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Commons and citizenship: The contradictions of an unfolding relationship

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“Two social tendencies resting upon entirely heterogeneous bases thus wrestle with each other.
The old economic order asked: How can I give, on this piece of land,
work and sustenance to the greatest possible number of men?
Capitalism asks: From this piece of land how can I produce as many crops
as possible for the market with as few men as possible?
[...] Capitalism extracts produce from the land, from the mines, foundries, and machine
industries. The thousands of years of the past struggle against the invasion of the capitalist
spirit.

Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology*

“From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation,
the private property of particular individuals in the earth will appear
just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men.
Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together,
are not owners of the earth.

Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3.

This article aims at contributing to the ongoing debate about the “commons” by exploring the emancipatory potential of contemporary struggles for the defense and reclaiming of common goods in connection with the development of substantive, not merely formal, citizenship. For the sake of clarity I have organized the discussion around three main propositions:

Proposition 1: The principles of citizenship as developed in capitalist democracies tend to fall into contradiction with the principles associated with the existence of the commons.

Proposition 2: In the short and midterm the substantive, not merely formal, exercise of existing forms of citizenship may contribute towards the defense and the reclaiming of the commons.

Proposition 3: The successful defense and reclaiming of the commons at a global scale may contribute to the unfolding of new social forms that transcend the limits imposed by existing citizenship systems.

The propositions and the ensuing discussion are based on assumptions that need to be made explicit before we proceed. Firstly, although we deal here with a somewhat abstract notion of

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the “commons”,² our reflection is grounded on empirical research on one particular type of “commons”: the social and political arrangements characterizing the control and management of freshwater as a common good. Our recent work has addressed different aspects of freshwater management and governance, including the development of citizenship in relation to water control. This research informs much of our arguments in this chapter.³ For the same reason, most of the examples and references made relate to cases from Latin America, although the lessons extracted cast light on similar processes elsewhere. Secondly, although we focus on defending and reclaiming the commons as a counter hegemonic project, we are aware that not all “commons” are necessarily conducive to substantive democracy and emancipatory politics and that certain projects carried out under the banner of “managing the commons” may actually be the vehicles of primitive accumulation, further expropriation and enclosure of the commons, and thus worsening social exclusion.⁴ Thirdly, we address here “citizenship” from a sociological perspective that places more emphasis on process than status. Citizenship is, primarily, a system of inclusion-exclusion that operates on the basis of specific criteria to define the membership of individuals in a given political community, including the allocation of the members’ rights and duties. This is a highly dynamic process, as citizenship evolves over time in qualitative and quantitative terms, adopting a diversity of forms in different territories, and being characterized by ongoing contradictions between the formal status bestowed on individual citizens and the actual, substantive exercise of rights and duties allowed to them in practical terms. Summing up, we are not concerned here with the connection between citizenship and nationality or other forms of political identity, but rather focus on citizenship as a set of social relationships grounded on the recognition of mutual rights and duties among formally equal members of society, and the tensions arising from the contradictions between this abstract equality of formal status and the actual social asymmetries and inequalities characterizing real human beings.

² For a detailed treatment of the different concrete forms of “common” property regimes, see the article by BOLLIER, David in this book.

³ CASTRO, José E. (2006). *Water, Power, and Citizenship. Social Struggle in the Basin of Mexico*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave-Macmillan; CASTRO, José E. and Miguel LACABANA (2005). "Agua y desarrollo en América Latina: por una democracia sustantiva en la gestión del agua y sus servicios." *Cuadernos del Cendes* 22(59): ix-xv.

⁴ GOLDMAN, Michael (1997). "'Customs in Common': The Epistemic World of the Commons Scholars." *Theory and Society* 26(1): 1-37. Also, MCCARTHY, JAMES (2005). "Commons as counterhegemonic projects." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 16(1): 9-24.

Proposition 1: The principles of citizenship as developed in capitalist democracies tend to fall into contradiction with the principles associated with the existence of the commons.

The principles and institutions characterizing the prevailing models of citizenship are, broadly speaking, the historically-specific product of Western societies. It can be said, by analogy with Herman Heller's classical characterization of the modern nation state, that the development of modern forms of citizenship has been a process circumscribed to the "Western circle of nations".⁵ This does not mean that some of the components of modern citizenship systems cannot be found in other societies, but the point here is that the main principles and institutions that are the hallmark of currently prevailing forms of citizenship (particularly civil and political rights and duties) have been largely the result of developments in Western societies and their adaptation to, adoption by, or imposition on other societies, particularly since the eighteenth century. More importantly, it means that similarly to the case of other western concepts, "citizenship" should not be mechanically applied to other societies without carefully examining the implications.

Closely related to the previous point, the formation and expansion of modern citizenship systems is part and parcel of the development of capitalist democracy. In particular, citizenship is at the centre of the crucial contradiction between formal equality and, the actual conditions of inequality that structure capitalist democracies. As suggested long ago by T H Marshall, citizenship in capitalist democracy provides the basis of formal equality on which the structural socio-economic inequalities that characterize capitalism can be sustained.⁶ In this sense, in contemporary society the system of citizenship is instrumental to the reproduction and expansion of capitalism. This is highly relevant to our discussion, because the most formidable process of commons encroachment takes place through the expansion of capitalist forms of social organization, and particularly through the commodification process. Not only these processes are not incompatible with the prevailing forms of citizenship, but in fact the institutions of citizenship themselves may foster the colonization of the commons by capitalist forms of property and management.

From another angle, the long-term evolution of western citizenship has been characterized overall by qualitative and quantitative expansion, but this expansion has been uneven and also subject to regressive tendencies. Broadly speaking, in modern times being a citizen evolved from being a burgher (a male head of family, property owner) in medieval European cities,⁷ to becoming an individual (still male, property owner) member of a nation state towards the end of the eighteenth century with the French Revolution. Subsequently, ever more inclusive forms of (nation-state-bound) citizenship developed, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which included the formal expansion of citizenship to women and to the majority of non-property owners (still excluding large sectors of the population, often on ethnic grounds). More recently we have been witnessing the re-appearance of old and the emergence of new forms of citizenship that tend to transcend the boundaries of nation states, such as in the case of "post-national", "transnational", "cosmopolitan", "world", or "global" citizenship.⁸ Thus, in a

⁵ HELLER, Hermann (1987). *Teoría del Estado*. Mexico City, Fondo de Cultura Económica, pp. 43, 78.

⁶ MARSHALL, Thomas H. (1963). *Citizenship and social class*. *Sociology at the Crossroads and other Essays*. T. H. Marshall. London, Heinemann: 67-127.

⁷ WEBER, Max (1978). *Economy and Society*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, p. 1243.

⁸ For a summary of this debate, see for instance THEORY AND SOCIETY (1997). "Special

long-term perspective it can be said that as an overall pattern the formal membership of citizenship systems has been continuously expanded to incorporate, borrowing from Norbert Elias, “ever greater numbers” of human beings.⁹ Moreover, in more recent times debates about citizenship increasingly involve the consideration of extending the membership also to non humans, whether it is animals¹⁰ or even artificial life.¹¹

This evolution has also a qualitative dimension given that the contents of citizenship, in particular the kinds of rights and duties involved in its exercise have also evolved in width and depth. Thus, the traditional basic components of citizenship, the civil and political dimensions, were expanded during the twentieth century with the incorporation of the social dimension consolidated during the post-Second World War period. Since the last decades of the twentieth century there has been a rapid transformation of the contents of citizenship, mostly through the further specification of the meaning and scope of rights and duties, but also moving beyond classical anthropocentric concerns through the incorporation of whole new areas such as ecological,¹² green (humans as stewards of the global commons),¹³ or post-human, technological (cyborg) citizenship.¹⁴

However, this has been neither a linear nor uniform progress, and the historical development of citizenship has been rather punctuated by recurrent social struggles and has been also subject to significant setbacks where rights acquired during favorable periods have been suspended or cancelled altogether. This can be illustrated, most notably, with the cancellation of basic civil rights such as the habeas corpus by both capitalist dictatorships¹⁵ and democracies¹⁶ or by the substantial reduction and even cancellation of social rights through the neoliberal reforms implemented worldwide since the 1980s.¹⁷ Moreover, it is well established that even in the most traditional capitalist democracies the actual exercise of citizenship is highly uneven, and therefore we have to distinguish between formal and substantive citizenship as well as between the social asymmetries expressed in the actual development of different citizen hierarchies (first, second and even third class citizens, non citizens, and so on) to take these nuances into account. Class, gender, and ethnic inequalities determine that for large sectors of the population in capitalist democracies citizenship is mainly a formality that has limited impact on their daily lives.

Issue on Recasting Citizenship " Theory and Society 26(4). Also, DELANTY, Gerard (2000). Citizenship in a global age: society, culture, politics. Philadelphia, PA, Open University Press.

⁹ ELIAS, Norbert (1994). The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners, and State Formation and Civilization. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, p. 354.

¹⁰ GOODIN, Robert E., Carole PATEMAN, and Roy PATERMAN (1997). "Simian Sovereignty." Political Theory 25(6): 821-849.

¹¹ IPSOS-MORI (2006) "Robo-rights: Utopian dream or rise of the machines?", London, Office of Science and Innovation's Horizon Scanning Centre, United Kingdom Government.

¹² STEENBERGEN, Bart v. (1994). Towards a global ecological citizen. The Condition of citizenship. Bart. v. STEENBERGEN. London, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage: 141-152.

¹³ NEWBY, Howard (1996). Citizenship in a green world: global commons and human stewardship. Citizenship Today. The Contemporary relevance of T. H. Marshall. Martin BULMER and Anthony M. REES. London, UCL Press: 209-221.

¹⁴ GRAY, Chris H. (2001). Cyborg citizen : politics in the posthuman age. New York, London, Routledge.

¹⁵ MARÍN, Juan C. (1996). Los Hechos Armados. Argentina 1973-1976. La Acumulación Primitiva del Genocidio. Buenos Aires, PICASO - La Rosa Blindada.

¹⁶ MORRISON, Trevor W. (2007). "Suspensions and the extrajudicial constitution." Columbia Law Review 107(7): 1533-1616.

¹⁷ LEYS, Colin (2001). Market-driven politics: neoliberal democracy and the public interest. London, Verso; HARVEY, David (2005). A brief history of neoliberalism. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Also, there exist different models of citizenship within the Western experience which draw on and reproduce rival intellectual and political traditions.¹⁸ Moreover, the particular institutions of citizenship derived from these models tend to diverge, often sharply, between different national and regional political cultures. The institutions of citizenship prevailing in Nordic Europe have followed a very different pattern from the rest of the continent,¹⁹ while the differences between West and South and between Anglo Saxon and continental Europe are also significant.²⁰ Likewise, there are fundamental differences between the European institutions of citizenship and those that were developed in the United States.²¹

Understandably, applying mechanically the notion of citizenship to the experiences of non European countries is even more problematic. For instance, what does it mean to be a citizen in Latin America, or rather in each of its countries and regions? Some authors have argued that the case of Latin American countries is one of “states without citizens”, where the development of nation states was not corresponded with the formation of a citizenry that could provide a legitimate basis for the exercise of political power.²² Still others have written about “imaginary citizens”, thus referring to the limitations of the often artificial attempts to transplant the liberal institutions of citizenship (and particularly private property) in countries like Mexico, which had well-established indigenous and Hispanic traditions of collective ownership of natural assets (land, water, forest).²³ In fact, what does it mean in practice to be a citizen, for instance, for the large proportion of indigenous population in countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico or Peru (but also for the smaller proportions of indigenous and non-white people composing the population of most countries in the region)? Moreover, even where in principle the conditions for the exercise of citizenship had experienced some degree of development, like for instance in the countries of the Southern Cone, decades of dictatorship followed by the neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1980s have significantly worsened those conditions as clearly illustrated by the re-emergence of an “exclusionary society” in countries like Argentina²⁴ and Chile.²⁵

Citizenship and the commons: the contradictions

The prevailing forms of institutionalized citizenship are integral to capitalist democracy and have developed in intimate correspondence with the other key structural components of the capitalist system. Thus, the unfolding process of citizenship has been closely bound with the

¹⁸ DELANTY, *op cit.*

¹⁹ ESPING-ANDERSEN, Gøsta (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press; KAUTTO, Mikko, Johan FRITZELL, Bjørn HVINDEN, Jon KVIIST, and Hannu UUSITALO, Eds. (2001). *Nordic Welfare States in the European Context*. London and New York, Routledge.

²⁰ BRUBAKER, Rogers (1992). *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press; STEENBERGEN, *op. cit.*

²¹ GLENN, Evelyn (2000). "Citizenship and Inequality: Historical and Global Perspectives." *Social Problems* 47(1): 1-20.

²² FLEURY, Sonia (1997). *Estados sin Ciudadanos. Seguridad Social en América Latina*. Buenos Aires, Lugar Editorial.

²³ ESCALANTE GONZALBO, Fernando (1992). *Ciudadanos Imaginarios*. Mexico City, El Colegio de México.

²⁴ SVAMPA, Maristella (2005). *La Sociedad Excluyente. La Argentina bajo el Signo del Neoliberalismo*. Buenos Aires, Taurus.

²⁵ LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES (2003). "Chile since 1990: The Contradictions of Neoliberal Democratization (Special Issue, Part 1)." *Latin American Perspectives* 30(5).

development of capitalist social relations construed around the pivotal element of capitalist society: the commodity and the corresponding process of commodification that continues its expansion into ever newer terrains.²⁶ In this connection, commodification is a long-term process by which relations between human beings are increasingly mediated and transformed by the logic of production and circulation of commodities, a process grounded on the private –not common– appropriation of nature. The development of currently prevailing citizenship systems centred on individual rights has not only been instrumental to such process, but it has actually been inextricable part of it. This relationship between the principles of citizenship and capitalism is more transparent in the liberal-individualist tradition of citizenship, which is predicated on the assumption that individuals are primarily maximizers of their own personal benefit, whose rational individual choices eventually deliver the best possible social outcomes if the appropriate conditions (e.g. private property) are present. These assumptions are familiar in debates about the commons, as they underpin a number of influential arguments that range from Garret Hardin’s “Tragedy of the commons”²⁷ and the neoinstitutionalists North and Thomas’ claim that common property is an anachronistic legacy of a bygone era when resources were plentiful,²⁸ to the extreme neoliberal positions that strive to replace the commons with private property as the key solution to the crisis of natural “resources”.²⁹ From this perspective, the prevailing forms of citizenship are in principle antagonistic to the very existence of the commons and it could be argued that the logic of the progress of citizenship in capitalist democracies implies in the long run the demise of social relationships predicated on common forms of property and their replacement with private property relations and institutions.

Proposition 2: In the short and midterm the substantive, not merely formal, exercise of existing forms of citizenship may contribute towards the defense and the reclaiming of the commons.

Notwithstanding the instrumental aspect of citizenship in the context of capitalist democracy, as discussed above, the historical development of citizenship has been neither monolithic nor linear. It has been rather characterized by divergence, diversity, and ongoing contradictions with the capitalist logic. In the words of T H Marshall, from a certain perspective, the principles of citizenship and capitalism have also been “at war”, in particular because while capitalism is predicated on the production and reproduction of social inequalities the principles of citizenship are grounded on notions of universal equality and its enhancement can potentially bring about the abatement of qualitative structural inequalities.³⁰ Moreover, the quantitative and qualitative expansion of citizenship over time has also incorporated the embryonic forms of potentially emancipatory forms of social organization that, among other issues, may foster the defense and reclaiming of the commons. Borrowing from Marx, the exercise of citizenship may constitute “the final form of human emancipation within the hitherto existing world order”.³¹ Let us

²⁶ See the article by MOONEY, Pat in this book.

²⁷ HARDIN, Garret (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162(3859): 1243-1248. For a critique of Hardin’s argument, see the article by LERCH, Achim, in this book.

²⁸ NORTH, Douglass C. and Robert P. THOMAS (1973). *The rise of the Western world: a new economic history*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ SMITH, Robert J. (1981). "Resolving the tragedy of the commons by creating private property rights in wildlife." *The CATO Journal* 1(2): 439-468.

³⁰ MARSHALL, op. cit.

³¹ MARX, Karl (1975). *On the Jewish Question*. *Collected Works*. Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS. London, Lawrence and Wishart. 3: 146-74.

explore some aspects of this short-term emancipatory potential of citizenship.

The basic components of citizenship in capitalist democracy concern the civil and political dimensions, basically the rights and duties involved in owning property, having judicial protection, and participating in political life. Over time, these have been extended to incorporate social rights (admittedly a controversial topic, as for free-market liberals citizenship is mostly limited to the civil and political dimension). Although these rights and duties are primarily allocated to individuals, the actual implications of the substantive exercise of such rights and duties go well beyond the individual sphere. For instance, while in relation to certain uses of freshwater the ownership of this element is allocated to private actors, such as has been often the case with underground water rights, in the case of urban uses water rights are normally in the hands of collective actors such as municipalities or provincial and national governments. In many cases these rights consist in abstraction permits granted by the state, but sometimes they may resemble a *de facto* property right over water, which may have been acquired in conjunction with land rights. Whatever the case, the actual exercise of the rights and duties derived from water rights in the hands of collectives like cities or metropolitan regions can be considered to be part and parcel of the rights of citizenship available to the relevant population.

In this connection, and remaining just in the sphere of civil and political rights, a number of questions arise. What kind of citizenship rights and duties are involved in the control, government and allocation of water in urban areas? Is this information available to urban dwellers? How do they actually exercise these rights and duties? The bottom line question regarding water-related civil rights would be: who owns the water? Do urban dwellers own the water (even if this ownership is formally in the hands of their local government institutions)? How is this ownership exercised? What institutions and (juridical and administrative) mechanisms are available for the exercise of the relevant rights and duties? Then, moving to the political dimension, how do citizens participate in the relevant political decisions related to the control, government and allocation of water in their cities? How are political decisions about water (e.g. about deciding if urban water services should be provided as a public good or as a commercialized, even privatized service) taken? Who takes the decisions? Are the decision makers elected by the citizens? What mechanisms are available to the citizens for challenging the decisions and practices of water policy makers and implementors? What are the instruments that help citizens to become aware of their own responsibilities as stewards of freshwater and other commons?

The answer to these and other related questions is that, in historical perspective, citizens have been precluded from actually exercising their rights because the decisions about the allocation and overall management of water in cities has been largely the preserve of, borrowing from Dryzek, the “administrative rationalism” of water bureaucracies.³² This applies to much of twentieth-century water policies, but also to more recent policy decisions implemented under the banner of “citizen participation”, empowerment, and “privatization”, which in fact continue to ignore –if not altogether cancel– the rights of the population in relation to the control of water in their cities and regions.

An examination of the key decisions taken worldwide in relation to water since the 1980s shows a clear pattern whereby the majority of water users have been systematically excluded or even prevented from exercising their citizenship rights, not just in the much publicized cases of

³² DRYZEK, John S. (1997). *The Politics of the Earth. Environmental Discourses*. Oxford, Oxford University Press

privatization of urban water and sanitation services, but also in a wider range of water policies from the creation of “markets” for water resources to the construction of large hydraulic infrastructures like dams, river transfers, or hydroways, which affect the livelihoods of millions of human beings. As a matter of fact, water-related policy decisions are usually taken with almost complete disregard for the opinion, values, and material interests of the majority of water users and citizens, even when they are oriented at providing effective solutions to problems such as food security, disaster protection, or underdevelopment.

This is the overall pattern, and it is not uplifting. However, at the same time, and as shown by mounting empirical evidence from recent and ongoing social struggles over freshwater and other commons, the attempt to transform merely formal citizenship entitlements through the substantive exercise of civil, political and social rights has a formidable emancipatory potential. Whether it is through direct action as it actually happened in the now world-famous Bolivian water wars that brought about the cancellation of privatization projects in Cochabamba (2000) and La Paz-El Alto (2006)³³ or through more nuanced political confrontations like in the 2004 Uruguayan plebiscite that led to the banning of water privatization in the national constitution,³⁴ water users have not been passive victims of exclusionary citizenship practices and authoritarian decision making.

Social and political forces that have stemmed from struggles against authoritarian rule and dictatorship are making inroads in the development of innovative forms of substantive citizenship that have already demonstrated the potential for democratization in the management of common goods. These include the also world-known example of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and other Brazilian municipalities,³⁵ which has been replicated with significant success in other Latin American and European cities. Another example is provided by the Community Water Boards in Venezuela, which place the emphasis on promoting the involvement of citizens in decision making at the local level.³⁶

The examples can be easily multiplied with reference to the widespread struggles for environmental justice being waged worldwide to protect or reclaim the commons from both state- and market-led capitalist encroachment.³⁷ These processes provide excellent examples of how existing forms of citizenship can eventually be turned into vehicles for radical change in the struggle to defend the common good. In fact, the potential for deepening the exercise of citizenship in this regard is significant, not least because closing the enormous gap between formal and substantive citizenship is already a major task ahead in the democratization process.

³³ LAURIE, Nina and Carlos CRESPO (2007). "Deconstructing the best case scenario: lessons from water politics in La Paz-El Alto, Bolivia." *Geoforum* 38(5): 841-854.

³⁴ SANTOS, Carlos and Alberto VILLARREAL (2005). *Uruguay: direct democracy in defence of the right to water. Reclaiming Public Water. Achievements, Struggles and Visions from Around the World.* Belén BALANYÁ, Brid BRENNAN, Olivier HOEDEMAN, Satoko KISHIMOTO and Philipp TERHORST. London, Transnational Institute and Corporate Europe Observatory: 173-179.

³⁵ DUTRA, Olivio and Maria V. Benevides (2001). *Orçamento participativo e socialismo*, Perseu Abramo; MALTZ, Hélio (2005). *Porto Alegre's water: public and for all.* In BALANYÁ, et. al., op. cit.: 29-36; MIRANDA NETO, Antonio (2005). *Recife, Brazil: building up water and sanitation services through citizenship.* In BALANYÁ, et. al., op. cit.: 113-119.

³⁶ ARCONADA, Santiago (2005). "Seis años después: mesas técnicas y consejos comunitarios de agua (aportes para un balance de la experiencia desarrollada)." *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales* 11(3): 187-203.

³⁷ See, for instance, GOLDMAN, Michael, Ed. (1998). *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons.* London, Pluto Press; MARTINEZ-ALIER, Joan (2002). *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation.* Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA., Edward Elgar.

Proposition 3: The successful defense and reclaiming of the commons at a global scale may contribute to the unfolding of new social forms that transcend the limits imposed by existing citizenship systems.

Unleashing the emancipatory potential available through the exercise of substantive citizenship, as Marx suggested, is certainly a desirable course of action to preserve and reclaim the commons. However, we can neither take for granted the replicability of successful experiences nor their sustainability, given that the conditions for the exercise of citizenship are highly uneven, in unstable equilibrium, and ultimately determined by the logic and constraints of capitalist democracy. After all, capitalism is driven by the commodification process, which is in principle incompatible with the subsistence of the commons. However, this is neither a necessary nor teleological process, and despite the privatization thrust of contemporary neoliberal capitalism the obstacles to the further commodification of the commons are significant.³⁸ This leaves ample room for counter hegemonic projects aimed at preserving and reclaiming existing commons and developing new ones.

There are, though, alternative possibilities and scenarios, some of which present us with a difficult dilemma in relation to the future of both the commons and citizenship. On the one hand, as already said, the progress of unbridled capitalist encroachment of the commons is not incompatible with prevailing forms of citizenship. Moreover, the currently dominant forms of capitalist democracy based on formal representation are predicated on the exclusion of most citizens from the public sphere, as the latter is considered to be a preserve of experts and professional politicians. This prevailing model of restricted citizenship has been strengthened in the last few decades, alongside the accelerated expansion of commons enclosures, which increasingly extends to the global commons such as the oceans and the atmosphere. On the other hand, the social struggles over the commons taking place globally tend to be associated with those forms of citizenship which place greater emphasis on direct participation by the citizens in crucial debates and decisions. An example, and another world-known case, has been the struggle of the Mexican Zapatistas who based their 1993 opening “war” declaration on Article 39 of their country’s Constitution and stated that one of their key objectives was “to suspend the plundering of our natural wealth”.³⁹ It can be said, hoping not to misinterpret the Zapatistas, that their struggle is both for achieving substantive citizenship (as a bottom line, to achieve the recognition of the indigenous population as full citizens in their country, and the actual participation of all Mexican citizens in their country’s public affairs) and protecting and reclaiming the commons.

In perspective, and as the experience of the Zapatistas and many other actors tends to suggest, the successful defense and reclaiming of the commons is likely to lead to (and in fact also require) the unfolding of new social relations that may supersede the currently prevailing forms and institutions of citizenship. To some extent, this potential and largely unintended outcome of the human struggle for substantive democratization was already anticipated by Marx, who stated that

³⁸ HEYNEN, Nik and Paul Robbins (2005). "The neoliberalization of nature: Governance, privatization, enclosure and valuation." *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 16(1): 5 - 8.

³⁹ COMANDO GENERAL DEL EJÉRCITO ZAPATISTA DE LIBERACIÓN NACIONAL (EZLN) (1994). Declaración de la Selva Lacandona EZLN Documentos y Comunicados. Antonio G. d. LEÓN, Elena PONIATOWSKA and Carlos MONSIVÁIS. Mexico City, Ediciones Era: 33-35.

“Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a species-being in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his own forces as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished”.⁴⁰

There is no certainty that human emancipation thus defined will be achieved, not any time soon at least to judge by the increasing alienation of common citizens caused by hegemonic neoliberal globalization in recent decades. However, the defense and reclaiming of the commons constitute one of the front lines in the ongoing struggle over the territory of substantive democracy and citizenship. In the process, it can be expected that new social forms will emerge that may help to re-equilibrate the system in a higher level of human organization that privileges intra- and inter-generational cooperation and solidarity over the blind dynamics of competition and the survival of the fittest.

⁴⁰

MARX, op. cit.: 168.