

Title of paper: COMMON URBAN PRACTICES AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

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Extended abstract

Recent debates on the defense and the constitution of the commons have sought to establish logics of the commons –as autonomous practices of collaboration for collective reproduction– that are separate from both market and state logics. My study explores these debates and the possibilities and limits of cooperative practices and logics in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the city that famously chose the local self-management of water over its privatization. Based on ethnographic and participatory research in informal and peripheral neighborhoods, this paper examines the ways that local self-managed practices to reproduce collective life are not only shaped in diverse articulations with state institutions, but demonstrate varied responses to their marginal positions. The logics of common practices in these neighborhoods are constituted in negotiation and in response to municipal, government and international development institutions.

The paper describes the collective logics of urban poor residents as they organize to make claims to the land where they live, negotiate and administer their access to water, and participate and represent themselves politically. As we witness their efforts to establish mutually sustainable life, we do not reach a straightforward vindication of local commons against the market and the state. Instead, it becomes clear that the distinct collective practices, logics and subjects instituted in each site are shaped precisely through interactions that are mediated by state institutions. We also see that each form of coordinating common goods has distinct consequences for the neighborhoods' individual and collective opposition to dominant hierarchies. Typifying diverse forms of self-managed collectives as *enterprising*, *unified* and *interpersonal* commons allows us to explore their subjectivities and implications for social inequalities below.

In this paper, I focus on the self-managed water systems that were fundamental to the successful anti-privatization protests of Cochabamba's 2001 Water War, which became an iconic event in global struggles to defend commons. Conceiving water as a common good is central to shaping alternatives to private corporate or public state management of basic services. Yet as we begin to see in this paper, diverse models for the community management of water have varied effects on social relations.

We begin by first looking at how the neighbors of *the most enterprising neighborhood* studied successfully establish an efficient communal water system that integrates the neighborhood into the city but promotes inequalities among neighbors. As part of their participatory approach to development, residents of a *neighborhood characterized by its unity* organize to access water through the collaborative building of a community water system, taking all-night armed turns to defend their tanks from attackers. The third neighborhood we look at, *in which interpersonal relations reign*, has not succeeded in establishing a communal water system. Yet no one goes

without water in this neighborhood; the interpersonal and reciprocal sharing of water in this neighborhood neither increases socio-economic inequalities nor does it marginalize particular groups. Yet it is also clear in that both the interpersonal associations and the dispersed engagements of these residents reinforce the neighborhood's marginal position vis-à-vis the municipality and state institutions.

The paper then explores the political implications of the three different forms of self-managed commons described. We accompany neighbors and the leaders in the small and decisive meetings presided over by the leaders of the enterprising neighborhood, at the huge public assemblies brought together by the charismatic president of the unified neighborhood, and in the familial block group meetings at dawn that take place in the one-room houses of the neighborhood characterized by its interpersonal relations. We examine the political subjectivities shaped in each of the three periurban collective logics: neoliberal subjects shaped by representative membership in an enterprising collective; counter-hegemonic logics as part of participation in a unified group; and communal subjectivities that emerge in interpersonal associations.

These diverse forms of the commons are linked with different possibilities for social change. In the enterprising neighborhood, we see that residents' representative membership allow them to pressure state authorities and institutions, despite limited and unequal participation among neighbors. The counter-hegemonic subjects of the unified neighborhood take part in oppositional participation, which allows residents to be both part of local decisions and to collectively legitimate alternatives to dominant urban and market hierarchies. This form of social organization, however, produces its own exclusions. Finally, associational logics establish the framework for communal subjectivities in the neighborhood characterized by interpersonal relations. This final organizational form most readily allows for inclusiveness and shared norms, but is marginalized by market and state institutions.

Comparing diverse forms of actually existing commons helps us to see that the possibilities for a more just society are forged in situated practices, institutionalized logics and economic subjectivities. In our search for paths and openings beyond the inequalities and hierarchies of liberal capitalism, it is the configuration of collective practices, their institutions and their subjects, as they shape our living-in-common, that makes up our constant struggle.