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Commons Movements: Old and New Trends in Rural and Urban Contexts

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Abstract

Over the past few years, studies in political ecology and environmental justice have been increasingly connecting the commons and social movements empirically, giving shape to a new, distinctive body of research on commons movements. In our review, we first organize and synthesize empirical lessons from this body of literature. We then highlight recent theoretical efforts made by scholars to both bridge and transcend the gap between the theory of the commons and social movement theory. As we illustrate, movements can help create and strengthen commons institutions and discourses, as well as rescale them horizontally and vertically. This is particularly evident in the context of rural community-rights movements in the global South, as well as in new water and food commons movements and community energy movements in both the global South and North. Commons institutions, in turn, can serve as the basis of social mobilization and become a key frame for social movements, as shown in the context of local environmental justice and livelihoods conflicts and anti-privatization struggles. Tensions and contradictions of commons-movement dynamics also exist and reflect trade-offs between diversity versus uniformization and organizational closure versus expansion of discourses and practices. Theoretically, there is an opportunity to cross boundaries from the theory of the commons to social movement

theory and vice versa, e.g., by highlighting the role of political opportunities and framing, and biophysical factors and polycentricity, respectively. More importantly, a new commons movements theory is emerging focusing on cross-scalar organizations, the virtuous cycles between commons projects and mobilization, and the processes of commons-making.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this review is to synthesize the literature connecting commons and social movement studies and shape what we understand is becoming a new, distinctive body of research on commons

movements. In the past decade or so, the commons have become a central frame in a range of social movements and grassroots eco-social initiatives, as well as in academic research. Increasingly, researchers recognize that local resource-dependent communities, which self-organize to manage their shared resources in many countries across the globe, also participate in and lead social movements to reclaim or defend those resources, in response to threats by extractivist or conservationist policies (1). In parallel, more and more activists and scholars have placed in the commons the hope to fulfill societal transformations for more democratic, equitable, and ecological lives (2).

Commons: resources, rules, and/or practices that are shared and maintained/ reproduced by a community

Social movements: processes of more or less contentious collective action that reflect grievances around perceived injustices and that constitute a pursuit of alternative policies, values, or practices

Commons movements: politically active community projects that scale-out within a territory and/or social mobilizations that materialize into practices of communal management, all aiming for a transformation toward a commons-based society

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM): organization of use and conservation of natural resources by local communities with relative autonomy from other authorities

Much of what we know about the commons and social movements comes from the theory of the commons and social movement theory, respectively. The theory of the commons has traditionally aimed to explain the ability of natural resource users to govern their shared resources via community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) regimes (3).[1] Social movement theory has traditionally focused on different elements of collective mobilizations and their impact on policy (10). These two bodies of scholarship have evolved in parallel for more than five decades despite shared interests in collective action and bottom-up policymaking.

In this review we first offer a review of the historical connections between movements and the commons. Then, in Section 3, we synthesize empirical lessons from the more recent scholarship on commons movements. We focus for that purpose on the cases of indigenous and peasant movements in the rural context, water and food commons in the urban context, and energy commons. We organize the synthesis around the existence of synergies [i.e., a virtuous cycle (6, 11–13)] and tensions between commons and movements. In Section 4, we highlight efforts made within the scholarship to theorize about commons movements. We organize these efforts around the virtuous cycle hypothesis as well as the multiscalar nature of commons movements and the process of commons making. In Section 5, we unveil complementary theoretical efforts that aim to use social movement theory and the theory of the commons to understand commons projects and movements, respectively. In the final section, we conclude by highlighting some divides within the commons movements scholarship.

[1]A tension that emerged in carrying out this review concerned the different definitions of commons and movements. The most widespread definition of the commons comes from the theory of the commons, which is fundamentally a theory of governance. The theory of the commons, strongly influential on CBNRM scholarship, has traditionally relied on economic theory to understand whether and how local communities are able to design and change rules that promote cooperation and collective management of shared resources (i.e., commons) (3). This theory has also been called common-pool resource (CPR) theory and institutional or collective action theory of the commons. In this literature, there is a clear distinction between the (natural) commons, or CPRs, the community (i.e., the user groups) and the rules or (common property) management regime used to manage the resources. The critical commons literature has questioned the institutional approach for its narrow focus on cooperation and ignoring important socio-political processes and contextual conditions that usually underlie the development of commons initiatives. Here we can distinguish two overlapping strands. The environmental justice strand has focused on the political nature of commons initiatives as solutions to ecological distribution conflicts and their entanglements with social movements (4). The Marxist school has focused instead on exploring how the commons can develop a path of emancipation from capitalism by building an alternative mode of production to the state and the market (5). Both strands, however, share an understanding of commons as the ensemble of resources, social relations, and practices that coproduce a given regime in a particular territory or across territories (6). In this review, we mostly use the "critical" understanding of the commons in an attempt to encompass older and newer trends. That said, we also use the terms CBNRM and community-based in some sections (Sections 3.1–3.3, 3.5, 5.1) to reflect the interest in governance of the authors reviewed. Finally, the definition of movements has also diversified with the evolution of social movement studies. Movements may occur as a struggle between groups locally or at broader scales, and may manifest as processes of overt conflict expansion and contestation (7), or as less confrontational processes of everyday transformation (8, 9). Movements may also be led by communities directly involved in local commons governance, or by external "activist" organizations. Here we refer to movements in all those interpretations.

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2. EARLY CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COMMONS AND MOVEMENTS

In this section, we begin with an overview of early connections between CBNRM and social movements. We then introduce a series of pioneering political ecology and environmental justice studies that inspired subsequent works, laying the foundations for this review.

2.1. Commons Governance Scholarship

Until recently, the study of movements by commons scholars has been marginal. Indeed, the theory of the commons envisioned the commons as systems exclusively concerned with resource management, not as a vehicle for broader societal transformations—making the theory indifferent to the relation between commons and movements (14). Still, a historical review shows that key early contributors to the theory underscored the importance of social movements to understand the emergence, renewal, and scaling-up of CBNRM institutions (15–18). Scholars saw CBNRM as initially emerging from different forms of social mobilization focused on decentralization, environmental protection, and traditional worldviews integrating the environment, economy, and community (19, 20). Stern et al. (21) concluded that one of the understudied themes in the theory was the role of social movement organizations, that having the right to participate in institutional design may be necessary for institutions to function. In a review of environmental governance, Lemos & Agrawal (22) pointed to governance-from-below strategies advocated by social movements as the only recognizable challenge to corporate/trade control of natural resource commons. Other scholars discussed the way in which rural development movements led to the formation of local CBNRM cooperatives (23), how persuasive communication could mobilize collective action (17), how mobilizations by rural communities with external allies contributed to effective decentralization and local autonomy (20), and how transnational, cross-scale movements and networks could benefit sustainable CBNRM (16).

2.2. Social Movement Scholarship

Social movement scholars have engaged with environmental issues for some considerable time (24–26), yet engagement with the commons has remained limited. We attribute this contradiction to three main reasons. First is the disciplinary division between environmental sociology focused on social movements and rural/natural resources sociology studying natural resource management by local communities (27). Second is the related bias in social movement studies toward a focus on contentious events of collective action, with less attention being paid to what happens before and after protests (14, 28). An exception is the work of scholars in the 1980s and 1990s, which focused on the microlevel politics or submerged networks that sustained and gave continuity to movements beyond protests, by building autonomy, collective identity, and interpersonal relations (29, 30). The third factor is the theoretical and empirical roots of social movement theory, mostly written by global North scholars and geographically centered on Northern movements. This is evident in authoritative handbooks of social movements (10, 31–33) and reviews of environmental movements (34–36). Whereas mainstream environmental movements, particularly in the global North, have often failed to link environmental issues to communities' resource management rights and livelihoods (37), environmental justice movements and scholars, especially in the global South, have specifically focused on this link (38).

2.3. Political Ecology and Critical Commons Studies

Since the late 1980s, political ecology scholars have made a concerted effort to link social movements and the commons, mostly in the global South (27). This effort is epitomized in edited

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volumes such as Taylor's (39) *Ecological Resistance Movements*, Peet & Watts's (40) *Liberation Ecologies*, and Goldman's (41) *Privatizing Nature*, which garnered contributions mainly from the global South, aimed at understanding how access to natural resources was shaped and contested by local, marginalized communities within the broader political-economic dynamics of global capitalist development. Classic examples included the Chipko movement in the Indian Himalayas (42), the Rubber Tappers' and Landless Workers' movements in Brazil (43, 44), the indigenous Zapatista movement in Chiapas (45, 46), and the Ongono movement in Nigeria (47) (see Reference 48 for a review of some of these early works from an anthropological perspective).

Political ecologists questioned the managerial emphasis of the theory of the commons, pointing instead to how state and corporate interests often tried to privatize (i.e., enclose) commons to advance economic development, as well as the primary role marginalized, resource-dependent populations had in mobilizing to defend their rights (49–53). In explaining these mobilizations, they also critiqued the then-dominant sociological theories that understood environmental movements as resulting from postmaterial conservation values (54). They contrasted this environmentalism of the wealthy North with marginalized, poor peoples, particularly indigenous and peasant communities in the global South, who struggle to defend the environment, not for its own sake, but as their source of material livelihood, health, identity, and, more broadly, life.[2] Moreover, political ecologists conceived movements as new forms of doing politics, based on community-based and mainly subsistence forms of natural resource management, grounded in historic roots to specific places or territories, and generative of alternatives to dominant patterns of modernity and development (40, 56, 57). These new forms were linked to ideals and practices of autonomism (*autonomismo*), self-management (*autogestion*), and communalism (*comunalidad*), which became the forces of mobilization for what Zibechi (58) termed societies in movement (also see 59 and 60). These analyses were captured in concepts such as environmentalism of the poor (54, 61), gendered (subsistence) class struggle (47, 62), subaltern environmental struggle (63), grassroots livelihood and autopoietic[3] movements (40), ecological resistance movements and popular environmentalism (39), grassroots postmodernism (56), place-based/territorial resistances (57, 64), or local sites of resistance (52). In all these cases, defense of rights over territories and their natural resources as well as the consolidation of local communities' political and governance autonomy were central elements.[4]

3. EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS FROM COMMONS MOVEMENTS STUDIES

There are different instances of commons movements. Here we focus on indigenous and peasant movements, urban water and food commons, and energy commons. These instances unfold in different contexts (rural, urban, energy), tend to align with different motivations (e.g., sovereignty, environmental justice, sustainability transitions), and have also tended to operate at different scales (transnational versus more localized). The instances share, however, two important features: They include some degree of collective action for both natural resource management

[2]These struggles parallel those often labeled as environmental justice movements in the global North (55).

[3]Autopoietic, adopted from Luhmann by Melucci (30) and other 1980s to 1990s social movement scholars, means self-producing and self-organizing.

[4]Interestingly enough, many of these contributions did not engage systematically with the theories of commons and social movements. A few of them cite the theory of the commons to recognize the organization of mobilized communities around common property regimes (61, 65) and/or to criticize the narrow focus of the theory on cooperation as a solution to overexploitation (49). Others cite social movement to highlight the importance of resource mobilization (15), framing (66), or political opportunities (67). In the remainder of this article, we expand on these breakthroughs with a review of subsequent literature over the past 10 years.

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and social mobilization, and they promote changes or transformations in socio-environmental governance. This includes community mobilizations, which are not necessarily based on broad social movements (7), as well as community-based initiatives that promote alternatives through everyday practices, not necessarily through protest or changes in public policy (68). Excluded are community-led protests against development projects that do not question underlying development logics (69), or certain new lifestyle movements aimed at transformation at the individual rather than collective level (70).[5]

Indigenous communities are probably the oldest example of commons movements. Here, the commons is an expression of ancestral territorial sovereignty, and indigenous movements emerge not only in defense of that sovereignty but also to protect the communities' identity and culture from neocolonial policies (57, 71). Peasant communities, on the other hand, mobilize in defense of the local environment that sustains their livelihoods (1).[6] As further detailed in Section 3.2, indigenous and peasant movement examples come mostly from the global South and share a recent history of internationalization.

In the urban context, we focus on water commons and their linkages to urban water antiprivatization and remunicipalization movements, as well as the food commons and their connections to food sovereignty and urban gardening movements. Our focus on the energy sector responds to the recent rise in public discussion and scholarly research around commons-based initiatives of production and/or consumption (72, 73) and their linkages to the antinuclear and energy democracy movements (74). Contrary to the indigenous and peasant instances, the urban and energy cases are rather local and have been studied mostly in global North countries (75, 76). Through a review of the scholarship on the above instances, we have identified eight key lessons.

3.1. Community-Rights Movements Promote and Defend Community-Based Natural Resource Management in the Global South

Social movements have contributed significantly to advancing local CBNRM regimes in the rural context. Across many countries, both the original push for CBNRM and associated decentralization policies emerged because of pressures from conservation, indigenous, peasant, and environmental justice movements in the global South (77, 78). In a systematic review of case studies, Villamayor-Tomas & García-López (4) concluded that social movements at different scales contribute significantly to CBNRM by defending community property and management from external threats, democratizing communities' collective choice processes, articulating community-based monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, reinvigorating local identity and ecological knowledge, and promoting local economic and political autonomy. They found that these movements influence CBNRM through different pathways. Strengthening community decision making, for example, can occur through the empowerment of women, the promotion of deliberative processes, and/or the formalization of decision-making rules. The reinforcement of monitoring can occur through the implementation of community-based data collection systems, the organization of patrolling teams, or the elaboration of environmental impact assessments (4).

[5]We recognize that there are gray areas in this distinction. In many new social movements, lifestyle goes hand in hand with individualistic and collective performances; and more traditional, interest group–like movements have also combined their own demands with broader discourses.
[6]The distinction between indigenous and peasant movements is not always clear-cut. Just like peasant communities, indigenous communities have frequently participated in mobilizations against resource degradation and overuse, and environmental justice is an important component of the global indigenous movement discourse (71). There are many examples of movements that coalesce around both indigenous and peasant communities.

These dynamics are illustrated in community forestry. In India, a broad social movement led to the historic recognition of local communities' collective forest rights through the Forest Rights Act. Movement-created nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have, in turn, been crucial in mobilizing and building the capacities of villagers to exercise their rights under the Act, ensuring the state's responsiveness to community claims and enabling market engagement (78). Localized mobilizations have also been important in this process. For instance, in Pondi, a village of the Baiga tribe in Madhya Pradesh, a women-led movement rooted in traditional connections to the forest led to protests against Forest Department logging, and, eventually, to obtaining title to their forest land (79) (see Reference 80 for a connected Indian case). Importantly, the movement gave women legitimacy that empowered them in community forest management institutions, leading to better governance outcomes (78). Similar but distinct processes are observed in forests of other global South countries, such as Nepal (81, 82), Mexico (83, 84), Guatemala (85, 86), Ecuador (87), Trinidad and Tobago (88), and Puerto Rico (89).

In the fisheries sector, Pinkerton (90, 91), highlights the role that social movements play as a key strategy in supporting the access and conservation rights of small-scale fishing communities, from the Dominican Republic and Malawi to the United States and Europe (92–94). Similar processes have been observed in other global South and global North countries (95, 96). In the water sector, studies of movements influencing communal management are less generalized, although there is increasing attention to a globalized movement contesting neoliberal privatization, demanding the right to water of local communities and promoting community-based management (97–101). Notable cases can be found across Latin American countries such as Colombia (102), Mexico (103), Ecuador (104), and Bolivia (105), and in Southeast Asia, e.g., Bangladesh (106). Promising concepts like rooted water collectives have emerged to bind all these instances under a common frame (see also Section 4.2).

Rooted water collectives: "instances of collective action, coordination and shared governance arrangements that either engage in communal management of water systems (and may have second or more tier federations) or form asocial movement that advocates for local common property resources management. Some rooted water collectives do both" (101, p. 2)

3.2. New Food and Energy Movements Materialize in Local Community-Based Projects

In the urban context, scholars have documented the ways that social movements have fostered the creation of community gardens at different scales (107–112).[7] In North American cities, such as New York (116, 117), Boston (118), Detroit (119), Oakland (120), and New Orleans (120), community gardens are associated with a relatively long tradition of environmental justice mobilization against racism and its discriminatory patterns of urban abandonment, pollution, and gentrification. Here, social movements have been key to resisting the efforts of local governments to pit the affordable housing movement against community gardening, defending neighbors' rights to land and mobilizing support around community development programs (116–119). Similar examples exist in Europe. In Campania, Italy, a social movement struggling to resist the mafia's illegal waste disposal and its degradation of health and livelihoods managed to reclaim lands for community gardening (121). Many of the current community garden projects in European cities such as Madrid, Athens, and Barcelona (109, 122–125) can be traced to post-2008 economic crisis mobilizations (i.e., the Squares movements), which catalyzed community projects, including the occupation of vacant lands and pressured local governments to sponsor community garden projects. Indeed, many authors have noted the tendency for urban agricultural movements worldwide to emerge during times of economic crisis (108, 112, 125). In global South

[7] Social mobilizations, in this context, have also led to the creation of other types of community-based services, such as health and cultural centers and housing cooperatives (13, 113–115).

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cities like Johannesburg, urban gardens have focused more on food security than on promoting alternative food systems (76, 112, 126). There are, however, notable exceptions of more political movement-based initiatives. In Rosario, Argentina (127), and Botogá, Colombia (128), networks of urban agroecology projects have emerged from movements against neoliberal urbanism and its food-disabling enclosures of commonly managed lands for urban expansion and corporate agribusiness. These networks offer both training and seeds for planting. In Rosario, they have begun developing small-scale, community-owned energy production and water harvesting facilities in the peri-urban area. In San Juan, Puerto Rico, meanwhile, community gardens have emerged from local mobilizations in response to marginalization and associated problems of abandoned spaces, illegal waste dumping, threats of displacement, and unemployment (89). Similar instances are reported in South Africa (129).

Energy democratization: the political process transforming the industry and socio-political institutions toward an ideal system, in which "the citizens are the recipients, stakeholders (as consumers/producers), and accountholders of the entire energy sector policy" (136)

In the energy context, various studies point to many—but not all—community energy initiatives being embedded in, and driven by, social movements (130–132). A predominant link is observed with antinuclear and associated environmental movements, as in the cases of Taiwan (72), South Korea (133), Germany, Norway, Belgium (130), Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden (134, 135). These movements have, in many instances, been precursors of today's energy democratization (136) movements, seeking to advance social, environmental, and climate justice through community-based renewable energy initiatives (74, 132, 137, 138). Many such instances intersect with anti-privatization and energy remunicipalization initiatives that resist fossil fuels and promote territorial/community autonomy. Lai (72), for example, discusses the Taromak 100% Green Energy Tribe Initiative in Taiwan as a product of the national antinuclear movement, but also as part of the tribe's historical struggle for autonomy on their traditional territory. In Puerto Rico, Santiago et al. (139) document how historical environmental justice movements against fossil fuels, coupled with struggles against colonialism and for recovery after a disastrous hurricane, have fostered the creation of community renewable energy and other mutual endeavors, together with a new network of allied organizations promoting energy transition. Similar dynamics can be seen in the Navajo Nation (140). Finally, the creation of community energy projects is linked, in some cases, to local sustainable development activism, as in the United Kingdom with the Transition Towns movement (141) and the community land trust movement (142).

3.3. Rural Community-Rights Movements Promote Second-Order Community-Based Natural Resource Management Organizations and Alliances Across the Global South

In the rural context, movements have contributed to the creation of second-order organizations, that is, federations of local CBNRM organizations. As part of that process, formal collaborative arrangements have developed with the state, and networks/alliances with other groups.

In the forest sector, well-documented examples of movement-related second-order organizations are the National Federation of Forest Communities in Nepal (143, 144), the Mexican intercommunity forest associations (83), and the Association of Forest Communities of Peten (ACOFOP) in Guatemala (145). In the water sector, second-order organizations include the National Federation of Water User's Organizations of Peru, federations of water user organizations in Ecuador, and the Latin-American Confederation of Community Organisations for Water Services and Sanitation (101, 146–149). In the fisheries sector, organizations include the South India Federation of Fishworker Societies (150), the Coastal Links in South Africa (92), and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers worldwide (151).

Many of these second-order organizations have a dual role combining management and mobilization/advocacy activities and have been captured in concepts like water rooted collectives or

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cross-scalar forest associations (see Section 4.2). Guatemala's ACOFOP, for instance, emerged out of the struggles of local communities to secure forest management rights (86, 143, 145, 152). Since then, it has channeled funding to communities and strengthened their monitoring capacity. It has coordinated communities' activities in defending their autonomy and rights from the influence of international NGOs and the granting of mining concessions within their jurisdiction.

Cross-scalar forest associations: cross-scale networks of forest communities and other politically mobilized actors seeking to advance community rights and CBNRM

A natural consequence of the scaling-up of CBNRM organizations has been the creation of comanagement arrangements with the state (4). In Mexico, the Revolution produced a corporatist arrangement between peasants and the state, which facilitated leaders from local and second-order community forestry organizations gaining formal representation in government (through the national peasant confederations) and becoming elected or appointed to municipal positions (83). Similar examples from the forest context include Nepal (143), Guatemala (143), Brazil (153), and India (84). Examples from the fisheries sector range from the United Kingdom (95) to Turkey (154) and Ecuador (155).

More notably, movements have contributed to networking between CBNRM communities and other actors (87, 148, 156–161) and to the emergence of international alliances (149, 151, 162). Locally, scholars have often observed scientists, lawyers, researchers, environmental activists, and broader epistemic communities acting as allies in those processes, promoting mobilization and organization from local to international levels (85, 151, 163), and translating communities' claims into the language of policy (149, 164). In Bolivia, for example, the irrigators' movement that emerged in Cochabamba against water rights privatization created both second-order organizations (e.g., the Cochabamba Irrigators' Federation) and cross-class, cross-ethnic, and urban–rural translocal alliances with other peasant and indigenous organizations, leftist political parties, and national and international NGOs. These networks projected irrigators' interests onto a national stage, advanced policies favoring irrigators' rights, and mobilized new support from other state and nonstate actors (165, pp. 131–47).

The contribution of movements to international alliances has been well documented. In the forest context, the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (145, 152), the World Rainforest Movement, Friends of the Earth International, and the Global Forest Coalition (166) frame forest conservation as based on small-scale, autonomous, and customary practices, traditional knowledge, and the collective land rights of local indigenous and peasant communities, challenging the dominant market-based discourse linked to the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation programs. In the water context, the New Water Culture movement and the International Rivers network have similarly shared an agenda against the erection of large dams that advances community-based knowledge and solutions to water storage and use, and to migratory fish conservation (101, 167). In the fisheries context, prominent examples are the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers and the World Forum of Fisher People (92, 151). Finally, in recent times, there has been a trend toward a transnationalized convergence of movements and associated CBNRM networks around questions of climate justice (168–170). Two prominent examples are the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change and La Vía Campesina ["The Peasants' Way" (168)].

3.4. Food and Energy Movements Scale-Out and Network Commons Alternatives in the Global North

In the urban food and energy contexts, patterns of scaling-out and networking rather than scaling-up are observed (75, 108, 109, 120, 122, 132, 135, 141, 171). In Barcelona, the Network of Communitarian Urban Gardens has been used by members of community gardens to exchange ideas, seeds and knowledge, and as a source of assistance to open up new gardens (122). In Rome, an

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alliance between the community garden movement and the longer-standing squatting movement catalyzed the expansion of community gardening projects across the city (109). Promising concepts like autonomous food configurations have emerged to bind all the above instances under a common frame (see also Section 4.3).

Autonomous food configurations: "a social economy of production, distribution and consumption of food where the separation of the actors involved aims to blur the borders between producers, distributors and consumers, and it poses retaking the city as its main objective" (109, p. 551)

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In Denmark, the community renewable energy movement promoted collaboration between wind cooperatives and new innovative business models, as a strategy to fight the co-optation of energy transition by large corporations (135). Across Europe, a variety of energy community projects justifies the networking carried out through local and international networks, such as the Transition Towns and the REScoop. More broadly, European Union movements are based on the need for creating "synergies, new ideas, and gain(ing) greater knowledge of the role that co-operatives can play in (the) energy transition" (132, p. 9) and for cultivating vision and managing expectations about what can be realistically achieved in such transitions (141). In the United States, dozens of urban–rural environmental justice organizations across the country—including those developing urban gardening, community renewable and community conservation projects in urban, rural, and indigenous territories—have formed the Climate Justice Alliance in a shared effort "[t]o stop the growth of the dirty energy-fueled economy . . . while, at the same time, providing critical leadership for a transition to just and regenerative economies"—supporting each other in the development of community-based urban gardens, agroecological farms, renewable energy, cooperative housing, and other such projects (172, p. 37).

3.5. Community-Based Natural Resource Management Institutions Can Be Repurposed for Livelihood-Based Mobilizations (Mostly in the Global South)

The relation between social movements and CBNRM is not unidirectional. Existing CBNRM institutions can be repurposed or used as stepping stones to organize, legitimize, and sustain environmental justice mobilizations oriented to defending community livelihoods (85, 173–177). This has been observed mostly in the rural context and at local levels. In Mexico's community forestry, for example, the constitutional collective rights to lands, and the land titling that followed, served as a springboard for community mobilizations to expand their forest management autonomy decades later (83, 84). Similarly, long-standing community associations in Colombia and their rights to self-organize water provision, as well as associated understandings of water as a living being and a commons, were key in the national campaign to constitutionally recognize the human right to water and to counter privatization proposals (102), and in the US state of Washington, sovereign fishing rights of the Lummi Nation constituted the focal point of a movement against the construction of the largest coal-shipping port in the state (178). In Mongolia (173) and Uganda (175), the strong collective organization of herders, together with their resource allocation rules and the recognition of traditional leaders' authority on land matters, facilitated community mobilizations against extractive projects threatening their lands. Similarly, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, a community-based monitoring program has been key in the efforts of the Amazonian Defense Front movement to give visibility to the damage emanating from the local oil industry (179). In Chilika Lake, India, the mobilizations against the encroachment of local fisheries by the prawn industry were sustained over time, thanks to the capacity of fishing cooperatives to pull together financial and legal resources (180). Finally, although not strictly associated with rules and management, there is the harnessing of social constructions. This is exemplified in the sense of identity and meaning that CBNRM regimes have embedded, particularly in traditional communities. In South Korea, for example, Jeong (181) illustrates how the CBNRM imaginary became a stepping stone for an environmental movement that prevented the conversion of an old community forest into a conservation area, and promoted a community-based ecotourism project instead.

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3.6. Community Garden and Energy Projects Constitute Spaces for Political Mobilization

The contribution of commons initiatives to movements in the urban and energy contexts is also important, although less well documented. Community gardens have become spaces of social networking, environmental discussion, and food culture exchange, constituting the basis of larger social movements, such as the food and land sovereignty movements (109, 123, 182). For participants, the garden becomes a space to "practice various forms of discussing, informing, deciding and mobilising" in the struggle to make cities more livable and just (182, p. 1167). In turn, community garden groups can act as movement "field guards" to protect, monitor, and generate knowledge of local green areas (108). In the energy context, Marquardt & Delina (183) show how a community renewable energy initiative in a rural village in Thailand provided training and national awareness-raising. The initiative fostered a new vision for the country's energy future and achieved support from the government for replicating their model in other villages. Also importantly, community "mutual aid" initiatives for relief and recovery during times of crises—such as those distributing food, rebuilding farms and housing and installing solar energy microgrids in the aftermath of climatic disasters—have been shown to simultaneously provide basic needs for survival, while building solidarity ties, collaboration and decision-making skills, mobilization for socially just recovery policies, and bold actions that defy illegitimate authority, all of which contribute to re-imagine ways of interacting with each other and the environment (184).

3.7. Movements Against Neoliberal Policies Build on and Promote the Commons Frame as a New Policy Paradigm

Since the late 1990s, the commons frame has been used by counter-globalization movements opposing neoliberal policies of privatization and free trade (185–188). This is not the first time that movements have relied on a community discourse. As hinted in Section 3.1, the community conservation movement was an important driver of natural resource decentralization policies and CBNRM in the global South in the 1980s. Back then, the CBNRM frame was strategically used by conservationist groups to offer an alternative to the top-down fortress conservation model (77, 189).

The commons frame shares an interest in community-based production with the CBNRM frame, which is linked to demands for autonomy and social rights (187, 188). Additionally, the commons frame envisions the commons as a way to "unite active politics with environmental concerns, urban movements with rural resistance, local struggles with global politics" 190, p. 13). This diverse understanding of the commons is arguably a strength of the new frame (191).

The commons frame has notably expanded in the urban context with the struggles of the Squares/Occupy/Indignados movements, coupled with imaginaries of direct democracy and autonomy. This is the case especially in global North cities like Barcelona and Athens, and various Italian cities (14, 192, 193), and also in places like Istanbul (194). The food sovereignty movement has mobilized the conception of food (and seed and land) as a commons (195, 196). For instance, the US Food Sovereignty Alliance reframed their efforts as "taking back the commons," as a way to both deepen the political implications of their analysis and simplify their public message: that privatization was driving the grabbing of lands and resources that "belong to everyone" (196). In the case of water, the movement across Italian cities harnessed the imaginary of water as a common good (*bene comune*) and as a human right, in its successful struggle against water privatization (197–199). Similar articulations of water as relational and communal have been mobilized by water justice activists in Detroit, Johannesburg, and Dublin (100) and across Europe (200).

Movements in some contexts have furthered the commons frame as a new policy paradigm that promotes citizen control over water and energy at the municipal level (200, 201). In Italy,

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the water movement (197) has motivated a new policy agenda for state-citizen collaboration, a new constitutional recognition of common goods, including water, and, in Naples, a new public water commons corporation with direct citizen participation (202). Similarly, in Barcelona, the Indignados movement led to the creation of the Barcelona en Comú ("Barcelona in Common") party, which has since promoted a new pro-commons policy agenda (200). In the energy context, Berlin and Hamburg are paradigmatic cases of a social movement introducing a public debate on grid ownership and supporting urban energy cooperatives in their attempt to buy the cities' electricity systems (74, 201).

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Although the commons concept has received most recognition in North American and European contexts (203), it is being increasingly mobilized by global North-South networks. For instance, in the People's Summit organized in 2012 in parallel with the United Nation's Rio+20 Sustainable Development meeting in Rio de Janeiro, a statement denounced the dangerous conspiracy between the market and state to enclose commons, and stressed the need to visibilize and organize commons-based alternatives as part of a convergence of movements across sectors (278). Similarly, in the context of the fifth IPCC Assessment Report in 2014, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas called for energy democratization and the need to protect the commons for livelihoods and the common good rather than for private profit (204). Finally, the commons has become a keyword for climate justice movements that frame climate as a global commons to be shared equally and governed collectively. This concept emphasizes the leading role of community-based solutions, such as agroecology and community energy for a just transition toward a fossil fuel–free society (205–208).

3.8. Tensions and Contradictions in Commons Movements

Although strongly indicating a positive effect of movements on CBNRM and vice versa, the literature reviewed also documents some trade-offs. Movements sometimes promote certain local organizational structures (e.g., cooperatives) that restrict self-organization and management autonomy (209) or that facilitate market integration and/or external funding. This can have the effect of undermining the economic independence of the communities (144, 210). Movements may also expose communities to government co-optation (83, 147) and either create or exacerbate community inequalities (101, 211, 212) or trigger internal conflicts about strategies to secure rights and local development (164, 213, 214).

The impacts of movements on scaling-up are, at times, subject to contradiction. Engaging in transnational processes implies the increasing professionalization of the strategies and discourses of community organizations. Thus, local communities and their networks "face the dilemma of appropriating external expert knowledge to support their claims, while simultaneously defending more locally-rooted knowledge on the common's governance" (149, p. 3). Numerous tensions accompany these dilemmas. Included here are tensions between confining grievances to management affairs or politicizing those grievances (215), between reaching out or maintaining social cohesion within the communities, and between adopting discourses that connect with the public at large or fulfilling the transformational ambition of local community projects (141, 171, 216). Furthermore, the institutionalization of government-community collaborations, for its part, can demobilize commons initiatives and "invisibilize" state repression of communities (217), or exacerbate existing patterns of social exclusion within communities (86).

Other challenges emerge from the influence of communities on movements. Existing or new divisions within the communities can undermine unity vis-à-vis mobilization and tactics (11, 103). Furthermore, government or firms may target communities to undermine movements (213). In the urban context, the occupation of land for urban gardening could result in less space for social housing and schools, thus undermining other rights to city and commons movement goals (182).

Coupled with these drawbacks is the irregularity of membership and participation, and the lack of experience in managing conflict that can limit the scaling-out of community-based initiatives (110, 123, 218–220). Furthermore, contradictions exist between the need to organize collective work and membership on the one hand, and to maintain certain social transformation values and remain open and inclusive to favor the expansion of the movement on the other (109, 113, 182, 221, 222).

With regard to the use of the commons frame by movements, Ferrando et al. (203) conclude that this concept was mostly developed in Europe and North America, particularly in urban areas. Thus, it risks reinforcing North-South epistemological hierarchies, displacing other visions from the global South, and even inciting resistance in some instances.

Commonization: "a process through which a resource gets converted into a jointly-used resource under commons institutions and collective action" (228)

Finally, there is ample literature documenting the conservationist movement that has in the past promoted coercive conservation policies that actually serve to undermine CBNRM regimes, often displacing communities or restricting their resource use and management rights over forests (e.g., 223), land (e.g., 224), and fisheries (e.g., 225). Although this has occurred mostly in the global South, it has also happened in the global North (226; see also 133 regarding conflicts between conservation and community energy projects in the United Kingdom).

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4. EMERGING COMMONS MOVEMENTS THEORY

An overarching insight emerging from Section 3 is the intrinsic way in which social movements and commons initiatives coproduce one another, to the point where it is difficult to distinguish them. This aligns with the theorizations we have encountered in our review, which transcend the theory of the commons and social movement theory (see **Figure 1**). Here, we synthesize these theorizations from three vantage points: the actions of hybrid organizations that operate at the interface of commons management and political advocacy and across scales, the synergies between social mobilization and self-organized governance in the struggles of local communities against commons privatization, and the processes of commons-making and how they shape identities, imaginaries, and relations.

4.1. Virtuous Cycles Between Movements and Commons Projects

As illustrated throughout Section 3, movements can reinforce CBNRM/commons projects and vice versa. These synergies, as well as the tensions, have become an object of study among scholars interested in how enclosures and privatization can be confronted and reverted.

The commonization and decommonization (180, 228) theory aims to explain how different political-economic and environmental conditions, coupled with the cross-level actions of communities, movements, governments, and other stakeholders, shift commons toward more or less commonized regimes (i.e., the extent to which natural and organizational resources are shared collectively as opposed to privately) (71, 176, 177; see also Sections 3.1 and 3.5). In the context of resistance to neoliberal privatization, movements can also "commonize the public realm" (229) and promote a commons approach within the state (201). They do so by coupling community-based initiatives and the remunicipalization of local services with citizen participation and oversight, as in the transformations that have occurred in the water and energy sectors of various cities (see Section 3.7).

The virtuous cycle theory (6, 12)[8] centers on the mutual influence of movements and commons as two separate but interrelated social forces that can jointly promote a broader societal

[8]De Angelis does not use these exact words but refers to a synergistic relationship between movements and commons.

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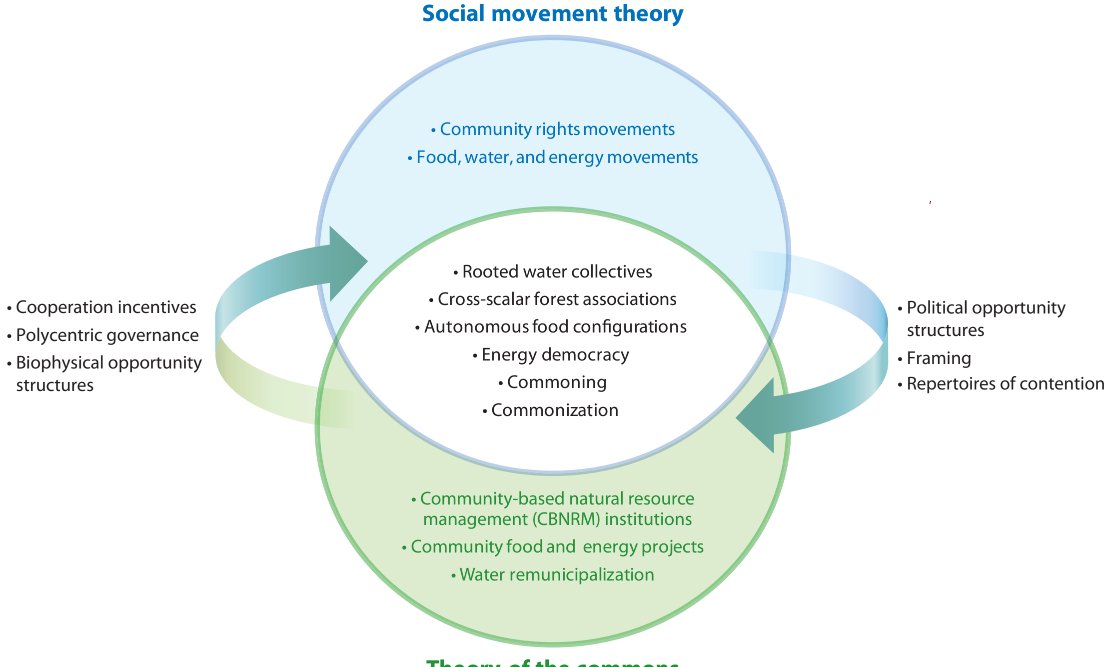

Figure 1

The green and blue inner circles represent instances of commons movements from the global South and global North in their community-based organization and social movement manifestations; these instances have been investigated by the theory of the commons and social movement theory. In the interface of these theories there are new emerging conceptualizations of commons movements (e.g., rooted water collectives, energy democratization) that transcend the separation of commons and movements. An alternative way to theorize commons movements is the extrapolation of lessons from the theory of the commons to the study of movements, and vice versa; this is represented by the left and right arrows, respectively, and the concepts listed in each. References for key terms: rooted water collectives (101), cross-scalar forest associations (e.g., 143, 144), autonomous food configurations (109), energy democracy (132), commoning (e.g., 227), commonization (180).

transformation to a "pro-commons society." Social movements are focused on protesting to demand a change and provide for institutional defense of commons projects, but they deactivate once a deal has been reached. Commons, in turn, are autonomous systems centered on reproduction of social and ecological life, through which movement demands are ultimately enacted, interconnected, and collectively envisioned. When these two forces intersect, they form commons movements that contribute to strengthening, expanding, and institutionalizing commons (6, 13). This theory fits particularly well with new food and energy movements and associated community projects (6, 12, 109, 132; see also Sections 3.2 and 3.6) but also peasant-indigenous movements (11). It dovetails with recent environmental justice scholarship, which perceives alternative-livelihood community projects and movements as two interdependent and mutually reinforcing sides of sustainability transformations (177, 230, 231). Commons environmentalism brings these concepts together, pointing out how a "rural working-class sensibility in which cultural and emotional ties to land and place weave together the stewardship of livelihoods and environment" serves as a coalescing force for just transition movements (232, p. 12).

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Other theorizations look at the synergies between movements and commons from a coevolutionary perspective. Varvarousis (13), building on De Angelis and others, proposes understanding

the evolution of commons movements as a rhizomatic expansion. This approach zooms in on how liminal experiments of community-based provision of goods and services (or liminal commons) emerge in the aftermath of crises "within, through and because of social movements" simultaneously across different places and times without a recognizable "center" (13, p. 2). At the same time, they "disseminate the ideas of the social movements throughout the social fabric," while creating a new social fabric that can contribute to future movement cycles (13, p. 2). Building from a similar perspective, Moreira & Fuster Morell (233) propose studying the life cycle of commons movements and the conditions under which they emerge, develop, sustain, and dissolve or transform themselves over time.

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4.2. Cross-Scalar Collectives and Dynamics

As also outlined in Section 3, the interaction between commons and social movements usually results in the creation of hybrid organizations and networks that operate at multiple scales and that carry management and advocacy tasks interdependently. Some scholars have theorized about these collectives as they unfold in different contexts. In the rural context, Vos et al. (101) talk about rooted water collectives and posit that entities can develop from mobilizations that crystallize in CBNRM experiences (as in, for example, 78), or from CBNRM organizations that mobilize beyond the local to advocate for social or policy change (as in, for example, 149). Similar arguments have been made about cross-scalar forest associations (67, 83) (see also Section 3.3). In the context of urban community gardens and related food movements (see Section 3.4), Mudu & Marini (109) talk about autonomous food configurations as dense webs of practice that mediate the organization of sporadic activities, such as guerrilla gardening or the occupation of abandoned lands, with regular food production and distribution activities. As they indicate, these configurations cannot happen if there is no proliferation of local activities to build on, or if there is no political project that glues them together and connects with other networks. In a similar vein, some sustainability and energy transition scholars refer to community energy projects and networks (see Section 3.3) as grassroots innovation movements to highlight how the innovative potential of local communities can contribute to energy transitions at the societal level (e.g., 9, 134, 141). They emphasize, for example, the importance that movements give to the consolidation of local community niches and networks (e.g., via identity and group formation) before scaling-out such networks (141).

An interest in cross-scalar organizations has drawn attention to cross-scale feedback and rescaling as a mobilization strategy. As illustrated in Section 3.8, commons movements face tensions and trade-offs in operating at different scales. These trade-offs, or boomerang effects, coexist with other, more synergistic types of cross-scale feedback. The catapult effect, for example, highlights how supralocal actors organize communities to advance their own agendas and how local actors, in turn, use this opportunity to gain rights, whereas the minefield effect points to how mobilizations of multiple isolated communities can coincide with and echo one another, creating a momentum for change at a larger (e.g., governmental) scale (234). Furthermore, cross-scalar organizations can also redefine the scales at which they operate (146–148; see also Sections 3.3 and 3.4). (Re)defining the physical and social boundaries of certain resources (e.g., a basin) or the impacts of certain projects (e.g., a dam) shapes the formation of coalitions and, in turn, their potential for mobilization and community-building (156, 235, 236). Scale, from this perspective, becomes not only a location or a relation but also the object of mobilization strategies, that is, rescaling.

Finally, global South scholars working in community-rights movements have underscored the importance of territory as a multiscalar object contested and redefined by commons movements

to organize and mobilize against neocolonial extractivism and dispossession, while developing alternatives that are both "rooted" in a given place and intersectional[9] (158, 159, 237, 238).

Commoning: processes through which community-based rules and practices, collective identities, and commonly shared resources are reproduced and expanded

4.3. Processes of Commons-Making

A fair number of the studies reviewed, particularly in the context of new urban commons but not only, point to the emergence of new practices, relations, identities, and discourses by those participating in commons initiatives, which redefine what commons are, what they are for, and for whom they are intended.

The idea of commoning blurs the boundaries between movements and commons more than the theories presented in the previous section. It merges the two by understanding them as part of a single process that both consolidates commons-based imaginaries, practices, and relations and contests dominant ways of governing nature, democracy, and economy (114, 227, 239–241). Commons-making can serve to resignify economic activities as a collective endeavor through the mobilization of otherwise-competing producers into production groups, the framing of their activity as part of a broader social transformation project, and the joint participation in campaigns to promote state support for the social and solidarity economy (242). These processes become sites for symbolic deconstruction, learning, and mobilization that foster counter-neoliberal subjectivities of producer, citizen, and activist in a dialectic with neoliberal subjectivities of consumer, entrepreneur, and volunteer (220). They can also contribute to the strengthening of collective ties and identities and, as such, become the constituent power of other social movements (243).[10]

The idea of becoming a commoner (80) focuses on the subjective changes that occur in commoning processes. New subjectivities of being-in-common are produced through the reconfiguration of people's experiences while engaged in movements and associated communal initiatives (244, 245). A key contribution in this regard is the attention to institutions and emotions as relational factors of subjectivity, that is, that do not reside solely in an individual or in the environment but in both, through the practices that connect them (246).

Finally, the energy democracy frame has been used to theorize the interface between energy transitions movements and community energy projects (see also Section 3.2). Campos & Marín-González (132), for example, argue why community energy projects are more than just a movement of people interested in self-generation (or prosumers) and point to their opposition to the centralized energy model (e.g., based on fossil fuel or nuclear energy) and their interest in energy literacy as a basis for active energy citizens and just energy transitions, among other features. Hess (138), in turn, links energy democratization to two types of sociotechnical transition goals, developing alternative technologies and ending existing technologies, and two types of societal change goals, the democratization of industrial organizations (e.g., via community energy projects) and the equitable access to jobs and industrial products.

5. THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE THEORY OF THE COMMONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

A complementary approach to the theorizations reviewed above is the application of social movement theories [e.g., political opportunity structures (POS), framing, and prefigurative politics] to

[9]Intersectional refers to the multiple identities (e.g., class, race, gender, coloniality, indigeneity) and relations expressed in a single subject or space, e.g., a community (see 234).
[10]As inferred by these and other authors, there is a connection between commoning and the idea of virtuous cycles.

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study commons projects, and the use of the theory of the commons (e.g., the importance of cooperation dilemmas and biophysical factors, or the merits of polycentric governance) to study social movements (see **Figure 1**).

5.1. Crossing from the Theory of the Commons to Social Movement Theory: Political Opportunities, Frames, and Repertoires of Contention

POS refer to structural—although not necessarily formal—(dis)incentives that encourage or discourage people to engage in social movements (247). These (dis)incentives are shaped by the degree of openness of political institutions to potential challengers, tolerance or repression of protest, the stability of political coalitions, and the presence of movement allies within elites (248). This theory has been increasingly used in studies of community-led movements defending subsistence livelihoods (249–252). Recent studies have shown, for example, how the type of political culture (e.g., corporatist versus pluralist), the level of democratic openness to citizens' claims, or elite and nonelite allies' support coevolve with communities' self-organization capacity to manage natural resources and lobby for new political and managerial opportunities (11, 83).

POS are intimately related to frames, which articulate certain narratives, collective identities, and movement goals with the aim of forging shared meaning in a group and mobilizing support (253). The theory of the commons has long recognized that shared mental models among natural resource users—for example, about the boundaries of the resource, scarcity, or degradation—can affect collective action (3). However, with few exceptions (17), little empirical work in commons research has focused on the strategic mobilization of frames and how they shape governance. This is not a trivial gap, considering that CBNRM/commons frames have been recurrently mobilized by social movements (see Section 3.7). Frames can potentially influence whether and how people perceive a given environmental problem as common and thus as meriting collective action, the type of actions that could potentially address the problem, and the territorial and scalar dimensions of such actions (72, 254). The concept of strategic action fields in the social movement scholarship highlights the strategic use of frames by incumbents and challengers of policies in a given sector (255). The concept is reminiscent of the theory of the commons' interest in strategic decision-making (256), which makes it particularly amenable for use in commons studies (129; see also Sections 3.1 and 3.6).

Social movement scholars have also begun conceptualizing commons projects as part of a repertoire of contentions of movements, that is, the range of strategies that include protests, direct action, and forms of organizing used by social movements. Here, the theory of prefigurative politics has taken some momentum. Prefigurative describes movements that envision and embody desired changes through their everyday practices and relations (14, 127, 183, 257).[11] This method challenges traditional approaches from social movement theory, which understand movements as protest-based cycles that would end once the demands to change formal institutions—usually the state—were met. It also questions the focus of the theory of the commons on cooperation and stable institutional arrangements, and the conceptualization movements and commons as separate phenomena.

Recent studies point to the fruitful ways in which prefigurative theory can be applied to understand commons dynamics as both a form of contentious politics and as an enactment of

[11] Boggs (258) defined prefiguration as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" of the movement (p. 7). This is done through "small, local, collective organs of popular control" such as factory councils and neighborhood assemblies (p. 15) that seek to democratize movements. For conceptual elaborations, see also References 221, 222, and 259.

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broader political projects. For instance, the strengthening of indigenous communal land governance can be perceived as part of the everyday tactics of contention in local struggles against extractivist projects (174). At the same time, strengthening and diversifying communal economies, autonomy, and local democratic practices for commons governance helps communities to stay in place and to mobilize broader popular support to promote alternative visions of rural development (239). Similarly, new community forestry and agroecology initiatives can be used by social movement activists as direct action to protect their environment, while producing food and economic opportunities and creating spaces to practice marginalized cultural traditions (88; see also Section 3.1).

Urban gardens have also been conceptualized as part of the contentious strategies of movements to stop real estate speculation or urban expansion, to counter corporate control of food, and to demand a right to more just and sustainable cities (14, 127, 182). And in the energy sector, community renewable energy projects have been used by movements to simultaneously provide a collective good, create a new vision of energy, confront clearly identifiable political opponents, mobilize broad popular support, and foster a societal change from a centralized to a decentralized, democratic, and socially just energy system (132, 137, 183, 201). Environmental scholars have labeled some of these cases as environmentalism of everyday life (8, 35, 68, 260, 261) through which communities try to isolate themselves from unsustainable production and consumption by generating new circuits of goods and service production and consumption.

5.2. Crossing from Social Movement Theory to the Theory of the Commons: Cooperation Dilemmas, Biophysical Opportunities, and Polycentricity

Movements are a form of collective action that require the cooperation of participants. However, most scholarship from social movement theory has focused on grievances, organizational resources, framing and other movement strategies, and the political-economic context shaping mobilization. Only recently have social movement scholars begun to explore the relevance of certain tenets from the theory of the commons, such as cooperation incentives, to better understand social mobilization (262). Olson (263) was an early pioneer, who explained the success of labor unions as a function of their capacity to create disincentive free rider behavior within their membership. Although Olson's theory was soon superseded by resource mobilization and other social movement theories, recent works have drawn new attention to cooperation and integrated it with considerations of psychological and emotional aspects (213, 262, 264). Scholtens (213), for example, shows the importance of participants' sense of efficacy or frustration to explain the inability of North Sri Lankan fishers to cooperate and sustain a movement against the intrusion of Indian trawlers.

The theory of the commons has extensively elaborated on the influence of the characteristics of natural resources, such as the size of the resource system, its mobility, and storability, on collective action (3, 265). With the exception of space, social movement theory has barely focused on the biophysical context as a mobilization factor. Tilly (266), for example, talks about a place-based approach that explores the impact of location and physical proximity, and the meaning people attribute to spaces in the formation of movements; Zhang & Zhao (267) add other factors, including spatial concentration and spatial scale shifts. An important exception is Scheidel et al. (268), who advances the idea of biophysical opportunity structures (BOS). According to these authors, BOS result from attributes of natural resources, such as their visibility, connectedness, and ecological conditions, and can influence the emergence of environmental justice movements.

The issue of coordination across geographical scales and governance levels is central to commons scholars interested in polycentricity (269). Polycentricity theory proposes that systems with

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multiple nested scales of governance, where semiautonomous decision-making centers both compete and cooperate, can improve the long-term adaptability of natural resource governance, as compared to fully centralized or decentralized systems (270). The theory has gained significant momentum in the past decades as a heuristic to study CBNRM beyond the local level (271). In this sense, it has overlaps with the study of cross-scale networks of commons-movement interactions, as discussed in Section 4.1. Despite early connections between polycentricity and social movement theory (25), it is only recently that social movement scholars have used it again, for example, to describe the World Social Forum (272), the solidarity economy and transition movements (273), and the climate justice movement (169). Tormos-Aponte & García-López (169), for example, develop the concept of polycentric struggles. They use this concept to analyze how movements challenge existing governance regimes to create new polycentric ones, connecting actors across multiple scales and diverse sectors and issues, fostering new community-based initiatives, and promoting transnational advocacy (see also 99 for an application of these ideas to water governance in Ecuador).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The emerging commons movements scholarship invites us to think of the dynamic between resistance and alternatives. Commons are sites of struggles that draw the last line of defense of the reproduction of the material and symbolic means of life; however, they are also sites that prefigure an exit option to state and corporate control of natural resources, environmental degradation, and injustices. Our review of the scholarship reveals a growing thread of empirical and theoretical contributions at the interface of commons and movements. As we found, movements can contribute to the strengthening and rescaling of commons projects, which can in turn serve as the basis of social mobilization and become a key frame to advance new policy/societal paradigms. We also found tensions and contradictions of commons-movement dynamics, which could be addressed more systematically in future research. The literature is also flourishing with new concepts and theory at the interface of these dynamics. Promising inroads for further theorization are cross-scalar organizations and the dialectics between local rootedness and scaling-up, the driving forces of decommonization versus commonization, the virtuous cycle between commons and social movements, and the new imaginaries and subjectivities emerging from processes of commons-making (commoning). Finally, there is an only marginally explored opportunity to cross boundaries from social movement theory into the theory of the commons and vice versa. Indeed, the diverging paths of commons and social movement theory from the 1960s until very recently is somewhat puzzling, given their shared interest in explaining collective action. Promising entry points in this regard are political opportunity and framing theories and the study of biophysical factors and polycentricity, respectively.

Our synthesis effort revealed two tensions. The first is between studying CBNRM and social movements as separate entities versus as a single phenomenon. Some authors are rather clear about their take on this but many are not. This blurring has resulted in a variety of promising new concepts, which stretch traditional definitions of CBNRM, commons, and movements in different directions. These new developments have not yet translated into diverging research strands but may in the future.

A second tension is that existing between natural resource studies in the rural, urban food and energy contexts. Studies of rural commons-movement interactions have a longer tradition within both the commons and social movement scholarships. This literature is richer in empirical insights but has been less innovative vis-à-vis theory integration than the new literature from the urban and energy contexts. Urban and energy studies, in turn, also diverge in their approach.

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Although both share an interest in the justice paradigm, urban studies are strongly influenced by Autonomous Marxism and New Left ideas, whereas energy studies often link to literatures on sociotechnical/sustainability transitions.

Further research could engage with non-English literature to capture empirical findings and recent theoretical innovations carried out by global South scholars, for instance from Latin America (274–276). Despite the presumed globalization of commons movements, e.g., around environmental justice (277), there is a strong (and in our view, fruitful) North-South divide in the motivations and developments of these movements, as well as in the epistemologies developed to understand them. Promising epistemologies from the South include the indigenous, afro-descendant and feminist approaches that do not separate the individual from the social nor the social from the ecological, but rather, understand all as part of a common heritage and the basis of life; stress the feminine character of much of the care labor involved in commons movements; propose the territory and communality as key elements of analysis; and envision these as the motor of societal transformations beyond colonial-capitalist development.

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Important instances of commons movements occur in the urban, rural, and energy contexts.
2. Movements can contribute to create and strengthen CBNRM institutions and commons, as well as scale them up and out. This is particularly evident in the context of rural community-rights movements and new urban, energy, and democracy movements.
3. CBNRM institutions and commons, in turn, can serve as the basis of social mobilization and become a key frame for social movements, as shown in the context of local environmental justice and livelihoods conflicts and new anti-privatization discourses.
4. Tensions and contradictions within commons movements also exist and reflect trade-offs between diversity versus uniformization, and organizational closure versus expansion of discourses and practices, among other issues.
5. New commons movements theory is emerging focusing on virtuous cycles between commons and movements, cross-scalar organizations, and the processes of commons-making.
6. There is an opportunity to cross theoretical boundaries from the theory of the commons to social movement theory and vice versa, by looking at the role of political opportunities, framing, and prefigurative actions, as well as on cooperation dynamics, biophysical factors, and polycentricity, respectively.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. Continue documenting and theorizing cross-scalar organizations, the virtuous cycles between movements and commons projects, and the processes of commons-making (i.e., commoning).
2. Address more systematically the tensions existing within commons movements and develop theory on the factors that explain and could resolve them.

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3. Explore more systematically the role of the state in the relationship between commons and movements. The theory on POS offers a promising starting point.
4. Analyze more systematically the connections between the theory of the commons and social movement theory, by systematically looking, for example, at the role of framing and mobilization strategies in CBNRM contexts or the role of cooperation dilemmas in social movements.
5. Complement this review with more insights from non-English literature and global South scholars and engage in more comparative case work that disentangles commonalities and differences across the global North and South.

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