



Interuniversity Institute of Social Development and Peace

INTERNATIONAL MASTER AND DOCTORATE  
IN PEACE, CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



# MASTER'S DEGREE

## FINAL DISSERTATION

### Considering Sustainable Degrowth from a Feminist, Transrational Perspective

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### **Abstract**

Today's global interlocking crises in the economic, ecological and social realms point to the need for profound change. Sustainable degrowth supporters propose multiple alternatives to move away from the dominant economic growth model, which they consider as the underlying problem. In this thesis, I investigate the intersection of degrowth and feminism, to identify how the promising degrowth movement can be enhanced and promoted.

The economic growth model has been identified as patriarchal, in many ways. The two movements diametrically opposing economic growth and patriarchy, namely degrowth and feminism, only partially overlap. Degrowth lacks feminist voices and dominant contemporary feminism is deemed compatible with economic growth. Paying attention to the intersection of degrowth and feminism, I make use of the concept of Yin. Yin represents the feminine principle, that needs to be embraced in order to establish healthier relationships with money, economics and a more sustainable livelihood in general. This transrational perspective reaches beyond both movements, pointing to the power of meaning-making as opposed to the definition of an absolute truth, as a tool for profound societal change.

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*It is the feminine that understands all the interconnections in life. And what we are suffering from at the moment is a very fragmented culture, very isolated, very insular, and as I have been shown there is this whole oneness that is emerging into the consciousness of humanity, which needs to be midwifed into our collective consciousness—to understand that ecologically we are one, economically we are one, and of course in the deep spiritual sense we are all one expression of the divine oneness that is inherent within everything.*  
(Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, 2006: 5:02)

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## **Chapter 1 — Starting with Ourselves**

### **1.1 Perspective and Motivation**

This thesis investigates in what ways the degrowth movement can be enhanced and promoted, by applying feminist and transrational approaches. Before beginning my venture to make a convincing case out of my research and line of arguments, I shall give a brief introduction to my perspective as an author by introducing myself and where I come from, in line with the politics of location (Rich, 2003). I refrain from making any claims to objectivity and instead embrace the subjective character of my style of communication, which while being academic, is still bound to a certain perspective, namely my own, influenced by experience as well as social context and education.

I was raised in several different countries due to my father's work as a diplomat. My family lived in and outside of Europe, staying in each country for about two to three years. This meant changing friends, houses, schools and environments completely, every time we moved. While this lifestyle seemed extraordinary to my local friends, either unbearable or infinitely exciting, for me it was what constituted the normal reality of my life. Growing up like this, I learned early on, that there is no such thing as universal truth. It all seemed dependent on the culture I was in. In fact every new place seemed like a different planet: different rules, different language, different people, different ways of treating one another and different truths. My whole identity was made up by the creative tension between the culture

inherited from my parents and the places I lived in.<sup>1</sup> I prided myself for being able to shift my perspective, adapting to the cultural context in which I found myself. So, since I was little I experienced in some empirical way that I knew nothing for sure. This relativistic standpoint, the conviction that nothing can be known in absolute terms, constituted my comfort zone. On the one hand this insight made me learn about and engage with the world in creative ways, and on the other it also made me feel that, in comparison to many of my friends, it was too difficult for me to form an opinion about society, politics and other large scale developments as I questioned everything and nothing at the same time.

Studying peace has kindled my passion for engaging with the world more actively as I was able to learn about my own bias. I learned about *point zero*, which describes the prejudice that people from Western cultures tend to have as they assume that scientific and objective evidence exists and, subsequently, the world can be described from a neutral perspective, meaning no perspective at all. However, despite any epistemology we might adhere to, and due to the limitations that our embodiment and circumstances provide, our knowledge of the world is, at most, partial. We all make implicit assumptions about *what is the case* and we also must take decisions according to the conventions of what is generally called reality. In this context, I was able to learn that, despite considering myself a global citizen I have a Western bias as well. This realization helped me with the conscious decision to having a world view and engaging myself based on those beliefs. In doing so I accepted that my

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<sup>1</sup>Years later I learned about the phenomenon of Third Culture Kids (Van Reken, 2010), a group of people I belonged to, who are raised in different countries and whose culture is a mosaic of the cultures she is raised in, combined with the one inherited from her parents.

viewpoint would inevitably be biased in certain ways, though equally valid when compared to others.

In my peace studies I have learned to trust my perspective as a starting point and simultaneously to dare to engage in analysis and understanding of different realities, and to make statements about these, in order to be challenged and to continue learning through fruitful debates about what should be and how that which is the case, could change, while always trying to align actions with words. This thesis is part of this endeavor and in many ways reflects my perspective of how the world can become more peaceful. Thereby the focus lies on the social movement of degrowth and the ways in which insights from feminism can enhance and promote it, whereby my holistic, transrational lens determines the choice of some key aspects, without failing to provide a practical dimension. The next section will provide an introduction to the background of my research problem (1.2), followed by the research problem, which leads to the research question (1.3) and ultimately the (1.4) structure and methodology of my thesis.

## **1.2 Research Topic and Background**

Economic growth is an integral part of the capitalist system. The international measure of a country's situation is its GDP, an index that indicates wealth accumulation, which nations generally aspire to augment year by year. However, economic growth is not an infinite option. Simply put, due to the fact that the Earth's resources are finite, and the global economic system relies on indefinite growth, this system is unsustainable. This is not a new discovery. In fact, in 1972 the Club of Rome published a report, *Limits to Growth*, which predicts that the Earth cannot withstand the rate of resource extraction generated by the human population. It

claims that human consumption patterns will lead to an ecological collapse with catastrophic effects, unless drastic measures are taken to protect the environment (Meadows et al., 1972). Years later, this awareness has reached the political arena and has brought about the innovative concept of sustainable development.

The concept of sustainable development is defined in the Brundtland report, which was published in 1987 by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD). In it, the WECD endorses a type of "development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 1). The resulting goal is to accomplish poverty alleviation and reduce environmental degradation, while continuing to pursue an economic growth agenda.

However, from the start, skeptics have criticized that the concept of sustainability suggested in the Brundtland report fails to produce the necessary change. It does not examine the root problems that have led our societies to consider a sustainable development path in the first place. Moreover, shortly after its launch, the idea of sustainability was made fit for the purposes of business, which became apparent at the environmental conference in Río in 1992 (Eden, 1994). At this conference, the International Chamber of Commerce depicted economic growth as one of the main drivers conducive to sustainable development. In other words, the sustainability enterprise ended up falling short of what it was set out to do, namely catalyzing a careful examination and understanding of the principles that have led to the current problems (Fournier, 2008). Hence, sustainable growth can be regarded as an oxymoron created in the endeavor to consolidate the necessity for change with the intrinsic fallacies of our current dominant economic paradigm (Farley and Smith, 2013). During the last ten years

of the last millennium, development critics such as Arturo Escobar (1994), Gustavo Esteva (1992) and Vandana Shiva (1988) pointed out some of the deepest problems in the economic development scheme by revealing its underlying human and ecological exploitation. These scholars and activists prominently portrayed the project of development as economic growth, as initiated by former US President Harry Truman as a failure (Rist, 2009). In this context, Shiva coined the term maldevelopment, referring to the destructive characteristics of industrial production, which is inherently dependent on the destruction of nature. While the destruction-production partners have become naturalized aspects of the economic system, it is this machinery that kills countless species, resulting in the initiation of the sixth mass extinction period on Earth which has been unparalleled for 65 million years (Ceballos et al., 2015).

Today many other effects of maldevelopment have become visible: environmental degradation, global warming, pollution and environmental catastrophes; these are largely man-made (Robbins, 2012). However, the harm we cause in nature is not restricted to animals and plants; in addition large groups of humans suffer increasingly from the effects of destructive industrial activities. An increasingly unequal allocation of finite resources, has led to increased competition and struggles over raw materials such as oil, minerals and water, which in many cases trigger violent struggles, including armed conflicts (McKie, 2014).

Beyond the effects of the growth-based economic system on the ecology, there are more ways in which the current economic system causes harm. Peace literature terminology such as structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) comes to mind. In fact, it can be argued that the global capitalist market relies on structural violence by means of exploitation (Sparke, 2015). The research field of post-colonial studies demonstrates the detrimental power

relations from colonial times continue to exist today but manifest in different ways, for example as a modern, free and voluntary arrangement of trade between states (Escobar, 1994). Former colonies are still exploited for their resource richness and cheap labor, by their former colonial powers. A manifestation of this is that with few exceptions, the gap between rich and poor nations has increased over the past decades (UNDP, 2005). Although the decrease of poverty was one of the Millennium Development Goals until 2015, poverty continues to be one of the largest social crises, since it is coupled with many life indicators, such as malnutrition, life expectancy, child mortality and literacy. Concurrently, on a global scale, there is more food than ever before, as we produce more than is needed to feed the entire population of the planet (World Bank, 2015; World Health Organization, 2015). This paradox is a sad indicator of our times, which ultimately confirms the notion that poverty is in fact materialized inequality (Gomes, 2012).

Growth critics refer to the collection of the foregoing symptoms as global interlocking crises, where economic, ecological and social crises meet (Baykan, 2007; Brownhill et al., 2012; Trainer, 2012; Vail, 2011; Kallis, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010; Wichterich, 2014). The term *crisis* used to refer to the progress of an illness, and from the seventeenth century onwards, of anything (Williams, 2012). The description of crisis within the context of illness is useful as a metaphor, as it refers to “the point in the progress of a disease when an important development or change takes place which is decisive for recovery or death; the turning-point of a disease for better or for worse” (OED, 2014: 1). In this sense, crisis may be viewed as a symptomatic convulsion indicating the advent of profound systemic change (Sbeih, 2014).

Whether viewed as a number of profound global problems or interlocking crises, the global situation today suggests that there is an urgent need for a profound and wide-reaching transformation. With the current economic paradigm that fully relies on economic growth (Oliver-Solà, 2010), there seems to be no outlook for the required swift and profound change.

Many who comprehend the entrenchment of the current system, as it ignores and perpetuates inequalities and injustices, have given up their hope to spur systematic deep change. This is understandable, since the systems that generate all this violence cannot be easily dismantled, nor can one single out the culprits to make things change; too many people and institutions support these structures of exploitation and violence. In fact, growth has become an unquestioned ingredient of any exchange in relation to money. Hence, one can say that ultimately all people who form part of the economic system of exchanging goods and services for money and vice versa, contribute to an exploitative unsustainable system to a certain degree (Mcgregor, 2003). Yet, it is crucial to not give up at this point. Understanding the violent aspects within our global interrelated systems is the initial step, which can lead towards change. The next step is to realize that all humans together form these systems, which gives us as individuals a share in the opportunity to shape it. As peace devotees, it is instructive to follow the idea of the peace scholar Vicent Martínez Guzmán, who says that we need an epistemological shift to help us recognize that positive change is a realistic option rather than an unrealistic dream (Martínez Guzmán, 2000). This resonates with the quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens with ideas can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." (Mead in Sommers and Dineen, 1984: 158).

Building on the notion that we need to imagine viable alternatives to the current system, the social movement of degrowth represents a promising option to consider: it is

valuable in that it suggests to engage in profound change which the concept of sustainable development has not managed, and yet it is realistic enough to consider as a path which can be started in the present rather than a utopist future. Degrowth suggests a gradual diminishing of the economy to stop the negative effects of growth as it advocates 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 *et al.*, 2013: 3).

The aforementioned idea seems particularly valuable for a number of reasons: Firstly, it proposes change from within the system at place, a motto which forms one of the basic lessons in peace studies as reflected by words of Sy Miller and Jill Jackson's composition (1955) "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me" (Miller & Jackson, 1955:1). This tenet of starting peace with ourselves furthermore resonates what has been called Mahatma Gandhi's invocation to *be the change that you want to see in the world*. In Gandhi's words "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do." (Gandhi, 1913:241). The degrowth movement is structured in a way that activists and theorists do not impose their ideas on others but attempt to create changes of the very system they live in and are a part of—namely the global North (Schneider *et al.*, 2010). Secondly, the sources of degrowth are drawn from several disciplines, combining multiple perspectives (Demaria *et al.*, 2013). This allows for diversity and heterogeneity, which in turn is useful for deliberation and a fruitful construction of alternatives. Third, degrowth brings theory and practice together by incorporating action-based science (Martínez-Alier *et al.*, 2014). The author, peace worker and scholar John Paul Lederach (1995) suggests that the gap



between theory and practice in the field of peace, ought to be bridged. Those who are prone to engaging in a theoretical way should become more active, and those who are active should engage in theory building (Lederach, 1995). Fourth, degrowth acknowledges the need to cultivate a *new imaginary* (Trainer, 2012) in order to envisage a truly sustainable future to live in, since it is through the sum of many individuals' effort that degrowth can generate profound change (Wichterich, 2014). This is in line with Elise Boulding's work (2003) about future imagination, where the author demonstrates the potential power of imagining a different, more peaceful, future. She theorizes about and applies Fred Polak's early insight that the human capability to create mental images of the totally other—that which has never been experienced or recorded—is the key dynamic of history (Woodhouse & Santiago, 2013). At each level of awareness, ranging from the individual to the macro-societal, we continually generate imagery about what is not yet here, the future. This imagery inspires our intentions and then moves us purposefully forward.

The power of future imagination must be contrasted with the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony, which asserts that the greatest power lies inside the hidden and widely accepted aspects of a discourse (Gramsci, 1971). Discourse is the most important tool through which humans are driven to think and act in certain ways with power being kept in the hands of the few whose discourse dominates. Hence, it is essential to engage with and challenge the dominant discourse for power relations to change. Therefore, it is my aim to engage in an alternative discourse that scrutinizes the economic paradigm of continuous growth, and to investigate degrowth's potential for positive change.

### 1.3 Degrowth and Philosophy for Peace

As indicated above, the promising features of the degrowth movement make it interesting to consider in terms of its potential for a peaceful transformation of the economic growth paradigm. This section elaborates further on how degrowth is backed by peace philosophy and concludes with the importance of viewing degrowth through a feminist lens. Since there are many different conceptions of peace (Martínez Guzmán, 2000), the connection between degrowth and peace philosophy is not as straightforward as it might seem. In other words, conceptions of peace vary from culture to culture, and even from person to person. However, if one settles with the relativist conception of peace, the normative aspect of studying peace can easily turn into an individualistic pursuit of what peace means to us personally, similar to the pursuit of subjective well-being or happiness, which we all feel entitled to in our modern consumer societies. Yet, there is a requirement for a certain consensus on what peace means if we are to make it a pursuit for the majority of people. It is at this point, that the idea of many peaces is juxtaposed with the question of universality and what set of features characterize the presence of peace. It is within this tension between personal conceptions and the aspired generalizability that peace studies have become a field of infinite endeavor where the subtleties of cultures, personal narratives and perspectives as well as political a social environments all converge mirroring the complexities of human interactions.

The mathematical definitions that Johan Galtung(1990)provides through his violence triangle, help to highlight different logical dimensions within the study of peace. It transcends the negative peace definition as the absence of war toward ever more subtle realms of what types of violence exist. Correspondingly, in the absence of these types of violence, the types of peace we can strive for are divulged. These are complex and yet quite understandable

measures of the meaning of peace. Furthering Galtung's work, Francisco Muñoz (2006), provides the realization that peace is never perfect and always transient and that violence is much more visible than peace and harmony. Muñoz's idea of imperfect peace explains that the notion of *perfect* is a utopist desire for better worlds, which cannot be realistically attained. The notion of imperfect refers to the procedural or unfinished character of peace, lying in between and transcending the notion of negative and positive.

Muñoz affirms that while we have an exaggerated perception of violence, we assume an automatic ability to embrace peace, leaving the challenge of rebuilding peace to peace-builders, without providing the fundamental intellectual tools. Similarly, degrowth is not merely the formulation of a concrete utopia, but utilizes ideals as metaphorical signposts. This means that while degrowth is rooted in the acceptance of present circumstances, it seeks transformation towards the better, while embracing imperfection.

Both, Guzmán (2001) and Muñoz (2006) understand peace as an intrinsic part of humanity on the individual and relational level. Muñoz (2006) asserts that without peace we would have never survived or developed as a species. Hence, peace is not something we need to look for, but rather something we already have and must safeguard. Similarly, conflict is understood as a naturally arising tension between different viewpoints that may escalate to become violent conflict. It is not conflict as such but violent conflict that we seek to avoid, stop and transform (Muñoz, 2006). In fact, Guzmán points out a crucial perception of human beings. He highlights that we have the capacity to organize our relationships in peaceful ways and therefore puts emphasis on human agency in the creation of peace. When, as Guzmán and Muñoz propose, we transcend the dichotomy of good and bad, by including both into the potential behavior of humans, degrowth addresses the individual in order to motivate

introspection and through this reflection, drive change from within. If we want to change society we must first reflect our own role within it and recognize the ways in which we deal with conflict.

Being a value of degrowth, self-reflection is also an underlying value of this very thesis, which utilizes a feminist lens to examine and potentially further the degrowth movement. Feminism has become a crucial aspect of peace studies since it has helped to transform a wide array of research realms by providing a unique perspective and revealing patriarchal structures, with the goal of transcending the dominant ways in which we live and think. Hence, viewing degrowth through a feminist lens, helps ensure that degrowth is in alignment with peaceful goals and is free of underlying patriarchic models of thinking.

## **1.4 Structure and Methodology**

Following the initial elaborations on my topic, I have developed the following research question and research objectives:

*In what ways can feminism help to promote and enhance the degrowth movement as a matrix of potential alternatives to the dominant economic growth paradigm, which is deemed responsible for multiple interlocking global crises, in the economic, ecological and social realms, in order to allow for a more peaceful and sustainable livelihood on Earth?*

Research Objectives:

- 1) Outline the main argumentative structures of the degrowth agenda.
- 2) Identify ways in which feminism has developed and is understood today.
- 3) Explore in what way feminism can concur with or reject the dominant economic growth paradigm.
- 4) Assess what aspects of feminism support degrowth and how feminists actively contribute to the degrowth debate.
- 5) Extract principles from feminist ideology to formulate concrete ways in which feminism can help to provide innovative and valuable theoretical and practical paths for the degrowth movement.

Besides this first introductory chapter, this thesis has the following structure. In the following Chapter two, I outline the main argumentative structures of the degrowth agenda. Therein I focus on the three main pillars of degrowth as well as the ways in which these respond to multiple crises explained in the introduction. In Chapter three, I aim to explore in what way feminism can concur with or reject the dominant economic growth paradigm. In order to do this, I first identify ways in which feminism has developed and how it can be understood today. The latter point will highlight the diversity in and fragmentation of the feminist movement, resulting in the contemporary contradicting yet coexisting sub-streams. Subsequently I intend to assess what aspects of feminism support degrowth and how feminists actively contribute to the degrowth debate in Chapter four. Finally, I aim to extract principles from feminist ideology to formulate concrete ways in which to provide innovative and

valuable theoretical and practical paths for the degrowth movement, in Chapter four and the conclusion.

This thesis brings together two fields—degrowth and feminism, both of which feature theoretical and practical elements that mutually reinforce each other. My focus is mainly theoretical, in that I mostly base my arguments on academic journal articles and books. Moreover, I dedicate a smaller but significant part to the action-based side of degrowth and of feminism. This is reflected in numerous examples and practical applications that I provide throughout the elaboration of my arguments. In addition to using numerous secondary sources that contain references to practical action in both movements, I have drawn a part of my practical insights from speeches and interviews in which activist figures in relevant fields directly expressed their views. Finally, in order to verify the relevance of certain themes in terms of public opinion, I have consulted numerous websites, blogs and online chat spaces.

One of the tools that I employ throughout my thesis is conceptual analysis in order to deconstruct the meanings of concepts, as proposed by Jacques Derrida (Bradley, 2008), so that their employment and background can reveal the political motivation behind certain aspects of them, instead of being presented as neutral, since assuming neutrality is fallacious, as I have described in the previous section. In this sense, I attempt to provide my own critical reading of the used sources.

The degrowth literature is very much up-to date since it constitutes quite a recent field (Demaria et al., 2013). The focus of the degrowth literature review presented in Chapter two, is to gain an understanding of the theoretical and practical sides of degrowth, as well as the main sources that it draws from. Important sources for this include, Demaria et al. (2013), several works by Serge Latouche (2010; 2012) and Trainer (2012).

In contrast, the body of literature on feminism has a longer history, much broader, and more heterogeneous, as will be seen in Chapter three. Since the field of the feminism can be described in myriad of ways, I find it pertinent to provide an overview by sketching the different parts of the movement. My introductory notes mainly rely on work of authors such as Rosemary Tong's *Introduction to Feminism* (2009). For the definition of feminism I have cross-analyzed different sources in order to understand the underlying tensions of this endeavor. I have used several of bell hooks<sup>2</sup> definitions and ideas, as I find her work clear and in line with the purpose of intelligibility and applicability of feminist methodology.

The feminist literature that provides growth critiques, serves as a rich pool to draw from, in order to understand potential feminist contributions to the degrowth debate, as can be seen in Chapter three. The publications of the 1990's have not without reason been denoted the *second wave of degrowth*, the first wave being the *Limits to Growth* publication of the Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972). The second wave of degrowth literature contains a range of useful insights which might not yet, as in the third wave specifically refer to degrowth as a movement, but do handle important topics, providing a wide foundation also in the feminist literature realm.

Within the literature that addresses the combination of feminism and degrowth, the handful of feminist writers focusing on degrowth, which can be read about in Chapter four, have elucidated these feminist perspectives, as well as other subaltern views that still lie at the margin of degrowth (Perkins, 2010)

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<sup>2</sup>bell hooks prefers to spell her name in lower case letters (Williams, 2006)

In my work, I seek to emphasize the lack of feminist readings of and contributions to degrowth, which is a gap that many are aware of (Perkins, 2010; Wichterich, 2012; Demaria et al., 2013) but still needs to be bridged. Generally, it has been noted that at degrowth conferences many of the marginalized groups which are spoken about, and whose lives are also addressed, are not represented. This is a crucial matter that forms one of the prime areas in which degrowth has potential for improvement and for which feminism forms a good trigger initiative.

Critical analysis and deconstruction form crucial methodological aspects of this work, yet, so does the aim to re-construct, in terms of proposing viable alternatives. This mixture of saying no to certain things and yes to others is what according to Naomi Klein, the author of the book *This changes everything. Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014), and opening lecturer of the Degrowth Conference 2014 in Leipzig, is the way to go if today we want to see change.

The re-construction side is to be found mainly within Chapter four and Chapter five, the conclusion. Here I refer to works by Bernard Litaer (2002) and Charles Eisenstein (2014) both of whom have gone beyond an analysis of the present situation in economics to propose viable alternatives for the future, and which resonate with degrowth and feminist principles. The proposals for re-construction have in common that they represent, or point to, holistic understandings of the current crises and offer ways through it. The underlying notion is that, as the current pervasive economic systems are unsustainable, we should embrace and already find ourselves in a transformation toward a less destructive and more holistic system.



## Chapter 2 — Degrowth and Transformation

### 2.1 Encountering Degrowth

My first encounter with degrowth was in the summer of 2012 when I was playing street music with my band in southern France. Since we wanted to engage in a sustainable and fun way of playing music outdoors, we decided to join an international group of cyclers for a few days, while they were crossing the region on their way to Italy. The cycling tour was organized by a non-profit organization called *Ecotopia*. The trip started in Barcelona and had the final aim of attending the International Degrowth Conference in Venice. During the inspiring days with the degrowth cyclers—people from different places, generations and backgrounds—I learned a lot about their shared values and got to know practical skills related to eco-friendly and low-consumption lifestyles. This included persuading farmers to let 40 people camp on their land, making seed bombs for guerrilla gardening, building a fire stove out of tin and using minimal amount of technology to get around.

During this encounter, I was impressed by the manner in which people translated their values into communal action in every possible way. I was also struck by the different reactions that others had towards us as we cycled through France as part of *Ecotopia*. Some were friendly and encouraged us, others rather skeptical and unwelcoming. However, most were just puzzled as they could not find a suitable category for what seemed to be a group of hippies on bikes who were on their way to an academic conference. This trip gave me the most action-based introduction to degrowth I could have imagined.

This chapter is dedicated to the degrowth movement and its potential for transformation. My contention is that for a profound enough transformation of our

unsustainable economic, ecological and social systems we need to move away from the current growth paradigm as a foundation of our societies, which degrowth as a heterogeneous grassroots social movement seems to be fit for. This entails deep changes in our shared ways of meaning-making or what degrowth denominates the collective imaginary. In the elaboration of my line of arguments I follow peace scholar John Paul Lederach's (2005) call for the art of observation in which he emphasizes the need for demystified theories that provide explanations for common, yet complex problems, by exposing their interlinked underlying causal factors and their potential connection to desired change.

In this chapter I expose the heterogeneous character of the degrowth movement, as it bridges the gap between theory and practice and combines multiple different fields and strategies. Furthermore, I introduce three main theoretical pillars of degrowth and elaborate on how these form a response to large-scale crises in the economic, ecological and social spheres as well as the collective imaginary. The final section of this chapter addresses the question in what way the degrowth movement could be improved, focusing on the inclusion of feminist voices. The different subchapters are divided as follows: (2.2) Defining Degrowth, (2.3) Engaging with Degrowth, (2.4) Responding through Degrowth, (2.5) Limitations of Degrowth, (2.6) Enhancing Degrowth and (2.7) Conclusion.

## 2.2 Defining Degrowth

The concept of degrowth has originated from the French *décroissance* and literally means reduction<sup>3</sup>. The notion of economic degrowth was first referred to by the ecological economist, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen in his 1971 paper on *Entropy and the Economic Process*. In it, he reveals that standard economic models ignore essential physical and biological phenomena, which set clear limitations to economic growth, whilst growth forms a driving principle of the dominant economic system<sup>4</sup> (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971).

In 2001, degrowth was launched as an activist slogan in France (Demaria et al., 2013). It emerged in Lyon, where an active concentration of environmental associations and social actors developed projects to promote car-free cities, meals in the streets and food cooperatives, amongst others (Demaria et al., 2011). After the degrowth concept became public, the term gained visibility and prominence through different French national magazines and newspapers. This included a section where special attention was given to degrowth in the newspaper *Le Monde* in 2006, as well as the emergence of various websites, associations and discussion forums on degrowth (Flipo, 2008). From 2008 onwards, the term was introduced into academic journals in English. Degrowth was quoted and analyzed by politicians and in several large newspapers across Europe, such as *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *El País*, the *Wall*

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<sup>3</sup>Serge Latouche's article *Degrowth*(2010) explains difficulty to translate *Décroissance* into other languages, and points out that the plurality of meanings that arise from translation mirror the plurality of approaches needed for the degrowth movement in different places.

<sup>4</sup>A year later, a now more prominent book was published, titled *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome (Meadows et al., 1972).

Street Journal and Financial Times (Demaria et al., 2013). In addition, several international conferences on degrowth were held in the cities of Paris, Barcelona, Venice, Montreal, and the latest in Leipzig in 2014. During its short life-span, degrowth has turned from an activist slogan to a social movement growing in importance. However, many misconceptions and reductionist interpretations have evolved around degrowth (Bonaiuti & Verdi, 2012; Sekulova et al., 2013; Demaria et al., 2013). This has led several authors to elaborate on a more comprehensive and broad-based explanation of its meaning. The more complex descriptions show that degrowth implies much more than simply a rejection of growth and its main indicator, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Degrowth can be defined as a collective and deliberative process intended to enable an equitable downscaling of the capacity of production and consumption as well as a downscaling of the role of markets and commercial exchanges as a fundamental organizing principle of human lives (Sekulova et al., 2013). Its underlying aim is to increase human well-being and enhance ecological conditions at the local and global level in both, the short and long term (Schneider et al., 2010).

A further elaboration on degrowth is presented by the prominent degrowth scholar Serge Latouche (2010), who refers to the need for creating a new imaginary that enables a shift in people's minds to open up to degrowth, since depicting the idea of degrowth as a caricatural inversion of growth in the sense of preaching negative growth for degrowth, would be strongly counter-efficient. If we focused our efforts on merely slowing down economic growth we would put societies into distress due to unemployment and the neglect of the social, cultural and environmental agendas that guarantee a certain quality of life. In other words, a society of growth without growth would be a nightmare. Instead, it is necessary to decolonize the imagination from growth first. Our current imaginary is colonized by the idea

of growth, which is inherently unsustainable and unhealthy. The term *imaginary* is a neologism derived from the work by Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst (Johnston, 2013), and strongly linked with Cornelius Castoriadis' work. In its usual context, it refers to the so-called *imaginary institutions of societies* (Castoriadis, 1975). With this expression, Castoriadis means that societies, together with their laws and legalizations, are based upon a basic understanding of the world and man's place in it. In a recent publication *Degrowth—A Vocabulary for a New Era* (2014), Castoriadis is quoted referring to the imaginary as the "psychological structure of people" and as "their attitude toward life" (D'Asila et al., 2014:118). An infamous illustration of the negative implications of growth is given by Edward Abbey in 1977, when he claims that growth for the sake of growth represents the ideology of a cancer cell (Latouche, 2009).

The attempt to break our addiction to this illness that we have ourselves generated, according to Serge Latouche, requires us to “decolonize our imaginaries” (Latouche in Diaz Maurin, 2010:1). He affirms that for this cultural revolution to take place, it will certainly take another 30 years. During the Second International Degrowth Conference in Barcelona, Joan Martínez-Alier in 2010, posited degrowth as the main current of economics of the future.

### **2.3 Engaging with Degrowth**

In the previous sections, we have defined degrowth and identified that it is displayed as a realistic, action-based science that seeks to generate profound change of the system we live in. It raises the question how degrowth achieves this. To answer the question, I will consider two aspects of degrowth, namely a diagnosis and a prognosis part. Diagnosis mobilizes multiple

sources across time and space, whereas the prognosis engages diverse strategies and actors (Demaria et al., 2013). The prognosis, which is usually characterized by a strong utopian dimension, searches for solutions and hypothesizes novel social patterns. Beyond pursuing practical goals, this process opens up spaces and prospects for action. There are many different strategies associated with the prognosis. Action strategies vary from research, oppositional activism and building alternatives, that is, new institutions to reformism, which means working from within existing institutions to create conditions for societal change on all levels from local to global.

Degrowth is an interpretative frame considers that disparate social phenomena, such as the social and environmental crises, are related to economic growth. Degrowth actors are thus so-called signifying agents who engage in the production of contentious meanings that differ from the ones promoted by the mainstream, meaning mass media, the majority of politicians, economics professors and financial experts as well as industry CEOs (Demaria et al., 2013). Pro-growth actors for instance, regard economic growth as the best path to industry CEOs handling the current economic crisis and paying off debts, whereas degrowth actors consider the economic system based on growth and fuelled by debt to be the core problem. In the following section, I elaborate on some of the action strategies that degrowth actors engage in.

## **Research**

As seen earlier, degrowth can be considered an activist-led science. As such, activist knowledge includes all kinds of experience-based concepts that spring from community groups, civil society, women's groups, trade unions, grassroots associations and other organizations (Martínez-Alier et al., 2014). The knowledge gained from grassroots experience

and activism has resulted in the creation of new concepts in sustainability studies and other disciplines. These include the ecological debt, climate debt, biopiracy, environmental justice, popular epidemiology and corporate accountability (Martínez-Alier, 2002). Such notions might be taken up, constricted or dismissed by academics. The reverse also occurs, when academic concepts are employed by civil society activism.

### **Oppositional Activism**

Oppositional activism includes campaigns led to inhibit the expansion of highways, airports, high-speed trains and other types of infrastructure. Opposition may take different forms including boycott, civil disobedience, direct action and protest songs. A particular example of political action is given by the activist Enric Duran in 2008, who publicly announced he had robbed almost half a million Euros by legally acquiring small loans from banks without ever having the intention of giving them back (Demaria et al., 2011). He used the money to finance various anti-capitalist movements, including the printing of a hundred thousand copies of magazines that focused on the energy crisis, critiques for the debt-based economy and concrete alternatives for a sustainable economy of solidarity. In his declaration, Duran denounced the unsustainable banking system, claiming that if it could make money appear out of nothing, he could make it turn into nothing.

### **Reformism**

In general, one can argue that a number of the existing institutions need to be preserved since they are perceived to provide valuable functions. Examples include social security and public

health, public kindergartens, schools and other elements of the welfare state. In this context, feminist literature warns from shifting back too much towards the *doing one's bit* at home, which threatens to intensify women's burden in the responsibility of care, as it is already unsustainable. In the same spirit, the important reduction technology in the household, is a further reason to work for a more egalitarian division of labor between men and women (MacGregor 2004: 77-78).

### **Building Alternatives Within the System**

Following the spirit of the *nowtopia* coined by Chris Carlsson (Schneider et al., 2010), there are many actions for developing alternatives outside present institutions, which can run parallel to them. Examples are decentralized, local, small scale and participatory alternatives such as cycling, reuse, vegetarianism and veganism, consumer cooperatives, co-housing, agro-ecology, eco-villages, solidarity economy, alternative banks or credit cooperatives and decentralized, renewable energy cooperatives. Eco-village and the Transition Town movement are important community based experiences, that often intersect with degrowth.

A number of actors engaged in the development of alternatives affirm that the change of individual values and behavior ought to be the main target of degrowth. This is expressed in the lifestyles of individuals who practice voluntary simplicity, downshifting, living better with less and slowing down life's pace. Furthermore, attention is given to the question how conscious critical consumption can promote transformation at the individual and the social level. The underlying consideration is that less time spent on formal work and consumption means more time for other activities that are fundamental to one's well-being, such as social



relations, political involvement, physical exercise, contemplation and spirituality. Within degrowth there is an understanding that change needs to happen on all levels. This points to the necessity to define appropriate political conditions, which might be useful in supporting the implementation of degrowth politics.

## **2.4 Responding through Degrowth**

To consider how degrowth politics can be implemented it is essential to understand how it operates. Therefore, I will outline the basic theoretical pillars that degrowth relies on: first, the bio-economics pillar; second, the social pillar and third the pillar of the collective imaginary. For a deeper understanding of degrowth, it is crucial to take into account the different sources it draws from and the problems they address, related to the current economic paradigm. In this context the focus shall not only be an investigation of details with related immediate short-term answers, but on shedding light on the all too often ignored overall picture, leading to proposals for long-term, sustainable strategies for transformation.

The previous section has shown that degrowth is a collective process of transformation that embraces a matrix of alternatives to the growth system. In this section, I will show how degrowth theory is constructed upon the three main pillars mentioned above. They rest on the discernment of different interlocking global crises (Baykan, 2007; Brownhill et al., 2012; Trainer, 2012; Vail, 2011; Kallis, 2011; Schneider et al., 2010; Wichterich, 2014), which affect the economic, ecological, social foundations and the foundations of our shared meaning-making, that is, the collective imaginary. Moreover, I will elaborate on the relation between the named theoretical pillars of degrowth and the global crises that these respond to.

## **The First Pillar**

The first pillar of degrowth is a bio-economic critique of the economic paradigm, as initially published by Georgescu-Roegen (Bonaiuti & Verdi, 2012; Bonaiuti, 2012). For growth critics, the financial crash of 2008 might be seen a possible starting point in the endeavor of challenging the dominant capitalist paradigm. Yet, the deepest roots of the crisis would have to be identified, analyzed and vocalized to generate change (Griethuysen, 2009). Hence, understanding the institutional and technological deadlock into which the western path of capitalist and industrial economic development has led our societies, seems to be a precondition for any socioeconomic reorientation towards a truly sustainable path.

The exponential economic growth that we witness today was unknown to other previous forms of economic and social organization, and can be considered a fundamental characteristic of the modern capitalist economy since the Industrial Revolution. The notion that a share of the profit made by companies should be reinvested to raise their endowment of capital, which then becomes the basis on which to make new products and new profit, is the basic underlying principle of such an economy. It enables a positive feedback loop, which has persisted throughout all other transformations that have taken place in the past centuries.

In the realm of classical economy, theorists such as Adam Smith and Marx clearly recognized the circular, recursive process of increased profit, new investments, and new profits, commonly called the Money-Commodities-Money cycle in Marxist terms, as the underlying singular logic of the modern capitalist economic system (Bonaiuti, 2012). However, the neoclassical interpretation of economics paid little attention to this logic, emphasizing the alleged self-regulatory nature of markets. Instead of acknowledging the evolutionary nature of the process of accumulation, the neoclassical perspective views this

situation as that of a general equilibrium. The increase of productivity is mainly attributed to the development of technology and hence considered an exogenous factor.

However, seen from a more complex and systemic perspective, the exponential character of economic growth can be explained with the existence of two underlying principles: first, the already mentioned long-term positive and self-reinforcing feedback of growth, together with accumulation and innovation; second, the emergence of new structures or institutions related to the multi-scale process of growth. The commodification of labor and of nature presents an example of the second principle, as this process has set the stage for another economy and also another society.

In the long run, the entering of new markets into the overall economy as well as the exhaustion of the life cycle of products in established sectors necessarily leads to a decline of profit. However, in the past centuries we have been able to avoid decreased marginal returns through innovation and the creating of monopolistic powers. Nonetheless, this upward race does not pass by the principle of entropy, which implies that the physical universe increases constantly due to an irrevocable, continuous and qualitative degradation of order into chaos (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). Applied to the economy, entropy means that the economic process degrades natural resources and pollutes the environment, which is what constitutes the present danger. The Earth entropically winds down naturally, and economic advance accelerates the process. This implies that the continuous production involves the irreversible degradation of a certain proportion of energy and a loss of available matter, meaning the matter that cannot be reused or recycled. This latter point provides an explanation of the ecological degradation and crises within the dynamic of the economic market (Bonaiuti, 2012).

The physical growth process that property-based industrial expansion ultimately relies on, affects the environment in many, interlinked ways. These include the over-exploitation of local natural resources leading to a crisis of global biodiversity, the expansive removal of mineral resources, the lowering of ecosystem resilience and disruption of the Biosphere. As a result, such human induced phenomena impact natural processes in such way that both the Biosphere and humanity have been said to enter a new geological era called the *Anthropocene*. In this era for the first time, evolution of the Earth System is dominantly shaped by the actions of one species, namely humans (Griethuysen, 2009).

As the name already indicates, the bio-economic pillar links problems arising in the economy to problems that arise in our environment, thereby asserting that the economy ignores important ecological factors. However, in order to give enough attention to both aspects of the bio-economic pillar, the economic and the ecological one, each aspect merits particular attention, which as we shall see, results in different crises, both economic and ecological ones.

### *Economic Crisis*

Frederick Soddy, a Nobel laureate in Chemistry and a professor at Oxford, explained the fallacies in the dynamics of the economic system in the following manner. It is axiomatic for the financial system to increase private or public debt and to mistakenly take the related expansion of credit for the creation of real wealth (Kallis et al., 2012). However, in the industrial system the growth of production and of consumption imply an increase in the exploitation of fossil fuels. Energy is depleted and cannot be recycled. Economic accounting

is false since it mistakes the dissipation of resources and the increase of entropy for wealth creation. For a limited period, the requirement to pay back debts at compound interest could be fulfilled by squeezing the debtors. Other ways of paying the debt are either by inflation, meaning debasement of the value of money, or by economic growth. Yet, economic growth, being falsely measured as it is based on undervalued exhaustible resources and on unvalued pollution. In economics there is no proper accountability in terms of the environmental damage and the exhaustion of resources.

Within the economics field in universities, the image of the economy is still that of a merry-go-round between consumers and producers. They encounter each other in markets where goods and working time are sold. Wages and prices are agreed and quantities are exchanged. The aggregate quantities combined, are what the GDP accounts for. Yet, while this type of economics is a lesson in chrematistics, there are very different ways of telling the same story that take into account the transformation of finite resources into products, services and waste. The field of ecological economics includes mentioned points (Alier, 2009a).

The economy has three levels (Fournier, 2008). The top, represented by the financial level, can grow with the help of loans that are made to the state or the private sector, sometimes even without any security of repayment, as is the case in the economic crisis of 2008. Thus, the financial system borrows the future, with the underlying assumption that indefinite economic growth will provide the means to reimburse debts and interest. The second level is what economists describe as the real economy or the productive economy. On this level wealth is increased not through financial leverage but through the creation of industrial value by innovation, the development of technology and the increased efficiency of manufacturing processes. This type of economic growth actually does allow for a certain

extent of debt to be repaid. If a part cannot be repaid, debts are defaulted. In this context, in the financial crisis of 2008, the debts were so high that even increases in the GDP could not possibly pay them off. Hence, the situation in itself was financially not sustainable and, of course, the GDP itself was not ecologically sustainable. This brings us to the bottom layer of economic building. Here we find a third level the real-real economy, from an ecological economist's viewpoint. It is represented by the flows of energies and materials. The growth of these is partially dependent on economic factors, such as market prices, as well as on physical limitations. Currently we encounter resource limits but also conspicuous sink limits, as exemplified by the anthropogenic climate change, mainly induced through fossil fuel burning. From this analysis it becomes apparent that a return to *debt-fuelled growth* after the crisis is financially risky. Besides the fact that banks are currently reluctant to lend, the growth that is debt-fuelled is actually fuelled by fossil fuels, which are not products of the economy, but products of thousands of years of natural processes.

Summing up, from the perspective of degrowth, the crises we find ourselves in can be seen as mismatches between the desire to buy, produce, build, employ and borrow and the limits to perform all these activities (Schneider et al., 2010). An additional exacerbating aspect is the common economic solution to crisis by triggering growth, often by means of removing the very factors, which pose limits to production and consumption.

### *Economic Transformation*

For degrowth proponents it is not enough to propose alternative economic models in order to challenge neo-liberal economics of growth. This is because the proposal of alternative

economies does not in itself question the importance that is given to the economy. Instead, it is necessary to provide a counterforce to economic determinism or *economism*, by returning to the realm politics. Hence, degrowth advocates propose re-politicizing the economy in order to reveal it as a self-referential system of representations, an abstract idea that presents itself as an objective reality with a range of given facts and forces.

After deconstructing the meaning of the economy, it is seen in the light of a historical process, which has been created through discursive practices. Within this context, the feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham (1996, 2002, 2006), have proposed the re-conceptualizing of economic relations and identities by moving away from the core of capitalistic thinking. This involves looking at economic activity in terms of the co-existence of diverse forms of transactions, labor, and ways of producing and distributing surplus. In this context, Gibson-Graham have engaged in an inspiring project where people were encouraged to re-imagine their economic activities in different ways than the ones capitalism provides for (Fournier, 2008). Some of the results included different forms of transactions outside of the frame of commodity market such as local trading schemes, gifts, mutual exchange between households; different labor forms aside from wage labor including self-employment, volunteering, domestic work; and alternative forms of surplus distribution besides capital accumulation and profit involving the principles of social and environmental ethics. This wider conception of the economy is a precondition to moving away from established forms of interaction based on the growth-paradigm.

While degrowth is a call for reframing the meaning of economy, the economic endeavor of shrinking growth is framed within the idea of once the economy has shrunk to truly sustainable levels, then living in a steady-state economy or zero- growth economy. As

Daniel W. O. Neill suggests, a steady state economy refers to an economy in which stocks and flows of energy are constant at a scale that is sustainable (Neill, 2011). Following Daly's definition, *stocks* refers to the absolute size of the economy, *flows* means the throughput required to support the economy, and *scale* means the size of the economy in relation to the environment. There are three stocks that are relevant: The first is the human population; the second is built capital, which includes human population as well as buildings, transportation infrastructure, cars, and durable goods; and the third is domesticated animals, meaning livestock. In terms of flows, three different types are considered: The first is of material inputs from the environment to the economy; the second represents the flow of material outputs from the economy back to the environment, and third is the energy used by the economy. Finally, two different measures of scale are important: the ratio of material inputs to the capacity of ecosystem sources to redevelop materials, and the ratio of material outflows to the capacity of ecosystem sinks to assimilate wastes<sup>5</sup>.

Whilst nowadays, returning to a situation in which a steady state economy is desirable and sustainable, the idea of this sort of economy is far older than degrowth. It was already proposed by John Stuart Mill in the mid-19th century. In Mill's words "the population and capital are the only great things which must remain constant in a world in balance." (Latouche, 2010:521).

This implies that all human activities that do not engage in unreasonable irreplaceable material consumption or do not degrade the environment in an irreversible manner could

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<sup>5</sup>A sustainable scale is also known to be measured as the ratio between the ecological footprint and the biocapacity (Sustainable Scale Project, 2003)



develop indefinitely. In particular, those activities that are considered most desirable and satisfactory: education, art, religion, basic research, sports, and human relations could then thrive. While according to Mill, capitalism in a more evolved stage would eventually intrinsically reach a state where man and nature are more respected, time has shown that we are beyond a point in which a zero growth economy is sustainable (Neill, 2011), which necessitates the cause of sustainable degrowth (Latouche, 2010). Degrowth in the Global North would provide the necessary environmental space needed for a certain amount of economic growth in the Global South. Hence, roughly speaking the Global North must engage in an agenda of degrowth whilst the Global South in one of decelerating growth.

### *Ecological Crisis*

As the previous section has indicated, the increase in the flows of energy and materials, mainly within the social metabolism of developed economies, has been achieved at heavy social and environmental costs, not only for future generations but also for those alive now (Martínez-Alier, 2012). The clash between economy and ecology shows in several ways: the exploitation of the remaining pristine nature, the growing demands for raw materials and sinks for waste in inhabited parts of the planet. Raw materials remain cheap and the established cost of sinks, that is methods of removing currency from circulation, is zero, which both point to unsustainable circumstances in terms of property rights as well as power and income. The strains that the economy puts on the environment are constantly growing, driven by increasing consumption and population growth, regardless of the hailed increased eco-efficiency in some sector, or a transition towards the service sector in many other areas.

The exacerbation of the problem despite technological advancements is due to the so-called *rebound effect* (Kallis, 2011). In addition one must bear in mind the different impacts that might for instance result from a change of energy source, from the coal industry to nuclear energy, as well as the social costs of environmental solutions (Martínez-Alier, 2002).

Currently, the ecological footprint of the global economy, meaning the area of land and water ecosystems that is needed to produce all resources to assimilate the waste products, surpassed the Earth's capacity to regenerate, by about 30 percent (Bonaiuti, 2012). There are great inequities between the North and South, but also within the North and the South, respectively. In this respect, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012) has claimed that the global South exists in the Global north and vice versa. The difference between rich and poor in terms of environmental impact can be seen in that some people use annually 300 GJ (Giga Joule) of energy, most of which comes from oil and gas, while other people manage with less than 20 GJ. In spite of the large disparities between the Global South and Global North, the tendency is towards economic growth and increased consumption in developing and developed countries (Alier, 2009b). In some countries, not only the absolute amount of materials but also the relative amount of materials per unit of GDP, has been increasing, which results in even more pressure on the environment.

Practically expressed, one can say that if the global living standard reached the levels of the USA worldwide, we would require roughly five planets like the earth to sustain it (Bonaiuti, 2012). A convergence to a European standard of 16 tons of material flow per person/year, excluding water, would increase the world's levels threefold, with the present population. Hence, there is an important component of environmental injustice at play that clearly points to the advantage of the population in so-called *developed countries* as opposed

to those in developing countries. The effects that human behavior has on the ecology cannot be seen as separate from social and political issues, which is why some of the links are mentioned in this section. Additionally, below I will dedicate an extra section to social inequalities. Hence, the ecological crisis is directly linked to an increase of consumption mostly benefiting the lifestyle of so-called developed countries where consumption is much higher. However, while at our current scale the extraction of resources is clearly unsustainable, it is important to remember that the problem lies within the basic functioning mechanism of our economy, which regards nature as an accumulation of resources to be commodified and used for profit (Martínez-Alier et al., 2014).

While we have seen that the economy in itself is not sustainable due to the scarcity of resources, the ecological component of the crisis merits particular attention. This process of systematic exploitation of natural resources has transcended many stages in history and in the development of economic models, together with an increase of scale and always under the motto of continued growth. The destruction-production twins have become a naturalized part of our economic system (Shiva, 1988), yet it is this activity that is destroying our own habitat and with this millions of other species (McKie, 2014). This process causes environmental degradation, global warming, pollution and environmental catastrophes, which are created largely by humans (Robbins, 2012).

### *Ecological Transformation*

Regarding our ecological conditions, degrowth is concerned with offering solutions that aim to reduce the impact we have on the environment. Attempting to list them would exceed the

scope of this chapter, which is why I concisely exemplify the main principles by which degrowth tackles ecological issues. The monetary value of nature can be estimated from the study of spiritual ecology. Within his work *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, Leslie Elmer Sponsel (2012), mentions that the value of a 50 year old tree once it has been logged only represents a fraction of the value it bears in terms of oxygen, air pollution control, soil erosion control, soil fertilizer, water and shelter for animals, all of which in monetary terms amount to 200.000 US dollars. While the monetary estimation of the value of a tree will inevitably fail to capture its worth beyond money, it is helpful to make such estimations within a commonly understood language just to provide an idea of the true dimension of loss that deforestation implies when environmental factors are accounted for.

However, the ecological source of degrowth goes beyond monetary calculations and implies the need to perceive a value within ecosystems themselves, not just as providers of useful resources or services. In addition, degrowth emphasizes the competition that exists between ecosystems and the industrial production and consumption systems (Kallis et al., 2012). It seems that industrial expansion cannot be absolutely decoupled from ecological destruction (Wichterich, 2012). Hence, degrowth presents itself as a possible pathway to preserve the ecology by reducing the pressure humans exert on ecosystems. In this context, degrowth has a *res communis* approach (Kallis, 2011), which suggests that rather than belonging to nobody (*res nullis* approach), environmental goods are commonly conserved and cared for, thereby avoiding the appropriation by individuals (Eisenstein, 2014). In the *res nullis* approach resources belong to nobody and can hence be freely destroyed and stolen. One way of preserving the value of nature could for instance be by establishing nature rights in order to preserve nature (Vidal, 2011). This has been done in the countries of Bolivia and

Ecuador (Thomson, 2011). Approaches in this direction include the initiative of leaving resources underground. Others are de-commodifying nature and working for environmental commons that include: habitat conservation, forest stewardship, community land trusts, conservation trusts, state subsidies and protection of farmland (Vail, 2011).

## **The Second Pillar**

### *Social and Political Crises*

The first pillar addressed shortcomings within the economic system itself as well as harm done to the environment. The second degrowth pillar addresses social and political dimensions. In order to comprehend the second pillar it is useful to look at the underlying social and political crises. It is within the context of neo-economic theory that the notion of development becomes apparent as a process in which different places play different roles in the same procedure. While the dominant discourse coming from more economically advanced societies asserts that wealth and prosperity is all about innovation and technological progress, encouraging underdeveloped nations to engage in business to have financial growth, their actual aim is the introduction of new markets (developing countries) for expansion of the capitalist logic (Bonaiuti, 2012). This logic is incidentally the core argument that has driven mainstream development initiatives since US President Harry Truman coined the notion of being *underdeveloped* (Rist, 2009). The problems of social sustainability have so far been faced in terms of equity (Bonaiuti, 2012). However, from recent history we can observe that the difference in incomes between the richest and the poorest people of society have increased, and continue to do so (OECD, 2015).

In theory, inequality should be erased by following the strategy of overall economic growth. The underlying assumption is that increasing goods and services sold to the international market generates an increase of national wealth. The so-called *trickledown effect* posits that a growing economy within a country should lead to a reduction of poverty and underlying grievance (Gomes, 2012). Theoretically, the trickledown effect helps to distribute wealth within a country, whereby those who are worst off in society benefit automatically if wealth is enhanced in general. Yet, several studies in the past decades have shown that the adage that *a rising tide raises all boats* does not stand up to thorough scrutiny (Muraca, 2012).

Moreover, the trickle-down effect does not seem to hold anymore, even in terms of mere income. In practice, structural inequality can be seen as a fundamental cause of conflict, social instability and loss of well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). A recent report by Oxfam has shown that the richest 85 people in the world are as wealthy than the poorest 50% of the global population combined, and are becoming richer (Wearden, 2014). On average—and taking into account population size—income inequality increased by 11 percent in developing countries between 1990 and 2010. Data of this have been collected since many decades and by different institutions, with shocking trends combining with clear statements such as "there is nothing inevitable about growing income inequality; several countries managed to contain or reduce income inequality while achieving strong growth performance" (UNDP 2014:1).

Nonetheless, within a complex analysis it is imperative to recognize not only self-reinforcing negative dynamics but also processes of self-correcting nature (Bonaiuti, 2012). On national levels, this would mean taking into account processes of redistribution of wages,

linked to the efficacy of trade-union struggles, as well as, to a lesser extent, the spread of welfare-state services. In the light of this, the discernible territorial dimension of inequality, as can be seen in the Global North and Global South divide, may be explained by the chronic weakness of foreign investments and lack of international welfare institutes.

The intrinsic logic of exponential growth seems to lead to increased inequalities and thus to a growing gap between rich and poor in the lack of institutional measures of redistribution of wealth. As studies show, only within countries with generous redistributive policies have there been significantly improved low-end incomes (Muraca, 2012). Hence redistribution has only worked in countries where it was a major political commitment that was effectively executed. The increased wealth in poor countries, where a GDP rise seems a condition for improved well-being, is also found to be equally dependent on the presence of such measures.

In his work *The Environmentalism of the Poor* Joan Martínez-Alier (2002) describes the inequality between affluent and deprived people within a context that lies between ecological economics and political ecology. He asserts that the continual growth of production and consumption involve an increase in the flows of matter and energy, which derive from the poorest nations and generate social disparities and conflict in the countries where these resources are extracted. In this process local cultures and populations are significantly affected as the prices of many resources depend on the outcomes of these conflicts. Resource prices play a significant role in defining long-term scenarios.

As a general principle in the property-based economy, proprietors enjoy exclusive privileges in contrast to non-proprietors, which creates a capitalist elite and reinforces social inequality (Griethuysen, 2009). As significant redistribution policies fail due to the opposition

of most members of the elite, the socio-cultural evolution spontaneously locks itself into a recurrent social crisis. Furthermore, the extension of social inequality adds force to environmental degradation, since extreme poverty and wealth are causal factors of ecological damage. The combination of social crises and environmental damage, linked to the establishment of elites is exemplified by a recent study by NASA (Ahmed, 2014). This study shows that unsustainable resource management and increasing inequality in terms of wealth distribution form potential causes for collapse of modern civilization. The study attempts to make sense of convincing historical data showing that the rise and collapse of societies is actually a recurrent cycle found in history and thereby deflects critiques that might point to the unlikeliness of such extreme scenarios.

The study reveals that even advanced and complex civilizations are vulnerable to collapse, and raises serious questions about the sustainability of modern civilization. In the research of the human-nature dynamics of these past cases of collapse, the project determines the most relevant interrelated factors that explain civilizational decline, and which may help to determine the risk of collapse today. Societies can lead to collapse when two crucial social features converge, namely the stretching of resources caused by the human pressures on the ecological carrying capacity and the economic stratification of society into so-called elites and masses, represented by few rich people and a majority of poor people. Over the past 5000 years, the collapses of civilizations have included these two social phenomena.

At the moment, high levels of economic stratification are connected directly to overconsumption of resources, with elites that reside mainly in industrialized countries, being responsible for both. In more detail, the accumulation of surplus is not equally distributed all through society, but controlled by an elite. The mass population is responsible for producing



wealth but only has access to a small portion of it, which just allows for subsistence or little more. The NASA study, similar to degrowth, claims that the generally hailed technological advances which are meant to raise efficiency of resource use, also tend to raise per capita resource consumption as well as the scale of resource extraction. This, in absence of efficient policies, cancels out positive effects of increased efficiency. The conclusion of the study, after modeling a range of diverse scenarios, is that under conditions closely reflecting today's reality, a collapse of our civilization is difficult to avoid (Ahmed, 2014).

In one of the scenarios the continued resource exploitation eventually leads to a decline of the commoners at a faster pace and then followed by the decline of the elites, due to resource depletion. In this scenario, both strata of society collapse due to the depletion of resources. In another scenario, the poor masses, or the commoners decline due to a famine that elites remain unaffected by. However, in the end elites decline too due to the loss of workers, rather than the collapse of nature. In both scenarios, elite monopolies of wealth provide a buffer from the most "detrimental effects of the environmental collapse until much later than the Commoners", (Ahmed, 2014:1), allowing them to continue their business as usual despite the imminent catastrophe. This mechanism could be an explanation for collapse: elites allow the collapse to occur as they are oblivious to the catastrophic trajectory they have undertaken- the most salient examples of this are the Roman and Mayan civilizations.

Hence, deriving a lesson from this phenomenon, the study warns us that some members of society might be alarmed that the system is about to break down and propose necessary structural changes. However, they will likely be faced with elites opposed to making these changes, as their interest is to maintain their privileged position. Despite the serious risks that this study points to, it does emphasize the fact that worst case-scenarios

could avoid collapse and even pave the way towards a more stable civilization. The two main solutions proposed to avoid this are directly linked to the main problems identified earlier: one is the large-scale reduction of resource consumption. This, according to the report can be achieved through population control and the shift to renewable resources. The second is the reasonable, equitable distribution of resources among the population. The NASA study can be seen as a convincing and well-founded piece of research outside of the degrowth field, which reaches conclusions similar to the values that degrowth also promotes. This includes that business as usual cannot be sustained and the recognition that action is needed immediately for structural change. The conclusion also implies that a fundamental paradigm change is necessary on all levels, thereby addressing governments, corporations and businesses as well as consumers, is necessary.

From a development critique lens, based on the evidence of a predominantly historical-social and anthropological nature, the main factor responsible for poverty and exclusion must be searched for exactly where it was asserted that the solution to poverty would be found, namely in the process of growth and development (Bonaiuti & Verdi, 2012). This paradox is in line with a systemic approach: as seen earlier, the process of growth and accumulation has a self-promoting nature. In the light of the competitive character of international markets, those areas that have not succeeded in keeping pace with innovations and progress, face a gap that is increasingly hard to bridge.

Hence, in the more advanced countries, the process of growth has led to a series of cumulative changes in the production, educational and financial systems with a complexity that lies far beyond the reach of the poorest economies. On the other hand, it becomes apparent that what are considered positive and negative results in the developmental process

of growth, are not to be seen as worse or better positions in a convergent process of increased well-being, but as the offspring of related processes where different actors or territories reach diverging results, while they also start from unequal initial conditions (Bonaiuti & Verdi, 2012). These processes allow the improvement of life standards in the Western middle-upper class and a simultaneous perpetuation of exclusion and poverty in other areas. Degrowth therefore attempts to provide a range of different solutions that truly start from alternative points of view.

### *Social and Political Transformation*

Degrowth's multiple strategies all have social and political dimensions, as they intend to shift economics back into the hands of people, and ecology back into people's responsibility consciousness. One very concrete approach is given by the synthesis 8Rs that Serge Latouche proposed as objectives for degrowth actions: To revalue, re-conceptualize, restructure, relocate, redistribute, reduce, reuse and recycle. These eight interdependent objectives are supposed to give activist and policy makers tools for a political program, not in its electoral sense but in its strong sense (Latouche, 2010) and foster serene, convivial and sustainable degrowth.

It can be posited that conceptually we need an eco-social rationale where economic activities are subordinated to ecological as well as social imperatives. Hence, from a degrowth perspective a radical inversion in the hierarchy of decision-making is necessary (Griethuysen, 2009). Degrowth as a process of common deliberation in itself yields features of direct democracy and self-organizational procedures of consensus. These are the preferred decision

processes of the degrowth movement not only on the theoretical-normative levels, but also in terms of its own practice and internal procedures, which are guided by principles of collaboration, experimentation, sharing and an open and free knowledge-ware. This includes degrowth conferences, where participants are not mere consumers, but proactive co-producers engaged in the preparatory and follow-up processes, on different levels. Thereby the most conventional tasks are open for work sharing, overcoming the divisions between intellectual and manual work, even if tentatively and at a small scale (Brownhill et al., 2012)

Building upon ideas by Ivan Illich, degrowth advocates recognize the need of peer reviewing of science and policies by non-experts (Martínez-Alier et al., 2014). The interface between science, society and governance should become re-politicized and a socialized and copy-free model of scientific production should be promoted. The institutional democratic framework we live in will have to change: in an optimistic setting of a new degrowth society, there is a cooperation among decentralized, smaller scale, informal organizations with an effect on more ecological, equitable and autonomous organization and hence more direct democracy (Brownhill et al., 2012). Castoriadis (1992) advocates a revolutionary project of direct democracy, which rather than implying a violent take-over of governmental power, involves spontaneous popular processes of autonomous self-institution, meaning procedures where collectives in a quick rush of self-determination decide to be critical towards existing institutions and reclaim these from experts (Bonaiuti & Verdi, 2012). The May movement of 1968 and the more recent 15M movement of the *indignados* in Spain can be considered examples of such moments of direct-democratic claim to self-institution (Brownhill et al., 2012).

The goal is not just to consume and produce less, but to do this in a socially emancipatory and democratizing way. In this context, some regard an evolution of parliamentary democracy as plausible and advocate a reform of the existing institutions. Others see a fundamental link among liberal democracies, capitalism and economic growth, and call for a more radical overhaul of the political-economic systems as well as a re-institution along lines of direct, localized democracy and economy.

The practice of building autonomous and frugal convivial communities happens in different ways in the North and in the South. In the South, a shrinking of the ecological footprint and even of the GDP is neither necessary nor advantageous. Yet this does not mean that it is generally necessary to build a society of growth or unnecessary to leave it. Degrowth of the ecological footprint and the GDP is certainly a necessity in the global North. Yet, if degrowth could be conceived of beyond being a necessity, certain advantages can be discerned: first, degrowth might play a significant role in reversing the wedge between the creation of well-being and the GDP. The main endeavor here is to (Latouche, 2010) uncouple the increase of subjective well-being of individuals from a statistical growth in material production. This, in other words would mean a decrease of *well-having* to improve the *well-being* (Latouche 2010: 521).

For over forty years, a small anti or post developmentalist group of researchers, associated with Ivan Illich, Jacques Ellul and François Partant (Demaria et al., 2011), analyzed and condemned the fallacies and wrongdoings of development, especially in relation to the enterprise of the North towards the South. This critique at first reflected on historical alternatives, meaning the auto-organization of earlier native societies and economies. Yet, this group of pioneering researchers were also concerned with finding alternative initiatives in the

North but not with an alternative for society as a whole. There has been an abrupt and relative success of long periods of preaching in the desert, in particular, due to the environmental crises but also because of the rise of globalization, which has led to an attention shift into its implications on the economy and society of the North (Latouche, 2010). The rediscovery of frugality enables people to rebuild a society of abundance on the basis of what Illich called *modern subsistence*, which refers to the lifestyle in a post-industrial economy where people achieve to diminish their dependence on the market, and reach that point while conserving—by political means—an infrastructure in which technology and tools are used primarily to create practical values, which are "unquantified and unquantifiable by the professional manufacturers of needs" (Latouche 2012:78). Degrowth is a wider project of escaping the economy, re-setting economic functions and decisions within the political and social sphere and thus deepening and re-politicizing democracies. Thereby controlling and scaling down the exponentially and autonomously thriving technological system is an integral part of this process, reclaiming popular control over collective destiny (Cattaneo, 2012).

In accordance with Castoriadis' explanation of the relevance of social imaginaries for generating change, the attempt to define what kind of person is most apt to enact degrowth may not be so helpful, because the strongest imaginaries tend to go beyond commonly understood groupings of class, race, gender, etc. The imaginary of growth itself presents an evident example of this. This conception entails the message that attention should be given to changing strong, common imaginaries rather than trying to establish the proper subject in order to perhaps strengthen his or her legitimacy and the legitimacy for achieving degrowth transitions (Cattaneo, 2012). A shared notion of citizenship within the degrowth movement could facilitate putting into practice common strategies for following paths of degrowth.

Research here could try to detect different understandings of citizenship within the degrowth movement on the academic and activism level, and to recognize key differences and key issues that trigger different approaches. This could open up spaces for dialogue and collective reflection in the movement concerning the meaning and implications of those differences and how to deal with them.

### **The Third Pillar**

#### *The (Latent) Crisis of the Imaginary*

This pillar deals with the collective imaginary, a concept that relates to the representations of reality a society has in common. Contrary to physical systems, biological and social systems are characterized by their capacity to form representations of the universe they live in. Human socio-cultural organizations in particular are characterized by their capacity to negotiate these representations, which gives rise to common representations (Bonaiuti, 2012) leading to a common imaginary. For any group action there is a need for this common imaginary. The imaginary that we find ourselves in today is the result of a multiplicity of historical processes in which humans have negotiated their common imaginary within certain contexts. In the light of this, the modern and post-modern paradigms are the backdrop against which our current imaginary, dominated by the growth principle, was created. Historically and philosophically one of the root bases for our growth paradigm to flourish is related to the Western anthropocentric worldview (Bryant & Goodman, 2004). This view of humanism is characterized by the notion that humans are superior beings who have natural rights over

other species and over nature (Latouche, 2009) and ultimately allows for its treatment, in terms of resources that can be extracted.

The afore-mentioned dominant Western view makes reference to the Cartesian mind set in which there is a split between mind and body, reason and matter. The Cartesian mind is typically part of Western and modern canon, along with the influences from other great thinkers of the time: Baconian science and Newtonian physics (Cordero Pedrosa, 2014). Together they have formed the basis for the modern dominant worldview into which the growth paradigm has been embedded. Outside of the dominant discourse, in and outside of the Western tradition, there were other more organic world views that did not establish themselves as dominant. One of them is represented by the Paracelsian hermetic tradition, which refrained from seeing mind and matter as separate, focusing on the interconnectedness. In this worldview, power and knowledge did not arise from a domination of nature but from cohabiting with the elements (Muntemba in Shiva 1988). However, the mainstream European standpoint ignores and generalizes other modernities, without acknowledgement of the power relations that affected identity formation (Cordero Pedrosa, 2014). The dominant Cartesian mindset objectifies nature and highlights its functional and mechanistic characteristics while positioning humans as reasoning objective observers that are separate from it. It is this mentioned dichotomy that has permitted the subjugation of nature, and has given rise to a new world-view where nature is inert and passive, uniform and mechanistic, separable and fragmented within itself, separate from and inferior to man; and hence dominated and exploited by man (Shiva, 1988).

Whilst the modern mindset played a crucial role in terms of defining our relation to nature, the post-modern paradigm, emerging as a reaction of the modern, is simultaneously a



deconstruction and a reflection of dynamics of modernity (Bonaiuti, 2012). In this spirit Jean-François Lyotard recognized that we reached the end of great narratives and the advent of post-modern society. Within this new paradigm any possibility of a shared meaning has gone astray. While religious tradition or ideology offered a shared horizon of meaning, it was not hard for people to take up a perspective. They identified with myths and heroes pertaining to such ideologies. Today however, since the 1970's the sense of a common meaning has vanished or lost influence on the social imaginary. The consequence is that the post-modern imaginary is polymorphous and fragmented. Great narratives are replaced by quotations and the myriad of codes and forms substitute the universalism that gave character to the emancipatory project of modernity. Whilst a large part of the post-modern condition is characterized by undeniable freedom and a variety of expression, it simultaneously hides the underlying reasons for fragmentation and dependence. In this context, Mauro Bonaiuti (2012) hypothesizes that the fragmentation of the imaginary is linked to the dissolving of the social ties that characterizes the route from traditional society to a society of the market. In other words, it is imaginable that the suspension of traditional ties and of their symbolic mechanism represents the central ground for progress of modernity and its symbols.

Therefore, the fragmented character of the imaginary is linked to the proliferation of objects that describe consumer society. This feature goes along with a media system with the boundless capacity to colonize the imaginary, for which the annual budget comes close to that of military spending. However, this must not lead to the conclusion that post-modern society lacks a common imaginary altogether. According to Latouche, (2010) this would be a thoughtless mistake. The consumer imaginary itself represents the only imaginary that we share nowadays. This paradox is more easily understood if we recognize that the dissolution

of great narratives is exactly the ground upon which the dominant imaginary is based on. The objects we surround ourselves with become a source of meaning and identity, due to the time we spend with and for them, even if this identity is restricted and fragmentary. This critique of the dominant imaginary is the third pillar of degrowth.

*Homo consumens* has an incredibly huge range of choices at his disposition, yet only within pre-given frames, as he cannot define ex ante the set of things from which to choose. The development and proliferation of technology is surely part of this set. Hence how, and to what ends and under what social and ecological conditions, to consume lie beyond the control of individuals, communities, territories and states. This is not to represent a determinist standpoint. On the contrary, in this context it is crucial to remember the presence of compensatory processes within the overall functioning of consumption dynamics. These include the attribution of new functions to artifacts and technologies. For instance, the information technology such as the Internet was originally designed for military purposes—but has come to promote the formation of solidarity networks. Similarly, advertising campaigns have been used against advertising, such as *Adbusters* (Bonaiuti, 2012). Nevertheless, these active transformations of originally intended meanings of artifacts are exemplary; they are not able to counteract the colonization of our imaginary. The question of the imaginary is closely linked to that of autonomy, and autonomy to that of scale. Lamentably very little attention has been given to the fact that dependence and autonomy are closely interrelated with the scale of processes.

Several degrowth thinkers regard the concepts of *economic development* and *growth* as equivalent to the modern-day, secular equivalent of religious dogmas, just dressed up in a modern-day secular fashion (Bergh, 2010; Fotopoulos, 2007; Wichterich, 2014). Growth is

pursued for the sake of itself in such a way that doubting the desirability of growth indirectly leads to the expulsion from a political debate (Cattaneo et al. 2012). The common-held argument is that degrowth bears normative assumptions. Yet, one must recognize that adhering to growth ad infinitum, as a desirable and sustainable path, is also a starkly ideological and strong normative stance to assume.

Above and beyond considering a cultural, broad-based social explanation it is crucial to bear in mind the interests and power relations of those in power. Most social and ecological indicators show that growth-based development path has brought societies close to a general collapse, yet leaving behind the growth-mania and a reorienting ourselves towards alternative directions must also be considered in relation to corporate vested interests (Sekulova et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the growth paradigm that we find ourselves in does not only reflect in common imaginaries but also within individual behavioral patterns that, in sum ultimately form the large scale social behavior. These aspects are captured by research in psychology and behavioral economics (Bergh, 2010). It shows that humans display a limited rationality, shortsightedness, a large degree of self-interest, little altruism, a tendency to compare, seek status and sensitivity to fashions. Needless to say, when considering the presence of such behaviors in combination with energy rebound at a large scale, they make up a difficult to alter system with a lock-in of undesirable behaviors and technologies. This picture underpins the need for systematic solutions that find clever strategies with a high social and political acceptance.

### *Transformation of the Imaginary*

Serge Latouche has recognized that we need a word, which cannot be reduced to the market logic, as most famously has happened to sustainable development. Hence degrowth represents the function of a UFO in the microcosm of politicking, marking a clear difference to other lazy ideas that try to mend things but do not really change them. However, for proper change, there is a need for a new mindset in which the focus is on what really counts. The problem of unemployment for instance, should not be handled in terms of a necessity for jobs for the sake of jobs. Within a degrowth frame this would be counter-efficient. Hence, some scholars hold that renouncing growth entails relinquishing some aspects of human nature and to change to a different way of being (Latouche, 2010).

Degrowth takes seriously the Easterlin paradox, which shows that GDP per capita does not correlate with happiness above certain levels of satisfaction of basic needs (Easterlin et al., 2010). While degrowth implies the abandonment of the growth-based index of GDP, ecological sustainability and social equity come into the foreground in the pursuit of well-being. Qualitative differences that GDP cannot capture could permit socio-environmental improvements while the GDP falls. Empirical evidence of the Easterlin paradox is strikingly clear in Japan, where between 1958 and 1991 the per capita income rose 600 percent, whereas the number of people who said they were *very happy*, stayed essentially unchanged. Moreover, the USA and Belgium, show a significantly negative correlation between income and well-being (Bonaiuti, 2012).

At the initial stages of economic development, there was low pressure on ecosystems and people consumed more basic, private goods. During this time positional interaction was generally weak and the common assumption held was that growth in income means higher

subjective wellbeing or happiness (Sekulova et al., 2013). However, after a certain threshold in scale is passed, the growth of the economy and the population pressure on ecosystems diminish their ability to sustain life and economic activities; social ties start dissolving and positional competition becomes more intense. It is not astonishing to note that important modifications in ecological, economic, and social structures may produce irreversible changes in the ecological, economic, and social flows and hence in the enjoyment of life, or *buen vivir* of a certain social organization (Sekulova et al., 2013). There have been two crucial factors that mainstream research on subjective wellbeing has not taken into account to date. The first is that the enjoyment of life depends on a complex adaptation dynamic (hedonic treadmill) and not on the absolute quantities of goods consumed (Bonaiuti, 2012). The second is that enjoyment of life is the outcome of a complex interaction among the transformations in the structure of the representations, preferences or values, and the alterations of the flows of goods and services, of economic, ecological, and social nature.

There are a number of indices which give better accounts of wellbeing than the GDP. The most recognized indicators of wellbeing, are the IHD (Index of Human Development), Herman Daly's Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), Robert Putnam's indicator of social health (ISS), the calculation of the so-called green GDP or PID, standing for the *Produit Intérieur Doux*, which means Soft Domestic Product of the Québécois. The latter integrates corrections concerning defensive expenditures, linked to the deterioration of quality of life such as water and air pollution, harmful acoustic effects, road accidents, alternating migration, urban crime, the loss of wetlands, the use of non-renewable resources, and a consideration for unpaid domestic work. Using alternative indicators in comparison with the GDP, the 1970's in the USA represent roughly the moment in which the tendencies of the GDP and other indices start

going in different directions (Sekulova et al., 2013).

Buddhist Economics, an area coined by Ernst Friedrich Schumacher (1973) shares some central assumptions with degrowth, enabling it to describe social reality more realistically than neoclassical economics. First, humans are interdependent with nature; hence nature is central in the economic model. Second, humans are not an isolated *homo oeconomicus* but are mutually dependent on each other, and also act in ethical ways. Third, the wellbeing of humans does not solely or mainly depend on material consumption. Therefore Buddhist economics, as well as degrowth, do not seek to maximize but to optimize consumption.

An important assumption within Buddhism is that peace in the world cannot be attained without peace in people themselves Sivaraksa (1992), and calls for more self-sufficiency, independence and inter-dependence of communities and people, instead of reliance on outside experts and powerful business. From this aspect, Buddhist economics shows similarities to Gandhian Economics, tending towards small-scale economics and technology. However, some scholars warn against a dogmatic localism, communalism, and the idealization of the natural. A shift towards life in smaller communities represents a necessary condition for improvement, yet people might remain greedy and full of hatred despite this change (Hirschbrunn, 2014). Moreover, whether structural transformation should contain an abandonment of capitalism, is widely contested. Some claim that through following the teachings of *right livelihood*, ethical forms of doing business and acquiring wealth are possible (Payutto, 1994). Others criticize the inherent violence of economic imperialism and maintain that competition leads to putting one's own interests above those of others. People might still be greedy and full of hatred in small communities. A further

particular aspect of Buddhist economics is the way in which rich and poor people are perceived. In contrast to most degrowth perspectives, Buddhist economics contends that not only poor people but also rich people suffer under their respective circumstances of poverty and richness. Rather than being seen as enemies, rich people are met with compassion. This discernment seems adequate if degrowth strives to be authentic and gains support from people who are rich or want to be rich, while dealing with one of its major challenges: the quest of rendering sufficiency a positive connotation (Hirschbrunn, 2014). Buddhism holds that poor people are just as capable in developing towards well-being as the rich, once they have enough to meet their basic needs.

## 2.5 Limitations of Degrowth

The previous section has dealt with the multiple crises that degrowth responds to and thereby shown that it seems to have potential in terms of approaching the inter-related problems we face today. The fact that degrowth is a heterogeneous movement is at the same time its strength and the basis for the challenges that it faces. In this context, I will subsequently describe the main limitations I observe in the degrowth movement, first in general terms and afterwards with a particular focus on the widely lacking gender perspective. While I believe that these challenges need to be addressed to propel the movement forward in a sustainable way, the focus on limitations does not mean to diminish the worthiness of degrowth, but to point out the potential that can still be developed.

The term of growth is in itself vague and polymorphic and hence brings ambiguity to the notion of *de-growth*. The deconstruction of the underlying notions of growth within a

complex, coupled ecological economic and social systems is crucial for enabling a productive dialogue towards enriching the sustainable *de-growth* idea. Otherwise, some scholars warn us that sustainable degrowth will not go beyond becoming a new *antifetish*, whilst becoming a fetish in itself nonetheless (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). Besides being a cluster of theoretical reflection and grass-root initiatives, the question that degrowth necessitates is in what the conditions and propositions can be formulated allowing to successfully make the changes advocated by the degrowth movement.

Robert Ayres (2008) points out that none of the relevant economic actors, be it government leaders or private sector executives, has an inducement that is compatible with a *no growth* policy. This might indeed explain that so far there are very few institutional initiatives supporting degrowth or a steady state discourse, and furthermore that there are barely any political programs that aim for a degrowth transition, in contrast to initiatives and strategies in the realm of sustainable development. In the light of this, it could be fruitful to engage in debate combining questions about scale, downsizing, degrowth, and about the ethical aims of a society, rather than removing them from technical and economic debates (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). This could help to provide the degrowth movement with more powerful tools in the face of the current crises.

In this context, different fields engaging with degrowth provide diverse answers as pathways. The ecological economics standpoint holds that in order for sustainable degrowth to be successful, one essential step would be to create a platform where diverse social movements converge: this includes the Global North and South, conservationists, trade unions, small farmers movements and movements from the South which endorse a low environmental impact economy. There could be a coming together of conservationists concerned with the



loss of biodiversity, large numbers of people concerned with climate change who push for renewable energy, as well as of the socialists and trade unionists striving for economic justice, and of urban squatters who advocate autonomy; agro-ecologists, neo-rurals, and the large peasant movements, pessimists (or realists) on the risks and uncertainties of technological change (post-normal science), the environmentalism of the poor movements and indigenous movements, that demand the conservation of the environment for livelihood (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010)

Yet, it is still questionable in what way and under what circumstances such mentioned coalitions could achieve more tangible results than those which the sustainable development movement has created. In order to bring fruitful answers to such questions it is crucial to value and listen to the differences and conflicts, which arise in the movement and to pay attention to marginal and critical voices.

The feminist perspective can be considered to lay more in the margins of the degrowth movement, although feminism has made significant growth critiques from early on, being the first to criticize the GDP as an index (Waring, 1988). Furthermore, particularly the field of ecofeminism represents what some call the second wave of degrowth in the 1990's. The first wave can be seen as the growth critiques within ecological economism, as well as post-development literature arising in 1970's. Together with ecological economists and post-developmentalists, ecofeminists criticized unsustainable and neo-colonial patterns of overproduction and overconsumption, and proposed for instance a sufficiency economy and the subsistence perspective as alternatives. Yet, as shall be seen in the following section, there is a lack of feminist voices within the degrowth movement and the existing ones seem to lack sufficient attention (Wichterich, 2014). In the latest Degrowth Conference in Leipzig in 2014

the issue of missing women's voices was addressed. For instance, larger numbers of female contributions were present and a feminist slogan *the private is political* was applied and reversing it into *the political is private* which represented a symbolic allusion to the feminist movement. Christa Wichterich, an active participant and contributor to this conference, has identified three main themes around which the current feminist approaches to degrowth evolve: first, the care perspective, that deals with sustaining social reproduction and the living foundations in society and nature; second, the issue of commons and commoning, as democratic strategy and conception of property that goes against the overall trends towards economization and privatization of public goods; and third, the critique of neoliberal globalization, and its patterns of overproduction, overconsumption and imperialistic life style, which are based on resource and care extractivism (Wichterich, 2014).

In short, the degrowth movement is not characterized by cohesion and is also not devoid of its internal tensions and critiques. However, instead of accepting a fake consensus, as for example the need to grow to pay debt or the sustainable growth discourse, degrowth provides visibility to the contradictions and conflicts that exist on all different levels of the movement.

## **2.6 Enhancing Degrowth**

One salient shortcoming in the degrowth movement is that the dominant voices are mainly male with few contributions by females in both theory and practice. The activist and scholar Paola Melchiori reveals that significant challenges persist for feminist perspective in general and also within progressive movements such as degrowth (Melchiori, 2012). In this context,

Melchiori argues that we are going through a period in history where the normal course of events discloses the hidden structures of society. This is characterized by the collapse and by the reinforcement of patriarchy at the same time. Moreover, it entails a new form of patriarchal restructuring. A global reformation in the organization of patriarchy, which we could call *neo-patriarchy*, is happening. Its visible main feature is the combination of ancestral phenomena with post modern ones. What is problematic about this new form of patriarchy is that it is hidden and ubiquitous: it works at diverse levels and forms, in the private and public realm. It is unfortunately hardly acknowledged even by progressive social movements. In the growth paradigm the resilience of patriarchy is evident in that now some attributes seen as typically feminine, such as flexibility, complexity and emotional intelligence are considered an added value to the capitalist market. Whilst these characteristics might or might not be typically feminine, they are valuable and targeted by the capitalist mindset. Within this mindset however, women will often still remain caught in the same struggles for equal recognition and influence as before.

In my view the matter of recognition is complex and difficult to handle, because on the one hand leaving aside the discussion whether this means essentializing women, valuing positive qualities is first and foremost a good thing. Fixing a monetary value for work is a typical feature of a growth based society that degrowth aims to move away from; and it would contribute to expanding the capitalist market logic into new fields. On the other hand, denying financial compensation in a money-driven society where male work is remunerated seems unfair and unfit too. The question is in how a transition towards a degrowth paradigm can include an attention to causes which typically affect women.

Generally seen, the aim of including a gender perspective should be to avoid the *add*

*women and stir* syndrome within the degrowth movement (Perkins, 2010). This is a phenomenon where the consideration of feminism consists of having a few feminine voices added to the debate so that the feminist claim for a voice can be considered done. Hence transcending male domination in a debate or movement should not merely be a question of finding the voices of women so that they can also join the debate. The problem related to this is that women willing to participate can be found, yet once they add their perspective, it often does not fit the patriarchal agenda. Individual women who follow the course of what males have done will not do much more than blending into the debate. To counter this, Elizabeth Minnich (2005) observes the need to actively undo the blinding definitional equation of some few men with humankind and the perpetual delegitimizing of the meaning of the category woman in real lives (Minnich in Perkins, 2010). In the light of this, it is crucial to recognize the interaction between scholarship and politics that has always existed. In a new scholarship women could and should not become a subspecialty within the standing disciplines. For it is not enough to simply add women's voices to an existing scholarship based on devaluation and exclusion

However, here we come to an inherent problem of the gender struggle. Is it even possible to subvert the patriarchal power structures without becoming part of those power relations? What would that look like? The aim of avoiding the *add women and stir* adage is highly significant of a feminism that aims to generate improvements beyond mere gender equality within unchanging frameworks. However, how can women's voices have a significant impact on the system? It seems like the option of joining the debate without strong impact is often the only possibility that women have to integrate their voices at all. Not joining the debate at all will not change anything at all. Whether it would be better to become

part of a debate without significantly transforming it, and even at times perpetuating patriarchal structures is worse than not joining the mainstream at all, is questionable. At the moment however, it seems like in mainstream politics and scholarship we encounter mainly the opposite phenomenon: quota of women who add their voice to the general male-controlled realm without changing the debate too much. The lack of impact women have as opposed to their interest and capability can be seen in the number of females who study in proportion to the number of females who become influential in the field (Pande and Ford, 2011). It is evident that no matter what position the feminist movement has achieved in terms of being integrated, feminism needs to remain alert and alive (Melchiori, 2012). In this sense, decolonizing the imaginary has to be an unending conscious suspicion in our own dreams, utopias and best hopes. It is indeed this notion that motivates me to give attention to feminist perspectives, which might help to enhance and promote degrowth.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the social movement of degrowth, thereby laying its main focus on the three different theoretical pillars—bio-economics pillar, social pillar and collective imaginary pillar— which address the large-scale interlocking crises of today. The crises in the economic, ecological, and social realms are all related to the globally dominant growth paradigm, which is deeply rooted in the dominant collective imaginary. The fact that the collective imaginary is colonized by growth has thus been identified as a root problem. Therefore, I have described it as the fourth crisis, which is latent but crucial.

With its combination of multiple strategies, degrowth reflects a capacity to address different components of crisis at diverging levels. Moreover, in degrowth discourse there is not just one principal narrative dominating the others. On the contrary, degrowth contains many, at times contradicting viewpoints. I address this issue while showing that as long as the contradictions among different perspectives are openly debated, these do not inhibit but enrich degrowth, as they reflect heterogeneity of its proponents and multiplicity of possible paths. In the section about potential enhancements of degrowth, I focus on the lack of feminist voices within the degrowth debate. Moreover, I point at the necessity of a watchdog feminism that plays the role of revealing neo-patriarchal structures, which can be present even within alternative movements. In this context, I mention that the degrowth movement has yet to assert its potential to evolve. While continuous debate and elaboration of common notions in the degrowth movement are useful in order to coordinate action and strategies, it is essential to bear in mind the strength that lies in keeping degrowth as a constant process rather than a fixed narrative.

## Chapter 3 — Growth and Feminism

### 3.1 The Compatibility Question

So far, I have presented degrowth as a movement with potential in terms of approaching the inter-related global problems we face today on the level of economics, ecology and society. Feminism has been introduced as a lens that might aid in critically assessing the remnants of patriarchy within alternative grassroots movements such as this one. At this point, it is important to point out that my reason for scrutinizing degrowth through a feminist lens is in order to enhance its promising features by considering a perspective that has remained in the background to date.

I would further like to point out the issue of labeling. Research has found that nowadays many women do not identify with being feminists (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014), whilst many support the women's movement and consider gender inequality an important issue to address in this world. For simplification purposes, I take everyone to be a feminist who believes that there is a gender component within inequality in this world, with the male sex being seen as superior to the female sex. Considering that nowadays, the gender perspective has been institutionalized in many ways (Hawkesworth, 2004; UN, 2000), it is striking that feminist voices have not had a salient position within degrowth theory and practice (Perkins, 2010; Wichterich, 2012; Demaria et al., 2013). While, as we shall see later, feminist perspectives are not completely absent from the degrowth debate, feminism and gender do not seem to be prominent themes for degrowth. Moreover, degrowth does not seem to have particularly patriarchal features either (Melchiori, 2012); the fact that it proposes a matrix of alternatives to the dominant systems, which have an underlying growth based

ideology, is an indicator that degrowth might resonate well with feminist tenets. In this spirit it is my contention that both, the degrowth and feminist movements could benefit from being allies, since they could both gain momentum in their respective quests of transforming the patriarchal and economic growth systems in positive ways. The reason for this supposition is that the economic growth paradigm seems to be intrinsically linked to patriarchy, because the particular ways in which the structures and underlying values of both overlap.

The investigation of the overlap between the economic growth paradigm and patriarchy leads to a number of interesting questions. If we find that degrowth would benefit from a feminist perspective, is the opposite also true? If growth is patriarchal and feminism seeks to reveal and transform the power structures of patriarchy, can we infer that feminism therefore also has a critical stance toward the economic growth paradigm? To gain deeper insight into these matters it is valuable to give attention to the connection between both alternative movements, since this would serve not only clarification but also as an incentive for the much older and established feminist movement to take interest in degrowth, so as to advance degrowth's purposes by simultaneously highlighting its gender perspective.

This chapter seeks to answer the question whether feminism is intrinsically critical of growth and prone to embrace degrowth, and if so in what ways. After highlighting the commonalities between the growth and patriarchal paradigms I provide an introduction to feminism, its meaning, the emergence of the movement and some of its different streams, while seeking to reach a definition. Thereafter, I consider the contemporary situation of the feminist movement, attempting to pinpoint overall feminism themes while paying attention to contradictions and inner divisions. At the conclusion of the chapter, I find that although growth has patriarchal features, it is not safe to infer that feminism inherently criticizes



growth. In fact, I suggest that the most prominent contemporary voices in feminism are embedded comfortably within the dominant growth paradigm.

### **3.2 The Patriarchal Features of the Growth Economy**

It is my assertion that growth-based capitalist society is not only violent and unsustainable but patriarchal. This means that it treats women unequally. The previous chapter has given the reader an idea of the relation between economic growth as a maxim and the current global neo-liberal system and its effects on other areas, such as the ecology, society and the realm of the common imaginary. In this section, without claiming to provide a comprehensive list, I name a number of ways in which patriarchy and the economy are linked together and shall be explained below:

- a) There is a historical division into man's productive work and woman's reproductive work or care work.
- b) Care work is infinite and invisible (and not accounted for by GDP).
- c) The system relies on care work exploitation, a domain mainly run by women.
- d) There is gender inequality within the paid work sector in terms of money and access to power.
- e) The care sector is underpaid and suffers the most in times of crisis.
- f) Many women who do paid work face a double burden as they remain in charge of unpaid work.
- g) Poverty is gendered: females suffer more from poverty than males.

The growth based capitalist society treats women unequally in the following ways: Labor is traditionally divided into man's productive work and woman's work in the household, called *reproductive work* or *care work*, whereby the former is paid and the latter unpaid (Léveillé, 1988). While productive work usually entails visible outcomes and a division into work and leisure time, household work is never finished and it is also invisible (Sekulova et al., 2013). Care work is hence mostly unpaid, hence the GDP does not account for it (Waring, 1988), however it relies on it for exploitation . The capitalist market, in fact, can be seen as nothing more than a small part of all that sustains it, the tip of an iceberg beneath which lies an economy that is invisible, which includes the tasks of reproducing and conserving life and which makes all other activities possible (Bianchi, 2012). In the past decades there has been a significant shift of females into the paid labor work force, particularly in the Western world. From a growth perspective, women are deemed the greatest untapped source of the market. However, within the rising female paid work force there are two main issues. One is the gender pay gap that prevails all over the world as well as gender discrimination in terms of access to powerful employment positions, such as managerial and political positions (Jütting et al., 2006; World Economic Forum, 2014).

There are many reasons for the existence and size of a gender pay gap and they may differ strongly between states, for example the kind of jobs held by women, consequences of breaks in career or part-time work due to childbearing, decisions in favor of family life and so on. Furthermore, it has been studied that within the paid care work sector a large majority of workers are female (Antonopoulos, 2009). This continuity of labor types beyond the unpaid is not surprising, yet in certain ways contributes to the extension of the domestic work problem into the market economy: care work and social work are generally underpaid and also the first

branch of work affected by cutbacks. This has been identified as an expression of patriarchy due to the high percentage of women in these sectors. There is well-documented evidence on gender discrimination in access to jobs, education, health, political representation and so on all testify to the persistence of gender inequalities in life choices and life chances (UNDP, 2014). Moreover, women who form part of the paid labor force mostly have a double burden of paid and unpaid, domestic labor (Beck & Pürckhauer, 2014; Martínez-Alier et al., 2014). This is evidently not the same problem for men. Finally, economic inequality between men and women is also expressed clearly when considering the people who have less. Women in fact represent disproportionate percentages of the poor (UNDP, 1995; UNDP, 2014). This concept is not only explained by a lack of income, but is also the consequence of the deprivation of capabilities and gender biases in societies as well as governments. This implies the poverty of choices and opportunities, such as the capacity to lead a long, healthy, and creative life, and enjoy basic rights like freedom, respect, and dignity. Women's increasing poverty is moreover related to the rising incidence of lone mother households.

The feminist political economist, Shirin M. Rai (2002), recognizes that, while particularly in the West and in international institutions, elites have demonstrated that they have adopted a language that is gender-sensitive, people-centered, sustainable and empowering, their understanding of development nonetheless remains “a-historical” and “depoliticized” (Rai 2002:160). She adds that their seemingly progressive viewpoints are melded with an accommodation to neo-liberal globalization. Hence, these actors either continue to push for greater market openings, or call for ways to help marginalized groups find opportunities within corporate-led globalization. Following the feminist agenda of revealing patriarchy, providing change and questioning dominant narratives (Swirsky

&Angelone, 2014), feminism should have something to say against patriarchal growth society and for equality. In the following paragraphs I introduce the domain of feminist economics to show that the patriarchal bias of the economic structures is not only a contingent, practical fact, but rooted within economic theory.

Considering the academic domain of economics, over approximately the past four decades, feminism has elucidated its male bias. A prominent feminist economics scholar, Julie Nelson (1995) clarified that the discipline of economics has a masculine-gendered, value-laden and partial perspective, while it has been presented and is commonly seen as value-neutral and impartial. The particular masculine perspective reflects in the subjects, models, methods and pedagogy of economics. In this context, the rational, autonomous, self-interested agent who successfully makes optimizing choices and is subject to exogenously imposed constraints represents the economic model. The features of the economic agent hence stand in contrast with characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, namely subjectivity, connection, intuitive understanding, cooperation, qualitative analysis, concreteness, emotion, nature, softness and weakness. The economic man arises out of the earth like a mushroom, “full of maturity, with fully developed preferences and fully active and self-contained” (Nelson, 1995: 135). Childhood, age, dependence and responsibility for others are neglected factors, as the economic man is responsible for nobody but himself. Moreover, the environment does not affect him; it is perceived as passive material subject to man's rationality. Similarly, he is not influenced by society. The only necessary form of communication is his interaction through the market and prices.

In the *economics of male experience*, as Mary Mellor (2006) names it, the economic man is grown-up, mobile, physically efficient, free from household responsibilities and from

the production process related to the goods and services he consumes, and finally, detached from the ecosystem. Nelson, however, recognizes that not all economists really believe that humans are in fact only *homo oeconomicus*, yet she maintains that this mode of behavior is perceived as the most applicable and rigorously objective foundation for economic analysis. However, it is this view that reflects gender bias. Humans are born from the wombs of women, they are nurtured and cared for as dependent children and cared for as they get old or get ill. They are socialized into families and communities and are constantly dependent on nourishment and a home to sustain life. The allegedly unimportant, intellectually unexciting or just natural aspects are those which fall into the areas of life believed to be women's work. The work of women, as it reflects the needs of the body, is entrenched in local ecosystems and is not able to detach itself from its own responsibilities. It manifests the basic reality of human existence (Mellor, 2006).

While feminist economics sees the fallacies of traditional economics, the field does not advocate a diametrically opposed view of the *femina oeconomica* (Nelson, 1995). The point is that both the male-biased *homo oeconomicus*, and its feminine equivalent are equally distorting and mythical representations. Economic methods are highly mathematical, abstract and formalized, whereby economists assert that their field is more sophisticated than for instance softer fields of political science. These methods trump concrete, detailed and empirical works due to the so-called purity of its proofs and generality that is without context. As seen earlier, the economic discipline does not give sufficient attention to care, families and communities. Economics furthermore ignores the implications of the fact that individuals organize in collective organizations and corporations as well as labor unions (Nelson, 1995). Economic pedagogy reflects more of the same reductionism to a point that prominent

economic textbooks suitably begin their reflections at the higher education level, where individual choice is highlighted and critical thinking in terms of care and dependence seem irrelevant.

Economics is male-biased and patriarchal. From a theoretical point of view, the concept does not concern women in themselves, but that range of human activities that have traditionally been entrusted to women, and connected with them. In the light of this, the market economy reflects a public world that has been defined by men, in which many women also participate, modeled on male experience disjointed from the fundamental necessities of life. It relies on domination, on the one hand of care work done by women and on the other hand, on other areas such as cheap labor and resources, as well as, of course, nature. Because of its categorical exploitation of women, today's economic reality, as well as economics as a discipline, is patriarchal. While this is true, within feminist critiques of economics there are many reactions to this unfairness, some of these being contradictory. What follows is the question whether the patriarchal features of the economy make feminists generally reject the economy or not. The following subchapters will introduce the feminist movement and roughly trace its development to reach an assessment of the situation of feminism today. This will help to ultimately assess in what way feminism acts against or within the dominant growth paradigm.

### 3.3 Understandings of Feminism

In order to understand whether feminism is inherently critical of growth<sup>6</sup> there is a need to clarify what exactly is meant by feminism. Although most people have some sort of idea of what feminism is, there are many different definitions, which vary in their degree of complexity and in the meanings associated with the different categories. This is reflected within class discussions related to gender, which can—for example—be observed in the peace master's program at university. Provided the learning environment gives space for diverse opinions, it is likely to find points of friction between distinct feminist ideologies of which none is superior to the others. Therefore, at our peace master's class debates it has become difficult to speak of the category of *women* without someone with a poststructuralist position emphasizing that women as such are a social construction or that gender should not be seen in binary categories. Another important objection is comes from the post-colonial perspective, where the feminist movement is scoured for being responsible for perpetuating relations of dominance, in the same way in which patriarchy does, but on the level of race. A further example of friction would be a Marxist feminist mentioning that the ultimate definer of exclusion and marginalization is capitalism and not patriarchy. As soon as one way of looking at feminism is pursued, numerous other ways are left behind and these may or may not gain ground in the debate. If they don't, feminist discussions risk being overly one-sided. If they do, then the debate unavoidably moves to the root differences in feminist conceptions and values. There are many different ramifications of feminism as there are differences among

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<sup>6</sup> When I refer to 'growth', unless specified otherwise I mean economic growth.

groups of women. The understanding of this fact is crucial for students of feminism and gender issues.

While close to the historical emergence of the feminist movement it still makes it possible to give a fairly accurate account of events and processes and groups through which feminism developed, as the above mentioned differences increasingly became recognized within the second wave of feminism, the movement gained in complexity. Further sub-movements emerged, parallel movements became apparent, counter-movements and discussions thrived and the will to find a common ground of sisterhood clashed with the will of defining a truly representative feminism, resulting in many different factions. A strong and often contradicting media representation coupled with the latest feminist and post-feminist ideas create the basis for a lot of confusion and misconceptions. People who identify feminism with the clear-cut *universal suffrage movement*, gender pay gap warfare, man-hating or other well-defined and oversimplified ideas have an easy time outlining it. Moreover, by endorsing a feminism of choice, contemporary feminists who focus on their freedom to wear or not wear lipstick, endorse pornography, prostitution, sexual submission or not, might also provide simple ideas of what feminism means, often conflating the notion of *choice of a woman* with a feminist act. Having arrived here, it becomes apparent that there are extremely different understandings of feminism and it is impossible to give an account of all. Nevertheless a rough sketch will be provided in the following pages, so as to provide a basis for discussion and further elaboration on distinct ideas and principles.



## **Defining Feminism**

In 1986 the author and editor Marie Shear prominently wrote, "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people" (Red Letter Press, 2007:1). Deriving from this statement, one could say that feminism is the commitment to achieving the equality of the sexes. This *radical notion* however is not limited to women. While men, benefit from being the dominant sex, overcoming the restrictive roles is also a worthy aspiration for them as these deprive them of their full humanity. bell hooks defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." (hooks, 2000:1). Similar to Shear's statement, this definition also states clearly that the movement is not anti-male but anti-sexism. It acts to remind us that both sexes have been socialized from birth to accept sexist thought and action. This implies that females can be as sexist as men. bell hooks asserts that until we change our minds and hearts, let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought, we all perpetuate patriarchy which is the institutionalized form of sexism. In a later work, hooks claims that Feminist politics strives "to end domination to free us to be who we are—to live lives where we love justice, where we can live in peace" (hooks, 2000: 118). This wide, operational definition of feminist politics shows the scope of what feminism can signify, considering that it no longer has the limited object of ending sexism, but has moved toward the end of domination in general.

Whilst the previously outlined definitions are rather clear-cut, many others attempt to capture within them the fact that feminism is diverse and complex. For instance, Sylvia Walby in 1989 claims that feminisms, in plural, share the overarching belief that gender imbalance is due to patriarchy, which is the system of social structures and practices that facilitates men's ability to dominate women in society (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). Several

scholars have argued that feminist movements operate in various distinct social arenas to combat this oppression and by working for gender equality. In this context, it can be posited that the three tenets of feminism include first, the need for extensive documentation and propagation of the historical exploitation, devaluing, and oppression of women; second the commitment to transforming the circumstances that affect women through empowerment and education while granting the same value and respect to all genders and groups; and third, the criticism of traditional intellectual quests and an implementation of new traditions (Singh, 2007; Acker et al. 1983).

In her work *Feminism Thought—A more comprehensive introduction* (2009), Rosemary Tong recognizes that the term feminism reflects a wide range of movements and ideologies. Among the most salient feminisms are liberal, radical, Marxist/socialist, psychoanalytic, care-focused, multicultural/global/colonial, ecofeminist, and postmodern/third wave feminism (Tong, 2009). Tong explains that the labels, which she has identified and can be attributed to a wide array of feminist thinkers, are not complete and are also highly contestable. While Tong emphasizes that feminist thinking is interdisciplinary, intersectional, and interlocking, and ultimately resistant to being categorized into unambiguous distinct schools of thought, she still finds the current labels useful, as they help to signal to the public that feminism is not a homogeneous ideology and that feminisms contain a variety of differences in terms of explanations for women's oppression, what I have labeled diagnosis in the previous chapter, and proposed solutions for its elimination, what I have labeled prognosis in the previous chapter. The following section will provide a small introduction to the historical development of feminism and the emergence of distinct feminisms. Due to space constrictions I am not able to go beyond a rough outline.

## **Development of Feminism**

Historically, the feminist movement can be said to have started with its first wave in the USA at the turn of the 20th century, while it had important antecedents in the previous decades. The ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, the right to property and the right to work can be seen as the ending point of the first wave (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). After this initial wave however, many women sensed that they were only at the beginning. Renewed hope for further and deeper change was sparked when US President John F. Kennedy attempted to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act, so as to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, religion or national origin by private employers and employment agencies. By 1966 there was such an explosive sense of urgency and to engage in a civil rights movement for women that it took only a few women to get together "to ignite the spark—and it spread like a nuclear chain reaction" (Friedan, 1967:4). This spark was represented by the formation of the group National Organization of Women (NOW), the first feminist group of the country, which attempted to challenge sexual discrimination in all areas of life: social, political, economic and personal. While at the beginning all kinds of feminists were represented in the group, it soon turned out to be a fundamentally liberal movement.

The second wave of feminism is seen to have sprung out of this sense of urgency to generate change beyond the universal suffrage achievements. While the first wave can be seen as the foundation of liberal feminism, a feminist stream which continued and also evolved, still existing today, most of second wave and contemporary feminist theory defines itself in reaction to liberal feminism (Tong, 2009). Therefore, liberal feminism serves as a good starting point for explaining the different streams. The driving force of liberal feminism is the

conception that female subjugation is rooted in a range of traditional and legal constraints that impedes women's engagement and success in the so-called *public world*. NOW is still an active representation of this viewpoint. To the extent that society bears the false belief that women are, on the intellectual and physical plane naturally less capable than men, it is inclined to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. These feminists emphasize that patriarchal society merges the categories of sex and gender, allowing only those jobs for women, which are associated with the so-called traditional feminine personality. This discrimination against women is denounced by liberal feminists who hold that women should have equal chances to succeed in the public realm, as men do. They insist that gender justice implies that, firstly, the rules of the game need to be made fair and secondly, in the race for society's goods and services, none of the contestants are systematically disadvantaged.

Contrasting with liberal feminism, proponents of radical feminism believe that this attitude is not drastic and dramatic enough to end women's oppression. According to radical feminists the patriarchal system cannot be reformed since power, dominance, hierarchy and competition define it. To get to the crux of the matter, social and cultural institutions, particularly the family and organized religion, must be uprooted. Radical feminists clustered together through women's liberation groups, which were smaller and more intimate, aiming to augment consciousness about women's oppression. The goal of these groups was opposed to just reform what they considered an elitist, capitalistic, competitive, individualistic system. Instead their goal was to replace it with an egalitarian, socialistic system that is cooperative, communitarian, and reflects powerful sisterhood. The perception was of a profound link between all women's personal fates. A famous proclamation arising from radical feminism is

that *the private is political*. The most elemental form of oppression among human beings, according to radical feminists entailed the male domination over female's sexual and reproductive lives and women's self-identity, self-respect, and self-esteem.

Among radical feminists one can divide them between the radical libertarian and radical cultural feminists. This distinction is quite crucial, as the libertarian feminists held that women should embrace a mixture of both, male and female, characteristics in their identity, becoming androgynous persons, whereas the radical cultural feminists insist on women being strictly female. Women should avoid being like men and instead should emphasize the values culturally linked to women, that is "interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life" rather than "independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war and death" (Jaggar, 1992:364). The assumption was that despite some cultural differences among women, all shared the same female nature that men should not have any influence upon (Alcoff, 1988).

Hence, radical cultural feminists tend to associate male and female attributes more to nature than to socialization, preferring the female ones. The US feminist and author Marilyn French mentioned that the "stratification of men above women, leads in time to stratification of classes: an elite rules over people perceived as 'closer to nature,' savage, bestial, animalistic" (French, 1985: 72). The nature-nurture debate, as well as the idea that one form of domination leads to another, are two key definers of the distinct types of feminism, which developed out of the second wave. The second wave by many is seen to be born in the early 1960's in the Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and subsequently died in 1976 according to Veronica Geng's account; then in the early 80's, according to many other

historians, ushered in the third-wave feminist era soon after (Hawkesworth, 2004).

The fact that this second wave of feminism was buried at such a tender age is due to several crises within feminism that factionalized the movement. One of the crises of feminism is commonly called the *sex-wars*. Disagreement between second wavers on topics such as pornography, prostitution and sadomasochism strengthened already present divides among feminists. The questions were about whether one could be a feminist and still endorse these activities, using one's sexuality in ways that served their self-reported best interests, or whether in doing so they undermined feminist power by supporting the objectification and subjugation of women. Besides the disagreements on female sexuality, during the 60's and 70', the feminist movement received a host of critiques in terms of not being representative. It was at this time that the predominantly white, middle class women's movement was called to attention by women who did not feel represented by it. The feminist movement of the 60's was accused of being oblivious to race, sexuality, class and other categorizations. More and more intersections with gender surfaced and created factions within feminism, such as postcolonialist feminism, black feminism, Marxist and socialist feminism, and so on. No longer could women claim to share a common experience besides the fact that they were women. However, even the category of woman came under scrutiny by post-structuralism, whose advocates deconstruct the binary gender categories, which in their view is contingent and limiting. While the generation of feminisms with different viewpoints on feminism took place within the second wave, this wave was no longer able to maintain these differences. This problem is said to have been overcome by the third wave.

### 3.4 Contemporary Feminisms

The evolution of the feminist movement includes a progress from narrow to broad, from clearly defined to expansive. In the course of the development of feminism, it had become clear that women do not experience their lives in their identities as women but also as belonging to different races, classes, sexual orientations and other groupings (hooks, 2000). The backlash within the feminist movement described in the previous section is a reaction to what Becky Thompson has called *hegemonic feminism*. This feminism is led by white, upper class women predominantly from the USA, treating sexism as the ultimate form of oppression, thereby ignoring class and race analysis. Its base is individualist rather than justice oriented (Thompson, 2002). It typically includes three or four branches, liberal, socialist, radical and sometimes cultural feminism. The expansion of feminism has led to a focus on understanding the different power relations and types of privilege that intersected with the gender category. Some claim that this has led to the realization that virtually everyone, men and women—is in some way exploited or mistreated through socially acceptable means, delineated by their social status. Hence, contemporary feminism has gone beyond the category of women to include the voice and viewpoints of all groups that experience dominance in society – which is pretty much every single person (hooks, 2000). Notwithstanding this position, the question arises how this inclusiveness affects disagreements, politics and social change.

The most recent wave of feminism is the third wave, which followed the second wave in the 1980's and 1990's. The third wave was coined in an essay by Rebecca Walker published in 1992 (Włodarczyk, 2010). In it she defines third wave feminism by claiming:

To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them. (Walker, 1992:2)

From Walker's and other third waver's essays it becomes clear that third wave feminists have broadened their goals of abolishing gender role expectations and stereotypes, and embracing ambiguity. However, in order to grasp the range of this wave, it is important to demarcate what it contains and what it does not. Particularly for this wave, this seems to be a rather challenging task, as it is so broad. Yet, refraining from a definition would only lead to meaninglessness. A way to understand the third wave's tenets is by considering the definition the feminist collective founded by Rebecca Walker called the Third Wave, gives itself (Wang, 2011). As Heywood and Drake (1997:7) indicate:

Third Wave is a member-drive multiracial, multicultural, multi-sexuality nation non-profit organization devoted to feminist and youth activism for change. Our goal is to harness the energy of young women and men by creating a community in which members can network, strategize, and ultimately, take action. By using our experiences as a starting point, we can create a diverse community and cultivate a meaningful response.

Indeed, the central tenet of the third wave seems to be the responsibility to "include certain groups of women who have previously been excluded as a result of race, class, and sexual orientation prejudice" (Jacob, 2001:1). When following this definition, the third wave seems to combine the activist and cooperative spirit of the second wave while embracing individualism—a feature so central to the lives of modern women.

Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third-wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether (Heywood & Drake, 1997:3).

When considering the third wave's attitude, particularly those aspects in which the third wave aims to discern itself from the second, the contours of this wave become somewhat more



clear. The third wave takes three essential steps that react to a range of theoretical problems within the second wave. First, in response to the disintegration of the category of *women*, the third wave pushed personal narratives to the foreground to illustrate an intersectional and plural version of feminism. Third-wave feminists precisely reject the universalist claim that all women share a set of common experiences, yet they do not cease to value the concept of experience altogether. Women continue looking to personal experiences to generate knowledge on how the world works and to challenge dominant narratives about how things should be. Second, following the rise of postmodernism, third-wavers endorse multi-vocality rather than synthesis and promote action over theoretical justification. Third, answering to the divisiveness of the sex wars, third-wave feminism stresses an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refrains from controlling the boundaries of feminist politics. Hence, third-wave feminism refuses to tell grand narratives, embracing a feminism that operates as a hermeneutics of criticism within a wide variety of discursive locations, and swaps intentions to gain unity for a dynamic and welcoming politics of coalition (Synder, 2008).

According to Walker (1992), the first to identify with the third wave, there is a fear amongst people in her generation that identity might "dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad" (Paul & Ganser, 2007:61). This way of organizing the world is particularly difficult for a generation that has grown up with categories such as transgender, bisexual, interracial, and knowing and loving people who are racist, sexist, and afflicted in other ways.

However, third-wave feminism does not lend itself very well for analysis. This is because of several reasons. The majority of third wave texts comprise loosely edited

compilations of first-person narratives that are autobiographical and anecdotal. Furthermore, many of the essays put their focus on media icons, images, and discourses, whereas feminist theory or politics per se remains mostly absent, making a comparison to the second wave difficult. Lastly, the volumes that third wave feminism presents show that third-wavers hold up a multiplicity of identities, accepting and endorsing the complexity of real-life contradiction, while avoiding a unifying agenda. These trademarks are what constitutes third wave feminism. The lack of comprehensive theories and the lack of a large scale political movement keeps the third wave rather invisible, which is something many second-wavers bewail. To their defense, some third-wavers claim that feminism is part of daily life, asserting that "feminism is out there, tucked into our daily acts of righteousness and self-respect...For our generation feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it's simply in the water" (Synder 2008:178). One essential aspect, which marks the difference between the second and third wave is that, contrary to their mothers' generation, who had to assert themselves, third-wavers believe they are entitled to equality and self-fulfillment, even as they acknowledge continuing injustices (Findlen, 1995: 6).

One trait of third wave feminists is that they seem to be very keen on differentiating themselves from their mother generation, the second wavers. In pursuing this difference, they tend to create a straw (wo)man as they accuse the second wave of certain fallacies that it does not entirely represent, thereby showing little knowledge of their own history. An illustration of this is provided in Astrid Henry's work *Not My Mother's Sister* (2004); Henry makes a persuasive case that third-wave feminism can be seen as the rebellion of young women against their mothers and as their wish to have a feminism of their own, even though their political agenda—when they have one—remains rather similar to that of their mothers. The

straw-woman that the third wavers often argue with is a corny, overly serious, anti-sex caricature of second-wave feminists, that is still caught up with the differences and nuances that existed within that movement (Kelly, 2005). Simultaneously however, second-wave feminists may be overly defensive or dismissive of the younger women's viewpoint (Evans, 2003: 231).

A further important critique of the third wave is the issue of sexualization and objectification of women. In a critique of precisely this notion, the feminist author Yanan Wang (2011) claims that feminists proclaim to reject objectification one moment and promote it in the next. According to Wang, the third-wave feminism engages in the sexualization of women, discrimination of men, and has a twisted perception of independence and freedom, which makes it a movement built on contradictions. In the third wave, sexuality is portrayed as being power. Yet the third wave promotes the sexual objectification it claims to so stolidly condemn. She claims that modern feminism has done as much to promote over-sexualization of women as it has done to discourage it. Wang refers to the reclaiming of demeaning words, such as *cunt* and *whore*, which have been one salient trait in the third wave exertion of power. As Wang and many others see it, ironically the third wave has not made woman's sexual freedom more acceptable, but woman's objectification.

Pop culture and the consumerist ideology are aspects that the third wave has integrated and assimilated as part of its movement. While the third wave emphasizes the second waver's predominant white and middle class bias, it is in itself not innocent of this: for instance, the BUST Guide to the New Girl Order proposes the existence of "our own Girl Culture—that shared set of female experiences that includes Barbies and blowjobs, sexism and shoplifting, Vogue and vaginas" (Karp and Stoller, 1999:xv). It seems evident that memories of playing

with Barbie and reading Vogue will resonate more and more with white girls than with others. Besides, the class privilege is indicated by the fact that the assumed founder of the third wave Rebecca Walker, who is Yale-educated daughter of Alice Walker and had the resources to create a major foundation during her early twenties (Heywood, 2006a: xvii).

Moreover, Third-wave feminism responds to conditions of postmodernity and also endorses post-modern and post-structuralist ideas. However, calling the third-wave feminism a postmodern movement would not be accurate. Gillis, Howie, and Munford show that third wave feminism provides a range of responses to a theoretical world described as postmodern (Synder, 2008). Yet, a lot of the primary sources display an uncritical view of experience, as they rely heavily on identity politics, and appear to articulate a basically modern liberal stance that is individualistic, volitional, and expressive. In other words, third-wave feminism is not unambiguously postmodern in its theoretical approach, but responds to a postmodern, post-Marxist world where all foundations and grand narratives have been called into question. On a final point, it is remarkable and important that newly found spaces of self-exploration give women the chance to lay claim to personalized feminist identities without having to face judgment or condemnation for this. However, the question arises whether laying claim to the legitimacy of one's experience is always a feminist act (Budgeon in Gill & Scharff, 2011). Third-wave spaces are placed within a context where an engagement with the project of self-definition is cherished in and of itself, and as such constitutes a contemporary normative expectation of contemporary, liberated femininity, which is celebrated for its amenability with neoliberal governance.

Summing up, the latest wave of feminism, the third wave is an attempt to invite and include all different types of feminism by being open, non-judgmental and flexible. While this

on the one hand seems to be the only logical way of uniting all kinds of different feminisms under one all-encompassing umbrella, on the other hand third wave feminism does not completely succeed in this endeavor. In fact the third wave is a type of feminism that despite its alleged openness and neutrality does have defining characteristics beyond the ones self-described. By avoiding grand narratives, the creation of theory and through *anything goes* feminism, the third wave ends up simulating a market of ideas upon which each visitor is welcome to choose among her preferred option of feminism. She always has a choice. However, it is this focus on choice, the willingness to move away from the second-wave seriousness and sense of obligation and restriction of belonging to one category, that makes the third wave somewhat shallow. Power is exerted through private actions of every-day life choices that are there, which previously were out of the question- and the liberty of third wavers expressed by them. However, unfortunately the choices made by a counter-culture to the second wave oftentimes seem reactive rather than a product of free reflection. The focus on media and image representations furthermore, makes the third wave give the impression that it is rather superficial.

Having seen all this, it is not surprising that nowadays so few young girls and women actually identify with feminism (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). Many contend that we have reached a post-feminist era. In any case, according to Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, “it is no longer easy, fun, empowering, or even possible to take a feminist position” (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000:3). The area of women’s studies scholars became increasingly pulled into “internal debates” which were separated from feminist mobilizations outside the academy, and feminist theory began to emphasize “the paradoxical nature” of the feminist enterprise

(Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000:3). Joanne Frye has made the following statement about feminism today:

Feminism aims for individual freedoms by mobilizing sex solidarity. It acknowledges diversity among women while positing that women recognize their unity. Feminism requires gender consciousness for its basis yet it calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles (Frye, 1987: 2).

While feminism only had paradoxes to offer (Scott, 1996), it seemed to bear little interest for a public longing for the innovative and exhilarating. As postmodernist discourses increased in the academy, challenges of conceptions of identity and difference “radically called into question the authority to speak. . . . [Thus] in the current courtroom of ideas, no one has clear standing to make a claim” (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000:9). What remains is hence one main goal: for every woman to become that kind of feminist she wants to be, as there is no formula for being a good feminist (Tong, 2009) and hence no argument left to be made. Therefore, it can be claimed that postfeminism simultaneously incorporates and reviles feminism (Budgeon in Gill & Scharff, 2011). By focusing on the levels at which equality has virtually been reached, postfeminist discourse encourages women to begin projects of individualized self-definition and privatized self-expression exhibited in the celebration of lifestyle and consumption choices.

### **3.5 The Feminism of My Choice**

#### **Pursuing Gender Equality**

As exemplified by the first subsection of this chapter, there is a wide-ranging gender inequality, which is globally prevalent. This inequality puts females in worse-off positions as

opposed to their male counter parts. Such differences can be particularly observed in the economy and the way in which it works that restricts female access to money and power. The manifestations of such inequalities are manifold. At one extreme, in the Western World, it is shown by a gender pay gap, a certain percentage of salary that on average women earn less due to their sex. Considering the entrenchment of the gender debate it is striking that such differences still exist even in places where feminism is most powerfully institutionalized and endorsed (World Economic Forum, 2014). At the other end of the spectrum lies the gendered dimension of poverty. Poverty is not merely a lack of income, but is also the result of the deprivation of capabilities and gender biases in societies and governments. Poverty implies a lack of choices and opportunities, such as the capacity to lead a long, healthy, and creative life, and enjoy basic rights like freedom, respect, and dignity (UNDP, 2014).

In the world we live in today the most visible characteristics of gender inequality are the ones that can be measured and explained in numbers. While the struggle against gender inequality is not the only aspect that feminism in my view should deal with, it is still the most salient aspect that constitutes a common denominator of many distinct feminist movements, including liberal feminism. Hence seeking gender equality is an appropriate starting point for my own feminist conception.

### **Engaging in Deep Transformation**

For most types of feminism the struggle for equality within existing structures, as in liberal feminism, is not enough. The notion that we live within structures that create systematic harm, as the multiple crises described in Chapter two suggest, is one that many feminists have

recognized, reorienting their struggle towards the goal of transforming the system of oppression in itself. If feminists limit their scope of action to the goal of attaining equality then they do not reach the root of evil—patriarchy, a dominant sexist ideology that permeates society. In order to really engage with and transform patriarchy it is therefore necessary to achieve deep changes.

The type of patriarchy that feminism seeks to uproot by going beyond reform into deeper patterns of change can be linked to Johan Galtung's notions of structural and cultural violence (1990). Facing the underlying structures of patriarchy in comparison to one sexist act of violence is similar to the difference between an earthquake and the moving of tectonic plates. Beyond this, the cultural violence, i.e. that violence in the system which goes unnoticed, as patriarchy mostly is, can be compared to the fault lines along which tectonic plates move. Of all the types of violence, cultural violence is the slowest to change. Similarly, patriarchy that is not recognized as such will take longest to be unveiled and undermined. Yet this is the level at which feminism still has most work to do, which is why many feminists are skeptical of anyone who claims that feminism has in any way become obsolete or has fulfilled its job. Such premature burials (Hawkesworth, 2004) of the feminist movement are mostly expressions of a continued resilient patriarchal dominance. Moreover, as Paola Melchiori (2012) suggests, where feminism seems to have become obsolete, fully integrated or perfected there is a need for *watchdog feminism*, a critical attitude towards the situation and our own perspective on it.



## **Asking other Question**

At some point during the second wave of feminism, many members of the movement had reached a deadlock, as they could no longer base themselves on the feeling of certainty that women all shared one common experience and were sisters. Too many differences were found, as feminists that were simultaneously part of other marginalized categorizations (such as race, class, and sexuality) surfaced, showing that they were not at all represented by a movement that was supposed include them, women. Hence, after recognizing these distinctions the struggle for women alone was not enough. Besides being concerned with the category of women, feminism ought to go further and to look also at intersections of feminism with other areas. In other words, feminism is not just about women but concerns everyone, in the sense that it gives a voice to marginalized and oppressed groups. The growth paradigm oppresses and marginalizes a majority and benefits a minority, usually white Western male, which makes it valuable for the feminist agenda. bell hooks (1984) has provided a compelling phrase to summarize this idea:

Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates the Western culture on various levels—sex, race, class to name a few—and a commitment to reorganizing society...so that self-development of people can take a precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desire (hooks, 1984:194-195).

For this purpose, the concept of intersectionality has been launched and deemed useful by many feminists (Davis, 2008). The notion of intersectionality points to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories in lives of individuals, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies as well as the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power. Originally termed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in

1989, intersectionality was proposed to address the notion that the experiences and efforts of women of color were excluded by both, feminist and anti-racist discourse. Crenshaw asserted that theorists needed to integrate gender and race and to show how they interrelate to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences. Feminist scholars from several disciplines, such as philosophy, social sciences, humanities, economy and law, theoretical viewpoints, such as phenomenology, structuralist sociology, psychoanalysis, and deconstructionism, and political directions including feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, queer studies, disability studies, all seem to have been convinced that intersectionality is precisely what is needed.

Nowadays, it is unthinkable that a women's studies program would merely focus on gender. Textbooks and anthologies in the area cannot neglect difference and variety among women, although opinions diverge about the best manner to approach these topics. It is common for women's studies professors to ask their students to reconsider the topics of their research while considering multiple differences. Feminist journals are prone to reject articles that have not focused enough attention on race, class, and heteronormativity, together with gender. At this particular moment in gender studies, any academic who neglects difference, runs the risk of having her work viewed as politically irrelevant, theoretically misguided or merely fantastical.

According to Ann Phoenix (2006:191) "no concept is perfect and none can ever accomplish the understanding and explanation of all that needs to be understood and explained within the field of women's studies". However, according to Kathy Davis (2008), it is precisely because intersectionality is so imperfect –open-ended and ambiguous – that it has been so fruitful for contemporary feminist research. Its missing a clear-cut definition or even

specific parameters has enabled it to be used in nearly any context of inquiry. The infinite regress embedded into the concept makes it vague, but also allows for endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored. Every new intersection allows previously concealed exclusions to come to light, which makes it a perfect fit as a feminist tool.

The feminist researcher only needs to *ask (an)other question*, and consequently her research will take on a new and often astounding twist. The concept helps to tease out the linkages between supplementary categories, to explore the consequences for power relations, and, of course, to decide when another question is necessary or when it is time to stop, and for what motives. Intersectionality provides endless opportunities for questioning one's own blind spots and changing them into analytic resources for additional critical analysis. In short, intersectionality, due to its vagueness and inherent open-endedness, has started a process of discovery that not only is potentially interminable, but also promises to yield new and more wide-ranging critical insights.

Ultimately, the most compelling aspect of this concept is its applicability as a transformative and not only analytical tool, as well the revealing and exciting way of making such a morally crucial consideration of expanding care into other realms beyond gender; a question of curiosity, exploration and fruitful debate, rather than being a hard and heavy moral addition to the already too a large range of feminism topics. Yet, the term intersectionality does not reach so far as to automatically provide ways in which to account for the manner in which different intersecting categories such as race, class and gender interact. This is left to the ability of the feminist researcher.

## **Including Natural Concerns**

Following and building upon feminist ideas of care for other categories of humans who are in some other way marginalized, it is not such a large step away from ecofeminism. The struggle for women and other oppressed humans should also imply a struggle for the environment, which not only represents all the other species on the planet who have no voice to represent themselves, as well as it stands for the human habitat, the subsistence of which is a necessary condition for human survival and hence a matter of concern for all. As shown in the previous chapter, nature can be seen as oppressed and exploited and it cannot speak for itself. Concrete stances and a more comprehensive account of ecofeminist theory will be examined in the following chapter. However, to find a common denominator and sticking to the least compromising ecofeminist thought, ecology concerns all of humanity and hence should also concern feminists. This is exemplified by numerous current critical phenomena such as the increase of environmental catastrophes, that we are facing the 6th mass extinction and others. Working towards a truly sustainable ecology is a matter of survival. The dominant growth paradigm contributes significantly to environmental destruction, which makes it necessary to scrutinize this paradigm. The last point made implies an appeal for feminism not only to see the private as political, but also to regard the political as private- the twisted version of which has incidentally been taken up as a motto by a degrowth movement conference.

## **3.6 Conclusion**

As seen in this chapter, the origins of the feminist movement can be historically traced back to the specific concerns of a particular group of women, who formed what is now called the first

wave of feminism. Over time the feminism has grown, evolved and split into factions, so that today it is represented by a large array of sub-movements, each with their own understandings and values. The second wave, faced with increasing internal debates and contradictions, split into factions as its proponents could no longer claim to share a common banner of goals and values. Feminists of the third-wave, rather than striving for cohesion and trying to overcome mentioned divisions, have sought to contain them within one overarching ideology. While the third wave manages to give space to a wide array of different voices, one should not mistake it for being neutral. A remarkable feature of the third wave ideology is that it tends to promote the choice of the individual and the openness for diverging personal narratives without explicit larger theoretical or political patterns. Moreover it has a strong focus on media and images. On the one hand the focus on media and personal experiences is accurate as a reflection of the third wave generation, where media play a crucial role and post-modern experience of different converging identities result in unique descriptions of feminist thinkers. On the other hand, this open structure simultaneously makes the third wave resemble a neoliberal market of ideas, rather than a social movement. In other words, the third wave may seem somewhat shallow and a-political due to a lack of generalizability and theory as well as an abundance of particular narratives that focus on personal identities and experience. The post-feminist era, as some have called what is left of contemporary feminism, is only an even stronger reification of the principles that the third wave already endorses: bluntly speaking, feminism is considered to be anything that you (as a feminist) choose it to be. It is nobody else's business.

Remembering the endeavor of understanding whether feminism is inherently critical of economic growth, it has become clear that what comes closest to uniting feminism today

under one banner is a type of feminism which not only accepts the current economic paradigm but perfectly fits into it. Hence when searching for an ally to join, enhance and complement the degrowth movement, feminism in general is not the right answer.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that counter-voices within contemporary feminist understandings exist. Some of these warn that a conflation of feminist acts with the choice of a feminist, as proposed in contemporary pluralist understandings, is a way to render feminism useless altogether. Thus, the question of what can be seen as feminist, needs to be discussed. Another critical voice claims that when feminism is asserted to have achieved its goals—as post-feminist advocates often do—feminism is in fact buried alive. It suffices to take a look at the growing rate of gender equality at the institutional level, to understand that feminism is active and alive on the one hand, and yet has a long way to go on the other.

Basing myself on the dominant overarching themes of third wave feminism, as well as post-feminism<sup>7</sup>, I find that their structure exhibit strong neo-liberal traits, which refutes the idea that overall feminism is critical of growth. In fact, I observe that we cannot claim feminism as a whole to be critical toward the economic growth paradigm. This brings about the question what can or cannot be said or done in the name of feminism. As I see the overall feminist movement disintegrate into its separate parts, held together by a liberal feminist umbrella and inviting us to *pick and choose* our own feminist lifestyle, I apply this principle to promote my own subversive version of feminism, which is not limited to my own individual feminist needs and choices but is a result of my reflection upon what feminism

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<sup>7</sup>In my analysis I shall concentrate on the third wave, since it is arguable if post-feminism still counts as feminism.

should endorse without contradicting itself and in the spirit of positive transformation. While we can consider the third wave to be dominantly represented by a continued thread of white upper class neoliberal ideology, this does not mean that numerous other feminisms exist in parallel, which actively seek and promote alternative discourses with their own set of questions and concerns. Having arrived in an era where feminism is not one thing but multiple, we might as well stop and think critically which type we endorse and why. Following this idea, I have presented my own thoughts on relevant feminist qualities and thereby reveal four points I find to be characteristic of feminism: 1) Commitment to gender equality, 2) Acknowledgment of patriarchy's deep roots and hence the necessity to deeply challenge patriarchy, 3) the recognition of intersectionality—the fact that patriarchy's underlying mechanism, that of domination, stretches beyond the category of gender and finally, 4) the notion that by consistently following a feminist ideology it makes sense to care for our environment.

In presenting my own feminism view, I have used the present feminist "market" to pick and choose those aspects that I find most valuable in feminism, and have thereby laid a basis for the following chapter, where I will refer to particular concrete feminist ideas that contribute to the degrowth debate. In this context, the feminism I support serves as a lens to view the world beyond the category of women's issues. This notion is in alignment with the reversal of the feminist saying *the private is political* into *the political is private*, which has been embraced by the degrowth movement (Wichterich, 2014:2).

In conclusion, the question is no longer whether or not feminism is fit for joining degrowth, and it is also not whether we have transcended feminism or whether it still makes sense. Feminist imaginary is the basis of feminist action. Hence feminism remains, as long as

for some people it remains relevant and used. In the following chapter I present a range of feminist ideas that resonate with, complement or constructively challenge degrowth discourse.



## Chapter 4 — Degrowth and Feminism

### 4.1 The Political is Private

The previous chapter introduced the movement of feminism and elaborated on the question whether feminism can potentially become allies with the degrowth movement in order for both to jointly face the challenges of the patriarchal growth paradigm. While the growth economy exhibits patriarchal traits, one cannot claim that feminism generally has a critical stance towards the growth-based economy. Despite the fact that contemporary dominant feminist discourse attempts to integrate most of the different types of feminism, it resonates loudly with the neoliberal ideology of consumerism and individualism. Nevertheless, we can expect alternative feminist perspectives to subsist and present valuable ideas which can serve to further the degrowth debate. It is these perspectives that shall be examined in this chapter, bearing in mind the question how they can contribute to degrowth.

Inspecting these diverse types of feminism more closely, it becomes apparent that, to a certain extent, degrowth has made use of feminist theory such as the first GDP critique by Marilyn Waring (1988) or the application of a variation of the *private is political* (Wichterich, 2014). Moreover, specific matters that degrowth in particular examines, are also addressed by certain types of feminism. Finally, there have been a few feminist contributions which have actively engaged with the discursive field of degrowth. These contributions have been divided into three main themes: care work, sharing, and subsistence economy.

## 4.2 Feminisms that Condemn the Growth Economy

There are several types of feminism that do have a critical stance towards the Growth Economy, for several different reasons. The ones I will deal with in this subchapter are feminist economics, several streams of ecofeminism, including ecofeminist political economics, and materialist ecofeminism, and finally feminist care ethics.

### **Feminist Economics**

One of the most notable early growth critiques was made by feminist Marilyn Waring who can be considered a pioneer of feminist economics. In the late 1980s, she published the book *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* (Waring, 1988). In it she proposes quality of life indicators rather than monetized exchanges as measures of progress, that take into account the gender dimension. Since then, repudiations of growth as the main indicator have proliferated (Brownhill et al., 2012), coming from in and outside feminism.

A contemporary example of the critique of current economic measurement is presented by the internationally renowned author Riane Eisler in her work *The Real Wealth of Nations: Claiming a "caring economy"* (Eisler, 2008). In her work, the interdisciplinary social sciences and feminist peace scholar criticizes contemporary economic theory and practice. She aims at redirecting the entire economy towards well-being and cohesion, human and social growth, a sustainable resource use and society-nature-relations, while avoiding renewed dominance over and exploitation of the *other*, the global South, cheap labor and nature (Wichterich, 2014). While Eisler's presented insights are not in themselves new, what is striking is that she makes a comprehensive and vivid synthesis of important works drawing

from economics, sociology, history, political science, and other fields into an integral piece of writing. However, coming back to the basic foundations of feminist economics critique, it is interesting to consider further studies that highlighted the patriarchal character of economics. Thereby, it is unsurprising to note a connection between feminist economics and ecofeminism, which parallels the same two conflating areas that the degrowth pillar of ecological economics represents. Similarly, the different feminist areas that regard economic growth critically sometimes overlap with each other, which makes their categorization contingent and reveals the fluidity between these notions, as they are artificially separated for analytical purposes.

### **Ecofeminist Political Economy**

An analysis of women's work can expose the link between unsustainable economic systems and the embedded nature of human existence. The basic ecofeminist case is that dominant men have created male-dominated socio-economic systems that have not incorporated the embodied and embedded nature of human existence. Instead, this has been rejected and despised as women's work. Valued economic systems have therefore been erected on a false base. Ecofeminists such as Maria Mies, have seen the valued economy as a small tip of a much greater sustaining whole. For Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies (2005), the valued economy is the tip of a massive iceberg, where below the water line is the invisible economy that includes the world of unpaid work, subsistence and natural resources (Bianchi, 2012). For Henderson (1996) the market sector is the icing on a cake (Mellor, 2006). Beneath the icing, lies the public sector, the non-market sector and *Mother Nature*. The filling of the

cake is the informal cash economy, which in practice forms a large part of the world's money-based economies. What the valued economy is not recognizing is the precariousness of its transcendent position; its immanence in the sustaining systems that support it (Mellor, 1997a). As Plumwood (1993) argues, the dualist and gendered economic system is highly unstable because it does not acknowledge its dependency:

After much destruction, mastery will fail, because the master denies dependence on the sustaining other: he misunderstands the conditions of his own existence and lacks sensitivity to limits and to the ultimate points of Earthian existence (Plumwood in Mellor, 2006:145).

In the 1980s, several studies highlighted the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Patriarchy rather than being an idea or an interpretative category, is a system of power relationships, which views women and colonies as resources, to be exploited just like nature (Bianchi, 2012). This trend of interpretation is fundamental to the work of the *Bielefeld School*, which includes Maria Mies, Claudia von Werlhof and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen. In particular, Maria Mies' work *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1999) has had a significant impact. In her introduction the author states:

The confusions in the feminist movement worldwide will continue unless we understand the "woman question" in the context of all social relations that constitute our reality today, that means in the context of a global division of labor under the dictates of capital accumulation. The subordination and exploitation of women, nature, and colonies are the precondition for the continuation of this model (Mies in Bianchi, 2012:12).

Building on the feminist debate around the tasks of production and reproduction, which had developed over the previous decade, Maria Mies gives attention to the significance of unpaid working relationships in capitalist accumulation. This includes domestic work in industrialized countries and the subsistence economies of the global south. Remembering the influence of the 1972 writings by Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the*

*Subversion of the Community*, and Selma James' *A Woman's Place*, who before her interpreted domestic work as a means of capitalist accumulation, Mies writes:

The discovery, however, that housework under capitalism had also been excluded per definition from the analysis of the capitalism proper, and that this was the mechanism by which it became a "colony" and a source for unregulated exploitation, opened our eyes to the analysis of other such colonies of non-wage-labor exploitation, particularly the work of small peasants and women in Third World countries (Mies in Bianchi, 2012:12).

In her work *Women and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1902) defined domestic work as *immediate altruism*, a type of activity that satisfies immediate needs without expecting any financial reward. Bruna Bianchi (2012) avers that maternal sentiment symbolizes the sustaining of life in all cultures as she notes that a number of feminists have pointed to the symbolic order of the mother in their critique of the unlimited growth paradigm. Considering a model of a worker that is not a white male industrial waged worker, but a mother, it becomes clear that her work conflicts with the Marxist concept of a laborer. For her, work signifies both: a burden and a source of enjoyment, self-fulfillment and happiness. While children may cost her a significant amount of effort and trouble, this work is never completely alienated or dead. Her relationship to her work is still more human than the indifferent position the industrial worker or engineer has *vis à vis* the fruits of his labor, the commodities he produces and consumes (Mies in Bianchi, 2012).

### **Ecofeminism as an Umbrella Term**

The previous section has discussed ecofeminist political economy as a field that is critical of the growth economy. In order to deepen the analysis of the ecofeminist growth critique I shall elaborate on some of some ecofeminist theoretical thoughts and main commonalities and

differences within ecofeminist thought. Ecofeminism is an umbrella concept for all feminist lineages with an ecological dimension. The main contention in ecofeminism is that there are important links between the domination and oppression of the environment or ecology and women subjugated by patriarchy (Kaur, 2012). However, different types of ecofeminism diverge in their foci and in the manner in which the double oppression takes place as well as the nature of the connection between women ecology. The main distinction that can be made is between cultural ecofeminism and materialist or socialist ecofeminism; the two latter ones have been said to denote quite similar positions (Tong, 2009). However, before going into these distinctions and their underlying debates I shall outline some of the strategies and premises ecofeminist scholarship makes use of.

### *Domination of Woman and of Nature*

In 1975, Rosemary Ruether argued that women must recognize the relationships of domination that perpetuates the oppression and unites the demand of the women's movement and that of the environment.

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (Ruether in Bianchi, 2012:3).

In line with the domination argument, Carson (1999) proposed a radical critique of science, which anticipates the criticism advanced by contemporary ecofeminism: the craving for dominion over nature, seen purely as a resource, is related to the destruction of life on the planet (Bianchi, 2012). Carson's work went unrecognized in governmental and industrial

circles, yet greatly influenced movements which emerged in the USA a decade later. The movements were feminist, pacifist, antinuclear, animal welfarist and environmentalist, and they increasingly yielded awareness that the ideology justifying oppression on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality or species is the same ideology that permits human dominion over nature. While feminist interpretations of dominion in the first place evolve around dominion over women, the wider implications of this reach into other areas where dominion plays a role. This shows itself in that generally, the oppressed tend to be simultaneously feminized and naturalized (Plumwood in Bianchi, 2012:8).

### *Revealing underlying Patriarchal Conceptions*

As seen above, one of the crucial aspects that ecofeminists recognize is the distinctive patriarchal construction of nature: as Carolyn Merchant (1989) shows in her piece *The Death of Nature*, the vision of the world and science which asserted men's dominion over women and nature is that of a machine, rather than a living organism. This conceptual death of nature, implying a perception of nature as an accumulation of inert material forms a prerequisite for the scrupulousness with which accelerated and indiscriminate exploitation of human and natural resources, could take place in a legitimized form. In her work she contends that science and masculinity are bound up together. In the light of this, she reveals two fundamental stereotypes in the relationship between women and science: first, the linking objectivity with masculinity and subjectivity with femininity, and secondly by identifying science as a human activity devoid of values or emotional connotations.

Ecofeminists have advocated for a change in the symbolic order of death towards a life embracing order. This entails abandoning the linear, fragmentary and abstract thinking that the aforementioned politics of universalistic categories promotes, and moving towards one which is respectful of subjectivity and individuality, cherishing plurality and difference. In this context, the symbolic meaning of motherhood has been emphasized to represent caring of and embracing the *other* as unique and unrepeatable. These contentions do not only represent a scrutiny of patriarchy, but one that questions the whole Western tradition.

### **Divides of Ecofeminism**

Within ecofeminism there is an "essentialist" stream, which regards women and men as distinct as a result of their biological natures. Women are seen as biologically closer to nature than men. This viewpoint has been challenged by activists and scholars arguing in favor of a materialist version of ecofeminism (Martínez-Alier et al., 2014).

The first strand of ecofeminism, which is still prevalent nowadays, is cultural ecofeminism. Developed in the 1970s, cultural ecofeminism reasserts the women-nature connections as liberating and empowering manifestations of women's capabilities to care for nature. The women-nature links that have a particular importance for cultural feminists are entrenched deeply within social and psychological structures and their identification enables a resurrection of pre-patriarchal religions and spiritual practices, making women's epistemologies and moral reasoning better suited to handling environmental problems. The canon of female authors in cultural ecofeminism is predominantly represented by Western writers, such as Starhawk, Ursula Le Guinn, Margaret Atwood and Jane Carson (Kaur, 2012).



The type of ecofeminism that is rooted in cultural feminism is also closely linked with the Gaia hypothesis developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. The Gaia hypothesis claims:

The Earth is an organic whole—Gaia—[and] is a total self-organizing and self-reproducing, organic, spatio-temporal and teleological system with the goal of maintaining itself. ...Man's development of the technosphere is viewed as a threat to the survival of Gaia. (Braidotti in Kaur, 2012:190)

The Gaia hypothesis has also been related to the stream of deep ecology and has brought about theories of interdependencies within the human inorganic and non-human organic world. According to Ynestra King (1990) this type of feminism by itself does not provide a genuinely dialectical ecofeminist theory and practice, which is why, cultural and spiritual feminism is not synonymous with ecofeminism. Creating a gynocentric culture and politics is a required, but not sufficient condition for ecofeminism (Kaur, 2012).

Mentioned critical viewpoint is already found in the work of Simone de Beauvoir, who asserts that to define women as beings who are closer to nature than men is sexist, a viewpoint widely distributed through her book *The Second Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir regrets that women are being defined in terms of the *other*, and once more they are being made into the second *sex*. She wonders why women should be more in favor of peace than men. In her view, peace should be matter of equal concern for both sexes, which is why she finds the equation of feminism and ecology irritating (Beauvoir in Kaur, 2012). This particular set of critiques of cultural ecofeminism asserts that the woman-nature connection reinforces sex-role stereotyping. It is considered as making "essentialist, universalist and ahistorical "statements about women and nature (Warren in Kaur, 2012:190-191). Thus, while the deep identification women have with cultural ecofeminism as it celebrates distinctive female characteristics, this assertion fails to take into account that men also have the capacity to develop an ethic of

caring for nature. Additionally, cultural ecofeminism disregards the social and historical construction of women's lives and identities. It overlooks the material reinforcement of a woman's role in the interplay of a diversity of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, marital status, and geographic factors. Hence, the main problem is that women as a category are homogenized by cultural ecofeminism, and their distinctive characteristics are romanticized.

### **Materialist Ecofeminism**

Socialist or materialist ecofeminism considers environmental problems to be rooted in the advent of capitalist patriarchy and the notion that the Earth and nature can be exploited for human progress through technology (Merchant, 1990). This idea builds upon the notion that men are responsible for labor in the marketplace and women carry the responsibility of labor in the domestic sphere of the home. Due to the fact that the women's main domain of labor is the home, it is unpaid and therefore inferior to men's labor in the marketplace. Nature and human nature are seen as historically and socially constructed, hence connections and interactions between humans, nature, men and women must rely on an understanding of power not only in the private, but also in the political realm. This view illustrates that relationships between women and nature are steeped in social, material and political realities (Kaur, 2012).

## **Feminist Care Ethics**

*Feminist Care Ethics* represent an effort to revise, reformulate, and rethink traditional ethics to the extent that it depreciates or devalues women's moral experience. Though care-focused feminists have been faulted for focusing too much on personal, particularly familial relationships, in fact most care-focused feminists have been quite involved with professional and public concerns. For instance, both Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings endeavor to elucidate the relevance of care-focused feminism for education at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary school (Tong, 2009). Gilligan emphasizes that a key dilemma for American education is how to encourage human responsiveness within a competitive, individualistic culture. According to Gilligan, educators should cultivate their students' empathetic skills and their reasoning skills, otherwise students may do more harm than good. Professional physicians, lawyers, and businesspeople, mainly busy with fighting diseases, winning cases, and increasing profits respectively, are likely to ignore the harm that they cause people through their achievements.

Complementing Gilligan's points, Noddings (2005) insists that educators should teach citizens how to be globally aware. In Noddings's view, global citizens are citizens who care about economic and social justice, protecting the earth, social and cultural diversity, and maintaining world peace. Yet, Noddings recognized the difficulty of teaching global citizenship in nations that aim to maintain their dominance in the world. Peggy McIntosh, a colleague of Noddings, held that many US educators are strikingly ambivalent about helping students develop their care giving skills (Tong, 2009). They see compassionate values as menacing the supposed masculinity that maintains US world power. Particularly young males, may have strong competencies in the caring, relationality, and plural vision that are

fundamental for global citizenship. However, what they are rewarded with is solo risktaking and individualism. White males particularly are encouraged for a go-it-alone bravery without a balanced consideration for, or awareness of, the impact on other people from one's own behavior.

Noddings recognizes that one big hurdle to educating for global citizenship lies in the conflation of care for others with irrational, leftist and unpatriotic ideology. For instance, when U.S. teachers invite students to think critically about the Iraq war, and how Iraqis might have been harmed by it, they are viewed as "left loonies," whose resolve for caring for all the world's people inhibits the American way of life, which is based on the values associated with white male individualism (Noddings in Tong 2009:196). Nonetheless, teachers need to assemble the courage to teach the practice of care to their male and female students. As long as this does not happen, US global awareness cannot ever amount to much. The global policy of the US merely revolves around temporary disaster relief in the aftermath of some natural disaster such as a tsunami or the height of a pandemic: in Noddings view, this form of care is a charity fix that hides the fact U.S society would give no thought to the people who receive their abundant temporary attention, if it were not for the chance of the next event. For both, Gilligan and Noddings, education can be the medium to transport topics from the private realm into the public realm (Tong, 2009). Education is the path by which the ethics of care is exported into the public realm. The two writers claim that care ethics should be the primary ethics used in the professional and public realms. Also Sara Ruddick (1998) argues that the reason there is so much violence in the world, including the horror of war, is that there is too little care in the world.

In Ruddick's view, what she calls maternal thinkers have an *obligation* to become peace activists. They should also become advocates for a sustainable economy and social justice. Moreover, maternal thinkers need to enter the public and professional domain with the purpose of shaping policies, institutions, and laws that will allow all children and not just their own children to prosper. Contrary to the allegation that care ethics deals with private matters, Ruddick affirms that maternal thinkers cannot afford to stay at home. It is their ethics of care that must burst out into the professional and public realms. Adding to the previous ideas, Virginia Held claims that market norms, the norms of efficiency and productivity, should not be permitted to have priority in education, childcare, health care, culture, and environmental protection (Tong, 2009). Furthermore, she argues that even areas that are by default governed by individual striving, self-interest and the maximization of satisfaction should be guided much more by the concerns of care than is presently. With the intention to make realistic propositions, Held gives concrete suggestions to care thinkers: to resist the extension of market values into areas that until recently had considered market values entirely inappropriate. For instance, care thinkers should oppose markets in human organs as well as human gametes—in other words to resist the commodification of body parts which are capable of saving or improving human lives. A further step would to more forcefully push care values, in order to reverse the encroachment of market values, into realms of human life where they have traditionally prevailed and where they have been accepted.

Held states that we should not rule out the possibility that economies and corporations could be much more guided by concerns of care than they are presently (Tong, 2009). Economies could promote what people actually need in a ways that contribute to human thriving. Hence, long before an economy itself is inclined towards the values of caring,

persons for whom care is a key value can and should influence the extent of the market. As a society, we should attempt to shrink rather than to expand the market in ways that different values can flourish. Those who care for their children and their futures, can become aware of the multiple values external to the market which should be valued and encouraged. In this spirit, we can argue in favor of the kinds of social and economic and other arrangements that reflect and promote these values. These submissions show that Held does not limit the ethics of care to the private realm. Nonetheless, she prioritizes strengthening care thinking in the private domain first, in order to incorporate enough men and women to catapult it with full force into a public realm that is traditionally resistant to it.

Families make great efforts to connect their personal and professional lives, and as workers from all layers of society begin to press their employers to enable them to balance their work and personal responsibilities, more space is being created for care in the public domain. While a proliferation of lawsuits is not an ideal means to cajole employers towards transforming their workplaces into care-friendly ones, it is still a way to make governments pass care-friendly laws, and laws which help restrain the market forces that Held refers to. In some parts of the world societies have implemented quite care-friendly laws. In Sweden, parents have the right to work a six-hour day at a prorated salary until their children turn 8 years old (Swedish Institute, 2013). Although policies such as that of Sweden's, which require lengthy paid care-giving leave may be considered a strain on the economy, such policies increasingly pervade a number of European nations, which at least partially consider care a public matter.

If one follows the previous arguments, Fiona Robinson's claim is that if we focus our attention on making care important in the public realm, there is no reason why the ethics of

care could not be *globalized* (Tong, 2009; Robinson, 2011). Robinson, who was struck by the dreadfulness of world poverty, advocated that we need a feminist care ethics, which is specific enough to help privileged people realize how their wealth makes them liars if they engage in rights discourse without engaging in care action. She admits that those people who would rather hang on to the "familiar language of rights and duties, justice and reciprocity" and the alleged certainty of the type of ethics that instructs us what to do, than to providing us with universal standards by which to decide the justice or injustice of all forms of human activity, might not consider a feminist ethics of care to be attractive (Robinson in Tong 2009:199). These critics will most probably continue dismissing and misinterpreting the notion of care as "sentimental, nepotistic, relativistic, paternalistic, and even dangerous." (Robinson in Tong 2009:199). However, the fact that large numbers of critics oppose care ethics should not hold care-focused feminists back from the endeavor of developing particularly demanding ethics, which may, hopefully, become globalized. This sort of ethics necessitates that all people and nations assume their fair share of care work with the goal of making the lives of all of the world's inhabitants worth living.

### **4.3 Feminist Contributions to Degrowth**

Speaking in waves terminology the degrowth discourse can be considered the third wave of the growth critique: the first one emerged around the famous Club of Rome's publication *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, feeding into concepts of steady state and degrowth (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010). In the 1990s, ecological economists, post-developmentalists and ecofeminists criticized unsustainable and neo-colonial patterns of overproduction and overconsumption. As

an alternative model they drafted concepts of a sufficiency economy and a subsistence perspective (Wichterich, 2014). Given that economic growth is not a neutral process with regard to gender, according to Bruna Bianchi (2012) the degrowth project cannot avoid investigating in depth the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. The question which she poses is the following: can the criticism against the paradigm of unlimited growth, the pull towards an economy not based on money, and being respectful of nature, find common ground with the perspectives provided by feminism, particularly ecofeminism, of a moral economy based on the protection of life and on subsistence, untied from dominion over women and over nature (Bianchi, 2012)? Like Bianchi I am interested in tracing the way in which feminism has contributed to the degrowth debate.

One of the main feminist themes in degrowth is in line with the old feminist saying of “we don’t want a larger slice of the poisoned cake” (Devaki Jain, 2000:21) and Bella Abzug's phrase “we don’t want to be mainstreamed into a polluted stream” (Moghadam, 2005:168). These feminists do not believe in market, techno and quick efficiency solutions for the economic and ecological crises. For them, the banner of degrowth is a chance to connect three significant feminist discourses of the recent past: the care perspective, commons and sharing, the critique of overconsumption, production and extractivism (Wichterich, 2014). Care, commons and a culture of enough may be seen as tactical sites for transformation and landmarks of another development paradigm. Feminists at the Leipzig conference highlighted these three reference points since they share a rationale of social reproduction, provisioning, protection, precaution, nursing, subsistence, cooperation and reciprocity that counterpoises the growth and efficiency canon of capitalist markets and the goal of accumulation of capital and material goods.



## Care for Care Work: Challenges and Opportunities

### *Taking on the Care Perspective*

Practitioners believe, with ecofeminist economists (Waring, 1988), that caring is more crucial for human welfare than commodity production – we ought to safeguard the caring capacities of our societies as much as the carrying capacity of our ecology. Degrowth activities promote cooperation with local, regional and even national authorities, rather than relying heavily on governmental measures, yet they do not shy back from demanding national and supranational policy reversals (Martínez-Alier et al., 2014). Claiming a *caring state* does not mean to ask for a restoration of the European welfare state that generated prosperity through the neo-colonial exploitation of unexploited human and natural resources in the Global South and by the usage of women’s unpaid care work within the male breadwinner model. However, there is a need for a state that can break away from the neoliberal focus of maximizing competitiveness. The state must shift its focus on fair distribution through regulation and taxation of real and financial markets, and on preservation of nature, as well as social reproduction.

The advantage for feminists here is to bring the viewpoint of care into the new social movements and to connect it to resistance against the economization and financialization of everything. For example, the German network “care revolution” brings together hundreds of small initiatives which revolve around provision, social reproduction and commoning at the margins or outside of the capitalist market economy: guerrilla gardening and food coops, bee keeping on the roof tops in cities and honey production, user cooperatives, clothes exchange, tools and technology. Instead of a hammer and sickle the symbols of this network are the toilet brush and the cake roll, and the main slogan says “care revolution against capital and the

permanent crisis of reproduction” (Wichterich, 2014:3).

Beck and Pürckhauer (2014) argue that care can be formulated as an elemental social right. That way, it becomes a societal necessity and responsibility, which could guarantee that care does not remain precarious. As a first step, union struggles within feminized jobs could be supported that would impede a further worsening of the care situation and would politicize women's concerns. Additionally, governmental policies and support should aim at encouraging men to enter traditionally female roles, for instance by an active support for men as caregivers, as well monetary support for leave during child caring, which should be equally distributed amongst men and women.

### *The Value of Unpaid Contributions*

According to Patricia E. Perkins (2010) one way to view feminist ecological economics is that it deals mainly with the interface between paid and unpaid contributions to the measured economy. The undervalued parts include women's work, including all under- and unpaid work and non-monetized services, as well as material inputs from nature which, as they become economically considerable, are introduced into the economic sphere almost for free. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, feminist writers have demonstrated that capitalism was founded and continues to be dependent on the unpaid and underpaid work of women. Mary Mellor (2006) and Ariel Salleh (2009) and a number of other theorists have followed the material connections between women's work and what economists refer to as *ecosystem services*. According to Perkins (2010), these instances of underpayment and disparity based on social injustice and ecological degradation, and the predictable manner in which they

create economic winners and losers, are based on colonialism, patriarchy, under-development<sup>8</sup>, and race and class discrimination within both individual countries and globally.

Whenever they are estimated as shown by Robert Costanza (1997), Hilikka Pietilä (1997), Giacomod'Alisa (2009), these unpaid or so-called free services and goods generally dwarf the calculated economy in value, however they are usually not considered important enough to policy deliberations and are often ignored completely. Hence, women's work and nature are fundamental and irreplaceable foundations of the economy (Perkins, 2010). In this context, one crucial pitfall needs to be exposed here. As long as degrowth is merely about, or includes, moving the frontier between the paid and the unpaid further towards the unpaid, it fails to address concerns about relative values, undervaluation, and justice. In fact, degrowth might even worsen the exploitation of underpaid workers, and of nature. This is because, as economies become increasingly local and service-oriented in order to create less material throughput, there will be changes in how much work is done, and by whom, and how much trade takes place as well as who is put out of work as a result, and whose economic needs are met or remain unmet (Perkins, 2010).

In the context of growth, reproductive activities are frequently described as being excluded from market exchange and deemed as unproductive. Their contribution to reproducing work, like education or nutrition, is not included in the calculation of production costs and is not considered as generating economic value. Their inclusion in production costs

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<sup>8</sup>I prefer employing the term poverty instead of under-development. Using the term under-development might suggest an uncritical understanding of this concept and its underlying power, as well as the detrimental effects of the US led development agenda (Escobar, 1994).

would diminish current growth rates. Therefore, recognizing them as being valuable for the economy is seen as essential and a reconsideration of the separation of paid and unpaid labor becomes imperative. While Beck and Pürckhauer (2014) agree with the fact that reproductive work cannot be seen as a free gift, the way in which these activities are valued and reconfigured is an important aspect of building a just, social and ecological economy premised on degrowth (Beck & Pürckhauer, 2014).

### *Valuing Reproductive Work*

Over the past decades we can observe a feminization of labor. A growing number of reproductive work has become valued economically. In addition, more and more females have entered the realm of paid work. This process developed as a consequence of the debate over wages for housework in the 1970's, which demanded the valuation of reproductive activities. Hence, according to Beck and Pürckhauer (2014) the argument surrounding reproduction concerns both paid and unpaid activities. It is crucial to consider that the tendency of giving an economic value to *women's work* has allowed the emancipation of women to a certain extent. Yet it also led to a further entrenchment of the capitalistic logic. Rather than revaluing reproductive labor, this process subsumed many women to market principles which resulted in higher profits for capitalists. Moreover, sadly, the feminization of women's work has not had an effect of equity in terms of work distribution. It is still women who continue engaging in most types of reproductive labor.

The authors assert that the commodified reproductive labor is mostly done by women but at least it is marked by a gendered division of work. They observe that so-called *feminine*

labor activities are poorly remunerated as they typically yield low rates of monetary return for capital investment. Yet those reproductive activities that remained in the *private sphere* continued to be carried out by women. Hence, many females became doubly burdened. This is worsened by a retrenchment of the welfare state that has reduced the compensation for reproductive work and has forced many women to engage in paid labor in addition to reproductive labor. Simultaneously, real wages are stagnating and an increasing amount of paid hours is required to at least maintain monetary income, which is essential to pay for reproductive activities. In this context Beck and Pürckhauer (2014) disclose that the same inequalities and uneven distributions of work seen in gender can also be seen across race, ethnicity and classes. The authors conclude that the goal of an economic revaluation of reproductive activities, which some feminists advocated has not led to the desired outcomes. Although the cost of unpaid reproductive work has been studied, it has not led to overcoming gender discrimination, but has in fact become entrenched within society a capitalist market logic. Inexpensive and unpaid or undervalued care work persists and must be overcome. Therefore it is crucial for degrowth proponents to discover ways to handle the twin challenge of valued and non-discriminatory ideas of labor. Specific examples about an improved way of configuring labor, reproduction and leisure may provide a way out and avert an exacerbation of social circumstances.

## **Sharing the Burdens and Benefits**

### *Justice, Commons and Sharing*

As Ellie Perkins explicates, the notion of the commons transcends the idea of a common-property administration that keeps socio-political structures in place to prevent open access (Perkins, 2015). The vision of commons, according to Perkins more widely refers to people working cooperatively, in order to build methods of production, service provision, and exchange that generate value and well-being as they integrate ecological care, justice, and long-term planning employing the diverse communities' abilities at their best. This structure includes institutions such as co-ops, land trusts, and non-market or beyond-market collective strategies of organizing production, distribution, consumption, and waste or materials management. Monitoring and checking open access through strong social institutions could thus preclude the so-called *tragedy of the commons*. According to Perkins, this necessitates a high level of general civic consciousness, co-operation, the ability to listen and mediate differing goals, conflict resolution, flexibility and good will throughout society, especially in the context of social dynamism and diversity. While the positive outcome of such management of the commons is not automatic, meticulous research by Nobel Economics Laureate Elinor Ostrom and others, has shown that overcoming the tragedy of the commons is possible in the described way.

A further insight related to distributive justice is a reconceptualization of the metaphorical pie that is often utilized in a growth-based discourse. Within an economic growth paradigm, as the economic pie grows, there is no need for redistribution of the pieces since everyone gets enough. Hence, with the right political conditions, growth allows for incomes and resources to be divided without too much conflict. However, from an

ecofeminist degrowth perspective there is no increase of the pie but a decrease. Hence, if some are to gain resources others need to give them up. The assumption is that people usually prefer peaceful and democratic governance, which is why it seems fit to assign slightly larger portions of a growing pie to previously- underprivileged groups so that overall, inequality is diminished over time. Yet, metaphorical pies, in particular growing ones, contain fruit and crusts, and furthermore take energy to bake. Perkins asks the crucial question of what mechanisms can be implemented to address historically conditioned material inequities, both among and within countries and regions, but also globally. Within degrowth progressive redistribution needs a new type of engine (Perkins, 2010).

When considering distribution, Beck and Pürckhauer (2014) stress that the public sphere should grant equal access to men and women in the sense that free, high quality childcare should be provided for, as well as support in the reduction of working hours. However, these are merely first steps in the quest of attaining a more just labor distribution. Such propositions tend to have an affirmative character as they usually entrench the division of the public and the private sector without challenging the production patterns that are generally based on economic growth. In the spirit of Nancy Fraser's combination of redistribution and recognition, it is crucial that redistributive policies provide ways to overcome the market and monetary logic.

Beck and Pürckhauer call to consider in what ways we can transform labor as an activity that overcomes gender discrimination within a production process that fosters an understanding of communal resources. The quest here, is to find how this newly conceptualized labor can be framed a manner that bypass the market and logics. In their view, degrowth might contribute valuable answers to this (Beck & Pürckhauer, 2014). They contend

that for the establishment of degrowth perspectives, it is crucial to consider the organization of work as a primordial and unavoidable starting point. Beyond the question of how much is produced and how production takes place, the ways in which we understand labor in terms of work division are also relevant to the fundamental question of how societal relations are organized. These ideas are crucial to address in any model building of a non-discriminatory concept of labor, which respects gender justice and degrowth.

### *The Reinvention of the Commons and De-alienation*

The feminists Brownhill, Turner, and Kaara (2012) stress that degrowth, in order to be more than just a range of policies that could be co-opted by capitalists, must engage in the re-establishment and reinvention of the commons. This can be attained through the de-alienation of labor, a process which necessarily implies efforts to overturn patriarchy and racism, being problems that are still largely ignored by degrowth proponents (Saed, 2012). Brownhill et al. (2012) point to the fact that degrowth values raise the reconceptualization of the notion of capital, and suggest steady-state-like regulation of everyday practices. Yet, they argue, what these values do not emphasize enough is that "the political project of a concrete utopia for degrowth" (Brownhill et al., 2012:94) necessarily implies a reconceptualization of the notion of the commons and, furthermore, a re-enactment of actual commoning. The authors hence present a scheme for scrutinizing processes by which commoning might be reinterpreted and its ongoing reinvention elucidated and assessed. The Occupy Everywhere movement, including the Arab revolution and myriad of other social movements, presents other antecedents as an important example of commoning in contemporary culture. These



demonstrate a renovation of the practice of democracy in egalitarian, horizontal social relations, and environmentally informed subsistence-oriented livelihood practices. This idea of the commons trigger ongoing local-to-planetary efforts to gather power that can reverse and un-do corporate enclosures (Brownhill et al., 2012).

It is from this vantage point, that according to Brownhill et al., that the degrowth of capital is achieved through the re-growth of commoning. The prominence of the expansion of commoning in fact characterizes East Africa's already-existing transformative social movements. Yet, the authors argue, this emphasis goes largely unnoticed by the degrowth proponents so far. This Occupy Together or Occupy Everywhere movement of the 99 percenters<sup>9</sup> has gone viral, with an ensuing virtually global popular occupation of the commons including parks, squares, streets and seats of state, as well as financial, and corporate power.

Brownhill and her colleagues continue arguing in feminist Marxist terms. By engaging in a gendered interpretation of Marx on alienation, the utter dehumanization particularly of women, can be clearly discerned. Women have been witch-hunted and dispossessed, losing property, professions, and status in Europe between roughly 1450 and 1750 (Monter 2010). Women have historically been colonized and enslaved in the global South. A relentless striving for accumulation has reduced women to labor power producers, in their role as womb carriers under the control of husbands, religious institutions, and the state.

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<sup>9</sup> The 99 Percenters is a an Occupy Wallstreet Slogan which points to the unequal distribution of wealth, with a minority of 1% controlling the rest and that this dynamics should be reversed by the majority rising to take power back (True Patriot Network, 2011)

Hence, women have been separated from the fundamental means of production and have been *housewifized* or forced to rely on husbands and other disciplinarians for access to inadequate ways of surviving. Due to the gendered and ethnicized nature of the class formations that occur in capital's processes of enclosure and alienation, it is unsurprising that those people who can be seen as the most exploited of the world are those who feature most prominently among the most advanced peoples, in terms of re-inventing the commons. Furthermore, it is no accident that those who are still partly rooted in the pre-colonial commoning social relations of cooperation, ecological stewardship, and autonomous political organizing hold rich resources from which to draw in struggles to re-enact new commoning relations. De-alienation thus calls for the substitution of the capital relation with the recuperation of the *species-being* and the re-invention of the *gendered commons* (Brownhill, 2009).

The authors explain in which way they apply Marxist theory, highlighting that their understandings of Marx's four features of alienation are not reified interpretations of holy text. They are rather elucidated and reconfirmed through practice by the already-existing movements to recuperate the earthly commons, by the main actors in the process of de-alienation. These movements are locally ingrained and extend globally, and each has a rich history. In East Africa such movements cover a very long, strong, creative, and continuing period of self-organization for social reconstruction and transformation (Turner 1994; Brownhill, 2009a).

De-alienation in practical terms thus signified eliminating our exploited conditions by re-integrating with others, which means working collectively; re-establishing the *species-being* and in that the acknowledgment of one's inter-connection with all other animate and inanimate beings; returning power over processes of production to producers; and finally,

regaining dominion over the products of our work. De-alienation starts and ends socially, necessitating the agency and diversity of every individual. The means and ends of de-alienation are social. The social relations of commoning are rebuilt through unity and collectivity, which implies the reversal of atomized individualism. Collectivity includes the extension of the idea of self, elucidating the notion that the life of the individual human being or the family is an inextricable part of the planet-sized experience of humanity and all other animate and inanimate beings, in its entirety.

This perception manifests as the reintegration of people with themselves, others, nature, and their spiritual lives that is, with the species being. Earth is conceived as part of this eco-socialist, eco-feminist notion of the species being. Thus far the whole of nature has already become a part of this conception so that there is, since the April 2010 Cochabamba, Bolivia world conference on climate change and the rights of Mother Earth, an increasing movement to legislate binding Rights of Nature through the United Nations (Brownhill et al., 2012).

## **Towards a Subsistence Economy**

### *Abandoning overconsumption, production and extractivism*

The idea of subsistence stands in opposition to the notion of *welfare* as commonly conceived in Western countries. Economic growth and the production of goods and money form the basis of welfare, since this includes the destruction of nature, of life and of all which we call humanity (Bianchi, 2012) yields a viewpoint that can help to guide social action in every sphere of human activity. According to Janis Birkeland (1993) it is based on a consciousness

that the degradation and oppression of women, the exploitation of their labor, of nature, and of peoples in the global south are the preconditions for the successful operation of the growth paradigm, that atrocious image of masculinity created by developmentalists. In the last few years, attention has turned to the incessant deterioration of women's living conditions in the context of globalization, which generates new disparities, deepens the old ones, consumes and kills life at an ever-increasing speed (Salleh, 2009) and brings about new challenges for ecofeminism. In the end through the process of production and consumption, we are all caught up in environmental destruction, in death and in war. "The relationships between nature, work and capital are some of the areas of the social organization of human existence whereby violence, including the most severe form – the power to kill – is supported and continually reproduced (Charkiewicz, 2009:67). The wish to avoid any such complicity has lent great impetus to the criticism of the unlimited growth paradigm, stimulated by the philosophy that has led the struggles of women in the global south. In all those nations, in fact, women undeniably play leading roles in movements to protect land and forests from destruction and privatization.

In this context, a famous historical example is the Chipko movement (Bianchi, 2012) better known as the tree-huggers, which is a movement led by women in defense of the trees in the Himalayan forests in 1973. The women who defended their forests succeeded when in 1980 the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi banned felling trees in these regions (Weber, 2004). In the aftermath of this movement, women founded cooperatives to protect local forests and among others, organized to replant degraded land. By preserving seeds, planting trees, and occupying uncultivated land, they avow the principle of food sovereignty, generate new

economies based on a non-competitive, community way of life, economies that renew ecological processes and stimulate creativity, solidarity and social cooperation.

There are numerous practical implementations of ecofeminist principles, some of which stand out for the diverse scope of their effects. For instance, the Kenyan activist and researcher Wangari Maathai set up a reforestation project in Kenya in 1977, with the main aim of promoting a positive image of women and their independence (Weber, 1988; Michaelson, 1994; Shiva, 2002; Maathai, 2006; Maathai, 2010).

In the years 1980 and 1981, two crucial events made the ecofeminism visible on an international level: in 1980, two-thousand women encircled the Pentagon in Washington to protest against nuclear power (Bianchi, 2012). In 1981 a similar protest was held at the Greenham Common missile base in England. One of the main concerns expressed during these protests was the potential annihilation of the planet by the force of destructive technology.

### *Reproduction and Nature*

In the recent past, the West has also been introduced to a new orientation that has allowed the creation of alternative local economies, the creation of communities that reveal the centrality of domestic life, based on subsistence ethics, whereby work has no goal beyond the direct production of life, and where people learn to live in another temporal dimension, namely that of biological time, that is women's time when they perform the task of caring. Only a different perception of time, work and economics will make it possible to overcome sexual divides in the workplace. Only a novel perception of work, displayed through the way in

which a society relates to the environment, can eliminate the mystique surrounding the idea that people can reproduce their own existence through paid work. The simple insight which springs from this and which we get the chance to remember, is that life reproduces itself, not in an exchange with capital, but with nature. In a salient essay written by the Finnish economist Hilikka Pietilä (1997) the action linked to the task of creating and preserving life has recently been described, as the heart of the economics, and defined as the only “free economy” (Pietilä in Bianchi, 2012:14). The greater the distance from this center, the less stability, the more uprooting, the stronger the individual unease, the social malaise and the environmental degradation (Pietilä 1997).

Aware that patriarchy and capitalist accumulation form, on an international level, the ideological and structural framework in which women’s reality is currently perceived, the feminist vision of a new society has recognized a path towards freedom in simple living, in decreasing the kind of consumption, which causes poverty and environmental destruction and increases the most brutal types of dominion over women. It is not a matter of giving up, but a way towards freedom which includes the affirmation of values that are denied by the market economy: cooperation, self-sufficiency, respect for all living beings, creativity, pleasure in work, a moral economy based upon ethical values that overcome the current sexual division in the workplace and the violence against women that accompanies it and is an integral part of the economic system (Bianchi, 2012).

Such a widening of horizons must inevitably lead to a transformation in how politics is understood. Western thinking is still bound to the traditional Greek notion of democracy: an elitist male activity, away from home, separate from the *oikos* and everyday tasks ascribed to women and slaves, an occupation for men at liberty in the polis, the home of men. That home

of men will not change its character even if it is entered by a greater number of women. Its problem is its estrangement from everyday life, namely the conviction that the realm of freedom is to be found beyond that of necessity. Disconnection from subsistence, from the reproduction of life, is the fundamental pillar upon which the economy of growth has evolved, a novel transcendence that destroys life in the present and transfers its false promises into the future. On the contrary, a politics, which holds the principles of subsistence as central follows what is imminent, namely the actual needs of real people attributing value to all living beings as well as to nature. This politics can only begin from the bottom (Bianchi, 2012).

Democracy could be perceived as action directed towards guaranteeing the *foundations of human life*, an everyday reality consisting of caring for and protecting life, friendship, compassion and solidarity. Democracy can be conceived as a process, similar to that of sowing and reaping; it is a path on which the road itself is the goal, like an experience, a way of life that embraces small-scale experiment. Hence, to those who realize power in old-fashioned terms, based upon dominion may perceive everything in this lifestyle as individualistic, partial, small and impotent (Bianchi, 2012).

### *Abandoning Hyper-consumerism*

From the perspective of consumption critics, degrowth presents an exceptional remedy for the insanity of overconsumption. A significant share of northern consumers increasingly become aware of the illogic of certain products, such as super-sized fries and therefore need not be convinced of the intrinsic benefits of a concrete degrowth agenda.

Living well, or the philosophy of *buen vivir* should replace the mantra of pursuing a higher standard of living obsessed with quantity and accumulation through capitalist growth. However, a monolithic focus on hyper-consumerism should not predominate, without considering other significant processes such as production, power relations, and the necessity of change in all of our relations both with each other and with nature (Brownhill et al., 2012).

#### **4.4 Transrational Feminist Degrowth**

How do all the learned principles apply to degrowth? Feminism, as we have seen, has several strands that contrary to the dominant institutionalized feminism, do provide reasonable critiques of growth. These have been taken up by feminists in the degrowth field in order to provide grounds for fruitful discussion and shed light upon crucial issues of gender from the care perspective, sharing perspective and the value of nature.

Employing the principles that I have personally assembled as my own "feminism of choice", I note the importance of transcending boundaries of women's issues. As my perspective includes the acknowledgement that patriarchy has deep roots, that its functioning patterns stretch beyond the domination of women categories of marginalized people, I certainly see feminism as an infinite process—similar to peace building—there is no perfect peace which is why the methodological feminism I advocate, drawing from its own principles and going beyond itself will always have work to do in terms of recognizing and moving beyond oppression and marginalization. Moreover, by including the fourth point, namely the suggestion to stretch the care to encompass more than humans—the environment— my notion of feminism becomes ecofeminist.



In this section I aim to go even one step further and to abstract a salient aspect of one particular type of feminism in order to make it applicable for the endeavors of degrowth: Notwithstanding the fact that I acknowledge that gender does not exist only binary categories but much rather represents a continuum, binary categories are still prevalent in that they have been constructed historically, and reinforced and reshaped through society. Hence, I contend that there is still a usefulness in discerning between the masculine and feminine, as principles which reside within each human being of any gender, even if these categories are not oppositional, but rather complementary. My contention is that patriarchy is not merely an oppression of the feminine sex, but also contains an oppression of what some have called the *feminine principle* (Shiva, 1988; Alexandre, 2013; Kaur, 2012). This oppression is simultaneously responsible for the inequalities and injustices among the sexes and beyond and among the dominant and marginalized groups, as it is responsible for the cultural suppression of certain values that have been traditionally associated with the feminine. I recognize that for many feminists there is a danger in conflating the categories of women and some certain types of characteristics, seeing that it is exactly these divisions that need to be diluted in order to overcome patriarchal thinking in our minds. In my opinion, not paying attention to these categories with the will to make them disappear, in fact allows for them to establish themselves unconsciously.

Therefore, without wanting to determine that it is women who represent one and men who represent the other, I would like to propose that there is a certain value in considering masculine-feminine dichotomies as a tool for meaning-making. In the light of this, Taoism understands all forces as complementary pairs, such as earth and heaven, water and fire, inhaling and exhaling, pulling and pushing, feminine and masculine, and so forth. Although

these are clearly distinct forces, Taoists recognize them as components which fit together so as to form a single ultimate unity. A balance between them is thus at the essence of a Taoist worldview, since both sides are necessary to each other (Litaer, 2002)

Having seen this much more inclusive perspective of binary yet complementary categories, I feel that feminist thinking could benefit from it, since it seems that far too often we are concerned with figuring out the truth about certain things or relations in an either-or fashion. Whilst feminism actively gives credit to the subjectivity of knowledge, within certain debates my impression is that feminist arguments quickly become problematic because they either deconstruct without reconstructing, searching for all that which is not true, such as the category of woman, or certain shared experiences. This is fair enough but it strips the debates of a lot of their power if one can no longer make any statement mentioning the entity of woman without it being devalued. On the other hand, an extreme subjectivity also makes debates impossible due to the overemphasis on individuality and uniqueness of experience. In my argument I endorse a pragmatic epistemology, whereby the applicability of concepts is not to be measured against their similarity with what we observe as reality, but in terms of usefulness for a more profound understanding that goes beyond the modern, rational mind.

Hence, I make use of Belgian economist Bernard Litaer's ideas on the money system and the ways in which it reflects the oppression of the Great Mother archetype. In his work *The Mystery of Money* (2002) Bernard Litaer writes about human emotional relation to money. He argues that our perceptions of money are quite neutral. Speaking from a Western perspective, he asserts that we tend to leave the money system unquestioned, observing it but without wondering too much about it. Litaer, however notes that money, together with sex and death is a taboo in Western society, and that these taboos correlate with the neglect of

feminine qualities throughout history. He draws from the Jungian psychological notion of archetypes in order to explain that we have collectively repressed money and the other categories from our consciousness and created a money system that is driven by male values.

In order to make sense of what male and female values mean, and how they relate to each other, Litaer makes use of the Taoist categories of Yin and Yang. One benefit in using the Yin-Yang concepts is that Taoists do not separate polarities. Instead, they stress the connection between them, emphasizing their complementarity. Yang stands for the masculine, which is not synonymous with man; in the same way Yin stands for the feminine and is not the same as woman. The understanding is that masculine energy predominates in men, feminine energy in women. However, when one energy becomes too strong problems and pathologies can emerge. Archetypal psychology acknowledges that a man cannot be fully male in a mature way if he has no access to his feminine qualities, and vice versa a female cannot be fully woman without accessing the masculine inside her. Hence, for both sexes it is important to keep masculine and feminine energies in balance. The following table represents a comparison of respective Yin and Yang qualities.

Yin	Yang
Cooperation	Competition
Circulating, Giving, Connecting	Hoarding, Accumulating, Concentrating
Caring, Quality of Life (not Quantity)	Goal Setting, Performance, Growth
Being	Having, Doing
Endurance, Sustainability	Peak Experience
Intuition, Empathy-Synthesis Paradox	Rational, Analytical
Physical-Emotional, non-linear	Logic, Mental, Linear
Ability to Hold Ambivalence	Pursuit of Certainty
Interpersonal Skills Dominate	Technology Dominates
Small is Beautiful, Conservation	Bigger is Better, Expansion
Interdependence	Independence
Egalitarian works best	Hierarchy works best
Mutual Trust	Central Authority
Self-Organizing 'Chaos', Faith in Future	Planning, Control of Future
Synchronicity	Cause and Effect
Whole explains Parts (Holism)	Parts explain Whole (Reductionism)

Figure 1. Bernard Litaer's Yin-Yang Table.

Litaer's point is that by suppressing the Yin we have created a society that is much more Yang focused and hence out of balance. Litaer identifies a particular archetype, namely that of the *Great Mother*, which we have repressed—with the consequence of manifesting the shadows (extreme) sides of these archetypes, instead of having a balanced healthy expression of it. In order to understand what is meant by this, I shall first briefly provide some definitions.

An archetype, according to Litaer is a "recurrent image that patterns human emotions and behavior, and which can be observed across time and cultures" (Litaer, 2002:283). A shadow is simply the manner in which an archetype shows itself whenever it is repressed. There are numerous examples of archetypes, of which some of the most prominent are: the King or Queen, who can be more or less sovereign ranging from abdication to dictatorship, the Magician, who can be hyper-rational or indiscriminate, the Warrior, who can be more or less powerful from a sadist to a masochist figure, and the Lover who in his shadow's can be addicted or impotent.

As suggested above, when archetypes are repressed, meaning not acknowledged or integrated, they manifest themselves as shadows, in one of their two extremes. A person who has not integrated his Sovereign archetype might act in an extremely authoritarian way or without authority, as an abdicator. The reason for acting in one extreme is usually the unconscious fear of the other extreme. When it comes to money, sex and death, Litaer notes that there is one archetype, which we have collectively dismissed or suppressed: the Great Mother. She is the nourisher, the provider, the earth, the source of reproduction and of death, as well as a source of abundance. When repressed the Great Mother expresses herself through her shadows: one shadow being greed and the other being fear of scarcity. While we cannot measure or prove that this explanation is real, it is possible to consider whether it is coherent with the way in which we perceive reality and relationality. After all, the Great Mother is a collective image that has been historically pushed aside. Litaer provides a range of arguments to show how we have repressed the feminine side, beginning with the rise of patriarchal systems hundreds of years ago and passing through history in more or less subtle ways, to be still found today—in the dominance of our monetary system.

Litaer argues that one of the most insightful ways to realize what a particular society is up to on earth is to explore what its image of the divine looks like. A perspective of the divine that denies any noteworthy role to the feminine leaves little space for females to honor themselves and their bodies. According to Litaer contemporary women's issues do have a direct tie to the claims that women had such roles in the past. Hence he acknowledges that the perspective of the researcher matters when trying to collect historical evidence about female worshipping in the past. In the past decades, an increasing controversy has surged between two opposing interpretations of the archeological evidence from the prehistoric period. Both

sides accuse each other of unscientific bias. The traditional side is blamed for purposefully ignoring the proof of female power in prehistory.

On the other side the Goddess movement, which seeks to reveal female power in prehistoric times, is accused of reinventing the past based on unconvincing evidence. In his analysis of these two opposing strands, Litaer takes note of the patriarchal bias of dominant historiography and hence consciously chooses to give particular attention to interpretations that do acknowledge the sacred feminine archetype in the past. For Litaer, the focal point for his search is not whether there was a single great goddess or great mother, or multiple goddesses, or even just mortal women presented in glorious light. For the purposes of his argument it suffices to search archetypal history, namely the history of the collective images people shared in the past. Thus, the *Great Mother* is referred to in the sense that the "Great Mother archetype was honored and active" (Litaer, 2002:33). The results are that four times as much evidence is found for female than for masculine worshipping across prehistory (Barnes, 2000). Among the female figures discovered all over Old Europe the most frequently presented is a plump, often pregnant woman, who has been identified as the Great Mother or Fertility Goddess. This figure, which has been found and recorded in thirty thousand different artifacts of prehistoric times, testifies to the worship of the Great Goddess, which stands for the unity of all life in nature. Archetypically, the power of the Great Goddess is found in water, stone, tombs, caves, animals, in particular birds, snakes, fish, as well as in hills, trees and flowers. This is where the mythopoetic holistic perception of the mystery and sacredness of all there is on Earth arises.

Litaer explains the relationship between this feminine archetype with sex, death and with the earliest forms of money. It is noteworthy that the term money in fact emerged from

the italic goddess, June Moneta, daughter of Saturn, who is the goddess of womanhood and menstrual cycles. She was worshipped by Roman women and was later amalgamated with Hera. The fact that at some point this veneration of the feminine got repressed is self-evident, considering the masculine bias of the three great monotheistic religions of our times, which a large majority of the global population adhere to today (Religion Facts, 2015). What is more interesting though, is the argument that money, as a social convention that it is, is perceived as neutral but in fact is an expression of Yang energy and a suppression of the Yin. The Yang characteristics of money are accumulation due to perceived scarcity. In fact Adam Smith, one of the founding fathers of modern economics, reveals that in all modern societies, the desire for individuals to accumulate and hoard is nearly universal. Hence, he would claim that greed and fear of scarcity are part of normality within civil societies. While Smith did not endorse greed on a moral level, his contention was that one could not oppose *normal* behavior. On the basis of this normal behavior, which he incidentally conflated with being *natural*, Smith developed the theory of economics, with the aim of allocating scarce resources by engaging in individual private accumulation. In particular, the modern money system creates systematic rewards, in form of earned interest, for those people who are willing to accumulate money, while they ruthlessly punish, through bankruptcy and poverty, those who do not "play the game" (Litaer 2002:70).

As Charles Eisenstein shows us in his work *Sacred Economics* (2014), banks have the power to create money by relying on mortgages of real value, which in turn promise them an increased return. The concept of interest on debt is what forces economic growth. A person who borrows a sum of money from a bank must later pay back more than they borrowed. On the side of the accumulators, or capitalists, it is normal today, but still counterintuitive that

people receive benefits (in terms of rents and so on), for property, be it land or any other property. Ultimately all property is derived from what used to be commons, earth and land that existed before humans existed and hence can only belong to someone by some unfair allocation that happened years ago. It is on the basis of these arguments that both, Litaer and Eisenstein reflect upon alternative ways of dealing with money. Following Litaer's example, I propose taking a closer look at Yin currencies within the conclusion. In response to Eisenstein's work I make some suggestions for policy, which allow us to move away from the entrenched growth paradigm.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Feminism can contribute to degrowth in several ways and through ideas that derive from different subtypes of feminism. In any case, mentioned subtypes conflate with each other, but the ones I single out include ecofeminism, feminist care ethics and socialist or materialist feminism. Moreover, the combined insights from feminist degrowth literature and my own ideas, have led me to search for a more abstract way in which principles from feminism may apply to degrowth. I have focused on the feminine principle or *Yin* principle and its repression in Western culture, as well as its expression in the dominant money-profit-growth system. Jung's notion of archetypes is helpful to create meaningful insights about how certain aspects of the collective experience of life are biased towards the masculine or *Yang* principle. It is therefore crucial to remember that masculine and feminine do not represent men and women, but both principles are integrated in both sexes. While it is important for both principles to complement each other, in the current global hegemonic economic systems, the masculine



principle dominates the feminine. The oppression of the feminine aspects of human nature is correlated with the repression of the great mother archetype, whose shadows represent both, greed and the fear of scarcity. These two extremes are manifested in our societies as we repress the Great Mother. The economist Bernard Litaer has shown that there is a pre-historical connection between the feminine archetype of the Great Mother with three great taboo topics of Western society: sex, death and money. In particular, money is of interest because the ways in which we utilize it; it being nothing more than a social convention, and male-energy biased. Our money systems are focused on accumulation and simultaneously propel economic growth. This has been seen in the second chapter, where the bio-economics pillar of degrowth describes the way in which money is no longer based on real economy but on debt and interest. Having seen these connections, even if they are only on the level of archetypes, it helps to understand the ways in which our collective imaginary has been colonized by growth.

It is crucial to gain awareness over the fact that the growth paradigm is an expression of an overemphasis on the Yang principle and a suppression of the Yin. The feminine principle needs re-integration, and as it happens, strategies of economic degrowth coincide with a movement towards societies with more sustainable attributes. The question arises in what ways can we concretely integrate degrowth ideas and how the feminine (Yin) principle as well as other insights from feminism, enhance and promote these developments?

In the conclusion of this thesis I propose concrete strategies such as the usage of Yin based currencies, as is the case in Bali or Japan, and other policies which are not mainstream yet have already been employed in certain areas, as opportunities for generating alternative systems that work parallel with the current one. I believe that the current dominant growth

system is still here to stay in the coming decades, although it becoming harder and harder to endure. Therefore, my suggestions will be best understood as part of the following allegory: apparently the Vikings of Greenland could have survived in their freezing environment if they had started eating fish. But they would not, they insisted on eating meat (Habermann, 2015). So, following the degrowth activist and historian Friederike Haberman's suggestion, if I were a Viking in Greenland I would not sit around and wait for a leader to promote fish eating, if I had discovered this option for survival, I would start eating it myself and tell all my friends about it. This way we would start a movement and eventually convert all Vikings into fish eaters. In other words, while the dominant systems that we have seen are in crises, will continue to be rescued and promoted, it is imperative to discover and experiment with alternative forms that can transcend the problems of the established systems. These may, develop into useful models for future human interaction, once the old systems cease to work completely.

## Chapter 5 — Transcending Degrowth and Feminism

### 5.1 Overall Summary and Conclusions

The two main topics of this thesis, degrowth and feminism, provide rich grounds for exploration, each by themselves as well as together. This holds true particularly when considering that both movements combine a range of different theoretical and practical elements that mutually inform each other. Moreover, both movements are open to diverse audiences, so that people with very different perspectives get involved, which generates internal debates and also contradictions. No longer need we be a woman, let alone share the same experience to be a feminist. In order to embrace degrowth ideas, we do not have to share the same particular political stance nor must we attribute the same significance to certain diagnoses or prognoses. Degrowth can be approached from a multitude of different angles, as its numerous sources show. How then can two so broad movements be analyzed together in meaningful ways? My research question reads: *In what ways can feminism help to promote and enhance the degrowth movement as a matrix of potential alternatives to the dominant economic growth paradigm, which is deemed responsible for multiple interlocking global crises, in the economic, ecological and social realms, in order to allow for more peaceful and sustainable livelihood on earth?*

As can be seen, I have used degrowth as a basic action-based theoretical framework to explore through a feminist lens. The basic underlying premise is that degrowth has the potential to transform the dominant economic growth paradigm, which is deemed the root cause of multiple interlocking crises that we face in today's globalized world. The reader might have noticed that this idea represents a long term vision of transformation that needs to

happen on multiple layers. In this thesis, I mostly refrain from delving into the question of the likelihood of degrowth to become the future global economic paradigm. Instead, I have focused on its current, present expressions and what degrowth proposes content-wise. The fact that degrowth proposes clear explanations for, and concrete, peaceful realistic solutions to some of the most important current global problems, is what makes it worth exploring in depth.

Following Martínez Guzman's notion of the epistemological shift, degrowth can be perfectly defined as realistic, since it uncovers the idealistic and narrow-minded structures that the growth-based paradigm embraces, while proposing practical alternatives for now and the future. In this context, the utopist edge of degrowth, made up of its idealist components, can be framed as metaphorical signposts that point in the right direction to drive out of the current situations into better future possibilities. On the economic level the signpost points to a steady-state economy. On the ecological level it is to fulfill the human capacity of living in harmony with nature, without extracting more resources than is necessary. On the societal level there are a myriad of forms in which humans can organize in ways that serve socially sustainable degrowth, some of which are already being experimented with in alternative communities. Keywords such as direct democracy, commoning, frugal convivial communities, redistribution and modern subsistence, come to mind. The collective imaginary can be best aligned with degrowth ideals if we realize at a collective and individual level that subjective well-being, or happiness is not enhanced by an increase of production and consumption, that is of the GDP, after basic needs have been covered. This has been illustrated on an academic level, by the Easterlin Paradox and, on a more spiritual plane, by the domain of Buddhist Economics.

The feminist lens that I have used in order to enhance and promote degrowth, has served the following purpose: in claiming that degrowth is worthy of supporting from a peace perspective, it is indispensable to be aware in what ways degrowth can be considered peaceful. This completely depends on how the notion peace is understood. Within the UNESCO Chair of Philosophy for Peace, gender is a fundamental topic which deserves to be dealt with not only as a particular subject but furthermore, as a dimension that is incorporated into all other subject matters within and outside of peace studies. Hence, peace and gender studies rather than being an enclosed framework with a particular content, much rather form a lens through which to consider any other area. The striking scarcity of feminist voices within the large and growing degrowth debate has incentivized me to seek answers that might change this situation. In asking how feminism might enhance and promote degrowth, I have focused on giving more legitimacy and consequently more power to the movement. The underlying thought is that the more the degrowth movement really represents different voices, including the ones that have traditionally been marginalized within hegemonic discourse, the more legitimate its call for action. In addition, the more different people that feel represented by the movement, the more chance it has to gain momentum, the more peaceful a transition can be made away from the growth-based mentality toward sustainable livelihoods.

While I have devoted the first two chapters to introducing the background problem as well as the degrowth framework, the third chapter has sought to position feminism within the spectrum, as a way to find the leverage point at which degrowth may be enhanced and promoted by feminism. This chapter ends with the conclusion that feminism as a whole cannot be seen to reject the growth paradigm, despite its patriarchal features. For these reasons, rather than stopping at the point where the feminist movement as dominantly

represented today, seems to have lost its critical power by being inserted into a neoliberal market of ideas, I have chosen to formulate my own particular notion of feminism that does subvert growth ideology and, beyond this, might provide valuable contributions to further degrowth.

The fourth chapter has elaborated on the particular feminist contributions to degrowth that have been made indirectly, and concretely. In the fourth chapter I have furthermore proposed a transcendence of the epistemological narrowness of modern rational thinking, which feminism is still largely part of. In this spirit, I have adopted a pragmatic epistemology, whereby meaning-making becomes more important than the identification of an absolute truth. This has allowed me to incorporate insights that transcend feminist literature, but still deal with the problems of growth-based economy and patriarchy. In this sense, economist Bernard Litaer's inspirational work *Money Mystery* (2002) has provided an explanation of the imbalances that revolve around money by resorting to Jungian Psychology as well as Taoist philosophy. Litaer establishes a correlation to the neglect of what can be called the feminine principle or Yin principle by explaining that the archetype of the Great Mother has been buried into the unconscious, as has been historically shown in patriarchal structures for many centuries. Beyond femininity the Great Mother archetype embodies the principles of money, sex and death, which are some of the greatest taboos of Western societies. It is within this archetype that the combined problems of greed and fear of scarcity, which arise from its repression, are coexistent with the repression of the feminine principle. What is striking about this, is that Litaer not only defines the problem, but also proposes concrete solutions to rebalance the feminine principle within a new conception of economics. While Litaer's work is exemplary, in that it embeds the understanding of modern economic thought into a holistic

interpretation, there are many other written works that describe ways to move away from a growth-based economy towards truly sustainable systems. As this thesis has also indicated, there exist numerous practical degrowth examples which can be put into action. The following section mentions a few of these ideas in the spirit of recommendations.

## 5.2 Recommendations and Implications

When considering ways in which transrational, feminist degrowth examples can be implemented, it is sensible to start from the basis of existing structures and initiatives, and to build upon those. In the field of peace, theorists and practitioners tend to remain in separate spheres, which makes them rather unaware of each other's modes of expression and different foci. It is due to this disconnection that it can be difficult to locate suitable examples for a particular theory.

However, referring back to the story of the Vikings of Chapter four, we can readily discern two types of engagement in degrowth that are already happening. One concerns political involvement and the other grassroots activism, which in many ways can be construed as the private action of living differently. Of course, as the feminist saying that *the private is political* suggests, both areas mix. An example of the political involvement would be the implementation of policies to support men and women to have equal access to the public sphere, by providing free and high quality childcare and institutionalized support for reducing working hours. An example of grassroots activism is the opening of a non-profit, private kindergarten run by a collective of men whose wives work in formal, paid jobs, which I witnessed in my neighborhood in Berlin about ten years ago. Both examples serve the same

goal of giving those who usually do not have the means, the opportunities to engage in non-traditional roles. One is a policy that can be implemented by governments and the other is a do-it-yourself (DIY) alternative. Each one of the two has its own strengths and weaknesses, but they also complement each other. A nation-wide initiative of the government to change working hours regulations is surely very wide-reaching and powerful, yet the path towards such policy implementation is usually a slow process. Hence, the alternative of people acting directly for change in their own immediate environment must not be ignored. In fact DIY is highly encouraged by degrowth advocates. Aside from this, as seen in Chapter two, there are also ways of engaging more directly, such as through oppositional activism, which includes boycott, civil disobedience, and others. These can be particularly powerful because these type of actions can easily attract public and media attention, which in turn, helps to increase the volume of a social movement. An example of this is Enric Duran's borrowing of micro financing banks without the intention of giving the money back, and thereby pointing to the fallacies in traditional debt-based, banking systems.

Duran has also been active in establishing the *Cooperativa Integral Catalana* (CIC), or the Catalan Integral Cooperative, which claims to be a transitional "initiative for social transformation from below, through self-management, self-organization and networking" (CIC, 2015:1). The CIC makes use of a community exchange system called the *eco*; it shares the features of other local exchange trading systems (LETS) but includes the option to expand currency creation by means of public accounts of assembly decisions. Contributing to the community by engaging in work for the commons has been established to be worth a maximum of five monetary units, whereby exact prices are assigned by participants themselves.



In the following examples that I give of feminism and degrowth, I have used a mixture of profit and non-profit initiatives, since I would like to highlight the margin of action where a certain type of consumption can still contribute to an overall lowering of the GDP. For instance the menstrual cup, an affordable reusable silicone product employed to collect menstrual blood is sold on the market, and yet, can be seen as a practical feminist contribution to degrowth. The menstrual cup has been introduced in developing countries to make lives of poor women and girls easier, enabling them to engage in their activities and visit school instead of facing a monthly so-called week of shame or other struggles related to their menstrual cycle (APHRC 2010). While this product is used increasingly by women all over the world, for its health and environmental benefits, it also diminishes rubbish accumulation, since one moon cup lasts for roughly two years, as opposed to the one-time use products, which are wasted every month. The menstrual cup is still relatively unknown, which might be related to its durability, which prevents women from regularly buying new, one-time use sanitary products.

A further initiative that can be labeled degrowth and feminist, is the roof top gardening in Egypt's capital Cairo (FAO, 2015). There, a number of families, in particular women were trained to learn the basics of growing vegetables and fruits on their terraces in the megacity. The initiative did not come out of a theoretical economic degrowth perspective, but due to the problem that people in Cairo's suburbs lacked access to fresh fruits and vegetables, resulting in diets low in nutrients. People from forty-eight families, mostly women, were trained to do this non-monetized activity and have begun to spread their knowledge to others. In Egypt women traditionally stay in the home and remain in charge of children's education and domestic work. Within this framework, the planting of food is certainly a positive and

empowering activity, as they can make a productive contribution to alleviate monetary expenses for the family, while also providing themselves with the means to lead healthier lives. A side benefit from growing their own food is that these families have healthier air to breathe on their rooftops which is a very valuable and quite scarce in the city. Similar initiatives have taken place in other large cities across the globe.

When it comes to the topic of food and agriculture, one of the most salient personalities engaged in degrowth is Vandana Shiva (Samath, 2014). She has been active in the critique of the growth model for decades and she continues to lead political campaigns. Shiva claims that "the right to basic services is a basic human right. There is also the need for food in addition to water, and food begins with seed" (Shiva in Samath, 2014:1). Lately, she has focused on political opposition to the business with seeds and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which is lead by large trans-national companies such as Monsanto and Dow. One of the most detrimental aspects of these business activities is that companies which create GMOs, compel farmers into a situation of forced buying of their seeds every year, and a payment of royalties. This way, the GMO industry commodifies seeds, the basis of all food, thereby creating scarcity and new dependencies with goods that used to be more easily accessible or even free. For instance currently, research is conducted in Sri Lanka to produce a type of genetically engineered bananas, designed to yield higher iron levels. These bananas are supposed to improve women's health, and to reduce maternal mortality during childbirth. While the aim to reduce maternal death is in itself good, Shiva shows that there are much simpler ways to reach the same goal without dependence on large enterprises. In this context, she points to the naturally available large variety of bananas available in the area, and to morunga, turmeric leaves, all of which contain high iron levels, are much more nutritious and

do not necessitate engineering. This example reveals the absurdity and vileness of the commodification of the very basis of survival—seeds. Inherent in Shiva's discourse is the call to go back to more direct and natural engagement with food and seeds, in order to ensure our survival, by moving away from economic growth, greed and its associated ills.

On the political level, there are many more suggestions of what can be done in the long run, to change the dominant growth-based economic system into one that is much more sustainable. Charles Eisenstein, a public speaker, writer and degrowth advocate has published a book called *Sacred Economics* (2014), which proposes an economic system that is more sustainable, meaning environmentally friendly, socially more just and spiritually healthy for humans. Presenting all of his arguments would exceed the scope of this chapter. However, one of the key notions he proposes is the employment of alternative financial systems, such as a negative interest economy. A negative interest on reserves and a physical economy that decreases its value with time can allow for prosperity while not being dependent on growth. Instead, the focus is on the equitable distribution of wealth. This can be done by discouraging people and institutions to give out credits, which essentially represent a discount for future cash flows and increase the creation of mortgages, a debt entrapment. An economy that devalues the accumulation of money can allow money to flow more easily and to stop being the more attractive alternative to natural assets, which naturally, decay over time. Money, according to Eisenstein, should also be defined by the same principle as natural assets, in order to prevent people who hoard money to profit from the mere fact that they own it. Incidentally, this idea is not new, but has been put into practice in different places at various occasions throughout history, particularly when standard economic systems were in crisis.

The underlying argument of a decaying or devaluing currency is the following: Since

profit is the result of millennia of technological development that all humans have inherited commonly, it is not fair if some people get richer from the fact that they have access to property (in terms of money or land or assets) just for the sake of it (Eisenstein, 2014). While this stance can be termed as a politically leftist or an anti-capitalist one, it should not be mistaken for being communist. After all, the distributive process is not a top-down decision, but one where the individual incentive counts—people are encouraged to do and profit from good work, rather than from their property.

A further example of an alternative approach to finance is given by the Japanese Fureai Kippu System (Gratis Basis, 2013). In this system, the assistance for senior citizens, such as doing the grocery shopping for them, is exchanged for credits which family members of senior citizens can earn if they live far away from their own family. By offering assistance to the elderly in their own community, family members can redeem the credits they earn this way, to make use of them when they are ill or to let their own elderly parents benefit from them. The benefit of this system is that it reinforces cooperation, trust and compassion among citizens, without having to rely on the bureaucratic apparatus and state, or insurance, to function properly. In this sense, according to Bernard Litaer (2004), this currency can be termed a Yin based currency, since it promotes Yin principles. The same holds true for the Balinese system of community engagement, where, in addition to the national currency of Indonesian Rupiah, there is a currency that the people use within communities of fifty to five hundred people, across the island. The currency is based on time that each adult individual is to give to the community, or *banjar*, in order to engage in projects together. Decisions on what is done in the banjar, are taken democratically and the investment is a mixture of time and money. This way, poorer members of the community can invest more of their time, while

richer ones can give more money, if they lack the time. Hence, the banjar does not place its time based currency in competition with money, but as a complementary factor. Similarly as in the Japanese example, the Balinese one benefits cooperation and strengthens the ties among people, and can thus be seen as an instance where the feminine principle is practiced to balance the masculine, Yang energy that money conveys (Litaer, 2003).

I have mentioned these particular examples in order to elucidate that the path towards degrowth covers a wide range of actions, some of which have already started to be implemented, and others which still seem rather far from becoming mainstream, but still have a significant basis upon which to be trusted. In order to obtain a thorough list of examples of degrowth engagement, it is advisable to consult the various websites available on degrowth. Furthermore, John Vail (2011) has created a compilation of degrowth activities that exist, ordered by categories. These are listed as decommodification activities, meaning actions that lead to a reduction of the use of money and oppose the growth economy. They include fair trade or equal exchange, ethical trade and consumption, open source or open access information and information technology, gift economy of the arts or cultural commons, and more. Evidently, degrowth is much more far reaching than this thesis has comprised. In the following section, I pinpoint some of the areas that, in my opinion, necessitate deeper engagement in terms of research and action.

### **5.3 Further Research and Limitations**

As seen in the previous sections, there are a myriad of ways in which ordinary people, citizens and consumers, with or without a conscious feminist stance, can engage in degrowth and

thereby provoke positive change. The degrowth movement does not expect every participant to share the same views and values in order to engage with any of the actions that promote degrowth. However, in this thesis I have shown that certain principles from feminism, can enhance degrowth. This begins with the inclusion of more female and feminist voices, but also requires the incorporation of other marginalized voices and, furthermore the principles that have been traditionally associated with the feminine role, mainly care, sharing and subsistence. This thesis has covered a few themes of feminist contributions to degrowth. Yet these can be elaborated in more depth, and more ways of relating feminism and degrowth remain to be discovered.

As outlined in the fourth Chapter and Conclusions, I argue in a transrational manner, by advocating that Taoism's Yin and Yang can be useful to understand the manner in which patriarchy and the imaginary growth converge, and how these can be overcome. The general ideology of degrowth goes so far as to propose that change needs to start in the minds of people and that we need to decolonize our minds from the growth idea, for economic degrowth to be truly sustainable and effective, rather than just generating turmoil. I agree fully with this and I would add that change does not only happen in the mind in terms of rational understanding and decision making, but is in fact a deeper, spiritual process. While deep change is something that most types of feminism find necessary, with the exception of the reformist liberal strand of feminism, when there is a mention of spirituality a large number of feminists leave the debate, since they are aware of, and allergic to, the potential pitfalls of cultural feminism and essentializing womanhood. I agree that it is crucial to be skeptical of any generalization or naturalization of any category, or idea, such as the one that women are, by nature, closer to nature. Furthermore, I recognize the tremendous importance and power of

recognizing and overcoming social construction of anything that has a meaning to us, particularly concepts such as sex and gender.

Nevertheless, I believe that due to the fear of being put back into the patriarchal box of the feminine role, many feminists take their job to be countering patriarchy by doing the diametrically opposite of what the patriarch would expect them to do. In fact, although feminism is tremendously diverse nowadays, the most dominant types of feminism seem to fall in either of the two categories: to be dualistic and competitive, in terms of intensely debating and discussing what is right and wrong to do as a feminist, or at the other end of the spectrum, it is pluralistic and unengaged, in terms of deeming everyone who considers themselves a feminist, to be a feminist, due to the glorification of choice. The former, in general terms, can be seen as a problem of second wave feminism, and the latter a problem of the third wave and of post-feminism. However, I believe that feminists should focus more on what they think and feel is right and beneficial. Hence, while Melchiori's proposition of watchdog feminism is crucial to continue the move away from patriarchy, it can also turn into an obsession whereby its agents become blinded by their one goal and mission, instead of gaining awareness of the whole picture.

Thus, further research and thinking should be dedicated to the convergence of feminist thought and spirituality, particularly in the realm of degrowth theory and practice. The feminism that I advocate is one that rekindles its passion for engaging with political topics in the world, in a holistic way. This means that it should neither compete with (as in second wave feminism), nor remain uninterested in (as in third wave and postfeminism) other types of feminism. It should engage, integrate, ask and learn. One of the principal obstacles here, is the aversion within feminism of embracing traditionally "feminine" qualities due to a fear of

being essentialized or trapped inside them. Yet, firstly, the adoption of feminine, meaning Yin principles is helpful for degrowth and secondly, embracing Yin does not mean a rejection of Yang. Both, Yin and Yang form part of the full spectrum of human behavior. In this sense, the call is not only for feminist activism and literature to engage with the Yin principle. In the long run it is for everyone, including dominant, white males.

In order to facilitate progress towards a degrowth society on the action-based level, it is not information that we are lacking. The world wide web is replete with examples of how degrowth can be lived on a daily basis. However, what is lacking repeatedly is the explicit connection of different movements that all aspire more or less for the same: a real shift away from business as usual. Hence, it is crucial for all those people who seek this kind of change to understand their power in active engagement. In recent years, for instance in the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, the people's power has been largely expressed and organized through social media, which presented networking opportunities that were previously unthinkable. Connecting to like-minded people in order to mobilize change is basically only a matter of choice and resolve. The ease with which information turns into action is fascinating, for example in form of online petitions for political change. Yet this overabundance of possibilities can also be confusing and overwhelming for the individual, and lead to the wrong choices, or no choices at all. In order to make good choices, meaning ones that are in alignment with our values, beliefs and dreams, it is not only necessary to be critical, but also to approach them mindfully.



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