Debates in Post-Development and Degrowth: Volume 2

A special issue published in collaboration with Tvergastein

The *Debates in Post-Development and Degrowth* Journal, published by Tvergastein, is an academic journal dealing with debates and works focused on advancing post-development & degrowth thought. This journal arises as an outcome of the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) course 4034: Debates in Post-development & Degrowth, thereby establishing a publishing space for the works emerging from within it. The journal hopes to create the desired academic space to organize the understanding and reconciliation of the present socio-ecological and climate catastrophe, but also to make efforts in subverting this disaster-ridden pathway. Let this journal serve as a forum for liberatory experimentation, allowing people to organize and align their thoughts, values and actions to raise awareness and create positive social change wherever they stand.

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Edited by Alexander Dunlap, Alejandro Ruelas, and Lisa Hammelbo Søyland

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UiO : Centre for Development and the Environment
University of Oslo

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Editorial Introduction: Can the University Be Socio-ecologically Sustainable?

by A. Dunlap, L. H. Søyland, and A. Ruelas

Welcome to *Debates in Post-Development & Degrowth Volume 2!* This journal is published in collaboration with *Tvergastein.* The journal emerges from the conversations, thinking, and course papers from the Spring 2022 course: *Debates in Post-Development & Degrowth* at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), University of Oslo, Norway. The University of Oslo (UiO) and, particularly, SUM – as discussed in *Volume 1* – sits at an important juncture between the rejection, negotiation and embrace of the ideology of 'sustainable development' and 'green growth.' This journal seeks to discuss the history of sustainable development, the struggle with and against it, while debating these issues as they relate to post-development and degrowth literature. The enthusiasm of students, their eager participation and critical engagement with the course material originally inspired the making of this journal, as it now appears for a second time!

This *Debates in Post-Development & Degrowth* journal provides students with a publication outlet to air their thoughts, concerns, provocations – and, overall, join this rapidly evolving academic conversation. Here, we offer exciting new papers and engagements—from degrowth education to digital extractivism and political struggle in Norway—that have undergone editorial and literal peer review by staff and students. The journal's intention is to not only widen engagements in the post-development conversation, but also expand the political thought and practice at SUM, which includes academic debates concerning the problems of development, resistance, so-called "energy transition" and, most of all, the propagation of the green growth myth.

As you might be new to the topics of post-development and degrowth, we would encourage readers to revisit the editorial introduction from *Volume 1*, which can be found on the *Tvergastein* website.[1]

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1 The journal can be found online on the *Tvergastein* website under the "special publications" tab, at the top of the screen (see Dunlap et al. 2021).

To give a brief definition, post-development refers to the critical research field questioning Development in its entirety, seeking to examine strategies of resistance to (modernist) Development, but also articulate alternatives to Development, as opposed to development alternatives (Escobar 2012 [1995]). Post-development is an overarching field emerging from Latin America, which in many ways degrowth falls under, yet degrowth has become a burgeoning literature on its own with large appeal in academia. Coming out of the school of ecological economics and political ecology, degrowth thought contends that the capitalist economy needs to organize and plan—as opposed to fall into crisis—the degrowth of material and energy use at both points of production and consumption, finding alternative economic development methods. The articles in this journal will discuss degrowth and post-development, but—again—we encourage unfamiliar readers to find a full introduction to these schools of thought in *Debates in Post-Development & Degrowth Volume 1*.

This issue presents nine exceptional articles examining or developing aspects of post-development and degrowth in relation to education; eco-feminism; wind energy development; digital extractivism; political resistance in Norway; the (fast) Fashion industry; squatting; gre-

en criminology; and transportation. We will offer an overview of these articles below. Before this, however, we want to engage in a thought experiment and conceptualize what a university articulating post-development and degrowth values and imperatives might look like. We find this rather important, as we are either students or employees at a high-learning institution that does not currently embody the socio-ecological values and practices necessary to regenerate ecologies and social relationships.

As it stands, and as was discussed in the editorial introduction of *Volume 1* (Dunlap et al. 2021), the planet is engulfed by and on a track towards intensifying global environmental catastrophe. This is linked to the failure to properly diagnose and remediate socio-ecological harm. Isak Stoddard and twenty-two other colleagues (2021), in the *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, demonstrate that the last thirty years of climate change mitigation policy have been a failure. The 'successes' that have emerged exist in the shadows of the global intensification of resource (material) extractivism, with increases in energy use and carbon dioxide emissions (Dunlap 2021a). The university system, we must admit, bears partial responsibility for this failure, which, as staff and students, we are obliged to change. Higher

education institutions are instrumental in knowledge production, socio-cultural value affirmation, societal development and, consequently, play a significant role in the current trajectory of our planet (Gills & Morgan 2021a). Many now emphasize the need for higher education institutions to change in order to rethink education as a key site of social-ecological activism (Murray 2018). This includes resisting instrumentalist notions of education and the ways that capitalism is naturalized within these institutions, thereby foreclosing other futures (Gayá and Brydon-Miller 2017).[2] Education should foster respect for Indigenous rights, epistemologies, and practices (Gayá and Brydon-Miller 2017; Murray 2018). Socio-ecological and climate catastrophe shows us not only that mainstream curriculum needs to be radically put into question, but also that what governments, markets, and technological development have been doing—relying on intensive mining, chemical processing, and manufacturing—has placed ecosystems and the world out of balance.

Adjusting Higher Education Institutions to Socio-Ecological Catastrophe

When attempting to reimagine the university, we must ask, as with any institution or social organism: what is its purpose and what does it *do*? And more still, what *can* it do? While higher education and research institutions produce beneficial and necessary biomedical, agroecological, technological, and social scientific knowledges, they are also institutions that are bureaucratic and, despite claiming to be worried about climate change and ecological catastrophe, their productive 'output' is rather contradictory. We might think the university is about 'making the world a better place'—and it might be—but it is clearly doing this while also celebrating statist and market logics with the full intention of advancing state, economic, and particular types of high-modernist technological development. To varying degrees, higher education institutions are dependent upon state interests, corporate politics, and profit logics, with efforts to maintain the status quo and advance capitalist, state, and military imperatives (Veblen, 1965 [1918]; Nocella et al. 2010; Chatterjee & Maira 2014).[3]

We must ask, as with any institution or social organism: what is its purpose and what does it do? And more still, what can it do?

As Gayá and Brydon-Miller state, higher education institutions are "increasingly corporatized rather than democratized," as standardization, commercialization, and neoliberal models of governance intensify and gain a tighter grip on public management regimes (Gayá and Brydon-Miller 2017, 35). Digitalization schemes also contribute to this (Muellerleile & Robertson 2018; Lewis et al. 2022). There is, however, resistance to corporatization and the ensuing socio-ecological harm within higher education institutions. According to Murray's (2018: 1101) literature review, there are "more than 580 fossil fuel divestment campaigns at HEIs worldwide, which are predominately led by students." The largest universities in Norway, including the University of Oslo, have pledged to divest from coal and oil and gas industries (Tollefsen 2016). While this might be a start, this is not enough—especially as fossil fuel divestment is accompanied by low-carbon infrastructure romantics that neglect the intricate connection between hydrocarbon industries and the production of so-called 'renewables.'[4]

Working within the University: Research, Teaching, and Learning

The university is largely a competitive environment which often does not foster cooperation (Sharp 2002; Shiel & Williams 2015). Despite ongoing efforts to cultivate collaboration and communication across academic disciplines, most universities are symbolically and physically divided into separate disciplinary "silos" (Brinkhurst et al. 2011; Murray 2018; Shiel & Williams 2015). This contributes to the rigidity of the institution and allows a variety of scientific disciplines to continue to disregard the social, ecological, and political aspects and effects of their knowledge production. While inter- and trans-disciplinarity are heralded as strategies for sustainability in higher education (Brinkhurst et al. 2011; Murray 2018; Shiel and Williams 2015), interdisciplinarity and collaboration are incompatible with the institutional neoliberal governance models, which "decrease collaborative research, increase short-term research projects that promise speedy publication, and focus inward on disciplinary audiences and away from more public venues for the dissemination of social science research" (Gayá and Brydon-Miller 2017, 37). There is significant room for improvement on this academic front.

2 Gayá and Brydon-Miller write from the contexts of the US and the UK, in which these tendencies are more pronounced. Nonetheless, this is of relevance in the Norwegian context as well.

3 This is especially true of institutions in the United States. Writing from Norway, this situation is a bit different, but there are, nonetheless, (nondeterministic) connections between corporate industry, profit logics, state interests and the workings of higher education institutions.

4 For more on the false fossil fuel versus renewable energy dichotomy, see York and Bell (2019), Brock (2020), Dunlap (2021a; 2021b), Lennon (2021) and Dunlap and Marin (2022).

Today, there is an extreme focus on output and rationalization within universities. Academics are also workers––high-value, skilled workers manning production lines whose output is measured in published articles, citations, grant acquisition, master and PhD diplomas, and public impact that increasingly relies on social media. Internet portals like Google Scholar, Researchgate.net, and Academia.edu offer data on publications, reads, and citations. These numbers are later converted into reports that, like all statistics on productivity, demand growth. Universities are immersed in the capitalist logic of perpetual expansion, extracting value from their workforce to bolster their market-oriented metrics. Professors and institutions battle each other for research grants and take carbon-intensive trips around the globe to gather in symposiums. Professors, or established academic staff, are known for 'gatekeeping' and 'bullying.' This entails preventing motivated staff from applying for grants, overworking them, belittling their publication efforts and, overall, engaging in disingenuous behavior that abuses their position of authority. This extends to sexual harassment, which disproportionately affects women.

The heavy workloads and output-oriented work culture leave little spare time for the bureaucratic and time-consuming work of institutional transformation and are therefore documented barriers to cultivating sustainable universities (Brinkhurst et al. 2011; Murray 2018; Sharp 2002). This treadmill of production needs to be reorganized and conceptualized to embody degrowth values.

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The focus on output and measurable productivity is a reality for students as well. The university (and virtually all other levels of schooling) has become characterized by test regimes that determine the international rankings of institutions and students' grades—which in turn limit or permit access to higher education levels. Such test and grade regimes necessarily render students as 'empty boxes' into which educators put the knowledge needed, which thereafter can be measured as learning outcomes. This is related to what the founder of emancipatory pedagogy Paulo Freire (2000, 72) called the *banking* concept of education, "in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits." In Freire's reckoning, the educator is considered the qualified keeper of legitimate and *true* knowledge, which is to be given to blank students. As Freire (2000, 73) wrote:

> *It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men [sic] as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world.*

This may, in some cases, seem like a caricature of education institutions. Many disciplines do seek to cultivate critical and independent thinking, and many programs aim to do so in ways that are less hierarchical, more creative, and more collaborative. Nonetheless, such efforts rub up against the rigidity of the stratified, outcome-oriented education system.

Moreover, different scientific disciplines have become too entrenched in their specific canonized theories and perspectives. Economics is perhaps the field that has most clearly enshrined certain views to the extent that other ways of thinking are precluded. Economics domesticates reality to fit it into economic logics: "[T]eaching tends to focus on setting out the mechanics of a concept or theory and providing worked examples, and students are often invited to go through the steps and confirm their understanding by emulation" (Gills & Morgan 2021b, 1196). As such, Gills and Morgan (2021b, 1196) write, mainstream economics textbooks and theory seem "more like an engineering manual approach than that which is typical in other social sciences." Mainstream economic logic is, therefore, inadequate for solving the looming climate catastrophe as it fails to understand, articulate, or solve ecological issues (Gills & Morgan 2021b). Yet, academic curricula continue to favor canonized, 'true' knowledge within the mainstream of the discipline. What is needed, then, is nothing less than "a revolution in economic education, placing biophysical processes at the heart of the study of economics" (Gills & Morgan 2021b, 99).[5] What is taught, and the outlets created to exercise that education, matters. The current environmental crisis demands educational programs organized to build real renewability[6] and create actual socio-ecological sustainable development, or post-development.

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5 In the field of economics, the organization Rethinking Economics (with its own chapter in Norway) has been working against this one-sided focus in economics education by forwarding a pluralism of economic ideas and systems, and expanding economic curricula to include considerations from biophysical science.

6 On real renewability see Dunlap (2021) and Dunlap and Marin (2022).

Simply 'greening' the status quo is not acceptable.

Gills and Morgan (2021b) elaborate on the issue of economics textbooks, but it may suffice to say this: we need a revolution in education in general. There are many other stubborn, calcified 'truths' in a variety of disciplines that need challenging, such as the colonial tendency to misread or misrepresent environmental changes in landscapes as the fault of local peoples (see Benjaminsen 2021; Fairhead and Leach 1996). Others include the privileging of economic development as inherently 'good' and desirable (Kothari et al. 2019), as well as the view of modernization as a natural process intrinsic to civilization (Shanin 1997). Many of these preconceptions stem from colonial and Euro- or Western-centric knowledge regimes. Therefore, curricula must be decolonized across disciplinary divides and debunking canonized knowledges. Simply 'greening' the status quo is not acceptable. We must learn Traditional Ecological Knowledges (TEK) both North and South of the Globe, Indigenous science, agroecology, permaculture, how to create edible cites, and much more. We need to interrogate the ways in which colonial power structures—or rather, what bell hooks (1994) calls *imperialist-white supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy*—have influenced what

is taught and known about humans, non-human beings, the natural world, different groups of peoples, modes of societal organization, and more.[7]

In reality, the learning that takes place in higher education institutions (as well as all other educational institutions) is not limited to the contents of official curricula. Students learn to live in the social space that exists within and beyond the institutions. Students, and/or people, acquire the tacit rules governing how different people move and what different bodies can *do* in social settings; they learn to orient themselves and move through these spaces (see Ahmed 2006, 2007). Though "the hidden curriculum" can be a variety of things (Kentli 2009), both good and bad, educational institutions often reproduce power structures. People racialized as white can move and orient themselves differently than people racialized as "non-white" (Ahmed 2007), just as sex/gender, sexuality, dis/ability and other categories can become consequential in social processes. In other words, the hidden curriculum is often "the curricula of class consciousness, whiteness, patriarchy, hetero-sexuality, and of the West" (Margolis et al. 2001, 3).

7 It is important to note, however, that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1). Decolonization is a symbolic, social, psychic, emotional *and material* struggle.

Another underlying doctrine is the paradigm of economic growth and capitalist extractivist logics, which can seep into education in more implicit ways than by being written in a syllabus or a textbook. For example, capitalist economics are often naturalized from the outset (Gills & Morgan 2021a); it is assumed to be common sense that 'there is no alternative'. Students (and staff) learn to live and work 'effectively' within capitalist structures that demand productivity, measured output and submission to arbitrary rules from authority or university boards.

For the university to become a socially sustainable and livable space, harmful and destructive ideas must be disrupted. In Ahmed's (2010) words, it is necessary to confront the hidden and explicit curricula by being the anti-racist, feminist killjoy: the person who addresses problematic things despite the discomfort this may entail for oneself and others.[8] This is related to what hooks (1994, 39) describes in *Teaching to Transgress*: "The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncon-

8 There is, however, always a risk of doing these things to gain social capital and to make yourself feel better, or morally superior, to other people. Political reflection and motivation, not to mention how one communicates, requires constant critical self-reflection.

trollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained." Teaching and learning from such standpoints can mean challenging the content of what is commonly taught, the ways it is taught, and other social processes that take place in the institution. Vigilance, moreover, should persist to not use critical anti-racist and decolonial ideas to reinforce exploitation, capitalism, and authoritarian control.

A university inspired by degrowth, post-development and intersectional feminism would seek a less rigid, less hierarchical, more convivial, and more embodied teaching style—one in which learning happens in relation to place and through engaging multiple senses (Springgay & Truman 2018). It would be a pedagogy in which neither educators nor students shy away from critical engagement with how power structures come up in both hidden and explicit curricula. A university in line with degrowth, post-development, and convivial approaches is also one in which the workloads and the working conditions are sustainable. It is a university with webbed connections across disciplines, a university that embodies transdisciplinarity in research practices and offers critical environmental courses to students that do not have to be exclusive, grade-based programs in order to be prioritized by the institution.

The Material Infrastructures of the University

There is little understanding of—or will to engage with—the social and ecological impacts of the material and digital infrastructures that make up today's higher education institutions. We must consider the obvious: university curricula are reflected in the infrastructures that surround us, and those infrastructures are not ecologically sustainable by any honest metric. The shift towards digitalization and electrification across Europe exemplifies this. Electric vehicles are considered green because the total sum of ecological destruction they require is not calculated properly, restricting accounting metrics to carbon emissions bounded by national borders—while the majority of material comes from the Global South (Dunlap & Marin 2022; Dunlap 2023). This issue has been popularized in documentaries, such as *The Dark Side of Green Energy* (2020), which look specifically at electric vehicle crazy and accounting in Norway.

The material construction of universities remains important. For example, how can we rely less on concrete, or use concrete that is made up of coal ash or other recyclable materials as filler, without compromising the building strength? Indigenous science, agroecology, permaculture, how to create edible cites,

and many others, remain important avenues to answer this question (see Fiebrig et al. 2013; Philips 2013; Whyte et al. 2016). The field of ecological engineering and design has an enormous amount of room to begin designing universities to be socio-ecologically sustainable. Universities, moreover, are becoming increasingly internet-dependent, creating new channels of digital technologies to manage classes and normalize computers within classrooms (Muellerleile & Robertson 2018; Lewis et al. 2022). The university is teeming with digital infrastructure, digital solutions, and digital bureaucracy, especially after the pandemic. In the case of the University of Oslo, we now have: a digital library (books & articles), email for communication, course websites (schedules & course information), Canvas (communication, course information, etc.), Leganto (downloading articles) and Inspera (grading). While this proliferation of digital programs is rooted in for-profit industries, digitalization also represents an expansion of material and energetic costs. Digital technology is not immaterial, as is often assumed in the current policy-making circles (see Landa 2020). The digital infrastructures that higher education institutions rely on are, in fact, *profoundly* material and social in the origins and effects that they create. The socio-ecological impacts of digitalization are enormous. Furthermore,

recent research on 'teleworking', related to home office and computational programs like Zoom, is systematically applying a narrow scope for understanding the amount of energy and materials required (Hook et al. 2020). While we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing academic flying and substituting in-person engagements for digital programs, Andrew Hook and colleagues (2020) remind us that it is not certain to bring ecological benefits, as the ardent realities of supply-webs and the transnational operations digitalization required are often not fully considered.

For example, the University of Oslo has its own data center (DCJ, 2022), but this is provided through complex and highly material-and energy-intensive supply-webs. This means the mining of various raw materials needed to produce servers, wires, and submarine cables (see Sovacool et al. 2020; Sovacool et al. 2022). It means chemical processing and complex manufacturing supply-webs and the construction requirements to build data centers and supporting infrastructures. Meanwhile, data and other digital infrastructures are proclaimed to be supported by so-called renewables that are positioned as the solution when, in reality, low-carbon infrastructure is highly material and mineral intensive and generates increasing environmental problems

(see Avila 2018; Bresnihan & Brodie 2020; Sovacool 2021; Dunlap 2021b). Some of these technologies require laying submarine cables that have disorienting and lethal impacts on sea life, most noticeably on whales (Sovacool et al. 2022). So, how does all of this disrupt and harm ecologies? Where is that harm inflicted? Who is doing the mining, and under what conditions? What happens to the mining waste? Is it thrown away? Where is *away*? These are critical questions we need to ask. In fact, whenever we meet any phenomenon in which technology is involved in some way or another (and what is not, at this point?), we must, as Haraway (2008) does, ask what or whom we are in touch with, in the broadest sense.[9]

The university is heading towards digital technological development instead of aiming to use less energy and materials, thus undergoing a convivial reconstruction. Convivial technologies are tools designed within the socio-ecological

9 For example, Haraway traces the social and material threads that *make it possible* to see a digital image on a computer, sent by email, of a moss-covered tree stump in the shape of a dog. Doing this, she stops at no less than the "histories of IT engineering, electronic product assembly-line labor, mining and IT waste disposal, plastics research and manufacturing, transnational markets, communications systems and technocultural consumption habits ⊠ [and] intersectional race-, sex-, age-, class-, and region-differentiated systems of labor" (Haraway, 2008, 6). This is what is meant by *in the broadest sense*.

Figure 1: "A mural on a social housing block in Nuuk, critical of economic growth and development in Greenland as erasing local culture," source: Sovacool and Colleagues (2022, 10).

fabrics of a given region. Creating convivial technologies might include actively limiting the production of such tools and thus their impact on people, nonhumans, and ecosystems (Illich 1973; Kothari et al. 2019). From using anonymized mail slots to writing by hand, alternative convivial processes are actually more common traditionally and have enormous potential in reducing energy, metallic, and mineral consumption. As it stands, however, universities are moving towards unidirectional digital development that, in the case of the University of Oslo, is voted on and directed by semi-anonymous boards. This brings up the issue of transparency

and democracy, and people's ability to participate in these matters through feedback mechanisms that allow dialogue and the implementation of institutional change. Do staff and students get a say in this pathway for digitalization? If so, how?

Digitalization relates to the classroom learning environment as well. Convivial and participatory learning methods are resoundingly more conducive to improved conceptual understanding, self-exploration, and creativity (Van der Velden 2020), something that is rarely talked about and implicitly dis-incentivized by using remote work tools. This relates to

overreliance on laptops for note taking, reading texts digitally, and substituting class activities with PowerPoints. While it is established that "[e]diting, referencing, and search[ing] were more effectively implemented on the computer than paper," explains Maja Van der Velden (2020, 13, 12), "[w]riting by hand was perceived as (re-)establishing the connection between the body and writing, by creating new connections between fingers, brain, and body." This means taking handwritten notes, but also physically having texts to make notes in the margins has significant pedagogical advantages. These advantages, however, are seldom discussed by boards of decisionmakers implementing new digital regimes in the university that have significant impact on the staff, students and, of course, ecosystems near and far. Educational means and ends should not be separated from their environments, which is to say, education and university infrastructures should respond to socio-ecological crises in all of their systemic and, often predictable, varieties. Institutions need to listen to their researchers and the academic research that is being produced.

What *is* the Purpose of the University? What Can We Do Within It?

This brings us back to our original question: What is the purpose of the university?

As it stands, it seems that the goal of higher education institutions –– including environmental studies research centers –– is to push students up a ladder within the socio-economic structure that has created this climate crisis and integrate them into the industrial economy. In his book *Deschooling Society*, Ivan Illich (2002/1971, 33) demonstrates the shortcomings of education as it is conceived in societies that have come to depend on 'the school' as an institution. He wrote that "an individual with a schooled mind conceives the world as a pyramid of classified packages accessible only to those who carry the proper tags." Obtain a bachelor's degree to get a job. Obtain a master's degree to find an even better job. The higher you climb in the education pyramid, the greater the benefits you can expect to receive. Or so the story goes. The desire for a higher title, the social status that comes with it, and the hope for better paid work remains a primary motivation of young people going into the university classrooms.

But what happens when one graduates university? What happens after completing a master's degree, which rests uncomfortably between traditional school and the lofty world of academia? There seems to be only two options. First, to try and use your newly acquired tag to find a job where wages reflect the value

of your university-provided intellectual toolkit. Naturally, and somewhat ironically, education scholars point out that this toolkit increasingly needs to include sustainability skills to secure employability and workforce preparedness (Murray 2018; Shiel & Williams 2015). Students educated in the arts of "sustainability skills," critical thinking, and independent research can put their abilities to work in the capitalist economy, entering cycles of production that happen between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm, from Monday to Friday (if there are good labor laws). Alumni of sustainability and development institutions join energy companies, NGOs structured in the image of corporations, or corporate sustainability departments, all of which offer very little that resembles the socio-ecological reconstruction needed to halt the ecological crisis. The second 'career path' (even the word 'career' is conceived as a one-way track almost identical to Rostow's (1960) linear *Stages of Economic Growth*) lies within the university itself. Students that obtain the required grades are offered the opportunity to enter academia proper; the chance to pursue a PhD and become researchers themselves—under the conditions we have described: highly geared towards productivity and output metrics, competitive and encouraging overwork. Merit, moreover, is no guarantee, as all decisions rest on the pre-

Academic institutions that promote ecological sustainability and social change reproduce an economistic logic that keep its own machinery going and research funding flowing.

ferences, egos, and insecurities of senior staff or external committees who have to sort through between 45 and 150 people applying for jobs in the social sciences. Finding reasons for disqualification only becomes more creative, shallow, and arbitrary. Research, moreover, is hidden in subscription journals and protected with paywalls that make it inaccessible to anyone outside of universities. Meanwhile, academic publishing is reported to be one of the most profitable businesses in the world. In 2018, the Dutch publishing giant, Elsevier, was reported to make £900 billion, while "[s]cientific publishers routinely report profit margins approaching 40% on their operations" (The Guardian 2019). Incredible amounts of talent and work are poured into critical research, published by companies that are, incidentally, also dedicated to the arms industry and increasing oil and gas drilling (Westervelt 2022). Academic institutions that promote ecological sustainability and social change reproduce an economistic logic that keep its own machinery going and research funding

flowing. Then again, the proof is right in front of us: the corporate environments, digital bureaucracies, and mediocre educational curriculums are divorced from practicing ecological sustainability and rebellion. Why not make departments or universities organized around ecological sustainability and social change? Let us begin practicing climate change mitigation here, now and in our departments.

The flows of knowledge, however, do not only lead from the university outwards, but seep in slowly from the outside. Perhaps the university should become more *porous*, enabling various forms of knowledge to travel within and across its boundaries and increasingly focusing on subjugated knowledges, local perspectives and multiple modes of learning and communication. In jargon terms, epistemic discrimination must stop. We should begin working to make the universities, our work and living spaces, socio-ecologically sustainable. Research is always geared towards the margins or so-called 'frontiers' of development in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but why not focus on our university systems to reorganize learning environments and infrastructural systems? Could we, for example, make permaculture gardens across the vacant grass, or grow food on the walls for the university cafeteria and roofs at UiO instead of importing it? How about in-

troducing low-carbon energy production for each building and/or use nearby sources? A small-scale wind and solar system could cover every building. Perhaps working in urban vegetable gardens should be part of the mandatory curriculum, instead of an elective activity. Maybe workloads could be reduced to accommodate community building initiatives so that, after reading and discussing change, we can make time for creating it in practice. And even if our university cannot be 100% renewable next year, we can begin the process and try these immediate changes as hard as some people have tried to make Carbon Capture and Storage anything but theoretical and costly. If administration, zoning laws and cold winters are the only barriers, these are obstacles that can be easily overcome—*if* people want to be serious about becoming ecologically sustainable. Finance? This might be a good cause for Equinor money, already circulating through UiO, or other hydrocarbon industries sponsoring universities.

There is an enormous amount of expertise and possibilities to make real transformations of our lived infrastructures, to give living examples, but as it stands, this is not happening because alternatives are either actively ignored or suppressed. What are these barriers and how can we change them to make the university and

"The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created."

education more fun, applicable, and generating wider socio-ecological results? The university *can* be transformed. At its worst, the university reproduces and reinforces many of the problems we face, and may even co-opt and 'domesticate' subjugated knowledges that challenge the status quo (Tuck and Yang 2014). At its best, it can enable the very transformations, struggles and knowledges it resists, albeit in highly contradictory and complex manners. Higher education institutions are not coherent wholes that act in concert, but assemblages of many different actors and interests. As hooks wrote (1994, 207): "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created."

Issue Contributions

This issue touches upon numerous topics and exhibits a great level of diversity. The articles discuss, apply, and advance post-development and degrowth research and thought. This issue is broken down into three thematic sections: "Theoretical Engagement" in Post-Development and Degrowth, "False Solutions and Changing the Narrative" to

socio-ecological sustainability and "Imagining How to Live in Degrowth." The articles, then, are followed by a "Comments and Debates" section, which includes an intervention by Desmond McNeill and Benedicte Bull. Because this intervention relates to the introduction of *Debates in Post-Development & Degrowth Volume 1*, this intervention is followed by a reply to McNeill and Bull by Alexander Dunlap.

Theoretical Engagements: The Ideas We Need to Challenge

The "Theoretical Engagements" section discusses degrowth education, misrecognitions of ecofeminism within degrowth and ways that green criminology can complement post-development. While raising the issue of education in degrowth, Sara Høye Alfsen argues for the creation of transformative change to the Western educational system. Alfsen's article explores the convergence of education in degrowth, which emphasizes critical discussions and reflections on dominant narratives, as well as anarcho-pedagogies promoting dynamic, flexible, and diverse learning environments. This extends past the classroom and into discussions around homeschooling that can help establish local networks for skill exchange and cooperation with the potential to reinvigorate communal values and build networks of solidarity

and reciprocity. This is followed by Kristin Charlotte Horn Talgø's *Ecofeminism: Misused, Misguided or Misrepresented?* This article demonstrates how degrowth literature can further benefit from ecofeminist scholarship. Surveying the literature, Talgø addresses the shortcomings of different representations of ecofeminism. While decolonial feminism has had valuable insights, Talgø shows how ecofeminism has been unfairly generalized and some of its valuable insights overlooked. This article, then, connects feminist perspectives on environmental degradation and social injustices to degrowth debates. The final article by Helene Kamfjord dives into the field of green criminology to trace the connections between knowledge produced in the Global South and the project of post-development. She looks at the emergence of 'southern' green criminology and how it conceptualizes ecological harm, in order to show how it contributes to the evolving idea of the pluriverse. "The recognition of and engagement with theories and perspectives from southern green criminology within what post-development call 'systemic critiques' would further strengthen their collection of pluriverse strategies," contends Kamfjord.

False Solutions and Changing the Narrative

The second section, "False Solutions," applies post-development and degrowth thought to different contexts. Ty Tarnowski's *Degrowth and the Digital Frontier* examines cryptocurrency in relationship to degrowth. The purpose of this article is to "premeditatively deconflate Bitcoin and related cryptocurrencies as a tool to be deployed towards a just degrowth." This connection between degrowth and cryptocurrency mining, Tarnowski shows, does not exist and remains unsubstantiated. Tarnowski dismisses the emancipatory capacity of the current generation of cryptocurrency, clouted in questionable green pretenses, while offering a grim warning about its ecological consequences. The next article, *Fighting Fire with Firestarters*, by Skander Manaa, offers a post-developmental critique to Tunisia's National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNDD). Similar to the European Green Deal (EGD), Tunisia's SNDD plan seeks to rapidly expand wind and solar infrastructures across the country. Manna disentangles the plan's "seductive transformative narrative" to foreground neo-colonial relations and extractivist trajectories obscured by the claims and promises of sustainable development. That Tunisia is "tackling the presented attachment and addiction to modernity,"

explains Manaa, "seems to be one of the fundamental challenges" for the country.

Imagining How to Live in Degrowth

The third section, "Imagining How to Live," finds ways to alter specific industries and challenge existing political orders. This first article by Charlotte Emilie Tobiassen cuts through the false sustainability claims of the fashion industry to show how degrowth can help build a post-fashion and post-capitalist world. Dismantling the fashion industry, she argues, will require material, ontological, and epistemological transformation in the overconsuming Global North. Reconceptualizing fashion, or "defashion," remains another sphere frequently ignored to create socio-ecological balance. Linnea Møller Jess then examines the slow travel movement, born as an internet trend. "Tourism and travel have not been focal points of degrowth research," explains Jess, and "existing work on degrowing tourism often fails to account for the material and energy throughput of transportation involved in destination tourism." Revealing issues with transportation, this article discusses ideas to make tourism and transport more socio-ecologically sustainable. By revealing how slowness ––a degrowth ideal–– can be co-opted and commodified, Jess interrogates the obsession with

rapid transportation with the hope of encouraging sustainable travel aimed at respecting ecological limits rather than promoting perpetual economic growth.

Moving away from a sectoral specific focus, Jonas Kittelsen explores the potential for anarchist revolutionary struggle in Norway to end the country's "petrophilia"—the obsession with and mass consumption of hydrocarbons. In Norway, oil infrastructure is perceived as a common good, but remains a highly toxic industry enabling irresponsible mass consumption and mobility. The struggle against Norwegian hydrocarbon industries requires action-based solutions, says Kittelsen, which entails the right to self-defense and strategic disobedience. Nearly echoing Arne Næss (1999), Kittelsen argues that more combative direct action, or anarchist practices, are less suited to the Norwegian context. The discussion around direct action continues with Elena Salmansperger's article, which looks at the connections between degrowth and squatting as an alternative form of housing. She responds to Claudio Cattaneo's work on legalized squats to argue that degrowth must abandon the legal/illegal dichotomy and support the squatting movement as a whole (including its anarchist and autonomous currents), which can have transformative political and cultural effects. This is done by loo-

king at the Zone-to-Defend in France and other accounts of squatting to challenge the utilitarian and legalist framework promoted by Cattaneo and others.

Commentaries and Debates

The final section, "Commentaries and Debates" provides a commentary from Desmond McNeil and Benedicte Bull taking issues with Peder Anker's work, which was carried forward in the introduction of the journal's last issue, Volume 1. McNeill and Bull's intervention illuminates shortcomings and omissions on the part of Anker, which leads into talking about 'activism' at SUM. This intervention, then, is responded to by one of the editors of Volume 1: Alexander Dunlap, who appreciates the insights revealed by McNeill and Bull, but also demonstrates why Anker's narrative is appealing—while harboring inaccuracies—and challenges the relational approach and conception of activism put forward by McNeill and Bull.

Conclusion

It is with great enthusiasm that we offer this journal coming from the Debates in Post-Development and Degrowth class. This introduction has presented our concerns regarding attendance and employment at the university, recognizing the importance of this institution in creating social change, but also in its

failure to take concrete actions to instigate socio-ecologically sustainable environments and curriculums. We hope that this introductory conversation will continue, inspire greater research and, more so, action from staff and students alike to create the immediate socio-ecological transformations necessary. The University of Oslo, all universities, and SUM need to set examples of becoming socio-ecologically sustainable in an effort to remediate ecological catastrophe. We hope that the articles that follow, moreover, will inspire both students and academics to further embark on critical research that contributes to public debate and change on matters of education, transportation, low-carbon infrastructural development, digital currencies, ecofeminism, green criminology, conceptions of justice, political struggle, and, most of all, claims of sustainable development and green growth.

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Part 1:
Theoretical Engagements:
The Ideas We Need to Challenge

Transforming Teaching and Learning: A Review of Degrowth and Alternative Approaches to Educational Practices and Processes

by Sara Høye Alfsen

Introduction

"Education, I fear, is learning to see one thing by going blind to another"

(Leopold 2021, 76)

With these words, Aldo Leopold was referring to how we – in so-called 'modernized' societies – have learned to ignore the intrinsic value, quality and complexity of nature; the environment; and the biophysical systems. We have separated ourselves from nature, from each other, and from other earthlings, but we have also created a dualism between body and mind. Following this Cartesian narrative, the cognitive intellect of humans has been elevated above the physical and emotional aspects of the body, as well as above other species (Malott 2012, 268). As a consequence, the practices and processes of institutionalized education in line with the western model have been distanced from the physical natural world, obscuring our understanding of the interconnections between our environments and our ways of living and being with them. This has severe consequences, as our current world is comprised of increasingly complex and intertwined ecological, environmental and social crises. Leopold called for a land ethic to evoke an ecological conscience by relearning and recognizing our relations to and responsibility for land, nature and non-humans (Leopold 1949). Increasingly, similar calls are made to address the worsening of these crises and the inability of current policy and knowledge institutions to understand, respond to, and solve them (Escobar 2015, 452). Both within academia, the political realm, and civil society worldwide, accounts from transition discourses are raised for transformative approaches of perceiving and responding to these multiple crises, as well as alternative ways of living and being. This implies fundamentally different percep-

tions of our existence as human beings and of our relation to our surrounding environments and beings. Emerging mainly in academic circles in the global North, degrowth argues for condemnation of the current western paradigm that glorifies economic growth, which facilitates and obscures the unsustainable, exploitative, and unjust character of current structures and mechanisms. There are clear calls for pursuing different and alternative ways of living: materially, politically and economically. However, increased emphasis should also be placed on transforming how we understand, experience, and relate to the world and other beings.

As argued by ample academics and scholars, current education in today's western 'modernized' societies is exceedingly institutionalized, manipulative and fixed, leading to the reproduction of unjust power relations, capitalism, and the imperial mode of living (Illich 1973; Todd 2012; Kaufmann et al. 2019). Further, the educational system's focus on individual progress has created a competitive environment where pupils are isolated from and compared to each other in educational practices, for example through testing and evaluation (Illich 1973). Challenging and changing these current educational practices, especially in westernized societies, is unavoidably a key element in creating societies capable of understan-

ding and tackling the multitude of socio-environmental crises (Prádanos 2015, 154). Therefore, the educational institution provides an exciting area of investigation, especially regarding its potentiality as a platform for building degrowth-oriented, convivial, and collective mentalities (Kaufmann et al. 2019). Such research can thus contribute to make education a tool for creating socio-ecological and sustainable worlds today and in the future.

This paper will explore how western educational institutions and practices could be transformed, from perspectives of degrowth pedagogy; these views will then be complemented with anarchist accounts for educational practices outside the institution. Due to the limitations of this paper, the focal point remains on education in western societies, whereas the educational institution refers to formal education, ranging from primary school to upper secondary school. A brief presentation of degrowth is given in the first section of the paper. The second section elaborates on critiques of the current educational institution and how these coincide with the core arguments of the degrowth perspective. In the third section, alternative approaches to education, teaching and learning are reviewed. Furthermore, degrowth accounts for changes within the institution, as those presented by Nadine Kaufmann,

Christoph Sanders, Julian Wortmann and Luis Prádanos-Garcia, are brought forth. Degrowth pedagogy offers insightful perspectives on different ways of organizing education, teaching, and learning practices in current western educational systems. Nevertheless, as degrowth is mainly concerned with the unequal and unsustainable economic status quo, degrowth pedagogy could broaden both its scope and scale by looking at a range of other pedagogical perspectives, e.g. feminist, queer, and anti-racist approaches. However, this paper will focus on the convergence of degrowth and anarcho-pedagogy. It will continue by highlighting Joseph Todd's proposal for homeschooling as an alternative anarchist form of education outside the educational institution. Concludingly, the paper offers reflections on the similarities between these approaches and the possibilities of bridging them. Such a convergence could offer a fruitful pathway to co-create pro-environmental ethics and knowledges through transformative educational processes and practices.

A Presentation of Degrowth

The reality we live in is constituted by multiple and intertwined social, environmental and ecological crises. As Álvarez and Coolsaet point out, the 'Environmental Justice Atlas' calls attention to over

2000 ecological conflicts occurring disproportionately across the globe at this moment, with an ample part of them localized in the global South (2018, 50-51). As the relationship between these socio-ecological breakdowns and economic growth increasingly become evident, a range of actors – from civil communities to academics – call for a shift of this dominant growth paradigm to fundamentally different ways of being and living (Escobar 2015; Kothari et al. 2019; Burkhart et al. 2020; Gómez-Baggethun 2020; Hickel 2021). As part of a wave of these global transition discourses both inside and outside of academia (Escobar 2015), the philosophical and political concept of 'Degrowth' has gained ground within academia and research in the global North, beginning with the French term *Décroissance* in the 1970s (Demaria, Kallis and Bakker 2019, 432; Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019, 466; Gregoratti and Raphael 2019). Although definitions of degrowth vary, two core characteristics can be acknowledged. First, and most prominent, is the critique and condemnation of the deeply embedded assumption of an unquestionable correlation between economic growth and improvement of human life, measured by GDP (Hickel 2020; Hickel 2021). In line with this thought is the argument that the capitalist pursuit of growth, predominantly pursued in the global North, is

inherently built on, and a cause of, social, environmental, and ecological sacrifices, mostly experienced in the global South (Burkhart et al. 2020; Hickel 2020; Kallis et al. 2020). Growth, as understood in economic and political terms, revolves around the increase in commodified materials and energy (Hickel 2021, 1106), which is inevitably achieved through extraction, appropriation, and exploitation of 'external sources', from which value can be accumulated as inexpensively as possible (Hickel 2020, 158). These 'out-

The reality we live in is constituted by multiple and intertwined social, environmental and ecological crises.

side, external sources' include nature and environments, other species, other human beings, and other ways of living that have been objectified and subordinated by capitalism through the spread of a dualistic, hierarchic worldview. This ultimately creates severe injustices and inequalities between humans, humans and nonhumans, as well as humans and their environment, making the ecological crisis "a crisis of inequality as much as anything else" (Hickel 2020, 21). Because of this, degrowth proponents like Jason Hickel call for "a planned reduction of excess energy and resource use

to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, just and equitable way" (2020, 29; 2021, 1106). Thus, underlying this first key aspect of degrowth is the call for a profoundly more just and sustainable world, both socially, environmentally and economically.

Therefore, as a second characteristic, degrowthers aim to promote ways of imagining and organizing societies built on values of reciprocity, care and the commons (Demaria, Kallis and Bakker 2020, 432), underscoring the human-nonhuman-environment-nature interlinkages. Instead of pursuing quantitative economic growth for the sake of growth, degrowth proponents argue for a shift toward qualitative improvement of human – and nonhuman – well-being. This again points to the need to expose the obscurity of economic growth and GDP as measures for human progress and well-being, aiming instead to measure human well-being on different terms. Hickel, referring to research conducted by Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn, notes that "countries that have robust welfare systems [including universal healthcare, unemployment insurance, pensions, paid holiday and sick leave, affordable housing, daycare, and strong minimum wages] have the highest levels of human happiness, when controlling for other factors" (Hickel 2020, 182). The degrowth

perspective therefore aims to reconstruct societies in order to meet human physical, psychological and social needs, rather than revolving around material and economic desires. Degrowth has, however, received ample criticism for lacking a developed vision of how these values and ideals would play out in practice. For instance, the concept is frequently accused of remaining too theoretically, politically, and economically concerned, as well as limited to the context and lifestyles of the Global North (Escobar 2015; Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019; Burkhart et al. 2020; Dunlap 2020; Abazeri 2022). Degrowth could therefore advance by acknowledging and learning from other transition discourses, as well as existing local societies and practices coherent with post-growth, post-development, holistic values. Through such a convergence, the different discourses and movements can engage in mutual learning and collaboration in shaping communal, solidary and convivial societies.

Critiques of Current Western Educational Institutions

Undeniably, the abovementioned accounts of fundamentally different ways of living and organizing society are crucial for dealing with, responding to, and living in this reality of crises. However, in order to make these societies resilient

and long-lasting, transformation is needed not only in the material and social world, but also in the subjective sphere of mentalities. Maschkowski and colleagues argue in *Degrowth in Movement(s)* that "in many degrowth and transition debates there is not enough consideration of cultural and psychological dimensions of change" (2020, 313). Relatedly, Álvares and Coolsaet (2018, 62) argue for the recognition of the subjective, psychological dimension when addressing the current global injustices as well as the continuation of mental coloniality and oppression. Educational institutions are recognized as central socializing and 'manipulating' agents (Todd 2012, 81), as

There is a need for a critical light to be shed on the practices and processes of education, teaching and learning.

they shape and frame individuals' worldviews and understandings of reality; their surrounding environments; history; relations between humans, nonhumans and nature; along with morals and cultural values. As such, it is deeply concerning that current educational institutions lack an attentive, critical view of issues related to the history, contextuality, and continuity of power inequalities and suppressive ideologies, as well as faulty dichotomies

like North/South, 'developed'/'underdeveloped' and human/nature. This also becomes visible in current proposals for 'Education for Sustainable Development' (ESD), which exceedingly relies on the definition of sustainable development found in the Brundtland report 'Our Common Future' (WCED 1987), leaving the pursuit of growth unquestioned. As argued by Sofia Getzin (2021), this is due to the reliance on weak sustainability within 'mainstream' ESD policy documents and political programs. This strand allows for an imbalanced prioritization of the three traditional aspects of sustainable development – the environmental, the social, and the economic – often resulting in a bias toward the latter, understood in terms of economic growth (Getzin 2021). This view neglects the practices and processes leading to economic growth, as well as the increased social inequality and environmental degradation it relies upon and causes. Therefore, there is a need for a critical light to be shed on the practices and processes of education, teaching and learning.

As argued by scholars like Illich (1973; 1997) and Todd (2012), education in today's 'modern, westernized' societies is highly institutionalized and manipulative. Further, Kaufmann, Sanders and Wortmann point out how Western educational institutions are shaped by, while

contributing to stabilize and reproduce, the status quo of dominant perceptions, which currently restrict ideas for sustainable societies and futures beyond the imperial mode of living (Kaufmann et al. 2019, 932). This mode of living, as defined by Brand and Wissen, implies the hegemonic and dominant norms of a consumer-based and accumulative-based 'good life' for citizens of the global North. This 'good life' is made possible through concealed western imperialist and capitalist extraction, along with the exploitation of natural external sources and of other human beings (2021, 41). As the Western educational institutions' normative, political, and restrictive character is manipulated in order to be perceived as natural and objective, it reproduces the dominant economic paradigm, generating fragmented, market-based, and individualized solutions to current crises (Kaufmann et al. 2019; Gills and Morgan 2020; Todd 2012). Thus, the imperial mode of living produces and strengthens the illusion of human/nature dualism mentioned earlier, as well as the invidious definitions of what and who belongs to which category. These features of current educational practices also affect individuals' feeling of well-being and achievement. Illich (1973; 1997) stresses the hegemonic and competitive character of educational institutions, as they attempt to shape individuals in order to fit into a

given society. The institution creates the illusion that the higher the level of education one achieves, the more resourceful and valuable one becomes in society, which instigates the desire to be superior to others (Illich 1997). This creates a competitive evaluation schema from which individuals measure and experience one's own and others' intrinsic value (Illich 1973). Additionally, it contributes to reproducing and naturalizing the current stratified labor force, feeding the economic paradigm, as practical skills and labor are undermined. Notably, this is linked to the formerly mentioned separation of body and mind, since physical labor, embodied knowledge and practical skills, needed in a range of crucial societal areas, are downgraded and devalued. This has grave consequences for individuals' well-being, as people's ability to achieve high scores within the current restrictive educational structures vary enormously and is linked to numerous other factors. This can also be related to what pedagogue Paulo Freire (1968) refers to as 'the banking model', where the educational system and its executive teachers decide what type of knowledge is regarded as valid in order to be inserted into the assumed blank minds of students. Consequently, current educational narratives and practices are 'locked-in' (Kaufmann et al. 2019, 934), constraining possibilities of imagining alternative, sustainable

approaches to understand and deal with the complexity of occurring crises and ways of living. These issues of educational practices thus evidently point to the core critiques put forth by degrowth proponents. Corresponding to the concern of Leopold, current western processes of education have been institutionalized and are blind to the root causes of today's pressing and complex crises, as well as to alternative and crucial pathways for dealing with them. Questions arise then as to what education could be in a degrowth society as well as how the educational institution might still offer a platform to cultivate creative and progressive agents of pro-environmental change.

Alternative Approaches to Education

Changing the Educational Institutions from Within

In the article "Building New Foundations: The Future of Education from a Degrowth Perspective," Kaufmann, Sanders and Wortmann (2019) argue for a 'critical-emancipatory education', which aims to cultivate collective reflections and discussions of shared and alternative beliefs, through two features of degrowth pedagogy. The first, *supporting people in reflecting on their worldviews*, underscores the need for a form of transformative learning that encourages and facilitates deep reflections as well as

shifts of understandings and perceptions (Kaufmann et al. 2016, 936). In practice, Kaufmann and colleagues suggest that safe collective learning spaces, such as workshops and frequent discussion groups, can generate individual and collective reflections and make visible existing alternatives, while debunking and countering taken-for-granted assumptions and narratives of the imperial mode of living as well as the growth paradigm. Additionally, they argue that field trips and visits to *niches*, like repair cafés, community-supported agriculture, and struggles for food sovereignty, allow students to get hands-on experiences relating to and imagining these alternative ways of living and organizing society (2019, 936). For example, Lockyer and Veteto point to how schools could collaborate with and participate in the creation of *ecovillages* – indeed some currently are – in order to allow students to learn and experiment with different ways of living sustainably (2013, 19). These ecovillages are understood as a 'socionature', a way of organizing a just and sustainable community of beings in harmony with each other, nature and the environments.

Collective learning environments and experiential, physical learning are also part of professor Luis Prádanos-Garcia's 'Pedagogy of Degrowth' (Prádanos-Garcia 2015; EXALT Helsinki 2022), as he

argues for the incorporation of Indigenous pedagogies from the Andes. This includes activities stimulating learning communities of active listening; cooperative and collaborative learning; as well as individual and collective imagination, creativity, and reflection (EXALT Helsinki 2022, video, 1:03:46). As part of this argument, Prádanos-Garcia (2015) stresses how learning is a physical and emotional practice. Arguably, learning is fundamentally a bodily and experiential activity that is highly determined by a range of factors, like the material surroundings and educational tools; content of the curricula; tutors' decisions of educational methods; as well as social dynamics and relations. Prádanos-Garcia suggests several alternative pedagogical tools that engage both body and experiential learning in creative and unconventional ways, like performance; meditation; singing; art; dance; and role play; while limiting the use of technology to a minimum (EXALT Helsinki 2022, video, 1:10:16 and 1:11:09). These active learning strategies, as well as the abovementioned hands-on experiences of 'other ways of living', can create the proper context for deeper understanding and recognition of the connection between one's own body and one's surrounding natural and social environment. Additionally, while actively improving ones physical and mental health and creativity, students and teachers can expe-

rience richer, longer-lasting aspects of well-being, within oneself and with others. The emphasis on the physical aspect of learning is also found in Maja van der Velden's (2020) viewpoint on the use of technology in classrooms. Technological tools used within the educational institution possess a certain restrictive agency, as their design enables some types of usage, but hinders other significant aspects. Having conducted an analysis of students' experiences with writing essays by hand instead of on laptops, van der Velden (2020) concludes that students reflect, understand and remember better and more when using paper and pen for note-making and writing. She further stresses the correlation between the physical practice of writing by hand and learning – we learn with our bodies. Writing by hand, as well as Prádanos-Garcia's physical activities (EXALT Helsinki, 2022), allow for a holistic learning process through the use of several body parts.

The second key aspect of Kaufmann and colleagues' vision of a pedagogical degrowth *emphasizes the political in educational settings*. Through a politicization of education, power inequalities and hierarchies underlying the dominant economic paradigm can become visible, and thus challenged and conquered (2019, 938). To reiterate, as current educational practices are static, restricted to

certain worldviews, and manipulated to be seen as objective, students are often taught curricula and popular textbooks as given, taken-for-granted truths. Therefore, degrowth pedagogical tools involve inviting and engaging students in critically reviewing and discussing commonly told narratives belonging to the paradigm, and explore alternatives, related to for example consumption patterns; working hours; food sovereignty; and technology. Prádanos-Garcia similarly argues for a reversed critical pedagogy and a meta-pedagogical critique to 'unlearn' and deconstruct unquestioned assumptions and ideological biases of popular textbooks (2015, 161). Rather than seeing these types of textbooks as sources of information, Prádanos-Garcia argues that they should be considered as "perpetuators of the dominant ideology to be exposed and criticized" (EXALT Helsinki 2022, video, 58:36). Hence, safe, collective, and communicative learning environments in line with these arguments can allow students to "attempt 'small-scale resistance' against hierarchies, routines and norms related to the growth paradigm and the operating modes of capitalism" (Getzin 2021).

Kaufmann and colleagues recognize the issue of feelings of powerlessness among students when they are exposed to the severe exploitative, hegemonic, and hie-

rarchical nature of commonly held beliefs as well as occurring crises (2019). Indeed, concerns about climate anxiety and guilt among children might lead to hesitation among policymakers, teachers and parents in the global North regarding how to educate children on issues of climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequality. Creating safe collective learning environments where students and educators deliberate and reflect upon these complex issues is therefore crucial for allowing students to relate to, engage in, and lean on convivial networks and communities (rather than being left to themselves). Moreover, as Hickel points out, avoiding provocation, discomfort or conflict "creates a milieu where problematic assumptions remain unidentified and unexamined in favour of polite conversation and agreement" (Hickel, as cited in Dunlap 2020, 4). Certainly, by not sufficiently addressing these deeply rooted issues, current educational institutions remain institutionalized and 'locked-in'.

Homeschooling as an Alternative Outside the Institution

These degrowth proposals for changing educational practices within the institutions provide valuable recommendations for the existing societal structures. However, though unquestionably necessary, changing the educational institutions

from within might prove to be severely challenging, as they are greatly static and withheld by the power of state and widely accepted as legitimate bodies in western societies. As pointed out above, degrowthers could benefit and widen their horizon by appreciating and incorporating other alternative transition discourses. Accounts for countering the institution altogether are therefore raised to bring forth fundamentally different ways of teaching and learning.

From an anarchist approach, Joseph Todd argues for homeschooling and deschooling as potential alternatives to western education beyond and outside the institutionalized models (2012, 70). Countering the dominant role of the educational institution, he points out how the hidden curriculum of compulsory education coerces students "into capitalistic hierarchies and unquestioning obedience" to the state and unjust power structures through "shame, guilt, ridicule, and peer pressure," which are also linked to Illich's critique of the institutions. Thus, Todd argues instead for an anarchopedagogy, built "on principles of freedom, equality, and community" (74). He claims that the estimated 1.5 million students being homeschooled in the United States in 2007 achieve higher academic scores than students in both public and private schools (72). Homeschooling allows pa-

rents, educating actors and students to reimagine education beyond the static and manipulative curricula, cultivating instead values of, among others, self-worth, conviviality, and creativity. Further, it allows for adjustments of the themes and topics that the children are taught, by prioritizing and relating them to relevance; urgency; needs; and the individuals involved. Todd claims that homeschoolers put Illich's four criteria for a deschooling model into practice, the four criteria being: 1) reference service to educational objects, 2) skill exchanges, 3) peer matching, and 4) professional educators (2012).

The first criterion, *reference service to educational objects,* involves making various learning resources available and accessible for individuals eager to learn. This includes library and museum materials, as well as the internet, and industries and services to learn and experience their inner workings and processes (Todd 2012, 78). Todd argues that, by making use of different and customizable technological tools, homeschooling can deliver more efficient and meaningful education than schools (2012). The second criterion, *skill exchange,* refers to the formation of networks of learners and educators that allow for skills to be demonstrated, shared, taught, learned and adopted. Homeschooling practicians create informal, nonhierarchical and

autonomous networks and communities for specialized studies and activities, enabling mutual learning and community interaction. This also relates to the first criterion, facilitating practical, hands-on experiences with skills. Illich's third criterion, *peer matching,* involves "locating like-minded individuals interested in coinquiring into a specific skill or topic" (Todd 2012, 79). Networks of skills facilitate this process, and skills can be further developed through peer matching, as individuals can learn and improve together. Therefore, this also involves a reconstruction of the relationships between the teacher and the student. Homeschooling provides such a nonhierarchical and egalitarian reconstruction that 'teachers,' being parents, other adults, or children, become "resources, facilitators, 'mid-wives' for children's learning" (Morrison, as cited in Todd 2012, 79). Through peer matching and skill exchange, homeschooling can also provide pleasurable teaching and learning, as well as increased experiences of well-being and achievement. This stands in stark contrast to Illich's (1973; 1997) critical analysis of educational institutions as homogenizing and competitive, measuring individuals' value in accordance with levels of academic achievement. Lastly, Illich argues for *professional educators* (Todd 2012, 80). Although Todd raises concerns about the reintroduction of the professionalism

of teaching, as it allows for a certain level of hierarchy, Illich rejects the notion of professionalism defined by degrees and certifications. Rather, professional educators are recognized by their role as guides for parents (due to their knowledge of human learning processes) and their role as guides for students, in educational processes that stimulate independent and critical reflections as well as meaning making (Todd 2012, 80). In homeschooling, parents take on the role of the educator. It is important to note how homeschooling one's children is a huge and time-consuming responsibility for parents, requiring a lot of planning; creativity; attentiveness; and energy; as well as access to various resources. For many parents, the time; resources; abilities; and accessibility to carry out the task of homeschooling one's own children are off limits, especially in societies where individualism, inequality, and social hierarchy contribute to shaping the way people live their lives separated from each other. From what can be understood from Todd's (2012) description of Illich's view, professional educators ought to function as guiding and assisting actors for the parents in understanding and facilitating rewarding learning experiences and development for the children. Furthermore, the organization of reciprocal networks allows parents, educators, and other actors to share

and delegate duties and responsibilities.

Through these four aspects of Illich's model, homeschooling counters the institutionalized education by providing more dynamic, multifaceted environments for learning, where various actors partake and bring in their knowledges, skills and competences. These networking environments can contribute to both individual and communal well-being. Each person is allowed to pursue, learn and develop their areas of interest in productive manners. At the same time, this open organization contributes to meeting human and societal needs; tying tighter communal bonds and relations; and increasing feelings of belonging, solidarity, and conviviality.

Reflections

As the previously mentioned critique of degrowth implies, there are ample benefits to converging proposals from a degrowth perspective with accounts from other transition discourses, as well as social movements and communities in line with transformative degrowth thoughts. A degrowth pedagogy, combined with other alternatives to educational practices and processes, like Todd's accounts for homeschooling, can generate positive and valuable outcomes and co-creations. Reflecting on the pro-

posals outlined above, these different approaches to transformative education – within or outside the institution – need not be seen as conflicting or separate. On the contrary, strong resemblances and similarities offer the potential for their co-existence and collaboration. As pointed out by Todd (2012), millions of children in the US, as well as millions of others elsewhere, are homeschooled alongside existing educational institutions. Public encouragement of supplementary homeschooling, deschooling, and other forms of non-formal education, along with fundamental change of educational practices within the institution can foster a potential to accelerate transformative pro-environmental changes in society, both at the personal and the collective level. Notably, just like the critique of the educational institution presented above, homeschooling can also be carried out in disadvantageous manners if children are taught misleading and harmful matters. For instance, in various subcultures and societies, one can find strong ideologies and worldviews which reject convivial and pro-environmental values, morals and behaviors. Arguably, cooperation and collaboration between various stakeholders and involved parties in communities, such as parents, educators, governmental representatives and researchers, would be necessary to achieve these convivial and progressi-

ve learning environments and networks for sustainable societies and futures.

Echoing throughout these accounts is the argument that education and learning practices ought to be more dynamic and egalitarian, in contrast to the fixed, hierarchic procedures of current educational structures. Kaufmann and colleagues' (2019) and Prádanos-Garcia's (2015) arguments for safe collective learning environments provide such a pedagogical tool where students and educators alike partake in and contribute to stimulating dynamic and mobile teaching and learning situations. Similarly, Todd's (2012) accounts for networks of skill exchange outside the educational institution contribute to understandings of interdependency, one's own and others' value. Additionally, opening industries and services, as Illich's first criterion addresses, introduces students to skills and practices at play in their local community. This stimulates collective and collaborative learning by experiencing and doing, theoretically expounded by philosopher John Dewey ([1938] 1997), among others. Further, this is connected to Kaufmann and colleagues' (2019) suggestion for visiting niche communities and Prádanos-Garcia's (2015) argument for physical learning. Though field trips and visits to niches are certainly beneficial, homeschooling's direct and continuo-

us engagements with existing practices can provide deeper understandings and valorization of various skills, as well as longer-lasting connections with the surrounding society. Prádanos-Garcia's (2015) arguments for including the body in learning activities also bring in alternative, holistic approaches and entryways for teaching and learning. Correspondingly, arguing for limiting the use of technology in classrooms, van der Velden (2020) highlights how note-making and writing – as physical activities of learning – prove to stimulate better understanding, reflection and memory. However, as Todd (2012) points out, different usages of technological tools in homeschooling can stimulate more diverse, efficient and meaningful education, opening educational resources and materials to a wider range of society.

Another aspect of homeschooling that is not explicitly addressed by Todd is its potential to be more mobile and interlinked with nature. As pointed out by Sahakian and Wilhite, materials, infrastructures and technologies carry engrained scripts "that have the potential to shape practices and in turn be shaped by practices" (2014, 29). The scripted agency of infrastructure and materials of formal educational institutions constrain the processes and practices of education, as well as the way individuals perceive and

act in relation to these. The infrastructures of schools, the buildings and closed-off school grounds effectively isolate students, educators, and other occupants of the institutions from engagement and learning with nature and the environment. Limiting learning to reading materials also prohibits students from engaging with and experiencing the actual natural world. Homeschooling could allow for education to be taking place outside at different locations and hours, as well as with different environments, natures and beings. As such, homeschooling would provide education *in*, *with*, *about*, and *for* nature and the environment, in more flexible and unrestricted manners, where practices can be arranged and adjusted to the environment. Combining degrowth pedagogies and homeschooling can form dynamic and versatile educational processes, varying between practices within and outside the institution, while staying with an overarching aim of promoting collective critical thinking; solidary relationships; and fundamental well-being for all. Such a convergence of degrowth-inspired and alternative tools of collaborative learning environments and networks bears the potential for critical reflections of the root causes of current unsustainable practices, imperial modes of living, and multiple socio-ecological crises. Resultingly, they can generate the co-creation of alternative and

creative strands of thoughts; ideas; solutions; and perceptions countering the dominant capitalistic and growth-oriented paradigm in western societies.

Conclusions

Arguing for an increased focus on transformative changes of education toward pro-environmental ethics, worldviews, and knowledges, this paper presents views on western educational processes and practices from various degrowth perspectives and from an alternative anarchist standpoint. From a brief clarification of some critical views of educational institutions in today's western societies, it becomes clear that educational practices and processes restrict the potential for creative, reflective and critical ideas for sustainable transformations. Responding to these issues, accounts from degrowth pedagogies are put forward in order to highlight more collective and dynamic pedagogical methods and practices within the educational system. With an emphasis on collective and dynamic learning practices to generate critical and reflexive discussions, a degrowth approach to pedagogy certainly provides insightful and valuable contributions to the debate on educational transformation in western societies. However, as is pointed out in the paper, degrowth would benefit greatly from looking to other critical pedagogical perspectives, such as

anarchist pedagogy with proposals for homeschooling. By incorporating anarchist pedagogy, degrowth can enhance its ability to approach today's entangled socio-ecological issues. Further, bringing in such accounts for alternative educational processes and practices outside the institution expands the views of possibilities for education, teaching, and learning in an era of socio-ecological degradation and injustice. Additionally, it facilitates alternative pathways to counter and dissolve the dominant and deep-seated paradigm in western societies, rooted in capitalism, imperialism and hierarchy. As argued in this paper, degrowth perspectives and anarchopedagogy share ample similarities regarding values, goals, and suggestive educational methods. Thus, a convergence of these approaches can bring forth co-creative and transformative changes to teaching and learning, which are needed in order to cultivate ideas, solutions and worldviews of a socially and environmentally just, convivial, and sustainable global society. Additionally, it could serve as an example of how combining varying pedagogical perspectives and strands of thought can unlock a multitude of pathways toward shared goals. Offering solutions to Leopold's concern presented initially in this paper, these changes to educational processes and practices can help us see what we have gone blind to.

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Ecofeminism: Misused, Misguided or Misrepresented? The Value of Ecofeminist Scholarship for Degrowth Debates

by Kristin Charlotte Horn Talgø

Perhaps they [environmentalists and feminists] share a reputation for being the type of scholars no one wants to invite to the theoretical party: the unrealistic, earnest environmentalist and the humourless, angry feminist. They should be natural allies, a match made in heaven.

(MacGregor 2009b, 332)

Introduction

First introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne through her book *Le féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), ecofeminism offers insights and relevant discussions relating to the interlinked oppression of women and nature (MacGregor 2021, 243). D'Eaubonne emphasised that we would not survive the ecological crisis without a radical cultural change, and in the 1970s, this entailed a shift away from male dominated militaries, nuclear technology, and the uncritical enthusiasm for unlimited growth (MacGregor 2021, 243). It has been nearly fifty years since then. The world today is characterized by Russia's war on Ukraine[1] leading to increasing military tensions[2], fear of nuclear war[3] alongside continued oil extraction[4]. Add into the mix a persistent belief in economic growth, now dressed as the disputed 'green growth' (Hickel and Kallis 2019; Robbins 2020; Tilsted et al. 2021; Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015), and the ecofeminist observations from the '70s are as relevant today as they were then.

1 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/25/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-91-of-the-invasion

2 https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/diplomat-mener-vi-tar-for-lett-pa-svensk-og-finsk-nato-soknad-1.15967954

3 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60664169

4 https://klassekampen.no/utgave/2022-05-07/utvikle-aldri-avvikle

Even so, "whether due to an unfounded caricature of ecofeminism as simplistic and essentialist, or due to wilful academic ignorance, there remains a blindness to the role of gender and the relevance of ecofeminist theory in the environmental social sciences" (MacGregor, 2021: 243). This is perhaps most surprising when it comes to the interdisciplinary field of degrowth. Degrowth, which criticizes capitalism's exploitation of earth and urges a reimagining of the economy to be more aligned with nature and human well-being (Hickel 2020), fails to acknowledge feminist theory despite claiming inclusivity (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 83).

Therefore, articles that point to the feminist gaps in degrowth literature (Abazeri 2022; Gregoratti and Raphael 2019; Bell, Dagget and Labuski 2020) are much needed, and the perspective of decolonial feminism to degrowth debates by Mariam Abazeri[5] is an important contribution. Decolonial feminism looks at how colonialism and modernity's historical processes continue to impact social, economic and political relationships of knowing, seeing, and being, influencing the current and imagined states of the world (Abazeri 2022, 1-2). Degrowth could be enriched by attempting to recognize the complex histories of those who have been subjected to colonial and modern hierarchies of dominance (Abazeri, 2022: 2). "This epistemic shift signals a feminist politic truly committed to cross-cultural and cross-racial solidarity departing from dominant neo-colonial logic that reproduces cases of assimilation or exclusion" (Abazeri, 2022: 2), and it is in particular the racial and colonial aspects of power hierarchies in decolonial feminism that offer a much needed contribution to degrowth. These aspects have often not been given sufficient attention in ecofeminism either and are therefore an important addition to this scholarship as well. Yet the way Abazeri presents ecofeminism in this context can be criticized for being narrow and reductionist, framing ecofeminism as outdated and essentialist. This is a pity, as decolonial feminism and ecofeminism could be 'allies' in expanding degrowth scholarship, each contributing to it with different aspects and strengths.

Moreover, in a world facing increasing heatwaves due to climate change[6], as well as severe environmental degradation (Hickel 2020, 1-16), the critique of capitalism in ecofeminism is particularly relevant (Bolsø and Svendsen 2015, 94). The exploitation of both human and non-human nature in the never-end-

5 Mariam Abazeri, "Decolonial feminisms and degrowth," *Futures* (2022): 136.

6 https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-61484697

ing pursuit of profit seems to lie at the core of capitalism and can be seen as the main driver of climate change and environmental degradation (Foster, Clark and York 2011). Many prominent feminist theorists write about ecofeminism in relation to gender, environmental destruction and climate change (Gaard 2011, 2015; Lykke 2009; Alaimo 2008, 2009, 2010; Plumwood 1993; Björk 2012; MacGregor 2009a, 2009b, 2014), making this strand of feminism highly useful when discussing these issues.

Despite this, misrepresentation of ecofeminism is a general problem, and Abazeri is not alone in presenting a narrow understanding of the theoretical framework; many writings on ecofeminism use "outdated" and "selective representation of ecofeminist scholarship" (MacGregor 2009b, 335), which fails to acknowledge the variety of contemporary contributions; this gives the impression that very little effort has been made to include newer ecofeminist theories (MacGregor 2009b, 336; Gaard 2011).

For these reasons, this essay has two purposes. First, to address the shortcomings on the representation of ecofeminism by Abazeri. Second, by presenting the strong points of ecofeminism in connection to environmental degradation and social injustices, to clarify how the de-

growth debate and literature could benefit from ecofeminist theories. The essay provides a short introduction to degrowth and presents an overview of ecofeminism as a field as well as its applicability when discussing environmental and social issues. Abazeri's article on decolonial feminism will be introduced, before the main points of contention with Abazeri's representation of ecofeminism are presented. This article will address the way the most antagonistic version of ecofeminism, essentialist (eco)feminism, has morphed into new varieties, before turning to queer ecology. The latter emerged through an attempt at opening up ecofeminism to queer perspectives in order to counteract the heteronormativity and sex/gender essentialism prevalent in mainstream environmentalism, as well as in certain strands of ecofeminism. Finally, the essay looks at how degrowth can benefit from and ought to acknowledge ecofeminist scholarship to a greater degree, before ending with a concluding remark.

Degrowth and Ecofeminism – Where does it come from? Where do we stand?

Degrowth originated as a concept in the 1970s, through intellectuals and economists such as André Gorz, Ivan Illich and Claudia von Werlhof (Burkhart et.al 2020, 148). It can be defined as "a planned reduction of excess energy and re-

source use to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a safe, just and equitable way" (Hickel 2020, 29). Degrowth challenges the automatic assumption that increased GDP (Gross Domestic Product) means a better life for all. It advocates a reorientation of the economy of societies towards other priorities than economic growth. By doing so, it tries to shift our perspective of what constitutes a good life, towards other values such as care, solidarity, justice and conviviality (Hickel 2020).

Degrowth offers possibilities such as downscaling productions that are only about maximising profits, cutting advertising, banning planned obsolescence and shortening

the working week to maintain full employment, distribute income and wealth more fairly and invest in public goods like universals healthcare, education and affordable housing (…) We can create an economy that is organised around human flourishing instead of endless capital accumulation (…) a post-capitalist economy. An economy that's fairer, more just, and more caring. (Hickel 2020, 30)

By urging voluntary simplicity and downscaling material consumption, degrowth has been critiqued for being a movement

for the white, middle-class Western elite (Hickel 2021a), though it has been pointed out that it was designed with exactly the affluent North in mind and that even so, degrowth is still relevant for the growing middle class in the South (Hickel 2021a, 2021b; Escobar, 2015).

The particularly strong emphasis that degrowth scholarship has been putting on care lately, makes the lack of ecofeminism and other feminisms amongst degrowth sources all the more puzzling (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 86). Care has been given substantial significance within ecofeminism, and the focus on care is integral to the ecofeminist deconstruction and critique of hierarchical power in society:

(…) ecofeminist scholars have offered a deep historical critique of the global capitalist patriarchal order, its religions, economics, and science. In deconstructing the continuing potency of ancient ideological dualisms – humanity over nature, man over woman, boss over worker, white over black, they have shown different forms of social domination to be interrelated. Thus, a 'politics of care' enacted by women from the global North and South converges (…) because across the hemispheres women's everyday labours teach 'another epistemology',

not based on instrumental logic, but 'relational' – like the rationality of ecological processes. (Kothari et.al. 2019, 32)

The key claim of the aforementioned Francoise d'Eaubonne, as well as that of many other early ecofeminists, was not that it would be the intrinsic virtuousness of women that would save the earth, but rather that it was "patriarchy's exploitation of all things feminine that would destroy it" (MacGregor 2021, 243). Ecofeminism thus came into being as a combination of feminist research and numerous movements for social justice and environmental health, "explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species, and nation" (Gaard 2011, 28). One of these notable movements was anarchofeminism which came into being in Europe and America in the late nineteenth-century as a response to the limitations of Marxist and liberal feminism, neither of which recognized the importance of the feminist perspective on closing the nature vs. culture divide (Kowal 2018; Tuana and Tong 2018).

Some key actors within this movement were Louise Michel, Charlotte Wilson, Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Emma Goldman (Kowal 2018). These women came from various socioeconomic and eth-nic backgrounds, composing a loosely formed network of activists, with different ideas regarding how to make a free society. Even so, several intersecting principles were reflected in their activism: the emancipatory potential of individual autonomy; the need for sexual freedom in order to gain autonomy; and the interconnectedness between women's liberation and the broader perspective of human liberation (Kowal 2018).

The early feminism of d'Eaubonne arose out of anarchofeminism (Gautero 2016), but the main concern of ecofeminism is the relationship between human and non-human nature (Tuana and Tong 2018). The field has far more contributors than the scope of this essay allows me to acknowledge and include: Karen J. Warren, Donna J. Haraway, Bina Agarwal, and Vandana Shiva (MacGregor 2021, 243) to name only a few. What is essential to highlight is that "ecofeminism has contributed a great deal both to activist struggle and to theorizing links between women's oppression and the domination of nature" (Plumwood 1993, 1). The basic premise of ecofeminism was, and still is, that neither feminism nor environmentalism is sufficient on their own to address the interconnections that are the root causes for both gender inequality and ecological crisis (MacGregor 2009b, 330).

Decolonial feminism and ecofeminism could be 'allies' in expanding degrowth scholarship, each contributing to it with different aspects and strengths.

In the case of feminism, the social construct of gender and the subsequent consequences have been explored by numerous feminists, aptly encapsulated in the famous phrase by Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Beauvoir [1949] 2000, 327). Judith Butler explored how we come to perform our perceived gender through the norms and expectations of a given society in the classic book *Gender Trouble* ([1990] 2007). While this feminism is vitally important in order to understand the persistence of gender norms and gender inequalities, it does not focus on non-human nature and, as such, does not address the nature/culture divide[7]. Reflections around Woman and Nature can also be seen in the thinking of de Beauvoir, as she emphasized that "in the logic of patriarchy, Women and Na-ture were connected as they present themselves as the 'Other' in respect to the male" (Valera 2017, 11). As for mainstream environmentalism, it has often had a single-minded focus on preserving the so-called pristine and untouched nature without addressing the connections between gender and the environment (Di Chiro 2018). To bridge these gaps, the foundation of ecofeminist theory provides an analysis of the interconnected dominations of nature — psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and non-human nature — as well as the historical position of both women and what is perceived as feminine in relation to these forms of domination (Tuana and Tong 2018).

For more than 40 years, ecofeminist theorists have explored, written and discussed how perceptions of femininity and masculinity have influenced environmental attitudes and behaviors (MacGregor 2009b, 333). Furthermore, they have criticized how the division of environmental risks, benefits and labour are based on gender, and shown how gendered concepts have been used to construct nature (MacGregor2009b, 333). By doing so, ecofeminism offers important insights on numerous relevant topics[8] relating to

7 Though it is worth mentioning that in the book Bodies that Matter (2011), Butler focuses on the materiality of the body (and the material universe more broadly), as well as the social and cultural construction of gender, in effect destabilizing the 'natural' essentialized Woman's body.

8 Examples include ecological economics (Perkins 2007), green democracy (Sandilands 1999), ecological citizenship (MacGregor 2006), international environmental governance

gender, environmentalism and the oppression of both human and non-human nature (MacGregor 2009b, 335-337).

A Narrow Understanding of Ecofeminism

Similarly, in *Decolonial feminisms and degrowth,* Mariam Abazeri makes her case for why degrowth would benefit from engaging with decolonial feminist praxis, in order "to better address, dislodge, and reimagine the elements and relations that maintain an ideology of growth (...)" (Abazeri 2022, 1) She offers this strand of feminism to counteract liberal feminism and ecofeminism, which she sees as not just insufficiently addressing gender inequality, but also upholding oppression of women in their different ways (Abazeri 2020, 2-4).

I acknowledge the need and importance of decolonial feminism, and agree that certain strands of feminism can contribute to uphold oppression of women by being "anthropocentric, such that liberal

(Bretherton 2003), human–animal relationships (Plumwood 2003), political activism (Sturgeon 1999; Di Chiro 2008), embodiment (Sturgeon 1999; Di Chiro 2008), queer and anti-racist theory (Gaard 1997), identity politics (Sturgeon 1999), intersectionality (Warren 2000; Sturgeon 1999), hybridity (Plumwood 2003, 2006; Haraway 1991), partnership ethics (Merchant 2003), social reproduction (Di Chiro 2008) and feminist ecological citizenship (Sandilands 1999; MacGregor 2006) (emphasis mine, MacGregor 2009b, 335-37).

and even socialist feminists may be pacified with the goal of 'equality'. In this way, their politics unwittingly band-aids existing masculinist institutions" (Kothari et.al. 2019, 31). A feminism of this kind upholds the current gender system and becomes the antithesis of what Audre Lorde envisioned when she said: "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."[9] In the critique of liberal feminism, Abazeri and I are in agreement. However, the way Abazeri chooses to present ecofeminism in this article deserves further scrutiny and needs to be addressed.

To begin with, Abazeri writes that "(...) ecofeminism (...) argues women are intrinsically different from men in that they hold a special relationship with nature" (Abazeri, 2022: 4). While this is true for a selective strand of ecofeminism, this is a highly narrow representation of a broad and varied field (Gaard, 2011). Ecofeminist scholarship arose in the 1980's and 1990's, containing a number of diverse approaches, some of which emerged from liberal, social, Marxist, anarchist, and socialist feminisms, while others were rooted in essentialist (cultural) feminisms (Gaard, 2011:32). Aligning themselves neither with liberal feminists who seeks admit-

9 https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1981-audre-lorde-uses-anger-women-responding-racism/

tance into the "public male sphere of rationality" (Gaard, 1997: 118) nor with those who wish to empower women through a supposed closer relationship with nature (essentialist/cultural feminists), ecofeminists "have argued for a 'third way', one that rejects the structure of dualism and acknowledges both women and men as equal parts of culture and nature" (Gaard, 1997: 118), thereby opening up a new way of viewing both humans and non-humans.

Acclaimed ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood strongly opposes the essentialist take on women as being naturally closer to nature than men, and referred to essentialist/cultural feminists as the "feminism of uncritical reversal" (Plumwood, 1993, 3). To view 'women as intrinsically closer to nature than men' locks both genders into the dualism of women seen as nature and men seen as reason. Plumwood argues extensively for the need to rise above this dualism and rethink what it means to be human for both women and men, in order to work *with* non-human nature, instead of against (Plumwood, 1993: 31-43). By simply referring to the limited essentialist version of ecofeminism, Abazeri fails to acknowledge the development of ecofeminism as a theoretical strand within the feminist discourse of academia. The latter continues to improve and ground its analyses, while expanding economic,

material, global and intersectional angles (Gaard 2011, 31), and so has moved a long way from tendencies in its early infancy towards essentialist feminism.

Within the field, many (MacGregor 2009b; Gaard 2011; Mallory 2018) are frustrated by the narrow representation of ecofeminism that is still prevalent. Broad generalizations are frequently expressed without particular or supporting documentation, and have repeatedly been debunked in the pages of scholarly and popular journals, in conferences and in discussions, but the contamination persists (Gaard 2011, 32). Building on this misrepresentation, Abazeri writes that: "In many cases (...) familial conditions and communal relations and negotiations influence livelihood activities and natural resource usage (...). *In claiming that these associations are intrinsic and essential with women's being is to reduce the interrelated dynamics that influence socio-ecological practices* (...)" (Emphasis mine, Abazeri 2022, 4) This strikes me as reductionist and taken out of context, considering the significant amount of ecofeminist literature that argues that the way we manage natural resources depends on how we are socially and historically positioned, as well as how we are situated in relation to economic structure, class, ethnicity and place in the gender division of labour, and cannot be attrib-

uted to any inherent feminine qualities alone (Bolsø and Svendsen 2015, 93-94).

Despite this, Abazeri's most prominent issue with ecofeminism seems to be that it "maintains a logic of exclusion and heteronormativity that further limits and entrenches subjectivity within the global capitalist institutions that hierarchize our existences" (Abazeri 2022, 3). Further, she argues:

Reading gender as a static dimorphic system based on sexual difference that translates into inherent heterosexually normative understandings of being with habitats imposes a universal interpretation of social organization, reproducing with significant ramifications the very logic ecofeminism seeks to critique (Abazeri 2022, 4).

It is true that a heteronormative understanding of women is embedded within the variety of ecofeminism that is most tightly connected to women's maternal role and because of this, sees women as having a "privileged epistemological access to an animate, enchanted, maternal earth" (Mallory 2018, 19). As a consequence, ecofeminism has gotten the shady reputation as "being essentialist, spiritualist and down-right fluffy" (MacGregor 2009a, 126). And it cannot be denied that echoes from the 'women seen as closer

to nature than men' are still with us today, though perhaps now in a different form, what Catriona Sandilands (1999) calls "motherhood environmentalism" (Mallory 2018, 25). Sandilands sees this as a form of environmental activism which inadequately critiques the ways that patriarchal society structures the institution and practical realities of motherhood (Mallory 2018, 25). This in turn represses women's full development as social beings and political actors, thereby maintaining male privilege (Mallory 2018, 25). This echoes back to Plumwood's critique of the "feminism of uncritical reversals"; "an old and oppressive identity as 'earth mothers': outside of culture, opposed to culture, not fully human," (Plumwood, 1993, 36) still chained to the nature/culture divide.

To exemplify a feminism of uncritical reversals, the organizations 'Eco-moms' in the US and the 'Women's Institute' in the UK have given explicit statements that doing what is best for the family and planet is 'women's work' and something 'good moms' already do (MacGregor 2009a, 135). Women have the 'power' to handle climate change by making good decisions in the supermarket and household (MacGregor, 2009a: 135). MacGregor, a student of Sandilands, uses the term 'ecomaternalism' to describe this theory, referring to how women's maternal role is used as justification for their involvement

in environmentalism (MacGregor 2009a, 134). A similar line of thinking was put forth in Norway in the newspaper Klassekampen, where Grethe Fatima Syéd and Kjersti Sandvik stated: "By re-evaluating motherhood and traditional female values there is hope for us as a species" (Translation mine, Klassekampen October 12, 2021). MacGregor succinctly sums it up when she writes: "Women have internalized the sense of responsibility to 'do their bit' for the environment and have taken up the duties promoted by the 'green agenda' quite willingly and publicly" (MacGregor 2009a, 136). Yet, Mallory (2018) asks a thought-provoking question:

Personally, I wonder if lurking in this objection isn't a lingering sense of devaluation of traditional "women's work" and reproductive labor (which includes the reproduction of human life) (...) And to what degree does other feminists' rejection of "motherhood environmentalism" serve to unwittingly devalue caregiving work and the ethics and epistemologies that arise from it? (Mallory, 2018: 25)

This raises a number of issues and I will soon go further into the issue of care in relation to ecofeminism and degrowth.

Questioning Normative Certainties and Intersectionality

Within ecofeminism, efforts are made to counteract the heteronormative understanding of gender and subsequent universalization of gender that Abazeri opposes. Some of this is addressed by many feminist and ecofeminist theorists (MacGregor 2009b; Lykke 2009; Kaijser and Kronsell 2014), through their emphasis on the need for an intersectional perspective.[10] Greta Gaard takes it a step further in her article "Towards a Queer Ecofeminism", where she does a thorough job of looking at how ecofeminism, to an even stronger degree, can challenge heteronormative understandings of identity and subsequent praxis (Gaard 1997). By learning from queer theory, ecofeminism can open up a larger space for a broader understanding and acceptance of sexuality and the erotic (Gaard 1997). In this article, Gaard traced the history of homosexuality and showed how it continuously has been viewed as

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10 Kimberly Crenshaw is usually credited with first using the term intersectionality in an article where she criticized how white, middle-class women's perspectives influence and dominate mainstream feminism. The term was coined as a response to the fact that Black women had to "choose" whether their oppression would be understood as racism or sexism, or the sum of these — but not as the unique forms of intersecting oppressions they face, thereby opening up a new and complex way of viewing power and oppression (Crenshaw 1991).

'unnatural' and a 'crime against nature' (Butler 2017, 271). It marked the starting point of a new field, *queer[11] ecology*, which critically analyzes how heteronormativity[12], cissexism[13] and reprocentricity[14] shape expectations and ideas regarding gender, gender roles, sexuality, and nature/environment (Butler 2017, 271 and 275).

Environmental justice activists, ecofeminist academics, and critical race theorists have significantly challenged how mainstream environmentalism views nature and subsequently how it views the solutions to environmental problems. This has inspired radical interpretations of sustainability that are founded on social and ecological justice (Butler 2017, 270). Queer theorists[15] have been slower to embrace environmental issues (Butler, 2017, 270). This is partly because the idea

11 Queer being here understood as LGBTQ-2SIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, questioning, two-spirit, intersex, and asexual) (Butler 2017, 270).

12 "The positioning of heterosexuality as natural and normal" (Butler 2017, 271).

13 "The conflating of gender and sex and positioning of cisgender people [people who identify with their biologically born sex] as natural and normal" (Butler 2017, 271).

14 "The positioning of reproduction (or procreation) as being central to all people's lives" Butler 2017, 271).

15 The study of "the extensive range of ways in which notions of sexuality and gender impact—at times implicitly—on everyday life" (Butler 2017, 271).

of the 'natural' (or, perhaps more accurately, the 'unnatural') has been persistently deployed to justify the oppression of queer people (Butler 2017, 270-271). As a consequence, sustainability has seldom been discussed from a queer perspective, and rarely has sustainability advocates taken queerness into account when planning for the future (Butler 2017, 270-271).

The tendency in mainstream environmentalism to ignore the issues of heteronormativity, cissexism and reprocentricity points to several significant questions when studying and discussing gender and the environment:

(…) how are gender roles defined and reinforced in relation to the heterosexual family unit in environmental rhetoric? When so-called traditional family units are the basis for eco-political discussion and policy initiatives, what happens to the people who don't follow those familial narratives? And how do heteronormativity and reprocentricity contribute to current ecological disasters? (Butler 2017, 271)

The heteronormativity and reprocentricity that suffuse 'a feminism of uncritical reversals' and 'ecomaternalism' stand in stark contrast, then, to queer ecology and would serve as an interesting starting point for the questions raised

here. In an attempt at approaching these questions, queer ecology can play an important role in re-shaping views of the environment and nature, for both human and non-human species (Butler 2017, 271). Continuing from here, it seems that Gaard's effort of opening up ecofeminism to queer theory did not necessarily mean that ecofeminism automatically became more inclusive of queer issues, but perhaps instead opened up a path for a new field of study and a new perspective on ecology and environmental issues. Yet there has been a development to be more queer inclusive when discussing gender and the environment, shining through for example in the *Routledge Handbook on Gender and Environment* (2017) where two chapters discuss queer ecology and trans ecology[16] (though the total number of chapters stands at 33…). Similarly, when *Gender Trouble* was re-published in 1999, Judith Butler wrote in the new preface:

If I were to rewrite this book under present circumstances, I would include a discussion of transgender and intersexuality, the way that ideal gender dimorphism works in both sorts of discourses,

16 Nicole Seymour refers to trans ecology as "a potential model for further work on the relationship between transgenderism [referring to transgender people] and environment – and even [as a] new theoretical framework (Seymour 2017, 253).

the different relations to surgical intervention that these related concerns sustain. I would also include a discussion on racialized sexuality and, in particular, how taboos against miscegenation (and the romanticization of cross-racial sexual exchange) are essential to the naturalized and denaturalized forms that gender takes. (Butler 2007, 27)

So while there is undoubtedly a long way to go in challenging the existing heteronormativity in mainstream feminism, environmentalism and also ecofeminism, there are those who continue to push the boundaries and challenge how we perceive issues of gender and heteronormativity within both human and non-human nature.

Coming back to the issue of intersectionality, Abazeri does acknowledge that it offers an important step in the right direction of being more inclusive, although "decolonial feminisms calls for an alternate understanding of sociality away from the current Western orientation that hierarchizes difference in relation to white men" (Abazeri, 2022:3). Furthermore, she urges us to step "into a space that destabilizes normative certainties about identity to better understand the array of experiences and injustices that dictate our positions of power" (Abazeri, 2022: 5). Not

excluding decolonial feminism, I would argue that ecofeminism to a high degree creates the space that is needed in order to 'destabilize normative certainties about identity.' This forms a significant part of Plumwood's extensive work on dismantling precisely the Western way of hierarchizing differences in order to embrace a wider spectrum of experiences and epistemologies, by moving away from the Western dualistic worldview and uneven power relations (Plumwood 1993, 43).

Decolonial feminism, ecofeminism, intersectionality, as well as queer and trans-ecology, all contribute to different perspectives that mutually benefit each other as we work towards a more socially equal and environmentally just future. These perspectives all have feminist theory in common, which degrowth could benefit from both acknowledging and incorporating to a far greater extent than is currently the case (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019).

The Value of Ecofeminist Scholarship for Degrowth Debates

That degrowth has been missing out on important feminist scholarship (or neglecting to pay due homage, depending on your point of view) is pointed out by Catia Gregoratti and Riya Raphael in the chapter "The Historical Roots of a Feminist 'Degrowth'" (2019, 83-92). As is exemplified in their chapter, many aspects of degrowth have been discussed in various forms by feminist and ecofeminist writers without due acknowledgment (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 83-84). While "degrowth extensively discusses production and consumption" it simultaneously "overlooks the 'sex and class body-politics of social reproduction" (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 83). Social reproduction can be defined as "the intersecting complex of political-economic, sociocultural and material-environmental processes required to maintain everyday life and to sustain human cultures and communities on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Di Chiro 2008, 281). By overlooking essential aspects of social reproduction, degrowth consequently ignores the unpaid labor that is mainly performed by women and without which no other production would be possible (no new humans, no new labor forces). Furthermore, "gender blindness is manifest in a consistent reluctance to consider gender hierarchies as constitutive of the capitalist mode of production and gender equality as an aim in the organization of transition to a post-growth economy" (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 83).

Furthermore, neoliberal and patriarchal capitalism would not function without

the work of women of color, which is essential but must remain invisible — both literally and economically (Vergès 2019). The devalued labor and care work of women of color "rests on a long history of the exploitation of black women in particular, of their bodies and souls," (Vergès 2019), making it clear that there are not just sex and class aspects connected to production and consumption that are under-communicated in degrowth, but racial ones as well. It is these colonial and racial aspects that Abazeri points out as being particularly important for degrowth to acknowledge and incorporate to a larger degree. This also underscores how decolonial feminism and ecofeminism can contribute with different strengths and aspects in order to enrich and bolster degrowth literature.

While Gregoratti and Raphael concede that there has been positive developments towards including feminist scholarship in degrowth, they are still concerned about the lack of attention devoted to feminist and gender issues in degrowth literature (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 84). What is most noteworthy and important to highlight in this context is that, within degrowth, there is a "strikingly absent" recognition of ecofeminism as a significant source of knowledge for the field (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 85).

For example, an article titled 'What is Degrowth?' (…) identifies six sources of the degrowth imaginary, none of which acknowledges the contributions forwarded by ecofeminist scholars with their critique of Western science and cultural dualisms, of 'development', of homo economicus, and of capitalism itself (…). In so doing, the article misses the opportunity of mentioning a number of original concepts that ecofeminist authors have put forth in the past two decades, all relevant to the six sources of degrowth: 'earthcare' or 'partnership ethic'(…) 'caring economy' (…) 'subsistence perspective' (…) 'community economy' (…) 'eco-sufficiency' (…) '(re)productivity' (…) (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 86).

To counteract this neglect, Gregoratti and Raphael put particular emphasis on the scholarly work and feminist activism of the influential ecofeminist writer Maria Mies (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 88). Mies was adamant in her argument that feminists needed to let go of the belief that capitalism and economic accumulation would pave the way for women's liberation (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 88). Just like Plumwood (1993), Mies was highly critical of the dualistic worldview that justifies 'unlimited growth' and so-cal-

led 'progress' at the expense of 'invisible others' (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 88).

Because of this, Mies argued that capitalistic growth destroys the essence of being human (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 88), and she also rightly pointed out, like many other feminists (Fraser 2013; Waring 1989; Stalsberg 2013) that social reproductive work, mainly performed by women, keeps the wheels of capitalism going (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 88 - 89). This echoes back to some anarchofeminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Emma Goldman. De Cleyre and Goldman fiercely opposed marriage, as they viewed this as locking women into socially sanctioned serfdom, stripping them of their economic, political and personal autonomy, while producing new soldiers to fight wars as well as laborers to fuel the economy (Rocha and Rocha 2019).

Marriage aside, the significance of social reproduction is also highlighted by Marilyn Waring who wrote the book *If women counted* (1989) (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 91). Waring pointed out that while both women and nature form the basis of all life and are what literally keep sustaining it, they count as totally unproductive and consequently become "invisible in the distribution of benefits" (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 91). Mainstream political, economic and environmental analyses tend to overlook or trivialize the reproductive economy, what is viewed as the 'private' sphere of production (Di Chiro 2008, 281).

In order to move away from this tendency to overlook unpaid labor, Mies advocates for a 'subsistence perspective' that is highly relevant for degrowth (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 89 and 86). A subsistence perspective has "no other purpose than satisfying direct human needs," (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 89) which entails a new way of looking at life and at the economy, and should value all varieties of work, including those which are not considered productive, such as housework (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 89). But, as the definition of care is rather uncertain, this emphasis on care is not unproblematic (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 92). Care is deeply associated with the work performed by women and fails to include all of the unpaid work that the economy depends on (Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019: 92). Gregoratti and Raphael (2019: 93) therefore ask a timely question: What would shrinking welfare states and growth mean to sex-workers, chamber-maids and migrant workers?

Perhaps here too the critical analyses of ecofeminism can be helpful: through "philosophical rationalism, neoclassical economics, anthropocentrism and epistemic remoteness," (MacGregor 2021, 243) ecofeminist theorists understand how socio-ecological injustice is perpetuated by numerous interconnected causes (MacGregor 2021, 243). MacGregor contends that the core principles and overall vision of ecofeminism can offer important dimensions to the movement and academic field of environmental justice (MacGregor, 2021: 243). I see this as very much applying to degrowth as a movement and field of scholarship as well, especially as the goal of ecofeminism is to create a sustainable society: one that does not exploit people or 'earthothers'[17], "even those who perform care out of love and/or duty" (MacGregor 2021, 243). This requires the radical cultural change that d'Eaubonne argued for five decades ago.

Conclusion

In order to set a path for a more climate and environment friendly future, there is a need to redefine what a 'good life' entails and to urge for a way of living where solidarity is the norm rather than the exception (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 429; Brand and Wissen 2021, 39-41). In this idea, there is common ground between degrowth and ecofeminism, but a strong feminism-degrowth alliance can only be created through the development of an alternative degrowth narrative and a deeper comprehension of the contributions that (eco)feminist critique(s) can offer to degrowth discussions and activities (Gregoratti and Raphael 2010, 84). Yet, "just as there is no one feminism, there is not a single political strategy for change" (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019, 93). Even so, both ecofeminism and degrowth literature share many of the same values and goals, and demonstrate a strong skepticism towards the narrow way of measuring a country's success through GDP. It is interesting to note that while writing this, 'The Stockholm Environment Institute' released a new report[18] declaring that "the world is at a boiling point" and that we need to "completely rethink our way of living."[19] The report urges countries to replace "GDP as the single metric to measure progress and instead focus on indicators that take "inclusive wealth" and the caring economy into account."[20] Whether politicians will

17 Term coined by Val Plumwood, referring to "the myriad forms of nature other beings – earth others – whose needs, goals and purposes, like our own, [need to] be acknowledged and respected" (Plumwood 1993, 137).

18 https://www.stockholm50.report/

19 https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/18/humanity-nature-stockholm-environment-institute-report?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

20 https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/18/humanity-nature-stockholm-environment-institute-report?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

listen and, more importantly, take action to follow upon this, remains to be seen.

What is clear, however, is that the proposals that degrowth and ecofeminism have been advocating for are now being presented by larger, more mainstream institutions. If used correctly, this might turn out to be a window of opportunity at a very critical moment in time. It would also be both timely and wise for degrowth to acknowledge and appreciate the feminist scholarship which for decades has pointed out so many of the failings of capitalism and society that degrowth laments (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019). Furthermore, it would be useful for degrowth to keep in mind that feminist theory also provides expertise in more general analyses of power, and can result in substantial redistributions of material rights and obligations (Bell, Dagget and Labuski 2020, 1 and 3). Considering how "growth has disproportionately benefited" the rich while millions of low income households keep getting left behind[21], a significant redistribution of material goods is long overdue.

Even so, degrowth needs to be self-critical. This applies to various forms of feminism as well, and ecofeminism is no exception. Yet it would be a great shame if so many of its valuable aspects 'got lost in translation' and only a narrow, reductionist representation was allowed to stand uncontested. By doing so, we would miss out on the important analyses of ecofeminism that dig deep into the root causes of the interconnectedness of gender inequalities and environmental degradation, which are essential for understanding the complexities that run through the multiple and intersecting problems we are facing today: increasing social inequality[22]; the regression of women's rights and the right to have autonomous control over their own bodies[23]; heatwaves due to climate change[24]; and the continued destruction of our ecosystems[25].

In the process of moving towards a more ecologically and socially just society, there ought to be a way to value reproductive labour and care work, without continuing to tie it exclusively to the role of women and particularly motherhood. We should listen and learn from different

21 https://www-oecd-ilibrary-org.ezproxy.uio.no/employment/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all_9789264235120-en

22 https://www-oecd-ilibrary-org.ezproxy.uio.no/employment/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all_9789264235120-en

23 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/24/roe-v-wade-overturned-abortion-summary-supreme-court

24 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62216159

25 https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/19/labor-says-it-wont-put-head-in-the-sand-as-it-releases-shocking-environment-report

ethics and epistemologies that arise from variously lived lives, but by relegating a special kind of responsibility to women through their reproductive capabilities or acts of motherhood, we quickly fall into several traps. Not only do we lock women into the sole role of caregivers, we also give them a particular responsibility for the salvation of the earth (no less!), while omitting responsibility for all others, be it men, transgender people, non-binary people or non-mothers. It also seems to imply that these 'others' are not capable of caring for the earth in the same way. And so we risk enforcing gender injustices many wish to fight and to entrench humans deeper into the gender stereotypes many wish to escape. However, ecofeminism is not the only solution. Intersectional, anti-racist, decolonial and queer feminist perspectives all have vitally important aspects to contribute. By shedding light on some of the root causes of the entwined problems of our world today, they, together with ecofeminism, might also carve a path into a future that includes social and environmental justice for all humans and non-humans alike.

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Knowledge as Power:
A Discussion on Post-Development and Southern Green Criminology

by Helene Kamfjord

Introduction

The project of improving human lives by gorging on natural resources to sustain Western ideas of development and modernization has resulted in an unprecedented environmental crisis (Álvarez and Coolsaet 2020). The consequences of the exploitation and extraction of nature are: mass extinction, biodiversity loss, and global warming, to name only a few (Goyes et al. 2021). When the idea of profit over people was spread as a new form of colonization throughout the Global South, the result was not only the destruction of biodiversity, but also the destruction of knowledge and worldviews (Goyes 2019). For the past three decades, this disregard for the well-being of nature and the treatment of some humans as 'less than' others and 'disposable' has been challenged within fields such as post-development and green criminology. International organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have also pushed towards a change in global governance and stressed the importance of identifying "alternative approaches to the currently dominant ways in which humans relate to other components of nature, with the aim of creating and encouraging opportunities for providing income without deepening the present environmental crisis" (Goyes et al. 2021, 470).

Environmental justice movements in the Global South, such as those related to climate and water justice, are influencing current understandings of the struggles for a healthy environment and livable climate. The latter have been undermined by a Cartesian understanding of humans and nature as separate entities (Escobar 2015). There has further been a rise in the use of legal pathways and rights perspectives to ensure the protection of environments and ecosystems, like the emergence of riverine rights in the constitutions of New Zealand, Colombia, and India (Macpherson, Borchgrevink, Ranjan and Vallejo Piedrahíta 2021). These trends are in line with the project of green criminology, a field of study which has emerged as a critique of orthodox criminology's disregard for the environment and non-human animals (Brisman and South 2014). Taking a more interdisciplinary stance on crime through the combination of law and social science, "green criminologists denominate as criminal all acts of substantial environmental destruction and animal victimization regardless of whether or not they are defined as such by law" (Goyes 2021, 8). In other words, understanding something to be criminal should not only be determined by what is considered so in a legal sense. This stance came as a response to the many environmental harms, often related to resource extractivism and intensive capitalist production, which are considered legal despite their devastating effects on (inter alia) ecosystems' and species' survival.

As a response to green criminology, which was developed by Western scholars but often looks at environmental harm in the Global South, there has been a push for the inclusion of criminological knowledge produced in the South - a *southern* green criminology (Goyes 2019; Brisman and South 2014; Goyes et al. 2021). Southern green criminology touches upon many different aspects within the post-development project. But where is southern green criminology located within the post-developmental project of plurality? This paper briefly visits the connections between post-development, green criminology and southern green criminology as well as the decolonization of epistemological power. Firstly, the article discusses the origins of development and modernization theories, along with critiques that emerged in the Global South. It then presents the inception, progression and limits of post-development. Thereafter, it analyzes the emergence of southern green criminology, before connecting it to the post-development project. The paper then assesses the similarities between the fields and advances the recognition of post-development and southern green criminology's contributions to the idea of the pluriverse as an alternative to the current social and environmental trajectory.

The Desire for Development and Modernization

To understand the desire for development we need to go back in history and assess the political climate after World War II. This period was influenced by the Global North's project of decolonizing the former colonies and bringing

modernity to the 'Third World' through a development agenda, which essentially continued dictating the former colonies in the name of progress (Asher and Wainwright 2018). This was enforced by liberal political agendas standing against the communist structures that existed in many 'underdeveloped' countries (Asher and Wainwright 2018). The road towards development passed through capitalist economic growth and a focus on technocratic solutions (Asher and Wainwright 2018). Walt W. Rostow's theory of modernization was influential for this period, describing the importance of the perspective of development and the stages of economic growth, where the 'end-stage' of a nation was its mass consumption (Ish-Shalom 2006).

Development was initially understood as being inherently good, and there still exists a general agreement that some sort of development was important in the after-war period in order to repair the damage of war and colonization (Escobar 2000). However, with time, the shiny promise of development and modernization was tainted by its failure to eradicate poverty and deescalate conflicts in developing countries. A critique of the very premise of 'development as a goal' emerged afterwards (Escobar 2000). The post-structuralists and cultural critics of the 1990s were most influential in critiquing the de-

There is often an underlying motive favoring the project of the powerful.

velopment projects (Escobar 2000; Escobar 2015). For example, Ivan Illich (1997), argued that the development project led by the West misdiagnosed and construed 'Third World' countries as being underdeveloped. This was achieved through the creation of a demand for structures and products which were not available to them; hence, making countries dependent on the supply provided by richer nations. The idea of underdevelopment was catalyzed in order to provide development and Westernization as a solution. Still, it is embedded in mainstream politics today, as it has been essential to the neoliberal project (Kothari, et al 2019). The "seductive nature of development rhetoric … has been internalized across virtually all countries. Even some people who suffer the consequences of industrial growth in the global North accept a unilinear path of progress" (Kothari et al. 2019, xxi). further enforcing a stigma of 'inferiority' on to the very nations which development was supposed to 'save.'

The failure of, and distaste for, development planted the seed for post-development discourse in the beginning of the 1980s, when people started to reject the one-size-fits-all idea of progress and

well-being (Esteva and Escobar 2017). Development was showing its true colors and "had taken a direction not uncommon in the history of ideas: what once was a historical innovation became a convention over time, one that would end in general frustration" (Sachs 2019a, xi). Whether the idea of development was ever supposed to favor the 'Third World' it diagnosed is another question. Giving development to the underdeveloped has been essential in creating the liberal trade structures which sustain the slow violence and unequal distributions we see today (Sachs 2019a). However, as with global aid, governance and politics, there is often an underlying motive favoring the project of the powerful.

Introduction to Post-Development as a Critique to the Status Quo

Post-development is most commonly associated with the theoretical critique attributed to the, eponymously named 'Post-Development School' (Escobar 2000). Central to the thought and literary body of the Post-Development School are *The Development Dictionary* from 1992, *Encountering Development* from 1995, and *The Post-development Reader* from 1997 (Escobar 2000). These classic works, written by intellectuals such as Wolfgang Sachs, Majid Rahnema, Victoria Bowtree, Ivan Illich, James Ferguson, Serge La-

touche, Gustavo Esteva, and Vandana Shiva, constructed a systematic critique of development (Sachs 2019a; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). One of post-development's most influential authors is Arturo Escobar, whose work has concerned post-colonial and post-structural theories centered around social movements and alternatives to development, mainly in solidarity with Latin American struggles and subaltern movements (women, Indigenous, peasants, and Afro-descendants) (Asher and Wainwright 2018, 27). The main post-development trends in Latin America are related to social movements such as *Buen Vivir*, which translates to 'the good life', and the Rights of Nature. These social movements have been perceived as empirical examples of post-development scholars' project, even though the movements themselves have had little interest for post-development theory (Escobar 2015). Their resistance to state power and dispossession has been instrumental in further inspiring other writers, which resulted in much post-development literature (Asher and Wainwright 2018).

Even if post-development is sympathetic to the struggle and project of subalterns, it has still received critique related to how it portrays local peoples (Escobar 2000; Asher and Wainwright 2018). This critique is related to the way peasants and the poor are romanticized, as it fosters an

'intellectual' distance to the people scholars are writing about (Escobar 2000). Although post-development has been explored and developed by a diverse set of people from both the Global North and the Global South, it is still rooted in post-structural thought developed by European thinkers – Foucault being one of the most influential (Escobar 2000). This post-structural framework analyzes discourse and culture as drivers of political struggle and inequality, which has made critics point to post-development as being too focused on discourse and

Despite the critiques towards post-development, it is still considered as one of the best theories working against mainstream, positivist promises of development.

not engaging properly with historical-materialistic critiques of development (Asher and Wainwright 2018). In other words, it fails to engage with Marxist critiques to evaluate unequal relationships between the so-called developed and underdeveloped worlds. Earlier critics have underlined the lack of proposals and alternatives given to the development scholars are critiquing, as well as the failure to describe what post-development might look like in practice (Asher and Wainwright

2018). However, this critique lost traction after conversations about a "Pluriverse" of post-development proposals emerged.

Despite the critiques towards post-development, it is still considered as one of the best theories working against mainstream, positivist promises of development (Asher and Wainwright 2018). As a testament to this, the book *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* was published in 2019 to continue the project of criticizing development and proposing alternative ways to imagine the future. Inspired by the Zapatista idea of many coexisting worlds, the book goes through different topics fitting within their understanding of the post-development project, described as "a myriad of systemic critiques and ways of living" (Sachs 2019a, xvii) It describes the pluriverse as "not just a fashionable concept, it is a practice. Societal imaginaries based on human rights and the rights of nature..." (Kothari et al. 2019, xxxiv). Some of the topics explored in the book are Buen Vivir, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and the Rights of Nature. Thus, the post-development project seems to be a space where the work of southern green criminology may belong.

The Emergence of Green Criminology as a Critical Harm Perspective

Green criminology does not depend on legal definitions of what constitutes crime in its outline of research interests. Rather, green criminology takes its lead from the harm perspective in which all sources of environmental destruction and victimization are included whether they are legally recognized as criminal or not (Goyes 2021, 7)

The term 'green criminology' was coined in 1990 by criminologist Michael J. Lynch, who saw the need for a perspective on environmental crime which would breach the gap between social science and law to create a more nuanced field (Brisman and South 2014). His work was highly influenced by ideas from post-structuralism and cultural studies (Brisman and South 2014). Although it may be difficult at times to define specifically what constitutes green criminology, it can be understood as a framework within critical criminology concerned specifically with the political and practical issues related to harms against the environment, ecosystems, (non-)human animals, and species (Brisman and South 2014; Goyes et al. 2021). Understanding that 'illegality' is constructed and sustained through economic, political, and often normative structures is

integral to how the field relates to discourses of power and practice (Ruggiero and South 2013). Thus, it favors a 'harm perspective' rather than relying on what is legal or illegal in the eyes of the law (Ruggiero and South 2013; Goyes 2021). This stance dates from the 1970s, when criminology was criticized for not recognizing acts of racism and imperialism as criminal, due to the legal frameworks of the time (Goyes 2021). Dichotomies and double standards like these were part of critical criminology's establishment, as a response to orthodox criminology and its failure to acknowledge that crime is construed.

Consequently, green criminology is concerned with issues such as deforestation; biopiracy; climate change; pollution; hazardous waste; illegal trade of wildlife (fauna and flora); and animal rights (Brisman and South 2014). These issues are often parts of bigger structures related to liberal trade, modernization, global production systems, organized crime and state crimes (Brisman and South 2014), which are connected to the demand for raw materials needed to sustain and promote development. Interestingly, there seems to be little engagement between green criminology and the project of post-development, which feels counterproductive as the fields should be sympathetic to one another. However, green criminology's tendency to en-

gage with issues related to the exploitation of the Global South has inspired a shift which includes and acknowledges the perspectives and knowledge produced in the South itself (Goyes, 2019).

The 'Southerning' of Green Criminology

Southern green criminology as a science that works to end ecological discrimination brings together the science of the discriminated against and listening to the discriminated against in their own right. (Goyes 2019, 19)

The call for a southern green criminology creates space for forms of truth and science that did not emerge from Western, Eurocentric intellectual traditions. Goyes (2019) describes it as the "knowledge of those who are usually considered knowledgeless" (19) and speaks to how there still exists a general monopoly over what is, or rather who are, considered to be in the possession of 'true' knowledge. Southern green criminology is generally concerned with issues related to environmental harm in the Global South and the way epistemologies existing in the so called 'periphery' should be accounted for within criminology. However, similarly to post-development, there is more focus on knowledge production from Latin American contexts. This can

be explained by the inspiration and influences of post-colonialism and de-colonialism on southern green criminology, often coming from the works of Escobar and de Sousa Santos (Goyes 2021).

The 'southerning' of criminology can be traced back to 2015, specifically from a journal article called *Southern Criminology*, concerned with power imbalances within the production of criminological methods, knowledge and framings (Goyes, South, Sollund and de Carvalho 2021). The piece, written by Carrington, Hogg, and Sozzo, pointed to a global bias towards Western understandings and framings of politics, economics, and culture – what may be understood as the "(neocolonial) portrayal of Northern societies as leaders in the "development" of the world" (Goyes, South, Sollund and de Carvalho 2021, 423). But even if the call for a 'southerning' of criminology came in 2015, it is important to stress that this project started as far back as the 1980s, pushed by a number of intellectuals from the South (Goyes, South, Sollund and de Carvalho 2021). Now, in the face of the current environmental crisis and Western solutions' failure to address issues of ecological discrimination, defined by Goyes (2019) as "the systematic negative differentiation and oppression of some human groups, non-human animals and ecosystems, based on modern instrumental

ideas about how to treat and relate to the natural environment" (15). Having a southern perspective on harm and crime is essential to escape our current trajectory.

The Power of Knowledge within Post-Development and Southern Green Criminology

Those who have monopoly over knowledge have power on their side. In *The Development Reader: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, first published in 1992, this idea is explored through the analysis of how the 'development' project enabled powerful actors in the Global North to impose their worldviews with the help of modernization politics. Within green criminology, the power of knowledge refers to the question of who gets to decide what kind of activity is considered legal or illegal (Goyes 2019). This refers to issues such as the mass-murder of animals (Sollund 2016); the destruction of ecosystems by megaprojects (Dunlap 2021b); or the destitution of communities through pollution and deforestation (Mol 2013). These afflictions are based on the 'truth' and 'knowledge' of Western political and economic traditions, often understood to be motivated by neoliberal trade structures (Goyes 2019). Moreover, multiple examples related to these 'green crimes' and harms show that one of the main drivers of continued environmental destruction is the

ghost of development, which still seems to haunt current political global relations.

In the 2019 preface of *The Development Dictionary*, Wolfgang Sachs (2019b) specifically uses this metaphor of development as a ghost thriving in our current political climate. Authoritarian or populist leaders, he explains, favor fossil fuels, extractivism, and mega-projects, much in the spirit of old-school development thinking. However, it is easy to criticize these extreme tendencies within politics, as they are evidently destructive towards the environment and living beings. Criticism becomes trickier when looking at current 'sustainable solutions'. These projects promise green jobs and clean alternatives, hiding in plain sight in the form of biofuels, electric cars, and carbon capture schemes – all in the name of sustainable development (Dunlap 2021a). These solutions are yet again built on the same dichotomy and logic that most mainstream Western thought have emerged from (Goyes et al. 2021), one where nature and society are seen as separate from each other.

The project of post-development shows how grassroots knowledge, different epistemologies, and moving away from the idea of 'one world' to push towards a pluriverse, will help humanity advance without destroying life on the planet.

Similarly, altering the legal frameworks of countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia, which included conceptualizations of the *Pachamama* ('rights of nature') in their constitutions, has been part of the southern green criminology project (Asher and Wainwright 2018). This push is inspired by the Indigenous understandings of nature's intrinsic value and the notion of human well-being as determined by, and dependent upon, environmental wellness (as seen in the Buen Vivir movement) (Asher and Wainwright 2018, 32).

The post-development project introduces alternative ways of seeing and understanding what is important for a future *after* development (Kothari et al. 2019). This is also a crucial step within southern green criminology in the sense that legal structures often discard 'grassroot' ideas and worldviews as romanticization. Therefore, southern green criminology must strive to learn from the epistemologies of peoples who are left out of dominant conversations and structures (Goyes et al. 2021). Post-development has focused on the departure from normative expert knowledge and "proposed that the more useful ideas about alternatives could be gleaned from the practices of grassroots movements" (Escobar 2015, 455). Also, within southern green criminology, there is an understanding of the relationship between the 'objects of study', who are

subjected to harm or crime, and the criminologist becoming adverse when the latter must explain or diagnose the situation of the 'informants' for them (Goyes, 2019, p. 17). This is connected to the critique that argues that post-development romanticizes the subaltern and may end up creating intellectual distance, preventing the studied populations from 'speaking for themselves' in the process (Asher and Wainwright 2018). However, Esteva and Escobar (2017, 2563) write: "It is not romantic, in my mind, to be on the side of those who oppose these tendencies, especially when Earth itself is 'on our side', considering the warnings she is giving as we wound her ever more deeply and extensively". In other words, deeming something as 'romanticized' may be another way of undermining the importance of Indigenous projects – alluding to the 'unscientific' natures of their worldviews or knowledge.

It is important, however, to mention that Indigenous perspectives are not the only integral part of the conversation. Generally, those who are construed as being closer to nature, and thus more vulnerable in dominant androcentric structures –– such as non-human animals, children, and women –– have not had their voice heard and are therefore important in the project of green criminology (Goyes 2019; Brisman and South

2014). Kothari and colleagues (2019) reflect on this relationship as they write:

> *the abuse of children and cruelty to animals are further aspects of the ancient yet widespread patriarchal prerogative over 'lesser' life forms. These activities are a form of extractivism; a gratification through energies drawn from other kinds of bodies, those deemed 'closer to nature' (xxxii).*

This is connected to what Latin American scholars have called *extractivismo*, the idea that nature, and consequently everything which is close to nature, can be used and instrumentalized for the benefit of progress (Esteva and Escobar 2017). The difference between what was understood as the uncivilized and the civilized nations strongly relates to Cartesian dualism – some are removed from nature, while others are not. The nations that led the colonization project got rich by instrumentalizing nature. Where they saw unproductive land, wild animals, and humans who were considered as 'less than', they realized a vision of profit and overproduction (Goyes et al. 2021). By cultivating the land, domesticating animals, and enslaving people, Western nations put nature to work for the imperial project (Daggett 2019). The fact that 'primitive' people had a connection and respect for nature and non-human animals

was what removed them from the possibility of accumulation (Goyes et al. 2021).

Escobar and his reading of 'development' as a discourse which continuously colonizes the South (Asher and Wainwright 2018) fits together with southern green criminology's critique of harm created by capitalism and modernization. An important term within southern green criminology is the 'progress parabola', which speaks to the project of post-development by critiquing Western ideas of helping 'underdeveloped' and 'primitive' nations through technology and modernization (Goyes et al. 2021). This critique is further supported by existing alternatives within these very nations, for example the Zapatista cosmology or Buen Vivir, and a "radical shift in our individual and societal behaviors toward nature, as well as our understandings of the world" (Goyes et al. 2021, 473). It is clear that current global solutions do not suffice – modern problems are no longer solvable with modern solutions (Esteva & Escobar, 2017)

It makes sense that southern green criminology spawned in Latin America, as the region has experienced immense destruction and environmental harm related to neoliberal extractivism (Escobar 2015). Projects promoted under the banner of 'growth and development' replace biodiverse forests with monocultures for

biofuels and pollute ecosystems through mining and extraction (Escobar 2015; Dunlap 2021a). These projects have been shown to further marginalize vulnerable groups, such as Indigenous peoples, forest dwellers and peasants, often driving violent conflict and militarization (Dunlap 2021a; Mol 2013). As a result, food security and traditional agriculture are threatened as food staples are replaced by cash crops to satisfy global markets and capitalist demand. A general wish for this type of development and growth, and arguments for why they are desirable, abound in corrupt states (Mol 2013). Land grabbing and extractivism are part of a bigger global picture where open markets try to satisfy the 'mass consumption' dream of development and modernization, which is further sustained by Western individualism and the Cartesian understanding of humans as being separate from nature (Esteva and Escobar 2017).

Environmental Justice and Decolonization

There are important critiques related to decolonization within post-development and southern green criminology. Both fields have a philosophical foundation of post-structuralism and are influential in the movements related to environmental justice (Brisman and South 2014; Álvareza and Coolsaet 2020). Environmental

justice is indeed considered one of the building-blocks of green criminology (Brisman and South 2014) and has generally been sympathetic to the struggle of communities against the appropriation and dispossession of their land and livelihoods (Álvareza and Coolsaet 2020).

There is still much to be done as colonialism lives on in language and discourse.

However, like green criminology, environmental justice has been mainly influenced by a Western framework when engaging with Southern communities (Álvareza and Coolsaet, 2020). Being grounded within post-structural thought, specifically that of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze, and focusing on culture and discourse as the main drivers of unequal and colonial structures, environmental justice fails to enter into dialogue with the knowledge and science produced in the Global South (Álvareza and Coolsaet, 2020). This then calls for the use of a decolonial theory, as it emerged from communities in struggle. This is also part of the southern green criminological project of moving away from a colonial idea of science and knowledge.

Still, even though some critics say otherwise, decolonial theories are present within post-development through the

work of different intellectuals such as Vandana Shiva and Shiv Visvanathan (Escobar 2015). When regarding other types of knowledge, whether those related to criminology or 'development' alternatives, it is important to do so "without reinforcing Western modernity as the de facto (naturalised) *(sic)* site of reason, progress, civility and so forth in contrast to the alleged barbarism or unviability of other worlds" (Esteva and Escobar 2017, 2568). However, there is still much to be done as colonialism lives on in language and discourse. Further engaging with decolonial scholars, different perspectives and discourses will enable both post-development and southern green criminology to become more pluriversal.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown which post-development ideas exist in the field of southern green criminology, and where southern green criminology fits within the post-development project of plurality. Furthermore, it has discussed how colonial exploitation and power imbalances prevail in the unequal perception of Northern knowledge as being 'neutral' compared to epistemologies produced in the South (Goyes, South, Sollund and de Carvalho 2021). This specifically relates to ideas of violence and crime, as well as perspectives on 'the good life'

and alternatives to development. Both southern green criminology and post-development are dealing with the challenges and limits of using Western theories, such as post-structuralism and environmental justice, to describe experiences and struggles in the South (Goyes, South, Sollund and de Carvalho 2021; Asher and Wainwright 2018). Still, both fields are working towards a more sensitive, critical and decolonial perspective on geopolitical and environmental issues. Post-development and southern green criminology connect in issues related to the struggle, mistreatment and discrimination of vulnerable peoples and groups (Indigenous peoples, peasants, women, children, and animals) and the project of changing the dualistic way we look at nature and humans. Most importantly, the fields converge in their conviction to listen to the 'knowledge of the knowledgeless' (Goyes 2019) in order to learn from them.

The recognition of, and engagement with, theories and perspectives from southern green criminology within what post-development call 'systemic critiques' would further strengthen their collection of pluriversal strategies (Sachs 2019b). Even if development issues are not the focus of criminology, green criminology tries to bridge the gap between law and social sciences. Furthermore, southern green criminology's unique perspective on

harm as crime, and its concern for environment and non-human species, will be primordial in the shift towards decolonializing legal systems and structures. Due to the fact that many of the interests within southern green criminology are related to issues caused by development, a deeper engagement with the struggle of post-development might prove to be fruitful. Southern green criminology should also use post-development as a tool in the project of decolonizing knowledge. Currently, there seems to be little to no acknowledgment of post-development within southern green criminology, despite the field's active engagement with the works of Escobar and Latin American struggles. Explicitly including post-development in southern green criminology will be a valuable contribution to a thriving interdisciplinary project.
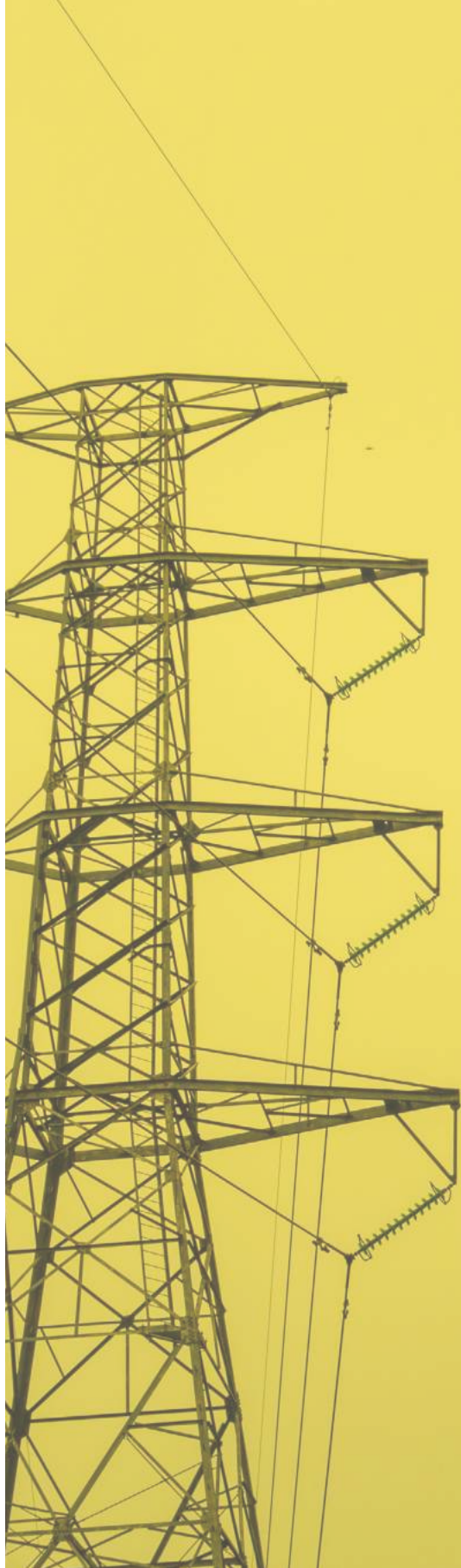
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Part 2:
False Solutions and
Changing the Narrative

Degrowth and the Digital Frontier

by Ty Tarnowski

Introduction

The miner is on the move. The pickaxe is an artifact of yore, shovels discarded by the wayside. In their stead, they fashioned technological behemoths powered by fossilized wealth to chew deeper into the earth, digest its precious ores and minerals, and spew its waste wherever it may fall. As these processes continue to gnaw with little abatement at the surface and those humans and nonhumans who inhabit it, the miner has begun to prospect new veins, immaterial, yet excavated with the same exploitative practices as its predecessors. Cryptocurrency, predominantly Bitcoin, has become one of the miners' new frontiers for extraction. This paper sets out to bring light to the relatively inchoate phenomena of Bitcoin mining and its version of digital extractivism, while situating the technology it relies on and has generated within debates in degrowth and post-development. Throughout this article, the compatibility of cryptocurrency and a just degrowth is assessed, leading to the conclusion that no rehabilitation of the current technology that underpins cryptocurrency can reform it into a tool to be deployed in the pursuit of social and ecological flourishing.

On the surface, the missions of degrowth – a transformative initiative within the post-development pluriversal approach to deconstructing and countering the hegemony of a homogenizing Western development model (Kothari et al. 2019) – and cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin seemingly have nodes of connection and overlap. Before untangling the two, it is imperative to see how they superficially converge. To illuminate this, we must first give a basic definition of degrowth, such as the one put forth by Demaria and Latouche (2019): "generally, the degrowth project challenges the hegemony of economic growth and calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being" (Demaria and Latouche 2019, 148). As we will later see, the manner in which Bitcoin is presented does not necessarily exclude it from this vision. To take it a step further, the sentiments around the inception of Bitcoin seem to be entangled with emancipatory pathways proposed by fields within the purview of degrowth. "Ecological economics," contends Giorgos Kallis (2012), "is well positioned to lead the discussion over a prosperous degrowth" (Kallis 2012, 172). Summarizing some of these discussions, Jason Hickel, in his spanning text *Less is More* (2020), writes that "over the past decade ecological economists have concluded that a money system based on compound interest is incompatible with sustaining life on a delicately balanced living planet. As for what to do about it, there are several ideas floating around" (Hickel 2020, 241). Bitcoin, as will be analyzed in the first section, with its manufactured scarcity, does stand in stark opposition to a "money system based on compound interest," albeit with immense caveats. As the ecosystem surrounding Bitcoin mining takes a nominally 'green' turn, there is danger that, if left unexamined, it can be disingenuously warped into fitting the call of ecological economists and degrowthers.

The purpose of the paper lies therein – to premeditatively deconflate Bitcoin and related cryptocurrencies as a tool to be deployed towards a just degrowth. To achieve this end, first, a brief history of Bitcoin's inception and the technology behind it will be outlined. Then, Bitcoin's trajectory towards an extractive mechanism will be traced, with special attention given to miners operating in the United States. Next, using the emerging literature published on the field of cryptocurrency, parallels between cryptocurrency mining and gold mining will be explored, while alternative routes for the technology are examined and their viability judged. In these discussions, Bitcoin mining will be situated in the realm of extractivisms – namely as a form of digital extraction. Proceeding this, the technologies that power Bitcoin will be situated in existing debates in degrowth and post-development, with estimations made where the nuances specific to cryptocurrency may be located amongst these streams of argumentation. Finally, conclusions about the desirability of Bitcoin and cryptocurrency at large in future pathways are levied.

Enter Satoshi Nakamoto and Proof-of-work

In 2008, the global economy plunged following the collapse of the American housing market, stemming from a diverse range of economic malpractice of finan-

cial institutions both in the United States and abroad. The speculative fabric holding together the entire financial sector was laid bare and appeared to unravel, eventually adding fuel to massive unrest and uprisings spanning the globe, from the Arab Spring to the 15-M movement (Hickel 2020, 122). Before the bulk of these movements had consolidated, Beat Weber (2016) notes a subtle ideological shift, writing: "with time passing after the initial outbreak of the recent crisis, a vague uneasiness about capitalism in general has transformed into a widespread uneasiness about the way money and finance work. This observation may justify speaking of a legitimacy crisis" (17).

Out of the context of this initial 'legitimacy crisis,' Satoshi Nakamoto, an anonymous online entity, published a white paper titled "Bitcoin: A Peer-to-Peer Electronic Cash System" (2008). The motivation behind its publishing was to provide "an electronic payment system based on cryptographic proof instead of trust, allowing any two willing parties to transact directly with each other without the need for a trusted third party" (Nakamoto 2008, 1). Trusting third party intermediaries, such as central banks and financial institutions – some of the culprits behind the Great Recession – would be redundant, and trust altogether outsourced to technology (Campbell-Verduyn and Goguen 2018).

Rather than trusting a middleman or an honest counterpart in an exchange, faith in the technology backing Bitcoin would be sufficient; no malintent could override the transparency of the exchange system. Bitcoin's solution was "a peer-to-peer network using proof-of-work to record a public history of transactions that quickly becomes computationally impractical for an attacker to change if honest nodes control a majority of CPU power" (Nakamoto 2008, 8). Bitcoin's innovation was proof-of-work, overcoming the main hindrance of past iterations of electronic cash systems: double-spending.

The proof-of-work algorithm requires that miners compete by directing computing power towards cracking mathematical puzzles – essentially using brute computational force to guess at a 64-digit hexadecimal number, a figure with trillions of iterations, known as a hash. Here 'work' is taken to mean the amount of computational power directed towards this task, and the 'proof' comes in the form of verifying the ledger and reaping the benefits of new Bitcoins – the exchangeable currency. The first miner to solve the puzzle is rewarded with a block of Bitcoin once the majority of the decentralized network verifies that the data and transactions being added to the growing ledger – the blockchain – are legitimate. Once transactions are written onto the

blockchain, they are irreversible; no hackers can duplicate coins and scammers cannot invalidate previous transactions, hence the issue of double-spending is effectively negated. To further back the security of Bitcoin, it is built to be scarce – for every 210,000 Bitcoin blocks mined, approximately every four years, the number of coins per block halves. The last Bitcoin will be mined by 2140, meaning there will be just shy of 21 million coins ever in circulation (Hong, 2022).

Here, two parallels between the arguments put forth by ecological economists as well as degrowthers and Bitcoin's mission emerge. First, it is infeasible to build a crypto-based financial system around compound interest with Bitcoin's finite supply. Second, Bitcoin could be argued, albeit with flawed logic, to fit the call of degrowth for a democratic redistributive downscaling of production and consumption. In theory, Bitcoin is democratic – anyone with access to a computer could turn processing power towards validating blocks and reap the benefits of solving the proof-of-work equations; no singular centralized entity could have the power to alter the ledger. And, if cryptocurrency were to reach a critical mass of acceptance, there would be significant downscaling in the financial sector. With trickery in environmental accounting, it could almost be made

to make sense. The reality, however, is sobering. The process of cryptocurrency mining is inextricably tied to violent levels of energy and material throughput, making it antithetical to the visions of degrowth and imperative that Bitcoin and its progeny be resisted when brought into debates over future pathways.

Moonshiners to Miners

Initially, Maurer, Nelms and Swartz (2013) noted that Bitcoin mining drew a crowd of "goldbugs, hippies, anarchists, cyberpunks, cryptographers, payment systems experts, currency activists, commodity traders, and the curious" (262). The early days of Bitcoin have been referred to nostalgically by Zimmer (2017, 323) as a period of "backwoods digital moonshining," where homemade amalgamations of computer components could land hobbyists a secondary income after deducting a slight surge in electricity prices. However, those days are a distant memory. Writing in April 2017, when Bitcoin's market cap sat at around $22 billion US dollars (de Best 2022), Zac Zimmer notes that "no longer can home producers enter the game as miners using graphic card processors, much less the multipurpose CPU. It is only with super-specialized hardware dedicated exclusively to cryptocurrency proof-of-work tasks that rigs can successfully mine new Bitcoins,

The reality, however, is sobering. The process of cryptocurrency mining is inextricably tied to violent levels of energy and material throughput.

and these ASIC [application-specific integrated circuit] rigs are only feasible at the largest of scales" (Zimmer 2017, 323). By April 2022, Bitcoin's market cap hit a staggering $828.75 billion US dollars (de Best 2022). With more incentive, there is a race for more cutting-edge technology and processing power, and with compounding transactions accumulating on the public ledger and intense competition to solve the proof-of-work algorithm, there is ramped up energy intensiveness. Thus, the industry has further centralized and coalesced around mega-scale mining facilities harnessing cheap, often coal-based, energy.

Although it is a largely futile task to measure quantitatively in absolute terms just how much emissions the industry creates, numerous studies have approached the issue. Despite their methodologies not encompassing the full range of ecologically degrading activities related to Bitcoin mining, the results are disconcerting in each instance. For example, one study calculated the emission rate of known pollutants created by burning fossil fuels

per kilowatt hour of electricity used to create one Bitcoin, in order to estimate its effects on premature mortality and climatic impacts (Goodkind, Jones and Berrens 2020). This methodology lacks a holistic approach – the authors neglect the mountains of electronic waste generated, the extraction of precious metals involved in creating ever updating processors, the transportation of parts, as well as the mobilization of energy infrastructure to power the mines. Zimmer (2017) calls our attention to the problem of e-waste, recounting a visit to a mine in Dalian, China, he writes: "even at this state-of-the-art operation some of the hardware was not current enough, as evidenced by the pile of nearly 900 discarded ASIC miners, some cannibalized for parts, others simply tossed aside as obsolete. These piles of trashed processors and casings accumulate like mine tailings, most certainly destined for the landfill" (325). Even with this oversight, the findings of Goodkind, Jones and Berrens are jarring. They found that at the end of the year in 2018, the damages from each Bitcoin mined amounted to 95% of the value of the coin. These damages, they add, "are not borne by the miners" (Goodkind, Jones and Berrens 2020, 2). This means that remuneration for health effects stemming from the entire supply web of Bitcoin mining, such as toxic mine runoffs, waste management, and air pollution among others,

are essentially impossible for the people upon whom they befall – a wide range of people living near nodes throughout this web, who in all likelihood gain virtually nothing from Bitcoin. Similarly, another stu-

At the end of the year in 2018, the damages from each Bitcoin mined amounted to 95% of the value of the coin.

dy taking a macro-ecological approach found that, in 2017, "Bitcoin usage emitted 69 MtCO2e." Essentially, the authors note that this figure is greater than individual middle income, mid-sized nations. The authors add: "should Bitcoin follow the median growth trend observed in the adoption of several other technologies⊠ usage growth could fall within the range of emissions likely to warm the planet by 2 °C within only 16 years" (Mora et al. 2018, 931), a clearly unacceptable outcome for a just degrowth. The manifold violent ripple effects of such a dramatic warming event would be felt unevenly across different geographies, leaving the ultra-rich – such as crypto mining executives – relatively unscathed, while devastating the vulnerable and marginalized both locally, near sites of mineral extraction, mining and waste, and those suffering from shifting and intensifying climates.

Crypto Cowboys and Mining Nirvanas

The value of Bitcoin has skyrocketed after the results in the previous section were published and, based on the proof-of-work model, we can assume that so too has its electricity usage. Further, The New York Times has reported an alarming trend in Bitcoin mining energy sourcing: "the Bitcoin network's use of green energy sources also dropped to an average of 25 percent in August 2021 from 42 percent in 2020" (Yaffe-Bellany 2022). This coincides with a forced exodus out of China enacted by a Chinese Communist Party nominally concerned about environmental degradation, where miners could previously tap into defunct hydropower plants, towards pastures with lax regulations, cheap privatized energy, and an entrepreneurial attitude – namely the United States (Yaffe-Bellany 2022). Inconceivably, Texas, where extreme heat requires even more energy usage to cool down the searing processors, has become a hotbed for 'crypto cowboys.' The environmental track record of Bitcoin is beginning to catch up with the industry – both China's mention of environmental degradation as the reason for its ban and a tweet from fellow techno-feudalist Elon Musk claiming that at the time Bitcoin mining entailed too many fossil fuels for his company Tesla to accept it as a payment briefly plummeted the value of Bitcoin (Yaffe-Bellany

2022). Along with the environmentally oriented criticism, the issue of whether Bitcoin's use value is purely speculative becomes relevant, although this remains beyond the scope of this paper.

In response to growing criticism, there has been an effort to 'green' the industry. David Yaffe-Bellany of the New York Times (2022) highlighted this narrative after touring the facilities of Argo Blockchain in Texas and interviewing its owner, Peter Wall. The news article reads: "the new facility, an hour outside Lubbock, would be fueled mostly by wind and solar energy, he declared. 'This is Bitcoin mining nirvana,' Mr. Wall said. 'You look off into the distance and you've got your renewable power.'" The article then shifts focus to the industry at large in the US, asserting that "all five of the largest publicly traded crypto mining companies say they are building, or already operating, plants powered by renewable energy, and industry executives have started arguing that demand from crypto miners will create opportunities for wind and solar companies to open facilities of their own" (Yaffe-Bellany 2022). Heeding the call of Elon Musk, it appears that the 'green' transition in Bitcoin mining is well underway.

Perhaps if Bitcoin miners successfully shift towards wind and solar energy, illusory claims of decoupling may obscure

actualities such as one Bitcoin transaction consuming as much electricity as 1,456,661 VISA transactions on average (Digiconimst, n.d.). However, we should remain wary. As Alexander Dunlap (2021) argues, these renewable energies should more appropriately be referred to as 'fossil fuel+ technologies' (84). "Renewable energy," he argues, "requires immense amounts of mineral and fossil fuel resources, both in the construction of machinery necessary for extraction and for the manufacturing, transportation, construction and operation of industrial-scale 'renewable energy' systems" (87). His analysis complicates the likes of Peter Wall's 'Bitcoin mining nirvana', foregrounding the ecocidal effects of constructing said nirvana. The case of renewables in relation to Bitcoin begs a question that Dunlap poses: "*What is all this energy used for?*" (original emphasis, Dunlap 2021, 92). Rather than socially beneficial outcomes, a handful of techno-capitalists are actively cheapening energy as well as harmful byproducts and converting these into a currency that only they obtain.

Dunlap (2021) continues on to prod studies of renewable energy acceptance to "question further the so-called sustainability and energetic renewability of these infrastructural systems" (84) These types of studies are few and far between in the nascent world of cryptocurrency. As re-

cent as three years ago, Pierce Greenberg and Dylan Bugden (2019) lament that "there have been no social impact assessments of crypto mining on the local or community-level scale in the U.S." (Bugden 2019, 166). By trawling through

> *A handful of techno-capitalists are actively cheapening energy as well as harmful byproducts and converting these into a currency that only they obtain.*

newspaper articles, public hearings and consultations from a crypto mining boomtown in rural Washington state, they attempt to delineate public attitudes towards diverting increasing amounts of 'renewable' energy, in this case hydroelectric, towards bitcoin mining. Their findings include residents' qualms about energy prices; socioeconomic value being leeched by urban technology hubs; loose environmental considerations; as well as ideological anchoring of cryptocurrency to illegal and illicit activities, but they omit broaching the subject of 'renewability' or resource intensive supply chains.

Due to the dearth of literature about social acceptance of renewable energy technology in the unique realm of crypto mining, more studies critically probing how these technologies are being mobi-

lized and accepted are needed. Susana Batel (2020) calls for these approaches to the social response towards renewable infrastructure to "problematize RET [renewable energy technology] as they are being deployed in current neoliberal capitalist systems as both remedy and poison in their role as mitigators of climate change, as often simultaneously sustainable and unsustainable, renewable and non-renewable, non-fossil and fossil" (4). Additionally, studies scrutinizing how crypto companies deploy tactics to influence public opinion, pacify resistance and naturalize their image as mutually beneficial (Brock and Dunlap, 2018) would aid in uncovering how power is exercised to drive these projects forward. From these angles, there would be ammunition to counter the onslaught of crypto corporations and Bitcoin zealots pervasive in internet fora, tech, and politics.

The Non-metaphor of Digital Extractivism

Does Bitcoin really have to be this way? The mining terminology and extractive imagery associated with the project emerge when recounting how the technology has played out, and the metaphors hardcoded into the algorithms seem less and less arbitrary. "The metaphor of mining," Mezzadra and Nielson (2017) note, "has caught on in this instance becau-

se the creation of bitcoins is entangled in dense economic and technological dynamics that resonate with the workings of extraction" (193). This nod to the extraction of precious metal-based currencies is not a euphemism of dissenters to the project, it is used explicitly in the language surrounding Bitcoin's creation. Nakamoto's (2008) white paper states, "the steady addition of a constant of amount of new coins is analogous to gold miners expending resources to add gold to circulation" (4). It is then no surprise that, as Zimmer (2017) points out, "accordingly, Bitcoin should be scarce, durable, and produced through a labor-intensive process of mining," creating a "digital coin rush that rewards miners who most efficiently centralize and consolidate their operations" (314). The proof-of-work algorithm cements this labor-intensive – albeit digital labor, but labor nonetheless – mining process as innate to Bitcoin; there is no way around it. And, just as the mining of precious metals in bullion economies necessarily led to centralization and exploitation of ecosystems, so too does Bitcoin mining. This reverberates with a conclusion drawn by Rosales (2021), that a devirtualization of our understanding of cryptocurrency is required.

The metaphor of mining by no means remains in the register of allegory. How can we make sense of this novel type of ma-

terial extraction tied up in virtual worlds? Scholars have taken note of these phenomena with various outcomes. To illustrate, Chagnon, Hagolani-Albov, and Hokkanen (2021) take Eduardo Gudynas, author of numerous publications about extractivisms, as an example. The aforementioned authors claim that he "maintains that expanding the concept of extractivism beyond the realm of natural resources—to finance, or additional forms of development—is detrimental to the analytical and descriptive power of the concept, and thus undermines the search for alternatives" (Chagnon, Hagolani-Albov and Hokkanen 2021, 177). However, Gudynas' stance fails to recognize how 'digital' worlds, taken to mean activities tied to digital signals and computer technology, are intertwined to the expansion of natural resource extraction across various layers of the global economic system. The authors

The metaphor of mining by no means remains in the register of allegory.

aptly counter this position by "contemplat[ing] the forms of violence that result from the progressively intricate knots that digital technologies weave into different formations of extraction and accumulation" (Chagnon, Hagolani-Albov and Hokkanen 2021, 178). They propose

the umbrella term 'digital extractivism' to encompass a wide range of activities, spanning the extraction of personal data online, the accumulation and sale of video-game capital, and cryptocurrency mining.

This hermeneutic of cryptocurrency mining, 'digital extractivism', is warranted. Employing the four metrics Kroger (2022) advances as criteria of extractivist practices, it seems that the process of Bitcoin mining, to varying degrees, satisfies some, if not all, characterizations of extractivisms. In monopolizing energy output and processing power, miners "create steep inequalities, whereby an elite or a political-economic sector or group☒ skews the possibilities to accumulate wealth for itself" (47). Further, with their numbing quantity of computer towers and cooling rigs and, more and more commonly, wind and solar 'nirvanas,' Bitcoin mines "expand monocultural or monotonous life-forms over the erased places" (Kroger 2022, 47), although in this case life-forms are more accurately digital and energy infrastructures. It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess whether Bitcoin mining "erase[s] most or all of the preceding life-forms," or, "produc[es] barren, toxic, or wasted environments, which lock-in extreme power inequalities" (47), although if one were to factor in the entire multi-sited supply web of infrastructures tied to Bitcoin mining, those connections

materialize. Regardless, Kroger reminds us that "not all extractivist activities need to fulfill all of the categories" (47). Bitcoin, as dictated by the metaphors it is programmed around, is inseparably tied to extractivism, and when turning sights towards just futures, prompts the urgency of an appeal put forth by Zimmer (2017): "Why not, instead, hardcode a different metaphor into future money, a metaphor as pervasive as Bitcoin's extractive model of expenditure, one that permeates every element of the currency?" (330). And we may ask, why does this metaphor need to be extractive at all?

Technological Splintering

Technology inhabits a contentious place within debates surrounding degrowth and post-development. On one end of the spectrum, technology and its companion green growth are seen as a panacea for environmental and social crises. In *An Ecomodernist Manifesto* (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015), a collective of self-identified ecomodernists proclaim: "the ethical and pragmatic path toward a just and sustainable global energy economy requires that human beings transition as rapidly as possible to energy sources that are cheap, clean, dense, and abundant" (24). Here, we can see that Peter Wall's aforementioned crypto mining nirvana may be alluring to ecomodernists, recalling that

"demand from crypto miners will create opportunities for wind and solar companies to open facilities of their own" (Yaffe-Bellany 2022). The ecomodernists, in their treatise, additionally call for intensifying technological interventions such as energy extraction, so that we may "decoupl[e] human development from environmental impacts" (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015, 7). Critics of this strand, such as Bliss and Kallis (2021), accuse the ecomodernists of perpetuating deleterious societal convictions, such as narratives of business-as-usual being acceptable with clean technology; of blaming marginalized for environmental degradation; of placing all hope on technical solutions rather than social or cultural transformation; and of taking growth as a given. They attack the foundations of the techno-optimism held by ecomodernists and green growthers, citing the lack of empirical backing for their claims of decoupling. They insist that "all the processes celebrated by the Manifesto have historically led to greater and greater, not lesser, environmental damage. Believing that speeding them up will reverse that trend runs counter to scientific evidence" (Bliss and Kallis 2021, 45). This fracture is significant when considering Bitcoin – whereas ecomodernists may be convinced by alleged decoupling as the industry shifts towards renewables and tout this as progress, those who are skep-

tical to the tenets of green growth deliver a bleaker, more accurate, assessment.

Despite convincing criticism, the position technology is afforded by ecomodernists is not an anomaly. Political ecologist Paul Robbins (2020), for example, commenting on the growth-technology-environment nexus, shows sympathies for this stance, although promoting a socialist variety of modernism. He recycles a mantra of green growth adherents, that innovation in energy sourcing has carried diminished environmental impact, justifying the drive for ramped up production and technological development. "The way to less," he asserts, "in short, is more" (4). He takes issue with degrowthers' deference to the idea of ecological limits, conflating them with austerity and neo-malthusianism, and questions their skepticism of technologies at scale. Erik Gómez-Baggethun (2020), on the defense of degrowth, persuasively responds to the issue of limits, arguing that their malicious appropriation and malleability are not sufficient reason to entirely neglect them. With this as a starting point, he launches a counter at Robbins, writing: "renewable technologies are part of the solution too, but deploying them at the scale required to replace fossil fuels, and expanding them in pace with continued economic growth, would require massive amounts of finite materials, including

rare minerals" (Gómez-Baggethun 2020, 2). Hence, the economy cannot grow ad infinitum; growth, green or not, must be curtailed to remain within the capacity of the host ecosystem, even if that capacity is elusive. He notes that this logic applies to Robbins' socialist variant of modernism as well – redistribution under conditions of growth will not alleviate environmental wreckage. This exchange carries implications for the positioning of Bitcoin in these discussions. If ecological limits are taken only to be constructs of elite power, there is room to embrace the abundant green energy Bitcoin mining may provoke. However, if any form of limits is recognized, the immense (and growing) material footprint of cryptocurrency's digital extractivism quickly makes the underlying technology unconscionable.

Although cryptocurrency has yet to figure significantly in these particular debates, it has popped up in other academic fields and the public arena. This paper has shown that various media outlets and scholars have sounded the alarm on crypto mining's track record of ecological devastation. In response, the industry in the US has only been able to muster false remedies, such as a shift towards 'fossil fuel+' energy sourcing and, in some cases, advocating a shift in the proof-of-work algorithm towards another consensus mechanism. This competing

consensus mechanism – proof-of-stake – doles out newly minted coins in a lottery-based system with odds increasing not as computational power directed towards the system increases, but as the amount of the relevant cryptocurrency being held by a participant increases. Proof-of-stake, although less energy intensive, therefore only rewards those with significant capital investment and gives those with a massive sum of the currency disproportionate control over the ledger, while still consuming significant amounts of energy to validate transactions (Hong, 2022). The oligarchical tendency of such a system reaches absurd heights. Regardless, the reality is that Bitcoin miners could not change their approach even if they desired it. The metaphors hardcoded into the technology demand digital extractivism from miners. This conundrum brings Ivan Illich, a progenitor of the degrowth school, to mind. In *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), he explains: "to the degree that he masters his tools, he can invest the world with his meaning; to the degree that he is mastered by his tools, the shape of the tool determines his own self-image" (29). Any meaningful reform pushed by miners is hindered by Bitcoin's incommutable insistence to devour energy and digital labor. Thus, Bitcoin is not a convivial tool, that "which give(s) each person who uses (it) the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of

his or her vision" (29). Bitcoin then overrides the possibility of our control over it and becomes a hindrance to the shaping of a multitude of futures according to a collection of individual imaginaries

It is abundantly clear that Bitcoin cannot be rehabilitated into a tool that can help us realize a just environmental future. This conclusion warrants careful consideration of Jevgeniy Bluwstein's (2021) intervention in the debates over progressive environmental futures. He warns that the debate between the likes of Robbins and Gómez-Baggethun "has not touched upon questions of political strategy, organization, and praxis for short-term dismantling of fossil capitalism, even though both camps agree that capitalism is the single biggest obstacle towards progressive environmental futures" (Bluwstein 2021, 1). As fossil capitalism increasingly turns its sights towards a new frontier of extraction – the digital – perhaps the time has passed to debate the merits of Bitcoin, and, rather, future debates should be centered around how to effectively dismantle it.

It is abundantly clear that Bitcoin cannot be rehabilitated into a tool that can help us realize a just environmental future.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to introduce Bitcoin and cryptocurrency mining into debates surrounding degrowth and post-development. First, a history of Bitcoin was presented while apparent points of overlap between the missions of Bitcoin evangelists and degrowthers were brought into view and under scrutiny. To refute these connections, the extractive engine of rare minerals, electronic waste, and immense energy usage underlying cryptocurrency mining was exposed and shown to be a necessary outcome of the technology underpinning Bitcoin and the likes. Deploying literature from various fields taking a nascent interest in cryptocurrency, the similarities of cryptocurrency mining and gold mining were contemplated, leading to the argument that cryptocurrency mining warrants being discussed as an event of digital extractivism – the extractivist label previously being reserved for more conventional raw material removal by some academics. Finally, the position of Bitcoin in existing debates in degrowth and post-development was anticipated, with grim assessments of its desirability and viability within these streams of thought.

Cryptocurrency supporters are spread across political spectrums, income levels, and geographical areas. Based on the long-term trend of Bitcoin's increasing market value, its advocates are gaining ground. Although Bitcoin and adjacent cryptocurrencies have yet to prominently enter the arena of debates surrounding degrowth and post-development, this paper issues a preemptive warning, exposing its potential allures as fantasies. The current generation of cryptocurrency, whether based around proof-of-work or proof-of-stake, whether run on coal, hydro, wind or solar energy, are irreconcilable with the mission of human and ecological flourishing. Future money systems should break free from the failures of past iterations – immense wealth accumulation based on violent extraction – something which Bitcoin fails to do. The hegemony of growth, homogenizing development programs that echo colonial systems of subjugation and domination, and false techno-remedies that maintain or intensify the status quo are and will continue to dissolve pluriversal ontologies and ecological balance. Thus, in defiance of these trends, it is imperative that the opening of new extractive frontiers, such as the digital one, needs to be met with resistance.

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Fighting Fire with Firestarters: A Post-Development Critique of Tunisia's "National Sustainable Development Strategy"

by Skander Manaa

"(…) sustainable development is a concept in constant evolution, but the determination to improve the quality of life for all of us, and that of future generations, by harmonising economic growth, social development, and the protection of the environment, remains the basis of sustainable development."
- National Strategy for Sustainable Development, Tunisia (MEDD 2015, 2)

Introduction

The Tunisian Revolution of 2010-11 has earned its place in the country's history, along with the subsequent Arab Uprisings which took place throughout the SouthWest Asia and North Africa (SWANA[1]) region, as a moment of hope, unity, and optimism. And though many of these uprisings ended in bloodshed and severe worsening in living conditions for populations across the region without significant modifications to existing political systems, Tunisia claims the status of exception to the rule (Muasher 2018). Researchers and commentators across universities and mainstream media have expressed admiration for the nation's efforts in affirming "a commitment to the collective and individual rights of all parts of Tunisian society" (Muasher 2018, 122), its "dismantling of the autocratic regimes" and "moving towards a genuine democracy" (Makdisi 2017, 20). These claims stand on questionable grounds as Tunisia has seen a series of crises and political implosions since the Revolution. Indeed, cronyism, religious fanaticism, and authoritarian tendencies have not just survived, but have thrived since 2011. However, as articles and books are penned left and right on the past decade of Tunisian political history, the issue of socio-environmental conditions in post-revolution Tunisia is still by-and-large neglected.

1 SWANA: SouthWest Asia & North Africa.

As the country attempts to find its footing in the years following the Revolution,[2] developmental and financial institutions around the world eye it as a laboratory for further testing for neoliberal economic development in the Arab world. Neoliberalist approaches contend that the surest way to achieve high economic growth and capital accumulation is for forms of social spending and protections to be slashed, for common or public goods to be privatised, and for the richest members of society to be taxed less. According to Jason Hickel, this dogma has been a key factor in the "significant disjuncture between GDP and human welfare" in countries like the US. Despite the fact that "real GDP per capita in the US has doubled since the 1970s (…) the poverty rate today is higher, and real wages are lower, than they were forty years ago" (Hickel 2017, 167). As the economy grew richer every year, the near-totality of those riches were "appropriated by the already-rich" (Hickel 2017, 167).

This neoliberal effort is evident in reports such as "Tunisia's Unfinished Revolution" (World Bank Group 2014) – an example of the continuation of coloniality in economic development, without a single mention of environmental con-

For players like the World Bank, the Tunisian Revolution was 'Unfinished' only in the sense that it had not yet embraced its place in the neoliberal world order.

cerns throughout its 300 pages. Rather, the 2014 report suggested a by-the-book neoliberal development plan: loosening of labour laws, liberalisation of markets, renewed focus on primary commodities, and fiscal policies which help only the rich. For players like the World Bank, the Tunisian Revolution was 'Unfinished' only in the sense that it had not yet embraced its place in the neoliberal world order. As these institutions continue to hold influence over Tunisia's institutions and policies, through financial loan schemes (World Bank Group 2022) or their links to establishment/Neo-Destourian[3] politicians in power (Grewal 2021), neoliberal pressures both within and outside of the country also shapes the Tunisian response to the socio-environmental issues of the late 2010s and beyond.

With the establishment of the Second Republic, the concept of "sustainable development" is thereby entrenched in the country's new constitution (Ferchichi 2014).

Though the country certainly deserves praise for codifying the importance of climate security, environmental protection, and the rights of future generations in its central governing document, we mustn't forget to scrutinise what is meant by 'sustainable development' and what this entails in practice. External institutions and members of the old ruling class have not released the country from their grip after the Revolution, in fact in some ways the unexpected power vacuum left by Ben Ali's sudden escape signalled an opportunity to exact new methods of political and economic control on the country's population. Political actors such as the theocratic Ennahda party and economic institutions such as the World Bank organised to fill the aforementioned vacuum, resulting in an acceleration towards neoliberal development.

The influence of these actors and their neoliberal development policies, focused on growth, extractivism and modernisation, is evident throughout one of the country's key strategy documents: the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNDD).

The SNDD, in its own words, exists to take on "9 challenges." These range from "sustainable consumption and production," "better quality of life", and the "development of energy efficiency

and renewable energy" to "promoting a knowledge-focused society" (MEDD 2015, 11). The SNDD identifies "action levers" for each challenge, with proposals on how to go up against the challenges, ranging from broad statements such as "behavioural change must be confronted" to more concrete ideas such as "reinforcing the monitoring of air pollution" (MEDD 2015, 16 and 72). The document does recognize the gravity of ecological crises, mentioning for example that "Tunisia demands twice as much biocapacity than what its ecosystems can produce" or that industry has not done enough on its own to reduce pollution (MEDD 2015, 13). However, it also reveals throughout the document the clear ideological foundations of its policies: market and fiscal policy remain at the heart of the SNDD. Capitalist approaches to environmentalism are revealed with references to "natural capital" and efforts to nudge the private sector to 'green' their activities through financial incentives and public-private partnerships. The SNDD does not in any way challenge the hegemonic narrative of the 'necessity' of perpetual economic growth and hyper-consumption, nor does it truly confront the colonial legacy of its past and the chains that still bind the nation to this day.

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2 The 'Revolution' (capitalised) will be used thereafter to refer to the 2010-11 Tunisian Revolution.

3 The Neo-Destourian party has been in power in Tunisia since its independence and up to the Revolution.

This essay aims to bring a post-developmental critique to Tunisia's SNDD based on three focal points. First, that the notion of 'modernity' is left unchallenged and remains hegemonic throughout the country's plans. This seductive transformative narrative advocates for social development through technological innovation, with its associated focus on individualism, universalism, and progress, which are central to the SNDD initiative. This foundational concept legitimises the subjugation of Tunisia's resources to private capital and external actors, as opposed to a more autonomous and emancipatory form of control. Second, the SNDD fails to truly acknowledge the (neo)colonial chains that bind the country and dominate its 'sustainable development' field. In this sense, it is passive in the face of problematic (neo) colonial relations through uneven and extractive trade deals and the persistence of the country as a 'dumping ground' for rich European countries. Third, the SNDD is embedded with an ideological prioritisation of economic growth. This form of total extractivism considers the country's biodiversity, cultural aspects, and spaces of emancipation as "natural resources", which exist only to be used for the purpose of capital accumulation and national economic gains. The protection of natural resources, while on-paper partially said to hold intrinsic

importance, is on-the-ground used to 'protect' resource spaces from non-state and non-capitalist extraction and exclude populations from their own lands.

I conclude that despite its presented discourse, the SNDD advocates policy which threatens the health and well-being of Tunisia's human and non-human biospheres. Following this, I conduct a brief exploration of possible post-developmental alternatives to the SNDD framework.

Defining Key Terms and Concepts

In order to establish clarity, it is important to define some terms in order to understand the SNDD initiative. The concept of *development* was formalised by Walt Rostow in his "stages of economic growth." Through this, Rostow postulated the trajectory of economic growth from the early "traditional society" stage all the way to the "age of high mass-consumption" (Rostow, 1960). For Rostow and his followers, this linear pathway, this 'development', represented an unavoidable and natural course for growing economies. This philosophy of eternal growth and consumption, of statistics and indicators, of universal and unidirectional progress is at the heart of what is termed 'development'. Born of the "disintegration of the colonial empires" and of a search by those same colonising forces

for new systems of subjugation, control and exploitation, development emerged as a mythological construct able to bring about 'the good life' (Rahnema 1997, ix). First propped up by post-colonial ruling classes and foreign profiteers, developmentalism – the rhetoric of development – has today been "internalised across virtually all countries" (Kothari 2019, xxi). As it spread, so appeared the cultural hegemony of the individual as a detached and independent component of society, a rampant expansionist commodification of all aspects of life and the biosphere, and a thirst for manufactured 'needs' that requires constant quenching. With this calamity came the demolition of the socio-cultural foundations of many societies; the merits and wisdom of solidarity, life in community, and equilibrium with everything around oneself (Rahnema 1997, x). Measured, bred, and verified through a seemingly infinite list of indicators such as GDP, development is often viewed and normalised as an inevitable process (McMichael 2019, Tortosa 2019). It taints visions for the future around the world as a single, often formless and blurry, end-point of abundance and individualist 'success', brought on by relentless economic growth and the rise of 'living standards' without any consideration for the social, cultural, or environmental impacts of such a quest (Gudynas 2019). In the words of philosopher Candido

Grzybowski, "*Development* is the ideology that dominates planet Earth; it is understood as a rising GDP, involving the ever-increasing possession and consumption of material goods, no matter what" (Grzybowski 2019, 102). Currently, our world of development is "awash with commodities", but also "increasing entropy (...) in deteriorating ecological

Measured, bred, and verified through a seemingly infinite list of indicators such as GDP, development is often viewed and normalised as an inevitable process.

conditions and fragile social institutions, with political and economic elites practising self-preservation, discounting public needs, and a looming climate emergency" (McMichael 2019, 13). At the logical finish line of such a philosophy lies a world hollowed by extractivism, with disintegrated communality, and a feeling of absurdism similar to the one described by Albert Camus, wherein humans seek sense in a senseless world (Camus 1942).

The concept of *Sustainable Development* appears in the 1980s on the world stage as the palliative cure to the destructive symptoms of growth and development (Gomez-Baggethun 2019). Outlined in

the Brundtland report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 41), the term also popped up as a response to the Club of Rome report – "Limits to Growth" – which had set in motion at least some recognition of the necessity to respect growth-related boundaries. By "effectively reshap[ing] sustainability principles to fit economic imperatives of growth", sustainable development allowed for a conscious continuation of the dominant ethos of trade liberalisation and growth, without experiencing the socio-ecological guilt associated with 'classic' development rhetoric. By performatively shifting its focus ever-so-slightly to the environment, developmentalism was able to rebrand itself as an entity capable of co-opting its more agreeable opponents, ensuring that 'growthism' remains a world power for – at least – the near future. Whether it be the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals or another set of objectives out of the myriad currently on display in the world, the new hegemony of sustainable development is characterised by an inability to confront and identify endless economic growth as a self-destructive idiosyncrasy, choosing instead to promote the mythological beasts that are 'green growth', decoupling, and techno-fixes (Gomez-Baggethun 2019, 71-73).

And though it does indeed promise a different outcome, through its name and apparently renewed focus, under a post-developmental gaze sustainable development effectively stands as a snake oil salesman painted green from head to toe, speaking of the medicinal properties of poison.

Post-development can be described as a school of thought, a critique, a collection of texts, or a project (Ziai 2004). Post-developmentalist works often share intrinsic values and principles such as: human emancipation within nature, natural repair and regeneration, local responsibility and autonomy, solidarity, criticality, radicality, subversiveness, pluralism, and an interest in alternatives *to* development (Kothari et al 2019b, McMichael 2019, Ziai 2004, Rahnema 1997). Born as a critique of developmentalism, post-development was at least in part led by 'spiritus mentor' Ivan Illich throughout the late 20th Century as its proponents were "ready to sing goodbye to the era of development" (Sachs 2019, xii). However, as development maintained its hegemonic status on the world stage, to some extent due to its 'sustainable' rebranding, it became clear to proponents of post-development that the world would not (yet) undergo a paradigm shift. For many of the leading voices in the movement, focus then moved from imagining an 'after development', to "how to *be* beyond development" (Esteva & Escobar 2017, 2560).

Tunisia's SNDD adopts an entirely mainstream conception of sustainable development. The Brundtland report is established as the foundational text on which rests the country's understanding of the term, and the successive United Nations statutes and conferences (Rio 1992, Rio+20, OWG) are recognised as key supplementary pillars (MEDD 2015). Most interestingly, beyond some of the more general objectives found in the text– such as a "global and integrated process conciliating where possible economic, social, environmental objectives" (MEDD 2015, 6) – lies a clear comprehension of the impossible challenge posed by unfettered growth. "(...) Tunisia demands twice as much biocapacity than what its ecosystems are able to produce, and this increase in consumption is linked to high economic growth and an improvement in living standards. (...) It is only through a better valuation of resources (...) that we may, in the future, ensure a better equilibrium" (MEDD 2015, 13). Overall, Tunisia's SNDD emphasises the importance of strong economic growth, as shown above and in the epigraph, while endorsing technological modernisation, poverty alleviation, and a focus on the individual consumer (MEDD 2015, MdE 2020).

Modernity Unchallenged

At the heart of developmentalist philosophy, Professor Jeremy Gould explains, lies a "narrative of humanity's rise from austerity to abundance (…) made possible by technological innovation" (Gould 2019, 36). Sustainable development proponents in turn tailored this narrative in a way that supposedly fit finite resource boundaries, through the ideas of 'efficiency' and 'progress'. While they initially promised a solution to the socio-environmental challenges faced by peoples across the world (Malghan 2019), these guiding principles have failed to produce sufficient results in avoiding climate catastrophe and social breakdown (Stoddard et al 2021). Modernity emerges first as a 'dominant worldview' in Europe, engraining in its peoples values of universalism, a separation of the individual from the collective, free markets, private property, and a deification of science as synonymous with truth and progress (Kothari 2019, Shanin 1997).

Modernist policies have been part and parcel of Tunisian politics for more than seventy years, since its independence in 1956 (Entelis 1975, Pepicelli 2021). Throughout the colonial era, the French authorities worked to implant and impose their vision of a 'modern' Tunisia. In practice this meant forcing policies on the subjugated that mirrored those passed in

Paris, alongside strict press censorship and heavy use of martial courts (Alzubairi 2019, 163). As Tunisia gained independence, the country's developmental trajectory did not show significant changes. France had imparted in their subjects a deep-rooted objective, to follow along in France's footsteps towards modernity, regardless of the destruction caused by decades of colonialism (Mirzaei et al 2020). Propelled by the secular and modernist principles of Bourguibism[4] and Neo-Destourianism, modernity has remained hegemonic throughout most of Tunisia's post-independence period (Zederman 2016) with the "primacy of the individual" and the "triumph of good sense and reason" (Entelis 1975, 520-522). Very rarely, if ever, did Tunisian leaders question the path of development, often unable to see how much of it was the result of French influence and subjugation.

Tunisia's SNDD shows a clear adoption of these subjectivities. In its key strategy document, the Ministry of Environment boasts an economy characterised by "dynamism" and "modernisation", referring to the need for "modern" energy services as one of its 17 primary goals (MEDD 2015, 2 and 22). It also inscribes objectives of "developing energy efficiency", the "efficient organisation of cities' economies",

4 The philosophy of Tunisia's first President Habib Bourguiba.

and the use of "modern, efficient, rational techniques" (MEDD 2015, 9, 42, and 50). Nowhere does the SNDD show hesitation towards the basic principles of modernity, obediently following the West's moralist conception of dynamism and activity as they enter a certain trajectorism towards nebulous ideals of an evolving economy (Daggett 2019, Appadurai 2003).

In practice, Tunisian governments have pushed for an unrelenting and uncompromising vision of the 'modern' economy, perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in the city of Gabès. In this locale, successive Tunisian governments have pushed for, and allowed, a destructive policy of industry and productivity over all else. Gabès, is a port-city in the southern part of the country's coastal regions and home to around 150,000 people. The city has long had, almost to the point of it having symbolic value, an important industrial site to process the country's phosphate exports (Robert 2021). This chemical enterprise took on an overtly modernist rhetoric, claiming at first to be a vehicle of decolonisation in post-independence Tunisia (Signoles 1985) through the nationalisation of the phosphate industry, then dodging socio-environmental concerns by pointing at its share of the Tunisian economy and the number of jobs it brought to the region (Lac et al 2019, Robert 2021). The industry's nefarious effects on the

people and biosphere have been nothing short of horrific: 95% of the atmospheric pollution in Gabès comes from the phosphate factories (European Commission 2018). Entire neighbourhoods suffer from cancers and respiratory failures, crops and fish are found dead before harvest, and reports of parents burying their children from pollution-related diseases are too numerous to count (Lac et al 2019). The Revolution marked a moment of hope for the people of Gabès, who felt relieved from the strongman approach of Ben Ali, and able to resist in a more open and public way. Though protests and consultations followed, the once-agricultural region saw a net increase in production and waste contamination year after year, despite the SNDD's promise of sustainability and the right to a clean environment (MEDD 2015, Robert 2021). In fact, Tunisia has doubled its production of phosphate – which has been rising on a yearly basis ever since a severe drop following the Revolution – in the first quarter of 2022 (Amara 2022). This persists despite continuous and important drops in mining efficiency and quality as the mines are pushed past their 'peaks' (Galtier 2022).

Gabès stands as one of the country's first major effort towards the impossible goal that is the Western economic model. 150,000 people are told to enjoy their misery and rejoice in the jobs brought to

the region through this dynamic industry. Though a hotspot of pollution and death on massive scale, the SNDD only mentions Gabès to propose a clean-up operation of the worst areas (MEDD 2015). Tunisian Sustainable Development has no answer to this destruction. After all, according to its own modernist values, growth and Tunisia's place in the global free market order must be secured, even at the cost of the health and lives of people and ecosystems. Instead of reflecting on the ills of abundance and limitless trade as communities break down and despair, Gabès and the Tunisian South are often depicted as 'backwards' and in need of modernity. There is also a temporalisation of modernisation through a separation of the country into North and South. The 'modern' North has achieved a certain standard of living for its populations, with consumption habits aiming to mimic the West, while the South is the 'Tunisia of the Past', tribal and rural, for which the phosphate industry's dynamism, industrialism, and technological 'gifts' are a guiding light towards the modern world (Robert 2021). If the South is still regarded by major politicians as living decades in the past, the North stands as an example to follow. As the SNDD recognises Tunisia's issues with desertification and water scarcity, so does it suggest for Gabès' Chemical Group to water its five new golf courses with used irrigation water inste-

ad of confronting the fact that one of the country's biggest polluters is allowed to build five new golf courses in a dying city (MEDD 2015, 31). 'Sustainable development' seems to mean, for Tunisia, the placement of band-aids on a dismembered limb; the country must go forward into the modern capitalist and industrial world without questioning development itself, nor its sustainability. As this – and other – generational struggle ensues, there is no doubt that Tunisia's SNDD has effectively ignored the crises of modernity.

Skin-Coloured Chains

Though the bells of independence rang sixty-six years ago for Tunisia, the ugly head of colonialism has still not yet completely disappeared into the void. Indeed, Tunisia has been subjected to continuations of the old colonial order through forms of (neo)colonialism and imperialism. Tunisians broke their chains in 1956, after decades of living under a so-called protectorate – effectively another name for colony – which assassinated, terrorised, and acted in whichever way benefited the French empire most from military courts and states of siege to press censorship and forced conscription (Ben Youssef 1954, Mullin 2019). President Bourguiba "accepted and assimilated those ideas, values, and aspects of French political culture which [were] helpful to [his] aims"

(Entelis 1975, 518). The subsequent decades of Bourguibist rule were dedicated to what Bourguiba himself called "the promotion of man" and "the supreme power of reason" (Entelis 1975, 520). Though he may have intended to instrumentalise the efficiency and industrialism of the French colonial order by bringing some of its philosophy into his government, Bourguiba internalised French colonialism to such an extent that the French did not need to have direct control over the country: Tunisia would 'self-manage'. The old colonial order continued to live through Bourguiba as the President and the majority of the political class beside him underwent a process of "identification with the aggressor." As Ashis Nandy puts it, the colonised see in the coloniser their salvation, their potential power, something which they wish to emulate in order to escape their chains. In doing so, Bourguiba rarely questioned the set-in order of the world economy, of competition between regions and cities, of the French present as the only present to wish for (Nandy 1997).

This stage of "intensification of the assimilation phase to normalise colonial structures, making them self-reinforcing and managing" (Dunlap 2018, 556) was ignored during the Revolution in 2011, allowing for international capitalism and the global (neo)colonial order to continue ravaging Tunisia throughout the Second Republic

(Mullin 2019). What seemed to be gained in the birth of more democratic institutions and leaders was quickly lost as technocracy, corruption, and the shadow of 'sustainable development' set in. Indeed, nothing was to change under the new order, as it swiftly became clear that the profit motive was still at the heart of power. In the years since the Revolution, 'sustainable development' became a throwaway term the successive governments used to fuel and greenwash policies that encroached on ecosystems, depleted resources beyond limits, and played into current-day (neo)colonial dynamics of primary commodity over-production.

Colonialism and (neo)colonialism do not feature in any way in the country's National Strategy for Sustainable Development, or rather: nowhere is it identified as such. Instead, these patterns of extraction and subjugation feature throughout the SNDD as an insidious, stealthy force influencing the policies and subjectivities throughout. The report obsesses over statistics and indicators created by global developmentalist institutions such as the World Bank, unable to go further in its self-reflection than an admittance that economic growth has in Tunisia, "favoured the social development of a significant minority of the population, particularly those situated in coastal cities" (MEDD 2015, 20). In fact, inscribed into one of the

'strategic axes' of the report is the explicit wish to "match as closely as possible the performance of European industry" through financial programs, auditing services, and neoliberal-styled deregulation (MEDD 2015, 52). This exemplifies the hegemonic attitude in Tunisian sustainable development that is trajectorism, whereby time and progress must inevitably lead one to "the world written in the image of Europe" (Appadurai 2013, 225), like an unstoppable and irremediable law of motion (Daggett 2019). By following such a process of self-management through modernisation and development, Tunisia succumbs to the "self-identification, dependency, addiction and/or desire for the social, ecological and self-destruction implicit within the colonial/state system" (Dunlap 2018, 557). These elements of coloniality have, as we've briefly seen, their roots in pre-independence and post-independence Tunisian governance, but also often understated is the influence of groups like the World Bank in nudging, pushing, or even forcing Global South countries like Tunisia to follow the global model of limitless economic growth before all else. One such instance of influence is the "Unfinished Revolution" report written by the World Bank after the Tunisian Revolution, which completely neglects to analyse in any meaningful way the impacts of colonialism, environmental degradation, or uneven relationships with

Western trading partners. Instead, the report, which has been highly influential for the country as it is also under constant 'need' to take out loans from the World Bank, stops short of begging Tunisia to become the "Tiger of the Mediterranean", by further investing itself in modernisation, liberalisation of the economy, and an economic philosophy of growth (World Bank Group 2014, 04). This animal moniker, popularised in Asia by the 'Four Asian Tigers' whose economies were laboratory experiments for neoliberal policies, makes an appearance as organisations such as the World Bank hope to turn Tunisia into their newest guinea pig. In fact, the World Bank itself has stated in its 'Unfinished Revolution' report that the Tunisian economy lacks competition, needs to shed its 'well-meaning' labour policies, and accelerate growth through what amounts to a free-marketeer overhaul.

An interesting case of (neo)colonialism in practice in Tunisia's SNDD, is the way the country handles trash. Though it may seem trivial, Tunisia has long had issues of trash collection and management. The SNDD appears to put a heavy focus on this area, as it is also one that Tunisians generally feel strongly about. Over the past decades, everything from city streets to beaches have often become ridden with trash of all kinds. The SNDD shows a genuine and somewhat serious effort in recounting the history of trash regulation and advances in the country's history, highlighting where the biggest obstacles in trash management lie today, and suggesting reforms (MEDD 2015). However, in the 68 instances that waste is discussed in the text, not once are imports of foreign – especially EU – waste considered or reflected upon. For example, Tunisia has imported thousands of tonnes of non-recycled/non-recyclable household waste from Italy in recent years (Delpuech & IrpiMedia 2021). Throughout the SNDD, no mind is paid by the sustainable development leaders of the country to question why a country accepts importing another's trash, especially when the receiving member of the deal's landfills exceed their daily intake capacity by several hundred times. The investigative journalists at Inkyfada report that despite it being technically illegal, Italian company SRA has exported nearly 8,000 tons of waste to Sousse in the summer of 2020 alone. In doing so, SRA has been charging around 52 euros per ton, making this a business worth millions. This demonstrates an inability to critically analyse (neo)colonial relationships, processes of development, and sustainable development like trash imports or even exports of banned/dangerous pesticides from the EU to Tunisia to increase petro-agricultural efficiency (Delpuech 2021). This illustrates how far the country still has to go in acknowledging and resisting the fact that "the patterns of extraction that characterised colonisation remain very much in place today" (Hickel 2020, 103).

Extractivism, Unstoppable

Sustainable development's insistent fixation on perpetual economic growth rests on the fictitious grounds that ever-more resources may be extracted from a biosphere – sustainably. Such an oxymoron should seem obvious, but instead this idea of 'sustainable' infinite growth on a finite planet lays the foundations for the modern variant of extractivist mindset that has dominated so much of human history. As extractivism-activist Samantha Hargreaves explains, the logic of "the pie must grow to fight poverty" prevails, "foreign investment and productivism get to be promoted over protection of natural resources and the livelihood rights of indigenous and other communities" (Hargreaves 2019, 63). But large-scale extractivism cannot exist without the support of the "modern notion of the disembedded individual and the nature-culture dualism that underscores the development complex" (Caruso & Barletti 2019, 220). Indeed, the foundation of any ideology which adopts a deep addiction to extractivism, such as the present global system, is a schizophrenic belief that humanity lives on the periphery, or completely outside, of 'Nature'. As Jason Moore writes (Moore 2021) even the term "Nature" is not without ideological baggage, for it comes into being as a way to manage capitalist relations and create hierarchies of labour, commodities, and people by delineating two realms: "Nature" and "Man". The first of those realms is to be conquered and taken from, the second to receive and use or consume (Moore 2021). By forcing such a conceptual barrier between the individual and their environment, extractivism allows for the extraction of resources while reinforcing the idea that these actions have little to no effect on society or individuals. Humans must then, accordingly, develop ever-further towards increasing resource use, intoxicated on the opiate delusion that actions have no consequences. As the global capitalist economy is fuelled by an imperative towards total extractivism, with a "rapacious appetite for all life" it makes use of the "deployment of violent technologies aiming at integrating and reconfiguring the Earth and its inhabitants, meanwhile normalizing its logics, apparatuses and subjectivities, as it violently colonizes and pacifies various natures" (Dunlap & Jakobsen 2020, 7). Indeed, Tunisia has not (yet) escaped its fate as a Global South component of the equation, whereby it is the prime target of resource extraction for the benefit of richer nations and populations.

Once again, the SNDD falls silent, this time on the dangers of extractivism. The document outlines that the "protection of natural resources" is an imperative, that it finds dangerous projects which are based on the "mobilisation of natural resources", and even highlights "the sustainable management of natural resources" as one of its 9 principal key challenges (MEDD 2015, 1, 4, and 11). Yet, it still aims to reconcile "economic and social development" with "the preservation of natural resources" (MEDD 2015, 3) with action-points such as programmes of "observation" of natural resources and "promotion" of conservation (MEDD 2015, 68-69). Market solutions, such as tax reductions on so-called "virtuous consumption", are proposed as the only viable pathway, with no mention of the vast array of alternatives which exist to tackle hyper-consumption and unnecessary resource extraction (MEDD 2015, 15). The SNDD places a strong focus on the individual as a consumer, arguing for the need of a "change in behaviour" without any such behavioural change suggested for the supply-side of the economy (MEDD 2015, 15). "Sustainable industry" (MEDD 2015, 17) is hailed as the primary objective of Tunisia's sustainable development policy, without once considering the extractive and destructive potential of such voracious industrialism based solely on unearthing phosphate and other minerals, or killing swathes of fish and trees, solely for the country to have a place in the global economic system through its 'specialisation' in endemic resource commodification like olive tree wood, fish, and fertiliser. Tunisia seems to also neglect instances of direct or indi-

"Sustainable industry" is hailed as the primary objective of Tunisia's sustainable development policy, without once considering the extractive and destructive potential of such voracious industrialism.

rect 'Green extractivism', wherein the biosphere's natural resources and its "vital or kinetic energetic flows" are disrupted, harvested, or depleted, under the guise of 'green' energy or so-called 'renewable energy' – a hallmark of sustainable development (Dunlap & Marin 2022, 6). The SNDD boasts support for these processes of "'green' and conventional natural resource extraction" without recognising "corresponding political repression and the overall structure of capital accumulation" as well as their role in advancing ecocide and genocide through the erasure of socio-cultural elements, practices of assimilation, and domination of nature – and therefore people (Dunlap 2020, 4). As demonstrated by Alexander Dunlap, 'green' technologies are not impervio-

us to critiques of ecocide and genocide. Many wind energy projects, for example, require deforestation, disruption of fauna and flora, and large quantities of rare-earth metals or minerals, obtained through ecologically destructive processes and supply chains. In some cases the culmination of this destruction and disruption can be qualified as ecocidal, as biospheres are permanently altered by extractivist policies and projects.

The rampant extractivism of 'sustainable development' in Tunisia is unfortunately present in countless areas of the country. For example, the SNDD does not question the ethics or impacts of Gabès' phosphate industry which "ravage[s] (…) pollutes and pillages", exposing the "paradox of abundance" wherein "poverty, unemployment, toxic waste, flares, dumped poisons, and resource pillaging take place in areas rich in natural resources…" (Hamouchene 2019, 5). This phosphate is used in the global agricultural field as a fertiliser, fuelling the destructive agrarian model at the heart of the world's food and feed production. These links are not considered in the SNDD, the suggestions merely touch on some of the externalities of the phosphate industry, rather than questioning its very existence and role in the current ecological catastrophe. Moreover, Tunisia exports enormous quantities of produce, flowers used for cosmetics,

gas, oil, tuna, olives, and other primary goods despite facing issues of water and biocapacity scarcity. The neoliberal order has indeed assigned Tunisia the role of primary commodity producer, a task which demands ever-increasing land, water and labour, for fragile and diminishing returns.

Due to this, a great many "national sacrifice areas" (Means 1983, iv) have been designated to be the bearers of modernity's greatest ills. Agareb, in my home region of Sfax, has been suffering from the unregulated and unmitigated dumping of the country's waste since 2008. A million people's trash ends up being thrown in what is supposedly a 'natural reserve area', where nothing grows any more. As Tunisia aims to move ever-closer to the European model of hyper-consumerism geared towards a trajectory of total extractivism, the inhabitants of Agareb denounce the country's path of development: "We are being sacrificed so that the rest of Tunisia can breathe" (Delpuech & Poletti 2021a). This is the other side of the coin of sustainable development practices. With continuing growth, unabated, extractive industries use places like Agareb to dump the by-products of such philosophies, causing extreme rates of disease, malaise, and death. In Borj Essalhi, on the coast, sustainable development takes an even more direct path to extractivism (Delpuech & Poletti 2021b). There, the wind in-

dustry has deceived or forced the population into selling or renting out their lands for "a few coins", to satisfy the country's incessantly growing demand for electricity in a 'sustainable' way (Delpuech & Poletti 2021b). "We used to grow wheat, corn and tomatoes. Before the arrival of the wind turbines, our land was very valuable, but today it is worth nothing" says Samir, a farmer and fisherman. Despite his family taking care of the land for generations, turbine construction began in front of his home with no explanation. Others mention contracts they were forced to sign, renting their land for around 15 euros a year (Delpuech & Poletti 2021b). Unfortunately, similarly to other sites of industrial-scale wind extraction (Dunlap 2017, 2020; Siamanta 2019), Borj Essalhi has been the victim of green extractivism (Verweijen & Dunlap 2021): their land and wind – and subsequently their health, place attachment, crop health, sleep, and peace of mind – are extracted under pretexts of sustainable development, climate action, and the green economy. As Tunisia aims to increase its 'renewable energy' production – which is clearly advocated in the SNDD – the windy village of Borj Essalhi was chosen to be a site of unadulterated extraction, with no mind paid to the villagers. Wind turbines have been placed as close as 50 meters to houses, within important biodiversity spots, and with no proper subsequent care

(Delpuech & Poletti 2021b). There are significant questions to be asked vis-à-vis local consent and carbon reductionism in the SNDD's plans. Throughout the document, renewable energy projects are held up as singularly positive, while issues of community sovereignty and biosphere impacts are absent from the document. As the rusting infrastructure slowly kills and disturbs the villagers of Borj Essalhi, Tunisia continues looking 'forward', identifying still more villages and biospheres like it, for its sustainable development policies to maintain a semblance of economic growth, increasing energy usage, and performative sustainability.

Conclusion and Discussion on Alternatives to the SNDD

Rejecting Tunisia's sustainable development approach, and seeking not "development alternatives, but rather alternatives *to* development" (Escobar 1992, 417), what – in broad strokes – could a post-development approach suggest? First, we need to highlight what the goals of such a proposal would be: to shine a light on the many paths that may be walked in the "Global Tapestry of Alternatives" towards a present and future of collaboration, socio-ecological wisdom, autonomy, and meaningful living – among the myriad of other objectives key to post-developmentalism (Kothari et al 2019a, xix).

Due to the current socio-ecological state of Tunisia, tackling the presented attachment and addiction to modernity seems to be one of the fundamental challenges such an approach ought to take, for it is both a product of the colonial order and at the heart of the country's extractivist policies. Confronting the Bourguibist and colonialist roots of Tunisia's modernism would go a long way already, in a society that often refuses to speak non-positively about its 'founding father'. Reflecting on the deep impacts of colonialism, and the shackles of its (neo)colonial continuation, Tunisia ought to force open the "grip of extractivism", as "it represents decolonisation in the truest sense of the term" with a rejection of the "old patterns of plunder" that persist today between the Global South/North (Hickel 2020, 224).

Tunisia could also take inspiration from the Maghrebin 'agdals', "a type of communal resource management in which there is temporary restriction on the use of specific natural resources within a defined territory with the intention of maximising their availability in critical periods of need" (Dominguez & Martin 2019, 82). "Beyond an agro-economic tool", agdals are also areas of high biodiversity and important tools of "cultural and ecological restoration" (Dominguez & Martin 2019, 83-84). Giving authority over resource use to localities, in which a respect for availabi-

lity and crises, surplus and shortage, or quality and ailment are observed, allows communities to not only repair and nurture their surrounding bioregion, but also the inherent links to culture and living that are built in each place, moving them further away from the ecocide-genocide nexus present in developmental approaches.

Strangely enough, the SNDD engages with one of the vital parts of this post-developmentalist approach: inward reflection on locality and the particularity of places. Unfortunately, this engagement is shallow as it does not alter its fundamental developmental vision, but there is something for the proponents of the SNDD to work from. An alternative to Tunisia's 'Sustainable Development' ought to, at the very least, rethink the ideas of modernity, colonialism, and extractivism presented in this essay. Choosing to reject the forces of sustainable development and capitalism is a project that will not be achieved in a day, but the Tunisian people have the tools, wisdom, and will to rise above the unilinear path drawn for them and walk into the "many worlds" (EZLN 1996).

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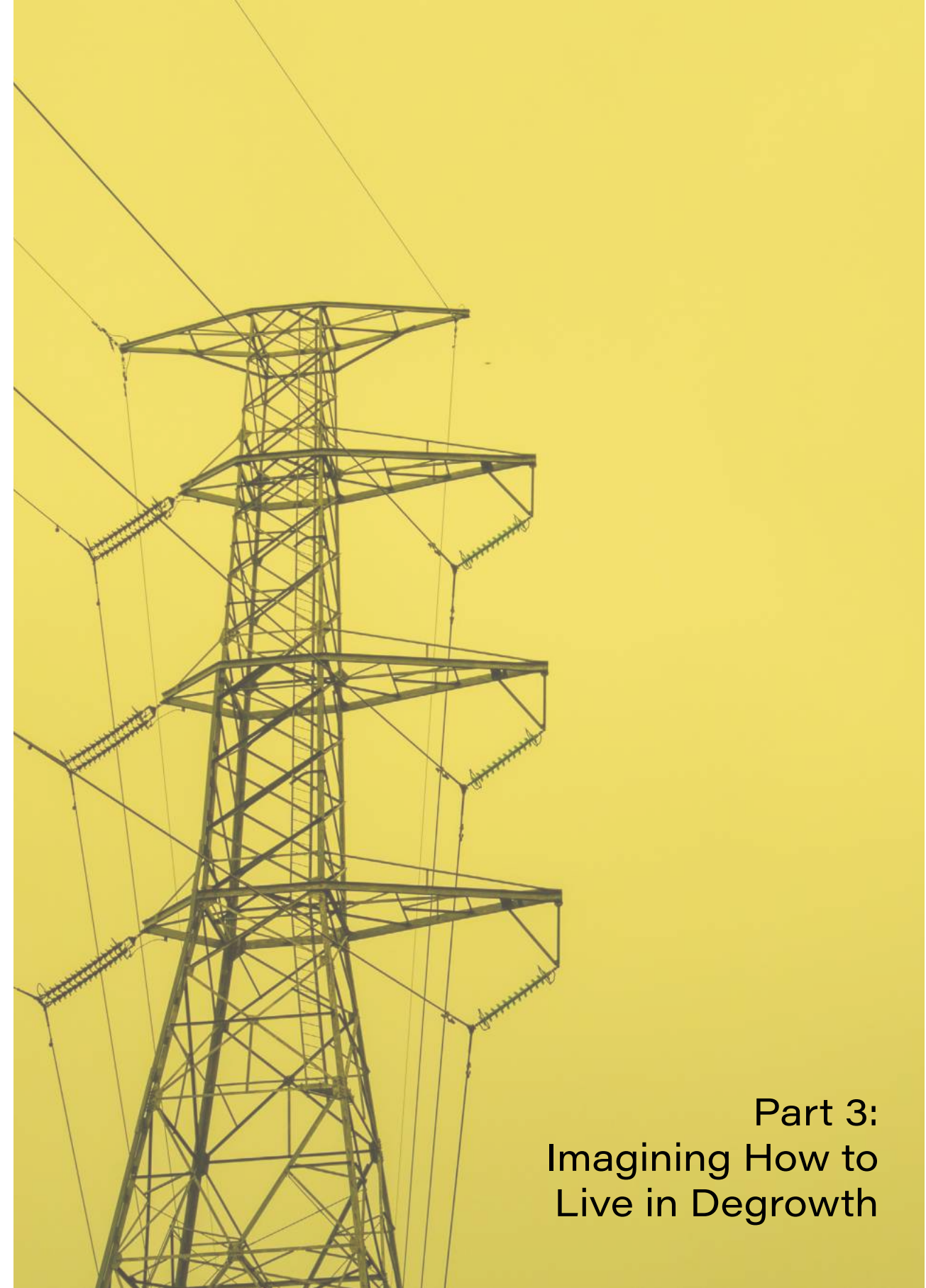
Part 3: Imagining How to Live in Degrowth

Anti-Fashion Movements and Degrowth Converging

by Charlotte Emilie Tobiassen

Introduction

"The fashion industry has become an existential threat" (Niessen 2020, 860), there is not a more accurate way to put it. Production, consumption and pollution of 'fast fashion' create massive, global environmental issues and social costs, including biodiversity loss and undignified working conditions for poor people (Niinimäki et al. 2020.; Niessen 2020). The fashion industry and its conditions for sweatshop laborers have attracted much critique for their human rights abuses ever since the Rana Plaza incident in Bangladesh, 2013, where more than a thousand garment workers died (ILO, n.d.). Just recently, social media followers of the world were also faced with the reality of fashion's rapid exchange and discard of perfectly usable clothes through the image of a giant clothing mountain in Chile's Atacama Desert (Averre 2021). These mountains of waste are no new phenomena – but to the comfort of Wes-

tern consumers, their (barely) used clothes are shipped 'away' to more laxly regulated countries in the South in order to be discarded (Niessen 2020). Despite such horrible impacts, the fashion industry is not set on slowing down – we now talk about 'ultra-fast fashion' taking center stage with its constant production of several hundred thousand new styles each year (Mahmood 2022). We may think that heightened awareness of fashion's ugly truths and exhaustive resource use would result in decreased consumption, but 'stylishness' and social conformity still holds a tight grip around Western consumption habits.

Lately, the fashion industry has attempted to clean up its image through brands' focus on circular economy solutions, talking about 'closing the loop' and providing customers with recycling opportunities in stores (Brydges 2021). In addi-

tion, more clothing is marketed as 'green' or 'eco-friendly' when recycled material is used. Often, these claims to sustainability promise more than they deliver, thereby fronting a misleading image of having no negative impact on the environment. Indeed, several brands have been accused of 'greenwashing' products for the good faith and conscience of consumers. For instance, the Norwegian Consumer Authority sent out a warning letter to H&M in 2019 saying that the brand's sustainability data were insufficient and misleading, thus illegal to use in marketing (Myklebost 2019). Still, the idea of a decoupled, circular production system is widespread (Stål and Corvellec 2018). No matter how optimistic the mainstream, neoliberal approach is of decoupling (inter alia) fashion's extractive resource- and energy use from planetary damage, degrowth scholarship explains how such a solution does not hold much ground (Hickel and Kallis 2020). The fashion value chain involves an immense throughput – the sum of both materials going into production, provision etc., and waste being discarded. In degrowth thinking, this throughput must be drastically reduced to stay within the bounds of our planet's finite resources (Gómez-Baggethun 2020). What is more, the global fashion system's deep, systemic issues go beyond encouraging conspicuous consumption for short-term happiness.

Fashion with a capital 'F' refers to the hegemonic industry, also (paradoxically) known as the "global fashion" industry (Niessen 2019). Within academia, Fashion is additionally critiqued for being deeply racist and colonial, seeing as it extracts, appropriates, and blatantly ignores the value of non-Western clothing systems, practices and styles (Niessen, 2020). Non-Western beauty ideals and styles first become trendy, and thus valuable, when the "global fashion system" reigned by the West adopts them. For example, patterns and embroidery from indigenous and cultural minorities' dress-making practices are taken by fashion brands without paying tribute to their source of inspiration (Fashion Revolution, n.d.).

As an anti-capitalist movement, Degrowth theory and scholarship can provide useful critiques against this unjust, systemic oppression by Western capitalist structures, in addition to alternative pathways towards a post-capitalist and post-fashion world. For instance, alternatives include re-commoning and recognizing other clothing systems than the one provided by the capital 'F' global Fashion industry. As a transformative movement, degrowth has been given both praise and critique for its focus on Western economic and structural change – its transformational potential in relation to the fashion industry must therefore be discussed.

After an elaboration of the fashion systems' ills related to resource use, greenwashing and systemic oppression, I will address both the values and the shortcomings of degrowth in an anti-fashion conversation. Through the example of an activist group called 'Fashion Act Now' (FAN), it becomes possible to see which themes are most relevant to address in this discussion. FAN is calling for 'defashion' – pushing for transformation in how we relate to and treat clothing, people and our planet. Lastly, this exploration brings forward a deeper understanding of what the degrowth scholarship can gain from acknowledging different issues such as those brought up by the defashion movement.

The Global Fashion Industry: Sustainability and Justice Harms

Fashion's global supply chain is vast and complex, spanning large industries such as agriculture, petrochemicals and retail. At each of these stages, new environmental impacts emerge – altogether the astonishingly high throughput of energy and material includes a production of over 92 million tons of pre- and post-consumer textile waste and 79 trillion liters of water consumption each year (Niinimäki et al. 2020, 189). In addition, the use and pollution of chemicals in clothing production is threatening ecosystems

and biodiversity, especially in producer countries situated in the global South. The most popular material, polyester, is synthetically produced from petrochemicals which massively pollute the air with CO_2, in addition to contaminating water with microplastics when clothes are used and washed (Niinimäki et al. 2020). Despite increased attention towards these destructive aspects, fashion consumption is predicted to grow by 63 per cent by 2030, showing that it takes more than media attention to change practices (Fashion Act Now 2020, paragraph 7). Western consumer culture continues to be obsessed with material possession as a symbol of well-being and social status. We have become compulsive shoppers, as we are constantly fed the idea that we are lacking, that we have nothing to wear in a fully packed closet. Rarely do we stop to question this behavior, the capitalist mindset of always craving more has become so deep-rooted in our everyday lives and practices.

To help with this cognitive dissonance between awareness and guilt of our continued harm, the mainstream panacea has become crossing our fingers that technological advancement and efficient resource use at the production end will curb these problems. This green growth narrative insists that we can decouple environmental harm from increa-

sed fashion consumption and economic growth (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Through such reasoning, more and more fashion businesses are launching 'sustainable' lines of 'eco-fashion' apparel, where the production phase is seemingly less destructive for the environment and us humans. However, green growth strategies of decoupling have rarely proven to be sufficient at reducing enough throughput to prevent global temperature rise and climate change (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Because the capitalist system still calls for competition, efficiency, and surplus value, companies take a shortcut by making sustainability claims and promises which they do not hold, essentially covering up the lack of real, systemic changes to this issue (Heidenstrøm et al. 2021).

What is so noteworthy and problematic about the fashion industry is that it represents a manifestation of everything capitalism demands and creates: from the excessive extraction of materials, the undignified exploitation of workers and environments, to the fantastical promise of heightened well-being from the next shopping spree. As argued by Jordan (2016), capitalism has captured our fantasies. The same can be said about the global fashion system. What is accepted as trendy and good-looking becomes extremely narrow once the Western-centric fashion industry steals the power to de-

What is so noteworthy and problematic about the fashion industry is that it represents a manifestation of everything capitalism demands and creates.

cide for 'everyone.' The result is a fashion monoculture, as is the case with so many other capitalist industries. Instead of creative freedom, the system both constrains the form of trends it allows and excludes what does not fit into its standards.

The global fashion system's embodiment of capitalism becomes further evident in its colonial and racist underpinnings. For instance, anthropologist Sandra Niessen (2020, 860) explains how fashion intrinsically demands and creates "sacrifice zones": "physical locations that are designated expendable for the sake of economic activity." Capitalism and fashion cannot exist without these places, so as fashion systems grow, the sacrifice zones do too. And, as Hop Hopkins (2020) rationalizes, sacrifice zones deeply depend on structural racism to keep considering 'Other,' non-Western people as disposable. For instance, the clothing systems of 'Other' cultures and minority peoples are rendered sacrifice zones, as they have been systematically obscured and devalued through Western dominance in fashion (Niessen 2020, 859). These 'Oth-

er' clothing systems include indigenous and tribal clothes-making, often made to seem less meaningful under the category of 'crafts.' As Niessen (2020) also mentions, the loss of appreciation for the practice of dressmaking within these cultures has become deeply normalized. Such a devaluation allows for a perverse exploitation of both the land, people and ideas situated in these zones, which are mostly located in the global South (Niessen 2020). People become dispossessed of their homes, culture and creativity through this process (Bollier 2019). As such, Eurocentric fashion systems are inherently racist in their treatment of those whose bodies are sacrificed for labor and are excluded from the – proclaimed desirable – realm of fashion.

What is more, the othering of these clothing systems renders them 'non-fashion' – in opposition to what Fashion is theorized to represent: incessant change and class segregation, at least according to sociologist Georg Simmel's definition from 1957 (Niessen 2020). He explains how fashion does not exist in tribal or classless societies, as fashion must be initiated by the elite (Simmel 1957). This dualist definition is still taught in fashion theory today, perpetuating a narrow and excluding image of what fashion constitutes (Niessen 2020). Essentially, clothing systems in the global South

become invisibilized, disallowing their intrinsic value from being acknowledged; their knowledge appreciated and reproduced; and their (more sustainable) materials and methods of production preserved. The fact that it is not talked about or challenged enough shows how deeply engrained and well-hidden the issue of Fashion's colonial and hegemonic nature is. Under layers of pretty clothes and distorted images lies the ugly truth of inherent racism, indigenous oppression, displacement, and dispossession of sacrificed people as well as destruction of sacrificed places. These issues cannot be dealt with unless systems-change is pushed into the political agenda and directed towards the global fashion industry.

Degrowth Scholarship and Critique

Considering the massive material and energy throughput and socio-environmental consequences of fashion production, consumption and discard, an exceptionally relevant and important critique is brought up by degrowth advocates. Some degrowth thinkers stress that we are dangerously pushing the biophysical limits of our ecosystems, thrusting them into uncertain thresholds (Gómez-Baggethun 2020). As Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019, 466) explain: "Degrowth emerged from a philosophical and policy proposal for reduced consumption and

voluntary simplicity, to stem the tide of economic growth and environmental destruction of late capitalism in the global North." There is no unified theory in degrowth, but it rather encapsulates a radical envisioning and an admonition that a different system is possible and necessary – how to go about it and what this alternative resembles varies greatly. This means convincing and encouraging people and countries with high consumption patterns to buy less and live more simply, to stop striving for more money and possessions, to prioritize abundant well-being and happiness. Some common ideals for this society include "sharing", "simplicity", "conviviality" and the "commons" (D'Alisa et al. 2015, as cited in Demaria and Latouche 2019, 148).

Some of the proposals for a planned degrowth future by degrowth advocate Jason Hickel (2020) are quite relevant to changing parts of the global fashion industry' inherent issues. For instance, he critiques fast-fashion techniques such as "planned obsolescence" – producing clothes of poor quality that are meant to be discarded shortly after purchase, when the next trends roll in - and advertisement, which creates a "perceived obsolescence" of the "outdated" clothing (Hickel 2020). What has been proposed in Hickel's critique includes (inter alia) policy changes, such as extending warranties

and introducing a right to repair; putting quota on advertising to reduce it; and legislating against manipulative techniques. However, the approach of imagining a more just and sustainable future achieved through and within existing and dominating institutions has been harshly critiqued or warned about by anarchist advocate Peter Gelderloos (2013). Through this fair-minded argument, the transformational potential of degrowth is questioned, a potential which is necessary for making changes to the global fashion system.

Degrowth has been described and critiqued as a mostly economics-focused, anthropocentric scholarship of the North (Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019; Abazeri 2022). The term originates from the French version, *Décroissance*, coined by André Gorz in 1972, and later taken up by French environmental activists to "repoliticize environmentalism" (Demaria and Latouche 2019, 149). Its uptake has mainly been within Western academia, conversations, and organizations. Arguably, this North-centered focus is justified by the disproportionate necessity to radically change the exhaustive, yet commonly accepted ways of living in rich, Western, industrial countries. However, the role of degrowth for and in the global South is widely and necessarily discussed as well. In "The Anti-Colonial Politics of Degrowth", Hickel (2021) argues

that demanding an end to extractivism and environmental injustice inflicted by the North is also a demand for decolonization and justice in the South. However, Hickel has also been criticized by Trainer (2021) for excluding the South in his description of degrowth as a solution in the North, by not providing necessary critique of the development/growth narrative which has infected Southern politics and visions of a good life. Furthermore, degrowth scholarship has been criticized for its lacking acknowledgment of capitalism's deep history and dependence on colonization. For instance, decolonial feminist Mariam Abazeri (2022) asks degrowth scholars to engage more critically with the assumptions that environmental justice only exists for the South, and degrowth only for the North. Indeed, Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019, 466) highlight the importance of engaging with ontological, epistemological, and cultural difference as well as different intersectionalities (of race, gender, class etc.) to avoid the Western/Northern dominance that is deep-seated in the degrowth movement.

Lastly, it is important to note that degrowth is not just an economic project, but as can be understood from the previous arguments, it advocates for a societal change. Hickel mentions the importance of pushing for an ontological and epistemological makeover, away from the Wes-

tern society/nature dualism. By escaping the Western 'enlightened' separation between humans and nature, degrowth proponents argue that we can realize more sustainable and connected lifestyles, moving away from the cynical 'us' and 'them' mentality. Another important argument thus derives from post-development scholarship, heavily influenced by the works of Arturo Escobar (2000; 2015). A valuable part of this ontological and epistemological transition involves looking to the South for wisdom and inspiration, while acknowledging the intrinsic value of non-Western knowledge systems and ways of organizing. As Demaria and Latouche (2019) introduce and describe degrowth, it is intended to serve as a common thread, a matrix of alternatives, and a platform for alternative pathways towards more sufficient and emotionally fulfilling lifestyles. It is thus important to discuss the potentials of this platform, how it is currently helping different pathways, and what could be improved. To exemplify the use of degrowth theory as a platform or alternative, especially in relation to a new pathway for fashion, what follows is a discussion of the degrowth-advocating activist group Fashion Act Now.

FAN and the Defashion Movement: Debunking the Myths of "Global Fashion"

Degrowth has become a popular topic of discussion in solving global socio-environmental issues; many groups have picked up this thread in their critiques of capitalism and its wicked consequences. For instance, the activist group Fashion Act Now recently grew out from the larger Extinction Rebellion (XR) activist organization to tackle the global fashion beast head-on. FAN consists mainly of activists and scholars who departed from their previous occupations within the fashion industry after realizing its horrors (Press 2021). The group is often represented by one of its founders, Sara Arnold, as well as anthropologist Sandra Niessen, who provide critical theory and understanding of the fashion industry's ills (Bollier 2022). The agenda of FAN's defashion movement is to dismantle the Fashion system, to repair biological and cultural diversity, and to build and maintain alternative, post-fashion systems (fashionactnow, n.d.). Their vision is tightly connected to a degrowth pathway, manifested in their aspiration for a 'defashion' movement: putting fashion in degrowth, and degrowth in fashion (fashionactnow, n.d.). In order to spread action and commitment to consumers, FAN encourages supporters to sign a defashion pledge as part of their journey – however, the group very much addresses the need for deeper, structural changes as well (fashionactnow, n.d.). They further emphasize how the myths sustained through marketing must be busted (Bollier 2022), and how marketing fantasies must be taken back by the people, as discussed by Jordan (2016) in his piece on degrowth artivism.

For a post-fashion future, FAN proposes a plurality of local clothing systems; respecting and sharing with each other; nurturing knowledge, skills and creativity (fashionactnow, n.d.). The defashion vision also relates closely to David Bollier's (2019) ideas on 'commoning', which he connects to fashion in "Reimagining Fashion as an Ecosystem of Commons". In line with degrowth imaginations of a future with more localization and community efforts, Bollier (2019) argues for a commoning of the fashion system. This entails a resistance of capitalist, neoliberal enclosure – which he argues is inherently theft and dispossession – envisioning instead a re-commoning with new types of institutions where cooperation and sharing is cherished (Bollier 2019; Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019). Examples of commons-based systems in fashion include different ways of producing clothing through weaving cooperatives; local sourcing of renewable materials; and, more importantly, re-using and sha-

ring what has already been made – for instance, reknitting initiatives or swapping-events (Bollier 2019). Right now, public spaces/our commons are overcrowded with fashion advertisement of all forms, shaping the way we shop and how we value ourselves. From a degrowth perspective, Hickel (2020) reasons that freeing public spaces from (inter alia) fashion advertisement could clear both public and mental space to make room for more creativity, thereby replacing psychological manipulation to consume. These ad-free commons could thus make people happier as well as lower fashion consumption.

Commoning also serves as an alternative to the critique-worthy exploitation of peoples in the global South through sweatshops, as well as the European/Western dominance of global clothing markets and cultural norms (Bollier 2022). A dismantling of enclosures imposed by the Eurocentric fashion system can arguably lead to a greater space for other, non-Western, marginal clothing systems to flourish and be appreciated – these could be commons-based, less excluding, and more creative. Indigenous and tribal practices of dressing and dress making are examples of these systems, which have been systematically excluded from the dominant fashion narrative through ignorance or denigration. In Norway, we can still read about Sámi people who experience discrimination and racism when wearing their *kofte* (traditional outfits) in public (Pulk 2020; Vik 2021). More openness to difference in clothing is thus important for social justice and the right to self-determination – determining which clothes to wear without being excluded from society. To change the dominating fashion system, it is imperative to imagine new pathways for fashion enjoyment.

Niessen further links the potential of commoning to the ideas of locality in degrowth: "If you think about degrowth — shrinking the industry down to size and focusing again on locality — you will see a return of pluriversality in clothing design" (Bollier 2022, paragraph 13). Just like degrowth, defashion will entail something more than degrowing the economy – as is emphasized by Hickel (2020), there needs to be a complete paradigm shift. The 'global fashion' system and those of us who are enmeshed in it need to rethink how clothes are valued, how societal pressures are driving dissatisfaction, what is deemed fashion or not, and who gets to decide on these issues. As discussed previously, this change can happen through the recognition and end of repression of 'Other', 'non-fashion' clothing systems – the main goal of Fashion Act Now. Although the group is referring mainly to degrowth theory and concepts, I want to discuss degrowth's

role in bringing about the transformation which FAN is seeking – especially because there are some gaps in degrowth scholarship which should be identified.

Filling the Gaps of Degrowth, While Recognizing the Need for other Perspectives

An important criticism, which FAN gives much focus to, relates to how fashion exemplifies and exacerbates colonial relationships. For instance, they write about systemic racism in fashion on their blog, calling for awareness and a new fashion practice which is more respectful and facilitates self-determination in all clothing systems (Fashion Act Now 2022). This element of critique is no surprise, as Niessen is part of the activist group. However, their referencing to decolonial thinking seems to go deeper than, and beyond, what degrowth scholarship can provide and has been critiqued for lacking (Nirmal and Rocheleau 2019; Abazeri 2022). As their visions seem to reach quite broadly, FAN could benefit from gaining more perspectives from other theories and scholarships besides degrowth. In addition, their positionality as a mostly British/ Western, scholar-activist group could make them fall under the same criticism as degrowth or reinforce the criticism which degrowth has already received.

However, this becomes a dual critique directed towards both FAN's approach and degrowth scholarship, as 1) FAN can look broader to gain more insight from other perspectives, and 2) degrowth should look broader to acknowledge these perspectives as well. The argument that degrowth should become more dynamic has been around for some time – Escobar (2015) has for example discussed the usefulness of a convergence between degrowth and post-development theory. This counter-term against the Western development model does not refer to one single movement, as there are many post-development critiques and perspectives existing in a "Pluriverse" (Kothari et al. 2019). The Pluriverse signifies an ontological, epistemological and material 'matrix' of alternative pathways towards sustainable lifestyles.

Like degrowth, approaches in the Pluriverse address systemic issues of Western, capitalist ways of living, and engage activists in political debates over socio-environmental transformation (Kothari et al. 2019). Escobar's (2015) argument is that bringing degrowth and post-development into dialogue would be mutually beneficial. Degrowth would for example benefit from the post-development discourse with a Southern origin, as post- and decolonial critiques are more established there. In addition, post-develop-

ment thinking provides valuable insights to non-dualist understandings and more experiences with the communal and relational lifestyles (Escobar 2015). Similarly, Abazeri (2022) asks for a stronger coalition between the movements gathered under the Pluriverse umbrella; and Dunlap (2020) argues from an anarchist perspective that degrowth should begin to recognize other anti-capitalist struggles that employ more direct or militant tactics, while sharing affinities with degrowth.

Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019) provide a similar analysis, focused on the decolonization of degrowth. They argue that degrowth would benefit from stretching beyond its "current conceptual limits", but at the same time narrowing its reach "by positioning itself as one of many "transition discourses" (2019, 471). The idea is that there are many perspectives to acknowledge and engage with other than degrowth, for example decolonial feminism or *Buen Vivir*. As a Western scholarship, degrowth has been accused of having an individualistic approach in arguing for voluntary simplicity, as well as excluding perspectives of those who fall below basic needs of health and well-being (Nimal and Rochelau 2019). Arguably, there is a slight connection between this critique and what has been said about the colonial nature of the global fashion system. Perhaps is there even a

parallel to draw between the dominant fashion system and degrowth's search for becoming an overarching and influential discourse (although with very different magnitudes and motivations). Decolonial and post-development theory provide perspectives which can critique both degrowth and Fashion in this sense. Both can benefit from recognizing 'Others', and both must avoid the unjust practice of silencing or invisibilizing perspectives from the global South. In line with this, Altmann (2020) notes how discourses of the global North tend to invisibilize and silence the South, for example through (re-)discovering Southern perspectives and implementing them into dominant, Northern ones. As mentioned, this 're-discovery', or appropriation, is well-engrained into Fashion's practices as well.

It is important to note that this comparing discussion does not put the gaps of degrowth on the same level as the trenches of Fashion hegemony. Degrowth is inherently against everything Fashion represents. Instead, this is a reminder that it is not enough to simply acknowledge and represent other perspectives, as these must be considered equally valuable to the project of a radically different, ecologically just world. In relation to Fashion, the hierarchy of knowledge and cultural capital between different clothing systems must be fully dismantled. Nielsen's reference to

"sacrifice zones" and exploitation strongly shows that other clothing systems and people are not simply "raw material" to extract and adopt into one's own, dominant system. The clothing cultures, ideas, labor, and resources of other clothing systems clearly have intrinsic value and must be recognized in their own right.

Seeking Transformation?

As Escobar (2015, 453) argues, we need profound transformation to bring about an altogether different world. He thus sees both degrowth and post-development as involving political imaginaries directed towards radical societal transformation, critiquing capitalistic market mentality and systems. However, in "Transformation is Not a Metaphor", Bluwstein (2021) argues that transformation cannot consist only of theoretical discussions about epistemological and ontological changes, it needs to be materially manifested as well. Praising Hickel's policy-directed approach – for instance to fashion advertisement and production, or collective self-limitation - Bluwstein (2021) considers it imperative to have a radical politics of rapidly dismantling fossil capitalism. Yet, it is important to note that both a degrowth and post-development transformation of society will require new and different democratic institutions

than what is dominant today (Kallis et al. 2012, 174, as cited in Escobar 2015, 457).

Although Fashion Act Now employs the theoretical discourse of degrowth, and discusses epistemological and ontological issues, its nature as an activist group suggests a strong motivation and push for material change. Indeed, its proponents are calling for a collective transformation of our culture and economy, urging an immediate crisis response towards the Fashion system (fashionactnow, n.d.). However, their emphasis on material change seems minor, judging by their main activities which include panel, podcast, and blog discussions, the spread of knowledge through different reading events, and the call for government action on their website. Perhaps by referring to Hickel (2020) and his degrowth solutions, FAN advocates see themselves as spreading the word that practical policy suggestions already exist, leading to possible material change (Bollier 2022). Nevertheless, without being displeased with their activist strategies, I believe that the group could arguably benefit from more direct, 'material' action as well. As their activism mostly involves theoretical discussions and nonviolent actions, I wonder if these tactics can ever lead to any impactful transformations of the powerful systems discussed above.

Concluding Remarks

What can be taken from this discussion is that dismantling such a beastly system as the Fashion industry will require a pluriverse of alternative solutions and pathways. It then becomes imperative to recognize and listen to the voices of those who have been systematically silenced by this loud spectacle of Western capitalism and 'global' fashion culture. Not only does Fashion constitute an obsessive and destructive lifestyle for consumers, but it also manages to drag our ecosystems and hard-working people into its trenches. From the unfathomable amounts of resource use and waste, it is evident that a different clothing culture and economy is necessary. Equally disturbing is the systemic silencing of non-Western clothing cultures through the lack of recognition and approval, coupled with their appropriation and commodification by the Fashion industry.

As has been pointed out, the value of degrowth in theorizing a shift away from this capitalist system of overproduction and overconsumption, is unquestionable – a material, ontological, and epistemological transformation is certainly necessary in the North. However, as degrowth is gaining traction globally, it has been primordial to discuss their role as both a platform for advocates such as Fashion

Act Now, and as part of a larger 'pluriverse' of perspectives. What must be more widely recognized is that clothing culture has a pluriverse of its own, with different systems of equal worth around the world.

Utilizing the fashion industry and its counter-movement of defashion is a useful facilitator to address some important topics around a degrowth, post-capitalist vision, and the necessary transformation. A thorough recognition of diverse perspectives is needed in order to achieve a just and sustainable version of our world. Both degrowth, post-development, decolonial feminism, anarchism and the like, need to be acknowledged and treated as equally valuable insights. Responsibilities lie with those who have the power to speak, so long as they allow the voices of others to rise. The fashion industry and degrowth scholarship both carry this responsibility.

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Degrowth and the Slow Travel Movement: Opportunity for Engagement or Consumer Fad?

by Linnea Møller Jess

Introduction

Transport accounts for around 23% of total energy-related emissions globally (Sims et al. 2014). Therefore, it plays a pivotal role in achieving a low-carbon transition. The UN and large environmental groups such as WWF support market-based instruments for a sustainable development path towards "sustainable personal mobility" (WWF, 2008: 9). As WWF (2008: 6) argues in its One Planet Mobility report: "consumers need the right price incentives and market options to enable them to choose low-carbon options". In practice, mainstream 'sustainable transport policies' have shifted responsibility for changing travel habits onto individual travelers even though studies show that the consumer lock-in to systems of aero- and automobility is maintained to satisfy endless economic growth (Cook and Butz 2018; Urry 2004). Simultaneously, governments are upholding the current intensity of mobi-

lity by using the 'window' of the climate crisis to roll out subsidies for electric cars, large-scale infrastructural projects, and so-called 'smart' mobility solutions – which mobility scholars have identified as neither socially just nor very 'smart' for 'sustainability' (Barr et al. 2021; Gössling and Cohen 2014; Young, Higham, and Reis 2014). The degrowth literature offers a more critical angle on the topic, foregrounding the often left out aspect that the current high level of mobility, particularly in the Global North, is unsustainable.

This article traces the roots of today's hypermobile travel practices and the associated obsession with speed, acceleration and energy, using the degrowth literature as a lens to envision slower and more ecologically just alternatives. Firstly, it introduces the heterogeneous field of degrowth and reviews its contributions to debates on transport and

travel, including an exploration of how increasingly faster travel speeds were normalized as part of industrialization and imperialism. Secondly, it focuses on one particular trend in the domain of 'sustainable' transport, the so-called 'Slow Travel' movement which, as part of the wider 'Slow' movement, started as an activist, anti-fast-food initiative in Italy in 1989 but has now largely been absorbed into the vocabulary of popular culture, marketers, and trendy travel blogs. 'Slow Travel' calls for letting go of rushed bucket lists to connect with local cultures and places instead. Considering the bid for 'slowness', this travel trend appears to hold some affinities with degrowth's way of thinking. However, this paper argues that while 'Slow Travel' presents a possibility for politization and the development of alternative thoughts on mobility and tourism, the transportation trend simultaneously opens up for the commodification of 'slowness', which goes against degrowth's critique of capitalism and commodification (Demaria, D'Alisa, and Kallis 2015). Thus, the article concludes that envisioning slower and more sustainable travel aimed at respecting ecological limits rather than promoting perpetual growth should begin with interrogating the full chain of commodification, production and consumption involved in mobility –– from origin to destination.

Degrowth: An Intellectual Activist Movement

While debates on biophysical limits were taking off in the 1970s, the degrowth movement emerged as a stark critique of the economic growth paradigm and techno-utopian proposals such as 'green growth' and 'sustainable development'. Today, degrowth scholars such as Demaria and colleagues (2015) and Hickel (2020; 2021) maintain that the current economic system's prerequisites of GDP growth, acceleration and development, especially prominent in Western capitalist societies, are incompatible with ecological limits. Instead of continuing down the growth-based economic path that is leading to socio-ecological breakdown, whether repackaged as 'sustainable development', 'green growth', or 'absolute decoupling', degrowth authors call for radically reducing destructive economic activity and extractivism "while expanding socially important sectors like healthcare, education, care and conviviality" (Hickel 2021, 1108). Hickel (2021) stresses that degrowth is not about encouraging austerity policies and having less economic growth or consumption, but about envisioning a fundamentally different society with a new set of institutions that can support the collective stewardship of shared natural resources or 'commons'. Degrowth presents a revised

understanding of well-being conceived as 'voluntary simplicity', meaning "embracing a minimally 'sufficient' material standard of living, in exchange for more time and freedom" (Demaria, D'Alisa, and Kallis 2015, 372). Such vision opposes well-being measured as GDP in order to reimagine 'the good life' not as being materially *wealthy*, but abundant with non-material values such as community; political engagement; family; gardening; and nurturing friendships. Political solutions for a degrowth transition range from an unconditional basic income to progressive taxation; consumption taxes; work sharing; job guarantees,; investments in civil society and care services; community currencies; a halt to planned obsolescence; regulation of advertising; 'sharing economy'; management of food waste; rent control; and much more (Demaria et al. 2015; Hickel 2021). Common to the proposed strategies for realizing a degrowth society is that action must take place on multiple levels and involve a range of actors, both through everyday grassroots practices and on an institutional level (Demaria et al. 2015).

Degrowth can also be viewed as part of a plethora of so-called 'transition discourses' which span beyond universities and include thinkers from social movements, environmental struggles, and NGOs from around the world (Escobar 2015). Alto-

gether, these discourses "posit a profound cultural, economic and political transformation of dominant institutions and practices" (Escobar 2015, 454), with different goals and means employed according to their specific geographical and political context. Escobar (2015, 452–53) importantly underlines that transition discourses such as degrowth vary in shape and focus between the Global North and South: "While the features of the new era in the North include post-growth, post-materialist, post-economic, post-capitalist, and post-dualist, those for the south are expressed in terms of post-development, post/non-liberal, post/non-capitalist, and post-extractivist". In this way, degrowth has been conceived as primarily a political project for the Global North, where most high-emission, resource-intensive lifestyles are located, while externalizing their negative socio-ecological consequences to the South (Brand and Wissen 2021; Hickel 2021). Degrowth in the North is further formulated as an egalitarian and decolonizing project taking a stake in the ecological debt owed to the South. Degrowing economies in the North is meant to put an end to the unequal exchange of cheap labor and raw materials between the Global South and North (Hickel 2021). However, as Escobar (2015) points out, degrowth thought in the North also has much to learn from engaging with social movements and post-development

ideas from the South and vice versa, as transitioning to a post-growth world is not simply a question of degrowing the North and 'developing' the South. So, as we go on to discuss the origins of the speedy transport system that keeps us looped into a fast-paced and ecologically destructive consumerist lifestyle, it is important to keep in mind that the call for degrowth applies particularly to the infrastructural context of the Global North.

The Invention of Speed and the Work of Ivan Illich

Degrowth authors favor slower and shared travel technology forms, pointing stark critiques at our current hypermobile lifestyles' obsession with speed, acceleration, and the associated fast metabolism of energy and materials (Demaria, D'Alisa, and Kallis 2015; Hickel 2020). But how did we become hooked on speed? To understand how speed became the taken-for-granted base for our growth economy, we might turn our attention to the industrial revolution. In *The Birth of Energy*, Cara New Daggett (2019) unravels how the 'novelty of energy' was invented through the discovery of thermodynamics according to the context of nineteenth and twentieth-century imperialism. She provides the historical backdrop for understanding how the science of 'energy' and, by extension,

Groups of people portrayed as 'idle', and thus inferior to the white man, were exploited for capitalist ends.

modern transportation technologies became inscribed with protestant values of productive work, well-being, dynamism, industrialization, and Western technological superiority. Daggett (158) argues that these energy 'logics' and what she calls "the invention of idleness" (as opposed to energetic work) justified the exertion of colonial power and naturalized domination over groups of people construed as 'idle' and 'lazy'. She posits "working women (especially sex workers, miners or domestic servants), Jews, gay men, Africans, the Irish, the poor, urban crowds, and so on, both in Europe and in the Global South—were racialized, feminized, and socially ranked in keeping with their supposed indolence, degeneracy, or deviance from the white work ethic" (157). Groups of people portrayed as 'idle', and thus inferior to the white man, were exploited for capitalist ends, as the processes of accumulation and growth intrinsic to the expansion of capitalism depended on cheap and undervalued labor. Simultaneously, railways and 'the engine' became central symbols of the industrial and thus 'energetic' superiority of the

British empire. As the imperial explorer and ethnographer Mary Kingsley wrote:

[W]hen I come back from a spell in Africa, the thing that makes me proud of being one of the English is not the manners or customs up here, certainly not the houses or the climate; but it is the thing embodied in a great railway engine (...) Well, that is just how I feel about the first magnificent bit of machinery I come across: it is the manifestation of the superiority of my race (1899, 386).

Mary Kingsley's equation of the British railway engine with racial superiority underlines the importance of faster transport technologies, such as the railway, for colonial capitalism's expansion in the nineteenth century. These symbolic associations of speed; efficiency; power; energy; superiority; and work; as opposed to 'idleness', have remained important justifications for reproducing the global division of labor and the growth paradigm of contemporary capitalism (Brand and Wissen 2021; Daggett 2019) . Now high-speed mobility has become an end in itself. Ivan Illich (1976), whose work greatly inspired degrowth thought, reflects on 'energy and equity' and the addictive qualities of 'speed', as well as how, in a more contemporary context, infrastructural advancements subject people to the pursuit of speed.

In every Western country, passenger mileage on all types of conveyance increased by a factor of a hundred within fifty years of building the first railroad. When the ratio of their respective power outputs passed beyond a certain value, mechanical transformers of mineral fuels excluded people from the use of their metabolic energy and forced them to become captive consumers of conveyance (6).

Thus, Illich argues, people become hooked on 'speed' as the invention of faster transport reconfigures autonomy, work, time and space, while increasing inequality. Leisure time becomes scarcer because, paradoxically, the proliferation of faster transport makes travel time longer as the geography of cities changes to accommodate 'faster' infrastructure and machines. Once the outlay of cities has been changed, Illich (1976) contends, it excludes slower, self-powered, and more autonomous forms of mobility. One can just think of a city like London which has tried to reintroduce bicycles, but the geography of the streets, made to accommodate motorized transport, makes it almost impossible to create safe and separate bike lanes without limiting space for cars on the already heavily trafficked roads (Marije de Boer and Caprotti 2017). Speed also creates new lines of inequality as lower classes are forced to spend more time commuting, while high-

er speeds, achieved through technologies such as private planes, are reserved for the elite and become a symbol of status. Today, governments keep investing in transportation to enable the ever-faster movement of people and goods, as high-speed infrastructure has become a prerequisite for economic growth by enabling work-related travels, commuting, going to shops, and further industrial development (Cook and Butz 2018).

Contemporary Degrowth Thought and Transport

The speed-sceptic work of Illich has been translated into contemporary degrowth discourse, such as in the reference guide *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era,* which cites "downscaling car dependence, as well as fast transport modes and polluting infrastructure in general" (Demaria et al. 2015, 329) as classic ideas within degrowth thought. Especially Illich's (1973) concept of 'convivial tools' has been central to contemporary degrowth debates on equitable transport. 'Convivial technologies', or 'convivial tools' in Illich's wording, relate strongly to the degrowth value of 'autonomy', as it refers to technologies that are simple to understand, communally owned and democratically developed based on the active involvement of its users (Illich 1973; Kerschner et al. 2018). Illich (1973; 1976) himself points

to the bicycle as an example of convivial transport, as bikes can be autonomously operated and repaired while not constraining the time and space of others.

Contemporary degrowth case studies on biking have carried Illich's legacy forward. Bradley's (2018) study of so-called 'bike kitchens', for instance, reveals how the proliferation of DYI bike culture, where tools, knowledge and space are shared to facilitate community repair, can present a 'convivial' degrowth alternative to the reliance on commercial transport. Public transport, including buses and trains, is also often highlighted as a more 'convivial' alternative to private vehicles in degrowth scholarship, although individual positions on the industrial scale, technological complexity, energy supply, organization and speed of public transport vary. Hickel (2020, 192), for instance, argues that "the most powerful intervention by far is to invest in affordable (or even free) public transportation, which is more efficient in terms of the materials and energy required to move people around".

However, crucial questions of ownership and speed in relation to public transport are left out of degrowth texts (Cattaneo et al. 2022). This is despite the fact that profit-driven 'public' transit is increasingly left to the private sector or public-private partnerships, while 'green' bids for

more public transport often result in environmentally and socially destructive large-scale infrastructural projects aimed at enabling greater speed, tourism, and interconnectivity between primarily urban regions (Sheller 2018). Furthermore, while degrowth scholars often call for higher taxes on polluting modes of transport in conjunction with promoting public transit, details on the concrete organization and principles for public transport are notably left out of classic degrowth texts such as Jason Hickel's (2020) *Less is More* and *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era* (Demaria et al. 2015). Degrowth literature outlines different organizing values for public transport such as 'conviviality' and 'autonomy', but how these values take shape in planning for a type of public transportation that is not profit-driven is more unclear. In this regard, it seems that Illich's proposal for slowing down public transport to the speed of bicycles and his warning that "a traffic utopia of free rapid transportation for all would inevitably lead to a further expansion of traffic's domain over human life" (1976, 15) could inspire further exploration within the degrowth movement.

Seven Emerging Principles for Mobility in a Degrowth Society

Recent scholarly contributions in the fields of tourism studies, urban planning and mobility studies can help develop degrowth principles in relation to public transport and transportation more generally. Chertkovskaya and Paulsson (2022) as well as Smith (2019) take up the question of speed as they argue, in a similar fashion, that a degrowth-centered approach to public transport would entail slowing down travel, although the actual limit for 'speed' remains up for debate. In Smith's words (2019, 25), "It might be worth discussing whether there is a socially and ecologically acceptable limit for speed." Cattaneo and colleagues (2022, 459) further seek to move "beyond the common proposition of promoting public transport as the solution." While they focus on *urban* transportation, their degrowth framework could be developed in order to apply to mobility more broadly. They draw on Illich's (1976) work on transport to develop seven principles and indicators for just mobility in a degrowth society: 1) The 'institutional' aspect considers collectivization both in *ownership* and *use* of transport, where collective ownership is seen as more desirable than public ownership. 2) 'Global environmental impact' takes up the question of energy supply for transport and tries to estimate the total material and energy use of a transport mode over a lifecycle, recognizing the substantial impact of 'renewable' sources, electrification and the maintenance of infrastructures.

3) 'Development of infrastructure' accounts for the land use of mobility infrastructures. 4) They consider 'local environmental impacts' of transport including air and noise pollution as well as the elevation of temperatures in urban areas – the so-called 'heath island effect.' 5) The approach considers whether travel modes contribute to or hinder gender, class, racial and environmental justice, and equity. 6) They measure whether a mobility option leads to increased proximity or 'localism', slowness and conviviality. 7) They evaluate the degree of 'autonomy', by referring to indicators such as time-space accessibility (can the trip be started at any time from any point?), weather appropriateness, and whether the transport mode furthers so-called 'radical monopoly', a term borrowed from Illich, which assesses if any given form of transport excludes other means of transport and thereby constrains the autonomy to choose freely between transport modes.

Elaborating on these principles allows the authors to critically assess the viability of transport modes for a degrowth society and go beyond the common consensus on public transport within degrowth literature. In their analysis, public modes of transport score high in some areas such as 'justice and equity', while they fall short in areas such as 'institutional' and 'material use', due to public rather than communal ownership and the large infrastructures they often require. It is important to note, however, that public transport still scores better than private options such as cars, e-cars, motorbikes, carpooling, and shared e-cars in almost all categories. Interestingly, Cattaneo and colleagues rate kick e-scooters and e-bicycles higher than public transport as these 'hybrid' modes score higher in the 'slowness and localization' and 'autonomy' categories since rail travelers, for instance, are constrained by time schedules and fixed stations which limit their autonomous movement. The authors argue that e-scooters and e-bikes grant a greater amount of autonomy than public transport, but the crucial question is whether hybrid e-modes work as an *extension* of more active practices (such as walking and biking) to travel longer distances *faster* or if they constrain and replace more active mobility with their faster speeds.

Overall, Cattaneo and colleagues (2022, 482) are more critical of public transport than many degrowth texts and argue that: "The future of public transport, rather, depends on long-term investment in costly infrastructure that, as we have learnt from Illich, cannot be considered as a first-best alternative. Moreover, it cannot contribute sufficiently to the rapid change of mobility patterns that climate change and pandemic emergencies indicate is required."

It is important to remember, however, that their analysis is centered on urban mobility, and thereby on journeys ranging from 5 to 10 km. For metropolitan trips over 10 km, they also argue that "degrowth intentionality would seek the overall reduction of the need for these trips and the relocalization of life as close as possible to residential locations" (Cattaneo et al. 2022, 480–81). While localization is arguably important for reducing the need for long-distance travel, there seems to be a gap in degrowth literature regarding the future of interregional and international travel as well as tourism more generally.

Tourism Studies and Degrowth

Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO n.d.) as "a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes". As an academic field, 'tourism studies' provides insight into the tourism industry, on which many livelihoods around the world depend, as well as the deep-rooted nature of travel practices that drive people to cover large distances. Given this wider scope compared to transport studies, engaging tourism studies in the debate on transport and degrowth can therefore help uncover issues at stake in transport beyond the 'urban mobility' and 'regional transport' focus of many degrowth transport studies, such as the degrowth proposition by Cattaneo and colleagues (2022) discussed above.

Alternative and sustainable tourism scholars have engaged with the concept of degrowth to explore the role and potential benefits of tourism in a degrowth society, especially taking a more global view. In their article on tourism and degrowth, Fletcher and colleagues (2019, 1756) propose that "another tourism is possible" as they advocate for degrowing mass tourism, for instance, by limiting the capacity of transport infrastructure, while making space for community-based ecotourism. They also uphold a type of post-capitalist tourism centered on social and environmental equity rather than economic development. Renkert (2019) outlines a case study of the Kichwa Añangu community in Ecuador as an example of how community-owned tourism can contribute to the development of a degrowth society. She shows how the Indigenous Kichwa people foster degrowth possibilities through collectivization, energy autonomy, and cultural reclamation as their community-owned tourism practices are guided by the Indigenous cosmology of *Sumak Kawsay*, defined as 'well-being' and "a way of living in harmony within the communities and with nature" (2019, 1900). While Renkert underlines that the ancient value system of Sumak Kawsay cannot be reduced to a Western degrowth vision, she maintains that by valuing the well-being of humans and nature over profit, modernity and 'development', "community-owned tourism might serve as an avenue of localized degrowth for small communities whose livelihoods currently depend on local tourism" (Renkert 2019, 1893). Renkert, nonetheless, acknowledges that alternative forms of tourism cannot solve all the ills of tourism as community-based tourism, among other things, still relies on global markets of affluent tourists and, importantly for this discussion, long-distance, high-speed transport.

Other authors, such as Hall (2009, 57) have suggested 'steady-state tourism' as "a tourism system that encourages qualitative development but not aggregate quantitative growth to the detriment of natural capital", which includes promoting local travel to reduce international trips and in the case of long-distance trips, staying longer, travelling more efficiently, and advancing 'polluter pays' principles to make economic costs reflect socio-environmental costs. Smith (2019) similarly argues that qualitative and quantitative changes to travel are necessary: qualitatively changing the perceived 'need' for long-distance, high-speed travel, while quantitatively reducing work hours to foster slower travel; capping tourist numbers; degrowing aviation and replacing short-haul flights with night trains and buses through measures such as bans, taxes and policies. The article also briefly mentions the so-called 'Slow Travel' movement as a proponent of "decelerated societies" (Smith 2019, 24) which I will next turn my attention to, as there might be potential for wider affinities with degrowth.

Slow Travel: Degrowth Alternative or Marketing Strategy?

A call for 'slowness' runs through the degrowth movement, from the early 'speed' critique of Illich up until today's formulation the contributions of Hickel (2020) and Demaria and colleagues (2015). While degrowth for the most part represents an intellectual movement, the so-called 'Slow Travel' movement emerged primarily as a lifestyle trend and could thereby present an opportunity for degrowth to engage with the wider public in a common effort to stop the speed-obsessed paradigm of economic growth.

The 'Slow Travel' movement can be considered an offspring of a wider 'Slow' movement which dates back to 1986, when the Italian food writer Carlo Petrini protested the spread of 'fast-food' at the opening of a McDonald's branch by the Spanish Steps in Rome (Honore

2010). In 1989, Petrini and other grass-roots activists founded the 'Slow Food' movement, which aimed at countering the fast-paced, globalized lifestyles born out of the industrial revolution. As the 1989 'Slow Food' (2015) manifesto reads, "homo sapiens must regain wisdom and liberate itself from the 'velocity' that is propelling it on the road to extinction" by reclaiming local food traditions and slowing down lifestyles more generally. Many related 'Slow' trends emerged out of the 'Slow Food' movement, including sectors such as "tourism, agriculture, architecture, fashion, learning, creating, as well as simply being" (Laven et al. 2019, 4). Especially 'Slow Tourism' or 'Slow Travel' seem to have taken off with widespread media coverage, dedicated blogs, 'Slow Travel' agencies and academic papers dedicated to the topic. While there is no single working definition of 'Slow Travel', Pauline Kenny, who first trademarked 'Slow Travel' in the early 2000s, described it as "a way of travel that lets you experience a place in depth" (2019). According to Kenny, this entails spending more time in one place; avoiding rushed bucket lists; and taking part in local culture. Interestingly Kenny underlines that 'Slow Travel' doesn't have to mean taking the train instead of flying to your destination, as she argues this should be referred to as 'green travel' and not 'Slow Travel'. Later formulations of 'Slow Travel' have however integrated

a greater environmental focus closer to the aims of degrowth. The popular travel blog thebrokebackpacker.com (Atkinson 2021), for instance, conceptualizes the 'Slow Travel' principles as follows[1]:

- *Give up some 'purpose' – i.e leave gaps in your itinerary!*
- *Train, don't plane.*
- *Get a little lost.*
- *Eat local.*
- *Learn a new language.*
- *Spend more time in one place.*

The brokebackpacker.com also highlights 'Slow Travel' experiences such as 'van life', boat travel, hitchhiking, volunteering and couchsurfing, for which the three latter options especially seem to have some affinities with degrowth values such as transport sharing and civic participation. Given the anti-globalization and environmental roots in the wider 'Slow' movement as well as the focus on localization, sharing and 'slowing down' more generally, the 'Slow Travel' movement might then provide fertile grounds for degrowth to engage with popular culture and existing movements. Importantly, the Slow Travel movement has drawn criticism from

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[1] Academics have also later attempted to define Slow Travel in perhaps more 'politically correct' ways, but for the purpose of this article it seems more appropriate to focus on *popular* definitions of Slow Travel as these appear more widespread and are generally adopted by non-academics.

authors that see it as a continuation of the commodifying paradigm of movement under the guise of 'ethical' or 'experiential' travel. Nonetheless, the main points of critique also offer opportunities for redirecting it towards a degrowth reconstruction.

Three main points of critique open spaces for degrowth to engage. First, the 'Slow' movement has been criticized for its apolitical nature, making it easy for commercial actors in the tourism sector to co-opt 'Slow Travel' for lucrative ends. While tourism scholars (Hall 2009) have pointed to the potential of the 'Slow Travel' movement for fostering degrowth, it is noticeable that a quick Google search of 'Slow Travel' redirects us to the webpages of travel agencies, travel magazines, blogs, and other commercial actors in the tourism industry. Although academics have sought to redefine the term in line with degrowth thinking, 'Slow Travel' still largely seems conflated with consumer trends such as 'sustainable tourism', 'ethical' and 'green' consumption, 'the experience economy' and other related developments that have been criticized for greenwashing and promoting economic growth (Hall 2009; Molz 2013). Studies also show that companies increasingly use 'authenticity' as an individualized branding technique to circumvent consumer skepticism and to authenticate emotional investment in consumption

(Davies 2016). Therefore, with its diffuse call for 'authentic experiences', 'Slow Travel' might run the risk of commodification, becoming a 'badge of authenticity' and individuality for travelers as part of an intricate marketing ploy, or as Hall (2012, 65) warns "yet another marketing slogan for screwing the Earth". Degrowth, in contrast, goes against this market-logic to advocate de-commodification: "It demands the de-commodification of social relations and of the human relationship with nature and challenges the "new environmental pragmatism" that sees market based instruments as the solution for environmental protection" (Demaria, D'Alisa, and Kallis 2015, 217). From a degrowth optic, seemingly green market solutions still expand an economic valuation of human-nature relationships with short-term gains in mind. Instead, degrowth suggests giving more intrinsic value to nature and considering what real basic needs can help us move in the direction of de-commodification, public accessibility and environmental justice (Demaria et al., 2015).

Second, the 'Slow Travel' and the wider 'Slow' movement might work to individualize responsibility for behavioral change as it calls for consumers to change their fast-paced and unsustainable travel habits. As Illich (1976) suggests , 'speed' is often imposed; therefore calls for individual travelers to travel slower might exclude

the possibility of a more profound transformation of institutions and the growth imperative that drives fast travel. Instead of making 'slowness' an individual choice, Khrenova and colleagues (2017) argue that "Time scarcity can be addressed through the degrowth prism because it is important to collectively decide if we want to have more free time as an aspect of well-being and less time-stressed society and, obviously, we will have less working hours to be paid for but we still compensate it with life satisfaction and fair work distribution". Moreover, viewed through the degrowth lens of Demaria and colleagues (2015), 'Slow Travel' can only be effective and equitable for the many if it takes part in a wider redistribution agenda, as 'slowness' for now remains an option only available to the richest individuals that don't rely heavily on fast-paced work lives and high-speed transportation.

Thirdly, as an extension to the lack of an explicitly political framework, the 'Slow Travel' movement might paradoxically promote high-speed mobility, which runs counter to much degrowth thinking. As outlined earlier, far from all definitions of 'Slow Travel' explicitly call for slowing down transport, remaining instead focused on the 'slowness' of tourism experiences *at the destination*. As Molz (2013, 121) argues, "slow tourism often relies on other systems of high-speed travel:

automobiles and motorways; airplanes that deliver tourists to their slow destinations; or high-tech, high-speed communication technologies." 'Slow Travel' often advocates high-speed trains as a 'green' alternative to flying, but this leaves out the full picture as profit-driven infrastructure developments for high-speed trains are frequently fiercely contested by environmental resistance groups for destroying local biodiversity and livelihoods (Collective and Ross 2018). The narrow focus on *destination,* rather than the full commodity chain of tourism, is similar to the selective scope of articles on 'degrowth and tourism' (for example Fletcher et al. 2019; Renkert 2019) that elaborate on the potential of ecotourism and community-based tourism for localized degrowth without accounting for the role of long-distance, high-speed transport in these alternative tourism forms. In order to sow the seeds for a widescale transformation of unsustainable transport and high-consumption lifestyles, it seems

With its stark critiques of growth and speedy transport infrastructure, degrowth might present a relevant framework for politicizing 'Slow Travel' while deepening its own framework on degrowing tourism and mobility.

necessary to assess the entire value chain and material throughput involved in travelling, instead of focusing exclusively on destination, as the tourism industry remains a tool for economic development. Degrowth literature can help to encourage this deeper institutional change and rethink the imposition of travel as a tool for economic growth, by reframing the 'need' for travel more in line with the virtues 'voluntary simplicity'. In the words of Molz (2013, 122): "In order for slow tourism to achieve the goals attached to it by tourists and researchers alike, we must not romanticize slowness, but politicize it." Considered in this way, with its stark critiques of growth and speedy transport infrastructure, degrowth might present a relevant framework for *politicizing* 'Slow Travel' while deepening its own framework on degrowing tourism and mobility. Adding degrowth critiques and strategies to 'Slow Travel' might then provide an opening for academic research and ideas to engage with wider audiences beyond conferences and classrooms. This could, as a start, be done by integrating Cattaneo and colleagues' (2022) seven principles and indicators for just mobility in a degrowth society into the 'Slow Travel' principles, thereby strengthening the link between slow transportation, travel and the degrowth movement.

Conclusion: Degrowth and (Truly) Sustainable Slow Travel?

On a surface level, the 'Slow Travel' movement seems to be fertile grounds for fostering a broader degrowth transition and for popularizing 'slower' transport practices. However, given the lack of organization, definition, and political agenda of the 'Slow Travel' movement, there is also room for caution as commercial actors in the tourism and transport industry have co-opted the word 'slow' in order to promote profit-driven 'sustainable tourism' and large-scale infrastructural projects (such as high-speed railways). The vagueness of 'Slow Travel' could nevertheless provide an opening for degrowth to politicize the 'Slow' movement and advocate for tourism degrowth. Illich's (1976) critique of speed and Cattaneo and colleagues' (2022) framework for mobility, for instance, provide clear principles for reorganizing 'Slow Travel' around values such as 'conviviality', 'sharing' and localization.

In this article, I first outlined how the degrowth movement emerged as part of a plethora of transition discourses with critiques of the economic growth paradigm, calling for more 'convivial', autonomous, simple, and care-centered lifestyles within the ecological limits of the planet. In a time of ecological breakdown and expanding high-speed (un)sustain-

able infrastructure, it is the moment for degrowth to enter the public debate on transport with a critique of the underlying 'energy' logic, that I have argued has roots in imperial control and enforces economic growth through speedy systems of transport, production and work. While biking together with public transport are often promoted as more 'convivial' alternatives in classic degrowth works, the mobility framework of Cattaneo and colleagues (2022) takes up Illich's critiques to raise important questions about how to reconcile public transport with the degrowth values of 'autonomy' and 'localization'.

Tourism and travel have not been focal points of degrowth research and, as this paper has argued, existing work on degrowing tourism often fails to account for the material and energy throughput of transportation involved in destination tourism. Degrowth accounts of transport have also retained a largely urban mobility focus. Engaging with the 'Slow Travel' movement could therefore provide an opportunity for degrowth scholars to bring together tourism and transportation, in order to build a theoretical framework for degrowing tourism, not just at the destination, but throughout the full chain of production and consumption involved in travel.

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Bringing an End to Petrophilia: Tactics in Anarchism and Degrowth

by Jonas Kittelsen

Introduction

Our time is monumental: the choices we will make in the next few years will directly affect our planetary conditions for centuries – if not thousands of years. This daunting urgency cannot be ignored and actualizes the need for uncomfortable discussions of how to create socio-ecological transformations. Degrowth and anarchism provide different methods and tactics for creating socio-ecological transformations, which will be discussed further in this paper, particularly in the Norwegian oil context. Degrowth is at the core of many debates, criticizing the validity of decoupling, which is embraced by mainstream politics and corporate power. However, as decoupling shows little empirical credibility (Parrique et al. 2019, 3; Hickel and Kallis 2020, 470; Hickel 2020a), a more difficult task is to outline viable strategies and tactics for materializing the fundamental transformations needed across all scales and localities. To illustrate this difficulty, when a mainstream Oxford economist was challenged by Erik Gomez-Baggethun (2020, 4) about whether green growth embraced an utopian vision for technological advances, the Oxford scholar replied: "possibly yes, but not more utopian than your vision [degrowth] entails with regard to political achievements".

This article focuses primarily on two books: the anarchistic proposals described by Peter Gelderloos (2022) in his recent book *The Solutions are Already Here: Tactics for Ecological Revolution from Below* and the book *Degrowth in Movement(s): Exploring Pathways for Transformation.* These two books shed a light on the use of different tactics and develop imaginations for what our future may look like. Diverging tactics from anarchist and more mainstream institutionalized activism will be contextualized within the Norwegian context in order to narrow down the scope of this essay,

but also to highlight the necessity for pluriversal action plans in different social settings. The Norwegian case study exemplifies the massive gap between what science says must be done and what politics delivers. This article argues that degrowth is a better entry point for mobilizing and materializing transformative change in the Norwegian oil context because the anarchistic revolutionary potential is weakened, since oppression and violence in the ecological crisis is externalized in time and space. This makes local resistance unlikely, as the violence tied to burning oil becomes a form of safety for Norwegians, instead of a source of displacement and marginalization.

Anarchistic Struggle: Constructive in the Norwegian Oil Context?

Norway, as a typical rich northern oil-exporting country – the 10th largest in the world – has a large historical responsibility in our current climate crisis. It is indisputable that any form of climate and environmental justice in this country necessitates a change of course (Norsk Petroleum 2022a). Calverley and Anderson (2022, 6) conclude in the newly Phase-out Pathways for Fossil Fuel Production report that rich northern oil-exporting countries like Norway must cut down production by 74% by 2030 to keep a 50 % chance of reaching the 1,5 degrees

Celsius increase. The report also determines that no "nation [can] develop any new production facilities of any kind". Still, Norway intends to expand its fossil fuel infrastructures, for example through the Wisting field in the Arctic region, which would be powered by wind energy directly degrading Saami territories and would constitute four times Norway's annual emissions (Raavand 2022). Norway's official prognosis for oil and gas production is set to reach records in 2025 and will by no means comply with a 74% reduction cut in 2030 (Norsk petroleum 2022b). If Norway – and similar states – continue down this pathway, there is little hope for a stable and ecologically safe future - especially for the most marginalized people - making it impossible not to ask: what tactics and strategies should we adopt to bring this petrophilia to an end?

Peter Gelderloos claims that 'the solutions are already here', by referring to many of the past and ongoing (successful) anarchistic and revolutionary struggles, forming a myriad of concurrent ecological revolutions from below. He believes that the revolutionary potential for transformation is embedded within struggle through a type of survival: "survival in the broadest term, not as individual survival, but as communal, physical, emotional, and intergenerational survival." (2022, 200) This type of 'fighting for sur-

vival' implies stopping pipelines from poisoning local water supply; stopping the construction of airports that would bring in floods of tourists and destroy traditional practices and relationships with their territory. Thus, Gelderloos convincingly shows how resistance against the pressure to modernize is rooted in self-defense and autonomy (200).

A prominent example of such struggles is the one lived by the people of Cheran K'eri. A small town in Mexico rose up to defend their forests, water and lives. Large swathes of territory initially recognized as communal lands became despoiled, and several men who spoke out about this out-of-control logging "usually ended up dead" (Gelderloos 2022, 126). As killings continued unpunished, the women rose up and took several cartel truck drivers and loggers hostage. The situation escalated as the people of Cheran K'eri made barricades, set fire to trucks, made Molotov cocktails and used whatever firearms they could get their hands on. After sustained resistance, the people of Cheran K'eri won their autonomy back from state forces, and created popular assemblies, which quickly became a cornerstone for autonomic exhibition. They realized the potential of *kuajpekurhikua*, a word that translates as "taking care of the territory" (Gelderloos 2022, 127). Their newfound

autonomy from state forces and exploitative capitalism gave them the ability to begin undoing colonialization in all its dimensions, even though the current *Uso y Custombres* governance system is under pressure from external socio-cultural systems that value individualism and reject the collective (Polo 2013, 169).

A revolutionary wave, as exemplified by the Cheran K'eri struggle, is, according to Gelderloos:

the only force currently in existence that meets all the following criteria: a structural independence from the bodies responsible for ecocide and colonializing capitalism; a capacity to force the state to back down in key conflicts; access to the locally specific knowledge necessary for real and intelligent responses; break through barriers and create an increasingly global consciousness that centers an awareness of the intersection of all forms of oppression and all the unfolding crises (146).

The primary limitations to such revolutionary waves, according to Gelderloos (147), are counter-insurrectionist "dominant institutions" that "need to monopolize society-wide organization." Correspondingly, there is a lack of "revolutionary imaginary" among activists, as most of them remain faithful to dominant institutions (147). Without discarding the

bloody and often successful 'ecological revolution from below', this article highlights a third limitation to the revolutionary potential of ecological struggles: the lack of localized violence towards privileged (Norwegian) inhabitants that benefit from a condition of status-quo.

The struggle of Cheran K'eri is one among many examples presented in Gelderloos' book, with the ZADs, agroecological projects and forest occupations as more significant examples. These all share the commonality of being 'place-based', as oppression from an 'outsider' is taking place. Therefore, the anarchistic potential for ecological revolution seems to be grounded in oppression. This is true for the Notre-Dame-des-Landes (NDDL) ZAD; the Hambach forest occupation; the resistance in Vaca Muerta against Equinor's fracking; the Alta demonstrations; and most of the rich collection of examples brought up by Gelderloos (especially those relating to Indigenous communities). States and capitalist companies expropriate land and resources, marginalizing local communities, leading to pushbacks and opposition from the people living in the territory. Currently, 3669 cases of environmental conflict have been reported by the 'Environmental Justice Atlas' (as of May 25, 2022). Consequently, Gelderloos identifies a particularly important dimension for mobilizing people to fight for au-

tonomy: territoriality. Territoriality means a relationship with the specific local territory. In Gelderloos' vision, revolutionary anarchistic struggle is to "situate ourselves in a territory, to converse and build relationship with that territory and its inhabitants to defend ourselves against those who would annihilate or expose us" and instead "grow into something healthier." (2022, 189) The dependence and affectionate relationship of many revolutionary anarchistic militants with their territory is strong enough to risk their life for it.

If we apply this insight to the Norwegian oil context, major problems arise. Let us imagine the social context in Stavanger, a city famous for its booming oil industry in the 1970s, which has been lasting until today. The oil industry dominates the economy in Stavanger, in contrast to, for example, Oslo with a more diversified economy. Contrary to the expropriation of land resources in the examples above, the local economy in Stavanger is ancho-

Very few Norwegian oil workers feel oppressed or want to 'struggle for survival'; quite the opposite, Norwegian oil is perceived to be what gives them material stability and the best possibilities to survive and thrive.

red in oil rigs and technology far out on the continental shelf – out of sight, out of mind. The anarchistic struggle Gelderloos mainly describes takes as a premise that oppression will be directed towards marginalized people in a specific local territory, and thus, the oppressed – the protagonist in the anarchistic struggle – might fight back. However, very few Norwegian oil workers feel oppressed or want to 'struggle for survival'; quite the opposite, Norwegian oil is perceived to be what gives them material stability and the best possibilities to survive and thrive.

What we are dealing with in this case is not an extractive mineral intensive project physically deteriorating local territory, sparking demonstrations like in Motvind against windmills; through Norway's colonial legacy towards Saami land; or in some of the most emblematic and ongoing European territorial movements like the NDDL ZAD in France, the NoTAV movement in Italy (Ross and Troupe 2018, 9), or the Hambach forest occupation in Germany (Brock and Dunlap 2018). Despite oil rigs and supply chains having huge ecological impacts, the negative consequences of the extraction and mining is not felt to the same degree in Stavanger, as oil is largely transported from mine-extraction elsewhere out to the continental shelf. Simultaneously, the structural and slow violence from oil production

fueling global temperatures is skewed in time and space; it is not directed towards those living in the local context such as in Stavanger, but towards marginalized people, nature, biodiversity, and future generations. Still, oil rig workers are suspected to have disproportionately high cancer rates, which qualifies as slow violence, but this has proven to be marginal as a mobilization force against the industry itself (Pedersen and Morsund 2022).

Using Gelderloos' (2022) own rationale for how struggles normally will and should organically evolve, this difference of whom is experiencing the violence has serious implications for the potential for revolutionary struggle within the Stavanger context. The dimension of oppression within a specific territoriality as a means to mobilize is therefore not just inaccurate, but the concept of territoriality itself is an obstacle to revolutionary struggles in Stavanger. This conclusion simply relates to the lack of territorialized violence as a weakened means to mobilize, not to other dimensions such as the human capability of empathy and solidarity (another key part of anarchistic and autonomous struggles).

A logical conclusion from the above discussion is that the greatest potential for mobilization in Norway is found outside of oil-dependent contexts such as

in Stavanger. For example, in Oslo, the dimension of territoriality is more neutral than in the latter, but the aspect of oppression is still absent in such cities. Consequently, the largest anarchistic potential seems to be found in those areas where extractive mineral-intensive projects, such as windmill parks, highways or mining projects, deteriorate local ecosystems, according to Gelderloos' (2022) rationale. This claim demands an important nuance as current opposition towards windmills often blame the climate crisis for the presence of green energy projects. This is of course partly true, but such a narrative upholds that nature and the climate crisis are separate. The revolutionary potential will only have resonance and be constructive – and overlap with anarchist traditions - if the diagnosis of the problem is moved away from the idea that 'the climate crisis is to blame' towards a more fundamental critique and resistance against modernization and green growth ideals. By situating the local struggle into a degrowth narrative of scaling down and/or anarchist ideals of resisting development, struggles become structural and encourage acts of resistance. In other words, the interlinkages between the capacity of anarchism and degrowth to mobilize people are strong.

However, there are serious limitations to these conclusions, as local resistance to-

wards certain energy intensive projects does not adequately address the problem of 'keeping the fossil fuel in the ground.' Such local resistance is often framed as being at the margins, detached from 'big politics' in the metropolis. Generally, when local resistance fights against oil companies, it is often done within local or Indigenous territories, which is not the case in Norway since oil extraction takes place at the continental shelf. This problematizes the claim that 'the solutions are already here.' If the revolutionary potential for anarchistic struggle is especially weak in places where the fossil fuel industry is at its strongest, such as in Stavanger, and the feeling of oppression from the fossil fuel industry is largely absent in cities like Oslo, is anarchistic revolutionary struggle the only, or best, option in Norway?

Degrowth: Filling the Void or Ignoring Committed Struggle?

The limitations of anarchistic struggle evident in a Norwegian oil context indicates a need for complementary and alternative pathways. In fact, oil extraction far out on the continental shelf has *no* territoriality, if one adopts an anthropocentric lens that defines territoriality according to where people live and sustain themselves. To summarize, an 'ecological revolution from below' might have the potential to occur in Norway in the context of environmen-

tal crises, given the planned expansion of highways, windmills, and further marginalization of the reindeer herding in Saami territories. However, the violence and negative consequences of environmental extractive projects within the Norwegian context are place-specific, in a way that climate issues are not (as the consequences of burning fossil fuels fall disproportionately on people in the South and further into the future). Still, as we know, both the climate crisis and the crises of soil, biodiversity and ecosystems must be solved in parallel. The claim that 'the solutions are already here' seems to be place-specific and issue-specific. As Gelderloos' (2013, 2) claim that all "the revolutions of today" are contingent upon people resisting oppression in a locally specific context, the outlooks for bringing an end to the Norwegian petrophilia through revolutionary struggle is not promising.

This argument deserves clarifications, as Gelderloos is not promoting violent anarchistic struggle as a 'silver bullet' solution, but rather criticizes the "authoritarian" idea of forcing "non-violent methods across an entire movement" and promotes the freedom and autonomy for a diversity of tactics (10). As such, it should be up to those who struggle to self-define what methods they want to adopt without being scrutinized by elites, media, or non-violent activists. This opens up pos-

sibilities for many tactics, and degrowth has generally been vague and ambiguous on which tactics should be deployed. Dunlap (2020) notes that degrowth intellectuals have connected degrowth with environmental justice movements and direct action, but "ambiguity reigns regarding politics and qualities of direct action". In particular, he argues that degrowth "should not deny its teeth" by tokenizing combative socio-ecological struggles in the Global South isolating movements on the frontlines, or even worse, discursively managing them by qualifying them as 'radical' and 'militant.' Consequently, he argues that direct actions are a logical pathway towards degrowing techno-capitalist systems by protecting their habitats from infrastructural invasion (2020).

Degrowth intellectuals have engaged substantially with social and Indigenous movements, but have also received criticism for their commitment. Nirmal and Rocheleau dislike "the continuing dominance of Western/Northern economic and political theory at the intellectual heart" of degrowth, problematizing the "continuing primacy of economic and politics in the capitalist-colonial one-world-world" (2019, 443). This westernized capitalist-colonial worldview assumes a wrongful sharedness; "while the degrowth imaginary often abstracts and universalizes, living worlds are webbed together"

(443). This substantiates the claim that the degrowth movement reflects the values of a well-educated European middle class sharing progressive green-cosmopolitan values (Demaria et al. 2019, 439); or the concern for epistemic extractivism when Indigenous knowledge systems and concepts are "pulled out of the contexts where they were produced in order to depoliticize and resignfy them from Western-centric logics" (Altmann 2019, 93). A starting point for strengthening the connection between ecological anti-capitalist struggles and degrowth movements would be, according to Dunlap (2020), to acknowledge these struggles and legitimize a diversity of tactics.

More fundamentally, degrowth advocates must better clarify to what degree they intend to be vocal on what methods should be used for fulfilling its mission. Degrowth's 'mission' is to pursue a strategy of convergence: throughput should decline in the North to get back within sustainable levels while increasing in the South to meet human needs, converging at a level consistent with ecological stability and universal human welfare (Hickel 2021, 2). What degrowth intends to add is the assertion that growth in high-income countries is not required, nor necessarily wanted. What is required in the face of ecological breakdown is solidarity with the South, meaning de-

growth in the North (Hickel 2020b, 1109). Whether a larger debate on degrowth's positionality towards direct action emerges remains to be seen, but the support for non-violent movements using civil disobedience has been quite strong. XR-activists Kofi Klu and Rupert Read wrote the preface for *Less is More* by Jason Hickel, arguably the most influential work within degrowth thought, which has received attention within several environmental and climate organizations in Norway (XR, Spire, Naturvernforbundet).

Several scholars have expanded the definition of violence, for example Sovacool and Dunlap (2022, 4) arguing that self-defense is not a form of violence as there is "no impetus for coercion or domination but rather a desire for self-preservation". Other anarchists argue that the widespread encouragement for non-violence and the ignorance of successful violent tactics protect state violence and support moralizing elite discourses (which some non-violent activists adopt to be more respected by elites with the intention to enhance personal careers) (Gelderloos 2013, 13-16). There are indeed many examples of activists striking compromises without local consent, but it is highly problematic to regard non-violence as something states encourage and coining non-violent activism as being "at peace with existing structures of violen-

ce" (Gelderloos 2013, 14). They are by no means at peace with existing structures of violence, since this is what they are opposed to. The intersectional lens is increasingly embraced, for instance as Fridays for Future's (FFF) main campaign is stopping EACOP (world's largest pipeline in Africa) by both institutional and direct actions. XR recognizes their failure to include more marginalized voices and has lately created global networks – for example Global Coastline Rebellion – designed to strengthen southern decolonizing struggles within the northern context (XR Strategy 2021). Additionally, more radical methods are on the rise, as "the climate justice youth movement is going to occupy hundreds of schools and universities all over the world" this autumn in a non-cooperative manner, until they win (EndFossil 2022). This is complemented by hunger strikes being organized that do not have an end-date, exemplifying non-violent activists' willingness to execute life threatening activities.

Using non-violence as a tactic has nothing to do with refusing to recognize structures of violence, but everything to do with how activists understand the state's role in ending the violence. In many of Gelderloos examples of anarchism, the aim is to fight and disrupt state power to win autonomy. Non-violent tactics often have a different theory of change; they in-

tentionally refuse to fight the state on its strongest grounds – namely military power – and highlight injustices as well as asymmetrical relationships. Non-violent tactics also make the invisible structural harm more visible, by being disobedient in a moral and symbolic sense. In response to this claim, Gelderloos (2013, 30) argues that "the exclusively peaceful moments have resulted in disappointment at least by anarchist standards". Conversely, Gene Sharp promotes non-violence because it seems to be more effective for regime change, partly because it is easier to mobilize the middle class, which is crucial for success, whereas anarchists want revolutionary changes disrupting state power in itself (Sharp 1990; Gelderloos 2013, 102). Within degrowth circles, non-violent institutionalized activism has generally been accepted to a larger degree than anarchist methods.

Degrowth builds upon anarchistic ideas, such as scaling down, autonomy, and localized practices, but it is not very revolutionary in nature. Degrowth's mission is to get the economy back on track ecologically by scaling down through policy measures often within democratic processes. Degrowth is constructed as a concrete utopia showcasing plausible and inclusive pathways for transitions and transformations, and as discussed above, anarchistic struggle is often roo-

ted in place-specific local and Indigenous communities. Simultaneously, in the Western context, anarchist proposals and methods are often perceived as extremely 'out there' among privileged countries holding doomsday power over planetary outlooks, especially in typical Norwegian oil contexts where violence is skewed in time and space. Furthermore, green anarchist theory emphasizes the necessity "to radically alter our relationships to the earth, each other and, importantly, the current modes of production and supply-webs" which contrasts to a certain degree to degrowth's more bureaucratic line of thought(Dunlap 2022). The discrepancy between the end goal perceived by anarchism and degrowth might explain a third limitation or reason for the lack of recognition and hesitation towards anarchistic struggle.

Still, combative ecological struggle and the right to a diversity of tactics does not necessarily entail violence towards life forms but rather property damage or other forms of resistance as a result of self-defense, further complicating the prospects of general statements on what degrowth can or should support. To exemplify this, most degrowth intellectuals might support Indigenous resistance against appropriation of their land but would be more skeptical towards violent resistance against other democratically chosen projects. This non-revolutionary perception of degrowth makes non-violence easier to swallow. However, creating truly transformative change requires more than simply mobilizing thousands of people on the streets. What is required is a multilayered and collective push across many scales, localities and sectors engaging with new imaginaries and bringing these new visions into reality.

Degrowth in Movements: Exploring Pathways for Transformation

Degrowth scholars take on the task of materializing the necessary transformational change seriously in the book *Degrowth in movement(s)*. By applying a multitude of ways to interact with art, democracy, food, growth-induced thinking and resistance, they sketch different pathways for how degrowth can be lived and exercised across various aspects of social life. In response to degrowth's vagueness towards direct action, Friederike Habermann (2020, 242) argues for a new movement of movements, which places both resistance and reorganization of day-to-day life at its heart. Our efforts should not focus entirely on demands, but on what anarchist David Graeber defines as direct action: living here and now the way we think is right (Haberman 2020, 241-42). The idea of direct action – the act of changing things directly on the matter instead of asking others to do so – is at the core of degrowth's proposals for transformations on ecological democracy, food sovereignty and overcoming growth, which aligns well with anarchistic thought. This also applies to artivism, as John Jordan (2020, 60) writes: "artivism comes into being when creativity and resistance collapse into each other," underlining how artivism is an act of being - being together in a radical situatedness and demanding a new world.

What is at play here is the way justice is materialized, and the question of what justice for whom. Justice implies the state. If justice cannot be provided through the state, as anarchists tend to argue, justice starts with fighting the state. Degrowth takes a more redistributive approach to justice through its economic and policy centeredness. However, Coulthard (2014, 13) reminds us that marginalized communities are not always fighting for the "distribution of risks and impacts," but for the right to live "in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominating and non-exploitative terms". Degrowth is about non-Western traditions of relating to and knowing nature, as

What is at play here is the way justice is materialized, and the question of what justice for whom.

environmental distribution appears to be incompatible with Indigenous, AfroColombian, and Indian peasant modes of life (Shiva 1993, 279; Alvarez 2020, 57).

Degrowth in Movement(s) does however exemplify that degrowth is more than transitional economic policy proposals, as was suggested by scholars like Jason Hickel. Degrowth is a movement in itself, nurturing integrative and collaborative efforts across disciplines to engage with many localities and scales. The book advances a mosaic of transformative alternatives by, for example, discussing *buen vivir* as a political concept for making horizontal societies (2020, 96); establishing socio-ecological ways of life through labor unions (318); describing how to demonetize economies in order to build a solidarity and commons economy (167); or observing how transition initiatives within communities can spark deep transformations (302). Western centered criticism towards degrowth is certainly valid, but the concept is also new, emerging in the North, so the process of making the concept global by engaging with non-western ontologies and epistemologies seem to be a work in progress. This work needs to be further strengthened, without falling in the trap of tokenizing these struggles or inflicting epistemic extractivism. Simultaneously, degrowth must also remain relevant in the North,

especially within specific contexts like Norway, which take a disproportionate portion of the remaining carbon budget, both historically and currently. As discussed above, given the lack of revolutionary potential in such countries, the need for other forms of resistance; raised awareness; and serious engagement with the degrowth of societies; is necessary.

Conclusion

Western communities must go beyond engaging with non-western traditions and sympathize or support different types of struggle. This is a first step; our present moment demands that we also look at ourselves by substantially engaging with alternative pathways that escape petrophilia, eluding an interlocked dystopia. In this sense, the degrowth movement can offer the climate justice movement something that it lacks: a narrative with strong appeal in parts of Europe and the Global North, luring in more than the "usual suspects" already attending social movement events (Muller 2020, 124). Few in the global North proactively raise issues of climate justice outside of academic circles, but most of 'ordinary people' agree with the core claim that degrowth formulates, namely that we cannot have infinite growth on a finite planet. Correspondingly, degrowth might prove to be a better entry point for mobilizing and ma-

terializing transformative change than the limited potential for anarchistic revolution in the Norwegian oil context. This is due to the fact that oppression and violence is largely felt among marginalized communities today and will progressively worsen as time goes by. However, the spread of degrowth thought would require concrete actions by its proponents, who can learn much from the active and practical methods that anarchists adopt. It requires making their voices heard either through articles, official talks or in the streets, as well as calling out politicians and fellow academics who take decoupling and techno-capitalist utopias as a viable premise.

At some level, this conclusion is an easy way out: 'Let us do what is comfortable to the habitus of Norwegians and decide for ourselves how and when it is reasonable to speak up'. Given the lack of revolutionary potential of this society, as discussed above, the limited crisis-consciousness of the Norwegian population and the strong reluctancy towards breaching the principles of civil disobedience (within XR and other organizations), it is difficult to imagine a revolutionary environmental mass movement challenging state power in Norway. However, a substantial part of the Norwegian population lives in areas vulnerable to extreme weather, and future climate catastrophes might spark a light for mass movements. However,

given the skewness in temporalized violence, waiting for a climate catastrophe might prove to be too little too late.

Moreover, it remains an open question if – or under which premises and circumstances – anarchistic struggles would be beneficial. To bring up a hypothetical scenario: would it be considered as legitimate for the Saami population in Fosen (who won their case in the Supreme Court) to stop the unlawful windmills by dismantling the wind turbines that are illegally operating? As reindeers are of existential importance to the Saami culture, the claim of self-defense is clearly relevant. The violence that Saami people experience would probably far outweigh the violence of potential sabotages towards windmills, making it difficult to declare 'sabotage in the name of self-defense' as an illegitimate tactic, unless a strict non-violence line is taken. Some anarchists staunchly criticize the latter for lacking empirical success.

The public debate on this topic has shifted considerably in the last two years, as sabotage and other forms of resistance is now discussed in mainstream channels (Henmo, June 23, 2022). Consequently, we might see the emergence of decentralized autonomous action groups - as Gelderloos (2022) shows has happened across scales and temporalities in all ty-

It is difficult to imagine a revolutionary environmental mass movement challenging state power in Norway.

pes of countries - using sabotage and more militant methods against fossil infrastructures, industrial megaprojects, and local projects, to cause maximum economic damage against the companies that initiate these destructive practices. Whether this 'violent radical flank' will lead to positive polarization and/or cause sufficient economic costs to stop destructive practices is almost impossible to anticipate. Some will argue it is worth giving it a try, considering the ecological urgency and the colonialist mindset driving policies. Parts of the general public and environmental movements will warn fiercely against sabotage, as political parties and political commentators supporting civil disobedience seem to draw the line of their support once property is damaged. This threat for escalating actions also opens up a new type of dialogue, where the compromise of holding back further escalation comes with demands for degrowth policies and cultural shifts inspired by green anarchism, creating a new form of pressure for the current system to adopt.

If bringing petrophilia to an end is taken literally, new transformative imaginaries inspired by a multitude of decolonized conceptions of degrowth must be materialized, through the embodiment of uncomfortable truths; the acknowledgment of the right to self-defense in global resistance; and strategic mass disobedience directed towards infrastructure and authorities.

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How Can Degrowth Really Appreciate and Support Squatting?

A Critical Engagement with Dedicating Degrowth's Support to Legal Housing Squats

by Elena Salmansperger

Introduction

Claudio Cattaneo's (2019) essay in *Housing for Degrowth* (Nelson and Schneider 2019), titled: "How can squatting contribute to degrowth?" ties squatting to the degrowth agenda. Degrowth seeks to achieve social and ecological sustainability through a "democratically led re-distributive down-scaling of production and consumption" (Demaria and Latouche 2019, 148). Cattaneo (2019, 92) points towards squatting for housing as a "natural focus" of his chapter and thus of degrowth. In relation to housing, degrowth strategies generally challenge ownership narratives; waste generation through the construction of newly built (and often 'greener') housing; land conversion; and the uneven distribution of access to housing. Instead, degrowth strategies propose the reallocation of already existing homes, especially regarding hardly used secondary or holi-

day homes, as well as the improvement of living conditions through renovation, rather than the destruction of old houses and construction of new ones (Nelson and Schneider 2019). Squatters confront capitalist property relations by reclaiming and commoning land or buildings. In doing so, they reallocate resources, seek more communal lifestyles and, depending on the context, resist gentrification or industrial expansion. Thus, the squatters' movement directly implements elements that are central to degrowth strategies. Drawing from his experiences of squatting for nearly two decades in Italy and on the Iberian Peninsula, Cattaneo (2006; 2013) highlights the "practical effect" of squatting communities in terms of how they drastically reduce their economic activity and, consequently, their energy and material consumption. In doing so, Cattaneo provides empirical evidence which links

squatting and degrowth (Dunlap 2021). He concludes that due to their practical effects, "community squat types [...] are most relevant to degrowth prerogatives" (Cattaneo 2019, 92). As a consequence, Cattaneo proposes a large-scale project of 'legal occupations' in order to redistribute access to housing while ensuring material and economic degrowth.

While Cattaneo's work provides valuable insights into developing degrowth in the housing sector, his intention of linking squatting and degrowth through the proposal of large-scale legalized squatting is shortsighted and limited. This essay engages critically with his approach to primarily support squats for their practical effects (e.g. material, energetic and economic), which leads to dedicating degrowth's support for squatting to legal housing projects. Instead of asking "How can squatting contribute to degrowth?", I propose the inverse: How can degrowth scholarship acknowledge what the squatting movement as a whole already contributes to a degrowth transition? This perspective is inspired by Cattaneo and Gavalda's (2010, 583) inductive approach which reveals that "[w]hat could be considered as degrowth has been occurring among grass-root movements, before it was presented as an idea at the macro political agenda."

This article argues that legalized squats may serve as a natural, but nonetheless insufficient and even misleading, focus for degrowth literature. This is, first, because such an approach alienates degrowth from illegal squatting activities and related political movements which implement the degrowth agenda here and now. Land expropriation or reclamation are an integral part of land defense movements' struggles to prevent land conversion, resist industrial development, and redistribute land. Second, dedicating degrowth's support to legal squats further stigmatizes and divides anti-capitalist political movements, falling into and strengthening hegemonic anti-squatting narratives. The mere possibility of legalization creates highly uneven power dynamics within the squatting movement and facilitates state repression against political squats. Third, limiting degrowth's support for squatting to legal projects is misleading as it deprives squatting of its radical potential, perpetuates middle class values and renders both squatting and degrowth susceptible for co-option by a capitalist state. Degrowth, in short, risks becoming an accomplice in the promotion of capitalist normativity. Thus, this article argues against degrowth only supporting legalized projects and challenges legalization as the implicit and explicit ultimate goal.

The next section briefly outlines some contours of degrowth scholarship and points towards its lack of engagement with anarchism. This summary is followed by a section elaborating on Cattaneo's conclusion to dedicate degrowth's support to legal housing type squats. The following three sections respond to Cattaneo's argument by drawing on the example of the Notre-Dame-des-Landes ZAD (Zone-to-Defend) close to Nantes, France. The article first responds to Cattaneo's advocacy of a focus on housing type squats instead of explicitly political or land defense squats. The last two sections address the issues of a focus on the "practical effect" of squatting which leads Cattaneo to foreground legalization. Instead, this text calls on degrowth to support squatting for its cultural and political effects.

Degrowth and its (Lack of) Engagement with Anarchism

Degrowth is a multi-faceted concept with various differing definitions (Kerschner et al. 2018; Gomez-Baggethun 2022). Generally, degrowthers oppose economic growth as an end in itself and refute GDP as a measurement of well-being. Instead, degrowth scholars refer to growth as "a process of elite accumulation, the commodification of commons, and the appropriation of human labor and natural resources" (Hickel 2021a, 1107), which

Land expropriation or reclamation are an integral part of land defense movements' struggles to prevent land conversion, resist industrial development, and redistribute land.

continues to rely "on patterns of colonization" (Hickel 2021b, 1). Based on empirical evidence, degrowth literature refutes absolute decoupling of resource and energy use from economic growth as a possible pathway to mitigate the climate crisis, ecological breakdown, and the multiple social crises of our times (Hickel and Kallis 2019; Parrique et al. 2019). This leaves most degrowth scholars in direct opposition to mainstream green growth or sustainable development narratives as well as eco-modernist strategies like smart cities (with some exceptions, see March 2018). While emphasizing that degrowth does not correspond to economic recession and renunciation (Hickel 2021a), the degrowth agenda suggests instead to organize society in a radically different way, based on concepts such as conviviality; solidarity; sharing; sufficiency; consensus decision making; and autonomy (D'Alisa et al. 2015). Many of these ideas are foundational in anarchist writings, as Toro (2017) demonstrates based on the texts of early anarchist thinker Elisée Reclus. Based on Reclus'

advocacy of simplicity, their dialectical view on human-nature relationships, their advocacy for self-management and the connections they draw between social injustice and environmental exploitation, their texts are "basic precepts of what degrowth philosophy should be" (Toro 2017, 89). Similarly to Joan Martínez-Alier (2015) and Lisa Hammelbo Søyland (2021), Toro (2017) also mentions Emma Goldman as an anarcho-feminist inspiration for degrowth's engagement with the population question as an issue of women's bodily autonomy, rather than an ecological problem. Although there are some exceptions (Toro 2017; Dunlap 2020b), main academic contributions on degrowth have been rather silent on the field's philosophical roots in anarchist thought. Instead, most degrowth scholarship sidelines or does not give credit to its anarchist currents (Dunlap 2020b; Dunlap 2021). Considering their similarities as anti-capitalist movements, degrowth's affinity to anarchism thus represents a gap in degrowth literature.

While silencing the field's anarchist roots, degrowthers moreover either remain unclear about their relation to the state (Toro 2021) or, like Giacomo D'Alisa and colleagues (2020), conclude by hoping for the step-wise development of "a good state" (Aries 2015, as cited in Toro 2021). As a result, degrowth scholarship's sup-

port for anarchist actions, such as present within the squatting movement, is nearly absent. Instead, as Dunlap (2020) points out, degrowthers tend towards reserving their support for anti-authoritarian or militant political struggle, giving it instead to movements in the Global South, which is exemplified by the repetitive references to the Zapatistas, *Buen Vivir* and other Indigenous uprisings and autonomous struggles. Building on Cattaneo's attempt to connect degrowth to housing struggles in Europe via squatting, this essay connects degrowth to broader political struggles in the form of land reclamation movements. Consequentially, this text also explores degrowth's affinity to anarchism and its relation to the state, as squatting and land defense confront and purposefully trespass legal structures like private property.

Legalized Housing-type Squats and Degrowth- A Natural Connection?

Cattaneo (2019) constructs his argument by first distinguishing two main characteristics of squats based on their emergence from either the need for housing, or deriving from more "radical" socio-political ambitions and the need for free spaces. The latter ambition responds to a general lack of places for non-commercial social activities and political self-organization. While Cattaneo (2019, 90) acknowledges that squatters usually respond to a com-

bination of both needs, he emphasizes that a focus on addressing and solving issues related to housing increases the social acceptability of squatting. Further, Cattaneo (2019, 95) contends that the immediate legalization of housing squats is most desirable in order to maximize their practical effect in terms of material and energetic degrowth. While uncertainty concerning the duration of squats usually involves temporary fixes on the squatted buildings, those are followed by more thorough repairs once a squat gains legal status. Immediate legalization allows squatters to skip the first stage of repairs, thereby saving materials and energy. Additionally, long-term maintenance work pursued by the squatters protects buildings from deterioration, thus increasing the squat's practical effect in the end. Moreover, Cattaneo (2019, 96-98) points towards economic degrowth associated with legalized housing projects. Rent costs for legal agreements are usually covered by energy and financial savings related to the repression of squatters, specifically expensive evictions costs (e.g. police deployment), lawyers and trial procedures. In addition, rent prices might generally decrease due to reduced demand, which adds to the financial benefits of collective living through sharing resources and space. In sum, Cattaneo's argument revolves around the more or less direct economic, material and en-

ergetic effects of squatting and puts forward two central points: first, squatting for housing as a socially more acceptable type of squatting, and second, the need for immediate legalization of squats in order to maximize their practical effect.

Towards the end of his chapter, Cattaneo briefly moves beyond a focus on the practical effect of squatting, referring to illegal squats as "powerful political subjects capable of impacting on politics and institutions," (Cattaneo 2019, 99) as well as highlighting the potential for political emancipation through collectivized housing. Nevertheless, Cattaneo (2019, 100) closes his paper by proposing the large-scale legalization of housing type squats, contending that these legal occupations "cannot be confused with the heterogeneous squatting movement because [the legal occupations] explicitly identify with the possibility of a wide-spread urban movement." Cattaneo thus cuts again the ties he was so close to build between degrowth and the squatting movement, which includes autonomous or anarchist squats.

Alienating Degrowth

Singling out housing type squats as a natural focus point for degrowth alongside Cattaneo's proposal for their large scale legalization alienates degrowth

from illegal squatting activities (like those involved in land reclamation movements such as ZADs). These movements can have much greater effects on decreased economic activity, as well as material and energy use, than legalized housing squats. Thus, having a narrow focus on legalized squatting limits and inhibits degrowth. The first ZAD emerged out of farmers' and villagers' resistance to protect valuable wetlands, their homes and their livelihoods from the construction of the Notre-Dames-des-Landes (NDDL) airport under Vinci motorways since 1963. Alongside resisting by living on the land, early attempts of different associations and committees focused on investigating the airport's legal contradictions and environmentally harmful impact, while spreading this information via posters, information nights, documentaries and protests (MTC 2018). However, exclusion from democratic decision making; the adjustment of justifications for the construction of the airport; and the purposeful emptying of houses in the surrounding area by the General Counsel; continued to put the protesters under pressure. Starting in 2008-09, large amounts of environmental activists and squatters offered considerate support to the cause by occupying the 4000 acres of land, squatting emptied houses, and helping to defend the territory against violent police evictions (like during 'Op-

eration Caesar' in 2012). After the 2012 evictions, the movements came out more united and organized a reoccupation four weeks later with 40 000 participants (MTC 2018), thus politicizing not just members of the ZAD, but also people from outside.

While this "unity" must not be overemphasized (CrimethInc. 2019), the movements' new strength derived from their diversification of tactics over time and from their attempts to ensure the co-existence of legal and illegal occupations, making the ZAD more resilient in the face of state repression (MTC 2018; Gelderloos 2013). All the while, the movements "[…] had in common the will to fight not only the airport but also the world that goes along with it, and wanted to build here and now a life in rupture with the capitalist economy and relations of domination," explains the Mauvaise Troupe Collective (MTC 2018, 24). "To inhabit thus became a radical political gesture" (MTC 2018, 22 and 122), as only empty land is easy to conquer. The ZAD's concept of combining resistance and simultaneously building an alternative society spread throughout France after the failure of Operation Caesar (Dunlap 2020). In January 2018, after a series of extremely violent police evictions and military occupations pursued with the use of tear gas and grenades, which caused hundreds of injuries and the death of Remi

Fraisse, the French government declared the cancellation of the airport project.

Connecting back to Cattaneo's categorizations of squats, land defense squats (like those forming part of the ZAD) neither primarily seek to provide alternative and low-impact housing, nor is it their main ambition to provide free spaces. Instead, they combine both of these ambitions with the goal of physically resisting imposed profit-driven and state approved development projects. ZADs collectivize spaces and tools; engage in local food production and 'non-markets'; use convivial technologies; and reuse and recycle materials for building. They thus drastically reduce their material and energy consumption, as well as their financial activity, while they prevent or interrupt industrial expansion. In doing so, ZADs slow down large-scale ecosystem destruction that radically increases biodiversity loss, as well as material and energy use, while converting valuable farmland into another international airport. Inhibiting the construction of an international airport furthermore prevents future increased economic activities associated with air-travel and consumption. Together, these practical effects surpass those achieved through communal lifestyles and savings on rent, as enabled by Cattaneo's proposal of legalized housing squats.

In sum, these additional aspects of land defense struggles and the squats associated to them refute the argument that a focus on legal housing type squats maximizes the practical effect of squats in material, energetic and monetary terms. Partly illegal squatting activities (like the ones taking place at the NDDL ZAD) do not only provide low impact housing and living alternatives for individuals in the present, but inhibit industrial expansion and prevent drastically increased future material and energy use, as well as economic activity. This increased practical effect is equally evident by looking at smaller and shorter land defense occupations which exist across Europe, like the Hambach Forest occupation in Germany against the expansion of the world's largest opencast lignite coal mine (Brock and Dunlap 2018). By limiting its support to legalized housing squats, degrowth scholarship would make itself artificially polite and risks alienating itself from combat-

Partly illegal squatting activities do not only provide low impact housing and living alternatives for individuals in the present, but inhibit industrial expansion and prevent drastically increased future material and energy use, as well as economic activity.

ive ecological struggles as examples of "real democratic participation" (Dunlap 2020b, 6), where people resist as they do not get to vote on the future of their territories. Disassociating degrowth from autonomous and anarchist struggles is disrespectful to those who place their entire lives at the risk of severe mental and physical injuries, as a means of resistance against industrial expansion, in other words achieving real material, energetic and financial degrowth. For degrowth to appreciate squatting, the focus must expand beyond legal housing projects (being the most socially acceptable type of squat) and must support multiple forms of and motivations behind squatting, including (illegal) land defense occupations.

Divide and Rule

Besides alienating degrowth from illegal squats, Cattaneo's proposal of the wide-spread legalization of squats strengthens the prevailing and divisive narratives on squatting. According to Miguel A. Martínez (2019), there are two hegemonic narratives about squatting that prevail in Western Europe. The first one describes squatters as a homogeneous group of criminals, 'a different other' opposed to the general public. This causes elite revanchism and moral panic, which frame every form of active resistance to evictions as violent. Their

selective representation in mainstream media creates a sense of urgency and justifies further criminalization of and repression against squats (Martínez 2019). With similar effects, the second hegemonic narrative about squats polarizes the movement by distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' squatters, depending on their use of "violent" means of protest, their ideological and political radicalism, their attitudes towards negotiations and their social integration (Martínez 2019). At first glance, Cattaneo's proposal of large scale legalization of housing-type squats appears to create an overall positive picture of squatting as sustainable and socially acceptable. Instead of modifying the homogenizing narratives of squatting as a criminal activity, however, the use and reinforcement of these narratives further stigmatizes squatters and weakens the movement from within, ultimately facilitating repression.

By buying into the legal/illegal dichotomy, Cattaneo's proposal offers the public, authorities and even squatters themselves, a framework to categorize and assess any other type of squats based on their legal status and their usefulness to society. Consequentially, illegal squatters are treated differently by authorities, institutions and the public. This deepens internal divides within and across projects, as it generates disassociation between

those that are willing to negotiate and those that strictly oppose any compliance in order to remain politically autonomous (Martínez 2019; CrimethInc. 2018). Developments within the NDDL ZAD illustrate this division. The French government's decision to abolish the airport project in 2018 'coincided' with Prime Minister Hollande's announcement to evict the ZAD's illegal occupants as an attempt to "[regain] control over the ZAD" (CrimethInc. 2019). Following this, concessions were granted to the agricultural use of the territory, but excluded squats that focused on defending the ZAD and providing shelter (CrimethInc. 2019). Earlier attempts to divide public opinion on the ZAD prior to and right after Operation Caesar through mainstream media and members of the Green Party remained relatively unsuccessful. This is made evident through the huge support that came about from the surrounding region and city of Nantes, with thousands of locals and activists joining in on their demonstrations (MTC 2018). However, according to a long-time inhabitant of the NDDL ZAD, "internal dynamics helped to set the stage for state repression" (CrimethInc. 2018). As much as political and tactical diversity proved to be a great strength of the ZAD in their early stages of resistance, the reinforcement and exploitation of those divisions through psychological warfare (like the six month long military occupation in

2012 and again in 2018) and the strategic isolation of 'illegal' occupants from the rest diminished support among different groups for each other by sowing distrust and creating the "fear of losing everything" (CrimethInc. 2018; CrimethInc. 2019). Based on this fear, decisions to cooperate with the state were made.

The implementation of this "divide and rule" tactic (Martínez 2019; CrimethInc. 2018) feeds not only on the legal/illegal dichotomy made by the French government, but also on the non-violence/violence dichotomy. According to Peter Gelderloos (2013), "violence is a social construct that is applied to some forms of harm but not to others, often depending on whether such harm is considered normal within our society". In the case of the NDDL ZAD, large scale ecosystem destruction; displacement; resource extraction related to the development of another mega-airport; and an accelerated climate crisis connected (among other things) to increasing air-travel emissions are normalized. The active defense of homes, livelihoods and ecosystems and resistance against this capitalist development on the other hand is framed and treated as offensive and violent. The concept of violence is thus highly flexible and susceptible to appropriation by mass media, the state and occupants themselves. Connecting back

to Martínez's (2019) hegemonic narratives on squatting, such polarization enables further division between different approaches to squatting and morally denounces any kind of active defense.

Together, the exploitation of legal/illegal and violent/non-violent dichotomies legitimizes what Martínez (2019, 177) refers to as "politics of emergency". Besides legitimizing violent state repression, the fear of injuries, destruction and death served as a justification for individuals and groups within the ZAD to bypass horizontal decision-making processes and impose their strategies in order to create the image of a unitary movement that is capable and willing to enter into negotiations with the state (CrimethInc. 2019). This is evident in the removal of barricades at a road called D281 (or *La Route des Chicanes*) which used to offer protection to the illegal squatters in the East of the ZAD. A long time participant (CrimethInc. 2019) remembers this incident as "[a] region of the ZAD with less power [being] scapegoated and their houses sacrificed, as they were accused of being dogmatic and insular 'purists' compared to others' participation in liberal-dominated general assemblies and events aimed at courting the mainstream." Other examples include the forced construction of 'practical' working paths throughout the ZAD and the demands of some self-proclaimed

leaders of ACIPA (Intercommunal Association of Citizen Populations concerned by the Airport) towards squatters to seek individual legal contracts. The latter contradicted the 6-point agreement met between the associations involved on the ground, which granted everyone involved after 2007 the right to stay on the territory in the case of the cancellation of the airport project (CrimethInc. 2019). Instead, legalization caused internal divisions and enabled property enclosure and state territorialization geared towards growth.

In this light and referring back to the potentially immense "practical effects" of illegal squatting activities as outlined in the previous section, Cattaneo's (2019, 95) focus on the increased material use connected to the unknown state of duration of illegal squats is misleading. Highlighting costs associated with temporary fixes in illegal squats sidelines the divisive effects of legalization and the economic, energetic and material costs of increasing repression as a result of internal divisions. Instead of placing responsibility on the squatters, scholarly attention should investigate the politically corrupt as well as the energy and material intensive strategies which create the need for squatting in the first place. Those strategies include processes of bureaucratic land-grabbing, which enable illegitimate expropriation and legalize

further industrial development (Dunlap 2020a), as well as increased repression. As such, they cause recurring destruction (and consequently material, energy, as well as mental and physical health costs) through violent police evictions, surveillance and military occupations on illegal projects. The legalization of some squats facilitates repression against illegal squats and is thus directly connected to large material, energetic and financial costs when squats defend themselves.

In sum, dedicating or limiting degrowth's support for squatting to legal projects strengthens hegemonic narratives about squatting that divide the movement and make squatters with autonomous ambitions more vulnerable to state repression. By combining the cancellation of the airport with increased repression against specific groups within the ZAD, the French government turned the ZAD's resistance from a fight against the airport as a shared enemy, towards one against parts of themselves (CrimethInc. 2019). This deepened not just divisions between squatters, their supporters and the public, but ultimately between different approaches to squatting (CrimethInc. 2018; Anonymous 2018). It is thus not through the (attempted) evictions of illegal squatters that the state gained control over the ZAD, but by the insinuation and normalization of the legal/illegal dichot-

omy. Both hegemonic narratives, in the words of Martínez (2019, 180), "undermine squatting, hide its social diversity and make some squatters speechless" as those seeking dialogue with institutions are presented as a united group while anarchist positions are being ignored. Cattaneo's approach carries the language of good and bad squatters into the degrowth discourses about squatting. As the example of the NDDL ZAD illustrates, this separates not just degrowth from certain types of squats, but also different types of squats from each other and from other anarchist and autonomous struggles. To avoid this from happening, degrowth scholarship should abandon the legal/illegal dichotomy as a basic determinant of its support for squatting.

Ignoring the Radical Potential of Squatting

Lastly, tying degrowth's support for squatting to legalization deprives squatting of its radical potential by sidelining (if not ignoring) its ability to actually, in the words of Castoriadis "decolonize the social imaginary" (Latouche, as cited in D'Alisa et al. 2015). Toro (2021, 188 and 194) emphasizes how states actively and passively perpetuate the neo-liberal system and contends that "public institutions are determinant agents for colonizing the social imaginary with neo-liberal

and capitalist values" through education, media and consumption. While granting a nod to the "decolonization of the [social] imaginary" as part and parcel of a degrowth transition (Demaria and Latouche 2019, 148), Cattaneo (2019, 92) explicitly characterizes this immaterial "contribution of squatting to degrowth" as less important than the immediate material dimension. He thus avoids any closer engagement with the cultural and political effects of legalization.

Such effects include that assessing and legitimizing a squat based on the social services it provides (for example providing affordable housing) not only divides the movement as previously elaborated, but simultaneously leaves untouched, legitimizes and perpetuates the power relations that create the need for specific social services in the first place (El Paso Occupato et al. 1995). As such, legalized squats or social centers do create spaces and opportunities for addressing social issues, but unlike illegal squats and land defense occupations, they do so without directly confronting, disrupting or changing capitalist structures as the premise for creating inequality or environmental destruction. Regarding the co-option of squatting for example, large scale legalization of squats in Berlin in the 1980s and 1990s have turned the squatting movement into co-constituents of urban

renewal strategies through their "modernizing function" leading to "the end of the political dimension of squatting beyond housing policies" (Holm and Kuhn 2010, 6 and 11). As decision making power remains in the hands of property owners, rental contracts are based on certain preconditions like expectations of order, cleanliness, standards and contributions to society in the form of cultural offers, relating back to Martínez's (2019) narrative of "the good squatter". Thus, legalization enacts state violence by disciplining, normalizing and integrating squats (Bourdieu 1991, as cited in Martínez 2019), which "undermine[s] their political leverage" (Martínez 2019, 174) and creates dependency on public institutions and property owners. Consequentially, legalization does not only facilitate repression against autonomous projects, it also domesticates those it incorporates and leaves untouched capitalist structures as the root causes for continuing social and environmental exploitation.

According to Giacomo D' Alisa and Giorgos Kallis (2020, 1), a lacking theory of the state leads degrowth literature to remain largely imprecise about transformative strategies that go beyond reformist policy proposals. After an extensive literature review, the authors contend that while there is a vast array of political visions and policy recommendations for a future de-

growth society, their implementation first "require[s] a radical change of the political and economic system." Ted Trainer (2012, 590) elaborates on how radical this change has to be, considering that degrowth is inherently anti-capitalist, while capitalism and growth are integral to the current political and economic system of "consumer-capitalist-society." This integrity manifests itself in powerful public-private partnerships between, for example, energy companies and local or national governments, as well as institutions and security services. Such partnerships legitimize infrastructural expansion like coal mines through financial entanglements, despite their known negative ecological and social consequences (Brock and Dunlap 2018). Leaning on Wright's (2009) three strategies of transformation, D'Alisa and Kallis (2020) emphasize the need of simultaneously pursued symbiotic and interstitial strategies (ignoring and reforming the state) to direct this process of forming a "good state" towards a degrowth transition. Yet again, D'Alisa and Kallis (2020, 6) reserve disruptive strategies (direct confrontation as pursued by land defenders and autonomous squats) as an option for the undetermined future. Cattaneo follows the same path of ignoring that "degrowth is a process of conflict [...] with the prevalent model of growth-based development" (Demaria et al. 2019, 437) and thus with the state,

by closing his chapter with the advocacy of large-scale legalization of squats in the name of degrowth. This proposal is insufficient not because it would not be implementable within existing societal organization, but because it would not transcend existing legal and thus capitalist structures and dynamics. More specifically, Cattaneo's proposal remains vague regarding the quality of such large-scale legalizations and how they would avoid being co-opted by private or state interests (for instance by contributing to anti-squatting industries or creative city narratives). The reader is left with questions considering the duration of such rental contracts; the conditions under which they would be negotiated; who would qualify as a negotiator and who would not; and what restrictions, if any, property owners would be subjected to.

In contrast, by studying illegal migrant settlements in Arica (Chile), Angel Aedo (2019, 15) centers "the radical potential" of squatting as their likelihood to change common sense through pursuing "politics of presence". In a similar way, by referring to new solidarity projects emerging out of urban struggles in post-crisis Greece, Varvarousis (2019, 494) identifies disruptive situations as creating a liminal stage and "possible triggering points for degrowth trajectories" as they destabilize dominant capitalist social imaginaries.

Moreover, Varvarousis (2019) identifies frequent and simplistic references to the "decolonization of the imaginary" (like in Cattaneo's chapter) as a common habit within degrowth literature which turns degrowth's aim of decolonizing the social imaginary into a political slogan without offering actual strategies. According to Varvarousis (2019), more scholarly work should focus on engaging with empirical studies to analyze how and when the imaginary actually changes. By interrupting industrial expansion and disrupting 'normal life' associated with it, ZADs and other autonomous or anarchist struggles create such moments of rupture and thus represent a link between squatting and degrowth which cannot be ignored but should be emphasized and further investigated. If states are the colonizers of the social imaginary (Toro 2021), how can degrowth focus its support for squatting on legalized housing projects and disregard or belittle the disruptive and radical potential of autonomous squats and resistance struggles like those of the ZAD?

In sum, focusing degrowth's support for squatting on legal housing projects artificially sanitizes political struggles (Dunlap 2020b) and ignores the radical potential of squatting. Cattaneo's (2019, 100) approach reduces squatting to "a tool for entering into negotiations with owners" and risks turning 'squatting' into bridge solu-

tions and profit-generating anti-squatting industries such as *anti-kraak* in the Netherlands or *Wächterhäuser* ('Guardian houses') in Germany. As a consequence of the political neutralization of squats through their legalization, I question one of Cattaneo's (2019, 96) main arguments, which poses that mass legalization of squats would effect a drastic decrease

By interrupting industrial expansion and disrupting 'normal life' associated with it, ZADs and other autonomous or anarchist struggles create such moments of rupture and thus represent a link between squatting and degrowth which cannot be ignored but should be emphasized and further investigated.

of economic activity through pushing down rents on the wider housing market. I suspect on the contrary that the artificial sanitation and domestication of squatting, especially in the urban context, leads to the co-option of squats into neo-liberal urban development and generate or amplify already existing gentrification and displacement processes by playing into creative, sustainable or just city narratives. The danger for co-option of degrowth into the neo-liberal discourse (Toro 2021) is al-

ready visible in the recent example of de-growthers' advocacy for the Green New Deal policies, in which states and private actors "radically underestimate the green growth agenda already underway within the European Green Deal" (Dunlap 2021, 399; Dunlap and Laratte 2022). Referring to Aries (2015), Toro (2021) compares de-growthers' trust in a 'good state' to the belief in green or clean growth. Thus, if degrowth is to stay true to its anti-capitalist and anti-growth attitude, its support for squatting needs to depart from a valuation of legal squats and their direct economic, energetic and material effects and instead value the cultural, combative and political potential offered by illegal squats.

Extending Degrowth's Support for Squatting to Autonomous Squats

This paper showed that dedicating degrowth's support for squatting to legal housing projects alienates degrowth from illegal squatting activities, fosters divides in the squatting movement and makes both, degrowth and squatting, susceptible to co-option by capitalist structures. The preface to *Housing for Degrowth* (2019) describes today's crises as "crises of culture". Instead of focusing on the 'contributions' of squatting in terms of reducing material, energy and economic throughput, degrowth needs to direct attention to the cultural and

political value of squatting. Where legalization becomes the primary focus, the "decolonization of the imaginary" and a change of common sense are confined to the boundaries of the capitalist state. ZADs on the other hand offer spaces of learning and experimentation by combining everyday life with resistance to industrial expansion and confronting the legitimacy of the capitalist state. Thus, when describing degrowth's relation to the state in terms of a Gramscian integral state (D'Alisa and Kallis 2020), disruptive strategies like illegal squatting activities must not be sidelined but must instead remain central for a degrowth transition.

Adopting Cattaneo's terminology, this article thus points to what I would call the 'indirect practical effects' in both material (through interrupting industrial expansion and thus preventing future energy and material use) and initially immaterial terms (through its radical potential and the decolonization of the imaginary). Those effects are sometimes preventative and not (instantly) quantitatively measurable. As a consequence, they cannot be directly compared to Cattaneo's practical effect. Thus, this essay does not seek to discredit legalized projects or the ambition to turn vacant spaces into collective housing projects. Indeed, the immediate material dimension of a degrowth transition is ultimately of central importance,

but it can not be as strictly separated from the cultural dimension as Cattaneo proposes. This essay clearly speaks against a generalization of what squatting 'has to be' in order to be considered 'useful' for degrowth. Cattaneo's attempts to connect squatting and degrowth remains urgently important. Cattaneo, however, does not speak about squatting anymore, but legal housing collectives. A focus on legalized housing projects tries to squeeze the diverse squatting movement into a narrowed down version of degrowth, rather than acknowledging squatting (and degrowth!) in its entirety.

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Commentaries
and Debates

A Response to the Editorial Introduction of "Debates in Development and Degrowth: Volume 1"

by Desmond McNeill and Benedicte Bull

Introduction

At the invitation of the editors, we take this opportunity to respond to their Editorial Introduction of "Debates in Development and Degrowth: Volume 1". This arose because we pointed out that there were a number of errors in their description of the early days of the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), based on a text written by Peder Anker (2018).[1] Precisely the same text is repeated in Anker (2020).[2] We begin our response by correcting these errors. We then move on to discuss two important issues faced by SUM in the early years that merit debate, but which were regrettably not touched upon in Anker's account. One concerns the relationship between environment and development; the other between research and activism.

Errors in Anker's Account

In his article "A pioneer country? A history of Norwegian climate politics" (Anker 2018) seeks to establish a narrative of Norwegian climate policy as one that has moved "towards technocracy and cost-benefit economics" which "reflects a post-Cold War turn towards utilitarian capitalism, but also a longing to showcase Norway as an environmental pioneer country to the world." (op.cit, 30) He seeks to inscribe the establishment of the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM)[3] at the University of Oslo into this narrative. Unfortunately, the whole article is riddled with factual errors and unsubstantiated claims.

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1 "A pioneer country? A history of Norwegian climate politics," *Climatic Change*, 1-13. Journal edition 151, no.1 (2018): 29-41.

2 Anker, *The Power of the Periphery: How Norway Became an Environmental Pioneer for the World* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

3 Anker uses an incorrect spelling of SUM's title throughout the text (it should be 'Centre' instead of 'Center').

For a start, Anker argues that SUM and the Center for International Climate Environmental Research, Oslo (CICERO) were established to counter the opposition from, among others, the deep ecology movement, against Gro Harlem Brundtland's ambition to reduce CO2 emissions:

To counter such claims Brundtland initiated research programs and two new centers: Center for Development and the Environment (SUM), and a Center for International Climate Environmental Research, Oslo (CICERO) (2018, 35)

In fact, five centres were established; one at each university plus one at Høyskolen i Ås (currently the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, but not a university at the time). Yet, each of them had only modest core funding from the Research Council. CICERO was a separate initiative. Anker writes further:

The task of these centers was to provide science to the politicians. They were to do their own research, as well as digest and summarize other research on how to realize the World Commission's vision for 'sustainable development' in Norway and beyond (2018, 35).

Anker does not cite any source for this – very inaccurate - description of SUM's mandate, which actually reads as follows: "SUM shall be an instrument for the University of Oslo to generate and disseminate knowledge about development and environmental issues. The main focus will be on research in the interface between environment and development."

Furthermore, Anker (2018) argues that:

Though officially independent, Labor Party environmental politics would, in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways frame research agendas at both centers. For example, a portrait of Brundtland hung prominently in the meeting area of SUM (and indeed is still hanging in its Director's office), and the hands-on Chairman of its Board, Hans Christian Bugge, was one of her acolytes.

Bugge was not Chairman of SUM until 1998; almost a decade after SUM was established – and thus long after the events that Anker describes. The portrait of Brundtland was hung up at SUM more or less as a joke, and was sometimes called "the altar" by employees, as if it were to be worshipped. Based on his dubious account, Anker concludes that SUM's research topics (that ranged from Norwegian liter-

ature to beer production in Botswana) were all "framed by Labor Party politics."

Anker further argues that the "Center for Development and the Environment (SUM) was not created from scratch, but instead took over and absorbed the Council for Nature and Environmental Studies (RNM) that had been active at the University of Oslo since 1972." (2018, 35).

Again, this is an inaccurate description. What happened was that three existing units were fused into one, under the leadership of a Board and a Director established by the University. Apart from the Council for Nature and Environmental Studies, there was a relatively new unit, the Program for Utviklingsforskning i Oslo-regionen (PUFO), which was concerned with development research. The third was an already existing administrative unit concerned with the University' collaboration with developing countries. Anker's account thus ignores the role of the development researchers and hence also omits to discuss the key issue of the relationship between environment and development (see below).

Further Anker argues that:

The Council had been the bulwark of Deep Ecology scholar activism. As longtime opponents of Brundtland and her environmental policies, its researchers found this reorganization challenging. Soon tensions and disagreements emerged with respect to action research and the role of ecology in envisioning a sustainable future. Should the Center question the deeper foundations of society or simply (as Brundtland thought) generate ecological facts to bring to the political table?

This is a crude, and rather inaccurate, way of describing the issue, and hence exaggerating the tensions – which did indeed exist – between being an activist and satisfying the quality requirements of university research (see below).

And Anker continues:

Unable to find a clear answer, environmental research at the Center became marginalized by its Chairman through the end of the 1990's. During this period an aging Næss was the only scholar from the Council who stayed put in his office. ... To new scholars moving in he was a charming

emblem of the past with a ring of fame around him that was suitable for generating public attention (2018, 35)

Again this is inaccurate. Substantial research on the environment was carried out in this period - but mainly by others than those earlier attached to the Council for Nature and Environmental Studies; for example: the long-running research programme on development and environment in Mali; the "Norwegian-Indonesian Rain Forest and Resource Management Project"; "Consumption and Social Change"; and "International Location of Polluting Industries and Sustainable Development in the Third World".

Anker continues:

At the Center for International Climate Environmental Research the story was different (Anonymous 2000). Its first Chairman was Henrik Ager-Hansen. He had served as Vice-President of the all-dominating state-owned Norwegian oil company Statoil ("state oil") for 24 years, and had just stepped down in order to be the company's chief adviser on environmental policy. His role was to make sure that climate research at CICERO would not undermine the nation's booming petroleum industry. CICERO's first

Director Ted Hanisch was a keen supporter of Brundtland, serving as her Parliamentary Secretary from 1986 to 1989.

This may be grounds for Anker's claim that CICERO was influenced by the Labour Party, but it does not apply to SUM.

In addition to these numerous factual errors, Anker includes a number of claims that cannot be substantiated regarding how the former prime minister thinks and "dreams," for example: "Despite a decade filled with criticisms from the Deep Ecologists, it is important to note that she [Mrs. Brundtland] did share the same dream of a harmony within humankind, as well as between humans and the environment." (Year of publication, 33) What does Anker actually know about her dreams? He also infers from her struggles for self-determination of abortion that she developed a skepticism against experts and science: "Brundtland was socially in the midst of these events, which led her to view scientists and experts with some skepticism. In the abortion debate, she noted, 'experts' were presenting a 'mixture of facts and personal beliefs' in a way in which they 'abused – knowingly or unknowingly their expert or scientific role in a political context." (Year of publication, 32) There were certainly good reasons for Brundtland to be skeptical about some of the arguments

used by abortion-opponents, including medical doctors, but this hardly justifies portraying a skepticism against science as a defining feature of Mrs. Brundtland.

In summary, Anker's account of events is very inaccurate. Perhaps more importantly it fails to address what were, in fact, two significant issues faced by SUM in the early years - and which merit discussion since they have relevance to many centres concerned with sustainable development. One is how to reconcile concern for the environment with the ambition of reducing poverty, especially in poor countries. The second is the relationship between research and activism in a university.

The Relationship between Environment and Development

It is far from clear how it is possible, on a global scale, to reconcile the conflicting ambitions of protecting the environment and reducing poverty (it is fair to say that the "Brundtland Report" does not do so; the concept of sustainable development is an aspiration rather than something that has been shown to be achievable). It was perhaps inevitable that there would be differences of opinion within the new centre about the relative importance of these two aims; with those previously at RNM emphasising the importance of protecting the environment, with an insist-

ence on Norway; while those at PUFO emphasised the need for reducing poverty in poor countries. A related, and hotly debated, issue was whether SUM should host research only in the cross-section between development and the environment, or also in individual projects focusing on only one of the two issues. Examples of the former could be studies of the history of bilateral and multilateral development aid, or nutrition in Africa; or research networks for Asian and Latin American studies. Examples of the latter could be studies of municipal environmental policy in Norway; or the conflict between wolves and farmers in the Norwegian countryside. The conclusion was that SUM should interpret its mandate as including both development and environmental research, but prioritize research in the intersection between the two.

Although it is true that Arne Næss was quite old by the time SUM was established, there were some interesting discussions with him regarding the challenge of squaring deep ecology with reduction of poverty in developing countries. We believe it is accurate to say that he recognised that this was a real problem – to which he had not before devoted much attention. It remains a challenge for the world today, and hence for researchers at a centre such as SUM.

The Relationship between Research and Activism

Although there were certainly differing views within SUM about to what extent the Centre's staff should be activists, the issue became manifest in the requirement that was made by the Board that those employed as researchers at the Centre should either have a PhD or be enrolled for one. A few of those attached to RNM did enrol for a PhD and remained employed at SUM. For a centre at a university, this is surely a reasonable minimum guarantee of research quality;nevertheless it is not one that precludes the researcher from also being an activist. It is, however, relevant to ask: how can, or should, a researcher be also an activist if he or she so wishes? An additional question might be: is the answer to the first question any different if the person concerned is attached to a centre such as SUM?

Our response to the first question is that a researcher is of course free also to be an activist – which could involve anything ranging from writing blogs to being chained to the railings outside parliament. But it may be helpful to distinguish the two roles and to be clear which one is adopted at any one time.

A researcher at an ordinary university department should not, in our view, feel obliged to be an activist. But what about a researcher at a centre explicitly concerned with a global challenge such as reconciling environmental protection and poverty reduction? Our personal view is that being a part of a centre such as SUM does carry with it the expectation, if not the requirement, that one wants one's research to be relevant – in the sense of potentially contributing, even in some small way, to improving the state of the world. But this does not necessarily imply being an activist, in the usual meaning of the term. A solid piece of research which demonstrates, for example, the power inequalities operating in global health; the inequities of a national energy policy; or the merits of an alternative approach to reducing rainforest destruction; can constitute a valuable contribution.

However, whether activist or not, a fundamental requirement in all research is to strive for accurate historical accounts and never let one's desire to convey a particular narrative make one 'adjust the facts'. In this case, Anker has given an erroneous and biased version of SUM's history – apparently in order to fit into a broader narrative about Norwegian environmental and climate policies.

SUM and Activism: A Response to McNeill and Bull

by Alexander Dunlap

It is with great enthusiasm that we have received a commentary and response by Desmond McNeill and Benedicte Bull to the editorial introduction of *Debates in Post-Development and Degrowth Volume 1*. When this journal was first distributed, there were notable expressions of discontent voiced by permanent staff at SUM that few could clearly articulate during brief hallway encounters. An explicit and concise explanation was provided by an ex-director at SUM, which was greatly welcomed—and appreciated—as it corrects the inaccuracies of Anker's article (2018). McNeill and Bull's response, however, warrants some clarification on our part for our attraction to Anker, despite the glaring inaccuracies that are now illuminated. The discussion on 'activism' in the editorial introduction of *Volume 1* appears to have been missed, ignored or misunderstood. Given that our editorial introduction on the concept of 'activism' and 'academia' did not come through in McNeill and Bull's response, this provides us an opportunity to clarify some points, which appear to have been haunting SUM since the 1990s.

What is Appealing about Anker's Narrative?

To be clear, I have some regrets regarding the section "Situating SUM: Deep Ecology, Sustainable Development, and Post-Development Critics", which relied too heavily on Anker as a single source. Anker, however, retained an attraction that, despite the glaring inaccuracies pointed out by McNeill and Bull, still endures. This attraction is due to the fact that Anker offered a past narrative that made sense of and explained the present reality at SUM (*even if I hope this journal and the related class emerge to challenge and transform this reality*). This reality could be summarized by the marginal interest in deep ecology or its present implications. For example, few

classes or curricula at SUM focus on deep ecology, lumping the subject matter into larger environmental humanities courses where Arne Næss remains more of a symbol within the self-titled lecture room at SUM. Deep ecology's widespread and continued influence on environmentalism and degrowth, while less acknowledged, remains enduring and largely ignored in favor of 'sustainable development' and related interests in 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs). Anker's narrative, however, offers a story as to how deep ecology was subsumed by sustainable development and later its corresponding offshoots.

Importantly today, sustainable development has been rebranded as 'green growth' and continues to guide the 'Sustainable Development Goals' , which are advancing capital accumulation, territorial control and ecologically destructive development projects, labeling themselves as 'green' and sustainable' (Menton et al. 2020; Larsen et al. 2022). Regionally, it is branded as the 'Scandinavian' or 'Nordic' developmental model (Witoszek & Midttun 2018). Despite the appeal of hydrocarbon, salmon, timber and hydroelectric capitalist fueled social-democracy, it never added up environmentally and has been officially discredited (Tilsted et al. 2021). This discrediting is intimately related to the wider trend of

debunking the myth of decoupling (Parrique et al. 2019; Hickel 2020; Vadén et al. 2020), which—said simply—claims that economic growth can be 'decoupled' from ecological degradation. Decoupling, in essence, is the central claim of sustainable development. Moreover, I am not sure it is accurate to say, as McNeill and Bull do, that "the concept of sustainable development is rather an aspiration than something that has been shown to be achievable." The results produced by sustainable development would suggest as much, but this statement ignores that sustainable development became a UN and international governance doctrine claiming that economic growth is complementary to environmental preservation. "Twenty years ago, some spoke of the limits to growth," exclaimed US President George Bush at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, "and today we realize that growth is the engine of change and the friend of the environment."[1] This, as we know, gave way to 'Payment for Ecosystem Services' (PES), 'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation' (REDD) and a plethora of other nature commodification, natural

1 Minute 12:04-25, from the documentary: *Fairytales of Growth* (2020), available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-Q4cpOKmde8&t=3s

capital and offset schemes designed to preserve capitalist expansion, growth and extractivism (Sullivan 2010; Dunlap & Sullivan 2020). Sustainable development has now proved to be a lethal geo-political discourse and program, which was more than an aspiration but a way to delay real policy action to the future, while ignoring deep ecology and other so-called 'radical' environmental critiques of statism and capitalism (Shiva 2002/1989; Best & Nocella, 2006; Dunlap, 2023). Anker's article illuminates the mechanics of this contention, even if it is inaccurate at times and flagrantly ignores some details—and quite possibly gives SUM more credit than it deserves in this debacle.

Even if, as McNeill and Bull write, SUM did not actively silence deep ecology, what Anker describes is a tendency to privilege economic growth paradigms that resonates with polite criticisms of energy transition, SDGs and the nominally pro-green growth stance at SUM. The struggle between deep ecology and sustainable development in the 1980s and 1990s appears under different names in the present. Even the heir of deep ecology at SUM has slid into an uncritical promotion of the Nordic model (Witoszek & Midttun, 2018). This is compounded by SUM co-sponsoring events that showcase actors promoting climate denialism and techno-utopianism (Rødvik

et al. 2022). Anker's narrative is flawed, but nonetheless resonates. As McNeill and Bull confirm, tensions between development and ecology did exist. This could offer an explanation as to why sustainable development, or the 'Nordic model', is still celebrated and only critiqued within the narrow social democratic political boundaries at SUM, and not at its roots as deep ecology once did. Engagements with Marxism are the exception that proves the rule here. Maybe the way Marxism celebrates proletarianization (e.g. the 'working class') and industrial development, often accepting capitalism as a necessary stage to full communism, indicates greater affinity with sustainable development than deep ecology. While this is a more hotly debated topic, subject to great infighting, the popularity of degrowth is becoming untenable to ignore, even if SUM has nominally supported 'green growth' and ecomodernism through its focus on the SDGs, energy transition and Global Governance as the status quo within Norwegian institutions. This, however, is slowly changing.

The concerns raised by deep ecology in the 1970s reverberate through degrowth today. Deep ecology is not without faults, as it has weak points to say the least (Dunlap et al. 2021). Deep ecology, however, especially how it influenced 'radical environmentalism' and ecological

anarchism has remained an enduring influence and, as we mentioned in *Volume 1*, complements Post-Development and continues as an enduring influence within Degrowth—even if explicit acknowledgement by degrowthers is lacking. Anker, then, offers a narrative about how deep ecology, and other politically engaged work, was significantly marginalized by 'sustainable development' and Gro Harlem Brundtland. While McNeill and Bull reveal how Anker failed at arranging and discussing these details accurately, his assessment—as already mentioned—resonates with existing students and staff. The reveals of how students were poorly treated when trying to create accountability over academic flying —which in my mind was likely to be a new 'green washing' scheme for the university— demonstrated the truly conservative and fragile image of SUM (Wøhncke 2021). This is complemented by the fact that students' blog posts were censored because they wanted to use an alias, putting the *Debates in Post-Development and Degrowth* course under review for including non-academic sources from environmentalist and anarchist movements. This is to say, while Anker made some serious oversights, the issues and concerns he outlines regarding SUM still feel alive and well. In the end, McNeill and Bull's outline of Anker's carelessness is helpful to academic inquiry,

even if greater detail of one or more of the environmental projects mentioned by McNeill and Bull would have been welcomed (e.g. "development and environment in Mali"; the "Norwegian-Indonesian Rain Forest and Resource Management Project"; "Consumption and Social Change"; and "International Location of Polluting Industries and Sustainable Development in the Third World"). This raises the question of the research designs, politics and objectives of these projects, especially in relation to ideas of deep ecology, sustainable development, capitalism and how the myth of 'pristine nature' was negotiated or situated within these projects. Research design, methodology and politics, then, directly relates to the next issue raised by McNeill and Bull on "Activism."

On Activism and Academic Research

Implicitly speaking about the moment when the Council for Nature and Environmental Studies (RNM) was absorbed into SUM in the 1990s, McNeill and Bull discuss the dilemma of SUM being "academic" or "activist." As McNeill and Bull ask: "how can, or should, a researcher be also an activist if he or she so wishes. An additional question might be: is the answer to the first question any different if the person concerned is attached to a centre such as SUM?" This question and framing is a bit strange considering how the edi-

torial introduction of *Volume 1* concluded by discussing a phrase said to students at SUM: "We are academics, not activists." Clearly, some of the staff at SUM maintain the dichotomous position of 'academics, *not* activists' (my emphasis). The *Volume 1* editorial introduction had a clear position that challenged such categorical separation, claims to objectivity and erasure of the different forms of 'activism', 'activity' or 'advocacy' taking place under claims of 'objectivity' or being a 'researcher'. Engagement with this aspect of *Volume 1* would have been welcomed and interesting. This, again, raises the question of what constitutes activism? - more so, in the context of the implicit claims to objectivity and imagined separation between academics and activists.

Are people self-identifying themselves as 'activists'—wearing pins, campaigning their colleagues or chaining themselves to the railings outside parliament—or are they just being called activists because they are clear about their politics, research findings and the impacts that different political-economic processes have on people and their environments? Then again, do researchers even understand the entire political terrains where they work, the motives of land defenders (in all their variety), and their own politics? Taking up the stance of the modern missionary promoting the Nordic model,

while enticing, we must admit *is* a form of activism and advocacy. Moreover, are researchers omitting certain phenomena (because they are foreign to their habitus, culture or class composition) when they do not understand political concerns or events? This raises serious issues about class, relationships with (computational) technologies, culture and politics in the process of knowledge production itself.

I completely agree with McNeill and Bull's statement that enrolling for a PhD "is surely a reasonable minimum guarantee of research quality" at a center like SUM. I have argued at the University of Sheffield's Political Ecology Research Groups (PERG) to "Give Up Scholar-Activism," because the latter generates confirmation bias or skewed research, which often does not help with academic development, nor with understanding conflicts or struggles themselves. Moreover, having an activist identity thrusted upon you by colleagues is often designed to discredit and isolate critical research. It can make sense for academics to present findings that are critical of institutional structures, to empathize with the actions of 'rioters' or to support the militancy of land defenders. Supportive findings for political movements are rather logical, *if* the researcher's priority is, for example, preserving habitats, Indigenous self-determination and improving agroecologi-

cal relationships, among others—*instead* of the more common, implicit celebration of (transnational) capitalist, statist development or the 'Nordic model'. This process of activist labeling often relates to omitting foreign political tensions within field (or home) sites and research positionality. Another reason to "Give Up Scholar-Activism" is that students wanting to be critical and 'activist' often create weak arguments and make research claims before they have demonstrated phenomena or events within their research. This is a recurrent problem I have faced while supervising students trying to be 'activists'. Said simply, righteous denunciation tends to take precedent over description and/or communication. Activist statements or explanatory leaps do not help with argument development and narrative flow in academic writing. This, however, raises the question of methodology, positionality and people making uncritical objectivity claims.

Critical researchers are, often wrongly, dubbed 'activists' for being more explicit about their intentions, bias or, more accurately, positionality. And this raises a question for everyone: Who is actually honest about their political subjectivities and different implicit bias in their research? The answer is few, unless specifically trained to develop positionality statements as a way to strengthen met-

hodological clarity by revealing details about a researcher's methods, hypothesis and socio-political positioning. Because there is no such thing as objectivity, there are just detailed methodological reveals, practices or, inversely, unstated assumptions (Foucault 1977; Dewalt & Dewalt 2011; Sullivan 2017). Political science, international relations and other social science disciplines often do not place weight on these concerns, exempting themselves from this self-reflection, and often rooting research within the dominant hegemonic ideology (e.g. liberalism, capitalism, statism) and, consequently, self-insulating themselves from reflecting on the bias or *activism* they enact as researchers. All researchers have positionalities, ideological preferences and therefore engage in all kinds of 'activism'. The problem, however, is methodological transparency and concealing this activism often through implicit claims of objectivity or attempting to call others 'activists'. Activism, then, emerges as a short hand for slander, political disagreement or a miscommunication in demonstrating the way students or staff can improve narrative description, methodological write-ups, research questions and, overall, the presentation of fieldwork material. The fact is that there is a lack of self-reflection on the reality of sustainable development and corresponding outgrowths (e.g. green growth, the Nordic model). The result is risking a re-

active jerk to call anything that questions liberalism, Nordic capitalism and mainstream political trajectories as 'activism' or 'activist'. This reactive jerk expresses itself with a rather comfortable exclusion of actors, lack of political knowledge and material comfort, which relies on rudimentary dichotomies, antagonisms towards different political positions, knowledge discrimination and, finally, a misrepresentation of colleagues, not because they are 'activists', but because they are a different type of researcher: a researcher with different experiences, political views and methodological commitments.

Thanks to McNeill and Bull, we have learned that Anker engages in careless research, but it should not take away from the existent problems that Anker was attempting to illuminate, even if done poorly.

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