden. Otherwise, punitive sanctions will be imposed. If a person uses his or her pasture for something other than animal husbandry, the expenses

incurred to remedy the damage and reinstate the pasture shall be covered by the person in question. In line with the economic conditions of the area, grazing capacity and grazing time (previously free of charge), commoners are obliged to pay a fee determined in return for the use. This income collected is only spent for the development of pastures. In addition, beneficiary farmers may be asked to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of summer and winter pastures in terms of expenses or labor.

This utilization is regarded as a crucial activity for making a living; so much so that if the product exceeds the needs of the farmer's family, then it can be sold only after the decision of the Pastures Administration Units established in villages and municipalities. The income provided is not left to the peasant who makes the production; it is used only for the development of pastures in the village or municipality.

However, a number of regulations and implementations that allow the production of commodities result in the enclosure of the pastures. According to the law, pastures can be hired by livestock companies. Moreover, a statutory clause, added to the law in 2013, allows the establishment of livestock facilities in the leased area. In such practices, we also see the rightful reaction of peasants from time to time. Within the boundaries of Ahmetbey Municipality in Lüleburgaz, the renting of the pastures, which are regarded as the commons of the villagers, to some companies was protested in a march with the slogan "Pastures belong to the public and thus cannot be sold". 69 companies got in line in order to rent the pastures that barely met the needs of the villagers, for a period of 25 years (*Evrensel*, 3 November 2014). Such ongoing practices in Turkey are similar to those in the US where herd owners actually usurp and hence enclosing the pasture. The only difference is that those in Turkey comply with the law.

A significant portion of the pastures has been subject to a series of alterations and amendments made during the AKP rule that has been in power since 2002. The allocation objectives of the pastures have been adjusted to enable potential investments, that is to say, they have lost their status as highlands, summer and winter pastures so as to be enclosed. A wide range of economic activities may now be carried out in these areas that used to be previously reserved as highlands, summer and winter pastures: all kinds of mining activities such as oil and stone quarries, tourism investments, oil and gas pipelines, settlements within the scope of disaster areas, greenhouses that use geothermal energy, technology development and organized industrial zones, free zones and electronic communication infrastructures to name a few. Similarly, these highlands, summer and winter pastures in question can also be declared as gentrification and urban transformation project sites by the President. What this means is that construction companies are allowed to build a series of private property houses whereas a villager cannot even erect a single barn according to the law. Legal persons, organizations, or companies that will make all these investments demand change to the status of these highlands and summer and winter pastures. Following the allocation decision in response to demand, the company pays an amount of only 20 years of 'grass income' to the state in return. If a new industrial estate or organized industrial sites are planned to be established within that region, companies do not even need to pay that amount either. All these profitable investments for companies suggest the fact that the legislator,

in effect, is not so interested in environmental or social issues, such as the destruction of nature and the livelihood of the villagers, or the disappearance of animal husbandry and the commons.

The AKP's amendments to the regulations are not limited to this. The allocation decisions have also been changed in favour of the Canal Istanbul project. In April 2016, an article based on law no. 6704 was added to the Law on Pastures. According to this, the status of the highlands and summer and winter pastures within in the project area shall be, *sua sponte*, removed by the Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications without adhering to the provisions of the Pasture Law. Thus, summer and winter pastures within the area of the Canal Istanbul project, whose sole purpose is to generate and share unearned incomes, are officially enclosed.

A similar situation is seen in the Green Road project intended to connect summer pastures in the Eastern Black Sea region. According to the Action Plan (2014) of the Eastern Black Sea Project (DOKAP), the 'Green Road' is expected to provide easy access to the upland villages in the region. Thus, the project will allow the region to become a branded value for the country's economy by using up the region's mines, especially water resources, biodiversity, gene resources, and summer and winter pastures. In the Plan, it is plainly emphasized that the local people's livelihood is closely tied to the ecosystem, but that sloppy use leads to the destruction of nature. Undoubtedly, local people also take part in contributing to environmental degradation. However, with the completion of the Green Road, the above-mentioned works are bound to lead to the irreparable destruction of nature as well as the means of subsistence.

For instance, it is outlined that 14 regions, all of which are found to have a high tourism potential in the Plan, will be declared Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Regions. According to Article 8 of the Law for the Encouragement of Tourism, the President shall decide and declare the aforementioned regions. The areas of pastures, highlands, lakes, and rivers that are under the authority and at the disposal of the state within the region whose boundaries are explicitly determined, are *sua sponte* registered on behalf of the Treasury. Thus, it is possible to allocate these areas to Turkish citizens, foreign nationals, or companies upon request. It is also possible that the entire tourism region can be allocated to a single investor as well. The President alone is to make the necessary assessment in the case of a single investor. An investor who obtains the necessary permit can not only rent or operate it but also transfer the rights to a party. Investors who receive investment permits in the region are also given supplementary incentives. The law also stipulates that the corresponding public institutions are to give priority to the completion of necessary improvements related to the infrastructure, such as roads, water, sewage, electricity, and telecommunication. Thus, an area that has previously been used as a pasture or highland is expropriated by a private company as tourism investment during the allocation period. Therefore, the village community living in the region now can enter the touristic territory of the region as customers if they can afford the price asked.

So, it is possible to understand the reason why some villagers have been resisting the

Green Road for some time now. With the intervention of the armed gendarmerie forces at times dispersing the locals, the construction of the new road has proceeded. While trying to stop graders in the Samistal summer pasture of Rize with a tremendous effort, the words of Havva Bekar, "What is the state for? The state is long gone; what we are left with is just us, the community" (*BirGün*, 11 July 2015) should not actually surprise anyone. Because the DOKAP Action Plan, the Green Road project, the tourism region and incentives, electricity and water infrastructure, and gendarmerie intervention are nothing but another step toward the government's planned enclosures.

However, there are still differing opinions about the Green Road among the villagers who benefit from summer pastures. Let's leave the people who feel positive about the road because they presume that they will benefit greatly from ecotourism aside for now. In regard to the large upland community, when the use of the land for grazing diminishes, the number of people who help and support each other in solidarity will also decrease. The need to reach the city centre quickly when necessary can in effect feed the demand for shorter roads instead of walking much longer paths with twists and turns (see Yazıcı, 2016: 136-137). In other words, when the community is unravelled, the commons also fades with it.

An interesting example of the community's defence of summer pastures is worth mentioning here, I believe. Villagers in the Gito summer pasture of Çamlıhemşin complained to the District Governor about some campers in their animal grazing area and a person who set up a tent to sell food and drinks to campers - even though he also belongs to the same pasture community. The unrealized demands ultimately lead to some fierce arguments that then resulted in the burning of the tent. The claim put forward by the pasture community is that the occupation of the area by these campers made it impossible for the cattle to graze. The villagers firmly assert that the grazing area solely belongs to the cattle. They say that strangers pollute the highlands with their rubbish which apparently affects the wellbeing of the cattle that then eat the rubbish in their search for food ([www.diken.com.tr](http://www.diken.com.tr), 6 August 2018). Issues such as the summer pasture being allocated to subsistence activities, the certain liabilities towards animals and highlands, and a commercial business being ill-suited to the purpose of using pastures are some of the matters here that are of pivotal importance in terms of the subject of this paper.

On the other hand, this example also leads us to a favourable debate in terms of obstructing access and enclosure. Since we do not have any research conducted on the issue so far, I would like to start from the premise that we can speak of the existence of the commons in the area, on the grounds of the conflict expressed by the pasture community in the above example. The summer pasture is closed to outsiders - campers in this case - because it is solely reserved for use by the community. The tent erected to sell commercial products is an enclosure of that part of the summer pasture. In such a case, we can clearly detect a contradiction between the use of the summer pasture by the campers and the tea selling activity that is a sort of enclosure on the one hand and the efforts of the commoners against the misuse of the summer pasture on the other - a contradiction that also points to the difference between obstructing access and

enclosure. We can see that it is not adequate to define the commons as something that “belongs to no one and everyone at the same time” for the commons is not obliged to include the principle of everyone’s free access in all cases. Some have the right to use it while others (in this case campers) may be deprived of access. Indeed, the commoners assert that they belong to the summer pasture, and that the summer pasture itself also belongs to them and the cattle. It is possible to say that another element that provides the legitimacy for obstructing access of others is subsistence production. Even if some claim that the person who puts up the tent is working for his subsistence, such an argument would be void as his activity, based on commercial interest, is a violation of the commoners’ rights to its use. Nevertheless, the issue of commoners obstructing outsiders’ access, even on grounds of legitimate subsistence production, still remains open to discussion - whether or not it is acceptable considering the idea of the commons - in the relevant literature.

## Forest enclosures

According to 2015 Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry figures, the forests constitute 28.6% of Turkey’s total land area. Here, the forest villagers mean the inhabitants of villages located in or near forests. Although the numbers are now dated, around seven million forest villagers live in about 20 thousand forest villages. And yet the number of villages that gain their livelihood from forests is about 1100. What’s more, half of the latter figure is composed of villages whose secondary income is based on forest products. For this reason, it can be said that the majority of forest villagers are engaged in labor, farming, animal husbandry, small commodity production, and trade rather than earning their living from forests (Çağlar, 2014: 174-175). When forestry activities become insufficient for the livelihood of the community - i.e. when their life is not directly connected to the forest- there will be few examples of the commons that require interaction with the forest. Nevertheless, forestry cooperatives for village development are worth examining in this respect. While doing this, we should also consider the idea that “The state intends to integrate forest villagers and forest ecosystems into an operational enterprise” (Çağlar, 2014: 179). On the other hand, in the face of potential industrial threats, it is possible for the defensive reactions of the villagers in organising joint actions to transform a forest into the commons. Forest villagers undoubtedly benefit from the forest, but it is also clear that not every use should be considered as a common. We know that a common is the subject matter of enclosure. For these reasons if there is no common but a possibility and potential to develop ecological commons in or near forests, we can investigate not enclosures but the effects of enclosure.

The above-mentioned article of the Law for the Encouragement of Tourism envisages the allocation of forest areas within Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Regions to the investor demanding when the highlands, summer and winters pastures are found to be insufficient. For this purpose, climate, environment, topography, altitude, and geothermal resource conditions offered by the forest area, together with the geographical and physical characteristics of coastal areas must be satisfactory enough. Thus, facilities for tourism in health, thermals, golf, sports,



tableland, winter, countryside, seaside, cruise, and sailing will be initiated in forest areas within the boundaries of the tourism region. Provisions such as incentives and infrastructure facilities mentioned above also apply in this case.

In the Constitution, it is distinctly emphasized that forests cannot be subject to a right of use other than public interest. In other words, even if the rights of use are granted for various purposes, they should all be accessible to the general public, thus everyone, according to the mandatory provision of the Constitution. When this rule applies, the forest will be accessible to anyone who wants to have a picnic, do sports or go hiking, enjoy the fresh air, or establish a relationship with nature. However, the facilities of in the Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Regions and other tourism and sports facilities in forest areas outside these regions do not meet this qualification. Investors welcome capitalist classes and high income groups to these facilities that are unaffordable and inaccessible for the working class, low-income groups, and forest villagers, hence demonstrating the enclosure effect in forest areas.

Moreover, according to the Forest Law, all kinds of mining operations by developers in forest areas are permitted (art. 16). Interestingly enough, according to this law, it is forbidden to remove any amount of soil, sand, or gravel for one's own needs from a forest area without an actual trading purpose, and yet it is free to open a quarry as a mining enterprise. The quarries that damage forests and nearby settlements continue to operate in spite of local demands for their closure in order to protect the forest. Despite many years of opposition from the villagers in Kocaeli-Halıdere, a quarry that continued to operate for 13 years, was finally closed due to the danger of potential landslides (Gülezer, 2018). In addition to mining, there is a long list of other works and facilities to be carried out in forests: transportation, energy, communication, water, waste water, oil, natural gas, infrastructure, solid waste disposal and landfill facilities, and state-owned health, education, judicial services, and sports facilities as well as prisons. The use of forests for these works is permitted for a period of 49 years, which then can also be extended to 99 years (art. 17).

"Strategic investments", which the Ministry of Economy have decided to support on the grounds of energy supply security, the reduction of energy dependency on foreign resources, and technology transformation can be established in forest areas. They can be carried out not only in forests but also on coasts, in streams, pastures, and plateaus. In accordance with the regulation known as Article 80, for these investments, the right to use of the property of the Treasury shall be left to the investor for a period of 49 years; and if requested, ownership is transferred to the investor without charge. In addition, the investor does not only enjoy exemption from customs duties and corporation taxes but also receives certain subsidies. For example, both the employer's national insurance contribution and 50 percent of energy consumption expenditures are met by the state for 10 years. The investor is even supported in terms of the wages to be paid to workers. The President is the sole authority for making these regulatory decisions and for ensuring their implementation. These investments may be exempted from the allocation, registration, authorization, and licenses foreseen in the legislation for the protection of the environment (Law No. 6745, O.G., 7 September 2016). The enclosure

effect of this whole arrangement is quite clear. For private investment, the various costs of which are covered by the public budget, a public good is given to capital free of charge. What's more, it is made impossible for the public to benefit from that public land either now or in the future.

Even though the legislative rule forbids the burning of forest land, the permitted construction of hotels and villas on those lands also creates an effect of enclosure. The method applied here is to usurp public property. The necessity of re-forestation of burnt forest areas is clearly stated in the Constitution and various laws. However, especially in coastal areas, burnt forest areas are being zoned for construction and left to the mercy of tourism capital.

As seen already, while various investments have been generously permitted, people's access to forest land has become almost impossible. Recently, it has also been ensured that the planted trees, which come under the category of 'forest products', are to be 'brought into the economy' by merchants of timber and forest products. It is a well-known practice that after cutting down trees, forest management sells them as logs. With a recent amendment to Article 30 of the Forest Law (O.G., 28 April 2018), the rule of selling planted trees at auction for a period of five years has been introduced. Even the shade of the merchant-owned planted trees is no longer within reach of the public, let alone the trees.

Can forest areas under the care and supervision of the State be reserved for the benefit of a particular sector for example for educational purposes? It is known that some foundations enjoy tax exemption granted by the President. The regulation stipulating that real estates should be given free of charge to some associations was announced in the *Official Gazette* dated 11 September 2018 and hence entered into force. Many foundation universities, such as Koç University, have established universities in the middle of forests or on Treasury lands, and have been run as profit-making companies. Together with the new regulations and amendments that alter existing laws, public benefit associations, the status of which is granted by the President, may have the right to exploit places that are under the authority and at the disposal of the State and also those that are owned by the Treasury. Thus, these associations will be able to build educational institutions and dormitory buildings by taking the land for free for a period of 49 years on coasts, pastures, plateaus, and forests. The question as to whether tourism and energy company developments as well as educational institutions are of real benefit and use to the general public still remains a controversial topic.

Through a variety of practices with the so-called aim of improving the conditions of peasantry, the forest villager becomes a mere instrument of the private ownership system to using forest lands for private interests. Obtaining timber logs from forests for poor villagers' need for shelter and also for the common requirements of the village such as schools, bridges, and health centres can be regarded as good practice (Forest Law, art.31). However, dividing forest land into parcels and selling them to forest villages as private property is something totally different. The ways and methods of this are set out in the Constitution and related laws such as the Forest Law and the Law

on Supporting the Development of Forest Villagers, and the Valuation of Areas Taken out of Forest Area Borders on behalf of the Treasury and Sale of Agriculture Lands Owned by the Treasury. According to item 2/B of the Forest Law, “lands that have lost the forest characteristics” are principally extricated from forest land. As expected, the official evaluation of whether land maintains its forest characteristics are rightly quite controversial. Afterwards, these places are sold to forest villagers who actually already use them.

In the 1989 and 2002 rulings, the Constitutional Court stressed that these areas could be left to the use of forest villagers, and they could not be transferred to the private ownership of villagers even if forest areas had lost their forest characteristics (Çağlar, 2016: 210-211). Indeed, unlike the use of land by forest villagers, the establishment of private property creates the enclosure effect. Private property is a right that ties land to a particular individual and thus deprives others of using it. As it stands, the Constitutional Court ruled that the sale of these places to those who were not even forest villagers was contrary to the Constitution. Nevertheless, despite these decisions, according to the law on the development of forest villagers in regard to places with 2/B status, it is now possible to construct private residences thanks to urban transformation projects. Additionally, according to articles added to the Forest Law on 28 April 2018, it is also possible to transfer these areas to private ownership of non-forest villagers through exchange, sale, and land consolidation methods.

## **Enclosures of coasts and waters**

According to the Constitution, “in terms of the utilization of sea coasts that are under the authority and disposal of the State, of lake shores or river banks, and of the coastal strip along the sea and lakes, public interest shall be taken into consideration with priority”. But for waters and coasts, the implementation is very different from what is stated in the Constitution as it is with pastures and forests.

In Turkey, there are not many practices that characterize the interactions between communities and coastal areas as a common. Perhaps the example of İztuzu Beach is worth mentioning here. In the framework of the obligations of beach users towards the coastal ecosystem, it can be discussed as a commoning practice carried out by joint decisions and actions.

The operating rights of İztuzu Beach, which is located in the Special Environmental Protection Area, were granted to a foundation by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning. That foundation then rented the beach out to a private company. In response, local people formed the İztuzu Beach Rescue Platform (İKUP). They emphasized that neither the *Caretta caretta* (loggerhead sea turtles), which use the beach as their spawning ground every year, nor the natural and cultural assets, or the beach as a whole can be protected with a profit-oriented business approach. They organized a petition in order to block the management project. They also filed a lawsuit against the Ministry in the administrative court. Around six months later, the company

in question sent in tractors to expropriate the beach illegally. Following this development, the İKUP set up a tent to keep watch at the beach day and night. When the court issued an injunction in their favour to prevent the project, the environmentalists finally ended their 11-day watch (see Çoban, Özlüer, Erensü, 2015: 404-405). The Ministry stepped back whereby the beach was allocated to Muğla University for three years in order to conduct research on sea turtles, biodiversity, and pollution prevention. However, two weeks later, the university transferred the management of the beach to Dalaman, Ortaca, Köyceğiz Touristic Hoteliers and Enterprises Union (DOKTOB) (*Milliyet*, 8 June 2015).

Today, it is common practice for coasts to be rented to private companies. Hotels standing along the shoreline often restrict access to the coast to paying guests, which is against the law. Some municipalities also charge the general public an entrance fee if they want to enjoy the coastline. Even though the İztuzu example failed to bring about a long-lasting result, it does demonstrate the possibility of preventing the privatization and commercialization of coasts by municipalities, companies, and hotels through commoning efforts.

As I emphasized earlier regarding forests, new facilities for coastal, sailing and cruise tourism have been built in the Culture and Tourism Conservation and Development Regions. For 'strategic investments' such as energy production and technology development, coasts and rivers are given to companies for 49 years. It is possible for certain foundations and public interest associations to establish training and dormitory facilities in coastal areas for 49 years. In addition to these, mining can be carried out near drinking water and utility water reservoirs (the Mining Law). There are many examples of roads, airports, and housing projects constructed by reclaiming land along the coast. In addition, protected wetlands, which are regarded as ecosystems, can further be granted to private capital for commodity production. In accordance with the relevant regulations, wetland refers to "all waters, marshes, reeds, and peat lands that are important for living things, water birds in particular; as well as the inland areas of the coastal line and areas that have been ecologically designated as wetlands". But in which ways are wetlands offered to capital? The Çatlıdere wetland near the village of Aliğa, for example has lost its wetland status due to a decision by the İzmir Local Wetlands Committee chaired by the governor in order to allow a yacht construction facility in the area (Akdemir, 2018). All of the above examples are evidence of the enclosure effect since places that should be accessible to the general public according to the legislations have been transformed into elements of capital accumulation.

We are familiar with the fact that large and small hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) built on rivers make it impossible for village communities to benefit from local water. For many village communities, access to water is often a crucial element in their lives for several reasons including survival, subsistence production, and cultural relations. According to the related regulation, the 'rights to use' rivers to generate electricity are given to an investor company for a period of 49 or 99 years. The company virtually becomes the owner of the river, which is, legally, unowned and devoted to the benefit of the general public. Practices have shown that streams are brutally exploited by the

HPPs, which don't leave enough water for the village community or for aquatic life. In response to these circumstances, various anti-HPP protests have emerged in numerous places in Turkey.

Fishing vessels and fish farms point to the fact that, as Marx also put it (1976: 892), whilst the smell of the fish rises to the noses of the fishmongers, they scent some profit in it. Since fish farms are cages built in the sea, they create a real enclosure effect. Fish are reared in the plant and offered to a buyer. The facility violates the right of everyone to benefit from the sea and shores for it inevitably pollutes the sea. The pollution it creates damages the marine ecosystem and negatively affects the breeding and development of marine fish. In this respect, it also threatens small fishermen's subsistence. In various cases, local people have obtained legal gains through their struggles. The farms in the Ayvalık Islands Natural Park, which is under protection, and a tuna aquaculture facility on the Sığacık Bay in the Seferihisar district of İzmir are just two examples of successful environmental struggles. A group of locals also initiated protests against plans to establish fish farms in the Meleş Bay in the district of Anamur, Mersin. The Anamur mayor objected on the basis that the farms would certainly undermine tourism developments in the bay. Although farms and tourism developments are different activities, they still have similar enclosure effects.

We must now return to the point previously discussed regarding the importance of the attitude of the forest villager. When local beneficiaries of forests, pastures, waters, and coasts opt to put their individual interests to the fore rather than their obligations, the result is that everyone's access is put at risk. A case in point is the zoning amnesty. The Omnibus Bill (Law No. 7143, R.G., 18 May 2018) has introduced a 'zoning amnesty' by adding a provisional article to the Zoning Law No. 3194. Accordingly, 'Structure Registration Certificates' may be granted to unlicensed buildings that are in violation of the law but built prior to 31 December 2017. The amnesty concerns more than ten million structures and thus millions of property owners. Thus, many buildings, from skyscrapers and apartments to various facilities, hotels, motels, and small construction units have been included in the scope of the amnesty. This arrangement, with a few exceptions such as the Bosphorus coastline and the Bosphorus Preview Area, has been effective throughout Turkey. This means that many structures in pastures, forests, coasts, and lakes that can be considered a crime against nature will be pardoned. For example, lawsuits were filed against hundreds of people for constructing houses or transforming houses into hotels in Uzungöl (Long Lake), a lake situated in the Çaykara district of Trabzon province. The court had already ordered the demolishing of some unlicensed buildings and some property owners were even sentenced to prison for violating the law on construction and zoning. But all of these verdicts were overturned under the new amnesty. The inhabitants in question all applied to the ministerial offices to benefit from the new regulation. You might say "Uzungöl is no longer a lake but a giant artificial pool! Who cares about the amnesty?" However, there are some serious consequences to the new amnesty.

It is possible to see such examples anywhere in Turkey. As a rule, in fact, the right of the general public to benefit from publicly accessible places should not be violated.

Otherwise these and other such structures have an enclosure effect caused by property owners thanks to the zoning amnesty. In many of the examples we have seen so far, I have tried to highlight the current activities of capital that lead to enclosure and widespread enclosure effects. What I would like to emphasize here is that small property owners contribute to the spreading of a looting system and to the legitimizing of possessive individualism by becoming part and parcel of enclosures and enclosure effects. They also reinforce the social prevalence of the system of private property. Instead of sharing the ideal of collective praxis, it becomes easier and more common for individuals to pursue the dream of owning their own property.

The amnesties for the slums since the 1950s and the recent 2/B regulation can be considered in the same framework. Similarly, the temporary third article of the Pasture Law also has a characteristic that results in the private ownership of pastures. Nevertheless, there is a very clear difference between the right to private property and the right to use public goods. Forest villagers benefit from the forest and pasture villagers from the pasture. But he or she cannot inherit or acquire it. In short, the villager cannot expropriate the land. Even if a villager stops using it, other villagers can continue to use it. Thus, the next generation of villagers maintain their right to use. In this manner, future generations, just like the present one, will continue to be able to establish and maintain the commons. However, the sale of public land as a deed property weakens the possibility and potential of forming new commons there.

## **Conclusion**

We can briefly highlight the scholarly contributions of the discussions above. Since enclosure means the expropriation of a common, it was first necessary to touch upon the discussion of the commons in the relevant literature. If the concept of the commons is defined in strict terms, enclosure policies and the politics of the commons are squeezed into a narrow concept since it requires many conditions to be met. In contrast, if it is considered in broader terms as the places and resources that are freely accessible to everyone, the difference between the commons and natural entities becomes blurred. In the former definition, commoning seems to be an exceptional practice. And the latter brings with it the error that each intervention resulting in the seizure of nature by capital remains identical to enclosure.

In order to solve these issues, I have tried to clarify the distinctive qualities of the commons. This clarification made it necessary to make a differentiation between the term enclosure and the enclosure effect. Based on this, the expropriation process creates the enclosure effect if there is no commons but the potential and possibility of constituting a common. In this respect, although the policy instruments are the same, some of them result in enclosure while some lead to the enclosure effect.

The examples discussed in the paper show that the policy tools and methods of enclosures are akin to those of Marx in the UK case. Legal regulations are amongst the most similar ones. The expropriation of places and entities subject to the commons is



implemented through new laws or amendments to existing ones. Lands as the commons and rivers that villagers benefit from are transferred to tourism, energy, and industrial capital by the administrative acts and actions of authorities. Privatization through sales and barter is also another broadly employed method. In today's world, it would not be appropriate for capital to expropriate the commons by using old-style methods of usurpation. The legislator seems rather convenient in terms of introducing new laws, amnesties, and amendments in that matter. Through methods such as the zoning amnesty and 2/B regulation, small property owners are also turned into small stakeholders of capitalist plunder. As the ground is set in this way, enclosure opportunities offered to big capital are met by social silence.

Nevertheless, enclosure and the enclosure effect include the conditions necessary for creating their counter-effect or opposition. If the commons are based on a relatively strong sense of commoning, then the anti-enclosure struggles can also be expected to strengthen. The reason for this is that not only the commons but also the commoning community is targeted. Consolidating commoning practices in the loose commons gains more ground in this regard. And the same goes for the enclosure effect. The best way to prevent the policies leading to the enclosure effect is to bring out of the potential of the commons.

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# The Crisis of Capitalism and the Commons

Ümit Akçay

Today's social and economic system, in which needs are provided on the basis of profit, is in deep structural crisis. This structural crisis sometimes manifests itself through a financial collapse, sometimes through crises in emerging market economies, and sometimes through the rise of authoritarianism. However, such economic and political issues, which can be seen as different parts of the puzzle, have so far been unable to affect the social power relations that have caused the structural crisis, and the economic policies. In the face of attacks by capital, social opposition around the globe, and particularly that of the working class, has been unable to generate articulate responses to challenge the predominance of ruling classes. And what's more, faced with a rising wave of authoritarianism, the social opposition is in perpetual decline.

In this article, with the perspective of the commons in mind, I will try to focus on some viable contributions to the discussion of what alternatives could transcend capitalist social relations in the context of the global financial crisis of 2007-8, which is considered the first and most critical one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With this in mind, in order to explain the conjuncture of the current crisis, first I will briefly touch upon the causes of the global financial crisis of 2007-8 and the mainstream economic policies that were applied in order to overcome the crisis, and its short term consequences. Secondly, through critical assessment of the alternatives introduced in terms of the crisis, I will focus on the inherent contributions that the commons can offer to this discussion.

## The first great financial crisis of the 21st century

When the history of capitalism is carefully examined, it can be noticed that the notion of financial crisis is neither a new one nor an exception. Among these crises are those that affect only individual countries, as well as those with a greater impact affecting multiple countries or even the global economy altogether. The crises of the 1870s, 1929, 1970s and lastly 2008 are considered to be the four major global financial crises experienced so far in the history of capitalism. Such major crises not only resulted in harsh economic contractions, but also had significant political, social, and economic consequences. These historic crises have certain similar mechanisms as well as differentiated characteristics in parallel with the development of capitalism. If we are to assess the recent global crisis from the commons perspective, we can assume that the current crisis – aside from the specific attributes highlighted in the literature on ‘financialization’ – is actually grounded in the neoliberal response to the crisis of the 1970s. The third major crisis in the history of capitalism took place in the 1970s. Various aspects of the causes of the crisis have been pointed out in various evaluations made from different perspectives. But what is critical for our subject here is to understand how the crisis in the 1970s was overcome, for it takes us to the actors of the current crisis. Notwithstanding their differences in different countries, they all seem to follow four fundamental processes.

The first one was the introduction of privatization in order to revive falling rates of profit. Privatization was one of the fundamental propositions of the market approach whereby the state abandoned its intervention in the economy (Harvey, 2005). In this way, it was suggested that new areas of profitability would be opened up for companies and public debt would be reduced. The basic logic of privatization, however, was the re-commodification of areas that were previously excluded from commodity relations. Public initiatives in myriad areas, such as education, health, social security, housing, and transportation in particular, used to be a part of everyday life before the crisis in the 1970s. These public commons not only prevented the commodification of these service areas but also limited the commodification of the labor force. In other words, the dependence on the market for the reproduction of labor power decreased in the presence of public commons. In this context, privatization led to both the commodification of service areas and the restructuring of the fields of reproduction of the labor force in a completely market-dependent manner. In short, the first strategy of capital against the 1970s crisis was the eradication of public commons.

The second process was the limitation of real wage growth. Indeed, when we review relevant data on the mature capitalist countries like the USA and the UK, we see that there has not been any substantial increase in real wages since the 1970s (Palley, 2015). In the remaining western countries, real wage increases have lagged behind increases in productivity. As for non-western geographies, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund’s structural adjustment and stabilization programs, which became widespread in the 1980s and 1990s, were based on the repression of real wages. Hence, the limitation of real wage increases has been the basis of neoliberal policies, which means continuous ‘austerity’ (Blyth, 2013). This policy has been justified by the anti-

inflationary programs. Beginning with high interest rate increases, which started with the theoretical support of monetarist and new classical economics, the process was completed in 1990s with independence of the central bank and inflation targeting frameworks (Itoh and Lapavistas, 1999). Therefore, limiting real wage increases, which was the main component of the anti-inflation programs, has been implemented as a strategy so as to increase the profitability of capital.

In an environment where labor reproduction has become more market dependent due to privatization, suppression of real wage increases has triggered an interesting dynamic. This dynamic, which is discussed in great detail in 'financialization' literature, is the integration of large segments of society, especially lower income groups, into the financial system (Langley, 2008). Normally, due to the increase in household expenditures as a result of privatization, but also in cases where real wage increases are limited, the continuity of economic growth may be jeopardized due to the suppression of total demand. However, consumer credit has miraculously enabled continuous economic growth despite austerity policies (Crouch, 2009). Over the past few decades, large segments of society, whose real income has not risen in line with spending, have been increasingly using more and more consumer credit to cover their own budget deficits. The gradual increase in consumer credit has not only created a basis for the establishment in the 1990s of a new financial architecture, it has also ensured control over the working class by means of market discipline by putting workers in debt. (Lazzarato, 2012).

The fourth process of tackling the crisis was the internationalization of capital. In fact, the internationalization of capital was not a development specific to this period. However, what made the post-crisis period of the 1970s so specific was the coordinated internationalization of forms of money, commodity, and productive capital, and thereby the increased in the volume and speed of the movement of capital, owing to revolutions in information technology (Oğuz, 2015). The most important result of this process, often referred to as 'globalization', was the limited movement of labor in an environment in which capital movements were liberalized. This has been a development that greatly increased the bargaining power of capital over labor. In addition to capital's trump card of moving to a different country or region, the fact that production per se could be dismantled with each piece produced in a different country or region has also been one of the biggest advantages of capital over labor. Last but not least, the discourse of 'improving the investment environment' has become a representation of the structural power of capital over labor. State managers have increasingly begun to adopt pro-capitalist economic policies to attract investments to their own city or country.

All of the four exit strategies developed in response to the crisis of the 1970s boosted company profit rates in the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, neoliberalism's success peaked with the new financial architecture established in the 1990s. Ironically, this success also laid the basis for the 2008 global financial crisis. The 'New Financial Architecture' (NFA), which emerged in the 1990s and matured in the early 2000s, was a new formation that interconnected various areas of the economy (Akçay and Güngen, 2016). When we think schematically, consumer credit (housing, personal, education,

vehicle, etc.) was the main tool for the integration of employees into the financial system. To the extent that borrowers' repayment of debts provided a regular flow of revenue, the banking system transformed these revenue flows into new financial products that it could sell by means of securitization. This process, which refers to the commodification of debt itself, was made possible by newly developed risk transfer techniques. These new financial products, which were dependent on revenue flows generated through the debt repayments, rapidly began to be in demand for they promised a high return in the low market interest rate setting. These new products also entered into the portfolio of conventional corporate investors, such as mainstream financial institutions and pension funds, thanks to rating agencies. Produced by the banking system, these new financial products began to be seen as an attractive source of income for investors, as credit rating agencies labelled them so safe that they would never crash. All in all, the NFA was established on the curious logic that debtors could pay their debts even if they had no real wage increase. However, once problems arose in the repayment of debts, the entire financial architecture collapsed. In short, the financial collapse of 2008 also meant that the solutions formulated by capital to exit the crisis in the 1970s were also blocked and entered into crisis.

The 2008 crisis has passed through different stages and continues up to today. The first phase took place in the United States in 2007-2009. The second phase took place between 2010-2012, when the crisis fully affected Europe. The third phase of the crisis affected the Global South countries, also known as emerging market economies, in 2013 onwards. And, now in 2018, we have started to witness the severe effects of the last phase, which started in 2013. But what was surprising was not the infectious effect of the global financial crisis; it was that the economic policy framework applied for the exit from the crisis was the same as the economic policy framework that was effective in the formation of the crisis itself. In other words, in the case of the 2008 crisis, there was not a single change in economic policies before or after it, unlike the crises of 1929 or the 1970s. The direction of economic policies in the aftermath of the crisis was toward 'more neoliberalism' (Blyth, 2013).

## **Social Movements in the post-2008 crisis period**

The formula of 'more neoliberalism' implemented after the first major crisis of 21<sup>st</sup> century guaranteed that further attacks on all kinds of public property and commons would follow. In the aftermath of the crisis, a significant opposition have risen, especially when the cost of the crisis was inflicted on the general public. And the crisis broke out at a time when heavily indebted and unorganized masses formed the majority of the working class in many countries. However, those who did not want to pay the cost of the crisis in different parts of the world launched serious objections.

Social movements, which had been inactive for a long time in the US, made their first public appearance with the 'Occupy Wall Street' demonstrations. The movement, which began with the occupation of a park on Wall Street, the financial centre in New York, soon became the focal point of those who questioned capitalism and those who were



suffering due to the crisis. Although the participation of the traditional working class to the Occupy process was quite weak, there was still a strong reaction in terms of public visibility. The main emphasis in these demonstrations was that while a handful of the rich (1%) were constantly enriched, the vast majority of the population (99%) becoming impoverished with no growth of income. Among the demands expressed was the transfer of revenues from the 1%, who were seen as responsible for the crisis, to the remaining 99% of the society. Even though the movement grew rapidly, it could not persevere in the face of police intervention. The flash in the pan nature of the Occupy movements, their rapid expansion and equally rapid decline, can be seen as a common feature of the protests developed by the social movements after the 2008 crisis. Although the Occupy movement was not able to offer a meaningful alternative in the years that followed, it was later revived as a discourse within the Democratic Party when Bernie Sanders mentioned the movement in his speech during the presidential race.

The protests that emerged in Europe against the crisis were in the form of strikes generated by the traditional working class against austerity policies. The fact that the workers were more organized made the objections longer lasting. In Greece, which was the crux of the anti-austerity wave in Europe, the radical left coalition SYRIZA came to power in January 2015 with promises that it would bring an end to the prevailing austerity policies and the debts would not be paid off. The experience of SYRIZA is a case in point in regard to the social movements launched against the crisis and the evaluation of alternatives (Varoufakis, 2017). As a result of the negotiations with the Troika between January and July 2015, it was decided to hold a referendum on the austerity program. On their way to the referendum, the Troika explicitly announced that the rejection of the program would mean leaving the European Union. And yet, 60% of the voters gave a resounding 'No'. Despite this support, the SYRIZA leadership nevertheless decided to implement the austerity program. It would be inadequate to explain the SYRIZA experience simply by the fact that party leaders were not brave enough. The deeper problem is that it is not possible to object to the austerity policies by remaining within the Euro Union. In this sense, the European Union project has been based on neoliberal economic policies, and thus any deviation from it is not possible while remaining within the Union. In short, the EU project excludes a genuine left wing alternative by its design (Akçay, 2016). Therefore, in addition to various other issues, the lack of alternative economic and political programs even in Greece, which was one of the most outstanding examples in terms of post-crisis reaction, has prevented social movements from reaching their desired targets.

It is also possible to observe the effects of the global financial crisis and the social movements in geographies outside the US and Europe. For example, the impact of the crisis in the Arab region, which had lived under relentless dictatorships for years on end, has been devastating. The surge in unemployment, the increase in the cost of living and economic contraction have had a triggering effect on the revolt of large segments of the population already living in poverty. This wave of riots ultimately led to the collapse of the old regimes one after another. Notwithstanding the geographical and qualitative differences, the Arab revolts, too, collapsed in a short period of time, just like the protests developed in various geographies after the 2008 crisis. Just like the rest

of the world, the underlying issue here was, again, the lack of institutionalization and any real alternatives. As a result, the rebellions in the Arab region were ceased within the geopolitical struggles of the great powers.

The crisis in Latin America had a devastating impact on the left in power in the 2000s, causing them to experience another crisis of their own. The economic contraction in countries such as Argentina and Brazil, where export revenues took a dip after 2013, together with the economic crisis in Venezuela, caused the right-wing opposition to strengthen its hand. Far from creating alternatives to capitalism, the development of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism such as 'new developmentalism' or neoliberal populism (Özden and Bekmen, 2015) made the realization of partial redistributive policies possible owing to the opportunities provided by a period of economic growth. However, when the global economic conjuncture that created this period of economic growth changed, the experiences in Latin America also entered into crisis.

In Turkey, the resistance of Gezi Park of 2013, on the one hand, stood as an articulate social movement against neo-liberal policies, and on the other hand was a massive reaction to the existing authoritarian populist government. However, the Gezi uprising, like other similar movements, also retreated shortly afterwards. The chances of politicization from the bottom up and the potential of the politics of the commons to be implemented were some of the features that made the Gezi movement so significant. However, the fact that the conventional left had been lagging behind this social movement was one of the factors that hampered the realization of these potentials. Again, lack of any viable alternative was the recipe for such a failure.

In short, the global wave of revolts that emerged after the 2008 crisis could not manage to affect economic policies. The most important result of the short-lived dissident riots was that it was made clear that they did not have an alternative that could overcome the prevailing neoliberal model. The fact that these alternatives were so weak was, in part, a result of the worldwide decline of working class politics. Parallel to this, the fact that such a mode of social democracy that embraced neoliberalism became the mainstream had an even more restrictive effect on options outside the mainstream. In this sense, the continuity of economic policies before and after the crisis was made possible since the ruling classes did not have to act in the opposite direction. This continuity in economic policies had a devastating impact on politics. When the discontent that emerged in the aftermath of the crisis was not represented by the left, a wide ground was opened for right-wing populist leaders and fascist movements to manipulate. So in a way, the deficiencies in social movements in general and the commons in particular led to the emergence of escalating authoritarian populism. As a result, after the crisis of 2008, when a rising wave of opposition across the world had to withdraw, a much more authoritarian political atmosphere remained.

## **The potentials and limitations of the politics of the commons**

As I have tried to summarize with the examples above, one of the reasons for the great

shortcomings of the social reactions that emerged after the 2008 crisis in terms of persistence and efficiency was the lack of a widely agreed upon common alternative program. Of course, this deficiency is not due to the fact that such a program cannot be devised. The problem, in a way, is linked to the phase at which capitalism stands today. For instance, growing an opposition movement in any country often leads organizations that monitor countries on behalf of global capital to immediately set alarm bells ringing. Triggering capital flight from a country, this process called the 'deterioration of investment climate' can swiftly eliminate the political alternatives that attempt to escape the current neoliberal system and do not give them the opportunity to become institutionalized by creating an economic crisis. In fact, the structural boundaries that we saw in the case of SYRIZA with regard to the framework of the European Union exist at a global level as well. In this context, the internationalization of capital makes an impact that bolsters the domination of capital over labor. Yet, in spite of all the handicaps, the development of post-capitalist alternatives is the common problem of anti-systemic dissident movements in different countries in today's world where social inequalities have reached their highest levels in the history of capitalism. The politics of the commons can offer a meaningful contribution to this field. The establishment of a system of thought and practice that puts common use, production, and management models on the agenda trying to overcome binaries such as economy vs. politics or public vs. private may indeed be a guide for the creation of an alternative program that the opposition is desperately in need of.

An important opportunity inherent in the politics of the commons is the potential to overcome the issues that tend to arise from the duality of state and market. Indeed, in the 20th century, we have witnessed the development of alternative projects in which the state was at the centre of focusing on limiting the destructive features of market-based economic and social systems, and in some cases also using non-market methods in resource allocation. However, although these state-centric projects were more successful in preventing inequalities than market-centric models, they were not so successful in developing a stable model that would eventually manage to overcome capitalism.

The commons framework has the potential of transcending the state or market-centric models. Placing the commons in the centre, such a reconsideration of property issues could be regarded as a crucial step in the right direction. Private property of units of production or consumption is the origin of the profit motive and commodification. The state ownership, which is its opposite, does not automatically eliminate the problems created by the market system. The structure of common ownership, on the one hand, helps to move away from commodification and profit-driven production structure associated with private property, while on the other hand, it can provide the establishment of democratic audit mechanisms that are the missing element in state property. In particular, the participation of employees in decision-making processes in production units and becoming a part of public control will be one of the important opportunities of public ownership. In short, instead of conventional binaries such as privatization vs. nationalization, filling in the conceptual and practical aspects of commoning practices is of critical importance so as to overcome the state and market

dichotomy (Akçay and Azizoglu, 2014).

Surmounting the dilemma of the state vs. market can help to bridge the gap between political democracy and economic democracy. In this regard, the politics of the commons can be seen as a suitable medium for the development of the most advanced form of democratization. It is impossible to reach a true democracy unless political democracy is complemented with economic democracy. Surpassing the liberal approaches based on the separation of economy and politics as well as having a perspective that does not limit the demand for participation in the political sphere is of crucial importance for the politics of the commons (Akçay, 2014). Otherwise, even if the demand for political participation is met, it may not automatically help the democratization of the economy.

The politics of the commons has the potential to bring together the system critical alternatives that are progressing on two levels and almost dissociated (Akçay and Azizoglu, 2014b). The first of these levels is conventional politics, which can be defined as the macro politics, aimed at achieving political power. Although political parties turn into dysfunctional subjects within the current crisis of the liberal democratic system, they are still considered the most indispensable components of the mainstream political game. Therefore, the criticisms and alternatives to the system developed through political parties are still the most important means of the macro politics. Apart from political parties at the macro level, trade unions are also conventional components of social opposition. However, in today's capitalism, in which precariousness is especially becoming more widespread with atypical working conditions and contract forms on the rise, the organized working class in the trade unions decreases quantitatively while conventional unions cannot organize a large group of workers. In this context, the commoning of trade unions by the working class and thereby transforming them into a means of struggle organized at the macro-level according to the new conditions of capitalism is of critical importance. The politics conducted at the macro level is still important in terms of reaching large segments of the population that cannot be encompassed by professional and economic organizations.

In the face of the macro strategy that makes policies to influence public opinion nationwide, addressing the whole country, there are also some micro strategies that are separate from the major agendas and that are often isolated. The micro strategies comprise practices that can be implemented 'right now', even without having major changes in macro politics, and without wasting any time, especially in the face of problems that are very difficult to solve in the short term. Having a large spectrum, micro strategies may range from ecological villages to production and consumption cooperatives, from park communes in urban areas to data commons or subject-oriented solidarity activities. The most advanced examples are cooperatives, which often combine production and consumption areas.

When we look at the social movements that emerged rapidly after the 2008 crisis and declined at the same rate, we can see that the levels of macro and micro politics usually work apart. Based on the politics of the commons, we can offer some suggestions on

this issue. For instance, it can be argued that even if flexibly defined, micro strategies that are not a part of the macro strategy can easily be incorporated into the system, whereas the effects of macro politics which are not embodied in micro strategies tend to be limited. Far from being isolated from each other, these two areas should therefore interact with each other so that they can both gain more strength. In this framework, the common aspects of local struggles together with national and international ones as a scale can be revealed through the politics of the commons. Apart from interconnecting the macro and micro strategies, another strategy is that the 'grey areas' between them can also be filled with the politics of the commons.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to point out some of the limitations of this approach after addressing the potential contributions that the politics of the commons can offer in terms of a social struggle program that could overcome capitalism. As I have pointed out above, the first of the limitations is that one of the strategies, which are found at different levels and which can have an advantage when interconnected, that is, especially micro strategies, is prevalent in the realm of the politics of the commons. The prevalence of micro strategies within social opposition may be functional in order to ensure the continuity of opposition in the absence of macro strategies. However, in the case of critical social upheavals, it is not possible for social movements with micro strategies to channel these social upheavals into a system critical direction.

In addition to this, in the context of the lack of alternative programs mentioned above, the most important limitation of politics of the commons is that the links between micro strategies are not sufficiently considered. More specifically, self-management and cooperative structures are suggestions of the politics of the commons in terms of communing of production. Nevertheless, there are still limits to be met even for the most successful implementations of these suggestions. In other words, the structural limit of the alternative production organizations under the existing capitalist system is the pressure of competitiveness. It is not quite possible for local cooperatives to compete on price with goods manufactured by giant capitalist corporations. For this reason, such production models must certainly be part of a macro strategy as well as a micro strategy. This macro strategy should be democratic planning. It is likely that the uncoordinated activities of different production units - even commonized ones - encounter severe crises, both strategically and economically. The coordination here has both technical and political content. A planning mechanism in which workers participate in both production and management, while also controlling the process, constitutes the very content of the coordination activity.

Another area on which the politics of the commons needs to focus more is the communing of production. This is an area where conventional working-class politics and the politics of the commons incorporate. Furthermore, it indicates the potential to overcome the current crisis of the trade unions. It should be emphasized that the communing of production units is both a sine qua non component in the communing of all other areas and also a means that promotes communing practices in other areas. On the other hand, communing of production units does not simply refer to the

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<sup>1</sup> For a strategy discussion on filling in the 'grey area', see Firat and Genç (2014).

establishment of State Economic Enterprises that operate under state ownership. Likewise, it is highly unlikely for the state to be at the very centre of such a commoning process as it has been restructured today. The reason for this is that the state per se conducts its operations based on market conditions. Hence, under the current circumstances, nationalization is far from being an alternative to overcome the problems that arise from the pressure of competitiveness. On the contrary, it can function as a catalyst for commodification and a means of marketization. With regard to an alternative program, it is precisely for this reason that the politics of the commons should advocate neither nationalization nor expropriation, but rather commoning.

In addition to production units, the commonization of finance is also another critical area. The restructuring of the banking system and especially the credits so as to meet needs will be one of the first steps of the democratization of money. In the same way, the commoning of finance, however, does not simply mean the development of public banking (Güngen, 2014) because such a reform of the monetary system has no transformative effect on its own, before the development of post-capitalist relations in the system of production, property relations, and distribution. However, if the commoning of production does not coordinate with the commoning of finance, the possibility of applying it in practice will gradually diminish. To put it in a nutshell, when the horizons of the politics of the commons are expanded through the commoning of production and finance, more constructive contributions can be made to the debate on the issue of a possible alternative program.

## **Concluding remarks**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2008 global financial crisis, the greatest crash of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there have been no changes in regard to either the economic policies that led to the crisis or the mechanisms that triggered it. The primary objective on the agenda proposed by the ruling class is not to find a long-term solution or to overcome the crisis, but just to look for ways to get around it. What makes them think the crisis is manageable is that the response from below is quite meagre. In this brief evaluation, I have tried to analyse the crisis of today's capitalism by studying its imminent roots grounded in the crisis of the 1970s from the perspective of the commons. The question of how the potential of the social oppositions that have emerged following the crises can be used more effectively so as to alter the dominant economic policies remains the most fundamental issue that I think should be answered by those who say 'Another world is possible'. I have tried to address some of the contributions that the politics of the commons can make by examining the post-crisis social movements launched so far across the globe. Nonetheless, the subject is too extensive to fit here in a single study and yet it is of crucial importance that the discussion on the commons should further be dealt with in other areas as well.

Alongside the basic arguments of commons literature, such as those that dwell on the right to the city, it is time that we discuss more contemporary perspectives. For example, as we are standing on the verge of a revolution in robotics, we should also discuss these



in depth from the commons perspective and focus on the contemporary aspects of technological advancements that can ease the overthrow of capitalism. Breaking the monopolies in the production of knowledge, commoning the knowledge production process, and ultimately creating models that can surpass the prevailing hierarchical university system are just a few of the areas to which the politics of the commons can contribute. As the discussion on the commons expands into such areas, it is necessary to address commoning practices from a much wider perspective in order to surmount their aforementioned limitations. The debates that seem to have been stuck in certain spheres, such as the cooperative system or self-management, need to adjust their focus to the commoning of production and finance at the macro level. Otherwise, no matter how radical their content and potentials may be, the commons will continue to face the danger of inclusion into the system.

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# Global Movement Cycles and Commoning Movements

**Begüm Özden Fırat**

Today the concept of 'the commons' has become rather a vague notion that is used in contradictory ways. This multifunctional concept has become more and more popularized, having entered into the jargon of both social movements, particularly after the Gezi protests in Turkey, and also into the critical vocabulary of the academic realm. Nonetheless, the concept has virtually become an 'empty signifier'. In some instances, it is used to describe the sociocultural values of a certain community, while in others it is used synonymously with the concept of 'right'. The concept of the commons has become one that is resorted to in order to define many movements that arise in various contexts such as discussions of cooperative systems, construction of self-autonomous and self-governing institutions in social reproduction, struggles against the marketization of natural resources, as well as those movements against the commodification of urban space.

Moreover, this concept has been articulated in the last decade by different institutions ranging from the World Bank to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). This 'liberal' commons approach is based on the claim that the 'good management' of natural resources such as water, forests, and land will prove to be profitable for the market and build a barrier against the social disintegration and ecological destruction caused by capitalism. While the enclosure of the commons is an economic necessity for capital, it has also become necessary to create

capitalist institutions to deal with social and ecological commons issues that have arisen due to enclosures. Known as the 'commons fix', this process refers to the commons being incorporated by the system and thus becoming an integral part of it (de Angelis, 2017).

However, the political debates around the concept of the commons in the 1990s questioned our potential to produce anticapitalist values, norms, and social relations as an alternative to capitalist enclosures that confiscate any kind of social value and relation we produce. The political discourse of the commons envisaged a 'social revolution' relying on becoming autonomous from the capitalist system, primarily and particularly in the realm of social reproduction. Therefore, this ongoing struggle of hegemony between the 'commons of capital' and social commons obliges us to understand the commons as a critical site of antagonistic struggle where "alternative value practices compete" (de Angelis and Harvie, 2018: 127).

In this paper, I will attempt to map the historical course of the concept of the commons within the framework of the anti-globalization movement beginning in the early 1990s and continuing up to the 2000s and the global movement cycle of 2010-2013 including the Arab Spring and the square and occupation movements. When I was asked to contribute to the discussion about the commons movements in the world, I considered that a paper on the two global movement cycles, of which my generation is the subject, through the lens of the commons, would be appropriate. Such a perspective would obviously not be a comprehensive analysis of both movements since it excludes many important attributes of both movement cycles and the political and theoretical discussion within them. Despite this shortcoming, I believe that looking at these two global movement cycles through the concept of the commons will be fruitful for understanding the internal connections, similarities, and limitations of these movements, which have developed as a reaction against neoliberal globalization. In this regard, this paper attempts to shed light on the interpretation of the commons from the perspective of historical struggles. In doing so, this paper may also serve as a starting point for understanding the impasse such movements are experiencing today.

## **The return of the commons**

In Turkey, the term commons, which was perhaps only used by Marxist economists in connection with the debates on primitive accumulation, began to be addressed particularly in critical social sciences literature starting from the mid-2000s. In that period, we witnessed that areas with the status 'entailed land' such as parks, woods in urban areas, and sea shores as well as land and buildings under public ownership, and 'common resources' like pastures, meadows, forests, water, and mountains were opened up to enclosure by capital as a result of a series of administrative and legal arrangements enacted in favor of the construction and energy sectors. In response to these attacks, struggles have arisen against mining developments and constructions of hydroelectric and thermal power plants in rural areas as well as the rising opposition against the gentrification of neighborhoods and the selling of the public land and public

properties in cities. The notion of the commons has come to define these sorts of new movements. Hence, new collective experiences (struggles, practices, organizations, and patterns of action) that have emerged as a result of the changes in social conditions in the last two decades have all made the word commons a part of critical vocabulary. Having been inspired by historical commons, the word commons has also gained new connotations which encompass *comradely* words like solidarity, autonomy, horizontality, and collectivism. It therefore presents an oppositional conceptual tool kit in relation to today and for today.

The concept of the commons began to be discussed particularly in autonomist Marxist literature from the 1990s onwards, and rested on the claim that the process of primitive accumulation is inherent to capital accumulation and encompasses continuity rather than a sense of primitiveness.<sup>1</sup> This historical conjuncture reveals that social commons are facing a new round of enclosure and commodification, ranging from the enclosure of intellectual property rights and patent and license rights of genetic material, to the enclosure and commodification of global commons such as air, water, and forests as well as that of cultural commons such as cultural products, heritage, and creativity, and the privatization and marketization of public services (i.e. education, health, water, and electricity) (Harvey, 2004: 123). Discussion of primitive accumulation seemed to be useful particularly for understanding the processes of capital accumulation in the eastern bloc countries, especially after the collapse of the USSR (see Midnight Notes Collective, 1990). However, different struggles were emerging in all parts of the world against the global 'enclosure movement'. Such struggles were based on the defense of the commons and creation of new commoning practices. Different scales and qualities of movements, ranging from resistance movements against the appropriation of common lands from local communities to the free software movement, started to gain global public visibility. The disappointment felt on the left due to the collapse of the Soviet Union gave way to a short-lived enthusiasm for a new cycle of movement, namely the anti-globalization movement (also known as 'alternative globalization', 'global justice movement' or the 'movement of movements') that lacked an ideological unity.

## **The anti-globalization movement and the invention of the commons**

Dardot and Laval state that the commons is such a category that it allows different and many numbers of struggles "to be all in unison but also to be various, being involved in both a global struggles site while also revealing that they are singular and local" within the anti-globalization movement framework (2018: 94). Indeed, the anti-globalization movement that gained public visibility in the 1999 summit of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, incarnated through the protests against transnational organizations like the IMF, WB, G8, and NATO as well as through the Social Forums, beginning with Porto Alegre 2001, and taking place on different scales, enabled the

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<sup>1</sup> For papers of autonomous Marxist thinkers like Massimo de Angelis, Silvia Federici, George Caf-fentzis and Werner Bonefeld on commons, see *The Commoner* journal: [www.commoner.org.uk](http://www.commoner.org.uk). For a good compilation that defends the sustainability thesis, see Özyay Göztepe (compiled., 2014).



concept of commons to be revisited and discussed on a global scale. This movement had been shaped by a series of meetings that brought together the movements of the global north and south well before 'the battle of Seattle'. This movement brought together new social movements that arose in the 70s (ecological, feminist, queer movements, etc.) along with the alternative trade union movements as well as the struggles of south and north with the local and indigenous communities around a single 'no' against neoliberal globalization.

Although there exist varying economic and political positions as well as different strategies within the movement, the commons gained visibility owing to the struggles of the global south in particular. Their struggles could be defined as localist, collectivist, or autonomist. Such resistance movements that defend the sovereignty of local communities within the framework of collective production and social rights across different national political systems emerged in particular in Latin America. These local struggles occurred particularly as a result of the enclosure of the natural commons, for example, water, land, seeds, and forests by multinational corporations. These struggles had a prefigurative quality too despite the majority being defensive in nature.

The Zapatistas, who began an armed struggle in January 1994, became a symbol of the commoning movements of the period, with their strategy of communities establishing their own autonomous forms of governance based on the defense of the commons. The Zapatista movement arose in opposition to the annulment of *ejido*, the regime that allowed for communal land use as stated in the Mexican Constitution. The movement was also opposed to the constraints concerning agricultural production as stated in the NAFTA agreement. The movement has made gains throughout the years in that the uprising led to the establishment of an autonomous organization structure that is still ongoing in Chiapas. Like many movements in South America, with its resistance to the enclosure of the commons, this movement unites indigenous peoples' in opposition to colonialism. Intergalactic Encuentros meetings held by the Zapatistas in Chiapas in 1996 and Spain in 1997 led to the emergence of an international activist network called Peoples' Global Action (PGA). The aim of this network is to establish a network organization opposed to the free trade principles of the WTO, G8, IMF, and WB. In addition, it is also against the global processes of enclosure and appropriation of the commons. PGA brings together the struggles of the north as well as the resistance movements of the global south, for example: large scale movements such as the Landless Peasants Movement in Brazil, Karnataka Farmers Association in India, community organization of the commons such as Quechua and Aymara in Bolivia, whose local community struggles are based on culture and identity, struggles of the local communities that rebelled against land enclosures in Africa, and struggles against dam constructions in India. Yet the movements that defended the commons were not only limited to the rural people's uprisings in the third world. In the very same time period, the squatters, the homeless, and the poor in Amsterdam, Berlin, New York, and London took to the streets not only for their right to housing per se but in order to reclaim urban commons (Caffentzis, 2004: 5). For instance, Reclaim the Streets was a movement that organized carnivalesque protests on a wide scale from the mid-1990s, intending to reclaim the urban commons in opposition to the privatization of public

space and construction of highways. Similarly, the occupy movements in Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands aimed at reclaiming the city as a commons against urban land speculation. Again in the north, the organizations of farmers and producers fighting against patented seeds and GMO are among the important actors of the global movement.

Furthermore, in 2001, factory occupations were carried out in Argentina against the financial crisis; on the neighborhood scale common kitchens and people's councils emerged. In the same period, mass community protests against the privatization of water resources occurred when water distribution in Cochabamba, Bolivia, was handed over to an American corporation. The experiences in both of these countries brought up discussions regarding the institutionalization of the commons based on organizations and administrations independent of the state and market. For example, the definition of water as a common in Cochabamba required the creation of the means and institutions for the organization and administration of water autonomous from the market and administration of the state and depending on self-governance on a local scale. The same process applied to the production cooperatives in the occupied factories of Argentina that were abandoned by their owners. Besides this, in the same period, thousands of popular organizations, cooperatives, and community areas, mostly organized by women, emerged in Peru and Venezuela. They engage in food, soil, water, health, and culture. Such solidarist organizations lay the ground for collaborative social reproduction systems that rely on their use value, and autonomy from the state and market (Zibechi 2012). These movements put forward a new type of struggle reliant on creating the new institutions of the commons their defenses.

In her paper *Reclaiming the Commons*, written during the days of heated alternative globalization movements, Naomi Klein focused on the potential of the movements created by different actors in different geographical locations to reclaim the commons. Such potential was concerned with how they employed new types of activity against neoliberal enclosures:

“As our communal spaces – town squares, streets, schools, farms, plants – are displaced by the ballooning marketplace, a spirit of resistance is taking hold around the world. People are reclaiming bits of nature and of culture, and saying ‘this is going to be public space’. [...] European environmentalists and ravers are throwing parties at busy intersections. Landless Thai peasants are planting organic vegetables on over-irrigated golf courses. Bolivian workers are reversing the privatization of their water supply. [...] In short, activists aren't waiting for the revolution, they are acting right now, where they live, where they study, where they work, where they farm” (2001: 51).

Klein emphasizes the prefigurative nature of the anti-globalization movement, that is, its orientation toward establishing the future today rather than wait for a revolution. This demonstrates the prefigurative nature of the movement as the creation of the desired community and collectivism as of today. In this sense, the commoning

movements of the period have realized a temporal 'jump' in revolutionary strategy, aiming at establishing a 'dual power' in the social sphere without 'putting off things till tomorrow which in fact can be done now'. Scale is the second issue that is related to the debates concerning strategy. Within the movement, as also stated by Klein, a connection is forged between "the state of feeling good locally" and abstract global processes. Here, the idea of scale is based not on a "vertical" but a "flat" spatial imaginary, that is, it is conceived as a ground created by wide ranging movements spreading on all over the globe, as Graham Gibson argues (2010). The global scale of the companies and finance giants and the horizontal and extensive network organization of grassroots movements are parallelized in this way. In addition, resistance movements place emphasis not only on internationalism. They also bring up the relationality between the sectors and struggles. The possibility and potential of a united and transvers struggle including ecological movements, labor movements, and women's struggles take place within the globalization movement; and in the center of this relationality lie the defense and creation of the commons.

The anti-globalization movement entered a phase of withdrawal after the legendary organization of the global day of protest day in 2003 against the US invasion of Iraq. The European Social Forum that took place in Istanbul in 2010 is seen as the convention that epitomized the demise and burial of the movement. In that period, the commons movements began to carry the risk of becoming internalized and turning into isolated 'rebel zones.' The holistic strategic approach of the anti-globalization movement during its heyday seemed to be replaced by isolated and scattered singular movements immersed in place and locality. 'The paradigm of commons' that addressed the relationship between global and local as well as that of political and social within the movement was then replaced by micro experiences such as squatting houses and social centers which became isolated in the north after the demise of the movement. As for the south, the movements there were either replaced by alternative institutions, absorbed by the system (as in the problematic relationship between the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil and the Labor Party), or they turned out to be isolated experiences that failed to spread their principles outward and became isolated on the national scale, even if they did manage to establish autonomous structures and institutions, as seen in the case of the Zapatistas.

Despite all this, the anti-globalization movement is still important since it has unmasked the inequality and injustice caused by free market sovereignty preached by the neoliberal phase of capitalism. Also, the movement provides an alternative to capitalist globalization. The commoning movements reveal new collective ownership models that supersede the binary of state and private ownership even though private ownership and market mentality expanded and became widespread on a social scale. Thus, social practices and institutions that rely on notions such as reciprocity and decommodification, and principles of solidarity, sharing, and direct democracy are created.

As Dardot and Laval state: "the movements that emerged against neoliberalism united under the name of *common* constitute a new moment in the history of social struggles given against capitalism." Even though this moment seemed to have halted, the global

cycle of uprisings that occurred during 2010-2013 would become a new beginning that developed the practical and ideological know-how of anti-globalization movement, and began a cycle that would make the commoning movements popular on global scale in a different way.

## **The 2011-13 movement cycle and the ‘emergent’ commons**

The square or occupy movements that emerged in different geographical locations in the aftermath of the protest cycle triggered in Tunisia in 2010 and the Tahrir moment in 2011 are, to say the least, in deadlock today. This cycle, which started as an opposition to neoliberal authoritarian regimes in the east and later led to civil wars and destruction in Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, fed into the 2011 large scale square movements in the USA, Greece, and Spain. A cycle of global struggle emerged as a result that included the referendum against water privatization in Italy in the same year as well as student and youth movements that unfolded against the neoliberal university system in Canada, Chile, and the UK. The 2013 Gezi uprising in Turkey, differing movements based on the occupation of city centers in Brazil, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Armenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Israel seemed to be the latest wave of this cycle. Each of these movements emerged in their own peculiar social, political, and historical context. However, taken together, they formed an anti-systemic movement cycle that opposed the political, economic, and social outcomes of the global capitalist crisis, contradicting the authoritarian political regimes and financial control processes of the neoliberal order. This movement cycle threw political regimes into crisis in every place it broke out. Yet it is evident that this movement cycle was not strong enough to change the current global system as a whole. These movements have reached a point where it is impossible for them to move under the pressure of the anti-revolutionary powers that emerged to counter the systemic political crisis brought about such movements.

These concurrent movements, which emerged in different geographic locations throughout the world, share a number of commonalities. The occupation of the city centers, the collective action of different political and social groups, patterns of organization without any sort of hierarchy or leader are among the most important political attributes shared by this movement cycle. Defending and establishing what is common is the determining feature of any square movement. This feature corresponds to the “increase in the solution of social reproduction problems through collective solidarity, with these problems being in the way of the communities”. This is named “the development of the commons” by Angelis (2017: 252). It would therefore be apt to discuss here the significance of the commons that has developed within these movements’ framework as well as their limitations and shortcomings, rather than discussing individually the particular patterns of this cycle of movement in their own geography.

The anti-globalization movement, reliant on the ‘scale jumping’ strategy between the global and local scales, head towards national and then local level politics in the 2011-13 cycle. When compared with the previous movement cycle, the movement of the

squares did not oppose the neoliberal processes or the determining actors of such processes such as corporations and transnational financial institutions. What they are opposed was the manifestations of these processes as experienced on their own national level. This cycle, compared to anti-globalization movements whose actors are mostly local and rural resistance movements, appears to carry an urban quality. One of the basic dynamics that triggers the movements is the intensifying commodification processes of urban space, and these movements are tightly embedded in the urban space. For this reason, many square movements 'jump' to the neighborhood level when the occupation comes to an end. No doubt, this situation does not render these movements 'national'. In fact, the cycle carries a 'sincere and heartfelt' internationalism even though it lacks the aspect of having global concurrence or organizational quality. Nearly every movement establishes a symbolic alliance with its own struggle on a national scale and with other struggles. For example, those who occupied the Madison Wisconsin State Capitol after the US Wisconsin State Senate and voted to curb the collective bargaining rights of public workers sent their regards to Tahrir. The Spanish, inspired by Tahrir, occupied the squares and prepared a banner that read "let's talk silent do not to wake the Greeks." Their whispers found a response in Athens upon the occupation of Syntagma square. A new slogan was invented in Israel: "Tel Aviv, Cairo, the same revolution." In Taksim square a banner stated that the square is Tahrir right here and a Brazilian flag was waved. "Love is over. This is now Turkey" became the motto of the uprising in Brazil. The squares are both a physical common site for this movement cycle and they are also a metaphor for a common movement.

Peter Waterman (2001) used to take the potential of anti-globalization movements seriously. This potential was concerned with the movements of anti-globalization forming a new internationalist movement. Perhaps one of the reasons for the regression of the movement was due to the fact that such a possibility had been overlooked. It can be claimed that today the 2011-13 movements carried a transnational sense of solidarity, and the idea of commons made up the emotional structure of this cycle, defined by Raymond Williams as 'emergent'. Williams tells us that "no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention... For there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness, in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize." (Williams, 1990:100). By 'emergent', he is referring to the processes of creating new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship (1990:100). The 2011-13 movement cycle has such an emergent global practical consciousness and a world of meaning.

The Invisible Committee reports the following about one of the Tahrir Square 'citizens': "Since nothing was working properly any more, everybody started to pay attention to those around. People assumed the responsibility of collecting garbage, they swept the sidewalks and at times repainted them. They drew frescos on the walls and looked after each other. ...At Tahrir, people would arrive and spontaneously ask what they could do to help. They would go to the kitchen or to a stretcher...They would work on

banners, shields or slingshots, join discussions and make up songs” (2015: 232). Douzinas states that people have similar shared experiences in all the places where square movements emerged, and adds that “this is an extraordinary metamorphosis shared by people in different parts of the world, which has changed them from obedient subjects of law to resisting subjectivities” (2014: 79). What is in question is the ‘emergent’ global experience that is commoning public spaces and is based on decommodification at a time when the neoliberal accumulation of capital has expanded and the state has withdrawn from social reproduction and public services such as housing, education, and healthcare—services which were won by social movements but have now been exposed to marketization. This global experience is an emergent one that strives to organize these sites through solidarity-based relationships and realizes that in a trial and error manner. These kinds of temporary utopian experiences show us that fulfilling the concrete social needs, namely organizing the realm of social reproduction, is itself a political issue, creating a social antagonism which has a class-based attribute. Such a perspective leads us to understand square movements as relational and process-oriented rather than seeing the movements as a system of values or as a resource in which the commons are given. It also leads us to understanding them as the production of new social relations and subjectivities through collective practices and struggles. Following Williams, the new experiences that emerged in the squares and their material foundation attain a term that will name these experiences.

Badiou, in a paper written during the very first days of the Tahrir Square occupation, describes Tahrir as a universal phenomenon, stating that:

“In the wake of an event, community is made up of those who are knowledgeable in resolving the problems posed by the event. The same applies for the occupation of a square. A place where all things happen. A place which has become a symbolic one, and all the chores to be conducted so that the place can remain to be the property of public. These chores include requires food and sleeping arrangements, ensuring safety, and prayers.... The solution of the unsolvable problems without the help of the state is the destiny of that event” (2011).

In fact, the destiny of the square movements converged on the daily social practices that constitute the rhythm of the occupation. These practices are caring for each other, dealing with food and cleaning, making tea, sleeping, having a chat, listening, discussing, taking care of the wounded, or organizing logistics and maintaining safety. Both in Tahrir and Taksim, these new reproduction practices, from food to care, associated with the private sphere of social life were moved and relocated to the public sphere. These actions were revolutionary not just because they rendered the occupation continuous, but because their revolutionary character was due to the fact that this site was organized in a way which excluded the state and the market.



## Afterlives

Within the anti-globalization movements, the practices of commoning viewed virtually as a survival strategy for the marginalized urban and rural communities – the local communities in colonial states in particular – were also put on the political agenda of those attributed as privileged in terms of culture and social status. This inclusion in the agenda was seen through the 2011-13 cycle. Nonetheless, carrying the ‘commoning moment’ in the squares to a point beyond a single ordinary ‘moment’ of the occupation, seems to be the Achilles’ heel of the issue. For example, Asef Bayat describes Tahrir as an exceptional moment within a long process of revolution that occurs in most of the great revolutionary transformations where practices emerged to go back and forth between real and unreal as well as between reality and utopia (2013). The real problem for Bayat, however, is “what happens the day after the dictator abdicates, and people go home to fulfill normal daily needs such as getting bread, jobs and safety” (2013). It is not possible to provide a complete answer to this question within this paper. Yet we can say that the period after that ‘moment’ comes to an end is the real starting point of the struggle.

In that case, we need to mention two aspects of these movements. The first aspect is the patterns of social relationality that are self-governing and outside the market as they emerge upon the occupation of space. In other words, it is the collective practices, meaning and values that commonizes the occupied space. The second aspect is the revealing of collective patterns of action and organization that will relocalize the world of practices and meaning on different scales on the temporal axis. Even though the future of the square movements varied depending on the historical, social, and political context in which they emerged, we can say that each movement faced a counter revolution. Thus the course each movement took differed under political violence and social pressure. For example, following Tahrir and Mubarek’s abdication, the processes of counter-revolution, which were shaped by the establishment of Muslim Brotherhood government and later the military coup, seem to make the square movements both dispersed and passivized. Despite these developments, Asef Bayat (2013) emphasizes the significance and novel quality of independent unionization inclinations of small farmers and autonomous youth organizations that were realized in the slums of Cairo after Tahrir. Bayat states that the ‘emergent’ mass revolutionary aspirations that are geared towards emancipation, self-actualization, and the establishment of a new order contradict the political elites’ aims of order and stability. For this reason, there emerges the need for them to withdraw and this conflict is the determining anomaly of the global movement.

On the other hand, we witness the rise of solidarity movements and a process in which commoning practices became institutionalized, particularly during the financial crisis after the occupation of Syntagma Square in Greece. Collective kitchens, solidarity pharmacies, social clinics, solidarity schools, cooperatives, producer-consumer networks, barter markets, time banks, and city gardens, which are among the solidarist, collaborative, equalitarian, self-governing, and democratic institutions of the common, enabled communities to survive during the ongoing crisis. As Çetinkaya (2016) notes,

these institutions also create the grounds of an alternative social organization based on commoning as much as solidarity and reciprocity principles allow, rather than just being reliant on philanthropy. What is important for us, if we are to put it in Fevzi Özlüer's terms, is that commoning is grounded on the principle of 'practicability', which renders individuals doers and subjects, rather than being based on 'accessibility' to food, medicine, education, or housing.<sup>2</sup>

The 15-M Occupy movements in Madrid and Barcelona, emerged as opposition to the 2008 financial crisis, and were fed by the autonomous movements from the earlier cycle of anti-globalization movement that is still healthy in both these cities. After people in the squares dispersed, the movements spread, on the one hand, toward neighborhood organizations, and parliamentary and local politics, on the other (Podemos and Ganemos). As Castells (2013) puts it, once the squares become empty, the movement aims at mobilizing different forms of organizations, such as neighborhood councils, consumer cooperatives, ethical banking, and barter networks that will make life more meaningful. On the other hand, the square movements gave rise to the Barcelona en Comu (Common Barcelona) movement that managed to get hold of the local administration. This municipalist movement is seen as a critical threshold as to how the relation between local administration and commoning movements is to be institutionalized.

Despite not being a square movement per se, the commons' struggle in Italy, known as *beni comuni*, has been going since the 2000s and is based on the accumulation of anti-globalization movements. In the water privatization referendum in 2011, the law was vetoed (56% of participation, with more than 90% of no votes), and eventually it resulted in a win since water was defined as a commons and social services would not be privatized. Besides this, the occupation of Teatro Valle in Rome paved the way for commoning practices in the sphere of culture; the No-TAV struggle against the construction of a high-speed train in the Susa Valley triggered yet more struggles in different cities for preserving the ecological commons. Commoning movements bringing grassroots movements together with that of institutional legal activism and municipalism are becoming stronger in Italy, with Naples being the center of such efforts.

Dardot and Laval agree with David Harvey when he points to "a sort of phobia of hierarchy, even phobia of organization and the idealization of horizontal organization of political action" seen commonly in square movements. According to Dardot and Laval, "as seen in the cases of Occupy Wall Street and Indignados, these attitudes have sometimes led to political impasses and demoralizing failures because they cannot create sustainable organizational models suitable for the object of the movements and the object of their demands" (2018: 142). Similarly, Asef Bayat (2013) states that the Tahrir 'moment' could not imagine what would lie beyond that particular 'moment' and that this lack of imagination and organization happen to be the fundamental attributes of the 2011 movement cycle and square movements. It seems that these

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<sup>2</sup> I used the term with reference to another discussion that was brought up by Fevzi Özlüer in the "Commons Working Group" meeting held in Mersin Kültürhane on July 28-29, 2018.

movements are bound to lose unless they can create their self-organizing 'institutions of the commons.'

It would be beneficial to view the movements of commoning that emerged in the two global movement cycles discussed in this paper, through the perspective provided by the famous slogan of Gezi: 'this is just the beginning'. Therefore, they should not be regarded as an outcome or an ultimate target, but a beginning. It is clear that the commoning movements within both of the movement cycles do not put forward a political revolutionary strategy in any recognizable sense. Nevertheless, these movements incorporate the core of a social revolution based on the institutionalization of commoning practices.<sup>3</sup> In this way, theoretical and practical discussion on the commons provides a paradigm of social transformation that is based on the production of alternative practices, relations, meanings, and values in socio-cultural and economic realms. Therefore, we are faced with a macro strategy that foresees the establishment of a 'dual power' in the social sphere, i.e. the construction of a conflict between capitalist and anti-capitalist institutions, relations, practices, and values. However, there lies a discrepancy between the micro level of the commoning movements within these two movement cycles and this macro strategy. This discrepancy requires the creation of a medium-level ground. Otherwise, micro experiences carry the risk of becoming new communitarian communities. Currently, the relation being established between the new municipality practices and commoning movements seems to carry the potential for creating such a mezzo level on condition that such local administrative actions should rise from the grassroots movements.

Commoning practices, such as production cooperatives of blue collar and white collar workers, non-commercial health centers and nurseries, sports associations, radio stations, and many more, can have a mobilizing effect in a period when leftist and socialist opposition cannot not make an organized and progressive political move. Besides, creating modest institutions of the common and making connections among institutions carries a crucial importance to most of us when the economic crisis has such a huge impact on daily life. The 'emergent' idea of the commons, as it emerged from within the global movement cycles in response to the economic, social, and ecological destruction of capitalism, offers a good starting point both for the survival of the planet and also for establishing an ethical common life for all.

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<sup>3</sup> For a paper that discusses the difference between social and political revolution from the perspective of commons, see De Angelis (2014).

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# Urban Social Movements and the Politics of the Commons in Istanbul

**Fırat Genç\***

The inhabitants of Istanbul witnessed the regeneration of their city in the 2000s at an increasingly rapid pace. From residential areas to public spaces, and from the transportation infrastructure to natural resources, this dramatic transformation process that affected the urban spaces at large and thus completely redefined the urban experience, has emerged as a consequence of the economic, political, and cultural strategies adopted by AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments during the period (Bartu Candan and Özbay, 2014). This was a national transformation. Yet Istanbul, as usual, was the city in which this process was most intense. At the same time, Istanbul underwent a noticeable revival of urban resistance during this period as well. The sense of inequality and injustice caused by developments that directly affected everyday life eventually led to the emergence of a collective reaction and urban spaces and life gradually became the very subject to the social/political conflict. Triggered by the AKP's economic growth model, the developments has so far incited the desires of a particular section of the urban population and thus constituted one of the most fundamental elements of the hegemony of the AKP government, concurrently turning miscellaneous issues of urban conflict into an element of the opposition's political vocabulary. In this way, both the scope and scale of urban politics in the context of Istanbul have undergone considerable changes over the last decade. While new aspects have

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recently been added to the agenda of urban politics, the actors as implementers of these agendas have, accordingly, also begun to vary (Kolluoğlu, 2014; Yalçınan and Çavuşoğlu, 2013; Ünsal, 2014; Çelik, 2017).

Notwithstanding the differing actors, demands, and the action repertoire, and discursive strategies for that matter, I am of the opinion that it is possible to identify certain commonalities amongst the numerous acts of resistance that emerged during this period, and we can therefore speak of a specific generation of urban social movements within the context of Istanbul. The core purpose of this article is to both classify and define this generation by focusing on the acts of resistance that have emerged during the AKP's rule. Conducting a thorough study over such a long period is clearly difficult in a city with so many complex dynamics. Therefore, I would rather focus on a discussion within more clear-cut boundaries, than compile a comprehensive list of various acts of resistance.<sup>1</sup> With this in mind, I would like to set out from a conceptual framework that focuses on urban commons as it seems to me that it would be of more use in describing the recent urban movements and some light on the strategic political path of these movements.

## **Urban commons and current enclosures**

As Begüm Özden Fırat's article in this book, highlights in detail, the debate on the commons, which seems to be gaining currency in both academic and political literature, is interconnected with the course of the anti-globalization movement that emerged in the 1990s against the destruction caused by neoliberal capitalism. The intellectual and practical efforts of this social/political movement, which seek to direct the reactions caused by the deepening and expansion of the commodification processes in the neoliberal phase of globalization, have led to the revival of the debate on the commons in the field of radical social theory. Attempts to define the increasingly aggressive expansionism of late capitalism and the destruction it has caused on social, economic, ecological, and cultural levels, together with the emergent resistance movements, largely appeal to concepts already existing in the Marxist literature, such as commons and enclosures (De Angelis, 2007; Midnight Notes, 2010; Linebaugh, 2014; Hardt ve Negri, 2009; Dardot ve Laval, 2018). The conceptual set in question has gained ground in current critical studies as it illuminates the mechanism, dynamics, and consequences of marketization and the commodification process (Harvey, 2003; Federici, 2014; Linebaugh, 2009; Kasmir ve Carbonella, 2014; Bensaïd, 2017).

However, it should be emphasized here that there is a second aspect of current critiques in question. The spatial dimension of the logic of the neoliberal stage of capitalism is another factor contributing to explanations regarding the debate on the commons, and these spatial practices and relations need to be included in the analysis (Sevilla-Buitrago,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to clarify the fact that the examples I have dealt with here are mostly relate to the practices that occur in a certain, somewhat defined, collective action. Moments of collective creativity that emerge in the course of our daily life together with commoning practices that pan out from them, all of which I consider to have a rather crucial place in the context of the politics of urban commons, do not fall within the scope of this article.



2015). The understanding of the unique forms of the complex and multi-layered restructuring processes under different localities and historical conditions, which are often simply referred to as neoliberalism, is only possible through the comprehension of the kinds of spatial relations and practices that emerge in the wake of such processes (Brenner, Peck and Theodore, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Gough, 2002). The realization of spatial reality, such as spatial regimes initiated in cities, the political subjectivities implied by such spatial regimes, and the redefined strategies of the state that is in interaction with such political subjectivities, is critical in gaining more insight into the qualities of the current phase of capitalism. Therefore, we see that the monitoring of the fate of the urban commons and of the enclosure toward them has gained ever more prominence both theoretically and politically in the context of neoliberal urbanization processes.

Based on this literature, if we are to move forward so as to look at the course of urbanization in Turkey back in the 2000s,<sup>2</sup> we see that the urban commons were under constant and comprehensive attack. The capital accumulation regime adopted by the AKP governments following the economic crisis of 2000-2001, together with the economic growth model required by this regime, have been the driving forces of the current cycle of enclosures (Akçay and Güngen, 2014). When we compare this economic model, which assigns a strategic role to the expansion of energy and construction sectors in order to achieve economic growth, with other models adopted in the 1950s (DP's tenure) and the period of 1984-93 (ANAP's tenure) in terms of the investments of both the state and the private sector in urban spaces, we see that the current model has expanded them in proportion. One of the salient factors that has made this expansion possible is that the state has accordingly channelled its legal, bureaucratic, and financial power into it. No development activity could have been implemented if it had not been for a series of interventions: the statutory amendments, facilitating the privatization of state-owned urban land stock, the restructuring of land-use planning legislature enacted in the previous national developmental period, the restructuring of the authority and organizational structures of institutions such as TOKİ (the Mass Housing Development Administration), and stretching the laws within the critical legal framework such as the Public Procurement Law.<sup>3</sup>

With this background in mind, if we are to take a closer look at the concrete forms of the development rush in Istanbul, four main topics seem to stand out. Firstly, during

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<sup>2</sup> When we speak of the commons, natural resources such as water, air, and forests are the first ones that come to mind. Nevertheless, I basically use the concept here to address the practices that are autonomous from the processes of marketization and commodification and those in which new relations through social reproduction are established/maintained, as well as the areas and spaces in which such practices occur implicitly. Such a definition does not necessarily exclude natural resources, of course, but neither does it always include them. Furthermore, it makes it possible to incorporate into the analysis both tangible and intangible products of our collective creativity –information, cultural heritage, physical public spaces such as parks or squares, and urban infrastructure systems, to name but a few, which is more difficult to identify but also is an indispensable element when it comes to urban spaces. For a study that outlines the commons literature, see Adaman, Akbulut and Kocagoz, 2017. For a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the differences between these paths, see Dardot and Laval, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> For a review of legal and administrative regulations in this period, see Balaban, 2013.

those years, incorporating public immovables into the ongoing privatization program so as to increase budget revenues, the public administration put up for sale especially high-value land in the city centre of Istanbul. Secondly, extensive large-scale infrastructure or commercial facility investments have been implemented under the public-private partnership business model. And third, the implementation of urban transformation projects designed to overcome the dynamics of incomplete marketization in poor, 'run-down areas' in the inner city, especially under the leadership of TOKI and with the encouragement of local governments. Fourthly, it is worth mentioning that the large-scale housing projects carried out by TOKI, especially for the market, and large-scale infrastructure projects carried out with public funding facilitated the opening of large areas in the city to private sector investment.<sup>4</sup> In brief, the ongoing reconstruction activities within these four aspects have not only transformed housing relations and land ownership patterns inherited from the previous periods in Istanbul but have also cumulatively deepened the commodification of urban spaces.

While there might be variations in their pace or policy and investment priorities over time, it is appropriate to consider these largely uninterrupted practices as elements of a particular spatial regime (neoliberal urbanism) (Bartu Candan and Kolluoğlu, 2008). The main point to underline in our discussion is that this spatial regime, constructed on the expansion and deepening of commodification in urban spaces, unravels the existing commons in the cities. As briefly mentioned above, it is necessary to think of the commons as a mode of social relations that are essentially free of capitalist processes. In this regard, the urban commons correspond to the forms of relations and networks that not only generate such spaces but also in turn evolve within them, transcending the actual physicality of the land or structure.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, from the past to today, the commons established by inhabitants, who engage in struggles either openly or covertly (the products of the past commoning practices), serve as 'defence cushions', which protect them from the excesses of capitalist processes, and at times even allow them to avoid the discipline of capital. Precisely for this reason, the enclosure of the urban commons yields devastating consequences, especially for those sectors of society more directly the object of relations of domination and exploitation. Unravelling deep-rooted solidarity networks in the slums, the privatization of public spaces in the inner city or the closure of them with the help of the state and capital, and the appropriation of social-ecological wealth by capital are just a few of the initial phases of the enclosure cycles brought about by neoliberal urbanism.<sup>6</sup> In the light of these examples, it is fair to say that enclosures tend to have differing effects on different sections of society. Nonetheless, it should be underlined that neoliberal urbanism as a whole is a continuum of strategies that reinforce the enclosures for urban commons, both through the apparatuses of state violence, and also through the functioning of market relations that

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive review of this multi-dimensional process, detailing the context of Istanbul, see Yalçınan et al., 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Indisputably, lands or structures can at times also be regarded as commons in terms of ownership (e.g. coasts). In most cases, however, it is their uses that render them common rather than their legal categories as properties.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Firat, 2011, and Akbulut, 2017.

appear non-violent.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, it is possible to understand the recent experiences of urban opposition as practices principally aimed at both defending and reclaiming the commons in the face of these strategies and also further establishing new ones.

## **Opposition to neoliberal urbanism before the Gezi resistance**

So far I have described the context that essentially determines the resistance movements. In this and following sections, I classify the grassroots movements in Istanbul in regard to the urban commons following a simple chronological path.

### **The problematic of housing the urban poor and the defence of neighborhood**

There is no doubt that the problem of housing is one of the most prominent elements of the urban political scene in Istanbul in the republican period (Erder, 1996; Erman, 2001). During the emergence and expansion of slums as well as their gradual incorporation into market mechanisms with the help of statutes such as zoning amnesties, the question of affordable housing was put at the heart of the political agenda, both locally and nationally. In the 2000s, negotiations and conflicts that took place around slum settlements gained momentum. In the wake of the framework of anti-crisis measures within the Emergency Action Plan announced by the new AKP government in 2003, urban transformation projects in city slums and poor inner-city neighborhoods became a current issue (Kuyucu, 2014). As the corollary of the comprehensive legal and administrative restructuring mentioned above, an urban renewal campaign was initiated by the government. Within the framework of the campaign, led by TOKİ, one project followed another in dozens of shanty towns, for example, Ayazma, Başibüyük, Gülsuyu-Gülensu and Derbent in Istanbul, as well as urban settlements with high levels of crushing poverty, such as Sulukule, Tarlabası, Süleymaniye, Fener-Balat and Tozkoparan, which were not technically categorized as slums.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding differing implementation principles, it can be argued that on the whole the main purpose of these projects was to fully integrate the housing and land stock in these places into the real-estate market. Of course, due to real-estate trade, there was a market structure in all these settlements, including the slums (Buğra, 1998; Öncü, 1988). However, issues such as the very fragmented structure of land ownership, the legal uncertainty of who owned the land and buildings, and the unqualified building stock would impede the smooth functioning of market relations. As the city continued to grow, the increasing competitive pressure due to economic rents on these settlements and, moreover, the fact that urban space is increasingly becoming the subject of large-scale capital investments

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<sup>7</sup> In an article elsewhere, we address the conception of neoliberalism from a much wider perspective as a continuum of strategies that seeks to abate the capacity of social and political actions of the working class. See Firat and Genç, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Urban transformation has so far been one of the most prominent areas of focus in the literature of recent urban studies. For just a few of dozens studies on the subject, see Bartu Candan and Kolluoglu, 2008; Kuyucu and Unsal, 2010; Lovering and Turkmen, 2011; Türkün, 2014.

rendered the phenomenon of incomplete marketization unsustainable in terms of building capital and public administration. The urban transformation practices, which aimed to demolish the existing housing stock and build high-yield housing while concurrently addressing the statutory ambiguities on property rights, were devised as an instrument in order to overcome the obstruction quickly and without causing any undesirable reaction.

It was foreseen that the legal powers of TOKI would be sufficient to overcome any possible resistance. Furthermore, that the beneficiaries would be those who would own property in the mass housing projects to be constructed by TOKI was designed as the principal mechanism for consent to the projects. Nonetheless, in most of the neighborhoods where the projects were initiated, the process did not progress as smoothly as the public administration had envisioned. Residents looked for ways to take collective action. The basic organization unit was the neighborhood solidarity associations that were founded during this process or that were inherited from previous periods of struggle. These associations brought together those who were entitled to apartments within the scope of the project and those who owned these units, although not legally entitled, as well as, more exceptionally, the tenants. Hence, from the announcement of the development plans, the neighborhood associations tried to become the main negotiating body for dealing with municipalities, TOKI and the contraction firms in order to determine who the legal beneficiaries would be from the onset of demolition to the construction of new buildings,. However, project owners attempted to cut the associations out, and sought ways to establish one-on-one relations with individual beneficiaries, thus controlling the inequalities and disagreements among inhabitants (Kuyucu and Ünsal, 2010).

The opposition to urban regeneration organized among neighborhood associations between 2004 and 2012 can be considered as the most volatile period.<sup>9</sup> During those years, dozens of associations kept trying to broaden their base in their living spaces, while on the other hand they were also searching for ways to create solidarity with each other through common platforms. With the help of the mechanisms for sharing of experiences between the neighborhoods established through informal alliances, such as the Istanbul Neighborhood Associations Platform, legal and technical knowledge necessary to sustain the counterclaims was shared; this is regarded as one of the fundamental tactics of the resistance. This revival in the neighborhood associations has over time led to the formation of a broader front against urban regeneration. Professionals, such as city planners, architects, and lawyers, have become involved in this front, occasionally through their involvement in professional societies and sometimes through academia but also by becoming involved in activist groups (for example, One Hope Association/the Solidarity Workshop, A Co-op Society's Urbanism Movement or Social Rights Association). Even though the Neighborhood Associations Platform eventually disintegrated, such collaborative experiments that seek to bring the urban poor and the urban middle classes as well as professionals together have continued through other initiatives,

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion on the neighborhood movements during this period, see Ünsal, 2014.

such as the Sarıyer Neighborhood Associations Platform or the Urban Movements.

Indubitably, the discourse and action repertoire of each element in the struggle cannot be claimed to be fully identical. However, if we focus on the neighborhood associations in this cluster, it is possible to identify some commonalities especially in terms of demands. In many instances, organizers were not categorically opposed to the intervention of the public administration. On the contrary, the unqualified building stock and the feeling of insecurity kept alive by the ambiguity of property rights hampered the total rejection of the urban regeneration projects by community dwellers. For this reason, many neighborhood associations were calling for on-site transformation. In some localities, such as Gülsuyu-Gülensu and Sulukule, demands to develop alternative plans were brought up and gained a great deal of support. However, the projects outlined by TOKİ and the municipalities invoked feelings of distrust as such projects ultimately led to mass displacement, as well as on-site transformation. Nevertheless, at this point it is worth noting that the reactions provoked at the neighborhood level were not homogeneous. Even though the community dwellers initially showed a common reaction, the structural differences between rights holders, squatters, and tenants, eventually created splits between them. When project owners took advantage of ambiguities in the legal framework defining the dissimilarities between inhabitants it was pretty enough to deepen such splits to a level that would weaken the movement and end the resistance (Kuyucu, 2014). On the other hand, in neighborhoods capable of sustaining the capacity of collective action, organizers focussed on eliminating the differences between right holders and those who were not recognized as right holders. In cases where this capacity was found to be somewhat loose, various sections of the neighborhood sought to increase their bargaining power with the public administration.

Aside from the fate of individual resistances, when we take a closer look at the discursive strategy of the anti-urban transformation movement as a whole, we see that the notion of the neighborhood itself tends to have a rather unique place. In the eyes of the insurgents, the neighborhood forms the very basis for making sense of the collective memory of the difficult conditions of the past and thus legitimizing the claims on the urban space (Özügür, 2010). The fact that the settlements in the shanty towns were established by the inhabitants of the neighborhood from scratch, and even some of these areas were only gained after fierce struggles against the state, makes the neighborhood one of the founding elements of the collective identity. This importance attributed to the neighborhood can be interpreted as a stylized expression of the social solidarity networks that the urban poor and the working class hold under the conditions of challenging urban life. If this proposition is valid, in other words, if the neighborhood is considered as a set of practices in which social reproduction relations that provide relative protection to the working class in the face of the destructiveness of market relations can be produced, then it would be appropriate to think of the defence of the neighborhood as the defence of an urban entity <sup>¾</sup> of course, without ignoring the structural dynamics of inequality that the neighborhood itself contains. From this point of view, it would be appropriate to interpret the neighborhood movements of the period I have been focusing on as

defensive movements in urban spaces against enclosures, whether their organizers prefer to use this terminology themselves or not.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, it is fair to say that the fate of the neighborhood defences is defined by the very limits of this strategy. Likewise, as seen in many instances, the desire that the commodification processes in urban space created in the residents of the neighborhoods themselves (the desire to gain a share of economic rents as a means of social mobility) won out against attempts to re-establish the neighborhood.<sup>11</sup>

## **Resistance to the expropriation of public spaces**

The urban transformation projects found in Istanbul today are just one of the quintessential examples of Harvey's (2003) conceptualization of 'accumulation by dispossession' in which he emphasizes the continuity and timeliness of the attacks by capital on the commons. The abandonment of one of the most pivotal elements in the field of social reproduction, for example, housing, to market dynamics produces devastating consequences for the urban working class. The fact that this social layer was deprived of the protection of the solidarity networks that it was able to establish in the past and were eventually scattered around peri-urban areas due to mass displacements creates a dynamic that reinforces the fragmentation experienced in city domain (Firat and Genç, 2015).

Nonetheless, it would be misleading to portray the enclosures in the context of neoliberal urbanism as if they were restricted to the field of housing. Likewise, the fact that the interest of the urban opposition in Istanbul in the period before the Gezi Resistance was increasingly directed to the public spaces in a way confirms this fact. As physical spaces such as parks, squares, coasts, and streets were increasingly the subject of the interventions of capital and political power during those years, controversies around the defence of such areas have also gained momentum with more determination. Renewal projects such as Galataport, Haydarpaşaport and Haliçport, for instance, caused such protests to evolve, over time, into opposition campaigns. These projects aimed at transforming valuable industrial structures and sites in the historic centre of Istanbul through public-private partnerships and including exclusively commercial activities. Thus, it increasingly rendered these physical spaces, such as the coasts, which are by definition characterized by public ownership and public use –even

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<sup>10</sup> However, this proposition does not necessarily mean that the neighborhood is, in any case, immanently an urban common. Indeed, the commons and socialization forms other than market relations cannot be regarded as identical categories (cf. Gough, 2002). It is a separate question that needs to be answered in terms of which processes affect the commons in regard to equitable, emancipatory, or sheer oppressive socialization forms and to what extent they cause the commons to differentiate. Yet, I would like to leave this discussion for now since it requires a much more detailed conceptual unearthing. However, it is important to emphasize the following: it is of utmost importance to take into account the very limits and conditions of the neighborhood either in respect to the urban commons defence or its re-establishment so as to understand the hindrances of resistance practices that emerged advocating the neighborhood in the period in which I am concerned.

<sup>11</sup> For a study discussing the construction of the neighborhood and the identity of the neighborhood resident through a sample of mainly urban middle classes, such as the case of Kadıköy, in the context of post-Gezi urban activism, see Gülen, 2016.



though it is not always the case on a daily basis– inaccessible. On top of that, due to such projects, the collective knowledge accumulated by urban dwellers over the years and the collective memory around these products/spaces were appropriated (this is much more evident in the objections raised to Haydarpaşa and the railway station). In other words, the urban commons, which were both the tangible and intangible products of the collective production of Istanbulites, were enclosed by capital through the interventions of the state. Although so many of us tend to focus on the enclosure of coastal areas to the use of the public or the privatization of public goods in a way that would harm the state budget, in fact the firm implications of these enclosures endure in more multiple embedded layers than they seem to be.

Seen in this way, it is not possible to say that the debates on the fate of public spaces and even campaigns have taken full account of the complex consequences of the enclosures of the commons. In the examples I have presented so far, the mainstay of the campaigns encompass the notions of accessibility, public interest, and cultural/urban heritage. These campaigns, which began with initiatives of professionals working in related areas (mainly architects and planners) and their corresponding professional societies, predominantly targeted the whole public rather than appealing to a more defined group that would be directly affected by such developments, as in the case of the opposition of neighborhood movements to urban transformation. They conducted the campaign with reference to the aforementioned abstract values as well. This discursive strategy, which aims to communicate the truth that the public's rights and interests are appropriated to the public itself, envisaged taking its legitimacy from the values and orientations that the disciplines such as law, design, and planning have accumulated over the years. The campaigns' repertoire of events was also shaped according to this discursive strategy. Press releases and counter-claims for cancellation plans were the preferred methods. As a matter of fact, the limits of resistance were determined according to the constraints of this very strategy. This is because the AKP's reckless moves to undermine the occupational ideologies that have been built step by step through the years of national developmentalism and the professional ideologies behind it, have largely, and inevitably, rendered the campaign efforts void. Hence, this discursive strategy could easily be framed by the circles of power as if it were mere rhetoric that appealed to the concerns of the urban middle classes and did not address the real problems of the poor. However, as of 2013, the association of Haliç (Golden Horn) Solidarity attempted to show that the enclosure of these physical spaces is neither an attack that solely focussed on urban middle class areas, nor a concept of cultural heritage that can be considered independent of the current the social stratification of the city.

In this regard, the upheaval of resistance concerning the Emek Cinema ('emek' means labor) stands as an effective counter-example because the public debate provoked by this resistance shows us that urban memory and heritage are, in effect, commons formed by active, contingent, and conflicting processes rather than given and fixed content (Firat, 2011). As a matter of fact, the Emek Cinema movement is a practice of resistance that was triggered by the concern of defending the rights of the public against the privatization of a public property. The basis for the conflict between the organizers of



the resistance and the project owners is the contradictory claims on the property in question. The question of whether the decisive criterion was the change value or the use value in the process of renovating the city block where the cinema was located lies at the heart of the conflict. The aspirations of the district municipality in pushing through this renewal project on highly valuable real-estate were its contribution to Istanbul's central position in international tourism. Be that as it may, the sole demands of the movement were for the cinema to remain as public property and open to collective public use.

Undoubtedly, this contrast is a conflict as regards the concrete forms of 'urban entrepreneurship' adopted by local governments in the context of Istanbul in the 2000s. And yet, what is even more momentous is that, as Harvey has justly claimed (2002), the collective cultural capital that the residents of the city had accumulated over the years was monopolized and thus converted into economic benefits. The enclosure of the material and intangible means of urban collective creativity plays a key role in the functioning of neoliberal urbanism, at least as much as commodification of the land. The second dimension of the antagonism behind the resistance of the Emek Cinema was the reaction to the enclosure of such urban commons. This is because of the way both lifestyles and cultural practices that derive from them in a given place are framed in accordance with the trends of the global tourism industry, and thus transform them into mere commercial elements so as to increase the attractiveness of individual locations, paradoxically, causes them to lose their originality and in time lead to uniformity.

Nevertheless, the main point not to be overlooked in this reaction is the fact that the rising upheaval against uniformity per se has redefined the urban memory. As the movement expanded the narratives about the position of the cinema in the cultural and political history of the city so as to justify its demands, and in parallel, the practices of re-using the concrete space in accordance with these narratives (organising film screening events on the street where the cinema is located, forums, street parties, concerts, May 1 celebrations, and so on), the Emek Cinema has been, in turn, redefined as an element of cultural heritage. However, it would be appropriate to think that this redefinition is a form of remembrance-in-movement rather than a sole portrayal of a fixed content with a nostalgic tone. Memory is built through and during a collective act (commoning). In this way, the social sections that mobilized the resistance (the urban middle classes at a glance) have built a discursive system through which they can express the implicit reaction concerning the forms of spatial injustice and domination they experience owing to the dramatic regeneration of the urban space as a whole. The fact that this discursive construction cannot be ignored by the ruling circles as well as in the discussions of cultural heritage occurring in other venues of the city is the fact that this active memory construction has successfully been able to connect with the concrete forms of exploitation and domination. Now, if we take all this into consideration, it should essentially be possible to say that the resistance seen in the case of Emek Cinema is an exceptional example of the opposition that extends from the defence of one urban common to the establishment of new ones.

Last but not least, it should be emphasized that the conflicts emerging over the appropriation of public spaces have a certain dimension exposing the overlapping dynamics of domination in such spaces. In addition, space is not only experienced through class exploitation but also through day-to-day relations in regards to gender and ethnic identities (Gonen, 2010; Alkan Zeybek, 2011; Alkan, 2012; Yonucu, 2014). The expressions of articulations between various relations of exploitation and domination are indeed an integral aspect of the construction of social identities. For this reason, even the most rudimentary use of the street at a basic level tends to construe one of the critical agendas of urban politics. In this respect, the tactics and improvisation practices developed in recent years by the feminist movement and the LGBT movement in order to take back the streets (night marches, street parties organized after major actions, street workshops, the use of central city parks such as Maçka or Moda for forums and meetings, and so on) are examples that need to be kept in mind with respect to the expanding platform of urban politics. The interest in night marches organized by feminists can be interpreted, for instance, as an expression of the response to the provocation of male-dominated rhetoric and practices, as well as an outpouring of the emotive reaction in respect to the day-to-day violence to which women are exposed triggered by the transformation of urban spaces. Similarly, the efforts of the LGBT movement to reclaim these spaces in the face of homophobic violence, which determines the access criteria of some commercial as well as public spaces, should also be seen as a form of opposition to the multiple domination dynamics incorporated into the use of space.

Such organized, defined reclamation attempts to redefine the conventional use of public spaces, as determined by the public authority, or even more undefined, improvised interventions,<sup>12</sup> give a clue to the scope of the notion of the right to the city as conceptualized by Lefebvre (1996). The right to the city, in the sense of Lefebvre, refers to the desire of the inhabitants to transform life through the revitalization of the city as a whole, not a simple sum of the individual rights of inhabitants. Hence, it is fair to say that commoning activities are both the concrete expression of this aspiration now as well as the experiments embodying certain implications for the future.

## **The Gezi Resistance as an urban event**

A massive literature on the very nature, actors, and consequences of the Gezi Resistance has been produced. I do not hereby intend to address all of these discussions here. Instead, I would like to define this multi-layered resistance as an urban event and assess it within the context of recent urban social movements. However, in order for this somewhat limited reading to be understood more clearly, it is necessary to take a closer look at two opposing ideas postulated in the literature in question. The first one elucidates the anger that emerged during the Gezi Resistance with respect to the

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<sup>12</sup> To name some of the numerous examples: the protests against the turnstiles mounted at the seafront in Bostancı, the outdoor meetings that started with the ban on the consumption of alcohol in public spaces, the street demonstrations following the enclosure of Galata Tower by the municipality, likewise the pavement gatherings after the ban on using tables and chairs in the entertainment places in Beyoğlu, as well as the use of Gezi Park as a concert venue and forum or picnic area prior to the Gezi Resistance.

demand for democracy and freedom of the young middle class urbanites, who have the means to access educational opportunities and who can seamlessly be absorbed into the economic activities defined by the new capitalism and also who are capable of following global cultural trends closely (e.g. Keyder, 2013). Accordingly, this social section, defined as the 'new middle classes' by Çağlar Keyder, was a social explosion that reflected the pressure felt with respect to the restrictions on freedom and rights brought by an increasingly authoritarian political regime. From this point of view, there is also a historically internal connection between the Gezi uprising and other examples of such social attempts (for example, the Arab Rebellions) because the evolution of neoliberal capitalism defines a contradiction between the social and political orientations of the new middle classes and the out-of-date administrative practices of the political elites, especially in developing countries. What is of pivotal importance within the context of our debate is that the formulation of this thesis hereby seeks abstract democracy and freedom, completely excluding urban dynamics or, at best, degrading the notion of urban conflict to a secondary phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> Another interpretation that I would like to emphasize is a more articulated notion in political literature than the academic one. In this regard, the Gezi revolt should be seen as the apex of subsequent urban resistance practices that I previously addressed, as well as the movements prior to the Gezi revolt itself. In other words, the Gezi revolt was the culmination of the urban movements with regard to the housing problem and public spaces. Nevertheless, this kind of reading ascribes purposefulness to resistance, and does not give a satisfactory answer to the question of why the people living in districts suffering from urban regeneration, for example certain Alevi and Kurdish quarters of the city of Istanbul, did not participate in the resistance as would be expected.

In contrast to these readings, when we look at the case of the Gezi from a perspective that focuses on urban commons,<sup>14</sup> we see that it is an urban event in the true sense of the word, and yet this is not just about centring urban issues at the heart of the political agenda, as is often claimed. In this respect, three distinct layers are worth mentioning here. Firstly, Gezi, above all, refers to the defence of a public park that was open to the use of general public, i.e., an urban common (Akbulut, 2017). In this respect, the resistance, was the 'Enough is enough!' response given to such lawlessness and recklessness inherent in the intention of converting a park, which is categorically a public property, into a shopping centre through the means of privatization. Undoubtedly, it is quite difficult to give a decisive answer to the question of why the reaction that arose here emerged in the Gezi Park but not in similar preceding cases. Nonetheless, at least it may be argued that the surprising vehemence and unexpected magnitude of the response of the Gezi protests was due to the lack of legitimacy of the attacks of capital and power on a social-ecological asset. With this in mind, it is necessary to take the image of the 'just three to five trees' seriously, as the dissatisfaction of large social groups felt in the face of the gentrification of Istanbul in the 2000s has found its expression and came to light.

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed review of this view, see Kuymulu, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that this point of view is a perspective that merely focuses on a certain moment in time and place rather than the whole of the Gezi Park process.

On the second layer, we must read the Gezi Resistance as a counter-reaction to the rapid disappearance of the common spaces that serve as a meeting point for diverse social groups living in the city. In today's Istanbul, the rapid disappearance of such physical areas (common spaces), where practices independent of the relations determined by the market and state can be sustained, in effect means that the anonymity, the possibility of meeting one another, which is perhaps one of the most important elements of modern urban experience, is lost. As it is quite clear in the case of Gezi Park, the fact that the common areas are gradually being enclosed and appropriated by capital and political power means that while Istanbul is expanding in terms of physical spaces, it is in effect fragmented into an increasing number of plots with regard to social spaces. With that in mind, it is possible to interpret the Gezi Resistance as a manifestation of the longing for a city open to daily encounters and the desire to create such a suitable city through the withdrawal of an urban common (Genç, 2018).

However, trying to define the case of Gezi with its counterpart is doomed to end up an incomplete effort (Firat, 2016). For this reason, we must include the nature of the practices implemented during the two weeks when the Gezi Park and its environs were occupied by the insurgents into our efforts so as to make more meaningful sense of the Gezi Protest. From this point of view, it may be regarded as certain that the way in which ordinary practices of daily life are organized from nourishment to shelter, or from security to leisure activities, per se, harbours potential and longing. The fact that the insurgents were able to provide for these kinds of needs following such values and principles as freedom, equality, reciprocity, solidarity, trust, and self-governance in a space where the state and capital were excluded for a temporary period contrasts with current urban life that is constructed on the basis of competition and cruelty. The commoning of the social reproduction area, albeit for a temporary moment, involved not only the longing for a different kind of city but also the potential practices within that city. With regard to this layer, the Gezi uprising does not only refer to the transgression of the city but also further emerges from it as the envisagement of its reconstruction. It should be kept in mind that this moment of infringement and construction provides a means of self-governance for the resisters, giving rise to the opportunity to bend the dynamics of disempowerment caused by neoliberal urbanism. The concrete utopias established through commoning, that is, the momentary and temporary practices that can be realized as of today on the verge of a different kind of life and city that is much longed for, displays a sense of 'doability' with regard to the activists. What makes the Gezi Resistance an urban political experience is not that issues concerning urban life have been raised more powerfully, but simply due to the manifestation of the moments of creativity and the potential of encounters inherent within urban spaces.

## **Concluding remarks: the moment of crisis and possibilities**

In this paper, I essentially argue that the individual practices of urban resistance observed in Istanbul during the 2000s ultimately constitute a generation of urban social movements. Yet, it should not be contemplated that this delineation relies solely on a

temporal phenomenon. On the contrary, notwithstanding the varying underlying reasons for these resistances in question, we can clearly discern internal connections between the distinct layers of this generation if we focus on the fundamental attributes of the full-scale restructuring that the city has undergone in this period. The conceptual framework for the urban commons presented in such a reading bestows us with intellectual and political means because the spatial regime established in the regeneration process, the forms of political subjectivity defined by this regime, together with the spatial power strategies framing them, confront the tangible and intangible resources that exist in the urban space via an unprecedented total attack that has not yet been seen in the modern history of the city. From a wealth of urban ecosystems such as the city's forests and water basins to urban infrastructure systems, or from community meeting spaces such as the sea front or squares to living spaces, urban commons are rapidly falling under the rule of capital and state with the help of neoliberal urbanism. In this regard, the urban movement that I have portrayed in this article should be read as the defence and reclamation of the urban commons, as well as of course the efforts made toward the generation of new ones.

Looking back on the past, it is fair to say that this generation has managed to expand the scope of urban politics. Leaving aside the issue of squatters and housing, today if we are capable of looking at a series of issues that have not yet become the subject of political struggles in the urban sphere in a conventional fashion, we owe it to the pernicious efforts of the participants of the movement. Furthermore, the very extension of the scope should not be merely limited to the new items added to the agenda. The dynamics of urban politics and the diversification and complexity of their actors are the consequence of the activeness of this generation. Likewise, as seen in the Gezi Resistance, the implications of the struggles in the urban space with this new pattern contain dramatically shaky and transformative potentials. It must be recalled that the Gezi Resistance, apart from everything else, put forward a different kind of image/scope/idea of the city blended with the anger provoked by the dissatisfaction of urban life. In this way, it managed to blur the boundaries of corporate politics, albeit for a short time.

We know that the political potential that becomes more visible with the Gezi Park resistance - the possibility of re-arranging the boundaries of the politics when facing the other, and in this way the possibility of establishing a new city - has greatly diminished in the meantime. Even though the imagination and the practice of Gezi have succeeded in dislodging the cornerstones of established politics, it did not yet survive in the accompanying harsh conditions of the political conjuncture. And yet, it is still necessary to explore the recesses left behind the moment of uprising.<sup>15</sup> This is because the practices blended in these spaces tend to gain more gravity in the face of dynamics of the crisis that are increasingly becoming more and more multi-layered. In the face of

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<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to prepare an exhaustive list; and yet, some of the examples that still exist today and some fading away are as follows: food cooperatives, collective school and nursery initiatives, urban gardens, urban orchards, squatter experiments, neighborhood forums and assemblies, defences of parks such as the recent cases of İhlamurdere or Validebağ, or formations such as the Northern Forests Defence fighting for forests and water basins all of which are of pivotal significance for the city.

the scope and destructiveness of the crisis, the potential for self-governance embodied within such recesses, as well as the palpable kernel of the envisagement of another kind of future, continuously gain new meanings.

Today, Turkey seems to have submerged into a moment of multiple crises. The signs that the shocks endured in the economic sphere will make life even more troublesome, especially for the laboring classes as well as other oppressed groups, are becoming clearer with each passing day. The effects of the ecological crisis, especially on climate and food, are becoming more and more evident day by day as if they prove the fact that ecological destruction is not just a dystopic scenario of the future. The recent democratic crisis, to crown it all, denotes the dismantling of the political institutions established within the last century. Undoubtedly, the analysis of such crisis processes, which have their counterparts on a global scale, necessitates lengthy discussions. Nevertheless, it may easily be said that: Urban spaces are the most principal areas where the dramatic consequences of the articulation of these multiple crises are experienced on a daily basis.

It is precisely for this reason that the political meaning of the commoning experiments implemented by the urban social movements has gained new currency. While such experiments may not completely overturn the social systems that have induced these crises, they can still strengthen the struggles in determining the direction that may make it possible to overcome such potential crises. Today, in a conjuncture in which there is a danger of a more destructive, aggressive, and authoritarian forms of capitalism on the horizon, the provisions and means of steering toward a more egalitarian and emancipatory social life will be reproduced through such experiments. Just as the commons, which are passed down to us from previous generations, are the accumulation of collective creativity that is revealed by past experiences of struggle, the common good life of the future will also be blended in the experiments of the present - that is, the present determined by the moment of crisis.



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# Where do the Solidarity Academies Stand in Relation to the Commons?

**Can Irmak Özinanır**

This paper discusses whether organizations such as solidarity academies and Street Academy will be able to form a new pattern of politics in terms of the commons or not, as well as the opportunities and limitations of this new way of politics. The formation of these organizations in many cities started to emerge upon the dismissal of hundreds of academics following the Academics for Peace campaign calling on academics to sign a petition entitled “We will not be a party to this crime”. First a brief historical perspective will be presented, particularly related to the issue of universities and their connection with knowledge production and the transformation that is currently going on at universities since the emergence of neoliberalism will be discussed. The paper also attempts to summarize the transformation that taking place within the universities during the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) term of office, which has been carried out largely by decrees enacted during the state of emergency. As well as this, the methods of struggle carried out by solidarity academies that emerged during this period and where this could evolve will be elaborated on, based mostly on the case of Ankara Solidarity Academy, whose development I have witnessed closely.

## **Neoliberalism and universities**

Capitalism entered into a phase of crisis starting with 1970’s, and this revealed that the regime of Keynesian accumulation, regarded

as the common regime for the future of capitalism since 1945, was not at all sustainable. Therefore, new approaches began to emerge. Under such circumstances, neoliberalism, a trend that actually developed in the university, came into play, and it gradually brought about a huge social change. The ideology of this new period was to a large extent shaped by views such as 'knowledge society' and 'knowledge-based economy', which claimed that economy was henceforward based on knowledge. Callinicos maintains that knowledge-based economy was the key ideology that triggered the transformation of the universities, and definitions regarding knowledge-based economy encompass some arguments that supported the following: production of the tangible shifted toward the production of the intangible, production slipped toward a knowledge-intensive ground due to this shift rather than toward a labor-intensive one; and thus companies as well as national economies needed well-equipped human capital rather than having the need for physical equipment (Callinicos, 2006: 9). Along with such arguments, Callinicos argues that the system leads knowledge to be used for the creation of wealth that is based on competition and profit. He places this situation at the center of this perspective and explains that universities have been transformed in line with this aim.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of 'knowledge society', according to L. Işıl Ünal, is the Trojan horse of neoliberalism. According to this understanding, universities are supposed to educate the 'qualified labor force' (knowledge workers) with the minimum unit cost and transfer the knowledge produced by them to flexible manufacturing via information technology (Ünal, 2011).

One point of emphasis that many authors agree upon is that, under neoliberalism the university has begun to be viewed as a sort of factory. For Haiven, considering the university as an Edu-factory has come to mean that the university has adjusted itself to the rationality of mass production, and this has caused education to become a homogenized commodity. This emphasis underlines the idea that the university is the creator of a new generation that is made up of capitalist 'subjects' (Haiven, 2018: 133).

Former Downing Street adviser Charles Leadbeater compares the neoliberal transformation of universities on the basis of a knowledge-based economy with mines that has even more negative connotations than a factory:

"Universities should become not just centres of teaching and research but hubs for innovation networks in local economies, helping spin-off companies for

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<sup>1</sup> At this point, it would be apt to emphasize that universities have never been a 'heaven' for many. Historically speaking, the university emerged as a result of urbanization in Europe in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The university was under the control of clergies at first, later of the noble elites, and gradually over time shaped by the needs of the bourgeoisie. Up until the time when the bourgeoisie needed qualified employees, the university remained an elitist organization and its doors were closed to the working class and others who were oppressed and subjugated: "The Western University emerged out of the guild system of the Middle Ages where 'Masters' and 'Doctors' (all men from wealthy aristocratic families) jealously hoarded knowledge in the same way masons and brewers protected their trade secrets... In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the university became an important institution in the development of new industrial machinery and other technologies that saw the rise of modern capitalism and the modern exploitation of waged labour. In other words,...the university has been a key institution for the reproduction of the ruling class" (Haiven, 2018: 139-140).



universities, for example. Universities should be the open-cast mines of the knowledge economy.” (Leadbeater, 2000, cited by Callinicos, 2006: 16)

Whether it is described as a company, a mine or a factory, the transformation of the university during the neoliberal period is shaped by the rationale of enterprise and entrepreneurship. As a result of this, the merging of the universities and companies has increased steadily. This merging has taken a different course in each country but it has been quite rapid in some countries, for example the USA and the UK. Although this course has been slower in European universities, and especially in those in Turkey, it would be conceivable to state that the development of university-company cooperation constitutes one of the most important aspects of neoliberal transformation. This means a change in the quality of education and research. In an education and research program where companies become more and more dominant, it becomes more difficult to produce critical knowledge and expand such knowledge:

“The trading of ‘education packages’ related to the knowledge needed in the market is conducted by the centers in the university (through distance education and lifelong learning practices). Through ‘technology exchange’, which is the element of ‘interactive’ and ‘long-term’ elements of university-company relations, universities orient themselves toward topics of research that companies are in need of. Hence, not only the articulation of universities into the market is realized but also it becomes easier for academicians to establish connections with companies and other corporations” (Ünal, 2011).

Despite this, is it not possible for academics to produce critical knowledge by opposing the pressures of the market? They may well produce such knowledge. However, this is prevented to a large extent by labor politics against academics. As it has been the case in all other fields during the neoliberal period, the basic determinant of employment in the university has also been ‘flexibility’ and competition, which can also be interpreted as precariousness. The university is no longer the ‘ivory tower’ of the common imagination. It is quite hard now in academia to find secure employment in most parts of the world. Most of academic positions are now temporary and project-based.

The Bologna Project constitutes one of the key legs of neoliberal transformation, particularly in Europe. There is insufficient space in this paper for a lengthy discussion on the Bologna Project; yet the values and series of concepts it extols shows very clearly what the project has transformed and how it has carried out this transformation. Adnan Gümüş and Nejla Kurul categorize the concepts used in the Bologna Process into two main clusters. The first cluster is related to the quality of education, and the second is concerned with academic, administrative, and financial management. Accordingly, the concepts in the first cluster include employability of the graduates, sustainability of lifelong learning, recognition, exchange of students, and the social dimension. The second group, meanwhile, involves concepts such as strategic planning, quality assurance, performance, transparency, accountability, diversification, stakeholders, board of trustees, agency, and accreditation. The concepts belonging to the first cluster suggest education of students fit for flexible working patterns, individualized and fee-paying certificate programs, and student debt, while those in the second group refer to

the curtailing of public resources, competition between employers and students, diversification of financing, and a complete integration with the market (Gümüş and Kurul, 2011: 60-65).

## **The neoliberal transformation of universities in Turkey**

The period after the 1980 coup saw the step by step neoliberal transformation of universities among the academia of Turkey through the cooperation between market and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), which is an instrument of soldiers and political authorities for this process. For Ali Ergur, the attempt was to impose a hierarchy as practiced in the military and the rationality of market mechanisms on academic activities (Ergur, 2003 cited by Sarı and Karabağ Sarı, 2014: 42).

One of the outcomes of the convergence of universities with market rationality is the establishment of the foundation universities. These universities are colloquially known as 'private universities'. Even though these universities technically seem to be bound by foundations and offer public services, it is, in fact, apt to call these universities 'private universities'. In these institutions, more weight is given to applied sciences than to basic sciences, and only those who can pay the price can benefit from the services provided. Moreover, these universities are managed under the rationale of a company that rests on profit and cost accounting. The steady increase in the number of these universities since 1984 and the increasing number of students studying at them reveals a huge inequality between students with a high enough income to access a university education and those with a low level of income excluding them (Çobanoğulları, 2015: 72).

YÖK has taken steps to destroy what is 'public' in the financing of public universities. The formation of financial flexibility and an income structure with multi-resources have led universities to create their own resources, which encouraged them to integrate with the market.

Precarious labor has also become one of the key aspects of the neoliberal transformation in universities. While civil servants are as yet not entirely precarious, the employment of subcontracted workers is practiced in almost all universities. As for the academics, they have been appointed to different posts: those with 50d status their period of employment is limited to their doctorate duration, 33a status employed with a relatively secure position, and the Academic Staff Training Program for research fellow posts that forces academics into study debts from the very beginning. Consequently, this situation has created a difference of status between people performing the same jobs. The rigid hierarchy that the university has assumed since the Middle Ages has been accompanied by the hierarchy and competition between those who do the same job.

Turkish universities have been part of the Bologna Process since 2001. The concepts discussed above with regard to the Bologna Process were also included in the YÖK law drafts prepared during the term of the AKP. When this is considered along with the ongoing authoritarianism and mounting pressures exerted on the university, particularly after the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) protests in 2012, the AKP has this expectation from the combination of YÖK and the Bologna Process: the

university should be a ‘knowledge’ factory in the Taylorist fashion offering services to its customers, that is, students, and performing production for the market under the centralized control of the state (Özınanır, 2012). In Aslı Odman’s words, this could also be called a Mega Company. As Odman states, the dramatic transformation of the university had already started way before January 11, 2016, when President Erdoğan spoke about the academics who signed the peace petition (Odman, 2018). It is also important to note that it would not have been so easy for the government to carry out the dismissals through decrees had it not been for the state of war and the state of emergency declared after the July 15 coup attempt.

## **Academics for peace and solidarity academics**

The latest wave of dismissals from universities in Turkey began with the state of emergency declared on July 20, 2016, following the July 15 coup attempt. 5,010 academics were dismissed from their positions between July 20, 2016, and July, 2018. A significant number of these academics were removed because they were stated to have been linked with a religious community organization that, after July 15, has become known as FETÖ. However, before then, more than 80 signatories to the petition had been dismissed; although this number was not as high as the number dismissed by decree. Moreover, the work permits of three non-citizens of the Republic of Turkey were revoked, one before the state of emergency and two following.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Universities in Turkey have a noteworthy tradition of dismissals. It can be said that since their initial foundation, universities in Turkey have always been under the control of political authorities and the market. The establishment of the universities dates back to 1773 when Mekteb-i Hendese (Engineering School) was founded (Başaran, 2017). The first dismissals took place at Darülfünun in 1870, seven years after its establishment. The Commission for Dismissal, established upon the merging of the Military Medical School and Civilian Medical School between the years 1909 and 1913, terminated the employment of many academics. Further dismissals occurred in 1919 at Medical School, and in 1922 at Darülfünun Literature Faculty. With the establishment of the Republic, the university was completely shaped around the central authority, and handled as a component of goals related to modernization and advancement. With the arrival of German scientists who came to Turkey after having escaped the Nazis in 1933, a reform was enacted in the university (Başaran, 2017). However, this reform was also synonymous with dismissal. Dismissals took place at the new Darülfünun in 1933 (Karaaslan Şanlı, 2011: 107). During the transition to multi-party democracy, when the Republican People’s Party (CHP) was still in power, a reform was enacted on June 13, 1946, that acknowledged the autonomy of the university for the first time. The new university law that bestowed scientific and managerial autonomy to universities was accepted unanimously in the Assembly. In fact, this recommendation of autonomy was also included in the program of the Democratic Party (DP), which was the new rival to the CHP in the multi-party system (Mazıcı, 1995). Two years after the enactment of this law, in 1948, Pertev Naili Boratav, Behice Boran, and Niyazi Berkes were dismissed from Ankara University Faculty of Language, History and Geography on grounds that they were “acting against Turkism”, “making communist propaganda”, and even “making friends with those who are known to be communists”. Following the coup on May 27, 1960, academics known as the 147s, were dismissed by the National Unity Committee who had carried out the coup. There were also academics who were dismissed due to individual pressures and informants. İsmail Beşikçi is one such example. He was removed from his office at Atatürk University, on July 23, 1970, due to speaking about the Kurdish issue. He was appointed as an assistant of Ankara University Faculty of Political Science in 1971; however, he was arrested after the Military Memorandum of March 12 that year and was never reappointed (Ünlü, 2018: 322-235). During the September 12 period, dismissals known as the 1402s were carried out. Through an annex enacted for the martial law No. 1402, 5,000 civil servants were discharged. 148 of these 5,000 civil servants were aca-

While it may seem unnecessary to provide a lengthy explanation of the neoliberal transformation of universities in a paper on solidarity academies, most of the academics who established the Solidarity Academies were also involved in the struggles against this neoliberal transformation. They were also struggling against state and capital policies particularly through Eđitim Sen, which is the confederation of public employees working in education and science. It is also important to note that even though there were some academics who were dismissed because of their involvement in struggles against neoliberalism, and the ‘We will not be a party to this crime’ petition, academics’ opposition to the state’s ‘local-national’ perspective, which emerged in 2015 with regard to the Kurdish problem, became another determining factor for dismissing academics other than being accused of Gülenism. There were also some academics who did not sign the peace petition but who signed a second petition that declared that signing the ‘We will not be a party to this crime’ petition was a matter of freedom of speech. Some of these were also dismissed by decree. Therefore, in the emergence of Solidarity Academies, the policies of the state and government that viewed the Kurdish issue as a survival problem of the state as well as the harsh reflection of this issue to the university were more influential than neoliberal policies promoting precarity. However, this does not change the fact that neoliberalism policies go hand in hand with authoritarian policies, and Solidarity Academies, which have emerged as a reaction to them, provide an alternative perspective to the neoliberal transformation of universities.

The first example of the new patterns of politics under discussion materialized in the form of solidarity academies during the period when dismissals in many cities began to be expected. The first solidarity academy was formed in Kocaeli upon the dismissal of all those who signed the peace petition at Kocaeli University on September 1. Kocaeli Solidarity Academy held its inauguration 27 days after the dismissals and became an inspiration for academics who had either been discharged or who were living under the threat of being discharged. Today it continues as an association. Currently there are nine other solidarity academies: in Ankara, İstanbul, Dersim, Urfa, Mardin, İzmir, Mersin, Antalya, and Eskişehir. In İstanbul, as well as the İstanbul Solidarity Academy, a group of activists operate under the name Campusless (Kampüssüzler) movement. Ankara Solidarity Academy is moving toward establishing an institution offering settled regular courses. Besides this, another organization known as Street Academy conducted courses in the parks, but it has recently ceased doing so. In Mersin, as well as the Solidarity Academy, dismissed academics opened a café-library, called Kültürhane. Expatriate academics, most of whom live in Germany, also established a solidarity academy named Off-University.

Solidarity Academies make collective decisions during meetings. As of March 2017, a common coordination has been established for all of the solidarity academies. On their common webpage, they explain who they are as follows:

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“We are academics who got their share from the reflection of authoritarian

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demics. The coup plotters of September 12 passed the Higher Education Law No. 2547 in 1981, and thereby made it possible that all higher education institutions would be bound by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). In the aftermath of the February 28, 1997, military memorandum, academics regarded as Islamists, in this instance, were ostracized from the profession by the Disciplinary Committee of YÖK.

neoliberalism process to the universities. We were dismissed from the university positions since we opposed oppression, war, violence and injustice, having been nurtured by the hope of peace, and we stood firm in our remarks during this process.”<sup>3</sup>

The goal of the solidarity academies is described as follows:

“Our concern is to maintain our connection with knowledge outside the university structures. And this connection requires courage, inevitably challenging authoritarian structures during the knowledge production and circulation which prioritizes peace. While carrying on with our connection with knowledge, we aim at producing and sharing knowledge with reference to the principles of equality, freedom and solidarity, which have been ostracized and excluded from the institutional sphere.”

Examining these goals, we can see academics whom the state apparatus wants to ostracize are creating a new pattern that is much freer, and more equalitarian and cooperative than universities.

Street Academy, which generally operates in Ankara, claims to carry the academy to the street, as stated on their Facebook page:

“As opposed to those who want to eliminate science and life from the campuses, we are carrying academy to the center of life, namely to the street.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Universities as laboratories of neoliberalism and sites of struggle**

Begüm Özden Fırat and Fırat Genç define the first determinant of the commoning strategy in the following way: “Self-empowerment and revealing of the utopian moments. Getting strong collectively that will initially ensure practices which will generate the commoning of different personal experiences and build a barrier against the sense of fragmentation and powerlessness caused by neoliberalism in social life.” The second determining component proposed by Fırat and Genç is to create a concrete and material utopian moment by making connections between such organizations (Fırat & Genç, 2014). Solidarity academies have become means of self-empowerment especially for those academics who were dismissed due to decree and subsequently are facing a really severe situation. Academies have also created a huge feeling of self-confidence by helping academics to share different personal experiences. They also helped people in that they did not remain detached from their professions and they also started to have a different perspective regarding their professions.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that collectivism and the sense of community required for the solidarity academy to transform into a concrete moment has already occurred or that it can occur in the short term. In the following

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dayanismaakademileri.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sokakakademisi/>

<sup>5</sup> It is important to underline that this is a subjective evaluation but Ankara Solidarity Academy and Street Academy have become one of the key means of expressing something confidently for many of my colleagues who have, like me, also been dismissed.



section of this paper, I put forward my opinions on whether the commoning perspective will prove to be sufficient for this or not, and also on the perspective of struggle that needs to be waged for the moment for collectivism to be attained.

Let me digress a little so that I can address the issue of the neoliberal transformation of universities and universities as areas of struggle. Later, I shall return to the discussion of Turkey and Solidarity Academies in the relevant context. The envisioning of a struggle that is equalitarian and free seems rather hard in the presence of atomization and precarization in the universities as brought about by neoliberalism. Yet struggles and resistances take place against each move of neoliberalism; and from time to time such struggles and resistances do win victories. As capitalism creates new ways of appropriation and exploitation, new patterns of struggle embedded within them emerge or at times some earlier methods of struggles come to the fore. Resistance movements conducted either against the marketization of universities or against state pressure take place in many different places around the world. We may also recall the struggles waged both by education workers and students in Turkey in the mid-1990s. Besides this, there have been ongoing struggles in Greece since the beginning of 2010, while in Chile, students put up a fight and gained important advances through the mass struggles they put forward. Another example we may provide is the student and worker movements in France in 2018, which was the 50th anniversary of May 1968. Even though such resistance movements gained advances and slowed down the process, they have not yet managed to stop the general trend regarding the transformation in universities. Nevertheless, each struggle has a potential. As Haiven puts it: "The important factor about these struggles is not merely their victories or failures, but the way they keep alive and fight for the ideal of what the university *could* be" (Haiven, 2018: 144).

The important point here is what kind of political line these struggles will tend toward. I think the perspectives of two authors, who view universities as the laboratories of neoliberalism and point out methods of struggle, are relevant for the creation of a new university vision: One is Max Haiven, who discusses the issue around the commoning perspective, and the other is Panagiotis Sotiris, who discusses counter-hegemony in relation to Gramsci's conception of hegemony and hegemonic apparatus.

Both Haiven and Sotiris state that universities do not only serve as the target of neoliberalism but also function as laboratories where neoliberalism is applied. For Haiven "university is not merely an example of new forms of discipline and exploitation; it is a laboratory" (Haiven, 2018: 136). Haiven also emphasizes that the university has created a lot of 'hopefuls' who expect that they will get a return on the money they have invested in education; however, the number of those employed remains very low. As a result, the cost of creating a specialized workforce is externalized and also the wages and worker demands are kept minimal. Those who are not members of the lucky minority are burdened with debt. This debt makes people learn that they live in an isolated and competitive world, and they are obliged to compete with their rivals if they want to attain a good standard of living. For all these reasons, university is not only a site to which neoliberal practices are reflected; it is also a laboratory in which the 'subjects' fit for neoliberalism are reproduced around the concept of



competition. Therefore, universities can be regarded as a key area of struggle against neoliberalism and also for the struggle to be given for imagination and social values (Haiven, 2018: 136-139, 144).

Haiven imagines a university of the commons against this situation. This does not rely on the thought that the university would be regarded as a common either. For Haiven, this sort of imagination relies on 'undercommons' and is revealed by a radical and common imagination. Faculty members, staff, students, and 'outsiders' try to leverage their precarious positions within the university, and for this reason they start to reimagine education and create different forms related to it:

"Occasionally, these undercommons explode into open revolt. When students occupy their universities or the streets, they infuse those spaces with the spirit of what the university could be... These movements both call for and, in a small way, materialize an alternative social space where the radical imagination can flourish, where we can ask deep questions about the nature of our society and ourselves, and where we can experiment with alternative forms of living. What peeks through in the streets or in the occupied classroom, or in the general assembly, or even sometimes in the day-to-day operations and classes of the university itself, is not the privatized university, or even the 'public university' of old, but rather the university to come, the university of the commons." (Haiven, 2018: 145)

Similarly, Sotiris also points out that universities are not merely concerned with knowledge and research. They are also concerned with collective desires, representations as well as practices. The current neoliberal strategy is preoccupied with creating a workforce that is more qualified and fit for making shifts between different tasks, and also one that has lower wages and fewer rights. The key to this is to create a workforce that is more individualized and atomized as well (Sotiris, 2013:7). Sotiris views universities as laboratories of hegemony:

"As a *hegemonic apparatus*, the University acts as one of the laboratories of hegemony. From the development of new productive techniques, ... to new economic discourses, to new ways to relate to technology, to new aesthetics and in general collective practices, the university is – in many aspects a laboratory of hegemony." (Sotiris, 2013: 8)

It is for this reason that university struggles could be considered as an apparatus of counter-hegemony in Sotiris's view. However, it would not be adequate to resist merely the austerity policies or neoliberal practices: "counter hegemony should be viewed as the strategic condensation of a new politics of labour, an attempt at social experimentation beyond capitalism, new forms or social interaction" (Sotiris, 2013: 10).

Despite not having an exact overlap, the perspective of hegemony and that of commoning share similar points in terms of a new political imagination and creation of a new 'political'. Gramsci points out that the hegemonic apparatus is a series of institutions and practices, ranging from newspapers to educational organizations to political parties by means of which a class and classes in alliance engage in a struggle

for political power (Thomas, 2010: 226). This shows the emergence of hegemony as a concrete practice that is beyond a theoretical abstraction. As Buci-Glucksmann states, “the hegemonic apparatus is intersected by the primacy of class struggle” (1980: 48). Therefore, Sotiris proposes a redefinition of this class struggle within the university and the construction of a new and proletarian ‘political’ in opposition to what capitalism or its old and new versions propose.

This proposal has similarities with the approach that suggests a new political understanding that relies on commoning beyond binaries, for example, market-state, public-private, and nature-culture (Bollier & Helfrich, 2018: 46). In the same way as Eylem Akçay and Umut Kocagöz, who regard the commoning of politics as the configuration of political subjects, Gramsci also handles politics as a formative practice. The authors state that a social party that has the recommendation of organizing society as a party expresses the forms that can be established by counter hegemony (Akçay and Kocagöz, 2018: 33).

## **Outside the laboratory?**

Solidarity academies emerged precisely as an outcome of neoliberal and oppressive experimentation performed on those who work in the university. They gained power owing to a short-lived street/campus struggle in the case of Ankara Solidarity Academy, which I closely witnessed. Ankara Solidarity Academy declared its establishment shortly after the dismissals that took place in January 2017. Following the huge wave of dismissals, which struck Ankara University in particular, the academy managed to get the support of the resistance that occurred in the street and campus. In its very first days, it also managed to get the attention of people from unions in different sectors.

Naturally, this struggle did not come out of nowhere. It managed to take place as a result of many previous experiences, particularly as an outcome of the unionization struggle waged through Eğitim Sen as well as other experiences like the struggle of research assistants for a secure job, experiences during the Gezi protests, forums, the struggle for peace, and the experience of each individual who took part in organizing resistance.

During the days when Ankara Solidarity Academy was established, many academics who joined this institution had yet to be dismissed. It would be apt to recall that afterward many of those who had undertaken the burden of setting up the Academy were the ones who had been working as employees or graduate/postgraduate students, along with academics who had been dismissed. Today, with its regular courses, rising and declining number of students, Ankara Solidarity Academy (like the other solidarity academies) is living proof of the possibility of making knowledge common and performing academic activities outside the university (although with some persistence). In this sense, it can be seen as the laboratory of a university that is collaborative (or common) rather than as the laboratory of neoliberalism. Its value is derived from this understanding. However, laboratory is the space of experiments, not of a completed process. Neither Ankara Solidarity Academy nor any other solidarity academy has

managed to socialize the commoning practice completely. Yet they have the ability to calling out to a limited audience. The way to address a larger social section is through discussing politics that go beyond coming together and taking action.

At this point, I find it useful to have a concurrent discussion about the inside and outside of the university along with the discussion of becoming public. An important component of the struggle of the university staff against neoliberalism has always been the struggle related to the public funding of universities. In this regard, there has always been a struggle against the merging of companies and universities, the privatization of various sectors or forcing universities to find resources from the market under the name of 'financial autonomy'. By decree, the public resources that hundreds of academics benefited from in order to conduct their research and courses as well as the resource for their payments were taken from their hands. The primary problem of these academics is that they have been deprived of the resources by which they could maintain a living. Solidarity academics, associations, and cooperatives try to create new economic models through different debates so as to create new resources in a solidaristic way. Despite these efforts, a permanent solution to this problem has not been found yet. This situation is inevitably forcing many academics to attempt at getting funds from the projects. Therefore, a practice that used to be opposed to while the academic was inside the university for the sake of public funding becomes one of the basic conditions of being able to perform academic activities when that person is outside the university. Accordingly, the question as to how production will be reorganized still remains as a threshold in the politics of the solidarity academics.

Unions and solidarity academics are certainly separate entities; and they should remain separate too. Yet it is important to remember the role of Eğitim Sen in enabling the continuity of the solidarity academics. One of the practices that minimizes the problem of making a living and ensures the continuity of academic activities is the money that is still paid to the dismissed academics from the solidarity account of Eğitim Sen. In this regard, Eğitim Sen is acting in solidarity with its members, and this solidarity can be taken as a worldwide example. The operations of Eğitim Sen are not limited by this. The main function of the union is to work for protecting and improving the rights of the faculty members who are still in the university. In order to overcome this seemingly binary situation, it is important to regard the practices of solidarity and struggle both within and outside the university as the various aspects of the same class struggle. In addition, it is crucial to discuss how all these can be brought together; for this, proposing a transformative action seems to be an inevitable moment for a new university imagination. Building stronger connections between the struggle of the unions and the commoning practices of the academics can help those outside and those within the university gain substantial strength.

Considering the solidarity academics as the core of a counter hegemonic apparatus requires a political perspective that takes over the inside of the university from which we have been pushed 'out'. This also makes it a requisite that the struggle of both sides should be made in common. These sides are, on the one hand, those who have been dismissed and pushed out of the university, either due to decrees or for any other reason, and on the other hand, those who are still within the university and suffering

from the oppression of 50/d status as well as the Academic Staff Training Program along with those working in the precarious atmosphere of foundation universities. Conducting commoning activities only within the university would not be sufficient. It is also necessary to persevere with the struggle that encompasses different parts of society, primarily with the working class, besides all those who have taken action and carry the potential of taking action. The most important point is that the perspective of putting a proletarian hegemonic apparatus into practice does not only require solidarity, it also requires a practice that can reorganize the relations of production in a proletarian way. This can open the door of a politics that goes slightly beyond solidarity and achieves the reconstruction of the university.

No one can know when a new wave of struggle will be born. Yet until that day solidarity academies provide us with a great opportunity so that the new imagination of labor can be positioned in daily practices. Perhaps, when that day arrives, the universities we will come back to will not be the old ones anymore and we will change the slogan to:

“Universities belong to everyone, and they will be made free by everyone!”

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# Thinking Migrant Solidarity Movements within the Commons

**Lülüfer Körükmez**

The number of migrants<sup>1</sup> who lost their lives for various reasons before the year 2018 has come to an end is recorded as 2,806. This number was 6,163<sup>2</sup> in 2017, and those who lost their lives while trying to pass through the Mediterranean constitute about the 50% of this figure. Those who manage to survive the risk of death may be abandoned on the ships that sail in the open seas while trying to cope with hunger, thirst, and disease. All this occurs in the glare of publicity across the globe, and most of the time such incidents are seen merely as unfortunate accidents and upsetting events, or that those people are simply unlucky.

Legal, political, economic, and cultural subjectivities have been produced by the framing of human mobility as the activity of crossing the borders in near or far distances. A new political discourse also accompanies such subjectivities when political and geographical conjunctures coalesce. This discourse is woven around key words such as 'border', 'migration' and 'crisis'. A so-called European idea also finds its place along with the other key

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'migrant' in this text is used as an umbrella term to encompasses anyone who is not the citizen of a (nation-) state but happens to be within the borders of that state, regardless of his/her legal status. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the term migrant does not include 'expats', migrants of an upper economic class or retired migrants, etc. The reason for such an exclusion is that the immigrants with whom collectivities within the solidarity movements work constitute the ones who are to a large extent in a fragile situation in legal, economic, and social terms.

<sup>2</sup> <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

words while pointing out the migration flow toward European countries through the relevant seaways but ignoring the fact that the Aegean Sea and particularly the Mediterranean have become graves for hundreds of people (Casas-Cortés et al., 2015; De Genova et al., 2016; Sigona 2017). Besides the political and economic causes of the constant migration flow, including both mass and non-mass flows, the fact that the border regimes that create ‘illegal’<sup>3</sup> migrants and visa, refuge, and asylum application practices that lead to deaths in the Mediterranean, Aegean, and elsewhere in the world is something discussed less frequently than *border*, *migration*, and *crisis*. The *Refugee Agreement* between Turkey and the European Union in 2016 is also one of the examples of the regimes and practices mentioned above.<sup>4</sup>

The risk taken by those who use the seaway to reach European countries does not only involve the effort of crossing the sea in large numbers without necessary safety measures. Reports have also noted that boats have been sunk by knifing them or opening fire, or their engines were smashed, and unlawful prevention of border securities were carried out.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that there have been increasing controls, pressure, criminalization acts, and attacks against humanitarian aid organizations performing search and rescue operations in the open seas,<sup>6</sup> which reveal the legal, bureaucratic, and military rhetoric and biopolitical mortar of the wall Europe has put up on its borders. Unfortunately, but as a matter of course, the attacks and rigid border policies and practices of European states are not only limited to the Aegean and Mediterranean. Practices similar to those along Europe’s land borders can be seen in almost every part of the world.

The system of states established on the basis of erecting borders and choosing who to exclude and include leads to these deaths. In other words, the international system organized in nations (Walters, 2002) itself is the system that establishes human mobility as crossing a border, and therefore producing migrants. Citizenship as the membership system of political geography framed by borders also constitutes a complementary element.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the place of migrants within the commons politics. It specifically focuses on the solidarity movements working with migrants and how such movements are placed within the commons politics. For this reason, it is important to take a quick glance at the political system that produces dichotomies such as migrant/non-migrant, insider/foreigner and entitled/unentitled, the fatal consequences of which have been described above.

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<sup>3</sup> The only reason why the adjective ‘illegal’ is used here for irregular migrants is to draw attention to the illegalization of immigrants as a subject.

<sup>4</sup> See Heck and Hess, 2017 for a comprehensive evaluation regarding the agreement.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://alarmphone.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2017/10/The-Alarm-Phone-3-Years-on-English.pdf>, <http://harekact.bordermonitoring.eu/2018/07/30/shedding-light-on-the-maritime-border-between-turkey-and-greece-changes-in-the-border-regime-in-the-aegean-sea-since-the-eu-turkey-deal/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tellerreport.com/life/-aquarius--the-headquarters-of-sos-m%C3%A9diterran%C3%A9e-invaded-by-activists-of-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9ration-identitaire-rJZxufUc7.html>

Accordingly, the first section of the paper will discuss how we can define migration within the commons. Next, migrant solidarity movements and two of the networks working in this realm, namely Peoples' Bridge Association and Doors Solidarity, will be addressed.

## Defining migration and migrants within the commons

The debate on the commons and social movements emerging from this debate does not constrain the commons to air, water, or land. Rather, its definition includes *anything that occurs because of humans* (Casas-Cortés et al., 2014: 450). It would be necessary to include the definition of "the regime of practices, struggles, institutions, and research that opens to a non-capitalist future" based on Hardt and Negri (Dardot and Laval, 2018: 9) in this broad definition as well. Even within the framework of these broad definitions, it is not clear, yet it is important, how solidarity with migrants should be defined and practiced within the commons politics. In order to be able to have this discussion, it is important to examine migration, or more appropriately, the process by which *human mobility is transformed into migration*, rather than examining the commons.

If we remember that about 55 million people left Europe to reach destinations of the New World between the years 1820-1920 (Hatton and Williamson, 1998: 7), yet no humans lived in Europe 40,000 years ago (Sutcliffe, 2001: 67), the question of why migration is defined as an extraordinary human mobility, an extraordinary situation, and a *crisis* will become more clear. Although it is suggested within migration studies that there are significant differences between the migrations of our day and those of earlier periods in terms of magnitude and pattern, antitheses also exist in discussions, particularly with respect to magnitude. Yet, this argument cannot explain why migration and correspondingly migrant is imagined as an extraordinary and undesirable phenomenon. The mechanism that underlies the construction of human mobility as migration can be understood only when it is accepted that human mobility across physical geography occurs on borders drawn artificially and within defined boundaries. Put differently, when the borders of the dominant and its geography are acknowledged, human mobility that occurs between these borders, through, or above them is constructed as migration.

Human mobility has become a control and governing mechanism as a result of people who belong to or are subject to a certain territorial mastery moving to another place out of reach of their ruler's sovereignty. In order to be able to explain the oppressive policies imposed on people travelling since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Lucassen (1998) argues that it is necessary to examine the relationship of migration with the labor market. He explains that other than those traveling for specific reasons such as pilgrims, seasonal workers, colonists, etc., migrants have been called idlers, people free from a *master*, and vagrants. They have also been seen as a threat. Thus, laws have been enacted for the purpose of binding these people to capital and also of preventing migration.<sup>7</sup> On the

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<sup>7</sup> The rights to travel for those who were slaved and 'slaves on contract' were under the control of their masters. As modern states started to emerge, the serfdom and slavery system diminished and states took the authority of granting or restricting the right to travel away from individuals, thus they incor-

other hand, while the rights to travel for those enslaved and ‘slaves on contract’ were under the control of the master, the serfdom and enslavement system diminished as modern states started to emerge. Thus, states took away the authority of granting or restricting the right to travel from individuals, and incorporated such power within their body. As a result of this centuries-long course, an international state system emerged that regulates travel across areas of sovereignty, as it does today (Torpey, 2000: 4-10). It should be borne in mind that farmers were expelled from their land in England and subsequently were first transformed into poor, idle people, and beggars, and later into paid workers. Land, on the other hand, began to be operated so as to feed the burgeoning international agriculture market (Midnight Notes Collective, 2001: 1), which marks the first enclosure. Therefore, the Poverty Laws, “controlling the mobility of the peasants whose commons were privatized, forcing those described as idlers to work” (Anderson et al., 2009: 10) emerge as a mechanism that accompanies, complements, and reinforces enclosure concerning the control of human mobility.

Enclosure, in the classical Marxist literature, is explained as the closing of common use that precedes capitalist accumulation in favor of property and ownership. It also explains the historical process of the shift from feudalism to capitalism. Nevertheless, instead of an approach which accepts that enclosure has already happened (De Angelis and Harvie: 2017: 109), enclosure has also began to be seen as a constant characteristic of capital (An Architektur, 2010). Midnight Notes Collective argues that the new enclosures function like the old ones: prevention of communal control of means of support, confiscating the land by means of debt, rendering migrant labor as the dominant form of labor, defeat of socialism, and finally an attack on reproduction (2001: 4-6).

The objective of the first enclosure in controlling human mobility is to control the one going *out* not the one coming *in*. The objective at stake for the new enclosure focuses on the ones coming *in* rather than the ones going *out*. With this, no matter what the direction of human mobility is, the function of criminalizing and finally creating a cheap labor force is the same (Anderson et al., 2009). Therefore, people who press against the *borders* of Europe or other states are presented as subjects that create a *crisis* due to their demands for accessing resources, services, and most importantly rights. Resources, services, and rights are provided to those individuals whom the dominant power defines and acknowledges within the borders of the defined political geography.

Modern states delineated from one another by borders also mark the differentiation of the insider (domestic) and outsider (foreigner) as a container. State, society, and all the other social relations are shaped within this kind of schema. This socio-spatial distinction, namely (state) border is not only a line that defines the territory, but it is also the heart of the political domain (Anderson and Hughes, 2015: 1). While it is assumed that insiders have innate equal rights and obligations due to their being citizens,<sup>8</sup> the access to rights and obligations concerning outsiders, in other words, those

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porated such power and authority within their body (Torpey, 2000: 8).

<sup>8</sup> For a critique of the argument supporting the idea that citizenship provides equal rights and status, see Cohen, 2009 and Kadioğlu, 2012.

who are non-citizens, are defined within the scope of international agreements or by a state's own discretion. At this point, a discussion as to whether migrants/non-citizens and non-migrants/citizens would be included in the same categories of rights or not would be necessary.

## **Considering the migrant and non-migrant within the same category of right**

State borders determine citizens and migrants. In the essence of citizenship, inclusion and exclusion work concurrently. For instance, citizens are accorded rights to work, the right to live in a country unconditionally, and most importantly the right of not being deported. However, a migrant's right to work and live in a place is conditional and limited. The right of not being deported does not apply to migrants. Citizenship is defined as membership of a community within state borders and the benefit of rights arising as a result of this membership. Yet, it is important to make a distinction between formal and substantive forms of citizenship. While formal citizenship describes membership to a state legally, substantive citizenship is defined as the ownership of rights and obligations. Even though some rights may well be accorded to those who are not citizens, it is not possible to state that citizens are automatically equal in terms of rights and obligations (Lister, 2003: 44, Staeheli, 1999).

Nonetheless, the non-citizen category is not uniform either and it encompasses different statuses. As a result of a series of developments that occurred after World War II, particularly with the influence of migration flows, the distinction between citizen and non-citizen has eroded (Soysal, 1994). Likewise, Benhabib (2004) notes that new forms of membership to a political community have emerged and the form regulated by the nation-state system no longer proves to be adequate. Although various definitions have been made, such as post-national citizenship, multicultural citizenship, global citizenship, and transnational citizenship, Bosniak points out that citizenship is still associated with nation-state, and international law acknowledges citizenship that is based on nation (Bosniak, 2006: 24-25). Apart from the erosion of excluding national citizenship through practices like multiple citizenships, the expansion of rights based on citizenship towards non-citizens in various ways is another matter of debate. To illustrate, the rights accorded to denizens<sup>9</sup> - a point between citizen and non-citizen (Groenendijk, 2006: 386) - can be evaluated within this framework. Denizens who have lived in a certain place on a work permit and/or residential permit for many years with restricted rights of access to political and social rights have been bestowed the right to vote in local or general elections, which is deemed the most important privilege of national citizenship. This has come to mean that rights similar to citizenship have been accorded and acknowledged.

Even though rights accorded based merely on national citizenship have partially expanded in a way to include non-citizens, the distinction between migrant and non-migrant is still prevalent both legally and in practice. Irregular migrants have no right to access political or social rights. In accordance with international agreements, there is

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<sup>9</sup> This is a term used for people who live in a country but are not the citizens of that country.

the principle that necessitates that fundamental human rights are applicable for everyone, regardless of the person being a citizen or not, so irregular citizens have these rights. On the other hand, by drawing attention to the fact that the stretching of the human rights framework or citizenship has been exaggerated, Gündoğdu remarks that many incidents are reported in the current regime of sovereignty, citizenship, and rights. These incidents include the violence that migrants are exposed to, being unable to fulfill basic human needs, legal insecurity (difficulty in accessing vested interests and rights), illegal detainment and poor conditions regarding detainment, and inhumane treatment (Gündoğdu, 2015:10). In addition to these, the attempts of migrants who are insecure and fragile legally and politically to access current rights or demand new rights may create risky situations for them. Such a demand requires being visible; therefore, most of the time it is not expressed because of the possibility that it may lead to being deported.

When it is examined from the perspective of the current political organization, which are nation-states demarcated by borders, formal citizenship, and official membership, we may state that it is not possible to evaluate migrants and non-migrants on the same plane in terms of rights. When it comes to fundamental human rights, it is possible to say that migrants and non-migrants enjoy the same rights, which is theoretically valid; yet, in practice we see that access to these rights becomes differentiated. Furthermore, in every part of the world there are differences among migrants with regard to having rights and accessing rights depending on their status. It is for this reason that political power and debates over rights based on its legal and spatial organization do not make it possible to refer to rights that are independent of statuses.

Apart from the restricting and excluding aspect of formal citizenship, substantive citizenship shows that, on the one hand, citizens are not equal at all with respect to rights and their access to rights. On the other hand, it could provide opportunities to unite non-migrants and migrants on the same plane with regard to rights.

## **Meeting in the commons or commoning: How and where?**

How can we construct migrants and non-migrants as equal subjects in a system in which being vested with a right is determined on the basis of membership through the law of sovereignty, the foundation of the international system? Put differently, how can we eliminate the differentiation of the migrant in terms of *having a right to have rights* and accessing rights?

### **Urban citizenship**

Being a citizen of a nation-state legally (formal citizenship) is not required or adequate for substantive citizenship (Holston and Appadurai, 1996: 190). Varsanyi (2006) clusters approaches concerning the relationship of city and citizenship under three headings: normative, rescaling, and agency-centered approaches. A normative approach is one that links global cities, world citizenship, and the international human rights regime by



differentiating citizenship from the nation-state scale. City lies at the heart of the rescaling approach, which is a proposition of citizenship based on residence on a local scale and differentiates citizenship from the nation-state scale. It assumes that anyone living in a city will automatically acquire citizenship rights. The third approach, namely the agency-centered approach, explains the construction of citizenship through acts with reference to examples in which urban residents, especially those who are marginalized, impose themselves as legitimate members of urban publicity. Varsanyi posits that none of these three approaches can provide an adequate explanation with regard to 'illegal' migrants. These approaches link citizenship with residence and being in one place (Varsanyi, 2006).

If we are able to shift the rights and membership to a community outside a citizenship perspective governed by the determinism of state sovereignty, then we will be able to conceive of rights and put them into practice as independent of status. What is at stake in such a perspective is to be able to consider citizenship as the new site of struggle and in a way that transcends territorial borders. This perspective also views citizenship beyond obligations such as voting, social security, and military service (Mhurchú 2014: 124). The attempt of moving the access to resources and rights out of the dominant law and even out of the ideology of the nation-state also refers to the emergence of non-citizen political subjects through political acts. *The Sans-Papiers*<sup>10</sup> movement in France can be regarded as the starting point of such an understanding of citizenship that is based on residence (Dikeç and Gilbert 2002: 62, Gündoğdu 2015).

Contrary to the approach that accords rights only to those who reside in a city, looking at citizenship on a basis that includes the daily and political acts of urban residents, such as going to school and working as well as protests and related demands, refers to the decentralization of citizenship. Casas-Cortés et al. propose viewing migrants independent of their status and acknowledging that they become citizens through their social interactions and by living there as well (Casas-Cortés, et al., 2014: 464). This proposition is not a legal legitimacy that would be 'granted' by the state or the state's bestowing of legality; it is rather a call for acknowledging the practices and acts that have already been going on. Based on these debates, residents having rights and stretching these rights to everyone residing in that place, independent of status, identity, and origin, makes the concept of urban citizenship (*CITYzenship*) possible (Vrasti and Dayal, 2016: 995).

Urban citizenship is also a means for the commoning of the city. Contrary to the nation-state centered racial and ethnic enclosure of the city, it refers to making the space common. Moreover, the struggles of migrants independent of their status bring a dimension for commoning practices that is non-racist (Casas-Cortés et al., 2014: 463-464). Urban streets, squares, parks, and all the other public spaces are assumed to be open for everyone. However, the city has invisible walls and barriers that function depending on race, gender, citizenship, class, and ethnicity. Harvey's warning is

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<sup>10</sup> The collective movement that was performed by irregular migrants in France. This movement is also known as the *Paperless Movement*. Their basic demands were to stay in France where they had been living for a long time and to make their status regular.

significant at this point; public<sup>11</sup> places being open does not necessarily mean that access is possible for everyone at any time. Streets are open in principle; however, they are regulated and controlled (Harvey, 2012: 71). They may even be allocated for companies and therefore privatization practices may be applied. Harvey insists on the requirement of political action that will realize commoning so that the city will be made common (Harvey, 2012: 73). Therefore, commons practices are required for urban commoning, urban resources, and rights that come automatically with formal citizenship as well as for practicing *existence with rights* as differentiated from the nation-state scale and its sovereignty.

Despite all this, existence with rights and urban commoning cannot obviate the construction of human mobility as migration in the context of today; therefore, it cannot preclude the creation of migrant subjects either. Rather, it paves the way for the construction of accessing rights from the 'bottom', independent of the legal status of individuals who have migrated. Exclusion is performed on the borders in a world where borders continue to exist and border policies have become more sophisticated through surveillance and tracking technologies and a new kind of apartheid regimes are created (De Genova, 2013: 1192 as cited in Balibar 1993/2002). Following the principle that *Nobody is Illegal* after crossing a border and generating an action and politics in line with this direction is as important as establishing a *No Borders* politics. Thus, freedom of movement is as crucial as existing in a place with rights. *No Borders* politics is eventually an integral part of common rights and struggle of commons (Anderson et al., 2009).

## **Considering the solidarity movements working with migrants along with rights**

Solidarity movements working with migrants may be different in terms of demands and patterns of action. Yet we can observe that these movements have been on the rise in countries such as Turkey, Greece, Sweden, and the US as well as in many other places across the world. While some of these movements can take a form that transcends the borders of a nation, some of them are local and of a smaller scale, just like the migration phenomenon itself. Solidarity actions/practices are performed in various forms such as protests, press releases, marches, 'assistance' campaigns, and creative artistic works. They also aim to declare that people are together with the migrants and in solidarity with them while defending migrants' fundamental rights, so that they have access to national and local rights, and that these rights are expanded. They also stand against racism and discrimination, national and international detainment and practices of deportation, or any other negative incident peculiar to migrants. The purpose and particular emergence may differ; yet it can be argued that it was the migrants' right to move and travel and have access to rights where they choose to reside that led to the formation of solidarity movements globally. Solidarity movements are particularly important today since they have emerged during a period when racism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant tendencies have increased and rightist politics have gained ground (Ataç et al., 2016: 528).

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<sup>11</sup> For the distinction of common, public and private see Dardot and Laval, 2018: 19.

This paper does not focus on the solidarity movements with migrants organized by migrants themselves or articulated by them; in short, it does not address the movements whose actual actors are migrants. It rather focuses on the movements in which citizens and migrants work together.

As has been discussed above, while citizenship defines a formal bond with the state as well as the rights and obligations defined based on such a formal bond, citizenship is also formed by acts. Within the framework of classical citizenship, the legitimate actors who are able to perform a political action are the citizens themselves. Those who are not citizens are not capable of doing politics or participating in politics either. Therefore, demands for migrants' rights might require the existence of citizens and their interventions as the legitimate political actors with their capability of taking action. In such an instance, when the action is limited by the one who is a citizen, defense and solidarity are carried out by non-migrants on behalf of migrants. The demands of migrants are pronounced by the citizens and are converted into a political voice, which prevents the migrants and non-migrants from being together as equal political actors and voices. This does not mean that the migrants' actions do not have any impact; however, this is an observation that citizens act as a necessary bridge between state power and non-migrant activists (Johnson 2012: 8).

Another important point in the migrant solidarity movements is related to how solidarity itself is constructed. Solidarity can be constructed as hospitality and humanitarian aid, the example of which we see frequently in Turkey. Its construction can also be made political and based on rights. The relationship between the guest and the host is always asymmetrical and includes some elements of uncertainty: while the host is the welcoming party, the guest is the one expecting to be accepted and the one who is demanding. The host chooses who is going to be accepted as a guest and it is the host who identifies the conditions and duration of the visit. What falls to the guest is to accept the conditions and limits determined by the host. As for migration, playing the host emerges as one form of showing compassion to people under difficult conditions, which mostly merges as humanitarian aid. By showing a 'sacrificing' attitude, the host accepts the guests *for a specific period and under certain conditions*. This asymmetrical relationship inevitably encompasses the domination of the host over the guest. The host has full control over access to all kinds of resources and rights (Herzfeld, 1987; Friese, 2009; Squire and Darling, 2013). Rather than seeing migrants as subjects who have rights and who exist with their rights, viewing migrants as people who are bestowed compassion along with altruism or in a position that renders them to be seen as those whose needs are to be fulfilled as a requirement of 'humanity' means constraining them within the boundaries of 'moral obligation' (Herzfeld, 1987). In an ethnographic work carried out in Lesbos and Chios of Greece, Knott observed that the volunteers working with refugees expected the refugees to treat them as good guests by "showing them respect, gratitude, and obedience" in return for their efforts in the camps (Knott, 2017: 6). On the other hand, the effects of the fact that the dominant state on the territory restricts the migrants with temporariness in terms of legal aspects and being guests on the rhetorical side cannot be underestimated. In Turkey, political figures and authorities working at top levels of the state from time to time state that migrants

are guests and they may be deported if requested. This shows how an approach that is not based on rights but on guest status allows dominance.

Following the problems experienced in Lampedusa and the camps on the Greek islands in 2013, we witnessed the emergence of a humanitarianism of moral values and compassion, no matter what its source. This humanitarianism emerged in response to the living conditions of migrants in Turkey and cities in many other countries, in other words, as a result of seeing the pain. Such humanitarianism spans the globe, but Ticktin reminds us of the need to question its arbitrariness and the hierarchies it has produced: the migrants who have been “excluded from legality” are only defined by their suffering bodies and they are excluded from what is political (Ticktin, 2006: 44). In addition, humanitarian aid is temporary, specified for a period of time, and it is far from being inclusionary. Those on one side of the hierarchy (those who see the pain and intervene, rescuers, for example) acknowledge the pain they witness and choose to intervene for a time and under conditions that they decide upon. Although both humanitarianism and human rights rest on the rhetoric of universality, they rely on different forms of actions, they defend different ideas of humanity and institutionalize them as such (Ticktin, 2006: 35). Despite all the criticism directed at the rules and practice of human rights, Sciurba (2017) notes that we do not have any alternative to human rights since no alternative is equal in conceptual, normative, or political power. Sciurba recognises humanitarianism and human rights as two different concepts and argues they have been employed together as rhetorical strategy in political discourse, for example, the European Union migration policy since 2013. Sciurba also highlights that this serves directly to legitimize policies that violate human rights. On the other hand, discursive and representative standardizations of national and international humanitarian organizations may silence those who find themselves constrained by the label of refugee (Malkki, 1996). A description of refugees as people taken care of by an authority and subject to those relevant practices also means that refugees are excluded from the political domain. Even though compassion and humanitarianism are derived from the idea of humanity, it does not necessarily mean being entitled to rights or justice. It is linked more to generosity and altruism. Humanitarianism also carries a latent distinction between human and citizen: one person cannot be both at the same time, and if one is protected within the scope of humanitarianism, that person will lose his/her political and social rights (Ticktin, 2016: 44).

It can be argued that the guest/host idea and humanitarianism serve certain functions such as building ‘empathy’ towards migrants and meeting their needs and, in many places, increasing ‘tolerance’. However, when we remember that these are also hegemonic, hierarchical, restrictive, and exclusive mechanisms and strategies, the requirement of placing migration itself and migrants on a political basis from the very beginning becomes evident. Acknowledging the fact that migrants have rights, just as all others do and as much as all others do, also requires the establishment of a political basis that is not statist or state-centered. In addition to Isin’s observation that acts of citizenship refer to the construction of migrants as the carriers of the right to demand rights (Isin, 2009: 371), the acts of citizenship of non-status migrants mean that they are “political beings that demand and acquire rights, they are no other than citizens”

(Nyers, 2010: 141).

Within the solidarity movements working with migrants, those acts established and practiced with citizens and migrants together provide opportunities for collective political action. Only solidarity that is *together with migrants* not 'for migrants' and is carried out between equal subjects independent of their status can make this happen. When the demands of migrants are vocalized by both citizens and non-citizens, the formation pattern of traditional communities that are based on the nation-state can change. This can also change the global and local hegemonic articulation of space and render the city visible as a knot between temporariness and asymmetrical orientations that are differentiated from nation (Burman, 2006: 390).

We can state that the urban fabric is produced collectively by taking into consideration migrants' contribution with regard to producing cities and even localities on scales other than cities. Therefore different domains of politics can be opened up by removing solidarity movements that work with migrants from the nation-state framework the domain of sovereignty, and other such references (for example, the law, borders, and legitimacy), and by establishing the city as urban commoning on a scale other than that of the nation-state and putting this into practice on the basis of *existence with rights* independent of status.

## **Solidarity movements with migrants: Examples in Turkey**

This study focuses on how migrant solidarity movements can be constructed as an urban common. Naturally, no true or single method of solidarity or urban commoning exists. The claim of this paper is not to have such an evaluation either. Rather it discusses the opportunities and limitations based on a couple of examples that have emerged among the migrant solidarity movements in Turkey.

Since its establishment as a nation-state, Turkey has continually been a destination of migrants. Despite this, today we see that migration flows have increased, diversified, and become more complicated since the 1980s. Since the 2000s, the politics of the state has changed regarding the control and management of migration and such politics has become more conspicuous. Accordingly, the number of academic studies and research centers focusing on migration has also increased during that period. In a country that holds a significant place within global migration flows, we see that not only has there been an increase in the national and international non-governmental organizations working in this field but also different formalities and organization patterns have emerged as regards the solidarity movements that work with migrants.

This study focuses on two solidarity movements that were set up in Izmir, *Peoples' Bridge* and *Doors Solidarity*. The structure and organization patterns of these organizations are different from each other, yet they both work with migrants to defend their rights by carrying their rights beyond the law and status. Besides these, the organizations that will be addressed here are at the same time 'local' organizations. Local does not refer to them having no bond other than the cities they inhabit, nor does it mean that they

are not associated with any place or issue other than what happens in that city. In local, there is a reference which means they do not work in the form of branches that are structured from the center ('up'), as is the case in professional institutions. A formation in any city can maintain a loose relationship with another one. And it would be more apt to handle these organizations as practices that assume "collective working that is open to participation from the outside" rather than one grounded in principles of hierarchy and direct official membership.

## **Peoples' Bridge (Halkların Köprüsü)**

Peoples' Bridge was established in 2014 with the aim of "establishing public friendship and solidarity based on equality, justice, and freedom between peoples"<sup>12</sup> and defines itself as a solidarity group. The founding purpose of the association does not involve conducting studies in the field of migration; its aim is to work for the social establishment of peace in Turkey. However, following the war between ISIS and the PYD in Kobane/Syria and explosion in Turkey's Suruç, their efforts began as addressing the urgent needs of people, and taking action to fulfill the emerging needs of many refugees that came to Izmir from Kobane. This course has made the association an organization that carries out various works in the field of migration as we see it today (Terzi and Şentürk, 2016). Istanbul and Diyarbakir branches of the association were opened in 2016. The association has had hundreds of volunteers since it was founded. The members and volunteers of the association define Peoples' Bridge as an organization that is based on solidarity. Besides health screenings, identifying and fulfilling vital needs, all carried out by visiting camps and houses in Izmir and other places around the city, they have also shared their observations with the wider public by holding various workshops, attending meetings, and preparing reports. They are not only interested in the borders within Turkey; they have also made statements on flows from Turkey to Europe and also on the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration.

The identification of acts of violence and calls to oppose such violations are important, yet it is also important to look at how Peoples' Bridge defines migrant rights. Essentially, they have declared that the status of refugee must be granted to everyone and to pave the way to citizenship for anyone who asks by eliminating the geographical reservation in Turkey that comes under the Geneva Convention. They have also made calls for the acknowledgement of health, education, and working rights for migrants coming from Syria. While such calls addressed general public opinion, their target was the state. In its 3rd Alan Kurdi Refugee Workshop report, Bridge stated that they rejected the *hospitality* approach towards refugees, and added that all people living in cities must be entitled to rights on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and citizenship law. The following was also included in the report:

"It is not possible for those living in the cities to be able to adopt and stake their claims for living spaces unless they can access the services, participate in urban

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.halklarinkoprusu.org/biz-kimiz/>



life and have an equal right to speak concerning the city. What makes a city belong to the urban dweller is the capacity of the urban resident to have discretion regarding the city and the legal rights the person has in order to render such capacity an actual one... Although peoples are differentiated by their legal status, the problems shared by the peoples who share the same space become common; for this reason, ways to struggle together to settle the common problems are required to be sought... We demand a local administration understanding that supports everyone who shares the living spaces so that they can participate in public life with equal rights, with all the disadvantaged groups along with the refugees being safeguarded" (Peoples' Bridge, 2018).<sup>13</sup>

Although the approach of Bridge is clear in that it sees the city as a common and rights as a necessity for everyone independent of their status, its declaration is intended to target local and national administration. Migrants and organizations that are made up of migrants themselves are among the organizations which Bridge works with. Yet identifying their urgent needs accounts for most of its activities. In the end, when those urgent migrant needs in and around Izmir lessened, Bridge became unable to perform activities in the field of migration and now it is reassessing its role.

### **Doors Solidarity (Kapılar Dayanışma)**

Following protests held in Işıkkent Shoemakers' Site in Izmir against the perceived threat of migrants to Turkish workers' jobs and wages, the Leather, Textile, and Shoemakers' Solidarity Association stated that migrants were not responsible for such attacks. They also stated that both migrants and non-migrants were affected by the outcomes of capitalism and the state administration, and declared that it is required to have solidarity with migrants. In the aftermath of this process, an old derelict house was collectively repaired in Basmane, a neighborhood in Izmir housing mainly migrants from Syria, African countries, and areas of Turkey. There, Doors was formed. It defines itself as a collective.

In the solidarity house, different activities are carried out side by side with migrants, together with them, and also for them, since it is located in that neighborhood. In order to satisfy urgent needs, food and clothes are collected from institutions and individuals and are handed out. Vegan food is cooked with food collected from the markets. In addition, courses are offered to children and adults (language courses, games workshops for children, and art workshops). Presentations and meetings on different topics are organized as well. Some of the courses are carried out by the migrants. However, as is the case with most of formations that work on a voluntary basis, the activities performed in Doors remain partial activities and cannot achieve sustainability.

Some of the activities realized in Doors are performed together with some formations such as Peoples' Bridge in Izmir, Izmir City Council, and Women's Door. Doors has an open door policy and is open to anyone.

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<sup>13</sup> This excerpt is taken from the 3rd Alan Kurdi Refugee Workshop Result Declaration which has not yet been published. The declaration will be published at [www.halklarinkoprusu.org](http://www.halklarinkoprusu.org).

Doors Solidarity aims to include migrants and build a solidarity together with migrants. It is mostly a place that performs activities for migrants together with migrants themselves. One of the most important reasons for this is that whether they come from official institutions or civilian initiatives, the 'culture of helping' is created among migrants through the organizations. As Genç states for Mutfak (Kitchen), which is a part of the Migrant Solidarity Network, migrants may find solidarity highly abstract vis a vis the solutions that aid-providing networks deliver among the needs created by the harsh living conditions (Genç, 2017: 127). It can be said that Doors has observed a balanced approach up to now within the aid and solidarity tension. They have tried to create a setting in which migrants can directly be involved, and while doing so they have not overlooked the vital needs of the migrants living in the neighborhood.

In a city neighborhood significant due to its migrant population and symbolically important in terms of its migration history, the space that has automatically formed is important as migrants are able to exist together with the city and on an equal footing in the city. Despite this, it also contains limitations.

These two formations, one with the status of association and the other a collective, define migrants as subjects with rights independent of their status. However, they are stuck in activities to provide for urgent needs and those putting demands on official authorities in terms of migrants' rights. Established on the basis of solidarity and demanding equality in terms of rights, these two movements have, up to the present day, taken action for migrants and partially with migrants. Naturally, political action can be more troublesome for migrants since the cost is high for them and their urgent needs of daily life are pressing. For this reason, it is important and essential that citizens make demands with migrants and for migrants. Unfortunately, a position that gives a voice to migrants and conveys a message for migrants, even if they are not on behalf of migrants, is not sufficient for migrants to produce an equally strong voice. Strengthening of migrants' voices can be realized through *moments* that could create a breakup and novelty within ordinary life, rather than one realized through large protests and popularised rights movements (Johnson, 2012). Seeing the city as a common space, it is possible to envisage how commoning can be conducted together and through solidarity by weaving together migrants and non-migrants side by side within the daily acts of ordinary life. What is in question here is not a proposition of a pastoral style of sharing daily life practices; it should rather be seen as part of small and limited struggles, opening up space and ongoing political struggle (Johnson, 2012). Non-migrant workers speaking out together with migrant workers at İşikkent Shoemakers Site in Izmir is important since it is a movement that raises a political voice and it is a moment that draws attention to class and exploitation issues, which is more than mere solidarity with migrants.

## Concluding remarks

Peoples' Bridge and Doors Solidarity have made exemplary efforts in building vibrant solidarity through the work they have done. The analyses and interpretations in this study can be read as an evaluation of the situation and investigation of opportunities as well as limitations. Branches of Bridge have opened in other cities and Doors has become a place frequented by activists and researchers from Turkey and other countries and a place where these activists and researchers can make a contribution. These are the results of the positive contributions that these two formations have made up to today in solidarity with migrants. On the other hand, although this study has focused on these two formations in Izmir, it is important to note that solidarity is maintained by Kirkayak in Gaziantep and Maya in Mersin.

Seeing the city as a common for solidarity movements working with migrants and performing commoning practices together is an important way of defining migrant rights from the 'bottom' and removing them from the nation-state scale. The principle that everyone exists together with their rights rather than nation-state citizenship as a way of accessing rights brings about a solidaristic and equalizing perspective.

The existence of everyone living in the city with their rights and the right to demand rights is essential but it is not adequate. Bosniak's criticism of the ethical territoriality approach should be taken into consideration while considering solidarity with migrants within the commons. Bosniak (2007) envisages that all rights and recognition of them should be broadened out to include *everyone* living in a national geographical space just because they are *there*, and everyone who is *there* has fundamental citizenship rights. Yet he adds that in approaches that are based on space, there are some conflicts at stake as to what the border of the space is, and there are some complications caused by different states of 'being' that are applicable for tourists and those in transit. There are also other problems such as what kind of legal basis will be in question regarding citizenship law and the nation-state (Bosniak, 2007; Varsanyi, 2006). Above all these issues, approaches that are based on residence and being there that envisage the equal and complete participation of everyone expands the scope of accessing rights in a system where rights are dispersed from 'above', as is the case in formal citizenship. Therefore, it is necessary to see the city as a space that does not have borders and is produced collectively, not as a structure in which the borders and those living within them are definite, but rights are distributed equally, like the small-scale structure of the states.

Finally, all kinds of demands for rights and solidarity with regard to migrants should reject any kind of borders. They should also say that nobody is illegal. Only through this will it be possible to preclude the naming of human mobility as migration and those who are moving as migrants.

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# The Commons Politics Of Food

Umut Kocagöz

## 1. The commonality of food and the food system

In today's world, the nutrition underlying the vital activity of living things appears as a 'food problem'. This problem, formed and defined by sufficiency, sustainability, mass starvation and slaughter throughout history, constitutes an important part in reproducing inequalities and injustices in the contemporary capitalist world. Today the issue of food is discussed in a variety of forms. From agricultural production to land, from products on the market shelf to the table, from packaging through labeling to recertification, numerous topics have been considered in relation to 'food'.

Taking nutrition simply as the means to fulfill nutritional needs in order to performing physical functions would be inadequate. The broader definition of nutrition as the means to protect and recuperate health and supply living beings with power and energy is an essential part of the right to live. Thus, nutrition essentially must be considered along with healthy nutrition, and healthy nutrition must be considered along with nourishment and healthy food.

Healthy food when defined as a *necessity* for all, makes possible considering food as commons. However, this possibility does not easily appear *prima facie*. Ultimately, the food phenomena taking place within the extensive relations such as production, processing, distribution, and consumption, includes property relations, commodification, trade and consumption. On the other hand, food

is determined by its *use-value*; it nourishes, feeds and is consumed. In this wider context, the primary condition to considering food as part of the commons is not simply seeing it as an object of consumption. Rather, it is a broader account of food that considers all the relations passed through during the *commodification* process (Akbulut, 2015). From this standpoint, the thing referred to as 'food' is a *process*. To understand how the process became established and meaningful within social relations, one must take into account the socio-political relations embedded within every particular food product.

We can understand the commonality of food as the relations that enable us to recognize food as a process, and in which agents take part (formed). Therefore, the production, processing, distribution and consumption processes should be considered as a whole – i.e. as a *food system*. Problematising the food system, namely all the relations and agents occurring in the context of food, allows us to grasp the commonality of food. Furthermore, in this context, we can see and understand the *commoning* possibilities and experiences that rise in contrast to the corporatization and commodification relations taking place in the food system.

*Commons* presume relations that belong to nobody, which implies being external to property relations. Here, *common* is something that belongs to everyone and, therefore, something that belongs to nobody (Adaman, Akbulut and Kocagöz, 2017). Since the agricultural structure depends on land ownership and sovereignty of corporations, it is hard to grasp the commonality of food without following commoning opportunities, such as processes, experiences and capabilities that define food as *for-all* (Akçay and Kocagöz, 2018). In this sense, it is possible to say that determining *commoning* aspects and constituent agents of food is much harder to grasp than the commonality of a river, a forest or knowledge. Indeed, it is essential to have a *relational approach* regarding food commons (See, Adaman, Akbulut, and Kocagöz, 2017; Akçay and Kocagöz, 2018).

This relationality, the relations included within the food process, allows us to discuss the politics of the commons. For, on one hand, the commonality of food requires the definition of food itself as a common, namely, the proposition that argues food *for-all*, and, on the other hand, it allows us to think about the commonality of the relations that occur at different stages of the food process. If we remember that there are various layers to the politics of the commons, such as defending, reclaiming and reinventing commons, then a standpoint that allows us to examine these different layers also requires taking into account the relations of the commoning practices that arise by means of agency.

So why is defining food as a common so important? First, if we want to think of an alternative for the existing food system, we must actualize this thought as a *criticism* of the existing system. For this, counter to corporate logic, the commons approach is perfectly appropriate. Precisely on the condition of *for-all*, food can be considered an emancipation potential for subjects. Second, defining food as commons suggests a basis for political framework over the food system. This basis for creating alternatives is possible only by the correct definition of subjects, and determining that actors can meet in what kind of alliances.

*The food system* expresses the formation and relations of subjects as food producers, processors, distributors and consumers/users. The dominant food system in the contemporary world has been shaped around the governmentality of agro-food corporations and profit-oriented corporation logic. Having worldwide domination, these corporations organize and manage production, processing, distribution and consumption of food with the profit-oriented logic. Correspondingly, they subject these relations to market rationality based on profit maximization. We can name this system the *industrial food system* or *corporate food regime*.

Formation of the food system according to profit maximization contradicts the fundamental function of food, which is the basis of nourishment. From seeds to table, the entire process and all the agents included are forced into subordination to profit maximization and the relations of these agents come up against the commodification processes. Thus, all agents involved in agricultural structures are subordinated to laws of full oppression: the rural commons are enclosed; the processing institutions become more privatized and financialized; the food supply becomes commodified; and food users are segregated and subjectivized.<sup>1</sup>

The commonality of food or a common food politics requires the projection of a line grasping the totality of these processes, defining its agents and discussing which agents in which conditions might engage to the politics of the commons. Every particular agent is formed in its own context, depending on other relations and is included in the food system. From this standpoint, circumstances in which agents have the right to comment on the food system, their direct participation and decisiveness in the management processes of the food system, i.e. *food sovereignty*, could be seen as the basis of the food politics of the commons.

## 2. Origins of the food problem in Turkey

### a. Agrarian change

Even if its geographical position is problematic, at the end of the 1990s Turkey was accepted as the last peasant country within Europe and the Middle East (Hobsbawn, 2006). Turkey could farm for its domestic market, and could export products such as hazelnuts, tea, cotton, fruit, and vegetables. It was always possible to find plentiful fresh fruit and vegetables; the home produced legume was taking its place on the shelf. Small farmers, who constituted the largest sector of the agricultural structure, could sell their goods by means of state-led cooperatives; they were motivated to continue farming.

Certainly, this scene does not mean that agriculture in Turkey was running perfectly or that there was not a food problem. Having been adopted after the Second World War within the scope of the Marshall Plan, 'green revolution' was a critical moment for tracking the structural transformation of agriculture in Turkey. With this process in agriculture, mechanization, the development of industry-oriented production processes,

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive critique of the existing food system see Aysu (2015).

rendering small scale farming dependent on the food market and the takeover of the monoculture<sup>2</sup> production system that creates uniform production patterns in agriculture, has been accelerated and has become an intrinsic fact. In this respect, the modernization process of agriculture in Turkey can be seen as the formation of the capitalist market and the integration of it to the global market.<sup>3</sup>

The monoculture-based agricultural pattern meant small-scale farmers who could not compete in the market leaving farming, and giving medium and large-scale agriculture corporations a greater share of the market. As the peasants have left farming, the proletarianization of the agriculture has accelerated, and new forms of labor such as seasonal work and contract-farming have become more dominant in the agricultural structure (Ulukan, 2009). In sum, agriculture depending on market relations became determined by the agro-business model in which a number of agro-food corporations have a say. The supply, processing and selling of food by these corporations has brought about the breakdown of the relations between producers and users, and made the production process subject to the market. Groceries, greengrocers, consumer cooperatives and individual/family food supply networks were rapidly yielding to supermarkets. In other words, *supermarketization* (Keyder and Yenil, 2013) confronted us as another face of agricultural corporatization in the cities; determining urban consumption relations. In brief, this transformation that took place in the food production process brought about new forms of agents and new forms of relations between agents. In contemporary Turkey, these new relations and forms of relations constitute the basis of the food problem.

## **b. Food supply**

Food supply, in terms of food systems, refers to a dynamic that has bilateral effects. On the one hand, supply relations formed in the supermarketization axis creates supply relations such as wholesale market-hall owning, wholesaling, commerce, small scale industry and processing. On the other hand, it has effects on behalf of the corporatization of agriculture and the formation of agricultural production according to the needs of corporations and the market. In this respect, the food supply issue itself is at the heart of the system as a network that bounds the two sides of the food system.

From the point of view of the producers, the importance of the food supply is based on how their products are used, that is, who supplies their products. Until the beginning of the 2000s, state funded and led agricultural cooperatives, unions or government agencies were the leading establishments that supplied the farming products. For example, in cereals, corn and rough rice TMO (Agricultural Products Office), in hazelnuts FİSKOBİRLİK, in tea ÇAYKUR, in olives TARIŞ and MARMARABİRLİK, in

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<sup>2</sup> Monocultural agriculture is the formation of agricultural production with a prominent product by using it in a region as a base. Therefore, agricultural production becomes industry-oriented; it strays away from its main purpose.

<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to discuss here the general structure of this process. In order to follow the story of the transformation of agriculture in Turkey see Aysu (2014), Köymen (1998), Keyder and Yenil (2013), Pamuk and Toprak (1988), Oral (2013) and Aydın (2017).

tobacco TEKEL, in meat, fish and dairy products EBK (meat and fish authority, or ESK as a rename), in beet PANKOBİRLİK. On the one hand, these institutions formed a public support basis by directly purchasing products from producers. On the other hand, they provided 'public safety' for food products through using their product processing capacity. Thus, producers had the support of the public guarantee that they needed to continue agricultural production, and food supply was provided to directly to society by cooperatives. It is necessary to emphasize that these cooperatives were under governmental control; they did not have democratic structures and they could not act autonomously of government policies.

At the beginning of the 2000s, ARIP (Agricultural Reform Implementation Project) prepared by the IMF and World Bank, had caused structural changes in Turkey's food system. On the one hand, the pattern of agricultural support was reorganized, and on the other hand, in accordance with free trade policies, agricultural production and supply cooperatives were disbanded and incorporated (Aysu, 2014; 2015). Marketization of the food system can be seen as the pressure on producers to transform themselves into a kind of *rural entrepreneur* (Keyder and Yenal, 2013). In the face of a process in which farmers have to offer their product to market themselves, they have had to deal with the following conditions that constitute product stock market: the necessity of adapting to a market constituting tradesmen, suppliers and food trends. Either producers would locate themselves in the market as *entrepreneurs* who adapt themselves to new forms of neoliberal existence, or they would not succumb to the pressures of the rationality of the market and would leave the rural area (*ibid*).

'Withdrawal' of the 'public' has caused the prominence of 'mediator' agents in the food system who undertake the distribution and marketing costs but who do not take part in the production and consumption phases. In this process, both the farmer, who has a problem in accessing the market, and the consumer lose. For mediator, trade is a sector in which the food processing industry, the large scale logistics sector, wholesale market halls, retailer merchants, supermarkets and small retailers take part; and the relations into which agents in this sector enter with agro-food corporations allow these agents to become powerful and dominant in the agro-food system.

The market process, determined by production costs, logistics, problems accessing the market, consumption habits, etc., requires the transformation of producers into agents who are then in the competition. Therefore, producers must find a form of existence that raises productivity, reduces production costs and minimizes logistics costs in order to regulate their domestic consumption habits. This *neoliberal governmentality* (Dardot and Laval, 2012) requires agents to form themselves into corporations, become entrepreneurs and meet market needs in their own way; thus, 'survive'. The farmers producing in the villages are not safe from this condition. Today, the new farming model is the *entrepreneur farmer*. The possibility of farmers who do not shape their concerns according to market dynamics to survive lessens day by day.



### c. A consumer who becomes an agent

This market mechanism brings us the need for 'real', 'genuine', 'organic', 'healthy', 'nutritious' food, which is another basis of the food problem. The unsecured food products has also brought into being a process that encumbers the consumer in accessing healthy food. The proliferation of problems caused by malnutrition, filling shelves with junk food that has little nutritious value increases the issue of the adulteration of food products implied in the question about the definition of the food.

Put simply, urban dwellers who have higher education have an awareness of urban, ecology and gastronomy problems. Their quest for healthy food is important for making healthy food a public demand, and developing awareness knowledge of food. On the one hand, this knowledge has led to the rise of the 'conscious consumer'" and on the other, leads to the development of a market aimed at the needs of this category and the absorption of these needs in market relations. Thus, products labelled *organic*, and expressions such as *natural* and *rural products* appeared in the market.<sup>4</sup> Development in communication technologies and the prevalence of social media have led to new forms of intermediate traders, who see establishing a connection between rural and urban areas by means of food as a kind of entrepreneurship: local internet sites selling 100 percent natural products; the logistic/naturalist/gourmet enterprises supplying the best products all over the Turkey; natural production farms; boutique businesses supplying direct from farm to table; neighborhood organic grocers; organic restaurants, cafes, associations, activities, etc.

Paying higher prices, those sections of society that have higher incomes, however, continue to access healthy, nutritious, delicious and locally produced food products through the market. Those sections that are still connected to rural areas continue to supply food in informal ways through their non-formal family relations. Nevertheless, the majority, having already drifted away from rural areas and not having high incomes and therefore little purchasing power, have a food security problem and have to access supermarkets, organic groceries, websites developed under the rationality of the market or producers they know. They have to choose from these various options themselves; they have to *become agents*. To put it another way, a large segment of consumers establish their agency in the market with each product they purchase.

In these circumstances, it is necessary to note that the particular decisions that depend on awareness, conscious consumption or attempts made by goodwill are extremely *partial*. It is important to enumerate the reasons for this. First, consumption is eventually one part of the four sectioned cycle of the food system. As mentioned above, each part

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<sup>4</sup> In today's Turkey, 'organic' refers to the certificate that defines an agricultural model that does not use chemical ingredients and fulfils certain standards, and defines products of this model. Entering a grocer you look at the certificate in order to understand whether a product is organic or not. The certificate is the mediator of the conversation between the producer and the consumer. Yet, it is interesting to note that the certification process is performed by a certain corporation rather than the public, and producers pay significant costs to attain this certificate (Keyder and Yenil, 2013). Thus, it is necessary to note that today organic agriculture is based on the corporate agriculture model.

of the food system (production, processing, distribution, consumption) has the capacity to effect and to alter the other parts. However, it is important to note that this capacity is limited and it causes only partial and slow transformations overall. Second, the dissolution of consumption habits in an individual way refers to a situation that weakens the power of consumers in the decision making processes. For the decision determining the product on the shelf and the final user is far beyond simply being a momentary issue. Each part of the production, processing, distribution, consumption relations that cover the food system effects the quality of this decision. Third, unless public policies are developed that take in the food system in its entirety, the frame of consumption practices will be limited by the decision practices of the corporate food system. These decision practices within the injustice class dynamics of the corporate food regime and reproduce the system at each moment.

In conclusion, these transformations taking place in the various phases of the food system have created a situation where the agents in the system, as entrepreneurs, are subject to market logic, and the large scale corporations are the actual winners in this process. Certainly, the corporate food system aimed at profit maximization prioritizes the profits of the agro-food corporations rather than society's access to healthy and nutritious food. It is that dynamic that underlies the food problem in Turkey.

### **3. Common food policies**

Up to this point, the corporate food system, which I have attempted to briefly depict, is involved in the process from seed to table with the construction of the agents mentioned above. This system is a model that reinforces the class layers and inequalities of society, includes the agents only as market players, therefore, excluding them from participation in making public policies, and means the sovereignty of corporations over food. The commodification process of food, in the first place, starts with seed-land and ends with end users decisions in the market. Common food policy requires following the dynamics of these very agents, their resistance to the system and their commoning practices, which can be a standpoint to understand an alternative policy over food.

#### **a. Food sovereignty**

Common food policies can only be constructed based on concrete relations and the activities of agents formed in these relations. For these policies it is necessary that the genuine agents be determinant, produce policy and focus on developing mechanisms that will enable the policies that are developed. Only a system in which organized agents settle their own food policy, from production to consumption, through participatory mechanisms can create the commoning of the food.

*La Via Campesina*<sup>5</sup>, in its 2<sup>nd</sup> General Conference in 1996, developed the *food sovereignty*

<sup>5</sup> Having 182 organizations as members from 81 countries, *La Via Campesina* is a global and institutionalized social movement gathering together more than 200,000 farmers, landless rural workers, peasants, nomads, and locals. *La Via Campesina* aims to develop opposition policies for any

approach as an alternative to 'food security', and which the United Nations' FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) supported and suggested governments to adopt. Remarking that the concept of food security is a limited approach built in the agro-business context and does not take into account the producers and their conditions, *La Via Campesina* developed food sovereignty as a model in which small farmers and peasants are at the center of the production process. The food system would be designed for the benefits of producers and consumers, putting food producers and consumers at the heart of the system. This point of view suggests centralizing production conditions of the food that is excluded by the food security concept. Problems such as access to land, seed, biodiversity, use of and access to grazing lands, forests and rivers, using agro-ecological methods are of central importance for peasant farming. Thus, they should be defined as the principal factors of the food problem.

Taking its lead from *La Via Campesina*, *Nyeleni Food Sovereignty Forum*, which took place at the Nyeleni town of Mali in 2007, planted the seed of a global movement by extending the discussion of food sovereignty to all agents of the food system.<sup>6</sup> In this forum, the global principles of food sovereignty were defined, agro-business and industrial food system were clearly opposed and the food sovereignty struggle was defined as a social movement. The six pillars of food sovereignty determined by this forum are as follows:

**1. Focuses on Food for People:** Food sovereignty puts people, including those who are hungry, under occupation, in conflict zones and marginalized, at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies, ensuring sufficient, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all individuals, peoples and communities; and rejects the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.

**2. Values Food Providers:** Food sovereignty values and supports the contributions, and respects the rights, of women and men, peasants and small scale family farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fisherfolk, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples and agricultural and fisheries workers, including migrants, who cultivate, grow, harvest and process food; and rejects those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threatens their livelihoods and eliminates them.

**3. Localizes Food Systems:** Food sovereignty brings food providers and consumers closer together; puts providers and consumers at the centre of decision-making on food issues; protects food providers from the dumping of food and food aid in local markets; protects consumers from poor quality and unhealthy food, inappropriate food aid and food tainted with genetically modified organisms; and resists governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade

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level of the corporate food system from land to global institutions, capitalism and patriarchy, defending those segments of the society it represents. For more information see Kocagöz (2018); Kocagöz (2017a); *La Via Campesina* (2015); Aysu (2009).

<sup>6</sup> <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290>

and gives power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

**4. Puts Control Locally:** Food sovereignty places control over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations on local food providers and respects their rights. They can use and share them in socially and environmentally sustainable ways that conserve diversity; it recognizes that local territories often cross geopolitical borders and ensures the right of local communities to inhabit and use their territories; it promotes positive interaction between food providers in different regions and territories and from different sectors that helps resolve internal conflicts or conflicts with local and national authorities; and rejects the privatization of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.

**5. Builds Knowledge and Skills:** Food sovereignty builds on the skills and local knowledge of food providers and their local organizations that conserve, develop and manage localized food production and harvesting systems, developing appropriate research systems to support this and passing on this wisdom to future generations; and rejects technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.

**6. Works with Nature:** Food sovereignty uses the contributions of nature in diverse, low external input agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximize the contribution of ecosystems and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; it seeks to heal the planet so that the planet may heal us; and rejects methods that harm beneficial ecosystem functions that depend on energy intensive monocultures and livestock factories, destructive fishing practices and other industrialized production methods that damage the environment and contribute to global warming.<sup>7</sup>

The food sovereignty paradigm stands on the side of producers' against the agrobusiness and the corporate food system and expands to the other segments of society. It is significant in both its formation and development. On one hand, being the self-organization of food producers as 'people of the land', the formation and organization of *La Via Campesina* places the producers and production problems at the heart of the food system (Martinez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). On the other hand, the food sovereignty strategically offers a ground for cooperating with the other sections of society (See, Kocagöz 2016a, 2016b). Therefore, for all agents included in the system, a practical basis and paradigm of producing and organizing common food policies has been defined.

Peasant agriculture and agroecology approaches defended by *La Via Campesina* appear as an agricultural model that secures producer peasants' (and/or small farmers') access to land, compatible with nature, labor, and the land used by peasants with reference to the use-value of common assets such as springs, forests, grazing land, plateaus, etc. Today, small farmers' fights for their land and struggles for the right to access the land

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<sup>7</sup> See: [https://nyeleni.org/DOWNLOADS/Nyelni\\_EN.pdf](https://nyeleni.org/DOWNLOADS/Nyelni_EN.pdf)

are leading problems for the peasantry. In particular, global land-grabbing (Borras and Franco, 2013) leads to fundamental transformations in agricultural structures; small farmers are thrown off their land by extra-economic means (Glassman 2017) in their fight with corporations, and the struggle of the land is the primary issue in small farmers' struggles. In Turkey, this situation occurs frequently regarding energy and development projects such as hydroelectric plants (HEP), wind power plants (WPP), dams, mines, and geothermal power plants (GPP) etc. Peasants whose lands are 'expropriated' and the rights of use are passed to the corporations start to take action in order to defend the commons. The primary demand of the rural-based social movements in Latin America is the modification of the large scale land owning system from the colonial period and the fair distribution of the lands around complete agrarian reform. The Landless Workers' Movement, MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*), focuses on access to the land and agrarian reform as their primary aim. MST arose from the struggles of the landless peasants, defined by the movement as landless rural workers, and aims at gaining the right of access to the land and to provide access to the land for peasants. Their most radical action was the occupation of the *latifundos*. Defining themselves as socialists, MST distributes land fairly between landless peasants in places where there is agrarian reform and allows them to have their own lands.

In such conjuncture, the struggles of small farmers underlying the food production for access to the land must be seen as a very fundamental element of food sovereignty as the struggle of production is also the defense of agroecology. MST firstly establishes *campes* in the lands they occupy and then transforms these places into a life space and begins agricultural production. Products are sold by cooperatives. If the occupation process is successful and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform accepts giving land to the landless peasants, then they settle in these lands and begin to establish a new life space. These *settlements* are organized around the collective organization and production principles of MST. Again, producers of the MST organize fairs in their areas and have been organizing the National Agrarian Reform Fair for the last three years. These fairs argue for the necessity of agrarian reform, and the importance of producers' peasant agriculture, as well as providing opportunities for consumers to meet farmers from whom they can directly buy products. Thus, through self-organization farmers who make their own decisions on what to produce can meet with the consumers and supply them with healthy and nutritious food.

After the *parliamentary coup* in 2016 in Brazil, one of the leaders of the MST, João Pedro Stédile, explained the connection between the Temer government and agri-business, proving the government's actions were in favor of these corporations. Based on this conjuncture analysis, Stédile proposed that all products of agroecological production were anti-Temer. As Stédile states, the coup was paid for by the profits of the agricultural corporations and proved the necessity of developing a solution to the food problem that encompasses the whole of society. Thus, every moment in which food sovereignty occurs expresses the democratic will against against the coup, and commoning of food as an alternative to the corporate food system. Certainly, it is important to note that this anecdote depends on the unique conditions of Brazil (Kocagöz, 2016c).

To sum up, we can note that food sovereignty takes food as a political issue, defines agents and places them at the heart of the food system. We can say it grants, from small farmers to collective farm practices to these agents to take place in the common organizations in the process, to connect each other, to develop approaches preceding cooperative relations rather than corporate ones, to produce local, national, regional, and global policies in order for commoning the food and defending these policies to be performed by the public. In this context, food sovereignty underlies the commoning of food and creating food policies for all and determines the issue of the food right and food justice as class issues (Allen and Smolski, 2016).

## **b. Food initiatives in Turkey**

For food sovereignty to be settled, it is necessary that the agents of the food system be organized and connected to each other. On one hand, each of these organizations have been looking for ways to define their own rights and to develop policy proposals to defend these rights. This is empowered by building alliances with other actors to construct a common food policy. On the other hand, they are looking for an actual commoning of food and ways of building food sovereignty here and now.

By the early 2000s in Turkey, farmers had decided to establish union organizations and to defend their agricultural production rights against the process described above. *Tüm Üretici Köylüler Sendikası* (Tüm-Köy- SEN, All Producer Peasant's Union) aims to bring all producer peasants around a single union structure, and *Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* (Çiftçi- SEN, Confederation of Small Farmers' Unions), confederated in 2008, foregrounds product-based unionism. These two organizations attempt to generate a farmer-based policy as a challenge to marketization in agriculture and neoliberal politics. Çiftçi-SEN, as a member of *La Via Campesina* and a participant in the establishment of European Via Campesina Coordination in 2009, is an important cornerstone for the recognition and construction of the food sovereignty struggle in Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

Again in the early 2000s, the initiative to regulate GMOs made possible the establishment of *GDO Karşıtı Platform* (Anti-GMO Platform) by bringing together different segments of society. This platform, which incorporates a large segment from farmers to engineers and from consumer organizations to political parties, is an important example of the alliances between farmers and urban dwellers. Thus, agriculture and food together have become a collective struggle of both urban and peasant sections of society and been defended as a common.

In their quest for food security, consumers' individual choices certainly do not result in their involvement in the food system. Associations, cooperatives, food communities, food networks, initiatives established by consumers and semi-producers (türetici)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more detailed information on the establishment process and the work of Çiftçi- SEN see Aysu (2017).

<sup>9</sup> This word is a combination of üretici (producer) and tüketici (consumer) that implies taking part in an organized consumer act productive of an alternative food system.



have been operating for a considerable amount of time in Turkey as organizations that bring together people who do not accept the existing food system and want to see change.<sup>10</sup> As well as these, we should add the existence of various producer-consumer initiatives such as ecological markets, earth markets, joint-kitchens, consumer associations, and various urban gardens.<sup>11</sup>

*Food communities and consumer cooperatives* are, in fact, the actualization of food sovereignty. These initiatives deliver healthy and nutritious products to end-users by supplying them directly from producers without an intermediary. These initiatives are usually open to everyone's participation and organized as democratic, non-hierarchical structures. They do not seek profit; therefore, it is not a matter of obtaining any rent from food. Food initiatives basically work with small farmers who engage in agroecology. They thus support the production right of small farmers and with this support contribute to their struggle to survive. The presence of such farmers, contacting and supporting them, shortens the distance between the urban and the rural, enabling a new form of relation that is participatory and *contact-based* (Aysu, 2015). Hence, we can say that these initiatives build food as a common by defending access to healthy and nutritious food for all.<sup>12</sup> Apart from these initiatives, it is possible to mention examples such as initiatives to support urban gardens under threat in İstanbul,<sup>13</sup> establishing and developing new agrarian urban gardens,<sup>14</sup> supporting the producers with the contribution of municipalities in the last agricultural production districts of İstanbul such as Şile and Silivri.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Buğday Derneği (Wheat Association), the most rooted of them all, dates back to the 1990s. Buğday Hareketi (Wheat Movement), which continues its work as an association in 2002 has contributed significantly by laying the foundations of ecological awareness and different ecological solutions in Turkey. Again, Yeryüzü Derneği, which does pioneering work regarding ecological practices and food communities, was established in 2009. The establishment of Boğaziçi Mensupları Tüketim Kooperatifi -BÜKOOP (Boğaziçi's Members Consumer Cooperative), which started off with the perspective of food sovereignty within consumer groups, dates back to 2009.

<sup>11</sup> I should note that from this point, I will focus on İstanbul-based initiatives. Hence, I need to say that these kinds of initiatives exist and spread to cities such as Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, Diyarbakır, Mersin, Antalya, etc. Also, I would like to remind you that, apart from the initiatives mentioned, food sovereignty practices, e.g. seed barter networks, exist. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into a detailed discussion on all these.

<sup>12</sup> For a variety of food communities in Turkey see <http://gidatopluluklari.org>. Aside from BÜKOOP, mentioned above, it is possible to mention Kadıköy Kooperatifi, Anadolu'da Yaşam Tüketim Kooperatifi, Yeni Hasat Tüketim Kooperatifi, Beşiktaş Kooperatifi Girişimi, Koşuyolu Kooperatifi Girişimi, Şişli Kooperatifi Girişimi as pursuing actively their works.

<sup>13</sup> *Direnen Üretici Tüketici Kolektifi -DÜRTÜK* is one of the most recent examples of this. DÜRTÜK is a food initiative that makes direct purchases from urban gardens that are currently under the threat of destruction. The participants of the initiatives meet and chat on shopping days organized by volunteers to buy products from these gardens; the right of production of urban gardens that resist destruction is defended, while the ways of organizing the consumers around the food are developed.

<sup>14</sup> The *Kent Bahçeleri* project, conducted by *Yeryüzü Derneği*, is an example of this. In addition *Moda Gezi Bostanı*, which was created after Gezi revolt in the Caferağa district of Kadıköy is an important example even though it is not in operation at the moment.

<sup>15</sup> An example of this is the *Tohum Takas Şenlikleri* (Seed Exchange Festivals) organized in Silivri and Şile. This type of seed-bartering practice is a resistance strategy developed to protect and share local seeds against the Seed Act of 2004, which prohibits farmers from selling seeds. In some festivals only exchanges are made, in others relations are established and networks are organized so that barter groups follow and support each other.

One of the primary concerns of the current food system is the issue of logistics. The separation of urban and the rural zones as agricultural production/consumption zones, as has happened in Istanbul, has removed agriculture from the urban and made it possible for non-agricultural lands to become widespread. However, the spread of urban food production may bring about the localization of the food system, thus a decrease in logistics costs and in ecocide. The support of urban parks and urban cultivation areas would increase the contact between the producer and consumer, therefore decreasing the distance between them. This may be possible through the growth, expansion, diversification, and development of food initiatives.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, it is crucial to talk about the formations of people who have recently begun farming in the countryside that advocates and supports collective agricultural practices.<sup>17</sup> These collective practices matter both in terms of developing and expanding non-industrial means of agricultural experience, and of building agriculture as a collective practice.

### c. Politics of commoning food

The question of commoning food requires that the *formation* of actors and the *linkage* between each of them be established and that actors should develop food sovereignty by building participatory and democratic mechanisms. For that, it is essential to build local, national, regional, and global food initiatives, strengthen and support existing food initiatives, establish links between different food initiatives, and build common grounds.

Commoning food requires crucially introducing resistance opportunities at all stages of the existing food system. Hence, it is crucial to deny the existing industrial-monocultural agriculture model but to defend agroecology and the peasant agriculture. For example, producer cooperatives, that were established by small and/or medium farmers in places such as Hopa, Devrek, Tire, Ovacık, Hozat, aim at both defending the rights of farmers defined-above and producing healthy food products. Thus, single farmers organize new types of relations on the common ground of the cooperative. Such an increase in farmer organizations can be considered as a core of organizing and joining more farmers engaged in ecological farming, as well as bringing together those who want to start farming and opening up organizational channels to establish a new agricultural model.

It is also important to increase the processing capacities of agricultural production cooperatives at the same time. For example, in opposition to ÇAYKUR and the other corporations, the Hopa Çay Kooperatifi's (Hopa Tea Cooperative) ability to survive is

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<sup>16</sup> As a contradictory example, it is necessary to mention here the *Istanbul Zapatista Coffee Collective*. It is in direct relation with the local Zapatista peasant cooperatives of coffee produced in Mexico, bringing coffee to Turkey, and by building an alternative network takes over the distribution of coffee. The Coffee Collective experience is quite influential, since international trade practices such as fair trade etc. are not common among food initiatives in Turkey. This non-profit collective employs pricing policies that meet only the labor involved and distributes the products at a fixed price.

<sup>17</sup> The farms of *Refikler Farm* in Fethiye, *Zeytinli Ecological Common Life Community* in Zeytinli, *Earth Eco Village* in Pamukova, *İmece House* in Menemen etc., are important examples of developing alternative living and agricultural practices.

its ability to turn wet tea (agricultural product) into dry tea (processing) and put it on the market through alternative channels. In the same way, the strengthening of the integrated facilities of Tire Süt Kooperatifi (Tire Milk Cooperative) and the development of a milk processing capacity makes it possible to reach more consumers. The agreement signed by Tire Süt Kooperatifi and the Izmir Municipality to deliver products to homes and schools in association with the Izmir Municipality can be seen as an important case in terms of the support given to such cooperatives by a public institution.

The kind of consumer-based food initiative mentioned above is a very important organization experience in terms of bringing consumers together and developing common practices to solve their common problems. Thus, the support for agroecology is becoming possible, as well as new urban organization practices, and the foundations for actors to construct an urban-based food politics are being laid. 2. *Gıda Toplulukları Çalıştayı [Second Food Communities Workshop]*<sup>18</sup>, organized by several food initiatives in 2017, and *Şeker Fabrikalarının Özelleştirilmesi Bağlamında Gıda Egemenliği Atölyesi [Food Sovereignty Workshop Regarding the Privatization of Sugar Beet Factories]* organized by Kadıköy Kooperatifi in 2018, could be thought as examples of such interventions helping to create grounds for producing common policies. Since these initiatives involve both producers and consumers and have developed horizontal and cohesive relations from the base up for sharing knowledge and policy production, they provide answers to the issue of how food commoning policies could be done.

While urban food initiatives are aimed at building an alternative to agro-food policies and supporting existing alternatives, they also have the ability to develop solutions to issues of how the urban zone should be organized, the possibilities of constructing alternative consumer relations, to find collective, lasting, and holistic solutions to social injustices that were stratified through food. In this way, it can be said that these initiatives have created a link between the urban-based and the rural-based labor movement and created the means to become part of the social movements. We can say that food initiatives are an important part of social movements because of their democratic structures, their wide connections and networks, and their tendency to construct solidarity and unity among different sections by problematizing food as a common.

## Afterword: Four tactics

We can describe the strategy for commoning food and developing common food policies with four main tactics. The *first tactic* is producing a *critical knowledge* of the food system. Criticism of the corporate food system mandates the production of information about what healthy and nutritious food is and how to access it. Researchers, producers, and food initiatives contribute to the production of this knowledge together and in solidarity and strive for the publication of it. The *second tactic* is organizing food initiatives. Grass root organizing and collective farm practices in rural areas are the basis for this. As long as food initiatives can build common ground in the city, as

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed evaluation of this issue see Kocagöz (2017b).

mentioned above, there is potential for them to become an alternative.<sup>19</sup> The *third tactic* is that urban and rural initiatives collaborate and actually build food sovereignty. The building of an unmediated and direct system by organized producers and consumers, the dissemination, and socialization of this system, and the consolidation of solidarity relations today means the construction of another food system. This system will be a possible alternative to the corporate food system as long as it is socialized. The *fourth tactic* is the production of common food policies at the public level. A 'food policy' that the actors and initiatives build together will enable them to become part of the social struggle by gaining the ability to be a common food program for large communities.<sup>20</sup> The politics of commoning food is based on the organization of food initiatives that identify food as a common, construct rhetoric on the public level, and the organization of networks that realize food sovereignty by directly commoning food. These networks today in Istanbul, in various cities of Turkey, in different countries, regions, and finally across the globe are haunting like a spectre. Some of them remain at the forefront, some of them are slow and stumbling, but they are involved in endless searching and construction. We, of course, know this spectre, which will be commoning food, from somewhere else, do we not?

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<sup>19</sup> For characteristic properties of common food initiatives see Kocagöz (2017).

<sup>20</sup> For an actual example on this issue see Kolektif (2018).

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# The Politics of the Water Commons

Özdeş Özbay

From the publication of Garret Hardin's article *The Tragedy of the Commons* in 1968 until the 1990s, the concept of the commons was mostly regarded as simply an academic discussion. However, the fact that the extremely 'tragic' consequences of the global neoliberal policies that began in 1980 were to be felt in the 1990s, has led to the emergence of social movements around the world, in particular on the issue of water.

Relying on the motto 'There is no other alternative', neoliberal policies were implemented based on the understanding that the public sector offered rather cumbersome and poor quality services. Furthermore, private companies and market practices, which were considered to be more innovative and effective, were presented as the only way to improve service quality. We have experienced the clearest practices of these ideas especially in the issue of water. International organizations, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the IMF, imposed certain policies that ensured water services were left in the hands of private enterprises or public-private cooperations throughout the world. Apart from these practices, rights to the use of lakes, rivers, and groundwater were also increasingly handed over to private companies. However, these attempts often failed after a while. Movements against such neoliberal water policies appeared just after the emergence of social and economic problems.

At the same time as the struggles of the right to water, the politics of the commons in opposition to neoliberal policies also

arose, and often these two struggles evolved intertwined with one another. The right to water is considered a human right, which by definition stands in contradiction to the idea of commodification and commercialization of water. Likewise, the politics of the commons opposes the prevalent commodification of the ecological commons, such as water, land, seas, and forests. This movement initially emerged from struggles against enclosures and commodification of ecological resources (which are not the domain of private property) through private or public institutions. The movement claims that these ecological resources are commons that belong to everyone. However, over time, the realm of commons politics has expanded its range. Against neoliberal attacks on every field of social services, the idea that public services such as education, health, and transportation are the commons of society has begun to be widely accepted. In addition, urban commons movements have emerged opposing practices of gentrification and urban transformation in cities. The issue of water has also become an important field of the politics of commons, both as an ecological common and as a struggle for the right to water in cities.

Although already emphasized in various articles in this book, it deserves mentioning once more that the politics of commons rejects not only the private property relations of the market but also bureaucratic state ownership. Today, in particular, as the neoliberal state itself and local administrations are managed like corporations, the politics of commons rejects the state politics on commons and struggles against the revoking of previously acquired social rights. At this point, however, please note that the question of how public institutions should be included in the politics of commons still remains a topic for discussion. Therefore, as far as the water commons are concerned, the protection of water resources is of pivotal importance. What's more, as a requirement of the right to water, the provision of water services through public resources provides important political goals in terms of the politics of commons.

Struggles for rights to water are conflicts that span a vast geography, from India to Brazil. I sought to explain the most important of these struggles in a previous article (Özbay, 2017). In this article, however, I will address two essential struggles of the right to water, both of which recognize water as a common and place the water commons on the agenda of social movements: Italian Water Movements Forum and Cochabamba Water Wars. Further I will discuss the municipal experiences that, as a consequence of social movements from below, recognize water as a common.

## **The recognition of water as a common: the Italian Water Movement**

It was the Italian Water Movement that triggered the politics of water commons. A number of right to water struggles exist in various parts of the world, but it was the movement in Italy that prompted a social mobilization to fight in defence of

water as a common for the first time.

The Italian Water Movement emerged in 1998 with the establishment of the Italian Committee for World Water Contract (CICMA) after the *Water Manifesto* by Riccardo Petrella, an Italian economist, found widespread support in Italy in 1995 (Carrozza & Fantini, 2016). A water movement emerged in Italy with the Alternative World Water Forum, which was organized as an alternative to the World Water Forum in Florence in 2003.

The debates launched around the water issue in the mid-1990s had turned into a social movement by the 2000s. The large-scale meetings held in this period gave way to the Italian Forum of Water Movements (hereafter the “Forum”) in 2006. This Forum, which was constituted of local resistance groups, NGOs, unions, academics, and activists, became the most influential organization that determined the demands of the water movement in the following period.

The Italian Water Movement had three key features. The first was that the movement was considered to be one of the most participatory and flexible social movements in the history of Italy. The movement acknowledged the right to water as a basic human right. Secondly, while the water struggles in Europe were either conceptualized as a means of remunicipalization or water right, the concept of “the commons” was also incorporated into the struggle for the first time in Italy. Thus, the definition of the commons appeared in the program of a social movement. Thirdly, the movement won a referendum on the issue of water privatisation in 2011, which encouraged the adoption of the concept of the commons by other social movements as well. Hence, the politics of the commons started to emerge in various other areas such as labor, information, and the internet (Carrozza & Fantini, 2016).

One of the important turning points of the water movement, which spread from Italy across the world, was that it spurred the remunicipalization movements. Recognising water as a common, the movement started a big campaign against the transfer of water services to private enterprises. As a result of the campaigns of the Forum in 2009, municipalities in the cities of Turin and Venice took control of water and sanitation services away from private companies. In addition to the remunicipalization processes in Naples, water resources were also referred to as commons and were handled in a way that transcended the binary approach of private vs. public (Carrozza & Fantini, 2016). According to the report *Here to Stay: Water Remunicipalization as a Global Trend*, prepared by the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), the Transnational Institute (TNI), and the Multinational Observatory in 2014, there were 180 cases of water remunicipalization around the world between 2000 and 2014 (Lobina, Kishimoto & Petitjean, 2015). However, it is not quite possible to include all of these cases of remunicipalization in the politics of the commons. Nevertheless, strong conceptual claims, such as water as a common and as a human right, have paved the way for potential gains against neoliberal practices on a global scale.

During the 2011 referendum in Italy, the water movement's slogan was "You write it water, you read it democracy", indicating that they were striving for the commoning of water. Whilst the politics of the commons acknowledges ecological resources, public spaces, or services as commons, commoning as politics includes the governance of factories, workplaces, and neighborhoods by prioritizing citizen participation. Commoning, meanwhile, means governance of a commonized thing outside of market relations. The Forum, with its extensive network of participants, has taken a step forward in the governance of water assets by water users through commoning practices.

The politics of the commons emerging from the water movement has also been widely embraced by numerous different struggles across Italy. They even formed a political movement called the Alliance for Labor, the Commons, and the Environment so as to participate in the 2013 elections, albeit without success. Even so, it was probably the first attempt at election politics under the name of the commons. Similarly, in Catalonia, Common Barcelona (Barcelona en Comú- BeC) took part in the Spanish local elections in 2015. It comprised many social movements and political parties as well as the Water is Life campaign. Unlike the movement in Italy, BeC achieved a historic victory in the municipal elections.

## **Cochabamba Water Wars as an experience of commoning water**

The 2000 water uprising in Cochabamba, Bolivia, marked the beginning of a major water movement. A series of events called 'Water Wars' went down in history as an inevitable consequence of the privatization program initiated by President Sanchez in Bolivia in 1993. The first phase of the privatization program, supported by the World Bank, was comprised of the privatization of electricity, telecommunications, and oil and gas companies. The second phase went on to include the privatization of the water services in the cities of La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba. Cochabamba had one of the highest numbers of immigrants over the previous few decades. The 1950 population of 80,000 mushroomed to 412,000 in 1992. While only 53% of this population was connected to the water network, only 23% could get a regular, 24-hour water service (Marvin & Laurie, 1999). The rest of the population obtained water from wells, water tankers, or through the formation of numerous civil society organizations, such as water committees (Assies, 2003). In 1999, the Bolivian government signed an agreement with an international consortium known as Aguas del Tunari, which entitled it to control the work of Cochabamba's Municipal Drinking Water and Sewerage Services (SEMAPA). The administration thought that the agreement could help them overcome Cochabamba's water crisis. However, the introduction of a profit-oriented water governance scheme saw water prices rise by up to 150%. As might be expected, after years of deepening water crisis, the privatization process led the people of Cochabamba to react.

Their objections were initially raised by organizations such as the Committee for

the Defence of Water and the Popular Economy, the Federation of Neighborhood Associations, and the Departmental Federation of Factory Workers of Cochabamba (FDTFC). These groups came together to form the Coordination for the Defence of Water and Life (Coordinadora). The Coordinadora was a concrete step in the commoning of the water governance in the city with its structure open to both labor organizations and neighborhood associations, as well as unorganized individual participation.

The FDTFC union played a fundamental role in starting the struggle. In January 2000, many people gathered outside the union building in the city square to protest the increase in water prices. The union called on citizens not to pay their bills. Aguas del Tunari, who had taken over management of the city's water, announced in response that it would cut the water supplies of those who failed to pay their bills. The Coordinadora members along with angry members of the public congregated in the union building on January 11th and declared a general strike. The strike swiftly developed into a rebellion when the neighborhood associations set up road blocks. The Coordinadora called for a rally on January 13th to be held in the city square. During the rally, at which there were clashes between demonstrators and police, government officials commenced negotiations with representatives of the movement. As a result of the negotiations, the movement was granted substantial concessions and thus the first phase of the Cochabamba Water Wars was over (Assies, 2003).

Within a few weeks, the failure to solve the water crisis increased tensions. As the demands of the movement had not been accepted, the outraged crowds went back to the streets in February and April. And the government intervened more firmly each time. The Bolivian Peasant Workers Confederation also joined the general strike in April, demanding the complete abolition of the water privatization law. The army declared a state of emergency in the city. One person was killed and hundreds of protesters were injured and detained during a week of riots and conflicts. Eventually the government took a step back: the deal with Aguas del Tunari was terminated and control of water provision was handed back to the municipality. Law no. 2029, which privatized the water, was amended accordingly (Assies, 2003).

The Cochabamba Water Wars had three significant consequences. To start with, for the first time in history a social movement managed to reverse a neoliberal policy that had been in effect for 15 years. Second, it changed the forms of social struggles in Bolivia. Prior to the water wars, only the trade unions took a lead in social struggles. Now, however, neighborhood associations and water committees formed in Cochabamba that became platforms for the movement to organize around. Formed with the help of the trade unions, the Coordinadora emerged as a horizontal network organization model. The government had no choice but to recognize and negotiate with this platform from below (Assies, 2003). The struggle, in essence, was a matter of democratic participation in the management of water. In this regard, the Coordinadora's massive open forums in the city square took

their place in the history of social struggles as an example of direct democracy. This citizen participation around the Coordinadora went down as a landmark experience in the politics of commons. The Coordinadora went on to play a crucial role in the city's water governance for several years. Thirdly, the spread of the general strike to other cities also led workers to put forward demands beyond the issue of water, which in turn paved the way for a new social movement. For example, peasants demanded that fuel and transportation costs be reduced, while teachers demanded a pay rise and coca producers, together with their leader Evo Morales, appealed for the removal of barriers to coca production (De Angelis, 2017: 309). In 2005, Morales was elected President as a result of this expanding radical left movement.

The water struggle in Cochabamba went down in history not only as an experience in the defence of water rights but also as a structure for managing water policies through Coordinadora, with the working class at its centre. However, the struggle for commoning water in Cochabamba continues in opposition to Morales's policies. Despite calling himself a socialist, under a 2008 constitutional amendment, he implemented an uncompromising policy against autonomous structures as he believes such problems can actually be solved by the state. He therefore opposes the intervention of the water committees in Cochabamba and other formations such as the Coordinadora in decision-making and implementation processes. Representatives of the movement quite rightly perceive this move as a new policy of enclosures implemented by the state (Dwinell & Olivera, 2017). Nevertheless, this struggle has provoked more in-depth discussion on both the potentials and limitations of the politics of the commons.

One of the leading figures of this debate is Massimo de Angelis, who discusses the inherent potentials that the politics of the commons are laden with in terms of the anticapitalist struggle. Others (Dwinell & Olivera, 2017) who look at the anticapitalist potential of the politics of the commons tend to obscure the weight of the general strike and the mobilization of the working class while emphasizing the importance of the movement. Showing the Cochabamba experience as one of the most well-suited cases with regard to his theory of politics of commons, De Angelis focuses on the self-established procurement methods people use in order to meet their water needs, which evolved 30 years prior to the emergence of the movement (de Angelis, 2017: 305). But while the main dynamic force in the formation of the Coordinadora in Cochabamba is the union and the general strike, Angelis tends to see this fundamental dynamic, which in fact has forced the state to back down and enabled Coordinadora to exist, as a side element instead. Interestingly, Dwinell and Olivera hardly ever mention the working class but rather highlight the water committees formed by the people. While the Morales government's practices have been widely criticized, they argued that the state is the problem whereas the solution is in the autonomous governance mechanisms. In fact, the water committees together with the Coordinadora are actually a form of class organization that lacks control of the necessary means of production. For this reason, those authors miss out the fact that these organisations have not



evolved into a kind of formation that is capable of responding to major social issues posed in committees and Coordinadora meetings. These structures are not organized around workplaces but rather through the participation of workers in their neighborhoods, and herein lies the root of their limitations. Water committees in the neighborhoods that are not connected to public water services are themselves responsible for the water network and repairs and for generating their own funds. Despite those authors' stress on this situation, it is clear that this is quite unsustainable. The problem is not only that the state does not recognize these autonomous structures in question but also that the workers in municipal and water services cannot participate in these management processes. Failing to provide effective services, the state could, over time, reclaim responsibility as a result of this deficiency and weakness of the water committees.

## **Acknowledging water as a commons and its spread in local governments**

The struggles rising out of the water movement have emerged almost everywhere as local mobilizations. And yet the magnitude of the problem has changed the scale of the struggle. The global anticapitalist movement that emerged after the 1999 Battle of Seattle and the World Social Forum has enabled local mobilizations to become an integral part of the global network of struggles. However, this global movement has experienced a rapid decline, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. Local water movements and, more recently, movements that attempt to create politics over the commons have failed to offer any national alternative to the austerity policies of national governments. As a result, they began to focus on municipalities as a political target. As a matter of fact, the municipalist movement was going well before this period; however, in terms of the politics of the commons, it came to the fore as a line of defence against ecological destruction and the neoliberal austerity policies of central governments, as well as the construction of a radical left alternative in the case of Barcelona.

With regard to the developments in water in this period, the Blue Communities have become one of the campaigns that aimed to make municipalities and various local governments adopt to the politics of the commons. After many years of struggle, the right to water was eventually recognized as a human right by the United Nations in 2010. Nevertheless, just like any other UN resolution, how this decision would be implemented was rather unclear. For about 20 years in Canada, water resources monitoring and water rights campaigns have been running widespread campaigns against austerity policies and the commercialization of water. Led by water rights activist and author Maude Barlow, the Blue Planet Project, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), and the Council of Canadians convened to create the Blue Communities Project in 2010. The Blue Communities have emerged as an attempt to implement the UN's decision of right to water at the local level.

The Blue Communities aim not only to keep water resources clean but also to protect them. They oppose privatization and commercialization of water, acknowledging water as a commons to all living things, and as a human right as well. The water commons framework of the Blue Communities is summarized below. The water commons framework defines water as a shared resource that is shared by everyone and the responsibility of all.

Blue Communities encourages municipalities and indigenous communities to adopt a water commons framework by:

1. Recognizing the right to water and sanitation as a human right
2. Banning or phasing out the sale of bottled water in municipal facilities and at municipal events
3. Promoting publicly financed, owned, and operated water and wastewater services (Blue Community, 2016: 4)

So far, apart from over 20 cities in Canada, a number of municipalities around the world, such as St. Gallen and Bern in Switzerland, Paris in France, Northampton in the United States, Thessaloniki in Greece, and Berlin in Germany have joined the Blue Communities.

While the Blue Communities initially started off as a campaign consisting of municipalities, they have begun to incorporate various institutions that have adopted these principles over time. The most important of these institutions are universities and autonomous regions belonging to indigenous peoples. Various organizations, such as St. Gallen and Bern Universities in Switzerland and the World Council of Churches, have also become members of the Blue Communities.

However, no local government or university is so far a member of the Blue Community in Turkey. And yet various attempts have been initiated under the leadership of the Right to Campaign of Turkey. The most outstanding of these initiatives was the campaign initiated by Boğaziçi University students at the end of 2017 with the support of the Right to Water Campaign. Having accepted the water commons framework, the students of Boğaziçi University demanded that the university become a member of the Blue Communities. Although the campaign was quite promising, it was not able to achieve the success it hoped due to the major political agenda in Turkey at the time.

Another network of municipalities advocating water as a commons was established in Spain after the local elections in 2015. The union of municipalities, called the Public Water Network, is a platform consolidated mostly by left wing municipalities in order to defend public water services against privatization and to spread public-public partnerships. This network organized a summit, Cities for Public Water Conference, and invited the mayors of cities which are won by left-

wing candidates such as Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Zaragoza, A Coruña and Santiago de Compostela to hold talks around the water issue in Madrid in November 2015. At a time when neoliberal market solutions are heavily imposed around the world, the Declaration for the Public Management of Water announced at this conference has the potential of becoming a milestone. The activists, unions, NGOs, and municipalities that came together once again declared water as a 'commons' and the right to water as a 'human right'. Additionally, they agreed on the notion that municipalities, local councils, and other public organizations should establish closer ties with each other with regard to the public administration of water.

## **From water to other issues: on the politics of urban commons**

Emerging through the Forum in parallel with other social movements in Italy in the early 2000s, the politics of the commons significantly increased over the politics of social movements in Spain from 2011 onwards.

Arising from a movement called the Indignados (indignants) that occupied squares in 2011 and a subsequent general strike wave, the new left-wing party, Podemos, became the third largest party in the 2015 general election with a radical anti-austerity programme. Again in local elections in 2015, several platforms supported by Podemos were organized by wide ranging social movements in different cities. They won many municipalities around left-wing candidates. In these local alliances, there were many social movements as well as right to water campaigns. Amongst these local election platforms, Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common- BeC) has made the most substantial breakthrough with regard to the politics of the commons. Launched in Barcelona, the movement was, in fact, given the name Guanyem Barcelona (Let's Win Barcelona). This name, in a similar way to Podemos, emphasized the movement itself rather than the party. However, when they were unable for various reasons to use the name in elections, they began to use the name Barcelona in Common. As for the debates on the name, although names like the Democratic Revolution had also come up, the word 'commons' received the greatest support for it incorporated the meaning of a new kind of publicity. The movement sees the commons as a non-institutionalized public sphere (Subirats, 2017).

Since Guanyem, the movement has had four key starting points:

1. Taking back the city. For various reasons including tourism and industry, the movement argue that businesses have taken the city from citizens.
2. Addressing urgent social issues. Immediate solutions to issues involving tens of thousands of victims, including housing and water.
3. Ensuring citizen participation in municipality decisions.

4. Commitment to political ethics. This is a reaction to corruption and to austerity measures (Subirats, 2017).

The candidate of Barcelona in Common for Barcelona's mayor office, Ada Colau, won the municipal elections.<sup>1</sup> Barcelona in Common is trying to redefine a common good life and to formulate it into policies on water, housing, transportation, wages, and public spaces. The importance of this is that it seeks to create an autonomous space from the state (that is, from municipal administrators and the bureaucracy as well) to ensure citizen participation in all areas, from the process of decision-making to the implementation processes, as well as to break away from the dichotomy between the private and public in politics. It envisions this as a common space in which every citizen can participate.

The most distinguishing feature of the movement is its proposition of a new type of political participation and activism against the traditional methods of politics, i.e. political parties and unions. Starting from the neighborhoods of the city, it creates the necessary tools for citizens' direct participation in both the determination of problems and the development of solutions. Therefore, Barcelona in Common is often referred to as the party of the movement (Zelinka, 2018).

Participatory neighborhood forums or assemblies are called *Asamblearismo* (Assembly-ism), which is the lowest sub-unit of Barcelona in Common. In these assembly meetings in which almost any issue can be on the agenda, equal rights of speech and consensus decision-making is given particular importance. Following the victory in the municipal election, active contributions of the assemblies concerning the preparation of neighborhood and city plans are received. There are currently about 300 neighborhood assemblies in the city (Zelinka, 2018).

With Ada Colau coming to power as the mayor of Barcelona, a serious remunicipalization process was initiated. The BeC management remunicipalized water services in several neighborhoods of Barcelona, since water services had been largely transferred to private companies in the city (Badia & Subirana, 2015). In 2018, she even held a referendum on this issue. From funeral procedures to women's shelters, remunicipalization takes place in many areas (Sobart, 2018). This municipalization not only aims to simply bring the services back into public hands, but also further aims to ensure their commoning practices, which means citizen

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish model of the neoliberal housing system collapsed a few years before the 2008 crisis. Approximately 160 people were thrown out of their homes almost every day. In a period of two years, hundreds of thousands of young people, women, and immigrants were made homeless. In 2006, the victims of this housing crisis formed "V de Vivienda" (V for Housing) in Barcelona (named after "V for Vendetta", a film about a rebellion under a dictatorship). In 2009, the "Platform of People Affected by Mortgages" (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca- PAH) was established in Barcelona. Country-wide networks of struggles established by PAH played a major role in calling for demonstrations in May 15. PAH's spokesperson Ada Colau was dragged and detained in a police raid to evacuate the Square of Catalonia in Barcelona during the occupations. Colau was later elected mayor of Barcelona in 2015. For more information see [http://www.x-pressed.org/?xpd\\_article=pah-platform-for-the-mortgage-affected-si-se-puede](http://www.x-pressed.org/?xpd_article=pah-platform-for-the-mortgage-affected-si-se-puede)

participation to decision-making processes.

The movement in Barcelona is aware of the fact that it cannot achieve long-term gains against global neoliberalism as a single city. However, the failures of the left on a national scale (the failures of leftist governments across Latin America, the frustration with Syriza, and the electoral defeat of Podemos) have led to the understanding that it is quite viable to conduct a global struggle through the medium of cities. Barcelona in Common, therefore, also strives to unite left municipalities on a global scale.

On the day she was elected mayor, Ada Colau said that they would try to establish an urban movement across the Mediterranean. Then, in 2016, she was elected as co-president of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). In June 2017, the Fearless Cities Summit was held in Barcelona. The declaration of the international municipalist summit was as follows: "In a world in which fear and insecurity are being twisted into hate, and inequalities, xenophobia, and authoritarianism are on the rise, towns and cities are standing up to defend human rights, democracy, and the common good" (Su Hakkı, 2017). Mayors, employees, NGOs working on the right to shelter and the right to the city, as well as representatives of various platforms in 180 cities from 68 countries and five continents participated in the meeting. Fearless Cities have organized international regional meetings in many cities such as New York and Warsaw in 2018.

Prof. Dr. Juan Subirats, a theorist of politics of the right to water and commons, is one of the most influential names in Barcelona in Common. Subirats, recognizing that national and global problems cannot be solved through a single city, asserts that they are committed to an international municipalist movement, and what's more, they are striving to establish 'Catalonia in Common' (Catalunya en Comú) through the initiative of 'A Country in Common' (Un País en Comú) (Subirats, 2017). It suggests spreading the politics of the commons at the country level by taking it one step further than the city scale; however, a formation and mobilisation such as in the case of Barcelona in Common is still yet to come for them.

## **Concluding remarks**

Beginning as a defence of the commons against neoliberal aggression from the 1990s onwards, the politics of the commons have evolved into a defence of the urban commons as well, and the commoning of public spaces has been a step forward in the politics of the commons. The fact that the city as such has been regarded as a common in recent years, allows many collective rights claims to come to the fore within this framework. The right to water is one of the most vital rights, which include the right to a public education, fresh air, and access to the sea. It should be noted here that there are also tendencies against rights-based struggles within the politics of the commons (Mattei, 2012; Dwinell & Olivera, 2017). This approach for some reason tends to reduce the concept of a 'right' to the realm of liberal individual rights and freedoms. However, 'rights' have always been the

most fundamental terrain of class conflict throughout the history of capitalism: the right to a weekend break, the right to a 48-hour week, the right to free education, and the right to free health, to name but a few. The notion of a right is a demand aimed at the use of public resources and yet it does not have to be limited by this. The movements for a solid demand for rights can in effect pave the way for political and organizational mobilization. Similarly, the politics of the commons may arise from collective rights via collective demands. In this regard, the right to water is a pivotal area of struggle. Nevertheless, transcending the limitations in question and determining the priorities of use of water by watershed management policies are some of the issues pertaining to the commoning of water. Demands such as the right to water are of crucial importance in terms of legal and constitutional guarantees of various gains; however, every right is vulnerable to obliteration as a result of social power relations. Rights can also be taken back as in the case of Bolivia today. The only way to make these rights permanent is for social movements to pursue a multi-faceted strategy to overcome capitalism. From commoning practices to rights-based struggles, from defending the commons to the commoning of production, multiple methods are required to be implemented in a concerted manner. With this in mind, we also need to discuss issues such as the central role of the working class, revolution, and political organization, all of which are issues that often tend to be neglected within politics of the commons. Accentuating collective rights is important for two aspects. First, it frees the movement from the politics of the commons constituted by the coexistence of different and contradictory classes. Secondly, it helps to reinterpret the public as a struggle for using public resources rather than the mere bureaucracy. Inasmuch as capitalism exists, social services like water, health, and education cannot be sustained with good quality and free for the benefit of society without public resources. For example, anarchist groups active in the neighborhood assembly tried to establish a school in Sants, Barcelona, to be run by citizens' own means and rejecting public resources. And yet, for the workers and the poor who continued to endure tax cuts from their salaries, this was less an anticapitalist practice than an economic burden. As a result, serious discussions occurred within the movement (Subirats, 2017). In the Cochabamba example, the poor were obliged to provide water services on their own because the state did not deliver the necessary services. As Can İrmak Özinanır emphasizes in his article in this book, the ongoing struggle outside the production area is bound to isolate itself unless it manages to unite with the workers inside. The inclusion of hundreds of thousands of education workers as well as thousands of water services workers cannot simply be accomplished by a movement merely based its own autonomous practices. At this point, the use of public resources is an area of class struggle. In addition, autonomy from state administration can only be possible through a politics of the commons that ensures the inclusion of laborers of the area of struggle. Otherwise, it is not possible to go beyond a local-scale resistance.

What makes the water issue distinctive is that water has more local boundaries than other ecological resources. For this reason, local struggles can achieve success as they manage to organize themselves. On the other hand, because the most



prominent interlocutor of the demand for the right to water is the municipalities, this situation facilitates the dissemination of the idea of municipalism within the politics of the commons. However, as autonomies or municipalities claiming to create an alternative against global capitalism, they can morph into somewhat sheltered islets in time, isolated from social movements. The limitations of a United Cities global network of radical left municipalities parallel to capitalist states proposed by Subirats are demonstrated by the case of Barcelona, particularly while states with highly centralized military and legal apparatuses continue to exist. It is important to remember, however, that Barcelona was able to organize the strongest resistance against the harsh intervention of the Spanish State during the independence referendum held in Catalonia. The assemblies of the Barcelona in Common movement made it possible to mobilize tens of thousands of people and organize a referendum from below. However, the central administration dismissed the prime minister of the autonomous region of Catalonia, limiting the region's autonomy as well as sending in Barcelona police and gendarmes from other provinces. Although the Barcelona in Common movement sought to build its own policies by ignoring the state, they had no choice but to face the harsh reality during the referendum.

Breaking loose from the political space between statism and private property, the politics of the commons enables an anticapitalist alternative and a struggle from below. Unlike all other goods and services, water is the source of life; hence, it is always at the top of the agenda of social movements. The right to water has an unobjectionable legitimacy. Thus, it is now recognized as a human right even by water companies and by capitalist states as a result of struggles that have been waged so far. However, how to manage water and therefore how to ensure the right to water is an issue that is at the heart of the politics of water commons. Determining the priorities in water use inevitably appears as a struggle arising from class politics.

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# The Commons

## Experiment in Barcelona

**Luke Stobart**

In June 2017 mayors, councillors and activists from four continents joined the first international summit of new municipal politics. It is no coincidence that the event, 'Fearless Cities', took place in Barcelona or that it was organized by Barcelona en Comú, a platform set up by movement activists that runs the city government (Town Hall). Indeed the 'Comuns' (Commons<sup>1</sup>) have become a reference point for those seeking an alternative to neoliberalism and right-wing populism. This is because of their origins – mayor Ada Colau was the public face of the inspiring PAH housing movement – and the breakneck speed by which they took office – months after setting up their platform! Also they have shown that politics can be done in more participatory and innovative ways.

A number of practical changes have been made in office. In response to firms cutting energy supply to those not able to pay their abusive prices, the Town Hall<sup>2</sup> has created a public (and sustainable) energy-management corporation. Because spiralling tourism has made rents unaffordable to many residents, the Town Hall has begun to regulate this powerful sector. Colau led other mayors to pressure a conservative Spanish government into accepting many more refugees. Public procurement now favours firms that belong to the 'social economy' (including cooperatives), offer better working conditions, or employ greater numbers of women and disabled people (Blanco, Salazar, & Bianchi, 2017). Municipal facilities are being handed over to communities for self-

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<sup>1</sup> Here the Commons mean Barcelona en Comu, which won the Town Hall in the elections.

<sup>2</sup> The city government.

managed social and cultural projects (Junqué & Shea-Baird, 2018: 145). Women's services have been municipalized, and all policies are tested for their specific impact on women (Pérez, 2018: 36). Importantly for the future, mechanisms have been introduced for residents and other associations to be able to present proposals for laws at the Town Hall (after collecting a certain number of signatures). Through such measures the Commons have shown there are practical alternatives to a political system that offers only neoliberalism with different degrees of authoritarianism.

This article looks at how such positive changes came about. But it also examines the limits of three years of Commons government. The general opinion in Barcelona – as has been voiced by spokespeople for a wide range of social movements – has been that transformations have been uneven and slow<sup>3</sup>. As a result, enthusiasm for (and involvement in) the project has declined. Any serious assessment of the Commons experiment must also try and identify why this is so, which is what is attempted here.

The piece begins by identifying how grassroots social movements made the project possible. Then it looks at the theories influencing its development. Next, I provide a brief history and description of how the Commons are organized and analyse their record in office, focusing on the key areas of housing and tourism. Lastly I look at *how* their relationship with movements and the institutions has led to mixed results and ask whether other political strategies are needed.

## **The movements that made Barcelona en Comú**

Two movements have been crucial to the development and electoral success of the Commons: the PAH, which was created in Barcelona in 2009; and the radical-democratic 15-M movement (“the Indignados”), which occupied squares and held protests and mass meetings across Spain in 2011. Their importance to BeC was stated in an article by Kate Shea-Baird, a leading member of the platform and prolific writer in English on the topic. She wrote that “Barcelona en Comú” (Barcelona in Common) “is the electoral result of the PAH” and that “you can do a map of the Indignados camps and the cities that the municipalist platforms won and they are basically one to one” (2018). Both movements were crucial in developing what neo-Gramscians call “counter hegemony” against the ideas of the establishment. And the PAH provided very many of the activists that created BeC.

The Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH according to its Spanish initials) is a grassroots movement with over a hundred branches, including around thirty in the Barcelona area. It has carried out civil disobedience to block over a thousand evictions, and has forced a reduction in abusive bank practices by which failure to meet mortgage payment leads to life-long debt (as well as losing one's home).<sup>4</sup> Colau and the platform

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<sup>3</sup> This was a clear finding from a survey by an investigative journalism site sympathetic to the Commons carried out two years after BeC came to office. In a minority of cases movement spokespeople reported mainly positive evaluations, and in a minority, predominantly negative (Bellver, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> This happens when the “recovered” property is auctioned at a lower price than the original purchase price. After 2008 this meant on average a victim would owe the bank a third of the original

became cause célèbres when the PAH collected a million and a half signatures in favour of housing reform and Colau spoke at a Congress meeting where she described the bankers' representative present as "a criminal" Videos and tweets of her refusal to retract the comments went viral (Durall & Faus, 2016). The conservatives ruling at the time blocked even discussing reform, ignoring a million emails sent to MPs in its support! The issue dramatically highlighted the gap between the people and government (as well as the Socialist opposition, who argued that life-long debts were necessary for the health of the economy). Polls showed nine out of ten people supported the PAH, a proportion that hardly dipped when the PAH more controversially verbally harassed MPs and bankers responsible for the housing crisis in the street (Colau & Alemany, 2013). Colau's name was quickly put forward when from 2013 activists began to discuss standing candidates in elections because of the public respect she had earned confronting a self-serving and corrupt "political class".

But for people to turn so strongly against that class (and for the PAH to grow into a mass network) the 15-M movement was needed. This was a truly historic development as it was a radical movement that (according to surveys) one in five people had some contact with. Through discussion of a wide range of social and other grievances (many linked to the crisis, others longer term, such as corruption) the idea became crystallized that "they" (politicians and other representatives<sup>5</sup>) "do not represent us", which became 15-M's main slogan. For many participants the idea meant that we should exercise direct rather than representative democracy. As a result of this sentiment *all* political parties, including radical-left parties, were banned from the squares. As a (Catalan) Commons leader wrote at the time, however, others saw "they don't represent us" as saying the *existing* representatives did not represent us (Domènech, 2014).

It is likely that these "two souls" in the movement – the more and less radical participants (Taibo-Arias, 2012) – were later attracted to municipal politics, which promised both an electoral alternative to the established parties and participatory democracy. But before such projects were off the ground, 15-M prepared their ground by creating a crisis for their main competitor, the governing Socialists, whose support plummeted after the occupations. This would lead the main two parties' share of the vote to fall from eighty to fifty percent of the total.<sup>6</sup>

As a range of social scientists have identified, movements under crisis and austerity, such as 15-M, differed from earlier movements (for example over "global justice") in that they adopted a "majoritarian" political approach. This meant they consciously tried to involve most citizens through inclusive discourse (references to being "the 99%"), consensus decision-making (Della Porta, Masullo, & Portos, 2015: 3) and communicating through commercial social-media (e.g Facebook and Twitter; Gerbaudo, 2012). 15-M and Occupy consciously framed themselves as confronting those from "below" with those "above", rather than being "left" versus "right" (Errejón, 2011). Not dissimilarly

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price of the house for which the mortgage was awarded. The difference would be automatically taken from wages received.

<sup>5</sup> The leaders of the large unions.

<sup>6</sup> This took place even before the new left-wing party Podemos emerged as a serious competitor.



the PAH described itself as being a movement of “citizens” (even though the people losing their homes tended to be from a narrower social group, the working-class poor<sup>7</sup>).

If 15-M, which most of the population sympathized with,<sup>8</sup> brought about a tectonic cultural shift, the PAH channelled the new outrage (*indignación*) in an effective direction. But even the PAH’s victories – and those of other “horizontal” movements that developed at that time – were small compared to the scale of the rollback of social rights that was taking place at the time. Public services were being weakened and the total number of evictions would reach half a million. There was a “sense among activists” that they had hit a “glass ceiling” and “that it would become increasingly difficult to sustain the level of mobilization” taking place (Castro, 2018: 186). This feeling was perhaps inevitable due to the absence of a powerful strike movement that could stop the government and the powerful forces, including the EU, standing behind it.

In 2013 many activists who until then had zealously defended their movements, remaining autonomous from parties and the institutions, appeared to do a 180-degree turn, now discussing standing in elections and “taking the institutions”,<sup>9</sup> and in some (impressive) cases studying and writing on municipalism in history (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014). One of the first new initiatives created was the platform *Guanyem Barcelona* (Let’s Win Barcelona, later renamed *Barcelona en Comú*), which involved large numbers of people in meetings and on-line voting. This way of organising and the organization’s very name reflected the majoritarian and democratic nature of the Squares.

## Common theories

While the movements shaping the “new politics”, the ideas of individuals and already existing organizations have played an important role as well. There is no single theory behind BeC, which is a fairly heterodox project, but there are some political ideas that have left an imprint. One of these, as I shall show, is *feminism*, which has been a notable feature of the radical social movements since the 1990s in the form of both specific feminist spaces and as an approach adopted by broader spaces (such as the squatters or radical pro-independence movements; García-Grenzner, 2018). And it is a movement that has risen while others have subsided: firstly it confronted abortion restrictions (in 2013-14), and secondly held an historic women’s strike (this year).<sup>10</sup>

Yet the two ideas that most shaped the creation and development of the ‘Comuns’ are those of “proximity” and “the commons”. For BeC, “[t]he proximity of municipal

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<sup>7</sup> Rodríguez-López, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> [https://elpais.com/politica/2012/05/19/actualidad/1337451774\\_232068.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2012/05/19/actualidad/1337451774_232068.html)

<sup>9</sup> It is also possible that for some autonomous movement activists, organising in party-free spaces was about ensuring that the movement only acted according to its own interests but that change was still expected to come through a partially responsive political class, which has become less and less the case, particularly in the austerity period.

<sup>10</sup> The central role of the feminist movement in current struggles is given a fascinating analysis by The Fundación de los Comunes (2018).

governments to the people makes them the best opportunity we have to take the change from the streets to the institutions” (Barcelona en Comú, 2016). Radical municipalists have insisted that this requires creating local “sites of direct decision-making” by people (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014: 143) and reversing “the logic of representative democracy” (Castro, 2018: 187), a view that echoes the writings of the US libertarian Murray Bookchin (Bookchin, D., 2018) as well the radical view in the Squares. Sometimes this idea is tied in with seeing *the city* as the privileged arena of struggle and transformation, as defended by the Marxist urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, because it is inevitably the site of dispossession, gentrification, cultural battles and an agglomeration of people. A central role for the city was attributed by a mayoral aide from Galicia (north-eastern Spain) participating in Fearless Cities who wrote that an “archipelago” of “rebel cities” was “democracy’s best hope”. For him this is because “traditional political institutions have lost power along with nation-states” (Martínez, 2018: 23-25).

The name “Barcelona in Common” reflects another important strategic idea in the new municipalism: the fight for *the commons*. The concept had become important over the previous decade in the milieu from which the organization developed. Yet there are different interpretations of what the term should mean. This was clear in an interesting debate between one of the key intellectuals in BeC, Joan Subirats, and the young sociologist Cesar Rendueles. For both, the Commons approach rejected both neoliberalism and statist “socialism” in favour of seeking collective ownership and running of “public goods”. It takes its name from the cooperative farming of common land in the pre-industrial period, which gave people the right to use such land but also the obligation to use it carefully. For Rendueles creating the commons made sense if these reclaimed spaces were used to help material (class) conflicts in society (which they could do by creating strong cooperative networks and introducing a basic income; Subirats & Rendueles, 2016: 11-12). Subirats, however, puts the emphasis on “the commons” being a “promising and exciting term” that could overcome the lack of appeal of politics at the nation-state level (which, like Martínez, he puts down to the impotence of the nation-state today; Subirats & Rendueles, 2016: 13). Put together with the nostalgia he demonstrates toward post-war European social-democracy (for being less unequal and thus “avoiding conflicts”; Subirats & Rendueles, 2016: 42), this approach could be seen as an example of what Shea Baird describes as municipalism “by necessity” (2018), which here seems to be little more than regenerating traditional social democracy from a local base. Rendueles, therefore, is probably right to suggest that the “vagueness” of the “commons” concept, as well as its popularity, is leading it to be interpreted in different ways (Subirats & Rendueles, 2016: 11). In the Comuns project both radical and social-democratic approaches to the commons would play a role.

## **Taking a town hall**

The process of creating the municipal platform in Barcelona was impressive on many levels, as it was in many other Spanish municipalities. Between June 2014 and May 2015 many thousands of city residents participated in some kind of democratic exercise. At

the platform's presentation in Central Barcelona there was an exciting militant atmosphere (with talk of going from "occupying the Squares", to "occupying the Town Halls"). It was striking how most speakers, including those from the floor, were activists in the PAH or residents' movements. Among the 2000 people present there were many from the 15-M generation as well as older people. Colau announced that Guanyem Barcelona would stand in the 2015 elections if they successfully collected 30,000 signatures in three months (which was reached). Other organizations and individuals were encouraged to join the project.

In its public events Guanyem aimed to involve people "to prove that there are other ways of doing politics" (Barcelona en Comú, 2016). Well-attended meetings in neighborhoods were held to present Guanyem's basic ideas but also to find out about local realities, discuss doubts, collect contributions and (in the organization's words) "ask ourselves what is needed to win in Clot, Sants, Nou Barris, etc.?", referring to the local issues in different neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup> Later "citizens demands" would be identified for each local area.

In the autumn a code of ethics was discussed, including in open meetings, and adopted. It included the requirement of limited and revocable mandates for representatives and for them "to make public their agendas and all their income sources, wealth and capital gains". The organization also had to make its revenue and spending public (Castro, 2018: 195; Barcelona en Comú, 2016). Also the organization choose to fund itself without taking loans from banks (Barcelona en Comú, 2016). This was because banks have used loan repayment as a lever to influence the policies of the traditional parties (Colau & Alemany, 2013: 9). Hundreds of volunteers ran a campaign that raised 90,000 euros through crowdfunding, which was more than doubled though small donations (Junqué and Shea-Baird, 2018: 65). The 'Comuns' are understandably proud of these measures and their implementation.

The process to create the election programme was also inspiring. It was developed over many months in 2014 and 2015 through sectorial commissions holding meetings to discuss proposals and gather expert knowledge. On-line consultation was also used. In February the programme was presented. According to the platform, 5,000 people had been involved in twenty neighborhood groups. They put forward 2,500 measures<sup>12</sup> and prioritized forty. The programme presented later (in April 2015) stood out as detailed and well-informed and conveyed the "collective intelligence" through which it was built (Barcelona en Comú, 2015b).

A more controversial aspect of the project was its progressive "convergence" with other political forces. Negotiations with these were held early on and then evaluated (with the content of negotiations made public, Barcelona en Comú, 2016). The eventual result was the inclusion in the platform of the Barcelona branches of the Euro-Communist ICV-Verds, Podemos, and smaller parties and citizens' movements. The incorporation

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<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es/como-hemos-llegado-hasta-aqui>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/politica/Barcelona-Comu-presenta-ciudad-democratica\\_0\\_381462113.html](https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/politica/Barcelona-Comu-presenta-ciudad-democratica_0_381462113.html)

of ICV-Verds was particularly significant. They had been junior partners in city and Catalan administrations and were in part responsible for a city model that since the preparations for the 1992 Olympics, had been obsessed with attracting tourists and capital. Also an ICV leader became hated after his ministry in the Catalan government badly repressed students and other groups. By including ICV, Guanyem precluded reaching agreements with the other interesting municipalist project: the anti-capitalist and pro-independence CUP. This at the time had 101 councillors and around 20,000 activist members in Catalonia. ICV, which already had municipal seats, would provide BeC with additional funds (a partial exception to Guanyem's funding ethics), as well as institutional experience, which later would help increase ICV's influence in the different Commons projects.

The alliance between the different organizations was not simply a coalition. Indeed the term "convergence" ("confluència") was preferred in the processes of regroupment that took place at the time across the Spanish state.<sup>13</sup> This preference was, first, because the final forms of alliance "went beyond established political identities" (Rubio-Pueyo, 2017). But secondly, and more importantly, when choosing election candidates and coordinators, most of the new platforms used open or semi-open systems of voting. Barcelona en Comú used a relatively closed system, where a slate of candidates was put to a vote,<sup>14</sup> and this (it seems) was the result of negotiations between the different parties and organizations in the new platform.<sup>15</sup> Some descriptions of the new municipalism suggest that its desire to include parties to the left of the Socialists was a sign of "15-M inclusivity". But 15-M rejected including all parties, including the Communists, and the new convergence is probably best seen as expressing the view of the more moderate wing of the movement (or simply as a shift rightwards).<sup>16</sup> And the Commons went further in this direction when, a year into government, they temporarily formed a new coalition with the Socialists and incorporated four of its councillors into the municipal government.<sup>17</sup>

Five months before the elections, and despite the name Guanyem Barcelona having become known by many, the platform was blocked from standing when a fake party officially registered the name. This ensured that the face and name of Ada Colau would dominate the campaign (rather than the new name Barcelona en Comú). In February BeC presented its "emergency plan", which called for creating decent jobs, guaranteeing basic social rights, reviewing privatizations and projects contrary to the common good and a financial audit of the institutions (Barcelona en Comú, 2015a). The campaign

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<sup>13</sup> "The Spanish state" is often used by leftists, particularly in the Basque Country and Catalonia, to describe Spain. It is preferred because it avoids treating "Spain" as simply another nation state.

<sup>14</sup> Only those in charge of districts were elected through primaries.

<sup>15</sup> In a video diary Colau complained that the negotiations to incorporate left parties and movements in BeC were "a big blow" because instead of these wishing to cooperate over common objectives, they fought over their "share of power" (Durall & Faus, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> The initiators of Guanyem Barcelona/BeC tend to be from activist generations earlier than 15-M. Some Guanyem Barcelona spokespeople, including Colau and Subirats, already had close relationships with ICV-Verds.

<sup>17</sup> This change was supposedly in order for policies to be passed more easily but, predictably, it led to policies being softened and even abandoned.

around this had a real buzz apart from when Ada Colau spoke before stony-faced businesspeople, as shown in the documentary *Ada for Mayor* (Durall & Faus, 2016). The day of the elections, 24 May 2015, was a historic day for Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain. Several new platforms ended up governing big cities. BeC won the highest amount of votes and 11 seats (with the CUP winning a further three). This was out of 41 seats, making it a very minority government and constrained in its possible actions, but the result was still stunning!

## How Barcelona en Comú is organized

The Comuns insist that the *how* in politics is as important as the *what*, and that the way their organization should operate should reflect the kind of society it wishes to bring about. Therefore I shall begin my examination of the platform's record by providing a short description and assessment of how BeC is organized and decisions are made. The first notable way by which their political objectives influence their way of doing politics is through "feminization" of the organization. Most visibly BeC has produced the first female mayor of Barcelona and a municipal team of whom 60 per cent are women, and 50 per cent of all BeC coordinators must be female (Pérez, 2018: 34; Castro, 2018: 192). Mechanisms against gender inequality are applied in the organization's processes: meetings are held at the times most compatible with childcare, and contributions in them are kept short (to avoid men talking more and dominating decision making) and must alternate between women and men to guarantee that women participate at least 50 per cent of the time (Pérez, 2018: 34-35).

Despite the abundance of writing on the BeC method and structures, it is not always easy to identify exactly how they work in practice (and whether they live up to the claims made about them). The organization's current structure was formalized in a plenary soon after winning office and separates its institutional and political platform spaces. This gave greater autonomy to the organisation from the municipal group but also gave more independence to elected representatives! The institutional section is organized around the municipal group and district heads and these have gained greater weight in the whole project over time, which has led to some tensions and criticisms.

On the "non-government" side the "coordinating team" ("coordinadora") is normally presented as being the key body. It includes forty representatives of which four are from the municipal group but many more from neighborhood assemblies (allowing it to act a "bridge" between the city and districts). It also contains an eight-member executive team responsible for implementing coordinadora decisions. Some observers believe that this team is the effective leadership within the platform (and it also has close links with the municipal team). BeC itself says it has the "responsibility of laying down the organisation's political strategy"<sup>18</sup> (but that so too does an elected "political council" of 150 members).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es/organigrama>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

There is broad involvement in BeC, for example plenaries are held every two or three months, in which the 1,500 people “active” in the organisation can participate,<sup>20</sup> On-line political consultations also take place. However, again, it is clear that things are not as horizontal as they seem (something suggested by the Comuns when they claim to combine “effectiveness” with “horizontality” in their organisational model; Barcelona en Comú, 2016). Even by BeC’s own accounts key political discussion takes place only where people have been elected to bodies.<sup>21</sup> And from the start the systems applied to voting on electoral lists and key bodies were of the “slate” kind that encouraged least proportionality and plurality<sup>22</sup> (Castro, 2018: 197).<sup>23</sup> The result has been a system that encourages bargaining behind closed doors and therefore disempowers the base. It is worth noting that some radical municipalists maintain that BeC was among the most top-down of the new municipal projects (Rodríguez-López, 2016). On the other hand, in office BeC has taken steps to increase the relative power of the movements compared to the political system: for instance introducing mechanisms by which social movements and residents’ associations can present a ‘Popular Legislative Initiative’ to effect policy change.

## Mixed results in office

A year after taking office around half of the measures in BeC’s Emergency Plan (for their first months in government) had been implemented successfully (Corominas, Moreno, Riera, & Romero, 2016). This has meant a great many positive transformations of the kind described at the beginning of this article. It also showed that many central changes promised were not materialising. There have been mixed results in relation to immigration. Anti-racists celebrated when the Town Hall closed a detention centre of the kind Colau described as “worse than prisons” and “racist”, because they “discriminate against people because of their origins” (Colau & Stobart, 2018). But because of the Town Hall’s limited powers in this policy area, this was done by means of a formality (the centre’s lack of a local operating licence); and central government predictably re-opened the centre, making the protest only symbolic. The Colau administration’s support for the pro-refugee movement is also welcome (although some pro-asylum activists have been less impressed by the institution’s commitment to their struggle once the issue stopped being major news<sup>24</sup>).

But during a Town Hall event in solidarity with refugees Colau and her Deputy were heckled by African migrants and supporters. The migrants were undocumented street

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> This is something I saw for myself when I attended a member’s plenary in January 2018. Despite only being a month into Madrid’s suspension of Catalan autonomy and the imprisonment of several Catalan leaders (for organising a mass referendum on independence) the only political issue discussed was the following year’s elections!

<sup>22</sup> However, Comuns leaders were included in slates of members from different participating movements and parties.

<sup>23</sup> The processes of choosing candidates in Galicia and Madrid have been held up as much more democratic (Rodríguez-López, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> This was made clear to me in conversations with anti-racist activists and is suggested by a migrant-rights campaigner in the Crític survey (Corominas, Moreno, Riera, & Romero, 2016).



vendors that, despite the change in local government, have continued to be harassed and abused by the municipal police, the Urban Guard, as well as other forces. Faced with this situation the mainly Senegalese migrants formed an impressive Union of Street Vendors, whose demands include having safe spaces and the Town Hall putting pressure on the central state to regularize migrants. Police pressure on migrants does seem to have relaxed but this may be linked to the riot that took place in Madrid in March after a member of the same union died during a police chase (under a Commons-type administration!). Jesús Rodríguez, a respected alternative journalist, told me he thought the Town Hall has not wanted to take on the Urban Guard (Rodríguez & Stobart, 2018), whose management and union made several protests about serving under Colau at the beginning of her mandate. These included their chief resigning, and complaining about her law-breaking in the PAH.<sup>25</sup> Rodríguez added that BeC also felt pressure because migrant street vending is an issue over which the media, opposition forces and many local traders are united in their opposition (Rodríguez & Stobart, 2018). When the Town Hall created a work cooperative helping 15 migrants abandon street vending and increase their chance of obtaining residence papers, the union understandably rejected the initiative as tokenistic. The street-vending issue has been a notable source of tension between social movement activists in general and the municipal administration.

## Housing and tourism

In recent years rents in Barcelona have rocketed (for example by 17 per cent between 2014 and 2016; Castro, 2018: 199), and in some neighborhoods tenants spend 60 per cent of their incomes on rent. This situation has developed thanks to laws reducing lengths of tenancy agreements, and the contrast between increased demand and reduced supply of rented property.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, supply of rented property has decreased because home rental to tourists (through Airbnb) has also rocketed to become a considerable source of income for many locals. Other locals are getting priced out of living in the city. And added resentment is caused because neighborhoods are being transformed to cater for the tastes and pockets of tourists rather than local people. This situation has led to the emergence of both a new Tenants' Union and an Assembly of Neighborhoods for Sustainable Tourism (ABTS).

Because of BeC's links with the PAH and urban movements, there were many expectations that it would tackle the "double and interrelated" rent and tourism bubbles (Castro, 2018: 198). And important steps have been made in this direction. In 2016 the Colau government forced Airbnb to stop advertising unlicensed apartments that totalled 40 per cent of apartments included on the platform. This was by fining the company 600,000 euros.<sup>27</sup> It has suspended giving licenses to new pubs, restaurants and discos in tourist areas (Blanco, Salazar, & Bianchi, 2017). In 2017 the Town Hall passed

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<sup>25</sup> [https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/relacion-Guardia-Urbana-Colau-claves\\_0\\_401760803.html](https://www.eldiario.es/catalunya/relacion-Guardia-Urbana-Colau-claves_0_401760803.html)

<sup>26</sup> A factor in this is that since the post-2008 wave of evictions, banks are more cautious about giving out mortgages and citizens are more cautious about taking them out (Bellver, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/02/airbnb-faces-crackdown-on-illegal-apartment-rentals-in-barcelona>

a Special Tourist Accommodation Plan (PEUAT), which introduced a non-growth and redistribution policy for accommodation used for tourism (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). These measures, however limited, have been introduced despite hundreds of legal appeals against them; appeals that have been supported by city lobbies, the media and the large opposition parties. They also encountered internal resistance from the Socialists when this party shared government with BeC.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that leading BeC members recognize such initiatives were made easier by the active protests of the ABTS and related movements in the neighborhoods (which, for example, helped overcome opposition to change from other parties in the Town Hall; Junqué and Shea-Baird, 2018: 133-134).

Positive steps also have been taken in the area of housing. A mediation unit now intervenes in almost all cases where evictions are announced. The Town Hall has introduced rules to ensure tenants keep their homes after municipal interventions, and investment in housing has quadrupled (albeit from a very low level; Barcelona en Comú, 2018). In June the Town Hall agreed to compel firms constructing new buildings or doing substantial renovation to devote 30 per cent of the property to social housing.<sup>29</sup>

The incorporation of large numbers of housing and urban activists in the Commons project decapitated and depleted the relevant movements. But in Barcelona both movements have regenerated. This is partly because, as one municipalist writes:

“the paradox is that after two years of...a government that emerged from social movements, the housing crisis is possibly worse than ever” (Castro, 2018: 200).

And despite all the mediation, evictions continue on a mass scale, at an average of 10 per day last year (Bellver, 2017).

Moreover, the movements have sometimes expressed their disappointment regarding the Town Hall’s progress in making real change. The PAH celebrated the Colau government’s announcement that banks would be fined if they kept houses empty and, more specifically, that the “bad bank” (Sareb<sup>30</sup>) should hand over 400 empty units. But PAH then publicly complained about the slow and inadequate enforcement of these policies.<sup>31</sup> For example in 2017 a movement spokesperson denounced the fact that only four fines had been given to banks despite 2000 flats remaining empty (Bellver, 2017).

Movement leaders argue the need for much more radical changes than have been contemplated, including large-scale public investment to expand the public housing

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20171113/los-sectores-economicos-de-bcn-temen-una-fase-de-paralisis-por-la-soledad-de-colau-6421146>. The agreement with the Socialists (PSC) was broken after this party supported suspending Catalan self-government during the crisis over the referendum. However, already there were big disagreements between the PSC and BComú on different issues.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20180618/acuerdo-vivienda-social-barcelona-6884056>

<sup>30</sup> The Sareb was created by the Spanish government to manage the assets of nationalized banks.

<sup>31</sup> <https://pahbarcelona.org/es/2015/12/01/carta-de-la-pah-a-ada-colau-alcaldessa-de-barcelona/>

stock. (This currently is at an extremely low one per cent of total housing; Castro, 2018: 200.) But the new municipal politics in Catalonia and Spain, including some of its more left-wing versions, tends to rule out big increases in spending that would contravene the municipal deficit limits imposed by central government during the crisis.<sup>32</sup> The only big Town Hall of Change that has openly challenged the law was Madrid, whose finance councillor presented a much-increased budget. Yet after months of pressure from the finance minister, the councillor was sacked and budget controls accepted, which created major division in the municipal team.

## Why the limitations?

In response to criticisms over progress, Commons representatives talk of the need for the project to “manage people’s expectations” (see Gala Pin in Bellver, 2017). But the fact is that while Colau and her comrades warned that change would not be straightforward, they themselves encouraged these expectations. Even a few years into office aspects of the Emergency Plan, including transforming work and the economy, have not been fulfilled. Previous administrations have failed to fulfill promises, but BeC stated explicitly it would never do this.

The limitations to progress are explained by the Commons as owing to factors beyond their control. And, yes, governing as a minority and requiring the votes of socio-liberal forces (whether Socialists or the pro-independence ERC) to pass policies does make change difficult. The Commons have been subjected to legal and economic threats on numerous occasions, including for wanting to hold a “multi-referendum” asking residents if they wish to remunicipalize water. Such reactions could be seen as a low-intensity war. When the Commons have made positive changes, a universally hostile media has failed to report on them adequately.

But the political strategy BeC has adopted has made it harder to overcome obstacles. Critics of BeC argue that the Town Hall is too obsessed with its popularity (or polling<sup>33</sup>), and is therefore, for instance, more concerned by the opinion of voting traders than non-voting African migrants. This then leads to excessive pragmatism vis-à-vis other political formations. As well as incorporating parties with little interest in doing politics from below, it even ended up governing with the party most responsible for Barcelona’s urban rifts.

In her campaigning and writing (also with Adrià Alemany, another influential figure in BeC) Colau showed a strong understanding of the way finance exercises its power in politics and society (Colau & Alemany, 2013). She warned that this would mean a backlash against a Commons government. But the Commons seem to have been less clear about the ease with which municipal institutions can be wielded as emancipatory tools (in other words how easy it would be to implement the commons through them).

<sup>32</sup> The conservative Finance Minister (Montoro) introduced the measure as part of a combined austerity and territorial re-centralisation strategy.

<sup>33</sup> This argument was made by the then-Deputy Mayor of Badalona in an interview (Télez & Stobart, 2017).

Issues such as the re-opening of the detention centre have shown that local government has much less power than institutions at higher territorial levels. For all the municipalist talk of the weakened nation state it has been central government that has been key to holding back municipal autonomy, in particular through fiscal discipline. This has even led to the depressing situation where new Town Halls boast having “balanced the books” better than the conservative central government<sup>34</sup> (Fundación de los Comunes, 2018).

It is possible that some realization of the *limits* of the local is what led Barcelona en Comú to intervene at a Spanish and later Catalan territorial level through similar political convergence to that achieved in Barcelona. But in the process the organization demonstrated something that was increasingly noticeable locally: that a project based on democracy and proximity was giving way to a more traditional left reformism. To be fair, Colau, Shea Baird and leading BeC members often imply they are not fully convinced about having moved the Commons beyond the municipal sphere,<sup>35</sup> and the Fearless Cities project could very well be an attempt to overcome the limitations of the local without abandoning the original commons approach.

Questions must also be raised about how much the Commons understood the nature of the institutions and party politics when they decided to enter both. The rationale behind the adoption of an ethical code for representatives (and the impressive effort put into it) was to “end the privilege that has led political representatives to be out of touch with ordinary citizens” (Barcelona en Comú, 2016). And Colau and Alemany wrote that parties become “hostages” to corporations by depending on corporate donations to fund their campaigns (Colau & Alemany, 2013: 9). There is degree of truth in both assertions but there is much more to the failure of institutional politics. Here is not the place for a detailed analysis of the role of the institutions under capitalism, suffice to say that both their non-elected administrators (police chiefs, civil servants...) and central function (arbitrating between individuals, including competing capitalists) actually makes them part and parcel of capitalism and the class system. This means that if a government is elected that tries to break with either, pressure can be exerted from both the outside<sup>36</sup> and the inside of the institution (as we have seen in the case of the Barcelona police).

Indeed the Commons reveal a utopian view of the institutions in their slogan to “take back” the institutions. This begs the question of when were the institutions *ours*? Subirats reminisces about a golden (social-democratic) age that hardly existed in Spain (thanks to forty years of far right dictatorship, followed by Socialist governments that quickly embraced neoliberalism). And even in northwestern Europe the post-war experiment in redistribution and welfare-state capitalism is probably best seen as *an anomaly* (fed

<sup>34</sup> Europe seems to have allowed Rajoy and his ministers to do this to avoid further social and political unrest that could bring about a left-wing government in Spain (at a time when Europe was trying to subdue and isolate the Syriza government in Greece).

<sup>35</sup> It is notable, for example, how invisible the Catalan Comuns (Catalunya en Comú) project is in the political writing of BeC leaders.

<sup>36</sup> Including by the actors Gramsci included in the “integral state” (or actors whose social role is in relation to capitalist states and sub-states).

by an unusually long period of economic expansion), rather than the rule.

## The democratic revolution

Resistance to change can come from powerful quarters: central government, large multinationals, municipal bureaucracies, etc. But it can be countered through the municipal institutions if there are movements outside also pushing for change. We gained a glimpse of this when the assemblies for sustainable tourism helped the Commons regulate tourist accommodation. But movements sometimes take complex forms and political leaderships can help them go forwards or *backwards*. In this regard one of the biggest mistakes made yet by the Commons has been over the Catalan independence referendum. The problem was not that the organization has an “ambivalent” attitude to independence (Shea-Baird, 2016), as many people who joined the protests over the referendum do. Rather it is that when a mass movement for national independence morphs into a broader and more radical struggle for democracy, the success or failure of this attempt will likely shape all other attempts at political transformation. This is exactly what happened in the autumn last year with Barcelona as its hub.

After a major spontaneous revolt began on 20 September in response to police raids and arrests at Catalan government buildings, the seriousness of the conflict became apparent to the world (Stobart, 2017). The Rajoy government was completely against allowing a “legal” referendum and therefore the only way to exercise the right to decide over independence (a right that BeC formally supported) was through a unilateral referendum, as was called by the Catalan parliament. But even while neighborhood assemblies organized across Catalonia to occupy polling stations (and ensure they were not closed by police), the Barcelona government refused to recognize the referendum (or prevented municipal facilities from being used for the vote). The mass mobilization on the day of the referendum (which BeC did support) and the improvised general strike two days later (Stobart, 2018b) was arguably the closest thing yet to the “democratic revolution” that the Commons said they stood for. Yet Colau and the Commons continued to be “equidistant”, spending the coming weeks blaming the Catalan as much as the Spanish government for the repression that took place.

Colau justified not treating the referendum as binding by saying she represented the whole of Barcelona and that the city was divided over the matter. A great many Catalans saw this as motivated by BeC having strong electoral support in neighborhoods mainly opposed to independence. But the problem was also strategic. Colau knew that no other referendum was possible under Rajoy. So effectively she was saying she could not align herself with the section of the population defending self-determination, which she herself had always defended, because she had to represent the section of the population that did not. This reminded me of the British Marxist Chris Harman’s observation in the 1960s that social-democratic parties (opportunistically) fail to defend the ideas of the most progressive section of the working class because they seek to represent the *whole* of the working class, including its less conscious sections (Harman, 1968-1969). By sitting on the fence during the Catalan crisis, the Commons

has distanced itself from a movement that has created new forms of counter-power in the neighborhoods, particularly working-class ones (Stobart, 2018a).<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to imagine how this helps a genuine commons project.

The conclusion I would reach from the analysis offered throughout this article is *not* to stop intervening in the institutions. But the question must be asked as to how such an intervention is best done to achieve emancipatory results. Should we always aim to “win”? Or should we see the institutions as enemy territory in which representatives can only act as “Trojan horses for the movements” (i.e. mouthpieces for a more important struggle outside)? The latter strategy was that of the first CUP MPs in the Catalan parliament and I believe deserves more attention.

All the same I believe we can learn many positive lessons from BeC. Its road to the Town Hall was really impressive on lots of levels. And its victory greatly lifted those fighting for a better city and world, and demoralized our opponents. Many positive changes have been made since, despite all the limitations. The Commons have demonstrated on numerous occasions that there are better, more-democratic and more egalitarian ways of organising politically than those of the traditional left. In Barcelona Town Hall the Commons have disorganized those parties that use the institutions to disorganize our side. Only a sectarian would not celebrate those achievements.

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<sup>37</sup> It probably also has unintentionally facilitated the growth in Spanish nationalism that has taken place since last year (which benefits from being able to present the struggle for self-determination as being only by nationalists and elites), while making it harder to push that struggle in a (needed) left-wing direction.



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