**Dedicated to the memory of Sandra Morgen
(1950–2016)**

Photograph courtesy of Robert Hill Long

We would like to dedicate this theme section on the commons to Sandra Morgen, who knew she would not live to see her article appear. Sandi fought for welfare rights, women's health, and many other causes. She worked for social justice all her life, and her career was a model of engaged anthropology.

THEME SECTION

Introduction

For or against commoning?

Ida Susser

Abstract: It seems crucial to research the transformative aspects of progressive grassroots movements in the face of the troubling turn to the right in elections in the United States and parts of Europe. This theme section considers “commoning” as one way to understand the emergence of social movements in Europe and the United States. The articles analyze different protests from housing movements, to anti-antiblack insurgency, redefinitions of the tax code, and the squares movement. The articles consider how movements around the urban commons change over time, differ from more traditional social movements, and address or emerge from the specifics of contemporary regimes. The aim is to develop a theoretical perspective on commoning, which will provide a framework for comparison across societies at this juncture.

Keywords: cities, commons, inequality, politics, social movements

In the current conjuncture and the international move toward right-wing governments facilitating corporate rapacity, common resources are ever more at risk for accumulation by dispossession, to use David Harvey’s (2012) term. Here we claim that these processes are contested by commoning, among other political strategies (De Angelis and Stavrides 2010; Kalb 2014a; Nonini 2007; Stavrides 2015; Susser 2006, 2016; Susser and Tonnelat 2013). In using the active verb “commoning,” we highlight the ongoing contestation for the commons (De Angelis and Stavrides 2010). In the current era, when right-wing regimes control the United States, the

United Kingdom, and many parts of Europe, it becomes ever more crucial to understand the possibilities for social justice in a democratic setting. We see commoning as one long-term effort to reorient discourse and practice in terms of a public good and the redistribution of shared resources toward a more equal world.

The concept of commoning raises challenges of openness, the incorporation of multiple groups, and even possibly a risk of veering toward nationalism, which we hope to interrogate in these articles. However, we see commoning as a grassroots project to build a new form of consensus that highlights the importance of shar-

ing, economic security, and horizontalism across thresholds of difference. Although the process of commoning may help to build a new political bloc, in Antonio Gramsci's (1971) terms, the participants involved have often refused to claim specific political goals and rather see themselves as transforming social relations from the bottom up.

Ideas of the commons and commoning seem to closely reflect many transformative efforts but also raise the possibility of an exclusive and closed corporate community. We look at images of the "public good" such as in taxes or affordable housing and explore the ways in which these can be promoted as part of a closed or open view of the state. We also examine the dividing lines of race and immigration and how these can distort commoning or how commoning can open up new visions of cooperation across these historic divides.

Commoning and the battle for the urban commons can be seen as global. The long-term history of housing movements in Latin America and the squares movements in the Middle East have been considered in terms of the commons and need further exploration. However, in the understanding that both national and regional contexts as well as the relationship of each nation to global capital are crucial to analysis, the articles focus on Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, while drawing on European traditions of the commons, we need to continuously recognize the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and multiple forms of racism that crosscut these historic centers of capital today.

The category of "the West," which would describe the nations included in this theme section, no longer seems appropriate. Capital investment in industry has relocated from the older industrial centers, China and Russia have risen as sources of imperial capital, and the European Union has merged East and West within Europe. The scales and definitions of space are changing as evidenced also in Brexit and elsewhere. However, shared conditions of global placement remain significant for nations in the

old centers of capital, which, alongside other growing centers and changed boundaries, now serve as centers of financialization (Kalb 2014b; Schneider and Susser 2003; Smith 2011). Similar characteristics include a long history of imperialism in different eras, inclusion in industrial capitalism, the emergence of a working class, and the development of variations of the welfare state. Since the 1980s, these nations have seen the implementation of neoliberal policies that involved the speeding up of space and time, informational technology, the exportation of industrial investment, the decline of the welfare state to various degrees, increasing inequality, and continuous external wars around resources and borders (Harvey 2005; Schneider and Susser 2003).

The construction of such neoliberal regimes has led to questions with respect to the restructuring of the working class, the decline of unions, an influx of immigrants as a consequence of the record of imperialism, and refugees precipitated by the state of continuous war (Kasmir and Carbonella 2014; Susser 2011). Assaults on the general public, associated with the continuing wars, have been accompanied by new forms of securitization and surveillance and the governance strategy of a "War on Terror." Such declining conditions for the majority of the population, especially since the economic crisis of 2008 combined with a massive influx of immigration and refugees, have been exploited by right-wing demagogues and led to the increasing respectability of the National Front in France and similar parties in many previously progressive democracies (Kalb and Halmai 2011; Maskovsky and Susser 2009). It is under these shared conditions that we examine the rise of movements to protect the commons among nations that served and may still serve as the centers of Western capital. The battle for the urban commons is being fought in cities where progressive forms of democracy and the welfare state are under attack, new class compromises are currently being negotiated, racism and anti-immigrant parties are influential, gender is

contested, and surveillance is being practiced through ever more inventive technology.

Articles in this section address commoning from a number of perspectives. Each of them takes on different aspects of resistance to current capitalist regimes, through housing movements, in anti-antiblack insurgency, redefinitions of the tax code, and generally in the squares movement. At the same time, we are careful to avoid the romanticization of the idea of the commons. While social historians can look back and document a commons that functioned in seventeenth-century Britain (Linebaugh 2008), or the earlier struggles to maintain a moral economy in the face of the commodification of bread in rural markets (Susser 2016; Thompson 1964), or how women shared care work (Federici 2012), it is much harder to understand the commons in the face of the divisive challenges of today among new and contested ideas of class, race, gender, and nation. This theme section represents an opening foray to provide a framework to describe contemporary movements for the urban commons that take into account the current conflicts.

In talking about the urban commons, the articles are primarily referring to the three urban commons comprised of (1) production and social reproduction, (2) collective use of public space, and (3) collective spheres of creative expression (Lefebvre 2003; Susser 2016; Susser and Tonnelat 2013). Because of the assault on the welfare state, issues with respect to the first urban commons, which combines the questions of production and reproduction, such as those documented in Wisconsin (Collins 2012) and the tax protests discussed by Sandra Morgen and Jennifer Erickson in this issue, come to the fore. We also refer specifically to examples such as the commoning during Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in 2011 when the use and control of Zuccotti Park became the object of struggle around which a new collective identity could be forged. This movement was focused on the second urban commons, the collective use of public space. However, in the process of bringing

people together in the square, it also included organizing around the first urban commons, that of production and social reproduction. Occupy Wall Street involved union support, as well as battles over institutional services and issues of collective consumption, such as ecology. The third urban commons, creative expression, was a constant aspect of the struggle as people created new signs, language, and graphics on the ground and through the multiplying virtual spaces.

How do movements around the urban commons differ from more traditional social movements, and in what ways do they address or emerge from the specifics of contemporary neoliberal regimes? Within Europe and the United States, movements around the commons have to confront crucial issues of immigration, refugees, race and racism, and how the idea of the commons addresses internal inequalities. In my discussion of social movements in New York City, I find some shared history, goals, and even shared successes among the activists who participated in OWS, Occupy Sandy, and Black Lives Matter. In Paris, we find that the 2016 Parisian squares protest, *Nuit Debout*, was supported by an extremely strong and independent movement at Université Paris 8 in Saint-Denis, an immigrant suburb. This contingent focused specifically on questions of racism, organizing their own campus-wide occupation and panels addressing racism, autonomous but parallel to the occupation of the Place de la République. In Barcelona, the movement for affordable housing was initiated in response to early foreclosures that particularly impacted immigrant homeowners and in 2016 included Spanish homeowners as well as immigrant homeowners from Latin America and Africa.

In his article on the history of the iconic squatters' movement in Amsterdam from the 1970s to the 1990s, Don Nonini develops a theory of the urban commons that takes into account the changing role of the state, capital, and the emergence of social movements. He argues that the social movements of squatters and of the New Left within the Dutch Labor Party

from the 1970s were facilitated by and were part of the overall progressive movements of the era that transformed the state regulation of social housing to create an urban housing commons. Under the Fordist regime, keeping housing costs low for workers was a negotiated compromise with capital. In the 2000s, as financial capital became more powerful, the state regulations that had formed the basis of the urban commons came under assault, activists lost their ties to state institutions, and state support for social housing for working people was eroded.

As noted above, a central question and frequent critique of commoning movements has been in relation to the questions of the inequalities of race. Jeff Maskovsky discusses the crucial topic of race in the United States and asks whether commoning has ever or could ever address such a fundamental divide. Maskovsky describes Black Lives Matter as a separate movement directly addressing race and does not link it to commoning. Maskovsky asks whether ideas of the commons might be minimizing the inequalities of color and in some sense denying them. He raises other challenges to commoning that are also the product of the neoliberal era. He argues that the new securitization and the surveillance of the streets has made all forms of protest riskier and more constrained. However, as Maskovsky notes, people's control of new technologies, such as photo apps, can go both ways—such as the emergence of the video recording of police violence, which has been the cornerstone of the Black Lives Matter movement. As I also discuss in my article, the increased video and photo documentation by police has been incorporated into the actions of contemporary street demonstrations as activists don masks or place signs over their faces during photos and protest marches.

Sandra Morgen and Jennifer Erickson explore the concept of “fiscal citizenship” in the United States as implying a set of assumptions about citizens' contributions for the common good. Clearly, as noted above, this refers to battles under the first urban commons of production,

social reproduction, and collective consumption. There are many ways people might view taxes under capitalism. For example, during the Vietnam War, a frequent form of resistance was to see taxes as an imposition from the state for the cost of war. Nevertheless, progressive movements have largely supported the graduated income tax, viewed as an equalizing tool, contributing to the building of good government, infrastructure, social services, and common goals. Morgen and Erickson outline the ways in which groups in Oregon in the United States opposed taxes and defined themselves as autonomous privatized individuals who relied solely on the market. In their claims of autonomy, such groups ignored or failed to note how government subsidies such as mortgage tax exemptions and Medicare actually supported many of their members. Morgen and Erickson view the creation of an identity of the “responsible Oregonian taxpayer” as a response to such claims of individual autonomy and privatized concepts of the economy. They find ideas such as “the good Oregonian” to be a form of “incipient commoning” and argue that such concepts capture an understanding of paying taxes as a common investment. However, this certainly raises the question of who is included in the category “good Oregonians” and whether over time this may veer toward excluding people who do not fit, as in some of the cases of welfare nationalism in Holland, Denmark, and other parts of Europe (Kalb and Halmai 2011).

Overall, the hope is that this theme section will provide a framework for addressing a challenging political moment. The current conjuncture of right-wing politics and austerity has promoted a hegemonic discourse dominated by support for massively invigorated efforts for corporate profit through confiscation of public wealth such as clean air and water and the destruction of shared social resources including expectations for health and economic security. Ongoing and long-term struggles for the commons represent one alternative to confront these forces.

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